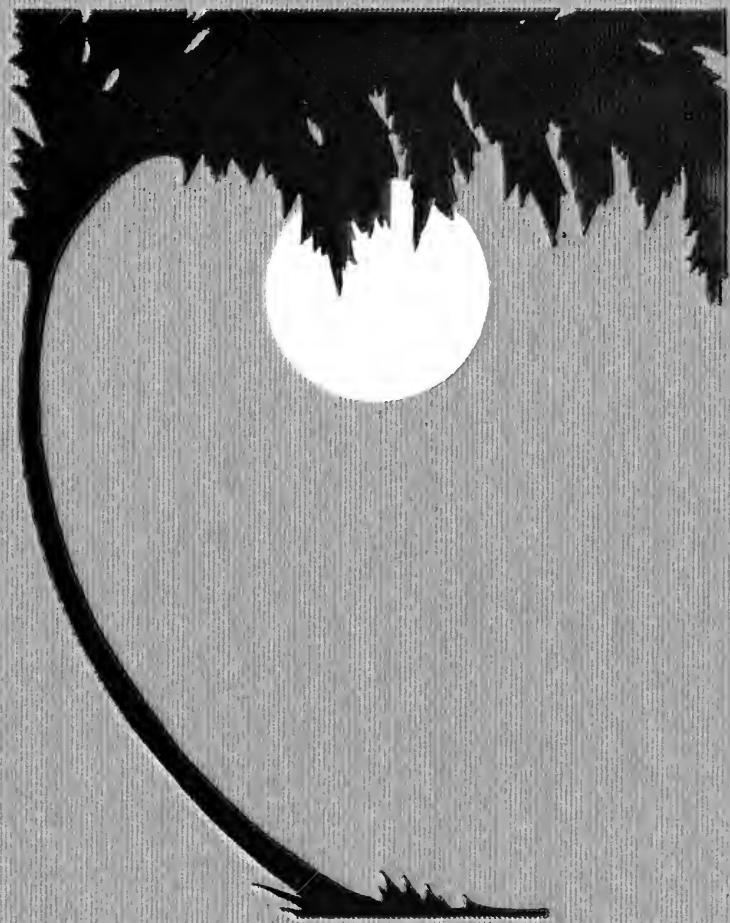


THE ISLE OF SEVEN MOONS



ROBERT GORDON ANDERSON

P R E

Dead Man's Channel
THE TWIN HORNS

Rainbow Bay

Coral Cove

BEN'S HUT

CAVE O'NIGHT

ARTHUR SPRING

CATHEDRAL WOODS
BRIDAL VEIL FALLS
I. A. A. BRIDGE

Gorge River

GREAT CAVE

CONE MOUNTAIN

TUNNEL

OLD HOUSE

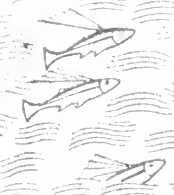
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MACA'S GLEN

Lone Palm Point

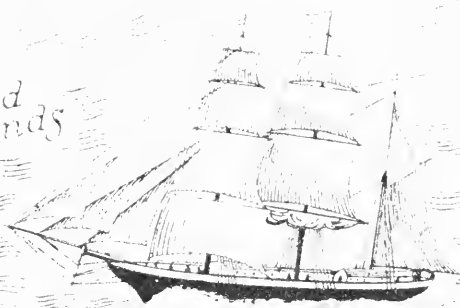
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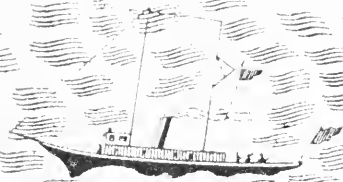


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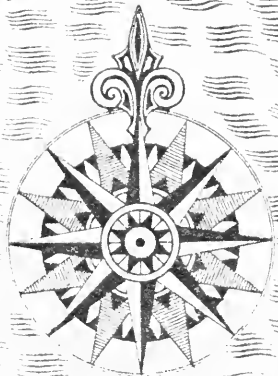
Leeward
Islands



Plover Bay



E A N
S E A



SCALE OF MILES



By Robert Gordon Anderson

The Isle of Seven Moons

Not Taps but Reveille

The Little Chap

Leader of Men

For Children

Seven O'Clock Stories

THE ISLE OF SEVEN MOONS

A ROMANCE OF
UNCHARTED SEAS AND UNTRODDEN SHORES

BY

ROBERT GORDON ANDERSON

AUTHOR OF
“NOT TAPS BUT REVEILLE,” “LEADER OF MEN”

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1922

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by
Robert Gordon Anderson

—
Made in the United States of America



To

MARION ANDERSON

*Good sailor in fair weather and foul, in
shallow waters and deep. May
winds and tides and stars
befriend you through
the Long Voyage.*

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The Isle of Seven Moons

The Isle of Seven Moons

CHAPTER I

THE PORT

THE island was there, yet it has gone. The seas have been scoured to every point of the compass by the scientifically or morbidly curious, by those lustful of blood or gold, yet no keel has sailed between its Twin Horns under the Seven Moons since that memorable year. One would swear that the very seas which the island jeweled were uncharted. Real enough, however, they were to the voyagers in that mad venture, for, after all, there is nothing quite so astounding and bewildering, nothing so romantic or so heavily veiled in illusion, as stark, naked Truth.

Reverse your camera, Time; flash back over the years; unreel your myriad little pictures on the silver screen; turn your long finger of light upon the protagonists—no, not that crazy New York crowd—not yet—but on those simpler folk who from childhood curled their fingers in the manes of the wild seahorses, who knew what it meant to sail out into the white shroud of the sea.

They are vanishing fast, these types, like the lone horsemen from the plains of the West, but they were more than

types—vital enough, God knows. In 1910 the last of the riders of the watery plains were still faring forth from Salthaven, but far more had gone down under the white hoofs of their own steeds, or else were drawn up on the beach like battered hulks, useful at best for mere rowboat voyages between house and wharf, or the post-office on Preble Square, their cargoes,—a weekly newspaper, a spool of thread. However, for a last port there could have been no more peaceful, no lovelier spot than Salthaven.

To the North, the superb lines of the Lighthouse upspring into the blue; under it, Challenge Rock shatters the league-long, rolling green walls into an eternal snowfall. The landscape to the West, undulating too, back from the rocky shore in sandy billows, is covered with fish-rod-jointed "mare's-tail," and, inland, clumps of cedar, feathery pine, and silver birch, and here and there a solitary hunchback of a house, white and gray against the silver and green. To the South stretches a narrow tongue of land, buff and very barren, and between the two capes, the crescent shoreline and the village,—roofs and chimneys, masts and ropes, a delightful jumble of dark lines, arcs, and angles against the gold and blue of a summer sky.

But the great half of the picture always to the East—tumbling, tossing, wallowing, shambling, raging, sleeping, thundering, whispering; blue or gray or green, all gold or black infinitely lipped with white—the vast, multitudinously-mooded chameleon of an ocean.

Just a mile and a half from the foot of Challenge Rock, the visitor, skirting the crescent of the smoother shore-line,

encounters the first of the weather-steeped shacks, which increase in number as they improve in appearance until, by the deeper part of the harbour, Salthaven comprises a fair number of cottages, clambering up the gently-sloping hill to the more pretentious homes at the top, perhaps eighty feet above the roadstead.

In the narrow streets at the foot of the hill, a few ancient buildings, ship-chandleries, storehouses, and sail-lofts, cluster around the wharves, huddling together like old cronies in the sun. But the thick forest of masts has been felled, leaving only the humbler second growth,—the naked top-masts and less intricate cordage of schooners, plying between the port and the Banks or engaged in the coastwise lumber trade.

Still, though a little out at elbow here, the town is not at all forlorn. Many of its respected citizens are retired skippers and shipowners, rich in health and salty vernacular, with pensions and incomes sufficient for all necessities and even those luxuries which the good folk of the place deem Christian. But the younger men—that is the more ambitious of them—one by one are drifting away, some to ships that clear from larger ports, others, detouring from the straight line of their inheritance, to Boston or Providence, becoming mere genuflecting shoe-clerks, or automobile-mechanics forever lying prone under graceless iron hulks instead of walking good decks manwise, with their hands on the tiller and their eyes on the stars.

At about four bells, or two o'clock of June sixth, a group of ancient fishermen, gnarled like apple-trees, had

caught a glimpse of the old glory that sometimes lingered around the port when the last of the "square-riggers" came home. That morning, the *North Star* had stalked into the harbour like a white ghost of the old days. They were alternately watching her "standing to" out in the harbour, and a queer-hatted fellow who was sitting before a tripod, making odd passes with a brush and meticulous pats with his thumb—incomprehensible way of making a living.

"Chunks of atmosphere, gobs of it," he murmured, raising his eyes from the bedaubed lily-pad board to the stertorous little tug, pushing and shoving and boosting the tall bark between the wharves. "Good Lord! if I could only get that smell of brine and bilge-water, the swish o' that cutwater, rattle o' block and tackle, shuffle o' feet, creak o' winch, and the crunch of her sides against the straining piles—it all ought to go in—not a discord, just close-shaved harmony, like Rachmaninoff—but you can't put it down in colour.

"'A thing of beauty'," he hummed, then outlined something rapidly on the canvas, not the tall beauty of trim spars but another in the line of his vision—seated on an upturned cask. "H'm! good line there," and he sketched in the middy, navy blue, and the skirt—even in the breeze it billowed modestly. "Didn't believe they ever cut 'em that way—good lines under it, too,—ankles, like the wrists, a bit sharply-boned but all right—thoroughbred, in fact—and a sapling figure" (she had risen from the cask as the snorting tug backed water) "but strong, perfect co-ordination. Can't get that wave in the black thatch, though—sort of a sea marcel."

The hawser thumped on the wharf; the gangplank slid to within a yard of the unconscious model. She had gauged it perfectly. Down they came, captain and mate, one sixty, the other, say twenty-four, both well-muscled, the younger without the seasoning.

"The old, old story of the sea, trite, commonplace, and yet not so commonplace, after all," sentimentalized the queer-hatted one. "The women waiting for 'their men,' but oh Lord!"—and he busily plied his crumbly eraser again.

"I've turned that brow into a regular movie Madonna's—Madonna's suggested, but, Man, put in the *common sense!* The nose, don't snub it—threatens to turn up but—for Heaven's sake! what does it do?—just—doesn't. And those features to which I've given a detestable movie cuteness—now she's three-quarters, I can see it—escape the 'diminutive'—by a fraction—chin, too, the 'fragile.'

"Now, steady there, Little Lady, ple-a-ase—I *must* get those lines—those fine, faintly-twitching, little lines, around your black eyes, and so delicately traced from the base of your nose. They mean a lot, and they crinkle like tiny ripples in a pond as you shiver yourself with excitement—like a silver birch in the breeze."

He drew back, surveyed the girl near the gangpank, the result on the canvas, then swore in disgust.

"I can mix paints—but not *that* mixture—and, top to toe, it's knit into the line,—delicacy and strength, same as the birch, the racehorse, that bird out there."

Almost "out of drawing," too, seemed that possessive, "their men." Father, uncle, godfather, the old one perhaps,

but the boy? The painter caught it all,—the full cordiality for the captain, then the half-turn, the flicker of a glance at his companion, the shy constraint, the convulsive handclasp, and the sudden release of it.

“Hello, Ben!” and “Hello, Sally,” that was all that was left of the greetings, so carefully conned-over for many nights, on the quarter-deck under the stars, and in the little white house up the hill.

The older man was evidently observant of more signs than those of the weather, for, after a few inquiries, and two or three playful tweaks of her ear, quite “in character” with the captain-and-godfather rôle, correctly allotted him by the sentimental stranger, he said something about “supper, later at the house,” and “tell your father to stow away that temper of his, and close down the hatches,” then he walked briskly up the gangplank.

With the waning sun, the queer-hatted one folded up his tripod and kit, and walked off the pier—landward of course,—and quite out of Sally Fell’s life. She never saw him or his picture, which didn’t matter much, either, for, though it has been shown a number of times at exhibitions, it was an ideal, lukewarm sort of thing, therefore not Sally at all.

They were gone before him, the boy and girl, past the dingy warehouses, up Water Street, and Jeliffe, and Far-ragut, to Preble Square, where the silent soldier stood at his post, his rifle over his arm, as it had lain ever since the famous Brigadier Bartlett had taken the flag from his visored cap, over fifty years ago.

They zigzagged slowly over the climbing pavements, at a

pace that finally slackened to a snail's, although she was sure she could bear the impatient "tamp, tamp, tamp," of an old man's cane on a porch, two turns to the right and three to the left up the hill.

She was shy, he inarticulate. But she did not resent his muteness, as she turned and measured him fondly.

No, six months hadn't changed him—just the same old Ben, hands fumbling at hips for pockets that never were there. But those broad powerful hands were very deft at furling sails and repairing winches. And those blue eyes which lighted his rather heavy features, even saving for them a sort of distinction, though they fell before hers, could hold a mutinous crew. Oh, "Captain Harve" had told her, called him "a man!"

Suddenly they both laughed—over nothing at all—but quite as suddenly hers trailed away.

"Tamp, tamp, tamp!" That cane was forever pricking the bubble of her happiness.

"Tamp, tamp, tamp, tamp!" It formed the heavy motif of her life, full time and double forty.

She slackened the pace still more, at the same time conversationally "going about," to get away as far as possible from that motif.

"You haven't told me the latest, Ben."

"Latest what?"

"Oh the most wonderful thing you saw on the voyage. You *always* tell me, you know."

"Well," he thought for a moment. "Oh, yes,—a vanishing island."

"An island that *vanishes!*"

"Yes, now it's here—hills and trees and rainbow bays—and then all-of-a-sudden it drops out of sight."

"Over the edge of the world?"

"I suppose."

"But you don't believe that?"

"Not exactly."

"And you haven't seen it?"

"Not exactly."

"Now you're jollying me."

"No, honest, Sally, I've met a lot of men you wouldn't call fools who swore they'd seen it."

"It's too spooky to be true."

"Of course."

"But you told me men you believed *swore* they'd *seen* it!"

"So they did, but I wouldn't worry about it. It's nice enough here."

"But it's more beautiful there, isn't it?"

"Where? In those vanishing islands? I haven't seen them."

"But the ones you *have*."

"Yes, it's beautiful enough, but it suits me here."

But Sally, though complimented, was straining at her anchor.

"*Tell* me about it."

"Well it's warm, and the people are dirty, and there isn't much plumbing——"

"That isn't the way you told it before."

"Well, how did I begin?"

"It's prettier than any play or Heaven——"

"Yes——"

"And there are royal palms——"

"Yes——"

"And wonderful shells and—oh, Ben, don't be mean, please."

"And sands as pink as coral," he started flood-tide to appease her, "and tangled forests full of birds that squawk horribly yet have the most scrumptious feathers—classier colours than any of the summer boarders sport. And the ocean is deep but clear as a spring, and in it are fish so queer they look like little jokes of God."

"That's it, Ben, the way you used to tell it! But does it seem real? Isn't it all like a dream?"

He thought a moment, his eyes many leagues south. But they had taken her with him, the black, star-pointers for the blue, the small hand resting in the big as on a trusty tiller.

"It does seem too pretty to be real, but it's real enough—the storms are anyway, and the fevers. When you go there, you're in another world as beautiful as Heaven. You come back home, and it seems far away—then you'd swear it was all a dream. You see it's pretty here but—like life." They had turned and were gazing down the hill over the sloping roofs which descended, each like the step in a staircase, to the sea.

"Look at the Light, now, and the harbour. You can put your finger on everything—pick it all out like a geometry problem. Down there it's just as clear, but it's kind of—," he groped for the word, "vague—so rich with the perfumes,

and flowers, and air like opium—and a feeling like there was years and years all a-callin' to you that it's no use a-worryin'—or a-hurryin'."

"They say men forget very easily, there."

"Without much trouble," he answered.

"Did *you*?"

"*Me*? No! It's the drifters, the derelicts, not fellows with anchors."

All the allure suddenly came back for Sally, and she exclaimed, "How I'd like to go!"

"Tamp, tamp," again——

"But I never can," she despairingly finished.

"Stranger things have happened."

"Than that? No, Ben."

"You see—*someday* I'll take you."

She went a little vivid at this, but the inarticulate boy had come back.

It was time, for they were at the Fell gate, and Captain Bluster was hard by.

CHAPTER II

“FAIRWINDS” AND “BLUSTER”

As trim and as trig as a homeward-bound ship—for then, as all sailors will tell you, above the water-line at least, they are cleanest—was the Fell place. Clapboards, cobbles, and conch-shells around the walks and flower-beds, were glistening white; so also the fence and the trunks of the trees. For colour-relief there were green shutters; the moss-grey of a pleasantly-sloping roof; the maroon of hollyhocks and marigold yellow against the walls; and, over towards the orchard, an old skiff, green-painted, with a cargo of old-fashioned flowers, foaming in myriad hues over oarlocks and gunwales.

Captain Fell, or “Ole Cap’n Bluster,” to use the villagers’ soubriquet, was seated—or rather “set”—on the porch. Sighting his daughter’s convoy, he tossed “The Salthaven Log, Founded in 1809,” in the corner, and puffed down the path like an ineffectual gale upon a ship cleared for rough weather.

“Good-day, sir”—it was a dismissal, not a greeting. The white hair bristled under the slightly-askew visored cap; the Adam’s apple swelled like a turkey-cock’s; his choleric face purpled; the grey whiskers stood out in the blast of his

wrath like two sails wing-and-wing; and the cane and square-toed shoes scrunched the gravel ominously.

As he bore down upon them, nautical similes fairly oozed from his paunchy blue figure, like pitch and oakum from the blistering seams of a ship in the tropics.

"I told you to keep clear o' my place, and here you are no sooner'n you reach port, alongside o' my gate," he boomed at Ben, "you sheer off . . ." The bombardment died in a spluttered chortle.

"But, Captain Fell. I——"

"Stow your gab, sir!"

The girl's hand was pleadingly laid on her father's. He wasn't an awesome or impressive personage to her, just an unreasonable old man, a spoiled old man. She was angry, but of late a new note—apoplectic, threatening—had crept into that full roaring boom of his—and sometimes, what was more touching, a quaver.

"Father, Ben's my oldest friend and——"

"Belay that, daughter, I'm skipper o' this ship, and on my own quarter-deck." And he drew her within the gate, closing it with a bang over-pettish for so dignified an officer, but a hint sufficiently explicit for Ben. He laughed disgustedly and turned towards the street as Sally marched, her shoulders up in what would have seemed mock obedience to any but the Captain's eyes. The old man planted his feet sturdily enough now, and the quaver wasn't at all apparent. The doctor had said that one of these fits might carry him off. Sally was beginning to doubt that doctor—there had been so many.

Over her shoulders the boy caught a glimpse of the black eyes. They signalled something. From old custom he could read that signal, and answered in code.

Half way up the cathedral aisle into which the nobly groined elms transformed the street, he met Captain Brent, on his way to supper—at Sally’s.

“Why so down in the mouth, Mr. Boltwood?” This formality of the handle, off-ship, was suspicious.

“He’s turned me down again,” the boy muttered—in love and therefore out of sorts and “out of character.”

“Point just a little closer to the wind, boy, Hiram’s mostly blow.” And his chief whistled a meditative stave or two, then as if he had found a solution in the melody, explained :

“It isn’t that fool grudges against your dad—so much—he’s afraid of losing *her*— And that,” he added a bit wistfully, if a man, two-handed and upstanding still at sixty, ever suggests such a thing, “I can understand!”

But Ben, blinded by the selfishness of all young love, couldn’t understand.

“He’s always throwing it up to me,” he grumbled on, “it’s getting past a joke.”

The Captain looked at him ; whistled sharply.

“By the great Lord Harry, I thought you had sand!”

The first mate looked sheepish, and scanned the horizon—rattling good officer but boy after all. The older man smiled in amusement, then drove the barb in a bit deeper :

“And it takes that to win women as well as ships—including fathers-in-law,” he added as necessary after-thought.

The boy straightened.

“Didn’t know nerve went with *them*,” referring to the first, presumably.

“You didn’t! Well, think it over.” And the captain, too, closed the barring gate.

But the whimsical wrinkles at the corners of his eyes belied the curtness of his retort. However, at the fifth conch-shell they had quite disappeared, as he ruminated half aloud.

“What was it that wench Portia said—about teaching? If I’d followed *mine* I wouldn’t have lost her mother, and he wouldn’t have won her.” The whistling stopped altogether. “He didn’t know it but he wore her out—killed her. It mustn’t happen twice.” Then he added a strange yet not illogical non-sequitur, “Poor Hiram! But that was long ago—and—by Jupiter! she lives again in the girl!”

“Cap’n Bluster” was goutily recouched on the porch, his broad back to the gate as a further expression of his resentment. At that slight distance, the two old sea-dogs resembled the twin stone lions that flank the gateways to great estates, or old andirons before a fire. A little nearer—and they seemed like pieces purchased by a short-sighted person in different shops, and which, when brought home, are found not quite to match. Neither did they in figure or temperament, but they were one in their quaint old oaths and their old blue uniforms, and in their love for the Sea and Salt-haven and Sally. Over the handling of the first and third there was constant dissension; in fact, the friendship had been cemented by a feud of some fifty years’ standing, a constant guerilla warfare of repartee, with reasonableness on one side, violent illogic on the other.

“Cap’n Fairwinds,” for he, too, had been aptly nicknamed by the salty gossips of the place, was square-set but not too square—very fit, in fact, with a beard still brown; above it, a complexion all red and leather. The full lips could tauten on the bridge in a nor’-easter, but off-watch they frequently puckered in a whistle, which for Sally always echoed the wind singing through the rigging, quite as the eyes reflected the colour of the waters they had gazed on so long. That they were well aware of all that was going on, even when she was not their target, she could testify. Around their corners were those little marks, like the tracks of game-birds at a spring, sure trails of shrewdness and humour—like Sally’s, too, but hers were mere wraiths of wrinkles, his, leathery creases, deeply indented.

She was on the top steps now and, hard at her heels, the gnarled parent trunk of which she seemed so strange a shoot.

“Well, you old barnacled tramp!” merely the Bluster way of saying that he was very glad to see an old friend, but Sally’s greeting quite made up for it.

After reminiscing for a half-hour or so, by way of strategy, on the ports and events of the voyage, all of which a retired and gouty sea-captain devoured greedily, Captain Fairwinds proffered some excellent tobacco, a custom they had, “of swapping,” like Jerry Reb and Johnny Yank between hostilities.

Puff, puff, puff, he watched the other’s signal-fires. All seemed quiet along the Potomac, so he broached the dangerous subject:

“What’s this I hear about young Boltwood?”

"No good, I'll warrant," blared the other, dropping his jaw and pipe in suspicion.

"It's too fine weather to be unreasonable, Hiram." He looked around. Sally was at the other end of the porch, trying, this way and that, the new scarf which he had brought her as the tribute which all returning captains must render. It was from the Argentine and, as usual, bright red—in fact, as Sally afterwards remarked to plump Stella Appleby, "It's funny how men always choose crimson or scarlet—never lavender, or mauve, or any of the softer tints. I guess they're just barbarians after all." Anyway the combination,—scarlet, and black hair and eyes, was bewitching enough, and it quite satisfied the godfather. He bent forward confidentially. "He's a good boy, he'd take care of her, and—" he nodded towards the pirouetting scarlet and black again, "he'd keep her that way. We're not as young as we once were, you know."

"Don't interfere there, Harvey Brent. I tell you I don't like the Boltwood timber—it don't build good ships."

"What are you trying, anyway? A little play all your own—nursing a grudge against an old man, and turning his only son from your door, and all the time spillin' your fool sailor's lingo all over the stage. Just throw in a few 'Shiver-me-timbers,' and you could charge admission. I thought you were a *real* sailor, Hiram, not a *play actor!*"

The wing-and-wing whiskers were luffing agitatedly, and under the shaking wattles the Adam's apple worked convulsively, like a floater jerked up and down by a freshly-hooked

fish. Captain Fairwinds continued, though a little more gently :

“If we hadn’t weathered so many storms together, my old friend, I’d——”

“If you want to weather any more, you’ll not give me any more opinions on this head, Captain Brent.”

Now the latter’s own formality with Benjamin had been merely jocular, *this* was ominous. His eyes narrowed, and his mouth snapped to bob-stay tautness. The argument had always ended that way, Hiram was *hopeless!*

All women attached to domineering men very early learn patience and tact, also its first principle,—that the sure Northwest Passage to the sunny Orient of a man’s “cussed nature” lies directly through an old canal, called the Alimentary.

She said something about “supper,” aiming a wink at Captain Harve—a maneuver quite significant of her difference in attitude towards the two old men. It was further noticeable when she placed an affectionate hand on a shoulder of each. With her father, as with Ben, she seemed almost maternal; when she leaned against her godfather she at once slipped back into the child.

Meanwhile he had obeyed that wink and was helping the delightful suspense by exclaiming :

“Hiram, I’ll play you a rubber of Pitch for the second helping. And I’ll bet you a package of Honest Long Cut that it’s——”

“Gingerbread!” roared Cap’n Bluster.

“Spongecake!” the other.

"With elderberry pie on the side!"

"Ris'n biscuit, you mean!"

It was evidently an old game and a very childish one for two old salts who had outridden nor'-easters and rounded the Horn, but Sally smiled on them quite maternally again as she fixed the backgammon board across her father's lap and adjusted the hassock under his tender foot.

They were shuffling the cards when Captain Harve called through the window—

"Ho, Sally, if it's 'Floating Island,' use the *big* bowl, and I'll tell you about some I sighted, tonight."

At the naïve pun the girl smiled, then frowned meditatively.

"Ben with his vanishing islands, and Uncle Harve with his that float!" She sighed and went over to the table where stood the delectable dish.

Wonderingly, yet wondering why she wondered, she bent over the blue bowl. It rimmed a creamy, yellow sea, and in it floated seven tiny islands, all snowy-white and delicately peaked and whorled.

An enchanted region—uncharted seas—and her own horizon had been so limited. It wasn't that the sound little cells of her perfectly-functioning system clamoured to react to the titillating shocks of city-life. Her routine was varied enough. Never had she tucked a yellow pay-envelope into the treasure cave of her blouse, but many times over she had earned it. And technique it does need to run a home on the neatly-spliced ends of a captain's pension, and as much subtle strategy to take dictation from a testy old man as

from any tired baron in Wall Street. Her life was too full of quiet drama ever to be sluggish. No existence can be, that is made up of farewells and waitings and welcomings-home again, quite as that odd fellow Queer-Hat had observed. Oh, she loved it all—and there was Ben, and she wouldn't have changed it, but——

“Tamp, tamp, tamp!” It came through the window, and, “I've won. Ho! Cookee, can't you hustle that grub?”

She didn't obey the summons at once, but bent over the bowl again. And before her eyes it seemed for the moment to expand, until it became the blue, ever-widening, ever-retreating horizon of the ocean itself, rimming a golden sea. And before her eyes swam the peaks, all snow and rose, of fairy-like, ethereal islands, floating, vanishing, beckoning, on that golden, sun-smitten sea.

CHAPTER III

THE RED BALDWIN

It was the fifth Sunday, or Sabbath (for it was always that in Salthaven) since Ben's return. The sun was coppery. Even the landward breeze had expired, and the lightest leaf seemed to weight the swooning air. Captain Fell sat, jelled on the porch and quivering with heat.

At last he opened his eyes. He hadn't been asleep, just slyly cogitating a plan, as Sally knew from the next question:

"Sally, will you swap a promise with me?"

"Oh, Father, do you *mean* it?"

"Yes, even if it's the worst fool contraption ever a female wanted, you can have it."

"Cross your heart?"

Now if frequently he talked to her as a child, it was because he *thought* she was one, while she kept her conversation in kind because she *knew he was*. So with a maternal tolerance, her eyes followed the puffy fingers as they registered the vow.

"*Now*, do you know what it is?"

"Of course, haven't you asked me often enough the past six months? A little benzine gig to throw dust in the eyes of honest people that walk, and spoil the wash on Mondays."

And how his sea-salted soul hated them! Like him, thought Sally. Wherever was he to get the money for an automobile? It was lucky he had a woman(!) to handle what he had! But there was a method in his madness, also one in hers.

"No, it's permission for Ben to come and see me," she returned demurely, but triumphantly.

His mouth fell open.

"You little fox!" he sputtered in admiration, then he stormed—"I—will—not!"

"But you promised!"

"I said the thing you wanted—permission to see a fool boy isn't a *thing*. It's got to be something you can *feel, handle, touch*. See my girl?"

It was his turn to be triumphant, and the cane stamped victoriously into the house.

However he must have relented in part, for the red-wattled face again appeared in the doorway.

"Changed your mind, Daughter? Shall I order that dodgasted devil's gig?"

"No thank you."

She looked up at the tree. Her eyes blinked rapidly, though the big Baldwin gave plenty of shade.

Suddenly they were focussed on that gate, which somehow seemed to have a personality of its own. To strangers its click might always be in one key, but she could distinguish many changes in pitch, and varying intimations. It always served as a sort of wooden butler announcing new arrivals.

Phil Huntington slammed it boldly. He always did every-

thing with that air of smiling audacity which from time immemorial has been reputed to charm the feminine heart. And he *was* good to look at,—brown, slender, and wiry, with a straight-enough, posturesque profile, challenging feminine admiration, likewise sometimes the equally ardent masculine desire to despoil it, and in his gait a perfect blending of two philosophies,—the classical “*carpe diem*” and the more synchronistic “*pep.*”

However, opinions differed about him. To nervous Salthaven mothers “that Philip Huntington” was a cogent reason for adding to their prayers for “those that go down to the sea in ships,” another for “those that go down to big cities in trains.” Cap’n Bluster approved him—or his prospects; Cap’n Fairwinds disliked him cordially. And even silent Ben had been known to allude—rather witheringly—to “the dude.”

As for Sally, she was sure she detected a little over-consciousness and pride in two things, one in the fact that his father owned the large ship-building plant at New Bedford, as well as the pretentious home on the hill, the other, in that fatal facility which his room-mate had once described as “getting away with murder.” He had just achieved a master-stroke in this fine art,—nothing less than the interception of both the Dean’s and Registrar’s letters which were to announce his ignominious and ultimate flunking at Yale. His allowance therefore secure for the summer, he was as triumphant as her father, and needed a taking down, “come-uppance,” the villagers would have called it.

So she vouchsafed him only a most nonchalant “hello,”

and signed him to a place beside her on the rustic seat under the apple-tree. He would have taken it anyway.

Her caller promptly and characteristically resented her inattention to His Princeship, and particularly to that new straw and its bright fraternity band.

"Welcome to our city!" he jeered sarcastically, twirling the ribbon into a rainbow gyroscope, then,—“What’s that you’re doing, there?”

Absent-mindedly she withdrew her foot from the bare patch between the ridged roots and surveyed the hieroglyphics she had been tracing. There, they were,—seven little cones in seven circles. Funny, wasn’t it? All night long she had been pursuing them—or they her—entrancing, beautiful, and always beckoning. Through her dreams the lovely shining things had floated on the giant sea-saucer. Sometimes they formed strange fantastic figures, and once they had even fallen in line and like children “snapped the whip.” And in the moment that always comes between complete unconsciousness and half-awaking, they had dropped quite over the edge of the sea-saucer, vanishing into a golden void. And she had knelt on the edge, looking over to see what could be underneath—and was disappointed because she could not see.

But “Nothing,” was all she answered Phil.

Then, for just at this unpropitious moment Ben must come up the street, she looked at her father, all curves and parabola outlines like some recumbent hippo of Lewis Carroll’s fancy. The *audible* assurance that he was asleep was really so overpowering that a quaint conceit of her

childhood came back,—he would make such a fine illustration in the Picture Bible for that story of the Fall of Jericho. So she waved to Ben, and forthwith entered into that game called, in different ages, banter, persiflage, repartee—“jolly-ing” in hers—at which, for all her straightforwardness, she was quite as expert as Master Phil.

The banished first mate sauntered by; looked chagrined, bashful, wistful, and envious, all at once; then gazed up at the apple-tree. The reddening Baldwins offered a suggestion which, seated upon an upturned skiff, a little way up the street, he promptly began to put into execution.

First he halved the apple very carefully, then removed the core. On the leaf of a pocket log-book he wrote something, tore out the page, placed it in the cavity, and fitted the two halves together. Picking up a shingle, he made two long skewers, thrusting them through the apple so that the halves would not part; and finished the job by nipping off the protruding ends of the skewers.

A minute later a perfectly harmless apple fell into Sally's lap. The Captain still slept and Master Phil did not notice the premature fall, but Sally, womanlike, connected a man with that apple. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Ben, who nodded and disappeared under the green tunnel of the elms.

Now only a faint radiance powdered them with gold.

Sally rose.

“Excuse me, Phil, I must get supper.”

She didn't ask him to stay, thus doing violence to Salthaven hospitality, but she *had* to examine that apple.

He held her hand a little longer than was necessary for an ordinary farewell. She wriggled her fingers out of his clasp.

“There, Phil, you’re not going away for a year, you know, and,” she added to herself as she skipped up the steps, “I’m afraid—someone else is.”

The western sky through the kitchen window glowed no more rosily than her cheeks, or the apple, as she groped for the note inside.

“Dear Sally,” it read, “I sail Monday. Won’t you meet me tonight at eight and walk to the Light? As ever—Ben.”

CHAPTER IV

SHADOWS

INTO Water Street, which runs along the harbour front, irregular alleys trickle, and at the corners of two of these, fronting the five-storied warehouses, is a coagulation of low-ceilinged, dark saloons, a patch upon the whiteness of Salt-haven. Tom Grogan's, the most notorious, was, of course, officially closed for the seventh day of the week, but just before moonrise, three shadows seemed to detach themselves from the yard at the rear, and stole up the passageway, singlefile because of its narrowness.

"He said tonight," said the first, assuming form and voice.

"At eight bells at Ole Man Veldmann's," the second shadow, broad-shouldered and hulking like the first, and with the same pugilistic crouch. Then he grumbled,—
"Vat the tinhorn tank? He always keep us vaitin'."

"Ease off, Swedie, he's no — — — — uv a tinhorn," admonished the third, a little weazened figure of a man, "an' don't ye go monkeyin' with him. Yuh'd better try practisin' on a — — — buzz saw fust."

They turned as a footfall sounded on the rough cobbles.

"It's him, all right."

The fourth shadow rounded the corner, taller than the

other three, more cosmopolitan in carriage. The voice, too, though it gave the few low directions with a roughness and menace, assumed for the sake of command, was smoother and ice-cold. Even his silhouette seemed more crisply cut.

“Will Huntington show up?” he asked.

“Couldn’t keep him away,” the first responded, “he’s spilin’ to win back some u’ that wad he lost the other night.”

“Well, start things when I give the signal—just throw a scare into him, but don’t beat him up.” Then, as in the teeth of the wind that blew up the alley, he lighted his cigarette with a deftness that somehow seemed consonant with the crispness of his voice, of his very silhouette, and symbolic of skill in many things, he added,—“Use your usual discretion. Pete.”

“All right, cap, we’re on.”

He left, and a little later, the trio lounged out of the alley, and sauntered towards the beach.

CHAPTER V

THE LIGHT

SALLY'S toes beat an impatient tattoo. There was such a vasty depth under that blue coat. A large pitcher of milk, a goodly portion of quivering currant jelly, one snow-white wheaten loaf, another of golden-brown gingerbread—but at last even the Captain was satisfied.

Then a whisk, and the blue willow ware dishes were on the freshly-papered shelves.

“Sixteen knots an hour,” he was grunting. Did he suspect! All-of-a-flutter she tried to read. Seven-fifteen, seven-thirty, the old clock chimed, then a quarter to eight.

No, thank Heaven, he couldn't for there, with the eight strokes, he was puffing up the stairs, she dutifully after him.

She leaned out of the window and listened. The crickets were making fiddles of themselves as usual; the tree-frogs were in full chime, like far-off sleigh-bells; and—snap—a board creaked in the walk! But there they were, at last—the trumpets of Jericho, coming full blast from her father's window.

Swiftly she climbed over the sill and clambered down the trellis, crushing the honey-suckle until it gave forth a sweeter fragrance.

Then the old gate clucked "good luck" behind them, and they stole down the street under the elms whose very shadows seemed kindly and protecting. Through the leaves the little slice of moon kept pace with them.

But all she said was :

"Well, I'm here, Ben."

And he :

"Thank you for coming, Sally."

There was that shyness of youth that kept them silent, but her hand fluttered into the curve of his arm, and the nearness was very sweet.

Now the houses were a little further apart, and they could hear the murmur of the breakers on the beach. They reached its white slope, and the murmur deepened to a musical thunder. A moment they stood in awe at the scene—a little in awe of each other.

Then Sally broke the spell. "I'll beat you to the next rock," she called, and taking off her Tam o' shanter, her hair flying free in the breeze, she dashed over the shingle.

He gained on her, but she reached it a little ahead, when suddenly she slipped on a moss-covered boulder, and he caught her in his arms.

A moment she trembled in them, then, half-frightened at the commingled beating, withdrew.

And again they were silent till they reached the great rock.

Above them the great white eye of the Lighthouse turned and turned as it had for so many years, now lighting up the expanse of the ocean, again leaving it in darkness.

Now it was he that broke the happy silence.

"I can't stand it, Sally," he said.

"Stand what, Ben?"

"Being kept away from you, and seeing—that"—he caught himself, he'd say *that* to his face.

"It isn't my fault, Ben. See what I've done for you tonight. If Father finds out, I don't know what will happen."

She looked up at the white, circling eye.

"Oh, Ben, look at the poor sea bird, flying against the Light."

Then even steady, prosaic Ben grew poetic, such magic has Love.

"You're the light, Sally, and I'm the wandering bird."

She shivered a little, suddenly seeing many things, such as the daughters of a race of sailors see in their frightened dreams—visions of storms and broken ships and men. She trembled and he put his arm around her.

She had not known her own heart, perhaps she did not fully know it now. But the spell of youth and the night was on her—and the spell of his presence. The protection of his arm, too, was comforting, so when, his voice a little thick and husky with feeling, he asked: "Sally, will you wait for me?" her heart stood still for one fleeting second, then she answered timidly:

"Yes, Ben."

He kissed the black hair tenderly, then the lips—the shy sweet kiss of first love.

Then they walked home under the stars.

And the lone figure that had been watching them rose from the shadow of the rocks and sauntered toward the deserted shack.

CHAPTER VI

THE DICERS

PHILIP knocked. The corner of the oiled paper which half concealed the light within the shack was lifted, a blood-shot eye applied to the chink, and he was admitted into the uncertain glow of a low-hanging lantern, flickering on three very diverse and ugly figures sprawled out on the bunk and the floor.

“Why if it ain’t m’lud Chestyfield come to pay us a call! Here, Swedie, take his card,” said the husky at the door, proffering a flask. “Yer good health, m’lud.”

The ceremonial was accompanied by a bow whose irony Master Philip chose to ignore as a princeling might the jeers of a Whitechapel mob. With something of the gesture with which the royal victim would have flicked an imaginary bit of dust from a lace cuff, the youth adjusted his tie, with a request to “cut the comedy, Pete,” and looked scornfully at the speaker,—a beamy, ox-shouldered hulk of a man, with a sailor’s legs, a mechanic’s smeared hands, and a pugilist neck and jowl. Over these a seaming scar, the result of an old boiler explosion, ran to the puffed ear. The same catastrophe had marked him with a still more peculiar branding—a circular indentation stamped squarely in the center of his

forehead by a red-hot flying burr. Its perfect resemblance to the call signals in old-fashioned hotel rooms had stamped on him quite as indelibly the nickname, "Pushbutton Pete."

"But yuh ain't a-takin' yer lickin'," he urged, edging towards Phil, who stood fascinated by that baleful mark of Cain.

Recovering, he accepted the flask, and gulped down a swallow or two with an attempted nonchalance, immediately belied by the spasmodic twitching of his throat, to the delight of the old man in the corner, a weazened old fellow, bent of back but strong in spite of seventy years' wandering the globe as cookee, cook, smuggler, pearl-thief, and general odd-job man of the seas.

"Hold 'er, sonny, hold 'er," he cried, slapping his knee, then chortled,—“Steward, bring yer bowl.”

Philip turned on him disdainfully.

"I'm used to a gentleman's drink—not this shellac."

"Ho ho," shrieked the old fellow, "the blankety son of a sea-cook calls hisself a gentleman!"

"Not so gay, old top, or you might get run out of town," Philip chided him, toploftily, as a lordly young sophomore a freshman for some breach of campus etiquette.

"That's it, Bub, lace it into him," encouraged Pushbutton Pete with a wink—and a stranger would have promptly conceived a very different figure for the situation.

Although the threat of banishment might have held a very real sting, for, as folks in Salthaven guessed, Old Man Veldmann repaired to his shack only for purpose of sanctuary, it seemed to afford him infinite amusement. His light-green

eyes blinked, and through his wicked rusty saw of a mouth, he started a flow of Gargantuan epithet and Nicotian lava—all accurately gauged—constant eruptions of which had stained the natural silver of his Oom Paul whiskers a sulphur yellow. But he was very diverting in his ugliness, and each epithet, grotesque gesture, and grimace was flavoured with a childlike yet diabolical air of gaminerie. He seemed immortal in his youth and wickedness, “too old,” folks said, “and too ornery to die.”

The term, “gentleman,” stuck in his ancient craw, and thereon he was haranguing the man on the bunk, with unholy glee, spiced with malice—for the boy’s benefit.

“What’s yer idee, Swedie, uv a gentleman? How would yer define it? Now I affirm—havin’ a prejoodice agin swearin’—that it’s a thin-skinned, white-copussled shadder uv a man who cops all the swag, while us ———— does all the dirty work.”

The man on the bunk, who had been bending forward so that only the broad back and the bare biceps bulking large under the sleeveless undershirt, were heretofore visible, raised his head. It was bullet-shaped, covered with light hair, cropped short.

“Ay tank so,” he muttered. But he was not so stupid as he seemed. The wide vacuous mouth looked harmless enough. But the eyes had the unpleasant shade of light blue, with the disquieting trick of immediately shifting when full-met, whether or not he was afraid of the gazer. Because of the perennial sanguineness of complexion, he was called “The Pink Swede.”

For the moment Philip was too befuddled to resent the insult. Besides, he was eager for that relaxation for which he had come, and not to be found in Sabbath Salthaven, and perhaps also anxious to retrieve his reputation as "a man among men." So he inquired with a bit of a swagger:

"How're they rolling tonight, Pink?"

"Smooth, sonny, smooth," interposed the old man, reaching under his flannel shirt, "looky there, my gentleman's whelp!" He shook a small leather bag, hung by a soiled string from his corded neck. "My amoolet—I'm a Drooid by religion—studied 'em all, an' Drooids is the most sensible—" Then he undid the bag and stroked the tiny ivory cubes. "Them's human—got 'em down Madagascar way—carved outen the back teeth o' a big buck nigger. The dirty ———— tried to kill me with a kriss—pizened. Y' can see his mark there—" across the chest, yellowed and shrunk like a lean roosting-fowl, ran a foot-long ragged scar—"but I done him proper——"

He finished the string of characterizations he deemed fitting, then went on—"I got wind uv their plannin' a little fest—cannybals, y'know—and Dick Hosford, the bosun, was sick uv a fever. I knowed he was goin to die so, just afore his death-rattle, I filled him full o' pizen. It was all friendly-like, for I knowed Dick would be glad to do an old matey a good turn, seein' he was agoin' to die anyway.

"Next morning I toted his corp ashore in the dingy, an' served him up, hot an' smokin' to them cannybals. It wasn't long afore the hull fambly, includin' my black friend, his nex'-o'-kin, an' all the real distant ones, lay rottin' in the jungle.

"Now I ask yer, as one gentleman to another," bowing mockingly to Phil, "whether or not I done him proper."

"Ay *tank* so," stolidly answered the Pink Swede, smoothing the blanket on the bunk, a strategy which the boy was too much of an amateur to protest.

At first, as always with the about to be shorn, the luck was his. But just as the pile of green rectangles, greasy and soiled but good currency nevertheless, assumed fair proportions in front of the boy, there was a sound as of pebbles thrown against the door and little square of window.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Oh, a brace o' spooks," answered Pete, "shoot, Bub, it's yer roll."

Suddenly the luck veered. It was strange how refractorily the little cubes tumbled for the youth. On the smooth surface of the blanket, the squat but skilful fingers of Pete and the Swede, holding the dice in just the right way, were rolling whatever combinations they wished. Even the yellow talons of the old man held magic.

"Come on, ye hell's pups, ye devil's back teeth," he was yelling his war cry on all-fours, "Nacheralls, by —."

So on it went until the pile of greenbacks, and the boy's watch and scarf-pin to boot, were divided with a suspicious equity among the three.

By now the vile whiskey which he had resampled, despite his reflections on its quality, had set his temper sparking. He picked up the dice, shook them in his hand, and sneered: "Loaded!"

"Them dice is not loaded," retorted Pete, shoving his jowl

within an inch of Phil's. The strange scar on the forehead, usually white, glowed vividly. Then he turned and unpeeled a derisive wink at his companions. "What'll I do, spank Mamma's boy or lick 'ell out of him?"

"You won't lick any hell out of me," raged the boy, and led for that baleful scar.

Some skill he had, but all in a gentle game called "sparing," in which "points" and light smarting taps scored, instead of such smashing jolts as those from Pete's burly fists. The counter staggered him, and they mixed it, shifting around the narrow cabin until Pete's head struck the hanging lantern. Old Man Veldmann seized it and mounted an upturned cask, holding the light so that it always flickered on the sligher of the two antagonists.

In keen delight he watched them, alternately ejaculating tobacco-juice and adjectives, shifting his shoulders and shadow-boxing with his free fist in unconscious imitation of Pete.

"A pretty one ———; smash him, ye ———. Neat, neat, my brave bucko! Ouch, but it's chile-murder! —By—but that drew the pretty red juice! Mess up the damned dude—spoil his bloody beauty, ye lazy lubber, ye've stalled long enough— Hell's bells—that went home!"

A jab or two from Pete; a clinch; a little infighting in the light of the swaying lantern; then they broke, and stood feinting and shifting for a moment. Pete loosed a swing for Phil's body—the latter dropped his guard a bit low—and the roustabout drove his huge right to the vital point

Phil had just missed. The boy crumpled up on the foul, evil-smelling fishnet in the corner.

The victor kicked him with his foot. "Damn him, I've sprained my thumb!"

"Yuh ain't got no kick comin' as I see," said the old fellow, "the young rooster was outweighed by forty pound, but he was game as a bantam."

Still he and the Pink Swede trussed the fallen none the less viciously for that.

The door opened and a tall stranger entered, as Phil began to stir in his bonds. He bent over the boy.

"The Chesterfield Kid! Hmmm, those classic features are messed up considerable."

Seeing the boy's eyes open, he turned on the trio, and with a well-dissembled arraignment ordered them to untie him.

They raised Phil, still rocking a little, and seated him on the one spavined chair. But his head cleared suddenly, and he was shrewd enough to note their suspiciously prompt and grinning obedience. He looked up at the new-comer.

"Some of your pretty work, MacAllister."

"That's gratitude for you," the stranger replied, "if I hadn't blown in just now, these gentlemen," indicating the three sarcastically, "would have shanghaied you."

"All very effectively staged, Mr. Belasco."

MacAllister pointed to the door, with a request to the others to "take the air." And again they promptly obeyed, Pete grumbling as they flung themselves on the sands a stone's-throw from the shack:

"What's the chief after now, pennies from the kid?"

The old man crooked his shoulder at a steam-yacht riding at anchor in the harbour.

"Damn pretty boat, that, Petie."

Pete whistled.

"So that's his game!"

"Ay tank so," said the Pink Swede simply.

Within, Philip was gazing sullenly at the blackleg and gambler. To the eye of an unbiased spectator he would have been infinitely more satisfying than most of his ilk, drab fellows enough outwardly and designedly unobtrusive. MacAllister was ever smooth, polished, immaculate. His well-fitting suit, eyes, and close-trimmed mustache were black, all contrasting strangely with the deadwhite of his complexion. In his dark scarf sparkled a three-carat stone, bluewhite and cold; its twin on a hand manicured to an alabaster finish, yet somehow suggesting a high degree of dexterity and power.

"Huntington, you can do me a favour, in return for the one I've just done you, and a lot more it isn't necessary to itemize."

"A pretty lot of favours you've done me, MacAllister."

"Have it your way, then, but you wouldn't have enjoyed maggoty bread and worm-eaten pork on a trip to Rio." The smooth deft fingers extended a cigarette-case. "Try one—they're French—now, as it happens I'm a little short, and—"

"N-o-t-h-i-n-g d-o-i-n-g! MacAllister."

"Never 'pass' before you look at your cards, my dear boy. Isn't my golden silence worth something—in gold?"

He flicked the ash on the floor, watching it fall as if computing to a milligram just how much it was worth. Then he looked wistfully up at the ceiling.

“It really is touching.”

“Besides your charming but nervy self, what is?”

“Oh the love of your father for his only son and heir—I—wonder how much he’d appreciate a little news—of a certain night at Napoli’s, for instance—or that little game at Smith’s, or that coffee-coloured girl they bill as ‘Rosetta’—How do you like the flavour,” he enquired solicitously, “try another?”

Now Philip was not nearly as afraid of the gambler as of Old Man Veldmann. For all his pretended disdain—which after all was merely a sort of class-consciousness—he stood a little in awe of the latter, whose wickedness seemed uncanny. The old rascal belonged to every age, to every clime. He might have shipped as coxswain of a Berseker crew, or sailed the seas in the Flying Dutchman. The cold, efficient MacAllister represented a more modern and commercialized deviltry, something the amiable youth felt he could understand and aspire to, even match. So he was enjoying himself hugely in spite of his bruises, and resolutely assumed what his fraternity brothers had once decided was the best “poker face.”

“Garden, Garrison, McClintock,” he murmured, “funny how many names that man had, and my father has an excellent memory.” He extended his own cigarette-case, asking with an ironic cunning,—“Try one of *mine*—I hope you like the flavour.”

And MacAllister never heeded the temptation to laugh, but gave him his heart's desire.

"You play a good hand," was his admiring rejoinder—subtlest of flattery for Master Phil. "Suppose we call it about fifty-fifty."

"How much do you want? Shoot!"

"A little brusque, soul of my soul, but then thou wert ever currish with thy friends."

"Oh, cut it, Mac, you're not back in the Seminary."

The allusion to the early punishment meted out to him by loving parents, who had actually designed him for the pulpit, amused the gambler. He smiled but kept to the main chance.

"Well, about fifty thousand, but five will do."

Now the boy began to envisage the stakes, but resolutely he bluffed on.

"You're a sweet little artist in blackmail."

"Not blackmail, the labourer is worth his hire."

"But you don't dare to see my old man, anyway, so why should I 'kick in'?" He was alarmed now, but, proud of his proficiency in the ways and vernacular of the underworld, he carefully kept his dialogue "in character."

"Your father knows me," the other explained as though with an infinite and even paternal patience, "but I don't think he's ever met Rosetta."

"She isn't here!"

"Not exactly, but within hail."

"All right, but talk some language I can understand, some figures I can count on my fingers."

"Well, a thousand will do—now—there's something you can do for me later."

"I thought so," said the boy, and in truth the scale of operations was a little low for the splendid MacAllister. "But it can't be done," he went on, "I'm strapped. I can't get more than five hundred."

"You could fix a check."

"That isn't being done this season, MacAllister, at least I've never done it yet. But I'll get the five hundred somehow."

"On account?"

"All right, on account, I won't say how large, but tell me why all this 'speshul scenery?' Signaling with pebbles on window an' everything—like some ham Belasco staging a ten-twenty-thirt' in Troy?"

"Oh, I just wanted to impress you a bit."

"Well, you didn't, *not-one-little-bit!*"

"Might better have tried it on the other, eh, Phil?"

"Who d'you mean?"

"The heart of oak, back there on the beach, with the girl."

"How did you know? But, thanks, I can handle him myself."

"*Can* you?" The intonation held the slightest of innuendoes.

"Why not?" Still there was a look of alarm on the features that would have made such a wonderful model for an "ad" artist.

The opportunity came a quarter of an hour later, in front of Tom Grogan's, as they came hard on the heels of Ben

who was making for the wharf, careening along full sail on the sea of the night's memories. Such voyages always come to sudden endings. This time the rock that stove in the frail bark was a bit of gashouse slang from Phil—about Sally. He was half-drunk or he wouldn't have said it.

The retort from Ben's right was swifter and more accurate than Pushbutton Pete's and Master Phil was stretched out on the cobbles of the alley, when MacAllister, with an almost imperceptible gesture, signaled to Pete. And Pete always caught the slightest of his chief's signals. Ben turned instinctively, only to slip in the lees from a battened-in wine-cask that lay near the gutter. The blow was a little high but sufficient to catch him off-balance, and stones made the oblivion utter and complete. Philip was the first to revive.

"Here, this is *your* mess," said MacAllister, "lend us a hand."

"Not there," called the boy, "that's his ship. Try the one laid up at the Bunker Dock."

They carried the unconscious sailor along the water-front two blocks, and, evading the watch on board, threw him under a life-boat by the port light, covering his inert form with a tarpaulin. As an extra precaution, the efficient MacAllister shook the full contents of a bottle on a handkerchief, and left it as a pleasant dream-potion over the victim's head.

"Another of my many little favours," said he to the youth as they slunk away from the wharf, "and another most excellent reason for forgetting."

"Just what do you mean?" asked the now frightened Phil.

“Why, this little affair of yours would send you over the road for a pretty long stretch, if not to the chair.”

“Not murder!” groaned the boy. MacAllister maintained an eloquent silence, but “Ay tank so,” again muttered the Swede, and the old man:

“May God have mercy on yer soul!”

The doubtful benison echoed in his ears as he stole through the shadows up to the great house on the hill.

CHAPTER VII

"THE BIG BOYS"

As they passed South Shore Light, at sun-up, the skipper of the *Provincetown* was startled to see, on his own deck, the first mate of the rival *North Star*. However, he maintained enough of his Yankee aplomb to observe the ritual following all physical contests that take place in America, by inquiring most solicitously after "the other fellow."

He was duly reassured. To the best of Ben's belief and knowledge, they were enjoying excellent health.

The skipper took note of the plural, also of the bruised cheek and hair clotted with blood.

"So they was they—huh!"

Thus conservatively expressing his sympathy and admiration, he called to the man at the wheel to "starb'r'd" his helm, meanwhile doing the same for the brown ballast in his cheek.

"If it's a foul wind that blowed ye aboard," he further observed, "it's turned out fair. Rogers, y'know, has the scurvy, and when I found he wahn't aboard, I gave Harris his berth, an' damme if Harris didn't just go an' break his leg. So the berth's yours, seein' ye've shipped with us," he paused to port his ballast again, the peculiar sucking, rotary

motion expressing an infinite sarcasm as he added,—“however unwillin’.”

So for this voyage at least Ben was signed up without examining the articles.

It was a fair one almost all the way down. Even Hatteras was not inclement and off the Carolinas, though the wind edged a little towards the north, it continued so favouring that they ran before it, three shining towers of cupolaed canvas under the bluest of skies. Fortune had not so smiled on them for many moons. But on the ninth day out, she and her breezes shifted most capriciously. Now folk who work under white, wind-driven canvas are quite as superstitious as those who play before its still, painted walls, and the crew, from the second officer down to the little runt of a cabin-boy, declared it was “all on account o’ that black cat.”

It was a hundred miles southeast of Florida, and in the morning. All one could see was a gentle respiration of waters fulfilling that pathetic fallacy of unnumbered poets, seeming indeed asleep. All one could hear was a gentle swish as the ship’s prow shore their pellucid green. Astern a shark’s fin winked threateningly.

Forward and in the waist, the hands were sluicing the decks, or mending the ship’s-gear. In the standing rigging, six of them sang as they dipped their brushes into little buckets of tar,—an old Down East chanty, slow-measured and mournful. No one was in the foc’s’le except a foreign seaman, who had gone below a few hours before, complaining of a touch of fever.

Suddenly three screams split the still air in rapid succes-

sion. The bosun and the ship's carpenter rushed forward into the forecabin, and there, stretched on his bunk, froth on his ashen face, his limbs distorted and rigid, lay the foreign sailor.

"Look at that!" whispered the bosun. His voice shook. So, too, did the forefinger pointing at the twisted corpse.

His companion stopped short, and he, too, shivered through all of his sturdy bulk, as his own eyes met two others of yellow, gleaming above the bunk. On the breast of the dead man, humping its back and spitting at them, sat—a black cat.

Perhaps the death could have been diagnosed by a ship's-surgeon, had there been one aboard, but the crew would never have believed him. They came tumbling on deck, trembling and swearing the strange rough oaths of the sea, each under his breath as if in fear of disturbing some evil presence that haunted the ship.

After them came the bosun, and in his hands, carried at arms'-length like a thing accursed, the black cat. Reaching the rail, he spun it by its tail three times around his head, then hurled it into the waters with a strength that seemed almost preternaturally aided. The ill-omened animal fell far astern, close by the winking shark's fin, which vanished, then reappeared, waiting with infinite patience for greater prey.

They buried the strange sailor in the next watch, for there must be haste in the heat of the tropics. While the crew gathered round, one or two in old-fashioned New England devoutness, but most of them turning their caps in

their hands, or shifting from one foot to another in child-like awe, the captain read a brief burial service. Then the weighted form dropped into the sea.

In the late afternoon, the second officer approached the quarter-deck.

"Jones and that damned squarehead Swanson have smuggled a jug o' Jamaicy in the foc's'le 'n are raisin' seven kinds o' hell."

Ordered on deck, that amiable pair became drunkenly mutinous, until Ben knocked them into the scuppers. Buckets of cold sea water revived them, and they returned to their duties, but in a sullen manner that boded further trouble.

Meanwhile the barometer was falling steadily. Twilight and the dog-watch came, but the haze on the horizon was even thicker and more ominous than the twilight. The wind shifted again, tuning the countless harps of the shrouds to an alarming concert-pitch.

"Port y'r 'elm two points," called Ben; "Port-'ellum-two-points-sir," the man at the wheel, and the ship came up into the wind. Another short command, and swiftly as circus hands striking a tent, little dark figures scurried up the tall spars into the commingled clouds of mist and canvas, and, curled perilously on yard-arms describing violent arcs on the sky, gathered in the crackling ghostly cupolas.

The gallant white towers had fallen now, and shorn of all but a little reefed square of topsail, two tiny mutton-legs of storm-jib and spanker, the *Provincetown* bowled along through the murk, holding well to her course, when the real gale struck her. For a moment she trembled through all

her timbers, then ran like a racehorse feeling whip and spur for the first time. The steersman spun his wheel, and the bark swung into head-seas, then pitched and tossed sickeningly, each mountainous wave hitting her slender ribs like a mighty triphammer fist in cruel infighting.

“A —— uv a night,” growled a hand as eight bells clanged again through the darkness, then to the slickered figure beside him:

“Say, matey, how’d the little house on Preble Square look t’ye now?”

“Tain’t a fair question, it’s crool—I’m afeared—” the words were lost in the wind and flying spate—“Never—again——”

“It’s the black cat that done it, dang ’er,” and simultaneously they reached into hip-pockets for the old consoler, when a moving mountain of foam swept across the deck, tossing them against the knightheads, and carrying the brown treasures away.

“Dod gast that black cat!” cried the less blasphemous one as they picked themselves up from the scuppers, “we ain’t had no luck since we found ’er a-clawin’ the corp.”

In a slight lull following midnight, Ben went below to the cabin where the cook brought as much of a can of coffee as he had been able to salvage in the rocking trip from the galley.

The mate stood a moment, dripping rivulets on the swaying floor, the mug of steaming liquid half way to his lips, but drinking in surer sustenance from a little picture frame. She had smuggled it in her blue dress to the Light, that night

before he sailed. In the midst of the storm the girlish face was strangely calm.

Draining the mug, he clambered on deck again, taking the lee-side, the captain still sticking to the weather. To the boy he seemed suddenly old and weak. And in the light from the binnacle the muscles of his face were caught up on one side as if in pain. His lurching, too, was more than the ship's roll warranted a veteran rider of the seas.

Stroke coming? Ben asked himself, then shouted in the other's ear,—

“You'd ought to go below, sir.”

“What d'ye take me for?” the granite soul roared back above the storm, “a lily-livered landlubber afeared of a capful o' wind?”

“It'll be a regular jugful before we're through, sir, and you're not well.”

“The more reason I shouldn't leave it to youngsters without hair on 'er chests—but sure as there's a God above those masts, the old girl'll ride 'er out. She's His fav'rite daughter, boy.”

At this premature boast the shrouds whistled eerily, every plank groaned as if torn asunder, and above the pandemoniac symphony blared the voice of some galloping storm king. Even as he spoke the captain staggered, but dauntlessly gazed aloft to where noble spars should have ranged, tier on tier, with three little pieces of canvas holding on stoutly against the wind, but all they could see through the gloom was the ghostly jib and the innumerable driving lances of the rain. Even the sailing lights gleamed dimly, rather like glazing

eyes than lanterns, and time after time—the watcher would tire of counting—the ship’s nose reared to the sky, then swung down into the maelstrom, not sliding gently but plunging desperately, as a wounded and frantic steed with legions of others at her heels, onrushing to beat her under.

So the night wore on.

At dawn, or the hour that should have seen dawn, Ben, scenting trouble again, visited the engine-room.

“How’s she holding, Sandy?” he asked the grizzled Scot who was watching the little auxiliary engine as a mother a dying child.

“Ay, she’ll pull through, sir, wi’ care, though I might gae sae far,” he qualified with characteristic canniness, “as to wish I had the auld engine on the *Cameronia*, noo. These mickle toys are no o’ much account.”

“You’re right. It’s only good in a calm, or to save tug hire in a harbour, but it’s the only liftin’ propeller that ever buzzed out of Salthaven, so the captain’s stuck on it like a kid with a tin machine.”

As he spoke, the unsteady floor on which they stood rose up at a perilous angle. The engineer slipped, his hand falling from the throttle. Deep within the hull as they were, they could feel the screw under her stern rising clear of water with the plunge, only to spin futilely in the air. The little engine, now uncontrolled, wheezed and thrashed as though it would be racked to pieces. Ben flew to the throttle, while Scotty steadied himself, then resumed the careful operation of opening and shutting it with the interminable fall and rise.

“The big boys are out, the nicht,” he said to Ben as they

climbed another long watery mountain, then jerked out a warning "Look out!"

The mate turned just in time to escape the heavy wrench flung by the leader of the drunken pair whom he had laid out on the deck in the afternoon watch, and who, bent on vengeance, were clambering down the ladder. The flying missile hurtled over his scalp into the frail engine. The damage was done; the frail mechanism was injured beyond repair.

The topmost sailor escaped up the ladder, but his companion, crouching low, hurled a belaying pin at the mate. It, too, missed the mark by a hair's-breadth, smashing the swinging lamp instead, and leaving the hold in utter darkness just as a heavy sea shattered the hatches, deluging them and the engine-room with a foot of water. In the murk and cloud of escaping steam, they grappled, Ben seizing the sailor's throat, and choking the spluttered curses until they died to a hissing whisper. There was a splash as a limp form dropped in the water swishing from side to side—followed by silence within, bedlam without. Above, he found the crew frantically clearing away the wreckage of the fore-topmast. As swiftly as possible he made his way over the careening deck.

Suddenly the heaviest sea of all that night struck them, and the skipper, shouting some inaudible command, lurched, missed his footing, falling afoul of the binnacle. The mate bent over to help him, when above the din of the tempest, rose the warning cry of the lookout forward.

It came too late. Head-on, the *Provincetown* crashed into

the dark mass floating only two feet above the water, and just a shade darker than the surrounding waves.

"A derelict!" came the cry.

"Dang that black cat! We might have knowed it."

The ship's carpenter reached the quarter deck.

"She's filling a hundred to the minute," he panted out, "she'll founder in ten."

"All hands to the boats!" megaphoned Ben through his trumpeted hands, but there was little need for the command. The panic-stricken crew were sprawling and sliding over the slanting decks to port and starboard.

The Chinese cook stumbled out from the galley, the oblique slits of his eyes turning almost to full oval as they rolled in an ecstasy of fear. He was jabbering a strange heathenish prayer and for defense against the raging elements, he carried a meat-cleaver, weapon futile enough. A heavy sea, breaking over the port side, silenced his uncouth orisons and hurled him, weapon and all, at the mast, then over the taffrail, as it might a tiny cork—and on out into the darkness.

A little mongrel dog, yellow as his vanished master, for whom he had conceived a strange and currish affection, had followed the cook up the ladder, and stood shivering and whimpering on the companionway. But there was no pity even for his helplessness. Like a little trick dog, striving for balance on the top of some elephant suddenly gone mad in a stampeded circus, he seemed, his forefeet churning the crest of the long greyback that carried him over.

Nine hands reached the lifeboats, four on the port, five on the starboard side. The one who in the earlier watches had

longed for the little house on Preble Square was praying, but others were cursing, not in the flippant ejaculations of ordinary intercourse, nor the reckless taunts flung in a fight, but the frenzied blasphemies of craven souls that face and tremble before annihilation.

The port boat swung clear but in the fury of the wind and their mad haste the "forward fall" quickly jammed; the stern tilted downward, and spilled them into the sea.

One by one they were washed astern. A clutching hand—a distorted face—a last imprecation—and they were gone.

The five in the starboard boat were ready when Ben, seeing their defection, ripped out the angry command:

"Belay there till I give orders!"

The renegade five would have put off, but the man who had just stood his trick at the wheel, the devout soul from Preble Square, and Scotty, his Gaelic dourness for once a beautiful thing, stood by, stopping the unreeling tackle and the boat midway in its descent to the waves. The mate bore the unconscious figure of his chief to the rail and propped him up in the bottom of the boat.

"In with you!" he called, shoving the steersman towards safety, but the engineer shook his grizzled old head.

"I'll stay wi' ye, laddie."

"In, you fool!" and Ben, shaking the affectionate hand from his shoulder, drew his revolver. Under its chill persuasion, the old man, stunned and wondering, clambered in just as the boat slid to the waves.

Then the boy's face changed. Peril ever wears a shrouding cloak, but its countenance envisaged by souls of steel is

an immortal flame, and in its light the boyish features seemed almost transfigured. Holding to the standing rigging, he waved to the old engineer.

"Good old Scotty, good-bye and good luck!"

Reaching under his oilskins, he drew forth a packet, clenched it in his fist as though weighing precious gold and tossed it to him.

"Get it to Sally Fell," was his last order as a long swell took the boat on its acre-wide shoulder and bore it away from the ship.

And then as, true to the old traditions of the sea, he waited for the final plunge, somehow in sublime irony, now that its work was done, the storm lulled.

As the skies began to lighten, a half mile away he could still see the last boat. But whether because the cowardly majority of its crew over-ruled old Scotty and the loyal hands, or because the seas still ran too high to effect a rescue, it disappeared, and he was left alone on the deep.

The wind died down, the clouds rifted in the north, but the long rollers still broke against the sides of the doomed vessel.

For a moment he leaned against the shrouds in despair. The bright vision had gone, hidden in its enshrouding cloak, but another came to him out of the dying storm,—a red tam o' shanter, lustrous black curls, and eyes with gleams like phosphor flashes on the midnight sea.

He looked up, murmuring a sailor's prayer. As if in answer, a solitary star shone in the rifts of the clouds. Its rays were a symbol of hope and he said to himself:

“What a fool I was to think of dying! I would have quit cold.”

Carefully guiding himself along by bulwark and rail, across the slanting deck he made his way. The ship's prow was deeper under the foam. Only a moment, perhaps two or three, was the margin between life with Sally—and death. There was no time to construct a raft, and the life-boats were gone. With deft quick fingers he lashed himself to a spar, and was clear of the wreck but a few powerful strokes when the stern rose into the air and her nose plunged for the last time. The suction almost dragged him down after the expiring ship, but after a fathom's submergence he floated free.

And strangely, as he rose and fell on the buoyant waves, and star after star came out, he felt, not dismay, but peace and hope. And memories, not the scarlet rosary whose telling, they say, no drowning man can escape, but glimpses of a girl, in all her varying moods and adorable ways, came and sustained him.

Then broke the dawn, at first just the promise of light, then a mirage of rose, the golden flood tide, and at last the jocund sun himself, like a perfect yellow coin lost from the purse of some old freebooter who once roved these waters, stood balanced on the far rim of the sea.

The hours passed. Once, a faint feather of smoke, two tiny needles of masts, and a thin line of hull, betrayed a far-away steamer. But it, too, passed, like a sick man's fancy. And the lonely sailor felt sick all over, and parched and faint in the sun. Now and then he swam a little but his strength was weakening.

Night fell again and its coolness freshened him. His fancy likened the light touch of the wind to Sally's own upon his brow. And once again the stars smiled on the man lashed to the bit of boating spar, speaking of hope. But Hope is a frail thing, delicate as any bird, and Despair has long clutching arms that forever drag one under.

Another dawn. More hours of pitiless sun. Now in his disordered imaginings he heard the sound of bells—bells—bells everywhere. At first he thought they were bell-buoys, all around him, rung by phantom hands to mock him. Now it was the bell in the old church at home, its brazen tones multiplied a thousand times, tolling his own knell.

"Ding-dong, ding-dong"—why couldn't he drive their ringing from his head.

Again they became ships' bells telling the time.

"How long have I been drifting, drifting! They must have tolled a thousand, thousand hours—enough time for all eternity."

"Ding-dong, ding-dong," to the rising and falling of the waves. Why couldn't he get them out of his head!

Perhaps back in her home in Salthaven, Sally, with the premonition God gives, they say, to faithful lovers, was praying hard for him, for a favouring wind sprang up, refreshing the shipwrecked sailor, silencing the incessant tones of those dreadful bells, and wafting him towards an unknown shore.

He rubbed his eyes—he feared a mirage. No, it persisted, that dark line, a little heavier and deeper than the sea-rim, like a deep-blue stroke of crayon on a thin line of lighter

blue. Its form grew more distinct. A tiny cone rose from its center. It grew into a mountain top. Rounded masses around it gave evidence of trees; a white strip betrayed sand; and gradually he was borne between the encircling arms of two coral reefs into a peaceful, happy bay.

Gently the rollers carried him to the white shore. Wearily he unslashed himself, then, too spent to move, lay on the sand in the sun. But so deep and full are the hidden reservoirs of human vitality and so strengthening was the thought of his escape that he finally managed to stagger to his feet. Crossing the sand and searching through the tropical vegetation, he discovered, but a few rods away, a little spring; drank of its cooling water, and then fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIVINE CARLOTTA

OF precisely the same height were Sally Fell and Rosey Cohen, but as different in habitat and appearance as a fallow deer and a gayly-striped zebra. Rosey was a daughter of the slums, a foster child of the cafés. Her first cry—even in that hour it was harsh and forceful—was heard in a close room behind a fire-escape draped with a vari-coloured bedding, one of a thousand such crude balconies ranging above the crowded East Side street and its jostling many-tongued thousands.

Her father usually stood with his skull-cap and wide flaring beard in the doorway of the Kosher shop, decorated with ugly dark red lumps of beef and scrawny fowl, hanging pathetically with their heads downward. In front of the store, and in and out of the interminable pushcarts, with their flaring oil-lamps at night illuminating a bewildering miscellany of merchandise,—everything from spoiled grapefruit to slimy suspenders, Rosey played and fought and bit her way. In her life there were two bright recurring episodes,—the visits to the gallery of the Grand Street Theater where the adipose Adler, pride of the Jewish race, stalked the boards, and the wandering hurdy-gurdy, to which

she danced, not with the dainty grace of the Greek and Italian children, but with a wild abandon and agility which distracted even the pushcart vendors from their wares.

As, in not any too ripe a fulness of time, eight little animated steps—a curly-haired brother and seven little sisters—followed the fat, girdleless “Momma,” Rosey, to keep this human stairway from collapse, joined the chorus of “The Queens of the East,” American Wheel Burlesque, even departing for one week at Miner’s (where they “liked ’em fat,” she confessed) but whose glory is now a pathetic legend.

Here an equipment of animal spirits, hard and sensuous good looks—really libeling her, for her head was level enough—together with that most surprising muscular agility, even promoted her to a place in the “olio,” the intermission between the two tawdry acts of the performance. But after a year or two, tiring of the road, she blossomed out at a semi-foreign café, on a street that cuts Second Avenue, the boulevard of the Ghetto, midway to the East.

The storm that was hurling the *Provincetown* to her doom enveloped the whole coast, and drove its slanting lances on the dripping cabs herded in the triangle outside the café. But all was warmth where she sat at a table near the piano, waiting her turn, meanwhile usurping the others’. The rouge on her cheeks was heightened by the natural scarlet of good spirits, and her bobbed black mane swished from side to side over fleshy but shapely shoulders, as she quarreled with the manager. In this fashion of headdress she was, of course, a prophetess, anticipating the present

by at least a decade, but she had adopted the wild coiffure from a Salome make-up she had admired. It was, as the cashier was explaining to a startled customer, an "Elluva-fight" she was having with "the boss." She apparently liked anything of an "elluva" variety, in fact, she never was so happy as when rowing. Besides she thought it effective. So finishing the manager, she ordered the jabbering busboys, waiters, and orchestra leader about with a sovereign and well-dissembled anger, and succeeded most thoroughly in drowning out the tenor of expansive chest. And all through this performance—by no means on the bill—the black eyes gauged its publicity value, for nothing pays so well as rudeness and a nicely-calculated degree of insanity. At least the faces of commuters in yokel quest of Bohemia so attested.

MacAllister made his way through the blue wisps of smoke, and between the little tables, with their spaghetti dishes and inverted siphons of carmine wine.

"Your exit-cue, Josef, here's a gentleman to see me."

Nettled by the emphasis she placed on the seventh word, and its implication, the manager beat a hasty retreat, almost as beside himself as an impresario over some famous star's caprice.

MacAllister dropped lazily into a chair at her table, giving as always the impression of the utmost economy of word and effort. When action was not insistent, his tall figure seemed to drawl through life—but never, even when motionless, those deft, alabaster-finished fingers of his. In the dark picture he made these were ever the highlights.

"Gotta bit of news for yuh," began the girl, "that Abey Clout is one swell little press-agent."

"Yeh, he's a bright boy," vouchsafed MacAllister.

"Bright! Why, he's got the Singer Tower faded! He's booked me for a solo dance at Standish's on Broadway at a hundred and fifty per, lessn his commishun. Not that I didn't have it comin'," she added proudly.

Not being exactly of a lymphatic nature, or one to sit back and lazily luxuriate in a prospect, she sat forward blithely and both thrilled and shrilled at it. Besides the figures just mentioned there were perquisites. She had a code, which was more than some of her Madonna-faced rivals could boast, priding herself on always having "gone straight," but such a course has fine gradations, and reasonably untainted luxuries were to be had from all gauged as "easy marks," without too entangling a compromise.

"Congratulations are in order, Rosey."

"Aw, don't Rosey me any more. He's goin' ta bill me as 'Carlotta,' 'The Divine Carlotta!' Canya beat it?"

Mr. MacAllister couldn't, and she continued.

"I'm the illigit'mate descendant of Mahomet, Abey says, some wop prophet, I guess—never heard him menshuned in the synagogue. But, dearie, 'the divine Carlotta!' Say, are you lissnen?"

"My homage, divine one."

Carlotta, for henceforth we must not incur her displeasure through addressing her by her earlier name, surveyed his cool, suavely-tailored length with some admiration.

"Say, Mac, yuh oughtta get some sportier suit than that cremation cloth you 're always wearin'."

"In what, my queen, does it offend you?"

"They're black, but they gimme the blues." She looked around proudly as she emitted this sparkle. "You look like a continuous wake."

"I wear them from sentiment."

"Sentiment—the Hell you say! 'Sleft outta your system."

"There you're in error, my dear, there's a vein, deep in my nature, which your more obtuse one hasn't touched,—a vein, tender and pure and unalloyed. You see," he grew rarely communicative, "it's for my parents. The dear old people booked me for the Amen corner, and later the big-time pulpit——"

"Yuh look the part!"

"And occasionally it can be useful. I can splice a man and an untoward girl without even a license—for a night—and a consideration."

"Oh, mister, ain't yuh got no respect for my innocence!" She surveyed him critically, "yes, yuh look it, with them bits of cracked ice. Yuh oughtn't ta wear 'em—they give you away."

"My lucky stones, ever since a happy night up in Nome."

He shed exquisite reminiscence. Much red blood had been spilled that night, much yellow gold exchanged.

"They were Cal Fresno's. And he cashed in when he forgot to wear them one evening. Same thing happened to Forty-nine Halliday when he grew careless, just as Lucky

Lucille foretold. On my hands they bring luck, but off, good-night!"

"Sounds like an intrestin' movie in a nickette," said Carlotta, then issued a raucous order.

"Gustaf, a bottle o' Bud for the gentleman, or will you have a highball, Mac?"

"Neither, thanks."

"Oh, I forgot, yuh always was a high-principled man, Mac."

But it was her turn, and she flounced from the table out into the little clear space, in an ensemble of raucous voice, twitching head, hips, and shoulders, all at a ludicrous but most engaging tempo—her pace was always *accelerando*.

She joined him again, to find a fourteen-year old youngster with ferret eyes and a Semitic nose whose hawk-curve was a grotesque caricature of his sister's well-shaped one. After a whispered colloquy, a modulation which she achieved with difficulty, Carlotta groped in her well-developed bosom, and the requested greenback rustled in the boy's hand.

"Now, run along, Izzy, and don't shoot any craps on the way home—see. And give love to the Momma.

"But where yuh been, Mac?"

"Week-ending with a friend of yours."

"Bar Harbour or Newport?" she jeered.

"Neither—Salthaven, Mass."

She concealed a sudden look of apprehension, leaning towards the gambler with an assumed tenderness that had absolutely no effect.

"What were yuh pullin' on the kid?"

"Just foraging."

Anger smouldered in her eyes, only to be diplomatically quenched.

"Did he fall?"

"Did your long-haired ancestor fall for Delilah?"

Now, strange as it may seem, Carlotta had been very careful with Master Phil and his pocket-book, choosing most inexpensive places for dining whenever he flitted down from New Haven. It really would have cut her tough little heart pretty deep, had he classed her as a "grafter" or "gold-digger," indifferent as she might be to the odium of these appellatives where fair game was concerned. When one had a "sweetheart"—why there was all the difference in the world.

"You oughtta lay off him, Mac." She sprang with some maternal quickening to the defense. "I've stood by you at cards an' a lot of your phony schemes, but blackmailin' a girl's friends is diff'rent."

"Friends!" he retorted, "a girl hasn't any, they're always something else, more or less. So, easy on the love-stuff, Little One, or it might wreck the fair structure of our partnership."

The voice was raised not a half-note, but it held a master's reproof for Carlotta. Those cold, unflickering eyes could read the faintest lines on the plaid backs of cards across a wide table, and even her easy impudence faltered before them. She was subdued, or through discretion appeared so. She was also a little uneasy over something else.

"Say, Mac," she assuaged him, "you was tellin' about Lucky Lucille—did she read palms an' tell your future and all that?"

"That's what her sign said."

"And did you believe her, did it come out the way she said?"

"A lot of it—why?"

"Oh, I went to a medyum, over on Pell Street, a spooky joint, three flights up, dark an' back of a chop-sooeey hangout. She was half-coon and half chink herself."

"A happy medium," MacAllister gibed.

"Gawd no! There was nothin' happy about her. She was the saddest lookin' dame I ever saw. An', well, she says,—'Dearie, you're goin' on a real long journey——'"

"You prefer roses?" murmured her tormentor.

Carlotta started, looking furtively over her shoulder. "Oh, Gawd, she couldn't a meant that—but a long journey, over some water——"

"Perchance, to 'the Island.'" (He referred to the city prison.)

"Stop your kiddin', Mac, this was serious—she made a big impreshun on me. It was all dark, with two spooky-lookin' guys with turbans, an' a crystal, an' incense burnin'. But she meant the ocean—in a ship, an' she said——"

Here Carlotta closed her eyes dramatically, and in a somnambulist's voice intoned,—

"'I see gold, dearie, showers of gold, an' you in the midst of it——'"

“Well, Carlotta, if you’re good, maybe you’ll have your wish,” said the gambler enigmatically.

“The gold lissens well—” she nodded, “but that long journey—I don’t like it.”

And she shivered as she reached for her cloak.

CHAPTER IX

“FAITHFUL AND TRUE”

SALLY wasn't at all anxious to see Philip, though he came charioted in the smartest of roadsters and splendidly appointed himself. Little Miss Phoebe, the postmistress, had just stopped her wrenlike chirping long enough to shake her head for the ninetieth time, with an eloquent pity that reminded one of lavender and the infinite pathos of transient things, and the girl nodded to Philip as to a passer-by whom one remembers having seen somewhere, and stood on the top post-office step, gazing downhill over the roofs and the little grove of masts to the sea beyond, out of whose silence no message, no sign had come.

“Oh, hasn't he a distinguished air!” whispered Stella Appleby, a plump, fair-sized matrimonial filly, with prettyish blond hair and blue eyes, Sally's chum, not from any particular affinity, but purely from geographical reasons. She had the air of always scanning the horizon for trousered craft, also a predisposition to giggles, all harmless enough, signifying nothing more than that she was preparing for her trade in life, quite as the boy destined to become an electrical engineer fools with toy batteries and bells. If you listened prophetically you could hear those giggles translated

into a not uncharming baby-talk over an infant of her own.

“Oh, *isn't* he distinguished!” she repeated, admiring further the sartorial graces,—the Byronic collar, extending a half-inch over the lapel, the unpadded, London-cut shoulders. “Oh, why don't you *say* something? You never get enthusiastic over anything any more, and I must say I like enthusiasm.”

The object of the adulation had finished puttering with his car, an operation ostentatiously prolonged over the new model, and was overtaking them.

“Isn't that just perfect?” persisted Stella, pinching the other's arm, and trying to delay her. Now the other youths of Salthaven obediently raised their hats two inches above their heads when addressing “a lady,” but young Mr. Huntington always doffed his, and, furthermore, stood uncovered during the whole course of the conversation, no matter what the weather, providing only the lady were not ill-favoured.

“He's just like the men in Robert Chambers's stories, isn't he?” Stella prattled on, with time enough to get in one more blurb, “Look at his hair—that's the sort of hair-cut to have, not the countrified round-cut the other boys get.”

Now a moment before Sally had looked most poetic, with none of the old sweetness gone, but the old care-free boyish look a little wistful, and now and then tinged with the heart's-tides. In the caverns of the deep, the pearl as it ripens always adds to its white innocence the auroral flushes of maturity. However, she answered Stella's chatter most unpoetically and rudely,—

"Shut up!"

That tonsure was the kind Ben innocently used to acquire, to her horror. Once she and Stella had quarrelled, not speaking for *three whole days*, because of a similar remark about Ben's foot-wear whose squarish cut, Stella declared, lacked the Huntington "class." But Sally had no time for further defence of her sweetheart.

"Oh—how do you do, Phil," she said, then made as if to hurry on, but he cut across the walk in front of her.

"Why what's the matter, Miss Abstraction? Thanks for the cordial welcome to our city!" he bantered with a sarcastic "Br-r-rr" and shiver.

"Oh, I have so many things to do at home, I must hurry back."

"Don't take life so seriously, Sally."

"That's just it, Mr. Huntington, I tell her she's *too* serious. She's changed a lot," put in Stella, eager to be in the conversation.

"I don't mean to be," apologized Sally, "But really I've been awfully busy and I must hurry back."

"Oh, have a heart, Sally," persisted Philip. "Let me drive you out to the cove. I've just had new shock-absorbers put on my car, they're just invented—pretty nifty, too, and she rides beautifully."

"Oh, do, Sally, it would be fine—let's!" Stella put in her oar, determined to at least occupy the rear-seat, whether asked or not.

"It's very kind of you, Phil, but really I can't—but Stella would love to go."

It would have been hard to decide whether this remark was vindictive or merely strategic, but it didn't matter, for, outmanœuvring him, she had hurried on, and Stella was enjoying the thrill of being helped in the car, with the additional and unexpected advantage of occupying that front seat.

Her foolish little heart thumped with the engine and thrilled at their speed. It also tingled with a delightful uncertainty as to whether in that stretch of deserted shore-road, in the dark o' the pines—he wouldn't—Phil did, and there was only a feeble, countering "Oh, Mr. Huntington," and a blush from Stella, weak indeed compared to the resounding slap Sally would have given him in her present mood, to say nothing of banishment thereafter from her company. But Philip didn't seem to enjoy the innocent episode. In spite of his immaculate toilet the features looked careworn and haggard, and frequently he endangered their course by furtively looking over his shoulder, to the bewilderment of Stella, who could make out no pursuer, and to her consequent chagrin. But little caring what had happened in the shade of the pines, or anywhere, for that matter, except somewhere on that wide, unspeaking ocean, Sally went home to face Captain Bluster—and Aunt Abigail.

Aunt Abigail had come to visit, then, worse luck, to stay, and worst of all, to ally herself with her obstinate brother in his championship of Master Philip.

Very spare of frame and also of kind thoughts was Aunt Abigail. Her eyes and the point of her spectacled nose were as sharp as her scent for neighbourhood gossip and possible

misdemeanours of Sally. The sparse hair was so tightly drawn into its knob that it seemed as if coiffured by some instrument of the Spanish inquisitors whom she resembled, or rather the iron union of one of those mediæval fanatics and some Puritan dame with a tight-corseted soul. She was forever making life a perpetual inquisition for herself and others, forever straightlacing their souls.

This championship of Philip by Cap'n Bluster was a little puzzling, for deep under the last layer of his crusty old heart was a selfish affection for the girl, and, though he rarely faced the fact, he at least subconsciously realized how barren the house would be of all life and colour and joy if she passed over its portal. Perhaps the foolish old Boltwood grudge had something to do with it, more likely the fact that her coldness to the Huntington heir made the catastrophe remote—but then, of course, Captain had a lee eye on that Huntington fortune.

All through the meal he annoyed her by constant innuendo which he meant to be subtle but which was only sly. She said nothing until Aunt Abigail was locked in rigid slumber, and she herself was sitting on the arm of the old Washington rocker. The firelight softened the stiffness of the oval portraits on the wall and the picture of Nelson's victory; flickered on the model of the ship on the mantel, the heavy side-board with its huge lobster-shaped tureen and the blue willow-ware; and wove fantastic patterns in the variegated rag-carpet on the floor.

But the comfort and cheer of the hour vanished when he took up again the thread that meandered through

all their conversation, thoughts, and her very pattern of life.

“Well now—that’s a sensible girl. Just you forget young Boltwood. He never was good enough for my girl.”

The black curls withdrew from his shoulder, and the girl jumped from the arm of the chair, and said very gravely :

“Now, Father, listen. We might as well settle it once for all. Don’t you ever say another word against Ben, or, much as I love you I’ll leave you—yes—*leave* you. Something tells me he isn’t lost, but if he were,” here the voice faltered but she went on heroically,—“if—he were, and something I can’t see now—*made* me marry someone else, I’d never forget him.”

Like most bullying souls Captain Fell was awed and frightened by this rebellion. For all the youthful curls, Sally’s black head held a good measure of wisdom. Too many dutiful wives she had seen cringe and efface themselves under the tyranny of their men-folk. She had never cringed, though she had done a lot of effacing herself, sometimes beyond what was politic or even necessary, hating rows as all really feminine women do. But she could turn, and after that explosion Captain was much more careful. Yet it did not hinder him, a few days before Halloween, from endorsing another invitation of Phil’s, though he was a little less peremptory about it.

“Please go,” Philip had urged, in the parlour into which Aunt Abigail had ushered him, smilingly for once. And wild and as unscrupulous as he was, the boy could be quite winning and gentle when he wanted something very badly.

Perhaps his heart was really touched, at least he was piqued by her elusiveness.

"You'll enjoy it," he pled, "the Schaufflers have planned a bang-up party. Everyone's going, and, besides, you've turned down every invitation I've given you."

"You ought to go—it's all nonsense, you're staying in like this," boomed the Captain's voice from the favourite rocker. "Your cheeks are gettin' as pale as the white-caps out yonder," and he tweaked them—a movement she hated, it was so forever putting her back in the category of a child.

"Yes," put in Aunt Abigail, from her own stiff-backed chair, "it's your *duty* to go."

Sally hadn't at all missed nor was she longing now for the attentions of Philip or any of the Salthaven young men, eligible or otherwise. For some reason Providence alone knows, women have a far better developed sense of spiritual nearness than men, and ever since that memorable night under the Light she was content, much of the time, with the invisible but very real companionship of her wandering sweetheart.

But—well—maybe she hadn't been quite fair to Phil—anyway she didn't want another row, so she accepted.

Promptly at eight on the night of the thirtieth of October, for "Home Sweet Home" always strikes up at eleven at all Salthaven affairs, only smugglers or doctors and storks being about later than that hour, the Schauffler's Maggie ushered Sally—"Ladies to the right, Gen'lemen to the left"—into the guest-room.

A moment, like the sea-birds she preened herself, for even

sorrow cannot drown this most normal of instincts. The large pier-glass apparently approved the brown dress, simple though it was, for it fitted her silver-birch symmetry perfectly. Simple, too, were the adornments enforced by a rigid economy, but the bitter-sweet added exquisite bits of colour. They had been crushed under her cloak, and, straight-seeing and little given to self-pity as she was, tonight she almost sentimentalized over their obvious symbolism as she rearranged the vermilion and saffron sprays on her own troubled breast. But resolutely stifling the sigh, she fluffed up the scarlet leaves and berries in hair which almost held the sheen of the purple grackles in that earlier season when Ben was still there, then caught up a gift of Captain Harve's, a shawl from the Orient, and descended the stairs, her shoulders misted in its transparent gold.

"The very flower of girlhood," whispered kindly Mrs. Schaufler to her husband, as they stood near the door of the spacious parlour, their silver hair framed in a bower of russet oak-leaves, asters and golden-rod.

"The prettiest girl in the old town," he paternally supplemented.

And instead of one formal hand, the hostess grasped both of Sally's hands in her own, falling in love with her all over again, as men and women and children had a habit of doing each time they met her, while old Mr. Schaufler teased her as usual.

"It's lucky, Sally, that this isn't two hundred years ago—you'd be hanged for *witchcraft*, sure—I'll be hanged if you wouldn't!"

And his wife added smilingly:

"This dull old world needs witchcraft like yours, my dear," and this time she couldn't resist kissing her, with an extra tenderness, perhaps thinking of the little tragedy still on the boards. To her, as to little Miss Phoebe, life would have been barren indeed without a daily manna of romance and sentiment, and over the bent head her lips formed the word "saint," adding the gentle reproof,—“Not hanged but canonized, you mean, Theodore.”

"What! Train six-pounders on such a pretty clipper!" the old fellow retorted, twinkling all over and pleased as Punch at this latest perpetration.

Then Sally, of course had to look up, her cheeks rivaling the berries in her hair.

"Mr. Huntington makes the best ships, Cartwright the best sails, Aunt Presby the nicest pies,—but Mr. Schauffler makes the prettiest speeches in all Salthaven."

"Well returned, young lady," said the old gentleman, "and you and my wife," he added gallantly, "the prettiest pictures."

"That's only half true," retorted Sally.

"No, it's *all* true. Now, may I have the second dance? I'd ask for the first if Master Phil weren't looking so jealously at me."

"Oh, please take it," she replied, almost pleadingly, then, seeing that she was holding up the chattering line behind her, patted the handsome old man's arm and passed on, head up and smiling.

The hour for corn-popping, chestnut-roasting, and shivery ghost-stories, over, the new two-hundred dollar phonograph.

a decided innovation in the town, was duly cranked up by the twinkling host—and the fun was on.

Very oddly-assorted couples two-stepped and—that is those of them that could—waltzed on the floor, for the Schaufflers, well-bred people in the best sense of that term, had veritably thrown open their doors. Neither purse nor family-tree determined the invitations; all who were wholesome and spiritually sound, in short “real folks,” had been bidden to the feast.

Ben Stout, the driver of the famous horse-car, furnished the low comedy, while Mr. Mather, the gold-spectacled principal of the school, essayed the high, each “monkeyshine” and quip being impartially rewarded with many-keyed laughter, although the latter’s classical allusions were seldom understood. And Phil gracefully steered Sally among the bouncing couples in the second dance, which he claimed, while Lizzie Rountree, the tiny little milliner with the round eyes and crab-apple cheeks, hopped happily with good old Dr. Ferguson; Don, the poorly-dressed son of the widow Wiggins, led Mrs. Schauffler on the floor, she not minding a bit when he ruined her train; Mr. Schauffler’s handsome figure escorted the pathetic grey little slip of the widow herself; and He who attended the lowly wedding in Galilee, which some of the well-tailored Pharisees with large bank accounts declared “was so mixed, you know,” must have smiled approval that night.

The wholesome fun and colour fed brightly-tinted fancies to the busy shuttle of the girl’s brain, though two of darker hue were constantly weaving in and out of the pattern,—the

thoughts of Ben's absence and a certain look in Philip's eyes, portending that something she had long feared, something she knew he and her father and Aunt Abigail were doing their utmost to bring about.

"Isn't this a peach of a waltz, Sally?"

"Yes—but it isn't a clingstone. Don't hold me so tight."

"That wasn't tight, Sally."

"Tighter than necessary," and then, because she was worried, she snapped,—“You *heard* what I said.”

"Why are you so stand-offish with me, Sally?"

She relented.

"I'm sure I didn't mean to be. If there's one thing I can't stand in people it's not being true to their friends." She was hoping he would accept that construction—it was getting to be a euphemism as it was—"I hope I'm not that way myself," she finished.

"You've avoided me, *haven't* you now?"

Sally's blush was very red, the answering fib white:

"N-n-no."

Not having entirely escaped the Puritan curse of hyper-conscience, she felt guilty, although all her avoidance had been mere self-defence. He reversed—she couldn't help noticing that he did it beautifully—she tried the same manœuvre with the conversation:

"Isn't the colouring of those leaves over there beautiful?"

It was too abrupt, and the trick didn't work.

"Almost as pretty as you are in that dress."

"Well, Phil, if you won't take a hint, I'll ask you right out *plain*. Please *don't be personal, tonight or any night*. Let's

change the subject from *me* to something else—leaves, dancing, anything—let’s talk of Stella!”

This last subject, to which Sally referred a little maliciously, had just been thrust upon them by fat Billy Plum, who did most of his dancing pump-handle fashion with his arms, to Stella’s evident disgust. Phil skilfully steered away from the impending collision while Stella gazed soulfully over Billy’s fat shoulder at the fascinating cavalier.

“I *won’t* change the subject, now I’ve got you here,” persisted Sally’s escort. “I’m going to tell you what I think of you.”

“Why, Phil, I haven’t intended to be mean to you. If I have, I do beg your pardon, indeed I do.”

“That wasn’t what I meant. Shall I really tell you what I think of you?”

“Oh, Phil, please don’t be personal again or I’ll stop dancing.”

“Not while I’ve got my chance—Sally I love you.”

The girl went white, stopped short with the music, writhed from his grasp, and hurried towards her hostess, calling in agitation:

“Oh, Mrs. Schauffler, I have a message for you.”

Safe within the shelter of that kindly lady’s wing, she stammered:

“Mrs. Schauffler, I hate to leave right now, but I have a headache and——”

“Oh, I’m sorry, dear,” and she looked anxiously at the pretty flushed face, reading there signs of other troubles besides the alleged indisposition. “Just run upstairs and lie

down on the couch. You'll be better in a moment—here are the salts—wait a second, Sally, and I'll go with you."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Schauffler"—the girl was determined not to give Phil any further chance of continuing the disagreeable subject on the walk home—"I hate to leave, for you've given me a lovely time—but I must go now—I'll tell you about it some other time."

Seeing her very real distress, Mrs. Schauffler no longer protested.

"All right, dear. Don't you worry. Theodore"—she called to her husband.

"Oh, don't bother, Mrs. Schauffler, I can run home alone. The moon is up and it isn't dark."

"Go alone? I should say *not*," briskly interjected the old gentleman. "You've been favouring the young squirts all the evening. Now we old fellows have our innings," then to overcome her reluctance he whispered,—“besides, you'll do me a favour. I'm dying for a smoke."

So after all, Phil saw Stella home and thereby gained the parting kiss at the gate, which many Salthaven girls allowed as the proper finish to an enjoyable party, but which Sally would as certainly have denied.

It was a more mystical caress she was venturing at her window, that window over whose sill she had climbed that memorable night, three months ago. She threw open her shutters. The wind drove the grey gondolas of the clouds across the wistful face of the moon. They were sailing south!

Taking the leaves from her hair, she kissed them, then

tossed them over the sill. And the wind took the scarlet messengers, frail and intangible and warm-coloured as her own thoughts, twirling them, spinning them, as if weighing them in its buffeting palms, then drove them, too, to the south. Was it there? Perhaps in those shining islands! Anyway as, following the old, foolish custom of leal daughters of the sea, she took her lamp and placed it in her window, she whispered a prayer that they might be wafted to *where ever* it was.

CHAPTER X

THE ISLE OF GREEN STAIRWAYS

AFTER a refreshing but cautious draught, the shipwrecked sailor tumbled on a clump of fern under a colonnade of royal palms, and fell asleep. The sun had been within two hours of the Zenith when he drifted away into that deep unconsciousness. It was but two hours from its own resting-place when he awoke, to the rapid alarum of a voluble parrot, whose plumage, as seen through the palm-leaves above him, was a splashing design in cubist planes of scarlet, indigo, and green.

It isn't the first days of isolation, any more than the period immediately following a bereavement, in which the full weight of loneliness is felt, and the boy, on arising, felt strangely refreshed, and yet incomprehensively light of head.

Nor was it so much the hunger and exposure—he was inured to these—as the atmosphere of the place itself. It had a singular clarity—the pristine purity of spring-waters or dews of Eden transmuted into ozone, while still retaining the soft-hued, dream-commingled drowsiness of some potent drug. It was as though this opiate quality which tintured every breath he drew, every space the eye dwelt on, had been compounded of the myriad hues of the vernal wilder-

ness that fronted him,—a wavering, softly-shimmering kaleidoscope of tree and vine and flower, set in tremulous motion by the most wooing of breezes. Line or curve he could not distinguish, only blurred masses of form and colour. In all that green paradise the parrot's shriek was the only concrete thing.

He turned his back upon it, to meet the more clearly-cut curve of a white, coral-flushed shore, and suddenly the vague spell of the place assumed the sharper proportions of hunger.

A green, checker-backed turtle basked on the beach. A swift somersault, and it lay flapping ludicrously on its back. Innumerable crayfish, too, wriggled their prankish tentacles in the water. The flesh might have been eaten raw in extremity, and a three days' fast could fairly be considered that, but first he took stock of his equipment.

A search in his pockets revealed a clasp-knife, almost soldered fast by rust, and the lens of a broken glass, which fortunately he had stowed away for safe-keeping, the day before the wreck.

With the latter he stole a little of the sun's flame, concentrating it on a heap of leaves and dried twigs. Soon a fire flagged its rosy invitation to the solitary banquet.

On the following day he added to this meagre menu with the aid of a crude but efficient bow, made of resilient vines and boughs, a sharp stone serving for the arrow-head. The island abounded in "agouti," little animals resembling prairie-dogs in size and shape, and their flesh he found to be not entirely unpalatable. The leaves of the wild plantain, too, were edible. A foray farther into the heart of the mysterious

wilderness produced tropical fruits; and on the rougher west coast of the island was a rendezvous of sea-birds which added new delicacies to the lost sailor's larder.

Other tools he contrived,—a spade from a flat stone, roughly sharpened by chipping it with another, then set in a cleft bamboo reed, and bound with tough vines; a hammer similarly fabricated; and an axe of disappointing dulness.

Fortunately, long handling of ropes rendered his hands proof against blisters, and on the thirtieth day, so busily did he work, the house-warming of a little hut was celebrated. Save for the jabber of the parrot and the scream of some harsh macaw, it was a very silent occasion. There was only one guest, and she never spoke. Yet the boy was sure the place echoed to her silent laughter. The day was to come, perhaps, when it would only mock him, but now he could hear its lilt pleasantly everywhere,—in the breeze ruffling the palm-fronds, the very silver break of the waves on the beach, and its overtones always in the bubbling of the spring.

The hut had one room, quite sufficient for his needs. His cooking was done on hollowed stones in the open. Sweet-fern and palm-leaves furnished his bedding. Yet he ate plentifully and slept soundly, though all too drowsily, for some time at least. On his square shoulders was set a very level head, and on one thing he was stoutly determined,—he would not let the loneliness, the overcompelling mystery, “get his nerve,” as hour by hour they threatened. Some day he would see Sally again. Either he would get to her, or she would come to him. Over and over he said it to himself.

To record the slow passage of time until that blessed reunion, he named the twelve royal palms that guarded the spring from which he had first drunk when cast on the island, according to the months, cutting on the proper trunk a broad nick each time the sun rose.

"I'm sure a magician," he said to himself, for, with a courage more admirable than his humour, he often fashioned naïve conceits as well as more ponderable weapons for his fight against despair—"with my little knife I've changed a cocoa into a sure-enough date-palm."

Occasionally he even chaffed or cracked boyish jokes with himself and his strange audience, constituting himself a whole minstrel show,—“Mistah Interlocutah,” “Endman,” “Bones,” and “chorus,” to the amazement of the agouti, the “gab-birds,” as he dubbed the brilliant parrots and macaws, and those beautiful winged creatures of such bright azure he called them “Heaven-birds.” Some of them even came to know him, the more trusting responding to his whistle, and he never violated the confidence once given by these furred and feathered waifs, only the wilder serving as game for his primitive weapons.

So his life was made up of two contrasting existences, and his eternal struggle between them—between the oppressive, almost supernatural, spell of the place, the loneliness, and the daily routine and fight for very survival. As the months passed by, he doubled his efforts to keep his sanity by absorption in practical tasks, those absolutely necessary, and others which he was constantly contriving.

The inland mystery of the island he had never penetrated

—he almost feared it—but now that the building of the hut, the manufacture of his weapons, and the stocking of his larder, had secured shelter and sustenance, he was resolved to conquer that dread. So, immediately after the housewarming, he started a tour of exploration, noting his discoveries on a rough chart made of bark from the widest girthed tree he could strip. Some human habitation he might find, although he doubted that, and perhaps the charting of the place in actual visual lines would give tangible form to its haunting vagueness, dispel the mystery, which for all its loveliness he felt to be unholy and ominous.

“The Two Horns,” as he called the capes encircling the bay, he first traced on the map. Then because of the many hues shimmering in the waters between them, he carved the letters “Rainbow Bay,” although he was tempted to change the name to one more fanciful when he gazed down through the pellucid depths at the odd sea forms and quaint sea fauna, lying still at the bottom or crawling lumberingly away.

Little sea-horses like animated chessmen floated through the waters, their heads held high, and seemingly propelled by no motive power but the buoyancy of their own mettle; and grotesque toad-fish; and warted creatures; and ludicrously misshapen things with toothed claws of vermilion; and angel-fish with mouths whose hideousness was swathed in scarflike fins of an infinitely delicate hue and texture. Each tint a poem; each fin a flame that water could not quench; each claw a most prodigious joke! The little jokes of God, as he had once told Sally—so long ago it seemed.

The aquarium, fathoms deep yet crystal-clear, was a vast depository of them,—the beauty, the humour, the fancies, the wondrous figments of the imagination of the Almighty. One had but to look down into the waters to realize an infinite variety which far outranged the vengefulness or mercy, the two lone attributes with which past ages have credited Him.

The island itself he christened "The Island of Green Stairways," a happy title, suggested by the view from the bay, looking upward and to the South. From the pink and white shore, it rose in a beautiful succession of table-lands covered with rich foliage of varying shades, that looked for all the world like green terraces or stairways designed for some giant's ascent to "Cone Mountain," a height of some two thousand feet, sometimes blue as smoke from a woodfire in the forest, at others tinted the darker hue of a swallow's wings. Yet even here, on the unencumbered shore, outside of the bewildering green wildwood inland, as his eye followed palm coronal, and plumed terrace after plumed terrace, to the mountain, the same sense of unreality held. The perspectives were bewildering, like those in the vistas of Versailles, now limned as on a vertical canvas suspended near one's eyes, again as though lengthened by a camera lens to poetic distances.

However, in infinite attention to practical detail lay salvation, and he returned to the shoreline again, curving around it until he reached the more jagged volcanic shore to the East, indented by little unnavigable bays, and one of deeper water, though not so favourable as that between the Twin

Horns. This, the haunt of innumerable, skirling sea-fowl, went down on the chart as "Plover Bay."

Now, with the spring again as the starting point, his knife swung to the West, past the limestone cliffs of Coral Cove (just west of the capes) to the great "Cave of Night," two miles and three-quarters, as the crow flies, from his home. Its roof, at least sixty feet high, was plastered all over with nests like those of martins, but larger and only dimly descried. Through the eternal darkness sounded the strange cries of nightbirds, whose wheeling bodies melted into the inky blackness of the vault until they became mere flitting pairs of eyes.

Fleeing this ghoulish aviary, he hurried home, and on the following morning took his most extensive tour, through the heart of the island, due south from the hut.

Leaving the coral-tinted beach and its border of feather-topped pines, he passed through acres of sworded thicket, then the rich foliage of several successive terraces, prolific with mangoes, oranges, limes, nutmegs, and other once cultivated fruits, all mingling with the wild and giving evidence that long ago beings of his own kind had dwelt in this beautiful, forgotten fragment of the earth.

As he ascended, over him towered gigantic trees,—mahogany, dye, and fine cabinet woods, and everywhere, criss-crossing between their mighty boles, stretched like a maze of ship's ropes the stout liana vines. Their roots were covered by an even more impenetrable labyrinth of weed, and bush, and hidden trailer, all as riotous in colour as in their bewildering disorder. The sombreness of the trees was richly tinted

by the warm hues of silver and golden tree-ferns, the delicate hues of myriad lichens and parasites, and here and there picked out by the crimson beauty of the Mountain Rose. And ever hither and thither among the trees and vine-mazes darted wild blue pigeons, while above the thickly netted vines hummingbirds hung suspended like little thrumming ruby gyroscopes.

The bewildering intricacies of blade, and frond, and trunk, and vine, of colour, light, and shadow, were so overpowering that he felt enmeshed and longed for something clear-cut, like the simple outlines of old New England roofs, or the familiar spars and cordage of a ship. It seemed as if some form must shortly disentangle itself from the green labyrinth, some half-human thing with body of faun or satyr, perhaps, but with at least the semblance of human lineament. The absence was uncanny.

Sometimes he thought he heard hallooing, faint and afar-off, and he ran after the fancies until he stumbled over some natural abattis. Then, recovering his footing and fortitude, he dismissed the wild imaginings from his mind.

Now, as the terraces ranged on and up, the tangle thinned out, and the trees loomed higher and higher, like columns supporting the rent blue roof of the sky. So deep was the twilight and so majestic the upward sweep of the Gothic shafts that in the silence, broken only by the cataract's thunder, the castaway christened this highest terrace "Cathedral Woods." But the organ-music of the waterfall was sharply pierced by the shriek of the birds above, whose harshness belied their gorgeous colouring. Harsh, harsh,

always harsh they were, though garbed in the raiment of Paradise, always striking the discordant, unholy note, and profaning this shrine of Nature as gargoyles the pure façade of some old-world cathedral. To the wanderer it seemed not only impious but a foreshadowing of impending evil.

He followed the cataract's thunder and came upon a gorge as regularly cleft as though cut by some Olympian battle-axe, and separating Cathedral Woods, on the West, from the last short climb to the summit of the mountain.

Over its edge leapt a white streak of waterfall with a sheer drop of four hundred feet. The almost supernatural beauty of the place, the lack of human companionship, and his lonely lover's dreams, had set the boy to the making of poetic figures, which would have surprised even Captain Fairwinds, and further increased the distrust of Captain Bluster, who with a pachydermic matter-of-factness would have despised such "loony" tendencies. At any other time, in any other place, the boy would have been equally ashamed of himself as a sentimental fool, but he had been transported back a thousand years, his fancy quickened and equipped with all the rich imagery of races in the dawn of the world. So when he gazed down the sheer side of the cliff, with a sudden catch in his throat he saw *her* face, on the wedding day that was to be, misted in the white wonder of the ever-falling water, and with the vision was born the sobriquet. Not for worlds would he have told it to a soul, had there been any to receive his confidences, nevertheless as "Sally's Bridal Veil" it went down on the chart.

Over the gorge stretched another trace of human occupa-

tion,—a half-rotting suspension bridge, built of liana vines. He essayed the passage fearfully. The frail structure swayed above the cataract's thunder, but he reached the other side in safety, and climbed to the summit of the mountain. From a distance it had seemed a perfect blue cone, but here the explorer saw that a few thousand feet had been decapitated or blown away by some volcanic eruption, leaving a little seething, sulphurous lake, shaped like a saucer with brown and yellow, cliff-like sides, and properly recorded on the map as "Davy Jones' Saucer."

The boy turned his face away from the mountain, and gazed over the beauty of The Isle of Green Stairways and far away over the surrounding blue radiance of the ocean, but there was no cheering touch of white to tell a sail, or any smudge of steamer smoke to mar its purity.

A little later, in the twilight, he descended, vastly depressed, to the hut, and fell asleep.

On the following week he again made the journey through Cathedral Woods to Cone Mountain, and this time saw, leagues to the Northeast, the longed-for smoke on the horizon rim. Frantically he built huge fires, but in an hour the smoke had melted into thin air.

If he had had a powerful glass instead of the one broken lens, he might have seen a trim schooner yacht with a Bohemian party aboard, bound on a cruise of the West Indies. From the deck of the yacht, the owner and skipper saw the smoke of Ben's signal fires, but fancied it the vapour of some inactive volcano. Though they sailed away, one of the party all unconsciously performed a service for the

castaway. In an exuberance of spirits, a woman guest hurled a half-emptied champagne bottle into the waves. Favouring winds carried it to the shore of Rainbow Bay, and a week later, Ben, while walking along the sands, discovered it, cast up by the receding tide, and now clutched in the embrace of a landcrab which crawled awkwardly away at his approach. The champagne in the bottle was stale—anyway Ben had no stomach for it. But an old, old idea occurred to him, and he decided to try the thousand-in-one, forlorn, last chance it offered.

“If that bottle has taken a trip all the way from civilization—if you call it that—why, maybe it can find its way back.”

So on a piece of bark, he cut the message:

“Shipwrecked on island—about Lat. 18 N.
Long. 62 W. Alive. Well. Notify
Capt. H. Brent & Miss Sally Fell
at Salthaven, Mass., U. S. A.

Benj. Boltwood,
form. mate Bark Provincetown.”

“Landlubber’s calculation,” he grumbled to himself, “but maybe it won’t miss it by more ’n a hundred miles.”

The old cork was too swollen to be replaced, so he fashioned a new one from a bit he found in the flotsam on the beach, then very carefully fitted it in the mouth, walked to the end of the southern Horn and swam out to sea. To the westward-moving current he gave the bottle with a wish

or prayer—or whatever it is that an unsentimental but despairing sailor would utter—then swam back swiftly, for fear of the finny picaroons, the only ones that seemed now to roam these waters. But even of that he was not so sure.

CHAPTER XI

WINDS OF CHANCE

LONG that night the boy lay, couched on his bed of fern, and watched the gold and purple cyclorama of the night wheel over the coronals of the palms. Leagues to the North a girl sat, draped in a blue and white counterpane, listening to the ticking of the old Seth Thomas in the hall, and wished she could cry herself to sleep.

But the voyage of the bottle had begun—the tiniest of objects to outwit Fate, or else to consummate his plans.

Flowing in from the Atlantic, the ocean currents and their sighing overtones, the winds, bore it on and on to the West, past storied islands, like jewels adorning the burnished breastplate of the sea, some crowned with massive overhanging mountains, others nestling low on the waters, rich with fertile plantations and white-walled, red-roofed towns, steeped in molten sunshine, and slumbering 'neath royal palms—picturesque, unsewered, full of white palaces and mired, insect-ridden slums, yet all beautiful to look at from the sea, for the fairest hues are often born out of corruption.

Now the bottle was almost caught and churned to pieces in the swirl from a fruit-steamer's screw. Near St. Kitts, a gaudily-painted pleasure craft hove in sight; a mulatto's

hand tried to grasp the long neck, but it bobbed out of reach. Above him, a girl, Cooks-touring the Indies, called:

“Sort of a message from home.”

He heard her, and their mingling laughter came through the porthole, his with the mellow gold of the negro, hers all staccato and silver.

Then the currents swept the bottle through the straits of the Greater Antilles, until it floated with the myriad islands of seaweed on the waters of the Gulf, then swung it to the North beyond the Florida Keys.

And so the seasons passed, and many wonderful sights it could have seen, had it eyes and a soul, which it should have had with that message inside, but it was only a thing of sand and potash and lead-oxide, subject to immutable laws of wind and moon and tide, not caring at all about the loves of two mortals as frail and puny as itself.

So they came and went,—the white wings of many ships, low-waisted tramps, sullen derelicts, and once, after a storm, a raft of ship’s timbers hastily lashed together, and on it a gigantic black with hollow eyes and emaciated cheeks, and around it those ever-winking fins.

Now the bottle was nosed by a school of porpoises curvetting over the foam-curdled crests, their sleek sides turning to dusky rainbows in the sun. And again the twin masts of a steam-yacht pricked the horizon, then came daintily stepping over the waves. On its deck lay a great railroad king whose wallet had digested millions of securities in perfect comfort, but whose stomach could not even assimilate curds and whey.

And at last came bearing down on the bottle, the ship from the North that might have been Destiny's own. Under the overhanging stern were the letters,—“*Mary Ann, Salthaven, Mass.*,” and from its quarterdeck a child perilously leaned over the rail, piping in the smallest of trebles :

“Daddy, see the bottle—it's dancing on the waves!”

But the bottle with the insistent message, of course, never answered at all, or clamoured, or even dislocated the cork in its neck, through any effort to be heard.

So shark and wreckage, spar and life-belt, tree and seaweed, flower and dead men, floated by. So cape and headland, and suns and storms, and winds and tides and seasons, passed; and countless tiny white wings in the blue above, and the great white wings of the ships on the blue beneath, and still the unthinking bottle danced gaily, almost sportively, on the waves.

CHAPTER XII

SPRING

It was in April that the news had come. The bottle was tossing, God knows where; the thirteenth nick had just been cut in the eighth trunk of Ben's tree calendar; and Sally was making her two-hundred and fifty-seventh trip—since that night under the Light—to the postoffice, each pilgrimage a Via Dolorosa now. Again on the top step she paused to scan the horizon, but her gaze was stopped midway by a crowd gathered in front of Comby's drugstore. She recognized its focus, a strangely gesturing courier from the sea, in tattered blouse and water-stained trousers. It was Martin Rogers, the ship's carpenter of the missing *Provincetown*.

Over the nodding heads of his audience he caught sight of her half eager, half-fearful look, and stopped his dramatic recital in embarrassment.

Straight to him she went.

"Where is Ben?" was all she said.

Neither in the serene sky nor in the transfixed faces of the crowd could the distressed mariner find an answer. He fumbled at his pockets, and dug the toes of his shoes, almost petrified with water, between the pavement cracks,

looking almost as if guilty of the old ocean's crime himself.

But the girl's hands never relinquished their grasp, and the dark eyes gazing straight into his own compelled an answer.

"There was a storm, Sally—and Ben—wouldn't leave the ship."

She recoiled—swayed a little, then, gathering her strength, demanded in a voice whose shrillness was strangely different from the musical tones her neighbours had always known :

"But you *saved* him—*somebody* saved him—oh, tell me the rest—tell me *the rest*——"

But Martin's answer to the plea of her voice and outstretched hands was a mute shake of the head.

There were no outcries, only a heart-quiver that made her tremble. Some of the good people stretched out their arms in pity to steady her, but she straightened, and the look on her face stayed their kindly impulses. Silently they again opened the circle and out she passed, and on over the Square and up the hill to her home. And although everyone in Salthaven saw the mute evidence in her face, no one then or ever after heard her speak of her grief. Only the wind on the dunes and the waves knew, and the Light, and for all their eloquent whispers or bright illuminings, none can ever apostrophize them into betrayal of confidence or counsel.

Quenched was all the old sparkle, broken the blithe spirit. As spring passed and summer ripened the fruit in the old orchard, Philip persisted in his wooing; and Aunt

Abigail and that eternal "tamp, tamp," finally tortured the girl into an apathetic consent. When August came and the harvest moon, Ned Bowlby, the whistling printer, set up his copy that ran somewhat in this wise:

"Captain Hiram Fell requests the honour of your presence," and so on down through the old formula.

Sally refused even to look at the proof. What mattered a little letter or a misplaced comma when the whole universe was turned upside down!

All her blurred eyes caught were two fatal words, looming ominously large and black on the clay-hued sheet——

"September sixth."

CHAPTER XIII

CARLOTTA SEES RED

STANDISH'S was the sort of place which the world sees nightly in the films—discounting their arch magnificence, of course, and leaving as net, something showy, noisy, and crass. Now ordinarily, where men and women, wine, gold, and the passions foregather, it is reasonable to expect romance, colour, if only the much admired hues of the *Flowers of Evil*. But here even such resplendent blooms are choked by the bindweed Greed. Baudelaire has given way to Irving Berlin. The revels are but so many transactions. And the "atmosphere" has as much of the real quality as a theatre air-cooler matched with the ocean's breath.

Everybody is out on the make, each trying to extract something, in cash or sensation, from his neighbour,—waiter from customer, head-waiter from underling, guest from host, and host from guest—man from woman, and woman from man. Now, on occasion at least, Montmartre can make of merriment an art. One may be a spendthrift yet even through Frailty's rent robe show something of the reprehensible but splendidly natural. Here the hand instead of flinging away with a careless grace, even as it spends is outstretched to seize. The quarry, not the moment's fleeting

joy but the hard quid pro quo. No blithe laughter, gay grotesquerie, or real roses—only crinkled things of paper crepe, the aroma of talcum, steam, and sweat, compounded; and the prevailing colour the sickly gilt—the sort that encrusts a radiator.

But one would be sadly lacking in humour to grow sententious over Standish's or to consider it worth an indictment. Besides, it served as an excellent background for the star's robustious dancing, a humour as galeful as the winds that snap around the Flatiron, and an impudence, at times disconcerting, at others well-nigh fetching. But so much for that.

On this evening of the fifth of September, Carlotta, the "divine Carlotta," she who, according to Abey Clout's four-sheet lyric, had performed a most extraordinary service for the world, nothing less than "putting the *sin* in *sin*-copation," made the last assault and charge with her lithe hips, and fled the white hoop of the calcium for her dressing-room.

Her metamorphosis from the little Yiddish tomboy who had danced and fought and bit her way up from Stanton Street, into the most approved type of showgirl, shoulder-and-hip-sway, slang and all, had been little short of amazing. It was paralleled only by her brother Izzy's sloughing off of the old physical timidity of the Jew, and his debut as Joey McGann, "the Fightin' Harp," at the Harlem A. C. Both created sensations when they came back to Stanton Street (by the L as far as Grand, thence, for effect, by taxi). But for all this innocent show, they were together keeping

the fat, girdleless "Momma" and her living stairway, now increased to nine little steps, from collapse.

As for other spending on the part of either, there was little save for board and keep—and not so much of that, it being one of the chiefest of the arts of both ring and cabaret entertainers to escape such expense.

This evening, before changing her costume, Carlotta reached for a newspaper which lay on her dresser, not her favourite daily but the *Salthaven Log*. She was probably the most remote, certainly the most incongruous, of its subscribers. Among the gilt bottles and makeup boxes the pale old English caption of the sheet stood out like some bulletin from Eden in a boudoir of Babylon, as anachronistic as Carlotta's vivid person would have been on the Salthaven sands.

That the little world whose revolutions it recorded was real, Carlotta knew because it sheltered a being on whom she had actually laid hands. Its existence was of course a rule-proving exception, since the tangible universe was bounded by three rivers, the North, the East, and the Harlem, and one bay; with Newark, Paterson, and Stamford somewhere vaguely out there as the outposts of civilization, sort of baby-farms for newly-born plays. Rural hamlet, Western plain, and lofty Alp, all were figments of the imagination, "sets" for revues, made out of whole cloth for box-office purposes and the livelihood of stage folk like herself. The very stars she had glimpsed once or twice in her life, could one capture them, would be sure to turn out five-pointed things of tinsel, stuck up there by Jake Shubert, Flo Ziegfeld, or some of the gods that be. If Jake said

"Lights," there would be light, otherwise the world would gnash its teeth in outer darkness.

Even had she travelled—ay, as long and as far as her charming compatriot, "the Wandering Jew," she would have recognized as existent only those things she could touch or feel, or that contributed to her well-being or purse. The sea, when it wasn't a salon for the display of bathing costumes, was something back of Filet of Sole, perhaps also of its Tartar sauce. Paris was the source of Mary Garden perfume, the slashed skirt, and—marvellous perspicacity here—one intangible thing—that *chic* which she called "class."

Altogether it was surprising that her superb matter-of-factness was disturbed by that prophecy of the Pell Street medium,—“a long journey”—but even Achilles had his compounding weakness. The solid ore of her practicality was shot through with veins of superstition, as near imagination's gold as she could show.

A violent reaction was produced by the idyllic headline which announced the "*Huntington Nuptials*." Now usually her displays of temperament were for effect, to please her vanity, or for shrewd professional purpose. One had sometimes the suspicion that this temper of hers was not so very dreadful, after all, but rather humorous and practical, a crude hose and hydrant sort of thing, to be turned at will, off, or on for the bowling over of weak victims. However, on this occasion the outburst was probably more natural.

She ripped the paper in two, back-kicked the gilt chair until its frail underpinning buckled, and hurled a bottle of

laboratory beauty at the wardrobe woman whom she had appropriated as her maid, to the fury of her sisters on the bill, and rushed out of the room. A youth with a dinnercoat, a plump purse, and an isosceles profile, lounged against the door, awaiting an engagement with her, which he imagined to be "social," she "strictly business." She breezed past him with a "Fade away, fade away, Milt," whose forceful insolence vastly chagrined him, but which to an impersonal spectator would have been most engaging, even captivating. Then she ordered the majestic negro under the canopy to order a taxi, not a too common vehicle in that year.

One drew up at the curb. She entered and under her directions, most explicit and clean-cut—though a trifle impure—the driver cut across Broadway, down Forty-ninth Street, and through Sixth Avenue, imperiling pedestrians, and skidding across the rain-glimmering asphalt in a succession of "sashays" that reminded one of her own on the polished floor, a little earlier in the evening.

The jolly voyage came to an end on Forty-fourth Street. After a lively little dispute over the fare, she approached the house, a famous brownstone front, and gave the cryptic signal at the grilled doors. Before her flaming imperiousness the doorkeeper blinked and backed a step, then perforce waived his orders not to admit women. Convention and tradition did not restrain her any more than the doorkeeper—they were ever the least of her worries. In fact Carlotta had no inhibitions whatever, even about pork and the passover. Were she in need of a person, and were that particular person at the moment in a Turkish bath—men's day only—she

would have instantly traversed every nook and corner of the place with a most admirable sang froid. "I should worry," was the device of her escutcheon—and, believe us, she held it high!

So up the stairs she raced, and into a room, spacious, brilliant with lights, crystal chandeliers, and the massive gilt frames of famous landscapes, as film and story have so often shown us—too often, it is to be feared, to the dispelling of the fascinating mystery.

This much censoring, however, must be made, to be accurate and faithful,—the films' universality of clawhammers must be reduced by a few sacksuits, at least, and the desperate and Satanic look rubbed from the faces of the real winners—who happened to know the numbers of both straight and crooked wheels—and an expression somewhat plainer and less alarming substituted.

However, against this now trite and commonplace background two figures stood out in bold and original relief. One, of course, was the raging beauty who loomed in the doorway, her un-removed makeup under the bobbed mane and heavily pencilled eyes seeming more garish than ever; her eyelashes twisted by some ultra-modern process into dark star rays; and the crimson cape trailing over one shoulder to reveal a plump—and—unless you prefer the slender—a pleasing décolleté, swathed in a gleaming cuirass of gilt scales. Altogether a typical rig, for when one remembers Carlotta—person, props, or appointments—it is always in primary colours, never in subtler hues.

Now of late, Carlotta had entered another stage of her

rise to Fame. She had been modelling herself after a much advertised tragedy queen. So at the door she paused to slip the melody of her gait into the upper register, and, quite as that lady would have towered upon such a scene, entered the room, to confront the other outstanding figure, her guide and mentor, MacAllister.

To vary the dry routine of poker, faro, baccarat, and roulette, he was reviving that old favourite, "three card Monte." It was a joy, though perhaps a doubtful and dangerous one, to watch him. The young bloods from the Avenue, or Sheridan Road, seemed quite willing to serve as victims on such an altar, as men with a sense of the artistic are willing to be hoaxed, even mulcted, provided the hoaxing or mulcting be not stupidly but deftly done.

Even Carlotta's rage diminuendoed into soft admiration as she gazed at those fingers, ever the first thing you noticed about him, long and white, not tapering but as slender at their base as at their well-manicured tips. It was almost like studying a virtuoso at the piano, his figure carrying out the illusion, so sharply contrasted it was, like the keys, in blacks and whites. Each flick of the deal was a grace note, every shuffle of the deck a finished chromatic scale.

He had seen Carlotta, of course—no one could have missed that dramatic entrance, but it suited him to ignore the tattoo of her bronzed slipper. After a few moments he summoned a substitute, and signing to her, withdrew into a bay window.

In this century of the rough metaphor, an interpreter of the quaint dialogue that followed is scarcely necessary. He first inquired "the occasion," "the motif," of her visit. And

she, distrusting the rounded periods and the pulpit highfalutin, which he adopted because it annoyed her, tartly requested him to "cut out the skypilot stuff." Then she condescended to explain the "occasion."

"That simp Huntington" (hitherto she had called the boy—with some show of affection—"the Kid") "was to be married." And——could he beat it?

MacAllister didn't say as to that, but descending from his tantalizing toploftical plane, inquired in her own dialect, "just what that meant in her sweet, young life?"

Here the bronzed slipper paused for reflection—jealousy, that was the system. MacAllister was her guide, her mentor, and chief. Not that his code was hers, hopskotch, synco-pated sort of thing though hers was, but she admired him, was dominated by him. Still he was a male and, though he were Napoleon himself, should have been subject to those reactions (to the feminine) which it was a girl's best strategy, her surest source of revenue, to play upon. But not realizing that MacAllister was immune to her charms, she tried to shower their opulence upon him. The soft, generously-moulded arm fell on his with what she meant to be the lightest of caresses, the rayed eyelashes languishing.

But neither cuteness, pertness, nor languor, suited her Amazonian outlay, and MacAllister, with unerring taste, saw that this manœuvre did not at all become her. He picked up her arm, replaced it at her side, then flicked the residuum of talcum from his sleeve, with the rude request, addressed to her as "Frail Lily of the Vale," that she "deposit her pollen—on some other flower."

However, the rayed eyelashes didn't wither, merely becoming so many adders' tongues once more.

"For Gawd's sake, Mac, don't be so cold! D'y' want me to tellya something? Well, when you cash in, the undertaker won't need no ice t' keep yuh from corruption"—she searched for an even more exquisite figure— "But you should worry. You'll never melt in my snowy bosom. I ain't a-waistin' my tender caresses on no iceberg! So, put that in your pipe an' smoke it!"

"So, little ewelamb, you've seen the light at last," he drawled, then mused for a second.

"What do you want me to do?" he threw out.

Not that he didn't know, but it was always his way to let the other make the suggestion. It flattered the tool, and, in heavier transactions, transferred the burden of the guilt.

She rose to it.

"Old man's got money," she growled out surlily.

Now this attitude was surprising in Carlotta, after her care of the lamb she might have shorn long ere this, and it seemed to pain MacAllister—at least his eyes were expressing an infinite pathos.

"Carlotta"—he groaned and the voice matched his eyes—"you've committed a crime!"

Involuntarily she jerked her head over her shoulder, the black mane snapping like a tangle of whips in the wind.

"What d'y' mean—crime?" she shot out in alarm, fast forgetting the queen of tragedy.—Not that she was conscious of anything capital, but when one trained with MacAllister, one felt such possibilities to be probabilities.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I thought your love for the charming boy" (aside—"damn his fool hide—") "was pure and without alloy. You've destroyed an illusion, a beautiful illusion—that's what you've done—and by all that's holy and sacred, 'tis murder in the nth degree!"

"It was somethin' like what you say it is—without the grenadine, Mister Experience," (referring to a morality play popular that year) "'tleast it was until he giv' me the razz,' and no rube can give me the razz' an' get away with it"—She crooked back a full arm, toyed with her hair—the gesture models use to display the grace of a gown, then finished,—“Huh, *me* that could have anything on Broadway!”

He qualified the claim with some sarcasm, then reflected a while.

Without question the mooted enterprise was crude, “old stuff,” altogether unworthy of his talents. But he was in straits. Things hadn't broken well at all for him lately. And the trip might prove diverting, satisfying his love of humour, local colour, and cash, at the expense of the provincials. Besides there was a raised check due to reach the clearing house in the morning. And he wasn't so sure about that check.

For the first time in his life he wondered if his hand had lost its cunning. Ordinarily he was as skilful with pothooks as with concealed aces. His cheirography had the hair-trigger nicety of his “stacking,” or—so rumour had it—his ability to locate the mortal spot with a bullet, the proper crevice between enemy ribs with cold steel.

He hated bungling even in little things; never had to strike

a match twice; never tied a shoelace—or a strangling knot—so that it came undone. He hadn't outlined the form of the circus lady on a board with sharp knives twice a day, six months running, for nothing. What was the matter? Getting a case of nerves—or Scotch. Last night the drinks had outrun his usual cautious ration.

That check! Again the signature looped and coiled across his fancy like a reptile across a virgin sheet.—And for once the debonair MacAllister was experiencing remorse—though of a very practical sort. His whole life had been foreshadowed, summed up, in that short semester at the Seminary, where he had spent enough time in devising ingenious schemes for “cribbing” to stand at the head of his class, had the hours been given to real study. But the quickening of conscience—or of the canny instinct which served him in lieu of that—was not registered on his imperturbable features. MacAllister might be hunted, but he never would wear a hunted look. And tomorrow was another day!

Immediately he struck another note, one which alarmed Carlotta, part banter though it may have been.

“Suppose we take real estate instead of cash?”

“*Real estate!*” she shot back, “what d’y’ mean? Live in that burg? Oh, Mac, have a heart!”

“No—sentence suspended—I just happened to remember that the old man had a yacht.”

“Say!” She retorted, “what kind of a dirty deed d’y’ think this is? Contrac’s all drawn up by a not’ry an’ everythin’? Fat chance you got of bein’ handed a steam yacht!” But she paused for reflection—of course, he was

“kidding,” but after all he was capable of putting a legal face even on an illegal transaction—capable, too, of the wildest of “parties”—what did he have on his mind?—“Yacht—yacht,”—she shuddered—the voice of the medium again! Almost in a panic, she implored him——

“For Gawd’s sake, yuh ain’t a-goin’ to take me on no long journey!”

“Sea air would restore those roses,” and rashly he pinched her cheeks, to the rude incarnadining of his fingers.

“Out damned spot,” he mimicked, soaring again, “not all the perfumes of Araby——”

“Mac, yuh make me sick, this is serious, an’ the trains don’t run all night. If we’re goin’ to stage any little stop-’em-at-the-altar game, we gotta get busy. But no shopliftin’ any steam yachts for mine, d’y’ understand? I’m not built for deep water, an’ I’d a sight rather skin live lobsters on Broadway than look at ’em in their nacheloral joints.”

“Well, we’ll cross the bridge when we hit the coulee. As for the trains, I haven’t overlooked any bets. There’s a twelve thirty sleeper to Boston. Taxi home with your usual speed, pack and dress with more than your usual, and board her at a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.”

The bobbed mane, the rose cape and the cuirass left the room.

The railroad schedule and their own movements dovetailed to a nicety, and at ten next morning they alighted at the Salthaven station. Here they parted, he repairing by unfrequented side streets to the Veldmann shack, she to the Preble House.

Now all the way up on the New Haven, Carlotta might have been adding to her limited geographical knowledge, but, with a tenacity, conscious or unconscious, she retained all her old backgrounds and attitudes. And when she took the pen from its slip of potato and signed her name on the register, she felt the reward of superior virtue. Here, in spite of unfamiliar surroundings, she was in a homelike atmosphere. For, as the yokel who combined the duties of bellboy, boot-black, and bus, led her up the stairs, a score of necks turned like marionettes pulled by a common string. Here were reactions and motivatings which she could understand. They were universal. Nether limbs were as compelling in Arcadia as in Cosmopolis. Even the comments, the dozen repetitions of the standard slogan of the day,—“Oh, you kiddo,” all ejaculated in a nasal staccato into which she had excited their usual drawl, testified to her usual triumph.

Perversely she didn't accommodate them with the back-kick she knew they expected. Instead, as she turned the baluster, she essayed the best exit of her idolized tragedy queen.

Her superiority, the maintenance of her standards, had been justified. Had she not always stood, loyally “from Missouri,” in all disputes in plays, books, or conversations, where the higher morality of Arcady had been argued?

And now not only in matters spiritual but in those material, was her philosophy shown to be sound. Proof indeed in the bedroom's lack of plumbing, the musty bed and carpet, the cracked pitcher over whose midnight interior a spider hung suspended!

"Of all the jay towns!" she exclaimed. "Modern improvements, huh!"

The claims of Broadway, even of Harlem, she'd back against Preble Street—against the world!

Then she caught sight of the bay and far-off masts, some of them dropping below the verge, and hurling her vanity case across the room, cried:

"To Hell with that long journey!"

Still she felt a grim foreboding, as if that grim defiance hadn't quite settled it.

Recovering her spirits a little later, she arrayed herself in what she considered her most fashionable dress,—a smashing thing woven of flame and snow, with a toque of swan's wings concealing her black hair, and so, like some bright flamingo, sought the Huntington home.

Arrived at her goal, she surveyed it critically, caustically.

"So there's flowers an' trees an' everythin'. An' apples hangin' on 'em—the scene-painters wasn't lyin' after all." She raised an imaginary lorgnette in haughty showgirl fashion, "Chawming place—reminds me of—the morchuary on Twenty-third Street. I wonder if the Squire an' Lord Percy are to hum."

The latter, the former informed her, was out. The very door was banged in her face, sending her rage a degree or two higher. However, she decided that she would postpone the fireworks. They could come later—at the, what was it Abie Clout said, oh yes, in the physiological (!) moment. So she flounced down the walk, and sat on the bench for a half-hour or so, commenting with forceful irony on the charm of

the scene before her. Meanwhile, from the parlour window, the old gentleman, in a vague alarm that would have been humorous if it hadn't been a bit pathetic, gazed at the vivid flamingo that had come to brood on his lawn, perhaps even to nest in his house.

"H'mmm!" he muttered to himself, "some of Phil's chickens come home to roost—I wonder!"

Nor was he borrowing one of Carlotta's figures, either, though you might have thought so, for she had the way of setting the most sedate to her own tricks,—their bodies to twitching and swaying, their tongues to queerest conversational turns.

Growing impatient, she returned to the hotel and tried the boothless telephone, to the delight of the lobby loungers, who had gotten past the salacity stage of their curiosity and were now merely enjoying the humour of the situation. As for her, she cared not that they heard. Those Huntingtons were going to get all the publicity they needed. Her charge and fee would come later.

"Hello, Phil dear, this is Carlotta"—then, hearing his voice, her own unconsciously softened, though it could never exactly achieve a pianissimo. "Ole guy's in the room," she muttered, as she heard the irrelevant answer:

"Yes, see that there's plenty of gasoline in the tank, and bring her around at six-thirty sharp."

At the other end of the wire, the elder Huntington's suspicions reared their ghastly heads once more. From where he sat he could hear the faint echo of a throaty contralto from the instrument, and it didn't sound at all like the gruff

bass of Gus Peters, that hardy pioneer who had turned a wing of his livery stable into the first garage of the town. But he kept his counsel—the boy would be out of harm's way soon.

Still, as she flung herself like a full-fed panther on the bed in her hotel room, Carlotta was rather pleased with herself, that is as long as she could shut out that warning prophecy which sometimes threatened to become an obsession. Her heartache was lost in the sense of the dramatic, in her delighted approval of the makeup of the loungers in the hotel, small-part people in the production she was staging. The situation held sufficient of both tragedy and farce to satisfy the most jaded appetite, and there was promised a most astonishing denouement and curtain, that night. On this she was determined. She would ring it down herself if necessary.

She was not sensing the loveliness of the quiet gardens behind the houses on the street, the sweet old people that worked or drowsed in them, the green roofs of the trees lining the street, and the irregular angles of the housetops sloping down to the sea. That she refused even to look at.

This scene was just what Sally was gazing at so mournfully, a bare half mile away. Now if she had met Carlotta, she never could have understood this distressing slant at the place and people she herself loved so well. Not that Carlotta was exactly a viper, to transform this Eden into an inferno. MacAllister might qualify for such a rôle—not she. But wherever Carlotta went, she could, and did, manage to add a touch of burlesque. Very swiftly she could turn an exquisite

idyll into a roaring farce. Had she herself realized to the full this faculty, Carlotta would have been highly delighted. Next to finding "a meal-ticket," she enjoyed nothing so much as "queering things," "crabbing anyone's act." It would have pleased her rarely to know that she had given this grotesque touch to so lovely a setting, and so threatened even the solemnities that were to be celebrated that evening. To Sally the former distortion would have been the sacrilege, the latter wouldn't have mattered much—it was farce enough already.

In a dull apathy she turned from the window and tried to interest herself in the preparations for the reception to follow the ceremony,—the final dusting of bric-a-brac, the making of salads and sandwiches. There was this much of consolation,—her Aunt Abigail had laid aside her soul's stays and whalebones, and, thinking more of satin and chiffons and her social prominence of the evening, was all smiles and approval, for once.

As she passed to and fro in the kitchen, the girl noticed on the windowsill the big blue bowl that had once held the magic golden flood. And the dream came back—the shining islands, floating, beckoning, vanishing, on the sun-smitten sea. But they had indeed slipped over its blue rim.

The dream had vanished with them. The blue bowl held no magic now, only a pool of yeast and potato sponge, which Aunt Abigail had not forgotten even in the importance of the night's event—a mess, not golden at all, but dreary and grey. And so forever would be the sea.

CHAPTER XIV

ENTER SPANISH DICK

AT seven of this same morning, the sun was shining quite as brightly—far more brightly, Sally would have declared—on a beach a few hundred miles to the southwest of Salthaven, where, not far from the inlet, stands the Barnabee Light, one of the most ancient on the Jersey shore, or, in fact, on the whole Atlantic coast. The life saving station here established had the honour, a generation back, of trying the first breeches buoy, with considerable success, losing not a life from the wreck. This reputation they and their successors guarded zealously, and now in the early morning light, they were inspecting the tackle of the ugly device that had brought them so much fame.

But today a strange and new figure, unenlisted and uninvited, was assisting in the inspection. Rather roughly ordered to stand off, he watched them for a while, grinning good-naturedly at their chaffing, then wearily sat him down on the sands, and untied a knotted bandana. From its gay folds he produced a frugal repast, appearing quite hurt that none of the guards who had just seemed so friendly would share in it. However, his moods being as variable as the waves or the sunbeams that played on them, he soon forgot this slight

to his sacred hospitality, and, between mouthfuls, started a song, quaint and very old, the sort that can come only from the sea. For tattered and torn and weather-beaten this wanderer might be, but never, even at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, anything but cheerful, highly diverting, and picturesque. These fortunes were about at their neap tide now. Three days before he had been paid off in Philadelphia where his ship had docked; had been robbed of that total ten minutes later; then, seized by some inexplicable wanderlust, had crossed the ferry to Camden and footed it through the sands and pines of south Jersey, only to land again on the shore, with the fourth sun-up.

The song over, he doffed his stiff brogans; rolled up to his knees a pair of trousers which had been stained by many waters to a characterless green; and plunged his feet in the sands. That he had two garments was obvious—the possession of more was extremely doubtful. This second, a denim shirt, matched the nether one in nondescript hue, opening to reveal a neck as brown and hairy as his shanks, and adorned in tattoo with some one of his patron saints. This design was intricate and must have cost much time and pains, to say nothing of physical agony, but it was not nearly so elaborate as the decorations on the arms which were veritable totem poles with their wealth of anchors, birds of paradise, hearts, suns, moons, and stars, etched in vari-coloured inks.

A curling brown beard, circular brass earrings, and a red and yellow handkerchief, bound fillet-wise about his forehead, completed the picture, all framing the seamed and leathery scroll of a face wherein one could read, not the

wisdom of books but an infinitely wiser lore. For Spanish Dick with his mixture of Spanish, Portugee, Italian, and who knows what Romance and even Romany bloods, was only in part a sailor. A goodly slice of him was gypsy and troubadour—but he was wholly an irresponsible love-child of the sea. He could cook fairly, and reef a sail in a storm with some dispatch. But while he performed the duties before the mast with perhaps only sufficient skill to escape being thrown overboard, in other arts he reached an almost miraculous perfection. He could curse as ingeniously as Old Man Veldmann, but with infinitely less of offence and more of music; spin a smacking good yarn; dance divinely; sing like an angel all the sailors' chanteys that ever were written; yes, and very quickly lull to sleep a restless child. Sally's still have this in their memories.

Even now he was sharing his repast with a little yellow dog who, between whiles, was boring for fleas, thumping his sausage of a tail on the sands, and looking up at his master with eyes quite as soft and almost of the same liquid brown.

"Señor Alfonso," the man was saying to his yellow companion, as he tossed him a bit of the cheese, "we always go feefty-feefty, non?"

Now his language was a linguistic Joseph's coat of many and quaint colours, a wonderful mosaic of grammatical and ungrammatical expressions from the Seven Seas, in which, as in his veins, no one could tell what strain predominated, no more than they could swear who was his mother, or where his father or grandfathers came from. But the dog seemed

to understand him, and thumped his tail again in an ecstatic affirmative.

But the actual answer came from another auditor, who seemed to be resenting the inattention to his Worshipfulness.

“The Hell you say, the Hell you say!”

The charming commonplace was uttered in a raucous and miscreant voice, but one should be charitable in judging the speaker, for it suggested rather an unmoral than an immoral attitude towards life.

Now Spanish Dick was a bit of a ventriloquist, but he couldn't have been responsible, for his mouth was at the moment gagged by a slice of bread and cheese full two inches thick. The real culprit swung in a cage three feet to the north of him, the greenest, the most scarlet, the foulest-mouthed, and the most ingenious parrot sailor ever trained in the doubtful Montessori system of the seas.

Lady Parrot seemed to have a predilection for bromides of the sulphurous sort. She repeated her observation with the delight of an urchin who does not altogether understand the significance of an expression picked up of an afternoon, but senses it, decidedly relishing its flavour, and the prospect it offers of later shocking his elders at the dinner-table.

For a while she kept it up, shattering the silences with her uncouth chatter, then the three drowsed on the sands, the man soundly, the dog lazily and a little on guard, but the bird with a pale, wafer-like lid, half-lowered over one smouldering eye like a camera diaphragm, which, when any came near, opened in a most vicious close-up, accompanied by a shrieked

blasphemy, at which her master but turned over and snored the more loudly.

And through all these precious minutes, a bottle was tossing on the waves, a bare three hundred feet away.

Roller after roller bore it gently, until with the tide it reached the bare feet of the sleeper, and he awoke.

Don Alfonso nosed it playfully, without any comprehension of its momentous cargo, but Spanish Dick, his curiosity aroused, picked it up and looked at the little roll of bark inside. There seemed to be characters of some sort on it, undecipherable through the brown gloom of the glass.

The strength of his fingers could not turn the improvised cork, so swollen was it, so he called on his clasp-knife, and the message, its long voyage over, was released at last. Now, with all his crazy patchwork vocabulary, the wanderer could read but a few words and these in Spanish, so with a childlike bewilderment he turned the odd scroll this way and that, vainly trying to make it out, then looked from left to right at his companions as if asking for counsel.

But Alfonso, though he looked volumes of intelligence, was quite inarticulate. And Mariuch the parrot, observing her master scratch his head—a familiar gesture, with him expressing mere bewilderment, with the dog a more annoying disturbance—merely cocked one eye, and forcefully predicted that her soul would be lost, a quite unnecessary prophecy when that eye expressed so clearly the Tophet road she had chosen—very early in her young life it must have been. It is a sad perhaps cynical thing to record but Mariuch always made one believe in predestination.

So, not finding any help from his companions, the tattered figure rose, and looked up and down the sands. The life-guards had disappeared, but over by the creek a little man was jerkily zigzagging his way, whistling determinedly the while, in staccato fashion, as if he had all the time in the world but was of too nervous an organization to know what to do with it.

As he neared the Light, he was hailed by a chorus of shrieks and barks, and the quaint jabberings of a tongue which he decided, after much speculation, was human.

“Holy cats!” said he, “did my ticket read New Jersey or the Spanish Main?”

The colourful figure was extending a bottle and a piece of bark, and saying something that sounded like:

“Bona dias, señor, you reeda da Ingleese?”

Before the bottle, the newcomer held up his hands in the holiest of horrors.

“On the wagon, don’t tempt me!” he wailed, then, glancing down at the bark,—“No thanks, none of your yellow sheets. If you see it in the *Star*, it’s so!”

Now, Butts was a little whippersnapper of a reporter, with restless eyes constantly asking questions, and a glib tongue that bombarded his victims with more—in fact so many that he never stopped for the answers, merely substituting for them his own preconceptions, which usually happened to be shrewd enough to keep his chief out of libel suits. He was too good a newspaper man, and too curious, to ignore a rival sheet, so after all he extended his hand.

“Here, old top, let’s see your three star extra—and what

Arthur Busybrain an' Ellawillerwillies are getting off their chests this fine afternoon.

“‘Shipwrecked!’” He whistled again. “‘On island—about latitude, eighteen north’—Where the heck did you get this?’”

“From the sea it came, señor, in the bottle.”

“Your uncle Dudley wasn't born yesterday, so easy on your persiflage, old Flying Dutch.”

“Si, si, señor,” said the other earnestly, scenting the skepticism though not the expressions which conveyed it, “from the sea it came—in a bottle—I swear it, by all the saints, Santa Caterina de Sienna, an' San Agnolo de Padua, an'——”

“Never mind your telephone directory of the Celestial Boulevards—h'mmm” he was reading it over—‘long. six two west, alive—well—notify Sally Fell— Salthaven’—is that burg on the map?’”

He searched his pockets which were bulging with stub pencils, wads of clay-coloured copy paper, and time-tables, and selected one of the latter.

“For the luv of Pete, if it ain't! But ye gods! it's a hoax, a plant, surest thing you know. But what a lulu of a Sunday spread it'd make—three running, too! Perhaps it's a hunch, and I never overlooked one yet. So goodbye, vacation, and”—here he counted a rather slender roll, “twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one, tuh, three—” he saluted the green-backs with his lips, then turning to his new friend, shot at him,——

“Are you on?”

The tattered one looked his bewilderment, and Butts tried to make things clear.

“Are you game—to visit this dame called Sally and restore her own troo love? It means a little voyage on a steam road—ever see one, Columbus?”

Seeing that the befuddlement of the stranger was utter and complete, he tried pantomime,—

“Railway, wheels,” his hands revolved—“steam, savvy? Choo choo—toot, toot—ah, for Ned’s sake, yuh stone wall from the Alhambra, come on!” and he seized the old fellow by the arm, and, like a self-important tug, hurried his strange convoy, man, dog, parrot, cage, and bandana bundle, to the railway station.

CHAPTER XV

A DISCORDANT LOHENGRIN

THAT carefree and slightly patronizing attitude towards the universe in general had forsaken the bridegroom. He was growing nervous, even over trifles. Perhaps the twin bracers which he had just taken were responsible, or his rather real infatuation for the unattainable (in the guise of Sally). Or possibly the cause was another lady, most maladroit and inopportune, she who never waited her cues, but entered unbidden.

Just now the faithful Agatha, who took the place of butler, an official unheard of in Salthaven even in the Huntington household, was shrilling up the stairs,—

“Telephone for Mr. Philip.”

His father rose with an eagerness, suspiciously high-keyed.

“I’ll answer, my boy, you hurry and dress.”

This was the second time that the old gentleman had insisted on answering the call. Philip guessed there had been others. He was right about that.

He stole to the door and listened, the end of the conversation that he could hear being suspicious enough.

“No!”

("Just five minutes?")

"Not one second!" But the receiver half way back to the hook, was replaced at his ear.

("Cost yuh something if yuh don't.")

"You threaten? Why, that's blackmail!—I'll call the police."

("Wouldn't you like to know the name an' number?")

This sally being accompanied by laughter unmistakably feminine but suggesting bronze rather than any precious metal.

Now it is maddening to be jeered at by someone who stands incog. at the other end of a wire, and the old gentleman fumed.

"I can find it, young woman, and when I do, you'll be run out of town."

("All right, dearie, but lissen,—before you do, just take your bunch of keys an' unlock that closet an' give the little ol' skeleton the O. O. If he looks good to you, all right, for we're goin' to 'xhibit him on Preble Street, sure as you're bald an' got false teeth an' one foot in the grave.")

The only reply now was the receiver's click, and as Master Philip returned to his grooming, suddenly beset was he with impulses for reform, quite as elusive as that collar-button.

Now these implements of torture were troubling many good citizens of the town that night, but that such should disturb Master Phil, the dapper, the immaculate, was indeed surprising. However, it takes but a trifle to suggest a horror. And now somehow, by a strange association, as he

stood before the mirror, the little gold stud brought up a picture of another,—one of plain bone, in the band of a shirt always greasy and collarless. And above that band, the bleary green eyes and foul whiskers of a wicked old man. Over his shoulders he could see the face blinking at him in the mirror, as the saw mouth jeered,—

“May God have mercy on yer soul!”

It wasn't exactly a pleasant recalling of that night at the wharf, the fight, the foul blow. Whether the latter had been fatal or not there had been no means of determining.

Just before the figure dissolved from the glass, it stuck one finger down between the band and the neck, and ran it round with a peculiarly significant gesture.

So real it was that Master Phil hurled his shaving mug at the apparition, shattering the mirror beyond repair. Agatha, passing the doorway just then, threw up her hands.

“Lord forgive us!” she mumbled, “there'll be no luck in *that* match!”

But the “chug, chug” of the motor sounded outside, with the pleasant and reassuring purr of prosperity, and the voice of his father followed—jovial, almost too resolutely jovial.

“Hurry, my boy, never keep a girl waiting on a night like this.”

It was perplexing that the old gentleman didn't sound out the boy about this mystery, but he himself was feverishly grasping at the hope that the wedding would prove the ending of this and many other problems that had been troubling him ever since Philip's unique adolescence began.

With fingers still trembling, the groom finished dressing,

descended the stairs, and bowled off towards the church in his shiny, seven-passenger car.

And, now, a few streets away, the high-pitched voice of Aunt Abigail was calling up the stairs to the bride.

The girl paused, though she was dressed and ready. Before, in that slender body there had always been an elasticity, delicate yet invigorating and delightful to see. Now she almost seemed to sag—on the brink.

It was so short a step over that doorsill. Over it she had skipped light-heartedly all the years of her life. Why did she hesitate and shrink back now as though a chasm lay beyond?

That it is a momentous step for any maiden when she passes beyond the threshold for the last time, she knew—even when happiness beckons. She had no right to ask greater security than any of the long host that had passed that way, but she could see, on the other side, only spirits of evil lurking for her. And in the room, the dear ghosts of her youth were pleading with faintly discerned hands, waving her back.

Here, on the old walnut bed, she had fallen asleep with the pure dreams of childhood, awaking, as the years went on, to the shy sweet visions of first love. On the bureau lay the pansy pin with the rhinestone heart, which Captain Harve had given her on her tenth birthday; beside it, the red, all too suddenly-ended diary; the high-school pennant on the wall. In the closet stood the slippers her godfather had brought her from Valparaiso or some strange port; and above them, the red Tam, which, in his memories, Ben would

always see crowning her hair. The little jade god, *his* gift, still grinned like a merry Billiken. This and all the other mutely eloquent things she saw through a mist—but not of tears. She felt that she could not have cried over any catastrophe now.

She went to the window and leaned out. The old sweet fragrance of the honeysuckle, the apple-orchard, the silver grey of the sea, were the same—yet not at all the same.

She looked at the sky beyond the trees. Clouds, feebly lit by flashes of far-off lightning, obscured the Western half, but one gold star still shone in the East, by the Light. Maybe Ben was in that star, awaiting her. Absurd fancy, of course, but as with all our ideas of Heaven hers were not so very clearly defined, and, in the dulling monotony of grief, like Ben on his far away island, she had slipped back into the childlike mind.

“Some day, dearest, we’ll be together again.” And, for the time, it comforted her, the mere trying to believe it so.

So at last the tears welled in her eyes, stole down her cheeks, and lay on the white veil like dew on the pure anemones in Spring.

Above, the great eye of the Light opened and shut, opened and shut, as it had for so many years. Then the clouds travelled over the face of the star. And on the stairs below, sounded the “tamp, tamp, tamp,” of a cane, seeming as immemorial and importunate as the summons of Fate in the Beethoven symphony. Over the threshold she stepped at last—and went down to them.

Then the three,—Aunt Abigail, Cap’n Bluster, and the

bride, entered the coach, the most famous of the historic vehicles that had carried the brides and mourners of more than one generation, and rode stately towards the church.

She felt not the majesty of the occasion, but sank back, a pathetic wisp in the corner, as though, fearing the touch of some hated hand, she were unwilling to let any come near her. Nor did she feel the pathos now. The self-pity, if it had been that she experienced in the upper room, was succeeded by another mood, the ashes of apathy banked over a smouldering rage. The driver had chosen the lower road. From the window she could see the waters. The tide and the clouds seemed to travel with them. She would have been glad if the horses had only fallen, sparing the rest, but carrying her own heavy heart down the hill into the sea. But there was no such salvation, no way out. The ride wound up, as all unhappy journeys, even to the gallows, have a habit of ending, at its appointed destination.

The doors were open, and they could see the lights and the crowd within. Half-way up the walk, she paused.

On the Sabbath, there was something of the harsh about the historic edifice although it never reached the unlovely. From the lofty, unadorned ceiling, hung the severest of gas chandeliers, suggesting nothing so much as crowns fashioned for some race of giant kings, or iron haloes for a hierarchy of tall Puritan saints. High windows of unstained glass, like ascetic eyes, looked arched askance at the worshippers uncomfortably ranged in the pews below. The tablets between the windows, commemorating departed heroes of frigate and ship-of-the-line, had no illumining about their

letters; and the three-quarters gallery was primly-railed, the pulpit austere, and the attitude of the pews eternally stiff and uncompromising.

But tonight, little tongues of flame from many jets softened the rigidity, giving the old oak and walnut the suggestion of polished mahogany; and festoons of purple aster and golden-rod added a royal emblazoning. Altogether it should have been a most charming scene, but somehow it wasn't.

Suddenly turning to the right, just before she entered, she saw a figure, a woman's. She was perched on a gravestone of some old admiral or saint, looking in through the window at the assembled guests. The intermittent lightning flashed, turning the cerise dress into a dark crimson blur against the lowering sky. Beside her, also against the headstone, leaned another figure, somewhat taller. Dimly she made it out to be that of a man. Another flash forked across the sky, its reflection winking over the headstones, so crazily leaning that they seemed to stagger. She started—she must be "seeing things." That woman crouched like a dark blood smear against the grey of the graves—and that other face! Her practicality had always rejected stagy, sentimental fancies, but somehow tonight she couldn't conceive of it as anything but pallid, even sneering, like the Prince of Darkness.

She shuddered and rubbed her eyes, half thinking herself mad as that bride in the story she had read—of Lammermoor. But there they were—the two, apparently in the flesh — A jolly wedding with such guests!

But this wasn't like her; she simply must not give way to such fancies. She straightened herself and laughed aloud.

It was utterly unlike the old laugh, harsh, with none of the old silver in it.

Aunt Abigail recalled her to the event at hand with a snort of disapproval.

“Sally!” One word, but sufficient!

And Captain Bluster, blind in more ways than one, though he heard the Huntington doubloons clinking loudly enough, patted her arm clumsily.

“Come, come, my lass, it’ll soon be over.” Ah, but there was the rub. Would it?

In the vestibule she paused to adjust her veil. Not heeding at all the ecstatic whispers of Stella Appleby, her maid-of-honour, she surveyed the pews, then, urged by some strange compulsion, turned, and at one of the rear windows saw the two faces staring in,—the woman’s and the man’s, the one angry and scornful, the other mocking—oh, yes, it was, it *was* mocking! She knew them for the two of the graveyard.

Now, the strange woman who in the flash of the lightning had seemed clad in a robe of blood, was herself in deadly fear of a medium’s prophecy. It therefore seems incredible to credit her with occult powers. Those other eyes—of the man beside her—rather suggested these disturbing things, perhaps even deserving the term malevolent. But Carlotta *was* almost supernatural in her gift for clowning, uncanny in her power of placing another in an embarrassing position. She could have turned Elsa into a Vesta Tilley, the holy grail into a stein. In fact, it has been reported that once when she had gone to attend the funeral of some old Broad-

way first-nighter and squire of "Janes," she had entered the room, humming unconsciously but so entrancingly to herself that the knee of the corpse was seen to twitch—the whole side of the coffin was down—vainly pawing the air as if trying to execute a one-step. Now even if exaggerated, this gruesome story has much of truth in its spirit. And she seemed even now to be giving just such a farcical touch to the whole proceedings.

It seems strange, however, that she should have had any effect on forthright Sally, always so straight-seeing, courageous, and loyal. But Sally's nerves were snarled and jangling. Perhaps in her distraught state she was savage, and even welcomed, as a showing up, a facing of facts, the burlesque into which the ceremony was threatening to turn. Afterwards she never knew whether to weep with vexation, shudder in horror, or to laugh, at the madness, the wild confusion, the absurdity, of it all.

In any event, now, as the evil influence in the famous play transforms by its very propinquity the characters in the cast to its own light, to its own kind—the place, the people were changed for her. So, too, a pilot of the spot-light can transform the whole complexion of a scene by throwing a new hue upon it. Sally's eyes seemed, for the moment, to be following some such baleful rays projected from that window. They were all neighbours whom she had known and loved,—simple, kindly folk, walking well-ordered ways. Yet now in the twinkling of an eye, the chatter, the witticisms — from years of acquaintance she could almost quote them verbatim—instead of being lighthearted, cheery, and amus-

ing, racy of salt water and the soil, were all too obvious and coarse. And everywhere the faces, the costumes, were exaggerated, not heightened into tragedy—that were forgivable—but twisted into the grotesque, into caricature.

The male part of the congregation were no longer sound citizens to whom she gave her respect and loyalty, but awkward yokels, with uneasy Adam's apples above unyielding linen armour-plate. The salty atmosphere which always pleasantly enveloped the old sea-captains abjectly surrendered to the bay rum emanating from the stout person of Gus Peters "the livery," who had so unsuccessfully tried to conceal the aroma of the stable.

On the edge of her pew perched Lizzie Rountree, the plump milliner. Well Sally knew the journey she was in fancy taking—up the flower bordered aisle, with the sailor sweetheart lost so many years ago. There should have been pathos there, but it was irretrievably gone. She was merely a fat, simpering old maid.

And Mrs. Dr. Ferguson. A moment ago she had been just a sweet little old lady, the youthful wave crinkling her silver hair; her husband a warring saint who had ministered to the bodily and spiritual needs of the village for seventy years. Now the lovelight was befogged into senility.

Two seats behind them, the little birdlike postmistress, Phoebe Prentice, was whispering to Mrs. Schaufler—oh, yes, Sally could hear her as well as if she had been by her side—"Ain't that sweet now,—the two dear old people, lovers still at seventy?" Suddenly Phoebe, too, grew ridiculous.

And then, as Millie Smith, seeing the reflection of the bridal

party in the mirror beside the keys, struck up the familiar wedding march, almost the girl expected the dulcet strains of Lohengrin to backslide into hideous ragtime.

Truly Carlotta was having at least part of her revenge.

The veil was shivering now, as the mist of green leaves around the silver birch when the slender trunk under it is trembling, too. Was she actually going mad—stark, staring mad? Where was the old loyalty, the old sweetness of life? For one black moment she hated the strangers, she hated herself, she hated everybody. She could have screamed, and, had she been less of a Spartan, would have fallen in one of Stella's statuesque faints, but instead, she straightened herself—slowly—as if to shake off the spell, and dug her nails deep into her palms, muttering,—“I've promised—I must go through with it,” then started up the aisle.

Meanwhile, the woman outside, who had returned to her strange eerie on the headstone, was not realizing this phase of her revenge. She was all unconscious of any preternatural gifts, and her conversation was pitched in another key than the sublime or horrific. She was at the moment replying angrily to her taunting companion:

“For Gawd's sake, leave me alone. If you had what's comin' to you, you'd be lyin' at right angles to where you're standing now, and six feet under.”

“Nerves, feminine nerves!” exclaimed MacAllister, but Carlotta turned on him in a fury.

“What are you goin' to do about it? Haven't you gotta plan? I thought you wasn't solid above the shoulders.”

"Little saint! How like an angel you do look upon that grave!"

"I may look it, but I feel like the Devil," then, as the lightning by some queer distortion revealed the crazy colony of the dead apparently staggering to and fro, she softened her voice to an awed though raucous stage-whisper,— "Say, Mac, we oughta choose some other set. Supposin' the Devil was walkin' round here, now!" She looked up at him — "maybe you're him yourself, who knows."

And he repeated airily: "Who knows!"

But as the thunder rolled again, a little nearer on the heels of the lightning this time, she cowered against him in spite of the imputed diablerie.

"Oh, Mac," she wailed, "can't you help me out?"

"Well, you might do the Clyde Fitch, Moth and the Flame act. It's highly dramatic—and an ideal rôle for you, you sweet, sorrow-stricken soul."

"For the love of Pete, speak English! Yuh talk like recitation day in the district school.— But what's this fire act?"

"Oh, you rush up to the altar as they pronounce the beautiful and fatal words. Now listen, Desdamona, and get this right. When the sky-pilot in there says feelingly, through his nose,— 'Or forever after hold your peace,' you rise from your seat, and raise your hand, outraged, thus, to high Heaven—and give 'em Hell——"

"We're getting that ourselves right now," she shrieked with a crashing bolt and a foretaste of the rain to follow. "Hadn't you better cut out that language?"

"Oh, come, Carlotta, you don't mean to tell me you believe in a Hell!"

"Didn't believe it where the lights was bright," she muttered, looking half-fearfully around, "but I'm not so sure—here."

"Well you'd better mosey along into the holy place—but hold on—to do it up brown, you ought to have a brat."

"If you keep on doin' a Joe Webber," she returned, "we might as well split. You don't seem to care at all—just stand there grinnin' like a rube at the circus, as if you was enjoyin' yourself."

"No, *your* most charming and amusing self," he amended. "But let 'em get spliced, we can cash in, *after* as well as before."

"All right, Benedick Arnstein, if you're goin' ta desert me in the pinch I'll do a little hittin' myself. Anyway, I'm not goin' to stand out here with *that* any longer. An' if I can't stop that weddin', I'll queer it—an' that's somethin' after all."

Yes, it was something after all.

But now the organ notes, mellowing under Milly's skilful hand, floated out on the night air. From the vestry door the groom's party approached the altar, as the lovely vision, rather wraith than girl, passed up the aisle. A subdued hush settled on the pews, broken only by the soft susurrus of feminine whispers,— "Isn't she sweet?" "Isn't she lovely?" Then came the solemn pause—followed by the minister's voice, sonorous yet fittingly modulated, as he repeated the impressive words of the old, old rite, so beautiful

and brief, and yet sometimes so long and terrible in their consequences.

“Beloved, we are gathered together—” So he came to the old question,——

“Do you, Philip?——”

But the answer was snatched from the groom’s lips——

Sally, herself, apparently nothing but an automaton now, lovely though she was, could afterwards recount it—always between laughter and tears—so every detail of the incidents that followed must have been indelibly though subconsciously registered. For it was at this juncture that the gods of Laughter intervened, providentially, of course, for theirs is the wisdom of tears. But from that moment the dignity and solemnity befitting the occasion, and so far bravely upheld, were irretrievably lost.

Concerned as he was, Captain Fairwinds wanted to roar out in relieving mirth—he did afterwards, out under the stars. His own memory held nothing like it for a mixture of the sacred and profane, except possibly the Holy Week processions in the cathedral cities of old Spain,—the grotesque holy images, the jewelled Virgin dancing on the shoulders of the revelling marchers, the Macareros in gay-coloured, slitted masks, the kneeling throng, the drunken singers, the benedictions and Rabelaisian jests interspersed, the hymns, the clashing instruments—the whole discordant pandemonium. But in old world haunts one expects sometimes the sacrament to be tintured with colourful ribaldry—in this cool austere shrine of the ancient Fathers—never!

But it was not unlike it,—the question,—“Do you, Philip, take this woman?” and the answer taken from his mouth,—

“I’ll be damned if I do!” shattering the silences to the very belfry rafters—not from the rouged lips of Carlotta, peering down from the gallery, the spot she had chosen as most effective, but from some seemingly preternatural being in that strange procession, as weird and motley as any in Spanish streets, and now advancing up the aisle.

A little man led it, grinning widely and looking as self-important as only a little man can feel. He was followed by a taller figure with curling brown beard, brass earrings, and a red and yellow handkerchief about his head. His heavy shoes sounded with almost a convict’s thud, even on the carpeted aisle, and he in turn led a little yellow cur, and carried a cage wherein swung the reprobate who had so rudely interrupted the rites. He or she—it matters not which, for sex places no restrictions on depravity—continued the maledictions.

Meanwhile Milly’s organ had stopped with a crash; the minister stood, his mouth agape, and on his face the most bewildered and outraged of expressions; the audience stared, transfixed in their seats; while, coming from the rear, the sexton tried to halt the strange procession, now halfway to the altar. But he didn’t help matters at all, in his rashness merely stepping on the little dog’s paw, and an agonized yelping added to the mad pandemonium.

As for the bride, she was still too benumbed to analyze anything— if anyone could analyze so fantastic a visitation. But automatically and vaguely she imputed, or connected it

rather, with the stranger two—there was the woman, now, with arms folded on the gallery rail, peering down at her with amused triumphant eyes, and clad like the scarlet symbol of old. It was nothing so fine and dramatic as that—it was a farce—a circus—nothing more. It was all so horrible—or was it now—rather fitting, in fact; the blasphemies, the sacrilege quite appropriate.

So there they were, advancing up the aisle, the parrot still shrieking out his abominable “I’ll be damned if I do.”

Sally was little given to profanity—however, dazed as she was, the grotesque fancy occurred to her that this should have been precisely her own answer, if she had had the courage and sense. It was odd that as yet she didn’t see in the rude interruption the sign of a respite if not of an ultimate reprieve.

But now the little man was taking something from the tall funny looking one, and was handing it to her. She tried to grasp it, but it fell from her fingers. Captain Harve was picking it up. But what was the little man saying?

“Better look at it, Lady Celeste, it’s your pardon from the governor.” Then to himself,—“Stopped at the altar—saved from the electric chair! Shades of Jean Libby! Can y’ beat it! Why it’s the sensation of the year—the scoop of the ages!”

Captain Fairwinds looked up from the scroll and spoke to the little man.

“I don’t know where you hail from, or where you got this, but let me tell you, son, it’s no time for practical joking.”

“From the look of the bride and the merry bridegroom

there, I should say it wasn't," responded Butts. "But it's on the level, all right." He turned to the foreigner. "Here, Flying Dutch, you tell him where you got the news."

Spanish Dick thrust his face into the group in childlike bewilderment at it all, but he comprehended enough of Butts' admonition to answer :

"Si, Señor capitan, I found it in a bottle. From the sea it came—I swear it by all the saints—by Santa Maria de Colon—by——"

"Shush," interposed Butts, "haven't you got any tact? You'll offend 'His Nibs,'" shrugging his shoulder at the minister, "you're in a Puritan hangout now."

Then he went on to the captain, "He's told you the truth. He picked it up down in Jersey, on Barnabee Beach—and it cost my last cent to tote it here."

"It won't be your last, son, if it's genuine," the captain assured him, then grasping Sally's arm with an unconscious roughness in his excitement, exclaimed,—

"And, by Godfrey, it does seem genuine!"

But seeing the frightened look in her eyes, he addressed her tenderly,—

"Sally, look here, can't you stand some news—if it's *good* news? Well, it's a miracle, almost too good to be true, but——"

He saw that she didn't comprehend what he was saying at all, but stood there, still in that daze, and her answering query was almost petulant.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?"

"He's alive and well—here, read it yourself."

Still, she didn't even look at it, but instead kept looking at the scarlet figure in the gallery, then, turning to the minister, rasped out,—

“For pity's sake, get this thing over!”

But the Captain was taking her into his arms.

“Sally, it *isn't* going on. I guess you didn't understand. There's a message from Ben——”

“Ben?” it was a sigh of despair, then a look almost of hope broke over her face. “A message?”

“Yes, this man—God bless him—picked it up on the shore—it's true—let me read it to you.”

“‘Shipwrecked on island—about latitude eighteen north—longitude sixty-two west—alive—well—’ hear that, girl, he's alive and well—‘Notify Captain Harvey Brent—and Miss Sally Fell.’ See, it's sent to you—there's the signature.”

But it was the voice of the parrot that really called her back. With her astounding flare for the ironic and appropriate, she was shrieking at the bridegroom,——

“Buss the lass, matey, buss the lass.”

Not heeding this rudeness, Sally was looking wildly into her godfather's face.

“Oh, don't fool me now! I could have stood it before, but I can't go through with it again.”

“We're not fooling you, Sally.”

Striving hard for comprehension, she looked down at the bit of bark. Yes, there were the letters, looming large, even through the mist she could see them—his name at the bottom. So at last she accepted the release.

But the bridegroom, who in his fright had been presenting rather a sorry figure, recovered his self-possession, and tried to pull her back.

“For the Lord’s sake, go on with the ceremony! She’s promised to me, and no phony play like that can stop it.”

“The boy’s right. Come on, Doctor Storrs,” put in Cap’n Bluster, the starboard side of the wing-and-wing whiskers almost pulled out in his agitation. But his friend waved him aside—

“You’ve done enough harm already, Hiram, to last a lifetime—. As for you, my lad, you ought to know when you’re aground.”

Then he turned to the elder Huntington —

“The whole thing’s a profanation, John. I’m sorry for your sake, but you’d better get that young hopeful out of the way quick. This is the church, but, outside, I won’t answer for him.”

So the unwilling groom was hustled through the vestry door—and Sally was in truth called back from the brink.

And now the floodgates had broken loose in the pews. There were congratulations and commiserations, according to the relationship, and “Oh’s” and “Ah’s,” and a regular feasting on sentiment and thrills. And there was a sudden onslaught on the altar, and a crowding to see the strange messenger and its tattered bearer, who in time grew to be a real ragged messenger sent from Heaven in answer to Sally’s faith and prayers.

As for Butts, poor Butts, he never saw his scoop in print, for, as he dashed out to interview the jilted bridegroom,

Master Phil seeing him, savagely "threw her into high," turned the corner at a perilous angle, skidded, and bowled over the intrepid reporter. Anyway, he died through devotion to his duty, and, having no kith or kin, was buried with appropriate honours among the gravestones where Carlotta had but lately perched.

But Sally reached her home safely. However, it wasn't long after Captain Harve's protecting presence had been withdrawn that she heard the cane ascending the stairs step by step, then her father's voice booming through the locked door,—

"Listen to me—I'm cap'n of this ship, and I say you've got to marry him—next week. That'll give her time to blow over. If you won't, I'll throw you overboard, disown you, d'y' hear?"

Very probably he didn't mean it, at least literally, for he regretted his words very bitterly next morning, when it was too late.

For just as the grandfather's clock struck ten in the hall below, a half-hour after receiving this ultimatum, Sally Fell threw a few things into her bag, and once more climbed over that trellis, and so hastened over the lawn, through the sibyllic gate, down the hill to the wharf where Captain Harve's ship, the *North Star*, lay moored, due to sail in the morning, when the tide was right.

Most of the crew were celebrating on shore. She could hear the snatches of song from Tom Grogan's now, across Water Street and up the dark alley. The moon had thoughtfully hidden her face. Except for a green light or two, it

was dark, and the watch was drowsy. So she escaped detection as she climbed aboard. She selected a seat in the prow of the port lifeboat, pulled the tarpaulin over her head, and, exhausted, fell asleep.

Captain Harve was uneasy. Nothing in the world meant quite so much to him as that godchild of his. It was indeed a pretty kettle of fish. Back and forth through the narrow quarters of his room he paced, puffing forth great clouds of smoke like an ocean liner's funnels.

At six bells he picked up his "warsack" and left the place with Dick, whom he had already "signed up." The wind had freshened, the moon had now completely vanished behind the storm-clouds scudding across the sky, and before he reached the wharf, vast sheets of rain and spate from off the harbour drove at his face. The sea was running high, and the *North Star* rose and fell on the tide, to the incessant crunching of the piles of the wharf, the creaking of her own gear and tackle, and the singing of the wind through the shrouds.

He climbed aboard, and, as he was making his way aft, the lightning made town, and wharf, and ships, and sea, clear and distinct in a sort of ghostly twilight. Not in his memory could he recall so continuous an electric storm.

In the shelter of the lifeboat a huddling bundle turned over, revealing a face—in the weird twilight the features seemed those of a child who had sobbed itself to sleep.

Darkness and rain again, then another flash, and he saw who it was.

"By the great Lord Harry!" he ejaculated, but did not stop for questioning.

In his powerful arms he carried her to his cabin, lit the oil lamp, and in the dim light ruefully surveyed the drops glistening on the black strands, the rain of Heaven and her heart's own sorrows commingled on her features.

He gently pillowed the head. The eyes opened.

"Uncle Harve," she called, then for the first time in those long months fell back on hysterics.

"It was terrible—that woman—that man—the parrot—the curiosity—everyone looking at me," then, drying her tears a little,—“Could there be anything holy in that?”

"Nothing but holy mackerel, I guess," he replied, trying to lighten her mood.

A little later she grew calmer and told him of her determination. It was indeed a prettier kettle of fish than he had imagined.

"I can't go home now, and I must find Ben."

"Never mind, tonight. Just put on some dry duds if you've got 'em in your bag, and get a little more sleep, and we'll all have clear heads to think it over in the morning."

"But I can't turn you out of your cabin!"

"Nonsense. Rayer is ashore. I'll use his bunk. Good-night, Sally."

"Uncle Harve, come here— You've got to be father as well as god-father to me now."

And she kissed him. And as he left the cabin he felt that like her mother she was worth all the trouble in the world; that he would like to wring the tough neck of Old Aunt Abi-

gail, and that Hiram Fell was a blind old fool and—then he, too, fell asleep.

In the morning the weather was still grey and fitful. Twice he went to his cabin and listened. There was no sound. A half-hour later he was taking a turn on deck while the crew were making preparations for the trip south, when he was blind-folded by two hands clasped across his eyes, and a voice, very funny in its attempted bass, cried:

“Guess *who!*”

Delighted at the swift recovery of her spirits, he seized both her hands in his, took her blow, and ordered the cook to bring coffee and bacon from the galley. Between nibbles, she asked him, using all the witchery of her black eyes and voice:

“Captain Harve, you’d do anything for me, wouldn’t you?”

“Of course, lass, why?”

“Then take me to Ben.”

He pretended to be stern.

“What do you mean, you minx of a mermaid, don’t you know that with high tide we clear for Rio?”

“But, my dear new daddy,” (yes, she was like a child again, he thought) “Ben is alone on an island. He may be starving now, or eaten by wild beasts or cannibals—or what do they have there? Anyway there’s something terrible about it. I don’t believe any of those fairy stories he and you used to tell about them, beautiful, and floating, and vanishing, and all——”

“You don’t eh, well you’d better.”

“Well it’d be just as bad if the island vanished with him,

wouldn't it now? Anyway, I love him and I can't help crying—" and forthwith she began to do so, on his shoulder. It was in truth a little unusual for Sally, for she had never been of the lachrymose sort or one who used such strategy to gain her ends. But it was natural enough. The year's strain had told heavily.

And, of course, like all strong men he was as helpless at this sight as Samson under the more designed wiles of Delilah, and he said, "There, there," as they always do, and he patted her shoulder, as they always do, and then, of course, she dried her tears, and both were fairly rational human beings again.

"I meant to go, all along, Sally, but I didn't know about taking you. They'll have me in irons for kidnapping or abduction. Your poor father! But I'll risk it. We'll find that island somehow—and the lad who's stirred up this confounded mess."

So when the tide was right they sailed away. And in the cabin Sally wrote a note to Cap'n Bluster, which they gave to a passing ship headed for Boston-town, and she smiled happily as she stood by the wheel, while Cap'n Harve paced the quarter-deck, and the great sails bellied, and the ship held up to her course, and headed due south.

CHAPTER XVI

BEHIND THE PICTURE

THE hall of the Huntington home has a spaciousness and breadth consonant with the dignity of its owners, so gravely maintained until this last heir came to upset it. At the further end of the scrupulously waxed floors, stands a giant clock, a century old and more, with purple and red and yellow festoons of flowers and fruit decorating its imperturbable face. On days when the air is still and all the doors are open, its tongue can be heard in the great cupola, which surmounts the broad square roof, overlooking the town, and commanding a view of harbour and sea for many miles.

Now, up to this sixth of September there had been a legend in the family that the long black hands had never once stopped their visible march around the dial. Six generations of Huntingtons had in turn religiously attended to the rite of its winding, on the sacred eighth day; and each head of the line, rather incongruously, when his hour of abdication came and he had the least concern with Time, had solemnly handed on the brass key like some sacred torch of his race. Neglect of this duty would have been held as disgraceful by the beruffed figures in the gilt frames on the wall as embezzlement, or infraction of any statute on the books of the good Bay State.

But today the dread sin of omission had been committed. The tongue was silent. The hands stood stock still, pointed at eight, the fatal hour when Philip's answer had been so sacrilegiously yet so appropriately translated. In the excitement of the wedding, the elder Huntington had neglected the equally important ceremony of the brass key, and when he and the luckless bridegroom returned from the church, the former was almost as perturbed over this discovery as the tragedy at the altar. Without removing hat or coat, he rectified the error. Then, in silence, unbroken save by the reproachful monosyllables of the clock, they went to their rooms.

Now, on three sides of the house are beautiful lawns, shaded by elms and maples, at the rear a garden. Philip's room in the northeast corner has windows overlooking this garden and the East lawn. When the panes turned to yellow, with the suddenly switched-on light, a figure in the shelter of the trees stopped the restless tapping of her foot and intently watched the shadow, now thrown on the shade, and now withdrawn, as its owner paced nervously back and forth.

The front door clicked, and the older man went up the street. Next, the kitchen door opened, throwing a warning pathway of light on the garden, and the cook appeared to discuss with the neighbour's domestic, over the hedge, the untoward event of the evening. On front porch and back, upstairs and down, in all Salthaven, it seemed the only theme worth discussion that night—and would probably so hold first place for many moons to come.

Had the figure under the trees been ignorant of it, she

could have caught its entire history from the conversational scraps borne from the gossips by the night wind.

“Such a shame—him lookin’ so grand— But Ben and her kep’ company so long.— The poor young man—the foreigner with them earrings of gold and all in rags—but them awful words the parrot used—um, um,—the man did look like the old boy hisself—but then Master Phil’s sowed his wild oats— Oh, oh, they do say——”

The two were now so engrossed that they might as well have been gagged. So with another glance at the lighted window and the nervous shadow, the figure left the big elm for the porch, and so through the door. Quietly she tiptoed through the pantry and kitchen, looked about, listened, found the back stairs, ascended them, and entered the door of the northeast chamber.

Philip threw the twentieth quarter-smoked cigarette in the tray. His hair was disordered, his face flushed, and the whiskey line in the flask a full four inches lower than a half hour before. It threatened to ebb still more before the night was much older.

Hearing a staccato laugh, shot through with hints of rag-time, topical songs, and all such titillating things, he turned in his chair, assuming a waggish expression, which at once changed to one of alarm.

“Carlotta!”

“Same to you, angel-face, how does it feel to be left waitin’ at the church?” Then glancing at him coquettishly,—“You look lonesome—you’re glad ta see me, aren’t you now, sweetie?”

"You're welcome in any other city but this, Carlotta. Why in—" he mentioned a familiar place, not, it is to be assumed, that he particularly desired her removal thither, but merely as a vivid instance—"didn't you make a date for somewhere else?"

"Tried to all day, but your poppa musta kep' his ol' whiskers ambushin' that phone—stalled me ev'ry time, an' what's more humiliatin' to a lady, when I called, acshually slammed the door in my face."

"Well, it's no use your coming here—I'm flat broke."

Now there could have been in this carefully swept room no verminous signs, but Carlotta inquired with some heat as to what was "bitin' him, anyway," then, probably thinking the query malapropos, sat on the arm of his chair, her arm creeping softly around his neck.

"What's your game, now?" he shot out, angrily jerking away from the embrace.

"Say, kiddo, yuh misconstruc' muh intenshuns, which is, so to speak, as it were, you done me wrong. Perhaps it amuses you—an' Mac cert'nly thinks so—but—I'm—*not—looking—for—coin*. I've cert'nly staked *you* often enough, if anyone should ast you, an' I wouldn't a done that, would I, if I hadn't fell for you?"

"No, little one, no one would accuse you of that," he returned, shaking his head in alcoholic perspicacity.

But her arms were softly emphasizing her plea. In fact she gave him their full opulence, and Philip wondered—if—after all——

"I've got money enough. Supposin' I stake you till you get

a job? You can dance. Me an' you together, why, we'd be a riot—cabaret or big time—we'd stop the show!"

"Besides, dearie," she went on, smoothing the disordered hair, "don't kid yourself into thinkin' that little Bright Eyes, who left you flat at the altar, is ever comin' back to youoo-oooh. No, sir, never on your tintype! She's pretty an' " (strange admission here for Carlotta) "she's good—probably—sort o' fell for her myself. But she's all for that sailor guy what's doin' the Robbie Crooso stunt. Gee! wouldn't it make anelluva movie!"

Catching sight of her own dishevelled condition in the mirror, she jumped up to make repairs, first with lipstick (1911! she *was* a pioneer!) and powder, then with his military brushes, which, looking over her shoulder, she plied with an implication of intimacy that riled him.

"Feel quite at home, don't you?" he jeered sullenly, "but if the governor comes——"

"I'll get the hook, don't I know it!—but about Little Agnes, now," she returned to his chair, "lissen, dearie,——"

"Though most people think I'm nothin' but a nut dancer, I can read 'em like a book——"

"Did you ever——" he interrupted, only to be cut short in turn,—

"Now, don't get off that old wheeze about a chorus girl's readin' one once—you oughta be ashamed of yourself—I subscribe to a circ'lating lib'r'y— an' don't short circuit me again, either." Then assuming the wisely guaging look of one to whom the human soul was quite transparent, she explained:

“I started to tell you that she won’t never giv’ him up. She’s one of the forever-after kind—damn fools, too, for as far as the men are concerned, that Roomyo an’ Jooliet stuff’s the bunk—” she sawed the air, sidewise, with a gesture of utter disgust— “An’ I’d stack my pile that that Mr. Roomyoh, soon as he left Jooly lyin there stiff an’ cold, lamped some other dame at the exit an’ giv’ her the high sign.

“But to get back to this kiddo,—there’s too much smalltown about her—y’know, blush all over when anyone menshuns legs, what we most cert’nly all got. Yep, she’d make nice apple tarts from your farm out there, an’ sweep the porch clean, an’ on Sundays doll up like a reg’lar curly-haired baby-doll. But she’d never do for you, kiddo, you gotta have pep an’ good rag—why, all you could do when yuh get all het up is to play the organ an’ look at the photygraft album, by Heck!” Here she snapped her fingers and executed that rustic shuffle, by which pieces of business her kind always know that beings from beyond their own sacred purlieus hold the boards.

“An’, an’,” she wound up, “Philip, me bhoy, you’d have plenty of babies, oodles uv ’em—like rabbits. You’d make a swell father walkin’ the floor with ’em, wouldn’t you, now?”

For further derision she hummed a popular favourite of the day—“When Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit Rented a Harlem Flat,” it was called—with pantomime of infant-on-each-arm, until Philip writhed and reached for the flask. But Carlotta, who was surprising both herself and him that night, snatched it away.

"You've had about enough of that!"

Again the heavy emphasis of soft arms, and he wavered. He would go—but the broad stairs announced the approach of someone.

"It's the governor—quick—in there!"

The knob of the door turned behind Carlotta, and the ceiling lights were snapped off, leaving the room in half darkness as his father entered.

He seemed to be concerned for his son, wanting to say something—he didn't quite know what. He felt still more worried when he saw the unusual débris in the tray, and the flask which Phil had neglected to hide.

"That won't help, my boy, it never does. I'm sorry things turned out so badly—sorrrier than I can say. But, cheer up, Sally'll come round on time. The whole thing's so romantic that it naturally appealed to her—all girls are that way."

"Maybe," the boy replied, "but you're wrong about her—she won't get the chance."

A sharp breeze, heralding the return of the storm, which had subsided for a while, blew through the curtains, knocking Sally's picture from the bureau. Renewed rumbles of thunder followed, and fitful spurts of lightning.

In the uncertain atmosphere of lamplight, lightning flash, and whiskey haze, commingled, through which Phil's brain was none too buoyantly volplaning, a picture on the wall opposite held him spellbound.

By day it was only a dingy oil in a tarnished frame, the canvas fissured by Time with tiny cracks like a maze of spider webs. But now it was wonderfully lifelike. On a

heavy sea a full-rigged ship tossed, under reefed topsails and jib, with tall masts raking clouds and a ghostly moon. When the lightning flickered out, the red lanterns on her rail glowed, he would have sworn, with a supernatural fire. It wasn't paint but *flame*. Almost like a phantom ship, the Flying Dutchman of unholy memory, perhaps, she seemed actually to skim the waves, those devil's lights blinking on her port.

To the bewildered son it was uncanny, and even the prosaic and perfectly sober father, though he tried to dismiss it as an illusion, was impressed. And now the wind, increasing in violence, started the sleeping ghosts of the house. The sheeted rain lashed savagely at the window panes. The storm had returned in good earnest. A vivid flash stabbed the darkness, and, hard on the shaft, a series of others, and accompanying reverberations like the ruffling of tremendous drums above the storm, in such swift succession it was hard to tell whether the crashes followed or preceded the bolts.

In the dazzling illumination, the dimmed port lights, all the tones of the painting, faded into oblivion, until it became but a framed bit of midnight. It was only in the spaces between, when the lamplight was not paled into insignificance, that they could discern the colours at all.

There came an instant's lull, as if the warring forces of Nature were gathering all their powers for the spring. The final onslaught was presaged by a strange ball of fire caroming around the room, with a train of sparks like the fiery impedimenta of a convict from some subterranean cell. Then the whole room burst into a white searing dawn, such as the

last of all must be when it comes, almost simultaneously with so mighty a roar that it strangely sounded not at all like artillery however gigantic, but rather the chorused hissing of legions of lost souls, raised into the most terrible of fortissimos. When it finally rolled away, in an almost equally inspiring diminuendo, they were unscathed, but the giant elm in the garden below, under which Carlotta had stood, was split as cleanly as a piece of cordwood halved by a sharp axe. The scream from the closet had passed unheard—one little note in the whole pandemonium.

The electric reading lamp had gone out, and Philip stumbled over something on the floor. The bulb brightened again. It was the picture. The worn moulding giving way, it had fallen unnoticed in the din of the tempest.

Now it lay back uppermost, and the boy saw the irregular lines of a crude chart, swiftly outlined in faded blues and yellows by a painter's brush. He held it to the lamp.

"What does it mean, this spooky ship, and the crazy chart?"

His father, apparently not hearing him at all, was abstractedly musing. But the boy, anxious for distraction, and scenting a mystery, perhaps even a hint of hidden, other-world treasure, demanded—wilfully as always:

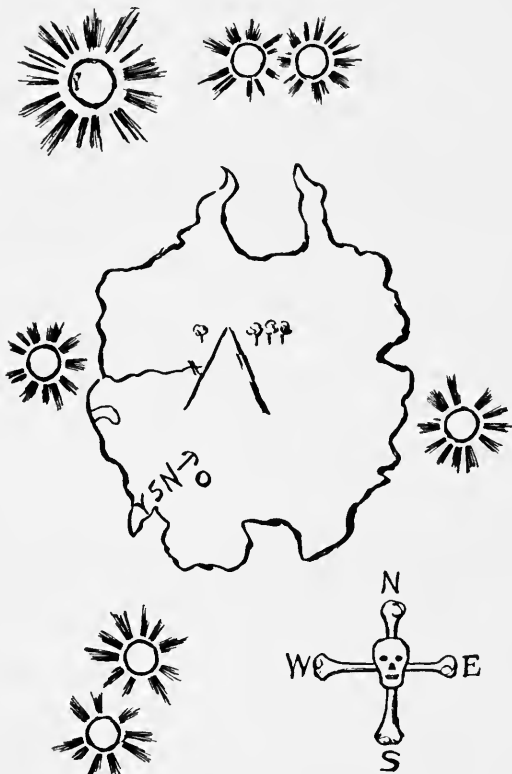
"What is it? Shoot, gov'nor."

"Oh, it's just a fool yarn, not worth repeating—the sort you can hear in any place where there are ships and drunken old sailors—and fools to listen to 'em."

"But you swallowed it yourself once, didn't you?"

"I'm not so sure about that. Anyway, the sooner one for-

gets such wild yarns and gets down to practical business, the better.”



Philip, thinking this presaged something rather ominous, very probably the horrible suggestion of some job for his princely self, and strangely forgetting the very living skeleton now ensconced in the closet, tried to wheedle him.

"Come, dad," he urged.

"All right, but forget it when I'm through.

"It goes back forty years, Philip. I can remember it as clearly as if it took place yesterday. Your grandfather was sitting on the porch here, reading *The Log*, the same old *Log*, at the usual hour—he was always on schedule to the split second in everything he did—when some old tramp, half seaman, half derelict, staggered up the path.

"He was ragged and half-starved, I guess, and under his arm he carried that painting, wrapped in oilskin. He gripped it hard, as if it were his own soul he was carrying, and sometimes I thought it was. He reached the steps and almost fell at your grandfather's feet. Of course, we took him in, fed him, and put him up for the night. Later he seemed to feel better, and told us an odd sort of story of some island in the French West Indies, haunted, and entirely deserted because the long line of owners had had so many misfortunes there,—volcanoes, epidemics, assassinations—everything. There was also some preternatural quality about the place. *That's* not worth repeating, but he did give some practical reasons for its condition; said it was mixed up in litigation in the courts—and French colonial courts are bad enough—the titles were all snarled up or something. But the important thing to the old fellow was the treasure that he swore was there.

"It was a weird mixture anyway you look at it, but, though as a boy I wanted to believe every word of it, even then I had the sense to call it a fairy tale.—Which it was—" he interjected half cautiously, torn between his desire to "get

this out of his system," as Phil mentally put it, and his reluctance to throw any more crazy ideas into the boy's head.

"However, the old boy was so earnest, and he showed us this painting with the chart on the back—my, how it has faded!—that I got to believe him, and I think Father half believed him, too—that night—in the dark. But in the light of the morning after, when the fellow got down to brass tacks and asked him to fit out a ship, why, that was another story. Your grandfather said it was a 'good enough yarn to spin when there was no work to be done but puffin' on your evening pipe, but to fit out a ship and spend a year cruising and digging for fairy gold, when there were genuine cargoes waiting on the wharves of a thousand ports, why, that was something else again.'

"Apparently, the old man had tried every shipowner in New England. They all listened, but no one would give him even a catboat, let alone the schooner he wanted.

"When he reached us he was in pretty bad shape from exposure, and we were his last chance, I guess. We kept him, of course. It would have been worse than cruel to turn him out. Anyway, one night about a week later, it was mighty warm—the sort of oppressive heat that tells a heavy electrical storm coming. Later it blew great guns and a storm broke—just like tonight. You remember that stump which your mother always kept covered with flowers, near the elm that was struck a few moments ago? Well, that was split the same way that night. Just before the crash, when the storm was at its worst, we heard cries from the sailor's room. We could hear them even above the roar of the wind. We

ran to the room. He was dying, but just before he passed away, he held out this canvas which he always kept by his pillow.

“‘You had faith, boy, take it,’ he called to me, then, between the hacks of his death rattle, managed somehow to gasp out,— ‘get the gold.’

“‘I was only a youngster, and I was terribly frightened, as you may imagine, for he choked on that last word,—‘gold.’ It was just at that very second that the bolt came, the one that struck that other tree.

“Afterwards, Father had the painting framed and hung up here. And, of course, I forgot it like the fool yarn it was— Hello!” he paused and looked startled; “what’s that?”

“Where? I didn’t see anything.”

Now, the older man was sure he had seen a figure steal down the hallway past the door, but he dismissed the idea as some vagary. It was altogether too wild a night, and incomprehensible things were happening everywhere—things which could be sensibly explained, of course, he assured himself.

But the boy was leaning forward to grasp his father’s hands.

“Father,” he pled, “let me take the *Aileen* and make a try for it——”

“No, Phil, we won’t go chasing rainbows. Your grandfather was right about it. No good would come of such a fool expedition.

“Besides,” he went on—more crisply now, “I’ve had a letter today. I didn’t tell you about it before, because I

thought you had had enough trouble for one day. But the Registrar has written me some news I wouldn't say pleased me down to the ground. Says he wrote another letter, which I never got."

At this Philip flinched a little, but even now the father trusted him too much to suspect the extent of his turpitude.

"I want you to come into the office and settle down," the old man explained, "there'll be a fine business for you when I die, my boy. But first we'd better get this picture out of the way. It's caused enough trouble already."

He picked up the painting and started for the closet.

"Let's put it in the attic, father. The closet's locked and I've lost the key."

But something had attracted the other's eye,—a bit of wine-coloured skirt caught in that door.

Now after a very bad half hour, Carlotta was almost welcoming release, even by an enemy. It was a fairly large and airy closet, but, nevertheless, she had sweated and trembled at the possibility of discovery, as well as the violence of the storm and the uncanny incident of the painting. Nerve in plenty she might have for her business and the ordinary exigencies of Broadway, but her old friend, the property man, had no such powerful "props" in his possession. As for the real demonstrations of the elements, they always seemed so far above a sky-scraper, so futile to one behind steel and concrete. But in this creaking and groaning "hangout," why, as the old gentleman had just said, "this was something else again." And that yarn which she couldn't help hearing against her inhibitions, not of taste

but caution, was the most fearful of all. Bit by bit the chain begun by that medium was being forged. The ghost ship was but another link in the chain! The long journey approached ominously, perilously, near.

The older man snapped on the ceiling lights and looked at the betraying evidence in the crack of the door. In spite of his paternal trust, he could add the two of the girl's call and her telephone message, the two of the Registrar's letter and that bit of wine-coloured cloth. They totalled a perfect incriminating four.

"Give me that key!"

There was nothing to do but deliver it. It turned, and Mr. Huntington confronted Carlotta. Now that he enjoyed a clearer view of the visitor, it didn't take any very acute observation to realize that she was no Salthaven product. She was so plainly an errant, brightly-coloured bulb, straying far from its proper setting on the "Great White Way," and with all the allurements thereof. But this stoutish little beauty, with her jet earrings, carmine flushes, snapping eyes, and pose and walk that were always on the point of swaying into ragtime, held no attraction for a perfectly respectable Salthaven father.

"Well, young man," he snorted in disgust, "so this is the indorsement of the Registrar's letter."

He went to the head of the stairs and called the cook, who came, breathless with excitement at the urgency of the summons.

"Show this young woman to the door, *the kitchen door*, I mean."

Powder and paint, and her clever selection of a modiste, had given Carlotta a certain sort of flashy smartness, but after all, under the skin she was "a tough little kyke," as she had often been called. But not the whole of her. She really loved the boy in her way, or wanted him—which amounts to the same thing. Ordinarily she would have reverted to type, and had a most distinct "mad on," as they used to say in the old days of her childhood, when she bit and fought and scratched her way on the Street of Pushcarts and Old Clothes; and an impudent retort, such as "you poor old boob" (it was that in that year) would have issued from her lips, and she might also have jabbed a hatpin into the screaming cook. Because she really did care in her way for the boy, and did not want to further antagonize the father, she did none of these things. She simply said—"You've got me wrong, Mr. Huntington, you'll find out some day," then "bye, bye, Phil," and walked a little stagily, but with at least an approach to dignity, out of the room, down the stairs, and out of the front door. She refrained even from banging that.

Just as it closed, every light in the house went out.

In the darkness, Philip called——

"Dad, that arm!"

The lights went up, and there was no trace of any one, ghost, demon, or human soul. But they heard a sound as of a displaced shingle, and running to the window, saw ten fingers curled around the gutter, as though the owner of them were suspended below, calculating the drop.

Philip hurled some object at them—the bottle crashed, slicing the fingers—then they disappeared.

Returning into the room they looked for the painting, but it, too, had gone.

CHAPTER XVII

THE *AILEEN*

So, by haphazard chance, or trick of Fate, were gathered in the port the motley crews that were to embark on that mad voyage, whose perils and strange adventures your historian will try to recount, from his own recollections, pieced out by the records and the most trustworthy tales of the survivors. But one of the participants was still missing.

He was—on the Tuesday after the wedding—conversing with none other than Queer Hat, the painter who had walked from the wharf so abruptly that morning of Ben's return, and who was destined to have nothing more to do with Sally's life except, perhaps, his propelling of the Unknown into it.

He—that is Queer Hat—was still daubing away, erasing and retouching his portrait, presumably for the Academy. For a fellow of only moderate talent, it wasn't a half bad portrait at that. Being one of those chaps who never can allow an opinion or observation to go unexpressed, he was haranguing the stranger, a friend of a few months, on the virtues of the portrait or its fair original.

"It's the damndest thing to get—begging your pardon" (he bowed to the canvas), "I mean that compounding of

common sense and the spirituelle"—here he turned half-hopefully to his auditor—"Or *do* you get it?"

But the other, who could let his reflections travel their designed course without delivering them up to chance companions, gazed at the picture in silence. He was presumably Latin, but not at all Gascon. His features, delicately moulded, were saved by the clean-cut conformation of jaw and skull. When he moved it was alertly, but out of action he seemed to possess a repose with which the poorly informed rarely credit his race. The eye, too, was steady but sad. There was about him the air, bravely and gracefully borne, of one who had always played in hard luck, whose ancestors had bequeathed him, possibly an honoured name, most certainly a heritage of poverty, and with it, of fatalism.

A slight, but not disfiguring, scar on his cheek, and a touch of ribbon in his lapel, suggested some service in the Foreign Legion.

But Queer Hat was pleasantly meandering on,—

"The figure, too, balks me. Somehow, simplicity seems to be the most complex thing in the world, the most difficult thing to arrive at. There's spring—lilt—poise——"

The Legionnaire now broke his silence——

"*Elan*, you mean—body and spirit *pointe du pied*—on tip-toe, you would say."

"By Jove, that's good—on tiptoe!" the other exclaimed, but the Frenchman went on as if he hadn't heard him——.

"One has the impression of having seen her, somewhere before."

"You're not getting that American habit!" the painter not

unpleasantly jeered, "Haven't I met you somewhere before! Ye Gods!"

Only half conscious of his meaning, the other continued,——

"No, it's not that, it is only that beauty——"

"I know what you mean," the painter replied, taking the explanation out of his mouth, "it's only that that elusive thing is so eternal, so right, that when you meet up with it in any form, you'd swear you'd known it—or her (indicating the picture) always, and you have, anyway, in your dreams."

But the Legionnaire was examining the background with its masts, and cordage, and wash of blue water. "There is not so much colour, but it is very like the Breton coast. But perhaps it is only because I am homesick."

"Yep, quaint place—called Salthaven," the painter said between puffs.

"Salthaven—in what department, *mon ami*?"

"Department! Oh, I see—in what state—Massachusetts—" then he looked up at him inquiringly. "You're not thinking of trekking there, you mad Gaul, are you?"

"I tire of your city, fren' Tony, too much fever——"

"And that from you!"

"It is a different sort of fever. Our kind is that of the sea, of the winds, and is governed by some law of Nature. There is peace even in the unrest, the wandering. But here in your nervous city, it is the spasm of the—what is your happy idiom—the capon decapitated? And, perhaps, I am homesick, though a man might travel far even for a pair of eyes he had never seen away from the canvas. I did once,

my fren', for a miniature—as far as Bokhara—and there is so much more there." He bowed to the canvas, then stood up. "Can you unravel me your railroads?"

"That's easy. Here's a time-table. The New Haven will take you there, if it chances to be its wreckless day."

"Wrecks are always my good fortune, my bad that always I survive them."

He started for the door, but was called back by his jovial friend.

"Hey there, now get this straight,—from Bunker Wharf you turn to Water Street, then two turns to the right and three to the left, up the hill. House, French windows—whitewashed trees, walk, shells, whitewashed everything—skiff groaning with flowers—and—name's Sally."

The other looked at him with a twinkle of amusement.

"Crude, as you say in your expressive American, but au revoir."

As he had judged from the picture and his friend's portrayal, the town was like the other his boyhood remembered, with roofs sloping to the harbour, but neither so gayly coloured nor sheltering so joyous a life. And this sky was blue yet not quite so blue, if he trusted his fancy.

Other pictures came back to him,—his proud testy old granduncle, tall and silver-haired, hawk-eyed and hawk-nosed, and Bourbon to the backbone, who, ever since the last Napoleon, had locked himself in his château and gardens, sternly refusing to recognize the new order by even so much as mingling with it, while his estate dwindled to a third of its former glory and, what was more to the point, to even less

of its liquidability; of his beautiful mother whose spirit was as determined as that of the old Royalist, and whose marriage to the rising young councillor from the North had broken the old man's heart, though it had proved longer in the breaking than one would have supposed; and so on down through the long sequence of his ill-lucked wanderings since.

The visions passed, and, though he was not at all given to vulgar curiosity, it was quite natural to follow those directions so chaffingly tossed as a farewell by Queer Hat.

He traversed the two turns to the right, and three to the left, up the hill, as verbally diagrammed, found the white-wash, the old skiff, and its cargo of petunias. However, over its creaking gate loomed something not in the prospectus,—a female most rigidly boned and coiffured, and most precisely pursed of mouth.

A few cues he caught from her conversation,—“Sally,” and “kidnapped,”—“or run away to sea,” then a more ominous “judgment of God.” So he made his way to the beach.

The sky was overcast, but a half-mile away a fire was burning. He followed its pennons, to discover a group around it,—a tall fellow, pallid of feature, and dressed in contrasting black, of the sort, the observing stranger decided, an American would at once label “smooth”; a trio of rascals that most certainly deserved the epithet “precious”; a smartly-dressed youth, a little the worse for whiskey—and a girl.

Pictorially she would have made an excellent Carmen, he thought, with her swarthy set in a crimson dress, but she

seemed ill at ease, every once in a while casting a troubled glance at the sea.

Not being given to eaves-dropping any more than to other forms of inordinate curiosity, he would have passed on, but the object which they were studying caught his attention. It was an old oil-painting. Strange, he thought, when that was just the thing that had sent him here. The flames leaped up a little and even at that distance he thought the painting familiar, though all he could detect was that it was a marine.

"Curious," he said, then "impossible," but he felt in his pockets as if searching for some object that was precious and so always carefully carried. He found it,—a yellow paper, a rough chart of some sort, very old, and yellow, and crinkled. The outlines upon it strangely resembled the lines on the back of the painting on the Huntington wall.

He hid in the lee of a rock close at hand, again catching enough of this conversation to piece out a suspicious, if not absolutely incriminating, case.

The callow youth was talking or rather trying to——

"You go to Hell, Mac"—Mac—something—the listener couldn't be sure— "Th' ol' man don't give me *Aileen*, I take her—just like that—you shign up crew here—mos' dish-tingshd crew"— he drunkenly waved his arms to take in the group— "an' we'll sail away to lil ole islan'—'n spade up iron men in ches'—have funny lil fairy tale all 'r own."

And now the girl was talking, scarcely in the musical tones of the Carmen she resembled, though it is conceivable that the Bizet lady could have acquired the same raucous voice and gesture, had she been transplanted to this catarrhal belt.

“Who d’ya think yuh are, pulling this Robinson Croosoe stuff? It’d go big at Miner’s, but as a real honest-to-Gawd journey, it doesn’t make a hit with me.”

She seconded this declaration with the queer twitchings of shoulder and hip, which, the stranger had observed, were the heart and soul of American dancing. A queer lot, but as amusing to him, in pantomime and patois, as a band of rioters in a Nice carnival to a Yankee tourist. It all depends on the point of view. The unfamiliar is always refreshing.

The leader admonished her in the same incomprehensible dialect:

“It’ll do you good, Carlotta, to see some foam besides that you blow off glasses.”

To this, the exotic but amusing Carmen responded that “steppin’ on Broadway suited her better’n rollin’ on the deep,” also that “she didn’t speak no language like the wild sea waves.”

There was more argument, then her further declaration:

“I know, Mac, but there are some things I won’t pull, an’ shopliftin’ a young steam yacht is one of ’em.”

The Legionnaire was decidedly bewildered. Such sentences had never appeared in any conversational grammar he had studied, yet he had been told that he spoke perfect English. He began to think that his professors had been badly chosen, or else that the only way to study any tongue was in the natural habitat. But the next demand from the leader was more to the point.

“Here, let’s look at that chart.”

But the alcoholic youth wouldn't deliver the painting.

"You shtole this once, MacAllshter, but you don't get 'way with it again."

At this the girl raised her tousled black head from her voluptuous elbows, and broke in.

"Say, Mac, what did yuh try that fool stunt for? Second story worker—huh! I thought yuh had more sense. Yuh mighta got filled with lead." She paused and surveyed him slyly, almost with a challenge—"I suppose yuh thought I'd double cross yuh, didn't yuh?"

"Women have been known to change their minds," he responded.

"Yuh said it, Mac, I nearly did."

"Well, Hermione, little flower of the slums, pure lily springing from the mire"—the ironic epithets fell from his bloodless lips with a delicate, almost melodious, lilt—"in changing yours, see that you don't short-change yourself."

Meanwhile, during these retorts most courteous, the youth, replenished from the flask with which the man called MacAllister was maliciously plying him, gazed down at the painting.

"Funny lil ol' islan', ain't it now?" He kept repeating the idea as if it vastly amused him, "but whaz zis?" his tongue failing him a little more, "muz be lil tent."

"That's a mountain, son," the leader informed him.

"Mountain!" the boy echoed it vaguely as most astounding information, "but whaz zis, tthhen? Ol' Doc Sawbones—how are you, ol' top?" (bowing gravely to the skull and crossbones) "an' that mus be ad for Turkssh cigaret."

"They're moons, you poor ——" (he couldn't catch this amazing appellative!) "seven of 'em."

Now this discovery of Carlotta's came near to unravelling the conversation, which the stranger mistakenly thought was extraordinarily uncommon. He decided that, in spite of his faulty knowledge of the purest Americanese, he could now understand the cryptic allusion to the "yacht," though why it should be called "young" was beyond him to fathom.

But the girl was talking on. Picturesque—but that voice—*Diable!*

"An' those marks in the corner—like chicken trac's an' letters?"

"That's the key to it," MacAllister deigned to explain. "And damned if I don't believe it's that island I heard of down in Kingston. If it is—by the beard of your alleged ancestor, Carlotta, it means treasure!"

"You mean," she said, "that that means *real cash?*"

"It's a fifty-fifty chance, you doubting Thomasina."

"Well, all right, but all I gotta say is,—if yuh can read money in those Shriner marks, I can bring yuh a stack uv Yiddish newspapers that'll cash in for millions." She turned away. "Gawd! It—" the pronoun referring to none other than her mentor, "*IT*," she repeated, "wants me to sign *that* fool contrac'!"

The further dialogue that now ensued between the three huskies, who had been lying motionless save for their masticating lips, was also illuminating.

The nearest, a bent old fellow, stood up, the flames leaping higher in the wind and revealing the matted whiskers which

completely encircled his jaws. The stranger couldn't see the colour of his eyes, but they looked cunning enough, even at that distance.

Between pauses for salivary punctuation, he inquired:

"Now atter you gents has settled this among yerselves, supposin' ye let us sit in. To get down to cases, if I might ax ye, what might be the compensation fer all this risk to our — — souls?"

The explanation of the leader was now inaudible, but it didn't satisfy the second, a burly chap with a pugilist's crouch and build, and a frightful scar, which the firelight revealed, forking across his flat, challenging features.

"We gotta split better'n that," he growled surlily.

"But Mr. Huntington owns the boat, I'm promoting the job. You three can spilt a third three ways, if you know what that means."

"You mean he gets a third, you get a third, and we divvy what's left?"

And the gesture of his thumb, as he indicated the spoils-men, reminded the spectator of some sign of the vendetta.

"You're a lightning calculator, Pete, but you don't invest any capital or brains, you see."

"Mebbe, but you sail without us, then, hey Swedie?"

The last one addressed, the bullet-headed roustabout in the sleeveless red undershirt, with enormous biceps and a close-cropped head, merely returned his usual "Ay tank so," and lay down on the sands as if indifferent to, or confident of, the outcome.

The man called MacAllister apparently yielded the point,

probably with his usual mental reservations, for even the lone spectator observed,—“I wouldn't give much for your share, Monsieur Pete.”

Then, stamping out the fire, the six trudged over the sand to the East, the girl dragging behind in the torment of fear and indecision, while the youth still informed the night, over and over again, that it was “a funny lil ol' islan'.”

Shortly after, the Frenchman hurried to the hotel, packed his bag, and took the creaky bus to the station, much earlier than he had expected.

Meantime the six, after a suitable refreshment at Tom Grogan's, resumed their journey, past the wharves and schooners, the sail-lofts and chandleries, to a dock clear at the other end of the waterfront.

Through a rift in the clouds, the moon shone on the *Aileen*, riding at anchor in all her trim beauty, a little way out in the harbour.

Alongside the dock lay a little gasoline launch, with a figure in the cockpit, working over the engine. To MacAllister's question the man replied,—“All set, cap,” and the five stepped in the launch, the girl shrinking back as though it were a maelstrom she was about to enter.

“None of your sulks, Carlotta,” ordered MacAllister, “come, in with you.”

Then it was that Carlotta tried what was always her last resort, a still prettier bit of temperament, that luxury of all stars, than any she had ever conceived in more familiar haunts.

“Phil,” she shrieked, grabbing the youth's arm, “yuh know

I been true to yuh an' staked yuh an' stood for your leaving me flat an' everything. Before Gawd, I ask yuh not to go.—It means death—do yuh hear—death.” And there was a sincerity in that last huskily whispered word that seemed to show more genuine fear than any desire for mere histrionic effect.

She actually cried (it was hard work for Carlotta, the weeping being rather expressed in shrieks and moans than salty tears), then ran the whole gamut of wringing of hands, and stamping, and kicking, until her arms were seized from behind, and across her vociferous lips was thrust a hand that was viselike for all its alabaster finish.

His watch came out.

“I'll give you just one minute, sixty seconds—d'y' hear? to make up your mind—once and for all.”

She watched the hands of the stopwatch ticking away, as if the little black arrow marked her own swift race into the jaws of annihilation.

Phil was standing up in the boat, or rather trying to.

“Come on, be a shport, Carlotta.”

Then he drunkenly fell athwart the gunwale, to be hauled in by the slack of the trousers, a ridiculous figure.

“All right, I know when I'm beaten,” the girl admitted between the slightly relaxed fingers, and then as she stepped in the boat, her short skirts unnecessarily raised in abject apprehension of this alarming new means of locomotion, she muttered,—“But Gawd help that medyum if I ever get these claws on her.”

The moon shone out gloriously now, in a golden and most

engaging innocence, as she seems best to do when foul deeds are afoot, and the freshening wind brought the sound of church bells from off shore. At the ninth peal, the little launch with its self-important "put, put," headed for the yacht. They hove alongside, Phil hailing the solitary watch a trifle pugnaciously. A head appeared over the taffrail, as if ready for resistance. But recognizing the young son of the owner, the sailor let down the ladder, and the six adventurers climbed aboard.

Hearing voices on deck, the old engineer came above. He touched his cap to Phil, but this futile deference was all that he showed him, and the boy, in his nervousness to be off, commanded a little too brusquely:

"Get up shteam at once, Stephens!"

The latter was stubborn and did not budge from the companionway.

"Your father hasn't given his orders, sir," he said, as if that settled it.

"Look here, old boy, you do as I tell you or you'll be fired," stormed the prince chap with alcoholic ugliness.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Philip, but I only take orders from your father."

At a sign from MacAllister, Pushbutton Pete and the Pink Swede ranged themselves on either side of the recalcitrant engineer, the first confronting him.

"Stephens, you'll either get up steam or go overboard."

At the answering protest,—*"Why this is piracy!"* Pete's hairy hand was over his mouth, and he was catapulted by four strong arms into the bay.

“You oughtn’ta do that,” cried Carlotta in alarm. “Why the poor fellah ’ll drown.”

But when she ran to the rail and saw in the moonlight silvering the dark waves the sure swift strokes of their victim, swiftly heading for shore, her fears of murder were dispelled, only to be succeeded by others equally alarming.

“He’ll start the bulls after us, Mac.”

The latter assuring her that “no ‘flatfoot’ could walk with any speed on the asphalt, let alone on the water,” turned to the sailor.

“You there, will you ship with us? We’ll double your wages if you can use your hands and lay off your mouth. Might as well. If you don’t,—” and he significantly indicated the disappearing swimmer.

“Just as you say, Cap,” the man assented sullenly.

Pushbutton Pete, who knew something of engines, as the odd scars attested, went below, and in three-quarters of an hour, just as they noticed a suspicious scurrying on shore, they weighed anchor, slipped between the two capes, and put out to sea.

In the morning, Old Man Veldmann and the Pink Swede went over the side in little swinging seats, and changed the yacht’s markings, rimming her portholes, and adding a line of red one foot below her gunwales. Then they ripped off the brass letter N from prow and stern, and one E of her name, ingeniously transforming it into a C, then transposed the I and the L. Forthwith, the *Aileen* became the *Alice*. To complete the deception, MacAllister searched through the yachting register and found the ensign of a man

who happened to own a vessel of the same burthen and name as the newly christened *Alice*.

He went over to Carlotta, who lay in a steamer chair, strangely inanimate. She looked at the cut of the desired pennant, but feebly turned away her face.

“You’re no Lady Duff Gordon, Carlotta, but you ought to be able to make something like this.”

She groaned.

“The only flag I could make now, Mac, is the white flag of surrender.”

However, the hands of the profane old man were quite equal to the occasion. A half-hour later the blue and white ensign of the supposititious owner was hauled to the peak.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GYPSY OF THE SEA

“BUT, Señorita, I see them.”

“With your own eyes, Dick?” questioned Sally from the knightheads.

“Yes, with these eyes. By San Juan el Moro I swear eet!”

“That makes thirty-eight fairy stories and thirty-eight saints, and we’ve only been out nine days.”

She shook her head sceptically, then gazed up at the giant yardarms that dipped and rose with the ship’s roll, then in spite of herself turned to listen again.

I have often wished that a painter, even slow old Queer Hat, had been there to transfix line and colour forever on some canvas,—the girl against the knightheads, a knot of scarlet at her throat, the spray glistening on her black lashes and unfettered hair; those trousers, crosslegged on the deck below her, a Whistlerish nocturne in azures and greys and greens; the brass earrings swaying as he talked; the crimson and yellow bandanna; and the wrinkled leather of the face looking up at her, with visions of lands and seas far beyond that ship.

No cloud above, the only white the gulls in their wake, and

the sails; and ever around them, and really above, for the sea seemed to rise up bowl-wise to meet the horizon, the shifting sapphire of the waves, their tips glinting like fire-flies far brighter than those of the night.

And then the buoyant grace, the brave strength of the ship, the aspiration of the tall masts, so like the soul's own, the delicate pattern of the rope-mazes, the curve of the filled sail!

She yielded to the temptation.

"And you say you *know* him?" again the girl asked.

"I swear it, Señorita. To many ports I go and in many ships I sail—Engleesh and Français and those from Etalee and my own Countree and many more" (Sally loved to listen to the flowing ripple of his r's). "I see him when he sail, an' his wife on the wharf an' the poor little bebee. An' also I see his bones."

"Now, Dick, that is too much."

"Believe me, Señorita, have I not swear by San Juan el Moro?" (He named him reverently in the Spanish phraseology again, this particular saint being the patron of this particular story. She wondered how he never mixed his tales and their protecting patrons): "Si, I saw his bones on the shore."

"Well, never mind the bones, Dick, sing it again."

So over he sang that song. It was English, but neither the polyglot patois nor its haunting music, as the gypsy interpreted it, can be here reproduced any more than those elusive qualities in the tale itself. We will give it in Sally's pretty paraphrase as she sang it seven years later to her children,

and as we heard it again on one of our summer vacations on the cape. Just what its name was she never knew, but something like:

“The Mermaid’s Tail.”

1

“There was a sailor bold
Who sailed upon the deep,
And when he left the port
His wife did nought but weep.

Chorus:

“Ding, dong, ding, dong,
Hark to the bell-buoy’s song;
But stop yer ears, when the Maid ye hears,
It’s death if ye listen too long.

2

“‘Oh Jack,’ she cries, ‘be true.
‘These hands are skin and bone
‘Worn with workin’ fer you,
‘And I’ll be all alone.’

3

“Oh Jack swore long and loud
By Mary Mother o’ Men:
‘As leal and true as now I am,
‘I’ll come back again.’

4

“He sailed a year and a day
To a sea that no man knows,
Where off the shore o’ the spicy isles
The Love Wind softly blows.

5

“And there upon the waves,
Combin’ her golden hair,
A mermaid sang a pretty song,
And she was very fair.

6

“Oh, Jack he heard her sing
And saw her glist’ning eyes,
And Nance was short ’er mate that night,
When the moon began to rise.

7

“Now whiter than her skin,
His bones tossed by the tide;
And still her song she sings
And still the waves she rides.

Chorus:

“Ding, dong, ding, dong,
Hark to the bell-buoy’s song;
But stop yer ears when the Maid ye hears,
It’s death if ye listen too long!”

All through the ballad, the small yellow mongrel at his feet, with eyes so like his master's, kept mournfully looking up at the singer and alternately averting his gaze in dumb animal embarrassment and uneasiness at the minor strain.

"Poor lady and oh, the poor little bebee!" sighed the troubadour.

Then he looked at the dog and at the girl. He felt a little ashamed. He understood why she shifted her position so uneasily—why her breast rose and fell—once—at the finish of the song.

"It's a beautiful song, Dick—and thank you. But it's sad. I like it and yet I don't like it."

"Perhaps the lady would like to hear the tale of the wicked Pierre who mock the good Saints and go aloft in the night an' was all swallow up in St. Elmo's Fire. That ees not sad, there ees no wife an' little bebee in that tale."

"Never mind now, Dick."

"Or the tale of Pedro who marry a mermaid and love her so much and pray so hard that the good God change her tail into legs and petticoat. They live in a little hut in the hills and have many goats. Then they forget their prayers and when the first little bebee come, it have a tail. Then for a year very hard they pray, but the second little bebee it also have a tail, and the third. They never have any more bebees. Those little tails punish them, for they forget the good God."

But Sally was in no mood for his stories now. That refrain still echoed in her ears. Her averted little nose and pretty mouth expressed scorn.

"And you believe *that*?"

“I myself see them—by Santa Maria el Blanco, I swear eet—with these eyes. Pedro and his wife grow very poor an’ all the goats die. Nothing for them to eat or the beebes. Not one leetle crumb of bread, not one leetle drop of goat’s milk. But the good God is sorry even for them who forget Heem an’ after, he send into the hills a man who had leetle shows with painted dolls—you pull them with strings like this.

“He see on the grass the three leetle beebes, lying flat on thin bellies—for as I tell you, Señorita, they have so leetle food—with their arms on the ground—so” (crooking his clenched fists to his jaws). “They lie just like real mermaids as I see them—so many times—on the sand of the beeg South Sea Islands, or bebee seals on the rocks where it ees very cold.

“The man with the little dolls see their tails go ‘thump,’ ‘thump,’ ‘thump,’ on the ground—just like Alfonso here” (he placed his hand on the head of the mongrel, who was illustrating that part of the story realistically on the deck) “only his tail is short like bologna an’ theirs grow long and green an’ so shiny like water.

“He turn their tails to gold. I mean he make much money out of those tails. For he take those little mermaid beebes to the beeg city, with his show of little dolls, an’ his dancing girl from Algier who did many wiggles. He ask ten centesimos for the people to have one leetle look at those beebes with tails. Soon he had many pesetas an’ so he turn those tails to gold, as I have said.

“I myself see them in Carnival time. By Santa Maria el

Blanco—the White Mary, you call her, Señorita, I swear eet.”

“What happened to the Mother and the Father?”

In spite of herself the girl tossed this question at him.

Gone was the “solid feel” of the commonsense Earth under her feet. There was only the deck rising and falling to the measured swell of the waves. They were borne along over a shining sailless sea, and on towards the ever retreating horizon, wafted by winds that breathed romance. Why couldn't such things be true? They were such pretty stories!

“Oh the Motherr and Fatherr,” he repeated, then, never at a loss for solution or sequel, he continued in that voice whose foreign inflections lazily rose and fell like the surrounding sea,—

“The man with his leetle show of painted dolls, an' the dancing girl from Algier, and bebee mermaids, send the poor man and his wife a leetle money—oh not nearly so much as make music in his own pocket but enough to buy more goats so that they do not starve.

“But their hearts are sad. They wish to see their beebes, even with leetle tails. So they pray and pray till they wear a beeg hole in the ground before the Virgin who stand by the road. Their knees grow very sore an' also they are bent from much praying, like very old people.

“Then one night when the angels light their lamps—the stars are their lamps, Señorita, an' they fill them with holy oil, an' trim their wicks so they shine bright for people who have eyes in their heads an' do not always look down on the ground, or make their eyes blind with looking at silver pesetas

like the bad man with the painted dolls. Oh, no, he never see the stars!

“On this night they hear a voice. It say:

“‘Go sell your goats an’ go into beeg city and get your beebes.’

“They look up, but the mouth of the Virgin is so still—they do not make move but there is leetle smile in her mouth, not like yours, Señorita, when you make fun for me, but like that when I hurt my hand in the storm and you feex it.

“So when the sun come up, very early nex’ day, they sell their goats and walk to the beeg ceety.

“It is very far, but they go very fast, although they are bent like old people. Señorita, the heart give wings even to lame feet.

“In the streets the rich people make mock of them, but they jus’ think hard of what the voice say:

“‘Go get your beebes.’

“It is again carnival time, an’ in the plaza they see the man an’ his painted dolls in a little red box high like your head an’ with boards like this above the middle. The people all go inside to see the dancing girl. You would not like *herr!* Oh no! She was not nice.

“All day the man and his wife they wait in Plaza. At night when the stars shine an’ the people sleep in their beds, that motherr and fatherr go to the door. But there is big lock on the door an’ they cannot open it. Then they both rub their eyes, for Señorita, believe me, the man tell me himself, there come out the air a hand. There was nobody, only the hand white like a cloud. It hold a key of gold. It is very

bright an' the door it open. Then the key an' the hand go away.

“The beeg fat man who make money from the little beebes an' the painted dolls he sleep on leetle bed inside an' snore—oh, like a beeg whale. They step over him soft like this—an' there on the hard floor are the little beebes. The ends of their leetle tails stick out from the blanket.

“They pick them up an' wrap them in the blanket an' run out of the beeg city an' up to the hills.

“Next day the man says to the people: ‘Come in an' see wonderrful merrmaids.’ The people are very angry to pay their centesimos and not see them. They throw stone an' kill heem. I know it, Señorita, I am there an' I myself throw the stone that hit heem here” (he pointed to his temple) “an' kill heem.

“When the sun get up an' say ‘Bon Dios,’ the motherr and fatherr are away up in the hills with their beebes on their backs, an' their backs are not bent any more. Oh, so very straight like the tall mast up there! They hear little voices say: ‘Mother let me down on the ground.’ But the mother do not, for how can they walk on their tails and they have yet far to go?

“But the beebes wriggle out—like eels and the motherr an' fatherr turn around an', Señorita, those little beebes were walking on legs so straight and white. They reach the leetle hut in the yard an' there are the goats again, which the Holy Virgin give back to them. So they live happy ever——”

But the spell was shattered by the sound of seven bells and a raucous voice calling:

"You're another, you're another." Through the gilt bars of a cage hanging from a cleat on the foremast near them, Mariuch the parrot, proud of her blue and green and scarlet magnificence, was transfixing them with her cantankerous eye.

"You're another, you're another," she shrieked, always happy in the selection of the eleven epithets in her repertoire.

Spanish Dick playfully shook his fist at her, upbraiding the culprit in his own picturesque tongue.

"You infidel of many colours! I feed you an' keep you well—an' yet you do not believe me. My little Alfonso, you alone keep the faith." He looked down at the mongrel, who was frantically thumping his tail on the deck in evidence of his loyalty and confidence.

"I believe you, Dick," fibbed Sally, guessing at the trend of his tirade, and placing her hand sympathetically on his shoulder. "It's such a pretty story, and I do appreciate the way you've kept me from feeling worried and blue."

Wistfully she looked over the starboard rail, then straightened suddenly.

"Look, Dick—there's a steamer to starboard—it looks more like a steam yacht—why it looks as tiny as the toy ones Ben and Phil, when he was just a nice boy—used to sail."

She made her way aft along the trim deck.

She reached the after deck-house, steadied herself against the lee-rail, and listened to the hoarse commands from the Mate's brazen throat, the shuffle of feet on deck, the creak of block and pulley, and the snap of canvas, as the yards were braced and the ship came up into the wind. Above her the

sails and the towering masts hung sleazily for a moment, then ballooned beautifully, as she heeled over on the star-board tack, racing on over the blue towards that ever-retreating horizon. The girl wished she could see its perfect rim broken by a little dark lump of island. But for the uncertainty about Ben she would have been jubilantly happy in this joyous carefree life of the sea.

“Don’t strain those pretty eyes of yours, lass! We’re a good three-hundred miles north of him still. Sight the Luards tomorrow, if all goes well.”

It was Captain Fairwind’s voice booming along the deck. How she loved to hear it! Out here on the sea it always rang like a trumpet.

She reached his side and asked for the glass. Still on their port, the far-off tiny yacht nosed its way steadily southwest. She could pick out more clearly now the twin slanting masts and funnel, but it was fast steaming out of sight.

And five minutes later when she looked again, the last line of mast, the last feather of smoke had gone. The *Alice* and her unseen motley crew had vanished. She seemed to have passed over the sparkling rim and dropped clean over its blue edge.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CAFÉ OF MANY TONGUES

As if the torments of his own fire were past enduring, the Sun, who all day had blistered the red roofs and pavements of the tropical sea-port, dropped like a red-hot stove-lid behind the mountain and into the sea. The last little lizard scurried over the burning stones of the courtyard, panting for relief. It seemed as if all the windows and doors of Heaven had been shut, and even with nightfall only a little coolness seeped through, to give promise of relief in the later watches.

In the street outside the café walls, a tired donkey with head sinking below the level of the crude shafts, plodded on the last lap of his journey. Skulking, rib-slatted curs and half-naked children sprawled over the door sills or on the broken sidewalks, dabbling their brown and yellow toes in the green half-dried up puddles that spread over the ill-defined gutters. Fat, girdleless brown women offered the fluent nourishment of pouchy breasts to their all-naked youngest born, and under their striped awnings native shopkeepers drowsed, their heads sinking lower and lower until they banged against the white walls of their bazaars, waking them to a half-torpid consciousness. The flames of sickly lamps shone on

low-foreheaded coolies, with tarnished rings in their ears, negresses with bold preying eyes, and the equally predatory but subtler glances of soft-eyed quarter and half-bloods. Now and then a derelict Spaniard or American, in white as limp as their persons and morals, sagged along in the polyglot crowd, always stopping when the way was blocked, not having enough energy to elbow a passage through, and rich only in eternities of time, which they could not barter for the vicious pleasures of the place.

Locked arm in arm with Phil and with MacAllister, whose tall bloodless face and figure, at last clothed in white, seemed cool as ever even in the all-developing heat, walked Carlotta. There was just a little of the old swagger left. The boy walked unsteadily, and his blood-shot eyes were dull and heavy except when they picked out in the sluggish stream the lazy grace of some full-curved figure, faintly outlined by the light of a half-drunken street-lamp, or the summoning eye of a handsome quadron, velvety and full of languid allure even in the darkness of the unlighted spaces.

The uneven stones of the street were hard on Carlotta's stilted French heels. She was very hot, and the subterranean V of her sheer waist gave her the appearance of greater nakedness than the frank-bosomed mothers in the doorways, whom her impudent black eyes scorned.

She had romped in a tropical village once for three months, but then there were little rows of electric bulbs, and an orchestra playing in front, and well-barbered youths in ultra suits, waiting at the stage door. As different as a patent medicine man's open-air clinic from a city hospital in

an epidemic, was that stage village from this swart, stark, sweaty, though colourful, mass of humanity. They were like worms in a fisherman's bait-can, or coagulated reptiles writhing in a noisome everglade. Perhaps, if someone had taken the bait-can and dumped the contents into one of the Five Boroughs, Carlotta would have sanctioned their existence. Her big city could do no wrong. Its great mantle can cover all ugliness and squalor.

"My Gawd, boys, why did you ever bring me from N'Yawk to this sink-hole!"

Phil jerked his arm from her. Now that half-Spanish girl (he mentally called the exotic beauty "a peach") who had looked back! Why—well—Carlotta bored him tonight. Pettishly he upbraided her:

"You make me sick, always grouching about something."

Stung by this slur, after all her patient devotion, the dancer retorted:

"*You're* the grouch with all that bad whiskey under your belt. You ought to go easy on the rotten stuff they ladle out here."

MacAllister was more worried about that peculiar flush on the boy's face than the whiskey. He knew the fevers that lurked in these luckless places. But his voice, the coolest thing in the panting town that night, soothed their irritation.

"Don't lose your nerve—we'll be off in the morning. There's more aurent gazooks in that island, my little babes in the wood, than your innocent hearts ever dreamed of."

The disgusted girl jeered at him in discordant slang phrases that added still another note to the polyglot noises of the street.

"Isn't *he* the cute little dreamer! For the luv o' Mike, Mac, change your brand. Do you mean to tell me that you expect to strike gold in that place? To blazes with your fairy stories and your phoney islands."

"It's like Heaven compared to Atlantic City, that apogee of your ballyhoo soul, Carlotta, so" (he descended) "don't get cold feet now."

"Cold feet—huh—they blister and burn and smart—ouch! and never a corner drug store where a soul can get footease of any sort."

The gambler left them to their wrangling, and they sauntered slowly up the street until they came to an ancient and crazily-leaning doorway, built of stone, in the Sixteenth Century Spanish style of the early discoverers.

"This is the place," he said, "hope the rest are there. Believe me, Desdemona, it's worth a gold-chest like Rockefeller's—wrangling that crew."

They turned from the street and all its noises and smells and colours into the courtyard of "The Café of Many Tongues." The proprietor, with some shadow of truth, at least as far as the period was concerned, always claimed that the stone building whose narrow windows commanded the courtyard had been built by Ponce de Leon himself. But there was visible no healing water such as the wearied Castilian sought, only the signs of old age and decrepitude, and in the shadow of the walls little puddles like those in the

street outside, not quite absorbed by the heat and still filled with green slime and lurking promise of pestilence.

On the harbour-side, an archway in the wall led to a flight of steps worn by the travel of countless smugglers, freebooters, and unclassified cutthroats of the past centuries. The stairway descended to a little wharf, by whose side a native rowboat and a launch rose and fell in the water gently lapping against the stone walls. Through the doorway, the port lights of a nondescript tramp steamer and their own trim yacht gleamed in the roadstead.

In the new-born breeze from off the waters, the trees began to whisper. The hum of conversation, like but more musically modulated than the drone of insects, rose in the courtyard, with an occasional epithet in some strange dialect, or northern oath, from the ill-assorted group of natives, sailors, derelicts and adventurers, who gave "The Café of Many Tongues" its name.

Passing between the rows of twinkling cigarettes, they chose a place in the favouring shadows of the wall fronting the street. A depression in the yard rendered useless the fourth leg, whose see-saw tilt enraged Phil in his present irritable mood, and he snarled out some cursing criticism of the place, loudly demanding a waiter.

Instead of an obsequious, false-shirt-fronted attendant, came a graceful langourous girl with sparks of temper, the adopted daughter of the proprietor and evidently a favourite with the old patrons of the place, who called her "Linda,"¹ which in their tongue means "the beautiful one."

¹ Pronounced Leanda.

“Not when Monsieur speaks like that,” she said in musically accented English, and turned towards the two new guests who were taking their places at the adjoining table. One was a Frenchman in the customary white of the island, dressed with that scrupulous attention to the person of the well-bred which shows a proper regard for reasonable conventions, stopping well on the right side of foppishness. Perhaps this care also served to cover a slenderness of purse and wardrobe. The effortless grace of his manner, too, fell short of that extravagance considered by the untravelled as characteristic of his race.

The other stranger, rougher in exterior, was a native of the island, but a fellow countryman by descent, with the look of one who gained a haphazard living from the seas.

“Sh,” whispered Carlotta, “that’s intrestin’.”

The seafaring man sat directly facing their table. Even in the slumberous, torpid shadows of the place, his eyes gleamed with the expectant look of one about to drive a hard and profitable bargain. The other sat at right-angles to him.

The girl Linda hovered over him with an amorous interest in her smouldering eyes, which was not lost on Carlotta, although she couldn’t hear the words the former said to him, and wouldn’t have understood if she had.

“Monsieur has not come to ‘The Café of Many Tongues’ for oh—ever so long! I—we are all so *happy* to see you again,” was the exact translation, and Carlotta hit somewhere near the truth when she whispered to the motionless Mac-Allister:

“Mabel’s askin’ the Count where’s he been since last Satur-

day night and what dames he was out with. Now she's pullin' the broken-heart stuff an' she means part of it anyway. But run away, girlie, you're wastin' your time. He's nice and polite, but he'll never fall for you."

It was a shrewd, unconscious paraphrase and judgment, for the stranger answered Linda with a well-gauged courtesy that didn't satisfy the hunger in those lovely eyes at all. Still, as she took the order, she let her hand fall with a designed carelessness on his shoulder, and once on his dark hair, which held the wave that all women envy and childishly love to fondle. But he never responded to the mute appeal.

At last Linda deigned to take their own order, Carlotta whispering to the girl to substitute a less vicious drink for the inflaming native concoction Phil ordered. When she returned they sipped their liquor in silence, hoping for some revelation of the stranger's presence in this place. Had he deliberately followed them from Boston to Salthaven and from there to this unfrequented port? That was not quite the solution, for his dreaming, somewhat downcast gaze never searched the courtyard or even cast a glance towards their table. They drew their chairs back further within the shadows of the many-fissured wall and the whispering tree whose trunk rose between the two tables, and listened intently. The low well-modulated voices did not carry to the listeners, and the only stray expressions they caught were in French.

Carlotta gruffly whispered:

"What was the matter with you, Mac, that you didn't learn to pollyvransey in all your travels?"

As the stranger sat at right-angles to the wall, with an old-world air of distinction and outworn romance, Carlotta quite forgot the heat, her blistered feet, and all her troubles, in speculating about his mystery.

“He’s had a past—by heck—he’s had a past! Lost all his fortune at cards. Old Duke Guy disinherits him. Lady Leonore weeps oodles, then hitches to the old Marky with the gout and his ropes of poils. There you have it, and now he roams and roams the world, singin’ ‘Farewell for ever me own troo luv?’ But he’s got nerve enough behind—if somebody’d only jar him out of his pipe-dreams.”

She was probably only half-wrong in her rough reading, for the lighted match which he held to his cigarette now revealed the face, turned three-quarters towards them, with its olive hue of South-eastern France and its almost feminine grace of contour. In the light of a later match, quite as in Queer Hat’s Studio, one was relieved to note that this delicacy of feature was saved by the courageous mouth and firm foundation of the jaw. Perhaps a more expert physiognomist than Carlotta would have said that the inherited melancholy of a line doomed to a century’s continued misfortunes had in him darkened to a sombre fatalism—possibly with a final and crushing catastrophe. Had he in addition to his discernment possessed a strain of the romantic, he might have added that never had the sword of this spirit actually rusted. It was only sheathed in the sadness of those dark eyes, and could flash forth right royally if the occasion came.

The final flicker of the match fell on an object of greater

interest to the watching conspirators than the melancholy foreigner himself. It was a small rectangular piece of paper, which the host was explaining to his companion.

The seafaring man moved his chair a little, and the oil-flare on the other side of the table cast a circle of light, a little paler than the paper itself, which was yellow with age. They saw that there were faint indications of outlines upon it.

The seafaring man studied it, looked up at the other's question, assumed a look of honest calculation. He then began a series of shrugs and gestures, thrusting his upheld fingers before the other's face, perhaps to indicate time or price. This was but the preliminary stage of the bargain, like the mimic sparring before the real bout begins. Through it all the prospective buyer sat in silence, his cigarette alternately paling or reddening through the ash with his inhalations. At last he spoke, with an air of finality, and they evidently got down to business. The gambler caught one or two French words,—*francs* and *bateaux*, whose meaning he had picked up on his travels.

Suddenly the incorrigible Carlotta who had been leaning forward, trying to decipher the paper, exclaimed:

"That's it. It's your phony island. Another map! Can you beat it! I didn't think there were other nuts loose in the world like you and Phil—m-m-m—I hope there aren't any squirrels loose on the island!"

"Keep quiet!" MacAllister meantime had cautioned, for her voice, almost raised to its usual pitch, sounded above the soft melodious flow of voices, as incongruously strident

in this other world place as the vibrating jangle of a Jew's harp or a bit of latter day Jazz would have been.

The stranger turned, looked hardly in their direction, then pocketed the map. And "Linda," who had been watching them, whispered something in his ear.

After a phrase of warning to his guest, he lingered for a moment, occasionally uttering a sentence or two of apparent inconsequence. Then he paid the reckoning and entered the door of the main building of "The Café of Many Tongues."

"You're a beautiful fisherman," said Mac to Carlotta. "But I've got what I wanted. They're going to fit out a little expedition of their own, which, by the way, they'll never make."

Over the wall from the street came ribald conversation from two northern voices. The sulphurous exclamations were furnished by a third and very familiar pilgrim.

"Hell's Bells! but this is a blankety blank blank blankety sewer-hole! A regular cess-pool, says I. Blank blank me hide, if ever I ship under a kid without hair on his chest, a sky-pilot gambler with his sleeves full o' cards, and a high-kicking petticoat for Mate."

"It's the saw mouthed old divil," commented Carlotta. "What a bird of a stage-door keeper he'd make for the Old Boy!"

The three sailors rolled in through the gate from the street. Pushbutton Pete walked as if he had a full cargo, but fairly well-ballasted, shifting now and then so he listed a bit, but on the whole navigating very well. The scars on his face and forehead were flushed with heat and alcohol. The

Pink Swede staggered sullenly behind, his heavy muscled pink torso stripped to the waist. The short figure of Old Man Veldmann stood swaying by the first table, his feet spread wide apart.

“Ye—dirty yellow rats, ye shriveled, miscarried spawn of black wenches, vamoose and make room for *white men!*” the fog-horn voice roared through the wicked saw-mouth. He spat on the sidewalk dangerously near the diners, swept the glasses off the near table, and took the panama from the head of a native, hurling it high up into a palm-tree, where it rested, ludicrously outlined against the starry sky.

A knife flashed, but MacAllister, who had swiftly glided forward from his place, knocked it from the insulted one’s hand with a blow on the wrist.

“*Ye little pint-pot, coffee-coloured shrimp!*” roared the hoary old sinner, but MacAllister’s hand was over his mouth, and, awed as usual by the superior coolness of their leader, they were hustled out of the courtyard before the angrily-chattering diners could attack them, Pushbutton Pete effectively guarding the rear of the retreat.

With a quick order to Pete to herd the two recalcitrants, MacAllister re-entered and hurried over to the table in the corner. It was growing late and the diners were beginning to leave, lazily sauntering away in groups of twos or threes. Phil was riveted to the table top, deep in feverish slumber, and the gambler and the girl had difficulty in getting him to his feet and steering him past the loungers, who still remained to sip what relief and forlorn pleasure they could from the dregs of the evening.

As they rejoined the group, they heard the voice of the girl Linda unsuccessfully pleading with the strange Frenchman, just inside the ancient doorway. He left her and slowly paced up the street towards the north, lost in some brooding memories of the past, or perhaps some faintly flickering hope of the future.

"Pete," whispered MacAllister, drawing that worthy aside, "that French boy is starting a little expedition of his own for our island. No first degree stuff—a week's lay-up will be enough. These greaser cops are as helpless as Secaucus constables, but it's better to play safe. So use discretion, Pete, *use discretion!*"

His husky lieutenant wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, shifted the lump from cheek to cheek, and hitched his trousers, as signals for action.

"I'll use somethin' on him all right," he answered, then disappeared up the street, shadowing the stranger around the corner of the northern end of "The Café of Many Tongues," and into a deserted alley that descended to the water. It was very dark here, and the only sounds were those of the wavelets whispering their secrets to the ancient walls.

Carlotta and MacAllister needed all their determination and tact to guide the protesting Phil, the pugnacious old man, and the Swede, southward along the irregular street. The polyglot babel had steadied to the snoring drone of many sleepers under the striped awnings on the uneven sidewalks, or in the narrow-windowed rooms above. They chose the middle of the highway, for the walk itself was

clogged with huddled bodies; old and young, ragged and stark naked, human and canine, mingling together.

The provoking coolness of the stars was too far off. The hot moon hung low, and, instead of its usual cheering gold, had assumed a sickly saffron. The sleepers stirred uneasily and the tongues of the dogs lolled over their jaws, their little hearts beating sterterously like small machines that try the steep hills.

Three squalid squares they passed, then veered to the water's edge. At a wharf the gasoline launch lay moored, with a sailor in its cockpit. They entered and waited.

The heat of her room in the little café was unendurable, and Linda removed the few garments she wore, donning a flowing one of sheer white, then gathered up her quilt to descend to the cooler and now deserted courtyard.

She heard a muffled cry, stopped, her heart beating, then went to the narrow window that commanded the northern alley leading to the water, and looked down into its darkness.

Footsteps shuffled around the corner. The fugitive had gone. She strained her eyes and saw a body lying prone on the hard-baked earth. With a little cry she descended the stairs, crossed the yard and threshold of the gate, arms, ankles, and shoulders, slipping from their white sheath, and betraying the grace of her lithe body.

She ran up the street, turned into the alley. A mongrel sniffed at the face which lay on the edge of one of those half-dried green puddles. She looked into the still features. There was a dark stain upon them. Tenderly she gathered

the head to her bosom, murmuring an incoherent jumble of love-cries.

Three squares up the Main Street and one turn to the right, Pushbutton Pete was taking his seat in the launch. With its cocky "put, put, put," the little boat moved on its course towards the steam yacht.

Pete wiped the sweat from his ugly scarred features, shifted the lump to the other cheek, and handed over a yellow paper.

"I used some of that there discretion you was tellin' about, Cap," he said.

CHAPTER XX

THE GIRL LINDA

PHILIP did not appear for breakfast, and MacAllister found him tossing in his bunk. After a hasty examination the gambler left him, and climbed the companionway to the deck.

“It’s more than a morning-after fever,” he said to Carlotta, who lolled on a steamer chair under a gay bit of awning, clad in a very negligent negligee of apricot silk, which allowed a maximum of comfort in that climate, as well as freedom for those fleshly assets of hers which made her a favourite at Standishs’.

Across the water came the creak of a windlass from the red-waterlined tramp, weighing anchor. A half-mile away ranged the red roofs of the town and its walls, the more modern glistening white, the ancient, like the Café of Many Tongues, worn by Time to a softer grey. Southward, an obsolete fort with a puffy little cannon and a pyramid of rusting cannon-balls, sentinelled the place. From the twin towers of the venerable Spanish Cathedrals came the sound of pealing bells.

“Wonder if we can rustle a doctor in that God-forsaken hole,” continued MacAllister and then,—“Hey, Pete, take the launch, and bring the best pill-mixer they’ve got in the place. If he bucks, use him gently, Pete, very gently.”

The girl descended to Phil's cabin to administer the first aid of caresses, the only nursing technique in which she had had any training, mentally cursing, the while, her idiocy (she called it "boneheadedness") in leaving her habitat (that she called "God's Country"). Why should she be chasing a "fool kid" who wanted to "shake her," when, as all the real world knew, millionaires should be decorating her with diamonds and "spoils"— her with her face and figure!

On deck, MacAllister watched the dock, where the little launch lay moored, through his glass. Pete was evidently following his leader's instructions to the letter, for a half-hour later MacAllister saw him backing to the wharf, one hand seemingly twisted in the collar of a struggling figure, the other hand, probably armed with an eloquent automatic, levelled on a gesticulating crowd of natives.

He got away from the wharf in perfect order, and reached the yacht. Up the ladder under Pete's gentle persuasion, or rather above it, climbed a seedy sallow-faced individual with yellow slit-pupilled eyes that looked more dangerous than any instrument in his delapidated case.

"He's a nasty bird, Cap. Keep your lamps on him," warned Pete. "Those brown — on shore are stirrin' up a hell uv a mess over the Frenchy. Better weigh anchor an' damn quick!"

MacAllister summoned the shanghaied sailor, the only member of the *Aileen's* original crew with them, ordered up steam, then turned to the snarling-eyed practitioner of medicine.

“Here—you! Go below and fix your patient. If you try any dirty work, you’ll sail with us—in bracelets.”

Wincing at the clinking handcuffs, this poltroon of a practitioner scuffled, or rather slid below, and after testing pulse, forehead, and throat, and snapping out a few questions, took from his case a bottle of powders.

“Try it yourself,” the gambler ordered.

The other protested, with a sputtering of oaths and angry gestures, replaced the bottle, and took out others, which he tasted.

“I *thought* so, you weasel. Now leave those bottles here and give the directions, pronto.”

Again he obeyed, and they climbed the companionway.

Steam was curling from the funnels. From off-shore came a native row-boat. In the prow stood a pompous pot-bellied individual in a braided uniform and queer visored red hat with a cockade. This tuppenny official waved a sword in one hand and gesticulated with the other. Two brown soldiers with rifles sat in the stern.

“What’d I tell you?” growled Pete. “Them theatre-sojers is going to subpeeny us.”

The chains rattled through the hawser-holes; up came the anchor; the screw churned the water under her stern; and the yacht glided on her way.

The town with its sin and squalor had been sinister and tragic enough the night before, and in it still lurked cut-throats worthy of fear, but the officialdom of the port was as ineffectual and comic as the cast of any slapstick opera-bouffé of the nineties.

Around the fort bustled little ludicrous, gay-clad figures. There was an explosion. A grape-shot skimmed the waves, a third of a mile on their port. A cloud of dust rose. The ball had cut a gaping hole in a ramshackle building on the opposite shore, and the half-naked occupants danced in frenzy on the sands, then scurried pell-mell into the palms. There was another wheezy little roar. Fragments of old iron showered the air. The little cannon had exploded and there were bright little splashes of colour on the sand, for all the ludicrous soldiers in their gay uniforms lay flat on their bellies, both the sound as well as the mortally hurt.

From the prow of the row-boat wildly swished the sword of the fat official with the rakish cockade.

The gambler turned to Pete and the Pink Swede, and crooked his shoulder towards the sallow-faced practitioner of medicine.

“Overboard!”

They grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and tossed him, bag and all, his legs sprawling ridiculously in the air, clean over the port rail.

He could swim just enough to stay afloat till the row-boat reached him, and the two soldiers dragged him like a half-drowned muskrat by his heels over the stern, losing their rusty rifles in the process.

“Cuss away, ye Mocho galoots, ye flea-bitten curs, ye nicotine shrimps, ye little walking fried sausages!” was Old Man Veldmann’s parting salvo, which, as Carlotta observed, was “goin’ some” even for this graceless old artist.

So, after executing in this very modern way the old free-

booters' sentence of "walking the plank," the mongrel crew of Broadway pirates sailed away, leaving the frenzied officials of the port to take toll of their casualties.

Meanwhile, between the acts of this comic opera, the girl Linda, in her stifling room in the Café of Many Tongues, was enacting a real drama of her own. She was genuine enough herself, but, as business is business in all cities and ports, her father, a Spaniard who conducted the café in the way all such places must be run, was not heavily burdened with scruples of any sort, and her own life as his assistant had been necessarily free from many conventions. But her mother, an *émigre* Frenchwoman, thrifty and a regular worshipper in the big white Cathedral, had left with the girl a set of principles far beyond the conception of the average patron of the Café of Many Tongues.

She sat at the narrow window, mending the jacket of the wounded man, who lay asleep on her bed. His head was bound with a bandage of her own careful making.

She had her arts. She *could* use the grace of that olive-brown shoulder, all of her lithe body if necessary. Yet now, for all its softly rounded outlines, it gave only the impression of strength, boundless vitality, and the refreshing repose that the wounded man needed most. The face softly-rounded, too, was that of an olive-brown Madonna, faintly flushed with rose and Love. The sun-ray slanting through the window revealed a faint silken floss on the cheek.

From below sounded the voice of her father, busy with foaming spigots, and ordering jabbering coolies to their duties; the clatter of shifted chairs, and the clink of glasses.

Angry tropical insects droned through the room, their vibrating wings translating the torpid heat into sound. She brushed them away from the sleeper's face, bent over and kissed him on the cheek, and fondled the wave in his hair. Playfully she shooed away a little lizard, then returned to her seat by the window and began to sing softly as she sewed. She was very happy. Not that she would have had him wounded—to suffer so—oh Mother Mary in Heaven, no! But if it had to happen, the Blessed Virgin must have sent him to her.

“At first sight!” There is no such love you say. But there is such a glorious thing, sceptic and worldly wiseman notwithstanding. If you have the seeing eye you will find before you grow old—or at least then, when the inner eye clears as the outer dims—many witnesses who will testify to the miracle.

Linda could have been one of the witnesses. The miracle had happened over a year ago when into the Café of Many Tongues first came this foreigner with his air of old-world distinction. How well she remembered that! And there he was now, weak and wounded, yet with her, and in her care, which was all that mattered.

He opened his eyes and called:

“Linda!”

“Yes.” It was only one word, yet it told many things.

“The yellow paper—the chart! Did you see it?”

She searched everywhere. At the envelopes she looked carefully, jealously studying the handwritings on each.

“No, Monsieur, there is no yellow paper, only these envelopes, three white, and this one of blue.”

"They have taken it, the scoundrels!"

He tried to rise—

"I must start today!"

"Where, Monsieur?"

"For the island."

"You are too weak. Lie still," she said, lowering him gently as a mother a child. "You must be good. Maybe in three weeks, maybe two, you can go."

"And then," she said, remembering the words the Old Padre had once repeated in the Confirmation Class, in that very pretty story,—*"Whither thou goest I will go!"*

The wounded man, too weak to protest, closed his eyes.

"Whither thou goest, I will go," the girl softly repeated.

CHAPTER XXI

LAND HO!

THE reckoning which Ben had inscribed on the bit of birchbark, later brought to Barnabee Beach, and which hangs over a Salthaven fireplace to this day, hadn't been accurate, of course, shrewd guess though it was. Ten days had elapsed since they had reached these waters, and they had circled, and tacked, and "gone about," between and around all the known islands that lie like emeralds, heavenly-soft, on the breast of the Carribean, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, and tiny Marie Galante, Rodonda, Nevis, and St. Kitts—all of the group which Captain Fairwinds knew like a book, and which, as the admiring Benson swore, with a pardonable exaggeration, the skipper could find if all compasses failed and the stars went out.

At eight bells of the tenth day—the eighteenth since they set sail—the skipper took another reckoning—62-46 West, it read, and 17-19, or thereabouts, North—no sail or strand in sight—and the *North Star* headed away from the outmost sentinel of the Leewards, on a course south-southwest.

"I wonder how the boy calculated that," said the skipper, scanning the horizon, "he must have kept a pretty level head. Remembered the last log entry, I suppose, counted the days

he drifted, and reckoned the drift. But it's funny the island was never charted—almost spooky, an old wives' tale."

Then, seeing an expression of concern, almost of alarm, flit across her face, he hastened to add,—

"It's somewhere in these parts, of course. I was thinking of the yarns about it,—floating and haunted, and all that. Then, too, the fact that it's not populated, when every little chip of an islet in these seas is swarming with blacks.

"I've never clapped eyes on it," he continued, after making sure of the light in his brier, "but it was owned once, so the yarn goes, by a French family, some grabbag lot of dooks or markeys or discounts—they lived there a long time. But a whole flock of misfortunes landed on 'em,—fever, murder, plague, earthquake, pirates, and such, that they gave it up as a bad job. Left it to the squatters and beachcombers, and the coffee-coloured wretches that make some sort of a living from the sea. The last big earthquake or visitation of spooks or voodoos drove them off—that is, if you're to believe the tale—and, well, there you are. But that old rascal, Mr. They Say, tells us it's a little chunk of Heaven let down on the water to show folks what the good place looks like. But I guess the Devil got in his licks since—There, there, I've told you all I've heard about it"—Sally smiled, for he seemed, for some reason, to be getting confused—"So take it for what it's worth—which means it's all a lot of nonsense and a pack of infernal lies," he finished lamely.

"No, no, Señor, no lie, eet *is* like that, for I have seen eet. This foot she have step on it."

They hadn't heard the pad of shoeless feet on the quarter-

deck behind them, not quite the place for an ordinary seaman, but Spanish Dick was subject to little discipline and many privileges, the chiefest of which being that of companion or troubadour to Sally.

"It ees a floating islan'," he continued with such seriousness as Hamlet must have assumed, "no thing under it, no coral, no rock, jus' water. An' it drif' around in the blue sea."

"Drifts around just like that!" teased the girl.

Again the melting brown eyes assumed their look of injured innocence.

"Yes, by San Christobal de Colon, the good saint, I have seen eet—once in the night. We sight eet in the dogwatch an' try to reach eet. All over with beautiful lights—like what you call—phosphor—an' like a beautiful veil with gold lightning in eet, and in the sky always shining, many moons, seven moons, six leetle young ones an' one ol' one.

"We never come near eet. Yet we sail very fast, twelve knot was the wind. But always eet drif' on an' on, though we sail so fast. In the morning—" he threw up his hands with a mystifying gesture—"gone!"

"If the law allowed, I'd put you in irons, Dick. Why do you fill the girl's head with your fool superstitions?" But the skipper's reproof was only mockly severe. Dick was really a Godsend for Sally.

"No fool, Señor," he was replying, "the fool ees he who not believe. The wise have faith."

"He's right in a way, Captain Harve," championed his ward. "I don't swallow everything, but there's enough of

the kid in me to half believe him, still. He tells such pretty stories. And oh, I wish they were true! They are—in spirit anyway.”

And the quaint teller of tales, guessing at her defence of him though he didn't understand all of her brief, interjected,—

“The Señorita ees kind an' have the faith.”

“Besides, Uncle Harve, you'll admit it's strange—the haunted island, not a living soul on it, and such a beautiful place—yet not on any chart.”

“It is strange,” Captain Fairwinds admitted, “but I could always find a practical solution for every mystery I ever heard of, and every ghost that ever walked. His Seven Moons now, they're a mirage perhaps, or electrical phenomenon like St. Elmo's Fire—or whatnot. Though I have heard it called ‘The Isle of Seven Moons.’ ”

“*The Isle of Seven Moons!*” She repeated it musically. “That *is* pretty,” then slowly, “I wonder!” Which perhaps again was a girl's delicate way of saying,—“There are more things in Heaven and earth, Harvey, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

At five bells the girl, who was almost always to be found on deck these days, hailed Captain Fairwinds.

“What's that—on our starboard bow?”

Yes, she was sure of it, and to confirm it, came the look-out's cry. There *was* a little smudge on the horizon, a little darker than the sea's blue rim.

“The glass, Captain Harve!” and she danced up and down on the deck, her hands and mouth twitching in impatience.

The little smudge expanded just as it had, though ever so much more slowly, for Ben on his floating spar. It *did* grow into an island, and when the sun went down, they could see the clear outline of Cone Mountain. The stars trooped up from the sea, and on and on towards it they sailed, until they could distinguish the Twin Horns, stretching out darkly into the water, and the mountain loomed up high in the air. They had neither chart nor pilot, but the Captain, as boyishly eager to reach the harbour as Sally, instead of casting anchor outside, kept the *North Star* to her course. Carefully sounding with the lead, they glided between the two dark capes and rested on the placid bosom of Rainbow Bay. The anchor went down with a splash, Sally almost after it in her impatience. She was all for going ashore. That strip of sand was so white in the moonlight, the feathery crown of Royal palms waved a soft invitation—and Ben might be very near.

But the Captain of the *North Star* said, "Not till dawn." So Sally disappeared down the companionway, and entered her cabin. Through the porthole she tossed a kiss towards that gleaming strip of sand, then uttered a prayer of pure gratitude, and tried to fall asleep to the lapping of the water against the ship's side.

But sleep would not come in spite of the wave's lullaby. Every nerve vibrated with excitement. As the old Salthaven folk used to say of children so wrought up over the morrow's journey to Boston-town that they were neither fit for food or slumber, she was "journey-proud." And yet that journey was over but a few feet of peaceful water, to that strip of sand that had paled to a ghostly white in the silent

hours of the night. So she sat up in her berth, a wistful little figure in white, with two dusky braids falling over her breast, and looked at it through the porthole. And those mysteriously waving palms! Did any sorrow lie hidden in their shadows! What was that—the cry of some night bird of ill omen? And that far-off faint roar! The slender figure shivered. *Would* he be there to meet her at dawn? Had anything happened to him? Could he have . . .!

CHAPTER XXII

JOURNEY'S END IN —————?

DAWN came—one moment, a silvery grey mystery, and the very *next*, it seemed to the girl watching it on deck, an ecstasy of rose that flushed the whole palpitating East; then a flood of rippling golden fire that fringed the mountain tops and palms, and smote the waters until one wondered why hill and vale and sea did not burst into song. But it was a song in colour, without notes or words—glorious, triumphant!

Under the spell the girl stood as motionless as the carven figurehead on the prow beneath her. Her dark eyes expanded to the beauty of the morning, her cheeks mirrored its flush.

But only for fleeting moments can we stand upon the mountain tops. The black eyes fell to the strip of sand. No life was visible except the wild sea-birds wading in the foam. No one save the sailors of the watch were on deck. Why didn't Cap'n Harve come up! Why should he sleep on this morning of all mornings! There was a very reasonable unreason in her vexation.

Well he should *have* his alarm clock. She turned and struck, as viciously as such a sweet-natured maiden could,

not three but *thirteen* bells! "Clang, clang, clang," rang the brazen notes over the water, startling the wild sea fowl into curious, circling flight around the topmasts, and frightening the long-legged herons from their fishing by the water's edge.

Disturbed at this unseaworthy distortion of time, the hands and Cap'n Harve came tumbling on deck, half-dressed, like firemen after an alarm, only reversing the direction of their flight.

"Here, here, what's up—somebody three sheets in the wind, striking thirteen bells?" the skipper's voice boomed out.

"What's the matter with *you*, Uncle Harve, don't you know——"

"To be sure, my dear, I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"But hurry, Uncle Harve, hurry, tell 'em to lower the boat!"

He tried to restrain her.

"Better get a bite of breakfast first. Cook's coming from the galley now."

But she stamped her foot on deck, again a little viciously for Sally. "No, siree! *Not a mouthful* till we go ashore."

It was nothing but rank mutiny. Still there are times when even a self-respecting skipper may surrender. A boat's crew manned the oars, the boat dropped from the davits to the water and sped towards shore, each of Sally's one hundred and nine pounds as tense as a coxswain's in a New London race.

They beached the craft, and the girl leapt on the sand. Up and down its almost perfect curve the black eyes swept, then watched the break in the palm-grove.

It was an archway leading into a green paradise. But the girl did not drink in the loveliness which she could see beyond. Her trembling eyes were thirsting for another sight—that of a youth about five feet nine or thereabouts; in wide-bottomed sailor's trousers; with body a trifle square-built but very straight; a little deliberate in speech and thought, but very sure in each; a clear-shaven face, also a little square at chin and temples—with the rough red and tan of the open on it; and honest, never-shrinking blue eyes, holding just the right measure of devotion and boldness to win and keep the heart of a girl.

Fitting him perfectly, was a homely, old-fashioned name by which she had often called him in those moments that verged as near on tenderness as shy young lovers ever dare, the restraint making more precious the slightest gesture or word of affection. "Ben True-Blue" it was, and that the trembling lips uttered now, as she stood on the sand, straight and graceful as a young silver-birch in spring, and trembling like that, too.

But instead of the picture which her memory painted, through the archway came a swarthy savage—at best a figure semi-civilized—bare of leg and girt about the trunks and thighs with an untanned skin. He was shaggy-bearded and burnt to a coppery-brown. Over his back hung a crude bow, and from his arms two braces of wild birds. On his shoulder swayed a giant macaw of many brilliant colours, and

at his heels trotted an odd half-tamed little animal, a cross between a ground-hog and a prairie-dog.

Evidently the barbarian-hunter had been called from his chase, after a plunge in some silver spring in the cool of the morning. Perhaps he had been disturbed by the ringing echoes of the *thirteen* ship bells which Sally's determined hand had struck, and so had hurried down from the hills to the beach to see . . . a ship riding at anchor in the bay, sailors cautiously exploring the underbrush, and on the shore—so still she stood—the statue of some Northern nymph!

Had he gotten to that? Was he seeing things? No,—the zephyr from the waters curled the blue skirt about the slender ankles. She swayed! It was not plaster or any cold image of iron or wood, but fashioned of warm human flesh.

And the bronzed savage, with the skin and slain wild birds, in turn became as motionless as the graceful trunks of the palms that framed his picturesque figure.

Suddenly his voice rang out, perhaps a little strange from the long silences, but not in uncouth gutturals, just in honest down east Yankee.

“You—you've come!”

At the cry her hands flew out, then clutched spasmodically and flew to her breast as if something stifled her. She rocked a little where she stood, for the reaction was too violent. It required such a swift adjustment to see in the bizarre figure the clean-cut sailor-boy who had clasped her in his arms under Salthaven Light.

But before he had run three paces towards her, something within told her that all was well. The swift readjustment

was made. The arms flew out, shaking a little, but waiting to fold him to her heart. Had he looked as uncouth as a South Sea cannibal, he could have rested his head there. That voice was enough, and beyond the tangled beard, and swarthy skin, and savage dress, the eyes leapt to hers, as blue and brave and winning as of old. It was her Ben, her boy!

In this ever-shifting old world, with its countless partings and reunions, there are many sorts of journeys' ends—and lovers' meetings. In the reverberating train-shed, on the subway stairs, on the rose-covered porch, or the commonplace corners of the ugly city, Heaven revisits earth and angels hover lightly in the air when severed hearts beat together again. But the thrill and joy of all are weak compared to that of a castaway sailor and his lass, on the shining sands of an unknown isle in an uncharted sea.

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The old boy and girl shyness had taken wing. Young as they were, in trouble and sorrow they had attained the heart's full stature. The unsatisfied yearnings of the past quickened to fulfilment in a long embrace, and at last the meeting of the lips.

Then the head sunk a little lower, the slender, blue serge arms around the bare, brown shoulders, the waving black strands against the auburn of his unkempt beard. He stroked the curls tenderly, while she quivered to him, half-sobbing.

"Thank God! You've come." He spoke with difficulty,

partly because of a heart too full, and partly because speech was so unaccustomed a thing.

"It's been pretty long, dear. How you stood it, I can't see."

"I did begin to think I'd never see you again. But I couldn't let myself think *that*."

She looked up at his eyes, for the beard was still strange. But all she could say now was:

"My dear, my dear!"

Then she almost broke down. Forgive her, for she had stood up so sturdily through it all. Again he stroked the dark hair.

"But, sweetheart, it's worth the waiting."

There was agreement in her answering kiss. A life may have its sorrows and yet be very fortunate, if it has had its big moments. But that lot which does not number some among its memories, no matter how free from care and smooth the path, is indeed a tragedy.

CHAPTER XXIII

WEEK-ENDING IN PARADISE

It was a strange setting to Ben after that of the year past. Heavy ship's timbers overhead; a civilized seat supporting him; real crockery, knives and forks and a steaming breakfast from the galley-stove; the grace Sally always insisted on, even on shipboard; and kindly voices saying, "Come fill up your plate Ben," "Please pass that," and all the familiar expressions of daily human intercourse.

It seemed as if ages had passed since, in some long forgotten existence, he had felt the exhilaration of a ship's rise and fall on the water, heard the shuffle of feet on deck, and the ring of ship's bells. And all the while, above the rough seafaring talk of the men beside him, rose the voice of the girl like a melody feathering their full-throated chorus.

"Sliced bacon, fried spuds, and hot coffee, look pretty poor, I'll bet—eh Ben?"

"They look good to me, Captain Harve, and especially this briar-pipe and real matches," he replied, just a little wistfully. How odd and yet how homelike the colloquialisms sounded after the long silences! How easily his own lips fell into them! And how good was human companionship, the sharing of confidences, especially with the one whom he cared for more than all else in the world!

There wasn't much space between Ben's seat and Sally's. The girl ate little herself. Somehow, women seem to feed their own spiritual flames best by stoking the physical fires of their mates. And with the avidity of the woman long denied the right to care for a loved one's needs, she was filling Ben's plate, with more than even his appetite, whetted by ranging the hills at sunrise, could take care of.

After breakfast, Ben called the mate aside. He suddenly recollected that there was such a custom in the world as shaving.

"Can you lend me a razor and some civilized duds, so I'll look like a human once more?"

"That is hardly a proper courtin' rig," the other commented, "With them bushwhacker whiskers a Maori wench 'ud kiss you for her mate."

And he gave the castaway a jocular dig in the ribs, but the Captain came to Ben's rescue, taking him into his own cabin. Then, observing the toughness of the unwelcome beard, he actually ordered hot water from the galley.

Hot water, soap that floated, razor, and strop! All these hair-splitting conveniences of civilization! For a man fresh from the wilds the shock was almost overpowering.

Even when, a little later, the boy and girl sat before his hut, and he wore the cleanest of white duck, the crude moccasins still encased his feet. Had he even attempted the heavy shoes Captain Brent had lent him, he would have been lamed for life. Still, it was a considerable improvement, for, shorn of its auburn thicket of beard, the pleasant lines of the jaw now emerged, clean-cut and firm as of old, though

the eyes had a strained, far away look, as if he were trying to grasp the real happiness that had come to him after the long wait, and could not. He was slower than ever of speech.

That look went straight to Sally's heart—it told so eloquently of the loneliness and despair of the past year. So she strove to cheer him, her laughter and raillery rippling lightheartedly under the waving palms, and by the waters of the spring, until the little "gab-birds," the brilliant parakeets with their Joseph's coats of many colours, jabbered harshly to each other, asking what it was all about.

"So I let Stell' get in the machine—she has a crush on Phil, you know—and she rode off proud as that chesty peacock on his lawn. And Ben, I'd bet a box of Huylers to a five cent bag of Comby's horehound drops, she let him kiss her when they got to that stretch of road in the pines— But there, that's mean, Stell's all right."

Yes there *had been* a plump, good-natured girl, always flirting with the boys, and there *were* such things as Comby's horehound drops, and Huyler's bonbons, and high-powered machines called automobiles. And however phantasmagorical their existence seemed in this green island paradise, there surely was, sitting before him, cross-legged on a bed of crumbled fern, a girl with black hair, with the sea's own wave in it, and a middy blouse and a scarlet tie—and in her dancing eyes gleams like the wave-crests, or phosphor flashes on the midnight sea—and in them, too, a look of love for him. And on that whimsical girlish mouth there flashed, in and out between her banterings, a look of sympathy and tenderness that was meant for him alone.

Again she asked the question: "How did you ever stand it, dear?" Only once in the old life had she ever so called him, and that was by the Lighthouse, and then very shyly. Today endearments came readily to her lips.

The words came far less easily to his, in this tête-à-tête under the palms. Hungrily he drank in each note, thinking how like they were to the lighter ones of the waterfall back in the mountain, which he had called "Sally's Bridal Veil." He must show it to her in the morning—and the mystery! It was the first time that day that he had thought of it, and it had been so much in his mind.

Then he found speech.

"I didn't dare lose my nerve. I made myself believe that I'd get back sometime, though I never dreamed of *this!*"

In the silence that followed, he sighed, which was an unusual thing for a husky chap not "long" on self-pity. But it was like the sigh of one long thirsting and parched—after a full draught that brings a Heavenly relief. Then for more earthly solace, he filled the heavy-bowl pipe, the lighting of which the girl accomplished with a skill born of long practice in waiting on "her menfolks." She had always "liked to see men smoke"—for the pleasure it gave them and—sometimes—for the reprieve she gained for herself from uncertain tempers. But a rare pleasure and privilege it was now—this and all the other little attentions for this boy. So she watched him with a contentment that quite equalled his, as he puffed, puffed, away, and dreamily continued:

"Mother used to say, 'work is a blessing.' I never was lazy exactly, but I never realized she was right until I was

cast away here. There wasn't so much necessary work to do, besides getting food and making shelter when the storms came, but I made up things to do. It was better than going crazy."

"My brave boy," and Sally bent over and kissed him. Then, with that pardonable vanity in women, the most beautiful of all vanities in the world, she asked:

"And did thinking of *me* help, Ben?"

She received the answer she wanted. It made her own cup of happiness overflow.

"Well—I just *guess*—if it hadn't been for *you!*"

A little later she asked:

"Ben, whatever are those nicks in that circle of palms?"

"Can't you guess? There are twelve of 'em— Count the nicks."

The girl rose and with her pretty finger reckoned their number.

"Thirty, thirty-one—why that's your calendar."

"Yes, they're my date-palms—though they're really cocoas. Gee, I've forgotten today's."

He cut in the thirteenth palm, then asked her:

"Want to see where I live?"

"Oh, Ben, *let's*." At the little girlish nod of assent he smiled tenderly—it was so like old times—the stout-hearted woman whom God had given back to him was still, and always would be, partly a child, whom he must care for and protect.

"Why this is a beautiful house, how ever did you build it?" she cried.

“With these. This is a spade, you see. Pretty crude but it did the business. All you’ve got to do is to take a limb of a tree and shape it with a knife, split it at this end, sharpen a flat stone by rubbing it against another, then fasten it in the cleavage. Liana vines make good ropes—and there you are. Of course the spade got loose from the handle sometimes, but I didn’t need to hurry.”

“And this is your hammer and your axe—and my, but this is a beautiful sitting room—and real chairs and cocoanut bowls!” then shyly—“I wouldn’t mind keeping house in that cute little place.”

For answer, he put his arms around her. There, in the little one-room hut built of tropical trees, the westering sun shining in the doorway, their lips met, not in the old boy and girl kiss of first love but the maturer sealing of their promise after long years of waiting.

Across Rainbow Bay and far beyond, the sun changed the liquid sapphire of the waters to rippling gold as he paused on the brink, and the Captain’s cheery hail rang through the grove.

On the beach, Spanish Dick was turning Ben’s brace of wild birds on a spit over a fire, whose rosy flickerings added a warm human touch to the wilderness of tropical colours all around them.

As they were finishing the last morsels Ben said to Sally: “Oh, Sally. I didn’t tell you but this island has a mystery——”

CHAPTER XXIV

UNDER THE TARPAULIN

“No, Monsieur, you have been our guest—please——”

Linda, standing before the doorway leading into the tap-room of the Café of Many Tongues, seized his open hand with both her own, closing his fingers on the franc notes. Then she patted the back of his clenched fist, a little coquetishly yet very gently, and pushed it away as if the matter were quite settled.

“But, Mademoiselle, you have done so much!” And in turn he seized her hands, trying to force the notes into the unwilling fingers.

“Please, Monsieur, I ask you again not to hurt me—here.”

Her hand sought her heart, not at all in affectation but in the natural way of her race. The corners of her mouth trembled. The soft brown eyes, which seemed as if they must have been stolen from some Madonna's portrait, that is when the more earthly provocativeness had fled, trembled, too. Farewells were such ultimate things to one of her temperament—and they were indeed likely to be final in this out of the way corner of the world, especially in the casual Café of Many Tongues.

The courtyard at this early hour was quite deserted. She withdrew into the triangle of shade under the ancient roof. The line of demarcation between light and shadow was cleanly cut by the sharp rays of the sun. As she passed within the shelter, the faint mirage of silken floss on her cheeks vanished. They became deep olive, dark crimson-flushed, once more. She was a lovely thing, leaning back against the grey stone of the doorway. But under the bandage that still bound his delicately moulded forehead, the eyes of the stranger, darker and more sombre than her liquid own, were not melted by her beauty. They were looking far out over the harbour and beyond even that.

But hers were travelling over the aristocratic outline of the features and the slender figure, very strong under the suppleness. The suit of white had been carefully mended and pressed by her own hands. Fate had been very hard on him—she thought—it had been very hard on both of them.

His eyes strayed back again from the shimmering waters and quickened to sympathy at her plea.

“Very well, Mademoiselle—I will settle with your father.”

She looked at the figure bent over the wine-casks within. She was sure he had heard, but she shrugged her shoulder scornfully. Her arm barred further progress through the doorway.

The inn-keeper deposited his measure on the stone pavements, wiping his hands, partly from necessity, rather more from obsequiousness, on the greasy apron which covered the thread-bare khaki trousers and the faded red sash girding his middle. He was very lean, and dried up like a parched

cicada in a burning August, but the abnormally long, claw-like hands were sinewy-corded and strong. That gesture of the hands on the apron, and the subservient bow, so entirely out of key with the proud poise of the woman standing with her graceful arm across the entrance, confirmed the Frenchman's suspicions of a probable step-fatherhood instead of a nearer relationship.

"The illustrious Señor will be leaving tonight," the innkeeper ventured with an illy-assumed graciousness, that clawlike hand instinctively stretching out from the apron.

"Yes, I go tonight. Pierre will come for my little luggage. Your daughter, who has been most kind, has refused, but here is my reckoning."

Again Linda pushed away the hand with the notes.

"Father—not from *him*. I tell you—he is our guest. You know what evil comes to those who are misers with their hospitality."

She turned towards the younger man.

"The good padre in the big church up yonder says to give of our best to strangers, even so we serve angels, not knowing."

The wistful smile tingled with little thrills of coquetry.

"Perhaps you are one of them, Monsieur. Who knows?"

"No, Linda, only the evil one of misfortune travels with me."

Her smile faded when she saw the sympathy in his look—and—nothing more.

The expression on the innkeeper's face changed, too. The smile which had a flavour like his thinnest sourest wines and

looked like the diacritical mark that indicates the soft vowel, dropped abruptly to an unpromising downward curve.

He retired inside, the unnecessary clatter of drinking-vessels, the scrunching of shifted table-legs, and his muttered imprecations, betraying his anger. By the seven twists in the devil's tail—he had been tricked, but he would get even! A few red welts across her soft body and she would sing another tune! Then he would waylay their *guest*—bah!—and then those beautiful franc-notes would be smoothed out and placed lovingly with their bed-fellows, in that hole in the wall of which she did not know.

With a vengeful toe, Linda crushed the hairy tarantella that crawled across the fissures of the courtyard, as if ending by proxy the evil life of her guardian, or whoever he was that ruled over her fate. She was very careful, however, of the tiny lizard that paused on the knife-edge of the shadow to blink his bright eyes at the sun.

“So you go tonight.”

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“And I will not see you again—for ever so long—maybe never!”

“I will come again, some day, when my fortunes change—to thank you—and repay.”

“It is not that, Monsieur, but I will be ver' lonely.”

She paused. In the deserted courtyard the only sounds were the angry bustle of her father and the soft lapping of the water of the harbour against the grey walls.

“How can you go—without the little map, which was stolen

by that wicked man with the scar in his face—who almost killed you?” she shuddered.

“I can find the place, Linda.”

“You may be lost—drowned. The sea is not always kind, *mon cher*.”

“Even so, it would not end much. But it is only a voyage of forty leagues! I will see you, before I go.”

He passed through the ancient, crazily leaning gateway, and started up the street, when he heard a woman’s scream, and hurried back.

The sullenness of the innkeeper had given way to violent wrath. One clawlike hand was clutched in her luxuriant hair, the other held the heavy leg of a broken stool, and this was falling again and again with a dull thud on the girl’s body.

It was strange what strength those slender fingers of the Frenchman possessed. They twisted the dried-up, grasshopper figure of Linda’s tormentor into a praying heap on the floor, then threw the offending bank-notes on the pavement beside him.

“Remember, Juan Ferrando, my ears can hear a very long way and if you ever so much as crook one of those evil talons of yours at the girl—I’ll return!”

Then he strode out of the café and on up the street, pausing here and there under the striped awnings of the bazaars that lined the malodorous street. It took many impatient and long-drawn-out bargainings with the cunning-eyed, brown-skinned merchants before the necessary purchases for the voyage were completed, and twilight fell before he turned northward again.

The night breeze stirred the fronds of the palm above the street wall of the Café of Many Tongues; the jasmine scented the heavy tepid air, and glasses clinked lazily, but Linda was not to be seen circling among the clusters of rosily-twinkling cigarettes.

He ascended the flight of stairs, and knocked at the door of the room where she had cared for him. There was no answer.

In the dark passageway behind him, he heard an almost noiseless footfall and turned to greet her as he thought, but instead of her soft fingers a knife descended, slashing his sleeve about the wrist. Again the swift agility and strength of the Frenchman were surprising, and the innkeeper's gnarled body crashed down the stairway, his head banging on the stone edge of each step as he rolled to the bottom, to the very feet of the sailor, Pierre.

The latter turned to bind and gag him, but there was no necessity for this. One clawlike hand opened and closed spasmodically twice—then fell. The head with its surly grin frozen on the thin lips, lay very still in the dark puddle.

“Quick, Pierre—this way!”

The two entered the narrow room, gathered up his luggage, crowding it into a sailor's sack, as the jabbering voices over the huddled body at the foot of the stairs gathered in volume.

Even then the stranger risked a precious half-minute in scribbling a note of farewell to Linda, which he placed before the sorrowful crucifix on the wall, opposite her bed.

It was only fourteen feet from the window to the alley and, throwing the sack before them, they achieved it in turn.

As they passed around the corner of the wall, very cautiously, the brim of a high-crowned panama, a swarthy forehead, and a pair of glittering eyes, looked over the window-ledge from which they had just leaped.

Curving in and out to avoid the worm-like snarls of naked bodies, on they ran. Once Pierre's heavy foot crunched the emaciated foreleg of some crouching cur, whose yelp of pain awoke a chorus of sympathetic howls, starting the sluggish sleepers to their feet, and causing the pursuers streaming from the gate-way of the inn, to pause and cross themselves shudderingly.

A half-mile south, they left the squalid street, curving down a lane at whose foot lay a wharf, with a launch moored alongside.

"It has not changed at all, the place," said Pierre's employer as the engine started sparking, and a rod of water showed clear between their stern and the wharf, "Everyone leaves the Café of Many Tongues quickly—or not at all."

They glided over the sailless roadstead, past the funny little fort, dignified now into a lovely picturesqueness by the rising moon, and slipped out of the harbour. With the moon, the wind and waves freshened, and the prow rose and fell, not breasting the rollers gracefully as the gulls and all sailing craft, but sharply, with a resounding slap under her nose.

Forward, the tarpaulin moved.

"What's that, Pierre?"

"Muskrats, Monsieur."

Again a heaving of the canvas, which no rodent's body could have caused. The seaman crossed himself.

"It is alive!"

Suddenly the top of the canvas rounded as though it concealed a head, and towered over the cockpit to the height a human form would have reached.

And now Pierre's whole body was shaking faster than the vibrating engine, so that he could scarcely outline the cross on his frightened heart.

"Saints deliver us! It is a spirit—the man we have killed!"

The tarpaulin parted. It was no evil face. The wavering tresses were covered with moonlit spray.

"Linda!"

"Even I, Monsieur!"

"But, Mademoiselle, you cannot go——"

"Why not—the old man he beat me. Would you have me go back to die? If I go back I will surely die, for if he do not, I will kill myself."

"He will not hurt you any more, my child."

"What—you have killed him?"

"Yes—there was no other way——"

"*Gracias?*"

The cry was a little savage for one whose heart was so tender to those she loved, but then she rapidly uttered a prayer, and a moment later she rose from her knees.

"There is no one who cares for me—back there, dear one."

"But you do not know where we are going, Linda."

"Yes, to the island, which, you tell me, is so like Heaven and yet as dangerous as the evil place—but I do not care——"

She laughed as lightheartedly as the waves slapping against their fragile cockleshell, but there was reverence in her voice as she repeated:

“Whither thou goest, I will go. Thy people——”

“They are all gone, Linda!”

“Then let *me* be ‘thy people.’”

“It is not right.”

“As you will—I love you—as a sister I will go with you—until——”

Not daring to finish the sentence she paused, then crept back to where he stood and, taking one hand from the spoke, she pressed it against her cheek.

“Beloved,” was all she said, and he, not knowing what else to do, stroked her hair, still glistening with the white and gold pattern of the spray and moon. He stroked the dark head tenderly, as he might a sister’s—as she had said, she who would have given her life for him.

Then away from the moonpath, straight into the heart of the darker west, they voyaged.

CHAPTER XXV

OVER THE TRAIL

“——the bleaching bones.”

“Human skeletons?”

“Yes—they’ve been there for years—unburied.”

“Show me the trail!”

“You won’t thank me if I do, Sally.”

“I’m game, Ben.”

“I tell you it’s spooky.”

“Not in the bright sunlight.”

“It’s pretty shivery even then. This island is beautiful enough, but there *is* something strange about it. It’s the most real unreal place I’ve ever seen, and I’ve been in some queer places. It stands out clear before us now, shore and green trees like a stairway, and that blue mountain over there—yet somehow you expect it every minute to melt away in a mist.”

“Spanish Dick says it’s covered with a mist like a veil with gold stars in it—and it’s a floating island—nothing under it—no foundation of any kind—just clear water——”

“It does have that feel,” the boy went on. “At night, once or twice, I’ve lain here on the fern and I’ve felt the motion like a ship’s deck on a calm sea—but always moving quietly

on. I've looked up through the palms, and the stars did not keep their relative positions to us, and the branches moved slowly across them, as if we were sailing, headed west. I was wide awake, and after I did fall asleep and later woke up in the morning, it has always seemed as if we had drifted in the night, on and on over the horizon into some sea that was never charted."

He laughed queerly, then added:

"Of course I laid it to nerves and the loneliness."

"Of course, dear, but did you see the seven moons?"

"The moons?" he repeated.

"Yes, Spanish Dick says there are seven."

"He's crazy—but——"

He never finished the sentence, and Sally thinking he had had enough of spookiness, jumped up. "Let's see that trail," she said.

So hand and hand, as all true lovers at one and twenty should, they passed along the curve of the shining sands to Coral Cove. Behind them rose the terraces of the green isle, in varying shades of that lovely colour, ascending to the cone of mountain, tinted richly blue, like a swallow's wings, and sharply picked out against a turquoise sky as innocent of white clouds as the surrounding sea of human sail—all crystal clear and yet unreal, as the boy had said.

They reached Coral Cove and there, where the white cliffs cast cooling shadows, came on the object of their search.

At their feet, half buried in the sands, white and pink-flushed from the myriad coral particles sifting through them, lay the bleaching bones; the perfect bars of the ribs, and the

great rusting hoops of iron casks, showing that the stillness of the island had once been broken by human revellers.

Yes, even in the clear sunshine it was mysterious and shivery.

Spanish Dick crossed himself hurriedly, calling on the name of another new saint—Sally did not hear—she had long ago lost count.

“Now mebbe, Señorita, you believe my tale of the islan’.”

“Of course, Dick,” said Sally soothingly over her shoulder, but she whispered to Ben:

“Don’t think I’m silly enough to really believe all his stories, but they’re always pretty and interesting, and that’s the main thing. I’d rather have Spanish Dick with me any day than Aunt Abigail, who’s always so keen for the truth, and kills all the joy in life. And, as Cap’n Harve says, we’re young only once. Say, Ben, does it ever seem as though we’d be old some day?”

The boy looked at her. It did seem impossible that Age could ever stiffen that lissom figure in blue, and slacken the blood dancing through her veins. Could he really wrinkle that lovely-curved forehead, blanch the red and tan of those rounded cheeks? Could he have the heart to destroy so fair a thing?

There was a little look of impatience about her averted face, as she waited for an answer which, womanlike, she wanted and *would* have. The boy had no knack of pretty speeches like old Mr. Schauffler, and he had not yet found conversation easy, even with Sally, after that year on the island.

"Why don't you say something? A gentleman should always have some answer for a question like that."

But all Ben could say was :

"You'll always look good to me, Sally."

It was quite enough and she gave him one of her impulsive little hugs.

Little cared they about any old thing like Age, even though her black slipper was even then stirring the indisputable evidence of his ghastly chemistry, there in the sands.

She looked down at the blanching skeletons.

"It *is* spooky—but let's just think it's a picture puzzle to piece together."

Again she surveyed the skeletons, then the hoops half gnawed away by rust.

"This part, anyway, is easy."

"Yes," Ben answered, "I could figure out *that* much."

"It's like a story book— isn't it?" she went on, counting the glistening breast bones with their rows of ribs, "there were eleven of them, real pirates and"—here her voice deepened to a rich contralto as she unconsciously assumed the phraseology of the old tales—"they must have counted their red gold and then drank deep of Jamaica rum.

"And then they fell out and quarrelled over the gold, and some of them fell on the others—and when it was over—there were left here—those eleven."

"Yes, Sally, that's just the way I figured it."

"But how long ago it must have been!"

"No one can tell that—but it *was* a long time ago."

"I wonder how many escaped."

“That’s the next part of the puzzle—let’s move on.”

She was glad to do that, and they left Coral Cove, Spanish Dick giving a wide curve to the ghastly relics, quite as little yellow Alfonso who trotted behind him would have shunned a feline stranger. They clambered up the limestone cliffs and found the old trail, leading back through a clump of feathery bamboos and thickets of tall grasses, to another grove of royal palms on the first green terrace of the ascent.

“Have a drink, Sally.”

She bent over and looked down through the pellucid depths of the spring, her lips starting the silver circles in its surface. She lifted her head and looked at the laughing face trembling in the mirror. At the bottom, far below the wavering features, little bubbles welled like tiny ascending spirits.

“How pretty!” she exclaimed—and then started back with a shudder as she made out—other things besides those silver bubbles in the gravel at the bottom,—a human breast bone with its ribs still intact, and worn even whiter by the action of the waters than its fellows on the sands a mile away.

“You did jump, Sally,” said Ben, “but never mind, I did, too, when I first saw it.”

She looked down into the clear depths again, then drew back and almost shrieked:

“Look at that!”

“What?”

“That”— A white finger pointed downward.

Straight through the breast-bone, and standing still upright after who knows how many generations, stood the haft

and blade of a corroded dagger, brown-red with what must have been only rust, though it seemed to the girl like stains of blood.

After a moment she recovered herself sufficiently to go on with her theory, though in a much lower key.

“Those that were left followed the trail here and they quarrelled on the way. Then the leader of the mutineers killed the one who lies down there, with that knife, as he stopped to drink.”

A round white pebble, disturbed by her foot, rolled over the brink, stirring the placid surface. Another face, dark and mysterious and framed with great round earrings, was indistinctly reflected beside her own in the trembling waters.

She started back, violently this time, as if to escape a knife-thrust aimed at her own slender shoulder-blades. But it was only Spanish Dick. He withdrew quite as quickly as she, having no ingenious explanation for this new mystery.

There was a crash in the underbrush a few yards away, and all three stood transfixed as if expecting an attack from the spirits who haunted the island. And even Ben himself was more startled than he cared to confess.

Spanish Dick was unconsciously making, with clenched thumb, second, and third fingers, and uplifted first and fourth, the old sign of the horn with which the superstitious exorcise the evil one.

But it was only a wild boar who emerged from the thicket and trotted with lowered tusks and slavering jaws across the open.

There were three sighs of relief, of varying intensity, but.

nevertheless, it was with silent trepidation that they hit the trail again.

On the next terrace, the lustrous green of mangoes and limes, mingling with the wilder tropical trees and shrubs, gave the first evidence which they had seen of human habitation, long years ago. But to the three explorers these traces of their own kind did not clear, but seemed to deepen the mystery, just as had the decaying foundations of the squatters' huts, and the keel and ribs of a long-boat imbedded in the sand, which they had noticed from the cliff, a little farther back.

Men had dwelt here once—and had gone. The natives had vanished, too. Had never-ending misfortunes visited civilized white and naked black, as it had the wild buccaneers of the Spanish Main, until the very place seemed cursed by the "Voodoos" whom all born in the Caribbees fear! Could it be haunted? Here, at any rate, it was hauntingly lovely. It was a place for bright angels, not demons of the dark.

Giant tree-ferns brushed their faces. Little checkered serpents spiralled through the undergrowth. Above them jabbered busy macaws in their gay coats of vermilion and indigo and emerald. Lichens misted the great boles of the mahoganies with silver-white like summer hoar frost, and the flaming scarlet of poncianas framed the black tresses of her hair. And when, forgetting for a moment the ghastly relics of the island, she laughed aloud, Ben saw that the pearly-white sheen of orchids for which a merchant-prince would have given a fortune, exactly matched her teeth.

Then, as the crowning touch to this gay carnival of Na-

ture, the quintessence of all the riot of colour, they saw what seemed to be a little heart of many hued fires, palpitating above the blossoms—a humming bird of rare species and rarer loveliness.

It was all a beautiful fantasy, the girl thought, more bewitching even than the one she had seen that Christmas when Captain Harve had taken her to the theatre in Boston.

“Oh—it is so lovely!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands in ecstasy. “It almost seems as if Peter Pan must appear any minute out of that wood there.”

They journeyed on and entered a forest with limbs and trunks tangled in an intricate maze of liana vines, like a great ship’s ropes—then a space where the trees had thinned a little, and the pattern overhead was broken with little rents of blue, the lighter—bits of the sky above, the dark—bits of the sea below.

Then at last they reached the cool silences of Cathedral Woods, and under the great arches ate their lunch of dried beef, and crackers, and cheese, while birds, coloured like those little patches, flashed from branch to branch.

“*Azur de la Virgin*,” exclaimed the gypsy-sailor.

“And what does that mean?” questioned Sally.

“The blue of the Virgin. They are Her carrier pigeons. If you hear and have the faith, some day they bring a message to you, when you are in trouble. They are blue like thoughts of love, not like that one up there, he is one big bad thought. He picks the bones of the dead.”

Their eyes followed his pointing finger, long, brown as tobacco, and marked with the two warts he was forever

trying to wheedle away with outlandish charms and brews. A buzzard soared above them in concentric circles, quite, as the gypsy had said, like a thought of evil hovering over this enchanted paradise. It was far away, and yet, somehow, it oddly reminded Sally of the story of the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, and how it grew and grew, told her when she wore pigtails and used to sit in the high-backed pews of the old church. How far away that sanctuary seemed!

But their eyes returned to the little heavenly messengers, flitting so peacefully above them, and Ben, his tongue unloosed at last, told her of his nicknames for these and all the other wonderful things on the island. She did not smile at them at all, for, with a little tremor of sympathy, she realized what a pathetic game it had been, that and all the tasks he had devised, battling against despair in this lonely place whose very loveliness at times seemed almost sinister.

She was almost for giving up the hunt then and there, but they tossed aside their feelings of depression, and ate, and laughed, and sang, till they woke the echoes of wood and cliff and were happy again. When Don Alfonso had devoured the last scrap, they rose and walked to the brink of the great gorge which severed Cathedral Woods from the last slope of the mountain.

"Hear that, Sally!"

A voice like thunder, shot through with notes of laughter, rose from four hundred feet below where the white waterfall ended, and yet never ended, the leap it started with such wild abandon by their side.

"What name did you give that, dear?"

Ben flushed a little under his coppery tan.

"Tell me," she repeated with sweet insistence.

"Don't think I'm crazy—I was a little ahead of time—but I called it 'Sally's Bridal Veil!'"

"Crazy? I think you're a *dear*."

She had to kiss him for that, of course—and then, as Spanish Dick was trying to tame another parrot more brilliant than his own pet, and the little yellow Don Alfonso was always a model of discretion—why, she kissed him again.

Then—after a moment—maybe it was ten—he shouted to make himself heard above the roar of the cascade.

"We'll have to stop here—I'll *tell* you about the rest."

"Oh—don't stop now—just when we've reached the most interesting part. We've just *got* to finish that picture puzzle, you know."

"Do you see that bridge?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's too dangerous for a girl."

She gauged it with a glance. Perilous indeed seemed the swaying passage over the few rotted planks, haphazardly laid on tenuous cables of liana vines. It was very old and guarded only by an uncertain hand rail, of the same vines, from the rocky chasm where the water-fall thundered.

The girl took a deep breath.

"I can make it."

"But there's worse beyond."

But the black ties with their slender toes and heels of a

military cut, not stilted like Carlotta's, but attractively feminine, Ben thought, were already on the first plank.

Ben followed, right behind, ready to grasp her if she faltered, then Spanish Dick with considerable ease, for his hardened bare feet had an almost prehensile faculty now, and finally, Don Alfonso, bewildered but with implicit faith in the guidance of his light-hearted master. The crossing achieved, he crouched at Dick's feet, his salmon-hued tongue lolling over his jaws. It was funny—that little yellow dog seemed the most human thing, the clearest connecting link with their old world, in all that strange setting.

They walked along the ledge of the gorge toward the sea, not always daring to look down, for the sheer cliffs were dizzying, but now and then glancing at the trickling stream, as it raced with bright-flashing courage to meet the leagues of rollers, storming the breast of the sea wall just beyond.

They reached the wall, facing the west, high above the tossing white plumes. Northward, they could see the masts and spars of the *North Star* and, near by, the strange yacht, both, at that distance, looking like miniature models rather than craft that sailed the ocean.

"We'll call this a day's work, Sally," said Ben. "You can't go any further. The cave is at the end of the path—just in the second curve of the S. But there's no use trying to look at it. That's just what that big buzzard up there wants you to do. I'll tell you all about it just as well."

"Not when I've come as far as this," she said. "I'm *not* one of your fussed up city girls, and I can climb. Why, I've

been on the maintop of the *North Star*—several times—when it was pretty rough.”

The girl was determined, so they wound around the jutting rock to the path in the cliff, while Spanish Dick sat him down tailor-fashion, in a nook just out of the wind. From his faded shirt he drew a much-stained pack of cards, and proceeded to tell Alfonso's fortune in some Spanish lingo, shaking his curly-head and earrings the while.

“Ah, my little Alfonso, thou hast no head to see things that are not in front of thy nose, but thou hast a loyal heart and, as the Americano says, ‘it is white, though thy hide be yellow.’ The cards tell good things for thee—very good things. Thou wilt be very happy with great bones, and a place in paradise, where little dogs with souls like thine can bark at the stars, and moon, and wear no collars or chains—that is after a little time—a *very* little time—in Purgatory.

“Now a little fortune for us.” The cards slapped on the rock. “No—I do not like that! That ace of diamonds comes again and again, between the dark lady and knaves with the winking eyes—no I do not like that.”

Hugging the sea wall to steady themselves against unbalancing puffs of wind, the young folks crept around the jagged, coiling path to the mouth of the cavern.

Gaining the opening, they started to enter the airy first chamber, when Ben, remembering, placed his hand on her elbow, guiding her past a little heap of objects that lay scattered on the floor.

Sally, peering in towards the dark recesses, did not notice them until Ben spoke.

"Another nice little piece of your picture puzzle."

Long ago the winds of the ocean had whirled away the mounds of dust, after the ancestors of that buzzard above them had finished their work, but the bones, disturbed a little by the boy's mad flight a year ago, remained, the index finger still pointing in towards the shadows.

The girl trembled to him. But her courage, and the fascination of those shadows, were greater than her fright. Hand in hand, they passed on into the darkness.

Taking out the little blue box of matches which, like the yellow dog back on the gorge, seemed an odd connecting link between them and the world they had known, the boy lighted the pine-knot he had brought with him. Aided by this unsteady torch, they curved around the elbow of the tunnel, stooping where the roof was low, and straightening as they came into the inner chamber, hallowed by Nature out of the great rock.

"Ooh! what are those?" shrieked Sally.

Far within, two pairs of yellow ovals gleamed like great cat's eyes in the dead of night. They dimly descried the outline of black shapes. Her cry startled them. Something brushed her hair. She fell back panting, against the sides of the cavern which echoed to great, hoarse cries as the black shapes sailed past them.

"Only birds," whispered Ben, "don't be frightened."

But he shook a little, himself.

Upon the walls the flickering torch cast capering shadows—of themselves and a thousand other impish figures which they could not see.

Then, turned on the floor, the light revealed the last of the ghastly relics—another skeleton, quite undisturbed, its long arm and the bones of its fingers clutched as if about to grasp something just beyond its reach, when the evil heart stopped beating.

The boy turned the torch once more and she saw the stone.

“What do you see?”

“Only a stone.” Then she added “Why, there are queer markings upon it.”

“What do you make of that?”

“Circles and odd lines—yes and numbers and letters—it looks like a chart.”

“Could that be a map of the island?”

“It can’t be anything else.”

“And there’s treasure on it! Those pirates didn’t divide their gold, after all—back there on the beach. They were looking for the key to treasure that was buried by some one else, before they landed.”

Then she continued in an awed voice:

“The last two reached the cavern, and even they had to fall out. One died at the mouth of the cavern, the other crawled here to die.”

As she turned and looked behind her another little cry was echoed back.

“Ooh—it *moved!*”

“What moved?” asked the boy a little roughly.

“That hand!”

She shrank back into the shelter of his arms. She had distinctly seen the hand move—and towards the stone.

"It was only your foot. You knocked it when you turned."



Safe in his arms, she sighed with relief, but he could still feel her heart beating against his own.

"I guess we'd better go, now," she said.

Still hand in hand, they hurried out of the cavern, almost

pitching over the great sea wall as they hurriedly stepped over the piles of bones at the entrance.

When they reached the spot where the path turned inland along the gorge, she stopped.

“Last Halloween at the Schauflers’, we told ghost-stories, but they were nothing like this. You should have heard Stella scream. If she’d gone in back there, you would have had to *carry* her out.”

Spanish Dick was still in the shelter of the rock, the great earrings, and curly hair under the red bandana, falling over his face as he frowned over the refractory cards.

“I don’ like that, Señorita. Again and again I deal them, an’ this ace of diamonds—it is the islan’ here—she turn up always between the dark lady an’ the grinning knaves. You tell your uncle with the many whiskers, by San Mariano with the crooked back, to haul up that anchor damn queeck.”

CHAPTER XXVI

SOME ODD REMARKS OF CAPTAIN BRENT

THE sound sleep which should have been the portion of so innocent a maiden, especially after such an arduous journey, did not visit her pillow. It was of ferns, that night, her couch, of palm-leaves in the hut, for here she stayed as had been arranged in the morning, Ben and Dick sleeping in the open not far away. She had wanted to spend one night, before sailing, in the place where Ben had rested during his exile, but at the last moment she was almost tempted to change her plans and sleep in her snug berth on the *North Star*. She would have felt just a little more secure after the uncanny incidents of the day. But she prided herself on "being game," and she had a goodly measure of pertinacity handed down by her Puritan ancestors, so she stayed on shore.

Even on this soft, sweet-smelling pallet she tossed and turned—for hours it must have been—although she had no man-made clock to tell the passage of time, only the Heavenly constellations, gradually sinking behind the palm-trees towards the west.

A strange and forbidding throng danced through the chambers of her tousled head. The scarlet and black kings,

and queens, and knaves, of Spanish Dick's cards, stepped out of their stiff frames, and in full regalia tried her in high court for trespass on the fairy isle. Condemned, she was delivered to a swarthy crew of bearded pirates, with huge rings in their noses, and cutlasses between their teeth, and carried up the side of the mountain.

In its crater boiled a gigantic cauldron, tended by jibbering skeletons who pointed their grisly forefingers at her, their wide death's-head mouths grinning horribly. The buzzard swooped down from a black sky and stood before her. It grew and grew till its fiery eyes were as big as cart-wheels, and it was as tall as the mast of a ship.

She looked for the *North Star*. It was sailing away! She called, but she could not utter a single word. Even at the great distance she could see Ben at the wheel, with his face turned towards her. He shook his head mournfully. Again she tried to shriek, but could not. And suddenly the mountain became alive and spat showers of burning coals, then an avalanche of fire. She was buried, but somehow the coals did not burn her body at all. She laughed aloud in relief—then again tried to scream for help, for the coals were choking her—suffocating her.

She awoke. It must have been somewhere about midnight. She wanted to call Ben, but was ashamed of her fear.

She shook off the spell of the evil dream, and looked out of the door of the hut, through the break in the grove. The waters were calm and untroubled. A bright moon-path led to the horizon. She rubbed her eyes for down it, between the Capes of the Twin Horns, came sailing, a slender craft,

with twin rakish masts, to cast anchor in the bay. Again she wanted to call the men, but she told herself it was all a part of her dream, and tried to fall asleep.

She was successful at last, and one by one the constellations wheeled on their way, those left in the blue field of the sky, paling at last in the golden-green light that comes in the East just before dawn.

The birds were in full chorus when she awoke.

Rising, she left the hut, walking around the still sleeping figures of the men, and sought the spring, to charm away with the shock of its silver waters the dark figures of her dreams.

But she paused at the brink and looked through the trunks of the palms.

It was not a dream!

Black, rakish and mysterious, there, at anchor, lay the strange craft.

The sun looked over the mountain. The slender vessel looked very real in the morning light. Little figures were climbing down the ladder; a boat shot from her side. Over the waters came the creak of the oarlocks. Back and forth swung the oars. Back and forth went the backs of the rowers. Now the nose of the boat swished in the sand and the figures leaped out. One was darkly dressed, slender and very tall; the middle one, burly with a fighter's crouch; on the end advanced a short man, a little bowed, and evidently old, but full of energy. Even at the distance she did not like their faces.

They came nearer and she hid behind the trunk of a palm,

which, though narrow of girth, could quite conceal her slender figure.

“At last we found this ———— uv a place atter tackin’ all over the hull Atlantic like a hayseed chasin’ a ———— pig,” she heard the little old man say, “why damme, Pete, if the boat herself didn’t get so dizzy with goin’ about that she near capsized. Blast me ———— hide if ever I ship on a cruise like that agin.”

It all came so quickly she didn’t have time even properly to stop her ears, and now the tall man held something in his hand. It looked like her high school diploma, only dingier and stained. He unrolled it and the three bent over it.

“It’s anelluva puzzle,” quoth the little old man.

Puzzle, puzzle! She looked again, then crept from trunk to trunk toward the spot where they sat in the edge of the cave. There were markings upon the unrolled canvas—yes—they were something like those on the stone in the cavern.

Cautiously she retraced her steps.

Quite as light as the fall of the first rays of the sun on Ben’s face, was the touch of her finger on his shoulder.

Up he sat, trying to shake the sleep from his body, and looking properly foolish, as a young man should, who finds his sweetheart up and about before him—and on such a glorious morning.

“Ben—Ben—wake up—there are strangers on the island!”

“Strangers—what strangers?” He hardly comprehended.

“Silly—they wouldn’t be strangers if I knew who they were.”

He rose to his feet.

"Where are they?"

"Back here on the beach—hush—don't talk so loud! They're suspicious looking enough."

When they reached the edge of the grove, the three figures had walked up the beach. They looked very black in the golden-lit patch of sands. Then, rounding the little cliff to the east and turning south, they disappeared.

"They're after that treasure, Ben, sure as shootin'."

"What makes you think that?"

"The tall dark man had a roll of canvas with him, and on its back were lines just like those on the stone up there."

Ben looked at her in alarm. Was the island haunted after all? Was it casting its spell on her level little head?

"Are you dreaming, Sally, or am I?"

"No, honestly—Ben—it's every word true—see that's how they came."

He hadn't noticed the black yacht before.

However, breakfast was a first law of nature, so very soon a fire snapped its rosy fingers on the beach, and Spanish Dick concocted some pretty strong coffee, Ben toasting some crackers brought from the ship the night before. For tid-bits they had the wings and legs of the wild bird left over from supper and, as a special appetizer, bananas gathered from the first terrace.

Out on the waters they saw a boat put off from the *North Star*. The crew rowed hurriedly to the yacht, and a man, evidently Cap'n Brent, climbed the ladder. He remained on

board but a few moments, then climbed down. A bit of colour caught their eyes—a gay-coloured dress. A woman's laugh floated on the morning breeze.

"Um—things *are* beginning to happen," muttered Ben. "I'm here for over a year without a living soul to speak to. Then in two days folks come sailing here like miners in a gold rush. We'll have a nice young city here soon."

The boat was beached and the Captain hailed them.

"Morning, Captain," called Ben, "where does *she* hail from?"

"New York, they say," replied the Captain, slowly filling his pipe from his oilskin pouch. "I can't make her out—there's something funny. She's called the *Alice*, and flies a New York Yacht Club pennant. Looks as if her name had been tampered with."

"What sort of a crew has she?"

"A pretty tough-looking lot. All I saw was a sailor with a grouch, a man who looks like a prize fighter, with an odd scar slashed across his face—like a streak of lightning—and a bell-button in his forehead." Then he smiled. "There's a woman aboard, too. Pretty fresh. Wears a sort of theatre petticoat and looks as if she were lost, strayed or stolen from some show-troupe."

The girl's curiosity rose to the boiling point.

"What did she say, Uncle Harve?"

The skipper laughed at this.

"Well—more than her prayers. When I came over the taffrail she hailed me with, 'Look who's here? If it ain't Old Cap from Way Down East, salt on his whiskers, honest 'n

true-blue, and a lookin' for his daughter! You forgot your cue, old scout, back to the wings.' ”

A fair imitation of his tempestuous hostess, nasal drawl and all, the Captain managed to give, then added :

“But unfortunately I couldn't find an interpreter aboard.”

The pipe wouldn't draw just then, so he blew out the stem, lighted it again, then puffed on it diligently.

“She referred to me a little later in the conversation as a 'stout old party.' Now, my girl, I leave it to you. Was that quite truthful?”

“No, Uncle Harve, you're *just right* for a big strong man.”

But the boy broke in :

“We'd better hurry. They're after it, all right.”

“Yes, we sail today,” returned the skipper. “If you've got any luggage in that palace of yours back there, better stow it aboard.”

Here Sally interrupted.

“Give us three days here, Uncle Harve?”

Then the older man looked at her in alarm. He wondered if the island were bewitched. Islands, especially these tropical ones, were like women. Too much beauty was suspicious.

“Are you daft?” he queried. “You've just got Ben back and you want to stay on this God-forsaken place!”

“Uncle Harve, there's *treasure* here!”

“Treasure! By the blue beard of Old Cap'n Teach—sometimes I think the old sinner was right in reducing the number of petticoats and empty heads in the world.”

He turned savagely on poor Dick, who was teaching Don Alfonso to balance a piece of drift-wood on his nose.

“You hardened old liar! It’s all your fault, stuffing her head with your fool yarns.”

“No, Señor Capitan, by Nostra Señora de la Caradid——”

“For the love of Heaven, forget some of your saints!”

“Never mind, Dick, he doesn’t mean it. It wasn’t his fault, Nunkie,—I saw the chart.”

The Captain’s mouth opened and shut twice, as if about to swear, or say something of the sort. But, shaking his head over this fantastic proposal of the young lunatics—he said nothing.

It was Sally’s opportunity now and she used it with all her witchery. She told her story, and pled, and persisted, and teased, with soft words and the softer arguments of her young arms around his neck, which he never could resist. So of course he yielded and granted the three days of grace, a little grudgingly.

Then he turned his back on them, and his eyes, blue as the waters where the icebergs float, but infinitely kinder, twinkled, and the lips over the auburn beard puckered in a whistle. He had discovered something. A little boy he had thought dead long ago was alive. Alive! although he was quite invisible to their young eyes and clamouring vociferously to be satisfied.

That boy was right. What was the use of dreary voyages around the Horn in search of sordid merchandise, when there was treasure close at hand. It didn’t matter whether they found it or not. The hunt’s the thing!

After all a man can be twenty-one again—or fourteen, if he will.

When, safe from the shifting sands of this illusory island, the Captain trod the deck, the real terra firma for him, he called the boatswain, the only one of the crew who, he knew, would not think him a doddering old fool for his orders.

"Benson, how old are you?"

"I'm sixty-one, sir, next December."

"No, Benson, you're *not*, you're *twenty-one!*"

"Ay, ay, sir, if you say so, sir."

"And you're going to man the long boat and load her with picks and shovels, tents and provisions; take Joe Bowling, Jack Beam, and Yeo—and I s'pose that cussed gypsy—around this island with Ben, and dig for gold."

For a second there was a gleam of suspicion even in trusting old Benson's eyes.

"*Gold*, sir?"

"Yes, gold, and pirate gold at that. In a chest, Benson, buried under the sand by wicked pirates, d'ye hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" he stammered.

"The youngsters want a holiday. They shall have it. We'll dig for that gold. And by the way, arm the men. It's lucky we've those cases of rifles aboard."

Then he called after the old boatswain:

"Remember, Benson, you're only twenty-one."

The old salt evidently thought it incumbent upon him to rehearse the business of his rôle immediately, for, as he rolled away in the Gilbert and Sullivan manner he deemed appropriate, he stiffly executed the steps of a hornpipe, hitching his trousers fore and aft, and singing in a voice like a half stopped-up fog-horn.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SONG IN THE WILDERNESS

"WHY *didn't* we make a copy of the chart?"

"Don't worry," he replied, touching his forehead, "I've got it all in *here*. It's too queer to forget."

The boy and girl stood on the southern slope of the divide, a mile from the gorge and the great sea wall, surveying the lay of the land.

It lacked an hour of high noon. The small ties with the military heels were scratched and worn from the long climb. Tiny drops of moisture beaded the tanned throat where it softly swelled into the bosom below the serge blouse. She was very tired, but her spirits and curiosity were unquenched.

"That must be the place."

He pointed to a little cape of sand which stretched out into the waters like a facsimile of Don Alfonso's pink tongue.

"But what does the spur in the corner of the chart mean?"

"Spur—spur, I wonder, Ben, if the sign didn't represent the trunk and branches of a tree?"

"Great head, Sally! Mine must be covered with barnacles. It's that single palm out there."

"How about the 5 and the M?"

"It wasn't an M, was it?"

"I thought it was," the girl returned, "but that awful hand moved just as I was looking at the stone, and we hurried out after that. Perhaps it means *five million* buried there!"

Ben whistled.

"Five million. Now you *are* seeing things. But I'm ready to believe almost anything now. Still that figure's more likely to stand for some measurement. We'll dig around the tree tomorrow and find the iron men—if there are any—. I'll bet it's a practical joke that some fellow thought he'd play on his lazy descendants to make 'em work."

"Never mind, it will be fun just the same."

"There are your friends, Sally."

"Who?"

"The three crooks from the yacht."

Below the cape and headed away from it, three black figures, one taller and more slender than the others, one of medium size and burly, the last bow-legged and short, and trailing behind the others, picked their way over the sands in the noontide glare.

"I wonder if they've found the place."

"I don't know," he answered, "but they're getting very warm."

While Sally rested, Ben descended to the beach on a scouting expedition. He was far out on the sands when she, feeling thirsty and hearing laughing ripples that betrayed the presence of a brook somewhere in the woods behind her, went in search of it.

It was a pretty, harum-scarum stream, unbridged except

for boulders in it. With the birds she bent over to drink, when she heard far off haunting strains of music.

She looked for the flash of whirring wings. But it couldn't be that. Harsh voices too often went with the brilliant plumage. Besides, the sounds were like those of human voices singing—or spirits, if there were such inhabiting the island.

Frightened yet impelled by devouring curiosity, she stepped from stone to stone to the other brink of the brook, then wandered through the colourful maze of the wild-wood, on up the mountainside and towards the voices.

At last she hit into what must have once been a path cut through the thinning woods, but it was rankly overgrown and there were no traces of footsteps.

The path wound towards the sea and into a bright open space, once a rich garden, now a beautiful tangle, commanding a view over the descending phalanxes of trees to the waters, east, west, and south.

The north side was barricaded by a cliff-like section of the mountain, whose summit towered a quarter of a mile above.

Against the cliff and half-concealed by the deep green foliage of trees, their branches seeming consciously to protect and soften its ruin, was a great house, facing directly South. Its roof, dulled by Time from bright red to the hue of rust, had fallen in at different places. But many of the slender pillars supporting the upper and lower verandahs, and the gracefully carved balconies, were still intact. In the windows, tattered remnants of curtains fluttered back and forth, stirred by the disconsolate wind.

The whole place, designed in the sunny style of the early French and Spanish colonies, was covered with vines and the vesture of decay. But it had grown old gracefully, as a woman who, long after youth has fled, adds a late loveliness that charms more than her earlier bloom because of its haunting elusiveness and what it so pathetically suggests.

Now, from the apparently deserted house, floated the same strains of music, slow and sorrowful, as if someone were chanting a requiem for the dead.

The great doors were swung open, their upper hinges dislocated by some violent convulsion. She entered, following the thread of song.

Dust and ashes lay everywhere. At every step she started little golden typhoons whirling in the stray sunbeams. There were mounds on the quaint eighteenth century tables and spindle-legged chairs, some overturned, some still upright and arranged in an intimate circle, unbroken by the capricious catastrophe that had startled their occupants into flight. Ceilings, mirrors, and candlesticks, were thick with mazes of cobwebs, and on one of the tables the torn pages of a book stirred in the breeze.

It was bound in vellum and had a clasp of jewelled bronze. She looked at the torn stubs. So exquisite had been the workmanship that some of the colour of the illuminated French text still brightened the yellowing pages. It lay there just as the fair hand had left it. The girl looked around, almost expecting to hear the rustle of a silken skirt trailing through the room.

She started towards the door, but paused a moment to

look at the rows of pictures. Two had fallen on the floor; the rest still hung securely upon the wall. Beruffed and long-curved cavaliers, and ladies with billowing skirts, and coiffures towering high like the poops of ancient galleons, or clad in the revealing costumes of the later Napoleonic era, stared back at her as if wondering at her intrusion.

A gloomy sea-scape hung over the piano, and in the adjoining corner of the wall, its companion, now nothing but a gaping frame. Jagged remnants of canvas left in the slits of the tarnished gilt, showed that the painting had been hurriedly slashed from the carved wood, undoubtedly by some thief, fearful of discovery.

She heard a stray footfall above her head, and again the slow-measured, sorrowful chant. For all its weirdness in these strange surroundings, it was so beautiful that she was not afraid. She ascended the staircase. In the deep layer of dust upon the rail, at regular intervals, were the recent impressions of human fingers.

On tiptoe she stepped over the hallway, and saw three figures within the most spacious of the upper rooms. Under a moth-eaten canopy, the bed was banked with flowers. And there, as though she had fallen asleep overcome by their fragrance, lay the tiny form of a very old lady. Grey ringlets, like a child's, fell over delicate cameo features, pale as the whitest of the blossoms. She made even Death seem a lovely thing when it brought so deep and quiet a slumber.

Beside her knelt a young man, whose profile was like hers but dark and animate. From his hand an open prayer-book had fallen on the floor.

Near him a girl clasped a crucifix. She, too, was alive, for her rounded bosom rose and fell gently, and the olive-brown cheeks were richly tinted with the warm colour of ripening apricots.

They rose from their knees, and the watcher noticed behind them a third figure,—a giant negro, fully a half over the six feet, in a livery of faded blue and gold. He had the unmistakable look of the congenital mute.

She stepped back of the door, as the young man and the giant mute lifted their burden very tenderly upon a bier of leafy boughs, scattered the flowers upon it and bore it down the staircase, the woman leading the way, with the crucifix held high before her.

To the left of the house and facing the morning sun, was a pile of black-red, newly-turned earth. There were mounds and crosses on either side.

Never noticing the one unbidden mourner who stood hidden behind the torn draperies of a window near them, they laid the quiet form on its bed of flowers in the dark earth.

The last rite payed, and the rough cross raised, they turned back towards the house, pausing under the trees. Sally listened to their voices, the young man's quite as pleasing in ordinary speech as in the chant, the woman's not shaming the rich contralto of the requiem, but shot through now, even in this sorrowful moment, with a certain lilt, as if she were altogether in love with him.

Their talk was all in French. Only a few nouns and verbs, and fewer adjectives, remained from Sally's old High-School vocabulary but she caught this much:

“—— return with him ——”

“No, no, monsieur, I will stay.”

Then the contralto voice asked a question which she could not understand, but she translated a fragment of the answer.

“Here—the one home left.”

Again in the woman’s voice she recognized two words, “dig,” and “gold.”

Shaking his head and smiling as at a child’s foolish fancy, he answered still in French :

“I will dig—yes—but it should be for food, not for fool’s gold.”

Still another band of strangers who knew of the mysterious treasure!

In her surprise Sally’s hand fell on the piano keys, warped and dried like the teeth in those death-heads on the sand. She started the little golden typhoons whirling through the sunbeams again, and a snarling discord that woke the echoes of the house.

Startled, she shrank from the ancient instrument, but then, a little ashamed of her fears, and full of sympathy for the young man outside, whose face was so kind, she passed out of the doorway to offer help.

But when she reached the tree under which the three had stood, they had disappeared, probably in the surrounding forest.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BULB FROM THE GREAT WHITE WAY

WHEN she found Ben, who was frantically hallooing through the woods, the sun had passed the zenith too far to allow further investigation of the strange house, so they made their way over the mountain, down the terraces to the hut.

"It's funny that I never discovered the place before," said Ben. "I've tramped every acre of the island north of the gorge, though, come to think of it, I've not covered the part south so well. I've stuck to the coast pretty much there. But I should have seen the house from the shore."

"I think the trees and vines hide it from anyone at a distance, Ben. I wonder who they are. Is it possible that they own the island?"

"No, they must have just come. If they had been here long I would have run across them before, or have seen the smoke of their fires at least."

As they reached the hut, they heard the sound of the *North Star's* bells—struck twice. It was five o'clock. After Ben had departed on some errand, Sally sat cross-legged, watching Spanish Dick as he moved about, preparing supper, his bare legs, tattooed arms, and chest, coppery-swart in the levelling sun-rays, his melting brown eyes full of dreams and fancies as usual.

"Well this island hasn't floated away yet, Dick," was the bait Sally offered him, adding a little slowly, "though I must confess it is a strange place."

"Wait and see, Señorita. Some day it go, if we stay here long."

He shook his curly head and great earrings uncertainly.

"Your uncle is a good man but very foolish. Tell heem haul up that anchor, dam queeck—your pardon, Señorita. The cards say trouble and they do not lie like men."

"But we're going to hunt for the gold."

"Gold is not good when the yellow is stain with red," he returned. "There is blood on that gold, and much bad will come to him who finds it."

"Why, Dick, whatever can happen?"

"I don' know," he shrugged his shoulders, "mebbe the island float away an' drop over the edge of the world."

"But the earth is round like a ball."

"No, Señorita, it is like a plate. See for yourself."

He pointed to the curve of the horizon.

"As I tell you many times, I have seen this islan' all blue an' green an' beautiful in—what you say? mist—like gold with stars in eet—an' way up high, the beeg moon an' the six leetle ones swim roun' and roun'. An' the islan'—she drift away like a boat when the oar gone. An' if she doan do that, she——"

He paused significantly, then gazed at her cunningly to see if her curiosity were sufficiently piqued. He had genuine histrionic talent, had Spanish Dick, and he knew well how to play on an audience.

“What, Dick?”

“Well mebbe she blow up—psst! like that—an’ bury us in fire, an’ the sea open up an’ swallow the beeg ship an’ el Capitan with the many whiskerr, who will not listen.”

A little too much like her dream was this, and she didn’t like it. Seeing this, the gypsy of the sea went on, really believing most of his tale.

“If we hurry, we can sail away before something happen. For by San Federigo who walk on the burning fire an’ was not scorch, we die if we do not go. The card say verry soon.

“But we must eet, Señorita; el Capitan has leetle faith but beeg stomach.”

Rising, he brought from the tree a brace of wild doves. Sally exclaimed over the lustrous beauty of their plumage, soft grey, irised with the tints one finds in the shadows of pearl-lined shells. Then, having no mind to see the pretty things torn apart, she strolled to the spring, looked in its mirror, and rearranged her hair, trying it this way and that.

So occupied, she did not notice the bird of strange plumage, as brilliant as the parrots above, who strayed into the grove and stood surveying the scene before her, one heavily-ringed hand resting against the stem of the palm. She might indeed have been “the fair Inez who came from out the west.”

But it was not a musical cry, such as the immortal heroine would have used, which issued from this dark lady’s lips, nor in so quaint a tongue. It was a single word in English that brought the nymph of the spring bolt upright.

“Camera!”

The girl could easily have dispensed with this new apparition—so many had crossed her path that day. Bizarrely clad in a diaphanous skirt of tango red, a sheer light waist of some kindred shade, and a hat of yellow, like a newly-minted coin, tilted on her sleek black hair, she walked across the open in languorous, hip-swaying fashion, a little daring and not at all ungraceful.

And all she said by way of greeting when she met Sally's stare was this:

"Where's the camera-man, girlie?"

The costume indeed seemed quite Spanish, but even to Sally's untravelled eyes it had a touch of extreme smartness that the tropics never knew. And the newcomer spoke in a lingo as unintelligible sometimes as any native dialect, yet with a nasal echo of the big cities back home.

However, she was a perfect picture in that setting. If only she could have hushed that voice!

Was this the woman of the yacht? Sally turned towards her sharply. She was in no mood for banter from a stranger. But was that face entirely strange? Where—no, she couldn't place it.

"Who are *you*?"

Again the harsh voice from the carmined lips.

"Oh-ah I'm Lady Geraldine taking a cruise in my youngest steam yacht. They are such a boah, my dear, don't you think?"

Carrying out the momentary rôle with the perfect ennui of a show-girl in a Palm beach scene, she crooked her arm affectedly, feathered her hair with the tips of her fingers, and

gazed at Sally through an imaginary lorgnette. Only the spotlight was lacking, and the round-brimmed yellow hat on the back of her head indeed gave that effect.

“So you’re the sweet little bride who left poor Philip flat.”

Fairly angry was Sally now, at the impudence of the stranger.

“Who *are* you? How did you know that?” Suddenly it dawned on her, the headstones—the church gallery—that mocking face!

The newcomer lowered her voice from the *grande dame* falsetto to its own natural harsh level.

“Oh, I was behind the scenes, it was a great show.”

“How did you get down here anyway?” returned the smaller girl sharply, for she could be spitfire enough when the occasion rose. But there was no malice in the stranger now. That night she herself had felt so defenceless, but out here in the open, the obsession, all fears, were gone.

So, thinking that she would be civil anyway, even if the stranger was too rude and personal, she added:

“I beg your pardon, I didn’t mean to be impolite, but it’s queer the way people are always bobbing up on this island that’s supposed to be deserted!”

“Ain’t it the truth! I tell Mac—he’s the boss of the expedition—the place is hoodooed. Did yuh pipe those skeletons?”

“Pipe—I beg your pardon.”

“Pipe? why lamp—get a look at ’em, I mean—they’re back in that cove.”

“Were you scared?”

“*Scared!* I had the worst case of stage fright I ever had. All the bones in my spine was clicking like castanets, tangoing faster’n Reny Castle’s.”

“Well, there’s a lot more of them, heaps all over the island,” returned her opponent viciously.

“Fur the luv o’ Mike! you don’t say so! The place is a morgue. We gotta beat it, we gotta beat it. I’ve seen guys croaked and never turned a hair—but no skeletons for mine.”

Appeased a little with the advantage in the skirmish, Sally smiled. The tables were surely turned. True, terra firma was all that and more to Carlotta. Once on it, and away from the dreaded deep, her spirits had risen, particularly with an audience before her—but—those skeletons weren’t any too reassuring!

“But tell me what is your name,” Sally ventured. “You apparently know mine.”

“Yes, yours is Fell, Sally for monicker. You see Miss Fell, Mr. Huntington and I are intimate, oh, very intimate. He told me all about you.”

“Phil Huntington? Where is he?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know? My name’s Carlotta, they call me ‘Carlotta, the Divine.’ Pretty isn’t it? He’s the swell little press-agent, that Abey Clout. But”—in a burst of good humoured confidence—“my *real* name’s Rosey Cohen, and I don’t care who knows it—but call me Carlotta. *Everybody* does now.”

Her curiosity aroused, Sally questioned further:

"If you won't tell me where he is, tell me what he said—about me, I mean."

"Well, it wasn't exactly American Beauty bouquets he handed you."

"You came in that yacht?"

"Sure."

"It looks like the Huntingtons' *Aileen*."

The stranger started at this, tapped her slipper with the rhine-stone buckles and stilted heels, and answered evasively——

"Oh, steam yachts all look alike, same's chorus men."

"But whatever are you doing here?"

"Lookin' for gold—can ya beat it?"

"Gold! You too!"

"Surest thing you know. You're not one of those crazy nuts that believe there's gold on this phony island, are you?"

A nut! Why couldn't the girl use regular English! As she talked on, she shifted her poses restlessly, and used hands and quick wrist motions to illustrate and emphasize her statements. Sally decided her eyes showed cunning—perhaps even avarice, but she had an infectious good humour. And she certainly was a smashing beauty in spite of the flaws.

"My gen'leman friends on the yacht swallowed some yarn about treasure on the place," Carlotta rattled on. "Now my own little idea is that you don't turn up gold with a spade, but you get it by darn hard work. I know I've worked hard enough for all I got—until this fool trip—though you couldn't tell that to the boobs that come to see me at Stan-dish's. They don't think I'm straight either," she added defi-

antly, "But I am. Us cabaret girls never get any credit. But that's how I fool 'em—lead 'em on—and—well, I can take care of myself when the pinch comes, all right."

"You sing in cabarets?"

"Yes, and dance a little—all the latest steps. You ought to see my newest—it's a regular riot—the Orangoutang Chill." She coolly measured the sweet-faced girl before her. "But no, you wouldn't like it. Hearts an' Flowers for yours, dearie. And you're right, it's prettier even if there isn't so much pep. The other's just some of that Broadway bunk the bald-heads and the wise guys from Oshkosh eat up."

The harsh voice softened and grew confidential.

"You didn't fall for Phil, did you?"

"No—I was sorry to treat him so. But I had to. Ben was alone on the island—and now I'm engaged to some one else."

Carlotta stretched out her strong, well-shaped hand impulsively.

"Put it there—girlie—congratulations. It's the sailor guy isn't it?"

"Well, it's Mr. Boltwood. He was wrecked here, you know, and we came after him."

"Regular fairy tale, bottle and all, isn't it?—But it's fine stuff—you'll be happy all right, back in that burg—what d' you call it? Pepper' n' Salt? An' a nice little cottage all covered with roses—an' lots o' babies an'—but never mind, dearie, you're ongenoo, all right. But I like you even if you aren't my style."

She patted Sally's hand, who forthwith was sure of her

own liking for the new friend, or rather acquaintance. She wasn't such a bad sort even if, as she had remarked, "their styles" were so different and she painted and smoked—and even swore at times. And she was decidedly good entertainment.

"It's queer about this love-stuff, isn't it? Now me and Phil's no more alike than caviar is like baked beans. But I've fallen for him somehow, and now you're not in the runnin'—we can be friends."

"You haven't told me yet whereshe is."

"Oh, he came with me in his father's yacht."

"He's here, then?"

"Surest thing you know, dearie. Otherwise I wouldn't have come. He's a fool kid and he just had to have a nurse—but all on the level—do you get me?"

Sally picked out the thread of reason in this vernacular maze, and nodded. But she was thinking that they must hurry about that gold, with the searchers increasing in number each day. If it *was* there, it belonged rightfully to Ben. But it was a fair game. Let them all have a try at it.

Carlotta rose.

"If I was you, girlie, I'd get back to God's Country as quick as I could, but *I* can't swim, so what's the use. I don't like that floating bottle stuff and the gold—and those skeletons. Too much for a sensible human bein'. I tell you somethin'll happen before we get through."

"That's what Spanish Dick says. He read it in the cards. Of course I didn't believe him but——"

"Is he the geezer with the curly whiskers and the merry-go-round rings in his ears?"

"That's the one. He's over there now. You can see him through the trees."

"Well, you'd better believe him, all right. But bye, bye, girlie, I've gotta beat it."

Sally watched her go, a bright bit of swaying colour against the green background. On the beach she joined the unpromising trio waiting with the boat,—the tall, dark man with the staring eyes she did not like, the heavy set husky with the bundles of muscles, glistening pink and oily with sweat, under his sparse flannel undershirt, and the chipper old man with the bleary eyes, the tobacco-stained beard, and the wicked saw mouth that cursed so constantly.

At four bells that night, Sally and Ben were watching the new moon over the rail of the *North Star*.

"It's just like a slice of ripe melon, isn't it?"

"And just like that night when I sent you the note, and you climbed down the trellis, and we went to the Lighthouse."

Her hand rested on his for a moment with a slight pressure, which he answered with one far stronger:

"If you hadn't come and given me your promise, I couldn't have stood it on the island," he went on in his shy boy's way.

"It's funny, but to tell the truth, I used to be jealous of Phil Huntington. I was all kinds of a chump, but I couldn't help it.

"There he is now."

The lights on the lee rail of the yacht were rising and

falling on the slight swell, and the metallic strains of a phonograph jarred the stillness of the tropical night. Listening carefully, the pair could distinguish a throaty soprano and a mediocre baritone, in a ragtime song as choppy as the waves of Dead Man's Channel.

“Um ti dee, deedle dee
Um ti dee, deedle dee
Oh play it again
That shivery refrain
Um ti dee, deedle dee—”

“It sounds like a frightful discord in this lovely, peaceful place—as much of a discord as—as—” Sally wildly searched for a home-made simile—“a piece of red flannel on a crepe-de-chine dress.”

“It has about the same itch,” said Ben. Homely humour—but they both laughed joyously anyway. Then he remarked, a little sternly:

“If that's Phil—I've been looking for him.”

Her hand closed over his.

“Now, dear, don't. You can afford to forgive.”

Over and over, the silly, and cheap, but maddening melody tantalized the listeners—“um ti dee, deedle, dee—um ti dee, deedle dee—” Now they were dancing to it—the man's figure and the girl's, still clad in the gay costume which even in the night gleamed colourfully as she swayed within the circle of the bright lantern. Aft, four figures were bending over some objects. A game of cards. The music at last

stopped, and in the stillness they thought they could hear the slap, slap, as the tall man dealt.

“Ben—look at that!”

In the northwest the golden slice of moon was brilliant—straining her eyes, she could see only one—but above the mountain to the south hung something dark.

It was a little curl of smoke, like a black ostrich plume.

“I never saw that before,” said Ben.

CHAPTER XXIX

TWENTY-ONE

NEXT morning, a half-hour before sunup, the long-boat with the skipper, Ben, Sally, and Spanish Dick, Benson the bo'sun, Jack Beam, and Zeke Yeo, and tents, provisions, and a stock of tools, left the *North Star* and stole out between the Twin Horn Capes. No life was yet visible on the deck of the black yacht.

Feeling perhaps that rigid ship's discipline must be relaxed on such a mad expedition, the old bo'sun remarked in a cautious voice to the skipper:

"You didn't congratulate me on my birthday, Captain. If there was an election in this latitude and longitude, I'd cast my first ballot today. I've just come of age," he finished with a smirk that would have been a fit piece of business for his execution of that ridiculous hornpipe the day before, or the old rascal's waggish recital of "I'm to be Queen of the May, Mother, I'm to be Queen of the May."

Then they bent to the oars right gallantly and skirted the white lime-stone cliffs of the western shore, under a sky as pink as a wild-rose on the hedge by the roadside, in late June.

The black-eyed sprite forward, laughed joyously as the

prow danced up and down, now clear of the water, now descending to meet the crest of the following wave, buffeting it playfully with a resounding slap, and tossing the spray over her shinning face and the black tresses flying free. Her eye had little lights of excitement in them like those in the veil Spanish Dick was forever telling about.

And Captain Brent, sanguine-cheeked, blue-eyed, deep-chested, his brown hair and full beard but sparsely frosted, altogether a fine figure of a man, sat by the tiller and boomed out a song in his deep bass voice. The tune was an old one, but the words, Sally felt, for she knew the streak of poetry in him, were his own.

1

“When you played hookey and I played hookey
And we ran away to sea,
Our ship was a raft in a little pond,
But we sailed to the end of the world and beyond,
And wonderful things did we,
Yo ho! and wonderful things did we.

2

“Oh, we fell in with a pirate ship;
We spoke them loud and bold.
We raked them fore, we raked them aft,
When the devil’s crew sank we only laughed,
And we divvyed their good red gold,
Yo ho! we divvyed their good red gold.

3

“When you played hookey and I played hookey
And we ran away to fish,

Our line was a string, our hook a pin,
But the big fish came a tumbling in——
Oh! anything we did wish,
Yo ho! Oh anything we did wish.

4

“Oh, there were dolphins rainbow bright
That came to our net from the streams;
A whale with tons of good sperm oil,
Wicked sharks grinning for human spoil——
And—things you see only in dreams,
Yo ho! Things you see only in dreams.

5

“And now we’re rich and we can’t play hookey
Just as once we did,
Can’t dig such gold, can’t catch such fish,
Nor sail those seas and how I wish
I was still a foolish kid!
Yo ho! I was still a foolish kid.”

So they rowed and rowed until they reached the great sea wall, rising sheer above the foam that laced its foot like swirling chiffon in a breeze. The boy and girl gazed up at the white sea-birds sailing in circles around it, and saw the opening of the cavern, approached by the perilous path. Quite innocent in the bright daylight it looked, but still they shuddered, remembering.

Now they sighted the Cape and there, in the very centre, waving in the morning breeze, stood the solitary palm, perhaps the key to the whole puzzle.

Rounding the Cape, they beached the longboat, unloaded the tools, and carried them to the base of the palm. The provisions were stacked farther back under a favouring clump of trees, and water was located. Then, in spite of Sally's impatient protests, at Captain Brent's orders they drove stakes where the verdure first fringed the coral-tinged sands with emerald, and in a jiffy poles and guy-ropes were set, the canvas stretched, and a shelter for Sally prepared against the swift-climbing sun.

But she would have none of this now, and made straight for the sentinel palm.

"What's your reading of the chart, Ben?" asked the skipper, but not as if that made any difference. One location was as good as another. Never a doubloon would they find anyway. Still, in any event, he would find, in fact he was already finding, the gold *he* was searching for.

With his forefinger Ben hastily sketched in the sand his recollection of the odd markings on the stone in the cavern.

"It was like this," he said, "or at least something like it——"

"The tongue of land is surely the cape, and that forking mark, like a spur or a chicken track, represents the palm, we decided. It's as good a guess as any."

"A pretty safe bet that, I should say," commented the skipper over his shoulder. "My boy, you could read the devil's own chart of the shoals and reefs of Hades."

"It *is* a sort of a devil's chart, isn't it? but it was Sally's idea. I can't figure out the rest. Say Sally, was that letter after the 5 an M or an N?"

The boy and girl looked at each other in chagrin. They were both quite uncertain on that point. They had hurried away from the cavern too quickly when that grisly hand had moved.

"We were more scary than a pair of kids," Ben snorted. "I'm going back to the cave to make sure."

The girl had sudden visions of the skeletons, those vagabonds from the yacht, whom she did not like, the dizzy path, and the waiting buzzard.

"No, you don't," she shouted. "You've been there twice already. The third time something's *bound* to happen."

The skipper gave one big glorious laugh. He was having the time of his life, sure enough.

"Never mind, my gay young bucko, what's the difference? You might as well go for a divining rod, or fetch one of those crystal-gazers on Howard Street, that fool the Jackies on shore leave when they're three sheets in the wind. We'll just dig a little jag around here and try our luck."

Then he playfully tweaked the girl's ears, for that year it was not the fashion to cover them entirely (fortunately—for they matched the delicate colouring of the sands on which they stood).

"That 5 and the M mean five million gold pieces for your wedding chest, my lass."

"Now, who's bewitched by the island," she retorted, then executing that funny little dance of hers, a precursor of the modern fox-trot, called, for she was determined to banish that old cave idea from Ben's head:

"Come on, let's begin."

"Righto, my girl, but we must start with the proper ceremony, as befits this momentous occasion."

The skipper's voice boomed from his chest in a mock-forensic base, as he handed Ben a shovel.

"When the railroad is finished, the President drives the gold spike, and the Governor always unveils the town statue. Ben, you're the chief Bey or Pshaw of this island—so you strike first."

"No, the Captain's daughter always christens the ship. Let Sally try, for good luck."

So the mariners gathered round, and the small black slipper rested on the iron rim of the implement, when she glanced at Spanish Dick, who was rolling his eyes and crossing himself while he muttered incoherently.

"Whatever are you doing now, Spanish Dick?"

"Do not deeg, Señorita. It ees bad luck. The gold ees stain with red. That means someone die a bad death."

For once the girl lost her patience and upbraided him unjustly.

"For Heaven's sake, stop! You're nothing but a kill-joy. Spanish Dick."

The small foot drove the iron in viciously, and several inches deeper than one would have expected from the size of the slipper. Over her shoulder she tossed the sand and coral dust, showering the recalcitrant gypsy who, feeling very aggrieved, retired to a hillock in the shade, muttering to his small buff-coloured companion, the only one in all the world, he complained, that understood him.

Then they began in real earnest, Ben and the bosun, Jack

Beam and Joe Bowling, old Yeo and the skipper himself. Shovels swung, picks described their arcs, backs curved and rose, rivulets of sweat dripped from sun-coppered faces, or glistened on the swift-playing muscles. Shining clouds of sand whirled through the air, and gaping holes yawned around the sentinel palm.

The sun curved through segment after segment of the zodiac, a canopy of luminous turquoise, but no gold except his own, stained or stainless, gleamed on their expectant—or doubting eyes.

At noon they paused for a spell, but after luncheon and a leisurely pulling on well-seasoned pipes, they struck again.

By now the keen edge of the holiday spirit had been dulled a trifle, but with the persistence of stout men of the open, who always like to see through a hard job once begun, their backs rose and fell in that slow swing of the digger which always seems to the idle onlooker too leisurely, but which, as the experienced hand knows, sets the only pace that can finish a hard stint with the spade.

Sally herself had tried to help as often as she was permitted. She paid for it. With her tendency to darkness, the backs of her hands always resembled the palest of the tea-roses around her home. And in spite of her activity, the palms had always kept the satin-soft finish of the moss-roses near by. But now, angry red welts and yellowish blisters discoloured them. Still, she kept at it until ordered to stop, then, with a cajolery which this quiet little maiden could use very cleverly, she soothed Spanish Dick's fears and per-

sueded him to take her place. At first he protested with a rapid play of his hands and shoulders.

“You tell me to deeg, Señorita,—I deeg. But only evil will come.”

But finally he had taken his shovel, and from where she sat, under the flap of the tent, she could see his red bandana and shaking earrings, bobbing up and down in unison with the bald pate of old Benson and the straw coloured thatch of young Jack Beam, a few inches above the latest trench.

At three, Ben threw down his pick, surveyed the gaping holes in disgust, and announced that he was going to climb to the cavern once more, to make sure of the forgotten markings.

In vain, this time, did Sally protest. Finding him adamant, she insisted that she would go, too. However, he laughed at her premonitions and refused her company, setting out alone through the wooded tangle, northward towards the mountain.

And now as the girl sat there, the old, vague forebodings assailed her in overwhelming force, spoiling the golden holiday, as a swarm of pestiferous mayflies suddenly mars for the forest wanderer the sylvan beauty of a woodland scene. All utterly unreasonable and idiotic, she tried to tell herself, but without any responding conviction.

In her New England home, common sense was a quality as indispensable to existence as a roof to a dwelling. But now it seemed quite as frail and as much of a mummery as superstition in her old life would have been deemed. By some strange witchery of the clime, values were uncannily reversed.

The substance there was shadow here. Common sense was gossamer, the fairy tale the tangible nugget of gold. The superstitions at which the world represented by Aunt Abigail would have so scornfully sniffed, this moment seemed the logical and immutable laws of this hauntingly lovely island.

As she tried to escape from the swarm of fancies, the vision of the haunted house on the mountainside flashed before her. An uncontrollable curiosity piqued her. Why hadn't she solved that mystery, at least! Even as she rose, a figure swung down the old overgrown pathway, that led like a clogged vein from the heart of the green forest. The figure, too, carried a spade over his shoulder. The girl turned, half-expecting to see one of the villainous voyagers of the black yacht.

It was the young man himself! The tenant of the haunted house, who had chanted the requiem so sorrowfully and so musically.

Behind him shambled a second figure,—the giant mute, his huge, loose-jointed six feet six looking altogether ludicrous in the faded blue livery with the tarnished gilt trappings. Set in a face as dead black, the girl thought, as the mire under the reeds of the Salthaven marshes, his eyes had the dull unhappy stare of one who silently protests against his affliction. The latter was all too evident, for his cavernous mouth, forced by the abnormally flattened nose to gape open for breath, showed only the grotesque root of a tongue. Still his uncouthness did not frighten her as the polished, well-groomed, but sinister, personage who led that other band.

For the mute she felt only pity, and for his master an even gentler pang.

The young man paused and dropped the spade, surveying the group of seamen, at first in surprise, then with a half-quizzical, half-fatalistic look that concealed his disappointment. She caught and translated his exclamation.

“Voilà! Late as usual. Kismet.”

His glances fell on the girl under the trees. He must have guessed her race, for, raising his hat with that courtliness which had amused Carlotta, but which would have both flattered and softened the heart of the average woman, he addressed her in English, perfect except for the elusive accent of the Frenchman, the tongue feathering the syllables as a rower the waves. And yet, for all its music and charm, which was strange to one accustomed to the frank rough speech of New England seafaring folk, the voice was quite as manly as theirs.

“Pardon me, Mademoiselle, are they your friends? It is not often that one sees a living soul on this island.”

The girl rose. From the start she liked the stranger, his bearing—a pathetic mingling of forlornness and debonair bravery—and that same fleeting, half-quizzical expression in those sombre eyes, which suggested fires banked with the cold ashes of many burned out ventures, scattered by Patience over the surface to keep the flame of the undaunted spirit still alive. When she looked at him she, too, felt she knew what his mother looked like, and that was no disgrace, no implication of effeminacy—the mother would have been proud of her son. Then the lovely vision of the peace-

ful old lady on the bed of flowers recurred to her. She wondered—but his question had not yet been answered.

“Yes, they all belong to one party. The tall good-looking man with the beard is Captain Brent. He’s the Captain of the ship in which we came.”

“Why did you come here, Mademoiselle? It is the backstairs of the world, the jumping-off place, the spring-board from which one leaps into a sea of oblivion or disaster.”

“We came to find a castaway. It sounds like a fairy tale, but it’s all true. The message came in a bottle from a boy we knew.”

“No, it is not strange, for one who has sailed these seas and lived on this island knows that many things happen that the rest of the world would shake their heads at—And so the message in the bottle came from him—the young man I saw climbing the mountain?”

Again the quizzical expression and, startled, Sally asked: “Yes, but how did you know?”

She flushed, and he, to spare her embarrassment, turned away, which was rather chivalrous and Spartan, with two wild roses blooming so suddenly and bewitchingly in the brown fields of her cheeks.

“When one has roved the world many years, he learns to read the human heart, and to put two and two together—or one and one—very quickly.”

He looked at the toiling sailors again.

“And so they are digging for gold?”

“You guessed that, too—who are you, anyway?” she asked

in sudden alarm, but the winning smile banished all suspicions. "Do you live on the island?"

He avoided a direct answer to this.

"I have lived in many places—but tell me, if I may ask, why you are looking for gold here. It is not the likeliest place for a *mine*."

"Those awful skeletons on the trail, and the chart on the stone in the cavern, gave us the clue. It seems silly, *perfectly idiotic*, to believe it, but, as Spanish Dick says and as you told me just now, so many odd things happen here. It's just *fun* to hunt for it—just a lark, you see. And anyway there's too much prose in the world, so I'm going to take the poetry when I find it. This was what was on it—the stone," and she traced what she could remember of the markings in the sand. "I'm not sure whether it was M or N, though.

"I don't want the gold for myself," she went on, "though it would be nice to have—if there is any—of course there isn't, but if there *is*—" (he smiled at her prettily-mixed sentences) "it would be fine for Ben— Mr. Boltwood—after all he's stood. He could have his own ship then. Just imagine it—he was here almost a year and a half. That was hard wasn't it?"

"Yes, that must have been pretty hard—here—all alone."

Then shyly she ventured, for she already felt quite at home with this well-bred stranger in the carefully mended clothes, which she correctly surmised were about all he possessed in the world:

"I'm an American and I live in Salthaven, way up north in Massachusetts. My name is Sally Fell."

He bowed—"Salthaven! I have heard of that place."

"Of course," she said, "it's on the map, but won't you tell me yours?"

"Charles Larone of—well—everywhere."

"I saw you yesterday."

"Yesterday, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, back in the house by Cone Mountain."

"Cone Mountain?" He looked puzzled then smiled. "You have rechristened the Sleeping Giant up there? He is harmless now, but watch out when he wakes. He rises about every fifty years."

"But what do those seven moons mean?"

"You! Have you seen them, too?"

"No, but I've heard a story about them."

"It is not in my power to explain it, it has been that way for many hundred years. Perhaps it is some condition of sky and sea, perhaps it is supernatural. But they always come before some earthquake or misfortune."

Then, thinking of his own, she ventured,—

"I wanted to tell you I was sorry—so sorry." She hesitated then asked gently:

"It was someone near to you—the one you lost, wasn't it? You don't mind my asking?"

"I understand and thank you. It was my mother."

He was quiet for a moment, in which she longed to take his hand, to express her sympathy in one of the thousand impulsive and eloquent ways which a woman's heart suggests in times of sorrow. But he was speaking again.

"My mother came with my father, and the big Alexandre

here, to the island six weeks ago. It was her only refuge from some trouble that has always followed her. My father lived only a week and, day before yesterday, I came to find her—dying. I had been looking for her for twenty years. I was glad to see her once more—even though it was the end.”

There was nothing that she could say to this, but he felt grateful for her silence, and that which her dark eyes expressed so plainly. Perhaps even this slight unburdening of his sorrow was a relief to the reserved wanderer, for excepting the girl in the big house on the mountain side, there was no one who could offer sympathy, and on her he could not lean. That was enough of a predicament already.

Sally turned towards the diggers on the beach.

“I must tell them to stop, Monsieur.” Unconsciously she called him this, although she had never had any but his imaginary countrymen of that High School course to practise on. “The island is yours and the gold, if there is any, belongs to you too.”

Now Charles Larone did a Quixotic and a handsome thing when he answered:

“No, if, as you say, there is any gold—and I think you will find it—it belongs surely to Monsieur Boltwood and yourself. I am only a rover who happened here. The buried treasure is the property of him who finds it. Good luck to your picks and shovels, Mademoiselle— But make that an N and try *five paces north*.”

It was indeed quite as fine a thing as if the duly recorded title to a California mine of richest vein, and not phantom

gold hidden by long forgotten pirates, had been at stake. Perhaps the whimsicality of the whole affair amused him, but had the actual doubloons lain gleaming before him, he would have made the same answer. And never had he needed the money so much as now.

And the existence of that gold was more than a legend with his people—it had grown to be a tradition, almost an accepted historic fact. The yellowing chart, stolen by the vagabond with the forking scar at the Café of Many Tongues, had been in their possession more than a century and a half. So, too, had been the picture of the ghost-ship, with the facsimile chart on its back, cut by the covetous painter from the frame still hanging on the wall of the deserted house. Even here the tradition had held, for disease and death had come to the culprit in the end.

Two hundred years ago the rich treasure had been cached on the island. If the reading of the ancient paper was right, the hiding place was on this very cape where even now the sailor's pick rang as it struck something hard—perhaps some coral formation or volcanic rock. No—it was a skull which the Captain held for a moment in his hands, then tossed away.

With that old chart had gone the warning that disaster and death, violent and sudden, would come to unsuccessful seekers and finders alike. But there had been this romantic codicil—no harm would come from the quest to lovers who had plighted their troth and kept it faithfully and true.

At this ancient superstition he would have laughed now, as never in the days of his boyhood. It was his last chance

after all his ill-starred wanderings. But—he had looked into the dark eyes and pure face of a girl, and another fairy tale, a very real one, was swiftly spun, there by the sands of the shining sea.

As for the girl, she did not realize what had happened. How could she? Like all good women, and many whom the world calls bad, she was quickly sensible to the appeal of misfortune, especially when so bravely borne as by this gallant Frenchman. She liked him better than anyone she had ever known on so short an acquaintance, and she felt—at home with him.

Perhaps—if Fate had cast them together on this island three years before—but that is a gambling in sentiment, a speculation on margin that benefits no one. Her love for her sailor sweetheart had not been like the river that had sprung full-grown in the stranger's heart, as swiftly as great streams were born when the earth was still young and in the throes of adolescence.

It had been like a mountain-rill's, in a later and well-ordered age, separated by a strip of green forest from its companion stream. Side by side they flow on in playful friendship, singing to each other as they go, until the silver threads of rills become swift running brooks, and then, swiftly dancing down the mountainside, they change to deep-flowing rivers in the valley. Farther on, at last they will join, on their way to the sea.

Back in the hills their course might have been deflected—but now?

So the eyes of the girl turned towards the opening in the green wild-wood, watching for the sturdy five foot eight of a not exactly graceful, but very dear, sailor boy. She didn't like that cavern at all.

But it was an entirely different sort of a person whose figure was framed by the wavering green tracery of the foliage,—a girl who stood studying them with the air of one who had been so engaged for some time, and, with that sixth or seventh sense of a woman deeply in love, wondering what had happened.

As she started towards them, her fingers agitatedly tore the scarlet petals of a flower from its dark centre. She was not wont to do that with the things she loved.

Languorously she walked, not indolently. Her graciously-curved figure had too much of latent vitality for that. Sally thought the dark rich olive line of the cheeks and throat, so flawlessly curved, and the soft brown eyes, really beautiful. The newcomer was dark, like that other visitor of the island, who called herself Carlotta, but her beauty was gentler than the metallic hardness of the good-natured dancer. It didn't occur to Sally that her own loveliness, with all the purity and delicacy of outline, compared not unfavourably with the other types. Three very distinct ones they were, though all dark, and quite as strongly contrasted, as if one of them had been suddenly changed to Titian, and one to bright blonde.

At the relationship between the man and the girl he called "Linda," Sally was puzzled. Chivalry, protection, were in his attitude. Was there more?

She welcomed her frankly, winning only a shy response.

The eyes of the strange girl were very soft, but something sharpened them now, and her strange concern placed a restraint on the other two.

It is a funny way Life has of snarling things. Sometimes the three fates are nothing but malicious cats. Linda's eyes were gazing at the man, his were bent on the younger girl, while she was watching the opening in the green, waiting for a fourth to appear. And the threads were even more badly snarled with Carlotta and Phil not far away.

Their attention was called to the blue sea again by the voice of Benson singing out to the skipper:

"If there ain't that black devil of a yacht again! If she'd only shake out some good canvas instead o' showin' them blasted funnels, I'd swear old Cap'n Bluebeard himself had his bloody claws on the wheel, or that woman-killer Lollinoy, with a chip of an iceberg for a heart. Wished I had a little eight-pounder and I'd send her to Davy Jones' locker where she belongs."

Trim and black, rakish and sinister, the yacht nosed her way over the blue, rounded the Cape, and, bearing South-west, cast anchor in the harbour which Ben had called "South Bay"—smaller and not so safe as Rainbow Bay.

Above the headland, they could see the twin needles of masts and the last grey blue feather of smoke, floating away.

Sally turned towards the mountain.

Over the decapitated cone hung, like a black ostrich plume, almost motionless, the same coil of smoke which she had seen at moonrise of the night before, but grown a little larger now.

CHAPTER XXX

FIVE PACES NORTH

ONE request the stranger made of Sally before he left, that Linda might stay with her until next morning when Pierre the boatman expected to start on the return voyage to the port. Even if more respectably run than in her step-father's devious régime, the Café of Many Tongues would yield a living, and she could not stay in the house on the mountain with him. So, after a farewell to Linda, gentle and considerate but not at all the one her heart longed for, the young Frenchman started towards his lonely lodgings, with the big Alexandre, who returned a half-hour later with her few belongings.

What the girl called Linda suffered through Larone's decision, only Sally guessed, seeing her hands like twin white moths flutter after his vanishing figure, then clench tightly as if she could so choke back the tears. It was several moments before she heard her new friend calling. She followed silently to the beach, where the golden and orange banners of a great fire were waving royally in a prankish breeze. And she made only a dumb show of eating, sitting as far apart from the others as she could without seeming ungracious, and never uttering a word.

The fish which that indefatigable Jack-of-all trades, Spanish Dick, had caught, was sizzling in the pan, flanked with appetizing brown slabs of bacon, when Ben returned.

Even in later years he never would admit as much, but I have always had a feeling that he did not like that cavern any more than Sally. It must have been awesome, for it was already growing late when he climbed over the seawall, and rather dark. Still, in the warmth of the fire and her welcome, he hailed her cheerily enough:

"It's an N and it means—"

"*Five paces North*," she finished for him.

"Five yards, or rods, or something or other, North, but how did you guess?"

"Someone told me just now."

"Someone *told* you."

"Yes, guess."

"Not Spanish Dick again."

"No—it was a stranger. And, oh, Ben it was the man I saw in the haunted house up yonder."

"What's his name? Who is he?"

"Charles Larone. I asked him several questions—all I could decently—and yet, come to think of it, he didn't tell much about himself. He's had a lot of trouble in his life."

"I thought he didn't tell you much about himself."

"He didn't. I did know he lost his mother, that beautiful old lady who died on the island. I could guess the rest. He was very handsome, and I did like him so much."

If, instead of two-stepping in a Salthaven parlour, Stella had been there, she would have declared that Sally was try-

ing to "get a rise out of the fellow." This accusation would have been unjust in this particular instance, and Ben should have realized from her frank confidence that her interest in the stranger was only natural and not sentimental enough then to arouse any jealousy—or was it?

Anyway, he was young and a lover, and he had just been brushing up against skeletons and ominous birds in that unholy cavern, so he grew more sarcastic still, not a normal vein for one of his robust and tolerant nature.

"Handsome, huh, and you feel so sorry for him, and you like him so much!"

The girl appeared delighted with this, and indulged in light-hearted singing and spasmodic bursts of merriment, all through the evening meal—only—she devoted her attention to young Jack Beam and Linda, quite ignoring Ben except to ask once or twice with an overcordial smile:

"Mr. Boltwood, will you be *so good* as to pass the pepper-box" or

"Mr. Boltwood, may I trouble you for the salt," etc., etc.

The accent on the words was tantalizing, and a sort of challenge in itself. And Ben looked bewildered, not knowing how to trump such a feminine lead.

The meal over, they busied themselves with clearing up the dishes, and making preparations for the night.

While the rest were sleeping, breathing lightly or heavily as the case might be, Sally raised the flap of her tent and stole out into the thick grass.

The moon, still the *one* solitary wanderer, was an hour

above the horizon. A faint suggestion of haze surrounded its perfect outline, like the soft fumes of a copper furnace when the fires are low. And yet it was very beautiful and so clear that, as she gazed at it steadily, she could almost distinguish the relief of the great shadow continents upon its bright silver surface.

It was then that they came along the shore—the five figures, now clearly silhouetted against the sand, now more vaguely outlined against the indigo of the ocean which, as she sat there, seemed to swell to meet the lighter sky, speckless save for those stars—whether gold or silver she could not decide—and for that glorious moon over her shoulder. Then as she looked back at it—yes—she was sure of it now—there appeared, in the haze over the summit, with the moon, six others, like her shadows, if shadows are ever cast in palest white, floating ghostily near the main planet, like sundogs around the sun.

She closed her eyes to rub them clear, opened them—the apparitions—if such they were—were gone.

A little from fright, and more from caution, the girl knelt in the long grass as the five figures advanced by the rising tide.

Their gaits were eloquent of their characters, the tall man with the rolled-up canvas, moving with easy though calculated steps, the burly figure with the bulky shoulders and the suspicious crouch, stepping with feet wide apart. The slighter one at his right walked with the spring of youth, but swaggered a little, the hat tilted on one side. Bringing up the rear, the short bowlegged man trudged along, behind the others,

pausing now and then for replenishment from a solid, dark object in his hip pocket. The fifth was equipped with petticoats, rippled by the evening breeze. She was hatless and zigzagged nervously, jerking her head this way and that, with quick, curious motions. Far out on the cape they stole, and bent over to examine the yawning holes which punctured the surface around the sentinel palm.

Now, two others followed them, stealthily, from the camp. The sturdy one of medium height was Ben, she knew, the heavier, slowly moving one, the Captain.

Earlier in the evening she might have been offended with the boy, but even in this slender maiden with the spiritual eyes lurked the sleeping tigress instinct. It awoke now that she saw him walking into danger.

A gruff challenge sounded on the night air. Ben had met his enemy at last. His level, watching gaze was bent, not on MacAllister, but on the bruiser and the jaunty young man. She recoiled a little—it was the first time she had seen Phil Huntington since Spanish Dick came to the church with the message, that eventful night.

The other man must be the one who had hit Ben so foully from behind on the Salthaven sands, the time he had told her about. For his own sake, she had begged him to forget that. But she knew men—and he was most certainly a man. They were so funny, so hard to manage in some things. They always insisted on revenge, on fighting things out. It was silly. Didn't do anybody any good at all—not at all. But if he *would* be so crazy-headed, she must look out for him.

She summoned the still-sleeping sailors, and then drew nearer, with beating heart, hoping in some way, she didn't just know how, to prevent that imminent conflict. Phil was "scrappy" enough and that other awful man was just spoiling for a fight—you could tell that by the ugly way he curved that shoulder and the way he swung his hands.

Her senses sharpened by her fear, she could distinguish what they were saying now—the Captain's caution: "Go easy, Ben, remember Sally's here"; the answer, "She's asleep, she won't know—I'm going to settle that little thing right here and now."

Now it was the cool, suave voice of the tall man:

"Good evening, gentlemen."

"Howdyedo." Ben slurred the greeting sarcastically and rudely. "What's the big idea? Sneaking around like a crew of oyster-pirates?"

He seldom lost his temper. It was generally pretty even. That was just the reason why she was frightened now that she saw it was thoroughly aroused, though still under some control.

Phil was saying with cool impudence:

"Why if it isn't Ben Boltwood! How are you Ben? Put her there, old top."

"Get out you—." Sally thought he called Phil by the name of the malodorous animal which all women shrink from, and oddly there recurred to her that old piece of advice by the uxorious king who never took any himself: "Evil Communications corrupt good manners." My! but her boy's were horrid that night. He was in bad company, sure enough.

"I'll tend to you after I've settled things with your thug friend here."

But she grew frightened when Pete at this uncomplimentary allusion detached himself from the group, sank into an even lower defensive crouch, thrusting forward his thick jaw insultingly and invitingly.

"If ye're looking for trouble, gents, we're glad to accommodate yer!"

But the Captain, essaying the thankless rôle of peacemaker, stepped in between them.

"Don't be a fool, Ben," he said a little roughly, then aloud:

"I don't know who you are, but you've got a right to stroll around this island as long as your intentions are all right. What are they?"

Sally felt relieved to have Captain Harve there. It was always good to have him around when there was trouble. He always seemed to be in command of himself as well as of his men. But, after all, it didn't work tonight.

"What the hell business 'av *you* got, buttin' in here," growled the man with the scar. She was near enough to see it now. It glowed peculiarly, she thought, and hatefully, even in the moonlight.

"Just because I tell you to get off," retorted Ben, circling around the barrier of the Captain's body and within a pace of the other's surly face. "Do you remember me?"

"No, s'elp me, I never seen yer ugly mug before."

"Take another look. But that's so, you only saw my back before."

The bruiser leered mockingly. He seemed to enjoy this hugely.

"Pretty, ain't yer? I'd spoil it for yer if it wasn't for yer old granpop there. It might break his heart to see his little grandson hurted. Better beat it, sonny, while the goin's good."

Then Sally heard three things all at once,—the harsh cry of Carlotta—she recognized the dancer now—calling: "For Gawd's sake, stop 'em, Mac, the big guy's gotta gun"; the cool voice of the leader, who before had seemed utterly indifferent, cutting the night air: "Don't be a damn fool, Pete, they're not looking for trouble"; and the more telling comment of Ben's arm—yes, she could have sworn she heard the impact on the bone and gristle of Pete's forehead, flush on the scar.

The hairy forearm countered. On the stomach. It hurt too. Ben grunted angrily, then rushed him. Pete's footwork was slow and heavy, and the boy caught him again on the scar. The white mark changed to angry red, but the bruiser got one back, an ugly one, on the mouth this time. Ben turned his head swiftly. He was spitting blood.

"Stop them," shrieked Sally, then looked around. Jack Beam, Benson, Yeo, and the gypsy, had joined the group, forestalling any foul play.

The fighters clinched and struggled over the smooth place to the north of the palm. Three neat ones, right, left, and right again, Ben got to the ribs, and Pete clinched, crouching still lower in agony like a wounded bear. Recovering in the infighting, he curved his fist viciously around to the kidney

—again—and again. As they lurched, panting and writhing, in a gleam of the moonlight, the girl saw her lover's face. It was distorted with pain.

They broke, and Ben hooked an uppercut to the centre of the chin, snapping it up so sharply it seemed as if the neck must crack. He had come back! He was fighting gloriously! Two more on the mouth and one on the heart. Pete backed, spewing forth crimson slather, and tumbled into the ditch.

At the brink Ben waited, his heart pounding, chest heaving, fists lowered a little but ready. Phil leaped for him and MacAllister and Old Man Veldmann flanked the Captain.

But the gun which Carlotta had seen was out. Its muzzle, coldly blue in the moonlight, swung in an ominous arc, covering the cursing old sinner and MacAllister's face, which was white, as usual, but did not flinch an inch.

"Avast, ye blackguards!" The Captain's own blood was up now. "*This* fight's to be on the square."

MacAllister glanced around. The three sailors surrounded him, itching for an active share in the excitement.

"A quick draw for a man of your age, Captain," replied the imperturbable one.

"Never mind my age, better look to your man," retorted the valorous skipper.

"You're right, let them get it out of their system. Do 'em good. You don't mind my changing this for a cigarette?"

He pocketed his gun, and sifted the grains into the paper, humorously eyeing the fallen gladiator.

"We're not throwing the towel in yet, Pete."

The latter was dragging himself over the sandy parapet,

bloody foam bubbling from his mouth and nostrils, two streams, dark-red—almost black in the night—trickling down until they were caught in the hairy chest, and a big, puffed-out, blue-black mass, which ring-followers call a “mouse,” over his left eye, contrasting oddly with the fiery scar.

Ben stepped back to let him get his footing.

“Round two—” cursed the old man, thrusting before Pete’s face a flask, from which, seeing his opponent scornfully waiting, the bruiser, spewing the bloody froth from his mouth, took a swift gulp. The taste of the whiskey, and his own swallowed blood, fired him a little, and he rushed like the wounded boar Sally had seen on the trail, straight towards the boy, bellowing blasphemies and obscenities.

The attack was savage. Sally couldn’t understand how Ben escaped any of the blows from the great fists, smashing through the air and landing, many of them, with the force of those powerful machines that drove the piles in the mud around the Salthaven docks. She clenched and unclenched her own small hands, and bit her lips till little dark beads stood on them, then prayed with sobbing intakes of breath.

“Oh God! Oh God! Give him strength, give him strength. Save him!”

She rushed to Captain Brent, and clutched his arms with both her hands.

“Stop them. Oh Uncle Harve, why *don’t* you stop them! You’ve got the gun. Shoot them. Do anything. Only save him for God’s sake.”

“They’ve got to fight it out. This is men’s work, Sally. Sorry you had to see it. Don’t be afraid—look at that!”

But she retreated from him in an agony of anger and fear.

“You’re heartless—you’re all alike—all b-b-b-brutes.”

Pete’s head was rocking with two furious swings from Ben’s right—but again the boy had to give way. The mechanic was no quitter, and that whiskey was a fiery juice that had started the dynamo of his powerful frame to wild swift working.

Still she must look on—she could not keep away—so she stood, moaning piteously every once in a while, just on the outside of the circle of men that moved this way and that as the battlers swayed. Between the heads and shoulders of the ring, and the driving blows, she caught a glimpse of his face. It was covered with bruises and blood, like Pete’s. Now the moon shone directly on it. She hardly knew those blue eyes, ablaze with a fire that was at once deadly and yet very cold. They sickened as a blow thudded above the heart.

Again his face was hidden in a clinch—all a snarl of straining bodies, rolling heads, heaving chests, and locking legs, and, now and then, short six-inch jabs that looked feeble because of the hindered leverage, yet each of which carried agony.

Why didn’t they stop them! She hated that downward blow on the back of Ben’s neck. If they must fight, why weren’t they forced to fight fair?

They broke from the clinch. What was the matter? The whiskey driven tide of courage had ebbed from the fighter’s heart. He stood rocking on his legs, now spread wide apart, a silly grin on his reddened mouth. His jaw hung limply.

The boy gathered himself together like a bundle of tightened springs. Straight and true, swift as a piston flashes when the engine speeds on at seventy miles an hour, the blow drove to the jaw. Pete rocked; swayed gently; his head sank on one side; the powerful knees sagged like a child's. In a flash the girl saw the boy measure the tottering figure. Once, in a paddock, she had seen a farmer strike a doomed steer with an axe. The first blow was not true. She remembered the thud. He lifted the axe a second time. It was like Ben's measuring glance. Again Ben's fist shot out, straight for the jaw with the silly grin, and the stricken fighter crumpled in a heap like the falling steer.

"No need of countin' this time," said Jack Beam.

His face, like the others gathered round under the murmuring palm, had a savage look. Even the good-natured dancer's was gazing in an unholy fascination at the victor's. Why were men like that—and women, too? Were they human beings after all? Even Uncle Harve—and Ben. She sobbed aloud. Then she saw the boy's bleeding face, his figure, relax. She sprang towards him, but he straightened and brushed her aside with that steel forearm. The lust of battle was still there.

"Now, Huntington, put up your dukes—if you're not *all* yellow."

That youth accepted the challenge, forcing an unconcern which he was far from feeling, but the Captain, Benson, and the gambler, stepped forward.

"Enough for tonight, young fellow," said the former, "I'm in command here."

The reaction came, and Ben staggered, as if he, too, would have fallen. Placing his arms over their shoulders, Jack Beam and the bosun helped him towards the camp.

A half-hour later, cold water and the flask revived the fallen gladiator sufficiently to make the journey back, and the evil crew retreated along the beach, very slowly, towards South harbour where lay the yacht.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RUBY

OF a truth Sally felt that the gold—if there was any after all, she firmly repeated to herself—had already been ensanguined sufficiently to justify Spanish Dick's prophecies. Still the gypsy insisted on reassuring her, thus pleasantly :

“It is only the leetle beginning, Señorita. When you speak so soft to El Capitain and put your pretty cheek up against his much whiskers—so—he always say ‘yes.’ You speak to heem now, and tell heem to sail away in the beeg ship, pronto, yes?”

In the early morning, when last night's memories hung like a fog over the dreary, drenched surface of her consciousness, she was tempted to follow his advice.

She thought of Ben and shuddered. Never had she seen him as he was on the night before. Had he, too, been bewitched by some unholy spell of the place? They had *better* sail away.

But, after all, she ought to be glad that it was the brute with the ugly face and the scar, who had fallen, and not the man she had loved. She gave a sob of thankfulness—then, in her distracted state, was horrified at herself. *Had* loved? What could she be thinking! She caught the phrase floating through her mind like an evil winged thing of the night and

strangled it. But if she should see him like that again, in the awful rage, her love would surely die. Still—he was hurt. She must go to him, do something for him.

On the vitality of young manhood she hadn't reckoned; and, in the tumult of her thoughts, was almost sorry when she saw him swimming through the breakers. Perhaps, if she could have nursed him, if he had needed her, some of the pain in her heart might have assuaged. But he was greeting her cheerily now, as if there never had been any night before. Dismal and reproachful was the glance she gave him, though it softened a little when her eyes dwelt on the bruises, still discolouring his face in spite of his plunge in the cool waters.

"Ben, dear, promise me one thing."

"Sure, what is it?"

"That you won't fight again, except in self-defense."

"What would you have a man do? There are some things a man can't stand."

"Revenge doesn't pay—ever. It's better to stand some things than to turn into a—a—"

"A what, Sally?"

"A *beast*—there, now you know what I think."

"Was it as bad as all that?"

"Yes—it was."

She looked away; the lips quivered.

He took her in his arms.

"All right, Sal old girl, I'll promise."

There, in its proper resting-place, the morbid thoughts flew away from her head. And she didn't mind at all that his

strong embrace wet her almost to the skin. Here in this paradise, no one cared for toilette, or fashions, or any such silly, shackling things, anyway. Nor did she notice that the black ostrich plume of the sleeping giant was larger even than on the night before.

The first cup of coffee was midway between the rock that served for a table, and her lips, when she jumped up suddenly, spilling the liquid in her haste.

"We forgot."

"What?"

"*Five paces North!*" she shouted joyously.

He whistled.

"Go to it, youngsters," interrupted the Captain. "But you'd better get breakfast first. *We're* going to, at any rate."

Swallowing a few hasty mouthfuls, they seized pick and shovel, and scampered over the beach. Somehow, Ben didn't move very swiftly this morning, and she beat him to the palm.

She started the measuring.

"Hold on, that won't do," he called. "Your legs are not as long as a pirate's, Sally."

So he paced off the distance that a normal man would cover in the measurement apparently specified by the chart, and soon his shovel was working away, a little more stiffly and painfully than on the day before, but right willingly nevertheless. Soon the others joined them, relieving Sally, who hovered over the designated spot in almost an ecstasy of excitement.

Deeper and wider grew the trench. Each time the implements rang on something harder than the sand and gravel, the

girl almost shrieked, but no crumbling wood or rusted iron, and certainly no gleaming gold, rewarded their staring eyes.

An hour flew by, and Sally straightened to her full height to relieve her aching back.

* Her clenched hand flew to her mouth. Last night's memories were still too fresh, so, hesitating to warn Ben, she crossed over to the Capitan.

"There they are again," she whispered.

Sure enough, those graceless vagabonds were sauntering along the beach, irregularly, as a pack of scavenging dogs prowling through city streets. They were five, as on the night before, only the Pink Swede had taken the place of the incapacitated Pete.

When they reached the neck of the cape, they threw themselves on the beach, regarding the workers, Sally even at that distance was sure, with malicious and threat'ning leers. She couldn't hear what they were saying, for they were out of earshot, though not of gunshot, as Captain Brent made certain, glancing at the rifle lying on the mound, now on a level with Benson's head.

For a resting spell, sorely needed, Ben threw down his pick and shovel, and, climbing out of the trench, sat on the mound. He saw them, too, and was for starting for them at once. But there was "that darn promise." He stopped short, and, sitting down again, surveyed the crew.

"Never mind, son," said Benson, "there ain't no law to prevent them cuckoos from a-settin' there sunnin' themselves, even if you are the Pshaw of this here island—that is so long as they don't lay any eggs in our nests. But come to

take a squint at 'em, them birds look more like buzzards, don't they now?—a hatchin' out wicked little notions. And there's nothing I'd enjoy more than shootin' a mean-beaked undertaker of a buzzard, especially if he was waitin' to pick my bones."

These ruminations were an excellent excuse for a rest from the boresome work with the pick, and Benson, first twisting off a corner of a plug as dark as mellow New Orleans molasses, continued, shifting his figures a bit:—

"Buzzards—did I call 'em *buzzards*? No, son, that's hard on the birds—they're more like pussy-footed, slimy-hearted octypusses, with bilge-water instid o' red blood in their veins.

"Ever seen an octypuss? They got eight arms with a hundred suckers on each arm. I seen one oncet. It drowned a man in the Bay o' Biscay; sucked him right under. It wahn't no pleasant sight, either,—them big, snaky arms a-coilin' round his neck, a-stranglin' the poor cuss, and the wicked-lookin' eyes a grinnin' like the Devil himself had turned into a fish.

"But Lor', them devil-fish over there can't catch nothin' but crabs, though they'll try and start suthin' afore the sun sets, or I don't know a maintop from a cutwater.

"They got a female bird with them, with red and yaller feathers. That there petticoat sets in the breeze like a sail on a lugger. But look out for her, my boy. I seen a little picture card onct, in a store up Boston way, with tape around it. It had some chantey of Shakespeare's I guess it was, a-written on it, somethin' about the female o' the species

bein' more deadly than the male. Now that man knowed lots. I've got a wife and——"

Meanwhile Sally was getting impatient and called out:

"Ben, are you intending to save up that gold—if there *is* any—for a Christmas present?"

Could they have heard, they would have been surprised at the gambler's occupation. He was softly whistling a sentimental ballad whose burden was the sorrow of a mother over her wandering son. It was a melodious whistle, like that of some gentle forest bird, and it issued from his bloodless lips with a great deal of feeling and expression.

"When d'ye want us to rush them ——s," asked Old Man Veldmann, his bleary eyes yearning for excitement, as long as there was prospect of his being a secure spectator. He felt barred out by age from actual conflict, and was content with his rôle of wicked, old Nestor to the party, though his advice consisted of little besides qualifying expletives.

"You ban a wise old bird," jeered the Pink Swede, the cunning twist of his usually expressionless mouth belying the vacuous look of his eyes, which had the chalky blue of watered milk. "The chief he ban no little baby. They do the dirty work. We cop the gold."

MacAllister, making no comment, whistled another stave of the pathetic ballad.

"Gee! but you get my nerve," screamed Carlotta. "You're too *darned* cool. Has Pink got it right?"

He carefully polished off the last trill to his satisfaction before he vouchsafed a reply.

"Sure, let *them* sweat for it."

"I always did say you was a man of intelligence, but, Mac, will you promise, when you're through we'll sail back where we can see some real human asphalt once more, where Long-acre Square splits old Broadway and Seventh, and the pianos are banging out the latest song-hits on the Alley—say, won't you, Mac?"

"If you're a good little girl and don't make any fuss."

"And say, Mac, no more rough-stuff. I ask you like a pal. These guys are white folks, and I like that little ongenoo.

"Honest-to-Gawd," she finished in a wail of homesickness and foreboding, "I wish you'd beat it now. That gold won't do no one no good."

"No more of that, Carlotta, or I'll lock iron bracelets on you, and throw you in the percolater of that volcano up there."

She looked up in fright, not so much at the threat as at what she saw.

"Look there, Mac, it's smoking now."

"Sure! You'd better be good."

"But it's smoking, I *tell you*. We've gotta get away."

"Oh, it does that all the time."

"It wasn't when we landed."

But the sun was shining brightly, and the mountain was as blue, the woods as green, as ever they had been, so the trousered four fell to playing cards, while she of the petticoat like a red-lugger sail leaned on the younger man's shoulder, indicating from time to time the proper play, to his growing irritation.

And all the while, up and down, up and down, ceaselessly

went the picks; down and up, down and up, went the shovels, tossing the shining clouds of sand.

The heads of the delvers were below sea level now, and water was seeping around their boots.

"It's a fake lead, Ben," said the bosun, "we've gone eight feet now."

Ben vaulted to the level again. The captain was coming towards them, a bit restless after the holiday, and eager to see the wind belly the sails of his ship once more.

"No luck, Ben?" he asked, his middle finger tamping the olive shavings, mixed with black speckles of perique in the bowl of his pipe.

"It's nothing but a fool yarn after all. We were crazy to even half believe it," replied the boy. He surveyed the area around them, which, with its dozens of trenches, looked as if it had been sown all over with little sticks of dynamite and impatiently discharged by some seeker for the gold.

"That handsome friend of yours, Sally, was joshin' you."

"Not at all, Mr. Benjamin Boltwood, *I* believe him."

"You'd better not," the Captain interrupted. "Anyway, our spree is over."

"You promised *three* days. Wait till tonight," she pleaded. "You men make me tired, if you want to know the truth. Ben give *me* that pick."

Into the ditch she leaped, not caring at all that the water soaked the black ties, and struggled with the pick, while Ben laughed at the height she raised the heavy implement in the air.

“Laugh away—but I’m going to find something, I *know* I am.”

Nine times she drove the point. At the last, she called in excitement :

“Hear that?”

“What?”

“Listen!”

But just as she spoke, she struggled with the pick. The point had caught in something. It was wrested free; fell again.

A dull ring!

“Don’t you hear it?”

Another metallic sound, a little sharper this time, as the pick, driven with renewed force, fell again.

“The shovel, Ben!”

The boy and the bosun leaped down by her side.

Two shovelfuls Ben scooped and threw over the parapet, almost blinding Sally in his eagerness.

Another—the implement grated along a smooth, hard surface whose substance was like its own.

Sparks snapped from the impact.

Iron!

Yes—it was. He brushed off the remaining particles of sand with his cap——

The rusted metal cover of a great chest was revealed.

Forgetting the watchers, the girl shouted.

“Look out, there’s no use letting *them* know,” warned Ben.

The group on the shore had paused midway in the deal and were gazing intently in their direction.

"I've a hunch that there's a nice fat jackpot over there," said MacAllister, "and we're going to rake it in ourselves. We don't need to draw to our hands either. Just stand pat, boys, just stand pat."

"Shovel a little away from the ends, Ben," Sally was ordering.

Then they sought for the handles.

"Here, where my pick caught," she said.

"My! but it's heavy," Benson exclaimed. "Lor'! it must be's full of gold beauties as a kiyoodle of fleas."

"Fetch a crowbar," called the boy, and Jack Beam ran for the required article, while the others,—Linda, the Captain, old Joe Bowling, and Spanish Dick, crowded round.

The long object was swept clean, and lay there before their eyes,—a massive chest, as long as a coffin, with crude figures upon it, and encrusted with a coat left by the centuries, a hard composition, terra-cotta coloured, of rust, and sand, and the dust of coral and burned-out lava. The padlock and clasps had been huge and strong when clamped by the horny hands of the hidiers; they had been made triply tight by the cunning fingers of Father Time.

"Lid won't budge," growled Benson. "It sticks like it had been soldered by the Devil himself."

Followed an hour of suspense for the watchers around the ditch, and of obscene speculation from the wicked crew on the beach.

The chest was not empty. That much was certain. But did it contain the treasure? For all they knew, it might be laden with tools or firearms stowed away by filibusters who

had never returned to finish their nefarious expedition. Or—it might even be full of rocks left by some Gargantuan practical joker, some whimsical bygone lord of the island, some mischievous genie of the place.

An hour—an age, it seemed,—of suspense—of struggling shoulders, prying and twisting and forcing; of grunts, masculine exclamations, and feminine sighs.

But in the end something snapped—gave way. At last it had yielded to the persuasion of muscle and iron.

Slowly, grudgingly, with creaks of protests—while it seemed as if the four watchers above had turned into illustrations of suspended animation at some surgeon's clinic—the lid rose.

From under the dark shutter, as if a dark cloak had been suddenly lifted from a field of dandelions, or a thunder-cloud removed from the sun, leaped a shining, a dancing of many lights such as they had never seen before, such as only Pizzaro and his rugged warriors had gazed upon when they stood transfixed and speechless in the shrines of the palaces of Peru.

So at last that part of the fairy tale came true.

"It *is*, it *is*, the gold!" breathed Sally in an awed whisper, her eyes expanding with both terror and delight, as they stared at the shining things. There they lay, rivalling the fabulous fortunes of the Old Incas she used to read about in the histories, and yet as carelessly strewn as the cheap bone buttons in Aunt Abigail's work box.

An old slang phrase, used half-jestingly before, but in very truth now, sprang unconsciously to her lips:

“I didn't know there was so much money in all the world.”

For they shamed the very sun, those gleaming coins, some inscribed with queer old queens' heads, others with crowns or the profiles of old, forgotten Kings, some newly-minted, and others worn with centuries of travel up and down the highway of ancient empires and in great galleons on the seas.

They had jingled in the pockets of gay caballeros in sunny Madrid; accompanied the muleteers' bells on the heights of the Pyrenees; rung on the counters of shops in Londontown when women wore headdresses like cornucopias, girdles and sweeping trains. They had been fought for by musketeers when Richelieu was more than King, and in garrets in the shadow of Notre Dame, caressed by shrivelled misers' hands. To turbaned Turks they had been carried in ransom, and stolen by bandits in doublets of green from rubicund monks on ambling palfreys.

Coveted, caressed, cursed, lied for, fought for, bled for—the shining cause of all the sins of the decalogue, at last they were wrested by buccaneers with dripping swords yet shouting hoarse *Te Deums*—from the holds of shattered ships—when the New World was really new.

And now that it was old, to lie at the feet of a modern young maiden who had never had even a gold eagle to spend on pretty things!

The sun, now high over head, shot down his flaming arrows, transforming into living rainbows the clusters of gems between the crevices of the golden piles—emeralds as green as the deep sea when it takes that hue; sapphires as blue as the sea when it changes again; diamonds like minia-

ture Northern Lights; topaz-rings, warm as honey distilled by the busiest of the queen-bees; amethysts rivalling the lavender tinted hepaticas of the woods; and rubies!

Their crimson beauty fascinated the girl, and she thrust her hand between the yellow discs, and picked up the largest gem. Holding it in her fingers, she turned it slowly until the sun, not in jealousy this time but in warning perhaps, shot another arrow through it, spilling little crimson reflections on the pieces in the chest.

"See, see!" shrieked the gypsy. "It is the blood! The yellow is stain' with red."

The girl looked down.

The crimson splashes were very vivid.

The ruby dropped from her limp fingers into the chest again.

Ben bent over, and, perhaps, to soothe her fears as much as to seal their troth, picked up a ring—it was a plain gold band—and tenderly took her hand.

"You haven't had a ring yet, you know, Dear."

"No—not that. Not from that chest. See! It is a wedding ring, perhaps cut off with the hand of some girl bride. No, there's blood on it," she gasped. "Wait till we get up North."

She hadn't noticed the latest comer who had joined the group, he whose face told of many things, as he listened to that last speech. As he glanced at the treasure in the chest, then at the awestruck mariners, the sadness of his eyes was lost in that half-quizzical expression, so mixed with shadow and sunshine that it had won Sally's heart—in a way.

That sense of the proportion of things, which we call humour, grows acute after one has wandered up and down the world, as that tiny bubble spins round its sun through unfathomed space. And if one has lost at almost every turn, and has a nature both sound and sweet, shadows become high-lights in an amusing picture, ever shifting and changing and—well, he can smile then at many things.

He was addressing her in that voice which was so full of haunting music, and courtesy, and gentleness, especially with her.

“Do not be afraid, Mademoiselle. The treasure is a fact now—the superstition which the good Richard repeats, nothing but a—superstition.”

“But I’m afraid of superstitions. They seem so real here.”

“Besides,” the Frenchman answered, “there is a romantic codicil to the will, which the old pirates left, so ironically, in that chart on the stone in the cavern, and on the old yellow chart, and the one on the back of the ghost picture.”

“I see it all now,” the girl exclaimed. “The canvas which that man had, that tall man who always makes me shiver—he’s staring at us now, there, over on the beach—was taken from the frame that hangs in the house in the mountain.”

“You saw it, then,” he replied. “Yes, it was stolen, years ago, by a wandering painter who came here and sought the gold, but could not find it. Later, he wandered back to your own land, Mademoiselle, trying to fit out an expedition to search for the treasure. But he never came back, so the tale runs,” he added grimly. “The curse must have followed him—even up there.”

"The curse!" The girl shivered as she had when she looked at the tall man.

"Yes, but it will not, cannot, follow you, for the romantic codicil was written on the back of the original yellow chart—it was stolen from someone I knew by a man with a scar——"

"A scar—was it like a streak of forked lightning across the cheek, with another funny one over it—like—like the button of an electric bell?"

"If he was also very ugly, yes, but how did you know that?"

She touched his elbow with her fingers.

It was the lightest of gestures, and no one saw the expression of wistfulness that softened his eyes, for one fleeting second, then vanished.

"Do you see those masts?" Her hand pointed to the south-east. "Well, the *gentleman's* on that yacht—resting. Ben had an argument with him last night," she added, with an expression of mingled disgust and satisfaction.

"Do not worry about *him*. He was looking for the gold—the curse will follow him, if it has not already." He looked at her sailor sweetheart and smiled.

"And us?" It was a mournful, almost frightened way she asked this question.

"*Oh, not for you, not for you.*" The sudden vehemence, the subdued passion of the words, gave them the effect of a heart-wrung petition, so much so that Ben looked at the stranger, for he really was that to them still, with a puzzled, inquiring glance that was not entirely free from suspicion.

Noticing this, the man who called himself Larone shot back a smile—winning enough to have disarmed any but a youth bristling with lover's doubts and alarms.

"You see," the former assured her, "the romantic codicil provides an escape. Perhaps it was not written by the pirates themselves, for the rogues wallowed in blood, not sentiment; perhaps it was added long ago by some owner of the place, or some spirit who rules over it. But it holds nevertheless.

"It says that no harm shall come of the gold to seeking lovers if they have plighted their troth, and so long as they remain faithful and true.

"You have complied with all those conditions, have you not, Mademoiselle?"

Her dark eyes were luminous now—and yet they were moist at a poignant note in the question.

Did she guess? I wonder! She never later mentioned such suspicions, if she had any, even in strictest confidence to her closest friend. No, we forget. There was one time——

But she was speaking rapidly and hysterically to Ben; for some queer reason she could not trust herself just then to address the stranger.

"How blind we are! Don't you see? This treasure's not ours. It's *his*. Oh I forgot"—she turned nervously. It was a funny interruption. "Monsieur Larone, Mr. Boltwood, Captain Brent." So on down the line she introduced them. She seemed to be talking against time, to regain her wits which had stampeded suddenly. "I tell you, Ben, that treasure's *his*—oh, why don't you say something?"

Of course she hadn't given him time, and his masculine

mind refused to follow this swift feminine leap at conclusions. She didn't wait for him, but ran on far ahead.

"You lived in that house!" she cried to the stranger. "You knew the charts. You told me 'five paces north.' Why did you do that?"

He shook his head.

"You are wrong. As I told you yesterday, I am just a rover—who happened here. As for the legends, they are known to all who have sailed these seas. The gold would have been found before, perhaps, by someone with the chart, for it was floating around the world for many, many years. That is, they would have found it, if they had had the wit to read the chart as you had, and if they had not feared the place. It is dreaded by every man, white and black, in the Caribbees. Even the owners fled long ago. Shipwreck and fever, murder and earthquake, and visits from the unseen powers—a long chain of disasters—have linked this island-paradise to the Devil himself.

"And yet it is so lovely." He sighed as his glance ranged from the serene blue mountain down over the exquisite shadings of the green terraces, to the coral strip bordered by the white wreaths of foam, now receding as if in fear, and again rushing on as if they could not resist the allure of its beauty.

"If I had come first," the musical voice went on, dreamily now, as if he himself had fallen for a moment under the spell, "I might have found the gold. But you came first. It is rightfully yours, your wedding-gift from Heaven, Mademoiselle, even though planted by wicked old pirates. And it is not half rich enough for so sweet and lovely a bride."

Afterwards, Sally learned the whole story, but not knowing it then, all she could say was :

“Take half of the treasure. You at least gave me the clue.”

“You would have guessed it anyway. You were not far from the spot—and remember the conditions and the warning. To me it would have perhaps brought evil.”

So for some Quixotic reason which had ruled and, the practical world would say, had ruined his life, some outworn code of *Noblesse Oblige*, perhaps the heritage of his race, he resolutely refused. In the end he did compromise, but not for himself. It was when he glanced at Linda, standing with downcast eyes and gazing mournfully out at sea, that he consented that twice the share which fell to the sailors should go to her, and a few gold pieces each to the helpless mute and the boatman Pierre.

At this concession Sally wondered, for it showed how little he believed the old tradition. In fact, in the brightened mood of the moment, she snapped her own fingers at the old mummery.

The division was arranged to take place in the morning, so they parted, with Larone’s last warning, given in an undertone to the Captain.

“Pardon my advice, but I would plan to sail now, Captain Brent. Pierre will start with Linda in the morning. The Sleeping Giant up there is beginning to wake. He does every fifty years.”

“How about yourself, my friend?” the Captain answered. He was a good judge of men, almost always.

But the stranger smiled and shook his head.

The card-players on the beach had vanished now, and it was growing dark. The coast was clear and they sought their camp.

In spite of the golden fortune, Sally's sleep that night was as troubled as on the night after the visit to the cavern in the mountain. The same buzzard, mast-high, with fiery evil eyes that grew to the size of cartwheels, tore at her heart. The same gibbering shapes pursued her and the mountain spat fire, only its sparks changed into yellow ingots and coins, that rolled in a golden flood down the slopes and buried her, suffocated her.

From the dream, as before, she woke—it must have been almost three in the morning—to see, as she thought, five shadowy figures creeping over the sands towards the place where old Joe Bowling, on his watch, the last of the night, was standing guard over the chest.

She tried to scream, but could not. Her throat seemed paralyzed; a film swam before her eyes, pierced by sharp, whirring lightnings centred by the moon. A moment ago there had been seven.

But she heard one agonized cry—then all was still.

For some time she must have sat in this stupor, then the mists cleared.

Out on the cape all seemed peaceful and quiet in the lovely moonlight. And the rigid figure of the sentry still sat on the chest, motionless, his rifle resting on his arm.

Out in the open the sailors slept the heavy sleep of wearied toilers.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SENTRY

HER eyes had not deceived her. Next morning the chest was gone. While the sailors were sleeping so heavily, those shadows had taken the treasure away.

Yes, it was surely gone, for as she advanced towards the sentry, after her first chill of disappointment and fear, she could see the object on which he sat. It was not shaped like the chest—it was round and black—a driftwood log!

How could they have done it? Old Joe was nobody's fool. He was at his post even now, not pacing up and down in military fashion, but still sitting bolt upright and gazing straight ahead, watchful and alert as a faithful sentry should be. Had they bodies of flesh and blood, those shadows she had seen steal across the cape, or phantom forms as intangible as the morning mist now stealing away in the dawn, with hands that could work evil more real and terrible than mortal rogue.

They *must* have been ghosts, the vengeful spirits of the old pirates themselves. She had never believed in such things. But could human hands have whisked away a ton of gold in an iron chest and placed there a driftwood log, while he was still standing guard? No, no—there were no such things. But how could they have fooled him— There were five!

A challenge was unnecessary in the broad daylight, but why didn't Joe answer her hail?

The mouth was open. That was it. Sleeping at his post! Yes, there were the furrows in the sand, where they had dragged the chest away. Sally was vexed. She grew very angry. His stupid carelessness had lost the treasure.

She shook him. Her hand recoiled at the touch. That figure was too stiff—too cold. She looked up—

The grey beard was matted with blood. And there was a knife, thrust cleanly through the throat, the reddened point emerging at the base of the skull.

The body fell aslant the log against which the thieves must have propped him when they dragged away the chest. But the rigid fingers did not drop the bright round things so tightly clutched, and with the fall of the body there was a dull clinking sound of something shifting within his shirt.

But the girl could neither see nor hear—she was as lifeless now as the body lying athwart the log, and the sailors, after they revived her, refrained from telling her of this last incident. But it troubled them mightily.

When they bent back the fingers and loosed the shining objects, they tossed them into the sea, like things accursed. The stolen chest they might seek later, but these at least they could never keep.

“This part of it we'll forget, boys,” said the Captain, when Sally was slowly coming to, “Old Joe had his one failing—love o' money, and the temptation was too much. But he had always been faithful and I never knew him to be dishonest before.”

And the boatswain, cap in hand, further defended the dead.

"Ye can't blame him much. It's the curse o' that devil's gold."

And the Frenchman, when he came to the camp, knew that he had made no mistake in his judgment. These simple-hearted seafaring folk, even allowing for their superstitious fears, were far more troubled over the death of their mate, than over the loss of the treasure that would have made them rich for the rest of their lives. And on the seas he had sailed and in the ports he knew, hearts like those were as rare as the treasure itself.

The simple burial service was performed by the Captain who remembered much of the short rite, having seen in his forty-five years at sea many weighted forms sink into the grey bosom of the ocean. A rough cross was raised above the mound, and around it the grasses murmured their own soft requiem, rippling in gentle waves like those of the sailor's home.

That the girl was almost heartbroken, the man could see. She blamed herself for the death of the old ship's carpenter. She had had warnings enough of all sorts. Why hadn't she heeded them—oh, why hadn't she stopped the search and sailed away!

Even after the last prayer was over, her head dropped like a flower, a lovely dark flower of the woods, and he in turn longed to comfort her, just as she had tried to comfort him because of that other rough cross back on the mountain side.

Passing strange are the ways of Fate. She, a beautiful thing and so frail, yet the daughter of a bleak New England coast, rigidly-nurtured; he the frank Gaul, from the genial shores of France. At the opposite poles, the world would say, and still not so far apart as that same world thinks. In ancestry, customs, and all outward things, unlike, yet akin in spirit and with the same clearness of vision.

An hour or two, all the converse he had ever had with her! Nevertheless he knew that that face with the dark eyes, sometimes roguish with laughter and lights of coquetry, again grave with wonder and mystery, yet always looking at him with that forthright glance, was the one he had been searching for, though unconsciously, all over the earth, even as he looked for the little old lady he had found too late. Too late? Yes, both too late.

If Fate could only have been kinder! Perhaps—if a year or two earlier— But *she* should be happy at any rate. And he—well, he had an hour or two—a meagre treasure to cherish, but those moments should be drops, fragrant with the double distilled quintessence of love . . . they would sweeten an ocean of memories— But that would come later. (He looked above at the mountain.) Now he must get her away.

She was talking with Captain Brent.

“I’d say to forget the gold and sail away as fast as the *North Star* can carry us. But there are the others to think of—their wives and children—and some of them, like poor Old Joe, have lots of grandchildren too—and all are poor. I don’t want it now—they can have all my share.”

Larone walked over, and apologizing, interrupted :

"My dear Captain, do not search for the thieves too long. To stay after today is to slap Fate in the face. It may take a month—a week—or a day—but trouble is sure to come—from up there—and what good would the gold be then?"

"Monsieur Larone is right," said Sally. "We ought to sail tomorrow."

"Perhaps—we'll see," was the only answer. The eyes of both the Captain and Ben, who had joined them, contracted in suspicion, which the latter voiced a few moments later, while the Frenchman was pleading earnestly with Sally.

"What's *his* idea, trying to scare us away? Do you think he's in with that gang? I never did trust these coffee-coloured chaps. South-Americans and Frenchmen, they're all alike,—smooth-talkers and quick with the knife." He accented the last word, peculiarly, significantly. Sally was right—Ben had not been himself. A very human jealousy and a little covetousness, also very human, had flowered from the root of all evil, in the heart of an otherwise nice boy.

The Captain turned his head towards the mountain, then answered coolly :

"We want to be fair, Ben. He doesn't look crooked. I don't like that smoke myself."

"Handsome rogues are the worst. He's hustling us off too quick. He offered to help in the hunt, but that's just a blind. He can't hang around here."

Perhaps he felt a little ashamed of himself—but only for a moment—when he saw what Sally was doing. On her knees in the freshly-turned earth, she was carving with Ben-

son's clasp-knife an inscription on the arm of the wooden cross, while little Don Alfonso looked on at the odd task, and the Frenchman was saying:

"You must not grieve, Mademoiselle, for your friend. You know there is a sea for old sailors somewhere beyond, which is fairer even than that out there, and its waves will never bring shipwreck."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BLACK YACHT

HER grief for the lifeless changed to concern for the living, as she saw Linda walking towards them. That same strained expression—of alarm, bitterness, and appeal, harshened the soft curves of the other's features, now at the height of their bloom.

Two teeth, as white as foam, bit the coral corner of Sally's mouth, as she puzzled over it all. People were so foolish. Why couldn't they be sensible! Ben was bad enough lately. Could it be? No it must not be. He (she wasn't thinking of Ben in that flash) was just the sort of a man to make a girl happy. Was she herself crazy? They must get back to Salthaven and normal ways of living soon or—(she didn't finish the disjointed sentence in her own mind). To her he could be nothing but a friend. She wanted him to be a friend always. Something would be missing if she never saw him again. But Ben was *her* boy, *her* own. Ben was a part of her as a child is of its mother. Fate had so willed it, or God, she thought reverently. And there was no use making that gentle-hearted girl feel badly—who showed so plainly—

The sailors were beating the brake and undergrowth, and looking in every likely hiding-place, for a half-mile around

the spot in the verdure where the furrows left the sand. There was no trace of the murderers nor of the missing treasure, except one trail that led into a tangle of vines, then stopped short. And the chest was pretty heavy for the shoulders of even five stout-muscle men.

The figure of Pierre the boatman, in trousers and jumper of coarse stained duck, appeared in the opening of the old pathway.

"Are you ready, Linda?" the Frenchman asked. "Pierre will bring the launch from the harbour here. We will not risk a meeting with those kindly gentlemen on the yacht."

"No, Monsieur, I am not going, after all——"

"But you must, it is death if you stay."

"Every day it will be death if I go. To see you again—never? No, no," she shook her head with a flash of the old coquetry, the more pathetic because so bravely assumed, "I could not stand that."

Her eyes were quite calm, but her hands played nervously with the gay ribbon at her waist, one of the few weapons which she had brought in that small bundle of hers, and into which she had thrust, not without design, a flower, a many-rayed thing of orange splendour.

"When one is away, it is easy to forget, Linda. The life of love—poof! No longer than the flight of a snowflake from the sky to the wave." But the eyes belied the light voice.

From the bright ribbon one hand rose to her heart.

"Snowflakes! There are none *here*. Brrr!" She shivered. "You think of the love of the North." One beau-

tiful shoulder shrugged towards the other girl, who was helping in the search, fifty yards from where they stood. The gesture was slight, for open jealousy might bring about the very thing she feared.

"The life of a spark then, blown by the wind," he returned, thinking how like his life, how unlike his own feeling, the figure was. "It dances merrily, a little way—then—puff—it is gone."

"When a woman loves truly—it is no little spark." One word followed, a French term of endearment, so low as to be almost unheard. "It is a great fire that burns always, like that in the old mountain you tell me of—very warm—and very deep. The wild tornado cannot blow it out—only the cold earth, when one is very old."

She sighed once—a long troubled sigh with a little catch in it, and he did not know what to answer, except:

"You will forget, Linda—and you will be happy."

"Never, Monsieur—but it is not for a woman to speak so. Already I have said too much——"

Pierre had reached them and interrupted volubly. Point-blank, he refused to sail that morning. He had heard of the gold. Men of his shrewd, crafty type could smell it out very quickly. Protests were vain and Larone, with the few francs left, could advance no substantial argument which the sullen Pierre would understand. Not one league would the little launch sail until he had his share of the gold.

The boatman sat him down on the sand, and set to making an hour-glass of his hands, which was of small practical help, all the while casting crafty glances over his shoulder at the

searchers. Not one inch would he budge. So, his own offer of assistance having been very bluntly refused by Ben, Larone, hurt at the suspicion but smiling courteously and patiently, left on a reconnaissance of his own.

"They must have the treasure on the yacht," said Benson, after six toilsome hours had passed in the fruitless quest. "Toted it over in the tender, piecemeal—in sacks or somethin'. Let's take the long-boat and find out."

"What, and leave Sally here?"

"Take Dick and Jack Beam with us," was his answer to the Captain's objection, "and leave Ben and Yeo with her. Give her a revolver. She can shoot 'n she won't turn her head, either, when she pulls the trigger. The thieves won't trouble her now they've got what they're after."

"Thieves, did you call them? Do you realize they're murderers!"

"I guess they done it, all right, Cap'n, and we ought to be huntin' them pizen snakes instead of lookin' fur filthy dollars."

They looked over at the headland. A little coil of smoke floated away like a feather in a lazy breeze.

"She's getting up steam, now."

"All right," said the Captain. "We'll search that yacht if she's armed like a dreadnought," and he issued his orders, which were promptly put into effect except as to the disposition of Ben.

"What! Me on watch here while you're getting in that mess!" he protested. "Let the gypsy stay, and Zeke Yeo, the burglars are on the yacht and she'll be safe. They'll be away from the place in an hour if we don't start."

The Captain yielded, and Spanish Dick and Yeo were left on guard. The crew ran the boat out into the surf and leaped aboard. Then they skirted the shore, twenty strokes to the minute, fast travelling for a heavy skiff in a tumbling sea, and entered South Harbour.

In the opening, at the Captain's command, they rested on their oars.

"What do you want to do, men?" he asked the crew. "The murderers are probably armed and I've no right to risk your lives."

"Murderers is right, sir," growled Benson. "We'll string 'em all to that gaff there afore the sun goes down; what do you say, boys?"

"Ay, ay, sir, we got a plenty o' rope—let the bloody dogs swing for it."

The Captain looked through his glass. On deck there was but one on watch. That individual had seen the boat and called a warning. Now a second figure was climbing over the companionway. That made two. Where were the others? Near the shore the launch rose gently on the swell, and on the mountain-side a little thin spiral of smoke wavered. A fire—probably near the haunted house, which was concealed by the foliage.

He gave the word and they pulled for the yacht. Three lengths away, a face appeared over the taffrail, forward,—an ugly face with a left eye that was now no more than a slit in a huge discoloured circle. Aft, rose the wicked saw mouth, with the brown-stained teeth, and the green bleary eyes.

"Belay, there, ye crawlin' sons of cuttlefishes," was the

gracious greeting, backed by his companion's insolent hail and the more eloquent forty-five.

"Sheer off, or I'll drill lead into yer blasted hides with this here little riveter."

The blades swept through the water—a boat's length nearer. From the rail came a crack like the snap of a black-snake whip. A singing little object cut the crest of the wave near the bow oar; another sent a little fountain of spray over the stroke and went ricocheting on its way.

Truer was Captain Brent's aim. A maddened yelp like a mongrel's when struck by a stone, issued from the wicked saw teeth. The grey head ducked.

"Winged by——"

Another length, the rudder swung, the starboard oars were shipped suddenly, and the boat sheered alongside.

Over the rail tumbled the sailors, but the two faces—the one with the discoloured eye and the scar, and the old man, had disappeared. Deck and cabin were searched—no sign of the chest or the fugitives, except the half-sullen, half-defiant girl who had commented so disrespectfully on the Captain's figure during their first and more formal visit to the yacht.

"Now, yaller bird," said Benson, "be nice an' ladylike and tell us where yer mates went."

Carlotta jerked her head saucily towards shore.

Three heads, like tiny corks on the water, were edging toward's the beach,—Pete's and Old Man Veldmann's and a third, that of the sailor who, mutinous at first, had later been won over by MacAllister's wiles and the lure of the gold.

But what was that thing just behind the last swimmer,— long, grey-white, and elliptically curved, like the white-leaded underparts of an overturned boat? A triangular object like the centreboard of a small craft was now visible. But the shape was not drifting or floating. It was curving swiftly on.

“A shark, so help me,” shouted Benson.

The arms of the swimmers were reaching out frantically—and the watchers were armed, but not a single barrel was sighted over the rail. Cruel, perhaps, but they were stern men of the sea, and those struggling heads yonder had murdered their friend. If one of Nature’s executioners, that grey-finned thing hurtling through the waves, could get them, why——

“More speed to those fins!” Could she have heard that hoarse prayer of Benson’s and seen the savage look on his face, Sally would have wondered still more at the strange ways of men.

Then rending the air, came the agonized cry of a soul in the jaws of the executioner. The startled sea-birds above echoed it weirdly back again. Through his glass, the Captain looked once—saw the head sucked from under, very swiftly. It did not bob up as before, only the waters were darkened suddenly, as if a cask of wine had been spilled into the brine. He shot the glasses back in the case and turned away his head.

“The law of the sea has taken its course,” he said grimly;

“And the curse of the gold,” the bosun.

The sailor of the old *Alice*, though not the worst of the renegade crew, had paid the price of covetousness.

There was little inclination for conversation now, and they continued the search, but not a gold ingot could they find.

"The female corby's below—" Benson reported, "bad case o' nerves after what just happened. She's pitchin' and tossin' in her bunk like a catboat in a blow."

By stress of atrocious threats, which he never would have fulfilled, he forced her into the captain's presence. The latter addressed her sternly:

"See here—that won't do any good. I want you to answer a few questions. I don't know what you're doing here with this crew, but your friends have murdered one of my men."

"Murdered!" she gasped.

"Yaller bird's play-action'," sneered the incredulous boat-swain, but the surprise and fear seemed natural.

"Yes, foully—if you're innocent, you may prove it by your answers."

"What do you want?" She choked out the question.

"Who killed Old Joe?"

"I don't know—didn't know it was him that was killed—didn't know anyone was killed."

"Now be careful."

"It's God's own truth."

"Don't be frightened. If you tell us, we'll protect you."

"The only thing I know was, that it wasn't the Kid."

"The Kid? Who—Huntington?"

Averting her face, a strange attitude for one of her assurance, she nodded. Tears had inundated with rivulets the rouge on her face, the lids were swollen, and she had intermittent attacks of sniffles—truly, a different girl than

Carlotta of the spotlight. A searching one was being turned on her now and for once she did not relish her conspicuousness.

"Was it one of the other four?"

"Maybe—if you say someone was croaked. I didn't see it, an' they didn't tell me."

"Didn't they tell you about the gold?"

"No."

"Think hard now. We don't want to be rough."

"Well, it isn't here anyway."

"Where is it then?"

"Oh, I'll tell you all I know—if you only won't take it out on the Kid. He's a fool Kid, but he'd never croak a guy."

"All right, we'll be fair with him."

"Well, they said they planted the gold somewhere on the island. They wouldn't tell me where. Afraid I'll double-cross 'em."

"Are you sure about that? Isn't it here?"

"Yes, I'll swear it—on a Bible—a stack of 'em if you want—Old 'n New Testament." She had regained some of her composure, as this snappiness showed.

"Be careful now."

"It's the truth, whole truth, nothin' but the truth—" she chanted. "Look, if you like."

That most of her meagre evidence was true, the Captain believed. He called Ben aside.

"It might be wise to hold the yacht and nab the rascals when they come aboard."

“But we can’t leave Sally with those thugs loose on the island.”

“That’s just what I’m afraid of. The old devil and the chap you licked are watching us, you can bet, and they won’t try to board tonight. Better hold the boat for hostage, steam to the Cape, get Sally, Dick, and Yeo, then beat around to Rainbow Bay. We can get reinforcements from the *North Star* and search the island thoroughly, or wait for them. Their provisions are on board and they’ve no way of escape, so they’ll have to give themselves up in the end.

“Benson, do you understand the dark and devious ways of a steam-engine?”

“Are you insultin’ me, Captain,” the bosun replied, with injured dignity. “Do you think I’m that treacherous and degraded? Jack Beam here onct lowered himself by flirtin’ with one of the damned things, on some ugly hulk of a Fruit Steamer. But he saw the light and reformed, swearin’ never to ship again ’cept on an honest, God-fearin’ square-rigger.”

“Beam, can you run it?”

“I’ll take a try at it, sir.”

Steam was already up, the rascals evidently having planned departure, and a little later, Carlotta from the porthole saw the darkling shores apparently moving. She rushed on deck to welcome her friends, but instead of the imperturbable MacAllister she found Captain Brent at the wheel. And then she repeated the old tricks of her Standish régime—“Worse ’n nine drownin’ cats all fightin’ in a sack,” the bosun described it—but it did her no good, and she subsided

when the skipper threatened to put her in irons, or, if they could not be found on board, to lash her to the mast instead.

In the East the moon appeared as they neared the Cape.

“Looks like one of them gold coins of the treasure chest, balancin’ itself there on the tree-tops, don’t it now,” remarked Benson, with his head on one side.

“They all roll away, when we chase ’em, they’re that pesky—but, by ——, what’s that! they’re seven of ’em—red, too. What does that mean?”

“Where did you get it? I don’t see no seven.”

“That’s the funny thing about it—I hain’t had any lick— but I saw them seven—blood red, I’d swear it. But we’re anchorin’.—Lend a hand there.”

After the anchor chains had rattled out and the yacht had been moored, the boat slipped from her side to the shore. But they found only Linda cowering by the fire, Zeke Yeo with a broken head, and Spanish Dick swiftly patrolling the camp, and looking apprehensively into the massed shadows of the trees inland, from which some night bird or mocking voice hooted mournfully at them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ON THE TRAIL AGAIN

SALLY had spent the long afternoon gazing offshore for a sight of the longboat, or watching the still motionless needles of masts pricking the sky above the headland that guarded South Harbour. So slowly passed the time, it seemed to her mind, stored with the Biblical lore of her childhood, as if the onward march of the sun had again been halted by the old warrior of Israel, while he advanced towards the white walls of the cloud city in the west.

But no mighty trumpets rang. Everything was so still. Sometimes, startled by the mere whisper of the trees back of the tent, the crackle of a twig as a heavily freighted armadillo moved or a serpent glided into the underbrush, she turned her head in alarm towards the wood. They were all harmless sounds, but her nerves and imagination, tuned to higher than concert pitch by the events of the night, translated them into voices of the spirits of the isle, or the footfalls of the murderers themselves, bent on some further deeds of darkness.

The gypsy, seeing her distraction, forbore from his depressing auguries and tried to cheer her with new tales and improvised songs, while Yeo drowsed before the tent, but the taut nerves would not relax.

But that last time she had turned towards the mysterious wood—the sun hung just a hand's breadth above the sea-line then—her imagination had not tricked her. A human form was brushing aside the branches that over-arched the once-clear pathway. Some relief she felt when she recognized the giant mute Alexandre, but the shambling gait of his weak-hinged knees and huge splay feet was hurried, and he kept glancing in fear back at the thicket from which he had just emerged.

With uncouth gibberings he handed her a slip of paper, the unaddressed side of a long envelope, and the girl thought she could read the reason of his fear in the message, hastily scrawled thereon:

“Come quickly—I am dying.

Larone.”

With a strong effort of the will, she controlled her trembling nerves, told Spanish Dick of the message, and unheeding his protests, followed the black into the shadows. She had gone but a hundred yards through the green gloom of the forest when she stopped short at a guttural sound of terror from her shaking guide. She looked around, but at first saw nothing to arouse his apprehension, only a gay cockatoo on a branch above their heads, squawking and ruffling his vermilion and azure feathers while he gazed down in curiosity at the thicket beside the path.

Angrily tossing off her own fears, she started to pass the rooted black, when she almost ran into the object of his

terror protruding from the thicket—a long, slender, cylindrical thing. Promptly her heart went as cold as that rifle-barrel itself.

Behind her someone laughed, she felt her arms seized, and a thick scarf was bound swiftly across her mouth and jerked into a vicious knot—a needless precaution, for she could not have screamed just then if her lips had been free.

Darting this way and that, her eyes gathered in the figures of the group around her,—the tall, dark man she feared, the pink-complexioned one with the tow scalp and the red undershirt, and behind them, the sullen face of Phil, and the bowlegged old fellow, now with a hasty bandage across his left shoulder, and grinning as wickedly as one of Rip van Winkle's bearded bowlers when the pins go crashing for a thunderous strike.

Rapidly she was pushed on through the tangle into a break, where the five held council.

The Pink Swede and the Old Man returned toward the camp, as the others, with the prisoner, travelled in the same general direction, but at an angle to the path, deflecting to the north of it. Forty yards from the grove where her own tent had been pitched, they released her from bonds and gag—a queer manœuvre which she could not understand. For a moment she stood irresolute. Then gathering herself together she made a dash for freedom, crying, very foolishly as she afterwards learned :

“Dick, Dick, look out!”

No sooner was the warning uttered than she was seized again by her amused captors, bound and gagged as before.

Even as she struggled she could see the barefooted gypsy, running with a smooth roly-poly gait, like that of the under-sized Italian labourers that work on our ditches, straight towards the underbrush, cocking his rifle as he ran. A little to the west, she thought she heard the thicket crackling under the feet of someone—probably Yeo—a cry, then no more.

They forced her back through a labyrinth of vines and bushes into the heart of the forest, not pausing until they reached a naturally fortified glen, where they found Pete on guard, half way, she reckoned, not as the crow flies but on an angle, from the Cape to the headland. The fastness was well-buttressed by giant trees, equipped with a *chevaux de frise* by the thicket and interlacing vines, and darkened even at noontide by their heavy cordage and the thick foliage overhead. Now the only illumination was the flame licking up the pile of fagots, over which the old man raised three pronged sticks like the poles of a wigwam, suspending a rusty kettle from their juncture.

A little later the two huskies returned, one with a box, a slab of bacon, and a shoulder of ham, under his arms, the other with two gunny sacks of provisions slung over his back.

“A lead-pipe cinch,” Pete reported. “He fell for it like a sucking baby.”

The series of manœuvres was easily analysed now,—the message, borne by the impressed black had been a decoy, those sacks and cases prizes from her own camp, lifted while the gypsy searched the underbrush after her warning. For

some queer whim of their own, they had not killed him. It would have been very easy. Perhaps they wanted to play on the sailor-superstitions of the crew. Of course she could not guess that the yacht had been taken as hostage, and that she herself had just been kidnapped in reprisal.

All food she refused, and sat reclining against a pile of cut boughs on the outskirts of the camp. Once she let her hand, now free of the thongs, grope underneath the leaves. She felt something hard, and her fingers, feeling along the surface, lighted on a padlock.

The chest!

She had found it again but to what avail now?

Bound around it were iron chains, and through them thrust two three-inch tree butts, by which they had carried it on their shoulders, leaving no furrows after they left the sand. Evidently they had returned after depositing the chest here, and had trampled down bushes and grasses to make the false trail which Ben and the sailor had followed, leading to nowhere.

Suddenly she recalled that other form which she had seen in the dawn, bolstered up against the driftwood log. She sprang up, passed to the other side of the fire, and watched the three precious blackguards eating so ravenously that they reminded her of jackals she had once seen feeding behind the iron bars in a zoölogical garden. Their leader was as cool as ever and quite as fastidious—the more dangerous for that, she thought, and Phil was far more slovenly and gross than in the old debonair days. His face was inflamed, the eyes swollen and heavy-lidded.

"Drinking more than's good for him," she commented to herself.

Her one-time fiancé came over and lounged carelessly beside her.

"As your friend Ralph Waldo says, 'it's a small world after all.'"

She did not answer and he tried another tack.

"Well, Miss Sally Fell, the shoe's on the other foot now."

Again no response and, angered, he rasped out:

"That was a mean trick you played on me last month."

Last month! Was it only as far behind them as that? Years had passed, she would have said—almost a lifetime. Still, even though she had acted according to her convictions, her Puritan conscience troubled her a little; she felt pity for the boy she had—yes, jilted—there was no other word—and at the very altar. How like an old play it had all been, but a play without any humour at all. Perhaps she was responsible, in part, for his flight, and, most of all, his moral disintegration, so evident now.

"I was awfully sorry, Phil, but you know when I became engaged to you, Rogers had brought back word that Ben had been lost. I promised Ben first, so when that message came in the bottle, what could I do but go?"

"You might better have stayed with me. A pretty mess you're in now."

"What are you doing with these criminals anyway?" she retorted. "They're nothing but thieves and murderers."

"Look out—they'll hear. It wasn't my fault. I couldn't help myself."

"Why don't you leave them? You can get to the *North Star* and help me escape."

"I will if——"

"If what?" Her question had a suspicious note.

"If you'll make good your promise to me."

"You can't mean what you're saying; you've been drinking, but you can't have fallen as low as that."

"You've got it coming, Sally Fell, after the way you've treated me."

"In Salthaven, we always considered the Huntingtons gentlemen."

"And a perfect hundred per cent lady always keeps her promise. Come, Sally, you know way down in your heart I could give you a better time, make you happier, than Ben Boltwood."

He reached towards her but she recoiled.

"Keep your hands to yourself, Philip Huntington."

"Just as you say, Miss Prisms and Prunes—but you'd better think twice—. Come, Sally, be a good fellow—just say the word and I'll see that you're safe."

"No, hard as your friends look, I'd rather trust *them*."

"Thanks," he bowed maliciously. "That's going some, but you'll change your mind—in the morning—after——"

"After what?"

"Never mind, you'll see."

"My answer will be the same—even if it means death."

He left her, and soon four of the five figures were stretched at full length in various postures around the glen, Mac-Allister keeping watch silently by the fire.

Every once in a while he abstractedly stirred the embers, sending a little fiery nebula of sparks to the arching roof of the trees.

Like all who gaze into the red heart of a fire, whether on the hearthstone or in the forest glen, he seemed to be seeing visions, evil, perhaps, but very absorbing, in the pantomime of the dancing flames. A smile flicked across his features like the cruel lash of a whip, and she knew then that here was the murderer of Old Joe. His hand might not have dealt the blow, but his cold, calculating engine of a brain had furnished the motive-power.

The flames died down at last, and then, glancing at the men, now deep in slumber, the girl feigning hers perfectly, he rose and went over to the chest, lifted the concealing boughs, cautiously unwound the chains, and raised the lid. As much of emotion as those cold features would ever show, they revealed now in the gloating expression, as he sifted the shining beauties between his fingers.

"The best day's work I ever did—or night's either," she heard him mutter.

Closing the lid, he examined his automatic and resumed his watch, while she sank into real slumbers at last.

In the morning, before sunup, a breakfast, cold for fear now of betraying smoke, was eaten hastily, and this time Sally accepted her own portion for strength against the unknown trials of the day.

All traces of the fire were scattered, then, well-guarded by Nature as was the place, for further security they disengaged vines from the tree-trunks and trailed them over

the chest and the sacks which they had brought from the yacht to convey thither the gold. In front they rolled boulders, and when their work was finished, under the gambler's direction, no trace of the iron was visible.

As the old man was patting the last creeper into place, like a "counterpane over the gold babies," he said, he suddenly stood mute and transfixed.

All eyes were bent on the leafy screen from which a little wriggling fork darted, behind, a flat spear-head and full three feet of muscle and gristle, coiled for the deadly spring.

Something whirred through the air—it was not the deadly forked thing, for *this* had the flash of steel. The knife pierced the adder's head just behind the poison wells in its throat, and pinioned the whole squirming length against the tree.

The gambler's nerveless hands were expert at many things besides stacking cards. Not for nothing had he swallowed swords and outlined the form of the painted lady with whirling knives, that year in the dime museum in Frisco.

Such hairtrigger accuracy was terrifying. Sally thought of that other knife she had seen, twenty-four hours before—the reddened one—and shuddered.

What was he saying?

"Old Timer, the good Book says 'thou shalt not covet,'" he quoted sardonically. "It grieves me to see how thou'st forgotten the Ten Commandments and all my holy teachings."

And the Pink Swede in turn jeered the maddened old man.

“Ay tank you ban tam fool. The whisky you always pack, she breed snakes like rabbits.”

After another whispered council, in which her ears, sharpened by fear, distinguished one question of Pete’s,— “Why don’t you leave ’er here, Cap, with the chest,” and the reply: “No, they’ve captured the yacht, and we can’t pack too much baggage, she’s safer up there,” the gambler and Phil left the camp, Pete and the Swede standing guard. Her mouth was swathed in the scarf again, and she was dispatched northward with the wicked old man as her guide. At first she was glad that it was not the gambler.

Up the mountain slope he drove her, through its forest-covered sides, past the haunted house, a glimpse of whose forlorn walls she caught as they toiled upwards, then among the ragged rocks and sulphurous saucers pocking the scarred face of the mountain below the crater, and boiling feverishly now. Thick murky scarfs of vapour swathed their yellowed lips, as that silken gag muffled her own, and wandered disconsolate over the whole area.

Over the divide they passed and zigzagged down to the brink of the gorge. Northward she could see the spars and masts of the *North Star* beautifully pencilled against the turquoise of the sky, and not far away, the graceful lines of the yacht, all like a cheerful painting in bright water colours.

Above, the black ostrich plume had expanded to four times the size when first she saw it, and near it, that black speck upon the blue sank and grew as it sank, like the evil thing of her dreams, until she could once more distinguish the wide stretched wings of the waiting buzzard.

Where was he taking her? To the yacht? No, they said it had been captured, and when they reached the frail bridge by the waterfall, they turned to the west and the sea-wall. Her hands were free, so, remembering some stories she had read of the expedients of other sorely-pressed heroines, she untied the red sailor's knot from the V of her middy-blouse, and dropped it upon the trail. But the trick did not work as in the old tales, for a gust of wind came whirling along and blew it over the brink.

The sheer distance to the bottom, and a sudden query flashing across her mind, dizzied her. Had they discovered that cavern? Was it there that the old man was leading her? Up till now she had been "game—" but to stay in that awful place with those evil men—that would be beyond her strength. Almost she was tempted to follow the dancing ribbon which fluttered like a gorgeous butterfly above the veil of the cascade, until, caught in the white meshes, it vanished.

They reached the sea-wall and the beginning of the perilous path. She was desperate.

"Old Man-whatever-is-your-name, I won't go a step farther."

"All right, Miss, if you think those rocks down there would make a nice soft bed for your pretty flesh."

He spat down into the gorge, then grasping her arm with one hand, with the other forced her head over the edge until she stared down into the cauldron seething around the rocks at the foot of the cliff.

"Take a good squint, sissy. It's a nice little drop, ain't it now?"

She writhed back from his grasp, glanced around for help that was nowhere near, and saw the *North Star* again. The sight of the buoyant ship somehow steadied her. Perhaps, after all, Ben and Cap'n Harve would come. She would wait and pray.

The old man snarled out something, and so, with fingers clutching at crevices in the sea-wall, and listing against its sides all the way to maintain her balance against the threatening winds, she essayed the perilous path once more.

She closed her eyes when she stepped over the mound in the mouth of the cavern, still she did not advance far into its darkness, but sat near the opening where she could see that circle of blue, the only thing in that desolate place which told of hope.

The old man crouched down nearby, chewing ferociously and exercising his marksmanship on the vaulted walls. Now the skeleton seemed to delight his ghoulish fancy, and he began a ribald conversation with the old freebooter of long ago, whose sins could not have been redder or more numerous than his own. They were kindred souls; if the theory of reincarnation were only true, he might have been addressing the remains of his former self.

"Have a swig, my hearty," he hailed his new comrade, taking the skull in his hand and forcing the flask between the rows of teeth, after applying it to his own.

"G— blast me hide if ye ain't a good mate, ye grinning deathshad! Ye ain't no kill-joy nuther, but a cheery——. Many's the cup o' good wine ye've swallered, and blood i' the

bargain, I'll warrant. Come wet your whistle again. Here's happy days!"

With a deep draught he pledged the toast.

"And here's wishin' ye luck in yer little game with the Devil tonight."

Stopping the flask, he leered at the girl.

"*There's* a pretty bridegroom for ye, my gal," then addressing again the thing in his hand, "How'd ye like to be spliced to this lass, me lad?"

Crouching, she retreated toward the inner chamber. Awful as it was, it could hold no worse terrors than that evil old man with the flask and the skull. But he followed, continuing his ghastly soliloquy.

"What right good bedfellows yu'd make. Her with her red cheeks and ye with yer old yaller bones."

The ballast of whisky suddenly shifted in his wicked old brain and his mirth changed to anger at her.

"Come, you close-mouthed jade, swing yer clapper. Yur sour-faced sweetheart on the ship below would only beat ye, and the Chesterfield Kid's only a quarter o' a man. Jilt 'em both, I say."

He thrust the jowl nearer her face.

"Now here's the proper bridegroom for ye. Won't never lay a finger on ye. Just give ye them soul-kisses ye read about, warm enough to yer way o' thinkin'?"

"Come, a good kiss for the handsum bridegroom."

Again he lifted the skull towards her face. The grinning thing was within an inch of her blanching lips. A scream rent the air, and she sank unconscious on the floor of the cavern.

And then there was a long tremor as if the whole island sighed to its very depths, followed by a more violent spasm. The floor of the cavern shook. Fragments fell from the roof, one crimsoning the temple of the prostrate girl, and the great birds of the night, startled from their brooding, flew from the dark recesses with weird and horrible cries.

The tremor subsided, but the old wretch dropped the skull and sank on the floor, praying in rabid fear to some unseen power—he knew not on whom to call.

CHAPTER XXXV

A TRICK OF FATE

ALL on the island felt those tremors,—the frightened thieves on guard in the camp and those who had departed northward on their mysterious mission, Larone on his solitary search in the heart of the island, and the three women and the sailors on the *North Star* and the *Alice*.

Like the swell of the flood-tide in the full o' the moon, only with far greater violence and swiftness, the waters of Rainbow Bay were sucked from the coral lips of the strand full forty feet, racing back again to forty more above high water mark, until they laved the trees of the grove around the hut. Three times they rose and ebbed, reaching their climax at the second rumble, while the yards of the ship danced merrily, and the helmsman worked frantically at the wheel.

"It's a young tidal wave, sir," cried Benson, for they had returned to the ship, for reinforcements.

"Yes, and worse to follow, I'm afraid," replied the Captain. He scanned the rising terraces with his glass—no sight of Ben and the searching party. "Rayer," he hailed the mate, "arm Crow, Slathers, and Yorke. I'll head the second party myself. We've no time to lose."

“What’s that, sir, by that clump o’ cocoas—that bit o’ rag?”

The captain raised his glasses again. A handkerchief, knotted on a stick, was wigwagging from the shore.

“None o’ my men. It’s the leader of the blackguards. The rogues are asking for a parley. Man the longboat!”

The gambler did not trust his own precious person to the sailors, and when they reached the shore they found only the handkerchief and the stick, and in its prongs a missive, which the captain hastily read.

“Are you willing to exchange the yacht for the girl? If so, anchor the *Alice* in South Bay and beach the tender this P.M.

If you agree to this, answer here
(signing your name). Will you also grant us safe conduct, agreeing not to attack?

(signed) Captain of the *Alice*.”

“We can’t risk any thing on her account, Benson. I’ll sign.”

He looked at his watch, reflected for a moment, then on the note he wrote——

“We will beach the tender *here*. Produce the girl at four o’clock unharmed or ——” —the dash was more eloquent than any threat. At the bottom he signed his name.

They rowed back to the yacht, and, when a furlong off-shore, saw the two figures by the white flag waving assent to the conditions.

Like all hardened rascals who live but for the lust of the moment, Old Man Veldmann had a gutta-percha disposition, and so, on the swift rebound, he quite forgot the warnings after the rumblings ceased. Of all that good gold was he thinking, and he chuckled at a little idea just hatched under the eaves of his grizzled old thatch.

"You be —— good and stay here, girl," he said to Sally who had recovered from her swoon. "I'll be back in a shake of a lamb's tail."

To make sure of her obedience, he bound her hands and feet, then started back along the sea-wall.

Larone, from an eyrie on Cone mountain, was watching the manœuvres on the shore of Rainbow Bay when he saw the bow-legged, bent old figure walk along the gorge and then pass over the divide to the southern slope.

"It is the cavern," he said to himself, and hurried after the retreating figure, only to lose sight of it in the forest.

So he turned to the house on the mountain, passed through the doorway and the wide hall, searched for a candle, descended to the cellar, lifted a trap-door, and lighting the wax, went down another flight of stone-steps into a gloomy dungeon.

Meanwhile the old figure toiled on through the woods, still chuckling to himself over his plan, until he reached the glen, to find only "the Swede" still on guard, Pete having gone on some errand to the shore.

Cunningly the old rascal addressed the pink-complexioned one.

"Say, Pink, that's a hell uv a lot of gold."

The dull eyes of the Swede gleamed with the glint of the treasure itself.

“Ay, she make us all rich for life.”

“Now, Swedie, don’t get no such notion in your — thick head, the chief’s as glib with promisin’ as a wench that’s atter yer roll.”

“Yu tank he go back on us—double cross us, you say?”

“Well, now I wouldn’t swear as to that. But what’s to prevent him? Ye can’t reef canvas after the ship’s sunk. Now I’ve a little idee, an’ it’s a ——— good one.”

Looking around cautiously to see that the place was quite as solitary as it seemed, the plotter proceeded to drill the “little idee” into the tow head. It seemed to register, and soon these two untied the clanking chains, and began a queer series of manœuvres of their own with the chest, the sacks, and stones.

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And all the while the girl sat alone in the deserted cavern above the sea.

“I must not give up, I must not give up,” she repeated over and over and over to herself. How her bones ached from the contact with the rocky floor!

It was all so still up here. Not even the roar of the breakers below ascended to this height; there was only the shriek of some gull, or the moan of the wind wandering through the hollow chambers, as lonely and forlorn as the captive maiden. She looked back into the darkness. It was impenetrable, not even relieved by flickering shadows now.

For company she had only the skull at her feet. She almost screamed as she glanced at the eyeless sockets, but courageously she stifled the cry and edged away from it, as best her body could, towards that irregular circle of blue. She *must* keep her eyes on that.

Why didn't they come! Where was Ben! Would the old man return after all, or was that only a lie. Almost she hoped that he wouldn't, that she could roll over the brink into the white foam. There would be rest there for a child of the sea.

But youth ran strongly in the slender body, so she waited and prayed, and prayed and waited, the long morning through.

Sometimes for relief, on that circle of sky as on a heavenly screen she tried to picture other places and things, to visualize old memories,—the trees, the orchards, and flowers, of her old home; the cheerful hustle of Preble Square; the old neighbours; the spick and span lighthouse, eternally guarding the deep; and Ben, telling the old, old story under the moon.

And then, in her fancies she saw the face of the stranger, the eyes, now with that quizzical expression as he read her through and through, now with the brave, pathetic look that went straight to her heart. Again she wondered. If his home had been in Salthaven, instead of on some strange shore—just where it was he had never told her—perhaps everywhere—but if it had been—why then—but, no, that could never be. Honest, blue-eyed Ben was hers, her boy. But why didn't he come!

Overcome by fatigue, her head drooped against the wall of the cavern, and she slept——. When she awoke it was to look at the impenetrable darkness behind her. A nightmare? Where was she? Then, with a dull feeling of despair, she realized her plight again. Her shoulders and neck were shot through and through with agonizing pains, and she couldn't help sobbing—long, racking sobs.

At last she grew quiet. What time was it? She looked at the patch of sunlight that splashed through the opening. By its angle, sharply cut from the shadow, she confusedly reckoned that it must be considerably past noon.

She looked down at her feet, and discovered that the knot so carelessly tied by the old man in his absorption over "that little idee," had become loose while she struggled in her slumbers. There was sufficient leeway to work the toe of one slipper against the heel of the other. It came off, the other followed, and bending over, with her bound hands she pushed the rope down over her slender ankles and feet. The knot on her hands was secure. She rose and stretched herself, trying to relieve the ache a little, and walked towards the sea.

What was that noise? It sounded like voices—out there on the sea-wall. They were coming! Or was it the sound of the gulls—the mocking wind?

They were human voices, calling to each other as their owners crept along the path above the sea.

More fearful of them than the darkness within, she turned and hurried into the cavern, circled the elbow, and threaded the gloom, feeling her way against the cold walls. Re-

remembering vividly the other mound near the stone chart, she tried to avoid it, and so ran plumb against the wall at the end.

Shaking in every nerve, she sank on the floor, her hand falling on the flat tablet of the chart.

As her fingers groped along its surface, she felt it move. The earth was trembling again. Nature, as well as humanity, was arrayed against her. But the rest of the place was silent, motionless. Only the stone, unevenly balanced, rocked a little, then rose again, as if struggling shoulders below were trying to force it upward. What arms could there be there in the bowels of the mountain.

She rose and recoiled. She had reached the ultimate depths of terror. Accustomed now to the darkness, her fascinated gaze was bent on that stone. One inch it rose, then fell back again, gained two, and so was forced up slowly, higher and higher.

Those voices sounded louder, shouting through the cavern.

Should she stay here to face this unknown terror, or flee to the known? They echoed again—those voices behind her, and one had the sharp ring of the tall man's voice.

"Here are her slippers."

Then the angry command:

"Come out of there."

And still that stone was rising inch by inch. Now, even in the darkness, she could see the gleam of a white arm, but the owner of it had uttered no sound.

Then, as if some mighty force were behind it, the stone fell back crashing against the walls, waking a thousand new

voices of the cavern. She did not faint, but strangely she felt that now she knew what the end, what Death, must be like.

The human voices were coming nearer, and around the elbow, the flickering flame of a torch illumined the walls of the curving passage with a ghostly light.

A shadowy form leaped up from the hole, uncovered by the stone when it fell. The form was at her side. It, too, had a voice, and her heart started beating again, as she heard the musical accent.

“You are safe—thank God!”

“Quick, they are coming!” She managed to gasp out the whisper.

He seized her around the waist.

“Look out, there are steps there,” and he drew her down into the dark passage, infinitely more cheerful than the gloom above, for he was with her, and, far away, flickered a little light, a taper set in its own wax, in a stone orifice.

Leaping up the steps again, with surprising strength the Frenchman pulled the tablet of stone over the opening into place again. They paused, listening to the muffled footsteps and the raging voice of the gambler.

“Gone by ——! We’re done for.”

Through the dark passage, one of Nature’s natural tunnels extended by the old owners of the place, he guided her towards the little light.

As they went, the rumblings sounded again, faint and far away.

“The Sleeping Giant is turning over in his dreams. But

he's sure to wake at any moment. You must tell your guardian to sail away, this very day."

She did not hear him, for she had swooned again, and he had to bear her and the light too, crouching under the low walls, to the dungeon, deep under the foundations of the house. They emerged into the sub-cellar, then, depositing his precious burden, he raised the trap-door, picked up the girl again, bore her up three flights, and placed her tenderly on the bed where the little exquisite old lady had lain with the flowers.

For a few long heart-beats he gazed on her face as she lay so still, knowing that he would never hold her in his arms again, and striving to impress the pure features forever in his memory.

As she stirred, a tiny object dropped to the floor. He picked it up and smiled. It was so typically American,—the little pennant-shaped pin of sterling silver and cheap enamel. The significance of the letters S. H. S. he could not read, but he slipped it in his pocket.

It was a fair exchange for a chest of gold.

Then he bent over and kissed her on the forehead—once, very gently, and finding that her eyes did not open, hurried down the stairway for water from the spring.

And the girl knew that he had kissed her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE CURSE OF THE GOLD

THEY journeyed over the divide as fast as the tired girl could travel, but when they reached the bridge over the gorge, the sun had set. In the west two scarfs, one of pink and one of saffron, floated away after his passing, and the gold seemed to ripple up from the underworld, like the reflection of the gleaming treasure under the dark lid.

But above them all was black. The smoke over Cone Mountain, looming up like a vast umbrella, covered half of the island.

She pointed at the harbour.

“See those lights!”

Upon the tips of the yards, and topmasts, all over the ship, burned little lights like flickering souls.

“I never saw the sun do that before.”

“It is not the sun, my dear Mademoiselle. It is St. Elmo’s Fire, and it always comes, like the moons, before the mountain does its worst. The people of the Caribbees say they are tapers of the sea—a wake for those that will be lost. And look, Mademoiselle, there are the lost souls themselves, above the mountain.”

And there they were, the seven moons, swimming through

the twilight so palely that one had to look twice to discern them.

The air was very calm now and pregnant with strange, quivering thrills, as if surcharged with electricity. She thought it was her own excited nerves, the feeling of dread she had at that farewell so soon to come—and perhaps the memory of that kiss, which she had let him give her, just after she drifted back from the yawning pit of unconsciousness and before she opened her eyes entirely. It was one of the few girlish deceits of her blameless, straight-forward life—but she was glad, glad for that kiss. There was no harm in it, and somehow she wanted that to remember.

The real danger that threatened she realized now, still, she hated to hasten that last journey to its end, but he urged her forward.

They ~~had reached~~ the bridge ~~above the waterfall~~, and he bade her go over first, as the old cables could not support their united weight. On the other side she watched, hands at her throat, it swayed so, as he crossed. Safe on the other side, he turned, and looked back for signs of pursuers. As he did so, he bent forward, and his hand lowered to his hip. Her eyes followed his and saw the figure crouching on the trail, just fifty yards from the gorge.

The old man had returned at last.

The Frenchman thrust her behind a tree, and waited at the northern end of the bridge, as the figure stepped upon it. The flask had perhaps made his footing insecure, and the frail old structure rocked from side to side under the stocky figure. He reached the middle. Even above the

cascade's thunder, she could hear the curses he shrieked at them derisively echoed back by gorge and mountain.

Then suddenly, so quickly it happened she never afterwards could tell just how, the bridge sagged in the middle; one rotting cable parted. The howling wretch clutched for the hand-rail. The bridge buckled, the sections swung to the sides of the gorge, and the body plunged head downward. It was horrible and yet grotesque, the bow-legs sprawling in the air, the jacket flopping over the head like a sack. From its lining and pockets dropped whirling, round, shiny things.

So, in a shower of gold, the old sinner plunged to his doom——

Fifty yards from the hut, they saw flickers of the fire, and heard the voices of the watchers.

She paused in the shadows.

"You must sail with us tomorrow. We will stop at the port with you and Linda.

"And now, because we won't have much chance—to talk over things on the ship again—I want to thank you for all you have done. I never will forget—never."

Then she went on, a little more lightly, perhaps with a forced blitheness, though he could not see the moisture gleaming in her eyes.

"Sometime you must come and visit us—Ben and me. He's a fine boy. You'll like him when you come to know him."

"Yes, I have seen many men and I know that he will be true." And the girl remembering her sweetheart's unchivalrous treatment of the man before her, was touched.

And she was glad that it was dark all about them, and he could not see the tremor of her lips when he said:

“All the happiness in the world—and in Heaven—my dear lady, I wish for you. I do not pray as often as a good Catholic should, but I will pray for that—very often.”

Then they went to the fire and the waiting sailors of the *North Star*.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ALL HANDS AHOY!

ONCE more the ship's bells sounded musically over the waters. The moon came up, gleaming wanly like a pale yellow moth through the clouds of smoke pouring from the inverted funnel of the mountain. The whirling eddies of these black columns, the motion of the moon, which appeared to float against their dark tides, and—to those that could see them—her six white shadows, were the only evidences that Nature was not slumbering. All else was motionless. No silver lip of wavelet kissed the cutwater of the ship; her deck did not heave—it was quite as steady as when, the voyage ended, she would rest in drydock.

Calm was the air. The depth and fulness of its silence presaged many things, perhaps a quiet gathering of all her forces for some fatal spring.

Again those strange tingles titillated through the whole of Sally's body. So surcharged was the atmosphere that when she stretched her hand out, it was as if it touched some invisible steel, completing the circuit of a ghostly battery.

She looked aloft. The southern half of the heavens with its smoke and lost moon souls was like the fouled and

corrupted ending of a once bright life; the north with its clear, untainted purple and pure-shining stars—the virgin years before the fall.

And over her head ever trembled and vanished, trembled and vanished, the little lights on the motionless topmasts and yards.

The strangely subdued girl and her repentant lover paced the deck. They tried to overcome the oppression of air, and sea, and mood, which had held them mute and uneasy in the dog watches. At last they ventured a few sentences of conversation.

“I thought I’d lost you for keeps, Sally.”

“You came near it. You would have, if it hadn’t been for *him*.”

“And to think I suspected him of yellowness. I was a fool.”

“Not quite that, dear. Just a foolish boy.”

“I deserve worse names than that.”

“We’ll forget them now, Benny boy. But don’t you think you ought to say something to him—to make up.”

“You bet I ought. I’d eat humble pie now, if it had an assafoetida crust and a castor-oil filling.”

Then he added thoughtfully:

“He may be a frog-eater, but he’s a real man.”

This phrasing she did not quite like, so she returned very slowly:—

“Perhaps, if we tried hard, we could forgive the diet. And as you say, he—is—a—real—man.”

The accompanying smile was strangely made up of irony

and wistfulness, neither of which ingredients the boy discerned, so absorbed was he in the task of apology, always a hard one for self-conscious youth.

Larone and the captain he found by the wheel, deep in consultation, and glancing now and then at that vast umbrella of smoke aloft, rotating slowly now, and weirdly muffling the moon.

Haltingly but with a winning honesty, the boy asked forgiveness. The other, in his graceful way, accepted the apology, accenting the gesture whimsically with that old quizzical smile of his.

"Think nothing of that, Monsieur. It was natural. Anyone would have felt the same way."

Looking out at sea, he went on slowly, and with a little grip and tenseness in each tone and word:

"I know you will be good to her. That is all I ask."

He turned then and faced him fully.

"You can sail the seven seas, but you'll never find a lovelier woman if you voyage as long as the Flying Dutchman himself—but what were you asking, Captain?"

"What are the risks, my friend?" the skipper repeated.

"I think we are safe for a few days. All the signs would point to that, and I have sailed not only the Caribbees but in many other places where surly fellows like the giant up there, sleep for a while, wake for a quiet smoke, turn over again, and then at last when the devil's nightmare is on them rise and stalk down the mountain, destroying whole cities and islands as fair as this. But—with the women I would not risk an hour."

With his charred pipe the captain reproduced in miniature the smoking mountain, before he replied.

“It’s a snug little fortune for Sally to lose. Besides, the crew’s seen the glint o’ that gold and it’s got ’em like the smile of the light o’ loves when the battleships come to port. Haven’t we leeway enough to anchor off the cape in the morning, recover the chest, bag the rascals in the bargain, then sail in the afternoon?”

The other shook his head.

“As I said, Monsieur Captain, there may be time but with the women——.”

The gesture of his hands expressively finished the warning. More than ever the heavy-bowled pipe looked like the mountain above, as the captain puffed and pondered.

“This island was never on any chart. There’s no lead can sound its waters, I would swear, no barometer to tell its weather. All we can do is to trust to old witch signs. Let’s leave it to the girl.”

At his hail she came slowly along the deck, drooping a little and supporting herself by the rail. However, she rallied her spirits and made her choice.

“I’ll never touch the stuff after what I’ve seen, but I *can’t* rob the others. Let’s take the chance, *oncc*, in the morning, then, whatever happens, sail before sundown.”

But the captain felt that inasmuch as history records isolated instances of feminine tacks of mind, in the end, for Ben’s sake anyway, she might take her allotment—besides, he knew his men, so he gave his orders for the next watch, and went below.

The little fires which for some time had been burning on the spars above their heads steadily, and with a sizzle like arclights when the protecting bulbs are broken, went out suddenly as if switched off by some unseen hand, then up again. Three times the uncanny performance was repeated.

"Like the last call for drinks in one o' them fancy grog-shops like Yaller Petticoat over there makes her livin' in," growled Benson to young Beam. "And the Devil's both brewer and barkeep. It's his claw as is dousin' them lights."

"Yes, and a mixin' the last drinks for one o' us," returned the other.

"Of course—it's fur yerself, Mister Beam. There they go again, those damned lights. Last call! What'll ye have?"

"He's not axin' me what'll I have, with that leaky old hulk Jerry Benson stranded on his bar."

"Stow yer gab, ye young fool. But whomsoever it is, here is hopin' he's got a roll to pay for the drinks. It's when *he's* copped it hisself ye've got to look out for the Black Barkeep."

So, on through the night watches the stars floated out of the black haze to the south, swam for a little while in the clear purple pool to the north, then one by one sank below the horizon.

Long after midnight, somewhere about seven bells, they grew fainter and fainter, and the sea began to swell unbroken by long rollers, just one even surface, grey in the false dawn, and rising like water in a glass when some displacing object is gently dropped into it.

It subsided, rose and fell again as if under the influence

of a series of intermittent tides, the anchor chains creaking ominously through the holes, as the ship was buoyed upward on the waters.

Finally, all was still again, oppressively still. The clear section of the sky to west and north did not turn to turquoise with the morning, but paled to an anæmic white. From the cone, clouds came columning, like vast, revolving, powder-puffs still of soft texture, but fouled by swabbing the great chimneys of that giant's furnace below. In between their sooty masses floated little white plumes of vapour, all enveloping the island and thinning a little as they spread over the coast waters.

Through these fugitive mists the sea birds wandered on disconsolate wing, like phantom wraiths. The sun came up, not jubilant, and golden, and glorious, but a pale oxblood wafer behind the smoke clouds, like the celluloid tiddlewinks Sally remembered in her parlour.

Then sounded over the troubled waters the old command of the sea, with its long drawn vowels and hoarse musical tones.

“Aa-ll ha-aands! Up annchorr a-ho-oy!”

Through the shifting fogs it sounded, like the deep sea-warning of some brazen-throated steamer off the Banks of Newfoundland.

Already the sails were loosed, the capstan creaked, and through hawser-holes came the anchor chains, clanking.

The wheel spun, yards were braced, and sails set, and through the channel between the Twin Horn Capes, like a ghostly ship of the night, floated the *North Star*.

"Better give up the chase, Sally," said the Captain.

"No, let's stick till noon, then sail, homeward bound," she replied.

With that, the smoke-avalanche weakened a little, and under the uplifted dark curtain, as they anchored off the Cape of the Solitary Palm, for a brief hour the island became its old living green self again.

From the deck the longboat sank to the waves. Into it tumbled the Captain and Ben, Benson and Jack Beam, and with six sturdy tars as oarsmen, they swung through the galloping white-toothed squadrons of breakers, and ran her up on shore.

But even as they vanished into the thicket, two standing guard by the boat, the dark mists descended, the sun turning to the colour of coagulated blood again.

During the eventful day of her captivity, well had Sally kept her head, and she had a natural sense of location, so her directions this morning had been fair enough. Following these, the searchers headed on an angle through the woods for South Bay.

But so dense was the gloom of the forest under the canopy of cloud, so intricate the tangle of roots and vines and sharp branches, that three hours of cautious scouting and constant reference to the compass passed before they discovered the first sign.

It must have been high noon when Ben, ahead and a little to the right of the rest, saw a flame flickering between the greenish black boles that buttressed the saucer-shaped glen.

They deployed. Over the rim of the saucer and through

the soft fern, their eight round steel muzzles pointed into the green hollow. It was very still and lonely save for the life of the rosily-leaping fire.

In the far corner, against a trunk a rifle rested, by its side a form crouched—near a pile of strewn boughs. Following the lines of the figure to the extended arm, they saw that it was caught by something heavy and black—the cover of the iron chest.

The eight muzzles circled, covering the figure.

A sharp demand for surrender rang through the glen. But the sentry was quite as silent as that other one, in the dawn by the drift-wood log.

Down into the saucer the eight clambered, with rifles on the alert for fear of treachery.

Benson's heavy boot kicked the thigh of the prone figure.

"Dead, stone dead," he said.

Swollen was the face, the mouth twisted in its last grimace of horror and agony. The fatuous, light-blue eyes held more of expression now than ever they had in life, and the stiff tow pompadour seemed to bristle still, though the evil heart had passed beyond any capacity for fear.

They glanced at the chest. The heavy cover had pinioned the arm. It was swollen to twice its size.

"But that couldn't have killed him," said Ben.

"No, *there's* the assassin's mark."

The captain pointed to two tiny sharp holes in the blue-black corruption of the arm.

From under the lid, they heard a dull clink of some dis-

turbed pieces, then saw a long wriggling thing coil out of the chest and disappear into the green.

Still on the tree hung its stiffened mate, nailed there by MacAllister's knife.

"It even breeds serpents, that gold," whispered Benson, shuddering fearsomely. "It's accursed, I can't touch it, sir."

"Don't be an old woman, Benson. Come, up with it, men!"

They lowered the lid, and swung it by the poles on four pairs of shoulders, with difficulty climbed out of the saucer, and zigzagged on their way through the serried phalanxes of trees, towards the shore.

If it hadn't been for the pocket compass, they never would have made it so quickly. There was need for haste, for as they went, long, far-away, rumbles sounded, leagues below where they were standing, like the echoes of heavy artillery firing in the deep quarries and caverns of the underworld.

Over and over they sounded, gathering force as the Plutonian batteries answered each other, and the whole earth recoiled with each subterranean salvo.

There was a rushing above, whipping the massed treetops like the surface of a lake in a sudden gale, and the trunks danced before the astonished sailors' eyes like the jumbled trees of a drunken man's dreams. Then, following each salvo, fell a death-like silence like the little respites which Nature brings, between the throes, to a woman in travail.

They had dropped the chest, but finally the rumblings ceased altogether. In the absolute silence now holding the forest, they could hear the swish of the surges rushing on shore, and picking up the chest, they hurried on again.

Through the glass from the deck, Sally's eyes followed the figures as they left behind them the green-black density of the woods, and bore that coffin-shaped thing on their shoulders, over the strip of sand, whose lively pink flush the gloom of the day had turned now to a bleak white bordering a leaden sea.

Into the rolling teeth of the breakers, head on they drove the boat, her gunwales bristling with oars. Threateningly she pitched and tossed, the weight of the chest almost dragging the stern under. But at last they gained the side of the *North Star*.

Chest and boat were hoisted over the rail; the anchor came up; the ship heeled to the breeze, and pointed north.

"Did you see any of the thieves?" Sally's voice called above the roar of the wind.

"Nary a one alive," the bosun replied.

"Or dead?"

"One by the chest."

"That was?"

"The tow-headed one with the complexion of a gal and the heart of a hell-hound."

"The others'll escape in the yacht."

"No fear o' that, though there's no watch aboard her. The bay's full of long grey revenue cutters with fins and teeth, and though I don't know much about the ways o' engines, I'd swear they won't run without these."

In his brawny fists he clinked the round, threaded metal things he had just taken from his pocket.

"Old Joe; the sailor in South Bay; the ornery old man; and

the wicked Swede—one, two, three, four”—he slowly counted. “Yes, that’s the devil’s toll of that cursed gold already.”

Up and down in his hands, he shook the cubes of iron and steel until they clanked like chain-links of the Evil One’s own forging.

On the grey heave of the sullen sea, they rounded the Twin Horns, and swung north eastward on the starboard tack.

Through the glass they saw three figures walk from the trees by the hut, wade into the snapping breakers, arch for the long dive, go under, emerge, then inch slowly towards the pitching yacht.

Now, the drifting fog hid them from sight, and all they could see in the harbour was the ghostly tracery of her spars.

“They are lost,” the girl shrieked in a voice that sounded like the cry of a doomed soul.

“What would you have,” the captain answered. “It is the judgment of God.”

Then, as if all Nature corroborated him, suddenly the jagged crater was brightly outlined by flames that spurted like jets of blood, followed by gorgeous streamers of yellow, and blue, and rose, that wove fantastic patterns on the sky.

Then woke the long drawn subterranean thunder again, and swell after swell drove the ship northward, while through the spars little lights threaded in and out like ropes of flame, and on the deck fell showers of mud coated with a weird phosphorescence.

And all the while, over the mountain to the south, the great balls of fire described their arcs against the pitch-black

fumes; gigantic geysers sprayed the zenith with white cascades; and red rivers flowed in swift destruction down the green terraces Ben had so often roved.

But most fearful of all were the vivid lightnings that like the invisible hand on the ancient walls of Babylon, wrote on the massing clouds their warnings in fiery, swift-vanishing script.

Set and stern was the captain's face, as his fingers held to the spokes, and he peered ahead through the straining ropes and the flying scud at the grey surface that heaved so it was almost breast to breast with the sky. But he held the *North Star* to her course, and they rode out the storm——

Leagues northward, a strange thing befell. They sailed into a little calm, as sweet and refreshing to the weary sailors as an oasis to travellers after the sand-storms of the Sahara.

Around them, the sea and sky were blue, and silver, and serene, once more; the sun, at his setting, jubilant and rosy; and in his golden wake, the evening star throbbled like a lover's heart at the first meeting.

Far away, near the last line of the horizon, hovered a pall of smoke above a dark smudge, the last they were to see of it—of the Island of Seven Moons. And the girl thought that now and then she could see them—the full seven, still circling through the haze, shining like pale gold, with beams falling from them like faintest lightnings. At last they went out, but these threads continued to glow like the filaments of a globe after the current fails.

She plucked Ben's sleeve.

“There, it does look like the veil that Spanish Dick told

about, with the gold lightnings in it. And—perhaps he was right in more ways than one.”

Again the pad of shoeless feet, and the gypsy smiled up at her, delighted at this vindication.

“An’ see, Señorita, as I tell you, eet is floating away.”

And indeed, as they voyaged northward, it did seem to be drifting, drifting, behind and away from them, over the rim of the sea, over the edge of the world.

No, no mariner ever brought word of the three buccaneers again. No letter ever came to the elder Huntington, and Lloyds and all the human sleuths of the sea gave them up as deservedly lost.

Benson always swore that they reached the yacht, and raised jib and foresail—he saw them steer through the murk, over that unprecedented swell—the yacht list as she reached the choppy Dead Man’s Channel, between the Twin Horns. Even so they sailed to their doom, for no eighty-foot craft could live in that sea.

It was not until long afterwards that Sally realized that there were seven that perished,—old Joe Beam, by the knife, the sailor in the jaws of the shark, the wicked old man in his shower of gold, the Pink Swede from the viper’s bite; and at last, in the sea itself, in the last eruption,—Mac-Allister, who had fancied himself omnipotent; his henchman Pete; and the wayward and luckless Phil—lost, all lost through their lust for that gold. Seven of them—one for each of the moons.

Carlotta, they say, does not sing any more—at least in

public. She was married—and here we have nothing less than the authority of Queer Hat—to a tailor, for whom she acted as forewoman for a while—but *only* for that, shortly after settling down to the erecting of a living stairway like her own parents'. In fact she threatens to become a fleshy, girdleless "momma" herself.

About once a year, Spanish Dick drifts into the front yard of the old Pell place to talk to Don Alfonso, who rises painfully now, for he is old, and very stiff and rheumatic. The children hang on his collar, pull his sausage of a tail, and poke their chubby fingers in his eyes. But he is quite patient, waiting for that Heaven to which, his bearded master assures him, as a "good doggie" he will go. A legion of new tales the gypsy has invented, and a cycle of songs he has sung to little Henry and Sally, the perfect miniatures, by the way, of the captain and owner of the *Sally Fell*, and his wife.

Of some "misery" did Aunt Abigail die, and nobody really much cared, and not long after old Cap'n Bluster himself, in a fit of laughter at one of Gus Peter's sallies, which was better than passing in one of his old choleric squalls.

As for Benson and Jack Beam, they are still sailing the seas, as tars worth their salt should be doing, and Cap'n Harve each day saunters from his home, not far away from the old Fell place, to play with the youngsters there.

Linda and the lovable stranger were married—after they were dropped at that tropical port where lay the Café of Many Tongues—of that, without any concrete confirmation, Sally was sure. It would have been his way, she knew.

Never a letter or word had she, except when little Sally and little Harve came. Then there also arrived, that is a week or so later, a package with some indistinguishable foreign postmark, and, inside the careful wrappings, a silver spoon with seven little moons engraved on the handle. But there was no card, for none was needed.

But she was very happy nevertheless. She had her beautiful dream, and she had a real live sweetheart and husband, too, and one very faithful and true. For such things can be.

And oh! about that chest! Well, when it was opened, after they left the port, the gleam seemed to have dulled, and when they bent over to count the treasure, they found but a few of the round shiny things, on the surface—under them, nothing but piles of pebbles. So had the wicked old man's "idee" worked out.

Into the sea they went, the iron chest, and after it, the top layer of the coins. She would have none of it, nor the sailors either. It was accursed, they said, and afterwards told in Salthaven how the shiny things splattered and hissed when they struck the waves.

And Sally, as they watched the last bubble break above them, kissed her sweetheart.

"Better heart's treasure than pirate gold, eh Ben?"

And oh—yes—once, ten years later, last summer it was—she went with Ben on a voyage around the Horn. And longing, of course, to see the island once more, they voyaged east, and west, and north, and south, in that region, but no island did they see.

"He was right, was Spanish Dick," Sally said. "It *was*

a floating island, and it has drifted away—over the edge of the world.”

Once she thought she saw or, for the children's sake, tried to think she saw, its blue summit and emerald terraces, shining many fathoms deep under the ocean, the green stairways peopled with beautiful beings and gleaming with gold. Ben tried to explain it away by an earthquake of great violence that had occurred in that latitude three years before. But she shook her head, and be that as it may, you will not find The Island of Seven Moons on any chart.

But they were very happy.

THE END

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By Victor Bridges

He was second officer on a steamer plying between Brazil and London when the news came. And now he was heir to his black-sheep uncle, of whom he had known but little and had not seen since childhood.

The inheritance of a small island comes to John Dryden as the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream, and he immediately decides to make it his home.

With his material possessions he also inherits a mysterious enmity, the cause for which, though apparently connected with Greensea Island, is unknown to him. Rapid and exciting events leading to the solving of the mystery—the romance, the perils, the girl—make up the best yarn that has come from Victor Bridges' pen.



Dead Man's Channel

THE TWIN HORNS

Rainbow Bay

Coral Cove

CAVE O'NIGHT

BEN'S HUT

MIAHOB SPRING

CATHEDRAL WOODS
LIANA BRIDGE
BRIDAL-VEIL FALLS

Gorge River

GREAT CAVE

TUNNEL

CONE MOUNTAIN

OLD HOUSE

5 N CAMP

MACA'S GLEN

Lone Palm Point

South Bay

C A R I B

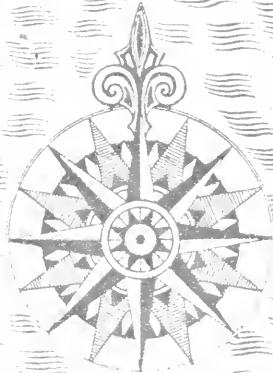


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Leeward
Islands



Plover Bay



E A N
S E A



SCALE OF MILES

