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# CREPUSCULE

A novel by Roman Payne

## CHAPTER I

*I care not that this moment's lot  
was thin and sparsely dealt,  
all pleasures sweet can be forgot  
the instant they are felt.*

“DIGNITY?’ ... ‘Dignity!’, you cry? ... you sorry fellow ... even the man being hanged is allowed his dignity. If he chooses to soil himself on the gallows, that’s his own business. He obviously just doesn’t care to have any dignity. But you can’t say the executioner isn’t allowing him dignity. Quite the contrary! The executioner is a paid servant of the government. And when he hangs a man, he is devoting his time to – that is, he is serving – the man whom he is hanging. Do you understand? Don’t be such a sorry fellow. In such a case, the government is paying, out of its own pocket, to have a professionally trained man, who surely doesn’t like

wasting his time, to go out of his own way, taking precious hours out of his own day, to string this man up on the gallows and watch him sway! ...And if that hanged man doesn't realize the dignity that's wrapped around his neck, he's a sorry fellow. When somebody is paying for another to receive a service – *and a hanging is a service, mind you!* – the one receiving the service is receiving respect and dignity any way you look at it ... he is receiving respect and dignity courtesy of the government treasury. Don't you think it costs money to hang a man? You think these gallows build themselves? You think these executioners are volunteering like Salvation Army workers? No, it costs a pretty penny to hang a man – especially these days, what with the new *Executioners' Union* and all. But why have you gotten me off track? We're not talking about a hanging here! No one's getting hanged. We're just talking about a mere *deportation!* You should feel lucky you're not getting hanged. How would like to be hanged today? And you cry about a lack of dignity ... why it's not like you're being deprived of your life. You are just being deprived of life in America!

“...And remember, you're getting a service here. Our government ... excuse me, *my* government, is paying me to pack you up in this little box and load you in with the rest of the cargo on this steamship so you can get back to Europe where you belong!

“...What? I can't hear you! The wood is too thick! ... No I'm not going to open the lid! I've already sealed you up. I've already hammered in the nails. You're just going to have to yell louder if you want me to understand what you're running your mouth off about in there! But you'd better hurry and say it, your boat is leaving. Just don't cry to me anymore that you're not being treated with dignity by the American government. That's an accusation America doesn't take lightly. Even our non-citizens, *such as yourself*, are treated with dignity in *this* country. Just wait till you get to Europe in a few days. See how those socialists treat you. Boy, you'll be wishing you were American, I tell you! If they treated their citizens with dignity, we wouldn't have this problem of people like you, trying to sneak over here to squat on the land of the free and freeloader in the homes of the brave! ... Now off with you!”

Then we hear a loud *thud* as the little pinewood crate, containing the young man being deported from America, is dropped onto the cargo plank of the steamship. Then that gruff man, the government worker at the city port – who had just been giving David a stern lecture about dignity while packing him up in a wooden box – loaded the few straggling pieces of cargo onto the cargo plank, shut the iron door, padlocked it; and, as was his custom when loading a ship bound for a foreign shore, he pulled a silver dime from his pocket, made a wish and threw it in the swells of the saltwater in the sound at the American port. He then walked up the pier, clocked out of his job, and walked on towards Second and Pike to buy a sandwich. By the time he reached the sandwich shop, the cargo ship containing packages, canned fish and, David, the hero of our story, (who was packed up for deportation in a box of pine with three small air-holes on each side just big enough to fit a pinky through) was leaving the harbor. It passed through the Puget Sound and through the great Strait of Juan de Fuca; and by afternoon it reached the cape where the beaches of Washington State lie to the southward eye and the shores of Canada stretch on in the north; and that massive cargo steamship proceeded on into the Pacific Ocean.

That ship saw several storms and many days of calm. It saw the full moon rise over the Panama Canal and the crescent moon drift alongside the black night waters of the Atlantic. The daytimes spent on the great ocean were mostly sunny and calm, though inside the cargo vessel, David saw no light of day, and no sliver of the moon. There were lamps burning near the engine room and a small amount of their kerosene light cast itself across the cargo room, illuminating pallets of canned fish and bottles of corn oil. David, who spent days scrunched up in one position in that small, pine crate kept his lips pressed to the breathing holes; yet, occasionally, when boredom became overwhelming, he took his lips away from the holes and let his eyes peer through them. He saw the beams of light from the kerosene lamps reflect off of the tin fish cans that sat on the pallets in the cargo room and the edges of these tin cans shimmered with this silvery jeweled light reflected from the beams, and this sight pleased David very much.

In his box, beside a scrap of bread, he had a bowl of water from which he could drink. The pine box, in which he was packed, was too small for his arms and hands to have the freedom to hold the bowl up to his mouth, so he had to lap the water up like a cat would do. As he didn't know how long the journey would take, David prudently conserved the water as long as possible – only permitting himself to lap two or three laps per day. Unfortunately, by the fourth day, David's bowl was dry as could be. It appeared as though all the water had evaporated; though as the bowl saw not the sun, and as the ocean air that filled the vessel was wet and humid, it didn't seem at all possible to David that his precious water had evaporated.

“It could not have evaporated,” David said to himself on the fourth day of his journey at sea, “an animal must have snuck in through one of my air-holes and sucked the water out!” ... “but how could an animal small enough to fit into one of these air-holes be big enough to drink that much water in one day? ...as there was quite a bit of water in my bowl yesterday.” This puzzled David and the only solution he could think of was that the animal that drank his water had, in fact, been rather big, but had also had a slender snout that could've slipped through the hole and into the water dish. As the sea journey was long and dull, and the hours lagged on and on, David had much time to muse on this question; and so he spent the fourth and the fifth day going over in his head all the world's living animals – great and small, of land and sky and sea – to ascertain exactly what kind of animal it was that drank the last of his water. After giving it a lot of thought, David decided that the animal could be none other than an anteater. “Only an anteater,” he concluded, “has a slim enough, and long enough snout to fit through one of these air-holes and drain my water dish.”

It may seem to you, dear reader, that David was rather petty and simple-minded to devote so much time and thought to this question of which animal, if any, had stolen his water, but I urge you to realize, for one thing, the importance water had taken at this point in the journey. When David left America, he was already quite ill (that being the cause by which he was being deported to begin with, which I'll explain later); and by the fourth day, the seasickness had fully set in and David was,

consequently, very dehydrated. Furthermore, David didn't know exactly how long the journey would take – for he'd never hitherto sailed from the West Coast of America to the shores of France – and he was sincerely afraid that if he didn't conserve his water with the utmost prudence, he would surely die. And, in any way, can one so ill with seasickness, among other ailments – who is trapped in a little box that allows no freedom of movement or circulation of air – really be expected to ruminate on deep and intelligent questions? In those days, David was experiencing traumatic psychological disturbances that would make anyone, you and I included, shudder with fear to the point of incapacity. He had recently been expelled from the hospital and forced to go overseas to live and receive treatment for an illness he didn't really understand – an illness even the doctors didn't understand. And to think of these problems, while seasick and stuffed in a dark cage for days on end, would have surely led to a madness of the most permanent kind. So by musing on petty and simple-minded questions, his brain was actually working in a very intelligent and sensible manner. David's intelligent brain was depriving him of the ability of complex thought in order to save him from madness. ...And so during the voyage, David's only thoughts were of the animal who stole his water.

Yet such musings also created another problem for our poor hero. By the fifth day, he had decided that an anteater was loose in the cargo room, poking its snout where it pleased; and so the sixth and seventh days at sea were exceptionally bothersome to David for he was, at this time, quite afraid of this strange animal's presence onboard. He had never seen an anteater before and, therefore, didn't know the nature and the capabilities of this beast. Do anteaters attack human beings? Even experienced zoologists have a difficult time answering this question.

The days were dark for David and intermittently, during the journey, he slept. And intermittently during his sleep, he dreamt. And what horrid figures and terrible apparitions haunted these dreams. Had there been any onlookers in that cargo room, they would hear pounding sounds and notice the pine box tremble and shake every few hours with the panicked movements of he who was inside. The box would tremble at the moments when David woke up from a sleep full of dreams of

winged anteaters devouring his liver, or of armies of anteaters marching on a twilight hill, with carbines in their arms, ready to fire on any human who approached; or after other similar nightmares.

I am just touching on the surface of David's internal and external worries. He was unfortunate to the depths, and if we were to explore these depths – especially in these first few pages of our story – we would find ourselves stressing our own brains with imaginings of the darkest and most ugly sort. So let us now limit our knowledge, for our own sake, to the knowing that David was psychically ill, psychologically irritated, cramped and dehydrated in a wooden box on a journey that would sooner or later bring him – in some state or another, alive or dead – to the shores of France. ...And before we arrive in France, let's just mention one other thing, David's body temperature was increasing by a full thermometer degree every day while he was at sea.

*Upon our hero's arrival in Bretagne, France...*

The sun was shining gaily on the port near Concarneau on the coast of Brittany. Down a long grassy hill, fragrant with lavender and honeysuckle flowers, Marc, a jovial man with ruddy cheeks and about fifty years, was running to greet the incoming cargo liner.

It was a spring day in April and the weather was mild but fresh and the sun resounded in the sky. Marc was happy to go to work that day, for it was still just late-morning and he knew he didn't have to spend much time on the docks. He only had to unload a few pieces of cargo, sign a few forms and then he would be off, around noontime, to enjoy the rest of the sunny day in the fashion he chose. There were other men to unload the pallets of canned fish and oil. There were young workmen for that. Marc had worked for the port authority of Brittany for many years and, as he was a really likeable and jovial fellow, he was continually given the more pleasurable and less time- and labor-consuming duties of the trade.

So, Marc reached the bottom of the hill and walked out to the edge of the pier to greet the cargo ship, which had just come from America.

Marc had himself been a sailor before, for many, many years, and had taken several voyages to America. He had seen San Francisco and Seattle, New York and Boston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Montreal and Vancouver. He could cook American food as spicy as anyone; and he spoke an English that always impressed the tourists – especially due to the large amount of foreign swearwords and vulgar expressions he had learned during his years as a sailor.

The pier near Concarneau was empty on the morning David's ship came in. The workmen who would be unloading the canned fish and oil were still sleeping in their bunks. Marc was up early and had the pleasure of seeing the sun cut through the fog and push away the early morning clouds to reveal a sky of blue azure.

He whistled a French folk tune and clapped his hands together as he walked to the pier. Once on the dock, he helped the enginemen secure the ship and then boarded on the main deck. He then descended to the cargo room to see what it was he would have to unload.

The cargo room was damp and musty, it was dark and smelled from some rotting fish that had burst out of a few cans, which broke in transit. Marc paced the aisles between pallets and parcels a few times until he decided that there wasn't much work for him to do. He was looking forward to getting off the ship, climbing that grassy hill and smoking a pipe underneath the laurel tree at its summit. From the summit, he could eat his lunch and see out over the ocean in three directions.

Just when Marc was preparing to leave the ship. He heard the sound of a wooden box sliding a few inches across the ground. He then heard the *thud, thud, thud* of some dull object pounding against wood – and he heard the box slide again. So, Marc took his flashlight and went looking for the box that was making so much noise. He was sure that a dog had gotten onboard and was trying to tear open a wooden box to eat the processed fish inside.

Marc walked the aisles of the cargo room banging his flashlight against wooden crates so as to scare the dog away. Although the smell of rotting fish was thick in the air, the smell of a sick man penetrated Marc's nose when he approached the crate containing our David. Marc could hear struggling from within the crate. He tapped his flashlight against the pine box and gasps could be heard as it rocked from side to side slightly with the movements of the struggling inhabitant.

"They're supposed to kill the damn fish before they pack 'em, the basta'ds!" Marc said aloud in the sailor English he picked up while docked in the Boston harbor years ago. He then tapped his metal flashlight against the crate again, and again the crate jumped a few inches. "Jump fishy!" said Marc.

Then came the muffled voice of the young man inside the crate. Marc couldn't make out exactly what the voice was saying but, as he recognized it not to be the voice of a fish, but the voice of a man, he himself jumped back a few inches, startled. He then left the cargo room in a quick and determined pace.

Back on shore, the late-morning sun was still beaming on the grassy hill and the workmen were still sleeping in their bunks. Marc crossed the pier to the storeroom and took a crowbar off the wall. He poured himself a cup of coffee and walked again down the pier onto the ship where he continued on into the cargo room.

Opening up David might have been a gruesome sight for many, but Marc was a seasoned witness to the cruder things in life; and, after he pried off one facet of the crate and David tumbled out, Marc simply tossed his jolly head back and laughed until his cheeks were ruddier than ever.

"Why it's not a fish, it's a stowaway!"

David lay there on the metal floor of the cargo room gasping for the clean air that now surrounded him. His lips were chaffed and his skin was scaly from dehydration. His forehead was covered in beads of sweat from fever. He lay in the fetal position clenching his abdomen in pain. His eyes were closed but he was conscious. He didn't know where

he was and when he tried to open his eyes and look around, hallucinations interfered with his judgment as to what was happening around him. David saw Marc and mistook him for an anteater; and, in fear, tried to crawl as far away and as quickly away as possible. His limbs were too weak to move properly and many portions of his body had been deprived of blood circulation during his transcontinental voyage, so any fanciful notions he had of standing and running or of swatting the giant anteater away were not at all possible, and so they just remained fanciful notions.

Even old Marc, who was accustomed to seeing dying men squirming on the floor of a ship's cargo room after being extracted from pine crates, realized that the young man was in a dreadful condition and could benefit from a glass of water and a cold washcloth. The old sailor went and fetched one of each.

David's forehead enjoyed the washcloth yet his body rejected the glass of water and after a couple sips, he vomited on the cargo room floor. Marc decided that he would leave the mess for the workmen sleeping in the bunks to clean up.

After it was clear to Marc that David would live, he stuffed the sick man back in the crate and tipped it back up so the open-end pointed upwards.

"Why are you putting me back in here?" David managed to say in a most feeble and pained voice.

"It's for your own good, kid. They kill stowaways, you know. I'm going to help you out." And so Marc put the lid back on the crate, took a hammer from his belt and drove a few nails into the lid, locking David inside the odious pinewood crate, once again. David made a few grunts and gasps as Marc loaded the crate onto a dolly, but Marc pounded the crate so hard with his hammer after hearing David make noise that the latter was soon quiet.

"Listen, kid ... you don't want anyone to hear you make any noise. Is that clear?"

There was no response. Marc pushed the crate on the dolly out of the cargo room and up onto the pier. As Marc was pushing the dolly up the

pier towards the shore, Henry – an English dockworker who had run away from England to become a French dockworker – approached Marc.

“What’ve you got there?” asked Henry.

“A delivery for the boss!” said Marc.

“Oh. ...Any coffee left?” asked Henry.

“Sure. In the storeroom,” said Marc.

And Henry continued on his way towards the ship, leaving Marc and the boss’s delivery alone.

That crate took a journey on the dolly down a path and through a square and up some steps and up another path and eventually it ended up under the laurel tree at the summit of the same grassy hill where Marc had intended earlier to smoke a pipe and wile away the warm spring day.

Once Marc and his crate took a seat on the grass under the laurel tree, Marc lit his pipe, took a few puffs, and once again, extracted the passenger from the crate. This time, when David tumbled out of the crate, he was no longer nearly-dead, but was half-way alive. Marc was relieved. David was given some more water, which his body took well this time, and was permitted to recline against Marc’s favorite tree while he nursed himself with clean air, water, and some dry bread that Marc offered him.

“You know,” said Marc, after David was in good enough condition to listen to and acknowledge someone, “If I’d had taken you to the boss, he would have chained your legs together and dumped your ass in the Atlantic! ...They kill stowaways in this business. ...It’s up to the ship captain to make sure all the passengers are accounted for and if someone is hiding onboard, and isn’t accounted for, and doesn’t have the proper documents, it’s the ship captain’s ass at stake. By law, he has to return the stowaway to the country where he came from. Otherwise, the captain is charged with aiding in illegal immigration and he loses his license, his boat and sometimes is even thrown in the clink for a while! No captain will have that! ...It’s easier to kill a stowaway then to declare him and sail him back to the other side of the world.” Marc talked while eating his bread covered with salted butter and sardines. David slowly

sipped his water and listened. Marc continued talking, “Me, I don’t like killings, I don’t like declarations, I don’t even care much for ship captains. So I’m going to save your life here, kid. I’m going to take you into town as soon as I finish my lunch and I’m going to drop you off and not look back. ...And if anyone asks, you never saw me, you never heard of me, and you never, never stepped foot on that ship down there – got it?!” Marc pointed to the great cargo liner off in the distance that brought David from America to the coast of France. It looked magnificent in the harbor, from the view on the grassy hill. The steel deck glimmered in the sunlight and one could see all of the workmen, who appeared as little specks in the distance, walking down the pier wheeling dollies filled with pallets of canned fish and oil. “...Don’t you even remember the name of that ship – got it?!”

“I never *knew* the name of the ship.” David managed to mutter in a feeble voice.

“Good kid,” said Marc, “In a few, I’ll drop you off in town. A town called Concarneau. It’s a beautiful place.”

## CHAPTER II

Two men and a woman were seated at a table in a sunny backyard around noontime. The woman, wearing a cotton housedress and apron, was helping the two men to large portions of roasted potatoes with melted gruyere, tomatoes with vinegar, and beet salad. The older of the two men was Marc, the fifty year old dockworker. He ate quickly and spoke very little, for he was quite hungry still, even after having eaten with David on the summit of his favorite hill underneath his favorite laurel tree. The woman, an elderly woman, with white hair and a nose full of grey freckles, was Marc's wife. She spoke not at all at first, but instead guessed at the answers to the questions that kept popping in her head about the young man sitting at the table. She didn't speak a word of English, and the young man didn't know French. The young man was David and he was sitting in the sunny backyard in the coastal village of Concarneau, fighting off his illness to seem pleasant to Marc and especially to Marc's wife. He picked at his potatoes and cheese, trying to eat as much as he could. Though his temperature had dropped considerably, he still had an acute pain in his gut and a wretched nausea that made the thought of food unbearable. The elderly woman kept glancing at David, and with each glance, a new question would pop into her head; and, after becoming frustrated trying to answer the questions for herself, she would turn to her husband and ask him about it. Marc answered a few words here and there between bites of lunch, but mostly he kept quiet. It had been his plan to drive David only as far as the entrance to the village of Concarneau, and to drop him off and let him fend for himself; but as Marc's faded blue pickup truck wended the country roads of Brittany, towards Concarneau, the two men talked – Marc, more than David, as the latter was quite ill during the journey – and Marc took a liking to the young man. Consequently, he decided to have him over to his house for lunch.

“Make sure, once we get to my house, David, that you don’t mention anything about being a stowaway. It will scare my wife, y’hear? Not that she’ll understand a word of what you say. She doesn’t speak English. But if she finds out you were a stowaway, she’ll be scared to death. I’m going to tell her you are an American tourist I picked up hitch-hiking, okay?”

“Okay, no problem.” replied David. He had no intention of informing Marc that he was not a stowaway, but that he was rather a deportee. David could not imagine how this bit of information could do him any good – and, although Marc was a decent guy, David didn’t plan on knowing him that long. David’s goal at that time was not to make friends. His goal was to go to Paris and find a doctor, or a hospital, to cure him of his illness.

“You are as pale as a whale’s underbelly, my boy – and you stink like burning whale oil, too! Ha! I’m sorry to say that, but you *do* stink kid! ...And you have a lot of sweat all over your forehead. That sea voyage didn’t do you good, did it?”

“No, I have a fever and I’m in terrible pain,” replied David.

“Well, I’ve seen worse than you, that’s no doubt. ...Don’t worry, kid. You’ll be fine. And you don’t need a doctor. Just a few good meals. I saw men in worse shape than you survive a whole month at sea without a good meal or any help from doctors. You know, way back, we used to have a doctor on board when we went to sea – back when I was a sailor. But we stopped taking those doctors out with us because they were too expensive; and anyway, *they* were usually the ones who needed the doctoring! ...Never met a doctor built for the sea, that’s for sure! After three days they’d be getting sick from the rocking ship and spend the rest of the journey in their cozy private cabins, puking all over themselves. We never knew what to do with them, we weren’t doctors. We just let them sleep in their puke. After all, the captain was paying for their voyage, why should *he* clean up their filth? ...No, a doctor is a thinkin’ man – and a thinkin’ man is not meant for the sea. You have to have strong arms and a strong gut to go to sea. ...I say this because we stopped taking those worthless doctors out with us and everybody did fine. Even stowaways like you, who suffered the most, almost always

lived to see the next port – that is, unless they were found out by the captain and thrown overboard. Then the stowaway had no hope for recovery.”

While David picked at his beet salad, he felt lucky that it had been a man like Marc who found him stuffed in that crate. Although he wasn't a stowaway, he doubted whether he could have convinced one of the captain's men otherwise. If he'd been found by another dockworker, he thought for sure he'd have been thrown off the pier with shackles around his ankles. Yes, he considered himself very lucky to have met Marc, although he was ill at ease eating with him and his wife in their backyard.

David let his thoughts drift away from Marc and the uncomfortable stares of the old woman; and he let his thoughts drift away from his illness, which was all too unbearable when he thought about it. Instead, he thought of Paris – and all that might await him there. It was a city he knew nothing about but he was sure that it was the nearest place he would find a good doctor – and a doctor was what he needed most.

While David sat in between the two, picking at his lunch, Marc's wife noticed that David smelled pretty bad; and, although she still didn't know whether or not to have a good feeling about this 'American hitchhiker', she decided he'd probably be a fine young man once he put on some clean clothes. David chewed on a little piece of beet soaked in wine vinegar and looked at Marc's wife. She then looked away and said something in French to her husband, and the latter excused himself from the backyard table and disappeared into the house for a moment.

When Marc returned, he had in his hands a man's formal, white summer suit – a jacket and trousers, and a clean white shirt, to boot. He threw the suit into David's lap. “Here, kid. Try this on! It's clean and if it fits, you can have it. I only wore it once – to a wedding – and I'll never wear it again. Never again, that's for sure!”

David felt the fabric of the suit with his fingertips. He loved it. He hoped it would fit, but, being the taller of the two, he was sure the sleeves and the legs would be too short. He asked Marc if he could go

change into it. Marc happily pointed to the backdoor of the house and told him to go on inside and try it on. David then stood immediately and walked towards the house. At that moment, the face of Marc's wife took on a distressed, almost panicked, look and she leaned over and muttered something in her husband's ear. Marc nodded his head; then he stood, and followed David into the house.

"You can change in there." Marc said, pointing to the bathroom. David followed his instructions and while he changed in the bathroom, Marc stood by the door, waiting.

The clothes David had worn during his voyage at sea meant nothing to him and he intended to throw them out as soon as he had on this nice, white suit. Once he was naked, he sat on the toilet seat, going through the pockets of his old trousers. He had important things in those pockets and he needed to make sure they stayed with him. He pulled out of his back pocket a French passport issued to him by the consulate in America the day before his deportation. He recalled what a fever he had had while standing in line in that French consulate, under guard and wearing handcuffs. That was an ugly memory, which he wanted to forget.

Still seated on the toilet seat, David pulled out of his front pocket an envelope that was filled with banknotes. Thirteen-thousand dollars in American cash. The most money he had ever seen in his life. He counted and recounted the money in the envelope just for the pleasure of feeling it in his fingers and seeing that it was all there. Then he set the envelope on the back of the toilet, along with his French passport and his other important possession: a small journal with a green leather cover that he had bought months ago in Seattle to write poetry in. He had already filled thirty or forty pages with verse but there were a hundred or so blank pages left to fill.

He tossed his old clothes on the floor, forgetting one last possession that remained in his pockets; then he stood and urinated idly, musing to himself many things – all the while Marc waited outside the door. When he finished urinating, he tried flushing the toilet but failed to figure out how.

“Marc, how do I flush this toilet?” he yelled through the door.

“Pull the chain!” Marc yelled back.

He had never seen a toilet that had a hanging chain to flush it before. It was a strange toilet indeed. David realized then that there were going to be many strange things about this new country that he would discover. He was no longer in America and every event from then on, he realized, would have a new and peculiar essence to it.

David slipped into the white suit, buttoned the white shirt and put on the white jacket. He examined himself in the mirror. He had guessed right. The sleeves were too short and the cuffs of the trousers hovered several inches over the tops of his shoes. But he didn't care ... he liked the suit ... and the pockets all had buttons to secure their contents. So, after he put his passport in his breast pocket, and buttoned it; and put his money in his other breast pocket, and buttoned it; and his journal in his back pocket, and buttoned it; he felt that his three important belongings were very secure. He forgot about the fourth belonging that lay in the pocket of his old clothes on the floor. David looked again into the mirror. The happiness of having that new white suit took some of his illness away. The whiteness of the fabric took some of his paleness away, as well.

Marc, meanwhile, was sitting in his living room waiting for David, and when the latter came out, he said: “Lookin' sharp ... lookin' sharp, kid! Glad I never have to wear that thing again. Let's go back outside, the wife's probably worried.”

David carried his old bundle of clothes out to the backyard and asked Marc where he could toss them. Marc said that he would have his wife wash them and then he would give them to one of the new dockworkers who hadn't any suitable working clothes. He said that there were always a few men hired each month to work down on the piers who were coming directly from prison, and the clothes that David had would help them out a lot.

David threw the bundle of clothes on the lawn near the washbasin, and went back to sit down at the table. The new clothes raised his spirits and his appetite. He quickly ate up the last of his

potatoes and then asked Marc if he wouldn't mind giving him a ride to the train station.

"There is no train station in Concarneau, kid! There's one up in Quimper, which isn't so far, but why do you want to get on a train? You should stay in Concarneau. It's a beautiful town ... and I could probably get you a job carrying loads off the ships that come in. You could sleep in the bunks with the other dockworkers. ...Just don't tell none of them that you're a stowaway! ...Yeah, you could bunk with the other dockworkers ... sure, some of them are rough, but you'll roughen up soon enough! ... you may need your old clothes back...."

David thought of how what Marc was suggesting was the last thing he wanted to do. What little of Concarneau he saw, didn't appeal to him. Working on the piers didn't appeal to him. And what he needed more than anything was to go into the city and find a good doctor. He had never lived in a village. He had always lived in the city. And he thought that if he was forced to be in France, he might as well begin in Paris. He had thirteen-thousand dollars American in his pocket and certainly that was enough to get a first-class ride on a train, a thorough fix-up at the doctor's, and a decent enough apartment, which he planned on paying off for many months in advance, to keep him secure while he looked for a job.

"Thanks for the offer, Marc; you are really too kind. But the reason I was depor... I mean, the reason I stowawa...." he looked over at Marc's wife, who wasn't even listening; she was busy picking the skins of potatoes from her teeth, "...the reason I was *hitchhiking* was because I need to get to Paris where my mother is. She came to Paris on vacation and, unfortunately, suffered a stroke," he lied, "she's in a hospital there and it looks like she won't live too long, so I really need to get to Paris as soon as possible to see her." David bowed his head in feigned remorse after he finished speaking.

"I'm sorry, kid. That's sad news," said Marc with sincere regret in his voice. "I'll take you Quimper after lunch and you can catch a train to Paris. ...But come back out to Brittany to visit, sometime. Paris is alright but it's no paradise. Here you have the sea, and, the ... well, what else do you need? ...Maybe a woman like her." At that moment, Marc

stood up, walked around the table and kissed his white-haired wife on the mouth. She was very surprised and, since she hadn't understood what the two men were talking about, she thought the kiss must have been to make it up to her for making her the butt of some joke or another. She looked at her husband suspiciously and frowned.

The afternoon crickets started chirping and a large cloud of gnats hovered over the lunch table in the backyard belonging to Marc and his wife. The three had finished eating and Marc was checking the oil in his old truck out in the driveway, while David sat in the shade under a nearby tree pressing a cold washcloth to his head to bring his persistent fever down. Meanwhile Marc's wife cleared the dishes from the table in the backyard. She thought about the stranger who came to her house and wasn't able to speak French. She thought about the coming of summer. It was almost May. She loved the month of May. She then mused on how nice the weather would be that day. She could smell the afternoon beginning. She felt quite full from the heavy lunch and wondered how she'd spend the rest of her day. Then the cloud of gnats began to fly into her mouth and eyes; and while spitting and blinking her eyelids rapidly, she ran into the kitchen carrying the last of the dishes.

Concarneau doesn't strike the newcomer to Europe as being very European. There is a small section of town, called the *Closed City* that has narrow, cobbled streets and ancient structures. This *Ville-Close* is fortified by castle walls, which were built to protect the inhabitants from an English attack by sea. But the rest of the village looks as modern and modest as a middle-class coastal town in America. There are no impressive cathedrals, there are no grandiose, stone courtyards with ancient sculptures and fountains. The larger village of Quimper, however, has these ancient squares and gothic cathedrals that are so impressive to the American traveler new to Europe. In Quimper there is a train station. Its tracks run through Rennes – the capital of *Bretagne* – and on into Paris. David and Marc took that pale blue pickup from Concarneau up to Quimper, which took quite a while. Marc made sure David drank out of the truck's canteen every fifteen minutes so as to get

healthy. It must not be forgotten that only a few hours before, David was all cramped up in a wooden crate, suffering from a high fever and dehydration – among other ailments that we'll soon find out about. But all that horrible nonsense seemed like a distant memory to David as he traveled down the country road, with a canteen full of fresh water and the springtime sun pouring its warmth and color on the rolling hills that stretched on into the distance. He was no longer stuffed in a dark box in a dank cargo room. He now had freedom, and clean air and Marc's good company. The lunch out back and the drive through the country was David's first experiences of Europe, and he tried to pay close attention so he would always remember them.

There is some evidence that David had been on this continent before, as a small boy; yet, regardless, there is not even a small trace of remembrance of Europe in his brain, so this April day truly was a day of new experiences ... and it was probably because Quimper was so quaintly European and so very beautiful in David's eyes that he felt good once he arrived there with Marc in the pale blue pickup.

The two men walked up to the train station and Marc helped David buy the right ticket, and find the gate where the Paris train comes through. Marc never saw the large envelope full of cash that David had on him. Things might have gone differently in this story had he seen the money. Then again, perhaps it wouldn't have made any difference.

With still an hour and a half before the arrival of the train, Marc decided to wait with David. He was actually happy about the delay because this allowed him time to write down some important phrases in French for David to use on his journey. Marc liked the young man a lot. For a fleeting moment, during their lunch that day, he caught himself fantasizing that David was his son, or that he would become his son – as he and his wife had never had children. Marc felt silly then for having this thought and he chased it out of his head right away.

Marc paid for David's train ticket to Paris, although the latter tried to refuse the favor as convincingly as he could without actually telling Marc that he had thirteen-thousand dollars American on him. Still Marc managed to pay the fare and he said to him, "Kid, if you ever

change your mind about working on the piers, call me up. I'll send you a ticket back here right away!"

David felt ashamed for getting the free ticket while all that cash sat in his pocket, but he knew better than to pull out that envelope in the feverish state he was in. That envelope was the only thing that separated him from a bum on the streets. He couldn't chance losing it. He knew if he lost his money and couldn't afford to get to a doctor, and had to sleep on the streets, he wouldn't live another fortnight.

Then they saw the Paris train arrive in Quimper.

"You'll be alright kid. I've seen sicker than you, just remember. ...And I hope your mother gets better – I'm really sorry about that."

"Thanks for everything, Marc. Thank your wife too for me."

"Will do. And you have our address and everything. If you wanna come out and stay and work, we'd love to have you. Concarneau would love to have you. It's really pretty country out here. And the boat work treats you right. The ocean keeps you strong. You'll get some color in your cheeks."

"Thanks, Marc. I'll remember your offer." David said this with appreciation, but his words were feeble from illness. He shook hands with Marc and boarded the TGV train to Paris. He walked through the train to the back, found a couchette to sleep in, and dozed off in his new, clean white suit – second class.

"Nice kid, that American. I hope he comes back someday. Dock work would do him good." Marc said to himself as he walked back to his pickup truck to return to Concarneau. Driving home, he thought of how he had to work a long day the next day, but he was glad that it was still early afternoon, that it was sunny and warm, and he didn't have to clock-in again that day.

On his way back to his wife, Marc stopped off at a pub, by the piers, where he went sometimes after his shift to have an afternoon beer. He walked in and saw that Bertrand was working. This made him smile.

He liked Bertrand, and Bertrand always poured him a little extra beer when his glass was half finished.

Marc sat at a bar stool and tasted the cold beer. The sun was getting warm and, although it was only the end of April, the day seemed to have that hot, stillness of a summer day. The beer tasted very good to Marc. And while he was enjoying it, his boss, the captain, came in.

“I was looking for you this morning, Marc. ...Forget to pull the parcels off the ship today?”

“I thought it was all just pallets of sturgeon,” replied Marc.

“No, there were some important shipments on there that the workmen left behind. They were thinking that those shipments were to be left for you. ...Nobody unloaded them, so they went away with the ship.”

“Man, I’m really sorry.”

“You should be really sorry! ... by the way, was that you smoking up on that hill today?”

“I just had a smoke and ate my lunch. I looked around the ship and I didn’t see anything but fish crates, so I left to go eat lunch.”

“What was in the crate you took up there?”

“What crate, captain?”

“You left a dolly and a crate up on the hill. A crowbar too. ...Tell me, Marc, what was in that crate, and where did it go?”

“It wasn’t anything ... I mean, captain, I...”

“Marc, do you work tomorrow?”

“Yes, sir ... at six in the morning.”

“Come to see me at nine,” said the captain. And with that, the captain turned around and left the pub.

Marc didn’t sleep well that night. The next day, he went to see his boss at nine in the morning. After a while, he finally admitted to the captain that there was a stowaway in that crate found on the hill. He said that he had taken him up to the hill to let him out where no one would

see, and to get him far away from the piers so as not to cause problems for the ship captain. He truthfully explained the situation and said that he told the stowaway to go far away from the piers and never to mention the name of that boat, or any boat, to anyone.

After Marc confessed everything, the captain told him he would have to find another job. Marc had worked those piers near Concarneau for more years than any of the others, but his boss wasn't going to risk going to jail and losing his captain's license for anyone; and sneaking an immigrant into the country illegally was a sure way for all that to happen. Marc left the meeting with the captain in shock. It was the first time he had ever been fired from a job – and this job had been his life for so long.

A few weeks later, Marc found menial work guarding the piers at night up north in Brest. He didn't like Brest. He thought it was an ugly town. It rained too much up there. But he had a wife to feed. So he took the job.

The two rented out their house in Concarneau and found a smaller place up in Brest. Then, while driving the pale blue pickup north with the back full of furniture to move into their new place, a gasoline truck weaved out of its lane on the highway and forced Marc and his wife off the road. Marc suffered a minor neck injury, but his wife – that little white haired lady with a nose full of grey freckles – died instantly.

Marc's grief was profound and he couldn't bear to stay even one night in the new house in Brest. As he had no real friends in Brittany – his only real friend had been his wife – he decided to do what he promised himself years ago he would never do again... and that is to go back to sea as a commercial sailor.

The ocean was cruel and the men were crude and they were all drunks. But the sea was his solace. The land just reminded Marc of his poor wife, whom he loved immensely.

He never returned to land again. His last days were spent at sea, drinking and working the hard labor of a sailor. □

(End of chapter 2 / End of excerpt)

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