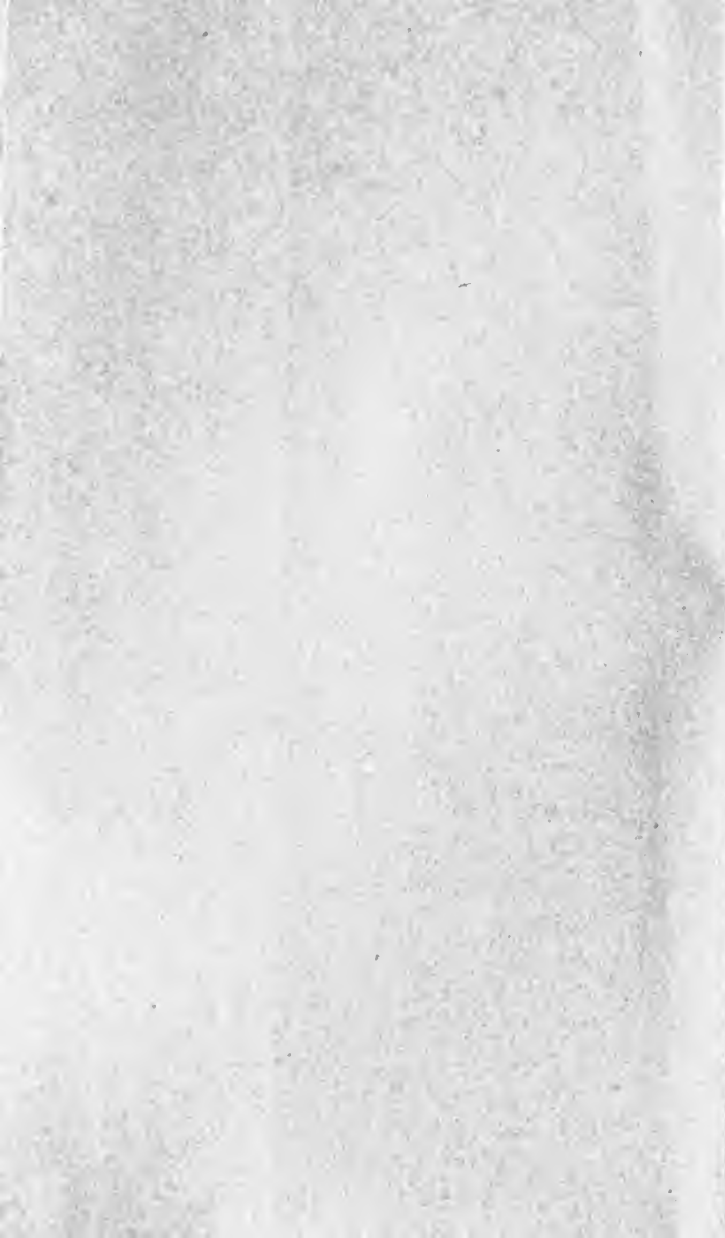


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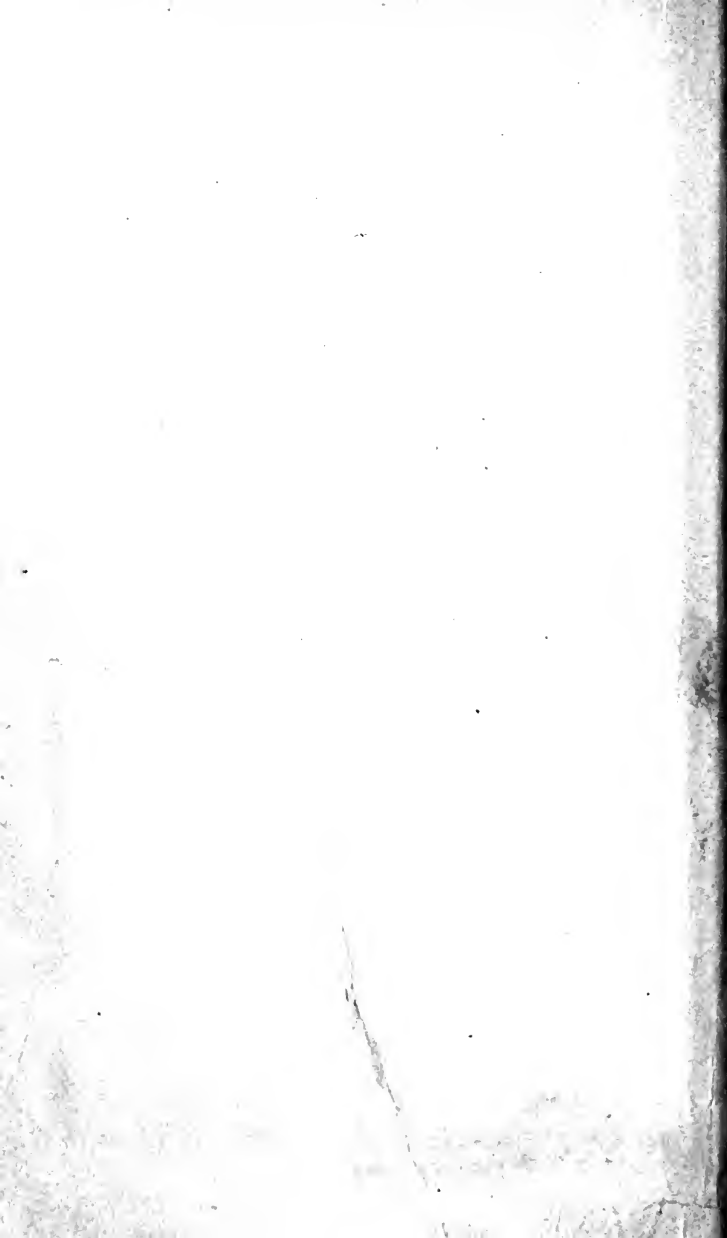




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RED BOB OF THE BISMARCKS



RED BOB
OF THE
BISMARCKS

BY
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Author of "When the Red Gods Call,"
"The Sorcerer's Stone," &c.

SECOND EDITION



LONDON
HURST AND BLACKETT LIMITED
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C.
1915

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ANNONIAO

Red Bob of the Bismarcks

CHAPTER I

AFTER lunch as I was passing through the weaving-sheds on my way back to the office, my father came through the swing-door. He had some samples of yarn in his hand.

“You have to hurry and catch the two-thirteen to Lime Street,” he said, speaking to me through the crash and yell of the looms, with his grey beard close to my ear. “Come outside.”

We crossed the sheds, and stood in an asphalted courtyard, where it was comparatively easy to speak.

“I can’t spare Henry or James,” said my father, twisting his beard with one hand. “In general, you are a disappointment to me, Paul, but I will allow you have an eye for yarns. You must do your best. Go and look up Griffens

and tell young Snaith himself that those seventies are not up to the last. Show him the difference; it takes some showing, but you can manage it; anyhow, you have to. Take these hundred-and-forties as well, and tell him the other is from Fletchers'; make him see the value they are offering us even at that increased price. Do your best. You have brains enough and to spare for nonsense of your own. . . . Have you your railway fare?"

I plunged hurriedly into three or four empty pockets. My father watched me with a disapproving eye.

"As usual," was his comment. "It is one-and-four return, first-class. There is one-and-sixpence, including trams. I'll debit it against your allowance. Make haste and catch your train."

I nodded, put the money and samples into my pocket, and crossed the yard to the outer door. My father stood in the middle of the asphalt, his long beard blowing in the September wind—it was a grey Liverpool day, and like to rain—and as I went out, I heard him call:

"Don't go and lose those yarns."

They were the last words he ever said to his troublesome youngest son. If I had known that the iron gate of the Corbet burying-ground was

already turning on its hinges to let him in. . . .
But when I knew, the world lay between.

* * * * *

When I got to Griffens', I found that Griffen Senior's wife had died the night before, and all the office was shut. I rolled up the yarn samples small, and put them in an inner pocket, till they should be wanted again. I have them still; my father's fear that I should lose them was quite unjustified.

Of course, the right thing to do was to take the train straight back to our works, and go on with my accounts. I did not do it. I looked at the Exchange clock, found it was not yet three, and walked down to the B. I. & C. offices in Water Street. The under-manager was a friend of mine; I could always rely on him for a seeing-off ticket when I wanted one.

I found him in his own small office, with all the windows shut, and a heavy smell of varnished linoleum in the air.

"What's going out to-day?" I asked.

"Best we have," said the under-manager, smacking his lips, as if the liners of the B. I. & C. were so many choice things to eat.

"Not the *Empress of Singapore*?"

“That’s she. Eleven thousand register, twin screw. A hundred and twenty first saloons, one hundred and eighty-two second, seventy-nine third. Cargo——”

“Bother the cargo. Can I have a ticket ? ”

“Catch hold. . . . We’ve got some star passengers this trip. Carita, going to sing all over India ; General Dames ; Professor Pedley Liddiard, for Borneo *via* Singapore. When are we going to see you in the passage-department for yourself, Corbet ? I never saw a lad so keen on watching other people go off.”

“Oh, God, Horsley, let it alone ! I’m not in the mood for being guyed about that.”

A side door opened, and a small, nervous clerk looked in.

“I didn’t call ; you can go,” said Horsley. Then, looking rather keenly at me : “You’ll get me into trouble with the G. M., if you roar like a bull in my respectable room. You go for a walk, lad, or go back to your father’s office, where I suspect you ought to be at three o’clock in the afternoon. If the *Empress of Singapore* puts you into such a devil of a temper, I guess you’d better let the lady alone.”

“I’m as cool as you are,” I said. “Anyone else going ? ”

“Vincent Gore, for parts unknown—after

Singapore. Lad, you're morbid. Lots of us get that way in Liverpool, and we have to get over it. You will too."

"I'm damned if I shall," I said, swinging out of the room. I wondered for a minute or two if there really was anything in the frequently repeated accusations of bad temper made by my father and my step-brothers. . . . Horsley seemed to have some idea of that kind in his head too. . . . However, I dismissed the subject, with the consideration that it did not matter, anyhow.

It was chill for September ; there was—almost—a threat of winter somewhere in the air. A pinching wind blew off the painty-grey water, making dry spots on the pavements. The sun had gone in ; Liverpool, down by the landing-stage and the elevated railway, looked like a steel engraving of itself.

They hint a lie who say, "if youth but knew." It does, sometimes ; above all—though this is strange—on days like the late September day that saw me drawn to the place where the ships went down to sea. Spring, for youth, is a time of dreaming and languor ; the white March days that send the man of full years looking for his cabin-trunk and his pamphlet of steamer sailings, more likely draw the lad of twenty to those quiet

nooks near railway-bridges far out in the country, where one may shelter from the east, and dream, and feel the new spring sun flow over his face, like the golden hair of the girl he is dreaming about. . . .

But the earliest bite of autumn, in the latitudes of England, fills a man in the pride of youth with a glory that seems to have no root or reason in any external circumstance. Because the wind has turned cold, and the roads are growing heavy—because dead leaves blow up beneath an iron sky—you are glad. You want to run and sing. You feel the round gold coin of Youth held tight within your hand, and know that there is nothing in the world it may not buy. Youth knows!

At all events, Paul Corbet, aged twenty-two, run away from his work to see the ships go out, knew that day. But what is the use of knowing when you may not do?

I wonder how many lads there are, now, in Liverpool, not yet broken to the bit and collar, who feel a sickness of heart every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon, when the great liners put forth with shouting to the ends of all the world, sending their cries far up the clattering grey streets? How many know the notes of the whistles? ("That's a Bibby for Burmah . . . There's the *Nestor* singing out; she's going to

Australia . . . That must be the *Benin* ; Canary Island and Gold Coast . . . There's the *Mauretania's* big bellow, third time ; she's off for New York . . . The *Victorian* should be leaving for Montreal about now ; that must be her . . . What's the Leyland boat for Buenos Ayres to-day ? Well, anyhow, she's going now ; I hear her.") . . .

We, the world's sea-rovers, have grown so rich nowadays through our roving that we must needs train our youths to stay at home and sit tight upon its gains in linoleumed rooms with all the windows shut. But they don't want to do it—they take a lot of training. And some of them—not the worst, though I say it—can't be trained at all.

Well ! I went down the Overhead to Prince's, having travelled third to Lime Street and saved eightpence ; otherwise I should have had to tramp it. My head was humming with Vincent Gore, all the way to the landing-stage. A famous traveller, whose life had been a tissue of the wildest adventures ; who had added more than one bit of red to the map of the British Colonies ; who was something of a mystery, something of a terror—for he did not write about his doings, and it was said that everyone who knew him was more or less afraid of him—this man was to be a

passenger on the *Empress of Singapore* to-day, and I with a ticket to go on board and see him !

The wind was getting up ; it blew along the great grey estuary in scuds and spirts of foam. A Cunarder was coming down the river ; you could see her scarlet, black-topped funnel swing a little against the ugly sky. The *Empress of Singapore* lay steady enough at her moorings, but every now and then the floating stage and the steamer heaved just enough to let you know they were not solid land. . . . To-night—oh, to-night ! the *Empress* would assuredly be rolling and storming down St. George's Channel, with the wild Atlantic breakers rushing up to meet her from the south ; the wind would yell in the wire riggings, and the spray would smack on the top of the smoke-stacks, and fall with a crash on deck. . . . And Vincent Gore would be going out to " parts unknown, *via* Singapore."

I was walking through the elevated tunnel that leads from the railway to the boats when this thought came to me. And at the moment, another came : a thought that exploded in my brain with the force of a bursting shell. To-night I would go too !

It sounded like the sheerest nonsense ; for I had only fourpence in my pocket ; my father and my step-brothers were even now looking out

for me to come back to the works with my samples, and my aunt, who kept house for us all, no doubt was planning out the dinner at Laurelholme (Gateacre and Woolton suburb) with perfect confidence in the assumption that four men were to be fed at that table, now and for ever more. Yet, I knew that I should do it. I was not too young to have experienced some of those rare moments in the history of the mind, when thought and desire, fused together by the heat of some outward shock, flash suddenly into a driving force that nothing can resist. I do not think all men have such moments; but those who have will never miss what they stretch their hands out to take.

So I went up the gangway of the *Empress of Singapore*, knowing that the gates of the world were opening for me—at last.

The alleyways were full of blue-coated stewards carrying cabin luggage; passengers and passengers' friends jostled one another against the enamelled bulkheads. There were half a dozen small crowds in the marble-panelled smoking saloon, farewelling one another, with the aid of drinks from the bar. Every table in the writing-room was occupied by people scribbling to catch the last shore mail. Madame Carita swept by in velvet and ermine, with a train of two maids and

a secretary; she was abusing the purser in voluble Glasgow, for having given her the second-best state cabin. The purser was, meantime, trying to pacify an indignant Indian general, who thought that he had been deprived of the second-best cabin in favour of Madame Carita.

It was all familiar to me—the whole scene of departure, the gilding and looking-glassing and marbling and bird's-eye mapling and brocading of the ship decorations; the typical ocean-going steamer smell of mattresses, apples, rubber carpeting and paint. I had never been on the *Empress of Singapore* before, but I have an eye for ships' geography, and I found my way without any hesitation to the first state cabin, about which no one was disputing, and which, I somehow guessed, would be the property of the man for whom I was looking.

I found the cabin, a double one, well amidships on the promenade deck, knocked at the shut door, and was answered in a voice that left no doubt whatever in my mind that I had guessed right. It was like the bark of a mastiff.

“Can't see anyone!” it said.

I opened the door and walked into the cabin.

The occupant swung round in a ship's chair that was fitted to a handsome writing-table, and asked me what the hell I meant by coming there?

“To speak to you,” I said. I did not feel half as put out as I had often felt in my father’s works, when James or Henry were rating me about something I hadn’t done.

“And is the youth of Liverpool,” said the barking voice, “so Liverpudlianly wrapped in fog that it is incapable of seeing when a man is busy?”

I stood against the doorway with my arms folded. He did not frighten me a bit; I felt my spirits rise at the fact. For this Vincent Gore, with his big, thin frame, his Cecil Rhodes type of face, and his blue, hard eyes with cat-pupils in them, was undoubtedly formidable.

I did not answer his gibe.

“You look as if you wanted a secretary,” I said. “I should like to offer myself. I could make myself exceptionally useful, if you cared to engage me.”

The first sentence I spoke in French, the second in German, the third, half in Spanish and half in Dutch. All these languages are useful in the cotton trade, and the work of learning them had been one of the few things about my father’s business that really interested me. James and Henry couldn’t learn languages for nuts.

Vincent Gore’s cat-pupils fixed themselves

on me steadily, and I saw that he was counting me up. I saw also that he was one of those men whose first impulse is always to say "No," who find every variety of "Yes" drag heavily on the tongue.

"I don't want a secretary," he said.

"I can fight," I went on. "I can stand anything, and I'm not afraid of anything in the world."

Vincent Gore swung round further in his chair, and made an impatient chop in the air with one finger—a characteristic gesture.

"Men don't say those things," he said. "Shed your baby petticoats, lad; they seem to have stuck to you a long time."

I felt myself flush hot at the thought of having swaggered; perhaps the smear of Liverpool clerkdom had not quite passed me by. . . .

"Will you have me?" I said.

"No," said Gore, turning back to his table, and taking up his pen.

I went out of the cabin, cold and hot at the same time, but the hot predominated. I was sure that the gods would send me something, for I was in the mood that Fate herself must heed when it comes.

Before I was out of earshot the door opened, and Gore barked out: "Sterry!"

A youngish man, light and strong-looking, well-clad, but not a gentleman, came running down the alleyway, answering, "Yes, sir." He went into the cabin and the door was shut. I waited, in an odd, passionless kind of calm. I was sure that something would happen.

Nothing did, except the reappearance of Sterry, who came out, hat in hand, and made for the shore gangway. It was still an hour before sailing time. I saw him go ashore; followed him and took the same train on the Elevated. My mind was beginning to purr like a cat inside me. For now I began to see.

When he got out I went after him, and followed him again. He went into an outfitter's in Bold Street, and began buying some special kind of socks. I stayed outside.

Either I was not clever at following or else Sterry was keen in suspecting anything of the kind, for when he came out again, he saw me, and asked me somewhat impertinently if I wanted anything.

"Yes, I do," said I. "I want you to come and have a drink."

"Oh, if that's all," said the man, dropping his gentleman's-gentleman air at once, "I'm with you, though I'm blest if I know who you

are from Adam. I thought you was a bill, I did."

"Bill for whom?" I asked, falling into step with him along the windy pavement.

"Me, you can lay. The governor isn't the sort to have bills after him. Wish you could say the same of me—but there, Jack ashore's Jack ashore, to the end of his days."

"Come in here; you'll find it a decent sort of place. So you were a sailor before you became a valet?"

"Yes; Royal Navy. Scotch is mine, thanks."

"Been many voyages with Mr. Gore?"

"Many," said the man, gaping at me with his hard red face over the rim of his glass. "Why, bless you, I only signed on with him last week. Hardly got time to know the run of his clothes."

"Would you sell your place to someone else?"

"You arst me, would I sell my place to someone else—meanin' 'oo?"

"No matter."

"Well, it isn't any matter, for I wouldn't. Not for all the girls that lives in Liverpool." He set down his empty glass and eyed it. I beckoned to the barman (who knew me, fortunately, for I had only twopence in my pocket) and had the glass refilled. The irrelevant remark

about girls made me feel hopeful—remembering that this was Liverpool and that the man had been a sailor.

I edged away from the neighbourhood of the men about the bar, and Sterry followed me, carrying his glass. I remember that I was very hot within and very cool without; that the place smelt of cold beer and washed marble, and that there was a white-faced clock on the wall, which I watched with half an eye as I spoke. The minutes were running away.

“See here, Sterry,” I said. “I want that place. No matter who for. I happen to be short of cash. But look at this watch. Handle it; open the case. You can see it’s worth all it cost, and that was fifty pounds.”

“Being a man that knows something of watches’ movements, I can. What’s that to do with the flowers that bloom in the spring?”

“I’ll tell you. My tie-pin is worth another ten. Take it into any jeweller’s and see, if you like. You can have the two, if you’ll cut off from the ship this afternoon, and let Mr. Gore suppose you’ve run away.”

“Do you want my answer to that proposition?” said the seaman-valet, draining his glass and setting it down. “Then you can have it. My answer is, No. Why? Because

Red Bob is worth being valet to, or bootblack neither. Red Bob's a man." He added some confirmatory adjectives. "And I don't pre-empt to go back on him. By Red Bob I mean my master, Mr. Vincent Gore, F.R.G.S., F.R.S., A.B.C.X.Y.Z., etc. Not that I don't want the cash, nor her. As it 'appens, I want them both each as much as the other, and she's agreeable—too agreeable, if anything; I like them a bit stand-off, best of all. But go back on Red Bob I won't. Not so long as I can stand on my blessed pins and see out of my blessed eyes."

Something in the style of the last remark struck me as familiar. I sized up the valet with an appraising glance. Long arm, light foot, broad shoulder, twinkling eyes beneath a penthouse brow, nose that had clearly been higher, in the original pattern, than it was at present. . . .

"Will you fight me for the place?" I asked. "I know a quiet place down in——" (for obvious reasons I do not give the name) "where you can be safe from the police. I could——"

"You got one ear regulation pattern and one cauliflower," interrupted Sterry, appraising me now in his turn. "You look young, but you're set. Hard and fit, and a proper young

devil, if there's anything in what they call physi-physiography. Yes, I'll fight you for it, and if I win, I take the foolish baubles, me lord, with which you tempt me virtue; and if you win, I stop and marry the girl. Nor don't you think I won't try to knock your head off, both ways, because I will honestly endeavour so to do. Where's your spot where the birds in their little nests can chide and fight, without Robert putting in his fairy foot to spoil a happy day?"

I think we had been speaking louder than either of us had imagined, for at this point three officers of the Red Sun Line, and two from the Kinnoull who had been drinking together at a small marble table, all got to their feet together and came over to us.

"Young Corbet of Corbet Mills; I knew the cut of his jib," cried the Kinnoull man. "Boys, this is going to be fun. I saw Corbet knock out Pentreath of the Bache Line in three rounds last Sunday week down at Joe Flanagan's. Come on, all of you."

We went out in a cheerful crowd, like a party of old friends, and made for Flanagan's. It is a quiet little gymnasium in a quiet street, the name of which I had better not mention; although, for the matter of that, I had not given the real name of Flanagan himself. He

is an excellent sport, and knows which side his bread is buttered on; fights with gloves or without, for love or for money, are all the same to him. He has a very thoughtful little arrangement in connection with his cellar-way and he does a bit of plumbing and gasfitting work, which is wonderfully apt to make loud slamming noises with sheets of iron just at the time when such noises are wanted. . . .

. . . There is nothing less interesting than the description of a fight on paper, long after it's over and forgotten, and in any case this one did not last very long. Sterry was a stone or so heavier than myself; older, at a time when age means advantage, and somewhat longer of reach. He fought, too, with the spirit and pluck of a gamecock, and the absence of gloves suited his rather rough-and-tumble sort of style very well. I think that on another occasion he would have had the better of me. But it was my day, and I knew, like a gambler who is in luck, that I could lose in nothing. I knocked him out in the fourth round, and the ship's officers cheered me till Flanagan thought it necessary to go out and nail a sheet of iron on to his fowl-house, with frightful clamour.

Burt of the Kinnoull Line took him to hospital, after I had handed over the watch and

pin, which I thought he had fairly earned, and received Sterry's ticket—I was cool enough to remember that they would not let me on board without it. The Red Sun fellows were very decent; they thumped me on the back, stood me drinks which I didn't particularly want, and fixed up my face for me as well as they could. I did not look very presentable when all was done, but there was no time to think about that; no time to do anything but bolt into a shop where they knew my father, get a few clothes on credit, stick them into a Gladstone bag, and run for the tram. The *Empress of Singapore* had already whistled twice.

With my bag in my hand, a good deal of plaster on my face, and one penny in my pocket, I reached Prince's again, thoroughly winded, and made for the big, black liner. The gangway was still down, but the bell was ringing furiously, and the stewards had begun to call out: "Any more for the shore?"—the cry that for those who sail is the swinging on its hinges of the great world's door, and for those who stay the first rattling of the sods upon a coffin. . . .

Women were streaming down the gangway as I pressed up; many of them were crying behind futile muffs and veils, and there were men,

too, who passed down to the shore with faces grey as the autumn river, and eyes that looked hard, yet saw nothing. People on the deck were saying last good-byes. . . . Often as I have seen it all, it never failed to make me a little choky in the throat. I consoled myself, pushing my way among the sobbing, hand-straining groups, with the reflection that there was, at all events, nobody to cry over my departure; and then an absurd vision came to me of my father and James and Henry, all tall and respectable and a little fat, standing out there on the landing-stage, and calling to me to come back immediately with the samples of yarn, whilst Aunt Sarah, pink and roundabout, shook a dinner-*napkin* at me, and told me that my soup was growing cold, and I was a disgrace to the Corbet family. . . .

“Hooray!” I said irrelevantly, and dived into the second-class companion way. A steward looked at my ticket and let me pass. I got into a quiet cabin, shut the door, and sat down upon the blue-quilted bunk to await the sailing of the ship.

“Any more for the sho-ore?” sounded out again, and stewards passed by in the alley-way, ringing bells. Feet trampled about; I could hear the gangway going up, and by and by

came the *Empress's* last call, a fierce succession of whistle blasts.

"She's off!" I said, bouncing on the mattress of the bunk. She was. In another moment or two the bit of landing-stage that was visible through the port began to slip back and away; a line of grey water opened out . . . the *Empress of Singapore* had sailed; and I, who had never been anywhere except across to Antwerp or Brussels, was off "to parts unknown, *via* Singapore."

I hoped—I almost prayed—that Vincent Gore would not want his valet before we were out of the river; and fortunately for me, my luck still held. We got clear of the Mersey and out to sea; and the September day shut down to dark. It was blowing up by now, the cabin in which I sat began to swing and curtsy, and the bulkheads creaked as the great ship leaned to the seas. By and by she began to lift in earnest, and you could hear the waterfall crash of big waves on the upper deck, as she drove her nose into it, storming down the Channel. We were in for a dirty night.

A clashing of plates in the neighbourhood of the pantries reminded me that I was hungry, and also that the dinner hour could not be very far off. I waited for the first bell in some

suspense; it seemed likely that my troubles would begin with the announcement of the dressing hour. . . .

I did not have to wait so long. Before the bell had rung a steward ran down the alleyway past my door, yelling: "Sterry! Sterry! Here, where's Cabin Seven's valet got to?"

I came out into the narrow passage with its glitter of white paint and brass door knobs, and sang out, "Here!"

The man did not give me half a glance.

"Your governor wants you," he threw over one shoulder, as he hurried away into the pantries, leaning all to one side, like a navy-blue flower growing on a windy soil of crimson carpeting. I made my way to the first saloon, staggering about a bit—for though I was a good sailor, I had no sea-legs as yet—and went to Number Seven with a dash, resolving to get it over.

Vincent Gore was seated at his table, writing, exactly as I had left him hours before. I do not think he had moved in all that time.

"Get out my clothes," he said, without looking up.

"Yes, sir," I said, determined to play the part out. My throat felt rather dry.

Gore looked up at once, and his glance went through me like a rifle-bullet.

“What is the meaning of this comedy?—and where is my man Sterry?” he said. Then he shut his mouth, and waited for a reply, in a manner that I felt to be peculiarly disconcerting. I was resolved, however, that it should not disconcert me.

“I fought your valet for the place,” I explained, somewhat short-windedly. “I tried to bribe him and he wouldn’t. So there was nothing else left to do. It was a fair fight; two of the Kinnoull men and four of the Red Star were there——”

“May one ask where?” asked Gore, with deceptive mildness.

“Joe Flanagan’s,” I explained. “Flanagan’s a real sport, and all the good fights——”

“I don’t particularly want to hear about all the fights, if you don’t mind,” interrupted Gore, still with that unpleasant gentleness. “Give me the net result of this one only—if you please.”

“You asked me, and I answered,” I said, with a spirit of flame. “We had as even a fight as you’d wish to see for four rounds, and your man knocked me down twice——”

“He seems to have done a little more than that,” interrupted Gore again, looking at my damaged face.

“Whatever he did, he’s in hospital, and I put him there,” I answered. “But he’ll be as right as rain in a day or two. I know.”

“So it would appear,” said Vincent Gore.

“I gave him about sixty pounds’ worth of jewellery,” I explained. “I hadn’t any cash. He didn’t want to go back on you, he said. He seemed a decent chap, and I was sorry I had to smash him up so, but there wasn’t anything else to do. I’ll make you as good a valet as you like, since you won’t have me for a secretary.”

“You,” said Gore, tilting back his swing-chair and looking up at me with those hard, cat-pupils of his, “you appear to be a nice young devil, taken all round.”

“That’s what your valet said,” I answered rather impatiently.

“I suspect it’s not the first time you have heard the comparison,” observed Gore. “Well”—with sudden change of manner—“perhaps I’m better suited to have the handling of a young devil than your parents seem to have been, and I’ve no particular objection to the breed, as such—what’s your name?”

“Paul Corbet.”

“Very well, Corbet, take away my boots and clean them. Clean them properly.”

I picked up the boots—they were exceedingly dirty—and started to leave the cabin.

“Say, ‘Yes, sir,’ when I speak to you,” barked Gore.

“Yes, sir,” I said. I took the boots away and shut the door.

The *Empress* was pitching heavily as I made my staggering way down the passage. I cannoned into a steward before I had gone far.

“Beg pardon——” he began, and then, seeing the boots in my hand: “You silly owl, why can’t you keep out of the way? Where are you going with them boots?”

“Going to clean them if I can get some blacking,” I said.

“Who are you with?”

“Mr. Vincent Gore.”

“Oh—Red Bob! Well; I’d recommend you to clean them proper. I’ll give you a lick of blacking after dinner; it isn’t boot-cleaning time now.”

“I’m going to do them,” I said. “I wish you could——”

“Who’s been knocking your face about like that?” he interrupted.

“A hospital patient.”

“Hospital patient?”

“ He is now.”

“ Oh—ah—I take you ; I comprehend. Well, seeing it’s Red Bob you’re with, I’ll stretch a point, and get you the stuff now. Where’s your own ? ”

“ Don’t know.”

“ New at the job ? ”

I made no answer, but looked at him. I might have looked unpleasant. He went off and got me the blacking, and I found my cabin and sat down to clean the boots. The job was not so easy as I had expected, but when I had got them clean and shining, I took them down to Number Seven again, and knocked at the door.

“ Your boots, sir,” I said.

The electric lights were on, and the cabin, panelled in white and gold and upholstered with amber brocade, looked very bright and luxurious. Gore was standing in the middle of it, and swinging to the motion of the ship as he tied his evening tie. He took the boots from me, and examined them. He tapped the inside of the heel with one finger.

“ Clean that again,” he said, and immediately turned to his tie once more, and blotted me out of existence. I went back and cleaned the insides of the heels with microscopical

care. The second bell rang while I was at work; I hurried back to the cabin as quickly as I could. Vincent Gore was still there. He examined the boots and set them down.

“Don’t let me have to speak about that again,” he said. “Unpack while I’m at dinner.”

He left the cabin and walked lightly and securely along the pitching alley-way towards the saloon companion. I did my best with his things; I had never had a valet—such luxuries not being fashionable even among the wealthy section of Liverpool society—but I was fastidious enough about my own clothes to guess fairly well how things should be done. Gore was back before I had quite finished—I found later that he was a phenomenally small eater and never lingered over meals. I got found fault with again over two or three matters. I shut my teeth and took it in silence. He dismissed me soon, and I went to the stewards’ pantry, and found someone to give me food; I was fairly ravenous, and the second-class cabin tea had long been over.

“But I wonder,” I said to myself, as I came back to my cabin, “I wonder why Vincent Gore is called Red Bob?”

CHAPTER II

WHY Vincent Robinson Gore, M.A., LL.D., F.R.G.S., F.R.S., was, by certain people, called Red Bob did not become clear to me for some time. There were a good many people on the ship who knew him, but his curious nickname did not seem to be current among the upper classes of our little world afloat. It was the ship proletariat and the ship *bourgeoisie* who used it—the deck hands, stokers, pantry boys, and general stewardry. He was Red Bob to all of these; I would not ask them why, for Gore kept me determinedly to my valet work during the first part of the voyage, and it was hard enough to stand all that was coming to me in such an anomalous position, without making things worse by asking questions about my employer. The stewards, knowing that I was not one of themselves, took it out of me by withholding all the small helps and hints they would have given to one of their own class, and the passengers, naturally, had nothing to do with

me. I had, in consequence, a fairly hard time of it up to Port Said—harder than anything in the shape of snubbings, scoldings, loneliness and uncongenial work that had ever fallen to my share in Liverpool.

And—I was supremely happy.

I had inherited Spain and Portugal. Up to this, they had been areas of paint on a piece of paper. Now they were purple headlands and blue, floating peaks, real peaks above a real sea . . . and they were mine. I owned the rock of Gibraltar; last week it had been an insurance company's boring advertisement—now it was a wonderful, glittering town, full of palms and castles and Othellos in white wool gaberdines, and Desdemonas picturesque in mantilla dress . . . and it belonged to me. I owned Marseilles—partly; I had seen France before, and that seemed to lessen my sense of property in the place; still, the delicate remoteness of Notre Dame de la Garde touched my senses like a perfume, and I added it to my gains. When we came to the Bay of Naples I found it so like a painting of itself by somebody that it disconcerted me a little. Nevertheless, through it, and through Vesuvius, cut sharp as a gem against a wonderful, clove-pink dawn, I immediately came into the possession of 'the

Mediterranean, which up to that point had somehow eluded me. And when the *Empress* tied up alongside the jetty of Port Said, I, looking on flat roofs and minarets painted in strange clearness against a sky of hard, high, unknown blue, felt with a deep content that my hands had closed upon the East.

With all that, was it likely that I should break my heart over tricks played by the "glory-hole," or cold shoulder from young infantry lieutenants going second out to Bombay?

Nevertheless, I was well pleased when Gore sent for me, just after we had entered the Canal, and told me, without any preface or explanation, that the cabin steward would take over my valet duties, and that my secretary work began that day.

"You will have a salary of a hundred and fifty and your expenses," he said. "I'll expect you to learn any languages I may require. I can get a working knowledge of any language in three weeks myself, and I don't see why you should take much longer."

He opened a drawer and took out a small volume.

"This is a Malay phrase-book," he said, handing it to me. "It's time you began. Malay—the pigeon Malay that's spoken all over

the Far East—is ridiculously easy; you ought to learn it in a fortnight. Talk to the sailors for practice; there are one or two Malays among them. . . . How about your German?”

“I’m pretty useful at it,” I answered, wondering a little, for I did not see what need there would be for German in the lands through which we were likely to travel.

“Right,” said Gore; he put his long legs up on the sofa and opened a book of Seligmann’s. I withdrew. The steward met me in the alleyway. It was as hot as the flue of a stove in there; the ripples on the Canal outside had a sharp, diamond radiance that hit you in the eye, and the sands of the Sahara glittered hard white and blue, through the yellow circles of the ports. The wind-shoots were out all along the ship, looking like great coal shovels set in a line. They caught next to no breeze, for we were going with the wind.

“Lord, it’s goin’ to be like ’ell in the Red Sea,” said the steward, mopping his neck. Then he suddenly remembered himself, and put away his handkerchief.

“Beg your pardon, sir, I forgot,” he said, pulling himself up straight. “Mr. Gore says you’re to go into cabin twenty-nine, sir, down

the next alley-way. Hope you'll be comfortable, sir. I'll see after you myself."

I had punched his head in the stewards' "glory-hole" the night before, for borrowing my shoe-brushes without leave; but his calm eye and starched demeanour suggested that he had never met me except as the benevolent employer of a worthy and obliging servant. . . . I could hear the clink of Vincent Gore's gold in his pocket, as plainly as if I had seen it put there.

"Thanks," I said. "Will you kindly shift my traps?"

"I did so already, sir. Anything else I can do, sir?"

"No, thanks," I answered, entering my new, neat cabin with its humming electric fan, and sitting down on my cream brocade sofa to meditate on the fresh turn of affairs. It was clear to me that I had been successful in passing some test—I could not tell what—and that Gore had finally decided to join my fortunes to his. What those fortunes might be I was uncertain; but I was sure of one thing—there was a mystery and a secret somewhere. Vincent Gore was not only an anthropologist and a geographer. . . . What else was he?

The door curtain swung a little, and a subdued tap sounded on the woodwork.

“Mr. Gore asking for you, sir,” came the steward’s voice.

I went back to cabin seven. Gore was still on the sofa, under the big, open port.

“Shut the door, please,” he said. “I wanted to say to you—that I have had secretaries, and given them up, because they talked. . . . Don’t you talk, young Paul!”

The last words were shot out with a dynamitic violence that almost made me jump, and as he spoke them, Gore’s cat-pupilled eyes flashed suddenly red. If you have never seen light eyes play this trick, you will not believe me; and indeed, the small flash sometimes caused by a sudden dilating of the pupil is not very noticeable. As a rule Gore’s eyes, however, did not dilate, they seemed to explode, and for one astonishing instant, they were red, red as flame. Then the light passed away, and the steady cat-pupil was fixed on me again. But now I did not need to ask anyone why Vincent Robinson Gore, in the steamer world that knew him so well, went by the name of Red Bob.

“That’s all,” he said.

When I got back to my cabin, I settled myself for a comfortable afternoon lounge beneath the fan, musing upon many things. Especially did I muse upon the other secretaries, who had

talked. . . . Gore was the sort of man who would maroon you penniless in a foreign port, without a grain of compunction, if he thought you had given him cause. I made a compact with myself that no cause should be given.

I worked hard at Malay ; it is an easy language, if you do not trouble about acquiring the literary form, and I was able to make myself useful with porters and "mandoers" (native hotel-clerks) by the time we got to Java. . . . This is not the story of our travels through the East and Farther East ; if I once began to tell those things, I should never come to an end. I think I was more or less drunk from Aden clear through to Batavia—drunk on the wonders and glories of the wide world. I should never have remembered to write to my father, if Gore had not told me to do it, somewhere about Bombay. When I did write, I found I had nothing particular to say to him ; I only told him that I was not coming back, and sent a civil message to Aunt Sarah. There was no use in filling up pages with explanations, even if I could have explained anything. East of the East, thank God, one simply does things, without having to chew and slaver them all over with explanations, before and after.

Gore himself, as I afterwards heard, had telegraphed to my people from Marseilles—

a characteristic message, which must have astonished the recipients :

“Your young devil is with me.—Vincent Gore.”

I don't know how other people feel about these things, but to me there has always been a fascination about certain parts of physical geography—latitudes, longitudes, Tropics, Arctic and Antarctic circles, points of the compass, the Equator. I should never have any respect for the man who was heard “to speak disrespectfully of the Equator.”

I said as much to Gore one night when we were running through a sea of hot, black oil, down towards the Java coast. I thought he would have laughed—but he did not. He only took another pull at the extraordinary Burmah cheroot he was smoking—a thing as big as a ruler—and said :

“I know, boy. . . . There is something in the words that goes to your head. You run down the Bay of Biscay into the thirties out of the forties, and you feel there's an adventure in that ; and you say to yourself that the South is waiting just round the corner ; and the word sounds to you like the name of a girl you love. And you see Africa—it's just a strip of sand and rocky hills—but it makes your heart jump, because

Africa is, well, Africa ; there are no words for these things. But men have shed their blood for them, and they'll go on shedding it.

“And you get to the Line—and it seems glorious to you—just an imaginary division in the sea—still, you'd write hymns to it if you knew how. . . . The East—everyone talks about the fascination of the East ; you thought you knew all about that, but then there's another East, further away, and that seems as delightful as finding a sovereign in a pocket you thought was empty. The forms of things on the map fascinate you like pictures ; you can read an atlas for hours. When there's a dotted line anywhere, or a blank space, you want so much to go there that it makes your mind ache just as your stomach aches when you're hungry——”

“I think you're a wizard, sir,” I said, staring at him. For indeed he had spoken out my very inner mind.

“Not a wizard, young Paul, only a man who's been there too,” said Gore. There was something I liked in his face. You would never have thought he had it in him to swear at you violently in four languages when you let his papers get astray.

“Ah, but you——” I said.

“Same breed,” said Gore, tucking the big cigar

into the corner of his mouth. "Celebrity and all that, you mean? Yes. But we're all one family, young Paul. You and I and Stanley and Burton and Sven Hedin and all of them. Any one of us would give up our lives for a river, or make love to a mountain range. Or we'd serve seven years, and seven years after that, for Rachel in the shape of a tribe that nobody'd ever heard of. No sense in it, boy, so far as we're concerned. Means a couple of letters after your name when you're growing old, and a flock of geese a-cackling over your little bit of work, and saying you never did it. . . . Means fevers and dirt and general uncomfortableness, short commons and that sort of thing. Spear or an arrow into you once in a way. Get three-quarters drowned now and again; get wrecked—beastly things, wrecks, except in boys' books. No comfort. No wife, no home. I'd tell you to stop while you can—only that was before you bashed in the head of my valet, and came aboard. You'll never stop now. You're one of us, God help you!"

"There's nothing in the world I'd rather be," I said.

"Twenty years—when the century's beginning to get middle-aged," went on Gore, as if he had not heard me. "Twenty years. . . . Your

James and your Henry will have the mills then, because of course you'll be out of the old man's will, and they'll take care you stay out. They'll be respected. Sit on committees, people ask their opinions, stand for Parliament, make the nation's laws. Mrs. James and Mrs. Henry. Nice, pinky-faced young daughters, boys at school. Lamps in the windows when they come up the avenue at night. Stuffy comfy evenings, red curtains—and cats—and somebody making crochet. Home, young Paul."

"If there's anything on the face of the earth I loathe," I said with emphasis, "it's home. And as for wives and kids, I can't for the life of me see why any man's fool enough to bother with them. And as for the rest, and red curtains, and stuffy evenings—why, sir, you'd have died if you'd had to live a life like that."

"Oh, yes," said Gore, with that twinkle in his eye again. "Undoubtedly I'd have died—some of me. . . . But did you ever hear the schoolboy 'howler' about an amphibious animal?"

"An animal that can't live in the water, and dies on the land," I quoted.

"Yes. That kid shot straighter than he knew. There are such animals."

"Well, I don't understand," I said.

"No," answered Gore, looking down at me

with the curious, middle-aged sort of wisdom that is so irritating to you when you are really young—in my opinion, elderly people of forty and upwards think they know a great deal more than they actually do.

We fell to talking about Java then, and the subject dropped. But after that night I think we both understood our fortunes were linked by a stronger bond than that of a salary and service. As Gore had said, we were one breed.

By this time he had told me where we were going, and I could have danced a hornpipe on the deck when I heard it. We were bound for New Guinea—not the comparatively settled and civilized area of British Papua, but the wild, unsettled northern coasts, and the archipelagos of little-known islands that lay beyond—Kaiser Wilhelms Land, the Bismarcks, the Solomons. There was nothing in all our baggage that engaged my attention so much, after this, as the great, finely-lettered atlas with its satisfying maps of every corner of the earth. I studied Borneo, Celebes, Halmaheira, Banda, Amboyna, Ceram, the Aru Islands—all the outliers of New Guinea—the great island continent itself, British, Dutch and German; the lesser island groups that huddled round it, like chickens round a hen (indeed, the whole country is shaped not at

all unlike a long, scraggy fowl). I gloated over the famous names that lay thick along its coasts—Geelvink, Schouten, Tasman, Le Maire, D'Entrecasteaux, and mentally shook my fist at the vandalism of the hideous titles along the German section—such names as Potsdamhaven, Stephansort, Friedrich Wilhelmshaven, Herbertshohe.

“It's like a beastly lot of suburban villas, with monkey-puzzles in their gardens, along a tarred motor-road,” I complained to Gore, when he found me nursing his weighty “Philip's” in a secluded corner of the deck.

“What are you going to do about it?” asked Gore oddly.

“Do about it?” I asked. In the curious pause that followed, the steamer's screw beat steadily, and the sound of the Java Sea rippling like corn silk before our bows, came up through the quiet afternoon. . . . Saucers and spoons were tinkling somewhere below; it was evidently four o'clock.

In those days—and they are not so long ago—the Terrible Year threw no shadow upon the sunny fields where mankind played like a child beneath the slopes of a slowly-waking volcano. Yet there were some, here and there, who sensed the first dull tremors, before the smoke and flame burst forth. Gore, I think, was one. I say

think, for there were recesses in his mind to which I was never admitted. How much he may have known, guessed, found out, I can never even surmise.

At any rate, he passed the matter off, and no more was said. If he, with his secret knowledge, whatever it may have been, saw "MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN" written across the Friedrichs and Finschs of the map, so did not I.

* * * * *

And now I have come to a part which is very difficult to tell. If I were one of those poetical fellows, who make a song about everything, in prose or in verse, I suppose it would be easy. But it is not. I read poetry, but I do not write it. And as for speaking it—

Well, when we came into the harbour of Banda, the last of the Moluccas, that blue, early morning, with the sun sending up long rays like the crest of the P. and O. Company, behind the rim of the volcano—

You see, Banda Harbour is just a volcano. A crater with walls of green forest, quite steep straight up, and a floor of deep water—very deep and very blue-green. And there are islands. Little ones, with palms . . . palms. . . .

No, I can't describe the place. It is like something that you see in a coloured picture when you are a little kid at school, and that you don't believe in when you grow up. Only it is true. Even the fortified sort of stone town, and the castle on the height, that you see in the picture, are there too—there on Banda, last outlier of Malaysia, next to New Guinea, which is certainly the end of the world. I am not going to write the history of the castle and the fort; all castles and forts have exactly the same history. Somebody built them; somebody else took them; somebody took them again; many somebodies were killed defending them; then at last they grew old-fashioned, and the green grass sprang up among their stones, and tourists with guide-books wandered about among the ruins, giving the excellent imitation of a hen drinking that I have always observed to be inseparable from the tourist spirit. . . .

I have nothing to say about the castle and fort of Banda, because life is short, and anyhow I am not Cook or Dr. Lunn of the tours. And besides, it was not at the forts that things happened.

We came in early, as I have said, and a German author recited poetry at the Goonong Api as we dropped under its fiery cone, and a young

doctor going to Kaiser Wilhelms Land said that the beautiful harbour was filled with the sea as a round, deep cup is filled with wine. I asked him if they drank wine out of cups in Berlin, and if so, why; but he did not answer me. Personally, I should have said that the place was more like an immense circular skating rink, with canoes for the skaters. At any rate, it was wonderful, and the town was wonderful too. Gore let me have the morning off, and I made for the market without waiting for breakfast, bought a loaf full of hot curry and another of rice, and ate them as I went along through the sleepy stone streets to the nutmeg woods above.

I do not know what took me to the nutmeg woods. The town was more interesting; it was scattered with odd, sleepy Chinese, sitting motionless as temple gods inside their little shops, where no one ever seemed to come to buy, and Malays in silk jackets and cotton petticoats, dozing on their feet at the street corners—and there were gateway carvings that made you think you were having a nightmare in broad daylight, and great Dutch planter houses—palaces almost—built largely of fine marble, but dropping to pieces for lack of a soul to live in them. Whereas, on the track that led up

through the woods, there was nothing—nothing but trees.

The morning was hot with the marrow-melting heat of Malaysia; even here in the woods, where the slim, light nutmegs grew beneath the shadow of lofty kanaris, like delicate ladies sheltering beneath a canopy of green and gold, it was undeniably warm. Still, I went on and up. The sea was sparkling and creaming far away below, where one could see it through the openings in the forest, and the nutmeg flowers, carved ivory blossoms smelling of all the East, lay in drifts like faded snow, so that I could scatter them with my feet as I went. There were nutmegs everywhere, growing at the same time as the flowers. It pleased me oddly to see that, I remember, and to know that leaf and fruit and blossom went on for ever and ever in these far-away, dreamy Islands of the Blest. And the fruit, like a nectarine to look at, with a jetty stone laced round in scarlet mace, was curiously fascinating—not very eatable, and yet one couldn't help eating it. . . .

“It is first cousin to the lotus,” I thought, as I set my teeth in a second. “If you ate enough of it, you would lie down here among these fallen flowers, with the scent of the spice in your brain, and stay there—you would doze

away, listening to the sound of the sea, and dreaming—dreaming. You'd hear those crested pigeons cooing, and the sound of the steamers coming in and going away, and you'd never mind them. I can understand. . . .”

I was touched by a kind of fear—not of the nutmeg, but of what it represented—the perfumed dream, the clinging, poisonous peace that wraps itself about the white man in the East beyond the East, leaving him, like Merlin in the hollow oak :

“ As dead,
And lost to life, and name, and love, and fame.”

I remembered things I had seen on our long journey—palm huts on coral beaches, with bare, white feet loafing and lolling about the sand of the floors ; eyes of English grey that had grown empty-happy, as no white man's eyes should be, that looked out all day under eaves of sago-thatch to the far-off ruffle of the reef upon the blue. . . .

I threw the nutmeg fruit away, but I laughed as I threw it. For I knew that, whatever my faults might be, I was not one of the kind that “ goes black.”

I went on and up. It was pleasant to me to hear the tramp of my solid boots on the track ; it seemed, in that land of gliding, barefoot

shadows, to mark me out as one of the master race. Only those who have lived in tropical countries can understand the significance of the boot, I can fully believe. If the ancient Romans hadn't allowed themselves to slop about in sandals, they would still have been the masters of the world.

Thinking after this fashion, I became aware of another boot; a very light one, but unmistakably no bare foot, sounding on the track somewhere above me. The air was so still under the great kanaris that one could hear every smallest sound. This boot, or shoe, was a long way off; but there was something clean-cut and delicate about its fall that interested me.

"A girl," I said, as it drew nearer, coming down. "A white girl. No half-castery in that walk. Young, I should guess. Pretty, if her face matches the sort of foot she seems to have. . . ."

I stood at a turn of the track and waited. A crested pigeon, deep in the wood, crooned monotonously to itself, like something that has been sounding for ever and ever, and never means to stop; among the kanari tops a bustling, small breeze had begun to stir, but down below it was windless as the bottom of the sea.

The step came round the corner. It was a girl. She was walking rather quickly; she wore a pale-green dress, like leaves, instead of the all but universal tropical white. I remember I noticed that particularly, also the leaves in her hair, worn, I think, instead of a hat, to protect her from sunstroke, but looking, nevertheless, like an Oread's woodland crown. I saw, as she came nearer, that her face, under the leaves, was like . . . what was it like? Something that I had seen lately; something that was sweet and intoxicating. . . . Why, it was like the blossoms of the nutmeg tree, carved ivory, pale and warm; and the eyes were the colour of the nutmeg's fruit—deep-hidden, rich black stone. There was no colour at all in the cheeks, but the lips were red—it may have been my fancy, yet I think not—with the very redness of the crimson mace that lay scattered among the ivory flowers on the ground.

Those dark eyes were eyes of the sun-lands, and the languor of the tropic world showed itself in the delicately poised head and undulating movements of the girl; yet the fineness of her features, and especially the cameo cutting of nose and upper lip, proclaimed the blood pure European—especially to me. It was not for nothing that I had been the pupil of a famous

anthropologist during many weeks of travel. I did not need to look at the Oread's finger-nails in order to know that there was no dark drop in her veins, despite the black eyes and the ivory-pale skin. The half or quarter-caste girl of gentle breeding, who swarms in Malaysian seas, charming, pretty, well-educated, yet cursed with the curse of mixed blood, that is sure as murder to "out" some day—this girl had not, and has never had, attraction for me. But the lady in green was a lady, one of my own race and blood, and I was interested in her. I judged her to be tropic-born, perhaps even of parents who were tropic-born themselves. We had not met with many of her kind; ethnologically, I told myself, she was quite worth studying. I did study her. She seemed entirely unconscious of me; she passed by me with the light, quick step that I had noticed (where did the languor come in? Yet it was undoubtedly there), and melted away among the kanaris, like :

"A green thought in a green shade."

After she had gone by, a very slight, sweet perfume hung about in the air for a moment or two. Most women in Eastern lands have an unpleasant liking for strong, coarse scent; I had noticed it, and come to detest any odour

that ever was manufactured and bottled. But I did not dislike this ; it was a fresh, live perfume, not dead nor made, and it seemed to represent the girl, when she was gone, as a picture represents a face.

What I did not know then about this scent of hers I will tell now. She had a passion for tropic flowers—mostly for those resembling herself, though I do not think this was a conscious selection. She loved frangipani, stephanotis, tuberose, trumpet-flower, magnolia, and all the rich white flowers, wax-like and marble-like and alabaster-like, that are common in hot countries. Her passion for them was such that she always had them about her, sometimes in her hair and on her dress, more often concealed beneath her muslins and laces, next her own white skin, surrounding her with the delicate, mysterious suggestion of flower-petals and fragrance that I had noticed, and that was so peculiarly her own.

I stood by the turn of the road for a little while after she had gone by. I smoked a cigarette, and wondered who this Oread with the woodland crown might be. I wondered where she lived. I wondered who was in love with her. I wondered why she had gone up the hill, and why she had come down. I wondered

if she ever wore a hat. There seemed no end to the wonder that flowed up like an outbreaking spring in my mind.

I got down to the ship again, I don't quite remember when or how. I must have been thinking a good deal on the way, but I could not have told then, and cannot tell now, what I was thinking about. The steamer—a small, rather unsteady thing called the *Atzelia*—left again by sunset. I nearly missed her, because I lingered about the gangway till the sailors were pulling it up, and had to jump in the end. I had an idea I wanted to see something or somebody, but was not sure what.

Gore saw that I had nearly been left behind, but he made no comment. What you had nearly done, good or bad, never interested him. Clean-cut results were the only sort of thing that he had any use for.

CHAPTER III

THE ship, as I have said, was a German one, a tidy little boat that did the long trip from Singapore to German New Guinea and New Britain once in three months or so, carrying Government officers, planters and traders to the colony. We had only been on her a day or two before Banda, and I had not taken any special notice of the passengers, being too much interested in the strange Moluccan ports where we were calling to trouble about anything with a flavour of Europe in it. But after Banda, our last port of call on the way to Kaiser Wilhelms Land, the *Afzelia* became suddenly so German that we two Englishmen began to feel a little "out of it." The magistrates and customs people and postal officials, and captains of native forces, and managers of plantations and stores, began to march up and down the narrow decks with their chests swelled out, whistling soldierly airs; the Kaiser's health was drunk after dinner, and free opinions were freely bandied about the Dutch colonies through

which we had been passing—not to the advantage of Queen Wilhelmina's empire.

“As soon as we get these places we shall reform them,” I heard a tall, smart-looking fellow called Hahn say to a stocky South German trader. They were marching together up and down the decks under the shadow of Ceram, last outlier of Malaysia—a wonderful world of high, sabretoothed peaks and rolling tablelands, Reckitt's blue in colour, hung above a sea of bluish silver.

“Yes—yes,” answered Wolff, the trader, nodding his round, cropped head, “so we shall.”

“That Ceram,” went on Hahn, “is worth something, and when the natives have been well kicked, there will be no more fool's play of rebellion. Also we shall back to life the trade of that dead island, Banda, immediately bring. Also Amboyna. Java we shall——”

“Guard!” interrupted Wolff. “That young Englishman knows German.”

“What does that make?” inquired Hahn, swinging his arms as he walked, and looking proudly over the sea. “In this part of the world it is not the English who are the masters.”

“No,” I said, putting my head out of the saloon entrance, “only everywhere else. We don't mind your having a bite of our leavings.”

Hahn turned scarlet from crown to chin;

the very scalp under his golden bristles of hair glowed pink.

“If you were a German,” he said, restraining himself with some difficulty, “I should know how to answer that.” He spoke in good English.

“Answer it any way thou likest,” I replied in German, using the familiar “*du.*”

“Damn you, then, I will!” was his (English) reply. He pulled a dogskin glove out of his pocket (where I seriously believe he kept it for just such emergencies) and was about to throw it in my face, when a head, bald, fair, middle-aged, with peculiar, grey-green eyes, quietly projected itself from a neighbouring port-hole, and remarked: “Quiet!”

It had an extraordinary effect upon Hahn. He dropped his arm, looked at me sulkily, and was about to turn away. Oddly enough, I felt sorry for him; I rather liked him on the whole. He wanted a row; that was all in his favour—so did I want a row. And whoever the gentleman with the commanding eye might be, he didn't command me.

So I straightened out the situation in my own way. The glove was still in the young German's hand. I nipped it from between his fingers, flicked him on the nose with it, and handed it back with a bow. He turned pinker than ever,

and looked at the bodiless head with what almost seemed an expression of entreaty. The head was sternly shaken.

As for me, I had my back turned to the port, so I quietly winked at Hahn, and said, as I passed him by :

“The first place we stop.” Then I went to my cabin, and lit the biggest and blackest of cigars that I had bought in Sumatra. I felt that I owed it to myself.

“Going to be fun,” I said, and swung my feet joyously to and fro, over the edge of my bunk.

I was not long left to enjoy myself. Gore sent for me, and gave me a lot of stuff to copy out in the saloon—our only working-place for the present. I took the papers, and set myself down at a side table with my typewriter, cursing his scientific zeal. I wanted to look at Ceram until we were out of sight—a piratical island, of the real old, fierce Malay type, where the natives were still actively engaged in hunting each other’s heads, seemed to me a good deal more interesting than some dusty facts about culture drifts and modification by environment.

We steamed on through a quiet sea, warm, pleasant winds pouring through the open doorways of the saloon. I could hear the flying-fish skittering about our bows; we were running

through shoals of them. The ship's bells sounded in the sleepy stillness of the morning.

Wolff and Hahn had disappeared; I knew as well as if I had seen them, that they were sitting in some private cabin, drinking beer out of large, glass-handled mugs, and discussing the duel that the bodiless, elderly gentleman had seemed so anxious to prevent. A duel! Something about my diaphragm was giving delighted little jumps as I worked. This was worth coming abroad for. This was better than punching the heads of second mates down in Larry's gymnasium.

I finished the stuff—it was a typed extract from a scientific paper that Vincent Gore had told me to do—and carried it to his cabin. He took it from me, and began reading it over. I stood with one knee on the locker-couch, pulling the curtain-tassels, and wondering how best I could keep the nature of my proposed diversions from my employer—at least, until after the “next stopping-place.”

Gore read the whole extract through till the end. Then he opened a drawer, took out a red pencil, neatly underlined one passage, and handed the paper back to me without a word.

I looked at the marked paragraph. It ran as follows :

“Nevertheless, considering the history of these islands, one is compelled to allow that successive waves of immigration, arriving from India, China, and the continent of Africa, have in so far modified the original duel . . .”

It was my turn to grow red now. I felt myself flushing pinker than even Hahn had done.

“May one ask,” said Gore, in a singularly gentle and agreeable voice, “what duels are doing in this particular galley? I never heard it was a custom of the races under question—but if you have made any new discovery——”

“Paying me a salary doesn’t entitle you to make fun of me, sir,” I cut in, twisting the tassels till they fell off in my hand. I threw them on the floor and looked at them. I found I was breathing rather hard.

“No, young devil,” said Gore, still in that pleasant voice, “but it does entitle me to notice if you mean to leave.”

“I don’t mean to——” I began.

“Oh, yes, you do,” said Gore. “By the shortest route—home. If I believed in the Christian mythology (it really does come in handy at times) I should say that you hadn’t far to go—home—in a climate like this. . . . Now will you please tell me what you mean

by cooking up duels when you are engaged in my service ? ”

His pleasant manner had suddenly flown out of window, and the last sentence was spoken in a tone that would—I suppose—have scared some people. It was also decorated—considerably. Gore was a remarkable hand at decorated language on occasion.

I said nothing at all. I looked at him.

“ You know I can give information to the authorities, and stop it,” said Gore.

I said nothing.

“ You know I can dismiss you at the first port.”

I thought it time to speak.

“ You can do all those things,” I said. “ But you won’t, Vincent Gore, because you’re not the sort of man, whatever you may say, to stop a fight. Also because I can jolly well guess you’ve fought duels yourself.”

Gore leaned back in his seat, and gave vent to one of his appalling shouts of laughter. A scared, small steward peeped in at the door, asked feebly if the Herr wanted anything, and scurried away without waiting for an answer.

“ Well aimed ! ” he said. “ Sit down and tell me about it.”

And I knew that I had won. I may mention

here that the "Sir" was dropped from that day onwards, between us.

I told him. He made no comment for a moment, and then asked: "They are evidently trying to force the challenge from you, so as to deprive you of the choice of weapons. . . . How are you with a pistol?"

"Don't worry about that," I replied. "Since I was a kid I've handled a Webley."

"Let him do the challenging; he will if you sit tight," observed Gore.

"That's all right; the old gentleman with the face won't stop him," I said. "We understand each other. Hahn is a white man. I wish I could punch his head instead. I'd enjoy it more, somehow."

I went out again into the warm wind and the sun, pondering on many things. It seemed to me I had acquired a good deal of food for thought that day already, although it was not yet eleven o'clock.

I was to acquire more. Half an hour afterwards, I met my employer coming round a corner, with an expression of abject terror on his face.

Sudden death was the smallest thing I thought of—such ideas as an outbreak of bubonic plague on the ship, a coming typhoon that was bound

to wreck us, fire among explosives in the hold, rushed through my mind, it is true, but only to be discarded on the instant. Nothing of that sort would have disturbed Red Bob's equanimity. Then what, in the name of all calamity and disaster, had disturbed it ?

My heart, as he came nearer, began to thump like the screw of the steamer. Surely unheard-of things were happening to-day ! I saw that Red Bob was gnawing the end of his moustache, and that his eyes looked like the eyes of a cat that is just going to jump out of your arms through the window. I should not have been surprised to see him make a spring over the rail.

“What—— ?” I began, rather breathlessly.

“God save us, Corbet !” said the great explorer, almost trembling. “The damned ship is full of damned women !”

“Come into my cabin,” was the first thing that occurred to me to say, for I really thought him mad. He preceded me into the little blue-and-white room, and sat down abruptly, mopping his forehead, and looking at me with an expression of abject dismay. I switched on the electric fan, and under cover of its steady buzz, which ensured us against being overheard from the next cabin, asked him :

“Has anything happened ?”

Gore was recovering somewhat. He answered peevishly.

“I told you what had happened. The ship is crawling with them. At least, there are three, and that’s as good, or as bad, as thirty.”

“I never knew you were—at least, on the *Empress*——”

“Give me a drink,” interrupted Red Bob. I filled him out a glass of tepid water; he drank it, and went on:

“On the *Empress*, and after, the women, what there were of them, were married, if you’ll remember.”

I did. The only lady passengers from Liverpool to Singapore had been a few wives going to join their husbands. And later, on the way to Batavia and Makasser, there were no women at all, except a few half-castes.

“Don’t you like unmarried women?” I asked, still feeling puzzled.

Red Bob poured out and drank another glass.

“I do not—I do not,” he said. “Two of these are married, I believe—a Frau Baumgartner and a Frau Schultz—going to join their husbands in Simpsonhafen—but the third . . . Young Corbet, for God’s and your employer’s sake, go and flirt with the whole lot till we get there. I believe you’re quite capable of it.”

“I don’t mind,” I said, struggling with a frantic desire to laugh, “but I haven’t much leisure time.”

“You shall have all you want,” declared Gore, leaning back in his seat, and watching the blue curtains sway out and in through the yellow circle of the port. “I feel better now. . . . It was the lean one did it. She scared the seven senses out of me, up there on the boat-deck just now.”

“Scared the seven—— Would you mind telling me what she did?” I asked. I would have given the world to be able to explode, like an overcharged soda-water bottle.

“She didn’t do anything. She sat and sniggled at me, and babbled. She saw a hole in my sock where I’d just torn it on a nail, and she put her head on one side, and said: ‘Oh, Mr. Vincent Gore! What a sad life you must lead, without a woman’s hand to attend to these things for you!’”

I was speechless.

He went on. “And then she said: ‘Is there nothing I could do for you?’ ‘Madam,’ I said, ‘you could——’ But she stopped me, and said with another sniggle: ‘I’m not madam, I’m miss—I’m a girl!’ A girl, and she as old as I am! ‘Well, madam, or miss, as you like,’ I said, ‘you could leave me alone; I want to read.’”

“ You didn’t ! ” I interrupted.

“ I did, ” said Gore, with a terrified look.

“ But she simmered at me, and said——”

“ She simpered ? ”

“ No, simmered—like a saucepan bubbling—and said : ‘ Oh, Mr. Gore, you’re too much alone, I’m afraid ; but I can understand about that, for so am I. ’ ‘ Excuse me, ’ I said, ‘ I’ve forgotten something in my cabin, ’ and got up—I got up and ran away.”

It was too much. I collapsed on my berth, and shrieked, rolling over and over in an agony of mirth.

“ Don’t, for heaven’s sake, ” said Gore. “ If she hears you, she’ll think you have a fit, and insist on coming in to nurse you. She’s so beastly sympathetic.”

“ I never thought you were afraid of anything, ” I choked, wiping the tears out of my eyes.

“ You thought dashed wrong, ” replied Gore. “ That sort of woman has been the tragedy of my life. Corbet——” he sat straight up, and his blue eyes dilated into the lakes of fire that had won him his name——“ Corbet, some day a woman like that’ll get me, and I won’t even have the pluck to hang myself.”

“ Oh, rats ! ” I said disrespectfully, rocking to and fro in the anguish of my enjoyment. “ A

woman can't make a man marry her. Anyhow, I never was afraid of anything that wore a skirt, in all my life."

"Honest Injun?" asked Red Bob, fixing his eyes on me. They were blue and quiet now.

"Honest!" I said.

"Shake!" remarked Bob gravely, holding out his hand. "You're a braver man than I am."

"Well, I know what your heel of Achilles is now," I said, getting up and going to the glass.

"What are you after?" asked Gore.

I pulled down my tie, and buttoned up my coat so as to show my figure, which is none of the worst.

"Going to talk to the lady who suffers from loneliness," I said, putting on my Panama with a rakish cock.

"Go on, Casabianca," said Gore, reaching for my cigarettes, "I'll stay where I'm safe."

We were almost out of sight of Ceram now, and the *Afzelia* was steaming steadily along towards the wild, strange coasts of New Guinea. The wonderful island-continent had not yet lifted its head out of the sea; I might have been more deeply engaged in looking out for it, had I not been interested in looking for something still stranger than itself—the woman who had scared Red Bob.

CHAPTER IV

I FOUND her on the boat-deck. She was reading, and did not hear my approach, so I was able to get a good look at her before she saw me. I should not have thought her to be so old as Gore had said, but she was certainly not far off forty, and she could never, at any age, have been pretty. She was smallish, and her figure—was there, or was there not, anything wrong with it? I thought not, at a second glance. Her feet were small, but flat and ill-shod; her hands, roughened by exposure without gloves, were what the palmists call “spatulate.” She looked up as I came nearer. I saw then that she had a—was it a squint? No, after all, it was not. Her smile was the one thing about which there could be no doubt; it was undeniably false. On the whole, I did not like her.

She spoke at once.

“Oh, you are Mr. Corbet—I saw your name in the purser’s list. It’s so nice to have a couple of Englishmen on board, among all these foreigners

—and then such a celebrity as Mr. Vincent Gore !”

Her voice did not match her person ; it was soft and pleasant—a misfit voice that should have belonged to a pretty woman. A pretty woman, however, would not have had that carneying manner.

Her hair was of no particular colour ; her dress, as far as I can describe it, seemed to be something squashy, with tags and bobs about it. By force of contrast, it brought to my mind something very different—the green floating robe, fresh and soft as a leaf, worn by the Oread of the mountain woods. But the Oread had nothing to do with my present duty—I had to remind myself of that. Who was that irritating heroine of Dickens’s who used to go about jingling a basket of keys, and saying to herself : “ Duty, Esther ! Duty, my dear ! ” I thought of her, with a grin, as I pulled myself together, and took a seat near the last from Banda. . . . After all, she had come from the island inhabited by the Oread ; she might even be able to tell me something about her. . . . Duty, for the moment, seemed something easier.

The lady looked at me over the top of her novel, with her head a good deal on one side.

(Did she really squint? No, a second time. She only made you think she was going to.) I saw her eyes fairly now; they were greyish, small, and very keen, and they seemed to be adding me up with considerable acuteness. There was no familiarity in her address; I should have wondered if Red Bob had not been dreaming, if I had not seen the unmistakable marks of terror produced by the lady's attentions to him, only half an hour ago.

As for what she said, it was simply the inevitable British comment on the weather. She informed me that it was a fine day. I, in my turn, informed her that the fine days thereabouts averaged some three hundred a year. She smiled a slightly one-sided smile, as I have noticed women do who are uncertain of their charms, and said gently that I knew all about those matters, no doubt, but she was just a stupid little thing who had to ask everything she wanted to know. It seemed to me that the remark was rather a clever one—supposing that she had summed me up as a man with more worldly keenness than Vincent Gore was possessed of. I knew then, and know now, that I had not a tenth part of his brains, but for mere commonplace sharpness I was easily his master.

“You don’t know my name,” said the small lady (I saw now that she was small—oh, no, not dwarfish; nor had she a squint, nor was she crooked—one had to keep reminding oneself of all these things). “I’m Miss Siddis—Mabel Siddis. You’ve never heard of me—no one ever has. I’m nobody. I’m just a little governess going back to my work in Herbertshohe; they wanted an English governess, and I saw the advertisement in Sydney. I can’t afford to take holidays in Australia or Singapore, so I came down as far as Banda, because I have kind English friends there. Or, rather, I had. It was a Mrs. Ravenna, an Englishwoman married to an Italian who settled there years and years ago. And she died while I was there—poor dear Margaret! But this is all a bore to you.”

It was, but I couldn’t say so. I made the inevitable contradiction, lit a cigarette, by special permission, and resigned myself to my duty. I didn’t see that it demanded attention on my part, if I could only manage to look attentive. So I let my mind wander off towards Hahn and the “next stopping place,” while Miss Siddis babbled gently on at my side.

I gathered that she was giving me the family history of the Ravennas—why the original Ravenna had come to Banda and settled there, why

his wife had married him, how he had died, how she had followed him. There was somebody called Schultz in the story, also Schultz's wife. I remembered that Gore had told me the Schultz woman was on board. I knew exactly what she was like; all middle-class German women are the same woman, and I rather thought I had seen her as I came on deck—a fat, grey-cotton back, below an area of barren neck leading to a small plot of scraped-up hair. She didn't seem to be the sort of person one wanted very passionately to hear about. I smoked, and looked blankly at Miss Siddis, letting my imagination run before me to the mysterious land of New Guinea, now so near. . . . Weren't we up to the islands and headlands of Dampier Strait? If I could just get away forward for a minute. . . .

I woke to attention with a jump. What was Miss Siddis saying?

“As for mourning, of course, no one in the tropics is expected to wear black. But I did say, and do say, that white, with a black sash, is only common respect. And when I saw her going about everywhere in green, just usual—”

“Saw who?” I asked, with sudden, sharp interest.

“Isola, of course—Mrs. Ravenna's daughter—

as I've been telling you," said Miss Siddis, with that phantom squint almost visible again.

"Isola! What a curious name!"

"It was her father. He called her 'Isola Bella' because he said Banda was an 'isola bella'—that's Italian, you know; it means 'beautiful island,' and she was born there. So he called her that. A very fanciful name."

"A beautiful name," I said, determining to know more about it, and about its owner.

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Siddis, with instant pliability. "Fanciful and beautiful—that's what I meant."

"She should be a beautiful girl herself, if she matches her name," I added.

Miss Siddis fingered her novel, and I saw something ugly look out of her small eyes. But her voice was gentler and pleasanter than ever as she answered:

"Now that's so nice of you! I can see you are one of the people who like to think the very best of everyone right away. Yes, poor Isola—yes, I should certainly say she was pretty. Oh, yes. You might call her that."

"Why do you call her poor?" I asked.

"Oh, I've just told you!"

"Yes, of course," I said, cursing my own stupidity. What had she told me about the

girl? Only her parents' death, and something about Frau Schultz, who seemed to be a worry to someone, as far as I could recollect the scraps of Miss Siddis's yarn that had penetrated to my consciousness. It seemed, then, that the Oread of the mountain was an orphan, and that Frau Schultz, somehow or other, was an annoyance in her life. . . . I resolved that, employer or no employer, I was not going to make myself pleasant to Frau Schultz.

I was quite prepared to stick by Miss Siddis now, being determined to get out of her all there was to be got about the girl in green—but Nature and the Pacific Ocean willed otherwise. We were well out from under the shelter of Ceram now, and in the open sea. The *Afzelia*, which had run on an even keel ever since we joined her at Makasser, felt the coming swell of the great ocean, though we were not in it yet, and began to dip and roll—not very much, but it was enough for Miss Siddis.

She gathered up her novel and her workbag, murmured an apology, and fled.

I remained alone on the boat deck, sitting astride a boat to watch the blue shadow on the water that was New Guinea—New Guinea at last!—and thinking about Miss Siddis and the girl in green. I had a notion that the former

was more dangerous than she might seem to be. Her carneying voice and deprecating manner, her skill in flattery, the hidden hardness of will that I sensed beneath all her clinging and purring, might be dangerous to a man like Gore. I knew her kind; it is a pathetic sort of creature in a way—the woman who has proved too unattractive to secure an “establishment” in England, and who, in consequence, roams the world’s waste places seeking whom she may devour. But I was not going to let any pity for Miss Siddis influence me in my duty as the watch-dog of Vincent Gore. I knew his weak point now, and meant to guard it.

Besides . . . besides . . . she was an insinuating, little, crooked creature; she was curious, as all inferior minds are curious. What was the hidden object of our journey?—what might happen if she found it out?

I came to a resolve there and then. I would know the secret myself, before I slept that night. It was time, and more than time, that Gore should take me into his confidence.

Late in the afternoon we came to New Guinea.

It was not in the least what I had imagined. I had expected huge rivers with painted war-canoes dashing forth from them, immense

peaky mountains overhanging the sea, stilt-legged villages with wonderful temples, black marshes full of crocodiles and crabs. . . .

Instead, I saw only a group of islands of moderate size and height, cut through by calm, dark straits. There were no villages, no houses, no rivers, no canoes, just that smear of dusky, lonely islands lying on a darkening sea. The mainland was not yet in sight. All the land we saw was hidden under a blanket of black forest, that swept from the summits of the hills down to the lip of the water. In all the Malaysian islands, there had been lights that moved and shone at dusk, and canoes flitting among the shallows like water-flies; one had heard the merry tom-tomming of the drums from the little villages, and always, from Sumatra right to Ceram, one smelt the universal, unforgettable smell of Indonesia—sandalwood, dust, gum damar and dried fish.

Here, running through Dampier Strait in the sinister sunset dusk, here at the very end of the world (for it felt like that) you heard no sound but the beating of the ship's steel heart, echoed back by the walls of the strait as she ran through. You saw no lights on the black, furry blanket of forest, untouched, unbroken.

If there was any living thing upon those

islands, it hid itself well. You listened to the silence of New Guinea, you smelled its mystery. For there was a new smell on the sea air, and it stirred—it called like a voice. It was subtle, cold and sweet; I cannot describe it, but you who have been by Geelvink Bay, who have panted in a launch up the Fly, who have seen the war-canoes slip out from the black beaches of cruel Mambare and heard the alligator belling under the shadows of Mont Yule—you will remember it—the sunset smell of Papua.

It grew dark then all in a minute, for we were close on the equator, up there by the long, northward trending beak of New Guinea—and the ship ran on towards the Pacific under invisible, impending mountains; still in the silence, still in the dark. Gore had once told me that New Guinea sunsets were like the Judgment Day. It seemed to me that New Guinea itself, in the dusk, was like a man's awakening after death in the twilight of lost souls.

Gore came up to me where I was standing in the ship's head, away from passengers and sailors, and sat himself down upon the opposite side of the bulwark, holding on by a stay.

“New Guinea,” he said. “Feel her stretching out to you. . . . She's your love. Her lips

have blood on them, but you'll kiss her. You'll leave her, and come back to her. We all do. New Guinea calls."

"I can believe it," I said. They had begun to play the piano in the saloon; one of Richard Strauss's waltzes was sounding over Dampier Strait, and our lights shone yellow on the curdled ink of waters where the old, old ships of discovery, manned by sturdy Dutchmen seeking fortune in the unknown, had passed by in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not a feature of the place was changed since then. As New Guinea had been in the days of Elizabeth, so—here at the end of the world—it had remained. Down southward, there were five white settlements—Merauke, Port Moresby, Samarai, Friedrich Wilhelmshaven and Simpsonhafen—all mere villages, scattered about the coasts of a country four times the size of England—but up about Geelvink, Dampier Strait, and the (Papua) Cape of Good Hope, there was the black blanket of forest, the mountains and the sea. No more.

We ran on through the strait, and now, coming out into the open, the great Pacific made itself felt, and the *Afzelia*, like the bergs in the song, "began to bow her head, and plunge, and sail in the sea." At the same time a breath of air

crept across the bows, so cold, so penetrating, that it made me shudder in my thin, heat-soaked drill.

“Get your coat,” said Gore. “You’ll be down with fever if you don’t. We’re passing the great snow mountains of Dutch Guinea—you couldn’t see them in broad daylight, but they can make themselves felt, though they’re right in the interior. Get your coat—and we’ll talk.”

“Shall we?” I asked, pausing with my foot on the deck.

“I promise you,” said Gore. “I always meant to, when we sighted New Guinea.”

I brought his own as well, but he would not take it.

“An old dog for a hard road,” he said. “Nothing can kill me. There’s the second bell; they’ll all have gone in to dinner in a few minutes, and we can talk quietly.”

I might have mentioned that it was one of his peculiarities to leave out any meal that happened to interfere with what he might be doing at the moment. I saw myself deprived of dinner for that evening; but the occasion was worth it—more so than many others had been. Several times on the voyage a visit to some ruin that didn’t particularly interest me, or an endless conversation in Malay with some tiresome

chief, had forced my youthful stomach to do penance that (I suspected) was no penance at all to the hardened frame of Red Bob. One of his huge Burmese cheroots always seemed dinner or lunch enough for him. He had lit one now, and it was glowing in a sharp point of scarlet against the mysterious outlines of New Guinea, the unknown land. The ship slid on in the dark. They had put out the lights on the boat deck to assist the steersman and drawn the curtains in the saloon; we could not see ourselves, or the water, or anything of the land but that faint, looming shadow, blackness against the black.

Red Bob said nothing at all for what seemed to me quite a long while. I lit a cigarette to keep him company, and waited as patiently as I could, which was more patiently than usual, for so many things had happened that day that my mind had been beaten into weariness. The first night of New Guinea—the duel—Red Bob's amazing cowardice concerning Miss Siddis—the news I had managed to pick up about Isola Ravenna, all these things had moved and excited me. Now there was something more. I felt that I needed my cigarette; I puffed at it gratefully. . . .

By and by Red Bob spoke, jumping home to the heart of his subject, as always was his way.

“I’m out—and you’re out—after the pearls of Willem Corneliszoon Schouten.”

“The what !” I said.

“The pearls,” he repeated, “of Willem Corneliszoon Schouten. I should feel more certain I was going to get them, if you could avoid the habit of jumping and exclaiming when anything astonishes you.”

“I will,” I said, swallowing my annoyance.

“You’ve got to,” replied Red Bob. “This is no sort of a picnic for babes ; and there are likely to be times when your life and mine—if either of them’s worth anything—will hang on your keeping your head. Well—I suppose you remember who Schouten was ; you ought to.”

We had been working on the population question for a few days, and the observations of all the old Dutch navigators had been tabulated by me for Vincent Gore’s reference.

“Schouten and Le Maire,” I said, “sailed from the Texel in 1615, to look for a passage to the South Seas south of Magellan’s Strait. They discovered Cape Horn, and then they went wandering about the Pacific—and I think they discovered New Britain—and they came up round this way, and got to Batavia, and one of their ships was seized.”

“It was,” said Gore, “because—as you don’t remember—they were trying to evade the law which gave the monopoly of all trading voyages made through the Straits of Magellan, or round the Cape, to the Dutch East India Company. The *Hoorn*, Schouten’s ship, had been burned before they got to Jilolo. It was the other ship, the *Eendracht*, that was seized, by Governor Jans Pieterszoon Coen. Spilbergen took Schouten and Le Maire home with him, and Le Maire died of vexation before they got to Holland. Schouten didn’t; he was made of harder stuff.”

There was a pause here; Gore puffed at his cheroot, which seemed to draw a little hard, as some of these native Burmese cigars will do. It had grown darker: you could tell by the echoing beat of the screw that we were somewhere near land, but the shadow on a shadow was swallowed up in one all-covering blackness, that lay on unseen land and sea like the cover of a coffin pressed down upon the dead.

“H’m! something coming, I think,” said Gore. He shifted his seat upon the bulwark, and went on, in a quiet voice that scarcely rose above the hissing of the *A/zelia’s* stem through the unseen water.

“I was here before—more than once—tracing

the incidence of the different waves of immigration—well, you know the result.”

I did. Before ever I boarded the *Empress of Singapore*, and sent Sterry the valet to hospital, for his good and mine, I had heard of Vincent Gore's Line of Culture Drifts. It stands with Wallace's Line, in scientific importance—higher, indeed, because Wallace's Line, nowadays—but I am not writing for the scientific press, I am telling of the hunt for the pearls of Willem Corneliszoon Schouten.

“I spent most of my time about the north and north-east coasts,” he went on. “Kaiser Wilhelms Land and the Bismarcks. Especially the Bismarcks—New Britain, New Ireland, and so on. You'll find people there—and nearer—who will tell you that I had a double game on. Secret mission—Government—and so on.”

I could not turn my tongue to ask him if it was true, although I wanted most passionately to know. Where is the man in his early twenties who will not rise to the word “secret mission” as a trout to a fly?

“Reason why they thought it,” went on Gore, “was because that is their own game. German wants to know something he hasn't any business to know about us or our places—first thing he does is to go in the character of a man of science.

'Cause we know so dashed little about science, we'll believe anything anyone tells us about it, and we—speaking of the public in general—have a sort of idea that a Professor—as we call them—is a woolly-brained old boy who spends his time measuring skulls, and wouldn't know a concealed battery from a currant bun, or recognize a private signal-book if somebody dropped it in his soup. . . . Well, you may take it—you may safely take it—that German scientific research is a dashed sight more researching than it seems to be, sometimes."

He stopped again. From the saloon below ascended sounds of plates and cutlery, also certain pleasant smells that made me puff hard at my cigarette. They were having stuffed veal to-night. If there was anything on earth I loved, it was stuffed veal—browned—with cherries. . . .

"Well," went on Gore, dismissing the subject, "that's neither here nor there. Only they hampered me a bit once or twice. So I went out to places at the end of everywhere—places they didn't know they'd got and don't know yet. And I ran across something that made me think—not about culture drifts. Something else."

We were running very quietly now, with a slight, steady roll. The night was too black for

one to see beyond the gaping hawse-pipes and the V-shaped end of the bow, but I could smell the land—a new smell now, with a mangrovy and marshy flavour in it. Something sounded away on the starboard beam—a distant bellow, with a sort of upturned snarl in it, and a long moaning tone like a fog-siren.

“Alligator—though properly speaking, it’s a crocodile. Always called alligators in New Guinea. It’s no use making oneself peculiar. Nasty beggars by any name you like to call them, and these northern rivers are hopping with them. Well—I ran across something, as I’ve said. I’ll tell you what it was another time. And it made me think. You know, young Paul, I’ve warned you about what this sort of life means—danger and hardship and accident and all that—but there’s one thing perhaps I didn’t rub in enough. Want of cash, my son. Being hard up. Money enough to rub along with while you’re fit—because any man who can knock around the backstairs of the world and not find little things lying about that nobody’s thought of picking up, must be a bigger fool than me—or you. But when age comes, or break-down, the tame beasts of burden have the best of it.”

“I daresay,” I said. “But when one has only oneself to think of——”

“I haven’t,” said Gore. “I have my daughter.”

After the previous lesson, I did save myself from answering: “Your what?” But I only did it by biting my cigarette clean through.

Gore seemed pleased by my silence—or so the tone of his voice suggested, as he went on.

“I have to think of her. I shan’t be always here—and it worries. Eats in.”

“I didn’t know you were ever married,” I ventured, wondering how many more revelations I was to hear that day.

Gore pushed his cheroot into the corner of his mouth, as he answered:

“I never was.”

“Oh!” I said feebly.

He went on, in a tone completely devoid of expression.

“She is nineteen. Very pretty—very pretty indeed—like. . . . She is delicate. Crippled. Doesn’t walk. Bath chair and all that sort of thing.”

There was a silence; I felt it incumbent on me to say something, but could think of nothing save the banal question:

“Was it an accident?”

“No,” said Gore, still quite inexpressively. He did not even stop smoking. “Done on

purpose. Her mother was thrown downstairs the night the child was born."

This time I forgot my lesson, and said, "Good Lord!" adding: "Who did it?"

"Her husband," replied Gore calmly. "You might give me a match; this dashed thing has gone out at last."

I gave it, mentally ejaculating "Good Lord!" again.

"She died," went on Gore conversationally, unsnapping his cigar-case and scraping a match on the bulwark. I could see his hard, lean face, with the brilliant eyes—"the brow of an angel, and the jaw of a devil," as someone said of Sir Richard Burton—lit up by the small red flame as he shielded it with his hands, and set it to the cigar.

"So did he," went on Red Bob, when the great roll of tobacco had caught.

"Died?" I asked. "How?"

Red Bob burst out into a great fit of laughter, as he had done in my cabin, earlier on that day.

"Ostend," he said. "Thirty paces. Smaller intestine shot through, one lumbar vertebra smashed. Lived a week, howling except when they had him under morphia. I used to call, to listen to him. Have a cheroot, youngster;

those cigarettes of yours are filthy things to ruin your nerve."

I took it, feeling—there is no elegant word for the condition—flabbergasted.

"So," said Gore, with the air of one taking up a conversation at the exact point where it had been abandoned, "it happens that I'm greedier after money than most people might suppose—for reasons. Always on the smell after it, even when I'm busy with something else. And this last time the scent was hot. So hot, I'd have run it down, only I wanted someone to work with me, and—as I told you—the fellow I had talked. Sterry didn't. He was a good sort; he'd have done just as well as yourself."

Whoever looked for smooth sayings from Red Bob was fishing in Dead Sea waters. I held my tongue, though I thought—no matter.

"Willem Corneliszoon Schouten," repeated Gore dreamily. "Good old boy. I always had a liking for him—him and Dampier—you'd be astonished if you knew how many hundreds of men would rather have been William Dampier, and had his chances, than go to heaven for evermore. . . . But I never thought old Willem Corneliszoon would leave me a legacy."

They were through with the soup and meat

now, and I thought—unless my nose mistook me, and I did not think it did—there was a smell of pancakes on the air. Also something suety and plummy. I put my hands inside my coat, and hauled in my belt. It did not do as much good as I had expected.

“I needn’t give you the whole history, or, rather, I won’t, just now,” went on Gore. “It came about through my spending a summer in Holland, poking about museums and libraries. And picture galleries. In that fine one at the Hague, there’s a picture of Helga Maria Van Oosterdyck—the girl old Schouten wanted to marry and didn’t; I read all about it in Hall’s ‘History of the Low Countries in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.’ She has a magnificent pearl necklace, with a sort of pearl cypher hanging on to the end of it—a monogram, but a very complicated one, and not made any easier by the age of the picture. I got it photographed, and took the photo away with me, because I fancied the face—it was pretty—very pretty—like someone I used to know—anyhow, I liked it. It’s nearly as celebrated as that little Duchess Christina of Holbein’s—and not so unlike her.”

I was getting more and more interested, though the sensations aroused by the passage of an officer’s

dinner on a tray, towards the quarters at the end of the deck, were passionate enough to induce me to take up another hole in my belt. What was he having? Stewed beef, I thought—hot and full of gravy—and surely that was pineapple fritters that accompanied it. . . . What was it Gore was saying? I did not want to miss a word—even for the officer's dinner, which indeed I rather wished to neglect altogether.

“Well,” went on the deep voice at my side, “before I went to Holland, it happened that I'd come across the tracks of old Willem Corneliszoon, about German Guinea—no matter where, just yet. Now you know—or you don't—that pearls, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were nearly all obtained from what they called the 'Indies'—a pretty big term, but it didn't include the Pacific, except a bit about Panama. Of course the islands were chock full of pearls, every here and there, as they are now, but those old explorers never seem to have suspected it—went hunting about for mythical islands called 'Rica de Plata' and 'Rica de Oro,' when there were hundreds of 'Ricas de Perlas' everywhere, if they'd only known it. Well, Willem Corneliszoon Schouten—I love his name; it sounds like the name of a man who could do things; you might expect a Jacob le Maire to curl up and die

when a Governor turned nasty—Willem went to some places where most people don't know he went. And he found things they didn't know he found. But I'd never have got on the scent, from now till the crack of doom—by the way, what is doom, and why should it crack? If it means the Christian idea of Judgment Day, why don't they say trump?—well, anyhow, I'd never have picked up the scent but for Helga Maria Van Oosterdyck—whom he certainly ought to have married, if suitability in names had anything to say to such matters.”

Gore stopped, and glanced about him in the dark. There was no one near; I think he would have managed somehow or other to see anyone there had been—he always seemed to me to have sharper senses than anybody else.

“Well, one day, when I was puzzling about what I had seen, I happened to come on the picture of Helga Maria in one of my boxes. I was looking at it—carelessly—but sometimes, when half your mind is at work on a thing, to your knowledge, in the ordinary way, the other half is at work without your knowledge, in some way that isn't ordinary. It was so in that case. As I was looking at the picture, the reading of the monogram jumped straight at my eyes, and I saw—without the shadows that had perplexed

me, mind you ; that was what had been doing the mischief—that it was ‘ W. C. S.’

“ Well, it told me the whole thing, for a reason I’ll explain later. It cleared—the matter I had been puzzling over. Schouten did find pearls in the Pacific, and he left a record of it. No matter where—now. And he brought some of them home, and gave them to Helga Maria. She took them—no woman could have helped taking them—but she didn’t marry him, for all that. And as for Schouten, I’ve no doubt he meant to come back again, but he never did ; if one could see through the fogs of that three hundred years—but one can’t. At any rate, till the latter nineteenth century, no one went looking for pearls in the Western Pacific again. And no one ever found the remains of Willem Corneliszoon Schouten’s pearls—but me. And I haven’t found them yet. That’s all, youngster—for the present. Stop pinching in your diaphragm with that smart belt you bought to impress the ladies of Batavia—whom it didn’t impress, because they have no waists themselves—and go and get your dinner.”

“ What about you ? ” I asked, springing down from my seat.

“ Not worth the bother,” said Gore, sliding down to the deck, and setting his back comfort-

ably against the iron plates of the bow. "Tell the steward to bring me two handfuls of raisins. Raisins, dates and olives are——"

I did not wait to hear what they were. I was convinced that the plummy pudding would be finished. . . .

It was not, and there was still some beef stew—tepid, but satisfying. As for the roast veal, only the cherries remained. I ate them, and was thankful. When the silently protesting steward had cleared my table, I went out on deck, feeling at peace with the world, and found a long chair where I could lie and think.

"Going to be fun!" was the result of my thinking. "Going to be jolly fun. How glad—how very glad I am that I punched Sterry, and that he didn't punch me.

"Now I should not be surprised," I meditated further, "if Red Bob never said another word about his daughter again. It would be like him."

It seemed I was right, for he never did.

CHAPTER V

THE "something coming" that Red Bob had predicted came in the night. North New Guinea is out of the hurricane zone, but nevertheless the Pacific, that ill-named ocean, welcomed us to the neighbourhood of the Schoutens with a blow that would have given the average steamship passenger something to talk about for the rest of his life. However, we were not average passengers on the *Afzelia*. I was by a long way the least experienced; the Germans had almost all been in the German-African colonies, to China, and to Australia, and even Miss Siddis (who turned up smiling as soon as the worst was over) could tell me tales of stormy days off the Golden Gate and the Farallones, and hurricanes in Honolulu. . . .

I said as much to Gore when I met him on the lower deck (he had seen Miss Siddis's green veil flying afar off on the boat deck, and hurriedly retreated, panic in his eye). Gore, wedged into a comfortable space where there was safe purchase for his chair, turned over the leaves of his volume of Pliny and remarked that in all his experience

of travel he had never met anyone who had been to Honolulu who was not a bore.

“I don’t know whether it’s Honolulu that makes people bores, or whether all the natural bores are mystically attracted to the place, by some strange provision of Nature that we can’t fathom,” he said. “But you’ll find that what I say’s a fact. The pious Mahommedan isn’t more intimately connected with pilgrimages to Mecca than the bore is with pilgrimages to Honolulu. I don’t say a man can’t be a bore—a travel bore—without going as far as the Hawaiian Islands. Spain produces a fine crop of the smaller varieties. So does Japan, rather bigger ones. And the man who’s been to the Balkans, and talks about it in his sleep—and in yours—is pretty bad. But on the whole, the Honolulu bore is the pick of the bunch. Everyone who’s been to Honolulu is a bore.”

“Have you been there?” I asked, balancing on my rubber-soled shoes to the steady roll of the boat, and looking down at the hard, strong, handsome face, worn with the winds and seas of all the world. It came to me just then, as I looked, that a woman who loved such a man would love him through life and to death—as one woman had done. Nor was I thinking of Miss Siddis, in that moment.

Gore, in reply to my question, laughed somewhat dryly.

“I don't tell it,” he said. “The curse might come upon me, like the Lady of Shalott, if I did. What a title for a poem, by the way! ‘Our Lady of Onions’ would be as poetical. It's part of the blasting influence of Tennyson on the Victorian age, that he had no sense of humour whatever, and discouraged it in everyone else. In Tennyson's reign, it was vulgar to see the joyousness of the world. Consequence was, inevitably, he and his school were dull and vulgar both. Smugly vulgar. Vicarage - and - croquet-lawn-vulgar. Oh, Lord!”

He saw by my face that I did not agree with him—as indeed I did not—and, with his diabolical power of reading thoughts, went on:

“But when a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of ‘Maud’—confess, young Paul; isn't ‘Maud’ your favourite poem?”

Now, as it happened, certain lines of “Maud”—which I thought, and still think, one of the noblest poems in the English language—had been running through my brain all night, mingling with the roar and wash of the great Pacific combers, as we swept through the Schoutens in the dark; weaving themselves with the faint cry of sea-birds, when the stormy

dawn began to break over Papua, and I stood clinging to the rail, all wet with spray, to see the black hills of the Unknown Land spread out their beckoning hands. . . .

Those lines had nothing to do with me—nothing to do with New Guinea—but the wild orchestra of the storm, and the sight of the strange dark land that we had reached at last, worked upon my mind as the sound of distant music works on one who scarcely hears or listens to it, and the brain-waves that came rolling in cast strange flotsam upon the shores of sense.

“There is none like her, none,
Nor will be when our summers have deceased. . . .”

Then again :

“Were it ever so airy a tread
My heart would hear it and beat
Had it lain a century dead.”

No definite vision went with the haunting lines ; if there was any vision at all, it was only the inappropriate one of Miss Mabel Siddis, giggling a grisly, elderly giggle in her deck-chair, and talking about the nutmeg islands. I did not pause to think why she had insinuated herself into that galley ; I wasn't thinking at all. I was merely feeling. And Gore's barbed arrow, in consequence, went far and stuck fast.

“I don't know why it should be,” I parried.

“Because,” said Gore, letting Pliny slide to the deck, and looking up at me with a twinkle in his blue cat-eyes, “because you are twenty-two and read a good deal. And because you’re over the Shelley stage, and not into the Browning stage. Also, if you want another reason, because you whistle, ‘Come into the Garden,’ while you’re shaving—out of tune.

“Tennyson!” he went on. “Pap! he never in his life wrote anything that bites home to human nature like those seven lines of Whitman’s :

“Shine! shine! shine! pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together,
Two together!
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers or mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
If we two but keep together.”

I do not think I have mentioned it, but Vincent Gore had a voice that was as uncommon as everything else connected with him—low-pitched as a rule, but strong and what instrumentalists call “full of reed.” When he recited poetry—a thing I had never heard him do before—he made the lines live and sing. I believe, from what I heard about him afterwards, that he had a wonderful singing voice, but had always declined to have it trained, or even use it, on the ground

that a man who could sing well was never any good at anything else. And, thinking over the character of the few really good singers I have known, I cannot help seeing that there was reason in what he said.

At any rate, be that as it may, there was something in Red Bob's rendering of the few rugged lines that affected me strangely. Since the coming of Marconi and his miracles, we have become much more liberal-minded than we used to be about the effect of thought on thought—the wireless messages that pass between human minds. Things are thought possible, even commonplace, now, that would have been laughed at in our parents' days as fanciful and absurd. . . .

I am trying hard to say it, but I find no words. I am compelled to state, plainly and baldly, what happened, without telling, as I would like, about the small, fine, wordless intimations and warnings that went before.

For that I knew before, I am convinced. That subliminal consciousness of which we hear so much nowadays had been at work, and was fully informed, long before my ordinary, physical eyes looked up from the white decks of the *Afzelia* pin-striped with caulking of pitch, and saw, just at the moment when Red Bob finished speaking, Isola of the nutmeg island—Isola

Ravenna—Isola Bella—coming round the corner of the dining saloon.

Red Bob could not see her where he lay in his chair, but he saw my hand fly instinctively to my tie—as it does, you know, when you see a girl who—a girl that is—well, everyone knows what I mean. . . . He did not even get up. He looked at my face, read something there, I suppose, and burst into one of his great bellows of laughter.

“Go on, Maud,” he said, “I shan’t want you till lunch. So there was another lady on board after all!”

“Why didn’t Miss Siddis tell me?” I wondered, as I got out of Red Bob’s neighbourhood, and found a place where I could watch the girl, myself comparatively unnoticed. “She was free enough with her yarns about Frau Baumgartner and Frau Schultz, but never a word about Miss Ravenna. . . . I wonder where the Schultz woman is—sick, I suppose.”

For I had caught a glimpse of the fat, fair-haired Frau Baumgartner already that morning, and had indeed accounted for all the passengers, with the exception of the Schultz woman. She seemed to be something of a mystery: I had not seen her, or even heard of her, since we left Banda.

“Well,” I thought, “the fewer the better;

the more chance of having her to myself." And by "her," I did not mean Frau Schultz.

Isola Ravenna, it was evident, was no bad sailor. Miss Siddis was sitting in a long chair on the deck above, well secured and well cushioned, and with no idea at all of tempting Providence by unnecessary movement. But the Oread of Banda mountain, sure-footed as an Oread should be, was pacing up and down the narrow deck, balancing to the roll of the ship as lightly as a flower in the wind. She was not dressed in green to-day. She wore a suit of very thin white wool, girdled with a green ribbon; there was another green ribbon tied about the wide-leafed hat she wore. As she passed me on the deck, I noticed the faintest possible perfume of fresh flower-petals.

We were running far out now, and there was nothing to be seen of New Guinea but a long, blue serrated line to starboard. The sky was the thin hot blue of the tropics; the sea pale blue, with intolerable diamond sparklings in every wave. Blue and diamond was the whole morning, hard, relentless, and, with the following wind, distressingly hot. Unseasoned as I was, I felt it somewhat, but Isola Ravenna, true flower of the tropics, seemed to enjoy the heat. At all events, she paced lightly up and down the decks, from shade to sun, and back again, and her

ivory-pale, small face, the exact shade and texture of a magnolia petal, did not seem to be affected in any way by the fierce glare from the sea. I remembered the redness of poor Miss Siddis's nose, and the roughness of her ungloved hands, and wondered if all white women born in the tropics, and only they, were armed like Isola, against the arrows of the sun.

Inside the smoking-room, watching her through the windows, I sat and enjoyed myself unobserved. What luck it was that she should be travelling on the *Atzelia*! What stupendous luck! I never asked myself why it should be so lucky; nor did I even pause to wonder why she, a young girl, without relations or friends, should be journeying along this wild north coast of New Guinea towards a German settlement where (I knew) no foreigner was especially welcome. I cannot account for such stupidity; God knows it cost me dear enough in the end.

While I was pleasing my eyes with the sight of Isola walking up and down, who should come forth from the saloon but the elderly man with the grey-green eyes, the owner of the bodiless head that had protested so strongly against my duel. I had not seen him before, and judged that the heavy rolling of the steamer during the first day and night had kept him in his cabin.

At all events, there he was, spruce, shaved, and fresh, with a grizzly head cropped so close that the skin shone through, a thick figure barely restrained by his loose shirt and belt, and, in unexpected contradiction to his short, weighty build, a light walk that was singularly well-drilled and smart, even for a German.

“Good morning!” he said, with a pleasant smile. I noticed another contradiction as he spoke; the pleasantness of his address did not agree with the cold watchfulness of his unsmiling, grey-green eyes, deep and chill as the Baltic of his Prussian home.

“Good morning!” I replied. I wondered how much he knew. I had ascertained already that the “next stopping place” would befall on the day after to-morrow.

“So you will visit Kaiser Wilhelms Land?” he said agreeably, seating himself at one of the small leather-covered tables, and offering me his cigar-case.

I helped myself to a cigar of uncommon quality and fragrance.

“The old gentleman does himself well,” I thought, as I lit it. I had already noticed that his shirt was of thick Assam silk, and that he wore a tie-pin of one perfect sapphire, about the size of a pea.

“ Yes,” I said. “ I’m secretary to Mr. Vincent Gore.”

“ So ! ” he said, as if the statement were news to him—which I was assured it was not. “ Then you are also a man of science ? ”

“ By no means,” I assured him. “ I don’t care a rap about it.”

“ Ah,” he said, holding his own cigar in a hand that was delicately white and smooth, and adorned with a heavy diamond-set ring. “ Youth loves adventure above all things. In company with Mr. Vincent Gore, adventure will run to meet you ; is it not true ? ”

His manner was careless, but those greenish eyes, hard with the hardness of eyes that have seen cruel things, watchful as eyes that have had to guard their owner’s life, betrayed him. And I thought he listened too carefully for my reply.

It is a good rule (I thought to myself) when one asks you a question that you do not choose to answer, to put the very same question in reply.

“ Oh, do tell me,” I begged. “ Are there adventures in New Guinea, and does Mr. Gore have them ? It’s been pretty dull up to the present, I can tell you. What does he do when he goes there besides hunting after mouldy old skulls and writing up tribal customs ? ”

“ What does he do ? ” repeated Herr Richter

(as I afterwards knew him to be called ; I say called, because—but that must come later). “What does Mr. Vincent Gore do in the Bismarcks and Kaiser Wilhelms Land ?” He looked carefully at the diamond in his ring, and polished it on his silk sleeve. “There is nothing for any man to do there but to study science, as you say. We Germans, we do not want English settlers or traders. You have many colonies of your own. . . . As for adventures, you must not believe everything you shall hear. You cannot expect adventure. We do not encourage men to outwander in the bush, and make trouble for the Government. No, I fear that German New Guinea will disappoint you.”

He seemed glad of it, on the whole. I liked his cigars, but I did not like himself ; besides, I was anxious to get to the doorway again, and see where Isola Ravenna had gone to. She had stopped walking up and down, and she was not sitting on the seats outside. So I excused myself as soon as I could, and went off hunting after the Oread of Banda. She was, I told myself, quite the most interesting girl I had ever seen. . . .

I did not find her. It grew dusk ; it turned to dark, and she had not reappeared. Someone told me that Miss Siddis had succumbed to the roll of the ship, and gone back to her cabin ; I

guessed that Miss Ravenna was keeping her company. The evening passed away stupidly. The Germans were playing cards in the saloon; Vincent Gore was reading; Richter was padding up and down the decks—it seemed to me, looking out for something. I could not settle to cards, to a book, even to the endless tramping up and down on deck that is the solace of most sea voyagers. Like Richter, I was looking for something. . . .

I did not find it. Richter disappeared, the card party broke up in the saloon. It grew towards the hour when the electric light was turned off. I wandered into the bows, and stood with my hands in my pockets, staring at the thick darkness that we were ploughing through, and wondering what lay beyond it. It struck me with a sensation of incredible strangeness that in two days more I might not be there—might not be anywhere—I, Paul Corbet, who stood here in the bows of the *Afzelia*, with the wind from the wide Pacific blowing in his face. It struck me with still greater strangeness that the *Afzelia* undoubtedly would be there; she would finish her voyage along the New Guinea coast, get to Simpsonshafen, and turn back again. That curve of iron in front of me, those two round-lipped hawse-pipes, with the anchor-chains

running through, would still be in the world, two days hence, ten days hence. And I who looked at them now, perhaps, would not.

It was the first time I had thought of death; the first time that the feeling and realization of man as a passing shadow struck right home to my heart. When the Romans—which of them was it?—no matter—cried out in bitterness: “We are dust and shadows!” this was the feeling that had possession of their minds. Why, they were right! we were shadows, nothing more. This iron ship, the rocks by which we ran in the soundless dark, the sea that carried us, were real things. But we, the masters of them all, were not real. They stayed, we passed—we passed!

The winds of eternity blew and in a moment the dust that was I was whirled away, and in the place where my feet had rested the sun shone again, and the salt-jewels sparkled . . . the shadow had gone.

“It is true,” I thought, “all true, what the old Jews and the Romans and the rest of them said. I am a shadow, and I shall pass like one, perhaps the day after to-morrow, perhaps in fifty years. It doesn’t seem to make much difference. But whichever it is, I’m not afraid. Glory be to——” I did not want to say God,

for some odd, shamefaced reason; I think perhaps it was the idea of the bloodthirsty business toward between myself and Hahn that held me back; yet the word would come—"Glory be to God, I'm not afraid of anything!"

A small, sweet, pointed face, magnolia-white, seemed to rise before me in the darkness. I shut my hands on the steel of the bulwark, cold with night and dew.

"Not even for that," I thought. "I am not afraid—for anything. The splendour of life—why, it is death. I wonder why I never saw that before."

Now in another minute the words seemed meaningless to me; yet they had had, for the moment, all the force of a revelation.

The window shut. It seemed to me that I had been thinking things without significance or sense. Man was dust and shadow; yes, everyone said it; there was nothing in that. I was going to fight a duel in two days—in one day and two nights, rather. Well, that was good fun, and I hoped I'd come out on top. Was there any supper going in the saloon?

I never found out if there was. I had come back from the bows, and was strolling toward the companion, when a voice said very near to me in the darkness: "May I—may I speak to you?"

I don't think the lessons of Red Bob—about

being surprised and so on—had been altogether wasted on me. I answered at once, and quietly :

“Certainly, Miss Ravenna. What can I do for you?”—although it seemed as if all the blood in my body had suddenly flung itself in one wave towards my head, and as if the sleeve that brushed accidentally at that moment against something soft and near were charged with a strong electric current.

“You can’t do anything for me,” said the voice rather breathlessly, “but I can do something for you—if I can speak where nobody hears.”

She was not whispering ; she spoke in a soft but rather high-pitched tone that somehow made one think of winds and waters . . . as different from the carneying tones of Miss Siddis as morning dew from treacle. . . . Isola ! Isola Bella ! that voice of yours :

“My heart would hear it and beat
Had it lain a century dead.” . . .

“You are most kind,” I answered. We had both forgotten—or had not troubled to remember—that we had never been introduced. “If there is anything you want to say, we had better go a little way back into the bows—or, indeed, no one can hear us here.”

“Oh, but they could,” said the girl, still rather breathlessly. “You’ve no idea how people

can overhear on a ship—I hadn't, till to-night—that's what I want to—— Please, in the bow. I won't be a minute, but you must hear; it's important."

There was not a shade of self-consciousness in her manner; not the veriest coxcomb who ever hinted at a hundred conquests could have seen anything flattering to himself or coquettish in her, at the back of the strange request.

I took it as it was spoken.

"Certainly," I said. "It is dark; let me lead you."

She gave me her hand with perfect confidence—it was a cool, firm hand, as smooth as silk, but not soft—and I helped her past the covered-up donkey-engine, and the coiling chains, to the quiet place I had just left.

"No one can see or hear us," I said. I took off my coat and threw it lightly round her shoulders. "The night air is sometimes chilly," I told her; and indeed, it was not so warm as it had been. Then, standing by the bulwark—for I would not sit when she did not—I waited. I thought she would begin with: "You must think me very forward," or, "I hope you won't be shocked," or some *cliché* of the kind. But I did not know my lady of the mountain.

“I’m afraid,” she said, with simple directness, “that there are people on board who mean you some mischief.”

“Oh, is that the case?” I said, laughing a little. “Perhaps I mean them some mischief, too.”

“You don’t understand,” she said, considering. “I will tell you just what it was. I was lying on the deck, with a cushion under my head, because I could not keep my chair from slipping about, and it was dark. And my head was a little over the side of the ship, under the rail, to catch the breeze. And there was a porthole just beneath, and people inside, smoking and talking. I heard what they said. It was German——”

“Do you speak German, then?” I asked.

“Why, of course,” she answered, “though I wasn’t born a German—perhaps you know——”

She paused for a moment, and I, thinking I did know, answered:

“Yes, Miss Siddis told me.”

Isola Ravenna did not go on with her story immediately. Her tall, slim figure, just visible in its white dress against the crape-like blackness of the sky, swung lightly to and fro with the rolling of the steamer—once, twice, three times. . . . The foam about the bows made

such a hissing that I could not tell if she sighed ; yet somehow I thought she did.

“ Well ! ” she said presently. “ I was going to tell you. They were talking about you. It was Richter, I think—he smokes those very nice-smelling cigars, doesn’t he ? ”

“ Yes, ” I said, remembering the sample I had enjoyed that afternoon.

“ And the tall, fair young Prussian, Hahn, I know his voice. And several others. They were in a private cabin—one that hasn’t any deck outside it. Richter said—I must try to remember, ‘ I have talked to him, and he is no sheep’s head, that young Englander. Thou wast right, Hahn ’—that was what he said—‘ he is clever enough to play the stupid game, and see thou, when a man plays even so, he has something to hide. Also he is not at all stupid.’ And then they said things I could not catch—and then I heard Hahn, and he said, ‘ Truly, sir, I did not do it on that account, but because he had insulted Germany.’ And Richter said—oh, he said—I can’t remember the words, but it was about Hahn having done right, although he had been hasty. ‘ Perhaps I should not have wanted it if the youngster had been the common English fool,’ he said. ‘ But I find him quite other, and what Vincent Gore knows, be

assured he knows. We cannot catch that bird with salt on the nose, as the English say, but the young chick we can.' And then he said, 'Thou, Hahn, when we get to Kronprinzhaven, fight then, like a right Prussian, and avenge the honour of Germany.' And they laughed, and talked together, so that I could not hear. But by and by I heard Hahn, and he said, 'No matter about the choice of weapons, to me it is all the same. Thou, wilt thou take the challenge to-night?' And someone else said he would."

She stopped a moment; she seemed out of breath. In the silence I heard the far-off tumbling of unseen waves on unknown shores; near at hand, the clattering of plates in some steward's "glory-hole" under the forward deck. The sound made me think of my strange experiences on the *Empress of Singapore*, coming out from England. Since then, I thought, the world had widened marvellously. Off the shores of New Guinea—going to fight a duel—bound on a mysterious treasure-seeking quest—listening at dead of night (it was a quarter to eleven only, but that was dead enough for purposes of romance) to a beautiful girl, who was warning me of a plot against my life.

"Well!" I said to myself, ramming my hands deep down into my pockets. "This is plummy!"

To Miss Ravenna I spoke with more formality. I told her that she was very kind indeed, and that I could not be sufficiently grateful to her. That I would tell Mr. Gore what she had told me, and act by his advice, and that I hoped she would not trouble herself in any way about the matter, but rest assured that everything would be all right.

She answered nothing at all to this, but gathered her thin skirts round her and slipped past the donkey-engine again, supported by my hand. I don't think the support was indispensable, but Isola Ravenna did not seem to find it disagreeable. For all that, I rather liked the manner in which she drew away that silken, firm, small hand of hers, as soon as we were on the open deck again, and the quick, silent fashion of her bow and instant disappearance. She would not have me think she had sought the interview for the reasons of a vulgar flirt.

"Nevertheless," I said to myself, making my way to Gore's cabin, "if you had thought me a perfect beast, you pretty dear, you wouldn't have taken so much trouble. Or wouldn't have taken it in that way. You certainly are a dear, and I'll tell you so, before many days."

Red Bob had turned in, but he answered instantly to my knock, and I entered, feeling

none too comfortable in face of the interview that I foresaw. It was clear that I had been "made a hare of" in the completest manner. I had answered readily to provocation that was meant to get me into trouble, I had allowed Richter—who was assuredly someone of importance in the secret service—to suspect some hidden motive underlying the apparent object of our journey. There was only one course to pursue, and it was bitter in my mouth. I had to tell Gore everything, and act by his advice.

I did tell him, first turning on the noisy electric fan to make sure that no one would hear me. I repeated every word that Richter and I had said to each other on the deck, every word that Miss Ravenna had reported to me. Then I stopped, and stood staring at the big man in the pink-and-white pyjamas, waiting for his reply. I was sure he would swear my head off.

Gore, sitting up in his berth, with his long legs in their gay covering, and his thin, arched bare feet dangling out into empty air, looked at me for a moment without any expression at all. Then, loosening the neck of his pyjama coat—for the night was hot—he remarked :

"We might as well have two beers."

I pressed the bell and a steward popped up like a pantomime demon. While we waited for

the beer, neither of us spoke. As soon as the tall glass mugs, cloudy with coolness, had been handed in, Red Bob remarked, "Shut the door," and buried his face in his mug. I did the same, feeling that what was to be, was to be; hoping, anyhow, that my fun was not going to be curtailed.

Red Bob finished his beer in one slow draught, reached for a handkerchief, deliberately wiped his moustache, and then said :

"I suppose you understand just what kind of a fool you are?"

"Does that matter?" I said.

"Devil a bit," said Red Bob. "The thing is, what are we going to do? They have caught you in a trap that they knew was too plain for this old fox. It may stop our job. If the thing's put up, as it seems, they mightn't even play fair. They know"—he tilted the glass mug upside down, to get the froth that had gone back to liquid while he was talking—"they know I need a companion, or I wouldn't have brought one. Yes, they can hang me up nicely. Especially as you played a game with Richter that he knows better than you do. Don't act the fool, Paul Corbet. Just be content to be what Nature made you, and you'll come quite near enough to a natural dashed fool for all practical purposes."

I said nothing to this, feeling that, all things

concerned, I had come off easily. Gore looked into the bottom of his mug again, set it down regretfully and remarked :

“When the European Armageddon comes—and mind you, it’s overdue—we may smash a few dozen castles on the Rhine, and things of that kind, but I hope to goodness the brutal and licentious soldiery will spare the German breweries. Well! These are my orders, young Paul, and you’ve got to mind them. You’ll have to fight.”

“I hope so,” I cut in.

“But you’re not on any account, or for any dashed piece of conceit, to kill, wound, or touch young Hahn. Do you understand? If he kills or wings you—well, that can’t be helped; you’ve brought it on yourself. But if you even damage him, you can rely on it you will see the inside of the jail at Frederick Wilhelmshaven, and won’t get out in a hurry. And I shall have to hang about and bother over you. And the fat will be in the fire, generally. Now, you have your orders; off to bed with you.”

He snapped off the light and lay down. I heard him breathing long and quietly, before I was out of the cabin. Red Bob could go to sleep as quick as another man could wake, and wake as quick as any man could fire off a gun. I used to think his nerves must be like telegraph wires.

CHAPTER VI

KRONPRINZHAVEN (which you will not find under that name upon the map) lies some way beyond the German-Dutch boundary of New Guinea. We came up to it in the very early morning, before the sun had gathered warmth, and while the shadows on the deck of the *Afzelia* were still powdered with dew as fine and sparkling as ground glass.

Wolff had made a formal call on me the evening before, on behalf of Hahn, and had arranged with Gore the details of the fight (who, of course, acted as my second). We were to use pistols at twenty paces. Hahn was rather anxious for rapiers, and I would not have been sorry to oblige him ; but Gore had put me through ten minutes' fencing earlier in the evening, and delivered it as his opinion that I was safer with the pistol, provided what I said as to my feats with that weapon was mostly true, and provided I didn't lose my head. It has no place in the story, but I cannot help observing here that

Red Bob's fencing was like everything else he did—perfect. I do not think that Hahn, or any other man in German Guinea, would have cared to stand up before him with the buttons off. Which, perhaps, may have to do with the story, after all; at least, so far as the challenge to me is concerned.

Well—we went ashore in the ship's boat, Red Bob, Hahn, Wolff and myself, and the mysterious Richter, who declared himself to be qualified as a doctor, in case we should need the services of one. The duelling pistols—Richter lent them—were hidden in the folds of a mackintosh. The captain, who usually took the ship into port himself, was late asleep this morning, and never showed out of his cabin. The chief officer, shining in white and gold upon the bridge, leaned down and called out to us that he hoped we would have a pleasant walk, recommending us, in particular, to take photographs of the native village. All the passengers were sound asleep, and the stewards and deck-hands, to a man, were busy on the seaward side of the ship. Perfect unconsciousness of our mission, innocent industry concerned only with itself, seemed fairly to stick out all over the ship. And I have not the slightest doubt that, the moment the boat left the *Afzelia's* side, every man on her

began making bets as to who was going to kill whom.

So I landed on New Guinea. I have since been to Kronprinzhaven more than once, and I am therefore able to say that it is a magnificently beautiful spot, a harbour of horse-shoe shape, edged with tall cocoa-palms leaning over a beach as white as paper, and backed by mountains that rise leap on leap, wave upon violet wave, to an unimaginable glory of remote, pale silver-blue. The sun-beaten splendour, the cruel, feverish beauty of the spot, may have touched my senses at the moment—I do not know. I have only the recollection of landing on a beach that was white and heavy, and walking across it into a windy coolness of palms; of a dark forest after, where huge buttressed roots ran out above our heads, and a bird with a fiery-gold tail flashed out from tree to tree as we entered—I remember its quick, harsh scream, and the rustle of its wondrous train, like a sound of a woman's silk dress. Then there was a river, roughly bridged with logs, and we couldn't hear each other speak because of the noise it made tumbling over the rocks. And then the track opened out, and there was a space of empty meadow-land, and Wolff was chattering joyously about a duel he had seen in Pomerania where "the Kapitan his brains, all outrushing, upon the

green grass spilled ;” and Red Bob, walking alongside of Richter, was smoking a foot of Burmese tobacco, and jerking out indifferent remarks about the loading of the *Afzelia*. . . .

I knew we had come to the place when I saw this open, sunny bit of land, walled in by the immense forest standing round about. I threw a look at Hahn, and decided, not without disappointment, that he was perfectly cool. In fact, everybody was, except Wolff, and he was simply bubbling over with delight. The whole thing felt extraordinarily like a surgical operation. I had been through one once, and remembered it as very much akin to this—the cool, business-like hospital people ; the new young student who was so delighted to be there and see me cut up ; even the assistant doctor who was busy laying out glittering things in a metal tray. . . . For that was how Richter occupied himself, what time the seconds were measuring off the ground, and inspecting the pistols. I really do not know whether he did it with the view of shaking my nerve or not, but if he did, he missed his mark, since the sight only increased that odd reminiscence of the operation and made me feel, somehow or other, that these were specialists concerned together in a job that they all knew, though I didn't ; that I was the job, and that my business

was to do just what I was told to do, and keep on feeling cool. . . .

Gore and Wolff tossed for position, and Hahn won. I had the sun in my eyes, but that didn't matter much, because it was still low, and the forest shut off most of it. They placed us, and Richter held the handkerchief. I saw Wolff's face, mouth greedily open, eyes staring, full of delight; and Gore's, hard and inexpressive, looking at me. Then I fixed my eyes on Hahn's pink face, with the golden moustache, and outstanding, heavy ears, like handles to his head. I knew what I was going to do, and knew I should do it.

The handkerchief fell, and a harsh German voice cried: "*Feuer!*"

In the very same moment, something hit me hard on the forehead, and I staggered.

"Did I do it?" I shouted out, straightening up, and trying hard to see—one eye was oddly obscured. . . . I was afraid I might be badly hit, and going to die. And if I died, I shouldn't know if I had done what I wanted to do.

"Confound you all!" I cried, losing my temper, as the blood—I knew it was blood now—poured down, and I began to get sick and giddy—can't any of you tell me, did I clip his right ear?"

“Sit down,” said Richter’s voice, and I sat on the grass.

“I’m not hurt,” I said. “Let me have another go. I tell you I can clip his ear like a sheep, and I want to do it.”

“Sit still, thou young fire-eater, while I sew up that iron head of thine,” said Richter, with the suspicion of a laugh in his hard voice. “Yes, truly, thou hast clipped his ear. A moment now——”

He lifted the piece of scalp that had been shot loose, and was hanging over my eye, and I saw Hahn a few yards away, holding a handkerchief to his ear.

“Hooray!” I cried. “Just the tip, wasn’t it?”

“Even so,” answered Hahn, looking at me with an odd mixture of expressions.

“What about another go?” I asked anxiously, as soon as Richter’s stitchery was finished. “I want to clip the other.”

“Yes,” said Hahn, taking away the handkerchief, and putting it back again. “I would like to give him the chance.” He showed his teeth unpleasantly as he spoke, and I reflected that, whereas the seam in my scalp would not show, as soon as my hair grew over it, he was marked for life by the events of the last few minutes.

“I object,” said Red Bob, coming forward. “Herr Wolff, do you consider that honour is satisfied?”

Wolff did not look as if he did, but a glance from Richter tamed him.

“Yes, yes,” he said discontentedly. “The insult to Germany and to her colonies without doubt now out is wiped.”

I got up from my seat and went over to Hahn, who was standing in the full sunlight (for the rising rays were just now over the forest) looking, with his golden hair and martial bearing, like a splendid, sulky, young war-god.

“Shake!” I said. He put his hand into mine, and I saw, as he let his handkerchief fall, that the tip of the right ear was indeed shot neatly off.

“I could have done the other,” I said, with some regret; and to my surprise, they all burst out laughing.

“Come,” said Richter, quite good-humouredly, “it is time for the coffee for one. Mr. Corbet, you shoot straight—for an Englishman.”

“Sorry I can’t say the same for you,” I said, looking him fair in the eyes. I think he understood, but it took more than the discovery of one small plot to unnerve Justus Richter.

“Ah,” he said pleasantly, “you mean Hahn.”

(I didn't.) "But I think he has shot quite near enough for you. Do you like to see the native village before we will return to the ship? I know all this coast, and I can conduct you with safety."

I said I would like it, and we left the field of battle, all in a body, and all very cheerful, as I suppose people generally are after a duel where no one has been killed, and there has been a little bloodshed, just to give the event a flavour. Gore, I recollect, was swinging along in front, just about to enter the forest, his hat tossed back on his head, his big frame just slightly bent down to hear what Richter was saying about a Papuo-Melanesian tribal custom, when all of a sudden—he straightened himself up, cast a glance at the path ahead, and bolted back with such suddenness that he cannoned violently against Wolff, and knocked Hahn into a lemon-tree full of thorns, and threw me into the arms—or, to speak more accurately, on to the well-cushioned stomach of Richter. It was as if a bullock had broken loose.

For a moment, we were all too fully occupied with ourselves to notice the cause of the disaster. Hahn came out of the lemon-tree with a scratched face, spitting thorns on the ground and cursing. Richter swore violently at me in German, before he realized that I was not the moving force in the attack; then he broke off gasping, and asked

what was the matter with the *verfluchter Engländer*.

Wolff, who alone had escaped without actual damage, went back a little way, and stared at the vanishing form of Gore, which had crossed the open grass with wonderful speed, and was now all but lost in the forest at the other side.

I alone of the party guessed what had happened. I had heard a woman's voice in the distance asking the way of a native who evidently did not understand her, and my foreseeing soul cried out: "Miss Siddis!"

To save my employer's face, however, I made haste to explain that he was taken suddenly ill; that I had seen these odd fits before, and that he would without doubt be all right in half an hour; also, that he liked to be left alone when thus affected. Wolff and Hahn accepted the explanation. Richter did not. He looked me through with those chill Baltic eyes, and asked himself, apparently, why I was taking the trouble to lie.

In another minute a woman's figure burst out of the forest running as hard as it could—which was not very hard—on small, flat feet. It was dressed in an untidy medley of muslins, with a hat over one eye, and its face was redder than I should have thought the face of any mortal being, not stricken with apoplexy, could be.

And as it went, bobbing its head with every call, like a cuckoo in a cuckoo-clock :

“ Mr. Gore ! Mr. Corbet ! Stop ! ”

Hahn, with the reddened handkerchief twisted about his ear, Wolff carrying the case of pistols, stood still in their tracks and stared, a wide grin spreading itself over their countenances, as ripples spread in a pool when stones are thrown in. But Richter acted otherwise. He made a quick, light step over to Miss Siddis, caught her by the arm, stopped her, and almost shook her.

“ Have you brought Frau Schultz on this fool’s errand—you, who are supposed to look after her ? ” he said.

The mysterious Frau Schultz again ! I thought that nothing could have added to my astonishment at her name being brought into the business of the duel ; but Richter’s next words did it.

“ This is your doing ! ” he said to me, his usual icy caution melting away in the heat of some incomprehensible anger. “ It is you who have told Frau Schultz, and she and this ass-head have——”

He broke off short, and looked about him. It was plain now that Miss Siddis was alone.

She, not minded to be left out of the conversation, began her cuckoo-clock exclaiming again :

“Stop the duel—I insist upon it. Stop it. The life of Mr. Vincent Gore must not be—
Stop the duel—Mr. Corbet, how can you stand by and— Stop the duel!”

She really seemed to be out of her mind for the moment. I had no doubt that she had run the whole way from the shore, repeating her clock-work cry all the time. Someone on board must have let it out to her after we had gone; and she had very nearly been in time to run screaming into the glade at the worst possible minute. . . .

“See, you foolish woman!” said Richter. “There is nothing to make a fuss about. See! There is no one hurt; Mr. Gore was not fighting; it was this youngling. He has a scratch and so has the other; that is all.”

At this she seemed to come to herself.

“But where is Mr. Gore?” she asked, looking up with something that was, and wasn’t, a squint from under the crooked brim of her hat.

“He is gone a walk. Where is Frau Schultz?” asked Richter sternly. I began to wonder if Frau Schultz were a criminal, being taken back to German Guinea for trial and imprisonment. Certainly I had never set eyes on her yet, though we were several days out from Banda. Miss Siddis, Miss Ravenna, I had seen;

also Frau Baumgartner—the lady whose fat, grey back and scraped-up hair I had noticed on the day of sailing; she had been more or less sick ever since. But of the mysterious Frau Schultz I had not had a glimpse. Miss Siddis's answer only added to my perplexity.

“Where should she be but on the deck, where she always is?” was her reply.

“She is there even too much,” said Richter. “She walks about too much at night. See, then, Schultz is my very good friend, and I warn you that I will look after his interests.”

“Oh, but, Herr Richter——” began Miss Siddis, in her most carneying tone.

Richter did not wait to hear her; conscious, no doubt, of having betrayed himself in some way, he walked on ahead, and rapidly left the party behind. We strolled to the shore together, Hahn, Wolff, the still panting Miss Siddis, and I. Not much was said till the beach shone out before us, white and glaring in the seven o'clock sun, and the *Afzelia's* boat appeared, drawn up below a big Barringtonia tree, that overhung the water with a cool canopy of green. Then Hahn, who had been nursing his sulks all the way, turned to me and held out his hand.

“You shoot well, and you are a brave youngster,” he said. “I am your friend. No,

Wolff, you need not look at me. From this day, I am the friend of Paul Corbet, and any man may know it who likes."

He pronounced my Christian name to make it rhyme with "howl," but, nevertheless, I felt gratified.

Richter was waiting in the boat, and we all went over to the ship together. As the oars ground in the rowlocks, taking me farther and farther from the fascinating shores of the land I had so longed to reach, I could scarcely console myself with the knowledge that we were going to call at other places. I had landed on New Guinea; I had seen a beach and a jungle and a couple of brilliant birds, no more. Round the corner were hosts of wonders, and I had not seen any of them. . . . It was really very hard.

Miss Siddis had found her tongue again by this time, and her prattle nearly maddened me. She wanted to know if we were sure Mr. Vincent Gore was not hurt; she had seen him go out of his cabin in the early morning, as she was on her way to the bath, and he was carrying a case of pistols, and before she could get dressed the ship's boat was away, and there wasn't another to be had till it came back again from the beach, and dear, dear! she was frightened, for she had heard what a reckless man he was,

and she was sure—— But after all, it was not Mr. Gore—we were certain? And he was coming back to the ship all right? That was right; but what a pity that Mr. Corbet should have been hurt—and Mr. Hahn—now she was only a poor little woman, but if we would let her just tell us how wrong and foolish——

At this point Richter looked up from the bottom boards of the boat, and remarked:

“Fräulein Siddis, these affairs of honour have nothing to do with women. Hold your tongue. You understand me?”

Miss Siddis, taken in full flow, stopped, blinked and swallowed.

“You are so natural and simple, you Prussians—so strong!” she murmured, honey in her tones and something very like hate in her small grey eyes. “Yes, Herr Richter, if you wish it, I will keep silence. A simple little woman like me—what does she know, after all, when there are men older and wiser than herself to decide?”

“Exactly,” said Richter.

Nothing more was said till we reached the ship. An accommodation ladder was set slanting down her side; we landed on the grating one by one, and ascended, Richter leading.

To the smart, starched officer who stood at the head of the steps, he remarked:

“We have met with a little accident ashore. A tree fell in the forest; it has injured Herr Hahn’s ear and the forehead of Herr Corbet. I myself have given first aid; there will be no need of the doctor.”

“So,” said the officer with an inexpressive face. We filed through the companion-way just as the first breakfast bell began to ring, and I went to my cabin with my head feeling like a turbine that is just beginning to go round and round under the pressure of the steam. Doubtless the injury I had received had something to say to this; but still more had a sight that flashed upon my eyes just as we were ascending the ship’s tall side—Isola Ravenna’s face, framed in a porthole, white as the paint of the ship, wide-eyed, and with the under-lip dropped down as lips only drop in terror or dismay. Her hands, clutching the brazen rim of the port, were blanched with the closeness of the grip. When she saw me pass, walking easily up the ladder and chatting with Hahn, a cigarette in my mouth, the terror on her face dissolved as snow dissolves beneath a thawing wind. Her clutching hands let go, and she slipped back into the dusk of her cabin, thinking, no doubt, that nobody had seen her.

I fancied Richter had, for he cast a curious

glance at me as we reached the grating, and then threw a rapid look down the ship's side. When we got on board, he went off at once down the alley-way; he had his back to me, but I could see that he was twisting his moustache violently with both hands, and I fancied, somehow, that something had occurred to put him out.

I don't know when Red Bob came on board. We sailed very shortly; he did not appear till we were well out at sea, and the ship was beginning her long, steady roll once more. Miss Siddis had succumbed again, and tottered down to her cabin before we were well clear of the land; she certainly was a wretched sailor. Whether Isola Ravenna was with her or not I do not know; but the girl did not appear all morning, nor yet at lunch time. I wanted her to appear; I wanted to show my bandaged head, and pose as the hero of a deadly fight—being in truth very proud indeed of my part in the business of the morning—but no green-girdled dress fluttered upon the boat-deck, no quick, light foot paced up and down the planking. There was nobody more interesting than Justus Richter to be seen, and he read persistently in his long chair from eight o'clock till one, never, so far as I could see, lifting his eyes off the heavy German print of the page.

Red Bob and I, sitting in our old retreat right up in the nose of the ship, had a short talk over the events of the morning as we steamed along past the curious blue - and - black mountain scenery and the silent estuaries of unpopulated rivers and the mighty mangrove walls that were New Guinea.

“ You did the best thing, under the circumstances,” he allowed somewhat grudgingly, looking not at me, but at the illimitable, sailless sea that stretched out on our port beam—a sea scarce altered in its primitive loneliness since the days when Willem Corneliszoon Schouten and Jacob Le Maire sailed over it. “ It was a put-up job from beginning to end, and not a nice one. They couldn’t have known you were handy with weapons that a young Englishman generally knows nothing about. If you could fence as well as you can shoot—— By the way, where did you learn that ? ”

“ No mystery about it,” I told him. “ When you find out that you’ve a natural gift for doing something better than other people, nothing can keep you from it. I learned it from myself. ’Tisn’t like boxing; other people must teach you that, even when you’ve got the ability—but shooting at a mark—well, you know, you must get to love it.”

"Yes, I know," said Red Bob reminiscently. "Curious thing, too, in Livonia about ninety-two, I did—— Well, that's nothing to do with the case."

"Do tell," I begged. "Did you shoot off the tip of anyone's ear?"

"No," said Red Bob calmly. "I did not. It's an ugly story, and best forgotten. . . . About this duel. I don't quite get the whole reason, somehow. It's true that your loss would have embarrassed me—but that could have been worked otherwise. . . . Almost seems like a grudge against you. But that's not likely."

"No," I agreed. Then, remembering the incomprehensible things that Richter had said to me when Miss Siddis invaded the scene of the duel, I repeated his words as near as I could remember them.

"I can't make head or tail of him and his Frau Schultz," I said.

Gore said nothing; you would have thought he was looking on the far horizon for the ships that never were there.

"I'm glad you told me," he said by and by. "It'll straighten out. Things do."

"I—I said you were ill," I ventured, "when you ran off like that. Was I right?"

Red Bob's hard face broke up into a mass of leathery creases.

"Right, right!" he said, his eyes twinkling. "I was. I was like those fellows in the Bible who describe themselves as feeling their bones turn to water, and their—— By the way, what an expressive book it is; you can find a phrase to fit any possible frame of body or mind in it. I've no doubt you would get something that would exactly describe your sensations in an aeroplane, if you only looked long enough. Or the way a man loses his temper over a long-distance telephone. Well, young Paul, to tell you the truth about that dashed Siddis woman, I ran because I was morally and physically certain she'd have her arms round my neck in two seconds if I hadn't. It's the way they try to save your life—God knows why—especially in shipwrecks or fires, or at any time when you want your hands free and your head cool. And she was out to save mine. You couldn't have stopped her with a club. So—I ran, as many a braver man than myself has done. Give me a match."

He ducked down beneath the bulwark to light his cigar—for the wind was blowing strong from those seas where no man sailed—and came up again, puffing.

“ Pick no more quarrels, and let no more be fastened on you,” he said in a tone of authority. “ And don’t flirt too much with that pretty girl from Banda ; I smell trouble there, and we’ve had enough already. In short, if it’s in the nature of a young rip like yourself to keep out of mischief generally, do it.”

He swung off the bulwark.

“ Do it ! ” he said, with the red flash showing up for an instant in his eye ; and was gone.

As for me, I stayed in the bows till lunch, alternately watching Justus Richter turn over the leaves of his learned book, and looking at the grim, goblin peaks of New Guinea. And I wondered which of the two, after all, concealed the more, and the darker secrets.

CHAPTER VII

IT was, of course, hardly to be expected that I should take Vincent Gore's counsels about Isola too literally. When a girl goes out of her way to give you a warning of a plot against you—when she almost faints because she sees you in a boat with your head tied up—when she revives because you do not appear to be very badly hurt after all, and comes up on deck in the quiet hour of the afternoon with the obvious intention of hearing all about everything—you would be an insensible brute if you did not instantly find a chair, place it as near as possible to the darling's own, and proceed at once to offer up your thanks, your excuses (for having fought at all) and your earnest assurances that no harm has come or is coming of the whole affair, for her acceptance and consideration.

I was not an insensible brute. I did all these things, and found that they were not ill received.

It was almost the first time I had really had the chance of a satisfactory talk with the lady of the island, and I was resolved not to waste my opportunity. After all, the voyage was a short one; in four or five days we should have reached Simpsonhaven, and then who knew that I should ever see this English flower of the East again?

English she undoubtedly was; her accent was that of the cultured classes at home, her simple, frank demeanour was the demeanour of the young English girl of good family and upbringing—and yet she was tropic of the tropics, too; to nothing reared among the fogs and snows of Britain could that starry sweetness, that white magnolia bloom have belonged.

It was fascinating to an eye trained as mine had been of late in shades of descent and strange comminglings of race, to see how the two influences of England and of Italy, working together in the languorous world of the Spice Islands, had shaped the person and the mind of this girl. She was her mother in soul, her father and her home in body. . . . I guessed (and I may say that time proved me to be right) that Isola's mother had been by far the stronger character of the two; that her Neapolitan father had brought little more to the match than his facile Italian beauty. She had known how to love,

it seemed—Margaret Ravenna, dead and gone. Did Isola Ravenna, alive, know, too ?

She was wearing her mother's wedding ring, I saw, on the third finger of her right hand, a fancy that I never cared about, in girls ; still, it showed a pretty feeling. . . .

Well ! I suppose everyone who has ever loved—which is to say, everyone who has passed through life alive and not dead—must have experienced the embarrassment, the difficulty that comes from talking with someone whose personality so obsesses you that you cannot hear her words for thinking of her. I missed quite a good deal of what Isola Bella said in answer to my tale of the duel ; but I picked up the threads just in time at the last.

. . . “ And I was almost sure he would guess who told you, because—you must have noticed it—he watches me all the time.”

It became absolutely necessary to ask questions here.

“ Watches you ! Who ? What cheek ! ”

“ Herr Richter ; I was telling you about him,” said the girl. I felt as one feels who steps at night upon a top stair that is not there. Something that was missing jarred me—jarred me badly. Why did she not laugh as a girl should laugh when a man forgets her words for her ?

Why did she not coquet—ever so little? If I knew a girl from a green goose—and I thought I did, on the whole—it was not because she could not . . . with those eyelashes!

But she spoke very quietly, as a woman thrice her age might have spoken, and she looked at the slight, firm hands in her lap, and at the memorial wedding-ring on her right hand, rather than at me.

“I don’t think you heard. He is a friend of Mr. Schultz’s.”

“Oh,” I said, without much interest. When Isola Bella was within twenty inches of me, I was not inclined to trouble about fat German Fraus and their husbands, and the problems affecting either.

“He is a relation, I believe,” went on Isola. “He is even rather like him—much fatter, and rather younger, but one sees it. . . . Well, he watches me; it is almost insulting. I believe”—she looked nervously about her—“if you could see everywhere, you would find he was watching me now.”

“Oh, nonsense!” I assured her, getting up nevertheless to take a walk round the deck-house and come back. “There’s not a soul. We are on the sunny side of the ship and it’s three o’clock—nothing but you or I or a

salamander could stick the heat. 'They're all in their cabins with their coats off, snoozing.'

Isola's eyes were fixed on the pale-blue curtain of an open port in the deckhouse some distance away.

"I thought I saw it move," she said.

I looked, but could see no movement.

"Anyhow," I said, "we can't be heard. I want to talk to you about yourself. Miss Siddis told me what a lovely name you have. Isola! Isola Bella!"

She made no answer. She was looking out to sea. There was a volcano island coming nearer and nearer as we steamed; a tall, wicked horn that pricked up out of the blue water all alone, smoking ominously.

"That must be Vulcan Island," she said presently. "I have heard of it."

"Isola Bella," I repeated again, very softly. "A beautiful name—Isola."

Now she looked at me; she looked as straight and as coldly as young Diana might have looked at a venturesome huntsman, trespassing on her forest grounds. And yet there was something behind the look—a shadow of pain—for me? For herself?

"You must not call me by that name," she said.

“Very well,” I said. “But I won’t call you by any name, in that case, until you are less cruel.”

She did not seem to hear me; and yet I knew she was thinking of me. In another moment she had risen from her seat, and flitted down the deck companion. There was nothing left of her but the faintest scent of sandalwood.

“Well,” I said, looking after her, with a feeling of depression I could not account for, “I’ve met some girls—but—but—but that——”

I did not want to finish the thought; in fact, I did not want to think at all, so I went to look for some work. There was small difficulty about that, when Red Bob was aboard. One had only to show oneself, in order to be pinned down at once upon a task likely to last on till the next meal. Gore accommodated me at once with a mass of unverified facts and figures urgently needing legitimation, and I grubbed among the ruins of departed empires till the dressing-bell rang.

I remember that I changed and went in to dinner feeling unusually light-hearted. The nameless depression caused by Miss Ravenna’s manner had altogether passed away. What did her manner, or even her words signify, when her actions were what they were? Perhaps I was

absurdly vain, perhaps not—but either way, I was sure that my safety, my welfare, were matters of concern to her, and that she had risked considerable annoyance to secure them. Things being so, it was a good world, and the weather was improving, and iced sweet soup, with fruit in it, though German, was not to be despised.

How I remember all about that dinner—even what the menu was! I could tell you just what sort of a pale, garnished roast the military-looking steward handed over my shoulder, and just what extraordinary pieces of pigs and giblets and sausages closed the meal. There was a gap among the diners that night—someone was ill, or on extra duty—I don't know what—but the result was that Wolff and I, usually separate, were side by side, with only an empty chair between, and that we were talking—a thing we had never done before. We were talking about girls, I remember, and Wolff was setting forth, in flat South German, the superior beauty of the ladies of Munich, first, over Germany in particular, and then over the world in general. Next to them, he was pleased to say, the Danes were the handsomest girls; and he had rather a weakness—acquired in Argentina—for a pretty Spanish girl of sixteen or so.

“Hear the married man, the fast and securely married man!” mocked Hahn from the other

side of the table. "Now, Wolff, shall I the charming little Frau, when we in Friedrich Wilhelmshaven arrive, tell?"

"The charming little Frau, she is the most charming of them all!" declared Wolff, blushing, but maintaining his ground stoutly.

I was a little surprised, for he was not apparently older than myself, if so old, and I had not been regarding him in the light of a married man.

"What, you have already a wife?" I asked him.

"Yes—yes," he said, with a pleasant grin. "See now, if you doubt, there is my ring. We Germans wear a marriage ring, men and women too; we are not like you English, who are ashamed of that honourable state."

"But——" I said. I had a glass of wine on my right; for some reason that I could not have defined, I lifted it, and drank it down. . . .

"But—you wear it on the wrong hand. Or perhaps," I went on, in a strange hurry, "German men wear wedding-rings on the right hand, and women on the left, like ours."

"No, no, no," said Wolff, shaking his head slowly from side to side. "German women and German men wear the wedding-ring on the right hand. The left hand is for the betrothal ring only."

I was calm now—as calm as I had been at Kronprinzhaven in the dawn of yesterday morning, when I had stood up against Hahn with a pistol in my hand, knowing that the next five seconds would decide whether I was to die or live.

“An Englishwoman,” I said, turning to Wolff as he sat contemplating the shining ring on his plump third finger—“an Englishwoman, married to a German—would she wear the ring on the right hand or the left?”

His reply was indifferent, and yet it came—to my senses—quick as the shot of Hahn’s pistol, in the dawn beneath the forests of Kronprinzhaven, the day before.

“Naturally, she would wear it on the right, since that is the custom of the country of her man.”

Hahn had missed me, or touched me only, in that deadly minute at Kronprinzhaven. Here, at the dining-table of the *Afzelia*, Wolff shot home. I was hit.

When one is shot, one does not scream. One bears the pain. That was all I could think of for a moment—that, and the pain itself. I did not even know what it was that I had learned in those few moments; I simply took it in with every pore of my mind, and felt it, as I had never felt any agony in the course of my existence.

I could have thanked God aloud that the captain rose at this minute, and set most of us moving out of the hot saloon on to the cooler deck, so that I was able to swing round out of my seat without unnecessary hurry, and get away.

There was only one thought in my mind, and it drove me like a leaf in the wind down the alleyway leading from the saloon to the deck cabins, after the white, green-belted dress of Isola. I caught her up just as she was entering her cabin. I remember how hot it was in that narrow passage, and how the inevitable ship smell of mattresses, apples and fresh paint seemed in the confined space to catch and wring me by the nose. I remember how the overhead electric light in its cut-crystal bell shone down upon the waves of Isola's black hair, and edged them with a mockery of white. . . .

"You told me," I said, without preface, "that I must not call you Isola—Isola Bella. What name am I to address you by?"

I am not sure that she understood—fully—but she looked at me with an expression in her eyes that was like the look of a mother over a child that is hurt—she, nineteen years of age, scarce out of pinafores and school. . . .

"You must call me Frau Schultz," she said, and went into her cabin and closed the door.

As I was coming up the main companion, Red Bob met me.

"Come out and see Vulcan Island," he said. "She's playing up finely to-night."

I saw my face in a mirror as we passed. It looked quiet, and—somehow—not like mine. "That is Paul Corbet," I said to myself, as the hawky young face flitted by in the bright light of the stairway, beside the handsome elder head of Gore. "Something has happened to him," I said. . . .

I saw that Gore was looking at me.

"You well?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered. "Perfectly." He said nothing more, but looked at me again, and I knew he knew that something had happened.

That is the advantage of being with a man. A woman would have sympathized; would have talked, at least. Gore did neither. He went out on deck with me, and pointed to Vulcan Island, glowing red and evil against a splendid starry sky.

"She's at it," he said. She was; a growl of thunder that seemed to shake one's vitals sounded across the water as he spoke, and a leaping burst of fire, unbearably golden, opened out like a flower from the garden of Death upon the summit of the terrible island.

“How far off is it?” I asked. My voice didn't sound quite right; it was a tone or two higher than usual, but Gore took no notice.

“About eleven miles,” he said. “She throws pretty straight up and down as a rule; not so dangerous as she looks. Do you know who named her?”

“No,” I said. (Isola—Isola Bella! What was it the song said that kept running through my head:

“And it's never, never, never, Douglas Gordon,
Never, never, never on earth I'll come to thee!”)

Douglas Gordon's girl was engaged to someone else, and they ran away together, and were drowned in each other's arms. But what would Douglas Gordon have done if she had been married?

The story of Vincent Gore came up before me in a red flash like the flash of Vulcan Island, and died down as the volcano fire sank into its cone. Not Isola. Never the Diana of the mountain. Married or single, she was not that kind. . . .

“It was a Dutchman found it, and gave it its name, some good few years ago,” said Gore. “Willem Corneliszoon Schouten. Look at it.”

I looked, with all the interest I could bring to bear. The flame rose and sank; small rivers of fire began to trickle down towards the

sea. Every few minutes came that heart-shaking thunder of the mountain's inner voice. Here, on that lonely, untravelled sea, beside the dark coasts where no one ever landed, it was strangely moving; and more than ever, it gave one the feeling that I had already experienced of being at the very ends of the earth.

“Does anyone live there?” I asked, trying to speak and act as usual, and—I think—succeeding well enough.

“Not on the island itself,” said Gore. “There are two others in the group; a few natives live on those. Dangerous beggars, of course. There's scarcely a spot where you could be shipwrecked, from Geelvink Bay right along, without being eaten alive if you got ashore.”

“Why,” I said, waking to momentary interest, “the Germans have had this place since 1885!”

“Right,” he answered, “but they haven't done more than sit on the edge of it anywhere. If we'd been making the usual trip, we should have called at two or three ports with big names, already, and we've got a lot of them to call at yet—sounds well, but they're nothing on earth but a jetty and a copra-shed, with perhaps a mission house somewhere or other close by. I tell you, the Germans are only holding this country by the tip of its tail.”

“Are they?” I said, and then, as it struck me I must talk—must seem quite as usual: “Is it worth holding?”

Red Bob laughed a little.

“It is worth it,” he said, his lean, sharp profile—the very type of a true sea-rover’s face—showing still and black against the glare of Schouten’s burning mountain. “I wish our slice was as good. They’re pretty near the same size, if you take in the Bismarcks and the Louisiades—each share is about twice as big as England. But the Germans have got the best ports, and the best navigable rivers. The Fly’s a showy river with a gigantic estuary, but it doesn’t begin to compare with the Kaiserin Augusta for use. You remember—that big mouth we passed, when the water was yellow for miles. That’s it. Smallish steamers can go up for two hundred miles, big ocean liners for forty. Fine plantation country all the way.”

“Who lives there?” I asked, picturing brown plantation houses and orderly groves of palms.

“A rather bad lot of man-eaters. Nearly got me and Warburton once. You’ve heard of Warburton; he was knocked on the head by a stone club in Rubiana.”

“What’s in the country besides rivers?” I

asked. I did not care in the least what was in the country ; but it seemed well to talk.

“Anything you like to name,” answered Red Bob. “Gold. Lots of it—but they can’t find it. We could, but we won’t. Other metals—sticking with ’em. Gems I suspect, and so do other people. Woods that will make your fortune in six months, if you get a fair chance at them—which in a German colony you won’t. Birds of Paradise, worth three pounds apiece in Simpsonhaven ; worth anything you like at home. Gums that no one’s investigated yet ; probably valuable. Sandalwood—ours is cut out, but theirs isn’t, and the Chinese are giving big money for it. Land—land, my boy, that will grow cocoanuts a year quicker than the Federated Malay States, that they make such a song about, and rubber a year and a half quicker. Labour, plenty of it, and on the spot. A bit of country twice as big as England, that’s four-fifths unknown, but the bit that is known is quite enough to make you want more. Oh, yes, worth having. I think old Jan Corneliszoon Schouten must have thought so, in the days when he spent so long exploring and coasting about—but, after all, it was only the western half of the country that Holland took. Till eighty-five, nobody seemed to want this place. Then they began the game

of grab—but you know how we took it up and dropped it, and how Germany cut in and left us with only the inferior slice to take, in the end.”

I did not speak. None of these things appeared to me to matter in the least. Who cared that German New Guinea had better natural advantages than British, and didn't use them? Cleopatra's cry over Antony was ringing through my head: “Married. He's married.” I had seen Lily Brunton act it. The dead despair of her voice was in my ears, the black despair of her eyes, as she stood with her back to the lights of her palace room, and said to the empty air: “Married. . . . Married. . . .”

That was how one felt. Lily Brunton knew.

I don't know when we passed the volcano. I don't know how long Red Bob stood watching on the deck, or whether he knew when I left him. I said nothing, but slipped away in the dusk and went to my cabin, where I snapped out the light, and lay with my face turned up towards the boards of the higher berth, trying to hold on to myself, and to think.

I had only known this girl for a few days, argued one side of my mind.

It was unreasonable to suppose that she should have taken any serious hold on my life—impossible, rather. One did not suffer agonies

because a girl one had only met last week turned out to be married to someone else. . . .

Answered Nature, with a throb of anguish :
“ One did !—one did ! ”

Well, allowing that—allowing anything you liked about the present state of affairs—it would not last. There had been others. What about ——, and ——, and little —— ?

Answered Paul Corbet, under the torture :
“ Nothing about them. They were different.”

But surely, one had said that before ?

One had, because one thought it. This time one didn't think it. One knew.

“ Very well,” said Common Sense, getting angry, “ have it your own way. If things are so, what are you going to do about it ? ”

“ Going to have the devil of a life, said Paul Corbet to Paul Corbet's Common Sense. Going to hate music, because she's in it, and flowers, because they are she, and the sea because she lived on it, and mountains, because she was born among them. Going to hate most things, including everything pleasant, because they will prick one at every turn with : ‘ Do you remember ? ’ Never going to have a wife. Never going to have a home. Going to travel for ever, like the Wandering Jew, or Red Bob.”

“ Why, bless my soul ! ” said Common Sense,

losing its temper altogether, "how long is it since I heard you say that if there was anything on earth you hated it was home, and that the thought of wives and children made you sick?"

"About a hundred years," answered Paul Corbet, grown old in a week.

And in any case, it was other men's wives and children I was thinking of. As for that, their homes and wives and children make me sick still. My wife, my home, my children—— I had to stop here; thought seemed fused in pain.

My home, I went on, would be—with her——

There was no following that thought. None—if sanity were to be kept.

"You have the whole world," puled Common Sense, growing weaker. "You have everything—else."

"The world and everything else are not worth her," I answered. And Common Sense fled away.

I lay long awake, thinking, and the sum of my thoughts was that my life was not going to be happy. I did not know anyone whose life was happy, now I came to think of it, but I had always fancied that I was to be an exception. One does fancy so at twenty-three. And all my wishes, of late, had met with such fairy-tale

fulfilment, as soon as uttered, that this fierce check seemed incredibly unjust and cruel.

They say that men under torture have been known to sleep through sheer exhaustion. I slept at last.

* * * * *

Nothing in my life has ever seemed to me less like life and more like a dream, than that slow progress down the long, long shores of New Guinea after leaving Vulcan Island. Gradually, as the coast turned southwards, we turned southwards too, till we were no longer off North, but off East New Guinea, creeping down the tail of the country in the direction of the British end. Ports with grand German names, and fine jetties where nobody (to all appearance) lived or even intended to live; where palm trees, swinging outwards to the deep blue, gem-like water, seemed to bear their fruit, dry it and cut it, and leave it piled for the steamer, without other aid than that of one small, black savage in a scarlet loin-cloth, peeping alarmedly from behind the trunk of a tree. Ports where white nuns in white dresses came down to meet the boat, from mission convents perched on little guarded islands; where gorgeous seas of mountain, coloured in those wonderful New Guinea

blues that no one can venture to describe, tossed defiant waves about, above, behind the little strips of planted country, flaunting menace and defiance from every crest of the wicked, unknown peaks where never yet a white man's foot had trod. Ports where the steamer, on coming to a halt, was instantly surrounded by curious carved canoes, loaded deep with green and yellow bananas, and paddled by wild brown creatures lowering from under a mop of woolly hair, beads and a strip of bark their only dress. One port where there were houses with red roofs, and offices, and a melancholy attempt at civilization which didn't seem to have penetrated more than a half-hour's ride back from the shore. All these things came and went, and passed, like the visions of a fevered night. I saw them, these places at the end of nowhere, which had been my dream for as many years as I could recall—and they impressed me, and interested me, not so much as the sailing of one liner from the Mersey used to do in Liverpool long ago. I called it long ago, because, indeed, it seemed so to be.

I saw Isola every day of these days, which were, after all, few in actual number, and I never spoke to her. For a man of my age, or youth, I think this showed some self-restraint; perhaps a little more self-restraint than others in similar

condition would have displayed. I thought her changed and quiet; she looked at me sometimes, when I passed her on deck, but she did not speak to me. I think she stayed a great deal in her cabin, and was seldom out; but as I said, this period is not very clear in my mind. There is no use writing about what I felt and went on feeling. It was clear to me that that had to be borne, and it was borne.

If I could have been amused by anything, the sufferings undergone by Red Bob on account of, and by means of, Miss Siddis would assuredly have done it. That small person, with her (doubtfully) crooked person, her (possibly) oblique eye, and her certainly matrimonial intentions, was never, from our leaving the stormier seas and coming into the sheltered part of the coast, off guard. She did not alarm her victim with the frankness of advance she had at first displayed, but none the less—rather the more—did she haunt his footsteps, morning, lunch-time, dinner-time and evening-walk-time, with the meekness of a mouse and the deadly persistence of a cat. I have seen Red Bob come down to his cabin, literally sweating with dismay, after a stern chase round and round the deck, in which Miss Siddis, by dint of un-sportsmanlike dodging through deck cabins and

under bridge ladders, had succeeded in overhauling him and riddling him with shot. I have seen him, when he wanted to get to the bath of a morning, waiting for half an hour just inside his cabin door, breathing hard with fear, and finally going out with a dash that would have done credit to a forlorn hope charging a glaxis under fire—because Miss Siddis's cabin was near the bath, and because she always happened to be "simmering and bubbling about," as he put it, when he went for his shower. I have been under considerable apprehension that he would really take the chance of sharks and alligators by jumping overboard when I caught the wild-cat-seized-in-your-arms look in his eye, on the occasion (not a solitary one) of his being pinned in by Miss Siddis right up at the nose of the ship, where there was no escape or retreat. She never, so far as I could make out, said anything calculated to alarm; but she soothed, and simmered, and stuck to him till she had him almost in a state of nervous prostration.

I mention this, because, absurd as it all was, it had a serious effect upon our fortunes, especially upon mine. If either of us—Red Bob in particular—had endured, instead of escaping from, the attentions and the talk of Miss Siddis, things would have been known to us that were

not known, and troubles that followed on our ignorance—on mine especially—never would have happened. For myself, I shrank from her conversation now as I might have shrunk from acid laid on a wound. I knew she would talk to me about Isola, and Isola's husband; I judged her likely to give me a full account of the wedding, if she got the least encouragement, down to the last orange flower and last bit of cake. And there was nothing from which I would more readily have fled to the very ends of the earth (if, indeed, German Guinea itself was not the end) than any mention of the man who had been before me. She was married. That was all, and more than all, I wanted to know.

So the voyage wore itself out and we came to Simpsonshaven, later known to the world as Rabaul, the capital of all Kaiser Wilhelms Land, situated on the great island which had once been New Ireland, hard by New Britain, and was now Neu Pommern, next to Neu Mecklenburg.

CHAPTER VIII

I KNOW now what I did not know when we entered the harbour of Rabaul, that I was sickening, on that day, for an attack of fever. New Guinea does not belie its looks. Its hard, gaudy loveliness is the loveliness of the tiger, and like the tiger, it hides talons beneath its velvet and gold.

Through a sunset of blood-red and liver-purple—a slaughter-house sunset that stained the sky from west to east—we steamed into Simpsonshafen, and up to the town of Rabaul. I say again that I had fever coming on, but even so—even making allowance for the cloud of wild, dark thoughts that settle on the mind of the fever-stricken as vultures settle on a corpse—I see Rabaul as a place of evil beauty. I have never been there again, but I know that the picture stamped on my mind, that evening of sinister sunset, will last as long as I shall.

Rabaul has been heard of often since then, after a fashion that none of us dreamed about

in those days, unless, indeed, Red Bob . . . but of that I cannot speak, since I do not know. It is always described as a spot of surpassing loveliness. There may be times when it deserves such praise, but on the evening when the *Afzelia* steamed in, it struck me as the wickedest-looking spot between Capricorn and Cancer.

The town lies in the hollow of an old volcano crater, walled with heavy forests. It is held tight in the elbow-curve of the bay, so that not a breath of Heaven's fresh outer air from the sea can visit it.

From the great black finger of the jetty that runs pointing out to sea, as if in silent warning of unseen dangers on the land, the streets run straight and narrow, thickly overhung with boulevarding of tropic trees—flamboyant, with its drips of blood-coloured flowers; mango, hanging heavy-scented fruit beneath a gloomy cave of leafage; casuarina, the grave-tree of the Pacific, that mourns with every faintest stir of breeze, like an Æolian harp set on a tomb. . . . There are rows of handsome offices and houses, and stores, and Government buildings, standing on forests of white or black legs, like creeping things. There is a heavy scent in the air, of gums and woods and foliage, and wet, raw earth, and rain . . . it is almost always raining

in Rabaul, and the rain is always warm, and the ground steams under the sun when the rain is over. Outside the town, in the oily waters of the bay—that bay that is never moved by any storm, for the harbourage of Rabaul is the pride of the Bismarcks—stand up two dagger-shaped islands, like some strange form of beacon. Do you wish to read their warning? Glance to the right of them, and you will see an ugly sight: a low, mischievous-looking crater, with its lip broken down towards the sea; a crater that lies like an ulcer on the face of the land, crusted with livid yellow and death-grey among the springing green. Within the memory of men no older than Red Bob that crater had spat out a low island or two and altered all the harbour levels; in that year the sea turned hot and the fish died, and were thrown up on the land. There was no settlement in Simpsonshafen then, nor in the days further back when the great beacon islands were cast out. But there are those who say that no settlement should ever have been put there, and prophesy the fate of Pompeii and St. Pierre for Rabaul—one of these days.

In the gloom of a pouring dusk we disembarked, and went to look for shelter. Isola was in the saloon as we passed through, and so was Mabel Siddis. The malign imp who had already

mingled so much of comedy with the small tragedy of my sorrows, was on hand again, to block Red Bob's pathway with the one thing on earth he feared, and to spoil my last vision of Isola with a ludicrous picture of the undaunted Mabel craning her head back to look up at Gore's mighty height, and squinting quite perceptibly at him, as she held on to his hand, and assuring him they were quite certain to meet again, in that misfit pretty-woman's voice of hers. As for me, I took three steps across the saloon to where the girl who was not for me was sitting under a window, her ivory face strangely pale in the gloom of the falling rain. I took her hand for a moment—it was only a moment, indeed, yet our fingers trailed and slipped from one another; they did not fall—and I said boldly:

“Good-bye, Isola Bella. I'd have loved you if I could; and if ever you want a friend, I'll come, dead or alive.”

“Good-bye,” she said. “It has—been—a pleasant voyage.”

I left her, with the dusk settling down about her motionless head. The stewards were coming to turn on the lights; they had not yet reached the saloon; on the deck, white star after white star sprang up. I saw nothing of what I had dreaded; no husband waiting for Isola.

With the strangeness of coming fever on me, I walked out into the town. We looked for lodging everywhere; for hotels, boarding-houses, apartments; for anywhere, at last, where two wet, houseless travellers could find shelter. There was no such place. The capital of Kaiser Wilhelms Land had no accommodation for strangers; did not like them; did not want them; abandoned them to sleep under houses among the piles, and feed out of rubbish-bins, if they so chose. It would not put them up. It would not even feed them. We could buy not so much as a piece of bread, or a glass of beer in all the inhospitable town.

“Just the same,” said Red Bob. “I rather anticipated this, but I thought I’d a friend I could put up with. It seems he has been cleared out; I suppose for harbouring just such objectionable characters as me. . . . We must try back for Herbertshohe; it’s ten miles down the coast, but they will give you a bed and a bite there.”

I burst out laughing, for the fever was growing in me, and I saw the darkening town of Rabaul circled with haloes of molten red.

“It’s the devil’s town,” I said. “See the two horns sticking up as we came in?” I laughed again; it seemed to me I had said a thing very clever.

“ Oh, that’s it, is it ? ” said Red Bob, and put his hand on my forehead. “ Nice kettle of fish ; you ought to be in bed.”

The town was dancing round me by now, and I became conscious of a red-hot spine, also of the fact that my legs—not my feet, they were all right—my legs were double-jointed, and did not work properly. This, for some curious reason, made me extremely cold. It did not matter—nothing mattered—but I could hardly speak without biting my tongue, my teeth chattered so. I assured Red Bob that I was all right, and that he had the loveliest dark eyes I had ever seen in a human face, only that I feared that ivory tint of skin meant delicacy of some kind. . . . I remember still how he stopped under a dripping mango tree to shout with laughter, and how he bundled me at once into something that was standing there—a sort of little truck on a tram-line—ran it down to the wharf at a smart trot, and carted me, in a second or two (or so I thought) on to the deck of a small schooner, that glittered very wet under the lights. Somebody was put in a cabin after that—myself, I thought—and some other people began fighting in German outside. There was a talk about marks by and by, and someone called someone else a robber, and then—immediately it seemed—there was a

fresh sea-breeze blowing on my face, and blocks creaking, and a boom swinging across the deck.

After which, I dreamed bad dreams for a week.

* * * * *

“Harrh!” came a bloodthirsty shout, over my shoulder.

I sat up suddenly. A kitchen-stove-coloured savage, with huge nostrils, and glaring black-glass eyes, was standing at the head of my long chair, scratching his head with one hand, and holding out a cup of soup with the other.

“Harrh!” he yelled again, as if I were a prisoner taken in battle, and about to be slain. “You have one-fellow soof?”

He shook the cup of soup at me with such vigour that some of it splashed out over my pyjamas.

“Oh, it’s you, Bo,” I said, reaching for the cup. The savage of New Britain is scarcely a restful type of attendant for a sick-room; but Gore and I were not out to find fault with any conditions that gave us a roof over our heads, and a “boy” to work for us, just then. I had been fairly ill for a few days, and was recovering. To-day I had so far returned to myself that I was able, lying out on the verandah, to take note of

where I was, and wonder at the oddity of the place

Herbertshohe, one of the many futile abandoned capitals of Kaiser Wilhelms Land, lies some ten miles from Rabaul, along the New Britain coast. I do not know how Gore had obtained leave for himself and me to camp in a forgotten wreck of an hotel there; probably he had more friends than I knew of, or than it was judicious to speak about, in the country. At all events, he had carried me there, on the night of our arrival, and here we still remained, in a structure that looked like somebody's cardboard model of a hotel he had intended to build, and didn't—a crazy, two-story contrivance of carved, flimsy woodwork, deformed with odd gables and bows, all placed at the front. I had a queer fancy that it had been constructed solely for the purpose of being photographed, in order to make somebody believe something—no matter what—about the prosperity of German rule in Kaiser Wilhelms Land. At all events, it could never, even in the days when Herbertshohe was the place of the Governor's residence, have been a paying proposition; and now, when the capital had escaped yet again, and gone to hide itself round the corner of Gazelle Peninsula (its fifth attempt at finding a quiet home) not even a

Government official drawing up a report to send to Berlin could have mentioned the Hotel Friedrichsruhe as an asset of the place.

Nobody lived there. There was a sort of hotel, carefully described as a private club, in order to discourage the passing traveller, a little way further on, and if you were a German, you stayed there. But the "Friedrichsruhe" was left to rats, centipedes, cockroaches and travelling English. You could camp among its decaying furniture, in its paintless, dropping-to-pieces rooms, for a sum that would have given you lodging in the "Savoy" at home; you could find your own boy, and send across to the "club" for a stray meal, which might be accorded you and might not, and you could pay for it at double the prices of Berlin. So much the Kaiser's Government allowed you, in the Bismarck Archipelago. You could not travel about; when you had polluted the country with your presence for two or three weeks, you would get notice to the effect that strangers were not permitted to take up residence there, and you would then—if you were not Red Bob, or Red Bob's companion in adventure—hasten obediently on to the *Prinz Sigismund*, when she came in from Singapore, and steam away to Australia.

But if you were Red Bob, or Paul Corbet, you

would not contemplate doing anything of the kind.

Bo, having given me the soup, left the verandah in two bounds that shook its crazy structure from end to end. Outside, he let loose a hideous war-whoop, and then went off to wash dishes. I lay on my long chair, congratulating myself on the return of a normal temperature, and looking out across the roadway to the sea beyond the belt of palms—a hot-weather sea of curiously transparent blues and greens, like inlay of Venice glass. There was grass on both sides of the road; there were low bushes here and there; there were palms everywhere. Grass, palms and undergrowth alike, forced by the hot rains of a German New Guinea December, were verdigris-green in colour, and so sappy and wet and juicy that they looked like one enormous salad.

I saw bullock-carts crawling down the road as I lay and drank my soup—box-like vehicles drawn by grey, long-horned buffaloes with rings in their noses. I saw a plump German or two, in neat white suits, passing by from the sleepy stores, or the sleepy, small post-office, or the sleepy Government offices that had been built for a capital, and were obviously misfits for the dead little town of Herbertshohe. I saw New Britain natives going by in gangs, from the great

cocoanut plantations. They were mostly like Bo—blacklead in colour, instead of the brown that one saw on the neighbouring mainland, and attired, like Bo, in the Governmentally regulated dress of a loin cloth and a singlet. They were singularly ill-looking savages, sulky and heavy-faced, and with a certain black fierceness latent somewhere, that I had not noticed among the tribes of New Guinea itself. Indeed, the Papuan of the mainland, man-eater, prisoner-torturer, and general all-round villain though he may be, has certain endearing qualities—a sense of humour, a liking for pleasure and fun, a sort of rough hospitality, that lead you into easy friendship with him, if you are much in his society. But the man who could be friendly with a New Britain savage has yet to be born. As the mainland Papuan is the tiger of the human race — treacherous, bloodthirsty, yet fascinating in his own way—so the New Britainer is the bison; ugly as a bison, black-faced and fire-eyed as a bison, and as a bison intractable and untamable. The mailed fist of Germany drove him to plantation work by a system of merciless taxes, and kept him to it by physical force—there was never anything of the man-and-brother method in the dealings of Germany with its colonies—but through all, he remained what he

is: the last, worst savage on the face of the earth.

* * * * *

I had finished my invalid's ration, and was wondering where Gore could have disappeared to all afternoon, and how soon he meant to come back, when I heard the tramp, tramp of bare feet—military bare feet—on the verandah. I sat up. It was Hahn, my old acquaintance of the duel, with his police, marching somewhere or other (he was a Government officer of fairly high standing) and calling in on the way to see me.

“Well, my nut, how are you this afternoon?” he shouted cheerily. Hahn prided himself on the accuracy of his English slang. “I have to march these beggars up to Toma, and I have at the club for some beers to give me heart just now called in. When will you be fit again?”

He seated himself astride the remnant of a chair, and roared an order, in the true Prussian bellow, at his police, who were standing at “Attention.” They dismissed, and squatted down outside.

“Why do you speak to them in English?” I asked somewhat wickedly, for I knew.

“I speak to them in pigeon-English,” replied Hahn, “because it is the nearest to their own

savage speech. Right German it is impossible to teach them. We have tried since 1885. When our Governor a good many years ago came here, he said in his opening speech that if he could that pigeon-English from Kaiser Wilhelms Land and the Bismarcks chuck out, he would think he had done a good deed for Germany, if he did nothing more in his stay. But the mind of the savage can't grasp a language so far removed from his habit of thought as the cultured German. So we have allowed him to retain the tongue that had spread over the archipelago already, through its eminent suitability to the ignorance of the savage mind."

"I see," was all my reply. I did see. Already, during the trip down the coast of Kaiser Wilhelms Land, I had had full opportunity of understanding the danger—to Germany—of the system that forced every newly imported officer to learn pigeon-English immediately on his arrival, and talk to his soldier-police in the language of a neighbouring, rival European power. For myself, however—since I did not pretend to Vincent Gore's linguistic abilities—it promised well. Gore was not likely to require me to learn a new savage dialect every week, when pigeon-English was spoken everywhere along the coast.

Where was Gore, by the way, and what was he doing? Now that I recollected, I had not seen him since breakfast. . . .

To my surprise, Hahn spoke my own thoughts.

“Where is that chief of yours? I thought I saw him going down to the Company’s launch.”

“Perhaps,” I said, leaning back on my pillow to shade my eyes from the light of the westering sun on the sea. “I don’t know where he has gone.”

“So,” said Hahn, obviously not believing me. He stopped talking for a minute, and began to roll a cigarette. Somehow, I recalled a fragment of counsel once thrown to me by Red Bob:

“Better make your own cigarettes. They take the place of a snuff-box, on occasion. You remember how all the old diplomats used to take snuff—because it gave them time to think when talking. . . .”

“Have you seen Herr Richter since you came?” asked the young officer presently. I have often noticed the naïveté of the German stare. They will ask you a diplomatic question, and then spoil its effect by a stare of such curiosity and keenness that it would put a baby on its guard. Hahn gave me just such a look as he spoke. Therefore, I picked my way in replying:

“Why, no. I’ve been pretty ill, off and on. Is he here?”

“Certainly not. His residence is in Rabaul,” replied Hahn. I don’t know why, but the answer convinced me that Richter had been—as the Americans say—“snooping around” in the neighbourhood of our residence, and did not want anyone to know it.

“If he should take the trouble to give you advice about your movements, you had better accept it, you can bet,” declared Hahn. “Herr Richter himself is a very learned man, and has much knowledge about the aboriginals of Neu Pommern. Yes, my boy.”

He grinned under his gold moustache, and offered me a cigarette. . . . I guessed then, and know now, that Hahn was told off to hamper our movements, and find out our plans; but somehow or other I never could help liking him. He didn’t do it well, in the first place. And then he was always jolly about it. And then I had shot off the tip of his ear, which endears a man to you. . . .

“Look here,” I said, “I don’t know the first thing about Gore and his plans. I do what I’m told, no more. I’m his secretary. You go and ask him anything you want to know, my son, and take what you can get; you can keep it all, with my compliments.”

“The little English bull-terrier again,” said Hahn, folding his arms on the back of his chair, and grinning more. “Powl, thou canst bite, but thou art no diplomatist.”

“In the first place, I’m five feet nine,” I said, “though I don’t carry as much beef as you—and in the second, the people who picked you for fighting got a very poor brand of diplomacy in with the packet.”

“Powl,” said the young officer, looking at me over his folded arms, “you know too much. I fear myself, Powl, thou wilt have to a first-class saloon, outside cabin berth by the *Prinz Sigismund* to Sydney buy. A single ticket, my boy.”

“Get out,” I said. “The British Association and the Royal Society would excommunicate you like the cardinal and the jackdaw of Rheims, if you stopped a man like Vincent Gore at his work.”

“Did you hear about the wife of Herr Richter?” asked Hahn, suddenly changing the subject.

“Your boss?” I asked.

“Boss?” queried the expert in slang, innocently. “What is that?”

“What Justus Richter is,” I countered. “Well? Didn’t know he had a wife.”

“Nor did we,” declared Hahn, with a romantic

tone in his voice, which I believe to have been perfectly genuine. Before 1914, we had occasional chances of seeing the romantic side of the German character—the side that produced “Werther” and the bread-and-butter. . . .

“None of us here in Kaiser Wilhelms Land knew,” he went on. “Richter had been married, oh many years ago, and a widower for many years had been. And two years ago, when he was going to Singapore by Java, the ship stopped at Ceram. And in Ceram there was cholera. Herr Richter got this cholera, and they put him ashore in Banda, thinking that he very shortly should die. Now in Banda there was no one should take him in, for they were all much afraid of a cholera patient, and I think he would have died at once, but that a lady—the wife of a Spanish settler—Herr Gott, Powl, you are ill——”

“I’m a little—weak—from this dashed fever,” I said. “I only want to put my head down; it’s dizzy. Go on.”

“Now! This lady was not young, but she was good-hearted and so was her husband, though he was a man very rude in temper at times. And when she heard of Richter, she and her husband said: ‘This is a good work to do, so we shall take the stranger in.’ And him they took.”

“Yes ?” I said. The sun was creeping down the white-hot sky ; green parrots were awaking from the lethargy of the afternoon, and beginning to wrangle feebly under the domes of the mango trees. Hahn’s soldier-police were grunting pigeon-English to each other on the steps of the verandah. I noticed these things ; I noticed that a sulky grey buffalo, with horns like levelled spears, was trying to steal bananas over a fence some yards away . . . and yet I knew what was coming.

“She nursed him through that terrible illness,” went on Hahn, the intense light from the sea contracting the pupils of his blue eyes to little pin-points of black, and making his very eyebrows glitter. “And at the last, he was in collapse. Now out of collapse recovers hardly ever any man. So Richter, who is of just and noble instincts, said to her : ‘I am dying ; before I die I would a will make, and leave my plantation in German New Guinea, and the money I there have invested, to you, because you alone have runned this so fearful risk on my account, and have saved me that I do not die like a dog on the jetty.’ And the lady said : ‘Right !’ But see then, Powl, I am blowed if they could find a notary who would come into that house, for there is very few in the place and they had wives

and children, and they would not run such a risk. Then Richter he was dying further, and he could speak, but he said : ‘ A pastor must not have fear of death. Send for a pastor, and you bet,’ he said, ‘ I will manage that thing.’ Also, the lady sent for the pastor, and Richter said : ‘ Give me some more cognac,’ and they gave him. ‘ Now,’ says he, ‘ bring down your daughter who has come home from school this week, and I will marry her before I die, and the plantation shall be hers and yours, but be quick,’ he says to her, ‘ for I go.’ But the lady was very quick indeed, for she was most poor, and she desired the plantation, and after a little she brings the daughter down, who is crying very much for fright of the death, and the pastor her to him fast and well marries. Then Richter says : ‘ That is well done, and now read me some of the Bible, for it’s many years I haven’t been at a church, and one doesn’t know how far these things may or may not be true.’ And the pastor he reads to him, and he prays—Herr Gott, he prays so strong that Richter falls in a good sleep, and the next day he is better.”

I knew it all now.

“ But, Powl, it’s the most romantic story—for then the girl is sent back to school, and Richter said : ‘ I am glad that I am not to die,

since that is a most beautiful bride, but since she was never by me courted, she shall courted be.' And back to German New Guinea he goes, but he never told Donna Ravenna his name was not Schultz only, it was Justus Schultz Richter."

Hahn suddenly pulled himself up here, and appeared to consider, looking at me thoughtfully, and pulling his moustache.

"You needn't worry," I told him. "If you think I can't guess why your Lecoq-Sherlock-Holmes-Schultz-Richter was masquerading about the Dutch Islands under a false name——"

"It was his own name!"

"Well, the wrong end of his own name, then—you're jolly well wrong. I can imagine quite easily. Drive on."

"You want some more quinine," commented Hahn, looking curiously at me. "You are yellow—aren't thou yellow just, old churl!"

"Go on while I'm taking it," I said, reaching for the bottle.

"Now see then, in the marriage service, of course the surname isn't used, but when Donna Ravenna and her daughter heard the bridegroom who was at the point of dying say 'Justus Schultz' they took no notice, and the bride after him said, 'Justus Schultz.' So that was the Christian names, all right. And when he

was better, and ready to go, he had thought that he would tell Donna Ravenna, at the point of leaving, 'I am not Schultz only, I am Justus Schultz Richter of New Guinea, and a man of much more importance than you have supposed, though in the interests of——' ”

“ Secret service,” I cut in.

“ Of diplomacy,” corrected Hahn, “ in those interests he had travelled under another name. But Donna Ravenna, not long after, paid with her life for that noble hospitality. She, also her husband, died of the cholera. Then Richter went away, most deeply annoyed and to the bottom of his heart grieved.”

“ He had some reason,” I commented. “ The quinine I had swallowed was not more bitter in my mouth than the whole of Hahn’s story to my mind, but I did not choose that he should see me grimace, over the one more than over the other.

“ Also,” continued Hahn, “ again, in six months, he returned to Banda, where now the girl had come back for a little while, and with a governess friend was living, to wait for him. But he told her that she should meet Schultz in New Guinea, and she, who had no remembrance of him—since a man in collapse of cholera is no more like the same one in health

than I am like a dead fish on the shore—she said she to New Guinea with Miss Siddis would go. For you understand, there was now no money left for her, and she had not one thing that she could do. ‘If he is a good man, as I think,’ said she, ‘I will try and like him, because, after all, I am his wife in law,’ and she embarked.”

Hahn laughed a little, sent a surprisingly vivid curse at one of his men who had dared to fall asleep, and went on :

“Then Richter went with her all the voyage, and not anyone knew he was the Schultz she had married. So right romantic is this man, who has indeed some grey hair, but the heart of a child——”

I thought of the gory affair at Kronprinz-haven, undoubtedly got up by this same child-hearted creature of romance, and if I had felt like grinning, would certainly have grinned.

“And not till they came to Rabaul, and were in the house of the lady to whom Miss Siddis is governess, didn’t he speak. So now we all look for a merry wedding in the church, because the bride will have it, though she is indeed married before, and then a happy home on the plantation for Richter, with his so-beautiful young wife.”

“They aren’t married again yet ?” I asked,

with great leaps of the heart that turned me sick.

“No, but to-morrow I think they will be. This pretty girl is a little sad at leaving all her home; still, by and by she will be more heartful. Also, Powl, I have talked to you too long, my nut; you are looking worse. If I do not take those police of mine on to Toma, I shall not be there before the evening rain. So long, ta-ta, see you soon.”

He tilted his white helmet forward on his brow, bellowed to his police, kicked one or two of them to encourage the rest, and marched off down the muddy road between the ranks of palms.

We were nearly at the longest day, it being December; still, the swift dusk of equatorial lands had fairly pounced upon the town before Gore came home, a little after seven. He struck a match and lit the verandah lamp.

“Oh,” he said, looking at me, with the inevitable cigar drooping from one corner of his mouth. Then, “Indeed!” Then he sat down on the rickety Austrian chair, and bellowed for tea.

Bo answered with a howl that would have done credit to a warrior in the act of decapitating an enemy, and bounded on to the verandah.

“You catchum one-fellow tea, quick!” ordered Red Bob. “You catchum bulimacow (meat), bread. . . . As usual,” he said. (Bo had taken the verandah in three leaps, and was gone to make up the fire in an outhouse.) “As usual, not a bite to be had since six this morning.”

“You’ve been in Rabaul,” I stated, being familiar with the inhospitable ways of the German capital.

“I have,” said Red Bob, leaning back in the chair with his long legs stretching across half the verandah. He looked at me under his eyebrows, but never a question did he ask.

So of course I had to burst out.

“I suppose you’re surprised to see me dressed again?” (Which I was, down to the pin in my tie.)

“No,” said Red Bob. “I’m not much in the way of being surprised at things.”

“Well,” I rushed on, “I’ve dressed because I’m going to Rabaul to-night.”

“Who lent you the aeroplane, and can you run it yourself?” asked Gore, with every appearance of interest.

“What do you mean?”

“Only that the launch has come back, and doesn’t run again till she’s wanted to.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “I’ll hire a cutter

or a schooner. I'm going to get to Rabaul to-night."

"They won't hire us any boats. That's what I've been looking up to-day."

"What!"

"Won't hire us anything that floats or swims."

"What for, in the name of common sense?"

"Name of Wilhelm II., more likely. We've bumped up against him somehow."

"Then I'll walk."

"By land," said Gore indifferently, "I take it to be thirty miles."

"Then," I said, breathing hard, "I'll go down to the jetty to-morrow, at daylight, and if the launch isn't running, I'll make it run, if I have to shoot the engineer."

"I see your point," said Gore, smoking lazily, "but it's an unnecessary trip. She's disappeared."

"Good God! Where?—and how do you——?"

"Oh, the yarn's all over Rabaul. Wedding was fixed for the day after to-morrow—formal wedding, that is—lady was staying with the Hirschmanns, who employ Miss Siddis; lady disappears and can't be found. No one seen her since yesterday afternoon."

“Then,” I said, getting to my feet and holding on by the back of the couch—for I felt a little unsteady—“there’s all the more reason why I should go and find her, dead or alive.”

“And give her over to her husband. Just so,” said Gore, puffing pleasantly. “Where’s that cannibal with the tea?”

I said something strong in contradiction.

“Yes, but you see,” said Red Bob, “to find her in this country would mean just that, nothing else. The whole community’s against her—what right has a silly little foreign girl to take a dislike to one of the most prominent citizens in the colony, especially when she’s tied to him by a legal ceremony already? That’s the way they look at it. Nobody would give her a hand.”

“Where do you think—what do you think? Do you think she’s——?”

“Oh, no,” said Gore, answering my question as if I had put it in words. “I don’t think she has. I don’t like thinking, anyhow. I prefer to know. Can’t say I know in this case, but I’ve an idea or two.”

“For God’s sake, tell me if you have,” I said, sitting down on the couch again. The great white stars among the palm trees seemed to be dancing about; the floor was heaving like

a steamer deck in a heavy sea. I was not so strong as I had thought, it seemed.

Gore looked at me.

“It’s a bad business, and a tangle,” he said ;
“but——”

“It is not a bad business,” I interrupted.
“If you think it’s a parallel case to—to anything you——”

“We’ll leave it at that, if you please,” interrupted Red Bob, with something slightly dangerous in his voice. “I was going to say I think the young woman’s made back to Friedrich Wilhelmshaven way. You see, the *Afzelia*’s still lying at the jetty—going to sail on the home voyage to-morrow morning ; and if she could stow away on board, she’d be all right. I don’t see what else she can have done. Every house about Rabaul has been searched, and as to getting off into the bush, she must know she’d be eaten if she got away five miles behind the town. Besides——”

“It looks as if you might be right,” I said doubtfully.

“Well, you’ll have every opportunity of finding out. We have to board the *Afzelia* when she calls here to-morrow morning. I’m trying back to Friedrich Wilhelmshaven myself.”

“What on earth for ?”

“ You hurry up with that tray, Bo. Put him there. Catch me two-fellow teaspoon, you black villain—why do you always forget the spoons ? . . . I’ll tell you what for when I’ve fed. My lunch and dinner to-day have been the smell of the meals in those dashed ‘ clubs ’ in Rabaul. Some of these days——”

He stopped to fill his mouth with meat.

“ Some of these days,” he went on, “ there’ll be restaurants in Rabaul where a stranger can actually buy a bite of food. And bars, where he can get an iced beer. And in those days the fat inhabitants won’t set their tables where you can watch them eating, and then snigger at you as you pass. No, my son.”

“ Why not ? ” I asked.

“ At all events,” said Red Bob, “ their beef is worthy of a noble race—when you get it. You’re well enough to eat a meal to-night ; come on and feed before we talk. I’m going to tell you about the Schouten pearls.”

I found I was well enough, and that I felt another man when the food was down. Bo cleared the table in a series of jerks and jumps while we settled ourselves on the upper verandah of the house. It was none too secure, but you could not be overheard on it.

“ Well,” said Red Bob, stretching his legs out

comfortably before him, "this is how it stands in a nutshell. Our friend, Willem Corneliszoon Schouten, sailed from New Hanover to Vulcan Island, on the mainland. He didn't make a bee-line, though; at one time he ran pretty close in to New Britain. And he stayed a devil of a time about there—all things considered. And he used to stop at the islands now and then—the ship's log tells about it. He would go away from his men, and trade with the natives all by himself; wonder was he didn't get killed and cooked half a dozen times over. Now the last time I was here, a year or two ago, I was following up Schouten's tracks a bit, for no particular reason—you see, at that time I'd never been to Holland or heard of Helga Maria; wish I had; it would have saved me a trip across the world and back. I was just taking ethnological notes, and followed his route. Well, on one of the islands—a good-sized place, marked on the map and named—I found a rock carving. Of course, I thought I'd struck something lucky about native history, and I cleared it out—it was in wonderfully good condition, being underneath an overhang. What do you guess it was?"

"Something about Schouten?" I hazarded.

"You can judge. It was an arrow; and a row of little roundish things that might have

been commas, or drops of rain, or almost anything you might choose to say. And a bit of ornamental carving that looked Celtic——”

“Celtic!” I exclaimed. No matter what his private troubles were, any man who had spent some months in the company of Vincent Gore was bound to rise to that as a trout to a fly. Celtic! In a Papuo-Melanesian island!

“I didn’t say it was, I said it looked Celtic,” went on Gore imperturbably. “As it turned out, the thing was Dutch, and seventeenth-century at that. Of course, I took a rubbing of the stone before I went. And then I sailed for a little bit of an island, further out in the direction of the Admiralties, where Schouten’s log mentions that they called. He says there were no natives there, but that they got some coconuts and oysters. It was an uninteresting place—I didn’t stay.

“After that I went home. And, as I told you, I went for a trip to Holland and amused myself looking up the history of the old Dutch navigators, Schouten in particular. That was the time when I ran across the history of Helga Maria Van Oosterdyck, and saw her portrait. Now let me show you something.”

Out of a small oilskin case he produced the photograph of the Dutch lady which I had already

seen, also a neat Indian-ink copy of a "rubbing" taken from an inscription.

"Do you see anything?" he asked.

At first I did not; then . . .

"By Jove!" I exclaimed.

"See it?"

"Yes, rather—they're identical."

"What?"

"Why, the carving and that monogram of pearls at the end of Helga Maria's necklace."

Gore looked at me and smoked. Presently he reached out a long arm for the carving, opened out a chart of New Britain, and set the paper on it.

"I took the bearings of the arrow," he said. "See where it points."

It pointed to a blank on the map, so far as I could see.

"That's not as blank as it looks," said Gore. "This region is worse charted than any other place in the world. There's an islet right in the line of the arrow. The islet where the cocoanuts and oysters were got."

"Lord!" I said, getting to my feet, "why, it's as clear as daylight." I felt more excited than I would have believed, ten minutes ago, I could ever feel over anything that was not connected with Isola.

“Of course,” went on Red Bob, “the best way to make for Aroko Island, where the inscription is, would have been by Rabaul, getting a schooner there, and sailing round the head of New Britain, and a bit back. But . . . they aren’t by way of wanting strangers in Rabaul at any time, and just now they want them less than usual. Every schooner, every cutter, every launch—everything with a keel on it—was engaged otherwise. Or it had to go on the slip for repairs. Or the owner was away, and no one could hire it in his absence, and nobody knew when he would return. Result—nothing doing.”

“What’s the meaning of it all?” I asked.

“That’s a big question, young Paul. Bigger than I can answer—at present. Rabaul’s the capital, and a naval station. . . . Well, I was given to understand that I might be tolerated over at Friedrich Wilhelmshaven—what a dashed sort of name to give a town—on the mainland of New Guinea; that is, old Richter came to me, and explained that it was twice as good for ethnological study of any kind, and he’d be delighted to help me, in the interests of science, to settle there for my stay. And the Governor said so, too. Therefore, knowing when I was beaten, I cleared. It’s not as good a way to get

to Schouten's little preserve, but it will have to do."

"And about Miss Ravenna?" I asked.

"About Frau Richter? Nothing about her till we find her, and then—time enough when we do. Don't cross bridges before we come to them. You'd better turn in, if you're going to be fit to travel to-morrow."

"I have come to it," I said, getting to my feet, though I was shaking a little with the effects of the fever, and with something else too. "Do you think I'm going to leave Rabaul just on a chance—with her—Gore. Those black brutes would have her if she went just a few miles back—in her terror. . . . If I can't do something, I—I——"

To the present hour I cannot say whether I meant it or not. I was "seeing red," I had lost self-control through the fever . . . but still, it was an irrational and a useless thing to catch up a chair, and throw it through the glass door of the adjoining bedroom. I can only hope I may have supposed that the door was open.

At any rate, the sound of the smashing glass, and the fall of the chair on the floor, seemed to do me good, and I felt calmer.

Gore did not turn a hair. He remained where he was, with his legs stretched out, smoking.

“As you were observing . . . ?” he remarked.

“I said—I said that I must do something. I can’t leave it to chance.”

“You needn’t,” said Red Bob. “She’s all right. Has that automatic of yours been cleaned since you took ill?”

“Yes. I made Bo do it. What makes you think she is?”

“I never think,” said Red Bob. “Go to bed.” And not another word could I get out of him.

But I knew him well enough, and trusted him enough, to get on board the *Afzelia* next morning with a comparatively quiet mind. And the blue, blue heights of New Britain, above the long levels of the glassy sea, faded away behind us. How soon they were to be seen again and under what strange circumstances I did not guess, nor indeed would I have believed, had anybody told me.

CHAPTER IX

AT Friedrich Wilhelmshaven, with its red-and-white villas a-tiptoe on concrete piles, its miles of noble cocoanuts spreading away in star-shaped avenues far behind the town, its exquisite harbour, where blue lanes of water wound in and out among green palmy points, and gay country cottages stood up alone on islands like a poet's dream—things looked brighter than at Rabaul. The paralysis that had mysteriously affected the shipping of German New Guinea mysteriously disappeared when we passed from under the lee of Gazelle Peninsula. They would hire boats at Friedrich Wilhelmshaven, for a consideration. They would help one to recruit a crew, for a consideration. In Friedrich Wilhelmshaven (place cursed of ships' pursers and others who had frequently to write its name) they did not, like Rabaul, and the "rude Carinthian boor":

"Against the houseless stranger shut the door."

On the contrary, they invited you to stay in a neat little bungalow hotel, and were glad to get

your money. They were ready to do business with you; to ask you into their houses (with discretion, and provided the Government officials at Rabaul did not object); to show you round, and let you admire the road, and the wharf, and the plantations, fruit of their country's occupation since 1885. No grey warships ran in and out of Friedrich Wilhelmshaven, on mysterious errands, as they ran in and out of Herbertshohe and Rabaul. No air of secrecy, of something to be hidden—something from which inquiring strangers must be loudly “shoo'ed” away—hung about the mainland town. . . . I suppose my mind was too full of Isola to take any special notice of these things at the time, but afterwards, in the days of Armageddon, they came back to me. As for Red Bob, I fancy—now—that what he did not know or guess about the matter was not worth knowing. The peaceful folk away south of us, in the British division of New Guinea, might have slept less soundly in their beds had they shared his knowledge.

All these things, however, have nothing to do with my story, except as they affected our stay in German Guinea. We found, as I have said, that Friedrich Wilhelmshaven was somewhat more hospitable than Rabaul, and we were able to make immediate arrangements for our voyage

to the islands lying north of New Britain. Ethnological research was supposed to be the object of our trip. In reality, and at long last, it was to be the wildest, most dangerous and delightful pirate picnic that ever gladdened the heart of an adventurous youth.

This seemed to me the kind of thing I had come out to see. I had honestly done my work for Gore through all our journeying; nevertheless, the secretary business had been against the grain. I did not really care a stone celt about the history of races; shapes of skulls, and deductions to be made therefrom, never kept me from a moment's sleep; nor did I find any joy in the fact that a couple of root words used in Madagascar cropped up again in Geelvink Bay. I saw what these things indicated, but I did not care. It seemed to me that all that sort of thing had happened too long ago to possess any vital interest, in a world that was full of new, untried adventures and delights.

In my secret heart, I thought it an amazing thing that a jolly, splendid fellow like Red Bob should care for such musty stuff, while there was a gun left in the world to shoot with, or an island to explore. . . . I am older now. I understand that the study of ethnology was simply Red Bob's spiritual tobacco. Every man it seems, must

have spiritual tobacco of some kind, when he is past the age that needs no narcotic. Things happen to people as life goes on—horrible things mostly—and though the things pass over, the memory does not. That is where the tobacco comes in—the interest or pursuit that keeps a man from thinking. With some people it's prize pigs. With lots and lots it is gardens. A great many seem to find mysterious solace and soothing in committee-meetings—which seems to me as if one should eat dry biscuits to allay thirst, like Lewis Carroll's "Alice." Red Bob turned his love of adventure and travel to scientific uses; to other uses too, I fancy; but that I shall never know now. At all events, comparative ethnology was his narcotic. I suppose there are worse ones.

Only one thing troubled me in those delightful hours of preparing for our adventure—the fact that I had heard nothing more of Isola. If she had stowed away on the *Afzelia*, she kept herself invisible and no one suspected it. If she was still in Rabaul, she was in good hiding. German New Guinea was of opinion, on the whole, that she had either drowned herself, or run away into the bush—which would come to the same in the end. A launch had come through from Rabaul on the day of our arrival, bringing no news of the

bride, but reporting the bridegroom as half distracted, and searching every gully and old volcano cup about the capital, with teams of plantation boys spurred on by the promise of big rewards. . . . If I had not trusted Red Bob as I trusted no one else on earth, I should have gone out of my mind with anxiety. But that trust, backed up as it was by the "radiograms" that inevitably pass between two people living in intimate association, assured me of what I wanted to know. I was as certain that Red Bob could put his finger on the missing bride when he liked as I was sure of the sun rising in the morning.

* * * * *

Next day we sailed out of Friedrich Wilhelmshaven harbour, and I could have sung for delight.

"It's beginning at last," I kept saying to myself, as our little schooner flew through the water under a heavy breeze, heading out from under the Ottilien and Bismarck Ranges, towards Long and Lotten and Umboi, and all the smaller unnamed islands that tangle themselves about the end of New Britain.

What "it" might be, I did not specify. I did not need to. I don't know that Robinson Crusoe could have told you—or Sir John Mandeville—or Ulysses—or any sailor lad who ever loved

the taste of blown spindrift on his mouth, and the leap of a deck beneath his foot—yet they all knew it, and wanted it, even as I.

Everything on board the schooner was “it.” The Winchester rifles slung on the bulkheads of the tiny cabin; the outfit of long bush knife, cartridge-belt, and .48 Colt revolver, in a leather holster, worn by Gore and myself; the crew, naked New Britainers with fierce bison eyes glowing under bison-like shocks of hair; the wild, wonderful ranges of New Guinea that opened out behind us as we sailed; the scarcely-charted ocean, and coast-lines but tentatively marked, of the regions to which we had set our dancing bow. Even the narrowness and inconvenience of the little *Cecilie*, after all those months of luxurious travel on great steamers, where not the most imaginative youth in the world could have felt adventurous or brave. For adventure does not consort with seven-course dinners and electric-lighted state-rooms; nor does the proximity of the most dangerous coasts and worst cannibal savages in the world suggest any kind of daring, when comfortably viewed at a distance of some miles, from the deck of a regular liner.

But now, Red Bob was captain, and I was mate, of a little cockle-shell manned by black savages

who had eaten human flesh, and were doubtless ready to do so again if the chance presented itself. We were tossing about on an ocean of which no good charts were to be had. We were going to unknown islands, which we had to find for ourselves. Our food was tinned and bagged stuff from Friedrich Wilhelmshaven, to be cooked in a galley like a sentry-box by Bo, whose attainments did not soar much above the point he had mentioned that day at breakfast—namely, that he “no savvy this blooming hegg! he savvy plenty cook ’em tin meat, cookem one-fellow man!”

Yes, undoubtedly “it” had begun.

Our native crew, though the roughest of savages, had had some teaching from white men and could handle a boat well enough. We let them run the *Cecilie* that morning, Red Bob and I steering by turns. While one held the wheel the other stood alongside, and, safe from all possible overhearing, we revelled—at least, I can answer for myself—in being able to speak loudly and freely of our plans. It was true that most of the crew knew pigeon-English, but the following of a connected conversation in ordinary language is not within the New Britain native’s powers.

“First,” said Red Bob, standing with bare

feet apart on the deck, and leaning to the *Cecilie's* heavy list, as he turned the wheel in his hands, "we go to the island where the inscription is. I've got the bearings of the arrow, but I must see it again, to avoid any possibility of mistake. That's down fairly near the north coast of New Britain. Best way would have been round Gazelle Peninsula, if we hadn't been blocked—however, this is quite feasible. After that, we make for Schouten's pearl island as quick as we can go. Then—we shall see."

"How are you going to get the pearls?" I asked. The huge coastline of New Guinea was fading behind us into the pale, thin blue of distance; ahead, bright islands, purple as wistaria flowers, were pricking up out of the sea. A December squall of fierce, hot rain had just swept over us; the decks were wet and shining, and over to windward the sea was silver with new sun.

Red Bob laughed.

"You may well ask," he said "You don't suppose one could bring diving gear through the customs at Friedrich Wilhelmshaven or Rabaul without questions being asked that would be pretty hard to answer."

"No," I said, "and, by the way, suppose we get it all right, aren't we pearl-poaching?"

“Oh, yes,” said Gore, laughing till his eyes were nothing but two blue slits in a mass of wrinkles. “You may certainly call it that. Pearl-poaching and smuggling are about the two forms of dishonesty that you may commit without being dishonest. It’s up to you not to get caught, that’s all. Koppi, you black villain, if you make that sheet fast I’ll throw you overboard. . . . Well, about the diving gear; it’s down in the hold, labelled, ‘Trade goods.’ A friend of mine managed that for me at Friedrich Wilhelmshaven. Same friend who got me the boys.”

“Are they safe?” I asked.

“Reasonably so,” said Gore. “I’ve done what I can. Couldn’t get quite all of them from separate districts, but three out of the five are strangers to each other. All the same, sleep with your belt on, and overhaul your pistol now and then. This climate’s the deuce on gunnery. I don’t know that I admire that automatic of yours. They’re a little too fine for these equatorial countries. Have known ’em jam.”

“Not mine,” I said. “It’s looked after, and I can shoot to a hair with it. I can’t do with that beastly kicking old navy pattern.”

“It has its points,” said Gore. We talked no more for a while.

The *Cecilie*, like Gore's revolver, had her points, but she was not the nicest of sailers on a following wind. I grew restless as the day went on over the slowness of our progress. It seemed to me, with such a breeze, we should have been out of sight of New Guinea before dark. But the afternoon wore on; the purple islands turned to palm-fringed green, and then faded to blue behind us; the wide, open sea grew wider, and glowed like a golden shield with the unbearable glory of the westering sun—and still the coasts of Kaiser Wilhelms Land, high and far and blue, stood up in the sky behind.

"I think the dashed place is tied to us," let out Red Bob, looking over his shoulder yet again, as we made another tack.

"Pity we haven't an engine," I said, leaning on the rail to keep my footing, as we lay over. "Of course, the objection about an engineer coming along— Talking of things coming along, there's a launch behind."

"Take the wheel," was Gore's reply. He dived below, brought up a glass, and fixed the oncoming boat with his eye.

"Not a Government launch," was his verdict. "Whatever she is, she's signalling. We may as well heave to."

With slatting sails and heaving deck, we

waited. I will confess that I did not feel altogether comfortable in view of the errand we were on. The pearls of Willem Corneliszoon Schouten seemed likely to weigh as heavy upon our enterprise as a belt of gold upon a swimming sailor. What if—supposing—

The launch, which seemed to be a swift one, overhauled us rapidly, jumping through the seas with tremendous smother and foam. We could not see who was on board, beyond her steersman.

She ran under our lee and stopped her engine. Out of the little engine-room came a lean, yellowish man in a worn khaki suit—a man I had seen in Friedrich Wilhelmshaven at work in a boatshed.

“I’ve got your Malay fellow on board,” he shouted in German. “He was very anxious not to miss you, but there’s not another launch in the country would have caught you, after such a start. Hallo, you Hendrik, come on out!”

Of course I knew that we had no Malay in our service, and didn’t intend having any. Of course Gore knew it too. But we had both been accustomed to walk warily of late, and neither of us contradicted the launch-driver.

“My Malay, have you?” said Gore. “Well, bring him out.”

“You don’t seem glad to see him, after all

the trouble he took to get here in time," observed the engineer. "He paid me not so much either." All this time the launch was plunging and dipping fearfully alongside the *Cecilie*, and the *Cecilie*, wallowing in the trough of the sea, threatened every now and then to slew round and cut the other down with her shining copper keel. The wind was getting up, too. I noticed that the engineer could scarcely keep his footing on the deck of the launch.

"He had no business to be late," was Gore's reply. "Corbet, have you any silver? I suppose Hendrik has run through all his cash."

"I suppose the beggar has," was my diplomatic reply, the while I wondered who in the wide world Hendrik could possibly be. "Yes, I've a few marks."

"Thirty marks more, that's my fair due; I wouldn't have set the engine going, only he promised his master would pay," declared the man.

I threw him the money and he stepped from in front of the cabin door.

"Now, come out, thou!" he shouted. "He has paid, but if he had not, I would have taken thee back; thou art a rascal who has got into trouble, so I believe."

Out of the little cabin of the launch stepped—

not indeed a Malay, but a Malay half-caste; a handsome, slender, nervous-looking lad, with sleek black hair, and an olive brown skin. He had a wide felt hat on, that shaded his face. I rather thought, in spite of the hat, that I had met him somewhere before—probably among the islands of Dutch Malaysia, where half-castes are as common as flies in summer.

The Jacob's ladder was swaying about dangerously, but he came up it lightly enough, and sprang down from the bulwark to the deck. His bundle—a wad of clothing tied up in a sack—was slung after him by the launch-driver.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” called the latter, evidently mollified by the thirty marks. “A pleasant voyage!”

“Good evening,” I replied, feeling as if, for the first time in my life, the motion of a vessel were making me sick, or at least giddy. What did it all mean?

The half-caste had disappeared, and Gore did not seem minded to explain his presence.

“Get her under way at once,” he ordered. “The sooner we're clear of all these reefs the better, at this hour of the evening.”

Indeed, the water about the *Cecilie* was marbled in many places with the beautiful patches of malachite green that all South Sea men dread.

We got her on her course again, not without much howling and stamping about on the part of the crew, and a little hard language on ours. When the pretty little ship was flying once more close up into the wind, with New Guinea fading away on her starboard quarter, Red Bob drew me to him with the lift of a finger.

“This is a nice business, upon my soul,” he said, with a graver countenance than I had ever seen him adopt before.

“Who is he?” I asked.

“Don’t you know?”

“I’ve seen him before, I think, but—no, I don’t——”

“You monumental young ass, it’s Frau Richter!”

“Lord Almighty!” I said. There seemed to be nothing else to say. Isola—here—in that disguise. The skies seemed crumbling above me.

“Why, I thought,” somehow I found breath to say, “I thought you knew where she was!”

“I did,” said Gore. “I didn’t want to tell you till we were well away, because I was dead certain you couldn’t be kept from going to see her, and giving her away to the amiable people who knew what was good for her better than she did herself—or thought they did. She came up to Friedrich Wilhelmshaven on the *Afzelia*

with us. The stewardess knew her well—used to call at Banda—and she hid her in her own cabin. She meant to get back to Banda, and ask some of her mother's old friends to take her in. Seems she couldn't stand Richter at any price, not so much because she thought him unpleasant—he's a man who has some good points, if you know him—but because of a young idiot who had turned her head. You. Told me—she did—that she never meant to have anything to do with Richter, or with any man; means to go into a convent, and spend the rest of her life expiating her sin——”

“ Her what ? ”

“ Sin. Sin of having taken a fancy to a young ass like you, when she'd vowed to love and obey someone else, who did not prove lovable or obeyable. There, we've talked enough, with the girl down in the cabin wondering what's going to become of her. Go on and see what's happened, while I take the wheel. There are too many horse-heads about these waters to leave it to the boys.”

I did not wait to be told twice. Three steps took me down into the cabin, a small, blue-painted place with a narrow table and two lockers, a swinging tray and swinging lamp, and a strongly pervading smell of cockroach.

Isola sat at the table. She was in a loose cotton gown; her sack of clothing lay open on the locker top, and the khaki coat and trousers in which she had come aboard were invisible, whatever she had done with them. I suspected that she had simply flung her dress over them, the moment she found herself alone.

Her hair—her lovely hair!—was cut short round her neck. Her face and hands seemed to have been stained with some brown dye. It had been very well done; I never should have suspected the ruse, had I not seen her in her natural ivory fairness. Deprived of the fairness, with her fine, falcon-like cast of feature and her black Italian hair and eyes, she made the most convincing half-caste one could imagine. Her slight, active figure, helped by the loose coat she wore, had been (I remembered) perfectly boyish in appearance when we saw her in the launch; and the slender hands and feet were not too conspicuous in a youth supposed to be of Malayan blood. On the whole the disguise was excellent. Sitting there at the cabin table, in her loose dress, with her big eyes shining out from under the short, heavy hair, she simply looked a half-caste island girl, of unusual beauty and refinement—to anyone untrained in the true signs of race.

In the unsteady, ill-smelling little cabin, with the wide seas of New Guinea swinging beneath our keel, I stood at the other side of the table and looked at her—the girl I loved who was not for me; yet who—thank God!—was not for anyone else either, so it seemed. I could think of nothing else but that for a moment. Then suddenly it occurred to me—selfish brute!—that she must be wearied, perhaps hungry and thirsty, that she was certainly in some grave trouble, and that I had not yet done anything but stare like the idiot Red Bob had just called me.

“Isola!” I said, taking her hands in mine—they were chilly for all the warmth of the evening—“you must be tired and famished—and—What has happened? Gore told me—Bo! get some tea, along galley plenty-plenty quick. What’s the matter? Why didn’t you get away on the *Afzelia*? Do you know where we are going? It’s a terrible place, not fit for—”

“You said,” she answered, looking at me with a light of perfect confidence in her beautiful eyes, “you said, ‘If you want me, I’ll come to you, alive or dead.’ And I did want you terribly. But I heard that you were dying—and I was afraid to let you know, because you would have tried to come—”

“What awful rot!” I exclaimed. “I had only a touch of fever.”

“They said you were very ill,” she replied. “So I had to do what I could. . . . When I found out that Herr Richter was not Schultz’s friend, but Schultz himself—if you had ever seen a man in that awful cholera collapse, you would understand how easily——”

“I have,” I interrupted—for Gore had chanced on an adventure or two in Singapore that I have said nothing about. “I have, and I can understand his own mother wouldn’t know him, if she only saw him then.”

“It came—it came—as a dreadful shock,” she said. “For you see, I did not like him, and I knew, or guessed, at any rate, he had been a cruel enemy to you. He can be cruel! People who knew him on his plantation have told me things. . . . And I realized that I simply couldn’t, after all. But I had no money, or hardly any, and no one in Rabaul was on my side; he is very popular there; they say ‘he has such fine qualities.’ Perhaps he has; it was a fine thing enough to do as he did, when he thought he was dying, just in order to repay my parents—oh, my poor dear mammie and dad! . . . But it wasn’t a fine thing to hold me to it whether I liked it or not—when I said I had changed

my mind—told him I did not care—said I would rather wash clothes or scrub floors for a living. He just laughed and said that no one in that country would give me clothes to wash, and nobody would give me money to get away; and that girls were always silly about marrying older men, but the older men made the best husbands, and for my own sake—Oh, I'm too tired to tell it all."

Her little dark head was drooping back against the bulkhead; she looked worn out.

"You shan't speak another word," I said. "You shall have some tea" (the war-whoop of Bo announced that it was on its way from the galley), "and you shall go right off to sleep in that little cabin—it's lucky we have one—and to-morrow, when you are quite rested, you can tell me anything you like."

Red Bob was still steering when I came up, his eyes set on a distant island.

"Well?" he said, shifting a spoke in his lean, brown hands.

I told him all that Isola had said.

"H'm!" was his comment. "More behind, of course. Richter must have found out and come after her. You remember they said there was a launch just in from Rabaul. . . . Clever little hussy that she is; never saw a better

disguise in my life, and I've seen some. Yes . . . some."

He stood with the spokes in his hands, looking a long way out across the sea—further, I thought, than eye could carry him; back into strange happenings and places of which I had never known anything.

"Well," he said presently, "it's an awkward position."

"Not a bit," I contradicted. "There's that small cabin—we can shift our things out of it in two minutes, and sleep on the lockers."

"That wasn't what I meant. You can surely understand that the trip we've started on isn't likely to be a picnic for ladies."

"If you send her back," I said, "you send me too. I—I won't desert her—if I were to be hanged for it."

"No one wants you to desert her, young fire-eater," answered Gore. "The only question is, whether we shouldn't give up our own trip and run her down to Brisbane, or back to Banda, or something of that kind. There are objections to that, however. . . ."

"Let her have her night's rest, and then we'll hold a council of war."

So it was settled. I found Isola asleep on the locker cushions when I went back to the cabin;

she was evidently worn out with trouble and fatigue. I took care not to wake her in shifting my things and Gore's out of the small inner cabin. When it was ready—a poor little place it was, with a narrow bunk, and a washstand, and just space besides, to stand on the floor—I placed her bundle on the rack, went back into the cabin, and lifted her up very gently indeed from the locker. She was so tired that she never waked as I carried her into the cabin and placed her on the bed. There I left her sleeping the naïve, innocent sleep of a child. After all, she was but nineteen, and young for that—too young, by far, for all the trouble that had fallen on her delicate head.

Isola, even as a runaway in desperate straits, was Isola of the island still. There are many sweet white tropic flowers at Friedrich Wilhelmshaven; some of them must have been concealed about her dress, for the perfume of fresh petals met my senses as I laid her on her bed. And the loose white robe that she had flung over her boyish disguise was fastened with a ribbon of forest green.

Next morning she was up and about as early as we were, and when Bo brought in the breakfast, with his usual shout, she was ready to pour out the tea, and help the tinned meat, hot and

glutinous on its iron plate. She looked very bright and fresh, and as happy as a child on a picnic. We were clear of reefs for the present, so one of the boys took the wheel while Gore and I came down to breakfast. Nothing was talked of but the weather and the ship while we were eating, but when the table had been cleared, Red Bob, with the courtly manner that he used towards all women, handed Isola to the most comfortable seat, and asked her permission to smoke.

“We’ll have some talking to do,” he said, “and I can talk better with a cigar. But if you mind——”

“Oh no, I smoke a little myself sometimes,” she said. “Father never used to mind ladies smoking; it’s so common in his country.”

I offered her a cigarette; she took it, and smoked away in the daintiest manner possible, curled up on the locker seat, while Gore and I lighted our cigars.

“Well,” said Red Bob, puffing away with deep satisfaction, “we want to know just what’s happened. When I last heard of you, the stewardess had you pretty close. What let the cat out of the bag?”

“Just an accident,” said Isola regretfully. “But for that, I’d have been into Dutch terri-

tory by this time. The *Afzelia* lay at the wharf all day and the heat in that small cabin was fearful. I couldn't stand it when the night came, so I got into some clothes belonging to a Malay steward, and darkened my face and hands, and went for a walk ashore."

"Where did you go?" asked Gore, narrowing his eyes as he looked at her.

Isola, for no reason that I could see, turned slowly pink.

"Not very far," she said.

"As far as the hotel?"

"Not much farther."

"Oh," said Red Bob, watching the pinkness spread. "Well, go on."

"When I was coming back," she said, "I saw him."

"Richter?"

"Yes. I saw him walking about, in the shadow, up and down, looking at the boat and the wharf. I was so frightened that I didn't dare to go near her. You see, they were taking on cargo, and there were big lamps, acetylene or something very bright, and no one could come or go without being seen. He must have found out or guessed somehow, and followed in that big launch that came in two days after us; and he was looking for me. And the look of his face terrified me so

that I ran away in among the palms, and stayed there all night. But in the morning, when I came back, the ship was gone. So there I was, left, and I had hardly any money, and I didn't dare let myself be seen—but I meant to wait, and come to you for help. Then I heard people talking, and oh!—they said you had sailed that afternoon. And then a file of native police came down the road. Something—I don't know what—made me hide from them in a clump of bushes. They passed quite near, and I heard them saying to each other in pigeon-English that they would soon find the 'one-fellow Mary belong Master,' and they would 'catchem fast for Master.' When I heard that, I felt sick. I waited till they were gone, and then took all the money I had left, and ran to the place where I knew that launch was, and bargained with the man. I had only twenty marks left, and he wanted fifty, so I told him my master would pay him the rest. And—and that's all."

"About enough," said Red Bob, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and looking at it as if it were somehow at fault. "You did the right thing. We'll stand by you, never fear."

"If you will let me be your cook," said Isola timidly. "I can cook quite well—and wash and mend your clothes. . . . I only want to keep out

of his way till I find some way of living. It's having none that makes me so helpless."

"Cook!" I said indignantly. "Cook and wash! I should like to see you doing it—or my letting you!"

"Keep your hair on, young Corbet," said Gore. "If Frau Richter, as I suppose we must call her, wants to cook, and mend and so on, by all means let her. People are happier employed."

"Thank you," said Isola, with a glance that made me angry with Gore for having earned it. Of course he was in the right. I saw that as soon as I took time to think. She would be a hundred times more contented, if she were allowed to do something—or fancy she was doing something—for us.

"Well," said Gore, fixing his passionless, blue cat-eyes on Isola and on me. "It seems that the best thing we can do is to go on—for the present, at any rate. No one is looking for a Malay lad; they're looking for a white girl. By and by they'll give her up, and then we can come back with you, and get you aboard the Banda boat."

"Thank you, more than I can say," said the girl, in a low voice. "Both of you . . . you are very good. I—I am going into a convent when I get to any place where I can. I'm not

a Catholic—mother was Church of England—but there are Protestant convents too.”

“ I hope you’ll never do anything so horrible ! ” I cried indignantly ; but I do not think she heard me, for she had left the cabin.

“ There are worse things,” said Gore, inspecting the ash on the end of his cigar as closely as if he were estimating its ratio to the volume of smoke.

“ I can’t imagine anything worse than mewing yourself up for life like that.”

“ Have you ever,” said Gore, “ heard of that part of the Pacific where they all have the D.S.O. ? ”

“ Distinguished Service Order ? No.”

“ That sort of D.S.O. isn’t the Distinguished Service Order. It’s the Done-Something-or-Other. There are groups of islands where every white man has it. I’ve seen ’em. Places where all the whites are sort of runaways. Men—and women. They don’t—on the whole—seem to find it an enjoyable life.”

I wanted to speak, but my lips found no words. With his uncanny power of divination, he had seen the vision of the coral island in the far South Seas that had flashed across my brain—the beautiful girl, tied only by a fiction of the law to another man, who was to be the angel of the dream. . . .

Well, since we had been running all the previous day through islands that were like a foretaste of Paradise on earth—islands steeped to the shores in romance and loneliness—the guess was not such a very difficult one.

“Another thing,” went on the cold voice beside me. “If you are going to carry off any one’s wife—even your own—to the ends of the earth, you can’t do it for nothing. Elopements are not a cheap form of amusement. They cost about one-and-a-half times as much as getting married, if you do it economically. If you do the thing in any sort of style, it’s more than three times as expensive. And the income, afterwards, doesn’t go near as far as a married man’s income. You need much more to live at the same rate. Somehow the lady you elope with never is what they used to call a ‘notable’ woman about a house.”

“I never heard such beastly cold-blooded——” I began.

Gore looked at me with half a smile.

“Facts are cold-blooded things,” he said. “What about taking your trick at the wheel?”

I took it, and while I was steering the little schooner—an easy job enough this morning—my thoughts had leisure to roam beyond the

deck and the wheel-spokes. Where were we sailing? What was to be the end? I thought and thought, till I let the *Cecilie* come up so far into the wind that I nearly put her into irons—but I saw no clear path ahead.

CHAPTER X

“**T**HINGS will dry straight if you only let 'em alone.” That was one of Gore's pet proverbs, and it kept repeating itself to me, over and over again, in the next few days. Things did seem to be drying straight. Isola had slipped into her own place on board the ship with wonderful quickness and adaptability ; that element of gay boyishness, which I had somehow divined to exist in her character, came out in the sunshine of safety and friendship, and she became the very life of the ship. I was angry at first that Gore allowed her to work so much as she did—cooking little messes in the galley, sewing and mending, even washing clothes. I would have treated her, had I had my way, like the lady in the nursery-rhyme, who was invited by her lover to :

Sit on a cushion, and sew a fine seam,
And feed upon strawberries, sugar and cream.

But Gore, wiser in knowledge of the world, let her use her hands as much as she liked, thus

keeping her from over-use of her mind. You cannot brood on your misfortunes when you are beating up "puff taloons," that stand-by of the eggless kitchen, or putting patches on somebody's old trousers. And Isola loved to work for us. I think she had an idea that she was in some way repaying us for her rescue. As if her presence had not been sufficient repayment for all the service that a man could give—for all a man's life, and everything that was his!

Red Bob allowed coolly that my lady of the nutmeg island was quite useful to us, after all. Our crew was small for the size of the ship, and so stupid that not one of them could be trusted to shorten a sail under the orders of another, or to steer unless Gore or myself was on deck. We had arranged to keep watch and watch throughout; but the coming of Isola made it possible for us to get a good spell of unbroken sleep now and again, since she could steer as well as I could. Girls brought up on small islands learn these things early; when I heard how much travel by cutter and schooner had to be done in the Banda group, I wondered less at Isola Bella's handiness on board ship. As for the cooking, I did not care what I ate, but Gore, who perhaps thought more about the dish than I did, as he thought less about the maker of it, declared that since Isola took

command of the galley, the meals were really fit for human beings.

So, over warm, blue, windy seas, through days of sun on the white, salt-sparkling decks, through afternoons of flying scud and squall, when we all ran barefoot about the ship, shouting to each other, and helping our useless boys to make or shorten sail, nights of diamond starshine, when the *Cecilie* went through the water softly as a swimming seal, and Isola and Red Bob and I lay shoeless and hatless on the planks, watching the sway of the topmast up in the velvet blue, and telling and hearing strange yarns of adventure from one another, we sailed to Schouten's island through the unknown seas. We met no ships upon the way; this part of the Bismarck Archipelago is almost as lonely, and very near as badly marked and charted, as it was in the days when old Willem Corneliszoon Schouten, of Hoorn in Holland, bravely took his castle-bowed ship where no man else had been. The strange detachment from all things on the land that comes to those who go down to the sea in sailing ships came upon us three. Our voyage was near five hundred miles in a straight line, and the amount of beating we had to do made it infinitely longer, not to speak of the days when there was no wind at all, and the *Cecilie* lay slamming

about in the trough of great glassy Pacific swells, spilling everything spillable, and casting loose everything that was not fast tied up. But we felt no impatience. The spirit of the sailing ship had touched us one and all; the things of the land were not; time was wiped out, and the hour in which we lived was all of life we knew.

I am well aware that there may be people ready to blame Red Bob and myself for taking Isola on such a trip; and certainly, as Gore himself had said, it was like to be no picnic for ladies. But those who live in safe, settled countries can scarcely realize the difference made in many points of view by travel in places where life is cheaply held, and adventure is so common that it almost ceases to be adventure at all. Certainly, apart from questions of propriety, neither Gore nor myself would have thought of inviting Isola to come with us, and share in the risks we knew we should have to run, in hunting for Schouten's island and his pearls. But when circumstances drove her, as they had, to take refuge with us, we accepted the circumstances. Undoubtedly, the best thing to do was to keep her out of sight for a while; and there could be no surer way of doing it than by taking her with us to the unknown seas. Later on, when we had all had time to look round us and think what was

best to be done, the matter of her future could be discussed. Now was not the time.

As for scandal, Mrs. Grundy has small sway at the ends of the earth, where white women are so few that the woman who objected to unchaperoned travel would very seldom be able to travel at all. No one was likely to "say things" about Isola's voyage in company with a middle-aged man like Gore, and myself, in a quarter of the world where solitary white women may at any time have to take passage on small, slow-sailing vessels run only by the owner and his native crew. I did not suppose that Richter would be pleased to hear—if he ever did hear—that his missing bride had run off in a ship with two men; but I knew the Pacific world by this time far too well to suppose that he or anyone else would think ill of her on that account.

There is no use telling how long our voyage lasted, or just where it took us, when it was done. It is enough to say that one warm, windy afternoon we sighted a row of palm-tree tops pricking up out of the sea like pins, and knew, from the distance and the bearings of the place, that we had come upon Schouten's island.

The palms grew higher and higher out of the water as we sailed in, and soon we could see a dazzling line of sand below them, and a reef

covered with foam, and within the reef a wide, pale-green lagoon. It was a staring, solitary place, that looked as if no one had ever been there since the beginning of time. You could see right across it from side to side, for the tall cocoa-palms were the only things that grew there, save for a little underbrush. Sand, and white palm-trunks, and thin, blue, dancing shadows, and sun and sun—this was Schouten's island.

“Well chosen, wasn't it?” said Gore, with the glass at his eye. “Not the sort of place anyone would ever settle on, or land on either, if they could help it.”

“How did you happen to land yourself?” I asked. Isola was beside us, listening with interest; I remember how gay and boyish she looked with her short, curling hair and sailor blouse, worn over a brief skirt of some kind of coarse cotton stuff. She had shoes on to-day; we had all put them on, regretfully, in anticipation of having to land.

“Something in Schouten's log. Had a fancy to stand where that fine old boy stood, three hundred years ago, and look out at the sea as he looked at it—wondering, I suppose, what might lie beyond the skyline where he had never been—or anyone else. Ah! it was a fine thing to live in those days.”

“They didn’t think of it as we do,” I said. “Schouten was a lot more interested in cutting out the big Company’s monopoly of the trade routes than in geographical problems. Those just came in.”

“I suppose,” said Isola, “in another hundred years they’ll be envying us for having any out-of-the-way, strange, unknown places to go to, and saying that we didn’t appreciate what we had.”

“Bo! Kaipa! Lalik! Lower away one-fellow boat! Hurry up, now, or by-’n-by I been break you blooming cocoanut,” ordered Red Bob. “Ready to go ashore, Mrs. Ravenna?”

For by common consent we had fallen into this compromise of a title. I could not bear to hear her addressed by Richter’s name, and Gore steadily set his face against allowing her to be called Miss.

“Ay, ay, Captain,” answered Isola, saluting merrily, “we’re all ready for the fun.”

“You can’t all go,” said Gore. “No leaving the schooner alone with these beggars. They are behaving well enough, but it’s ingrained in the nature of the New Britain native to cut off his employer whenever he can, if you take him sailing. Not a month since a crew of them did it close up to Rabaul. . . . Mrs. Ravenna, I’ll

take you first, and then you can wait at the rock, and show it to Corbet here, while I stay aboard. Corbet"—he spoke a little apart—"keep your eyes skinned. These beggars are always nasty near land."

"Right," I said. I saw them pull off in the boat with a couple of the boys, and resigned myself to wait for Gore's return. The crew, however, seemed to me to be nothing worse than a little lazy and stupid, and that they always were. I did not think they would have made any attempt to run off, even if they had been left alone.

The island was small, as I have said, and so flat that one could easily see all over it. I saw Isola and Gore walk together to a spot some few hundred yards away, stop, and bend over something, examining it. Then Gore returned alone.

"All right," he hailed, as he came down to the beach. "You can go as soon as I'm on board."

I thought all these precautions rather superfluous, considering the way our rough black crew had behaved up to the present, but I explained things, to my own satisfaction at all events, by reflecting that Red Bob wasn't as young as he used to be, and that middle-aged men are apt to become—well, not nervous; one could not

apply such an adjective to Gore—but what one might call, if one chose to coin a word, somewhat “precautious.”

The dingy ferried me across the lagoon, and left me on the beach. I suppose, if Gore and I had come alone, I should have been thinking, as I set foot on that lonely shore, of the brave old explorer who had been there three hundred years before me—who, like the Ancient Mariner :

Was the first who ever burst
Into that silent sea.

But as things had turned out, Willem Corneliszoon Schouten was occupying my mind scarce at all. Isola Bella—Isola Richter—Ravenna, or whatever her name might be—for I was resolved not to think of her by that of the man who had married her—left little room in my thoughts for anything else.

She was standing by a sort of rockery of coral—a pile of white boulders that looked like huge Turkish sponges suddenly turned to stone. There were green vines twining about the boulders, with pink flowers on them, and of course she had got some of the flowers by this time, and was trying to place them in her hair.

“It’s so short,” she said piteously. “I wish I hadn’t had to cut it. It makes me look so hideous.”

“It’s rather more becoming than the long hair was, if you want to know,” I said consolingly. “Long hair can’t curl like that, and your curls are lovely.”

“Are they?” said Isola, pulling them out about her face. “I’m glad you think so.”

“Oh, Isola!” I burst out, “we never can have a talk on that schooner; let’s have a minute to talk now. Isola—if you could get rid of that brute. . . .”

I broke off for a minute. All had indeed been said between us—without words—but it was nevertheless hard to speak out in plain prose what both of us understood.

Isola paused, with the pink convolvulus flowers falling from her dark curls, and her hand half raised to adjust them. . . . I have only to close my eyes and I see the picture before me, clear as some exquisite painting limned on crystal—for no colours that were ever put on dingy canvas or paper could reproduce the hues of that coral island and its surroundings. Isola with her little boyish figure, cheeks kissed to red by the salt sea-winds, and black curls edged with gold—the coral sea, blue as blue fire, for background to her small, dark head, and above it the swaying leaves of cocoa-palms, flashing back flame to the flaming sun from their varnished

fronds of enamel-green. . . . One might have painted it on stained glass, with the sun shining through ; not on anything more dull and earthly.

“ I can’t,” she said, in answer to my words. “ I don’t see any way. Yes, I understand, but it isn’t any good. As for him, he’ll live for ever, just because—because— Oh, I don’t want to say wicked things ! ”

“ He won’t live for ever,” was all the consolation I could find.

“ He must be fifty—people die when they get near sixty as often as not, so perhaps, perhaps after all——” ; and somehow, when I looked at the sea and sky, their glory seemed to have faded ever so little. I thought the evening must be coming on.

Isola was silent ; the wind blew up strong from the sea, and whistled in the swinging leaves of the palms. I ripped a strand from one of them—I was in the mood when one feels like tearing and destroying—and twisted it in my hands as I sought to find words. But I, too, was struck with silence.

In that moment a hail came across the water from Red Bob, who, as I have told before, had a voice that would carry the better part of a mile.

“ Hurry up ! ” it said. “ Getting late.”

We had both forgotten about Willem Corneliszoon Schouten and his stone!

“Oh!” cried Isola, suddenly waking up, “how stupid and selfish I am! Look, this is it; it’s really wonderful.”

She stooped down a little, and showed me the slanting under face of one of the boulders. Coral rock is easy to carve and shape. This had been tooled off smooth in a place where neither sun nor rain fell directly on it, and there, cut so deep into the white mass of “brainstone” that all three hundred years had not effaced it, was the curious, twisted monogram of Schouten, also a row of dots that—to my mind—might have been anything at all—and an arrow.

I did wake to interest at that; I should have been a stone myself if I had not. While I was examining the inscription and feeling it with my finger-tips, Isola fell a-dreaming over it, her eyes full of something sweet, yet very sad.

“And she never married him,” I heard her say to herself. “I wonder—did she marry anyone else? Do you know if she did?”

“Gore never told me,” I said. Nor had he; nor do I know to this day whether the Helga Maria of Schouten’s young dreams died a maiden or a wife.

“Why can’t people be allowed to be happy?”

said Isola, leaning on to the coral boulder and looking out to the hyacinth-coloured sea. (I had been right about the time; the afternoon was indeed beginning to darken ever so little.)

“If we’re going to discuss the origin of evil, we’d better go back to the ship to do it at leisure,” I said somewhat hardly; for I was suffering too much not to be cruel. And as Gore had already hailed us a second time, we went.

The sun had not yet sunk when we got clear of the lagoon. Red Bob set a new course, gave me the wheel, and went below for a while. When he came back he joined Isola, who was seated on the cover of the main hatch, and began to talk to her. I have spoken before of the delicate courtesy always shown to women by Vincent Gore—even to such gadfly creatures as Mabel Siddis—but I have said nothing as yet of the curious new side of his character revealed to me by this voyage in the company of Isola Ravenna. Unconsciously, I had been classing him as hard all through; a man with nothing warm about him but his temper, and nothing soft about him at all. . . . Since the girl had joined our company, however, I had seen a new Vincent Gore—the father.

The story of the crippled daughter, told while we voyaged down the coast in the *Afzelia*, had

interested me as a dramatic tale, and as nothing more. I did not visualize it in any way. But now—now that I had daily and hourly opportunity of seeing Red Bob in company with a young and friendless girl, I understood what girlhood and young womanhood meant to him, and that was something quite other than what they meant to me. I loved Isola ; I would have died for her instantly and gladly in any disagreeable way that might have presented itself. But I loved her for what she, as one beautiful girl out of the millions in the world, meant to me, Paul Corbet. Vincent Gore liked her and cared for her for the sake of all young girlhood ; and this because he was the father of a girl. I don't know how I understood all this, but I did understand it, and it helped me, moreover, to see his quest of Schouten's pearls in a newer and wider light—as a determined effort to lift one girl, unusually helpless, out of the path of the dragons of wretchedness, want and worse, that harry and tear all moneyless women. . . . Were not all Isola's troubles, from first to last, due to these same dragons of moneylessness ? Had not they chased her into a marriage that she feared ; driven her to a bridegroom for whom she had no love ; blocked her pathway when she had striven to escape from him ? Did they not

stand across her life, even yet, barring her from all free choice and action? What was she going to do—what were we going to do for her—when this voyage of flight should be over?

From where I stood at the wheel I could see her clearly, sitting on the hatch beside Red Bob and looking up at him with a bright confidence and quiet repose of manner that she seemed to keep for him alone. Did I envy it to him? . . . Well, on second thoughts, I did not. That Isola was never quite at ease with me was perhaps no matter for regret. When one is two and twenty, one does not envy the special privileges of five-and-forty. They come too high.

Red Bob, at that moment, was doing what she certainly would never have allowed me to do—buckling a neat red leather belt about her waist and adjusting something on the left-hand side. I remembered seeing a few of those same belts among our “trade goods,” but I could not make out what the addition was, until Gore got up and walked away, with some light, half-jesting remark. Isola sat still, looking at her new adornment. My eyes followed hers, and saw, with something of a shock, that it was a revolver holster, made like ours, and doubtless filled like ours. But I reminded myself that that was a precaution which should have been taken long

ago—more as a formality than anything else; most people in the Bismarcks wear revolvers, away from the settlements—and dismissed it from my mind.

Dark came down before long, and we anchored for the night, as was the custom of Schouten and of Cook, and as was also ours. In these far, little-known, ill-charted seas, men travel even now as they did three hundred years ago, and take no risks in the darkness.

Gore told me that we were very near the pearl island indicated by the arrow on Schouten's rock, and that we had better get the diving-gear in order. When he had been to the island before, he said, he had at the time been vaguely struck by its resemblance to some of the celebrated pearl-bearing atolls of the Eastern Pacific. He knew that no one in German New Guinea or the Bismarcks was even aware of its existence—small wonder, for it was in the loneliest and least travelled region of all these seas, off every possible steamer or sailing-vessel route. That it was the island mentioned in certain of Schouten's diaries as "Rica de Perlas" (named, doubtless, from some old Spanish tradition, as the elusive Rica de Plata and Rica de Oro Islands were) he did not doubt. The arrow, cut with infinite care to a certain point of the compass,

showed its direction clearly, and there was no other land between.

“Why do you think he made a memorandum in such a curious way?” asked Isola, as we were busy overhauling the diving gear on deck, after tea.

“Because,” said Gore, heaving up a great Muntz metal helmet, to look at the valve, “he was afraid that something might happen which, as a matter of fact, did happen.”

“What?”

“Loss of his ship there. He lost them both—one burned on the way to Batavia, and one confiscated with everything on board. You see, Schouten was an old sailor; he’d probably been shipwrecked in his time, and knew how difficult it was for a sailor, especially in those days of endless voyages, to keep any of his goods together. He insured himself against loss or forgetting by his plan. And yet he never came back to get the rest of the pearls.”

“Perhaps he took them all,” I suggested.

“No,” said Isola instantly, “there would have been no reason for leaving guide-marks behind him, if he had.”

“Right,” said Red Bob, setting down the helmet and turning his attention to an enormous pair of boots, soled with sheet-lead. “Lucky

these weren't made for the Jap trade, Corbet, they'd never have fitted you. I suppose you're jumping for the first turn; just as well; you'll need proper 'tending.' "

"I can tend," observed Isola modestly.

"You can? But of course, Banda's one of the best pearling-grounds in Malaysia," commented Gore. "How did you learn?"

"Father had a lugger for two years, when I was only fourteen to sixteen; he had it more for fun than for anything else," she confessed, "but he used to go down lots of times, and I always tended for him, after the first. Either of you will be quite safe if you leave me on top, Mr. Gore."

"That's good; it will almost double the work we can do, because a diver must have rest," said Gore. "Talking of rest, suppose you all turn in; it's turn out at sunrise to-morrow."

It was. We were all up and about before the side-lights of the schooner were out next morning. The east was just turning to raspberry pink as we sat down to breakfast in the small saloon, and the dawn-wind was blowing the blue curtains of the ports straight in. We had the *Cecilie* under way as soon as it was clear enough to see the coral reefs. The wind was in our favour, and the journey was a short one. Before ten

o'clock we were in sight of the nameless atoll island that Gore had pencilled upon our chart ; and the secret of Schouten's pearls lay almost in our grasp.

I suppose, when I come to think it out, that very few people among the millions of the world have ever seen an atoll, or know what it is like ; but it really seems strange to me—since those days—that anyone should need a description. So much have atolls and reefs and islands, barriers, horse-heads and vigias, entered into my everyday life since then, that I can scarce conceive of anyone who does not know all about them.

Still. . . . An atoll is a circular, or partly circular, coral reef, enclosing an inner space of shallow water. It may take the form of a mere ring of foam in the sea ; it may again be a perceptible belt of white rocks ; or it may—like Schouten's atoll—be an actual coral island shaped like a ring : a garland of beautiful foliage edged with whitest sand, encircling a clear green lake, all set in the blue of the deep surrounding sea, like a device in emeralds and ivory set in a turquoise shield.

I could not help exclaiming when I saw it ; it seemed to me the eighth wonder of the world . . . but Red Bob and Isola both took it very coolly ; nothing in the shape of coral was a novelty

to either. The black crew, however, seemed pleased at the sight ; one of them pointed to the cocoanuts swinging aloft among the palms, and explained in pigeon-English that this was a good place, and that they wanted to stay there a long time, and eat cocoanuts and fish.

“They’re right about it’s being a good place. I never saw a likelier spot,” said Gore.

“Nor I,” agreed Isola practically. “Two to twenty fathoms, I should think—sheltered water, small passage through the reef, low island. . . . Yes, it does look well.”

We had the dingy out in no time, and brought all the boys ashore with us, since there was safe anchorage for the schooner, and we needed their help with the gear. First of all, Gore produced his water-glass—a kerosene-tin with the ends cut out, and a piece of window-glass substituted—and we rowed into the middle of the lagoon in the dingy, to make an inspection. Both Isola and myself, by this time, were a good deal excited ; I think we shouted to each other and to Gore, and moved about in the boat more than was absolutely necessary, hanging suicidally over the gunwale, and trying to see where the shell was, if any. Gore, meantime, with a countenance of stone, was looking through the glass, lowering it every now and then into the water, and inspect-

ing the bottom through the bit of window-pane which gave him a clear view, unobstructed by ripples. The light in the lagoon was blinding; the sand blazed like white-hot metal in a furnace, the leaves of the palm-trees glittered as they swung, far up in the hard hot blue; in the shallow water where we were cruising about, the dancing diamond-nets of sun and ripple were really too bright to look at, and the water itself was warmer than the air.

. . . Gore drew himself up from the gunwale, and handed the glass to Isola. His face had turned a little pale—or perhaps it was only the green reflection from the sea.

“Look!” he said. Isola seized the glass—she was trembling with excitement by this time—and buried her face in it. She came up again in a moment, all pink.

“Paul, Paul, look!” she cried. “Oh, look at the shell!”

Even at that moment I was not too much excited to notice that she had called me by my Christian name.

I took my turn, and there, on the sandy bottom of the lagoon were the beds of pearl-shell—masses of them, acres of them, it seemed. They glowed in entrancing colours through the water—lilac and purple and emerald-green—but I knew well

enough that they would be plain grey when lifted out of that deceiving medium. There they were, set tight as dinner-plates, piled over and over on each other, to I do not know what thickness—an accumulation such as few pearl-seekers indeed have seen, in these days of universal exploration.

We drifted slowly into shallower water, and now no glass was needed. Undoubtedly, "Rica de Perlas" if this were indeed the place, deserved its name.

"It's a fortune," said Gore. "Half a dozen fortunes. . . . Corbet, have you a cigar about you?"

"Only some cigarettes," I said, handing them over. We all lit up, and smoked, drifting to and fro about the still waters of the pearl lagoon which were only moved by the slight current setting out through the opening in the reef.

"There will be pearls," stated Gore, and I thought, for a moment, I saw the famous red light gleam in his eye.

"Oh, yes," agreed Isola, with the prettiest air of professional knowledge. "Just the place for big ones. Some of those shells look as if they had been there for hundreds of years. Did you see them, all crusty and worm-eaten and grown over?"

"I did," said Gore, drawing at my cigarette

rather as if he felt it insufficient. Suddenly he turned to me.

“Paul Corbet,” he said, “that mill-owning father of yours was right when he said you had no head for business. You haven’t enough for a third-grade clerk in a fourth-rate bucket-shop.”

“Why not?” I asked. Isola looked rather hurt.

“Because,” said Red Bob, taking the oars, and beginning to pull back to shore with long, powerful strokes, “you’ve never yet had the sense to ask me where you come in.”

“I didn’t know that I came in at all,” was my answer; but all the same, I felt my heart beginning to throb in quick, sharp beats. . . . I could see in a moment all that “coming in” might mean to me—and to someone else—if only the lions in the path could be scared away.

“You thought,” stated Gore, “that I was going to trust you absolutely, let you take your share of risk and work, and give you just your salary for it?”

“I did,” was my answer.

“I’m sorry, then, that you should have had such a dashed poor opinion of me,” was his reply. Characteristically, he dropped the subject there, and we rowed back to land, carried the dingy across the strip of beach, and rejoined the waiting

boys on the far side, without any further reference to the matter. But all the same, I knew Red Bob, and I knew that my days of dependence on another were all but done.

We sailed the schooner into the lagoon, and Gore got the diving gear and the pumping machinery out. Shallow though the place was, we needed the dress to work it; and this set me wondering how pearls and pearl-shells had been obtained in the days before the diver's dress. Gore was of the opinion that Schouten had Eastern Pacific sailors with him when he visited the place. They were good for anything up to fifteen fathom, sometimes more, he said; but you had to pick New Britain boys very carefully before you found any that were of real use.

Our two native divers, therefore, were not wanted; and they were sent back to the beach while we got to work with the gear. The crew and Bo seemed to enjoy their idle afternoon; they sat beneath the palm-trees, fishing, singing, talking, and drinking green cocoanuts till dark. If we had had an idea what their talk was about. . . .

But I think we were all a little mad on pearls that day, and nothing else found room in our minds. I begged to be allowed to go down first, and Isola promised to tend me herself.

“She may, while I watch her,” said Gore bluntly. “I’ll not risk anyone’s life on hearsay.”

I got myself into the diver’s heavy woollens—always necessary for under-water work in the hottest climates—and Isola and Gore between them pushed and pulled and shoved me into the dress, which is not so easy to get into as it seems. Then Gore, taking a wrench for buttonhook, buttoned me up with engine-nuts. After that he put the huge metal helmet and corselet on, and screwed these also into place. I began to wonder if, and how, I should ever get out of the dress again. Followed a pair of boots with twenty pounds of lead on the soles; followed a double locket round my neck, of eighty.

They had tied a rope round my waist some time ago. (“Always put on the rope as soon as your diver is into the dress,” warned Gore, and Isola said with dignity, “I know *that!*”) Now they slung the ladder over the side, and Gore asked me: “Can you walk?”

I could, just—but I felt like a fly that has fallen into a treacle-pot, and can scarcely drag its weighted limbs and wings along.

Gore told me what to do with the signal cord, and how to manage the valve; also how to land on my feet, instead of on my head—a thing most

beginners do. Then he helped me over the bulwark, and told Isola, "Screw him down!"

It sounded like directions to an undertaker, and—I must say—the screwing down, even though Isola did it, felt as one would imagine the same process would feel to a corpse, if the latter retained any power of sensation. Red Bob was taking no chances; he watched the girl narrowly as she screwed on the glass of my helmet, shutting out the fresh sea-air, and closing away all sound. I could see her and Gore now, but I could not hear them; their good-byes were given in pantomime. . . . "In with the coffin!" I said to myself, and signalled to let go.

With all that weight of lead, I landed on the bottom like a bird coming home to a bough. The makers of diving dresses know what they are about.

It was dim and green down there, but there was plenty of light enough to see the shell—to see the schooner too, a dark hull hanging above my head, with her cable stretching down from the bows. It was not at all agreeable—this diving. I felt swelled and asthmatic; I could not manage the valve easily, and my ears were painful. However, these were trifles. I lifted all the shell I could, put it in the sack I had

brought, and signalled "Pull up!" It was pulled up, emptied and lowered, and I filled it again. I worked for twenty minutes or so, and then found I was being hauled to the surface.

"Long enough for the first time," said Gore, and I found it was. I was glad to take off the heavy gear and let him have his turn.

"Now you see the advantage of letting you go down first," said Gore. "I've made sure that I can trust Mrs. Ravenna with the tending, so we can work in turn."

He went down next, and Isola, at the pump, kept sharp look-out for signals, supplying the air with the style of a practised hand. I spoke to her once, but she answered gravely, "You must not talk to a tender," and I was mute.

We worked for a good part of the day, with a brief halt for lunch, and by the time the sun began to climb down the sky, we had collected a splendid heap of shell.

"Time to stop now," said Gore. "We've both done all that amateurs could—or should—do in a day."

He might have said that he had, for he had been down three times to my one, using his great strength to the utmost in gathering and sending up the shell, at a rate that I could not hope to rival. Strong as he was, I think he was weary.

But for all that he did not rest. Nothing would do him but we must open our shell at once ; and I was not inclined to balk him.

Pearl oysters are not like the oyster of commerce ; they open almost at a touch, and when you have slit the muscle the two halves fall apart. With tin tubs and knives, we laboured furiously till dusk, and our labour went not unrewarded. I cannot describe the excitement of feeling for pearls in the slimy mantle of the fish—of eagerly examining the shell for adherent buttons or baroques—of closing the finger-tips round something that felt like a gem, pulling it out into the light, and finding—perhaps a dull blob of chalky stuff, perhaps a bit of coral that had got into the shell, perhaps a fair, round, shining pearl, fit for the hand of a queen. It was the bravest sort of hunting !

Towards dusk, we put the unexamined shell away in a heap by itself, threw the débris overboard, and counted our gains. There were seven large pearls of splendid lustre, each as big as a marrowfat pea ; there were thirty of medium size, but good ; forty or fifty small ones, well worth setting, and about a cupful of seed pearl.

I was just a shade disappointed with the afternoon's work, for I had expected to find a pearl in every shell, and a big one in every six or seven ;

but Red Bob said it was incredible luck, and that the place must be exceptionally rich.

“Never touched, either,” he said, “that is, not since Willem Corneliszoon got the pearls for Helga Maria, who didn’t marry him, here.”

He put away the pearls in a little case of soft leather, underneath his shirt, and went to the bulwarks to shout at the crew.

“Time they came over,” he said. “We may as well get these decks washed up and have tea.”

The crew had the dingy with them, and I saw them shove her down the sand, and get into her. They rowed her carelessly, splashing about and shouting. It struck me that they were what one would call “a bit above their boots,” and I wondered for a moment if it was possible they had smuggled any drink away with them. But, remembering that the New Britain native is seldom civilized enough to care for spirits, I ascribed their gaiety to the effects of an afternoon’s liberty on shore.

I was just going below after Isola, when I was startled by a burst of swearing from Red Bob. I jumped back on deck, and saw the dingy reared up on a coral “horse-head,” and the crew, with loud cries, swimming to the ship.

“They’ve stove her bottom in with their

dashed fooling!" shouted Gore, rapping out "language" as a Maxim raps out bullets.

They had; and we were now reduced to the yawl, a heavy, unhandy boat not well suited for light ferrying about the lagoon.

"Keep that girl below while I talk to them," ordered Red Bob, once more showing the danger-signal in his eye. "There's more in this than——"

I heard no more, for I was anxious to spare Isola the scene that I knew would follow. In a moment I was down the companion, and rapping at the door of her tiny cabin. She came out at once.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mr. Gore is talking to the boys; don't be alarmed," I said.

"I did not hear——" she began, and then broke off, for such a tornado of sound arose on deck as drowned both our voices. Gore's great voice, bellowing the language of the sea—wild, cannibal yells from five terrified savages—stamping, scurrying and thumping all round and round the decks—the sound of heavy blows from a rope, coupled with requests to "take that!" and assurances that the operator meant to "teach" several persons unnamed to lose good boats—an offer that, under the circumstances, seemed at

least superfluous—all this, breaking at once like a thunderstorm over our heads, was enough to bewilder and terrify any girl, even one brought up in the wild, equatorial lands. . . .

“Come into the cabin,” I shouted in her ear, trying to engage her attention—for Red Bob was talking very freely. “They’ve lost the dingy, and Mr. Gore is a good deal annoyed about it. Come and tell me what you think about the pearls we’ve got.” I drew her into the cabin, and closed the door, to shut out the noise from above. The storm, however, proved a brief one. In a very few minutes, Gore came down, rather out of breath, and looking satisfied.

“I’ve put the fear of God into them,” he remarked. “They needed it.” He took the “Travels of Sir John Mandeville” from the box that represented our library, and coiled his long legs up on the locker tops, to read.

Next morning, to my astonishment, he did not get out the diving gear again. Instead, he went off in the yawl—the only boat we had besides the dingy—to see what damage had been done to the latter. He came back whistling “*La Donna è mobile*” and looking notably cheerful. This made me feel a trifle uneasy, since I judged it to be an effect got up for the

benefit of Isola, and I took the first opportunity that presented itself of finding him alone. He was still whistling "La Donna è mobile"—very well, with variations.

"What's wrong?" I asked, without preface.

Gore, sitting astride the old-fashioned wooden bulwark, made no answer for a moment. He went on whistling. Something seemed to have put him in spirits. And yet it was not exactly spirits either.

I saw that he had taken his revolver out of its holster, was unloading it, and replacing the cartridges with fresh ones.

"Oh," I said. "So that's it."

"That's it," said Gore, continuing to whistle. He threw the chambers of the revolver open and shut two or three times, with a loose movement of the wrist, and dropped a little oil on the lock.

"How did you find out?" I asked. It is a curious fact that nothing whatever had been said, and yet I knew mutiny was in the air as well as I knew that the water of the sea was beneath the deck on which I stood.

"Dingy looked like it," he said, dropping the cartridges one by one into their chambers, and snapping the breech shut. "It was a bit too careless. She's useless, keel ripped off her

on the coral. And then, when I took the boat over this morning—you might have observed that I took all the crew with me—I saw she had been tampered with. Not much; fellow who did it must have been interrupted before he had time to do any harm, and he wasn't clever on his job, anyway. But there's been an attempt."

He had put the revolver into its holster now, and was swinging one leg out over the water, looking at the toe of his worn canvas shoe as he did so.

"Why!" I exclaimed, remembering the afternoon when he had fastened the revolver belt round Isola's waist, "you must have been expecting something of the kind all along?"

"Who—me? Not exactly," said Gore. "Or rather—perhaps. I think I did it on general principles. No trusting these beggars."

"They seemed all right up to this," I said.

"That's when you want to watch 'em," said Gore. "I've been thinking they were a bit too biddable. Take my word for it, a New Britainer's best when he's his natural self, and that's a cheeky bounder."

There was a moment's silence; the outgoing tide rippled gurglingly against the schooner's keel.

I stuck my hands deep down into my pockets.

"I wish to God she wasn't here," I said, staring at the deck.

"Wishing to God or the devil either won't make any difference now. We did what we thought was the best thing. Also, the case isn't particularly black. They have no firearms; we've warning that they mean to seize the schooner and scrag us, and it's up to us not to let them."

"What about the pearls?"

"There," said Gore, inspecting the worn toes of his shoe again and lifting it up to feel whether his sock was really coming through, "there you have the difficulty. The longer we stay in this place, where either you or I must always be awake and on watch, the more risk we run of a surprise. And the more risk she runs."

"It's not to be thought of," I said, with my blood running cold for all the heat of the morning.

"I judge not. Yet it does go against the grain to turn and run for Friedrich-et cetera, just because these black brutes have taken a turn that I could belt out of them. If only——"

"The risk's too great, for her."

"It is. . . . Well, the lagoon won't run away. And to carry on with a job that keeps either you or me out of the fighting line half the time, with the one who's in the fighting line bound to

look after the one who isn't, or drown him—that can't be done. Not—as things are.”

Neither of us expressed regret at having Isola with us—we should have been brutes if we had; but I think in the mind of Red Bob and myself alike there was a bitter, unspoken longing to see the thing out, “belt” the plotting crew into another frame of mind, and work the lagoon, if necessary, pistol in hand. . . . Well, that could not be. What we had to do was to get back to civilization, and return—when circumstances allowed—with a better crew.

Armed as we were, we knew that we could keep the brutes in hand through the ordinary work of a voyage—it was the pearling that had become impossible.

“How are we going to explain things to Isola?” I asked.

“When in doubt, tell the truth,” quoted Red Bob. “She’s no ninnyhammer of a girl.”

“Curse the black beasts,” I said, looking at the group of sulky, bison-like savages squatted on the small fore-castle-head, smoking in turn from a bamboo pipe, “I hate being done by them.”

“So do I, my boy, but there’s nothing else for it. Tell Mrs. Ravenna to keep her revolver on all the time; but explain to her that there’s no real need for alarm. We’ll take the ship

out inside of an hour, make for Rabaul—it's a good bit nearer than Frederickdashithaven—and keep the crew too busy to hatch mischief. If we can ship a decenter lot, we might finish the job yet."

"But what about Isola? You can't take her back into Rabaul, where that Richter is."

"No," said Red Bob, "several times no. Because, you see, if he can bring any evidence of any residence together that may show something like consent—why, then, an attempt to break the marriage would not have much to stand on."

"I understand," I answered. "But—do you think—can there be any way of breaking it?"

"Never said there was," replied Red Bob. "Also, I never said there was not. But if there is, why the further off she is kept from Richter the better. No, no taking her . . . visibly . . . to Rabaul."

"Then what would you do?"

"Easy as pie. Keep her dark till we ship a crew, and then run her to an Australian port, and board her out with someone reliable."

"I wish I had your head," I said.

"You haven't much of your own, it's true; still, I've met with young idiots I liked less. Don't let the crew know you suspect anything; call them up and get the ship under way; we

want to be well clear of these reefs before dark."

I was going forward to do his bidding when I was suddenly struck by something curious about the aspect of the sky, as seen through the long gap in the palms that was made by the entrance to the atoll. Not all atolls have a break in the ring, but one might say that most have, and this was one of the majority.

"Look at that," I said, turning round.

Gore looked at it, and said something between his teeth in Spanish.

"Is that a 'gooba'?" I asked. I had heard something of these New Guinea blows—too big for a squall, too small for a hurricane—but I had not yet seen one.

"It is," said Gore, looking at the dark, parasol-shaped cloud that was spreading upwards from the horizon like some strange black dawn. "It is, and we shan't get out to-night."

"What about the ship?"

"Safe enough in here, unless she drags her moorings, and she won't do that." He threw a glance aloft to see that everything was safely stowed. "We must make the best of it," he said. "Keep a look-out while I go and search the fore-castle for knives and clubs. I took their ordinary knives away this afternoon, but they

probably have a second lot hidden away somewhere."

* * * * *

The thing happened so quickly that I cannot tell it without becoming bewildered. I cannot even now realize that the whole ghastly affair did not occupy ten minutes from start to finish—the first part of it scarcely one. At something like five o'clock I was sitting quietly on the coaming of the main hatch; Isola had just come up from the saloon and was looking with interest at the "gooba" as it climbed the sky, Gore was stooping to get in through the low, narrow hatchway of the forecastle where the crew slept and kept their goods. The crew were smoking on the forecastle-head. We had a sound ship under us, full of goods and provisions, we were well armed, and thought we were going to make a safe and comfortable voyage down to Rabaul, just keeping a little extra watch over our New Britain savages. . . . At ten minutes past five we were homeless, wrecked, and cast away; Gore was wounded, I was defenceless, and Isola——

But let me tell the story as well as I can.

Gore, as I said, stooped down to enter the forecastle. There were no men inside it, and

the crew, sitting up on the forecastle-head, were some distance away and apparently busy in the most peaceful fashion with their big bamboo pipe. They took no notice of him or of anything else, until he had finished his search and was bending to come out again, with his face turned towards the deck. Then, with a leap so quick that it seemed as if he had suddenly doubled himself, and appeared in two places at once, one of them reached the break of the forecastle, and struck at the back of Gore's skull with an iron belaying-pin.

Quick as he was, I was a shade quicker. I had my automatic pistol out of my belt before the blow fell, and I aimed on the rise of the barrel. . . . It missed fire.

One thinks quickly in such moments. I had time to remember Red Bob's warning against the use of these pistols in equatorial countries while I was tearing at the magazine and striking the breech in one frantic effort to knock out the jammed cartridge. Then I felt a revolver pushed into my hand, and seized it without waiting to look where it came from. I took the length of the deck in three jumps, saw Red Bob lying insensible on the planking, and shot the nigger who did it clean through the head. Then I seized Gore by the legs, and began dragging him

to the side of the ship, where the boat was. I had one arm round him and Isola—I don't know how she came there—and I pushed her half behind me, as I backed to the side of the ship.

“Get over!” I yelled. I had to yell, for the six savages—Bo, our own man, among them—were howling like devils let loose from hell. Four of them had got tomahawks, which they must have looted from the trade goods in the hold, and kept hidden; the others were armed with iron belaying-pins from the rail. While Isola was climbing down into the boat, I kept the savages at bay with the revolver she had handed me; but it had only five shots left, and there were six men. . . .

I was conscious that something was happening besides the mutiny; it did not, however, make much impression on me, even though I felt a sudden, fierce clap of wind and rain strike the schooner and heel her half over, and though I was drenched through in an instant, as if I had been dipped in the sea. I was too much engaged with my six New Britainers, who, wise fighters that they were, were rapidly spreading themselves out into a fan with the intention of scattering my fire, and, no doubt, of surrounding me. I got two of them in two shots, and missed

the third, because the schooner at the moment of my pulling the trigger gave a fearful leap like a wounded horse. The fourth shot was never fired. I had not had time to aim before we were all flung to the deck by a crash that shook every timber in the *Cecilie*, and that was instantly followed by a torrent of sea-water washing from end to end. The ship recovered a little, after the shock, rose slightly, and seemed to shake the water off her decks as a dog might shake itself; but again she staggered, beat herself on the cruel reef that we had struck, and smothered the waist and fore-castle in foam.

“We’ve struck—she’s dragged——” I cried, I do not know to whom, for *Isola* was in the boat below, and Red Bob was still lying without life on the deck, rolling to and fro like a corpse. The lash of the “gooba” almost knocked me down again as I rose; rain was coming straight along through the air like a river lifted off the ground; the calm lagoon was a mass of beaten foam, and the palm-trees bent to the gale like fishing-rods when a fish pulls from below. The four New Britain natives, terrified by the disaster that they had brought on themselves (we learned afterwards that they had been preparing a rapid get-away by severing almost through the moorings) began jumping up and down on the deck

and crying out pitifully. They even attempted to rush the boat, while I dragged Red Bob over the bulwarks, but I dropped the first with one of my two remaining cartridges, and the rest, warned by his fate, kept off. The mutineer spirit was all out of them now; they saw they were wrecked, and knew no swimmer could live in the sea that was getting up. . . .

I never knew till weeks afterwards how much thinking I did in the few seconds occupied in getting Gore up to the gunwale of the boat, and heaving him in. It was not plain to me then why I beckoned to one of the mutineers to accompany me; but I did—it was the recreant Bo, as things happened—and he seized the chance eagerly. Over into the boat he went, lowered her down with me, and launched her into the white, boiling, battering sea below the ship.

We were barely able to fend her off from the hull, for the doomed *Cecilie* was rolling terribly, but we got safely away and pushed off into the storm.

It was already abating; these “goobas” of New Guinea are short and sharp. The rain was passing over, the palm-trees lifting up their battered heads a little, as we pulled over towards the shore. By the time we reached it, the worst

of the "gooba" was fairly spent, and the waves that ran up the strand were slackening in their fierceness, so that we could beach the boat without much trouble. But where was the *Cecilie*?

Sunk, in the deepest part of the lagoon; gone to the bottom, with the five mutineers in her. There was nothing to be seen, where the schooner had lain ten minutes before, but a raffle of foam breaking on a reef, and one small black head fighting the waves. It did not fight long.

"Sark he catchum," yelled Bo, through the wind, as the black point disappeared. I watched, but there were no more.

When I turned round, Red Bob was sitting up on the beach, very wet and sandy, feeling his head. His fingers were red when they came away.

"Did they get the ship?" he inquired, with perfect coolness, taking a dripping handkerchief out of his pocket, and tying it round his head. "I don't remember after someone knocked me over."

"She dragged, went on the reef and sank," I said. "They must have meddled with the cable."

"You all right?" inquired Red Bob of Isola, who was sitting on the sand beside him.

“ Yes,” said Isola. “ I’ve got no clothes,” she added, “ except these.”

“ Tie that knot for me, will you ? ” said Gore. “ Crew all gone ? ”

“ All except Bo, I brought him along,” I said.

“ Right. We’ll want him before we’re through. I hope the boat wasn’t lowered stern foremost, and the stores spilled.”

“ Stores ? ” I asked. “ She was got down all right.”

“ I don’t,” said Gore, “ allow boats to be kept unprovisioned in any ship that I command. That’s common sense. We have two beakers of water, a keg of beef, a ten-pound tin of biscuit, a pound of tobacco, pound of tea, packet of matches, sealed in tin, compass and box of quinine.”

“ Then we can make for the nearest settlement ? ” I said.

“ We can. The ‘ gooba ’ seems to be over.”

Here Isola, to my astonishment, burst out laughing.

“ I can’t—can’t—help it,” she said, half giggling, half sobbing. “ It seems too absurd. We’ve been shipwrecked—and all sorts of awful things have happened—and here we are sitting under the palm-trees talking like a tea-party.”

“ What way do you think we ought to talk ? ”

asked Red Bob. "I've been shipwrecked before, and it was pretty much the same as this. Do you expect people to say 'Gadzooks' and 'By my halidom,' because they've been spilled out of a ship?"

"Me want my kai-kai," observed Bo, by way of diversion. The rain was quite over now, and the ruffled lagoon was sobbing itself to sleep like a naughty child.

"Do you realize, my friend, that you did your best to commit piracy and murder half an hour ago?" demanded Gore. "Do you understand that you ought to be hung, if there was a tree on the island that one could hang you to—cocoanuts having no hangable branches?"

"Me wantum kai-kai," repeated Bo, unmoved.

Only people who have been through like adventures will believe me, I suppose, when I say that all three of us burst out laughing at the New Britainer's cool demand.

"He's quite right, it's near tea-time," commented Gore, "You go catchum cocoanut, plenty quick!"

"Never," he advised, "let anything interfere with your regular meals if you can help it; not even a shipwreck. Bo, you go and catch plenty crab when you finish. We'll make you earn your living—you scurvy brute."

“Me no brooss,” complained Bo, as he moved away, his *amour propre* being apparently wounded by the epithet. The New Britainer is curiously touchy on the question of personal abuse, whatever he may have done to earn it.

Everything we had on was wet through, and there was no possibility of sun-drying for to-day, but Gore, with the matches out of the boat, and wood from underneath a fallen palm, had a fire going before long, and we dried ourselves at that as well as we could. He declared his wound was nothing, and Isola, when she had examined and washed it carefully for him, gave it as her verdict that the bone was not in any way damaged. By the light of the fire we sat down to feed, looking, I suppose, very like an ordinary picnic-party, and afterwards Bo was made to dig a big hole in the sand for shelter from the wind.

“There’ll be no more rain to-night,” said Gore; and he proved right. It was a fine night of stars; the lagoon was as still as a marble tank in a palace; as we lay in the shelter of the pit, protected by the sails of the boat, we could hear the fish leap in the water, and the ripples talking strangely on the sand. Isola, at her end of the shelter, seemed to rest quietly, but once in the night she sat suddenly up, made as if to throw

back the long hair that she had shorn away, and cried out: "Paul, why did you kill them? There's blood on your hands!"

I watched her, but did not answer, for I saw that she still slept. She sank back on the sand in another moment, and her eyes closed again. There was some night-bird hidden among the palms; it waked up and cried for a little while in a complaining, bitter tone. Then it was silent; and the ripples whispered strange wicked secrets to each other on the beach, and the sea breathed deep, outside the barrier reef. I thought the morning would never come; but it came at last, low and red among the palm trunks, and our castaway life had begun.

CHAPTER XI

“NEU KÖNIGSBERGSHAFEN is the place,” said Red Bob, as we sailed out of Schouten’s ill-starred lagoon, leaving the bones of the *Cecilie* and the bones of her destroyers lying side by side at the bottom of the sea. “With a fair wind, we aren’t three days from the coast of New Britain—wrong coast, of course, not the settled side, but it’ll do at a pinch. Neu Königsbergshafen is a settlement, or rather a plantation, where we can refit and get provisions ; after that, if there is no ship likely to call, we could go on to Rabaul round the head of the island, and if we wanted to get Mrs. Ravenna away without any bother, why, she’d only have to get herself up *à la* Malay again for a couple of days.”

“Who lives at Neu Königsbergshafen ?” asked Isola.

“Beyer, rather a good friend of mine. He grows rubber and copra, and a bit of coffee. Very lonely place, no other white man for fifty or sixty miles—but as pretty a spot as you’d like

to see. Beyer has a wife; half-caste woman, but a decent sort. She'll look after Mrs. Ravenna. You'll be a little cramped running down to the coast," he said, turning to Isola with a kindly smile, "but we'll do our best for you; there's no man alive who wouldn't do his best, and a bit more, for such a plucky girl as you."

"She is brave," I said proudly—somehow, since Gore's talk about possibilities of breaking the marriage, I had felt more than ever that I had an actual right to be proud of her. "She's as good as another man in the boat." And indeed it was useful to have a third hand to steer, or help with the sails when necessary. Bo, a house-boy pure and simple, proved very little use. With the amazingly brief memory of the savage he had quite forgotten the part he had taken in the mutiny, and though our memories were longer, we chose to forget it too, since we thought he might be valuable to us in many ways while coasting along New Britain.

We rigged up a little shelter for Isola, and did our best to make her as comfortable as circumstances permitted during the voyage. I do not really think she felt the boat journey to be a serious hardship. In the first place, it was not long—we were extraordinarily lucky in the matter of wind, and the yawl proving a good sailer, we

sighted the coast of New Britain in two days and a half. Further, she had been accustomed for many weeks to roughing it in our company, and at the best, though a thoroughly refined girl, was no fine lady. Gore and I ran the boat in turns, gave out the rations and kept a look-out for sails, of which we saw and expected to see none. As for Bo, he spent his time between sleeping at the bottom of the boat, and begging for tobacco—of which we gave him little, not knowing how long it might be before we could get any more ourselves.

About the middle of the third day, a long blue cloud arose in the horizon, and for the second time—but under what altered circumstances!—we approached the coast of the great island of New Britain. Coming on it from this side and in such a way, one realized its size better than one did from the steamer approach to Rabaul.

“Four hundred miles or so in length, isn’t it?” I said, looking at the long panorama of peaks and ranges unfolding as we sailed in. “Is it fertile country?”

“Plant an old shoe in it, and it’ll come up a crop of Wellington boots inside of six weeks,” was Gore’s reply. “Healthy? Very fair, for the tropics. Good rainfall, magnificent forests, hill country, plain country, rivers, ranges,

minerals. Harbours by the dozen. Fine place for road-making; New Guinea's a bit of a problem in that way, but the Germans have motor-roads along quite a lot of the New Britain coast, and here and there inland.

“Is it settled pretty well? Bless you, no, nor explored. Nothing known about the natives in the far interior except that they are brutes. Why? Ask the Kaiser. They've only had a quarter of a century at it, you know. In another two hundred years, they'll be getting quite a move on, I dare say.”

We ran in and on towards the great island, the boat flying under all sail as if she were as hungry for the land as we undoubtedly were; and soon I began to see that Gore's description of Neu Königsbergshafen was not unjustified. It was a beautiful, a sweet and gentle-looking spot. The cruel loveliness of New Guinea was not here, nor the dark, wet picturesqueness of volcanic Rabaul. This coast was vivid blue and green, with sloping peaks, not too high, and pleasant grassy lawns running down from the mountain spurs to the sea. It had not the frowning massiveness of the German Guinea coast—the tier on tier of the black, high ranges, leaping behind one another into the very vault of heaven, and barring off the interior with a Titan wall of

rock and precipice and densely tangled forest. No, here one could almost sense the narrowness of the long, indented island, feel its accessibility, and understand, with its deep, fine harbours and rich coast-lands, that it might mean much to commerce some day.

“What a parrot-coloured place!” was Isola’s comment as we ran towards Neu Königsbergshafen bay. She was right. The wondrous blue of those rounded hills was parrot blue, the green of the lawns and the forests and the springing palms was just that vivid powdery green that one sees on a parrot’s wings. The bay itself was paved with still water in colour like a huge emerald, and the coral-sand shore curved about it, white as a crescent moon.

“It is very, very pretty, but not so pretty as my ‘Banda Neira,’” said the girl, looking with wide, dark eyes at the scimitar-shaped beach, and the tall, leaning palms that hung over it.

“Master, be good place this, but plenty bad boy he stop along here,” declared Bo, raising himself from the bottom of the boat to look about him. “I no savvy that fellow bushman stop here. I too much fright along him.”

“By and by you too much fright along me; you hold your tongue,” was Gore’s reply. I could see he did not want to alarm Isola unneces-

sarily. Bo squatted on the gunwale, holding on with his black toes like a monkey, and stared hard at the place, as we came up. He was chewing tobacco, and he spat and spat continually in the water, with a vigour that seemed to be the expression of some unspoken feeling.

Who does not know the New Britain and New Guinea natives does not know or guess how much can be expressed after this simple and disgusting fashion. Bo's spitting, it seemed to me, was of a kind entirely unfavourable to Neu Königsbergshafen.

There was a little pier of piled white coral rock built out into the deepest part of the bay. We ran the boat up to this, tied up, and most thankfully disembarked. Even two days in an open boat is enough to stiffen the limbs, and weary the mind with a feeling of confinement. Isola's first action on getting to shore was characteristic. She went straight to a frangipani tree, buried her face in its clusters of creamy, perfumed stars, and said, "The darlings! how I have missed them!" Her hands were full of blossoms in another minute; she was sticking them in her hair, dropping them down her dress, smelling them, all but eating them.

"Missus he plenty like along 'em frowers," observed Bo, looking at her in some astonishment

“That one he no good for kai-kai, Missus, one-fellow waster (oyster) he more better. Plenty stop.”

Indeed, the rocks up to high water were covered with fine edible oysters. Bo was anxious to stop and sample them at once, and we told him he might do so, as we wanted someone to stay with the boat while we went up to the plantation. New Britain natives are very thievish, and it was ten to one we might find all movables taken out of the yawl if we left her without any guard. So we gave Bo a tomahawk for protection, and charged him not to let any of the plantation boys approach the boat.

“Of course, they’re tamed and civilized boys on a plantation, more or less,” said Gore; “but I wouldn’t trust them near my stores.”

We left the pier behind, passed through the belt of cocoanuts that circled the bay, and came out on a most lovely avenue of shorn grass, bordered by magnificent flowering trees. There were coral trees, like bouquets of scarlet geranium, forty feet high and fifty feet across; kapok trees, with flowers like golden stars, and hard brown pods upon their branches, bursting open to show the silky-white cotton within. There were frangipanis, mangoes, green as nothing but a mango tree can be; trees like an acacia, with

drooping flowers of pink and white ; trees that I could not and cannot tell the name of, but that were as tall as an English lime, and had bunches of blossom like heliotrope in appearance, smelling like new-mown hay. All these had been planted about the same time, perhaps eight years before, and set in two orderly ranks along the cleared ground leading to the house. In the New Britain climate, five years will make you a glorious avenue at any time. This was more than glorious. We all exclaimed with admiration when we saw it.

The walk up to the house was a pretty long one, and we had time to notice, as we went, that the place seemed to be holidaying, for not a boy was at work on any part of the plantation. The shining rows of coffee bushes looked rather ill-weeded ; somebody had carelessly abandoned hoes and clearing-knives here and there among them, and the iron was red with rust. Among the star-shaped avenues of rubber, radiating out towards the horizon every way one looked, there was no one busy tapping the trees ; no small white-metal cans were hung against the trunks, filling up with milky latex. The door of the copra house was shut ; a great heap of unopened cocoanuts was piled up against it. And still there were no boys.

I began to feel that there was something about this I did not altogether like.

We walked on up to the house, which was a neat little wooden bungalow with an iron roof hidden away in a cluster of mango trees. Here, at least, it seemed there was someone, for the door was open, and fowls were clucking and strutting about in a pleasant, homely way. Gore took a step aside, and cast a look at their feed-dish. It was empty and scraped, and the water trough had not a drop in it.

“Wait a bit,” he said, and carried the trough to a tank. The fowls collected about him, clucking wildly. He filled the trough, and they fought with one another to get at it. He stood watching them narrowly.

“How kind you are to animals,” said Isola, looking at him with simple admiration.

“Do you think,” she went on, putting her hand up to her head, which was covered only by a hat of rudely-plaited palm leaves, and looking down at her stained and tattered dress, “do you think Mr. Beyer’s wife will be able to spare me some clothes? I feel such a disgraceful object that I’m almost ashamed to go in and ask her!”

“Suppose you don’t,” said Gore, catching quickly at the suggestion “Suppose you stop

here for a minute with Corbet, while I go up to the house and tell the Beyers we're coming. Then, if you feel very badly about being seen by strangers in such a state, I'll bring you down a dress."

"Thank you," said Isola. "How kind you always are!"

"Stay here with her," said Gore, throwing me a glance. I stayed. We sat down on the edge of the trough—for our legs felt shaky after the days in the boat—and I tried hard not to remain silent. I tried to talk about everything—about the avenue, the pretty situation of the house, the range of bright blue hills behind, the fowls, the rubber trees. . . . Isola kept breaking in with remarks about Beyer and his wife, what they could give us in the way of clothes and food, whether there would be a schooner along presently or not, but I talked fast and answered nothing. I think she must have felt me rather rude.

Presently Gore came out of the verandah, and walked down the steps. He seemed out of breath, as if he had been doing hard work.

"Lord, I am hot," he said, and made straight for the tank, where he stayed, running the water over his hands and arms for quite a little while. Then he came up to us.

“I’m sorry to say,” he said, “the Beyers aren’t here. They seem to have gone away.”

“Gone? Where to?” asked Isola disappointedly.

“I can’t say. Gone for good, I should think.”

“Gone home, you mean?”

“I suppose so,” said Gore, without looking at her. “Yes, I should think they have. The place will no doubt be taken over by someone else. It’s disappointing, but people are apt to come and go suddenly in these places. It isn’t as civilized as your Banda Neira.”

“What are we going to do?” asked Isola. Her pretty, pale face was a shade paler with disappointment; I could see how she had counted on this little oasis of civilization, though she was too plucky to complain when it was snatched from her.

“Borrow a few things, and get back to the boat,” answered Gore. “You can come in, if you like. The house is almost all locked up.”

I thought I had heard his feet tramping through more rooms than one while we were waiting outside, but I made no comment. I knew by some unnamed sense that Red Bob was anxious to have a word apart with me, and

all my wits were engaged in getting it. Isola was walking up the path to the house, pausing now and then to admire the bushes of flowering plants that had been set on each side of the path. I stayed aside for a minute, and asked :

“What is it ?”

Gore, with his eyes narrowed till they looked more than ever like a cat's, told me in a word ; and the sunlight of the glorious day seemed to die out in horror as he spoke.

“Beyer and his wife and child are murdered. . . . Must have been done about a week. I got the bodies into a back room, and locked the door. She needn't suspect anything. Take some clothes and food, and come as fast as you can lick down to the beach. I'm going to see if the boat's all right. We oughtn't to have left her, but one couldn't guess. . . . Keep Isola out of sight of the avenue. If the boat's all right, she need know nothing. Don't delay ; there's no knowing where they may be.”

With the last words on his lips he was away down the avenue again, running as few men of his height could have run. I followed Isola on to the verandah, full of uneasiness as to what she might see or suspect. But there was nothing. The living-room into which we entered was tidy ; the furniture undisturbed. This did not

surprise me, as I knew that the natives would steal nothing but food and weapons; but I feared to enter any of the bedrooms or pantries. And yet food was absolutely necessary if we were to continue our boat voyage round into the settled districts, perhaps weeks away.

Isola, knowing nothing, ran in and out everywhere, trying the locked doors, exploring the verandahs, and even, to my horror, peeping in through the closed windows here and there.

“They’ve shut nearly everything up,” she said, “but they are careless people; they’ve left the sitting-room and pantry open. Or perhaps some of the boys got at the locks.”

“Take what you want in the way of clothes, and come on,” I said. “Gore told us not to—not to—miss the tide.”

There was a heap of woman’s apparel thrown down roughly in the sitting-room; Gore, I judged, had put it there. While Isola was turning over the things, filling the deadly silence of the house with her gay chatter as she did so, I busied myself among the few things that were left in the pantry, and flung what I could get into an empty flour-bag. There was not much; I could see the place had been looted, but the looting had been very hurriedly done, and there were tins of one thing and another fallen behind

parcels, or lying on the floor. I took them all, and stood a moment listening. The heat of the little iron room was terrible; I had to mop the streams of perspiration that ran down my forehead as I stood. Isola had stopped talking; I guessed she was trying on clothes. The fowls clucked and scratched in the yard; a low-lying mango branch swept back and forwards upon the iron roof of the house with a sleepy, soothing noise. There was not a sound. I gathered up my sack and prepared to start.

At that moment I heard a fierce, indignant shriek from a big sweet-chestnut tree near the house—the cry of the white cockatoo that is common in all these islands. I remembered that these wild cockatoos always cry out at the approach of strangers. Were strangers approaching, and who?

“Come on,” I said to Isola. “I can’t wait another minute. Gather up your things; we’ll have to trot.” I was in agony to get her out of the place.

“What a nuisance you and your tides are!” she answered playfully. “Well, I’m not sorry to get out of the place, for it’s the stuffiest house I ever was in. I don’t think your Germans can have kept it very clean. Pooh!” She wrinkled up her nose.

“Come on, come on,” I said. “We’ll take hands and run.”

We did, carrying our loot in each disengaged hand; Isola, strange to say, suspected nothing. She told me afterwards that she thought there might be another “gooba” coming, and that we were anxious to get off without alarming her. At all events, she half ran, half walked with me all the way down to the beach, and asked no questions.

We were met by Gore. His face was so impenetrable that I knew disaster had struck us yet again.

“Where’s the boat?” I asked.

“Gone,” he replied. “No trace of Bo either. Clear case of New Britain natives on the job.”

“What are we going to do?” I asked, feeling that we were indeed in a very tight place. Isola looked inquiringly from one to the other.

“We have the choice of two things,” said Gore. “Stay here till the inquiry comes along, which may be to-morrow, and may be in six months; or start and walk to the nearest settlement.”

Isola still watched our faces. She saw by this time that something had happened; but she had been through too much in the last few weeks

to make the woman's common mistake of asking premature questions.

"How far would that be?" I asked.

"I think about a hundred and twenty miles."

"Is there any road?"

"No. Couldn't keep on the shore all the way; we'd have to branch inland every now and then. There's a third way, but . . . It would be a big job."

"If you are thinking of me," said Isola, speaking for the first time; "you needn't be uneasy. I can walk splendidly, and I will do anything you tell me."

"Well, then!" said Red Bob, glancing at her approvingly, "we'll chance it. If we can do something between thirty and forty miles of bush, mostly unknown, in the few days before our provisions give out, we can come down on one of the settled districts at the other side of the island. It takes one through country that has a pretty bad reputation, but——"

"If Mr. Corbet is with me—and you, of course," broke in Isola, "I'm not afraid of anything. Paul is so brave. And, of course, so are you."

Even in the straits we were in Red Bob's eyes twinkled a little over her "of course."

"We'll do our little best," he said. He took

out his compass, and looked long and thoughtfully at the blue range lifting above us.

"I see the pass," he pronounced. "Lucky for me I have New Britain in my head. . . . Well, little lady, you're going to be an explorer, it seems. Few women have so much luck."

"When shall we start?" she asked. "Do you mean to go right off to-morrow?"

"I mean to look for the boat, and if we don't find it, go now," answered Bob. "I have an idea that this is not exactly a healthy place to stop in."

He forgot, I think, the quickness of the mind he was dealing with. Isola turned pale, and looked at him.

"Mr. Gore, did you tell me the truth about those Beyers?" she asked.

"I did."

"That they had gone home?"

"Yes. Don't you worry about them."

"What—home did you mean?"

"The one you do," said Gore, giving in to the inevitable. "Now, now! who's going to cry? Where's our brave explorer who is afraid of nothing? We can't help them; their troubles are over. We've ourselves to look after."

"I didn't mean to," said the girl, struggling against the horror of the situation, "but you

don't know—there was a baby's little shoe among the things. Did they——”

“Yes,” said Gore plainly. “That's enough. Think no more about it. Come here and help Corbet and me to sort out our provisions.”

She choked a little in her handkerchief, and then pulled herself together bravely, and began to lay out the stores on the flat sand of the beach. We looked at them critically. There was enough and to spare, as far as loading went; whether enough for our journey, time alone could tell.

Gore divided the tent calico, the axes, the meat and biscuits carefully, loading himself with forty pounds of food and me with twenty-five. I had found a few boxes of cartridges among the things abandoned in the pantry, and these we divided between us. Isola, at her earnest request, was given the three blankets to carry.

“I could carry twice that load, and not feel it,” I told Red Bob.

“Could you?” he said dryly. “You don't know much about conditions for travel in this part of the world. That delusion of being able to do one's own carrying has made a good few graves in the bush, over Papuasias. You take my word for it, you've got all you'll want there.”

We had worked as rapidly as we could, while we were talking, and our packs were ready in a

few minutes. Our arms consisted of two revolvers—Gore's and Isola's, which I carried now; a tomahawk apiece, and a knife in each of our belts. We had each a husked cocoanut for drinking and for carrying water in later on. Our venture was in truth a desperate one, but all that forethought could do, under the circumstances, had been done. It only remained to search for the boat—a forlorn hope indeed. While Gore went off to look, I stayed with Isola. I think none of us were surprised when he returned an hour later with a sinister piece of news. The yawl was beached half a mile down, and burned to ashes.

We were standing on the beach when the preparations were completed; the sun was climbing down the western sky, and the waters of the bay, cool green in the morning, were now one sheet of blazing brass. There was not a breath of wind to stir the drooping plumes of the palm trees; in the shallow water near the shore you could see them reflected as in a glass. It was astonishingly quiet; even the birds in the forest seemed to have ceased their chuckling and calling, and the frogs in the marshy ground below the palms, that had been bleating to each other like goats when we came in, were now still as death.

We stood and listened, and then from far off came a sound that made my blood crisp in my veins. It was only the call of a cockatoo—an angry, frightened scream—but I knew, or thought I did, what it portended. So did Red Bob; he swung round and led the way into the forest without another word.

* * * * *

“Paul!” said a soft voice, almost in my ear.

I turned and saw Isola, like a dim ghost in the dawn, wrapped in her blanket, and standing close behind me. It was my watch, the last of the night. Day was coming quickly. The fire of the evening before, dead out, looked like a snow-drift of ash beneath its sheltering log; the pale bamboo trunks showed like frosted silver. It was a grey, ghostly hour, up here in the heart of the unknown New Britain ranges, with the memory of hardships and dangers scarcely passed behind us, and the thought of new perils to confront us with the coming day.

“What is it?” I answered, laying my hand instinctively on the butt of the revolver I wore night and day.

“I am almost sure,” she said, “that there’s someone hidden back in the bamboos. I heard a creeping sound—didn’t you?”

“I thought so, but I couldn't be sure,” I answered. In these last few nights, when Gore and I took turns to keep watch and watch over our camp, I had learned what all night sentries know—that you are apt occasionally to hear sounds that do not exist. I had been listening to the sound mentioned by Isola for some time, and really could not make up my mind whether it was fancy or not. But her words solved the doubt.

“Wake up Gore quietly,” I said, covering the clump of bamboo with my pistol. I heard her steal behind me; no other sound reached my ear, but in two seconds Red Bob was standing beside me, awake and ready.

“Natives?” he said, in an almost soundless whisper.

“I think so,” I answered. We both remained motionless for a minute or two, and then the creeping sound began again. It seemed decidedly nearer.

“Don't fire,” whispered Gore. “Stop where you are.”

He listened again, bent forward like a wild cat about to spring, and then made one tremendous leap right into the brushwood.

The young bamboos cracked under his weight like pencils; the feathery foliage parted like a wave when a diver springs into it head fore-

most. A fearful yell followed his leap, and a struggle instantly began among the leaves, shaking the bamboo clump to the very top of its limber, hundred-foot-high stems. I could see black legs waving among the green, but I did not dare to fire, for fear I might hit Gore himself; the white and black seemed inextricably tied up together. . . . Backwards, like a tarantula dragging a hornet to its den, came Red Bob out of the bush, hauling at something—something black and very much agitated—something that fought hard and howled loudly, first in native and then in pigeon-English :

“ Master ! master ! you lettem me go ! Master, I no stealem you boat ! You no killem me ! ”

It was Bo !

Gore let go his legs, and he tumbled on the ground, a heap of misery and fright. I suppose we must have been a hard-hearted lot, for we all three burst out laughing. It was the first laugh we had enjoyed for many a day, and I think it did us good. It seemed to do Bo some good, too, for he sat up, dashed his bison-like shock of hair out of his eyes, and said :

“ You givem kai-kai, you givem kobacco. Me want.”

“ You talk first,” said Gore, standing over him. “ What for you steal my boat ? ”

“Fore God, master, I no stealem one-fellow boat belong you. That black swine he stealem. I no savvy fight that fellow, I see him come, very quick I go another-fellow place. I think, more better for me.”

“Where he take my boat ? ”

“He puttem fire along him, burn him altogether. By-n-by he want to come back, kai-kai altogether master, but master he been go away too quick. Me come behind master all a way. Me too much hungry, no catchem plenty thing along booss.”

It was getting light by now ; one could see the shining of the dew on the bamboo stems, fine as hoar-frost on a pane ; and the great flags of the wild bananas glittered like a green velvet robe a-sprinkle with diamonds. We had camped for the night in a small bit of clearing on the top of a ridge ; and now that the sun was up, we could see, through gaps in the netted foliage, a wonderful ocean of softly-swelling ranges, blue and purple and warm green, thickly forested, like those through which we had been cutting and crawling our painful way for a whole toilsome week ; furrowed deeply with river gorges and here and there showing park-like spaces dotted with solitary, stately trees, and clothed with richest grass. One could hardly believe that

some of these lovely lawns were not the work of men—white men—and that one would not see, by and by, some castled wall peeping up among the swelling trees, or hear the sound of a hunting-horn winding among the glades where the rivers ran.

And yet . . . no white man's eyes had looked upon these hills and valleys until this day ; and it was above all things likely that no others would look upon them for many a year to come. We knew what the barriers were through which we had passed so far ; how that hard week's journeying, on carefully doled-out food, had carried us scarce twenty miles of the five-and-thirty we had to cover ; how we had climbed slowly up and down endless heights, cutting our way step by step with the knives carried by Gore and myself ; how we had tried for an easy road up river-beds, and been turned back ; how we had been bogged in sago swamps full of leeches and alligators, and crossed river after river, dangerously, on single logs thrown from bank to bank. These were obstacles indeed ; and yet the worst was still before us. The country ahead was the district of the most danger, though easier to traverse than that through which we had passed, was the district of the most dangerous natives in New Britain—natives who had massacred and killed

more than one party of missionaries and recruiters—and we could scarcely hope to avoid coming into collision with them. So far, through Gore's wonderful knowledge of New Britain (scanty as it was, it was more than any other white man at that time possessed), we had been able to pick out a route that took us through thinly inhabited places, and the few natives we had seen had not been hostile—indeed, they had been willing to trade a little, and had sold us certain invaluable bundles of yams for a little of our tobacco. But now we were approaching the districts that were specially fertile and desirable, according to native ideas, and we knew well that there would in all probability be trouble before we got across to the white men's settlements.

Under the circumstances, Bo was really a godsend. He was not to be trusted for guard duty, but he could carry, get water, build fires, and in other ways save Gore and myself from unnecessary work; a matter of much importance, when each one of us was going simply "on his pluck," as they used to say—how long ago it seemed!—in Flanagan's gymnasium where the fights came off.

If I said that Isola had kept her beauty through this terrible march I should be telling a lie. She had not; she was thin, worn, and yellow.

No woman can keep her looks when she is worked to the uttermost point, and poorly fed to boot. For the sake of the whole party, Gore had asked from her the uttermost she could do, since her pace must necessarily be the pace of all, and she had nobly responded. Not a word of complaint had left her lips since we started, even though I knew her to be so weary every night that she moaned and sighed in her sleep.

I should never have had the heart to drive her on as Red Bob did—to see her stumble with weariness when we came near camping-time, and to take her by the hand and simply help her on, instead of letting her lie down and rest, as her tired, dark eyes so eloquently begged she might do—to wake her in the morning if she slept long, through fatigue, and tell her that she must be up and going. . . . Yet I knew it to be necessary. If our small stock of food ran out, we should be compelled to seek the native villages, and trade with them; and that was a resort so desperate that any alternative was safer.

A week ago I should have said that I would carry Isola if necessary—carry her from one side of New Britain to the other. Was I not young and strong, and could I not have run round the whole of Schouten's island with her small, light figure in my arms, if I had wished?

But I had learned what Red Bob meant when he spoke of the difficulty of doing your own carrying in Papuasia. In those steaming thickets and swamps, where sweat poured down your back, and into your eyes, all day long, and your clothes were soaked through from dawn to dusk—up those terrible precipices, where you hung on by trailing vines, and crept slowly from peak to peak of stone—through the river-beds, jumping from stone to stone till every muscle cried out in weariness, even a twenty-five pound load, made up to thirty by weapons and cartridges, was hatefully, miserably heavy. Our loads lessened as we went on, since we ate our meat and biscuits day by day; but the canvas that we stretched for a tent at night to keep off the furious mountain rains, and the knives for trade, and our few clothes and belongings remained. . . . Long before we had crossed the first of the many ranges that rose behind the coast I had come to the conclusion that carrying in tropic climates was a job for niggers, and for no one else. We had taken even the blankets from Isola after the first hour's walk—taken her small parcel of clothing, which she declared weighed nothing at all. She was anxious to be allowed to help, if ever so little, but we knew better than to let her.

And now here was Bo, good for a fifty-pound load, if needs were, not affected by the climate, not particularly liable to fever (Gore had dosed us with five grains of quinine regularly every day, and it had so far kept off malaria, but there was no knowing how long that would last, for we were terribly tormented by mosquitoes at night), and exceedingly anxious to join himself to our party again.

We accepted him readily, gave him a portion of our small stock of food, and the tobacco he begged for, and asked him questions about the natives who had taken our boat. But he had little to tell, having bolted into the bush at the first sign of danger. It seemed clear, however, that the band who burned the boat were the same lot who had murdered Beyer and his wife and child a few days before; and so far as we could make out, they were the plantation boys themselves—Beyer having made the mistake of recruiting his labour in his own neighbourhood. It is a cheap and easy plan, but one that many planters have found only too dear in the end.

Bo did not know the country we were passing through, but he informed us that the "boy who stop out there," pointing to the ranges ahead, was "countryman belong him," and that he could get us safely through, supposing his tribe were not

“making dance.” If they were, he thought there might be some difficulty.

We were too glad to have a guide and interpreter, however, to trouble much over details, and that day's walk was begun with better spirits than any of us had known since starting. . . . If we could have seen the end ! . . .

Bo, laden with most of our goods, and carrying them with an ease that I felt to be almost a personal insult, marched first, down the thickly forested slope that led to the first river valley, slashing the way open as he went with his big clearing-knife. Isola came after, very pale and thin, but with the same brave light always in her eyes and a step that had grown more active than ever in this last week of hard climbing. Her dress, kilted up above the knee, was a mass of rags ; her head was protected by a sort of mat of plaited palm, and her hair, beginning to grow again, was tied up in a tight bunch of curls at the back of her head, so that the lawyer vines and thorny-edged palm leaves should not catch and tear it as she went. I followed her, and Red Bob came last ; in places like the interior of New Britain, you put your best man in the rear, and Red Bob never made any bones about classifying himself as the best of the party.

I don't know whether we were all “fey,” or

not, but the fact remains that we were amazingly cheerful through that day and on the next one too. Bo seemed, in spite of his disclaimer, to know—or guess something about the country for on the second morning he led us to a place that none of us would have found without his help—a narrow, rocky ravine that seemed to promise nothing, but that widened out by degrees into a deep cañon, trending towards the point of the compass where we wanted to go, and in that pathless land making the best path we had enjoyed since we started. Of course there was a river at the bottom of the cañon, and of course we had to jump and wade, and go round spits of land; but we got on. By the time it was late enough to begin looking about for a camping-place, we had covered about seven miles, according to Red Bob—far and away the best day's work we had done—and the settled districts, so we calculated, were no more than two days' march away—perhaps even less; it all depended on the sort of road we got.

Making camp in the wilderness, one does not wait for dark, or even dusk. While the sun is yet well above the horizon, one must begin to look about; to find some spot where there is water within reasonable distance, where there is ground suitable for pitching a tent, and where

you can find shelter from a possible storm, without closing yourself in so much as to be easily taken by a rush of enemies.

We began looking early, but no suitable spot appeared at once. As the sun slipped down the sky, with the dismaying speed it always shows when you are counting every minute of light, we looked more and more eagerly, but still the forested slopes that had followed on the cañon continued, and still there was not a place where one could have pitched a tent. But all of a sudden, just as Red Bob was making up his mind, I think, to camp on a slope rather than to go on any further, we came upon a tableland of open grass, scattered with just a few large trees, and sloping a little down to a central stream.

“ Might have been made for us,” said Gore, shading his eyes from the dropping sun with one hand, while he looked at the little plain. “ Camp in the middle of those trees nicely. No chance of a sudden surprise. Stir yourselves and come on ; it’s farther than it looks.”

We stirred ourselves to some purpose, and reached the clump of big trees in a few minutes. Beyond it, only a little way off across the grass, came the forest again ; on one side, not the side we were approaching, was a bright green, marshy patch of land, on which, as we came up, the

declining sun seemed to cast strange shadows. . . . Were they queer plants that were growing there, among the mud and water? Were they the remains of buried or cut-down trees, with long stiff branches still remaining? Were they——

“Run!” said Gore suddenly, picking up Isola like a Sabine wife or a sack of potatoes, and slinging her across his shoulder. He began to run as he spoke, rapidly covering the ground in the direction of the forest, and glancing over his shoulder now and then as he ran. I saw he had got his revolver in his hand. . . .

I looked behind me—it was time—and I saw that the strange things in the marsh had risen up with one accord, and were charging towards us, and that they were neither plants nor trees, but buffaloes—big grey buffaloes with spear-like horns a good two yards across.

“They are escapes,” I thought, as I took to my heels, Bo running and yelling behind me. “Escapes from the settlements—wild for years. . . . You cannot stop a charging buffalo. . . . They will follow you till they kill.

“But all the same,” my thoughts ran, “one must have a shot. Ah!” Gore had fired as he ran, I don’t know how. His shot hit a big bull, and it roared like the Last Trump, fell on one

knee, got up again, and came thundering on, snorting "Och! och!" as it went, and fully determined to exact vengeance.

I am a good shot—perhaps I have said so before—but I am not at my best running hard, with or without a girl over my shoulder. I will freely allow I could not have hit that bull as Gore hit it. But I knew I could "dead him," as Toddie would have said, if I stopped; so I did stop, and put a .45 bullet through his eye. You should have heard the crash he made as he dropped; he almost turned a somersault. I had to run faster now—I couldn't; yet I did—and reach cover before the others came along; they were coming fast. I couldn't see where Red Bob and his burden had gone to, and the light was failing, but I caught sight of a narrow opening in the forest, and made for it. . . . It was a track; at any other moment I should have thought of what the track meant and avoided it, or at least followed it cautiously. But you cannot be cautious with a herd of furious buffalo galloping at your heels. I made along the track as fast as I could, through the growing gloom of the sunset; saw a rocky cliff rise up in front of me; noticed that it had steps hewn in the rock, scrambled up the steps like a monkey (they were not exactly on the pattern of a villa staircase),

and found myself, with Bo behind me, on the top of the rocky plateau, and right in the heart of the one thing we had been trying to avoid all along—a New Britain native village.

At first the buffaloes continued to occupy my thoughts. I looked down and saw that the herd had gone “Och”-ing and trampling by, and also that there was no possible means by which they could get up the rock, which seemed to me a natural fortress of a very high order. Then I looked about me, and realized, with a jump of the heart, that we were “in for it.”

Crowds of savages were collecting from every side. Gore and Isola—who was on her feet again—were surrounded by a crowd of creatures more like wild beasts than human beings—things with fiery eyes and huge monkey lips; things dressed in mere fringes of bark and leaves, and wearing necklaces of dogs’ teeth and human teeth about their necks. Another crowd had collected about myself, and six or seven were hanging round Bo, pinching his arms and legs. I do not think it was the trifling pain caused by this operation that induced our solitary carrier to howl as he did; probably he knew that the pinching betokened more interest in his physical condition than a kindly hospitality could account for. . .

CHAPTER XII

SINCE they did not seem to be doing any harm to our carrier, beyond pinching him to see how much fat he had on him, I left him to himself for the present, and joined Red Bob and Isola, who were standing together in the middle of the village. A crowd of chattering natives had collected about them, and were shoving and fingering them more than can have been pleasant—the women were especially annoying in their attempts to snatch away various pieces of clothing from Isola—but so far no attack had been made, and none seemed in contemplation.

“Can we get quietly away, do you think?” I asked Red Bob.

“We’ll try,” he said, with a cheerful countenance.

I looked round the open space, dotted with huts, that seemed to constitute the village; it was small enough in all conscience—I do not think there were twenty houses scattered about

the clearing—but I saw, at a rough guess, that there must be near two hundred men present, with thirty or forty women. Plainly, we had intruded on some sort of a gathering; a savage “at home,” including all the “people who belonged” in the immediate neighbourhood. The village was in every way inferior to the wonderful native towns of New Guinea, of which I had seen one or two at Geelvink Bay. Here were no stately assembly-houses, eighty feet from floor to ridge-pole, built with curious towers and spires and deep verandahs, and all made out of forest material, without so much as one European nail used from start to finish. Here were no long streets as wide as Piccadilly, with fine, verandahed houses set at regular intervals, and beautiful, red-foliaged trees planted in between. Before us, in this typical New Britain town, was simply a huddle of brown roofs set almost on the ground, rubbish scattered everywhere, dogs and pigs scampering freely about.

Ugly black women, shockingly dirty and clothed only in a ragged fringe of leaves, were walking about with babies like monkeys held in their arms, or slung on their backs in a net. Men, short, hairy, and sturdy, with eyes sunk under deep eaves of heavy brow, and a strange,

half-startled, half-fierce expression, which I was to know hereafter as the typical look of the cannibal, stood in herded groups like wild animals, and stared ceaselessly. A few in the crowd about us fingered their long ironwood spears and kept their hands set tight on their great bows—weapons such as those the English fought with at Crécy and Agincourt, and to the full as deadly.

“Don’t you mind them,” I said to Isola, taking my place at her side, and—I fear—almost pushing Gore away—for I could not bear to think that any other man than myself was protecting her. “You need never be uneasy about natives as long as their women are kept in sight. That’s so, isn’t it?”

“It is,” said Red Bob. “Is that black donkey of yours able to talk to them?”

“Bo, can you talk along this fellow?” I asked, pulling him away from what looked like rather rough usage on the part of the natives.

“Fore God, master, I no savvy him talk,” declared Bo, the whites of his eyes rolling with fear. “Altogether I no savvy him; he no my people. This fellow man he plenty bad man. Me too much fright along him.”

It had grown quite dark by now, but the cooking-fires which had been lit all over the

village showed the place clearly enough. The women were busy burying yams and sweet potatoes among hot stones; there were great piles of bananas heaped together here and there, and some kind of mess was being concocted in wooden bowls. The amount of food that had been collected, the coloured leaves, flowers and feathers worn in the heads of the men, and especially the number of people all collected together, seemed to point to a public feast. In the glare of the cooking-fires the wild black figures went constantly to and fro, and I could see that they were getting a good deal excited—whether in prospect of the food or in prospect of something else I could not tell. Red Bob and Isola and I stood bunched together, with that unlucky craven Bo sniffing on the ground at our feet; he had made up his mind at once that it was all up with the party, and was evidently prepared for the worst.

“Can we get away?” asked Isola of Gore. She kept her head and her courage wonderfully, but I felt her hand—her poor little roughened, sunburned hand—steal into mine and stay there.

Red Bob, as calm as if he had been on the deck of the *Empress of Singapore* in Liverpool docks, stood rolling a cigarette and looking about him.

“If they don’t seem likely to show fight, I

think we can," he said. "Corbet, have you a match left? Thanks. . . . We can't attempt to fight our way out. Two guns against two hundred bows and spears is not impossible odds in daylight with a clear get-away. In the dark, surrounded by bush you don't know, it's insanity. No, our game for the present is peace. Keep edging towards the entrance, talking as we go."

We did as he directed. We were standing some fifty yards from the rock staircase that led up into the town. Step by step we strolled towards it, stopping altogether now and then, talking as we went, and looking at the preparations for the feast and the dance with an interest that I, at any rate, certainly did not feel. But before we had covered half the distance a party of young fighting men, armed with bows taller than themselves, had strolled between us and the opening.

"May be chance; keep going," said Gore. We edged along till we were close to the band of warriors, who looked very ugly when you came near them, and—I must say it—smelt, like Kipling's camel, "most awful vile." The fire-light, leaping high, flickered on their plummy headdresses, and shone from the white necklaces of teeth they wore. I could not help wondering

where the teeth came from, and whose would form the next row in those ghastly adornments.

Quietly and politely, we tried to press through their ranks; at least, Gore and I did, keeping Isola behind us. I could feel her trembling, but she did not say a word.

The warriors did not move. At first they seemed unaware that we were trying to get through; they shifted and shuffled about in such a way as to block us, and yet it seemed all done by accident. Then Gore took one lightly by the arm, and tried to press him aside. Instantly, as if that had been a signal, the whole body of them—some forty or fifty—massed themselves in front of the opening, thumped the ends of their great bows on the ground, and set forth one loud shout.

We were prisoners.

Quietly, without any appearance of hurry, Red Bob drew us back towards the centre of the square. I kept tight hold of Isola. She put her head close to mine for a moment, and whispered to me:

“Paul, will you shoot me before you die yourself? Will you promise?”

“I promise,” I answered. “But it won’t be necessary; none of us are going to die.”

She was silent.

“Bluff it out till daylight; that’s our best plan,” said Gore cheerily. “See me get some supper out of those fellows. Now, don’t you worry, little girl; I know the brutes, and they’ve no mischief in their heads at this minute. Look at the women and children. They’re keeping us for some reason of their own—blessed if I know what it is at this minute, but I’ll find out. I know enough sign language to do that. Here, you, Paul, kick that beggar till he stops howling; it isn’t healthy for any of us—and look after your girl till I see the chief. That’s the fellow over there, I reckon.”

He strode across the square and walked in among the biggest group of savages, a crowd of men more highly painted and decorated than the rest, who had massed themselves about one tallish, elderly man. His air of confidence seemed to impress them, and they drew aside to let him pass. I saw him take the handkerchief from his neck—a dirty rag enough, but red in colour, and colour goes a long way with niggers—and present it to the chief with the air of one offering a noble gift. The elderly man took it, smelt it, touched it with his tongue, and then twisted it about his head. The other natives closed in round them after this, and I could see little, but I thought that Gore was gesticulating with his

hands, and making signs, and that there was a good deal of general chattering among the group.

By and by he came back, walking across the square with the easy, care-free step of a man who has not a trouble in the world.

“I made out something,” he reported. “I know a few words of several of these confounded dialects of theirs. Sign business helped it along, too. It’s pretty mysterious; dashed if I can make it all out. They told me there was very big fighting in the places where the white men were, and that everybody was going to be killed with guns. That was easy to make out—even you could have done it”—Red Bob never forgot to keep down what he was pleased to call my “fine natural sense of self-appreciation”—“but the next bit was a teaser. He made the sign for innocence again and again, and I believe he meant it. Unless the Germans have gone mad, and are killing the natives for fun—which isn’t likely, considering that they are the biggest asset of the country—I can’t make it out.”

“Make Bo have a try,” I suggested. “His language must be fairly near theirs as he isn’t twenty miles from his own place.”

We had some trouble in kicking him up off the ground and setting him to work; in fact, it took the muzzle of my revolver to persuade

him—but in the end he gave in and, trembling all over, tried his linguistic acquirements on the chief. His report was that all the white men were killing everybody, and the chief of the town thought we had been sent to kill him. It was apparently his intention to keep us under observation for a little while and if no reinforcements followed us, Bo thought he would probably give orders to have the party eaten.

“Good hearing,” said Red Bob. “I don’t know what the row can be down on the coast—sounds as if all New Britain had risen together—but whatever it is, there seems to be so much shooting going on that this beast of a chief is afraid to attack us right away. Isola, my dear, we’ll get out of this all right; there’s twice the chance I thought there was five minutes ago. Now for supper. Corbet, I’ll do the looking-out while you go among those women and take what you think is a fair share of yams and potatoes; don’t ask, just lift what you need.”

I put the boldest face on that I could, walked in among the women—what hideous old hags they were, one and all!—and loaded myself with food. No objection was made, but the old beldames sat back on their haunches and stared at me with a kind of cruel curiosity that I did not altogether care for. It seemed almost as

if they knew a lot of unpleasant things about me and about my party that they didn't choose to say.

We sat down on the ground and ate, leaving our own stores unopened, by Red Bob's advice.

"Trouble among natives, eight cases out of ten," he said, "begins by looting. We won't tempt them."

For many a night after, if I opened my eyes in the dark, I used to see that scene; the wild, cannibal village, with the black figures coming and going in the red glare of the fires; walls of dark foliage almost meeting overhead; columns of smoke curling up among the branches as one and another of the natives threw on more fuel, working the blaze up ever higher and higher—for what? . . .

I remember even the smell of the place—the odour of damp grass thatch and trampled dust, of spicy leaves and gums in the forest; of sweet potatoes crumbling in hot ashes, mingling with the horrible insanitary odours that haunt all native villages. I remember the yelps that the savages began to give as they worked themselves up for the dance; the drugging, benumbing beat of the drums, the sudden bursts of wolf-like howling that began among the dogs hidden under the houses. . . . Were they expecting

to be fed? I remember, best of all, beside me in the dusk, the small, white face of Isola, and the clasped hands that told me she was praying; and above all the fire and the fury down below, the far, high stillness of the stars.

Not that I felt for a moment we had come to praying and resigning. Like Dame Quickly, I thought there was no need to trouble ourselves about such things—yet.

We were hardly through our meal when a man advanced towards us, holding a green branch in his hand—the sign of peace. He motioned us to get up and follow him. I saw Gore calculating the chances of making a rush, but the square was hemmed in two deep with fighting men, and what we might have attempted as a forlorn hope, had we been alone, could not be thought of when Isola was there too. We followed the man to a house near one end of the village, a low, thatched building with walls of sago palm, and pointed grass roof. It had a door but no windows, after the fashion of their houses. Into this retreat he led us, showing the way with a torch, and when he had seen all four safely inside, he went away, shutting the door behind him.

It was, of course, contemptible, viewed in the light of a prison. Anyone could have cut a

way out in five minutes with a penknife. But I judged that our guards were to be the village itself, and it was not likely that they would permit us to escape.

Bo, lying on the ground, gave way to tears again, and expressed his opinion that we were all going to be eaten, just like pigs. Gore and I discussed the situation, but we could only arrive at one conclusion—that we were being held in some way as hostages, and that if the trouble which had evidently occurred on a large scale further on turned against our hosts, we might, as Gore put it, look out for squalls.

“I don’t like their dancing,” he said. “Nasty beggars when they dance. Get all worked up. Is there any more tobacco?”

“One small piece,” I said.

“I need it,” said Gore. “I want to think. Don’t you chatter for a bit, Paul, or you, Isola. All you flappers are terrible chatterboxes. Don’t flap; go to sleep. You may want it.”

He leaned up comfortably against the sago wall; smoked, and fixed his eyes on the low ceiling.

Meantime, in the square outside something new was preparing, and it sounded, to my inexperienced ears, as if half a dozen liners with sirens in good order, and fifty strong donkeys

in fine voice, had entered the village and begun a competition against one another. The most extraordinary bellows and brays were arising from outside. "Oom, oom, oom!" came something like the whistle of the *Oceanic*; then, "Ai-ai, ai-ai!" in a higher note, then a wild burst of "Oomty-ai, oomty-ai!" leaping from the lowest note to the highest, while all the time the spectral donkeys kept up a steady "Honk-ee, honk-ee!" and something sharp and thin as the note of a policeman's whistle kept shrilling far above the rest.

"Lord, I must have a look at this!" I exclaimed. "Gore, you must be made of wood if you don't want to know what that is."

"I knew you couldn't keep from chattering for five minutes if you tried," was his reply. "Think I've never seen a New Britain dance before, or heard one? That's bamboos."

I really thought he was making fun of me, even in our serious straits, until I got my eye to a crack in the flimsy sago sheath door, and saw that nearly every man in the place had got either a set of pan-pipes made of different lengths of bamboo, or a single long pipe, or else a section of bamboo trunk as big round as a main drain-pipe—these last furnishing the extraordinary booming noises that dominated all the rest. The savages

were dancing as they played—dancing in a solid circle, that went round and round on itself like cattle “milling” when they swim across a stream. They held their heads low to play on their pipes, they lifted their legs till knee almost struck on chin; they looked less like human beings, and more like prancing, bellowing bisons, than I had ever seen them look yet. I would not give Isola a place at the hole, for I thought by their appearance that they were “working up,” as Red Bob had said, and I began to see we were in a tighter place than any of us had supposed. If they got themselves up to the proper point of bloodthirsty excitement before morning, no questions of prudence were likely to restrain them from knocking us on the head.

I told Isola that the men were playing on bamboos, and that it wasn't particularly interesting. Whether she believed me or not I cannot say; but she did not try to look out. Silence fell for a little while inside the dark brown house; we saw each other only as shadows stirring faintly in the dark; we heard nothing but the inhuman honking and hooting of the savage music in the square.

Presently I heard Red Bob strike a match, and saw him standing up inspecting our prison closely. I watched him with an interest that

was almost feverish, and I think Isola, and even Bo, watched him too. We all three felt that he was the greatest man of the party; we felt that if he could not save us, nothing and no one could. It had come to that by now; each one of us felt that we were in serious danger, and that the sun that had sunk two hours ago behind the unknown forest ranges might never rise for us—unless Red Bob could help.

I don't really know what I expected him to say or do, but I was horribly disappointed—disgusted too—when I saw that he was turning over a heap of old native dancing-dresses in the corner, and examining them with all the ardour of the ethnologist, just as if (I thought to myself) there had been no horde of blood-lusting brutes working themselves to frenzy outside, and no Isola to save from their fury.

“What selfish brutes men of science are after all!” I thought. “All for themselves and their wretched discoveries—as if it really mattered to anyone on earth except a few musty German professors whether one brand of nigger dances and dresses—or undresses—in the same way as another! Oh, I know your arguments”—my thoughts rambled on—“‘History of Races’ and all that; but what does history of races really mean to any live human being in the world to-

day? If ever I get out of this alive, I'll have done——”

“Look, look!” said Isola, “what is he doing?”

Gore had put a match to a burned brand out of some old fire, and had stuck it in the ground. It gave light enough for us to see that he was curiously busy with the dancing dresses—selecting out of the heap a few that looked like large, old-fashioned beehives, or coachman's capes made of straw, examining them with anxious care—yes, actually trying them on. . . .

It was then that I began to understand that Red Bob might have resources and reserves beyond what I could guess.

“Corbet,” he said presently, his head half muffled in a mass of something like hay, “look out and see if there are any dresses like this in the dance.”

“There is one,” I said, peering through the hole.

“A thing like a beehive on two feet—you can't see anything but the dress itself, and an ugly mask stuck on top?”

“Yes, that's it. The mask looks like a clown's face and a gargoyle off Notre Dame mixed up together.”

“What's the dancer doing? Hopping round and round?”

“ Yes.”

“ Let Isola take her turn, and watch the dancer. Watch him, both of you, as if your lives depended on it. See what he does ; what steps he takes.”

We did as he told us. I cut the hole a little larger, so that all three might peep cautiously out together, and Gore came and joined us.

“ Yes,” he said with a glance, “ it’s the Duk-Duk dance. You may be glad it is.”

The Duk-Duk was performing a solemn chassée down the middle of the village, looking, I must say, like the maddest and most horrible figure that ever escaped from a nightmare dream. Its formlessness, and the blank, inhuman mask that topped the shuffling figure, took from it all semblance to a human being, and, strangely enough, seemed to terrify or overawe the natives almost as if they had never seen it before. The Duk-Duk is the goblin of New Britain life ; its appearances in the village dance are always cleverly calculated by the sorcerers for some unexpected moment ; no one knows who is hidden beneath the shuffling beehive with the grisly face on top, and murder often follows on its pointing out of a victim. . . .

In and out, in and out of the hopping pan-pipe players it went, a thing of horror, speechless, limbless, apparently deaf and blind—yet we knew

well that a clever sorcerer must be concealed beneath the sinister disguise watching his opportunity to mark down a victim. I saw that the women had hidden their faces on the ground—it is death to them to look upon a Duk-Duk—and that they trembled and burrowed lower into the earth every time the wind of its going passed them. The men with the pipes made a shift to pretend they did not notice the hideous thing, but wherever it went by the ranks of the dancers shrank and winced away, as from the swaying scythe of Death itself.

I watched it, fascinated beyond words. Few people have seen the Duk-Duk dance of New Britain, and of these some have not lived to tell about it. Yet I felt as if we should. I believed in Red Bob.

When I looked round again, he was busy with one of the dresses, putting it on.

“Listen to what I say,” he said, “and be careful. When the next Duk-Duk comes out—there will be another by and by, perhaps more—I am going to cut through the wall at the back of the hut and join it. You must keep your eye on me, and when I have been dancing for a little, get into the three of the dresses that are left, blacken your feet well with ashes (you’ll have to carry your boots under your dress) and come after

me. Do exactly as the other Duk-Duks are doing, and then dance to the rock stairway and go down it. You see the first Duk-Duk did that, and came back again, more than once. We can't take any baggage, but tie a little food about you—so—quickly. Now if this heathen doesn't queer our pitch—Bo, do you understand what we are doing ? ”

“ My God, master, me savvy plenty,” answered Bo unexpectedly. “ Long my village, one time I makem Duk-Duk, I makem kill plenty men.”

“ Then we can trust him to play his part. Good business. I thought he would be a difficulty. Now, do you understand, and can Isola manage it ? Yes ? Then I'll make a start. Isola can come next, and you two after. And Paul, remember, if things go wrong, shoot, but don't shoot till you have to, for it's a last chance.”

“ I understand,” I said. Gore took my hand in his and shook it. I understood that, too ; he was saying good-bye, in case “ things went wrong.”

We cut a slab or two of the pith-like sago stems out in a couple of minutes, and reconnoitred carefully. On this side there was no guard ; the projection of stone that appeared here and there among the trees explained why—clearly it was inaccessible. Only a few women were

visible, lying with their faces on the ground, and their arms over their heads.

“Let’s hope they don’t peep,” laughed Gore. He seemed in excellent spirits. I do not think the man ever knew what fear meant.

In a moment he had slipped through the opening, and was advancing down the square. We rushed to the other side to watch him. He danced as the other Duk-Duks danced—there were two of them now—and before him, as before the others, the ranks of the pipers shrank and quivered, as he passed, and the women moaned when they heard his feet shuffling by. . . .

It was time to make our move.

How well I remember the stuffy, dirty smell of the dress when I put it over my head, after seeing Isola and Bo into theirs! It was wonderfully light, in spite of its size; and the hideous mask on the top, as I had anticipated, had two small holes through which one could see quite well. I wondered what insanitary beast had worn the dress before I did, and hoped that none of us would get leprosy or anything else that was unpleasant from the manner of our disguise. Then I had not time to think any more, for Isola was out, and making the perilous pass of the square. God, how my heart beat as I watched her! How loose I kept my finger on the trigger of my revolver!

Her coolness was wonderful. On her little blackened feet, she shuffled and chasséed along, exactly as the other Duk-Duks had done, even pausing once or twice to make the hideous "point" from which the savage shrank back so nervously (I judged that any man thus "pointed" stood in imminent danger of the cooking-oven). I saw her near the rock staircase, saw the ranks of warriors part as the sea parts before the stem of a ship, to let her through; saw that Red Bob followed her closely—or was it one of the other Duk-Duks? For the life of me I could not tell.

"Now, Bo!" I whispered, and together we danced out from behind the hut, shuffling along without haste, and weaving in and out among the dancers as we had seen the other Duk-Duks do. The fires leaped and glowed; the black figures of the piping men "milled" continually, round and round in a circle. "Oom-oom," went the pipes, "Oom-ty, oom-ty, ai-ai, ai-ai!" The air was full of dust; everything was seen as in a cloud; the smell of the dust was like snuff in one's nostrils. I could hardly keep from sneezing. . . . Bo and I danced on. The stone stairs were close to us; we were hopping and skipping down them. . . .

We had reached the foot, and stood in the dark, leafy wet-smelling track below; I could

just see two Duk-Duk dresses in front of me. I stretched out my hand, and felt for the hand of the nearest. It snatched at me fiercely, and then seized my arm. I had got one of the real ones!

One thinks quickly in such moments, and luckily I remembered Red Bob's counsel: "Fire only as a last resort." I drew the long bush-knife from my belt with my free arm, thrust aside the grass of the Duk-Duk dress, and drove the blade through the dancer's ribs. He stopped in the very beginning of a cry, coughed, "Och!" once, like the buffaloes, and fell down at my feet. Gore had him by the legs in an instant and slung him quietly among the trees. I thought by the movement of his arm as it came up from the cape that he made assurance surer, with his own good knife; but it was too dark to see.

We made off down the track, very slowly at first, and dancing as we went, in case we should meet any more of this infernal *corps de ballet*; but soon we threw aside our hampering disguises, put on our boots, and taking Isola between us (for the track was a good one, and unusually wide), ran as hard as we could. When we had put a mile or two between ourselves and the village Gore called a halt. We listened, standing in the drip of dew from enormous cottonwoods overhead, and hearing the great green frogs of New

Britain bleat like goats in the under-brush, and once, a long way off, an alligator belling in a swamp. But of the savages we heard nothing.

After a little rest, we went on, guided by Bo, who seemed to know where he was, or at least to guess, as a native sometimes can. Isola's endurance was wonderful. She leaned upon my arm, and sometimes took Red Bob's, also for a while, but she never once faltered or complained. We went on till near daylight, and then, finding a safe nook among some rocks, slept for a while, Gore and I taking turns to watch. The sun came up, red and rainy-looking, over the outline of a dark blue ridge, not many miles away. Gore looked at it, laughed and clapped me on the back.

"My boy, we've done it," said he, "for that's the range above the Gore plantation country, and we'll be into the settlement to-night."

I do not think we should have been, however, had we not chanced upon a buffalo wallowing in a marsh—a tame one this time, obviously not long escaped from the nearest settlement, and with a fresh hole in its nostril—and pressed it into our service, to carry Isola. Being a tame beast of burden, it submitted, after some trials, and for the rest of our march—which we kept up till dusk, with the exception of a couple of hours' spell in the middle of the day—our brave little

lady went as Evangeline rode in the "beautiful meadows of Grand-Pré." I think we must have made an odd-looking procession—Gore striding along in front, chewing a bit of stick for want of his usual smoke, Bo trotting along behind him, and last, Isola, on the great grey buffalo, with myself walking beside her—a ragged, dirty party, sunburned almost as black as Bo, muddy, torn and sadly in need of a wash. It began to rain in waterspouts before we got to the settlement, and when we came out at last on a range that overlooked green, orderly ranks of palms, and shining woods of rubber trees, we saw the welcome sight through a veil of streaming wet. As for ourselves, nothing could have made us look more draggled than we were.

Red Bob paused on the crest of the hill and drew a sigh of relief.

"Well through," he said. "And now to invade Sachs's bungalow, get cleaned and fed, and hear how the world has been going without us all these weeks."

CHAPTER XIII

SACHS'S plantation was the furthest back of all the settled districts. It was a place where very few white men came, and no white women; Sachs himself lived a lonely life with his boys and one overseer, riding a long day down to Kori, the nearest place to his own, when he wished for a little society.

We were therefore somewhat astonished to see, as we went down the zig-zag pathway leading to the bungalow, that there were white dresses visible on the sheltered side of the verandah, and that temporary cots had been put up here and there, evidently for the accommodation of an unusual number of male visitors.

"Seems to be rather a run on Sachs's place," said Red Bob, twisting his moustache and looking down at the house with a thoughtful expression. "Seems to have some sport going on, too."

I had already seen what he pointed out to me with one finger. Sentries. White men with rifles in their hands pacing up and down in front of the house.

“But look here!” I said, pausing to stare. “They’re all mad. It’s at the back the sentries should be. Down to the front there’s nothing but plantations and motor roads between us and Herbertshohe!”

Red Bob twisted his moustache some more, and said nothing. He walked a little faster. I hit the buffalo with a bit of lawyer-cane, and urged it on. I was getting very curious. What were all those white people doing down there?

“Well, at any rate,” whispered Vanity, “there would be all the bigger audience for the sensational tale we had to tell—all the more to admire and wonder at what we had done—we, two white men and a woman, who had walked across New Britain, done no small amount of exploring and discovery (for Gore, though I have not mentioned it, had been mapping and estimating all the way, and cursing his ill luck in having no scientific instruments) and met with hair-breadth adventures enough to stir the pulse even of New Britain residents. Already I savoured our triumph. We were going to be heroes!

It rained and rained as we went down the interminable zig-zags of the path; red waterfalls poured from every bank and boulder, the ground sent up a spray of rainy spume. The people on the verandah sat in their chairs and watched

us. In front of the house the armed sentries walked back and forwards; we could see them at each end as we went down.

“Sachs! Hollo, Sachs!” bellowed Red Bob, in his great bull voice, as we came on to the last turn. “Here’s a lost party for you. Have you any room?”

Sachs came out on to the verandah—a tall, stout Prussian with a grizzly beard—and eyed us with his hands in his pockets.

“I don’t know,” he said in German.

I began to realize that something had happened, but I could not for the life of me think what.

Gore did not seem entirely surprised. He told me afterwards that he had guessed at the state of the case as far back as the cannibal village.

“Oh, yes, I think you have,” he said cheerily. “We’ve got a lady with us, and she is very badly done up. Can you let her go right off to bed?”

“I suppose I can,” answered Sachs, melting a little. “There are four women here; they can take care of her, no doubt.”

“Oh, but of course I can!” cried a well-known—too well-known—voice from a corner of the verandah, and a serge skirt and white

blouse, inhabited by a lady with her head held sentimentally on one side, became clearly visible close to the lattice. Then it was that I saw what I had not seen through all the perils of our journeying—fear on the face of Red Bob. He turned actually pale.

“I always knew it,” he said to himself.

“What did you know?” I asked. But he made no answer; he only looked at the face and figure of Mabel Siddis, and then once at the forests behind him, and then he walked on.

We reached the house and walked up on to the verandah—three muddy, wretched-looking objects, with Bo, outside in the rain, very much at an advantage over us owing to his want of clothes. Sachs still remained in the same place, his hands in his pockets. He said nothing at all. The women, plump, tight-haired Germans, exclaimed loudly when they saw Isola.

“Why, it is Frau Richter!” they cried. “Ach! see you there!” screamed the fattest and tightest-haired, “see then, she is dying!”

Isola was not dying, but she had sunk into the nearest chair and quietly fainted away.

In spite of Miss Siddis’s loudly-expressed anxiety to take care of Isola, it was the fat German women who lifted her into a bedroom, shut the door, and ministered to her. Mabel Siddis was

far too busy clasping her hands and looking sideways (no, it was not quite a squint) at Red Bob, who, for his part, had backed up against the verandah rail and was talking with furious energy to a German trader.

I don't think he quite knew what he was saying, for he actually began to describe our journey and mention our adventures—a thing he would never have done unasked, except under the disturbing influence that now held possession of him. The other men on the verandah listened, but with a curious lack of interest. Gore saw it, and cut the tale short.

“What's going on here?” I broke in, for I was getting extremely curious. That something big had happened somewhere I could not doubt. Why, it even seemed to prevent people from being interested in our affairs!

The answer came from an unexpected source. Round the corner of the verandah walked a tall figure in military uniform, clinking spurs as it moved. It paused, looked, and greeted me with:

“Powl!”

“Why, Hahn, is it you?” I said, glad to see him—I always had an odd sort of liking for the man who had so nearly succeeded in shooting me that morning in Kronprinzhaven. “What's going on about here?”

“War, my nut,” said Hahn.

“War! I did hear something about a lot of fighting—but it was so confused—which of the tribes are out?”

“The tribes that are out, my nut,” said Hahn—and in spite of his slang, I recognized a new gravity in his bearing, a seriousness in the once gay and debonair young face—“the tribes that are out are the Germans, the Austrians, the French, the Belgians, the Russians, the Servians and the Turks.”

“Good Lord!” I said. “Are we at war with you?”

“You are, Powl,” said Hahn.

“Then I suppose Gore and I are your prisoners?”

“No,” said Sachs, taking his hands out of his pockets at last, and coming forward, “we are yours.” I do not write all he said in addition; it may well be forgiven and forgotten.

Facts began to rain like branches in a hurricane. We heard the history of those two months that we had spent in the wilds—the greatest two months that the world has ever seen. We were told—with a certain amount of personal colouring—the story of the march to Paris, of Liége, of Mons and the Marne and the Aisne. It was later, from other lips, that we heard of

Rheims and Louvain. We knew before long that German New Guinea was German New Guinea no longer.

Miss Siddis, between her prudent devotion to her employers' interest (for she was still a governess in a German family, and had come up with them to Sachs's, to be safe from bombardment in the towns) and her desire to stand well with us, was a sight worth seeing. She did all that clasped hands and expressive looks could do to show her delight at the success of British arms; her words, addressed to her patrons in the German language (which she seemed to think Gore and myself did not understand) contained the heartfelt wishes of an earnest soul for a speedy readjustment of things as they had been. . . . I was disgusted by her, and withdrew.

Sachs, I must say, behaved decently enough, all things considered. He agreed to give us room for the night, and to sell us some clothes against a cheque on the bank of New South Wales. Next day, if Isola was well enough, we intended to journey on down to Rabaul with her (since persecution from the man she had married was one of the least likely things in the world to happen now) and report ourselves to the troops in possession. Things had

changed considerably for us, and all to the good, during those months of absence from telegrams and news.

“We weren’t pearl-poaching after all, if we’d only known it,” said Gore to me that night, when we had put up our cots side by side in a quiet corner of the verandah. “And, by the way, you’ve never asked me yet, you unbusiness-like young beggar, what your share in the venture was to be. Of course we’ll go back and rake the place out as soon as possible; there’s a big fortune in it.”

“If I am entitled to anything,” I said, “it can be what you please; but I don’t want to be paid for—for——”

“For backing me out in a row or two—no, naturally. You will be paid for taking your part in an illegal, dangerous, discreditable poaching adventure, which fortunately turned up trumps. I propose to give you twenty per cent. of the takings, and if I’m any judge of an atoll, it ought to be a pretty decent little independence for you—in case you want such a thing, for yourself or anyone else.”

“What do you mean?” I said excitedly, sitting up in my cot. It was late at night; the moon had climbed far down the sky and shone in streaks and patches through the grapeless

vine that Sachs had trained about the enclosing lattice in memory of his Rhineland home. The other men were sleeping on the side that looked down towards the Herbertshohe road; I don't know what they expected in the way of attack or surprise, but it was well for our quiet conversation that they had left us alone.

"I can't quite say what I mean myself; time must show that," said Gore. "But I got a curious admission out of Isola not very long ago. . . . She referred, quite innocently, to the fact that her impulsive Italian papa had overcome her objections to a marriage with a dying cholera patient by violent means. In fact, when he found she was disinclined to do his bidding, and secure the New Guinea plantation for her deserving family, he took her by the hair, shook her, and boxed her ears, and threatened to shut her up without food."

"The brute!" I said indignantly. "Wish I had had the chance of boxing his ears—once."

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Gore, turning on his pillow and looking at me with the moon full on his strange, brilliant eyes.

"Well, that's about all you could have done to a man who happened to be her father."

"I don't mean that. Do you not see—why, man, a marriage under compulsion, especially

if the parties don't live together afterwards, is breakable."

I sprang out of my cot, and plumped myself down on the foot of Gore's.

"Say that again!" I exclaimed, drumming on his chest with my fists in my excitement.

"Say it again—she isn't married—Oh, Lord!"

"Stop acting the goat or you'll have the sentries up here. I never said anything of the kind. She's married all right at this moment. You'd have to bring a suit in the Dutch courts."

"I'll bring twenty," I said joyously.

"I don't think Richter will appeal to quite that extent; if you bring one or two it'll probably meet the case," said Gore dryly. "Whether it'll all be plain sailing or not I can't say; Miss Siddis—dash her!—seems to be the only witness, and that won't make things any easier."

"I'll go and make love to her before breakfast to-morrow morning," I declared.

"For God's sake, do," said Gore. And so, being very weary, we fell asleep.

Next morning there was no question of Isola going on. She was in bed, and according to the good German women, bound in common prudence to remain there at least another day. She sent me a pitiful little note begging us not to abandon her, and we decided to wait, though

both of us were wild to be down in Herbertshohe, seeing the meaning of war—perhaps even joining in it. . . .

“It makes no difference,” said Sachs gloomily, when we told him of our intentions. “We must all go down soon; they will order that we go into camp at Rabaul, and after that we leave the country.”

“No, they say that they will respect property,” argued one of the men. “I do not think that our people need have ordered us to go up here and guard the plantations; we should have been much better fighting down below.”

“Orders, old churl,” said Hahn, who had come in from the front of the house. “Here is my Powl. Powl, how are you? It is a sad thing that you are again my enemy, Powl. Shall we fight another duel, that thou may take off the tip of my other ear?”

“I don’t mind if I do,” I said cheerfully.

“Nonsense,” said Gore. “We’ll have no private editions of the European war on this plantation. . . .”

Whether we should have had or not I do not know, but circumstances prevented any chance of Hahn’s losing another ear-tip.

During the morning some mysterious message arrived, in obedience to which he collected his

few remaining police, mustered them on the grass outside the house, and marched away down the hill with a laugh and a wave of the hand, as he turned the corner of the road. So, smiling, he marched out of my life. He was killed that very afternoon, in a sniping skirmish near Rabaul. I shall always think, enemies though we were, that there was something about Hahn I could have liked, and liked well. . . .

But Lord! (as Pepys would have said) to see the airs that Mabel Siddis took on, immediately it became plain that the whole of the Richter marriage case was hanging on her willingness and ability to give evidence! Gore and I questioned her, and we elicited, with some trouble (for she became very choice and difficult as she went on), the fact that no one but herself had seen any ill-usage, or heard any threats. She would not say definitely that she had seen or heard such things, either; but she left us in no uncertainty as to the fact, all the same, revelling in the importance of her position. She gave us to understand that if she was to do as we asked her, and set Isola Bella free from the chains wound round her by that unlucky hour in Banda Neira, she must, in some way, profit by it. Of course she did not say this openly, but:

“ Oh no, Mr. Gore! ” she would giggle, shyly

biting the end of her little finger (she had very small but very ugly hands). "I couldn't say I remember that definitely, but one never knows—one's memory may return—it depends so much on circumstances. I would do anything I could for a friend—I would indeed—and the nearer the friend, the more I would do—indeed I would. That is, if I happened to remember at the right time, but I have such a silly little memory—just like silly little me."

Gore got away from her at last, and told me, in the course of a quiet walk among the palms of the plantation, that he had no doubt whatever as to her being able to prove the case, if only she chose to do so.

"It's clear, however, that she must be bought," he said. "Paul, you'll have to tackle her yourself about that; she—she makes my blood run cold. . . . See here, youngster, don't go too shy on the money part of it. I'll stand by you. You're a perfect young idiot, but, somehow, you're the kind of idiot I like—and—I shall never have a son. . . . What the deuce do you suppose Sachs has done to these rubber trees to make them seed so young? By the look of the trunks, they shouldn't have been ready till . . . Well, go on and face the dragon, St. George; I'll skulk here till it's all over."

Miss Siddis was sitting out of doors when I found her, under the shade of a wall of young rubber trees. The crimson buds hung down above her head as she sat poking a crochet-needle in and out of some totally useless object meant for somebody's troops; the broad glory of the leaves made a background that would have better suited a fairer woman than Mabel. I approached her cautiously; I was bent on getting the matter settled there and then, but I did not like the job. Suppose she had fallen in love with me? That might be the reason of her reluctance to sever the tie between Isola and Richter. Suppose she was simply spiteful? Suppose she didn't really remember, and was only pretending she did, to make herself important? I trembled as I thought how much depended upon all these suppositions, and upon the fantasy of a vain, not dependable woman like Mabel Siddis.

She made way for me on her bench, with the mechanical smile that had done duty for so many years, on so many occasions. I found myself, oddly enough, feeling a little sorry for her. To fail in the object of your whole life, utterly and humiliatingly, as she had failed—to stake your success, your comfort, and your self-respect, upon the winning of a game, and lose it, was surely a wretched fate. It seemed to me that the place

of the humblest lay sister in a quiet convent, where every nun had her own fitted niche in life, or the simplest work of teacher, nurse, or even servant, done for itself, and not for ulterior aims, must be a life more worthy of respect.

I need not have wasted my pity. Mabel Siddis was well able to take care of herself.

In ten minutes, glancing shyly and modestly down at her work, with a horrible parody of the girlhood that she should have forgotten about long ago—speaking softly, in that misfit pretty voice of hers, as one who would not hurt the wing of a fly, if the fly only behaved itself and did not get in her way—Mabel Siddis had made me understand what she demanded for the setting free of Isola, and the making of my happiness. She demanded Red Bob.

Not that she said so right out—she was far too modest and feminine for that. But she made her meaning very clear ; clear as still waters that run deep, and only half hide the ugly things that lurk within their silken depths. I was to have Isola ; she was to have Vincent Gore. That was the bargain.

The horrid shrewdness of the woman peeped out in the whole affair. Another would have thought that Red Bob was not attainable by such means ; that no man would marry a woman he had been systematically running away from,

just because the happiness of two people could be secured by his doing so.

And I must confess that for the moment I did not think so either. Women know men better than men know each other.

I could not keep my face from telling my dismay, when I went back to Gore, a miserable and perplexed ambassador, if ever there was one. He laughed when he saw me.

“You needn’t pull such a face,” he said. “I know what she said.”

“You can’t!” I cried.

“Oh, yes, I do,” said Red Bob. “I know all right. Always did know, from the moment I first met her. Felt it coming, somehow.”

“You don’t mean to say you care for——” I began, my eyes widening.

“I don’t. I mean to say she’s done it, and that I’ll have to do as many a better man has done. Don’t look so upset; it isn’t you have got to marry Mabel.”

“But you don’t mean——”

“I tell you what I don’t mean,” said Gore, looking at me with narrowed pupils. “I don’t mean to see you and Isola go down the road I went. Not if I can help it by marrying Mabel Siddis. There’s not much of my life left, and there’s all of yours and hers.”

“ But—you told me—wouldn't it make some difference to anyone ? ” I said lamely. I was circling round the strange confidence he had made on board the *Afzelia*—the tale of the crippled, beautiful young daughter, “ being taken care of ” somewhere.

Gore answered without answering.

“ She'd lose her worst qualities if she were married,” he said. I saw him wince over the word, but he went on bravely. “ She seems to have been a pretty good governess all her life. She was decent to Isola.”

“ Looks like it now,” I burst out.

“ She's playing for her own hand. I can see her point of view,” said Gore ; and I felt almost frightened to note how mildly he spoke. It seemed as if there were something broken in his character—some spring that had given way. . . . I remembered the day he had fled from the upper deck and taken refuge in my cabin, declaring that “ some day a woman like that would run him in, and he wouldn't have pluck enough to hang himself.” Well, she had run him in. And I did not anticipate that he would lay violent hands upon himself in consequence. Instead, I had a horrid vision of a wedding—cake, favours, orange flowers, bridesmaids, speeches, champagne—I was sure that the victorious Mabel would spare

him no detail—with Gore in the middle of it all, running for his life.

“Hang it all,” I said, “I don’t know how you think I can accept such a thing.”

“You’ve got her to think of,” said Gore, and he did not mean Miss Siddis this time.

“I offered her money,” I said, after a silence. “I went high. . . . But she isn’t out for that, or not that only. She wants to write Mrs. on her visiting-cards. She wants a celebration—oh, damn her!”

“Damning won’t help the case,” said Gore. “When a thing’s done it’s done. We’ll see Isola safe into Herbertshohe first, and then I’ll come back and fix things with Miss Siddis. You can let her know as much—judiciously.”

“You can trust me not to put the rope round your neck before the sentence is passed,” I said. “If I saw any other way I’d have you shut up in a lunatic asylum sooner.”

“Don’t fluff,” said Gore. “I always did say you talked too much.” And not another word would he say.

I carried out my mission to Mabel Siddis judiciously, as I had been asked. I was not the man, in any case, to have Red Bob let in for a breach of promise case, if . . . I sincerely hoped it would be “if,” and yet I did not believe it. For all

I could see, Bob was doomed. There are no words to say what a selfish beast I felt.

Miss Siddis minced and "simmered," as Gore used to say, a good deal, but pretended not to understand my meaning. Still, I saw by the way she preened herself that she did. She saw us off when we all three set out next day, and if anything could have made my heart heavier than it was, the way Red Bob kept close to me, to avoid a personal farewell from Mabel, would have done it.

We had borrowed a horse and buggy, and set off down the long road leading to Herbertshohe, with spirits excited by the prospect of seeing real war, or at least its aftermath. An hour or two after leaving, we met a body of khaki-clad young Australians, marching up to the plantation country, and singing gaily as they went. We stopped to greet them, and to hear the news. There had been another skirmish that day; not much harm done to anyone. The soldiers thought it would be the last: German New Guinea was settling down peaceably enough to the new occupation.

"Is there anything to avoid on the way?" I asked of one young fellow, aside. He looked at Isola.

"No," he said. "They're burying some dead men, but it's nothing. . . . The casualties have

been very small—very small indeed. You needn't be uneasy about the young lady."

We drove on. The afternoon sun shot low among the ranks of palms, and laid long golden spears across the dusty road. Green parrots chattered in the leaves and huge, slow, red and blue butterflies sailed past, as peacefully as though no war-storm had struck the isolated, far, strange island of New Britain. A few miles on we came to a turn in the road, where some Germans engaged in carrying coffins to the graveyard of Herbertshohe had stopped to rest.

"There are three coffins," said Isola, her dark eyes wide with horror. "It may be people that I know, Paul; will you stop and let me ask?"

The men were strangers to all of us, and they looked sullenly at the three English people who were driving freely about the land, gloating, no doubt, over the triumph of their countrymen. They answered shortly when Isola spoke.

"Right Germans, all three," was their answer. "What can it matter to you?"

"Tell her," said Red Bob, leaning down with the reins in his hands. And because he was a man whom most people obeyed, they obeyed also.

"It is Friederichs, Reuss and Richter," said one of the bearers, "and may the everlasting curse——"

I need not add what he said.

Isola sat still and white till he had done, and then asked: "Justus Schultz Richter?"

"Did you know him?" asked the man, looking up at her.

"I was married to him," she said; "drive on!"

Red Bob whipped up the horse and we drove fast.

"I can't feel sorry," said Isola, looking at me piteously. She drew out her pocket-handkerchief and began to cry as she spoke.

"You've no reason to," said Red Bob, whose face had suddenly taken on an astonishingly bright expression. "No one has any reason to. It cuts the knot—for us all."

Red Bob was sitting on the front seat of the buggy, while Isola and I occupied the back. I put my arm round her waist, and consoled her as I liked best; and now she did not repulse me.

"It's like dancing on a grave," she said, but she crept up closer as she said it.

And the sun sank low and golden on the sea, where before the port of Herbertshohe, an Australian liner lay waiting.

THE END

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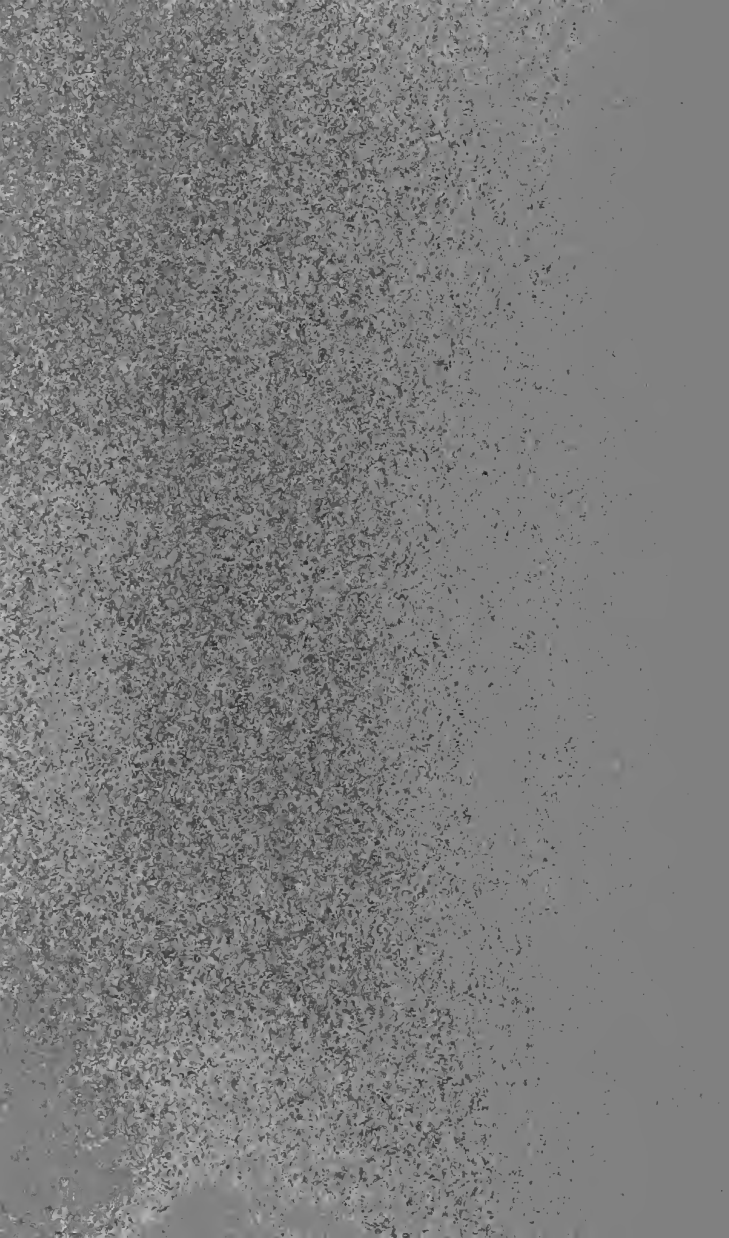
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