

Poor Man's Rock

Bertrand W. Sinclair



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Title: Poor Man's Rock

Author: Bertrand W. Sinclair

Illustrator: Frank Tenney Johnson

Release Date: August 17, 2005 [EBook #16541]

Language: English

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Produced by Suzanne Shell, Paul Ereaut and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

Novels by:

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

NORTH OF FIFTY-THREE

BIG TIMBER

BURNED BRIDGES

POOR MAN'S ROCK

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POOR MAN'S ROCK

BY

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON

publisher symbol

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

Published September, 1920

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, MASS., U.S.A.

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POOR MAN'S ROCK

PROLOGUE

LONG, LONG AGO

The Gulf of Georgia spread away endlessly, an immense, empty stretch of water bared to the hot eye of an August sun, its broad face only saved from oily smoothness by half-hearted flutterings of a westerly breeze. Those faint airs blowing up along the Vancouver Island shore made tentative efforts to fill and belly out strongly the mainsail and jib of a small half-decked sloop working out from the weather side of Sangster Island and laying her snub nose straight for the mouth of the Fraser River, some sixty sea-miles east by south.

In the stern sheets a young man stood, resting one hand on the tiller, his navigating a sinecure, for the wind was barely enough to give him steerageway. He was, one would say, about twenty-five or six, fairly tall, healthily tanned, with clear blue eyes having a touch of steely gray in their blue depths, and he was unmistakably of that fair type which runs to sandy hair and freckles. He was dressed in a light-colored shirt, blue serge trousers, canvas shoes; his shirt sleeves, rolled to the elbows, bared flat, sinewy forearms.

He turned his head to look back to where in the distance a white speck showed far astern, and his eyes narrowed and clouded. But there was no cloud in them when he turned again to his companion, a girl sitting on a box just outside the radius of the tiller. She was an odd-looking figure to be sitting in the cockpit of a fishing boat, amid recent traces of business with salmon, codfish, and the like. The heat was putting a point on the smell of defunct fish. The dried scales of them still clung to the small vessel's timbers. In keeping, the girl should have been buxom, red-handed, coarsely healthy. And she was anything but that. No frail, delicate creature, mind you,—but she did not belong in a fishing boat. She looked the lady, carried herself like one,—patrician from the top of her russet-crowned head to the tips of her white kid slippers. Yet her eyes, when she lifted them to the man at the tiller, glowed with something warm. She stood up and slipped a silk-draped arm through his. He smiled down at her, a tender smile tempered with uneasiness, and then bent his head and kissed her.

"Do you think they will overtake us, Donald?" she asked at length.

"That depends on the wind," he answered. "If these light airs hold they *may* overhaul us, because they can spread so much more cloth. But if the westerly freshens—and it nearly always does in the afternoon—I can outsail the *Gull*. I can drive this old tub full sail in a blow that will make the *Gull* tie in her last reef."

"I don't like it when it's rough," the girl said wistfully. "But I'll pray for a blow this afternoon."

If indeed she prayed—and her attitude was scarcely prayerful, for it consisted of sitting with one hand clasped tight in her lover's—her prayer fell dully on the ears of the wind god. The light airs fluttered gently off the bluish haze of Vancouver Island, wavered across the Gulf, kept the sloop moving, but no more. Sixty miles away the mouth of the Fraser opened to them what security they desired. But behind them power and authority crept up apace. In two hours they could distinguish clearly the rig of the pursuing yacht. In another hour she was less than a mile astern, creeping inexorably nearer.

The man in the sloop could only stand on, hoping for the usual afternoon westerly to show its teeth.

In the end, when the afternoon was waxing late, the sternward vessel stood up so that every detail of her loomed plain. She was full cutter-rigged, spreading hundreds of feet of canvas. Every working sail was set, and every light air cloth that could catch a puff of air. The slanting sun rays glittered on her white paint and glossy varnish, struck flashing on bits of polished brass. She looked her name, the *Gull*, a thing of exceeding grace and beauty, gliding soundlessly across a sun-shimmering sea. But she represented only a menace to the man and woman in the fish-soiled sloop.

The man's face darkened as he watched the distance lessen between the two craft. He reached under a locker and drew out a rifle. The girl's high pinkish color fled. She caught him by the arm.

"Donald, Donald," she said breathlessly, "there's not to be any fighting."

"Am I to let them lay alongside, hand you aboard, and then sail back to Maple Point, laughing at us for soft and simple fools?" he said quietly. "They can't take you from me so easily as that. There are only three of them aboard. I won't hurt them unless they force me to it, but I'm not so chicken-hearted as to let them have things all their own way. Sometimes a man *must* fight, Bessie."

"You don't know my father," the girl whimpered. "Nor grandpa. He's there. I can see his white beard. They'll kill you, Donald, if you oppose them. You mustn't do that. It is better that I should go back quietly than that there should be blood spilled over me."

"But I'm not intending to slaughter them," the man said soberly. "If I warn them off and they board me like a bunch of pirates, then—then it will be their lookout. Do you want to go back, Bessie? Are you doubtful about your bargain already?"

The tears started in her eyes.

"For shame to say that," she whispered. "Lord knows I don't want to turn back from anything that includes you, Don. But my father and grandpa will be furious. They won't hesitate to vent their temper on you if you oppose them. They are accustomed to respect. To have their authority flouted rouses them to fury. And they're three to one. Put away your gun, Donald. If we can't outsail the *Gull* I shall have to go back without a struggle. There will be another time. They can't change my heart."

"They can break your spirit though—and they will, for this," he muttered.

But he laid the rifle down on the locker. The girl snuggled her hand into his.

"You will not quarrel with them, Donald—please, no matter what they say? Promise me that," she pleaded. "If we can't outrun them, if they come alongside, you will not fight? I shall go back obediently. You can send word to me by Andrew Murdock. Next time we shall not fail."

"There will be no next time, Bessie," he said slowly. "You will never get another chance. I know the Gowers and Mortons better than you do, for all you're one of them. They'll make you wish you had never been born, that you'd never seen me. I'd rather fight it out now. Isn't our own happiness worth a blow or two?"

"I can't bear to think what might happen if you defied them out here on this lonely sea," she shuddered. "You must promise me, Donald."

"I promise, then," he said with a sigh. "Only I know it's the end of our dream, my dear. And I'm disappointed, too. I thought you had a stouter heart, that wouldn't quail before two angry old men—and a jealous young one. You can see, I suppose, that Horace is there, too.

"Damn them!" he broke out passionately after a minute's silence. "It's a free

country, and you and I are not children. They chase us as if we were pirates. For two pins I'd give them a pirate's welcome. I tell you, Bessie, my promise to be meek and mild is not worth much if they take a high hand with me. I can take their measure, all three of them."

"But you must not," the girl insisted. "You've promised. We can't help ourselves by violence. It would break my heart."

"They'll do that fast enough, once they get you home," he answered gloomily.

The girl's lips quivered. She sat looking back at the cutter half a cable astern. The westerly had failed them. The spreading canvas of the yacht was already blanketing the little sloop, stealing what little wind filled her sail. And as the sloop's way slackened the other slid down upon her, a purl of water at her forefoot, her wide mainsail bellying out in a snowy curve.

There were three men in her. The helmsman was a patriarch, his head showing white, a full white beard descending from his chin, a fierce-visaged, vigorous old man. Near him stood a man of middle age, a ruddy-faced man in whose dark blue eyes a flame burned as he eyed the two in the sloop. The third was younger still,—a short, sturdy fellow in flannels, tending the mainsheet with a frowning glance.

The man in the sloop held his course.

"Damn you, MacRae; lay to, or I'll run you down," the patriarch at the cutter's wheel shouted, when a boat's length separated the two craft.

MacRae's lips moved slightly, but no sound issued therefrom. Leaning on the tiller, he let the sloop run. So for a minute the boats sailed, the white yacht edging up on the sloop until it seemed as if her broadened-off boom would rake and foul the other. But when at last she drew fully abreast the two men sheeted mainsail and jib flat while the white-headed helmsman threw her over so that the yacht drove in on the sloop and the two younger men grappled MacRae's coaming with boat hooks, and side by side they came slowly up into the wind.

MacRae made no move, said nothing, only regarded the three with sober intensity. They, for their part, wasted no breath on him.

"Elizabeth, get in here," the girl's father commanded.

It was only a matter of stepping over the rubbing gunwales. The girl rose. She

cast an appealing glance at MacRae. His face did not alter. She stepped up on the guard, disdainingly the hand young Gower extended to help her, and sprang lightly into the cockpit of the *Gull*.

"As for you, you calculating blackguard," her father addressed MacRae, "if you ever set foot on Maple Point again, I'll have you horsewhipped first and jailed for trespass after."

For a second MacRae made no answer. His nostrils dilated; his blue-gray eyes darkened till they seemed black. Then he said with a curious hoarseness, and in a voice pitched so low it was scarcely audible:

"Take your boat hooks out of me and be on your way."

The older man withdrew his hook. Young Gower held on a second longer, matching the undisguised hatred in Donald MacRae's eyes with a fury in his own. His round, boyish face purpled. And when he withdrew the boat hook he swung the inch-thick iron-shod pole with a swift twist of his body and struck MacRae fairly across the face.

MacRae went down in a heap as the *Gull* swung away. The faint breeze out of the west filled the cutter's sails. She stood away on a long tack south by west, with a frightened girl cowering down in her cabin, sobbing in grief and fear, and three men in the *Gull's* cockpit casting dubious glances at one another and back to the fishing sloop sailing with no hand on her tiller.

In an hour the *Gull* was four miles to windward of the sloop. The breeze had taken a sudden shift full half the compass. A southeast wind came backing up against the westerly. There was in its breath a hint of something stronger.

Masterless, the sloop sailed, laid to, started off again erratically, and after many shifts ran off before this stiffer wind. Unhelmed, she laid her blunt bows straight for the opening between Sangster and Squitty islands. On the cockpit floor Donald MacRae sprawled unheeding. Blood from his broken face oozed over the boards.

Above him the boom swung creaking and he did not hear. Out of the southeast a bank of cloud crept up to obscure the sun. Far southward the Gulf was darkened, and across that darkened area specks and splashes of white began to show and disappear. The hot air grew strangely cool. The swell that runs far before a Gulf southeaster began to roll the sloop, abandoned to all the aimless movements of a

vessel uncontrolled. She came up into the wind and went off before it again, her sails bellying strongly, racing as if to outrun the swells which now here and there lifted and broke. She dropped into a hollow, a following sea slewed her stern sharply, and she jibed,—that is, the wind caught the mainsail and flung it violently from port to starboard. The boom swept an arc of a hundred degrees and put her rail under when it brought up with a jerk on the sheet.

Ten minutes later she jibed again. This time the mainsheet parted. Only stout, heavily ironed backstays kept mainsail and boom from being blown straight ahead. The boom end swung outboard till it dragged in the seas as she rolled. Only by a miracle and the stoutest of standing gear had she escaped dismasting. Now, with the mainsail broaded off to starboard, and the jib by some freak of wind and sea winged out to port, the sloop drove straight before the wind, holding as true a course as if the limp body on the cockpit floor laid an invisible, controlling hand on sheet and tiller.

And he, while that fair wind grew to a yachtsman's gale and lashed the Gulf of Georgia into petty convulsions, lay where he had fallen, his head rolling as his vessel rolled, heedless when she rose and raced on a wave-crest or fell laboring in the trough when a wave slid out from under her.

The sloop had all but doubled on her course,—nearly but not quite,—and the few points north of west that she shifted bore her straight to destruction.

MacRae opened his eyes at last. He was bewildered and sick. His head swam. There was a series of stabbing pains in his lacerated face. But he was of the sea, of that breed which survives by dint of fortitude, endurance, stoutness of arm and quickness of wit. He clawed to his feet. Almost before him lifted the bleak southern face of Squitty Island. Point Old jutted out like a barrier. MacRae swung on the tiller. But the wind had the mainsail in its teeth. Without control of that boom his rudder could not serve him.

And as he crawled forward to try to lower sail, or get a rope's end on the boom, whichever would do, the sloop struck on a rock that stands awash at half-tide, a brown hummock of granite lifting out of the sea two hundred feet off the tip of Point Old.

She struck with a shock that sent MacRae sprawling, arrested full in an eight-knot stride. As she hung shuddering on the rock, impaled by a jagged tooth, a sea lifted over her stern and swept her like a watery broom that washed MacRae off the cabin top, off the rock itself into deep water beyond.

He came up gasping. The cool immersion had astonishingly revived him. He felt a renewal of his strength, and he had been cast by luck into a place from which it took no more than the moderate effort of an able swimmer to reach shore. Point Old stood at an angle to the smashing seas, making a sheltered bight behind it, and into this bight the flooding tide set in a slow eddy. MacRae had only to keep himself afloat.

In five minutes his feet touched on a gravel beach. He walked dripping out of the languid swell that ran from the turbulence outside and turned to look back. The sloop had lodged on the rock, bilged by the ragged granite. The mast was down, mast and sodden sails swinging at the end of a stay as each sea swept over the rock with a hissing roar.

MacRae climbed to higher ground. He sat down beside a stunted, leaning fir and watched his boat go. It was soon done. A bigger sea than most tore the battered hull loose, lifted it high, let it drop. The crack of breaking timbers cut through the boom of the surf. The next sea swept the rock clear, and the broken, twisted hull floated awash. Caught in the tidal eddy it began its slow journey to join the vast accumulation of driftwood on the beach.

MacRae glanced along the island shore. He knew that shore slightly,—a bald, cliffy stretch notched with rocky pockets in which the surf beat itself into dirty foam. If he had grounded anywhere in that mile of headland north of Point Old, his bones would have been broken like the timbers of his sloop.

But his eyes did not linger there nor his thoughts upon shipwreck and sudden death. His gaze turned across the Gulf to a tongue of land outthrusting from the long purple reach of Vancouver Island. Behind that point lay the Morton estate, and beside the Morton boundaries, matching them mile for mile in wealth of virgin timber and fertile meadow, spread the Gower lands.

His face, streaked and blotched with drying bloodstains, scarred with a red gash that split his cheek from the hair above one ear to a corner of his mouth, hardened into ugly lines. His eyes burned again.

This happened many years ago, long before a harassed world had to reckon with bourgeois and Bolshevik, when profiteer and pacifist had not yet become words to fill the mouths of men, and not even the politicians had thought of saving the world for democracy. Yet men and women were strangely as they are now. A generation may change its manners, its outward seeming; it does not change in its loving and hating, in its fundamental passions, its inherent reactions.

MacRae's face worked. His lips quivered as he stared across the troubled sea. He lifted his hands in a swift gesture of appeal.

"O God," he cried, "curse and blast them in all their ways and enterprises if they deal with her as they have dealt with me."



CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE IN CRADLE BAY

On an afternoon in the first week of November, 1918, under a sky bank full of murky cloud and an air freighted with a chill which threatened untimely snow, a man came rowing up along the western side of Squitty Island and turned into Cradle Bay, which lies under the lee of Point Old. He was a young man, almost boyish-looking. He had on a pair of fine tan shoes, brown overalls, a new gray mackinaw coat buttoned to his chin. He was bareheaded. Also he wore a patch of pink celluloid over his right eye.

When he turned into the small half-moon bight, he let up on his oars and drifted, staring with a touch of surprise at a white cottage-roofed house with wide porches sitting amid an acre square of bright green lawn on a gentle slope that ran up from a narrow beach backed by a low sea-wall of stone where the gravel ended and the earth began.

"Hm-m-m," he muttered. "It wasn't built yesterday, either. Funny he never mentioned *that*."

He pushed on the oars and the boat slid nearer shore, the man's eyes still steadfast on the house. It stood out bold against the grass and the deeper green of the forest behind. Back of it opened a hillside brown with dead ferns, dotted with great solitary firs and gnarly branched arbutus.

No life appeared there. The chimneys were dead. Two moorings bobbed in the bay, but there was no craft save a white rowboat hauled high above tidewater and canted on its side.

"I wonder, now." He spoke again.

While he wondered and pushed his boat slowly in on the gravel, a low *pr-r-r* and a sibilant ripple of water caused him to look behind. A high-bowed, shining mahogany cruiser, seventy feet or more over all, rounded the point and headed into the bay. The smooth sea parted with a whistling sound where her brass-shod stem split it like a knife. She slowed down from this trainlike speed, stopped, picked up a mooring, made fast. The swell from her rolled in, swashing heavily

on the beach.

The man in the rowboat turned his attention to the cruiser. There were people aboard to the number of a dozen, men and women, clustered on her flush afterdeck. He could hear the clatter of their tongues, low ripples of laughter, through all of which ran the impatient note of a male voice issuing peremptory orders.

The cruiser blew her whistle repeatedly,—shrill, imperative blasts. The man in the rowboat smiled. The air was very still. Sounds carry over quiet water as if telephoned. He could not help hearing what was said.

"Wise management," he observed ironically, under his breath.

The power yacht, it seemed, had not so much as a dinghy aboard.

A figure on the deck detached itself from the group and waved a beckoning hand to the rowboat.

The rower hesitated, frowning. Then he shrugged his shoulders and pulled out and alongside. The deck crew lowered a set of steps.

"Take a couple of us ashore, will you?" He was addressed by a short, stout man. He was very round and pink of face, very well dressed, and by the manner in which he spoke to the others, and the glances he cast ashore, a person of some consequence in great impatience.

The young man laid his rowboat against the steps.

"Climb in," he said briefly.

"You, Smith, come along," the round-faced one addressed a youth in tight blue jersey and peaked cap.

The deck boy climbed obediently down. A girl in white duck and heavy blue sweater put her foot on the steps.

"I think I shall go too, papa," she said.

Her father nodded and followed her.

The rowboat nosed in beside the end of a narrow float that ran from the sea wall. The boy in the jersey sprang out, reached a steadying hand to his employer. The girl stepped lightly to the planked logs.

"Give the boy a lift on that boat to the *chuck*, will you?" the stout person made further request, indicating the white boat bottom up on shore.

A queer expression gleamed momentarily in the eyes of the boatman. But it passed. He did not speak, but made for the dinghy, followed by the hand from the yacht. They turned the boat over, slid it down and afloat. The sailor got in and began to ship his oars.

The man and the girl stood by till this was done. Then the girl turned away. The man extended his hand.

"Thanks," he said curtly.

The other's hand had involuntarily moved. The short, stout man dropped a silver dollar in it, swung on his heel and followed his daughter,—passed her, in fact, for she had only taken a step or two and halted.

The young fellow eyed the silver coin in his hand with an expression that passed from astonishment to anger and broke at last into a smile of sheer amusement. He jiggled the coin, staring at it thoughtfully. Then he faced about on the jerseyed youth about to dip his blades.

"Smith," he said, "I suppose if I heaved this silver dollar out into the *chuck* you'd think I was crazy."

The youth only stared at him.

"You don't object to tips, do you, Smith?" the man in the mackinaw inquired.

"Gee, no," the boy observed. "Ain't you got no use for money?"

"Not this kind. You take it and buy smokes."

He flipped the dollar into the dinghy. It fell clinking on the slatted floor and the youth salvaged it, looked it over, put it in his pocket.

"Gee," he said. "Any time a guy hands me money, I keep it, believe me."

His gaze rested curiously on the man with the patch over his eye. His familiar grin faded. He touched his cap.

"Thank y', sir."

He heaved on his oars. The boat slid out. The man stood watching, hands deep in his pockets. A displeased look replaced the amused smile as his glance rested a second on the rich man's toy of polished mahogany and shining brass. Then he turned to look again at the house up the slope and found the girl at his elbow.

He did not know if she had overheard him, and he did not at the moment care. He met her glance with one as impersonal as her own.

"I'm afraid I must apologize for my father," she said simply. "I hope you aren't offended. It was awfully good of you to bring us ashore."

"That's quite all right," he answered casually. "Why should I be offended? When a roughneck does something for you, it's proper to hand him some of your loose change. Perfectly natural."

"But you aren't anything of the sort," she said frankly. "I feel sure you resent being tipped for an act of courtesy. It was very thoughtless of papa."

"Some people are so used to greasing their way with money that they'll hand St. Peter a ten-dollar bill when they pass the heavenly gates," he observed. "But it really doesn't matter. Tell me something. Whose house is that, and how long has it been there?"

"Ours," she answered. "Two years. We stay here a good deal in the summer."

"Ours, I daresay, means Horace A. Gower," he remarked. "Pardon my curiosity, but you see I used to know this place rather well. I've been away for some time. Things seem to have changed a bit."

"You're just back from overseas?" she asked quickly.

He nodded. She looked at him with livelier interest.

"I'm no wounded hero," he forestalled the inevitable question. "I merely happened to get a splinter of wood in one eye, so I have leave until it gets well."

"If you are merely on leave, why are you not in uniform?" she asked quickly, in a puzzled tone.

"I am," he replied shortly. "Only it is covered up with overalls and mackinaw. Well, I must be off. Good-by, Miss Gower."

He pushed his boat off the beach, rowed to the opposite side of the bay, and

hauled the small craft up over a log. Then he took his bag in hand and climbed the rise that lifted to the backbone of Point Old. Halfway up he turned to look briefly backward over beach and yacht and house, up the veranda steps of which the girl in the blue sweater was now climbing.

"It's queer," he muttered.

He went on. In another minute he was on the ridge. The Gulf opened out, a dead dull gray. The skies were hidden behind drab clouds. The air was clammy, cold, hushed, as if the god of storms were gathering his breath for a great effort.

And Jack MacRae himself, when he topped the height which gave clear vision for many miles of shore and sea, drew a deep breath and halted for a long look at many familiar things.

He had been gone nearly four years. It seemed to him but yesterday that he left. The picture was unchanged,—save for that white cottage in its square of green. He stared at that with a doubtful expression, then his uncovered eye came back to the long sweep of the Gulf, to the brown cliffs spreading away in a ragged line along a kelp-strewn shore. He put down the bag and seated himself on a mossy rock close by a stunted, leaning fir and stared about him like a man who has come a great way to see something and means to look his fill.



CHAPTER II

HIS OWN COUNTRY

Squitty Island lies in the Gulf of Georgia midway between a mainland made of mountains like the Alps, the Andes, and the Himalayas all jumbled together and all rising sheer from the sea, and the low delta-like shore of Vancouver Island. Southward from Squitty the Gulf runs in a thirty-mile width for nearly a hundred miles to the San Juan islands in American waters, beyond which opens the sheltered beauty of Puget Sound. Squitty is six miles wide and ten miles long, a blob of granite covered with fir and cedar forest, with certain parklike patches of open grassland on the southern end, and a hump of a mountain lifting two thousand feet in its middle.

The southeastern end of Squitty—barring the tide rips off Cape Mudge—is the dirtiest place in the Gulf for small craft in blowy weather. The surges that heave up off a hundred miles of sea tortured by a southeast gale break thunderously against Squitty's low cliffs. These walls face the marching breakers with a grim, unchanging front. There is nothing hospitable in this aspect of Squitty. It is an ugly shore to have on the lee in a blow.

Yet it is not so forbidding as it seems. The prevailing summer winds on the Gulf are westerly. Gales of uncommon fierceness roar out of the northwest in fall and early winter. At such times the storms split on Squitty Island, leaving a restful calm under those brown, kelp-fringed cliffs. Many a small coaster has crept thankfully into that lee out of the whitecapped turmoil on either side, to lie there through a night that was wild outside, watching the Ballenas light twenty miles away on a pile of bare rocks winking and blinking its warning to less fortunate craft. Tugs, fishing boats, salmon trollers, beach-combing launches, all that mosquito fleet which gets its bread upon the waters and learns bar, shoal, reef, and anchorage thoroughly in the getting,—these knew that besides the half-moon bight called Cradle Bay, upon which fronted Horace Gower's summer home, there opened also a secure, bottle-necked cove less than a mile northward from Point Old.

By day a stranger could only mark the entrance by eagle watch from a course close inshore. By night even those who knew the place as they knew the palm of

their hand had to feel their way in. But once inside, a man could lie down in his bunk and sleep soundly, though a southeaster whistled and moaned, and the seas roared smoking into the narrow mouth. No ripple of that troubled the inside of Squitty Cove. It was a finger of the sea thrust straight into the land, a finger three hundred yards long, forty yards wide, with an entrance so narrow that a man could heave a sounding lead across it, and that entrance so masked by a rock about the bigness of a six-room house that one holding the channel could touch the rock with a pike pole as he passed in. There was a mud bottom, twenty-foot depth at low tide, and a little stream of cold fresh water brawling in at the head. A cliff walled it on the south. A low, grassy hill dotted with solitary firs, red-barked arbutus, and clumps of wild cherry formed its northern boundary. And all around the mouth, in every nook and crevice, driftwood of every size and shape lay in great heaps, cast high above tidewater by the big storms.

So Squitty had the three prime requisites for a harbor,—secure anchorage, fresh water, and firewood. There was good fertile land, too, behind the Cove,—low valleys that ran the length of the island. There were settlers here and there, but these settlers were not the folk who intermittently frequented Squitty Cove. The settlers stayed on their land, battling with stumps, clearing away the ancient forest, tilling the soil. Those to whom Squitty Cove gave soundest sleep and keenest joy were tillers of the sea. Off Point Old a rock brown with seaweed, ringed with a bed of kelp, lifted its ugly head now to the one good, blue-gray eye of Jack MacRae, the same rock upon which Donald MacRae's sloop broke her back before Jack MacRae was born. It was a sunken menace at any stage of water, heartily cursed by the fishermen. In the years between, the rock had acquired a name not written on the Admiralty charts. The hydrographers would look puzzled and shake their heads if one asked where in the Gulf waters lay Poor Man's Rock.

But Poor Man's Rock it is. Greek and Japanese, Spaniard and Italian, American and Canadian—and there are many of each—who follow the silver-sided salmon when they run in the Gulf of Georgia, these know that Poor Man's Rock lies half a cable south southwest of Point Old on Squitty Island. Most of them know, too, why it is called Poor Man's Rock.

Under certain conditions of sea and sky the Rock is as lonely and forbidding a spot as ever a ship's timbers were broken upon. Point Old thrusts out like the stubby thumb on a clenched fist. The Rock and the outer nib of the Point are haunted by quarreling flocks of gulls and coots and the black Siwash duck with his stumpy wings and brilliant yellow bill. The southeaster sends endless

battalions of waves rolling up there when it blows. These rear white heads over the Rock and burst on the Point with shuddering impact and showers of spray. When the sky is dull and gray, and the wind whips the stunted trees on the Point—trees that lean inland with branches all twisted to the landward side from pressure of many gales in their growing years—and the surf is booming out its basso harmonies, the Rock is no place for a fisherman. Even the gulls desert it then.

But in good weather, in the season, the blueback and spring salmon swim in vast schools across the end of Squitty. They feed upon small fish, baby herring, tiny darting atoms of finny life that swarm in countless numbers. What these inch-long fishes feed upon no man knows, but they begin to show in the Gulf early in spring. The water is alive with them,—minute, darting streaks of silver. The salmon follow these schools, pursuing, swallowing, eating to live. Seal and dogfish follow the salmon. Shark and the giant blackfish follow dogfish and seal. And man follows them all, pursuing and killing that he himself may live.

Around Poor Man's Rock the tide sets strongly at certain stages of ebb and flood. The cliffs north of Point Old and the area immediately surrounding the Rock are thick strewn with kelp. In these brown patches of seaweed the tiny fish, the schools of baby herring, take refuge from their restless enemy, the swift and voracious salmon.

For years Pacific Coast salmon have been taken by net and trap, to the profit of the salmon packers and the satisfaction of those who cannot get fish save out of tin cans. The salmon swarmed in millions on their way to spawn in fresh-water streams. They were plentiful and cheap. But even before the war came to send the price of linen-mesh net beyond most fishermen's pocketbooks, men had discovered that salmon could be taken commercially by trolling lines. The lordly spring, which attains to seventy pounds, the small, swift blueback, and the fighting coho could all be lured to a hook on a wobbling bit of silver or brass at the end of a long line weighted with lead to keep it at a certain depth behind a moving boat. From a single line over the stern it was but a logical step to two, four, even six lines spaced on slender poles boomed out on each side of a power launch,—once the fisherman learned that with this gear he could take salmon in open water. So trolling was launched. Odd trollers grew to trolling fleets. A new method became established in the salmon industry.

But there are places where the salmon run and a gasboat trolling her battery of lines cannot go without loss of gear. The power boats cannot troll in shallows.

They cannot operate in kelp without fouling. So they hold to deep open water and leave the kelp and shoals to the rowboats.

And that is how Poor Man's Rock got its name. In the kelp that surrounded it and the greater beds that fringed Point Old, the small feed sought refuge from the salmon and the salmon pursued them there among the weedy granite and the boulders, even into shallows where their back fins cleft the surface as they dashed after the little herring. The foul ground and the tidal currents that swept by the Rock held no danger to the gear of a rowboat troller. He fished a single short line with a pound or so of lead. He could stop dead in a boat length if his line fouled. So he pursued the salmon as the salmon pursued the little fish among the kelp and boulders.

Only a poor man trolled in a rowboat, tugging at the oars hour after hour without cabin shelter from wind and sun and rain, unable to face even such weather as a thirty by eight-foot gasboat could easily fish in, unable to follow the salmon run when it shifted from one point to another on the Gulf. The rowboat trollers must pick a camp ashore by a likely ground and stay there. If the salmon left they could only wait till another run began. Whereas the power boat could hear of schooling salmon forty miles away and be on the spot in seven hours' steaming.

Poor Man's Rock had given many a man his chance. Nearly always salmon could be taken there by a rowboat. And because for many years old men, men with lean purses, men with a rowboat, a few dollars, and a hunger for independence, had camped in Squitty Cove and fished the Squitty headlands and seldom failed to take salmon around the Rock, the name had clung to that brown hummock of granite lifting out of the sea at half tide. From April to November, any day a rowboat could live outside the Cove, there would be half a dozen, eight, ten, more or less, of these solitary rowers bending to their oars, circling the Rock.

Now and again one of these would hastily drop his oars, stand up, and haul in his line hand over hand. There would be a splashing and splattering on the surface, a bright silver fish leaping and threshing the water, to land at last with a plop! in the boat. Whereupon the fisherman would hurriedly strike this dynamic, glistening fish over the head with a short, thick club, lest his struggles snarl the line, after which he would put out his spoon and bend to the oars again. It was a daylight and dusk job, a matter of infinite patience and hard work, cold and wet at times, and in midsummer the blaze of a scorching sun and the eye-dazzling glitter of reflected light.

But a man must live. Some who came to the Cove trolled long and skillfully, and were lucky enough to gain a power troller in the end, to live on beans and fish, and keep a strangle hold on every dollar that came in until with a cabin boat powered with gas they joined the trolling fleet and became nomads. They fared well enough then. Their taking at once grew beyond a rowboat's scope. They could see new country, hearken to the lure of distant fishing grounds. There was the sport of gambling on wind and weather, on the price of fish or the number of the catch. If one locality displeased them they could shift to another, while the rowboat men were chained perforce to the monotony of the same camp, the same cliffs, the same old weary round.

Sometimes Squitty Cove harbored thirty or forty of these power trollers. They would make their night anchorage there while the trolling held good, filling the Cove with talk and laughter and a fine sprinkle of lights when dark closed in. With failing catches, or the first breath of a southeaster that would lock them in the Cove while it blew, they would be up and away,—to the top end of Squitty, to Yellow Rock, to Cape Lazo, anywhere that salmon might be found.

And the rowboat men would lie in their tents and split-cedar lean-tos, cursing the weather, the salmon that would not bite, grumbling at their lot.

There were two or three rowboat men who had fished the Cove almost since Jack MacRae could remember,—old men, fishermen who had shot their bolt, who dwelt in small cabins by the Cove, living somehow from salmon run to salmon run, content if the season's catch netted three hundred dollars. All they could hope for was a living. They had become fixtures there.

Jack MacRae looked down from the bald tip of Point Old with an eager gleam in his uncovered eye. There was the Rock with a slow swell lapping over it. There was an old withered Portuguese he knew in a green dugout, Long Tom Spence rowing behind the Portuguese, and they carrying on a shouted conversation. He picked out Doug Sproul among three others he did not know,—and there was not a man under fifty among them.

Three hundred yards offshore half a dozen power trollers wheeled and counterwheeled, working an eddy. He could see them haul the lines hand over hand, casting the hooked fish up into the hold with an easy swing. The salmon were biting.

It was all familiar to Jack MacRae. He knew every nook and cranny on Squitty Island, every phase and mood and color of the sea. It is a grim birthplace that

leaves a man without some sentiment for the place where he was born. Point Old, Squitty Cove, Poor Man's Rock had been the boundaries of his world for a long time. In so far as he had ever played, he had played there.

He looked for another familiar figure or two, without noting them.

"The fish are biting fast for this time of year," he reflected. "It's a wonder dad and Peter Ferrara aren't out. And I never knew Bill Munro to miss anything like this."

He looked a little longer, over across the tip of Sangster Island two miles westward, with its Elephant's Head,—the extended trunk of which was a treacherous reef bared only at low tide. He looked at the Elephant's unwinking eye, which was a twenty-foot hole through a hump of sandstone, and smiled. He had fished for salmon along the kelp beds there and dug clams under the eye of the Elephant long, long ago. It did seem a long time ago that he had been a youngster in overalls, adventuring alone in a dugout about these bold headlands.

He rose at last. The November wind chilled him through the heavy mackinaw. He looked back at the Gower cottage, like a snowflake in a setting of emerald; he looked at the Gower yacht; and the puzzled frown returned to his face.

Then he picked up his bag and walked rapidly along the brow of the cliffs toward Squitty Cove.



CHAPTER III

THE FLUTTER OF SABLE WINGS

A path took form on the mossy rock as Jack MacRae strode on. He followed this over patches of grass, by lone firs and small thickets, until it brought him out on the rim of the Cove. He stood a second on the cliffy north wall to look down on the quiet harbor. It was bare of craft, save that upon the beach two or three rowboats lay hauled out. On the farther side a low, rambling house of logs showed behind a clump of firs. Smoke lifted from its stone chimney.

MacRae smiled reminiscently at this and moved on. His objective lay at the Cove's head, on the little creek which came whispering down from the high land behind. He gained this in another two hundred yards, coming to a square house built, like its neighbor, of stout logs with a high-pitched roof, a patch of ragged grass in front, and a picket-fenced area at the back in which stood apple trees and cherry and plum, gaunt-limbed trees all bare of leaf and fruit. Ivy wound up the corners of the house. Sturdy rosebushes stood before it, and the dead vines of sweet peas bleached on their trellises.

It had the look of an old place—as age is reckoned in so new a country—old and bearing the marks of many years' labor bestowed to make it what it was. Even from a distance it bore a homelike air. MacRae's face lightened at the sight. His step quickened. He had come a long way to get home.

Across the front of the house extended a wide porch which gave a look at the Cove through a thin screen of maple and alder. From the grass-bordered walk of beach gravel half a dozen steps lifted to the floor level. As MacRae set foot on the lower step a girl came out on the porch.

MacRae stopped. The girl did not see him. Her eyes were fixed questioningly on the sea that stretched away beyond the narrow mouth of the Cove. As she looked she drew one hand wearily across her forehead, tucking back a vagrant strand of dusky hair. MacRae watched her a moment. The quick, pleased smile that leaped to his face faded to soberness.

"Hello, Dolly," he said softly.

She started. Her dark eyes turned to him, and an inexpressible relief glowed in them. She held up one hand in a gesture that warned silence,—and by that time MacRae had come up the steps to her side and seized both her hands in his. She looked at him speechlessly, a curious passivity in her attitude. He saw that her eyes were wet.

"What's wrong, Dolly?" he asked. "Aren't you glad to see Johnny come marching home? Where's dad?"

"Glad?" she echoed. "I never was so glad to see any one in my life. Oh, Johnny MacRae, I wish you'd come sooner. Your father's a sick man. We've done our best, but I'm afraid it's not good enough."

"He's in bed, I suppose," said MacRae. "Well, I'll go in and see him. Maybe it'll cheer the old boy up to see me back."

"He won't know you," the girl murmured. "You mustn't disturb him just now, anyway. He has fallen into a doze. When he comes out of that he'll likely be delirious."

"Good Lord," MacRae whispered, "as bad as that! What is it?"

"The flu," Dolly said quietly. "Everybody has been having it. Old Bill Munro died in his shack a week ago."

"Has dad had a doctor?"

The girl nodded.

"Harper from Nanaimo came day before yesterday. He left medicine and directions; he can't come again. He has more cases than he can handle over there."

They went through the front door into a big, rudely furnished room with a very old and worn rug on the floor, a few pieces of heavy furniture, and bare, uncurtained windows. A heap of wood blazed in an open cobblestone fireplace.

MacRae stopped short just within the threshold. Through a door slightly ajar came the sound of stertorous breathing, intermittent in its volume, now barely audible, again rising to a labored harshness. He listened, a look of dismayed concern gathering on his face. He had heard men in the last stages of exhaustion from wounds and disease breathe in that horribly distressed fashion.

He stood a while uncertainly. Then he laid off his mackinaw, walked softly to the bedroom door, looked in. After a minute of silent watching he drew back. The girl had seated herself in a chair. MacRae sat down facing her.

"I never saw dad so thin and old-looking," he muttered. "Why, his hair is nearly white. He's a wreck. How long has he been sick?"

"Four days," Dolly answered. "But he hasn't grown old and thin in four days, Jack. He's been going downhill for months. Too much work. Too much worry also, I think—out there around the Rock every morning at daylight, every evening till dark. It hasn't been a good season for the rowboats."

MacRae stirred uneasily in his chair. He didn't understand why his father should have to drudge in a trolling boat. They had always fished salmon, so far back as he could recall, but never of stark necessity. He nursed his chin in his hand and thought. Mostly he thought with a constricted feeling in his throat of how frail and old his father had grown, the slow-smiling, slow-speaking man who had been father and mother and chum to him since he was an urchin in knee breeches. He recalled him at their parting on a Vancouver railway platform,—tall and rugged, a lean, muscular, middle-aged man, bidding his son a restrained farewell with a longing look in his eyes. Now he was a wasted shadow. Jack MacRae shivered. He seemed to hear the sable angel's wing-beats over the house.

He looked up at the girl at last.

"You're worn out, aren't you, Dolly?" he said. "Have you been caring for him alone?"

"Uncle Peter helped," she answered. "But I've stayed up and worried, and I am tired, of course. It isn't a very cheerful home-coming, is it, Jack? And he was so pleased when he got your cable from London. Poor old man!"

MacRae got up suddenly. But the clatter of his shoes on the floor recalled him to himself. He sat down again.

"I've got to do something," he asserted.

"There's nothing you can do," Dolly Ferrara said wistfully. "He can't be moved. You can't get a doctor or a nurse. The country's full of people down with the flu. There's only one chance and I've taken that. I wrote a message to Doctor Laidlaw—you remember he used to come here every summer to fish—and Uncle Peter

went across to Sechelt to wire it. I think he'll come if he can, or send some one, don't you? They were such good friends."

"That was a good idea," MacRae nodded. "Laidlaw will certainly come if it's possible."

"And I can keep cool cloths on his head and feed him broth and give him the stuff Doctor Harper left. He said it depended mostly on his own resisting power. If he could throw it off he would. If not—"

She turned her palms out expressively.

"How did you come?" she asked presently.

"Across from Qualicum in a fish carrier to Folly Bay. I borrowed a boat at the Bay and rowed up."

"You must be hungry," she said. "I'll get you something to eat."

"I don't feel much like eating,"—MacRae followed her into the kitchen—"but I can drink a cup of tea."

He sat on a corner of the kitchen table while she busied herself with the kettle and teapot, marveling that in four years everything should apparently remain the same and still suffer such grievous change. There was an air of forlornness about the house which hurt him. The place had run down, as the sands of his father's life were running down. Of the things unchanged the girl he watched was one. Yet as he looked with keener appraisal, he saw that Dolly Ferrara too had changed.

Her dusky cloud of hair was as of old; her wide, dark eyes still mirrored faithfully every shift of feeling, and her incomparable creamy skin was more beautiful than ever. Moving, she had lost none of her lithe grace. And though she had met him as if it had been only yesterday they parted, still there was a difference which somehow eluded him. He could feel it, but it was not to be defined. It struck him for the first time that many who had never seen a battlefield, never heard a screaming shell, nor shuddered at the agony of a dressing station, might still have suffered by and of and through the reactions of war.

They drank their tea and ate a slice of toast in silence. MacRae's comrades in France had called him "Silent" John, because of his lapses into concentrated

thought, his habit of a close mouth when he was hurt or troubled or uncertain. One of the things for which he had liked Dolly Ferrara had been her possession of the same trait, uncommon in a girl. She could sit on the cliffs or lie with him in a rowboat lifting and falling in the Gulf swell, staring at the sea and the sky and the wheeling gulls, dreaming and keeping her dreams shyly to herself,—as he did. They did not always need words for understanding. And so they did not talk now for the sake of talking, pour out words lest silence bring embarrassment. Dolly sat resting her chin in one hand, looking at him impersonally, yet critically, he felt. He smoked a cigarette and held his peace until the labored breathing of the sick man changed to disjointed, muttering, incoherent fragments of speech.

Dolly went to him at once. MacRae lingered to divest himself of the brown overalls so that he stood forth in his uniform, the R.A.F. uniform with the two black wings joined to a circle on his left breast and below that the multicolored ribbon of a decoration. Then he went in to his father.

Donald MacRae was far gone. His son needed no M.D. to tell him that. He burned with a high fever which had consumed his flesh and strength in its furnace. His eyes gleamed unnaturally, with no light of recognition for either his son or Dolly Ferrara. And there was a peculiar tinge to the old man's lips that chilled young MacRae, the mark of the Spanish flu in its deadliest manifestation. It made him ache to see that gray head shift from side to side, to listen to the incoherent babble, to mark the feeble shiftings of the nervous hands.

For a terrible half hour he endured the sight of his father struggling for breath, being racked by spasms of coughing. Then the reaction came and the sick man slept,—not a healthy, restful sleep; it was more like the dying stupor of exhaustion. Young MacRae knew that.

He knew with disturbing certainty that without skilled treatment—perhaps even in spite of that—his father's life was a matter of hours. Again he and Dolly Ferrara tiptoed out to the room where the fire glowed on the hearth. MacRae sat thinking. Dusk was coming on, the long twilight shortened by the overcast sky. MacRae glowered at the fire. The girl watched him expectantly.

"I have an idea," he said at last. "It's worth trying."

He opened his bag and, taking out the wedge-shaped cap of the birdmen, set it on his head and went out. He took the same path he had followed home. On top of the cliff he stopped to look down on Squitty Cove. In a camp or two ashore

the supper fires of the rowboat trollers were burning. Through the narrow entrance the gasboats were chugging in to anchorage, one close upon the heels of another.

MacRae considered the power trollers. He shook his head.

"Too slow," he muttered. "Too small. No place to lay him only a doghouse cabin and a fish hold."

He strode away along the cliffs. It was dark now. But he had ranged all that end of Squitty in daylight and dark, in sun and storm, for years, and the old instinctive sense of direction, of location, had not deserted him. In a little while he came out abreast of Cradle Bay. The Gower house, all brightly gleaming windows, loomed near. He struck down through the dead fern, over the unfenced lawn.

Halfway across that he stopped. A piano broke out loudly. Figures flittered by the windows, gliding, turning. MacRae hesitated. He had come reluctantly, driven by his father's great need, uneasily conscious that Donald MacRae, had he been cognizant, would have forbidden harshly the request his son had come to make. Jack MacRae had the feeling that his father would rather die than have him ask anything of Horace Gower.

He did not know why. He had never been told why. All he knew was that his father would have nothing to do with Gower, never mentioned the name voluntarily, let his catch of salmon rot on the beach before he would sell to a Gower cannery boat,—and had enjoined upon his son the same aloofness from all things Gower. Once, in answer to young Jack's curious question, his natural "why," Donald MacRae had said:

"I knew the man long before you were born, Johnny. I don't like him. I despise him. Neither I nor any of mine shall ever truck and traffic with him and his. When you are a man and can understand, I shall tell you more of this."

But he had never told. It had never been a mooted point. Jack MacRae knew Horace Gower only as a short, stout, elderly man of wealth and consequence, a power in the salmon trade. He knew a little more of the Gower clan now than he did before the war. MacRae had gone overseas with the Seventh Battalion. His company commander had been Horace Gower's son. Certain aspects of that young man had not heightened MacRae's esteem for the Gower family. Moreover, he resented this elaborate summer home of Gower's standing on land

he had always known to be theirs, the MacRaes'. That puzzled him, as well as affronted his sense of ownership.

But these things, he told himself, were for the moment beside the point. He felt his father's life trembling in the balance. He wanted to see affectionate, prideful recognition light up those gray-blue eyes again, even if briefly. He had come six thousand miles to cheer the old man with a sight of his son, a son who had been a credit to him. And he was willing to pocket pride, to call for help from the last source he would have chosen, if that would avail.

He crossed the lawn, waited a few seconds till the piano ceased its syncopated frenzy and the dancers stopped.

Betty Gower herself opened at his knock.

"Is Mr. Gower here?" he asked.

"Yes. Won't you come in?" she asked courteously.

The door opened direct into a great living room, from the oak floor of which the rugs had been rolled aside for dancing. As MacRae came in out of the murk along the cliffs, his one good eye was dazzled at first. Presently he made out a dozen or more persons in the room,—young people nearly all. They were standing and sitting about. One or two were in khaki—officers. There seemed to be an abrupt cessation of chatter and laughing at his entrance. It did not occur to him at once that these people might be avidly curious about a strange young man in the uniform of the Flying Corps. He apprehended that curiosity, though, politely veiled as it was. In the same glance he became aware of a middle-aged woman sitting on a couch by the fire. Her hair was pure white, elaborately arranged, her eyes were a pale blue, her skin very delicate and clear. Her face somehow reminded Jack MacRae of a faded rose leaf.

In a deep armchair near her sat Horace Gower. A young man, a very young man, in evening clothes, holding a long cigarette daintily in his fingers, stood by Gower.

MacRae followed Betty Gower across the room to her father. She turned. Her quick eyes had picked out the insignia of rank on MacRae's uniform.

"Papa," she said. "Captain—" she hesitated.

"MacRae," he supplied.

"Captain MacRae wishes to see you."

MacRae wished no conventionalities. He did not want to be introduced, to be shaken by the hand, to have Gower play host. He forestalled all this, if indeed it threatened.

"I have just arrived home on leave," he said briefly. "I find my father desperately ill in our house at the Cove. You have a very fast and able cruiser. Would you care to put her at my disposal so that I may take my father to Vancouver? I think that is his only chance."

Gower had risen. He was not an imposing man. At his first glimpse of MacRae's face, the pink-patched eye, the uniform, he flushed slightly,—recalling that afternoon.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You'd be welcome to the *Arrow* if she were here. But I sent her to Nanaimo an hour after she landed us. Are you Donald MacRae's boy?"

"Yes," MacRae said. "Thank you. That's all."

He had said his say and got his answer. He turned to go. Betty Gower put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Listen," she put in eagerly. "Is there anything any of us could do to help? Nursing or—or anything?"

MacRae shook his head.

"There is a girl with him," he answered. "Nothing but skilled medical aid would help him at this stage. He has the flu, and the fever is burning his life out."

"The flu, did you say?" The young man with the long cigarette lost his bored air. "Hang it, it isn't very sporting, is it, to expose us—these ladies—to the infection? I'll say it isn't."

Jack MacRae fixed the young man—and he was not, after all, much younger than MacRae—with a steady stare in which a smoldering fire glowed. He bestowed a scrutiny while one might count five, under which the other's gaze began to shift uneasily. A constrained silence fell in the room.

"I would suggest that you learn how to put on a gas mask," MacRae said coldly, at last.

Then he walked out. Betty Gower followed him to the door, but he had asked his question and there was nothing to wait for. He did not even look back until he reached the cliff. He did not care if they thought him rude, ill-bred. Then, as he reached the cliff, the joyous jazz broke out again and shadows of dancing couples flitted by the windows. MacRae looked once and went on, moody because chance had decreed that he should fail.



When a ruddy dawn broke through the gray cloud battalions Jack MacRae sat on a chair before the fireplace in the front room, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his cupped palms. He had been sitting like that for two hours. The fir logs had wasted away to a pile of white ash spotted with dying coals. MacRae sat heedless that the room was growing cold.

He did not even lift his head at the sound of heavy footsteps on the porch. He did not move until a voice at the door spoke his name in accents of surprise.

"Is that you, yourself, Johnny MacRae?"

The voice was deep and husky and kind, and it was not native to Squitty Cove. MacRae lifted his head to see his father's friend and his own, Doctor Laidlaw, physician and fisherman, bulking large. And beyond the doctor he saw a big white launch at anchor inside the Cove.

"Yes," MacRae said.

"How's your father?" Laidlaw asked. "That wire worried me. I made the best time I could."

"He's dead," MacRae answered evenly. "He died at midnight."



CHAPTER IV

INHERITANCE

On a morning four days later Jack MacRae sat staring into the coals on the hearth. It was all over and done with, the house empty and still, Dolly Ferrara gone back to her uncle's home. Even the Cove was bare of fishing craft. He was alone under his own roof-tree, alone with an oppressive silence and his own thoughts.

These were not particularly pleasant thoughts. There was nothing mawkish about Jack MacRae. He had never been taught to shrink from the inescapable facts of existence. Even if he had, the war would have cured him of that weakness. As it was, twelve months in the infantry, nearly three years in the air, had taught him that death is a commonplace after a man sees about so much of it, that it is many times a welcome relief from suffering either of the body or the spirit. He chose to believe that it had proved so to his father. So his feelings were not that strange mixture of grief and protest which seizes upon those to whom death is the ultimate tragedy, the irrevocable disaster, when it falls upon some one near and dear.

No, Jack MacRae, brooding by his fire, was lonely and saddened and heavy-hearted. But beneath these neutral phases there was slowly gathering a flood of feeling unrelated to his father's death, more directly based indeed upon Donald MacRae's life, upon matters but now revealed to him, which had their root in that misty period when his father was a young man like himself.

On the table beside him lay an inch-thick pile of note paper all closely written upon in the clear, small pen-script of his father.

My son: [MacRae had written] I have a feeling lately that I may never see you again. Not that I fear you will be killed. I no longer have that fear. I seem to have an unaccountable assurance that having come through so much you will go on safely to the end. But I'm not so sure about myself. I'm aging too fast. I've been told my heart is bad. And I've lost heart lately. Things have gone against me. There is nothing new in that. For thirty years I've been losing out to a greater or less extent in most of the things I undertook—that is, the important things.

Perhaps I didn't bring the energy and feverish ambition I might have to my undertakings. Until you began to grow up I accepted things more or less passively as I found them.

Until you have a son of your own, until you observe closely other men and their sons, my boy, you will scarcely realize how close we two have been to each other. We've been what they call good chums. I've taken a secret pride in seeing you grow and develop into a man. And while I tried to give you an education—broken into, alas, by this unending war—such as would enable you to hold your own in a world which deals harshly with the ignorant, the incompetent, the untrained, it was also my hope to pass on to you something of material value.

This land which runs across Squitty Island from the Cove to Cradle Bay and extending a mile back—in all a trifle over six hundred acres—was to be your inheritance. You were born here. I know that no other place means quite so much to you as this old log house with the meadow behind it, and the woods, and the sea grumbling always at our doorstep. Long ago this place came into my hands at little more cost than the taking. It has proved a refuge to me, a stronghold against all comers, against all misfortune. I have spent much labor on it, and most of it has been a labor of love. It has begun to grow valuable. In years to come it will be of far greater value. I had hoped to pass it on to you intact, unencumbered, an inheritance of some worth. Land, you will eventually discover, Johnny, is the basis of everything. A man may make a fortune in industry, in the market. He turns to land for permanence, stability. All that is sterling in our civilization has its foundation in the soil.

Out of this land of ours, which I have partially and half-heartedly reclaimed from the wilderness, you should derive a comfortable livelihood, and your children after you.

But I am afraid I must forego that dream and you, my son, your inheritance. It has slipped away from me. How this has come about I wish to make clear to you, so that you will not feel unkindly toward me that you must face the world with no resources beyond your own brain and a sound young body. If it happens that the war ends soon and you come home while I am still alive to welcome you, we can talk this over man to man. But, as I said, my heart is bad. I may not be here. So I am writing all this for you to read. There are many things which you should know—or at least which I should like you to know.

Thirty years ago—

Donald MacRae's real communication to his son began at that point in the long ago when the *Gull* outsailed his sloop and young Horace Gower, smarting with jealousy, struck that savage blow with a pike pole at a man whose fighting hands were tied by a promise. Bit by bit, incident by incident, old Donald traced out of a full heart and bitter memories all the passing years for his son to see and understand. He made Elizabeth Morton, the Morton family, Horace Gower and the Gower kin stand out in bold relief. He told how he, Donald MacRae, a nobody from nowhere, for all they knew, adventuring upon the Pacific Coast, questing carelessly after fortune, had fallen in love with this girl whose family, with less consideration for her feelings and desires than for mutual advantages of land and money and power, favored young Gower and saw nothing but impudent presumption in MacRae.

Young Jack sat staring into the coals, seeing much, understanding more. It was all there in those written pages, a powerful spur to a vivid imagination.

No MacRae had ever lain down unwhipped. Nor had Donald MacRae, his father. Before his bruised face had healed—and young Jack remembered well the thin white scar that crossed his father's cheek bone—Donald MacRae was again pursuing his heart's desire. But he was forestalled there. He had truly said to Elizabeth Morton that she would never have another chance. By force or persuasion or whatsoever means were necessary they had married her out of hand to Horace Gower.

"That must have been she sitting on the couch," Jack MacRae whispered to himself, "that middle-aged woman with the faded rose-leaf face. Lord, Lord, how things get twisted!"

Though they so closed the avenue to a *mésalliance*, still their pride must have smarted because of that clandestine affection, that boldly attempted elopement. Most of all, young Gower must have hated MacRae—with almost the same jealous intensity that Donald MacRae must for a time have hated him—because Gower apparently never forgot and never forgave. Long after Donald MacRae outgrew that passion Gower had continued secretly to harass him. Certain things could not be otherwise accounted for, Donald MacRae wrote to his son. Gower functioned in the salmon trade, in timber, in politics. In whatever MacRae set on foot, he ultimately discerned the hand of Gower, implacable, hidden, striking at him from under cover.

And so in a land and during a period when men created fortunes easily out of

nothing, or walked carelessly over golden opportunities, Donald MacRae got him no great store of worldly goods, whereas Horace Gower, after one venture in which he speedily dissipated an inherited fortune, drove straight to successful outcome in everything he touched. By the time young Jack MacRae outgrew the Island teachers and must go to Vancouver for high school and then to the University of British Columbia, old Donald had been compelled to borrow money on his land to meet these expenses.

Young Jack, sitting by the fire, winced when he thought of that. He had taken things for granted. The war had come in his second year at the university,—and he had gone to the front as a matter of course.

Failing fish prices, poor seasons, other minor disasters had followed,—and always in the background, as old Donald saw it, the Gower influence, malign, vindictive, harboring that ancient grudge.

Whereas in the beginning MacRae had confidently expected by one resource and another to meet easily the obligation he had incurred, the end of it was the loss, during the second year of the war, of all the MacRae lands on Squitty,—all but a rocky corner of a few acres which included the house and garden. Old Donald had segregated that from his holdings when he pledged the land, as a matter of sentiment, not of value. All the rest—acres of pasture, cleared and grassed, stretches of fertile ground, blocks of noble timber still uncut—had passed through the hands of mortgage holders, through bank transfers, by devious and tortuous ways, until the title rested in Horace Gower,—who had promptly built the showy summer house on Cradle Bay to flaunt in his face, so old Donald believed and told his son.

It was a curious document, and it made a profound impression on Jack MacRae. He passed over the underlying motive, a man justifying himself to his son for a failure which needed no justifying. He saw now why his father tabooed all things Gower, why indeed he must have hated Gower as a man who does things in the open hates an enemy who strikes only from cover.

Strangely enough, Jack managed to grasp the full measure of what his father's love for Elizabeth Morton must have been without resenting the secondary part his mother must have played. For old Donald was frank in his story. He made it clear that he had loved Bessie Morton with an all-consuming passion, and that when this burned itself out he had never experienced so headlong an affection again. He spoke with kindly regard for his wife, but she played little or no part in

his account. And Jack had only a faint memory of his mother, for she had died when he was seven. His father filled his eyes. His father's enemies were his. Family ties superimposed on clan clannishness, which is the blood heritage of the Highland Scotch, made it impossible for him to feel otherwise. That blow with a pike pole was a blow directed at his own face. He took up his father's feud instinctively, not even stopping to consider whether that was his father's wish or intent.

He got up out of his chair at last and went outside, down to where the Cove waters, on a rising tide, lapped at the front of a rude shed. Under this shed, secure on a row of keel-blocks, rested a small knockabout-rigged boat, stowed away from wind and weather, her single mast, boom, and gaff unshipped and slung to rafters, her sail and running gear folded and coiled and hung beyond the wood-rats' teeth. Beside this sailing craft lay a long blue dugout, also on blocks, half filled with water to keep it from checking.

These things belonged to him. He had left them lying about when he went away to France. And old Donald had put them here safely against his return. Jack stared at them, blinking. He was full of a dumb protest. It didn't seem right. Nothing seemed right. In young MacRae's mind there was nothing terrible about death. He had become used to that. But he had imagination. He could see his father going on day after day, month after month, year after year, enduring, uncomplaining. Gauged by what his father had written, by what Dolly Ferrara had supplied when he questioned her, these last months must have been gray indeed. And he had died without hope or comfort or a sight of his son.

That was what made young MacRae blink and struggle with a lump in his throat. It hurt.

He walked away around the end of the Cove without definite objective. He was suddenly restless, seeking relief in movement. Sitting still and thinking had become unbearable. He found himself on the path that ran along the cliffs and followed that, coming out at last on the neck of Point Old where he could look down on the broken water that marked Poor Man's Rock.

The lowering cloud bank of his home-coming day had broken in heavy rain. That had poured itself out and given place to a southeaster. The wind was gone now, the clouds breaking up into white drifting patches with bits of blue showing between, and the sun striking through in yellow shafts which lay glittering areas here and there on the Gulf. The swell that runs after a blow still thundered all

along the southeast face of Squitty, bursting *boom—boom—boom* against the cliffs, shooting spray in white cascades. Over the Rock the sea boiled.

There were two rowboats trolling outside the heavy backwash from the cliffs. MacRae knew them both. Peter Ferrara was in one, Long Tom Spence in the other. They did not ride those gray-green ridges for pleasure, nor drop sidling into those deep watery hollows for joy of motion. They were out for fish, which meant to them food and clothing. That was their work.

They were the only fisher folk abroad that morning. The gasboat men had flitted to more sheltered grounds. MacRae watched these two lift and fall in the marching swells. It was cold. Winter sharpened his teeth already. The rowers bent to their oars, tossing and lurching. MacRae reflected upon their industry. In France he had eaten canned salmon bearing the Folly Bay label, salmon that might have been taken here by the Rock, perhaps by the hands of these very men, by his own father. Still, that was unlikely. Donald MacRae had never sold a fish to a Gower collector. Nor would he himself, young MacRae swore under his breath, looking sullenly down upon the Rock.

Day after day, month after month, his father had tugged at the oars, hauled on the line, rowing around and around Poor Man's Rock, skirting the kelp at the cliff's foot, keeping body and soul together with unremitting labor in sun and wind and rain, trying to live and save that little heritage of land for his son.

Jack MacRae sat down on a rock beside a bush and thought about this sadly. He could have saved his father much if he had known. He could have assigned his pay. There was a government allowance. He could have invoked the War Relief Act against foreclosure. Between them they could have managed. But he understood quite clearly why his father made no mention of his difficulties. He would have done the same under the same circumstances himself, played the game to its bitter end without a cry.

But Donald MacRae had made a long, hard fight only to lose in the end, and his son, with full knowledge of the loneliness and discouragement and final hopelessness that had been his father's lot, was passing slowly from sadness to a cumulative anger. That cottage amid its green grounds bright in a patch of sunshine did not help to soften him. It stood on land reclaimed from the forest by his father's labor. It should have belonged to him, and it had passed into hands that already grasped too much. For thirty years Gower had made silent war on Donald MacRae because of a woman. It seemed incredible that a grudge born of

jealousy should run so deep, endure so long. But there were the facts. Jack MacRae accepted them; he could not do otherwise. He came of a breed which has handed its feuds from generation to generation, interpreting literally the code of an eye for an eye.

So that as he sat there brooding, it was perhaps a little unfortunate that the daughter of a man whom he was beginning to regard as a forthright enemy should have chosen to come to him, tripping soundlessly over the moss.

He did not hear Betty Gower until she was beside him. Her foot clicked on a stone and he looked up. Betty was all in white, a glow in her cheeks and in her eyes, bareheaded, her reddish-brown hair shining in a smooth roll above her ears.

"I hear you have lost your father," she said simply. "I'm awfully sorry."

Some peculiar quality of sympathy in her tone touched MacRae deeply. His eyes shifted for a moment to the uneasy sea. The lump in his throat troubled him again. Then he faced her again.

"Thanks," he said slowly. "I dare say you mean it, although I don't know why you should. But I'd rather not talk about that. It's done."

"I suppose that's the best way," she agreed, although she gave him a doubtful sort of glance, as if she scarcely knew how to take part of what he said. "Isn't it lovely after the storm? Pretty much all the civilized world must feel a sort of brightness and sunshine to-day, I imagine."

"Why?" he asked. It seemed to him a most uncalled-for optimism.

"Why, haven't you heard that the war is over?" she smiled. "Surely some one has told you?"

He shook his head.

"It is a fact," she declared. "The armistice was signed yesterday at eleven. Aren't you glad?"

MacRae reflected a second. A week earlier he would have thrown up his cap and whooped. Now the tremendously important happening left him unmoved, unbelievably indifferent. He was not stirred at all by the fact of acknowledged victory, of cessation from killing.

"I should be, I suppose," he muttered. "I know a lot of fellows will be—and their people. So far as I'm concerned—right now—"

He made a quick gesture with his hands. He couldn't explain how he felt—that the war had suddenly and imperiously been relegated to the background for him. Temporarily or otherwise, as a spur to his emotions, the war had ceased to function. He didn't want to talk. He wanted to be let alone, to think.

Yet he was conscious of a wish not to offend, to be courteous to this clear-eyed young woman who looked at him with frank interest. He wondered why he should be of any interest to her. MacRae had never been shy. Shyness is nearly always born of acute self-consciousness. Being free from that awkward inturning of the mind Jack MacRae was not thoroughly aware of himself as a likable figure in any girl's sight. Four years overseas had set a mark on many such as himself. A man cannot live through manifold chances of death, face great perils, do his work under desperate risks and survive, without some trace of his deeds being manifest in his bearing. Those tried by fire are sure of themselves, and it shows in their eyes. Besides, Jack MacRae was twenty-four, clear-skinned, vigorous, straight as a young fir tree, a handsome boy in uniform. But he was not quick to apprehend that these things stirred a girl's fancy, nor did he know that the gloomy something which clouded his eyes made Betty Gower want to comfort him.

"I think I understand," she said evenly,—when in truth she did not understand at all. "But after a while you'll be glad. I know I should be if I were in the army, although of course no matter how horrible it all was it had to be done. For a long time I wanted to go to France myself, to do *something*. I was simply wild to go. But they wouldn't let me."

"And I," MacRae said slowly, "didn't want to go at all—and I had to go."

"Oh," she remarked with a peculiar interrogative inflection. Her eyebrows lifted. "Why did you have to? You went over long before the draft was thought of."

"Because I'd been taught that my flag and country really meant something," he said. "That was all; and it was quite enough in the way of compulsion for a good many like myself who didn't hanker to stick bayonets through men we'd never seen, nor shoot them, nor blow them up with hand grenades, nor kill them ten thousand feet in the air and watch them fall, turning over and over like a winged duck. But these things seemed necessary. They said a country worth living in was worth fighting for."

"And isn't it?" Betty Gower challenged promptly.

MacRae looked at her and at the white cottage, at the great Gulf seas smashing on the rocks below, at the far vista of sea and sky and the shore line faintly purple in the distance. His gaze turned briefly to the leafless tops of maple and alder rising out of the hollow in which his father's body lay—in a corner of the little plot that was left of all their broad acres—and came back at last to this fair daughter of his father's enemy.

"The country is, yes," he said. "Anything that's worth having is worth fighting for. But that isn't what they meant, and that isn't the way it has worked out."

He was not conscious of the feeling in his voice. He was thinking with exaggerated bitterness that the Germans in Belgium had dealt less hardly with a conquered people than this girl's father had dealt with his.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand what you mean by that," she remarked. Her tone was puzzled. She looked at him, frankly curious.

But he could not tell her what he meant. He had a feeling that she was in no way responsible. He had an instinctive aversion to rudeness. And while he was absolving himself of any intention to make war on her he was wondering if her mother, long ago, had been anything like Miss Betty Gower. It seemed odd to think that this level-eyed girl's mother might have been *his* mother,—if she had been made of stiffer metal, or if the west wind had blown that afternoon.

He wondered if she knew. Not likely, he decided. It wasn't a story either Horace Gower or his wife would care to tell their children.

So he did not try to tell her what he meant. He withdrew into his shell. And when Betty Gower seated herself on a rock and evinced an inclination to quiz him about things he did not care to be quizzed about, he lifted his cap, bade her a courteous good-by, and walked back toward the Cove.



CHAPTER V

FROM THE BOTTOM UP

MACRAE did nothing but mark time until he found himself a plain citizen once more. He could have remained in the service for months without risk and with much profit to himself. But the fighting was over. The Germans were whipped. That had been the goal. Having reached it, MacRae, like thousands of other young men, had no desire to loaf in a uniform subject to military orders while the politicians wrangled.

But even when he found himself a civilian again, master of his individual fortunes, he was still a trifle at a loss. He had no definite plan. He was rather at sea, because all the things he had planned on doing when he came home had gone by the board. So many things which had seemed good and desirable had been contingent upon his father. Every plan he had ever made for the future had included old Donald MacRae and those wide acres across the end of Squitty. He had been deprived of both, left without a ready mark to shoot at. The flood of war had carried him far. The ebb of it had set him back on his native shores,—stranded him there, so to speak, to pick up the broken threads of his old life as best he could.

He had no quarrel with that. But he did have a feud with circumstance, a profound resentment with the past for its hard dealing with his father, for the blankness of old Donald's last year or two on earth. And a good deal of this focused on Horace Gower and his works.

"He might have let up on the old man," Jack MacRae would say to himself resentfully. He would lie awake in the dark thinking about this. "We were doing our bit. He might have stopped putting spokes in our wheel while the war was on."

The fact of the matter is that young MacRae was deeply touched in his family pride as well as his personal sense of injustice. Gower had deeply injured his father, therefore it was any MacRae's concern. It made no difference that the first blow in this quarrel had been struck before he was born. He smarted under it and all that followed. His only difficulty was to discern a method of repaying in kind, which he was thoroughly determined to do.

He saw no way, if the truth be told. He did not even contemplate inflicting physical injury on Horace Gower. That would have been absurd. But he wanted to hurt him, to make him squirm, to heap trouble on the man and watch him break down under the load. And he did not see how he possibly could. Gower was too well fortified. Four years of war experience, which likewise embraced a considerable social experience, had amply shown Jack MacRae the subtle power of money, of political influence, of family connections, of commercial prestige.

All these things were on Gower's side. He was impregnable. MacRae was not a fool. Neither was he inclined to pessimism. Yet so far as he could see, the croakers were not lying when they said that here at home the war had made the rich richer and the poor poorer. It was painfully true in his own case. He had given four years of himself to his country, gained an honorable record, and lost everything else that was worth having.

What he had lost in a material way he meant to get back. How, he had not yet determined. His brain was busy with that problem. And the dying down of his first keen resentment and grief over the death of his father, and that dead father's message to him, merely hardened into a cold resolve to pay off his father's debt to the Gowers and Mortons. MacRae ran true to the traditions of his Highland blood when he lumped them all together.

In this he was directed altogether by the promptings of emotion, and he never questioned the justice of his attitude. But in the practical adjustment of his life to conditions as he found them he adopted a purely rational method.

He took stock of his resources. They were limited enough. A few hundred dollars in back pay and demobilization gratuities; a sound body, now that his injured eye was all but healed; an abounding confidence in himself,—which he had earned the right to feel. That was all. Ambition for place, power, wealth, he did not feel as an imperative urge. He perceived the value and desirability of these things. Only he saw no short straight road to any one of them.

For four years he had been fed, clothed, directed, master of his own acts only in supreme moments. There was an unconscious reaction from that high pitch. Being his own man again and a trifle uncertain what to do, he did nothing at all for a time. He made one trip to Vancouver, to learn by just what legal processes the MacRae lands had passed into the Gower possession. He found out what he wanted to know easily enough. Gower had got his birthright for a song. Donald MacRae had borrowed six thousand dollars through a broker. The land was

easily worth double, even at wild-land valuation. But old Donald's luck had run true to form. He had not been able to renew the loan. The broker had discounted the mortgage in a pinch. A financial house had foreclosed and sold the place to Gower,—who had been trying to buy it for years, through different agencies. His father's papers told young MacRae plainly enough through what channels the money had gone. Chance had functioned on the wrong side for his father.

So Jack went back to Squitty and stayed in the old house, talked with the fishermen, spent a lot of his time with old Peter Ferrara and Dolly. Always he was casting about for a course of action which would give him scope for two things upon which his mind was set: to get the title to that six hundred acres revested in the MacRae name, and, in Jack's own words to Dolores Ferrara, to take a fall out of Horace Gower that would jar the bones of his ancestors.

With Christmas the Ferrara clan gathered at the Cove, all the stout and able company of Dolly Ferrara's menfolk. It had seemed to MacRae a curious thing that Dolly was the only woman of all the Ferraras. There had been mothers in the Ferrara family, or there could not have been so many capable uncles and cousins. But in MacRae's memory there had never been any mothers or sisters or daughters save Dolly.

There were nine male Ferraras when Jack MacRae went to France. Dolores' father was dead. Uncle Peter was a bachelor. He had two brothers, and each brother had bred three sons. Four of these sons had left their boats and gear to go overseas. Two of them would never come back. The other two were home,—one after a whiff of gas at Ypres, the other with a leg shorter by two inches than when he went away. These two made nothing of their disabilities, however; they were home and they were nearly as good as ever. That was enough for them. And with the younger boys and their fathers they came to old Peter's house for a week at Christmas, after an annual custom. These gatherings in the old days had always embraced Donald MacRae and his son. And his son was glad that it included him now. He felt a little less alone.

They were of the sea, these Ferraras, Castilian Spanish, tempered and diluted by three generations in North America. Their forebears might have sailed in caravels. They knew the fishing grounds of the British Columbia coast as a schoolboy knows his *a, b, c*'s. They would never get rich, but they were independent fishermen, making a good living. And they were as clannish as the Scotch. All of them had chipped in to send Dolly to school in Vancouver. Old Peter could never have done that, MacRae knew, on what he could make trolling

around Poor Man's Rock. Peter had been active with gill net and seine when Jack MacRae was too young to take thought of the commercial end of salmon fishing. He was about sixty-five now, a lean, hardy old fellow, but he seldom went far from Squitty Cove. There was Steve and Frank and Vincent and Manuel of the younger generation, and Manuel and Peter and Joaquin of the elder. Those three had been contemporary with Donald MacRae. They esteemed old Donald. Jack heard many things about his father's early days on the Gulf that were new to him, that made his blood tingle and made him wish he had lived then too. Thirty years back the Gulf of Georgia was no place for any but two-handed men.

He heard also, in that week of casual talk among the Ferraras, certain things said, statements made that suggested a possibility which never seemed to have occurred to the Ferraras themselves.

"The Folly Bay pack of blueback was a whopper last summer," Vincent Ferrara said once. "They must have cleaned up a barrel of money."

Folly Bay was Gower's cannery.

"Well, he didn't make much of it out of us," old Manuel grunted. "We should worry."

"Just the same, he ought to be made to pay more for his fish. He ought to pay what they're worth, for a change," Vincent drawled. "He makes about a hundred trollers eat out of his hand the first six weeks of the season. If somebody would put on a couple of good, fast carriers, and start buying fish as soon as he opens his cannery, I'll bet he'd pay more than twenty-five cents for a five-pound salmon."

"Maybe. But that's been tried and didn't work. Every buyer that ever cut in on Gower soon found himself up against the Packers' Association when he went into the open market with his fish. And a wise man," old Manuel grinned, "don't even figure on monkeying with a buzz saw, sonny."

Not long afterward Jack MacRae got old Manuel in a corner and asked him what he meant.

"Well," he said, "it's like this. When the bluebacks first run here in the spring, they're pretty small, too small for canning. But the fresh fish markets in town take 'em and palm 'em off on the public for salmon trout. So there's an odd fresh-fish buyer cruises around here and picks up a few loads of salmon between the

end of April and the middle of June. The Folly Bay cannery opens about then, and the buyers quit. They go farther up the coast. Partly because there's more fish, mostly because nobody has ever made any money bucking Gower for salmon on his own grounds."

"Why?" MacRae asked bluntly.

"Nobody knows *exactly* why," Manuel replied. "A feller can guess, though. You know the fisheries department has the British Columbia coast cut up into areas, and each area is controlled by some packer as a concession. Well, Gower has the Folly Bay license, and a couple of purse-seine licenses, and that just about gives him the say-so on all the waters around Squitty, besides a couple of good bays on the Vancouver Island side and the same on the mainland. He belongs to the Packers' Association. They ain't supposed to control the local market. But the way it works out they really do. At least, when an independent fish buyer gets cuttin' in strong on a packer's territory, he generally finds himself in trouble to sell in Vancouver unless he's got a cast-iron contract. That is, he can't sell enough to make any money. Any damn fool can make a living.

"At the top of the island here there's a bunch that has homesteads. They troll in the summer. They deal at the Folly Bay cannery store. Generally they're in the hole by spring. Even if they ain't they have to depend on Folly Bay to market their catch. The cannery's a steady buyer, once it opens. They can't always depend on the fresh-fish buyer, even if he pays a few cents more. So once the cannery opens, Gower has a bunch of trollers ready to deliver salmon, at most any price he cares to name. And he generally names the lowest price on the coast. He don't have no competition for a month or so. If there is a little there's ways of killin' it. So he sets his own price. The trollers can take it or leave it."

Old Manuel stopped to light his pipe.

"For three seasons," said he, "Gower has bought blueback salmon the first month of the season for twenty-five cents or less—fish that run three to four pounds. And there hasn't been a time when salmon could be bought in a Vancouver fresh-fish market for less than twenty-five cents a pound."

"Huh!" MacRae grunted.

It set him thinking. He had a sketchy knowledge of the salmon packer's monopoly of cannery sites and pursuing licenses and waters. He had heard more or less talk among fishermen of agreements in restraint of competition among

the canneries. But he had never supposed it to be quite so effective as Manuel Ferrara believed.

Even if it were, a gentleman's agreement of that sort, being a matter of profit rather than principle, was apt to be broken by any member of the combination who saw a chance to get ahead of the rest.

MacRae took passage for Vancouver the second week in January with a certain plan weaving itself to form in his mind,—a plan which promised action and money and other desirable results if he could carry it through.



CHAPTER VI

THE SPRINGBOARD

With a basic knowledge to start from, any reasonably clever man can digest an enormous amount of information about any given industry in a very brief time. Jack MacRae spent three weeks in Vancouver as a one-man commission, self-appointed, to inquire into the fresh-salmon trade. He talked to men who caught salmon and to men who sold them, both wholesale and retail. He apprised himself of the ins and outs of salmon canning, and of the independent fish collector who owned his own boat, financed himself, and chanced the market much as a farmer plants his seed, trusts to the weather, and makes or loses according to the yield and market,—two matters over which he can have no control.

MacRae learned before long that old Manuel Ferrara was right when he said no man could profitably buy salmon unless he had a cast-iron agreement either with a cannery or a big wholesaler. MacRae soon saw that the wholesaler stood like a wall between the fishermen and those who ate fish. They could make or break a buyer. MacRae was not long running afoul of the rumor that the wholesale fish men controlled the retail price of fresh fish by the simple method of controlling the supply, which they managed by coöperation instead of competition among themselves. He heard this stated. And more,—that behind the big dealers stood the shadowy figure of the canning colossus. This was told him casually by fishermen. Fish buyers repeated it, sometimes with a touch of indignation. That was one of their wails,—the fish combine. It was air-tight, they said. The packers had a strangle hold on the fishing waters, and the big local fish houses had the same unrelenting grip on the market.

Therefore the ultimate consumer—whose exploitation was the prize plum of commercial success—paid thirty cents per pound for spring salmon that a fisherman chivied about in the tumbling Gulf seas fifty miles up-coast had to take fourteen cents for. As for the salmon packers, the men who pack the good red fish in small round tins which go to all the ends of the earth to feed hungry folk,—well, no one knew *their* profits. Their pack was all exported. The back yards of Europe are strewn with empty salmon cans bearing a British Columbia label. But they made money enough to be a standing grievance to those unable to

get in on this bonanza.

MacRae, however, was chiefly concerned with the local trade in fresh salmon. His plan didn't look quite so promising as when he mulled over it at Squitty Cove. He put out feelers and got no hold. A fresh-fish buyer operating without approved market connections might make about such a living as the fishermen he bought from. To Jack MacRae, eager and sanguine, making a living was an inconspicuous detail. Making a living,—that was nothing to him. A more definite spur roweled his flank.

It looked like an air-tight proposition, he admitted, at last. But, he said to himself, anything air-tight could be punctured. And undoubtedly a fine flow of currency would result from such a puncture. So he kept on looking about, asking casual questions, listening. In the language of the street he was getting wise.

Incidentally he enjoyed himself. The battle ground had been transferred to Paris. The pen, the typewriter, and the press dispatch, with immense reserves of oratory and printer's ink, had gone into action. And the soldiers were coming home,—officers of the line and airmen first, since to these leave and transportation came easily, now that the guns were silent. MacRae met fellows he knew. A good many of them were well off, had homes in Vancouver. They were mostly young and glad the big show was over. And they had the social instinct. During intervals of fighting they had rubbed elbows with French and British people of consequence. They had a mind to enjoy themselves.

MacRae had a record in two squadrons. He needed no press-agenting when he met another R.A.F. man. So he found himself invited to homes, the inside of which he would otherwise never have seen, and to pleasant functions among people who would never have known of his existence save for the circumstance of war. Pretty, well-bred girls smiled at him, partly because airmen with notable records were still a novelty, and partly because Jack MacRae was worth a second look from any girl who was fancy-free. Matrons were kind to him because their sons said he was the right sort, and some of these same matrons mothered him because he was like boys they knew who had gone away to France and would never come back.

This was very pleasant. MacRae was normal in every respect. He liked to dance. He liked glittering lights and soft music. He liked nice people. He liked people who were nice to him. But he seldom lost sight of his objective. These people could relax and give themselves up to enjoyment because they were "heeled"—

as a boy lieutenant slangily put it—to MacRae.

"It's a great game, Jack, if you don't weaken," he said. "But a fellow can't play it through on a uniform and a war record. I'm having a top-hole time, but it'll be different when I plant myself at a desk in some broker's office at a hundred and fifty a month. It's mixed pickles, for a fact. You can't buy your way into this sort of thing. And you can't stay in it without a bank roll."

Which was true enough. Only the desire to "see it through" socially was not driving Jack MacRae. He had a different target, and his eye did not wander far from the mark. And perhaps because of this, chance and his social gadding about gave him the opening he sought when he least expected to find one.

To be explicit, he happened to be one of an after-theater party at an informal supper dance in the Granada, which is to Vancouver what the Biltmore is to New York or the Fairmont to San Francisco,—a place where one can see everybody that is anybody if one lingers long enough. And almost the first man he met was a stout, ruddy-faced youngster about his own age. They had flown in the same squadron until "Stubby" Abbott came a cropper and was invalided home.

Stubby fell upon Jack MacRae, pounded him earnestly on the back, and haled him straight to a table where two women were sitting.

"Mother," he said to a plump, middle-aged woman, "here's Silent John MacRae."

Her eyes lit up pleasantly.

"I've heard of you," she said, and her extended hand put the pressure of the seal of sincerity on her words. "I've wanted to thank you. You can scarcely know what you did for us. Stubby's the only man in the family, you know."

MacRae smiled.

"Why," he said easily, "little things like that were part of the game. Stubb used to pull off stuff like that himself now and then."

"Anyway, we can thank God it's over," Mrs. Abbott said fervently. "Pardon me,—my daughter, Mr. MacRae."

Nelly Abbott was small, tending to plumpness like her mother. She was very fair with eyes of true violet, a baby-doll sort of young woman, and she took possession of Jack MacRae as easily and naturally as if she had known him for

years. They drifted away in a dance, sat the next one out together with Stubby and a slim young thing in orange satin whose talk ran undeviatingly upon dances and sports and motor trips, past and anticipated. Listening to her, Jack MacRae fell dumb. Her father was worth half a million. Jack wondered how much of it he would give to endow his daughter with a capacity for thought. A label on her program materialized to claim her presently. Stubby looked after her and grinned. MacRae looked thoughtful. The girl was pretty, almost beautiful. She looked like Dolores Ferrara, dark, creamy-skinned, seductive. And MacRae was comparing the two to Dolores' advantage.

Nelly Abbott was eyeing MacRae.

"Tessie bores you, eh?" she said bluntly.

MacRae smiled. "Her flow of profound utterance carries me out of my depth, I'm afraid," said he. "I can't follow her."

"She'd lead you a chase if you tried," Stubby grinned and sauntered away to smoke.

"Is that sarcasm?" Nelly drawled. "I wonder if you are called Silent John because you stop talking now and then to think? Most of us don't, you know. Tell me," she changed the subject abruptly, "did you know Norman Gower overseas?"

"He was an officer in the battalion I went over with," MacRae replied. "I went over in the ranks, you see. So I couldn't very well know him. And I never met him after I transferred to the air service."

"I just wondered," Nelly went on. "I know Norman rather well. It has been whispered about that he pulled every string to keep away from the front,—that all he has done over there is to hold down cushy jobs in England. Did you ever hear any such talk?"

"We were too busy to gossip about the boys at home, except to envy them." MacRae evaded direct reply, and Nelly did not follow it up.

"I see his sister over there. Betty is a dear girl. That's she talking to Stubby. Come over and meet her. They've been up on their island for a long time, while the flu raged."

MacRae couldn't very well avoid it without seeming rude or making an explanation which he did not intend to make to any one. His grudge against the

Gower clan was focused on Horace Gower. His feeling had not abated a jot. But it was a personal matter, something to remain locked in his own breast. So he perforce went with Nelly Abbott and was duly presented to Miss Elizabeth Gower. And he had the next dance with her, also for convention's sake.

While they stood chatting a moment, the four of them, Stubby said to MacRae:

"Who are you with, Jack?"

"The Robbin-Steeles."

"If I don't get a chance to talk to you again, come out to the house to-morrow," Stubby said. "The mater said so, and I want to talk to you about something."

The music began and MacRae and Betty Gower slid away in the one-step, that most conversational of dances. But Jack couldn't find himself chatty with Betty Gower. She was graceful and clear-eyed, a vigorously healthy girl with a touch of color in her cheeks that came out of Nature's rouge pot. But MacRae was subtly conscious of a stiffness between them.

"After all," Betty said abruptly, when they had circled half the room, "it was worth fighting for, don't you really think?"

For a second MacRae looked down at her, puzzled. Then he remembered.

"Good Heavens!" he said, "is that still bothering you? Do you take everything a fellow says so seriously as that?"

"No. It wasn't so much what you said as the way you said it," she replied. "You were uncompromisingly hostile that day, for some reason. Have you acquired a more equable outlook since?"

"I'm trying," he answered.

"You need coaching in the art of looking on the bright side of things," she smiled.

"Such as clusters of frosted lights, cut glass, diamonds, silk dresses and ropes of pearls," he drawled. "Would you care to take on the coaching job, Miss Gower?"

"I might be persuaded." She looked him frankly in the eyes.

But MacRae would not follow that lead, whatever it might mean. Betty Gower was nice,—he had to admit it. To glide around on a polished floor with his arm

around her waist, her soft hand clasped in his, and her face close to his own, her grayish-blue eyes, which were so very like his own, now smiling and now soberly reflective, was not the way to carry on an inherited feud. He couldn't subject himself to that peculiarly feminine attraction which Betty Gower bore like an aura and nurse a grudge. In fact, he had no grudge against Betty Gower except that she was the daughter of her father. And he couldn't explain to her that he hated her father because of injustice and injury done before either of them was born. In the genial atmosphere of the Granada that sort of thing did not seem nearly so real, so vivid, as when he stood on the cliffs of Squitty listening to the pound of the surf. Then it welled up in him like a flood,—the resentment for all that Gower had made his father suffer, for those thirty years of reprisal which had culminated in reducing his patrimony to an old log house and a garden patch out of all that wide sweep of land along the southern face of Squitty. He looked at Betty and wished silently that she were,—well, Stubby Abbott's sister. He could be as nice as he wanted to then. Whereupon, instinctively feeling himself upon dangerous ground, he diverged from the personal, talked without saying much until the music stopped and they found seats. And when another partner claimed Betty, Jack as a matter of courtesy had to rejoin his own party.

The affair broke up at length. MacRae slept late the next morning. By the time he had dressed and breakfasted and taken a flying trip to Coal Harbor to look over a forty-five-foot fish carrier which was advertised for sale, he bethought himself of Stubby Abbott's request and, getting on a car, rode out to the Abbott home. This was a roomy stone house occupying a slightly corner in the West End,—that sharply defined residential area of Vancouver which real estate agents unctuously speak of as "select." There was half a block of ground in green lawn bordered with rosebushes. The house itself was solid, homely, built for use, and built to endure, all stone and heavy beams, wide windows and deep porches, and a red tile roof lifting above the gray stone walls.

Stubby permitted MacRae a few minutes' exchange of pleasantries with his mother and sister.

"I want to extract some useful information from this man," Stubby said at length. "You can have at him later, Nell. He'll stay to dinner."

"How do you know he will?" Nelly demanded. "He hasn't said so, yet."

"Between you and me, he can't escape," Stubby said cheerfully and led Jack away upstairs into a small cheerful room lined with bookshelves, warmed by

glowing coals in a grate, and with windows that gave a look down on a sandy beach facing the Gulf.

Stubby pushed two chairs up to the fire, waved Jack to one, and extended his own feet to the blaze.

"I've seen the inside of a good many homes in town lately," MacRae observed. "This is the homiest one yet."

"I'll say it is," Stubby agreed. "A place that has been lived in and cared for a long time gets that way, though. Remember some of those old, old places in England and France? This is new compared to that country. Still, my father built this house when the West End was covered with virgin timber."

"How'd you like to be born and grow up in a house that your father built with a vision of future generations of his blood growing up in," Stubby murmured, "and come home crippled after three years in the red mill and find you stood a fat chance of losing it?"

"I wouldn't like it much," MacRae agreed.

But he did not say that he had already undergone the distasteful experience Stubby mentioned as a possibility. He waited for Stubby to go on.

"Well, it's a possibility," Stubby continued, quite cheerfully, however. "I don't propose to allow it to happen. Hang it, I wouldn't blat this to any one but you, Jack. The mater has only a hazy idea of how things stand, and she's an incurable optimist anyway. Nelly and the Infant—you haven't met the Infant yet—don't know anything about it. I tell you it put the breeze up when I got able to go into our affairs and learned how things stood. I thought I'd get mended and then be a giddy idler for a year or so. But it's up to me. I have to get into the collar. Otherwise I should have stayed south all winter. You know we've just got home. I had to loaf in the sun for practically a year. Now I have to get busy. I don't mean to say that the poorhouse stares us in the face, you know, but unless a certain amount of revenue is forthcoming, we simply can't afford to keep up this place.

"And I'd damn well like to keep it going." Stubby paused to light a cigarette. "I like it. It's our home. We'd be deucedly sore at seeing anybody else hang up his hat and call it home. So behold in me an active cannery operator when the season opens, a conscienceless profiteer for sentiment's sake. You live up where

the blueback salmon run, don't you, Jack?"

MacRae nodded.

"How many trollers fish those waters?"

"Anywhere from forty to a hundred, from ten to thirty rowboats."

"The Folly Bay cannery gets practically all that catch?"

MacRae nodded again.

"I'm trying to figure a way of getting some of those blueback salmon," Abbott said crisply. "How can it best be done?"

MacRae thought a minute. A whole array of possibilities popped into his mind. He knew that the Abbots owned the Crow Harbor cannery, in the mouth of Howe Sound just outside Vancouver Harbor. When he spoke he asked a question instead of giving an answer.

"Are you going to buck the Packers' Association?"

"Yes and no," Stubby chuckled. "You do know something about the cannery business, don't you?"

"One or two things," MacRae admitted. "I grew up in the Gulf, remember, among salmon fishermen."

"Well, I'll be a little more explicit," Stubby volunteered. "Briefly, my father, as you know, died while I was overseas. We own the Crow Harbor cannery. I will say that while I was still going to school he started in teaching me the business, and he taught me the way he learned it himself—in the cannery and among fishermen. If I do say it, I know the salmon business from gill net and purse seine to the Iron Chink and bank advances on the season's pack. But Abbott, senior, it seems, wasn't a profiteer. He took the war to heart. His patriotism didn't consist of buying war bonds in fifty-thousand dollar lots and calling it square. He got in wrong by trying to keep the price of fresh fish down locally, and the last year he lived the Crow Harbor cannery only made a normal profit. Last season the plant operated at a loss in the hands of hired men. They simply didn't get the fish. The Fraser River run of sockeye has been going downhill. The river canneries get the fish that do run. Crow Harbor, with a manager who wasn't up on his toes, got very few. I don't believe we will ever see another big sockeye run

in the Fraser anyway. So we shall have to go up-coast to supplement the Howe Sound catch and the few sockeyes we can get from gill-netters.

"The Packers' Association can't hurt me—much. For one thing, I'm a member. For another, I can still swing enough capital so they would hesitate about using pressure. You understand. I've got to make that Crow Harbor plant pay. I must have salmon to do so. I have to go outside my immediate territory to get them. If I could get enough blueback to keep full steam from the opening of the sockeye season until the coho run comes—there's nothing to it. I've been having this matter looked into pretty thoroughly. I can pay twenty per cent. over anything Gower has ever paid for blueback and coin money. The question is, how can I get them positively and in quantity?"

"Buy them," MacRae put in softly.

"Of course," Stubby agreed. "But buying direct means collecting. I have the carriers, true. But where am I going to find men to whom I can turn over a six-thousand-dollar boat and a couple of thousand dollars in cash and say to him, 'Go buy me salmon'? His only interest in the matter is his wage."

"Bonus the crew. Pay 'em percentage on what salmon they bring in."

"I've thought of that," Stubby said between puffs. "But—"

"Or," MacRae made the plunge he had been coming to while Stubby talked, "I'll get them for you. I was going to buy bluebacks around Squitty anyway for the fresh-fish market in town if I can make a sure-delivery connection. I know those grounds. I know a lot of fishermen. If you'll give me twenty per cent. over Gower prices for bluebacks delivered at Crow Harbor I'll get them."

"This grows interesting." Stubby straightened in his chair. "I thought you were going to ranch it! Lord, I remember the night we sat watching for the bombers to come back from a raid and you first told me about that place of yours on Squitty Island. Seems ages ago—yet it isn't long. As I remember, you were planning all sorts of things you and your father would do."

"I can't," MacRae said grimly. "You've been in California for months. You wouldn't hear any mention of my affairs, anyway, if you'd been home. I got back three days before the armistice. My father died of the flu the night I got home. The ranch, or all of it but the old log house I was born in and a patch of ground the size of a town lot, has gone the way you mentioned your home might go if

you don't buck up the business. Things didn't go well with us lately. I have no land to turn to. So I'm for the salmon business as a means to get on my feet."

"Gower got your place?" Abbott hazarded.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Made a guess. I heard he had built a summer home on the southeast end of Squitty. In fact Nelly was up there last summer for a week or so. Hurts, eh, Jack? That little trip to France cost us both something."

MacRae sprang up and walked over to a window. He stood for half a minute staring out to sea, looking in that direction by chance, because the window happened to face that way, to where the Gulf haze lifted above a faint purple patch that was Squitty Island, very far on the horizon.

"I'm not kicking," he said at last. "Not out loud, anyway."

"No," Stubby said affectionately, "I know you're not, old man. Nor am I. But I'm going to get action, and I have a hunch you will too. Now about this fish business. If you think you can get them, I'll certainly go you on that twenty per cent. proposition—up to the point where Gower boosts me out of the game, if that is possible. We shall have to readjust our arrangement then."

"Will you give me a contract to that effect?" MacRae asked.

"Absolutely. We'll get together at the office to-morrow and draft an agreement."

They shook hands to bind the bargain, grinning at each other a trifle self-consciously.

"Have you a suitable boat?" Stubby asked after a little.

"No," MacRae admitted. "But I have been looking around. I find that I can charter one cheaper than I can build—until such time as I make enough to build a fast, able carrier."

"I'll charter you one," Stubby offered. "That's where part of our money is uselessly tied up, in expensive boats that never carried their weight in salmon. I'm going to sell two fifty-footers and a seine boat. There's one called the *Blackbird*, fast, seaworthy rig, you can have at a nominal rate."

"All right," MacRae nodded. "By chartering I have enough cash in hand to

finance the buying. I'm going to start as soon as the bluebacks come and run fresh fish, if I can make suitable connections."

Stubby grinned.

"I can fix that too," he said. "I happen to own some shares in the Terminal Fish Company. The pater organized it to give Vancouver people cheap fish, but somehow it didn't work as he intended. It's a fairly strong concern. I'll introduce you. They'll buy your salmon, and they'll treat you right."

"And now," Stubby rose and stretched his one good arm and the other that was visibly twisted and scarred between wrist and elbow, above his head, "let's go downstairs and prattle. I see a car in front, and I hear twittering voices."

Halfway down the stairs Stubby halted and laid a hand on MacRae's arm.

"Old Horace is a two-fisted old buccaneer," he said. "And I don't go much on Norman. But I'll say Betty Gower is some girl. What do you think, Silent John?"

And Jack MacRae had to admit that Betty was. Oddly enough, Stubby Abbott had merely put into words an impression to which MacRae himself was slowly and reluctantly subscribing.



CHAPTER VII

SEA BOOTS AND SALMON

From November to April the British Columbian coast is a region of weeping skies, of intermittent frosts and fog, and bursts of sleety snow. The frosts, fogs, and snow squalls are the punctuation points, so to speak, of the eternal rain. Murky vapors eddy and swirl along the coast. The sun hides behind gray banks of cloud, the shining face of him a rare miracle bestowed upon the sight of men as a promise that bright days and blossoming flowers will come again. When they do come the coast is a pleasant country. The mountains reveal themselves, duskily green upon the lower slopes, their sky-piercing summits crowned with snow caps which endure until the sun comes to his full strength in July. The Gulf is a vista of purple-distant shore and island, of shimmering sea. And the fishermen come out of winter quarters to overhaul boats and gear against the first salmon run.

The blueback, a lively and toothsome fish, about which rages an ichthyological argument as to whether he is a distant species of the salmon tribe or merely a half-grown coho, is the first to show in great schools. The spring salmon is always in the Gulf, but the spring is a finny mystery with no known rule for his comings and goings, nor his numbers. All the others, the blueback, the sockeye, the hump, the coho, and the dog salmon, run in the order named. They can be reckoned on as a man reckons on changes of the moon. These are the mainstay of the salmon canners. Upon their taking fortunes have been built—and squandered—men have lived and died, loved and hated, gone hungry and dressed their women in silks and furs. The can of pink meat some inland chef dresses meticulously with parsley and sauces may have cost some fisherman his life; a multiplicity of cases of salmon may have produced a divorce in the packer's household. We eat this fine red fish and heave its container into the garbage tin, with no care for the tragedy or humors that have attended its getting for us.

In the spring, when life takes on a new prompting, the blueback salmon shows first in the Gulf. He cannot be taken by net or bait,—unless the bait be a small live herring. He may only be taken in commercial quantities by a spinner or a wobbling spoon hook of silver or brass or copper drawn through the water at

slow speed. The dainty gear of the trout spinner gave birth to the trolling fleets of the Pacific Coast.

At first the schools pass into the Straits of San Juan. Here the joint fleets of British Columbia and of Puget Sound begin to harry them. A week or ten days later the vanguard will be off Nanaimo. And in another week they will be breaking water like trout in a still pool around the rocky base of the Ballenas Light and the kelp beds and reefs of Squitty Island.

By the time they were there, in late April, there were twenty local power boats to begin taking them, for Jack MacRae made the rounds of Squitty to tell the fishermen that he was putting on a carrier to take the first run of blueback to Vancouver markets.

They were a trifle pessimistic. Other buyers had tried it, men gambling on a shoestring for a stake in the fish trade, buyers unable to make regular trips, whereby there was a tale of many salmon rotted in waiting fish holds, through depending on a carrier that did not come. What was the use of burning fuel, of tearing their fingers with the gear, of catching fish to rot? Better to let them swim.

But since the Folly Bay cannery never opened until the fish ran to greater size and number, the fishermen, chafing against inaction after an idle winter, took a chance and trolled for Jack MacRae.

To the trailers' surprise they found themselves dealing with a new type of independent buyer,—a man who could and did make his market trips with clocklike precision. If MacRae left Squitty with a load on Monday, saying that he would be at Squitty Cove or Jenkins Island or Scottish Bay by Tuesday evening, he was there.

He managed it by grace of an able sea boat, engined to drive through sea and wind, and by the nerve and endurance to drive her in any weather. There were times when the Gulf spread placid as a mill pond. There were trips when he drove through with three thousand salmon under battened hatches, his decks awash from boarding seas, ten and twelve and fourteen hours of rough-and-tumble work that brought him into the Narrows and the docks inside with smarting eyes and tired muscles, his head splitting from the pound and clank of the engine and the fumes of gas and burned oil.

It was work, strain of mind and body, long hours filled with discomfort. But

MacRae had never shrunk from things like that. He was aware that few things worth while come easy. The world, so far as he knew, seldom handed a man a fortune done up in tissue paper merely because he happened to crave its possession. He was young and eager to do. There was a reasonable satisfaction in the doing, even of the disagreeable, dirty tasks necessary, in beating the risks he sometimes had to run. There was a secret triumph in overcoming difficulties as they arose. And he had an object, which, if it did not always lie in the foreground of his mind, he was nevertheless keen on attaining.

The risks and work and strain, perhaps because he put so much of himself into the thing, paid from the beginning more than he had dared hope. He made a hundred dollars his first trip, paid the trollers five cents a fish more on the second trip and cleared a hundred and fifty. In the second week of his venture he struck a market almost bare of fresh salmon with thirty-seven hundred shining bluebacks in his hold. He made seven hundred dollars on that single cargo.

A Greek buyer followed the *Blackbird* out through the Narrows that trip. MacRae beat him two hours to the trolling fleet at Squitty, a fleet that was growing in numbers.

"Bluebacks are thirty-five cents," he said to the first man who ranged alongside to deliver. "And I want to tell you something that you can talk over with the rest of the crowd. I have a market for every fish this bunch can catch. If I can't handle them with the *Blackbird*, I'll put on another boat. I'm not here to buy fish just till the Folly Bay cannery opens. I'll be making regular trips to the end of the salmon season. My price will be as good as anybody's, better than some. If Gower gets your bluebacks this season for twenty-five cents, it will be because you want to make him a present. Meantime, there's another buyer an hour behind me. I don't know what he'll pay. But whatever he pays there aren't enough salmon being caught here yet to keep two carriers running. You can figure it out for yourself."

MacRae thought he knew his men. Nor was his judgment in error. The Greek hung around. In twenty-four hours he got three hundred salmon. MacRae loaded nearly three thousand.

Once or twice after that he had competitive buyers in Squitty Cove and the various rendezvous of the trolling fleet. But the fishermen had a loyalty born of shrewd reckoning. They knew from experience the way of the itinerant buyer. They knew MacRae. Many of them had known his father. If Jack MacRae had a

market for all the salmon he could buy on the Gower grounds all season, they saw where Folly Bay would buy no fish in the old take-it-or-leave-it fashion. They were keenly alive to the fact that they were getting mid-July prices in June, that Jack MacRae was the first buyer who had not tried to hold down prices by pulling a poor mouth and telling fairy tales of poor markets in town. He had jumped prices before there was any competitive spur. They admired young MacRae. He had nerve; he kept his word.

Wherefore it did not take them long to decide that he was a good man to keep going. As a result of this decision other casual buyers got few fish even when they met MacRae's price.

When he had run a little over a month MacRae took stock. He paid the Crow Harbor Canning Company, which was Stubby Abbott's trading name, two hundred and fifty a month for charter of the *Blackbird*. He had operating outlay for gas, oil, crushed ice, and wages for Vincent Ferrara, whom he took on when he reached the limit of single-handed endurance. Over and above these expenses he had cleared twenty-six hundred dollars.

That was only a beginning he knew,—only a beginning of profits and of work. He purposely thrust the taking of salmon on young Ferrara, let him handle the cash, tally in the fish, watched Vincent nonchalantly chuck out overripe salmon that careless trollers would as nonchalantly heave in for fresh ones if they could get away with it. For Jack MacRae had it in his mind to go as far and as fast as he could while the going was good. That meant a second carrier on the run as soon as the Folly Bay cannery opened, and it meant that he must have in charge of the second boat an able man whom he could trust. There was no question about trusting Vincent Ferrara. It was only a matter of his ability to handle the job, and that he demonstrated to MacRae's complete satisfaction.

Early in June MacRae went to Stubby Abbott.

"Have you sold the *Bluebird* yet?" he asked.

"I want to let three of those *Bird* boats go," Stubby told him. "I don't need 'em. They're dead capital. But I haven't made a sale yet."

"Charter me the *Bluebird* on the same terms," Jack proposed.

"You're on. Things must be going good."

"Not too bad," MacRae admitted.

"Folly Bay opens the twentieth. We open July first," Stubby said abruptly. "How many bluebacks are you going to get for us?"

"Just about all that are caught around Squitty Island," MacRae said quietly. "That's why I want another carrier."

"Huh!" Stubby grunted. His tone was slightly incredulous. "You'll have to go some. Wish you luck though. More you get the better for me."

"I expect to deliver sixty thousand bluebacks to Crow Harbor in July," MacRae said.

Stubby stared at him. His eyes twinkled.

"If you can do that in July, and in August too," he said, "I'll *give* you the *Bluebird*."

"No," MacRae smiled. "I'll buy her."

"Where will Folly Bay get off if you take that many fish away?" Stubby reflected.

"Don't know. And I don't care a hoot." MacRae shrugged his shoulders. "I'm fairly sure I can do it. You don't care?"

"Do I? I'll shout to the world I don't," Stubby replied. "It's self-preservation with me. Let old Horace look out for himself. He had his fingers in the pie while we were in France. I don't have to have four hundred per cent profit to do business. Get the fish if you can, Jack, old boy, even if it busts old Horace. Which it won't—and, as I told you, lack of them may bust me."

"By the way," Stubby said as MacRae rose to go, "don't you ever have an hour to spare in town? You haven't been out at the house for six weeks."

MacRae held out his hands. They were red and cut and scarred, roughened, and sore from salt water and ice-handling and fish slime.

"Wouldn't they look well clasping a wafer and a teacup," he laughed. "I'm working, Stub. When I have an hour to spare I lie down and sleep. If I stopped to play every time I came to town—do you think you'd get your sixty thousand bluebacks in July?"

Stubby looked at MacRae a second, at his work-torn hands and weary eyes.

"I guess you're right," he said slowly. "But the old stone house will still be up on the corner when the salmon run is over. Don't forget that."

MacRae went off to Coal Harbor to take over the second carrier. And he wondered as he went if it would all be such clear sailing, if it were possible that at the first thrust he had found an open crack in Gower's armor through which he could prick the man and make him squirm.

He looked at his hands. When they fingered death as a daily task they had been soft, white, delicate,—dainty instruments equally fit for the manipulation of aerial controls, machine guns or teacups. Why should honest work prevent a man from meeting pleasant people amid pleasant surroundings? Well, it was not the work itself, it was simply the effects of that gross labor. On the American continent, at least, a man did not lose caste by following any honest occupation,—only he could not work with the workers and flutter with the butterflies. MacRae, walking down the street, communing with himself, knew that he must pay a penalty for working with his hands. If he were a drone in uniform—necessarily a drone since the end of war—he could dance and play, flirt with pretty girls, be a welcome guest in great houses, make the heroic past pay social dividends.

It took nearly as much courage and endurance to work as it had taken to fight; indeed it took rather more, at times, to keep on working. Theoretically he should not lose caste. Yet MacRae knew he would,—unless he made a barrel of money. There had been stray straws in the past month. There were, it seemed, very nice people who could not quite understand why an officer and a gentleman should do work that wasn't,—well, not even clean. Not clean in the purely objective, physical sense, like banking or brokerage, or teaching, or any of those semi-genteel occupations which permit people to make a living without straining their backs or soiling their hands. He wasn't even sure that Stubby Abbott—MacRae was ashamed of his cynicism when he got that far. Stubby was a real man. Even if he needed a man or a man's activities in his business Stubby wouldn't cultivate that man socially merely because he needed his producing capacity.

The solace for long hours and aching flesh and sleep-weary eyes was a glimpse of concrete reward,—money which meant power, power to repay a debt, opportunity to repay an ancient score. It seemed to Jack MacRae that his personal honor was involved in getting back all that broad sweep of land which his father had claimed from the wilderness, that he must exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That was the why of his unceasing energy, his uncomplaining endurance of long hours in sea boots, the impatient facing of storms that threatened to delay. Man strives under the spur of a vision, a deep longing, an imperative squaring of needs with desires. MacRae moved under the whip of all three.

He was quite sanguine that he would succeed in this undertaking. But he had not looked much beyond the first line of trenches which he planned to storm. They did not seem to him particularly formidable. The Scotch had been credited with uncanny knowledge of the future. Jack MacRae, however, though his Highland blood ran undiluted, had no such gift of prescience. He did not know that the highway of modern industry is strewn with the casualties of commercial warfare.

CHAPTER VIII

VESTED RIGHTS

A small balcony over the porch of Gower's summer cottage commanded a wide sweep of the Gulf south and east. That was one reason he had built there. He liked to overlook the sea, the waters out of which he had taken a fortune, the highway of his collecting boats. He had to keep in touch with the Folly Bay cannery while the rush of the pack was on. But he was getting more fastidious as he grew older, and he no longer relished the odors of the cannery. There were other places nearer the cannery than Cradle Bay, if none more sightly, where he could have built a summer house. People wondered why he chose the point that frowned over Poor Man's Rock. Even his own family had questioned his judgment. Particularly his wife. She complained of the isolation. She insisted on a houseful of people when she was there, and as Vancouver was full of eligible week-enders of both sexes her wish was always gratified. And no one except Betty Gower ever knew that merely to sit looking out on the Gulf from that vantage point afforded her father some inscrutable satisfaction.

On a day in mid-July Horace Gower stepped out on this balcony. He carried in his hand a pair of prism binoculars. He took a casual look around. Then he put the glasses to his eyes and scanned the Gulf with a slow, searching sweep. At first sight it seemed empty. Then far eastward toward Vancouver his glass picked up two formless dots which alternately showed and disappeared.

Gower put down the glasses, seated himself in a grass chair, lighted a cigar and leaned back, looking impersonally down on Point Old and the Rock. A big, slow swell rolled up off the Gulf, breaking with a precisely spaced *boom* along the cliffs. For forty-eight hours a southeaster had swept the sea, that rare phenomenon of a summer gale which did not blow itself out between suns. This had been a wild tantrum, driving everything of small tonnage to the nearest shelter, even delaying the big coasters.

One of these, trailing black smoke from two funnels, lifting white superstructure of cabins high above her main deck, standing bold and clear in the mellow sunshine, steamed out of the fairway between Squitty and Vancouver Island. But she gained scant heed from Gower. His eyes kept turning to where those distant

specks showed briefly between periods in the hollows of the sea. They drew nearer. Gower finished his cigar in leisurely fashion. He focused the glass again. He grunted something unintelligible. They were what he fully expected to behold as soon as the southeaster ceased to whip the Gulf,—the *Bluebird* and the *Blackbird*, Jack MacRae's two salmon carriers. They were walking up to Squitty in eight-knot boots. Through his glass Gower watched them lift and fall, lurch and yaw, running with short bursts of speed on the crest of a wave, laboring heavily in the trough, plowing steadily up through uneasy waters to take the salmon that should go to feed the hungry machines at Folly Bay.

Gower laid aside the glasses. He smoked a second cigar down to a stub, resting his plump hands on his plump stomach. He resembled a thoughtful Billiken in white flannels, a round-faced, florid, middle-aged Billiken. By that time the two *Bird* boats had come up and parted on the head of Squitty. The *Bluebird*, captained by Vin Ferrara, headed into the Cove. The *Blackbird*, slashing along with a bone in her teeth, rounded Poor Man's Rock, cut across the mouth of Cradle Bay, and stood on up the western shore.

"He knows every pot-hole where a troller can lie. He's not afraid of wind or sea or work. No wonder he gets the fish. Those damned—"

Gower cut his soliloquy off in the middle to watch the *Blackbird* slide out of sight behind a point. He knew all about Jack MacRae's operations, the wide swath he was cutting in the matter of blueback salmon. The Folly Bay showing to date was a pointed reminder. Gower's cannery foreman and fish collectors gave him profane accounts of MacRae's indefatigable raiding,—as it suited them to regard his operations. What Gower did not know he made it his business to find out. He sat now in his grass chair, a short, compact body of a man, with a heavy-jawed, powerful face frowning in abstraction. Gower looked younger than his fifty-six years. There was little gray in his light-brown hair. His blue eyes were clear and piercing. The thick roundness of his body was not altogether composed of useless tissue. Even considered superficially he looked what he really was, what he had been for many years,—a man accustomed to getting things done according to his desire. He did not look like a man who would fight with crude weapons—such as a pike pole—but nevertheless there was the undeniable impression of latent force, of aggressive possibilities, of the will and the ability to rudely dispose of things which might become obstacles in his way. And the current history of him in the Gulf of Georgia did not belie such an impression.

He left the balcony at last. He appeared next moving, with the stumpy, ungraceful stride peculiar to the short and thick-bodied, down the walk to a float. From this he hailed the *Arrow*, and a boy came in, rowing a dinghy.

When Gower reached the cruiser's deck he cocked his ear at voices in the after cabin. He put his head through the companion hatch. Betty Gower and Nelly Abbott were curled up on a berth, chuckling to each other over some exchange of confidences.

"Thought you were ashore," Gower grunted.

"Oh, the rest of the crowd went off on a hike into the woods, so we came out here to look around. Nelly hasn't seen the *Arrow* inside since it was done over," Betty replied.

"I'm going to Folly Bay," Gower said. "Will you go ashore?"

"Far from such," Betty returned. "I'd as soon go to the cannery as anywhere. Can't we, daddy?"

"Oh, yes. Bit of a swell though. You may be sick."

Betty laughed. That was a standing joke between them. She had never been seasick. Nelly Abbott declared that if there was anything she loved it was to ride the dead swell that ran after a storm. They came up out of the cabin to watch the mooring line cast off, and to wave handkerchiefs at the empty cottage porches as the *Arrow* backed and straightened and swept out of the bay.

The *Arrow* was engined to justify her name. But the swell was heavier than it looked from shore. No craft, even a sixty-footer built for speed, finds her speed lines a thing of comfort in heavy going. Until the *Arrow* passed into the lee of an island group halfway along Squitty she made less time than a fishing boat, and she rolled and twisted uncomfortably. If Horace Gower had a mind to reach Folly Bay before the *Blackbird* he could not have done so. However, he gave no hint of such intention. He kept to the deck. The girls stayed below until the big cruiser struck easier going and a faster gait. Then they joined Gower.

The three of them stood by the rail just abaft the pilot house when the *Arrow* turned into the half-mile breadth of Folly Bay. The cannery loomed white on shore, with a couple of purse seiners and a tender or two tied at the slips. And four hundred yards off the cannery wharf the *Blackbird* had dropped anchor and lay now, a dozen trolling boats clustered about her to deliver fish.

"Slow up and stop abreast of that buyer," Gower ordered.

The *Arrow's* skipper brought his vessel to a standstill within a boat-length of the *Blackbird*.

"Why, that's Jack MacRae," Nelly Abbott exclaimed. "Hoo-hoo, Johnny!"

She waved both hands for good measure. MacRae, bareheaded, sleeves rolled above his elbows, standing in hip boots of rubber on a deck wet and slippery with water and fish slime, amid piles of gleaming salmon, recognized her easily enough. He waved greeting, but his gaze only for that one recognizing instant left the salmon that were landing *flop, flop* on the *Blackbird's* deck out of a troller's fish well. He made out a slip, handed the troller some currency. There was a brief exchange of words between them. The man nodded, pushed off his boat. Instantly another edged into the vacant place. Salmon began to fall on the deck, heaved up on a picaroon. At the other end of the fish hold another of the Ferrara boys was tallying in fish.

"Old crab," Nelly Abbott murmured. "He doesn't even look at us."

"He's counting salmon, silly," Betty explained. "How can he?"

There was no particular inflection in her voice. Nevertheless Horace Gower shot a sidelong glance at his daughter. She also waved a hand pleasantly to Jack MacRae, who had faced about now.

"Why don't you say you're glad to see us, old dear?" Nelly Abbott suggested bluntly, and smiling so that all her white teeth gleamed and her eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Tickled to death," MacRae called back. He went through the pantomime of shaking hands with himself. His lips parted in a smile. "But I'm the busiest thing afloat right now. See you later."

"Nerve," Horace Gower muttered under his breath.

"Not if we see you first," Nelly Abbott retorted.

"It's not likely you will," MacRae laughed.

He turned back to his work. The fisherman alongside was tall and surly looking, a leathery-faced individual with a marked scowl. He heaved half a dozen salmon up on the *Blackbird*. Then he climbed up himself. He towered over Jack

MacRae, and MacRae was not exactly a small man. He said something, his hands on his hips. MacRae looked at him. He seemed to be making some reply. And he stepped back from the man. Every other fisherman turned his face toward the *Blackbird's* deck. Their clattering talk stopped short.

The man leaned forward. His hands left his hips, drew into doubled fists, extended threateningly. He took a step toward MacRae.

And MacRae suddenly lunged forward, as if propelled by some invisible spring of tremendous force. With incredible swiftness his left hand and then his right shot at the man's face. The two blows sounded like two open-handed smacks. But the fisherman sagged, went lurching backward. His heels caught on the *Blackbird's* bulwark and he pitched backward head-first into the hold of his own boat.

MacRae picked up the salmon and flung them one by one after the man, with no great haste, but with little care where they fell, for one or two splattered against the fellow's face as he clawed up out of his own hold. There was a smear of red on his lips.

"Oh! My goodness gracious, sakes alive!"

Nelly Abbott grasped Betty by the arm and murmured these expletives as much in a spirit of deviltry as of shock. Her eyes danced.

"Did you see that?" she whispered. "I never saw two men fight before. I'd hate to have Jack MacRae hit *me*."

But Betty was holding her breath, for MacRae had picked up a twelve-foot pike pole, a thing with an ugly point and a hook of iron on its tip. He only used it, however, to shove away the boat containing the man he had so savagely smashed. And while he did that Gower curtly issued an order, and the *Arrow* slid on to the cannery wharf.

Nelly went below for something. Betty stood by the rail, staring back thoughtfully, unaware that her father was keenly watching the look on her face, with an odd expression in his own eyes.

"You saw quite a lot of young MacRae last spring, didn't you?" he asked abruptly. "Do you like him?"

A faint touch of color leaped into her cheeks. She met her father's glance with an

inquiring one of her own.

"Well—yes. Rather," she said at last. "He's a nice boy."

"Better not," Gower rumbled. His frown grew deeper. His teeth clamped a cigar in one corner of his mouth at an aggressive angle. "Granted that he is what you call a nice boy. I'll admit he's good-looking and that he dances well. And he seems to pack a punch up his sleeve. I'd suggest that you don't cultivate any romantic fancy for him. Because he's making himself a nuisance in my business—and I'm going to smash him."

Gower turned away. If he had lingered he might have observed unmistakable signs of temper. Betty flew storm signals from cheek and eye. She looked after her father with something akin to defiance, likewise with an air of astonishment.

"As if I—" she left the whispered sentence unfinished.

She perched herself on the mahogany-capped rail, and while she waited for Nelly Abbott she gave herself up to thinking of herself and her father and her father's amazing warning which carried a veiled threat,—an open threat so far as Jack MacRae was concerned. Why should he cut loose like that on her?

She stared thoughtfully at the *Blackbird*, marked the trollers slipping in from the grounds and clustering around the chunky carrier.

It might have interested Mr. Horace Gower could he have received a verbatim report of his daughter's reflections for the next five minutes. But whether it would have pleased him it is hard to say.



CHAPTER IX

THE COMPLEXITY OF SIMPLE MATTERS

The army, for a period extending over many months, had imposed a rigid discipline on Jack MacRae. The Air Service had bestowed upon him a less rigorous discipline, but a far more exacting self-control. He was not precisely aware of it, but those four years had saved him from being a firebrand of sorts in his present situation, because there resided in him a fiery temper and a capacity for passionate extremes, and those years in the King's uniform, whatever else they may have done for him, had placed upon his headlong impulses manifold checks, taught him the vital necessity of restraint, the value of restraint.

If the war had made human life seem a cheap and perishable commodity, it had also worked to give men like MacRae a high sense of honor, to accentuate a natural distaste for lying and cheating, for anything that was mean, petty, ignoble. Perhaps the Air Service was unique in that it was at once the most dangerous and the most democratic and the most individual of all the organizations that fought the Germans. It had high standards. The airmen were all young, the pick of the nations, clean, eager, vigorous boys whose ideals were still undimmed. They lived and—as it happened—died in big moments. They trained with the gods in airy spaces and became men, those who survived.

And the gods may launch destroying thunderbolts, but they do not lie or cheat or steal. An honest man may respect an honest enemy, and be roused to murderous fury by a common rascal's trickery.

When MacRae dropped his hook in Folly Bay he was two days overdue, for the first time in his fish-running venture. The trollers had promised to hold their fish. The first man alongside to deliver reminded him of this.

"Southeaster held you up, eh?" said he. "We fished in the lee off the top end. But we might as well have laid in. Held 'em too long for you."

"They spoiled before you could slough them on the cannery, eh?" MacRae observed.

"Most of mine did. They took some."

"How many of your fish went bad?" Jack asked.

"About twenty-five, I guess."

MacRae finished checking the salmon the fisherman heaved up on the deck. He made out two slips and handed the man his money.

"I'm paying you for the lost fish," he said. "I told you to hold them for me. I want you to hold them. If I can't get here on time, it's my loss, not yours."

The fisherman looked at the money in his hand and up at MacRae.

"Well," he said, "you're the first buyer I ever seen do that. You're all right, all right."

There were variations of this. Some of the trollers, weatherwise old sea-dogs, had foreseen that the *Blackbird* could not face that blow, and they had sold their fish. Others had held on. These, who were all men MacRae knew, he paid according to their own estimate of loss. He did not argue. He accepted their word. It was an astonishing experience for the trolling fleet. They had never found a buyer willing to make good a loss of that kind.

But there were other folk afloat besides simple, honest fishermen who would not lie for the price of one salmon or forty. When the *Arrow* drew abreast and stopped, a boat had pushed in beside the *Blackbird*. The fisherman in it put half a dozen bluebacks on the deck and clambered up himself.

"You owe me for thirty besides them," he announced.

"How's that?" MacRae asked coolly.

But he was not cool inside. He knew the man, a preemptor of Folly Bay, a truckler to the cannery because he was always in debt to the cannery,—and a quarrelsome individual besides, who took advantage of his size and strength to browbeat less able men.

MacRae had got few salmon off Sam Kaye since the cannery opened. He had never asked Kaye to hold fish for him. He knew instantly what was in Kaye's mind; it had flitted from one boat to another that MacRae was making good the loss of salmon held for him, and Kaye was going to get in on this easy money if he could bluff it through.

He stood on the *Blackbird's* deck, snarlingly demanding payment for thirty fish.

MacRae looked at him silently. He hated brawling, acrimonious dispute. He was loth to a common row at that moment, because he was acutely conscious of the two girls watching. But he was even more conscious of Gower's stare and the curious expectancy of the fishermen clustered about his stern.

Kaye was simply trying to do him out of fifteen dollars. MacRae knew it. He knew that the fishermen knew it,—and he had a suspicion that Folly Bay might not be unaware, or averse, to Sam Kaye taking a fall out of him. Folly Bay had tried other unpleasant tricks.

"That doesn't go for you, Kaye," he said quietly. "I know your game. Get off my boat and take your fish with you."

Sam Kaye glowered threateningly. He had cowed men before with the fierceness of his look. He was long-armed and raw-boned, and he rather fancied himself in a rough and tumble. He was quite blissfully ignorant that Jack MacRae was stewing under his outward calmness. Kaye took a step forward, with an intimidating thrust of his jaw.

MacRae smashed him squarely in the mouth with a straight left, and hooked him somewhere on the chin with a wicked right cross. Either blow was sufficient to knock any ordinary man down. There was a deceptive power in MacRae's slenderness, which was not so much slenderness as perfect bodily symmetry. He weighed within ten pounds as much as Sam Kaye, although he did not look it, and he was as quick as a playful kitten. Kaye went down, as told before. He lifted a dazed countenance above the cockpit as MacRae shoved his craft clear.

The fishermen broke the silence with ribald laughter. They knew Kaye's game too.

MacRae left Folly Bay later in the afternoon, poorer by many dollars paid for rotten salmon. He wasn't in a particularly genial mood. The Sam Kaye affair had come at an inopportune moment. He didn't care to stand out as a bruiser. Still, he asked himself irritably, why should he care because Nelly Abbott and Betty Gower had seen him using his fists? He was perfectly justified. Indeed, he knew very well he could have done nothing else. The trailers had chortled over the outcome. These were matters they could understand and appreciate. Even Steve Ferrara looked at him enviously.

"It makes me wish I'd dodged the gas," Steve said wistfully. "It's hell to wheeze your breath in and out. By jiminy, you're wicked with your hands, Jack. Did you

box much in France?"

"Quite a lot," MacRae replied. "Some of the fellows in our squadron were pretty clever. We used the gloves quite a bit."

"And you're naturally quick," Steve drawled. "Now, me, the gas has cooked my goose. I'd have to bat Kaye over the head with an oar. Gee, he sure got a surprise."

They both laughed. Even upon his bloody face—as he rose out of his own fish hold—bewildered astonishment had been Sam Kaye's chief expression.

The *Blackbird* went her rounds. At noon the next day she met Vincent Ferrara with her sister ship, and the two boats made one load for the *Blackbird*. She headed south. With high noon, too, came the summer westerly, screeching and whistling and lashing the Gulf to a brief fury.

It was the regular summer wind, a yachtsman's gale. Four days out of six its cycle ran the same, a breeze rising at ten o'clock, stiffening to a healthy blow, a mere sigh at sundown. Midnight would find the sea smooth as a mirror, the heaving swell killed by changing tides.

So the *Blackbird* ran down Squitty, rolling and yawing through a following sea, and turned into Squitty Cove to rest till night and calm settled on the Gulf.

When her mudhook was down in that peaceful nook, Steve Ferrara turned into his bunk to get a few hours' sleep against the long night watch. MacRae stirred wakeful on the sun-hot deck, slushing it down with buckets of sea water to save his ice and fish. He coiled ropes, made his vessel neat, and sat him down to think. Squitty Cove always stirred him to introspection. His mind leaped always to the manifold suggestions of any well-remembered place. He could shut his eyes and see the old log house behind its leafy screen of alder and maple at the Cove's head. The rosebushes before it were laden with bloom now. At his hand were the gray cliffs backed by grassy patches, running away inland to virgin forest. He felt dispossessed of those noble acres. He was always seeing them through his father's eyes, feeling as Donald MacRae must have felt in those last, lonely years of which he had written in simple language that had wrung his son's heart.

But it never occurred to Jack MacRae that his father, pouring out the tale of those troubled years, had bestowed upon him an equivocal heritage.

He slid overboard the small skiff the *Blackbird* carried and rowed ashore. There were rowboat trollers on the beach asleep in their tents and rude lean-tos. He walked over the low ridge behind which stood Peter Ferrara's house. It was hot, the wooded heights of the island shutting off the cool westerly. On such a day Peter Ferrara should be dozing on his porch and Dolly perhaps mending stockings or sewing in a rocker beside him.

But the porch was bare. As MacRae drew near the house a man came out the door and down the three low steps. He was short and thick-set, young, quite fair, inclined already to floridness of skin. MacRae knew him at once for Norman Gower. He was a typical Gower,—a second edition of his father, save that his face was less suggestive of power, less heavily marked with sullenness.

He glanced with blank indifference at Jack MacRae, passed within six feet and walked along the path which ran around the head of the Cove. MacRae watched him. He would cross between the boathouse and the roses in MacRae's dooryard. MacRae had an impulse to stride after him, to forbid harshly any such trespass on MacRae ground. But he smiled at that childishness. It was childish, MacRae knew. But he felt that way about it, just as he often felt that he himself had a perfect right to range the whole end of Squitty, to tramp across greensward and through forest depths, despite Horace Gower's legal title to the land. MacRae was aware of this anomaly in his attitude, without troubling to analyze it.

He walked into old Peter's house without announcement beyond his footsteps on the floor, as he had been accustomed to do as far back as he could remember. Dolly was sitting beside a little table, her chin in her palms. There was a droop to her body that disturbed MacRae. She had sat for hours like that the night his father died. And there was now on her face something of the same look of sad resignation and pity. Her big, dark eyes were misty, troubled, when she lifted them to MacRae.

"Hello, Jack," she said.

He came up to her, put his hands on her shoulders.

"What is it now?" he demanded. "I saw Norman Gower leaving as I came up. And here you're looking—what's wrong?"

His tone was imperative.

"Nothing, Johnny."

"You don't cry for nothing. You're not that kind," MacRae replied. "That chunky lobster hasn't given you the glooms, surely?"

Dolly's eyes flashed.

"It isn't like you to call names," she declared. "It isn't nice. And—and what business of yours is it whether I laugh or cry?"

MacRae smiled. Dolly in a temper was not wholly strange to him. He was struck with her remarkable beauty every time he saw her. She was altogether too beautiful a flower to be blushing unseen on an island in the Gulf. He shook her gently.

"Because I'm big brother. Because you and I were kids together for years before we ever knew there could be serpents in Eden. Because anything that hurts you hurts me. I don't like anything to make you cry, *mia Dolores*. I'd wring Norman Gower's chubby neck with great pleasure if I thought he could do that. I didn't even know you knew him."

Dolly dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"There are lots of things you don't know, Jack MacRae," she murmured. "Besides, why shouldn't I know Norman?"

MacRae threw out his hands helplessly.

"No law against it, of course," he admitted. "Only—well—"

He was conscious of floundering, with her grave, dark eyes searching his face. There was no reason save his own hostility to anything Gower,—and Dolly knew no basis for that save the fact that Horace Gower had acquired his father's ranch. That could not possibly be a ground for Dolores Ferrara to frown on any Gower, male or female, who happened to come her way.

"Why, I suppose it really is none of my business," he said slowly. "Except that I can't help being concerned in anything that makes you unhappy. That's all."

He sat down on the arm of her chair and patted her cheek. To his utter amazement Dolly broke into a storm of tears. Long ago he had seen Dolly cry when she had hurt herself, because he had teased her, because she was angry or disappointed. He had never seen any woman cry as she did now. It was not just simple grieved weeping. It was a tempest that shook her. Her body quivered, her

breath came in gasping bursts between racking sobs.

MacRae gathered her into his arms, trying to dam that wild flood. She put her face against him and clung there, trembling like some hunted thing seeking refuge, mysteriously stirring MacRae with the passionate abandon of her tears, filling him with vague apprehensions, with a strange excitement.

Like the tornado, swift in its striking and passing, so this storm passed. Dolly's sobbing ceased. She rested passively in his arms for a minute. Then she sighed, brushed the cloudy hair out of her eyes, and looked up at him.

"I wonder why I should go all to pieces like that so suddenly?" she muttered. "And why I should somehow feel better for it?"

"I don't know," MacRae said. "Maybe I could tell you if I knew *why* you went off like that. You poor little devil. Something has stung you deep, I know."

"Yes," she admitted. "I hope nothing like it ever comes to you, Jack. I'm bleeding internally. Oh, it hurts, it hurts!"

She laid her head against him and cried again softly.

"Tell me," he whispered.

"Why not?" She lifted her head after a little. "You could always keep things to yourself. It wasn't much wonder they called you Silent John. Do you know I never really grasped *The Ancient Mariner* until now? People *must* tell their troubles to some one—or they'd corrode inside."

"Go ahead," MacRae encouraged.

"When Norman Gower went overseas we were engaged," she said bluntly, and stopped. She was not looking at MacRae now. She stared at the opposite wall, her fingers locked together in her lap.

"For four years," she went on, "I've been hoping, dreaming, waiting, loving. Today he came home to tell me that he married in England two years ago. Married in the madness of a drunken hour—that is how he puts it—a girl who didn't care for anything but the good time his rank and pay could give her."

"I think you're in luck," MacRae said soberly.

"What queer creatures men are!" She seemed not to have heard him—to be

thinking her own thoughts out loud. "He says he loves me, that he has loved me all the time, that he feels as if he had been walking in his sleep and fallen into some muddy hole. And I believe him. It's terrible, Johnny."

"It's impossible," MacRae declared savagely. "If he's got in that kind of a hole, let him stay there. You're well out of it. You ought to be glad."

"But I'm not," she said sadly. "I'm not made that way. I can't let a thing become a vital part of my life and give it up without a pang."

"I don't see what else you can do," MacRae observed. "Only brace up and forget it."

"It isn't quite so simple as that," she sighed. "Norman's w—this woman presently got tired of him. Evidently she had no scruples about getting what she wanted, nor how. She went away with another man. Norman is getting a divorce—the decree absolute will be granted in March next. He wants me to marry him."

"Will you?"

Dolly looked up to meet MacRae's wondering stare. She nodded.

"You're a triple-plated fool," he said roughly.

"I don't know," she replied thoughtfully. "Norman certainly has been. Perhaps I am too. We should get on—a pair of fools together."

The bitterness in her voice stung MacRae.

"You really should have loved me," he said, "and I you."

"But you don't, Jack. You have never thought of that before."

"I could, quite easily."

Dolly considered this a moment.

"No," she said. "You like me. I know that, Johnny. I like you, too. You are a man, and I'm a woman. But if you weren't bursting with sympathy you wouldn't have thought of that. If Norman had some of your backbone—but it wouldn't make any difference. If you know what it is that draws a certain man and woman together in spite of themselves, in spite of things they can see in each other that they don't quite like, I dare say you'd understand. I don't think I do. Norman Gower has made me dreadfully unhappy. But I loved him before he went away,

and I love him yet. I want him just the same. And he says—he says—that he never stopped caring for me—that it was like a bad dream. I believe him. I'm sure of it. He didn't lie to me. And I can't hate him. I can't punish him without punishing myself. I don't want to punish him, any more than I would want to punish a baby, if I had one, for a naughtiness it couldn't help."

"So you'll marry him eventually?" MacRae asked.

Dolly nodded.

"If he doesn't change his mind," she murmured. "Oh, I shouldn't say ugly things like that. It sounds cheap and mean."

"But it hurts, it hurts me so to think of it," she broke out passionately. "I can forgive him, because I can see how it happened. Still it hurts. I feel cheated—cheated!"

She lay back in her chair, fingers locked together, red lips parted over white teeth that were clenched together. Her eyes glowed somberly, looking away through distant spaces.

And MacRae, conscious that she had said her say, feeling that she wanted to be alone, as he himself always wanted to fight a grief or a hurt alone and in silence, walked out into the sunshine, where the westerly droned high above in the swaying fir tops.

He went up the path around the Cove's head to the porch of his own house, sat down on the top step, and cursed the Gowers, root and branch. He hated them, everything of the name and blood, at that moment, with a profound and active hatred.

They were like a blight, as their lives touched the lives of other people. They sat in the seats of the mighty, and for their pleasure or their whims others must sweat and suffer. So it seemed to Jack MacRae.

Home, these crowded, hurrying days, was aboard the *Blackbird*. It was pleasant now to sit on his own doorstep and smell the delicate perfume of the roses and the balsamy odors from the woods behind. But the rooms depressed him when he went in. They were dusty and silent, abandoned to that forsaken air which rests upon uninhabited dwellings. MacRae went out again, to stride aimlessly along the cliffs past the mouth of the Cove.

Beyond the lee of the island the westerly still lashed the Gulf. The white horses galloped on a gray-green field. MacRae found a grassy place in the shade of an arbutus, and lay down to rest and watch. Sunset would bring calm, a dying wind, new colors to sea and sky and mountains. It would send him away on the long run to Crow Harbor, driving through the night under the cool stars.

No matter what happened people must be fed. Food was vital. Men lost their lives at the fishing, but it went on. Hearts might be torn, but hands still plied the gear. Life had a bad taste in Jack MacRae's mouth as he lay there under the red-barked tree. He was moody. It seemed a struggle without mercy or justice, almost without reason, a blind obedience to the will-to-live. A tooth-and-toenail contest. He surveyed his own part in it with cynical detachment. So long as salmon ran in the sea they would be taken for profit in the markets and the feeding of the hungry. And the salmon would run and men would pursue them, and the game would be played without slackening for such things as broken faith or aching hearts or a woman's tears.

MacRae grew drowsy puzzling over things like that. Life was a jumble beyond his understanding, he concluded at last. Men strove to a godlike mastery of circumstances,—and achieved three meals a day and a squalid place to sleep. Sometimes, when they were pluming themselves on having beaten the game, Destiny was laughing in her sleeve and spreading a snare for their feet. A man never knew what was coming next. It was just a damned scramble! A disorderly scramble in which a man could be sure of getting hurt.

He wondered if that were really true.

CHAPTER X

THRUST AND COUNTERTHRUST

By the time Jack MacRae was writing August on his sales slips he was conscious of an important fact; namely, that nearly a hundred gas-boat fishermen, trolling Squitty Island, the Ballenas, Gray Rock, even farther afield to Yellow Rock Light and Lambert Channel, were compactly behind him. They were still close to a period when they had been remorselessly exploited. They were all for MacRae. Prices being equal, they preferred that he should have their fish. It was still vivid in their astonished minds that he had shared profits with them without compulsion, that he had boosted prices without competition, had put a great many dollars in their pockets. Only those who earn a living as precariously, as riskily and with as much patient labor as a salmon fisherman, can so well value a dollar. They had an abiding confidence, by this time, in Jack MacRae. They knew he was square, and they said so. In the territory his two carriers covered, MacRae was becoming the uncrowned salmon king. Other buyers cut in from time to time. They did not fare well. The trollers would hold their salmon, even when some sporting independent offered to shade the current price. They would shake their heads if they knew either of the *Bird* boats would be there to take the fish. For when MacRae said he would be there, he was always there. In the old days they had been compelled to play one buyer against another. They did not have to do that with MacRae.

The Folly Bay collectors fared little better than outside buyers. In July Gower met MacRae's price by two successive raises. He stopped at that. MacRae did not. Each succeeding run of salmon averaged greater poundage. They were worth more. MacRae paid fifty, fifty-five cents. When Gower stood pat at fifty-five, MacRae gave up a fourth of his contract percentage and paid sixty. It was like draw poker with the advantage of the last raise on his side.

The salmon were worth the price. They were worth double to a cannery that lay mostly idle for lack of fish. The salmon, now, were running close to six pounds each. The finished product was eighteen dollars a case in the market. There are forty-eight one-pound cans in a case. To a man familiar with packing costs it is a simple sum. MacRae often wondered why Gower stubbornly refused to pay more, when his collecting boats came back to the cannery so often with a few

scattered salmon in their holds. They were primitive folk, these salmon trollers. They jeered the unlucky collectors. Gower was losing his fishermen as well as his fish. For the time, at least, the back of his long-held monopoly was broken.

MacRae got a little further light on this attitude from Stubby Abbott.

"He's figuring on making out a season's pack with cohoes, humps, and dog salmon," Stubby told MacRae at the Crow Harbor cannery. "He expects to work his purse seiners overtime, and to hell with the individual fisherman. Norman was telling me. Old Horace has put Norman in charge at Folly Bay, you know."

MacRae nodded. He knew about that.

"The old boy is sore as a boil at you and me," Stubby chuckled. "I don't blame him much. He has had a cinch there so long he thinks it's his private pond. You've certainly put a crimp in the Folly Bay blueback pack—to my great benefit. I don't suppose any one but you could have done it either."

"Any one could," MacRae declared, "if he knew the waters, the men, and was wise enough to play the game square. The trouble has been that each buyer wanted to make a clean-up on each trip. He wanted easy money. The salmon fisherman away up the coast practically has to take what is offered him day by day, or throw his fish overboard. Canneries and buyers alike have systematically given him the worst of the deal. You don't cut your cannery hands' pay because on certain days your pack falls off."

"Hardly."

"But canneries and collectors and every independent buyer have always used any old pretext to cut the price to the fisherman out on the grounds. And while a fisherman has to take what he is offered he doesn't have to keep on taking it. He can quit, and try something else. Lots of them have done that. That's why there are three Japanese to every white salmon fisherman on the British Columbia coast. That is why we have an Oriental problem. The Japs are making the canneries squeal, aren't they?"

"Rather." Stubby smiled. "They are getting to be a bit of a problem."

"The packers got them in here as cheap labor in the salmon fishing," MacRae went on. "The white fisherman was too independent. He wanted all he could get out of his work. He was a kicker, as well as a good fisherman. The packers thought they could keep wages down and profits up by importing the Jap—cheap

labor with a low standard of living. And the Jap has turned the tables on the big fellows. They hang together, as aliens always do in a strange country, and the war has helped them freeze the white fisherman out on one hand and exact more and more from the canneries on the other. And that would never have happened if this had been kept a white man's country, and the white fisherman had got a square deal."

"To buy as cheaply as you can and sell for as much as you can," Stubby reminded him, "is a fundamental of business. You can't get away from it. My father abandoned that maxim the last two years of his life, and it nearly broke us. He was a public-spirited man. He took war and war-time conditions to heart. In a period of jumping food costs he tried to give people cheaper food. As I said, he nearly went broke trying to do a public service, because no one else in the same business departed from the business rule of making all they could. In fact, men in the same business, I have since learned, were the first to sharpen their knives for him. He was establishing a bad precedent. I don't know but their attitude is sound, after all. In sheer self-defense a man must make all he can when he has a chance. You cannot indulge in philanthropy in a business undertaking these days, Silent John."

"Granted," MacRae made answer. "I don't propose to be a philanthropist myself. But you will get farther with a salmon fisherman, or any other man whose labor you must depend on, if you accept the principle that he is entitled to make a dollar as well as yourself, if you don't stretch every point to take advantage of his necessity. These fellows who fish around Squitty have been gouged and cheated a lot. They aren't fools. They know pretty well who makes the long profit, who pile up moderate fortunes while they get only a living, and not a particularly good living at that."

"Are you turning Bolshevik?" Stubby inquired with mock solicitude.

MacRae smiled.

"Hardly. Nor are the fishermen. They know I'm making money. But they know also that they are getting more out of it than they ever got before, and that if I were not on the job they would get a lot less."

"They certainly would," Abbott drawled. "You have been, and are now, paying more for blueback salmon than any buyer on the Gulf."

"Well, it has paid me. And it has been highly profitable to you, hasn't it?"

MacRae said. "You've had a hundred thousand salmon to pack which you would not otherwise have had."

"Certainly," Stubby agreed. "I'm not questioning your logic. In this case it has paid us both, and the fisherman as well. But suppose everybody did it?"

"If you can pay sixty cents a fish, and fifteen per cent, on top of that and pack profitably, why can't other canneries? Why can't Folly Bay meet that competition? Rather, why won't they?"

"Matter of policy, maybe," Stubby hazarded. "Matter of keeping costs down. Apart from a few little fresh-fish buyers, you are the only operator on the Gulf who is cutting any particular ice. Gower may figure that he will eventually get these fish at his own price. If I were eliminated, he would."

"I'd still be on the job," MacRae ventured.

"Would you, though?" Stubby asked doubtfully.

"Yes." MacRae made his reply positive in tone. "You could buy all right. That Squitty Island bunch of trollers seem convinced you are the whole noise in the salmon line. But without Crow Harbor where could you unload such quantities of fish?"

It struck MacRae that there was something more than mere casual speculation in Stubby's words. But he did not attempt to delve into motives.

"A good general," he said with a dry smile, "doesn't advertise his plan of campaign in advance. Without Crow Harbor as a market I could not have done what I have done this season. But Crow Harbor could shut down to-morrow—and I'd go on just the same."

Stubby poked thoughtfully with a pencil at the blotter on his desk.

"Well, Jack, I may as well be quite frank with you," he said at last. "I have had hints that may mean something. The big run will be over at Squitty in another month. I don't believe I can be dictated to on short notice. But I cannot positively say. If you can see your way to carry on, it will be quite a relief to me. Another season it may be different."

"I think I can."

But though MacRae said this confidently, he was privately not so sure. From the

very beginning he had expected pressure to come on Stubby, as the active head of Crow Harbor. It was as Stubby said. Unless he—MacRae—had a market for his fish, he could not buy. And within the limits of British Columbia the salmon market was subject to control; by just what means MacRae had got inklings here and there. He had not been deceived by the smoothness of his operations so far. Below the clear horizon there was a storm gathering. A man like Gower did not lie down and submit passively to being beaten at his own game.

But MacRae believed he had gone too far to be stopped now, even if his tactics did not please the cannery interests. They could have squelched him easily enough in the beginning, when he had no funds to speak of, when his capital was mostly a capacity for hard, dirty work and a willingness to take chances. Already he had run his original shoestring to fifteen thousand dollars cash in hand. It scarcely seemed possible. It gave him a startling vision of the profits in the salmon industry, and it was not a tenable theory that men who had controlled such a source of profits would sit idle while he undermined their monopoly. Nevertheless he had made that much money in four months. He had at his back a hundred fishermen who knew him, liked him, trusted him, who were anxious that he should prosper, because they felt that they were sharing in that prosperity. Ninety per cent. of these men had a grievance against the canneries. And he had the good will of these men with sun-browned faces and hook-scarred hands. The human equation in industrial processes is a highly important one, as older, wiser men than Jack MacRae had been a longer time discovering.

He did not try to pin Stubby to a more definite statement. A hint was enough for MacRae. Stubby Abbott could also be depended upon to see things beyond the horizon. If a storm broke Stubby was the most vulnerable, because in a sense he was involved with the cannery interests in general, and they would consider him an apostate and knife him without mercy,—if they could. If the Abbott estate had debts, obligations which could be manipulated, if through the financial convolutions of marketing the Crow Harbor pack Stubby could be reached, the Abbott family had property, a standard of living that stood for comfort, appearance, luxury almost. There are always plenty of roads open to a flank attack on people like that; many levers, financial and otherwise, can be pulled for or against them.

So MacRae, knowing that Stubby must protect himself in a showdown, set about fortifying his own approaches.

For a first move he hired an engineer, put Steve Ferrara in charge of the

Blackbird, and started him back to Squitty. Then MacRae took the next train to Bellingham, a cannery town which looks out on the southern end of the Gulf of Georgia from the American side of the boundary. He extended his journey to Seattle. Altogether, he was gone three days.

When he came back he made a series of calls,—at the Vancouver offices of three different canneries and one of the biggest cold-storage concerns on the Pacific Coast. He got a courteous but unsatisfactory reception from the cannery men. He fared a little better with the manager of the cold-storage plant. This gentleman was tentatively agreeable in the matter of purchasing salmon, but rather vague in the way of terms.

"Beginning with May next I can deliver any quantity up to two thousand a day, perhaps more, for a period of about four months," MacRae stated. "What I should like to know is the percentage over the up-coast price you would pay."

But he could not pin the man down to anything definite. He would only speak pleasantly of the market and possible arrangements, utter vague commonplaces in business terminology. MacRae rose.

"I'm wasting your time and my own," he said. "You don't want my fish. Why not say so?"

"We always want fish," the man declared, bending a shrewdly appraising eye on MacRae. "Bring in the salmon and we will do business."

"On your own terms when my carriers are tied to your dock with a capacity load which I must sell or throw overboard within forty-eight hours," MacRae smiled. "No, I don't intend to go up against any take-it-or-leave proposition like that. I don't have to."

"Well, we might allow you five per cent. That's about the usual thing on salmon. And we would rather have salmon now than a promise of them next season."

"Oh, rats!" MacRae snorted. "I'm in the business to make money—not simply to create dividends for your Eastern stockholders while I eke out a living and take all the risks. Come again."

The cold storage man smiled.

"Come and see me in the spring. Meantime, when you have a cargo of salmon, you might run them in to us. We'll pay market prices. It's up to you to protect

yourself in the buying."

MacRae went on about his business. He had not expected much encouragement locally, so he did not suffer disappointment. He knew quite well what he could expect in Vancouver if Crow Harbor canceled his contract. He would bring in boatloads of salmon, and the dealers would squeeze him, all but the Terminal Fish Company. And if the market could be controlled, if the men behind could dictate the Crow Harbor policy, they might also bring the Terminal into line. Even if they did not the Terminal could only handle a minor portion of the salmon he could get while the big run swirled around Squitty Island.

But MacRae was not downcast. He was only sober and thoughtful, which had become characteristic of him in the last four months. He was forgetting how to laugh, to be buoyant, to see the world through the rose-colored glasses of sanguine youth. He was becoming a living exemplar of his nickname. Even Stubby Abbott marked this when Jack came back from Bellingham.

"Come on out to the house," Stubby urged. "Your men can handle the job a day or two longer. Forget the grind for once. It's getting you."

"No, I don't think it is," MacRae denied. "But a man can't play and produce at the same time. I have to keep going."

He did go out to Abbott's one evening, however, and suffered a good deal of teasing from Nelly over his manhandling of Sam Kaye. A lot of other young people happened to foregather there. They sang and flirted and presently moved the rugs off the living-room floor and danced to a phonograph. MacRae found himself a little out of it, by inclination. He was tired, without knowing quite what was the matter with him. A man, even a young and sturdy man, cannot work like a horse for months on end, eating his meals anyhow and sleeping when he can, without losing temporarily the zest for careless fun. For another thing, he found himself looking at these immaculate young people as any hard-driven worker must perforce look upon drones.

They were sons and daughters of the well-to-do, divorced from all uncouthness, with pretty manners and good clothes. They seemed serene in the assurance—MacRae got this impression for the first time in his social contact with them—that wearing good clothes, behaving well, giving themselves whole-heartedly to having a good time, was the most important and satisfying thing in the world. They moved in an atmosphere of considering these things their due, a birthright, their natural and proper condition of well-being.

And MacRae found himself wondering what they gave or ever expected to give in return for this pleasant security of mind and body. Some one had to pay for it, the silks and georgettes and white flannels, furs and strings of pearls and gold trinkets, the good food, the motor cars, and the fun.

He knew a little about every one he met that evening, for in Vancouver as in any other community which has developed a social life beyond the purely primitive stages of association, people gravitate into sets and cliques. They lived in good homes, they had servants, they week-ended here and there. Of the dozen or more young men and women present, only himself and Stubby Abbott made any pretense at work.

Yet somebody paid for all they had and did. Men in offices, in shops, in fishing boats and mines and logging camps worked and sweated to pay for all this well-being in which they could have no part. MacRae even suspected that a great many men had died across the sea that this sort of thing should remain the inviolate privilege of just such people as these. It was not an inspiring conclusion.

He smiled to himself. How they would stare if he should voice these stray thoughts in plain English. They would cry out that he was a Bolshevik. Absolutely! He wondered why he should think such things. He wasn't disgruntled. He wanted a great many things which these young people of his own age had gotten from fairy godmothers,—in the shape of pioneer parents who had skimmed the cream off the resources of a developing frontier and handed it on to their children, and who themselves so frequently kept in the background, a little in awe of their gilded offspring. MacRae meant to beat the game as it was being played. He felt that he was beating it. But nothing would be handed him on a silver salver. Fortune would not be bestowed upon him in any easy, soft-handed fashion. He would have to render an equivalent for what he got. He wondered if the security of success so gained would have any greater value for him than it would have for those who took their blessings so lightly.

This kink of analytical reasoning was new to MacRae, and it kept him from entering whole-heartedly into the joyous frivolity which functioned in the Abbott home that evening. He had never found himself in that critical mood before. He did not want to prattle nonsense. He did not want to think, and he could not help thinking. He had a curious sense of detachment from what was going on, even while he was a part of it. So he did not linger late.

The *Blackbird* had discharged at Crow Harbor late in the afternoon. She lay now at a Vancouver slip. By eleven o'clock he was aboard in his bunk, still thinking when he should have been asleep, staring wide-eyed at dim deck beams, his mind flitting restlessly from one thing to another. Steve Ferrara lay in the opposite bunk, wheezing his breath in and out of lungs seared by poison gas in Flanders. Smells of seaweed and tide-flat wafted in through open hatch and portholes. A full moon thrust silver fingers through deck openings. Gradually the softened medley of harbor noises lulled MacRae into a dreamless sleep. He only awakened at the clank of the engine and the shudder of the *Blackbird's* timbers as Steve backed her out of her berth in the first faint gleam of dawn.

The *Blackbird* made her trip and a second and a third, which brought the date late in August. On his delivery, when the salmon in her hold had been picarooned to the cannery floor, MacRae went up to the office. Stubby had sent for him. He looked uncomfortable when Jack came in.

"What's on your mind now?" MacRae asked genially.

"Something damned unpleasant," Stubby growled.

"Shoot," MacRae said. He sat down and lit a cigarette.

"I didn't think they could do it," Abbott said slowly. "But it seems they can. I guess you'll have to lay off the Gower territory after all, Jack."

"You mean *you* will," MacRae replied. "I've been rather expecting that. Can Gower hurt you?"

"Not personally. But the banks—export control—there are so many angles to the cannery situation. There's nothing openly threatened. But it has been made perfectly clear to me that I'll be hampered and harassed till I won't know whether I'm afoot or on horseback, if I go on paying a few cents more for salmon in order to keep my plant working efficiently. Damn it, I hate it. But I'm in no position to clash with the rest of the cannery crowd and the banks too. I hate to let you down. You've pulled me out of a hole. I don't know a man who would have worked at your pitch and carried things off the way you have. If I had this pack marketed, I could snap my fingers at them. But I haven't. There's the rub. I hate to ditch you in order to insure myself—get in line at somebody else's dictation."

"Don't worry about me," MacRae said gently. "I have no cannery and no pack to market through the regular channels. Nor has the bank advanced me any funds.

You are not responsible for what I do. And neither Gower nor the Packers' Association nor the banks can stop me from buying salmon so long as I have the money to pay the fishermen and carriers to haul them, can they?"

"No, but the devil of it is they can stop you *selling*," Stubby lamented bitterly. "I tell you there isn't a cannery on the Gulf will pay you a cent more than they pay the fishermen. What's the use of buying if you can't sell?"

MacRae did not attempt to answer that.

"Let's sum it up," he said. "You can't take any more bluebacks from Gower's territory. That, I gather, is the chief object. I suppose they know as much about your business as you know yourself. Am I to be deprived of the two boat charters into the bargain?"

"No, by the Lord," Stubby swore. "Not if you want them. My general policy may be subject to dictation, but not the petty details of my business. There's a limit. I won't stand for that."

"Put a fair price on the *Birds*, and I'll buy 'em both," MacRae suggested. "You had them up for sale, anyway. That will let you out, so far as my equipment is concerned."

"Five thousand each," Stubby said promptly.

"They're good value at that. And I can use ten thousand dollars to advantage, right now."

"I'll give you a check. I want the registry transferred to me at once," MacRae continued. "That done, you can cease worrying over me, Stub. You've been square, and I've made money on the deal. You would be foolish to fight unless you have a fighting chance. Oh, another thing. Will the Terminal shut off on me, too?"

"No," Stubby declared. "The Terminal is one of the weapons I intend ultimately to use as a club on the heads of this group of gentlemen who want to make a close corporation of the salmon industry on the British Columbia coast. If I get by this season, I shall be in shape to show them something. They will not bother about the Terminal, because the Terminal is small. All the salmon they could take from you wouldn't hurt Gower. What they want is to enable Gower to get up his usual fall pack. It has taken him this long to get things shaped so he could call me off. He can't reach a local concern like the Terminal. No, the Terminal

will continue to buy salmon from you, Jack. But you know they haven't the facilities to handle a fourth of the salmon you have been running lately."

"I'll see they get whatever they can use," MacRae declared. "And if it is any satisfaction to you personally, Stub, I can assure you that I shall continue to do business as usual."

Stubby looked curious.

"You've got something up your sleeve?"

"Yes," MacRae admitted. "No stuffed club, either. It's loaded. You wait and keep your ears open."

MacRae's face twisted into a mirthless smile. His eyes glowed with the fire that always blazed up in them when he thought too intensely of Horace Gower and the past, or of Gower's various shifts to defeat him in what he undertook. He had anticipated this move. He was angrily determined that Gower should not get one more salmon, or buy what he got a cent cheaper, by this latest strategy.

"You appear to like old Horace," Stubby said thoughtfully, "about as much as our fellows used to like Fritz when he dropped high explosives on supposedly bomb-proof shelters."

"Just about as much," MacRae said shortly. "Well, you'll transfer that registry—when? I want to get back to Squitty as soon as possible."

"I'll go to town with you now, if you like," Stubby offered.

They acted on that. Within two hours MacRae was the owner of two motor launches under British registry. Payment in full left him roughly with five thousand dollars working capital, enough by only a narrow margin. At sunset Vancouver was a smoky smudge on a far horizon. At dusk he passed in the narrow mouth of Squitty Cove. The *Bluebird* was swinging about to go when her sister ship ranged alongside. Vincent Ferrara dropped his hook again. There were forty trollers in the Cove. MacRae called to them. They came in skiffs and dinghys, and when they were all about his stern and some perched in sea boots along the *Blackbird's* low bulwarks, MacRae said what he had to say.

"Gower has come alive. My market for fish bought in Gower's territory is closed, so far as Crow Harbor is concerned. If I can't sell salmon I can't buy them from you. How much do you think Folly Bay will pay for your fish?"

He waited a minute. The fishermen looked at him in the yellow lantern light, at each other. They shifted uneasily. No one answered his question.

MacRae went on.

"You can guess what will happen. You will be losers. So will I. I don't like the idea of being frozen out of the salmon-buying business, now that I have got my hand in. I don't intend to be. As long as I can handle a load of salmon I'll make the run. But I've got to run them farther, and you fellows will have to wait a bit for me now and then, perhaps. The cannery men hang together. They are making it bad for me because I'm paying a few cents more for salmon. They have choked off Crow Harbor. Gower is hungry for cheap salmon. He'll get them, too, if you let him head off outside buyers. Since I'm the only buyer covering these grounds, it's up to you, more than ever, to see that I keep coming. That's all. Tell the rest of the fishermen what I say whenever you happen to run across them."

They became articulate. They plied MacRae with questions. He answered tersely, as truthfully as he could. They cursed Folly Bay and the canneries in general. But they were not downcast. They did not seem apprehensive that Folly Bay would get salmon for forty cents. MacRae had said he would still buy. For them that settled it. They would not have to sell their catch to Folly Bay for whatever price Gower cared to set. Presently they began to drift away to their boats, to bed, for their work began in that gray hour between dawn and sunrise when the schooling salmon best strike the trolling spoon.

One lingered, a returned soldier named Mullen, who had got his discharge in May and gone fishing. Mullen had seen two years in the trenches. He sat in his skiff, scowling up at MacRae, talking about the salmon packers, about fishing.

"Aw, it's the same everywhere," he said cynically. "They all want a cinch, easy money, big money. Looks like the more you have, the more you can grab. Folly Bay made barrels of coin while the war was on. Why can't they give us fellers a show to make a little now? But they don't give a damn, so long as they get theirs. And then they wonder why some of us guys that went to France holler about the way we find things when we come home."

He pushed his skiff away into the gloom that rested upon the Cove.

The *Bluebird* was packed with salmon to her hatch covers. There had been a fresh run. The trollers were averaging fifty fish to a man daily. MacRae put Vincent Ferrara aboard the *Blackbird*, himself took over the loaded vessel, and

within the hour was clear of Squitty's dusky headlands, pointing a course straight down the middle of the Gulf. His man turned in to sleep. MacRae stood watch alone, listening to the *ka-choof, ka-choof* of the exhaust, the murmuring swash of calm water cleft by the *Bluebird's* stem. Away to starboard the Ballenas light winked and blinked its flaming eye to seafaring men as it had done in his father's time. Miles to port the Sand Heads lightship swung to its great hawsers off the Fraser River shoals.

MacRae smiled contentedly. There was a long run ahead. But he felt that he had beaten Gower in this first definite brush. Moving in devious channels to a given end Gower had closed the natural markets to MacRae.

But there was no law against the export of raw salmon to a foreign country. MacRae could afford to smile. Over in Bellingham there were salmon packers who, like Folly Bay, were hungry for fish to feed their great machines. But—unlike Folly Bay—they were willing to pay the price, any price in reason, for a supply of salmon. Their own carriers later in the season would invade Canadian waters, so many thorns in the ample sides of the British Columbia packers. "The damned Americans!" they sometimes growled, and talked about legislation to keep American fish buyers out. Because the American buyer and canner alike would spend a dollar to make a dollar. And the British Columbia packers wanted a cinch, a monopoly, which in a measure they had. They were an anachronism, MacRae felt. They regarded the salmon and the salmon waters of the British Columbia coast as the feudal barons of old jealously regarded their special prerogatives. MacRae could see them growling and grumbling, he could see most clearly the scowl that would spread over the face of Mr. Horace A. Gower, when he learned that ten to twenty thousand Squitty Island salmon were passing down the Gulf each week to an American cannery; that a smooth-faced boy out of the Air Service was putting a crimp in the ancient order of things so far as one particular cannery was concerned.

This notion amused MacRae, served to while away the hours of monotonous plowing over an unruffled sea, until he drove down abreast the Fraser River's mouth and passed in among the nets and lights of the sockeye fleet drifting, a thousand strong, on the broad bosom of the Gulf. Then he had to stand up to his steering wheel and keep a sharp lookout, lest he foul his propellor in a net or cut down some careless fisherman who did not show a riding light.

CHAPTER XI

PERIL OF THE SEA

The last of August set the Red Flower of the Jungle books blooming along the British Columbia coast. The seeds of it were scattered on hot, dry, still days by pipe and cigarette, by sparks from donkey engines, by untended camp fires, wherever the careless white man went in the great coastwise forests. The woods were like a tinder box. One unguarded moment, and the ancient firs were wrapped in sheets of flame. Smoke lay on the Gulf like a pall of pungent fog, through which vessels ran by chart and compass, blind between ports, at imminent risk of collision.

Through this, well on into September, MacRae and Vincent Ferrara gathered cargoes of salmon and ran them down the Gulf to Bellingham, making their trips with the regularity of the tides, despite the murk that hid landmarks by day and obscured the guiding lighthouse flashes when dark closed in. They took their chances in the path of coastwise traffic, straining their eyes for vessels to leap suddenly out of the thickness that shut them in, their ears for fog signals that blared warning. There were close shaves, but they escaped disaster. They got the salmon and they delivered them, and Folly Bay still ran a bad second wherever the *Bird* boats served the trolling fleet. Even when Gower at last met MacRae's price, his collectors got few fish. The fishermen took no chances. They were convinced that if MacRae abandoned buying for lack of salmon Folly Bay would cut the price in two. It had been done before. So they held their fish for the *Bird* boats. MacRae got them all. Even when American buyers trailed MacRae to the source of his supply their competition hurt Gower instead of MacRae. The trollers supplied MacRae with all the salmon he could carry. It was still fresh in their minds that he had come into the field that season as their special Providence.

But the blueback run tapered off at Squitty. September ushered in the annual coho run on its way to the spawning grounds. And the coho did not school along island shores, feeding upon tiny herring. Stray squadrons of coho might pass Squitty, but they did not linger in thousands as the blueback did. The coho swept into the Gulf from mysterious haunts in blue water far offshore, myriads of silver fish seeking the streams where they were spawned, and to which as mature fish

they now returned to reproduce themselves. They came in great schools. They would loaf awhile in some bay at a stream mouth, until some irresistible urge drove them into fresh water, up rivers and creeks, over shoal and rapid, through pool and canyon, until the stream ran out to a whimpering trickle and the backs of the salmon stuck out of the water. Up there, in the shadow of great mountains, in the hidden places of the Coast range, those that escaped their natural enemies would spawn and die.

While the coho and the humpback, which came about the same time, and the dog salmon, which comes last of all—but each to function in the same manner and sequence—laid in the salt-water bays, resting, it would seem, before the last and most terrible struggle of their brief existence, the gill-net fishermen and the cannery purse-seine boats took toll of them. The trollers harried them from the moment they showed in the Gulf, because the coho will strike at a glittering spoon anywhere in salt water. But the net boats take them in hundreds at one drift, and the purse seiners gather thousands at a time in a single sweep of the great bag-like seine.

When September days brought the cohoes in full force along with cooler nights and a great burst of rain that drowned the forest fires and cleared away the enshrouding smoke, leaving only the pleasant haze of autumn, the Folly Bay purse-seine boats went out to work. The trolling fleet scattered from Squitty Island. Some steamed north to the troubled waters of Salmon River and Blackfish Sound, some to the Redondas where spring salmon could be taken. Many put by their trolling gear and hung their gill nets. A few gas boats and a few rowboat men held to the Island, depending upon stray schools and the spring salmon that haunted certain reefs and points and beds of kelp. But the main fleet scattered over two hundred miles of sea.

MacRae could have called it a season and quit with honor and much profit. Or he might have gone north and bought salmon here and there, free-lancing. He did neither. There were enough gill-netters operating on Gower's territory to give him fair cargoes. Every salmon he could divert from the cans at Folly Bay meant,—well, he did not often stop to ask precisely what that did mean to him. But he never passed Poor Man's Rock, bleak and brown at low tide, or with seas hissing over it when the tide was at flood, without thinking of his father, of the days and months and years old Donald MacRae had lived and worked in sight of the Rock,—a life at the last lonely and cheerless and embittered by the sight of his ancient enemy preening his feathers in Cradle Bay. Old Donald had lived for thirty years unable to return a blow which had scarred his face and his heart in

the same instant. But his son felt that he was making better headway. It is unlikely that Donald MacRae ever looked at Gower's cottage nestling like a snowflake in the green lee of Point Old, or cast his eyes over that lost estate of his, with more unchristian feelings than did his son. In Jack MacRae's mind the Golden Rule did not apply to Horace Gower, nor to aught in which Gower was concerned.

So he stayed on Folly Bay territory with a dual purpose: to make money for himself, and to deprive Gower of profit where he could. He was wise enough to know that was the only way he could hurt a man like Gower. And he wanted to hurt Gower. The intensity of that desire grew. It was a point of honor, the old inborn clan pride that never compromised an injury or an insult or an injustice, which neither forgave nor forgot.

For weeks MacRae in the *Blackbird* and Vin Ferrara in her sister ship flitted here and there. The purse seiners hunted the schooling salmon, the cohoes and humps. The gill-netters hung on the seiner's heels, because where the purse seine could get a haul so could they. And the carriers and buyers sought the fishermen wherever they went, to buy and carry away their catch.

Folly Bay suffered bad luck from the beginning. Gower had four purse-seine boats in commission. Within a week one broke a crankshaft in half a gale off Sangster Island. The wind put her ashore under the nose of the sandstone Elephant and the seas destroyed her.

Fire gutted a second not long after, so that for weeks she was laid up for repairs. That left him but two efficient craft. One operated on his concessions along the mainland shore. The other worked three stream mouths on Vancouver Island, straight across from Folly Bay.

Still, Gower's cannery was getting salmon. In those three bays no other purse seiner could shoot his gear. Folly Bay held them under exclusive license. Gill nets could be drifted there, but the purse seiner was king.

A gill net goes out over a boat's stern. When it is strung it stands in the sea like a tennis net across a court, a web nine hundred feet long, twenty feet deep, its upper edge held afloat by corks, its lower sunk by lead weights spaced close together. The outer end is buoyed to a float which carries a flag and a lantern; the inner is fast to the bitts of the launch. Thus set, and set in the evening, since salmon can only be taken by the gills in the dark, fisherman, launch, and net drift with the changing tides till dawn. Then he hauls. He may have ten salmon, or a

hundred, or treble that. He may have none, and the web be torn by sharks and fouled heavy with worthless dogfish.

The purse seiner works in daylight, off a powerfully engined sixty-foot, thirty-ton craft. He pays the seine out over a roller on a revolving platform aft. His vessel moves slowly in a sweeping circle as the net goes out,—a circle perhaps a thousand feet in diameter. When the circle is complete the two ends of the net meet at the seiner's stern. A power winch hauls on ropes and the net closes. Nothing escapes. It draws together until it is a bag, a "purse" drawn up under the vessel's counter, full of glistening fish.

The salmon is a surface fish, his average depth seldom below four fathoms. He breaks water when he feeds, when he plays, when he runs in schools. The purse seiner watches the signs. When the salmon rise in numbers he makes a set. To shoot the gear and purse the seine is a matter of minutes. A thousand salmon at a haul is nothing. Three thousand is common. Five thousand is far below the record. Purse seines have been burst by the dead weight of fish against the pull of the winch.

The purse seine is a deadly trap for schooling salmon. And because the salmon schools in mass formation, crowding nose to tail and side to side, in the entrance to a fresh-water stream, the Fisheries Department having granted a monopoly of seining rights to a packer has also benevolently decreed that no purse seine or other net shall operate within a given distance of a stream mouth,—that the salmon, having won to fresh water, shall go free and his kind be saved from utter extinction.

These regulations are not drawn for sentimental reasons, only to preserve the salmon industry. The farmer saves wheat for his next year's seeding, instead of selling the last bushel to the millers. No man willfully kills the goose that lays him golden eggs. But the salmon hunter, eagerly pursuing the nimble dollar, sometimes grows rapacious in the chase and breaks laws of his own devising,—if a big haul promises and no Fisheries Inspector is by to restrain him. The cannery purse seiners are the most frequent offenders. They can make their haul quickly in forbidden waters and get away. Folly Bay, shrewdly paying its seine crews a bonus per fish on top of wages, had always been notorious for crowding the law.

Solomon River takes its rise in the mountainous backbone of Vancouver Island. It is a wide, placid stream on its lower reaches, flowing through low, timbered

regions, emptying into the Gulf in a half-moon bay called the Jew's Mouth, which is a perfect shelter from the Gulf storms and the only such shelter in thirty miles of bouldery shore line. The beach runs northwest and southeast, bleak and open, undented. In all that stretch there is no point from behind which a Fisheries Patrol launch could steal unexpectedly into the Jew's Mouth.

Upon a certain afternoon the *Blackbird* lay therein. At her stern, fast by light lines to her after bitts, clung half a dozen fish boats, blue wisps of smoke drifting from the galley stovepipes, the fishermen variously occupied. The *Blackbird's* hold was empty except for ice. She was waiting for fish, and the *Bluebird* was due on the same errand the following day.

Nearer shore another cluster of gill-netters was anchored, a Jap or two, and a Siwash Indian with his hull painted a gaudy blue. And in the middle of the Jew's Mouth, which was a scant six hundred yards across at its widest, the *Folly Bay No. 5* swung on her anchor chain. A tubby cannery tender lay alongside. The crews were busy with picaroons forking salmon out of the seiner into the tender's hold. The flip-flop of the fish sounded distinctly in that quiet place. Their silver bodies flashed in the sun as they were thrown across the decks.

When the tender drew clear and passed out of the bay she rode deep with the weight of salmon aboard. Without the Jew's Mouth, around the *Blackbird* and the fish boats and the *No. 5* the salmon were threshing water. *Klop*. A flash of silver. Bubbles. A series of concentric rings that ran away in ripples, till they merged into other widening rings. They were everywhere. The river was full of them. The bay was alive with them.

A boat put off from the seiner. The man rowed out of the Jew's Mouth and stopped, resting on his oars. He remained there, in approximately the same position. A sentry.

The *No. 5* heaved anchor, the chain clanking and chattering in a hawsepipe. Her exhaust spat smoky, gaseous fumes. A bell clanged. She moved slowly ahead, toward the river's mouth, a hundred yards to one side of it. Then the brown web of the seine began to spin out over the stern. She crossed the mouth of the Solomon, holding as close in as her draft permitted, and kept on straight till her seine was paid out to the end. Then she stopped, lying still in dead water with her engine idling.

The tide was on the flood. Salmon run streams on a rising tide. And the seine stood like a wall across the river's mouth.

Every man watching knew what the seiner was about, in defiance of the law. The salmon, nosing into the stream, driven by that imperative urge which is the law of their being, struck the net, turned aside, swam in a slow circle and tried again and again, seeking free passage, until thousands of them were massed behind the barrier of the net. Then the *No. 5* would close the net, tauten the ropes which made it a purse, and haul out into deep water.

It was the equivalent of piracy on the high seas. To be taken in the act meant fines, imprisonment, confiscation of boat and gear. But the *No. 5* would not be caught. She had a guard posted. Cannery seiners were never caught. When they were they got off with a warning and a reprimand. Only gill-netters, the small fry of the salmon industry, ever paid the utmost penalty for raids like that. So the fishermen said, with a cynical twist of their lips.

"Look at 'em," one said to MacRae. "They make laws and break 'em themselves. They been doin' that every day for a week. If one of us set a piece of net in the river and took three hundred salmon the canners would holler their heads off. There'd be a patrol boat on our heels all the time if they thought we'd take a chance."

"Well, I'm about ready to take a chance," another man growled. "They clear the bay in daylight and all we get is their leavings at night."

The *No. 5* pursed her seine and hauled out until she was abreast of the *Blackbird*. She drew close up to her massive hull a great heap of salmon, struggling, twisting, squirming within the net. The loading began. Her men laughed and shouted as they worked. The gill-net fishermen watched silently, scowling. It was like taking bread out of their mouths. It was like an honest man restrained by a policeman's club from taking food when he is hungry, and seeing a thief fill his pockets and walk off unmolested.

"Four thousand salmon that shot," Dave Mullen said, the same Mullen who had talked to MacRae in Squitty one night. "Say, why should we stand for that? We can get salmon that way too."

He spoke directly to MacRae.

"What's sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander," MacRae replied. "I'll take the fish if you get them."

"You aren't afraid of getting in wrong yourself?" the man asked him.

MacRae shook his head. He did not lean to lawlessness. But the cannery men had framed this law. They cried loudly and continually for its strict enforcement. And they violated it flagrantly themselves, or winked at its violation when that meant an added number of cases to their pack. Not alone in the Jew's Mouth; all along the British Columbia coast the purse seiners forgot the law when the salmon swarmed in a stream mouth and they could make a killing. Only canneries could hold a purse-seine license. If the big men would not honor their own law, why should the lesser? So MacRae felt and said.

The men in the half-dozen boats about his stern had dealt all the season with MacRae. They trusted him. They neither liked nor trusted Folly Bay. Folly Bay was not only breaking the law in the Jew's Mouth, but in breaking the law they were making it hard for these men to earn a dollar legitimately. Superior equipment, special privilege, cold-blooded violation of law because it was safe and profitable, gave the purse seiner an unfair advantage. The men gathered in a little knot on the deck of one boat. They put their heads together and lowered their voices. MacRae knew they were angry, that they had reached the point of fighting fire with fire. And he smiled to himself. He did not know what they were planning, but he could guess. It would not be the first time the individual fishermen had kicked over the traces and beaten the purse seiners at their own game. They did not include him in their council. He was a buyer. It was not his function to inquire how they took their fish. If they could take salmon which otherwise the *No. 5* would take, so much the worse for Folly Bay,—and so much the better for the fishermen, who earned their living precariously at best.

It was dusk when the purse seiner finished loading her catch and stowed the great net in a dripping heap on the turntable aft. At daylight or before, a cannery tender would empty her, and she would sweep the Jew's Mouth bare of salmon again.

With dusk also the fishermen were busy over their nets, still riding to the *Blackbird's* stern. Then they moved off in the dark. MacRae could hear nets paying out. He saw lanterns set to mark the outer end of each net. Silence fell on the bay. A single riding light glowed at the *No. 5's* masthead. Her cabin lights blinked out. Her crew sprawled in their bunks, sound asleep.

Under cover of the night the fishermen took pattern from the seiner's example. A gill net is nine hundred feet long, approximately twenty feet deep. They stripped the cork floats off one and hung it to the lead-line of another. Thus with a web forty feet deep they went stealthily up to the mouth of the Solomon. With a four-

oared skiff manning each end of the nine hundred-foot length they swept their net around the Jew's Mouth, closed it like a purse seine, and hauled it out into the shallows of a small beach. They stood in the shallow water with sea boots on and forked the salmon into their rowboats and laid the rowboats alongside the *Blackbird* to deliver,—all in the dark without a lantern flicker, with muffled oarlocks and hushed voices. Three times they swept the bay.

At five in the morning, before it was lightening in the east, the *Blackbird* rode four inches below her load water line with a mixed cargo of coho and dog salmon, the heaviest cargo ever stowed under her hatches,—and eight fishermen divided two thousand dollars share and share alike for their night's work.

MacRae battened his hatch covers, started his engine, heaved up the hook, and hauled out of the bay.

In the Gulf the obscuring clouds parted to lay a shaft of silver on smooth, windless sea. The *Blackbird* wallowed down the moon-trail. MacRae stood at the steering wheel. Beside him Steve Ferrara leaned on the low cabin.

"She's getting day," Steve said, after a long silence. He chuckled. "Some raid. If they can keep that lick up those boys will all have new boats for next season. You'll break old Gower if you keep on, Jack."

The thought warmed MacRae. To break Gower, to pull him down to where he must struggle for a living like other common men, to deprive him of the power he had abused, to make him suffer as such a man would suffer under that turn of fortune,—that would help to square accounts. It would be only a measure of justice. To be dealt with as he had dealt with others,—MacRae asked no more than that for himself.

But it was not likely, he reflected. One bad season would not seriously involve a wary old bird like Horace Gower. He was too secure behind manifold bulwarks. Still in the end,—more spectacular things had come to pass in the affairs of men on this kaleidoscopic coast. MacRae's face was hard in the moonlight. His eyes were somber. It was an ugly feeling to nurse. For thirty years that sort of impotent bitterness must have rankled in his father's breast—with just cause, MacRae told himself moodily. No wonder old Donald had been a grave and silent man; a just, kindly, generous man, too. Other men had liked him, respected him. Gower alone had been implacable.

Well into the red and yellow dawn MacRae stood at the wheel, thinking of this,

an absent look in eyes which still kept keen watch ahead. He was glad when it came time for Steve's watch on deck, and he could lie down and let sleep drive it out of his mind. He did not live solely to revenge himself upon Horace Gower. He had his own way to make and his own plans—even if they were still a bit nebulous—to fulfill. It was only now and then that the past saddened him and made him bitter.

The week following brought great runs of salmon to the Jew's Mouth. Of these the *Folly Bay No. 5* somehow failed to get the lion's share. The gill-net men laughed in their soiled sleeves and furtively swept the bay clear each night and all night, and the daytime haul of the seine fell far below the average. The *Blackbird* and the *Bluebird* waddled down a placid Gulf with all they could carry.

And although there was big money-making in this short stretch, and the secret satisfaction of helping put another spoke in Gower's wheel, MacRae did not neglect the rest of his territory nor the few trollers that still worked Squitty Island. He ran long hours to get their few fish. It was their living, and MacRae would not pass them up because their catch meant no profit compared to the time he spent and the fuel he burned making this round. He would drive straight up the Gulf from Bellingham to Squitty, circle the Island and then across to the mouth of the Solomon. The weather was growing cool now. Salmon would keep unspoiled a long time in a trailer's hold. It did not matter to him whether it was day or night around Squitty. He drove his carrier into any nook or hole where a troller might lie waiting with a few salmon.

The *Blackbird* came pitching and diving into a heavy southeast swell up along the western side of Squitty at ten o'clock in the black of an early October night. There was a storm brewing, a wicked one, reckoned by the headlong drop of the aneroid. MacRae had a hundred or so salmon aboard for all his Squitty round, and he had yet to pick up those on the boats in the Cove. He cocked his eye at a cloud-wrack streaking above, driving before a wind which had not yet dropped to the level of the Gulf, and he said to himself that it would be wise to stay in the Cove that night. A southeast gale, a beam sea, and the tiny opening of the Jew's Mouth was a bad combination to face in a black night. As he stood up along Squitty he could hear the swells break along the shore. Now and then a cold puff of air, the forerunner of the big wind, struck him. Driving full speed the *Blackbird* dipped her bow deep in each sea and rose dripping to the next. He passed Cradle Bay at last, almost under the steep cliffs, holding in to round Poor Man's Rock and lay a compass course to the mouth of Squitty Cove.

And as he put his wheel over and swept around the Rock and came clear of Point Old a shadowy thing topped by three lights in a red and green and white triangle seemed to leap at him out of the darkness. The lights showed, and under the lights white water hissing. MacRae threw his weight on the wheel. He shouted to Steve Ferrara, lying on his bunk in the little cabin aft.

He knew the boat instantly,—the *Arrow* shooting through the night at twenty miles an hour, scurrying to shelter under the full thrust of her tremendous power. For an appreciable instant her high bow loomed over him, while his hands twisted the wheel. But the *Blackbird* was heavy, sluggish on her helm. She swung a little, from square across the rushing *Arrow*, to a slight angle. Two seconds would have cleared him. By the rules of the road at sea the *Blackbird* had the right of way. If MacRae had held by the book this speeding mass of mahogany and brass and steel would have cut him in two amidships. As it was, her high bow, the stem shod with a cast bronze cutwater edged like a knife, struck him on the port quarter, sheared through guard, planking, cabin.

There was a crash of riven timbers, the crunching ring of metal, quick oaths, a cry. The *Arrow* scarcely hesitated. She had cut away nearly the entire stern works of the *Blackbird*. But such was her momentum that the shock barely slowed her up. Her hull bumped the *Blackbird* aside. She passed on. She did not even stand by to see what she had done. There was a sound of shouting on her decks, but she kept on.

MacRae could have stepped aboard her as she brushed by. Her rail was within reach of his hand. But that did not occur to him. Steve Ferrara was asleep in the cabin, in the path of that destroying stem. For a stunned moment MacRae stood as the *Arrow* drew clear. The *Blackbird* began to settle under his feet.

MacRae dived down the after companion. He went into water to his waist. His hands, groping blindly, laid hold of clothing, a limp body. He struggled back, up, gained the deck, dragging Steve after him. The *Blackbird* was deep by the holed stern now, awash to her after fish hatch. She rose slowly, like a log, on each swell. Only the buoyancy of her tanks and timbers kept her from the last plunge. There was a light skiff bottom up across her hatches by the steering wheel. MacRae moved warily toward that, holding to the bulwark with one hand, dragging Steve with the other lest a sea sweep them both away.

He noticed, with his brain functioning unruffled, that the *Arrow* drove headlong into Cradle Bay. He could hear her exhaust roaring. He could still hear shouting.

And he could see also that the wind and the tide and the roll of the swells carried the water-logged hulk of the *Blackbird* in the opposite direction. She was past the Rock, but she was edging shoreward, in under the granite walls that ran between Point Old and the Cove. He steadied himself, keeping his hold on Steve, and reached for the skiff. As his fingers touched it a comber flung itself up out of the black and shot two feet of foam and green water across the swamped hull. It picked up the light cedar skiff like a chip and cast it beyond his reach and beyond his sight. And as he clung to the cabin pipe-rail, drenched with the cold sea, he heard that big roller burst against the shore very near at hand. He saw the white spray lift ghostly in the black.

MacRae held his hand over Steve's heart, over his mouth to feel if he breathed. Then he got Steve's body between his legs to hold him from slipping away, and bracing himself against the sodden lurch of the wreck, began to take off his clothes.



CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN SUN AND SUN

Walking when he could, crawling on hands and knees when his legs buckled under him, MacRae left a blood-sprinkled trail over grass and moss and fallen leaves. He lived over and over that few minutes which had seemed so long, in which he had been battered against broken rocks, in which he had clawed over weedy ledges armored with barnacles that cut like knives, hauling Steve Ferrara's body with him so that it should not become the plaything of the tides. MacRae was no stranger to death. He had seen it in many terrible forms. He had heard the whistle of the invisible scythe that cuts men down. He knew that Steve was dead when he dragged him at last out of the surf, up where nothing but high-flung drops of spray could reach him. He left him there on a mossy ledge, knowing that he could do nothing more for Steve Ferrara and that he must do something for himself. So he came at last to the end of that path which led to his own house and crept and stumbled up the steps into the deeper darkness of those hushed, lonely rooms.

MacRae knew he had suffered no vital hurt, no broken bones. But he had been fearfully buffeted among those sea-drenched rocks, bruised from head to foot, shocked by successive blows. He had spent his strength to keep the sea from claiming Steve. He had been unmercifully slashed by the barnacles. He was weak from loss of blood, and he was bleeding yet, in oozy streams,—face, hands, shoulders, knees, wherever those lance-edged shells had raked his flesh.

He was sick and dizzy. But he could still think and act. He felt his way to matches on a kitchen shelf, staggered into his bedroom, lit a lamp. Out of a dresser drawer he took clean white cloth, out of another carbolic acid. He got himself a basin of water.

He sat down on the edge of his bed. As he tore the first strip of linen things began to swim before his eyes. He sagged back on a pillow. The room and the lamp and all that was near him blended in a misty swirl. He had the extraordinary sensation of floating lightly in space that was quiet and profoundly dark—and still he was cloudily aware of footsteps ringing hollow on the bare floor of the other room.

He became aware—as if no interval had elapsed—of being moved, of hands touching him, of a stinging sensation of pain which he understood to be the smarting of the cuts in his flesh. But time must have gone winging by, he knew, as his senses grew clearer. He was stripped of his sodden, bloody undershirt and overalls, partly covered by his blanket. He could feel bandages on his legs, on one badly slashed arm. He made out Betty Gower's face with its unruly mass of reddish-brown hair and two rose spots of color glowing on her smooth cheeks. There was also a tall young man, coatless, showing a white expanse of flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled above his elbows. MacRae could only see this out of one corner of his eye, for he was being turned gently over on his face. Weak and passive as he was, the firm pressure of Betty's soft hands on his skin gave him a curiously pleasant sensation.

He heard her draw her breath sharply and make some exclamation as his bare back turned to the light.

"This chap has been to the wars, eh, Miss Gower?" he heard the man say. "Those are machine-gun marks, I should say—close range, too. I saw plenty of that after the Argonne."

"Such scars. How could a man live with holes like that through his body?" Betty said. "He was in the air force."

"Some Hun got in a burst of fire on him, sometime, then," the man commented. "Didn't get him, either, or he wouldn't be here. Why, two or three bullet holes like that would only put a fellow out for a few weeks. Look at him," he tapped MacRae's back with a forefinger. "Shoulders and chest and arms like a champion middle weight ready to go twenty rounds. And you can bet all your pin money, Miss Gower, that this man's heart and lungs and nerves are away above par or he would never have got his wings. Takes a lot to down those fellows. Looks in bad shape now, doesn't he? All cut and bruised and exhausted. But he'll be walking about day after to-morrow. A little stiff and sore, but otherwise well enough."

"I wish he'd open his eyes and speak," Betty said. "How can you tell? He may be injured internally."

The man chuckled. He did not cease work as he talked. He was using a damp cloth, with a pungent medicated smell. Dual odors familiar to every man who has ever been in hospital assailed MacRae's nostrils. Wherever that damp cloth touched a cut it burned. MacRae listened drowsily. He had not the strength or the wish to do anything else.

"Heart action's normal. Respiration and temperature, ditto," he heard above him. "Unconsciousness is merely natural reaction from shock, nerve strain, loss of blood. You can guess what sort of fight he must have made in those breakers. If you were a sawbones, Miss Gower, you wouldn't be uneasy. I'll stake my professional reputation on his injuries being superficial. Quite enough to knock a man out, I grant. But a physique of this sort can stand a tremendous amount of strain without serious effect. Hand me that adhesive, will you, please?"

There was an air of unreality about the whole proceeding in MacRae's mind. He wondered if he would presently wake up in his bunk opposite Steve and find that he had been dreaming. Yet those voices, and the hands that shifted him tenderly, and the pyjama coat that was slipped on him at last, were not the stuff of dreams. No, the lights of the *Arrow*, the smash of the collision, the tumbling seas which had flung him against the rocks, the dead weight of Steve's body in his bleeding arms, were not illusions.

He opened his eyes when they turned him on his back.

"Well, old man, how do you feel?" Betty's companion asked genially.

"All right," MacRae said briefly. He found that speech required effort. His mind worked clearly enough, but his tongue was uncertain, his voice low-pitched, husky. He turned his eyes on Betty. She tried to smile. But her lips quivered in the attempt. MacRae looked at her curiously. But he did not say anything. In the face of accomplished facts, words were rather futile.

He closed his eyes again, only to get a mental picture of the *Arrow* leaping at him out of the gloom, the thunder of the swells bursting against the foot of the cliffs, of Steve lying on that ledge alone. But nothing could harm Steve. Storm and cold and pain and loneliness were nothing to him, now.

He heard Betty speak.

"Can we do anything more?"

"Um—no," the man answered. "Not for some time, anyway."

"Then I wish you would go back to the house and tell them," Betty said. "They'll be worrying. I'll stay here."

"I suppose it would be as well," he agreed. "I'll come back."

"There's no need for either of you to stay here," MacRae said wearily. "You've stopped the bleeding, and you can't do any more. Go home and go to bed. I'm as well alone."

There was a brief interval of silence. MacRae heard footsteps crossing the floor, receding, going down the steps. He opened his eyes. Betty Gower sat on a low box by his bed, her hands in her lap, looking at him wistfully. She leaned a little toward him.

"I'm awfully sorry," she whispered.

"So was the little boy who cut off his sister's thumb with the hatchet," MacRae muttered. "But that didn't help sister's thumb. If you'll run down to old Peter Ferrara's house and tell him what has happened, and then go home yourself, we'll call it square."

"I have already done that," Betty said. "Dolly is away. The fishermen are bringing Steve Ferrara's body to his uncle's house. They are going to try to save what is left of your boat."

"It is kind of you, I'm sure, to pick up the pieces," MacRae gibed.

"I *am* sorry," the girl breathed.

"After the fact. Belting around a point in the dark at train speed, regardless of the rules of the road. Destroying a valuable boat, killing a man. Property is supposed to be sacred—if life has no market value. Were you late for dinner?"

In his anger he made a quick movement with his arms, flinging the blanket off, sending intolerable pangs through his bruised and torn body.

Betty rose and bent over him, put the blanket back silently, tucked him in like a mother settling the cover about a restless child. She did not say anything for a minute. She stood over him, nervously plucking bits of lint off the blanket. Her eyes grew wet.

"I don't blame you for feeling that way," she said at last. "It was a terrible thing. You had the right of way. I don't know why or how Robertson let it happen. He has always been a careful navigator. The nearness when he saw you under his bows must have paralyzed him, and with our speed—oh, it isn't any use, I know, to tell you how sorry I am. That won't bring that poor boy back to life again. It won't—"

"You killed him—your kind of people—twice," MacRae said thickly. "Once in France, where he risked his life—all he had to risk—so that you and your kind should continue to have ease and security. He came home wheezing and strangling, suffering all the pains of death without death's relief. And when he was beginning to think he had another chance you finish him off. But that's nothing. A mere incident. Why should you care? The country is full of Ferraras. What do they matter? Men of no social or financial standing, men who work with their hands and smell of fish. If it's a shock to you to see one man dead and another cut and bloody, think of the numbers that suffer as great pains and hardships that you know nothing about—and wouldn't care if you did. You couldn't be what you are and have what you have if they didn't. Sorry! Sympathy is the cheapest thing in the market, cheaper than salmon. You can't help Steve Ferrara with that—not now. Don't waste any on me. I don't need it. I resent it. You may need it all for your own before I get through. I—I am—"

MacRae's voice trailed off into an incoherent murmur. He seemed to be floating off into those dark shadowy spaces again. In reality he was exhausted. A man with his veins half emptied of blood cannot get in a passion without a speedy reaction. MacRae went off into an unconscious state which gradually became transformed into natural, healthy sleep, the deep slumber of utter exhaustion.

At intervals thereafter he was hazily aware of some one beside him, of soft hands that touched him. Once he wakened to find the room empty, the lamp turned low. In the dim light and the hush the place seemed unutterably desolate and forsaken, as if he were buried in a crypt. When he listened he could hear the melancholy drone of the southeaster and the rumble of the surf, two sounds that fitted well his mood. He felt a strange relief when Betty came tiptoeing in from the kitchen. She bent over him. MacRae closed his eyes and slept again.

He awakened at last, alert, refreshed, free of that depression which had rested so heavily on him. And he found that weariness had caught Betty Gower in its overpowering grip. She had drawn her box seat up close beside him. Her body had drooped until her arms rested on the side of the bed, and her head rested on her arms. MacRae found one of his hands caught tight in both hers. She was asleep, breathing lightly, regularly. He twisted his stiffened neck to get a better look at her. He could only see one side of her face, and that he studied a long time. Pretty and piquant, still it was no doll's face. There was character in that firm mouth and round chin. Betty had a beautiful skin. That had been MacRae's first impression of her, the first time he saw her. And she had a heavy mass of reddish-brown hair that shone in the sunlight with a decided wave in it which

always made it seem unruly, about to escape from its conventional arrangement.

MacRae made no attempt to free his hand. He was quite satisfied to let it be. The touch of her warm flesh against his stirred him a little, sent his mind straying off into strange channels. Queer that the first woman to care for him when he crept wounded and shaken to the shelter of his own roof should be the daughter of his enemy. For MacRae could not otherwise regard Horace Gower. Anything short of that seemed treason to the gray old man who had died in the next room, babbling of his son and the west wind and some one he called Bessie.

MacRae's eyes blurred unexpectedly. What a damned shame things had to be the way they were. Behind this girl, who was in herself lovely and desirable as a woman should be, loomed the pudgy figure of her father, ruthless, vindictively unjust. Gower hadn't struck at him openly; but that, MacRae believed, was merely for lack of suitable opening.

But that did not keep Jack MacRae from thinking—what every normal man begins to think, or rather to feel, soon or late—that he is incomplete, insufficient, without some particular woman to love him, upon whom to bestow love. It was like a revelation. He caught himself wishing that Betty would wake up and smile at him, bend over him with a kiss. He stared up at the shadowy roof beams, feeling the hot blood leap to his face at the thought. There was an uncanny magic in the nearness of her, a lure in the droop of her tired body. And MacRae struggled against that seduction. Yet he could not deny that Betty Gower, innocently sleeping with his hand fast in hers, filled him with visions and desires which had never before focused with such intensity on any woman who had come his way. Mysteriously she seemed absolved of all blame for being a Gower, for any of the things the Gower clan had done to him and his, even to the misfortune of that night which had cost a man his life.

"It isn't *her* fault," MacRae said to himself. "But, Lord, I wish she'd kept away from here, if *this* sort of thing is going to get me."

What *this* was he did not attempt to define. He did not admit that he was hovering on the brink of loving Betty Gower—it seemed an incredible thing for him to do—but was vividly aware that she had kindled an incomprehensible fire in him, and he suspected, indeed he feared with a fear that bordered on spiritual shrinking, that it would go on glowing after she was gone. And she would go presently. This spontaneous rushing to his aid was merely what a girl like that, with generous impulses and quick sympathy, would do for any one in dire need.

She would leave behind her an inescapable longing, an emptiness, a memory of sweetly disturbing visions. MacRae seemed to see with remarkable clarity and sureness that he would be penalized for yielding to that bewitching fancy. By what magic had she so suddenly made herself a shining figure in a golden dream? Some necromancy of the spirit, invisible but wonderfully potent? Or was it purely physical,—the soft reddish-brown of her hair; her frank gray eyes, very like his own; the marvelous, smooth clearness and coloring of her skin; her voice, that was given to soft cadences? He did not know. No man ever quite knows what positive qualities in a woman can make his heart leap. MacRae was no wiser than most. But he was not prone to cherish illusions, to deceive himself. He had imagination. That gave him a key to many things which escape a sluggish mind.

"Well," he said to himself at last, with a fatalistic humor, "if it comes that way, it comes. If I am to be the goat, I shall be, and that's all there is to it."

Under his breath he cursed Horace Gower deeply and fervently, and he was not conscious of anything incongruous in that. And then he lay very thoughtful and a little sad, his eyes on the smooth curve of Betty's cheek swept by long brown lashes, the corner of a red mouth made for kissing. His fingers were warm in hers. He smiled sardonically at a vagrant wish that they might remain there always.

Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. MacRae wondered if the gods thus planned his destruction?

A tremulous sigh warned him. He shut his eyes, feigned sleep. He felt rather than saw Betty sit up with a start, release his hand. Then very gently she moved that arm back under the blanket, reached across him and patted the covers close about his body, stood looking down at him.

And MacRae stirred, opened his eyes.

"What time is it?" he asked.

She looked at a wrist watch. "Four o'clock." She shivered.

"You've been here all this time without a fire. You're chilled through. Why didn't you go home? You should go now."

"I have been sitting here dozing," she said. "I wasn't aware of the cold until now. But there is wood and kindling in the kitchen, and I am going to make a fire."

Aren't you hungry?"

"Starving," he said. "But there is nothing to eat in the house. It has been empty for months."

"There is tea," she said. "I saw some on a shelf. I'll make a cup of that. It will be something warm, refreshing."

MacRae listened to her at the kitchen stove. There was the clink of iron lids, the smell of wood smoke, the pleasant crackle of the fire. Presently she came in with two steaming cups.

"I have a faint recollection of talking wild and large a while ago," MacRae remarked. Indeed, it seemed hazy to him now. "Did I say anything nasty?"

"Yes," she replied frankly; "perhaps the sting of what you said lay in its being partly true. A half truth is sometimes a deadly weapon. I wonder if you do really hate us as much, as your manner implied—and why?"

"Us. Who?" MacRae asked.

"My father and me," she put it bluntly.

"What makes you think I do?" MacRae asked. "Because I have set up a fierce competition in a business where your father has had a monopoly so long that he thinks this part of the Gulf belongs to him? Because I resent your running down one of my boats? Because I go about my affairs in my own way, regardless of Gower interests?"

"What do these things amount to?" Betty answered impatiently. "It's in your manner, your attitude. Sometimes it even shows in your eyes. It was there the morning I came across you sitting on Point Old, the day after the armistice was signed. I've danced with you and seen you look at me as if—as if," she laughed self-consciously, "you would like to wring my neck. I have never done anything to create a dislike of that sort. I have never been with you without being conscious that you were repressing something, out of—well, courtesy, I suppose. There is a peculiar tension about you whenever my father is mentioned. I'm not a fool," she finished, "even if I happen to be one of what you might call the idle rich. What is the cause of this bad blood?"

"What does it matter?" MacRae parried.

"There is something, then?" she persisted.

MacRae turned his head away. He couldn't tell her. It was not wholly his story to tell. How could he expect her to see it, to react to it as he did? A matter involving her father and mother, and his father. It was not a pretty tale. He might be influenced powerfully in a certain direction by the account of it passed on by old Donald MacRae; he might be stirred by the backwash of those old passions, but he could not lay bare all that to any one—least of all to Betty Gower. And still MacRae, for the moment, was torn between two desires. He retained the same implacable resentment toward Gower, and he found himself wishing to set Gower's daughter apart and outside the consequences of that ancient feud. And that, he knew, was trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. It couldn't be done.

"Was the *Arrow* holed in the crash?"

Betty stood staring at him. She blinked. Her fingers began again that nervous plucking at the blanket. But her face settled presently into its normal composure and she answered evenly.

"Rather badly up forward. She was settling fast when they beached her in the Bay."

"And then," she continued after a pause, "Doctor Wallis and I got ashore as quickly as we could. We got a lantern and came along the cliffs. And two of the men took our big lifeboat and rowed along near the shore. They found the *Blackbird* pounding on the rocks, and we found Steve Ferrara where you left him. And we followed you here by the blood you spattered along the way."

A line from the Rhyme of the Three Sealers came into MacRae's mind as befitting. But he was thinking of his father and not so much of himself as he quoted:

"Sorrow is me, in a lonely sea,
And a sinful fight I fall."

"I'm afraid I don't quite grasp that," Betty said. "Although I know Kipling too, and could supply the rest of those verses. I'm afraid I don't understand."

"It isn't likely that you ever will," MacRae answered slowly. "It is not necessary that you should."

Their voices ceased. In the stillness the whistle of the wind and the deep drone of

the seas shattering themselves on the granite lifted a dreary monotone. And presently a quick step sounded on the porch. Doctor Wallis came hurriedly in.

"Upon my soul," he said apologetically. "I ought to be shot, Miss Grower. I got everybody calmed down over at the cottage and chased them all to bed. Then I sat down in a soft chair before that cheerful fire in your living room. And I didn't wake up for hours. You must be worn out."

"That's quite all right," Betty assured him. "Don't be conscience-stricken. Did mamma have hysterics?"

Wallis grinned cheerfully.

"Well, not quite," he drawled. "At any rate, all's quiet along the Potomac now. How's the patient getting on?"

"I'm O.K.," MacRae spoke for himself, "and much obliged to you both for tinkering me up. Miss Gower ought to go home."

"I think so myself," Wallis said. "I'll take her across the point. Then I'll come back and have another look over you."

"It isn't necessary," MacRae declared. "Barring a certain amount of soreness I feel fit enough. I suppose I could get up and walk now if I had to. Go home and go to bed, both of you."

"Good night, or perhaps it would be better to say good morning." Betty gave him her hand. "Pleasant dreams."

It seemed to MacRae that there was a touch of reproach, a hint of the sardonic in her tone and words.

Then he was alone in the quiet house, with his thoughts for company, and the distant noises of the storm muttering in the outer darkness.

They were not particularly pleasant processes of thought. The sins of the fathers shall be visited even unto the third and fourth generation. Why, in the name of God, should they be, he asked himself?

Betty Gower liked him. She had been trying to tell him so. MacRae felt that. He did not question too closely the quality of the feeling for her which had leaped up so unexpectedly. He was afraid to dig too deep. He had got a glimpse of depths and eddies that night which if they did not wholly frighten him, at least

served to confuse him. They were like flint and steel, himself and Betty Gower. They could not come together without striking sparks. And a man may long to warm himself by fire, MacRae reflected gloomily, but he shrinks from being burned.



CHAPTER XIII

AN INTERLUDE

At daybreak Peter Ferrara came to the house.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Sore. Wobbly." MacRae had tried his legs and found them wanting.

"It was a bad night all round, eh, lad?" Peter rumbled in his rough old voice. "Some of the boys got a line on the *Blackbird* and hauled what was left of her around into the Cove. But she's a ruin. The engine went to pieces while she was poundin' on the rocks. Steve lays in the house. He looks peaceful—as if he was glad to be through."

"I couldn't save him. It was done like that." MacRae snapped his fingers.

"I know," Old Peter said. "You're not to blame. Perhaps nobody is. Them things happen. Manuel'll feel it. He's lost both sons now. But Steve's better off. He'd 'a' died of consumption or something, slow an' painful. His lungs was gone. I seen him set for weeks on the porch wheezin' after he come home. He didn't get no pleasure livin'. He said once a bullet would 'a' been mercy. No, don't worry about Steve. We all come to it soon or late, John. It's never a pity for the old or the crippled to die."

"You old Spartan," MacRae muttered.

"What's that?" Peter asked. But MacRae did not explain. He asked about Dolly instead.

"She was up to Potter's Landing. I sent for her and she's back," Peter told him. "She'll be up to see you presently. There's no grub in the house, is there? Can you eat? Well, take it easy, lad."

An hour or so later Dolly Ferrara brought him a steaming breakfast on a tray. She sat talking to him while he ate.

"Gower will have to pay for the *Blackbird*, won't he?" she asked. "The fishermen say so."

"If he doesn't in one way he will another," MacRae answered indifferently. "But that doesn't help Steve. The boat doesn't matter. One can build boats. You can't bring a man back to life when he's dead."

"If Steve could talk he'd say he didn't care," Dolly declared sadly. "You know he wasn't getting much out of living, Jack. There was nothing for him to look forward to but a few years of discomfort and uncertainty. A man who has been strong and active rebels against dying by inches. Steve told me—not so very long ago—that if something would finish him off quickly he would be glad."

If that had been Steve's wish, MacRae thought, then fate had hearkened to him. He knew it was true. He had lived at elbows with Steve all summer. Steve never complained. He was made of different stuff. It was only a gloomy consolation, after all, to think of Steve as being better off. MacRae knew how men cling to life, even when it has lost all its savor. There is that imperative will-to-live which refuses to be denied.

Dolly went away. After a time Wallis came over from the cottage at Cradle Bay. He was a young and genial medico from Seattle, who had just returned from service with the American forces overseas, and was holidaying briefly before he took up private practice again. He had very little more than a casual interest in MacRae, however, and he did not stay long once he had satisfied himself that his patient had little further need of professional services. And MacRae, who was weaker than he expected to find himself, rested in his bed until late afternoon brought bars of sunlight streaming through openings in the cloud bank which still ran swift before the wind.

Then he rose, dressed, made his way laboriously and painfully down to the Cove's edge and took a brief look at the hull of the *Blackbird* sunk to her deck line, her rail and cabins broken and twisted. After that he hailed a fisherman, engaged him to go across to Solomon River and apprise the *Bluebird*. That accomplished he went back to the house. Thereafter he spent days lying on his bed, resting in a big chair before the fireplace while his wounds healed and his strength came back to him, thinking, planning, chafing at inaction.

There was a perfunctory inquest, after which Steve's body went away to Hidalgo Island to rest beside the bodies of other Ferraras in a plot of ground their grandfather had taken for his own when British Columbia was a Crown colony.

MacRae carried insurance on both his carriers. There was no need for him to move against Gower in the matter. The insurance people would attend efficiently

to that. The adjusters came, took over the wreck, made inquiries. MacRae made his formal claim, and it was duly paid.

But long before the payment was made he was at work, he and Vin Ferrara together, on the *Bluebird*, plowing the Gulf in stormy autumn weather. The season was far gone, the salmon run slackening to its close. It was too late to equip another carrier. The cohoes were gone. The dog salmon, great-toothed, slimy fish which are canned for European export—for cheap trade, which nevertheless returned much profit to the canneries—were still running.

MacRae had taken ninety per cent. of the Folly Bay bluebacks. He had made tremendous inroads on Folly Bay's take of coho and humpback. He did not care greatly if Gower filled his cans with "dogs." But the Bellingham packers cried for salmon of whatsoever quality, and so MacRae drove the *Bluebird* hard in a trade which gave him no great profit, chiefly to preserve his connection with the American canners, to harass Folly Bay, and to let the fishermen know that he was still a factor and could serve them well.

He was sick of the smell of salmon, weary of the eternal heaving of the sea under his feet, of long cold tricks at the wheel, of days in somber, driving rain and nights without sleep. But he kept on until the salmon ceased to run, until the purse seiners tied up for the season, and the fishermen put by their gear.

MacRae had done well,—far better than he expected. His knife had cut both ways. He had eighteen thousand dollars in cash and the *Bluebird*. The Folly Bay pack was twelve thousand cases short. How much that shortage meant in lost profit MacRae could only guess, but it was a pretty sum. Another season like that,—he smiled grimly. The next season would be better,—for him. The trollers were all for him. They went out of their way to tell him that. He had organized good will behind him. The men who followed the salmon schools believed he did not want the earth, only a decent share. He did not sit behind a mahogany desk in town and set the price of fish. These men had labored a long time under the weighty heel of a controlled industry, and they were thankful for a new dispensation. It gave MacRae a pleasant feeling to know this. It gave him also something of a contempt for Gower, who had sat tight with a virtual monopoly for ten years and along with his profits had earned the distrust and dislike of a body of men who might as easily have been loyal laborers in his watery vineyards,—if he had not used his power to hold them to the most meager return they could wring from the sea.

He came home to the house at Squitty Cove with some odds and ends from town shops to make it more comfortable, flooring to replace the old, worn boards, a rug or two, pictures that caught his fancy, new cushions for the big chairs old Donald MacRae had fashioned by hand years before, a banjo to pick at, and a great box of books which he had promised to read some day when he had time. And he knew he would have time through long winter evenings when the land was drenched with rain, when the storm winds howled in the swaying firs and the sea beat clamorously along the cliffs. He would sit with his feet to a glowing fire and read books.

He did, for a time. When late November laid down a constant barrage of rain and the cloud battalions marched and countermarched along the coast, MacRae had settled down. He had no present care upon his shoulders. Although he presumed himself to be resting, he was far from idle. He found many ways of occupying himself about the old place. It was his pleasure that the old log house should be neat within and without, the yard clean, the garden restored to order. It had suffered a season's neglect. He remedied that with a little labor and a little money, wishing, as the place took on a sprightlier air, that old Donald could be there to see. MacRae was frank in his affection for the spot. No other place that he had ever seen meant quite the same to him. He was always glad to come back to it; it seemed imperative that he should always come back there. It was home, his refuge, his castle. Indeed he had seen castles across the sea from whose towers less goodly sights spread than he could command from his own front door, now that winter had stripped the maple and alder of their leafy screen. There was the sheltered Cove at his feet, the far sweep of the Gulf—colored according to its mood and the weather—great mountain ranges lifting sheer from blue water, their lower slopes green with forest and their crests white with snow. Immensities of land and trees. All his environment pitched upon a colossal scale. It was good to look at, to live among, and MacRae knew that it was good.

He sat on a log at the brink of the Cove one morning, in a burst of sunshine as grateful as it was rare. He looked out at the mainland shore, shading away from deep olive to a faint and misty blue. He cast his gaze along Vancouver Island, a three-hundred-mile barrier against the long roll of the Pacific. He thought of England, with its scant area and its forty million souls. He smiled. An empire opened within range of his vision. He had had to go to Europe to appreciate his own country. Old, old peoples over there. Outworn, bewildered aristocracies and vast populations troubled with the specter of want, swarming like rabbits, pressing always close upon the means of subsistence. No room; no chance. Born

in social stratas solidified by centuries. No wonder Europe was full of race and class hatred, of war and pestilence. Snap judgment,—but Jack MacRae had seen the peasants of France and Belgium, the driven workmen of industrial France and England. He had seen also something of the forces which controlled them, caught glimpses of the iron hand in the velvet glove, a hand that was not so sure and steady as in days gone by.

Here a man still had a chance. He could not pick golden apples off the fir trees. He must use his brains as well as his hands. A reasonable measure of security was within a man's grasp if he tried for it. To pile up a fortune might be a heavy task. But getting a living was no insoluble problem. A man could accomplish either without selling his soul or cutting throats or making serfs of his fellow men. There was room to move and breathe,—and some to spare.

Perhaps Jack MacRae, in view of his feelings, his cherished projects, was a trifle inconsistent in the judgments he passed, sitting there on his log in the winter sunshine. But the wholly consistent must die young. Their works do not appear in this day and hour. The normal man adjusts himself to, and his actions are guided by, moods and circumstances which are seldom orderly and logical in their sequence.

MacRae cherished as profound an animosity toward Horace Gower as any Russian ever felt for bureaucratic tyranny. He could smart under injustice and plan reprisal. He could appreciate his environment, his opportunities, be glad that his lines were cast amid rugged beauty. But he did not on that account feel tolerant toward those whom he conceived to be his enemies. He was not, however, thinking concretely of his personal affairs or tendencies that bright morning. He was merely sitting more or less quiescent on his log, nursing vagrant impressions, letting the sun bathe him.

He was not even conscious of trespassing on Horace Gower's land. When he thought of it, of course he realized that this was legally so. But the legal fact had no reality for MacRae. Between the Cove and Point Old, for a mile back into the dusky woods, he felt free to come and go as he chose. He had always believed and understood and felt that area to be his, and he still held to that old impression. There was not a foot of that six hundred acres that he had not explored alone, with his father, with Dolly Ferrara, season after season. He had gone barefoot over the rocks, dug clams on the beaches, fished trout in the little streams, hunted deer and grouse in the thickets, as far back as he could remember. He had loved the cliffs and the sea, the woods around the Cove with

an affection bred in use and occupancy, confirmed by the sense of inviolate possession. Old things are dear, if a man has once loved them. They remain so. The aura of beloved familiarity clings to them long after they have passed into alien hands. When MacRae thought of this and turned his eyes upon this noble sweep of land and forest which his father had claimed for his own from the wilderness, it was as if some one had deprived him of an eye or an arm by trickery and unfair advantage.

He was not glooming over such things this rare morning which had come like a benediction after ten days of rain and wind. He was sitting on his log bareheaded, filled with a passive content rare in his recent experience.

From this perch, in the idle wandering of his gaze, his eyes at length rested upon Peter Ferrara's house. He saw a man and a woman come out of the front door and stand for a minute or two on the steps. He could not recognize the man at the distance, but he could guess. The man presently walked away around the end of the Cove, MacRae perceived that his guess was correct, for Norman Gower came out on the brow of the cliff that bordered the south side of the Cove. He appeared a short distance away, walking slowly, his eyes on the Cove and Peter Ferrara's house. He did not see MacRae till he was quite close and glanced that way.

"Hello, MacRae," he said.

"How d' do," Jack answered. There was no cordiality in his tone. If he had any desire at that moment it was not for speech with Norman Gower, but rather a desire that Gower should walk on.

But the other man sat down on MacRae's log.

"Not much like over the pond, this," he remarked.

"Not much," MacRae agreed indifferently.

Young Gower took a cigarette case out of his pocket, extended it to MacRae, who declined with a brief shake of his head. Norman lighted a cigarette. He was short and stoutly built, a compact, muscular man somewhat older than MacRae. He had very fair hair and blue eyes, and the rose-leaf skin of his mother had in him taken on a masculine floridity. But he had the Gower mouth and determined chin. So had Betty, MacRae was reminded, looking at her brother.

"You sank your harpoon pretty deep into Folly Bay this season," Norman said

abruptly. "Did you do pretty well yourself?"

"Pretty well," MacRae drawled. "Did it worry you?"

"Me? Hardly," young Gower smiled. "It did not cost *me* anything to operate Folly Bay at a loss while I was in charge. I had neither money nor reputation to lose. You may have worried the governor. I dare say you did. He never did take kindly to anything or any one that interfered with his projects. But I haven't heard him commit himself. He doesn't confide in me, anyway, nor esteem me very highly in any capacity. I wonder if your father ever felt that way about you?"

"No," MacRae said impulsively. "By God, no!"

"Lucky. And you came home with a record behind you. Nothing to handicap you. You jumped into the fray to do something for yourself and made good right off the bat. There is such a thing as luck," Norman said soberly. "A man can do his best—and fail. I have, so far. I was expected to come home a credit to the family, a hero, dangling medals on my manly chest. Instead, I've lost caste with my own crowd. Girls and fellows I used to know sneer at me behind my back. They put their tongues in their cheek and say I was a crafty slacker. I suppose you've heard the talk?"

"No," MacRae answered shortly; he had forgotten Nelly Abbott's questioning almost the first time he met her. "I don't run much with your crowd, anyway."

"Well, they can think what they damn please," young Gower grumbled. "It's quite true that I was never any closer to the front than the Dover cliffs. Perhaps at home here in the beginning they handed me a captain's commission on the family pull. But I tried to deliver the goods. These people think I dodged the trenches. They don't know my eyesight spoiled my chances of going into action. I couldn't get to France. So I did my bit where headquarters told me I could do it or go home. And all I have got out of it is the veiled contempt of nearly everybody I know, my father included, for not killing Germans with my own hands."

MacRae kept still. It was a curious statement. Young Gower twisted and ground his boot heel into the soft earth.

"Being a rich man's son has proved a considerable handicap in my case," he continued at last. "I was petted and coddled all my life. Then the war came

along. Everybody expected a lot of me. And I am as good as excommunicated for not coming up to expectations. Beautiful irony. If my eyes had been normal, I should be another of Vancouver's heroes,—alive or dead. The spirit doesn't seem to count. The only thing that matters, evidently, is that I stayed on the safe side of the Channel. They take it for granted that I did so because I valued my own skin above everything. Idiots."

"You can easily explain," MacRae suggested.

"I won't. I'd see them all in Hades first," Norman growled. "I'll admit it stings me to have people think so and rub it in, in their polite way. But I'm getting more or less indifferent. There are plenty of real people in England who know I did the only work I could do and did it well. Do you imagine I fancied sitting on the side lines when all the fellows I knew were playing a tough game? But I can't go about telling that to people at home. I'll be damned if I will. A man has to learn to stand the gaff sometime, and the last year or so seems to be my period of schooling."

"Why tell all this to me?" MacRae asked quietly.

Norman rose from the log. He chucked the butt of his cigarette away. He looked directly, rather searchingly, at MacRae.

"Really, I don't know," he said in a flat, expressionless. Then he walked on.

MacRae watched him pass out of sight among the thickets. Young Gower had succeeded in dispelling the passive contentment of basking in the sun. He had managed to start buzzing trains of not too agreeable reflection. MacRae got to his feet before long and tramped back around the Cove's head. He had known, of course, that the Gowers still made more or less use of their summer cottage. But he had not come in personal contact with any of them since the night Betty had given him that new, disturbing angle from which to view her. He had avoided her purposely. Now he was afflicted with a sudden restlessness, a desire for other voices and faces besides his own, and so, as he was in the habit of doing when such a mood seized him, he went on to Peter Ferrara's house.

He walked in through a wide-open door, unannounced by aught save his footsteps, as he was accustomed to do, and he found Dolly Ferrara and Betty Gower laughing and chatting familiarly in the kitchen over teacups and little cakes.

"Oh, I beg pardon," said he. "I didn't know you were entertaining."

"I don't entertain, and you know it," Dolly laughed. "Come down from that lofty altitude and I'll give you a cup of tea."

"Mr. MacRae, being an aviator of some note," Betty put in, "probably finds himself at home in the high altitudes."

"Do I seem to be up in the air?" MacRae inquired dryly. "I shall try to come down behind my own lines, and not in enemy territory."

"You might have to make a forced landing," Dolly remarked.

Her great dusky eyes rested upon him with a singular quality of speculation. MacRae wondered if those two had been talking about him, and why.

There was an astonishing contrast between these two girls, MacRae thought, his mind and his eyes busy upon them while his tongue uttered idle words and his hands coped with a teacup and cakes. They were the product of totally dissimilar environments. They were the physical antithesis of each other,—in all but the peculiar feline grace of young females who are healthily, exuberantly alive. Yet MacRae had a feeling that they were sisters under their skins, wonderfully alike in their primary emotions. Why, then, he wondered, should one be capable of moving him to violent emotional reactions (he had got that far in his self-admissions concerning Betty Gower), and the other move him only to a friendly concern and latterly a certain pity?

Certainly either one would quite justify a man in seeking her for his mate, if he found his natural instincts urging him along ways which MacRae was beginning to perceive no normal man could escape traveling. And if he had to tread that road, why should it not have been his desire to tread it with Dolly Ferrara? That would have been so much simpler. With unconscious egotism he put aside Norman Gower as a factor. If he had to develop an unaccountable craving for some particular woman, why couldn't it have centered upon a woman he knew as well as he knew Dolly, whose likes and dislikes, little tricks of speech and manner, habits of thought, all the inconsiderable traits that go to make up what we call personality, were pleasantly familiar?

Strange thoughts over a teacup, MacRae decided. It seemed even more strange that he should be considering such intimately personal things in the very act of carrying on an impersonal triangular conversation; as if there were two of him

present, one being occupied in the approved teacup manner while the other sat by speculating with a touch of moroseness upon distressingly important potentialities. This duality persisted in functioning even when Betty looked at her watch and said, "I must go."

He walked with her around to the head of the Cove. He had not wanted to do that,—and still he did. He found himself filled with an intense and resentful curiosity about this calm, self-possessed young woman. He wondered if she really had any power to hurt him, if there resided in her any more potent charm than other women possessed, or if it were a mere sentimental befogging of his mind due to the physical propinquity of her at a time when he was weak and bruised and helpless. He could feel the soft warmth of her hands yet, and without even closing his eyes he could see her reddish-brown hair against the white of his bed covers and the tired droop of her body as she slept that night.

Curiously enough, before they were well clear of the Ferrara house they had crossed swords. Courteously, to be sure. MacRae could not afterward recall clearly how it began,—something about the war and the after-effect of the war. British Columbia nowise escaped the muddle into which the close of the war and the wrangle of the peacemakers had plunged both industry and politics. There had been a recent labor disturbance in Vancouver in which demobilized soldiers had played a part.

"You can't blame these men much. They're bewildered at some of the things they get up against, and exasperated by others. A lot of them have found the going harder at home than it was in France. A lot of promises and preachments don't fit in with performance since the guns have stopped talking. I suppose that doesn't seem reasonable to people like you," MacRae found himself saying. "You don't have to gouge and claw a living out of the world. Or at least, if there is any gouging and clawing to be done, you are not personally involved in it. You get it done by proxy."

Betty flushed slightly.

"Do you always go about with a chip on your shoulder?" she asked. "I should think you did enough fighting in France."

"I learned to fight there," he said. "I was a happy-go-lucky kid before that. Rich and poor looked alike to me. I didn't covet anything that anybody had, and I didn't dream that any one could possibly wish to take away from me anything that I happened to have. I thought the world was a kind and pleasant place for everybody. But things look a little different to me now. They sent us fellows to France to fight Huns. But there are a few at home, I find. Why shouldn't I fight them whenever I see a chance?"

"But *I'm* not a Hun," Betty said with a smile.

"I'm not so sure about that."

The words leaped out before he was quite aware of what they might imply. They had come to a point on the path directly in front of his house. Betty stopped. Her gray eyes flashed angrily. Storm signals blazed in her cheeks, bright above the delicate white of her neck.

"Jack MacRae," she burst out hotly, "you are a—a—a first-class idiot!"

Then she turned her back on him and went off up the path with a quick, springy step that somehow suggested extreme haste.

MacRae stood looking after her fully a minute. Then he climbed the steps, went into the front room and sat himself down in a deep, cushioned chair. He glowered into the fireplace with a look as black as the charred remains of his morning fire. He uttered one brief word after a long period of fixed staring.

"Damn!" he said.

It seemed a very inadequate manner of expressing his feelings, but it was the best he could do at the moment.

He sat there until the chill discomfort of the room stirred him out of his abstraction. Then he built a fire and took up a book to read. But the book presently lay unheeded on his knees. He passed the rest of the short forenoon sprawled in that big chair before the fireplace, struggling with chaotic mental processes.

It made him unhappy, but he could not help it. A tremendous assortment of mental images presented themselves for inspection, flickering up unbidden out of his brain-stuff,—old visions and new, familiar things and vague, troublesome possibilities, all strangely jumbled together. His mind hopped from Squitty Cove to Salisbury Plain, to the valley of the Rhone, to Paris, London, Vancouver, turned up all sorts of recollections, cameralike flashes of things that had happened to him, things he had seen in curious places, bits of his life in that somehow distant period when he was a youngster chumming about with his father. And always he came back to the Gowers,—father, son and daughter, and the delicate elderly woman with the faded rose-leaf face whom he had seen only once. Whole passages of Donald MacRae's written life story took form in living words. He could not disentangle himself from these Gowers.

And he hated them!

Dark came down at last. MacRae went out on the porch. The few scattered clouds had vanished completely. A starry sky glittered above horizons edged by mountain ranges, serrated outlines astonishingly distinct. The sea spread duskily mysterious from duskiest shores. It was very still, to MacRae suddenly very lonely, empty, depressing.

The knowledge that just across a narrow neck of land the Gowers, father, daughter and son, went carelessly, securely about their own affairs, made him infinitely more lonely, irritated him, stirred up a burning resentment against the lot of them. He lumped them all together, despite a curious tendency on the part of Betty's image to separate itself from the others. He hated them, the whole damned, profiteering, arrogant, butterfly lot. He nursed an unholy satisfaction in having made some inroad upon their comfortable security, in having "sunk his harpoon" into their only vulnerable spot.

But that satisfaction did not give him relief or content as he stood looking out into the clear frost-tinged night. Squitty had all at once become a ghostly place, haunted with sadness. Old Donald MacRae was living over again in him, he had a feeling, reliving those last few cheerless, hopeless years which, MacRae told himself savagely, Horace Gower had deliberately made more cheerless and hopeless.

And he was in a fair way to love that man's flesh and blood? MacRae sneered at himself in the dark. Never to the point of staying his hand, of foregoing his purpose, of failing to strike a blow as chance offered. Not so long as he was his father's son.

"Hang it, I'm getting morbid," MacRae muttered at last. "I've been sticking around here too close. I'll pack a bag to-morrow and go to town for a while."

He closed the door on the crisp, empty night, and set about getting himself something to eat.



CHAPTER XIV

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

MacRae did himself rather well, as the English say, when he reached Vancouver. This was a holiday, and he was disposed to make the most of it. He put up at the Granada. He made a few calls and presently found himself automatically relaunched upon Vancouver's social waters. There were a few maids and more than one matron who recalled pleasantly this straight up-standing youngster with the cool gray eyes who had come briefly into their ken the winter before. There were a few fellows he had known in squadron quarters overseas, home for good now that demobilization was fairly complete. MacRae danced well. He had the faculty of making himself agreeable without effort. He found it pleasant to fall into the way of these careless, well-dressed folk whose greatest labor seemed to be in amusing themselves, to keep life from seeming "slow." Buttressed by revenues derived from substantial sources, mines, timber, coastal fisheries, land, established industries, these sons and daughters of the pioneers, many but one degree removed from pioneering uncouthness, were patterning their lives upon the plan of equivalent classes in older regions. If it takes six generations in Europe to make a gentleman, western America quite casually dispenses with five, and the resulting product seldom suffers by comparison.

As the well-to-do in Europe flung themselves into revelry with the signing of the armistice, so did they here. Four years of war had corked the bottle of gayety. The young men were all overseas. Life was a little too cloudy during that period to be gay. Shadows hung over too many homes. But that was past. They had pulled the cork and thrown it away, one would think. Pleasure was king, to be served with light abandon.

It was a fairly vigorous place, MacRae discovered. He liked it, gave himself up to it gladly,—for a while. It involved no mental effort. These people seldom spoke of money, or of work, or politics, the high cost of living, international affairs. If they did it was jocularly, sketchily, as matters of no importance. Their talk ran upon dances, clothes, motoring, sports indoors and afield, on food,—and sometimes genially on drink, since the dry wave had not yet drained their cellars.

MacRae floated with this tide. But he was not wholly carried away with it. He

began to view it impersonally, to wonder if it were the real thing, if this was what inspired men to plot and scheme and struggle laboriously for money, or if it were just the froth on the surface of realities which he could not quite grasp. He couldn't say. There was a dash and glitter about it that charmed him. He could warm and thrill to the beauty of a Granada ballroom, music that seduced a man's feet, beauty of silk and satin, of face and figure, of bright eyes and gleaming jewels, a blending of all the primary colors and every shade between, flashing over a polished floor under high, carved ceilings.

He had surrendered Nelly Abbott to a claimant and stood watching the swirl and glide of the dancers in the Granada one night. His eyes were on the brilliance a little below the raised area at one end of the floor, and so was his mind, inquiringly, with the curious concentration of which his mind was capable. Presently he became aware of some one speaking to him, tugging at his elbow.

"Oh, come out of it," a voice said derisively.

He looked around at Stubby Abbott.

"Regular trance. I spoke to you twice. In love?"

"Uh-uh. Just thinking," MacRae laughed.

"Deep thinking, I'll say. Want to go down to the billiard room and smoke?"

They descended to a subterranean chamber where, in a pit lighted by low-hung shaded globes, men in shirt sleeves clicked the red and white balls on a score of tables. Rows of leather-upholstered chairs gave comfort to spectators. They commandeered seats and lighted cigarettes. "Look," Stubby said. "There's Norman Gower."

Young Gower sat across a corner from them. He was in evening clothes. He slumped in his chair. His hands were limp along the chair arms. He was not watching the billiard players. He was staring straight across the room with the sightless look of one whose mind is far away.

"Another deep thinker," Stubby drawled. "Rather rough going for Norman these days."

"How?" MacRae asked.

"Funked it over across," Stubby replied. "So they say. Careful to stay on the right

side of the Channel. Paying the penalty now. Girls rather rub it in. Fellows not too—well, cordial. Pretty rotten for Norman."

"Think he slacked deliberately?" MacRae inquired.

"That's the story. Lord, I don't know," Stubby answered. "He stuck in England four years. Everybody else that was fit went up the line. That's all I know. By their deeds ye shall judge them—eh?"

"Perhaps. What does he say about that himself?"

"Nothing, so far as I know. Keeps strictly mum on the war subject," Stubby said.

Young Gower did not alter his position during the few minutes they sat there. He sat staring straight ahead of him, unseeingly. MacRae suddenly felt sorry for him. If he had told the truth he was suffering a peculiarly distressing form of injustice, of misconception. MacRae recalled the passionate undertone in Gower's voice when he said, "I did the only thing I could do in the way I was told to do it." Yes, he was sorry for Norman. The poor devil was not getting a square deal.

But MacRae's pity was swiftly blotted out. He had a sudden uncomfortable vision of old Donald MacRae rowing around Poor Man's Rock, back and forth in sun and rain, in frosty dawns and stormy twilights, coming home to a lonely house, dying at last a lonely death, the sordid culmination of an embittered life.

Let him sweat,—the whole Gower tribe. MacRae was the ancient Roman, for the moment, wishing all his enemies had but a single head that he might draw his sword and strike it off. Something in him hardened against that first generous impulse to repeat to Stubby Abbott what Norman had told him on the cliff at Squitty. Let the beggar make his own defense. Yet that stubborn silence, the proud refusal to make words take the place of valiant deeds expected, wrung a gleam of reluctant admiration from MacRae. He would have done just that himself.

"Let's get back," Stubby suggested. "I've got the next dance with Betty Gower. I don't want to miss it."

"Is she here to-night? I haven't noticed her."

"Eyesight affected?" Stubby bantered. "Sure she's here. Looking like a dream."

MacRae felt a pang of envy. There was nothing to hold Stubby back,—no old scores, no deep, abiding resentment. MacRae had the conviction that Stubby would never take anything like that so seriously as he, Jack MacRae, did. He was aware that Stubby had the curious dual code common in the business world,—one set of inhibitions and principles for business and another for personal and social uses. A man might be Stubby's opponent in the market and his friend when they met on a common social ground. MacRae could never be quite like that. Stubby could fight Horace Gower, for instance, tooth and toenail, for an advantage in the salmon trade, and stretch his legs under Gower's dining table with no sense of incongruity, no matter what shifts the competitive struggle had taken or what weapons either had used. That was business; and a man left his business at the office. A curious thing, MacRae thought. A phenomenon in ethics which he found hard to understand, harder still to endorse.

He stood watching Stubby, knowing that Stubby would go straight to Betty Gower. Presently he saw her, marked the cut and color of her gown, watched them swing into the gyrating wave of couples that took the floor when the orchestra began. Indeed, MacRae stood watching them until he recalled with a start that he had this dance with Etta Robbin-Steele, who would, in her own much-used phrase, be "simply furious" at anything that might be construed as neglect; only Etta's fury would consist of showing her white, even teeth in a pert smile with a challenging twinkle in her very black eyes.

He went to Betty as soon as he found opportunity. He did not quite know why. He did not stop to ask himself why. It was a purely instinctive propulsion. He followed his impulse as the needle swings to the pole; as an object released from the hand at a great height obeys the force of gravity; as water flows downhill.

He took her programme.

"I don't see any vacancies," he said. "Shall I create one?"

He drew his pencil through Stubby Abbott's name. Stubby's signature was rather liberally inscribed there, he thought. Betty looked at him a trifle uncertainly.

"Aren't you a trifle—sweeping?" she inquired.

"Perhaps. Stubby won't mind. Do you?" he asked.

"I seem to be defenseless." Betty shrugged her shoulders. "What shall we quarrel about this time?"

"Anything you like," he made reckless answer.

"Very well, then," she said as they got up to dance. "Suppose we begin by finding out what there is to quarrel over. Are you aware that practically every time we meet we nearly come to blows? What is there about me that irritates you so easily?"

"Your inaccessibility."

MacRae spoke without weighing his words. Yet that was the truth, although he knew that such a frank truth was neither good form nor policy. He was sorry before the words were out of his mouth. Betty could not possibly understand what he meant. He was not sure he wanted her to understand. MacRae felt himself riding to a fall. As had happened briefly the night of the *Blackbird's* wrecking, he experienced that feeling of dumb protest against the shaping of events in which he moved helpless. This bit of flesh and blood swaying in his arms in effortless rhythm to sensuous music was something he had to reckon with powerfully, whether he liked or not. MacRae was beginning dimly to see that. When he was with her—

"But I'm not inaccessible."

She dropped her voice to a cooing whisper. Her eyes glowed as they met his with steadfast concern. There was a smile and a question in them.

"What ever gave you that idea?"

"It isn't an idea; it's a fact."

The resentment against circumstances that troubled MacRae crept into his tone.

"Oh, silly!"

There was a railing note of tenderness in Betty's voice. MacRae felt his moorings slip. A heady recklessness of consequences seized him. He drew her a little closer to him. Irresistible prompting from some wellspring of his being urged him on to what his reason would have called sheer folly, if that reason had not for the time suffered eclipse, which is a weakness of rational processes when they come into conflict with a genuine emotion.

"Do you like me, Betty?"

Her eyes danced. They answered as well as her lips:

"Of course I do. Haven't I been telling you so plainly enough? I've been ashamed of myself for being so transparent—on such slight provocation."

"How much?" he demanded.

"Oh—well—"

The ballroom was suddenly shrouded in darkness, saved only from a cavelike black by diffused street light through the upper windows. A blown fuse. A mis-pulled switch. One of those minor accidents common to electric lighting systems. The orchestra hesitated, went on. From a momentary silence the dancers broke into chuckles, amused laughter, a buzz of exclamatory conversation. But no one moved, lest they collide with other unseen couples.

Jack and Betty stood still. They could not see. But MacRae could feel the quick beat, of Betty's heart, the rise and fall of her breast, a trembling in her fingers. There was a strange madness stirring in him. His arm tightened about her. He felt that she yielded easily, as if gladly. Their mouths sought and clung in the first real kiss Jack MacRae had ever known. And then, as they relaxed that impulse-born embrace, the lights flashed on again, blazed in a thousand globes in great frosted clusters high against the gold-leaf decorations of the ceiling. The dancers caught step again. MacRae and Betty circled the polished floor silently. She floated in his arms like thistledown, her eyes like twin stars, a deeper color in her cheeks.

Then the music ceased, and they were swept into a chattering group, out of which presently materialized another partner to claim Betty. So they parted with a smile and a nod.

But MacRae had no mind for dancing. He went out through the lobby and straight to his room. He flung off his coat and sat down in a chair by the window and blinked out into the night. He had looked, it seemed to him, into the very gates of paradise,—and he could not go in.

It wasn't possible. He sat peering out over the dusky roofs of the city, damning with silent oaths the coil in which he found himself inextricably involved. History was repeating itself. Like father, like son.

There was a difference though. MacRae, as he grew calmer, marked that. Old Donald had lost his sweetheart by force and trickery. His son must forego love—if it were indeed love—of his own volition. He had no choice. He saw no way of

winning Betty Gower unless he stayed his hand against her father. And he would not do that. He could not. It would be like going over to the enemy in the heat of battle. Gower had wronged and persecuted his father. He had beaten old Donald without mercy in every phase of that thirty-year period. He had taken Donald MacRae's woman from him in the beginning and his property in the end. Jack MacRae had every reason to believe Gower merely sat back awaiting a favorable opportunity to crush him.

So there could be no compromising there; no inter-marrying and sentimental burying of the old feud. Betty would tie his hands. He was afraid of her power to do that. He did not want to be a Samson shorn. His ego revolted against love interfering with the grim business of everyday life. He bit his lip and wished he could wipe out that kiss. He cursed himself for a slavish weakness of the flesh. The night was old when MacRae lay down on his bed. But he could find no ease for the throbbing ferment within him. He suffered with a pain as keen as if he had been physically wounded, and the very fact that he could so suffer filled him with dismay. He had faced death many times with less emotion than he now was facing life.

He had no experience of love. Nothing remotely connected with women had ever suggested such possibilities of torment. He had known first-hand the pangs of hunger and thirst, of cold and weariness, of anger and hate, of burning wounds in his flesh. He had always been able to grit his teeth and endure; none of it had been able to wring his soul. This did. He had come to manhood, to a full understanding of sex, at a time when he played the greatest game of all, when all his energies were fiercely centered upon preservation for himself and certain destruction for other men. Perhaps because he had come back clean, having never wasted himself in complaisant liaisons overseas, the inevitable focusing of passion stirred him more profoundly. He was neither a varietist nor a male prude. He was aware of sex. He knew desire. But the flame Betty Gower had kindled in him made him look at women out of different eyes. Desire had been revealed to him not as something casual, but as an imperative. As if nature had pulled the blinkers off his eyes and shown him his mate and the aim and object and law and fiery urge of the mating instinct all in one blinding flash.

He lay hot and fretful, cursing himself for a fool, yet unable to find ease, wondering dully if Betty Gower must also suffer as he should, or if it were only an innocent, piquant game that Betty played. Always in the background of his mind lurked a vision of her father, sitting back complacently, fat, smug, plump hands on a well-rounded stomach, chuckling a brutal satisfaction over another

MacRae beaten.

MacRae wakened from an uneasy sleep at ten o'clock. He rose and dressed, got his breakfast, went out on the streets. But Vancouver had all at once grown insufferable. The swarming streets irritated him. He smoldered inside, and he laid it to the stir and bustle and noise. He conceived himself to crave hushed places and solitude, where he could sit and think.

By mid-afternoon he was far out in the Gulf of Georgia, aboard a coasting steamer sailing for island ports. If it occurred to him that he was merely running away from temptation, he did not admit the fact.



CHAPTER XV

HEARTS ARE NOT ALWAYS TRUMPS

If MacRae reckoned on tranquillity in his island seclusion he failed in his reckoning. A man may fly from temptation, run from a threatening danger, but he cannot run away from himself. He could not inhibit thought, reflection, surges of emotion generated mysteriously within himself.

He did his best. He sought relief in action. There were a great many things about his freehold upon which he bestowed feverish labor for a time. He cleared away all the underbrush to the outer limits of his shrunken heritage. He built a new enclosing fence of neatly split cedar, installed a pressure system of water in the old house.

"You goin' to get married?" old Peter inquired artlessly one day. "You got all the symptoms—buzzin' around in your nest like a bumblebee."

And Dolly smiled her slow, enigmatic smile.

Whereupon MacRae abandoned his industry and went off to Blackfish Sound with Vincent in the *Bluebird*. The salmon run was long over, but the coastal waters still yielded a supply of edible fish. There were always a few spring salmon to be taken here and there. Ling, red and rock cod knew no seasons. Nor the ground fish, plaice, sole, flounders, halibut. Already the advance guard of the great run of mature herring began to show. For a buyer there was no such profit in running these fish to market as the profit of the annual salmon run. Still it paid moderately. So MacRae had turned the *Bluebird* over to Vin to operate for a time on a share basis. It gave Vin, who was ambitious and apparently tireless, a chance to make a few hundred dollars in an off season.

Wherefore MacRae, grown suddenly restless beyond all restraining upon his island, made a trip or two north with Vin—a working guest on his own vessel—up where the Gulf of Georgia is choked to narrow passages through which the tidal currents race like mountain streams pent in a gorge, up where the sea is a maze of waterways among wooded islands. They anchored in strange bays. They fared once into Queen Charlotte Sound and rode the great ground swell that heaves up from the far coast of Japan to burst against the rocky outpost of Cape

Caution. They doubled on their tracks and gathered their toll of the sea from fishing boats here and there until the *Bluebird* rode deep with cargo, fresh fish to be served on many tables far inland. MacRae often wondered if the housewife who ordered her weekly ration of fish and those who picked daintily at the savory morsels with silver forks ever thought how they came by this food. Men till the sea with pain and risk and infinite labor, as they till the land; only the fisherman with his nets and hooks and gear does not sow, he only reaps. Nature has attended diligently to the sowing, from the Cape of Good Hope to Martha's Vineyard, from Bering Strait to Botany Bay.

But MacRae soon had enough of that and came back to Squitty, to his fireplace and his books. He had been accustomed to enjoy the winters, the clear crisp mornings that varied weeks of drenching rain which washed the land clean; to prow about in the woods with a gun when he needed meat; to bask before a bed of coals in the fireplace through long evenings when the wind howled and the rain droned on the roof and the sea snored along the rocky beaches. That had been in days before he learned the weight of loneliness, when his father had been there to sit quietly beside the fire smoking a pipe, when Dolly Ferrara ran wild in the woods with him or they rode for pure sport the tumbling seas in a dugout canoe.

Now winter was a dull inaction, a period of discontent, in which thought gnawed at him like an ingrowing toenail. Everything seemed out of joint. He found himself feverishly anxious for spring, for the stress and strain of another tilt with Folly Bay. Sometimes he asked himself where he would come out, even if he won all along the line, if he made money, gained power, beat Gower ultimately to his knees, got back his land. He did not try to peer too earnestly into the future. It seemed a little misty. He was too much concerned with the immediate present, looming big with possibilities of good or evil for himself. Things did not seem quite so simple as at first. A great many complications, wholly unforeseen, had arisen since he came back from France. But he was committed to certain undertakings from which he neither wished nor intended to turn aside,—not so long as he had the will to choose.

Christmas came again, and with it the gathering of the Ferraras for their annual reunion,—Old Manuel and Joaquin, young Manuel and Ambrose and Vincent. Steve they could speak of now quite casually. He had died in his sea boots like many another Ferrara. It was a pity, of course, but it was the chance of his calling. And the gathering was stronger in numbers, even with Steve gone. Ambrose had taken himself a wife, a merry round-cheeked girl whose people

were coaxing Ambrose to quit the sea for a more profitable undertaking in timber. And also Norman Gower was there.

MacRae did not quite know how to take that young man. He had had stray contacts with Norman during the last few weeks. For a rich man's son he was not running true to form. He and Long Tom Spence had struck up a partnership in a group of mineral claims on the Knob, that conical mountain which lifted like one of the pyramids out of the middle of Squitty Island. There had been much talk of those claims. Years ago Bill Munro—he who died of the flu in his cabin beside the Cove—had staked those claims. Munro was a young man then, a prospector. He had inveigled other men to share his hopes and labors, to grubstake him while he drove the tunnel that was to cut the vein. MacRae's father had taken a hand in this. So had Peter Ferrara. But these informal partnerships had always lapsed. Old Bill Munro's prospects had never got beyond the purely prospective stage. The copper was there, ample traces of gold and silver. But he never developed a showing big enough to lure capital. When Munro died the claims had been long abandoned.

Long Tom Spence had suddenly relocated them. Some working agreement had included Uncle Peter and young Gower. Long Tom went about hinting mysteriously of fortunes. Peter Ferrara even admitted that there was a good showing. Norman had been there for weeks, living with Spence in a shack, sweating day after day in the tunnel. They were all beginning to speak of it as "the mine."

Norman had rid himself of that grouchy frown. He was always singing or whistling or laughing. His fair, rather florid face glowed with a perpetual good nature. He treated MacRae to the same cheerful, careless air that he had for everything and everybody. And when he was about Uncle Peter's house at the Cove he monopolized Dolly, an attitude which Dolly herself as well as her uncle seemed to find agreeable and proper.

MacRae finally found himself compelled to accept Norman Gower as part of the group. He was a little surprised to find that he harbored no decided feeling about young Gower, one way or the other. If he felt at all, it was a mild impatience that another man had established a relation with Dolly Ferrara which put aside old friendships. He found himself constrained more and more to treat Dolly like any other pleasant young woman of his acquaintance. He did not quite like that. He and Dolly Ferrara had been such good chums. Besides, he privately considered that Dolly was throwing herself away on a man weak enough to make the tragic

blunder young Gower had made in London. But that was their own affair. Altogether, MacRae found it quite impossible to muster up any abiding grudge against young Gower on his own account.

So he let matters stand and celebrated Christmas with them. Afterward they got aboard the *Bluebird* and went to a dance at Potter's Landing, where for all that Jack MacRae was the local hero, both of the great war and the salmon war of the past season, both Dolly and Norman, he privately conceded, enjoyed themselves a great deal more than he did. Their complete absorption in each other rather irritated him.

They came back to the Cove early in the morning. The various Ferraras disposed themselves about Peter's house to sleep, and MacRae went on to his own place. About an hour after daybreak he saw Norman Gower pass up the bush trail to the mine with a heavy pack of provisions on his back. And MacRae wondered idly if Norman was bucking the game in earnest, strictly on his own, and why?

Late in January the flash of a white skirt and a sky-blue sweater past his dooryard apprised MacRae that Betty was back. And he did not want to see Betty or talk with her. He hoped her stay would be brief. He even asked himself testily why people like that wanted to come to a summer dwelling in the middle of winter. But her sojourn was not so brief as he hoped. At divers times thereafter he saw her in the distance, faring to and fro from Peter Ferrara's house, out on the trail that ran to the Knob, several times when the sea was calm paddling a canoe or rowing alongshore. Also he had glimpses of the thickset figure of Horace Gower walking along the cliffs. MacRae avoided both. That was easy enough, since he knew every nook and bush and gully on that end of the island. But the mere sight of Gower was an irritation. He resented the man's presence. It affected him like a challenge. It set him always pondering ways and means to secure ownership of those acres again and forever bar Gower from walking along those cliffs with that masterful air of possession. Only a profound distaste for running away from anything kept him from quitting the island while they were there, those two, one of whom he was growing to hate far beyond the original provocation, the other whom he loved,—for MacRae admitted reluctantly, resentfully, that he did love Betty, and he was afraid of where that emotion might lead him. He recognized the astonishing power of passion. It troubled him, stirred up an amazing conflict at times between his reason and his impulses. He fell back always upon the conclusion that love was an irrational thing anyway, that it should not be permitted to upset a man's logical plan of existence. But he was never very sure that this conclusion would stand a

practical test.

The southern end of Squitty was not of such vast scope that two people could roam here and there without sometime coming face to face, particularly when these two were a man and a woman, driven by a spirit of restlessness to lonely wanderings. MacRae went into the woods with his rifle one day in search of venison. He wounded a buck, followed him down a long canyon, and killed his game within sight of the sea. He took the carcass by a leg and dragged it through the bright green salal brush. As he stepped out of a screening thicket on to driftwood piled by storm and tide, he saw a rowboat hauled up on the shingle above reach of short, steep breakers, and a second glance showed him Betty sitting on a log close by, looking at him.

"Stormbound?" he asked her.

"Yes. I was rowing and the wind came up."

She rose and came over to look at the dead deer.

"What beautiful animals they are!" she said. "Isn't it a pity to kill them?"

"It's a pity, too, to kill cattle and sheep and pigs, to haul fish by the gills out of the sea," MacRae replied; "to trap marten and mink and fox and beaver and bear for their skins. But men must eat and women must wear furs."

"How horribly logical you are," Betty murmured. "You make a natural sympathy appear wishy-washy sentimentalism."

She reseated herself on the log. MacRae sat down beside her. He looked at her searchingly. He could not keep his eyes away. A curious inconsistency was revealed to him. He sat beside Betty, responding to the potent stimuli of her nearness and wishing pettishly that she were a thousand miles away, so that he would not be troubled by the magic of her lips and eyes and unruly hair, the musical cadences of her voice. There was a subtle quality of expectancy about her, as if she sat there waiting for him to say something, do something, as if her mere presence were powerful to compel him to speak and act as she desired. MacRae realized the fantasy of those impressions. Betty sat looking at him calmly, her hands idle in her lap. If there were in her soul any of the turmoil that was fast rising in his, it was not outwardly manifested by any sign whatever. For that matter, MacRae knew that he himself was placid enough on the surface. Nor did he feel the urge of inconsequential speech. There was no embarrassment in

that mutual silence, only the tug of a compelling desire to take her in his arms, which he must resist.

"There are times," Betty said at last, "when you live up to your nickname with a vengeance."

"There are times," MacRae replied slowly, "when that is the only wise thing for a man to do."

"And you, I suppose, rather pride yourself on being wise in your day and generation."

There was gentle raillery in her tone.

"I don't like you to be sarcastic," he said.

"I don't think you like me sarcastic or otherwise," Betty observed, after a moment's silence.

"But I do," he protested. "That's the devil of it. I do—and you know I do. It would be a great deal better if I didn't."

Betty's fingers began to twist in her lap. The color rose faintly in her smooth cheeks. Her eyes turned to the sea.

"I don't know why," she said gently. "I'd hate to think it would."

MacRae did not find any apt reply to that. His mind was in an agonized muddle, in which he could only perceive one or two things with any degree of clearness. Betty loved him. He was sure of that. He could tell her that he loved her. And then? Therein arose the conflict. Marriage was the natural sequence of love. And when he contemplated marriage with Betty he found himself unable to detach her from her background, in which lurked something which to MacRae's imagination loomed sinister, hateful. To make peace with Horace Gower—granting that Gower was willing for such a consummation—for love of his daughter struck MacRae as something very near to dishonor. And if, contrariwise, he repeated to Betty the ugly story which involved her father and his father, she would be harassed by irreconcilable forces even if she cared enough to side with him against her own people. MacRae was gifted with acute perception, in some things. He said to himself despairingly—nor was it the first time that he had said it—that you cannot mix oil and water.

He could do nothing at all. That was the sum of his ultimate conclusions. His hands were tied. He could not go back and he could not go on. He sat beside Betty, longing to take her in his arms and still fighting stoutly against that impulse. He was afraid of his impulses.

A faint moisture broke out on his face with that acute nervous strain. A lump rose chokingly in his throat. He stared out at the white-crested seas that came marching up the Gulf before a rising wind until his eyes grew misty. Then he slid down off the log and laid his head on Betty's knee. A weight of dumb grief oppressed him. He wanted to cry, and he was ashamed of his weakness.

Betty's fingers stole caressingly over his bare head, ruffled his hair, stroked his hot cheek.

"Johnny-boy," she said at last, "what is it that comes like a fog between you and me?"

MacRae did not answer.

"I make love to you quite openly," Betty went on. "And I don't seem to be the least bit ashamed of doing so. I'm not a silly kid. I'm nearly as old as you are, and I know quite well what I want—which happens to be you. I love you, Silent John. The man is supposed to be the pursuer. But I seem to have that instinct myself. Besides," she laughed tremulously, "this is leap year. And, remember, you kissed me. Or did I kiss you? Which was it, Jack?"

MacRae seated himself on the log beside her. He put his arm around her and drew her close to him. That disturbing wave of emotion which had briefly mastered him was gone. He felt only a passionate tenderness for Betty and a pity for them both. But he had determined what to do.

"I do love you, Betty," he said—"your hair and your eyes and your lips and the sound of your voice and the way you walk and everything that is you. Is that quite plain enough? It's a sort of emotional madness."

"Well, I am afflicted with the same sort of madness," she admitted. "And I like it. It is natural."

"But you wouldn't like it if you knew it meant a series of mental and spiritual conflicts that would be almost like physical torture," he said slowly. "You'd be afraid of it."

"And you?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said simply. "I am."

"Then you're a poor sort of lover," she flung at him, and freed herself from his arms with a quick twist of her body. Her breast heaved. She moved away from him.

"I'll admit being a poor lover, perhaps," MacRae said. "I didn't want to love you. I shouldn't love you. I really ought to hate you. I don't, but if I was consistent, I should. I ought to take every opportunity to hurt you just because you are a Gower. I have good reason to do so. I can't tell you why—or at least I am not going to tell you why. I don't think it would mend matters if I did. I dare say I'm a better fighter than a lover. I fight in the open, on the square. And because I happen to care enough to shrink from making you risk things I can't dodge, I'm a poor lover. Well, perhaps I am."

"I didn't really mean that, Jack," Betty muttered.

"I know you didn't," he returned gently. "But I mean what I have just said."

"You mean that for some reason which I do not know and which you will not tell me, there is such bad blood between you and my father that you can't—you won't—won't even take a chance on me?"

"Something like that," MacRae admitted. "Only you put it badly. You'd either tie my hands, which I couldn't submit to, or you'd find yourself torn between two factions, and life would be a pretty sad affair."

"I asked you once before, and you told me it was something that happened before either of us was born," Betty said thoughtfully. "I am going to get at the bottom of this somehow. I wonder if you do really care, or if this is all camouflage,—if you're just playing with me to see how big a fool I *will* make of myself."

That queer mistrust of him which suddenly clouded Betty's face and made her pretty mouth harden roused Jack MacRae to an intolerable fury. It was like a knife in a tender spot. He had been stifling the impulse to forget and bury all these ancient wrongs and injustices for which neither of them was responsible but for which, so far as he could see, they must both suffer. Something cracked in him at Betty's words. She jumped, warned by the sudden blaze in his eyes. But he caught her with a movement quicker than her own. He held her by the arms

with fingers that gripped like iron clamps. He shook her.

"You wonder if I really care," he cried. "My God, can't you see? Can't you feel? Must a man grovel and weep and rave?"

Betty whitened a little at this storm which she had evoked. But she did not flinch. Her eyes looked straight into his, fearlessly.

"You are raving now," she said. "And you are hurting my arms terribly."

MacRae released his hold on her. His hands dropped to his sides.

"I suppose I was," he said in a flat, lifeless tone. "But don't say that to me again, ever. You can say anything you like, Betty, except that I'm not in earnest. I don't deserve that."

Betty retreated a little. MacRae was not even looking at her now. His eyes were turned to the sea, to hide the blur that crept into them in spite of his will.

"You don't deserve anything," Betty said distinctly. She moved warily away as she spoke. "You have the physical courage to face death; but you haven't the moral courage to face a problem in living, even though you love me. You take it for granted that I'm as weak as you are. You won't even give me a chance to prove whether love is strong or weak in the face of trouble. And I will never give you another chance—never."

She sprang from the beach to the low pile of driftwood and from that plunged into the thicket. MacRae did not try to follow. He did not even move. He looked after her a minute. Then he sat down on the log again and stared at the steady march of the swells. There was a sense of finality in this thing which made him flounder desperately. Still, he assured himself, it had to be. And if it had to be that way it was better to have it so understood. Betty would never look at him again with that disturbing message in her eyes. He would not be troubled by a futile longing. But it hurt. He had never imagined how so abstract a thing as emotion could breed such an ache in a man's heart.

After a little he got up. There was a trail behind that thicket, an old game trail widened by men's feet, that ran along the seaward slope to Cradle Bay. He went up now to this path. His eye, used to the practice of woodcraft, easily picked up tiny heel marks, toe prints, read their message mechanically. Betty had been running. She had gone home.

He went back to the beach. The rowboat and the rising tide caught his attention. He hauled the boat up on the driftwood so that it should not float away. Then he busied himself on the deer's legs with a knife for a minute and shouldered the carcass.

It was a mile and a half across country to the head of Squitty Cove. He had intended to hang his deer in a tree by the beach and come for it later with a boat. Now he took up this hundred-pound burden for the long carry over steep hills and through brushy hollows in the spirit of the medieval flagellantes, mortifying his flesh for the ease of his soul.

An hour or so later he came out on a knoll over-looking all the southeastern face of Squitty. Below, the wind-harassed Gulf spread its ruffled surface. He looked down on the cliffs and the Cove and Cradle Bay. He could see Gower's cottage white among the green, one chimney spitting blue smoke that the wind carried away in a wispy banner. He could see a green patch behind his own house with the white headboard that marked his father's grave. He could see Poor Man's Rock bare its kelp-grown head between seas, and on the point above the Rock a solitary figure, squat and brown, that he knew must be Horace Gower.

MacRae laid down his pack to rest his aching shoulders. But there was no resting the ache in his heart. Nor was it restful to gaze upon any of these things within the span of his eye. He was reminded of too much which it was not good to remember. As he sat staring down on the distant Rock and a troubled sea with an intolerable heaviness in his breast, he recalled that so must his father have looked down on Poor Man's Rock in much the same anguished spirit long ago. And Jack MacRae's mind reacted morbidly to the suggestion, the parallel. His eyes turned with smoldering fire to the stumpy figure on the tip of Point Old.

"I'll pay it all back yet," he gritted. "Betty or no Betty, I'll make him wish he'd kept his hands off the MacRaes."



About the time Jack MacRae with his burden of venison drew near his own dooryard, Betty Gower came out upon the winter-sodden lawn before their cottage and having crossed it ran lightly up the steps to the wide porch. From there she saw her father standing on the Point. She called to him. At her hail he came trudging to the house. Betty was piling wood in the living-room fireplace

when he came in.

"I was beginning to worry about you," he said.

"The wind got too much for me," she answered, "so I put the boat on the beach a mile or so along and walked home."

Gower drew a chair up to the fire.

"Blaze feels good," he remarked. "There's a chill in this winter air."

Betty made no comment.

"Getting lonesome?" he inquired after a minute. "It seems to me you've been restless the last day or two. Want to go back to town, Betty?"

"I wonder why we come here and stay and stay, out of reach of everything and everybody?" she said at last.

"Blest if I know," Gower answered casually. "Except that we like to. It's a restful place, isn't it? You work harder at having a good time in town than I ever did making money. Well, we don't have to be hermits unless we like. We'll go back to mother and the giddy whirl to-morrow, if you like."

"We might as well, I think," she said absently.

For a minute neither spoke. The fire blazed up in a roaring flame. Raindrops slashed suddenly against the windows out of a storm-cloud driven up by the wind. Betty turned her eyes on her father.

"Did you ever do anything to Jack MacRae that would give him reason to hate you?" she asked bluntly.

Gower shook his head without troubling to look at her. He kept his face steadfastly to the fire.

"No," he said. "The other way about, if anything. He put a crimp in me last season."

"I remember you said you were going to smash him," she said thoughtfully.

"Did I?" he made answer in an indifferent tone. "Well, I might. And then again I might not. He may do the smashing. He's a harder proposition than I figured he would be, in several ways."

"That isn't it," Betty said, as if to herself. "Then you must have had some trouble with his father—long ago. Something that hurt him enough for him to pass a grudge on to Jack. What was it, daddy? Anything real?"

"Jack, eh?" Gower passed over the direct question. "You must be getting on. Have you been seeing much of that young man lately?"

"What does that matter?" Betty returned impatiently. "Of course I see him. Is there any reason I shouldn't?"

Gower picked up a brass poker. He leaned forward, digging aimlessly at the fire, stirring up tiny cascades of sparks that were sucked glowing into the black chimney throat.

"Perhaps no reason that would strike you as valid," he said slowly. "Still—I don't know. Do you like him?"

"You won't answer my questions," Betty complained. "Why should I answer yours?"

"There are plenty of nice young fellows in your own crowd," Gower went on, still poking mechanically at the fire. "Why pick on young MacRae?"

"You're evading, daddy," Betty murmured. "Why *shouldn't* I pick on Jack MacRae if I like him—if he likes me? That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Does he?" Gower asked pointblank.

"Yes," Betty admitted in a reluctant whisper. "He does—but—why don't you tell me, daddy, what I'm up against, as you would say? What did you ever do to old Donald MacRae that his son should have a feeling that is stronger than love?"

"You think he loves you?"

"I know it," Betty murmured.

"And you?" Gower's deep voice seemed harsh.

Betty threw out her hands in an impatient gesture.

"Must I shout it out loud?" she cried.

"You always were different from most girls, in some things," Gower observed reflectively. "Iron under your softness. I never knew you to stop trying to get

anything you really wanted, not while there was a chance to get it. Still—don't you think it would be as well for you to stop wanting young MacRae—since he doesn't want you bad enough to try to get you? Eh?"

He still kept his face studiously averted. His tone was kind, full of a peculiar tenderness that he kept for Betty alone.

She rose and perched herself on the arm of his chair, caught and drew his head against her, forced him to look up into eyes preternaturally bright.

"You don't seem to understand," she said. "It isn't that Jack doesn't want me badly enough. He could have me, and I think he knows that too. But there is something, something that drives him the other way. He loves me. I know he does. And still he has spells of hating all us Gowers—especially you. I know he wouldn't do that without reason."

"Doesn't he tell you the reason?"

Betty shook her head.

"Would I be asking you, daddy?"

"I can't tell you, either," Gower rumbled deep in his throat.

"Is it something that can't be mended?" Betty put her face down against his, and he felt the tears wet on her cheek. "Think, daddy. I'm beginning to be terribly unhappy."

"That seems to be a family failing," Gower muttered. "I can't mend it, Betty. I don't know what young MacRae knows or what he feels, but I can guess. I'd make it worse if I meddled. Should I go to this hot-headed young fool and say, 'Come on, let's shake hands, and you marry my daughter'?"

"Don't be absurd," Betty flashed. "I'm not asking you to *do* anything."

"I couldn't do anything in this case if I wanted to," Gower declared. "As a matter of fact, I think I'd put young MacRae out of my head, if I were you. I wouldn't pick him for a husband, anyway."

Betty rose to her feet.

"You brought me into the world," she said passionately. "You have fed me and clothed me and educated me and humored all my whims ever since I can

remember. But you can't pick a husband for me. I shall do that for myself. It's silly to tell me to put Jack MacRae out of my head. He isn't in my head. He's in my—my—heart. And I can keep him there, if I can't have him in my arms. Put him out of my head! You talk as if loving and marrying were like dealing in fish."

"I wish it were," Gower rumbled. "I might have had some success at it myself."

Betty did not even vouchsafe reply. Probably she did not even hear what he said. She turned and went to the window, stood looking out at the rising turmoil of the sea, at the lowering scud of the clouds, dabbing surreptitiously at her eyes with a handkerchief. After a little she walked out of the room. Her feet sounded lightly on the stairs.

Gower bent to the fire again. He resumed his aimless stirring of the coals. A grim, twisted smile played about his lips. But his eyes were as somber as the storm-blackened winter sky.



CHAPTER XVI

EN FAMILLE

Horace Gower's town house straddled the low crest of a narrow peninsula which juts westward into the Gulf from the heart of the business section of Vancouver. The tip of this peninsula ends in the green forest of Stanley Park, which is like no other park in all North America, either in its nature or its situation. It is a sizable stretch of ancient forest, standing within gunshot of skyscrapers, modern hotels, great docks where China freighters unload tea and silk. Hard on the flank of a modern seaport this area of primitive woodland broods in the summer sun and the winter rains not greatly different from what it must have been in those days when only the Siwash Indians penetrated its shadowy depths.

The rear of Gower's house abutted against the park, neighbor to great tall firs and massive, branchy cedars and a jungle of fern and thicket bisected by a few paths and drives, with the sea lapping all about three sides of its seven-mile boundary. From Gower's northward windows the Capilano canyon opened between two mountains across the Inlet. Southward other windows gave on English Bay and beach sands where one could count a thousand swimmers on a summer afternoon.

The place was only three blocks from Abbott's. The house itself was not unlike Abbott's, built substantially of gray stone and set in ample grounds. But it was a good deal larger, and both within and without it was much more elaborate, as befitted the dwelling of a successful man whose wife was socially a leader instead of a climber,—like so many of Vancouver's newly rich. There was order and system and a smooth, unobtrusive service in that home. Mrs. Horace A. Gower rather prided herself on the noiseless, super-efficient operation of her domestic machinery. Any little affair was sure to go off without a hitch, to be quite charming, you know. Mrs. Gower had a firmly established prestige along certain lines. Her business in life was living up to that prestige, not only that it might be retained but judiciously expanded.

Upon a certain March morning, however, Mrs. Gower seemed to be a trifle shaken out of her usual complacency. She sat at a rather late breakfast, facing her husband, flanked on either hand by her son and daughter. There was an injured

droop to Mrs. Gower's mouth, a slightly indignant air about her. The conversation had reached a point where Mrs. Gower felt impelled to remove her pince-nez and polish them carefully with a bit of cloth. This was an infallible sign of distress.

"I cannot see the least necessity for it, Norman," she resumed in a slightly agitated, not to say petulant tone. "It's simply ridiculous for a young man of your position to be working at common labor with such terribly common people. It's degrading."

Norman was employing himself upon a strip of bacon.

"That's a mere matter of opinion," he replied at length. "Somebody has to work. I have to do something for myself sometime, and it suits me to begin now, in this particular manner which annoys you so much. I don't mind work. And those copper claims are a rattling good prospect. Everybody says so. We'll make a barrel of money out of them yet. Why shouldn't I peel off my coat and go at it?"

"By the way," Gower asked bluntly, "what occasioned this flying trip to England?"

Norman pushed back his chair a trifle, thrust his hands in his trousers pockets and looked straight at his father.

"My own private business," he answered as bluntly.

"You people," he continued after a brief interval, "seem to think I'm still in knee breeches."

But this did not serve to turn his mother from her theme.

"It is quite unnecessary for you to attempt making money in such a primitive manner," she observed. "We have plenty of money. There is plenty of opportunity for you in your father's business, if you must be in business."

"Huh!" Norman grunted. "I'm no good in my father's business, nor anywhere else, in his private opinion. It's no good, mamma. I'm on my own for keeps. I'm going through with it. I've been a jolly fizzle so far. I'm not even a blooming war hero. You just stop bothering about me."

"I really can't think what's got into you," Mrs. Gower complained in a tone which implied volumes of reproach. "It's bad enough for your father and Betty to

be running off and spending so much time at that miserable cottage when so much is going on here. I'm simply exhausted keeping things up without any help from them. But this vagary of yours—I really can't consider it anything else—is most distressing. To live in a dirty little cabin and cook your own food, to associate with such men—it's simply dreadful! Haven't you any regard for our position?"

"I'm fed up with our position," Norman retorted. A sullen look was gathering about his mouth. "What does it amount to? A lot of people running around in circles, making a splash with their money. You, and the sort of thing you call our position, made a sissy of me right up till the war came along. There was nothing I was good for but parlor tricks. And you and everybody else expected me to react from that and set things afire overseas. I didn't. I didn't begin to come up to your expectations at all. But if I didn't split Germans with a sword or do any heroics I did get some horse sense knocked into me—unbelievable as that may appear to you. I learned that there was a sort of satisfaction in doing things. I'm having a try at that now. And you needn't imagine I'm going to be wet-nursed along by your money.

"As for my associates, and the degrading influences that fill you with such dismay," Norman's voice flared into real anger, "they may not have much polish—but they're human. I like them, so far as they go. I've been frostbitten enough by the crowd I grew up with, since I came home, to appreciate being taken for what I am, not what I may or may not have done. Since I have discovered myself to have a funny sort of feeling about living on your money, it behooves me to get out and make what money I need for myself—in view of the fact that I'm going to be married quite soon. I am going to marry"—Norman rose and looked down at his mother with something like a flicker of amusement in his eyes as he exploded his final bombshell—"a fisherman's daughter. A poor but worthy maiden," he finished with unexpected irony.

"Norman!" His mother's voice was a wail. "A common fisherman's daughter? Oh, my son, my son."

She shed a few beautifully restrained tears.

"A common fisherman's daughter. Exactly," Norman drawled. "Terrible thing, of course. Funny the fish scales on the family income never trouble you."

Mrs. Gower glared at him through her glasses.

"Who is this—this woman?" she demanded.

"Dolly," Betty whispered under her breath.

"Miss Dolores Ferrara of Squitty Cove," Norman answered imperturbably.

"A foreigner besides. Great Heavens! Horace," Mrs. Gower appealed to her husband, "have you no influence whatever with your son?"

"Mamma," Betty put in, "I assure you you are making a tremendous fuss about nothing. I can tell you that Dolly Ferrara is really quite a nice girl. *I think Norman is rather lucky.*"

"Thanks, Bet," Norman said promptly. "That's the first decent thing I've heard in this discussion."

Mrs. Gower turned the battery of her indignant eyes on her daughter.

"You, I presume," she said spitefully, "will be thinking of marrying some fisherman next?"

"If she did, Bessie," Gower observed harshly, "it would only be history repeating itself."

Mrs. Gower flushed, paled a little, and reddened again. She glared—no other word describes her expression—at her husband for an instant. Then she took refuge behind her dignity.

"There is a downright streak of vulgarity in you, Horace," she said, "which I am sorry to see crop out in my children."

"Thank you, mamma," Betty remarked evenly.

Mrs. Gower whirled on Norman.

"I wash my hands of you completely," she said imperiously. "I am ashamed of you."

"I'd rather you'd be ashamed of me," Norman retorted, "than that I should be ashamed of myself."

"And you, sir,"—he faced his father, speaking in a tone of formal respect which did not conceal a palpable undercurrent of defiance—"you also, I suppose, wash your hands of me?"

Gower looked at him for a second. His face was a mask, devoid of expression.

"You're a man grown," he said. "Your mother has expressed herself as she might be expected to. I say nothing."

Norman walked to the door.

"I don't care a deuce of a lot what you say or what you don't say, nor even what you think," he flung at them angrily, with his hand on the knob. "I have my own row to hoe. I'm going to hoe it my own style. And that's all there is to it. If you can't even wish me luck, why, you can go to the devil!"

"Norman!" His mother lifted her voice in protesting horror. Gower himself only smiled, a bit cynically. And Betty looked at the door which closed upon her brother with a wistful sort of astonishment.

Gower first found occasion for speech.

"While we are on the subject of intimate family affairs, Bessie," he addressed his wife casually, "I may as well say that I shall have to call on you for some funds—about thirty thousand dollars. Forty thousand would be better."

Mrs. Gower stiffened to attention. She regarded her husband with an air of complete disapproval, slightly tintured with surprise.

"Oh," she said, "really?"

"I shall need that much properly to undertake this season's operations," he stated calmly, almost indifferently.

"Really?" she repeated. "Are you in difficulties again?"

"Again?" he echoed. "It is fifteen years since I was in a corner where I needed any of your money."

"It seems quite recent to me," Mrs. Gower observed stiffly.

"Am I to understand from that that you don't care to advance me whatever sum I require?" he asked gently.

"I don't see why I should," Mrs. Gower replied after a second's reflection, "even if I were quite able to do so. This place costs something to keep up. I can't very well manage on less than two thousand a month. And Betty and I must be clothed. You haven't contributed much recently, Horace."

"No? I had the impression that I had been contributing pretty freely for thirty years," Gower returned dryly. "I paid the bills up to December. Last season wasn't a particularly good one—for me."

"That was chiefly due to your own mismanagement, I should say," Mrs. Gower commented tartly. "Putting the whole cannery burden on Norman when the poor boy had absolutely no experience. Really, you must have mismanaged dreadfully. I heard only the other day that the Robbin-Steele plants did better last season than they ever did. I'm sure the Abbotts made money last year. If the banks have lost faith in your business ability, I—well, I should consider you a bad risk, Horace. I can't afford to gamble."

"You never do. You only play cinches," Gower grunted. "However, your money will be safe enough. I didn't say the banks refuse me credit. I have excellent reasons for borrowing of you."

"I really do not see how I can possibly let you have such a sum," she said. "You already have twenty thousand dollars of my money tied up in your business, you know."

"You have an income of twelve thousand a year from the Maple Point place," Gower recited in that unchanging, even tone. "You have over twenty thousand cash on deposit. And you have eighty thousand dollars in Victory Bonds. You mean you don't want to, Bessie."

"You may accept that as my meaning," she returned.

"There are times in every man's career," Gower remarked dispassionately, "when the lack of a little money might break him."

"That is all the more reason why I should safeguard my funds," Mrs. Gower replied. "You are not as young as you were, Horace. If you should fail now, you would likely never get on your feet again. But we could manage, I dare say, on what I have. That is why I do not care to risk any of it."

"You refuse then, absolutely, to let me have this money?" he asked.

"I do," Mrs. Gower replied, with an air of pained but conscious rectitude. "I should consider myself most unwise to do so."

"All right," Gower returned indifferently. "You force me to a showdown. I have

poured money into your hands for years for you to squander in keeping up your position—as you call it. I'm about through doing that. I'm sick of aping millionaires. All I need is a comfortable place where I can smoke a pipe in peace. This house is mine. I shall sell it and repay you your twenty thousand. You—"

"Horace! Sell this house. Our home! *Horace*."

"Our home?" Gower continued inflexibly. "The place where we eat and sleep and entertain, you mean. We never had a home, Bessie. You will have your ancestral hall at Maple Point. You will be quite able to afford a Vancouver house if you choose. But this is mine, and it's going into the discard. I shall owe you nothing. I shall still have the cottage at Cradle Bay, if I go smash, and that is quite good enough for me. Do I make myself clear?"

Mrs. Gower was sniffing. She had taken refuge with the pince-nez and the polishing cloth. But her fingers were tremulous, and her expression was that of a woman who feels herself sadly abused and who is about to indulge in luxurious weeping.

"But, Horace, to sell this house over my head—what will p-people say?"

"I don't care two whoops what people say," Mr. Gower replied unfeelingly.

"This is simp-ply outrageous! How is Betty going to m-meet p-people?"

"You mean," her husband retorted, "how are you going to contrive the proper background against which Betty shall display her charms to the different varieties of saphead which you hit upon as being eligible to marry her? Don't worry. With the carefully conserved means at your disposal you will still be able to maintain yourself in the station in which it has pleased God to place you. You will be able to see that Betty has the proper advantages."

This straw broke the camel's back, if it is proper so to speak of a middle-aged, delicate-featured lady, delightfully gowned and coiffed and manicured. Mrs. Gower's grief waxed crescendo. Whereupon her husband, with no manifest change of expression beyond an unpleasant narrowing of his eyes, heaved his short, flesh-burdened body out of the chair and left the room.

Betty had sat silent through this conversation, a look of profound distaste slowly gathering on her fresh young face. She gazed after her father. When the door closed upon him Betty's gray eyes came to rest on her mother's bowed head and

shaking shoulders. There was nothing in Betty Gower's expression which remotely suggested sympathy. She said nothing. She leaned her elbows on the table and rested her pretty chin in her cupped palms.

Mrs. Gower presently became aware of this detached, observing, almost critical attitude.

"Your f-father is p-positively b-brutal," she found voice to declare.

"There are various sorts of brutality," Betty observed enigmatically. "I don't think daddy has a corner on the visible supply. Are you going to let him have that money?"

"No. Never," Mrs. Gower snapped.

"You may lose a great deal more than the house by that," Betty murmured.

But if Mrs. Gower heard the words they conveyed no meaning to her agitated mind. She was rapidly approaching that incomprehensible state in which a woman laughs and cries in the same breath, and Betty got up with a faintly contemptuous curl to her red lips. She went out into the hall and pressed a button. A maid materialized.

"Go into the dining room and attend to mamma, if you please, Mary," Betty said.

Then she skipped nimbly upstairs, two steps at a time, and went into a room on the second floor, a room furnished something after the fashion of a library in which her father sat in a big leather chair chewing on an unlighted cigar.

Betty perched on the arm of his chair and ran her fingers through a patch on top of his head where the hair was growing a bit thin.

"Daddy," she asked, "did you mean that about going smash?"

"Possibility," he grunted.

"Are you really going to sell this house and live at Cradle Bay?"

"Sure. You sorry?"

"About the house? Oh, no. It's only a place for mamma to make a splash, as Norman said. If you hibernate at the cottage I'll come and keep house for you."

Gower considered this.

"You ought to stay with your mother," he said finally. "She'll be able to give you a lot I wouldn't make an effort to provide. You don't know what it means really to work. You'd find it pretty slow at Squitty."

"Maybe," Betty said. "But we managed very well last winter, just you and me. If there is going to be a break-up of the family I shall stay with you. I'm a daddy's girl."

Gower drew her face down and kissed it.

"You are that," he said huskily. "You're all Gower. There's real stuff in you. You're free of that damned wishy-washy Morton blood. She made a poodle dog of Norman, but she couldn't spoil you. We'll manage, eh, Betty?"

"Of course," Betty returned. "But I don't know that Norman is such a hopeless case. Didn't he rather take your breath away with his declaration of independence?"

"It takes more than a declaration to win independence," Gower answered grimly. "Wait till the going gets hard. However, I'll say there's a chance for Norman. Now, you run along, Betty. I've got some figuring to do."



CHAPTER XVII

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Late in March Jack MacRae came down to Vancouver and quartered himself at the Granada again. He liked the quiet luxury of that great hostelry. It was a trifle expensive, but he was not inclined to worry about expense. At home, or aboard his carriers in the season, living was a negligible item. He found a good deal of pleasure in swinging from one extreme to the other. Besides, a man stalking big game does not arm himself with a broomstick.

He had not come to town solely for his pleasure, although he was not disposed to shy from any diversion that offered. He had business in hand, business of prime importance since it involved spending a little matter of twelve thousand dollars. In brief, he had to replace the *Blackbird*, and he was replacing her with a carrier of double the capacity, of greater speed, equipped with special features of his own choosing. The new boat was designed to carry ten thousand salmon. There was installed in her holds an ammonia refrigerating plant which would free him from the labor and expense and uncertainty of crushed ice. Science bent to the service of money-making. MacRae grinned to himself when he surveyed the coiled pipes, the pumping engine. His new boat was a floating, self-contained cold-storage plant. He could maintain a freezing temperature so long as he wished by chemico-mechanical means. That meant a full load every trip, since he could follow the trollers till he got a load, if it took a week, and his salmon would still be fresh.

He wondered why this had not been done before. Stubby enlightened him.

"Partly because it's a costly rig to install. But mostly because salmon and ice have always been both cheap and plentiful, and people have got into a habit of doing things in the same old way. You know. Until the last season or two salmon have been so cheap that neither canneries nor buyers bothered about anything so up-to-date. If they lost their ice in hot weather and the fish rotted—why, there were plenty more fish. There have been times when the Fraser River stunk with rotten salmon. They used to pay the fishermen ten cents apiece for six-pound sockeyes and limit them to two hundred fish to the boat if there was a big run. The gill-netter would take five hundred in one drift, come in to the cannery

loaded to the guards, find himself up against a limit. He would sell the two hundred and dump more than that overboard. And the Fraser River canneries wonder why sockeye is getting scarce. My father used to rave about the waste. Criminal, he used to say."

"When the fishermen were getting only ten cents apiece for sockeyes, salmon was selling at fifteen cents a pound tin," MacRae observed.

"Oh, the canneries made barrels of money." Stubby shrugged his shoulders. "They thought the salmon would always run in millions, no matter how many they destroyed. Some of 'em think so yet."

"We're a nation of wasters, compared to Europe," MacRae said thoughtfully. "The only thing they are prodigal with over there is human flesh and blood. That is cheap and plentiful. But they take care of their natural resources. We destroy as much as we use, fish, timber—everything. Everybody for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

"Well, I don't know what we can do about it," Stubby drawled.

"Keep from being the hindmost," MacRae answered. "But I sometimes feel sorry for those who are."

"Man," Stubby observed, "is a predatory animal. You can't make anything else of him. Nobody develops philanthropy and the public spirit until he gets rich and respectable. Social service is nothing but a theory yet. God only helps those who help themselves."

"How does he arrange it for those who *can't* help themselves?" MacRae inquired.

Stubby shrugged his shoulders.

"Search me," he said.

"Do you even believe in this anthropomorphic God of the preachers?" MacRae asked curiously.

"Well, there must be something, don't you think?" Stubby hedged.

"There may be," MacRae pursued the thought. "I read a book by Wells not long ago in which he speaks of God as the Great Experimenter. If there is an all-powerful Deity, it strikes me that in his attitude toward humanity he is a good

deal like a referee at a football game who would say to the teams, 'Here is the ball and the field and the two goals. Go to it,' and then goes off to the side lines to smoke his pipe while the players foul and gouge and trip and generally run amuck in a frenzied effort to win the game."

"You're a pessimist," Stubby declared.

"What is a pessimist?" MacRae demanded.

But Stubby changed the subject. He was not concerned with abstractions. And he was vitally concerned with the material factors of his everyday life, believing that he was able to dominate those material factors and bend them to his will if only he were clever enough and energetic enough.

Stubby wanted to get in on the blueback salmon run again. He had put a big pack through Crow Harbor and got a big price for the pack. In a period of mounting prices canned salmon was still ascending. Food in any imperishable, easily transported form was sure of a market in Europe. There was a promise of even bigger returns for Pacific salmon packers in the approaching season. But Stubby was not sure enough yet of where he stood to make any definite arrangement with MacRae. He wanted to talk things over, to feel his way.

There were changes in the air. For months the industrial pot had been spasmodically boiling over in strikes, lockouts, boycotts, charges of profiteering, loud and persistent complaints from consumers, organized labor and rapidly organizing returned soldiers. Among other things the salmon packers' monopoly and the large profits derived therefrom had not escaped attention.

From her eight millions of population during those years of war effort Canada had withdrawn over six hundred thousand able-bodied men. Yet the wheels of industry turned apace. She had supplied munitions, food for armies, ships, yet her people had been fed and clothed and housed,—all their needs had been liberally supplied.

And in a year these men had come back. Not all. There were close on to two hundred thousand to be checked off the lists. There was the lesser army of the slightly and totally disabled, the partially digested food of the war machine. But there were still a quarter of a million men to be reabsorbed into a civil and industrial life which had managed to function tolerably well without them.

These men, for the most part, had somehow conceived the idea that they were

coming back to a better world, a world purged of dross by the bloody sweat of the war. And they found it pretty much the same old world. They had been uprooted. They found it a little difficult to take root again. They found living costly, good jobs not so plentiful, masters as exacting as they had been before. The Golden Rule was no more a common practice than it had ever been. Yet the country was rich, bursting with money. Big business thrived, even while it howled to high heaven about ruinous, confiscatory taxation.

The common man himself lifted up his voice in protest and backed his protest with such action as he could take. Besides the parent body of the Great War Veterans' Association other kindred groups of men who had fought on both sea and land sprang into being. The labor organizations were strengthened in their campaign for shorter hours and longer pay by thousands of their own members returned, all semi-articulate, all more or less belligerent. The war had made fighters of them. War does not teach men sweet reasonableness. They said to themselves and to each other that they had fought the greatest war in the world's history and were worse off than they were before. From coast to coast society was infiltrated with men who wore a small bronze button in the left lapel of their coats, men who had acquired a new sense of their relation to society, men who asked embarrassing questions in public meetings, in clubs, in legislative assemblies, in Parliament, and who demanded answers to the questions.

British Columbia was no exception. The British Columbia coast fishermen did not escape the influence of this general unrest, this critical inquiry. Wealthy, respectable, middle-aged citizens viewed with alarm and denounced pernicious agitation. The common man retorted with the epithet of "damned profiteer" and worse. Army scandals were aired. Ancient political graft was exhumed. Strident voices arose in the wilderness of contention crying for a fresh deal, a clean-up, a new dispensation.

When MacRae first began to run bluebacks there were a few returned soldiers fishing salmon, men like the Ferrara boys who had been fishermen before they were soldiers, who returned to their old calling when they put off the uniform. Later, through the season, he came across other men, frankly neophytes, trying their hand at a vocation which at least held the lure of freedom from a weekly pay check and a boss. These men were not slow to comprehend the cannery grip on the salmon grounds and the salmon fishermen. They chafed against the restrictions which, they said, put them at the canneries' mercy. They growled about the swarms of Japanese who could get privileges denied a white man because the Japs catered to the packers. They swelled with their voices the feeble

chorus that white fishermen had raised long before the war.

All of this, like wavering gusts, before the storm, was informing the sentient ears of politicians who governed by grace of electoral votes. Soldiers, who had been citizens before they became soldiers, who were frankly critical of both business and government, won in by-elections. In the British Columbia legislature there was a major from an Island district and a lieutenant from North Vancouver. They were exponents of a new deal, enemies of the profiteer and the professional politician, and they were thorns in the side of a provincial government which yearned over vested rights as a mother over her ailing babe. In the Dominion capital it was much the same as elsewhere,—a government which had grasped office on a win-the-war platform found its grasp wavering over the knotty problems of peace.

The British Columbia salmon fisheries were controlled by the Dominion, through a department political in its scope. Whether the Macedonian cry penetrated through bureaucratic swaddlings, whether the fact that fishermen had votes and might use them with scant respect for personages to whom votes were a prerequisite to political power, may remain a riddle. But about the time Jack MacRae's new carrier was ready to take the water, there came a shuffle in the fishery regulations which fell like a bomb in the packers' camp.

The ancient cannery monopoly of purse-seining rights on given territory was broken into fine large fragments. The rules which permitted none but a cannery owner to hold a purse-seine license and denied all other men that privilege were changed. The new regulations provided that any male citizen of British birth or naturalization could fish if he paid the license fee. The cannery men shouted black ruin,—but they girded up their loins to get fish.

MacRae was still in Vancouver when this change of policy was announced. He heard the roaring of the cannery lions. Their spokesmen filled the correspondence columns of the daily papers with their views. MacRae had not believed such changes imminent or even possible. But taking them as an accomplished fact, he foresaw strange developments in the salmon industry. Until now the packers could always be depended upon to stand shoulder to shoulder against the fishermen and the consumer, to dragoon one another into the line of a general policy. The American buyers, questing adventurously from over the line, had alone saved the individual fisherman from eating humbly out of the British Columbia canner's hand.

The fishermen had made a living, such as it was. The cannery men had dwelt in peace and amity with one another. They had their own loosely knit organization, held together by the ties of financial interest. They sat behind mahogany desks and set the price of salmon to the fishermen and very largely the price of canned fish to the consumer, and their most arduous labor had been to tot up the comfortable balance after each season's operations. All this pleasantness was to be done away with, they mourned. Every Tom, Dick, and Harry was to be turned loose on the salmon with deadly gear and greedy intent to exterminate a valuable species of fish and wipe out a thriving industry. The salmon would all be killed off, so did the packers cry. What few small voices arose, suggesting that the deadly purse seine had never been considered deadly when only canneries had been permitted to use such gear and that *they* had not worried about the extermination of the salmon so long as they did the exterminating themselves and found it highly profitable,—these few voices, alas, arose only in minor strains and were for the most part drowned by the anvil chorus of the cannery men.

MacRae observed, listened, read the papers, and prophesied to himself a scramble. But he did not see where it touched him,—not until Robbin-Steele Senior asked him to come to his office in the Bond Building one afternoon.

MacRae faced the man over a broad table in an office more like the library of a well-appointed home than a place of calculated profit-mongering. Robbin-Steele, Senior, was tall, thin, sixty years of age, sandy-haired, with a high, arched nose. His eyes, MacRae thought, were disagreeably like the eyes of a dead fish, lusterless and sunken; a cold man with a suave manner seeking his own advantage. Robbin-Steele was a Scotchman of tolerably good family who had come to British Columbia with an inherited fortune and made that fortune grow to vast proportions in the salmon trade. He had two pretty and clever daughters, and three of his sons had been notable fighters overseas. MacRae knew them all, liked them well enough. But he had never come much in contact with the head of the family. What he had seen of Robbin-Steele, Senior, gave him the impression of cold, calculating power.

"I wonder," MacRae heard him saying after a brief exchange of courtesies, "if we could make an arrangement with you to deliver all the salmon you can get this season to our Fraser River plant."

"Possibly," MacRae replied. "But there is no certainty that I will get any great number of salmon."

"If you were as uncertain as that," Robbin-Steele said dryly, "you would scarcely be putting several thousand dollars into an elaborately equipped carrier. We may presume that you intend to get the salmon—as you did last year."

"You seem to know a great deal about my business," MacRae observed.

"It is our policy to know, in a general way, what goes on in the salmon industry," Robbin-Steele assented.

MacRae waited for him to continue.

"You have a good deal of both energy and ability," Robbin-Steele went on. "It is obvious that you have pretty well got control of the blueback situation around Squitty Island. You must, however, have an outlet for your fish. We can use these salmon to advantage. On what basis will you deliver them to us on the Fraser if we give you a contract guaranteeing to accept all you can deliver?"

"Twenty per cent, over Folly Bay prices," MacRae answered promptly.

The cannery man shook his head.

"No. We can't afford to boost the cost of salmon like that. It'll ruin the business, which is in a bad enough way as it is. The more you pay a fisherman, the more he wants. We must keep prices down. That is to your interest, too."

"No," MacRae disagreed. "I think it is to my interest to pay the fishermen top prices, so long as I make a profit on the deal. I don't want the earth—only a moderate share of it."

"Twenty per cent. on Folly Bay prices is too uncertain a basis." Robbin-Steele changed his tactics. "We can send our own carriers there to buy at far less cost."

MacRae smiled.

"You can send your carriers," he drawled, "but I doubt if you would get many fish. I don't think you quite grasp the Squitty situation."

"Yes, I think I do," Robbin-Steele returned. "Gower had things pretty much his own way until you cut in on his grounds. You have undoubtedly secured quite an advantage in a peculiar manner, and possibly you feel secure against competition. But your hold is not so strong as Gower's once was. Let me tell you, your hold on that business can be broken, my young friend."

"Undoubtedly," MacRae readily admitted. "But there is a world-wide demand for canned salmon, and I have not suffered for a market—even when influence was used last season to close the home market against me, on Folly Bay's behalf. And I am quite sure, from what I have seen and heard, that many of the big British Columbia packers like yourself are so afraid the labor situation will get out of hand that they would shut down their plants rather than pay fishermen what they could afford to pay if they would be content with a reasonable profit. So I am not at all afraid of you seducing the Squitty trollers with high prices."

"You are laboring under the common error about cannery profits," Robbin-Steele declared pointedly. "Considering the capital invested, the total of the pack, the risk and uncertainty of the business, our returns are not excessive."

MacRae smiled amusedly.

"That all depends on what you regard as excessive. But there is nothing to be gained by an argument on that subject. Canning salmon is a highly profitable business, but it would not be the gold mine it has been if canneries hadn't been fostered at the expense of the men who actually catch the fish, if the government hadn't bestowed upon cannery men the gift of a strangle hold on the salmon grounds, and license privileges that gave them absolute control. I haven't any quarrel with cannery men for making money. You only amuse me when you speak of doubtful returns. I wish I could have your cinch for a season or two."

"You shouldn't have any quarrel with us. You started with nothing and made twenty thousand dollars in a single season," Robbin-Steele reminded.

"I worked like a dog. I took chances. And I was very lucky," MacRae agreed. "I did make a lot of money. But I paid the fishermen more than they ever got for salmon—a great deal more than they would have got if I hadn't broken into the game. Abbott made money on the salmon I delivered him. So everybody was satisfied, except Gower—who perhaps feels that he is ordained by the Almighty to get cheap salmon."

"You're spoiling those men," Robbin-Steele declared irritably. "My observation of that class of labor is that the more money they get the less they will do and the more they will want. You can't carry on any industry on that basis. But that's beside the point. We're getting away from the question. We want you to deliver those fish to us, if you can do so at a reasonable price. We should like to have some sort of agreement, so that we may know what to expect."

"I can deliver the fish," MacRae asserted confidently. "But I don't care to bind myself to anything. Not this far in advance. Wait till the salmon run."

"You are a very shrewd young man, I should say." Robbin-Steele paid him a reluctant compliment and let a gleam of appreciation flicker in his dead-fish eyes. "I imagine you will get on. Come and see me when you feel like considering this matter seriously."

MacRae went down the elevator wondering if the gentleman's agreement among the packers was off, if there was going to be something in the nature of competition among them for the salmon. There would be a few more gill-net licenses issued. More important, the gill-netters would be free to fish where they chose, for whosoever paid the highest price, and not for the cannery which controlled their license. There would be scores of independent purse seiners. Would the packers bid against one another for the catch? It rather seemed to MacRae as if they must. They could no longer sit back secure in the knowledge that the salmon from a given area must come straight to their waiting cans. And British Columbia packers had always dreaded American competition.

Following that, MacRae took train for Bellingham. The people he had dealt with there at the close of the last season had dealt fairly. American salmon packers had never suffered the blight of a monopoly. They had established their industry in legitimate competition, without governmental favors. They did not care how much money a fisherman made so long as he caught fish for them which they could profitably can.

MacRae had no contract with them. He did not want a contract. If he made hard and fast agreements with any one it would be with Stubby Abbott. But he did want to fortify himself with all the information he could get. He did not know what line Folly Bay would take when the season opened. He was not sure what shifts might occur among the British Columbia canneries. If such a thing as free and unlimited competition for salmon took place he might need more than one outlet for his carriers. MacRae was not engaged in a hazardous business for pastime. He had an objective, and this objective was contingent upon making money.

From the American source he learned that a good season was anticipated for the better grades of salmon. He found out what prices he could expect. They were liberal enough to increase his confidence. These men were anxious to get the thousands of British Columbia salmon MacRae could supply.

MacRae returned to Vancouver. Before he had finished unpacking his bag the telephone rang. Hurley, of the Northwest Cold Storage, spoke when he took down the receiver. Could he drop into the Northwest office? MacRae grinned to himself and went down to the grimy wharf where deep-sea halibut schooners rubbed against the dock, their stubby top-hamper swaying under the office windows as they rocked to the swell of passing harbor craft.

He talked with Hurley,—the same gentleman whom he had once approached with no success in the matter of selling salmon. The situation was reversed now. The Northwest was eager to buy. They would pay him, *sub rosa*, two cents a pound over the market price for fresh salmon if he would supply them with the largest possible quantity from the beginning of the blueback run.

As with Robbin-Steele, MacRae refused to commit himself. More clearly he perceived that the scramble was beginning. The packers and the cold-storage companies had lost control. They must have fish to function, to make a profit. They would cut one another's throats for salmon. So much the better, MacRae cynically reflected. He told Hurley, at last, as he had told Robbin-Steele, to wait till the salmon began to run.

He left the Northwest offices with the firm conviction that it was not going to be a question of markets, but a question of getting the salmon. And he rather fancied he could do that.

Last of all on the list of these men who approached him in this fashion came Stubby Abbott. Stubby did not ask him to call. He came to the Granada in search of Jack and haled him, nothing loth, out to the stone house in the West End. It happened that Betty Gower, Etta Robbin-Steele, and two gilded youths, whom MacRae did not know, were there. They had been walking in the Park. Nelly and her mother were serving tea.

It happened, too, that as they chatted over the teacups, a blue-bodied limousine drew up under the Abbott pergola and deposited Mrs. Horace A. Gower for a brief conversation with Mrs. Abbott. It was MacRae's first really close contact with the slender, wonderfully preserved lady whose life had touched his father's so closely in the misty long ago. He regarded her with a reflective interest. She must have been very beautiful then, he thought. She was almost beautiful still. Certainly she was a very distinguished person, with her costly clothing, her rich furs, her white hair, and that faded rose-leaf skin. The petulant, querulous droop of her mouth escaped MacRae. He was not a physiognomist. But the distance of

her manner did not escape him. She acknowledged the introduction and thereafter politely overlooked MacRae. He meant nothing at all to Mrs. Horace A. Gower, he saw very clearly. Merely a young man among other young men; a young man of no particular interest. Thirty years is a long time, MacRae reflected. But his father had not forgotten. He wondered if she had; if those far-off hot-blooded days had grown dim and unreal to her?

He turned his head once and caught Betty as intent upon him as he was upon her mother, under cover of the general conversation. He gathered that there was a shade of reproach, of resentment, in her eyes. But he could not be sure. Certainly there was nothing like that in her manner. But the manner of these people, he understood very well, was pretty much a mask. Whatever went on in their secret bosoms, they smiled and joked and were unfailingly courteous.

He made another discovery within a few minutes. Stubby maneuvered himself close to Etta Robbin-Steele. Stubby was not quite so adept at repression as most of his class. He was a little more naïve, more prone to act upon his natural, instinctive impulses. MacRae was aware of that. He saw now a swift by-play that escaped the rest. Nothing of any consequence,—a look, the motion of a hand, a fleeting something on the girl's face and Stubby's. Jack glanced at Nelly Abbott sitting beside him, her small blonde head pertly inclined. Nelly saw it too. She smiled knowingly.

"Has the brunette siren hooked Stubby?" MacRae inquired in a discreet undertone.

"I think so. I'm not sure. Etta's such an outrageous flirt," Nelly said. "I hope not, anyway. I'm afraid I can't quite appreciate Etta as a prospective sister-in-law."

"No?"

"She's catty—and vain as a peacock. Stubby ought to marry a nice sensible girl who'd mother him," Nelly observed with astonishing conviction; "like Betty, for instance."

"Oh, you seem to have very definite ideas on that subject," MacRae smiled. He did not commit himself further. But he resented the suggestion. There was also an amusing phase of Nelly's declaration which did not escape him,—the pot calling the kettle black. Etta Robbin-Steele did flirt. She had dancing black eyes that flung a challenge to men. But Nelly herself was no shrinking violet, for all her baby face. She was like an elf. Her violet eyes were capable of infinite

shades of expression. She, herself, had a way of appropriating men who pleased her, to the resentful dismay of other young women. It pleased her to do that with Jack MacRae whenever he was available. And until Betty had preempted a place in his heart without even trying, Jack MacRae had been quite willing to let his fancy linger romantically on Nelly Abbott.

As it was,—he looked across the room at Betty chatting with young Lane. What a damned fool he was,—he, MacRae! All his wires were crossed. If some inescapable human need urged him to love, how much better to love this piquant bit of femininity beside him? But he couldn't do it. It wasn't possible. All the old rebellion stirred in him. The locked chambers of his mind loosed pictures of Squitty, memories of things which had happened there, as he let his eyes drift from Betty, whom he loved, to her mother, whom his father had loved and lost. She had made his father suffer through love. Her daughter was making Donald MacRae's son suffer likewise. Again, through some fantastic quirk of his imagination, the stodgy figure of Horace Gower loomed in the background, shadowy and sinister. There were moments, like the present, when he felt hatred of the man concretely, as he could feel thirst or hunger.

"A penny for your thoughts," Nelly bantered.

"They'd be dear at half the price," MacRae said, forcing a smile.

He was glad when those people went their way. Nelly put on a coat and went with them. Stubby drew Jack up to his den.

"I have bought up the controlling interest in the Terminal Fish Company since I saw you last," Stubby began abruptly. "I'm going to put up a cold-storage plant and do what my father started to do early in the war—give people cheaper fish for food."

"Can you make it stick," MacRae asked curiously, "with the other wholesalers against you? Their system seems to be to get all the traffic will bear, to boost the price to the consumer by any means they can use. And there is the Packers' Association. They are not exactly—well, favorable to cheap retailing of fish. Everybody seems to think the proper caper is to tack on a cent or two a pound wherever he can."

"I know I can," Stubby declared. "The pater would have succeeded only he trusted too much to men who didn't see it his way. Look at Cunningham—" Stubby mentioned a fish merchant who had made a resounding splash in matters

piscatorial for a year or two, and then faded, along with his great cheap-fish markets, into oblivion—"he made it go like a house afire until he saw a chance to make a quick and easy clean-up by sticking people. It can be done, all right, if a man will be satisfied with a small profit on a big turnover. I know it."

MacRae made no comment on that. Stubby was full of his plan, eager to talk about its possibilities.

"I wanted to do it last year," he said, "but I couldn't. I had to play the old game—make a bunch of money and make it quick. Between you and Gower's pig-headedness, and the rest of the cannery crowd letting me go till it was too late to stop me, and a climbing market, I made more money in one season than I thought was possible. I'm going to use that money to make more money and to squash some of these damned fish pirates. I tell you it's jolly awful. We had baked cod for lunch to-day. That fish cost twenty cents a pound. Think of it! When the fisherman sells it for six cents within fifty miles of us. No wonder everybody is howling. I don't know anything about other lines of food supply, but I can sure put my finger on a bunch of fish profiteers. And I feel like putting my foot on them. Anyway, I've got the Terminal for a starter; also I have a twenty-five-year lease on the water frontage there. I have the capital to go ahead and build a cold-storage plant. The wholesale crowd can't possibly bother me. And the canneries are going to have their hands full this season without mixing into a scrap over local prices of fresh fish. You've heard about the new regulations?"

MacRae nodded assent.

"There's going to be a free-for-all," Stubby chuckled. "There'll be a lot of independent purse seiners. If the canneries don't pay good prices these independent fishermen, with their fast, powerful rigs, will seine the salmon under the packers' noses and run their catch down to the Puget Sound plants. This is no time for the British Columbia packers to get uppish. Good-by, four hundred per cent."

"They'll wiggle through legislation to prevent export of raw salmon," MacRae suggested; "same as they have on the sockeye."

"No chance. They've tried, and it can't be done," Stubby grinned. "There aren't going to be any special privileges for British Columbia salmon packers any more. I know, because I'm on the inside. The fishermen have made a noise that disturbs the politicians, I guess. Another thing, there's a slack in the demand for

all but the best grades of salmon. But the number one grades, sockeye and blueback and coho, are short. So that a cannery man with an efficient plant can pay big for those fish. If you can hold that Squitty fleet of trollers like you did last year, you'll make some money."

"Do you want those salmon?" MacRae asked.

"Sure I want them. I want them as soon as they begin to run big enough to be legally taken for sale," Stubby declared. "I'm going to rush that cold-storage construction. By the time you begin collecting bluebacks I'll have a place for them, all you can buy. I'll have storage for three hundred thousand fish. I'm going to buy everything and start half a dozen retail stores at the same time. Just imagine the situation in this burg of a hundred and fifty thousand people with waters that swarm with fish right at our doors—salmon selling for thirty cents a pound, hardly ever below twenty, other fish in about the same proportion. It's a damned scandal, and I don't much blame a man who works for four dollars a day thinking he might as well turn Bolshevik. I know that I can pay twelve cents for salmon and make a good profit selling for sixteen. Can you make money supplying me with bluebacks at twelve cents a pound?"

"Yes, more money than I made last year," MacRae replied—"unless Folly Bay boosts prices to the sky in an effort to drive me out of business."

"I don't think there's much danger of that," Stubby said. "I doubt if Folly Bay opens this season. It's reported that Gower is broke."

"Eh?" MacRae looked his doubt.

"That's what they say," Stubby went on. "It's common talk. He sold his place in town a short while ago. He has the cannery on the market. And there are no takers. Folly Bay used to be a little gold mine. But Gower rode the fishermen too hard. And you balled things up last season. He lost his grip. I suppose he was involved other ways, too. Lots of these old-timers are, you know. Anyway, he seems to be trying to get out from under. But nobody wants to take over a plant that has a black eye among the men who catch the fish, in a territory where you appear to have a pretty strong hold."

"At the same time, if I can pay so much for salmon, haul them up the coast and make a profit on that, and if you can pay this advanced price and pack them at a still bigger profit, why in blazes can't a plant right there on the grounds pay top price and still make money?" MacRae asked impatiently.

"Could," Stubby declared. "Certainly. But most men in the salmon canning business aren't like you and me, Jack. They are used to big returns on a three months' season. They simply can't stand the idea of paying out big gobs of money to a sulky, un-shaven bohunk whose whole equipment isn't worth a thousand dollars. They think any man in sea boots ought to be damn well satisfied if he makes a living. They say high wages, or returns, spoil fishermen. On top of these new regulations nobody hankers to buy a plant where they might have to indulge in a price war with a couple of crazy young fools like you and me—that's what they call us, you know. That is why no experienced cannery man will touch Folly Bay the way things stand now. It's a fairly good plant, too. I don't know how Gower has managed to get in a hole. I don't believe one poor season could do that to him. But he sure wants to get rid of Folly Bay. It is a forty-thousand-dollar plant, including the gas boats. He has been nibbling at an offer of twenty-five thousand. I know, because I made it myself."

"What'll you do with it if you get it?" MacRae asked curiously. "It's no good unless you get the fish. You'd have to put me out of business."

"Well, I wasn't exactly figuring on that," Stubby grinned. "In the first place, the machinery and equipment is worth that much in the open market. And if I get it, we'll either make a deal for collecting the fish, or you can take a half-interest in the plant at the ground-floor price. Either way, we can make it a profitable investment for both of us."

"You really think Gower is in a bad way?" Jack asked reflectively.

"I know it," Stubby replied emphatically. "Oh, I don't mean to say that abject poverty is staring him in the face, or anything like that. But it looks to me as if he had lost a barrel of money somehow and was anxious to get Folly Bay off his hands before it sets him further in the hole. You could make Folly Bay pay big dividends. So could I. But so long as you cover his ground with carriers, every day he operates is a dead loss. I haven't much sympathy for him. He has made a fortune out of that place and those fishermen and spent it making a big splurge in town. Anyway, his wife has all kinds of kale, so we should worry about old Horace A."

MacRae lit a cigarette and listened to the flow of Stubby's talk, with part of his mind mulling over this information about Horace Gower. He wondered if that was why Robbin-Steele was so keen on getting a contract for those Squitty bluebacks, why Hurley of the Northwest wanted to make a deal for salmon; if

they reckoned that Gower had ceased to be a factor and that Jack MacRae held the Squitty Island business in the hollow of his hand. MacRae smiled to himself. If that were true it was an advantage he meant to hold for his own good and the good of all those hard-driven men who labored at the fishing. In a time that was economically awry MacRae's sympathy turned more to those whose struggle was to make a living, or a little more if they could, than to men who already had more than they needed, men who had no use for more money except to pile it up, to keep piling it up. MacRae was neither an idealist nor a philanthropic dreamer. But he knew the under dog of the great industrial scramble. In his own business he would go out of his way to add another hundred dollars a year to a fisherman's earnings. He did not know quite clearly why he felt like that. It was more or less instinctive. He expected to make money out of his business, he was eager to make money, but he saw very clearly that it was only in and through the tireless labor of the fishermen that he could reap a profit. And he was young enough to be generous in his impulses. He was not afraid, like the older men, that if those who worked with their hands got a little more than sufficient to live on from season to season they would grow fat and lazy and arrogant, and refuse to produce.

Money was a necessity. Without it, without at least a reasonable amount of money, a man could not secure any of the things essential to well-being of either body or mind. The moneyless man was a slave so long as he was moneyless. MacRae smiled at those who spoke slightingly of the power of money. He knew they were mistaken. Money was king. No amount of it, cash in hand, would purchase happiness, perhaps, but lack of it made a man fall an easy victim to dire misfortunes. Without money a man was less than the dirt beneath the feet of such as Robbin-Steele and Hurley and Gower, because their criterion of another man's worth was his ability to get money, to beat the game they all played.

MacRae put himself and Stubby Abbott in a different category. They wanted to get on. They were determined to get on. But their programme of getting on, MacRae felt, was a better one for themselves and for other men than the mere instinct to grab everything in sight. MacRae was not exactly a student of economics or sociology, but he had an idea that the world, and particularly his group-world, was suffering from the grab-instinct functioning without control. He had a theory that society would have to modify that grab-instinct by legislation and custom before the world was rid of a lot of its present ills. And both his reason and his instinct was to modify it himself, in his dealings with his fellows, more particularly when those he dealt with were simple, uneducated

men who worked as hard and complained as little as salmon fishermen.

He talked with Stubby in the den until late in the afternoon, and then walked downtown. When he reached the Granada he loafed uneasily in the billiard room until dinner. His mind persistently turned from material considerations of boats and gear and the season's prospects to dwell upon Betty Gower. This wayward questing of his mind irritated him. But he could not help it. Whenever he met her, even if it were only a brief, casual contact, for hours afterward he could not drive her out of his mind. And he was making a conscious effort to do that. It was a matter of sheer self-defense. Only when he shut Betty resolutely out of the chambers of his brain could he be free of that hungry longing for her. While he suffered from that vain longing there was neither peace nor content in his life; he could get no satisfaction out of working or planning or anything that he undertook.

That would wear off, he assured himself. But he did not always have complete confidence in this assurance. He was aware of a tenacity of impressions and emotions and ideas, once they took hold of him. Old Donald MacRae had been afflicted with just such characteristics, he remembered. It must be in the blood, that stubborn constancy to either an affection or a purpose. And in him these two things were at war, pulling him powerfully in opposite directions, making him unhappy.

Sitting deep in a leather chair, watching the white and red balls roll and click on the green cloth, MacRae recalled one of the maxims of Hafiz:

"Two things greater than all things are
And one is Love and the other is War."

MacRae doubted this. He had had experience of both. At the moment he could see nothing in either but vast accumulations of futile anguish both of the body and the soul.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RENEWAL OF HOSTILITIES

The pussy willows had put out their fuzzy catkins and shed them for delicate foliage when MacRae came back to Squitty Cove. The alder, the maple and the wild cherry, all the spring-budding trees and shrubs, were making thicket and foreshore dainty green and full of pleasant smells. Jack wakened the first morning at daybreak to the muted orchestration of mating birds, the song of a thousand sweet-voiced, unseen warblers. The days were growing warm, full of sunshine. Distant mountain ranges stood white-capped and purple against sapphire skies. The air was full of the ancient magic of spring.

Yet MacRae himself, in spite of these pleasant sights and sounds and smells, in spite of his books and his own roof-tree, found the Cove haunted by the twin ghosts he dreaded most, discontent and loneliness. He was more isolated than he had ever been in his life. There was no one in the Cove save an old, unkempt Swede, Doug Sproul, who slept eighteen hours a day in his cabin while he waited for the salmon to run again, a withered Portuguese who sat in the sun and muttered while he mended gear. They were old men, human driftwood, beached in their declining years, crabbed and sour, looking always backward with unconscious regret.

Vin Ferrara was away with the *Bluebird*, still plying his fish venture. Dolly and Norman Gower were married, and Dolly was back on the Knob in the middle of Squitty Island, keeping house for her husband and Uncle Peter and Long Tom Spence while they burrowed in the earth to uncover a copper-bearing lead that promised a modest fortune for all three. Peter Ferrara's house at the Cove stood empty and deserted in the spring sun.

People had to shift, to grasp opportunities as they were presented, MacRae knew. They could not take root and stand still in one spot like the great Douglas firs. But he missed the familiar voices, the sight of friendly faces. He had nothing but his own thoughts to keep him company. A man of twenty-five, a young and lusty animal of abounding vitality, needs more than his own reflections to fill his days. Denied the outlet of purposeful work in which to release pent-up energy, MacRae brooded over shadows, suffered periods of unaccountable depression.

Nature had not designed him for either a hermit or a celibate. Something in him cried out for affection, for companionship, for a woman's tenderness bestowed unequivocally. The mating instinct was driving him, as it drove the birds. But its urge was not the general, unspecified longing which turns a man's eyes upon any desirable woman. Very clearly, imperiously, this dominant instinct in MacRae had centered upon Betty Gower.

He was at war with his instincts. His mind stipulated that he could not have her without a revolutionary overturning of his convictions, inhibitions, soundly made and passionately cherished plans of reprisal for old injustices. That peculiar tenacity of idea and purpose which was inherent with him made him resent, refuse soberly to consider any deviation from the purpose which had taken form with such bitter intensity when he kindled to his father's account of those drab years which Horace Gower had laid upon him.

Jack MacRae was no angel. Under his outward seeming his impulses were primitive, like the impulses of all strong men. He nursed a vision of beating Gower at Gower's own game. He hugged to himself the ultimate satisfaction of that. Even when he was dreaming of Betty, he was mentally setting her aside until he had beaten her father to his knees under the only sort of blows he could deal. Until he had made Gower know grief and disappointment and helplessness, and driven him off the south end of Squitty landless and powerless, he would go on as he had elected. When he got this far Jack would sometimes say to himself in a spirit of defiant recklessness that there were plenty of other women for whom ultimately he could care as much. But he knew also that he would not say that, nor even think it, whenever Betty Gower was within reach of his hand or sound of his voice.

He walked sometimes over to Point Old and stared at the cottage, snowy white against the tender green, its lawn growing rank with uncut grass, its chimney dead. There were times when he wished he could see smoke lifting from that chimney and know that he could find Betty somewhere along the beach. But these were only times when his spirits were very low.

Also he occasionally wondered if it were true, as Stubby Abbott declared, that Gower had fallen into a financial hole. MacRae doubted that. Men like Gower always got out of a hole. They were fierce and remorseless pursuers of the main chance. When they were cast down they climbed up straightway over the backs of lesser men. He thought of Robbin-Steele. A man like that would die with the harness of the money-game on his back, reaching for more. Gower was of the

same type, skillful in all the tricks of the game, ruthless, greedy for power and schooled to grasp it in a bewildering variety of ways.

No, he rather doubted that Gower was broke, or even in any danger of going broke. He hoped this might be true, in spite of his doubts, for it meant that Gower would be compelled to sacrifice this six hundred acres of MacRae land. The sooner the better. It was a pain to MacRae to see it going wild. The soil Donald MacRae had cleared and turned to meadow, to small fields of grain, was growing up to ferns and scrub. It had been a source of pride to old Donald. He had visualized for his son more than once great fields covered with growing crops, a rich and fruitful area, with a big stone house looking out over the cliffs where ultimate generations of MacRaes should live. If luck had not gone against old Donald he would have made this dream come true. But life and Gower had beaten him.

Jack MacRae knew this. It maddened him to think that this foundation of a dream had become the plaything of his father's enemy, a neglected background for a summer cottage which he only used now and then.

There might, however, be something in the statements Stubby had made. MacRae recalled that Gower had not replaced the *Arrow*. The underwriters had raised and repaired the mahogany cruiser, and she had passed into other hands. When Betty and her father came to Cradle Bay they came on a cannery tender or a hired launch. MacRae hoped it might be true that Gower was slipping, that he had helped to start him on this decline.

Presently the loneliness of the Cove was broken by the return of Vincent Ferrara. They skidded the *Bluebird* out on the beach at the Cove's head and overhauled her inside and out, hull and machinery. That brought them well into April. The new carrier was complete from truck to keelson. She had been awaiting only MacRae's pleasure for her maiden sea-dip. So now, with the *Bluebird* sleeked with new paint, he went down for the launching.

There was a little ceremony over that.

"It's bad luck, the very worst sort of luck, to launch a boat without christening her in the approved manner," Nelly Abbott declared. "I insist on being sponsor. Do let me, Jack."

So the new sixty-footer had a bottle of wine from the Abbott cellar broken over her brass-bound stemhead as her bows sliced into the salt water, and Nelly's

clear treble chanted:

"I christen thee *Agua Blanco*."

Vin Ferrara's dark eyes gleamed, for *agua blanco* means "white water" in the Spanish tongue.

The Terminal Fish Company's new coolers were yawning for fish when the first blueback run of commercial size showed off Gray Rock and the Ballenas. All the Squitty boats went out as soon as the salmon came. MacRae skippered the new and shining *Blanco*, brave in white paint and polished brass on her virgin trip. He followed the main fleet, while the *Bluebird* scuttled about to pick up stray trollers' catches and to tend the rowboat men. She would dump a day's gathering on the *Blanco's* deck, and the two crews would dress salmon till their hands were sore. But it saved both time and fuel to have that great carrying capacity, and the freezing plant which automatically chilled the fish. MacRae could stay on the grounds till he was fully loaded. He could slash through to Vancouver at nine knots instead of seven. A sea that would toss the old wrecked *Blackbird* like a dory and keep her low decks continually awash let the *Blanco* pass with only a moderate pitch and roll.

MacRae worked hard. He found ease in work. When the last salmon was dressed and stowed below, many times under the glow of electric bulbs strung along the cargo boom, he would fall into his bunk and sleep dreamlessly. Decks streaming with blood and offal, plastered with slime and clinging scales—until such time as they were washed down—ceased to annoy him. No man can make omelettes without breaking eggs. Only the fortunate few can make money without soiling their hands. There is no room in the primary stages of taking salmon for those who shrink from sweat and strain, from elemental stress. The white-collared and the lily-fingered cannot function there. The pink meat my lady toys with on Limoges china comes to her table by ways that would appal her. Only the men who toil aboard the fishing boats, with line and gear and gutting knife know in what travail this harvest of the sea is reaped.

MacRae played fair, according to his conception of fair play. He based his payments on a decent profit, without which he could not carry on. Running heavier cargoes at less cost he raised the price to the fishermen as succeeding runs of blueback salmon were made up of larger, heavier fish. Other buyers came, lingered awhile, cursed him and went away. They could not run to Vancouver with small quantities of salmon and meet his price. But MacRae in

the *Blanco* could take six, eight, ten thousand salmon profitably on a margin which the other buyers said was folly.

The trolling fleet swelled in numbers. The fish were there. The old-timers had prophesied a big blueback year, and for once their prophecy was by way of being fulfilled. The fish schooled in great shoals off Nanaimo, around Gray Rock, the Ballenas, passed on to Sangster and Squitty. And the fleet followed a hundred strong, each day increasing,—Indians, Greeks, Japanese, white men, raking the salmon grounds with glittering spoon hooks, gathering in the fish.

In early June MacRae was delivering eighteen thousand salmon a week to the Terminal Fish Company. He was paying forty cents a fish, more than any troller in the Gulf of Georgia had ever got for June bluebacks, more than any buyer had ever paid before the opening of the canneries heightened the demand. He was clearing nearly a thousand dollars a week for himself, and he was putting unheard-of sums in the pockets of the fishermen. MacRae believed these men understood how this was possible, that they had a feeling of coöperating with him for their common good. They had sold their catches on a take-it-or-leave-it basis for years. He had put a club in their hands as well as money in their pockets. They would stand with him against less scrupulous, more remorseless exploiters of their labor. They would see that he got fish. They told him that.

"If somebody else offered sixty cents you'd sell to him, wouldn't you?" MacRae asked a dozen of them sitting on the *Blanco's* deck one afternoon. They had been talking about canneries and competition.

"Not if he was boosting the price up just to make you quit, and then cut it in two when he had everything to himself," one man said. "That's been done too often."

"Remember that when the canneries open, then," MacRae said dryly. "There is not going to be much, of a price for humps and dog salmon this fall. But there is going to be a scramble for the good canning fish. I can pay as much as salmon are worth, but I can't go any further. If I should have to pull my boats off in mid-season you can guess what they'll pay around Squitty."

MacRae was not crying "wolf." There were signs and tokens of uneasiness and irritation among those who still believed it was their right and privilege to hold the salmon industry in the hollows of their grasping hands. Stubby Abbott was a packer. He had the ears of the other packers. They were already complaining to Stubby, grouching about MacRae, unable to understand that Stubby listened to them with his tongue in his cheek, that one of their own class should have a new

vision of industrial processes, a vision that was not like their own.

"They're cultivating quite a grievance about the price you're paying," Stubby told Jack in confidence. "They say you are a damned fool. You could get those fish for thirty cents and you are paying forty. The fishermen will want the earth when the canneries open. They hint around that something will drop with a loud bang one of these days. I think it's just hot air. They can't hurt either of us. I'll get a fair pack at Crow Harbor, and I'll have this plant loaded. I've got enough money to carry on. It makes me snicker to myself to imagine how they'll squirm and squeal next winter when I put frozen salmon on the market ten cents a pound below what they figure on getting. Oh, yes, our friends in the fish business are going to have a lot of grievances. But just now they are chiefly grouching at you."

MacRae seldom set foot ashore those crowded days. But he passed within sight of Squitty Cove and Poor Man's Rock once at least in each forty-eight hours. For weeks he had seen smoke drifting blue from the cottage chimney in Cradle Bay. He saw now and then the flutter of something white or blue on the lawn that he knew must be Betty. Part of the time a small power boat swung to the mooring in the bay where the shining *Arrow* nosed to wind and tide in other days. He heard current talk among the fishermen concerning the Gowers. Gower himself was spending his time between the cottage and Folly Bay.

The cannery opened five days in advance of the sockeye season on the Fraser. When the Gower collecting boats made their first round MacRae knew that he had a fight on his hands. Gower, it seemed to him, had bared his teeth at last.

The way of the blueback salmon might have furnished a theme for Solomon. In all the years during which these fish had run in the Gulf of Georgia neither fishermen, canners, nor the government ichthyologists were greatly wiser concerning their nature or habits or life history. Grounds where they swarmed one season might prove barren the next. Where they came from, out of what depths of the far Pacific those silvery hordes marshaled themselves, no man knew. Nor, when they vanished in late August, could any man say whither they went. They did not ascend the streams. No blueback was ever taken with red spawn in his belly. They were a mystery which no man had unraveled, no matter that he took them by thousands in order that he himself might subsist upon their flesh. One thing the trollers did know,—where the small feed swarmed, in shoal water or deep, those myriads of tiny fish, herring and nameless smaller ones, there the blueback would appear, and when he did so appear he could be taken

by a spoon hook.

Away beyond the Sisters—three gaunt gray rocks rising out of the sea miles offshore in a fairway down which passed all the Alaska-bound steamers, with a lone lighthouse on the middle rock—away north of Folly Bay there opened wide trolling grounds about certain islands which lay off the Vancouver Island shore,—Hornby, Lambert Channel, Yellow Rock, Cape Lazo. In other seasons the blueback runs lingered about Squitty for a while and then passed on to those kelp-grown and reef-strewn grounds. This season these salmon appeared first far south of Squitty. The trolling scouts, the restless wanderers of the fleet, who could not abide sitting still and waiting in patience for the fish to come, first picked them up by the Gulf Islands, very near that great highway to the open sea known as the Strait of San Juan. The blueback pushed on the Gray Rock to the Ballenas, as if the blackfish and seal and shark that hung always about the schools to prey were herding them to some given point. Very shortly after they could be taken in the shadow of the Ballenas light the schools swarmed about the Cove end of Squitty Island, between the Elephant on Sangster and Poor Man's Rock. For days on end the sea was alive with them. In the gray of dawn and the reddened dusk they played upon the surface of the sea as far as the eye reached. And always at such times they struck savagely at a glittering spoon hook. Beyond Squitty they vanished. Fifty and sixty salmon daily to a boat off the Squitty headlands dwindled to fifteen and twenty at the Folly Bay end. Those restless trollers who crossed the Gulf to Hornby and Yellow Rock Light got little for their pains. Between Folly Bay and the swirling tide races off the desolate head of Cape Mudge the blueback disappeared. But at Squitty the runs held constant. There were off days, but the fish were always there. The trollers hung at the south end, sheltering at night in the Cove, huddled rubstrake to rubstrake and bow to stern, so many were they in that little space, on days when the southeaster made the cliffs shudder under the shock of breaking seas. If fishing slackened for a day or two they did not scatter as in other days. There would be another run hard on the heels of the last. And there was.

MacRae ran the *Blanco* into Squitty Cove one afternoon and made fast alongside the *Bluebird* which lay to fore and aft moorings in the narrow gut of the Cove. The Gulf outside was speckled with trollers, but there were many at anchor, resting, or cooking food.

One of the mustard pots was there, a squat fifty-foot carrier painted a gaudy yellow—the Folly Bay house color—flying a yellow flag with a black C in the center. She was loading fish from two trollers, one lying on each side. One or

two more were waiting, edging up.

"He came in yesterday afternoon after you left," Vin Ferrara told Jack. "And he offered forty-five cents. Some of them took it. To-day he's paying fifty and hinting more if he has to."

MacRae laughed.

"We'll match Gower's price till he boosts us out of the bidding," he said. "And he won't make much on his pack if he does that."

"Say, Folly Bay," Jack called across to the mustard-pot carrier, "what are you paying for bluebacks?"

The skipper took his eye off the tallyman counting in fish.

"Fifty cents," he answered in a voice that echoed up and down the Cove.

"That must sound good to the fishermen," MacRae called back pleasantly. "Folly Bay's getting generous in its declining years."

It was the off period between tides. There were forty boats at rest in the Cove and more coming in. The ripple of laughter that ran over the fleet was plainly audible. They could appreciate that. MacRae sat down on the *Blanco's* after cabin and lit a cigarette.

"Looks like they mean to get the fish," Vin hazarded. "Can you tilt that and make anything?"

"Let them do the tilting," MacRae answered. "If the fish run heavy I can make a little, even if prices go higher. If he boosts them to seventy-five, I'd have to quit. At that price only the men who catch the fish will make anything. I really don't know how much we will be able to pay when Crow Harbor opens up."

"We'll have some fun anyway." Vin's black eyes sparkled.

It took MacRae three days to get a load. Human nature functions pretty much the same among all men. The trollers distrusted Folly Bay. They said to one another that if Gower could kill off competition he would cut the price to the bone. He had done that before. But when a fisherman rises wearily from his bunk at three in the morning and spends the bulk of the next eighteen hours hauling four one hundred and fifty foot lines, each weighted with from six to fifteen pounds of lead, he feels that he is entitled to every cent he can secure for his day's labor.

The Gower boats got fish. The mustard pot came back next day, paying fifty-five cents. A good many trollers sold him their fish before they learned that MacRae was paying the same. And the mustard pot evidently had his orders, for he tilted the price to sixty, which forced MacRae to do the same.

When the *Blanco* unloaded her cargo of eight-thousand-odd salmon into the Terminal and MacRae checked his receipts and expenditures for that trip, he discovered that he had neither a profit nor a loss.

He went to see Stubby, explained briefly the situation.

"You can't get any more cheap salmon for cold storage until the seiners begin to take coho, that's certain," he declared. "How far can you go in this price fight when you open the cannery?"

"Gower appears to have gone a bit wild, doesn't he?" Stubby ruminated. "Let's see. Those fish are running about five pounds now. They'll get a bit heavier as we go along. Well, I can certainly pack as cheaply as he can. I tell you, go easy for a week, till I get Crow Harbor under way. Then you can pay up to seventy-five cents and I'll allow you five cents a fish commission. I don't believe he'll dare pay more than that before late in July. If he does, why, we'll see what we can do."

MacRae went back to Squitty. He could make money with the *Blanco* on a five-cent commission,—if he could get the salmon within the price limit. So for the next trip or two he contented himself with meeting Gower's price and taking what fish came to him. The Folly Bay mustard pots—three of them great and small—scurried here and there among the trollers, dividing the catch with the *Bluebird* and the *Blanco*. There was always a mustard-pot collector in sight. The weather was getting hot. Salmon would not keep in a troller's hold. Part of the old guard stuck tight to MacRae. But there were new men fishing; there were Japanese and illiterate Greeks. It was not to be expected that these men should indulge in far-sighted calculations. But it was a trifle disappointing to see how readily any troller would unload his catch into a mustard pot if neither of MacRae's carriers happened to be at hand.

"Why don't you tie up your boats, Jack?" Vin asked angrily. "You know what would happen. Gower would drop the price with a bang. You'd think these damned idiots would know that. Yet they're feeding him fish by the thousand. They don't appear to care a hoot whether you get any or not. I used to think fishermen had some sense. These fellows can't see an inch past their cursed

noses. Pull off your boats for a couple of weeks and let them get their bumps."

"What do you expect?" MacRae said lightly. "It's a scramble, and they are acting precisely as they might be expected to act. I don't blame them. They're under the same necessity as the rest of us—to get it while they can. Did you think they'd sell me fish for sixty if somebody else offered sixty-five? You know how big a nickel looks to a man who earns it as hard as these fellows do."

"No, but they don't seem to care who gets their salmon," Vin growled. "Even when you're paying the same, they act like they'd just as soon Gower got 'em as you. You paid more than Folly Bay all last season. You put all kinds of money in their pockets that you didn't have to."

"And when the pinch comes, they'll remember that," MacRae said. "You watch, Vin. The season is young yet. Gower may beat me at this game, but he won't make any money at it."

MacRae kept abreast of Folly Bay for ten days and emerged from that period with a slight loss, because at the close he was paying more than the salmon were worth at the Terminal warehouse. But when he ran his first load into Crow Harbor Stubby looked over the pile of salmon his men were forking across the floor and drew Jack into his office.

"I've made a contract for delivery of my entire sockeye and blueback pack," he said. "I know precisely where I stand. I can pay up to ninety cents for all July fish. I want all the Squitty bluebacks you can get. Go after them, Jack."

And MacRae went after them. Wherever a Folly Bay collector went either the *Blanco* or the *Bluebird* was on his heels. MacRae could cover more ground and carry more cargo, and keep it fresh, than any mustard pot. The *Bluebird* covered little outlying nooks, the stragglers, the rowboat men in their beach camps. The *Blanco* kept mostly in touch with the main fleet patrolling the southeastern end of Squitty like a naval flotilla, wheeling and counterwheeling over the grounds where the blueback played. MacRae forced the issue. He raised the price to sixty-five, to seventy, to seventy-five, to eighty, and the boats under the yellow house flag had to pay that to get a fish. MacRae crowded them remorselessly to the limit. So long as he got five cents a fish he could make money. He suspected that it cost Gower a great deal more than five cents a salmon to collect what he got. And he did not get so many now. With the opening of the sockeye season on the Fraser and in the north the Japs abandoned trolling for the gill net. The white trollers returned to their first love because he courted them assiduously. There

was always a MacRae carrier in the offing. It cost MacRae his sleep and rest, but he drove himself tirelessly. He could leave Squitty at dusk, unload his salmon at Crow Harbor, and be back at sunrise. He did it many a time, after tallying fish all day. Three hours' sleep was like a gift from the gods. But he kept it up. He had a sense of some approaching crisis.

By the third week in July MacRae was taking three fourths of the bluebacks caught between the Ballenas and Folly Bay. He would lie sometimes within a stone's throw of Gower's cannery, loading salmon.

He was swinging at anchor there one day when a rowboat from the cannery put out to the *Blanco*. The man in it told MacRae that Gower would like to see him. MacRae's first impulse was to grin and ignore the request. Then he changed his mind, and taking his own dinghy rowed ashore. Some time or other he would have to meet his father's enemy, face him, talk to him, listen to what he might say, tell him things. Curiosity was roused in him a little now. He desired to know what Gower had to say. He wondered if Gower was weakening; what he could want.

He found Gower in a cubby-hole of an office behind the cannery store.

"You wanted to see me," MacRae said curtly.

He was in sea boots, bareheaded. His shirt sleeves were rolled above sun-browned forearms. He stood before Gower with his hands thrust in the pockets of duck overalls speckled with fish scales, smelling of salmon. Gower stared at him silently, critically, it seemed to MacRae, for a matter of seconds.

"What's the sense in our cutting each other's throats over these fish?" Gower asked at length. "I've been wanting to talk to you for quite a while. Let's get together. I—"

MacRae's temper flared.

"If that's what you want," he said, "I'll see you in hell first."

He turned on his heel and walked out of the office. When he stepped into his dinghy he glanced up at the wharf towering twenty feet above his head. Betty Gower was sitting on a pile head. She was looking down at him. But she was not smiling. And she did not speak. MacRae rowed back to the *Blanco* in an ugly mood.

In the next forty-eight hours Folly Bay jumped the price of bluebacks to ninety cents, to ninety-five, to a dollar. The *Blanco* wallowed down to Crow Harbor with a load which represented to MacRae a dead loss of four hundred dollars cash.

"He must be crazy," Stubby fumed. "There's no use canning salmon at a loss."

"Has he reached the loss point yet?" MacRae inquired.

"He's shaving close. No cannery can make anything worth reckoning at a dollar or so a case profit."

"Is ninety cents and five cents' commission your limit?" MacRae demanded.

"Just about," Stubby grunted. "Well"—reluctantly—"I can stand a dollar. That's the utmost limit, though. I can't go any further."

"And if he gets them all at a dollar or more, he'll be canning at a dead loss, eh?"

"He certainly will," Stubby declared. "Unless he cans 'em heads, tails, and scales, and gets a bigger price per case than has been offered yet."

MacRae went back to Squitty with a definite idea in his mind. Gower had determined to have the salmon. Very well, then, he should have them. But he would have to take them at a loss, in so far as MacRae could inflict loss upon him. He knew of no other way to hurt effectively such a man as Gower. Money was life blood to him, and it was not of great value to MacRae as yet. With deliberate calculation he decided to lose the greater part of what he had made, if for every dollar he lost himself he could inflict equal or greater loss on Gower.

The trailers who combed the Squitty waters were taking now close to five thousand salmon a day. Approximately half of these went to Folly Bay. MacRae took the rest. In this battle of giants the fishermen had lost sight of the outcome. They ceased to care who got fish. They only watched eagerly for him who paid the biggest price. They were making thirty, forty, fifty dollars a day. They no longer held salmon—only a few of the old-timers—for MacRae's carriers. It was nothing to them who made a profit or suffered a loss. Only a few of the older men wondered privately how long MacRae could stand it and what would happen when he gave up.

MacRae met every raise Folly Bay made. He saw bluebacks go to a dollar ten, then to a dollar fifteen. He ran cargo after cargo to Crow Harbor and dropped from three to seven hundred dollars on each load, until even Stubby lost patience with him.

"What's the sense in bucking him till you go broke? I'm in too deep to stand any loss myself. Quit. Tie up your boats, Jack. Let him have the salmon. Let those blockheads of fishermen see what he'll do to 'em once you stop."

But MacRae held on till the first hot days of August were at hand and his money was dwindling to the vanishing point. Then he ran the *Blanco* and the *Bluebird* into Squitty Cove and tied them to permanent moorings in shoal water near the head. For a day or two the salmon had shifted mysteriously to the top end,

around Folly Bay and the Siwash Islands and Jenkins Pass. The bulk of the fleet had followed them. Only a few stuck to the Cove and Poor Man's Rock. To these and the rowboat trollers MacRae said:

"Sell your fish to Folly Bay. I'm through."

Then he lay down in his bunk in the airy pilot house of the *Blanco* and slept the clock around, the first decent rest he had taken in two months. He had not realized till then how tired he was.

When he wakened he washed, ate, changed his clothes and went for a walk along the cliffs to stretch his legs. Vin had gone up to the Knob to see Dolly and Uncle Peter. His helper on the *Bluebird* was tinkering about his engine. MacRae's two men loafed on the clean-slushed deck. They were none of them company for MacRae in his present mood. He sought the cliffs to be alone.

Gower had beaten him, it would seem. And MacRae did not take kindly to being beaten. But he did not think this was the end yet. Gower would do as he had done before. When he felt himself secure in his monopoly he would squeeze the fishermen, squeeze them hard. And as soon as he did that MacRae would buy again. He could not make any money himself, perhaps. But he could make Gower operate at a loss. That would be something accomplished.

MacRae walked along the cliffs until he saw the white cottage, and saw also that some one sat on the steps in the sun. Whereupon he turned back. He didn't want to see Betty. He conceived that to be an ended chapter in his experiences. He had hurt her, and she had put on her armor against another such hurt. There was a studied indifference about her now, when he met her, which hurt him terribly. He supposed that in addition to his own incomprehensible attitude which she resented, she took sides with her father in this obvious commercial warfare which was bleeding them both financially. Very likely she saw in this only the open workings of his malice toward Gower. In which MacRae admitted she would be quite correct. He had not been able to discover in that flaring-up of passion for Betty any reason for a burial of his feud with Gower. There was in him some curious insistence upon carrying this to the bitter end. And his hatred of Gower was something alive, vital, coloring his vision somberly. The shadow of the man lay across his life. He could not ignore this, and his instinct was for reprisal. The fighting instinct in MacRae lurked always very near the surface.

He spent a good many hours during the next three or four days lying in the shade of a gnarly arbutus which gave on the cliffs. He took a book up there with him,

but most of the time he lay staring up at the blue sky through the leaves, or at the sea, or distant shore lines, thinking always in circles which brought him despairingly out where he went in. He saw a mustard pot slide each day into the Cove and pass on about its business. There was not a great deal to be got in the Cove. The last gas boat had scuttled away to the top end, where the blueback were schooling in vast numbers. There were still salmon to be taken about Poor Man's Rock. The rowboat men took a few fish each day and hoped for another big run.

There came a day when the mustard pot failed to show in the Cove. The rowboat men had three hundred salmon, and they cursed Folly Bay with a fine flow of epithet as they took their rotting fish outside the Cove and dumped them in the sea. Nor did a Gower collector come, although there was nothing in the wind or weather to stop them. The rowboat trollers fumed and stewed and took their troubles to Jack MacRae. But he could neither inform nor help them.

Then upon an evening when the sun rested on the serrated backbone of Vancouver Island, a fiery ball against a sky of burnished copper, flinging a red haze down on a slow swell that furrowed the Gulf, Jack MacRae, perched on a mossy boulder midway between the Cove and Point Old, saw first one boat and then another come slipping and lurching around Poor Man's Rock. Converted Columbia River sailboats, Cape Flattery trollers, double-enders, all the variegated craft that fishermen use and traffic with, each rounded the Rock and struck his course for the Cove, broadside on to the rising swell, their twenty-foot trolling poles lashed aloft against a stumpy mast and swinging in a great arc as they rolled. One, ten, a dozen, an endless procession, sometimes three abreast, again a string in single file. MacRae was reminded of the march of the oysters—

"So thick and fast they came at last,
And more and more and more."

He sat watching them pass, wondering why the great trek. The trolling fleet normally shifted by pairs and dozens. This was a squadron movement, the Grand Fleet steaming to some appointed rendezvous. MacRae watched till the sun dipped behind the hills, and the reddish tint left the sea to linger briefly on the summit of the Coast Range flanking the mainland shore. The fish boats were still coming, one behind the other, lurching and swinging in the trough of the sea, rising and falling, with wheeling gulls crying above them. On each deck a solitary fisherman humped over his steering gear. From each cleaving stem the bow-wave curled in white foam.

There was something in the wind. MacRae felt it like a premonition. He left his boulder and hurried back toward the Cove.

The trolling boats were packed about the *Blanco* so close that MacRae left his dinghy on the outer fringe and walked across their decks to the deck of his own vessel. The *Blanco* loomed in the midst of these lesser craft like a hen over her brood of chicks. The fishermen had gathered on the nearest boats. A dozen had clambered up and taken seats on the *Blanco's* low bulwarks. MacRae gained his own deck and looked at them.

"What's coming off?" he asked quietly. "You fellows holding a convention of some sort?"

One of the men sitting on the big carrier's rail spoke.

"Folly Bay's quit—shut down," he said sheepishly. "We come to see if you'd start buying again."

MacRae sat down on one sheave of his deck winch. He took out a cigarette and lighted it, swung one foot back and forth. He did not make haste to reply. An expectant hush fell on the crowd. In the slow-gathering dusk there was no sound but the creak of rubbing gunwales, the low snore of the sea breaking against the cliffs, and the chug-chug of the last stragglers beating into the shelter of the Cove.

"He shut down the cannery," the fishermen's spokesman said at last. "We ain't seen a buyer or collector for three days. The water's full of salmon, an' we been suckin' our thumbs an' watching 'em play. If you won't buy here again we got to go where there is buyers. And we'd rather not do that. There's no place on the Gulf as good fishin' as there is here now."

"What was the trouble?" MacRae asked absently. "Couldn't you supply him with fish?"

"Nobody knows. There was plenty of salmon. He cut the price the day after you tied up. He cut it to six bits. Then he shut down. Anyway, we don't care why he shut down. It don't make no difference. What we want is for you to start buyin' again. Hell, we're losin' money from daylight to dark! The water's alive with salmon. An' the season's short. Be a sport, MacRae."

MacRae laughed.

"Be a sport, eh?" he echoed with a trace of amusement in his tone. "I wonder how many of you would have listened to me if I'd gone around to you a week ago and asked you to give me a sporting chance?"

No one answered. MacRae threw away his half-smoked cigarette. He stood up.

"All right, I'll buy salmon again," he said quietly. "And I won't ask you to give me first call on your catch or a chance to make up some of the money I lost bucking Folly Bay, or anything like that. But I want to tell you something. You know it as well as I do, but I want to jog your memory with it."

He raised his voice a trifle.

"You fellows know that I've always given you a square deal. You aren't fishing for sport. You're at this to make a living, to make money if you can. So am I. You are entitled to all you can get. You earn it. You work for it. So am I entitled to what I can make. I work, I take certain chances. Neither of us is getting something for nothing. But there is a limit to what either of us can get. We can't dodge that. You fellows have been dodging it. Now you have to come back to earth.

"No fisherman can get the prices you have had lately. No cannery can pack salmon at those prices. Sockeye, the finest canning salmon that swims in the sea, is bringing eighty cents on the Fraser. Bluebacks are sixty-five cents at Nanaimo, sixty at Cape Mudge, sixty at the Euclataws.

"I can do a little better than that," MacRae hesitated a second. "I can pay a little more, because the cannery I'm supplying is satisfied with a little less profit than most. Stubby Abbott is not a hog, and neither am I. I can pay seventy-five cents and make money. I have told you before that it is to your interest as well as mine to keep me running. I will always pay as much as salmon are worth. But I cannot pay more. If your appreciation of Folly Bay's past kindness to you is so keen that you would rather sell him your fish, why, that's your privilege."

"Aw, that's bunk," a man called. "You know blamed well we wouldn't. Not after him blowin' up like this."

"How do I know?" MacRae laughed. "If Gower opened up to-morrow again and offered eighty or ninety cents, he'd get the salmon—even if you knew he would make you take thirty once he got you where he wanted you."

"Would he?" another voice uprose. "The next time a mustard pot gets any

salmon from me, it'll be because there's no other buyer and no other grounds to fish."

A growled chorus backed this reckless statement.

"That's all right," MacRae said good-naturedly. "I don't blame you for picking up easy money. Only easy money isn't always so good as it looks. Fly at it in the morning, and I'll take the fish at the price I've said. If Folly Bay gets into the game again, it's up to you."

When the lights were doused and every fisherman was stretched in his bunk, falling asleep to the slow beat of a dead swell breaking in the Cove's mouth, Vin Ferrara stood up to seek his own bed.

"I wonder," he said to Jack, "I wonder why Gower shut down at this stage of the game?"

MacRae shook his head. He was wondering that himself.

CHAPTER XIX

TOP DOG

Some ten days later the *Bluebird* swung at anchor in the kelp just clear of Poor Man's Rock. From a speck on the horizon the *Blanco* grew to full shape, flaring bow and pilot house, walking up the Gulf with a bone in her teeth. She bore down upon her consort, sidled alongside and made fast with lines to the bitts fore and aft. Vin Ferrara threw back his hatch covers. His helper forked up salmon with a picaroon. Vin tossed them across into the *Blanco's* hold. At the same time the larger carrier's short, stout boom swung back and forth, dumping into the *Bluebird's* fish pens at each trip a hundred pounds of cracked ice. Presently this work was done, the *Bluebird's* salmon transferred to the *Blanco*, the *Bluebird's* pens replenished with four tons of ice.

Vin checked his tabs with the count of fish. The other men slushed decks clean with buckets of sea water.

"Twenty-seven hundred," MacRae said. "Big morning. Every troller in the Gulf must be here."

"No, I have to go to Folly Bay and Siwash Islands to-night," Vin told him. "There's about twenty boats working there and at Jenkins Pass. Salmon everywhere."

They sat in the shade of the *Blanco's* pilot house. The sun beat mercilessly, a dog-day sun blazing upon glassy waters, reflected upward in eye-straining shafts. The heat seared. Within a radius of a mile outside the Rock the trollers chug-chugged here and there, driving straight ahead, doubling short, wheeling in slow circles, working the eddies. They stood in the small cockpit aft, the short tiller between their legs, leaving their hands free to work the gear. They stood out in the hot sun without shade or cover, stripped to undershirt and duck trousers, many of them barefooted, brown arms bare, wet lines gleaming. Wherever a man looked some fisherman hauled a line. And everywhere the mirror of the sea was broken by leaping salmon, silver crescents flashing in the sun.

"Say, what do you know about it?" Vin smiled at MacRae. "Old Gower is

trolling."

"Trolling!"

"Rowboat. Plugging around the Rock. He was at it when daylight came. He sold me fifteen fish. Think of it. Old H.A. rowboat trolling. Selling his fish to you."

Vincent chuckled. His eyes rested curiously on Jack's face.

"Haughty spirit that goes before destruction, as Dolly used to say," he rambled on. "Some come-down for him. He must be broke flat as a flounder."

"He sold you his salmon?"

"Sure. Nobody else to sell 'em to, is there? Said he was trying his hand. Seemed good-natured about it. Kinda pleased, in fact, because he had one more than Doug Sproul. He started joshin' Doug. You know what a crab old Doug is. He got crusty as blazes. Old Gower just grinned at him and rowed off."

MacRae made no comment, and their talk turned into other channels until Vin hauled his hook and bore away. MacRae saw to dropping the *Blanco's* anchor. He would lie there till dusk. Then he sat in the shade again, looking up at the Gower cottage.

Gower was finished as an exploiter. There was no question about that. When a man as big as he went down the crash set tongues wagging. All the current talk reached MacRae through Stubby. That price-war had been Gower's last kick, an incomprehensible, ill-judged effort to reestablish his hold on the Squitty grounds, so it was said.

"He never was such a terribly big toad in the cannery puddle," Stubby recited, "and I guess he has made his last splash. They always cut a wide swath in town, and that sort of thing can sure eat up coin. I'm kind of sorry for Betty. Still, she'll probably marry somebody with money. I know two or three fellows who would be tickled to death to get her."

"Why don't *you* go to the rescue?" MacRae had suggested, with an irony that went wide of the mark.

Stubby looked reflectively at his crippled arm.

"Last summer I would have," he said. "But she couldn't see me with a microscope. And I've found a girl who seems to think a winged duck is worth

while."

"You'll be able to get hold of that ranch of yours again, probably," Stubby had also said. "The chances are old H.A. will raise what cash he can and try to make a fresh start. It seems there has been friction in the family, and his wife refused to come through with any of her available cash. Seems kind of a complicated hole he got into. He's cleaned, anyway. Robbin-Steele got all his cannery tenders and took over several thousand cases of salmon. I hear he still has a few debts to be settled when the cannery is sold. Why don't you figure a way of getting hold of that cannery, Jack?"

"I'm no cannery man," MacRae replied. "Why don't you? I thought you made him an offer."

"I withdrew it," Stubby said. "I have my hands full without that. You've knocked about a hundred per cent off its value anyway."

"If I can get my father's land back I'll be satisfied," MacRae had said.

He was thinking about that now. He had taken the first steps toward that end, which a year ago had seemed misty and rather hopeless. Gower rich, impregnable, would hold that land for his own pleasure and satisfaction. Beaten in the commercial scramble he might be forced to let it go. And MacRae was ready to pay any price in reason to get it back. That seemed a debt he owed old Donald MacRae, apart from his own craving to sometime carry out plans they had made together long before he went away to France. The lives of some men are rooted in the soil where they were born, where they grow to manhood. Jack MacRae was of that type. He loved the sea in all its moods and colors, its quiet calm and wildest storms. But the sea was only his second love. He was a landsman at heart. All seamen are. They come ashore when they are old and feeble, to give their bodies at last to the earth. MacRae loved the sea, but he loved better to stand on the slopes running back from Squitty's cliffs, to look at those green meadows and bits of virgin forest and think that it would all be his again, to have and to hold.

So he had set a firm in Vancouver the task of approaching Gower, to sound him, to see if he would sell, while he kept in the background. He believed that it was necessary for him to remain in the background. He believed that Gower would never willingly relinquish that land into his hands.

MacRae sat on the *Blanco's* deck, nursing his chin in his palms, staring at Poor

Man's Rock with a grim satisfaction. About that lonely headland strange things had come to pass. Donald MacRae had felt his first abiding grief there and cried his hurt to a windy sky. He had lived his last years snatching a precarious living from the seas that swirled about the Rock. The man who had been the club with which fate bludgeoned old Donald was making his last stand in sight of the Rock, just as Donald MacRae had done. And when they were all dead and gone, Poor Man's Rock would still bare its brown hummock of a head between tides, the salmon would still play along the kelp beds, in the eddies about the Rock. Other men would ply the gear and take the silver fish. It would all be as if it had never happened. The earth and the sea endured and men were passing shadows.

Afternoon waned. Faint, cool airs wavered off the land, easing the heat and the sun-glare. MacRae saw Betty and her father come down to the beach. She helped him slide his rowboat afloat. Then Gower joined the rowers who were putting out to the Rock for the evening run. He passed close by the *Blanco* but MacRae gave him scant heed. His eyes were all for the girl ashore. Betty sat on a log, bareheaded in the sun. MacRae had a feeling that she looked at him. And she would be thinking,—God only knew what.

In MacRae's mind arose the inevitable question,—one that he had choked back dozens of times: Was it worth while to hurt her so, and himself, because their fathers had fought, because there had been wrongs and injustices? MacRae shook himself impatiently. He was backsliding. Besides that unappeasable craving for her, vivid images of her with tantalizing mouth, wayward shining hair, eyes that answered the passion in his own, besides these luring pictures of her which troubled him sometimes both in waking hours and sleeping, there was a strange, deep-seated distrust of Betty because she was the daughter of her father. That was irrational, and Jack MacRae knew it was irrational. But he could not help it. It colored his thought of her. It had governed his reactions.

MacRae himself could comprehend all too clearly the tragedy of his father's life. But he doubted if any one else could. He shrank from unfolding it even to Betty, —even to make clear to her why his hand must be against her father. MacRae knew, or thought he knew—he had reasoned the thing out many times in the last few months—that Betty would not turn to him against her own flesh and blood without a valid reason. He could not, even, in the name of love, cut her off from all that she had been, from all that had made her what she was, and make her happy. And MacRae knew that if they married and Betty were not happy and contented, they would both be tigerishly miserable. There was only one possible avenue, one he could not take. He could not seek peace with Gower, even for

Betty's sake.

MacRae considered moodily, viewing the matter from every possible angle. He could not see where he could do other than as he was doing: keep Betty out of his mind as much as possible and go on determinedly making his fight to be top dog in a world where the weak get little mercy and even the strong do not always come off unscarred.

Jack MacRae was no philosopher, nor an intellectual superman, but he knew that love did not make the world go round. It was work. Work and fighting. Men spent most of their energies in those two channels.

This they could not escape. Love only shot a rosy glow across life. It did not absolve a man from weariness or scars. By it, indeed, he might suffer greater stress and deeper scars. To MacRae, love, such as had troubled his father's life and his own, seemed to be an emotion pregnant with sorrow. But he could not deny the strange power of this thing called love, when it stirred men and women.

His deck hand, who was also cook, broke into MacRae's reflections with a call to supper. Jack went down the companion steps into a forepeak stuffy with the heat of the sun and a galley stove, a cramped place where they ate heartily despite faint odors of distillate and burned lubricating oil from the engine room and bilge water that smelled of fish.

A troller's boat was rubbing against the *Blanco's* fenders when they came on deck again. Others were hoisting the trolling poles, coming in to deliver. The sun was gone. The long northern twilight cast a pearly haze along far shores. MacRae threw open his hatches and counted the salmon as they came flipping off the point of a picaroon. For over an hour he stood at one hatch and his engineer at the other, counting fish, making out sale slips, paying out money. It was still light—light enough to read. But the bluebacks had stopped biting. The rowboat men quit last of all. They sidled up to the *Blanco*, one after the other, unloaded, got their money, and tied their rowboats on behind for a tow around to the Cove.

Gower had rowed back and forth for three hours. MacRae had seen him swing around the Rock, up under the cliffs and back again, pulling slow and steady. He was last to haul in his gear. He came up to the carrier and lay alongside Doug Sproul while that crabbed ancient chucked his salmon on deck. Then he moved into the place Sproul vacated. The bottom of his boat was bright with salmon. He rested one hand on the *Blanco's* guard rail and took the pipe out of his mouth

with the other.

"Hello, MacRae," he said, as casually as a man would address another with whom he had slight acquaintance. "I've got some fish. D'you want 'em?"

MacRae looked down at him. He did not want Gower's fish or anything that was Gower's. He did not want to see him or talk to him. He desired, in so far as he was conscious of any desire in the matter, that Gower should keep his distance. But he had a horror of meanness, of petty spite. He could knock a man down with a good heart, if occasion arose. It was not in him to kick a fallen enemy.

"Chuck them up," he said.

He counted them silently as they flipped over the bulwark and fell into the chilly hold, marked a slip, handed Gower the money for them. The hand that took the money, a pudgy hand all angry red from beating sun, had blisters in the palm. Gower's face, like his hands, was brick red. Already shreds of skin were peeling from his nose and cheeks. August sun on the Gulf. MacRae knew its bite and sting. So had his father known. He wondered if Gower ever thought about that now.

But there was in Gower's expression no hint of any disturbing thought. He uttered a brief "thanks" and pocketed his money. He sat down and took his oars in hand, albeit a trifle gingerly. And he said to old Doug Sproul, almost jovially:

"Well, Doug, I got as many as you did, this trip."

"Didja?" Sproul snarled. "Kain't buy 'em cheap enough, no more, huh? Gotta ketch 'em yourself, huh?"

"Hard-boiled old crab, aren't you, Doug?" Gower rumbled in his deep voice. But he laughed. And he rowed away to the beach before his house. MacRae watched. Betty came down to meet him. Together they hauled the heavy rowboat out on skids, above the tide mark.

Nearly every day after that he saw Gower trolling around the Rock, sometimes alone, sometimes with Betty sitting forward, occasionally relieving him at the oars. No matter what the weather, if a rowboat could work a line Gower was one of them. Rains came, and he faced them in yellow oilskins. He sweltered under that fiery sun. If his life had been soft and easy, softness and ease did not seem to be wholly necessary to his existence, not even to his peace of mind. For he had that. MacRae often wondered at it, knowing the man's history. Gower joked his

way to acceptance among the rowboat men, all but old Doug Sproul, who had forgotten what it was to speak pleasantly to any one.

He caught salmon for salmon with these old men who had fished all their lives. He sold his fish to the *Blanco* or the *Bluebird*, whichever was on the spot. The run held steady at the Cove end of Squitty, a phenomenal abundance of salmon at that particular spot, and the *Blanco* was there day after day.

And MacRae could not help pondering over Gower and his ways. He was puzzled, not alone about Gower, but about himself. He had dreamed of a fierce satisfaction in beating this man down, in making him know poverty and work and privation,—rubbing his nose in the dirt, he had said to himself.

He had managed it. Gower had joined the ranks of broken men. He was finished as a figure in industry, a financial power. MacRae knew that, beyond a doubt. Gower had debts and no assets save his land on the Squitty cliffs and the closed cannery at Folly Bay. The cannery was a white elephant, without takers in the market. No cannery man would touch it unless he could first make a contract with MacRae for the bluebacks. They had approached him with such propositions. Like wolves, MacRae thought, seeking to pick the bones of one of their own pack who had fallen.

And if MacRae needed other evidence concerning Gower, he had it daily before his eyes. To labor at the oars, to troll early and late in drizzling rain or scorching sunshine, a man only does that because he must. MacRae's father had done it. As a matter of course, without complaint, with unprotesting patience.

So did Gower. That did not fit Jack MacRae's conception of the man. If he had not known Gower he would have set him down as a fat, good-natured, kindly man with an infinite capacity for hard, disagreeable work.

He never attempted to talk to MacRae. He spoke now and then. But there was no hint of rancor in his silences. It was simply as if he understood that MacRae did not wish to talk to him, and that he conceded this to be a proper attitude. He talked with the fishermen. He joked with them. If one slammed out at him now and then with a touch of the old resentment against Folly Bay he laughed as if he understood and bore no malice. He baffled MacRae. How could this man who had walked on fishermen's faces for twenty years, seeking and exacting always his own advantage, playing the game under harsh rules of his own devising which had enabled him to win—until this last time—how could he see the last bit of prestige wrested from him and still be cheerful? How could he earn his

daily bread in the literal sweat of his brow, endure blistered hands and sore muscles and the sting of slime-poison in fingers cut by hooks and traces, with less outward protest than men who had never known anything else?

MacRae could find no answer to that. He could only wonder. He only knew that some shift of chance had helped him to put Gower where Gower had put his father. And there was no satisfaction in the achievement, no sense of victory. He looked at the man and felt sorry for him, and was uncomfortably aware that Gower, taking salmon for his living with other poor men around Poor Man's Rock, was in no need of pity. This podgy man with the bright blue eyes and heavy jaw, who had been Donald MacRae's jealous Nemesis, had lost everything that was supposed to make life worth living to men of his type. And he did not seem to care. He seemed quite content to smoke a pipe and troll for salmon. He seemed to be a stranger to suffering. He did not even seem to be aware of discomfort, or of loss.

MacRae had wanted to make him suffer. He had imagined that poverty and hard, dirty work would be the fittest requital he could bestow. If Jack MacRae had been gifted with omnipotence when he read that penned history of his father's life, he would have devised no fitter punishment, no more fitting vengeance for Gower than that he should lose his fortune and his prestige and spend his last years getting his bread upon the waters by Poor Man's Rock in sun and wind and blowy weather.

And MacRae was conscious that if there were any suffering involved in this matter now, it rested upon him, not upon Gower. Most men past middle age, who have drunk deeply the pleasant wine of material success, shrink from the gaunt specter of poverty. They have shot their bolt. They cannot stand up to hard work. They cannot endure privation. They lose heart. They go about seeking sympathy, railing against the fate. They lie down and the world walks unheeding over their prone bodies.

Gower was not doing that. If he had done so, MacRae would have sneered at him with contempt. As it was, in spite of the rancor he had nursed, the feeling which had driven him to reprisal, he found himself sorry—sorry for himself, sorry for Betty. He had set out to bludgeon Gower, to humiliate him, and the worst arrows he could sling had blunted their points against the man's invulnerable spirit.

Betty had been used to luxury. It had not spoiled her. MacRae granted that. It had

not made her set great store by false values. MacRae was sure of that. She had loved him simply and naturally, with an almost primitive directness. Spoiled daughters of the leisure class are not so simple and direct. MacRae began to wonder if she could possibly escape resenting his share in the overturning of her father's fortunes, whereby she herself must suffer.

By the time MacRae came slowly to these half-formed, disturbing conclusions he was already upon the verge of other disturbing discoveries in the realm of material facts.

For obvious reasons he could not walk up to Gower's house and talk to Betty. At least he did not see how he could, although there were times when he was tempted. When he did see her he was acutely sensitive to a veiled reproach in her eyes, a courteous distance in her speech. She came off the beach one day alone, a few minutes after MacRae dropped anchor in the usual spot. She had a dozen salmon in the boat. When she came alongside MacRae set foot over the bulwark with intent to load them himself. She forestalled him by picking the salmon up and heaving them on the *Blanco's* deck. She was dressed for the work, in heavy nailed shoes, a flannel blouse, a rough tweed skirt.

"Oh, say, take the picaroon, won't you?" He held it out to her, the six-foot wooden shaft with a slightly curving point of steel on the end.

She turned on him with a salmon dangling by the gills from her fingers.

"You don't think I'm afraid to get my hands dirty, do you?" she asked. "Me—a fisherman's daughter. Besides, I'd probably miss the salmon and jab that pointed thing through the bottom of the boat."

She laughed lightly, with no particular mirth in her voice. And MacRae was stricken dumb. She was angry. He knew it, felt it intuitively. Angry at him, warning him to keep his distance. He watched her dabble her hands in the salt chuck, dry them coolly on a piece of burlap. She took the money for the fish with a cool "thanks" and rowed back to shore.

Jack lay in his bunk that night blasted by a gloomy sense of futility in everything. He had succeeded in his undertaking beyond all the expectations which had spurred him so feverishly in the beginning. But there was no joy in it; not when Betty Gower looked at him with that cold gleam in her gray eyes. Yet he told himself savagely that if he had to take his choice he would not have done otherwise. And when he had accomplished the last move in his plan and driven

Gower off the island, then he would have a chance to forget that such people had ever existed to fill a man's days with unhappiness. That, it seemed to him, must be the final disposition of this problem which his father and Horace Gower and Elizabeth Morton had set for him years before he was born.

There came a burst of afternoon westerlies which blew small hurricanes from noon to sundown. But there was always fishing under the broad lee of the cliffs. The *Bluebird* continued to scuttle from one outlying point to another, and the *Blanco* wallowed down to Crow Harbor every other day with her hold crammed. When she was not under way and the sea was fit the big carrier rode at anchor in the kelp close by Poor Man's Rock, convenient for the trollers to come alongside and deliver when they chose. There were squalls that blew up out of nowhere and drove them all to cover. There were days when a dead swell rolled and the trolling boats dipped and swung and pointed their bluff bows skyward as they climbed the green mountains,—for the salmon strike when a sea is on, and a troller runs from heavy weather only when he can no longer handle his gear.

MacRae was much too busy to brood long at a time. The phenomenal run of blueback still held, with here and there the hook-nosed coho coming in stray schools. He had a hundred and forty fishermen to care for in the matter of taking their catch, keeping them supplied with fuel, bringing them foodstuffs such as they desired. The *Blanco* came up from Vancouver sometimes as heavily loaded as when she went down. But he welcomed the work because it kept him from too intense thinking. He shepherded his seafaring flock for his profit and theirs alike and poured salmon by tens of thousands into the machines at Crow Harbor,—red meat to be preserved in tin cans which in months to come should feed the hungry in the far places of the earth.

MacRae sometimes had the strange fancy of being caught in a vast machine for feeding the world, a machine which did not reckon such factors as pain and sorrow in its remorseless functioning. Men could live without love or ease or content. They could not survive without food.

He came up to Squitty one bright afternoon when the sea was flat and still, unharassed by the westerly. The Cove was empty. All the fleet was scattered over a great area. The *Bluebird* was somewhere on her rounds. MacRae dropped the *Blanco's* hook in the middle of Cradle Bay, a spot he seldom chose for anchorage. But he had a purpose in this. When the bulky carrier swung head to the faint land breeze MacRae was sitting on his berth in the pilot house, glancing over a letter he held in his hand. It was from a land-dealing firm in Vancouver.

One paragraph is sufficiently illuminating:

In regard to the purchase of this Squitty Island property we beg to advise you that Mr. Gower, after some correspondence, states distinctly that while he is willing to dispose of this property he will only deal directly with a *bona fide* purchaser.

We therefore suggest that you take the matter up with Mr. Gower personally.

MacRae put the sheet back in its envelope. He stared thoughtfully through an open window which gave on shore and cottage. He could see Gower sitting on the porch, the thick bulk of the man clean-cut against the white wall. As he looked he saw Betty go across the untrimmed lawn, up the path that ran along the cliffs, and pass slowly out of sight among the stunted, wind-twisted firs.

He walked to the after deck, laid hold of the dinghy, and slid it overboard. Five minutes later he had beached it and was walking up the gravel path to the house.

He was conscious of a queer irritation against Gower. If he were willing to sell the place, why did he sit like a spider in his web and demand that victims come to him? MacRae was wary, distrustful, suspicious, as he walked up the slope. Some of the old rancor revived in him. Gower might have a shaft in his quiver yet, and the will to use it.



CHAPTER XX

THE DEAD AND DUSTY PAST

Gower sat in a deep grass chair, a pipe sagging one corner of his mouth, his slippered feet crossed on a low stool. His rubber sea boots lay on the porch floor as if he had but discarded them. MacRae took in every detail of his appearance in one photographic glance, as a man will when his gaze rests upon another with whom he may be about to clash.

Gower no longer resembled the well-fed plutocrat. He scarcely seemed the same man who, nearly two years before, had absently bestowed upon MacRae a dollar for an act of simple courtesy. He wore nondescript trousers which betrayed a shrunken abdominal line, a blue flannel shirt that bared his short, thick neck. And in that particular moment, at least, the habitual sullenness of his heavy face was not in evidence. He looked placid in spite of the fiery redness which sun and wind had burned into his skin. He betrayed no surprise at MacRae's coming. The placidity of his blue eyes did not alter in any degree.

"Hello, MacRae," he said.

"How d' do," MacRae answered. "I came to speak to you about a little matter of business."

"Yes?" Gower rumbled. "I've been sort of expecting you."

"Oh?" MacRae failed to conceal altogether his surprise at this statement. "I understand you are willing to sell this place. I want to buy it."

"It was yours once, wasn't it?"

The words were more of a comment than a question, but MacRae answered:

"You know that, I think."

"And you want it back?"

"Naturally."

"If that's what you want," Gower said slowly. "I'll see you in——"

He cut off the sentence. His round stomach—less round by far than it had been two months earlier—shook with silent laughter. His eyes twinkled. His thick, stubby fingers drummed on the chair arm.

MacRae's face grew hot. He recognized the unfinished sentence as one of his own, words he had flung in Gower's face not so long since. If that was the way of it he could save his breath. He turned silently.

"Wait."

He faced about at the changed quality of Gower's tone. The amused expression had vanished. Gower leaned forward a little. There was something very like appeal in his expression. MacRae was suddenly conscious of facing a still different man,—an oldish, fat man with thinning hair and tired, wistful eyes.

"I just happened to think of what you said to me not long ago," Gower explained. "It struck me as funny. But that isn't how I feel. If you want this land you can have it. Take a chair. Sit down. I want to talk to you."

"There is nothing the matter with my legs," MacRae said shortly. "I do want this land. I will pay you the price you paid for it, in cash, when you execute a legal transfer. Is that satisfactory?"

"What about this house?" Gower asked casually. "It's worth something, isn't it?"

"Not to me," MacRae replied. "I don't want the house. You can take it away with you, if you like."

Gower looked at him thoughtfully.

"The Scotch," he said, "cherish a grudge like a family heirloom."

"Perhaps they do," MacRae answered. "Why not? If you knock a man down you don't expect him to jump up and shake hands with you. You had your inning. It was a long one."

"I wonder," Gower said slowly, "why old Donald MacRae kept his mouth closed to you about trouble between us until he was ready to die?"

"How do you know he did that?" MacRae demanded harshly.

"The night you came to ask for the *Arrow* to take him to town you had no such feeling against me as you have had since," Gower said. "I know you didn't. You

wouldn't have come if you had. I cut no figure in your eyes, one way or the other, until after he was dead. So he must have told you at the very last. What did he tell you? Why did he have to pass that old poison on to another generation?"

"Why shouldn't he?" MacRae demanded. "You made his life a failure. You put a scar on his face—I can remember when I was a youngster wondering how he got that mark—I remember how it stood like a ridge across his cheek bone when he was dead. You put a scar upon his soul that no one but himself ever saw or felt—except as I have been able to feel it since I knew. You weren't satisfied with that. You had to keep on throwing your weight against him for thirty years. You didn't even stop when the war made everything seem different. You might have let up then. We were doing our bit. But you didn't. You kept on until you had deprived him of everything but the power to row around the Rock day after day and take a few salmon in order to live. You made a pauper of him and sat here gloating over it. It preyed on his mind to think that I should come back from France and find myself a beggar because he was unable to cope with you. He lived his life without whimpering to me, except to say he did not like you. He only wrote this down for me to read—when he began to feel that he would never see me again—the reasons why he had failed in everything, lost everything. When I pieced out the story, from the day you used your pike pole to knock down a man whose fighting hands were tied by a promise to a woman he loved, from then till the last cold-blooded maneuver by which you got this land of ours, I hated you, and I set out to pay you back in your own coin.

"But," MacRae continued after a momentary hesitation, "that is not what I came here to say. Talk—talk's cheap. I would rather not talk about these things, or think of them, now. I want to buy this land from you if you are willing to sell. That's all."

Gower scarcely seemed to hear him. He was nursing his heavy chin with one hand, looking at MacRae with a curious concentration, looking at him and seeing something far beyond.

"Hell; it is a true indictment, up to a certain point," he said at last. "What a curse misunderstanding is—and pride! By God, I have envied your father, MacRae, many a time. I struck him an ugly blow once. Yes. I was young and hot-headed, and I was burning with jealousy. But I did him a good turn at that, I think. I—oh, well, maybe you wouldn't understand. I suppose you wouldn't believe me if I say I didn't swoop down on him every time I got a chance; that I didn't bushwhack—no matter if he believed I did."

"No?" MacRae said incredulously. "You didn't break up a logging venture on the Claha when he had a chance to make a stake? You didn't show your fine Italian hand in that marble quarry undertaking on Texada? Nor other things that I could name as he named them. Why crawl now? It doesn't matter. I'm not swinging a club over your head."

Gower shook himself.

"No," he declared slowly. "He interfered with the Morton interests in that Claha logging camp, and they did whatever was done. The quarry business I know nothing about, except that I had business dealings with the people whom he ran foul of. I tell you, MacRae, after the first short period of time when I was afire with the fury of jealousy, I did not do these things. I didn't even want to do them. I wish you would get that straight. I wanted Bessie Morton and I got her. That was an issue between us, I grant. I gained my point there. I would have gone farther to gain that point. But I paid for it. It was not so long before I knew that I was going to pay dearly for it. I tell you I came to envy Donald MacRae. I don't know if he nursed a disappointment—which I came to know was an illusion. Perhaps he did. But he had nothing real to regret, nothing to prick, prick him all the time. He married a woman who seemed to care for him. At any rate, she respected him and was a mate, living his life while she did live.

"Look, MacRae. I married Bessie Morton because I wanted her, wanted her on any terms. She didn't want me. She wanted Donald MacRae. But she had wanted other men. That was the way she was made. She was facile. And she never loved any one half so much as she loved herself. She was only a beautiful peacock preening her feathers and sighing for homage. She was—she is—the essence of self from the top of her head to her shoes. Her feelings, her wants, her wishes, her whims, her two-by-four outlook, nothing else counted. She couldn't comprehend anything outside of herself. She would have made Donald MacRae's life a misery to him when the novelty of that infatuation wore off. The Mortons are like that. They want everything. They give nothing.

"She was cowardly too. Do you think two old men and myself would have taken her, or anything else, from your father out in the middle of the Gulf, if she had had any spirit? You knew your father. He wasn't a tame man. He would have fought—fought like a tiger. We might have killed him. It is more likely that he would have killed us. But we could not have beaten him. But she had to knuckle down—take the easy way for her. She cried; and he promised."

Gower lay back in his chair. His chin sunk on his breast. He spoke slowly, groping for his words. MacRae did not interrupt. Something compelled him to listen. There was a pained ring in Gower's voice that held him. The man was telling him these things with visible reluctance, with a simple dignity that arrested him, even while he felt that he should not listen.

"She used to taunt me with that," he went on, "taunt me with striking Donald MacRae. For years after we were married she used to do that. Long after—and that wasn't so long—she had ceased to care if such a man as your father existed. That was only an episode to her, of which she was snobbishly ashamed in time. But she often reminded me that I had struck him like a hardened butcher, because she knew she could hurt me with that. So that I used to wish to God I had never followed her out into the Gulf.

"For thirty years I've lived and worked and never known any real satisfaction in living—or happiness. I've played the game, played it hard. I've been hard, they say. Probably I have. I didn't care. A man had to walk on others or be walked on himself. I made money. Money—I poured it into her hands, like pouring sand in a rat-hole. She lived for herself, her whims, her codfish-aristocracy standards, spending my money like water to make a showing, giving me nothing in return, nothing but whining and recrimination if I crossed her ever so little. She made a lap dog of her son the first twenty-five years of his life. She would have made Betty a cheap imitation of herself. But she couldn't do that."

He stopped a moment and shook his head gently.

"No," he resumed, "she couldn't do that. There's iron in that girl. She's all Gower. I think I should have thrown up my hands long ago only for Betty's sake."

MacRae shifted uneasily.

"You see," Gower continued, "my life has been a failure, too. When Donald MacRae and I clashed, I prevailed. I got what I wanted. But it was only a shadow. There was no substance. It didn't do me any good. I have made money, barrels of it, and that has not done me any good. I've been successful at everything I undertook—except lately—but succeeding as the world reckons success hasn't made me happy. In my personal life I've been a damned failure. I've always been aware of that. And if I have held a feeling toward Donald MacRae these thirty-odd years, it was a feeling of envy. I would have traded places with him and been the gainer. I would have liked to tell him so. But I couldn't. He was a dour Scotchman and I suppose he hated me, although he kept

it to himself. I suppose he loved Bessie. I know I did. Perhaps he cherished hatred of me for wrecking his dream, and so saw my hand in things where it never was. But he was wrong. Bessie would have wrecked it and him too. She would have whined and sniffled about being a poor man's wife, once she learned what it was to be poor. She could never understand anything but a silk-lined existence. She loved herself and her own illusions. She would have driven him mad with her petty whims, her petty emotions. She doesn't know the meaning of loyalty, consideration, or even an open, honest hatred. And I've stood it all these years—because I don't shirk responsibilities, and I had brought it on myself."

He stopped a second, staring out across the Gulf.

"But apart from that one thing, I never consciously or deliberately wronged Donald MacRae. He may honestly have believed I did. I have the name of being hard. I dare say I am. The world is a hard place. When I had to choose between walking on a man's face and having my own walked on, I never hesitated. There was nothing much to make me soft. I moved along the same lines as most of the men I know.

"But, I repeat, I never put a straw in your father's way. I know that things went against him. I could see that. I knew why, too. He was too square for his time and place. He trusted men too much. You can't always do that. He was too scrupulously honest. He always gave the other fellow the best of it. That alone beat him. He didn't always consider his own interest and follow up every advantage. I don't think he cared to scramble for money, as a man must scramble for it these days. He could have held this place if he had cast about for ways to do so. There were plenty of loopholes. But he had that old-fashioned honor which doesn't seek loopholes. He had borrowed money on it. He would have taken the coat off his back, beggared himself any day to pay a debt. Isn't that right?"

MacRae nodded.

"So this place came into my hands. It was deliberate on my part—but only, mind you, when I knew that he was bound to lose it. Perhaps it was bad judgment on my part. I didn't think that he would see it as an end I'd been working for. As I grew older, I found myself wanting now and then to wipe out that old score between us. I would have given a good deal to sit down with him over a pipe. A woman, who wasn't much as women go, had made us both suffer. So I built this cottage and came here to stay now and then. I liked the place. I liked to think

that now he and I were getting to be old men, we could be friends. But he was too bitter. And I'm human. I've got a bit of pride. I couldn't crawl. So I never got nearer to him than to see him rowing around the Rock. And he died full of that bitterness. I don't like to think of that. Still, it cannot be helped. Do you grasp this, MacRae? Do you believe me?"

Incredible as it seemed, MacRae had no choice but to accept that explanation of strangely twisted motives, those misapprehensions, the murky cloud of misunderstanding. The tone of Gower's voice, his attitude, carried supreme conviction. And still—

"Yes," he said at last. "It is all a contradiction of things I have been passionately sure of for nearly two years. But I can see—yes, it must be as you say. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? For what?" Gower regarded him soberly.

"Many things. Why did you tell me this?"

"Why should the anger and bitterness of two old men be passed on to their children?" Gower asked him gently.

MacRae stared at him. Did he know? Had he guessed? Had Betty told him? He wondered. It was not like Betty to have spoken of what had passed between them. Yet he did not know how close a bond might exist between this father and daughter, who were, MacRae was beginning to perceive, most singularly alike. And this was a shrewd old man, sadly wise in human weaknesses, and much more tolerant than MacRae had conceived possible. He felt a little ashamed of the malice with which he had fought this battle of the salmon around Squitty Island. Yet Gower by his own admission was a hard man. He had lived with a commercial sword in his hand. He knew what it was to fall by that weapon. He had been hard on the fishermen. He had exploited them mercilessly. Therein lay his weakness, whereby he had fallen, through which MacRae had beaten him. But had he beaten him? MacRae was not now so sure about that. But it was only a momentary doubt. He struggled a little against the reaction of kindness, this curious sympathy for Gower which moved him now. He hated sentimentalism, facile yielding to shallow emotions. He wanted to talk and he was dumb. Dumb for appropriate words, because his mind kept turning with passionate eagerness upon Betty Gower.

"Does Betty know what you have just told me?" he asked at last.

Gower shook his head.

"She knows there is something. I can't tell her. I don't like to. It isn't a nice story. I don't shine in it—nor her mother."

"Nor do I," MacRae muttered to himself.

He stood looking over the porch rail down on the sea where the *Blanco* swung at her anchor chain. There seemed nothing more to say. Yet he was aware of Gower's eyes upon him with something akin to expectancy. An uncertain smile flitted across MacRae's face.

"This has sort of put me on my beam ends," he said, using a sailor's phrase. "Don't you feel as if I'd rather done you up these two seasons?"

Gower's heavy features lightened with a grimace of amusement.

"Well," he said, "you certainly cost me a lot of money, one way and another. But you had the nerve to go at it—and you used better judgment of men and conditions than anybody has manifested in the salmon business lately, unless it's young Abbott. So I suppose you are entitled to win on your merits. By the way, there is one condition tacked to selling you this ranch. I hesitated about bringing it up at first. I would like to keep this cottage and a strip of ground a hundred and fifty feet wide running down to the beach."

"All right," MacRae agreed. "We can arrange that later. I'll come again."

He set foot on the porch steps. Then he turned back. A faint flush stole up in his sun-browned face. He held out his hand.

"Shall we cry quits?" he asked. "Shall we shake hands and forget it?"

Gower rose to his feet. He did not say anything, but the grip in his thick, stubby fingers almost made Jack MacRae wince,—and he was a strong-handed man himself.

"I'm glad you came to-day," Gower said huskily. "Come again—soon."

He stood on the porch and watched MacRae stride down to the beach and put off in his dinghy. Then he took out a handkerchief and blew his nose with a tremendous amount of unnecessary noise and gesture. There was something suspiciously like moisture brightening his eyes.

But when he saw MacRae stand in the dinghy alongside the *Blanco* and speak briefly to his men, then row in under Point Old behind Poor Man's Rock which the tide was slowly baring, when he climbed up over the Point and took the path along the cliff edge, that suspicious brightness in Gower's keen old eyes was replaced by a twinkle. He sat down in his grass chair and hummed a little tune, the while one slippered foot kept time, rat-a-pat, on the floor of the porch.



CHAPTER XXI

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

MacRae followed the path along the cliffs. He did not look for Betty. His mind was on something else, engrossed in considerations which had little to do with love. If it be true that a man keeps his loves and hates and hobbies and ambitions and appetites in separate chambers, any of which may be for a time so locked that what lies therein neither troubles nor pleases him, then that chamber in which he kept Betty Gower's image was hermetically sealed. Her figure was obscured by other figures,—his father and Horace Gower and himself.

Not until he had reached the Cove's head and come to his own house did he recall that Betty had gone along the cliffs, and that he had not seen her as he passed. But that could easily happen, he knew, in that mile stretch of trees and thickets, those deep clefts and pockets in the rocky wall that frowned upon the sea.

He went into the house. Out of a box on a shelf in his room he took the message his father had left him and sitting down in the shadowy coolness of the outer room began to read it again, slowly, with infinite care for the reality his father had meant to convey.

All his life, as Jack remembered him, Donald MacRae had been a silent man, who never talked of how he felt, how things affected him, who never was stricken with that irresistible impulse to explain and discuss, to relieve his troubled soul with words, which afflicts so many men. It seemed as if he had saved it all for that final summing-up which was to be delivered by his pen instead of his lips. He had become articulate only at the last. It must have taken him weeks upon weeks to write it all down, this autobiography which had been the mainspring of his son's actions for nearly two years. There was wind and sun in it, and blue sky and the gray Gulf heaving; somber colors, passion and grief, an apology and a justification.

MacRae laid down the last page and went outside to sit on the steps. Shadows were gathering on the Cove. Far out, the last gleam of the sun was touching the Gulf. A slow swell was rising before some far, unheralded wind. The *Blanco* came gliding in and dropped anchor. Trollers began to follow. They clustered

about the big carrier like chickens under the mother wing. By these signs MacRae knew that the fish had stopped biting, that it was lumpy by Poor Man's Rock. He knew there was work aboard. But he sat there, absent-eyed, thinking.

He was full of understanding pity for his father, and also for Horace Gower. He was conscious of being a little sorry for himself. But then he had only been troubled a short two years by this curious aftermath of old passions, whereas they had suffered all their lives. He had got a new angle from which to approach his father's story. He knew now that he had reacted to something that was not there. He had been filled with a thirst for vengeance, for reprisal, and he had declared war on Gower, when that was not his father's intent. Old Donald MacRae had hated Gower profoundly in the beginning. He believed that Gower hated him and had put the weight of his power against him, wherever and whenever he could. But life itself had beaten him,—and not Gower. That was what he had been trying to tell his son.

And life itself had beaten Gower in a strangely similar fashion. He too was old, a tired, disappointed man. He had reached for material success with one hand and happiness with the other. One had always eluded him. The other Jack MacRae had helped wrest from him. MacRae could see Gower's life in detached pictures, life that consisted of making money and spending it, life with a woman who whined and sniffled and complained. These things had been a slow torture. MacRae could no longer regard this man as a squat ogre, merciless, implacable, ready and able to crush whatsoever opposed him. He was only a short, fat, oldish man with tired eyes, who had been bruised by forces he could not understand or cope with until he had achieved a wistful tolerance for both things and men.

Both these old men, MacRae perceived, had made a terrible hash of their lives. Neither of them had succeeded in getting out of life much that a man instinctively feels that he should get. Both had been capable of happiness. Both had struggled for happiness as all men struggle. Neither had ever securely grasped any measure of it, nor even much of content.

MacRae felt a chilly uncertainty as he sat on his doorstep considering this. He had been traveling the same road for many months,—denying his natural promptings, stifling a natural passion, surrendering himself to an obsession of vindictiveness, planning and striving to return evil for what he conceived to be evil, and being himself corrupted by the corrosive forces of hatred.

He had been diligently bestowing pain on Betty, who loved him quite openly and

frankly as he desired to be loved; Betty, who was innocent of these old coils of bitterness, who was primitive enough in her emotions, MacRae suspected, to let nothing stand between her and her chosen mate when that mate beckoned.

But she was proud. He knew that he had puzzled her to the point of anger, hurt her in a woman's most vital spot.

"I've been several kinds of a fool," MacRae said to himself. "I have been fooling myself."

He had said to himself once, in a somber mood, that life was nothing but a damned dirty scramble in which a man could be sure of getting hurt. But it struck him now that he had been sedulously inflicting those hurts upon himself. Nature cannot be flouted. She exacts terrible penalties for the stifling, the inhibition, the deflection of normal instincts, fundamental impulses. He perceived the operation of this in his father's life, in the thirty years of petty conflict between Horace Gower and his wife. And he had unconsciously been putting himself and Betty in the way of similar penalties by exalting revenge for old, partly imagined wrongs above that strange magnetic something which drew them together.

Twilight was at hand. Looking through the maple and alder fringe before his house MacRae saw the fishing boats coming one after the other, clustering about the *Blanco*. He went down and slid the old green dugout afloat and so gained the deck of his vessel. For an hour thereafter he worked steadily until all the salmon were delivered and stowed in the *Blanco's* chilly hold.

He found it hard to keep his mind on the count of salmon, on money to be paid each man, upon these common details of his business. His thought reached out in wide circles, embracing many things, many persons: Norman Gower and Dolly, who had had courage to put the past behind them and reach for happiness together; Stubby Abbott and Etta Robbin-Steele, who were being flung together by the same inscrutable forces within them. Love might not truly make the world go round, but it was a tremendous motive power in human actions. Like other dynamic forces it had its dangerous phases. Love, as MacRae had experienced it, was a curious mixture of affection and desire, of flaming passion and infinite tenderness. Betty Gower warmed him like a living flame when he let her take possession of his thought. She was all that his fancy could conjure as desirable. She was his mate. He had felt that, at times, with a conviction beyond reason or logic ever since the night he kissed her in the Granada. If fate, or the

circumstances he had let involve him, should juggle them apart, he felt that the years would lead him down long, drab corridors.

And he was suddenly determined that should not happen. His imagination flung before him kinetoscopic flashes of what his father's life had been and Horace Gower's. That vision appalled MacRae. He would not let it happen,—not to him and Betty.

He washed, ate his supper, lay on his bunk in the pilot house and smoked a cigarette. Then he went out on deck. The moon crept up in a cloudless sky, dimming the stars. There was no wind about the island. But there was wind loose somewhere on the Gulf. The glass was falling. The swells broke more heavily along the cliffs. At the mouth of the Cove white sheets of spray lifted as each comber reared and broke in that narrow place.

He recollected that he had left the *Blanco's* dinghy hauled up on the beach on the tip of Point Old. He got ashore now in the green dugout and walked across to the Point.

A man is seldom wholly single-track in his ideas, his impulses. MacRae thought of the dinghy. He had a care for its possible destruction by the rising sea. But he thought also of Betty. There was a pleasure in simply looking at the house in which she lived. Lights glowed in the windows. The cottage glistened in the moonlight.

When he came out on the tip of the Point the dinghy, he saw, lay safe where he had dragged it up on the rocks. And when he had satisfied himself of this he stood with hands thrust deep in his pockets, looking down on Poor Man's Rock, watching the swirl and foam as each swell ran over its sunken head.

MacRae had a subconscious perception of beauty, beauty of form and color. It moved him without his knowing why. He was in a mood to respond to beauty this night. He had that buoyant, grateful feeling which comes to a man when he has escaped some great disaster, when he is suddenly freed from some grim apprehension of the soul.

The night was one of wonderful beauty. The moon laid its silver path across the sea. The oily swells came up that moon-path in undulating folds to break in silver fragments along the shore. The great island beyond the piercing shaft of the Ballenas light and the mainland far to his left lifted rugged mountains sharp against the sky. From the southeast little fluffs of cloud, little cottony flecks

white as virgin snow, sailed before the wind that mothered the swells. But there was no wind on Squitty yet. There was breathless stillness except for the low, spaced mutter of the surf.

He stood a long time, drinking in the beauty of it all,—the sea and the moon-path, and the hushed, dark woods behind.

Then his gaze, turning slowly, fell on something white in the shadow of a bushy, wind-distorted fir a few feet away. He looked more closely. His eyes gradually made out a figure in a white sweater sitting on a flat rock, elbows on knees, chin resting in cupped palms.

He walked over. Betty's eyes were fixed on him. He stared down at her, suddenly tongue-tied, a queer constricted feeling in his throat. She did not speak.

"Were you sitting here when I came along?" he asked at last.

"Yes," she said. "I often come up here. I have been sitting here for half an hour."

MacRae sat down beside her. His heart seemed to be trying to choke him. He did not know where to begin, or how, and there was much he wanted to say that he must say. Betty did not even take her chin out of her palms. She stared out at the sea, rolling up to Squitty in silver windrows.

MacRae put one arm around her and drew her up close to him, and Betty settled against him with a little sigh. Her fingers stole into his free hand. For a minute they sat like that. Then he tilted her head back, looked down into the gray pools of her eyes, and kissed her.

"You stood there looking down at the sea as if you were in a dream," she whispered; "and all the time I was crying inside of me for you to come to me. And presently, I suppose, you will go away."

"No," he said. "This time I have come for good."

"I knew you would, sometime," she murmured. "At least, I hoped you would. I wanted you so badly."

"But because one wants a thing badly it doesn't always follow that one gets it."

MacRae was thinking of his father when he spoke.

"I know that," Betty said. "But I knew that you wanted me, you see. And I had

faith that you would brush away the cobwebs somehow. I've been awfully angry at you sometimes. It's horrible to feel that there is an imaginary wall between you and some one you care for."

"There is no wall now," MacRae said.

"Was there ever one, really?"

"There seemed to be."

"And now there is none?"

"None at all."

"Sure?" she murmured.

"Honest Injun," MacRae smiled. "I went to see your father to-day about a simple matter of business. And I found—I learned—oh, well, it doesn't matter. I buried the hatchet. We are going to be married and live happily ever after."

"Well," Betty said judiciously, "we shall have as good a chance as any one, I think. Look at Norman and Dolly. I positively trembled for them—after Norman getting into that mess over in England. He never exactly shone as a real he-man, that brother of mine, you know. But they are really happy, Jack. They make me envious."

"I think you're a little hard on that brother of yours," MacRae said. He was suddenly filled with a great charity toward all mankind. "He never had much of a chance, from all I can gather."

He went on to tell her what Norman had told him that afternoon on the hill above the Cove. But Betty interrupted.

"Oh, I know that now," she declared. "Daddy told me just recently. Daddy knew what Norman was doing over there. In fact, he showed me a letter from some British military authority praising Norman for the work he did. But Daddy kept mum when Norman came home and those nasty rumors began to go around. He thought it better for Norman to take his medicine. He was afraid mother would smother him with money and insist on his being a proper lounge lizard again, and so he would gradually drop back into his old uselessness. Daddy was simply tickled stiff when Norman showed his teeth—when he cut loose from everything and married Dolly, and all that. He's a very wise old man, that father of mine, Jack. He hasn't ever got much real satisfaction in his life. He has been more content this last month or so than I can ever remember him. We have always had loads of money, and while it's nice to have plenty, I don't think it did him any good. My whole life has been lived in an atmosphere of domestic incompatibility. I think I should make a very capable wife—I have had so many object lessons in how not to be. My mother wasn't a success either as a wife or a mother. It is a horrible thing to say, but it's really true, Jack. Mamma's a very well-bred, distinguished-looking person with exquisite taste in dress and dinner parties, and that's about the only kind thing I can say for her. Do you really love me, Jack? Heaps and heaps?"

She shot this question at him with a swift change of tone and an earnestness which straightway drove out of MacRae's mind every consideration save the proper and convincing answer to such intimate questions.

"Look," Betty said after a long interval. "Daddy has built a fire on the beach. He does that sometimes, and we sit around it and roast clams in the coals. Johnny, Johnny," she squeezed his arm with a quick pressure, "we're going to have some good times on this island now."

MacRae laughed indulgently. He was completely in accord with that prophecy.

The blaze Gower had kindled flickered and wavered, a red spot on the dusky shore, with a yellow nimbus in which they saw him move here and there, and sit down at last with his back to a log and his feet stretched to the fire.

"Let's go down," MacRae suggested, "and break the news to him."

"I wonder what he'll say?" Betty murmured thoughtfully.

"Haven't you any idea?" MacRae asked curiously.

"No. Honestly, I haven't," Betty replied. "Daddy's something like you, Jack. That is, he does and says unexpected things, now and then. No, I really don't know what he will say."

"We'll soon find out."

MacRae took her hand. They went down off the backbone of the Point, through ferns and over the long uncut grass, down to the fire where the wash from the heavy swell outside made watery murmurs along the gravelly beach.

Gower looked up at them, waited for them to speak.

"Betty and I are going to be married soon," MacRae announced abruptly.

"Oh?" Gower took the pipe out of his mouth and rapped the ash out of it in the palm of his hand. "You don't do things half-heartedly, do you, MacRae? You deprive me of a very profitable business. You want my ranch—and now my housekeeper."

"Daddy!" Betty remonstrated.

"Oh, well, I suppose I can learn to cook for myself," Gower rumbled.

He was frowning. He looked at them staring at him, nonplussed. Suddenly he burst into deep, chuckling laughter.

"Sit down, sit down, and look at the fire," he said. "Bless your soul, if you want to get married that's your own business.

"Mind you," he chuckled after a minute, when Betty had snuggled down beside him, and MacRae perched on the log by her, "I don't say I like the idea. It don't seem fair for a man to raise a daughter and then have some young fellow sail up and take her away just when she is beginning to make herself useful."

"Daddy, you certainly do talk awful nonsense," Betty reproved.

"I expect you haven't talked much else the last little while," he retorted.

Betty subsided. MacRae smiled. There was a whimsicality about Gower's way of taking this that pleased MacRae.

They toasted their feet at the fire until the wavering flame burned down to a bed of glowing coals. They talked of this and that, of everything but themselves until the moon was swimming high and the patches of cottony cloud sailing across the moon's face cast intense black patches on the silvery radiance of the sea.

"I've got some clams in a bucket," Gower said at last. "Let's roast some. You get plates and forks and salt and pepper and butter, Bet, while I put the clams on the fire."

Betty went away to the house. Gower raked a flat rock, white-hot, out to the edge of the coals and put fat quahaugs on it to roast. Then he sat back and looked at MacRae.

"I wonder if you realize how lucky you are?" he said.

"I think I do," MacRae answered. "You don't seem much surprised."

Gower smiled.

"Well, no. I can't say I am. That first night you came to the cottage to ask for the *Arrow* I got a good look at you, and you struck me as a fine, clean sort of boy, and I said to myself, 'Old Donald has never told him anything and he has no grudge against me, and wouldn't it be a sort of compensation if those two should fall naturally and simply in love with each other?' Yes, it may seem sentimental, but that idea occurred to me. Of course, it was just an idea. Betty would marry whoever she wanted to marry. I knew that. Nothing but her own judgment would influence her in a matter of that sort. I know. I've watched her grow up. Maybe it's a good quality or maybe it's a bad one, but she has always had a bull-dog sort of persistence about anything that strikes her as really important.

"And of course I had no way of knowing whether she would take a fancy to you or you to her. So I just watched. And maybe I boosted the game a little, because I'm a pretty wise old fish in my own way. I took a few whacks at you, now and then, and she flew the storm signals without knowing it."

Gower smiled reminiscently, stroking his chin with his hand.

"I had to fight you, after a fashion, to find out what sort of stuff you were, for my own satisfaction," he continued. "I saw that you had your Scotch up and were after my scalp, and I knew it couldn't be anything but that old mess. That was natural. But I thought I could square that if I could ever get close enough to you. Only I couldn't manage that naturally. And this scramble for the salmon got me

in deep before I realized where I was. I used to feel sorry for you and Betty. I could see it coming. You both talk with your eyes. I have seen you both when you didn't know I was near.

"So when I saw that you would fight me till you broke us both, and also that if I kept on I would not only be broke but so deep in the hole that I could never get out, I shut the damned cannery up and let everything slide. I knew as soon as you were in shape you would try to get this place back. That was natural. And you would have to come and talk to me about it. I was sure I could convince you that I was partly human. So you see this is no surprise to me. Lord, no! Why, I've been playing chess for two years—old Donald MacRae's knight against my queen."

He laughed and thumped MacRae on the flat of his sturdy back.

"It might have been a stalemate, at that," MacRae said.

"But it wasn't," Gower declared. "Well, I'll get something out of living, after all. I've often thought I'd like to see a big, roomy house somewhere along these cliffs, and kids playing around. You and Betty may have your troubles, but you're starting right. You ought to get a lot out of life. I didn't. I made money. That's all. Poured it into a rat hole. Bessie is sitting over on Maple Point in a big drafty house with two maids and a butler, a two-thousand-acre estate, and her pockets full of Victory Bonds. She isn't happy, and she never can be. She never cared for anybody but herself, not even her children, and nobody cares for her, I'm all but broke, and I'm better off than she is. I hate to think I ever fought for her. She wasn't worth it, MacRae. That's a hell of a thing for a man to say about a woman he lived with for over thirty years. But it's true. It took me a good many miserable years to admit that to myself.

"I suppose she'll cling to her money and go on playing the *grande dame*. And if she can get any satisfaction out of that I'm willing. I've never known as much real peace and satisfaction as I've got now. All I need is a place to sleep and a comfortable chair to sit in. I don't want to chase dollars any more. All I want is to row around the Rock and catch a few salmon now and then and sit here and look at the sea when I'm tired. You're young, and you have all your life before you—you and Betty. If you need money, you are pretty well able to get it for yourself. But I'm old, and I don't want to bother."

He rambled on until Betty came down with plates and other things. The fat clams were opening their shells on the hot rock. They put butter and seasoning

on the tender meat and ate, talking of this and that. And when the last clam had vanished, Gower stuffed his pipe and lit it with a coal. He gathered up the plates and forks and rose to his feet.

"Good night," he said benevolently. "I'm going to the house and to bed. Don't sit out here dreaming all night, you two."

He stumped away up the path. MacRae piled driftwood on the fire. Then he sat down with his back against the log, and Betty snuggled beside him, in the crook of his arm. Beyond the Point the booming of the surf rose like far thunder. The tide was on the ebb. Poor Man's Rock bared its kelp-thatched head. The racing swells covered it with spray that shone in the moonlight.

They did not talk. Speech had become nonessential. It was enough to be together.

So they sat, side by side, their backs to the cedar log and their feet to the fire, talking little, dreaming much, until the fluffy clouds scudding across the face of the moon came thicker and faster and lost their snowy whiteness, until the radiance of the night was dimmed.

Across the low summit of Point Old a new sound was carried to them. Where the moonlight touched the Gulf in patches, far out, whitecaps showed.

"Listen," MacRae murmured.

The wind struck them with a puff that sent sparks flying. It rose and fell and rose again until it whistled across the Point in a steady drone,—the chill breath of the storm-god.

MacRae turned up Betty's wrist and looked at her watch.

"Look at the time, Betty mine," he said. "And it's getting cold. There'll be another day."

He walked with her to the house. When she vanished within, blowing him a kiss from her finger tips, MacRae cut across the Point. He laid hold of the *Blanco's* dinghy and drew it high to absolute safety, then stood a minute gazing seaward, looking down on the Rock. Clouds obscured the moon now. A chill darkness hid distant shore lines and mountain ranges which had stood plain in the moon-glow, a darkness full of rushing, roaring wind and thundering seas. Poor Man's Rock was a vague bulk in the gloom, forlorn and lonely, hidden under great bursts of

spray as each wave leaped and broke with a hiss and a roar.

MacRae braced himself against the southeaster. It ruffled his hair, clawed at him with strong, invisible fingers. It shrieked its fury among the firs, stunted and leaning all awry from the buffeting of many storms.

He took a last look behind him. The lights in Gower's house were out and the white-walled cottage stood dim against the darkened hillside. Then MacRae, smiling to himself in the dark, set out along the path that led to Squitty Cove.



THE END



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