

# My Girl

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I jumped onto the fleet landing, jostled my way through a horde of happy, swearing sailors and made my way to a gate that meant freedom after thirteen months of navy routine. I paused momentarily at the gate to determine which good old American street I should follow. With no objective in mind, other than to absorb some clean U. S. air, I chose a street which ascended to a high bluff overlooking San Francisco Bay.

Puffing heartily at the half way mark, I sat down on a pillow of grass to rest. When I again breathed normally, I realized that I was completely alone on this hill. The other fellows, eager to quaff some state side beer, were taking the course of least resistance to the heart of San Francisco. The scene that lay before me was certainly food for thought; and my mind, unconditioned by a life in which thinking was done for me, leapt hungrily upon such a delicacy. Below lay the black greasy bay spotted with hundreds of ships. The grey evening sky made each ship seem life-like. The slow rolling water of the bay gave each enough motion to transform it from a ship

into a fat, withered, old woman settling down in an overstuffed chair for a nap.

My eyes roved the blackened water and settled on a ship that was darker and uglier than all the rest. Rust had pock-marked her awkward hull and had left a sickening clay-colored cloak about her water line. In my mind I smelled the pungent odor of the salty canvas lying on her deck and the not unpleasant scent of pitch calking that lingers after sundown. I heard her straining seams moaning in answer to the pounding sea and the screaming wind. I heard the clank and thud of chain, and the scraping of tired feet on her worn deck. A curse was heard, and the songs of the *Okies* drifted up and down her dingy passageways — but all this was fantasy, for in reality this ship was inert. Her reason for living had deserted her; her pulse was faint, and a key had locked her mind. She was resting now after thirteen months of struggle. She was a queen, a real queen clad in the filthy garb of a pauper. She was my girl.