

VI

THE LOG OF THE *EVENING STAR*

WE were sitting in the porch of a low white bungalow with masses of purple bougainvillea embowering its eaves. A ruby-throated humming-bird, with green wings, flickered around it. The tall palms and the sea were whispering together. Over the water, the West was beginning to fill with that Californian sunset which is the most mysterious in the world, for one is conscious that it is the fringe of what Europeans call the East, and that, looking westward across the Pacific, our faces are turned towards the dusky myriads of Asia. All along the Californian coast there is a tang of incense in the air, as befits that silent orchard of the gods where dawn and sunset meet and intermingle; and, though it is probably caused by some gardener, burning the dead leaves of the eucalyptus trees, one might well believe that one breathed the scent of the joss-sticks,

wafted across the Pacific, from the land of paper lanterns.

A Japanese servant, in a white duck suit, marched like a ghostly little soldier across the lawn. The great hills behind us quietly turned to amethysts. The lights of Los Angeles ten miles away to the north began to spring out like stars in that amazing air beloved of the astronomer; and the evening star itself, over the huge slow breakers crumbling into lilac-colored foam, looked bright enough to be a companion of the city lights.

"I should like to show you the log of the *Evening Star*," said my visitor, who was none other than Moreton Fitch, president of the insurance company of San Francisco. "I think it may interest you as evidence that our business is not without its touches of romance. I don't mean what you mean," he added cheerfully, as I looked up smiling. "The *Evening Star* was a schooner running between San Francisco and Tahiti and various other places in the South Seas. She was insured in our company. One April, she was reported overdue. After a search had been made, she was posted as lost in the maritime exchanges. There was no clue to what had happened, and

we paid the insurance money, believing that she had foundered with all hands.

"Two months later, we got word from Tahiti that the *Evening Star* had been found drifting about in a dead calm, with all sails set, but not a soul aboard. Everything was in perfect order, except that the ship's cat was lying dead in the bows, baked to a bit of seaweed by the sun. Otherwise, there wasn't the slightest trace of any trouble. The tables below were laid for a meal and there was plenty of water aboard."

"Were any of the boats missing?"

"No. She carried only three boats and all were there. When she was discovered, two of the boats were on deck as usual; and the third was towing astern. None of the men has been heard of from that day to this. The amazing part of it was not only the absence of anything that would account for the disappearance of the crew, but the clear evidence that they had been intending to stay, in the fact that the tables were laid for a meal, and then abandoned. Besides, where had they gone, and how? There are no magic carpets, even in the South Seas.

"The best brains of our Company puzzled

over the mystery for a year and more; but at the end of the time nothing had turned up and we had to come out by the same door wherein we went. No theory, even, seemed to fit the case at all; and, in most mysteries, there is room for a hundred theories. There were twelve persons aboard, and we investigated the history of them all. There were three American seamen, all of the domesticated kind, with respectable old mothers in gold-rimmed spectacles at home. There were five Kanakas of the mildest type, as easy to handle as an infant school. There was a Japanese cook, who was something of an artist. He used to spend his spare time in painting things to palm off on the unsuspecting connoisseur as the work of an obscure pupil of Hokusai, which I suppose he might have been in a way. I am told he was scrupulously careful never to tell a direct lie about it.

"Then there was Harper, the mate, rather an interesting young fellow, with the wanderlust. He had been pretty well educated. I believe he had spent a year or two at one of the Californian colleges. Altogether, about the most harmless kind of a ship's family that you could pick up anywhere between

the Golden Gate and the Baltic. Then there was Captain Burgess, who was the most domesticated of them all, for he had his wife with him on this voyage. They had been married only about three months. She was the widow of the former captain of the *Evening Star*, a fellow named Dayrell; and she had often been on the ship before. In fact, they were all old friends of the ship. Except one or two of the Kanakas, all the men had sailed on the *Evening Star* for something like two years under Captain Dayrell. Burgess himself had been his mate. Dayrell had been dead only about six months; and the only criticism we ever heard against anybody aboard was made by some of Dayrell's relatives, who thought the widow might have waited more than three months before marrying the newly promoted Burgess. They suggested, of course, that there must have been something between them before Dayrell was out of the way. But I hardly believed it. In any case, it threw no light on the mystery."

"What sort of a man was Burgess?"

"Big burly fellow with a fat white face and curious little eyes, like huckleberries in a lump of dough. He was very silent and inclined

to be religious. He used to read Emerson and Carlyle, quite an unusual sort of sea-captain. There was a *Sartor Resartus* in the cabin with a lot of the queerest passages marked in pencil. What can you make of it?"

"Nothing at all, except that there was a woman aboard. What was she like?"

"She was one of our special Californian mixtures, touch of Italian, touch of Irish, touch of American, but Italian predominated, I think. She was a good deal younger than Burgess; and one of the clerks in our office who had seen her described her as a 'peach,' which, as you know, means a pretty woman, or if you prefer the description of her own lady friends, 'vurry attractive.' "

"She had the dusky Italian beauty, black hair and eyes like black diamonds, but her face was very pale, the kind of pallor that makes you think of magnolia blossoms at dusk. She was obviously fond of bright colors, tawny reds and yellows, but they suited her. If I had to give you my impression of her in a single word, I should say that she looked like a gipsy. You know the song, 'Down the World with Marna,' don't you? Well, I could imagine a romantic vagabond singing it

about her. By the by, she had rather a fine voice herself. Used to sing sentimental songs to Dayrell and his friends in 'Frisco, 'Love's Old Sweet Song' and that sort of stuff. Apparently, they took it very seriously. Several of them told me that if she had been trained—well, you know the old story—every prima donna would have had to retire from business. I fancy they were all a little in love with her. The curious thing was that after Dayrell's death she gave up her singing altogether. Now, I think I have told you all the facts about the ship's company."

"Didn't you say there was a log you wanted to show me?"

"There were no ship's papers of any kind, and no log was found on the derelict; but, a week or two ago, we had a visit from the brother of the Japanese cook, who made us all feel like fifteen cents before the wisdom of the East. I have to go over and see him to-morrow afternoon. He is a fisherman, lives on the coast, not far from here. I'd like you to see what I call the log of the *Evening Star*. I won't say any more about it now. It isn't quite worked out yet; but it looks as if it's going to be interesting. Will you come—to-

morrow afternoon? I'll call for you at a quarter after two. It won't take us long in the automobile. This is where he lives, see?"

I switched on the electric light in the porch while Fitch spread out a road map, and pointed to our destination of the morrow. The Californian night comes quickly, and the tree-toads that make it musical were chirruping and purring all around us as we walked through the palms and the red-tasseled pepper trees to his car. Somewhere among the funereal clouds and poplarlike spires of the eucalyptus, a mocking-bird began to whistle one of his many parts, and a delicious whiff of orange blossom blew on the cool night wind across a ranch of a thousand acres, mostly in fruit, but with a few trees yet in blossom, on the road to the Sunset Inn.

I watched his red rear lamp dwindling down that well-oiled road, and let the *Evening Star* go with it until the morrow, for I could make little of his yarn, except that Fitch was not a man to get excited over trifles.

II

Promptly at the time appointed on the following afternoon, Fitch called for me; and a

minute later we were gliding through orange groves along one of those broad smooth roads that amaze the European whose impressions of California have been obtained from tales of the forty-niners. The keen scent of the orange blossom yielded to a tang of new incense, as we turned into the Sunset Boulevard and ran down the long vista of tall eucalyptus trees that stand out so darkly and distinctly against the lilac-colored ranges of the Sierra Madre in the distance, and remind one of the poplar-bordered roads of France. Once we passed a swarthy cluster of Mexicans under a wayside palm. Big fragments, gnawed half-moons, of the blood-red black-pipped watermelon they had been eating, gleamed on the dark oiled surface of the road, as a splash of the sunset is reflected in a dark river. Then we ran along the coast for a little way between the palms and the low white-pillared houses, all crimson poinsettias and marble, that looked as if they were meant for the gods and goddesses of Greece, but were only the homes of a few score lotus-eating millionaires. In another minute, we had turned off the good highway, and were running along a narrow sandy road. On one side, rising from the

road, were great desert hills, covered with gray-green sage-brush, tinged at the tips with rusty brown; and, on the other, there was a strip of sandy beach where the big slow breakers crumbled, and the unmolested pelicans waddled and brooded like goblin sentries.

In three minutes more, we sighted a cluster of tiny wooden houses ahead of us, and pulled up on the outskirts of a Japanese fishing village, built along the fringe of the beach itself. It was a single miniature street, nestling under the hill on one side of the narrow road and built along the sand on the other. Japanese signs stood over quaint little stores, with here and there a curious tinge of Americanism. RICE CAKES AND CANDIES were advertised by one black-haired and boyish-looking gentleman who sat at the door of his hut, playing with three brown children, one of whom squinted at us gleefully with bright sloe-black eyes. Every tiny house, even when it stood on the beach, had its own festoon of flowers. Bare-legged, almond-eyed fishermen sat before them, mending their nets. Wistaria drooped from the jutting eaves; and—perhaps only the Japanese could explain the miracle—tall and well-nourished red gera-

niums rose, out of the salt sea-sand apparently, around their doors. A few had foregone their miracles and were content with window boxes, but all were in blossom. In the center of the village, on the seaward side, there was a miniature mission house. A beautifully shaped bell swung over the roof; and there was a miniature notice-board at the door. The announcements upon it were in Japanese, but it looked as if East and West had certainly met, and kissed each other there. Some of the huts had oblong letter boxes of gray tin, perched on stumps of bamboo fishing poles, in front of their doors. It is a common device to help the postman in country places where you sometimes see a letter-box on a broomstick standing half a mile from the owner's house. But here, they looked curiously Japanese, perhaps because of the names inscribed upon them, or through some trick of arrangement, for a Japanese hand no sooner touches a dead staff than it breaks into cherry blossom. We stopped before one that bore the name of Y. Kato. His unpainted wooden shack was the most Japanese of all in appearance; for the yellow placard underneath the window advertising SWEET CAPORAL was balanced by a sin-

gle tall pole, planted in the sand a few feet to the right, and lifting a beautiful little bird-house high above the roof.

Moreton Fitch knocked at the door, which was opened at once by a dainty creature, a piece of animated porcelain four feet high, with a black-eyed baby on her back; and we were ushered with smiles into a very bare living-room to be greeted by the polished mahogany countenance of Kato himself and the shell-spectacled intellectual pallor of Howard Knight, professor in the University of California.

"Amazing, amazing, perfectly amazing," said Knight, who was wearing two elderly tearoses in his cheeks now from excitement. "I have just finished it. Sit down and listen."

"Wait a moment," said Fitch. "I want our friend here to see the original log of the *Evening Star*."

"Of course," said Knight, "a human document of the utmost value." Then, to my surprise, he took me by the arm and led me in front of a kakemono, which was the only decoration on the walls of the room.

"This is what Mr. Fitch calls the log of the

Evening Star," he said. "It was found among the effects of Mr. Kato's brother on the schooner; and, fortunately, it was claimed by Mr. Kato himself. Take it to the light and examine it."

I took it to the window and looked at it with curiosity, though I did not quite see its bearing on the mystery of the *Evening Star*. It was a fine piece of work, one of those weird night-pictures in which the Japanese are masters, for they know how to give you the single point of light that tells you of the unseen life around the lamp of the household or the temple. This was a picture of a little dark house, with jutting eaves, and a tiny rose light in one window, overlooking the sea. At the brink of the sea rose a ghostly figure that might only be a drift of mist, for the curve of the vague body suggested that the off-shore wind was blowing it out to sea, while the great gleaming eyes were fixed on the lamp, and the shadowy arms outstretched towards it in hopeless longing. Sea and ghost and house were suggested in a very few strokes of the brush. All the rest, the peace and the tragic desire and a thousand other suggestions, according to the

mood of the beholder, were concentrated into that single pinpoint of warm light in the window.

"Turn it over," said Fitch.

I obeyed him, and saw that the whole back of the kakemono, which measured about four feet by two, was covered with a fine scrawl of Japanese characters in purple copying-pencil. I had overlooked it at first, or accepted it, with the eye of ignorance, as a mere piece of Oriental decoration.

"That is what we all did," said Fitch. "We all overlooked the simple fact that Japanese words have a meaning. We didn't trouble about it—you know how vaguely one's eye travels over a three-foot sign on a Japanese tea-house—we didn't even think about it till Mr. Kato turned up in our office a week or two ago. You can't read it. Nor can I. But we got Mr. Knight here to handle it for us."

"It turns out to be a message from Harper," said Knight. "Apparently, he was lying helpless in his berth, and told the Japanese to write it down. A few sentences here and there are unintelligible, owing to the refraction of the Oriental mind. Fortunately, it is Harper's own message. I have made two

versions, one a perfectly literal one which requires a certain amount of re-translation. The other is an attempt to give as nearly as possible what Harper himself dictated. This is the version which I had better read to you now. The original has various repetitions, and shows that Harper's mind occasionally wandered, for he goes into trivial detail sometimes. He seems to have been possessed, however, with the idea of getting his account through to the owners; and, whenever he got an opportunity, he made the Japanese take up his pencil and write, so that we have a very full account."

Knight took out a note-book, adjusted his glasses, and began to read, while the ghostly original fluttered in my hand, as the night-wind blew from the sea.

"A terrible thing has happened, and I think it my duty to write this, in the hope that it may fall into the hands of friends at home. I am not likely to live another twenty-four hours. The first hint that I had of anything wrong was on the night of March the fifteenth, when Mrs. Burgess came up to me on deck, looking very worried, and said, 'Mr. Harper, I am in great trouble. I want to ask you a question,

and I want you to give me an honest answer.' She looked round nervously, and her hands were fidgeting with her handkerchief, as if she were frightened to death. 'Whatever your answer may be,' she said, 'you'll not mention what I've said to you.' I promised her. She laid her hand on my arm and said with the most piteous look in her face I have ever seen, 'I have no other friends to go to, and I want you to tell me. Mr. Harper, is my husband sane?'

"I had never doubted the sanity of Burgess till that moment. But there was something in the dreadfulness of that question, from a woman who had only been married a few months, that seemed like a door opening into the bottomless pit.

"It seemed to explain many things that hadn't occurred to me before. I asked her what she meant and she told me that last night Burgess had come into the cabin and waked her up. His eyes were starting out of his head, and he told her that he had seen Captain Dayrell walking on deck. She told him it was nothing but imagination; and he laid his head on his arms and sobbed like a child. He said he thought it was one of the deckhands

that had just come out of the foc'sle, but all the men were short and smallish, and this was a big burly figure. It went ahead of him like his own shadow, and disappeared in the bows. But he knew it was Dayrell, and there was a curse on him. To-night, she said, half an hour ago, Burgess had come down to her, taken her by the throat, and sworn he would kill her if she didn't confess that Dayrell was still alive. She told him he must be crazy. 'My mind may be going,' he said, 'but you sha'n't kill my soul.' And he called her a name which she didn't repeat, but began to cry when she remembered it. He said he had seen Dayrell standing in the bows with the light of the moon full on his face, and he looked so brave and upright that he knew he must have been bitterly wronged. He looked like a soldier facing the enemy, he said.

"While she was telling me this, she was looking around her in a very nervous kind of way, and we both heard some one coming up behind us very quietly. We turned round, and there—as God lives—stood the living image of Captain Dayrell looking at us, in the shadow of the mast. Mrs. Burgess gave a shriek that paralyzed me for the moment, then

she ran like a wild thing into the bows, and before any one could stop her, she climbed up and threw herself overboard. Evans and Barron were only a few yards away from her when she did it, and they both went overboard after her immediately, one of them throwing a life-belt over ahead of him as he went. They were both good swimmers, and as the moon was bright, I thought we had only to launch a boat to pick them all up. I shouted to the Kanakas, and they all came up running. Two of the men and myself got into one of the starboard boats, and we were within three feet of the water when I heard the crack of a revolver from somewhere in the bows of the *Evening Star*. The men who were lowering away let us down with a rush that nearly capsized us. There were four more shots while we were getting our oars out. I called to the men on deck, asking them who was shooting, but got no reply. I believe they were panic-stricken and had bolted into cover. We pulled round the bows, and could see nothing. There was not a sign of the woman or the two men in the water.

"We could make nobody hear us on the ship, and all this while we had seen nothing

of Captain Burgess. It must have been nearly an hour before we gave up our search, and tried to get aboard again. We were still unable to get any reply from the ship, and we were about to try to climb on board by the boat's falls. The men were backing her in, stern first, and we were about ten yards away from the ship when the figure of Captain Dayrell appeared leaning over the side of the *Evening Star*. He stood there against the moonlight, with his face in shadow; but we all of us recognized him, and I heard the teeth of the Kanakas chattering. They had stopped backing, and we all stared at one another. Then, as casually as if it were a joke, Dayrell stretched out his arm, and I saw the moonlight glint on his revolver. He fired at us, deliberately, as if he were shooting at clay pigeons. I felt the wind of the first shot going past my head, and the two men at once began to pull hard to get out of range. The second shot missed also. At the third shot, he got the man in the bows full in the face. He fell over backwards, and lay there in the bottom of the boat. He must have been killed instantaneously. At the fourth shot, I felt a stinging pain on the left side of my body, but

hardly realized I had been wounded at the moment. A cloud passed over the moon just then, and the way we had got on the boat had carried us too far for Dayrell to aim very accurately, so that I was able to get to the oars and pull out of range. The other man must have been wounded also, for he was lying in the bottom of the boat groaning, but I do not remember seeing him hit. I managed to pull fifty yards or so, and then fainted, for I was bleeding very badly.

"When I recovered consciousness I found that the bleeding had stopped, and I was able to look at the two men. Both of them were dead and quite cold, so that I must have been unconscious for some time.

"The *Evening Star* was about a hundred yards away, in the full light of the moon, but I could see nobody on deck. I sat watching her till daybreak, wondering what I should do, for there was no water or food in the boat, and I was unarmed. Unless Captain Burgess and the other men aboard could disarm Dayrell, I was quite helpless. Perhaps my wound had dulled my wits; for I was unable to think out any plan, and I sat there aimlessly for more than an hour.

"It was broad daylight, and I had drifted within fifty yards of the ship, when, to my surprise, Captain Burgess appeared on deck and hailed me. 'All right, Harper,' he said, 'come aboard.'

"I was able to scull the boat alongside, and Captain Burgess got down into her without a word and helped me aboard. He took me down to my berth, with his arm around me, for I almost collapsed again with the effort, and he brought me some brandy. As soon as I could speak, I asked him what it all meant, and he said, 'The ship is his, Harper; we've got to give it up to him. That's what it means. I am not afraid of him by daylight, but what we shall do to-night, God only knows.' Then, just as Mrs. Burgess had told me, he put his head down on his arms, and began to sob like a child.

" 'Where are the other men?' I asked him.

" 'There's only you and I and Kato,' he said, 'to face it out aboard this ship.'

"With that, he got up and left me, saying that he would send Kato to me with some food, if I thought I could eat. But I knew by this time that I was a dying man.

"There was only one thing I had to do, and

that was to try to get this account written, and hide it somehow in the hope of some one finding it later, for I felt sure that neither Burgess nor myself would live to tell it. There was no paper in my berth, and it was Kato that thought of writing it down in this way.

"About an hour later. Burgess has just been down to see me. He said that he had buried the two men who were shot in the boat. I wanted to ask him some questions, but he became so excited, it seemed useless. Neither he nor Kato seemed to have any idea where Dayrell was hiding. Kato believes, in fact, in ghosts, so that it is no use questioning him.

"I must have lost consciousness or slept very heavily since the above was written, for I remembered nothing more till nightfall, when I woke up in the pitch darkness. Kato was sitting by me. He lit the lamp, and gave me another drink of brandy. The ship was dead still, but I felt that something had gone wrong again.

"I do not know whether my own mind is going, but we have just heard the voice of Mrs. Burgess singing one of those sentimental songs that Captain Dayrell used to be so fond of. It seemed to be down in the cabin, and when she

came to the end of it, I heard Captain Dayrell's voice calling out, '*Encore! Encore!*' just as he used to do. Then I heard some one running down the deck like mad, and Captain Burgess came tumbling down to us with the whites of his eyes showing. 'Did you hear it?' he said. 'Harper, you'll admit you heard it. Don't tell me I'm mad. They're in the cabin together now. Come and look at them.' Then he looked at me with a curious, cunning look, and said, 'No, you'd better stay where you are, Harper. You're not strong enough.' And he crept on the deck like a cat.

"Something urged me to follow him, even if it took the last drop of my strength. Kato tried to dissuade me, but I drained the brandy flask, and managed to get out of my berth on to the deck by going very slowly, though the sweat broke out on me with every step. Burgess had disappeared, and there was nobody on deck. It was not so difficult to get to the skylight of the cabin. I don't know what I had expected to see, but there I did see the figure of Captain Dayrell, dressed as I had seen him in life, with a big scarf round his throat, and the big peaked cap. There was an open chest in the corner, with a good many clothes scat-

tered about, as if by some one who had been dressing in a hurry. It was an old chest belonging to Captain Dayrell in the old days, and I often wondered why Burgess had left it lying there. The revolver lay on the table, and as Dayrell picked it up to load it, the scarf unwound itself a little around his throat and the lower part of his face. Then, to my amazement, I recognized him."

"There," said Knight, "the log of the *Evening Star* ends except for a brief sentence by Kato himself, which I will not read to you now."

"I wonder if the poor devil did really see," said Moreton Fitch. "And what do you suppose he did when he saw who it was?"

"Crept back to his own berth, barricaded himself in with Kato's help, finished his account, died in the night, with Dayrell tapping on the door, and was neatly buried by Burgess in the morning, I suppose."

"And, Burgess?"

"Tidied everything up, and then jumped overboard."

"Probably,—in his own clothes; for it's quite true that we did find a lot of Dayrell's

old clothes in a sea-chest in the cabin. Funny idea, isn't it, a man ghosting himself like that?"

"Yes, but what did Harper mean by saying he heard Mrs. Burgess singing in the cabin that night?"

"Ah, that's another section of the log recorded in a different way."

Moreton Fitch made a sign to the little Japanese, and told him to get a package out of his car. He returned in a moment, and laid it at our feet on the floor.

"Dayrell was very proud of his wife's voice," said Fitch as he took the covers off the package. "Just before he was taken ill he conceived the idea of getting some records made of her songs to take with him on board ship. The gramophone was found amongst the old clothes. The usual sentimental stuff, you know. Like to hear it? She had rather a fine voice."

He turned a handle, and, floating out into the stillness of the California night, we heard the full rich voice of a dead woman:

*"Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low,
And the flickering shadows softly come and go."*

At the end of the stanza, a deep bass voice broke in with, "*Encore! Encore!*"

Then Fitch stopped it.

When we were in the car on our way home, I asked if there were any clue to the fate of the Japanese cook, in the last sentence of the log of the *Evening Star*.

"I didn't want to bring it up before his brother," said Knight, "they are a sensitive folk; but the last sentence was to the effect that the *Evening Star* had now been claimed by the spirit of Captain Dayrell, and that the writer respectfully begged to commit *hari kari*."

Our road turned inland here, and I looked back toward the fishing village. The night was falling, but the sea was lilac-colored with the afterglow. I could see the hut and the little birdhouse black against the water. On a sand dune just beyond them, the figures of the fisherman Kato and his wife were sitting on their heels, and still watching us. They must have been nearly a mile away by this time; but in that clear air they were carved out sharp and black as tiny ebony images against the fading light of the Pacific.