

out the other oar and row for her? No, she had way enough on to reach him, and her steersman had the situation under control. He threw down the oar and seized the boat-hook, and standing with it in his hand watched as she came ever so gently, immense and rust red, the water creaming about her stem and the swell washing her plates, black heads watching over the rail and an arm waving gently as though to say, "that's right, hold on so."

And now the rusty iron wall was alongside and something came flying through the air, a rope; it struck him on the left shoulder and seizing it he tied it to the thwart. Holding on to the rope and looking up, he saw the ladder being lowered.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE "MORCLAR"

THERE were only four men on deck, and the man who helped him over the rail, a black-bearded man wearing a peaked cap, was the first to speak.

To ask questions? Not a word.

He was not speaking to Jean, but to the others, giving them directions for getting the boat on board, in French and with a terrible Provençal accent. It was a business requiring care.

Speed in the mercantile marine is money; it is, in fact, another term for cargo space, and every revolution of the engines means a cent gained.

Cochard was a man like that; he was not only captain but part-owner of the *Morclar*; he was also not in too good a temper. Picking up a derelict was picking up worry, an entry in the log, a man to be

fed and berthed, and all sorts of questions to be answered when he got to port.

It was not till the tackle was rigged and the fellows winching the boat up, that the fiery and excitable little man began to shoot questions at the newcomer.

Blown off the coast. Which? The Dalmatian. What was he doing to get like that, fishing? Thirsty?

He shouted to a man who had come up through the engine-room hatch, and the man vanished and returned with a can with a long spout such as the stokers use. Jean, whose thirst had come back on him, drank and drank whilst the boat rose into the air like a bird, and was brought in-board with a fellow sitting in her. The trampling of the engines had recommenced. The steersman and officer of the watch who had been looking down over the after canvas of the bridge had disappeared, and the *Merclar* was on her course again. But all that was nothing to Jean; an appalling sense of misery rising from his stomach in waves and reaching his very soul had seized him. It seemed to him that the end of everything earthly had come—it was the water he had drunk. He turned to the rail and vomited.

Then he was being led along by the arm to the deck-house aft, and Cochard was giving him brandy out of a cup.

The deck-house was stuffy, lit by a skylight and side ports, and furnished with a table, a swinging lamp, racks stuffed with odds and ends and showing a cabin door opening aft.

The brandy was heaven.

Cochard fetched some biscuits from a tin and, as the other ate, sat opposite to him at the table,

drumming on it with his thick-set fingers and putting in questions, mainly about the boat.

A boat was a boat, and this one was worth anything up to five hundred francs.

The fact that she was Jean's gave him satisfaction, the man would be able to pay something if the boat were sold when they got to port. He said nothing of this, however, and, indeed, Jean was not in the condition for much conversation, the biscuit and the brandy between them had done their work, and Cochard taking him by the arm led him into the little cabin aft. There were two bunks here, an upper and a lower, the lower filled with all sorts of truck such as extra blankets, sea boots and sweaters. Cochard helped him into the upper bunk. "And there you are," said Cochard; "it's my cabin and I can't do better for you than that. I'll take the chart house till you get your pins under you again. Well, he's asleep," said Cochard, receiving no reply but a snore; "that's the way it takes them after they've been through the mill—and now let's have a look at his boat."

He came out on deck and ordered the boat which had been swung at a spare davit to be brought in-board, and on to the deck.

Yes, she was a well-built boat, as most Adriatic boats are, not more than five years old, he judged, and worth fully the price he had fancied her bringing.

No name on her.

He did not notice the word "Karan" in pencil on the low planking; there was no painted name, and having verified this fact he began an inspection of her contents. The mast had been unstepped and lay fore and aft across the thwarts. He called to a couple of the hands, and they removed mast, sail,

oars and boat-hook, casting them on deck; then they took out the water breaker. Cochard measured it with his eye. It was empty, but it had presumably been full when put into the boat; men don't stow empty water breakers in boats. The castaway had presumably plenty of water to start with, yet the thing was empty. Then came the basket of food, the rye bread and the sausage, untouched—of course he might have had more food in another basket or in the boat's locker—still . . . He had been fishing, so he said—where was the fishing tackle?—and as for fish, there was not even a scale on the planking.

This boat had never been used, for fishing—at least, not for a long time.

Cochard stepped away and stood filling a pipe with his back to the port rail, and his eyes on the boat.

Too much water consumed for the time mentioned, too little food, no evidence of fish or fishing gear, and the man himself!

Cochard could see at once that Jean was not a common man. His hands told that, his face, his manner and his voice, and dress.

Well, then, what was he? Why had he lied, saying that he had been fishing when blown away—blown away! Why, there had been no storms at all lately, at least in the upper Adriatic. The *Morclar* was out of Trieste and the weather had been fair all the time of her stay. It is true that the Adriatic can't be judged as a whole from any one piece, and that it may be fine weather at Durazzo with a Bora blowing at Sebenica.

All the same, the glass had been steady, and it was probable that it had been steady all down the coast.

He ordered the boat to be swung out again, and

went forward, mounting the bridge ladder and relieving Yves, the mate, who went below.

He did not say a word to Yves or to the steersman of what was in his mind.

Yves was a big blond man out of Treguier, a Ponantaise. The French mercantile marine is divided into two great classes, the men from the north and the men from the south. The man from the north is a Ponantaise, the man from the south a Morco. Cochard was a southerner, Yves a northerner; they had nothing in common except their duty to the ship. They would pass the day sometimes without exchanging more than half a dozen words other than on business, not because of taciturnity, but just want of talk. They had nothing in common. Cochard, who could be as excitable and garrulous as any Marseilles fishwife, was a damp squib in the presence of Yves. More, the very presence of Yves seemed to wet blanket thought. There was no second officer, that position being taken by Rerard the bo'sun.

So Cochard held the bridge alone, companionless but for Gaillard, the steersman.

Pacing to and fro, with nothing to catch the eye but the blue Adriatic, and no one to speak to but his imagination, Captain Pierre Cochard held a debate about the person in the after cabin, arraigned him before all sorts of tribunals and found him wanting. Smuggler? No. Spy? No. Runner away from the Law? No, he did not seem that sort. Well, what then?