

THE MYSTERY

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Illustrations by Will Crawford.

CHAPTER IV.

The Steel Claw.

During the next few days the crew discussed our destination. Discipline, while maintained strictly, was not conventional. During the dog watches, often every man aboard would be below for at that period Captain Selover loved to take the wheel in person, a thick clear between his lips, the dinky checked shirt wide open to expose his hairy chest to the breeze. In the twilight of the forecastle we had some great sea lawyer's talk—I say "We," though I took little part in them. Generally I lay across my bunk smoking my pipe while Handy Solomon, held forth, his speech punctuated by surly speculations from the Nigger, with hesitating deep-sea wisdom from the hairy Thrackles, or with voluminous bursts of fractured English from Perdosa. Pula had nothing to offer, but watched from his pale green eyes. The light shifted and wavered from one to the other as the ship swayed: garments swung, the empty berths yawning cavernous. I could imagine the forecastle filled with the desperate men who had beaten off the Oyama. The story is told that they had swept the gunboat's decks with their own rapid-fires, turned in.

reading, the rumbles of strange, exasperated oaths. Whatever the evening's lecture, it always ended with the book on alchemy. These men had no perspective by which to judge such things. They accepted its speculations and theories at their face value. Extremely laughable were the discussions that followed. I often wished the shade of old Duvall could be permitted to see these his last disciples, spelling out dimly his teachings, mispronouncing his grave utterances, but believing utterly.

lover, enraptured as always when his precious deck was soiled, would not listen. Finally the Mexican grew sulky and turned away as though refusing to hear more. The captain thereupon felled him to the deck, and began brutally to kick him in the face and head.

Perdosa writher and begged, but without avail. The other members of the crew gathered near. After a moment they began to murmur. Finally Thrackles ventured, most respectfully, to intervene.

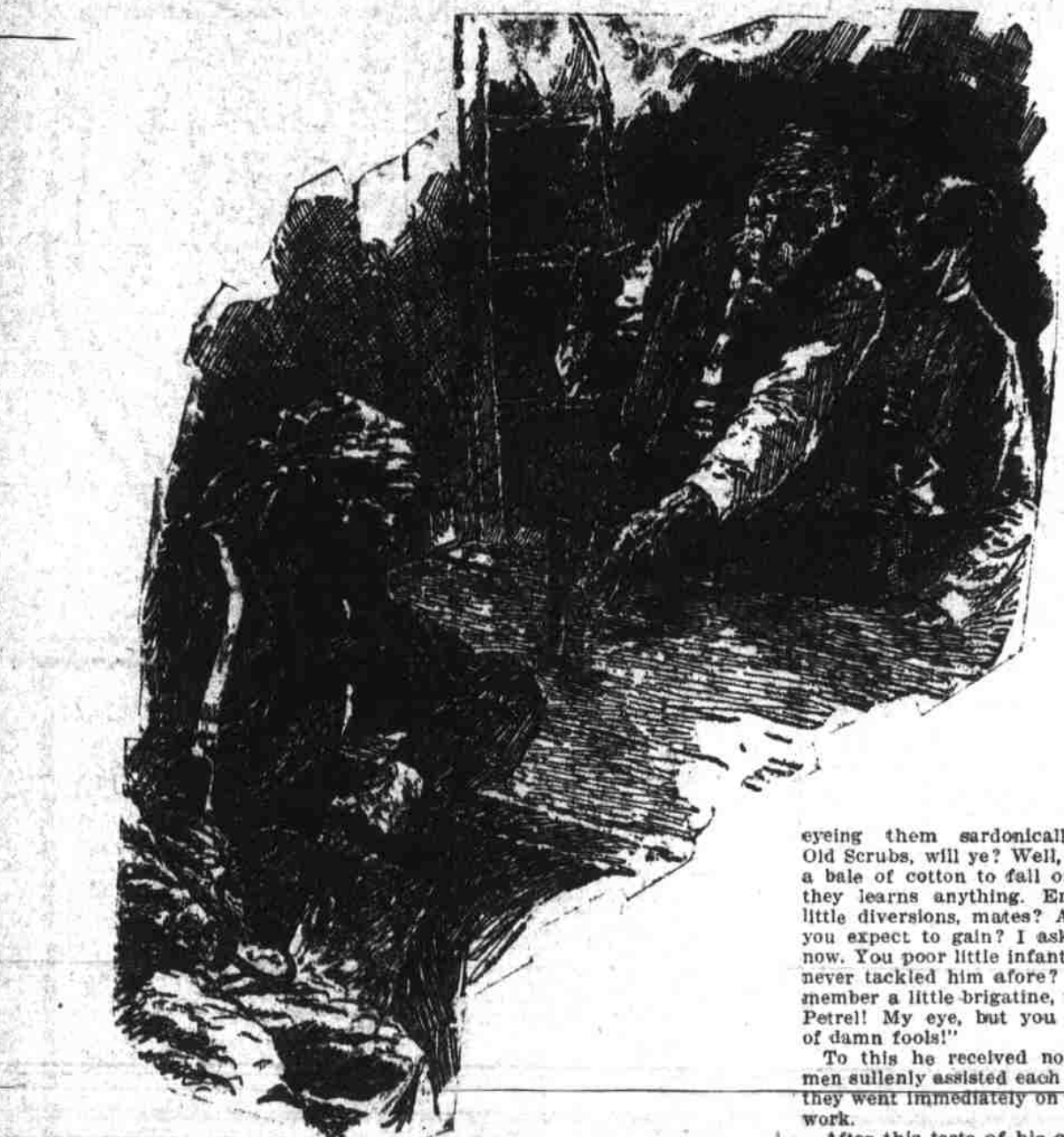
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Men are needed for the big battleships, cruisers and torpedo boats. Here is the chance for you to learn all about the Navy, without costing you anything. Large increases are now being made in the Navy and the Government is looking for a large number of able-bodied boys and young men eligible for enlistment.

be better (all things considered than you could ordinarily earn in any unskilled position which you would be apt to secure on shore; but if you have learned, or partly learned any trade or profession, such as that of machinist, electrician, carpenter, fireman, engineer, plumber, cooper, blacksmith, pharmacist, nurse, cook, musician, or any clerical work, such as bookkeeping, stenography, typ-

comfortable quarters. Then your training in a blue jacket commences. You are taught how to look after your person and health, how to care for your clothing, handle a rifle, revolver, etc.; how to make knots and "hitches"—in fact, you learn all of those things which will be required of you when you enter upon actual service on board a battleship or cruiser. At each of these training stations there are small training ships, and you are taught to steer, handle the lead, box the compass, and well as manage boats of all kinds under oar and sail, how to swim, etc.



"The Spirit of the Wild Beast, Cowed but Snarling Still."

"Ain't you got a reason, Doctor?" asked Handy Solomon. "No trade," insisted the Nigger. An uneasy silence fell. I could not but observe that the others held the Nigger's statements in a respect not due them as mere opinions. Subsequently I understood a little more of the reputation he possessed. He was believed to see things hidden, as their phrase went.

of him with a thin smile. "Too bad it doesn't work, my amiable pirate," said he. "It would be so handy for fighting—see here," he suddenly continued, pulling some object from his pocket, "here's a pipe; present to me; I don't smoke 'em. 'Twill her halfway, like that, she comes out. Twist her halfway, like this, she goes in. That's your principle. Give her back to me when you get through."

eyeing them sardonically. "Tackle Old Scrubs, will ye? Well, some needs a bale of cotton to fall on 'em afore they learns anything. Enjoyed your little diversions, mates? And 'wat do you expect to do? I asks you that, now. You poor little infants! Ain't you never tackled him afore? Don't remember a little brigantine, name of the Petrel? My eye, but you are a pack of damn fools!"

At this time we crossed into frequent thunders. One evening just at dark we made out a heavy black squall, and I called up all hands. We ducked the stay-sail and foresail, lowered the peak of the main-sail, and waited to feel of it—a rough and ready seamanship often used in these little California wind-jammers. It was pretty busy, but I heard distinctly Handy Solomon's voice behind me.

proper way to divide the loot after they had got it. They didn't get it. Why?" He drew his powerful figure to its height and spread his thick arms out in luxury of stretching. "Why?" he repeated, exclaiming abruptly, "Because their captain was Ezra Selover! Well, Mr. Eagen," he went on crisply, "Capt. Ezra Selover is their captain, and they know it! They'll talk and palaver and git into dark corners, and sharpen their knives, and perhaps fight it out as to which one's going to work the monkey-doodle business in the doctor's chest, and which one's going to tie up the sacks of them diamonds, but they won't git any further as long as Captain Ezra is on deck."

lost and hopeless! Here, take this, it'll make a man of you." He gave me a Colt's .45, the barrel of which had been filed down to about two inches of length. It was a most extraordinary weapon, but effective at short range.

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