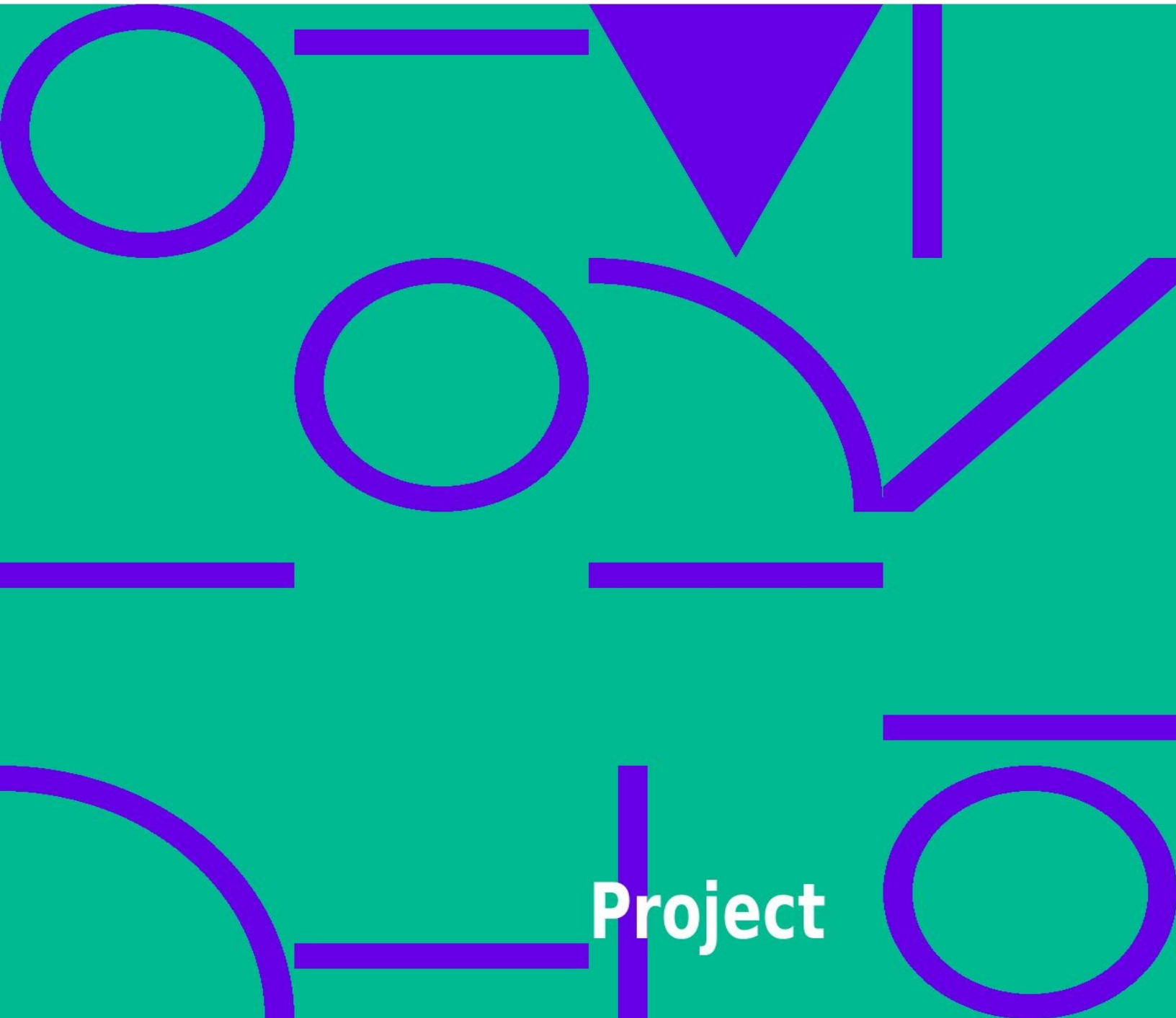
West Wind Drift

George Barr McCutcheon



Title: West Wind Drift

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Release Date: March 26, 2009 [EBook #6014]
Last Updated: March 12, 2018

Language: English

Produced by Carrie Fellman, and David Widger

WEST WIND DRIFT

By George Barr McCutcheon

On a bright, still morning in October, the Doraine sailed from a South American port and turned her glistening nose to the northeast. All told, there were some seven hundred and fifty souls on board; and there were stores that filled her holds from end to end,—grain, foodstuffs, metals, chemicals, rubber and certain sinister things of war. Her passenger list contained the names of men who had achieved distinction in world affairs,—in finance, in business, in diplomacy, in war, besides that less subtle pursuit, adventure: men from both hemispheres, from all continents. It was a cosmopolitan company that sailed out to sea that placid day, bound for a port six thousand miles away.

Her departure, heavy-laden, from this South American port was properly recorded in the then secret annals of a great nation; the world at large, however, was none the wiser. For those were the days when sly undersea monsters of German descent were prowling about the oceans, taking toll of humanity and breeding the curse that was to abide with their progenitors forever.

Down through the estuary and into the spreading bay slid the big steamer; abreast the curving coast-line she drove her way for leagues and leagues, and then swept boldly into the vast Atlantic desert.

Four hundred years ago and more, Amerigo Vespucci had sailed this unknown southern sea in his doughty caravel; he had wallowed and rocked for months over a course that the Doraine was asked to cover in the wink of an eye by comparison. Up from the south he had come in an age when the seas he sailed were no less strange than the land he touched from time to time; the blue waste of sky and sea as boundless then as now; the west wind drift as sure and unfailing; the waves as savage or as mild; the star by which he laid his course as far away and immutable,—but he came in 1501 and his ship was alone in the trackless ocean.

The mighty Doraine was not alone; she sailed a sea whose every foot was charted, whose every depth was sounded. She sailed in an age of Titans, while

the caravel was a frolicksome pygmy, dancing to the music of a thousand winds, buffeted today, becalmed tomorrow, but always a snail on the face of the waters. Four hundred years ago Vespucci and his men were lost in the wilderness of waves. Out of touch with the world were they for months,—aye, even years,—and no man knew whither they sailed nor whence they came, for those were the days when the seven seas kept their secrets better than they keep them now.

Into the path traversed by the lowly caravel steamed the towering Doraine, pointing her gleaming nose to the north and east.

She was never seen again.

Out from the lairs of the great American navy sped the swiftest hounds of the ocean. They swept the face of the waters with a thousand sleepless eyes; they called with the strange, mysterious voice that carries a thousand miles; they raked the sea as with a fine-tooth comb; they searched the coast of a continent; they penetrated its rivers, circled its islands, scanned its rocks and reefs,—and asked a single question that had but one reply from every ship that sailed the southern sea.

For months ships of all nations searched for the missing steamer. Not so much as the smallest piece of wreckage rewarded the ceaseless quest. The great vessel, with all its precious cargo, had slipped into its niche among the profoundest mysteries of the sea. Came the day, therefore, when the Secretary of the Navy wrote down against her name the ugly sentence: “Lost with all on board.”

Maritime courts issued their decrees; legatees parcelled estates, great and small; insurance companies paid in hard cash for the lives that were lost, and went blandly about their business; more than one widow reconsidered her thoughts of self-denial; and ships again sailed the course of Amerigo Vespucci without a thought of the Doraine.

For months the newspapers in many lands speculated on the fate of the missing liner. That a great ship could disappear from the face of the waters in these supreme days of navigation without leaving so much as a trace behind was inconceivable. At first there were tales of the dastardly U-boats; then came the sinister reports of treachery on board resulting in the ship being taken over by German plotters, with the prediction that she would emerge from oblivion as a well-armed “raider” cruising in the North Atlantic; then the generally accepted theory that she had been swiftly, suddenly rent asunder by a mighty explosion in her hold. All opinions, all theories, all conjectures, however, revolved about a single fear;—that she was the victim of a German plot. But in the course of events there came a day when the German Navy, ever boastful of its ignoble

deeds, issued the positive and no doubt sincere declaration that it had no record of the sinking of the Doraine. The fate of the ship was as much of a mystery to the German admiralty as it was to the rest of the puzzled world.

And so it was that the Doraine, laden with nearly a thousand souls, sailed out into the broad Atlantic and was never heard from again.

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BOOK ONE.

CHAPTER I.

The Captain of the liner was an old man. He had sailed the seas for two-score years, at least half of them as master. At the outbreak of the Great War he was given command of the Doraine, relieving a younger man for more drastic duty in the North Sea. He was an Englishman, and his name, Weatherby Trigger, may be quite readily located on the list of retired naval officers in the British Admiralty offices if one cares to go to the trouble to look it up.

After two years the Doraine, with certain other vessels involved in a well-known and somewhat thoroughly debated transaction, became to all intents and purposes the property of the United States of America; she flew the American flag, carried an American guncrew and American papers, and, with some difficulty, an English master. The Captain was making his last voyage as master of the ship. An American captain was to succeed him as soon as the Doraine reached its destination in the United States. Captain Trigger, a little past seventy, had sailed for nearly two years under the American flag at a time when all Englishmen were looking askance at it and wondering if it was ever to take its proper place among the righteous banners of the world. It had taken its place among them, and the “old man” was happy.

His crew of one hundred and fifty was what might be aptly described as international. The few Englishmen he had on board were noticeably unfit for active duty in the war zone. There was a small contingent of Americans, a great many Portuguese, some Spaniards, Norwegians, and a more or less polyglot remainder without national classification.

His First Officer was a Scotch-American, the Second an Irish-American, the Chief Engineer a plain unhyphenated American from Baltimore, Maryland. The purser, Mr. Codge, was still an Englishman, although he had lived in the United States since he was two years old,—a matter of forty-seven years and three months, if we are to believe Mr. Codge, who seemed rather proud of the fact that his father had neglected to forswear allegiance to Queen Victoria, leaving it to his son to follow his example in the case of King Edward the Seventh and of King George the Fifth.

There were eighty-one first-cabin passengers, one hundred and nineteen in the second cabin,—for the two had not been consolidated on the Doraine as was the case with the harried trans-Atlantic liners,—and approximately three hundred

and fifty in the steerage. The first and second cabin lists represented many races, South Americans predominating.

The great republics in the lower half of the hemisphere were cut off almost entirely from the Old World so far as general travel was concerned. The people of Argentine, Brazil and Chili turned their eyes from the east and looked to the north, where lay the hitherto ignored and sometime hated continent whose middle usurped the word American. A sea voyage in these parlous days meant but one thing to the people of South America: a visit to an unsentimental land whose traditions, if any were cherished at all, went back no farther than yesterday and were to be succeeded by fresh ones tomorrow. At least, such was the belief of the Latin who still dozed superciliously in the glory of his long-dead ancestors. Not having Paris, or London, or Madrid, or Rome as the Mecca of his dreams, his pilgrimage now carried him to the infidel realities of the North,—to Washington, New York, New Orleans, Newport and Atlantic City! He had the money for travel, so why stay at home? He had the money to waste, so why not dissipate? He had the thirst for sin, so why famish?

There were lovely women on board, and children with and without the golden spoon; there were men whose names were known on both sides of the Atlantic and whose reputations for integrity, sagacity, intellect, and,—it must be confessed,—corruptness, (with the author's apology for the inclusion); doughty but dogmatic university men who had penetrated the wildernesses as naturalists, entomologists, mineralogists, archaeologists, explorers; sportsmen who had forsaken the lion, rhinoceros, hartebeest and elephant of Africa for the jaguar, cougar, armadillo and anteater of South America; soldiers of fortune whose gods had lured them into the comparative safety of South American revolutions; miners, stock buyers and raisers, profiteersmen, diplomats, priests, preachers, gamblers, smugglers and thieves; others who had gone out for the Allies to buy horses, beeves, grain, metal, chemicals, manganese and men; financiers, merchants, lawyers, writers, musicians, doctors, dentists, architects; gentiles and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, skeptics and infidels,—in short, good men, bad men, beggar men, thieves.

The world will readily recall such names and personalities as these: Abel T. Landover, the great New York banker; Peter Snipe, the novelist; Solomon Nicklestick, the junior member in the firm of Winkelwein & Nicklestick, importers of hides, etc., Ninth Avenue, New York; Moses Block, importer of rubber; James January Jones, of San Francisco, promoter and financier; Randolph Fitts, of Boston, the well-known architect; Percy Knapendyke, the celebrated naturalist; Michael O'Malley Malone, of the law firm of Eads,

Blixton, Solomon, Carlson, Vecchiavalli, Revitsky, Perkins & Malone, New York; William Spinney, of the Chicago Police force, (and his prisoner, “Soapy” Shay, diamond thief); Denby Flattner, the taxidermist; Morris Shine, the motion picture magnate; Madame Careni-Amori, soprano from the Royal Opera, Rome; Signer Joseppi, the new tenor, described as the logical successor to the great Caruso; Madame Obosky and three lesser figures in the Russian Ballet, who were coming to the United States to head a long-heralded tour, “by special arrangement with the Czar”; Buck Chizler, the famous jockey,—and so on.

These were the names most conspicuously displayed by the newspapers during the anxious, watchful days and weeks that succeeded the sailing of the Doraine from the port in the Tropic of Capricorn.

Dozens of cities in the United States were represented by one or more persons on board the Doraine, travellers of both sexes who, being denied the privilege of a customary dash to Europe for the annual holiday, resolved not to be deprived of their right to wander, nor the right to return when they felt inclined. Whilom, defiant rovers in search of change, they scoffed at conditions and went their way regardless of the peril that stalked the seas. In the main they were money-spending, time-dragging charges against the resources of a harassed, bewildered government, claiming protection in return for arrogance.

Far to the south, off the Falkland Islands, at the bottom of the sea, lay the battered hulls of what ware supposed to be the last of the German fighting-ships in South Atlantic waters. Report had it, however, that several well-armed cruisers had either escaped the hurricane of shells from the British warships, or had been detached from the squadron before the encounter took place. In any event, no vessel left a South American port without maintaining a sharp lookout for prowling survivors of the vanquished fleet, and no passenger went aboard who did not experience the thrill of a hazardous undertaking. The ever-present and ever-ready individual with official information from sources that could not be questioned, travelled with remarkable regularity on each and every craft that ventured out upon the Hun-infested waters. In the smoke-room the invariable word went round that raiders were sinking everything in sight. Every ship that sailed had on board at least one individual who claimed to have been chased on a former voyage by a blockade-breaker,—(according to the most reliable reports, the Germans were slipping warships through the vaunted British net with the most astounding ease and frequency,)—and there was no one with the hardihood or desire to question his veracity; indeed, it was something of a joy to believe him, for was he not a living and potential document to prove that the merchant marine could outwit, outrace and outshoot the German pirates?

The Doraine was barely twenty-four hours out from port and ploughing along steadily through a choppy sea when Mr. Mott, the First Officer, reported to Captain Trigger that a stowaway had been found on board.

“German?” inquired Captain Trigger tersely.

“No, sir. At least, he doesn't look it and, what's more, he doesn't act it. Claims to be American born and bred.”

“That's what a great many Germans are claiming these days, Mr. Mott. We can't take any chances, you know. Where was he found?”

Mr. Mott cleared his throat. “Ahem! He wasn't what you might call found, sir. As a matter of fact, he applied in person to the Chief Engineer about half an hour ago and asked for a job. He said he was perfectly willing to work out his passage home. Mr. Gray had him conducted to me, sir,—rather sharply guarded, of course,—and he—”

“Fetch him here at once, Mr. Mott,” commanded Captain Trigger. “I'll hear what he has to say first hand.”

“Very well, sir.” Mr. Mott started away, hesitated, rubbed his chin dubiously, and then came back. “He's having a bit of breakfast, sir, and has asked for the loan of Mr. Codge's razors—”

“What?” roared the captain.

“I informed him he would have to appear before you at once, sir, and he said he was quite willing to do so, but would it be possible for him to tidy up a bit beforehand. I am obliged to confess, sir, that I have never encountered a more interesting stowaway in all my career, which leads me to confess still further that I gave orders to feed him,—he hasn't had a mouthful to eat since we left port, owing to the fact, he says, that his luggage shifted the first day out and try as he would he couldn't locate it without a match, or something to that effect,—he rather stumped me, sir, with the graceful way he lies,—and then Mr. Codge agreed to let him take one of his razors, and when I left him below, sir, it seemed quite certain that Mr. Gray was on the point of lending him a shirt and a change of underwear. I—”

“Good God, sir!” gasped Captain Trigger, with something more than emotion in his voice. “What is this you are telling me?”

“He seems a most likeable chap,” explained Mr. Mott lamely. “Quite a courteous fellow, too, sir. I forgot to mention that he sent his compliments to you and asks for an interview at your earliest conven—”

“Asked for an interview? Drag him here at once—by the heels, if necessary.

Tell him I shan't keep him waiting an instant," said the captain ironically.

Mr. Mott still hesitated. "In the event, sir, that he is in the midst of shaving—"

"I don't care a hang what he's in the midst of," exclaimed Captain Trigger. "Even in the midst of changing shirts. Present my compliments to him, Mr. Mott, and say that he needn't dress up on my account. I am an old-fashioned sailor-man. It is nothing new to me to see men who haven't shaved in a fortnight, and others who never change shirts."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Mott, and departed.

Presently he reappeared with the stowaway in charge.

Captain Trigger beheld a well set-up young man of medium height, with freshly shaven chin and jaws, carefully brushed hair, spotless white shirt and collar, and,—revealed in a quick glance,—recently scrubbed hands. His brown Norfolk jacket was open, and he carried a brand new, though somewhat shapeless pan-ama hat in his hand. Evidently he had ceased fanning himself with it at the moment of entering the captain's presence. The keen, good-looking face was warm and moist as the result of a most violent soaping. He wore corduroy riding-breeches, cavalry boots that betrayed their age in spite of a late polishing at the hands of an energetic and carefully directed bootblack, and a broad leather belt from which only half an eye was required to see that a holster had been detached with a becoming regard for neatness. His hair was thick and sun-bleached; his eyes, dark and unafraid, met the stern gaze of the captain with directness and respect; his lips and chin were firm in repose, but they might easily be the opposite if relaxed; his skin was so tanned and wind-bitten that the whites of his eyes were startlingly defined and vivid. He was not a tall man,—indeed, one would have been justified in suspecting him of being taller than he really was because of the more or less deceiving erectness with which he carried himself. As a matter of fact, he was not more than five feet ten or ten and a half.

Captain Trigger eyed him narrowly for a moment.

"What is your name?"

"A. A. Percival, sir."

"Your full name, young man. No initials."

The stowaway seemed to add an inch to his height before replying.

"Algernon Adonis Percival, sir," he said, a very clear note of defiance in his voice.

The Captain looked at the First Officer, and the First Officer, after a brief stare at the speaker, looked at the Captain.

“It's his right name, you can bet, sir,” said Mr. Mott, with conviction. “Nobody would voluntarily give himself a name like that.”

“You never can tell about these Americans, Mr. Mott,” said the Captain warily. “They've got what they call a keen sense of humour, you know.”

Mr. Percival smiled. His teeth were very white and even.

“I am a first and only child,” he explained. “That ought to account for it, sir,” he went on, a trifle defensively.

Captain Trigger did not smile. Mr. Mott, however, looked distinctly sympathetic.

“You say you are an American,—a citizen of the United States?” demanded the former.

“Yes, sir. My home is in Baltimore.”

“Baltimore?” repeated Mr. Mott quickly. “That's where Mr. Gray hails from, sir,” he added, as a sort of apology to the Captain for the exclamation.

The Captain's gaze settled on the stowaway's spotless white shirt and collar. Then he nodded his head slowly.

“Mr. Gray is the Chief Engineer,” he explained, with mock courtesy.

“Yes, sir,—I know,” responded Percival. “He comes of one of the oldest and most highly connected families in Baltimore. He informs me that his father—”

“Never mind!” snapped the Captain. “We need not discuss Mr. Gray's antecedents. How old are you?”

“Thirty last Friday, sir.”

“Married?”

“No, sir.”

“Parents living?”

“No, sir.”

“And now, what the devil do you mean by sneaking aboard this ship and hiding yourself in the—by the way, Mr. Mott, where was he hiding?”

Mr. Mott: “It doesn't seem to be quite clear as yet, sir.”

Captain Trigger: “What's that?”

Mr. Mott: “I say, it isn't quite clear. We have only his word for it. You see, he wasn't discovered until he accosted Mr. Shannon on the bridge and asked—”

Captain Trigger: “On the bridge, Mr. Mott?”

Mr. Mott: “That is to say, sir, Mr. Shannon was on the bridge and he was

below on the promenade deck. He asked Mr. Shannon if he was the Captain of the boat."

Captain Trigger: "He did, eh? Well?"

Mr. Mott: "He was informed that you were at breakfast, sir,—no one suspecting him of being a stowaway, of course,—and then, it appears, he started out to look for you. That's how he fell in with the Chief Engineer. Mr. Gray informs me that he applied for work, admitting that he was aboard without leave, or passage, or funds, or anything else, it would seem. But, as for where he lay in hiding, there hasn't been anything definite arrived at as yet, sir. He seems to have been hiding in a rather wide-spread sort of way."

Mr. Percival, amiably: "Permit me to explain, Captain Trigger. You see, I have been obliged to change staterooms three times. Naturally, that might be expected to create some little confusion in my mind. I began in the second cabin. Much to my surprise and chagrin I found, too late, that the stateroom I had chosen,—at random, I may say,—was merely in the state of being prepared for a lady and gentleman who had asked to be transferred from a less desirable one. I had some difficulty in getting out of it without attracting attention. I don't know what I should have done if the steward hadn't informed them that he could not move their steamer-trunk until morning. There wouldn't have been room for both of us under the berth, sir. If the gentleman had been alone I shouldn't have minded in the least remaining, under his berth, but he—"

Captain Trigger: "How did you happen to get into that room, young man? The doors are never unlocked when the rooms are unoccupied."

Mr. Percival: "You are mistaken, sir. I found at least three stateroom doors unlocked that night, and my search was by no means extensive."

Captain Trigger: "This is most extraordinary, Mr. Mott,—if true."

Mr. Mott: "It shall be looked into, sir."

Captain Trigger: "Go on, young man."

Mr. Percival: "I tried another room in the second cabin, but had to abandon it also. It had no regular occupant,—it was Number 221 remember,—but along about midnight two men opened the door with a key and came in. They were stewards. I gathered that they were getting the room ready for someone else, so when they departed,—very quietly, sir,—I sneaked out and decided to try for accommodations in the first cabin. I—"

Mr. Mott: "Did you say stewards?"

Mr. Percival: "That's what I took them to be."

Captain Trigger: “You are either lying, young man, or plumb crazy.”

Mr. Percival, with dignity: “The latter is quite possible, Captain,—but not the former. I managed quite easily to get from the second cabin to the first. You'd be surprised to know how simple it was. Running without lights as you do, sir, simplified things tremendously. I found a very sick and dejected Jewish gentleman trying to die in the least exposed corner of the promenade deck. At least, he said he didn't want to live. I offered to put him to bed and to sit up with him all night if it would make him feel a little less like passing away. He lurched at the chance. I accompanied him to his stateroom, and so got a few much-needed hours of repose, despite his groans. I also ate his breakfast for him. Skirmishing around this morning, I found there were no unoccupied rooms in the first cabin, so I decided that we were far enough from land for me to reveal myself to the officer of the day,—if that's what you call 'em on board ship,—with a very honest and laudable desire to work my passage home. I can only add, Captain, that I am ready and willing to do anything from swabbing floors on the upper deck to passing coal at the bottom of the ship.”

Captain Trigger stared hard at the young man, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

“You appear to be a gentleman,” he said at last. “Why are you on board this ship as a stowaway? Don't you know that I can put you in irons, confine you to the brig, and put you ashore at the first port of call?”

“Certainly, sir. That's just what I am trying to avoid. As a gentleman, I am prepared to do everything in my power to relieve you of what must seem a most painful official duty.”

Mr. Mott smiled. The Captain stiffened perceptibly.

“How did you come aboard this ship?” he demanded.

“As a coal passer, sir. Day before yesterday, when you were getting in the last lot of coal. I had a single five dollar gold piece in my pocket. It did the trick. With that seemingly insignificant remnant of a comfortable little fortune, I induced one of the native coal carriers,—a Portuguese nobleman, I shall always call him,—to part with his trousers, shirt and hat. I slipped 'em on over my own clothes, stuffed my boots and socks inside my shirt, picked up his basket of coal, and walked aboard. It isn't necessary, I suppose, to state that my career as a dock-hand ceased with that solitary basket of coal, or that having once put foot aboard the Doraine, I was in a position to book myself as a passenger.”

“Well, I'm damned!” said Captain Trigger. “Some one shall pay for this carelessness, Mr. Mott. I've never heard of anything so cool. What did you say

your name is, young man?”

“A. A. Percival, sir.”

“Ah—ahem! I see. Will it offend you, A. A., if I make so bold as to inquire why the devil you neglected to book your passage in the regular way, as any gentleman from Baltimore might have been expected to do, and where is your passport, your certificate of health, your purse and your discharge from prison?”

Mr. Percival spread out his hands in a gesture of complete surrender.

“Would you be interested in my story, Captain Trigger? It is brief, but edifying. When I arrived in town, the evening before you were to sail, I had a wallet well-filled with gold, currency, and so forth. I had travelled nearly two thousand miles,—from the foothills of the Andes, to be more definite,—and I had my papers, my cancelled contract, and a clear right-of-way, so to speak. My personal belongings were supposed to have arrived in town on the train with me. A couple of cow-hide trunks, in fact. Well, they didn't arrive. I don't know what became of them. I had no time to investigate. This was the last boat I could get for two or three weeks that would land me in the U. S. A. I put up at the Alcazar Grand for the night. It was then too late to secure passage, but I fully intended to do so the first thing in the morning. There was a concert and dance at the hotel that night, and I went in to look on for awhile. I ran across a friend, an engineer who was on the job with me up in the hills a few months ago. He is also an American, a chap from Providence, Rhode Island. Connected with the consular service now. He was with a small party of Americans,—am I boring you?”

“No, no,—get on with it,” urged Captain Trigger.

“Several of them were sailing on this ship, and they were having a little farewell party. That, however, has nothing to do with the case. I left them at midnight and went up to my room. Now comes the part you will not believe. During the night,—I sleep very soundly,—some one entered my room, rifled my pockets, and got away with everything I possessed, except my clothes and the five-dollar gold piece I have carried ever since I left home,—as a lucky coin, you know. He—”

“How did he happen to overlook your lucky coin?” inquired the Captain sarcastically.

“Because it couldn't be a lucky coin if I carried it in my purse. No coin is ever lucky that gets into my purse, Captain. I always kept it tightly sewed up in the band of my trousers, safe from the influence of evil companions. I did not discover the loss until morning. It was then too late to do anything, as you were sailing at eight. My Providence friend was not available. I knew no one else. But

I was determined to sail on the Doraine. That's the story, sir, in brief. I leave it to you if I wasn't justified in doing the best I could under the circumstances."

Captain Trigger was not as fierce as he looked. He could not keep the twinkle out of his eye.

"We will see about that," he managed to say with commendable gruffness. "Assuming that your story is true, why are you in such a tremendous hurry to reach the United States? Skipping out for some reason, eh?"

"Well," said the young man slowly, "you see, news is a long time getting out into the wilderness where I've been located for a couple of years. We knew, of course, that there was a war on, but we didn't know how it was progressing. Down here in this part of the world we have a war every two or three months, and we've got so used to having 'em over within a week or two that we just naturally don't pay much attention to them. We don't even care who wins. But a couple of months ago we got word up there that the United States had finally got into it with everybody under the sun, and that the Germans were bound to win if we didn't get a couple of million men across in pretty short order. I am thirty years old, Captain, strong and healthy, and I'm a good American. That's why I want to get home. I've told you the truth about being robbed. I don't mind losing the money,—only a couple of thousand pesos, you know,—but if you chuck me off at the next port of call, Captain Trigger, I'll curse you to my dying day. I'm willing to work, I'm willing to be put in irons, I'm willing to get along on bread and water, but you've just got to land me in the United States. You are an Englishman. I suppose you've got relatives over in France fighting the Germans. Maybe you've had some one killed who is dear to you."

"My youngest son was killed in Flanders," said the Captain simply.

"I am sorry, sir. Well, for every Englishman and every Frenchman who has died over there, my country ought to supply some one to take his place. I expect to be one of those men, Captain. I have no other excuse for coming aboard your ship as a stowaway."

The Captain still eyed him narrowly.

"I believe you are honest, young man. If I am deceived in you I shall never trust the eyes of another man as long as I live. Sit down, Mr. Percival. I shall put you to work, never fear, but in the meantime I am very much interested in what you were doing up in the hills. You will oblige me by going as fully as possible into all the details. I shall not pass judgment on you until I've heard all of your story."

CHAPTER II.

Algernon Adonis Percival, civil and mining engineer, Cornell, had gone through certain rather harsh stages of development in the mines of Montana and later in the perilous districts of Northern Mexico. A year or two prior to the breaking out of the great World War, he was sent to South America to replace the general superintendent of a new copper-mining enterprise in a remote section of the Andes, on the Bolivian side of the mountains. Here he was in charge of the heterogeneous horde of miners, labourers, structural workers and assayists who were engaged in the development and extension of the vast concession controlled by his company.

His description of the camp or town in which this motley assemblage dwelt from one year's end to the other, far from civilization, was illuminating to the two sea-faring men. It must be confessed, however, that a sound reluctance to swallow the tale without the proverbial grain of salt caused them to watch closely for the slightest sign that might reveal to them the always-to-be expected and seldom successful duplicity so common in those harrowing days when all men were objects of suspicion. From time to time they glanced inquiringly at each other, but the stranger's story was so straightforward, so lacking in personal exploitation, so free from unnecessary detail, that they were finally convinced that he was all that he represented himself to be and that they had nothing to fear from him.

His long, hazardous journey by horse through the passes down into the forests and jungles, out upon the endless, sparsely settled pampas, and eventually into the remote village that witnessed the passing every second day of a primitive and far from dependable railway train, was presented with agreeable simplicity and conciseness. He passed briefly over what might have been expanded into grave experiences, and at last came, so to speak, to the gates of the city, unharmed, resolute and full of the fire that knows no quenching.

“By the way,” observed the Captain, still wary, “has it occurred to you we may be justified in suspecting that you deserted your post up there in the hills, and that you have betrayed the confidence of your employers?” Percival had completed what he evidently believed to be a full and satisfactory account of himself.

“I was in full charge up there, Captain Trigger. My contract had but a month

more to run. I appointed my own successor, and the company will not be any the worse off for the change. My letter to headquarters, announcing my decision not to renew the contract, went forward two weeks before I left the camp. I merely anticipated the actual termination of my contract by a month or so, and as I handed my resignation at once to my own newly appointed superintendent, I submit that I acted in absolute good faith. I may say that he accepted it without a word of protest, sir. As a matter of fact, I told him in advance that I wouldn't appoint him unless he agreed to accept my resignation."

The Captain smiled at this ingenuous explanation.

"I daresay I ought to put you under guard, Mr. Percival," he said. "My duty is very plain. A stowaway is a stowaway, no matter how you look at him. The regulations do not leave me any choice. Maritime justice is rarely tempered by mercy. However, under the circumstances, I am inclined to accept your word of honour that you will not violate your parole if I refrain from putting you in irons. Have I your word of honour that you will not leave this ship until I hand you over to the proper authorities in the United States?"

"You have, sir."

"You are a very head-strong, ambitious young man. You will not jump overboard and try to beat us into port under your own steam?"

"You may trust me, sir, never to give up the ship."

"And you will kill as many Germans as possible?"

"Yes, sir," said A. A. Percival submissively.

Captain Trigger arose and extended his hand.

"I've never done anything like this before in all my years as ship's master. You ought to be flogged and stowed away in the brig until you show a properly subdued spirit, young man. I suppose you've heard of the cat-o'-nine-tails?"

"My reading up to the age of fifteen was confined almost exclusively to the genteel histories of pirates, buccaneers and privateersmen, Captain Trigger," announced A. A. Percival, taking the master's hand in a firm grip. "I wonder if you know what a black-snake whip is, or a cattle-adder? Well, they're both painful and convincing. As director of morals in the camp I have just left behind me, it was my official duty on frequent occasions to see to it that current offenders had from fifteen to fifty applications of the black-snake in a public sort of way. The black-snake, I may explain, could be wielded by a strong but unskilled arm. It was different, however, with the cattle-adder. That had to be handled by an expert, one who could stand off twenty paces, more or less, and

crack the long lash with such astonishing precision that the tip end of it barely touched the back of the culprit, the result being a nobby assortment of splotches that looked for all the world like hives after the blood got back into them again. You see, I was chief magistrate, executioner ex-officio, chief of police, jury commissioner—in fact, an all-around potentate. Sort of Pooh-bah, you know. For serious offences, such as wife beating, wife stealing, or having more than one wife at a time, we were not so lenient. The offender, on conviction, was strung up by the thumbs and used as a target by amateurs who desired to become proficient in the use of the cattle-adder. Murderers were attended to a trifle more expeditiously. They were strung up by the neck."

"Good God, man,—do you mean to say you hung men in that off-hand fashion?" cried Captain Trigger, aghast.

"Not without a fair trial, sir. No innocent man was ever hung. There was no such thing as circumstantial evidence in that camp. The guilty man was always taken red-handed. We had good laws and they were rigidly enforced. There was no other way, sir. Short, sharp and decisive. It's the best way. Men understand that sort of thing and honest men approve of the method. You see, gentlemen, we had a hard lot of characters to deal with. I wish to add, however, that before I had been up there six months we had a singularly law-abiding and self-respecting camp. Crime was not tolerated, not even by the men who had once been criminals. If two men quarrelled, they were allowed to fight it out fairly and squarely in any way they could agree upon. Knives, hatchets and all other messy weapons were barred. It was either fists, pistols or rifles at a fairly long range, and under the strictest rules. Duels were fought according to Hoyle, and were witnessed by practically every one in camp. You will perceive that Copperhead Camp was no place for a coward or a bluffer or a bully. It takes a brave man to fight a duel with a chap who may be only half as big as he is, but who can shoot like the devil. So you see, Captain Trigger, the cat-o'-nine-tails has no terror for me."

Mr. Mott regarded the young man with wide-open, somewhat incredulous eyes.

"You don't look like a fire-eating, swashbuckling party to me," he said.

"I am the most peaceable chap you've ever seen, Mr. Mott. You needn't be alarmed. I'm not going to bite a hole in the ship and scuttle her. Moreover, I am a very meek and lowly individual on board this ship. There's a lot of difference between being in supreme command with all kinds of authority to bolster you up and being a rat in a trap as I am now. Up in Copperhead Camp I was a nabob, here I'm a nobody. Up there I was the absolute boss of five or six hundred men,

—I won't say I could boss the women,—and I made 'em all walk chalk without once losing step. There were murderers and crooks, blacklegs and gunmen in my genial aggregation, men whose true names we never knew, men who were wanted in every part of the civilized world. The only place on earth, I suppose, where they could feel reasonably at home was in that gosh-awful nowhere that we called Copperhead Camp. You can't handle such men with mittens. And there were good men there as well,—good, strong, righteous men. They were the leaven that made the whole thing palatable. Without them I could have had no authority. But I dare say I am boring you. The present situation is the one we're interested in, not the lordly past of your humble and, I trust, obedient servant."

His smile was most engaging, but back of it the two seamen read strength, decision, integrity. The gay, bantering, whilom attitude of this unusual young man was not assumed. It was not a pose. He was not a dare-devil, nor was he a care-free, unstable youth who had matured abruptly in the exercise of power. On the contrary, he was,—and Captain Trigger knew it,—the personification of confidence, an optimist to whom victory and defeat are equally unavoidable and therefore to be reckoned as one in the vast scheme of human endeavour; a fighter who merely rests on his arms but never lays them down; a spirit that absorbs the bitters and the sweets of life with equal relish.

Captain Trigger was not slow in making up his mind. This clean-minded, clean-bodied American with the confident though respectful smile, was a chap after his own heart.

"I hardly know what to do with you, Percival," he said, a scowl of genuine perplexity in his eyes. "You are not an ordinary transgressor. You are a gentleman. You have exercised an authority perhaps somewhat similar to my own,—possibly in some respects your position up there was even more autocratic, if I may use the term. I am not unconscious of all this, and yet I have no choice other than that designated by law. The regulations are unalterable. It is a matter of morale, pure and simple. We are compelled to treat all stowaways alike. Of course, I shall not subject you to the ordinary—shall we say methods of —"

"Pardon me, Captain," broke in the young man, his smile no longer in evidence; "I am asking no favours. I expect to be treated as an ordinary stowaway. Set me to work at anything you like and I will make as good a job of it as possible."

"I was about to suggest that you serve as a sort of assistant to Mr. Codge, the purser. I've no doubt he could find something for you to do and—"

“If that is your way of punishing me, Captain Trigger, of course there is nothing for me to do but to submit.”

“Eh? I am sure you will not find Mr. Codge a hard taskmaster. He is quite a good-natured man.”

“Extremely kind and considerate,” hastily added Mr. Mott, reassuringly.

“But I don't want to loaf my passage home,” protested Percival. “I want to be sentenced to the hardest sort of labour, if you don't mind. I don't want to owe this steamship company a penny when I step ashore. It is your duty, sir, as master of this ship, to put me on the meanest job you've got.”

“My word!” exclaimed Captain Trigger.

“I'm blessed!” said Mr. Mott.

“Up where I've been running things and cock-walking like a foreman in a shirt-waist factory, I made the rules and I enforced them. I want to say to you that no favours were shown. If the Prince of Wales had drifted in there, dead broke, and asked for something to eat, he would have got it, but you bet your life he'd have had to work for it. A tramp's a tramp, no matter how much purple he's been used to, and you can say the same for a stowaway. What's the matter with me taking the place of one of those deck-hands, or whatever you call 'em, you lost last night?”

“What's that?”

“Swabbers, maybe you call 'em. Men that mop up the decks after everybody else has turned in.”

“What are you talking about?” demanded the Captain, sitting up very straight. Percival stared at him in astonishment.

“I thought you knew about it, of course. Good Lord, sir, don't you know that a couple of your men jumped overboard last night,—or early this morning, rather? Just as the ship was rounding that big headland—”

“Good God, man, are you in earnest?” cried Mr. Mott, starting toward the door.

“I certainly am. I took them for deserters, of course,—not suicides, because they didn't forget to put on life preservers before they jumped. I haven't a doubt they were picked up, so there's no use worrying. A minute or two after they went over,—from the bottom deck or whatever you call it,—I heard a motor boat popping away like a gatling-gun not far,—”

But he was alone. Captain Trigger had dashed out of the cabin in the wake of the First Officer.

Algernon Adonis Percival stared blankly at the open door.

“Good Lord, why all this excitement over a couple of bums?” he said, addressing space. “If they were working for me, I'd thank the Lord to be rid of 'em so cheaply. They—Hello!”

The Second Officer popped into the room.

“Come along with me,” he snapped. “Lively, now. Just where and when did you see a couple of men go overboard? Quietly, now. We don't want to alarm the passengers.”

Within five minutes after Percival's disturbing report, the officers of the Doraine, with set faces, were employed in a swift but silent investigation. Before many more minutes had passed, at least a portion of the stowaway's story had been verified. Two men were found to be missing, although, strange to say, they had not been missed up to the time that noses were counted. They were down on the ship's roster as Norwegians, New York registry, and had come down with the Doraine on her trip from the north.

Percival repeated his story, but had little to add in the way of detail. He had stolen on deck some time after midnight for a breath of air, risking detection, and from the shelter of a secluded corner well aft had heard the two men swabbing the deck below. Suddenly they ceased work, and he prepared to creep back to a place of safety, concluding that they were on their way to the upper deck.

He went to the rail to listen. The two men were almost directly below him, and he could see the upper portions of their figures as they leaned far out over the rail, apparently looking into the swirling waters below. Quite distinctly he heard one of them say, in English: “We got to do it now or never.” The other mumbled something he could not distinguish. He was only mildly interested, not anticipating what was to follow. For a few seconds he heard them scrambling and puffing and then he saw them quite plainly on the rail, their figures bulky with what he identified as life buoys, a faint light from somewhere falling directly upon the grayish-white objects in which they were swathed.

One of them uttered the word “Now!” and to his amazement they shot out, as one man, into the black-ness below. There was a single splash. For a moment or two he stood spell-bound. Then he heard some one running along the deck below. Convinced that the incident had been witnessed by others, he darted into the companion-way and made his way back to the stateroom of the sick passenger. Through the lightless porthole he listened for the terrifying shout, “Man overboard!” It did not come, but his ear caught the staccato beat of a motor near by, striking up abruptly out of the swish of rushing waters. In his

ignorance, he decided that it was a boat from the ship going to the rescue of the daring deserters, and calmly waited for the engines of the mighty Doraine to cease their rhythmic pulsing. He fell asleep.

When he awoke, he concluded that he had dreamed the whole thing. This conclusion was justified when he asked his wretched “bunkie” if he had observed him leaving the room during the night. The answer was a mournful negative, followed by the sufferer's more or less positive declaration that he was staring wide awake the whole damned night long.

Percival, unconvinced, boldly made his way to the lower deck and discovered that two life buoys were missing from their supports, a circumstance that put an end to the hope that he had dreamed it all. His own affairs however now loomed large, taking precedence over the plight of the men who had deliberately abandoned the ship. In any case, the ship's officers had done everything that could be done in the matter. He was genuinely astonished to learn that the act of the two men was unknown to the Captain.

A hurried conference of the ship's officers and the commander of the gun-crew resulted in a single but definite conclusion. The desperate, even suicidal manner in which the men left the ship signified but one thing: the absolute necessity of flight before an even more sinister peril confronted them. Not a man on board doubted for an instant that they had taken their chance in the waters as a part of a preconceived plan, and they had taken it with all the devilish hardihood of fanatics.

The presence of the motor craft, so far out from port, lurking with silent engine in the path of the steamship, could have but one significance. It represented one of the carefully thought-out details in a stupendous, far-reaching plot.

If there were signals between the motor boat and the two men aboard the steamship, they were not observed by the lookouts. In all probability no signals were given. The little craft was to be at a certain place at a certain hour,—and she was there! The men who jumped knew that she would be there. A black, tiny speck on the broad expanse of water, sheltered by a night of almost stygian darkness, she lay outside the narrow radius to which visual observation was confined, patiently waiting for the Doraine to pass a designated point. There was to be no miscalculation on the part of either the boat or the men who went over the side of the big steamship into the seething waters.

The closest inquiry among the members of the crew failed to reveal any one who had witnessed the leap of the men. Percival was positive, however, that

some one ran along the lower deck, but whether toward or away from the spot where the men went over he had no means of knowing. He offered the suggestion that there were three persons actually involved, and that one of them, more than likely the victim of a coin-flipping decision, had remained on board to complete the work the trio had been chosen to perform, even though death was to be his lot.

The Second Officer had been regarding Percival with ever-growing suspicion.

“Is there anything to prove, young man, that you are not the one who stayed behind to complete the job?” he demanded at last.

“Nothing,” said Percival promptly, and somewhat scathingly, “nothing at all, except the trifling fact that I am here talking it over with you gentlemen instead of attending to my business, as any honest conspirator should be doing. You may be quite sure of one thing: if there is a man on board this ship whose business it is to finish the job, he isn't idle. He's getting on with the job at this minute, gentlemen. If you'll take my advice you will institute two investigations. First, search the ship from stem to stern, from keel to bridge, for bombs or infernal machines. Second, ask your rich passengers if they have lost anything in the shape of pearls, diamonds, coin of the realm, or anything else worth jumping into the ocean for.”

Captain Trigger looked at him over the top of his eye-glasses.

“You are not in Copperhead Camp at present, Mr. Percival,” he said stiffly.

The young man flushed. “I beg your pardon, Captain Trigger,” he said simply.

“All you have to do,” said the Second Officer, fixing him with an inimical eye, “is to answer questions and not to tell us how to run this ship.”

Percival did his best to hold back the retort, but, failing, released it with considerable sharpness:

“Well, if I was running this ship I'd head her for shore pretty damned quick.”

The American in command of the gun-crew was the only one who smiled, and he did it openly. Captain Trigger's face darkened redly.

“Take this man in charge, Mr. Shannon. He wants work. Give it him. Under guard.”

“Am I suspected, Captain Trigger, of being in league—”

“Every man, every woman on board this ship is suspected,” said the Captain with decision. “Every one, sir, from myself down. The rest of us grasp that fact, even if you do not.”

And so it was that while Algernon Adonis Percival, under the watchful eye of

a burly seaman, fell to work scraping the scuppers on the boat deck, the stern business of searching the ship went forward with a thoroughness that left no room for doubt as to the fears and apprehensions of the men who had her in charge. Despite the fact that intensive, anxious hours of delving revealed no hidden, sinister agent of destruction, there was no relaxation on the part of the officers and crew. One by one the passengers were examined; their rooms and their luggage were systematically overhauled. No one resented these drastic operations, for by midday the whole ship's company knew what had transpired during the night. Eagerly they answered the questions, cheerfully they submitted to the examination of their effects, and then fell silent and subdued, oppressed by the suspense that hung over the ship like a cloud. Crew and passengers alike underwent the most rigid questioning, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the young and the old.

Early that morning, in fact some time prior to the time that Percival told his story, the wireless operator reported that his transmitter was out of order. While he was satisfied that the apparatus had not been tampered with, he was plainly affected by the rather grim coincidence. He was an old and trusted man in the service, competent, efficient and loyal.

His assistant, the night operator, however, had made less than half a dozen voyages on the Doraine. He was an Englishman, a cripple; twice he had been rescued after vessels on which he sailed were sent to the bottom by German submarines. His credentials were flawless. He was on duty during the night just past, and had picked up several indistinct, incomplete radio messages. There was nothing wrong with the receiving or transmitting apparatus when he went off duty at six in the morning, and as his superior came on at the same hour,—they exchanged greetings at the door of the wireless house,—it was absolutely impossible for any one to have entered the well-guarded room without attracting attention. Cruise, the chief radio-man, had his assistant routed out of bed and together they worked like beavers over the disabled mechanism.

Hour after hour, the nervous, uneasy passengers paced the decks. Few remained indoors, and few possessed the calmness to loll in deck-chairs.

Percival toiled cheerfully, but with eye and ear alert for the first inkling of definite peril. With commendable thoughtfulness, he had shed the clean white shirt and collar so generously supplied by his fellow townsman, and had donned a commodious sea-jacket.

He could not help observing the dark, suspicious glances cast upon him by the deck-walkers, nor were his ears proof against audible comments. Mothers nudged their children and said, in slightly lowered but distinctly impressive

tones:

“That's the man. He's a stowaway.”

“See, Wilfred,—see the man? No, no! The one with the mop, dear. Don't go near him.”

“What a dreadful looking creature he is.”

“The Captain captured him this morning away down in the bottom of the ship. He was stealing a ride.”

“Poor fellow! He doesn't look like a bad man, does he?”

And so on and so forth, as the day went along.

Masculine strollers had very decided opinions about him. Mr. Landover, the banker, stopped to discuss the toiling menial with Mr. Nicklestick, Mr. Block and Mr. Fitts.

“He ought to be in irons,” said Mr. Landover, glowering at Percival. “That's what I told the Captain a little while ago. He's a bad egg, that fellow is. I'm a pretty good judge of men, gentlemen, and I don't often make mistakes. That fellow is a fugitive from justice, if he isn't something worse. Observe the cut of his mouth—ah! see that? What did I tell you? Did you ever see a more evil grin?”

“Take it from me,” said Mr. Nicklestick, “that guy knows a good deal more about what is going on aboard this ship than he lets on. He ain't as simple as he looks. I told Captain Trigger just now that he ought to give him a dose of the third degree. That's the way to get to the bottom of this business. String him up by the thumbs till he squeals. What say, Mr. Fitts?”

Mr. Fitts, the architect, was a mild man.

“He strikes me as a rather honest looking sort of chap,” he said, and was promptly glared at by his companions. “Of course,” he hastened to add, “I am not saying that he is all right. He may be as crooked as the deuce. I'm only saying he's got a rather pleasing sort of face.”

“The most innocent, open-faced young fellow we ever had in the bank,” said Mr. Landover, “turned out to be the damnedest rascal I've ever encountered.”

“How did you happen to have him in the bank if you are such a good judge of men?” inquired Mr. Fitts, utterly without malice.

Mr. Landover reddened. “My dear sir, I do not come in contact with every employe of the bank. You forget that it is quite an immense institution.”

“It sure is,” said Mr. Nicklestick. “I'm thinking of transferring our account to

your bank, Mr. Landover. We've been banking with—”

“I vas telling my vife at lunch,” broke in Mr. Block, twitching his Hebraic nose emphatically,—“not that we could eat any lunch, by gracious, no!—I vas telling her I bet my boots dere ain't enough life-boats to get as much as half of us off safe in case something happens. I counted up all the life-boats I could see, and ven I estimate the number of peoples on board, w'y, by gracious, the loss of life vould be frightful, gentlemen. The only chance we would haf would be for approxi-madely fifty percent of the peoples on board to be killed outright by the explosion.”

“I hear there is a detective from Chicago on board, with a prisoner,” ventured Mr. Fitts. “Why doesn't the Captain ask him to have a look at this stowaway fellow?”

“What would be the good of that?” demanded Mr. Landover. “I never saw a detective in my life that knew what to do in an emergency. Soon as you get one of them where he can't telephone in to headquarters for instructions he's as helpless as a baby. Don't talk to me about detectives. Why, this fellow would simply laugh in his face.”

“Just, as he is laughing in yours at this moment, Mr. Landover,” pursued Mr. Fitts pleasantly.

“The damned rascal,” said Mr. Landover, and stalked away.

“There goes one of the biggest figures in the United States,” said Mr. Nicklestick, looking after the banker. His remark was addressed to Mr. Fitts. “I wish I had his brains.”

“Dey vouldn't do you any good, Nicklestick,” said Mr. Block, “unless you had his money too also.”

“If I had his brains,” said Mr. Nicklestick, “he wouldn't have his money, so what's the difference?”

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Block looked uneasily out over the tumbling ocean, focusing his gaze on a section of the horizon that for want of something more definite than mere hope lay in a direct line with the City of New York.

“And ven you stop to think,” said he wistfully, “that we are still something like six thousand miles from home,—oh, veil! Vat's the use? I bet you I never go so far avay from my business again. Vat a fool I vas to make this trip ven the whole ocean is full of submarines and German agents and plotters and—Yes, vat a fool ven I had so many high-priced men vorking for me who vas crazy to come. But my vife she vould do it. Paris and London every year it used to be, so she must haf a little holiday or she vill die, she say. Veil, here we are. And ven I think vat a long holiday it is going to be maybe,—by gracious, I could kick myself for not giving in to my brother-in-law ven he begged so hard to be allowed to make the trip because he needed the change from not being avay from the office for five years, and his vife and children too. His vife she needed a change as much as he, vat with not being able to get into any good hotels in the summer time and not being able to keep out of them in the vinter time, she vas nearly distracted. No, I vas selfish. My vife she vas selfish too,—and him her own brother. Vy shouldn't he haf a vacation vonce in awhile?”

He turned abruptly to the sailor who lounged near the perspiring Percival.

“How far is it to land, my frient?” he inquired.

The sailor touched his cap. “Which way, sir?” he asked solemnly. “Fore or aft?”

(Percival said to himself: “By golly, I'll bet that man is an American.”)

“Vat? Land,—you know vat I mean,—the end of the ocean. How far avay is it?”

The sailor calculated. “Well, the nearest land, sir, I should say, is about three hundred miles away, to port.”

“How deep is it here?” asked Mr. Nicklestick, moving away from the rail suddenly.

The sailor glanced down at the water, squinted an eye, and then spoke reassuringly.

“It ain't half as deep here as it is a little furder on,” he said. “It's only a shade

over three miles where we are now, sir. We're comin' to the deepest part of the ocean,—ought to be there inside of a couple of hours. Here, you! On the job, on the job!”

“You ought to search that man carefully,” advised Mr. Nicklestick.

“I have,” growled the sailor. “He says he never uses it in that form. I guess he's tellin' the truth.”

“Never uses what?”

“Tobacco, sir.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Nicklestick, and, catching a glimpse of Madame Obosky emerging upon the deck, unceremoniously deserted his companions and hurried off to join her, his speed being suddenly accelerated by the spectacle of Mr. Shine, the motion picture magnate, who approached the lady from an equidistant station and with similar haste. Mr. Block, being a trifle near-sighted and in some doubt as to the whereabouts of his wife, peered here and there intently, and then bore down upon the celebrated Russian dancer, who, it would seem, was in dire need of consolation.

Mr. Fitts followed them with a glance over his glasses and then turned to the sailor man.

“I suppose it's against orders for me to speak to this man,” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

The architect sighed, and walked away.

The parade became more interesting as the lack of news from the investigators restored a sort of hopeful optimism to the breasts of the anxious company. Those who had maintained a stubborn air of bravado, now became almost offensively jaunty. Others, frankly terrified at the outset, sauntered timidly away from the life-boats to which they were assigned. Every one was glad that the Captain had ordered a life-boat drill on the first afternoon out, and every one was glad that he had ignored the demand of Mr. Landover that the boats be lowered the instant he discovered that his passengers were in peril. No news was good news, argued the majority, and jesting was in order.

Peter Snipe, the novelist, got out a pad of paper and began jotting down impressions. Madam Careni-Amori and Signor Joseppi exchanged the first friendly words they had spoken to each other in weeks, and in full view of an entranced audience linked arms and strode bravely to and fro, the former clasping a huge jewel case to her ample bosom, the latter chafing perceptibly under the weight of an invisible belt stuffed to its capacity with banknotes and

gold. Chilean ladies and Chilean gentlemen, dazzling Brazilian ladies and pompous Brazilian gentlemen, smug Argentinians, lordly Castilians, garrulous Portuguese, lofty English gentlemen and supercilious English ladies, friendly and irrepressible Americans,—all of them swinging their sea-legs with new-found abandon—clattered solidly around the wind-swept circuit. New faces appeared in the procession, new voices were raised with energy, new figures sprang into existence with marvellous rapidity. It seemed to Percival that the population doubled and tripled and quadrupled with every throb of the powerful engines. He saw his “bunkie” of the night before,—the man who was trying so hard to die and couldn't,—he saw him plunging along with the throng, pale but valiant, ferociously glaring at every one who smoked.

A small group of American nurses, some young and pretty, others young and homely, but all of them sprightly and clear-eyed,—nine of them, in fact—tramped by in “columns of three.”

Percival's guardian jerked his head in their direction after they had passed, and volunteered this bit of information:

“Hornswoggled, them girls was. Come all the way down from New York six months ago. Promised double pay and plenty of work in the American colony. Sore as crabs, all of 'em. They got double pay all right, all right, but there was some misunderstandin' as to what single pay was to be to start off with. Single pay turned out to be just whatever suited the people that employed 'em, seein's they were nearly seven thousand miles away from God and up against it, so they're beatin' it back home to volunteer for service in France. I heard one of 'em say she could save more money workin' for nothin' in France than she could earn in a year down here at double pay. What'd you say your name was, young feller?”

“Percival.”

“I mean your last name.”

“That's it.”

“Come off! Nobody ever had a last name like that.”

“You ought to hear what my first name is,—and my middle one, too. You said a little while ago you'd never seen any one of my size with bigger and harder muscles. Well, if you knew what my full name is, old man, you'd understand why I began developing them,—I've got a lot more too that you can't see,—when I first began going to school.”

“What is your other names?” inquired the sailor curiously.

“Algernon Adonis,” said Percival.

The sailor was silent for a moment, thinking of the proper thing to say. Then he said:

“You're dead right. It takes a heap of muscle to pertect a name like that.”

Three women stopped in front of the two men. Percival kept his eyes lowered.

“Why,—why, Auntie,—I know him,” fell from the lips of one of the trio. There was not only surprise in her voice but a trace of awe as well.

The swabber looked up quickly. He found himself gazing straight into the eyes of the speaker. Her lips were parted, her head was bent slightly forward, her eyes expressed utter incredulity and bewilderment. Her companion, an elderly lady, and a bespectacled young woman who carried an arm-load of steamer-rugs, stared not at him but at the girl who had delivered this startling announcement.

“I mean I,—that is, I may be mistaken,” stammered the latter, suddenly averting her eyes. A wave of crimson swept over her face.

“Undoubtedly,” exclaimed the elderly lady with great positiveness. Turning to inspect the object under discussion, she sustained a shock that caused her to stiffen and draw in her breath quickly.

Percival was smiling in a most friendly and encouraging manner. He went farther, and lifted his disreputable white canvas hat.

“Oh, goodness!” exclaimed the young lady in a sort of panic. “Are you—is it really you, Mr. Percival?”

Mr. Percival glanced inquiringly at his guard.

“That's his name, Miss,” said that worthy. “And that's one of the three reasons why he's got them muscular arms you're lookin' at. Sorry, though, but my orders are not to allow any one to speak to him.”

“Are you crazy, Ruth?” cried the older lady, aghast. “It's the stowaway every one is talking about. The one who tried to blow up the ship.”

The young lady returned Percival's smile,—rather a diffident, uncertain effort, to be sure, but still a smile,—and murmured something about night before last at the Alcazar Grand.

“What are you saying, Ruth? Do you mean to say you met this man at the Alcazar Grand?”

“Yes, Aunt Julia,” said the other wrinkling her pretty forehead in perplexity. “He—he danced with me.”

“He—you danced with him?” gasped the horrified Aunt Julia.

“Don't you remember? Phil Morton introduced him to us. I—I can't believe my eyes.”

“I can't believe mine,” snapped the elder woman. “I never saw this fellow before in my life. The idea! Phil Morton having a friend like—You are mistaken. And people are staring at us.”

“Just the same,” said her niece, stubbornly, “I did dance with him, and, what's more, I danced more than once with him. Didn't I, Mr. Percival?”

Mr. Percival, still beaming, again looked at the sailor appealingly.

“You can tell it to me,” said the latter, furtively glancing to the right and left before making the concession.

Looking straight into the sailor's eyes, Percival said:

“Yes, Miss Clinton. I had four dances with you,—and a lemon squash.”

“Wait a moment, Aunt Julia,” protested the young lady, holding back. “Would you mind telling me, Mr. Percival, how you happen to be here and in this plight? You didn't mention sailing on the Doraine.”

Mr. Percival, to the sailor: “Neither did you, Miss Clinton. You certainly are no more surprised than I am.”

“Why are you on board as a stowaway? Phil Morton told me you belong to an old Baltimore family and had all kinds of—that is, you were quite well-off.”

Mr. Percival, to the sailor: “Please don't blush, Miss Clinton. I'm not the least bit sensitive. Money isn't everything. I seem to be able to get along without it. Later on, I hope to have the opportunity to explain just why—”

“That'll do,” interrupted the sailor. “Here comes the Captain.”

Captain Trigger hove in sight around the corner of the deck building, with Chief Engineer Gray and the Second Officer.

“I don't know what to make of you,” said Miss Clinton, sorely puzzled. Her aunt was clutching her arm. “You seemed so awfully jolly the other night. And—and just look at you now.”

She moved away, followed by the bespectacled young woman and the steamer-rugs, graceful despite the sudden yank with which her aunt set her in motion. Percival managed to keep an eye on her till she turned the corner. Then he sighed.

The Captain halted in front of him.

“Are you acquainted with Mrs. Spofford and her niece, Percival?” he inquired.

“Miss Clinton has done me the honour to remember meeting me night before

last at the Alcazar Grand, sir. Mrs. Spofford is not so generous."

"I see," said Captain Trigger reflectively. "You will report at once to Mr. Gray. He will give you a less public job, as you call it." A twinkle came into his eyes. "He doesn't like the hat you're wearing. Nor the shirt. Nor the boots."

"Thank you, sir."

"And, by the way, Percival, as soon as you are slightly refurbished I want you to stroll through the second cabin and if possible identify the two stewards who came to No. 22. Let me see, was it during the day or at night?"

"Some time during the night, sir. Eleven or half-past, I should say."

"Very well."

An hour later he reported to Captain Trigger. "I have seen all of the stewards, sir, according to Mr. Codge, and I do not recognize any of them as the men who came to No. 22. I had a fairly good view of them, too, from beneath the lower berth. They spoke in a language I did not understand—"

"Do you understand German?"

"No, sir. I know it when I hear it, however. They were not speaking German. I may have been wrong, but I came to the conclusion that they were transferring some one to No. 22. They brought in two suitcases, and left them when they went out. I—"

Captain Trigger brought his clenched fist down on the table with a resounding, emphatic bang.

"Now, we have it! That Chicago detective is right, by gad!"

He turned to the small group of officers clustered behind him. Fresh alarm,—real consternation,—had leaped into the eyes of every man of them.

"Then—then, that means our search isn't over?" cried Mr. Mott, starting up.

"It does! Every inch of this ship,—every damned inch of it, from stem to stern. Overlook nothing, Mr. Mott. Don't delay a second."

Percival was alone with the agitated Captain an instant later. Trigger's eyes were rather wild and bloodshot. The younger man's face blanched. He knew now that the danger was real. He waited for the Captain to speak.

"Percival, the two men you saw in 22 were not stewards. They were the men who jumped overboard. You tell me they left two bags there when they went out of the room. Well, they were not there this morning when the regular steward went into the room. They have disappeared. But the contents of those bags are still somewhere on board this ship. And if they are not found in time, by gad, sir,

we will all be in Kingdom Come before we know it.”

CHAPTER IV.

The first explosion occurred at eleven minutes past six. The chart-house and part of the bridge were blown to pieces. Three dull, splintering crashes ensued in rapid succession, proving beyond question that the bombs were set to automatically explode at a given time. One of them wrecked the engine-room; another blew a great hole in the stern of the ship, above the water line; the third destroyed the wireless house and carried away a portion of the deck with it.

There were eight in all of these devilish machines in the heart of the Doraine. Some time prior to the first explosion, the feverish searchers had uncovered four of them, cunningly planted in the most vital parts of the ship. Two were taken from the lower hold, one at each end of the vessel, and two more were found close to the carefully protected section of the vessel in which a rather insignificant but deadly shipment of high explosives was stored.

The discovery of the four bombs and their immediate consignment to the sea saved the ship from being blown to bits. With another hour to spare, it is more than probable the remaining four would have been found, notwithstanding the amazing cleverness with which they were hidden, so thorough and so dogged was the search. Confusion, terror, stupefaction and finally panic followed the successive blasts. The decks were strewn with people prostrated by the violent upheavals, and many there were who never got up again. Stunned, dazed, bewildered, those who were able to do so scrambled to their feet only to be hurled down again and again. Shrieks, groans, prayers,—and curses,—filled the brief, ghastly silences between the muffled detonations. The great vessel surged and rolled and plunged like a tortured animal.

The splintering of wood, the rending of plates, the shattering of glass, and above all this horrid turmoil the mighty roaring and hissing of steam!... And the wild, gurgling cries of the frantic unfortunates who had leaped into the sea!

Out of the chaos with incredible swiftness came the paralysis of despair, and out of that slowly but surely groped the never-failing courage of the men who go down to the sea in ships. Hoarse commands lifted above the groans and prayers, and strong but shaken figures sprang with mechanical precision to the posts allotted them. Life-boat after life-boat went down into the sea that glistened with the slanting rays of an untroubled sun, low-lying at the end of day.

Fire broke out in several places. Down into the bowels of the ship plunged the

resolute, undaunted heroes who remained behind, the chosen complement reserved for just such an emergency by the far-seeing master.

Above the hissing of steam and the first feeble cracklings of flame, rose the stentorian voice of the Captain from his post at the base of the demolished bridge.

“Fight, men! Fight! Fight! There are dying men below! Stand by! Fight for them!”

He was bloody and almost unrecognizable as he stood there clutching a stanchion for support. His legs were rigid, his body swayed, but his spirit was as staunch as the star that had guided him for fifty years through the trackless waste.

And while these doughty, desperate spirits fought the fire and smoke with every means at their command, down in the suffocating depths of the ship, braving not only the peril visible and at hand, but the prospect of annihilation in the event that a belated bomb projected its hideous force into the nest of high explosives,—while these men fought, the smiling, placid sea was alive with small white craft that bobbed in the gleaming sunlight, life-boats crowded to the gunwales with shuddering, bleak-eyed men, women and children waiting to pick up those who stayed behind, and who inevitably would be driven overboard by the resistless, conquering flames.

Cruising about at a safe distance from the menacing hull, these boats managed to rescue a few of the beings who had leaped overboard in the first mad panic of fear, but many there were who went down never to be seen again. No boat was without its wounded—and its dead; no boat was without its stricken, anxious-eyed survivors who watched and prayed for the salvation of loved ones left behind. With straining eyes they searched the surface of the sea, peered at the occupants of near and distant boats, stared at the scurrying figures on the decks of the smoking steamer, hoping,—always hoping,—and always sobbing out the endless prayer.

At last, as the sun sank below the blue-black horizon, exhausted, red-eyed, gasping men struggled up from the drenched, smothering interior of the ship, and hurled themselves, not into the sea, but prone upon the decks! They had conquered! The scattered, vagrant fires, attacked in their infancy, while still in the creeping stage, had been subdued.

Darkness fell. A chill night air stole out of the east, stealthily trailing the sun. Will-o'-the-wisp lights bespecked the sea, surrounding the black hulk that lay motionless in the center of the circle. Lanterns in a score or more of small boats

bobbed fitfully in the gentle swell. Presently lights appeared on board the Doraine, one here, one there, then others in twos and threes,—some of them stationary, others moving slowly from place to place. The life-boats crept closer, still closer. Then, out from the silent hulk, came the voice of man. It was the voice of the First Officer, hoarse and unrecognizable, but sharp with authority. Other voices repeated the commands from various parts of the ship,—commands to the encircling will-o'-the-wisps.

The word came down to the scores who filled the boats that they were to lie by until sunrise, keeping in close contact with each other and at no great distance from the ship. The most thorough, careful examination of the steamer was in progress. If it was found that she was in no danger of foundering,—and the word was most reassuring,—all of them would be taken aboard in the morning. Nothing could be done at present. A few hours more would tell the tale.

And then, for the first time since the disaster, the note of the croaker was heard. Each and every boat contained at least one individual who knew exactly what ought to be done in a crisis like this.

Mr. Landover addressed the benumbed, unresisting occupants of the boat into which he had climbed with commendable reluctance as one of the last persons to leave the ship.

“Why don't they begin sending out S. O. S. calls? What's the wireless for, if not to be used at a time like this? Say, you! Yell up there to some of those damned muddled-headed idiots and tell them what to do. Tell them that I say for them to send out calls for help. What's that? What did you say?”

The steward in charge of the boat repeated his remark and Mr. Landover at once said he would report him to Captain Trigger.

“But it won't do any good,” complained the banker despairingly. “Captain Trigger hasn't got the backbone of a fishworm. He'd let you tell him to go to hell and never think of jacking you up for it. No wonder we're in the fix we're in now. If he'd had the sense of a jelly-fish he'd have—Here! Sit still! You'll upset the boat, you fool! What—What are you going to do with that oar?”

“I'm going to crack you over the bean with it if you don't take back what you said about Captain Trigger,” said the steward, very earnestly. “Take it back, do you hear me?”

“My God, would you murder me for a little thing like that?”

Mr. Nicklestick aroused himself from the torpor of despair.

“Take it back, Mr. Landover,—please do. If he misses you, he'll get me sure,

it's so dark, and so help me God, I got nothing but the deepest respect for Captain Trigger. He's a vonderful man, steward. Don't make any mistake. You hear me say he is a vonderful man? Veil,—”

“Oh, shut up, Nicklestick,” grated Landover, crouching down behind the gentleman addressed.

The steward sat down. “I'd do it in a minute if it wasn't for the women an' children in this boat.”

“I intend to have every officer on that steamer arrested for criminal negligence the instant I set foot in New York,” boomed the banker. “I call upon every one of you, my fellow-passengers, to testify to the utter lack of precaution taken by the men in charge of that ship. And what effort are they making to bring help to us now? By gad, if I was in command of that vessel I'd be shooting wireless calls to every—Great Scott! What's that?”

“That's a rocket, you blamed old fool!” roared the steward.

“Good God!” gasped the exasperated banker. “Are we having a celebration with fireworks?”

The dull, hapless occupants of the lifeboats watched with fascinated eyes the first of the giant rockets that whizzed and roared its way up from the deck of the ship, an endless arrow of fire piercing the night. A loud report, the scattering of a hundred stars, and then—denser blackness than before.

Morning came. Up out of the east stole a sickly grey. It turned slowly into pink, and then suddenly the sea once more was blue and smiling. In the heart of the dancing cordon lay the weirdly camouflaged Doraine, inert, sinister, as still and cold as death. No smoke issued from her stacks to cheer the wretched watchers; no foam, no spray leaped from her mighty bow. She was a great, lifeless thing. Waves lapped gently against her sides and fell away only to come back again in playful scorn for the vast object that had rent and baffled them so long. On high fluttered the Stars and Stripes, gay in the presence of death, a sprightly harbinger of hope flaunting defiance in the face of despair.

Men, stripped to the waist, grimy and shining with the sweat of hours, moving about in knots of three and four—always in knots of three or four as if afraid to disintegrate—leaned upon the rail and watched the approach of the crowded boats, looked down into pallid, anguished faces with their eager, hungry eyes, eyes that devoured the groups along the rail. Now and then a glad shout of joy went up from one of the boats, and a figure in the huddled mass was transformed into a responsive thing of life.

In each of the square, black openings in the hull of the ship stood men with

ropes and ladders. The great steel doors lay flat against the sides, swung wide to admit this time a human cargo. From the interior of the vessel came the brisk, incessant clatter of hammers against wood and steel; from the decks broke the loud, commanding voices of men calling out directions; from the gliding, slapping boats went up the hearty shouts of understanding and obedience, the rattling of boat-hooks, the grinding of oars in the locks, the murmur of voices revived.

“Vomen and children first!” was the shrill, oft-repeated exhortation from one of the boats.

And up in the centre of another sprang a fine, imposing figure, from whose lips rolled these thrilling words:

“By God, they're great! They're great, after all! God bless Captain Trigger and every man-jack of them!”

“Get down!” roared his still unpacified critic, the steward. “You'll fall overboard, you dam' fool!”

The gaunt, coatless Mr. Mott commanded the port side of the vessel; Mr. Codge, the purser, the starboard. Fighting men in the breeches and leggings of the American Navy; blackened and bandaged stokers, sailors and landsmen comprised the motley company that stood ready to drag the occupants of the boats up into the dank, smoke-scented maw of the ship.

One by one, in regular, systematic order, the lifeboats came alongside. There was no confusion, no bungling. They bumped gently against the towering rows of plates, and, made fast by ropes with ample play, gave up in time their precious cargoes. No one lifted up his voice in rejoicing, for there were dead and injured back in the shadows; there were grief-stricken, anxious men and women crouching out there in the sunshine; there were limp, unconscious women and half-dead children; and over all still hung the ominous cloud of catastrophe fat with prophecies of perils yet to come.

They had gone out from a ship filled with a monstrous clangour and confusion, they were returning to a tomblike hulk, a lonely mass in which echoes would abound, a thing of sighs and silences, the corpse of a mammoth that had throbbed yesterday,—but never more.

Up in the curving triangle of the forward deck were two long, canvas-covered rows. The dead! Forty-six twisted, silent forms lying side by side, some calm in death, others charred and mutilated beyond all possibility of identification. Every man in the engine-room at the time of the explosion was now a mangled, unrecognizable thing. Engineers, electricians, stokers,—all of them wiped out in

the flash of an eye,—burnt, boiled, shattered. Half a dozen women, as many children, lay with the silent men.

The injured had been placed in staterooms on the promenade deck, regardless of previous occupancy or subsequent claim. There lay the score and a half of seriously injured, and there toiled the ship's surgeon and his volunteer helpers. Sailor and merchant, worker and idler, scholar and dolt, steerage and first cabin, wealth and poverty, shared alike in the disposition of quarters and shared alike in attention. There was no discrimination. One life was as good as another to the doctor and his men, the poor man's moan as full of suffering as that of the rich man, the wail of the steerage woman as piteous as that of her sister above.

Captain Trigger was one of the injured. He swore a great deal when the doctor ordered him to bed. Ribs and a broken arm? Why the devil should he be put to bed for something a schoolboy would laugh at? Mr. Shannon and two of the younger officers were killed by the explosion that wrecked the bridge and chart house. Chief Engineer Gray died in the engine-room. Cruise was blown to pieces in the wireless house. His assistant, the cripple with the charmed life, was dead.

A few seconds before the first explosion took place he blew out his brains with a big navy revolver. The last seen of Cruise was when he appeared in the door of his station, an expression of mingled rage and alarm on his face. Pointing frantically at the figure of his assistant as it shot down the steps and across the deck, he shouted:

“Get that man! Get him! For God's sake, get him!”

It all happened in a few seconds of time. The shrill laugh of the fleeing assistant, the report of the revolver, an instant of stupefaction,—and then the dull, grinding crash.

It will never be known what Cruise had heard or seen in the last moments of his life. No one on board the Doraine, however, doubted for an instant that he had discovered, too late, the truth about his misshapen assistant. They now knew with almost absolute certainty the identity of the odd man in that devilish trio, the man whose footsteps Percival had heard, the man who stayed behind to guarantee the consummation of the hideous plot. Coward in the end, he shirked the death he was pledged to accept. He knew what was coming. Unlike his braver comrades, he took the simplest way.

The count began. Late in the afternoon it was completed. There were forty-six known dead on board the Doraine, the majority being members of the crew. Seventeen persons were missing, chiefly from the steerage. Twenty-nine seriously injured were under the doctor's care. Some of them would not recover.

A hundred or more persons suffered from shock, bruises, cuts and exposure, but only a few of them required or demanded attention. In spite of their injuries, they fell to with the spirit that makes for true heroism and devoted themselves to the care of the less fortunate, or to the assistance of the sorely-tried officers and men who strove to bring order out of chaos.

Among the survivors were two American surgeons and a physician from Rio Janeiro. They, with the nurses, all of whom had been saved, immediately went to the relief of the ship's doctor, and in short order an improvised hospital was established. There was a remarkable unanimity of self-sacrifice among the passengers. High and low, they fell to in a frenzy of comradeship, and worked side by side in whatsoever capacity they were needed, whether fitted for it or not. No man, no woman, who was able to lift a helping hand, failed in this hour of need. The bereaved, as well as those who were untouched by a personal grief, gave all that was in them, tearfully, grimly, ardently.

Menial labour fell to the lot of the lordly but uncomplaining Landover, to Block and Nicklestick, Jones and Snipe, and even to the precious Signor Joseppi, who, forgetting his Caruso-like throat, toiled and sweated in the smoky saloon.

Morris Shine, the motion picture magnate, the while he laboured amidst the wreckage of the after deck, lamented not the cheerless task but the evil fate that prevented the making of the most spectacular film the world had ever known.

Madame Careni-Amori, Madame Obosky and her dancers; bejewelled Jewesses and half-clad emigrants; gentle women unused to toil and women who were born to it; the old and the young—all of them, without exception,—rose from the depths of despair and faced the rigours of the day with unflinching courage, gave out of a limitless store of tenderness all that their strength could spare.

And through a neglected, abandoned field of pearls and gold and precious stones, limped unchallenged the tireless figure of “Soapy” Shay, diamond thief, a bloody bandage about his head, an exalted light in his pain-stricken eyes. His one-time captor lay stark and cold in the gruesome line in the bow of the boat. It was “Soapy” Shay who staggered out of the rack and smoke with the burly, stricken detective in his arms, and it was “Soapy” Shay who wept when the last breath of life cased out through his tortured lips. For of all the company on board the Doraine, there was but one whom “Soapy” knew, but one who called him by name and shared tobacco with him,—and that one was William Spinney, the man who was taking him back to a place where mercy would not be shown.

After the sun had set and the decks were dark and deserted except for the men

employed in the gruesome business, the dead were lowered into the sea, swathed in canvas and weighted with things that were made to kill,—shells from the gunners' hoard. Swiftly, methodically, one after the other, they slid down to the black, greedy waters, sank to the grave that is never still yet always silent, to the vast, unexplored wilderness that stretches around the world. The thin little missionary from the barren plateaus of Patagonia and the plump priest from the heart of Buenos Aires monotonously commended each and every one of them to the mercy of God!

The sun came up again in the morning over a smiling, happy sea that licked the sides of the Doraine with the tenderness of a dog.

CHAPTER V.

The plight of the hapless steamer could not be disguised. Even the most ignorant passenger knew that the wrecked engines could not be repaired or compounded. They knew that the Doraine was completely paralysed. The power to move at will was for ever lost, the force that had driven her resistlessly along the chosen path was still. The powerful propellers were idle, the huge stern-post wrenched so badly that the rudder was useless. She was adrift, helplessly adrift. Of what avail the wheel and a patched-up rudder to the mass that lay inert, motionless on the smiling sea?

Every one on board realized, with sinking heart, that the Doraine was to go on drifting, drifting no man knew whither, until she crossed the path of a friendly stranger out there in the mighty waste. No cry of distress, no call for help could go crackling into the boundless reaches. That was the plight of the Doraine and her people on the mocking day that followed the disaster, and unless fate intervened that would be her plight for days without end.

Mr. Mott, temporarily in command, addressed the passengers in the main saloon, where they had congregated at his request. He did not mince matters. He stated the situation plainly. It was best that they should realize, that they should understand, that they should know the truth, in order that they might adapt themselves to the conditions he was now compelled of necessity to impose upon them. They were, so to speak, occupying a derelict. Help might come before nightfall, it might not come for days. He hoped for the best but he intended to prepare for the worst.

Without apology he laid down a rigid set of rules, and from these rules, he made it perfectly clear, there could be no deviation. The available supply of food was limited. It was his purpose to conserve it with the greatest possible care. Down in the holds, of course, was a vast store of consigned foodstuffs, but he had no authority to draw upon it and would not do so unless the ship's own stock was exhausted. Passengers and crew, therefore, would be obliged to go on short rations. “Better to eat sparingly now,” he said, “than not to eat at all later on.” He concluded his remarks in this fashion:

“Remember that we are all in the same boat. We don't know how long we'll be drifting like this and we don't know where we're drifting to. It's an everlastingly big ocean we're on. We ought to thank God we're not at the bottom of it now. If

we're lucky we'll be picked up soon, if not,—well, it's up to us, every one of us, to make the best of it. We're alive, and that's certainly something. We'll all find it easier if we keep ourselves busy. That's why I'm asking you, one and all, to do a good day's work regularly, one way or another, from now until relief comes. We can't have any loafers or quitters on board this ship. That means everybody, rich and poor. You may think I'm putting a hardship on you, seeing as how you have paid for your passage and all that, but what I'm ordering you to do ain't a marker to what you'd be doing if you were out there in lifeboats, eight hundred miles from shore, and—well, we won't go into that. We've got to make the best of it, my friends. We're up against it good and plenty, that's the plain facts of the case. There's no use in me saying it's all going to turn out right in a day or so, because I don't know a da—- blamed thing about it. We're in God's hands. Maybe it will help to pray, but I doubt it. All I've got to say is this: go down on your knees as much as you like, but don't lick!”

Signor Joseppi lifted his voice, but not in song. In very bad English he wanted to know how long the Captain thought it would be before they were rescued, and when he was informed that it might not be for weeks or even months, he cried out in worse English that he was ruined. He would have to violate his contract! No impressario would think of engaging him again! His wonderful American tour! If he was not rescued within a week—Oh, my God, the consequences! He did not regret the paltry two thousand a week—for thirty weeks—but to violate a contract!

Mr. Mott looked rather helpless. He appreciated the fact that Signor Joseppi was a very great personage, but what was he saying? Was it—could it be mutiny?

“I'm sorry, Mr. Joseppi,” he broke in, “but if Madame Amori is willing to take her regular turn at making up berths, I guess it won't hurt you to help every now and then in the dining-room.”

Signor Joseppi did not understand a word of it. He turned to the man at his elbow for enlightenment.

“What did he say?” he whispered.

“He says you have a perfectly marvellous voice and that he'd give two thousand any time to hear you sing,” replied his neighbour in excellent Italian.

Whereupon the Signor favoured the severe-looking Mr. Mott with a beaming smile and as deep a bow as he could make in such close quarters.

“A most courteous officer,” he said to his neighbour. “It will be a joy to serve him, my friend. We should, one and all, do what he asks of us, no matter how

mean the task. I, Joseppi,—you have heard of Joseppi, my friend?—I shall be the example for all of you. Should he say, 'Wash the dishes, Joseppi,' then will I wash the dishes. I, Joseppi, who never washed a dish in his life. Should he say, 'Cook the meals, Joseppi,' then will Joseppi, who never cooked a thing in his life, then will Joseppi cook the meals. Should he say, 'Joseppi, scrub the floor,' then will I scrub the floor. Should he say, 'Signor, steer the ship,' then will I do my best to steer the ship. I who have never steered a ship. So let me be your example, my friend."

"That's fine," said his neighbour, as they moved off together. "But supposing he asks you to sing occasionally to amuse the rest of us,—what then?"

"Amuse?" cried the Signor. "Amuse?"

"Well, then, entertain."

The great Joseppi pursed his lips. His brows grew dark with trouble.

"Ah, but that would be violating my contract," he said. "My contract specifically states that under no circumstances may I—" Then suddenly, as if renouncing a sacred principle, his brow cleared, and he cried out: "Damn the contract! Joseppi's voice is his own. Joseppi will do as he pleases with it. Let him but make the request, my friend,—and Joseppi will sing till he drops from exhaustion." Lowering his voice to a confidential undertone, he went on: "And that, my friend, is more than you will find Careni-Amori willing to do. There is one cold-blooded, grasping woman for you. Money! She thinks of nothing but money. And flattery! Ah, how she thrives on flattery. That woman, my friend, beautiful as she is, has no more heart than a—"

"Excuse me, please," broke in his listener, in English. "I've got to beat it."

He had caught sight of a slim young figure at the head of the stairs,—a girl in a rumpled blue serge tailor-suit and a tan-coloured sport hat pulled well down over her dark hair. He made his way through the crowd and caught her up as she passed out on the deck.

"I've been terribly worried about you," he began without other greeting, planting himself in front of her. "I thought maybe you might have—but, thank the good Lord, you weren't."

She looked momentarily bewildered. Then she recognized him and held out her hand. Her face was serious, unsmiling, her voice low and tired.

"Isn't it dreadful, Mr. Percival? What a terrible experience it has been. Oh—and I am glad you came through safely, too. But—" as her eyes narrowed anxiously,-"you were hurt. Your hands?"

“I can't very well shake hands with you, Miss Clinton,” said he. “Scorched a little, that's all. You'd think it was serious, the way they're bandaged. One of the sailors fixed them up for me last night. I can't tell you how glad I am that you are all right. And your aunt? Is she—” He paused.

“Auntie is all right, Mr. Percival. She's in bed. Shock and exposure. We were out there all night. In one of the boats. Katherine,—” her voice shook a little, —“Katherine is gone. She leaped overboard. I—I saw her go. I shall never forget it,—never. Aunt Julia's maid. For, oh, so many years, Mr. Percival.” She spoke in sharp, broken sentences, as if breathless. “You must have been terribly burned. Your hair,—your eyes, how bloodshot they are.”

“Smoke,” he said succinctly. “Singed on this side only. Really nothing serious. I got off very lightly.”

“Some of the men were frightfully burned,” she said with a shudder. “I am trying to be a nurse. There are two men in my—in my—”

“I know,” he broke in hastily. “Don't talk about it, Miss Clinton. It's corking of you to take hold like this. Corking!”

“Tell me about yourself. Where were you when it happened?”'

“I hate to admit it, but I was having a bite to eat down in the galley. You see, they'd somehow forgotten to give me anything to eat,—in the excitement, of course,—and I had been so busy myself it didn't occur to me to be hungry till rather late in the day. I managed to get on deck but not until after the bombs had all gone off. My friend, Mr. Gray,—the Chief Engineer, you know,—was down in the engine-room. That's how I got my hands burned. Not badly, I assure you, but—well, they may be a little scarred. You may not know it, but Mr. Gray and I came from the same place. Baltimore. He belonged to a fine old family there—and he'd been very kind to me. Poor fellow! Penned in. They never had a chance down there. He was—well, he died a few minutes after he was dragged out here on the deck. His clothes were on fire. But let's not talk about it. Tell me, is there anything I can do to make you more comfort-able? Or your aunt? I'm what you might call officer of the deck at present. Mr. Mott—”

“You ought to be in bed, Mr. Percival,” she interrupted sharply. “Your face is burned, too,—you must be suffering terribly. Wait! Now don't tell me you are not. I know better. I've seen those other men who were burned. I—”

“It's nothing, I tell you,” he interrupted, almost roughly. “There are dozens of men worse off than I am, and are they in bed? Not much. This is no time to lie down, Miss Clinton, if you've got a leg to stand on. See that little chap over there with his head and hands covered with bandages,—and barely able to drag his

feet after him? He's an American jockey. I don't know his name. He was blown twenty or thirty feet across the after-deck. Brought up at the bottom of a companion-way. He's nothing but cuts and bruises from head to foot. But he's around on his wobbly little pins today, just the same, trying to edge in on some sort of a job. Couldn't keep him in bed."

Miss Clinton's eyes were full of wonder and incredulity. "I cannot understand it," she said. "My cousin was with the American Ambulance in France. He says that the slightest flesh wound sends a soldier to the hospital."

"They haven't any choice in the matter. Besides, it isn't the same. Poor devils, they may have been at it in the trenches for weeks and months. A wound of any sort means a pleasant vacation. Still," he went on after a moment, a faint derisive smile on his lips, "we had a big husky up in Camp who insisted on going to bed every time he had the nosebleed."

She was looking into his blood-shot eyes, infinite pity and concern in her own.

"Will you let me dress your hands, Mr. Percival, whenever it is necessary? I am getting used to it now."

"It's good of you, Miss Clinton," he replied gratefully. "But I think you'd better stick to the fellows who really need attention. Don't add an extra ounce to your burden. You'll need all of your strength and courage to face the demands of the next few days. Those chaps have just begun to suffer. They're going to have a tight squeeze getting through,—if they get through at all. You have not answered my question. Is there anything I can do for you or your aunt?"

"No,—not a thing," she said. "We are quite all right. As Mr. Mott said, we are all in the same boat, Mr. Percival. We've got to make up our minds to that. We can't have the comforts and the luxuries we had day before yesterday. Whatever is left of them, we must share with others."

"Even with stowaways," he ventured, but not fatuously.

"No one is likely to forget how our only stowaway came by his wounds," she said simply. "Despite your modesty, I am quite certain who it was that carried the Chief Engineer on deck, Mr. Percival. While his clothes were burning, too."

Percival turned his face away and many seconds passed before he spoke.

"By the way," he said at last, a trifle unsteadily, "at regular intervals the gun up there in the bow is to be fired. You must not be alarmed when it goes off. There is a chance that some ship may hear the report. The British have a few warships down here, you know. They would investigate if they got word of big guns being fired anywhere in these parts. Mr. Mott will give warning when the

gun is to be fired, so that every one will understand. I—I just thought I'd tell you."

"Thank you. Good-bye for the present. I must get back to my wounded."

"Keep your spirits up," he said. "That's the principal job now, Miss Clinton. Good-bye,—and thank you."

He watched her as she moved off down the deck. He could not help noticing that her figure drooped perceptibly. In his mind's eye he saw her as she was but two days before, straight, graceful, full of the joy of living, with a stride that was free and swinging. He recalled her lovely, inquiring grey eyes as she stared at him on that ignominious afternoon, the parted red lips and the smile that came to them, the smartly dressed hair, the jaunty hat, the trim sport suit of tan-coloured jersey—he recalled the alluring picture she made that day, and sadly shook his head.

"Poor girl," he said to himself, and walked slowly in the opposite direction, favouring his left leg.

He went down to see the Captain. The old seadog was stretched out in his berth, a look of pain and utter despair in his eyes. One of the Russian dancers, a rather pretty girl of a distinctly Slavic type, was cleaning up the room. The ship's doctor had just left.

"Feeling a bit more comfortable, sir?" inquired the young man.

"I wish you'd get this girl out of here," growled Captain Trigger with difficulty. "I want to swear."

"I think it would be all right to go ahead with it, sir," said Percival. "She doesn't understand a word of English."

The Captain shook his head. "I'll let it wait." Then, looking at his visitor's bandaged hands: "How are your hands, my lad?"

"Fairly easy. The doctor says the burns are not deep. Mr. Mott asked me to step in and see you, sir, and give you my opinion as to the bombs. You see, I've had a great deal of experience with high explosives. There isn't the slightest doubt in my mind that you found and got rid of the worst of them. The officer in charge of the gun-crew agrees with me. They planted the big ones, the ones that were to destroy the ship, down in the hold, where there was less chance of discovery. The others, I am convinced, were much smaller. It would have been impossible to hide a bomb of any noticeable size in any of the places where the explosions occurred. They went about it very cunningly, very systematically. Of course, no one saw the bombs that exploded, but judging by the actual results,

they could not have been very powerful."

"And I also," said the Captain, "thank God we dug out the big ones." He scowled forlornly. "Dr. Cullen says I am in for a week of this, Percival. You don't think so, do you?"

Percival smiled. "I am more or less of an expert on explosives, sir," he replied.

"Umph," grunted Captain Trigger. "I see. Just the same, I think I'll be up and about by tomorrow. If I were your age, young man, you can bet I wouldn't be lying here in this bed."

"On the other hand, if I were your age, Captain Trigger," said Percival, "I'd probably have sense enough to do exactly what the doctor ordered."

Captain Trigger's mouth fell open.

"Well, of all the damned—" he began, and then swallowed hard.

CHAPTER VI.

For three days and nights the Doraine drifted lazily in a calm and rippling sea, always to the southward. The days were bright and warm, the nights black and chill. It was the spring of the year in that zone. Without adequate navigation instruments, Mr. Mott was forced to rely to a great extent on speculation. He was able to make certain calculations with reasonable accuracy, but they were of little real significance. It was, of course, possible to determine the general direction in which they were drifting, and the speed. They were slowly but surely edging into the strong west wind drift. The Falkland Islands would soon be off to the right, with South Georgia and the Sandwich group farther to the south and east, the southernmost tip of Africa to the left.

Not a sail had been sighted, not a sign of smoke appeared on the spotless horizon. At regular intervals the gun on the forward deck boomed thrice in quick succession, startling the lifeless hulk into a sort of spasmodic vitality. Then she would sink back once more into the old, irksome lethargy, incapable of resisting the gentlest wave, submissive to the whim of the slightest breeze. The ship's carpenter and his men were making slow headway in the well-nigh impossible task of repairing the rudder. Attempts were being made to rig up makeshift sails to replace those licked from the supplemental spars by flames that had earned considerable progress along the roof of the upper deck building before they were subdued. Blackened, charred masts and yards, stripped of rigging, reared themselves like pines at the edge of a fire-swept forest. Sail-makers and riggers laboured stubbornly, but the work was slow and the means of restoration limited.

The occupants of the derelict had settled down to a dull, almost dogged state of resignation. There were several deaths and burials, incidents that made but little impression on the waiting, watchful survivors. Each succeeding day brought forth additional watchers to swell the anxious throng,—resolute and sometimes ungovernable men who, defying their wounds and the nurses, refused to stay where they could not have a hand in all that was going on.

Back of all this pitiful courage, however, lurked the unholy fear that they might be left to their fate in case the ship had to be hurriedly abandoned.

Mr. Mott watched the weather. Every seaman on board the Doraine scanned the cloudless sky with searching, anxious eyes. They sniffed the steady wind that blew them farther south. Always they scanned the sky and sniffed the wind.

“It's got to come sometime,” repeated Captain Trigger, after each report from Mr. Mott.

“I've known weather like this to last for weeks,” said the First Officer.

“In the South Pacific, yes,” said the Captain grimly. “But we're in the South Atlantic, Mott.”

On the sixth day the barometer began to fall. The breeze stiffened. The sea became choppy, and white-caps danced fitfully over the greenish stretches, growing wilder and wilder under the whip of a flouting wind. The two patchwork sails on the lumbering Doraine flapped noisily for awhile, as if shaking off their tor-por, then suddenly grew taut and fat with prosperity. The twisted, half-jammed rudder,—far from worthy despite the efforts of its repairers,—whiningly obeyed the man at the wheel, and once more the ship felt the caress of the deep on her cleaving bows.

The horizon to the north and west seemed to draw nearer, the contrast between the deepening blue of the water and the clear azure of the contracting dome more sharply defined. The sky that had been cloudless for days still remained barren, but the sailor knew what lay beyond the clear-cut rim of the world. The man of the sea could look far beyond the horizon. He could see the ugly clouds that were even now speeding down from the north, invisible as yet but soon to creep into view; he could see the mighty billows on the other side of that distant line; he could hear the roar and shriek of the tempest that was still hundreds of miles away. It was the matter of but a few hours before the wind and the billows would rush up to smite the Doraine with all their might under the cover of a black and storm-rent sky. And what was to become of the vessel, floundering in the path of the hurricane?

Late afternoon brought the forerunner of the gale, a whistling, howling squall that frantically strove, it would seem, to outrace the baleful clouds. Then the Doraine was in the thick of the furious revel of sea and sky, plunging, leaping, rolling like a monstrous cork....

How she managed to weather the storm, God knows, and He alone. At the mercy of wave and wind, she was tossed and hammered and racked for two frightful days and nights, and yet she remained afloat, battered, smashed, raked from stem to stern, stripped of everything the tempest could wrench from her in its fury. And yet on the third day, when the storm abated, the sturdy ship was still riding the waves, flayed but un-conquered, and the baffled sea was licking the sides of her once more with servile though deceitful tenderness.

But there was water in the hold. The ship was leaking badly.

Up from the stifling interior straggled the unhappy inmates. They looked again upon the unbelievable: a smiling, dancing sea of blue under a canopy clean and spotless. It was unbelievable. Even the stouthearted Captain and the faithful mate, blear-eyed and haggard from loss of sleep, were filled with wonder.

“I can't understand it,” muttered Mr. Mott a dozen times that day, shaking his head in a bewildered sort of way. “I can't understand how she did it. By right, she ought to be at the bottom of the ocean, and here she is on top of it, same as ever.”

“Do you believe in God, Mr. Mott?” asked the Captain solemnly.

“I do,” said Mr. Mott emphatically. After a moment he added: “I've been a long time coming to it, Captain Trigger, but I do. Nothing short of an Almighty Being could have steered this ship for the past two days.”

The Captain nodded his head slowly, his gaze fixed on something above and far beyond the horizon.

“I suppose it's too much to ask of Him, though,” said he, audibly completing a thought.

Mr. Mott evidently had been thinking of the same thing, for he said:

“I'm sorry to say it's gained about two feet on the pumps since last night.”

Captain Trigger's face was very grave. “That means a couple of days more at the outside.” His eyes rested speculatively on the three lifeboats still hanging above the starboard rail. There was another being repaired on the port side. “More than six hundred of us on board, Andrew.” His head dropped suddenly, his chin twitched. Mr. Mott looked away.

“I don't believe it will come to that,” said he, an odd note of confidence in his voice. “'Tain't likely, old friend, that God would see us safely through all we've had to tackle and then desert us in the end. Something's bound to turn up. I've a feeling,—a queer feeling,—that we're going to pull out of this all right. I know it looks mighty hopeless, but—”

“Just the same, Mr. Mott,” broke in the Captain, lifting his head and setting his jaw, “you'd better set all available hands to work on the rafts immediately. It's true God has helped us through a lot, but it strikes me we'd better be on the safe side and help God a little at this stage of the game. He is wonderful, Andrew, but He isn't wonderful enough to keep man afloat very long unless man himself builds the raft. So don't lose a minute.”

Anxious, inquiring eyes followed the Captain and his First Officer wherever they went. On all sides were silent, beaten people who asked no questions, for

they were afraid of the answers. Sick, dazed, haggard, they stared hopelessly, drearily out over the water; for all that their faces revealed the end was near at hand and they cared but little. They had been through one hell; death could bring nothing worse.

Here and there a stout-hearted optimist appeared among them, but his very cheerfulness seemed to offend. They did not want to hear his silly, stupid predictions that something was “sure to turn up.” They knew that water was coming into the hold; they knew that there were but four lifeboats and seven hundred men and women; they knew that the Doraine was going down in a very few hours; they knew that the Captain had given up all hope of rescue. Nothing could “turn up” now but death.

Madame Obosky had taken a great fancy to Algernon Adonis Percival, and for a most peculiar reason. He had, it appears, abused her roundly on the first night of the storm for venturing on deck against orders, compelling him to risk what he considered a very precious life in a successful effort to drag her back to safety. As a matter of fact, he did not drag her back to safety. That feat was accomplished by two sailors who managed to reach both of them before another devastating wave came up to tear his grip loose from the broken rail to which he clung with one bandaged hand while he kept her from sliding into the sea with the other.

He was very angry. In the first place, his hands hurt him dreadfully, and in the second place she had forced him to disobey orders by going out to save her. He did not mutter his complaints. He told her in plain and violent English what he thought of her, and if she went out there again he'd be damned happy to let her drown.

Now, it had been some time since any man had had the hardihood or temerity to upbraid Madame Obosky. No male had cursed her since she left Petrograd,—and that was four years ago. She had been cursed often enough by her own sex,—professionally, of course,—but the men she had encountered since leaving Russia were either too chivalrous or too cowardly to abuse her, and she missed it terribly.

She had gone through a very hard school in order to become one of the principal dancers in her land. Teachers had cursed her, teachers had beaten her,—and they always were men.

When she was eighteen she married a lion-tamer. Who would have thought that a man who trained lions could be gentle and mild, and as tame as the beasts he had beaten for years? She was barely nineteen when he died, quite suddenly.

There was a dark rumour that she had poisoned him. True or false, the rumour persisted, and she soon became one of the most popular dancers in the Empire. For three years she had a manager who treated her so vilely, so contemptuously that she tried to kill his wife, whereupon the unnatural husband refused to have anything more to do with her.

She was dancing in Germany when the War broke out, but succeeded in getting over into Holland within a week or two, thereby escaping what she was pleased to describe as “something zat no woman could endure, no matter how long she have live' in Russia.” Paris and London had treated her kindly, courteously, but that was to be expected, she repined, because all of the real men were off at the front fighting. Instead of being scowled at and ordered about by managers and orchestra leaders, or brow-beaten by hotel-clerks and head-waiters, she met with nothing but the most servile politeness,—due, she was prone to argue, to the unquestioned decadence of the French and English races. They were a bloodless lot, those Frenchmen and Englishmen.

It was the same in Rio Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Santiago,—and it would be even worse in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. The Americans, she had heard, were the worst of them all. They didn't know the first thing about the majesty of sex. The Indian, she understood, was an exception. From all accounts, he knew how to treat his woman.

She was homesick. Her heart leaped with joy when she discovered in Percival what she believed to be a domineering, masterful man. He had been neither servile, nor polite, nor afraid. He had treated her,—at least for an illuminating, transcendent ten minutes,—as if she were the dirt under his feet,—and he was an American at that. True, he had apologized a little later on, and had blushed quite becomingly in doing so, but nothing,—nothing in the world,—would ever make her believe that he was not the sort of man who could be depended upon to put a woman in her place and keep her there. He might apologize until he was black in the face and still be unable to take back the words he had uttered. Notwithstanding that he, in his apology, professed to have mistaken her in the darkness for one of the Portuguese immigrant women who didn't understand a word of English, she forgave him quite humbly, and that was going pretty far for Olga Obosky, whose identity ought not to have been a matter of doubt, even on the darkest of nights.

She was a lithe, perfectly formed young woman, beautiful in an unusual way. Her body was as sinuous as that of a woodland nymph. Indeed, in one of her most spectacular dances, she appeared as a nymph, barefooted, bare-legged, and, —as Mrs. Spofford caustically remarked,—bare-faced. She possessed the

marvellously clear, colourless complexion found only among the purely Slavic women. Her lips were red and sensuous, her eyes darkly mysterious and brooding, her hair as black as the raven's wing.

When she smiled her face became strikingly alive, radiant, transforming her into a jolly, good-natured, wholesome girl in whom not the faintest trace of the carnal was left. Every move, every thought, every impulse was feminine; her imagination was feminine; she cast the spell of her femininity over all with whom she came in contact. Primitively sensuous, she was also primitively wary, —and so she was ineffably feminine.

Prior to the time of her dramatic encounter with the American, she had favoured him with no more than a glance or two of curiosity. He was a stowaway; for a brief while he was suspected of being involved in the plot to blow up the ship. That was enough for her. Twice she had seen Miss Clinton talking with him, and once, just before the storm set in, she had paused to watch the young American girl renew the bandages on his hands after dressing the burns. Half an hour after he had apologized for speaking so roughly to her, she decided that it was her duty to hunt him up and minister to him. The ship was rolling terribly, the din of the elements was deafening, but Olga Obosky was not a faint-hearted person. She went forth boldly, confidently. Terrified, clinging observers marvelled at her sure-footedness, at the graceful way in which her sinuous body bent itself to the perilous heavings of the vessel.

She found him in the reading-room, seated in a corner. Miss Clinton was readjusting the bandage on one of his hands. Half a dozen people were in the room, manfully defying the turmoil that had sent nearly every one else to bed in terror and distress. Without hesitation the dancer joined the couple in the corner. Her smile was engaging; a faint line between her eyebrows signified the concern she felt for him.

Miss Clinton looked up from her work. Her smile was politely accusative,—and brief.

“It is all my fault,” began Madame Obosky, standing before them, her feet wide apart, her knees bent slightly to meet the varying slants and lurches of the vessel. She spoke the English language confidently and well. Her accent, which was scarcely noticeable, betrayed the fact that she had mastered French long before attempting English. There was a piquant boldness in the occasional misplacing of words and in the haphazard construction of sentences. She was unafraid.

“I have subject him to much pain and discomfort,” she went on, addressing the girl. “Those poor hand! It is I who should kiss them, Mademoiselle, not you.”

“Kiss them?” gasped Miss Clinton.

“Of no doubt,” said Madame Obosky readily. “Do they not pain because of me? Should I not kiss the hand who snatch me from the horrible death? From the Kingdom Come, as the doctor he say to me such a little time ago. And you, Mademoiselle, who have not been save by him from the Kingdom Come, you attend his hands and make him to be greatly comfortable.”

“I am merely dressing the burns, Madame Obosky,” said the other, coldly. “I have done as much for the other poor fellows who—”

“I know, I know,” broke in the Russian, smiling. “You must not be offend with me if I speak your language so badly.”

“It strikes me you speak it most acceptably,” interposed Percival.

“What is your name?” she asked abruptly. “I have heard you called the stowaway. No one has speak your name to me.”

“My name is Percival,” said he.

“It is a pretty name,” said she, dubiously. “But surely you do not approve of me to call you Percival so quick. What is the other name, the name I am to—”

“That's the trouble with a name like mine. It sounds so beastly informal when you leave off the Mister, and it sounds as if you'd been a servant in the family for at least one generation if you stick it on. If you could only call me Monsieur Percival, or Senor Percival, or even Herr Percival, it wouldn't seem so bad, but Mister Percival,—well, it's pretty soft, isn't it, Miss Clinton?”

“Please hold your hand still, Mr. Percival,” ordered the girl. She smiled up at the puzzled dancer. “His name is Mr. Percival, Madame Obosky. That's the poor creature's last name.”

“Oh, I see. Then even you, Mademoiselle, may not call him Percival?”

“No, I do not call him Percival.”

“You see, she's known me such a very short time,” explained the subject of these remarks.

For a few moments Madame Obosky watched the bandaging process in silence. When she spoke again it was to say:

“You are so skilful, so gentle, Mademoiselle. I am taking a lesson in gentleness from you.”

“It is quite simple, Madame. I am very awkward. I have had no experience. But if we ever live to see home again, I shall prepare myself at once for work in France. We are needed over there. We will be needed more than ever, now that America has gone in. Our own soldiers are over there, God bless them.”

Madame Obosky gave her a pitying look.

“You may thank your God that you do not live in a land of soldiers, Mademoiselle. If you did, you would not be so eager to nurse them back to life. Do I shock you? Voila! When you train a boy to be a soldier, as the boys are trained in my country and in Germany, you make an animal of him,—and not a very nice animal at that. You nurse him back to life and strength and in return for your kindness he outrages you, and goes his way rejoicing. No, I do not like the soldiers.”

Miss Clinton did not look up. Percival stared at the Russian for a moment and then observed:

“I don't think you can say that of the French or the English, Madame.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Quite true. But the French and the English, Mr. Percival, are decadent races,” she said coolly, as if there were nothing more to be said on the subject. “Please, Mademoiselle,” she went on, briskly, “will you not let me see how you have prepared his hands? I mean, how have you,—is it right to say fixed them?”

“Dressed them, you mean, Madame Obosky.”

“I see. First you undress them, then you dress them, is it not so?”

Ruth Clinton laughed. The woman was quaint.

“I am about to begin on the left hand. You may watch me, if you care to do so.”

“Will it not make you embarrass?”

“Why should I be embarrassed?” inquired Ruth, flushing.

“I have said the wrong word,” lamented the other. “Nervous,—zat,—that is the word.”

“They're not very lovely things to look at,” said Percival. “All red and blistery and greasy. Miss Clinton is a regular heroine to tackle 'em.”

“I have witnessed some very terrible sights, Mr. Percival,” said the Russian, her eyes narrowing. “Have you ever seen a little Jewish girl,—but no, Mademoiselle, no! I have catch the look in your eyes. I shall not tell you what I have seen. Go on! I shall be silent and take my first lesson.”

Closely, intently she watched the process. When it was all over and the bottle containing ointment had been restored to the patient's pocket, she spread out her hands and exclaimed:

“It is not difficult. May I inquire where the gauze bandages are to be obtained, Miss Clinton? And do you always use the same safety pins?”

She arose early the next morning. Rousing her maid, she ordered her to apply to the ship's surgeon for bandages and to fetch them to her at once.

“I know,—yes, I know. You are dying, but do as I tell you. This instant! Why should you, a great hulking beast of a woman, be dying every minute of the day while I, not half your size, am tingling all over with life? Go!”

“But, Madame,” groaned the wretched woman, rolling her eyes, “I shall be dashed to pieces against the walls. I cannot stand. My legs will not hold me up. They—”

“Enough! That is no excuse. My legs manage to hold me up.”

“But, Madame, it is my legs I am speaking of. My legs are not like yours.”

“Any fool can see that,” retorted her mistress, and the ungainly maid staggered out on her mission.

Later on, supplied with a roll of gauze, Madame Obosky set out in quest of her preserver. Even the veterans among the seamen gazed upon her in wondering admiration as she made her way about the ship. She was a revelation to them. The increasing fury of the storm had driven all save the hardiest sailors and a few of the non-praying male passengers to their rooms. Now and then one or two of the courageous, devoted nurses appeared in the corridors, reeling from patient to patient, but except for them the ship seemed entirely bereft of women. Small wonder then that the lithe, undaunted Russian created a sensation among the sailors who themselves were cold with dread.

She discovered him at last, coming up the steps from the devastated engine room. He was with Mr. Mott and several other half-dressed men. Their faces were grave,—more serious than ever. They had been down to investigate the leak. Percival was stripped to the waist. The glare of the lanterns fell upon his broad shoulders and powerful arms, bronzed and burnished by the sun of the high hills.

“Come,” she said, laying her hand on one of his brawny arms, “I have with me the bandages.” She sent a swift glance over him, and smiled. “But I see you have not the bottle. Is it in your cabin, Mr. Percivail?”

He flushed darkly under his coat of tan. His companions stared for a moment,

and then went on.

“I am busy,” he said. “I haven't the time now, Madame Obosky. Thank you, just the same.” Then a sense of loyalty to the girl who had been kind to him impelled him to add: “Besides, Miss Clinton has been taking care of my hands. She has got used to dressing them, so I—”

“But it is my duty now,” she protested. “She owes so little to you and I so much. Come, let us procure the lotion. Where is your cabin?”

He held back. “You can't go to my cabin.”

“And why not?” she exclaimed, in surprise. “Does not Miss Clinton go to your cabin?”

“No, she does not!”

“But she goes to the cabins of other men who are wounded. I have see her with my own eyes.”

“That's different. They can't come to her.”

She looked searchingly into his eyes.

“I see,” she said after a moment. “You are in love with her.”

“Ridiculous,” he exclaimed, scowling.

“And so you prefer to have her fix your hands. I see, my friend. Voila! If so is the case, I am outcast.”

“But, confound it, it isn't the case,” he cried. “It's simply this: I wouldn't for the world have her feel that I am not grateful, and that's exactly what it would look like if I allowed you or any one else to butt in, Madame Obosky.”

“Butt in?” she said, a puzzled look in her dark eyes. “What is that?”

“It's English for interfere,” said he, shortly.

She removed her hand from his arm. He was conscious of the abrupt termination of an exquisite thrill.

“Very well,” she said, lifting her chin. “I shall not interfere.”

“Forgive me, please,” he said. “It's mighty good of you. Please don't think me ungracious. You understand, however,—don't you?”

“No, I do not,” she replied, shaking her head slowly. Suddenly her eyes widened. “Is it because I dance in my bare feet, in my bare legs, that you think so vilely of me?”

He stared. “Good Lord! I don't think vilely of you, Madame Obosky. I wasn't even aware that you danced in your bare feet and legs.”

“You have never seen Obosky dance?” she cried in astonishment.

“Never.”

She frowned. “Then, my friend, I was wrong in what I say just now. Most men who have seen me dance think I am a bad woman, and so they either covet me or despise me. If you have not had ze pleasure of seeing me, Mr. Percivail, you do not either covet me or despise me. That is fine. It is good to know that you do not despise me.” Observing the expression in his eyes, she went on calmly. “Oh, yes, I shall be very much please to have you covet me. Zat—that is all right. But if you despise me,—no, no, zat would be terrible.”

For a moment he was dashed. He did not know how to take her remark. She was a new, a strange type to him. After a sharp, quick look into her eyes, however, he came to the conclusion that she was absolutely sincere. So far as she was concerned, it was as if she had said nothing more outrageous than: “I shall be please to consider you one of my admirers.”

“My dear Madame,” he said, smiling, “permit me to express the hope that both of us may go on to the end of our days without having our peace of mind disturbed.”

She looked puzzled for a moment, and then favoured him with her broad, good-natured smile.

“Spoken like a Frenchman,” she cried, and added, “and with equal sincerity, I fear. Go your way, Monsieur Percivail. I shall keep my gauze. Some day when we are very old people and very old friends I may then be permitted to bandage your hands. At present, however, the risk is too great, eh? I am so inexperience. I might by accident tie your hands in my clumsiness, and zat—that would make so much trouble for Miss Clinton to untie zem,—yes?”

Now there was mockery in her eyes. His face hardened.

“I must be on my way,” he said curtly. “We have been looking things over down below. The Captain is waiting for our report.”

He bowed and started off. She swung along at his side.

“What have you discover, Mr. Percivail?” she inquired anxiously.

“That, Madame Obosky, is something that will have to come from Captain Trigger.”

“I see. That means it is bad. I see.”

The lurching of the ship threw her body against his. She righted herself promptly, but did not reveal the slightest confusion nor utter a word of apology.

“By Jove, you're a cool one!” he exclaimed. “I don't believe you know the meaning of fear. Don't you realize, Madame Obosky, that we are in the gravest peril? Don't you know this ship has but one chance in a thousand to pull through?”

“Ah, my friend, but it has the one chance, has it not? Surely I know the meaning of fear. I am afraid of rats and snakes and thieves—and drunken soldiers. I am afraid of death,—terribly afraid of death. Oh, yes, I know what fear is, Mr. Percivail.”

“Then, why don't you show it now?” he cried. “Good Lord, I don't mind confessing that I'm scared half to death. I don't want to die like this,—like a rat in a trap.”

“But you are not going to die,” she proclaimed. “I too would be groaning and praying in my bed if I thought we were going down to the bottom of zis dreadful ocean. But we are not. I have no fear. We shall come out all right on top, and some day we will laugh and tell funny stories about how everybody else was frightened but us,—us apiece, I mean.”

“Well, you're a wonder! And how the deuce do you manage to keep your feet with the ship rolling like this?”

“Two things I have been taught, since I am ten years old. First, to keep my head, and second to keep my feet. In my profession, one must do both. You will always find me doing that. Good-bye,—we part here. You will not forget zat—that I have retain the bandage for you? And you will not ever despise me?”

As she turned away a roll that must have caused the wallowing vessel to list thirty-five degrees at the very least, sent her headlong across the passage. She slipped down in a heap. The same lurch had sent him reeling against the wall some distance away. She sat up but did not at once attempt to arise. Instead she clutched frantically at her skirt to draw it down over her shapely ankles and calves. In the lantern light he saw the dismayed, shamed look in her eyes and the vivid blush of embarrassment that suffused her pale cheeks. As the ship rolled back, he moved forward to assist her, but she sprang lightly to her feet and hurried on ahead of him, disappearing around a corner.

“Well, by gosh!” he muttered aloud in his surprise. “And she dances half naked before thousands of people every night! Can you beat it! The last person in the world you'd think would care a whoop, and she turns out to be as finicky about her legs as your grandmother. Women certainly are queer.”

With this profound comment on the inconsistency of the sex, he took himself off in the direction of the Captain's quarters,—a forward cabin which served in

lieu of the dismantled bridge.

CHAPTER VII.

He saw but little of her during the next forty-eight hours. She seemed to avoid him. At any other time and in other circumstances he undoubtedly would have resented her indifference,—a very common and natural masculine failing,—but in these strenuous hours he was too fully occupied with the affairs of life and death. Once she stopped him to inquire if Miss Clinton was still able to dress his wounds.

“Once a day,” he replied. “She's even pluckier than you are, Madame Obosky.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Indeed?”

“Yes, because she believes we are going to die—every one of us. It takes pluck to keep going when you've got that sort of thing to face, doesn't it?”

Her gesture took in the dozen or more men within range of her vision. “It should take no more pluck to keep a woman going than a man, my friend. You do not call yourself plucky, do you? I do not call myself plucky. On the contrary, I call myself a coward. I am afraid to stay in my stateroom. I like to be out in the open like zis. One has to be very, very brave, Mr. Percivail, to lie in one's bed all alone and think that death is waiting just outside the thin little walls. Miss Clinton is splendid, but she is not plucky. She is as I am: afraid of the darkness, afraid to be alone, afraid to be where she cannot know and see all zat is happening. She has a woman's courage, just as I have it,—if you please. It is the courage that depends so much on the courage of others. You think I am brave. I am brave because I am with trained, efficient men. But if the Captain were to come to me now as I stand here, and say zat the ship is to sink in ten minutes and that we all must go down with her, would I face it bravely? No! I would throw myself down on the floor and scream and pray and tear my hair. Why? Because the men had given up. I am kept up by the courage of others. That is the courage of woman. She must be supported in her pain, in her suffering, in her courage.”

“Well, if you put it that way, there are very few men who would take such an announcement from the Captain calmly.”

“Perhaps not, my friend. But if there were room for but few in the boats, who would stay behind and go down with the ship? Nine out of every ten of the men. Why? Not because they are all courageous, I grant you, but because of the horrible conceit that makes them our masters. Pride and conceit constitute what

stands for courage in most men. The wild animal has no conceit, he has no pride. Does the male lion rush out to be shot in place of his mate? He do not. He sneaks off in the high reeds and leaves her to take care of herself. The Captain of this steamer is so full of pride zat he will stay on it till it goes under the wave. It is not courage, Mr. Percivail. It is his pride in the power zat—that God has give to his sex. These men here,—you, my friend,—face the danger now so unflinching for why? Because for ages and ages you have believe in and depend upon the man beside you, the men around you. Zat is the difference between man and woman. Woman believes in and depends on man. She has no faith in her own sex. So, you see, my friend, when I say I am brave and you say Miss Clinton is plucky, it is all because we have men about us who are so proud and conceited zat they will die before they will admit that they are not as helpless and as weak as we are in times like zis."

"You may be right," he mused, struck by her argument. "It's usually pride that makes a man stand up and fight another, even when he knows he's sure to be beaten. It's neither confidence nor courage. It's just plain fear of being a coward."

"You will admit then that I understand the wonderful male animal which struts on two legs and rules all the other animals of the world, eh? It is the only animal in the whole big world zat—that is completely satisfied with itself. So now, Mr. Percivail, you have the secret of the so-called courage of the male of our species."

"I hope all women haven't gone into the subject so deeply," he said, with a rueful smile. "You make rather small potatoes of us."

"Ah, do not say that," she cried, "for, alas, I am denied potatoes."

"Well, then," he said, laughing, "if all women understood us as well as you do, we wouldn't rule the world very much longer. They'd yank us off the pedestal and revile us forevermore."

"But you do not understand women, my friend. Did we not bring you into the world? Are you not our sons, and therefore begotten to be kings? We may despise our husbands, we may loathe our brothers and our fathers, we women, but our sons are the gods we worship. My dear Mr. Percivail, women will go on being ruled to the end of time unless they cease populating the world with sons. The mother of the man is the humblest subject of the son and yet the proudest. The mothers of kings, of emperors, of presidents,—do they think of them as kings, emperors, presidents? No. They think of them as sons. That is why man is supreme. That is why he rules. To be sure, we women are not always disposed to

have our husbands rule, we even go so far as to say they are not fit to rule, but alas, the men we are permitted to know the best of all are always the sons of some one else, and so there you have the endless chain. Sons! Sons! Sons! Sons to create new sons,—sons without end, amen! God bless our sons!”

“And I say God bless our mothers!”

“In that one little sentence, Mr. Percivail, spoke from the heart, you have reveal the secret history of the world. You have account for everything.”

“You are a million years old, Madame Obosky,” he said, looking into her deep, unfathomable eyes.

She smiled. “So? And which of my sons, Mr. Percivail, do you think I love the most? Cain or Abel?”

“It would take a woman to answer that question. There's one thing certain, however. You loved both of them more than you loved Adam.”

“True. But I followed Adam out of the Garden of Eden and I have never left his heels from zat day to this. What more could any man ask?”

On the second morning after the storm, the lookout fixed his straining eyes on a far-distant, shadowy line that had not been a part of the boundless horizon the day before. Dawn was breaking, night was lifting her sheet from the new-born day. He waited. He could not be sure. Minutes that seemed like hours passed. Then suddenly his hoarse shout rose out of the silence:

“Land ho!”

Down into the heart of the ship boomed the cry, taken from the lookout's lips by one after another of the weary men below. The sweating, exhausted toilers who manned the pumps paused for a moment, then fell to work again revitalized. Out from the cabins, up from every nook and corner of the ship scrambled the excited horde, fully dressed, their faces haggard with doubt, their eyes aglow with joy. Land! In every round little window gleamed a face,—for a moment only along the portside. Nothing but the same endless ocean on the port side of the ship. Water! Sick and wounded drew themselves up to the portholes and peered out from their cells for the first time.

“Where?... Where?” ran the wild, eager cry of the scurrying throng, and there was disappointment—bitter disappointment in their voices. They had been tricked. There was no land in sight! The glasses of the ship's officers, clustered far forward, were directed toward some point off the starboard bow, but if there was land over there it was not visible to the naked eye. A junior engineer saluted Captain Trigger and left the group.

“There is land ahead,—a long way off,” he announced as he passed through the throng in the saloon deck.

Up above the clamour of questions shouted from all sides as the crazed people flocked behind the messenger of hope, rose the voice of Morris Shine.

“Land ahoy! Ahoy-yoy-yoy!” he yelled over and over again, his chin raised like that of a dog baying at the moon.

Every person on deck was either carrying a life-belt or was already encased in one. Grim orders of the night just past. Here and there were to be seen men who clutched tightly the handles of suitcases and kit bags! Evidently they were expecting to step ashore at once. In any case, they belonged to the class of people who never fail to crowd their way down the gang-plank ahead of every one else. The fashionable ocean liners always have quite a number of these on board, invariably in the first cabin.

Percival ranged the decks in quest of Ruth Clinton. She was well aft on the boat deck, where the rail was not so crowded as it was forward. Her arm was about the drooping, pathetic figure of her aunt. They were staring intently out over the water,—the girl's figure erect, vibrant, alive with the spirit of youth, her companion's sagging under the doubt and scepticism of age. He hesitated a moment before accosting them. Nicklestick, the Jew, was excitedly retailing the news to them. He went so far as to declare that he could see land quite clearly,—and so could they if they would only look exactly where he was pointing. He claimed to have been one of the very first men on board to see the land.

Ruth was hatless. Her braided brown hair had been coiled so hastily, so thoughtlessly that stray strands fell loose about her neck and ears to be blown gaily by the breeze across her cheek. Her blouse was open at the neck, her blue serge jacket flared in the wind. Every vestige of the warm, soft colour had left her face. She was deathly pale with emotion.

Percival was suddenly conscious of a mist bedimming his eyes.

Several people were grouped near them at the rail, listening to Nicklestick. The stowaway joined them. As if sensing his presence, Ruth turned suddenly and saw him.

“Oh!” she cried, tremulously. “Have—have you seen it, Mr. Percival?”

“No,” he replied. “It won't be visible for an hour or so longer. It's off there all right, though. The lookout, Captain Trigger and several others got a glimpse of it before the sun began to pull the mist up to obscure it for a little while. That's mist over there,” he went on, turning to Nicklestick. “You couldn't see the Andes Mountains if they were where that strip of land is hidden. It won't be long, Miss

Clinton, before we all can see it.”

“How far away is it?” she asked, controlling her voice with an effort. “Do they know? Can they estimate?”

“I'll tell you what let's do,” he said abruptly. “Let's go up on the sun deck. I've got Mr. Gray's glasses. We can see better up there. Let me assist you, Mrs. Spofford. The sun deck is pretty badly smashed up and littered with all sorts of wreckage, but we can manage it all right.”

Mrs. Spofford looked at him intently for a moment.

“I remember you now,” she said. “Are you sure,—are you positive there is land over there?”

“I have Captain Trigger's word for it.”

“And mine, too,” added Mr. Nicklestick. “You may rest assured, Mrs. Spofford, that we will all be on dry land before many hours.”

Percival leaned close to the speaker and said in a very low but emphatic tone:

“You don't know a damn thing about it, so keep your trap closed. If you're a man, you won't go on raising false hopes in the breasts of these women.”

Nicklestick's jaw fell. He whispered:

“My God,—ain't we—you don't mean to say there is a chance we won't be able to—”

But Percival had turned away with the two women. Mrs. Spofford took his arm, leaning heavily against him. Her figure had straightened, however. He had given her the needed confidence.

They made their way up the steps leading to the topmost deck. Others had already preceded them. A dozen men and women were looking out over the sea through their binoculars. They recognized Landover, Madame Careni-Amori (clutching her jewel case), Joseppi, Fitts and one or two more. Olga Obosky was well forward, seated on the edge of a partially wrecked skylight and ventilator. Her three dancing girls were with her, closely grouped.

Percival purposely remained near the steps. He knew full well that the ship's hours were numbered. It was only a question of time when she would founder. In the lee of one of the big stacks they huddled close together and waited for the lifting of the veil. The wind was soft but strong up there at the top of the vessel. He took hope in the fact that it was blowing toward the shores of that unseen land, and that slowly but surely the Doraine was drifting thither.

Suddenly, as if a curtain were being raised, a far-off line appeared on the surface of the waters. Higher rose the curtain, and like magic the line developed

into an irregular ridge, the ends of which sank below the horizon far to the right and left.

Percival felt the girl's hand on his arm. He shot a swift glance at her face. It was turned away. She staring at the mystic panorama that was being unveiled off there on the rim of the world. Her eyes were bright, her lips were parted in the ecstasy of hope revived, she was breathing deeply. The pulse in her smooth white neck was beating rapidly, rythmically. He could see it. He laid his bandaged hand firmly upon hers and pressed it tightly to his arm. She did not look around. Her every thought was centred upon the unfolding vision.

“There are trees,” she murmured, enthralled. “Trees,—and hills! See, Auntie, —but oh, how far away they are!”

For many minutes they stood there without speaking. Then from all sides came the clamour of voices,—shouts of joy, cheers,—laughter! She looked down at the clumsy object that imprisoned her hand, then swiftly up into his eyes. A warm flush spread over her face.

“I—I couldn't help it,” he muttered. “It—it looked so helpless.”

“It isn't half as helpless as yours, Mr. Percival,” she said, and smiled. She waited a moment before withdrawing her hand. “May I have the glasses, please? Had you forgotten them?”

“Completely,” he replied.

Later, while Mrs. Spofford was peering through the glasses, she drew him aside.

“Tell me about the water in the hold,” she said in a low tone. “Is it serious?”

He looked grave. “Very. If you will take a peep over the side of the ship, you'll see how low down she is in the water.”

“My aunt doesn't know the ship is leaking,” she went on, hurriedly. “I want to keep it from her as long as possible.” He nodded his head.

“Mr. Mott figures we'll stay afloat for ten or twelve hours,—maybe longer. I will see to it that you and Mrs. Spofford get into one of the boats in case we—well, just in case, you know. We will be given ample warning, Miss Clinton. Things don't look as hopeless as they did last night.” He pointed toward the land. “It looks like heaven, doesn't it?”

Her face clouded. “But only a very few of us may—” she stopped, shuddering.

“You poor little girl!” he cried brokenly. He steadied himself and went on: “It wouldn't surprise me in the least if every blessed one of us got safely ashore.”

“You do not believe that, Mr. Percival. I can tell by the look in your eyes. I

want you to promise me one thing. If we have to take to the boats, you will come with us—”

He drew himself up. “My dear Miss Clinton, there is quite a difference between being a stowaway on an ocean liner and being one in a lifeboat. I have no standing on this ship. I have no right in one of her boats. I am the very last person on board to be considered.”

She looked searchingly into his eyes, her own wide with comprehension. “You mean you will make no effort to leave the ship until every one else is—”

He checked her with a gesture of his hand. “I may be one of the first to leave. But I'll not rob any one else of his place in a boat or his space on one of those rafts. I'll swim for it.”

Slowly the land crept down upon the Doraine. The illusion was startling. The ship seemed to be lying absolutely motionless; it was the land that approached instead of the other way round. A thin white beach suddenly emerged from the green background to the left, to the right an ugly mass of rocks took shape, stretching as far as the eye could reach. Farther inland rose high, tree covered hills, green as emeralds in the blazing sunlight. On a sea of turquoise lolled the listless Doraine.

Soundings were taken from time to time. Even the bottom of the ocean was coming up to meet the Doraine. Its depth appreciably lessened with each successive measurement. From fifty fathoms it had decreased to ten since the first line was dropped.

At four o'clock, Captain Trigger ordered a boat lowered and manned by a picked crew in charge of the Second Engineer. The Doraine was about five miles off shore at the time, and was drifting with a noticeably increased speed directly toward the rock-bound coast. He had hoped she would go aground in the shallow waters off the sandy beach, but there was now no chance that such a piece of good fortune was in store for her. She was going straight for the huge black rocks.

The boat's crew rowed in for observations. Even before they returned to report, the anxious officers on board the vessel had made out a narrow fissure in the rocky coast line. They assumed that it was the mouth of a small river. The Second Engineer brought back the astonishing information that this opening in the coast was the gateway to a channel that in his judgment split the island into two distinct sections. That it was not the mouth of a river was made clear by the presence of a current so strong that his men had to exert themselves to the utmost to prevent the boat being literally sucked into the channel by the

powerful tide, which apparently was at its full. This opening,—the water rushed into it so swiftly that he was satisfied it developed into a gorge farther back from the coast,—was approximately two hundred yards wide, flanked on either side by low lying, formidable bastions of rock. The water was not more than fifty feet deep off the entrance to the channel.

Gradually the prow of the Doraine swung around and pointed straight for the cleft in the shore. The ship, two miles out, had responded to the insidious pressure of the current and was being drawn toward the rocks,—at first so slowly that there was scarcely a ripple off her bows; then, as she lumbered onward, she began to turn over the water as a ploughshare turns over the land.

At precisely six o'clock she slid between the rocky portals and entered a canal so straight and true that it might have been drilled and blasted out of the earth under the direction of the most skilful engineers in the world.

Soundings were hastily taken. Discovering that the water was not deep enough even at high tide to submerge the vessel when the inevitable came to pass and she sank to the bottom, Captain Trigger renewed his efforts to release the anchor chains, which had been caught and jammed in the wreckage. He realized the vital necessity for checking the Doraine in her flight before she accomplished the miracle of passing unhindered through the channel and out into the open sea beyond. The swiftness of the current indicated plainly enough that this natural canal was of no great length.

The ship slid on between the tree lined banks. The trees were of the temperate zone, with spreading limbs, thick foliage and hardy trunks. There were no palms visible, but in the rarely occurring open spaces a large shrub abounded. This was instantly recognized by Percival, who proclaimed it to be the algaroba, a plant commonly found on the Gran Chaco in Argentina. While the woodland was thick there was nothing about it to suggest the tropical jungle with its impenetrable fastnesses.

The keel of the half-sunken Doraine was scraping ominously on the bed of the channel. She shivered and swerved from frequent contact with submerged rocks, but held her course with uncanny steadiness, while every soul on board gazed with stark, despairing eyes at the land which mocked them as they passed. Far on ahead loomed the lofty hills, and beyond them lay—What? The ocean?

Gradually the passage widened. Its depth also increased. The ship no longer scraped the bottom, she no longer caromed off the sunken rocks. On the other hand, water poured into her interior with increasing force and volume, indicating a disastrous rent forward. She was sloshing along toward the centre of a basin

which appeared to be half a mile wide and not more than a mile long. Directly ahead of her the hills came down to meet the water. A dark narrow cut, with towering sides, indicated an outlet for the tiny, inland sea. This gorge, toward which the Doraine was being resistlessly drawn, appeared to be but little wider than the ship itself.

Almost in the shadow of the hills, and within a dozen ship-lengths of the sinister opening, the worn, exhausted, beaten Doraine came to rest at the end of her final voyage. She shivered and groaned under the jarring impact, forged onward half her length, heeled over slightly—and died! She was anchored for ever in the tiny landlocked sea, proud leviathan whose days had been spent in the boundless reaches of the open deep.

And here for the centuries to come would lie the proud Doraine, guided to her journey's end by the pilot Chance, moored for all time in the strangest haven ever put into by man.

Behind the stranded vessel stretched centuries incalculable, and in all these centuries no man had entered here. Screened from the rest of the world, untended by chortling tugs, unheralded by raucous sirens, welcomed only by primeval solitude, the Doraine had come to rest.

She settled down on her bed of rocks to sleep for evermore, a mottled monster whose only covering was the night; indifferent to storm and calm, to time and tide, to darkness and light, she sat serene in her little sea. Her lofty walls towered high above the waves that broke tremblingly against them, as if afraid of this strange object from another world that could rest upon the bottom of the ocean and yet be so far above them.

Reported “Lost with all on board!”

CHAPTER VIII.

Captain Trigger and a dozen men stood on the boat deck with guns and revolvers, facing several hundred sullen, determined men and women from the steerage. Night had not yet fallen; the shadow of the hills, however, was reaching half way across the oval pool; gloom impenetrable had settled on the wooded shores.

With the striking of the Doraine, nearly every one on board was hurled to the decks. As she heeled over five or six degrees in settling herself among the rocks, a panic ensued among the ignorant people of the steerage. They scrambled to their feet and made a rush for the boats, shouting and screaming in their terror. Other passengers were trampled under foot and sailors standing by the davits were hurled aside.

Captain Trigger, anticipating just such a stampede, rushed up with members of the gun crew. The gaunt, broken old master of the Doraine drove the horde back from the boats, but as he stood there haranguing them in good maritime English he could see plainly enough that they were not to be so easily subdued. The first panic was over, but they were crazed by the fear that had gripped them for days; they believed that the ship was soon to sink beneath their feet; safety lay not more than a hundred yards away,—and it was being denied them by this heartless, unfeeling despot.

They were mainly low-caste Portuguese bound for Rio and Bahia, and they had obeyed him through all those tortuous days out on the deep where he was the shepherd and they the flock. But now,—now they could well afford to turn upon and rend him, for he had brought them safe to land and they no longer owed him anything!

“My God, I don't want to shoot any of them,” groaned the Captain, steadying himself against the rail. “But they've got guns, and they're crazy. I—”

Some one touched his arm, and a firm, decisive voice spoke in his ear.

“I'm used to handling gangs like this, Captain Trigger. They don't understand you, but they'll damn soon understand me, if you'll turn the job over to me. I'm not trying to be officious, sir, and I'm not even hinting that you can't bring 'em to their senses. I know how to handle 'em and you don't, that's all. They're not sailors, you see. And it isn't mutiny. They need a boss, sir,—that's what they need. And they need him damned quick, so if you don't mind saying the word,—

they're ready to make a rush, and if—”

“Go ahead, Percival,—if you can hold them—”

“Say no more!” shouted Percival, and stepped resolutely forward. His hands were bare,—swollen, red and ugly; his eyes were as cold as steel, his voice as sharp as a keen-edged sword. He spoke in Spanish to the wavering, threatening horde.

“You damned, sneaking, low-lived cowards! What sort of swine are you? Have you no thought for the women you've trampled upon and beaten out of your path,—your own women, as well as the others,—think of them and ask yourselves if you are men. I'm in command of this ship now, and, by God, I'm going to let you get into those boats and start for shore. Don't cheer! You don't know what's coming to you. I'm going to turn that cannon on you up there and blow every one of you to hell and gone before you get fifty feet from the side of this ship. You don't believe that, eh? Well, that's exactly what I'm going to do. Lieutenant Platt!” He called over his shoulder in English to the young commander of the gun's crew. “Get some of your men up there and train that gun so as to blow these boats to smithereens. Quick!” In a half-whisper to the Captain: “It's all right. I know what I'm talking about.” Then to the crowd: “We don't want you on board this ship a minute longer than we can help. We've got no room for dogs here among decent white men and women. Do you understand that? We don't want to have anything more to do with you, either here or on shore. I'm going to wipe you out, every damned one of you,—men women and children. You're not fit to live. You're going to climb into those boats now and get off this ship. You'll never realize how safe you are here till you get down there in the water and hear that gun go off. Come on! Get a move! We're through with you, now and for ever. Nobody's going to stop you. I'm even going to have the boats lowered for you, so as not to delay matters.” He shouted after Lieutenant Platt: “Be lively, please. You've got your orders. We'll make short work of this pack of wolves.” To Captain Trigger, authoritatively: “Withdraw your men, sir. I am going to let them leave the ship. At once, sir! Do you mean to disobey me, sir?” He gave the captain a sly wink.

Then as the bewildered master withdrew with his armed men, he turned once more to the mob. “Come on! Step lively, now! No rushing! Take your turn. Every blasted one of you, I mean. What the hell are you hanging back for,—you? You were so darned eager to go a little while ago, what's the matter with you now? No one's trying to stop you. Here are the boats. Put up your guns and knives, and pile in. You're absolutely free to go, you swine. We'll be damned good and rid of you, and that's all we're asking. It's a pity to waste powder and

cannon-balls on you, when we may have use for all we've got later on, killing the lions and tigers and anacondas up there in the woods, but I'm going to do it."

He stepped back. Not a man or woman moved. They stood transfixed, packed in a huddled mass along the deck. Then a woman cried out for mercy. The cry was taken up by other women. Percival halted and faced them once more.

"Get into those boats!" he roared savagely. "It won't do you a bit of good to whine and pray and squeal. I'm through with you. You've got to—Well?"

Several of the men edged forward, some of them trying to smile.

"Would you kill us when we are only trying to save our lives?" called out one of them, finding his courage and voice.

"I don't want to talk to you. Get in!"

"We have as much right to remain on this ship as anybody else," shouted another. "We paid for our passage. We are honest, hard-working—"

"No use! I'll give you ten minutes to climb into those boats."

There was a moment's silence. "And what will you do if we refuse to leave the ship?" cried one of the men.

"Be quiet!" he bawled at the whimpering women. "We cannot hear what the gentleman has to say."

"You'll soon find out what I'll do, if you don't obey me inside of ten minutes," replied Percival.

"But the ship is not going to sink any more," protested another, looking over the rail timidly. "She is safe. We do not wish to leave now."

Captain Trigger and Mr. Mott joined Percival. In an undertone he told them what he had said to the mob.

"And now, gentlemen," he whispered in conclusion, "it's up to you to intercede in their behalf. They're as tame as rabbits now. They know the ship's all right, and they believe I intend to blow 'em to pieces if they once put off in the boats. Start in now, Captain, and argue with me. Plead for them. They know who I am. They know I come from the hills and they think I'm a bloodthirsty devil. They're like a lot of cattle. Most of them are simple, honest, God-fearing people, —and if we handle them properly now we'll not have much trouble with them in the future. And only the Good Lord knows what the future is going to bring."

So the three of them argued, two against one. Finally Percival threw up his hands in a gesture of complete surrender.

"All right, Captain. I give in. Perhaps you are right. I suppose it would be

butchery.”

There were a few in the crowd who understood English. These edged forward eagerly, hopefully. They called out protestations against the “slaughter.”

“Tell them you have reconsidered, Mr. Percival,” said the Captain. “They are to remain on board.”

Excited shouts went up from the few who understood, and then the word went among the others that they were to be spared. There were cries of relief, joy, gratitude, and not a few fell upon their knees!

Percival stood forth once more. Silence fell upon the throng.

“The Captain has put in a plea for you, and I have decided to grant it. You may remain on board. Now, listen to me! No one is to leave this ship until tomorrow morning. We are safe here. We are stuck fast on the bottom, and nothing can happen to us at present. Tomorrow we will see what is best to be done. Every man and woman here is to return to the task he was given by Mr. Mott at the beginning of our troubles. We've got to eat, and sleep, and—Wait a minute! Well, all right,—beat it, if you feel that way about it.”

He stood watching them as they excitedly withdrew toward the bow of the ship, breaking up into clattering groups, all of them talking at once.

Captain Trigger laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

“If it had not been for you, Percival, this deck would now be red with blood,—and some of us would be dead. You saved a very ticklish situation. I take off my hat to you, and I say, with a full heart, that I shall never again doubt your ability to handle men. No one but an American could have tricked that mob as you did, my lad.”

From various points of vantage the foregoing scene had been witnessed by uneasy, alarmed persons from upper cabins. Overwhelmed and dismayed by the rush of the yelling mob, the elect had fled for safety, urged by a greater fear than any that had gone before,—the fear of rioting men.

A few of them, more daring and inquisitive than the rest, had ventured recklessly into the zone of danger. Among them were Ruth Clinton and Madame Olga Obosky, who, disregarding the command of Mr. Mott, were the only women to venture beyond the protecting corner of the deck building. They stood side by side, bracing themselves against the downward slope of the deck. Half-way forward were Trigger and the armed gunners, and beyond them the dense, irresolute mass of humanity. Percival, in rounding the corner to go to the assistance of Captain Trigger, observed with dismay the exposed position in

which the two women had placed themselves. He paused to cry out to them sharply:

“What are you doing here? Get back to the other side. Can't you see there is likely to be shooting? Don't stand there like a couple of idiots! You're right in line if that gang begins to fire.”

“He is tearing off his bandages,” cried Ruth, as Percival hurried on.

Madame Obosky was silent, her gaze fixed intently on the brisk, aggressive figure of the man who had called them idiots. She understood every word he uttered to the Portuguese. Her eyes glistened with pride when he stepped forward to tackle the mob single-handed, and as he went on with his astonishing speech she actually broke into a soft giggle. Her companion looked at her in amazement.

“Why do you laugh?” she demanded hotly. “Those dreadful creatures may tear him to pieces. He is unarmed and defenceless. They could sweep him—”

“You would laugh also if you understood,” interrupted Olga, her eyes dancing. “Oh, what a grand—what do you call it?—bluff? What a magnificent bluff he is doing! It is beautiful. See,—they whisper among themselves,—they have back down completely. Wait! I will presently tell you what he have said to them.”

“I never dreamed any man could be so fearless. Look at the odds against him. There are scores of them,—and they—”

“Pooh! Do you suppose he would stand up and fight them if they rushed at him? Not he! He would turn and run as fast as he could. He is no fool, my dear. He is a very intelligent man. So he would run if they make a single move toward him.”

“I think this is rather a poor time to accuse him of cowardice, Madame Obosky, in view of what he—”

“Have I accused him of cowardice?”

“I'd like to know what you call it. You say he would run if they—”

“But that would not be cowardice. It would be the simplest kind of common sense. He is so very sure of himself. It is not courage. It is confidence. That is his strength. He would be a fool to stand in front of them empty-handed if they were to charge upon him. Maybe when you have known him as long as I have, you will realize he is not a fool,—about himself or any one else.”

Ruth stared at her. “Unless I am greatly mistaken, Madame Obosky, I have known Mr. Percival as long if not longer than you have.”

“You do not know him at all,” rejoined the Russian brusquely. “Be still,

please! I must hear what he is saying to them now." A little later she turned to the American girl and laid her hand on her arm. "For-give me, if I was rude to you. I am so very much older than you that I—how old are you, Miss Clinton?"

"I am twenty-five," replied the other, surprised into replying.

"And I am twenty-six," said Madame Obosky, as if she were at least twice the age of her companion. "See! They are dispersing. It's all over. Come! Let us go back to the other side."

"I am not ready to go back to the other side," protested the American girl, resisting the hand on her arm. "Why should we go back, now that the danger is over?"

"Because we must not let him catch us here," urged Olga in some agitation.

"And why not, pray?"

The Russian looked at her in astonishment. "But surely you heard him tell us to go back to the other side. You heard him call us idiots, Miss Clinton?"

And Ruth Clinton suffered herself to be hurried incontinently around the corner of the deck building.

"Once, in Moscow, I saw a Grand Duke confront a mob of students who had gathered in the street near his house. They were armed and they had come to destroy this man himself. There were hundreds of them. He walked straight toward them, his head erect, his shoulders squared, and when they stopped he spoke to them as if they were dogs. When he had finished, he turned his back upon them and walked away. They might have filled him with bullets,—but they did not fire a shot. At the corner he entered his carriage and disappeared. And then what did he do? He fainted, that Grand Duke, he did. Fainted like a stupid, silly young girl. But while he was standing before zat—-that mob of terrorists he was the strongest man in Russia. Nevertheless, he was afraid of them. You have therefore the curious spectacle to perceive, Miss Clinton, of one man being afraid of hundreds, and of hundreds of men at the same time being afraid of one. Man, he is a queer animal, eh?"

It was not long before the doubts and fears of all on board the Doraine gave way to a strange, unnatural state of exhilaration. It represented joy without happiness, relief without security, exultation without conviction,—for, after all, there still remained unanswered the question that robbed every sensation of its thrill. While they were singing the hymns of thanksgiving in the saloon that night, and listening to the fervent prayers; while they ate, drank and were merry, their thoughts were not of the day but of the morrow. What of the morrow? In the eyes of every one who laughed and sang dwelt the unchanging shadow of

anxiety; on every face was stamped an expression that spoke more plainly than words the doubts and misgivings that constituted the background of their jubilation. They had escaped the sea, but would they ever escape the land? Had God, in answer to their complaints and prayers, directed them to a land from which the hand of man would never rescue them? Were they isolated here in the untraversed southern seas, cast upon an island unknown to the rest of the world? Or were they, on the other hand, within reach of human agencies by which the world might be made acquainted with their plight?

Uppermost in every mind was the sickening recollection, however, that for days they had ranged the sea without sighting a single craft. They were far from the travelled lanes, they were out of the worth-while world. Hope rested solely on the possibility that the hills and forests hid from view the houses and wharves of a desolate little sea-town set up by the far-reaching people of the British Isles.

The story of Percival's achievement was not long in going the rounds. It went through the customary process of elaboration. By the time it reached his ears,—through the instrumentality of Mr. Morris Shine, the motion picture magnate,—it had assumed sufficient magnitude to draw from that enterprising gentleman a bona fide offer of quite a large sum for the film rights in case Mr. Percival would agree to re-enact the thrilling scene later on. In fact, Mr. Shine, having recovered his astuteness and his courage simultaneously, was already working at the preliminary details of the most “stupendous” picture ever conceived by man. His deepest lament now was that he had neglected to bring a good camera man down from New York, so that on the day of the explosion he could have “got” the people actually jumping overboard, and drowning in plain sight—(although he did not see them because of the trouble he was having to get a seat in one of the life-boats),—and the wounded scattered over the decks, the fire, the devastation, the departure and return of the boats, the storm and all that followed, including himself in certain judiciously preserved scenes, and the whole production could have been made at practically no cost at all. There never had been such an opportunity, complained Mr. Shine the moment he felt absolutely certain that the opportunity was a thing of the past.

“No wonder he got away with it,” said Mr. Landover to a group of rejuvenated satellites. “He is hand in glove with them, that fellow is. I wouldn't trust him around the corner. Why, it's perfectly plain to anybody with a grain of intelligence that he's the leader of that gang of anarchists. All he had to do was to speak to them,—in their own language, mind you,—and back they slunk to their quarters. They obeyed him because he is their chosen leader, and that's all there is to this—What say, Fitts?”

Mr. Fitts, who was not a satellite but a very irritating Christian gentleman, cleared his throat and said:

“I didn't speak, Mr. Landover. I always make a noise like that when I yawn. It's an awfully middle-class habit I've gotten into. Still, don't you think one obtains a little more—shall we say enjoyment?—a little more enjoyment out of a yawn if he lets go and puts his whole soul into it? Of course, it isn't really necessary to utter the 'hi-ho-hum!' quite so vociferously as I do,—in fact, it might even be better to omit it altogether,—if possible,—when some one else is speaking. There are, I grant you, other ways of expressing one's complete mastery of the art of yawning, such as a prolonged but audible sigh, or a sort of muffled howl, or even a series of blissful little shrieks peculiar to the feminine of the species,—any one of these, I admit, is a trifle more elegant and up-to-date, but they all lack the splendid resonance,—you might even say grandiloquence,—of the old-fashioned 'hi-ho-hum!' to which I am addicted. Now, if you will consider—”

“My God!” exclaimed the banker, with a positively venomous emphasis on the name of the Deity. “Who wants to know anything about yawns?”

Mr. Fitts looked hurt. “I am sorry. My mistake. I thought you were trying to change the subject when you interrupted my yawn.”

“That fellow's a damn' fool,” said the banker, as Fitts strolled off to join another group.

“Try one of these cigars, Mr. Landover,” said Mr. Nicklestick persuasively. “Of course, they're nothing like the kind you smoke, but—”

“Is mine out? So it is. No, thank you. I'll take a match, however, if you have one about you.”

Four boxes were hastily thrust upon the great financier.

“Haf you noticed how poor the matches are lately, Mr. Landover?” complained Mr. Block.

“As for this vagabond being superintendent of a mining concession up in Bolivia,” continued Landover, absentmindedly sticking Mr. Nicklestick's precious, box of matches into his own pocket, “that's all poppycock. He's an out-and-out adventurer. You can't fool me. I've handled too many men in my time. I sized him up right from the start. But the devil of it is, he's got all the officers on this boat hypnotized. And most of the women too. I made it a point to speak to Mrs. Spofford and her niece about him this morning,—and the poor girl has been making quite a fool of herself over him, you may have observed. Mrs. Spofford owns quite a block of stock in our institution, so I considered it my duty to put a

flea in her ear, if you see what I mean.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Mr. Nicklestick.

“She should have been very grateful,” said Mr. Block.

Mr. Landover frowned. “I'm going to speak to her again as soon as she has regained her strength and composure. Nerves all shot to pieces, you understand. Everything distorted,—er—shot to pieces, as I say. I dare say I should have had more sense than to—er—ahem!—two or three days' rest, that's what she needs, poor thing.”

“Absolutely,” said Mr. Nicklestick.

“You can't tell a woman anything when she's upset,” said Mr. Block, feelingly.

“Miss Clinton is a very charming young lady,” said Mr. Nicklestick, giving his moustache a slight twist. “I should hate to see her lose her head over a fellow like him.”

“She is a splendid girl,” said Landover warmly. “One of the oldest families in New York. She deserves nothing but the best.”

“That's right, that's right,” assented Mr. Nicklestick. “I don't know when I've met a more charming young lady, Mr. Landover.”

“I didn't know you had met her,” observed the banker coldly.

“Oh, yes,” replied Mr. Nicklestick. “We were in the same lifeboat, Mr. Landover, you know,—all night, you know, Mr. Landover.”

CHAPTER IX.

Early the next morning, Percival turned out long before there were any sounds from the galley or dining-room. The sun had not yet cleared the tree-tops to the east; the decks of the Doraine were still wet with dew. A few sailors were abroad; a dull-eyed junior officer moodily picked his way through the debris on the forward deck. Birds were singing and chattering in the trees that lined the shore; down at the water's edge, like sentinels on duty, with an eye always upon the strange, gigantic intruder, strutted a number of stately, bright-plumaged birds of the flamingo variety—(doubtless they were flamingoes); the blue surface of the basin was sprinkled with the myriad white, gleaming backs of winged fishermen, diving, flapping, swirling; on high, far above the hills, soared two or three huge birds with wings outspread and rigid, monarchs of all that they surveyed. The stowaway leaned on the port rail and fixed his gaze upon the crest of the severed hill, apparently the tallest of the half dozen or so that were visible from his position.

With powerful glasses he studied the wooded slope. This hill was probably twelve or fourteen hundred feet high. He thought of it as a hill, for he had lived long in the heart of the towering Andes. Behind him lay the belt of woodland that separated the basin from the open sea, a scant league away. The cleft through the hill lay almost directly ahead. It's walls apparently were perpendicular; a hundred feet or less from the pinnacle, the opening spread out considerably, indicating landslides at some remote period, the natural sloughing off of earth and stone in the formation of this narrow, unnatural passage through the very centre of the little mountain. For at least a thousand feet, however, the sides of the passage rose as straight as a wall. That the mountain was of solid rock could not be doubted after a single glance at those sturdy, unflinching walls, black and sheer.

“Well, what do you make of it?” inquired a voice at his elbow. He turned to find Mr. Mott standing beside him.

“Earthquake,” he replied. “Thousands of years ago, of course. Split the island completely in two.”

“Sounds plausible,” mused the First Officer. “But if that is the case, how do you account for the shallowness of the water in the passage and out here in the basin? An earthquake violent enough to split that hill would make a crack in the

earth a thousand fathoms deep."

"I have an idea that if we took soundings in this basin we'd find a section twenty or thirty feet wide in the centre of it where we couldn't touch bottom. The same would be true of the passage if we plumbed the middle. When we came through it the ship scraped bottom time and again. As a matter of fact,—the way I figure it out,—she was simply bumping against the upper edges of a crevice that reaches down God knows how far. We took no soundings, you will remember, until we swung out into this pool. I'll bet my head that that cut through the hill yonder is a mile deep. Earthquake fissures seldom go deeper than that, I've heard. Generally they are mere surface cracks, a hundred feet deep at the outside. But this one,—My God, it gives me the creeps, that crack in the earth does."

"Umph!" said Mr. Mott, his elbows on the rail beside the young man, his chin in his hands. He was looking down at the water. "Captain Trigger is planning to send a couple of boats outside to survey the coast. I dare say he'll be asking you to go out in one of them. You're a civil engineer and so he feels—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Mott, but what's the sense of sending boats out to explore the coast before we find out how big the island is?"

"What's the sense? Why, how are we to find out how big the island is unless we make the circuit of it? And how in thunder are we to find out that there isn't a village or some sort of trading port on it—What are you pointing up there for?"

Percival's finger was levelled at the top of the higher half of the bisected mountain.

"See that hill, Mr. Mott? Well, unless we're on a darned sight bigger island than I think we are, we can see from one end of it to the other from the top of that hill. It isn't much of a climb. A few huskies with axes to cut a path through the underbrush, and we might get up there in a few hours. I've been figuring it out. That's why I got up so early. Had it on my mind all night. The sensible thing to do is to send a gang of us up there to have a look around. Strange Captain Trigger never thought of it. I suppose it's because he's an old sea-dog and not a landlubber."

Mr. Mott coughed. "I fancy he would have thought of it in good time."

"Well, in case he doesn't think of it in time, you might suggest it to him, Mr. Mott."

The result of this conversation was the formation of a party of explorers to ascend the mountain. They were sent ashore soon after breakfast, well-armed, equipped with axes and other implements, boat-hooks, surveying instruments,

and the most powerful glasses on board. Percival was in command. The party was made up of a dozen men, half of them from the gun crew, with an additional complement of laborers from the steerage.

Ruth Clinton, as soon as she learned of the proposed expedition, sought out Percival and insisted upon re-bandaging his hands.

“You must not go into all that tangle of brushwood with your hands unprotected,” she declared, obstinately shaking her head in response to his objections. “Don't be foolish, Mr. Percival. It won't take me five minutes to wrap them up. Sit down,—I insist. You are still one of my patients. Hold out your hand!”

“They are ever so much better,” he protested, but he obeyed her.

“Of course they are,” she agreed, in a matter-of-fact tone. “You did not give me a chance last night to tell you how splendid you were in tackling that crazy mob. I witnessed it all, you know. Madame Obosky and I.”

“Then, you didn't beat it when I told you to, eh?”

“Certainly not. What are you going to do about it?”

“What can I do? I can only say this: I'm glad Captain Trigger's opinion of me is based on my ability to reason with an ignorant mob and not on my power to intimidate a couple of very intelligent young women.”

“I wouldn't have missed it for worlds,” she said coolly. She looked up into his eyes, a slight frown puckering her brow. “Do you know, Madame Obosky had the impertinence to say that you would have turned tail and fled if those people had shown fight.”

He grinned. “She's an amazing person, isn't she? Wonderful faculty for sizing the most of us up.”

“You would have run?”

“Like a rabbit,” he answered, unabashed. “That's a little too tight, I think, Miss Clinton. Would you mind loosening it up a bit?”

“Oh, I'm sorry. Is that better? Now the other one, please.”

“Yes, I'm an awful coward,” he said, after a long silence.

She looked up quickly. Something in his eyes brought a faint flush to her cheek. For a second or two she met his gaze steadily and then her eyes fell, but not before he had caught the shy, wondering expression that suddenly filled them. He experienced an almost uncontrollable desire to lay his clumsy hand upon the soft, smooth brown hair. Through his mind flashed a queer rush of comparison. He recalled the dark, knowing eyes of the Russian dancer,

mysterious and seductive,—man-reading eyes from which nothing was concealed,—and contrasted them with the clear, honest, blue-grey orbs that still could fall in sweet confusion. His heart began to pound furiously, he felt a queer tightening of the throat. He was afraid to trust his voice. How white and soft and gentle were her hands,—and how beautiful they were.

Suddenly she stroked the bandaged hand,—as an amiable manicurist might have done—and arose.

“There!” she said, composedly. Her cheek was cool and unflushed, her eyes serene and smiling. “Now you may go, Mr. Percival. Good luck! Bring back good news to us. I dreamed last night that we were marooned, that we would have to stay here for ever.”

“All of us?” he asked, a trifle thickly.

“Certainly,” she replied, after the moment required for comprehension. Her eyes were suddenly cold and uncompromising.

“If I never come back,” he began, somewhat dashed, “I'd like you to remember always, Miss Clinton, that I—well, that I am the most grateful dog alive. You've been corking.”

“But it isn't possible you won't come back,” she cried, and he was happy to see a flicker of alarm in her eyes. “What—what could happen to you? It isn't—”

“Oh, all sorts of things,” he broke in, much in the same spirit as that which dominates the boy who wishes he could die in order to punish his parents for correcting him.

“Are—are you really in earnest?”

“Would you care—very much?”

She hesitated. “Haven't I wished you good luck, Mr. Percival?”

“Would you mind answering my question?”

“Of course I should care,—very much indeed,” she replied calmly. “I am sure that everybody would be terribly grieved if anything were to happen to you out there.”

“Well,—good-bye, Miss Clinton. I guess they're waiting for me.”

“Good-bye! Oh, how I wish I were in your place! Just to put my foot on the blessed, green earth once more. Good-bye! And—and good luck, again.”

“If you will take a pair of glasses and watch the top of that hill,—there is a bare knob up there, you see,—you will know long before we come back whether this island is inhabited or not. I am taking an American flag with me. If we do

not see another flag floating anywhere on this island, I intend to plant the Stars and Stripes on that hill,—just for luck!”

She walked a few steps at his side, their bodies aslant against the slope of the deck.

“And if you do not raise the flag, we shall know at once that—that there are other people here?” she said, her voice eager with suppressed excitement. “It will mean that ships—” Her voice failed her.

“It will mean home,—some day,” he returned solemnly.

The one remaining port-side boat was lowered a few minutes later and to the accompaniment of cheers from the throng that lined the rails, the men pulled away, heading for a tiny cove on the far side of the basin. The shore at that point was sloping and practically clear of undergrowth.

It was while Percival was waiting to take his place in the boat that Olga Obosky hurried up to him.

“I have brought my luck piece for you,” she said, and revealed in her open palm a small gold coin, worn smooth with age and handling. “Carry it, my friend. Nothing will happen to you while it is in your possession. It was given me by the son of a Grand Duke. It was his lucky piece. It brought me luck, for he was killed zat very same day, and so I was saved from him. Keep it in your pocket till you come safely back and then—then you shall return it to me, because I would not be without my luck, no.” She slipped her hand deep into his trousers pocket. “There is no hole. That is good. I have place it there. It is safe. Au revoir! You will have good luck, my friend.”

Withdrawing her warm hand from his pocket she turned and walked swiftly away.

The throng on board the Doraine watched the party land; hats and handkerchiefs were waved as the adventurers turned for a last look behind, before they disappeared into the forest.

Hours passed,—long interminable hours for those who were not engaged in the active preparations for the landing of people and stores. Captain Trigger was making ready to transfer the passengers from the ship at the earliest possible moment. He was far from certain that the Doraine would maintain its rather precarious balance on the rocks. With safety not much more than a stone's throw away, he was determined to take no further risk.

At last a shout went up from some one on the forecastle deck. It was taken up by eager voices. Out upon the bald crest of the mountain straggled the first of the

explorers to reach the goal. They were plainly visible. One after another the rest of the party appeared. The illusion was startling. It was as if they had actually emerged from the tree-tops. With straining eyes the observers below watched the group of figures outlined against the sky. They spoke in subdued tones. As time went on and the flag was not unfurled, they took hope; eyes brightened, the hushed tones increased to a cheerful, excited clatter, the tenseness that had held them rigid for so long gave way before the growing conviction that another flag already fluttered somewhere beyond the screening hills.

And then, when hope was highest, the Stars and Stripes went up!

Captain Trigger assembled the ship's company on the forward deck later in the day. The landing party returned about three o'clock. Acting on advance instructions, they made their report in private to the Captain, denying all information to the clamorous passengers. A brief conference of officers, to which a number of men from the first cabin were invited, was held immediately after Percival's return. A course of action was discussed and agreed upon, and then all on board were summoned to the open deck to hear the result of the expedition.

Percival reported the following facts and conclusions:

1. The island was approximately fifteen miles long and six or seven miles wide in the centre. The basin in which the Doraine rested was about midway between the extreme points, and about two miles inland from the northern shore. The southern slope of the range descended to a flat plain, or perhaps moor, some two miles across at its broadest point and ran in varying width from one end of the island to the other. It was green and almost entirely devoid of timber. The central eminence from which the observations were taken was the loftiest of a range of ten or twelve diminishing hills that formed what might actually be described as the backbone of the island. The eastern extremity tapered off to a long, level, low-lying promontory that ended in a point so sharp and wedge-like that it bore a singular resemblance to the forward deck and prow of a huge ironclad. The hills, as they approached the plateau, terminated altogether a couple of miles from the tip of land. The western half of the island (strictly speaking, it was a separate bit of land, cut off from its neighbour by the ribbon-like channel), was of a more rugged character, the hills, in fact, extending to the sea, forming, no doubt, steep and precipitous cliffs, rising directly from the water's edge.

(Since his return, Percival had painted on a large piece of canvas a fairly accurate outline map of the bisected island as it had appeared to him from the top of the mountain. This crude map was hung up in full view of the spectators, and served him well in an effort to make clear his deductions. His original sketch

is reproduced later on in this chronicle.)

2. There was no visible sign of past or present human habitation. Absolutely nothing appeared to indicate that man had ever attempted to claim or occupy this virgin land.

3. The channel through the mountain was less than one hundred feet wide. The walls of this gorge at one point were fully seven hundred feet high, absolutely perpendicular, and of solid rock. It was as if the hill had been split wide open with one blow of a tremendous broad-ax. Beyond the elevation the channel spread out fan-fashion, creating a funnel-like bay or inlet from the sea.

4. There was no other land in sight. As far as the eye could reach with the aid of lenses there was nothing but water, a mighty waste of water.

5. The wind, which had veered around to the south, was cold and dry.

6. A curving beach of almost snowy whiteness extended for a mile or so along the northern shore, about half way between the entrance to the channel and the eastern point of land. Inside the fringe of trees that lined this beach stretched what appeared to be a long strip of rolling meadow-land, reaching far up the hillsides.

7. Monkeys, parrots and snakes abounded in the forest. An occasional gay-plumaged bird of the toucan variety, but larger than the ordinary South American species, was seen, while large numbers of plump birds of the tinamou family went drumming off through the forest at the approach of the party. Penguins strutted in complete “full dress” among the rocks of the southern shore. A dead armadillo of extraordinary dimensions was found near the foot of the slope. It was at least thrice the size of the common South American mammal. The same could be said of the single iguana encountered. This large lizard, which was alive, must have been fully ten feet from head to tail, and gave rise to the belief that the supposedly extinct iguanodon, described by the scientists as attaining a length of thirty feet, might any day be discovered in the fastnesses of this unexplored land. The mere existence of this rather amiable, unfrightened monster was of the greatest significance. If it were known to man, why had it never been reported in zoological or natural history journals?

8. The trees on the mountain-side were thick and stunted, with interlocking limbs that created a sort of endless canopy which the sun was unable to penetrate. The cool, dry wind that swept the slope would account, however, for the surprising absence of moisture in soil and vegetation in the dense shade of the trees. Oak, elm, spruce, even walnut, and other trees of a sturdy character indigenous to the temperate zone were identified. What appeared to be a clump

of cypress trees, fantastic, misshapen objects that seemed to, shrink back in terror from the assaulting breakers, stood out in bold relief upon a rocky point to the south and west of the observation hill. Their gaunt, twisted trunks leaned backward from the sea; their shorn limbs, racked by gales, were raised as if in supplication to the sombre forest behind them. Trunks of enormous trees that had fallen perhaps a century ago were found half-buried in the earth, while scattered along the northern base of the range, overlooking the downs, a few of their gigantic counterparts, alive and flourishing, raised their lofty heads far above the surrounding forest, and stood like sentinels, guarding the plain.

9. A small river wound its devious way, with serpentine crooks and curves, through the downs and across the meadow, emptying into the ocean some distance east of the gleaming beach. That its source was far up in the secretive hills was not a matter of conjecture, however; the incessant hiss and roar of a cataract was plainly heard by the investigators.

Here is the crude, hastily sketched map of the island as made by Percival:

1. Position of stranded vessel in basin.

2. Entrance to channel from the north.

3. Entrance to channel from the south.

4. Narrow strip of woodland from channel almost to river's mouth.

5. Strip of meadow-land clear of trees.

6. River.

7. Stretch of lowland leading down to the water.

8. Crest of hill from which observations were taken with range extending east and west.

9. Point of rocks with cypress trees.

10. Buttress-like west end of island.

11. Dense forest reaching to channel.

12. Rocky cape.

13. Level plateau, without trees.

14. Beach.

15. Penguins.

CHAPTER X.

After the second reading of the foregoing report, the first being in English, Percival requested his fellow explorers to verify the statements contained therein. This they did promptly. He then went on:

“I am delegated by Captain Trigger and the officers of this vessel, after a conference just concluded,—and of which you are all well aware,—to put before you as briefly and as clearly as possible the decision that has been reached. I may as well confess in the beginning that this decision is based on the recommendations of the party who went to the top of the mountain. It is out of the question for the people on board this vessel to go ashore until further investigations have been made. For the present, we are all safe here on board the ship. We don't know what perils exist in the absolutely unexplored country that surrounds us. Additional parties are to be sent out to explore the island, especially the eastern section of it. There is no use mincing matters. We are confronted by a very plain situation. It is possible, even probable, that we are the first human beings ever to set foot on this land. If that be true, we are now so far out of the path of the few ships and steamers sailing these southern seas that there is small hope or chance of a speedy rescue. As a matter of fact, it isn't likely that we will be discovered until the island itself is discovered, if you see what I mean.

“There isn't the slightest chance that the ship we're now standing on will ever float again. Even if the engines could be put in order,—and that is possible, I am told,—the vessel cannot be raised. If anybody has been nursing that sort of hope, he may as well get rid of it. It's no good. We are here to stay, unless help comes from the outside. There's the plain English of it. We may have to live here on this island, like poor old Robinson Crusoe, for years,—for a great many years. I'm going to stop just a few seconds to let that soak into your brains. We've got to face it. We've got to make the best of it. It is not for Captain Trigger or me or any one else to say that we will not be taken off this island some time—maybe sooner than we think. Whaling vessels must visit these parts. That's neither here nor there. We've got our work cut out for us, friends. We've got to think of the present and let the future take care of itself. Now, here are the facts. We cannot remain on board this wreck. We've got to go to work, every man, woman and child of us. I don't know what can be cultivated on this island, but we've got to

find out, and when we find out we've got to begin raising it. If we don't, my friends, we'll starve to death in a very short time. And what's more, if we do not get out there and put up houses to live in, we'll freeze to death when winter comes along.

"According to calculations, winter is still five or six months away. We won't get it, I dare say, before next April or May. All you have to do is to take a look at all these trees around here to realize that we are a long way from the tropics. It gets as cold as blazes here in the dead of winter, I can tell you that. We've got to build homes. We've got to build a camp,—not a flimsy, half-way sort of camp, but a good, solid, substantial one, my friends. There is what you might call a minority report in regard to the situation. Captain Trigger asked me to speak for him and others who look at it as I do. Mr. Landover, who is, I understand, one of the leading bankers in the United States of America, contends that we are well enough off as we are, on board the Doraine, where we've got cabins and beds and shelter from the elements. He may be right. All I have to say to him is this, —I don't believe I mentioned it at this conference, Mr. Landover, simply because I'm one of those unhappy individuals who always think of the brilliant things I might have said when it's too late to say them,—all I have to say is this: if Mr. Landover and his supporters expect to sit snugly on this ship while the rest of us build houses and plant crops, and then conclude to come out and bone the rest of us for a square meal and a nice warm place to sleep, they are going to be badly fooled. We're all equal here. A couple of million dollars, more or less, doesn't cut any ice on this little island. What counts here is muscle and commonsense and a willingness to use both.

"A little while ago I asked Mr. Landover how much money he has with him. He informed me that while it wasn't any of my business, he has about five hundred dollars in American money and a couple of hundred pesos besides, but that his letter of credit is still good for fifteen thousand. Mr. Nicklestick has about five hundred dollars in money, and so has Mr. Block and one or two others. They've all got letters of credit, express checks, and so forth, and I suppose there is a wheelbarrow full of jewellery on board this ship. Now, if money is to talk down here, I wish to state that the men and women from the steerage have got more real dough than all the first and second cabins put together. They haven't any letters of credit or bank accounts in New York, but there are a dozen men in the steerage who have as much as two or three thousand pesos sewed up inside their clothes. So far as I can make out, the only people who can afford to hire anybody to build a hut for them, and pay for it in real money, are the plutocrats from the steerage.

“Mr. Landover's letter of credit is good for fifteen thousand if he ever gets back to New York, but it isn't worth fifteen cents here. His life is insured for one million dollars, I am told. I don't know who the beneficiaries are, but, whoever they are, they are going to put in a claim for the million if he doesn't show up in New York pretty shortly. He is going to be declared officially dead, and so are all the rest of us, after a reasonable time has elapsed. Now, I don't say that we are never going to be rescued. We may be found inside of a month. Some of us don't quite realize the fix we are in. Mr. Codge, the purser, was saying a little while ago that a lady from the first cabin nearly took his head off when he told her it was impossible to send a cable message to her people in Boston. A number of passengers have already demanded that their passage money be refunded.

“You have doubtless heard how I came to be on board this steamer. I am a stowaway. I have no standing among you. I haven't a penny in my pocket,—aside from a luck-piece that doesn't belong to me. I wanted to get back to the States so that I could carry a gun or something over in France. I wanted to fight for my country. I wasn't thinking very much about my life when I started for home and France, but I want to say that I'm thinking about it now. I don't intend to starve or freeze to death if I can help it. I am going to fight for my life, not for my country.

“This is no time to be sentimental. It is no time to sit down and pity ourselves or each other. God knows I am just as sorry for myself as you are for yourselves, but that isn't going to get me anywhere. We've got to work. That means all of us. It means the women as well as the men. It means the women with soft, white hands and the men who never did a stroke of manual labour in their lives, just as much as it means the people who have never done anything else but work. Something will be found for every one of us to do, and, ladies and gentlemen, we will have to do it without whining.

“Captain Trigger is accountable for the cargo on board this ship. Naturally he is opposed to our confiscating anything that has been entrusted to him for safe delivery. He takes a very sensible attitude, however. He will officially protest against the removal of anything from the hold of his vessel, but he will not employ force to resist us when we begin to land stores, foodstuffs and all that sort of thing. He understands the situation perfectly.

“Now, here is what we will have to do. We must select a site for our camp,—or town, you may well say,—and we must build upon it without delay. That is to be our first step. Details will come later. There are over six hundred of us here. We represent a fair-sized village. We have mechanics, carpenters, farmers, surveyors, masons,—and merchants, to say nothing of cooks, housekeepers, and

so on. The ship contains all sorts of tools to work with, canvas for temporary quarters, beds and bedding, cooking utensils,—in fact, we have everything that Robinson Crusoe didn't have, and besides all that, we've got each other. We are not alone on a desert island. We are, my friends, as well off as the Pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock, and we are better off than the hardy colonists who laid the foundation for the country that flies that flag up there. Centuries ago bold adventurers set out to discover unknown lands. They were few in number and poorly equipped. But they ventured into the wilderness and built villages that grew to be cities. They went through a thousand hardships that we will never know, and they survived.

"Captain Trigger and the others selected me to make this talk to you because I have had some practical experience in establishing and developing a camp, such as we will have to build. Experience has taught me one thing above all others: work, hard work of a constructive nature, is our only salvation. Unless we occupy ourselves from one day's end to another in good, hard, honest toil, we will all go mad. That's the long and the short of it. If we sat still on this boat for thirty days, doing nothing, we'd lose our minds. There isn't a man in this crowd, I am sure, who wouldn't work his head off to spare the women an hour of hardship. But the greatest hardship you women could possibly know would be idleness. There will be work for every one to do, and we can thank God for it, my friends. We will have to work for nothing. We will have to help each other. There is but one class on this island at present, and that is the working class.

"We've all got people at home waiting for us. By this time the whole world knows that the Doraine is three weeks overdue at Rio Janeiro, and that no word has been had from her. The ocean is being searched. Our friends, our relatives are doing everything in their power to get trace of this lost ship. You may depend on that. In a little while,—a few weeks, at best,—the ship will be given up for lost. We will be counted as dead, all of us. That's a hard, cruel thing for me to say, and I hate to say it,—but we've just got to realize the position we're in. It's best that we should look at it from the worst possible angle. I do not speak jestingly when I say that we may as well consider ourselves dead and forgotten. I am as full of hope and confidence as anybody and I am an optimist if there ever was one, but I don't work on the theory that God takes any better care of an optimist than He does of a pessimist.

"It will require months, maybe years, for us to construct a ship, and even then it will not be big enough to transport all of us. The most we can hope for is a craft that will be stout enough to go out and bring help to the rest of us. I am trying, at Captain Trigger's suggestion, to convince you that we can't build a

ship, that we can't expect to get away from this island by our own endeavours, unless we go about it in the proper and sensible way. That means, first of all, that we must safeguard ourselves against time. We've got to live and we've got to keep our strength.

“Mr. Landover has made a very generous proposition. He agrees to give a hundred thousand dollars to any boat's crew that will take one of these lifeboats and make port somewhere. He fails to mention the compensation they are to receive if they never make port. He forgets that this big ship floundered around for a good many days without sighting anything but water. He would have been perfectly safe in offering a hundred million dollars, because he would never be called upon to pay it. I understand, however, that his offer still stands.

“Tomorrow morning surveying parties will be sent ashore to look for a possible site for our town. Volunteers will undertake this work. As soon as possible thereafter a temporary camp will be set up, and practically every one on board will be moved from this ship. Captain Trigger and a few chosen men will remain on board. It is his wish, ladies and gentlemen. He is the captain of the Doraine. He will not leave her. We are all here today, and alive, because Captain Trigger would not leave his ship. We owe our lives to him. This is not the time to propose three cheers for the gallant master of the Doraine. It is not the time to cheer for anybody or for anything. We do not feel like cheering. We've done all the praying that is necessary, we've offered up all the thanksgiving that the situation calls for, so now we've got to roll up our sleeves and go to work.”

He, stepped down from the gun-platform. There were no cheers. Every voice was stilled, every face was set. Many seconds passed before there was even the slightest stir among those who had listened so intently.

Then the few English-speaking people from the steerage began to whisper hoarsely to their bewildered companions.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I.

The warm, summer season was well-advanced in this far southern land before the strenuous, tireless efforts of the marooned settlers began to show definite results.

Some six weeks after the stranding of the Doraine, staunch log cabins were in course of completion along the base of the hills overlooking the clear, rolling meadow-land to the north and east. Down in the lowlands scores of men were employed in sowing and planting. The soil was rich. Farmers and grain-raisers among the passengers were unanimously of the opinion that almost any vegetable, cereal or fruit indigenous to Argentina (or at the worst, Patagonia), could be produced here. Uncertainty as to the duration of the warm period, so vital to the growing and maturing of crops, was the chief problem. No time was to be lost if there were to be harvests before the cold and blighting weather set in.

It was extremely doubtful if the spring and summer seasons combined covered more than five months in this latitude. Assuming that the climate in this open part of the world was anything like that of the Falkland Islands, the rainy season was overdue. Midwinter usually comes in July, with the temperature averaging between 35 deg. and 10 deg. above zero over a period of four or five months. At the time of the wreck, the thermometers were registering about 70 deg. during the day, and dropping to 50 deg. or thereabouts after nightfall. This would indicate that spring was fairly well-advanced, and that midsummer might be figured on as coming in January. It was now the end of November. Warm weather probably would last until February or March. Possibly they would be too late with their planting, but they went about it speedily, determinedly, just the same.

All of them had had crop failures before. All of them had seen the labour of months go for naught in the blight of an evening's frost, or the sweep of a prairie fire. So here on this virgin isle, in soil whose sod had never been turned, they sowed from the bins of the slumbering ship. Wheat and oats and flax, brought from the Argentina plains; potatoes, squash and beet-root; even beans and peas were tried, but with small hope. And there were women ready to till the soil and work the gardens, women to draw the strangely fashioned ploughshares as willing beasts of burden, to wield the hoe and spade, and to watch for the

cherished sprout that was to glorify their deeds.

The ring of the ax resounded in the forest; the clangour of hammer and nail, the rasp of the saw, the clatter of timber went on from dawn to dusk,—for there was no eight-hour law in this smiling land, nor was there any other union save that of staunch endeavour, no other Brotherhood except that of Man. There was never a question of wage, never a dispute as to hours, never a thought of strike. Every labourer was worthy of his hire,—and his hire was food!

The Doraine was gradually being dismantled. She was being stripped of every bit of material that could be used in constructing and furnishing the huts. The new camp lay not more than a mile and a half from the basin. A road had been cleared through the wood from the small, hastily constructed dock and runway on the eastern side of the basin to the open territory beyond.

Material, supplies, equipment were carried through the densely shaded avenue, and later on, after the warehouses and granaries had been built, the leafy lane witnessed the transportation of ton upon ton of stores, patiently borne in hundredweight lots, in bushel bags, in clumsy parcels, by men whose work seemed endless; wheat, barley, oats, sugar, coffee and other commodities entrusted to the steamship company for delivery in the United States. Tobacco, canned and refrigerated meats, olives, flour, figs and dates in large quantities were included in the vast cargo, to say nothing of the enormous supply of canned fruits and vegetables. Washed wool, tanned leather, homespun cotton and woollen cloth, silks, hides, furs, rugs, laces, linseed oil, blankets,—all these came ashore in course of time, but of the sinister treasure that had inspired the destruction of the ship, i.e., the manganese, the rubber, the nitrates, the copper bars, and the stacks of high explosives, not a pound was moved. All this was left for another and more leisurely day.

In the end, the once luxurious liner was to be reduced to “skin and bones,” to employ a trite but eminently appropriate phrase. Ultimately she became a black, unlovely skeleton, bereft of every vestige of her former opulence. Her decks were torn up and the timbers hauled away to make floors in the huts; the doors, mirrors, stairways, windows, rails, carpets, pipes, bathtubs, toilets, lamps, every foot of woodwork from stem to stern, berths, washbasins, kitchen ranges, boilers,—in fact, everything that man could make use of was taken from the ship, leaving nothing of her but a hollow, echoing shell through which the wind howled or moaned a ghostly requiem.

Much of this material was carefully stacked or stored away against the day when it could be utilized in the construction of a small but sturdy ship, in which a chosen company of sailors were to fare out to sea once more in search of the

world they had lost.

Tireless and indomitable engineers later on succeeded in transferring portions of the damaged machinery, including dynamos, to the camp, where in course of time their skill and ingenuity bade fair to triumph over seemingly insurmountable difficulties in the matter of restoration.

Fully six weeks elapsed, however, before the women were allowed to leave the ship for their new homes on the land, and even then they came but a few at a time and only as huts were ready and fully equipped to receive them. Each hut contained a combination kitchen and living-room, with a single bedchamber. A substantial fireplace, built of stone and mortar, with a tall chimney at the back, was a feature in every house. The cracks between the logs, and all chinks, were sealed with thick layers of mortar; the ceilings, made of stout saplings, were treated in a similar manner, while the roof, resting on a sturdy ridge-pole, and securely anchored, was of three layers of poles, interstices mortared and the whole covered with a vast quantity of seaweed, moss and reeds held in place by several well-fastened sections of iron railing from the decks of the Doraine.

While the huts were uniform in size, shape and construction, there was nothing to prevent the occupant from subsequently enlarging and improving his house. For the present, however, the interests of all were best served by speed and compactness.

The superintendent of construction was Algernon Adonis Percival. As a matter of fact, the end of the first week found him occupying the position of General Manager for the whole enterprise, an unsolicited honour but one which he was resolved that no one, great or small, should deride. He had one stormy “run-in,” as he described it, with Mr. Landover and his group of satellites. This occurred about the middle of their first week on the island when practically every able-bodied man from the Doraine was at work cutting a way through the forest or in constructing the dock at the water's edge. As the incident is entitled to a very definite place in this narrative, a more or less extended account of it may be given here and now, even at the risk of being classed as a digression, or a step backward in the sequence of the history.

Mr. Landover, Mr. Block, Mr. Nicklestick and two or three other men were grouped on the after-deck early one morning decrying the brainless scheme to build a camp out there in the open. Their audience included several women, among them Mrs. Spofford, Ruth Clinton, Madame Careni-Amori, Madame Obosky, Mrs. Block and a couple of loquacious Rio Janeiro ladies.

Percival bore down upon this group. He wasted no time in getting to the point.

“We've been at work for two days out there, gentlemen, and up to date not one of you has turned to with the rest of us. The understanding was that—”

Mr. Landover whirled on him, white with anger. “That will do!” he exclaimed. “Clear out! I do not intend to allow any such riff-raff as you to order me to—Oh, pray do not be alarmed, ladies! This rowdy is not likely to assault me. Nothing will happen, I assure you. Clear out, you bum,—do you hear me?”

Percival was smiling. “I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Mr. Landover. As I was saying, it was understood that every man on this ship who is well enough to —”

“Can't you see that there are ladies present? Haven't you an atom of decency about you?”

“—understood that every man on this ship was to do his share of the work laid out. I owe these ladies an apology for reminding you in their presence that the boats are leaving for shore and that if you do not get off in the next relay you will be compelled to swim to that landing over there,—and I doubt very much whether any of you can make it.”

“Wha-what's that?” demanded Mr. Block.

Mr. Landover was speechless. A hard glitter came to Percival's eyes, the smile left his lips.

“You heard what I said, Mr. Block. I'll make it plainer, however. If you men don't get into the next boat leaving this ship, I'm going to have you thrown overboard and made to swim to your work. I regret exceedingly, ladies, that I have been obliged to resort to harsh words in your presence, but time is so precious that I can't afford to give them a private audience.”

“Oh, my goodness gracious!” cried Mrs. Block, twisting her fat hands in an agony of alarm. “Maybe you better go, Moses. You vas nearly drownded twice yet in pool at White Sulphur.”

“This is the most outrageous, high-handed,—” began Landover, explosively, but stopped short as Percival levelled his unlovely forefinger at him.

“Cut it out, Mr. Landover,—cut it out,” he snapped, inelegantly. “Now, listen to me. For two days you and these boon companions of yours have been loafing on the job. While the rest of us have been working like dogs, you and your friends,—you needn't look insulted, because by the looks of things they are your friends,—you've been sitting up here talking to the ladies, smoking cigars, and telling every one how successfully you conduct a bank in New York. Now, Mr. Landover, you're not an old man. If you were, I'd be the first to suggest the

easiest sort of work for you. You are under fifty and you're a strong, healthy man. You ride every morning in Central Park, you play golf in winter and summer, and you're one of the men who made Muldoon famous.

“You are able to work as the rest of us are working. Your hands are in a much better condition than mine. If we were in New York, I would take off my hat to you and admit that you are one of the greatest bankers in the world, and that you know your business. But we're not in New York. We're down here on a lonely island. You know how to build and conduct banks, I know how to build and conduct camps. We have no use for scientific bankers here, but we have considerable use for experienced camp builders. I have been put in charge of this work. I'm going to see it through. Up in the hills I got a full day's work out of my men,—and there were worse men among them than you will ever be. There were gunmen, knife slingers, cutthroats and bullies,—but they had to work, just the same. Just a minute, if you please. I'm not through. I think I appreciate your position, Mr. Landover.

“You regard me as a four-flusher, a tramp,—maybe a thief or worse. I am but little more than half your age and I am a person of absolutely no importance. That's neither here nor there. I have been selected to run this job because Captain Trigger, with Mr. Mott and virtually every other man on this ship, believes that I know how to handle it. But even that's neither here nor there. What I'm coming to is this. As long as I am in charge of this job, every man, woman and child has got to do something. Just at present there isn't much that the women and children can do, but there is work for every man who can stand on his feet. You needn't glare at me. I'm not afraid of you, Mr. Landover. You say you are going to stay on this ship. Well, I've come here to tell you that you are not going to do anything of the sort. The women and children are to remain on board until we've got houses built for them on shore, or until the time comes when there is work for them to do. If they choose to come ashore occasionally it will be to watch the men work and to cheer them up with their presence. But no man is to stay on this ship after we've once got the real job going out there. Now you've heard my statement, sir. I am willing to listen for a few minutes to your side of the question. Don't all speak at once,—and please be careful, there are ladies present.”

While Percival did not take his eyes from Landover's face during this speech, he was aware that Miss Clinton and her aunt had turned abruptly away and were leaning against the rail a few yards distant, their backs to him. Olga Obosky and Careni-Amori were regarding him with shining, approving eyes, while Mrs. Block,—gulping furiously,—clasped her husband's arm and kept up a constant

muttering. Something told him that Ruth Clinton and Mrs. Spofford had turned against him.

“I have nothing to say to you,” said Landover, curtly. Turning on his heel, he joined the two ladies at the rail. He spoke a few words to them in a lowered tone, and then the three of them strode off without so much as a glance at the young man.

Percival flushed a dull red under his tan. His eyes followed them until they disappeared around a corner. Down in his heart he hoped that Ruth would not deny him a fleeting look of encouragement and approval.

Landover carried himself like a soldier. He was tall, well set-up, and almost offensively erect. He was a handsome man of perhaps forty-eight. His cleanshaven face was firm, aggressive, domineering. There was not a trace of grey in his dark hair. He typified strength, mentality, shrewdness and that most essential quality in the standards of wealth and power,—arrogance. In a word, he personified Finance.

“Now, see here, Percival,” began Nicklestick, in a most cavalier manner, greatly encouraged by the lofty conduct of the Money King, “you know you can't do this sort of thing. We won't stand for it, not for a minute. We object to this high-handed business. You got to realize that—”

“Object and be hanged!” snapped Percival. “The next thing, you'll be calling yourselves conscientious objectors. Well, it's no use, Nicklestick. There's no such animal on board this Ark. I see a couple of boats returning from shore. You've got about fifteen minutes to shed that Stein & Bloch suit and jump into something that will never need pressing again,—your working clothes. I'm doing you a kindness. That gang out there won't stand for slackers. If you're wise you'll take my word for it.”

He was turning away when Nicklestick intercepted him.

“What do you think they would do, Mr. Percival?” he inquired in some agitation. “We are gentlemen. We got a right to decide for ourselves vat we shall do. We can pay for—”

“You will find a lot of gentlemen out there who have already decided for themselves,—and very cheerfully, too. You will not be lonely. If you desire any further information as to the class of labourers you will come in contact with, Mr. Nicklestick, I would suggest a careful study of the first cabin list, the second cabin list, and finally the third cabin list, if you can find such a thing. You will also run up against some excellent material from the United States Navy, to say nothing of a fine lot of able seamen. They've adopted a common name. Do you

know what they call each other?”

“No,” said Nicklestick, wiping his brow. “Vat—vat do they call each other?”

“Men,” said Percival, and walked away.

He was followed closely by Careni-Amori and Olga Obosky, and at some distance by the whispering, gesticulating Jews. The great soprano was profoundly agitated. Obosky, a pace or two behind her, was tense and silent. Her head was slightly bent. There was a strange, dog-like expression in her eyes as they regarded the back of Percival's head.

“But what will you do?” Careni-Amori was crying, as she clutched his arm. “He is a great man. He is a millionaire. He owns part of this steamship line,—so he have inform me. You will not throw him into the water,—yes?”

“As sure as you are a foot high, Madame Careni-Amori,” said he, grimly.

“Oh, mon Dieu! You hear him, Obosky? He means what he have say.”

“Be careful, my friend,” said Obosky, drawing alongside of Percival. “Do you not see how the wind blows?”

“What do you mean?”

“Have you count the cost of victory? You may lose more than you will gain.”

Percival looked at her intently for a moment; then, in a flash, the meaning of her words was revealed to him.

“Even so, Madame Obosky,” he returned, his jaw setting, “I am a good loser.”

“The spoils do not always go to the victor,” she warned him.

“I still have your luck-piece,” said he, smiling as he slapped his trousers-leg.

“It has always brought me luck,” she said, looking straight into his eyes. “It may continue to do so, who knows? Alas for you, my friend, you may yet have to turn to me for consolation. It is the ill-wind that blows nobody good. Am I not shocking, Mr. Percivail?”

They had lost Madame Careni-Amori, who was behind them, shrieking a command through a port-hole to her maid.

He looked at her in amazement. “I don't know what to think of you, Madame Obosky.” Then he grinned. “Good Lord! You—you can't be making me an offer of marriage?”

“Heaven forbid!” she cried. “I have had all I want of marriage, my friend. You will never catch me doing anything so foolish as that again. No, no! I do not desire to marry you, Mr. Percivail. Nothing so dreadful as that! Suppose we would be married,—what zen? Poof! Because I am an honest woman I would

have to tell you some time zat I have had ze honour to be once the mistress of a Crown Prince,—and then you would hold up your holy hands and cry out, 'My God, what kind of a woman is this I have marry?' and—Oh, but I would not tell you about zat Crown Prince until we have been married a year or two, so do not look so pleased! In a year you would be hating me so much zat you would rejoice to hear about the Crown Prince, and I would be loathing you so much zat I would probably have to kill you,—because I do not believe in divorce any more than I believe in marriage. You see? Most women hate their husbands. They never hate their lovers. It is so difficult to get rid of the one, and so easy to keep the other,—zat is the explanation. So! Now you may know zat love is the humblest thing in the world, and passion the noblest, for love is for the weak while passion is for the strong. Love is easily deceived, passion never. Love endures, passion conquers. Love is blind, passion is sight itself. Love rules the world, but passion rules love. Love consents, passion demands. Love is law, passion is life. I could go on forever, but I see you do not like my discourse. Zat is because you are already in love, my friend. Poof! You will get over that!” She laughed.

Percival was white clear through. He was red-blooded, but at the same time his heart was clean. Once more he found himself contrasting the honest-eyed, pure-hearted Ruth with this sensual scoffer. There was no denying the physical appeal of the lithe, sinuous Russian; there was no gainsaying the call of the blood. On the other hand, the American girl stood for everything his own mother exemplified in flesh and spirit.

As it is with all men, he was absolutely incapable of associating passion with the mother who bore him, or with sisters who marry and give them nieces and nephews to adore. It was impossible, utterly impossible that they should have possessed the instincts of this woman beside him. But even as the thought raced through his mind he experienced the sudden, almost staggering realization that after all the chief, probably the only difference between his women and Olga Obosky was that they were good!

“Do you want me to tell you what I think of you?” he inquired, his eyes hardening.

“Yes,” she said calmly. “But not now. When you have more time, my friend. I shall be very much interested to hear what you think of me. In the meantime, I am troubled for you. You are in love with her,—oh, yes, you are,—and I am very much afraid zat you will lose her if you are not careful. I am your friend. Be warned in time, Mr. Percivail. She is sorry for him. Landover. You have humiliated him before all of us. He is the friend of her family. Go slow, my

friend, or she will turn against you and you will lose her. You have still a good chance. She is more nearly in love with you than she suspects. A little good judgment on your part, my friend, and you will win. She will marry you, and when she have done so, zen you may with impunity toss Mr. Landover in the sea,—but not now, my friend, not now."

"By Jove, you've got me guessing, Madame Obosky," he exclaimed, frankly puzzled. "I can't make you out at all."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Zat is because I am a thousand years old and very, oh, so very wise, Mr. Percivail," she returned, with a smile. "Au revoir!"

Percival went straight to Captain Trigger.

"See here, Captain," he said at once, "I'm up against it with Landover. He refuses to take orders from me. I don't want to do anything drastic without consulting you. If you say I'm to let him off, that's the end of it so far as I'm concerned. Of course, I can't answer for the rest of the crowd. But if you say I am to go ahead along the line originally laid out, I'll do it."

Captain Trigger's eyes, red from loss of sleep, pinched with anxiety, rested for a few seconds on the three boats coming across the basin. Then he turned to the young man.

"Mr. Landover is one of the owners of this steamship line, Percival."

"So I understand, sir."

"He notified me this morning that he will see that I am dismissed from the service if I continue to support this silly, suicidal plan to build a camp on shore."

"Yes, sir. And you?"

"I promptly tendered my resignation as master of this vessel," answered the Captain.

"You did?" cried Percival, dismayed.

"To take effect when I have tied her safely up to her pier in New York," said the old man, striking the rail with his fist.

"Great!" cried Percival.

"He has just come to me with the complaint that you have threatened to throw him overboard. Is that true, Percival?"

"Yes, sir,—in a way. I mentioned an alternative."

"Mr. Landover is no better than any of the rest of us. You will proceed to throw him overboard, Percival, if he refuses to do his share of the work."

Percival gulped, and then saluted.

“Orders, sir?”

“Orders!”

The young man started away, but the Captain called him back.

“What are you going to do after you have had him thrown into the water?”

“Why, dammit all,” exclaimed Percival, “what can I do but jump in and save his life? You don't suppose I'd let him drown, do you? And, God knows, nobody else would save it. They want to tar and feather him, as it is, or lynch him, or make him walk the plank.”

CHAPTER II.

The first of the two boats came alongside, and men began to go clumsily, even fearfully down the ladders. Throughout the early stages of activity on shore, the passengers and crew went out in shifts, so to speak. Percival and others experienced in construction work had learned that efficiency and accomplishment depend entirely upon the concentration of force, and so, instead of piling hundreds of futile men on shore to create confusion, they adopted the plan of sending out daily detachments of fifty or sixty, to work in regular rotation until all available man power had been broken in and classified according to fitness and strength. For example, certain men developed into capable wood-choppers, while others were useless in that capacity. Each successive draft, therefore, had its choppers, its strippers, its haulers, its “handy men,”—and its water-boys. Moreover, this systematic replacement of toilers made it possible for those who were not accustomed to hard, manual labour to recover from the unusual tax on strength and endurance.

It should be explained, however, that this system was not applied to individuals selected for the purpose of exploration and research. Four parties, well-armed and equipped, were sent out to explore both sections of the island. These expeditions had numerous objects in view: to determine, if possible, whether the island had ever been visited or occupied by man; to determine the character of the fruits and vegetables; extent and variety of animal life; the natural food resources, etc. The groups were made up of men familiar with nature in the rough. Lieutenant Platt headed one group, Professor Flattner another, a Bolivian ranchman and an English horse buyer the remaining two.

Abel Landover was to have gone out with the first day's shift to work on the road through the wood. He refused point-blank to leave the ship. This state of affairs lasted through the next two days, the banker stubbornly ignoring the advice and finally the commands of Captain Trigger. In the meantime he had been joined in his rebellion,—a word used here for want of a milder one,—by half a dozen gentlemen who did a great deal of talking about how the Turks were maltreating the Armenians, but, for fear of being suspected of pro-Germanism, studiously avoided pre-war dissertations on the conduct of the Russians.

The first shift's turn had come around once more in the natural order of things, and practically all of the men had been landed. Landover had refused to go out

with either of the other shifts. He had stood his ground obstinately. Percival's ultimatum, sweeping like wildfire throughout the ship's company, brought nearly every one on board to the rails to see whether he would carry out his threat. Would he dare throw the great capitalist, this mighty Croesus, this autocrat, into the sea?

The first boat carried off Nicklestick, Block, Shine and the other objectors. Landover was in his stateroom.

“Just a minute,” called out Percival to the oarsmen, as they waited for him to take his place in the last boat. “We're shy a man, I see.” His eye ranged the deck. His face was a sickly yellow. It would have been white save for the tan. “Where is Landover?” he demanded of the crowd.

Some one answered: “He went to his cabin a couple of minutes ago,” and another volunteered: “It's Number 9 on the promenade deck.”

Half a minute later Percival rapped peremptorily on the door of Number 9.

“We're waiting for you, Mr. Landover,” he called out.

“Wait and be damned,” came strongly from the stateroom. “The door is unlocked. If you put a foot inside this room, I'll shoot you like a dog.”

“You will have the satisfaction of killing a mighty good dog,” said Percival, and threw the door wide open. He did not enter the room, however. Standing just outside the door, he faced the banker. Landover stood in the centre of the luxurious cabin, a revolver in his hand.

“I mean exactly what I say, Percival. I will shoot the instant you put a foot through that door.”

“I don't believe you would,” said Percival, “but, just the same, I'm not going to chance it. If I ever conclude to commit suicide, I'll go off somewhere and blow my brains out with my own gun. At present, I have no thought of committing suicide, so I'll stay right where I am. I didn't come here to kill you, Mr. Landover. I have no gun with me. I simply came to tell you that the last boat is leaving, and we are waiting for you.”

For many seconds the two men looked straight into each other's eyes.

“Are you coming?” demanded the young man levelly.

“Certainly not!”

Percival's shoulders sagged. His face wore an expression of complete surrender.

“Well,—if you won't, I suppose you won't,” he muttered.

A triumphant sneer greeted this abject back-down on the part of the would-be dictator.

“I thought so,” exclaimed Landover. “You're yellow. You can bully these poor, ignorant—”

He never finished the sentence. Percival cleared the eight or nine feet of intervening space with the lunge of a panther. His solid, compact body struck Landover with the force of a battering ram. Before the larger and heavier man could fire a shot, his wrist was caught in a grip of steel. As he staggered back under the impact, Percival's right fore-arm was jammed up under his chin. In the fraction of a second, Landover, unable to withstand this sudden, savage onslaught, toppled over backwards and, with his assailant clinging to him like a wildcat, found himself pinned down to the spacious, inset washstand.

The revolver was discharged, the bullet burying itself in the floor. An instant later the weapon fell from his paralysed fingers. With his free left hand he struck wildly, frantically at Percival, but with no effect. The broad back and shoulders of his assailant proved a barrier he could not drive past. And that rigid, merciless right arm, as hard as a bar of steel, was pressing relentlessly against his throat, crushing, choking the life out of him. He was a strong, vigorous man, but he was helpless in the grasp of this tigerish young fighter from the slopes of the Andes. He heard Percival's voice, panting in his ear.

“I can keep this up longer than you can. I don't want to break your neck,—do you understand? I don't want to break your neck, Landover, but if you don't give in, I'll—I'll—” The pressure slackened perceptibly. “Say it! Now's your chance. Say you've—got enough!”

Landover managed to gasp out the word. He could still feel his eyes starting from his head, his tongue seemed to fill his mouth completely.

Percival released him instantly and fell back a yard or so, ready, however, to spring upon his man again at the first sign of treachery. No more than sixty seconds elapsed between the beginning and the end of the encounter. It was all over in the twinkling of an eye, so to speak. In fact, it was over so quickly that the first man to reach the door after the report of the revolver rang out, found the two men facing each other, one coughing and clutching at his throat, the other erect and menacing. For the first time, Percival took his eyes from the purplish face of the banker. They fell first upon a head and pair of shoulders that blocked one of the two port-holes. He recognized the countenance of Soapy Shay, the thief. To his amazement, Soapy grinned and then winked at him!

“The boat is ready to leave, Landover,” said the victor briskly. “We have no

more use for this thing at present," he went on, shoving the revolver under the berth with the toe of his boot. The banker stared past him at the agitated group in the corridor. The man was trembling like a leaf, not so much from fear as from the effects of the tremendous physical shock.

Percival was a generous foe. He experienced a sudden pity,—a rush of consideration for the other's feelings. He saw the tears of rage and mortification well up in the eyes of the banker, he heard the half-suppressed sob that broke from his lips. Whirling, he ordered the crowd away from the door. "It's all right," he said. "Please leave us." He addressed Soapy Shay. "Beat it, you!"

Soapy saluted with mock servility. "Aye, aye, sir. I saw the whole show. It was certainly worth the price of admission." Having delivered himself of that graceful acknowledgment, he effaced himself.

"Just a word or two, Mr. Landover," said Percival as the crowd shuffled away from the door. "I am sorry this had to happen. Even now I am not sure that you fully understand the situation. You may still be inclined to resist. You are not in the habit of submitting to force, reason or justice. I am only asking you, however, to recognize the last of these. You will be happier in the end. I don't give a hang how much you hate me, nor how far you may go to depose me. I don't want your friendship any more than I want your enmity. I can get along very nicely without either. But that isn't the point. At present I am in charge of a gang of workmen. Every man on this ship belongs to that gang, you with the rest. I ask you to look at the matter fairly, honestly, open-mindedly. You accuse me of being high-handed. I return the charge. It's you who are high-handed. You set yourself above your fellow-unfortunates. You refuse to abide by the will of the majority. I represent the majority. I am not acting for myself, but for them. God knows, I am not looking for trouble. This job isn't one that I would have chosen voluntarily. But now that it has been thrust upon me, I have no other alternative than to see it through. You ought to be man enough, you ought to be fair enough to see it in that light. If conditions were reversed, Mr. Landover, and you were in my place, I would be the last to oppose you, because I have learned in a very tough school that it pays to live up to the regulations. Everywhere else in the world it is a question of capital and labour. Here it is a question of labour alone. There is no such thing as capital. Socialism is forced upon us, the purest kind of socialism, for even the socialist can't get rich at the expense of his neighbour. But I'm beginning to lecture again. Let's get down to cases. Are you prepared to go out peaceably,—I'll not say willingly,—and do your share on the job as long as you are physically able?"

"I submit to brute force. There is no other course left open to me," said

Landover hoarsely.

“Very well, then. Come along,—we're wasting valuable time here.”

“I will follow you in a few minutes.”

“You will come now,” said Percival levelly. “You and I, Mr. Landover, are jointly concerned in the establishment of a very definite order of discipline. We represent the two extremes.” He stood aside. “Precede me, if you please.”

After a moment's hesitation, the other lifted his chin and walked past the young man. The corridors were clear. Percival followed close behind. He kept up a glib, one-sided conversation.

“You see, there was no other way to handle you. I was obliged to resort to punitive measures. That's always the case when you are dealing with sensible, intelligent, educated men. It is impossible to reason with an intelligent, educated man. He invariably has opinions, ideas, viewpoints of his own. He is mentally equipped to resist any kind of an argument. Take our United States Senators, our Congressmen, even our Presidents. You can't reason with them. No doubt you've tried it a thousand times, you and the other capitalists. We've all tried it. You've got to hit 'em on the head with some sort of a club or big stick if you want to bring 'em to time. You have to club them to death at the polls, so to speak. Now, you take these wops. They can't argue. They haven't got that sort of intelligence. They're considerably like the common or garden variety of dog. No matter how much you beat them and scold them, you can always get along with them if you feed them and let them see that you're not afraid of them. If they once get an idea that you are afraid of them,—well, it's all off. They begin to be sensible right away, and then they form a labour union. And the more sensible and intelligent they become, the easier it is for the labour leaders, the walking delegates, and blood-sucking agitators to make fools of 'em. It's all a matter of leadership, Mr. Landover, as you will admit, any way you look at it. Well, here we are.”

Landover paused before starting down the ladder to the boat. He turned to address Percival in a loud, clear voice.

“You will not long be in a position to browbeat and bully the rest of us, young man. Your reign will be short. I would like my fellow-passengers to know that I have never refused to work with them. I have merely declined to work under an outlaw. Life is as dear to me as it is to any one else on this ship. I am taking this step against my will, rather than subject myself to further indignities and the cruelties you would inflict if I held out against you. I am sorry to deprive you of the spectacular hit you might have made by throwing me into the sea, a treat which you doubtless led all of these people to expect.”

He climbed down the ladder and dropped into the boat. As he took his seat, he ran his eye along the line of faces above. Finding the persons he sought, he smiled, shook his head slowly to signify a state of resignation, and then set his flushed, angry face toward the land.

Percival, following him, did not look up at the row of faces.

Careni-Amori sang that evening in the main saloon. Signer Joseppi, tired and sore after his hard day's work, wept, and after weeping as publicly as possible created a profound sensation by kissing the great prima-donna in full view of the applauding spectators. Then, to cap the climax, he proclaimed in a voice charged with emotion that Madame Careni-Amori never had sung better in all her life! This to an artist who had the rare faculty for knowing when she was off the key, —and who knew that she was very badly off on this particular occasion.

Percival was standing near the door as Ruth Clinton and her aunt left the saloon on the way to their rooms. He joined them after a moment's hesitation. The two ladies bowed coldly to him. He was the essence of decision. As usual, he went straight to the point.

“I can't take back what I did this morning, and I wouldn't if I could,” he said, falling in beside Mrs. Spofford. “I know you are displeased with me. Can't we thresh it out now, Mrs. Spofford?”

The elder woman raised her chin and stared at him coldly. He shot a glance past her at the girl's face. There was no encouragement to be found in the calm, unsmiling eyes.

“I fail to see precisely why we should thresh anything out with you, Mr. Percival,” replied Mrs. Spofford.

“It is barely possible that you are not quite clear as to my motives, and therefore unable to gauge my actions.”

“I understand your motives perfectly,—and I approve of them. Your actions are not so acceptable. Good-night, Mr. Percival.”

He smiled whimsically at Ruth. “My left hand is rather in need of attention, Miss Clinton. I suppose I am so deeply in your bad graces that I may not hope for—er—the same old kindness?”

She stopped short. “Is this a request or a command? Mr. Percival, I will be quite frank with you. Mr. Landover is our friend. I am not, however, defending him in the position he has taken. There is no reason why he should not do his share with the rest of the men. But was it necessary to humiliate him, was it necessary to insult him as you did this morning? He is a distinguished man. He

—”

“Are you coming, Ruth?” demanded Mrs. Spofford, sharply.

“In just a moment, Aunt Julia.”

“You will oblige me by coming with me at once. We have nothing more to say to this young man.”

“I have asked him a question. I shall wait for his answer.”

“I will answer it, Miss Clinton, by saying it was necessary,” said he steadily. “There are other distinguished men here who are further distinguishing themselves by toeing the mark without complaint or cavil. Mr. Landover was appealed to on three distinct occasions by Captain Trigger and the committee. He ignored all private appeals—and commands. The time had come for a show-down. It was either Landover and his little band of sycophants, or me and the entire company of men on this ship. It may interest you to know that you and Mrs. Spofford are the only two people on board, outside of Mr. Landover's retrievers, who blame me for what I did this morning.”

“You can hardly expect me to be interested in what other people think of my position, Mr. Percival,” she said, raising her eyebrows slightly.

“No more, I dare say, than Landover cares what they think of his,” was his retort.

She lifted her chin. “I am beginning to appreciate Mr. Landover's attitude toward you, Mr. Percival,” she said icily.

“And to justify it, I suppose,” he said dejectedly. “I want your friendship, Miss Clinton,—yes, I want a great deal more than your friendship. You may as well know it. I'm not asking for it,—I'm just telling you. Please don't go away. I promise not to make myself ridiculous. You have been good to me, you have been wonderful. I—I can't bear the thought of losing your friendship or your respect. I just had to bring Landover to time. You may think there was some other way, but I do not. At any rate, it isn't a matter that we can discuss. Some day you may admit that I was right, but I don't believe I will ever see the day when I will admit that I was wrong. Won't—can't we be friends?”

“I do not believe I can ever feel the same toward you after witnessing what I did this morning,” said she, shaking her head. “You deliberately, intentionally degraded Mr. Landover in the presence of others. Was that the act of a gentleman? No! It was the act of an overbearing, arrogant bully who had nothing to fear. You took advantage of your authority and of the fact that he is so rich and powerful that he is practically without a friend or champion. You knew only too

well that ninety-nine per cent of the people on board this ship were behind you in your attack on him because he represents capital! You had nothing to fear. No, Mr. Percival, I don't believe we can be friends. I am sorry."

"You heard what Mr. Landover said to me this morning, Miss Clinton," said he, paling. "You heard what he called me. Do you believe these things of me?"

She was silent for a moment. "No, I do not," she replied slowly. "I believe that you are all you have represented yourself to be."

"Thank you," he said, with gentle dignity. "I am sorry if I have distressed you this evening. Please don't think too harshly of me when I say that I just had to find out how we stand, you and I. Now that I know, I can only promise not to bother you again, and you may rely on my promises. I never break them. Good-night, Miss Clinton."

He bowed to Mrs. Spofford, who ignored him, and then to Ruth, a wistful smile struggling to his lips and eyes as he did so. As he turned away, she spoke to him.

"You mentioned your hand being bad again. If you would like me to dress it for you,—under the circumstances,—I will do so."

"Ruth!" cried Mrs. Spofford in a shocked voice.

He put his left hand behind his back. It was the one with which he had gripped Landover's wrist that morning. The strain had reopened the partially healed wounds.

"I injured it this morning in an encounter with your friend, Miss Clinton. I can hardly ask you to dress it. Thank you, just the same."

"I know all that happened in Mr. Landover's cabin, but even so, I am ready and willing to do anything in my power to ease the pain you are suffering." She spoke calmly, dispassionately, almost perfunctorily.

He shook his head. "I shouldn't have spoken of it," he said. "It isn't so bad that I can't fix it up myself. Good-night."

She joined her aunt and they made their way in silence to the latter's stateroom. It was not until after the door was safely locked that Mrs. Spofford delivered herself of the thought that had been in her mind the whole length of the slanting corridor.

"I hope he will not take advantage of his position to—to bully us—to bully you, dearest,—he might, you know. He has shown himself to be perfectly capable of it. And we are so defenceless. No one but Abel Landover to look to for help if he,—for, of course, no one else would dare oppose this lawless young,

—oh, you need not smile! He has the power and it is quite plain now that he intends to exercise it. He will brook no interference—”

“I am not afraid of Mr. Percival, Aunt Julia,” said the girl, sitting down wearily on the edge of the berth. “He is a gentleman.”

“A—a gentleman?” gasped Mrs. Spofford. “Good gracious!”

“He will not annoy me,” said Ruth, absently study-ing the tips of her slim, shapely shoes. “Possess your soul in peace. I think I know him.”

“Are you defending the braggart?”

“Not at all! I detest him,” cried the girl, springing to her feet, her face crimsoning. “He is perfectly abominable.”

“I—I wouldn't speak quite so loudly, my dear,” cautioned her aunt, glancing at the door uneasily—“It would be like him to listen outside the door,—or at any rate, one of his men may have been set to spy upon—”

“Don't be silly, Aunt Julia. And don't be afraid. Mr. Percival isn't going to make us walk the plank for mutiny, or put us in chains,—or outrage us,—if that is what you are thinking. Now, go to bed, you old dear, and—”

“I insist on your staying in my room, Ruth. He is in love with you.”

“He can be in love with me and still be a gentleman, can't he, Aunt Julia? Don't worry! I shall sleep in my own room. I may even go so far as to leave my door unlocked.”

“What! And if he should come to—”

“Ah, I shan't send him word that it's unlocked, dear,” scoffed Ruth, finding a malicious enjoyment in her aunt's dismay. “Good-night. Sleep tight! We must sleep while we have the opportunity, you know. Our lazy days will soon be over. He says we've all got to work like,—I think he said dogs.”

“Oh, dear me. I,—I wonder what is to become of us?” moaned the wretched lady. “After what he tried to do to Abel Landover, there is no telling to what lengths he may go in—By the way, has Mr. Landover reported to Captain Trigger that the fellow attempted to shoot him this morning?”

“Of course not, Aunt Julia.”

“Well, I think it is his duty to do so. Captain Trigger should take drastic means to curb this—”

“You forget that Mr. Landover maintains that Captain Trigger and all the other officers are like putty in the hands of Mr. Percival. I am beginning to believe it myself. He—he has got them all hypnotized.”

“He hasn't got me hypnotized!” exclaimed Mrs. Spofford.

“In any case, he is in the saddle,” sighed Ruth.

“He deliberately tried to kill Mr. Landover,” said the other. “Is nothing to be done about it? We heard the shot,—every one heard it. And no one has the courage to say a word about it! What a lot of cowards we are! I don't see why he refuses to let me take the matter up with the Captain. Captain Trigger ought to know the truth.”

Ruth was silent for a moment or two. “It's hard for me to believe, Aunt Julia, that he would attack a defenceless man with a revolver. It—it doesn't seem like him.”

“But you have Abel Landover's word for it, Ruth. The bullet grazed his head. The coward would have killed him most certainly if he had not succeeded in knocking the pistol out of his hand and overpowering him.”

“If I did not believe Mr. Landover to be an absolutely truthful, honourable man, I—” began Ruth, a little furrow between her eyebrows, “well, I might still believe a little in Mr. Percival.”

“And what chance had poor Landover with that highwayman, or whatever he is, pointing a revolver at him through the porthole and threatening to blow his brains out if he did not throw up his hands and let Percival alone?”

Olga Obosky bandaged Percival's hand. She intercepted him on his way to Dr. Cullen's cabin.

CHAPTER III.

During the days and weeks that followed, Percival maintained an attitude of rigid but courteous aloofness. Only on occasions when it was necessary to consult with Ruth and her aunt on matters pertaining to the “order of the day” did he relax in the slightest degree from the position he had taken in regard to them.

In time, the captious Mrs. Spofford began to resent this studied indifference. She detested him more than ever for not running true to the form she had predicted; her apprehensiveness gave way to irritation. She resented his dignified, pleasant “good mornings”; she complained acidly to Ruth about what she was now pleased to describe as “disgusting superciliousness.”

The truth of the matter was, he failed to take any account whatsoever of Mrs. Spofford in his calculations; he did not even make a pretence of consulting her in matters relating to the common good of the common people, and as she was in the habit of devoting a considerable portion of her time, energy and executive ability to the interests of the common or lower class people, the omission was an insult.

Nor was his cause benefited by the unnecessary and uncalled for deference he seemed to feel was due her on account of her age. What had her age to do with it? No one had ever deferred to her age in New York? She was one to be reckoned with, she was accustomed to the deference that hasn't anything at all to do with age. And here she was, shunted to one side, ignored, disregarded,—she who had been the brains and inspiration of a dozen charitable enterprises, to say nothing of war-work and very important activities in opposition to Woman Suffrage!

She found little consolation in Landover's contention that the upstart was bound to hang himself if they gave him rope enough, or in Ruth's patient reminder that Percival was getting results,—and getting them without bullying anybody.

Ruth accepted the situation with a calmness that exasperated her aunt. She announced her intention to obey any order the “boss” might issue, without recrimination, without complaint. And so, when the day came for her to go forth with other women to do her share of the cooking, washing, cleaning, and later on the more interesting task of putting the huts in order for occupancy, she went

with a full understanding of what was required of her and without a word of protest. The women with whom she toiled from early morn till sombre dusk draped the land were under the immediate direction of a stewardess of many years experience, an Englishwoman whose husband, an engineer, had been killed at the time of the explosions.

Each night she returned to the ship tired and sore but uncomplaining. Her strong young body stood the test with the hardiest; her spirit was unflinching; her heart in the common cause. For she looked ahead with a clear, far-seeing eye, and saw not one but many winters in this vast, unguarded prison. And she wondered,—wondered day and night,—what was ahead of her.

She was young. The young do not dream of death. They dream of life, and of its fullness. What did fate have in store for her? Sometimes she crimsoned, sometimes she paled as she looked ahead.

Bare-armed, her heavy sport skirt caught up with pins, her bonny brown hair loosely coiled, thick golf stockings and sturdy shoes covering her legs and feet, she presented a figure that caused more than one heart to thump, more than one head to turn, more than one pair of eyes to follow her as she went about her work. Her cheeks and throat and breast and arms were browning under the fire of the noonday sun, her eyes glowed with the fervour of enthusiasm; her voice was ever cheerful and her smile, though touched with the blight that lay upon the soul of all these castaways, was unfailingly bright. And when she returned “home” at night from her wageless day of toil, she slept as she never had slept before.

Her aunt worked in what was known as the salvage corps. She was one of the clerks employed in checking out the cargo and other materials seized by the committee of ten, as the leaders in this singular enterprise were called. Captain Trigger having protested against the dismantling of the vessel and the confiscation of its cargo,—which was as far as he could go,—announced that he would abide by any satisfactory plan to salvage the property. He required an official, documentary report, however, in which every item removed was accounted for, with its condition and value set down and sworn to by responsible persons. The purser, Mr. Codge, and First Officer Mott represented the Captain in this operation, while the consignees were properly taken care of by Michael O'Malley Malone, the lawyer, James K. Jones, the promoter, and Moses Block, the rubber importer. It is unnecessary to deal further with this feature of the situation. Suffice it to say, the transaction,—if it may be so denoted,—was managed with the utmost regularity and formality. Elderly men and women were chosen for the clerical work which this rather laborious undertaking entailed.

On the crest of the loftiest hill there was established a permanent observation and signal station. Near the top a sort of combination dug-out and shanty was constructed by order of Captain Trigger, and day and night, week in and week out, watches were kept similar to those maintained on board ship.

While the entire company, high and low, worked with a zeal that eventually resulted in a state of good-natured though intense rivalry in skill and accomplishment,—while they were generally cheerful and courageous,—there was a profound lack of gaiety. In the eyes of each and every one of them lay the never-vanishing shadow of anxiety,—an eternal unspoken question. The hardest, fiercest faces wore a wistful expression; the broadest smile revealed a touch of sadness. Over all, however, the surpassing spirit of kindness and generosity presided.

Calamity had softened the hearts in the same crucible that hardened the hands. The arrogance of the strong mellowed into consideration for the weak; wisdom and culture went hand in hand with ignorance and brawn; malice and rancour left the hearts of the lowly and met half-way the departing insolence of the lofty; fellowship took root and throve in a field rich with good deeds. The heart of man was master here, the brain its humble servant.

Landover worked hard, doggedly. To all outward appearances, he had resigned himself to the inevitable. He affected a spirit of camaraderie and good humour that deceived many. Down in his heart, however, he was bitterly rebellious. He despised these people as a class. In his estimation, all creatures who worked for a living were branded with the obnoxious iron of socialism; he even went so far as to believe that they were, after a fashion, anarchists! His conception of anarchy was rather far-reaching; it took in everything that was contrary to his notion of a satisfactory distribution of wealth. He believed that every man who worked for a wage was at heart an enemy to law and order. He regarded the wage-earner as one whose hand is eternally against the employer, absolutely without honour, justice or reason. The workingman was for self, always for self,—and to Landover that was anarchy.

The thought that people,—men and women,—of the lower classes possessed physical and mental qualities similar to those possessed by himself, even in a modified form, was not only repugnant to him but incredible. They had none of the finer emotions,—such as love, for instance. He could not conceive of a labouring man loving his wife and children; it wasn't natural! He pictured the home-life of the lower classes as nothing short of indecent; there couldn't be anything fine or noble or enduring in the processes of birth, existence and death as related to them. Nature took its course with them, and society,—as

represented by the class to which he belonged,—provided for the litters they cast upon the world. In a word, Abel Landover's father and grandfather and great-grandfather had been rich men before him.

He despised Captain Trigger for the simple reason that that faithful, gallant sailor was an employee of the company in which he was a director. It meant nothing to him that Captain Trigger came of fine, hardy, valiant stock; it meant less to him that he was a law unto himself aboard the Doraine. For, when all was said and done, Captain Trigger worked for just so much money per month and doubtless hated the men who paid him his wage. On board the Doraine,—as was the case with all other vessels on which he chose to sail,—the banker sat at the Captain's table. But he did not consider that to be a distinction or an honour; it was his due. As a matter of fact, he looked upon himself as the real head of the Captain's table!

Half a dozen persons in all that company comprised Landover's circle of desirables. Of the rest, most of them were impossible, three-fourths of them were “anarchists,” all of them were beneath notice,—except as listeners. As for Percival, if that young man was not literally and actually a bandit, at least he had all the instincts of one. In any case, he was a “bum.” Whenever Mr. Landover was at a loss for a word to express contumely for his fellow-man,—and he was seldom at a loss,—he called him a “bum.”

The women on board were divided into three classes in Landover's worldly opinion: the kind you would marry (rare), the kind you wouldn't marry (plentiful), and the kind you wouldn't have to marry (common). He put Olga Obosky and Careni-Amori in this rather extensive third class, and even went so far as to set what he considered a fair value upon them as human commodities!

He worked with the gang of “log-toters,” a term supplied by Percival. They were the men who carried or dragged the trimmed tree-trunks from the forest to the camp site, where they were subsequently hewn into shape for structural purposes by the more skilful handlers of ax and wedge and saw.

A certain man named Manuel Crust was the fore-man of this gang. He was a swarthy, powerful “Portugee” who was on his way to Rio to kill the pal who had run away with his wife. He was going up there to kill Sebastian Cabral and live happily for ever afterward. His idea of future happiness was to sit by the fireside in his declining years and pleasantly ruminate over the variety of deaths he had inflicted upon the loathsome Sebastian. In the first place, he was going to strangle him with his huge, gnarled hands; then he was going to cut off his ears and nose and stuff them into the vast slit he had made in his throat; then he would dig his heart out with a machete; then, one by one, he would expertly

amputate his legs, arms and tongue; afterwards he would go through the grisly process of disemboweling him; and, then, in the end, he would build a nice, roaring fire and destroy what remained of Sebastian. Inasmuch as either of these sanguinary and successive measures might reasonably be expected to produce the desired result, it will be seen that Sebastian was doomed to experience at least six horrific deaths before the avenger got through with him. At any rate, if one could believe Manuel,—and there seemed to be no end of conviction in the way he expressed himself,—the luckless home-wrecker, if he lived long enough, was absolutely certain to die.

Landover took a strange fancy to Manuel Crust. He was drawn to him in the first place by the blasphemous things he said about Percival. In the second place, he enjoyed Manuel's vituperative remarks about cutting the liver out of the "boss." Notwithstanding the fact that Manuel was more or less given to cutting the livers out of remote and invisible persons,—including King Alfonso, the Kaiser, Queen Victoria (he didn't know she was dead), King Manuel, the Czar of Russia, the Presidents of all the South American republics, the Sultan of Turkey, President Roosevelt, and Sebastian Cabral,—Mr. Landover positively loved to hear him talk. He made a point of getting him to talk about Percival a great deal of the time. He also liked the way in which the prodigious Manuel deferred to him. It inspired the philanthropic motives that led him to share his very excellent cigars with the doughty foreman. Moreover, he had something far back in his mind, had Mr. Abel Landover.

Percival was indefatigable. He set the example for every one else, and nothing daunted him. The sceptics,—and there were many of them at the start,—no longer shook their heads as they went about what once had loomed as a hopeless enterprise, for to their astonishment and gratification the "camp" was actually becoming a substantial reality.

The small group of men who, for obvious reasons, had courted the favour of Abel Landover at the outset, now went out of their way to "stand in" with the amazingly popular man of the hour.

He represented power, he stood for achievement, he rode on the crest of the wave,—and so they believed in him! Landover may have been a wizard in New York, but the wizard of Trigger Island was quite another person altogether,—hence the very sensible defection.

These gentlemen openly and ardently opposed him on one occasion, however. It was when he proposed that the island should be named for the beloved Captain. They insisted that it be called Percival Island. Failing in this, they advocated with great enthusiasm, but with no success, the application of

Percival's name to almost every noticeable peculiarity that the island possessed. They objected fiercely to the adoption of such titles as these: Mott Haven (the basin); Split Mountain; Gray Ridge (after the lamented Chief Engineer); Penguin Rocks; The Gate of the Winds; Top o' the Morning Peak; Dismal Forest (west of the channel); Peter Pan Wood (east of the channel); Good Luck Channel; Cypress Point; Cape Sunrise (the extreme easterly end of the island); Leap-frog River; Little Sandy and Big Sandy (the beaches); Cracko-day Farm; New Gibraltar (the western end of the island); St. Anthony Falls. Michael O'Malley Malone christened the turbulent little waterfall up in the hills. He liked the sound of the name, he claimed, and besides it was about time the stigma of shame that had so long rested upon the poor old saint was rewarded by complete though belated vindication.

Strange to say, no name was ever proposed for the “camp.” Back in the mind of each and every member of the lost company lay the unvoiced belief,—amounting to superstition,—that it would be tempting fate to speak of this long row of cabins as anything more enduring than “the camp.”

Notwithstanding his dominant personality and the remarkable capacity he had for real leadership, Percival was a simple, sensitive soul. He writhed under the lash of conspicuous adulation, and there was a good deal of it going on.

The satiric Randolph Fitts, notwithstanding his unquestioned admiration for the younger man, took an active delight in denouncing what he was prone to allude to as Percival's political aspirations. It is only fair to state that Fitts confined his observations to a very small coterie of friends, chief among whom was the subject himself.

“You are the smartest politician I've ever encountered, and that's saying a good deal,” he remarked one evening as he sat smoking with a half dozen companions in front of one of the completed huts. They were ranged in a row, like so many birds, their tired backs against the “facade” of the cabin, their legs stretched out in front of them. “You're too deep for me. I don't see just what your game is, A. A. If there was a chance to graft, I'd say that was it, but you could graft here for centuries and have nothing to show for it but fresh air. Even if you were to run for the office of king, or sultan or shah, you wouldn't get anything but votes,—and you'd get about all of 'em, I'll say that for you. To a man, the women would vote for you,—especially if you were to run for sultan. What is your game?”

Percival smoked in silence, his gaze fixed on the moonlit line of trees across the field.

“And speaking of women, that reminds me,” went on Fitts. “When does my

lord and master intend to transplant our crop of ladies?”

“What's that, Fitts?” said Percival, called out of his dream.

“Ladies,—what about 'em? When do they come ashore to occupy the mansions we have prepared for them?”

“Captain Trigger suggests next week.”

“What's he got to do with it? Ain't you king?”

“He's got a lot to do with it, you blithering boob.”

“Besides,” drawled Peter Snipe, the novelist, picking doggedly at the calloused ridges on one of his palms, “some of the women object to moving in the dark of the moon. They say it's sure to bring bad luck.”

“There's quite a mixup about it,” observed Flattner. “Part of 'em claim it's good luck. Madame Obosky says she never had any good luck moving by the light of the moon, and Careni-Amori says she doesn't blame her for feeling that way. Sort of cattish way of implying that the fair Olga could get along without any moon at all. Professional jealousy, I suppose.”

“I was speaking to Miss Clinton about it today,” remarked Michael Malone.

“What does she think about it?” from Percival.

“I don't know. She asked me what I thought about it.”

“And what did you tell her?”

“I told her I wasn't a woman, and that let me out. Being a man, I'm not entitled to a vote or an opinion, and I'd be very much obliged to her if she'd not try to drag me into it,—and to answer my question if she could. Whereupon she said she was in favour of moving by the light of the sun, and payin' no attention at all to the moon. Which I thought was a very intelligent arrangement. You see, if they move in the daytime the damned old moon won't know anything about it till it's too late and—”

“You're the first Irisher I've ever seen who wasn't superstitious, Mike,” broke in Fitts, with enthusiasm. “It takes a great load off my mind. Now I can ask you why the devil you've never returned that pocket-knife of mine. I thought you had some sort of superstition about it. A good many people,—really bright and otherwise intelligent people,—firmly believe it's bad luck to return anything that's been borrowed. I suppose I've owned fifty umbrellas in my time. The only man who ever returned one,—but you know what happened without my telling you. He got caught in a sudden shower on his way home from my apartment after making a special trip to return it, and died some three years later of pneumonia. Sick two days, I heard. So, as long as you're not a bit superstitious

about it, I'd thank you—”

“I'd have you know that I never keep anything I borrow,—that is, never more than a day. It's against my principles. Don't ask me for your dommed old knife. I lent it weeks ago to Soapy Shay.”

“You did?” cried Fitts, incredulity and relief in his voice. “Much obliged. I haven't been able to look Soapy in the face for a month. Did he recognize it?”

“I think he did. He kissed it.”

“Landover tried to borrow my lead pencil yesterday,” remarked Flattner. “Finally offered to put up his letter of credit as security. I gave him the laugh. That lead pencil is worth more than all the letters of credit lumped together. He wanted to write a note. So I agreed to let him use it if he wouldn't take it out of my sight and on condition that he didn't write more than five or six line's. But when he made as if he was going to sharpen it, I threatened him with an ax. Can you beat that for wastefulness? These low-down rich don't know the meaning of frugality. Why, if I hadn't stopped him he might have whittled off five thousand dollars' worth of lead, just like that. I also had to caution him about bearing down too hard while he was writing.”

“What was he wanting to write a note for?” demanded Malone. “Has he lost his voice?”

“It was a note of apology. He says he never fails to write a note of apology when he's done something he's ashamed of, or words to that effect. Lifelong practice, he says.”

“Who was he apologizin' to?”

“That little nurse, Miss Lake,—the one with the coral earrings. You know, Mike. I saw you carrying a bucket of water for her yesterday.”

“Her name isn't Lake,” said Malone. “It's Hardwickley. And if you had your eyes open, you'd have seen me carrying one for her every day, so you would, my lad.”

“The damned villain!” exploded Flattner. “He told me her name was Lake,—word with only four letters,—and she turns out to have—let's see,—eleven! I call that pretty shifty work, I do. You can't trust these wizards of Wall Street. They'll do you every crack, if you don't keep your eye peeled. Hornswoggled me out of seven letters.”

“You've got to watch 'em,” mused Fitts. “What was he apologizing to her for?”

“Something to do with his washing. I don't just remember what it was, but I

think she didn't iron and fold his handkerchiefs properly, or maybe it was his collars. In any case, he panned her for it, and afterwards repented. Told me in so many words that he felt like a blooming cad about it, and couldn't rest till he had apologized."

Fitts took several puffs at his pipe and then remarked: "That man has the biggest wash of anybody in this camp. I don't see any real reason why he should change collars three times a day while he's hauling logs down from the hills. As a matter of fact, what's the sense of wearing a collar at all? Most of us don't even wear shirts. See here, your majesty,—begging your pardon for disturbing your thoughts with my foot,—why don't you issue a manifesto or edict or something prohibiting the use of collars except on holidays, or at weddings, funerals and so forth?"

Percival yawned. "If Landover didn't have a collar on he'd think he was stark naked. Gosh, I'd like to go to bed."

"Why don't you? We'll call you as soon as we get any news," said Flattner.

"No, I'll stick it out a while longer. I say, Flat, it begins to look as if there's real wheat coming up over there after all. Old Pedro was telling me today that it looks like a cinch unless we got it sowed too late and cold weather comes along too soon. I never dreamed we'd get results. Putting out spring wheat in virgin soil like this is a new one on me. If it does thrive and deliver, by gosh, a whole lot of agricultural dope will be knocked to pieces. I thought spring wheat had to be sown in land that was ploughed the fall before. What's the explanation?"

"You can't explain nature, A. A.," said Percy Knapendyke. "Nature does so darned many unnatural things that you can't pin your faith to it at all. Of course, it was a pure experiment we made. We happened to have a lot of hard spring wheat, and this alluvial soil, deep and rich, was worth tackling. Old Pedro was as much surprised as I was when it began to come up. Using that fertilizer was an experiment, too. He swore it wouldn't help a bit. Now he just scratches his head and says God did it. We've got fifty acres out there as green as paint and you can almost see it grow. If nothing happens we ought to harvest it by the middle of February, and if God keeps on doing things for us, we may get as much as twenty-five bushels to the acre. It's different with the oats. You can plant oats on unploughed land, just as we did, and you can't stop it growing. The oats field up there along the base of the hills is a peach. Takes about ninety days for oats to ripen. That means we'll harvest it in about two months, and we'll beat the cold weather to it. Forty or fifty to the acre, if we have any luck at all. Potatoes doing well and—Say, did I tell you what I've found out about that stuff growing over there in the lowlands beyond the river? Well, it's flax. It's the same sort of thing

that grows in New Zealand. Those plants I was pointing out to you last week,—the ones with the long brownish leaves, like swords. There's no mistake about it. I took those two Australian sailors over to look at 'em a day or two ago and they swear it's the same plant, growing wild. Same little capsule shaped fruit, with the little black seeds, and everything. I've been reading up on it in the encyclopedia. You cut those leaves off when they get to be full size, macerate 'em in water for a few days, sun dry 'em, and then weave 'em some way or another. We'll have to work that out. Strongest sort of fibre in the leaves. Makes a very stout cloth, rope, twine,—all that sort of thing. Opens up a new and important industry, boys,—particularly obnoxious to married men. We'll be having dress-making establishments in full blast before you know it, and model gowns till you can't rest. I almost hate to spread the news among the women. We won't have a cook, or a laundress, or a school-teacher on the Island if this dressmaking craze gets started. Every hut along this row will have a sign beside the door: 'Dressmaking Done Here.' On the other hand, I doubt very much if we'll be able to get a single tailor-shop going,—and God knows I'll soon need a new pair of pants, especially if we're going to have regular church services every Sunday, as Percival says."

"Father Francisco and Parson Mackenzie have finally got together on it," said Malone gloomily. "For the first time in the history of civilization we're going to have a combination Catholic and Protestant Church. It's all arranged. Father Francisco is going to conduct mass in the morning and Parson Mackenzie is going to talk about hell-fire in the evening. I was wondering what the Jews are going to do for a synagogue and a rabbi."

"I can't answer that question," said Peter Snipe; "but Morris Shine tackled me the other day to write a play for him, something with music and dancing in it. He's got a great idea, he says. A stock company to use the church building once a month. Expects to submit his scheme to Fitts as soon as he gets it worked out, with the idea of having our prize little architect provide for a stage with ecclesiastical props in the shape of pulpits and chancels and so forth, which can be removed on short notice. Suggests, as a matter of thrift, that footlights be put in instead of altar candles. Free show, free acting, no advertising bills, no royalties to authors, free programs,—everything free, including supper."

"Grand little idea, Pete," said Percival. "Are you going to write the play?"

"Sure. My faithful old typewriter is aching to be thumped once more,—and I've got half-a-dozen extra ribbons, thank God. Good for two long novels and an epitaph. Just as soon as we can get the ship's printing press and dining-room type ashore, I'll be ready to issue The Trigger Island Transcript, w.t.f.—if you know what that means. I see you don't. Weekly till forbidden."

“I've always wondered what those confounded letters meant down in the corner of the half-inch advertisements,” said Flattner. “It will be a rotten-looking newspaper if it's anything like the sheet the Doraine put out on the trip down. No two letters matched, and some of 'em were always upside down. Why were they upside down, Pete? You're an old newspaper man. Tell us.”

“Because it's impossible to set 'em sideways. If it was possible, the blamed printers could do it, you bet. When I was writing leaders on the Saxville Citizen years ago there was a ruffian up in the composing-room who used to set whole paragraphs of my best editorials in em quads, and when I kicked,—Hello, isn't that a lantern, A. A.?”

They all scrambled to their feet and peered intently in the direction of the wooded strip that lined the channel. This whilom conversation came to an abrupt end. Ghostly forms suddenly took shape in front of other huts, figures of men that were until then as logs in the shadows. Far off in the road through the wood, a light bobbed, flashed and disappeared intermittently, and finally emerged into the open and came steadily forward. Detached knots of men down the line of huts, twos and threes and fours, swiftly welded themselves into groups, and, hurrying forward, swelled the crowd that congregated at the end of the “street.” Two hundred of them, tired but eager, awaited the arrival of the man with the lantern.

These were the men who slept on shore, the unmarried men, those who had no “feminine hearth,” as Snipe put it dolefully one dark and windy night. Since supper-time these men had been waiting and watching. But few of them had gone to bed. Gentleman and roustabout, one and all, were linked together by a common anxiety. News of the greatest import was expected during the night.

A child was coming to the pathetic little widow of Cruise, the radio-man.

Two messengers had gone down to the landing to wait for the report to be shouted from the afterdeck of the Doraine,—Soapy Shay and Buck Chizler, the jockey. Now they were returning,—and it was nearing midnight.

They drew near, the lantern buffeting the legs of the one-time diamond thief as he swung along in the rear of the more active jockey.

“It's a girl,” called out Buck to the silent mob. Not a sound, not a word from the eager crowd. “Mother and kid both doing well,” went on the jockey, a thrilling note of triumph in his voice.

And then a roar of voices went up to the moonlit sky. The shackles of doubt and anxiety fell away, and every heart swelled with joy and relief. Men began to dance and laugh. Out in front of the crowd leaped Percival.

“Come on now, fellows! Everybody up! Three cheers for the Trigger Island baby! One—two—three!”

And while the last wild cheer was echoing back from, the mountainside: “Now, three good ones for the baby's mother, God bless her!”

Thrice again the exultant yells echoed across the plain, and then out leaped another excited figure. It was Nicklestick the Jew.

“Come on! Come on! Ve got to light the bonfires! Come on! I got the matches! Vait! Vait! Let's vait while we take off our hats a minute, boys,—take them off to our baby's father, Jimmy Cruise. No cheers!”

A hush fell over the crowd. Every hat came off, and every head was bent. To many of them James Cruise was no more than a name salvaged from the shocking experiences of those first dreadful days. Few of them had come in actual contact with him. The time had been too short. But Betty Cruise, his widow, was known to all of them, high and low. They had watched over her, and protected her, and slaved for her, for besides pity there was in every man's soul the fiercest desire that nothing,—absolutely nothing,—should be left undone to insure the happy delivery of the babe they were counting so keenly upon!

She was a frail, delicate English girl whom Cruise had married in Buenos Aires the year before. He was taking her up to his mother's home in Connecticut. His death,—alas, his annihilation!—almost killed her. There were those who said she would die of grief. But, broken and frail as she was, she made the fight. And now came the news that she had “pulled through.”

There were mothers on board with tiny babies,—three or four of them, in fact, —peevish, squalling infants that innocently undertook to inspire loathing in the souls of these self-same men. They had no claim upon the imagination or the sympathy of the eager crowd,—no such hold as this newcomer, the child born in their pockets, so to speak,—an expression first employed by an ardent champion of the impending infant in defending his righteous solicitude when it was attacked by a sophisticated and at the same time exasperated nurse.

Two bonfires were started in the open space known as “The Green.” The huge piles of twigs and branches had been thrown up earlier in the evening. They were in plain view of the “lookout” at the top of Split Mountain. It had been agreed that if it was a boy one fire was to be the signal; if a girl, two. The “watch” was to share in the glad tidings!

The cheering awoke Abel Landover from a sound sleep. He turned in his bunk and growled:

“The damned idiots!”

Mr. Landover did not like children. He declined to sit up half the night to find out “how things were going.” So he went to bed, knowing perfectly well that his three bunkies would come piling in at some outlandish hour and jabber about the “kid,” and he wouldn't be able to get back to sleep again for hours.

He was what is commonly known as a “grass widower.” His wife rather too promptly married inside of a month after leaving Reno, and, much to her own gratification and joy, proceeded to have three very desirable children within a period of five years, causing him a great deal of pain and annoyance for the reason that their father had once been regarded as his best friend,—and now he couldn't abide the sight of him. He hated children. Now you know the kind of a man he was.

Five tired and thoughtful men were going to bed a little later on in one of the huts.

“What shall we call her?” came from Randolph Fitts, as he threw one of his clay-covered shoes into the corner.

“There's only one name for her,” said Percival firmly, from the edge of his bunk. “We'll call her Doraine.”

“Good shot!” cried Peter Snipe. “I had two names in mind, but Doraine's got 'em both beat. It may not be as pretty as Angelica, but it's more appropriate. Mortimer was the other name I had in mind.”

“Yep,” was the smothered decision of Michael Malone. His shirt came off, and then he spoke more distinctly. “We can't do better than to name her after her birthplace. That's her name. Doraine Cruise. It sounds Irish. Got music in it. All Irish names have,—leaving out Michael and Patrick and Cornelius and others applied solely to the creatures who don't take after their blessed mothers and who grow up to be policemen and hod-carriers, with once in awhile a lawyer or labour-leader to glorify the saints they were named for, and—Yes, begorry, Doraine's her name.”

And so it was that, with an arbitrary quaintness, the babe was named without so much as a thought of consulting the mother. They assumed a proprietary interest in her, a sort of corporate ownership that had as its basis a genuine affection for and pride in Cruise's widow. It did not occur to one of them that she ought to have been considered in the matter of naming her own child; they went to sleep perfectly satisfied that when the question was put to a general vote on the morrow there wouldn't be a single dissenting voice against the name they had selected.

And Mrs. Cruise herself would be very grateful to them for the prompt

assistance they had given her at a time when she was in no condition to be bothered with minor details!

CHAPTER IV.

The death of Betty Cruise occurred the second day after her baby was born. In a way, this lamentable occurrence solved a knotty problem and pacified two warring sexes, so to speak. For, be it known, the women of the Doraine took a most determined stand against the manner in which the men, viva voce, had arrogated unto themselves the right to name the baby. Not that any one of the women objected to the name they had given her; they were, in fact, pleased with it. But, they protested, this was a matter over which but one person had jurisdiction, and that person was Betty Cruise. If it was not a mother's privilege to name her own child,—especially in a case where the infant's father was in no position to decide the question for her, whether she consented or no, then all they could say was that things had come to a pretty pass.

At any rate, they were going to see to it that the baby was not named by a mob!

Ruth Clinton went straight to Percival.

“I hear you have named the baby, Mr. Percival,” she said, prefacing her remark by a curt “good morning.”

It was the first time she had spoken to him in many days. Their ways not only lay apart but she had made a point of avoiding him. She stopped him this morning as he was passing the hut in which she and her aunt were to live with two of the American nurses.

The three young women had spent several days in the making and putting up of some very unusual and attractive window curtains and portieres; painting the stones that framed the fireplace, the crude window-casings and door jamb; and in draping certain corner recesses which were to achieve dignity as clothes closets. They were scrubbing the floor when Percival passed on his way to the “office.”

His “office,” by the way, was a rude “lean-to” at the extreme outer end of the street. It was characteristic of him to establish headquarters at a point farthest removed from the approach to the camp from the ship. Fitts was perhaps the only person who sensed the real motive back of this selection. Every one else attributed it to an amiable conclusion on Percival's part to sacrifice himself for others by walking almost twice as far as any of them. As a matter of fact, he had nothing of the sort in mind. He deliberately arranged it so that all operations

should be carried on between headquarters and “home.” It was his plan to drive inward instead of outward, to push always in one direction. In other words, thought Fitts quite correctly, he “never had to look behind him for trouble.”

To save his life, Percival could not subdue the eager, devouring gleam that flashed into his eyes as he looked into hers. He could have cursed himself. A swift warm flush raced from her throat to her cheeks. Her direct, steady gaze faltered under fire, and a confused, trapped expression flickered perceptibly for a moment or two. He mistook it for dismay, or, on second thought, even worse,—displeasure.

“I—I can't help it,” he stammered, surprised into voicing the thought that was uppermost. “You know how I feel. I—I—”

But she had recovered her self-possession. “Do you really think you have the right to name Mrs. Cruise's baby?” she inquired coolly.

He managed a wry, deprecatory smile. “Everybody seems to like the name, Miss Clinton. The more I think of it myself, the better it sounds. I tried it out last night in all sorts of combinations. It fits nicely into almost any family tree—even Nicklestick's. Just say it to yourself. Doraine Nicklestick. Try any name you like. Doraine Smith, Doraine Humperdinck, Doraine Landover—even Doraine Shay—and, I tried it out with Clinton. Doraine Clinton. Don't you like it? I even tried Percival. It isn't quite so satisfying tacked onto a name like mine,—and it's a poor beginning for Fitts,—but with good, sensible surnames, it's fine.”

“It isn't a question of how it sounds, Mr. Percival.”

“Don't you like Doraine Clinton?”

“I like almost anything better than Ruth. I suppose most people loathe the names that other people have given them.”

“No one knows that better than I. I sometimes wonder what they might have called me if I were a girl. Nothing as nice as Doraine, or Ruth, I'll bet my soul on that. Something like Guinevere Aphrodite, or Desdemona Venus, or—”

“We are getting away from the subject,” she interrupted crisply. “Has it occurred to you that poor little Mrs. Cruise might like to name her own baby? Why should you men take it upon yourselves to choose a name for her child? Don't you think you were a trifle high-handed in the matter?”

“Of course, if Mrs. Cruise doesn't like Doraine, we will—”

“You will suggest another, I suppose,” she broke in scornfully. “Well, I may as well inform you that you are about to strike a snag,” she went on, a trifle inelegantly in her desire to be emphatic. “We intend to see to it that the mother

of that baby gives it a name of her own choosing."

"May I inquire just who you mean by we?" he asked.

"The women,—three hundred of us, Mr. Percival, that's who. I for one happen to know that Betty Cruise chose a name long ago. Her heart is set on naming the baby after her mother,—Judith, I think it is. That's the name she wants, but do you imagine she will have the hardihood or the courage, poor little scrap, to oppose you, Mr. Percival? I mean you, personally. She thinks your word is law. She would no more think of defying you than she would think of—"

"Pardon me, Miss Clinton," he interrupted gently, "but don't you think that's a trifle far-fetched? I am not a dictator, you know. I fancy Mrs. Cruise knows that, even if you do not."

"I have heard all about your meeting last night," she went on ruthlessly, her eyes flashing. "How you suggested the name, how you settled the question to suit yourself, and how you called the men together this morning and told them that the child was to be called Doraine before you asked them to vote on it. Vote on it! What a travesty! And no one had the nerve to stand up and say a word for that poor little woman. Oh, you've got them well-tamed, Mr. Percival."

By this time the two nurses had appeared in the doorway, and several other women at work down the line, scenting the fray, were approaching.

"I guess you'd better call off the vote, Mr. Percival," said one of the nurses, eyeing him unflinchingly.

"I can't call it off. The men adopted the name unanimously. I have no right to set aside their decision, no matter how hastily it was made," said he, beginning to bridle now that he tasted concerted opposition.

"I warn you that I intend to call the women,—and what few men there are with minds of their own,—together this evening to see that Betty Cruise gets fair play," said Ruth. "When she hears that we are behind her, she'll have the backbone to tell you men to mind your own business and—"

"Have I a mind of my own or not, Miss Clinton?" he interrupted.

"You certainly have," she declared with conviction.

"Then you may expect me to be one of the men to attend your meeting. Good morning." He lifted his hat, smiled and walked briskly away.

"He'll crab the whole thing," observed one of the women, and despite her vocal rancour there was an admiring expression in her eyes as they followed him down the road.

"If he wants to call that baby Andrew Jackson or George Washington, he'll

have his way," said another. "Sex won't make any difference to him."

"You just wait and see," said Ruth, quivering with indignation.

"Mercy, how you must hate him, Miss Clinton," cried one of her house-mates.

"I only wish I were a man," cried the other, clenching her fists.

"It would simplify matters tremendously," came in dry, masculine tones from the outskirts of the group. They turned and discovered Randolph Fitts. He was smiling sympathetically.

"I don't quite see what you mean, Mr. Fitts," said Ruth, after a moment.

"Because if you were a man, Miss Clinton, you wouldn't even think of hating him. You'd love him."

Miss Clinton stared at him for a second or two and then, whirling, entered the hut. Her cheeks were burning. Who shall say whether the tears that sprang to her eyes as she fell to work scrubbing in the corner were of anger or self-pity?

Briefly, the situation became quite strained as the day wore on. Women gathered in little knots to discuss the unprecedented "nerve" of the men. By nightfall they were pretty thoroughly worked up over a matter that had mildly amused them at the outset of the day. A comparatively small proportion had cared one way or the other in the beginning. Most of them did not care at all. Given time, however, to digest the thought, aided by such seasoning as could be supplied by a half dozen determined and more or less eloquent voices, they came in the course of a few hours to the conclusion that they never had heard of anything so outrageous, and, to a woman, were ready to fight for little Mrs. Cruise's rights!

Several of the stewardesses and two or three women from the second cabin were avowed and bitter suffragettes. Indeed, two of the stewardesses, being English, were of the hatchet-wielding, brick-throwing element that made things so warm for the pained but bull-headed male population of London shortly before the Great War began. These ladies harangued their companions with great effect.

To have heard or witnessed the little gatherings at noon and at the close of work for the day, one might have been led to believe that a grave, portentous ques-tion of state was involved. Trifling and simple as all this may seem to the reader of this narrative, it serves a definite purpose. It reveals to a no uncertain degree the eagerness with which these castaways reached out hungrily for the slightest morsel that would satisfy the craving of active minds dulled by the constant, never-absent thought of self; minds charged with thoughts that centred

on something thousands of miles away; minds that seldom if ever worked in harmony with hands that toiled.

The men took up the gauntlet. They considered themselves challenged. Notwithstanding the secret conviction that the women were right, they stood united in defence of their action. Nothing that Percival could say or do moved them. He tramped from one group of toilers to another, always meeting with the same grins and laughter when he suggested that they wait until Mrs. Cruise was able to approve or disapprove of the name they had chosen.

“Good gosh!” cried one of the sailors. “Are you goin' to give in to the women, boss?”

“Well, I've been thinking it over, boys. I guess we were a little too officious. We meant well, God knows, but after all, Betty Cruise ought to be consulted,—now, oughtn't she?”

“Sure,” cried any number of them cheerfully. “It's her kid.”

“Well, there you are,” he rejoined persuasively.

“But how do we know she won't be tickled to death with our name? She'd ought to be. It's purtier than any name I can think of,” argued Jack Wales, a sailor. “When she's well enough, we'll tell her the kid's name is Doraine, and—”

“She won't hold back a second, boss, when she finds out that you picked it for her,” broke in another. “Only a couple o' days ago she was sayin' to one of the other women in my hearin' that if it was a boy she was goin' to call him Percival,—and she didn't know what on earth she'd do if it was a girl. Said she'd probably have to call it after her mother and she didn't like her mother's name a little bit.”

“I know, but after all, we did butt in a trifle too soon with our—”

“For God's sake, don't let any of these here women hear you talk like that, boss,” groaned Jack Wales. “They'll think we're beginning to hedge. We got to stand together in this thing. If we don't, they'll rule this camp sure as you're a foot high. I don't give a dern what the kid's name is, far as I'm concerned, but on principle, boss, it's just got to be Doraine. Doraine she is an' Doraine she stays.”

Every one of them was good-humoured about it. They were taking it as a rare and unexpected bit of politics. The thrill of opposition invested them. They scoffed at surrender.

Buck Chizler, however, was seriously affected. He was courting one of the nurses and he, for one, saw peril in preliminary defeat.

“There won't be any living with 'em,” he proclaimed, scowling darkly. “I know what it is to have 'em get the bit in their teeth. You just can't manage 'em,

that's all. Upset all the dope. Likely to throw you clear over the fence. Experience ain't a particle of use. The gad don't do a bit of good. They just shut their jaws, lay back their ears, and—”

“We're not talking about race-horses, Buck,” interrupted Percival, smiling.

“Neither am I,” said Buck forcibly.

Ruth went to Olga Obosky. She did so only after a rather prolonged inward struggle. The Russian's interest in Percival was not moderated by the reserve supposed to be inherent in women. She was an open idolatress. One had only to watch the way she followed him with her dark, heavy-lidded eyes to know what was in her mind. Ruth tried not to despise her. She tried not to care, when she saw Percival laughing and talking with this beguiling sensualist,—and it was not an infrequent occurrence.

The dancer was seated on the floor of her hut, tailor-fashion, a cigarette between her lips, her bare arms resting limply on her knees, her body bent forward in an attitude of extreme fatigue. The three “coryphees” were busy at work about the place with Olga's maid. Ruth stopped in the doorway. Olga lazily removed the cigarette from her lips and smiled.

“I once thought I was very strong and unbreakable,” she said, “but now I know I am not. See, I am all in, as we would say in America. Suffering snakes,—how tired I am! That also comes from America. Won't you sit down, Miss Clinton? We have three or four deck chairs, you see, and some cushions.”

“Why do you sit there on the floor, all doubled up and—heavens, it must be uncomfortable,—if you are so tired? How do you manage your legs?”

“My legs? Oh, my legs are never tired. It is my poor back.” Whereupon she slowly, gracefully straightened out one of her legs, and without changing the position of her body, raised it, with toes and instep on a perfect line, until the heel was some three feet from the floor. Then she swung it slowly backward, twisting her body sinuously to one side. A moment later the foot was stretched out behind her and she lifted herself steadily, without apparent exertion, upon the other knee,—and then stood erect. Ruth watched this remarkable feat in wonder and admiration.

“How—how on earth do you do it?” she cried. “Why,—you must be as strong as—as—a—” She was about to say horse, and floundered.

“But I trust not as clumsy as one,” said Madame Obosky, stretching her body in luxurious abandon. “I sit on the floor like zat, my friend, because my back is tired, not my legs. If I lie back in ze deck chair when I am tired, I would relax,—and would make so much more regret for myself when the time came to get up

again. Besides, it is a good way to rest, zis way. Have you never tried it? Do, sometime. The whole body rests, it sags; the muscles have nothing to do, so they become soft and grateful. The backbone, the shoulders, the neck,—they all droop and oh, zey—they are so happy to be like zat. It is the same as when I am asleep and they are not running errands all the time for my brain. The Arab sits like zat when he rests,—and the Hindoo,—and they are strong, oh, so very strong. Try it, sometime, Miss Clinton, when you are very tired. It is the best way to let go, all over."

Ruth laughed. "I couldn't do it to save my soul."

"Oh, I do not mean for you to get up as I did, or use your leg as I did. You could not do zat. You are too old. That is one of the fruits, one of the benefits of the cruelest kind of child labour. I was a great many years in making myself able to do zat. See! Put your hand on my leg. Now my back,—my arm. What you think, eh?"

Ruth, in some embarrassment, had shyly obeyed her. The dancer's thigh was like a column of warm iron; her waist, free as ever from stays, was firm and somehow suggestive of actual resilience; her shoulders and back possessed the hard, rippling muscles of a well-developed boy; her shapely forearm was as hard as steel. Ruth marvelled.

"How strong you are!" she cried; "and yet you are slight. You are not as big as I am, but oh, how much stronger you are!"

"I have a perfect figure," said Olga calmly. "It is worth preserving. No one admires my body so much as I do myself. I must not get fat. When you are a fat old woman, I shall still be as I am now. You will diet, and pray, and rave,—because you are growing old,—and I shall do none of these things. I eat like a pig, I never pray, and I do not believe in growing old. But you do not come to see me about myself, Miss Clinton. You find me sitting idly with my legs crossed, and you are surprise. I work as I dance,—very, oh, so very hard while I am at ze task,—but with frequent periods of rest. So I do not wear out myself too soon. It is the only way. Work for an hour, rest for ten minutes,—relax and forget,—and you will see how well it goes. Why do you come? Is it to talk about the baby?"

"Yes, it is, Madame Obosky. I have come to ask you to use your influence with Mr. Percival. You—"

"But I have no influence with Mr. Percivail," interrupted the other, staring.

Ruth flushed. "You are his friend. You—"

"Ah, yes,—but nothing more than zat. You too are his friend, Miss Clinton."

“I see little or nothing of Mr. Percival,” said Ruth stiffly. “We are not friends,—not really friends.”

“But you admire him, eh? Quite as much as I admire him,—and as every one else does.”

“There are certain things about him that I admire, of course.”

“You admire him for the same reason that I admire him. Because he has a most charming and agreeable way of telling me to go to the devil. Is that not so?”

“Madame Obosky!”

“It comes to the same thing. If you would like me to put it in another form, he has a very courteous way of resisting. He is most aggravating, Miss Clinton. He is most disappointing. He should be like soft clay in our hands, and he isn't. Is that not so?”

“Is it not possible, Madame Obosky, that we,—you and I,—may have an entirely different viewpoint so far as Mr. Percival is concerned? Or any other man, for that matter?” Ruth spoke coldly, almost insultingly.

“I dare say,” agreed Olga, composedly, not in the least offended by the implication. “You want to marry him. I do not.”

“How dare you say that? I do not want to marry that man. I do not want to marry him, I say.”

“How interesting. You surprise me, Miss Clinton. It appears, then, that our viewpoint is in nowise different, after all.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I leave it to your imagination,—and to reflection. Listen! We may as well be friends. You do not wish to admit it, even to yourself, but you are in love with him. So am I. The difference between us is that I realize I can get along without him, and still be happy. I am not jealous, my dear. If I were, I should hate you,—and I do not. He is in love with you. You know it perfectly well, because you are not a fool. He is not in love with me. No more am I a fool. He—”

“I am not in love with him!”

“So be it,” said Olga shortly. “Have your own way about it. It is not my affair. You have come to me, however, because you know he loves you and you know you do not love him. Why, therefore, are you afraid of me?”

“It is useless to continue this—”

“Oh, I see! You do not wish my girls to hear our conversation.” Without more

ado, she ordered the three girls out of the hut. “Go out and play,” she commanded. Then, as the girls imparted in haste, she turned to Ruth. “I am very thoughtless. You are not in the habit of discussing your love affairs quite so generously as I. Poof! They do not care, those girls. Love affairs mean nothing to my girls.”

“I have no love affair to discuss, Madame Obosky. You need not have sent them away. Good-bye..There is nothing more to be said—”

“Do not go away,—please. You do not know whether to like me or not. You do not understand me. You have never encountered any woman as honest as I am, zat is the trouble. Sit down, please. Let us talk. We may be here together on this island all the rest of our lives, Miss Clinton. It would not be right for us to hate each other. When you are married to Mr. Percivail, you will have nothing to fear from me. I give you my solemn oath on zat, Miss Clinton. Our little world here is too small. If we were out in the great big world,—well, it might be different then. But, how, I ask you, is it possible for me to run away with your husband when there is no place to run away to?”

She spoke so quaintly that Ruth smiled in spite of herself.

“You are a most extraordinary person, Madame Obosky. I—I can't dislike you. No, thank you, I sha'n't sit down. I came to see you about the naming of the baby. I suppose you know that we women have decided to oppose the—”

“Yes, yes,—I know,” interrupted the other. “But why should we oppose? It is a very small matter.”

“Do you really believe those men had—or have—the right to give a name to Betty Cruise's baby? I don't believe it, Madame Obosky.”

“In the first place, can you blame Mr. Percivail for taking the matter out of the mother's hands? Mothers are very, oh, so very stupid sometime, you know. For example, my dear Miss Clinton, you have but to see what Mr. Percivail's mother did to him when he was an infant. She called him Algernon Adonis,—and why? Because she thought he was the most wonderful child in all the world,—and because she was silly. I can almost hear her arguing now with the father, poor man. One day I asked Algernon Adonis what name his father called him by,—I was so sure he would not call him Algernon. He said that up to the day his father died he called him Bud. That's a toy's name, you see. I am in favour of children being named by outsiders, disinterested outsiders,—a committee or something, —men preferably. I think this child should be called Doraine. Betty Cruise she do not care what she call it now that it is not possible to call it Jimmy Percivail or Percivail Jimmy. Has it occur to you that if it had been a boy, all these men

would have insisted on Jimmy, without the Percivail?”

“I like the name Doraine,—we all do. What we resent is Mr. Percival's presumption in—”

“Let me tell you one more thing. Do not permit Mr. Percivail to address your indignation meeting tonight, for if you do, and he smiles zat nice, good-humoured smile and tells the ladies zat he is sorry to have displease them, and zat he is to blame entirely for the blunder,—poof! Zat will be the end!”

“I am not so sure of that,” said Ruth. “There are some very determined women among us, Madame Obosky.” A faint line appeared between her eyes, however, —a line acknowledging doubt and uncertainty. “And you will not join us in the protest?”

“No,” said Olga, shaking her head. “I am content to let the men have their way in small things, Miss Clinton. It makes zem—them so much easier to manage when it comes to the big things. I speak from experience. Once let a man think he is monarch of all he surveys and he becomes the most humble of subjects. As I have said before, we may all be here for a long, long time. No one can tell. So, I say, we must pat our men on the back and tell zem what great, wise, strong fellows they are,—and how good and gallant too. Then they will fight for us like the lion, and zey—they will work for us like the ass and the oxen, because man he enjoys to be applauded greatly. A man likes to have his hair rubbed gently with the finger tips. He will smile and close his eyes and if he knew how he would purr like the cat. But, my dear, he do not like to have his hair pulled. Zat is something for you to remember,—you and all your determined women, as you call them.”

“Of course you understand, Madame Obosky, I—and the other women,—are thinking only of Betty Cruise in this matter.”

“From what I have been told, all these men out here stayed awake half the night thinking about her, Miss Clinton. They behave like so many distracted fathers waiting for news from the bed-chamber. Bless their hearts, you might think from their actions that the whole two—three hundred of them consider themselves the consolidated father of zat single infant.”

“I must be getting back to my work,” said Ruth abruptly. Her eyes were shining, her voice was soft and strangely thick. “But,” she went on bravely, after clearing her throat, “we intend to fight it out with them, just the same, Madame Obosky.”

Olga went to the door with her.

“You mean, you intend to fight it out with Mr. Percivail,—you yourself, eh?”

“It is not a personal matter with me, let me remind you once more. He is their leader. He dominates them. He is the force that holds them together. That's all.”

“And you would render that force impotent, eh? I see. How wise you women are!”

Ruth stopped short, struck by the remark. “Say that again, please.”

Olga repeated the words slowly, significantly, and added: “They might have a worse leader, Miss Clinton.”

At another time, Ruth Clinton would have been deeply impressed by the underlying significance of the Russian's words. But she was at the mercy of a stubborn, rebellious pride. She chose to ignore the warning that lay in Obosky's remark. She felt herself beaten, and she was defiant. It was too late to hark now to the mild, temperate voice of reason.

Something rankled deep down in her soul, something she was ashamed to acknowledge even to herself. It was the disagreeable conviction that Percival ascribed her activities to nothing more stable than feminine perversity,—in fact, she had the uncomfortable feeling that he even went so far as to attribute them to spitefulness. Something in his voice and manner, as he left her that morning, suggested the kindly chiding of a wilful child. Well, he should see!

“I don't care what it all comes to, Madame Obosky,” she said, a red spot in each cheek. “He shall not name that baby.”

The Russian smiled. “Forgive me for saying that you will not feel so bitterly toward him when the time comes for him to name your baby.”

Ruth's lips fell apart. She stared for a moment in sheer astonishment. Then she paled with anger. Drawing herself to her full height, she asked:

“Are you deliberately trying to make me despise you?”

“By no means,” replied the other, quite cheerfully. “I am merely giving you something to think about, zat is all.”

“Rubbish!” was all that Ruth flung over her shoulder as she walked away.

CHAPTER V.

It was the noon hour. Scores of men were resting in the shade of the huts as she strode briskly past. They all smiled cheerily, but there was good humoured mockery in their smiles. Here and there were groups of women talking earnestly, excitedly.

Abel Landover was leaning in his doorway, watching her approach. His eyes gleamed. She was very beautiful, she was very desirable. She had been in his mind for months,—this fine, strong, thoroughbred daughter of a thoroughbred gentleman. His sleeves were rolled up, his throat was bare; his strong, deeply lined face was as brown as a berry; if anything, his cold grey eyes were harder and more penetrating than in the days when they looked out from a whiter countenance. He was a strong, dominant figure despite, the estate to which he had fallen,—a silent, sinister figure that might well have been described as “The Thinker.” For he was always thinking.

“I understand you tackled the 'boss' this morning, Ruth,” he said as she came up.

“I daresay the news is all over the island by this time,” she replied, still angry.

“Was it worth while?” he inquired, a trace of derision in his voice.

She was on the point of replying rather emphatically in the negative, when suddenly she recalled the look in Percival's eyes and the first words he spoke to her. She caught her breath. Her eyes sparkled, her lips parted in a rosy smile.

“Yes, Mr. Landover, it was worth while,” she said, and went on, leaving him to reflections that were as perplexing as they were unanticipated.

She experienced a short spell of triumph. After all, Percival was in love with her. She did not need Olga Obosky to tell her that. She could see, she could feel for herself. A certain glee possessed her,—indeed, as she afterwards succeeded in analysing the sensation, it bordered decidedly on malice. She had it in her power to make him miserable and unhappy. She would enjoy seeing him unhappy!

The meanness of the woman who longs to injure the man who loves her, whether loved or unloved, revealed itself for the moment in this fair-minded, generous girl. (It is a common trait, admitted by many fair-minded and generous women!) But even as she coddled and encouraged the little sprout of vengeance,

the chill of common-sense rushed up and blighted it.

She had a sickening impression that Percival would fail to play the part according to her conception. In fact, he was quite capable of not playing it at all. He would pursue the even tenor of his way—(she actually made use of the time-honoured phrase in her reflections),—and she would get small satisfaction out of that.

Moreover, there was Olga Obosky to be reckoned with. She was conscious of a hot, swiftly passing sense of suffocation as the thought of Olga rushed unbidden into her brain,—for an instant only,—and then came the reaction: a queer chill that raced over her body from head to foot. What part would Olga Obosky play in the game?

The women congregated on the forward deck of the Doraine after supper that night. The evening repast was no longer dignified by the word dinner. The sky was inky black; not a star flickered in the vault above. There were low, far off mutterings of thunder. The rail lanterns,—few and far between,—threw their pallid beams down into the rippling basin in a sickly effort to penetrate the gloom.

Captain Trigger and Mr. Mott, smoking their pipes on the makeshift bridge, studied the throng of women in dour silence.

“I understand the farmers are praying for rain,” remarked Mr. Mott, sniffing the air with considerable satisfaction.

“It would do no end of good,” said Captain Trigger, without taking his eyes from the chattering mass below.

Mr. Codge, the purser, joined them.

“What are they waiting for?” he asked. “Why don't they call the meeting to order?”

“They did that half an hour ago,” said Mr. Mott. “Good Lord, man, can't you hear them talking? Have you no ears at all?”

“But they're all talking at once.”

“And why shouldn't they?” demanded the First Officer. “It's their meeting, isn't it?”

“I met Miss Clinton as I was coming up. She was going to her room. I asked her how the meeting was getting along. I don't believe she understood me, because all she said was 'good-night.'”

“I guess she understood you, all right,” said Mr. Mott, again sniffing the air. “Seems to me it's getting a little nearer, Captain Trigger. There's a little breeze

coming up, too.”

“A good thunder-storm,—” began the Captain, musingly, but failed to complete the sentence.

“Would settle something besides the dust,” said Mr. Codge, after a deferential wait of a few seconds.

A figure detached itself from the mass on the weirdly lighted deck below and, approaching the perch of the three officers, came to a halt almost directly below them. The light of a lantern fell fairly on the upturned, smiling face of Olga Obosky.

“What is the hour, Captain Trigger?” she inquired.

“Almost nine, Madame Obosky.

“That is nearly two bells, eh, yes? How peaceful you look up there, you three old owls.”

“Come up!” invited the Captain cheerily. She joined them a moment later. “Tell me, are they leaving a shred of Percival and his band of outlaws?”

Mr. Codge struck a match and held it for her to light a cigarette. She inhaled deeply and then expelled the smoke in what seemed like a prolonged sigh of satisfaction.

“They are very funny, those women,” she said, placing her elbows on the rail and looking down at the crowd. “Do you know what the trouble is now? It is this: they cannot think of a way to condemn the action of those men as a body without also including Mr. Percivail in the verdict.”

“How's that?”

“Ninety-five per cent, of them want to exonerate Mr. Percivail, but they don't know how to do it in view of the fact that he is the guiltiest man of them all. That's why I say they are very funny, those women. They approve of what he has done in naming the baby, because whatever he does must be right, but they are almost unanimous in charging that all the other men out there were wrong. So they are in a great dilemma.”

Captain Trigger laughed. “I see. What was Miss Clinton's position in the debate?”

“Oh, she was one of those who insisted that Mr. Percivail alone be held accountable, the other men not at all. She was the chairman, you see, and they were oblige to listen to her at first. But zen, presently, one of those Brazilian ladies said it was a shame to put all the blame on dear Mr. Percivail, who is such a gentleman and so splendid and all zat,—and zen—then zat Mrs. Block jump up

and say that if it was not for Mr. Percivail her husband would have been killed last week when he fell off of the landing into ten sousand feet of water. And the great Careni-Amori she get up and say she would die for Mr. Percivail because he is such a gentleman, and two of those nurses at the same time cry out that he ought to be in the hospital because he is so worn-out working for other people zat he can hardly drag his poor feet around. And so it goes. Miss Clinton has departed, her chin in the air. But she does not deceive me. She has gone to her room to have a good weeping."

"Well, I wish they'd get together on something," growled the Captain; "so's we can all go to bed and get a few hours' sleep."

"Like as not they're keeping the baby awake with all this jabbering," said Mr. Codge. "And that isn't good for babies, you know. They've got to have plenty of sleep. Specially little ones."

"Will you tell me, Captain Trigger, why Mr. Percivail did not come aboard tonight?" asked Olga suddenly. "They were expecting him."

"And they were disappointed, eh?"

"I dare say. At any rate, a good many of them kept peering out over the water most of the time, and listening for the sound of oars." She laughed softly.

The men chuckled. "Talk about strategy," said Mr. Mott, "he's a bird at it. Keeps 'em guessing, he does. By glory, I wish I'd known how to handle women as well as he does. I might have been married fifteen or twenty times if I could have kept 'em anxious and worried,—but I couldn't. I never did have any sense about women. That's why I'm a bachelor instead of a grandfather."

"He told Miss Clinton he was coming," said Olga, harking back to the unanswered question.

"I daresay he changed his mind," said the Captain, rather evasively.

"I do not believe zat. There is some other reason. He is not a woman, Captain Trigger."

"Well, to tell you the truth—but don't let it go any farther, Madame,—he came aboard just before supper to find out how Mrs. Cruise is getting along. Dr. Cullen told him exactly what all these women down there know,—that she's very low,—so he went ashore. Said something about not wanting to take part in any racket that might disturb her,—noisy talk, and all that,—and left a bunch of wild flowers for her in case she was better by morning."

There was a slight noise behind them. Turning, they saw the figure of a woman in the shadow of the deck house.

“Who's there?” demanded Mr. Mott.

Ruth Clinton stepped forward into the light.

“Did he—did he do that?” she asked huskily.

“He did,” said the Captain.

“And is she so very ill? I did not know, Captain Trigger.”

“She's likely to die, Miss Clinton,—poor little woman.”

Ruth was silent for a moment. Then: “Do you think she—she can hear all that hubbub down there?”

“I am sure she cannot. But Percival was afraid she could, so he—well, he thought it best not to make it any worse by adding his groans of agony when you women tore him limb from limb out here on deck. That's the way he put it, so don't look at me like that.”

Ruth suddenly hung her head and walked away. As she disappeared down the steps, Mr. Codge remarked, sotto voce:

“She isn't as rabid as she was, is she?”

“She's got it in for Percival ever since he took that fall out of Landover,” said Mr. Mott.

“Think she's—er—keen on Landover? He's a good bit older than she is,—twenty years or so, I should say.”

“Don't ask me, Codge. As I was saying awhile ago, I don't know anything whatsoever about women. They know all about me, but, gosh, I'm worse than a baby goat where they're concerned. There's no law against her being in love with Landover, and there's no law against him marrying a woman fifty years younger'n himself if he feels like it. Now you take that good looking Russian over there talking to the Captain. Who knows what's in her mind? Nobody, sir,—nobody. All I know is that Landover tried to—”

“Sh! They've got ears like cats,” cautioned Mr. Codge.

“—And she put him in his place so quick it made his head swim. That's why he's got it in for her so hard. He says she's not fit for decent women to associate with. On the other hand, if she had been willing to flirt a little with him, and so on, he would have said all the other women were cats if they refused to take up with her. That's a man all over for you, Codge. I hope Miss Clinton ain't considering getting married to that man. He's one of these here what-do-you-call-'ems? Er—”

“Sybarites?” said Codge, who had picked up a good deal from conversations

with Peter Snipe.

“That ain't the word,” said Mr. Mott. “Now, I'll lay awake all night trying to think of that word. Damn the luck!”

He fell into a profound state of mental concentration, from which he was aroused a few minutes later by the swift and almost unheralded shower that rushed up ahead of the thunderstorm. The rumble of the “apple carts” in the vault above had suddenly become ominous, and there were fitful flares of light in the blackness.

The indignation meeting broke up in a wild scurry of skirts. It is worthy of mention that nothing definite had transpired. The speeches of the ardent suffragettes from the wilds of London were all that the most exacting could have demanded, for they covered all of the known and a great many of the unsuspected iniquities that the masculine flesh is heir to, but except for an introductory sentence or two they failed to touch upon the object of the meeting. They all began with something like “While I am frank to admit that Doraine is a very pretty name,” or “Notwithstanding the fact that Doraine is a lovely name,” or “If I had a child of my own, I should not in the least object to calling her Doraine,” and so on and so forth, but they cruelly abandoned the baby in the next breath, leaving it to be revived by the ensuing speaker.

The rain came just in time to prevent a vote being taken on a motion made by Miss Gladys Spotts. She moved that a committee of three be appointed to serve notice on Captain Trigger, et al, that it was the unanimous sense of the meeting that the women should not only have voice and vote on all public questions, but also representation in the official government. She had learned that there was talk of electing a mayor, a town clerk, a treasurer, a sheriff and a board of commissioners, and it ought to be understood in advance that—

The torrent came at that instant, but it requires a very slight stretching of the imagination in order to understand precisely what Miss Spotts insisted ought to be understood.

It rained very hard all night, and thundered, and lightened, and blew great guns. Not one, but all of the women, tucked away in their bunks, wondered how those poor men were faring out there in that black and lonely camp!

The next morning it was still raining. (In fact, it rained steadily for three days and nights.) Betty Cruise died shortly after daybreak, and with her death ended the controversy over the naming of her babe.

She was the first to be laid to rest in the burying-ground on Cape Sunrise. Services were conducted on the Doraine by the Reverend Mr. Mackenzie,

assisted by Father Francisco. All work was suspended on the morning of the funeral. Shortly before noon the entire company walked, in a long, straggling procession, from the landing to the spot three miles distant where the lonely grave awaited its occupant. Careni-Amori sang “Lead, Kindly Light” and “Nearer, my God, to Thee,” at the graveside. There were tears in a thousand eyes, and every voice was husky. To most of these people, Betty Cruise meant nothing, but she was to lie out there alone on the wind-swept point, and they were deeply moved. They all went back to work after the midday meal, a strangely silent, thoughtful company,—even down to the lowliest “Portugee.”

Mr. Mott, the gaunt old cynic, surprised every one, including himself, by adopting the infant! He announced his decision on the day after the funeral.

“That baby's got to have a father and a grandfather and a mother, and all that,” he declared to Captain Trigger, “and I'm going to be all of them, Weatherby. It ain't legal, I know, and I reckon I'll have to turn her over to her proper relatives if they make any demand,—provided we ever get off this island,—but while she's here she's mine, and that settles it, and as long afterward as God's willing. Chances are that no one at home will want to be bothered with an infant that don't actually belong to 'em, so I shouldn't wonder but what I'll have her always. What are you laughing at?”

“I was just thinking that you didn't mention anything about being a grandmother to her.”

“Is that meant to be sarcastic?”

“Not at all,” said the Captain hastily, noting the look in Mr. Mott's eyes. “But for fear you may think it was, I take it all back, Andrew.”

“I laid awake all last night worrying about how lonely and useless and unoccupied I'm going to be if we stick here on this island for any considerable length of time, not to say, always, and I made up my mind that if I had that kid to bring up, life would be sort of worth while. I'll probably live a good deal longer if I have something to live and work for. Ain't that so?”

“It certainly is,” agreed the Captain. “Do you mind my asking how you're going to feed it?”

“I've got that all attended to,” said Mr. Mott calmly. “I've been to see three of these women who've got tiny babies, and they've promised between 'em to nurse this one. It's all fixed, Captain. Of course, I don't know how it's going to work out, seeing as one of 'em is Spanish, one of 'em Portugee and the other a full-blooded Indian,—but they're all healthy.”

“It's very noble of you, Andrew,” said the Captain, laying his hand on the First

Officer's shoulder.

“Absolutely not,” snapped Mr. Mott. “It's nothing but plain, rotten selfishness on my part,—and I don't give a damn who knows it.”

CHAPTER VI.

Inside of a fortnight after the events just chronicled, the women came ashore to occupy the practically completed huts.

The Doraine was deserted except for Captain Trigger and the half-dozen sailors who remained with him. These sailors were ancient tars whose lives had been spent at sea. They were grizzled, wizened old chaps. One of them, Joe Sands, had been an able seaman for forty-six years, and, despite a perpetual crick in the back, he insisted that he was still an abler seaman than ninety-five per cent, of the thirty-year-olds who followed the sea for a living. When Captain Trigger announced his resolve to stay on board, where he belonged, these vainglorious old seadogs elected to remain with him to the end.

The exodus of women was hastened somewhat by the further listing of the Doraine. This was due primarily to the removal of thousands of tons from the holds, the galley and the engine room. A more sinister cause for alarm, however, was the action of the greatly lightened vessel when a tidal wave swept into the basin from the north. This came at the tag end of the storm,—on the third day, in fact. The Doraine seemed actually to be afloat for a few seconds, heaving, shuddering, groaning. Her bottom, after scraping and grinding and giving up the most unearthly sounds, suddenly appeared to have freed itself completely from the rocks on which it was jammed. She seemed on the point of righting herself. Then she started to roll over on her side! Almost as abruptly she stopped, shivered, and then lay still again. But she was not in her old position. She was lying over at least two degrees farther than before the upheaval.

This same, tremendous tidal wave, driven up by the strong wind that had blown steadily and viciously out of the north for three days,—or perhaps created by some vast internal convulsion of the earth,—completely inundated the low-lying point of land known as Cape Sunrise, At least two miles of the island was temporarily under water. The high ridge lining the shore alone prevented the sea from hurtling over into the valley to destroy the fields and gardens and even to imperil the row of huts along the opposite slope.

Out on Cape Sunrise the waters swept over the lonely grave of Betty Cruise, but fell back baffled when they attacked the foothills that protected the homes of the living. There were superstitious persons who read meaning into this startling visitation of the sea. They made ugly romance of it. For, said they, the lonely

spirit of Jimmy Cruise was trying to reach its mate,—aye, striving to drag her body down to the bottom of the sea to lie beside his own.

As the days went by,—long days that were not governed by any daylight saving law,—the settlement took on the air and life of a sequestered village. There was the general warehouse from which stores were dispensed sparingly by agents selected for such duties. Women and men went to market and carried home the provender. A fish market was established; wood-yards, fruit and vegetable booths, a dispensary, and a general store where leather, cloths of various description, and furs were to be had by requisition.

In speaking of the dispensary, Dr. Cullen complacently announced that the supply of medicine was limited, but that it was nothing to worry about. He declared bluntly,—and with a twinkle in his eye,—that people took too much medicine anyhow.

“Medicine is a luxury,” he said. “The more we stuff into people the more they want, and the less they take the sooner they forget they're sick. As your doctor, from this time on, I shall be delighted to set your broken bones, sew up your gashes, and all that sort of thing, but it is precious little medicine I'll give to you. So don't get sick. The only epidemic we can have here, according to my judgment, is an epidemic of good health. Am I right, gentlemen?”

The two young American doctors put aside their dignity and grinned.

The wines and liquors from the Doraine were brought ashore and locked away in the cellar beneath the warehouse. It could be had only on the doctor's orders.

“It won't hurt any of us to drink nothing but water for awhile,” said Percival in discussing the matter; “and the chances are we'll be less likely to hurt each other if we let the grog alone. There'll be no drinking on this island if I can help it. I understand some of you men are planning to put the pulp of the algarobo through a process of fermentation and make chica by the barrel. Well, if I have anything to say about it, you'll do nothing of the sort. I know that stuff. It's got more murder in it than anything I've ever tackled. We can make flour out of that pulp, as some of you know, and that's all we are going to make out of it. Besides, we can be decent longer on flour than we can on chica.

“We'll find it harder to do without tobacco than without booze, and unless we discover something to take its place we'll be smokeless in a few weeks. Professor Knapendyke is experimenting with a shrub he has discovered here. He says it may be a fairly good substitute if properly cured. But it won't be tobacco, so I guess we may as well make up our minds to swear off smoking as well as drinking. I hope there's nothing in the saying that the good die young. Because if

there is, we're in for an epidemic that will wipe out four-fifths of our population in no time at all. We're going to be so good we'll die like flies.”

The weeks wore on and the fields of grain were harvested. The yield was not a heavy one, but it was sufficient to justify the rather hap-hazard experiments. The fifty-odd acres of wheat produced a little over a thousand bushels. The twenty-acre oat-field had averaged forty bushels. A few acres of barley, sown broadcast in the calcareous loam along the coast, amounted to nothing.

Primitive means for grinding the grain had been devised. This first crop was being laboriously crushed between roughly made mill-stones, but before another harvest came along, a mill would be in operation on the banks of Leap Frog River.

The exploration of the island had long since been completed. In certain parts of the dense forest covering the western section there were magnificent specimens of the Norfolk Island pine. Fruits of the citrous family were found in abundance; wild cherries, wild grapes, figs, and an apple of amazing proportions and exceeding sweetness. Pigeons in great numbers were found, a fact that puzzled Professor Knapendyke not a little.

He finally arrived at an astonishing conclusion. He connected the presence of these birds with the remark-able exodus of wild pigeons from their haunts in the United States in the eighties. Millions of pigeons at that time took their annual flight southward from Michigan, Indiana and other states in that region, and were never seen again. What became of this prodigious cloud of birds still remains a mystery. Knapendyke now advanced the theory that in skirting the Gulf of Mexico on their way to the winter roosts in Central America they were caught by a hurricane and blown out to sea. By various stages the bewildered survivors of the gale made their way down the east coast of South America, only to be caught up again by another storm that carried them out into the Atlantic. A few reached this island, hundreds of miles from the mainland, and here they remained to propagate. At any rate, the naturalist was preparing to put his impressions and deductions into the form of a paper which he intended to submit to the National Geographic Magazine as soon as he returned to the United States.

The more practical Mr. Fitts decided to start a squab farm.

A few of the giant iguanas were seen, and many smaller ones. The meat of the iguana is a great delicacy. There were no beasts of prey, no herbaceous animals.

Lookouts on Top o' the Morning Peak reported the presence of monstrous birds at rare intervals. Where they came from and whither they went no one could tell. There were unscalable cliffs and crags at the western end of the

island, and it is possible that they had their nests among them.

Lieutenant Platt described the first of these huge birds as being at least thirty feet from tip to tip. It flew low above the top of Split Mountain and disappeared beyond the hills to the west. When first descried by one of the lookouts, this bird was far out over the ocean, approaching the island from the east. As it soared over the heads of the men, several hundred feet above them, its wings full spread, it was more like a small monoplane than a bird. In colour it was a dirty yellow, with a black belly and head. Before any one could procure a gun from the hut it was out of range, flying at an incredible speed. A few days later another was seen, coming from the same direction. It was flying much higher, and a few futile shots were fired at it. Then, after a week or ten days without a single one of the monsters being seen, five of them appeared in the west and flew eastward over the island and out to sea.

“What was the name of that passenger-carrying bird they were always talking about in the 'Arabian Nights'?” inquired Platt.

“You mean the roc,” replied Knapendyke. “If it ever really existed outside of the fairy tales, it is now extinct. The nearest thing to it in size is the condor, I suppose.”

“I've seen some whopping big condors up in the Andes,” said Percival, “but twelve feet from tip to tip was what the natives called a full-grown specimen. What do you make of these birds, Flattner?”

“After seeing an iguana eighteen feet long, I'm ready to believe anything. A protracted and an enforced spell of sobriety is the only thing that keeps me from diagnosing my own case as delirium tremens. There's one thing sure. Birds as big as these, and iguanas as huge as the three we've seen,—to say nothing of the enormous flying fish Morris Shine claims to have seen,—take me back to the Dark Ages. I daresay we're seeing the tag end of the giants. God knows how old these birds and reptiles are,—hundreds of years, at least. I'd give almost anything to get one of those birds and stuff him. There was once a flying animal known as the pteranodon. It has been extinct for millions of years. Belonged to the class called pterodactyls. Who knows? If you fellows could shoot for sour apples, I'd have one of 'em.”

Christmas and New Year's day, long since past, had been celebrated in a mild, half-hearted way on board the Doraine. Easter was drawing near, and Ruth Clinton took upon herself the task of arranging special services for the children. She was going ahead with her plans when her aunt, with some bitterness, advised her to consult the “King of Babylon”—(a title surreptitiously accorded

Percival by the unforgiving lady)—before committing herself too deeply to the enterprise.

“It would be just like him to cut Easter out of the calendar altogether,” said she.

“He cannot possibly have any objection to an Easter service,” protested Ruth, her brow puckering.

“There's no telling what he will object to,” said Mrs. Spofford.

“He is really quite tenderhearted, and awfully fond of children, you know. I am sure he will be very much pleased with the—Besides,” she broke off to say with considerable heat, “Mr. Percival is not as high and mighty as he imagines himself to be. Other people have something to say about the management of this camp. You forget,—and so does he perhaps,—that we have a council of ten. I rather fancy—”

“Pooh!” sniffed her aunt. “He is worse than all the Tammany bosses put together. The other men on the council of ten eat out of his hand, as Abel Landover says. His word is law,—or, I should have said, his smile is law. All he has to do is to grin and the argument is over. I've never seen anything like the way people give in when he smiles. It is disgusting.”

“Please don't forget, Auntie, that he did not smile on Saturday when Manuel Crust stopped him in front of the meeting-house and said he was going to take Sunday off from work up in the woods. He didn't smile then, did he? And there were a dozen men planning to take the day off with Manuel Crust, too.”

“I confess I was frightened,” admitted Mrs. Spofford, with a slight shudder. “That Manuel Crust is a—a dangerous man. He carries a knife. I saw it.”

“Were your sympathies with Manuel Crust or Mr. Percival? Answer, please.”

“Naturally, my dear, I—why, of course, they were with Percival. He was one man against a dozen. Besides, he does represent law and order. I have never questioned that, have I?”

“Weren't you a weeny, teeny bit proud of him yesterday, Aunt Julia?”

“Weren't you?” countered the other.

“I could have hugged him,” exclaimed Ruth, her eyes sparkling. “I hate him,—mind you,—but I could have hugged him, just the same.”

Mrs. Spofford looked searchingly into the girls clear, shining eyes.

“I wish I knew just how much you hate him, Ruth.”

“Be honest, Auntie. What you mean is, how little I hate him; isn't that so?”

“I don't believe you hate him at all.”

“Well, the first chance you get, ask him how much I hate him. He will tell you. Now let's talk about Easter Sunday. I don't in the least see why I should go down on my knees to Mr. Percival in order to—”

“Manuel Crust went down on his knees, didn't he?”

“Don't be silly! Manuel Crust was leading a strike. I am arranging a sacred entertainment.”

“Still, if I were you, my dear, I would ask him what he thinks about it.”

“All right,” cried Ruth, “I'll ask him. And what's more, I shall ask him to sing in the choir. He will love it.”

Not only did Percival promise to sing in the choir, but he eagerly offered to help her with the decorations. But when she announced that she was going up into the hills in quest of the little red winter berries that grew in profusion, he flatly put his foot down on the project.

“I don't feel any too sure of Manuel Crust and his gang,” said he. “They're in an ugly mood and they are brutes, Miss Clinton. Don't be alarmed. They're not likely to molest you or any one else, but I don't believe in taking chances. Just at present they're pretty sore at me and they're doing all they can to stir up discord. It will work out all right in the end, of course. They may be beasts but they're not fools.”

“Is it true that Manuel Crust claims that every man should have his woman?” she asked steadily.

He was surprised by the frank, unembarrassed question. “Crust is about as vile as they make them, Miss Clinton. Most of these fellows are decent, however.”

“But you have not answered my question.”

“I will answer it by saying that if he has any such notion as that in his mind he will have it taken out of him in short order if he attempts to put it into practice. The women on this island will be protected, Miss Clinton, if we have to kill Manuel Crust and his fol-lowers. It is true he has been preaching that sort of gospel among the vicious and ignorant Portugees and half-casts, but it's all talk. Don't pay any attention to it.”

“We can't help being worried. Suppose his following is much larger than you think. They are a rough, lawless crowd, and—”

“Ninety-five per cent, of the men here are decent. That's the only comfort I can give you.” He smiled his whimsical smile. “I think you will find that you will be courted in the regular, old-fashioned way, and proposed to with as much

solemnity and uncertainty as if you were back at home, and it will be left for you to choose your own husband. We have two ministers of the gospel here, you know. I predict some rather violent courtships, and perhaps a few ill-advised marriages, but you may rest assured that no man is going to claim you until you claim him."

He was looking straight into her eyes. She felt the blood mounting to her cheek,—and was conscious of a strange, delicious sensation as of peril stealing over her.

"You are most reassuring," she managed to say, scarcely above a whisper, and then paused expectant.

Afterwards she was shamed by the exquisite pain of anticipation that had coursed through her in that moment of waiting. She never could quite account for the temporary weakness that assailed her and left her mute and helpless under the spell of his eyes. She only knew that she waited expectant,—for something that never came! What she might have said in response, what she might have done if he had uttered the words she was prepared to hear, she did not care to contemplate, even in the privacy of her own thoughts. She only knew that she was ashamed of the thrill that went over her and strangely bitter toward him for being the cause of it. She would not admit to herself that disappointment had anything to do with it,—for she found herself arguing, nothing could have been more distressing than to rebuff him when he seemed so eager to help her in her plans for Easter Sunday.

The fact remains, however, that Percival held his tongue, and she never quite understood why he did.

The time and the place of this encounter invited confession. There was a full moon in the heavens, the night was still, the air crisp with the tang of October in the north,—and they were alone in the shadow of the "tabernacle." Lights gleamed in the little windows that stretched to the right and left of them. Far off somewhere in the dark, an unseen musician was gently thrumming a fandango on his Spanish guitar. She had been on her way home from Careni-Amori's cabin, where she had gained the prima-donna's promise to sing, when she saw him, walking slowly across the "Green." His hands were clasped behind his back, his head was bent. She experienced a sudden rush of pity for him,—she knew not why, except that he looked lonely and forgotten. It was she who turned aside from her course and went out across the Green to join him.

"You are most reassuring," she had said. The dusky light of the moon fell full upon her upturned face; her shadowy, limpid eyes were looking straight into his;

enchantment charged the air with its soft and languorous breath,—and yet he looked away!

After a moment he spoke. His voice was steady and,—to her,—almost sardonic.

“The day of the cave-man is past. Likewise the cannibal. I think I can promise that you will neither be beaten nor eaten,—but you do run a little risk in being abroad on such a night as this,—and alone.”

She stiffened. “I don't think there is the slightest danger, Mr. Percival.”

“I wasn't thinking of danger,” he said. “There is a lot of difference between danger and consequences. You see, you might have been mistaken in your man. I might have turned out to be Manuel Crust.”

“I—I—I was sure it was you,” she stammered, and wished she had not said it. It was a confession that she knew his figure so well that she could recognize it in the gloom of the night and at a distance that should have rendered him almost invisible.

“Even so, I am Manuel's brother under the skin,” he said. “Like Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's lady, you know. However, all's well that ends well, so what's the use of magnifying the peril that stalks through the land.”

“You were brought up on the good, old-fashioned novels, I see. That's the language of heroes,—and heroes live only in novels, where they are perfectly safe from harm, thanks to the benevolent author.”

“You're right. I was brought up among the old-fashioned heroes. I lived through every adventure they had, I longed for every girl they loved, I envied everything they did, and I dreamed the most beautiful dreams about prowess and virtue and love. I rather fancy I'm a better man for having been a swashbuckling boy. I acquired the generous habit of falling in love with every heroine I read about, and in my thoughts I performed even more prodigious deeds of valour in her behalf than the hero to whom she inevitably plighted her troth in the final chapter. In real life, however, I've never been in a position to do anything more heroic than give up my seat in trolley-cars to ladies of all ages,—By the way, have you never longed desperately to be a heroine?”

“Of course, I have,” she cried, smiling in spite of herself. Her eyes were sparkling again, for the danger was past. “And I have loved a hundred heroes,—madly.” She hesitated and then went on impulsively: “We haven't been very friendly, Mr. Percival. Perhaps I am to blame. In any case, you have been very generous and forbearing. That is more than I have been. I never thought I could bring myself to the point of saying this to you. Can't we be friends again?”

He was silent for a moment.

“Do you mean to go back to where we were before—Well, before we clashed?”

“Yes,—if you will put it in that way.”

“I can't go back to that stage,” he said, shaking his head. “You may have stood still, Miss Clinton, but I have progressed.”

“I don't know what you mean.”

“You will, after you reflect awhile,” he said.

She drew back, in a sudden panic. She spoke hurriedly, her composure wrecked.

“I—at least, Mr. Percival, I have done my part. If you do not care to be friends, I—I have nothing more to say. We must go on just as we were,—and I am sorry. I have done my part.”

“I do not want to distress you,” he said huskily. “If I were to tell you why it is best for us to go on as we are, you would lose what little faith you may still have in me. I have not always been able to conceal my feelings. You do not care as I do,—and I have been pretty much of a rotter in showing you just how I feel from time to time,—an ordinary bounder, and God knows I hate the word,—so there's nothing more I can say without distressing and offending you. I want you to feel perfectly secure so far as I am concerned. We are out here alone in the night. If I were to let go of myself now and say what I want to say to you,—well, you would be frightened and hurt and,—God knows I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I hope you understand, Miss Clinton.”

She had had time to fortify herself.

“Yes,—I understand,” she said, but not without a strange wonder filling her mind.

He was fair,—and yet he was baffling. She had not expected this rare trait in him. Men she had known were not like this. The men who loved her,—and they had been many,—were impetuous and insistent, demanding much and offering everything,—vain-glorious warriors who counted confidently on easy conquest. She had come in contact with but one class of men: the spoiled, cocksure sons of the rich who love in haste and have it over with while there is yet time to love again. She caught herself guiltily wondering how many men of her acquaintance would have allowed this engaging opportunity to pass without making the most of it! And why should this man be different from the others? She experienced a sharp feeling of irritation, and out of that sprang the wilful desire to hurt him

because he was different. So she lifted her chin, and looking straight into his eyes, said: “I understand perfectly. You prefer that I should not put you in the class with Manuel Crust.”

“I'm not quite certain that Manuel's way of handling women isn't the best after all,” he said musingly. “Ride over 'em rough-shod, trample them under foot, kick them to one side and then ask them whether they love you or not. If they say they don't, all you have to do is to behave like a gentleman and leave them alone.”

She laughed. “But suppose they were to say they did love you,—what then?”

“That, I understand, is what they generally do say,—and it causes a great deal of trouble for the unfortunate gentleman.”

“Are you never in earnest, Mr. Percival?”

“I was very much in earnest a moment ago. You knew how much in earnest I was or you wouldn't have said that nasty thing about Manuel Crust.”

“I am sorry I said it,” she cried. “It was uncalled for,—and I was deliberately trying to be mean.”

“I knew it,” he said quietly. “I don't think any the worse of you for it. A woman plays fair until you get her into a corner,—and then she plays fairer than ever to make up for what she did when cornered. Am I not right?”

She did not reply. She was staring past him, down the line of huts. The door of Olga Obosky's cabin had opened and closed, projecting for an instant an oblong block of light into the darkness. The figure of a woman, emerging into the full light of the moon, had caught Ruth's attention. Percival turned quickly. Together they watched the figure move swiftly across the Green toward them. Suddenly it stopped, and then, after a moment, whirled and made off down the line of cabins, soon to be swallowed up by the gloom.

“Were you expecting some one?” inquired Ruth, icily.

He was still looking intently into the far-reaching gloom. Neither had spoken for many seconds. He started, and looked searchingly into her eyes.

“That was Madame Obosky,” he said.

“I know. I recognized her,” said she evenly.

“And you believe she was coming out here to meet me,—isn't that so?”

She drew herself up. “I shall have to say good night, Mr. Percival. No! It is not necessary for you to walk home with me.”

He placed himself in front of her. “Would you mind answering my question?”

“Yes,” she flashed, “I think she was coming out here to meet you. Permit me to pass, please.”

He stood aside. “Good night, Miss Clinton.”

He watched her until the door of her cabin swung open,—and he smiled as she stood revealed for an instant in the square of light, for she had obeyed the impulse to glance over her shoulder.

She was angry, hurt, disgusted as she slammed the door behind her.

“Where have you been?” cried out an accusing voice, and Ruth's gaze fell upon the figure in one of the deck chairs beside the fire. “I have been waiting for you for—”

“How long have you been here?” cried the girl, stock-still and staring.

“If Mrs. Spofford had not been so entertaining, I should say for hours and hours,” said Madame Obosky.

“As a matter of fact,” said Mrs. Spofford from her side of the fireplace, “it hasn't been more than an hour. Madame Obosky came soon after you went out, dear.”

“But—but I saw you just now coming out of your cabin,” cried Ruth blankly. She had a queer sensation as of the floor giving way beneath her.

“You saw—Oh, now I understand!” cried the Russian, with a laugh. “Zose girls of mine! Zey—they are like so many grandmothers. They will not go to bed until zey know I am safely tucked in myself. Alas, Mrs. Spofford, zose girls do not trust me, I fear. If I go out at night alone, zey instantly put their heads together and shake zem all at the same time. So that is what has happen, Miss Clinton. One of them,—Alma, I suspect, because she had a sister who,—Yes, it would be Alma, I am sure,—in any case, one of zem comes out to get me, so like a policeman. But still I do not understand something. I have told them I was coming here to see you. If it was one of my girls, why has she not come?”

Ruth had turned away, ostensibly to pull down the little window shade but really to send a swift searching glance out across the Green.

“She went the other way,” she replied, rather breathlessly.

Olga sprang to her feet. “Now, what is zat little fool up to?” she cried, angrily. “If I catch her running out to meet men at zis hour of—”

Ruth interrupted her. “She started in this direction but when she saw us, she turned and went the other way. I was talking to Mr. Percival out near the meeting-house. About the Easter services, Auntie,” she made haste to say as Mrs. Spofford looked up in surprise.

Olga was looking at her fixedly, an odd expression in her eyes, her lips slightly parted.

“He has promised to help me. He is delighted to sing in the choir. Madame Careni-Amori will sing two solos. She promises to make Joseppi sing one or two. I—I was discussing the arrangements with Mr. Percival.”

“Now I understand,” said Olga, gaily, but with the odd, inquiring look still in her eyes. “Alma thought it was I. I have zem very well-trained, those girls. She sees me with a man,—zip! She runs the other way as fast as she can! That is the height of propriety,—is it not, Mrs. Spofford?”

“I do not quite understand what you mean, Madame Obosky.”

“Why did he say it was you?” cried Ruth, hot with chagrin.

Olga shrugged her shoulders. “He is so very amiable,” said she. “I dare say he thought it would please you.”

Ruth bit her lip. There was no mistaking the challenge in the Russian's remark, however careless it may have sounded.

“I came to see you about Mr. Percivail's birthday,” said Olga, abruptly changing the subject. “Some one has suggested zat we all join in giving him a grand great big celebration. Bonfires, fire-works, a banquet with speeches, and all zat kind of thing. What do you think, eh?”

“He wouldn't like it at all,” said Ruth promptly. “Moreover, why should we celebrate his birthday? He doesn't deserve it any more than scores of other—”

“Oh, then we must drop it altogether,” broke in Olga, rather plaintively. “I thought every one would be in favour of it. But, of course, if there is the slightest opposition—”

“I do not oppose it,” said Ruth coldly. “Pray do not let me upset your plans.”

“It is not my plan. Zat nice, sarcastic Mr. Fitts, and Mr. Malone, and Captain Trigger, they have proposed it, Miss Clinton, not I. But men never quite get over being boys. They do not stop to question whether a thing is right or wrong. I dare say after they have thought a little longer over it, zey will agree with you that it is foolish to be so enthusiastic about this fellow Percivail,—and the whole project will dissolve into thin air.”

Her hand was on the latch. She met Ruth's harassed, unhappy gaze with her indolent, almost insolent, smile. Suddenly the American girl snatched up her jacket and the little fur collar she had thrown across a chair in the corner.

“If you don't mind, I will walk part of the way home with you,” she said.

Olga opened the door and looked out. “Thank you,—I am not afraid. Pray do

not think of it,—I cannot permit you to come. It is late,—and the moon is under the clouds. Good night,—good night, Mrs. Spofford.”

CHAPTER VII.

She quickly closed the door behind her and sped off down the line of now lightless cabins. A man stepped out of the black shadow beyond the second cabin and stood in her path. She did not pause, but walked swiftly, fearlessly up to him, her heart quickening under the thrill of exultation. He was waiting for her! He had been waiting for her all the long evening. The time had come!

The night was dark now; a strong wind had sprung up to drive the black and storm-laden clouds across the moonlit sky. She held out her hands with a little moan of ecstasy,—and then she was in his strong, crushing arms, pressed fiercely to his breast.

“God, can I believe,—is it true? You have come,—you have come of your own free will,—you are here in my arms!” His hot lips found hers in a wild, passionate kiss. “Speak to me! Tell me it is all real,—that I am not dreaming. Oh, Ruth, Ruth,—darling!”

Her body stiffened. A convulsive shudder raced over her, and then, for an instant, she was limp and heavy in his embrace. Then suddenly she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him furiously, savagely, again and again,—breaking away at last with a low, suffocating laugh.

“Now,—now,-” she cried, “now, what are you going to do with me?”

He lifted his head with a jerk, peering into her face, slow to realize the incredible mistake he had made. He was still under the spell of the riotous passion that her lustful response had aroused. It had rushed over him like a great, resistless wave,—hot, delicious, tingling. He had been amazed, bewildered by the unbelievable craving,—furious and uncontrolled,—which she revealed in her momentary surrender to the elemental. The truth began to dawn upon him even before she spoke. Could this be Ruth,—could this unbridled, voluptuous wanton who clung to him and smothered him with kisses be the pure, high-minded girl he had grown to love and revere? She spoke, and then he knew that the consuming fire in his blood was unholy,—as unholy as the spark that set it ablaze.

“Damn you!” he whispered hoarsely,—but he did not put her away from him. The lure of the flesh was upon him. It was stronger than his will, stronger than his love.

For months this woman had beguiled him. There had been times when he was compelled to fight himself,—times when he asked: “Why not?”

She was alluring, she was frankly a sensualist; but she was patient, she was crafty. She knew that he was honourably in love with another, but she was not deterred by that nor by the conviction that her conquest, if she prevailed, would be transitory. She had a code of her own. It included an uncertain element of honour, fixed rather rigidly upon what she would have called constancy. Singleness of purpose was her notion of morality. She would not have believed herself to be a bad woman any more than she would have looked upon her lover as a bad man. To her, morality in its accepted sense signified no more than the suppression of human emotions and human sensations. As a matter of fact, she considered herself a good woman if for no other reason than that she steadfastly had repelled the munificent appeals of countless infatuated men. Treasure had been laid at her feet, only to be kicked aside. She calmly spoke of herself as a pearl without price. She was content to possess, but not to be possessed. That was what she called self-respect. She was a pagan, but she was her own idol. She worshipped herself. She would never permit her idol to be desecrated.

All this Percival knew,—or rather sensed. He was not above feeling a queer sort of respect and admiration for her. She was not without integrity.

He had reached the pinnacle of happiness in believing that the girl he loved was in his arms. He was blind and deaf with ecstasy. The awakening was a shock. His senses reeled for an instant,—and then Ruth Clinton went out of his thoughts entirely!

“Damn you!” he cried again, and drew her close. “She hates me,—she will always hate me,” he was mumbling. “Why should I care? Why should I refuse to take—” Her lips were on his again, warm, firm, voluptuous, drawing his heart's blood with the resistless power of a magnet.

They did not hear the rapid approach of footsteps—heavy, swift as of one running. A dark, panting figure raced past them, and then another but a few paces behind.

Percival's senses were released. They cast off the bewitching bonds. His head went up again. In a flash his brain was clear. His arms were still about her, she was still lying close against him,—but the current of passion that consumed both of them was checked.

“What was that?” she gasped, as if coming out of a dream.

He released her, and sprang out into the path to peer fruitlessly after the unseen runners. The sound of footsteps was rapidly diminishing.

They were suddenly aware of women's voices far away to the right. They were indistinct but there was a sinister significance in the ever-increasing volume.

“There's trouble out there,” said Percival. “Something wrong. Come,—come along! You must get indoors at once.” He grasped her arm and started rapidly off in the direction of her cabin. She stumbled at first, but quickly fell into stride with him. Men's shouts were now added to the clamour.

“I know,—I know,” she cried in his ear. “It has happened, just as I said it would. Some of these men are beasts.”

“Then, there's hell to pay,” he grated.

They reached her cabin just as the door was thrown open. The three startled coryphees filled the entrance. Recognition was followed by a clatter of agitated voices. Olga was fairly dragged into the cabin.

“Bolt your door,” was Percival's command as he turned away.

She stood in the door for a moment, looking after him. He passed out of the radius of light. The chorus of voices grew louder down the way,—like the make-believe mob in the theatre.

Then she closed the door slowly, reluctantly. The three girls watched her in silence as she stood for many seconds with her hand on the knob, her eyes tightly shut.

She turned and faced them. There was a wry smile on her lips as she shrugged her shoulders and spread out her hands in a gesture of resignation.

“Yes,—bolt the door,” she said. As Alma hesitated, her eyes grew hard, her voice imperative. “Do you know of any reason why you should not do as both Mr. Percivail and I have commanded?”

“No,—no, Madame,” cried Alma hastily.

As the heavy wooden bolt fell into place, Olga again shrugged her shoulders and threw herself into a chair in front of the fireplace.

“Put on your clothes,” she ordered.

“What is happening, Madame? What is all the noise about?” questioned one of the girls.

But there was no answer. Olga was staring into the fire.

CHAPTER VIII.

Percival's blood was still in a tumult as he ran down the line of cabins. From every doorway men were now stumbling, half-dressed, half-asleep. Behind them, in many cabins, alarmed, agitated women appeared. Farther on there were lanterns and a chaotic mass of moving objects. Above the increasing clamour rose the horrible, uncanny wail of a woman. Percival's blood cooled, his brain cleared. Men shouted questions as he passed, and obeyed his command to follow.

The ugly story is soon told. Philippa, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Pedro, the head-farmer, had gone out from her father's cabin at dusk to fetch water from the little reservoir that had been constructed alongside Leap Frog River a short distance above the cabins. The pool was a scant two hundred yards from her home. It was a five minutes' walk there and back. Half-an-hour passed, and she had not returned. Her mother became uneasy. Pedro reassured her. He laughed at her fears.

“She could not have fallen into the pool,” he said. “You forget the fence we have built around it.”

“I am not thinking of the pool, Pedro,” she argued. “Go you at once and search for her. She is no laggard. She has not stopped in to see one of the girls.”

And Pedro went grumpily forth to search for his daughter. An hour later he came staggering down from the woods above the pool to meet the dozen or more friends and neighbours who had set out some-time earlier to look for the two of them, father and daughter.

He bore in his arms the limp, apparently lifeless form of Philippa. He was covered with blood, he was chattering like a madman. Out of his incoherent babble the horrified searchers were able to put together the cruel story. It seems he had heard a faint cry far back in the dense wood,—another and yet another. Then utter silence. Even the night-birds were still. Swift, paralysing fear choked him. He tried to call out as he rushed blindly up from the pool into the forest, but only hoarse, unnatural gasps left his lips. He fell often, he crashed into the trunks of trees, but always he went onward, gasping out his futile cries. He knew not how long he beat through the forest. He was not even sure that it was Philippa's cry he had heard, but his soul was filled with a great, convincing dread. He knew that his beloved Philippa, the idol of his heart, the sunshine of his life, was up

there in the woods. Frequently he stopped to listen. He could hear nothing save the pounding of his own heart, and the wheezing of his breath, thick and laboured.

Then, at last, during one of those silences, he heard something moving in the darkness near at hand. Something—some one was coming toward him through the underbrush. He called out hoarsely: “Philippa!” The sound ceased instantly, and then he heard a whispered execration. Wild rage possessed him. He plunged forward into the brush. Something crashed down upon his head, and he felt himself falling forward. The next he knew, he was trying vainly to rise to his feet. Something hot was running into his eyes,—hot and sticky. He lifted his hand to his head; it came away wet. He put his fingers into his mouth,-and tasted blood! It was enough. His strength came back. He sprang to his feet and rushed onward, shouting, cursing, calling upon God! He had no recollection of finding his girl. Apparently everything was a blank to him until long afterwards he saw lights moving among the trees, and voices were calling his name.

Percival and other cool-headed men were hard put to check the fury of the mob. Men and women, bent on vengeance, made the night hideous with their curses, howls and shrieks. In their senseless fury they prepared to kill. They had heard the stories about Manuel Crust and his disciples. Only the determined stand taken by the small group that rallied to Percival's support kept the maddened crowd from seeking out these men and rending them limb from limb. The sailors from the Doraine were the first to listen to the pleas of the level-headed,—just as they had been the first to demand the lives of Manuel Crust and his gang. Individually they were rough men and lawless, collectively they were the slaves of discipline. It was to their vanity that Percival and the others appealed,—only they called it honour instead of vanity. The mob spirit was—quelled for the time being, at least. No one was so foolish as to believe that it was dead, however. Unless the man guilty of the shocking crime was found and delivered up for punishment, the inevitable would happen.

“We'll get the right man,” said the voice of universal fury, “if we have to cut the heart out of every one of Manuel Crust's gang.”

The women were the worst. They fought like wildcats to reach the cabins occupied by the known followers of Manuel Crust. With knives and axes and burn-ing faggots they tried again and again to force their way through the stubborn wall of men that had been raised against them.

As for Manuel Crust and his little group of radicals, they had vanished. They had mingled with the mob at the outset. There were many who recalled seeing this one and that one, remembered speaking to him, remembered hearing him

curse the ravisher. But as their own names began to run from lip to lip, they silently, swiftly disappeared.

Dawn found the camp awake, but grimly silent. No one had gone to bed. With the first streak of day, the man-hunt began in earnest. All night long the camp had been patrolled. Every cabin had been searched, even those occupied solely by women. This search had been conducted in an orderly, business-like way under the supervision of men chosen by Percival. The folly of beating the woods during the night was recognized even by the most impatient; there was time enough for that when the blackness of night had lifted.

Throughout the long night, the restless crowd, with but one thought in mind, hung about the cabin of Pedro the farmer. The doctors and several of the nurses were in there. Down at the meeting-house a bonfire had been started, and here were grouped the men to whom the leaders had intrusted firearms and other weapons,—men of the gun crew, under officers from the Doraine, the committee of ten and others.

It was accepted as a fact that two men were involved in the heinous deed. Percival's account of the mysterious runners seemed definitely to establish this. He called upon Olga Obosky to verify his statement. If she was surprised by his admission that he was in her company when the men rushed past them in the darkness, she did not betray the fact. She indulged in a derisive smile when he went on to explain that it was so dark he had failed to recognize her until she spoke to him. She agreed with him that the two men must have come into the open a very short distance above them, having sneaked out between the cabins before suddenly breaking into a run. Avoiding the beaten roadway, they had laid their course twenty or thirty feet to the right of it, keeping to the soft, springy turf.

Percival had issued orders for the entire camp to congregate on the Green at the first sign of day. The cold grey light of dawn fell upon vague, unreal forms moving across the open spaces from all directions. There was no shouting, no turmoil, scarcely the sound of a voice. The silent, ghostly figures merged into a compact, motionless mass in front of the meetinghouse. It was not necessary for Percival to call for order when he appeared on the steps and began to speak. The only sounds were the shuffling of feet, the rustling of garments, the deep, restrained breathing of the mass.

He spoke partly in English and partly in Spanish, and he was brief.

“You know what we are here for and what is ahead of us. I don't have to tell you the story of last night. You know it as well as I. You will be glad to hear the

latest word from Dr. Cullen. Philippa is conscious. He thinks she will recover. She is having the best of care and attention. I will explain why we are all here now. The first thing for us to do is to count noses. We will go about it as rapidly as possible. After that, we will get down to business. Mr. Landover and Mr. Malone will check off the name of every man, woman and child. As your names are called, come forward, answer, and then move over beyond the corner of the building. We've got to find out just who is missing,—if any one is missing at all."

He raised his voice. "I want you all to keep cool. Don't forget that we are after the men who committed this crime. We have no right to say that Manuel Crust or any of his crowd did this thing until we have positive proof of the fact. It may not have been any of Manuel's gang, don't forget that, people. We must make no mistakes. I am saying this to you now because I see Manuel Crust and some of his friends standing over there at the edge of the clearing. Stop! Don't make a move in their direction. We've all had time to think,—we've all had time to get ourselves in hand. There is a right and a wrong way to handle this thing,—and we've got to be sure we're right. The guilty cannot escape. They haven't a chance, and you know it. So, let's be sure,—let's be dead sure before we accuse any man. We have no right to charge Manuel's gang with this crime. The guilty men may be here among us,—absolutely unsuspected. Chizler! You and Soapy Shay go over and tell those men that we are taking a count of all the people in this camp. Tell them to come and answer to their names. They will be safe."

The count was never completed. Manuel Crust did not wait for his name to be called. He pushed his way through the crowd, leaving his followers behind. Advancing to the foot of the steps he cried out hoarsely to Percival:

"If you want your men, I—I, Manuel Crust, will lead you to one of them. He is up there in the wood. Three men are guarding him. He is Sancho Mendez, the blacksmith. Listen, I will tell you. It is the God's truth I tell. There were seven of us hiding out there in the wood. We were scared. We heard our names called out. We had heard the threats to burn us alive. We ran away. We were not cowards,—but still we ran away. We would wait till the crowd cooled off. That was my advice. Then we would return,—then we would help to find the men who did it,—and we would help to burn them alive. An hour ago Sancho Mendez crawled out of the brush up there above the landing and begged us to protect him. His leg was broken. He had fallen over a log. You all know Sancho Mendez. He was a good boy. He was the friend of Boss Percival. He was no friend to me. But he swears he will be my slave for ever if I will save him. Then he tells us everything. When I ask him why the hell he run away, he says he lose his mind

or something. He just go crazy, he says. He say everybody was chasing him,—he could hear them in the bushes, he could hear that girl screaming out his name,—and all that. He was going to jump in the water and drown, because he say people tell him always it is the easy way to die. But he falls down and breaks his leg,—here below the knee. He cannot run no more. It is all up. He is afraid to breathe. People are all around him with knives and axes and clubs. He can hear them in the brush. Then the daylight comes, and he sees us down below in the wood, and he says he thanks God. I will be his friend,—I will save him because I am an angel from heaven! Bah! I spit in his face. We tie him to a tree with our belts, and then I come down to tell Boss Percival we have his man,—his good and loyal friend."

"Stop!" yelled Percival, as the crowd began to show symptoms of breaking away. "Listen to me! I give you fair warning. I don't want to do it, but, by God, I'll order these men to shoot the first who tries to start anything. We're going to have law and order here. This man Sancho is going to have a fair trial. What's more, he had a companion. What does he say of the other man, Manuel Crust?"

"Sancho Mendez says he was alone. There was no other man."

Percival looked hard into Manuel Crust's bloodshot eyes. An appalling thought had suddenly flashed into his mind. Many seconds passed before he dared to open his lips. As if by divine revelation the situation lay bare before him,—the whole Machiavelian scheme as conceived by Manuel. Sancho Mendez was to be sacrificed!

Even as he stood there speechless, the plan began to work toward its well-calculated end. Manuel's friends started to harangue the crowd. They were growling hoarse invectives, shaking their fists in the direction of the wood, fanning the pent-up fury of the mob into a whirlwind that would sweep everything before it. Once the tide turned there would be no stopping it until Sancho Mendez was torn to pieces. He would shriek his innocence into deaf ears. And that was Manuel's game.

Percival's heart leaped with joy as he saw the armed force under Lieutenant Platt move swiftly into a position barring the way to the woods. He thrilled with a mighty pride in the shrewd intelligence and resourcefulness of this trained fighting-man from the far-off homeland.

Manuel Crust was turning away to mingle with the crowd. Quick as a flash, Percival was down from the steps and at the "Portugee's" side. He grasped the man's arm.

"I've got a gun against your back," he cried in fierce suppressed tones. "Stand

still and keep your mouth shut, or I'll drill a hole through you. You're safe if you do as I tell you, Crust. I'm onto your little game. I'm not saying you are the guilty man, but you know who he is,—and it won't work."

Manuel Crust was as rigid as a block of stone. He did not even turn his head to look into the face of the man who held him.

Michael Malone and Landover were at Percival's side in an instant. From their position on the steps they could see what was not visible to the crowd beyond,—the revolver that was pressed against the small of Crust's back.

"Cover this man," whispered Percival to Malone. "Shoot if he opens his mouth."

Malone's revolver was jammed against the "Portugee's" back, and Percival sprang back up the steps.

Manuel Crust shot a look of surprise at Abel Landover.

"What the hell—" he began, but choked off the words at a command from Malone. While Percival was rapidly calling out orders from above, he broke out recklessly again, addressing the stern-faced banker.

"Are you my friend or not?" he snarled. "What kind of a man are you? Speak up! Tell them I'm all right."

"Keep quiet," warned Malone.

Landover's eyes met the searching, questioning gaze of the Portuguese. Manuel Crust apparently was satisfied with what he read in them, for a quick gleam of confidence leaped into his own. His chest swelled with a tremendous intake of breath.

The remarkable personality,—or perhaps the magnetism,—of the "boss," again asserted itself. He made no allusion to the thing uppermost in his mind as he spoke hurriedly, emphatically to the tense throng. When he directed Randolph Fitts to take a few picked men with him up into the woods to bring down the captive, there were mutterings but no move on the part of the crowd either to anticipate or to follow the detachment. A few terse words to Buck Chizler sent that active young man after Fitts, the bearer of instructions. Sancho Mendez was to be brought in alive. His guards were not to be given a chance to kill him when they realized that the scheme had failed and he would be allowed to tell his own story.

With the departure of Fitts and his men, Percival ordered the people to return to their cabins. He promised them that Sancho Mendez should have his just deserts. Slowly, reluctantly the crowd broke up and shuffled away in small

groups across the dewy Green. Manuel Crust was free to go. The few words that passed between Landover and Percival, although unheard by the man, sufficed to put courage back into his heart. He had come to look upon the banker as his “pal”! And his “pal” had not failed him!

This is what Landover said to Percival:

“Whatever may be in your mind, Percival, I want to say this to you. I was in Manuel Crust's cabin when the thing happened. There were eight of us there. I can point out to you the other six. I must beg you to overlook the fact that we are not friends, and believe what I am saying. It is the absolute truth.”

“I will take your word for it, Mr. Landover,” said Percival, after a moment. “I am aware of your dealings with Crust and his crowd. I don't know what the game is, but I do know that you have been fostering discontent,—it may even amount to revolt,—among; these men. If you say you were with Crust and that he was not out of your sight all evening, I will believe you. You may be a misguided, domineering fool, Mr. Landover, but you are honest. You have failed to appreciate what you were stirring up,—what you were letting yourself and all the rest of us in for, that's all.”

Landover flushed. He compressed his lips for a second or two before speaking.

“My opposition to you as a dictator, Percival, hardly warrants the implication that I am in a sense responsible for the devilish thing that happened last night.”

“I grant you that,” said Percival. “Nevertheless, it is your purpose to down me, no matter what it costs,—isn't that true?”

“No, it is not true. There is an honest, sincere belief on the part of some of us that you are not the man to rule this camp. You may call it politics, if you like,—or revolt, if you prefer.”

“We'll call it politics, Mr. Landover. It was not politics that made me the superintendent of construction here, however. I've looked after the job to the best of my ability. I am ready to retire whenever the people decide they've found a better man. You may be right in supposing that Manuel Crust is the right man for the job,—but I don't agree with you.”

Landover started. “Nothing is farther from my thoughts than to turn the affairs of this camp over to Crust,” he said.

“Once more I agree with you. But that is what you will be doing, just the same. If you think that Manuel Crust is going to play second fiddle to you, Mr. Landover, you'll suddenly wake up to find yourself mistaken. You know what

Crust is advocating, don't you? Well, I guess there's nothing more to be said on the subject."

"We will drop it, then," said Landover curtly. "I merely want you to understand that Crust had no hand in last night's affair. I can vouch for that."

"Can you vouch for each and every member of his gang?"

"I know nothing about his gang, as you call it. If I am not mistaken, this fellow Mendez is one of your pet supporters. He may be double-crossing you."

"We'll see. For the present, your friend Crust is safe. As long as he lives within the law, he is all right. We're going to have law and order here, Mr. Landover. I want you to understand that. The best evidence that most of us want law and order is the incredible manner in which these people have curbed their natural instincts."

"No one wants law and order more than I," said Landover.

"And I suppose Manuel Crust is of the same mind, eh?"

"So far as I know, he is," replied the other firmly.

Percival looked at him in blank astonishment. "Well, I'm damned!" he said, after a moment. "Do you really believe that?"

"It does not follow that he is an advocate of lawlessness and disorder because he happens to be opposed to some of your pet schemes, does it, Mr. Percival?" inquired Landover ironically.

"One of my pet schemes happens to conflict seriously with Manuel's pet scheme, if that will strengthen your argument any, Mr. Landover."

"I don't believe Crust ever had any such thought," said the other flatly.

"We're not getting anywhere by arguing the point," said Percival. He turned to walk away.

"Just a moment," called out Landover, after the younger man had taken a few steps. "See here, Percival, I don't want you to misunderstand me. If there is anything in this talk about Crust,—you know what I mean,—and if it should come to the point where stern measures are required, I will be with you, heart and soul. You know that, don't you?"

Percival studied the banker's face for a moment. "I've never doubted it for an instant, Landover. We may yet shake hands and be friends in spite of ourselves."

Landover turned on his heel and walked away, and Percival, with a shrug of his shoulders, set about making preparations to safe-guard Sancho Mendez when he was brought in from the wood. He posted a number of reliable, cool-headed

men around the “meetinghouse,” many of them being armed. Arrangements were made for barricading the door and the few windows. The prisoner was to be confined in the building, a long, low structure, and there he was to tell his story and stand trial. There was to be no delay in the matter of a trial.

“You will sit as judge, Mike,” said the “boss,” addressing Malone. “There will not be any legal technicalities, old man, and there won't be any appeal,—so all you've got to do is to act like a judge and not like a lawyer. We've got to do this thing in the regular way. Try to forget that you have practiced in the New York City courts. Remember that there is such a thing as justice and pay absolutely no attention to what you are in the habit of calling the law. The law is a beautiful thing if you don't take it too seriously. Ninety-nine out of every hundred judges in the courts of the U. S. A. sit through a trial worrying their heads off trying to remember the law so that they can keep out of the record things that might make them look like jackasses when the case is carried up to a higher court,—and while they are thinking so hard about the law they forget all about the poor little trifle called justice. I guess you know that as well as I do, so there's no use talking about it.”

“I guess I do,” said Michael Malone. “I live on technicalities when I'm in New York. If it were not for technicalities, I'd starve to death. And, my God, man, if we had to stop and think about justice every time we go into court, we'd be a disgrace to the profession.”

Percival, Peter Snipe, Flattner and several others strode out from the meeting-house and swept the long line of huts with serious, apprehensive eyes. They had expected to find the people congregated at some nearby point, ready to swoop down upon the prisoner the instant he appeared with his captors at the edge of the wood. To their amazement and relief, the people had taken Percival's command literally. They had retired to their huts, and but few of them were to be seen, even on their doorsteps.

“Can you beat it?” cried Snipe. “By golly, boys, they've put it squarely up to us. It's the greatest exhibition of restraint and confidence I've ever known. This couldn't have happened at home. Hello!”

The gaze of all was centred upon two persons who walked rapidly in the direction taken by Fitts and his party. No one spoke for a few seconds. Flattner, after a quick look at Percival's set, scowling face, was the first to speak. To a certain degree, he understood the situation. It was out of pure consideration for his friend's feelings that he said:

“I'll go and head 'em off, A. A.”

“Thanks, old chap,—but there's no sense in getting yourself disliked. I'll do it. I'm in bad already,—and besides I'm the one who gave the order.”

Near the end of the row of huts, he drew alongside of Ruth Clinton and Landover.

“The order was meant for every one, Miss Clinton,” he said levelly. “Am I to understand that you have decided to ignore it?”

She stopped short and drew herself up haughtily. Their eyes met. There was defiance in hers. She did not speak. Landover confronted Percival, white with fury.

“I am capable of looking after Miss Clinton,” he exclaimed. “Your beastly officiousness—”

“You will go back to your cabin at once, Miss Clinton,” said Percival, ignoring Landover.

She did not move.

“Miss Clinton came out here at my suggestion,” said Landover. “If you have any more bullying to do, confine yourself to me, Percival.”

“I am not doing this because I enjoy it, Miss Clinton,” went on the young man, still looking into her unwavering eyes. “I am sorry it is necessary to remind you that there are no privileged classes here. You will have to obey orders the same as every one else.”

“Very well,” she said, suddenly lowering her eyes. “Take me back to the cabin, Mr. Landover. There is nothing more to say.”

Percival stood aside. They walked past him without so much as a glance at his set, unsmiling face. Landover slipped an arm through hers. She did not resist when he drew her up close to his side. Percival saw him lean over and speak to her after they had gone a few paces. His lips were close to her ear, but though his voice was low and repressed, the words were distinctly audible to the young man.

“Ruth darling, I am sorry,—I can't tell you how sorry I am for having subjected you to this insult. God, if I could only help matters by resenting it, I —”

She broke in, her voice as clear as a bell.

“Oh, if I were only a man,—if I were only a man!”

They were well out of hearing before Percival looked despairingly up at the pink and grey sky and muttered with heartfelt earnestness:

“I wish to God you were. I'd like nothing better than to be soundly threshed by you.”

CHAPTER IX.

Just before sunset that evening, Sancho Mendez was publicly hanged. Confessing the crime, he was carried to the rude gibbet at the far edge of the wheat field and paid the price in full. He had been tried by a jury of twelve; and there was absolutely no question as to his guilt. His companion, a lad named Dominic, callously betrayed by the older man, fled to the forest and it was not until the second day after the hanging that he was found by a party of man-hunters, half-starved and half-demented. He was hanged at sunrise on the following day.

Manuel Crust considered himself glorified. After a fashion, he posed as a martyr. Some sort of cunning, as insidious as it was unexpected, caused him to assume an air of humility. He went about shaking his head sorrowfully, as if cut to the quick by the unjust suspicions that had been heaped upon him by the ignorant, easily-persuaded populace.

Sentiment began to swing toward him. He and his so-called followers were vindicated. It was his gloomy, dejected contention that if Providence had not intervened he and his honest fellows undoubtedly would have been placed in the most direful position, so strong and so bitter was the prejudice that conspired against him. He was constantly thanking Providence. And presently other people undertook to thank Providence too. They began to regard Manuel as a much-abused man.

The burly “Portugee” haunted the cabin of Pedro the farmer. He was the most solicitous and the most active of all who strove to befriend and encourage the unhappy father, and no one was more devoted than he to the slowly-recovering girl. He carried flowers to Pedro's hut; he did many chores for Pedro's wife; he went out into the woods and killed the plumpest birds he could find and cooked them himself for Pedro's daughter.

Presently he began to assert a more or less proprietary interest in the family. It was no uncommon thing for him to issue orders to the nurses; he hectored the Doctor; and on several occasions he went so far as to offend such well-meaning ladies as Mrs. Spofford, Madame Careni-Amori, Mrs. Block and others when they appeared at Pedro's cabin with delicacies for the girl. And finally the people in that end of the camp began to speak of Manuel Crust as a good fellow and a gentleman!

On Easter Sunday he stood guard over Pedro's cabin while that worthy and his family went to the “Tabernacle” to attend the special services. Two of the nurses were inside with the girl, but outside sat Manuel, a grim watch-dog that growled when any one approached.

The horror of that black night and the days that witnessed the wiping out of Sancho Mendez and Dominic hung like a pall over the camp. Both executions had been witnessed by practically all of the inhabitants. Captain Trigger came ashore.

With set, relentless faces the people watched two men go to their doom. The women were as stony-faced, as repressed, as the men. Save for the involuntary groans, and the queer hissing sound of long-pent breath as the black-capped figures swung off into space, the tremulous hush of intense restraint rested upon the staring crowd.

Twice they came out to see men they had known and respected “hanged by the neck until dead,” and on neither occasion was there the slightest manifestation of pity, nor was there a single word of gloating. They watched and then they went away, leaving the victims to be disposed of by the men selected for the purpose. No shouts, no execrations, no hysterical cries or sobs,—nothing save the grim silence of awe. For these people, even to the tiniest child, had ceased to live in the light of other days.

Peter Snipe, in his journal, wrote of that silent, subdued throng as other historians have written of the rock-hearted people of Salem, and of the soulful Puritans who grew heartless in the service of the Lord.

They stood afar-off and watched the small detachment of sailors carry the bodies down to the basin, and every one knew that Sancho Mendez and Dominic, heavily weighted, were rowed out to the middle and dumped into a bottomless grave. Some there were who declared that their bodies would sink for ages before reaching the bottom,—and no one thought of Sancho Mendez and Dominic without picturing them as gliding deeper and deeper into the endless abyss of water.

Michael Malone's speech to the multitude on the shorn edge of the wheat field was brief. He spoke from the scaffold on which Sancho Mendez, the blacksmith, sat with a noose around his neck.

“This man has been fairly tried and he is being fairly punished. There is no way to circumvent the laws of God or the laws of man on this island, my friends. The guilty cannot escape. If we transgress the law, we must pay in proportion to our transgression. This man is to die. The laws of our homeland would not have

demanded the life of such as he,—but they should, my friends, they should. This island is small. It will be easy for us to keep it clean,—and we must keep it clean. We must not live in fear of each other. The lion and the lamb lie down together here; the thief and the honest man walk hand in hand. Our sins will find us out. We cannot hide them. Remember that. In this little land of ours there is nothing to stand in the way of the soundest principle ever laid down for man. 'Do unto others as ye would have others do unto you.' That is the Golden Rule. All we have to do is to observe that rule and there will be no use for the Ten Commandments, nor the laws of Moses, nor all the laws that man has made. We don't even have to be Christians. 'Do unto others as ye would have others do unto you.' That, my friends, is the law of laws. It is the religion of religions."

"Soapy" Shay, sitting before the fire in his cabin a few nights after the executions, held forth at some length and with peculiar emphasis on what he called an exploded theory.

"As I said before, and as I've always said,—not being a drinking man myself,—it's all bunk about booze being responsible for all the crimes that are committed. Now here were these two guys, Sancho and Dominic. Look at what they did,—and they hadn't touched a drop for months. I'm not saying that licker is a soothin' syrup for a man's morals, but what I am saying is that if a feller has got it in him to be ornery, he'll be ornery, drunk or sober. I was tellin' Parson Mackenzie only this morning that him and me both have good reason for not touchin' the stuff,—for different reasons, of course,—but I didn't see why other people oughtn't to have it if they want it.

"With me, in my former profession, it would have been criminal to touch the stuff. The worst crime a burglar can commit is to get drunk. No decent, bang-up burglar ever does it. I don't suppose there is a more self-respectin' sort of man in the world than a high-grade burglar. And it's the same with a preacher. He can't any more preach a good sermon when he is lit up than a burglar can crack a safe or jimmy a window if he tanks up beforehand. The parson seemed surprised when I put it right up to him like that. He said he'd never thought of it in that light before. Of course, says he, a minister of the gospel ain't even supposed to know what licker tastes like, and I says to him that's where we have the advantage of him. We know what it tastes like, and we like it, and we leave it alone because it cramps our style. He leaves it alone because it's the style for preachers to leave it alone, and because they'd go to hell if they drank like ordinary men. The only place a burglar goes to if he boozes is jail.

"Well, as I was sayin', this here Sancho wasn't soused when he committed that crime, and it all goes to prove that these temperance cranks are off their base.

Most of the crime that's committed in this world is committed because the feller wants to commit it. When I was up in Sing Sing once,—sort of by accident, you might say,—there was a lot of talk about prison reform, and pattin' the crooks on the back, and tellin' them they could be just as good as anybody else if they had a chance. The only chance them guys want, and keep lookin' for night and day, is a chance to lift something when nobody's lookin'. That's all they're thinkin' about while they're in the pen, and God knows they're as sober as judges all the time they're there. Crime is crime and you can't always lay it to booze. It's human nature with some people. I'm not sayin' the world wouldn't be better off if there wasn't any licker to drink. It stands to reason that there wouldn't be half so much bunglin' if people kept sober, 'specially when it comes to crime. Now, if this guy Sancho had had a couple of pints in him, everybody would be going around preachin' about the horrible effects of booze, and—What say?"

"I said you make me tired," said Buck Chizler, repeating his remark. "I never did anything wrong in my life except when I was half-soused."

"Sure," agreed Soapy. "But you'd have done it right if you'd been sober, my boy. That's the principal trouble with booze. It never gives a feeler a chance to do anything right." Whereupon, with a slow wink for the other members of the group, he arose and passed out into the night.

"I can't make that feller out," grumbled Buck, uncomfortably.

Easter Sunday was bright and clear, following a fortnight of cold, penetrating winds and rain. The sun smiled, but it was a cold smile that mocked rather than cheered. The sky was the colour of thin, transparent ice; the vast white dome was unspotted by a single cloud; the rose tints of early morn, frightened away at birth by the chill, unfeeling glare, took with them every promise of tenderness that dawned with the new day. But, though the sky was hard, the air was soft; the tang of the salt-sea spice lay over everything.

Percival had no active part in the exercises arranged by Ruth. The song service was held in the open. A platform had been erected in front of the "tabernacle" (the meeting-house on occasion) for the choir and musicians. There were no seats for the congregation. Every one stood, bareheaded, in a wide semi-circle facing the platform. The "boss" took his place inconspicuously among those who formed the outer fringe of the assemblage. His gaze seldom left the face of the girl he loved. Once her eyes met his. She was on the platform discussing arrangements with the two clergymen when her roving, unsettled gaze chanced to fall upon him. For many seconds she stared at him fixedly,—so fixedly, in fact, that Father Francisco, after a moment, shot a look in the same direction. Even from his far-off post, Percival saw the colour mount to her

cheeks as she hastily turned away to resume the conversation that had been so incontinently broken off. She was bare-headed. He had been watching the sun at play among the coils of her soft, dark hair,—a glint here as of bronze, a gleam there as of gold, ever changing under the caresses of that flaming lover a hundred million miles away.

The affable Mr. Nicklestick was standing beside Percival, carrying on a more or less one-sided conversation.

“You see, it's this way,” he was saying, contriving to reduce his far-reaching voice to a moderate undertone; “I'm not in the habit of attending Easter services. I'm not opposed to them, believe me, A. A.,—not in the slightest. Now at home in New York, I make it a habit to walk from the Metropolitan Museum down to the Waldorf-Astoria regularly every Easter. Between eleven and twelve-thirty. You get them going into certain churches and you get them coming out of others, don't you see? Oh, vat would I give to be on Fif' Avenue at this minute, A. A.! A hundred thousand dollars,—gladly, villingly,—yes, two hundred thousand! I vonder vat things are like on Fif Avenue now,—at this minute, I mean. I vonder what the vimmin are wearing this season. My God, don't you vish you were on Fif Avenue, A. A.?”

“What?”

“I say don't you vish you were on Fif Avenue now?”

“No, I don't,” gruffly.

“You—you don't?” gasped Nicklestick. “My God, where do you wish you were?”

“Over in France,—or better still, in Germany,—that's where I'd like to be. Keep still! Can't you see Careni-Amori is singing?”

Nicklestick was silent for two minutes. Then he volunteered: “Do you know what that song vould cost if she vas to give it in the Metropolitan Opera House, A. A.? A thousand dollars, von thousand simoleons. And we get it for nothing. It ain't possible to realize that you can get something for nothing in these days, is it? I vas saying to Morrie Shine only this morning that—”

“Sh!” hissed an exasperated Brazilian in front of them.

“I guess we better not talk any more, A. A.,” said Nicklestick, deprecatingly. Presently he leaned close to Percival's ear and whispered: “Miss Clinton is looking very fine today, isn't she?” Receiving no reply, he waited a moment and then went on: “Landover is a very lucky dog, eh?” Failing again, he was silent for some time. His next effort was along a totally different line. “I've been

feeling some of the people out in regard to the election next week. I think it's a great idea. You got a cinch, A. A. Nobody vants anybody but you for governor. What seems to be—”

“Sh!”

“Oh, you go to the devil!” addressed the exasperated Mr. Nicklestick to the Brazilian. “Ain't we got freedom of speech here on this island? Veil, then! What seems to be troubling most every one, A. A., is who is the best man for clerk. Nobody vants to be treasurer, for why? Because there ain't anything to be treasurer about. Say, where are you going?”

“Nowhere,” replied Percival, as he strode away.

Over against the line of trees on the opposite side of the wheat field still loomed the gibbet from which Sancho Mendez and Dominic had stepped blindfolded into another and darker world. While Pastor Mackenzie, leading up to the glorious resurrection, was repeating the story of the Crucifixion, Ruth Clinton, sitting behind him on the platform, stared wide-eyed at this gaunt object, and she saw not Christ on the Cross but the spectre of Sancho Mendez falling off into darkness. Percival's gaze followed hers, and his heart smote him,—for it was he who had demanded that the gruesome reminder be left standing as a warning to carrion. And he had laughed when Peter Snipe christened it “the scarecrow!”

“Leave it standing, A. A.,” Peter had said, “and you can bet your boots no jailbird will ever roost on it if he thinks twice. And it's just that sort of thing that makes a man think twice.”

But the look of dread in the eyes of this girl who could do no wrong, and yet was to be everlastingly tortured by the sight of the thing that stood as a silent accuser of all who looked, was more than Percival could stand. Easter Sunday,—and that gibbet pointing its long arm toward the little flock in the shadow of sanctuary,—mocking the good as it beckoned to the bad,—Easter Sunday and that!

He stole quietly away, circling the edge of the crowd, his head bent, his teeth set. Just as he was about to pass from view around the corner of the “tabernacle,” he cast a quick glance at the girl on the platform. Their eyes met again. She turned her head quickly, but he was certain that she had followed his movements from the beginning.

CHAPTER X.

Toward the close of the exercises, the congregation was startled by the sound of an ax smiting wood. The blows were rapid and vigorous. The surprised people looked at each other first in wonder and then in consternation. Who was guilty of this unseemly sacrilege?

Finally those on the edge of the multitude discovered the wielder of the ax. Some one, not easily recognizable, was chopping away the supports of the scaffold. The crowd grew restless; angry mutterings were to be heard on all sides. Every eye was turned from the platform to glare at the lone chopper across the fallow field.

Madame Careni-Amori, who was about to begin her second song, looked helplessly at Ruth Clinton.

Ruth had recognized the man at once. At first she was annoyed, then there surged over her a great, uplifting thrill of exaltation. She stepped quickly to the front and, raising her clear young voice, reclaimed the wandering attention of the throng.

“Please be quiet. Madame Careni-Amori is to sing for us once more. Mr. Percival is knocking down that horrible thing over there. It is right that he should. We do not need it there as a warning. Mr. Percival has had a change of heart. He has been moved,—tremendously moved,—by what he has seen in your faces today. That is why he is over there now hacking down that dreadful thing. It is the skeleton at our feast. We were conscious of its presence all the time. He is over there all by himself cutting it down so that our hearts may be lighter, so that this glad hour may end without its curse. Please remain where you are. He requires no assistance. He prefers to do it all alone. And now, if you will all give attention, Madame Careni-Amori will sing for us.”

Careni-Amori lifted up her glorious voice in song. The rhythmic beat of the ax went on unceasingly; the powerful arms and shoulders of the destroyer were behind every frenzied blow. As the last notes of the song died away, there came the sound of splintering wood, then a dull crash, and the gibbet lay flat upon the ground. Some one uttered an involuntary shout. As Percival turned from his completed work and wiped the sweat from his brow with his bare forearm, he found the gaze of the entire company fastened upon him. Then there came to his ears the clapping of hands, then the shrill clamour of voices raised in

approbation. Swinging the ax on high, he buried its blade deep in the fallen timber and left it imbedded there. Snatching up his coat from a nearby stump, he waved his hand to the crowd and then, whirling, was quickly lost among the trees that lined the shore.

Landover walked beside the thoughtful Ruth as she crossed the Green on her way home. He studied her lovely profile out of the corner of his eye. As they drew away from the dispersing throng, he spoke to her.

“If money were of any value here in this Godforsaken spot, I would offer considerably more than a penny for your thoughts, Ruth.”

She started slightly. “You couldn't buy them, Mr. Landover. They are not for sale at any price.”

“I suppose there is no harm in venturing a guess, however. You will give me one guess, won't you?”

“All the guesses you like,—free of charge,” she rejoined airily.

“You are trying to decide whether or not it was all done for effect.”

She smiled mysteriously, looking straight ahead. Her eyes were very bright.

“You are wrong. I was thinking about hats, Mr. Landover. Don't you know that every woman's thoughts run to hats on Easter?”

“I confess I had a better opinion of him,” he said, disregarding her flippancy. “I don't like him, but I've never suspected him of being a stupid ass before.”

“Of whom are you speaking?” she inquired, suddenly looking him full in the eye.

“Our mutual friend, the enemy,” he replied.

“Mr. Percival?”

“Certainly.”

“But I thought he was beneath our notice.”

“We can't very well help noticing him when he goes to such extreme lengths to attract attention.”

“You think he did it to attract attention?”

“Not so much that, perhaps, as to get back into the lime-light. You see, he was rather out of it for as much as half an hour, and he simply couldn't stand it. So he went off and staged a little sideshow of his own.”

She walked on in silence for a few moments, torn by doubts and misgivings. Landover's sarcastic analysis was like a douche of cold water. Perhaps he was right. It had been a spectacular, not to say diverting, exhibition. Her eyes

darkened. An expression of pain lurked in them.

“I can't believe it of him, Mr. Landover,” she said at last, in a slightly muffled voice.

“I thought it was understood you were to call me Abel, my dear.”

“If he did it deliberately,—and with that motive,—it was unspeakable,” she went on, a faint furrow appearing between her eyes.

“Of course, I may be wrong,” said he magnanimously. “It may have been the result of an honest, uncontrollable impulse. But I doubt it.”

“Men do queer, strange things when under the influence of a strong emotion,” she said, a hopeful note in her voice.

“True. They are also capable of doing very base things. You don't for an instant suspect Percival of being a religious fanatic, do you?”

“Please don't sneer. And what, pray, has religion to do with it?”

“I dare say Morris Shine is again lamenting the absence of a motion picture camera. He is always complaining about the chances he has missed to—”

“Stop!”

“Why, Ruth dear, I—”

“We have no right to judge him, Mr. Landover.”

“Are you defending him?”

“I don't believe he had the faintest notion that he was being—theatrical, as you call it. I am sure he did it because he was moved by an overpowering desire to make all of us happy. He couldn't bear the thought of that evil thing out there, pointing at us while we worshipped and tried to sing with gladness in our hearts. No! He did it for you, and for me, and for all the rest of us,—and he made every heart lighter when that thing toppled over and fell. Did you not see the change that came over every one when they realized that it was destroyed? There were smiles on every face, and every voice was cheerful. The look of uneasy dread was gone—Oh, you must have seen.”

“I can only say that it ought to have been done before, Ruth,—not during the exercises.”

“It was his way of publicly admitting he was wrong in insisting that it should remain.”

“He had his way with that weak-kneed committee, as usual. The tactics of that Copperhead Camp he talks so much about are hardly applicable to conditions here. We are not law-defying ruffians, you know,—and these are women of quite

another order.”

“No one,—not even you, Mr. Landover,—can say that he has been anything but kind and considerate and sympathetic,” she flashed. “He is firm,—but isn't that what we want? And the people worship him,—they will do anything for him. Even Manuel Crust respects him,—and obeys him. And you, down in your heart, respect him. He is your kind of a man, Mr. Landover. He does things. He is like Theodore Roosevelt. He does things.”

Landover smiled grimly. “Perhaps that is why I dislike him.”

“Because he is like Roosevelt?”

“My dear, let's not start an argument about Roosevelt.”

“Just the same, I've heard you say over and over again that you wish Roosevelt were President now,” she persisted. “Why do you say that if you are so down on him?”

Landover shrugged his shoulders expressively.

“I can wish that, my dear, and still not be an admirer of Mr. Roosevelt,” he replied. “But to return to Percival, isn't it quite plain to you that he was pouting like a school-boy because he had not been asked to take part in today's exercises?”

“He was asked to take part in them. I asked him myself.”

He glanced at her sharply. “You never told me you had asked him, Ruth.”

“The night the crime was committed,” she said briefly. “He was very nice about it. He promised to sing in the choir and—and to help me with the decorations. After our unpleasant experience the next day, he had the—shall we say tact or kindness?—to reconsider his promise.”

“Openly advertising the fact that he preferred to have no part in any entertainment you were arranging,” was Landover's comment. “I don't believe it was because of any particular delicacy of feeling on his part, my dear. In any case, the fact remains that he let you go ahead with the affair, and then, bang! right in the middle of it he stages his cheap, melodramatic, moving-picture act. Bosh!”

She turned on him with blazing eyes.

“You will not see anything good in him, will you? You can't be fair, can you? Well, I can be,—and I am. He has been fair with both of us,—and I am ashamed of the way I have treated him. We deserved his rebuke that morning, and he did not hesitate to turn us back,—although he realized what it would mean. He loves me, Abel Landover,—he loves me a thousand times more than you do, in spite of

all your protestations. He—”

“Why, Ruth,—I—I—”

“Yes,—I know,—I know you are shocked. And I don't care,—do you understand? I don't care that! You want your answer, Mr. Landover. Well, you shall have it now. I cannot marry you. This is final.”

The blood left his face. “You don't know what you are saying, Ruth,” he exclaimed. “You are angry. When you have had time to—”

“I've had all the time I need,” she interrupted shortly. “I don't want to be disagreeable,—but it's no use, Mr. Landover. I do not love you. I am sorry if I have misled you into hoping. There is nothing more to be said.”

“You have misled me,” he cried out bitterly.

“I am to blame, I suppose, for not giving you your answer before this. I have temporized. It is a woman's trick,—and a horrid one, I'll admit. I have never even thought of marrying you.”

“Are you in love with Percival?” he demanded.

“Yes,—I think I am,” she replied, looking him straight in the eye. She spoke with a sort of gasp, as if releasing a confession that surprised even herself.

“My God, Ruth,—I can't believe it,” he groaned.

“I have denied it to myself—oh, a thousand times,—I've fought against it. I've tried to hate him. I've done everything in my power to make him believe that I despise him. But it's no use,—it's no use. I—I can't think of anything else. I can't think of any one else. Oh, I know I am quite mad to say this, but I sometimes find myself praying that we may never be rescued. It might mean—well, you can see what it might mean. Thank God, you have driven me to this confession. It is the first time I have been really honest with myself. I have lied to myself over and over again about my feeling toward him. I have lain awake for hours at night lying to myself—telling myself that I hate him and always will hate him. Now, it's out,—the truth is out. I have never hated him,—I have cared for him from the very beginning.”

She spoke rapidly, the words rushing forth like a flood suddenly released after breaking through the dam, sweeping everything before it,—resistless, devastating, cruelly rapturous. She thought nothing of the hurt she was inflicting upon the man beside her; he was an atom in the path of the torrent, a thing that went down and was left behind as the flood swept over and by him. As suddenly as it began the torrent was checked. A hot flush seared her neck, her cheeks, her brow.

“What a fool you must think me!” she cried in dire chagrin. “What a stupid fool!”

He had not taken his eyes from her transfigured face. He had listened with his jaw set, his lips tightly pressed, his brow dark with anger.

“I don't think that,” he said shortly. “You have merely lost your head, as any woman might, over a picturesque, good-looking soldier of fortune. Perhaps I should not be surprised, nor even shocked by what you've just told me. He is the sort that women do fall in love with,—and I suppose they are not to be blamed for it. No, I do not think you are a fool. When one reflects that such experienced heads as those possessed by the irreproachable Obosky, the immaculate Amori, —to say nothing of the estimable lady we are pleased to call the 'Empress of Brazil,'—when such heads as theirs are turned by a man it is high time to admit that he has something more than personal magnetism. I am wondering how far the contagion has really spread. There is a difference between contagion and infection, you know. Infection is the result of personal contact,—contagion is something in the air. This epidemic of infatuation very plainly is in two forms. It appears to be both infectious and contagious. I rather fancy the amiable Obosky has selected the former type of the prevailing malady. Percivalitis, I believe, is the name it goes by.”

There was no mistaking the significance of his words. The implication was clear, even though veiled in the heaviest sarcasm. He had the satisfaction of seeing the colour ebb from her cheek. Her face being averted, he missed the swift flicker of pain that rushed to her eyes and, departing, took away with it the soft light that had glowed in them the instant before. He had touched a concealed canker,—the sensitive spot that had been the real cause of her sleepless, troubled nights,—the thing she had refused in her pride to accept as the real source of discomfort.

Down in her soul lay the poison of jealousy, a cruel and malignant influence that until now had been subdued by a mind stubbornly unwilling to recognize its existence.

In the eagerness to supply herself with additional reasons for hating Percival, she had given her imagination a rather free rein in regard to his relations with Olga Obosky. While she was without actual proof, she nevertheless tortured herself with suspicions that came almost to the same thing; in any case, they had the desired effect in that they created a very positive sense of irritation, and nothing seemed to please her more in the dead hour of night than the feeling that she had a right to be disgusted with him.

And now, Landover, in his sly arraignment, prodded a very live, raw spot, and she knew that it was bleak unhappiness and not rancour that had kept her awake.

“Is it necessary to beat about the bush, Mr. Land-over? If you have anything definite to tell me about Mr. Percival and Madame Obosky, I grant you permission to say all you have to say in the plainest language. Call a spade a spade. I am quite old enough to hear things called by their right names.”

“Since you have been so quick to get my meaning, I don't consider it necessary to go into details. I daresay you have ears and eyes of your own. You can see and hear as well as I,—unless you are resolved to be both blind and deaf.”

“Did you not hear me say that I know he loves me?”

“Yes,—I heard you quite distinctly.”

“As a rule, do men love two women at the same time?” she inquired, patiently.

“I have never said that he loves Obosky. It is barely possible, however, that he may not choose to resist her,—if that conveys anything to your intelligence.”

“It does and it does not,” she replied steadily. “You see, I believe in him. I trust him.”

“And I suppose you trust Olga Obosky,” he said, with a sneer.

“I understand Olga Obosky far better than you do, Mr. Landover.”

“I doubt it,” said he drily.

“She is my friend.”

“Ah! That measurably simplifies the situation. She will no doubt prove her friendship by delivering Mr. Percival to you, slightly damaged but guaranteed to —”

“Please be good enough to remember, Mr. Land-over, that you are not speaking to Manuel Crust,” she exclaimed haughtily, and, with flaming cheeks, swept past him.

He hesitated a moment, and then started to follow her. She stopped short and, facing him, cried out: “Don't follow me! I do not want to hear another word. Stop! I can see by your eyes that you are ashamed,—you want to apologize. I do not want to hear it. I am hurt,—terribly hurt. Nothing you can say will help matters now, Mr. Landover.”

“Just a second, Ruth,” he cried, now thoroughly dismayed. “Give me a chance to explain. It was my mad, unreasoning love that—”

But, with an exclamation of sheer disgust, she put her fingers to her ears and

sped rapidly down the walk. He stood still, watching her until she entered the cabin door and closed it behind her. Then he completed the broken sentence, but not in the voice of humility nor with the words that he had intended to utter.

CHAPTER XI.

Shay, coming up the walk, distinctly heard what he said.

“What's the matter, Bill?” he inquired, pausing. “Did she throw the hooks into you?”

Landover glared at him balefully. “You go to hell, damn you,” he snarled, and walked away.

“Soapy” rubbed his chin dubiously as he watched the retreating figure. Pursing his thin lips, he turned his attention to an unoffending stump six or eight feet away and scowled at it vindictively. He was turning something over in his mind, and he was manifestly in a state of indecision. Ruminating, he spoke aloud, perhaps for the benefit of a Portuguese farm-hand who happened to be approaching from the opposite direction, but who still had some rods to cover before he was within hearing distance.

“Gee, he's getting to be as decent and democratic as any of us. Shows what association will do for a man. Two months ago he would have been too high and mighty to tell me to go to hell. If he keeps on at this rate, he'll be worth payin' attention to in a couple of months more. Won't he, Bill?” This to the farmhand, who obligingly halted.

Mr. Shay made constant and impartial use of the name Bill. Except in a very few instances, he applied it to all males over the age of two, and he did it so genially that resentment was rare. Americans, Britons, Irishmen, Portuguese, Spaniards, Indians, Swedes,—all races, in fact, except the Hebrew,—came under the sweeping appellation. His Hebrew acquaintances were addressed by the name of Ike.

It so happened that this particular “Bill” was lamentably slow in picking up the English language. It was even said that he prided himself on being halfwitted. However, being an exceedingly dull creature, he was quite naturally a polite one. He was a good listener. You could speak English to him by the hour and never be annoyed by verbal interruptions. At regular intervals he would insert a shrug of the shoulders, or nod his head, or lift an eye-brow, or spread out his hands, or purse his lips,—and he never smiled unless you did.

Perceiving that some sort of an answer was expected, “Bill” wisely shrugged his shoulders. “Soapy” interpreted the shrug as affirmative,—having a distinct

advantage over “Bill,” who hadn't the faintest idea which it was,—and proceeded to go a little deeper into the matter.

“Now, as I was saying, this Landover guy is up against something, Bill. She handed him something he didn't like. Right on the nose, too, if I'm any judge. What do you suppose it was, Bill?”

“Bill” nodded his head very earnestly.

“That's what I think,” said “Soapy,” fixing his hearer with a moody, speculative frown. “Now, I know something about this Landover guy that she don't know. I suppose A. A. will give me an awful panning if I up and tell her what I saw that day. He seems to think it's a secret.”

There was a slight pause, suggesting to “Bill” that he ought to frown as if also in doubt.

“At the same time, I think she ought to be told, don't you, Bill?”

This called for something definite. So Bill scratched his left ear.

“In the first place, she's too nice a girl to be hitched up with a Priscilla like him. Now, I don't know what happened here a couple of minutes ago, but it looks to me as if she needs a little moral support. It strikes me that this would be a good time to tell her. What do you think about it, Bill?”

Always on the lookout for rising inflections, “Bill” was ever in a position to give prompt replies. He could dispose of the most profound questions almost before they were out of the speaker's mouth. His answer to “Soapy's” query was a broad grin,—for he had detected a sly twinkle in the speaker's eye. He also shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands,—and, to clinch the matter, he winked.

“Now, I don't want to take this important step without being backed-up by some clever, intelligent feller like you, Bill,” went on “Soapy.” “It's all for her good,—and A. A.'s, too, although he won't see it in that light. If you say you think she ought to be told, that's enough for me. If you say she oughtn't,—why, nothing doing. It's up to you, Bill.”

“Bill” was plainly at sea. You can't decide a question that lacks an interrogation point. So all that “Bill” could do was to stare blankly at “Soapy” and wait for something tangible to turn up. Mr. Shay suddenly appreciated the poor fellow's dilemma and supplied the necessary relief.

“What say, Bill?”

Whereupon “Bill” started to shake his head, but, catching the scowl of disapproval on “Soapy's” brow, hastily changed his reply to a vigorous nod.

“Good!” exclaimed Mr. Shay. “That completely clears my conscience. So long, Bill.”

And half a minute later he presented himself at Ruth Clinton's cabin.

“Goodness!” exclaimed Mrs. Spofford, as she opened the door. She also opened her eyes very wide, and sent a startled, apprehensive glance over her shoulder into the warm, fire-lit interior. “What do you want?” she demanded querulously of the unexpected visitor.

Mr. Shay took off his hat. “I'd like a few words with Miss Clinton,” he said. “I saw her come in, so she's not out. It's important, ma'am. She will hear something to her advantage, as they say in the personals.”

“Will you please return at three o'clock, Mr. Shay? My niece is resting after the arduous labours of the—”

“I dassent wait,” said “Soapy,” with a furtive glance over his shoulder. “If he sees me, I'll probably have to change my mind.”

“Who is it, Auntie?” called out a clear voice from within.

“'Soapy' Shay,” replied the visitor himself.

“Mr. Landover will be here presently, Mr. Shay,—” began the obstacle in the doorway.

“I guess not,” broke in “Soapy,” forgetting himself so far as to wink. “I expect you haven't heard the news, ma'am. He's had his nose put out of joint.”

“Good heavens! His nose out of—”

“Come in, Soapy,” cried Ruth.

“Ruth, my dear,—do you know who—do you know what—”

“Sure she knows,” again interrupted “Soapy,” unembarrassed. “I'm not after anybody's jewels, Mrs. Spofford,—and besides which I am the principal candidate for Sheriff of this bailiwick. You don't suppose a man who's running for the office of sheriff on Mr. A. A. Percival's ticket is going to lift anything before election, do you? Besides which I've made up my mind to be straight as long as I'm on this island, and if I'm elected,—which I will be,—I'm going to see that nobody else does anything crooked. Mr. A.A. Percival is a wise guy,—a mighty wise guy. Says he to me, 'Soapy, you are one of the most expert—'”

“Come inside, Soapy,” called out Ruth.

Mr. Shay entered. “You better shut the door, Mrs. Spofford,” he said coolly. “What I got to say is private. As I was saying, A. A. says to me, 'Soapy, you are one of the craftiest and slipperiest crooks on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

What you don't know about crime would fill a book about as thick as a postage stamp. There's nobody on this island more fittin' to be an officer of the law. You know everything that an officer of the law ought to know, and besides which you know everything that a thief has to know. So you're going to be elected Sheriff of Trigger Island.' That's what A. A. says to me, and, as usual, he's dead right. Why, ma'am, there ain't a thief in the universe that can fool me. I don't have to have any evidence,—not a grain of it. All I got to do is to just ask 'em why they done it. But what I dropped in to see you about, Miss Ruth, is—Say, you ain't by any chance expecting A. A. to drop in, are you? I wouldn't have him ketch me here for—"

"I am not expecting Mr. Percival, Soapy," she said, her gaze fixed expectantly on the man's face.

"Well, then," said he, "I got a little story to tell you. It's the gospel truth. Just try to forget that I used to be a crook and that in ordinary times I am one of the most gosh-awful liars on earth. But there's absolutely no pleasure in lying nowadays, and as for working at my regular trade, Mrs. Spofford, you needn't be the least bit nervous. It ain't necessary for you to set on that trunk. Take this chair, please. Now, you remember some time back that A. A. and your friend Landover had a mix-up in the last named gentleman's stateroom, and you also must remember that Mr. Landover told you about it and that Mr. Percival never told you anything about it. Well, I was a witness to that fracas. I just happened to be walking along the deck when something caught my eye and I went up close to see what it was. You'd never guess what it was. After looking at it very carefully I discovered it was a port-hole."

Forsaking his whimsical manner, he related tersely in as few words as possible the story of the encounter.

"Now, it's my guess that Mr. Abel Landover didn't speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth when he furnished you with his version of the affair. Am I right, or am I wrong?" he asked, in conclusion.

"I prefer to believe Mr. Landover's story," said Mrs. Spofford stiffly. "Will you be good enough to go now, Mr. Shay?"

"Sure," said "Soapy," rising. "I'm not asking anybody to take my word against his. I'm just telling you, that's all. Good afternoon, ladies."

"It was not Mr. Percival who fired the shot? You are sure of that, Soapy?" Ruth was standing now. Her eyes were very dark and tempestuous.

"Sure as my right name ain't Soapy Shay," returned the witness, holding up his right hand.

“Ruth, it isn't possible that you place any credence in—”

“Thank you for coming, Soapy,” interrupted Ruth. “It was very good of you.”

“Soapy” lingered at the door, fumbling his dilapidated hat. Mrs. Spofford was staring speechlessly at her niece.

“I'd a little sooner you wouldn't say anything to A. A. about me peaching on him,” said “Soapy,” somewhat nervously.

“I shall not 'peach' on you, Soapy,” said the girl, a joyous smile suddenly illuminating her face.

“Soapy” went out. As he closed the door, he said to himself: “Next time you tell me to go to hell, Abe Landover, I guess you'd better furnish a guide that knows the way.”

As soon as the door was closed, Mrs. Spofford turned upon her radiant niece.

“You are not such a fool as to believe that rascal's story, Ruth?”

“I believe every word of it!” cried the girl.

CHAPTER XII.

Sailors, sniffing the gale that night, shook their heads and said there was snow on the tail of it. Morning found the ground mottled with splashes of white and a fine, frost-like sleet blowing fitfully across the plain. The ridge of trees over against the shore became vague and shapeless beneath the filmy veil, while the sea out beyond the breakers was clothed in a grey shroud, bleak and impenetrable.

Knapendyke was positive and reassuring in his contention that no great amount of snow ever fell upon the island. While much of the vegetation was of a character indigenous to the temperate zone, there was, he pointed out, another type peculiar to tropical climates,—and although the latter was of a singularly hardy nature, it was not calculated to survive the rigours of a harsh, protracted winter.

“We'll have spells like this, off and on, just as they occasionally do in Florida or Southern California, is the way I figure it out,” he said to the group of uneasy men who contemplated the embryonic blizzard with alarm and misgiving. “Moreover, I believe the wet, cold season is a short one here. The birds are content to stick it out. The fact there is no migration is proof enough for me that the winter is never severe. As the weather prognosticators say, look out for squalls, unsettled weather, frost tonight, rising temperature tomorrow, rain the next day, doctors' bills the end of the month. Avoid crowded street-cars, passenger elevators and places of amusement. Take plenty of out-door exercise and don't eat too many strawberries.”

Children, on their way to school in the town hall, shouted with glee as they romped in the snow-laden gale. It had no terrors for them. They were not concerned with the dour prospect that brought anxiety to the hearts of their elders.

“It's fine to be a kid,” said Percival, watching the antics of a crowd of boys. “Why do we have to grow up?”

“So that we can appreciate what it was to be a kid,” said Randolph Fitts.

Ruth Clinton was one of the teachers. There were, all told, about thirty children in the school, their ages ranging from five to fourteen. Most of them were youngsters from the steerage, bright-eyed little Latins who had picked up with lively avidity no small store of English. They were being taught in English.

The council, spurred by the far-seeing Percival, recognized the perils of a period of inactivity following the harvest and the flailing days. The majority of the men and women would be comparatively idle. Preparations for the building of a small ship occupied the time and interest of a few engineers and ship-carpenters, but as some weeks were bound to pass before the work could be begun in earnest, an interim of impatience would have to be bridged. Work, and plenty of it, was the only prescription for despair.

Already symptoms of increasing moodiness marked the mien of the less resourceful among the castaways. While it was not generally known, two men had attempted suicide, and one of the Brazilian ladies,—a beautiful young married woman,—was in a pitiful state of collapse. She had a husband and two small children in Rio Janeiro. The separation was driving her mad. There were others,—both men and women,—whose minds were never free from the thought of loved ones far across the waters and whose hearts ached with a great pain that could not be subdued by philosophy, but they were strong and they were cheerful. In their souls burnt an unquenchable fire, the fire of hope; they stirred it night and day with the song of the unvanquished.

Improvements in the hastily constructed cabins provided not only occupation but interest for the able-bodied men and women. There was no little rivalry in the matter of interior embellishments; those skilled in the use of implements took great pride in hewing out and adding more or less elaborate ornamentation to the facades of their habitations,—such as casements, door-posts and capitals, awnings, porches, and so forth. A shell road was in process of construction from one end of the village to the other, while over in Dismal Forest woodsmen were even now cutting down the towering Norfolk pines and hewing out the staunch timbers for the ship that was to sail out one day in quest of the world they had left behind them. But these enterprises provided work for men only. The women, in the main, were without occupation. With the approach of winter the men in active control of the camp's affairs realized that something would have to be done to relieve the strain,—at least, to lighten it until spring came to the rescue with toil in the fields and gardens.

A system of exchange was being worked out. As has been mentioned before in this chronicle, the people of the steerage were the plutocrats. Their hoardings represented real money, the savings of years. When it came to an actual “show-down,”—to use Percival's expression,—these people who were poor in the accepted sense, now were rich. They could “buy and sell” the “plutocrats” of another day and another world.

The theory that one good turn deserves another was an insufficient foundation

upon which to construct a substantial system of exchange. It is all very well to talk about brotherly love, said Percival. The trouble is that certain brothers are for ever imposing upon other brothers, and the good turn does not always find its recompense. Socialism, he argued, is a fine thing until you discover that you are not alone in the world. Brotherly love began with Cain and Abel, and socialism is best exemplified by a parlour aquarium. Nothing happens to disturb the serene existence of the goldfish until somebody forgets to feed them, and then they begin nibbling at each other.

“You mend my fence, I'll mend yours,” is an ideal arrangement until you find it is “our fence” and doesn't need mending.

To Landover, Block and other financial experts was delegated the power and authority to perfect a fair, impartial monetary system. First of all, they arbitrarily declared the dollar, the peso and the shilling to be without value. “Time” script was to be issued by the governing board, and as this substitute would automatically become useless on the day the castaways, were discovered and taken off the island, no citizen was to be allowed to reduce or dissipate his hoard of real money.

Landover's proposal that a central depository be established for the purpose of holding and safe-guarding the possessions of each and every person was primarily intended to prevent the surreptitious use of real money. This project met with almost universal opposition. The “rich” preferred to hang onto their money, thereby running true to form. While professing the utmost confidence in the present integrity of the banker and his friends they ingenuously wanted to know what chance they would have of getting their money back when these masters of finance were ready to leave the island! So they elected to hide their gold and silver where it would be safe from unscrupulous financiers! And nothing could shake them in this resolve.

“Time” was the basic principle on which the value of the script was to be determined, and as “time,” in this instance, meant hours and nothing else, a citizen's income depended entirely on his readiness to work. Ten hours represented a full day's work. The hand-press on board the Doraine was used to print the “hours,” as the little slips made from the stock of menu card-board were called. They were divided into five denominations, viz.: One Hour, Three Hours, Five Hours, Seven Hours and Ten Hours. Each of these checks bore the signature of Abel T. Landover and a seal devised by Peter Snipe, who besides being an author was something of a draughtsman,—indeed, his enemies said he was a far better artist than he was an author, which annoyed him tremendously in view of the fact that he had stopped drawing when he was fifteen because eminent

cartoonists and illustrators had told him he had no talent at all. The printing and stamping was done on board the Doraine and the script was shortly to be put into circulation. Landover was slated to become treasurer of Trigger Island at the general election.

As an illustration, this sort of dialogue was soon to become more or less common:

“What's the price of this hat, Madame Obosky?”

“Twenty-seven hours, Mrs. Block.”

Or:

“Gimme an hour's worth of 'smoke,' Andy,” meaning, of course, the substitute for tobacco.

Or:

“You blamed robber, what do you mean charging six hours for half-soling them shoes? If you was any good, you could ha' done it in half the time.”

Every individual in camp over the age of thirteen was obliged to have an occupation. To a certain extent, this occupation was selective, but in the main it was to be determined by a board whose business it was to see that the man-power was directed to the best advantage for all concerned. A camp tax was ordered. At the end of the week, every citizen was required to pay into the common treasury two “hours.” He could not “work out” this tax. It had to be paid in “cash.” Out of the taxes so received, the school, the church, the “hospital” and the “government” were to be supported.

The “governor” of Trigger Island and the humblest workingman were to receive exactly the same pay: “hour” for hour. Thirty thousand “hours” represented the total issue, or, approximately fifty units for each individual over the age of thirteen.

As no man's hours was worth more than another's, and as every transaction was to be based on time, rather than on money, there was no small likelihood that any one man or group of men could ever obtain a commanding grip on the finances of the Island.

And so it came to pass that all manner of enterprises sprang into existence. Competition was not allowed. There could be but one millinery shop, one dress-making establishment, one shoe and sandal factory, and so on. Everything was conducted on a strictly cash basis; there were no “charge accounts.”

Olga Obosky, as the proprietress of the millinery shop, earned no more than any one of her half-dozen assistants,—and they were all paid by the

“government.” The same could be said of Madame Careni-Amori, who conducted a school of music, and the great Joseppi who graciously,—even gladly,—went into the tailoring business. Andrew Mott, one time First Officer on the Doraine, opened a “smoke” store and dispensed cured weed that Flattner authorized him to call “tobacco.” The austere Mrs. Spofford decided to open a dress-making shop!

It was all very simple, this man-to-man system of traffic, but no one took it lightly or in the spirit of jest. They were serious, they were sober-minded. Interest, incentive, grim determination centred in the seemingly childish arrangement. Greed was lacking, for there was no chance to hoard; confidence was paramount, for there was no chance to lose.

The “hours” travelled in a circle, from the “government” to people, from people to “government”; when all was said and done, it was the product of soil and sea that formed the backbone of the system.

With the adoption of the plan, it was to become a punishable offence,—indeed, it was to be classified as treason,—for any resident of Trigger Island to “forage” for necessities. He could do what he pleased in respect to the non-essentials, but when it came to foodstuffs of any kind or description, he was guilty of a felony if he failed to turn all that he produced or secured into the general stores.

“Strikes me,” said Randolph Fitts in council meet-ing, “that we are arriving at the most exquisite state of socialism. This comes pretty close to being the essence of that historic American dream, 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' Up to date, that has been the rarest socialistic doctrine ever promulgated, but we are going it a long sight better. 'From the people, by the people, to the people.' What do you call that but socialism?”

“Are you speaking to me?” demanded Percival.

“In a general way, yes.”

“Well, it's not my idea of socialism. So far as I've been able to discover, socialism is a game in which you are supposed to take something out of your pocket and put it into the other fellow's whether he wants it or not. This scheme of ours is quite another thing. We're not planning to split even on what we've got in our pockets so much as we're planning to divide what we've got in our hands, and there's a lot of difference between a hand and a pocket, old top. You can see what's in one and you can't see what's in the other. And, by the way, Fitts, if we let the socialists in this camp suspect that we're trying to introduce socialism here, there'll be a revolution before you can say Jack Robinson. They won't stand

for it. They'd let out the blamedest roar on record if they thought we were trying to deprive them of the right to feel sorry for themselves."

Ruth hurried over to the town-hall bright and early on this snowy, gusty morning. The forenoon session of the school began punctually at 8:30 o'clock. She was there half an hour ahead of time to see that there was a roaring fire in the huge fire-place, and that the benches for the scholars were drawn up close to it. There were two teachers besides herself,—and both of them were experienced "school marms." She taught the "infant class," comprising about a dozen tots. The three teachers took turns about in building the fires, arranging the benches and cleaning the crude blackboard.

There had been church-services the night before, and the benches were all in use, arranged so that they faced the combination pulpit-rostrum-stage at the far end of the room. Tonight there was to be a general committee meeting to discuss the prospective financial scheme and the general election that was to take place the following week.

The structure was not blessed with a paucity of names. If there was to be a council-meeting or a camp assembly, it was called the "Meeting-house." On Sundays it became the "tabernacle." Week-days it was known as the "schoolhouse," and at odd times it was spoken of as the "theatre," the "concert-hall," and the "Trigger Island court-house." In one corner stood the grand piano from the Doraine, regularly and laboriously tuned by the great Joseppi. Madame Careni-Amori gave vocal and instrumental lessons here every afternoon in the week, from three to six. Among the older children there were a number who had voices that seemed worth developing, and the famous soprano put her heart and soul into the bewildering task of stuffing the rudiments of music down their throats.

Ruth stopped just inside the door and looked about her in astonishment. The benches had been drawn up in an orderly semi-circle about the fire-place. Beyond them she observed the figure of a man kneeling before the fire, using a bellows with great effect. The big logs were snapping, and cracking, and spitting before the furious blasts.

She closed the door and started across the room in his direction. Suddenly she recognized the broad back and the familiar but very unseasonable panama hat. Panic seized her. She turned quickly, bent on making her escape. Her heart was beating like a triphammer,—she felt strangely weak in the knees. As abruptly, she checked the impulse to flee. Why should she run away, now that the moment she had wished for so ardently the night before was at hand? Chance had answered her call with amazing swiftness. She was alone with him,—she could

go to him and lay her weapons at his feet and say,—as she had said a hundred times in the night,—“I can fight no more. I am beaten.”

But now that the time had come for bravery, she found herself sorely afraid. A chill swept through her,—a weakening chill that took away her strength and left her trembling from head to foot. The crisis was at hand,—the great, surpassing crisis. She found herself hazily, tremulously wondering what the next minute in her life would be like? What would be said in it, what would happen to her? Would she be in his arms, would his lips be upon hers,—all in the minute to come? Was the whole of her life to be altered in the brief space of a minute's time?

A warm glow suddenly drove off the chill. It came with the realization that he was building the fire for her,—that his thoughts were of her,—that he had stolen into the building to make it warm and comfortable long before she was due to arrive,—and that he would steal away again as soon as the “chores” were done.

He arose to his feet and stood over the fire for a moment or two, watching its lively progress. Apparently satisfied with his efforts, he turned and started toward the door. She was standing in his path, a shy, wavering smile on her lips.

He halted, and after an instant's hesitation, stammered:

“I—I never dreamed you'd be around so early. I thought I'd run in as I was passing and build a fire for—for the kiddies. Get the place warmed up a bit before—”

“Will you let me say something, Mr. Percival?” she broke in, hurrying the words.

He fumbled for his hat. “I am sorry if you are annoyed, Miss Clinton. Please believe me when I tell you I hoped to get out before you came. I came early so that you would not find me—”

“You are not letting me say what I want to say.”

She came toward him, her hand extended. “Oh, I don't want to thank you for lighting the fire and putting the room in order. I want to tell you that I surrender.”

“Surrender?” he exclaimed, staring.

“I cannot fight you any longer,” she said breathlessly.

He looked dumbly first at her hand and then into her eyes. She was an arm's length away.

“Fight me?” he mumbled, uncomprehending.

“You—you said we could not be friends. I knew what you meant. If—if you love me,—oh, if you do love me, we need not be friends. But I know you love

me. If I did not know it I could not have come to you like this and—”

“Do I love you?” he cried out. “My God, I—I worship you.”

She held out both arms to him. “Then, we will try no more to be friends,” she murmured very softly. “Here are my arms. I surrender.”

A long time after he said to her as they sat before the jubilant, applauding fire,—the only witness to their ecstasy:

“Now I understand why we have never really been friends. It wasn't what God intended. Even in the beginning we were not friends. We thought we were,—but we weren't. We were lovers, Ruth,—from the start.”

“I tried very hard to hate you,” she sighed, drawing a little closer in the crook of his encircled arm. “How wonderful it all is,—how wonderful!”

“I never believed it could come true. I hoped, God, how I hoped,—but it didn't seem possible that this could ever happen. I've wanted to hold you in my arms, to kiss your dear lips, to kiss your eyes, to touch your hair, to press you tight against my heart. And here I am awake, not dreaming, not longing,—and I have done all these things. Lord! I wonder if I can possibly be dreaming all this for the thousandth time.”

“I was thinking of you when I came into this room,—not ten minutes ago,—and suddenly I saw you. I was terrified. I knew then that my dreams were coming true,—I knew it, and I don't know why I did not run away. Any self-respecting, modest girl would have done so. But what did I do? I, a supposedly sensible, well-brought-up—”

“You caught me trying to run away,” he broke in. “I give you my word, my heart was in my throat all the time I was working over that fire,—scared stiff with the fear that you would come in and bayonet me with one of those icicle looks of yours. And see what really happened!”

They were silent for some time, staring into the fire. Suddenly his arm tightened; he drew a sharp breath. She looked up quickly.

“Why are you frowning?”

“I was just thinking,” he replied after a moment's hesitation.

He gave a queer little jerk of his head, as if casting off something that bothered him. Into his paradise had slipped the memory of a night not long since when he held the yielding, responsive form of another woman in his arms, and felt the thrill of an ignoble passion surging through his veins. The kiss of the sensualist had burned on his lips for days; even to this hour it had clung to them; he was never free from the fire it had started in his imagination. And always on

Olga's red, alluring lips lurked the reminder that she had not forgotten; in her eyes lay the light of expectancy.

“Of whom?” asked Ruth, not coyly, but with a directness that startled him. She seemed to have divined that his thoughts were not of her in that brief, flitting instant.

“Of myself,” he answered, quite truthfully.

She laid her hand on his. “I forbid you to think of any one but me,” she said.

He was silent for a moment. “I shall never think of any one but you, Ruth Clinton,” he said earnestly. “You have nothing to fear.”

“I believe you,” she said, and pressed his hand tightly. After a slight pause, she went on, looking straight into his eyes: “I might have lost you, dear,—and I could have blamed no one but myself. She—she is very alluring.”

He shook his head. “I've always been of the opinion that Samson's hair needed trimming. His mother probably brought him up with Fauntleroy curls, poor chap. If he'd had his hair cut regularly, he wouldn't have looked such an ass when Delilah got through with him.”

“I don't quite follow the parable.”

“In other words, it's what a man's got in his head and not so much what he's got on it that makes him strong,” he explained, still more or less cryptically.

“I am beginning to see. You made good use of what you have in your head, is that it?”

“I made use of what you put into it a good many months ago, dear heart. You have been in my head and in my heart all these months, and so it was you who made me strong. Without you in there, I might have been as weak as Samson was before he had his hair cut. No sensible man blames Delilah. In fact, men are rather strong for her. When you stop to think how long old Samson got away with it, and what a shock it must have been to her after she trimmed him and found there wasn't anything left to speak of, you've just got to feel sorry for her. She took one good look at his head and understood why he let his hair grow. He was like the fellow who wears long whiskers to develop his chin. If Samson had had room enough in his head for a thought of anything except himself, Delilah wouldn't have been able to catch him napping.”

She could not help laughing. “You take a most original way of evading the point. Still, I am satisfied. You did not have room in your head for any one else but me,—and that's all there is to it. I can't help feeling tremendously complimented, however. She is quite capable of turning any man's head.”

“She plays fair, Ruth,” he said seriously. “She keeps the danger signal up all the time. That's more than you can say for most women.”

“Yes,” said she; “she plays fair. She is a strange woman. She has given me a lot of advice,—and I am just beginning to take it.”

“If I had believed what she told me three months ago,” said he, “this glorious hour would have been advanced just that length of time.”

Ruth stiffened. “What did she tell you?”

“She told me I was a fool and a coward; that all I had to do was to walk up to you and say 'Here, I want you,' and that would have been the end of my suspense. She told me something I didn't know and couldn't believe.”

“Indeed! I like her impudence! She—”

“She told me you were as much in love with me as I was with you. Honest,—was she right?”

Ruth sighed. “I suppose she was right.”

“And would you have come to me if I had said 'I want you '?”

“If you had said it as you say it now, I—listen! Good gracious! There are the children!”

She sprang to her feet, blushing furiously. The door opened and three small children were fairly blown into the room,—three swarthy, black-eyed urchins who stared in some doubt at the “boss” and the adored “teacher.”

“Good morning, children,” she cried out jerkily, and then glanced at each of the windows in quick succession. “You don't suppose,—” she began under her breath, turning to Percival with a distressed look in her eyes.

“I wouldn't put it above 'em,” said he, cheerfully.

“We should have thought of the windows.”

“Thank God, we didn't,” he cried.

He went out into the storm with the song of the lark in his heart.

“God, what a beautiful place the world is!” he was saying to himself, and all the while the sleet was stinging his radiant face with the relentlessness of angry bees.

CHAPTER XIII.

As he swung jauntily down the road in the direction of his “office,” all the world might have seen that it was a beautiful place for him. He passed children hurrying to school, and shouted envious “hurry-ups” to them. Men and women, going about the morning's business, felt better for the cheery greetings he gave them. Even Manuel Crust, pushing a crude barrow laden with fire-wood, paused to look after the strutting figure, resuming his progress with an annoyed scowl on his brow, for he had been guilty of a pleasant response to Percival's genial “good-morning.” Manuel went his way wondering what the devil had got into both of them.

Olga Obosky was peering from a window as he passed her hut. He waved his hand at her,—and then shook his head. He had passed her three dancing-girls some distance down the road, romping like children in the snow.

Buck Chizler was waiting for him outside the “office.” The little jockey had something on his mind,—something that caused him to grin sheepishly and at the same time look furtively over his shoulder.

“Can I see you for a coupla minutes, A. A.?” he inquired, following the other to the door.

“Certainly, Buck,—as many minutes as you like.”

Buck discovered Randolph Fitts and Michael Malone seated before the fire. He drew back.

“I'd like to see you outside,” he said nervously.

“Well, what is it?” asked Percival, stepping outside and closing the door.

Buck led him around the corner of the hut.

“It ain't so windy here,” he explained. “Awful weather, ain't it?”

“What's troubling you, Buck? Put on your cap, you idiot. You'll take cold.”

“Plumb nervousness,” said Buck. “Same as if I was pulling up to the start with fifty thousand on the nag. I want to ask your advice, A. A. Just a little private matter. Oh, nothing serious. Nothing like that, you know. I just thought maybe you'd—Gosh, I never saw it snow like this up home, did you? Funny, too, when you think how tropical we ought to be. There was a bad blizzard a coupla years ago in Buenos Aires, but—”

“Come to the point, Buck. What's up?”

Buck lowered his voice. “Well, you see it's this way. I'm thinking of getting married. Tomorrow, if possible. Don't laugh! I don't see anything to laugh at in __”

“I beg your pardon, old chap. I couldn't help laughing. It's because I'm happy. Don't mind me. Go ahead. You're thinking of getting married, eh? Well, what's to prevent?”

“Do you approve of it? That's what I want to know.”

“Sure. Of course, I approve of it.”

“I just thought I'd make sure. You see, nobody's ever got married here before, and I didn't know what you'd think of me—er—sort of breaking the ice, don't you see.”

“She's finally said 'yes,' has she? Good girl! Congratulations, old chap,—thousands of 'em'—millions.”

“Well, that takes some of the load off my mind,” said Buck, as they shook hands. “Now, there's one or two things more. First, she says she won't come and live in a hut where five men besides myself are bunking. I don't blame her, do you? Second, she says if we ever get rescued from this island, she won't let me go to the war,—not a step, she swears. I put up a holler right away. I says to her I was on my way to the war before I ever met her, and then she says I ain't got anything on her. She was going over to nurse. But she says if she gets married she's going to claim exemption, or whatever they call it, and she says I got to do the same,—'cause we'll both have dependents then. Then I says the chances are the war's over by this time anyhow, and she says a feller in the Argentine told her on his word of honour it wouldn't be over for five years or more. But that's a minor point. What's rusting me is this: how am I going to get rid of them five guys in my cabin?”

“Have you told them you're going to be married?”

“Oh, hell, they're the ones that told me.”

“It's pretty rough weather to turn men out into the cold, unfeeling world, Buck.”

Buck scratched his ear in deep perplexity. “Well, it's got me guessing.” He slumped into an attitude of profound dejection. “What we'd ought to have done, A. A., was to build a hotel or something like that. If we had a hotel here, there'd be so blamed many weddings you couldn't keep track of 'em. That's the only thing that's holding people back. Why, half the unmarried fellers here are

thinking about getting married. They're thinking, and thinking, and thinking, morning, noon and night. And they've got the girls thinking, too,—and most of the widders and old maids besides. I don't see how a smart feller like you, A. A., happened to overlook the possibility of just this kind of thing happening."

"Good Lord, what have I got to do with it?"

"Why, darn it all, you'd ought to have put up a few huts with 'For Rent' signs on 'em, or else—"

"By George, Buck! I've got it," cried Percival excitedly. "Have you thought of a wedding journey?"

"A what?"

"Wedding trip,—honeymoon."

"Well, we might walk up and down the main street here a coupla times," said Buck sarcastically. "Or take a stroll along the beach or something like that."

"What's the matter with a nice long sea voyage?"

"Say, I'm not kidding about this thing," exclaimed Mr. Chizler, bristling. "I'm in dead earnest."

"Has it occured to you that the Doraine is lying out there in the harbour—Here! Look out! I don't like being hugged by—"

"My gosh, A. A! Oh, my gosh!" barked the ecstatic bridegroom-apparent. "How did you happen to think of such a beautiful, wonderful—"

"How did I happen to think of it?" shouted Percival, just as ecstatically. "Why, darn your eyes, why shouldn't I think of it? Why did old Noah think of the Ark? Why, I ask you?"

"He didn't," said Buck succinctly. "The feller that wrote the Bible thought of it."

"What time is it? Oh, Lord, nearly three hours yet before school is out."

"Say, are you off your base,—lemme smell your breath. You act like—Wait a second! There's something else I want to speak to you about. Is it—is it all right for me to get married? She says I'll have to get your O. K. before she'll move an inch. She says nobody can do anything around here without you say so. So I—"

"You tell her I give my consent gladly, Buck, my boy. Give her a good kiss for me, and say I'll speak to Captain Trigger this afternoon about passage on the Doraine. By George, I—I think I'll go and speak to him about it now."

"Much obliged, boss. By gosh, you are a brick. There ain't anything you won't do for a friend, is there?"

Percival blushed and stammered. “I—I've got to see him anyhow, Buck,—so don't thank me. By the way, while I'm about it, I suppose I might as well speak to Parson Mackenzie, eh? Or is it to be Father Francisco? And that reminds me, I'll have to see Malone and find out about the legality,—got to have the law on our side, you see, Buck. Something in the form of a license,—United States of America and all that,—and also see about fixing up desirable quarters on board the Doraine. I may have to transfer quite a lot of—er—furniture and so forth from my hut to the ship, and—”

“Gee whiz, A. A., you mustn't go to so blamed much trouble for me,” gasped the delighted Buck.

“Eh? What? Oh, the devil take you! Beat it now. I'm going to be mighty busy this morning.”

“I'll do as much for you, A. A., if you ever get married,” cried Buck, once more wringing the other's hand. Then he was off up the road like a schoolboy.

Shortly before the noon recess, Percival returned from the Doraine. By this time, the news had spread through the camp that there was to be a wedding. Every one he met hailed him with the excited question:

“Say, have you heard the news?”

“What news?”

“There's going to be a wedding.”

“Good Lord!” said Percival to himself. “They must have been peeping through those windows after all.”

Finding that he had ten minutes to spare before school was out, he decided to call upon Mrs. Spofford. That lady received him with icy politeness.

“I have been expecting you,” she said. “Your friend Mr. Shay honoured us with a visit yesterday. My niece is at the school. Will you sit down and wait for her, or—”

“I beg your pardon. What was that you said about Shay?”

“I said he came to see us.”

Percival stared, “He did?”

“Please sit down, Mr. Percival. Do not ask me to tell you anything more about Mr. Shay,” she went on hurriedly, and in some confusion. “I don't believe he would like it,—and as he is a dangerous character, I beg of you not to—”

“If Soapy Shay dared to intrude—”

“I implore you, do not think anything more about it. He was most courteous

and polite and all that."

He remained standing, his gaze fixed upon her face. Somehow, he guessed the nature of Soapy's visit.

"I suppose he came as a tale-bearer."

"I must decline to discuss the matter, Mr. Percival."

"Mrs. Spofford," he began, with all the dignity of a courtier, "I have come to request the hand of your niece in marriage. I have loved her from the very—"

"Oh, God!" groaned the trembling lady. "It has come at last! It has come,—just as I feared. For pity's sake, Mr. Percival, spare her! She is—"

"I beg your pardon," he broke in, flushing. "I think you misunderstand me. I am asking your consent to marry her. I believe it is still customary among gentlemen to consult the—"

"Permit me to interrupt you, Mr. Percival," said she, regaining her composure and her austerity. "What you ask is quite impossible. My niece is,—ah,—I may say tentatively engaged. I am sorry for you. Perhaps it would be just as well if you did not wait for her to come in. She will be—"

"Mrs. Spofford, I am obliged to confess to you that I have already spoken to Miss Clinton, and I may add that she is not tentatively engaged. She has promised to be my wife."

She drew back as if struck. She was silent for many seconds.

"It would appear that my consent is not necessary, Mr. Percival," she said at last, "Why do you come to me?"

"Because, while you may not suspect it, I was born a gentleman," said he stiffly.

She received this with a slight nod of the head and no more.

"My niece, no doubt in her excitement, has neglected to ask you one or two very important questions," she said levelly. "First of all, have you any means of convincing us that you do not already possess a wife?"

He started. "You are right," he said. "That is an important question, and she has not asked it. I have no means of convincing you that I have never been married, Mrs. Spofford. My word of honour is the only thing I can offer."

She regarded him narrowly. "Do you consider that sufficient, Mr. Percival?"

"I do," said he simply. She waited for him to go on, and was distinctly impressed by his failure to do so. So far as he was concerned, there was nothing more to be added.

“How are we to know what your past life contains? You may have left your homeland in disgrace, you may even have been a fugitive from justice. We have no means of knowing. You were a stowaway on board the Doraine. That much, at least, we do know. We know nothing more. You are smart, you are clever. Surely you must see yourself that under other circumstances, under normal conditions, my niece would not have condescended to notice you, Mr. Percival. We are on an undiscovered island, remote from the environment, the society, the __”

“Permit me to remind you, Mrs. Spofford,” he interrupted, a trifle coldly, “that you just remarked that you know nothing whatever about me. Isn't it barely possible that my life may contain something desirable in the shape of family, position and environment?”

“I recall that Mr. Gray did speak of knowing the Percival family. My niece never allows me to forget it.”

“Mr. Gray did not know my family. He knew of my family, Mrs. Spofford, if that conveys anything to you. Not that they would not have been proud to have known him, for he was a gentleman. As for my own case, I can only say that I am not a fugitive from justice, nor have I done anything more disgraceful than the average young man who has been through college and who, ignoring the counsel of his father, proceeds to find out for himself the same things that his father had found out a great many years before,—and his father before him, and so on back to the beginning of man. My great-great-grandfather on my mother's side was a comparatively recent settler in America. He didn't come over from Scotland until about 1750. My father's people came over in the days of Lord Baltimore. Most of my remote ancestors were very wicked men. You will find that one of them was executed in the Tower of London the same week that Lady Jane Grey went to her death, and another was openly in love with Mistress Nell Gwyn, thereby falling into disgrace with a monarch named Charles. I admit that I come of very bad stock.”

A fleeting twinkle lurked in her eyes.

“You are very adroit, Mr. Percival.”

“Which is as much as to say that I have an agreeable and interesting way of lying. Is that what you wish to imply, Mrs. Spofford?”

“Not at all. I say you are adroit because you place me in an embarrassing position. If I believe your confession that you come of bad stock, I must also believe that you come of an exceedingly good old Maryland family.” He bowed very low. “My niece, Mr. Percival, is an orphan. I am and have been her

protector since she was fourteen years of age. She is the possessor of a large fortune in her own right. Her father,—who was my brother,—gave her into my care when he was on his death-bed. I leave you to surmise just what were his dying words to me. She was his idol. I have not failed him in any respect. You ask me to give my consent to your marriage. I cannot do so. No doubt you will be married, just as you have planned. She loves you. I have known it for months. I have seen this day and hour coming,—yes, I have seen it even more clearly than she, for while she struggled desperately to deceive herself she has never been able to deceive me. You are a strong, attractive man. The glamour of mystery rests upon you. You have done prodigious deeds here, Mr. Percival. All of this I recognize, and I should be unfair to my own sense of honour were I to deny you my respect and gratitude. I must be fair. Fear has been the cause of my attitude toward you,—not fear of you, sir, but fear for my niece. Now I am confronted by the inevitable. The thing I have tried so hard to avoid has come to pass. In these circumstances, I am forced to confess that I have not been without a real, true admiration for you. I admit that I have felt a great security with you in command of our camp. But, even so, you are not the man I would have chosen to be Ruth's husband. The time is surely coming when we will be delivered from this island prison, when we will return to the life and the people and the conditions we knew before catastrophe made a new world for us. I am thinking of that time, Mr. Percival, and not of the present. I fear my niece is thinking only of the present and not of the future."

He had listened with grave deference. "Forgive me if I appear impertinent, Mrs. Spofford, but is it not, after all, the past you are thinking about?"

She did not answer at once. His question had startled her.

"Youth does not live in the past," he went on quietly. "It deals only with the present. I love Ruth Clinton,—I love her with the cleanest love a man can feel for a woman. It will not alter when we leave this island. If we are fated to spend the rest of our lives here, it will endure to the end."

"You are speaking for yourself," she said. "Can you speak for Ruth?"

"No, I cannot," he admitted. "Nor can you," he added boldly. "That is what I meant when I asked if you were not thinking chiefly of the past. I cannot say that Ruth will love me always, but I can say this: she loves me now, as I love her, and in her heart she has said just what I said to you a moment ago,—that her love will endure."

"I daresay I do think more of the past than of the present, Mr. Percival. You are right about the future. It is a blank page, to be glorified or soiled by what is

set down upon it. Fate has thrown you two together. Perhaps it was so written in the past that you despise. A single turn of the mysterious wheel of fortune brought you into her life. Half a turn,—the matter of minutes,—and you would never have seen each other, and you would have gone your separate ways to the end of time without even knowing that the other existed. No doubt you both contend that you cannot live without each other. It is the usual wail of lovers. But are you quite as certain in your minds that you would have perished if you had never seen each other?”

The note of irony did not escape him. He smiled. “In that case, Mrs. Spofford, we should not have existed at all.”

She shook her head despairingly. “You are too clever for me,” she said. “I warn you, however, that I shall do everything in my power to persuade Ruth to reconsider her promise to you.”

“Nothing could be fairer than that,” said he, without rancor. “If she comes to me this afternoon and says she has changed her mind and cannot marry me, I shall not ask her again. Will you be kind enough, Mrs. Spofford, to include that in your argument? It may spare her a lot of worry and anxiety.”

He bowed ceremoniously and took his departure. She went to the window and, drawing aside the curtain, watched him until he disappeared down the road. Then, as the curtain fell into place, she said to herself:

“Their children will be strong and beautiful.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A fortnight later, Ruth and Percival were married. He was now governor of Trigger Island.

The ceremony took place at noon on the Green in front of the Government Building,—(an imposing name added to the already extensive list by which the “meeting-house” was known),—and was attended by the whole population of the island. His desire for a simple wedding had been vigorously, almost violently opposed by the people. Led by Randolph Fitts and the eloquent Malone, they demanded the pomp and ceremony of a state wedding. As governor of Trigger Island, they clamoured, it was his duty to be married in the presence of a multitude! A general holiday was declared, a great “barbecue” was arranged—(minus the roasted ox),—and when it was all over, the joyous throng escorted the governor and his lady to the gaily decorated “barge” that was to transport them from the landing to the Doraine.

Olga Obosky made the bride's bonnet and veil, and draped the latter on the morning of the wedding day. Like the fabled merchants of the Arabian Nights she appeared to the bride-elect and displayed her wares. From the depths of her theatre trunks she produced a bewildering assortment of laces, chiffon, silks, and the filmiest of gauzes.

“You must not be afraid zat they will contaminate you,” she explained, noting the look of dismay in Ruth's eyes. “Zey have never adorned my body, zey have never been expose to the speculating eye of the public, zey have not hid from view these charms of mine. No, these are fair and virtuous fabrics. It is you who will be the first to wear them, my friend. Take your choice. See! Zis piece, is it not wonderful? It comes from Buda Pesth. One day it would perhaps have caressed my flesh in the Dance of the Sultan's Dream,—but, alas,—zat is not to be. Feel, my friend,—take it in your hand. See? You could hide it in the palm of one of them,—and presto! Throw it outspread,—and it is like a blanket of mist filling the room. It is priceless. It is unobtainable. None except Obosky can afford to dance in such imperial stuff as this. Take it,—it is yours. It is my pleasure that you should have it. Better far it should be your bridal veil than to drape these abandoned legs of mine.”

And so it was that the scant costume of the Sultan's Dream became the bridal veil of the governor's lady.

If Olga Obosky was sore at heart, she gave no sign. On the contrary, she revealed the sprightliest interest in the coming nuptials. Percival himself had told her the news within the hour after his interview with Mrs. Spofford. In his blind happiness, he had failed to notice the momentary stiffening of her body as if resisting a shock; he did not see the hurt, baffled look that darkened her eyes for a few seconds, and the swiftly passing pallor that stole into her face and vanished almost instantly. He saw only the challenging smile that followed close upon these fleeting signs, and the mocking gleam in her eyes.

“So?” she had said. “So the citadel is yours, my friend. Hail to the chief! I salute you. But consider, O conqueror, what it is you are about to do. You are setting a woeful example. There will be a stampede, a panic. People will trample each other under foot in ze mad rush for captivity. The wedding bell will crack under ze strain of so much ringing. Everybody will be getting married, now zat they find it is so easy and so simple. I congratulate you, my friend. You have been very slow,—I have said she was yours for the asking, you will remember. She is good, she is beautiful, she is pure gold, my friend. I am her friend. Do not ever forget, my Percivail, I am her friend.”

He flushed warmly. He could not misinterpret her meaning. She spoke slowly, deliberately. It was renunciation on her part.

“I understand, Olga,” he said.

She smiled, and shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh, but you do not understand!” she cried. “You are so very much perplexed. It is enough for me that you are perplexed. I am content. I am the puzzle you will never solve. So! La la! You will never cease to wonder. Look!”

She pointed her finger at a man who was crossing the Green below them.

“I am a puzzle to zat man also. He thought that he understood.”

“Landover? What do you mean?”

A spasm of fury transformed her features. She hissed out the words:

“I did spit in his face last night,—zat is all.”

The thirteenth of April, 1918, came on Saturday. Defying superstition, Ruth selected it as her wedding day. It was a bright, warm autumn day, bestowed by a gallant sun, and there was great rejoicing over this evidence of God's approval. It came as a winter's whim, for that night the skies were black and thunderous; the winds roared savagely between the lofty walls of Split Mountain and whined across the decks of the slanting Doraine, snug in the little basin, while out on the boundless deep the turmoil of hell was raging.

And so began the honeymoon of the stowaway and the lady fair, even as the “voyage” of the jockey and his bride had begun a fortnight before. They sat at the Captain's table in the ghostly, dismantled saloon. Above them hung two brightly burnished lanterns, shedding a mellow light upon the festal board. Outside, the whistling wind, the swish of the darkened waters, the rattle of davits and the creak of the straining timbers.

Up from his place at the head of the table rose the gray and gallant skipper.

“Up, gentlemen,” said he, his face aglow. “I give you the health, the happiness and the never diminishing glory of the governor's lady.”

“May she never be less,” added the gaunt First Officer, who spent his days ashore watching the growth of a new Doraine and his nights on board with the failing master of the older one.

And in the rare old port from the Captain's locker they pledged the radiant bride.

“A long voyage and a merry one!” cried Mr. Codge, the purser, as he drained his goblet dry.

Mr. Furman Nicholas Chizler bowed very gravely to the lady on the Captain's right, and then to the one at his left.

“What care we which way we sail so long as the wind's behind us?” quoth he.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER I.

In the far-off Northland it is winter again,—the winter of 1919-20. Trigger Island is bright and clean with the furbishings of summer. It is January,—January without its coat of white,—January as green as the tender gourd.

There are a dozen graves or more on Cape Sunrise; Betty Cruise no longer lies alone out on the windswept point. Crudely chiseled on the rough headstones are names that have not been mentioned in this chronicle, still not the less enduring. One name is there, however, chipped in a great black slab from the face of Split Mountain, that will never be forgotten as long as Trigger Island exists: it is that of Captain Weatherby Trigger.

The master of the Doraine died aboard-ship in the second winter. After his death the ship was abandoned. Mr. Codge and the half-dozen old mariners who had made their home in the dismal hulk came ashore.

Grim and ugly and as silent as the grave, save for the winds that moan through her portholes and corridors, she lies rusting in sun and storm, a gloomy presence that fills the soul with awe. Even the birds of the air shun her barren decks; less fastidious bats have taken up their abode in the heart of her, and spiders great and small are at work on a sickly shroud.

Twenty months have passed. Christmas and New Year's day have twice been celebrated and another Easter Sunday has found its way into the faithful journal of Peter Snipe, and with them two amazing Fourths of July when there was coasting on the long slopes and winter sports on the plains. There has been one bountiful harvest and seed has been sown for yet another. The full length of the sunny plain is under cultivation. The bins in the granaries are well-filled with the treasures of the soil; the gardens have increased and flourished; the warehouse is stacked with fresh and dried fruits, vegetables, honey, and row upon row of preserves! Great earthen jars, modeled with all the severity of the primitive cave-dweller, serve as receptacles. The grist-mill on Leap Frog River is busy from dawn till dusk; the forge rings with the music of hammer and anvil; a saw-mill in the heart of Dismal Forest hums its whining tune all day long. A noisy, determined engine, fashioned by mechanics out of material taken from the engine and boiler room of the Doraine provides the motive power for the saws and the means to produce ponderous, far-reaching blasts on the transferred “fog-horn.”

New and more commodious huts have gone up, roads have been blazed through the forests, a logging ferry plies between the opposite shores of Mott Haven, and a ship is on the ways above the landing “stage.”

At the top of Split Mountain stands a lofty wireless tower. For months it has been spitting vain messages to the four winds. Out of the great silences at rare intervals come faint flickers of radio calls, jumbled, indistinct, undecipherable, —but, for all that, definite pulse beats of a far-off life.

Trigger Island went mad with joy when the first of these aerial mutterings was reported down from the mountain-top. “Only a question of time now,” they cried in their delirium. But weeks went by before another sound was heard. Now the report of feeble, long-separated manifestations, like vague spirit-rappings, no longer caused excitement or enthusiasm,—only a rueful shaking of heads.

Lieutenant Platt's station at the top of the mountain is a rude, elementary affair, notwithstanding the many weary, puzzling, disheartening months spent in its construction. The damaged, almost useless dynamo from the Doraine had to be repaired and conveyed to the crest of the eminence; what seemed to be fruitless ages were consumed in devising an engine with power sufficient to produce even the feeble results that followed. And when the task of installing the plant was completed, the effective radius was far short of a hundred miles. Constant efforts were being made to develop greater sending power, but the means at hand were inadequate, the material unobtainable.

The firing of the Doraine's gun had long since been discontinued. The supply of shells being greatly reduced, Lieutenant Platt decided to waste no more of them, but to wait for some visible evidence that a vessel was within signalling distance: a shadowy plume of smoke on the far horizon or the white tip of a sail peeping over the rim of the world.

Frugality is the watchword. The days of plenty are sternly guarded so that their substance may not be squandered; always there is the thought of the lean year that may come, the year when the harvests fail and famine stalks naked through the land.

The first law, therefore, is thrift. Not thrift in its common, accepted sense, based on the self-denial of the individual, but a systematic shoulder-to-shoulder stand for the general welfare of the community. There is no such thing as waste on Trigger Island. The grim spectre of want and privation treads softly behind every mortal there, and there is none who treats its invisible presence with disdain. Even the wood-ashes from stoves and fireplaces are carefully hoarded in hoppers, for the alkaline solution obtained by treating them with water is lye.

This lye is being used chiefly in the production of a soap not unlike that made by thrifty farmers' wives in the Argentine, experimentation with the pulpy fruit of a tree belonging to the variety known as Sapindus marginatus bringing about rather astonishing results.

For many months of the year the people wear sandals on their bare feet. Only those who toil in the forests don the uncouth boots turned out by the firm of cobblers known as Block & Nicklestick. Shoes, boots and slippers of another day are zealously guarded by their owners, in anticipation of still another day,—the day of deliverance. “Waste not, want not,” is the motto of Trigger Island.

The second winter brought a double catastrophe, and for days thereafter deepest gloom prevailed. Even the stout-hearted Percival drooped under the weight of it.

Fire wiped out the work of months in the space of a few bleak, bitter hours. The sturdy little ship that was so well along toward completion was destroyed.

Months of faithful, patient, dogged toil had resulted in the construction of a stout hull which stood proudly on the ways to be admired and glorified by the eager, confident supporters of the determined little band of builders. Six weeks more would have seen the vessel off the ways and floating gaily on the surface of the snug little basin, ready for the final touches, the provisioning and the ultimate departure of the hardy company that was to take her out into the open stretches in quest of the helping hand. For weeks a devoted, one-minded community had been preparing food, raiment and comforts for the men who were to go forth in the new Doraine. The masts and spars were in place, the forecastle and cabin were almost ready for occupancy, the galley was nearing completion,—and then came swift, relentless disaster.

The night was cold and windy. Down at the water's edge, almost under the bulging side of the ship, two men had their quarters at one end of the low, rambling carpenter shop. At the other end was located the forge. The very thing they were there to guard against happened on this miserable night. Fire broke out in the forge.

The man on watch had fallen asleep. His name was Smiley. It is mentioned here for the only time in this narrative.

Shortly before midnight, his companion was awakened by the smell of smoke. He scrambled out of his blankets on the floor,—and cursed the man who still slept in his chair beside the smoke-befogged lantern on the end of a carpenter's bench. Flames were creeping along the wooden partition separating the forge from the shop. Half a mile away three hundred men were sleeping,—but half a

mile is half a mile. Before the watchmen could sound the alarm, after their first courageous efforts to subdue the blaze, the building was a roaring mass of flames and a gleeful wind had carried tongues of fire to the side of the vessel where they licked shapeless black patterns at first and then swiftly turned them to red.

Stark-eyed, shivering people stood far back among the trees throughout the rest of the night and watched the work of months go up in flame and smoke. Nothing could be done to save the ship. Hewn from the hardiest trees in the forest, caulked and fortified to defy the most violent assaults of water, she was like paper in the clutch of flames. In the grey of early morn the stricken people slunk back to their cabins and gave up hope. For not only was their ship destroyed but the priceless tools and implements with which she had been built were gone as well. It was the double catastrophe that took the life, the spirit, out of them.

And while the day was still breaking, the man who had slept at his post, stole off into the forest and cut his throat from ear to ear.

But now, months afterward, another ship is on the ways. Indomitable, undaunted, the builders rose above disaster and set to work again. New tools were fashioned from steel and iron and wood,—saws, chisels, sledges, planes and hammers—in fact, everything except the baffling augurs. Resolute, unbeaten hands toiled anew, and this time the humble craft was not to be given a luckless name.

Superstition was rife. All save Andrew Mott saw ill-omen in the name “Doraine.” Steadfastly he maintained that as the Doraine had brought them safely to the island, guided by a divine Providence, a Doraine could be trusted to take them as miraculously away. And as for changing the name of his prattling ward, he fairly roared his objection; though an uncommonly mild man for a sailor, he uttered such blasphemous things to a group of well-meaning women that even Sheriff Soapy Shay was aghast.

After the dreary period that followed the disaster, there came a sharp awakening as from a dream filled with horrors. Something lying dormant in the com-mon breast had stirred. It was the unbeaten spirit that would not die. These men and women lifted up their heads and beheld the star of hope undimmed. In a flash, the aspect changed.

“We must start all over again,” was the cry that awoke them, and from that time on there was no such word as fail in the lexicon of Trigger Island.

Slowly, laboriously out of the ashes rose a new hull, a stauncher one than its

ill-fated predecessor. The year wasted in the building of the first ship was lamented but not mourned. Cheerfulness, even optimism, prevailed throughout the village. No man, no woman lifted the voice of complaint. Resignation took the form of stoicism. A sort of dogged taciturnity was measurably relieved by the never-failing spirit of camaraderie. There was even a touch of bravado in the attitude of these people toward each other,—as of courage kept up by scoffing. Even Death, on his sombre visits, was regarded with a strange derision by those who continued to spin. They had cheated him not once but many times, and they mocked him in their souls.

“I'm not afraid of Death,” was Buck Chizler's contribution. “I've just discovered that Death is the rottenest coward in the world. He either waits till you get too blamed old to fight, or else he jumps on you when you ain't looking, or when you're so weak from sickness you don't care what happens. I used to be afraid of Death. And why? Because I wasn't onto the old bum; Why, look at what he does. He jumps onto weeny little babies and feeble old women and—and horses. Now, I'm onto him, and I ain't got any use for a cheap sport,—not me.”

The little community had taken to religion. As is invariably the case, adversity seeks surcease in some form of piety. Men who had not entered a church since the days of their childhood, men who had scoffed at the sentimentality of religion, now found consolation in the thing they had once despised. They were abashed and bewildered at first, as one after another they fell into the habit of attending services. They were surprised to find something that they needed, something that made life simpler and gentler for them, something uplifting.

“We're a queer mess of Puritans,” reflected Randolph Fitts. “You know that parrot of old Bob Carr's? Well, he took it out and wrung its neck last night,—after all the time, and trouble, and patience he spent in giving her a swell private education. There never was a bird that could swear so copiously as that bird of Bob's. He taught her every thing she knew. He worked day and night to provide her with an up-to-date vocabulary. He used to lie awake nights thinking up new words for old Polly to conquer. Now he says the blamed old rip was deceiving him all the time. She began springing expletives on him that he'd never heard of before in all his forty years before the mast. She first began using them a couple of months ago when he undertook to reform her. He started in to teach her to say 'good gracious' and 'goodness me' and 'hoity-toity' and all such stuff, and she cursed so loud and so long that he had to throw a bucket of water on her.

“Every time he came home from church, that redheaded harridan would open up on him with such a string of vituperation that he had to hold his ears so's not

to forget himself and backslide. Well, it got so that Bob couldn't live with her any longer. She simply wouldn't puritanize. The nearest he ever got her to saying 'good' was when she said it with only one 'o,' and then as prefix to 'dammit.' So he decided the only way to reform her was to murder her. She managed to nip a piece out of his hand while he was doing it, however, and he's had the hump all day because he fell from grace and said something he'd oughtn't to. Yes, sir; we're a queer mess of Puritans. Look at us. Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Jews, infidels, Theosophists,—even Christian Scientists,—all rolled up into one big bundle labeled: 'Handle with Prayer.' We know nearly all the Ten Commandments by heart, and the Beatitudes flow from us in torrents. My wife was saying only the other night that if Sheriff Shay didn't arrest that bird for using profane language, she'd start a petition to have—Hello, Soapy! I didn't know you were present."

"What was she going to do?" demanded the Sheriff of Trigger Island.

"There's no use telling you now. It's too late. Polly has gone to a place I don't dare mention, so what's the use talking about it?"

"I can't go 'round pinchin' fallen parrots," growled Soapy. "Besides, I'm the feller that learned her most of the cuss-words old Bob never heard before. I never saw a bird that was so anxious to improve. She used to set there with her ear cocked, just simply crazy to learn something new. Every time she'd see me coming she'd begin to hop up and down on her perch and call me names, figurin' I'd lose my temper and give her a tongue lashin'. Gosh, I'm glad she's dead. It was gettin' to be an awful nuisance chasing parrots out of the trees back of Bob's house. They got so's they'd come down there and set around all day pickin' up things she said. Somebody told me the other day he heard a parrot 'way up in the woods swearin' like a sailor. He fired a club at it, and what do you think it said to him?"

"If you weren't such an ungodly liar, Soapy, I'd ask you," said Chief Justice Malone.

Soapy regarded him sorrowfully.

"If you keep on sayin' things like that, Judge, I'll have to tell your wife you ain't true to her," said he.

"And that would be the most prodigious lie you ever told," exclaimed Mr. Malone.

"Sure. You and me know it's a lie, but you'd ketch hell, just the same."

CHAPTER II.

The population of Trigger Island has increased. Following the example of Buck Chizler and the Governor himself, scores of dubious lovers took heart. They succeeded in dispelling certain misgivings—and doubts lurking in the hearts,—not to say consciences,—of approximately three-fourths of the unmarried women on the island, with the result that Father Francisco and Parson Mackenzie were kept exceedingly busy for a number of weeks.

The “state,” guided by the newly elected Chief Justice, extracted vows even more severe than those incorporated in the marriage service. And yet, despite the emphatic declarations of certain candidates,—principally male,—there remained in the minds of all,—including brides,—a lingering doubt. On the other hand, several ardent and undoubtedly honest gentlemen were unable to marry the objects of their affection for the simple reason that too many people were able to recall the lamentations of the ladies themselves, in the early days when it was customary to suffer because of the suspense and agony their poor husbands were enduring at home.

The case of Joe Hooker and Matilda Larson was particularly distressing, and ultimately led to the passage of a rather drastic law by the Council. Judge Malone was the father of this law. It provided for the automatic annulment of all previous marriages at the expiration of two years,—provided, however, the absent husband or wife didn't turn up to contest the matter. This law also granted absolute freedom to the absent husband or wife, who was thereby authorized to remarry without further notice,—or words to that effect. It was, declared Randolph Fitts, a perfectly just and equable law, and would no doubt ease the minds of quite a number of people in far-off lands,—if they ever heard of it.

Joe and Matilda had been married nearly two months when, in the thick of a connubial row, he demanded her passport. He even went so far as to threaten her with his if she didn't produce it at once. Matilda's temper was no milder than Joe's. She not only dug up her passport but a marriage certificate as well, while all he could show was a passport. It was a very unfortunate contretemps, in view of the fact that they shortly afterwards kissed and “made up.” It so happened that there were quite a number of witnesses to the flaunting of these damaging documents, and as Trigger Island was then in the first stages of a religious upheaval, it was impossible to overlook this definite instance of iniquity. Despite

the recantations of the chagrined couple,—and, it must be added, the surreptitious disappearance of the incriminating papers,—the matter was brought before the tribunal of justice. Chief Justice Malone was equal to the emergency. Indeed, he had been expecting something of the sort, and was prepared. He ordered both of the interested parties to bring suit for divorce from their legal spouses, one for “failure to provide,” the other for “desertion,” and promptly granted decrees, service by publication having been obtained through the medium of the Trigger Island Pioneer, printed monthly by Peter Snipe, editor and publisher, limited to an edition of one, owing to the scarcity of paper, and posted conspicuously for all subscribers on the bulletin board in front of the “government building.” Additional spice was lent to the affair by the surprising reluctance of Joe and Matilda to re-enter the paradise from which they had been ejected. Apparently they had had enough of each other. Moreover, they had both “got religion” and insisted on repenting at leisure, separately and alone. But people took a very decided stand in the matter. They could repent in any manner they liked after Matilda's baby was born, but not before. And so they were married once more, and, strange to relate, lived happily and contentedly thereafter.

Now, while all this may strike the reader as footless and trivial, it really has a distinct place in the chronicles of Trigger Island. If, perforce, the writer has succeeded in treating the situation facetiously, it should not be assumed that the people of Trigger Island had any desire or inclination to be funny about it. On the contrary, they took it very seriously, and quite naturally so, if one stops to consider the narrow confines by which their very existence was bounded. There were no such things as “trifles” in the daily life of Trigger Island. The smallest incident took on the importance of an event, the slightest departure from the ordinary at once became significant. In other circumstances, these people would have been vastly amused by the quixotic settlement of the affairs of Joe and Matilda; they would have grinned over the extraordinary decree of Justice Malone, and they would have taken it all with an indulgent wink. As a matter of fact, they were stern-faced and intense. They had made laws of their own, they had established a code. The violation of either was not to be countenanced. It was of no consequence to them that Judge Malone's methods were without precedent, that they were not even a travesty in the true light of the law.

No one was more soberly in earnest than Michael Malone himself. The proceedings were carried out with the utmost dignity and formality. There were no smiles, no jocose comments.

Nothing will serve more clearly to illustrate the sense of isolation to which the

people of Trigger Island had resigned themselves than the fact that they accepted the Judge's decision and the subsequent marriage as absolutely unassailable, either from a legal or an ethical point of view.

The town itself was flourishing. Traffic and commerce were carried on in the most systematic, organized manner. Everybody was busy. The utter impossibility for one man or set of men to profit at the expense of others naturally put a curb upon ambitions, but it did not subdue the spirit of enterprise.

There is a baby in the Governor's Mansion,—a lusty boy with blue eyes and an engaging smile. He is four months old, and his name is already a household word on Trigger Island. It is not Algernon, nor is it Adonis. It is John;—John Clinton Percival.

The Governor's Mansion is a pretentious structure. It has four rooms and a bath! A wide porch extends along the full front of the house, with a steeply pitched awning protecting it from the rain and sun. At one end of the porch is a very cosy arrangement of hand-wrought chairs and a commodious swinging seat. The other end, just off the parental bed-chamber, has been converted into an out-door sleeping-room for John C. Percival. The Governor's lady has no nursemaid. She does her own housework, her own washing and ironing, and she takes care of her own baby. (There is no such thing on Trigger Island as a servant. More than one woman who reads this tale will sigh and murmur something about Paradise.) Ruth still teaches in the little school. Though she is the first lady of the land, she supports herself, she earns her daily bread. It is the law irrevocable. There are no distinctions. Nor would she have it otherwise.

The “Mansion,” as it was universally called, stands alone at the upper end of the Green, facing the meeting-house. The nearest hut is at least two hundred yards away. Work on its construction was begun the day after the wedding. For weeks men had toiled eagerly, enthusiastically, voluntarily, and in the first gay days of spring it was completed. Since then, the same hands, the same thoughts, the same interests were constantly employed in improvements,—not only to the house itself but to the grounds about it. The Governor's “Mansion” became the plaything of the people. Percival's protests were received with amiable grins.

“It's our house, boss,—not yours,” explained Buck Chizler, whose spare time was largely expended in the development,—you might almost say, the financing,—of a flower-bed on the lawn. It was to be the finest flower-bed of them all, he swore. “This is government property and we, the people, are going to do what we please with it.”

“That's all very fine, Buck, but don't you think you ought to be spending your

spare hours with your wife, instead of puttering around here?”

“Do you know who the boss of this job is? My wife. I'm nothing but an ordinary day-laborer, a plain Mick, a sort of a Wop, obeying orders. Good gosh, you don't think I've got brains enough to design this flower-bed, do you? No, sirree! It takes an artist to think up a design like this. When I get all these rocks in place according to plans you'll see what I mean. It'll be a hum-dinger, A. A. This here thing running off this way is the tail. Come over here and look at it from this side,—it's upside down from where you're standin'.”

“Tail? Tail of what?”

“Tail of a horse. This is going to be a horse when it's finished.”

“My God!”

Buck was not above being irritated by the dismay in Percival's voice.

“Minnie's got her heart set on it, A. A.,” he explained. “It's going to be a sorrel horse, you see,—with a blue tail and a red head. Mustard, hollyhocks and geraniums is what she's going to plant here when I get the bed fixed. Socrates,—he was the best horse I ever straddled,—he was a sorrel. I took him down the—”

“As far as you've got, Buck, it looks more like a dachshund than a horse,” observed Percival.

Buck eyed his work deprecatingly. “That's because there ain't space enough. I had to either saw his legs off or else have him layin' down. Minnie had him kneelin' in her first sketch, but gosh, it was the funniest thing you ever saw. It ain't possible for a horse to kneel with his hind legs, but she had him doin' it all right,—kneeling forward, at that, with his tail stickin' straight up so's it wouldn't be in the way of his heels. It's all Jack Wales's fault. He simply would put that blamed sun-dial of his right in the middle of this plot,—and these doggoned gravel-walks running every which way give me the blind-staggers. Why, A. A., you got more gravel walks here than they've got in Central Park. And all these scrubby hedges, stone walls, fountains, flower-beds, cedar freaks,—my God, Perce, I'd hate to come home a little squiffed if I lived in that house of yours, 'specially at night. Look at old Pedro and Philippa over there, setting out that stuff that looks like sparrowgrass. And that prize job of Ed Keller's,—my God, A. A., what good is a dog kennel on this island? There ain't a dog inside a thousand miles. The only one we ever had was that poodle old Mrs. Velasco had, and it died before—”

“That isn't a kennel, Buck.”

“It ain't? Well, what is it?”

“It's a Swiss chalet.”

“What does Ed Keller know about Swiss chalets?”

“Nothing,—absolutely nothing, Buck,” admitted Percival forcibly.

A tall, perfectly straight flagpole graced the extensive “front-yard,” and from its peak floated the flag of Trigger Island,—a great white pennon with a red heart in the centre, symbolic of love, courage, fidelity. But on the tip of Split Mountain the Stars and Stripes still waves from sunrise to sunset.

The new cabins are farther up the slope of the mountains, overlooking what is now called the “old” town. There is something fairy-like in the picture one sees at night from the Green below. Dozens of lighted windows gleam softly through the foliage, for all the world like witches' lamps. The day reveals thin, blue plumes of smoke stealing out of the tops of the trees to be wafted off into nothingness; they come from invisible chimneys far down in the leafy fastnesses. Up here are the huts of the newly married. Almost without exception, they are tiny affairs, scarcely larger than the metaphorical bandbox. Each contains two rooms.

During the very hot weather in January and February, the long, curving beach is alive with oddly dressed bathers and idlers. This is at midday only, when the sun is so hot and fierce that all work ceases for two hours or more. Though the sun is hot, the water is never warm. A dip in the surf is all that any one save the hardiest cares to take. They loll on the cool white sands, under improvised shelters made of boughs, or indulge in spirited games on the long level stretches. This is the play-hour of the people throughout the hot months of summer. They “knock off” work of all sorts, and seek relief from the stifling heat of the woodland in the cool wet sands along the shore.

The costumes are strange and varied; some are pretty, others almost ludicrous. Small children appear in a scant breech-cloth; women of all ages and proportions wear a sort of one-piece “jumper,” arms bare and legs uncovered up to the knees. The men affect nothing except trunks made from coffee sacks. The few real bathing-suits belong to such experienced travellers as Nicklestick, Shine and the Blocks,—regular and persistent patrons of the hotels at Atlantic City, Palm Beach and Rockaway. They never travel without a full and complete equipment. Mr. Nicklestick, very superior in his red two piece “costume,” goes so far as to contend that a man never should be without a bathing-suit, because, says he, “it takes up no room in your trunk, and if you leave it at home some one else is sure to stretch it so's you can't use it yourself again.”

Olga Obosky and her three dancing-girls, Careni-Amori, and several of the

Brazilian ladies possess Ostend costumes in which they disport themselves with complacent disregard for public opinion, favourable or otherwise.

“She's got 'em all skinned a mile,” was Morris Shine's comment upon Olga's lithe, graceful figure. “Ain't that so, Abey?”

The remark was addressed to Abel Landover.

“Even so,” returned that gentleman, glaring at the offender, “it doesn't give you the right to call me Abey. You've got to cut it out, Shine. Understand?”

“Sure,” said the affable Morris. “Only I've got a brother named Abraham, and that was my father's name too. It comes natural to me to—Why, by gracious, she's got the Venus Belvedere lashed to the mast. Did you ever see—”

“I've never had the pleasure of seeing the Venus Belvedere,” interrupted Landover coldly.

“You haven't?” exclaimed Morris, amazed. “The armless wonder? You ain't seen her? Why, she's supposed to have the most perfect figger in the world. Maybe you've seen her without knowing what her name is. They never put the name on it, simply because every school boy and girl is supposed to know who it is without being told. Funny you don't know—Oh, she ain't alive, you know,—she ain't real. She's a statue,—thousands of 'em turned out every year. Gee, the feller that designed that statue must have cleaned up a pile. But, as I was saying, our little old Olga has got her—Say, did you ever see a figger like that?”

“Yes,” broke in Landover shortly, “thousands of them.”

Mr. Shine looked sceptical. “Well,” he said after a moment's reflection, and with studied politeness,—having already offended at the outset, “all I got to say is, you talk like a woman, that's all I got to say.”

Landover was a greatly changed man in these days. There had come a crisis in the affairs of Trigger Island, not many weeks before the second annual election in April, when he was obliged to show his true colours. The banker suddenly realized with a shock that he was actually involved in a well-organized, though secret plot to overthrow the so-called “government.” He had been completely deceived by the wily Manuel Crust and several of his equally wily friends. They professed to be organizing an opposition party to oust the dictatorial Percival and his clique from office at the ensuing election,—a feat, they admitted, that could be accomplished only by the most adroit and covert “educational” campaign, “under the rose” perforce, but justifiable in the circumstances. They had led Landover to believe that he was their choice for governor. They went among the people, insidiously sowing the seeds of discontent, hinting at the advantages to be obtained by the election of an entirely new set of officers, mostly from among

the people themselves, but headed by the ablest man on the island,—Abel T. Landover. They argued that as treasurer and comptroller of currency he had shown himself to be the only man qualified to direct the affairs of the people.

And Landover believed them. Despite his superior intelligence and his vaunted ability to size up his fellow man, he was as blind and unsuspecting as a child when it came to penetrating the real motives of the conspirators. Vain, self-important, possessed of an abnormal conceit, men of his type go ahead ruthlessly, ignoring the details, bent only on achieving the ultimate. In Landover's case, he made the fatal error of underestimating the craftiness of Manuel Crust; he looked upon him as a blatant, ignorant ruffian of the stripe best known to him as a “beer saloon politician,”—and known only by hearsay, at that. He regarded himself as the master-politician and Crust as a contemptible necessity.

As a matter of fact, Crust was using him to very materially advance his own ends. The big Portuguese had a very definite purpose in mind. He had no more intention of making Landover the chief man of the island than he had of flying to the moon. He,—Manuel Crust,—was to have that distinction! He despised Landover and all that he represented. He hated him because he was rich, educated, favoured by fortune,—and given to washing himself with unnecessary frequency and thoroughness. Manuel was foul of body as well as foul at heart. He bitterly resented the sanitary rules set up and enforced by the Council because those rules interfered with what he was pleased to call his personal liberty. Why should he be required to wash himself if he didn't want to do so? And why should he do a great many silly things that Dr. Cullen ordered, just because a lot of aristocrats were in the habit of doing them?

His hatred of Landover, however, was impersonal. The banker merely represented a class. On the other hand, he hated Percival as an individual; he hated him with every drop of blood in his black, venomous heart. He had a certain grudging regard,—it might even be called respect,—for the class to which Landover belonged; he was sometimes conscious of a strange but quite positive sense of his own inferiority. But he did not for an instant put Percival in the class with Landover. He looked upon the young American as being no better than himself, and yet the people from the Doraine had showered honours upon him, had made him their chief, had suffered him,—a vagabond without a penny to his name,—to marry the fairest and rarest woman of them all. What right had this interloper to everything that was worth having, while he, an honest fellow who always had paid his way, was denied even the smallest place in the councils of the land? What right had he, a tramp, to sit upon a throne?

Landover was an unwitting, but thoroughly self-satisfied dupe. He fitted in very nicely with Manuel's plan to gain control of the island. There were certain people who regarded the great banker as an apostle, a man to follow, to be imitated,—such men as Block, Nicklestick and a few others. Was he not one of the great financial geniuses of the day? Was he not a power, a tremendous power, in the banking world? Was he not a man who understood how to transform a dollar into a business block almost over-night? For a time, sentiment had played tricks with their boasted astuteness. Swept along by the current, they had failed to appreciate the true conditions. They began to realize that it had been a mistake to keep such men as Percival in power; behind the hand they went about convincing each other that it was high time to rectify the original error. These, in addition to the ignorant, easily persuaded rabble from the steerage,—who, by the way, could give ample testimony as to Percival's ability to “bluff,”—provided Crust with a decidedly formidable following. The steerage people had but to be reminded of the time when Percival tricked them so successfully.

Crust contended that if the American could fool them once, he would do so again,—in fact, he went so far as to say that he had been doing it all the time.

There was nothing open and above board about the methods of Manuel Crust. He proceeded about the business of fomenting dissatisfaction and strife with an artfulness surprising in one of his type. At no time did he openly denounce the “government.” He was very careful about that. A jesting word here, a derisive smile there, a shrug of the shoulders,—and in good time others less politic than himself began to do the talking. Others began to complain of the high-handed, dictatorial manner in which Percival and his friends ruled the community.

The secret, stealthy opposition grew apace; it assumed sinister proportions,—all the more sinister because it was masked by every outward sign of submission. Crust had won friends right and left among the very people who would have killed him not so many months before but for the very man he was planning to destroy.

Outwardly he had changed,—not subtly, it is true,—from a sullen, threatening bully into a hearty, smiling, sympathetic comrade who laid himself out to be obliging. Even Percival was puzzled, if not deceived, by this surprising transformation.

CHAPTER III.

It was Olga Obosky who discovered and exposed the plot. A young Spaniard had fallen hopelessly, madly in love with her. He was a good-looking, hard-eyed boy from the pampas,—a herder who was on his way to visit his mother in from Rio. He was a “gun-slinger” bearing close relationship to the type of cowboy that existed in the old days of the Far West but who is now extinct save for pictorial perpetuation on the moving-picture screens.

Down in his wild young heart smouldered a furious jealousy of Percival. Crust played upon this jealousy to fine effect. He did not hesitate to feed the flame with sly speculations, innuendos and even tales concerning Percival and Olga.

One day the Spaniard, in the midst of his violent protestations and pleadings, became reckless with promises to Olga. He swore that if she would have him he would make her the first lady of the land in place of the stupid American girl who now held the honour. Then, having loosed his tongue, he poured out the whole of the ugly scheme which was to alter every existing condition on the island. The wiping out of the dictator and his swell-headed gang of “intellectuals”; the seizure of all firearms, ammunition and stores; the complete subjugation of the people, even to the point of slavery; the elevation of Manuel Crust and his followers to a state of absolute power; the confiscation of all property,—including women! He naively advised her to jump at the chance offered her,—the chance to avoid the most unpleasant feature of the new regime.

“As my woman,” he said, “you will be safe. It is understood. It is all arranged. If you belong to me, nothing can happen to you. We shall be of the elect. I am to be of the council. I am to be one of the masters, the—”

“But,” she cried, scarcely able to believe her ears, “how is all this to be accomplished? How will the few overcome the many? You say there are scarcely more than a dozen of you, my friend. What can a dozen men do to—”

“It will be simple,” cried he, his eyes flaming. “How is it that Percival and his little gang hold all of us in bondage? It is because they have the guns, the revolvers, the bullets. Well, we shall have the guns, and everything. When the time comes, when the people have voted in the election and a new party is in control, then we will have our chance. We will have the upper hand. To hell with the people, Olga. They will count for nothing once we have charge of the guns and stores. This Percival he has ordered the election. He insists that the people

be given a chance to vote once a year, to elect some one to take his place if they feel like it. He says it is only fair. Faugh! He laughs in his sleeve. Come! Your promise! I love you. I must have you for my woman. I cannot live without you. I will give you power to spit in the face of that woman down there—that American aristocrat! We will be rich, we will be happy, we will have everything. Diamonds and pearls and rubies and all the gold there is on this island. We will be the ones to go away in the ship, and we will have jewels to shame the richest of them."

"We—you and Manuel and the rest—are to go away in the ship?" she cried, cold to the marrow of her bones.

"Sure. Why not? Are we not to be the owners of that ship? It is your chance to go back to the world again,—with me! Oh, and I agree to this also: If you do not want me any longer after you are in Rio or Buenos Aires or anywhere out there,—if you would rather be free again,—I promise to release you. What could be fairer than that? Nothing! I shall kill myself, of course, when you leave me,—but still I promise, and I never break a promise. But I shall love you so much that you will never leave me. You are my queen. Hell, how I love you—how I love you!" His face darkened, then slowly paled. He realized that he had gone too far. Leaning close to her, his frightened eyes not a foot from hers, he said: "You cannot deny me now. I have told you everything. I do not know why I have told you. I must be crazy with love of you. Ah,—the look in your beautiful eyes! God, how it takes the weight off my mind. You will love me,—you will be mine,—I see it in your eyes. When? When?"

She affected a bantering smile. She knew how to play with such fools as he.

"Do you think I am a fool? How do I know you are not lying to me about all this? It may be a trick to influence me. No, no! I am not such a simpleton. You promise me diamonds, and gold, and much love. You promise to take me away from this dreadful place on a ship, back to the world I worship. But you may be lying. I must have something better than your word, my friend."

"But I am telling you the truth. I swear it!" he cried eagerly.

"Keep your hands off of me,—do you hear! Don't touch me! Not yet, not yet. I must have some proof that you can give me all these things you offer. Will you have Manuel Crust guarantee that—"

"My God,—Manuel,—he must not know I have spoken to you. He must never know," he gasped. "Take my word,—believe me, beloved one. It is the God's truth I tell you. Within the month I will lay diamonds, pearls,—everything,—at your feet. I—"

“Leave me now. Come again,—tomorrow. I must think. I must—”

“But you will love me? You will come to me? You—”

“You are a very handsome boy,” she said softly, “and I should like to believe you.”

He followed her for a few steps, trouble in his eyes.

“It is not enough. I must have your promise,” he said.

She looked at him coldly. “You will have it when I am ready to give it,” she said, and his face lightened for a moment, only to darken again.

“I will cut your heart out if you breathe a word of this to any one,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Is that the way for a lover to speak?” she returned.

“Yes,” he said without hesitation. “It is the way,—with me.”

“Come to me tomorrow and tell me exactly what my share of the treasure is to be,—and then I will let you know whether it is to be you—or Manuel Crust, my friend. Oh, you see, I am greedy,—and I can love Manuel quite as easily as I can love—”

“I will cut his heart out if you—”

“There—there! It will not be necessary. Come tomorrow.”

That same afternoon she went to Percival with the Spaniard's story.

“Well, we'll nip that in the bud,” said he, setting his jaw. “The first thing to do is to warn Landover.”

“Warn Landover!” cried the Russian. “He is all mix up in it,—he is one of ze ringleaders.”

“No, he isn't. He's not that kind of a man. He doesn't know a thing about all this, I'll stake my life on it.”

“But, Olga,” cried Ruth, white-faced and troubled; “Fernandez will kill you. He will,—Good heaven, girl, did he not swear to cut your heart out if you—”

“Poof!” cried the other, snapping her fingers. “He will not do zat, my dear. I am not afraid. Do you know what happens to informers in my country? They vanish. No one ever sees them again, and no one ever asks where they have gone. They are here today—tomorrow they are not. It is the same the world over.”

“You mean,—Manuel's men will make way with him? How horrible!”

“Do not waste your sympathy on zat Fernandez. He is no good. You would see what kind of man he is if this plot should succeed.”

“But you will have to give him your answer tomorrow,” cried Ruth.

Olga shot a keen glance at Percival's face.

“It is for you to say, Percivail, what my answer shall be,” said she, after, a slight pause. A queer pallor spread over her face.

“For me to say?” he exclaimed.

“Are you not the governor? If it suits your plans for me to give myself to zat man—”

“My God, Olga! What the devil are you driving at?”

“—to satisfy him until you are prepared to nip zis revolution in the bud, as you say,—I shall—”

“Thunderation!” he gasped. “You mean you would sacrifice yourself—Great Scot! What do you think I'm expecting to do? Go to sleep for a month or so? Bless your heart, my dear Olga, if you are even thinking of getting married to Fernandez, you'll have to be pretty spry about it. Because I'm going to nip the business in the bud before tomorrow morning.”

“Zat is what I thought,” said she, the colour rushing back to her face.

That evening Percival called a meeting of the “cabinet,”—as the council was now called. They were asked to come to his home, instead of to the meetinghouse. This, of itself, was surprising. Landover had never set foot inside the “governor's mansion.” While his attitude toward the “governor's lady” was studiedly courteous, he made no effort to resume the intimate and friendly relationship that existed before her marriage to his enemy. Contact with Percival was unavoidable. They met frequently in “cabinet” conferences, but avoided each other at all other times.

He came to this hastily called meeting, however, and Percival was the only man present who was not dumbfounded. Sheriff Shay, in summoning the members to this secret meeting, had delivered a message that Landover could not well afford to ignore.

Seventeen men were crowded into the little sitting-room of the house. Each one of them bore a high-sounding title. There were present, besides Percival, State Treasurer Landover, Chief Justice Malone, Minister of War Platt, Minister of Marine Mott, Minister of Agriculture Pedro Drom, State Clerk Flattner, Surgeon General Cullen, Lord High Sheriff Shay, and the following members of the Executive Council: Snipe, Block, Jones, Fitts, Knapendyke, Calkins, Ruiz' and Alvara. Ruiz was a Chilean merchant and Alvara a Brazilian coffee grower. Calkins was an English cattle buyer.

Percival, with his customary abruptness, announced that there was a plot on foot to destroy the present government and turn the island over to the mercy of a gang of desperadoes headed by Manuel Crust.

Landover was on his feet in an instant.

“I am in a position, gentlemen, to declare that there is not a word of truth in that statement. It is true there is a very definite movement on foot to organize a new party to contest the election of many of us who are gathered here tonight. The people want a change. They are dissatisfied. They have a right to vote as they please, to choose their own—”

“We are not here to discuss the election, Mr. Landover,” broke in Percival. “Before we go any farther, however, I wish to state that if you are chosen Governor of Trigger Island, you will find no one more willing and ready to serve you than I. But, that is beside the question. If you will listen to me, I will tell you exactly what it is that confronts us. The election next month is to be the signal for all kinds of hell. You may be elected governor, Mr. Landover,—but you will not be allowed to serve. Now, here is the story that came to me today,—and I can vouch for it. I am authorized,—in fact I am commanded to reveal to you the name of my informant. You may be sure I did my best to prevail upon her to remain unknown, for the present, at least, but she threatened to go forth and shout her story from the housetops if I did not do as she wished.”

The conference ended an hour later, and Abel Landover had shown his true colours at last. He stood up, his face drawn and haggard, his eyes ablaze, his voice husky, and addressed the group.

“Gentlemen, I have been wrong. I am grateful to Mr. Percival for his generosity in warning me of the danger into which I was rushing. We have not been friends. He could have left me to my fate. I would not have blamed him. He has played fair,—and I have not. I ask you all to bear witness to that humiliating admission. I have argued here tonight against all of you,—when down in my heart I had the sickening fear that this damnable story is true. I now believe it to be true. I now see through the whole devilish game.

“I give you my word of honour as a gentleman and an American, I did not realize the true conditions until tonight. Perhaps I might have found out in time to upset their plans,—but that is doubtful. These men are smart. They are natural born plotters. They are dark men with dark souls. This fellow Fernandez has fooled me completely. He is a gay, smiling boy, but now that I have heard Madame Obosky's account of him, I recall many little traits in his make-up that go far to substantiate my new opinion of him. I never quite understood till now

why he hated you, Percival. Frankly, I knew that he had it in his heart to kill you. Crust has told me of his difficulty in keeping him from running a knife into you. I thought it was all talk, boyish bravado,—but now I know he meant it."

He lifted his head and set his jaw. "Gentlemen, I have a shameful confession to make. Ever since I can remember, my sole thought has been to rule. I did not know what it was to take orders from another man until I came to this island. My whole being has been in revolt. The thought uppermost in my mind for two years has been to re-establish myself as a dominating force. To that end, I have played pretty bad politics. I have worked upon the credulity and cupidity of these men, promising them positions of authority if I were chosen by vote to govern the affairs of this island. But, I am sure you all will believe me when I say that it was my purpose to administer those affairs honestly, fairly and as capably as I knew how. I was not only deceived by these men, but by myself as well. I have played, like a blundering fool, into their hands. My chagrin is beyond words. I can only say to you now that you may count upon my unfailing support in any action you may decide to take. My forebears were honest, loyal, law-abiding Americans. I —I think I may say without fear of contradiction that it is impossible for me to run otherwise than true to form.

"I lied, Percival, to Ruth Clinton about the encounter in my stateroom on the Doraine. Believe me or not as you see fit, but I think that was the only deliberate lie I have ever told in my life. I have done a great many high-handed things, I have been inconsiderate of others, I have crushed opposition in my own way, I have never allowed myself to acknowledge defeat. My hand has been against you since the day you appeared on the decks of the Doraine. It was not in my nature to see good in you. To me, you were a good-for-nothing—Well, I'm glad to see you smile! That is the devil with you,—your confounded smile. I ask you to overlook what I have said, and done—and been, Percival,—and shake hands. You have nothing to apologize for. There never has been a time in all these months that I have not felt you to be a real man, an honest one, and a gentleman. I think I know an honest man when I see one,—indeed, it is my business to read men,—and I rarely make a mistake."

As the two men shook hands, Randolph Fitts remarked drily:

"Seems to me I remember your saying something of the sort the first day you ever laid eyes on A. A., Abel."

"The trouble is," put in Soapy Shay sarcastically, "you don't know a dishonest one when you see him, Bill."

"Veil, let's get down to business," said Moses Block nervously. "Ve must go

slow and careful-like. If we show our hands too soon, they will uprise and—veil, I don't know vat!”

“Mr. Mott, what would you do if you got wind of a plot like this aboard ship?” inquired Percival, his eyes narrowing.

“I would have the whole gang in chains before morning. Then I'd give 'em a taste of the 'cat' at daybreak, and before noon I'd have the ringleaders hanging from a yard-arm,” said Andrew Mott, succinctly.

“Oh, my gracious!” gulped Mr. Block.

“Now, I'll tell you what would happen up in Copperhead Camp,” said Percival, darkly. “They would get a beautiful cow-hiding and then sentenced to wear a ball and chain, day and night, for anywhere from six months to two years, —depending largely on the process of regeneration. My experience has been that six months is enough.”

“We wouldn't dare do that, A. A.,” said Fitts. “You must not forget public sentiment,—and public pity. I've got a better plan. How far out is that little island off New Gibraltar, Platt?”

“A quarter of a mile, I should say.”

“Well, if they're not satisfied with life and conditions here, let's make 'em a present of a nice little island of their own. That's what I've always advocated as the proper way to treat anarchists. Stick 'em away on an island completely surrounded by sharks and let 'em run it to suit themselves.”

“But there are no sharks in these waters,” said Flattner. “They'd swim over here some night and slit all our throats.”

“Not a chance. They hate water too much to have ever learned how to swim. Now, here's the scheme. Round up as many of them as we're dead sure about, row 'em out to the island, dump 'em with enough food and water to last a week, supply them with tents and beds and tools, and let 'em build their own penitentiary. They'll have to do it or freeze next winter. Once a week send food and drink out to them. The water is a hundred fathoms deep between Trigger Island and that little green wart out there on the face of the ocean. It will look like a million miles to them. How does it strike you, gentlemen?”

Off the precipitous western extremity of Trigger Island lies a tiny scrap of tree-covered land. It is perhaps one hundred yards wide and thrice as long. An exploring party had visited it shortly after the wreck of the Doraine, but since then no one had set foot upon its shores. Its steep slopes, densely wooded, viewed from afar, suggested a mountain top sticking up out of the sea. By boat,

skirting the coast, it was a good ten miles distant from the town.

Three men were seized that night and put through a rigid examination. Early the next morning twelve more were taken, Manuel Crust among them. Half of them, in their terror, “squealed.” Crust himself was one of these. Almost before the people of the town knew what was afoot, the fifteen had been tried, convicted, and were on their way to the landing where boats were waiting to take them and their belongings off into exile. As for the conspirators themselves, the blow was so swift, so sudden, that they were dazed. It was like a bolt out of a clear sky.

Judge Malone sent them to “the Island” for indeterminate periods. At stated intervals they were to be released, one by one, and restored to citizenship. The shortest term of exile, however, was one year. The releases were to be decided by lot, except in the case of three men: Crust, Fernandez and an Irish sailor named Clark. They were the ringleaders and they were to remain on “the Island” until the time came for them to go aboard the relief ship with all the other citizens of Trigger. At the end of the first year, and once a month thereafter for twelve months, drawings were to be held, and the man whose name was drawn would be released.

“You are prisoners of state,” said Judge Malone, in passing sentence. “The state is obliged to feed you, and clothe you, and sustain you if you fall ill, no matter how bitterly it goes against the grain. You will not be obliged to work, or wash, or observe a single law. You may rob each other to your hearts' content, you may murder each other with perfect impunity, you may do just as you like. We started out to conduct the affairs of this island along lines laid down by the Golden Rule. I have come to the conclusion that the Golden Rule would be all right if it were not for the human race. I am beginning to believe that the Rule of Iron is the only one for the people of this earth to live under,—and that is a pretty hard thing for an Irishman to say. You men ought to be lined up against a wall and shot. We do not feel that we have the right to take your lives. It is not in our hearts to destroy you, as you would have destroyed us. But you may not dwell among us.”

Fernandez, wild with fury, shrieked vengeance upon the head of Olga Obosky. Out of his ravings, the unsavoury crew gleaned enough to convince them that he was responsible for their present unhappy plight.

“You will pay for this, you snake!” he yelled, foaming at the mouth and shaking his fist at her. “I will drink your heart's blood! Remember what Joe Fernandez says. I will come back here and get you,—Oh, I will get you,—and when I am through with you your dog of a lover may have what is left. I will cut

you to pieces! I swear it—I swear it! Hear my oath! You double-crossed me! You squealed on me! I will come back, and I will drink your heart's blood! I swear it!”

He spat in her direction as he was dragged away with the rest of the gang. Through his glittering, bloodshot eyes he saw the cool, derisive sneer on her red lips. He had failed, however, to note the keen, appraising look with which she searched the faces of his baffled, glowering companions. In that long, tense look she had seen dawning comprehension change to conviction; she had read his doom, so she could, in perfect security, give him that scoffing, heartless smile to take with him on the journey from which he was never to return.

Fifteen men went out to “the Island” that afternoon. From that day, the authorities provided weekly rations for that number of men. To this day they are ignorant of the fact that there are but fourteen mouths to feed.

CHAPTER IV.

In the cool of a balmy January evening, following what had been the hottest day the castaways had experienced since coming to Trigger Island, a group of men and women sat upon the Governor's porch. There was no moon, but the sky was speckled with millions of stars.

Olga Obosky, sitting on the squared log that served as a step, leaned back against the awning post, her legs stretched out in luxurious abandon. She was fanning herself, and her breath came rapidly, pantingly. Now and then she patted her moist face with a handkerchief.

“How warm you are, Olga,” said Ruth, who sat beside her. “And you must be dreadfully tired.”

“I am hot, but I am not tired,” replied the other. “I could dance all night, my dear, without tiring. Did you really like the children, Ruth?”

“They were lovely. You have done wonders with them.”

“Regular Isadora Duncan stuff,” sighed Peter Snipe, drawing lazily at his pipe. “Woodland nymphs, phantom pixies floating on the wind, zephyrs in the guise of fairies, dreams come true,—my dear Olga, you are a sorceress. You change clods into moonbeams, you turn human beings into vapours, you cast the mantle of enchantment over the midsummer night, and we see Oberon, Titania and all the rest of them disporting on the breeze. And to think that only this afternoon I saw all of those gawky girls working in the fields, their legs the colour of tan bark, with sandals that looked like canal-boats, skirts made of hemp,—just regular kids. And you transform them tonight into gleaming cloudlets to float upon the ambient atmosphere—”

“For heaven's sake, Pete, stop being an author and talk like a real man,” interrupted Fitts. “Can't you say, 'Gee, they was great, Olger'?”

It was “Twelfth Night,” and Olga's pupils had given a fairy dance on the Green. To conclude the almost mystic entertainment, the great Obosky herself had appeared in one of her most marvellous creations,—the “Dance of the Caliph's Dream,”—the sensational, never-to-be-forgotten dance that had been the talk of three continents. There was no spotlight to follow her sinuous, scantily clad figure as it spun and leaped and glided about the dim, starlit Green; there was no blare of brass and cymbals, nor the haunting wail of flageolets,—

only the tinkle of mandolins and Spanish guitars to guide her bewildering feet,—and yet she had never been so alluring.

When it was all over,—when the charmed circle of faces had vanished into the byways of the night,—she came and flung herself down upon the steps of the Governor's mansion. She had wrapped her warm body in a sheath of yellow velvet; the tips of her bare feet were exposed to the grateful night air. Her uplifted eyes shone like the stars that looked down into them; her lips were parted in a smile; her flesh quivered with the physical ecstasy that comes only with supreme lassitude.

“You never danced so beautifully in your life, Olga,” said Careni-Amori. “And after two years, too. I cannot understand. I shall never sing again as I sang two years ago. But you,—ah, you dance even better. I take courage from you. Perhaps my voice has not gone to seed as Joseppi's has,—poor man. Not that it had very far to go,—but still it was second only to Caruso's, and that is something. How can it be that you improve with idleness, while I—while we go the other way?”

“I shall never dance like zat again,” replied Olga, her eyes clouding.

“You speak as if it were your swan dance,” cried Michael Malone.

“Oh, I shall dance for ever,” said she, “but never again like zat. You would ask why not. I cannot tell you. I do not know. Only can I say I shall never dance like zat again,—never.”

Ruth turned her head quickly to look at the woman beside her. Olga's face gleamed white in the starlight. Her eyes were still searching the speckled dome, and the smile had left her lips.

“Don't say that, Olga,” she whispered softly. “You will delight great audiences again,—you will charm—”

“Possibly,” interrupted the other, lowering her voice, turning her eyes upon Ruth, and smiling mysteriously. “Great audiences, yes,—but what are they? I appeared tonight before an audience of one. I danced as I have never danced before,—all for zat audience of one. Your husband, my dear. He one time informs me he has never seen me dance. Well,—tonight I dance for him. Now, he can say he have seen Obosky dance. He will never forget zat he have seen Obosky dance.”

Ruth laughed, but it was a strained effort. “He was positively enchanted, Olga,” she said. Then she added: “But for goodness' sake, don't ever let him know that you did it all for him. He will be so proud and important that—”

“Oh, he knows I danced for him,” broke in the Russian calmly, in a most matter-of-fact tone.

“You—you told him?”

“I did not have to tell him. He knew, without being told. La la, my dear! Do not look so shocked. It is a habit I have. Always I dance for one person in my audience. I pick him out,—sometimes it is a she,—and zen I try only to please zat one person. I make him to feel he is the one I am dancing for, zat he is all alone in the great big hall,—all alone with me. Maybe he is in the gallery, looking down; maybe he is in a box, or standing up at the back of the house,—no matter where he is, I pick him out and so I think of no one else all ze time I dance.”

“And, by the same token, he is powerless to think of any one else. I see. No wonder you charm them out of their boots.”

“And all the rest of his life he will remember that I danced for him alone, zat man. As for me,—poof! I would not recognize him again if he came to see me a thousand nights in succession. Once I saw a very tiny boy in the stalls. He was with his mother and father. I danced for zat child of six. When he is a very, very old man he will look back over the years and see me dancing still,—always the same whirling, dazzling thing that filled his little eyes and soul with wonder. So! Percivail has seen me at my best. He will tell his grandchildren how wonderful Obosky was,—and he will think of her to his dying day as something beautiful, not something vile.”

“Oh, Olga!”

“You see, my dear,” said the other, composedly, “I wanted to make a good impression on zat virtuous husband of jours. Now he will think of me as the artist, not as the woman. It is much better so, is it not?”

“Sometimes you say things that cause me to wonder why I don't hate you, Olga Obosky,” cried Ruth under her breath.

Olga laughed softly. “I repeat zat Golden Rule to myself every night and every morning, Ruthkin,” said she, somewhat cryptically. Then they were silent.

Conversation on the porch behind them lagged and finally ceased altogether. The soft swish of fans was the only sound to disturb the tranquil stillness.

“Nineteen-twenty,” fell dreamily from the lips of Randolph Fitts's wife. “I used to think of Nineteen-twenty as being so far in the future that I would be an old, old woman when I came to it. And here it is,—I am living in it,—and I am not old.”

“Presidential year,” said Michael Malone, as he struck a match to relight the pipe that had gone out. “Doesn't take them long to slip around, does it? Seems only last week that I voted for Wilson. I wonder if he'll be running again.”

“Sure! And if he can keep us in the war as long as he kept us out of it,” said Peter Snipe, “we'll have to elect him again.”

“I'd give a lot to know whether we've got the Germans licked or not,” mused Fitts. “We've had nearly three years to do it in.”

“Depends entirely on the navy,” said Platt, Minister of Marine, late of the U. S. Navy.

“What can the navy do if the Germans will not come out?” demanded Landover.

“Why, confound it all, the navy can go in, can't it?”

“The British Navy hasn't,” was Landover's reply.

“What's the use of speculating about the war?” said Percival, as he threw himself on the grass at Ruth's feet. “Either it's over or it isn't, and here we sit absolutely in the dark. They might as well be fighting on Mars as over in Europe, so far as we are concerned. For God's sake, let's not even think about the war. We'll all go crazy if we do.”

“You're right,” said Fitts, gloomily.

“In any case,” said Malone, “Trigger Island has done all that any self-respecting government can do. She has declared war on Germany. We have nothing to be ashamed of. Still, I'd feel better if we could fire a few shots at the dirty blackguards.”

“The war is over,” said Olga, staring up at the stars. “The Germans are beaten. I have said so for many months, have I not?”

“You have,” agreed Malone. “But I don't see that you have anything on the Kaiser. He said it was over in 1914.”

“'Don't argue with him, Olga,” said young Mrs. Malone. “He's Irish.”

“Like all Irishers he's longing for something he'll never get,” said Fitts, drily.

“And what is that?” inquired Mrs. Malone.

“Home-rule,” said Fitts.

Olga Obosky yawned luxuriously. “I am so sleepy. My sandals, Governor Percivail. I am going home.”

He picked up the sandals lying on the grass beside him and held them out to her. She coolly extended one of her feet.

“It cannot bite you. Put zem on for me, your Excellency.”

He knelt and, slipping the sandals on one after the other, fastened the straps over her bare insteps.

“So,” she sighed. “Thank you. Good night, Ruthkin. No! I shall go home alone. There is nothing to be afraid of now on zis island, my dear. The ardent Fernandez is playing—what you call it?—pea-knuckles?—he is playing pea-knuckles away off yonder on zat prison island, as he has been playing for nearly a year.”

Little she knew of Fernandez!

Ruth and Percival walked around the corner of the porch with her, out of sight of the others.

“It was a perfectly ravishing dance, Olga,” said he. “If I live a thousand years I shall never forget how beautiful it was.”

“You see?” cried Olga softly, pressing Ruth's hand. “Was I not right?”

“Men are very queer things,” said Ruth, with a curious sidelong glance at her husband. Then she squeezed his arm tightly and went on with a little thrill in her voice: “Good night, Olga. Thank you for the lesson.”

“What's all this?” inquired Percival.

“Nothing you would be interested in, my friend,” said Olga, with a little laugh. She waved her hand airily as she moved swiftly away in the gloom.

They watched her yellow figure fade into the starlit shadows. As they turned to rejoin the others, Ruth said:

“I think you might have told her how beautiful she was, dear.” So much for the native perversity of woman, even when she is most content.

He raised her hand to his lips and pressed a kiss upon the soft, warm palm. It was a habit of his,—and she never failed to shiver in response to the exquisite thrill. She drew a deep breath, and leaned a little closer to him.

“Look up yonder, sweetheart,” he whispered. “Do you see the one star in all the heavens that shines the brightest? It is the only one I see when I raise my eyes. The big, full star in the Southern Cross. The others are dim, feeble little things preening themselves in reflected glory. That great, beautiful star at the foot of the Cross is all that I can see. It's no use for me to look elsewhere. That star fills my vision. Its splendour fascinates me.”

She waited for him to go on. Her eyes were shining. But the analogy was

complete. She laid her cheek against his and sighed tremulously. After a moment, they turned their heads and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss.

“I should be content to stay on this dear little island for ever, sweetheart,” she murmured. “My whole world is here.”

He stroked her hair lovingly, and was silent for a long time. Then he smiled his whimsical smile.

“It's all right for you and me, dear,—but how about the future President of the United States sleeping up there in his crib?”

She smiled up into his eyes. “It's a nuisance, isn't it?—having to stop and consider that we are parents as well as lovers.”

They rejoined the group on the porch.

“I had a horrible dream last night,” said Peter Snipe, getting up and stretching himself. “That's why I'm staying up so late tonight. I hate to go to bed.”

“What was your dream, Peter?” asked Ruth.

“Do you believe in 'em?”

“Only in day-dreams.”

“Well, I dreamed our little old ship was finished and had sailed at last and for once our wireless plant up there began to get messages from the sea. I dreamed I was sitting up there with the operator. It was a dark, stormy night. The wireless began to crackle. He jumped up to see what was coming. He was getting messages from our own ship, away out there on the ocean. She was calling for help. 'Sinking fast,—sinking fast,—sinking fast.' Over and over again,—just those two words. 'Gad,—it was so real, so terribly real, that the first thing I did this morning was to walk down to see if the boat was still on the stocks. She was there, a long way from being finished, and—and, by gad, I had hard work to keep from blubbering, I was so relieved.”

“It will take more than a dream to knock that ship to pieces,” said Percival. “When she's ready for the water, there will not be a sturdier craft afloat. Andrew Mott says she'll weather anything outside of the China Sea. Don't look so distressed, Amy. Pete's a novelist. They never do anything but dream horrible dreams. Generally they go so far as to put them into print, and people read 'em and say they are wildly improbable,—especially if they have a happy ending. It's always the happy ending that makes them improbable,—but popular. Isn't that so, Pete?”

“If we didn't give them a happy ending, they would refuse to recognize us the next time they saw us on a bookseller's counter,” said Peter. “Well, I guess I'll be

on my way. I've got a busy day tomorrow, setting up the Trigger Island Pioneer,—and as I belong to that almost extinct species known as the bachelor, I am forced to be my own alarm clock. Going my way, Abel?”

“Good night, Ruth,” said Landover. “Give the Lieutenant Governor a good smack for me,—and tell him he is still in my will.”

“Umph!” grunted Fitts. “I'd like to know what you've got to leave the little beggar. Your letter of credit?”

“Certainly not,” replied Landover. “Something worth while, Fittsy, my boy. I am making it now. It's going to be a hobby-horse, if I live long enough to finish it. Good night, Perce. 'Night, everybody.”

When the last of the company had departed, Ruth and Percival stood for a long time in silence, listening to the far-off thrumming of a Spanish guitar, their tranquil gaze fixed on the murky shadow that marked the line of trees along the shore, her head resting lightly against his shoulder, his arm about her waist.

“What are you thinking of, dear?” she asked at last.

“Peter's dream,” he replied. “It has put an idea into my head. The day that ship down there sails out to sea with her courageous little crew, I shall start laying the keel for another just like her.”

Neither spoke for many seconds. Then she said, a deep, solemn note in her voice: “I understand, Perce.”

They went into the house. Later they stole tiptoe to the side of the crib where slept the sturdy, sun-kissed babe. The two middle fingers of a chubby hand were in his mouth. With one hand Percival shaded the pitch candle he had brought from the kitchen. She leaned over and gently touched the smooth, warm cheek.

“I—I can't believe he is real, Perce,” she whispered.

“He isn't,” whispered he. “He is something out of a fairy story. Nothing as wonderful as he is can possibly be real.”

THE END

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