

Tuffy and his Harem

by Nick Anderson



THERE was a pale glow in the eastern sky. Tuffy Scott, broad-shouldered, big-muscled, a giant of a fellow, stood up on the stern thwart of the small row boat for another long sweeping look at the empty horizon. Then he looked down at the indistinct figures of the three girls sprawled awkwardly at his feet.

What a mess for a guy like him to get in, he thought to himself as he peered at the faint outlines of the girls' almost totally unclothed bodies. Three girls! And he alone with them!

But it wasn't his fault. The night before when the gambling ship on which Tuffy worked as deckhand had been raided by government officials off the coast of California, he had suddenly found himself pushed into the boat with the three girls and told to stay out of sight

while the raid was on.

For an hour they had crouched in silence a few feet away from the ship. Then, before their startled eyes, the boat had pulled up anchor and slipped off into the darkness. They had been forgotten or deserted, one of the two. It didn't matter which.

And here they were, Tuffy Scott, with a black stubble of beard on his roughly handsome face, and three blonde girls in dance outfits consisting of tiny red silk panties and red and white silk bandeaux that barely covered three sets of luscious breasts.

NOW that the sky was lighter, Tuffy had a chance to take a good look at the girls as they lay before him—long, slender, bare legs curled up under bodies that had more

swells and softnesses than a June surf. And in spite of the predicament he knew faced them all, Tuffy felt pleasure in looking at the lovely creatures and feeling that he was responsible for their safety.

“Hey, girls,” Tuffy shouted by way of waking them up, “if you want your breakfast, you’d better get up and fight for it.”

The girl nearest him, Mai Williams, full-breasted and narrow-waisted, popped one eye open, looked with disgust at the tiny, very dead minnow Tuffy held between his fingers, and said, “That isn’t funny.” And she closed the one eye only to open both at once.

“Do you think it is good to eat?”

“Sure,” Tuffy laughed and tossed the dead minnow back into the sea, “only I’m too finicky since I met up with you refined ladies.”

Zoe Smith, another of the trio, shook her very pale hair fiercely at Tuffy and murmured wrathfully, “Your jokes are as smelly as that minnow.”

Honey Lawrence, the third of the girls, ignored the talk and jumped up for a look around the wide expanse of the empty horizon. She stretched her arms and legs lazily. And winked mischievously at Tuffy.

“Say, you two,” Honey said, “if you don’t pipe down on that quarreling, our sailor boy friend will be tossing you dames to the fishes, and a good riddance, I’d say. Tuffy and I wouldn’t mind a little privacy, would we?”

Tuffy grinned. He saw she was kidding to keep up their spirits. It was sporting of her. Lots better than having them rave at him as they had done the night before when the gambling ship moved off and left them deserted on the wide Pacific. As though it had been his fault!

“Well, big boy,” Honey asked, “what’s to do about it? You’re the skipper of this here vessel now, and have you thought of a way to get us back to shore?”

Tuffy shrugged his big shoulders. The grin that had been on his face left it. “Girls,” he said,

“we’re in a tough spot. When they pushed us off last night, they left us only one oar. And you don’t need to know much about rowing to know you can’t get very far with one stick.”

“How about a drink?” Mai inquired.

Tuffy looked at the girl. In spite of himself, his eyes followed the curve of her breasts, the flatness of her bare stomach, the seductive, tempting allure of her hips and white thighs. He tore his gaze away from her and motioned the girls to sit down in front of him

Tuffy reached under the stern seat pulled out a small cask. He thumped it with his fist. “Hear that?” he said ominously. “Less than a quarter full. Good for a couple of days. That’s all. And we’d better save it till we’re thirsty.”

He looked at the three youthful faces before him—three girls who had lived in cities and had never faced the thought of death. Dancers. Smart in the ways of life. Three girls who were young and fresh and full of delights for the right kind of guy. But not a mug like him. What right had he to look at them that way?

He turned away. The girls hadn’t said a thing. Not a whimper out of them. Pretty good sports. He had to hand it to them.

He stood up on the stern seat for another look around. The sky was now fully aglow. The sun was already bouncing on top of the highest swells. He gazed at it—and suddenly caught his breath.

A ship!

A SHIP had outlined itself against the rising sun, just as the tiny boat had climbed a high swell. Yes, there it was again—a low lying hulk of a ship, only three or four miles to the east. “Say girls,” Tuffy yelled, “I think I see something. One of you get up on my shoulder, and take a good look. Off under the sun—see it?”

Honey jumped up on Tuffy’s back as he leaned over and steadied himself against the motion of the sea. The girl’s bare legs encircled

his neck and he straightened up.

“Hurrah, it’s a ship,” Honey cried excitedly.

“Now, said Mai with a drawl as she fingered her tiny silk panties, “if we there were only a skirt in the crowd, we could use it to hail the rescuers in proper style.”

At that, it was an idea! Tuffy tore off his shirt and tying the two sleeves to the end of the oar, waved the improvised signal wildly for several minutes.

Again Honey jumped up on Tuffy’s back for a look at the ship. This time his shirtless torso felt even more intimately the warm touch of the girl’s legs around him, gripping him tightly.

“Say, fellows,” Honey exclaimed from her vantage point. “That isn’t a ship. There’s no mast, no smokestack, no nothing. Not even any people. Looks to me like one of those old barges they used to use on the canal down where I lived as a girl.”

“Come on, you dames,” Tuffy roared. “We gotta get over to that scow.”

“And to think I forgot my roller skates,” Zoe said with a laugh.

“And how is the skipper gonna get his boat over there?” Mai inquired.

Tuffy ripped his shirt from the end of the oar and wrapped it around the middle. “Zoe,” he directed, “you straddle this oar at the stern. Hold it firm now between your legs. I’m gonna swing the oar back and forth. That gives a little forward motion. Mai, you and Honey use your hands at the side. Yes, your hands. Like oars. Everybody get to work. We gotta get to that hulk before sundown. Remember I’m the skipper.”

“Yo ho,” cried Mai, “and I suppose we’re the mates?”

“Oh yeah?” Zoe inquired as she tried to find a comfortable way to hold the oar firmly between her knees.

FOR an hour they worked, making seemingly little progress. Mai took Zoe’s place at the

stern, hugging the one oar between her slender bare legs. Then came Honey’s turn. After that they all rested for a few minutes. The scow was closer all right.

“How about breaking open that high-powered keg of water, Cap’n?” Mai asked as they sprawled out.

Tuffy pulled the keg out and yanked out the plug. “Who wants the first drag?” he asked. His own mouth was dry and raw from thirst. But he could wait his turn.

He held the keg up and Honey leaned over for him to pour some of the contents into her open mouth. Tuffy saw her swallow, half choke, and then quickly spit the stuff out.

“It’s terribly salty,” she cried.

Tuffy’s heart sank. He tasted the water. It was just ordinary sea water. Some damn fool of a hand on the gambling ship had neglected to put fresh water in the keg. Now they were in a fix. Under the sun’s hot rays they’d be finished in a day or two. They had to make that scow, and pray there was water on board.

Tuffy told the girls of their danger. There was no jesting when they went back to their tasks. Hour after hour, under the broiling sun, the three all but nude girls and the lone man with his bare upper body glistening in the sweat of his exertions struggled and fought their way foot by foot toward the scow. Slower and slower became their progress. Less often they looked to see if the barge was any closer.

Finally in Tuffy’s thirst crazed mind there seemed only one thought left—to move the oar back just once more. Just once more. And then once more. That way lay madness, he knew. But he couldn’t stop. He had to make one more swing of the oar.

Long ago the two girls had ceased their useless hand paddling, their bodies stretched inert on the boat’s bottom. Honey, who had been straddling the oar, drooped and several times all but slipped backwards into the water. Tuffy pulled the girl toward him and together

they slipped wearily to the bottom of the boat.

WHEN Tuffy looked up again, the sun had sunk almost to the water's edge in the west. A strong wind was blowing from the east, a wind that seemed cool and refreshing. Tuffy wished he could open his mouth and let the breeze blow in and cool his tongue with its sweet touch. With some effort he pulled himself to the side of the boat and looked over. He blinked. . . .



There—not fifty yards away was the scow. Square ends, low lying, with one end slightly higher than the other, it seemed to Tuffy's distorted sensibilities a strange grotesquerie out of some wild nightmare.

With a whoop of wild joy he shook the girls and pointed at the huge object so close to them. Frantically they set to work to cover the short

distance.

It was dark when they finally scraped sides with the old and seemingly deserted hulk. Using their hands they pulled their tiny boat along the edge until they found a chain dangling down to the water.

Cautioning the girls to hold tight to the chain and to stay where they were, Tuffy climbed up to the deck. The place was completely deserted. It had probably been one of a number of scows being towed and had broken loose. Or been cut loose in a storm. Anyway, here it was, empty and with not much promise of protection for help for Tuffy and the girls.

After a circuit of the deck, Tuffy came back and called for the girls to come up. He helped them as they made the ascent. Then with a couple of ropes that he had found on the scow, he pulled their own boat around to the low lying side of the barge and managed to get it up safe and sound on the deck.

Finally with the three skimpily dressed girls trailing his every footstep, Tuffy made a complete search of the barge. And in a little superstructure, open on one side and built evidently to hold towing ropes and chains, he found a barrel half filled with a warm, brackish water.

“Not too much at first,” he cautioned the girls when they would have buried their faces in the stuff. He felt very strong and full of responsibility for the girls now that he had brought them this far. It was a good feeling.

With the fall of the sun, the wind which had sprung up began to whip the sea into a writhing mass of foam and black terror. A flash of lightning revealed a huge bank of clouds overcasting half of the sky.

Tuffy fixed up a sleeping place for the girls back of the ropes in the superstructure. He himself sat with his back to them, and for a time watched the storm's approach. Then he fell asleep.

IT WAS probably some time after midnight when Tuffy awoke. He was rolling wildly down the deck. With a terrific smash he crashed into the row boat he had turned over on the deck. He got up unsteadily.

The storm was now of hurricane proportions. The scow, drifting helplessly, was at the mercy of every crashing wave. The wind roared down and around the lone figure of Tuffy as he fought his way back to the tiny superstructure where the girls were. He crawled in.

At once a pair of arms encircled his neck and a soft face crushed up against his in fright.

“Are we sinking?” it was Zoe who was hugging him so desperately.

“Naw,” Tuffy tried to put confidence and disdain in his voice. “This ain’t nothing. Only a little squall. Be over before morning. We can’t sink in this old tub.”

“Tuffy, will you do something for us girls?” the question was from Mai.

“Anything you say.”

“Then, for Pete’s sake, come on in here and hold us down. We’re all mixed up in this rope and stuff. And every time a wave comes we bounce all over each other.”

Tuffy laughed to himself. What a sweet job this was going to be! To sleep with three of the most beautiful dames he had ever seen.

He crawled over the ropes and lay down beside one smooth, warm body. He reached out a hand. His palm cupped a soft, pointed breast. Then a wave sent him rolling, and he felt the girl’s arms around him, holding him close.

“Lord help the poor working gal,” cried Honey from nearby.

“‘Twas a dark and stormy night,” sang Zoe, “when he did wrong by our little Nell.”

“Say, girls, who has Tuffy now?” laughed Mai. “That last wave sorta tore us asunder.”

“Pipe down, you dames,” Tuffy grumbled, only pretending he wasn’t enjoying the situation. “Let’s get some sleep.”

“Sleep?” cried Honey.

“Sleep?” cried Mai.

“Sleep?” cried Zoe.

“That’s what I said,” Tuffy laughed in spite of himself. And strangely enough, huddled as they all were together, wedged in back of the ropes, they did manage to get some sleep in spite of the storm.

MORNING found the storm over and Tuffy and his crew of fair damsels eager for a thorough examination of their floating palace. It proved to be an ordinary ore barge. The small superstructure for ropes was the only shelter. Their lifeboat had come through the storm in good shape.

If they only had something to eat, the place wouldn’t be half bad for adventure of this sort.

Tuffy knew he’d have to keep the girls busy to get their minds off their empty stomachs, so he suggested they make their cabin more comfortable and seaworthy.

First they dragged out one great interminable tow rope that must have been a quarter mile long. This they wound around and around the small structure in several layers until there was barely enough room to crawl over the top into their now fairly spacious quarters. The place was probably eight or ten feet square and about five feet high. And when the girls finished cleaning it up, it was almost cozy looking.

Tuffy caulked a few bad cracks up in the roof with rope strands. And all in all, the four of them felt proud of their efforts by nightfall.

The evening was as calm and lovely as the previous night had been wild. A half moon gave a silver gleam to the sea and the sky.

Tuffy was sitting near the lifeboat, thinking what a grand thing life was, when the girls came up behind him and all started talking at once.

“Hey, hey, girls,” he cried. “One at a time.”

“O.K., Tuffy,” Honey answered.

Then she hesitated.

“Go on, Honey,” Mai urged teasingly, “Tell

him.”

“Well, it’s like this,” Honey began. “You see we’re show girls. And we thought that maybe you’d kinda like to be entertained a bit. You know—we thought we could put on one of our acts for you. You’ve been pretty swell to us poor gals. This pickle we’re in isn’t your fault. We might just as well have as much fun as we can—while we can. What do you say, Tuffy?”

“I say—swell! I’ve been wondering what sorta stuff you did for a living back on the gambling ship.”

“Come on, girls,” Zoe cried. Then to Tuffy she called “See if you can find that empty water cask that was on the small boat and try and make it sound like a drum. You’ll hafta be both orchestra and audience.”

TUFFY smiled broadly at thought of what was to come. “Tuffy and his harem,” he murmured joyfully to himself, as he watched the three girls scamper like kittens over the cables that all but barred the entrance to the tiny cabin.

He looked about him at the silvery ocean and at the sky. On the side of the old scow the lapping waters were making a caressing susurrus of sound. The redolence of southern waters filled the air with the perfume of romance.

By holding the empty water cask on his knees and pounding lightly with a bit of rope in which he had tied a thick knot, Tuffy managed to make a sort of deep booming effect. For some time he amused himself by beating on the crude drum. He even hummed an old sea chantey to himself and beat a low accompaniment with the rope end.

“We’re coming,” Zoe called out to him from the cabin.

He turned. Three pale figures slipped over the rope barrier and approached him silently on bare feet.

The red blood in Tuffy’s body quickened at

the sight. Even the silver faintness of the moon’s light was enough to reveal the full loveliness of the three beings coming toward him.

The girls had discarded their dancing outfits, skimpy as they were. Their breasts, snowy mounds, that trembled as they moved, were free and uncovered. And as the girls walked toward Tuffy, the three pairs of breasts seemed to be alive under the moon’s pale light.

Around their middles, the girls had looped up stray ends of ropes. And around their ankles and wrists were more rope strands. Somehow they looked like slim marble goddesses to Tuffy’s highly appreciative gaze.

Slowly he let the rope end strike the top of the water cask. The resulting thud, deep and hollow, set the girls into motion. And such motion!

They lifted their arms and moved in a circle about him, their breasts swaying provocatively as they dipped their knees at each beat of his drum. The drum beat became sure and steady.

Then, as the girls slipped in and out before him on their silent bare feet, he increased the tempo of his beat. The water cask became a throbbing drum between his knees. Swifter the girls danced.

Bare arms and white slender legs and high flung heads, pale in settings of moon-tinted hair, flashed in a gay pattern before his eyes. Tuffy became a little drunk with the sight. Swifter went the rope end on the water cask.

Now the girls were soaring through the evolutions of their wild dance, sometimes close to him, sometimes a score of feet away. From the girls came occasional little animal cries that followed the abandon of their actions.

Suddenly when Tuffy could beat the drum no faster, the girls stopped as of one accord, tore the rope strand girdles from their middles, and ran naked across the deck to the tiny cabin.

For a frenzied moment Tuffy wanted to run after them, seize their lovely bodies in his arms,

and crush the three of them to him. Lord, but they were beautiful!

A need for physical action seized him. Tuffy strode to the end of the scow.

And there, in his little way, Tuffy looked out over a moon-shimmering sea and felt himself a king of men. Here on this scow was his kingdom, the girls were subjects, the sea was his royal enemy, and who cared what the future brought.

A LONG time later when Tuffy went back to the cabin, he could hear their soft regular breathing, and he knew that the girls were asleep. With a smile he sank down, his back to the entrance. There would be more days coming! And more nights!

But about the middle of the next morning. Mai called excitedly to the others that she had seen a ship. Tuffy clambered up on the cabin and peered in the direction she pointed. In a moment he saw it—a small vessel in the distance.

Again Tuffy tied his shirt to the oar and waved it steadily over his head. At length the boat, which was nothing more than a small fishing tug, had covered enough of the intervening distance so that they were at last sure they had been seen.

Instinctively the girls tidied up their mops of blonde hair and patted smooth the frayed silk of their panties and bandeaux. Their faces were glowing with joy, and they kept jumping upon the cabin for a look and then running around like children.

Tuffy peered at the oncoming boat and felt sad about it. Of course he knew why. But he didn't like to admit that the idea of his little harem had made such an impression on him. It was sorta hopeless now.

As the fishing tug drew close, Tuffy looked with some misgivings at the rascally crew of six or seven Mexicans who were lined up at the tug's side. The men were swarthy and looked

like movie villains. But worst of all were the broad grins that covered their ugly faces as they leered at the three almost nude girls on the scow.

"Any of you speak English?" Tuffy hailed the tug.

"I do," was the answer from the man at the wheel, a huge, filthy-looking rascal, even bigger in body than Tuffy himself.

"Will you take us to San Diego?" Tuffy cried. "We'll pay you well for it."

"*Si, si,*" the man broke into a still wider grin as his black eyes went avidly from one girl to the next.

The girls turned and looked at Tuffy,

"Well, girls," he said to them, "here's a hitch-hike you can't walk back from. Want to take a chance with those mugs?"

"We may not get another chance," Mai insisted, "and I'm hungry enough to eat those guys if they get fresh."

"Aw, come on, girls," Honey declared. "I've yet to meet the man I can't handle. These guys are too dumb to be dangerous."

TUFFY took another look at the tug and kept his own opinion on that score. "All right, girls," he said with finality. "Let's get our lifeboat launched. They don't seem to want to come after us. We'll have to go to them."

Soon they were next to the tug and dirty Mexican hands were lifting the three blonde girls to the deck. Tuffy went at once to the man at the wheel.

"You, the captain of this boat?" he asked the man.

"Cap'n and owner," the other replied proudly. "But how does thees thing happen, you and thees girls on the old scow?"

Tuffy gave a brief summary of their experience. It was evident the Mexican captain didn't believe a word of it.

"The fishing ees very bad—until now," the fellow added as he took a look over his shoulder

at the three girls standing in the midst of his leering crew. "Lovely girls," he averred as he winked at Tuffy.

"You'll get a damned good reward for saving us when we get to San Diego," Tuffy stated, trying to divert the fellow's thoughts away from the girls.

"*Si*" the captain grinned suggestively. "—when we get to San Diego."

Tuffy turned to go back to the girls. The captain stopped him.

"What ees your name?"

"Scott."

"You like thees girls, no?"

"I'm taking care of them, if that's what you mean," Tuffy replied.

"Ees not one woman enough for you?" the captain grinned.

Tuffy looked straight back into the Mexican's pig-like eyes. He read cruelty there, and worse. . . None of the dangers they had faced so far equaled this Mexican tug boat captain, Tuffy felt.

A shrill scream rent the air!

Tuffy turned. One of the men had grabbed Mai and was pulling her through the entrance into the tug's small cabin.

With a half dozen leaps Tuffy pushed aside others of the crew and had the fellow by the neck. Mai pulled herself free and ran back to Zoe and Honey who were huddling together in terror.

Tuffy looked down into the Mexican's rage filled face. He drew back his fist to pound it into the fellow when he heard a scream of warning from the girls. Quickly he doubled over and then slid sideways. One of the crew went sailing over his back.

But at that same instant the man at Tuffy's feet sprang at him, a long, naked blade in his right hand. Tuffy jerked back and felt the cold steel slide past him and bury itself into the wood of the door. A fist to the point of the knife-wielder's jaw finished him for the moment.

Tuffy turned to face the rest of the crew.

FIVE of the most evil-looking men he had ever faced in any kind of fight were lined up on the deck waiting for him to come out. All held knives in their hands. On their brutal, ugly faces were grins of unholy joy at thought of the butchery that was to come. Behind them cringed the three girls.

Swiftly Tuffy pulled out the knife from the wood behind him. With it in his left hand, he crouched in the small opening waiting for their next move. One by one he could handle them. In the open he wouldn't have a chance.

Tuffy felt a surge of power go through him. Back there on the scow he had thought great thoughts about what he would do for these three girls. And now was his chance. Now if ever they needed him. They depended on him to bring them through safely. He'd do it too. Those Mexicans weren't going to stop him now.

Then something happened—

The three girls who had been crying and weeping in each other's arms suddenly leaped on the backs of three of the crew. That left only two of that free to meet Tuffy.

At once he sailed into them. One he laid low with a sledgehammer blow. When the other came at him with knife upraised, Tuffy dodged, snapped the man's arm back, and sank his own blade in the fellow's throat.

The three others of the crew meanwhile were having their troubles trying to toss off the biting, scratching cats on their backs. Tuffy grabbed one of them and with three swift blows put him down, the girl still on top of him, tearing and gouging. The other two he grabbed one in each hand, his fingers seizing their throats in a death grip. The girls on their backs were holding the men's hands from using their knives.

Then came the voice of the captain to put a quick end to the fight.

"Get back, all of you," he bellowed.

Tuffy looked up to see a pair of revolvers leveled at him. He released the two men who squirmed away from him as fast as they could.

With the three girls, their dance outfits in shreds, behind him, Tuffy faced the captain.

“If you know what’s good for you,” Tuffy said indignantly, “you’ll bring your men under control and get us back to land as fast as you can. We are American citizens.”

“You kill Stephano. I feex you, I kill you and take girls. And when we are through with them, we use them for bait, *si* . . . Bait for tiger sharks. And who finds out? I think that ees good way for to revenge Stephano, *no es verdad!*”

Tuffy looked up into the man’s insane face. He could feel the girls cowering at his back. If they were all to die, the three girls were going to have the worst of it. Somehow or other, his own quick death didn’t seem so very terrible.

The man cocked one of his revolvers and leveled it at Tuffy’s heart.

WAS this to be the end, he wondered vaguely? The end to all those grand ideas for living? There was nothing he could do to save himself. The captain was a full dozen steps away. Two black holes yawned at him. They would presently spurt flashes of crimson and unseen slugs of lead. And that would be the end of him.

Tuffy felt a nudge at his back. One of the girls was poking him. He slipped his hand behind him and felt the sharp point of a blade slide between his thumb and forefinger.

The captain was talking to him again, reluctant to end the delightful torture of his victim.

“You will die, *mi amigo*. But the girls, they will not die for awhile. I will take thees girls, one by one. I will drink the first drink from each little lovely bottle, *si*. After me my men can drink. My five men who are left, they will drink the three bottles empty. And then we toss them to the sharks. Three empty bottles. Do you not

envy us, *mi amigo?*”

Swiftly the blade flew through the air, straight for the captain’s throat. And there it struck, hilt out. A look of wonderment crossed the captain’s face. He tried to look down at the flow of blood which suddenly gushed out from him.

Then he toppled over.

Almost before the body touched the deck, Tuffy had covered the distance and grabbed up the revolvers as they clattered at the man’s feet. With one in each hand he faced the crew. The three girls crouched down in a compact heap to avoid being in the way should Tuffy have to shoot at the men. But all the fight had been taken from the Mexicans,

“I ought to shoot every damn’ one of you,” Tuffy swore. “You’re just a lot of rats. But I’ll give you a chance. Get this tug going. And see that we keep going. I’m going to sit right out here, and at the first sign of treachery, I’ll cut you down like dogs. Do you understand?”

The men nodded meekly.

With the girls’ help in guarding the men from any possible mischief, Tuffy held the course steady all that day until late in the afternoon they sighted the mainland. And before dark they had reached San Diego and had firm ground under them again.

WHILE the girls skipped off to a friend’s home to be bathed and fed and clothed,

Tuffy Scott saw the crew of the Mexican fishing boat safely in the hands of the authorities.

And only after he had a shave and a haircut, and had borrowed a suit of clothes from a seaman friend of his did Tuffy call on the girls to say good-bye to them.

Silently he shook their hands. Almost he wished he were back on that old scow with them still in those little silk dance outfits instead of the dresses they now wore. He, alone with those three beautiful blondes. The boys would never

believe it. He was even beginning to wonder if he believed it himself.

At his forlorn expression the girls burst into sudden laughter. There was a merry twinkle in their eyes. It was Honey who finally made the proposition to him.

“You know, Tuffy,” she said mock-seriously, “we’re mighty famous people now. The papers have been full of us for days. And you should read what they say about your rescue of us from those bold bad Pancho Villas.”

“Get to the point, Honey,” Mai urged.

“Give me time, darling,” Honey laughed. “Anyway, Tuffy, with a bunch of us making the headlines, and our pictures plastered over the front page of every big time newspaper in the country, we’ve decided to cash in on it. We’re making up an act, and we want you to be in it!”

“Me, in your act!” Tuffy cried in disbelief.

“Sailor, you’ll make a hit!” Mai said. “With those shoulders of yours—boy! A diamond in the rough. Won’t he, girls?”

“Aw, no, you’re kidding,” Tuffy laughed at their eagerness. “What about later—when the

excitement dies down. What then?”

“Well,” Zoe replied, “we really are pretty fair dancers, you know, and we can always get along. We’ll pay you a salary just to stay with us, whether you work in the act or not. You can be our bodyguard. It sorta looks like we need one anyway. You’ll never make as much as a deckhand.

“And you can go everywhere with us. And there’ll be lots of pretty girls. And plenty to drink. And places to go. Just a swell life. How about it, Tuffy?”

“Aw heck, girls,” Tuffy blushed. “You’re swell to me. I’m crazy about all of you. But I wouldn’t be no good in that sort of life. All I’m good for is swabbing decks and such things. A guy just doesn’t up and leave the sea, you know. But I would sorta like to ask a last favor of you.”

“Sure thing,” the three exclaimed.

For a moment Tuffy hesitated. Then he reached over clumsily and kissed each one of the girls full on the lips—and dashed wildly from the house, his eyes glowing and his borrowed tie flying free in the wind.