



"THE THREE MEN ROSE AGAINST THE SKY-LINE AND RACED AFTER THE HORSES"

## Captain Kidd of the Underground

By J. Olivier Curwood

Illustrated by W. Herbert Dunton



HERE were at least seven Lake Erie ports that might have claimed Captain Kidd as a citizen, for the reason that this unusual individual was a frequenter of them all, though he owned property in none. In these seven towns there were seven thousand or more people who could have pointed out Captain Kidd on sight, but it is doubtful if there were more than seven who could truthfully have said that they were personally acquainted with the man and his ship, especially the ship, and not one of these could have sworn as to Captain Kidd's method of making a livelihood. Some thought that he carried sand. Others were of the opinion that his ship was a tramp. And a few, a very few, winked in a peculiarly non-committal way when the subject was raised, as is the habit of old lakemen when in doubt. But the people of busy lake-ports are too deeply absorbed during the

months of navigation to prod into another man's business unless there are dollars and cents at the bottom of it, and as a result the skipper of the *Lauraline Spreckles*, abbreviated to *Laura Spreck* by her master and owner, was allowed to seek his ways in undisturbed peace.

This fact was properly appreciated by Captain Kidd, who frequently gave thanks for the same to the providence which guided his fortunes. On the other side of the lake, where in a bleak stretch of the Canadian shore terminated the famous underground railway which began in Peking, Hongkong, and Shanghai, Captain Kidd possessed a reputation which would have won him a life of considerable monotony, if Uncle Sam had known. This, too, was a fact properly digested by this cheerful adventurer. Meanwhile he continued to smuggle Chinamen and now and then a Chinese girl.

This afternoon Captain Kidd was in a more reflective mood than usual. Ostensibly he was taking up sand. The *Laura Spreck* lay three-quarters of a mile off a



*Drawn by W. Herbert Dunton*

"THERE CAME A FLASH OF STEEL, A SHARP REPORT, AND THE WHITE-FACED MAN  
CRUMPLED UP WITH THE VENOM OF LEAD IN HIS VITALS"



barren stretch of Ontario dunes and marshes, over which the day was fading away in a fiery sunset. Back of him the gray rib-line of Point Pelee trembled like a thread of desert sand in the haze that was shifting seaward from the marshes of Pigeon Bay. That rib-line, which reminded him of the slim white forefinger of a lady's hand, was indissolubly associated with the fortunes of Captain Kidd. Among its barren drifts he had added to his sins; in its loneliness he had piled up the hoard of gold of which no man knew but himself. To him it was the visible end of the underground. That mysterious chain of human mechanisms might begin almost anywhere outside the country of which he was a subject, but it ended there. From that point the yellow-skinned contraband came to him, and as he half dreamed now in watching its thin outline, he thought of the secrets that it held for him. From it he had taken Hop Lee, a cousin of Mock Duck, who had paid five thousand dollars to the head agent for his relative's importation. Hop Lee had taken up with his famous cousin's life in San Francisco, and long before the great fire he had become one of the most proficient murderers in his tong. Then there was honest "Joe" Tung, who now owned three laundries in Buffalo, and who annually sent him a present of fifty dollars because of prosperity and gratitude; and there were two score or more others of whom he had lost all account. Now and then there had been a girl, but he could only wonder where these had gone, and each time one of them came to him through the underground his rough heart ached with sympathy.

It was a girl he was waiting for now. For weeks Captain Kidd had been working up an interest in her. There were certain reasons why he had come to anticipate the time when he would see Ah Ho, as she was named to him in his instructions. In the first place, he was interested in her story. Ah Ho, a letter from the agent at Hongkong had told him, was of Canton parents. Her father was an official of some dignity in a small town, and Ah Ho, he stated at some length, was very beautiful, for which reason the underground charged a big price for her importation. A dozen years before, when her father needed money in order to achieve a certain ambition, the girl had been disposed of to

a wealthy and aged Chicago Chinaman named Tai Sing, and after giving her an opportunity to grow up Tai Sing was now claiming her. A copy of a cable-message from Hongkong stated that she had sailed on the *Star of the Orient*, and still later advice assured Captain Kidd that she had arrived safely in Vancouver. After that she had been passed like a precious parcel along the underground. The head agent in Montreal had reported that Ah Ho was in that city. The latest despatch read, "Embarked in regular channel, Friday, 6 p.m." This was Friday. It was 5:30 p.m. If all had gone well, a signal of Ah Ho's presence would be shown among the sand-dunes within the next thirty minutes. Arousing himself from his listless contemplation of the shore, Captain Kidd swung down among his men. His strong, thin face was now lit up with eager anticipation. He bared his large teeth in a cheerful smile as he nodded to Stetson, the graybeard engineer. Stetson grinned joyfully, and hurried off to his engines. Billy, the boy coal-passer, followed him with the enthusiasm of the adventurer under twenty. There were two men left: old Grimmsey, the wheelman, whose boast was that he could walk his ship in and out of the corners of Lake Erie blindfolded, and Watts, the mate.

"We'll have to pull in pretty close to see the signal, Watts," announced the captain. "I think it'll come from the edge of the marshes."

He went with Grimmsey into the wheelhouse, and the electric bell down in the engine-room tinkled his orders to Stetson. Over the bow of the *Laura Spreck* he watched Pelee's rib-line of sand as it broadened out under his advance. The sun had now reached the water-rim. In its last glow the shore burned for a few minutes more brilliantly than before, and the wind-swept tops of the sand-dunes reflected the light, as though each were capped with a million infinitesimal mirrors.

In this interval, when half of the bay was losing itself in the gloom of evening, a carriage toiled slowly up over the backbone of the point and for a moment stood motionless on its crest, silhouetted in black against the glow of the western sky. Captain Kidd leaned out eagerly. He strained his eyes for a signal, and fingered word down to Stetson to stop the engines. As



"HALF A DOZEN HORSEMEN TORE OVER THE SAND-RIDGE"

he looked, three men sprang from the carriage, and he caught the glint of rifle barrels in their hands. They threw themselves upon their faces, and sent a fusillade of shots over the sand-ridge. In another instant the carriage was tearing down to the beach, and while the captain of the smuggler still leaned over the edge of the wheel-house and stared, his face tense, his breath coming quickly, the three men rose against the sky-line and raced after the horses.

Captain Kidd turned for the space in which one might flip an eyelash. That lightning glance assured him that toward the open lake the way was clear. When he turned again to the tragedy ashore, the carriage had come down to the edge of the water. It had plunged in to the hubs, and as the frightened horses reared in the surf a boat shot out toward the fugitives from the reeds of the marsh. Then again the sky-line was broken, this time by a horseman. Two of the three riflemen were waiting for him on bended knees, and even before the reports of their rifles sounded in Captain Kidd's ears the pursuer lurched from his saddle and fell upon the sand, where he lay a motionless blot. Two

female figures jumped from the carriage into the water, and waded out to meet the approaching boat. Close after them came the armed fugitives, and barely had they scrambled over the side of the craft when half a dozen horsemen tore over the sand-ridge.

Captain Kidd heaved a deep sigh as he faced Grimmsey. The hardness had gone out of his face. "A close shave," he breathed. "A damned close shave, Grimm!"

Five minutes later the boat ran alongside, and Captain Kidd recognized the chief matron of the underground in her bow. He had met this woman many times, and when he carried female passengers she always accompanied him. She called up to him now from the gloom gathering under the starboard bow.

"You'll have to take us all, Captain Kidd," she cried.

"Certainly, Miss Moore," replied the captain. "Come aboard; all of you. I'll land you gentlemen a few miles down the shore. Of course you understand that under ordinary circumstances I never allow a man on my deck—unless he's a passenger."

"A Chinaman, he means," explained

the matron with emphasis. As she came over the side of the ship, she whispered low:

"They discovered our movements in Montreal, Captain. We didn't know it until the last moment, and then we thought we could beat them out. It will be surprising if we don't have a revenue cutter at our heels before long."

Somebody lifted up Ah Ho, and Captain Kidd leaned over to take her in his arms. He felt her warm breath against his rough cheek, as he hoisted her over the rail. He stared hard as he released her on deck, but a thin veil and the gloom of evening baffled his attempt to see her face. He was conscious that she had been like a feather in his arms, and that something had thrilled him for a moment as he held her. He had thought much about Ah Ho. As she slipped away beside the matron, he did not doubt but that she was beautiful, as the Hongkong agent had said. But the Hongkong agent was a half-breed, and spelled beauty in a different language from his. Anyway, he wanted to see Ah Ho.

"Watts, see 'em to the private room," he said to the mate, who stood near.

The matron laughed back shrilly from the gathering shadows amidships. "He needn't mind," she called; "I know the way."

The men from the boat had scrambled aboard. One of them introduced himself as the new Montreal subagent, and then presented his comrades.

Captain Kidd pointed to the rifles which they carried. "You may have to use them before morning," he suggested.

After a little he instructed Watts as to the course to be pursued by the *Laura Spreck*, and retired to his cabin. The matron had preceded him and sat at his table coolly sorting a number of papers. As he entered, she looked up and nodded smilingly. Over the captain's shoulder she caught a glimpse of the subagent's boyish face peering in inquiringly, and called out for him to enter.

"I want you to talk with Wilson, Captain," she begged. "Wilson and I are great chums, and I've promised that some day we'd tell him things about the lakes. He's almost a Chinaman. He's lived in Hongkong ever since he was so high." She measured to her knee.

With his big white teeth shining in the glow of the cabin-lamp Captain Kidd held

out a frank hand. "I'm going there some day, Mr. Wilson," he said. "I've always had a hankering to see both ends of the workings."

The woman shot the subagent a lightning glance from behind the captain's back. "Captain Kidd knows more about the underground on this side than any other man," she said sweetly. "There was McVeigh—but he's dead." Her eyes scintillated at the subagent. Suddenly she gave an hysterical little laugh, and when the captain turned in her direction her face was buried in her arms. "Ugh-h-h-h! That back there has shattered my nerves!" she moaned. When she looked up, her face was flushed instead of pale. "We had to kill a man—perhaps two," she said. "You must talk to me, Captain, or I'll go into hysterics. Tell me something, anything. Wilson wants to hear, too."

"Hear what?" grinned the captain.

"About the underground, of course!" blurted the subagent.

Captain Kidd leaned toward him. The smile left his face. His eyes shone harshly. "I never talk about that," he said. There was warning in his voice. He would have said more, but his ears caught the cry of a man outside, a cry which he recognized, and the meaning of which he read in the subagent's flinching eyes and pale cheeks. He wheeled upon the woman, and met her smiling at him over a pistol barrel.

"What do you mean——" he began.

"It means," the woman interrupted him, "—it means that I've grown tired of it all, Captain Kidd; that I've turned state's evidence to save myself; that——"

Captain Kidd turned his head slowly. The "subagent" had him covered from behind.

"It means," continued the woman, "that the fight on shore was a ruse; that the men out there are secret-service agents; that you're going to be extradited; and that your crew——"

"And Ah Ho?" he interrupted. He faced the woman, gripping the edges of the table fiercely. "What about Ah Ho?"

"Oh, she's all right," laughed the matron nervously. "She'll make splendid evidence, Captain. She thinks we're all her friends, poor thing, and that——"

The woman stopped. Captain Kidd had stretched out his arms to her, his face filled with the agony of his helplessness.



"Nell!" he cried, his voice pleading. "Nell, I didn't expect it of you! Oh, God, how I've loved you, Nell, and how I've wanted to tell you—a dozen times—a hundred times—but I've waited—waited—" In his despair he seemed to stagger as he approached her. The woman rose. She dropped her pistol upon the table, and her breath came in hurried gasps. "Nell! Nell! don't say you've turned traitor to me!" he pleaded. "Kill me, Nell, kill me—kill me—but don't—say—that!" He came nearer, until his hands touched the woman. Then, in an instant, she was in his arms. It was as if a vise of steel was crushing the life from her body. Over her shoulder Captain Kidd's face shone triumphantly at the secret-service man. The woman was a shield. For a moment he groped under his coat with one free hand. Then there came a flash of steel, a sharp report, and the white-faced man in front crumpled up with the venom of lead in his vitals.

"Love you!" hissed the captain in the woman's unhearing ears. "Love you, you she-fiend! I knew you would do this some day. I guessed it was coming!" His fingers gripped her throat for a moment; then he flung her insensible form to the floor, as a heavy knock sounded from without. Captain Kidd moved like a cat, silently, swiftly. In his day-dreams he had wondered if something like this would not happen, and long ago he had prepared for it. Before the knock was repeated he had snatched up a rug, disclosing a trap-door. In a moment the black exit lay open before him. He could hear men straining at the door, and there was an unpleasant smile in his eyes and something dazzlingly dangerous in the gleam of his strong teeth, as he paused for an instant, half crouched for the retreat. Hesitatingly he aimed at the middle panel of the door and fired twice. After that he slipped quickly through the hole into a passageway, and locked the trap-door behind him.

"Now, Chinkey," he spoke softly, "it's for you." He made his way through the passage, his right shoulder brushing against the inner timbers of the ship's hull, his left against the bulkhead. He was now walking with the vessel's deck just above his head, and by the steps he had taken he knew when he had reached the secret chamber containing Ah Ho. After a little

he found a bolt. This he drew back noiselessly. Imperceptibly at first he pushed in a door. A gleam of light caught his eye, and he stopped to listen. There was absolute silence. A twentieth of an inch, a tenth, a half, and then an inch, the aperture grew. He saw one wall of the room, the door, and finally Ah Ho. The girl was crouching in a listening attitude, her face turned toward the hold of the ship. Captain Kidd knew that she had heard the shots.

"Chinkey," he called in a low voice. "Chinkey!"

At the sound of his voice the girl's white face turned straight toward him. She uttered no sound, but terror was rooted in her big dark eyes. Those eyes puzzled Captain Kidd. He could not see her face distinctly, but the eyes fascinated him. He could not remember having seen a Chinese girl with eyes like Ah Ho's.

"Don't you be afraid, Chinkey," he said soothingly, thrusting his head and shoulders out into the room. "They think they've got us, but they ain't!" He pulled himself through, and sprang to the door. As he shot the bolt which secured it from the inside, he heard a distant crash. "That's the cabin-door, Chinkey," he cried. He ran to Ah Ho, and picked her up in his strong arms as if she had been a child. "We'll fool 'em yet, Chinkey, an' th' won't be nobody left to tell how we did it!"

As he carried her under the swinging lamp, Ah Ho's veil fell aside, and Captain Kidd caught a glimpse of her face. "The deuce, Chinkey! You are pretty, s'elp me, you are!" he exclaimed. He thrust her through the trap, and followed after. "It's darker'n seven devils, ain't it?" he asked. "Where's your hand, Chinkey?" He squeezed past her and groped under the cape of the long coat which the agents of the underground had furnished her, until her little trembling fingers lay gripped in his big palm; then he gently pulled the girl after him.

Back of him he heard voices echoing in the passageway. "They've found the trap!" he whispered. "God, what a chance to even up!" For a moment his blood burned with a desire to turn and, in the narrow passage, wreak vengeance upon those who had overcome him by treachery. He leveled his revolver over Ah Ho's head, and held it there, with

Ah Ho trembling close up against him, until he saw a streak of light at the other end.

"They're coming, Chinkey," he breathed. "Now we've got to hustle!"

He continued down the passage until his outstretched hand touched a wall. Beyond this he could hear the throbbing of the ship's engines. For a moment he listened to it, and for the sound of voices behind. "They think I'm layin' for 'em in the passage," he whispered joyfully. "They don't dare follow us, Chinkey!" He dropped Ah Ho's hand, and ran his fingers over the wall until they found a lock. Slowly he drew the bolt. Then with a sudden thrust of his shoulder he burst open the door, and his tense face stared out over his pistol barrel into the glare of the engine-room. Hopefully his eyes sought for Stetson and Billy. Both were gone, and in Stetson's place he saw one of the men who had come with the matron. There was promise of deadly accuracy in Captain Kidd's aim, and the revenue man threw up his arms without delay. The smuggler grinned approvingly as he came out, with Ah Ho close behind.

"Guess you'd better git out," he invited. "That's the best way." He nodded toward the passage. There was a dangerous glitter in the eyes behind the gun, and the officer obeyed. "Tell your friends I'm down here waitin' for 'em," said Captain Kidd as he slammed the door. In an instant he had whirled upon Ah Ho. "Quick—this way!" he cried. He caught her almost roughly, and half dragged her to a partly open door aft of the engines, through which he thrust her ahead of him. The girl stumbled and fell over a pile of litter, but her companion seemed not to have noticed the mishap. Ah Ho could hear him tugging at a heavy object, and soon she saw him roll something big and round out through the door. He came back like a shadow, and a second and a third object were rolled after the first. Then there came the crashing of an ax, the rattle of shattered glass, and a moment later utter darkness, as Captain Kidd sprang back and closed the door.

"It's done, Chinkey!" he cried, groping for her. "It's done!"

Ah Ho stretched up her hands, and Captain Kidd gathered her close in his

arms. "They've got all that's coming to 'em, now, Chinkey!" he continued excitedly. "Smell it, girl! D' ye smell it?" He sniffed the air, already impregnated with a biting, unpleasant odor. "They're carb'ys of acid, Chinkey! God, I figgered this was comin' some day!" He left her standing, and with the butt of his revolver hammered upon metal in the side of the hull. Soon he had driven back a number of hooks, and now swung open a port as large as one of the traps through which they had escaped.

"See the stars out there, Chinkey?" he whispered, making room for Ah Ho at his side. "Well, you 'n me'll soon be as free——"

At the head of the engine-room he could hear the excited shouts of men. But they came no nearer. Even Ah Ho knew why. Through the cracks of the cubby-room door the acid fumes were pouring stronger each moment. The girl coughed, and clutched Captain Kidd's arm. The light from outside shone upon her upturned face, and there the man read something of what was passing in her soul. He realized for the first time that this was all a great mystery to her, and that she could only guess at the significance of the shots ashore, the hurried flight to the vessel, and his actions now. But she trusted him. He could see that in her eyes. Her mouth was round and red, like a rose, Captain Kidd thought, even in that moment, and he saw it tremble as he looked down into her face.

"Chinkey, d'ye know, I'm beginning to have a deuced chummy feeling for you," he said. "You're a game little girl, if you are a Chink; and I swear I'll feel a bit rummy when I deliver you to that yellow-skinned old cuss who's buying you over there!" He stuck his head out of the port and looked up. The aft boat was swinging low in her davits. By hoisting himself partly through the opening, Captain Kidd reached an iron ring under the rail of the ship, and drew himself cautiously out until his free hand gripped the falls. For a few moments he listened, almost ceasing to breathe. Amidships he heard the crash of an ax and voices that came to him indistinctly. But the stern of the smuggler seemed deserted. Unlooping the falls, he held the ropes taut while he retreated through the port. Then, with arms and

shoulders out, he lowered the boat until it swung within a foot of the water.

"Chinkey!" he whispered.

He slipped the ropes under the swing of the port-door, and lifted Ah Ho through. As her feet touched the boat, he released his hold and climbed out himself. He half hung in the port-hole, listening for the explosion which he knew would come soon, until the fumes of the acid drove him down. Crouching beside Ah Ho, he loosed the falls, and the small boat plunged into the tumultuous trail of the ship, which dragged out behind like a molten river tossing in the face of the moon. A shout of triumph half rose in the throat of Captain Kidd, but when his lips parted it came only in a throttled, inarticulate cry. He leaned out until the crests of the waves swept their spray into his eyes. His lean, white face was alight with a passion as hard as the glint of the pistol barrel which reached out toward the *Laura Spreck*. The ship was dissolving into a shadow, and before it disappeared Captain Kidd longed to let those upon it know that he had beaten them. He thought of the woman who had betrayed him, and the desire became almost overwhelming. For a moment he hesitated, and in that moment he fancied he heard a rumbling from where the lights were slipping away into the gloom of the night. When he was sure of it, he sprang up tall and gaunt between Ah Ho and the moon, and tossed his long arms over his head with a far-reaching cry of joy. Then he sat down, and Ah Ho crept to him and remained unnoticed for a time, crumpled in a little trembling heap at his feet. When the man turned from his lost ship, she was staring straight up at him. "Didn't you hear it, Chinkey?" he asked. He leaned over and tilted the girl's face up by placing his forefinger under her chin, much as if she had been a child. "Didn't you hear it, Chinkey? That was the acid gettin' next to the boiler fires! You'll soon see it. Look!" He stretched out an arm, and Ah Ho drew herself up beside his knee to get the direction. "Mebby you've never seen anything like what's going to happen," he spoke reassuringly, "but don't get scared. They'll get off all right, because there's two rafts and another boat on board." An understanding came to her that something was going to happen somewhere out in the gloom

that shut out the vastness of the lake, and she watched for it with the tragic earnestness of the man.

"It's coming—soon!" whispered the man. His words were tremulous with excitement. "It's coming, Chinkey."

A mile away a tiny red streak seemed to split the blackness. Ah Ho felt him twitch as though he had been stung. She turned her face to him instinctively, and when she looked back the red streak had grown into a lurid glare with twisting flashes of flame shooting skyward. And as those flames grew higher and higher and the glare spread until half the lake seemed lit up by it, she snuggled up close to Captain Kidd in her wonderment and terror, and the captain, opening both arms, held her so close that when all was over and only a dull glow lasted in the distance, Ah Ho was almost breathless from the embrace.

"She's gone, Chinkey," he said. For many minutes he remained silent, until even the glow was out of the sky; then he set Ah Ho down in the bottom of the boat and leaned over until his face was very near her own. "I'm going, too, Chinkey," he continued. "I've got to. Everybody'll know who Captain Kidd is now, 'n' there's fifty years o' bars waiting for me if I go back there!" He swept an arm toward the American shore. "I'll miss the old ship like the devil, but I don't know but I'll miss you more, Chinkey."

Suddenly he reached out and took Ah Ho's face in both of his hands. "Listen, Chinkey!" he cried. "In the sand over there on the point I've buried all I ever made—and it's a plenty. The sand was safer'n banks, mind you, seeing as I was Cap'n Kidd, and I'm going for it—now! And when I get it I'm going to take you to a place away off there—so far up that it's cold most all the year round, and then—and then, Chinkey—"

He drew the girl's face so close to his own that his lips touched it. "And then I'm going to teach you American, 'n' you're going to teach me Chink, an' between us I'm going to find out darned soon how bad you hate that yellow-hided cuss who bought you. An' I reckon, Chinkey, that I've got enough to pay your family's debt."

With a cheery heigh-ho, Captain Kidd unlocked the boat's oars, turned his broad back upon Ah Ho, and struck out for the sand-dunes of Point Pelee.