

THE SONG OF THE STARS.

The morning star began it. At the dawn of creation it birthed. And the circling spheres go swinging and singing it unto earth. And earth shall forget her groaning. And learn the songs of the spheres. And the tired shall sing that are moaning. And the sad shall dry their tears. As the scars tread paths appointed. And the sun gives forth his heat. So the sons of men shall labor. Ere they rest in leisure's seat. And kings are to serve the people. And wealth is to ease the poor. And learning to lift up the lowly. And strength that the weak may endure. Lo, the burden shall be divided. And each shall know his own. And the royalty of manhood. Shall be more than crown or throne. And the flesh and blood of toilers. Shall no longer be less than gold. And never an honest spirit. Into hopeless bondage be sold. For we the people are waking. And low and high shall employ The splendid strength of union For liberty, life, and joy. —Silver Cross.

THE MURDERER.

(Concluded from last issue.)

The mate measured him with a practiced eye. Though he had the crazy courage of a bulldog, he was too much an expert in warlike emergencies to overlook the risk of trying to rush a desperate man armed with a knife; the chances of the grapple were too ugly. There was something lunatic and strange in the youth's glare also; and it will sometimes happen that an oppressed and cowed man in his extremity will shrug his meekness from him and become, in a breath, a desperado. This had its place in the mate's considerations. "Finish, den!" he rasped, with no weakening of his tone or manner. "You don't think I'm goin' to wait all night for dem rope-yarns—hey?" He turned his back at once lest Conroy should venture another retort and make an immediate fight unavoidable. Before his eye the silent audience melted as swiftly as it had appeared, and Conroy was alone with his sick sense of having ventured too far, which stood him in place of the thrill of victory. The thrill came later, in the fore-castle, where he swelled to the aculation of his mates. They, at any rate, had been deceived by his attitude; they praised him by word and look; the big Greek infused a certain geniality into his smile. Only Slade said the wrong thing. "I was ready for him as soon as he moved," Conroy was asserting. "And he knew it. You should have seen how he gaped when I wouldn't put the knife away. The men were listening, over-ting him. Old Slade, in the background, took his pipe from his lips. "Ar' now I suppose you're satisfied," he inquired, harshly. "How d'you mean, satisfied?" demanded Conroy, coloring. "You saw what happened, didn't you?" "You made him gape," said Slade. "That was because he made you howl, eh? Well, ain't you calling it quits, then—till the next time he kicks you?" Some one laughed; Conroy raised his voice. "Hell never kick me again," he cried. "His kicking days are over. He's kicked me once too often, he has. Quite a guess, no?" Slade let a mouthful of smoke trickle between his lips; it swam in front of his face in a tenuous film of pale vapor. "Well, talkin' won't do it, anyhow," he said. "No," retorted Conroy, and collected all eyes to his gesture. "But this will!" He showed them the thin-bladed knife which the Greek had given him, holding it before them by the hilt. He let a dramatic moment elapse. "Like that?" he said, and stabbed at the air. "Like that—see? Like that?" They came upon bad weather gradually, drawing in a belt of half-gales, with squalls that roared up from the horizon and made them for the time into whole gales. The Villingen, designed and built primarily for cargo capacity, was a wet ship, and upon any point of sailing had a way of scooping in water by the many tons. In nearly every watch came the roar, "Stand by yer to'gallan' balliards!" Then the wait for ten minutes while the wind grew and the big four-masted back lay over and bumped her bluff bows through racing seas, until the next order, shrill and more urgent, "Lower away!" and the stiff canvas fought and slatted as the yards came down. Seabirds and oilskins were the wear for every watch; wet decks and the crash of water coming inboard over the rail, dull cold and the rasp of heavy, sodden canvas on the numb fingers, became again familiar to the men, and at last there arrived the evening, grayed with tempest, on which all hands reefed topsails. The mate had the middle watch, from midnight till four o'clock in the morning, and for the first two hours it was Conroy's turn on the lookout. The rest in oilskins and sea-boots, were standing by under the break of the poop; save for the sleeping men in the shut fore-castle, he had the fore part of the ship to himself. He leaned against the after rail of the fore-castle head, where a ventilator somewhat screened him from the bitter wind that blew out of the dark, and gazed ahead at the murk. Now and again the big bark slid forward with curtsying motion, and dipped up a sea that flowed aft over the anchors and cascaded down the ladders to the main-deck; spray that spouted aloft and drove across on the wind, sparkled red and green in the glare of the sidelights like brief fireworks. The splash and drum of waters, the heavy drone of the wind in the stilt, the clatter of gear aloft, were in his ears; he did not hear one bell strike

from the poop, which he should have answered with a stroke on the big bell behind him and a shouted report on the lights. "Hoy! You schleepin' up dere—hey?" It was the mate, who had come forward in person to see why he had not answered. He was by the fore fire-rail, a mere shape in the dark. "Schleepin'—no, sir!" "Don't you hear von bell strike?" cried the mate, slithering on the wet deck toward the foot of the ladder. "No, sir," said Conroy, and stooped to strike the bell. The mate came up the ladder, hauling himself by the hand-rails, for he was swollen beyond the stidly with extra clothes under his long oilskin coat. A plume of spray whipped him in the face as he got to the top, and he swore shortly, wiping his eyes with his hands. At the same moment Conroy, still stooping to the bell-lanyard, felt the Villingen lower her nose and slid down in one of her disconcerting curtsies; he caught at the rail to steady himself. The dark water, marbled with white foam, rode in over the deck, slid across the anchors and about the capstan, and came aft toward the ladder and the mate. The ship rolled at the same moment. Conroy saw what happened as a grotesque trick of circumstance. The mate, as the deck slanted, slipped and reached for the hand-rail with an ejaculation. The water flowed about his knees; he fell back against the hand-rail, which was just high enough for him to sit on. It was what, for one ridiculous moment, he seemed to be doing. The next, his booted feet swung up and he fell over backward, amid the confusion of splashing water that leaped down the main-deck. Conroy heard him strike something below with a queer, smacking noise. "Pity he didn't go overboard while he was about it," he said to himself, acting out his role. Really, he was rather startled and dismayed. He found the mate coiled in the scupper, very wet and stupid. He took hold of him to draw him under the fore-castle head, where he would have shelter, and was alarmed at the inertness of the body under his hands. "Sir!" he cried, "sir!" He shook the great shoulders, but quickly desisted; there was something horrible, something that touched his nerves, in his irresponsiveness. He remembered that he might probably find matches in the lamp-locker, and staggered there to search. He had to grope in gross darkness about the place, touching brass and the uncanny smoothness of glass, before his hand fell on what he sought. At last he found the matches, and the mate's side, and a match shed its little illumination. The mate's face was odd in its quietude, and the sou'wester of oilskin was still on his head, held there by the strings under the chin. From under its edge blood flowed steadily, thickly, appallingly. "But—" cried Conroy. The match-flame stung his fingers and he dropped it. "O Lord!" he said. It occurred to him then, for the first time, that the mate was dead. The men aft, bunched up under the break of the poop, were aware of him as a figure that came sliding and tottering toward them and fell sprawling at the foot of the poop ladder. He floundered up and clutched the nearest of them, the Greek. "The mate's dead," he broke out, in a kind of breathless squeal. "Somebody call the captain; the mate's dead." There was a moment of silence; then a cackle of words from several of them together. The Greek's hands on his shoulders tightened. He heard the man's purring voice in his ear. "How did you do it?" Conroy thrust himself loose; the skies of his mind were split by a frightful lightning flash of understanding. He had been alone with the mate; he had seen him die; he was sworn to kill him. He could see the livid smile of the Greek bent upon him. "I didn't do it," he choked, passionately, and struck with a wild, feeble hand at the smile. "You liar—I didn't do it!" "Hush!" The Greek caught him again and held him. Some of the men started forward; others had slipped into the alleyway to rouse the second mate and captain. The Greek had him clutched to his bosom in a strong embrace and was hushing him as one might hush a scared child. Slade was at his side. "He slipped, I tell you; he slipped at the top of the ladder! She'd occupied a dolly of water and then rolled, and over he went. I heard his head go smack and went down to him. I never touched him." "Hush!" It was Slade this time. "And yer sure he's dead?" "Yes, he's dead." "Well, the old man exchanged nods with the Greek. "All right. Only—don't tell the captain that tale; it ain't good enough." "But—" began Conroy. A hug that crushed his face against the Greek's oilskin breast silenced him. "Vat is all dis?" It was the captain, tall, august, come full-dressed from his cabin. At his back the second mate, with his oilskin coat over his pajamas, thrust forward his red, cheerful face. Slade told the matter briefly. "And it's scared young Conroy all to bits, sir," he concluded. "Come for'ard," bade the captain. "Get a lamp, some vum!" They followed him along the wet, slippery deck, slowly, letting him pass ahead out of ear-shot. "It was a belayin'-pin, ye-es?" queried the Greek, softly, of Conroy. "He might have hit his head against a pin," replied Conroy. "Eh?" The Greek stopped. "Might 'ave—might 'ave it 'is face? Ah, dat is fine! 'E might 'ave it 'is cad, Slade! You 'ear dat?" "Yes, it ain't bad!" replied Slade, and Conroy, staring in a wild attempt to see their faces clearly, realized that they were laughing, laughing silently and heartily. With a gesture of despair he left them. A globe-lamp under the fore-castle head lighted the captain's investigations, gleaming on wet oilskins, shadow-pitted faces, and the curious, remote thing that had been the mate of the Villingen. Its ampler light revealed much that the match-flame had missed from its field—the manner in which the sou'wester and now as he sat up it needed an effort of mind to

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