

Mel Keegan

**The
DECEIVERS**



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THE DECEIVERS

Mel Keegan

DreamCraft Multimedia, Australia

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THE DECEIVERS

Chapter One

The Kilpatrick Hills were bleak in the grudging sun of late afternoon, veiled by a thin pall of river mist and the ever-present smoke of a thousand chimneys and factories too numerous to count. Crowded rooftops huddled along the north bank of the river, which had begun to widen out fast on its way west to Greenock and Helensburgh. The whole course of the Clyde was sullied now, by the burgeoning of industry. Shipyards and factories brought in labor; the population on these shores was growing every year, which in turn meant more homes, and children, and then more jobs. Would the Celts and Romans who had known this river as the Kluta, the wide, wild passage from the Firth itself, even recognize it today? Bill Ryan thought not.

Not so many years ago these riverlands were almost virgin wilderness, but since boyhood Ryan had watched the clamor for work transform the Clyde into a maze of competing shipyards, which in places had begun to shoulder for space and business, even for survival. The big yards in Dumbarton and Greenock gave birth to the China clippers themselves; and cheek-by-jowl with the great ladies of sail were the steamers — even now the old world and the new found a way to exist side by side, in a kind of uneasy truce.

Commercial ambition and steam engines aside, sail continued to rule most of the world's seas, and the old romantics swore it always would. But Ryan was sure the stubborn belief was no more than a fantasy. Hands in pockets, the collar of his black greatcoat turned up against the persistent mist and drizzle, a black woolen cap pulled firmly down around his ears, he stood on the riverbank and frowned into the jungle of industry just west of the town of Dumbarton.

A steam screw had launched just hours before. She was arrestingly ugly, still little more than a raw hull with dormant boilers and the fearsome engines of a locomotive. The dead weight of her steel body made her ride low in the water, as if she were laden with cargo. In fact, she

carried no superstructure. The fitters would labor for weeks or months more before she was seaworthy.

Bill Ryan disliked steamers intensely. Even as he stood glaring at this new eyesore, which wallowed like an iron hog in the gray, murky river waters, a packet was inbound from some foreign port, most likely Scandinavian, in which case it was probably loaded with timber. Its single squat funnel belched the dragon's breath of black coal smoke while its engines drummed with a ceaseless, savage beat, setting a man's teeth on edge.

Yet it was more than twenty years since these vessels had begun to compete for business in the freight trade, and almost as long since they had taken to racing their rivals under sail. One day, Ryan thought bitterly as he watched the inbound steamer come lumbering up the Clyde as if it had declared war upon the ocean — one day the sky would be black with smoke and the sea just a constant din of engines. Gone forever would be the pavane of man, sail and wind, the elegant, pagan dance of wood and water, sweat and sinew. That day, Ryan would mourn. Few generations in history were ever compelled to bear witness to the end of an era; fewer people yet had the wits to recognize what they were seeing.

He turned, hands thrust deeply into his pockets as the wind got up, strong, sharp and cold. Tenacious enough to survive in the jungle of iron, hawsers, cable and chain, herring gulls squabbled along the waterfront. The iron rasp and the bell-like chime of tools, steel on steel, clattered through the thickening sea mist. The heavy air smelt of brine, rust, old wet wood, and the tainted river.

The weather had begun to deteriorate in the late morning and worsened steadily through the afternoon, when Ryan arrived in Dumbarton. The Linwood and Clough shipyard lay more than a mile from the train, but his luck held. The drizzle did not begin in earnest until he was in Duncan Linwood's office, with his coat draped over the hatstand and a glass of malt whisky in his hand.

The old man always made Ryan think of a clan chieftain. He was well turned sixty, with fierce silver whiskers and a capacious belly. The Hebridean accent was still so thick, after forty years away from the islands, a knife could have sliced it like cheese. Ryan had always liked him for his honesty and forthright speech — qualities which seldom endeared Linwood to his business associates.

But then, Bill Ryan was not a businessman, and he had no desire to be. Left to himself, he would not have been found within ten miles

of a shipyard fitting out steam packets. He and old Duncan Linwood were separated by a thousand differences, not merely age and heritage. And then, Ryan thought with a crooked smile, they were united by one great common-ground: the kinship of the sea.

For three decades now, Linwood had built ships; for fifteen years, since his beginnings as a midshipman, Ryan had sailed in them. The tradition and continuity of sail were a brotherhood — a fraternity, Ryan thought grimly, which the coming of steam was sure to undermine. Linwood certainly agreed with the sentiment, but he was businessman enough not to be blinded by his love for sail. The coming of steam, he said, was the natural order of things. The days of the sail packet trade, from the great China clippers right down to the modest coastal smacks and schooners, were numbered.

Without a doubt, he was right — but a lot of men were going to be hard to convince. Jonathan Hale was of Linwood's generation, but no matter how long they lived, the two would never see eye to eye. It was often amusing to listen to their arguments, but Bill Ryan was sure Linwood had seen the way of the future, while Jon Hale was simply hiding his head in the sand. Like so many old men, he clung to yesteryear as if with the loss of the past, he would lose himself also. The future which Linwood and Ryan could see fast approaching would roll over Jonathan Hale like a steam locomotive, leaving wreckage in its wake. Hale's business, the Eastcoast Packet Company, would be reduced to dust.

Even now Eastcoast Packet struggled to survive, half-dead already and flailing its arms like a drowning swimmer. And Hale was mortgaging every stick and stone he possessed to build the vessel Linwood had dubbed 'Hale's Folly.'

Yet old Jon was right in his own way. The new ship was a beautiful hull, long, slender and filled with the grace of a Viking raider. One of the schooner's masts was up already, showing proudly over the shingled rooftop of Linwood's site office. In another week the riggers would be working on her tackle. She would launch in a matter of months, perhaps the last of her kind to come out of Linwood's yard. And what would become of her, Bill Ryan could not begin to guess. She was a butterfly, gorgeous and lighter than air in a world of steam-puffing iron warthogs. Ryan breathed a sigh.

If Eastcoast Packet were a horse, the animal would have been shot a year ago. The company was sick unto death, and this beautiful, redundant folly of a hull was only partially responsible for the state of affairs. The *Spindrift* was a lady, a duchess, a queen of the sea. Beside

her the steamers looked and sounded like tawdry old tarts, dirty, lumbering and foul. Ryan did not wonder at Jonathan Hale's determination to build the finest, fastest schooner in the merchant trade, but even as he watched the *Spindrift* take shape, her first mast already towering over the nearby sheds and workshops of Linwood's yards, he could only wonder how much of a company would be left for young Jim to inherit when Jonathan passed away.

In these last months Jonathan was failing so badly, even a blind man could see it. Jim was painfully aware of his father's pallor and frailty, the blue of his lips, the charcoal smudges circling his eyes. For six months and more the doctors had warned him, his heart was fragile and his lungs were poor. They cautioned him to rest, keep warm, stay out of the wet sea air and not exert himself either with travel or business.

All of which brought Bill Ryan to Dumbarton on a misty, cold and steel-gray April afternoon. Old salts swore they could smell a northeast gale coming in from Scandinavia, and with a glance at the wind-torn skies in that direction, Ryan was inclined to agree. The clouds were tattered, driven hard ahead of some goblin in the air, and the only good thing to be said for the gale was, it would blow the sea fog west and scour the coal smoke away from Dumbarton.

He had traveled up from Scarborough overnight on the *North Star*, and caught the early train across from Edinburgh. Jim would certainly have shared the journey with him, but his father was confined to bed on doctor's orders, coddled by his nurse, and young Jim Hale was effectively manacled to the business.

Linwood was not at all surprised to see Ryan's face at his door. He knew the *Adelaide* was docked for repairs, he knew the elder Hale was similarly docked, and he was well aware that Jim must be tied down. Since Ryan's own ship was off the water for a week at least, the captain might as well be employed on Eastcoast Packet business as kicking his heels in Scarborough.

Kicking his heels? The thought made Ryan smile as he stood at the corner of Linwood's site office and watched the tradesmen and laborers at work on the *Spindrift*. Skill and strength, steel, hemp, wood and water, fused into something which was almost alive.

Time spent with Jim was never a waste, Ryan thought with a self-mocking smile. How could it be? Since the *Adelaide* was the last genuinely competitive hull Eastcoast possessed, Ryan spent a great deal of his time at sea. He found all too little opportunity to enjoy Jim's compa-

ny. Any hour they could find together was a treasure. If they could wrangle a way to be alone, such an hour was the nearest thing to heaven Ryan knew, even if it must be snatched before the dawn tide, and in privacy amounting to paranoid secrecy.

A door banged with the sharp sound of mallet on plank and he turned to watch Duncan Linwood wrapping a vast tartan muffler about his neck as he stepped out of the white pine office building into the wind and rain. Linwood turned up his collar against the striking cold, and his boots splashed through the sheet of muddy water under the timber steps.

As frail as old Jon Hale had become at almost the same age, Linwood was robust. He still had the working man's big shoulders and tool-scarred hands, and Ryan wondered if the man's taste for whisky had pickled him in his youth, rendering him impervious to the ravages of time. He was pulling on a pair of green leather gloves as he joined Ryan, and he led the way down to the slip where the *Spindrift* lay cradled. With an audible sigh, Linwood cast a glance at the beautiful hull.

"Your payment is already in the bank," Ryan said with rueful humor. "You've no cause for concern, Mr. Linwood." Yet, he added, though he did not say it aloud. He knew Linwood must have some inkling of the state of Eastcoast Packet's financial health, since he and Jonathan Hale had been friends since they were young men who shared one love. Not a woman; not such dark, rich, heady pleasures as Ryan shared with young Jim Hale, but a love nonetheless.

The sea was a harsh and unforgiving mistress. A man either loved or hated her, no middle-ground could exist. Even Bill Ryan, who counted himself the realist, the pragmatist, could not shake off the conviction that wood and canvas and hemp wooed the sea goddess, while iron hulls, belching funnels and pounding steam engines battered her, even raped her.

It was a sentiment Duncan Linwood would have understood, although he might pretend to be amused. He shared Ryan's revulsion for steam, though he would have denied it to the end. His eyes rested on the *Spindrift*, his mouth softened, and a tiny shake of his head both acknowledged the new ship's beauty and her doom.

So Linwood built her, breathed life into her — almost the last of her kind, obsolete before her timbers tasted the salt of the water. Was he gulled by Jon Hale's positive talking? Or did Duncan nurse the secret hope that his old friend might be right? Could the *Spindrift* out-race, out-earn and outlive her ugly, steam-driven siblings? Ryan was never

sure what was in the man's mind, but Linwood gave him a shrewd sidelong look as they fell into step, walking away from the yard office and the new hull.

"I'm not concerned about the pennies, Captain," Linwood was saying in his dry tones, rich with thick Hebridean vowels. "Not when I've a legal contract to hold over Jon Hale's foolish head!" He puffed out his cheeks as they walked up to the employees' gate onto the street. "But I know he's in a good deal more strife than any man of his age and health should be, and yon bonny ship is only half of his worries."

"Rather less than half," Ryan corrected. "Mr. Hale has two other wolves snapping at his heels, either of which could spell ruin for the *Spindrifft* almost before you launch her, along with every other sailing vessel on the coast. The only good thing you can say for those two wolves is, between 'em they're likely to put the steam packets themselves out of commission before Christmas!"

"Aye, and good riddance to them," Linwood said bluffly with a glare at the river, and the ugly hull of the just-launched steam screw. It wallowed in the water like a dead thing. Then he turned his back on the gray murk of the river and the orderly chaos of the shipyard, and Ryan had to step out briskly to catch up with him.

They turned out of the employees' gate and headed east along the maze of yards, factories, sheds and warehouses toward the outskirts of the town. The Linwoods lived in the big house at the far end of the high street, and Duncan was headed for home, but in a tiny street fifty yards closer to the river was a public house.

It flew both the flag of Scotland and a white ensign over a door whose lintel was so low, a tall man ducked to enter or was laid flat. The Lord of the Isles served the working men from the yards and factories near at hand and was usually packed to the doors, but at four in the afternoon the pub was almost empty. Upstairs were four bedrooms, and Ryan had left his baggage in the largest of them, over the bar. The room fronted onto the street and from the windows he could almost see the *Spindrifft*, and could certainly see the top of her first standing mast.

"Aye, I'd be glad to see Jon Hale's wolves run amok," Linwood said dryly as he stepped into the sudden, humid warmth of the bar.

"You would?" Ryan followed him inside. "I meant," he said acerbically, "steam and sail alike will soon be done for, at least as far as the coastal freight trade is concerned."

"I know exactly what you meant." Linwood hung his greatcoat up on the rack by the door and tugged down the sleeves of a black jacket.

"Then, what does it matter if old Jon Hale, bless him, wants to build a floating folly, a man's last eccentricity?" Ryan asked. "It's doomed, and you and I both know it, but —"

"I know a good deal more than I care to about the demise of sail and steam on these coasts, Captain," Linwood snorted. "The damned railway. Mark my words, laddie, and remember them. In ten years there'll not be one tenth of the shipping on these coasts as there is today, and what do you think that means for the likes of me? I don't have the resources to build clipper ships. I'm not out of the same mold as your Walter Hood and your Robert Steel." He looked darkly at Ryan. "They'll feel the pinch. And me?" He shook his head. "I'll not survive, Captain Ryan ... and if I had a son to fret over, I'd be a worried man indeed."

But Linwood had four daughters, all of them married and three of them gone from Scotland. One was in London, one in Canada. The future of Linwood and Clough was purely Duncan's concern since Gordon Clough and his wife died, childless, in the wreck of the *Artemis* back in '45. The shipyard was willed to Linwood.

"It'll be privation and hunger," the old man was saying bitterly. "You'll soon not set foot in any port in England or Scotland without seeing gangs of ragged men standing on street corners for want of work, and barefoot, unfed children."

"I've heard that," Ryan agreed quietly. "It was in the *Telegraph*, if I remember correctly. They're saying the same in King's Lynn. Forty-five thousand seamen will soon be out of work, when the railway has snatched their trade right out from under them."

The Lord of the Isles was quiet, warm, with a mound of coal blazing in the black-lead hearth. The tapbar smelt of beeswax; jars of pickles, onions and eggs stood ranked along the back, while from the kitchen came the aroma of baking bread and from the cellar, the pungent smell of hops. Ryan's insides gave a growl of hunger, reminding him of how long it was since he eaten, but for the moment he was content to stand aside and let Linwood buy him a glass of the best malt in the house.

"Ye'll be returning to Scarborough today," Linwood guessed. His eyes were foxy, bright in the light of fire and gaslamps. He frowned thoughtfully at Ryan as he searched a pocket for coins.

"I'll be on the night train back to Edinburgh," Ryan said easily, following Linwood to the bar. A little terrier of a man was polishing glasses there, and knew exactly what Linwood would want without

Duncan saying a word. Ryan accepted a glass, tried the contents and went on, voice a little hoarse with the strong spirit, "The *Mascot* ships out on the morning tide, headed south ... have you a message for Mr. Hale?"

"Junior or Senior?" Linwood said aridly.

"Either one." Ryan took another sip. "Sadly, I think you'll be doing business with young Jim before much longer."

"So I hear, and the world will be poorer for the loss of Jon Hale." Linwood drained his glass in one quick swig, which was an insult to so fine a whisky. "Well, tell him the *Spindrift* will launch in August, not a day past the contract, and if you'll take the responsibility upon yourself to approve of the hawsers, Captain Ryan, we'll have her rigged by July at latest."

The hawsers were of Scandinavian manufacture rather than English, and Linwood adhered strictly to the contract he was so fond of quoting. The new cables from Trondheim were probably superior to those originally promised, but an Eastcoast Packet officer must see them with his own eyes and approve their use, though they came recommended by Linwood and Clough. Ryan did not take the responsibility lightly; those damned hawsers were the reason for his being here.

"You've already had my signature on the matter, Mr. Linwood," he said affably. "And as to your payment ... well, I don't think you need to be concerned."

"Not yet," Linwood added pointedly. His eyes looked piercingly into Ryan's, needling for more. "Och, don't try to pretend. I know Jon's having his troubles. He's got the damned railway on the one hand and the wreckers on the other. You think I'm blind? I read the same newspapers."

"No, sir, not at all." Ryan permitted a faint smile. "The wreckers are the second of the two wolves I mentioned, snapping at Hale's heels." His brows knitted into a deep frown. "I think the east coast wreckers are also nearing the end of their time. See it from their perspective for a moment. When the railway wreaks doom on the coastal trade, the wreckers will be out of business too, they'll go the way of the smugglers fifty years ago. This is their last hurrah, and by God, they'll make the most of it."

"All of which may come down to the only decent word to be said for the railway." Linwood took a brimmed glass to the window and looked through tiny glass panes toward the yard where he had built hulls since he came in from the islands. Ryan knew his story, had learn-

ed it at second- and third-hand from men who had known Linwood for twenty years and more, and respected him. Linwood's lifetime business partner, Gordon Clough, had died more than fifteen years before, when the threat which steam held over sail still seemed negligible, harmless as a squall down over the horizon.

But soon every shipyard from the big companies whose fortunes were built on the China clippers right down to the much more modest Linwood and Clough must tool-up to install boilers and screws, else succumb to the merciless march of progress, and even then the coastal freight trade was doomed by the railway. Ryan doubted if Linwood had the resources, much less the inclination, to build steel and steam monsters, leviathans for the North Atlantic, the New York run. Little ships like the *Spindrift* were his life and had long been his fortune. The time was at hand, Ryan thought, when retreat was the better part of valor.

And what could possible be in store for the packet companies, century-old, family-owned freight-shipping businesses like Eastcoast? For a moment Ryan considered Jim Hale's uncertain inheritance, and he sighed. Linwood heard the small expression of regret and looked up at him, eyes shrewd now. Ryan answered with an eloquent shrug.

"I'm just thinking of young Jim Hale," he admitted. "The lad has ten years of his life invested in Eastcoast, and I doubt he'll be fairly compensated for his efforts. I wouldn't give a snap of the fingers for Eastcoast in the next five years, but it's all Jim has. The freight trade, and the *Spindrift*, for what she's worth."

"Well, don't be too sure now," Duncan Linwood said wisely. "You of all men should know there's a deal more to the trade than running grain and coal from Norwich to King's Lynn. Do you know, has Jim looked into the trade in wine, butter and timber from the Continent?" Bushy silver brows arched, creasing Linwood's forehead. "Aye, tell him from me to look to overseas business if he wants to keep Eastcoast Packet on the water. The steam screws burn a deal too much coal to make the long runs profitable. Mark my words, there'll be tea-clippers on the China run ten years after I'm in the ground, Captain Ryan. It's not all steam, not yet, by a long chalk."

Surprised, Ryan tilted his head at Linwood. "That's sound advice, sir, and thank you. I'll tell him everything you've said. I don't know where Jim's ambitions lie, but he's far from dull or foolish."

"You've a fondness for the lad," Linwood observed thoughtfully.

An odd prickle crept down Ryan's spine, like an ice-cold spider.

What did Linwood know, what had he heard? Nothing! They had been careful to the point of paranoia. Scarborough was an old-fashioned town, not the place where two men wanted to get caught in an intimate scene. Ryan's face felt like a wooden mask as he said, "Jim Hale's a good lad and I've believed for some time, he deserves better than he's getting. I've a fondness for him. I served with scores like him in the Navy. Salt of the earth, Mr. Linwood." Then he held his breath and waited.

He need not have been concerned. "As you say. And tell him what I said of the Continental trade. It's sound advice, if he's a mind to make a last-ditch stand," Linwood said sourly. "Yon schooner'll take on the North Atlantic for him. The *Spindrift* is the finest hull out of my yard in thirty years, and there's the pity of it. There's a lifetime of knowing invested in every curve and plane of her, every board and timber. If she'd been built back in the '30's ..." He shook his head. "Progress, devil take it. And devil take the steam screws, the 'tin scows' as they call 'em, and railway alike." He emptied the glass in one swig and color bloomed in his cheeks.

Ryan lifted his own glass. "Well said. I believe I'll drink on that, Mr. Linwood."

"I thought ye might." Linwood touched the rim of Ryan's glass with his own, though it was empty now. "Well, I must away home, Captain. Doubtless we'll meet again, since old Jon's taken to his bed — and the boy is bound to the mast of the sinking ship and doesn't dare turn his back on it!"

"You believe Eastcoast is in such straits already?" Ryan was taken aback. "Forgive me. I've command of an Eastcoast vessel but Jon Hale doesn't show me his account books."

The empty glass slapped down on the polished tapbar and Linwood angled a glare at Ryan that might have been a warning. "The truth, Captain? I believe Jon's as good as dead in the water right now, as much as it pains me to say it, and if he had the sense he was born with, he'd know it himself. He'd sell up and get out, while he still owns the roof he lives under."

"A harsh judgment," Ryan observed.

"And accurate." Linwood leaned back on the bar and frowned deeply at Ryan. "Jon's old, he can afford to indulge an old man's fantasy, but you're still young, Captain. If you haven't woken up to the truth, it's time you did. Steam already commands the Atlantic. The *Great Britain*, the *Leviathan* and a dozen others took her surrender dec-

ades ago. The coastal freight trade is one of the only places ships under sail still prosper — and the tea routes, where it'll be decades yet before steamers get to be so profitable, even the China clippers'll have to be retired."

He wagged a bony finger under Ryan's nose. "Now, I know full well, Bill Ryan, you once held a Naval commission. You had command of your own vessel. I also know you've come down so low in the world, you're skippering a merchant schooner, though it's no business of mine how you came to grief, and I'll not pry into your affairs." He paused, eyes twinkling with an almost reluctant humor. "Still, if the scuttlebutt I hear is any more than idle bilgewater, you were damned lucky to get a merchant command, and you doubtless feel indebted to old Hale for putting you back on a deck, any deck." His silver head shook minutely, warning or regret. "But don't you go down with Eastcoast, Captain. When Eastcoast Packet runs aground with all the rest of them, look to yourself. It's no more than the same sound advice I'd give to any lad on the coast this year."

"Well taken, sir," Ryan said reasonably, impressed by Linwood's plain speaking, though the old man's words held nothing of surprise. "I'll bid you good day," he offered as Linwood bustled to the door and shrugged back into his coat. He handed the old man his muffler. "They say there's a storm coming, but you should get home before it breaks. Which is more than I can say for myself."

On the threshold, collar up, muffler tight around his chin, hands buried in pockets, Linwood turned back with a grim expression. "A storm? It's wreckers' weather. Mind yourself, Bill Ryan."

He was gone with that, leaving Ryan on the pub's doorstep in the sharp, wet river wind, frowning as he mulled over the advice. Linwood had a lifetime of experience, not merely in ships, the sea and shipbuilding, but in business and the ways of men; and he was rarely wrong about any of those.

The railway did indeed spell the end of coastal shipping just as the fleets of steamers being launched every year now sounded the death knell for sail; and both those forces of progress rendered the *Spindrift* just an old man's dream. Soon enough the wreckers who lived on the struggling freight companies like fleas on a harness horse would also be finished.

Little wonder, Ryan thought bitterly, they were busier now than ever, making what hay they could while the sun shone through this last season. The terrier-like little man who tended the bar drifted closer

with a bottle, and Ryan held out his glass. A rising wind began to batter at the window and the hearth beckoned him.

He settled in a leather chair in the corner, listening to the first sounds of a gale in the chimney. The clock on the mantelpiece read a quarter before five and he began to seriously consider staying overnight. His bag was upstairs in a comfortable room and he could watch the storm break over Dumbarton and fly on, headed for the Irish ports. But he was expected back in Scarborough aboard the *Mascot*, and his absence would only cause Jim to fret. He might be the *Mascot's* only reason for stopping in Scarborough; without him, she could sail by, and Jim would fret all the more.

Sporadic rain flurried against the window glass and Ryan gritted his teeth. At least he had time to get a decent meal before he made his way back to the station ... the train back into Glasgow, the late express to Edinburgh and a cab to the docks. And he could not keep the thought out of his mind: it was a shame the trains did not turn south, and run all the way through to York on the same 'line,' the same 'gauge.' If the train had run through to York, Bill Ryan would have been on it, and be damned to catching a ride on the *Mascot*.

He was just sixteen years old when the Great Western Railway became the fascination of the whole country. Prince Albert had traveled by train from London to Bristol, and the newspapers reported speeds of 65mph between Paddington and Slough. The event set a milestone and if the lore could be believed, Isambard Kingdom Brunel himself, the great engineer, was on the footplate for the whole journey. The reminiscence made Ryan smile. When he read the news in a letter from his father, he was in the Canary Islands, already six months at sea; the year was 1845.

Fifteen years sped by in Ryan's life like as many months and now the network of railways connected almost everywhere to almost everywhere. As soon as the lines were finished — and the day was not far in the future — Bill Ryan, for one, would not be on a coastal packet, butting his way through the treacherous North Sea from Glasgow to Scarborough. Freight and passengers would be safer aboard the trains, they would travel faster and enjoy infinitely more comfort.

If the likes of himself and Jonathan Hale dreamed on about the 'romance of sail,' it was because they chose to forget the danger, the inconvenience and the damned discomfort. Ryan was not the kind of man to fool himself. He first went to sea soon after his fifteenth birthday and he was still at sea as he contemplated the approach of his thirty-third.

Ships were what he knew; the sea was his trade, his livelihood, and he was caught in the same snare as the tens of thousands of the country's other seamen. The vast probability was, he would soon be unemployed with half his life ahead of him, and like most of the merchant seamen in Scarborough and King's Lynn and Norwich, he could turn his hand to no other trade. The future seemed bleak, if he allowed himself to look that way. Ryan rarely permitted himself the luxury of pessimism.

The bell over the door jingled and a draught of cold, rain-wet air blustered into the pub around the coattails of another patron. Ryan did not look up from the hearth until he heard his name, and recognized the man's voice.

"Captain — damn, Billy Ryan, I *knew* it was you! I saw you in the street, saw you come in here. I had an errand to run, then I came straight here. What brings you up to Scotland, old son?"

Joel Tremayne? Ryan hardly believed his ears. He set down his glass and turned from the hearth, still disbelieving as he saw the man. A hand's-span taller than Ryan, as yellow-blond as Ryan was dark, Tremayne was three years older, wind-tanned and sun-creased, with the tough hands and wide shoulders of a man who had worked hard all his life.

"What the hell brings *you* to Scotland? Damn! Joel, you're looking good, but you're the last man in the world I'd think to see here!" Ryan was out of the chair as he spoke, and took Tremayne's cold hands.

"Business brings me here." Tremayne dragged him into a bearhug and slapped his back painfully before he would let Ryan go. "I've got a sloop out of the water in McBride's yard for a thorough refit." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Linwood and Clough, and beyond.

No such vessel was on the slips in the yards of Linwood's neighbors, but five other modest facilities separated L&C from the much bigger big yard where a China clipper was being rigged in preparation for launch. "Who're you sailing for these days?" Ryan wanted to know as Tremayne fronted up to the bar and gestured for a pint of the house bitter.

The man had not bothered to take off his coat and was obviously staying only a moment. "I sail for myself, sailing master and owner, and it's a good feeling." Tremayne angled a glance at Ryan. "And you? I did worry for you," he added quietly, "but I lost track of you after Southampton."

Ryan nodded roughly southeast. "I did all right, Joel. I found a berth with Eastcoast Packet. I've got the *Adelaide* this year. She's a schooner, an old one but a good one."

"Eastcoast ... coastal freight, is it?" Tremayne wondered with a disquieting shrewdness as he sampled the house's dark ale.

"Not always. Scandinavia, the islands, Scotland, Ireland and home," Ryan said with a spurious indifference. "It's ... a challenge."

"Hunting down your own cargoes as you go and tying up in your home port when luck permits, I imagine it is." Tremayne set down the tankard and blotted froth from his upper lip. He regarded Ryan thoughtfully. "How long's it been, Billy?"

"Two years, is it?" Ryan said easily. In fact, it was six months longer. Time had a tendency to race like a full Atlantic gale when a man was fighting to survive.

He leaned one elbow on the bar and looked up into Joel Tremayne's sun-browned face. Too handsome for his own good, was Joel. And he knew it. Squinting against the sun had tanned-in a set of white lines like fans of permanent creases around his pale blue eyes, and the effect only improved his looks. He was still in fighting trim, if Ryan was any judge; the wounds in his right shoulder would have healed away to thin, silvery lines. Tremayne looked better out of the uniform — and he knew that, too. He was well-dressed, with a heavy gold pocket watch and three thick gold rings among his fingers; Ryan thought he detected the faint aroma of money, like a fine cologne.

They had been regarding one another in silence for almost a minute, while the barman polished glasses and sorted bottles, when Tremayne said quietly, "You're too good for this shit, Billy."

Ryan looked away. "Easy to say it, Joel. Now let's see you convince an owner." He felt the old anger rise, hot and clenched in his middle, and choked it down. "I was lucky to get any command. Jonathan Hale took a gamble on me, and I'll not forget it."

"Hale?" Tremayne echoed musingly. "I should know that name, now. I've heard it, and recently."

"Probably around here." Ryan nodded in the direction of Linwood and Clough. "You might have heard the words 'Hale's Folly.' Which is a damned cruel name for a 'bonny wee ship,' as Duncan Linwood calls her."

"The schooner with one mast up —?" Tremayne was impressed. "Yes, I've heard the name. I've also heard men saying the *Spindrift* will be the fastest schooner on the water. True?"

Ryan pushed away from the bar. "Finish your ale, come and judge for yourself. I'm here on Eastcoast's business, as it happens."

He lifted his coat from the rack as Tremayne drained his glass. A few pennies rattled on the bar, and Ryan was ahead of him as they stepped out of the pub. The rain had stopped and the wind was gusting powerfully now. It caught at Ryan's coat, tugged at him, and if he looked into the northeast he saw the leading edge of something big and dark, poised in the sky like an avenging angel. Though the day was gray as the side of a battleship, the air smelt cleaner and the river mist was gone.

"What are you going to do?" Tremayne wanted to know as they swung down the narrow street toward the river.

"When ...? Ryan prompted, hands deep in pockets, eyes still on the sky.

"When the schooner *Adelaide* is sold off for firewood, and like every other merchant seaman in port you're counting the farthings left in your pocket and wondering if you can afford a pint of beer and still eat tonight," Tremayne said bluntly. "Christ, Billy! What's it going to be? Are you going to sell your soul to the Army? Get out there to Egypt, get a spade in your hand and help dig a bloody great ditch through the desert at Suez? Or will you get a job on the railway, laying tracks and digging tunnels?"

"I've thought about it," Ryan admitted between clenched teeth. "And I've thought about the Army. Every man has this year. They'll shove any fit, strong body into a uniform. In the last decade our troops have fought on almost every continent in the world. India, China, Africa. We're enjoying a few years of peace now only because the British Army is stationed *en masse* in — how many countries? Jesus God! How many fronts does this government think we can fight on, all at once? You can only ask yourself where the next war will break out, and who we'll be fighting."

Tremayne angled a glance at him. "That's how you build an empire, and hold onto it. Read a few pages of Caesar. It was no damned different twenty centuries ago." He paused, brow creasing slightly. "A shilling a day, Billy, is that it? Spill your own blood, wade in your friends' guts, come home maimed. Is this all you think you're worth?"

"Do you want to say what you mean?" Ryan heard the edge in his own voice, felt his lips compress. The anger was too close to the surface and he struggled to smother it. "There isn't a seaman in England who hasn't thought about taking the Queen's shilling or tunnel-digging for

the railway — a lot of them have already done it, and don't imagine the decision doesn't take courage! More courage than I've been able to find." He gave Tremayne a hard look. "Make your point, Joel, or drop it. I'll buy you a whisky and we can talk over better times."

They were on the street above the river now, listening to the distance-muffled rasp and clatter of tools from Linwood and Clough. The wind caught at Tremayne's shock of yellow hair as he turned toward Ryan and looked him up and down as if he were a commodity at market.

"All right, Bill." Tremayne was serious now, shrewd as a horse trader. "I walked a deck with you, and I know you were good. I'd be gambling you still are. And the sea is where you belong."

"I have a command," Ryan said tersely. The wind snatched his words away.

"A merchantman, tramping around the ports of Europe looking for a paying cargo to get you home, because if you come back under ballast your boss will take pleasure in skinning you alive." Tremayne snorted. "What are they paying you? You deserve better."

Suddenly tired, Ryan stepped out across the street toward the employees' gate in Linwood and Cough's high brick wall. "Are you trying to make me an offer? Then just make it, Joel. I'm not going to fence with you."

"I'm coming to it," Tremayne said easily, falling into step with him. "I have a sloop in the McBride yard, refitting."

"So you said." The gate creaked on rusting hinges as Ryan swung it open and held it for Tremayne. A few faces turned toward them as they appeared, but Ryan was known here, and welcome on Eastcoast business. His belly tightened once more, he heard the thud of his pulse in his ears as he guessed what Joel was going to say.

"The *Mercury* needs a skipper," Tremayne said into the wind as the gate latched. "She's a fast hull. I've a good crew, they've been with me for three voyages, and ... the money's good, Billy." His fair brows rose. The wind tossed his straw-colored hair into his eyes and he raked it back. "The money," he added deliberately, "is more than you'll have seen in years. Possibly ever."

"Which means," Ryan said in an acid tone, "whatever you're carrying as cargo wouldn't pass inspection if I get boarded, and the next thing I know, I'll be looking at the wrong side of the prison gate. What is it, Joel, brandy and spirits out of France? Rum coming in from Jamaica?"

"Nothing coming in." Tremayne's voice dropped and he stepped closer. His eyes glittered. "Going out."

"Of England?" Ryan's curiosity was piqued in spite of his better judgment. He looked up into Tremayne's brown face, seeing the angular cheekbones, the winter-pale blue eyes, the white teeth framed in Joel's sudden and disarming grin.

"Or Scotland or Ireland," Tremayne said easily.

"Then, what the hell is your cargo, and where's it going?" Ryan demanded in a harsh undertone. What could Joel be smuggling? None of it made sense.

They were walking again, into the teeth of the wind, toward the site office and around the corner, to the slip where the *Spindrift* still lay under construction. Tremayne visually measured the length and beam of her, the height of the mast, and whistled. She had the dimensions of a racing hull. Ryan fell in behind him as he worked his way closer, among the bales and stacks of construction materials and tools, and at last climbed up onto a mound of crates to see over the sheer strake. He was counting the hanging knees and half beams, the solid formers which buttressed her sides, and he whistled again as he hopped down.

"She's built to run before a full Atlantic gale," Ryan affirmed, "and she's got the keel to carry a full rig plus a jackyard topsail. And she'll hold it longer than you'd think, especially under cargo."

"She launches soon," Tremayne guessed.

"August." Ryan tugged up the collar of his greatcoat as the wind whipped across the river with renewed vigor.

"She'll be yours to command, then."

"I'd expect her to come to me." Ryan cocked his head at Tremayne. "I'm not Eastcoast's only captain, but I *am* the best. She was built for the Skagerak run, Joel. I won't take her out and run contraband for you, have this pretty little thing impounded, put myself in jail and ruin the old man who built her. If that's what you're thinking —"

"Not contraband," Tremayne said quickly, and came closer, his voice soft under the wind. "I already told you, Billy, my cargoes head *out* of this country, not in." His eyes were hard, hawkish. "There's a war being fought."

Ryan tipped back his head and closed his eyes against the gray overcast. "There's *ten* wars being fought, there's not a continent at peace. Which one are you talking about?"

And yet again Tremayne surprised him. "America." His brows quirked. "Don't you take a look at the newspaper over breakfast?"

Chancellorsville, Vicksburg, Chickamauga, Gettysberg.”

“Sometimes I don’t see an English newspaper for a month,” Ryan said tersely. “I try to catch up when I’m home, but I’m rarely in port for long. The *Adelaide* is either on the water or she’s losing money, and there are times when she’s all Eastcoast has, as a bulwark against the receiver.”

Perhaps Tremayne should have been surprised but no flicker of expression crossed his face. “All of which means Eastcoast are pinning all their hopes on this little lady.” He gave the *Spindrift* a thoughtful look. “And unless I miss my guess, Billy, the building of her is bleeding them white. I’m looking at quality, and quality never comes cheap.”

“You’re right, of course.” Ryan swore softly and turned his back on the graceful, gorgeous hull. “You want the truth, Joel? I’m not even sure Eastcoast will survive in business long enough for me to get my feet on the deck of the *Spindrift*. She could be auctioned off for a coal barge as soon as she hits the water.”

“Which is certainly a sin and should be a crime.” Tremayne’s teeth closed on his lip and he studied Ryan almost rudely. “There’s a command waiting for you. Take out the *Mercury*. My sloop’ll be back on the water in ten days and she has a cargo waiting to load. She’s yours, if you want to take her out.”

“To America?” Ryan asked while a sliver of dreadful fascination wormed through his insides. Tremayne nodded, waiting. “Carrying what, exactly?” Ryan insisted. “What’s this rich cargo of yours, and what’s to become of a sailing master apprehended as a smuggler?”

“Ah, now ... there’s the trick.” Tremayne was plucking at his ear and wearing a crooked smile, like a schoolboy caught doing the forbidden. “Can’t you guess?” The crooked smile broke into a grin. “It’s guns and ammunition, Billy. What else could it be? You’d be taking a heavy load of rifle shells and as many guns as we can pack into the empty spaces, and running them through to ... oh, somewhere in the south, should I say. Warm waters, if nothing else.”

“Then you’re supporting the Confederacy,” Ryan whispered.

But Tremayne only shrugged. “On the last trip we carried ammunition to the Union. It’s a foreign war and I don’t know enough about it to pick sides, so the only decent thing is to supply both sides evenly and not tip the scales one way or the other. The truth is, the conflict makes no sense to me. They all speak the same language, wear the same clothes, kneel in the same church, eat the same food. If I’m any judge — and obviously I’m not! — they should be at a table, talking up a truce.

If I even halfway understood the stories in the *Telegraph*, the war is about the abolition of slavery. For my money, the sooner human bondage is abolished the better, but there's a lot of generals and politicians who'd rather send their own people's sons to die by the thousand than give up the right to *own* the sons of another people, body and soul. The logic mystifies me, which probably means I'm missing half the story — which in turn is reason enough for not tipping the scales in a foreign war. But my dear, departed da had a favorite saying. 'Great wars,' he said, 'are the way God shapes the world through the hands of men.' His logic, I can see! I'll not pick sides in someone else's war, Billy. If I'm going to supply one side, I'll supply both, leave it to the Almighty to sort saints from sinners, and sleep easy." He paused. "And the money —"

"Had better be good," Ryan said acidly, "because the *Mercury* will be heading to sea like a powderkeg. She could blow the insides out of herself. We've seen it happen to a ship. You were there, you were right beside me."

The accident was dire, the explosion monstrous. When the smoke cleared only smashed bits of driftwood remained of the *Percival Gantry*, nothing much larger than an oar. Nothing to suggest the presence, the fiery death, of a cutter doing service as a powder hulk. Ryan would always remember the rush of heat boiling over him, scorching his face and lungs — diving swiftly onto the deck as the air filled with a thousand projectiles, the screams of men who did not get down in time, the sudden, bright blaze of spot fires as sails and rigging caught alight just overhead, touched off by cartwheeling shards of burning debris from the *Percival Gantry* —

"We've made the run three times, and not a care in the world," Tremayne was saying. "Afraid, are you, Billy?" He frowned deeply. "You were never afraid before, not a day in your life. You once told me, a man who has nothing to lose doesn't feel fear."

"And a man who has something to lose?" Ryan challenged.

Tremayne's eyes widened. "Command of an old merchant schooner, tramping around Europe, hunting for a decent paying cargo to get you home? You can do better. Come on, Ryan! What's stopping you? There's nothing to keep you here."

"I've a deal of unfinished business," Ryan said thickly.

"In Glasgow?"

"In Scarborough." Ryan took a breath. "I can't just walk away, Joel, not on a job with this kind of risk, no matter how much money you're paying."

A moment of dense silence, in which the wind lashed across the river, and then some sixth sense made Tremayne say, "You've got someone. Haven't you? A lover, Billy?"

For the first time in an hour Ryan smiled. He gave Tremayne a mocking look. "What, you don't believe it? The old salt finally found a berth, a place to hang his hat and put up his feet?"

"I'll be damned," Tremayne said softly, eyes dancing.

"Very probably," Ryan said in dry tones.

"Well, I'm glad for you." Tremayne looked genuinely delighted. "What's his name?"

"Jim." It felt so odd, talking about the relationship for the first time. Ryan could never utter a word about his feelings to any soul in Scarborough. In a town of almost twenty thousand people, he knew four or five men who shared the 'inclinations,' and none of them could be trusted to keep a secret. A few jars of rum, and the news would be out. It would be all over Scarborough by morning, and Jim Hale and Captain Bill Ryan might never live it down. Speaking openly about his feelings seemed almost like making words in a foreign language, but Ryan said quietly, "He's Jim Hale."

"Hale?" Tremayne's brows arched and he jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Scarborough, down the east coast.

"Only son of the Jon Hale who owns Eastcoast Packet and is building this pretty little ship," Ryan affirmed with a sigh.

For a moment Tremayne blinked, then threw back his head and laughed. "And you're bedding the owner's son? Good God, Billy Ryan, you never do anything by halves, do you? You never did. Couldn't you have found yourself a pretty lad in the darkest tavern, possibly in another town?"

"Affairs of the heart don't work like that, as well you know," Ryan scoffed.

"As well I know." Tremayne's eyes were warm on him now, amused and overtly affectionate. "Well, damn. You know, I was going to invite you along to my hotel for dinner and a shot or two of malt and ... so forth. But I suppose now you're about to tell me it's true love and you intend to remain faithful."

"It's true love and I intend to remain faithful," Ryan intoned dutifully. "But I appreciate the offer," he added, "and I haven't forgotten, Joel. I never will. Those were good times."

"Good times," Tremayne echoed. "We should have stuck together. Going separate ways was a mistake."

"No. We were ... under suspicion," Ryan said regretfully. "You can't be too careful, especially when you're trying to claw your way back up from perdition." He lifted a brow at Tremayne. "And if I may say so, you appear to have clawed your way back in style. You own the *Mercury*?"

"By a stroke of luck." Tremayne made dismissive gestures. "The cards could have gone against me just as easily, but I won the hull, the right to carry the existing cargo and the services of a damned good crew."

"You always did have the luck." Ryan cast an eye at the overcast. "It'll be raining soon. Do you want that whisky?"

But Tremayne pulled out the gold pocket watch, took a look at the time and shook his head. "I've a meeting. Later, perhaps."

"I'm on the night train to Edinburgh," Ryan warned.

"Then, much later. I know where to find you now." Tremayne gestured at the *Spindrift* as they strode back toward the gate into the street. "And I'll make you a firm offer, Billy. When Eastcoast goes under — and notice I said *when* — I'll come looking for you. I've made three trips out to America on the *Mercury* and I was hoping to avoid making a fourth. I'm not so desperate for money anymore."

"An ammunition ship," Ryan said doubtfully.

"Maybe, and maybe not." Tremayne's expression darkened. "Last time out there, I was appalled ... war has always been a filthy business, and the war in America is one of the worst I've seen. The numbers of dead and injured dizzy a man's brain, Billy, and they've no medical supplies. It's getting worse than the Crimea, the longer it goes on. Next trip out, we should be headed for America loaded to the gunwales under opium, carbolic, bandages and catgut." He stepped back to let Ryan swing open the gate. "I know where to find you now. I'll see you in Scarborough, Billy-boy."

"I look forward to it," Ryan said honestly, "but I'll tell you the truth, Joel. I'm serious about Jim Hale. His father's dying fast, about as fast as Eastcoast is going down. I'll not run out on Jim, not when he's in trouble."

"Then bring him along," Tremayne offered affably. "He's a ship owner's son? Then he knows ships, he knows the sea."

"But Jim won't leave his father when the old man's on his death-bed," Ryan added.

Tremayne puffed out his cheeks as they waited at the side of the street for a cart to rumble by. "Then we're all waiting on God's plea-

sure, are we? Waiting for a sick old man to pass away and stop complicating the issue."

"That's a cruel way of putting it, but you're far from wrong," Ryan affirmed. "And then ...?"

"When it happens," Tremayne said expansively, "you and your Jim should be free to leave Scarborough. And I sure as hell don't want to take the *Mercury* to America again. I told you, Billy, she's yours. Five or six voyages out as her sailing master, and you can get well out of this game — right out, and in style, as you put it."

The offer was sorely tempting but Ryan was hesitant. "My head wants to call it a deal, but my heart tells me to wait."

The other man almost recoiled. "You mean the owner's son is too namby-pamby to walk a deck with you? That was never the kind of lad who caught your eye."

"Namby —?" Ryan actually laughed. "Quite the contrary, Joel, and that's the problem. I'll give you short odds, Jim Hale will want to see if he can take the bull by the horns, give it a good kick in the arse, light a fire under Eastcoast and make a going concern of it. He can't do a thing, nor make a decision, while his father is on this earth, but after we've done the graveside duty it'll be Jim Hale, not Jonathan, calling Eastcoast's shots, tendering for cargoes, hiring crew. And remember, he'll have the *Spindrift* to work with."

"August," Tremayne mused, and tapped his lips with one long forefinger. "Tell me, Bill, is he too squeamish to run ammunition?"

"Too intelligent, I'd say," Ryan retorted. "When it comes down to the wire, the *Spindrift* may be all Eastcoast has left. He'd be a fool or a madman to take that gamble when there's good, legal cargoes to be run."

"Medical supplies, then," Tremayne amended. "You're not skipping a floating bomb if you're loaded down with carbolic and catgut."

"Legal cargo?" Ryan was pressing hard now.

"Depends which perspective you look at it from. It can all depend on where you land, in the company of friends or foes, when you're always going to be supplying aid and succor to *someone's* enemy." Tremayne's face was rueful. "I'll tell you honestly, now. It's blockade running. Slither through in the night, tie up in a friendly port, and you're heroes and saviors."

"Get caught by the blockade and you're a stinking criminal, mercenary scum looking at twenty-five years in a hellhole prison," Ryan added. He frowned at Joel Tremayne as the wind swirled like a live

thing and a flicker of lightning licked through the northeast, the first signature of the storm out there, though the thunder could not yet be heard. The truth had hit him like a body blow. "You must have been desperate, Joel, to get into this 'game,' as you call it."

The façade of cheer slipped from Tremayne's features and for a moment Ryan saw the truth etched into the man's face, raw as fresh blood. "It was ... interesting. I took what I could get. Second mate on a filthy steamer, and a more wretched existence I cannot imagine," he said quietly. "It was either the tramp steamer or sign aboard a whaler out of Whitby. Two years in the Arctic, wading in blood and whale-guts and hoping the ship doesn't freeze herself in and crush like an egg-shell." He closed his eyes. "Six months on the damned tin scow put a few quid back in my pocket, and I was glad to get out of there."

"I told you, the cards fell my way. If they hadn't, I could be taking the Queen's shilling or digging railway tunnels." He lifted his chin, pulled back his shoulders and looked Ryan in the eye. "Instead, I own the *Mercury* and I'm past ready to put a sailing master aboard. I've had enough of the sea to last me a lifetime." He set a hand on Ryan's shoulder. "You've got to know, I'll not put *any* skipper on the *Mercury*. There's maybe five men in Scotland and England I'd entrust her to, but none's available to take her from me, and of the whole lot of them, Captain Bill Ryan's the one I'd want the most, standing in my place on my deck."

Flattered, surprised, even chastened, Ryan took a breath of the cold, wet air and held it. "All right, Joel. I'll talk to Jim Hale about it. That's the best I can do for you right now. The *Adelaide* is equal to the task of running medical supplies to America, and she might just run a blockade for you. Beyond that, I'm not free to speak."

"Sure to heaven, the *Spindrift* would run it." Tremayne's brows rose.

"She's not mine to sign away. She's not even paid for! If old Hale can't keep up the payments, Duncan Linwood will sell the hull at auction to recover his costs." Ryan paused. "I told you, I'll talk to Jim for you."

"Good enough." Tremayne thrust out his hand.

Ryan took it firmly, shook it, and for just a moment remembered the hard, hot, solidarity of Joel Tremayne's body against him, the cradle sensation of a hull moving under them, the sound of the wind in the lines, the creak of timbers in the night. Those days were not so long ago, and the memories would haunt him forever.

"I'll find you in Scarborough," Tremayne promised.

"When?" Ryan withdrew his hand and took a step away, back toward the Lord of the Isles.

"Later." Tremayne said, deliberately inspecific, and shrugged. "Looks like I'll be taking the *Mercury* out myself again, and afterward I can wait for fair weather for the cruise home, loaded with tobacco or bourbon."

"It'll be summer when you get back." Ryan gave the incoming storm a glare. "I'll look out for you."

"I'll be there." One pale blue eye winked, and Joel Tremayne turned away, striding fast along the street toward the yards where the China clipper was being rigged in the Scott and Linton yard.

The last Ryan saw of him, he was waving to a man in a tall stove-pipe hat, and they marched away together, toward the yard when the sloop lay under repairs. For some moments Ryan stood on the side of the road, glaring at the clipper's mastheads, his brain a whirl of possibilities.

The offer was almost too good to turn down, and Tremayne was genuinely surprised. Only the fact of Ryan's unfinished personal business in Scarborough convinced Joel of the truth and persuaded him to back off, give Ryan time to work things out. No one was going to hurry Jon Hale out of the world. A year ago his doctors had given him two months to live, but enough life remained in the old dog even now for him to frustrate any attempt Jim made to do business. The fact was, Jon Hale did not trust his son, and Ryan had pondered the mystery for some time.

The possibility was, Ryan thought as he turned back toward the Lord of the Isles, old Hale sensed something 'different' about Jim, though Jim had never given his father any clue as to where his heart lay, Ryan was sure. If Hale glimpsed even a tenth part of the truth — that Jim was the kind of lad who had an eye for a handsome man, much less that he was embroiled in an affair — the papers would be signed in an hour, cutting Jim out of the will. No, whatever Jon Hale perceived about his son was not so clear-cut; but Jonathan was uneasy enough to breathe down his neck at business and leave Jim no margin to be his own man, make his own decisions, take any responsibility for East-coast's future.

And the future itself was like a swirling storm. Ryan pictured it as a maelstrom whirling, dervish-like, around a malevolent eye which sucked in sloops and schooners, even clipper ships, while the steam-

ships battered and pounded on the edge of the whirlpool, staying out of the eye of hell through sheer brute force.

The nightmare vision was uncannily accurate. Ryan was still a child, almost too young to understand the news, when the *Great Western* shipped out of Bristol in the April of '38. She was Brunel's pride and joy at the time; she was also the harbinger of change, and when seven-year-old Billy Ryan sat on his father's shoulder to watch her leave port, to his young ears her steam horn had the sound of doom. The bellowing horn made him shudder with dread, though he could not have said why.

That day the *Great Western* was bound for New York on her maiden Atlantic voyage. Coal smoke rose like dragon's breath from her funnels, the drumbeat of her engines could be heard when she was more than a mile out at sea ... and she arrived in America fifteen days after leaving Bristol, with 200 tons of coal left in the bunkers. By the time Bill Ryan was fifteen, the monster had crossed the Atlantic sixty-seven times and the future of sail seemed over.

And then Dame Fortune seemed to take a hand. Five years later, the same shipping company built the *Great Britain*, and Isambard Kingdom Brunel himself oversaw construction. She came out of the same yard as the *Great Western*, with a sixteen-foot iron propeller; she was over thirty yards longer than the next biggest ship on the water ... and she ran herself aground in Ireland the year after she was launched. The monstrous engines that might have made her the most profitable ship at sea were ruined, and save for Brunel's quick thinking she would surely have gone to the breaker. Refloating her almost ruined the owners, and she was sold; Gibbs Bright & Co. were running her now, but she was not the ship she had once been.

Would Brunel even have recognized her? Low in the water, the ship designed to be the queen of all steam screws was subjected to the ultimate indignity. Gibbs Bright refitted her as a three-masted square rigger, for the run out to Australia, where the gold rush raged through the '50s. She was rebuilt a third time, remasted again, and chartered to the Government for the Crimea run, the India run.

As Bill Ryan hurried back to the Lord of the Isles, through swirling wind and a pattering of rain, the *Great Britain* was on her way back from Australia again. Last year she carried the first cricket team ever to tour in Australia ... and she was under sail. Her engines spent more time shut down than running, and there was talk of taking them out, converting her to a windjammer, using the weight and space of engines

and coal for cargo. Her hull was superb, she would convert so easily. And Brunel, Ryan decided, must be spinning in his grave.

Full circle. Ryan smiled faintly as he stepped into the pub and slammed the door on the wind and rain. Brunel was almost three years dead now, and the ship which had embodied the dream of steam was under sail. Jonathan Hale loved to tell this story; he savored it, relished every syllable. The days of sail were not quite over yet. The tea and wool clippers would surely keep alive the dream, especially for the China and Australia runs, at least until the 'bloody great ditch in Suez,' as Joel called it, was finished. The canal would not be open for years yet; but when it did open, when the 'tin scows,' the steamers, no longer had to head south around Africa and buck through the Roaring Forties ... that day, the businessmen who dreamed of the power and wealth of Steam would celebrate.

The pub was still quiet, and Ryan was hungry. The little man at the bar offered him a glass, and Ryan took a rum before he ordered a quick meal. The wind was howling as he climbed the narrow, steep ship-stairs to his room, and there he threw back the heavy, soot-dusty drapes. The fire was unlit, the room very cold.

He opened the window a crack, breathed the chill, salt wind and smelled the taint of the industry on the river. His eyes dwelt on the first masthead of the *Spindrift*, which thrust tenaciously above the rooftops. Where was she going, what would become of her? And in the stiff wind of change, what would be left for Jim Hale? Ryan had the answer to neither question, and he set them both aside as a knock at his door announced a boy from the kitchen.

He made the decision as he sat down to eat. If he made a run for the Dumbarton railway station, he could be on the train back into Glasgow in time for the late express to Edinburgh, and be in Scarborough tomorrow night. Scarborough would always lure him back with the special welcome of a lover, the dark eyes, the warm arms, the kisses for which Bill Ryan had come to long when he was far from home. It was a dangerous love, filled with peril even behind the closed doors of home, but he had told Tremayne the truth: he was serious about Jim Hale.

He was not about to run out on the lad, and one could never guess, never plan, where or when affairs of the heart would happen. They chose their own times and places, and a man went along with the flow.

Chapter Two

Wreckers' weather.

The gale was a northeaster, typical around the equinoxes and in winter, and before the assault of the wind and pounding waves a ship on these shores had no safe anchorage save Harwich, and even that had become a deathtrap since the growth of Landguard Point, thirty years before.

Scenes of shipwreck were too commonplace to merit even a mention in a regional newspaper. For a century and more, salvage crews had grown rich on the spoils of 'mercy dashes,' as they raced one another to take passengers and crew off stricken vessels. But when the caprices of wind and weather were not enough, who had not heard the whispered prayer, 'Please God, send a ship ashore before morning.'

Like a dragon in the sky, the northeasterly gale howled over the cliffs of Scarborough, rattled the window panes, tested the roofing and shouted in the chimneys. Jim Hale threw down his pen and knuckled his eyes, which had grown tired after hours of book work. Manifests, charts and logs had never been his interest.

He would have preferred to be out and doing, up and moving, but since the little Scotch smack, *Eliza*, had foundered off Blackhall Rocks where she had stood at anchor, waiting to load a cargo from the colliery, Eastcoast Packet had only three hulls left in the water ... two insurance claims pending, and no capital to be 'squandered' on the services of a clerk. Jim was quite able to do the work, so Jim would do it, and no argument.

The wind grew more violent with the hour. The wreckers need hardly trouble themselves tonight, yet somewhere men would be out, showing false lights to lure a vessel inshore. Desperate and foolhardy skippers would be rushing for what cover they could get. How many times had a deceiver's light lured prey onto the very rocks where the 'salvage crew' lay waiting?

The grandmother clock in the hall struck six as Jim threw down his pen. Daylight had dwindled, the sky was thickly overcast, dim with a deep, steel-blue twilight of boiling clouds and flying spray. Jim was working by the illumination of a lamp, though it should still have been daylight. Rain lashed the window glass, and he set aside the paperwork for moment to watch the splendor of the storm. Lightning sheeted out

the sky and forked in the north, and his view offered him an entire panorama.

Marrick Hall perched on the cliff south of Scarborough, well out of the town. From the north windows one could see the great hunched shape of the castle, like a giant on the headland, looming over the south bay where the town huddled. Lightning forked, northeast to southwest, and for a split second he could see rooftops, pick out the line of the headland, the shape of the castle's keep. It seemed a battle was being fought on the horizon, and Scarborough was lit up, deafened, by unseen artillery.

The town's buildings seemed to shrink together for comfort under the onslaught of Nature. Narrow streets led steeply down to the waterfront, cottages seemed sometimes to physically cling to the cliffs, sitting one atop the other, and below it all Scarborough's bay and harbor threshed and heaved.

A few fishing boats remained tied up, jostling dangerously at their moorings; several smacks and the coast guard cutter were even then trying to make it in to safety, and the ugly little steam tug *Good Intent* stood by them. Most of the fishing fleet was at sea, and Jim had received word not an hour ago, a large number of boats had run for Whitby while others headed south with the storm winds behind them, hoping to make it to shelter on the Humber.

An hour ago the lighthouse had begun to flash out its warning to shipping as daylight prematurely failed. If mist rolled in on the gale the foghorn would soon begin to bellow like an enraged bull and all Scarborough would get no sleep.

Pushing aside the books, Jim went to the window, rested his flat palms against the cold glass and watched the lighthouse. He counted the rhythmic pulses, so familiar to anyone who had lived in this place even a year.

April had begun as the proverbial lamb, a mild month — far too clement for the fair weather to last. Good weather so early in the year, said the old folks, would turn into busy nights for the salvage crews. Jim sighed, eyes half closed against the flicker of lightning. Mick Hutton would be at the old boathouse, north of Castle Hill. It would be sweet black coffee, salt-beef sandwiches, oilskins, and the telescope with which he kept vigil as surely as the other salvage crews, and the wreckers.

No ship was safe in an east or northeast gale; some skippers had better sense than to put out into weather which could drive them up on a shore with no chance of shelter, but others surrendered to pressure from foolhardy passengers to whom money was a god.

And the *Mascot*? Jim cast a glance at his desk. A silver tea tray and several cups commanded a corner; a carelessly uncapped inkwell stood beside the open ledger, under it, a newspaper, and a cable dated the

day before. 17th April, 1862: 'Business done. Sailing in *Mascot* if weather holds. Ryan.'

The *Mascot* should have tied up in Scarborough at five, unless her skipper had decided to take refuge up on the Tees — or else not to put out of Edinburgh at all. Jim might have prayed Captain Rob Butterwick had stayed in port, but he knew Butterwick too well. The man was reckless, he owned the hulls he captained and he would do anything to keep a promised schedule since most of his competitors were running steamers. And Robert E. Butterwick was well insured.

So the *Mascot* had surely sailed, and damn the weather. Ryan would certainly have cabled again if they had dallied in Edinburgh, and Jim had received no further message; he took this as his guarantee. Heaven help her, the *Mascot* was at sea.

So, in the name of any sailor's god, where was she? Rain sluiced across the window glass and, the better to see, Jim opened it. The ozone tang of the sea was heavy, overpowering on the air; thunder pealed like cannon on the other side of the castle, and the ocean was the color of lead.

It was hard to believe, but this was a spring night, just a fortnight short of the old pagan festival of Beltane. Daylight was almost gone. Peering, Jim saw no sign of a ship in the offing, though the smacks and cutter had battled their way into harbor by now. Scarborough was battened down, her people content to wait out the storm as they had done for centuries.

The old fishermen swore it would blow till morning — and they had predicted this weather for two days, with some fey alchemy Jim actually envied. He believed he possessed half a notion of how to read the tide, waves and water, but only a lifetime lived on, and even in, the ocean would teach a man how to read the sea like a book.

Bill Ryan was far more adept at this particular skill than Jim ever expected to be; but then, Ryan had spent half his life in ships — a dozen different vessels, first as a lowly midshipman, more lately with the commission of a lieutenant in command of a twenty-two gun Naval sloop, until the day of his fall from grace. Now Ryan was simply the skipper of a twelve-year-old gaff-rigged schooner, plying between Scotland and Ireland, the ports of France, Holland, Scandinavia and the rich markets on the Thames. And against the odds, he seemed content with the *Adelaide*.

What Jim knew of Ryan's life was little, for Ryan seemed reluctant to offer more than one terse word about his Naval service. Long ago, Jim had learned when not to harass him with unwanted questions. Ryan's face would become a blank mask, as surely as if he had put up storm shutters. His mouth would compress and intelligent conversation was at an end for an hour at least, until he forgave the invasion of his privacy.

Yet Ryan seemed more than satisfied to skipper the *Adelaide* from Rotterdam or Skagerak to King's Lynn and then home to Scarborough. She was well-maintained, a fast, agile little ship, as responsive to knowing, careful hands as a lover. Under Ryan's captaincy she had, in just two voyages, become Eastcoat Packet's main earner; and for months now she had been the final bastion between Jonathan Hale and the bank.

The *Adelaide* was under repairs but the damage was minor — a broken block-and-tackle, fallen rigging, a weakened foremast. She would be on the water again in a week for the cost of a chandler's account, but her survival was to Ryan's credit. The damage could have been much worse.

Until the *Spindrift* launched in August, the *Adelaide* was the only ship Eastcoat possessed which could safely undertake the run to the Scandinavian timber and dairy ports. This knowledge brought Jim a small but uncomfortable pang of anxiety.

He stood back from the window as the wind whipped toward him, and slammed it shut as the gale burst into the room, sending papers fluttering to the floor. His reflection gazed back from the glass: a head of unruly brown hair, direct eyes with the power to arrest, and at this exact moment, a worried expression betraying the turmoil in the pit of his belly. He felt an unpleasant tingling, like a half-felt shiver, as if a chill wind blew on sweated bare skin, while in fact he stood in a closed room where a fire burned brightly, a pendulum clock ticked softly on the mantle and the lamp hissed like a snake over his desk.

The unease in his gut was premonition, and he knew it. He recognized the sensation, had felt it too many times before. After ten years' vigil, watching the moods and humors of the sea, a man attained a kind of feyness which to some perhaps appeared like the second sight. Jim Hale knew better.

With a bare half of his mind he returned to the paperwork while he waited. His eyes skimmed figures, his pen scrawled numbers, tallied this and that. And sure enough, within half an hour, he heard the creak of a floorboard on the stairs, the slow, heavy tread he would have recognized anywhere.

Knuckles gave a discreet knock at his door and Mosswell's shining bald head appeared.

"Beggin' pardon," the butler said in what passed for gentility in the northcountry, "Captain 'utton just come for thee. It's that kind of weather, should've expected it."

Jim's insides gave a peculiar flip-flop. He closed the ledger on the company accounts and threw down his pen. "I've only been waiting, Mosswell. Where is Captain Hutton now?"

"In t' parlour, 'olding 'is feet agin t' fire." Mosswell stepped into the office. "Will I be gettin' out thy gear, sir?"

"I think so." Jim lifted his jacket from the back of the chair and

shrugged quickly into it. "Did he tell you the news?"

"No, just said to fetch thee down, and be quick about it." Mosswell was at the window, drapes held aside as he peered out into the night. He was a tall old man who had been with Jonathan Hale since they were both younger than Jim was now. Mosswell was still lean, filled with bony angles and cable-like sinews, still strong despite the white of his hair and the twists and knobs of his fingers. "'Tis black as t'pit out there. Can't see nothin'."

"I think you'd best get my gear now," Jim said tersely, on his way through the door. "I have a feeling this is going to be one of those nights."

Mick Hutton was a skipper without a ship. It was his collier, the old *Eliza*, that sank on Blackhall Rocks, and Mick was waiting now, hoping for another vessel. Without question he hoped to get the *Spindrift*. Perhaps only Jim knew the truth. Hutton did not have a prayer; the *Spindrift* already belonged to Ryan ... so long as Eastcoast Packet was still in business when 'Hale's Folly' was launched. Jim was not the only man entertaining well-founded doubts.

He took the stairs two at a time, sparing a glance for the clock in the hall and a nod for the maids who fretted there. Annie and Mary were half-sisters, one big and brawny as a man, the other like a pixie, more child than woman even though she was the elder by a year, but they shared one thing in common. Both had an eye for Captain Bill Ryan. From the apprehensive looks of them, they knew he was on the *Mascot* — which meant they had seen the cable when the boy brought it up from the telegraph office.

Tugging his collar straight, Jim frowned at himself in the hall's brass-bound mirror. He was framed there between the antlered head of a red stag and a pair of cameo portraits by the local artist, Thaddeus Pemby. In one palm-sized painting was a young and smiling Jonathan Hale. In the other, a young and very beautiful woman. A male version of her face seemed to look out of the mirror tonight. The tiny portrait haunted Jim as always, but he could only spare it a moment before be passed by into the parlor.

A big man, thickset and powerful, was Mick Hutton, with a chest like a barrel, wide shoulders and the coloring of a Swede, yellow hair and pale skin tanned to deep gold by sun and wind. His cheeks had flushed as he warmed himself by the fire after the sprint through the chill and rain.

He was on his feet as Jim appeared, and gestured at the tantalus on the sideboard with the glass in his right hand. "Hope you don't mind. I helped myself. The wind's cold enough to freeze the nose off a Scowegian." He spoke with the vague remains of a south London accent. Twenty-one years in the Navy had done much to smooth it out, but Hutton would never be able to cultivate the 'correct' accent, the

voice which would win him entry to influential circles. He was forty now, fifteen years Jim's senior, and an old friend.

"Help yourself to another, Mick," Jim invited with a wave at the tantalus, which was filled with a reasonable brandy.

"We haven't time." Hutton finished the spirit fast and set down the glass, upturned, on the salver. "There's a coaster on rocks at Scalby Ness. She must have been trying to make the harbor and the current took her in, not a mile from the lighthouse. If you want the salvage fee we'll have to move our arses, Jim. Give the Kerr brothers another half hour and they'll know she's aground. They might know already. They'll be glad to snatch her right out of our hands."

"How long since she struck?" Jim was on his way to the door. "Mosswell! Is my gear ready?"

A disembodied and irreverent Yorkshire voiced floated back: "Aye, all ready, like I told thee!"

"She went on about a quarter hour ago. I saw her strike and then came here as fast as old Blondin can run," Hutton called as Jim went up the stairs at a run.

"What ship is it, could you tell?" Jim shouted down as he hurried into his room. His oilskins were laid out on the bed, the heavy rubber boots standing incongruously beside his slippers.

Hutton bellowed up from the foot of the stairs. "No way to tell, Jim, not in this dark, but she's a coaster, and you can bet she's carrying passengers. In a storm, they always are."

They were the worst kind of salvage. The kind where an hour's delay did not merely mean salt-ruined grain or silk or butter, but drowned women and children, grief all around, services for the dead in churches from Scarborough to Whitby and beyond.

Jim rushed out of his shirt and trousers, struggled fast into dungarees, two pairs of thick stockings and a sweater, and fought the oilskins on over the top of them. With his feet thrust into the Wellington boots, he had the sou'wester in his hand and headed for the stairs again. "Mosswell!"

The butler's face looked out of a bedchamber on the landing.

"Tell my father where I've gone," Jim said in passing. "I want the salvage fee, we need the money. And if we give the Kerr brothers half a chance the buggers'll be in there in front of us!"

In the hall, hand already on the brass front door knob, Hutton looked worriedly up at him as he swung down the stairs. "The lads should have the first boats in the water by now, Jim, but it's going to be damned dangerous. The sea's running like a maelstrom. I don't think you should be out on the boats."

Jim just gave him a glare and made no verbal comment. There were times when being the owner's only son and heir could be an advantage. This was not one of them. A moment later he was out in the

wind-lashed dark, watching Hutton's horse snatch at his tether while young Walter struggled around the corner of the house with the stable's new gelding, Duke. He was an ex-Army nag, twelve years old and either deaf as a post or as impervious to the crash and bang of the storm as to a battlefield, while Blondin was half-wild.

The surf pounded on the rocks below Marrick Hall, and the lights of Scarborough beckoned from the houses below. It was a town of almost twenty thousand souls now, and still the forces of nature seemed to hold it to ransom, castle and all. Five times, the castle had withstood sieges; for more than seven centuries the headland had been fortified, yet the fury of the storm seemed to dwarf the ramparts and overpower the greatest works of mortals.

As he caught Duke's bridle and swung carefully into the saddle, Jim Hale felt his mortality keenly. Fighting Blondin every foot of the way, cursing the animal, Hutton scrambled back into the saddle. Jim turned Duke's nose to the north and touched him with his heels. Lightning sheeted out the whole sky again as the horses took off, and Jim caught his breath.

The town was on their right, in the south bay, below. The wind carried up strange snatches of sound — voices bellowed, he heard the music of a French accordion and the raucous sound of drunken singing from a tavern. As yet no one down there knew the plight of the crippled coaster. Soon enough the word would get about: a ship was on the rocks. Volunteers would appear from all quarters. Were they eager to help save life and limb, Jim wondered, or just eager for a cut of the salvage price?

The boathouse was on the north bay, on the last stretch of the beach before the rocks began, the last stretch of sandy beach before Whitby, twenty miles away. The battered timber building housed four boats — longboats taken from a Whitby whaler eight years before and kept here as insurance against nights like this.

The horses scrambled down the trail toward the beach, and Jim thanked any sailor's god who might be watching: the boathouse was open, the crews swinging lanterns, while the sea threshed and churned. He swallowed hard as he saw the height of the waves, the white water breaking on the rocks while foam seemed to float on the air. Duke skittered to a halt in the lee of the boathouse and a boy hurried up to take his bridle.

The stone slipway angled steeply into the water, which tonight broke high, flinging spume around the roof of the boathouse. Jim's oilskins were running wet in moments and a trickle of water found its way under his collar. He saw at once, two of the four boats were already in the water; a third had just launched as he and Mick Hutton handed over the horses, and they hurried into the cold, flying spray and the mad whirl of the gale. The fourth boat was still on its slip,

waiting for several crew members who were very late.

If he cast a glance back along the cliff, Jim could see the castle and a few lights of houses on the north bay, but the town and Marrick Hall were out of sight around the headland. Still, he knew where his father would be. It was the same, always. The old man would have hoisted his ailing body out of the bed. He would be at his window with a telescope, still trying to share in the excitement when his body had long ago decided enough was enough.

Unease and resentment tightened Jim's mouth. Jon Hale would surely command Eastcoast for many more years, yet he was a creature of the past, unable to adjust to the reality of the present. To him the age of the machine was unknowable, unthinkable. Eastcoast was on the rocks as surely as the ship which had just been driven in by this storm, but still the old man's every hope and aspiration remained pinned on the *Spindrift*. He would mortgage the last stick and stone the family possessed to finish her.

And what would become of them, Jim wondered, when the steamers, or the wreckers, or the railway threw Eastcoast onto the mercy of a Manchester bank and the bailiff was at the gate? He gritted his teeth as the fourth boat was made ready to launch into the churning water.

Hand cupped to his mouth, Hutton yelled, "Jim! Jim! We're almost away!"

Breath held jealously in his chest, Jim Hale jumped over onto the pitching deck and caught the high end of an oar to steady himself before the first pounding wave tossed him like a rag doll over the side. Hutton was in the bow, and as Jim took the tiller the seamen who stood this duty for bonus pay threw their backs into the work.

Ashore, their wives were also busy: hot food, blankets and bandages were being assembled at the hospital, and lookouts were in the lighthouse. Little more could be done for travelers caught between the wind and cliffs; if they got out of the wreck with their lives, they would consider themselves the luckiest folk alive tonight.

Strong backs took the boats out, and Jim fought the tiller as the sea tried to tear it out of his hands with a fury which defied his understanding. They rowed north from the boathouse toward the Scalby Ness Rocks, and thanked heaven it was not a long pull. On a fine day it was an easy trip — a man could swim it for pleasure without even getting out of breath. Tonight the same small voyage was a nightmare. Soaked, winded, pummeled by waves that continually smashed down over the boats, Jim was half blinded by the salt spray. But in moments he had seen the crippled coaster, and the lights — two sets of lights. He swore vividly.

The figure of a man stood on the angled foredeck of the stricken vessel and was swinging a lantern in wide arcs. Out to sea a second light showed, another lantern in the bow of an incoming boat. The Kerr

brothers were even quicker off the mark than usual. Their boats were housed a quarter of a mile north, toward Cromer Point, and they kept their own cliff-top lookout. Still, they were so quick to the kill, Jim was astonished.

He put the tiller hard over, held it with his knee and cupped both hands to his mouth. "Ahoy! Ahoy on the coaster! Throw us a line! Are you carrying passengers?"

The man with the lantern heard him somehow above the roar of the sea, and turned toward him. His words were almost ripped away by the wind. "Nine! Nine passengers! She's taking water fast! Can you take us off?"

The line Jim had asked for came flying out from the darkened ship and smacked into the water not five yards from Jim's boat. Oars thrashed to hold the longboat steady as he lashed the tiller with a loop of hemp hawser, and struggled a boathook over the side to snare it. The line ran quickly through a brass ring and two men left the oars to heave on it.

The ship towered over the longboats. Masts and hull groaned like a creature in agony, and white faces peered over the side, half-seen, more like wraiths than men as lightning licked along the northern horizon once more. Jim's own face was filled with salt spray and he reached up blindly; a hand caught him by the forearm, hoisted him up onto the steeply-canted and still shuddering deck. The footing was difficult, the planks oily, slick, and he swore as he crashed heavily against the side with his hip.

"Watch your step, Jim — careful, now. You're supposed to be out here to rescue us!"

"Bill!" Astonishment exploded into shock. Jim righted himself and spun, fingers clenching into the drenched sleeves of a black greatcoat he recognized. Ryan's face was pale in a flicker of lightning but he seemed unharmed. "My God, then this is the *Mascot* after all. I thought it might be."

"We limped our way through, God alone knows how," Ryan said tersely over the banshee voice of the wind. "Half the crew and most of the passengers are sick below decks. They'll need help, Jim. There's five women, and two are just children. Robbie Butterwick's running with seven crew. Can you take us all off at once?"

"We'll have to. She's not going to give us any second chances," Jim shouted. "Feel her wallowing, Bill. She's already full of water, she won't last much longer."

"She tore a gash in herself, down by the keel." Ryan turned his back to the wind and lent his hands to Hutton, who had just appeared at the rail. "We struck with one hell of a blow." He hauled Hutton over onto the deck. "A nice night for a jaunt, Mick!"

"Is that Billy Ryan I can hear?" Hutton peered out from beneath

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