

CHAPTER XIX

DAY

THE coast line grew more sharply defined, and the mountains beyond Grudo showed their line sharp and strange, and curiously hard, yet diaphanous—the effect of ice against sky.

It was the dawn coming up behind the hills to fight the moon light in a silence almost complete, for the *Karan* was running before the wind, and the only sound was the faint whisper of her stern wash.

The sky paled, and above the razor-sharp line of the hills a momentary wisp of cloud turned to a golden feather, the gold touched the hill tops and in a moment the moon was no longer the moon, but a burnt-out cinder floating in the sky of morning.

Far, far away, the coast showed now miraculously clear for a moment before the sun, free of the hills, flooded sea and coast with its fire.

Jean looked back, Ragusa and the islands had vanished, there was nothing to be seen up there, nothing anywhere except far ahead the white sail of some ship put out from Cattaro.

He took the map from his pocket and opened it. Now in the full light of day he could see the impossibility of clinging to the coast as a guide, the trend of it made the vast bay that runs from Dulcigno to Point St. Amana. To keep within sight of the coast would lead him a tortuous journey, for the great bay itself is indented by a score of smaller bays, and there were towns like Durrazo all eyes

for a possible fugitive. No, he must strike absolutely away from the coast and, trusting to Fate, make a course as nearly for the open sea as possible without a compass.

And yet, the decision come to, he held on a while as a bather hesitates before taking a plunge. It was not till the sun was well above the hills that he altered his course, turning the *Karan's* bow to the open Adriatic.

An hour later, letting the sheet loose and the sail to flap in the breeze, he came forward and stood up, holding to the mast. There was no sign of land, north, south, east and west; the Blue Adriatic lay desolate, no trace of sail, no trace of steamers' smoke, not even a gull.

He bent to the basket of food, and picking it up brought it aft. The matting of the basket was wet and there was water on the bottom planking, showing that the boat was slightly leaky. Having placed the food on the stern sheets he reached for the little water breaker, it was so light that he could have lifted it with one hand. It was empty. The bung had come out, and the water had drained away.

No, it was not quite empty; as he turned it over half a cupful or so ran out and spilt on the bottom boards.

Hurriedly put aboard it had been placed with the bung downwards, and the bung had been loose. He djiman's fault. Ah! The good Herdjiman had seemed stolid and even cruel in his matter-of-fact way, but the disturbance that had really been agitating his mind like a storm was evident here; just as in the fact that he had forgotten that first of all necessities to a sailor—a compass.

Well, the thing was empty.

Jean, putting the breaker down, knelt and tasted

the water in the bottom of the boat with his finger. It was saltish, not bitter, but brackish with the small amount of sea water that every boat takes in—quite undrinkable.

Then he came aft and put the *Karan* before the wind again.

The desire for food that had made him fetch the basket had quite passed, put out by the shock of this finding. He had not been thirsty; he had reached out for the breaker just as one uncorks a bottle before a meal, because it is natural to drink when eating. He was not thirsty now, but his lips had become dry, the pumice-stone dryness that comes in moments of high tension or fear.

Yet he was not under the sway of immediate fear.

His feelings were those of a man who sees, suddenly, a long distance away, an utterly insurmountable obstacle. The event would not happen for a good while yet, but it was inevitable.

He had food enough to last him days, that was no use. He had no water.

As he sat and steered, a small object on the bottom planking caught his eye. It was the bung of the breaker. The thing that had done all the mischief, or at least helped; it was Herdjiman's fault really, if fault there was, better to call it the fault of Luck—and yet Luck had helped him up to now.

Looking back, it seemed to him that his escape from the villa after that happening had been more than lucky. Luck had kept the servants away, had given him direction where to go, had brought him to Herdjiman's house, and had given him the *Karan* to escape in; yet, doing so, had played him a dirty trick by leaving him like this without water!

He believed in Luck, that is to say he had the ordinary man's belief in things having a run one

way or the other, towards fortune or the reverse ; the run being long or short, but continuous whilst lasting.

An absurd feeling came to him that what had happened was wrong, and against the nature of that fair dealing that even a gambler had a right to expect from Fortune. The run of luck had been fictitious from the first. She had, whilst giving him seemingly the way to escape, given him in reality the road to a pit.

Perhaps the feeling was not so absurd after all, for it was instinctive, and instinct tells the heart, rightly or wrongly, that the Eternal Dealer of the red and black cards is, whatever else, not a cheat.

He was under the spell of this apparent wrong done to him, when a thought rose in his mind. Perhaps this thing, after all, is an indication of what I should do—hail the first ship within reach and going towards the Mediterranean, instead of keeping on for days to clear the Adriatic, and find a ship beyond the Strait of Otranto.

Then came another thought ; whether an indication or not it is the only thing you can do.

It is impossible to go back to the Dalmatian coast, the Italian coast is impossible, the open sea is impossible, you have no water with which to reach it.

Your only chance is to find a ship here, a ship going to clear the Adriatic, and coming within hail of you—will such a ship come ?

The map gave no indication of shipping lines or whether vessels kept to the Italian coast or the Dalmatian.

In the Strait of Otranto the shipping lines would be crowded together, but that was much too far to reach in his condition. He judged from the scale of

miles attached to the map that it was at least two hundred.

Well, there was the whole position. One single chance a ship, and no single indication as to how he should steer for the best chance of hailing one.

Then came Temptation. The temptation to make back for the coast, risk capture, and seize the certainty of escape from death by thirst.

Though the coast was gone from sight, the morning sun still gave its position, which was not far away as yet. A few hours' sailing would bring him up to it. The alluring idea also came that he might land and fill the breaker, and put to sea again.

Yet he well knew that inhospitable cinder of a coast, and the miles he would have to travel in search of water, should he land anywhere but at a town. The idea and the temptation lost hold on him, and he let the boat keep her course. Chance at her prow and the viewless wind her follower.

CHAPTER XX

THE SHIP

TOWARDS noon the wind died down to a gentle breathing intermittent and fitful, the sail would fill and the sheet tauten; then the canvas would fall slack, shudder, half-fill again and fall slack.

The sea surface under run by a gentle swell showed here satin smooth, and here roughed by the breeze that passed like a violet shadow.

Jean could not tell how the boat's head lay; north, south, east and west were all the same, and did not matter for the *Karan* now was scarcely