

Wild Norene

by Johnston McCulley

CHAPTER I. The Girl in the Doorway.

SENOR GUERRERO led the way down the dark and narrow alley and softly opened the door. The man behind him waited close to the wall.

A shaft of light pierced the darkness. With it came the sound of strong voices raised in ribald song and the tinkling of a piano scarcely heard above the din.

Feet shuffled, liquor gurgled, glasses rang as they were placed on the tables.

Foul air rushed out, bearing odors of stale tobacco-smoke and cheap liquor. In an instant the clean smell of water-soaked pine was gone, and the breeze that swept up the street from the river and the distant sea seemed instantly polluted.

"The coast, I think, is clear," Senor Guerrero whispered.

He slipped inside, and Captain Bill Adams followed and stood against the wall for a moment while Guerrero closed the door behind them.

Captain Adams had a soft hat pulled down to his eyes and his coat collar turned up in an attempt to pass without being recognized. There was no disguising his broad shoulders, great hands, and massive form, yet the risk was small, for those men in the room who knew him were scattered in the crowd or sitting at tables near the street door.

Adams's lips curled in scorn as he followed Guerrero along the wall to a table

in a far corner, at which there were two chairs, both unoccupied.

As he sat down he glanced over the room.

There was a bar along one wall, with a crowd of men before it. There were scores of tables to which silent-footed Chinese carried liquor. On a platform in one corner was an old piano, a woman playing it. Another woman stood beside her and sang in a cracked voice.

In another corner were poker-tables, where the players silently eyed one another, speaking in low voices only when it was necessary. There were faro-tables and roulette-tables. And there were women who mingled in the throng, painted women dressed in gaudy gowns.

"It is a place," said Captain Adams slowly and with conviction, "where a man would expect to find a traitor."

Strong men of the sea called Adams king. He was a relic of the days of bucko mates. He had slain a man with a single blow of his fist. He had quelled mutiny single-handed.

His name was a synonym for fear from Valdez to Cape Horn, in Honolulu, in the ports of China and Japan, Australia, and the South Seas.

That name also was coupled with justice, for Captain Adams never gave a demonstration of brute force without good and sufficient provocation.

He always showed his strength at sea, never on land. The usual haunts of sailormen did not know him. He left his ship only to transact business. He was an

abstainer, and morally clean.

Because he never appeared in a gathering to refute them, seamen told great tales of his strength and brutality when provoked, thus making his reputation in that regard thrice what he deserved.

Now he bent forward at the table, his keen eyes taking in the scene before him. Guerrero had ordered liquor, and as soon as the Chinese waiter had gone Captain Adams had thrown his in a cuspidor.

"If our suspicions prove true—" Guerrero began.

"We'll say nothing until we are certain," the captain interrupted. "It's a bad thing to accuse a man of unless there is an abundance of proof."

"And if we get the proof?"

Captain Adams straightened his shoulders and waited a moment before replying.

"If we get the proof I'll attend to the matter personally," he said. "You are not concerned in it, senor, except that you are a sort of guide for me ashore."

"Not concerned in it!" exclaimed the other hoarsely. "Not concerned in it? When there may depend on it success or failure?"

"Screech, senor, and tell our business to the world," the captain advised. "There are some in this place, I believe, who would be glad to hear."

"I beg your pardon," Guerrero said, and fell silent.

Captain Adams looked over the room again. The woman at the piano had ceased playing and was standing at the end of the platform, talking with some men. She was tall, graceful, and fair, despite her painted face; but there were lines about her eyes and a wistful look was about her lips.

"What a place!" Adams gasped.

"Sailors must have relaxation after

a long voyage," suggested Guerrero.

"This isn't relaxation! They spend two months' wages here in a night, drinking vile liquor, trying to beat gambling games that cannot be beaten. I've been a sailor for thirty years, and I don't need this sort of relaxation. And the women—"

"That tall one who was playing the piano is Sally Wood," said Guerrero. "Every one in Astoria knows her. She has a history."

"I don't doubt it."

"Not the sort you think, senor. She lived in Seattle as a girl. A man won and married her. Then he took her aged father's savings and deserted her, left her penniless with a baby—the old story."

"And she turned to this sort of thing?"

"Again, senor, not as you think. She turned to this sort of thing because she can play a piano, and because she gets more money here in a night than she could any place else in a month. The sailors worship her, senor. Sometimes when she plays they throw silver and gold on the platform, showers of it, and she thanks them prettily."

"Pity she wouldn't take her silver and gold and get out of here, then."

"She stays because she needs much silver and gold. Every one seems to know the story. She is laying it by. When she has an adequate amount she intends trailing the man who deserted her, and when she finds him—ah, senor, when she finds him! Such a woman will know how to take her revenge."

"Her child is a girl—she keeps the little one in a school. I admire Sally Wood, senor; she mingles here with the scum of the earth, yet is not defiled. She is a good girl; countless men will tell you so. Countless men would fight for her in an

instant to avenge an insult. They know her story, tell it to every newcomer, help her in every way.”

Captain Adams showed sudden interest.

“If that story is true, if she is a good girl and can mingle with this sort and keep her goodness for such an object, I pray Heaven she finds the man,” he said earnestly.

“There is also another story,” continued Guerrero. “There is a man hereabouts by name Jack Connor, a pleasant giant, a happy-go-lucky devil of a sailorman of the usual sort. He is at present out of a place, and is here in Astoria visiting his aged father. He is a favorite of men and women. He drinks with the men—but he has no use for the women.”

“Half sensible, at any rate,” said the captain.

“Sally Wood, so the story goes, rebuked him on a certain night because he was drinking heavily. The proprietor of this place even lets her do such a thing as that, for it delights his customers to see one of their number the subject of a sermon. Jack Connor treated the girl courteously, but continued drinking. If he had done as she requested she would have forgotten him; since he refused to obey her wish, she loved him.”

“Womanly,” said Captain Adams. “So she loves him?”

“In her own sweet way, senor. All have noticed it. Her eyes follow him continually when he is here. And he continues to treat her courteously, but that is all.

“Jack Connor, say his friends, has little use for women. He respects them—the good ones—too much to ask one of them to share his lot, he says; and the other sort he does not respect enough to consider at all.”

“He has the making of a man in him then,” the captain decided. “Sailorman out of a job, eh? I need a couple more men.”

“A very devil of a fellow, senor; I have seen him. I do not know, of course, whether he would be the man for our business. He has an independent way about him. Speak of the angels—”

Voices near the door had been raised in eager greeting! The throng parted, and through it strode a man the appearance of whom made Captain Adams’s eyes sparkle.

More than six feet he stood, with shoulders almost the equal of the captain’s. His hair was yellow, his eyes blue, his face boyish. He walked with an easy swagger that betrayed his agility.

Such was Jack Connor.

Friends crowded close to him; voices called to ask him what his drink would be. A bartender, smiling in welcome, brought forward a private bottle and sat it on the bar before him and polished a glass and sat beside it.

He and his friends drank.

“Jack, the woman-hater, caught at last!” one of the men shrieked in laughter.

Guerrero tapped the captain on the shoulder.

“The man who is talking, the one with his arm on Connor’s shoulder, is his best friend, a sailorman by name Morgan,” he whispered.

“Listen!” the captain commanded.

There had come a flush into Jack Connor’s face not caused by liquor. He turned toward Morgan menacingly, but still smiling.

“Hold him while I tell the story!” Morgan cried. “It is too good to keep.”

“If you open your mouth—” Connor began.

But, laughing, three of them held him. The others in the room had grown

quiet to listen.

Morgan ran away a few paces and faced them.

"We were walking down Commercial Street," he said. "A girl passed. Her eyes met Connor's. My friend Jack was done then and there!"

"Love at first sight, eh?" cried another.

"Wait!" Morgan cried. "He insisted on following her. Think of that—Jack Connor, who never looks at a woman! Oh, he did it in a proper fashion! He never took his eyes from her. She dropped a handkerchief—"

"They always do something like that," interrupted another.

With a roar of rage Jack Connor hurled away the men who held him and looked into the crowd.

"Understand me?" he cried. "The young lady—*lady*, I said—dropped her handkerchief. I ran forward and picked it up. I'm not ashamed of it. I never saw her before—I don't know her name!

"But she's a lady—and not to be talked about in a crowd like this. Understand me?"

"I walked down the street with her, talked with her while Morgan waited. She's the sweetest girl I ever saw. I'm not worthy to speak of her, and if I am not, neither are any of you. So we'll drop the subject. Understand?"

There was no answer; no man's eyes met his. He smiled at them again and motioned toward the bar. The men crowded forward.

"He strikes me as pretty much of a man," said Captain Adams to Guerrero in their corner.

Sally Wood, sitting at her piano, had heard. Now she began playing furiously, and some of the men near the platform began to sing, and the noise broke

out anew.

Jack Connor and half a dozen of his friends made their way across the room to a table within fifteen feet of where Captain Adams and Guerrero were sitting.

The captain turned toward the wall, his back to the room, and there he remained, talking with Guerrero in whispers, until he heard his own name mentioned. It was Jack Connor speaking.

"The *Amingo* is the cutest little steam schooner that ever carried a cargo of lumber," he was saying. "I never saw her until she dropped down the river from Portland this morning, but I've heard a few things about her and her skipper."

"Who hasn't?" Morgan asked.

"If all I hear of Cap'n Adams is true—"

"You can bet it is," Morgan interrupted, and the others nodded their heads.

"Then I've got to set eyes on the old sea-dog some time. He's turned some good tricks in his day, but he's getting careless. Must be feeling his age."

Captain Adams's shoulders straightened, but Guerrero warned him and he slouched forward in his chair again.

"Meaning just what?" Morgan asked.

"What's his old scow doing?" asked Connor.

"Lumber, Portland to Mazatlan," said Morgan.

"Oh, she carries a deck-load of lumber, all right," said Connor, laughing. "But what she carries in her hold is the joke."

"Contraband?" one of the men asked.

"Not so loud, friend. We don't want to queer Cap'n Adams's deal. Only he's getting careless. I know what he's up to; and if I know it, what must persons know

whose business it is to find but. He isn't carrying opium or chinks, if that is what you mean. But he's got an interesting cargo, all the same."

"Meaning?" asked Morgan.

"Meaning it is none of our business," said Connor. "Only I'd hate to see an old sea-dog like Cap'n Adams spend his last years in a Federal prison."

The face of Captain Adams flushed, then grew ashen as the meaning of the man's words came to him.

This man knew—he knew.

And, across the table, Senor Guerrero muttered a good Spanish oath that has no just equivalent in English and started to rise from his chair.

But Captain Adams gripped his arm so that the bone almost snapped, and the senor resumed his seat.

"Queer old fish, the cap'n," Jack Connor went on. "And that niece of his—What about her? I never heard much of it."

Morgan enlightened him.

"They call her Wild Norene; she is Captain Adams's brother's girl, and she's lived with the cap'n for ten years, since her daddy died. Sails with him all the time. Cap'n taught her to read and write aboard the schooner. Pretty as a picture, strong as a man yet soft as a woman, and wild and untamed."

Connor laughed.

"She needs a man to tame her, maybe."

"Maybe you'd like the job," chuckled Morgan.

"And I could do it if I was in the woman-taming business," Connor answered. "Honestly, I mean. I'll bet I could make her love me—make her promise to marry me. I could tame her so she'd eat out of my hand."

Again Guerrero restrained the captain, whispering to him that he could

wait for vengeance—that to betray himself now meant to spoil their enterprise.

Morgan and the others were laughing.

"Why, she won't even look at a man," said Morgan. "She's waiting to find one that measures up to her uncle, Cap'n Bill Adams; and she'll have a long wait, I'm thinkin'."

"If what I hear is true, she'll have a long wait," assented Connor. "Won't look at a man, eh? If I was in the woman-taming business, I'd make her look at me. Pretty, eh?"

"Like a picture," said one of the men. "I really saw her once."

"I'm getting interested," remarked Connor, laughing again.

"And you're gettin' blamed inconsistent—I guess that's the right word. A few minutes ago you raised blue blazes because we mentioned a certain young lady in this place, and now you're not only mentioning one, but you're mentioning names."

Jack Connor's face grew sober.

"There's a difference," he said. "There are but two classes of women. One class should never be mentioned by such men as us—they're too good. And the other class—what's the difference? This niece of Cap'n Bill's—this Wild Norene, as you call her—scarcely comes under the first class."

Captain Adams's face grew ashen again and he gripped the sides of the table, but made no attempt to get out of his chair.

Guerrero felt sudden fear; he knew Captain Adams was waiting for this Jack Connor to go so far—then the blow would fall.

"For God's sake, senor," he whispered, "don't wreck our plans! Wait until the other business is disposed of; then we can find this Jack Connor and you can

kill him. Hold on to your temper! We can find him easily; he'll be about all night."

Captain Adams's lips were set tightly; he looked across the table at Guerrero and nodded assent.

"This Wild Norene," Connor was saying, "must be the other sort. I don't know what her father was, but we all know her uncle. Bucko mate once, he was! Blackbirder, too. Traded in human flesh! His name's a terror in the South Seas. He's been a smuggler; he is yet. He's pulling off a crooked deal right now! And this Wild Norene has been on his schooner, knows his life and how he makes his money, helps him no doubt; so what sort of a girl do you suspect her to be? Too good to be mentioned in a place like this? I'm sorry for the girl, but—bah!"

They nodded their heads as they picked up the drinks a Chinese had placed on the table.

Captain Adams was looking straight at Guerrero and not seeing him, and a tear was rolling down the captain's cheek.

No man ever knew the pain he suffered in that instant. Like a flash, his life was before him—his life and Norene's. Captain Bill loved his niece, worshiped her. And he realized now, how men regarded her. They measured her by his standard.

But Connor had been wrong.

Adams never had been a blackbirder—never had dealt in human beings. He had been honest, in a way, in his dealings. He had broken revenue laws, smuggled Chinese, carried arms and ammunition to revolutionary armies, and landed them by dodging gunboats; but he had been honest in business dealings.

And Norene, he thanked Heaven, was innocent of it. She did not know the truth.

He had kept her with him rather than placing her in a school because he thought he could guard her better so. And now it appeared from this man's talk that he had made a great mistake.

But he felt rage at the thought that this man could talk so. He could tame Norene, could he? She was of the sort to be spoken of lightly?

Captain Adams said nothing aloud, but he cursed bitterly in his heart and stored up rage against Jack Connor, the man he had liked at a first glance.

Guerrero was looking across the table at him appealingly.

"I'll not spoil our plans," the captain whispered to him. "I'll wait!"

"Heaven be thanked, senor! I—I was afraid! After we have attended to this other business you'll—you'll kill this man?"

"There are things worse than death, Guerrero. And this is my own affair; keep your nose out of it!"

The men at the other table had risen and were scattering, some of them returning to the bar, some going to the gambling tables, others crowding about the platform where Sally Wood was playing.

Captain Adams heard Guerrero gasp—realized that one of the men had stopped beside him.

"Can I trouble you for a match?" a voice asked.

Adams looked up; Jack Connor was smiling down upon him.

The captain got to his feet, while Guerrero trembled and waited for the outcome. But Captain Adams had lived a life full of experience and could control himself even at such a time as this. He ran his hand in a pocket and handed Connor the match for which he had asked.

"Thanks," Connor said. He lit his pipe and puffed slowly. "Lots of the boys

around to-night," he added.

"Seems to be," replied Adams, resuming his seat. Guerrero's fear was unnecessary; the captain was studying the man before him, was not ready to take vengeance yet.

"Sailorman?" asked Connor.

"Yes. Came down from Seattle to meet a friend of mine who's skipper of a German bark. Going to sign on with him," the captain replied.

"Astoria isn't the port she used to be, but she's still some port," said Connor. "Lots of queer fish float in here. There's a funny old tub in the river now. Notice her?"

"Which one?" Adams asked. Guerrero felt the fear again.

"The letters on her stern spell '*Hester*,'" replied Connor. "But that's a joke. I know her. Once away from the river she'll be the *Benito*, and there'll be guns on her, and her sailormen will put on uniforms; then she'll be a Mexican gunboat. Her skipper is Garza, cap'n in the Mexican navy—or what they call their navy—and he's a secret service agent, too."

"Why the disguise?" asked the captain.

"That's another joke. Ever hear of Cap'n Bill Adams? Of course you have, since you're a sailorman. Cap'n Bill's old scow is in the river now, and the gunboat is watching her. Old Bill must be losing his cleverness."

"Why is the gunboat on his trail?" the captain asked.

"Nobody knows exactly, but there are suspicions. It wouldn't be the first time Bill Adams had carried arms and ammunition marked sewing machines. But nobody dares tackle Adams without getting the goods on him first. Believe me, they'd better not! Have a drink? No? Much obliged for the match."

Connor hurried away toward the bar, and the captain's eyes met Guerrero's across the table.

The senor was vastly troubled.

"We must get away to-night," he whispered. "Great Heaven, every one seems to know!"

"Remember what the fellow said—nobody tackles Adams without getting the goods on him first. And they haven't got the goods on me—yet!"

"But the man for whom we wait—"

"That man thinks we sail to-morrow evening. If he does what you think he'll do, we can attend to him and get away before daylight. I can get outside the three-mile limit before that old scow of a gunboat catches me."

"Sit as you are," said Guerrero. "I am watching for your man. When he comes in—Ah! He has arrived."

The captain did not turn.

"And the other?" he asked.

"I do not see Garza yet. We have been watching him closely, and one of my men will trail him here. Your mate is to meet Garza here to-night and tell him the cargo is aboard and when you are to sail."

Captain Adams's hands gripped the sides of the table again.

"I hate a traitor and know how to deal with one," he said. "What is Riney doing?"

"Is that his name? He's looking through the crowd. Now he has seated himself at a table. There's no doubt of the man's guilt."

"Riney had been my mate for two years, and there is doubt of his guilt until I hear from his own lips words that prove him to be dishonest," said the captain. "You don't suppose he can recognize me if he looks over here?"

"Sit as you are. You are in the shadow. I am watching."

Riney, Captain Adams's mate, appeared nervous. He arose and went to the bar again, then resumed his seat at the table.

In the corner of the room men were wildly applauding Sally Wood's music. She ceased playing when she saw Jack Connor standing near the platform, and walked over to him.

"You've been drinking too much again," she accused. "Why do you?"

"Now, Sally, I'm not in a mood for a lecture to-night. You've been playing too much; you look tired."

"I get sick of it at times."

There was agony in the woman's voice. Connor looked down at her with sympathy in his face. It was not sympathy she wanted to see there.

"It is pretty hard on you," he said. "Why don't you give it up? Let the scoundrel go!"

"Not until I find him and punish him. He took my father's savings, remember. My father didn't—didn't have quite enough to eat for a year before he died."

She looked away, biting her lip to keep back the tears. Soon she turned toward him again, trying to smile.

But Jack Connor was looking away toward the opposite side of the room. An expression of unbelief was on his face.

In that opposite wall was an open doorway, twice as wide as an ordinary door, that led to a cheap cafe and restaurant where sailormen ate and painted women sometimes took their meals. Framed in it for an instant, beckoning him, he had seen the girl he had met in the street while with Morgan, the girl whose handkerchief he had picked up, mention of whom he had prohibited in this sorry resort.

CHAPTER II.

Defiance.

SALLY WOOD had not seen the girl who had stood for an instant in the doorway, and thought little of it when Jack Connor excused himself and hurried across the room, thinking some friend had called him.

Connor made his way rapidly around the room, shaking off his acquaintances who would have detained him, and reached the open doorway. He waited there for a moment, until he was sure nobody was watching him, then slipped into the other room.

She stood a dozen feet from the doorway, awaiting him. In an instant he was at her side.

"You wanted me?" he asked.

He looked down into her face. He regretted the liquor he had taken, and the very thought of such a girl in such a place half sobered him. But her eyes met his without drooping, and he read in them that she was good.

"Perhaps we'd better walk out on the street," he said. "This is scarcely a place—"

"Wait," she interrupted. "I want you to do something for me. You said this afternoon—"

"That any time I could do you a service you had but to let me know. I still say the same."

"Look through the doorway then. You see the third man from the end of the bar—the one with the red handkerchief about his neck?"

"The one with the scar on his right cheek?"

"Yes. My father gave him that scar one day because he was impudent. He has hated my father and me since. This evening I learned of something he said—about me."

“Yes?”

“It wasn’t complimentary. It was an insult.”

Connor’s eyes met hers again, and he did not need to ask more questions. His fists clenched.

“I saw him come in here a short time ago,” the girl went on, “and as I passed the place the door was open and I saw you. I remembered what you had said, and took the liberty of entering and asking you to do me a service.”

“I shall do so gladly.”

“I want you to thrash that man.”

He looked at her quickly. This girl, with goodness in her face, thought nothing apparently of asking that a man be given a beating.

He looked through the doorway at the man again.

“His name is Riney,” the girl was saying. “You’ll thrash him for me because of the insult he has offered?”

“Consider it done,” Connor said.

“But first you may walk as far as the corner with me, if you will.”

He ushered her from the place, put himself at her side, and they hurried to the corner. She clung to his arm, and Connor’s heart throbbed.

“I suppose you think I am a peculiar girl for asking you to do such a thing,” she said.

“I have no right to think so. No doubt you have a good reason for it. But I would suggest, if you’ll allow me, that this part of town—”

“Is no place for me? I can take care of myself, sir.”

She was smiling as she spoke.

He met her eyes again, half afraid of what he might see there.

And she read his thought.

“I don’t want you to think that I am a—a bad girl,” she whispered. “Don’t

think, please, that I am used to associating with—with—”

“Such persons as are to be found here? Myself, for instance?” he asked.

“I did not mean that. I feel sure you are a good man.”

“A woman like you would make a saint out of a sinner,” he said.

“Here we are at the corner. You’d better return now. I shall know if you do as I have asked.”

“When I beat him I shall remember that he insulted you.”

“Yes. And thank you!”

“Shall I see you again?” he asked.

“I don’t even know your name.”

“Does the name make much difference?” she asked.

“None at all.”

“And you want to see me again?”

“Yes.”

“Perhaps to-morrow afternoon I’ll be walking along Commercial Street, where you saw me to-day. I am not certain—”

“I’ll watch for you then.”

She held out her hand, and he clasped it.

She smiled at him again, then hurried away.

Connor looked after her until she had disappeared in the darkness down the street, then turned back toward the resort.

He did not question. She had asked him to thrash a man who had insulted her, and he promised himself to do the task well.

He did not care to know the circumstances. He did not care to remember she had entered the resort to call him. He gave her credit for courage in doing so, feeling that it had taken courage for her to stand there in the midst of painted women and men who thought nothing of approaching any woman to be

found there.

When he reentered the resort he did not see the man Riney at first. Riney had left the bar and crossed the room again, to sit at the table within a few paces of Guerrero and Captain Bill Adams.

The captain was bent over the table in the shadow, listening, waiting.

"Garza has arrived," Guerrero was whispering to him.

"Has he located Riney yet?"

"Yes; he is coming this way. He has nodded to Riney. Now he sits down beside him."

Garza was wise, however. He and Riney regarded each other as if they had been strangers.

Garza ordered a drink and when it arrived tossed it off. Then he looked across at Riney and winked.

"Fishing good?" Garza asked.

"Great!" said Riney. "I know a craft whose hold is full."

"Shipping 'em south, eh?"

"I should guess," said Riney slowly, "that she would float out tomorrow evening with the tide."

Guerrero's eyes met Captain Adams's across the table, and the captain nodded slowly.

He had heard. Riney, his mate, had sold him out. There was nothing enigmatical about his conversation with Garza, the secret-service agent. The hold was full of fish—the ship would sail tomorrow evening with the tide. The hold was full of arms and ammunition; the *Amingo* would start on her voyage to the aid of revolutionists in less than twenty-four hours—that was the meaning.

Captain Adams stood up, and so did Guerrero.

The captain's rage was not of the sort that makes a man "fly off the handle" and "have it out." Guerrero shuddered as he

looked at the face of the old sea-dog. Captain Adams was the sort of man who would proceed with deliberation and refined cruelty in such a case.

Not for any amount of money would Guerrero have stood in the shoes of Mate Riney.

But as Adams turned to confront the traitorous mate another man lurched across the room and half fell against the table at which Riney and Garza were sitting.

It was Jack Connor, feigning intoxication.

"Look where you're going," Riney growled.

"Keep out of the way!" shouted Connor.

He kicked at the table, and it went over. He reached for Riney, who sprang to his feet and aimed a terrific blow at Jack Connor's head. And then Riney realized his mistake; Jack Connor was not intoxicated. He stepped swiftly to one side, and his fist crashed into the mate's face.

In an instant they were at it, and every one in the room had crowded forward, making a great ring of human bodies, to watch the combat.

Members of the *Amingo's* crew were there, cheering on their mate, who had a reputation as a fighter. Jack Connor's friends were there, too, and stood in the ring, grinning with delight.

They had seen Connor fight before. He had punishment in his blows, and he had fistic science in addition.

The mate's terrific blows struck empty air; Connor's fists played on the other man's face, head, and breast.

Slowly and surely Connor was beating his antagonist down. He was delaying the final blow purposely, making Riney take all the punishment he could stand. He remembered only that the man he

was beating had insulted the girl he had met that afternoon.

Riney's shipmates saw how the battle was going, and edged forward. It was an axiom of the sea that Captain Adams's men stood together in brawls.

A foot was thrown out, Connor was tripped, and as he saved himself from sprawling on the floor a blow from Riney's fist caught him on the side of the head and staggered him.

A roar of rage at the foul trick came from a score of throats. In an instant the fight had become general. Connor's friends sprang to meet the men from the *Amingo*.

But in that last instant Connor's fist stretched Riney to the floor.

Garza had made his escape. Guerrero hung close to the wall.

Captain Adams, towering above the other men, watched the combat as it raged, his arms folded.

Riney, getting up from the floor with the intention of continuing the combat, saw his captain's eyes fixed on him. He recognized the coat the captain was wearing, and knew that the captain had been sitting a few feet away while he had been talking to Garza.

Riney knew well nothing but suspicion would bring Captain Adams to such a place. And he realized what form the vengeance of the captain would take.

He stooped and started toward the combatants again. But as several men came between the captain and himself, he turned and darted toward the door, escaped into the night, and fled toward the water-front.

Sally Wood, standing on the platform against the end of the piano, caught sight of the mate's face as he flashed past her and to the door.

Her own face turned white, and she staggered to a chair and sat down.

Morgan had been beaten to the

floor, and others of Jack Connor's friends had met with disaster. The crew of the *Amingo* could fight. Connor found himself almost alone, in a circle of flying fists.

His rage redoubled. The odds were not fair. He threw himself into the fray with renewed zeal.

A weight of human bodies assailed him. His foot slipped and he crashed to the floor. Men were on top of him, striking him, trying to choke him.

Some one near him was screeching: "Let him up! Tie his hands behind him!" Take him to the cap'n!"

Others of the *Amingo's* crew took up the cry:

"Take him to th' cap'n! Cap'n Bill will know what to do with the man that smashed the mate!"

Connor began fighting again as they let him up. He had heard of Captain Bill Adams; he didn't intend to let these men carry him aboard the *Amingo*.

But his struggles were in vain. They fastened his hands behind him and started him toward the alley door, half carrying him, some of them guarding the rear to prevent Connor's friends from effecting a rescue.

"Take 'im to th' cap'n!" they cried.

A giant of a man stepped between them and the door and held up a hand. "Stop!" he cried. "Turn that man loose!"

The sailors of the *Amingo* gazed at him in amazement. One of them laughed aloud. Another looked away, afraid to meet the skipper's eyes.

"Why, it's th' cap'n!" another cried. "It's Cap'n Bill!"

Jack Connor, knowing the captain had heard his conversation earlier in the evening regarding himself and his niece, felt something like fear clutch at his heart for a moment as he looked at the giant in front of him whose eyes met his and held

them.

“Turn him loose!” the captain repeated.

“But he beat up Mate Riney, cap’n!”

“I saw it! Turn him loose!”

“He beat up th’ mate!”

“That’s why I’m telling you to turn him loose!” cried the captain, walking toward them. “He saved me a job. I was going to beat Riney up myself.”

Wondering at the skipper’s manner, his men obeyed him, and Jack Connor soon stood in their midst with his arms and hands free.

Senor Guerrero, who had been standing beside the door, hurried forward and stood on tiptoe to whisper something in the captain’s ear. The captain nodded his head.

“Go aboard, men—all of you!” he commanded. “Round up the others! I want every one aboard in half an hour—every one except Riney!”

It was the old sea-dog giving a command. The men disappeared as if by magic influence.

“As for you,” said the captain, stepping up to Jack Connor, “I want to talk to you. Come over in the corner.”

Connor followed him slowly, ready for the combat he felt sure was coming.

He remembered how he had made sport of Captain Bill in the captain’s hearing; remembered what he had said concerning the captain’s niece, Wild Norene.

Morgan, on his feet again, holding one hand to a bruised and bloody face, sensed the situation, and attracted the attention of certain of Connor’s friends. At a short distance away they waited, ready to plunge to the rescue if Captain Bill Adams opened hostilities.

They had heard of Captain Bill.

Even Jack Connor would have difficulty standing up to Captain Bill.

Captain Bill sat down at the table and motioned Connor to the other chair. Guerrero remained standing against the wall a short distance away, wishing the captain would hurry, fearful for the success of their enterprise.

The mate had been unmasked; Garza, the secret-service agent, knew facts and details. They might not wait many hours before making a move.

Even now, when the captain was away, they might be descending upon the ship, and the few men left aboard might be making an inspection of the cargo in the *Amingo’s* hold.

“You’re a sailor?” the captain asked Connor.

“Yes. I’ve got a mate’s ticket.”

“It is none of my business why you thrashed Riney,” the captain went on. “I’m glad you did it, however. I had just discovered that he was a man I couldn’t trust. I’m minus a mate. Do you want his job?”

Connor looked up quickly and met the captain’s eyes.

“You’re offering me the berth?” he demanded.

“I am.”

“And to-night you sat here and heard me grill you and say things about your—your niece.”

Captain Adams’s eyes flashed for an instant, then he regained his composure.

“I’m not speaking of that. Do you want the job?”

Connor laughed lightly.

“No, thanks!” he replied. “You’d get me aboard and beat me to death as soon as we got to sea. I’m taking no chances with you after you heard what I said this evening. Do you think I am a fool? And, besides, I don’t like the voyage you’re to

take. I don't like your cargo."

The captain restrained his anger and bent forward across the table.

"As to my cargo," he said, "that is none of your business. You are not supposed to know anything about it when you ship. As to the other thing you mention—you've heard whether my word is good."

"I've heard it is as good as gold," said Connor.

"Very well. I give you my word of honor that I'll not lay a hand on you during the voyage. Understand? Does that satisfy you? And you can bring your friend Morgan along. I need another man or two."

"I don't doubt your word, captain. But I'll decline the job with thanks."

Their eyes clashed again.

"I want you," said Captain Adams. "You're the sort of man I need on the *Amingo*. I'm going to sail within twenty-four hours, and when I sail, you'll be aboard."

"I guess not!"

"I'm a man of my word, you've admitted. And I give you my word right now that you'll sail with me. You'll sail with me, as my mate, whether you want to or not!"

"I don't care to sail with any one just now," said Connor, remembering the girl he had met, and her half promise that he was to see her again. "And, if I did, I'd not sail with you! I've got money and friends, and Astoria is my home port.

"And even Captain Bill Adams can't make me sign on when I don't want to do it! *You* can understand *that!*"

CHAPTER III. Wild Norene.

THE throbbing of engines, the washing of waves came to the ears of Jack Connor. He opened his eyes, sitting up quickly at the same time, and in an instant was lying down again, for his head had struck sharply against the top of the bunk.

He realized then that he was in the fore-castle of some craft.

He slipped from the bunk and tried to stand up. The vessel was rolling and pitching. Connor guessed instantly that she was passing out over the bar at the mouth of the Columbia River.

He cursed softly to himself as he put his hands to his aching head and tried to remember what had occurred. He had risen from the chair after hurling his defiance into the face of Captain Bill Adams, and gone to the bar, to be joined there by Morgan and some of his friends.

As they drank they had watched Captain Adams and Guerrero walk through the room and out the front door.

Connor had talked with Sally Wood again for a short time, but Sally had acted in a peculiar fashion. Sally's face had been white, and she appeared nervous, and Connor had left her, afraid she was going to lecture him again for drinking so heavily.

Together with Morgan and the others, he had gone to another resort. There Morgan and he had seated themselves in a corner and ordered a Chinese to bring drinks.

He had tossed his off—and that was all he could remember.

Shanghaied! Jack Connor
Shanghaied!

Connor laughed mirthlessly as he held his aching head. He did not doubt that he was aboard the *Amingo*, that Captain Bill Adams had won.

He found a bucket of water in a corner and drank deeply, then bathed his

head. A groan caused him to whirl around. A cry escaped him. Crawling out of another bunk was Morgan, his friend.

"You!" Morgan gasped. "You?"

"The same!" said Connor.

"Where are we?"

"Aboard some old hooker, just crossing the bar, I should imagine. We're shanghaied, that's what!"

Morgan cursed as he made his way toward the water-bucket.

"But—" he began.

"It isn't a hard puzzle to solve," said Connor, laughing again. "I'll bet we're aboard the *Amingo*."

"She wasn't to have sailed for twenty-four hours."

"Maybe it's been twenty-four hours," replied Connor, "and maybe Cap'n Bill made up his mind to sail earlier. Cap'n Bill has a habit, I've understood, of changing his mind at times. Take another swig of that water, and we'll go on deck and face the music."

"Shanghaied!" gasped Morgan, only half able to get the idea through his befogged brain. "Now, by Davy Jones—"

"Going to whip the skipper and crew and put back into port?" sneered Connor. "If we're shanghaied aboard the *Amingo* we might as well take our medicine, that's what! We're due to obey cap'n's orders until we make a port, then there'll be a chance to desert. We might as well make the best of it."

Morgan sat down on the edge of a bunk and held his head in his hands. Connor stood before him smiling.

"We might get a chance to get square with Cap'n Bill, you know," he said. "That is, if we are aboard the *Amingo*, and I'll make a big bet we are. And, if we are, we're helping pack arms and ammunition to the Mexican revolutionists, and there'll be a Mexican gunboat at our

heels. Oh, we'll have experience and excitement, all right, and maybe get shot up and maybe go to jail!

"We'll be lucky if we have only the Mexican to deal with. One of Uncle Sam's revenue cutters might take a notion to overhaul us before we get on the high seas."

"What are we going to do?" Morgan asked.

"Go on deck. Come on."

Connor led the way. They reached the deck to discover that day was breaking. To starboard the light at North Head flashed. Behind was the river and Astoria.

And they were aboard the *Amingo*, as Connor had guessed.

Her lights were not burning, and Connor guessed they had not been burning when the craft slipped from the river. Her nose was pointed toward the open sea, and the throbbing of her engines told that they were being driven to the utmost. Captain Adams was barking orders, and members of the crew were hurrying about.

Morgan followed at Connor's heels as he led the way across the deck toward the skipper. There was a grin on the face of Captain Adams as he met them. He stood before them with arms folded, waiting for one of them to speak.

"Would you mind telling us, cap'n, what we're doing here?" Connor asked.

"Sleep must have robbed you of your wits, Mr. Connor," came the reply. "You are aboard the steam schooner *Amingo*, Portland to Mazatlan, with lumber, of which craft you are first mate and your friend a member of the crew."

"Oh! That's it! I'm first mate, eh?"

"You must have taken too much liquor, Mr. Connor, that you fail to remember. I shall be obliged to deny you shore leave when we make port. You'll ruin your health."

“Would you mind telling me just how it came about?”

“Delighted. I offered you the berth and you refused, you’ll remember. When you left that resort you went to a saloon where the proprietor is under obligations to me. He put the old reliable knock-out drops in the poison you ordered. A couple of my men took pity on you and your friend and carried you aboard. We didn’t want to leave you behind.”

Morgan took a step forward. His chin made an inviting target as he bent toward the skipper.

“And let me tell you, you’ll suffer for this!” he cried. “No man can shanghai me and get away with it!”

Captain Bill’s arm flashed through the air, there was a crack, and Morgan stretched his length on the deck.

Connor did not make a move. Morgan should have known better, he thought. Shanghaied or not, no man can rebuke a ship’s master and expect to go unpunished.

“I am glad to see, Mr. Connor, that you take a sensible view of the matter,” said the captain. “I’ll ask you to take the deck presently. Just now I am interested in putting three miles of the Pacific between the schooner and the coast.

“Of course, you must understand. There’s a little vessel in the river that might follow us. You mentioned her last night during our interesting conversation.”

He called a couple of the men and ordered them to take Morgan to the forecabin for the time being and place him in irons, then faced Connor again.

“I said I’d have you for mate, and I have you,” he announced. “I am a man of my word. I suppose you wonder why?”

“Because I smashed your old mate, Riney, I reckon.”

“Wrong, Mr. Connor. Riney

deserved the smashing, but I didn’t want you for mate because I admired your fistic ability. I can supply all of that necessary on this craft. I wanted you under me where I could give you the punishment you deserved.”

Connor’s face flushed as he looked the other man squarely in the eyes.

“You gave me your word of honor that, if I made the voyage with you, you’d not lay hand on me,” he said. “Now that you have me aboard, I suppose you’ll take it out on me. Start in, Captain Bill Adams. You’ll win, maybe, and anyway I’m helpless on your ship and out at sea. But I’ll leave my mark on you—”

The look in the captain’s face caused him to hesitate.

“I am a man of my word,” replied the captain, “and when I said I’d not lay hands on you I meant it. I’m not going to beat you up on this voyage.

“But I am going to make your life a hell!

“I overheard you last night, as you know. I don’t care what you think of me or what you have said about me. But you spoke of my niece. You divided women into classes, and put her in the worthless class.

“You called her wild and untamed, and said you could tame her. You could make her love you, promise to marry you, you said. And you intimated she was a woman of loose character, my niece, one of the sweetest girls God ever let breathe the breath of life! You can tame her, can you! Very well, Mr. Jack Connor, that’s exactly what you’ll have to do!”

His eyes blazed into Connor’s, and Connor took a step backward, not because of sudden fear, but because of the spectacle of wrath and pain mingled that those eyes held.

“I’ll be watching you,” the captain

continued, "and Heaven help you if you show an instant of disrespect. I'll tell the girl what I heard you say. She's a good girl, a sweet and honest girl. I've kept her with me because I was afraid to leave her alone in some port. I worship her. Whatever I have been, Norene is honest and good.

"Tame her, then, if you can; make her love you and promise to marry you, and do it honestly and honorably. You have until we make port. I've put you in the mate's place so you'll have every chance. I'm playing fair!"

"Suppose I do not fancy making a young woman fall in love with me," said Connor. "Suppose I do not make the attempt; suppose I grant you that I made a mistake, that she is a good, sweet girl?"

"There still remains the fact that you said you could tame her, boasted of it before your worthless companions. You have until we reach port."

"And if I do not try, or do try and fail?"

"Then you stand proved a liar, Jack Connor, and I'll remember the insults and deal with you."

"But you've passed your word you'll not lay a hand on me."

"And I'll not. But I can do something else. I can make it appear you are guilty of certain things, violating international law, for instance. I can swear, and my men will back me up, that what this vessel carries is known to you alone, was shipped by you, that I thought it honest cargo—for so it looks. I can have you stood up against a wall, a file of Mexican Federal soldiers before you, and shot.

"Do you understand now? Make good your boast. Tame Wild Norene after she knows what you have said about her—or die! Take the deck!"

Captain Adams went aft. Connor stood near the rail, looking after him. What

the skipper had said was damnably true—Adams could, perhaps, do as he promised.

Ordinarily, Connor would have had no scruples. He would have laid siege to the heart of Wild Norene and won it to save his own life, if he could.

But now the scheme seemed distasteful to him. Even if such a thing were possible after the girl's mind had been poisoned against him, he did not want to play with a girl's affections only to cast her aside if he won.

He remembered the girl in Astoria, the one he could not meet now on Commercial Street, as he had hoped. He saw a vision of her before him—her large, trusting eyes and frank face. She was the first woman he ever had met for whom he thought he could care.

What would she think of a man who would make love to a woman when he did not mean it, merely to save his own half-worthless life?

"I'll not do it!" he muttered. "There'll be some other way. I can wait until the last—put up a fight. Morgan will help me!"

He took charge of the deck and for a time worked frantically. Captain Adams watched him and recognized that Connor knew his business, that the new mate was familiarizing himself with the men and the ship.

Half an hour passed; then Connor turned aft—to meet the vision of which he had dreamed.

She was coming across the deck toward him, her face flushed, her eyes wide in wonder. She was dressed in a loose blouse and short skirt, and her hair was whipped about her face by the wind. Connor stared at her as she advanced.

What could she be doing here? he wondered. If she was surprised to see him, he was more surprised to see her. But his

heart beat wildly as he realized she was aboard, that he would see her every day, talk with her, walk the deck with her.

Tame Wild Norene to save his own life? Not with this girl aboard! He could not act falsely before her, could not let her despise him, as he felt sure she would if he did such a thing.

"You?" he heard her say. "You are the new mate?"

"I whipped Riney, then got his job," he replied, laughing. "But how do you happen to be here? I was to have met you this afternoon in Astoria."

"I intended to sail on the *Amingo*, but she wasn't to have sailed until tonight," she answered. "There was a change in plans. I really expected to see you in Astoria this afternoon. And now—to find you here—"

"But why are you here?" he asked. "I didn't know the *Amingo* carried passengers."

Captain Adams, smiling evilly, stepped between them.

"Mr. Connor," he said, "let me make you acquainted with my niece, Miss Norene Adams!"

The captain's eyes were upon him, but Connor could not prevent the look of amazement and pain that came into his face.

Norene Adams! This woman he had met on the street in Astoria, the only woman he ever had taken the trouble to look at more than once, the woman for whom he had thrashed a man, the woman it had pained him to see in the resort, mention of whose name he had prohibited there—was Wild Norene, of whom he had spoken lightly to his friends!

The girl was dimpling, her eyes sparkling, ready to laugh at her uncle and tell him they had met before. But Connor, watching the evil smile on the captain's

face, was thinking of the predicament in which he found himself.

That this girl could be the Wild Norene of whom he had heard so much was not to be believed. How she would despise him when her uncle told her!

There was a pleading in Connor's face as he looked at the skipper, but Captain Bill did not show mercy.

"Norene," he said, "I've something to tell you in Mr. Connor's presence."

"Well, uncle?"

"You know I went to a certain resort in Astoria last night to learn the truth about Riney being a man I could not trust?"

"I heard you say you were going with Senor Guerrero."

"Mr. Connor was sitting at a table near me with some of his companions. They began talking of the *Amingo*, of me and my business, finally of you."

"Of me!" she exclaimed.

"Very complimentary, wasn't it, to speak of you in such a place? Mr. Connor spoke, too, in a tone half the persons in the resort could hear. One of his companions remonstrated with him about mentioning your name there.

"Do you know what he replied? That there were but two classes of women, one too good to be mentioned by men of his stamp, and the others of such standing that it made no difference what a man said about them.

"He put you in the latter class."

"Oh!" the girl, cried; her face flushed scarlet.

She looked at Connor, but he was not watching her; his eyes were blazing into those of the captain, and he said nothing.

"Is this—true?" she asked him.

"Your uncle has said that it is," he replied, without taking his eyes from the captain's face.

“Wait, Norene; that is not all,” the skipper resumed. “One of the men said you were called Wild Norene, and Mr. Connor said you needed a man to tame you.

“‘I would tame her,’ he boasted. ‘I could make her love me, promise to be my wife. I could tame her so she’d eat out of my hand.’

“That was his boast, Norene, to his drunken companions, in a dive, where other men could hear.

“So I had him knocked out and carried aboard, and I’ve made him mate. We’ll see if he makes good his boast. I’ve given him until we reach port to win your love and your promise to be his wife. If he fails, there will be punishment provided.”

Captain Adams laughed raucously. Anger flamed in the girl’s face as she turned toward Connor and stepped close to him.

“Is all this true?” she demanded.

“Cap’n Adams says it is.”

“I want to hear you say so. Did you make that boast before your drunken companions in that resort?”

“Listen to me!” Connor cried. “I met you accidentally yesterday afternoon on the street. You’re the first woman I ever took the trouble to look at twice. My friend taunted me about it when we went to that resort, and I warned all men they were not to mention you, even without mentioning your name. Your uncle, if he was there at the time, will say this is the truth.

“I didn’t know you were Wild Norene; I’d never have guessed it. I knew only that you were a woman, and a good woman.

“I saw you later at the door of that resort, and you asked me to thrash a man who had insulted you, acted as if your presence in such a place was nothing unusual, and still I knew that you were good.

“When I spoke as I did to my friends I was not speaking of you. I was talking of the Norene I knew by reputation only, thinking only of what I had heard men say—”

“Then you *did* say it?”

“I said it—yes. But I didn’t know—”

Her eyes held his. Her face went white for an instant, and with all the strength at her command she struck him across the face with the flat of her hand. Her fingers left white marks in the red and tan, but Connor did not move.

She started to turn away, half ashamed of what she had done.

“I didn’t know!” he said. “Great heavens, girl, do you suppose I’d insult you purposely, whether I knew you personally or not? I tell you you’re the last woman in the world whose name I’d speak lightly—the only woman in the world I’d look at a second time—”

“You already are beginning to tame me, I see. You are trying, perhaps, to make me believe you love me, trying to make me love you,” she said in scorn.

“Miss Adams, can’t you understand? I didn’t know you were Wild Norene.”

“And how may I be sure?” she asked. “You boasted you could tame me. When I asked you to thrash Riney for his insult to me, you did it instantly. Perhaps that was to gain my gratitude. Maybe that was part of the taming process.”

“Miss Adams, I—”

“I do not care to discuss the matter with you,” she interrupted. “You are beneath notice! You may prepare to take what punishment my uncle has promised, for small chance you have of taming me and winning my love!”

“And if that punishment is—death?”

"It does not matter to me; I am not interested," she said.

Without another word she turned her back upon him and walked slowly away to the rail, to stand there looking out over the sea, making a picture to attract the eyes of any man.

Connor looked after her. He was cursing himself for the words he had spoken in the resort.

Captain Adams was chuckling.

"I guess she told you something!" the skipper said.

Connor whirled upon him.

"And I'll tell you something!" he exclaimed. "This is the third time I've met her. But I love her! Do you understand? I think she's the best and sweetest woman in the world. And I'll do what I boasted I could do, in spite of the way you have poisoned her against me.

"I'll win her and I'll marry her! And I'll not do it to escape any punishment you may hand out, but because she's the woman I want—the woman I'm ready to fight for! Can you understand that?"

CHAPTER IV.

The Stowaway.

THE noon hour found the steam-schooner *Amingo* on the broad sea far off the coast, her nose pointed to the south, the Oregon shore half obscured by a fog.

Connor had gone to the fore-castle, at Captain's Bill's orders, to remove the irons from Morgan and, after delivering a lecture, send him on deck. He made the most of the opportunity and told Morgan all that had transpired; an attempt to outwit Captain Adams was decided upon, and both were to apply their minds to inventing ways and means.

There would be safety for several days, for the captain would keep his word, they knew, and make no move to harm Connor until the end of the voyage.

It was at this time that two members of the crew, climbing over the lumber lashed to the deck, discovered the stowaway.

The stowaway was a woman.

Captain Adams's eyes bulged with surprise as the two men led her across the deck toward him." She was tall and shapely, dressed in serviceable clothing, and had no hat. Her hair was disheveled and flying in the breeze.

She made no attempt at resistance, but walked forward proudly, not even trying to shake off the men who grasped her arms and urged her on.

The brow of Captain Bill was wrinkled in thought; he told himself he had seen the woman before. The men led her up to him, and her eyes met his unflinchingly.

"Stowaway, cap'n," one of the men said, grinning. "She was hidden between two piles of lumber."

"Go forward!"

The men obeyed, turning frequently to look back at the woman, who remained standing in front of the skipper, waiting for him to speak.

A woman stowaway was unusual, and any sort of a stowaway was a rarity aboard the *Amingo*.

"Well?" the skipper demanded.

The woman put her hands behind her back and regarded him without apparent emotion.

"How did you come aboard?" Captain Adams asked.

"I took a small boat and rowed out to the schooner this morning about three o'clock. I understood you would sail before daylight, so I had no time to lose. I caught a line under the bowsprit, and made my

way to the deck and hid in the lumber. I let the boat drift out to sea.”

“It is rather unusual for a woman to do such a thing. Why did you do it?”

“I had good reasons.”

“You live in Astoria?”

“I’ve been living there for some time.”

“Running away from the police?”

The girl’s face flushed as she replied:

“I have done nothing to put the police on me, sir.”

“I guess you’ll have to explain. When a woman does what you have done—sneaks aboard a vessel—there must be some compelling reason. There isn’t much charity for stowaways. Do you know where this vessel is going?”

“No, sir.”

“What? I supposed, naturally, you wanted to get to a certain port and had no money. Why, in Heaven’s name, did you stow away on a craft whose destination is unknown to you?”

“I’m not anxious to get to any certain port,” she said, “and I have plenty of money. I can pay my passage.”

She reached in the front of her waist and drew out a roll of bills, and a small bag filled with silver and gold coins.

“This isn’t a passenger vessel,” said the captain. “And if you wanted to sail with us and had money, why didn’t you see me about it, instead of playing stowaway?”

“You’d not have given me passage, would you?”

“I scarcely think so.”

“That’s why I sneaked aboard in the way I did. I was determined to sail on this vessel and none other.”

“Seems like I’ve seen you some place before.”

“You no doubt have, sir. I’ve been playing the piano in a certain resort in

Astoria. My name is Sally Wood.”

“Ah! I remember now. Your story was told to me last night. I think I am more than justified in asking you for an explanation now. You don’t know where we are bound, but were determined to sail with us. Why?”

“You say you’ve heard my story?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know that I’ve been working—where I have—in order to get money quickly. And you know for what reason?”

“To trail the man who married you and deserted you, I was told.”

“The man who stole my father’s savings and left us penniless,” she added. “Last night I saw that man. That’s why I’m aboard this vessel. He is a member of your crew.”

“A member of my crew!” the captain cried. “Prove that, girl, and convince me your story is true, and I’ll manhandle him myself.”

“I will take care of him,” she said. “I always thought I’d kill him when I found him. Now I’m not so sure but what I’ll make him suffer first. I don’t know how it’s to be done, but I’ll find a way. Just let me pay passage, so I can be near him and watch. I’ll not create a disturbance aboard your ship.”

“You’ll pay no passage! “ the captain exclaimed. “If I’ve got a man like that aboard this ship I want to know it, and I’ll help you punish him. Who is he?” .

“Your mate, sir.”

“What?”

“He was fighting last night, and I recognized him just as the fight was over. I learned he was your mate and discovered that you had ordered your men aboard. I knew you meant to sail immediately. I got my money, changed clothes, left the place where I was employed, and boarded the

schooner. Now I want to meet him face to face.”

The captain looked away across the sea for a moment, then back at her. She was watching his face, waiting for his answer.

“I’m afraid you’ve made a mistake, girl,” he said.

“Do you think I don’t know the man who wrecked my life, helped send my father to his grave?”

“I didn’t mean a mistake in that way. You say he fought in the resort?”

“You saw the fight, for I saw you watching. He was fighting with Jack Connor. He sneaked away like the coward he is.”

“You mean Riney, then?”

“His name was Wood when I married him. The man I mean has a scar on his face.”

“He didn’t sneak away because he was afraid to continue the fight, for, my men won,” said the captain. “He sneaked away because he saw me there—because he knew I had discovered he was a man not to be trusted. He sneaked away so I couldn’t get my hands on his worthless throat—”

“And now you’ve—you’ve punished him?” she asked. In her eyes was the fear that she would not have a chance for vengeance; that the captain had taken that chance away from her.

“I’ve had no chance to punish him,” Captain Adams said. “He’s deserted the ship, girl. I’ve got a new mate, though I had a deuce of a time getting him. My new mate is the man who thrashed Riney—Jack Connor.”

“Oh!” There was surprise in her voice at this last statement of the captain’s.

Then realization of her position came to her.

“So he has escaped me, too!” she

cried. “I’ve stowed away to get him, and he’s behind in Astoria laughing, and I’m aboard this ship bound for—Heaven knows where!”

Captain Adams patted her shoulder.

“Don’t worry, girl,” he said. “It isn’t as bad as you think. I’ve a good notion that the man you want will meet up with you soon. I’m pretty sure he’s on a craft that’s going to follow us down the coast. You just make yourself comfortable aboard. It’d do me good to see you meet him, and I’ll arrange it if I can. My niece is aboard, and she’ll be company for you. And there is Jack Connor, too.”

The captain chuckled as another thought came to him. “It is fortunate Connor is my new mate,” he said. “I think he likes you, girl.”

Her face flashed crimson as the captain looked at her. He had remembered what Guerrero had said—that this woman loved Jack Connor. If she thought Connor returned her affection she’d pay considerable attention to him. It would prove another barrier between Connor and Norene.

Captain Adams didn’t think another barrier was needed, but it was better to be on the safe side.

It happened that at that moment Connor and Morgan came from the forecabin. Connor and Sally Wood faced each other across six feet of deck.

“You?” Connor gasped. “For the love of Heaven, Sally, what are you doing here?”

“She came to find her husband, the man who deserted her,” the captain said. “Riney was the man.”

“Then I’m doubly glad I smashed him! But you missed him—you are here, and he has remained behind.”

“She played stowaway to get at him,” the captain said. “Two of the men

found her among the lumber piles forward. There's nerve for you. We'll take care of her, Connor, and if Riney follows on that fool gunboat we'll see that she meets him face to face and makes him uncomfortable. Take her below and see that she has something hot to eat."

"Thank you, sir," Connor replied.

Sally Wood staggered as she started forward, and Connor threw an arm about her and helped her across the deck.

Wild Norene came from below just in time to see them. She stood to one side as they passed. Connor gave her no attention; he was bending over Sally Wood and talking to her in a low tone.

Wild Norene's face flushed and she hurried across to her uncle.

"Who is that woman?" she asked. "What is she doing here?"

The captain laughed.

"She's a stowaway, niece. The men found her behind a lumber pile. She crept aboard at Astoria just before we sailed."

"But—"

"She was afraid I'd not take her as a passenger, and she was determined to sail on the *Amingo*. That's why she stowed away. Interested in the mate."

"Interested in the mate," Norene repeated, looking in the direction Connor and Sally Wood had taken. "What sort of a woman—"

"She's a musician. She played the piano in the place where Riney and Connor had the fight last night.

"Oh!" There was deep scorn in Norene's voice.

"Both interested in this girl, I imagine. Perhaps that's why they fought; the fight seemed to start over nothing at all."

"Oh!" she gasped again.

It flashed over her mind that here was the reason Jack Connor had agreed so

promptly to thrash Riney, and without asking questions as to why he should be thrashed. She had thought he was fighting for her—and he had been fighting for this woman!

Wild Norene said nothing more to her uncle, but turned and went forward to stand near the rail and look ahead at the tossing sea.

Captain Bill Adams chuckled. Let Jack Connor win Norene now, if he could!

CHAPTER V. The Mate's Order.

THE North Pacific kicks up its heels at times like a wilful youngster overriding parental authority. For the remainder of that day and that night and the day following there was work for Jack Connor to do.

Captain Bill Adams, on deck with his mate, watching the crew as they carried out Connor's orders, listening to the mate's hoarse voice as he bellowed his commands, found himself regretting that he had planned to punish the man; he began wishing he could have Connor for his mate permanently.

There is danger in a blow when the seas run high for a vessel that carries a cargo of lumber lashed to her decks.

Time and time again giant seas boarded the *Amingo* and threatened to tear away lashings and make every stick of the cargo a peril to the crew and a matter of loss to underwriters.

An afternoon, a night, and a day without sleep, Connor held himself to his work, refusing politely to turn in when the skipper told him he could do so.

Connor relished the work because, for the time being, it took his mind away

from other matters.

Senor Guerrero, brave enough, perhaps, on the field of battle when engaged in leading ragged revolutionists against their organized government, was an abject coward now. Seasickness had made of the hero a craven.

He remained below, moaning, longing for the death that did not come.

Sally Wood, too, remained in the small cabin Captain Adams had assigned her, for Sally was not used to the sea. The Chinese cook offered her food and drink, which she refused, and played steward in an attempt to relieve her suffering.

In those two days Connor knew why Wild Norene was so named.

She was on deck when the blow began, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushed. She clung to the rail and watched the tumbling sea, glorying in the rushing wind, the dashing spray, running away now and then to escape a wetting. She stood on the deck and watched the man put extra lashings on the lumber, laughed and shrieked like a wild sister of the wind that was raging.

Jack Connor, watching her from afar, felt his admiration grow. She had not spoken to him since the scene that first morning: she had not spoken to Sally Wood at all.

The second night came and the storm fell. Jack Connor turned in, stiff and sore, to sleep the clock around.

He emerged from the cabin in the middle of the next morning, to find the sea dancing in the sunshine. The coast could be seen in the distance.

Behind, smoke pouring from her stacks, followed the Mexican gunboat like a hound on the trail.

Captain Adams laughed as he saw Connor regarding the pursuing vessel.

"Needn't fear her, lad," he said.

"You have graver things to fear. You haven't won Wild Norene's love yet, I take it?"

"I haven't spoken to your niece since you blackened me to her."

"You lost time because of the storm, lad, but that's the fortune of war. The days are slipping. We're getting down the coast a bit. The voyage will not last for always."

"It is my affair," Connor said. "You gave me until we made port. Let it rest at that."

Captain Bill was watching the gunboat through his glass.

"She's kicking up a real lot of water," he said, "but that's all she dare do. I scarcely think she'll put a shot across our bows when Old Glory is flying from our stern."

"She can make as good time as the *Amingo*, sir. You'll not dare go in Mexican waters."

The skipper laughed loudly.

"You don't think I'm going to stay on the high seas forever, do you? I've a bit of cargo to deliver, and it'll be delivered. A measly little gunboat with a Mexican in command can be dodged by the *Amingo* with a Yankee sailing her, and don't you forget it. I'll turn in now, I guess."

The *Amingo* was making good time and was on the right course; there was little for Connor to do. Morgan was with others of the crew in the forecabin getting sorely needed sleep after the battle with the gale.

Senor Guerrero came on deck for a time, pale and weak, spoke a few words, and retired again. Connor imagined he did it to see for himself whether the *Amingo* still was afloat.

And then Norene appeared.

She walked forward, playing with the ship's dog mascot. Presently she turned and made for the bridge.

Connor watched her from the corners of his eyes. She did not go aft; she stopped, started up.

Connor swung his glass up and looked hard to starboard at nothing. When he lowered the glass she was within six feet of him and with a glass of her own was looking back at the Mexican gunboat. She did not appear to recognize his presence.

Connor smiled as he turned his back upon her and again regarded a spot he imagined to be on the horizon. When he looked back she had dropped the glass to her side and was watching the antics of the dog playing with one of the men over the piles of lumber.

Connor wondered whether she had come there to explain by her actions that she did not consider he existed on earth. If she would not recognize his presence, he would recognize hers, he told himself.

He was puzzled how to begin.

A plea for justice would not avail with such a girl as Norene; he had made that before and it had failed. To start an ordinary conversation would mean to be snubbed. He must find some way to startle her, some way to make her answer, to get her to talk.

An idea came to him, an idea so bold that for a moment it held him aghast, then forced him to smile in spite of himself. He would startle Wild Norene as she never had been startled before, he decided.

He took a step nearer her.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She turned her back on him and made no reply. Raising the glass again, she contemplated the distant shore.

"Pardon me, but passengers are not allowed on the bridge!"

"Passengers!"

She whirled toward him as she spoke, then, realizing she had been betrayed into speaking, flushed and bit her

lip.

But Connor was not smiling at her nor sneering at her, was not sarcastic, not angry, not attempting a pleasantry. He was only the courteous, firm officer in temporary charge of a vessel on the high seas.

"Pardon me for mentioning it," he continued. "Perhaps you did not understand about it."

"Not understand—"

She bit her lip and flushed again. Not understand? Wild Norene Adams, who had spent ten years aboard a vessel with Captain Bill, not to understand the simple rules of the sea?

Hot anger flamed within her; her eyes flashed danger signals.

"It is permissible, with the captain's permission, to visit the bridge with himself or another officer, but it is not permitted you to be alone on the bridge with the officer in charge."

"Are you trying to be impertinent?"

"Also, it is forbidden to speak to the bridge officer, madam."

He turned away from her and again contemplated the horizon, trying hard to keep from smiling.

"It happens," she said in scorn, "that I have the run of the ship. I own one-fifth interest in her, if you desire to know it. I think I may stand on the bridge a moment."

He turned toward her again, his face grave.

"It would be the same, madam, if you owned all of her," he said. "An officer in charge of a vessel has responsibilities and certain rights. He can order an owner in irons if that owner makes an attempt to interfere with navigation of the ship."

Her eyes flamed again.

"You'd put me in irons, I suppose?" she asked.

He did smile now.

"I scarcely think it will be necessary," he said. "Now that I have explained, I am sure you'll descend to the deck and observe my orders."

"Your orders!" she exclaimed. "You—You dare to speak to me like this? You—*you*—dare order me from the bridge of the *Amingo* as you would a meddling tourist on a Japanese liner? You—"

"Ordinary rules of seafaring, my dear madam, that I cannot see fit to disobey," he reminded her. "Pardon me for not accompanying you to the deck; I cannot leave the bridge."

She gasped at him again, then sat on the rail, crooking her feet around a post, folded her hands in her lap, and regarded him, her head held high, the danger signals still in her eyes."

She knew he was laughing at her—that he was attempting to make her talk to him. She had come up on the bridge to punish him by acting as if unaware of his presence, and now she could not retreat and leave to him the victory.

She would remain, and she would ignore him.

He regarded the pursuing gunboat again, looked long at the shore, then turned toward her and pretended surprise.

"I believe I suggested that you descend to the deck, madam," he said.

She looked away from him; made no answer.

"You refuse to obey my order?" he asked.

No answer. She was biting at the corner of her lip to keep from laughing. What could he do now, she wondered.

He turned away from her again.

"Forward!" he cried. "Pass the word to Morgan; tell him to come to the bridge immediately with one of the other men!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The *Amingo* continued on her way through the wallowing sea. Connor did not look at her again, could not trust himself to do so.

She remained sitting on the rail, trying to keep from laughing. He would speak to her again soon, she supposed, and again she would ignore him and make no answer.

Morgan, rubbing his sleepy eyes, came from the forecabin and made his way aft, another man at his heels. They mounted to the bridge and stood before the mate.

"You wanted us, Mr. Connor?"

"Yes. This young lady refuses to leave the bridge after being ordered to do so. Conduct her to her cabin and lock her in. If she resists, put her in irons!"

Norene's eyes bulged in amazement and she got down from the rail, staring at him, not believing what she had heard, not dreaming he would dare think of going so far.

"I—I beg pardon, sir?" asked Morgan, looking from one to the other.

"You heard my orders? Do as I told you!"

"But—"

"As I told you!" Connor advanced toward him threateningly.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Morgan turned toward her, the other seaman stepping beside him.

"Mate's orders, you go below, miss," Morgan said.

"I'm very comfortable here, thank you."

Morgan was bewildered. Conducting the captain's niece below was something out of the ordinary. He wasn't sure what he should do. But the discipline of the sea is strong—and he had received his orders.

But—

“Lady refuses to go below, sir,” he reported to the mate.

“You have your orders!” Connor’s lips were twitching; he did not dare turn and look at them. Through his glass he regarded another spot on the horizon. Morgan scratched his head a moment, then faced Norene again.

“Mate’s orders must be obeyed, miss,” he said. “Officer says you must go below.”

Norene realized the man’s predicament and did not care to cause him trouble. It was Connor she wanted to outwit.

“Tell your officer,” she replied, “that I was just going. There is much better company in the forecabin.”

She started to descend, and Morgan and the other sailor followed her at a respectful distance. On the deck they stopped, while Norene walked across to the rail, leaning against it and kicking out her heels like a girl of ten.

“What th’ dev—” Morgan was muttering to himself.

“Morgan!” came the hail from the bridge.

“Aye, sir!”

“I told you to conduct the young lady to her cabin and lock her in. Do so instantly, and fetch me the key.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

Morgan and his messmate started slowly across the deck toward her. Orders were orders; if they had been told to throw the Chinese cook overboard they might have done it, and stopped to think of it afterward.

Norene whirled upon them as they advanced, and held out her hands.

“Do as your officer ordered!” she said. “Lock me in my cabin, then take him the key.”

Her face was fiery red; she looked

once at the bridge, her eyes flashing angry—but Connor was calmly gazing through his glass at the imaginary spot on the horizon.

Morgan and his comrade followed her below, ushered her into her cabin, locked the door, and carried the key up to the mate. In the ears of Wild Norene rang the chuckle she had heard Morgan give as he locked the door:

“Great Salt Lake! Cap’n’s niece! And it’ll be in th’ log!”

Her head held high, her hands clenched, and her arms held rigid at her sides, she stood for a moment and regarded the door they had locked. Then the storm broke.

She was Wild Norene Adams in earnest now. She pounded against the door in her fury, shrieked and screeched, hurled to the floor or against the walls everything movable.

In another woman it would have been old-fashioned hysterics, but in Wild Norene it was anger, pure and simple, rage at herself for having been conquered, not at the man who had conquered her.

The slumbering skipper in the adjoining cabin was awakened when a lamp-bracket crashed against the wall. He sprang to his feet and began pulling on his clothes, his ears assailed by shrieks and cries.

He knew it was Norene’s voice. What had happened? What in the name of Neptune, he asked himself, could have happened?

He ran out and pounded on Norene’s door. He saw that Senor Guerrero was standing near, aghast at such an outburst. Farther away, Sally Wood had opened a door and was peering out, fright in her face.

“Norene! Girl!” the skipper cried. “What is it? Open the door!”

Another shriek of anger answered him.

“What’s the matter? Open the door, girl!”

Another chorus of hysterical screams. Captain Bill stepped back. Another instant and his gigantic bulk crashed against the door’s panels and burst them in. He half fell into the tiny cabin.

Norene was standing near a port-hole, her back toward him, stamping her feet, pounding against the thick glass with her tiny fists.

“Norene! What is it, girl?”

She turned as he approached, and he tried to take her in his arms, sudden alarm in his face, for never had he seen Norene in quite such a state before.

But she pushed him away and confronted him, wild anger in her eyes.

“Girl—girl! What is it?” he asked.

“Ask—your mate!” she gasped.

“My mate!” Captain Bill turned and dashed from the cabin and to the deck. He had been aroused from a deep sleep, he had heard Norene screeching as if in fear and anger, he had demanded the reason, and had been told to ask his mate. Had Connor overstepped the bounds of courtesy? Had he dared insult Norene?

Captain Bill’s fists were clenched and his breath was coming in angry gasps as he hurried across the deck and mounted to the bridged.

He stopped in astonishment as he reached it. Jack Connor was looking through his glass at the imaginary spot on the horizon. He did not present the appearance of a man who had just quarreled with a woman or insulted her. He was the typical, cool, calm and collected officer on the bridge.

Captain Bill began to feel ridiculous as Connor turned and faced him.

“Up so soon, cap’n?” he asked.

“What’s been goin’ on here?”

“I beg your pardon, sir?”

“My niece is down in her cabin shrieking to wake the dead. She woke me, all right! I asked her what was the matter and she said to ask the mate. If you’ve gone too far—”

“Oh!” Sudden recollection seemed to come to Connor. “She came up here on the bridge, sir. I informed her, courteously, that passengers were not allowed on the bridge.”

“Passengers—”

“And asked her politely to leave. She answered me, and I informed her it was against the rules to talk to the bridge officer.”

Connor’s eyes were twinkling and a smile lurked on his lips as he faced his superior.

“Well?” the captain demanded.

“She refused to go, sir. Mutiny of passenger against rules! I called two of the men and had them lock her in her cabin and fetch me the key.”

“You—You what?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You did that—to Norene?”

“Yes, sir—fully within my rights, of course, and in a polite and courteous manner. Here is the key, sir.”

Captain Bill Adams took the key, but did not take his eyes from the mate’s face. Slowly the expression of his own face relaxed, his mouth twitched, then he threw back his head and roared.

“For the love of Neptune!” he cried, and laughed again. “Sent her to her cabin—locked her in—Wild Norene! Great Heaven, how she’ll hate you now! Fully within your rights and in a polite and courteous manner, eh? That’s good! By Heaven, it’s good! Wild Norene! So that’s the way you start in to tame her, eh?”

Captain Bill laughed again; Connor

searched the horizon once more. A voice behind them—Norene's voice—made them both turn.

"Funny, is it?" she demanded. She had followed her uncle and made her way to the bridge. "Well, are you going to thrash this fine mate of yours? The men could not help it—they had to carry out his orders!"

The captain laughed again, while she stood before him angrily, tapping the floor of the bridge with the toe of one shoe. The captain's laugh died down, and as Norene looked away an instant he winked at Connor.

"Mr. Connor tells me he ordered you to leave the bridge and you refused to go."

"He did—and I did."

"And he called a couple of men and had you locked in your cabin?"

"He did! And it'll be in the log. I went because of the men—they were forced to obey orders. Now thrash this man for me because of his impudence!"

Captain Bill pulled at his mustache.

"My dear Norene," he said, "my officer acted fully within his rights. He wasn't insolent, was he?"

"He was polite enough," she admitted.

"You should have left the bridge when he ordered it," said the captain, trying hard not to laugh. "I cannot punish my mate for abiding by the rules of the sea. And now you've gotten yourself in worse than ever—you've broken your arrest and come up here on deck."

"Uncle!"

"Must have discipline!" said Captain Bill. "You'll have to go back in your cabin until I have time to consider your case. Mr. Connor, I'll take the bridge until you return. Conduct Miss Adams to her cabin. I smashed the door, but you can

put a man on guard if you think it necessary."

"Uncle Bill!" she shrieked.

But the captain had turned his back upon her, for no longer could he keep back the chuckles that bubbled to his lips.

"At least," she said, recovering some of her dignity, "take me back yourself, or let me go alone. I do not care to walk across the deck with a man of Mr. Connor's stamp."

Connor's face grew red, and there was an expression of pain in it.

"Miss Adams," he said, "I do not care to accompany you if you think I am unworthy. I see you are bound not to be friends with me. I explained honestly to you once. I spoke lightly of Wild Norene in a low resort, because I did not know you personally then, I thought. But I did know you, only not by name, and a few minutes before I had prohibited mention of you in the same place—because I had met you and admired you, because I loved you from the first—and I'm not ashamed to tell you now, in your uncle's presence."

"This is a part of the taming process, I suppose," she sneered. "Do you think I believe in your love merely because you say you love me? Are you not saying it to escape the punishment my uncle has promised you? Do you think I am that weak-minded?"

"I have told you the truth," he replied, "believe it or not. I'll never mention the subject again—and I'll take whatever punishment your uncle sees fit to give me. But do not say I am unworthy to walk across the deck with you, for I have not lied. I'm a rough sailor, but I've kept myself measurably clean, and what bad habits I have can be corrected easily.

"However, you do not see fit to give me a square deal. I'll not bother you further, Miss Adams. Regarding the present

matter, with the captain's permission we'll consider your arrest at an end."

He bowed to her and turned away.

The look in his eyes haunted her. She fought against feeling that his words were true. She wanted to feel that she could condemn this man to his face. Ah—

"A worthy man—you!" she exclaimed. "And just how worthy? Do you know one reason I won't believe you? Do you want to know one reason why I think you are unworthy? What about the girl who became a stowaway? What about the girl who played the piano in that low resort you made your headquarters? Why did she become a stowaway? 'Interested in the mate,' my uncle says. A woman like that—a vile creature like that un-sexes herself to follow you when you sail, yet you say you are a worthy man. And you fought with Riney for her—not because I asked you to avenge his insult to me!"

"Stop!" Connor almost yelled the word. "You do not know what you are saying! Sally Wood is a woman in a thousand—a good woman—"

"A good woman—playing the piano there?" she cried, laughing.

"Yes—a good woman!" Connor's eyes blazed at the captain, then he faced Norene again. "Evidently your uncle hasn't been fair. Evidently he didn't tell you this woman's story! It's one to make an honest woman's heart bleed with sympathy for her. 'Interested in the mate,' eh? Cap'n Bill didn't happen to mention which mate, did he?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

There was an expression of guilt in the captain's face, and she had been quick to notice it.

"I wasn't the mate meant," said Connor. "It was Riney, the old mate, she followed aboard, or thought she was following him. She is interested in Riney—

and she has the right to be."

"But a woman of that sort—" she began again.

"A woman that is good and honest, and whom any other woman ought to help," he said. "Why not ask your uncle to set you right—to tell you the story? I don't blame you for blaming me if Cap'n Bill led you to believe some things that are not true."

She demanded the story, and Captain Adams told it in a manner that showed he was somewhat ashamed.

Norene said nothing as he concluded, but there was a bit of contempt in her face as she watched her uncle descend to the deck and start toward the cabin to continue his interrupted sleep.

But Captain Adams turned, grinning, and called back at her, sending a parting shot in revenge.

"Better get off that bridge, Norene, or the mate will have you in irons!" he cried.

Her face grew red, and she started to descend without looking at Connor.

"Miss Adams," he called softly as she started, "I meant what I said. I'll bother you no more. I love you—I meant that, too. I've corrected one false idea you had of me, but I shall go no farther. I just wanted you to know I'm perhaps not as bad as you thought, and that Sally Wood was a decent woman, deserving of kindness and sympathy. You're the one woman I've ever looked at a second time—"

She hesitated, then ran swiftly down to the deck, as if afraid to hear more. She did not ask his pardon; did not by word or look express penitence.

But that evening in the moonlight Jack Connor saw her walking the deck with Sally Wood, and Wild Norene had her arm around the other woman's waist.

He did not know how Wild

Norene's pride had suffered that day.

CHAPTER VI.
The Truth Comes Out.

SEVEN days passed, with the steam schooner *Amingo* wallowing on toward the south, and the Mexican gunboat following, dropping behind by day, creeping up by night, always watching, ready for any emergency, ready to match wit against Captain Bill Adams's strategy.

The pursuing craft had thrown out her true colors, and now and then by looking through a glass one could see the sun reflected from her guns.

The *Amingo* now was off the Mexican coast, and Connor knew that the end of the voyage was near. Times without number he had passed or met Norene Adams, but always he had merely saluted her courteously and passed on.

She had grown to be great friends with Sally Wood, and with Sally Wood Connor talked a great deal now and then.

These conversations were but half sweet to Sally. She was a woman who could read the heart of such a man as Jack Connor. And she read that she had his respect, but not his affection; that all that was reserved for Wild Norene.

Guerrero, now that they were approaching the end of the voyage, became nervous and looked continually over the stern at the pursuing gunboat. He held long conferences with Captain Adams, at which the skipper repeatedly requested him to attend to his own business; that he had promised to land the arms and ammunition, and that they would be landed.

On a certain afternoon the captain mounted to the bridge during Connor's watch and looked long at the vessel behind.

"She hangs on pretty well, doesn't she?" Connor said.

"I'll shake her off when I am ready."

"Do we put into Mazatlan first, then out again and land the arms, or do we land the contraband first?"

The captain whirled upon him.

"Who said anything about contraband?" he demanded.

"Why pretend with me?" asked Connor. "I was just wondering if we were near the end of the trip."

"You are near the end of your trip!" the captain snarled. "Ready for the firing party?"

"I was beginning to believe you'd changed your plans."

"Well, I haven't. You insulted my niece—you'll pay for it!"

"Why not leave it to her?" asked Connor.

"I gave you your chance. You haven't tamed her, have you? And you'll never get back to a United States port to say Cap'n Bill Adams weakened. You'll never tell about this voyage! Maybe I've been a bit friendly with you now and then, and maybe it was because you amused me. But don't think I've altered my original program."

"Oh, very well!"

"You take it calmly enough."

"Why not?" demanded Connor. "You're a man of your word, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Very well. You've promised to keep your hands off me during the voyage. And I'm going to take advantage of that and tell you just what I think of you."

The captain sneered in his face.

"Go ahead!"

"I'm not going to tell you that you're a cruel, masterful terror, because you'd like that—you're vain! I'm going to

tell you that you're an ordinary, plain fool!"

Captain Bill's fists doubled instantly.

"Remember your given word!" warned Connor. "You're ready to send me to prison or death on some trumped-up charge because I didn't accomplish a task you made impossible. And I didn't try. I tell you again I love Norene. I told you I'd win her. I still think I'll do it. But I'll not even attempt it now when she will think I am making the effort merely to escape punishment from you. I've done nothing to make you seek vengeance on me—"

"Nothing, eh? Calling my girl an unmentionable woman, saying she was a fit subject for barroom gossip, declaring to the world you could tame her—nothing?"

"I've explained that. I'm sorry I did it. I know her now, you see. I'd marry her if she'd have me and go back and tell every one in Astoria I'd done it, and beat half to death the man that dared make a remark about it, either in a barroom or in a church. That's where I stand.

"You shanghai'd me and made me mate of your law-breaking craft against my will. You placed me in a position where I was subjected to insult. You let Norene believe things that were not true. You haven't been fair. You're not only a fool, but you're a coward!

"Strike me now, break your word, and make yourself out a liar as well!

"That's about all I have to say to you. I'm your mate until the climax, Cap'n Bill Adams. But from now on I fight—you understand?—I fight for myself and for Norene! And you'll find that a Connor can fight, curse you!"

"Bah! Fight—and be cursed yourself!"

"I'm not trying to tame Wild Norene, Cap'n Bill! But I'm starting in,

right now, to tame you!"

For a moment they glared at each other. For a moment Connor thought the captain would break his word and strike.

But Captain Bill Adams only laughed evilly, and started to turn away.

"One moment!" Connor stopped him. "I have guessed that you're going to try to land that cargo under the nose of the gunboat that's been hanging on like a dog. Have you stopped to think of the consequences?"

"I'll take care of the consequences!"

"There are women aboard—your niece and another. There may be a fight. These women will be in danger. They'll be in danger of wounds or death, and of a Mexican prison and Mexican jailers. I guess you know what that means."

"Well?"

"Land the women first. Run ahead to Mazatlan and land 'em, then run out again and land your contraband. You can dodge the gunboat tonight. But don't put the women in danger."

The captain walked up close to him again, but Connor did not retreat.

"I'll land that cargo when and where I please," he said. "And you needn't fear for the women. You'd best fear for yourself!"

"Then you'd risk Norene's life and happiness for the sake of aiding a handful of ragged, ignorant fools fight against their own government—for the little money the junta pays you?"

Connor had raised his voice and his words carried far. From below came a snarl of rage, a cry of fright.

Captain Adams and his mate looked down—to see Senor Guerrero standing there talking to Norene.

Sudden hatred had flamed in the senor's eyes.

“Ragged, ignorant fools!” he cried. “You call them that? They walk through jungles with naked, bleeding feet, they die because of exposure and poisonous snakes, they are shot down like dogs when found, they starve, they die of thirst, they let themselves be strung up and riddled by bullets—and you call them ragged, ignorant fools! They fight for what your country boasts every man has there—the right to live and be free.

“You Americans! Three months ago I was coming into New York on a steamer from France. I saw a poor Italian weep for joy when he saw your Statue of Liberty. God pity him—and the thousands like him!”

The senor’s words choked in his throat. It seemed to be genuine emotion depicted in his face.

“Ragged, ignorant fools!” he cried again. “And how could we make the fight without breaking laws? My government is strong enough to keep from us that with which to fight. We can’t fight with the ballot, for that is denied us. And if we use guns, we must smuggle them.

“Your country—your liberty-loving country—denies us the right to buy guns there for shipment. But we buy them. And if it wasn’t for a few fearless men like Cap’n Bill Adams, who isn’t afraid to carry them and land them, we’d have no chance to fight at all!”

“Run your guns, curse you!” cried Connor, thoroughly angry. “I’m not talking of that! I’m talking of making women run the risk—”

Too late he remembered that Norene was standing there below beside Senor Guerrero.

“What does it mean?” she asked wonderingly. “Uncle, you told me you were going to stop along the coast before we got to Mazatlan, to land some

machinery that was to go back in the mines.”

“I—I know I did, Norene.”

“And now—guns!”

“Run on to your cabin, Norene, and let us talk this thing out.”

“No!” she cried, looking up at him.

“You—you lied to me?”

“Now, Norene—”

“You lied to me?”

“Don’t you understand, girl? It wasn’t necessary for you to know.”

“But you’re breaking the law!”

“It isn’t a fair law, girl. Why should it be against the law to carry guns and cartridges to people who want to fight?”

“Because,” she said, “unscrupulous men always would be starting trouble, getting poor downtrodden men to fight for liberty when really they would be fighting to help rich men seize property. The law would not have stood this long, uncle, unless it had been a good law. And all nations would not have adopted it unless it was good. You don’t know what you do.

“You’re making it possible for men to shoot one another, you’re helping create widows and orphans—and you’re breaking the law!”

“Liberty cannot be gained except blood be shed,” said Senor Guerrero.

Norene looked at him in scorn.

“I begin to understand,” she said.

“You have mentioned to me that you and your friends own oil-fields and mines, and that you could make more money if the government favored you more. You are trying to establish a government more to your liking, I suppose.”

The banner of guilt showed in Guerrero’s face. Norene’s lips curled as she looked at him.

“But I am speaking to my uncle,” she went on, looking up at the bridge again. “Why have you deceived me, uncle?”

"It wasn't any of your business, girl," he said brutally. "Women shouldn't bother their heads about business."

"You should have told me. You'd no right to do such things when I was on the schooner, to make me a party to them—"

Captain Adams's anger had been growing steadily, and now it flamed forth. That it was directed against his niece happened because the last words addressed to him had been spoken by her.

"No right!" he exclaimed. "I've been a good uncle, haven't I? I've tried to raise you right. You've had everything money could buy. It cost more to have you with me instead of putting you ashore, but I did it because I wanted to be sure you'd be protected. I've run guns before with you aboard. You've spent a lot of the money I got for doing it. It's legitimate, whether the government thinks so or not. And I'll continue to do it, and no Mexican gunboat or headstrong girl or fresh mate can stop me!?"

"Protected me!" she cried, half-shrinking from him because of his words and manner. "In return I've given you such love as a daughter should give a father. And how have you protected me? This man, Jack Connor, spoke lightly of Wild Norene in a barroom—spoke so because of what he thought I must be, having been with you. Because you are a breaker of laws, he assumed I must be a dishonest woman. Can you blame him? By Heaven, I cannot!"

"Norene!" There was agony in the captain's voice.

"I cannot, I say. Not knowing me as he does now, what else could he think? You were a lawbreaker, I was your constant companion, nearer to you than any other human being; I sailed with you on all your voyages! What could men think except that I was a lawbreaker, too, that I

knew what you were doing and agreed with you in it; that I was lawless—not a good woman, but a thing to be spoken of in scorn?"

"Don't, girl—you don't understand—"

"I do understand! And I don't blame Jack Connor for what he said, nor for where he said it! You left me open to the insult—you, my uncle! I blame you!"

"Girl—girl! Maybe I made a mistake—"

"I've loved you and trusted you," she went on. "I knew you were a hard man, and gloried in your reputation as such, because I thought you were honest and fair. I knew you were clean compared to other men of the sea, and I thought—I thought my Uncle Bill was the soul of honor.

"And now you're breaking the laws of two nations. A gunboat follows, watching you as a thief. And behind you've left a nation—your country—fooled, swindled, because you've gotten away with a contraband cargo. You fly the stars and stripes from the stern—you're a disgrace to the flag and the country for which it stands!"

"Norene!" he begged.

"This is my last trip with you," she said. "I cannot prevent you breaking the law this time, but I'll never be with you when you do it again. I'll go ashore—I'll work! I'll wait for my uncle to turn honest before he can claim my friendship again!"

Sobbing, her head bent, she turned and walked quickly away, to go below to her cabin, to throw herself in the berth and burst into a storm of tears.

They stared after her for a moment—Guerrero, Captain Bill, Connor.

Guerrero's face broke into a grin that was half a sneer. Anger flamed in the captain's, anger more at himself than at Norene; anger because she had vindicated,

in a way, the thing for which he was blaming Jack Connor.

And Jack Connor, meeting the captain's eyes, knew that he could expect no mercy now!

CHAPTER VII.

Prisoners—and Freed!

WONDERING how it all would terminate, Jack Connor left the bridge and went to the cabin to throw himself in a bunk and try to sleep, for he felt he would get no sleep that night.

He realized within a few minutes that Captain Adams was forcing the *Amingo* to her greatest speed. The attempt to dodge the gunboat had begun.

Had he been on deck, watching, he would have seen a peculiar thing, for Captain Bill called the members of the crew to him on the bridge, one by one, and to them imparted certain information. These men, for the greater part, had sailed with Adams for some time, had played parts in his evasions of the law, and were ready to do his bidding.

Others, newer on the *Amingo*, could be trusted by the skipper, since they had been vouched for by tried and trusted men. Only one man failed to get the summons to the bridge and a message from the captain; he was Morgan, Jack Connor's friend.

Morgan's guarded inquiries as to what was up were met by sneers from the others, and one man told him to his face to attend to his own business. Morgan asked no more questions, but decided to mention the matter to Connor when next he saw the mate.

Guerrero was on the bridge during these conversations and heard them all. One by one, the men were informed that

that night cargo was to be landed. Grinning, they nodded that they understood.

But the remainder of the captain's message puzzled them. He would not be on deck, possibly, during the unloading, and they were to take orders only from Senor Guerrero in case their captain was absent.

If Connor attempted to take command, they were to ignore him. If he made himself obnoxious, they were to tie him to the mast and proceed with their work.

It was peculiar instructions, but the men did not question. They knew Captain Bill had peculiar ways.

As far as the mate was concerned, they knew there was bad blood between him and the captain. They had missed nothing during the voyage; they had witnessed clashes between Norene and the mate, and between Captain Bill and Connor.

One other instruction they received, too: if the gunboat overhauled the *Amingo* and her officers asked questions, the men were to swear that whatever Captain Bill said was the truth. They understood that—many of them had sworn to lies before for Captain Bill.

The *Amingo* began to gain on the gunboat. The latter did not realize it until night began falling and she attempted to creep nearer, as she had done on previous nights. She found she could not; the *Amingo* held her distance.

Then the gunboat put forth her greatest speed, Garza, her commander, realizing that the clash was near at hand. At any time after dark he knew, the *Amingo* might turn toward the shore and soon get within Mexican waters.

Night came. Captain Bill still paced the bridge. Hatches were opened and huge packing cases were put on deck—cases

supposed to contain mining machinery; and they might have, as far as their weight was concerned.

The men worked swiftly, silently, like men used to such labor. Senor Guerrero was among them, more nervous than ever, continually rubbing his hands together, his eyes sparkling with excitement. It was pitch-dark, and the lights of the pursuing gunboat could not be seen.

An hour or two passed, and the nose of the *Amingo* was turned toward the distant Mexican shore.

In the cabin below Jack Connor slept. In an adjoining cabin Wild Norene lay in a berth, her tempest of tears at an end, and Sally Wood sat beside her, bathing the girl's swollen face and telling her of Jack Connor.

"I heard it all—that night," she was saying. "I've known Jack Connor for some time. He never looks at a woman. And I knew by the way he acted that night that he never would look at a woman unless that woman was you. I could read him like a book. You should have seen him hurl the men away and prohibit them mentioning the girl he had met on Commercial Street, even though they did not say your name.

"He didn't know your name then. If he had he'd never have spoken of Wild Norene as he did a short time later."

"I know—I know," Norene said. "He wasn't speaking of me; he was speaking of the girl he *thought* I must be."

"And he—he loves you, I am sure," said Sally Wood.

She looked away as she said it, and there was an expression of pain in her face.

"I know he is clean and honest," she went on.

"You must be in love with him yourself," Norene muttered.

Sally hesitated before she answered.

"But he's never looked at *me* twice—with any interest," she said. "He—he feels sorry for me, I suppose. I have a share in his sympathy and perhaps his pity, but not in his love."

Norene thought it best to change the subject.

"Do you suppose you'll ever meet the other—Riney?" she asked. "What are you going to do if you meet him?"

"I don't know," Sally answered. "I've had thoughts of revenge for years, but I never decided how I'd take it. I've thought I'd find a way when I found him. We never know what we'll do, do we, when we meet the person we've hated for years?"

"He may be on Garza's boat," suggested Norene.

"In that case I hope I'll not meet him just now, for that would mean danger for you and your uncle."

Norene got up from the berth and walked across to the port-hole, to stare out at the blackness of the night.

Her uncle! There'd be another scene with him, she knew. And she was firm in her decision to leave the *Amingo* as soon as the vessel was in a United States port again. She had meant it when she said she would not sail with her uncle again until he turned honest.

The *Amingo* was steaming toward the coast without lights. On the bridge Captain Bill Adams searched the horizon with his night-glass, trying to locate the gunboat, wondering whether she had gone on south, past the place where the *Amingo* had turned her nose toward the shore.

And then from a masthead Captain Bill caused two red lights to be displayed for an instant, then extinguished, then displayed again. Guerrero stood beside him, and they watched in the direction of the coast.

Another hour passed, the lights winking their signal now and then, and finally the answer came—two green lights that blinked ahead in the darkness.

Captain Bill rang for half speed, and for a few minutes there was an exchange of signals between the vessel and the shore.

"I want the gunboat to come up just after the cargo is landed and you are safe, ashore," Captain Bill told Guerrero.

"It is a risky business, senior."

"We'll carry it off, all right. You remember your instructions."

"Everything shall be done as you wish, senior."

"We'll go below in a moment, then."

The red lights had disappeared from the masthead; on the distant shore one green light blinked as a signal and a guide.

The *Amingo* crept nearer and nearer, then stopped, and the anchor was let go.

Captain Adams and Guerrero descended to the deck. A few whispered orders, to the men and a boat went over the side, and the crew began letting down the first heavy packing-case.

The stopping of the vessel had awakened Connor, and he left his cabin, to meet Captain Adams and Guerrero at the head of the companionway.

"You'd better stay in the cabin," the captain told him with a grin. "But you can go on deck if you wish."

"I beg your pardon, sir. Is the deck to be left without an officer?"

"Go on deck, by all means, if you think an officer necessary," the captain retorted, grinning again, then walked to his cabin, with Guerrero following close behind him.

Connor sprang to the deck and looked about him. He saw that a boat had been lowered, and that a heavy packing-

case was being let down.

He searched the sea, but did not see the lights of any craft; nothing to indicate the presence of the gunboat.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of the men near the boat.

"Cap'n's orders, sir."

"Just what are the cap'n's orders?" he demanded.

The man did not answer, but turned to grasp a line. Connor gripped him by the shoulder and whirled him around.

"Answer me, you scum, and be civil about it!" he roared.

By way of reply the man struck; the blow grazed Connor's shoulder.

"You would, would you? You'd strike an officer, would you?"

As he spoke one fist shot out and the sailor struck the deck like a dead man. But Connor found others upon him. They grasped his arms, tried to trip him, rained blows upon his head and face and breast.

Morgan sprang across the deck to the mate's assistance. In an instant he, too, had been conquered.

Both were carried to a mast, and lashings appeared as if by magic. Kicking, trying to strike, struggling to be free did not avail. The crew left their work at the boat to help.

A moment—and Connor and Morgan were lashed securely to the mast, so that they could move neither hand nor foot.

"Cap'n's orders," grinned one of the men as they started back across the deck.

"You'll suffer for this, you dogs!" Connor cried.

They gave him no reply; they hurried back to the boat and began lowering away another packing-case. They worked by only one dim light that was shielded so there would be no reflection in

the distance of the open sea. They talked in whispers.

Connor and Morgan struggled at their bonds, but the sailors had done their work well and escape was impossible.

"They're landin' th' contraband," Morgan whispered.

"Yes."

"Do you suppose it was cap'n's orders?"

"Yes."

"But he hasn't come back on deck; there ain't anybody to boss the men."

"They don't need a boss," snorted Connor. "They've got their orders, and they've done this work before."

Then he saw Guerrero, who had come slowly across the deck and was standing before them.

"We are sending the playthings to the ragged, ignorant fools," Guerrero said. "And you, my friend, will soon be one of those men who tell no tales."

He turned and walked toward the men working at the packing-cases.

"Lively, men!" he called. "You'll be remembered with something extra apiece if we come out all right."

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the men in chorus.

"Easy with that case, there! Those lines need more grease; they are making a devil of a noise!"

"Cap'n's orders," muttered Connor to Morgan. "You notice, don't you, who's commanding the ship?"

"But where's th' cap'n?" Morgan demanded. "Why isn't he on deck? I'd think he'd want to boss this job himself, with a gunboat liable to poke her nose at us out of th' dark any minute. You don't suppose Guerrero has done for th' cap'n, do you? You don't suppose th' men have mutinied and turned to Guerrero?"

"I do not," replied Connor. "I have

an idea we'll see the captain presently, and I've an idea that he's playing some sort of a game."

Then there was silence for a time, save for the creaking of the lines and the scraping of the cases as they were lowered against the side, and low oaths of men who smashed fingers or cut hands, and the soft-spoken orders of Senor Guerrero.

From the dark behind them after a time came a whisper:

"Don't speak! Don't attract their attention!"

Connor felt his bonds give and knew a knife had slashed them. Another slash of a knife, and he was free. Morgan, too, was being favored, and without making noise they turned slowly and peered around the mast at their deliverer.

It was Wild Norene!

CHAPTER VIII.

Caught!

THERE had been a peculiar scene enacted in the captain's cabin. Entering it with Senor Guerrero, Captain Bill Adams had closed the door behind them, locked it, and draped a towel over a crack in it, through which the light filtered.

"Well?" the captain asked then, smiling.

They sat down at the table opposite each other.

"You think there's no danger?" Guerrero asked.

"None for you, senor; the cargo will be put ashore and you will go with it. Everything seems to be in proper order. As for the cargo itself—you shipped it from Portland to the lumber-camp in boxes labeled machinery, and we picked it up as we dropped down the Columbia to Astoria.

“As far as I know, I am carrying for you certain machinery. If you desire to have it landed at this spot on the coast, well and good—you know your own business.”

The captain grinned and puffed at his cigar. Senor Guerrero, grinning also, arose and turned his back, lifted up his vest, parted his shirt, and so reached the opening of a money-belt he wore next his skin. From this he took folded bills.

He turned to the captain again and counted out a certain sum. The captain counted the bills in his turn.

“Correct,” he said. “One moment, please.”

Behind a panel in the wall of the cabin the captain had a strong safe. He opened this now, put the money in it, and twirled the combination knob again. Guerrero was half-way to the door when he turned.

“A moment, senor,” said the captain. “I wish you to do me a favor.”

“Certainly.”

Captain Adams took a coil of rope from a corner and advanced to the middle of the cabin.

“The men already are moving your cargo, and have been told to obey your orders in the matter. I’ll not go on deck again at present. Senor Guerrero, you will kindly take this rope, bind me securely, and place me in my bunk; then tie me in so that I cannot move.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I have a reason for this unusual request, believe me. You’ll get your cargo ashore before the gunboat comes—if it comes afterward and finds me I do not care. I have a little game of my own to play.”

“It is a great risk, captain.”

“Which I alone am taking. You’ll do as I ask?”

Guerrero complied. He bound the

captain securely, except that one hand was left free, and in it Captain Bill held a revolver, so that when he was placed in the bunk he could cover any one who entered the cabin. The captain was chuckling at the look of amazement on Guerrero’s face as the senor finished the task.

“Now go on deck, senor,” he directed, “and see that all your cargo is landed properly. After the last load send the men back to the schooner, and we’ll consider that we’ve said farewell. If you need me again you know how to find me.”

“Si, senor! Adios!”

“Adios!”

Guerrero unlocked the door and went out, to close it after him as the captain had directed, and hurry back to the deck.

Norene, with Sally Wood in the adjoining cabin, knew that the vessel had stopped and that the cargo was being unloaded. She knew Captain Bill had entered his cabin with Guerrero, and when she saw Guerrero go back to the deck and leave the captain alone she determined on an interview with her uncle. She opened the door of his cabin and entered, to stand aghast at what she saw.

“Uncle Bill!” she exclaimed, starting forward. “Who has done this?”

“Stay where you are!” he commanded.

“I was going to unbind you.”

“I don’t want it!”

“What can you mean?” she asked.

She stepped toward him, wonderment in her face.

Captain Adams laughed at her appearance.

“Go back to your cabin,” he ordered. “Remain there, too! This is not your affair.”

“You—you are unloading the cargo—the contraband?” she asked.

“We are—if you want to know.”

“But you—the captain—tied here at

such a time! And the gunboat—”

“This is a little scheme,” said Captain Adams, “to get square with the man who called you an unmentionable woman and said he could tame you.”

He thought his words would touch her, and they did, but not in the way he imagined.

For Norene had been thinking the past hour.

“I have told you,” she said, “that I blame you for that more than I blame him.”

“Girl!”

“I do! And now you are breaking the law again at this minute, and in addition placing me in a position where I may be insulted by the officer of a Mexican gunboat.”

“So you’re taking the part of the man who insulted you against your own uncle, are you?” the captain demanded.

“I am taking nobody’s part—but I am not blaming a man who should not be blamed.”

Anger flared in the captain’s face.

“Let me tell you this!” he exclaimed. “If you want to overlook what this man said, you may. I’ll not. He insulted me, too. He called me blackbirder, smuggler—”

“And haven’t you been?”

The girl’s retort increased the captain’s anger. Had he been free at the moment he might have struck her.

For an instant he half choked with rage, then he looked up at her and snarled.

“If I’ve got to tame you, girl, I’ll do it after this business is over,” he said. “But I’ll fix Mr. Jack Connor first. Want to know why I had Guerrero tie me up like this, eh? Because about the time the cargo is landed and safe over the first hill the gunboat will put in an appearance. The schooner ’ll be seized. And I’ll have a story to tell.”

“What do you mean?” she asked with quick suspicion.

“I’ll be found bound and helpless. I’ll explain how Jack Connor shipped machinery with me to be landed here— mining machinery. I’ll say that just before we sailed I lost my other mate and signed on this Jack Connor, who told me he’d go on as far as Mazatlan in that capacity, then return to his mines; that he engaged to do this because he was in a hurry to get the machinery through and I couldn’t find another good mate in a hurry.”

“Well?”

“And I’ll say that just before we got to this cove he admitted to me that the cargo wasn’t mining machinery, but arms and ammunition for the revolutionists; that I rebuked him and said I’d go on to Mazatlan, hand him over to the authorities and give them the contraband cargo.

“He bound me here, left me helpless, took the bridge, brought the ship to anchor, and ordered the men to discharge cargo. They did it because I wasn’t on deck, and he was the mate, and of course they’d obey his orders. Understand, girl?”

“I’ll be released and we’ll sail on with the *Amingo*—and the man who slandered you and insulted me will be shot by a firing squad. The cargo will be landed, and I’ll have kept my word with Guerrero. I win—and Connor loses. I said I’d do it, and I’ll keep my word.”

“Oh!” she gasped. “You’d do that? You’d send him to his death—and for nothing? You’d blame him for the crime you are committing?”

“I said I’d do it, and I keep my word. No man can call me a blackbirder and get away with it! If you want to overlook his insult to you, the more shame to you; but I’ll not overlook his insult to me!”

“You’d not dare!”

The captain laughed unpleasantly.

"I promised I'd let him off, of course, if he tamed you before we got the cargo landed. If he'd made you love him, agree to marry him. But it's too late for that now. It'll not do any good to say you love him just to save him. If you're willing to admit before all the crew that this man has tamed you—if you'll admit he insulted you and you loved him for it—"

The captain laughed raucously again.

Sudden fire flashed in the eyes of Wild Norene. A swift movement forward and she had wrenched the revolver from his grasp—and Captain Bill Adams, outwitted for the first time in his life, found himself bound and helpless in his bunk, scarcely able to move, his subterfuge turned against him.

"What are you going to do?" he cried, a feeling of dread in him.

"I'm going to play fair!" she answered. "I'm going to save the man you'd send to death. And I'm going to stop this unlawful act. I'll see that the men stop unloading that cargo; that the *Amingo* runs out to sea again—"

"Girl!"

"If I must fight you, uncle, I'll fight well! I'm Wild Norene, you know. You've often boasted no man could outwit me, that in an emergency aboard ship I was worth any six of the crew and any two officers. Well, I'll try to live up to your boasting!"

"You dare—"

"It is my wits against yours," she reminded him. "You are helpless, but it is your own doing. I didn't bind you and tie you in your bunk. Your little trick has proved a boomerang.

"Swear—nobody will pay attention. Call—the men will not answer, for they're busy. I'm fighting you with your own sort of weapons, but I'm fighting for the right

and you're fighting for the wrong!"

His curses ringing in her ears, she sped from the cabin and hurried to her own. A moment, and she had explained to Sally Wood, and Sally followed her to the deck.

The men were loading the first boat—Guerrero was commanding them. Connor and Morgan were lashed to the mast and helpless.

Sally remained in the shadow, and Norene sped across the deck, and with her knife slashed the ropes that bound the mate and his friend. There was not time to explain, and Norene spoke but few words.

"We must stop them, and get the ship away from the coast! There is danger—"

Already she was speeding across the deck, with Connor and Morgan at her heels. Sally Wood remained where she had been standing, watching the scene in the dim light of the one lantern that burned.

Norene stepped within the circle of light just as the last case for the first boatload was being lowered. A pretty picture she made, her eyes flashing, her hair blowing in the wind, a look of grim determination on her face, the revolver gripped in her hand.

"Stop!" she commanded, and as one man the members of the crew turned to look at her. "Bring that case on deck again—all of them! Hurry! Get up the anchor and put straight out to sea!"

Connor stood beside her.

"Lively, men!" he cried.

He had not forgotten how they had handled him a short time before. His fists were clenched and the look in his eyes promised ill for the one who hesitated.

"Up with that case!"

"We're not takin' orders from you!" one of the men growled.

Connor sprang forward, and that man struck the deck felled by a single

blow. Guerrero, who had stood to one side astonished, seemed to come to life.

"Throttle him!" he shrieked. "Lash him to that mast again!"

The men sprang to obey. The captain had told them to obey Guerrero and disregard the mate.

But Norene stepped before Connor, and the weapon in her hand covered them.

"Do as I commanded!" she ordered.

"My dear young lady!" It was Guerrero speaking. "There must be some mistake. This work must not be delayed—for there is danger. It must be done as swiftly as possible."

"There is no mistake!" she said. "You men—do as I ordered!"

One of them stepped forward and touched his forehead.

"Cap'n's orders, miss, under favor, that we unload cargo and take orders from Senor Guerrero."

"The captain's orders have been changed!" she said.

"If th' cap'n—"

"The captain is ill, cannot come on deck."

Guerrero cursed and stepped toward her.

"Enough of this nonsense!" he cried. "To your work, men! You know the skipper's orders."

"They've been changed!" Norene said again.

"I'll see!"

Guerrero turned to start to the cabin. The revolver in the hands of Wild Norene covered him.

"You'll stay here!" she said.

Guerrero, his face purple with rage, turned toward her threateningly. But he did not speak to her—he faced the men.

"Do as I ordered!" he commanded. "Hurry with that cargo! Do you want that gunboat down on you-want to go to a

Mexican prison, want to be stood against a wall and shot?"

The men began to murmur. They could not understand the situation.

Connor sensed the clash in authority, and he didn't trust the men. He stepped into the circle of light again.

"Back with that case!" he ordered.

"We ain't takin' orders from you—cap'n told us not to obey you!"

Again Norene stepped before him and with her weapon threatened the crew.

"You men know me!" she said. "If you'll not obey the mate because of the cap'n's orders, you'll obey me!"

The weapon spit fire; a bullet crashed into the deck at the feet of the foremost man.

Guerrero had been watching for his chance; now he sprang upon her in an attempt to wrest the revolver from her hand.

But Guerrero did not know Wild Norene. A quick step she gave to one side, and the butt of the heavy weapon struck the senor behind the ear and felled him.

"Bring back those cases now!" she commanded again, and the men turned to obey.

And out of the blackness that hung over the sea came a tiny finger of light that flashed toward the shore, broadened, and finally bathed the deck of the *Amingo* in its glory, making it as light as if the sunshine had played there.

Like statues they stood, those on the *Amingo's* deck—statues whose faces expressed fear and horror and anger and hopelessness—while the search-light revealed to all their guilt.

A crash out there in the night, a flash of vivid flame, and a shell shrieked over the *Amingo's* bow and rushed on toward the shore!

The gunboat had arrived!

CHAPTER IX.
What Riney Did.

MOMENT they stood, while the gunboat crept nearer, and in the silence they could hear the slow beating of her screws, the creaking of davits as boats were prepared to be lowered away.

That pitiless light revealed everything on the *Amingo's* deck. A dash below, an attempt to get arms, a movement even might call forth a shell that would crash into the vessel or the rigging or scatter death among those on deck.

Senor Guerrero's face was white as chalk, and his teeth chattered. None knew better than he what capture meant—that there would be no red tape about the matter.

A trip to the shore—a squad—flashes of fire—then the hereafter.

The search-light and the whining shell had struck fear to the hearts of the men. Instinctively one of them put up his hands, as if he had been covered with a revolver. Others trembled, some showed acute nervousness, some growled angrily.

Sally Wood was behind a mast, where the light did not strike her. Wild Norene, still clutching the revolver, turned and faced the glare of the light. Her face expressed no fear, only patient resignation.

Two men had been below in the small boat, and now they came scrambling to the deck to join their fellows.

"We'll be shot—shot!" one of them was mumbling.

"Shot by greasers!"

The search-light had startled Jack Connor, too. For a moment he had stood silent, a tumult of thoughts in his mind. He, too, knew what it meant.

Then he thought of Norene and of

Sally Wood. He knew how the men regarded Norene. They would hold her equally to blame with her uncle.

For Norene it probably meant prison or death or worse. No courtesy would be shown her, no respect.

Connor looked at her where she stood gazing into the face of the light. Love for her swelled his heart.

This was the time to make the fight, he decided; even if she detested him, that did not prohibit him making a fight for her sake. True love, even when hopeless, calls forth sacrifice.

Now they could hear oars creaking. The boats from the gunboat were coming. In a moment men from her would be swarming over the deck of the *Amingo*, taking prisoners.

And that search-light held them in thrall, and behind it, Connor knew, were big guns ready for firing when an officer gave the word.

Yet it would do no good to stand and wait for capture and what capture meant. A fight seemed hopeless, but a fight would relieve the tension.

And always, even in the most hopeless fight, there is the slim chance that the god of battle may prove capricious.

"Arms! Where are they?" Connor asked in a hoarse whisper, without making a move.

One of the men answered him in a similar manner.

"We all have 'em—in th' forecastle, sir! And th' cap'n has some! If th' cap'n was here—"

"Pay attention!" Connor said. "When I give the word, rush for the forecastle and arm yourselves. Miss Adams, you go to the companionway; you'd best go below and take Sally Wood with you. You, Guerrero, may do as you blamed please!"

They waited; the boats from the gunboat came nearer.

"Now!" Connor shouted.

His shout seemed to rouse them. With cries and curses the men dashed across the deck, some of them shielding their faces from the strong light, many of them expecting to hear the crash of a shell.

Norene darted to the companionway, dragging Sally Wood with her. Connor and Morgan ran with the men. They gained the forecastle, and revolvers and knives were torn from bunks and from the wall.

It flashed over Connor again that this was to be a hopeless combat. Even if they overcame the boarding party, there was the gunboat ready to sink them. And the *Amingo* was anchored.

But the men were frenzied now. Prison or execution stared them in the face, and they were the sort who'd rather die fighting.

Out on the deck again they grouped near the bowsprit, holding their weapons ready, trying to keep in the shadows as much as possible.

"Wait until they're on deck, then mix!" Connor was shouting. "The gunboat won't dare fire then, for fear of hitting her own men!"

The small boats reached the *Amingo's* side. On the gunboat a bugle was blowing a signal, and some officer was trying to megaphone a warning to the boarding party.

Then they came over the side, in two places, a swarm of some thirty men, two officers in command. Garza himself was there, intent on taking the filibuster and Guerrero.

And Connor saw that Riney was with him.

Riney had a score to settle with Captain Bill Adams—he had a score to

settle with Connor for that beating in the Astoria resort.

A chorus of yells and shrieks, a volley of shot, a fusillade from the gunboat's men, and then they were at it hand-to-hand on the deck, in the glaring illumination of the search-light.

The men of the *Amingo* were fighting for liberty and life; the men from the gunboat were urged on by their officers.

Connor found himself in the thick of it, with faithful Morgan at his side fighting like a wild man with his knife. Revolvers cracked in their ears, exploding powder burned their faces.

Senor Guerrero already was a prisoner, for Garza had attended to him first.

Amidships they fought, but the men from the gunboat, by the weight of their superior numbers, were driving the *Amingo's* men aft.

Connor saw Morgan slip and fall, but he was up in an instant. But some of the Mexicans were between them now, and the friends were denied the advantage of fighting back to back.

A bellow of rage assailed Connor's ears—and he faced Riney.

"Now, my fine buck!" Riney shouted, and followed it with a volley of curses.

It was a hand-to-hand conflict. Connor's revolver was empty; he had but a knife. Riney had a revolver at his hip, but he fought with a knife, too, for he was handy with the weapon, and he was a man who liked to see his foe's blood.

They clashed, parted, clashed again, now slipping on the slippery deck, now fighting toward one rail and now toward the other, but always going aft.

Connor found he had no mean antagonist—he knew he was fighting for his life.

Riney's knife found his side, but the wound was not deep. In turn he ripped the man's forearm. Save for them, the battle was at an end, and the men of the *Amingo* had been vanquished.

Some of the Mexicans rushed toward them.

"Back! This is my fight!" Riney roared at them.

Garza ordered them back. Riney had stipulated that he was to have a chance at Connor alone. He knew Connor had been shanghaied by Captain Adams, and that was why he had sailed with the gunboat.

Riney was the sort that doesn't forgive a beating.

Again they clashed, fought around and around, both tiring. Connor called forth his last ounce of strength and forced his foe. Again he felt the knife bite into his side. Again he drew blood on his adversary.

Then a lucky stroke came for him, and Riney's knife flew from his hand and over the side.

Connor, too weak to follow up his advantage, too generous to take the advantage of an unarmed antagonist, perhaps, staggered backward, gasping for breath.

But Riney, with a cry of rage, sprang backward, too. His hand dived at his hip; came up holding the revolver.

"Now, curse you!"

Two screams rang in Connor's ears—for behind him, at the mouth of the companionway, Norene and Sally Wood had been watching the combat.

A rush across the deck, a body before his own—The crack of Riney's weapon, and a scream of pain as its hot messenger struck home. Cries of horror from more than one throat.

On the deck at Connor's feet a

stricken human being who had saved him.

It was not Wild Norene Adams, for, though she had rushed forward, another had been before her. It was Sally Wood.

The men were still. Riney, still cursing, walked forward to look at his work.

"Some fool woman!" he muttered.

Connor had knelt beside her and was trying to lift her. Norene stood beside him, and the wild girl of the sea had tears in her eyes. Sally Wood's eyes had opened; she looked up at Connor and smiled.

Then she looked at Riney, standing less than six feet away, the smoking revolver still in his hand.

"I've—found—you!" she gasped. "And this—is my—revenge! Perhaps you'll think—of me—the next time you plan to desert a woman and child—or rob—an old man."

The man was staring at her. His revolver dropped to the deck. A look of horror came into his face.

"You left me—to starve," she whispered. "Left me—your wife—and your baby, too. And you took every cent my father had—my old father—who suffered from hunger before he died—because of what you did. I've always said I'd find you—and have my revenge. And this—is my revenge! Wife-murderer!"

She screamed the last words at him, and the man staggered backward, holding his hands before his face.

The Mexicans, realizing the drama they were seeing enacted, stood like statues, and regarded Riney with scorn and sudden hatred.

Sally Wood looked up at Jack Connor again, and tried to smile.

"Jack," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear. "I think—I loved you—a little. But there is—Norene—"

And with that she died.

Norene was sobbing as Connor got slowly to his feet and looked at Riney. The expression in the mate's face was not pretty to see.

"Give the cur a knife!" Connor cried to Garza. "Let the wife-murderer stand before me again!"

But Garza knew a better way.

"The man had committed a murder, and we are in Mexican waters," he said. He stepped up and clapped a hand on Riney's shoulder.

"Irons, here!" he commanded, and two of his men stepped forward and obeyed.

CHAPTER X.

When Death Is Faced.

THE gunboat was sending a shower of shells toward the shore, where the revolutionists had been awaiting the landing of the cargo.

On the *Amingo's* deck another scene was being enacted. The cases that had been lowered to the small boat were on deck again, guarded by the Mexicans—Captain Bill Adams had been "caught with the goods."

They had searched the cabins and had found Captain Bill bound and helpless in his bunk, cursing at the top of his voice in an effort to attract attention.

This had puzzled Garza, and now all of them were on deck, and he was trying to work out a solution to the puzzle. Guerrero and Riney had been sent to the gunboat as prisoners. Sally Woods's body had been carried to one side and covered.

Captain Adams, Connor, Wild Norene and the men of the crew stood under guard, awaiting the pleasure of the Mexican officer.

"I'll make him suffer for it!" Captain Bill was shouting. "Mutiny on the high seas! Make me a lawbreaker, will he?"

"Calm yourself, Captain Adams, and let us get at the straight of it," Garza ordered.

The captain sputtered a bit, as if in rage, and then complied, darting glances of venom at Connor, meanwhile.

"I can see now it's all a put-up job!" he said. "In the first place, I'll admit I've run guns before, but never into Mexico. Only into little two-by-four countries of Central America. I stopped that sort of business some years ago; I'm an honest skipper handling lumber principally.

"I was loading lumber in Portland when I was approached by a member of the junta. He said his name was Gonzales—that's Spanish for Smith, I guess. He made his little proposition, without saying exactly where the stuff was to be landed, and I turned him down flat—told him I was done with that sort of thing."

Garza grinned.

"I'm telling the truth, as you'll soon have reason to believe. I went on loading lumber at Portland. This man, Jack Connor by name, came to me one day and said he understood I was going to carry lumber to Mazatlan. He said he was a sailorman, but had come into a bit of money and was buying an interest in a Mexican mine.

"He had some machinery he wanted to ship. Part of it was in a lumber camp on the Columbia, he said. Would I carry it for him, and land it here—at this place?"

"I told him yes. Everything seemed all right, and we stopped on our way down the river to Astoria and took his stuff aboard. My papers are all right, and the packing-cases look like machinery to me.

"I went on to Astoria and tied up, to sail a couple of days later after I'd taken on some supplies. There I met Guerrero. He

wanted passage to Mazatlan, and I told him I didn't carry passengers. He offered me big money, because he said he was in a hurry and didn't want to go to Frisco and wait for a regular steamer. I agreed to take him.

"I can see now how they worked it, and how they made it look. Guerrero hung around me, and I suppose you spotted him and thought I was carrying contraband. My old mate, that fellow Riney, had a grudge against me, but I kept him because he was a good man.

"One day in Astoria, Guerrero told me my mate wasn't honest. I asked what he meant. He said you were in Astoria trying to lease a small ship for your government; that you were the whole thing in Mazatlan and were a dirty grafter. He said Riney was to meet you, and the two of you were to work up some scheme to libel the *Amingo* at Mazatlan, and Riney was to have a share of the graft.

"I think he said the idea was to confiscate the schooner and divide the money you would have paid out if you'd bought a ship.

"Wait a moment now before you smile like that. I went to the resort with Guerrero where Riney was to meet you. You began talking, and before you'd got down to bedrock this man Jack Connor pitched into Riney for some reason and beat him up. Riney saw me watching him, and I think he guessed I was on to him, for he sneaked away.

"Then this man Connor told me he would act as my mate until we got to Mazatlan, then run back to this, cove on some little boat. I was to deduct regular mate's wages from what I charged him for handling his machinery. I was anxious to sail, and I took him up."

"Well?"

"Let me get this straight now," said

the captain. "Riney's wife was a stowaway, came aboard expecting to find him and make things hot for him—so that explains her presence.

"We turned in toward the cove last night, and I went down to the cabin with Connor for him to pay me for hauling his stuff. That was the arrangement. He was to go on to Mazatlan, though, then come back. I wanted my freight money before that cargo was put ashore, of course.

"When we got to the cabin and I was looking for my papers, he knocked me down, bound me, and tied me in my bunk. Then he came on deck and brought the schooner here to anchor, and began getting the cargo overside. He boasted to me when he tied me, that the cargo was arms and ammunition; that he was getting a pretty penny for running it in, and that I had been fooled and was getting just ordinary freight rates.

"The men obeyed him, of course, for he was the mate, and they didn't ask questions because I didn't come on deck. Then the gunboat came, and you had the row. Connor led the fighting, didn't he? Because he knew what he was up against! And you found me bound in my berth, didn't you?"

"Connor is the man you want. He's your filibuster. Punish him for it, and welcome, for he made my ship a dishonest vessel in spite of me. You can take the rest of us to Mazatlan for trial, if you want. I can prove my innocence. Question the crew, if you like!"

Garza grinned again.

"That story doesn't sound good."

"Why did you find me bound then? Why wouldn't I be on deck putting up a fight? You know my history. Do you think you'd have taken this ship so easily if I'd been running guns?"

"There's something in that," the

Mexican officer said.

He turned and looked at Connor.

“What have you to say?” he demanded.

Connor had been thinking swiftly. Captain Bill had plotted well. He could send Connor before an execution squad.

“I’ve nothing to say,” Connor growled.

“You admit it is true?”

“I’m not talking!”

Garza faced Captain Bill again.

“If this is true, I am glad for your sake,” he said. “But I’m not certain.”

Connor was still thinking. Either he would pay the penalty, else Captain Bill and Norene would pay it. He didn’t care for Captain Bill, but Norene was innocent; had been horrified when she discovered what her uncle was doing.

Perhaps there’d be some chance of escape after Captain Bill got Norene and the *Amingo* away.

“It’s up to me!” he told Garza suddenly. “What the captain, says is true. But you haven’t executed me yet by a long shot—”

“So!” Garza cried, “Iron him, men! He’s tried to run guns for the last time!”

Two of the men started toward Connor.

Norene, her face white, stepped before him. Connor never forgot how she looked just then.

“Wait!” she cried. “It isn’t true! My uncle has lied to you! He alone is guilty!”

“Wait—listen to me! He shanghaied this man in Astoria—shanghaied him, and one of his friends, too. This man had spoken lightly of me. My uncle swore he’d punish him for it. Guerrero tied my uncle, at his orders. My uncle admitted to me what he was going to do—that he was going to send this man to his death, and go free himself.”

“Girl!” the captain screeched.

“It’s true—true! You sha’n’t have an innocent man executed! You must face your crime yourself! I’m telling the truth, senor,” she added, facing Garza again. “Ask Guerrero—he has no reason to hate this man, but he has reason to hate my uncle now, because he failed to land the cargo. Go back to the States and find who bought the arms and cartridges!”

She was sobbing as she spoke, for she began to realize the consequences of what she was saying.

Connor realized, too, with horror. The girl was freeing him, but condemning her uncle—and perhaps herself.

“Girl—girl! You’ve just killed me!” said Captain Bill, surprise and horror in his voice.

Garza was looking at him searchingly.

“This matter can be investigated and the guilt fixed,” he said. “I think, Captain Adams, that your little plot has been in vain.”

Captain Adams cursed, cursed his niece, cursed Connor, cursed the Mexican officer and his men, and Senor Guerrero most of all.

“Silence!” Garza commanded, and called a subordinate to him. “Take charge of this schooner and follow the gunboat to Mazatlan. A squad here! Bind these prisoners well and have them taken aboard the gunboat. Watch the captain carefully, and have his guard a double one. Senor Connor, too. And the girl—

“Take the girl aboard the gunboat, but keep her in irons. She’s as bad as her uncle. She’s known in every port. She’s slippery as an eel.”

Two of the men caught Connor just as he launched himself at the Mexican officer.

“Watch the girl closely!” Garza

went on, ignoring the American. "I don't know why she's turned against the captain, but that makes no difference. You all heard her testimony here. We'll make her repeat it—and it'll send her uncle before a firing squad. Lively, now!"

"You dare lay hands on me?"

Norene had ceased her weeping. Her tiny hands were clenched at her sides, her eyes blazed.

"You curs!" she cried. "I accused my uncle to save an honest man, not because I hated my father's brother. And he's a better man than any five of you! He's an American and I'm an American, and you can punish us for such an offense if we are guilty—but you'll treat us decently until we're proved so!"

"You're going too fast, my fine Mexican officer—entirely too fast aboard an American ship. We have a right to stop here and land cargo, haven't we?"

"Scarcely, when that cargo is contraband of such a nature, my dear young lady," Garza smilingly reminded her.

"We're lost, I suppose. But we'll bother you as much as we can!" she went on. "You'll take every step in a legal manner! Perhaps, before you remove us to the gunboat, you'd better be sure the cargo is contraband. Not all of us will be executed—and the man who is not you may be sure will see that you suffer if every step is not legal."

Garza, smiling, bowed before her with fine sarcasm.

"Very well, *senorita*," he said. "A squad! Smash in those cases and we'll have a look. If you'll pardon me, *senorita*, I was about to do so, to make the evidence sure."

She turned toward her uncle, weeping, but he repulsed her.

Connor clasped her in his arms. It was all foolery, he knew. They'd be taken aboard the gunboat, there would be a farce

of a trial in Mazatlan. With the country in such a state, the trial would be over and they'd be executed before a United States consul could even make a protest.

But he held Wild Norene in his arms for the moment, and that was because she sought a refuge in her grief, not because of love. Even as he thought these things she drew away from him and stood in the circle of Mexicans, watching Garza's squad smash in the tops of the cases.

She tried to explain to herself why she had not let Connor be taken to his death while her uncle escaped. What was Connor to her?

She answered herself that she had done it because of the dread of seeing an honest man suffer for the crime of another—and because she had real love for her uncle after all, that he was her ideal, and she didn't want that ideal shattered, didn't want her uncle to lower himself by putting the blame on another.

It was over now, she thought. Prison, perhaps death—at least for her uncle and his crew, and perhaps for herself. Or, if she escaped, there would be endless years to remember that she had condemned her father's brother with her words—the man who had been like a second father to her.

A cry from Garza caused all to turn toward him. The lid of the first case was off. Here were no rifles, no cartridges—here were chunks of scrap iron, stones, packed with heavy paper!

A smothered oath came from the Mexican.

"Smash them in—all of them!" he commanded in his own language.

They waited in consternation—Captain Bill, Norene, Connor, Morgan and the crew.

Case after case was opened—all scrap iron and heavy paper and stones!

Some one laughed hoarsely. Some one cursed.

It was a miracle, almost. Norene had not known. She had spoken as she did without reason, on the verge of hysteria.

Garza ordered his men below—but they found no contraband.

“I scarcely think you’ll trouble us further,” Norene said to him when he returned to the deck. “By the way, you and your men in the Mexican service are on the deck of a ship flying the United States flag. You’ve fired a shot across our bows, attacked our crew, seized the ship. The United States government shall hear of this!”

Captain Bill Adams, coming from his lethargy, suddenly realized the situation.

“Off my ship, you scum!” he roared. “Into your boats! Take us to Mazatlan, will you? Not without evidence! Off my ship!”

Garza was an officer who knew when he was whipped. He knew as well as any man that Captain Bill Adams had put into that cove to land contraband.

He wasn’t sure who was fooled—Captain Bill or himself—but he had an inkling that it was both.

With poor grace he ordered his men into their boats after, releasing the members of the *Amingo*’s crew. He would have to be satisfied with Riney, a murderer, and with Guerrero, who was wanted on other charges of inciting rebellion.

And down in his soul he hoped he never would hear from the incident again.

The boats pulled away. The

searchlight died out. Captain Bill Adams roared out an order, and men sprang to touch match to the lights of the *Amingo*.

Forgetting the predicament, the certain death he had faced, Captain Bill was himself again.

“Tend to the wounded!” he roared. “And bless the swindlers that sold the junta scrap iron for rifles!”

Connor stretched his cramped muscles and made his way from the forecandle to the deck. He had been dressing a bad wound in Morgan’s leg. The *Amingo* was on her way again, and day had broken, and the sea danced in the sunshine.

The Mexican coast was red with poinsettias. In the distance the gunboat steamed toward the south.

Wild Norene stood beside the rail, looking at the distant warship.

Connor stepped up beside her.

“Why did you do it?” he asked softly. “Why didn’t you let me die, let your uncle live? You didn’t know, when you spoke, that the junta had been fooled, that it would turn out such a farce. Why did you do it, Norene?”

“I didn’t want to think my uncle would hide behind another man, put his guilt on another man, even if to do otherwise meant his death.”

“And that was the only reason?” he asked.

“That—and because—because—maybe—Wild Norene has been tamed,” she whispered.

And the man at the wheel whistled softly as she turned and went into Connor’s arms in token of sweet surrender.