THE MYSTERY LADY

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Title: The Mystery Lady
Date of first publication: 1925
Author: Robert W. Chambers (1865-1933)
Date first posted: July 23, 2018
Date last updated: July 23, 2018
Faded Page eBook #20180793

This ebook was produced by: Al Haines, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at http://www.pgdpcanada.net

THE MYSTERY LADY

By

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THE COMMON LAW, AMERICA, IN SECRET, ETC.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Made in the United States of America

Printed in the United States of America

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A STORY IN TWELVE ADVENTURES

NUMBER ONE

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I

That was the trouble with the boy when he came into his own money—a headstrong desire to prove himself a grown man—reaction, probably, from twenty years of apron-strings, from which the death of his widowed mother and the advent of his majority set him free.

Now he was through with advice. He was through with having anybody tell him anything. He was now ready to tell the world. . . . At twenty-one.

His sister could do nothing with him. He was sensitive, stubborn, cocksure of himself. He flared up at any hint of admonition, of authority, of pressure.

He was neither vicious nor weak; he was a healthy cub suddenly unleashed in the world's very large back yard. It went to his head, and he raced all over the place, intoxicated by a freedom with which he did not know what to do.

There's always some dog-catcher watching for crazy pups.

A Mr. Barney Welper made the boy's acquaintance one evening in the Club at Palm Beach. At West Palm Beach there was a religious revival and prohibition rally, whither, it appeared, Mr. Welper was bound. That he could not induce the boy to go, saddened Mr. Welper.

So, as the boy did not take readily to the spiritual, Mr. Welper tried him with the material.

Like the Red Fisherman who has such a varied assortment of bait in his bait-box, Mr. Welper therefore changed the lure and put on a gang-hook garnished with cruder bait.

So several enormously wealthy friends of Mr. Welper's sauntered onto the stage, taking their several and familiar cues in turn.

The first of these was a very pretty brunette woman of thirty—a Mrs. Helen Wyvern. She had been "misunderstood," it appeared.

After half an hour on the beach with her the boy discovered that Mrs. Wyvern was the first woman who ever had "understood" *him*.

Still all a-quiver with wonder, pride, and gratitude, he met another friend of Mr. Welper's—a Mr. Eugene Renton.

Mrs. Wyvern whispered to the boy that, like Mr. Welper and herself, Mr.

Renton was making millions out of Orizava Oil.

The rest is redundant.

II

When the boy's money went into Orizava Oil they fed him "dividends" until his last penny was up.

He was proudly a part of Orizava Oil. On a salary he travelled on "confidential" missions for the corporation. All the glamour of a King's Messenger was his, only he didn't carry the *Silver Greyhound*: he was enough of a pup without other insignia.

And now the boy prepared to show the world,—and his incredulous sister. Already the inevitable astonishment and admiration of Wall Street entranced him in advance. He was a sad dog. He gazed into the brown eyes of Mrs. Wyvern and knew he was as sad a dog as ever had been whelped on earth.

Now it happened, when travelling on one of his "confidential" missions—which were devised to keep him out of the way because he bored Mrs. Wyvern ——the boy found himself in Charleston, South Carolina, where Mr. Welper awaited him.

What Mr. Welper ever was about few people on earth knew; but he inhabited Charleston at that time, and the boy found him at the St. Charles Hotel and delivered a heavily sealed packet proudly. No doubt there were millions in securities in that envelope. It thrilled the boy to see Welper lock it in his satchel. It thrilled the boy still more to fish out a heavy automatic from the holster under his left arm-pit and lay it carelessly upon Mr. Welper's bureau.

"They'd be up against hell itself if they tried to pull anything on *you*, wouldn't they?" remarked Mr. Welper solemnly.

The boy attempted to look modest.

"Possibly," suggested Welper, "while I'm busy here you might like to stroll about town—m—m, yes—or see a moving picture—" He handed the boy a local newspaper.

With the weary and patronising air of extremest sophistication the boy condescended to glance over the newspaper. He remarked that theatres bored him.

"There are some amusing auctions in the older part of town—if you are psychologically inclined," suggested Mr. Welper. "Man is, m—m, the proper study of man."

Psychology was the cant word of the hour.

"I'll stroll around that way," said the boy. In the back of his blond head his thoughts were fixed upon a movie.

III

In the crowd in which the boy was standing a friendly neighbour drawled gratuitous information to the effect that the house,—the contents of which were being sold preparatory to demolition,—was “one of the oldest houses in Charleston, Suh.”

Also the boy learned that here Governor Eden of evil fame, and of North Carolina, died of fright several hundred years previously.

“What frightened him?” the boy inquired.

He was informed that Governor Eden had been in secret partnership with Stede Bonnet, the pirate; and that when Bonnet was finally caught the guilty Royal Governor, in terror of Bonnet’s confession, fled to Charleston and died of sheer fright in this very house.

“The coward!” commented the boy, who had never known a guilty fear.

The auctioneer, in his soft, pleasant, Southern voice, continued to describe the contents of this ancient house as it was sold under the hammer, lot by lot.

A small but heavy leather box, garnished with strap hinges and nails of copper, was offered.

According to the auctioneer it bulged family papers; he urged it as a fine speculation for any collector of antique documents.

As there appeared to be no such collectors present, the boy bid a dollar. A negro wanted the box for some unknown purpose and bid a dollar and a quarter.

At two dollars the boy got the box.

Why he bought it he did not quite understand,—except that like all boys he was interested in pirates; and the mention of Stede Bonnet revived the deathless appetite.

“Send it to me at the St. Charles Hotel,” he said carelessly, and paid for the cartage also.

Then, having had enough of romantic antiquity, he started for reality and the nearest movie.

IV

That evening after dinner Mr. Welper wrote letters, and the boy went to the theatre.

Mr. Welper was still writing letters when the boy returned. Tired, ready for bed, he went into his room, which adjoined Mr. Welper's. But a boy, no matter how sleepy, welcomes any diversion that postpones that outrageous waste of time called sleep.

As he stood yawning and undecided, his eye fell on the box which he had purchased at auction.

A large, wrought-iron key was tied to one handle. With his penknife he cut it loose, unlocked the box, and gazed at the stacks of ancient documents within.

All were tied with pink tape. A musty odour filled the room. The boy seated himself on the carpet, still yawning, picked up a packet of ancient deeds, tossed them aside, glanced over a sheaf of letters, petitions, invoices, legal documents with waning interest. Then, of a sudden, his eye fell upon the signature of Stede Bonnet. Interest freshened; he read the letter with the conscious thrill that invades all boys even when in vaguest contact with great malefactors.

He looked with awe upon the signature of Stede Bonnet, touched his finger to the faded ink, strove to realise that the hand which had penned this screed had been imbrued in human blood; shivered agreeably.

The letter was written by Bonnet on board the sloop *Revenge* off the Virginia Capes, to one Edward Teach, Esq., on board a ship called the *Man-o'-War*.

It requested a rendezvous for the two ships off False Cape.

Further, Bonnet informed Teach, he had obtained documents in the Barbadoes which, if deciphered, might clear up the mystery of the ship *Red Moon*. But, he added, it would require the crew of the *Man-o'-War* as well as his own crew to salvage the cargo if, indeed, the location of the sunken ship could be discovered.

Eden believed it lay in five fathoms somewhere off Tiger Island. The crews of the two ships could camp on Tiger Island, or, more comfortably, on the group of three islands west of False Cape and known as "The Place-of-Swans."

The boy was wide awake now. Letter after letter he examined, untying and re-tying the faded yellowish packets.

These letters and documents offered all sorts of information concerning events on the high seas two hundred years ago. Among other things the boy learned that Bonnet had hoisted the black flag and had taken the *Anne of*

Glasgow; that the other name for Edward Teach, Esq., was "Blackbeard the Pirate;" and that Blackbeard had as ally a bloody scoundrel named "Dick Hands," commanding a sister ship near Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina.

And now the thrills that had swept the boy when he first read *Treasure Island* so long ago again stirred his blond and curly hair. He read of abominable cruelties, of treachery unspeakable, of savage reprisal, of robbery, of torture, of murder, of heartless mirth, of horrible excesses, carouses, mutiny, of pursuit, of escapes by sea and land.

Hour after hour he sat there cross-legged on the carpet devouring the ancient records of wickedness; but, not until he came to the very last packet in the box, did he discover any further mention of the "*Red Moon*, galley."

"She has been missing," Bonnet wrote, "since the month of July in 1568, which is now more than a hundred and fifty years ago. But it is known that she sailed loaded from bilge to gunwales with pure, soft, Indian gold. . . . Which knowledge, when imparted to me by Eden," added poor Bonnet, "so inflamed me that, although I was an English gentleman with vast estates in the West Indies, and indeed was rich and everywhere respected, I could think of naught but this Spanish shipful of soft, Indian gold.

"My God, Mr. Teach, I think my mind is crazed with the fierce flame of desire that devours me night and day. For such a man as I must be mad indeed to abandon estates, riches, and the approbation of honest men to take the sea for gold he hath no need of.

"Yes this, God help me, is what I have done in my sloop, *Revenge*; and I am committed, for I have taken the *Anne of Glasgow*; and the black flag flies at my fore."

The other documents in the last packet were a paper and a parchment tied together.

The paper was grimly significant. In Governor Eden's hand was written:

"This parchment, if properly translated, should indicate the precise spot where the *Red Moon*, galley, sank in 1568."

Under this Stede Bonnet had written his name and: "Property of Governor Eden, who had it of the late Captain William Kidd."

Under this was written:

"Kidd is in hell and Eden may go thither at his convenience. This document now belongs to Wm. Teach. Let him who hath a gamecock's gizzard come and take it!"

The boy sat with mouth open staring at a specimen of that kind of Truth which makes fiction tasteless.

Here between his own fingers he had the terrible story as told by those who once enacted it; he actually was touching a paper which had been touched by

the reeking hands of Blackbeard!

Legendary pirates suddenly had become living creatures of to-day, leering at him out of the lamplight, telling their frightful tales for his ears alone,—tales of blood and gold!

Again and again as in a trance he read the tragedy,—strove to read between the brief, grim lines, to visualise, to comprehend.

And now, trembling, the boy unfolded the parchment which, these bloody men informed one another, contained the key to a sunken ship loaded to the gunwales with "pure, soft, Indian gold!"

It was the strangest document he ever had gazed upon. Half of the parchment was covered with outlandish signs and symbols. Then there was a space; then some writing in Spanish, done with ink, perhaps; perhaps with blood.

The boy could neither decipher the strange and rather ghastly symbols, nor could he read Spanish.

For a long while he pored over the parchment, his eyes heavy now with sleep; and at last he placed it on his dresser and laid him down to dreams of blood and gold.

When Mr. Welper came in the morning to awake the boy he found him still sleeping.

It was a habit of Mr. Welper's to satisfy a perennial curiosity concerning other people's private business when opportunity offered.

He was a soft-handed, soft-footed, short, stout gentleman with a sanctimonious face and voice. His hands and feet were so disproportionately small that they seemed almost dwarfed; but they were endlessly busy implements in Mr. Welper's service; and now his little feet trotted him soundlessly to the open box with its contents of yellow papers; and his little hands touched and pried and meddled and shuffled the documents, while at intervals his sly eyes fluttered toward the sleeping boy.

Presently Mr. Welper discovered the documents on the boy's dresser; he approached, and had been cautiously studying them for a minute or so when suddenly the boy sat up in bed.

Caught in the act, Mr. Welper was, as always, efficient in any crisis.

"The wind," he explained, "blew these papers into the bathroom. Supposing that, m—m, they belong to you, I entered your room to return them."

Some latent instinct stirred the boy to get out of bed and take the papers which Welper laid upon the dresser. He got back into bed still clutching them.

"Where," inquired Mr. Welper with gently jocose but paternal interest, "did you collect this ancient box of junk?"

“Oh, it’s just worthless stuff,” said the boy, reddening at the lie.

Mr. Welper stood motionless, a remote expression on his countenance.

“You had better dress and come to breakfast,” he said absently. “We start back to New York this morning, and our train leaves at ten.”

It was evident to the boy that Mr. Welper attached no importance to the documents.

V

All the way to New York, Barney Welper was occupied in contriving a safe and sane way to possess himself of the documents which he had read sufficiently to realise that he wanted them.

But some blind, odd instinct led the boy to keep them upon his person night and day—not that it occurred to him to suspect Mr. Welper—

But, if he had anything at all of tangible value in those papers, he had a fortune! And so vast a fortune that it made him almost uncomfortable and slightly giddy to try to calculate what a ship loaded to the gunwales with "soft, pure, Indian gold" might be worth.

One thing in these pirate papers had instantly engaged the boy's attention—the mention of False Cape, Tiger Island, and Place-of-Swans.

Because, westward from False Cape and across the sea-dunes, lay those vast inland fresh-water sounds and bays spreading through Virginia and North Carolina which he had known from earliest childhood.

And Place-of-Swans was the valuable island property inherited by his sister and himself from a sportsman father; and which, for two months every year, had been the family's home in early winter.

Tiger Island was farther away—a place of no value for shooting, because for some reason neither duck, geese nor swan haunted the adjacent waters, nor ever had within the memory of living men.

To see False Cape and Place-of-Swans and Tiger Island mentioned by a bloody pirate in his own handwriting had thrilled the boy as he never before had been thrilled.

Suppose—but it would be sheer madness to suppose that the *Red Moon*, galley—And yet the boy understood that the first thing he meant to do on reaching New York was to sell enough stock in Orizava Oil to buy Tiger Island.

And now he began to recollect that in earliest childhood he had heard mention of the region as an ancient haunt of pirates. . . . There was the almost forgotten nursery legend of False Cape, and of the aged horse wandering all alone over the wintry dunes with a lighted lantern tied around his sagging neck. . . . And the boy now remembered to have heard his father speak of an ocean inlet which once existed somewhere to the eastward, and which now had filled up with a solid mile-wide barrier of snow-white sand, barring the salt sea water from the fresh.

So the long hours in the train wore away for the boy in the endless glamour of other days; for Mr. Welper in mousy cogitation.

VI

When the boy, to his stupefaction, discovered that his shares in Orizava Oil were neither regarded as attractive collateral by any financial institution, nor as salable at any except ruinous figures, he went in terror to Mr. Welper, and was calmed and reassured at a "confidential" interview in the private office of that pious financier.

In about six months, it transpired, the "inner interests" would be ready to start Orizava Oil sky-high. Until then, mum!—not a word, not the wink of an eyelash!

The boy, tremulous but comforted, resigned himself to await the millions which, within six months, were certain to be his.

Yet, meanwhile there was Tiger Island. The state owned it, but offered it for sale. A few hogs pastured in the reeds and the gloomy pines of Tiger Island. There was no habitation on the snake-ridden place; for centuries it had been ownerless and common property for any who cared to pasture hogs or cut logs and float them to the mainland. Which latter enterprise was more of an effort than anybody ever had undertaken; and the pine woods were still primeval.

Finally the state took title to Tiger Island; set, arbitrarily, a ridiculously high figure on it, and offered it for sale, claiming that the purchaser could cut a quarter of a million dollars' worth of timber from the untouched woods.

The boy now suffered deadly fears that either some lumber interests would buy Tiger Island, or that somebody's anchor might accidentally foul the wreck of the *Red Moon* and drag up golden relics which would start a gold craze and set the entire region wild.

Somehow or other the boy had to raise enough money to secure Tiger Island and the adjacent waters, worthless as far as wild fowl were concerned.

The boy's sister was still in Europe. He cabled her that he needed a hundred thousand dollars—without any other result than worrying his sister and starting a flight of sisterly and admonitory letters.

Then he wrote her and explained the matter in full; and his sister, thoroughly alarmed at what he had done in Orizava Oil, made preparations to terminate her delightful sojourn on the Riviera and return to New York where, it was very evident, her younger brother was attempting to make ducks and drakes of his inheritance.

And now the boy was becoming nervous and desperate, and he tried to borrow the money from Mr. Welper personally, without explaining why he wanted it, and was severely and piously chastened by that austere gentleman, who pointed out the enormity of anybody in the secret being treacherous

enough to move a finger or stir an eyelash until the time set for starting an eruption of Orizava Oil as high as the volcano after which the corporation had been named.

The next week the boy's apartment was broken into and ransacked by burglars who, oddly enough, burgled only the documents which the boy had bought at auction in Charleston.

The packet containing the parchment, however, was in the boy's safe-deposit box,—or rather in two separate boxes in different banks. For the boy, supposing that the Spanish inscription was a translation of the hieroglyphics, had torn the parchment in two, thinking it safer to separate the duplicate inscriptions in case of any accident to either.

Nevertheless, the affair alarmed the youngster fearfully, though he never dreamed of connecting Mr. Welper with such a thing—a gentleman he so frankly admired, revered, feared.

But the stupidity of burglars who made off with antique documents exasperated him. Such papers loose in the world might start clever minds in the direction of Tiger Island.

One day, almost beside himself with anxiety, the boy took from one of the safe-deposit boxes the cherished papers and went to the offices of Orizava Oil, determined to show Mr. Welper everything and offer him a partnership for money enough to start the enterprise.

Mr. Welper was not in his own private lair, but the boy walked in, all white and desperate. And saw the private safe of Mr. Welper wide open, yawning in his very face.

Like a little bird hypnotised by the wide jaws of a deadly snake, the boy moved irresistibly toward the open safe.

Good God!—here was plenty, and to spare,—packets of Treasury notes, securities instantly marketable, bonds better than bars of gold—

His half-swooning mind was trying to co-ordinate robbery with the fact that, in six months, he would be worth millions who to-day hadn't a thousand dollars in the bank.

He took a hundred thousand dollars in Treasury notes and securities.

He placed the packets in his overcoat breast-pocket, turned, walked out, went very steadily to the corridor, out into the hall to the elevator.

The cars flashed up and down. He had not rung. He waited. But when at length a car stopped at the landing where he stood he let it go on without him. And, after a long while, the boy turned as though dazed and started unsteadily back toward the offices of Orizava Oil. And met Mr. Welper coming out.

The latter looked at him with sly, keen eyes veiled by heavy lashes.

"I'm just leaving—if you've come to see me. A very, m—m, very important matter."

The boy now realised the private safe of Mr. Welper was closed. He turned deathly pale.

"Is anybody there?" he managed to ask.

"Nobody now—except Mrs. Wyvern. Why?"

A last straw!—the only woman who ever had understood him!

"I'll come back if—m—m—if I can be of any service," purred Welper. . . . "Are you sick?"

"N-no."

"You look like a ghost, my son. Probably—ah—undoubtedly you are up late. M—m, yes; but youth!—ah, youth! Well, I must hasten. So—m—m, ah, *good*-day to you, my son."

The boy went slowly back to the offices of Orizava Oil and straight into Mr. Welper's lair. The safe was closed.

Now, more slowly still, he walked through the pretentious suite, noticing nobody until he came to the private retreat of the only woman who ever had understood him.

She was busy at her desk, looked up at him, annoyed, but smoothed her features instinctively. For even a fool of a boy *might* make mischief within the next few months if treated with too open contempt.

"Sit down, Jimmy," she said sweetly. "What is the trouble?"

"Trouble—trouble—" he stammered, "I can't tell you. . . . And I've got to —." His face had become scarlet and there were tears in his eyes.

"Helen," he whispered, "you won't understand—you who are so chaste, so pure, so untempted—" he choked. And she looked at him tenderly, considering him a fool and an unmitigated nuisance.

"What is the trouble, Jim; a—" she smiled archly, "a love affair?—"

"Oh, my God!—when I am in love with the very ground you walk on!"

His voice had a little of the bleat about it—which perhaps was natural in a case of calf love—and it unutterably annoyed Mrs. Wyvern, who had no desire to be made ridiculous within hearing of the stenographers in the next office.

It was hard for her to play her part, but she was a thrifty and cautious woman, so she suppressed her temper and, rising, led the human calf to a sofa, where she retained his feverish hand.

For a while he sobbed on her shoulder. She set her even teeth and endured it.

"Helen," he managed to say at last, "I'm disgraced. . . . I can't tell you—looking into your pure eyes. . . . I—I'll write it and you c-can read wh-what the man who loves you really is—"

He seized a scratch-pad and fountain pen, and, hunched up beside her on the sofa, began the hysterical scribble which was destined to put a quietus upon him and his asininity for a while. The screed was an explanation. He told

her about the discovery of the parchment, of his dire necessity for money with which to buy Tiger Island, of his attempts to raise it.

He fished out the corroborative documents and laid them on her lap. Half of the parchment was missing—the Spanish part—because he had been in too much of a hurry to go to both banks.

Mrs. Wyvern's brown eyes had now become magnificently brilliant. She examined the documents; read the statement he showed her.

"But," she inquired, mystified, "where is the disgrace in all this, Jim?"

"Wait," he said in a choking voice. Then, as she watched his clumsy boy's fingers under her very and ornamental nose, this embryo ass wrote his valedictory:

"—Helen, try to be merciful and find it in your heart to forgive the man who loves you and who confesses his degradation at your feet.

"I have been weak enough to take from Mr. Welper's safe notes and securities valued at a hundred thousand dollars.

"I am a common thief."

And then he signed his full name, pulled the stolen securities and money from his pocket, and laid them in her lap.

Mrs. Wyvern really was dumb with amazement. This little whipper-snapper!—this sentimental little ass had had the courage to do that!

She looked at the packet, at the parchment covered with hieroglyphics, at the letter, at the boy's confession, signed with his full name and the ink still wet—

In a flash she knew exactly what was to be done and how to do it. She drew the boy to her and gently kissed his forehead; sat patiently while the storm burst and swept his miserable young soul cleaner of vanity than it had been for many a month.

"You—you have the co-combination of Mr. Wel-el-per's safe. Put them back and he will never know how low I sank. I—I thought I could be a thief, but it wasn't in me—and I couldn't do it—I couldn't do it—"

Mrs. Wyvern could cheerfully have pushed a knife in him. She wore one in a satin sheath attached to her right garter.

"There, there," she said soothingly, "there, there. Now go home and forget it. It's all over, Jimmy—"

"B-but—"

"No, it hasn't made any difference with me. Your behaviour was noble. There is no other word. You remember—there is more rejoicing in Heaven—you recollect?—something about the ninety and nine—"

"Oh, Helen!"

"Go home and leave it all to me."

He went, at last, having bleated his fill.

Meanwhile Mr. Welper had returned. After the boy had left he came into Mrs. Wyvern's office.

"What was the matter with that fool boy, Nell?" he inquired.

She told him exactly. She went over every incident with precision. She handed him the stolen securities; she showed him the documents concerning Tiger Island, letters, parchment, everything. Then she gave him the boy's confession to read.

After a little while: "I think," said Mr. Welper softly, "that this is going to be easy—very easy, and, m—m, remunerative. Yes, I think so."

"I think so too," smiled Mrs. Wyvern, delighted to be rid of the boy forever.

Then both of them, still smiling, put their heads together to sketch out the last act of the farce in which the boy had played the clown too long.

"Why not finish at once?" said Mrs. Wyvern. She rose, opened the safe, tossed in Mr. Welper's securities, the boy's documents and written confession. Then she closed and locked the safe.

"Very well, call him on the telephone. He's home by this time, I suppose," the man agreed.

Mrs. Wyvern called; the boy answered tearfully, and promised to return at once.

"I'll have to go to the Forty Club and try to decipher these hieroglyphics," said Mr. Welper.

"Do you think you can?"

"We are supposed to have every facility in our library for solving any cipher ever known," remarked Mr. Welper. . . . "I ought to do it in a week."

"Why not take it to the Museum of Inscriptions?"

"Why call in anybody unless I'm obliged to?" inquired Welper, slyly.

"Meanwhile you had better take a flyer and buy Tiger Island," suggested pretty Mrs. Wyvern. "Fifty-fifty, you know. I *might* have kept it for myself, Barney."

Welper hesitated, ventured a cautious glance, understood that he was at her mercy.

"Certainly, my dear," he purred, "fifty-fifty was what I meant to offer."

Both smiled again. But their expressions altered immediately as the boy entered and stood stock still at sight of Welper.

"Where are the Treasury notes and securities you stole from my safe?" asked Mr. Welper coldly.

The boy stared at him, horrified, then went white as death and turned to Mrs. Wyvern.

"I gave them to you," he said in a ghastly voice.

"You did not," she said calmly.

After a terrible silence: “God!” he gasped, “am I going crazy!”

“No,” said the woman, “you’ve always been a fool, and now you’re a thief.” And to Welper: “You tell him where he gets off, Barney. And if he pulls any gum about making restitution to *me*, tell him to get his witnesses or we’ll get his signed confession and turn it—and him—over to the police.”

Mrs. Wyvern rose leisurely, turned and left the office by another door, leaving the boy half fainting, leaning against the wall, and Mr. Welper slyly watching him.

The latter broke the frightful silence, harshly:

“Where’s that hundred thousand, you dirty thief!”

At the word the boy suddenly understood the entire and horrible duplicity. He made a movement toward his left arm, and Mr. Welper’s pistol muzzle dented his stomach.

Then the older man relieved the boy of his weapon.

“Now,” he said, “you listen. You go to prison. Understand? I’ve got it on you, and your fist at the bottom; and I’ve got my witness, and your finger prints on my safe and on the packets. And I’m going to see that they railroad you, my young buck, and you’ll do your stretch and disgrace your family forever.

“Now get out. You’re just one jump ahead of the cops. And if ever you show that boob mug anywhere you can kiss yourself good-bye—one way or another. . . . Beat it!”

VII

After a night of such agony as he never dreamed could be, even in hell, the boy was terrified by a ring at his door-bell. But it was only a messenger boy with a wireless dispatch from his sister in mid-ocean, whose steamer, she warned him, would dock in four days.

Haggard, half dead from the shock of it all, almost crazed by his ruin and threatened disgrace, he packed a suit-case and sat down to write a letter to his sister. He was shaking all over. Had Welper not taken his pistol away he probably would have committed the supreme fool act.

Very shakily and painfully the boy wrote out the circumstances of his connection with Orizava Oil from the beginning. He ended with the fear expressed that it was a gigantic swindle and that his money was gone forever.

Then, forcing his flagging hand, he wrote out the history of his love for Mrs. Wyvern and how it had ended.

And last of all he told her about the Bonnet-Eden-Teach documents, the parchment covered with South American symbols, his attempt to raise money to buy Tiger Island, his temptation, disgrace, the restitution, and how utterly he had put himself into the hands of this woman and this man who now were about to hand him over to the police.

"Sis," he continued, "I've been a fool. I can't face the disgrace. I can't disgrace you. I'm ruined utterly. They mean to send me to prison. They have sufficient evidence.

"There's only one way out of it to save the family name. I'm going to Place-of-Swans. You will get a telegram by Thursday from old Jake saying I've had a bad accident with a shotgun. I'll be dead, Sis darling. It's the only way. You'll find this letter at your bank waiting for you. I enclose our safe-deposit key. The half of the parchment which Welper did not steal is in the box at the Imperial Trust Company, which you and I rent together. If the paper is of value, turn it over to your lawyer and try to get hold of Tiger Island before Welper buys it. I firmly believe it is worth millions. Good-bye, dear Sister. Forgive me for being a fool. I wasn't a thief; I did give back everything, no matter what they say.

"Your unhappy brother."

Three days later, when the boy's sister landed, a telegram awaited her to say that her only brother had been drowned off Tiger Island by the capsizing of his sailboat.

NUMBER TWO
The Adventure of the Museum

I

That morning the Curator of the Division of Inscriptions arrived at the Museum at about ten o'clock, as usual.

In the anteroom his secretary rose from her typewriter, and handed him a visiting card. And at the same time be became aware of a slender girl in mourning seated on a sofa in the corner.

He read the visiting card: *Miss Maddaleen Dirck*; turned toward the motionless figure in black:

"Miss Dirck?" he inquired.

The girl stood up: "Yes; could I speak to you for a moment in private?"

He opened the door to his private office: "Come in," he said.

Except for a cast of the Rosetta Stone, a model of some Argive ruins, and one or two photographs on glass, showing Egyptian excavations, and hung against the window-panes, the private office of the Curator of Inscriptions resembled that of any ordinary business man.

Dr. Walton laid off his hat and coat, adjusted his spectacles, regarded his visitor absently, and suggested that she be seated. But the girl remained standing, her dark blue eyes fixed on him with intensity almost disturbing.

"Well," inquired the Curator of Inscriptions, "what can I do for you?"

After a moment's silence: "Dr. Walton, please help me," she said.

The Curator looked surprised: "My dear young lady, what is it you wish?"

"Please give me permission to come here every day and sit in your office. I beg you will not refuse."

"Come every day and sit in *my* office?" he repeated in mild astonishment. "Why?"

"Please let me," she pleaded. "I promise to remain very silent and still. I shall not disturb you—"

"But, my dear child—"

"I know shorthand and typewriting—"

"But I already have what assistance I require—"

"It isn't for money; I don't care to be paid for helping you. . . . I know how to clean your desk, sweep and dust, wash the woodwork and floors—I'll do anything, *anything*, for you if only you will let me come here every day."

He was frowning a trifle; his large, mild eyes seemed larger, rounder, and more owlish through his spectacles.

“Miss Dirck,” he said, “your request is most extraordinary.”

“I know it is—”

“*Why* do you desire to come here?”

The girl stood silent, twisting a black-edged handkerchief between black-gloved fingers, her distressed gaze fixed on the Curator.

“Come,” he said kindly, “there must be some reason for your rather unusual request. Are you interested in ancient inscriptions?”

“Yes.” Her gaze fell to the carpet.

“Do you know anything about the subject?”

She shook her head.

“Did you suppose that merely by coming here you might pick up information?”

She lifted her dark eyes from the handkerchief which she had been twisting. The transparent honesty in them, and the tragedy, too, were plain enough.

“Please do not refuse,” she said. “I promise I won’t disturb you. I will work for you without pay. Just let me come here—for a while. . . .”

“For how long, Miss Dirck?”

“I don’t know. . . . A day—a month—”

“You seem to be in trouble,” he said solemnly.

“No. . . . Yes, I am in—in some distress of mind.”

“Could I aid you?”

“Only by letting me come here.”

“Why do you select this place? Can you not tell me that much?”

“Because I am informed that ancient inscriptions are studied and deciphered here.”

The Curator, thoroughly perplexed, gazed at her through his glasses, owlishly but not unkindly.

“Is there any particular kind of ancient inscription that interests you?” he asked. “You’ll have to tell me *something*, you know.”

She hesitated, moistened her lips: “Inscriptions which—which come from Central and South America interest me.”

“Maya or Aztec?”

“Both, I think.”

“But, my dear young lady, how are you ever going to learn anything about Aztec and Maya hieroglyphics,—ideographs, phonetics,—by coming into my private office every day and remaining in a corner still as a mouse?”

He smiled owlishly in his kindly way; but on the girl’s pale features there was no smile in response.

“Do not people come here sometimes to have inscriptions deciphered?” she asked tremulously.

“Sometimes. Have you any ancient inscriptions which you desire us to solve for you?”

“We—I had one—”

“Your family had one?”

“My brother. . . . He is dead. . . . I have nobody, now.”

Dr. Walton looked at her intently for a moment; then he walked up to her, took both her black-gloved hands between his own.

“Sometime,” he said, “you may care to tell me a little more about yourself. . . . I don’t mean that I’m vulgarly inquisitive.”

“You are good and kind,” she murmured.

He smiled and patted her hands:

“Now what do you wish me to do for you, Miss Dirck?”

“Let me sit quietly in your office while you are here. . . . And if people—come in—and talk about Central American inscriptions—I’d like to listen, if I may.”

He smiled: “You may; unless others object. I shan’t. But, my child, there is no deciphering work of that description done in my private office.”

“Oh,” she said, blankly, “where is it done?”

“Let me arrange matters for you,” he said, still smiling. He went to his desk and asked through the telephone for the division of Maya and Aztec Inscriptions.

“Mr. Whelan, please. . . . Is this you, Scott? Would you mind coming over to my office for a moment? Thanks.”

He hung up the instrument and nodded to the girl in black:

“Scott Whelan, one of our assistant curators, will be here presently. The Aztec and Maya division is his—”

The door opened and a lively young man entered.

“Miss Dirck,” said Dr. Walton, “this is Mr. Whelan.” And, to the latter: “Scott, Miss Dirck desires to have the privileges of your division. She wishes to see how it’s all done. In return she offers her services gratis. Anything of a clerical and useful nature that you may desire of her she volunteers to do,—copying, stenography, typing, cleaning, scrubbing—”

Under Mr. Whelan’s astonished gaze Miss Dirck reddened brightly. Dr. Walton laughed; and then Whelan laughed too; and, for the first time, a pale trace of a smile touched the girl’s lips.

When they all had laughed a little over the situation, Dr. Walton pleasantly explained it. Whelan, still perplexed but courteous, conducted Miss Dirck to his own private office.

Through an open door the girl saw another office where, at long tables, two or three men and as many women were seated poring over plaster models of inscriptions engraved on stone, studying, comparing, taking notes, making

sketches, using magnifying glasses and even microscopes.

All around the room were ranged great plaster casts of massive, vermiculated blocks of stone covered with elaborate carvings and with hieroglyphics. Charts set thickly with symbols hung on the wall above rows of shelves filled with books.

“In there,” said Whelan, “my assistants are helping me to decipher the hieroglyphic inscriptions of a very ancient and wonderful civilisation,—the Maya.

“A thousand years before Christ a civilised people lived in Central America, Miss Dirck. They had priests, they had astronomers, mathematicians, politicians, architects, sculptors, painters,—they had a system of writing such as was developed in China and in Egypt—”

He checked himself with a smile: “Doubtless you already know all this, Miss Dirck?”

She shook her head.

“You are interested?” he asked.

“Yes. May I stay here in your office?”

“Certainly.”

She removed her hat; he took it and her fur coat and hung them beside his own.

When the girl had seated herself, Whelan sat down at his desk. She slowly stripped off her gloves.

“If,” he said, “it is Maya hieroglyphs that interest you, I must warn you that as yet we know very little about them. But about Aztec hieroglyphic writing we know pretty nearly all there is to know.”

“What is the difference between the two?” asked the girl, plainly interested.

“The Maya writing is a combination of the ideographic and phonetic,—symbols representing ideas, and symbols representing sounds. The Aztec is largely phonetic. It is simpler than the Maya, which is the older. Generally, the ancient Maya gentleman made a picture of what he wanted to say in writing; the Aztec drew a symbol representing a sound—as we do in our own alphabet. Their writing was homophonetic. Their basic symbols number about two hundred. We know most of them.

“But in the Maya hieroglyphics there are many more,—we don’t know yet how many. Almost all are ideographs,—that is, picture of ideas—”

He hesitated, realising that the girl was not able to follow him, although she listened with an intensity almost painful.

“Is there any beginner’s book, any primer, I might study?” she asked anxiously as a perplexed child.

He said: “There are a number of pamphlets, monographs, and reports

published by our Museum. There are only three original Maya manuscripts known in the world. We have copies. All other Maya inscriptions are engraved on stone. We have many originals of these, and many casts.

"On the bookshelves over there you'll find all the writings on Maya and Aztec civilisations that ever have been published. They are at your disposal, Miss Dirck."

"Mr. Whelan, do people come to you with Maya and Aztec inscriptions which they wish to have you decipher for them?"

"Sometimes. Very few people are interested. Fewer still possess any such inscriptions. Now and then an amateur explorer or a hunter or a naturalist comes to us with a fragment of stone which he has picked up in some Mexican or Guatemalan jungle."

"And you decipher for him what is written?"

"If we can—" He spoke absently but politely as he glanced over the morning mail laid upon his deck for his inspection.

Now, as the girl fell silent, he pleasantly asked her indulgence, and occupied himself with the pile of letters.

For half an hour he remained so occupied. Then laying aside his mail, he caught her dark eyes watching him.

"By chance," he said with a smile, "I have a letter this morning from a man who says he has a parchment covered with Central American hieroglyphics, and who desires us to decipher it. If this is literally true it is important. Probably it is not true."

"Is he coming here?" asked the girl quickly.

Whelan glanced at the clock. "Yes, and he is due now."

"May I remain?"

"Certainly."

"May I listen?"

"Yes, unless he objects."

She drew a swift, nervous breath, sat up rigidly on her chair with a tense expression on her white face and her ungloved hands tightly clasped in her lap.

Minutes passed; the office clock ticked loudly. Whelan re-read his letters, made marginal notes on some of them, called his secretary from the anteroom, and dictated one or two replies; talked to several people on the telephone, conferred with two or three assistants who came to him for aid.

As the last of these retired, a museum guard opened the door and announced, "Mr. Barney Welper, sir. He says you expect him."

"Show him in, Mike."

II

Mr. Welper came in.

He was a man of sixty, perhaps, under middle height, rather fat, smoothly shaven, carefully but very simply dressed.

His grey hair was closely clipped; his features pasty but regular and almost expressionless—except the eyes. These were a hazel hue, shaded by remarkable lashes which, on a woman, would have been beautiful,—long, curling black lashes partly veiling the slyest pair of eyes that Whelan had ever encountered.

Urbane, softly moving, soft of voice, and with small, soft, pallid hands—these and the long lashes shadowing two sly eyes were the salient features which checked up the surface personality of Mr. Welper.

He bowed cautiously to Miss Dirck; he bowed very cautiously to Mr. Whelan.

The latter said: "I received your letter, Mr. Welper. Have you brought the inscription?"

Mr. Welper bowed again and Whelan indicated a chair beside his desk and asked his visitor to be seated.

Out of his breast-pocket Mr. Welper produced a folded paper, opened it, and laid it politely upon Whelan's desk.

"Oh," remarked Whelan, "a photograph?"

"There were reasons why I could not bring the original document."

Whelan gave him rather a sharp glance.

"On what substance were these symbols written?" he asked bluntly. "It makes some difference, you see."

"The original is written on parchment," said Mr. Welper softly.

"Skin, fibre, wood, stone,—genuine Maya records are written on these. Unless I can examine the parchment I cannot tell you whether or not your records are genuine."

He continued to study the photograph before him for a moment:

"However," he added, "genuine or not, these Maya and Aztec characters are not difficult to decipher. I think I can translate this into English for you without much difficulty—"

He spoke into the transmitter of his desk telephone: "Please bring me the Maya and Aztec keys, Mr. Francis."

In a few moments a thin young man with bulging forehead and scant hair came in, laid the two working documents on his desk, and retired.

Whelan spread out the photograph; Mr. Welper looked over his shoulder; Miss Dirck, deadly pale, got up and came toward the other side of the desk.

Mr. Welper rose noiselessly as though to intercept her.

"Pardon," he said, politely,—and impolitely covered the photograph with one pasty little hand—"the matter is confidential, and I am not at liberty to show this document to anybody except Mr. Whelan."

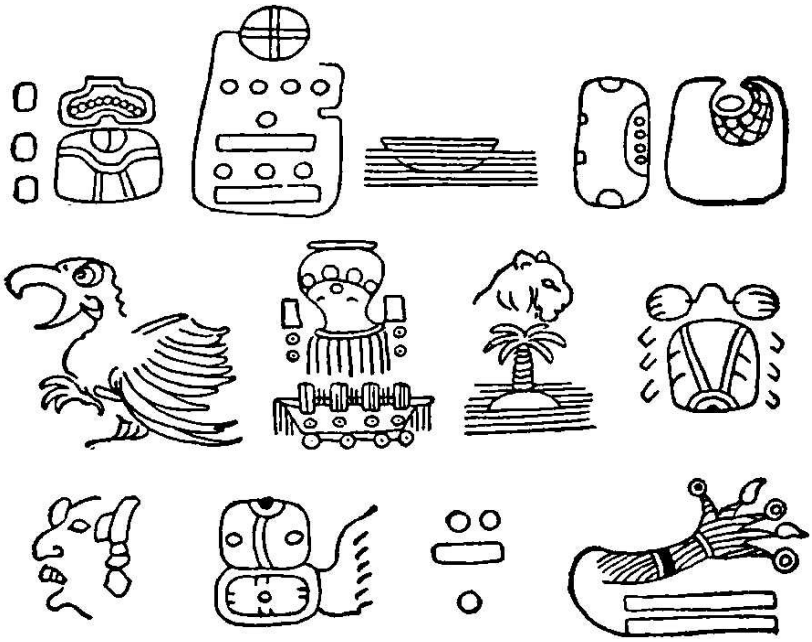
The girl flushed as though she had been struck. She had halted half-way across the room.

Whelan looked at Mr. Welper in surprise, then with a smile and the slightest of shrugs he asked the girl to step into the inner office where his assistants were at work.

As she passed the desk where Whelan sat he noticed that she had lost all her colour.

When she had gone, and the door was closed behind her, Whelan and his visitor bent over the sheet of hieroglyphs. And this is what they saw:

For a few minutes the two men neither spoke nor moved. Finally Whelan half-reached out for the working list of Maya hieroglyphics, hesitated, reconsidered, pushed away the volume.



"This document of yours isn't genuine," he said bluntly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Welper very gently.

"I say it isn't genuine. No Maya ever wrote this jargon."

"Jargon?"

"Certainly. It's nonsense. It has been written by some European."

“Doesn’t this inscription mean anything, Mr. Whelan?” demanded his visitor, visibly worried.

“It’s not an ancient Maya inscription.”

“Are these not Maya symbols?”

“Yes—some of them.”

“Have these symbols no meaning?” insisted Welper.

“Yes—but this is not the way the Mayas wrote their chronicles. . . . They didn’t do it this way. They didn’t employ their ideographs in this manner. . . . And there are symbols here with which I am not familiar. . . . I don’t believe they are Maya ideographs or Aztec phonetics. . . . I don’t know what they are—what they stand for. . . . The whole thing looks to me as though some European, with a smattering of Maya and Aztec, and a vague general idea of hieroglyphics, had attempted to write something using symbols.”

“If,” suggested Mr. Welper softly, “some European did this, how long ago did he do it?”

“I don’t know. Yesterday, perhaps; perhaps three hundred years ago. Maybe I can tell you if you show me the original manuscript.”

“It is on parchment and seems very old,” breathed Welper.

“It may *seem* old and be no older than a forgery furnished yesterday,” remarked Whelan, examining the photograph through a lens.

Presently he shrugged his shoulders: “This,” he said, “is not a Maya inscription; it is a fraud.”

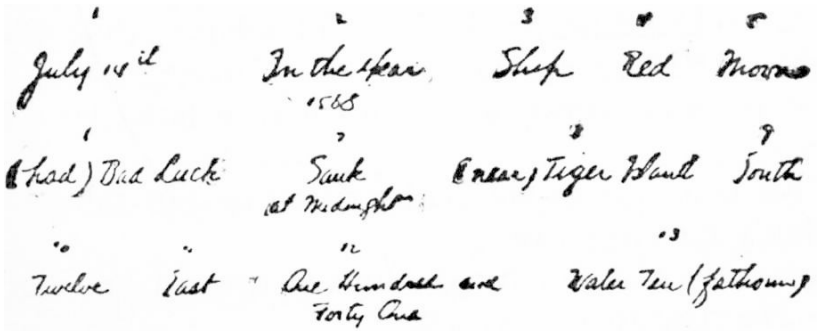
“Yet you say that the symbols have a meaning,” urged Mr. Welper. “Can you read these symbols, Mr. Whelan? Here is your key—”

“I don’t need it, thank you. I can decipher these symbols without a key—I mean the Maya ideographs and numerals—”

“Would it be too much trouble for you to write in pencil under each symbol what it stands for?” pursued Mr. Welper.

“Not at all,” said Whelan, picking up a pencil.

This is what Whelan wrote:



When he finished he said: “You see? That’s not Maya work. Some white man has composed this jargon, using these hieroglyphs—or rather *mis*using them.” . . . He handed the paper to Mr. Welper: “Probably I could tell you how old your original parchment is if you care to bring it around. . . . Did you buy it in some antique shop?”

Mr. Welper did not seem to hear the question.

“Mr. Whelan, I thank you,” he said. “I shall not further encroach upon your valuable time.”

He offered his remarkably small, soft hand:

“Once more, thank you, and good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” said Whelan, looking after him with the slightest scowl as he disappeared through the door.

Something about the touch of that small, pudgy hand annoyed him, too. Scarcely conscious of what he did he went to the wash-basin, rinsed his hand, dried it, came back and picked up the desk telephone.

“Please say to Miss Dirck that she may return,” he said.

Miss Dirck, with pencil and tablets, had been noting the titles of certain translated volumes on the shelves: The Letters of Cortes to Charles the Fifth, printed in Seville in 1522; Castillo’s Conquest of New Spain, printed in Madrid in 1632; volumes by Alonzo de Mata; Ojeda; Herrera; Juan Torquemada; Lopez de Gomara; Toribio de Benavente, the Franciscan; the Jesuit, Juan de Tobar; Padillo, a Dominican; Arrias Villalobos; Abbé Raynal; and the Abbé D. Francesco Saverio Claverigo, who wrote in Italian, and whose works were translated by Charles Cullen.

This is as far as she had written on her tablets when Whelan’s message came.

Instantly and swiftly she moved toward Whelan’s office. He rose to receive her.

“Where is that man?” she asked excitedly.

“He has just left,” replied Whelan, surprised by her tone and manner.

“May I see that paper he brought?”

“He took it away with him—”

The girl ran for hat and coat.

“Please,” she said breathlessly, “forgive my rudeness. I’ll come back—”

She had her hat and coat on and was out of the door before Whelan could stir or utter a word.

He was sufficiently astonished to remain immobile in his chair for several minutes. Presently, however, being a busy man, he turned to the papers on his desk again. Then, too late, he noticed her reticule of black leather and black silver lying beside her black-edged handkerchief. The handkerchief was faintly

fragrant.

As he picked it up, with the idea of tucking it into the hand-bag, an automatic pistol fell from the reticule to the carpet.

Whelan picked it up, replaced the weapon in the little black hand-bag, went swiftly into the outer office.

"Which way did that young lady go?" he asked his secretary.

The secretary, naturally, didn't know, and Whelan hurried to the corridor and called to the museum guard on duty: "Which way did that girl go, Mike?"

"Th' wan in black, Sorr?"

"Yes! Did she take the lift?"

"Faith, I seen her go skippin' an' bucketin' down the stair, Sorr. Sure she's the light-footed wan, Misther Whelan,—she is that, Sorr!"

Whelan hastened through the corridor into the gallery.

It was too early for many visitors in the museum. He scanned the few people there with a single glance. The girl in black was not among them.

However, he took the lift and descended to the ground floor. No sign of her in any gallery, or in the lobby where a few early school-children, personally conducted, lingered around the big metallic mass which had fallen to the earth from interstellar space.

No guard on duty had happened to notice her; but a small, freckled, cloak-room boy remembered a very pretty lady in black who sped out into the sunshine of Central Park, West, as though the devil were at her heels.

"How long ago?" demanded Whelan.

"I dunno. Half'n hour, I guess."

Whelan surveyed the lad in silent disgust, forgetting, perhaps, that time drags very slowly with a small, freckled boy who has to work for a living.

"She'll miss her reticule and come back for it," he reflected as he returned to the lift and was hoisted toward his own domain.

Seated at his desk once more he gazed curiously at the reticule.

"Probably," he thought, "she'll be back within half an hour. . . . It was rather a queer proceeding. . . . I didn't care for that man, Welper. . . . But she was—unusually—ornamental. . . ."

He shrugged his well-set shoulders and opened a volume on the Archæology of Guatemala. But he was aware of a faint perfume in the air. It came from her handkerchief in the satchel, and he found it difficult to concentrate his thoughts upon Guatemala.

III

The girl who disturbed the archæological reflections of Scott Whelan had caught sight of the object of her impulsive pursuit as she emerged from the entrance to the Museum.

Mr. Welper was in the act of entering a taxicab in front of the porte cochère; and the next moment the taxi and Mr. Welper started for parts unknown to her.

Outside the Museum grounds on the street curb stood several taxicabs. Miss Dirck ran along the paved way past beds of winter-blighted flowers, hailed the chauffeur of the foremost vehicle, and pointed at the distant taxi containing Mr. Welper.

"It's absolutely necessary that I keep that taxi in sight!" she said breathlessly. "Please follow it wherever it goes!"

"I getcha, Lady!" said the chauffeur briskly. And the chase began.

Central Park, West, is a southbound avenue. Welper's taxi swung south and the taxi containing Maddaleen Dirck did the same.

"Don't get too near, but don't lose that taxi!" she called to her driver.

"Getcha, Miss," he nodded.

Half way to Columbus Circle the girl missed her reticule. In a panic she rummaged her fur coat and the seat and floor of the cab, then seemed to recollect that she had left it in Mr. Whelan's office. A desperate expression came into her pallid face; she leaned close to the window and gazed at the taxi ahead. Her purse was in her reticule and she hadn't a penny.

At Columbus Circle the traffic police stopped both vehicles; beyond, Mr. Welper's cab swung into Broadway, and hers followed.

Now her driver drew closer to the pursued taxi, because there were chances that some traffic policeman might arbitrarily separate goat from sheep.

However, Mr. Welper never turned around to peer back through the oval window behind his head. Probably he would not have remembered her or recognised her if he did. It was quite evident, also, that he had no fear of pursuit by anybody.

She could see the sleek, grey back of his head under a grey felt hat, and his plump shoulders.

Down town they drove close together, swerved into Seventh Avenue, continuing south, were halted at Forty-Second Street, again at Thirty-Fourth Street; turned east on that thoroughfare.

Welper's cab stopped at the Waldorf; Miss Dirck's halted behind. She said quietly to her driver; "Wait here, please."

No suspicions concerning her insolvency occurred to her driver. Her

appearance, manner, voice placed her beyond any doubt.

Mr. Welper was just entering the Waldorf. Miss Dirck followed without a cent in her possession.

On the Thirty-Third Street side, near the news stand, a maid gave Welper a check for hat and coat.

He dropped the check in the side pocket of his coat and turned to enter the breakfast room. As he passed close to Miss Dirck in the crowd she slipped her left hand into his side pocket and drew out the coat check.

It was done in a flash. She never before had done such a thing—wouldn't have known how, had she hesitated. Scarcely realising what she had done, she passed on through the little throng gathering before the maid, who was rapidly exchanging checks for hats and coats.

Had anybody seen her? She halted near the news stand, suddenly terrified. Not even daring to look around, she stood motionless, enduring all the agony of reaction, listening, trembling lest a hand fall upon her shoulder from behind.

With an effort she mastered her fright, strove to reflect, to consider.

Calm again. Somehow or other she must present that check to the maid, invent an excuse for claiming a man's overcoat, face the crisis coolly, plausibly. Because she *had* to have that paper if it were in his overcoat. . . . And, if he carried it on his person, then she must continue to follow him and, somehow, to rob him. . . . God only knew how she was to accomplish this—how the affair might end. . . .

And suddenly the end came, like a stroke of lightning, as a man stepped to her side, looked into her eyes, stood so in utter silence, looking at her.

She seemed paralysed with fear; she could not stir, could not command her quivering mouth or the scarlet flush that scorched her dreadful pallor.

"I saw what you did," he said in a low tone.

She stared at the man until his features blurred a little and she felt faint.

Her evident distress under the sudden shock seemed to disconcert the man beside her.

"You seem to be a novice in this work," he said. "I don't wish to frighten you. But I have a word or two to say to you. Perhaps we had better find a seat —"

He turned, waited; she found strength to move forward beside him. Down the corridor they moved until he found two gilded chairs together at some distance from any group. She sank down on one of them; he seated himself beside her.

"Why did you pick that man's pocket?" he asked pleasantly.

The girl remained mute.

"What did you take?"

Her black-gloved hand lay in her lap. She opened it, showing him the coat-

check.

"That," remarked the man beside her, "is a new one on me. Do you think you can get away with it?"

"I—" She could not utter another sound.

"I suppose you meant to pass as his wife—say he'd gone to his room and wanted you to bring his coat?"

It was what Miss Dirck had thought of attempting and her terrified eyes filled with tears.

"What is it you want out of that man's overcoat?" demanded her inquisitor.

"A—a paper."

"Oh. You're not a dip?"

"A—a what?"

There was a silence during which the man beside her studied her intently.

"You're no crook," he said, slowly.

"N-no."

"What is the paper you wish to find? Don't be afraid of me. Maybe I might help you."

"Are you the—the hotel detective?"

"Come," he said, "don't ask questions. Answer me. . . . And give me that coat check."

She handed it to him.

"What paper do you want out of that coat?—or shall I bring you everything in it?"

"D-do you mean—"

"Yes, I do. I can get away with it; you couldn't. Now describe the paper you are after."

"It—has figures—not numbers—but strange signs on it—I think—"

"You don't mean hieroglyphics, do you?"

"Yes. . . . Central American hieroglyphs."

"Oh. . . . All right. Wait here for me—"

He rose, sauntered down the corridor to the distant cloak-room; presented his check.

"I want to get something out of my overcoat," he said to the maid.

She glanced at the number, brought the coat, and the young man ransacked it thoroughly but found only a pair of grey suede gloves and a neatly folded handkerchief.

"Thank you," he said, returning the coat; and he walked back to where Miss Dirck was seated.

"Nothing in the coat," he said. "Now what are you going to do?"

The girl made no reply but her eyes now met his with less fear than perplexity in their dark depths.

He smiled at her in friendly fashion: “You’re in trouble of some kind.”

“Yes.”

“Do you know who that man is whose pocket you picked so neatly?”

“No,” she said, flushing painfully, “—that is, I know his name only.”

“So do I,” smiled the man beside her. “What do you suppose his name to be?”

“Mr. Welper.”

“That’s it. And what do *you* want of Mr. Welper?”

“That—paper.”

“Oh, the Central American hieroglyphs! Well—how do you mean to get that paper?”

The girl’s mouth quivered: “If you will—will let me go—if you don’t mind—I must try to follow him—”

“Why?”

“I have got to know where he lives.”

“I can tell you where he lives.”

“Where?”

“He lives at his club.”

“What club, please—”

The young man beside her laughed:

“It’s called The Forty Thieves.”

Miss Dirck stared.

“If you were a crook,” said the young man, “you’d know the name of that club.”

“What—what kind of club is it?”

“I’ll tell you. It’s a very quiet club. There are forty members, never more. Only when a member gets bumped can another be elected—”

“B-bumped?” she repeated in perplexity.

“Well—when a member—dies. . . . That man, Welper, is President. A Mr. Potter is Secretary. There are no other officers. The dues are five thousand dollars a year and five thousand dollars initiation fee. . . . When any member becomes worth a million dollars he must resign. . . . It’s an odd sort of club, isn’t it?”

“Y-yes.”

“Unique. Only forty members. And every member a crook. . . . How do *you* expect to follow Mr. Welper into the Forty Club and pick his pockets?”

“I—don’t know—”

“You don’t mean you contemplate trying such a thing?”

“I—I *must*.”

“But it can’t be done.”

“Somehow—”

“Utterly impossible.”

“I must have that paper—”

The man beside her looked at her intently, then spoke to a passing page:

“Here, boy, take this check to the coat-room. Somebody has lost it.” And he handed the check to the boy, who went smartly on his way.

To Miss Dirck the man said: “Welper might as well have his coat. No use to us, that check.”

He had said “to us,” with a smile, and he saw that the girl noticed it.

“I don’t know why you want that paper,” he said, “but I suppose Barney Welper has done you some crooked trick. . . . Why don’t you call in the police?”

“I *can’t*!”

“Oh.” The young man’s brown eyes fairly bored into hers.

“You don’t care to ask for a warrant?”

“No.”

“Couldn’t you prove your charge?”

“Even if I could—”

“All right. I’m not inquisitive. Every family has its skeleton.”

The girl turned crimson and gazed at him out of distressed eyes.

“You’re not a good actress,” he said bluntly.

She was silent.

“If you were,” he said, “I’d take you to the Forty Club. I’m a member,” he added blandly.

He saw pain turn to incredulity in her eyes.

“Yes,” he said, “you mistook me for a dick, didn’t you? Well, I’m a crook! You ain’t. But if you’re after Barney Welper *I* wouldn’t stop you. Not me.”

From a cultivated vocabulary he was steadily slipping into vulgarisms, yet still spoke with the accent and manner of a man well born.

“Do you understand?” he went on with his pleasant smile; “I could get you into the Forty Club if you were a crooked little girl with that face and shape—and if you had the jack to stake yourself. But—you’re good.”

He sat very still, watching her; and she was stiller yet, listening, her eyes bent on the floor at her feet; and, in her brain, lightning!—flash after flash of wild and desperate intuition. . . . Only she must control the crisis, dominate it, take swift, instant command of her fate—

“That’s the trouble,” he repeated; “you’re good. You *look* it. And—” he shrugged, “you’re no actress.”

She looked up, laughing.

“That’s where you get off, old dear,” she said with the devil glimmering in her blue eyes.

His astonishment was so genuine that the girl laughed again.

“Did it get over?” she inquired merrily.

“It—did,” he said. She could scarcely sustain his intent gaze.

“See here,” he said, “you’re good, aren’t you?”

“Not very.”

“Oh. . . . What’s your line?”

“Oh, I—don’t know—”

“All right. . . . You made a monk of me, didn’t you? . . . Is that straight—your being a professional?”

“Professional?”

He was completely taken aback and puzzled.

“I admit you’re an actress,” he said. “You’ve done two turns. Which is *you*?”

She looked at him for a little while, her cheeks flushed with the terrific excitement of it all, her eyes lovely and brilliant.

“Are you really a—crook?” she asked gaily.

“I told you.”

“All right,” she said. “I’ve come a thousand miles to get that paper. I want to know what’s written on it. An hour ago I thought I was going to find out. I didn’t.” She turned and looked toward the breakfast-room: “The man’s in there,” she said. “That paper is in his pocket. I want it. Will you help me get it?”

He smiled: “How?”

“You’ve just told me. Take me to that club.”

“I told you only forty could belong.”

“But you said you’d take me if I were an actress.”

“Yes. I said so. I *can*. Because the bulls bumped a member last night. There are only thirty-nine. . . . Have you ten thousand dollars, little lady?”

“Yes.”

“What do you mean to do; stick up your man? Vamp and creep? Dope and frisk? . . . What are you staging?”

She regarded him with contemplative eyes, almost absently. Under her waist her heart was racing, almost suffocating her.

“I don’t know how it’s to be done,” she said. “But it’s got to be done.”

He remained silent.

“You’ll want to be paid, of course,” she added.

He nodded.

“How much?” she asked.

“Do we work together, little lady?”

“Yes, I’d be very glad.”

“Pals?”

“Yes. . . . You mean like sister and brother?”

"All right: that way—if you don't fall for my map. . . . I flop for yours."

"M-map?"

"Face," he said coolly, watching her vivid blush deepen from hair to throat.

After a moment: "I asked you," he said, "which is *you*—a troubled young girl in mourning, who seemed scared out of her wits, or the cleverest actress I've ever met?"

"Which do you think?"

"If you're an actress you're new to the crooked game."

"Why?"

"You don't talk the patter. You don't seem to understand it. . . . You've got me guessing anyway. I admit it. What are you? Which? You can tell me; I'll work with you anyway."

"Keep guessing," she said with a little smile, tremulous from the strain of excitement.

His thoughtful eyes never left hers. He nodded after a moment.

"You promise to take me to the Forty Club?" she asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Whenever you are ready."

She reflected and decided not to leave him even for an instant.

"I've got to go up town. I left my money. You must come," she said.

He rose; they went out by the Thirty-Fourth Street side.

Her taxi-driver, who had become anxious, welcomed her; she directed him to drive to the Museum.

And even there she insisted that the young man accompany her to the outer office of Mr. Whelan.

That young gentleman had just returned from luncheon and she was admitted.

"I expected you'd return," he said. "And, by the way, when I put your handkerchief into your reticule, a rather large pistol fell out."

"Thanks so much," she said, reddening. "Please forgive my abrupt behaviour. I didn't mean to be rude. But something so very important happened so very suddenly."

Whelan looked at her: "Aren't you coming back?" he inquired naïvely.

"I hope so. . . . Tell me, Mr. Whelan, did you read those hieroglyphics for the gentleman who came in while I was here?"

"I did. It was utter nonsense."

"Would it be impertinent of me to ask you what was written on that paper?"

"No; but, as the matter was confidential, it would be unethical of me to tell you, even if I could recollect."

“Please try to recollect the inscription!”

“The inscription was not Maya; it was a fraud perpetrated by somebody who—”

“That doesn’t matter. Can’t you remember it?”

“No; it was sheer nonsense; and I told Mr. what’s-his-name so. *I* can’t remember nonsense. I never could!—”

The girl came close to his desk where he was standing:

“Try to recollect,” she said in a low voice. “It may be a matter of life or death.”

“Good heavens!” he said. “All I recollect of it was something about a ship—a shipwreck—and an island—” He stood staring at her, both hands pressing his temples:

“A shipwreck near some island. . . . And some measurements. . . . That’s all I recall of that ridiculous trash—”

She gazed at him in tragic silence. Then her lips moved a silent “Thank you;” she turned and walked to the outer office, where the young man from the Waldorf awaited her.

They went together into the body of the great Museum, down the iron stairs, slowly, from floor to floor.

“Will a cheque be all right to pay for my initiation, and dues, at the Forty Club?” she asked in a low voice.

He smiled incredulously: “You’re too clever to do that, or to think Welper would cash it.”

She saw she mustn’t offer a cheque.

“Very well,” she said, “we’ll drive to my bank.”

On the way down town every few moments he looked at her, partly in admiration, partly in perplexity, and in swift moments of suspicion, too.

What was this girl? He hadn’t decided. All he understood was that, as an actress, she was matchless in his experience.

Never before had he seen any professional so exquisitely interpret unsullied youth—that delicate and virginal allure which to him had seemed inimitable, and never to be mistaken.

But, that suddenly lifted head; that laughter, charming, defiant, subtly sophisticated: and, to his query if she were not “good,” her demure “not very.” Well, that was art. . . . Yet, somehow, he seemed unable to divorce her art and herself.

They stopped at the Imperial Loan & Trust Company; he descended and offered his arm.

She remained in the bank about ten minutes. He paced the sidewalk by the taxi, smoking a cigarette.

When she reappeared she came to him and drew him a little aside.

“I want to be honest with you,” she said. “I don’t know that there will be anything to divide between us when I secure that paper from Mr. Welper. Suppose I pay you now what you think you should have for helping me?”

“No; I’ll take a chance.”

“Don’t you need some money?”

The young man reddened, and it seemed to annoy him.

“I’ll look out for myself,” he said bluntly. “Where do you want to go now?”

“I’ve had no lunch.”

“You can lunch at the Forty Club.”

The girl trembled slightly, then mastered herself and nodded with composure.

“Very well,” she said. “Please tell the driver where to go.”

They returned to the taxi; he aided her in, spoke to the driver, and followed her.

“Will I be in any—danger?” she asked calmly.

“None. . . . Unless you ever squeal.”

“I understand . . . They’ll take me for—for granted.”

“The Forty Club is like any other Club, except that wine and cards are forbidden. We don’t risk a row. There’s no betting, no drinking allowed. No quarrelling either. Any infraction of rules means expulsion. . . . And if you’re expelled you usually are found dead in a day or two.”

“Dead?”

“Yes, somewhere or other—in the river, in the Park, in a taxi—” he shrugged.

She sat silent, gazing out at the crowded traffic on Fifth Avenue.

He went on in his low, agreeable voice: “Only a genius in her or his own line ever cares, or dares, to join the Forty Club. The members are there for one purpose only—to make a million as quickly as possible, and resign.”

“What is the use of the club to them?”

“Its uses are infinite. Every facility is there to help you. Through the secret influences of the Forty Club you can go anywhere, meet anybody whom you need in your—ah—operations.

“All your operations are covered, too. It’s your own fault if you’re caught with the goods on or if you’re bumped.

“If you get into trouble there’s a bail, counsel, money for defence, influence for judge, jury, and pressure in legislative circles—pressure even in the Executive Mansion. You get the best of opportunities; you ought to make your million and get away with it in five years. Many do it in three, some in two, some in a year.”

She turned her pale face: “And you?”

"You are inquisitive," he said, smiling.

She coloured: "I'm sorry. . . . You don't look like—like—"

"A crook?"

"No."

"You don't either. And that's the kind that does the business. It's our kind you'll find at the Forty Club. Not a mouth that would melt butter."

He was laughing:

"Take Welper. He's a sanctimonious guy to look at. . . . But—when you frisk him, for God's sake make your getaway. He's bad."

"Yes, I thought so."

"You take it coolly."

"I have to."

He smiled: "You are a sport, Miss—Miss—"

"Miss Dirck—Maddaleen."

"That's a good name," he said gaily, "—Dirck or Dagger—a perfectly good name for the Forty Club. Some wear their hearts on their sleeves; some carry their names in their garters. . . . Maddaleen Dirck! That's a first-rate name."

"And yours?"

"Oh, nothing suggestive or subtle. My name is John Lanier."

"John Lanier," she repeated aloud to herself.

"You see," he said, "what goes in the Underworld doesn't go with us in the Forty Club. We *look* all right; we seem all right; we know how to behave, and we do it. None of us care to live in the Underworld. We're merely out for a million and don't care how we get it.

"And, when we get it, back to the fold for us—*inside* the law, Miss Dirck—that's our aim and ambition,—the legit!"

She nodded.

"Interesting, isn't it?"

"Very."

"You expect to make your million?" he asked, smiling.

"All I want is that paper."

"Sorry," he said, flushing, "—none of my business, of course. Your line is your secret unless you care to mention it."

"I have no other line, Mr. Lanier."

"You *are* an actress, aren't you?"

"I hope so."

After a moment: "Suppose," he said, "Barney Welper catches you at your little game. . . . Do you know he is quite certain to kill you?"

After a slight hesitation, Maddaleen Dirck leaned a little toward him and opened the reticule on her lap.

Her pistol lay there beside her handkerchief, purse, and vanity case.

"So—that's your answer, Miss Dirck?" he asked, placing one finger on the pistol.

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "that is my answer."

She closed the reticule. The taxi stopped at the same moment.

Lanier said coolly: "You've lived in Paris?"

"Yes. Why?"

"So have I. Don't blush when I tell them that we've lived there together."

"Need you say that?"

"Yes. We lived very quietly in the rue d'Alencon, numero neuf. Y'êtes vous, mademoiselle?"

"Parfaitment, monsieur, si vous le trouvez necessaire—"

"Listen! We operated in the Opera quarter and sometimes in the Observatory and Luxembourg quarters. You know them?"

"I did—as a schoolgirl—"

"Then *that's* all right." He got out of the taxi, aided her.

She had her purse ready, but he insisted.

"You don't realise how much I owe our driver," she said with a nervous smile.

He looked at the metre, laughed, paid the fare. The taxi drove off.

"Now," he said, "here's the Forty Thieves. The moment I take you inside that door you're on your own."

She nodded.

"Have you ten thousand dollars in that reticule?"

"Yes, ten one thousand dollar bills."

"Very well," he said calmly, "come in."

NUMBER THREE
The Adventure of the Forty Club

I

The girl turned and looked up at the house.

It* stood on the south side of the street just west of the shabby avenue—an ancient brick edifice in extreme dilapidation.

Broken blinds closed every window. Stoop, iron railing, deeply recessed door, fan-light, pilasters, all were sadly eloquent of generations forgotten.

For the age of this melancholy mansion could not have been less than a century; and it looked twice as old.

Maddaleen Dirck glanced at Lanier, and the smile he gave her was ironical and slightly sinister.

"You don't have to come in," he said.

"I do have to. . . . But goodness, how dismal! This house is not merely expiring; it's already done for. It's all in, Mr. Lanier."

"Oh, a touch of lively paint would revive it—"

"No; only bedizen it. Like rouging a corpse. There's no resurrection for this house. It's *dead*."

He seemed amused at her imagination: "Well," he said, "shall we enter this melancholy morgue and make ourselves comfortable on a pair of slabs?"

"Tea," she said, "*is* a balm. Let us go in and embalm ourselves."

"You seem to be in a mortuary mood, Miss Dirck."

"Illogical?"

"Necrological."

"Isn't that house sufficient reason?"

"It's more cheerful inside."

"I hope so."

They ascended the worn stoop. Lanier touched an electric button. The old-fashioned door opened silently; they entered; the door clicked behind them very softly.

The interior of the Forty Club was agreeably lighted by shaded globes. To the left opened a small cloak-room; to the right a dining-room; and in the rear was the lounge, pleasantly lighted, comfortably furnished.

In fact, the place resembled one of the quieter and quainter London clubs with its dark old woodwork polished by time, its black marble fireplaces where, behind old-fashioned fire-screens, heavy logs burned.

A pair of fat grey cats dozed on the hearth in conjugal proximity.

“Their names,” remarked Lanier, “are Hell and Maria.”

In the subdued light of the lounge two or three members were visible, lolling in armchairs, reading, smoking, dozing. There seemed to be nobody in the dining-room, where small tables for two were ranged along the walls.

“You mentioned tea,” suggested Lanier.

“Yes, please. But I meant lunch.”

He smiled and stepped into the cloak-room, took her fur coat, and hung up his own coat, hat, and stick beside it. There were no checks, nobody in attendance.

“Personal property is supposed to be safe in this club,” he observed. “Otherwise there’d be no club.”

They entered the lamp-lit dining-room and seated themselves at one of the tables. Lanier pushed a button. A door opened at the further end of the room and a servant in yellow-and-black livery brought the luncheon card. He looked like any servant in any respectable club; he took orders for grapefruit, omelette, chops, muffins and tea; Lanier signed the check; the servant filled their water glasses, brought fresh butter; retired, soundlessly.

The girl’s dark eyes roved brightly about the room. Wainscot and mantel of old black cherry glimmered in the mellow light. Against the woodwork a few faded pictures hung in tarnished frames,—paintings of horses, hounds, gentlemen in pink careering across a very British landscape. Over the fireplace grinned a wolf’s head mounted on a panel, and appropriately flanked by the heads of two sheep.

“Did he eat them because they roiled the water?” inquired Maddaleen Dirck.

Lanier, who had been slyly watching her, replied:

“Is not the bla-bla created to be eaten by wolves?”

“Is that why you ordered chops, Mr. Lanier?”

“You’re quite witty,” he said.

“No, I’m frightened.”

“I wonder.”

“You needn’t; my flippancy is a certain symptom that I’m badly scared.”

“How old are you?” he asked abruptly.

“Twenty-three.”

“That makes you mentally nine years my senior: I’m only thirty-two.”

Maddaleen shook her head: “That is one of those popular and masculine delusions. Really there is no wisdom in women.”

“The wisdom of serpents.”

“Perhaps that much.” . . . She hesitated, then: . . . “These walls have the usual ears, I suppose?”

“I don’t think so.”

"Really?"

"Quite. This is sanctuary. . . . Even malefactors have to have one."

"Then I may talk to you in safety?"

"Except before servants or other members."

She sat looking absently at her plate in silence until luncheon was served. And when the servant had retired, and after they had been eating for a little while:

"I've told you why I desire to join this club, Mr. Lanier."

"You wish to pick the pocket of our Mr. Welper."

"I do."

"You'll have to accomplish that bit of legerdemain *outside* these walls. This is the crooks' heaven—

'Where they cease from double-crossing
And the leery are at rest,' "

he hummed under his breath; but his lively glance became sardonic and his eyes remained curiously intent on hers.

"What would happen to me if I stole that paper inside this club?" she asked.

"It isn't done."

"I know. But what might result if I did?"

"Some member would 'get' you sooner or later. Treachery within is a common danger and concerns every member of this club. If you do such a thing it becomes the club's business to get rid of you."

"Expel me?"

"Kill you."

"Do you mean that they'd continue to track me until—"

"I do mean exactly that. You couldn't get away with it. Sooner or later you'd be found dead somewhere, or—you'd remain missing, indefinitely."

"If I took that paper from him inside this house would it get *you* into trouble?" she asked calmly.

"No. But they'd expect me to help get *you*."

He sipped his glass of water and watched her over the goblet's rim:

"Is that all you want out of this club,—a scrap of paper in Barney Welper's pocket?"

"That is all."

"And you are not sure that the paper is of any value to you?"

"No, not absolutely sure."

"And you are willing to pay five thousand dollars initiation and five thousand dues on the chance that the paper is worth that much to you?"

"I am."

“And you are willing to take a chance of picking Welper’s pocket inside this house?”

“Yes.”

“You’re some plunger, aren’t you?”

“Why?”

“Ten thousand dollars—and thirty-nine guns—all to be drawn on you at sight. Thirty-nine large, black automatics—”

“Thirty-eight, Mr. Lanier.”

“Oh. You don’t think I’d go after you?”

“Not if the paper I want is worth what I expect. I’ve offered you half interest, you know.”

“Suppose I—prefer to *inherit*—your share?”

The girl’s eyes seemed to darken and the curve of lip and cheek stiffened.

“No use,” she said. “The other half of that paper is in my safe-deposit box.”

“What foresight!” he exclaimed in a bantering voice. “So you hold the key to Mr. Welper’s document?”

“I think so.”

“Then why do you want Welper’s paper?”

“It is also the key to mine—I *think*.”

“Oho! I understand. The one is useless without the other.”

“I think so.”

Lanier smiled: “You do a lot of thinking, don’t you, Miss Dirck? And what is your ultimate conclusion concerning yourself, myself, and this scrap of paper?”

“That I *must* have it. And that I don’t believe you’ll kill me.”

“Not if you frisk your man outside the club. Otherwise I—”

“No. You won’t try to kill me whatever I do,” she said in a low voice. She had been studying the pattern on the table-cloth. She raised her eyes as she spoke, looked straight into the young man’s face with intuition as old as the mother of all serpents: “*You’d* never kill me,” she murmured.

“Is that another of those things you think?”

“I don’t trouble to think about that. It is what these others might do to *you*—”

“What about what they might do to *you*? You can’t beat this game, Miss Dirck.”

“You say so.” . . . After a moment a pale smile touched her features: “Let me do a little more thinking,” she said.

While they had been talking several members drifted into the club, and among them Mr. Welper. Lanier, facing the hall, had noticed those who entered. Now he said to the girl:

“I’ll introduce Barney Welper to you when you’re ready. He came in about a quarter of an hour ago.”

“I’m ready,” said Maddaleen Dirck.

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* The house still stands as it was.

II

Mr. Welper was seated by the fire in the lounge reading the *Evening Post*.

He looked up when Lanier and Maddaleen Dirck paused behind his chair, then he got up, cautiously.

"How are you, Barney?" said Lanier in his low, agreeable voice.

"Quite well, I thank you, John. I trust you, also, enjoy all the blessings of health."

They shook hands.

"Miss Dirck," said Lanier, "this is Mr. Welper. . . . Barney, this is Miss Maddaleen Dirck. . . . Miss Dirck and I hope, some day, to live in a little house in Passy—No. 9 rue d'Alençon. . . . We know Paris: we wish to go back and live there." . . . He looked pleasantly at Maddaleen: "I think," he said, "that money is the only obstacle to our marrying. . . . But I shall work very hard because I am very much in love."

Mr. Welper's beautiful but sly eyes were scarcely lifted to the girl's flushed face. Then his veiled gaze slipped toward Lanier:

"I am very grateful," he said in his mousy manner, "for the privilege of being presented to your ah—m—m—to your affianced wife, John. . . . Miss Dirck, I wish you every happiness. . . . If there is anything that I can do to—"

"There is, Barney. . . . We are only thirty-nine members in this club to-day. I propose my fiancée."

After a silence and a slight veiling of the shifting eyes: "Do I quite understand you, John?—"

"You do."

"Then your affianced wishes to become your—ah—m—m—helpmeet—ah—*prior* to the—m—m—nuptial ceremony?"

"We have no time to lose," interrupted the young man bluntly, "either waiting for money or for marriage."

"That is true," murmured Welper with a slight sigh; "time is the one thing none can afford to lose. Ah, time! fugacious time! . . . Temporibus mores sapiens sine crimine mutat. Ah, yes, yes. Ardua res haec opidus non tradere mores."

The epigram, the stealthy side-look, the unctuous inclination he bestowed upon the girl, all were evil. The hot colour in Maddaleen's cheeks deepened. But her daring smile flung across Welper to Lanier was utterly enchanting.

"Argilla quidvis imitaberis uda," she said; "soft clay, you know, takes any form you please, John Lanier. What I shall become depends on you."

Now the sly, hazel eyes and long lashes of Barney Welper remained intent upon Maddaleen Dirck.

"You see," said Lanier, "she is perfectly qualified for membership."

"Doubtless," murmured Welper, "you have already instructed Miss Dirck concerning our—ah—little family here in the Forty Club? Our quaint customs, and ah-m—m—our little *prejudices*—"

"I've explained it all. She knows. I'm entirely responsible for her, Barney."

"Very well, John." . . . He turned with an almost slinking inclination to the girl. "Then there remains only to—ah—to offer you my respectful felicitations . . . and the freedom of the Forty Club, Miss Dirck, as soon as you care to m—m—to—ah—consummate the happy event."

Maddaleen smiled, opened her black reticule, and offered ten one-thousand-dollar bills to Mr. Welper.

"I thank you," he said with unction. "You are now at home, Miss Dirck. I pray you to accept the hospitality of our little club until a happy fortune renders you again m—m—ineligible. . . . I thank you; I thank you. I am always your servant to command." With his horridly small, soft hand he lifted hers and bowed very low over it.

Lanier coolly slipped his arm through Maddaleen's: "Thank *you*, Barney, for congratulations," he said gaily. "I'd like to show my future wife around a bit. You speak to Gorm and tell everybody it's all right—" To the girl: "I want you to see our club, dearest."

Together they turned and strolled across the room through the mellow lamp radiance.

"Who is Gorm?" she asked, still rosy from his easy familiarity of speech and touch.

"The doorman. He saw you come in. Welper will tell him you're one of us. Shall we go upstairs?"

They went up over a soundless velvet carpet:

"There's the library. You mustn't talk in there. It's a fine library—for students in our profession,—full of standard practical working volumes—art, science, psychology,—and hundreds of forbidden books,—a lot of privately printed stuff, too."

"What sort?"

"Oh, on poisons, for example. And on the manufacture of forbidden implements."

"Burglars' tools?"

"Oh, yes, everything of interest to us."

She glanced around the empty library; then, guided by his arm, they moved into a writing-room where, in alcoves, desks stood.

"There's no monogram or address on our club paper," remarked Lanier, smiling. "No water mark, either. And usually we wear gloves when we write letters."

Other rooms were private dining-rooms.

"Things are hatched in here," he said carelessly. "These private dining-rooms are great incubators. . . . And that door over there leads into the ladies' room. Take a look at it." He dropped her arm and stood aside.

When the girl emerged she said: "It's really quite pretty. Only there's no maid in attendance—"

"We get along with few servants. It's safer," he said drily.

"Do any members live here?"

"Barney Welper and I live here permanently."

"Are there other rooms? Could a woman take up quarters here?"

"Do *you* wish to take a room here?" he asked curiously.

"I'd like to, for a week or so. Could I see one of the bedrooms now?"

"Certainly." He unhooked the transmitter of a service telephone: "Gorm? . . . It's Mr. Lanier. Send Dan Supple up with the master-key. I want to show the bedrooms to Miss Dirck, our new member. . . . All right."

In a minute or so the same servant who had served their luncheon came with a little key-ring from which dangled nine Yale keys.

Asking pardon he led the way to the floor above, selected the master-key, opened the first door, lettered *E*.

It was a clean bedroom in white muslin, with private bath adjoining.

After Maddaleen had inspected it she sauntered out to the corridor again and glanced along the row of doors.

"May I select any of these rooms?" she inquired of Lanier.

"Any except *A* and *H*. Mr. Welper inhabits *A* and I live in *H*.—"

"Then," she said with her enchanting smile, "I shall take room *G*, so we can talk through the door if I'm lonely." And, to Supple: "Please give me my key."

"These are duplicate keys, Madam. Your key is in Mr. Gorm's office."

"Can you get it now?"

"Yes, Madam, I can run down and fetch it."

She stretched out her pretty arm and took the key-ring out of his hand, saying that she'd open Room *G* with the master-key while he was gone.

"Open *your* door, too; I wish to look in," she said gaily to Lanier.

As they walked together toward Room *H* her fingers were carelessly occupied with the keys—more swiftly still as soon as Lanier turned to unlock his own door.

Even before he could open it the girl had detached the master-key from the ring and substituted for it a Yale key from her own reticule.

"So that is where you live," she said, glancing around the room from the threshold.

"Won't you come in?"

“Ought I? I suppose it makes no difference in a club of this kind.”

“None. Will you come in?”

She seemed to hesitate, a faint smile on her lips. And before she arrived at a decision the servant, Supple, returned with the key to Room *G*.

“Thank you,” she said, handing him the key-ring and taking the key he offered. She unlocked the door, walked in, glanced around, walked out, closed and locked the door.

“I’ll take it,” she said briefly.

When Supple had gone away with his keys, jingling down the corridor, Maddaleen Dirck signed to Lanier to close his own door.

“Another time,” she said coolly; “I must be going now.”

Together they turned to retrace their steps, descended the staircase, paused on the next landing.

“Are there any other women members in this Club?” she inquired.

“Yes; four or five.”

“Women of—”

“Yes; crooked,” he said coldly. “But don’t ask who they are. Nobody ever asks that question in this club. Members talk to one another if they are inclined. But our members are very busy with their own business, and nobody would presume *outside*, on casual acquaintance made in here. . . . You see you might meet any of our members almost anywhere in any social environment in the world.”

“I understand.”

“Well, then, that *is* the Forty Club. You can’t come here unless you appear to be well-bred, cultivated, accustomed to the forms and traditions of fastidious society. . . . That’s what makes us dangerous. . . . And yet, we’re not criminal at heart—the majority of us. . . . Are we, Maddaleen, dear?”

His bantering smile took the edge off the impertinence; and he was so very good-looking, and so indefinably agreeable that the familiarity scarcely displeased her.

“I wonder,” she said, “what you think our relations are likely to be, Mr. Lanier?”

“Crooked, I hope—”

“What!” she asked crisply.

“Why, crooked, of course. You’re going to pick pockets and go halves with me. That’s not a moral relation, is it?”

The swift flush of annoyance in her face still lingered when she realised he was poking sardonic fun at her.

“Our relations,” she said, “will always remain on a business basis.”

“You don’t like me, personally?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, we are affianced.”

“Oh, yes; I forgot.”

“Don’t forget. It’s the only reason Barney Welper let you in. Our manner toward each other, here, ought to confirm the idea.”

“Oh.”

“You are an actress; you ought to play the sweetheart convincingly.”

“How often do you come here, Mr. Lanier?”

“Quite often,” he replied with the slightest touch of a grin.

“Very well,” she said coolly, “my manner toward you will be theatrically correct. . . . And, by the way—may I not settle our luncheon check—”

She looked for annoyance in his face, discovered it with satisfaction, shrugged her pretty shoulders.

“Don’t presume upon the situation,” she said. “It isn’t funny. You are too much my own sort to take any liberty; too much of another sort to make any impudence agreeable.”

“Now,” he said, “I *know* you’re not a crook.”

“Do I say I am?”

“You said—”

“I said that I am not *too* good. I’m not. But what does that mean?”

“What *does* it mean?”

“Occupy your leisure with that problem,” she suggested, laughing, and moving to the door.

“That is exactly what I mean to do, Maddaleen. . . . Because I like you a lot —”

She turned and looked hard at him. “Does it matter what you think as long as I pay you for your services, my nimble friend?”

“Do you feel *that* way?”

“Certainly. . . . If you’d let me be on friendly terms with you,—as a comrade,—on that footing,—very well. But anything further is not agreeable to me, Mr. Lanier.”

“You couldn’t tolerate any other footing from a crook. Is that it? Because it’s that, or you’re crooked too and you’ve got a ‘feller.’ ”

“You must draw your own conclusions.”

“All right,” he said amiably. After a pause she glanced at him. He was still smiling. She thought, with swift repugnance, that he looked well-bred—parodied in a disturbing manner the sort of man he was not. And, suddenly, the girl realised how terribly dangerous was such a man.

Prudence—perhaps fear—parted her lips in a forced smile:

“I’d like to be friends,” she said. “Anything more I simply don’t want. Do you mind?”

“Doesn’t it depend on the man—how much you tolerate?”

"I don't want more from *any* man. Isn't that quite clear?"

"Quite," he said seriously.

After a moment's silence they turned away together. She drew on her gloves as they descended the stairs.

At the front door she offered her hand: "I'm glad we understand," she said. "We do; don't we?"

"Yes. . . . Will you dine here this evening?"

"Perhaps. I'll decide when I get home."

"Where is home?"

"The Ritz—temporarily."

"Please telephone me when you decide about dinner. Our private telephone is Stanwix 7205—" He scribbled it on a card and gave it to her. "Please call me and tell me what you are going to do this evening. Will you?"

"I think so. . . . Good-bye, Mr. Lanier—"

His clasp tightened, silencing her: "Don't forget we're closer than *that*. You'll have to play your part better when we're *here*."

She smiled adorably: "Good-bye Jack, dear, et à bientôt!" she added with her enchanting little laugh.

The door clicked behind her.

After a moment Lanier turned on his heel and walked slowly into the lounge.

Welper, standing with his back to the fire, rolling an unlighted cigar between his fingers, looked up as the younger man approached.

"John," he said softly, "why is your girl following me about town?"

"What!" demanded Lanier, thunderstruck.

"She followed me in a taxi to the Waldorf this morning. Why?"

"Nonsense!"

"And now she turns up here? *Why?*"

"You're crazy, Barney. Why should she do that?"

"*You* ask her," said Welper in his stealthy voice.

"What rot! Why don't *you* ask her if you suspect her of—"

"No."

"It's ridiculous," repeated Lanier; "you're developing nerves, Barney. Where did you think you saw her?"

"I'm not perfectly sure. I did notice a girl in black. . . . Your girl is in mourning, too. Her taxi dogged mine from Seventy-Second Street to the Waldorf."

"Then what?"

"I lunched. I didn't see her again until she turned up here with *you*."

"Is that all?"

"And—I lost my coat check out of my pocket at the Waldorf."

“What do you mean, Barney?”

“Nothing . . . nothing. . . . It may have been somebody else . . . who resembles your—ah—charming fiancée. Certainly it must have been somebody else. I don’t doubt it.”

“Well, what *do* you doubt, Barney? *Me?*”

The sly eyes sought the rug: “If I doubted you I wouldn’t have taken your girl’s money. . . . If it really was she who followed me in a taxi I’ll find out why. . . . But I guess it was somebody else. . . . I guess so. Yes. . . . I guess so, John.”

“I guess so, too,” said Lanier, scornfully. And he dropped into a leather armchair and picked up an evening paper.

And whenever the paper concealed his face, the sly eyes of Barney Welper studied him intently from head to foot.

III

Mr. Welper had a room at the club; so did John Lanier. Both lived there. But the other eight rooms had never been occupied permanently; members usually occupying quarters for a few days or a few weeks at a time, and very seldom longer than a month.

Lanier was reading a nature story in the children's column of the *Sun* when Welper said softly: "Are you dining here, John?"

"Possibly."

"Are you perhaps—ah—m—m—dining alone?"

"I hope not," replied the young man, smiling.

"Ah, the eternal domestic!" murmured Welper. . . . "A be-au-ti-ful girl, John. Yes, yes, cosmopolis incarnate. Lovely, very lovely. And clever, I presume. Ah, yes, my friend, a true helpmeet from the start."

"Why not?" laughed Lanier, tossing aside his newspaper.

"Ah, why not, indeed?" repeated Welper with exquisite unction. "Do not the little birds first mate and then aid each other to—ah—to feather their little nests? Nature, John, nature. Your pretty helpmeet is wise to follow nature's laws and help to ah—m—m—ah—to *collect* sufficient material for the future m—m—domicile. . . . John, I think it is my accustomed hour to bathe and dress for the evening repast."

"Same here," said the other, getting up.

As they went toward the staircase they nodded politely to two or three members, who courteously acknowledged the attention.

"Renton is likely to resign before the year ends, I hear," remarked Lanier.

"Eugene has so informed me," purred Welper. "My God, John, what a little oil can do for a brisk young man!—Have you seen to-night's paper?" He fished it out of his pocket, put on a pair of pince-nez, found the column with his forefinger, and read:

"THREE ACCUSED OF $2,000,000 OIL SWINDLE

Woman and Two Men Suspected—Ten Thousand People Bought Worthless Stock

Complaints from nearly 10,000 small investors, alleging that they had been swindled out of their savings by the stock promoters of the Orizava Oil Company, resulted in the filing of a sealed indictment in Federal Court Monday charging a woman and two men with using the mails in a scheme to defraud. A precedent of two

years' standing—that the United States Attorney's office in the present crowded condition of the calendar cannot take cognizance of such cases—was broken only when it was discovered that the total of the alleged fraud was more than $2,000,000 and that its victims numbered nearly 10,000.

In the indictment, which was released from seal yesterday, the defendants are charged not only with grossly misstating the financial condition of the company, but with the misappropriation of the names of two widely known business men and a lady well-known in New York society, to lend respectability to their venture.

In the letters and circulars sent out to advertise Orizava Oil stock, according to the indictment, it was set forth that the corporation controlled leases on 19,000 acres of land in proven fields; that its production averaged between 800 and 1,000 barrels a day; that it operated 100 producing wells; that it was drilling fourteen others in proven fields; that it had a surplus of property assets totalling $1,500,000, and that it had recently acquired large producing tracts in Iceland.

All these statements, it is charged, were false. The government believes that Orizava Oil did not have more than half a dozen wells under its control, and three of these were the property of subsidiaries which promptly went into bankruptcy.

The central figure in the alleged fraud is thought to have been Mrs. Helen Wyvern, a trim dark-haired woman in her thirties, who has been connected with oil promotion schemes since she failed as an actress a few years ago. Dressed in the latest Paris creations, living at the best hotels and driving a racing car, she won the friendship of many prominent business men. It was a concern of which she was an officer, the Wyvern Oil Company, which was two years ago expanded and renamed to consummate the alleged fraud. Mrs. Wyvern has disappeared, as have also the two men who figured as relatives of well-known business men, and whose proper identities have not yet been established——"

Welper paused, looked slyly over his papers at Lanier: "Eugene Renton and Harry Senix," he murmured. "Do you see what a little oil can do?"

He looked oily himself as he spread his little, pasty hands—a benignant gesture characteristic of Mr. Welper when appreciating any financial coup.

"Eugene Renton," said Lanier, "is well thought of in Central America . . . whatever a few thousand suckers are going to think of him here."

"Possibly," said Welper mildly, "it were as well that Eugene started

betimes for Central America. You—ah—recollect the little verse so popular among our members?—

" 'You never can tell
When a sucker will yell——'

"I have a little business in Costa Rica which he could transact for me. I think the emoluments would complete his million. Security, John—ah, what a sacred word!—and how sadly misused when m—m—applied to—ah—to *some* securities!"

He smiled benignly and entered his room; and John Lanier went on down the corridor to his own quarters, and turned on the bath.

Then he sat down on his bed, and, like our best shirt-front actors, bit his under lip and looked vacantly at his carefully kept finger nails.

What on earth had ever induced him to suggest the Forty Club to this girl? What irresponsible devil had prompted him to so perilous a procedure for them both?

He was beginning to realise, now, that if this girl meant to dog Welper until she accomplished the theft of the paper she was after, he, on his part, must watch her every moment that she was in this club, and see that she didn't attempt so dangerous a trick within its walls.

She might. He didn't understand her. He hadn't made her out. She might attempt it. Amateurs are foolhardy. Besides, it was evident that she had courage.

But—was she amateur or professional; sophisticated or still inexperienced? Was she all good, or only partly; all bad, or only half?

What mischance had driven her into the underworld? Usually it's a man. Somehow he didn't reconcile such a scrape with her. . . . Or she was the most perfect of actresses, or no more of an actress than is every woman.

Had she been long in the business? She couldn't have. . . . Not with that mouth. . . . The eyes, too. Yes—how marvellously she had played the terrified thief when he touched her arm in the Waldorf. . . . "Not *too* good." . . . He'd never forget that, and the enchanting wickedness of her smile. . . .

"I was crazy to bring her here," he thought. "If she hadn't mentioned Central America,—and if she hadn't been dogging Welper—"

He got up and turned off the water in the tub. Then, as he began the matter of freshening mind and body for the approaching evening, his room telephone rang, and Maddaleen's voice greeted him:

"Come to the Ritz after dinner. I wish to talk to you. If I'm not there wait for me. Will you do this—Jack, dear?"

"Yes, dearest."

"Be sure to wait?"

"Certainly."

"All right, dear, good-bye—"

"Wait—"

She had hung up.

Meanwhile the vice-president and treasurer of the Forty Club, Mr. Samuel Potter, had entered Mr. Welper's room; and now those two gentlemen were engaged in low-voiced conversation while Welper, his horrid, tiny feet in socks, pattered about preparing evening attire for his fat, short person.

"It isn't John Lanier," he said, "who's got me going, Sam; it's his girl. . . . I've seen that girl somewhere. I must be gettin ga-ga if I can't remember a face I've once seen. I *know* I've seen her before. But where? That's the hell of it."

Sam Potter, large, florid, iron-grey and genial in his smooth-shaven, sloppy way—except for his too pale eyes—chewed an unlighted cigar reflectively.

"It may have been accident," continued Welper, "but a girl in black, in a taxi, certainly did dog me to the Waldorf this morning. I couldn't get a close-up; the window was dirty and there was a lot of traffic."

"She look like Jack's girl?" inquired Sam Potter.

"Well, when Jack brought her in I thought of it right away. Maybe it wasn't. Maybe I've seen Jack's girl somewhere else. It's likely—where *are* those damn studs!—m—m—yes; what would any girl be chasing *me* for, Sam?"

"I'm not asking you," said Potter in his honest, hearty, disarming way, "but maybe you pulled off a job on some young lady in black—"

"You wrong me, Sam," said Welper, gently. "If I ever do any business with anybody their face is like a photograph in my vest pocket. . . . I never before talked to that girl of John's. All the same, I've seen her—somewhere. And—some girl dogged me."

"Had you just pulled something fine? I'm not asking you, Barney—"

"I've pulled something—ah—recently. . . . Partially pulled it. . . . I don't know who could be after me in the shape of a girl—"

He got into his bathrobe and toddled into the bathroom where, presently, Mr. Potter heard him wallowing and singing in a thick and greasy voice:

"On Execution Dock I was hung,
I was hung,
On Execution Dock I was hung;
And the rain will wash the stains
Where I'm rotting in my chains,
While the ravens eat my brains and my tongue—"

"Some Kidd!" called out Sam Potter jovially, and lighted his heavy, damp cigar. Then he, also, began to sing the older version of the favourite club

melody:

"Oh, I murdered William Moor as I sailed,
As I sailed,
I murdered William Moor as I sailed;
I knocked him on the head
Till he bled the scuppers red,
And I heaved him with the lead
As I sailed!"

From the bath came spatter and splash, and the unctuous voice of Barney Welper:

"The Jolly Roger's dancing in the sky,
In the sky,
And I hope to God I never dance as high;
With a hemp around my throat
On a galley, brig or boat,
For I'd rather walk the deck than dance and die!"

And Potter roared his jolly verse in turn:

"Lord Bellomont he took me in his trap,
In his trap,
And my King who set me sailing round the map,
And the scurvy Lords of Trade
Sat and trembled sore afraid,
Till Livingston accomplished my mishap—"

"Sam," interrupted Welper from his bath, "I'm going out among 'em to-night and I guess I'll be stylish and wear two guns. They're in the top drawer. Fill 'em up, will you?"

Then he nestled down into the warm, soapy water again, murmuring: "Who the hell was that girl in black? . . . She better quit dogging me. . . . I've known little girls to get bumped for less. M—m—yes, bumped for less than that."

Sam Potter, loading both guns with new clips, called out jocosely: "What are you shooting to-night?"

"Craps, maybe. . . . Maybe little girls." He added piously: "The future, Sam, is known to God alone. . . . And I wish you'd open the—m—m—the bottom drawer of my dresser, and—a—fill up that ammonia squirt gun for me. . . . And lay that knife in the silk sheath beside it, Sam,—the one with the Spanish-spring blade,—in case I shoot craps." . . .

"Yeh, craps," muttered Potter, as he opened the drawer and selected the articles described: "Now, isn't he the fancy cut-up! He's a scream, he is."

IV

After Lanier had dined at the club he put on hat and coat and went blithely to the Ritz. Miss Dirck was out, he was politely informed, but had left word that Mr. Lanier should be kind enough to await her return.

He waited. He was enormously interested.

And, at the very moment when this young man most impatiently awaited the return of Maddaleen Dirck, that young lady descended from a taxi and entered the shabby portal of the Forty Club, and rang for the doorman, Riley Gorm.

The old doorman appeared, presently, and informed her that Mr. Lanier had gone out after dinner.

She then inquired for Mr. Welper. Mr. Welper, also, it appeared, had left the club for bournes unknown.

Miss Dirck, who was in a black evening gown and wearing a cloak of silver fox, seemed to hesitate.

"I wish," she said, "to leave with you a very important and confidential note for Mr. Welper."

"Yes, Madam."

"Is there writing material in my bedroom?"

"Yes, Madam."

She nodded a pleasant "Thanks" and went up the velvet staircase to the bedroom floor, unlocked her door, turned on the light, and entered.

She had left her door ajar. And now, as she seated herself at the desk and started to write, she listened intently for any step in the corridor outside.

She wrote: "There is no need to inform you why I have not gone to the police in this affair. You took a cowardly, dastardly advantage of a lonely, frightened boy in fear of arrest, to gain his confidence and then rob him.

"And now you are to learn that what you stole from him will be worth millions to me. And so I take it from you.

"You look and speak like a pious old fraud, but they say you are murderous when irritated. But if you'll be advised you had better keep your temper in this matter.

"Because it is not safe to bother those who, not daring to ask protection from the police, must depend entirely upon themselves for safety.

"Keep your temper and keep away, Barney Welper. There will be no more blackmail: there will be only bullets, now, if you ever bother us again.

"(Signed) The Boy's Sister."

When Maddaleen finished, folded, sealed and addressed the note to Room *A*, she took a pistol and the master-key from her reticule, went out to the

passageway, listened; then silently traversed the corridor to Mr. Welper's room. Swiftly she unlocked his door, turned on the light, locked the door from the inside, and began her feverish search. Flinging the contents of the bureau drawers in every direction, she rummaged everything, scattering hosiery, underwear, portfolios, jewelry about. She jerked the pillows from the bed, tore the coverings away, searched every pocket of every garment in his wardrobe, turned breathlessly to the small bookcase and began to open and shake out the pages of each volume in turn.

That is where she found the paper she was looking for, among the leaves of a large, fat Bible.

It was the copy, not the original parchment. Probably that was in his safe-deposit. But it didn't matter now.

Pistol in hand, muffled in her silver-fox cloak, the girl unlocked the door, stole out, relocked it, and sped away through the corridor.

It was necessary for her to recover her breath before descending. Flushed and breathing rapidly she waited until self-command was restored; then she locked her door, placed pistol and master-key in her reticule, went leisurely downstairs, and handed to Gorm the letter addressed to "B. Welper, Esq."

"—As soon as he comes in, please," she said with her engaging smile.

"Yes, Madam."

As she descended the stoop, she met Welper coming up.

For a second her knees almost gave way, then she smiled prettily:

"Good evening, Mr. Welper," she said.

He lifted his very shiny top hat, and his bow was almost a cringe.

She forced herself to walk leisurely to her taxi, and to say in a clear, careless voice: "To the Ritz, please."

As she seated herself and the cab moved off, she glanced sideways. Mr. Welper had paused on the stoop to watch her.

As soon as her taxi turned the corner of Park Avenue she leaned forward and opened the sliding glass in front.

"The Pennsylvania Station," she said. "Fifty dollars if you don't get caught in the traffic!"

There was comparatively little traffic at that hour; the theatre and opera rush was over; and her driver took empty one-way streets with all the speed he dared.

At the station she hurried to the telephone; called the Ritz; asked the desk to page Mr. Lanier; got him in a few moments:

"Mr. Lanier?"

"Oh, it's *you*!"

"Yes. I have the paper I wanted—"

"*What!*"

"I have it. I came near being caught. Welper came into the club as I left. I tore his room to pieces but I found my paper."

"Are you crazy!"

"No, but he will be. He probably is by this time. . . . And I want to warn you. He *may* suspect you. Because you were with me when I took the master-key. You recollect?"

"Good heavens—"

"That's how I got into his room to-night. . . . And I left a letter for him warning him to keep away from me and mine. . . . And he may go to the Ritz to look for me because he heard me tell my taxi driver to go to the Ritz. So look out—"

"*You* look out!" he interrupted harshly. "If you're not utterly mad you'll stay away from the Ritz! I tell you that man is bad all through—"

"I'm not going to the Ritz. I'm going aboard my train in a moment—"

"What train? Where?"

"Don't ask me, Mr. Lanier, but give me an address. On my honour, if that paper is of any value, I shall share with you half and half. When can I reach you?"

"The Imperial Loan and Trust."

"I'll remember. . . . Thank you for what you've done—"

"Maddaleen!"

"I hear you quite plainly, Mr. Lanier."

"I *beg* you to let me see you a moment—"

"No; my train leaves at eleven-five—"

"Where are you? Which station?"

"I can't answer. . . . Look out for Welper. . . . I'm worried."

"You *should* be—"

"Not about myself," she returned scornfully.

"You need have no concern about me," he said, "but this is a bad business. I *wish* you'd let me see you a moment before you—"

"No. . . . Thank you again, and—good-bye."

"Maddaleen—"

She hung up in his ear.

The next moment he called up the New York Central Station. There was no train leaving at eleven-five. But a minute later he learned there was a train for the South leaving the Pennsylvania Station at eleven-five.

It was just ten o'clock. He telephoned to an apartment on Park Avenue: "Is this you, Donald?"

"It is," replied a calm young voice.

"I'm leaving the Penn Station at eleven-five. Will you have Tikko pack what he can and get it to me in time?"

“All right. Wait—” Lanier heard young Mayne call sharply, “Tikko! Two suit-cases for Mr. Lanier at the Penn Station by eleven sharp!” Then, to Lanier: “Do you need me, Jack?”

“Not so far. . . . I think I’m in Dutch at the Forty Club. I think they may conclude to get me. Can’t tell yet.”

“What is it about?”

“I can’t talk now. Send my cheque book and five hundred. Don’t worry. I’ll get into touch with you as soon as I can. Good-bye.”

By ten-forty Lanier had secured a drawing-room on the eleven-five and was standing near the iron gates when a little, smiling Japanese came trotting up laden with two suit-cases.

“Fine!” said Lanier, also smiling; “give them to that red-cap, Tikko.”

“Missa John has ticket?” inquired Tikko.

“Everything.”

Tikko handed him an envelope, lisping: “Chekk and money, Sir.”

“Thank you. And please say to Mr. Mayne that he need have no concern about my safety.”

Tikko smiled, lifted his little bowler hat, turned and trotted cheerfully away.

At that moment Maddaleen Dirck, followed by two red-caps with her luggage, came out of the waiting-room and walked leisurely to the gates.

“Maddaleen,” he said as she passed him.

The girl turned deathly white. Then, as he came up to her, a furious colour flamed in her cheeks:

“Damn you,” she said breathlessly, “if you interfere with me I’ll kill you! Do you understand *that*, you petty crook?”

NUMBER FOUR
The Adventure of Drawing-Room A

I

Lanier, in his drawing-room, rang for the porter, and scribbled a note in pencil while awaiting the negro's advent:

> Dear Miss Dirck,
>
> I am not hounding you; I am not blackmailing you; I'm not afraid you'll forget to divide with me; I'm not planning to double-cross you; and I'm not attempting to make love to you. And that's that.
>
> But what you've done to-night requires an interview with me before you go to sleep. I have Drawing-Room *A* on this train. Please come to it.

He directed it to "Section 12."

The porter arrived; Lanier showed him a ten-dollar bill, which evoked a lively African grin. Lanier said in a low voice:

"The young lady in Section 12. Ask her to send me an answer to this note, by you."

The porter remained absent five or six minutes, then reappeared, mysterious, important:

"The young lady wishes me to convey to you, Suh, her ansuh in respect to your communication of this evenin', Suh. I am requested to say to you that she will be pleased to considah a social interview with you in a few moments, Suh."

Within those "few moments" there came a light knock on his door; he opened; Maddaleen stood in the corridor, wearing her mantle of silver fox over her black evening gown.

"Please come in," he said politely. His berth had not yet been made up; seats and sofa were available. They sat down vis-a-vis by the window.

The girl's beautiful face was still flushed from excitement. She said:

"I'm sorry I spoke to you as I did. It was vulgar to swear at you. I am ashamed."

"It's all right. You must be rather nervous."

"I am."

"I don't blame you, God knows. I'm nervous, too."

There ensued a brief silence. The girl dropped one elbow on the sill and rested her forehead against her hand for a while as though steadying the upset nerves.

Except for the vibration of the moving train she remained unstirring and silent until Lanier said carelessly:

"I'm going to exchange accommodations with you. You must take this drawing-room and I'll occupy your section."

"No, thank you—"

But he already had rung for the porter once more; and, when the negro came, he told him to take his luggage to Section 12 and bring the luggage from that section to Drawing Room *A*.

"I didn't wish you to do that," said the girl under her breath.

"I understand," he said good humouredly, "that you don't care to be under obligations to a man of my sort. But I really don't mind a lower berth, and you really do need conveniences, comfort, and a good night's rest."

"Why should *I* concern *you*, Mr. Lanier?" she returned coldly.

"That you should feel perfectly fit to-morrow concerns our common safety."

"Has what I have done to-night compromised your security, too?"

"Probably."

"Then you—told me an untruth!"

His smile was mildly ironical: "You'd have done what you did all the same, Miss Dirck."

"Yes, but differently—"

"Well, it's done, anyway. You surely have stirred up the hornets."

"Do you really think they'll try to do to me what you said?"

"It has been their—*our*—custom," he replied gravely, "to search for and try to murder any member who has violated the neutrality of the Forty Club."

The girl's coolness and self-control preoccupied him. Her gaze met his; not a nerve twitched or a muscle quivered.

"Has that ever before occurred?"

"Twice since I have been a member."

"Did they discover the—"

"In both cases."

"And—"

"Yes; in both cases," he said gently. . . . "And that is why I'm concerned about you. . . ."

"You need not be—"

"Why not? Your safety may mean a million to me. I want you to *live*."

"Of course—on that score," she said hurriedly.

He laughed: "Certainly not on sentimental grounds. Your attitude toward

such a man as I am is painfully plain."

She gave him a flushed and troubled look; remained silent for a while, then, with some difficulty:

"I'm not a crook, Mr. Lanier. . . . And that is the—reason for my—attitude. . . . Probably you believe I'm a criminal. I've behaved like one."

Her lifted eyes were interrogative. He answered them:

"You are a finished actress, Miss Dirck. I don't know what else you may be. I merely surmise."

"Do you think I am acting *now*, Mr. Lanier?"

"Instinct tells me that you are not; reason warns me that you are," he said lightly. "If you weren't a genius you couldn't have done what you did to-night and we wouldn't be sitting here. You're the cleverest woman I ever knew. I actually am not sure at this moment whether you are straight or crooked. And I'm not a fool. I've told you that the members of the Forty Club are dangerous because they don't *look* like criminals. . . . It's easy enough to see what sort of girl you *seem* to be. I know nobody who would not be disarmed instantly at sight of you—who would not be perfectly certain of you the moment you spoke. . . . But I have seen you pick a man's pocket. . . . And I have seen a gun in your hand-bag. And I've seen you *act*. How in God's name did you ever put it over so quickly?"

She told him the story calmly, admitting that she had lured him to the Ritz to get him out of the way; that she had watched the house until Welper had gone out. And she admitted that, if Welper had returned and surprised her ransacking his room, she would have killed him with her pistol.

Lanier's face had been expressionless as he listened. She said, in ending:

"What I have told you is true. My motives for behaving like a crook I shall not explain to you. Think what you please about me, Mr. Lanier. It really doesn't matter to either of us."

He said: "You've made up your mind about *me*, haven't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"That I'm a crook?"

"Certainly."

"Am I not forced to a similar conclusion regarding you?"

"I suppose so. Does it matter?" she repeated coldly.

"Yes, it does. Because it puts us on common ground if I regard you as a crooked little girl," he replied smilingly.

"If your conclusion were a fact it would put us on common ground. But, whatever you choose to believe, I'm quite frank with you, Mr. Lanier; I'm not a criminal; I have never done anything dishonest; I am not interested in dishonest people; I *couldn't* be."

"Are you very sure I am dishonest?"

"Are you not?"

He laughed; and the girl took his mirth for his reply.

"I'm sorry," she said with a shrug. "You are well born, Mr. Lanier."

"Sorry I'm a crook?"

"Sorry anybody is—particularly a man of your breeding."

He waited, his head averted, until the glint of amusement was entirely quenched in his eyes; then:

"Suppose I reform. Would it help me with you?"

She turned her head to look at him. His handsome face seemed serious, almost wistful.

"Is that a pleasantry?" she asked suspiciously.

"No; really, what would be your attitude toward me if I dropped this sort of thing and lived a straight life?"

She felt oddly uncomfortable, hesitated, shook her head:

"I can't answer."

"Would the stain remain—in your estimation of me?" he persisted.

"Really, Mr. Lanier, I don't know. I've had no experience with men of your description. There is a natural revulsion—"

"You couldn't ever forget, could you?" he insisted; and his pursuit irritated her:

"There is no interest of that sort—no question of friendship involved—"

"*Could* there be?"

The girl was becoming more and more impatient:

"There's no friendship between us *now*, anyway," she retorted nervously. "I am emphatically not interested in you, Mr. Lanier. . . . Of course I should be —interested—to believe that you even consider the possibility of giving up the —the sort of life—"

"Really would it please you?" he asked, so boyishly that the girl blushed.

"It ought to interest any decent woman," she said, "if a man attempts to regain his self-respect—"

The porter appeared with Maddaleen's luggage, saying that Section 12 was now made up. He removed Lanier's effects; and that young man rose to make his adieux.

"About leopards' spots and Ethiopians we can continue some other time," he remarked cheerfully, "but what I ought to know to-night is your destination."

"Why?"

"I'd rather you arrived *alive*."

The shock passed clear through her: "Do you suppose—*they* are on this train?"

"That's the trouble; I don't know. I'm not going to undress to-night. I'm

going to watch your door. *Keep it locked*, too. Now; where are you going?"

"I am going to Cape Charles," she said with a slight shiver.

"Then you expect to take a boat from there?"

"Yes, for Norfolk."

"And then?"

She looked up out of eyes that were slowly becoming less hostile.

"Why do you ask, Mr. Lanier? Do you really mean it kindly?"

"I ask because I don't intend to leave you for a single moment until you are safe."

"What do you mean by safe?"

"I told you. It's important to me that you wake up alive every morning for a while. I've a million at stake, perhaps."

"Of course. . . . That is all that interests you."

"That is all the interest you permit me, isn't it?"

"Oh. . . . What do you intend to do? Follow me?"

"Keep a lively and sophisticated eye on you." He added, smilingly: "Set a thief to watch thieves, you know. I ought to make the best of watch dogs. . . . Of course," he added blandly, "after we divide fifty-fifty I won't bother you with my attentions."

"Naturally," she said with faint contempt. And, oddly enough, it hurt to realise the base and selfish motives of this man. She said with heightened colour: "Well, if you think it advisable to remain in my vicinity for a while, I'll tell you where I'm going: I'm going by train from Norfolk to a little crossroads hamlet called 'Stede's Landing.' From there I shall journey in a launch to an island called 'Place-of-Swans.' There are really five islands close together. I live on one of them. It is my only real home. And there are real men there," she added, looking insolently at him, "who care for me and know how to take care of me . . . and are not paid crooks."

"I appreciate," he said, grinning, "your girlish confidence in my being as rotten as I seem to be. Maybe I'm even rottener. Maybe I haven't a single decent instinct. You never can tell."

The girl reddened. After a moment she said: "Thank you, Mr. Lanier, for giving up your drawing-room;—whatever your motive;—and for offering protection,—whatever your reason."

"Purely mercenary," he assured her with a malicious laugh; and he went off toward Section 12.

When he buttoned the curtains he opened a suit-case, selected fresh underwear, and changed his evening clothing for tweeds and knickerbockers.

Then he extended himself flat on his bunk, took a pistol in either hand, and fixed his eyes on the locked door of Drawing-Room *A*, where a ceiling light burned.

“That is the cleverest, the most dangerous, and most crooked woman in the United States,” he reflected; “or else she is the straightest, pluckiest, *and* cleverest. . . . But—I’m taking no chances. . . .”

His mind was open. . . . His opinion, so far, was divided, fifty-fifty. . . . But if any of the Forty had tracked that girl to this train, and had boarded it, certainly he was going to see that they did her no harm.

Lying on his back, his two pistols placed upon the blankets on either side of him, he rang for his porter and requested a telegraph blank.

When the pad was brought he sat up cross-legged on the bunk, covered both pistols with the sheets, and fished out a fountain pen:

“Stick around,” he said to the porter: “I want this sent from Cape Charles.” And he wrote a night letter to one Donald Mayne:

> The two men and the woman indicated in the Orizava Oil matter are Eugene Renton, Harry Senix, and Helen Wyvern. Welper, the brains, has not been named. The action of the Government has been premature. Departments do not co-ordinate. Those named will vanish.
>
> For your personal and confidential information other matters more important than Orizava Oil are linked with that corporation. These matters include the recent sale of Tiger Island to the Du Bloon Syndicate; the negotiations with the Mexican, Guatemalan, and Costa Rican Governments and with the Government of Panama for concessions in Chiapas, at Ixlu, in the Perlas Islands, and at Old Panama. The two or three millions cleaned up in Orizava Oil are nothing compared to plans for a two hundred million clean-up financed by Orizava profits.
>
> I am keeping in touch, always mindful of your interests and mine. Welper knows quite well that we must have *ours* in anything pulled off, but he doesn’t dream *how much* we must have.
>
> I may wire for you at any moment. Until I do don’t let anybody at the Forty Club put anything over on you in Central America. And don’t worry about me.
>
> J. L.

Lanier leaned forward in his bunk and touched the porter, who was waiting in the aisle.

“I want you to send this from Cape Charles,” he said. “And I want you to secure for me two cabins de luxe on a private corridor on the Norfolk boat. Can you do it?”

“I’m sorry, Suh—”

“Could you do it for a fifty dollar tip?”
“Yaas, Suh—”
“Do it. Get the bridal suite for us and I’ll give you a hundred dollars.”

II

The sleeping-car was dark and silent; the porter had retired for a nap in the smoking compartment; a dim light burned in the centre of the ceiling, but both ends of the long car were dark.

A little after two o'clock, Lanier swung himself noiselessly to the edge of his couch, sat listening for a moment, then, pocketing both pistols but holding them grasped in both hands, he rose and walked swiftly toward the corridor that led past Drawing-Room *A* to the vestibule.

There was a man there busy with the locked and curtained window of the Drawing-Room *A*. A tiny ray of electric light streamed out of his scarf-pin and revealed two abnormally small hands roaming over sill and pane.

"Barney," said Lanier calmly.

The soft fingers, instantly still, remained motionless on the pane. Slowly Mr. Welper turned his head in the darkness, and the thin star-ray from his scarf-pin fell upon Lanier's breast.

"What do you think you're putting over?" inquired Lanier in a low voice full of cold contempt.

Welper's voice was as cautious and as calm:

"I'm after what's mine, John."

"Walk out into the vestibule."

After a fraction of a second's hesitation Welper turned with a mousy movement and moved silently toward the vestibule, followed by the younger man.

Through the glass sides starlight made the two men visible to each other.

"Now," said Lanier, "what are you trying to do to my girl, Barney?"

"Do you know what she's done to me?"

"What?"

"Frisked my room at the Forty Club."

"Who says so?"

"*She* does, for one," retorted Welper in a colourless voice.

"You mean my girl cleaned you up?"

"She was after a private paper and she got it?"

"What did you ever do to her, Barney?" asked Lanier; and there was a hint of a smile in his voice.

"I never did anything to your girl. . . . But I know now where I first saw her. . . . And she followed me. . . . She put one over on you, too, John;—or—"

"Or what?" said the younger man.

"Or she's a gay-cat."

"*Whose?*"

“Somebody’s, of course—”

“Whose?”

“Well,” said Welper huskily, “whose gay-cat would she be?”

“Get this, Barney,” said Lanier in an even voice, “she’s my girl and she’s nobody’s gay-cat. And that’s that.”

Welper moistened his lips. His sly, half-veiled eyes fell to the side pockets of Lanier’s coat. He knew now that he was covered with two pistols. He had meant to scratch an imaginary itch under his left arm-pit; but decided otherwise, profoundly influenced by the shape of those two coat pockets.

“You’re so impulsive, Barney,” said Lanier persuasively. “If you don’t alter the sleepy expression of your map I’ll be likely to frisk you.”

“John—”

“No; safety first, my friend. Get it out of your bean that I’m doubling on you. I could have killed you in the corridor. You’ve a gun and a ‘can-opener’ on you. Any jury would have thanked me. Is that right?”

“Yes, John,—so far.”

“All set, then, as far as it concerns me. And now I’ll take you all the way, Barney. Do you want to go?”

“It’s natural, isn’t it, John?”

“Why, yes. But why didn’t you wait to hear from me? I’ll tell you why; you assumed my girl was a gay-cat and I was framing you. All right: do you know what would happen to you if you had croaked my girl. . . . Think of that the next time you jump to a conclusion. How the hell can you run the Forty Club if you become hysterical over a scrap of paper and try to start something with a sectional can-opener and a gun?”

Welper’s sly eyes met Lanier’s level gaze.

“You’re twice my age; you’ve a hundred times my experience, Barney; but I don’t fly off the handle over a scrap of paper. And now you listen to me; I took you just so far; I’ll take you all the way. Here’s the whole business; my girl told me you’d stolen a document that is her property. I warned her not to pull anything inside the Forty Club. Being a kid she didn’t think I meant it. She played me for a boob, planted me at the Ritz, slid on a back-trail to the club, palmed the master-key, and got her document.

“All right. Then she called me at the Ritz and spilled it. My God, what a knock for me! I handed it to her good over the wire and I guess I scared her, for she started to beat it till it blew over.

“But she couldn’t get away with *that*. I came after her;—and I guess she realises what’s coming to her, because she’s locked herself into that drawing-room, and I’m sitting up to nab her. And that’s the situation—”

The young man’s face paled slightly, and grew intent and rigid; and he stepped close to Mr. Welper and looked him in the eyes:

"*You* keep out of this," he said. "I'll maintain discipline in my own family. *I'll* do the punishing. You'll get what's yours. But, by God, Barney, if ever again you meddle with what belongs to me, you can pick out your style of casket and your own favourite hymn."

After a pause Welper said: "Very well, John. When do I get my document?"

"When I take a stick to her, I suppose."

"You promise?"

"Certainly. She gives up or I beat her up. Do you think any skirt runs my business?" Lanier's smile became so unpleasant that Welper's ebbing suspicions ebbed faster.

"I don't understand yet," he said softly, "how your girl knew the value of that document. But she did. She got a glimpse of it; she took a taxi and followed me. She played you for a sucker, got into the Forty, frisked my room —all for that paper. . . . Why?"

"That's past me, too," said Lanier. "But don't worry; she'll get what's coming to her and you'll get what's coming to you, Barney.

"But, as far as my family is concerned, you're *out*! Don't ever again forget that. If things seem to break bum, you come to *me*."

"Yes, John."

In Welper's sly eyes the chill of murder had died out; only infinite insincerity remained as they shifted over Lanier's person and sought the door of the rear sleeper.

"You in *there*?" inquired Lanier.

"Yes, John."

"Alone?"

A second's hesitation, and the younger man said: "Who else?"

"Sam."

"Sam Potter?"

"Yes—"

"Who else?"

"No one."

"Anyone else to follow you?"

"P-possibly Gene and Harry—"

"Eugene Renton and Harry Senix?"

"Well, I left word—"

"All right. That's your affair. You run the Forty Club," retorted Lanier in cutting contempt.

"But, John—"

"Oh, go to hell, you old Dodo! What's the matter with you, starting the whole club out to 'get' my girl and me when you've only circumstantial

evidence? Isn't it customary to give a guy a chance to explain himself before you turn your guns on him? You act like an old woman crossing traffic with signals set against her!"

"John," protested Welper with unction, "you wrong me—"

Lanier's right hand flashed out and ran over Welper like lightning:

"You've two guns, a knife, a squirt and a go-easy on you, not counting your sectional can-opener. What do you think you're doing, mobilising like that? Go to bed. You sicken me."

"John—"

But Lanier turned on his heel, jerked open the car door, and left Welper with his loose mouth partly open.

III

Lanier could have gone to bed and to sleep. He was certain of that.

As he lay back on his bunk he realised that in any other affair he would have undressed and slept without bothering to make assurance doubly sure by a night's vigil.

But this girl's security had become a positive obsession already. Without effort—even with effort to dismiss it—the image of Maddaleen Dirck remained always before him—her unusual beauty emphasised by the black gown of mourning; her dark blue eyes, lovely and fearless; the enchantment of voice, of her smile—

"The deuce," he murmured, parting the curtains in order to keep her door in view.

And it was thus that the hours wore away far into the dark morning until his porter came to arouse him and found him in the wash-room already shaved and dressed in his knickerbockers.

"Speak to the lady in Drawing-Room *A*," said the young man.

A few minutes before the train rolled slowly into the station at Cape Charles, Maddaleen came from her room, dressed in a black wool travelling gown and hat.

She nodded to Lanier with polite reserve.

"No," he said, "that won't do. Please act. We've been followed. Last night they tried to kill you."

She gave him a startled but incredulous look; saw the grave concern under his smile, felt the full shock of fear.

"Probably we're watched," he said calmly. "We'd better play our parts from now on. Do you understand?"

"Yes. What shall I do?"

"Behave as though we were in love but had quarrelled."

Her voice was not entirely clear and steady: "Shall I—kiss you?"

"Yes, that's corroborative evidence. Put both hands on my shoulders."

Maddaleen placed her ungloved hands on Lanier's shoulders; and stood so, blushing furiously.

"My part is to sulk," he whispered. "You locked me out last night. You're trying to square yourself."

"I understand—"

One arm slipped around his reluctant shoulder; he turned, sullenly, but she drew his head against hers, laughing, and kissed his cheek-bone.

"Who followed me?" she whispered close to his face.

"Welper and Sam Potter."

“What did they do?”

“Welper tried to jimmy your window.”

He felt her hands trembling on his shoulders.

But now the train was slowing to a stop; passengers emerged from sections and began to fill the aisles; porters appeared outside along the dim platform.

“Do everything I tell you. Don’t hesitate,” he whispered.

“I will.”

Lanier drew her to the vestibule. “Call two porters,” he said to his own porter; “—send that night letter; get those two staterooms or get the bridal suite if you can. Then come to the boat for your tip.”

Amid the throngs of sleepy passengers descending from the cars to the dark platform, Lanier perceived two negroes making signals to him, and he nodded and charged them with the safety of Maddaleen’s baggage and his own. And now on the dimly lighted platform he drew the girl aside and backed her against an iron pillar; and stood so as to cover her with his own body, passing his left arm through hers. His right hand clutched a levelled pistol in the depths of his coat pocket.

“Now you’ve *got* to do exactly as I tell you,” he said under his breath. “I don’t propose to kick in because a strange girl develops a stubborn streak or a yellow one—”

“Look!” she interrupted in a nervous whisper; “there is Mr. Welper!”

“I see him. And that big, jolly looking man with light eyes is Sam Potter. Try not to forget *his* face.”

“They don’t see us,” she breathed.

“Oh, yes, they do.”

He felt the girl beside him shudder.

“Maddaleen?” he whispered.

“Yes—”

“You *are* game, aren’t you?”

“I hope so. . . . Yes.”

“Very well. If they try anything I’m going to shoot through my coat pocket. If I do, don’t move.”

“I—won’t,” she faltered.

“I’ll *have* to kill them both if they turn tricky. You’ll be cleared. . . . So will I, for that matter. . . . I want you to look up at me and smile. Quick—”

She turned her head, smiled adorably, laid her vivid cheek against his shoulder:

“Don’t be angry, dear,” she murmured. “I’m sorry I locked you out—”

“What you need is a beating up,” he interrupted with cold brutality.

The act was on, and Welper’s sly eyes watched them askance as he moved about the platform, busy with baggage and porters.

"Carry on," whispered Lanier. "If you really can act, show me *now*!" And, aloud: "I'm going to teach you that you can't lock me out. I'm going to hammer hell out of you, girlie."

"If you lay a finger on me I'll never love you again," cried Maddaleen, jerking her arm free of his.

"You'll love me better if I give you what's coming to you," he growled; and took possession of her arm roughly.

"Jack, dear, I'm sorry—" She leaned closer to his shoulder with a sort of scared coquetry. "I'm sorry, Jack—"

"You'll be sorrier when I get you alone in our stateroom," he murmured under his breath: "Turn nasty and defy me. I've got to beat you up on the boat, but it won't hurt."

The girl took her cue; drew away with a defiant, sinister little laugh; and again he jerked her back to his side.

"You rotten bully!" she exclaimed with a venom that really startled him.

Welper, passing close behind them in the crowd, heard Lanier say in a guarded voice, thick with ferocity:

"Shut your damned mouth and give me what you stole from Barney Welper, you little slut, or I'll whale the hide off you when I get you on board!"

Sam Potter, following two negroes carrying the luggage, caught up with Welper.

"Hey," he whispered jovially, "d'ye hear what John is handing that gay-cat of his?"

Welper nodded cautiously: "I guess John's all to the square," he muttered, "and I guess he can handle that fancy skirt of his. . . . I fear I was hasty, Sam. But, my God!—to be frisked for a probable two or three millions by that little bunch of lace underwear—"

"I hope he takes the skin off her," said Mr. Potter with a jovial grin. His light-coloured eyes remained small and round and blank, and utterly unwarmed by the mirth which stretched his big mouth.

They went aboard the brilliantly lighted boat; their luggage was stowed away in their double cabin; but they disregarded the call for breakfast and stood in the centre of the saloon, watching the crowd of passengers slowly moving through.

Presently: "There they come, Barney," whispered Sam. "Turn your back and I'll look around your right ear at them—"

"I see them in the mirror."

Maddaleen and Lanier passed amid the throng, piloted by laden porters.

"They've got the bridal suite," said Potter. "Some front they pull. What?"

"He means to marry her," remarked Welper, as they entered their own

stateroom.

"Oh, *that* bunk?" sneered Potter.

"No; it's level, I guess. They're tied tight and good, those two. You can tell: there's something in a girl's eyes—and in the fellow's. . . . All the same no guy can put out that line to me—with a gay-cat on the hook. . . . Still—I was hasty,—I guess. M—m, yes; I guess John is going to slam the toilet-powder out of her. He'll make her eat her lip-stick—and like it. But if he hadn't been that kind of guy—I—m—m, I think that little lady would have been 'found' in Drawing-Room *A*, Sam,—m—m, yes—discovered by a porter this morning with her pretty head out of joint,—m—m; and with both ornamental eyes open and a sailor's knot in her silly neck. . . . You going to bed, Sam?"

"Ho—ho!" roared Mr. Potter, selecting a cigar from his vest pocket. "I'm going to eat first. Come on to breakfast, Barney—"

"No, I lost sleep—"

"Aw, come on. . . . And say; the corridor runs aft there right past that bridal suite. I'd like to hear him beat her up, Barney."

"M—m, let us walk that way," suggested Welper. "I'll swallow a little sea-air and turn in—"

They strolled through the saloon toward the after saloon-deck; and both paused in the corridor by the door of the bridal suite.

Through the keyhole Mr. Potter's large cable-chain of gold and sapphires, which spanned his belly and anchored watch and keys in his vest pockets, was visible to Lanier. He recognised the lavish jewellery as Mr. Potter's, straightened up, signalled to Maddaleen that the expected eavesdroppers had arrived, and that their act was on again.

"Come here," he said, threateningly.

"Go to the devil," she retorted.

"Bring that paper you swiped to me. Do you hear?"

"I hear you."

"Well, I'm waiting."

"I won't give you that paper,—and you can curse your head off, Jack."

"You won't?"

"No!"

"You *won't*?"

Welper and Potter heard a scuffle; a slight scream instantly muffled, as though by a hand. The struggle became graphically audible; the listeners almost could see the two young people in the cabin swaying, reeling, clutching each other,—see the infuriated, panting girl dragged away from the bunk where she had sought refuge;—see the very blows that fell from Lanier's limber walking stick,—fell, actually, upon the bed.

“I’ll teach you to play crooked in the Forty Club when I tell you it isn’t done there!” came Lanier’s cool, malignant voice, followed by blows and choked whimpers from the struggling girl.

“Oh, Jack—oh, don’t! *don’t!* You hurt! You’re—you’re killing me, Jack —”

“Give up then!”

“I won’t!—”

“Give up, damn you—”

Potter was fairly squirming with pleasure as the noise of blows increased with the sobbing and crying.

“Will you give me that paper?”

“Yes!”

“Oh, Jack! Oh, my God—”

“Well, then, hand it over!”

There came an interval of suspense punctuated by strangling sobs. Then the girl’s exhausted voice:

“There, Jack, darling—”

“All right,” panted Lanier. “Now go to bed!”

Welper and Potter, listening with painful intensity, gazed triumphantly at each other.

“He’s got your stuff for you,” motioned Potter with his thick lips; “come on down to breakfast, Barney.”

“That’s what she needed,” murmured Welper. “M—m, yes; whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. M—m. . . . She’ll be crazy about that young man after this. They all fall for the man who knows how to beat them up.”

Potter rubbed his thick palms together exultingly: “Say, he tanned her good. He certainly tattooed that potential young gay-cat. When she looks at her fancy stripes she’ll do a lot of thinking, Barney.”

“M—m, yes. . . . I deplore violence,” he added, sanctimoniously dropping his sly eyes; “—it saddens me, Sam. . . . But *sanctio justa, jubens honesta*—m —, yes. . . . *ab honesto virum bonum nihil deterret*. . . . Ah, yes, yes, yes, indeed,—*nihil, nihil deterret*—”

“Aw hell,” grinned Potter, “—don’t pull *that* stuff before breakfast.”

IV

In the bridal-suite Maddaleen, dishevelled, flushed, palpitating, sat on the bed breathing fast and unevenly. Lanier leaned against the door, his features set in stern lines, listening to the departing eavesdroppers.

After a little while he ventured to open the door and look out. The corridor was empty.

"Now," he said, turning to the girl, "give me the paper you took from Welper."

Surprised and startled, she merely gazed at him.

"We'll have to give it back. But I'm going to make a copy of it for you."

Then she understood. She rose, went through the connecting bathroom to the bedroom beyond.

Lanier seated himself at the little desk, pulled toward him a sheet of the steamer's stationery, and took from his key-ring a gold pencil-case fitted with indelible lead.

In a few moments the girl came back. She had a paper in her hand. She hesitated, looking at the young man with eyes full of inquiry and indecision.

"I'm trying to throw a sop to that bloodhound," said Lanier. "I want to get him off your trail if I can—permanently. . . . After all, isn't a copy of this paper sufficient for your purpose?"

"Yes—"

"Does it matter if Welper possesses this as long as you have a copy?"

"N—no."

"Well, then?"

She still hesitated. He gave her a puzzled glance, then reddened:

"You don't wish *me* to see it. Is that it?

"Yes," she admitted, "that is it."

"You're afraid of treachery," he said calmly.

She looked at him, lowered her eyes, nodded slightly, and stood slowly smoothing the paper between her fingers.

"I thought," he said, "that this document alone was not enough for Welper."

"I did say so."

"And you told me that you had another document which gave this one its only real value."

"Yes, I said so."

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

"And," he asked with a smile, "isn't it true, also, that I've played square so

far?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then?” he inquired, amused.

“I—wondered—”

“What did you wonder?” he asked patiently.

“—Whether you—ever—might think of—robbing me.”

“Of what?”

“Of *both* papers.”

“Well,” he said laughing, “you’ll have to take that chance. And you’re quite right; honour among thieves is merely idle fiction. There is none; there never was any. . . . So perhaps you had better copy that document for yourself.”

“Yes. . . . But the trouble is that I can’t—draw.”

“*Draw?*”

“These are drawings. They are hieroglyphs. I can’t copy them; I don’t know how. I never could draw a stroke. . . . Can *you*?”

His smile was boyishly mischievous: “Oh, yes,” he said, “I can draw. . . . What are we to do about it?”

In her painful dilemma she gave him a flushed and desperate look in which there was a hint of distressed appeal.

“I suppose,” he said, “you consider my word of honour a paradox. But if it has any currency at all with you, take it in pledge of a square deal.”

There was a silence.

Presently she came slowly to his side and laid the paper on the desk before him.

“Don’t worry,” he said; “I won’t rob you; I’m not as rotten as that.” And he looked down at the sheet of hieroglyphics with the pencilled translation under each symbol.

“That’s nothing,” he remarked, beginning his copy with a rapid accuracy that interested and surprised her.

She watched his nimble fingers and flying pencil. It really was an absurdly simple task, except for those congenitally unable to draw.

In a few minutes he had completed the copy and had written under each pictograph and phonetic its proper equivalent in English.

“There,” he said, handing the copy to her; “now I can return this to Welper and square your account with him. . . . Does he know there is *another* paper besides this?”

“He couldn’t know it.”

Lanier sat motionless for a while, studying the original document with thoughtful eyes.

Finally: “What troubles you?” she ventured.

“Nothing. . . . I don’t know. . . . I’m terribly sorry you stirred up such a man—”

“But if I return to him what I took—”

“I know.” . . . He looked up at the girl and his features had become expressionless. “I told Welper,” he said, “that I’d kill him if he ever again bothered you. . . . But that wouldn’t help you if—”

“If I were ‘found’ somewhere?” she said quietly.

He smiled: “Well, it wouldn’t; would it?”

A slight colour came into her cheeks: “Did you really say that to Mr. Welper?” she asked.

“Yes; it was part of our act, you know,” he replied carelessly. He added, laughing, “Any guy will fight for his own skirt.”

“You really didn’t mean it, then,” she said coolly.

“What do you think?”

“Why should you fight anybody on my account?”

“Fifty-fifty.”

A rush of painful colour flooded her face:

“Certainly,” she said, “I forgot. Any dog will defend his own bone.”

“Why didn’t you say *cur*? You meant it.”

“Did I?” She turned on her heel and walked back to her own cabin, carrying his copy of the document.

A little while afterward he knocked at her door; she opened it, meeting his amiable gaze with blue eyes darkly hostile.

“Do you want to sleep?” he asked.

“Does that concern you?”

“It concerns both of us if you are as hungry as I am.”

“Very well,” she said, “we can go to breakfast if you wish.”

As they went out, and as he locked the door, he asked her where the papers were.

“In my gown—both of them,” she replied. “And my pistol is in my hand-bag.”

“That’s right,” he said with his swift smile—a mischievous smile amiably ironical. “They’ll probably get in and rummage while we’re at breakfast. Is there anything among your effects that Welper ought not to see?”

“Nothing. . . . But how can they get in—”

“Oh,” he said, “you funny child!”

“Pick the lock?” she persisted.

“Dear lady, there are so many ways of opening doors.”

“I suppose so,” she said with faint disgust.

“Yes; *you* used one way.”

She bit her lip and walked on beside him.

“I gave the document to Welper,” he remarked.

“Oh. Did he say anything?”

“Yes. But what Welper *says* never indicates what he thinks. . . . There’s a man who seems to be unique. Because he seems to be *all* bad. . . . I don’t think I ever before knew anybody who is entirely bad.”

“In your opinion,” she said nervously, “have I any reason to be apprehensive for the future?”

“We’ll talk it over after breakfast.”

They entered the dining saloon; were seated at a table for two; gave their orders.

“Tell me now,” said the girl in a low voice, “I wish to hear the truth.”

“I want you to eat a good breakfast first—”

“I *shall*! . . . Tell me.”

“Well,” he said, “I’m going to keep an eye on you for a while.”

“Then you’re really worried about your share in our enterprise?”

“I’m going where you go. I’m going to remain near you as long as my experience with Barney Welper—”

Lanier’s voice stopped short. Maddaleen looked around at him, and saw that his narrowed eyes were fixed on the pantry door, which swung to and fro as tray-laden negro waiters came and went.

“Wait a minute,” he said, rising. And he went swiftly toward the swinging leather door, where a head steward stood in brass-buttoned blue uniform.

“I hear,” said Lanier to the steward, “that this new boat has a fine kitchen.”

“Yes, Sir,” returned the official proudly; “it’s worth seeing.” And he reached out and opened the leather door, holding it wide. “After the rush is over, Sir, if you would care to inspect it—”

“Thank you, steward.” Lanier stood aside to let a waiter pass. The waiter carried a heavy tray to the table where Maddaleen sat, and was beginning to dismantle it when Lanier returned and seated himself.

The waiter was a quadroon with sickly yellow skin and eyes set close together. As he brought the coffee-pots Lanier touched his elbow:

“Lance?” he said softly.

Over the waiter’s visage a dreadful sort of pallor came; he nearly dropped the two coffee-pots.

“Lance,” said Lanier pleasantly, “take those coffee-pots and dump what’s in them overboard.”

The waiter couldn’t utter a sound; he steadied his trembling legs by leaning one hand on the table.

“Then,” continued Lanier, calmly, “tell Mr. Welper that I advise him to keep out of the kitchen. . . . Which pot is doped?”

The negro stared at the young man in loose-jawed terror.

"*Which?*" repeated Lanier.

The negro touched Maddaleen's pot with shaky fingers.

"*With* what?"

"I—I dunno, Sir—"

"Bring some fresh coffee. Leave that pot here! If you don't start, *I'll* start something *now*!"

Scarcely able to walk, almost blind with fear, the negro went away to fetch fresh coffee.

Lanier looked at Maddaleen. She was very pale.

"I'd better tell you," he said. "I caught a glimpse of Welper through that door. He was in the kitchen talking to this waiter. The waiter's real name is Lance Ferray. He's an ex-convict and he's one of Welper's rats. I've heard that Welper has been known to use strychnine."

The girl's face was marble.

"Now," he said, "do you understand why I think it wise to keep an eye on you?"

Her blanched lips formed a soundless phrase. Then, "How horrible," she said in a voice scarcely audible.

"Can you eat?"

"I—think not—"

"Try."

"It is too—awful."

He turned, smiled at her, rested a firm hand over hers, which were clasped convulsively in her lap.

"You're not to be afraid," he said. "Do you understand?"

She looked at him with pallid courage.

A new waiter appeared with fresh coffee.

"Where's our waiter?" asked Lanier sharply.

"He ain't well, Suh. He done flop down in de pantry, Suh; an' de gin'ral he sent me to wait on you all."

Lanier tasted the coffee from both pots. The breakfast was spread before them.

"All set for the next scene," he said gaily to Maddaleen. "Come; don't fail me now. I haven't failed you, so far."

She said; "Very well; I'll eat;" and tasted her coffee with a slight shudder.

"I wonder," said Lanier, "whether you've room for me in your own house."

"Yes."

"Maybe you don't want me there—"

"Yes, I do. . . . I'm—frightened."

"I know you are. . . . That isn't good for you, either. . . . Suppose I—suppose I tell you something that ought to—well—reassure you. . . . Shall I?"

She was silent for a while, then she slowly turned her head.

"Haven't I guessed?"

"Have you?"

"I think so, Mr. Lanier."

He seemed in the slightest degree disconcerted: "What is it you think you've guessed?" he asked mockingly.

"Something about—*you*."

There was a trace of chagrin in his smile of inquiry. She did not smile when she spoke again:

"I think you are to be trusted," she said.

"Well, now, is *that* what you guess about me?" he said in a bantering voice.

"More than that, Mr. Lanier."

"What?"

"Somehow or other I think you really are what you look like."

"I told you that is why men of my sort are dangerous—"

"I can't believe that you are a criminal."

"Then your guess is that I'm an honest citizen?"

"You are, aren't you?"

"What! Hand in glove with Barney Welper and Sam Potter? And a member of the Forty Club—"

"*I* am a member, too. . . . And I know you think me honest."

Her voice, her manner, her expression brought an odd expression into his face.

"Once," he said, "I asked you what would be your attitude toward me if I chucked the crooked life and became honest. Have you made up your mind?"

She continued with her breakfast for a while and he waited. At last she said, not looking at him:

"I've—wished I could—like you."

The simplicity of the avowal was its charm. And it settled the last trace of doubt in the young man's mind concerning Maddaleen Dirck.

And yet the actress in her, and strange experiences with the world, left him a little cautious.

"I'll tell you this much," he said; "I mean to play square with you from the beginning. I mean to, always. . . . Whatever my motive really is, I leave you to guess—because you are so good at guessing," he added lightly. "But I would like to have you know that my motive is not money."

She looked up with a trace of incredulity in her blue eyes.

"I don't want a share in anything except—your goodwill," he said with a smile.

"But—you helped me. It is a bargain—"

“The fifty-fifty?”

“Yes—”

“Do you really believe I’d take *money* from you?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

“What does your intuition teach you is the right guess?”

She blushed. “I’m quite willing to share whatever I get. You’ve been—loyal—”

“Yes, but not for a price.”

The girl’s face cleared exquisitely: “Why, then?”

“I suppose,” he said lightly, “it’s because I like you. . . . If there are other reasons why I have aided you, desire for money is not among them. . . . I wonder whether you will come up on deck with me and tell me a little about yourself.”

“What do you wish to know, Mr. Lanier?”

“Are you really an actress?”

“Yes, I am. I have had three years experience on the English stage.”

“Well,” he exclaimed happily, “that clears things.” They rose from the table.

“How?” she enquired.

He laughed, offered his arm; they went to the saloon deck and walked toward the bow.

Standing there, her arm still clasping his and the wind blowing in their faces, she said:

“You might just as well tell me that you are as honest as I am. You are, aren’t you?”

“Would you like to believe it?”

“Yes.”

“Suppose I tell you I am honest.”

“If you do I’ll believe you.”

They had turned to look at each other and their faces had become serious.

“*Are* you?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, “I’m all right.”

Under the intentness of his scrutiny the almost painful intensity of her own gaze remained unaltered.

A deep breath of relief was her only comment.

At that moment Mr. Welper came to the door of the saloon. Lanier freed himself from Maddaleen’s arm and was beside Welper before he could retire.

“Barney,” he said, “you’re still inclined to take chances with me, aren’t you? Do you want me to plug you *now* and settle matters?”

“Why, John!”

“Go and find Lance. He’ll tell you what I mean if he’s not too sick with

fright. . . . I've told you already that if you continue to bother my girl I'll bump you."

"John, you wrong me—"

"Remember," said Lanier pleasantly, "I'll kill you if you touch her. . . . I'll kill anybody in the Forty Club who touches her. And that's the case as it stands."

NUMBER FIVE
The Adventure of Stede's Landing

I

The rapid and perilous sequence of events during the last twenty hours had profoundly affected Maddaleen Dirck.

She was a girl of only average courage, but she was a girl of decision and of intelligent determination, too. Further, she had imagination, and all the impulse characteristic of a sex whose instinct is to restrain it.

These traits and qualities sent her to the Division of Inscriptions in the Museum; governed by them she followed Mr. Welper and encountered John Lanier; still urged by them she secured access to the Forty Club, fled, and now was here on the Norfolk boat with John Lanier beside her and a malignant and revengeful enemy somewhere aboard who twice, already, had attempted her with sinister intent.

Her situation, now, was the logical consequence of what imagination and courage had incited her to do. She knew this; and yet it amazed her that she had possessed enough courage to carry out such a determination.

Yet, the quality of feminine courage is not constant; it ebbs or wanes even with the bravest.

What almost destroyed every atom of courage in this girl had been that dreadful letter from her brother, and the telegram from Old Jake confirmed by letter.

These messages of death seemed to paralyse her; and she had scarcely mind and energy sufficient to go about the unfamiliar New York streets to purchase mourning apparel.

But what brought her mind to life again, and set imagination and courage aflame had been a second letter from Old Jake.

He was a very old and very wise man who had served her father as steward at Place-of-Swans, and had served his father before him.

And Old Jake had written her in his strange, quaint, old-time penmanship, that the young master's body never had been found—as certainly it would have been had he really been drowned off Tiger Island in the black squall that upset his sailboat.

Furthermore, the old man had left the others—fishermen and baymen—to their poles, nets and grapples; had gone ashore to prowl on Tiger Island; and had discovered there the prints of his young master's hobnail boots.

There was no mistaking those imprints; the young master's sea-boots had

been made in New York with leather soles and hobnails; and there was not another pair like them in the region.

Moreover, these same tracks led up through the mud and reeds to the shelter of a sand hill; and here, down in the hollow amid the scanty dune-grass, *somebody* had built a fire and had fried a particular brand of ham which came only from New York, and was sent to Place-of-Swans for the special gastronomic pleasure of the young master of the Manse.

So Old Jake wrote to his young mistress that he was positive the boy was not dead at all; that the boy, however, had seemed very despondent upon his arrival at Place-of-Swans; had admitted to Jake that he was in great trouble, and feared he was destined to bring disgrace upon the family name.

"—I am confident, Ma'am," continued the letter, "that the young master is bodily well and sound, however ill he may be in mind. And further, I believe, under God, that when he has done with hiding his boyish shame and has come to the clearer understanding of a grown man, he will put away childish things and will return to us at Place-of-Swans;—and a better man, too, for his repentence of folly—to which all men are heir, Ma'am."

It was this letter that rekindled Maddaleen's courage and set afire imagination and determination.

It was due to this letter that the girl was in time to encounter, at the Museum, the man who had robbed her brother.

It was due to Mr. Welper's excess of caution that he had not gone earlier to the Museum to seek the solution for the hieroglyphs, so brutally stolen from the girl's brother.

That now was the situation; her brother was alive but hiding his disgrace—or what he feared would prove to be disgrace.

She, his sister, had recovered the stolen document and the copy was on her person.

And she was on her way to Place-of-Swans with a strange young man of most casual acquaintance in whose honesty she, of a sudden, had come to believe implicitly.

She and this young man had been standing together in the bow of the Norfolk boat for a long while without speaking, looking out over the Chesapeake. Grey water swelling, tumbling into foam, raced away alongside; eastward a ragged curtain of November mist hung over the Atlantic Ocean.

Maddaleen Dirck broke the long silence:

"I'm so glad that you *are* all right, Mr. Lanier."

"I only *say* I am," he reminded her with good-humoured malice. "Do you actually believe me?"

Lately there sometimes came a little smile into her dark blue eyes when she

spoke to him. He noticed it now.

She said: “I never have been entirely able to reconcile you with what you pretended to be.”

“Nor I you,” he said. . . . “Although that, ‘not *too* good,’ rather staggered me.”

“I had to say it; I was desperate. . . . Do you think I am a good actress? Or —not *too* good?”

He laughed. “Your art is wonderful, Miss Dirck.”

“That’s nice,” she said with the quick blush of the unspoiled. For a moment the shadow on her features lightened; and, for the first time, he saw pleasure there,—realised the delightful youth of her in all its charm of diffidence and inexperience.

For a little while she remained uncommunicative, her pretty face turned seaward, the wind blowing her furs. Finally, without looking at him:

“Won’t you please go and lie down? You had no sleep last night.”

“I don’t mind. . . . Besides, I couldn’t safely leave you here, you know.”

“Then I’ll come with you. There are two staterooms.”

“I know you’d rather not do that,” he said.

“Why? Because it’s the Bridal Suite? I’m not Victorian; I don’t care. You can get five hours’ sleep if we go now—”

She turned from the rail, hesitated as though waiting; and he joined her. Together they walked through the corridor. As he unlocked their door he laid his finger on a scarcely visible depression in the white paint:

“That’s the mark of a jimmy,” he said coolly. “It had pants on, as they say.”

The girl’s face became serious: “Then they *did* try to break in. You said they would.”

“Somebody must have frightened them away,” concluded Lanier with a slight shrug.

They entered the Bridal Suite; he locked the door.

“What was it,” she enquired, maintaining her composure, “that you said to Mr. Welper when he appeared at the door a little while ago?”

“Oh, nothing much—”

“Don’t you wish to tell me?”

He looked around at her—he was just starting to enter his own stateroom:

“If you desire to know,” he said, “I reminded Barney Welper that I’d kill him if he continued to annoy you. . . . And I’ll lie down for a while if you don’t mind—”

He smiled politely and continued on through into his own stateroom, where he laid both pistols on the counterpane, dropped down between them onto the bed and pulled a pillow under his cheek.

He was not quite asleep when some slight disturbance caused him to open his eyes.

Maddaleen was there, seated on a chair.

“I’m still a little frightened,” she said. “May I sit here?”

“Why don’t you lie down in your room and I’ll come and sit near you—”

“No, please! I’ll leave if you don’t lie still—”

“But—”

“I merely wish to sit here near you. I’m cowardly, I suppose—”

“No; it’s better we should remain together. But you should take my place and let me sit over there—”

She forbade his rising with a gesture, sprang to her feet and came over to him.

“If you’ll pick up your pistols there’s room for us both,” she said calmly.

He nodded: “Of course; that’s simple,” and laid the other pillow for her.

She stripped off her hat and gloves, glancing absently at the shuttered window, opened her hand-bag and placed her own pistol near his, then, without the slightest hesitation, she laid her slim length down beside him.

“I’ll stay awake,” she said, “so you can sleep.”

“You needn’t.”

“Isn’t it safer?”

“No; I sleep very lightly.”

The girl sighed: “I also lie awake most of the night,” she said. . . . “I hope we both sleep, Mr. Lanier.”

II

The steamer's whistle saluting old Norfolk awoke them.

"That was wonderful," she exclaimed with a smile and a light yawn; "I feel so much better. Do you?"

"Very fit," he said, "and quite ready for shore and another breakfast."

Maddaleen swung her feet to the floor, yawned again undisguisedly, put her pistol into her bag, picked up hat and gloves, nodded frankly to Lanier: "Thank you so much, you are wonderfully kind to me."

"Why not?" he enquired laughingly.

She paused in the passageway to turn around:

"Why should *you* be kind to *me*?"

"Ah," he said, "that is another of my secrets."

"You'll tell me some of them later—won't you?"

"That depends on how communicative *you* are."

"Oh, I shall tell you everything," she said, so sincerely, and so utterly without a trace of coquetry or even of self-consciousness that Lanier stood there looking at the passageway for several minutes after she had disappeared into her own stateroom.

When Maddaleen had accomplished a bath she rapped on his door:

"Your turn now!" she called; and he heard her door slam.

Porters appeared on board when they were ready to rejoin each other.

On deck they saw hundreds of friendly sea-gulls stemming the fresh wind, balancing in the teeth of it on sleek, powerful wings, or alighting like tame pigeons on the piles and low roofs of the wharf, watching for some kind human to toss them a crust of bread.

Always Lanier's keen eyes were on duty, and his left arm was hooked through Maddaleen's; but he caught no glimpse of either Welper or Sam Potter, and his grip on the pistol in his side pocket relaxed.

They found a taxi; the porters stowed their luggage; and they drove to the great hotel on Granby Street at Maddaleen's suggestion.

"Our train doesn't leave Norfolk until one o'clock," she said; "and—you *are* coming with me, aren't you, Mr. Lanier?"

This amused him—touched him, too,—but he masked sentiment with something approaching a grin:

"Once," he said, "you swore at me for following you—"

The girl blushed painfully: "Is that generous of you?—"

"Rotten. Slinking! It's the gibe of a bounder—"

"Oh," she protested; and they both laughed a little.

"But you are coming to Place-of-Swans, Mr. Lanier?"

“Never heard of it—”

“It’s my home—”

“That’s interesting; but I don’t belong in your home—”

“You are punishing me!” said the girl, a trifle apprehensively. “You wouldn’t really leave me now. . . . Would you?”

He grinned in his boyish fashion:

“Let me catch you trying to get away from me,” he said. “If Place-of-Swans suits me I may stay there all winter.”

Her expression became actually happy under his light badinage; she took his arm with an engaging confidence that touched him again—so evidently unfeigned was this young girl’s belief in him and so frankly sweet its betrayal.

“Two adjoining rooms and a sitting-room?” he inquired. “And, for registering—what is your idea of what would be best for you?”

“They know me here,” she said. . . . “I’m a little nervous about being alone; but I don’t believe anybody here would think ill of me—”

She checked herself, flushed and embarrassed for the first time.

“Mr. Lanier,” she said, “when we register the desk-clerk will recognise me and speak to me. . . . So I ought to tell you that my name is Maddaleen Loveless.”

“Oh,” he said, “not Dirck?”

Her expression altered and the colour faded:

“Dirck was—*is* my brother’s first name. . . . Dirck Loveless. . . . He is sometimes called Jimmy—from Fitzjames, his middle name.”

Lanier looked at her thoughtfully:

“I shall tell you something about my brother, too,” she said. “I need a man’s opinion.”

They walked together to the desk; the clerk bowed politely to Maddaleen and ventured to express pleasure at her return from three years’ residence abroad.

The girl presented Lanier; the two men shook hands; there was a moment’s unembarrassed conversation, then the polite clerk, at Lanier’s request, assigned them connecting rooms with a common parlour.

A maid showed them their accommodations; their luggage was brought in; breakfast ordered in the parlour.

When they were alone Lanier said that he wished to send a telegram, bade her lock the door behind him and not open it until he returned.

He went back to the desk; the polite clerk glanced up, regarded Lanier intently, expectantly, as though awaiting a cue.

“How are you, Frank?” said Lanier in a low voice.

“Fine, Mr. Lanier. You look well. How are things at the old dump?”

“Busy.”

“As usual, I suppose. Are you down here on business?”

“Yes.”

“Can I be of any service?” murmured the polite clerk, pretending to inspect the register.

“Yes. . . . You never came across Barney Welper or Sam Potter, did you—in the old days?”

“Not personally. What is their line?”

“Oil—or any old thing.”

“General utility men?”

“Exactly.” He took out a cardcase, extracted two photographs and showed them to the clerk: “Have *they* registered here?”

“Not so far.”

“Take a good look at them, Frank.”

After a silent scrutiny: “I’ve got them,” said the clerk. And Lanier pocketed the photographs of Mr. Welper and Mr. Potter.

“All right,” he said. “If they do register here, find out their destination. I’ll get into touch with you before long.”

The desk-clerk smiled: “Of course I wouldn’t ask you where you are going, Mr. Lanier—”

“I’ll tell you: I’m on my way to Place-of-Swans.”

“Oh, the old Loveless place. Miss Loveless is a charming girl. Have you known her long, Mr. Lanier?”

“Not very.”

There was a pause; the desk-clerk lowered his voice: “That was a sad affair about her brother—”

“Don’t tell me.”

“Haven’t you heard?”

“No.”

“Then I’d better tell you—”

“No, don’t.”

“Why not, Mr. Lanier?”

“Because she hasn’t. If she chooses to tell me herself—”

“Everybody knows about it down here. It’s no secret; the Southern papers published it. And you might as well know that last week young Dirck Loveless was drowned off Tiger Island.”

“*What!*”

“—And he was a fine swimmer. . . . He came into a fortune at twenty-one, but I’ve heard it said he lost most of it in oil. . . . And there’s gossip about the poor kid—that he upset his own sailboat on purpose. That’s what is being said in Norfolk. Hadn’t you heard anything about it?”

“No.”

"I was right to tell you; don't you think so, Mr. Lanier?"

"Yes—it's all right, Frank. . . . What oil stocks was the boy mixed up in?"

"Orizava, I believe. There are rumours concerning it, you know."

"I know."

"It isn't a buy, is it?"

"Frank, you might as well buy hell-fire preferred."

"I wondered. . . . The Loveless boy was loaded to the gills with oil, I hear. When is Orizava due to blow up?"

"Not for a while."

"But those indictments—"

"Were premature. It's the same old eternal trouble,—one department cutting another department's throat. The Dodo isn't extinct. There is more than one living specimen in the Cabinet. . . . Frank. I want to send a code wire."

"I'll handle it, Mr. Lanier."

"All right, then, I won't take time to code it—"

He wrote on a slip of paper:

Tikkio, No. 3 Schuyler Square, N. Y.

I want to know where Helen Wyvern is and what she is doing. Reply to Frank Lane, Desk Clerk, Hotel Marquis-of-Granby, Norfolk, Virginia.

"Number B."

"Very well, Mr. Lanier," said the polite desk-clerk. Lanier went back to his rooms, and Maddaleen, recognising his voice, admitted him.

"Anything queer?" he enquired with a smile, noticing her serious and rather colourless face.

"I was standing at the window and I saw Welper and the other man walking through Granby Street."

"Oh, yes; they're somewhere in Norfolk. But they're not in this hotel."

"I wonder where they are going," said the girl.

"I don't know, but I think it likely that Welper is going to Tiger Island. He's bought it."

"Are you certain?" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Practically. Why?"

A gleam kindled the girl's eyes to fierce brilliancy. For now she was sure that Barney Welper never had seen the second half of the parchment which her brother had discovered among the Eden papers in the leather box he bought in Charleston.

A waiter knocked, bringing breakfast. It was served in their sitting-room. And, as soon as the door was locked behind the departing waiter, Maddaleen,

all excitement, started to lay the entire situation before Lanier.

"I must tell you from the very beginning," she said; "and the beginning occurred in the month of July, 1568."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, laughing, "what sort of tale are you telling me, Miss Loveless?"

"Please pour the coffee," she begged him—"I'm too excited. And it's a tale of piracy and pirates I'm telling you, Mr. Lanier. You mustn't laugh. You won't after you hear it."

"Fine," he said. "I never had enough of *Treasure Island*. There should have been more volumes—sequels—like 'Twenty Years After'—"

"Please! This isn't fiction."

"Go ahead," he said, gravely buttering his toast.

"It's more exciting than fiction," she said. "It's the story of my own family."

He thought to himself that family tales never amused anybody except the families involved. But he managed to appear politely receptive while gastronomically busy.

She began, between spoonsful of grapefruit:

"In the month of February, 1567, an ancestor of mine named Fitzjames Loveless landed in New York—then New Amsterdam—without a penny."

"He couldn't last long now," remarked Lanier.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"Really, no. Please go on."

"Very well. This adventurer, Fitzjames Loveless, managed to marry the daughter of a thrifty and wealthy Dutch burgher. He lost no time doing it. Her name was Maddaleen Dirck. Our records say she was plump and handsome but had a sharp tongue.

"All this is merely a matter of family record, and not interesting except as it directly concerns what I did yesterday to the man, Welper. Because, as a matter of fact, what a Spaniard did to this same Fitzjames Loveless in July, 1568, caused me to pick the pocket of Barney Welper in November, 1921."

Lanier looked at the girl in unfeigned admiration:

"You're telling an interesting story very cleverly," he said. "I perceive the creative talent in you."

"You do believe me though, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I do. Now go ahead and I won't interrupt."

"Well, then, with his wife's marriage portion this enterprising young fellow, Loveless, bought a fine sailing galley. His wife christened it the *Red Moon*. And away he sailed with a lot of knives and looking-glasses to make his fortune in the Spanish Main. You see my ancestor was clever; pirates wouldn't bother a man whose only cargo consisted of cheap knives, needles, scissors,

beads, and looking-glasses. As for the Spaniards, well, he must take his chances.

"And what happened was this: Captain Loveless put into the Chiriqui Lagoon, Costa Rica, where his light draught *Red Moon* was quite at home and well screened from patrolling Spanish sloops.

"Then he went ashore; and there he traded his knick-knacks with the natives for lumps of gold. More than that, he and his crew caught a small Spanish rowing-galley in the lagoon, loaded with strange and exquisitely carved little ornaments of pure, soft gold. It was piracy; Spain and England were not at war.

"Somehow or other Captain Loveless discovered that these lovely little gold ornaments representing birds, reptiles, fabulous creatures and gods, all came from burial places. So he and his crew looted the country so thoroughly that the *Red Moon*, galley, was loaded to the gunwales with pure, soft, Indian gold."

"Where did you learn all this?" asked Lanier, fascinated by the beauty of this youthful teller-of-tales, as much as by the tale she was telling.

"Oh, that much is known. Spanish writers of the period tell about it. My father had volumes which mentioned it. They are in the library at Place-of-Swans. And also, I think that John Esquemeling mentions it."

"Fine! Please proceed."

"Well, this happened; that Loveless, loaded with gold, rowed out of the lagoon at night, hoisted sail, and made for the open sea. And a Spanish sloop, *The Holy Rosary*, commanded by a Don José Carrillo, chased the *Red Moon*, came up with her, engaged her, took her, threw Loveless and his crew into *The Holy Rosary*, which was on fire, and sailed away.

"And now, first, I shall tell you what happened to *The Holy Rosary*. She was badly on fire, but Loveless and the few men of his who remained alive contrived to provision a boat, lower it, hoist a sail, and start westward.

"How they managed only God knows, for Loveless, in his letter to his wife, is reticent concerning that voyage, merely remarking that he alone was living when he reached the coast of North America.

"Well, he got back to New Amsterdam somehow. And there he heard that his captured ship, the *Red Moon*, was reported missing, and had last been seen by an English schooner which chased her off False Cape, North Carolina. But a terrific storm suddenly interfered. And the last that the English captain saw of the *Red Moon* was her battle for life off False Cape.

"As soon as Loveless heard the story he packed up, took his wife, and started for False Cape.

"The group of little islands just inside the dunes seemed to him, no doubt, a good place to settle, and from which to search for his sunken treasure. He

named these little islands ‘Place-of-Swans,’ from the vast companies of wild swans which still ‘use,’ as we say, the waters in that region.

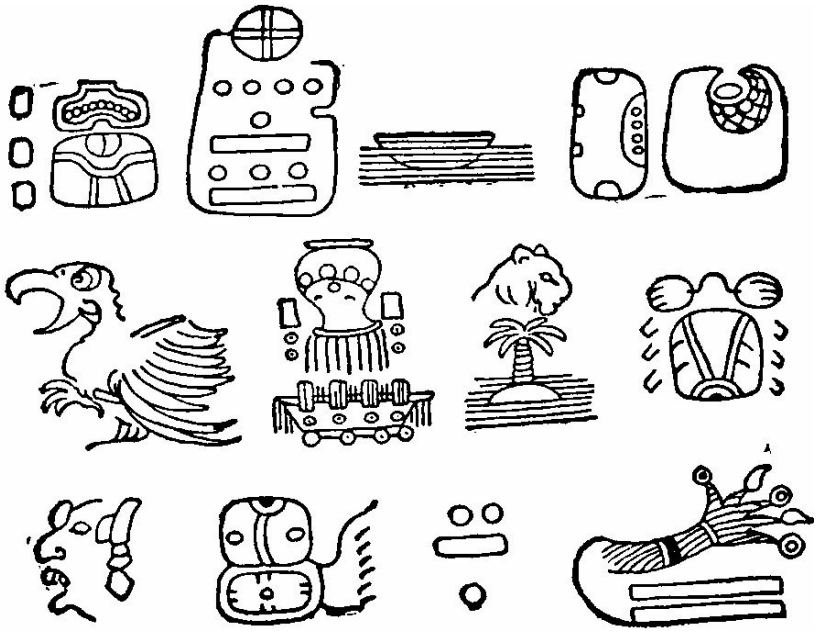
“And here Loveless built a house of sea-stone, as he called it,—really a coquina concrete. You shall see the ruins. We call it the ‘Old Manse.’

“So that, Mr. Lanier, was the beginning of our family in America.”

The girl’s lovely face, flushed with excitement, as well as with her story, stirred the young man to intense interest.

“Now,” she said, “let us follow the *Red Moon*. The mystery of that ship has been a legend in the Loveless family for more than three hundred and fifty years.

“The last ever seen of her was off False Cape. And that was the last that the Loveless family ever heard of the *Red Moon* until—what do you think!” she said dramatically. “My brother discovered in Charleston, among a lot of old documents which he bought for two dollars and a half at auction, the last message of Don José Carrillo, who took the *Red Moon* from my ancestor, Fitzjames Loveless!”



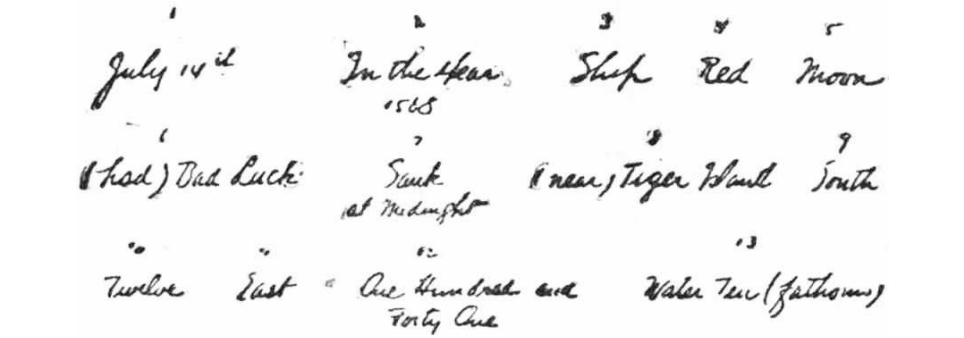
“That’s astounding,” said Lanier, feeling her excitement stirring his very blood.

“It’s a miracle, and true. Look! Here is Carrillo’s message in Maya hieroglyphs, with the pencilled translation below each symbol.”

“But that is not all,” she said, springing to her feet. She turned around, drew the Spanish script, with its pencilled translation, from her bosom, leaned

over the breakfast table, and laid it before Lanier.

"Read," she said, scarcely able to speak from excitement.



And, when Lanier had read the literal translation of this quaint document, written in sixteenth century Spanish, the girl cried exultantly:

"Do you see now how useless is Tiger Island to this creature Welper?"

"This is amazing," muttered the young man.

"Isn't it! A true miracle! Think of the wanderings of the original parchment, written, perhaps, by Don José Carrillo in his own blood.

"Do you understand? He was ill, dying. He dared not trust the entire truth to the Maya hieroglyphs with which, it seems, he was fairly conversant. And this is not strange because his brother, the Franciscan friar, wrote a book upon the subject.

"Anyway, poor Carrillo wanted his brother, the friar in Panama, to know what had become of him and of the *Red Moon*. So he wrote the story in two parts; in Maya hieroglyphics, purposely not exact; and in Spanish, modifying the Maya message. Isn't it like a sixteenth century Spaniard?"

"Do you know," asked Lanier, "how the message came to be found among the papers which your brother bought in Charleston?"

"Yes. I found copies of the papers in my brother's safe-deposit box. Reading them carefully I found it easy to trace the wanderings of this parchment. This is what happened:

"Fitzjames Loveless, after years of search, discovered a human skeleton—probably Carrillo's—in the pine woods on Tiger Island. Near this bony horror, which still was clad in a rusty morion and a corselet of inlaid steel, lay a rusted sword and an arquebus—or musket—some such weapon. It had a bell-mouthed barrel, anyway; and it was in the barrel that Fitzjames Loveless found this parchment.

"Evidently he could not make head or tail of it. It meant nothing to him. Probably it never occurred to him that this parchment held the solution of the mystery of the *Red Moon*.

“At all events, it is plain enough that Loveless never deciphered the document.

“And now comes another link in the evidence supporting this miracle: for, more than a hundred years later, when a descendant of the first Loveless lived in the Old Manse and grew cotton and indigo along the lagoons, Captain William Kidd anchored off False Cape, and his men came ashore to fill their water casks at Place-of-Swans.

“And some of those ruffians—perhaps not by Kidd’s orders—stole the chest of family silver in which this old parchment document lay.

“Kidd wrote to Loveless saying he meant to restore the chest. He never did. And somehow or other the chest and document came into possession of Stede Bonnet, the pirate, who secretly was in league with that scoundrel, Governor Eden of North Carolina.

“Captain Kidd was taken, tried, and hung, as everybody knows—*not* for piracy, but for murder. Maybe he was unjustly executed; they say so now.

“Then Stede Bonnet was taken by Lieutenant Rhett in the *Sea-Nymph*, and *he* was hung. But, somehow or other, Edward Teach, called ‘Blackbeard the Pirate,’ got hold of the parchment—probably when he kept Stede an unwilling and idle supercargo aboard his ship the *Man-o’-War*.

“Anyway, Teach must have had an inkling that the ancient parchment might contain valuable information concerning the lost *Red Moon*.

“Evidently he sent the parchment to Governor Eden with the idea of enlisting that rascal’s aid in finding some learned man to decipher the Maya inscriptions.

“But Edward Teach, the pirate, was caught by governor Spottswood of Virginia, who sent a Captain Maynard to attack him; and Blackbeard died fighting to the end.

“Then Eden, terrified lest he be implicated, fled to Charleston; and there the wretched creature actually died of fright in the very house in which my brother bought for two dollars and a half a leather box full of his personal and private papers.

“And that, Mr. Lanier, is how this document, written three hundred and fifty years ago by a Spaniard who robbed an ancestor of ours on the high seas, came back through many and bloody hands to the last living male of our race, my brother, Dirck.”

III

Of all the interesting true stories which John Lanier had ever heard—and in many of which he had been a part—this story of Maddaleen Loveless was easily the most fascinating.

He was thinking of it now as he sat beside her in the quaint old rickety train speeding southward.

They had left the Hotel Marquis-of-Granby after breakfast; had left Norfolk at ten o'clock; and now they were on their way to Place-of-Swans.

The girl had told him all about her brother and about the near tragedy which, for days, she supposed had ended the boy's brief and silly career.

"Think of the brutality of that creature, Welper," she said. "Do you wonder that, as soon as Old Jake wrote me my brother was alive, I picked Welper's pocket?"

"I wonder you didn't shoot him," remarked Lanier.

"Oh," she cried in horror, "I *couldn't* shoot anybody!"

"You carried a pistol,—and rather flourished it."

She blushed: "Yes; but I couldn't *kill*. . . . Unless in self defence. . . . Even then I'd probably be dead before I made up my mind to take human life."

"You're a plucky child."

"That's sarcasm, I suppose—"

"No."

"You think I'm a coward."

"You're braver than I am. I carry a gun and am perfectly capable of using it. You walk coolly into a lion's den unprepared to use the only weapon you possess. You have much courage, Miss Loveless."

The girl seemed embarrassed,—murmured that she didn't have any courage at all; cited the situation to prove it; blamed herself for asking his protection—for dragging him to Place-of-Swans.

"Some of that," he said with his amused smile, "you don't really mean. You know I am very glad to be your guest at Place-of-Swans."

"But—you have business elsewhere, haven't you?"

"Maybe I shall be able to transact it at Place-of-Swans."

"You are trying to be polite and considerate and put me at my ease—"

"No, I mean it. And, if I didn't, do you suppose I'm going to let you travel alone to Place-of-Swans, or live there alone while Welper and Sam Potter are prowling on Tiger Island just across the way?"

"You are so wonderfully kind to me, Mr. Lanier."

"It's easy to be kind to you."

"I don't think I made it easy—"

Instinct told Maddaleen that conversation had better end; and, a trifle uncertain, she turned to the window and gazed out upon the flying landscape.

It was not a gay scene; solemn pines, fields of standing November corn bleached white, among the ghostly stalks of which roamed scraggy cattle and misbegotten hogs; frost-ravaged fields of weeds, swamps, pines, more swamps, more pines, more desolate corn-fields, more cattle, more razor-backs. And here and there a negro or a flock of crows. And everywhere the three inevitables,—a China-tree, an Asia-tree, and a hound-dog scratching the industrious Southern flea.

"I love this country," remarked Maddaleen innocently.

Lanier controlled a smile and said something sympathetic about one's native land.

"Yes, it seems very near and dear to me after three years abroad."

"Three years' experience on the English stage," he suggested, looking sideways at her.

"Yes. It was in me, I suppose. It was inevitable, Mr. Lanier. I inherited the love of the stage; my mother sang in opera in Paris; her mother sang in concert when Jenny Lind was the rage."

"Do you sing, too?"

"My voice is agreeable in a drawing-room; useless for anything more ambitious."

"What do you play?"

"Anything—comedy usually. I've done a little of everything—Shakespeare, Ibsen, Pinero,"—she shrugged, "—*and* the moderns, of course."

"Did you live alone in England?"

"I lived with my great-aunt, Lady Baybury."

His odd sense of relief surprised and amused him. He hadn't realised that he resented the thought of this young girl pursuing a professional career all alone in England. There still were traces of the Victorian in John Lanier. When in humanity the Victorian becomes extinct, God help us every one.

And now the locomotive was whistling for the next station; the quaint, rickety train slowed down.

"We get off here," she said. "This is Pinelands. We take a bus from here to Stede's Landing."

Pinelands was not misnamed. Melancholy conifers dominated the landscape. A blue clay road, deeply rutted and bordered by three or four weather-ravaged houses, formed the metropolis called Pinelands.

Upon the sun-blistered steps of the store sat the inhabitants and hound-dogs of the place. The daily train was the attraction.

Maddaleen and Lanier discovered the bus waiting at the end of the platform. It was so solidly encrusted with dry clay that its original shape could

not be determined. But the horses were good and the lank driver touched his ragged felt hat to Maddaleen.

"Evenin', Mar'm," he said softly, "I reckon we're right glad to see our home folks comin' back to Place-o'-Swans."

"Thank you, Henry; I'm very happy to come home. Is your family well?"

"Yaas'm, tollable pert. Paw he's took the misery in his back; an' Maw she's some sickly—"

"Henry, I want you to know my friend, Mr. Lanier: Mr. Lanier, my friend and neighbour, Mr. Henry Everly."

They shook hands. Then Henry stowed the luggage aboard, Maddaleen and Lanier got into the bus, and, as soon as the train rolled out, they crossed the single track.

No storm-tortured ship at sea could hope to pitch and roll as rolled and pitched that mud-encrusted bus. Through depthless ruts that squirted clay and water, over mountains of marl, hub deep in sand, or deeper still in squashy silt, the bus staggered on between clearings set with dead corn-stalks and sad wastes of pines.

Maddaleen, lurching toward outer space or in helpless collision with Lanier, breathless, desperately clinging to her seat, laughed at the alarmed expression on her companion's features but made him a little sign not to comment unfavourably upon the roadway.

"It hurts their feelings," she managed to whisper when again they collided.

"Not as badly as it hurts mine," he replied; and they laughed, very gay in their new comradeship and newborn understanding.

There came a merciful stretch of better road through pine woods.

"Henry," she said, "I telegraphed to Jake for the launch. I hope he received my wire."

"I reckon he'll be late, Mar'm. Dees right smart o' sea in the bay."

"Is anything changed since I've been away, Henry?"

Henry sniffed. "Waal, dees right smart o' hard licker down to Bonnet House. We all don't take no notice of such trash."

"Bonnet House always was a rough, lawless place," remarked the girl.

"Waal, Mar'm, dee allus will be bad people in the world; even in No'th Ca'lina,—an' I reckon dee just natchally have to stay *somewheres*."

"Do they bother your folks any?"

The lad turned; there was a slow gleam in his grey eyes: "No'm, dee don't bodder us none. We watch our waters."

"Do you and your father still guide?"

"Yaas'm."

"Is the shooting still good outside Stede's Landing?"

"Yaas'm. Plenty o' canvas in the bay. Swan, geese and duck usin' inside.

Dee's usin' by Little Crescent, now."

A few moments later the bus emerged from the woods. A vast expanse of marsh and league on league of blue water stretched away before them to the horizon.

From the nearer swamp jack-snipe darted up uttering their startled squak! squak! A marsh-duck or two flapped and floundered out of the reeds on clattering wings. Overhead an eagle passed through an accustomed air-lane, his snow-white head and tail agleam in the declining sun, his coppery wings beating a slow, majestic measure above the waves.

"It's beautiful—and rather desolate," commented Lanier.

"It's a desolation one grows to love," said the girl in a low voice.

They looked out across the water where white-caps curled. There was more than a capful of wind out yonder. Very far away the dim, bluish shapes of islands loomed.

"Yours?" asked Lanier.

"Oh, no. We are far beyond that headland to the eastward. . . . *Look* at those ducks!"

The wild ducks looked like great patches of blackish grey on the distant water. Strings of duck and coot, made restless by wind and wave, were rising continually to shift feeding grounds; now and then a great cloud of wild fowl whirled up like turbulent smoke, to drift away against the sky until it became merely a misty wisp.

"Those dark specks off in that cove are wild geese," said the girl, pointing. "Beyond, almost as far as you can see, is a raft of wild swan. . . . Do you shoot, Mr. Lanier?"

"Some. . . . I know little or nothing about duck or geese."

"If you would care for it, I'd be happy to go with you," she ventured. "The season is on, you know."

He said he'd like to try it very much.

A few minutes later the road curved with the marshy shore. Two houses came into view; one neatly painted white with green blinds, the other more squatty, ramshackle, and retaining traces of muddy red paint.

The bus stopped at the white house; the baggage was removed; the passengers descended.

"It's fifty cents apiece," whispered Maddaleen; "I haven't any change."

Lanier smiled and paid the fare; Henry drove around to the stables in the rear, calling back: "Maw is cookin' you a lunch, Mar'm. Go right in."

As they turned toward the door, Maddaleen pointed at the ramshackle red house which stood two hundred yards or so to the east.

"That is Bonnet House," she said, "—where the pirate, Stede Bonnet, lived for a while,—nobody knows why. A very undesirable citizen, named Albert

Mewling, keeps a rather vile tavern there; and the company suits the tavern."

"Possibly," said Lanier, "Welper and Potter may go there."

"If they are on their way to Tiger Island," said the girl, "they will have to come here for a lunch or go to Bonnet House for one."

As she spoke the door opened and a handsome woman in her early forties appeared. It was "Maw," and she looked anything but sickly.

"Howdy, Miss Loveless," she said with soft-voiced cordiality. "It surely is good to see home-folk again. Peter he's out huntin' an' he'll surely feel sorry not to welcome you. Come in an' take a chair. I cooked a lunch, for, s'z-I, Miss Loveless surely will be hungry before Jake comes, what with the wind and all that sea—"

Maddaleen presented Lanier. "Is anybody else stopping with you, Mrs. Everly?" she asked.

"Not a soul."

"Did you notice any strangers—"

"Two men drove up to Bonnet house. I reckon they came on the train you came on."

Maddaleen described Mr. Welper.

"I reckon," nodded Mrs. Everly, "though I don't notice folks who stop with Bert Mewling. They's right smart o' bad trash there these days, Miss Maddaleen, and we all can hear them shouting and singing nights till I declar' it surely would disgust you."

They went in to the "lunch" prepared for them,—two delicately broiled "Blue Peters," fried sweet potatoes, muffins, marmalade, coffee.

Lanier said aside to Maddaleen: "Of course Welper and Potter may have been on our train, but I didn't see them get off and I was watching."

"They could have stepped off at King William Court House."

"But that was miles back—"

"Yes, but if one hired an automobile from King William Court House one could beat our train to Pinelands and beat us to Stede's Landing by half or three-quarters of an hour."

"Probably," said Lanier, "that is what they did."

"Anyway," said the girl, "they are at Bonnet House if they're really here at all, and they go to Tiger Island."

They ate in silence for a while. Presently Lanier said: "Your manager whom you call Jake is likely to arrive soon, isn't he?"

"I suppose so."

"Has he anybody with him in the launch?"

"He usually has one of our bay-men."

They finished their "lunch," chatted for a while with Mrs. Everly, then went into the parlour.

From the parlour windows the great bay was in sight only a hundred yards away.

White-caps raced across it; uneasy wild-fowl went skimming across the wave-tops or, in great ragged strings and bunches, wavered high against the horizon.

The sun hung low over the pine forests from which came a distant roaring of mighty winds.

“The geese and duck will come inside to-night,” said Maddaleen; “it will be too rough out at sea.”

“I’m wondering whether it isn’t going to be rather rough crossing that waste of lively water,” suggested Lanier. “Is your launch seaworthy?”

“Jake knows. He wouldn’t take any chances with me aboard. . . . Still, I rather wish he’d come. That bay is angry; and I don’t quite care for angry water at night.”

There was another window behind Lanier. From it he could see the ancient, decrepit Bonnet House.

Even without its legends of piracy it was an evil-looking place,—a low, two-storied house painted a dull and bloody red, squatting between dune and marsh; and so close to the bay that the boat landing made a sort of wooden walk through the front yard.

There was no sign of life about the house; no sound from it;—but the west wind would have carried sounds away from where they sat.

But, to Lanier, there seemed to be something sinister as well as forlorn about the place, where a dead China-tree stood in the yard and an ancient live-oak, uprooted by some forgotten tempest, sprawled indecently above the rotting picket fence its fall had crushed so long ago.

But there was life in Bonnet House, for, as the sun went down kindling the dreary pines to living coals, lights flickered behind the windows, shades were drawn, and shadows, cast upon them, passed and repassed.

“I think the wind is quieting,” said Lanier. He rose, went to the door, walked slowly down to the little wharf, gazing out over the waters where now the last tints of sunset were fading fast and only the pale, flashing crests of waves varied a monochrome of misty grey.

He walked a little way along the sandy shore road. He could hear sounds from Bonnet House, now—a gramophone playing—or was it a harmonica—or the stringy entrails remaining from a wrecked piano?

A few paces further, and he heard voices,—heard singing and muffled shouting. He looked at the house as he slowly walked toward it—looked at its vaguely lighted windows, at the deepening shadows that were crawling over it, veiling it, possessing it.

Now he could hear very plainly a man’s voice singing—other men’s voices

joining in; he even could distinguish the words of the song—a song which he sometimes heard at the Forty Thieves Club:

"I sank a lofty sail in the West,
In the West,
And the Duke and Romney knew I did my best;
And the Earl of Orford knows
Which were friends and which were foes,
For the King of England sent me on my quest."

Then Sam Potter's large, harsh voice broke in:

"Bob Livingston in hell shall burn with me,
Burn with me,
And Orford and his mate though Earls they be;
May the *Viper that I nursed
And Sir Henry suffer worst
While the devil roasts them both in his glee!"

Then Welper's voice took it up:

"To Execution Dock I must go,
I must go,
Where infamy and death shall lay me low;
To Execution Dock where the crows and ravens flock,
And the crowds of people mock at my woe!"

And, in roaring chorus:

"Come all ye young and old; see me die,
See me die!
Come see them twist my gullet all awry:
Come all ye young and old, ye are welcome to my gold,
For I curse it seven-fold as I die!"

There came cheers and a great knocking together of glasses and pewter pots; then Sam Potter's hoarse, wet voice a-roaring out another verse in the endless ballad of Captain Kidd.

But Lanier did not wait to listen.

He found Maddaleen standing at the open door and gazing out across the bay where the lights of a boat tossed.

The boat was drawing nearer; that was plain in a few moments.

"I'm very sure it's our launch," she said.

Henry came out of darkness carrying a lantern:

"It's Jake," he said, and gathered up their baggage.

Lanier settled accounts with Mrs. Everly; they took their leave and walked down to the landing.

The wind had gone down with the sun but a heavy sea was running. Slowly the launch drew in, her port and starboard lights pitching until she struck quiet water inside the arm of the marsh.

"Jake!" called the girl eagerly.

"Yes, Ma'am, Miss Maddaleen! We're a mite late, but it blowed some. Yes'm!"

"Is it rough outside?"

"It's some, yes'm."

The launch nosed in along the flimsy dock; a figure in oilskins climbed out.

"Oh, Jake!" she cried, throwing her arms around him, "I'm so glad to see you!"

"Be ye, Miss Maddaleen, ma'am? Wa'al, I'm glad to see *you*, 'n that's sure as shootin'!"

"Tell me," she said in a low, hurried voice, "has Dirck come back?"

"No'm—"

"Oh, Jake—"

"Don't you get skeered none, Miss Maddaleen. Master Dirck he's hangin' 'round the house purty nigh."

"How do you know?"

"Huh! I left the ice-house door open, 'n they was two hull hams 'n a side o' bacon gone. Yes'm."

"But—"

"Naw, t'want no one 'cept Master Dirck. I seen them prints in the wet path. Why, Miss Maddaleen, every night sence he tuk an' went off to play hide n' seek with us, I've left things whar he could git em—left doors open—accidentally on purpose, Ma'am! That boy will come home when his own cookin' makes him good n' sick,—he will. . . . Waal, now, Miss Maddaleen, jest you hop aboard—n'—your gentleman friend, too—"

Maddaleen made the presentation: "Captain Jacob Winch, Mr. Lanier," and, not forgetting the bay-man, whom she greeted cordially and introduced to Lanier as Mr. Robert Skaw, "the best sink-box helper on the Bay."

"I brought the oilskins," said old Jake to the girl, "but I didn't know you would bring company, Ma'am."

But Henry Everly ran back and fetched oilskins for Lanier.

"Jake," he said, "dees hittin' her up down to Bonnet House."

"Let 'em," growled Jake, shoving off, "—so long as they don't 'use' around Place-o'-Swans."

For a few minutes, after the launch started, it was smooth running; then, by

degrees, they began to feel what the Bay can do. Whip-splash! came the spray aboard, splash, dash, whip-splash! Maddaleen pulled down her sou'-wester, bundled up and crouched close.

"Are you all right?" whispered Lanier in the dusk.

"Splendid! I've had good news." She turned her chilled face, all wet with spray, to Lanier: "I'm happy," she murmured. "All seems to be right with the world,—and we know where God is."

"Can you tell me your good news?"

"Yes; my brother is all right. He's a foolish kid, that's all. . . . I think he'll come back when he knows I'm at Place-of-Swans."

"Where is he?"

"I'm rather afraid he's camping on Tiger Island."

Lanier slowly turned his eyes astern. Far on the mainland, like two inflamed eyes, the mean little windows of Bonnet House leered after them through deepening gloom.

Suddenly, as he looked, a rocket rose from Bonnet House. Then two or three Roman candles sprayed the distant darkness.

"Them bums," said Bob Skaw contemptuously, "is celebratin'."

"Those fireworks," growled old Jake, "scare the duck out o' Bonnet Bay. If I was Pete Everly I'd touch up Bert Mewling's windows with a Winchester." And, to Maddaleen: "Ma'am," he said, "Mewling is in with the people who bought Tiger Island; and he's fixin' to have a rough bunch there, I guess."

"Lumbermen?" she asked.

"I dunno. I dunno who bought Tiger Island or why. Lumber, mebbe; mebbe stills."

"Stills?"

"Whiskey stills. Why, they could run licker into Norfolk or Newport News if they've a mind to. An' they've put up one of those portable houses already —like a sort of eatin' house and hotel for lumber-jacks. Or mebbe a blind-tiger. I sailed by the other day—with my eye peeled for—you know who—and I saw that bran' new house a-settin' there. A sign was hanging out front—a queer one. . . . *You* saw it, Bob? What was the name painted onto that shingle they hung out—hotel something or other—"

"It didn't say 'hotel,' " replied Skaw; "it said 'At the Sign of the Gay-Cat.' . . . What's a gay-cat, Jake?"

"I wonder do they call a blind-tiger a gay-cat," growled Jake. "Do you know, sir?"

"No," said Lanier, deeply troubled.

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[*] The "Viper" means King William III of England, whose

greed, cowardice, and selfishness ruined Captain Kidd.

NUMBER SIX
The Adventure at Place-of-Swans

I

John Lanier awoke in a four-poster bed at Place-of-Swans in a great panelled wing-room full of sunshine.

Although the month was November, dotted swiss curtains at all four open windows were stirring in warm and languid breezes.

To bathe, shave, dress in flannel shirt and knickers, did not take long, even with loss of time looking out of the four windows.

Eastward a drifted barrier of snowy dunes against the sky, and the unbroken ocean beyond; west and south, the grey-blue waters of a vast bay edged on the horizon by pastel-tinted islands; north, the bay again with Tiger Island not far away set thick with tall and gloomy pines—this was the view from Place-of-Swans.

To the west the waters he saw were Bonnet Bay and the gulf which washed Stede's Landing; and the misty strip of darker tint was the mainland beyond.

He liked the big bedroom with its sycamore panelling aged to a deep satin-gold texture; the old-time prints and mirrors, the heavy furniture, not too elaborate, and made by Goddard and by Savery perhaps. One or two of the pieces were much older.

When he was ready he went out of his bedroom,—which was on the second floor,—and down through the solidly built two-story house to the south porch, and walked out across the flat grassy space beyond.

From here the house, out-buildings, and the collection of islands called Place-of-Swans all were in close view.

The house, low, oblong in shape, and built of heavy sea-stone, or coquina, looked intensely white against the cobalt sky. Four massive chimneys broke the high slope of the pointed roof. Grey, weather-ravaged slates covered it; the sun glittered on little window-panes; and on a gilded weather-vane—a sea-horse—which swung gently atop a white flagpole set in the centre of the grassy lawn.

As Lanier turned to look at the near-lying cluster of little islands, Maddaleen Loveless appeared at the door. He went to her, cap in hand; her cool, smooth fingers lightly lay on his as polite morning enquiries were exchanged.

It appeared that both had slept well, that the weather was superb, that breakfast would be ready in a few moments.

She came with him out to the lawn and leaned against the tall, white flagpole from which the flag was flying to show that the owner was at home—not the National emblem, but a red flag with three white swans on it.

"Do you think it pretty—our Place-of-Swans?" she asked.

"Very fascinating and quaint," he said. "How long has your house stood?"

"Since 1758,—you see the date carved over the door? But the first house—the remains of it—stands over there on Loveless Land—that island yonder—"

With a natural sort of confidence, free of self-consciousness, the girl took his arm and led him across the patchy Bermuda grass which served as a lawn.

"Now," she said, pointing, "that long island across the channel is Loveless Land. That is where our family first built. The ruin of the original house is known as 'The Old Manse.' Our house is called 'The New Manse.' "

He felt the gentle pressure of her arm and turned to the eastward. She explained:

"The little island between us and the dunes is called 'Lantern Island.' It is said that wreckers hung a lighted lantern in that tall pine—the only tree remaining. Beyond, to the east, there was, in olden times, an inlet through the dunes to the ocean. Through that inlet, now vanished, it is supposed that the *Red Moon,* galley, beat her way in from the storm off False Cape."

"And foundered off Tiger Island," added Lanier.

"Ah," she said, "that is what the man, Welper, believes! But I have another story to tell you. . . . Not now. . . . Let me show you Place-of-Swans first—"

The slight pressure of her arm turned him, again, southward:

"That little island east of Loveless Land is Crescent Bar. We have three blinds on it. You and I will shoot from there—"

She turned him toward the west:

"That island across the channel is Star Shoal. We have a blind on it. Geese 'use' there. West of it—that reedy patch is called 'The Old Man's.' Why, we never knew.

"And now, to end the story, the island on which we stand is Red Moon Island; and that gloomy, forested land out yonder to the north is Tiger Island."

The girl dropped his arm, smiled at him:

"Now you may have a little breakfast, Mr. Lanier."

Breakfast was ready in the ancient panelled dining-room,—a breakfast of fruit, coffee, hot breads, ham, eggs, and crisp little fish—bass, no doubt.

"You seem unusually happy," remarked Lanier, meeting her swift, charming glance.

"I am. That silly, stubborn brother of mine nearly emptied the pantry last night. Jake told me. . . . I'm happy and—vexed."

"He ought to come in and take his medicine," nodded Lanier.

"It's boyish shame, I suppose, that keeps him away. But I'm so thankful

he's alive—and I could shake him for the pain he has caused me—"

Her face grew serious; she looked out through the window at Tiger Island; sat silent, absent-eyed for a while.

Breakfast ended, they walked together to the north porch and out across more Bermuda grass to a little stone pavilion which stood at the water's edge near a dock.

Boats were moored at the wharf—and Jake and Bob Skaw, busy aboard a launch—saluted them with doffed caps. The former left the launch and came across to the stone pavilion:

"Any orders, Miss Maddaleen, Ma'am?" he enquired.

"Jake, did any people go to Tiger Island this morning?"

"Yes, Ma'am. A sloop anchored in the channel and people went ashore. She's there yet. I kinda reckon it was that gang from Bonnet House."

The girl turned to Lanier:

"I've told Jake our story."

"Of course," nodded Lanier.

"Jake tells me," she continued, "that there are a dozen men at that shanty on Tiger Island,—the place they call 'The Gay-Cat.'

"He tells me also that a launch towed in a dredge and pontoons early yesterday morning."

"Welper is evidently after the *Red Moon*," said Lanier.

The girl said in a troubled voice: "If Dirck is hiding on Tiger Island I do wish he'd leave, now. . . . If there were any way to find him—"

"I'll go over if you like," suggested Lanier.

The girl looked up quickly: "Do you believe you would be safe?"

"I think so."

There was a pause: "I'd rather talk it over with you first," she said. And, to Jake: "There are no orders. And I don't wish you and Bob to do anything to provoke trouble between Tiger Island and Place-of-Swans."

"No, Ma'am; not till you say so."

"I shall not say so. Let them keep to their own island and their own waters. We'll keep to ours—"

"But if they are after the *Red Moon*, Ma'am—"

"What of it?"

"Waal, Ma'am, if that old boat is ever to be salvaged, then the job belongs by rights to our own people. If there's a ship anywhere in these waters, and if there is treasure in her, why, it belonged to a Loveless in the beginning, and it belongs to the family, now. . . . And I ain't a-going to set around like a tarrypin-turkle and stretch my neck and gawk while strangers dredge up what rightly belongs to you, Miss Maddaleen—"

"Jake, let them alone! Let them probe and dredge and build dikes and

cofferdams. Because I am very certain that the wreck of the *Red Moon*, galley, lies in our own waters."

"Are you sure, Ma'am?"

"Almost positive. And when we're ready we'll search for it. And *then*, if they attempt to interfere—"

A glimmer came into her blue eyes and the soft curve of her lips hardened.

Lanier observed her with a new curiosity. And when old Jake had gone back to the launch he said with a smile: "I didn't realise how really formidable you are until now. Have you, perhaps, inherited something of your seafaring ancestors' gold-hunger?"

They walked, together, to the pavilion, and seated themselves on a bench.

"If the *Red Moon* is to be found," she said, "and if there is any treasure in her, I am determined to have it. But, Mr. Lanier, it isn't gold-hunger. It was not gold-hunger that started me after the man, Welper. It was a determination to give my brother another chance.

"Welper and Orizava Oil made a beggar of my brother—nearly made a criminal of him—and nearly a suicide. They swindled the boy out of his money. They stole the documents he discovered in Charleston. They charged him falsely with crime after he had made restitution. It was no crime; it was a terrible impulse under strain, instantly reconsidered, touchingly atoned for.

"But they blackmailed him, threatened him, drove him to despair.

"That was why I found courage to rob Welper; that is why I shall defend what I discover—if, indeed, I discover the *Red Moon* and any treasure in it. Because any treasure found belongs doubly to my brother—by right of descent from the ancestor who owned it; by right of discovery among those ancient documents in Charleston. Welper and his gang beggared him; robbed him even of his good name. Now, through his own initiative, it seems possible for Dirck to re-establish his fortune—"

The girl turned suddenly toward Lanier with a glint of tears in her eyes:

"I'd give every ounce of gold that ever was in the *Red Moon* if this menace to Dirck's good name were removed."

Lanier nodded. Certainly the boy had been an awful ass. But nothing worse.

"Some day," he said, "we must try to get from Mrs. Wyvern that foolish scrawl with your brother's name attached. . . . I don't know how we're going to get it. . . . Buy it, I suppose."

"I'll pay for it," said the girl.

"But there is no knowing what such a woman might demand—"

"*I'll pay!*"

"You wouldn't ruin yourself—"

"Financially? Yes, I would. I'll pay what I have got to pay if it takes every

penny!”

“And—then what?” he enquired, looking at her with faint irony.

“I’m not worth survival if I can’t maintain myself, am I?”

There was a silence, then he said with seriousness born of respect: “There is no hurry as long as they don’t know that your brother is still alive. . . . Let me think it over. It certainly is a very important matter—”

“My brother’s honour is of first importance; his fortune and mine of secondary importance.”

“I understand,” he said pleasantly. “I’ll do my best.”

“You are always so kind—” Her swift gratitude left her hand in his. And then he did a thing unexpected to both; he bent and touched her hand with his lips.

Each, aware of a new and sudden emotion, remained silent and as though afraid to move. The south wind blew softly through the pavilion, stirring the girl’s curly hair.

Gravely, without looking at him, she withdrew her hand, folded both, and sat gazing out across the sunlit waste of water toward the dark pines on Tiger Island.

Somewhere within those gloomy shades her cub of a brother probably was lurking—a scared, mortified, sullen, wrong-headed boy tasting all the misery he had stored up for himself, and perhaps, alas! something of that perverse satisfaction which youth savours when attitudinising in the centre of a tragic state.

“Don’t worry,” said John Lanier in a low voice; “I’m quite sure it will come out all right.”

The girl looked up, drew a deep breath, smiled in her honest, engaging way:

“I’ve learned to rely on you—so much. . . . Don’t go away very soon—if you can help it.”

“No, I won’t. . . . We’ll see this business through together. . . . Now tell me why you have concluded that the *Red Moon* lies somewhere near Place-of-Swans and not yonder under the lee of Tiger Island.”

She pulled from her bosom a small fragment of parchment which had been torn across.

“This is why,” she replied. “This is the *other* half of the document which Dirck discovered in Charleston. It is written in sixteenth century Spanish. I had it translated, as you see.”

He took the fragment and read it.

“This *is* interesting!” exclaimed the young man; “but I don’t quite recognise the description written by this dead Spaniard. Are there *seven* islands

in Place-of-Swans?"

"There *were*."

"That's exciting!"

"Isn't it! I'll let you see a map made by the James Loveless who built this house. I have it framed in my room. It shows—from east to west—Lantern Island, Crescent Bar, Red Moon, Loveless Land, Star Shoal, and then *two* islands just off Star Shoal.

"What we call 'The Old Man's' is the remains of one I am convinced; and the shoal west of it is what once was a separate, three-cornered, sandy islet.

"My ancient map shows that it lay on the edge of the *old* channel, or inlet; now it is merely a shoal and lies south of it. And, Mr. Lanier, somehow I've had an idea,—ever since this Carrillo document came into my hands,—that somewhere *west* of The Old Man's and perhaps on the spot where was once the vanished island, the *Red Moon*, galley, lies deep beneath tons and tons of sand and silt. . . . And maybe the core of the vanished island was once the wreck of the sunken *Red Moon* itself!—a bar of sand and silt might easily have swept over the submerged hull in the inlet which no longer exists. . . . A storm could have covered the wreck over night."

After a silence Lanier began cautiously: "But the old Spaniard says: '—near to the seventh island going from east to west.' The island, therefore, existed in his time."

"Yet the very storm that wrecked the *Red Moon* may have covered his sunken galley and formed a little island before the castaway Spaniard could land and collect his senses to definitely map his surroundings. . . . Suppose it all happened at night, and that he was flung ashore on Loveless Land? . . . And if a single spar of his sunken galley were sticking up out of the channel off the *seventh island* it might have taken only another night to cover even that. . . . Or if it took a year, who would ever know? For Carrillo wrote his tragic message and died; and the first Loveless discovered a few bones in a rusted corselet and morion, and a parchment scroll in the bell-barrel of a musqueton."

"That all may be," admitted Lanier, studying the aged and discoloured parchment. "In fact, your theory would seem worth taking a chance on, except that Carrillo writes—'And not in the isle before mentioned but at twenty leagues toward the *south*.' "

"I know it," said the girl, "but there are no islands and there is no channel and there never has been any inlet twenty leagues south of Tiger Island.

"I do not believe that a sinking ship driven inside, from False Cape, through the ancient inlet, ever got twenty leagues south of Tiger Island. . . . Or even half a league.

"I believe that poor Carrillo wrote that to deceive. He deceived in the Maya hieroglyphs. He admits, in the Spanish script, that the *Red Moon* sank 'in the

Place of the Swans'—'*en el paraje de los cisnes*'—and not in the '*Isla antes mencionada*'—or Tiger Island."

"That's one deception. He further pretends that Place-of-Swans lies twenty leagues to the south of Tiger Island. Deception number two—trusting, probably, that the good friar Juan would recognise the spot he really meant by the seven islands and by the presence of vast quantities of wild swans feeding there.

"And then Carrillo admits that his last galley lies in *three fathoms* and *not* in *ten*—'*como está escrito*'—as pictured in the Maya hieroglyphs."

"You are very clever," said Lanier looking at her lovely, flushed face.

"Do you think my deductions improbable?"

"I think there's a chance that you are right."

"Really!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly. I think the thing to do is to examine that lump of mud and reeds out yonder which you call 'The Old Man's.' "

"Yes, I think so too. We'll examine all the islands. I want you to see them all,—and the ruins we call 'The Old Manse.' "

"I'm ready when you are," said Lanier. "But let us clearly understand how matters now remain between the Forty Thieves and you, your brother, and myself."

He spoke pleasantly but seriously, and the girl's fair face became graver, and she looked at him attentively.

"Here," he said, "is the situation: Welper robbed your brother. He thinks that the boy whom he knew as Fitzjames—or Jimmy—Loveless, is dead. But Welper knows now that the girl who called herself Maddaleen Dirck, and who —who passed for my sweetheart—in the underworld sense—is really Maddaleen Loveless, sister to the boy he robbed. That's clear, so far, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the girl calmly, blushing.

"*You* gave Welper that information in the note you left after you ransacked his room at the Forty Club," added Lanier in a graver voice.

"I know it. . . . I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too. Because Welper is now fully armed and forewarned. He may believe that your brother is dead, but he knows you are alive and he knows now why you robbed him.

"Also he knows that you and I are not sweethearts and never have been. There is very little chance that he thinks you deceived me into vouching for you the Forty Club. He must realise that I betrayed the club and himself when I vouched for you. . . . He is now my enemy."

There was a silence for a little while; then Lanier asked her if she remembered his warning in regard to any attempt to recover the stolen document *inside* the walls of the Forty Club.

"Yes," she said, reddening again.

"It was important for me that I remain a member there and in touch with the members of the Forty Club," continued Lanier. "You spoiled that chance for me, Miss Loveless."

The girl turned a vivid scarlet: "I didn't know—I'm sorry—it was abominable of me after—after your kindness—"

"It was unwise."

"It was shameful. . . . But I supposed you were a—a malefactor of—of some description—"

"I had played square with *you*! I told you I was playing square for a price. But that didn't matter so long as I did play square. You made a bad mistake."

The girl lifted distressed eyes to his.

"What can I do in reparation?" she asked miserably. "I didn't know what I was doing;—and you said your life would be safe—"

"But I couldn't suppose you'd ransack Welper's rooms and leave a message telling him why you did it. That message connected you, definitely, with your brother. I believe that Welper learned first at Bonnet House last evening that you are a sister of Jimmy Loveless. And as soon as Barney Welper established your identity as Jimmy Loveless' *sister*, then he knew absolutely that there was no such relationship between you and me as we pretended.

"Which knowledge would make it suicidal for me ever again to walk into the Forty Club. . . . I am not reproaching you, but it's a bad business for me. You've pretty nearly ruined my career."

The girl was completely overwhelmed, and Lanier, for a while, made no effort to relieve her distress and shame. Finally, however:

"The reason," he said, "that I speak of this matter is because, hereafter, I must be able to place confidence in you. It won't do for you to turn headstrong and try to carry matters in your way. . . . It might mean your death—and mine. . . . Hereafter don't make a move unless we both agree to it."

"N-no, I won't ever again—" she stammered.

He said, "I do not desire to humiliate you. But if I go into this affair I also must be protected. . . . I have other responsibilities beside you. You must not trip me up. You did the right thing in the wrong way. I do not desire to alarm you, either, but we had better have a very clear understanding of the gravity of this case as it now stands. And it stands this way: You dare not call on the police because Welper possesses lying evidence to silence you—evidence which, though false, is corroborated by your brother over his own signature. To publish it would bring disgrace on your brother.

"And Welper has other evidence which, while you and I know it to be false, can be falsely sworn to by various people in the Forty Club and outside.

That evidence, if published, would disgrace *you*."

The girl bowed her pretty head. Lanier went on:

"You naturally ask why the police do not raid the Forty Club and arrest its criminal members.

"There are many reasons. One is that in the Forty Club are concentrated the brains of almost everything crooked in America; and it is well for the authorities to have these crooks concentrated instead of scattered over the globe.

"Another reason is that certain branches of Federal authority have been watching the development of vast criminal conspiracies hatching inside the Forty Club. The time is premature for any Federal action. . . . I hope that this affair has not aborted the plan to take every crook red-handed at the proper moment."

"This—this is terrible," murmured the girl. "What have I done!—what have I done to ruin you and—and—"

"You've really helped a great deal to clear up some things," said Lanier, rising and walking about the pavilion. "Your method was unfortunate, that's all. . . . Now we'll say no more about that phase. Let's see where we stand. Welper would harm us both if he could do so and remain undetected. All right; we are forewarned.

"*But*—if Welper, in addition to his enmity, discovers that we also are after the treasure in the *Red Moon*; and if, further, he ever learns that the *Red Moon* lies in these waters and not off Tiger Island, which he has purchased, then, in this remote spot, I think we may look for lawlessness and violence. I think we may expect trouble from Barney Welper and his gang at the Gay-Cat shanty. And that makes it imperative that I remain here for the present, and that I can count upon your implicit confidence and instant obedience at all times. . . . Can I count on you?"

The girl sprang to her feet as he stopped in his nervous walk to confront her.

She gave him both her hands and looked straight into his eyes.

"I believe in you; I promise to obey you. Forgive me if you can."

"That's well," he said, cheerfully. "And now you must not be afraid."

"I am worried and alarmed, but I am not afraid," she said, "—except for my brother's safety."

"We'll have to see what can be done. And now, in regard to the *Red Moon*, we must be very quiet and very inconspicuous in our activities and investigations. A good glass from Tiger Island would inform Welper concerning what we are about. That wouldn't do, would it?"

The girl shook her head: "It wouldn't do at all," she repeated; "we are too remote from civilisation. If we did discover the *Red Moon*, and found gold in

her—and if those men at The Gay-Cat learned of it—they could come over and kill us all. Who would pay attention to shooting where, four days in the week, so much shooting is going on during this season? Here and there some solitary duck-hunter in his blind might hear a fusillade, but he'd only think that the shooting must be good in these waters. . . . Which is true."

"Why," she exclaimed, "Welper and his gang could exterminate us and spend a week looting the *Red Moon* without being seen by anybody!"

"How many men have you here?" demanded Lanier.

"You, Jake, Bob Skaw, and two other bay-men—boys of eighteen—Sid Warnock and Chester Gray."

"Five . . . six, if your brother comes in. . . . Your other servants are women?"

"Yes; wives and daughters of bay-men and fishermen. . . . Pearl Gray and Pansy, her sister, can shoot as well as their brother, Chester. My housekeeper, Mrs. Pangborn, has plenty of courage. My personal maid, Jessie Miller, is timid. But all these Southern women can be counted on—" the girl blushed painfully—"better, perhaps, than you can count on me—"

"I don't want anybody better than you!" he retorted sharply, and took her hands in his with a quick roughness that made her wince. But it set her heart beating faster, too; and, though his grasp hurt her, she gave him a swift smile and bravely squeezed the hand that hurt her.

"You *do* forgive me, Mr. Lanier?" she breathed.

"Yes. It wasn't your fault. I should have told you more—trusted you more. But you perplexed me. You are so clever. I wasn't absolutely *certain* that you were—what you are. . . . Anyway, that's all over, isn't it?"

"Y-yes." She stood looking at him, holding to the hand that clasped hers. "But—may I know a little about you, Mr. Lanier?"

"Aha! More doubts?" he laughed.

"No."

"Well—I know what you mean. I told you that I am all right, but you desire further credentials—"

"No!"

"References?—honest, industrious, sober, cleanly—"

She laughed but said a little wistfully: "Don't you care to tell me?"

He was still smiling: "I'll tell you; I'm thirty-two, white, unmarried, can read and write—"

She strove to fling his hand from hers but he clung to hers. Both were laughing. He said, finally:

"I won't tease: I'm in a service the existence of which is not generally known. It is international in character. I might describe it as a sort of intelligence bureau organised by a certain group of civilised nations to obtain

information and investigate and—ah—control the criminal activities of modern groups of malefactors."

The girl's eyes were beautifully wide.

"This is very confidential," he said.

"Yes."

"Well, then, in each of these allied civilised nations a ring of criminals exists, linked with similar rings in other countries. The Forty Club is the brains of criminal America. There is a Forty Club in every nation to-day.

"And there small groups of super-crooks are everywhere involved in vast, co-operative conspiracies to loot and swindle on an enormous scale.

"To investigate, study, combat, thwart, exterminate these tremendously dangerous international groups of crooks bent on cleaning out the world itself for their own benefit, certain associated civilised governments have concluded a secret agreement to establish an allied intelligence bureau. Men picked for this work usually are officers in the armies and navies of these allied governments—and usually are drawn from the military intelligence department or from the secret service divisions maintained by these various governments in various ways.

"To this international bureau our own Government contributes men from the Army, the Navy, the Customs, Coast Survey, Revenue Service, and from the Departments of the Treasury, Post Office, and the Department of Justice."

He quietly imprisoned her other hand, drew both against his breast, and looked into her eyes quizzically, almost mischievously:

"In plainer words, I'm a policeman of sorts. But that seems suitable in our case, because you're a sort of nurse-maid to your brother. So I think if you and I take a Sunday out and sit on a bench together it would complete a very logical situation. Don't you?"

Into the girl's eyes, too, came a glint of something,—mischief, perhaps.

"Certainly," she said, "—Mary Ann and Riley the cop. Is there anything more innocent?"

"There is not. And—is it too soon to begin to court you, Mary Ann?"

"Aren't you doing it?"

"I mean—seriously," he said, and his smile altered.

"Oh; are policemen philanderers?" She looked up, and her smile became nervous and uncertain and she freed her hands from his with gentle decision.

"You're a nice policeman," she said, "but then, I'm a very nice nurse-maid . . . and you must be very polite and circumspect if I'm to feed you in my kitchen."

"Are policemen's courtships supposed to be of long duration?" he enquired guilelessly.

Maddaleen laughed: "They're endless—as long as the food lasts, aren't

they? Or a new policeman appears on the beat."

"Don't nurse-maids ever marry?" demanded Lanier.

"I never heard of one doing it," said the girl. "I never heard of a policeman doing it either. So—" she glanced at him gaily, maliciously—"you and your Mary Ann are perfectly safe, Riley. . . . And luncheon is ready."

They returned slowly to the house, falling thoughtfully into step across the grass.

"I shall sail you around the islands this afternoon," she remarked. "This is blue-bird weather—as we call it down here—and there will be no shooting while it lasts. . . . Do you mind very much being bored with me all day?"

"I'd be very much bored in life without you."

"Riley! Such a philandering cop!"

"You'll be surprised, Mary Ann."

Laughing, they stepped onto the porch and entered the dining-room—the girl apparently unconscious that the little finger of her left hand had somehow become entangled in the second finger of his right.

They separated; she made him a mischievous curtsey:

"Please take the head of the table," she said. "Thank you; I might as well become accustomed to it—" He seated her; she looked up at him.

"Policemen don't court while feeding," she said, "—do they?"

"I told you you'd be surprised," he said. "The history of other unsuccessful and unmarried policemen doesn't interest me; I'm going to change that story —"

"You can't—without me," retorted the girl, very pretty in her defiance across the table.

There was a late white rose at either cover, lying on the cloth. She picked up hers, dusted her delicate nose with it, looked over the petals at him with unfeigned and virginal curiosity—as though wondering what kind of man this really was—wondering a little, too, to find him at her table at all.

The waitress entered with a dish of terrapin cooked in very old Madeira. The air became fragrant.

Maddaleen sniffed her white rose, disdainfully:

"Probably," she said, "you prefer the other odour."

"I do," he said. "You are very good to me, my Mary Ann."

"Say it with food," murmured the girl, "and any man understands."

"Ah," exclaimed Lanier, "an avowal!"

They both laughed like two children. They seemed curiously happy, oddly forgetful, for the moment, of Tiger Island across the water, and of what was lurking there in the shadow of the gloomy pines.

III

There was enough wind to dimple the sheet, that was all. Maddaleen in white, bare-headed, bare of throat and arm, caressed sheet and tiller, indolently coaxing the boat over still blue waters and exchanging lazy badinage with Lanier, who lay flat on the turtle deck, his crisp head pillowed on both hands.

Already they were on terms both confident and wary, guardedly conscious of a mutual belief and also of a delightful distrust which was becoming interesting to the verge of charm.

"If you had the ambition of a turtle you'd take the pole and shove," she said.

"My ambition is to bask; so is a turtle's," he remarked.

He was good to look at, this lean, loose-knit young fellow in white. His pipe lay beside his sun-browned cheek; his eyes regarded her.

"It would be very easy to spoil you," she said; "you're pleasantly receptive now."

"Receptive of what?"

"Assiduities! There you lie and let me work this poky old sail-boat. You calmly sprawl there and permit me to navigate you about."

"Do you really want me to pole?"

"No. I admit that your picturesque attitude repays me for my heavy manual labour. . . . Why don't you light a cigarette?"

"Light one for me."

She did so; he sat up and took it as she drew it from her lips. There was a sea-blue glint in her dark eyes again. She seemed very carefree. Skies were soft and life was young, and death seemed far away as a legend scarce listened to and unbelieved.

Idly she pushed the tiller; a baby puff of wind dented the sail.

"There is The Old Man's," she said.

They sailed along the tiny islet set with reeds, and glided on over the shoal beyond, where, in shallow silvery depths, patches of duck-weed glimmered a dull bronze-green. A deeper tint marked the channel.

"You think the *Red Moon* lies here?" he asked, looking down into the limpid water.

"Down there, somewhere, under silt and weed and sand. One can wade anywhere almost—except that wild swans feed here, and there always is the peril of a swan-hole."

"A swan-hole?"

"Swans, feeding, dig holes in the bottom of the bay. Ducks don't. But we can wade without danger of anything worse than a wetting. . . . You don't see

anything shaped like the hull of a sailing galley down under the sand, do you?”

“Sorry, but I don’t.”

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful to find the *Red Moon*! . . . Full of soft, Indian gold! Really it would be wonderful for a Loveless to discover it. The legend of the *Red Moon* has been in our family for generations. There are sayings, proverbs, verses, ballads, a song or two—all of which I heard as a child in the nursery, and which were listened to by generations of little Loveless children before me—”

The girl swung the tiller; the sheet filled in a slight but steadier breeze as the boat rounded and came up into the east along Star Shoal—

“—Do you want to hear a little song mother sang to us in the nursery? And other mothers before her?”

Lanier nodded: the girl eased the sheet and lay back, one bare arm across the tiller: and presently she opened her lips and sang, with the engaging unconsciousness of a bird:

“Red Moon, Red Moon,
Where are you sailing?
Over the dune
The stars are paling;
Over the sea a lone gull sails;
Over the waves a curlew wails;
Red Moon, Red Moon.

II

“Red Moon, Red Moon,
On your gilt railing
Your sea-lights soon
Will all be failing;
Flaring astern your cloudy sails,
The battle lantern pales and pales,
Red Moon, Red Moon.

III

“Red Moon, Red Moon,
The day is breaking;
The tryst with noon
The dawn is making;
Under the world the Sun awakes
And in her bed sweet Night forsakes,
Red Moon, Red Moon.

IV

“Red Moon, Red Moon!
Red seas are flowing;
Red is the dune
With red spray blowing;
Red is the blood that dyes your deck;
Red Moon, red sun, red reef, red wreck!”

It was a queer, sing-song rune chanted in a fresh, childish voice, with a bird-like grace note and recurring quaver which seemed to make words and air doubly strange.

“It’s odd, isn’t it?” she said. “It has a creepy sea-thrill about it that used to

give me an agreeably uncomfortable shiver. . . . Especially when the winds thundered like great guns firing from the sea. . . . And the weather-vane creaked all night long; and a stormy moon rode herds of little flying devil-clouds outside the nursery window—like some misshapen witch pale with fury —"

She threw back her head, looked up into peaceful azure depths. And the man looked at the smooth, white column of her young throat.

His features hardened a little: death must not meddle with such youth as hers.

He thought of Tiger Island; of the men gathered there; of the shanty already erected; and of the sinister insult it flaunted—"At the Sign of the Gay-Cat."

He sat up on deck and looked out across still, sunlit waters toward the ominous island. There seemed to be something tigerish in its bronze-gold shape; and now a westering sun turned the pines on the beast's back-bone to a ruddy ridge like stiffened hair on some crouching thing—

"Up centre-board!" cried the girl. "What are you dreaming about?"

He obeyed; felt the prow softly running into sand; turned around to find they were ashore.

"Loveless Land," said the girl, demurely. "That is where I have piloted you, my dreamy friend, into—Loveless Land."

She sprang ashore. He followed, pulled the boat up among tall reeds, and followed her, along a hard marl roadway through Bermuda grass and stunted growth and over a rolling, uneven little island toward a clump of hardwood trees, gums, maples, oaks.

"There are no snakes here—nor anywhere on Place-of-Swans," remarked the girl, "but there are plenty over on Tiger Island."

"Poisonous snakes?"

"Moccasins," she replied briefly. "But woodticks are all you need dread here."

As they advanced along the roadway toward the trees Lanier noticed slabs of coquina lying here and there bedded deep in the herbage. And now he caught sight of the Old Manse,—a stark and ancient house of sea-stone, partly demolished, its windows empty of pane and sash, its leaden roof rent and sagging over great beams of live oak, its massive chimneys, gallery, portal, in varied stages of ruin. Cherokee roses, trumpet vine and brambles ran riot there; tree branches entered the empty windows.

Even now, however, over the door were still visible the Loveless arms carved deep in the coquina, crusted with lichens.

"That's where the first Fitzjames lived and died," said Maddaleen. "Poor old chap; he had the parchment but he had no imagination. But I have a lot.

And perhaps I have enough imagination to discover the *Red Moon* . . . with your encouragement."

They went into the empty hall. The great, hewn floor-beams of live oak still held soundly, but the cypress flooring was treacherous. All walls and partitions within, as well as staircases, had been built of sea-stone, and all were integral parts of the structure.

"Has anybody ever dug here?" inquired Lanier.

"Oh, yes, it's all been dug over by succeeding generations. In our garret there's a collection of broken pottery, pewter, rusty buckles, buttons, copper coins, one or two silver pieces of eight, and one gold dubloon. . . . And there were some bones and several skulls. God alone knows who they were and how they died."

"Your ancestors, perhaps?"

"No; they're buried over yonder. . . . We all lie there, sooner or later—" She pointed to a space beyond the trees where now he perceived a low wall of coquina, a gateway crowned with a coat of arms, and some symmetrical cedars, mulberry trees, live-oaks, China-trees, and Asia-trees.

"That's our family acre," she explained. "We try to keep it neat, but the wind is hard on the flowers and trees on Loveless Land."

They wandered all over the old Manse, up the massive stairs, trusting themselves gingerly to floorings, then down again to the kitchen cellar, where ancient ovens still remained almost intact. Below was a wine cellar, but they had no lantern.

"There's a well of pure water there, too," said the girl. "We never use it because somebody fished a skull out of it about fifty years ago."

"I don't believe the flavour would last that long," said Lanier; but the girl shuddered; and they walked back through the Bermuda grass to their boat.

IV

When they returned to the New Manse on Red Moon Island it was nearly sundown. Bath, fresh clothes, and dinner with a charming girl in a pretty dinner gown are refreshing stimulants to any young man.

To all these Lanier's exhilaration was due—and to the girl's beauty—and in the delicate danger that he might lose his heart to her. . . . At any moment, perhaps. . . . A straw might tip the scales. . . . Either way, perhaps.

And yet, possibly, a deeper exhilaration was founded on a controlled but continuous excitement due to what might become real peril.

That the Forty Thieves had no suspicion that he was anything except a crook like themselves did not render the danger less to him or to Maddaleen. A crook who double-crossed, was more hated by crooks than any officer of justice.

There lay the real peril: not in the chance that the Forty Thieves might discover that they had purchased a worthless island for their Red Moon speculation.

What threatened Maddaleen and himself was what always threatens any crook suspected of disloyalty to the caste.

The girl had shown him her map where seven islands were plainly marked, and the old obliterated channel charted. For two hundred miles north and south these inland lagoons and bays and creeks and seas were very accurately mapped. Certainly there was no mistake in the map-maker's mind; Place-of-Swans consisted of seven islets then, and a wide inlet poured in from the ocean south of False Cape.

When the stars came out they went out and sat in the pavilion by the water. Distant lights glimmered on Tiger Island; there was no other light in that vast, dark world except the clustering high stars and the illuminated windows of the house behind them, and the spark of his cigarette.

It was long after sundown, but the flights of swan and duck and geese were still passing through starry darkness overhead, and the obscurity rang with the thrilling clangour of the geese, the sweet, bewildered calling of wild swan, and the whimpering rush of duck speeding unseen under the stars.

At moments, when the faint breeze changed, came to their ears the low, dull, bull-like rumble of the ocean, and from infinite leagues of night the far faint complaint of some ghostly buoy rolling and tossing in darkness all alone.

"What a perfect rendezvous for pirates in the old days when a channel split those dunes," remarked Lanier.

"Yes, they all came here at times for wood and for sweet-water—Morgan,

that frightful fiend, l'Ollonois, and later Kidd, and Teach and poor Stede Bonnet. . . . Did you ever hear the ballad of Captain Kidd?"

"Oh, yes. . . . And there's another string of lugubrious doggerel called 'The Complaint of William Kidd.' I've heard about a hundred verses of that, too. They sing it at the Forty Club," he added, in a slightly malicious tone, "but you and I are not likely to attend any more musicales there."

"I should think not!" she agreed with emphasis. . . . "Did they sing 'Stede Bonnet' there, also?"

"I never heard it."

"Would you like to?"

"Very much," he replied, amused at the child-like streak in her.

Again, like a bird, she looked heavenward at the stars and opened her pretty lips and throat:

"Stede Bonnet dwelt in Barbadoes,
All laced with gold his scarlet clothes,
'A bloody pirate I would be,
Yet can not sail a ship!' quoth he;
He bought a ship and signed a crew,
And hired a sailing master too!

"Poor Stede Bonnet!
Good folk, depend upon it,
A sorry buccaneer was he
Who could not take his ship to sea!

II

"Stede Bonnet sailed from Barbadoe;
On deck his cannon stood in rows;
'Run up the gay black flag,' quoth he,
'And fire a gun to wind and lee,
To warn all ships that fight is vain
When Old Stede Bonnet sails the main!'

"Old Stede Bonnet
Of ballad, song, and sonnet,
He quaffed his rum, he quaffed his beer

He quaffed his rum, he quaffed his beer
But could not sail and could not steer.

III

"Stede Bonnet took a ship at sea,
The Anne of Glasgow, brig, was she;
'A pirate bold at last am I,
And on this deck I'll live and die!
Run out the plank, and they that balk,
Quoth he, 'shall swim who will not walk!'

"Cruel Stede Bonnet!
He fought a fight and won it;
He slew the crew and took their gold
And stowed their treasure in his hold!

IV

"Stede Bonnet hailed a passing craft;
'What ship is that!' Her captain laughed;
'To come aboard my ship you're free;
My name is Edward Teach,' quoth he;
'My ship is called *The Man-o'-War*;
Her forty cannon carry far!'

"Poor Stede Bonnet!
His deck he trembled on it;
'O God,' says he, 't'is Blackbeard Teach!
Now he'll maroon me on the beach!' "

The girl paused and looked at Lanier with pretty, impersonal enquiry: "It's a very, very long ballad," she suggested. "If you really would care to hear it all we might take a few new verses every day."

They laughed.

"You see," said she, "as a child I've lived in the very odour of piracy; and buccaneering ballads were imbibed with my first milk. I know a positively unlimited number—"

“If a few verses every day could give me an unlimited future with you—”

“Is the starlight rendering you reckless, Mr. Lanier?”

“I think the light from two particular blue stars is!”

“Reckless and romantic! A policeman-poet! A Byron below-stairs! . . . My eyes *should* remind you of your two station-house lamps; not of twin stars.”

They laughed for a while, then his features altered:

“You’re right,” he said seriously, “your eyes ought to remind me of duty.”

“What duty?”

“Our common—necessity for—precaution—”

“You mean our common *danger*.”

“That’s rather strong,—and premature—”

“We *are* in danger. I know it.”

“You don’t show that you know it.”

“Because I feel secure with you, I suppose,” she said with an enchanting candour that no man could withstand. He took her hand and kissed it, twice. The girl let him. It seemed ages that his lips rested on her hand in that starry, silent place,—ages before she stirred, withdrew the hand, folded both against her breast and sat staring out across the wastes of darkness.

At last: “Shall we go in?” she said.

“If you like.”

“Why do you—kiss my hand, Mr. Lanier?”

“In pledge of service.”

“Oh. . . . Then—you would serve me best if you bring my brother back.”

“I promise.”

Their voices were oddly altered—had become colourless and impersonal. They rose, turning toward the house, moving slowly and a trifle aloof from each other.

In the drawing-room she avoided his eyes, stood irresolutely turning over her music, seated herself at the piano, ran a meaningless scale or two, remained motionless with brooding eyes remote.

At length the duet of silence was terminated by her rising and bidding him good-night in a pleasant voice tinctured with decision.

“Is there anything you’d like before the servants go to bed?” she enquired politely.

“Send them to bed,” he said amiably, “but point out the pantry, please.”

She guided him to the pantry door. “In the ice-box and side-board,” she explained, “are ingredients which men regard as desirable. . . . I leave you to your revels, Mr. Lanier,”—with a charming mockery of a curtsey.

“Dainty and disdainful lady,” he said with a bow that matched her exaggerated grace, “I shall teach you that I know how to fulfil the promise which my lips pledged to your pretty hand.”

“That makes three times you’ve kissed it,” said she with her nose in the air. “Any carpet-cavalier can kiss a lady’s fingers. . . . If you’ll bring me my brother I’ll let you do it all day long!”

She retired, her nose still high. After she had vanished, Lanier went to the drawing-room, extinguished every lamp, opened a pocket torch, made his way back to the dark pantry, and sat down under a window which old Jake had purposely left open.

It was a long, long wait there in the dark. But Lanier, who had been a boy once, knew something about boys. He was taking a chance on the psychological aspect of a case involving primordial plasm and basic instinct. When night comes, Primitive Impulse stirs Wandering Adolescence to a longing which primarily involves desire for home. The homing impulse for Maddaleen’s cub of a brother was nourished by a yearning for security, and for surreptitious sustenance. It offered sentimental satisfaction to an immature ass who adores the dramatic and who sees in all misunderstood heroes the pathetic portrait of himself.

It was nearly two o’clock in the morning, and the air had grown chilly. But Lanier’s psycho-philosophy buoyed him above the ever-threatening tide of sleep; he thought of Maddaleen’s sarcastic jeer at all hand-kissing carpet-cavaliers, and increasing irritation kept him awake. He sat immovable, listening, waiting, and stoically catching cold.

About half past two o’clock he heard a slight sound above him. Cautiously looking up he saw on the windowpane, against the stars, a human hand in silhouette.

Instantly he left his chair, stole on tip-toe to the unbolted pantry door, opened it without a sound, crept over the grass to the corner of the house and peeped around.

A young man had opened the pantry window and was hoisting himself upward, one knee already on the sill.

As a goshawk strikes game, so pounced Lanier on his quarry, plucking the lad bodily from the window and holding him, struggling and kicking in a grasp of steel.

“Come into the house,” said Lanier. The boy struggled like a convulsed panther.

“Come into the house,” repeated Lanier. “Your sister is worrying about you!”

“Who the devil are you!” gasped the infuriated boy.

“I’m your friend and hers—”

“Let go of me!”

“Your sister needs you!” repeated Lanier coldly.

“I tell you I’ll never face her! I’ll die before I face her—”

“Come on! She wants you!”

“Never!”

“Yes, you will,” said Lanier, yanking him bodily across the grass, into the pantry, through the house in spite of his frenzied struggles. Chairs fell, tables overturned, lamps crashed; but Lanier lugged the frantic lad to the stairs and dragged him up, step by step, fighting like fury.

Both were speechless when finally they floundered to the landing and into a sudden and startling flood of light.

A white figure stood at an open door holding a lamp and a pistol. For an instant she stared at the hard-breathing man and the panting, dishevelled boy. Then she set her lamp on her night-table and laid the pistol beside it.

“Dirck!” she said quietly, “come here.”

NUMBER SEVEN
The Adventure on Tiger Island

I

What passed between sister and brother that night John Lanier did not know. It was likely that he never would know. For, in the race of Loveless, private misunderstandings were settled privately; and the family preferred to turn an unruffled and united front to the world.

It was so on this occasion. For the only sequel that Lanier perceived was a very subdued and civil youth in the breakfast-room, politely awaiting the family guest.

The boy reddened and bade him good-morning in a low voice, and seemed gratefully confused when the older man offered his hand, blandly ignoring any previous encounter.

"You must be Dirck Loveless," he said; "I'm John Lanier; and I hope I haven't kept the Master of *Red Moon* waiting."

"Oh, it's quite all right," said the boy shyly. . . . "Would you be kind enough to be seated here. My sister is breakfasting in her room—" He pulled the old-time velvet bell-rope, and they sat down in silence.

But Lanier permitted no awkwardness: "You have a fine place here and your shooting must be wonderful," he said with a smile.

"It really is," replied the boy eagerly, "only this blue-bird weather always stops it. You know the birds won't decoy; point shooting is hopeless; and even box shooting isn't worth the trouble. But you ought to see Place-of-Swans when the duck and geese are using off Crescent! You *will* see it, won't you? You're not going away soon, are you?"

Here was an instinctive hospitality—a nice, boyish response to advances. Lanier was remembering what recently he had done to this same boy when he replied:

"Your sister has been kind enough to ask me to remain for a while, and I am very happy to do so if it suits her brother, too."

"That's fine! If you'll stay long enough I promise you fast work in the box or off Crescent."

"But I know very little about duck shooting," remarked Lanier, breaking a smoking muffin in two and buttering it.

"Don't you *shoot*?" Dirck regarded him anxiously over suspended coffee-cup—a generous wish to find no sporting quality lacking in this well-built stranger who had laid him so unmercifully by the heels the night before.

"Well, I *have* shot," admitted Lanier, "—a little."

"Quail, probably, in Virginia."

"N-no."

"Oh. What have you shot?"

"Tigers . . . in India."

The boy's eyes became perfectly round.

"Lord!" he said. "You must think this punk sport."

"I'm sure I'd like it when I learn how—"

"Tigers," repeated Dirck, thrilled and content that Lanier had not fallen in his sporting estimation, "—tigers! What wonderful sport, Mr. Lanier!"

"It's one sort of shooting," said the other carelessly. "I dare say your ducks are more difficult and quite as interesting—"

"But there's no comparison!" exclaimed Dirck. "Tiger shooting in India! That is a man's sport! But," he added, loyally, to make the best of it, "our duck do fly fast in rough weather. . . . Lord! I'm glad I found out that you've hunted tigers before I bragged about our ducks!"

Lanier laughed at the lad's transparent honesty; and Dirck's resiliency was that of youth which rebounds readily from rough handling. He *liked* this man who had trounced him.

"I say," he began, blushing, "you certainly did wipe the floor with me last night. Oh, boy! what a wipe!"

"I had to, old chap."

"Yes. . . . I put up some sort of a fight though; didn't I?" he ventured.

Lanier made no effort to control his laughter: "I should say you did, you young devil. It was the toughest job I ever took on."

"No!" exclaimed the boy, delighted that such a man should deem him a devil.

"Rather! . . . I thought I'd been in a fight or two; but I'd rather tackle a panther bare-handed than try that job again."

The pride of all youth sparkled in the boy's eyes. The good-humoured tribute to his frantic struggles; the fact that he had been in combat with a tiger-hunter; Lanier's careless and frank kindness; his attitude of man-to-man without condescension,—all these captivated Dirck.

In ten minutes he had become Lanier's devoted admirer. The older man, much amused, suspected it.

They sauntered out of the room and across the grass toward the water.

Jake and Bob Skaw were fussing down among the boats and Dirck responded shyly and uncertainly to their cordial greeting.

For several minutes he and Lanier stood looking seaward. Suddenly the reaction came; memory awoke to the nightmare of the past; the boy, much upset, was swiftly realising that this very admirable man beside him must

know what a wretched character was his and what a miserable mess already he had made of life.

As the realisation grew he became more unhappy, more mortified, more uncertain of himself, and of the respect of the man whose approval he desperately longed for with all his youthful heart.

Something had to be said—masculine youth blurts out things in mental anguish—blurts, bleats, bawls—as do all calves.

"You probably have heard from my sister what a f-fool I was, Mr. Lanier. I hope you don't think me a hopeless r-rotter—"

Lanier turned, amiably surprised at the outburst, instantly and gravely kind when he saw the boy's flaming features dauntlessly facing him.

"Nonsense, old chap," he said evenly, "there are no rotters in your race. . . . I suppose you refer to the dirty trick that those Orizava Oil people played you."

"Yes; but—"

"You're not the only one; don't think it," continued Lanier carelessly. "They fooled wise men."

"Do you know what I did?"

"I know what you *didn't* do. And *couldn't*."

"I suppose my sister told you everything," said the boy in hollow tones.

"Well—she mentioned what seemed necessary for me to know. . . . You went off half-cocked, old chap. *I* don't blame you. They're a bad bunch, the Orizava crowd. I don't blame you, Dirck."

The familiarity at the psychological moment was so grateful to the boy that tears spangled his sight and he turned sharply around.

Lanier seated himself on the grass. After a few moments the boy came and stood rather near. Without turning:

"What information did you get over on Tiger Island?" asked Lanier, cleverly.

There was new calm to the boy's pride in this aspect of his skulking flight. He dropped down on the grass.

"All Welper's Orizava gang are there," he said. "I didn't understand why they built the shanty and the saw-mill until I talked to my sister last night."

"Have they a saw-mill, too?"

"Yes, a steam one. They are cutting pines—for cofferdams and caissons, I suppose. . . . You know that, after all, the *Red Moon* probably is lying off Place-of-Swans?"

"It seems rather certain that she is not lying off Tiger Island," said Lanier grimly. "Now let's talk this thing over, Dirck. There's some danger even now. Probably your sister has told you what she and I have discussed?"

"Yes."

"Then you understand why it is better that Barney Welper should not

suspect you are alive?”

“Y-yes.”

“Well, then, old chap, let’s hold a council of war. . . . Will you try one of my cigars?”

Behind them a slender figure in white appeared on the porch. Maddaleen looked at the two men squatting in friendly intimacy on the grass, and her heart grew grateful and warm toward Lanier. And then, gradually and subtly disturbed, her heart wondered, grew doubtful, wary. Because it recognised, in an indefinable way,—the way of instinct,—that yonder sat a man endowed with a dangerous quality—the gift of familiarity, the winning ability easily, swiftly to turn acquaintance into intimacy over night.

She advanced across the grass toward them; they heard her, and rose to receive her.

There was curiosity, feminine irony, latent defiance in her blue eyes.

“A council of war,” began Lanier; and saw at the same instant that she had declared it against him. He read it in her level gaze, felt it in the coolness of her hand, in her even voice.

It was as plain to him as though she had said: “I am a girl to whom sentimental emotion is neither understood nor welcome. You’ve started something, young man. I defy you to finish it!”

He had been sentimental,—had surprised in her a momentary and faint response. Twice, the night before, she had been made conscious of this; and had avoided the subtle menace with a counter-challenge. She had turned up her nose at him: he promptly put that dainty feature out of joint. Did this girl admire him for it? Not more than the law of decent gratitude allowed. What he had done confused her. She was not grateful to the first man who ever successfully had meddled with her maiden emotions.

Further, his general habit of success; his easy ways of winning out; his complete victory over her brother, reacted oddly upon her. Self-assurance and efficiency are admirable. . . . He had thrilled her as long as his deeds remained impersonal. Suddenly he had made her conscious that his winning qualities might involve a conquest of herself.

That is where any feminine instinct takes alarm. No emotional awakening is really welcome to a normal girl. Suspicion follows caution,—irony is the usual feminine weapon. To watch, to distrust, to minutely examine—this was the reaction to the touch of his lips on her hand and the consciousness of emotion awaking within her.

Maddaleen seated herself upon the grass and invited the men to imitate her.

“Gentlemen,” she said, “in November no Southern table is properly appointed without terrapin, canvas-back, and Madeira. The latter is our sole claim to quality, so far.”

“Terrapin are scarce as crowing hens; and how can you shoot canvas-back in blue-bird weather?” expostulated Dirck.

“But,” she insisted in mock surprise, “all we need to do is to tell Mr. Lanier, who understands how to accomplish everything immediately.”

Lanier gave her a long, thoughtful look: she was braiding together three blades of Bermuda grass, smilingly intent upon the process.

“A remarkably resourceful man,” she murmured absently. “Ask him anything within reason or without, and it’s merely a case of abracadabra—presto—change!”

She looked up impudently at Lanier and was troubled because he grinned. A slight heat came into her cheeks. There are men who know too much. Even that could be pardoned; but it was irritating to wonder how his knowledge of women had been obtained. . . . Gravity; the border of an obscurity not to be further investigated; white fingers busy again braiding Bermuda grass:—then Lanier:

“Now that we have had our morning pleasantries, suppose we start a cofferdam off The Old Man’s?”

With a calm consciousness of internal fury and a livelier, lovelier colour, Maddaleen ignored both suggestion and taunt.

Dirck, however, said eagerly that there was plenty of lumber in the tool-house barn.

“Material for piles?” enquired Lanier.

“Yes, and a pile-driver on the dredging scow. We make our own docks, Mr. Lanier. Jake, Bob, Sid and Chet Gray can build us any cofferdam we stake out.”

“I wish you’d get those documents, Dirck,” said Lanier, “—and the map of Place-of-Swans showing the seventh island and the Old Channel.”

Maddaleen continued to braid her grasses; Dirck jumped up and ran back to the house.

Lanier said to his silent hostess: “Shall we digress?”

She looked up, warily: “Digress?”

“Or, rather, revert?”

“Revert to what, Mr. Lanier?”

“Well, to carpet-cavaliers, for instance.”

“Ah,” she exclaimed maliciously, “you are *not* generous. And that’s one flaw, anyway!”

“Never,” said he, “have I experienced such implied adulation.”

“There are plenty of other flaws,” she interrupted hastily, “—cracks, probably—yawning chasms full of Stygian darkness—” She braided her grasses faster, as though timing her fingers to some hidden, uneven rhythm. . . . “Because,” she said, “you dragged my poor, half-starved brother upstairs

by his heels I ought to swoon with admiration, I suppose. The trouble is I don't know how to swoon. However, I am very much obliged to you for returning to me my brother."

There was, on his visage, the vague shadow of a grin: "You are needlessly alarmed; I am not going to kiss your hand again," he said.

"What?" she snapped.

"You offered me perpetual and manual osculatory concessions—"

"Is that your idea of indoor sport, Mr. Lanier?"

"That was the agreement you suggested—'

"I—"

"Wasn't it?"

She looked up so pink and so thoroughly incensed that the next instant they both laughed.

"I renounce the emolument," he said. "I permit you to enter a voluntary petition in bankruptcy—"

"You're very silly!"

"—Or, you may enter a plea of *non vult*," he added blandly, "and leave the penalty to me."

"Why do you bully and torment me, Mr. Lanier?"

"Oho," he said, "I fear such meekness in you more than your sarcasms."

"You don't fear anything," she retorted; "if you did you'd be more attractive."

"It's your fearlessness that makes *you* attractive."

"You *know* I'm a coward!"

"Oh. Then what is it makes you so attractive to—"

"Any average girl is attractive to any idle young man," she remarked with a shrug.

"But I'm a busy man—"

"Busy being flippant. I *won't* talk in this strain—"

"It's no strain on me—"

"Mr. Lanier!"

They laughed.

"It's like some horrid give-and-take vaudeville," she said. . . . "And you *can* be sensible and interesting. . . . *Pax*, if you please. . . . And I'm sorry for the 'carpet-cavalier.' And I *do* thank you."

"*Pax*," he said, "—I didn't really mind your jeers."

That was part of her trouble; he didn't mind; and she lifted uncertain eyes to inspect this too clever young man.

Dirck returned with map and documents; they spread them on the grass; Maddaleen placed the tip of one finger on a spot a little south by west of The Old Man's.

“Here,” she said, “is where I have imagined that the *Red Moon* lies buried under silt and sand.” She read aloud from the Spanish script—“From east to west . . . toward the south and at three fathoms depth—”

“There’s half a fathom there now, Sis,” said Dirck, “but there may have been three fathoms then.”

“Particularly,” added Lanier, “if the *Red Moon* struck the vanished seventh island and sank in the shoals at the Old Channel’s edge. . . . Why not build a miniature cofferdam out there and try a little excavation? Or—better and quicker—why not do a little digging on The Old Man’s, first? . . . For if that poor Spaniard, Carrillo, tried to salvage anything so long ago, some sign of his operations ought to remain on The Old Man’s—some buried debris, bits of charcoal, metal, perhaps—”

“I’ll get a couple of bay-men and we’ll go over and dig now!” said Dirck, impetuously. “What do you say—just for a try-out?”

“All right—if your sister thinks so,” said Lanier politely. “In the reeds I don’t think we need worry about a glass on Tiger Island.”

“If they notice us at all they’ll think we’re digging a blind, probably,” said Dirck.

He went down to the water where the live decoys yarded, and where, on the long wharf in a repair shop, Sid Warnock and Chester Gray were patching up leashes, leg-bands, weight-cords, and wooden decoys.

“Take some shovels and picks and a hand-pump over to The Old Man’s,” said Dirck. “We’re going to get sea-boots and row over.”

“You all aimin’ to build a blind, Mr. Dirck?” enquired Warnock. “I better tote some cement, too—”

“No; but if you’ve a wooden form we can sink to box in a hole, bring it with you, Sid. You can bring a couple of blasting cartridges, too.”

His sister and Lanier were moving toward the house when the boy joined them.

In the gun-room closets were plenty of sea-boots and Lanier was soon fitted out. Then they took a rowboat at the foot of the south lawn; Dirck assumed the oars; and they shot out across the quiet, sparkling water.

It was only a short pull to the lumpy expense of mud and reeds called “The Old Man’s.” Maddaleen led the men to the north-west end of the islet, where reeds stood higher than their heads.

A few minutes later the two young baymen arrived, poling their skiff; and the pump, the form for cement work, and the tools were carried up and laid among the reeds.

It was squashy digging; the four men all fell to with picks and long-handled shovels; and very soon the box-form was lowered into the hole and the pump started.

At the depth of two spade-blades Chet Gray struck a bit of timber. It was as heavy and sound as bog-oak and had a copper spike in it.

"Part of a ship's timber, I reckon," said Chet Gray: "I dunno how it come here."

"Driftwood from False Cape," suggested Sid Warnock. "Mebbe someone who was aimin' to build a boat towed it here in olden times."

"It's good live-oak," remarked Lanier. "That was a big spike once."

They pumped the box, started to dig again; encountered more fragments of live-oak, hewed, chiseled, and planed. Some were pierced by spikes and bolts or bore the marks of them.

"These are the fragments of a ship's timbers," said Lanier; "and they are very, very old. They may have been bits of drift from False Cape brought here for boat patching or for fuel; or they might be fragments of the *Red Moon*."

He was down in the box, ankle deep in water, his hands and features spattered; and he looked up at Maddaleen Dirck with a smile:

"If I dig up the *Red Moon* for you," he said, "what's the reward?"

"Fifty-fifty—as I told you in New York," she replied with malice.

"But I refused that."

"Very well, what, then?" she asked defiantly, safe in the presence of the others, from any gay presumption on his part.

He laughed and drove his shovel into the mud. "I'll dig up your ship first," he said. "Dirck, you'd better get busy with your pump!"

When the water was all out it was discovered that the silt was out, too. A deposit of almost dry, yellow sand appeared; and, at a spade-blade's depth, Lanier struck charcoal.

There was a bed of it full of lumps of metal which rang against the shovels. A few oyster-shells partly calcined, bits of iron and copper, shards from broken earthenware with patches of iridescent glazing left—but nothing of more value; no nobler metal; not a flake of gold or silver—merely the debris of some immemorial camp-fire, or the remains of a burnt rubbish heap, centuries old, perhaps.

Yet, to Lanier, this bed of charcoal was vividly significant. Here, perhaps, toiled that ancient and shipwrecked outcast, Carrillo, all alone in this untenanted desolation, doggedly striving to maintain life in his wretched body with fire and scraps of scorched sea-food.

The remains of this ancient fire warmed him through days and nights of horror; cooked for him what shellfish he discovered; sent up a red, smoky, and wavering signal above infinite wastes of land and sea, calling man to the aid of man where only God existed.

Through the bed of charcoal, at three spade-blades' depth, all the men left the caisson; everybody retired to the eastern end of the islet, and a cartridge

was exploded, which resulted in revealing that, under the charcoal, there was nothing between it and the centre of the earth excepting yellow sand.

"That," remarked Lanier, "would seem to settle operations, as far as this island is concerned. . . . Where had you decided to build your cofferdam, Miss Loveless?"

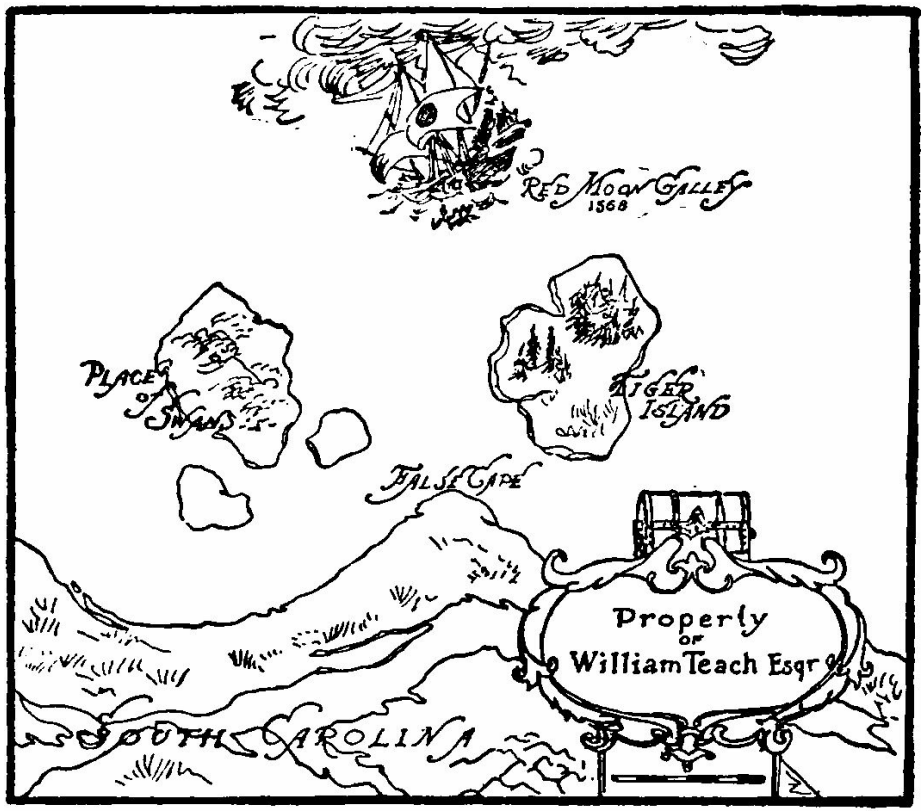
The girl detected the shadow of amusement on his mud-spattered features: "That's mean," she said, "to put the burden of decision on me."

"I'll share it," he said; "shall we wade out?"

Dirck warned them to beware of swan-holes as they stepped into the shallow water and moved out, knee deep, toward the south-west. Lanier carried a pointed stake with a rag tied to it.

As they waded on, side by side, the girl showed him where the ancient channel once wound between Red Moon and Star Shoal, and where once it flowed on either side of The Old Man's.

She had made a little map that morning and now she took it from her pocket and showed it to him.



"You see," she explained, "the dotted line is the ancient channel. Here,

where I made a star within a circle, south-east of The Old Man's, and on the edge of the old channel, I believe that the *Red Moon* lies deep in the sand."

"Shall I set the stake here?" he inquired, smilingly.

"Mr. Lanier, will you kindly give me your opinion first?"

"So you can hold me responsible in case of failure?"

"Do you wish to be considered too perfect to make mistakes? You are not divine, you know. And the unerring human is a bore."

"If I blunder in this will you like me better?"

"Probably I'd consider you less tiresome."

That was rude. It also was untrue. Maddaleen reddened, annoyed at herself and at Lanier's faint grin.

"Well," he said, "I seem to lose out either way." And he drove the stake into the sand.

II

That day, the next, and every day during the week, old Jake and his men were engaged in the preliminaries of building a cofferdam on the shoal off The Old Man's.

It was going to be a long and complicated matter ever to build such a dam on the shoals in a shallow sea where no great resistance of material was required.

The dredging scow had to be overhauled; its machinery put into shape; the pile-driver assembled and installed aboard another scow; fuel gathered and prepared, piles made ready, plank transported.

Lanier and Dirck worked nearly all day and every day to help the men make the most of this stretch of blue-bird weather. Between times they cruised around Place-of-Swans or spent several hopeless hours in the blinds on Crescent Bar, with a total of a pair of black duck kicked up out of the marsh and one Blue Peter stupid enough to flitter past within very long range.

But the weather remained beautiful and warm, and life at Place-of-Swans was tranquil within doors by lamplight and in the unvarying sunshine out of doors.

As far as anybody knew, no intruders from Tiger Island had come prowling around Place-of-Swans; no strange sail save the lazy sheet of some poling fisherman ever broke the blue expanse of waters as far as the eye could see. Nothing moved in sky or sea save a gull or two wandering in from the ocean or a high hawk turning in the blinding blue.

Yet, with a good glass from any north window, they on Red Moon could see signs of distant activity on the western shore of Tiger Island, where, it appeared, dredging already was going on, and preparations under way for other elaborate works of a nature not yet to be determined by the watchers on Red Moon.

Several times, however, from an anchored scow, a clumsy figure that looked like a deep-sea diver in helmet and armour went over the sides. Maddaleen first detected this; Lanier confirmed her report later; and the three discussed the situation at the breakfast table.

"What a ghastly business it would be," said Dirck, "if, after all, the *Red Moon* should really lie off Tiger Island. . . . It's our ship and our treasure; but they'd be entitled to it if they found it in their waters, wouldn't they?"

"After three hundred years," said Lanier, "I doubt that you could show title to the *Red Moon*, Dirck. . . . Besides, unless we watch them at very close quarters we'll never find out whether they've discovered either ship or treasure."

Maddaleen said to Dirck: “I don’t wish you ever to risk going among those men on Tiger Island.” She did not include Lanier in this admonition; did not even look at him.

After she had left the breakfast-table to encounter and dispose of daily household matters, write her letters, and generally put in order her personal affairs for the day, Dirck said to Lanier:

“All the same I’d like to take a look at what Welper’s people are up to. I’d run along shore in a launch if it wasn’t so noisy.”

“A launch would sound like the battle of the Marne,” remonstrated Lanier; “and besides, Dirck, it really is important that you remain deceased as far as Welper is concerned;—for your sister’s sake as well as for your own.” He added: “They’d blackmail her and bleed her white.”

Dirck reddened with anger. To realise what a fool he’d been was painful enough, but that his affair with Mrs. Wyvern should now threaten to involve his sister in the sinister coils of the affair exasperated him.

“I lost my money like a fool,” he said, “and I’ll stand the gaff. But I’ve simply got to get that signature back—somehow—”

“I have that in mind, always,” said Lanier. “But don’t ever start anything on your own, Dirck; talk it over with me first. When the opportunity offers we’ll manage it somehow.”

They went out of the house and down to the dock and stood watching the boxing operations off The Old Man’s.

Jake saw them, called through the megaphone to Dirck asking for a chain and a coil of rope which lay on the wharf. The boy threw them into a skiff, jumped in himself, and poled it out.

Lanier watched him for a while, then turned on his heel and sauntered back to the house and upstairs to his room.

Here he fastened a web belt across his chest, so that the two woven holsters attached to it lay under either arm-pit.

Into each holster he slid a loaded pistol; filled the belt flaps with clips, buttoned his coat, picked up his tweed cap.

In the little library downstairs Maddaleen sat writing.

“May I disturb you?” asked Lanier.

“You *never* disturb me,” replied the girl with a faint malice in her smile that barely hinted at a double meaning.

The young man grinned cheerfully: “I’m going over to have a chat with Barney Welper,” he said. “I thought—in the remote event of such a necessity—that I’d better leave an address to which you could telegraph from Stede’s Landing. . . . May I have a pen and a slip of paper? . . . Thanks—”

He wrote: “Notify Frank Lane, Desk Clerk, Hotel Marquis-of-Granby, Norfolk, Virginia.”

"Thank you," he said calmly, "I'll be back to dinner, I expect—"

"Mr. Lanier—"

He turned at the door; the girl sat quite motionless: he walked back to the table where she had been writing.

"Why are you going to Tiger Island?" she asked in a voice so constrained that it sounded cold.

"I thought I'd talk to Welper."

"About—Dirck?"

"Yes; I thought perhaps there might be some way of getting that fool paper bearing your brother's signature."

"How?"

"I hadn't quite formulated any plan," he replied airily. "One is forced to become something of an opportunist in such affairs. . . . One must see for one's self just how matters stand; and then, whichever way they turn, one must be ready to think quick—"

"Or shoot quick?"

After a moment: "Oh, I don't expect it to turn that way," he said pleasantly.

"But if it should turn that way, Mr. Lanier?"

"Well—"

"I stand to lose you."

"The man you send that telegram to will come and stand by you as I would have."

"You misunderstand. I said that I stood to lose *you*."

"But—"

"Is there any replacing a friend?"

"That's nice of you. . . . I thought perhaps you did not quite regard me as such—"

"You *know* I do. . . . You know too much what people really think. . . . I don't have to explain anything. . . . And I won't." She clasped both hands on the table's edge and looked down at them. . . . "Only—I don't want you to go," she said in a low and stubborn voice.

He rested one hand on the table, watching her; and presently she looked up out of troubled eyes.

If there were any advantage to him in her attitude at that instant he ignored it. And earned a young girl's respect and gratitude.

"Really," he said, "I don't believe I run any danger in going over to Tiger Island. Barney Welper knows that you and I are here. He knows, also, that I must have told you exactly what to do in case I don't return. He's in no position to punish me; he's hot after the *Red Moon*; and the last thing on earth that he wants is any trouble with the authorities. Really, Miss Loveless, I feel very secure in doing what I propose to do."

He picked up his cap and was going: she rose and joined him; and they walked through the house and down to the southern cove where her sailboat lay.

He untied the painter, jumped in, picked up the pole.

“Au revoir,” he said lightly.

“Please come back soon.”

“As soon as I can—”

She had been standing on the water’s edge, her head lowered. As he pushed off she looked up at him.

“I want you to know,” she said, “that you are worth more to—*us*—than any kindness you can do for us.”

He held the boat: “It makes me happy to hear you say so. . . . Au revoir, Maddaleen.”

“Good-bye, John Lanier.”

With their given names on each other’s lips and a little constraint in the parting smile, the skiff shot out into the water.

She watched him hoist sail and drift almost imperceptibly west by north, then north-west, then, as the land-breeze caught the sheet, the skiff headed north on a northeast tack. A bunch of Blue Peters got up nervously at a long distance.

The girl watched his sail until, far across the water, it merged with the white dunes, glimmered, and was gone like the distant glint of a gull’s wing.

III

Lanier landed, poling to a muddy shore through thickets of tall reeds which already had turned from green to bronze and gold.

Here he pulled up the prow a little way, unshipped the mast and furled his sheet.

But he had no intention of remaining here. This manœuvre was for the benefit of anybody watching from Tiger Island.

And now, stealthily as a Blue Peter sneaking along reeds and rushes, he slipped off the bank and began to pole, noiselessly, due east, kneeling so that nobody on land could see his head above the shore-reeds.

In and out among the reedy thickets his skiff slipped swiftly, edging every indentation of the island, always eastward, until he had put a mile between his first landing place and the spot he now chose.

This was a muddy gully, possibly a channel, but probably a blind lead running south out of Tiger Island. Up this he poled a little way, drove his pole in for a mooring, tied his painter.

As he was about to step from the boat he recoiled, saving himself with a violent effort from putting his foot almost on top of a moccasin.

The deadly and filthy-looking serpent lay in its characteristic coil on the bank where the sun fell hot. Its triangular head, with the swollen chops, rested on what would have been its chin if it had had any, and was tilted slightly upward, giving to it an expression of devilish impudence.

But never had Lanier looked into two such fixed and deadly eyes; and, as he looked, the snake stirred in its heavy, lustreless folds, silently opened its mouth and displayed a pair of needle-slender curved fangs against a yawning gullet as white and glistening as whitest satin.

When Lanier picked up his pole the snake struck so quickly that its movement was too swift for the eye to follow; but now the young fellow saw it crinkling up to re-coil, and he hit it hard, ending the disgusting career of the creature.

It was a heavy specimen,—a big, bloated body ending in a whip tail; and he had some difficulty in lifting it on his pole and dumping it into the water.

Warily, he climbed out to the bank, and, warily always, picked his way across a rolling bit of country set with very young pines intensely green, which grew thickly everywhere, lifting great plumy terminal shoots from two to four feet above the earth.

Now Lanier took from his pocket a reel of tiniest wire, attached it to a young pine which grew on the bank above where his boat lay; then, slowly advancing, he unreeled his wire along the ground.

Between the tall and ancient pines which covered the centre of the island and the growth of young pines there was open scrub and grass.

When he reached this he laid his reel of wire under a young pine, walked westward a hundred paces, carefully keeping count, and there he broke off and peeled a living pine about five feet high,—not using his knife, not entirely removing the tender bark, but leaving it as though some of the wild hogs on the island had trampled it while fighting.

Now he continued to walk eastward, parallel with the pine-woods on his right; and when he thought he had covered a mile he walked into the high pine forest searching for some less lofty and climbable tree on the outskirts.

He found a live-oak, which was easier and better. Up he went among the evergreen foliage and spectral drapery of shaggy Spanish moss, until he was high enough to see the shore.

It was as he had expected: where he first had landed there were several men moving in the scrub. He could see the sun-glint on gun barrels. The company that had taken over Tiger Island was guarding its waters very vigilantly.

There was every probability that the men yonder must conclude that the boat which had landed must have sailed away again.

Lanier's mind was fairly at ease on that score. But what lay before him now began to disturb him.

He got down from his tree, walked on eastward just inside the pine woods.

Twice he saw large, bloated, loathsome moccasin snakes, sunning on fallen logs, and he proceeded with more caution, irritated and disgusted at the snake-infested place.

At that time of year moccasins leave their accustomed haunts in bog and swamp to hole up for the winter under the roots of dead pines. But always warm weather brings them out to bask.

The pines were gloomy enough without these sinister lurking reptiles to add horror to the forest twilight. Every shadowy hollow loomed dark with a new menace now; every dim gully was suspect; every fallen tree, every rotting log and stump.

Once a huge wild hog passed silently across his line of vision,—a fierce, bearded, dirty grey creature, agile, powerful, moving with springy, stealthy speed.

Except for the moccasins, the hog, a buzzard or two, and himself, Lanier saw nothing alive among the pines of Tiger Island until he drew near the western end of it.

For some time, now, he had heard the mean whine of a saw-mill somewhere ahead in the forest.

But the men who operated it evidently were on the western edge of the

woods, and so screened from his view.

As he advanced the scream of the saw became more distressingly near; and very soon he came in sight of the shore.

There were a few huts and a bunk-house on the wood's edge. Farther ahead, in a clearing beside a rough, new road, stood the larger portable house, evidently used for drinking and eating purposes.

Very soon he was near enough to read the letters on the swinging board suspended from two iron hooks: "At the Sign of the Gay-Cat."

This saturnine humour had always hidden a grimmer meaning for John Lanier. To him it meant that Maddaleen was not forgotten; what she had done had been important enough for Barney Welper to remember it, and let her know he remembered it. There was still more in the sign,—an insult to Maddaleen,—for Welper now knew the truth concerning the girl's relations with Lanier.

Well, there was the tavern; there swung the sign; and beyond, on the water, he could see a sloop and a dredger anchored off shore, two scows, and several boats of various sorts, all clustering off the westward point of Tiger Island where, no doubt, Barney Welper had decided to begin salvage operations for the *Red Moon*.

Lanier now stepped from the rough ground into the new road; walked carelessly up to The Gay-Cat; walked into the open doorway where he heard voices and the clinking of heavy glasses.

Voices and the tinkle of glass ceased as he entered. From the farther end of a long, pine table three men looked at him out of cold, astounded eyes.

"Hello, Barney," he said, smiling; and to Mr. Samuel Potter and Harry Senix he spoke gaily, amiably, and with the careless, good-humoured ease of a man greeting friends in his own club.

"Some plant you've got here, Barney," he added, pulling a chair toward him and seating himself; "I suppose all the Forty are in this deal, more or less."

Perhaps it was the incredible impudence of the man that saved him at that instant; perhaps it was the swift common sense of Welper, whose left hand caught Mr. Potter's right hand under the pine table and crushed it immovable over the weapon it clutched.

If Lanier noticed and understood the scarcely perceptible movement he seemed to exhibit no concern. Harry Senix, with his pasty, scorbutic face, gazed at him out of washed-out eyes—the unblinking regard of a vindictive creature, sick but dangerous.

Lanier said carelessly to Welper: "I'm sorry you've got it in for me, Barney. But I'm sorrier yet that my girl did what she did in the Forty Club."

Welper's thin lips receded: "*Your girl!*" he sneered.

"Whose else? I'm going to marry her."

“Like hell you are,” said Sam Potter. “You tell me a straight skirt with a wad like that is going to fall for a crook like you?”

Harry Senix loosened his colourless, unhealthy lips: “All that’s coming to you is jack. You framed Barney good, you did, and you’ve got your nerve showing up here.”

“If I’d framed anybody in the Forty Club I wouldn’t come here, you poor dope! Even if I had no more mind than the coke’s left you I’d beat it if I ever framed the club or anybody in it.”

“If you didn’t frame me,” said Welper softly, “what do you think you did to me with that gay-cat?”

“Talk straight!” retorted Lanier. “You’ve found out who and what my girl is. Cut out the gay-cat!” He turned suddenly on Sam Potter: “You know damned well she’s no gay-cat or she wouldn’t have started anything inside the club!” And, to Welper again: “That’s where I couldn’t hold her. She didn’t understand. Why, do you think I’d ever have let her pull anything if I could have helped it? I’m *marrying* her, I tell you!”

“*Maybe*,” said Harry Senix, his pale, evil eyes unmoved.

“Oh. *Maybe?* Who’ll interfere, Harry?”

A silence; and Lanier’s even tones again: “If you feel that way we can shoot it out *now*!”

Nobody stirred a muscle. Lanier, looking at Senix, addressed Welper: “It isn’t what it looks like, Barney; my club record concerning you is clear. I wouldn’t have had that happen for all the gold in the *Red Moon*. . . . Because gold is no use to a dead man. And if I’d framed you inside the Forty Club I might as well have kissed myself good-bye.”

He glanced at Welper, now, yet kept Senix within his orbit of vision:

“That isn’t what worries me,” he said. “Nobody in the club really believes me a fool. I know what happens to squealers—”

“So do I,” said Senix thickly.

“You need a few shots before you know anything,” said Lanier, smiling at his own double meaning. And, to Welper again: “You *know* I never doubled you, Barney. You’ve more respect for my brains than to believe that. Am I right?”

There was an interval of silence.

“Am I right?” repeated Lanier coldly.

“M—m—I guess so. But—does that let you out, John?”

“Because I brought her there?”

“M—yes.”

“Barney, she’s my girl and she’s going to be my wife. Your Orizava Oil bunch flim-flammed her brother, took his last cent, framed him, and drove him to bump himself. That was *enough*.”

“Whaddye mean?” growled Sam Potter.

“That’s what I mean, Sam. You’d done him enough dirt. And when his sister came to me and told me that Barney had taken the *Red Moon* documents, too, and that she ought to have them back, I said to her, ‘Sure! Go to it—*outside* the club. That’s allowable. That’s understood. But’ I said, ‘nothing like that indoors.’

“If she’d been a gay-cat she’d never tried it. You know that, Barney; you too, Sam. . . . After a shot or two Harry, here, will agree with me. Why, my girl isn’t even an amateur. She isn’t crooked. Look what she did—followed Barney from the Museum to the Waldorf and picked his pocket of a *coat check*! Can you beat it?

“Then she stalls, gives me a phony date at the Ritz, goes to the Forty Club and frisks Barney’s room! My God—why all that trouble when she could swallow bichloride or shoot her face off?”

Lanier’s short laugh was bitter; he took no further precaution to keep Senix within range of vision, but jerked his chair forward and rested both arms on the table.

It is true that his arms were *folded*,—and either hand within a fraction of a second to its hidden pistol.

“No,” he said contemptuously, “I’m not worrying about myself. I did what I could! I chased her; I got your paper for you, Barney. What my girl pulled hasn’t hurt you: you’ve bought Tiger Island; you’re dredging already; your diver is working all day long. You’ve got no kick coming; you’ve nothing on me; and now that you know facts, you’ve nothing on *her*. If you punish her you do it to me. You can’t touch me under club rules. All the Forty can do is to bump a squealer.”

He looked quietly at Welper, at Sam Potter, at Senix:

“Is anybody here going to call me a squealer?” he enquired with a gentle smile.

After a long pause: “Well then, by God!” burst out Sam Potter, “that’s all you get, John! And if you’re smelling around over here for a look-in you can smell your way home again.”

“I see. You mean that my girl gets nothing out of this *Red Moon* job.”

Welper looked up slyly: “M—yes; that’s what we mean, John. What your girl did to me lets her out. . . . If she hadn’t done *that*—and being your girl—”

“All right then,” interrupted Lanier sharply; “if that’s the price and the penalty, I lose out too, do I?”

“You’ve got to be responsible for your girl,” growled Potter.

Senix stroked his scarred face with a twitching hand: “If you want a piece of the *Red Moon*,” he said, “you gotta bump your girl. . . . Or we’ll do it for you. . . . Ain’t that right, Barney?”

Lanier turned on him: “Shut that dead clam you call your face!” he said. “What did *you* ever do to get a piece of the *Red Moon*, you lobbygow! . . . You crook your finger once—*once*—and you’ll get the kind of free pill that’s coming to you!”

Welper interposed with lifted hand: “John,” he demurred in his smooth, soft way, “if you start anything on Tiger Island—m—m—you’ll gum the show. If you—ah—gum us up we’ll get your girl. M—yes—we’ll get her if you pan us, John.”

“Then tell that dope to stay out of this,” retorted Lanier. “How can a guy keep his temper when his girl puts crimps in him and his pals read him out of the Forty Club, and a cuckoo like that coke over there wants to bump his skirt?”

“You gotta take your medicine,” insisted Potter heavily.

“All right; I’ll take it,” snapped Lanier. “Between you guys and my girl I’m done good. All right. . . . I don’t get a piece of the *Red Moon*. . . . All right; you’re squared now.” He turned on Welper: “Are you squared, Barney?”

“M—m—yes, John. . . . I guess that’s right.”

“And that’s her punishment and mine—that we don’t get a piece of the *Red Moon*?”

“You and her has gotta stand the gaff,” muttered Potter.

“Very well. Are we square, now?”

“I’ll put it up to the club,” said Welper in his mousy voice. After a moment he peered slyly at Lanier: “Hand it to me straight, John; what’s that rich skirt to you?”

Lanier got to his feet, leaned both clenched hands on the table and bent his head almost level with Welper’s:

“You want to know? I’ll tell you,” he said. “I don’t care for the jack you took off her brother; I don’t care about the *Red Moon*. That’s all in a day’s work; the smart guy gets his; it’s what we’re all out for; it’s understood!—”

He struck the table with doubled fist: “Those things don’t worry *me*! What worries me is that my girl’s straight, and she thinks I’m straight; and if any guy in the Forty Club slips her the facts she’ll dump me. . . . And there you are!”

The realisation that they held the whip-hand instead of the pistol-hand only was reflected variously upon the visages of these three men. Welper veiled his sly eyes under long and beautiful lashes; Sam Potter smirked; Senix moistened his clay-tinted lips with a dry and bluish tongue, and there came a spasm over his features which was his manner of smiling.

Lanier looked from one to the other: “I’m satisfied,” he said; “I’m glad we’re squared. . . . Because if any guy on Tiger Island had guessed what was worrying me and had slipped the facts to my girl, I’d have lost her, and her jack. . . . And that—wouldn’t—suit—me,” he drawled.

Welper presently unveiled his small, sly eyes: “How do you square her about the Forty Club, John?”

“Hell,” said Lanier contemptuously, “she thinks I’m a dick, of course.”

After a pause Lanier let his glance rest carelessly on these three expressionless faces; and was satisfied that these men had never even suspected him on that score.

Welper sat up in his chair, eased his cramped limbs, reached for one of the bottles on the table and shoved a clean glass toward Lanier:

“This is Scotch,” he said. “We got rye, too, if you want it, John.”

Potter heaved a great sigh, straightened his bulky body, withdrew his pistol-hand from his coat pocket.

Harry Senix reached for a glass with shaky fingers and held it clutched tightly while Welper half-filled it with raw rye whiskey. Then the drug addict added two fingers of tabasco and three of Jamaica ginger.

Welper held up his glass: “Here’s fun, John. You get your girl and her jack, anyway.”

Potter held out his glass: “Sorry about the *Red Moon*, John, but it’ll learn her to mind what you say.”

Harry Senix emptied his horrible and scorching mixture without a tremor and his eyes of a dead fish rested on Lanier:

“You do what you damn please,” he said thickly, “but if it was me I’d marry her for the jack, and then I’d croak her and cut in on the *Red Moon* deal.”

Lanier laughed: “Dope and skirts don’t mix,” he said; “you’ve got to stick to one or the other.” . . . And, to Welper: “Well then, we’re set, Barney. I wouldn’t touch Orizava Oil; I’m out of the *Red Moon*; so I’ll stake myself to my wife’s jack and try for my million on my own. . . . Come on; show me your plant. . . . Anybody else here that might try to bump me?”

“Eugene Renton and Dan Supple,” replied Welper. “They heard what your girl did to me in the Forty Club. I told Donald Mayne, too. And Helen Wyvern knows. But these are all who know about it. I haven’t laid it before the club.”

“Is Don Mayne here?” asked Lanier.

“No. But he’s coming with Helen.”

“Well then,” continued Lanier, “don’t you think it is just as well that Eugene Renton and Dan Supple should see you and me arm in arm, Barney?”

“I—m—m—think it highly advisable, John,” said Welper. “If you wish to inspect our preparations directed toward the—ah—the recovery of the *Red Moon*, I am sure that Sam and Harry will share with me the—m—m—the pleasure of conducting you.”

As they walked out into the outer sunshine Lanier said gaily to Welper: “That was a punk frame-up of yours, Barney, when you shoved Lance Ferray

at us on the steamer."

"Did you realise my state of mind?" enquired Welper in mild reproach.

"Yes; but strychnine!"

"Yes," murmured Welper, "that was, perhaps, too severe—was ill-considered—the natural impulse of youth and not of maturity. . . . M—m, yes, John; your rebuke is just. . . . And I've lost a perfectly good nigger."

"Lost?"

"M—m, yes; so to speak. It is—ah—regrettable, unfortunate. He might have continued to be of service to me; m—m, yes, of considerable service."

"What happened to Lance?" enquired Lanier.

"Ah—that I am not prepared to say; not being possessed of—m—m—of precise information concerning preliminary details of his—m—m—his decease—"

"Dead!"

"M—m, exceedingly so. I—ah—I am informed that the—ah—the admirably efficient police of Norfolk discovered the m—m—the remains of the unfortunate negro—ah—so to speak—floating near a dock."

"Hell," grunted Potter, who had been listening; "you scared him into a squealer, John; and when he asked the steward for headquarters telephone number, why, some guy stuck a knife behind his ear and pushed him overboard."

"Sam may be big and fat but he's nervous," explained Welper, "and he's got to get his sleep. . . . So some one eased his mind about Lance; that's all."

"Why," exclaimed Potter, virtuously outraged, "you scared him so that he had a fit in the pantry and began yelling about some one framing him, and about a cup of doped coffee! Do you suppose Barney and I would let any nigger get away with that bunk?"

"No," said Lanier, "I'm sure you wouldn't."

They came out on the western edge of Tiger Island. At that moment, aboard a scow, a heavily helmeted and armoured deep-sea diver was lowering himself on the ladder, while his assistants aided him or stood around the apparatus on deck ready to respond to his signals.

Sam Potter framed his mouth between huge, hollowed hands: "Hey! Aboard the scow! Any news?" he bellowed.

A man lifted a megaphone: "Only an old Spanish anchor!" he shouted.

"Well," remarked Welper, "that's something. Maybe it's the *Red Moon's* anchor. Maybe there are other ships down there. Who knows what we shall discover. It's a good graft, John, and it don't cost so much, considering the stakes;—m—m, no, it don't cost such an awful lot, considering what we are playing for."

"A ship crammed full of gold," nodded Lanier. "I suppose there must be

several millions aboard her."

"By mathematical deduction, assuming the capacity of the ancient Spanish sailing galley to be that of its measurements recorded in Spanish archives, we believe, John, that the *Red Moon* should contain gold valued—ah—at approximately eleven millions of gold dollars—m—m—yes,—at about eleven millions."

"I see eleven members of the Forty Club retiring from business," laughed Lanier.

Potter turned to him with a bull-like grunt of admiration: "You're a good sport, John. I'll say so. You tell 'em."

"Oh," said Lanier carelessly, "I'll get mine, too, some day and somewhere. . . . And, if I don't, my girl is worth this entire show—to me. . . . All the gold in the *Red Moon*—she's worth more than that to me."

"Ah—h," sneered Senix with a wry face, "don't kid yourself. I never saw a moll I'd spend more'n a nigger bill on. . . . And that's two dollars too much."

Lanier turned on his heel in disgust: "Barney," he said to Welper, "I'll be going—" He checked himself: Eugene Renton had come up behind the group, immaculate, jaunty, his clean cut, clean shaven face as colourless as ever, accenting his black eyes and black hair.

He wore solaro riding breeches, puttees, and a clean silk shirt open at his very white throat. Two pistols sagged in holsters low on either thigh.

"Gene," said Welper, casting a sly glance at Lanier, "shake hands with John. He's squared himself, and we've squared ourselves."

"That's good," said Renton without changing his expression.

Lanier offered his hand; Renton accepted it. His black, still eyes remained intent on the other man.

Welper asked Lanier where he had left his boat. "Yes," said Renton; "Dan Supple and I went down to where we thought you landed, but you were gone."

"Oh, it was you?" replied Lanier carelessly. "I saw somebody down there." And, to Welper: "This seems to be a snaky place, Barney. It isn't always safe to land where you want to."

A frightful spasm contracted the visage of Harry Senix and he cursed the island and the snakes. "They make me sick," he said shrilly, "—those big, slimy, swollen snakes. You can't tell where you'll see 'em. One of the crackers with the saw-mill outfit took a grub-hoe yesterday and he turned up ninety-three snakes in the woods inside two hours!—"

"He's off again; the snakes will scare him crazy before he quits Tiger Island," said Potter to Lanier.

The latter laughed: "I don't like them either," he remarked, but he continually kept his gaze on Renton—an amiable, casual regard—but which never for a moment swerved elsewhere.

"Well, I'll be going," he repeated. "Good luck to you, Barney. Good luck, gentlemen—"

"Take another drink first?" insisted Potter.

"No, it's getting toward sundown, and I feel like Harry; I want to *see* where I step on this island." He smiled, his eyes on Renton, and nodded adieu to him.

What he must do, now, came hard; he turned his back to Eugene Renton. For Lanier was as utterly convinced as though he had been told, that Renton suspected him in spite of Welper's endorsement and its acceptance by the others.

For, while Eugene Renton was of a thoughtful, secretive type, with a false appearance of nervous frankness, sometimes he acted like lightning.

It was hard for Lanier to nod airily to these men, to walk on past them, to turn his back on Renton. Ten yards, twenty, thirty; and no explosion behind him sent him pitching on his face to die while the pistol-shot was still ringing in his lifeless ears. Thirty yards, forty, fifty; and here he strode out into the scrub.

And here it was natural for him or for anybody to turn, look back, wave a last greeting.

He looked back. Welper, Potter, Senix, were gathered in a close group; Renton apparently harangued them with fiercely nervous gestures. He saw them lift their heads to look at him; saw Renton turn and stare. And he waved his cap in gay and careless adieu, entered the bushes, whirled on his heel under cover, and saw Renton start swiftly after him; saw Senix hesitate, then follow Renton; saw both men start to free their pistols.

He freed his own weapons, grasped them in either hand, moved on as fast as he could without running—not caring to face anybody with a thumping heart and gasping lungs to mar a steady trigger finger.

All the scrub looked alike; all the wastes of young pines, too. He did not know how far to go or how far he had gone. He did not know where to turn off toward the shore or where his boat lay. The forest told him nothing; its edges were unaccented and monotonous; and when he looked for the live-oak he had climbed he saw scores along the edges of the pines, all shrouded with Spanish moss, all similar.

Now and then he caught glimpses of Renton and Senix, not much nearer, perhaps, but always on his track. The sun hung very low, reddening the scrub till it rolled away like a vast waste of glowing gold.

Suddenly he caught sight of his peeled pine-bush; ran to it, swept the ground with one hand, caught the reel of wire, dropped it, and hurried on guided by the hair-fine strands running through his fingers.

It was not far; he saw the cleft where the gully cut inland. Then, as he came

out on the bank above, he saw Dan Supple sitting in the boat, a rifle across his knees, but looking the wrong way.

"Put 'em up!" came Lanier's ringing command. "Stand and drop that rifle off your knees!"

Men like Dan Supple lose no time under such circumstances. Even as he jumped to his feet and lifted both arms on high, Lanier landed on the deck.

"Step that mast, Dan! Quick!" snapped Lanier. "That's right. Grab that pole and shove her out. *Shove!*"

The boat shot out into the bay.

"Keep on poling," said Lanier. "Faster! Put your back into it! That's the way—"

There came a flash and report from the shore, another, another. There were two round holes in the sheet and a ragged tear where it was partly furled. Another shot struck the water.

"Hey, you guys!" bawled Supple. "Who'n hell d'yeh think you're shootin'!"

Lanier picked up the rifle, emptied the magazine, reached over and stripped the cartridge belt from Supple's body.

"Thanks, Dan," he said. "Now step overboard."

"Swim?"

"I don't think you'll need to. Come! Make it snappy! Hop it!"

Supple seized the gunwale, steadied himself, vaulted into the water. It was only waist deep.

"Here's your rifle," said Lanier politely. "Look out for swan holes."

Supple, over his hips in water, stood glaring at him.

"Dan," said Lanier, holding the boat with the pole, "what does Gene Renton think he's got on me to chase me with two guns?"

Supple leered at him: "You want to know? All right; I'll tell you. You act too much like a squealer to suit Gene Renton."

"He's crazy. I squared myself with Barney! Do you think I could pull anything on Barney Welper and Sam Potter?—"

"You done it!" retorted Supple savagely. "Orizava Oil is pinched. Mrs. Wyvern, too. She's out, on bail, and she wired Gene."

"What!"

"Ya-as, 'n' you squealed to square your girl with the Orizava bunch because they trimmed that rat of a brother of hers.

"Gene and I was over to Bonnet House to-day and Helen Wyvern wired him how she got pinched. That's where you stepped on Gene Renton, and he's got it in for you."

Lanier reddened: "Dan," he said, "I'd rather have Renton put a bullet in me than hear you tell me that Orizava Oil has been pinched.

“You say so to Barney, and to Eugene. If they want to pull a gun on sight, all right; but, on my word—which you fellows know I never broke—I didn’t know Orizava was pinched; I had nothing to do with it; and I wouldn’t have had it happen for anything on earth.”

Supple’s little, ruddy ferret eyes bored into Lanier’s features for a full minute’s silence.

“John,” he said finally, “I gotta believe you. A liar—that’s one thing you ain’t, unless you’ve changed. I guess Gene got you wrong. But Helen is his girl. Any guy that’s got a girl is influenced by her. And Helen wired Gene to watch you because of what your girl done to Barney and because we skinned your girl’s brother. By God, if that little rat wasn’t dead I’d say he started the dicks after Orizava. . . . By God, I wonder if he *is* dead at all!—”

“Wasn’t his body found?”

“*I* didn’t see it. . . . Rats is rats. Cats hasn’t anything on ’em—no, not with all their nine lives. . . . Rats has nine times nine. I wouldn’t wonder—”

“You better start and wade ashore,” remarked Lanier. “If you hit a swan hole you’ll swim. Tell Gene the truth. Then, if he still itches to toss a gun, tell him it’s all right with me. . . . Only I want to know beforehand. . . . I’d hate to kill him too quick.”

“Got a glass on your island, John?”

“Yes.”

“All right. I’m satisfied. If Gene wants war I’ll burn a flare on the diving-dock at seven o’clock.”

“Right. Good-night, Dan.”

“Aw review!” said Supple, and started toward the shore.

It was just seven o’clock when Lanier landed on Red Moon. As he stood up to unship his mast and furl sail, he looked across the darkness toward Tiger Island.

A distant flare burned at the extreme western end where the diving-dock ran out.

Between himself and Eugene Renton, now, any encounter meant death.

NUMBER EIGHT
The Adventure at the Gay-Cat

I

At last the cofferdam off The Old Man's was finished; pump and dredge had been at work for a week; the débris of mud and sand, dumped on the scow, had been carefully screened.

So far nothing was discovered to encourage anybody in the hope that a submerged ship lay anywhere in the vicinity. The dump-heap consisted of nothing but sand, silt, weed, and a few antique shells.

Blue-bird weather had vanished; skies changed; grey days came and raw nights and rough water. It grew colder; the four winds were up and busy, blowing freshly one day, boisterously the next, never entirely quiet—blustering winds, sudden winds, treacherous winds, arising capriciously anywhere and at any hour.

Sometimes at night Lanier could hear the roar of a mighty tempest in the pines on Tiger Island, or the cannon-like thunder of a gale beyond the dunes off False Cape. Wind-demons whined in the chimneys, whimpered around the eaves; tormented the gilded weather-vane until it shuddered, veered wildly, creaking, complaining.

Ducks, geese and swan now came in thousands—not remaining, however, very close to Star Shoal and The Old Man's, where early dredging operations stirred them up and kept them from returning until late at night.

Also the duck and geese were made uneasy by activities on Tiger Island. Yet, even with all that stir and noise and the constant sailing of boats between Tiger Island and Bonnet Bay, the wild-fowl of that wilderness might not have felt very much disturbed had it not been for the nightly revels of Welper's gang—their sudden mania for lighting bonfires and setting off fireworks.

Why and what the Forty Thieves were celebrating nobody on Red Moon Island could guess. It made Lanier uneasy, apprehensive, and finally moody. Had it not been a case of shooting on sight between him and Eugene Renton he might again have risked a visit to the Gay-Cat. He was contemplating it.

But he did not wish to kill Renton, or anybody else if it could be avoided. Moreover, there was another way of securing information. He went after luncheon one day with Jake in the launch to Bonnet Bay; and, from Everly's house at Stede's Landing, he called up Frank Lane, Desk Clerk at the Hotel Marquis-of-Granby in Norfolk.

"Frank," he said, "this is Number *B*. Give me *your* number."

“Double B. What is your letter?”

“Twenty-six. What is yours?”

“My letter is Fifty-two.”

“All set, Frank?”

“All set.”

“How is the fishing?” enquired Lanier.

“Number E is very anxious to go fishing. He calls me up every day for instructions. Have you any advice to give.”

“Yes. Please call up Number E and say you are wiring him instructions. Tell him in code that the fishing season has begun; that he is to go on the job at once, find out what is happening in the fish-pond, and get the information to me. You know where I am?”

“Perfectly.”

“Instruct Number E. . . . By the way, one of the Departments has poked a pole in the pool again. One fish was hooked, then released. But the whole pond is frightened.”

“So I noticed in the newspapers.”

“Too bad,” said Lanier. “They’re premature once more. Try your best to make them understand that they are interfering with the entire puddle. I’ll do my best to keep the fish quiet, but they’ll surely scatter if they’re scared again. . . . It will be the same everywhere in the world; every local fish-pond is sure to empty itself into the ocean; and when the big net is drawn there’ll be nothing in it.”

“I’ll post notices on the preserve. Look for Number E within two days.”

“Right. Thanks.”

Late one windy afternoon, returning with old Jake from a cautious cruise through a choppy sea, he noticed a strange launch off Red Moon Island, alongside the dredging-scow.

Jake told him that the launch belonged to the game warden, Bill Bailey, who was on his annual visit to those remote regions for the purpose of inspecting licences.

The warden, a weather-beaten native in sou’wester and tarpaulin, hailed Jake jocosely:

“Vere you-all been a-sailin’ to ven I come a-visitin’?”

“We was chasin’ sand-flies on False Cape. We got a licence to kill skeeters, too.” He handed the licences to the warden, who inspected them and returned them.

“Vat you-all diggin’ in de duck-veed, Cap’n Jake?” he demanded in a bantering voice, gazing at the dredging scow.

“We’re diggin’ up swans’ aigs, Bill,” replied Jake, gravely. “You-all been over to Tiger?”

"I reckon."

"What's all them fires 'n' fireworks for?" demanded Jake. "What the hell is them doins' yonder I dunno. They act like they's aimin' to cl'ar the bay o' duck."

"Vell," replied the warden, "ven I seen dem doin's yonder I vent over vit' de launch. Dee tell me how dee done find some ole ship sunk off'n Tiger—"

"Hey? They've located a sunken ship, you say?"

"I reckon."

"Wot kinda ship!" demanded Jake incredulously.

"Dee tell me she's Spanish an' dees a heap o' money in de hold—"

"Is that why they're shootin' rockets an' celebratin'?"

"I reckon h'it's dat-a-way, Cap'n Jake."

"A—h," retorted Jake, "they're a bilin' bunch o' liars, them Bonnet Bay bums! Bert Mewling he's a crook and a poacher and a liar and a louse! Don't you let 'em tell you they found no Spanish ship full o' gold—"

"I reckon it's silver," drawled the warden, "—vich is vat dee showed me, anyvay."

"You seen silver money took up out'n the water off'n Tiger?" demanded Jake furiously.

"I reckon."

The warden ejected a compact quid, slowly gnawed a section from a twist of native plug, thoughtfully started his engine, seated himself and took the tiller. As his launch started he glanced around at Jake:

"Dees all drunk on Tiger, 'n' shoutin' lak dees crazy, 'n' shootin' rockets, 'n' buildin' bonfires. Ef dee scares yo' ducks, gentlemen, kin'ly lay a complaint an' dee'll fin' a summons nailed up on de shanty do' ven dee vakes up in de mawnin'."

Lanier called across the widening interval of water:

"Did you see those silver coins, warden?"

"Yaas, I did, suh."

"Were they old coins?"

"Yaas, suh."

"What kind?" shouted Lanier.

"Spanish, I reckon, suh," came the faint reply across the water.

Jake poled the launch to the dock: Lanier sprang to the landing and tied up.

"That looks bad for us, sir," remarked old Jake, in sombre tones.

"I wonder," muttered Lanier.

When he was bathed and dressed it was near the dinner hour. He found Maddaleen in the library before an open fire, her slender feet on the fender. She extended one hand to him in friendly welcome.

"You've been to Stede's?"

"Yes."

"Rough?"

"Rather rough."

He pulled up closer to the fire:

"Well," he said, re-seating himself, "how is the dredging going on?"

"Nothing, so far," she admitted ruefully.

"You're not discouraged, are you?"

"I don't know. . . . Jake told me, just now, what the game-warden told you."

"About the Tiger Island gang finding some silver coins?"

"*Spanish* silver. . . . That is rather disturbing, isn't it?"

"In a way . . . certainly. Welper pretends that he's discovered a sunken ship and has dredged up some Spanish silver coins. In consequence the gang over there got boiling drunk, lighted bonfires, and fired rockets. And yet, Maddaleen, I'm not as much disturbed as the wild ducks are."

The girl turned in her armchair and saw that he was smiling.

He said: "In the documents you have, there is no mention of *silver*. We are told, only, that the *Red Moon*, galley, was *loaded to the gunwales with pure, soft, Indian gold*. The metal mentioned was *Indian*, not Spanish. And that remote ancestor of yours traded with Indians, not with Spaniards. He was not paid for his beads and knives and looking-glasses in Spanish *coin* or in coin of any sort, either gold or silver. He was paid in soft Indian gold."

The girl flushed slightly. "Really," she said, "you have an extraordinary talent for comforting people. I've been rather blue since Jake told me what the warden said."

"It worried me, too. But I've been thinking it over. If the *Red Moon* was laden with gold, that gold, of course, was not minted. The Indians had no coinage. The gold was native gold. Perhaps there were raw lumps of it; perhaps utensils, or sacrificial implements. But what I think is this; that your adventurous ancestor acquired many sackfuls of those marvellous specimens of the Maya and Aztec goldsmiths' art which once—and even to-day—are found in the tombs of certain important personages who reigned or who functioned as high dignitaries in the ancient Maya and Aztec civilisations."

Maddaleen had seen the superb collection of golden *objets d'art* in the Museum of Natural History in New York. But, somehow,—and naturally enough where piracy was concerned,—the girl had thought of golden treasures on the sunken *Red Moon* in terms of doubloons.

Now, suddenly, Lanier's theory appeared to be the reasonable one: gold ornaments from Maya tombs!—of these was the treasure of the *Red Moon* composed!

And the girl, who had seen such recovered treasures, was aware they were

marvels of cleverness, of archaic skill, of beauty—these tomb-ornaments which continually were being discovered in Costa Rica. In some of them there seemed to be a touch of Chinese grotesquerie; in all a characteristic fidelity to truth. Some were strangely reminiscent of the great monsters of stone carved on Gothic cathedrals; others seemed startlingly modern; some futuristic; some as naïve as the wooden products of a German toy maker.

There were eagles and vultures of every type and design; the Moan-bird of ominous significance, sinister as a Gothic gargoyle. There were spiders, bats, delicate and lovely butterflies, beautifully modelled crabs, sea-shells; and there were panthers, jaguars, little dogs with curly tails, dolphins, crocodiles; and there were Aztec gods, male and female,—all wrought out of pure gold, and varying from half an inch to nearly ten inches in diameter.

Certainly it must have been with such objects as these that the *Red Moon*, galley, was so deeply laden “to the gunwales with pure, soft, Indian gold!”

II

Dinner had been announced; the girl rose and took Lanier's offered arm, resting on it with light yet confident familiarity.

"I breathe freely again," she said, "thanks to you, John Lanier."

That, so far, was her concession,—his full name, John Lanier, but not the more intimate John, alone.

Dirck, who had been on Crescent Bar, was a little late in changing his wet clothing. He appeared when dinner was nearly over, almost starved.

"Sis," he said, "you and Lanier"—the boy was proud to call him Lanier without prefix—"should have been on Crescent. There was a northwest wind and the ducks came in as fast as driven snow-flakes. Geese, too! My, what a sight, and what a day!—"

"What did you get?" asked Maddaleen with the unfeigned interest of a sportsman.

"I got my limit. I could have doubled it,—tripled it! I got four geese, six sprig, three canvas, seven mallard, two red-head, a golden-eye, a blue-bill, and a black duck."

"Fine, Dirck. . . . Did any of the decoys get loose?"

"Oh, I had a terrible time with that old gander, Major Bagstock. The Major always keeps at his leg-cord until he gets it off. He went nearly half-way to Tiger before I headed him.

"Then two mallard pulled loose and I had a time rounding them in."

Maddaleen and Lanier lingered over their coffee to listen to the boy's adventures by flood and field; and he talked and ate and gesticulated with a detached vigour and delightful freedom from brag and pose that showed what he really was, under wholesome influence and home conditions.

The decease of each one of these twenty-five wild-fowl had to be related, singly and in detail. Each episode was described with excited pantomime;—how the wretched geese-decoys sulked and refused to "call" at the critical moment; how he, Dirck, had "called" where he crouched; how the crafty leader of the clamoring but wary geese in the sky overhead finally swerved, turned, beguiled to his doom below; and how this deluded gander carried down with him the wide-winged squad of comrades to the water where their treacherous fellows preened and floated off the fatal blind.

As his sister and Lanier listened, they seemed to see the wild duck whirring in; see their short, strong wings curve to a bow; the webbed feet thrust out as they lit on the rough water; see the hidden figure in the blind stand up; the grey light glint on his gun-barrels; hear the scuttering clatter of startled wild-fowl rising, breast to the wind; hear the two short, dry reports; see a pair of towering

duck collapse in mid-air, hurtle downward and strike the water with separate splashes.

"You're very graphic, young man," said Lanier gravely. "I feel the fever myself; and if this cursed thirst for Spanish gold would ever let up I'd go and burn a few shells myself."

"You could have gone to-day," said Maddaleen.

"No, I had to go to Stede's Landing."

"Why?" enquired Dirck.

Lanier lit a cigarette. "I'll tell you why. In the peculiar service in which I am engaged there is a man named Donald Mayne. We keep in touch with each other." . . . He smiled at Maddaleen; "Don, also, is a member of the Forty Club —"

"Dirck," interrupted the girl seriously, "you understand how confidential this is. You know what would happen to Mr. Lanier and to his comrade, Mr. Mayne, if Welper suspected them?"

"Yes," said the boy bitterly, "I know."

Lanier nodded and went on: "Day before yesterday I sent word to Donald Mayne that I need him on Tiger Island. He'll be there to-night. I want you both to know that,—in case a stranger appears in these waters asking for me,—probably the man will be Donald Mayne. And the way you may recognise Mayne is this: When he says, 'Tell John Lanier a fisherman wants to see him,' you must say, 'What do you do with the fish you catch?' If it is Mayne he will say, 'When I catch them I fry them.'

"I've told Jake; Jake is to instruct all your men how to recognise one of my friends, no matter where he comes from, what he looks like, or what his behaviour may be."

In spite of the real seriousness of the situation,—which they never yet had entirely realised,—the boy and his sister were agreeably conscious of the dramatic element developing daily in the unusual affair of the *Red Moon*, galley.

The discovery of the Eden documents, the linked chain of events which followed, the entire dramatic gamut excepting tragedy alone,—yes, even tragedy!—the murder of Lance Ferray,—every separate episode had arisen in logical sequence, promising in turn some inevitable sequel.

Never had cause been plainer, effect more natural, consequences more disturbingly simple and swift than when Dirck Loveless came into his inheritance and started out to tell the world where it got off.

The sister looked up at the brother, concerned, unsmiling, yet still conscious of the thrill in the situation as it was so rapidly developing.

There were dangerous men on Tiger Island who might become more dangerous at any moment.

She had never dreamed what she was stirring up when she went to the Museum, and, by sheer chance, encountered there the very man she was searching for.

Immediately there stepped into the scene an agent of some occult international bureau representing law.

He had stood between her and peril unnoticed, unimagined: he had guarded, guided, counselled her: he had discovered her demoralised brother and restored him to her: and now he had summoned to her aid a comrade who was to watch her enemies.

Yet, so far, for brother and sister, the romance of it all—the legendary setting, the glamour of piracy, of wild deeds, of sunken gold—seemed to obscure the raw and ugly fact that a gang of cold-blooded modern men had swindled and blackmailed the brother, had attempted to murder the sister; and were entirely capable of trying it again whenever annoyed.

However, that evening, the graver aspect of the situation seemed to be dawning on Maddaleen's mind; and when they went into the library after dinner she seated herself near Lanier—instinct unconsciously seeking protection, perhaps.

There was half a gale off False Cape that night. From far darkness came the dull thunder of bombardment. On the flagpole the golden sea-horse fretted and whinnied; halyards clattered; windows rattled; chimneys were full of the little demons of the wind rustling, wailing, screaming.

The boy said: "Major Bagstock is no good. He doesn't care for Miss Tox. I never before heard of a wild gander that wouldn't fuss and talk and gossip and complain if you staked him out separated from his wife. But the Major never said gloo-gluck! *once!*"

"Did the mallard quack?" enquired his sister.

"Not very well, except when an eagle or a hawk showed up. Of course all decoys have their days of sulkiness and perversity. . . . The swan were tumultuous in the sky. It sounded like thousands of little children dressed in white all calling to one another up there;—and it looked like a perpetual flight of angels."

The girl said to Lanier: "I love the swan. Even when law allowed we never shot them. The baymen don't like them because they dig swan-holes, but Dirck and I adore them. . . . Only the English skylark seems to bring one as close to heaven. . . ."

After an interval: "The white brant were flying on the beach," said the boy. "I think I'll dig a pit out there and see if I can't get some."

Maddaleen explained to Lanier: "White brant don't decoy, you know."

"I didn't know."

"Well, they don't. One gets a few chance shots on the ocean beach

sometimes."

Lanier said to Dirck: "Be a little careful about Welper's gang. They are likely to make trouble if they discover you are alive."

The boy returned his gaze soberly:

"I carry a dozen of buck and swan shot," he said without any braggadocio whatever.

"Not good enough, old chap, if they happen to carry rifles."

"No. . . . I could carry a light Mänlicher *en bandoulière*—"

"Look here; a shooting bee isn't what we want, Dirck. Stay out of trouble —"

"But if I happen to get into it—"

"Dirck, we don't want any snow-geese," interrupted his sister. "Goodness, the larder is hanging thick with all the duck and geese we need, and thousands more are using off Crescent. Why do you want to wander around False Cape?"

Why does any boy want to wander? That is something no girl can find out or understand.

Lanier's understanding and vaguely sympathetic glance crossed Dirck's; but he merely said: "You comprehend the situation. Use the better half of valour for a while."

After Dirck had gone out to nose the gale and come to some conclusion concerning prospects for point-shooting on the morrow, Maddaleen looked at Lanier.

"You might care to follow your own excellent advice yourself, John Lanier. It would materially reduce my worries."

"What advice?"

"To use more liberally the better part of valour—discretion."

"Am I indiscreet?"

"You went to Tiger."

"Oh, that?"

"And there's a ruffian named Renton who'll open fire on you without notice."

"I expect to have sufficient notice. . . . Does that worry *you*?"

"It does," said the girl calmly, but not caring to look at him.

"From what angle does your apprehension arise, Maddaleen?"

"What do you mean?" But she knew; and her eyes regarded him indifferently.

"Oh, well," he said, leaning forward and lifting another heavy bit of driftwood onto the fire, "I know you like me enough to be concerned."

"Certainly I do. I'm not inhuman."

"Un-human?"

"But pretend to think I am." She shrugged. "But is it unhuman to lift a

polite but warning traffic-hand when a young man, a little *too* sure of himself, puts on a trifle too much speed?"

Lanier said, slowly: "But if he knows what he wants—"

"Others who also know what they want are to be considered too, John Lanier."

"Do you know what you want?"

The girl looked at him in chilled surprise, then, to her consternation, turned scarlet.

Perhaps, at that instant, and for the first time, she really knew—or desperately suspected the truth. But she did not want so crude a truth; she wouldn't have it so.

"I suppose," she said, icily, "you think you are flirting with me very cleverly."

"I am paying my court to you—not very cleverly."

"That always is a woman's due . . . I suppose . . . whether she likes it or not."

"Do you dislike it, Maddaleen?"

"It does not always amuse me."

"Does it—sometimes?"

"Possibly."

There was a silence. The girl looked at the fire. The drift burned blue and green.

"Copper bolts," she remarked. "Oh, I wonder whether those miserable creatures on Tiger really have discovered treasure? Positively, it would make me sick."

She rose, walked to the door, opened it, and stood on the doorstep.

Presently, over her shoulder: "John Lanier, the wind has stopped blowing. It's turning warmer."

He went to the door where she was standing; she moved to make room for him on the door-step:

"Stars in a clear sky; look!" she said. "That is ominous in this country."

"Why?"

"Such sudden calms come between gales. And the second gale is sometimes a hurricane."

"Do you think we'd better make things snug—"

"Everything is snug."

"I'm wondering about the cofferdam, too—"

They walked out over the grass to the dock.

"Torches on the cofferdam!" she exclaimed. "That's odd."

Splinter-wood torches were burning on the cofferdam and aboard the dredging-scow. In the red, smoky glare men's forms were visible.

“I don’t understand *that*!” remarked Lanier.

There was a megaphone in the summer-house. He fetched it, set it to his lips:

“Hallo! Aboard the scow!”

In a moment old Jake’s voice came back to reassure them.

“What are you up to, Captain?” shouted Lanier.

“We dredged up a coupla funny images just afore you went to supper. When the ca’m come, thinks I, we’ll try it again—”

“Images!” repeated Lanier, the thrill of rising excitement in his voice, “—what kind of images, Captain?”

“Waal, one’s a kinda bird, I reckon, ’n’t’other’s a crab; ’n’they’r heavy ’n’ yaller; ’n’ if you ask me I reckon I’d say they’s gold.”

“Bring them ashore and put out your lights. There may be a glass on Tiger Island spying on you.”

III

There was.

Ray Wirt, of Stede's Landing, just in with a jug of blockade whiskey for Tiger Island, noticed the distant glare off Place-of-Swans, used his night glasses, and reported to Bert Mewling that men were working by torchlight near The Old Man's.

"Aw," said Mewling, "they want a get their blinds done; they's duckin' weather comin'."

But after a long observation with Wirt's night glasses:

"That looks funny, Ray. They're a dredgin'."

"You reckon the Place-o'-Swans folks are startin' after treasure, too?"

"Jake Winch ain't no booby, Ray. I guess John Lanier ain't, neither. Mebbe the Loveless girl set 'em to work. I reckon her brother was a fool, and it may run in the family."

"It shore does look that a-way, Bert. See that dredge? See them buckets? I reckon some'n done tole 'em we've struck sunken treasure, 'n' that Loveless girl has started 'em diggin' like a passel o' swan."

Mewling took another look through the night glass.

"Them buckets is shore dippin' out silt, Ray. They don't want no foundation like that for no duckin' blind, 'n' they ain'ta aimin' to build no lighthouse. . . . It's funny. What 'n' hell 'r' them folks up to? Why don't you go 'round that way a piece, Ray, 'n' take a peek on your way back—"

"Becuz," remarked Wirt, "it's too dam ca'm to go a-moseyin' off Tiger to-night. 'N' I reckon I better git fur Bonnet's afore hell busts loose off'n False Cape."

"I reckon," nodded Mewling, leering up at the stars.

"Them stars is worse'n them gay women up to No'falk, a smilin' an' a winkin' an' invitin' you to take a walk," grunted Wirt, stepping into his launch and giving the wheel a twist. "This here ca'm scares me, 'n' I'm bound to mosey, Bert. You a'comin' back to Bonnet's?"

"Them lights on The Old Man's has went out," said Mewling. "Now what was they a-dredgin' up in them buckets? . . . No, I ain't a-goin' back to-night."

He stood on the rough dock watching the starlit wake of Ray Wirt's motor boat foaming in the starlight, curving magnificently away into darkness.

He put his glasses to his ratty eyes: far out he could make out Wirt's launch rushing westward. Southward, now, all was dark. North and east there were few stars. After a little while none.

"Somer's off False Cape," he said to himself, "hell's a-rarin' 'n' tarin', 'n' comin' into this here sound."

But if hell was what he looked for, peering, listening there in darkness, there was a more convenient inferno at hand—only a few rods away—where an unpainted house stood, from which hung a painted board, “At the Sign of the Gay-Cat.”

He walked there slowly, slouching along in his sea-boots, listening now to the yelling, and to the outrageous noise of an upright piano which sounded as though it were being kicked and ripped to pieces.

When he entered the Gay-Cat he saw that Mr. Potter was at the piano. The piano appeared to be intact; it was merely Mr. Potter’s technique that had deceived Mr. Mewling.

The occasion for vivacity at the Gay-Cat was the recovery, by a diver, from the hull of a sunken vessel, of about a thousand dollars’ worth of Spanish silver.

Not one among the members of the Forty Club, present, doubted that the *Red Moon*, galley, had been located. Therefore, they were rejoicing.

They were a picturesque company of ruffians. Like all metropolitan dwellers of their sort, a sojourn in the countryside meant, for them, an opportunity to abandon convention, live impudently, behave riotously, and neglect personal appearance.

To wallow—that was the instinct—to live unshaven in old clothes, gorge, puzzle, sleep swinishly, relapse into original beastliness—that is the sort of primitive orgy into which such men drift swiftly.

Barney Welper wore a red shirt, a red sash, and a red bandanna twisted around his head. His sprouting beard, to the surprise of all, came out a dirty white.

Sam Potter preferred a yellow silk shirt and bandanna and velveteen-corduroy trousers; Harry Senix, Dan Supple, and Eugene Renton all were clad in gaudy odds and ends,—big slouch hats, brilliant shirts and bandannas,—and all were drinking Ray Wirt’s fiery, white “blockade;” and all were lolling loutishly, yelling the songs that Sam Potter pounded out on the trembling piano:

"Bully Billy Teach
Marooned me on the beach,
And here I lie,
And here I'll die;
I got no rum,
Neither water have I got,
So I suck my thumb
A-waiting for to rot!

"There's no one nigh for to hear my groans
On the red-hot beach where the ebb tide moans;
On the red-hot sand I'll leave my bones;
Oh, it's wetter,
Oh, it's better
Down to Bully Davy Jones!
Refrain
"Bully Davy Jones!
Bully Davy Jones!
That's where I'd like for to lie;
That's where I'd be,
A-sousing in the sea,
Down—down to Bully Davy Jones!——"

"Hey," screeched Bert Mewling into Barney Welper's ear, "they's doin's an' gallivantin's onto Place-o'-Swans."

Welper, slightly intoxicated, looked around at the Bonnet Bay man gravely, out of eyes no longer focussed:

"M—m, certainly," he muttered; "what's it all about?"

"Loveless folk, yon, is started dredgin', same as we uns!" shouted Mewling. "They's took to dredgin' by splinter-light at night! An' they ain't a-dredgin' oysters!"

"Let 'em dredge," retorted Welper, owlishly. "We've got the *Red Moon*."

Renton, paler for the fiery drink in him, but with clearer head than Welper, came unsteadily over to where Mewling stood yelling to Welper through the din:

"What do *you* think the Place-o'-Swans people are up to?—you think they're after treasure, too?"

"I ain't sayin' that. They ain't diggin' oysters. Mebbe they all found a ship, same as we found."

"You mean a Spanish ship?"

"Lawsee, man, how do I know? It ain't like our folk down here to start a-

dredgin' by torchlight."

"You told us that the Place-of-Swans people were busy building blinds on that mud heap."

"I reckon they'se dug deep enough for to start a lighthouse, too."

"You suspect they've found a *ship*!"

Mewling replied impatiently:

"You-all can't prove it by me, Gene Renton. I seen 'em dredgin' by splinter-wood light. Now I've done tole you-uns all I knowed. Now you-uns know all I knowed, 'n' you kin chaw onto it like you was a-chawin' onto a hank o' twist. . . . Gimme a pull at Ray's stuff—I'm dry that-a-way shoutin' like a baptised nigger to a flatwood-fire—"

"Bully Davy Jones!
Bully Davy Jones!
That's where I'd like for to lie!——"

bawled Sam Potter, hammering the piano till it rocked on the uneven floor. Sweat spangled his large, broad features; he winked it out of his small, pale eyes, flourished his fists and bellowed the chorus.

Then Renton's penetrating tenor set another verse to the air of "Bully Billy Teach:"

"Bully Billy Teach
He left me on the beach,
At dawn o' day
For that's his way;
He left no crumbs—
Not a morsel on the sands—
So I suck my gums
And I gnaw my hands:
No sail on the sea where the green waves roll—
O God, for a priest to save my soul——"

Harry Senix pulled a pistol, firing into the ceiling to time the chorus.

Suddenly the door opened, and into the hell of heat and smoke and noise stepped a man and a woman wrapped in dripping rubber coats.

The yelling chorus swelled to a shout. Sam Potter, a large pale cigar screwed into the corner of his mouth, looked around over his shoulder, still thumping the piano. Then he picked up his partly-filled glass and towered to his big flat feet as the din rose to a crescendo roar; and waving his glass and facing the new-comers he intoned their impromptu welcome:

“O here’s to Happy Helen,
Drink her down!
O here’s to Happy Helen,
Drink her down!
O here’s to Happy Helen,
What she’s buyin’ or she’s sellin,’
Eugene knows but he ain’t tellin,’
Drink her down!

“O here’s to Donald Mayne,
Drink him down!
O here’s to Donald Mayne,
Drink him down!
O here’s to Donald Mayne.
With da greata bigga brain,
For he’s brought Eugene his Jane,
Drink him down!”

Sam Potter’s stentorian voice drowned everything; then the Forty cheered vociferously while Mayne and Helen Wyvern shook hands all around.

“We’re on the loose!” yelled Dan Supple. “We got the ship and the first thousand. How about it, Nellie?”

“Take off your coat, Donnie!” added Welper in a thick voice; “this convention is al fresco,—m—m,—bueno retiro—cappa-da-monti,—dolce-far-niente!—”

“Soused to the fins, you old pirate!” said Mayne with his quick, lively smile. “What’s all this—a buccaneer’s bally-hoo? What do you think you are, —bunch of Flying Dutchmen, or the Pirates of Penzance?”

Harry Senix, partly dazed but persistent, was trying to tie a red handkerchief over Helen Wyvern’s wet hair.

“We’re a gang of bloody pirates,” he kept repeating; “we’re diggin’ up pirate jack out of a blinkin’ pirate ship. You gotta make us a black flag, Nellie —”

“All right, Harry,—quit pulling me about, you fresh dope!—Make him stop, Eugene!—”

“We wanta flag with a skull an’ bones—” insisted Senix, “like a dope label —”

“Your face and shin-bones will do,” interrupted Eugene Renton, pushing him away; “hit the box, Sam! Everybody fill up! Helen, you better take yours hot—”

His resonant, unpleasant tenor voice rang out as he pulled the girl toward

him, and he sang with one wiry arm around her supple waist:

"I looked to the East
And I looked to the West,
Where I lay aloft
In the old crow's nest;
And I seen a sail
And I seen her run,
And I up with my flag
And I fire a gun;
Bang! goes the gun,
Up goes the rag.
Hurrah! Hurrah! for the jolly black flag!——"

In the din of the chorus Helen Wyvern continued to pull at Renton's arm, trying to make herself heard: "Eugene! Where am I to sleep! I don't want to hit it up to-night—I'm tired, damn it all—"

"You stay put," he retorted, seating himself and pulling her with him. "We've found the *Red Moon* and we're telling the world we've struck gold!"

Mayne was patiently attempting to extract information from Barney Welper, but, like the classic parrot, "Pieces-of-eight!" was all that Welper repeated, and his glassy stare offered no further encouragement.

"Pieces-of-eight are gold," insisted Mrs. Wyvern. "The *Red Moon* was supposed to be loaded with gold! Have you found any gold?"

Harry Senix waved his lank, nicotine-stained fingers vaguely: "Lotsa gold," he said with a deathly leer, "—lotsa gold, Nellie. That's my middle name, Nellie—gold!—You help yourself,—I got millions 'n' millions, 'n' millions—'n' billions—"

The heat from the big sheet-iron stove, the acrid tobacco smoke, the fumes of blockade liquor were stifling the girl. The din had become terrific. Sam Potter at the piano pounded out a frenzied rag; Renton drew Helen Wyvern into an iron embrace and started to dance with her, his gaudy sash and bandanna fluttering.

Barney Welper got up and gravely attempted an old-fashioned waltz step by himself; Harry Senix and Dan Supple footed it together with dips and struts and fancy-steps.

Mayne opened the door for air.

A few deck hands from the dredging scow, the diver and his crew, and some natives from the sawmill were clustered around The Gay-Cat shanty, gazing at the gayety through the dirty windows.

Mayne stepped out; Mrs. Wyvern managed to elude Renton, dodged Senix too, and joined Mayne.

“This is disgusting,” she panted; “I’m tired and sleepy and mussed and wet. That was a rough trip across the bay. Have you any idea where our quarters are, Don?”

A man with a lantern pointed out the bunk-house to them.

“They’ll keep it up all night,” she said to Mayne. “Shall we go?” Her pretty dark eyes regarded him sideways, and she took his arm.

“All right,” he said with his quick, agreeable smile; “but I’d better get our luggage first.”

He went to the dock, picked up her hand luggage and his own, returned to where she stood in the lantern light.

“Thanks, Don,” she said. “Will you take me over now?”

They walked together toward the bunk-house where a kerosene lamp burned feebly behind a filthy window.

The door was ajar. They entered. Mayne lifted the lamp and looked around the corridor.

“Here’s your name chalked on a door,” he remarked.

There was another lamp in the little bedroom. He lighted it for her, and they gazed about at the flimsy, unpainted place with its scanty furniture.

On the bureau stood a cheap pitcher and in this pitcher somebody had stuck some branches bearing glossy green leaves set with orange-tinted berries.

“Probably a sentimental attention from Eugene,” remarked Mayne, smiling.

The girl turned up her dainty nose.

“Well,” said Mayne, “if you’re all right here, Helen, I’ll beat it—”

“Don’t go yet, Donnie.”

“You said you were tired and sleepy—”

“I only meant I didn’t care for that kind of party.” She seated herself on the flimsy bed and nodded toward the only chair: “Please talk to me, Don.”

“No,” said Mayne. “Eugene is touchy. I’ll be going—”

“I don’t belong to Eugene.”

“Oh. Well, it seems to be his impression that you do—”

“I want to talk to you, Don.”

“Why not to-morrow?”

She leaned back against the pillow and drew her prettily shod feet up onto the spread.

“We had two whole days alone together,” she sighed, not looking directly at him. “Did you also find our journey agreeable?”

“Certainly.”

“So did I. I thought it wonderful.”

He remained warily silent.

“Don?”

"Yes?"

"If you think Eugene Renton ever interested me sentimentally you are mistaken. . . . I merely want you to know the truth."

"I am much flattered by your confidence."

"I don't think you are. I don't believe you ever could be flattered."

"All men can be," he said, laughing. "It's the universal masculine failing. None is exempt."

She shook her dark head: "You're very clever, Don. You're different from most men. You look like a jolly sort of boy; and you laugh like one. But there's age-old wisdom behind those boyish blue eyes of yours. . . . I've often watched you at the Forty Club, and I've wished I knew you better. . . . All you ever let women see of you is your nice manner and your quick smile. . . . You always seem to be too busily occupied to be interested in—" She hesitated.

"In what?"

"In—sentiment."

His quick laugh rang out.

"It's the general impression that you have little use for women," she insisted. "I suppose that's why Eugene suggested that you come down here with me."

"Glad to be considered safe and sane," he said.

"Are you, really? Most men like to be considered dangerous."

"Well, I'm not dangerous," he admitted smilingly.

"Are you quite sure, Don? . . . Because I am not."

He glanced at her, got up, looked at her outstretched hand. It was a wistful gesture and a lovely hand, softly persuasive; and it remained extended toward him.

He took it, politely, gave it a friendly little shake:

"Good-night," he said. "Hope you have a jolly good rest. We'll take a look around, to-morrow."

He went out, closing her door behind him. Farther along in the corridor he discovered his own name chalked on a pine door. The door was ajar and he went in, carrying his suit-case.

"If I don't look out," he thought, "that girl will involve me in a shooting scrape with Renton before I get off this island."

He slipped quickly into his pyjamas and then into bed.

As he lay there in darkness he could hear the revelry at The Gay-Cat, the sound of the piano, hoarse voices loud in song,——freebooters' songs of the Forty Club.

"Continue to sing," he thought grimly; "you'll be whining a sicker tune before I finish with you, gentlemen."

He turned over, felt for his two pistols, located them, placed his flashlight

beside them and closed his eyes.

The girl down the corridor didn't interfere with his slumbers. Yet, understanding her species, he remained a trifle concerned about Renton.

"It would be like her," he thought, "to stir up that cold-blooded skunk. He's a bad one and so is she. I don't intend to mix it with either of them."

He slept after a while. He may have been asleep for two hours or more, when he awoke suddenly, with a light in his eyes.

Helen Wyvern stood by his bed holding a lamp.

"Don?"

"What?" he asked coldly.

"Who do you suppose they've just caught on this island?"

"I don't know. Who?"

"They've caught that wretched little sneak, Dirck Loveless."

Mayne lay still for a moment, then he yawned and sat up in bed:

"I thought he was dead," he remarked vaguely.

"Well, he isn't. One of the natives—Bert Mewling of Bonnet Bay—recognised him hanging around the diving dock. They told Welper, but he's too drunk to understand. Eugene wants to shoot him, but Sam Potter says he's more value alive."

"Why?"

"Well, I suppose Sam wants us all to make an honest penny on the side. I've got papers in my satchel that could send that snivelling cub to prison,—unless his sister cares to buy him off."

"Isn't she John Lanier's girl?"

"Eugene tells me that we're through with John Lanier," said Mrs. Wyvern, calmly. "His girl acted up like a gay-cat and Eugene means to bump him off on sight. That's what Eugene told me just now. I think he means to croak that kid."

"Where have they got the boy?"

"Locked up in the tool-house. What do you think of that rotten kid faking a bump-off to fool us and getting away with it? Eugene says we ought to bump him off for fair. He says he's sure to squeal if we don't. Eugene hates a squealer. I don't know what Barney might decide if he were sober."

"Is Barney Welper very drunk?"

"Very," said the girl. "Do you think Eugene ought to wait until Barney sobers up?"

"Certainly; there's plenty of time to fix the kid," replied Mayne drowsily. And he dropped back and buried his curly head in the pillow.

The lamp in the girl's hand trembled a trifle. "Good-night, Donnie," she said softly. But Mayne seemed to be already asleep.

The instant his door closed and the girl had gone, Mayne got out of bed,

dressed swiftly, took both pistols in one hand, his shoes in the other, and crept out into the lamp-lit corridor.

He knew Eugene Renton; he knew that he was absolutely cold-blooded; and he was terribly convinced that if Renton considered the Loveless boy as a possible squealer, the boy would never live till sunrise.

As he crept past Helen Wyvern's door he listened, but did not hear her stir.

Out on the road he put on his shoes. As he finished tying them he saw Renton come out of The Gay-Cat and start toward the tool-house, where a splinter-torch was burning. He carried a key in one hand and a pistol in the other.

The key was already in the keyhole, and Renton was already turning it when Mayne's hand fell on his slender, bony wrist, pushed it away, and jerked out the key.

"What's the matter with *you*!" snapped Renton in angry surprise.

"Eugene," replied Mayne, smilingly, "you're getting a little too fresh. Maybe because you've made a lot of money you think you're running the Forty Club. You're wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. You've made a lot of easy money in South America. But everybody hasn't been so lucky. Some of us still need jack. That kid in there may prove a source of revenue. But you've got yours; *you* don't care; so you come out here to bump the kid without asking anybody's opinion. . . . It isn't done, old top!"

"He's a squealer, that's why. You bump a squealer where you find him."

"All right! but pump him first, then bump him. Isn't his sister's money good? Maybe it isn't worth your trouble, but it's good enough for a poor guy like me."

"Safety first," insisted Renton, stubbornly. "If that kid squeals on the Orizava Oil crowd, where'll *I* be? . . . You weren't in it: you don't care—"

"That's all right, but you're not running the Forty Club, Eugene. Don't think it. If there's any revenue to be had out of this kid, I want mine. I've a right to it. Keep off till I get it. After she's bled white I don't care what you do to the kid."

"I tell you," insisted Renton, "we'd better bump him. It's a safe job. He's supposed to be dead. I don't want that babbling kid running around and blabbing—"

"You wait to hear what Barney has to say. You can't put anything over on me!"

In Renton's pale visage the contracting eves grew deadly:

"Is—that—so?" he sneered.

"Sure it's so. Don't try any of your nervous temperament on me, Eugene. I

don’t like it.”

“Give me that key.”

“Well, we’ll leave it in the door,” said Mayne pleasantly.

As he put it into the keyhole Renton reached for it.

“Don’t touch it,” smiled Mayne.

“What’ll you do?”

“Blow your bean to bits,” replied Mayne, still smiling.

Renton reached for the key, found himself closely inspecting two pistols, stood frozen, white as a corpse.

“Sorry,” said Mayne, cheerfully, “but both these guns are likely to go right off in your face if you touch that key. . . . I think you’d better back off a little. . . . That’s the idea. . . . Thank you, Eugene. . . . And don’t ever again try to interfere with my legitimate source of income. . . . That’s one of the rules of the Forty Club. Any member monkeying with another’s source of income is liable to be bumped. *You* know that. And if ever you try it again I’ll lay it before the Club and you’ll get a great, big, fat fine which you won’t like. Because you’re stingy, Eugene, and you never staked a guy in all your life.”

“All right,” retorted Renton venomously; “I’ll bet you a thousand dollars right now that Barney says to bump the kid. Do you take me on?”

Mayne yawned: “No; I’m too poor. . . . And also, whatever Barney says goes.”

“You bet it goes,” barked Renton, white and exasperated; “and we’ll settle the matter now!”

He glared palely at Mayne, glared at the locked door of the tool-house, turned sharply on his heel, and hurried toward the Gay-Cat in search of Mr. Welper.

NUMBER NINE
The Adventure on False Cape

I

Dirck Loveless was in a serious situation, he had not understood how serious until, crouching inside the tool-house door, he listened to the cold-blooded conversation between Eugene Renton and Donald Mayne.

Impulse had landed him in a perilous predicament. What Renton said to Mayne had frightened him horribly.

What had happened was this: the boy, always impetuous and impulsive, had left a note for his sister saying that he was going over to False Cape that night to dig in for a crack at the white brant at dawn.

He had often done it in quieter times. Boylike, he wished to surprise Lanier and show now, to the older man, a half-dozen pair of the wiliest and most difficult of all water-fowl.

The calm between two storms was the time to get away; the wild, rough weather off False Cape promised to drive the snow-geese into his gun.

The enterprise was a blazing indiscretion; but discretion is seldom instinctive in an impulsive boy who is eager to exhibit his prowess to a man he blindly admires.

The easiest way for Dirck to get to False Cape was to run up under the lee of Tiger Island.

That was a risky affair, and it proved disastrous. For, in trying to gain the lee shore, he was nearly run down by Ray Wirt in his bootlegger launch; he was recognised, hailed, chased, shot at, driven toward the diving-dock, hurled against it by a squall, caught there by Bert Mewling and the diver's gang, and locked up in the tool-house.

This, now, was the very dangerous plight of Dirck Loveless; this was why nobody on *Red Moon* would really feel any anxiety concerning him until afternoon of the next day.

After that they'd search for him on False Cape.

If Renton killed him here, and scuttled his boat, nobody ever could know what had become of him.

The men who had caught him had taken everything he possessed except his matches. And the first thing the boy did in the tool-house was to light one of these, examine the windowless interior, select a long-handled shovel, and start to dig out under the sill.

The floor was of dirt; the structure built of pine logs smeared with blue

clay. There appeared to be no foundation under ground, excepting piers of coquina to support the log sill.

But when Renton's penetrating, unpleasant voice broke out in harsh argument with another and unknown voice, the lad listened, horrified; for his tunnel was not half dug, and the only weapon he had was his shovel.

To strike Renton with that before he could shoot seemed to be the only chance now. He stood beside the door, desperate, his shovel lifted for a blow, waiting for the lithe and agile murderer to open the door and enter with gun levelled.

When the wrangling outside terminated and Renton had gone angrily away to the Gay-Cat, bent upon his deadly purpose, the strain left Dirck weak and almost sick; and he rested on his shovel and strove to keep his head and key up his courage.

Then, almost instantly, came the cool, cautious voice of the unknown man outside, calling to him by name.

Dirck made the effort: "I'm listening. What do you want?"

"Did you hear what Renton has been saying?"

"Yes. I heard what you said, too."

"I had to say that. I'm Donald Mayne. I'm your friend. I'm John Lanier's friend. I'm going to open the door as soon as Renton is out of sight and let you make a bolt for it."

"How do I know *you* won't shoot me?"

"I tell you I'm a friend of John Lanier."

Suddenly Lanier's instruction flashed into Dirck's memory.

"Are you that fisherman he told me about?" demanded the boy.

"Yes, I'm a fisherman. *Go on!*"

"W-what do you do with the f-fish you catch?"

"When I catch them I fry them. *Now* do you understand?"

Mayne heard the lad sob with excitement and relief. He said:

"If you can get out any other way, Dirck, I'd rather not open the door, because others are watching me. Could you dig out the rear and take to the woods?"

"I've dug half-way out."

"Go on and dig. If Renton brings Welper here I'll start arguing. . . . How much time do you need to dig out?"

"I don't know—"

"Can you get off this island after you're out?"

"I can swim the channel to False Cape."

"All right. Dig like the devil. I can see men on the dock looking this way. Don't worry; dig! I'll hold off Renton."

It seemed hours to Mayne before Renton came out of The Gay-Cat. Harry Senix was with him.

Renton came forward with his jaunty, nervous step; Senix shambled, and Renton paused impatiently at times to await him.

When they came to where Mayne was standing, Renton's ashy visage contracted till his even teeth glistened.

"Barney put it up to the club," he said. "We voted to croak the kid. Now what have you got to say, Mayne?"

"Plenty," replied the other, smiling. "For one thing, I wasn't present."

"Your vote isn't necessary—"

"I'm not saying it was. I'm telling you I wasn't present."

"Are you trying to tell me I lie?"

"I'm trying to tell you that I was not present when the vote was taken. I don't *know* what was voted. I don't have to take your word, or anybody's. I wasn't there. I want official information."

"You didn't have to be there and you know it! It requires *two* dissenting votes to kill anything. There was a quorum of the members of the Forty Club, who compose the expeditionary force on this island. There was Barney Welper, Sam Potter, Harry Senix, Dan Supple, and myself. You were absent —"

"How about Helen?" asked Mayne, coolly.

"She votes the way I do," said Renton bluntly.

"Ask her."

"I don't have to—"

"Yes you do, under the rules. I'm not obliged to take your say-so for gospel. There's Helen over there now, looking at us out of the bunk-house window."

Renton said: "You're making a hell of an argument out of a simple matter. . . . But I'll go over and ask her."

"No; I'll hear for myself what she has to say." He turned toward the bunk-house: "Helen!" he shouted; "would you mind coming over to settle an argument?"

The figure at the lighted window disappeared; reappeared carrying the glass lamp; set the wretched light on the grass and came gracefully toward them.

Her bare feet were covered by Chinese slippers and she wore a scarlet-and-gold kimona over her lace nightdress.

Mayne said smilingly: "Gene wants to shoot the Loveless kid to stop any chance of his squealing. I want to make a little money out of his sister, first. I need it. Renton doesn't. Which way do you vote?—"

"The club votes to croak him," interrupted Renton, "—all except Mayne,

here—You vote that way, don't you?"

The girl gazed intently at Mayne, then turned calmly to Renton:

"Why not take the jack first, as Donnie proposes," she suggested. "You can bump the little rat later."

Surprise, then chagrin turned Renton faintly red.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You're in Orizava Oil, too. Do you want to see this little louse on the witness stand?"

The girl shrugged: "I've got enough on him to keep him off any witness stand. I don't care what you do to him, later, but if there's any more jack to be picked up, let Don get it if he needs it."

Renton's visage became ghastly:

"You know the way I vote; what are you going to do? I want an answer."

"Vote as I damn please," retorted the girl. "Don't try to get fresh with me, Eugene."

Senix who had not uttered a word, began to laugh, and dandle his heavy head vacantly:

"That's what you get for playing a skirt, Gene," he mumbled. "I never saw a skirt I'd stake to a nigger bill—"

"Do you think any skirt would ever stake you to anything, you poor dope?" retorted Helen Wyvern. And, to Renton: "Your head's swelled because you cleaned up in South America. All right; a girl can stand for that. But you're a tight-wad, too, Eugene; and that combine isn't making a hell of a hit with me!"

She looked him over insolently, gathering her kimona in one brilliantly-ringed hand:

"—You seem to think *I* ought to vote whatever way *you* vote. I might, at that, if you weren't so damn stingy. But I'll do my own figuring and run my own business; and you'd better act up different if you ever plan to hook up with me."

The glare that Renton turned on her from his pale eyes she encountered with careless contempt.

He said hoarsely: "You seem to have changed a lot since you took this trip with Donald Mayne. What's the big idea?"

"Aw, my God," she retorted wearily, "haven't you any sense at all? Do you think any woman has got to stand for your rotten disposition? Get wise, loosen up, get sense,—or step on your gas and beat it."

"You don't vote to croak the kid then?" he demanded venomously.

"When I stoop to pick up a dollar, do you think you can kick it out of my fingers? Nothing like that, Eugene. I don't have to ask you how to make a living, do I?"

"No; you ask Donald Mayne, now—"

"That's a dirty slam," interrupted Mayne quietly. "You know there's

nothing in it."

"Do I?"

"Well, if you don't you're crazy. Ask anybody in the Forty Club whether I'm that kind of rat!"

Renton's trim, slim frame was trembling now. He said in a stifled voice:

"This rag-chewing gets us nowhere. If Helen won't vote to croak the kid, that settles it for *to-night*. . . . But I'm going in to take a slant at him before I go to bed—"

"Wait!" retorted Mayne.

"Give me that key!"

"I'll take your guns first."

"Like hell you will!"

"Yes, just like that. . . . Give them to Helen,— or you get no key."

Renton's face was now all a-quiver as he freed his pistol. At the same instant both Mayne's hands plunged into his side pockets; and Renton knew he was covered.

Slowly, looking at Mayne all the time, he extended his pistol to the girl. She took it, twirled it over her finger, and began to laugh with excitement.

"You act like a spoiled child, Eugene," she said; "Don is right. You've a hasty temper and you ought not to go into that tool-house with a gun—"

With a sort of baffled snarl, Renton snatched the key from Mayne, unlocked the door, jerked it open, and, picking up the torch, entered.

The place was full of shovels, picks, grub-hoes, spades, and machinery such as dump-scoops, cranes, drills, and several steam-shovels not yet assembled.

They watched his red and smoky torch as he moved about lighting up the rubbish. He called out, once or twice, in an unsteady voice. And, for a while, he poked and jabbed among tools and machinery with a shovel.

When, at length, Renton discovered the hole under the bed-log, by which the prisoner had escaped, he came back slowly to where the others were waiting.

"He's gone," he said in a thin, colourless voice. "I can't tell how long he's been gone. Maybe he beat it ten minutes after we locked him in. It wouldn't take ten minutes to dig under this shanty—"

Suddenly a spasm contorted his bloodless face, and from a distorted mouth torrents of foulest blasphemy burst out.

"You wouldn't listen to me," he yelled in a strangled voice, "when I tell you the thing to do is to bump a squealer every time. Now we've got to reckon with two squealers—John Lanier and that rot of a kid! You mark what I tell you; they're both quitters and both squealers, and they'll start a holler unless

we start out and get them!

"Wait till Barney hears of this! You both butted in and you've done one fine job! And all I say is this: if somebody doesn't get that pair of rats inside forty-eight hours, *I* quit the island . . . cold!"

There was a silence; then, with his hands holding level the two pistols in the side pockets of his coat, Mayne said pleasantly to Renton:

"I didn't quite get you. Am I to understand that you're a *quitter*?"

"Do you think I'm a fool to stay here and face the dicks with John Lanier and that kid alive and loose? No, by God! I'm through."

"Now?"

"Yes; I quit right now, I tell you."

"Is that what you're telling me, Eugene?"

"Sure. And I'm telling the world, too. I'm off this bunch. I'm through."

"Well, now. I'll tell *you* something," said Mayne, calmly. "You'll never live to quit us and get away with it. When it's time to beat it, we all beat it. You leave with the bunch or you stay with it. . . . *Or*—I'll start you on a long, long journey, Eugene. . . . And you'll travel all alone."

"*You'll* s-start *me*?" stammered Renton. He whipped out his pistol; his whole body was shaking. "I'm a killer!" he burst out incoherently, "and I'm going to bump you off!"

Mayne eyed him intently for a moment. Then, withdrawing his own hands from the pistols in his pockets, he walked slowly up to Renton, jerked the weapon from his unsteady grasp, took him firmly by the shoulder and gave him a push.

"Get out of this," he said. "I've got *your* number. You're only a kid-killer. You're all yellow. I always knew you were a miser. Now I know the rest. . . . Beat it!" He drew the clip from the pistol, pocketed it, and threw the useless weapon after Renton.

"That's for you to play bad-man with," he said. "Stay put. Don't try to quit. . . . Or I'll slap your pasty map for you."

II

Dirck ran. A boy's legs are made for emergencies. The trouble with this boy was that he ran the wrong way.

Before he realised where he was, he found himself at the wood's edge, close to the diving-dock where a splinter-wood torch burned.

Horrified, he stared at the smoky torch which a rising wind was whipping into a bright red blaze.

Almost under it lay his own boat, just as he had been yanked out of it, except that the sail was furled. But the mast was still stepped, his gun in its case lay in the stern beside a thermos bottle, tin cartridge case, and lunch bucket.

There was not a soul to be seen either on the dock or on shore.

In the Gay-Cat the piano still jingled, and there were thick voices hoarse in song; but both were more subdued; the only definite noise was an occasional crash of glassware.

The pines spread impenetrable shade to the very edge of the torch's glare. And even there shadows danced grotesquely, so that fixed objects seemed to be jigging about.

The boy hesitated a moment, turned and gazed into the blackness of the woods behind him, shuddered, took his chances, and crept out into the torchlight.

There, for the first time, he realised that the wind was blowing hard again, and he saw the white teeth of writhing waters flash at him out of the darkness.

But that was nothing to what might await him in the other direction. He untied the painter, shoved off the boat, poled to deep water, shook loose the sail, and seized the tiller.

Over she heeled in a fountain of spray; the boy dropped his centre-board, climbed to the gunwale, and clung there, humped up like a wildcat on a swaying branch.

Had not his gun and impedimenta been lashed to a duck-crate, all must have gone overboard.

Like a crazed and frantic creature the boat tore out into the gale, and the waves were becoming murderous when he fought his way into the lee-shore.

That settled it. In a series of violent shivers the boy reacted to his late peril ashore. Then the miraculous shock-absorber we call Youth took the impact, and distributed it. The boy wiped the spray from his eyes and drew a long, deep breath.

Lanier had been right: there never were rotters in the race of Loveless.

And, in proof of this, instead of steering for home the boy continued to

caress the lee-shore of Tiger Island, setting a true course for False Cape.

Outside the shelter of Tiger Island the wind was rising to half-a-gale's velocity; white water tumbled away to southward; an ever deeper, heavier roar rolled in from the ocean, raging and bellowing around False Cape.

"Oh, Lord," thought the boy, still assailed by sudden quivers of skin and muscle, "—death was very near this time . . . and I don't want any of it in mine. . . . I think I know more about it now. . . . I don't want it, O Lord!"

Against a spectral sky, the high pines of Tiger Island flew past as the sailboat scudded east, her starboard rail buried in foam. Louder, heavier grew the thunderous bombardment on False Cape; whiter, higher writhed the tortured flood rushing southward through obscurity.

Whether he could cross the flow between Old Inlet Woods and Tiger without being capsized or without being hurled helplessly away toward Lantern Island, Dirck didn't know.

In the darkness, right ahead, he caught a glimpse of a world of foam; it boiled around him, over him; his boat was on her beam-ends—a moment—then hurled herself into the air and stranded like a quivering fish.

Almost overhead a full gale roared, raved, screamed through the Old Inlet Pines. The pandemonium beyond the dunes deafened him.

But he was all right now: he dragged his boat far up among the reeds, unshipped the mast, seized gun-case, shovel, and impedimenta and staggered away through the sand storm.

Again and again the wind blew him flat; he bored his way with lowered head into the gale, crawled up and over the range of dunes, and was face to face with the frantic sea.

This was False Cape, now a vast chaos of darkness, hurricane, and surf. The din, the detonations of breakers in explosive crescendo, bewildered him for a few moments, and he lay on the sands fighting for breath which the wind ripped from his very lips.

Presently he got up, managing to balance himself, and began to dig in.

"It's going to be wonderful," he kept thinking, "—such a day for white brant as nobody ever saw." . . . And ten minutes later the boy lay snug on his slicker in his sand-pit, already hungry with the perpetual hunger of all real boys, nibbling luxuriously at his breakfast and scalding his throat with the hot coffee in his thermos bottle—the real boy *sui generis*,—resilient, irresponsible, eager, forgetful, impatient,—eternally the opportunist,—already tremulous in anticipation of that surpassing miracle which, for all real boys, is hiding just around the corner of Life, and is always on the verge of magnificent manifestation.

All night long the convulsions of the ocean resounded around False Cape,

which shook to its sand-bedded depths under the battering of wind and wave.

At one time the gale attained hurricane violence, then fell to a gale, to half-a-gale, grew wild and gusty, veered, dropped, picked up freshly, rippled into a breeze as dawn whitened the horizon.

Now a star or two sparkled high above the tumult of water; others broke out fainter from infinite depths. Then, one by one, all stars went out in a ghostly pallor which vaguely revealed the ruled line dividing sky and sea.

Against the watery, primrose-tinted light an ocean tossed in silhouette. Far in the dawn's uncertainty a wave washed golden; another; then another almost imperceptibly stained with rose.

Suddenly, overhead, came the swift silky whisper of snowy wings; two crimson streaks of fire slanted skyward; down through the growing glory of rosy gold hurtled two snow-geese and struck the sand with solid impact. At the same instant the sun's dazzling rim set all the vast waste a-glitter.

And now the boy's gun spoke again, abruptly; then twice. Faster came the white brant, faster, faster spoke the gun. The lower rim of the sun just touched the water. The flight was done.

Now the boy gathered up the game—heavy heaps of snowy plumage spotted here and there with spatters of brightest crimson, tied them, slung them over his shoulder.

They were all he could stagger under and he carried them up the highest sand ridge which is called "Flyover Dune"—a miniature mountain of whitest sand set with wild grasses.

Here was a natural hollow, and here, on the summit of Flyover Dune, Dirck deposited his snow brant.

He had to go back for his gun, shovel, and impedimenta, and eventually he collected everything in the sandy hollow atop Flyover Dune.

Now Flyover Dune was so called because, after storms, duck pass over it from ocean to sound and from sound to ocean, using the same immemorial air-lanes.

Swan were passing now, the sunrise splendour all musical with their wild, sweet, bewildered voices.

But these angelic creatures, on wide and silvery pinions, were immune; all the New World was sanctuary to such as these. And, watching them, the boy opened his lunch bucket and uncorked his thermos bottle with serious intentions.

In his warm, sandy hollow, amid tufts of harsh dune-grasses, he lay on his back and ate and drank and caressed the wild plumage of the white brant beside him, and watched the flight of the wild white swan.

By mere chance no duck passed over Flyover Dune; his gun and he remained motionless.

But now, as he lay there, his appetite satisfied, drowsy, content, dreaming awake yet close to the verge of deeper dreams, he noticed that the swan, passing over, were swerving in the sky, dividing above him, rising to higher levels, as though they saw him.

He noted it instinctively, almost mechanically, too drowsy at first to react mentally.

Then a vast wedge of swan veered out southward, losing intervals, breaking files, drifting, mixing as though beset by sudden panic.

The boy's mind woke up with a conscious jolt; he stared intently at the swan; then, with infinite caution, he rolled over on his belly and lifted his head so that his eyes were level with the dune's grassy edge.

Below, on the beach, stood three men gathered around a chest.

The men were Barney Welper, Sam Potter, and Dan Supple.

Their faces were flabby and pallid from the night's debauch; they were unshaven, unkempt; they still wore the gaudy bandanas and shirts of their revelry. Potter and Supple leaned on long-handled shovels; Welper carried a repeating rifle. As for the chest, it looked like one of those massive, iron-bound, nail-studded sample-cases which commercial men ship about with them as they travel.

Dirck's heart had almost stopped when he beheld them. So near were they —gathered just at the base of Flyover Dune. But they had not spoken, nor had the boy heard their coming over the soft sand.

And now, shifting his horrified gaze, he caught sight of a mast among the reeds to the northwest, where their sailboat had landed. There it slanted, clean cut against a dune, and the furled sail white as a gull's wing at sea.

One thing was evident; neither Welper nor Potter had been as drunk the night before as they pretended to be.

And now Welper's sly eyes began to rove over the vicinity. He looked up at the dunes, and the boy's pale visage among the grasses blanched; but the sly, veiled eyes shifted northward. Then Mr. Welper spoke, hoarsely:

"You see that pine with the top broken off by the wind—or—m—m—by lightning, or some m—m,—some all-righteous act of Almighty God,—Sam?"

"I see it," replied Potter, thickly.

"All right. . . . Dan, you take the string and pegs and walk down the beach till you bring that damaged pine in line with the pine on Lantern Island."

Supple picked up a ball of cord and a bundle of pegs split from splinter-wood, and went over to the stricken tree.

Here he shifted his position, squinted west until he had this tree in line with the solitary pine on Lantern Island, consulted a compass, noted the memoranda.

Now he pushed a peg into the sand, looped his cord around it, paced

toward Welper and Potter, compass in hand, counting his strides aloud.

Halfway toward them he consulted his compass, drove a peg, attached the cord, jotted down the memoranda, turned at right angles, strode seaward, counting his paces in a monotonous, distinct voice. At the water's edge he drove another peg, measured an angle of forty-five degrees, attached his string, and came marching up to Welper, announcing the sum total of his paces as he halted, and offering his note-book.

Welper wrote down everything very carefully. Then he went over to the damaged pine and carefully retraced Supple's course, taking up every peg, winding up the cord, verifying by compass, note-book, and stride, the memoranda written.

"All set," he nodded as he arrived, panting; "you can dig the hole right here, Dan. I've got it down safe."

Potter glumly drove his own shovel into the sand, also.

While he and Supple were digging, Welper dropped down on his fat knees, unlocked the sample-case, and lifted the heavy lid. And Dirck Loveless, peering fearfully down from the dune above, gazed into a chest crammed to the rim with crushed and twisted fragments of gold.

Sam Potter, digging doggedly, paused to look over his massive shoulder at the mass of treasure.

"Say, Barney," he grunted, "you sure you fixed that grafting diver so he won't double-cross us?"

"He's a reckless devil," added Supple; "he's half Portugee."

"You need not worry," replied Welper, "he's getting his m—m, yes,—he's getting his in real money, Sam. Also, I—ah—I have the goods on Lorenzo. . . . He's, m—m,—liable for life—if I talk out in church—m—m, yes,—if I talk out loud in church."

"God," muttered Supple, "all hell would break loose if Gene and Harry and Don Mayne got wind of what we're a-doin' to them. And Bert Mewling—and that other rat, Ray what's-his-name! . . . And Nellie—"

"When that diving Portugee keeps on haulin' up silver," said Potter, "that Wyvern woman is going to get leery, Barney."

"Helen?"

"Sure. Suppose she insists on rigging up and going down with that damn Lorenzo—"

"M—m, yes," murmured Welper thoughtfully; "I—ah—I have considered the m—m, the possibility of such an unfortunate event."

"Well?" inquired Potter.

"M—m, yes, exactly," purred Welper. "*Sometimes* the,—ah—the *air* does not m—m—operate as it is expected to. . . . Accidents,—m—m—regrettable accidents, occur, Sam. M—m, the life of a diver is precarious. . . . Ah, yes—

life is always precarious and full of trouble. . . . In the morning we grow up—ah—like grass—”

“I get you,” laughed Potter; and he spat upon his huge hands and resumed his shovel and his digging.

When he and Supple had excavated sand sufficient to satisfy the critical eyes of Mr. Welper, a rope was produced, the sample-case locked and lowered into the hole. Then, in silence, the two men fell to covering up the hole and its contents.

Welper suggested they work briskly because the others *might* recover from their debauch sooner than expected. Also, he pointed out that neither Mayne or Helen Wyvern suffered from exhaustion other than that incurred by their journey from New York.

“Aw, they’re not wise to anything yet,” grunted Potter. “They won’t ask where we are. They’ll sleep late, then they’ll want breakfast, then they’ll want to see the diver and find out what it’s all about—”

“Helen’s a slick article, all the same,” gasped Supple, wiping the sweat from his eyes with his brilliant sleeve. “She don’t talk a whole lot, but her bean is a busy one, and what she thinks she might spill out to Eugene. . . And he’s a dirty one to stir up. And dirtier yet to mix it with.”

Potter dumped a last shovelful of sand and began to smooth out the mound. Supple aided him by kicking the pile with both feet.

“You goin’ to bury any more gold, Barney?” he demanded.

“I hope to—if Providence prove propitious.”

“Here?”

“M—m, yes; exactly here, Sam. . . . *If* it be the Almighty’s will,” he added, piously.

Potter said: “We’ve got to give another souse-party, then. . . . I’m scairy, anyway. Some calm night some o’ those fancy guys we’re bunkin’ will get wise to us and catch that wop diver workin’ in the dark—”

“If they do they’ll catch a spring-blade knife in their—ah—guts,” remarked Mr. Welper.

“All the same, there’s no use startin’ anything—”

“We’d better go,” interrupted Welper; “the sun’s been shining half an hour and more. Dan, you run up onto that big dune and take a little peek around, first—”

“What dune?”

“That high one!” He pointed to Flyover Dune; and Dirck’s blood froze in his veins.

But Supple demurred: “Go on up yourself,” he returned, sulkily; “I’ve been digging and I’m all in—what with that blockade hootch you staked me to, ’n’everything—”

“Aw, come on, beat it, Barney,” said Potter. “There’s nobody awoke on Tiger, you bet; you don’t have to take a peek at this hour.”

He took Welper by the arm, urging him; Supple shouldered the shovels.

Welper’s sly eyes wandered uncertainly over Flyover Dune; he hesitated; then, furtively licking his lips, he shouldered his rifle and suffered Potter to lead him across the lower ridges and down to the reeds where the boat lay.

And now, as Dirck followed their movements with excited eyes and a blessed relief at heart, he became more and more surprised, then utterly puzzled. For, instead of filing off to the north where, above the reeds the mast of a hidden boat stuck out, they turned west, then west by south.

Then, of a sudden, the boy saw their boat. It lay hauled up in the reeds, perfectly visible from where he crouched. He had not noticed it at all until that instant.

A crawling chill of fear invaded him. To *whose* boat did that other mast belong?

Evidently the other mast was not visible to the choice company that were leaving False Cape to its sunny solitude. They filed away, plodding along down to the water, pushed off, clambered aboard, hoisted sail, and started to tack for Tiger Island. Supple was poling, for the sail hung slack; Welper laid his rifle on the turtle deck and stretched out beside it; Sam Potter took the tiller and attempted to jockey the sheet and flirt with the gentle cats-paws that now and then caressed the sound.

It took them a long time to fade away against the blue waste of water to the westward.

But even when at last they were gone, Dirck dared not stir from his nest on Flyover Dune until some explanation offered for the tip of that strange mast just visible through the reeds and bushes to the northward.

III

The explanation developed gradually. First he noticed the tops of bay-bushes shaking as though some creature were stirring them—cattle, or a wild hog, perhaps.

Later something moved among the pines and vanished.

It was dusky in there and the boy could not make out what it was.

For a while he saw nothing more. The rising sun magnificently swept the outer ranks of pines and flashed across acres of seedlings, setting their dewy, green aigrettes a-sparkle.

Then, among these plumy young pines, Dirck saw a man.

For a few moments the man stood motionless; then, lithely, silently, he traversed the patch of seedlings, crossed the border-strip where sand, set with creeping primrose and beach-plum, met the woody, fibrous débris of the pineland.

He went straight to the damaged tree which Welper had lined with the solitary sentinel on Lantern Island. Placing both hands upon the trunk he sighted for Lantern Island, stepped back, looked at the sand around him.

It was startlingly plain to Dirck that the man discovered the peg hole in the sand. Also, to the boy it became more evident still that this man had been concealed within close view of Welper's operations, and had followed them with keen and accurate eyes. For now he began to pace out the directions taken by both Supple and Welper; and it appeared that he discovered peg-holes to verify his attempt to duplicate the recent rough survey, for, in a few minutes, he arrived at the foot of Flyover Dune, and stood looking about him at the smeared and trampled sea-sand.

Who the man might be Dirck had no idea; and it gave him a terrific shock when the man lifted his head and called out to him by name.

The boy slipped two swan-shot cartridges into his gun in silence.

"Dirck!" repeated the man below; "you needn't worry. I'm a fisherman; and what I catch I fry."

The boy rose trembling:

"Mr. Mayne?" he managed to blurt out.

"Sure thing, my son. You're all right, aren't you?"

"Yes—"

"I was sure. I saw you pick up your geese and crawl up among the dunes. . . . Where did those fancy gentlemen bury their box?"

"—Where you're standing—"

"Good-eye!" exclaimed the young man, much pleased with himself. "Bring down your game and your other stuff. Bring that shovel of yours, too. Step

lively, my son; we ought to start before they're awake on Tiger Island."

Dirck draped the heavy string of snow-geese over his back, gathered his effects and made his way down to where Mayne stood scooping up sand with one foot.

"Here?" he queried, as the boy dropped his load and came up to him.

"Yes, right there, Mr. Mayne—"

"All right. Take your stuff to your boat and hurry back, old chap."

Mayne's voice was agreeable and calm, but in it there was a slight clarity of authority; and Dirck hurried to obey.

He found his boat, stowed away his geese, cartridge-case, lunch bucket, thermos bottle, and slicker. He stepped his mast, laid the pole ready, and pulled up the prow to the limit of safety. Then, shouldering his loaded gun, he ran back.

Mayne already had uncovered the box. Together they managed to haul and push it up and out of the hole.

"One moment," said Mayne, who was breathing rather heavily. He pulled out a key-ring from his pocket. Other instruments dangled on the ring. He selected one which opened like a pencil-case, fussed a moment at the locked chest, then coolly opened it.

The interior disclosed an astounding sight. Crushed and battered vessels of gold, pyxes, chalices, crucifixes, chains, hilts of swords, candlesticks—all were crammed and jammed together in a glittering mass. And the interstices were choked with doubloons as beautiful as though freshly minted.

"Get that slicker of yours," said Mayne.

Dirck ran back to his boat and returned in a trice, Mayne dug out as much as he thought the slicker would hold and the boy could carry; and bade him fill his cockpit.

Five times Dirck made the trip before the chest was empty.

When he came back, Mayne had placed the empty box in the bottom of the hole and was filling the box with sand.

Filled, he closed it, found an instrument on his key-ring to lock it, and fell to filling the excavation. Dirck used feet and hands; the hole was soon covered, the place trampled on, smoothed with the shovel. Both men were streaming with perspiration.

"Good work, Dirck," nodded Mayne with a friendly pat on his shoulder. "Now let's beat it."

At the water's edge Mayne motioned Dirck to board his boat. With his hand on the prow he said:

"Dirck, have you any idea what that loot is or where it came from?"

"No," said the boy, "I haven't."

"Well, I'll tell you; and you tell John Lanier. The ship Welper has

happened to locate is a Spanish ship, and not the *Red Moon*, galley.

"Tell Lanier that this hunt for the *Red Moon*, galley, is nothing new—not as recent even as the day of Stede Bonnet, William Kidd, and Blackbeard. From the days of buccaneers before John Esquemeling, adventurers have searched for the *Red Moon* and her sunken treasure.

"Francis l'Olonnois heard of the *Red Moon* and searched for her. Barthelemy the Portuguese was after her. Montbar of Languedoc told Oexemelin at Honduras that he took a large Spanish ship off False Cape that was searching for the wreck of the *Red Moon*. She was called the '*Holy Trinity*,' was of immense value; the hold crammed with riches.

"The Gascon put every Spaniard to the sword, put his uncle aboard the *Holy Trinity*, and ordered him to pass inside False Cape by the Old Inlet and repair ship off Tiger Island.

"And that same night a wounded wretch, left for dead in the hold, crawled to the magazine, fired it, and perished with such Frenchmen as remained on board.

"And *that*, Dirck, is undoubtedly the ship which Welper has discovered—the *Holy Trinity*."

"Good heavens," said the boy, "where did you learn, all this, Mr. Mayne?"

"Stede Bonnet knew it, Blackbeard knew it, Governor Eden knew it.

"When John Lanier left New York he sent word to me to go to Charleston and search for more of the Bonnet-Eden papers. The old Eden house already had been demolished; but I went to Raleigh; and in the archives I discovered among Eden's papers, which apparently *never had been examined since deposited*,—for the seals were still *unbroken*,—a full memorandum in Blackbeard's own hand, tracing the history of the *Red Moon*, galley, and every attempt to find it.

"And that, Dirck, is what you are to tell John Lanier; and that the sunken ship is, probably, Montbar's prize, the *Holy Trinity*; and that Welper, Potter, the club servant, Supple, and Lorenzo Portugee, the diver, have conspired to double-cross the others, feed them the silver and divide the gold between themselves. . . . Now I think you'd better start back. . . . Tell Lanier I have the situation pretty well in hand. I want him to burn *the international signal* when the entire affair is ripe. Tell him there are twenty men in Norfolk who can land on Tiger Island within three hours. . . . I wonder how much of all this you can remember?"

"All of it," said the boy quietly.

"All right. Push off!"

"I am to give this treasure to Lanier?"

"He'll tell you what to do with it."

The boy stood up, drove his pole into the shallows, looked earnestly at

Mayne.

"I haven't thanked you for my life. I don't know how. It's too big a debt to talk about. . . . All I know how to say is that I'm yours—at any moment—always—" He choked, threw his weight on the pole, followed it aft, withdrew it, dropped it again with the ease of a born bayman.

Mayne stood among the reeds watching the receding boat until the boy drew in the pole, set sail, took the tiller, and set his course for Place-of-Swans.

Long before Dirck landed he could see his sister and Lanier on the east wharf in the channel between Lantern and Red Moon Islands, watching him intently through their sea-glasses.

Presently, Lanier hailed him through a megaphone:

"Are you all right, old chap?"

Dirck nodded vigorously.

"Any snow-geese?"

Dirck nodded violently, turned, and partly lifted the heavy string.

"All right. Everything's fine ashore. We've *found the Red Moon, galley*!"

Dirck, in uncontrollable excitement, sprang to his feet, waved frantically, then he lifted a great battered salver of gold and waved it in the sunlight.

"What on earth is *that*!" roared Lanier through his megaphone.

And, to the girl at his side: "Your brother's boat looks as though it were full of gold plate. He's got about a ton of something in there—"

After a moment she exclaimed in astonishment: "I see something that shines like a gold crucifix. . . . And something that seems to be a chalice. . . ."

She drew nearer to Lanier, rested one hand on his arm. In speechless silence they awaited the on-coming boat.

NUMBER TEN
The Adventure in Crescent Blind

I

Now there could be no doubt that old Captain Jake Winch and his brawny baymen were uncovering the remains of the *Red Moon*, galley.

Examples of goldsmiths' work of ancient Maya and Aztec civilisation were now being sifted out of age-old ooze every hour; and the pure, heavy Indian gold was as bright and flexible as when the long dead master-goldsmiths finished burnishing.

Every ounce of silt was saved, screened, re-screened on the dredging scow; and again raked dry and screened twice more on shore.

And out of the sand tumbled hundreds and hundreds of exquisite and curious specimens of Maya gold-work. The grotesque and fearsome Moan-bird of ill omen, with its basilisk eyes and horrid beak wide open as though screeching, turned up in scores. There were heavy, dolphin-shaped creatures, heavier alligators, stumpy, sinister little gods, and dumpy, ugly goddesses; there were frail, delicately sculptured butterflies and beautiful dragon-flies; there were wonderful bats, life-like crabs, fishes, conch-shells, birds—particularly vultures and harpy-eagles. Now and then a great lump of raw gold bounced off the screen; now and then some gold sacrificial vessel, or a ceremonial amulet, or part of some clavical, or gorget, or plaque pierced for fibre-cords that had long rotted, or still were attached in the guise of gold chains.

Now and then, but rarely, pure copper ornaments appeared, or a utensil composed of amalgam and gilded with a thin, beaten plate of virgin gold.

But there were very few of these; practically everything was wrought out of solid gold, often without alloy, sometimes with a very small percentage of other metal.

Inside the cofferdam the men were digging by hand now; and every shovelful lifted was all glittering with gold ornaments, some intact, others in fragments.

The excitement and interest at Place-of-Swans became almost too thrilling to endure. At daylight Maddaleen, Dirck, and John Lanier were out on the cofferdam watching, and sometimes even wielding shovels.

Never had they experienced such thrills as when, from the screen, some lovely Maya creation of heavy gold rebounded and dropped at their feet on the sand. All gold hunger—all greed for gold because it was merely gold, vanished

in the ecstatic delight of archeological research. With each shovelful of sand a newer and more lovely surprise rewarded them. And there seemed no end to the width and depth of this great golden vein which had been uncovered under the shallow waters of Place-of-Swans.

And the vein was practically all gold; there seemed to be no relics of the ship itself,—not a ring or bolt or timber; no fragment of human remains; no rusted arms, no battered helmet, nor armour; no cannon-balls, no broken pottery, no brass utensils of Spanish or Dutch or English manufacture; no anchor chains—not a link—and no anchor.

Nobody ventured to estimate the value in gold which was being dug up every minute; nobody, so far, had spoken of that aspect of the affair.

Even the astounding Spanish booty which Dirck had brought in from False Cape, and which had been carried to the wine-cellar and locked in, had not been discussed in term of monetary value.

This loot from False Cape was real pirate's plunder—the sacrilegious harvest of bloody and desperate men, ravished from the sacked churches of Panama, from the convents of Hispanola, palaces, castles, monasteries of a Spanish, French and English civilisation which now was as extinct as that of Maya and Aztec.

The golden débris lay piled up in a vast heap on the floor of the wine-cellar at Place-of-Swans,—beautiful sixteenth-century altar vessels all crushed and battered, splendid chalices, ewers, basins, candlesticks, crucifixes,—all mutilated and stamped on and hammered into more compact masses so that the gold-crazed buccaneers could cram more loot into the spaces allotted them within the reeking hold.

Maddaleen was more shocked and concerned than thrilled by this windfall of blood-sprayed treasure; Dirck himself felt uncertain, troubled, apprehensive. For, after all, as he said to Lanier, this really was discovered by Welper's gang on territory belonging to them; and, even as recompense for the fortune out of which Welper and Orizava Oil had swindled him, it seemed too much like robbery to take what those ruffians had found off their own shore.

But Lanier, who had been given the run of the house, and access to all its garret-stored mass of musty archives, was rather sarcastic about the qualms of brother and sister.

"If you knew more about the history of your own manor and your own people," he said, "you'd know that the Spanish treasure belongs to both of you and not to Barney Welper."

He went to his room and brought back a dirty parchment deed, discoloured, brittle, and all over pinkish-red seals and shreds of silken tape.

"You never saw this, did you?" he inquired ironically. "It wasn't concealed. It lay on top of a sea-chest up there among the mud-wasp nests. It's

the royal patent to your domain, fair lady and gallant sir: do me the honour to listen to this paragraph:" and he read aloud:

"—it being further understood that these same and aforementioned riparian rights to the Manor which is called The Place-of-Swans does and shall forever extend to and include, northward, the *high-tide mark and limit at greatest flood* upon the western and southern shores of Tiger Island; and, to the east, the high-tide mark upon all that western shore of the mainland known as False Cape, from and including the channel between Tiger Island and False Cape, to and including the *Inlet* south of the aforesaid Cape—"

"Good heavens!" cried Dirck, "is Tiger Island *ours*?"

"As far as tidewater, my casual friend," said Lanier, laughing.

"Then," said Maddaleen, amazed, "Welper has no rights at all in the sunken *Holy Trinity*, has he, John Lanier?"

"None, dear lady. . . . But this is hardly the moment to take up the question with Barney Welper."

They were seated after dinner in the library before the fire of sea-wood. Coffee was being served; Maddaleen set her cup aside, took the old parchment with its rose-tinted seals, curled herself up in the depths of a wing-chair, and studied it.

"Anyway," she said, stealing a resentful glance at Lanier, "this deed must have been recorded somewhere; so *I'm* not the shiftless chatelaine you insinuate. . . . You're rather impudent sometimes, John Lanier."

The latter merely grinned, then his face altered and he looked gravely at Dirck.

What Dirck had told him about his predicament on Tiger Island and about Eugene Renton's murderous proclivities had deeply disturbed the elder man.

And he laid down the law, without compromise, that henceforth Dirck was not to go roving anywhere unaccompanied.

"Well," the boy had argued, "what could you or Jake have done with me against that entire gang?"

"I don't know," Lanier had replied, "but that's the law, now, Dirck. You can't go cruising alone until this matter is finished. . . . After all, you ought to consider your sister."

"I do—"

"You do not," rejoined Maddaleen, calmly.

Still studying the parchment, she said: "Brothers don't consider sisters. I don't expect it. But you ought to consider Mr. Lanier, Dirck."

"I do—"

"You don't. He has done about everything a man can do for this family. And the family just sits around and waits for him to do more. He has been as unselfish as a father, as loyal as a brother, fearless, tireless, generous,—not one

thought for himself. . . . Not *one*.

"He may have come into this region in line of duty, but that scarcely included guarding and protecting me and mine and you and yours at the peril of his life.

"I think," she added, still examining the parchment, "that you owe him *something*. And if he requests you not to go cruising or shooting by yourself,—that is the only thing he has ever asked of either of us. . . . And—I wish he would ask—more."

"Of course I'll do whatever Lanier says," asserted the boy. "I'd do anything for him and he knows it. No use talking as though I wouldn't, Sis."

"I'm rather overwhelmed," murmured Lanier. "Who am I to be offered such a tribute—"

"It's time somebody named Loveless offered you something—even if it's only the tribute of common consideration," said Maddaleen. "Dirck?"

"What?"

"It's absolutely ridiculous for Mr. Lanier to refuse to consider a proper and decent division of what we are dragging up out of the *Red Moon*, and what you are—are—"

"Stealing?"

"Obtaining—on False Cape. . . . Can't you talk to him as men talk to one another?"

"Well, I can say, 'Damn it all, Lanier, you've just got to take a third of all this junk—' "

"Nonsense!" interrupted the elder man, laughing. "What you dig up doesn't concern me. . . . You're two kind and generous children; but I couldn't accept such a suggestion. . . . I can't take anything. . . . And you know it"—looking at the girl.

She was studying the deed. Presently she lifted her blue eyes, smiled slightly:

"You won't share with us? You won't take anything?"

"I couldn't take anything."

"Then will you *give*?"

"Yes. What?"

"Your promise not to go cruising alone."

He laughed. "I couldn't do that, either."

"I suppose not." . . . She rested her chin on her hand, drew a deep breath. "You won't take, you won't give, John Lanier. . . . I'm sure I don't know what to do with you."

"Well, I do," said Dirck; "it's beginning to blow, and I'm going to take Lanier to Crescent Blind before daylight and give him the duck shooting of his life."

"Do you think you ought to leave the cofferdam?" inquired Lanier.

"Jake and the men are honest. Besides, one of us can be back by ten o'clock."

"You'll have to come back then; I don't want you alone anywhere—not even on Crescent, for the present."

"Nobody invites me," remarked Maddaleen.

"Come on, Sis," cried the boy cordially. "Three can shoot those twin blinds; or I can go over to the northeast blind and leave you and Lanier to stop everything to the westward."

Maddaleen looked at Lanier: "The prospect doesn't enchant you, does it?"

"It does," he said. "I don't see why it wouldn't be all right for us to shoot on Crescent until ten o'clock."

"Do you apprehend any trouble on Red Moon Island?" inquired the girl uneasily.

"None that I can foresee. . . . No. Donald Mayne might come before daylight to talk to me. He'd find me gone; that's all."

"But he's never yet done that—"

"What?"

"Come over to Place-of-Swans."

"Oh, yes he has."

"When?" asked the girl, surprised.

"Yesterday morning and this morning before sunrise."

Maddaleen said: "You are very reticent, John Lanier."

"There was nothing important to tell you and Dirck. Mayne came on other business."

"I didn't mean to be inquisitive—"

"You're not. I'll tell you. Mayne and I are trying to herd a lot of malefactors together and nurse them along until similar groups in various other parts of the world can be beguiled into similar conditions and situation."

He smiled at Maddaleen: "You don't quite understand; and I'll be clearer. A gigantic drag-net is to be drawn over the whole world. That gang over there on Tiger Island comprises the brains of the criminal world in the Eastern United States. A few are missing. The authorities whom Mayne and I represent are trying to concentrate them all on Tiger.

"We don't want anything to happen to cause them any suspicion or in any way to interfere with their sense of security.

"Certain Federal authorities prematurely startled the Orizava Oil crowd. That was a blunder.

"What we who represent Law are attempting to do is to strike without warning and simultaneously *all over the world*."

The girl and her brother gazed at him wide-eyed and dumb.

Lanier went on, slowly: “There is, to-day, throughout the world, a serious conspiracy against civilisation. In every land, under every government, sinister and dominating combinations of minds direct this vast menace.

“To these groups is due the steadily increasing lawlessness in communities, in nations which, hitherto, have been generally law-abiding and secure.

“It is a deliberate attempt, directed by diabolical wisdom, to invade, terrorise, ravage, and overthrow all security, all law, all order,—yes, and all refinements of civilisation,—science, art, all learning, all accepted moral conventions, all religion.

“The underworld is preparing for a conquest of civilisation. And that’s the fact we are facing. . . . And that is why all governments founded upon law and order have now finally combined in a solemn and secret pact, engaging each other to put an absolute end to this increasing menace within their dominions.

“Certain simultaneous measures have been internationally agreed upon. Action is being concerted. The forces of disorder are being cleverly and amazingly organised by the master minds of evil.

“The forces of law and order must be even more perfectly organised. They will be. They are already. And, of these forces, I am a small and humble part—a mere cog that fits into a vast and intricate mass of machinery.

“And I think that the machine, when assembled, is destined to grind exceeding small.”

He rose, tossed his burnt-out cigarette into the fire:

“To-morrow we shoot duck, dear lady—” he said gaily, “if still it be your pleasure.”

The girl flushed a little. As she passed him and said, “Good-night,” she added under her breath:

“I think you know what is my pleasure, John Lanier.”

“What?”

“To meet your—wishes,” she said; and, not looking at him, she mounted the stairs on light, swift feet.

II

It was still very dark in his room when a knock on his door and Jake's voice aroused Lanier. He lighted his night light, looked at his watch, got out of bed with a suppressed groan, and went about the business of bathing, shaving and dressing.

Outside, the gilded sea-horse rattled and creaked; shutters banged; the wind-demons quarrelled in the chimneys; False Cape thundered.

When Lanier was dressed he went down to the lamp-lit breakfast-room. Maddaleen, in sea-boots and leather shooting-coat, welcomed him with an airy gesture, and indicated a fowling-piece on a chair.

"That's your gun. Your shells are in the tin case beside it, along with your lunch bucket. Coffee will be ready in a moment. . . . What splendid ducking weather!"

"It's blowing," he remarked, picking up his gun and adjusting it to his shoulder.

"It isn't blowing too hard. Does the stock suit you?" she added, demurely.

"I suppose so. I don't know much about shotguns. You suit me, anyway, Maddaleen. You look very fetching in your shooting clothes."

"Yes, I must resemble a baby elephant. Here's breakfast. We won't wait for Dirck—"

Dirck sauntered in at the moment; they seated themselves before coffee, hot bread, bacon, eggs, and broiled bass.

"It would be a great day for canvas-back," suggested Dirck, falling to with his usual appetite. "I don't think it's too rough for a sink-box."

"We can't risk box shooting with that gang on Tiger Island, you see," said Maddaleen. "And besides, the men couldn't take out the tender. It won't do to leave the cofferdam unguarded with all that gold uncovered."

"I should say not," added Lanier. "I'm not sure that I ought to go at all—"

"Then I suppose I couldn't go," said Dirck. "You say I shouldn't go off alone—"

"If Mr. Lanier doesn't care to go," remarked his sister, "I can go with you, Dirck." She looked at Lanier defiantly.

"Yes," returned Lanier, "that would solve all my anxiety—you and Dirck alone on Crescent."

The girl shrugged: "I know how to use a gun as well as Dirck does. . . . If any of the Tiger Island gang should bother us. You think I'm a child."

"A nice variety of outdoor sport for a girl," retorted Lanier. "I thought you were sensible."

"You think cotton batting the proper clothing for me. It's nice of you, John

Lanier, but it's Victorian—"

"Oh, shut up, Sis," interrupted her brother; "I don't care to have you blinded by a charge of sixes in the face, either. If Welper's people should ever really bother us, Lanier and I don't want you on the firing line."

The girl got up from the table and pulled on her sou'wester:

"Are you coming, John Lanier? Yes or no? Choose between duck and dump—between girl and gold!"

"I'm Victorian enough to choose the girl," he said, picking up his gun, bucket, and cartridge case. "May I have her?"

"You may have her—thanks. I am very grateful to be taken shooting by a tiger hunter."

There was a trace of malice in her bright, quick smile. Her cheeks were slightly pink.

Dirck followed to the rear door. All was darkness outside. Maddaleen lighted two lanterns, and they picked their way down to the little wharf on the lee-shore behind the house, where were the yards for duck and geese decoys.

Here lay their boat; and they stowed their guns and paraphernalia aboard.

"Oh, dear," sighed the girl, "this is what I don't like about duck-shooting, but the men sleep on the barge at night, now, and I didn't want to bother Jake —"

"Come on, Sis," interrupted her brother. "Lanier and I will attend to the geese."

In their hip-boots they waded out and around to the water-gate in the palings which fenced in the decoys' yard.

Major Bagstock was the first victim; Dirck chased, cornered, and seized the indignant gander, tucked him under one arm, caught Miss Tox, his spouse, and started for the boat, the Major protesting with a vehemence which would have won encomiums had he been staked out off the blind.

Lanier managed to corner two belligerent geese and grab them, and the buffeting he got from their wings fairly staggered him.

"Let me show you!—" said Maddaleen, laughing, as the furious impact of the pinions nearly knocked Lanier flat in the water.

She took one of the geese, showed him how to hold the other, and waded to the boat with him. Here, without ceremony, Dirck nabbed them and thrust them into a crate.

The geese always were difficult; the mallard turned out to be more difficult to catch but far easier to handle.

Maddaleen chased, cornered, caught, and crated her quota; and finally all the live decoys were aboard; and Dirck slung some three dozen wooden ones into the cockpit—a mess of battered stools, tangled cords and weights.

Major Bagstock already had his head out between the crate-bars, and with

evil intent; and he managed to nip Lanier twice before that young man learned how to avoid him.

But now it was time to set sail.

"Not earlier than one hour before sunrise," the law reads.

Dirck stepped the mast, Maddaleen took the tiller, and Lanier stowed himself among guns, buckets, crates, oars, stools, and poles; and as far from Major Bagstock as possible.

There was a good deal of sea running off Red Moon Island; the boat did some pitching; and Dirck some bailing.

From the darkness overhead came a charming confusion of treble voices where unseen swan in hundreds were already on the wing.

Now and again the thrilling tumult of wild geese broke out upon their ears, sometimes from far away, sometimes startlingly close overhead.

The great armies of water-fowl were awake and stirring upon the infinite waste of waters; from every direction out of darkness came the clangour of wild geese and halloo of wild swan; and sometimes a mighty rush of wings where wild duck sped through the viewless lanes of night.

The boat came up to the windward of Crescent and was fairly blown ashore across the shallows.

Out of obscurity, which now had grown greyer, loomed the low reed barricade of a point blind.

Maddaleen stepped overboard, and stood, knee-deep, holding the boat while the two men carried ashore the guns and luggage and laid everything in the blind.

Now the live decoys, geese, and duck, were dragged forth unceremoniously; weighted leg-cords were attached, the birds liberated in proper groups at proper distance and intervals.

Major Bagstock discussed the outrage excitedly with Miss Tox; other geese floundered, splashed, preened, or enquired loudly what had become of their several wives.

All the mallard duck were quacking and gossiping and resenting the scandalous proceedings, and the green-headed drakes answered in soft, lisping response—the very refinement of a ghostly quack.

Out of darkness, somewhere, one old marsh-duck had set up a raucous and incessant clamour; and far away in reedy obscurity other marsh-duck fussed and commented excitedly, while, in the greying light above, though not yet visible, the snowy legions of the sky swept past in endless battalions, filling the dawn with their wild hallooing.

And now the mast was unshipped; the boat pulled up and concealed among the reeds; Maddaleen and Lanier seated themselves on the rough board, with guns resting on the edge of the reeded sill in front, and Dirck squatted down

above and behind them, his slicker for a seat, and ranks of growing rushes to conceal him.

Almost instantly the treble whimper of wings filled their ears; right in front, just beyond the decoys, a bunch of whistlers sped past. Three reports shattered the silence; then a fourth. Three duck struck the water, then a fourth collapsed far out, slanted down and hit the running waves with a visible splash.

"Don't move; they'll drift right in to the blind," said Dirck in a hoarse whisper. "Ready! Pintails coming!"

The duck decoys set up a loud quacking. A dozen pintails drove high over the marsh behind them, and the boy called them, "Deedle-deedle-deedle—dilly-dilly-dilly!—"

"Dirck's pulled them around," whispered Maddaleen. "You must shoot this time, John Lanier. Here they come—"

"Let them come all the way around!" muttered Dirck. "They'll drop in, I think."

The pintails swept past outside the decoys at full speed and disappeared; three excited pair of eyes waited expectantly; suddenly, right in their faces, the duck reappeared, rising a little to breast the wind; their wings curved to a bow; for an instant they seemed to be suspended in mid-air; then down they dropped onto the water amid the treacherous quacking of the decoys.

"John?"

"Yes, Maddaleen."

"When I count three you stand up. And when the pintails jump you kill two."

"Yes—dear lady."

"One—two—three!"

Lanier rose, and so did Maddaleen. Out on the water a dozen sleek, seal-brown heads were turned in alarm; a dozen startled duck clattered up out of the water; Lanier fired twice—with perfect safety to the duck. Then four shots cracked out and five pintails doubled up, collapsed, hitting the water beyond the decoys in a rapid series of splashes.

"Well done, Sis!" cried Dirck. "You crossed two beautifully."

But his sister was looking with a sort of sweet anxiety at Lanier.

"You'll get the hang of it after a shot or two," she said.

He smiled: "I hope so. But you and Dirck mustn't bother with me. You keep on doing the serious work and I'll blaze away and furnish the comic element."

Dirck, out in the water, was picking up the floaters driven inshore. The decoys, which had helped to lure their own wild kindred into the ambuscade, didn't like to have their victims come splashing among them or floating by too near, and all the duck were tugging at their leashes and splashing and beating

their wings in efforts to avoid their assassinated dupes.

"We're careful," explained Maddaleen, "not to shoot at any duck when it might fall among the decoys. It scares the decoys and sometimes renders them useless."

Dirck came wading back to the blind dragging the nine inert but beautiful masses of plumage.

Maddaleen and Lanier laid the birds behind the reeds.

"Look out!" whispered Dirck, scrambling back to his place as the clamour of Major Bagstock, taken up by Miss Tox, set all the geese and duck decoys vociferously vocal.

Thrillingly from the sky came the clamour of wild geese replying.

"Don't move an eyelid," whispered Maddaleen to Lanier. "Don't let them see your face; keep your head down; I'll warn you in time."

Louder and more boisterously called Major Bagstock and his feathered hirelings; louder, nearer came the metallic clangour of the wild-geese.

"About thirty—passing over behind us—fairly low, kill them?" demanded the boy impatiently. "They're you treacherous son-of-a-gun! Call! Gloo-uck! Gloo-uck! Gloo! Gloo! Gloo-uck!—By jingo, they're turning! We've turned them, Sis! They're coming. Look out, now—"

Overhead came the wild geese again, answering the wildly excited invitation of their tethered comrades below to alight and join the alluring banquet.

Suddenly in front of the blind the air was filled with great grey-and-black-and-white creatures balanced on wide pinions, gliding down to the water level.

Lanier's heart was thumping; the girl touched his arm:

"*Now!*" she whispered.

He stood up; there came a thunderous noise of spray and wings; all space before him was a bewildering mass of rapid motion.

He fired at a goose, saw it pitch over, strike the waves, flap furiously. He fired at it again, and saw the long neck fall flat on the water.

Four other geese fell dead, clean shot, and floated with heads under.

"Good work!" cried the girl, extending her cold, wet hand to Lanier.

"Probably a fluke," he said, "but thanks for congratulations—"

"Don't move! Canvas!" came Dirck's warning. "Take them as they pass, Lanier: they don't usually decoy to a point—"

"Quick! Here they are!" breathed Maddaleen. "Now!"

Lanier fired at some grey-white streaks that glimmered for a second in his line of vision; he did not even hear the other guns, so excited was he.

"By jingo!" cried Dirck, "you got one, Lanier!"

"Good heavens! Did I?"

"I missed clean with my left," said the girl. "You got one with each barrel,

Dirck." She turned a bewilderingly brilliant smile on Lanier; her cap was off, her brown hair blowing on her forehead.

"One each for us, John. Are you going to overtake and beat me at my own game so soon?"

"I just want to overtake you—as Atalanta was overtaken."

"O. . . . You mean catch me?"

"I do."

The girl broke her gun; the spent cartridges flew out; she reloaded, a faint smile curving her lips.

"Have you provided yourself with a few golden apples?" she inquired, closing her gun with a soft click and looking up at him. "There were three golden apples, you remember, which were the undoing of that speedy but grasping wench."

"I have three—words—"

"Oh. . . . Don't fling them too soon. . . . All girls are not as easily swerved as that empty-headed jade, Atalanta."

He said with a forced smile: "Then you don't care for golden apples. . . . Or words—to the same effect? . . . And you don't think I could overtake you?"

She examined the Damascus pattern on her gun-barrels, tracing the convolutions with slowly-moving finger.

"I—don't—know," she said. "No race is over till it's won—"

"Get down!" whispered Dirck fiercely, as the decoys broke out into a clamour.

But it was only an eagle, sailing up magnificently into the wind, sheering almost into their very faces in fierce menace to the frantic water-fowl below.

"Get out!" shouted Dirck, springing up and flourishing his gun.

The great bird swept past; its yellow eyes glittered almost level with Lanier's. For an instant it hung there in the air, its snow-white head and tail and brownish-bronze body shining gloriously; then the splendid bird rose and slanted away to the westward; and the tumult of the terrified decoys abated.

"Mallard! Coming fast! Ready!" came Dirck's excited warning.

"John! Now!" whispered the girl as the mallard came in grandly, bowed their wings, dropped, only to spring into the air again as the ambush was revealed, and fall as though lightning struck in the dry crack of the guns.

And now the wild duck came driving by in an almost unbroken flight, squad after squad, bunch following bunch, wedges of teal, a pair of widgeon, a rushing drive of bluebills, a solitary oyster-duck, ignored by sister and brother, but neatly bowled over by Lanier, who, at first, did not understand their gaiety at his expense.

"Don't mind our beastly manners," said the girl; "it was a good shot, John."

“So that’s a fish-duck, is it?” he said grimly. “Well, I ought to be compelled to eat him—”

“Two black duck; in!” whispered Dirck.

“One with each barrel—please,” said the girl close to his ear, with a taunting smile.

“It would surprise you, I suppose.”

“You always are surprising, John Lanier.”

“If I do it—how about those three golden words I’m keeping in reserve?”

“I don’t know—”

“May I try them—if I get those two duck?”

“I can’t advise you in—in such matters. Ask the gods.”

“Is anybody going to put up those marsh-duck and kill them?” demanded the boy impatiently. “They’re suspicious already and they’re swimming out.”

Lanier looked at Maddaleen, and saw her turn slightly pink.

“I offer them to Mrs. Aphrodite,” he said. He rose; the wily black duck rose too, clattering noisily. With a deliberation that fascinated the girl he killed one with each barrel—killed them clean—the last one towering—a long shot at extreme range limit.

“Yonder,” he said calmly, “float my votive offerings to Venus.” The girl smiled mechanically; then, as their eyes met, she blushed and got to her feet as though startled by her own sudden confusion.

“Somebody had better get those votive offerings of yours,” she remarked, “or they’ll sweep past our point—”

Already she was climbing over the blind when Lanier detained her, saying he’d wade out and get them himself.

“*I’ll* go,” she insisted with a malicious sweetness in smile and voice; “*you’d* probably lose them both, now. . . . And you can’t expect to do much with any goddess if you don’t back up your prayers with something substantial.”

She vaulted over the blind into the water, and, wading out across the tossing shallows, skilfully headed the two duck which the wind already had driven beyond their point. He saw her reach down and seize one, wade out still farther, seize the other, turn, lift them both in triumph.

“Now, John Lanier!” came her clear call across the water; “pray your prettiest and pray fast and hard. Because your giddy goddess may not care for your wild-duck dinner after all.”

Lanier laughed. But he was now looking at a sail which suddenly had glimmered distantly a mile or so beyond her to the northwest.

“What’s that, Dirck? A fisherman?” he enquired.

“Probably,” said the boy. “I hope he has no intention of fishing in our vicinity. He’ll queer our shooting.”

Maddaleen came wading up to the blind, swinging her two black ducks and looking at Lanier with a saucy air:

"Here," she said, "—you can give them to your fancy friend from Olympus if you want to; but I've heard gossip about that woman."

"About my friend, Mrs. Aphrodite?"

"They say she's no better than she should be," returned Maddaleen, her nose in the air.

Lanier helped her in over the blind. She stood swinging the two ducks by their legs, the indefinable smile edging her lovely mouth. Then she extended her arm toward him.

"Many thanks," he said, relieving her of the two heavy ducks. "I'm sure my business with Madame Venus is going to be successful if you'll continue to help me a little—"

"She's a notorious character. They're a shady family—she and that brat of hers. They're not on *my* calling list, John Lanier."

"Be polite to her," he urged. "It might mean a lot to me—"

"That confounded fisherman *is* headed this way," called out Dirck. "He has no business off Crescent and he knows it. Probably it's one of those Bonnet Bay poachers. *I'll* send him about his own affairs if he anchors in our waters."

After a few moments: "It's Ray Wirt's boat," said Maddaleen uneasily. "What is he doing off Crescent?"

III

The boat was standing in for Crescent; that seemed plain enough. Three men were aboard; but Dirck had forgotten his ducking glasses and nobody could make them out for a while.

"That's Ray Wirt at the tiller," said Dirck, finally.

"That's the Vice-President of The Forty Club forward," added Lanier.

"Who?" asked Maddaleen, startled.

"Sam Potter. . . . I don't seem to recognise the slim man with the red handkerchief tied around his head. . . . Wait!—" He turned to Dirck: "Drop out of sight," he said; "that's Helen Wyvern."

The boy reddened and seated himself in the blind.

"What do they want over here?" he muttered, giving his sister a distressed and shame-faced glance.

Lanier, watching the approaching boat, touched Maddaleen and motioned her to be seated. Then he slipped two cartridges into his gun, walked out into the reed-lined alley, and sauntered down to the water's edge.

"Boat ahoy!" he called across the water. "On board the boat, there! What do you want?"

"We want to land," bawled Potter. "Is that you, John?"

"Keep off! Keep outside our decoys!" returned Lanier calmly. "Can't you see you're spoiling the shooting?"

"We want a word with your girl—"

Lanier levelled his gun: "Anchor where you are, Sam," he said coldly. "You there at the tiller!—down with your sail, now! Hold it!"

"Hey!" cried Potter, turning to Wirt. "You better do what he says."

Wirt stepped hastily overboard and held the boat, sail flapping.

"Say," he yelled, "you-all act right smart with your shotgun. Who-the-hell you reckon you are?"

Lanier ignored him: "What do you want, Sam?" he demanded.

"I want to talk private to your girl."

"No, you talk right out loud to *me*, Sam."

"All right, then. You know what your girl's brother did to Barney? Frisked his office safe for a hundred thousand."

"Is that so?"

"Yaas, that's so," retorted Mr. Potter. "And half of it was Helen's."

Lanier looked at Helen Wyvern and she gazed back coolly, the scarlet handkerchief fluttering on her temples.

"What are you doing over here, Helen?" he asked pleasantly.

Helen Wyvern replied in a placid voice: "I thought perhaps that your

friend, Miss Loveless, might wish to make good what her brother stole—rather than have any trouble—"

"Trouble?"

"Yes—prosecution—publicity—"

"You mean that you think Miss Loveless might submit to blackmail rather than have her brother arrested for theft?"

"Hold on, John!" shouted Potter; "it isn't blackmail to try to recover stolen property! Don't start anything like that—"

"Wait! Miss Loveless does not believe that her brother stole a penny from Barney Welper."

Helen laughed: "Well, John, we have his own confession over his own signature. Would Miss Loveless care to have us show that to a jury?"

"You *say* you have such a document."

"We've got it, John," she said, smiling.

"It's for sale," added Potter; "your girl had better buy it in."

After a silence: "How much?" asked Lanier, drily.

"Well—a trifle for our trouble, and the interest and expenses—well, say a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Too much."

"What! Your girl's rich. What are you stalling for? Isn't it worth that to keep her brother out of State's Prison?"

"Will you take ten thousand? No? Twenty? . . . Thirty? Fifty?"

"No, nor sixty, seventy, ninety-nine," shouted Potter. "We've got the goods; she can buy them cheap if she wants them, or she can carry a little basket of cake in a clean napkin once a week to her brother for the next ten years."

Lanier looked at Helen Wyvern: "I suppose Eugene put you up to this."

"A social error, old dear," retorted the girl. "I'm off Eugene. No; it's a better man who backs me in this little flyer."

"Donnie?"

"None of your business! Concern yourself with your own girl. And say, John, I fancy you've a handful, too."

Potter, squirming uncomfortably on the covered deck forward, hitched his bulk around to let his legs dangle in the cockpit.

"Well, John," he demanded, "what's the answer?"

"That's a rotten thing to do to my girl. I understood I was square with you—all except Eugene Renton."

"You're square with me as far as I'm concerned. I don't care whether you shoot it out with Eugene. Neither does Helen, I guess."

"Then why do that to *me*?"

"We're doing it to your girl, not you."

“She’s mine, I tell you.”

“Then make her behave, and she won’t get into trouble. . . . I’d hate to tell you what we think of your girl.”

“Go on.”

“No, I don’t want to hurt your feelings, John—”

“Go on, I tell you!”

“Oh, very well. You want it straight! Here it is then: whoever catches a gay-cat in the pantry has a right to make her sing. That’s what we’re going to do,—make her sing. . . . Loud!”

“What tune, Sam?”

“I told you; one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. Now what have you got to say, John?”

Lanier made no reply; and, after a silence: “What is your answer, John?” asked Helen Wyvern.

“I’ll tell you what my answer is: I want a week to think it over.”

“No. Tell us now.”

“I want three or four days anyway, Helen—”

“No; Sam is here for an answer. Yes or no; pay your debts or we call in the dicks and fight it out before a jury.”

“Come, John,” said Potter, “you deserve all that’s coming to you and you know it—staking your gay-cat to a free razzle in Barney’s private quarters. By rights we ought to have bumped you and your girl. You’re getting off very slick, my son. Come on; grin and pay up—”

“You disciplined me by crowding me out of the *Red Moon*,” insisted Lanier.

“Yes, but all the while you knew that rat of a brother of your girl’s was alive, and you knew he had touched Barney for his roll, and you never said a word. Come on, now, John; we want your answer.”

“You’ve got to have it *now*?”

“Right now, just like that!”

“Very well, Sam. I’ll give my answer to *you*. Get overboard, wade in, and I’ll meet you half way.”

“And you with that gun,” rejoined Potter derisively.

Lanier set the gun inside the blind, turned, waded out toward the boat.

At that, Potter climbed over the side and began a wallowing progress toward Lanier.

They met half way. Neither offered to shake hands. Lanier said in a very low voice:

“Sam, I want a week to think it over before I let loose a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars.”

Mr. Potter shook his head.

“Yes, and you’re going to give me a week to make up my mind, Sam,” added Lanier calmly.

“Like hell I will. Where do you get that stuff, John?”

“Shall I tell you?”

“Sure.”

“Well, then,” said Lanier, lowering his voice, “I got that stuff where you and Barney and Dan buried it in the sand on False Cape. . . . Now do I get my week?”

Mr. Potter’s large visage lost all its sanguinary colour.

“—Or,” continued Lanier, “must I speak to Helen about the matter—”

“Hush, for God’s sake,” whispered Potter in a strangled voice.

“All right. But you and Barney can call off that gay-cat of Renton’s over there. You know it’s a lie; the boy has not stolen that money. It’s a frame-up, a holdup, and you know it.”

Potter’s little pale eyes in his fat and ghastly face glittered pure murder.

“Now you see what comes of crowding a friend,” said Lanier. “You don’t like to be crowded, do you, Sam? But if you’re not very, very careful I’ll not only crowd you but I’ll step on you.”

“All right,” said Potter in a ghost of a voice. “I’m the Patsy. Let’s play the cards as they lie—”

“No.”

“Hey?”

“No. I draw another ace, first. I fill, Sam. And now, my one best bet is that you’ll get that paper on which Dirck Loveless put his name, and you’ll bring it to me.”

“Good God, I can’t—”

“You’ve got to.”

“John—”

“Go back and tell them that you’ve given me a week to decide. And you get that paper to me within the week or Eugene and Helen and the rest will learn how the President and the Vice-President of the Forty Club double-crossed the rest.”

Potter’s large, flabby face seemed to have actually wilted to a smaller size.

Without a word he turned, plowed his way back through the water, climbed into the boat with an effort.

“Well?” demanded Helen.

“He gets a week to think it over,” muttered Potter.

“What! You let him stall you—”

“He’s got good reasons—”

“He bluffed you, Sam! And you let him—”

“Never mind!” roared Mr. Potter, losing self-command. “Barney’s running

this business and I'm his deputy. If you don't like what I done, make your holler to Barney!" And, to Ray Wirt: "Get aboard and go back. I got business ashore and I can't stay here monkeying—"

"Sam," said Helen Wyvern, with a sinister smile on her pretty face, "John Lanier has got something on you and he's scared you off."

"And that's a lie, whether you're a lady or not," retorted Mr. Potter. "Now go and holler your head off to Gene Renton or that new guy of yours—"

"Donald Mayne," nodded the girl, all the evil in her terribly transfiguring her face. "It's *his* bread you're taking out of his mouth—you fat fake! And, by God, you can't do that to any man I stand for—"

"Shut up or I'll throw you overboard!" growled Mr. Potter. "I've heard all I care to hear from any skirt. You shut your lipstick box or I'll put you out for keeps, my fancy Moll!"

He turned and encountered Ray Wirt's leering visage: "What the hell is it to *you*!" he demanded, coldly. "Why, you damned Carolina cracker, I'll bust your bean if you grin at me. Get *that*!"

The voyage to Tiger Island proceeded in silence.

NUMBER ELEVEN
The Adventure of the Little Death

I

When Ray Wirt's sailboat with Sam Potter and Helen Wyvern aboard tied up below the diving-dock on Tiger Island, there seemed to be an excited crowd above, clustered around the Portuguese diver who had just been hauled up.

Harry Senix looked over the edge of the dock, his nervous, dead-white features working.

"Sam," he called down, "we've struck the gold vein on the *Red Moon*! That diving wop, Lorenzo, has just fetched up what looks like a gold spittoon crammed full of big, thick doubloons. Eugene's counting 'em."

"That's great," shouted Potter, forcing surprise and delight into his voice. "That's the dope, Harry." And, to Helen, turning with heavy jocularity: "Say, Nellie, that's better than shaking down John's girl. You're going to get yours easier than that, and faster and more of it. How about it, hey?"

Helen gave Potter a searching look: "It's all right," she said, "—and I hope you are, too, Sam."

"What's that!" he demanded.

But Helen was climbing up to the diving-dock where the throng pressing around Eugene Renton sullenly parted for her. She made her way among them politely, and looked down at the heap of heavily minted gold coins which Eugene Renton, seated cross-legged on the planking, was digging out of a huge, solid gold ewer in double hands full.

Just beyond him the diver and his aids were busy with preparations; the diver was going down again—had already set his leaden feet on the ladder.

Helen turned and looked at the dripping and monstrous shape; at the connecting tubes and lines; at the dark, unquiet water into which he was already descending; then she glanced at Eugene's colourless, determined visage; at his pallid fingers arranging the gold pieces in piles of tens; at the double ring of flushed faces fiercely intent upon the placing of every coin.

There were men there who would have done murder for less than one of those piles of thick, gold coins. The girl's calm glance moved from face to face as she realised this.

Sam Potter, with obvious intent to placate her, took her familiarly by the arm:

"That's the dope, Nellie, ain't it?" he said with false jocularity. "Add a little more of that stuff to the silver we got, and we'll pay for our outlay, and

everything else will be velvet. How about it, my beauty, eh?"

The girl's expression remained unresponsive; her gaze followed Renton's deft, swiftly moving fingers. She was preoccupied; not with Renton's activities; but with a gradual, subtle invasion of that intuition which in women is the awaking of a sixth sense.

Something was wrong. She felt it. Instinct, vaguely stirring, began to warn her. Sam Potter's voice and manner, after his conference with John Lanier, had angered and surprised her. The memory of it, and now Potter's obvious attempt at reconciliation after his brutality to her, were disturbing her profoundly.

She lifted her pretty head and looked around for Donald Mayne. He was not there. Neither did she see Barney Welper. But his valet pal was there.

Replying to her inquiry, Dan Supple said that Mayne had sailed for Bonnet House with Bert Mewling, to get a supply of fireworks.

"Sure," cried Potter with feigned heartiness, "we got to celebrate the opening of this gold vein in the *Red Moon*! Hey, Nellie, old sport?"

Renton placed a pile of ten doubloons on the planking and looked up palely at Helen for the first time.

The girl nodded and smiled. "Well," she said, "the situation looks better, Eugene, doesn't it?"

"Do you think so?" he asked in a colourless voice.

"Why, of course I do. Don't you?"

Renton gazed at her a moment with something terrible brooding in his light grey eyes; then he resumed his counting without an answer.

Sam Potter nudged the girl and whispered: "Gene's dead sore on you and Donnie. He's acting mean and he's shot full of dope. You better tell your young man to sleep with both his guns on."

"He needn't. I can sleep with mine on," she said; and walked away toward the Gay-Cat.

Potter, uneasy, followed her as far as the Gay-Cat; but Mrs. Wyvern kept on toward the bunk-house, and Potter turned aside and went into the tavern. Nobody seemed to be in the tap-room, which stank of gin. He went on upstairs to his bedroom. Listening, he heard something stir in Welper's bedroom—the flutter of paper and scrape of a pen—and he knocked gently on the board partition:

"Barney," he called in a modulated voice.

"Come on in, Sam."

Potter went in. Welper was writing, but he looked up, shoved aside his papers, and sat tapping his front teeth with the pen-holder.

"How are things, Barney?" inquired Potter.

"Bert Mewling brought in a letter from Bonnet Bay after you left this

morning," replied Welper. "It's in code from the Rio bunch. I been de-coding it out of my pocket Bible. They write that Government agents are watching them, and that, if things get any hotter, they're going to scatter. . . . That tight-wad, Gene Renton, has been getting nervous for the last two months. He's a pretty good barometer. I wonder—m—m—whether he's been writing to the Rio crowd and stirring them up. You think it likely, Sam?"

"All misers have got yellow guts," remarked Potter, seating himself: "Renton is nervous because Helen is bedevilling him."

"Also, he's made his pile," nodded Welper, "and, as you say, Sam, all rich guys are scary. I think he meant to beat it. . . . So I told Lorenzo to let 'em see a little gold for their money."

"Oh, that's why," nodded Potter.

"M—m—yes. . . . I want Renton where I can see him for a while."

Potter shrugged up his fat back: "He won't skip. He's too sore on Donnie. He ain't a-going to leave his girl with Donald Mayne, Barney. But that isn't what I came in to talk about. What do we care about that South American bunch—or about Gene's troubles with Helen? Not a damn." He leaned forward, bulkily, in his chair.

"Barney," he said, "something's gone wrong. I'm in punk."

"What?"

"Dead punk," repeated Potter solemnly. "Let me tell you. You know that Helen and I went over this morning in Ray Wirt's boat to stick up John's girl and shake her down for a hundred and twenty-five on account of her rat of a brother?"

"Yes, I know. Did you—ah—prosper, Sam?"

"It was Helen's graft. She wanted the jack for Donnie. It wasn't nothing to me—"

"I know. M—m, did Providence aid Helen in her, m—m, enterprise?"

"Listen. We sailed for Red Moon Island, but those Place-of-Swans crackers, on the cofferdam where dredging is going on, jumped into a power boat and ordered us off. They had guns and we had to sheer off.

"Then Ray Wirt he heard shootin' near Crescent, and sure enough when we sailed across, John Lanier said how-de-do to me with a shot-gun in one hand—the dirty squealer."

There was a silence.

"I wish Renton had got him," mused Welper.

"I'm sorry, too. . . . Well, I tried to bluff him out before everybody. . . . It didn't work.

"Then he said he'd like to talk to me, private; so we waded out and met half-way between shore and boat. And *what* in hell do you think that squealer handed me, Barney?"

"What?"

"He said he wanted a week to think it over before letting go his girl's hush-jack. I wouldn't listen, naturally—"

"I should think you wouldn't!" protested Welper, with virtuous indignation.

"But I *did* listen. I *had* to."

"I'm astonished, Sam—"

"Well, don't be. Here's the way it went: I says, 'Where do you get that stuff, John?' And he comes back with, *'I got that stuff where you and Barney and Dan buried it in the sand on False Cape!'* "

Welper's face became greyish; he started to get out of his chair, dropped back, limp. But the sly eyes, partly veiled under thick, curling lashes, peered steadily at Potter.

"What do you think of that kick in the belly?" inquired Mr. Potter. "I near fell dead when he come back at me with that."

Welper made no reply.

"What was I to say?" insisted Potter "—before Helen and that dirty cracker, Ray Wirt?"

"What *did* you say, Sam?" inquired Mr. Welper, softly.

"I said what I *had* to say. He had me. I was scared stiff he'd talk out loud before Helen and that cracker. He had me cold. He knew it. He laid down the law to me; he said he'd take a week to consider. And, in the meantime, I'm to get that paper from you in which her rat brother convicts himself over his own signature. And that's what I got by going over and trying to help Helen stick up John Lanier and his gay-cat. Say, it's a sweet situation, ain't it, Barney?"

Welper looked out of the window:

"Did Helen hear?" he asked.

"No. But John Lanier will see to it that she hears if he doesn't get that document. . . . What's the answer, Barney?"

After a long interval of silence, Welper's sly eyes again sought Mr. Potter's.

"I guess he gets the paper, Sam."

"I guess he does."

"M—m, yes. . . . Certainly. There seems to be nothing else to do in that direction. No, nothing to hope for, Sam. M—m, the Lord Almighty did not bless our undertaking. No. Providence, Sam, does not seem disposed to prosper our desires involving the—ah—matter in question. No bounteous return, no plenteous harvest promises to benefit us with rich reward for our labours. No."

"He's a good man to bump," mused Potter,—"John Lanier. . . . Yes, I guess so."

"M—m, yes. I'm sorry—very sorry—that we ever let him go. . . . I wonder if Renton could go over some—ah—some night—"

"If he could shoot before John talked,—yes. That's what's worrying me, Barney—the fear of John's talking. What would that gang on Tiger Island do to you and me and Dan and that wop diver if they found we'd double-crossed them?"

They sat there very still, in the grey light, looking at each other.

"Who spilled the beans?" inquired Welper very gently.

"Search me. The diver? What for? Dan? No. *You* didn't. *I* didn't. There's no one else. . . . Somebody saw us. That's the answer."

"M—m, I presume so. Yes, Sam, it was God's will that some damned, sneaking, weasel-bellied, misbegotten son of a yellow slut spied on us. . . . The ways of the Almighty are beyond human understanding, Sam. We must bow our heads, meekly, to the inscrutable will. Yes, Sam—to the—m—m, the mysterious and occult behests of Providence. . . . If I thought that Eugene could get our friend John Lanier before he had a chance to talk—But no. Let us accept the decree of Heaven with resignation, Sam. . . . Did you go over to False Cape?"

"How the hell was I to go to False Cape with Helen and Ray Wirt in the boat?"

"I suppose what we buried is gone," concluded Welper calmly. Under his long, velvety lashes his little hazel eyes glittered. He said, softly: "I don't doubt that John took it. He knew he was safe. We can't holler. He and his gay-cat have done us in, Sam."

After a rigid silence Welper relaxed in his chair with a sigh, slowly veiling his murderous eyes:

"I guess John had better have that paper," he said. . . . "Of course we'll have to bump him. . . . His girl, too. . . . And the brother. . . . M—m, yes; all in God's good time, Sam. . . . Or some of the Forty Club are going to bump *us*."

"I get you," nodded Mr. Potter. "But say, what about that spittoon full of gold that Lorenzo fished up?"

"That," said Welper, "was premature—a ghastly mistake, Sam. I thought, before we added to our little dividend on False Cape, that we ought to encourage the others—just enough—for fear of suspicions. . . . She's a smart slut—that Wyvern woman. She's acted just a little strange lately—and I'm always afraid of a woman like that—too keen, too clever, too damn efficient to monkey with very much. . . . So I told Lorenzo to bring up just enough gold to keep 'em quiet. . . . I'm sorry. . . . I don't know whether we could let her in with safety now—"

"We haven't anything to offer her; John's got it," said Potter with calm ferocity. "Besides, Nellie would want Donald Mayne in on it. She's crazy

about him. . . . And who can guess what he'd do if she let him in?"

Welper thought for a while.

"Well?" demanded Potter anxiously.

"It's hard to keep a clear brain and think straight," explained Mr. Welper, "when your mind's full of murder, Sam. I pray that a merciful Providence gives me my chance at John Lanier before I die,—and another crack at that girl of his. I won't ask for too much of the Almighty. . . . I don't ask for the kid brother; I'll be grateful for a chance at those two. . . . Or just John—if the Lord lets me fix him the—m—m—the way I hope to fix him—"

The grey rage in his visage slightly startled Potter.

"Well, Barney," he said, "quit dreaming pleasant dreams and come back to earth. What are we going to do? John Lanier gets our pile and we get the gate. He gets the document too, or he spills on us. If he spills, the bunch on Tiger will kill us, sure."

"Yes; we shall be cut off and utterly destroyed," murmured Mr. Welper.

"Well, what are we to do? We can't get at John now. Helen is sore. She wants the hush-jack for Donnie. You know how a moll is when she's stuck on a guy? Fierce. She's leery, too. She'll go and talk to Donnie. They may work it out. They may go talk to that wop diver. If they ever get it into their beans that we held out on them—say!—*if* they ever get that on their minds—"

"Could you take a boat and go over with the letter to John—and *get him*—in some manner—"

"Forget it! *You* know John Lanier. Say, do you think he'd ever give me a chance?"

"M—m, no. . . . And yet, Sam, if you and I are to remain on Tiger Island, John Lanier can't go on living. Do you realise that?"

"If he gets that document he'll play square, I think."

"Why do you think so, Sam? He doubled me for his gay-cat, didn't he? He let her frisk me, didn't he?"

"I'm not so sure," said Mr. Potter. "I guess he really did warn her not to try anything in the club. And outside—well—it was her money—which was the same as his—and who wouldn't make a play for it within the rules of the Forty Club? *You* would; *I* would; and so would Tom, Dick and Harry, and the Messrs. Doe and Roe. Hell! I wasn't for driving him out. It was that damn tight-wad, Renton. I wasn't for crowding him because his fool of a girl broke a club rule. That was you, Barney,—and Eugene. Now you see what comes of it. Why wasn't you satisfied with what you did to the kid? Why must you chase that gay-cat with guns and strychnine when you seen how John was acting—same's you and me would act in them same circumstances. . . . You know what I think?"

"What?"

“I think you gummed us up. I think you’re getting old, Barney, and your mind ain’t what it once was.”

As Welper gazed at him, his hand, resting on the arm of the chair, trembled very slightly.

“That,” he said, “is the worst thing any one ever handed me, Sam.”

“I can’t help it. You’ve gummed this. I’m beginning to think it’s almost too late for us to do anything except beat it.”

“Leave Tiger? Leave the *Red Moon*?”

“You got out a couple of millions in gold and you let a guy swipe it. You and I are walking around on this island like we had ropes around our necks and was doin’ a clog on the drop-trap. If John Lanier spills on us we’re the same as bumped. Where does that get us? I think we ought to beat it.”

Welper considered: “We could get Lorenzo to fetch up all the gold he could lay his hands on first,—*then* beat it. . . . Just you and I, Sam.”

“Double-cross Dan?”

“I’m afraid so. God knows it would hurt me more than it would him,” added Welper piously; “I’m fond of Dan—”

“Leave the diver, too?”

“What’s a Portuguese wop?” inquired Welper softly. . . . “I can hire a cracker to cut his life-line for a hundred dollar bill. . . . Yes, for a ten spot.”

“You mean that you and me ought to take a boat some night and beat it for Bonnet Bay?”

“And then to Norfolk, Sam. And then to Europe—Providence assisting.”

“My God, if they caught us—Gene, or Dan, or Donnie, or that fly girl of his! . . . No. . . . *No!* Get that paper to John Lanier. We’ll take a chance that he won’t spill. And we’ll stay and play the game,—and try to start another kitty. That’s all there is to do—”

There came a knock at the door. Welper took a pistol from under his left arm-pit, placed it in his coat side-pocket, and pleasantly said: “Come in.”

Renton entered in his nervous, restless manner. His countenance was pale and wet with sweat.

“Look here,” he said, “the game’s up on Tiger. The diver just came up, and he says there’s no more gold and only some bars of silver left in the *Red Moon*.

“And that isn’t all I’ve got to tell you. Do you know what they’re dredging up at Place-of-Swans out of that cofferdam? They’re shovelling up tons of gold figures—gods and things—birds, snakes, animals—

“One of their rafts got adrift last night and Bert Mewling picked it up and towed it in. There was a half-ton of dry silt on it, and the sand was full of gold ornaments—here’s one!”

He pulled from his pocket a Moan-bird carved out of virgin gold and set it upright upon the table where Welper had been writing.

“Now,” he said in his strident, menacing voice, “what about it, Barney? It looks like Helen was right when she said that the real *Red Moon* had nothing except gold in her, and that we had found some other sunken ship and not the one we’re after.”

Welper gazed blankly at the golden bird of ill-omen. Its alarming beak was open as though shrieking; its fierce, bold eyes seemed to glare back at him. In its talons it clutched what seemed to be a mass of blind snakes—or human entrails, perhaps.

In the copy of the Maya parchment which he had stolen from Dirck Loveless such a creature was figured.

Renton said: “That’s the kind of gold that John Lanier is digging out of his cofferdam across the water yonder. . . . Tons of gold like this. . . . And all we get is some silver and one little pot of gold coins. . . . While that squealer and his gay-cat, and the rat you wouldn’t let me bump—”

“That will do for the present, Gene,” interrupted Mr. Welper in a ghost of a voice.

“What?” retorted Renton violently. “You’re going to stand for it?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t considered it. M—m, this is a—ah—a painful surprise, Eugene. . . . I do not propose to discuss it at the top of my voice with you—”

“Everybody knows it. Bert Mewling towed in the raft and everybody saw it, and watched us screen the silt.

“Dan’s filled two pockets full of gold gods and animals. The men in the saw-mill heard of it and have come down to the dock to see what we got. Everyone’s watching Place-of-Swans through their sea-glasses; Helen is sitting at the telescope; the Bonnet Bay bunch are talking ugly—”

“How, ugly?” demanded Sam Potter.

“They say it’s our ship, no matter where she lies. They’re talking about going over and taking their share. And the lumber crowd, too, talk crazy stuff —”

“What’s so crazy about going over and cleaning out that Place-of-Swans bunch?” interrupted Potter. His glance flickered toward Welper, returned to the damp, pale visage of Renton: “—If it’s our ship it’s ours. We know the *Red Moon* sank in our own waters off Tiger. She belongs to us wherever she drifted afterward—”

“Do you mean gun-play?” asked Renton in an altered voice. “Besides, that isn’t the law.”

After a silence: “What’s law to do with a Godforsaken place like this?” said Mr. Potter slowly. . . . “We got enough men to clean ’em up. We got the Bonnet Bay bunch, and the lumber-jacks—”

“Are you crazy?” demanded Renton. “Are you trying to tell me we can go

over there, bump half a dozen people, and get away with it?"

"Who's to hear our guns? And if ary a soul comes into this waste end of the world he'll think it's gunners shooting duck."

Renton stared at Mr. Potter in unconcealed alarm:

"Are you trying to tell me we can stick up those Place-of-Swans people, shoot a few, and get away with a ton or two of raw gold?"

"Are you a quitter?" retorted Mr. Potter.

"I won't cut my own throat."

"No?"

"Not me. No."

"I see. You've got yours. You're heeled. You'll quit us."

"I'm through anyway," said Renton harshly.

"No, you're not. You're not through with your girl. Nor with Donald Mayne," said Welper, softly. "You'll never quit and leave them together, Gene. . . . Besides, you're wrong about a get-away. I've fixed that."

Renton's bony, symmetrical visage still retained the sudden stain of colour.

"How have you fixed it?" he asked.

"There's a tramp steamer off False Cape. . . . Hull down. . . . Three red rockets and two green ones bring her in. . . . We got to scatter anyway. It's getting too hot. I heard from Rio to-day."

Potter said: "Leave it to us. We can fix it so it's a baymen's feud between Bonnet Bay and Place-of-Swans. It's just a crackers' fight; see?

"Let 'em shoot each other. It will be weeks before it's known. . . . And we'll be scattered over the globe from South America to Singapore. . . . And we'll stay put till things are quiet. . . . Do you get us right, Gene?"

Renton glared at him: "No," he said, "not me. I'm through."

"You leave Helen to Donnie?" asked Welper, softly.

Suddenly Renton snarled at him, turned and went out swiftly, slamming the flimsy door.

Potter rose and looked out of the dirty window.

"There he goes, the dirty white-livered miser," he said over his shoulder to Welper.

"I'm sorry. I hoped he might get John. . . . Or get bumped."

Potter came back into the room.

"I took your idea, Barney. I get you. We got to beat it. Sure. And maybe we can take enough jack with us to help a little. . . . What does Lorenzo really know about the wreck? There's plenty more yellow-ones down there, ain't there?"

Welper surveyed him gloomily: "There's another spittoon-full. That's all except silver in bars."

"What! No more coin?"

"That's all."

"No jugs and mugs and crosses and gold pots and pans?"

"Only that antique cuspidor—or whatever it is. No, Sam; we're through down there."

"Then that damn ship ain't the *Red Moon* after all. John Lanier's got the *Red Moon* over in Place-of-Swans!"

"I guess that's right," admitted Mr. Welper. "He's got almost everything, Sam; he's got the *Red Moon*; he's got a rich girl; he's got our jack; and he's got our goat. I—" Mr. Welper lifted sly, pious eyes to the ceiling, "poor as I am, Sam, God knows I've always tried to act square to that man in the Forty Club; but if it be the will of the Almighty, he's as good as bumped right now. . . . And I know how to do it."

"How?"

"You go down to the dock and pay everybody double wages. And you tell 'em it's a holiday. You tell 'em there's free booze at the Gay-Cat, and we're going to celebrate and have piano music and a fiddle.

"Tell the lumber-jacks and the Bonnet Bay bunch to fetch their girls over in Bert's launch—"

"Barney!"

"Yes, Sam."

"Do you realise what you're a-doin' of?"

"I guesso. I'm starting a brand new hell. We'll have the old one looking like Brooklyn on a Sunday morning in July."

After a silence: "I get you," nodded Mr. Potter. . . . "Is Dan Supple in on this?"

"Yes. He's got to help us fetch and carry, and run us over to False Cape. Tell him to sodjer his drinks."

"Lorenzo? Do we take him, too?"

Mr. Welper shook his grey head and his sly eyes travelled from the writing-table to the sheet-iron stove.

"I'm going to burn my papers and yours, Sam. We travel light—except for what we pick up—at Place-of-Swans. . . . Tell Dan we'll want the new launch to-night. Tell him to load her as we agreed,—one bundle of red rockets and one of green ones; our suit-cases, empty; two dozen empty canvas sacks; three rifles; a box of dynamite, fuses, battery, and wire."

He got up, swept together an armful of papers from the table, including the blotter, carried them to the big sheet-iron stove.

Potter lifted the lid; Welper dumped in the papers.

"Get yours, Sam. And don't forget the blotter," said Welper cheerfully.

He was singing in a low voice when Potter returned with a suit-case full of letters. He lighted a match and dropped it into the stove; Potter dumped in his

letters and replaced the lid.

"You going to send John that document he wants?" asked the latter.

"Like hell I am," replied Mr. Welper softly.

The stove, which had leaked smoke a little, now began to roar. Welper carried to it an armful of underclothing and toilet articles and dumped them in, singing contentedly under his breath. The celluloid comb and brushes burnt fiercely as he clapped the lid on.

"Burn everything except what you got on," said Mr. Welper. "Here's some scissors; cut off the buttons and buckles on your clothes. We can throw them into the bay when we go out."

Mr. Potter went to his room and returned with all his extra clothing. Very patiently he cut off the buttons and buckles and deposited them in a heap on the bed.

"Fix mine, too, Sam," said Welper cheerfully; and he continued the hymn he was singing:

"From wicked men's designs and deeds
My hands and heart refrain,
Nor let me share their evil works
Nor their unrighteous gain!"

The big stove roared and grew cherry red around the base; garment by garment, Mr. Potter incinerated his wardrobe and Welper's. Everything else went in,—every stray scrap excepting their razors. These, when the holocaust was finished, they shoved into their pockets along with their pistol ammunition.

"Lightly, lightly, lightly," sang Mr. Welper;—

"Tread lightly over trouble,
Tread lightly over gloom,
There's pearls to string of gladness
On this side of the tomb;
Why clasp woe's hands so tightly,
Why sigh o'er blossoms dead,
Why cling to things unsightly,
Why not seek joy instead?
Lightly, lightly, lightly,
Tread lightly over trouble—"

"You got your guns loaded?" inquired Mr. Potter.

"I thank you, yes. . . . Make a bundle of those cold-chisels and the other tools, Sam—" He went to the rear window, opened it, looked up at the smoke whirling out of the chimney, took a cautious survey of the woods, then bent his

grey head and looked down at the deep water below.

"All right," he said to Potter.

Together they dropped the remaining debris into the rocking depths of the bay—burglars' tools, spare ammunition, buttons, buckles, bottles with corks drawn, scissors, pens, ink-wells,—everything that would sink.

In the Gay-Cat there now remained no physical traces of these two men's occupancy. Of all their possessions, excepting suit-cases, they retained only what they wore and carried on their persons.

Mr. Welper had become almost cheerful, now.

"It's going to be some party, Sam," he said. "When these coyotes get their skins full enough of the joyous juice, oh boy!—who's going to hold 'em? Wow! They'll start over to clean out that Place-of-Swans bunch. . . . And what pickings! All that gold junk we buried on False Cape!—all that stuff they dug up out of their cofferdam,—you and I and Dan the only sober ones—" He looked up towards the sky, humbly, slyly: "Out of Thy plenteous bounty, oh Lord, grant us sufficient of Thy good things to reward us for our toil and industry this day."

"A million apiece," added Mr. Potter solemnly, "and we'll live straight ever after."

"Amen," said Mr. Welper with a furtive glance out of the north window. "Hell," he continued, "that Wyvern woman is watching our chimney."

"What of it, Barney? It's cold enough for a wood-fire."

"Chuck in some pine sticks," said Mr. Welper. "If Nellie likes to watch smoke we'll give her plenty."

"She's a snake," remarked Mr. Potter. He dumped an armful of fat pine sticks into the stove.

"Go on down to the dock and tell 'em about the party," said Mr. Welper. . . . "And I'm going to dope Nellie's high-ones if she starts acting up. . . . Look at her nosing us down there by the bunk-house. . . . That's Donald Mayne with her, isn't it, Sam?"

"Yes. . . . Say, Barney, I'll be happier outside Donnie's pistol range. . . . We'll be in Dutch if the *Mandril* don't stand in and send a boat when we send up our rockets."

"Don't worry," said Welper; "Dan's got a sailboat on the ocean side—if worst comes to worst. . . . Say, you got to beat the box and start things downstairs good, Sam. Don't forget we sodjer our booze, either. Now, you better go down to the dock—"

He went to the window and looked across at the bunk-house.

"I'm wondering," he said gently, "if that Wyvern girl is leery. God knows, Sam, I never yet was perfectly certain what was buzzing in her damn bean."

Helen Wyvern could see Mr. Welper at the window. She looked at him; she also looked at the smoke which now had changed character and was rolling black and thick from the chimney of The Gay-Cat.

A brisk, chill wind was blowing from the West; there was a sound from the pine forest as though a rapid river were rushing through its viewless depth; squadrons of big white clouds moved across the blue sky; sunshine and shadow alternated swiftly; and waves splashed high on the dock.

Mrs. Wyvern turned to Donald Mayne, who was seated on the bunk-house door-step, cleaning a pistol:

"Where did you go this morning, Don?" she inquired.

"To Bonnet Bay," he said carelessly.

"Oh, to Bonnet House?"

"No, to Everly's."

"To Everly's," she repeated, surprised; "what for?"

"I telephoned the desk clerk at The Marquis-of-Granby to reserve a room for me to-morrow. I'm going up to Norfolk for a day or two."

He had told her the truth; not all of it. He had also telephoned to Frank Lane, Desk Clerk at the Marquis-of-Granby, that there was a big school of fish off Place-of-Swans, and that the fishing fleet should start immediately.

Moreover, he had instructed Mr. Lane to relay by radio the information to all fishermen interested.

In addition to this, on his way back to Tiger Island, he had signalled Bob Skaw on the cofferdam off The Old Man's, and had tossed a letter ashore to him as he passed at full speed in the launch.

The letter, addressed to John Lanier, merely said:

> "All set. Orders by radio. Fishing fleet to rendezvous off Place-of-Swans. No. B will command. Good luck and a big catch.
>
> "No. E."

These were the activities which had kept Mr. Mayne busy in the early hours of morning.

Seated on the step in the bunk-house door-way he poured a drop or two of Three-in-One onto a rag and gently applied it to the heavy black pistol clutched in his left hand.

Mrs. Wyvern's dark and pretty eyes watched him.

She said: "I suppose you know that you've got to be careful when you telephone from Everly's."

"Yes, I know."

"Because," she said, "this is a very sketchy business we're in, Don. I'm beginning to feel a little uneasy."

"Why?" he inquired, carelessly, not looking up.

"I don't know just why I feel the way I do, Don, but I'm growing rather anxious about this whole business," she repeated.

"What's on your mind?" asked Mayne, amiably.

"Nothing definite. But this Tiger Island enterprise is plainly a flivver. The silver we found won't pay our expenses. The gold they discovered this morning won't, either."

"The pines are worth something," remarked Mayne.

The girl shrugged her shoulders: "I suppose so. . . . But I'm wondering—"

"About what?"

"I don't quite know, Don. We haven't located the *Red Moon*. I don't know what ship we've found, but it's not the *Red Moon*. . . . It worries me. . . . And it looks to me as though John Lanier has found our ship off Place-of-Swans."

"He's found *some* ship; that's clear enough," said Mayne: "did he say anything about it when you and Sam went over this morning?"

"No. I told you all he said. He stalled. He's got something on Sam. That's another thing that bothers me; what has he got on Sam that scares him stiff?"

"Maybe it's a bluff."

"No. . . . And I tell you it enrages me, Don. There ought to be a hundred-thousand-dollar shake-down for me in that business. I've got the goods on that rat of a boy. I hold all the cards. I need the money. And, when I reach for it, Sam suddenly caves and lets me down! *Why?*"

Mayne was now rubbing his pistol with a bit of chamois; Helen Wyvern, leaning gracefully against a pine, looked down at him with an odd expression on her clever, handsome features.

"I wanted that money—for *you*," she said very calmly.

Mayne looked up, scowling: "Cut that out," he said. "I don't want your money."

"You don't seem to want me, either," she returned with a smile that seemed a little forced.

"I'm frank, Helen; I don't. I don't want any woman, or any woman's money."

She gazed intently at him where he sat. He now had begun to clean the other pistol.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he inquired politely.

"You've never even given me friendship, Don," she replied in her quiet, agreeable voice.

"Am I not always courteous and amiable to you?"

"I mentioned *friendship*," she repeated.

"I don't make friends easily."

"You haven't ever tried to make one out of me."

He slipped his pistol into the holster under his left arm.

"Some day," he said, "I'll do you a friendly turn if you'll let me. But I predict you won't."

"Try."

"Perhaps—when the time comes."

"Try," she repeated. "I'd make you a good—friend, Don."

He got up: "I don't make friends in the Forty Club. I don't need them; I don't want them. They cramp my style."

"In a way," she said, "you're right. There's no such thing as a square crook—except when the crook happens to be a woman—and in love."

Mayne laughed: "And when she's out of love?"

"I said *love*, Don. That happens only *once* to us. The rest doesn't mean anything."

"Well, what does 'love' mean?" he inquired with smiling disbelief.

"Everything."

"Yes, I've read about that—"

"Will you try me?"

"No, I won't."

"Please, Don—"

"Suppose I told you I'm going to get a job and live straight."

"That's all right," she said coolly.

"Would you?"

"I could—with you."

"On wages? Or a salary? I don't think you could or would, Helen."

"Yes."

"No," he said, "you couldn't stand it."

"I'll do anything you tell me to, Don."

He laughed: "All right. Go back to New York and live straight."

"Very well. When?"

"*Now!* There's Ray Wirt's launch ready to go to Bonnet House for booze. Get aboard and beat it."

"Alone?"

"Certainly."

"When will you come?"

"Never, probably."

"Isn't there a single chance, Don?"

"You can kid yourself that there's a chance and you can take it if you like," he said, smiling. "You can go to New York or any other place and live straight for the next three or four years. If you like it, let me know. But I tell you now, I never make a friend of a crook. And probably that is why I'm still out of jail."

The girl came slowly toward him, laid one hand lightly on his sleeve,

looked wistfully into his eyes:

"Men don't ever love," she said. "I don't care what you are or what you've done. Your record makes no difference to me. There isn't anything you may have done rotten enough or revolting enough to alter the way I feel toward you. . . . And you can be cruel to me. . . . Or you can go with another girl. . . . I'd suffer. . . . I'd try to kill the other woman. . . . But not you, Don. . . . And I'd never change, no matter what you did to me—if only you'd be with me—call me your girl—love me a little,—a very little,—once in a while—"

He said: "Take your hand off my sleeve."

Her slim hand dropped to her side.

"Now," he said, "you listen to me. Any friend I ever make must be clean, not dirty. Never mind how dirty I am; I don't want dirty friends; I want clean ones.

"You're crooked all through; I suppose you weren't born so; I fancy Joe Wyvern started you vamping and swindling and blackmailing. You've done about everything a crooked woman can do short of murder. . . . I don't want to fool with you. Dirty women disgust me. . . . I don't know that you ever could clean up. . . . Perhaps you could. You still wear your scapular. . . . Well, you know how it's done. Blood and tears, I guess. . . . I suppose nothing is impossible. . . . But if you try to clean up because you think there's anything in it for you—any reward—yes, even a cinch on the Hereafter—there's no use trying; the dirt won't come off."

The girl watched him as though fascinated. Her oval face had become pale under the dark mass of curly hair. Unconsciously the smooth, almost immature hands had come together in a slowly tightening clasp.

He said: "I'm telling you two sure things: the first is that you've got no chance with me as far as love is concerned: the second is, if you get into Ray's launch, *now*; then go on to New York and get a job, we might become friends. . . . But you won't do it," he added smilingly.

"Yes," she said, "I will. . . . Hold that boat, Don—" She turned and ran into the bunk-house.

"Launch ahoy!" shouted Mayne. "Wait a minute, Ray! Mrs. Wyvern wants to go over with you."

Wirt, standing up in his launch, waved one hand in understanding. Mayne, surprised and still incredulous, waited.

In a few moments Helen Wyvern came out with a satchel and a suit-case.

"I haven't enough money, Don," she said with an unfamiliar softness in her face—an odd sort of hesitation and embarrassment.

He took a sheaf of bills from a portfolio in his breast-pocket and laid them in her reluctant hand.

"I'm sorry," she murmured, reddening: "I'll repay you, Don. . . . And—

please be careful. . . . There's something wrong here. . . . Be careful of Sam. . . . And of Gene. . . . Will you let me write to you?"

"Yes, at the club. . . . Don't write here. I'm leaving very soon."

"I'm glad. . . . Don't forget me. . . . I'll try to—clean—myself."

"Good-luck," said Mayne with a skeptical but good humoured smile.

Wirt came up and took her luggage: "Goin' to Norfolk?" he asked. "All right. You goin' too, Mr. Mayne? No? Well, you'll have company, anyway, Mrs. Wyvern. Mr. Renton, he's a-goin' over to Bonnet's—"

"What!" said Mayne sharply, turning to look at the launch where she lay behind the bunk-house. And he saw Eugene Renton seated on the turtle deck.

"Don't quarrel with him. Be careful," murmured Mrs. Wyvern, as they followed Wirt with her luggage.

Mayne said nothing. Renton stood up as they approached the launch. Wirt stowed the luggage.

"Where are you going?" said Renton to Mrs. Wyvern, as Mayne handed her over the side.

She made no reply. Mayne said to Renton in a low voice: "Get out of that boat!"

Renton's right hand jerked toward his pocket, hesitated. Mayne laughed, reached down, and took him by the arm:

"Do you want me to beat you up and pull you ashore by your heels? Get out of that boat!"

Renton slowly obeyed. Every atom of colour had left his face. He walked a few paces across the wharf; stopped.

Mayne scarcely noticed him. "Tell Ray," he said to Helen, "what train you're returning on, so he can meet you at Bonnet House."

She understood him and nodded. Then, hastily, she turned her head. Wirt started the engine; the launch slid out into the blue water.

With his amiable but unbelieving smile, Mayne watched the receding boat for a few moments. The girl, crouched forward, did not look back, but sat with her face clasped between both hands. Her handkerchief was crushed under one of them. Twice he saw her wipe her face with it. Probably spray was coming aboard.

And now Mayne turned away; and saw Renton still standing there, not looking at him.

"Eugene," he said pleasantly, "don't try to leave this island until I leave. If you do I'll go after you and catch you. And when I catch you, Eugene, I'll punish you."

Renton's visage was damp and ghastly and his right hand twitched convulsively.

"No," said Mayne, laughing, "don't kid yourself you're a gun-fighter.

You're afraid. . . . If I lay dead you'd be afraid to plug me for fear I'd get up and knock your cowardly head off."

And he lit a cigarette and sauntered across the grass toward the Gay-Cat.

Renton's face was that of a damned man. Twice his shaking right hand fumbled and trembled under his left arm-pit; and fell away, shaking and jerking the handkerchief he had clutched.

Yet he had a fair mark—a man's back—not a difficult shot. . . . But, *if* he missed the first shot—

Renton's pallid face glistened with sweat now; and he was crying, his mouth loose and sagging:

"O God," he sobbed—"O God—" and suddenly began to run toward the woods as though distracted.

Mayne walked on into the open door of the Gay-Cat; Renton had drawn his pistol at last. But now the range was too far; his chance had vanished.

He stood a moment staring at the empty doorway, then his knees sagged, the pistol fell among the shore weeds; and Renton sank down clutching his distorted face in his fingers—bowed lower, lower, till the cool herbage brushed his cheeks.

In silence, and very, very slowly, the Little Death stirred deep among the weeds—so noislessly, so deliberately that not a stalk moved.

"Oh, God," whispered the crouching man, "let me kill him—"

Like lightning the moccasin struck his right cheek near the neck. The sheer shock of the blow knocked him backward so that he lost his balance and fell on his left side.

Still confused by the impact he got to his feet, feeling stunned and bewildered. Blood and venom dripped from his neck, wetting collar and shirt.

It was only when his eyes recovered their focus that he realised what had happened: something stirred in the weeds—a bloated fold as thick as a man's leg; and up from the lustreless, slowly pulsating heap he saw something white slowly rising and unclosing—the livid, widening maw of the Little Death.

Crashing physical reaction; cerebral chaos; thin noises that seemed to squirt out of swelling tissues. . . . The man trying to scream—trying to run—

In the doorway of the Gay-Cat he collided with Bert Mewling, pitched blindly into the crowded barroom, hit the table and fell onto a chair.

His face was blotched a blackish grey, his head already shapeless with the monstrous swelling.

Two lumber-jacks and Bert Mewling partly guided, partly carried him upstairs to Welper's bed. There they forced his jaws apart and poured in whiskey—surest accelerator of dissolution.

But one can not ligature the human head.

Downstairs Sam Potter sat with inert fingers still gripping the keys of the piano. The noise, the shouting, singing, trample of dancing feet was hushed.

Then, from the bedroom above, they heard the dying man screaming again.

Welper got up and shook Potter's shoulder:

"Beat the box, for God's sake!" he said hoarsely, "—go on, hit her a wallop!—"

Potter struck at the keys with both spread palms and the deafening dissonance drowned the horror breaking out above.

"Oh, here's to the ladies that I weep,
Bless their bones!
For I sewed 'em in a sack and they sleep
With Davy Jones;
Slim and tall, short and fat, it was love, love, love!
And a smack and a sack and a shot and a shove,
And a splash in the sea on a starboard tack;
The shadow of a shark—and they never came back—"

Harry Senix, on wavering legs, waved a slopping glass and piped out the refrain:

"Oh, I weep for their souls
And I weep for their bones
Where the green sea rolls
They're a-kissing Davy Jones!"

"Everybody!" bawled Mr. Potter, as a dreadful sound came faintly from above. And he struck at the piano as though he had gone insane.

Somebody got the black flag decorated with skull and bones, which Helen Wyvern had made. The Portuguese diver, Lorenzo, climbed to the table and began to flap it over the heads of the yelling crowd.

Then the door was flung open and Ray Wirt came lurching in, drenched with spray and carrying two great stone jugs.

A lumber-jack jerked out the stoppers; colourless blockade whiskey slopped into every glass, was drained, poured out again, blindly, running over table and floor.

Harry Senix tied a scarlet bandana around his dishevelled head and flourished the black flag:

"Come on," he yelled, "we'll clean out that bunch across the water! Come on! Let's go!"

Mayne sprang forward and dragged the man from the table:

"Shut up—shut up!" he said, shaking him—shaking the quick pistol out of his scarred and pasty fingers.

But the lumber-jacks were reeling to their feet and roaring a ferocious acquiescence.

Mayne forced his way to Welper:

“Do you understand what that dope, Senix, is starting!” he said sharply. “Pull your guns and stop it!”

But Welper, apparently drunk, dandled his head and leered at Mayne.

“Let ’em loose,” he said, “let ’em loose. ’S’all same to me!”

“All hands!” bellowed Potter, mounting his chair and stamping on the piano keys. “Break out your flag! All hands for Place-o’-Swans!”

In the seething, milling, drunken mass of men plunging toward the door, Mayne caught the glimmer of the sly, veiled eyes of Mr. Potter. Then he understood.

“All hands!” he roared, shouldering his way out into the red sunset light.

The doorway of the Gay-Cat vomited armed men, plunging, struggling, fighting their way toward the dock,—reeling, cursing, maddened men, tumbling into launches and sailboats, shouting, gesticulating, fiercely struggling to hoist sail or start engines.

Welper, Potter, and Dan Supple got into a small launch together. Supple, crouched in the engine-pit, was trying to start her; Welper forward and Potter in the stern kept off others with warning pistols.

That was the last that Mayne saw as he turned to run toward the bunk-house where his own launch lay.

And, as he started, he heard a vague and dreadful sound from the bedroom overhead. Then silence.

The victim of the Little Death lay dead at last on Mr. Welper’s bed.

All his pockets had been turned inside out.

NUMBER TWELVE
The Adventure in Loveless Land

I

Under the rough horse-play and drunken revelry at the Gay-Cat, a sinister and definite purpose was becoming more and more apparent.

Much scuffling, shouting, loud laughter accompanied the scramble for the boats. The boisterous and fantastic still masked the ferocity of intent; rapacity still grinned and cavorted; murder merely flickered in dull, drink-inflamed eyes.

Somebody had nailed the black flag with its skull and crossed thigh bones to the masthead of Ray Wirt's fishing boat, and the lumber-jacks and Bonnet Bay men were capering and yelling around it, firing their guns into the air.

Lorenzo, half-crazed by blockade whiskey, had found the fireworks brought from Bonnet House, and he was setting off chasers and Roman candles in every direction, imperilling everybody. Rockets whizzed along the water; bombs rose roaring into the sunset light, bursting in pale and ghastly radiance over sea and shore; the balls from the Roman candles were mere ghosts of colours exploding in showers of sickly sparks. Against the low floating sun the pines of Tiger Island stood gigantic and black; and the boats and men, too, were black as shadows dancing on a screen.

Lumbermen, baymen, divers, dredgers, had decked themselves in the garish finery used in former orgies at the Gay-Cat; red shirts, red sashes, red bandanas tied askew over weather-beaten brows, did duty again.

They had learned the songs of the Forty Club; they sang "Old Stede Bonnet" and "Davy Jones;" they crowded the rocking sailboats and launches, laughing, scuffling, filling the air with the random roaring of intoxication. And, underneath, always smouldered their ultimate rage and purpose.

Already the sinister, which had lurked in abeyance, began to burn and show a redder glimmer in their eyes.

In the lurid light of sunset, Ray Wirt set a megaphone to his distorted mouth and his voice checked and dominated the tumult.

"Ahoy, you Bonnet Bay men!" he shouted; "they's a mint o' gold on Place-o'-Swans! What you-all aimin' to do about it?"

At that the shrill yelling which had partly ceased for a moment died out utterly. In comparative stillness, amid the lap of wave and creak of rocking craft, a metallic clang sounded distinctly. Somebody was loading the magazine of a rifle.

Instantly, all around, the dry clink-clank rattle of weapons being loaded broke out on every boat.

"They got our ship!" cried Harry Senix shrilly. "Her belly's full o' gold an' they're a-diggin' the very guts out of her! Are we goin' to get ours?"

Mr. Samuel Potter arose from the engine-pit of the launch:

"Let's go!" he bellowed. "Who's got the guts to go over and clean out John Lanier's bunch on Place-of-Swans!"

"Listen!" yelled Dan Supple, standing between Welper and Potter; "every fella here can stuff his pants full of gold if he ever gets into that cofferdam!"

In the silence an indescribable torrent of exclamations burst from Lorenzo. His two assistants seized the mast of their sailboat, stepped it, hoisted sail amid a confusion of high-pitched cries. Everywhere aboard the rocking boats sails went up, booms swung wide; the confusion of voices swelled to a jangling shout.

The sinking sun flashed crimson on mast and sail and hull as the boats, getting under way, crept out of the shadow of Tiger Island. Red shirts, red bandanas gleamed; red sunset light glinted on rifle and shotgun; the wild shouts became a sustained and yelling uproar; boats fouled; were fended off, fought clear with curses and blows from pole and oar; the staccato racket of launches echoed over the water, drink-crazed men began to shoot at the distant, sunlit islands toward which they were headed; futile volleys from rifle and shotgun rattled at random over the water; the black flag, made by Helen Wyvern, flapped broadly and rippled out from the masthead of Ray Wirt's fishing boat.

On board Mr. Welper's launch Dan Supple, squatted in the engine-pit, steered wide of the grotesquely crowding and heterogeneous fleet of small craft:

"Let 'em do the dirty work," he muttered to Mr. Potter, "and we'll pick up what we can on our way to False Cape."

Mr. Welper, extended flat on his stomach on the turtle deck forward, said over his shoulder to Potter: "I didn't see Donald after he tried to stop the stampede to Place-of-Swans."

"Me neither," added Supple, fussing over his engine. "I guess he thinks the beans is spilled and we're headed for Sing-Sing, sure."

"If he smelled a rat I dunno," remarked Mr. Potter; "—but there was rats to smell a-plenty."

Supple set aside his oil can and crouched, one grimy hand on the tiller:

"That's kinda funny, his moll startin' for Norfolk. Looks like Providence was warnin' her to beat it. . . . Maybe Don is fixin' to folla her, now that the beans is spilled."

"M—m, yes," said Mr. Welper thoughtfully; "it's just as well that Nellie

left us. M—m, yes; speaking in all reverence, Dan, I consider her escape a direct intervention of m—m—of that Providence which so mercifully—”

“Barney!” interrupted Mr. Potter.

“Yes, Sam?”

“You got those rockets handy?”

“Yes; here in two bundles under my overcoat.”

“One bundle of red ones and one of green?”

“All safe and dry, right here, Sam.”

“We send up three red and two green for the *Mandril’s* boat to come ashore for us?” inquired Supple.

“Quite right, Dan. . . . The wind’s going down with the sun,” he added, squinting at the ragged, bellying line of sailboats to starboard, standing in for Place-of-Swans.

Beyond, like skirmishers, three launches were well out on the sunset sea, headed for Place-of-Swans.

“Slow down and circle, Dan,” said Mr. Welper. “We don’t want to mix in with the dirty work.”

Potter said: “It’s going to be some mix-up, what with those drunken lumber-jacks and that bunch of Bonnet Bay crackers full of bootleg. . . . I guess there’ll be some hog-killin’, Barney.”

“If it be the will of the Almighty,” said Mr. Welper piously, “everything is in the hands of an all powerful Providence. . . . We must have trust and faith, Sam. . . . M—m, yes, we must hope for the best with faith and resignation. . . . I—ah—venture to hope that John Lanier is, m—m, shortly to be removed, so to speak, from among those present at the m—m,—the banquet of life. . . . Yes, Sam, I have faith in John’s imminent and—ah—violent demise. . . . *Not*, Sam, that I speak in any spirit of revenge for, m—m, for injury unjustly done to me by him and that damned gay-cat of his. No, Sam, I would wish him a full life and a happy end. I would wish him all the earthly satisfaction that the—ah—the poet includes in the stanza:

‘From the banquet of Life
Rise a satisfied guest,
Thank the Lord of the feast
And in peace go to rest!’ ”

Supple, steering in a wide circle, grinned:

“He’ll get his diff’runt, I guess,” he remarked. . . . “An’ you can’t tell what them drunken bums from Bonnet’s will do to his girl, neither.”

“I deplore it,” murmured Mr. Welper, “but I fear it is destined to be. Violence, Dan, begets violence; wrong Dan, starts ripples which reach to the—m—m—the uttermost ends of the earth. . . . Yes, Dan, our every action begets,

m—m, consequences which, like ripples, spread—ah—indefinitely. . . . When John's girl frisked me in the Forty Club, consequences were inevitable. . . . She's going to experience a few this evening—God willing," he added piously.

His sly eyes stole out toward the grotesque fleet standing in for Place-of-Swans.

"It's going to be rough on a woman when that gang lands," said Mr. Potter, following his glance.

"Sam," said Mr. Welper solemnly, "the wicked shall be utterly cut off . . . When those rough-necks get ashore and begin the party, I want Dan to take the launch in close.

"The stuff they took from us on False Cape must be piled up with their stuff. When the boys locate it, we'll go ashore with three sacks apiece. . . . That's all we could have time to drag across False Cape with safety."

Potter, watching Place-of-Swans through the marine glasses, handed them to Welper:

"Looks quiet at Place-of-Swans," he remarked; "nobody on the cofferdam, nobody on the scows, no dredging, no boats out."

After a few moments: "And no smoke coming from the chimneys," observed Mr. Welper; "did you notice that, Sam?"

The last level rays of the sun flooded the distant house with a rosy light. The western window-panes glittered as though flames illuminated them from within. The gilded sea-horse burned in the sky like a golden coal of fire.

"That's a still looking place," said Welper.

"A little too quiet," nodded Potter.

"It looks deserted, in fact," continued Welper.

"It looks suspicious," said Mr. Potter with emphasis.

Welper turned and looked at the motley fleet of boats standing in under a slack and fitful wind for Place-of-Swans.

"If any people are at Place-of-Swans," he said, "they've seen that bunch making for them. . . . John Lanier is no fool. . . . You know what I think, Sam? I think John, and the kid brother, and their three crackers know what's coming. And I think they locked up, took what gold they had, took their women, and beat it for civilisation."

Mr. Welper was partly right and partly wrong.

An hour before the rim of the declining sun had touched the waste of western waters. Donald Mayne's launch, rushing in between Lantern Island and Old Inlet, and passing the deserted blinds on Crescent Bar, had landed on Red Moon Island just north-east of Loveless Land.

As John Lanier came down to the little wharf, Mayne, tying his launch, shouted up to him:

"Call your men in from Star Shoal and the cofferdam! The Tiger Island

gang is coming over to clean you out!”

Lanier turned and ran for the north dock, picked up the megaphone, hailed Old Jake on the dredging scow:

“Bring the men ashore, Jake!” he shouted; “we’re going to have trouble with the Tiger Island gang! Bring in what gold you have sifted out, and leave everything except your rifles!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” bellowed Old Jake.

Dirck appeared, running down to the dock, rather white with excitement. Maddaleen came more leisurely behind her brother.

“Donald Mayne has just arrived,” said Lanier coolly. “He’s mooring his launch at the south dock. . . . It seems that the Tiger Island gang is coming over here.”

There was a brief silence; all three looked across the sunset water. Far away, against the northwest, the pines of Tiger Island looked black along the horizon.

“Well?” asked the girl quietly.

“Probably,” said Lanier, “the gold they discovered in the silt on that raft of ours that broke away has started this business.”

Mayne came up, rifle in hand, and took off his hat politely.

Lanier presented him to Maddaleen, who offered her hand with smiling composure. Then he shook hands with Dirck:

“I think it’s going to be all right,” he said. “Twenty of our men are on their way here from Norfolk. . . . We may have to stand off the Tiger Island crowd for a while. There are seven of us, aren’t there?”

“Eight,” said Maddaleen.

Lanier’s eyes met hers: “We are not going to need you on the firing line, I think,” he said . . . “How much time have we, Don?”

They all turned instinctively to look at Tiger Island. At that instant Harry Senix started shooting his fireworks at random. The multi-coloured glare was visible against the pines.

“Welper engineered this business deliberately,” said Mayne to Lanier. “Something has aroused his suspicions. I think that he and Sam Potter mean to disappear under cover of the general tumult. Their tramp steamer has arrived off False Cape, as you know,—*The Mandril*. I think they mean to signal her to-night.”

“Three red and two green rockets,” nodded Lanier. He turned to Maddaleen: “That’s quite all right,” he said with a faint smile; “all the officers and half *The Mandril’s* crew are our people.” And again, to Mayne: “We mustn’t lose Dan Supple, or Renton, or Senix, or Mrs. Wyvern.”

“Dan goes with Welper and Potter,” said Mayne. “Harry Senix is with the gang that is coming here. . . . Renton was bitten by a moccasin this afternoon.

He died just as I left."

Lanier said: "That's rather a horrible ending. . . . Where is Mrs. Wyvern?"

"Gone to Norfolk on her way to New York."

"Do you know where to get her, Don?"

"Yes—if we want her."

"Of course we want her!"

"I'm not certain. . . . But probably we shall want her," admitted Mayne quietly. "You can leave that safely to me, John."

Lanier cast a sharp, hard glance across the water, which was now tinted scarlet.

"There are seven of us," he said, "to stand off that crowd. There are four servants in the house, all women. I think, Maddaleen, that your cook had better draw the fires. Then I'd like to have you take all the servants over to Loveless Land and stay in the Old Manse until the affair is over."

"I don't want to stay there," she said, reddening. "I can use a rifle. So can my servants. They're all North Carolina girls. They know how to shoot. Let us stay here."

"I want you to go to Loveless Land," repeated Lanier. "I want you to take five rifles there from the gun-room, and plenty of ammunition. Five women who can use rifles can hold the Old Manse against five hundred rough-necks from Tiger—"

Old Jake and his three men, Bob Skaw, Sid Warnock and Chester Gray, came clumping up from the wharf below. Very quietly Lanier explained the crisis.

"Jake," he added, "Miss Loveless and the other women are going over to the Old Manse. I want you and Warnock and Gray and Skaw to ferry them over. There's a good well in the old cellar, I understand."

"Yas, sir."

"All right. Take a rope and bucket. Take plenty of provisions, although they won't be needed because this affair is not going to last very long. . . . And, Jake?"

"Yas, sir."

"You and Chester and Sid will take every sack of gold in the cellar over to the Old Manse."

"Yas, sir."

"And this is our plan," continued Lanier, quietly lighting a cigarette: "we seven men are going to try to hold the house against assault until twenty of my own men arrive from Norfolk. . . . That sounds rather easy, doesn't it?"

"Unh," grunted Bob Skaw, with a shadow of a grin on his hard jaws, "I reckon the Bonnet Bay scum must be right smart full o' joyful juice to come botherin' folk on Place-o'-Swans."

"Yes," said Mayne, "they are very full of the joyful juice, Bob. Also, they have sifted the silt on the raft that drifted away last night. . . . And between bootleg juice and Aztec gold they're a mean crowd to argue with."

"A sober man is meaner. He shoots straighter," remarked Captain Winch gravely.

There was a little subdued laughter.

"All right," said Lanier cheerfully; "will you start things, Maddaleen? All right, Captain Jake. Now, Dirck, we'd better go to the gun-room. . . . Don, you'll keep watch with your marine glasses, won't you?"

"I will," said Mayne.

He followed the others into the house.

"The north hallway window upstairs, Mr. Mayne," said Maddaleen, pleasantly.

He mounted the stairway, drew a chair to the window, seated himself, and adjusted his binoculars.

After a moment: "Well, I'll be shot!" he muttered, "they're all as crazy as a flock of loons!"

Through his glasses the grotesque fleet was visible under the lee of Tiger Island. Sails were being hoisted, launches started; but what caught and held his disgusted gaze was the black flag with its skull and bones, flapping from the masthead of Ray Wirt's sailboat.

It seemed too ridiculous to be anything except a farce—the broadest of burlesque and most reckless of horse-play.

Only he knew the men and knew that they were murderously drunk: otherwise his amusement had been more genuine.

He watched the slow getting under way, the scuffling, the interference and collision, the launches rushing to and fro, circling the craft, the lagging sails of which now felt waning and capricious breezes from the westward.

Presently he picked up Welper's launch, veering out widely to the eastward.

"The fox," he thought. "If there are to be pickings he'll hang around. Then he'll make for False Cape and send up his comic rockets. . . . We've got him; we have got Sam Potter, too; and Dan Supple." . . . He called down to John Lanier with careless levity:

"The three-ring circus is afloat and heading this way."

"There isn't much wind, is there?" inquired Lanier.

"Not much."

"All right. . . . Which do you prefer, Don, a 45-70 or a 30-30?"

"I'm not particular," replied Mayne politely.

Lanier stepped to the window of the gun-room and gazed silently across the sunset water. Out of the northern distance, enveloped in a pinkish light,

sailed Mr. Welper's armada, moving straight southward across a sea of rose and gold.

"Coming on in line-of-battle," he remarked to Dirck, amid the clatter of ejectors which the boy was testing on every rifle.

"Do you know what I think, Lanier?" said Dirck eagerly, yet with a certain new and becoming modesty in voice and attitude.

"What's that, Dirck?"

"I don't know, but it seems to me that if you and Mr. Mayne and I went out to meet them in our big power-boat—I mean *The Moccasin*—we could crumple up those sailboats. *The Moccasin* is all steel, is very powerful and she has a reinforced steel prow. What do you think?"

Lanier slammed in the bolt of the 30-30, locked it, lifted his head and looked at the distant line of sails.

After a moment's silence: "Dirck, that was spoken like an Admiral. I think it worth trying. I think we can throw the fear of God into their sailing-craft before they get within rifle-range of Place-of-Swans. Let me consult Donald Mayne—"

He called for the latter, who came downstairs, his telescope under one arm, the marine glasses under the other.

When Mayne heard the suggestion he nodded:

"Yes, but they have four launches. It wouldn't do to have them drive in here while we are at sea."

"*The Moccasin* is faster than anything they have except their big power-boat," insisted Dirck.

"Welper and Sam Potter are in that," said Mayne. "If we raise the deuce with their sailboats I think Welper will run for False Cape. . . . I believe it's worth trying a dash at them, John."

"All right. Are all the rifles in good shape, Dirck?"

"Everything is ship-shape; the proper ammunition is in boxes beside each rifle."

"Where is *The Moccasin*?"

"At the south dock, padlocked."

"Well, I wish you'd take three rifles of the same calibre, and plenty of ammunition, and wait for us in *The Moccasin*. . . . Is the key in the back door?"

"Yes."

"All right. Run down and see how the men are getting on in the cellar."

Dirck hurried out. Mayne said to Lanier: "Bullets are bullets. High-powered rifles can raise hell with us—if they've got them."

"Have they?"

"I didn't see any and I looked. But Welper is such a fox one never can be sure that what he lets you notice is all there is to see. . . . I'm only wondering

about the women, if anything happens to us—”

“Jake and his men can stand off those drunken thugs until our people arrive from Norfolk,” said Lanier. . . . “If we go out to meet them maybe we can save this house from being riddled—perhaps set on fire. I think we had better have a try at them.”

“It appeals to me,” said Mayne, levelling his telescope. Presently he said: “Welper’s launch is far out to the eastward, marking time. . . . Three other small launches are cutting circles around the fleet.”

“Is it coming on?”

“Very slowly. The wind is light and comes in puffs. . . . Some of the boats are being rowed. . . . It’s too deep to pole, I suppose. . . . I wonder if those drunken bums realise that they’re actually committing an act of piracy. . . . Helen Wyvern made that black flag for one of their drunken parties, when they all rigged up in cheap finery and sang the Forty Club songs. . . . But this is no joke. They’re sailing under the Skull-and-Bones. That is no baymen’s feud. It’s not merely robbery under arms. It’s piracy.”

“Is their black flag still flying?” inquired Lanier, sorting pistol clips.

“Flapping from the masthead of Ray Wirt’s fishing smack.”

“That confirms my belief,” remarked Lanier: “Barney Welper never will come in under that flag, whether it’s hoisted in jest or earnest.”

“If that gang lands, storms this house, and kills us or drives us off, *then* Welper will slip in, pick up what he can, and beat it for False Cape. Not otherwise, Don. . . . Here’s ammunition for your pistols. . . . Did Dirck take our rifles and cartridges?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Go down to the dock and see that everything is ship-shape. I’ll be along in a moment.”

As Mayne went out carrying his night-glasses and a sackful of clips, he encountered Miss Loveless entering the house by the rear door. She smiled and passed on and came leisurely and silently into the gun-room.

Lanier, stuffing the pockets of his Norfolk with clips, looked over his shoulder, then turned around.

“Everything is in on Loveless Land—the servants, all our gold, ammunition, and provisions.”

“Is the well all right?”

“Jake’s men are dipping it out.”

There was a pause; the girl laughed:

“We cut down a sapling and nailed our house-flag to it. Our ensign is flying over the Old Manse.”

“Fine,” he said smilingly; “now we’d better go.”

The girl’s smile faded: “Let me remain here with you, please. . . . I prefer

to be where—where my brother is."

"He won't be here. He and Donald Mayne and I are going out in *The Moccasin* to take a look at that Tiger Island gang."

That this news was unwelcome, and that it astonished her and made her afraid was visible in the girl's paling face.

She said with an effort: "Is that what must be done, Mr. Lanier?"

"I think it should be done."

She remained silent so long that he said finally: "Dirck really need not go. Donald and I can do all that is necessary—"

Her deep, swift flush silenced him. She said:

"If you said such a thing to Dirck he'd never forgive you. . . . My brother will go, of course."

They walked slowly to the rear door together. Lanier drew out the key, waited for her to pass out.

As she did not move he looked at her with a questioning smile.

"I want to go out in *The Moccasin* with my brother," she said. "I can shoot, as you know."

"Four are too many."

"Why?"

"Four in *The Moccasin* would offer too good a target," he said patiently.

She continued to gaze at him; her mouth began to quiver a very little.

"I asked to go because I—I wish to be with—with—*you*," she said in a ghost of a voice. . . . "And that is the reason—John Lanier."

"That is a strange reason," he said unsteadily. "Why do you desire to be with me?"

"It would be very strange if I did not wish to be with you—in this hour—John Lanier—"

She turned sharply, brushed her eyes with her fingers, rested a moment against the wall with head bowed. In a stifled voice: "I'm sorry. . . . I'll do what you wish."

Behind her she felt him close to her, became rigid as his arms encircled her. There was a silence; then her slender body slowly relaxed until her head, reversed, lay back upon his shoulder.

Her eyes were closed and her lashes wet when he kissed the upturned lips.

That was all: she straightened herself, withdrew herself gently, stepped across the threshold out into the fading sunset light.

He followed, locked the rear door from outside.

"We'll run you over to Loveless Land first," he said.

Her hand touched his and one of her fingers linked itself with his as they walked together down to the dock where *The Moccasin* lay.

"All set!" cried Dirck from the engine pit. "Sis, we're going out to give

them a razzle!"

The girl leaned down over the dock: "I want you to promise me to do everything that Mr. Lanier tells you to do," she said. "He is in command; remember, Dirck."

"Yes, I will," said the boy seriously. Then: "We'll be all right, Sis. Don't waste a second's worry over us."

Lanier helped her over the side and jumped down to the deck. *The Moccasin* backed off, turned, darted away across the channel toward the little, rickety wharf on Loveless Land, where an armed man stood guard.

Before the launch had stopped, Maddaleen, resting one hand on Lanier's shoulder, sprang ashore.

Then she turned, looked at her brother, looked at Mayne, then looked at Lanier with all the virgin soul of her in her eyes.

"Au revoir! Good-luck," she said briefly.

The Moccasin backed away, swung east, rushed seaward through the sombre, smouldering light.

When she rounded Red Moon and was out of sight, the girl turned away toward the Old Manse, moving erect, but as though slightly fatigued.

As *The Moccasin* rounded Red Moon Island, her crew caught sight of the Tiger Island fleet standing well in toward Place-of-Swans—a long, straggling line of craft under lagging sail and oar and pole, around which formation three noisy launches circled in frantic effort to stimulate them to speedier activity.

Ray Wirt's patched-up smack led the fleet, the black flag flapping at her peak.

Over the water a dull ruddy light partly revealed and partly veiled objects afloat. It was evident, at first, that the Tiger Island fleet had not noticed *The Moccasin*. Probably nobody expected any such onslaught from Place-of-Swans. Undoubtedly the eyes of the marauders were all turned on Red Moon Island and on the cofferdam. In fact, already several boats were headed toward the cofferdam and the barges anchored there.

However, from away to the eastward, Mr. Welper presently discovered *The Moccasin*. But he was too far distant for the fleet to hear his alarming hails; and besides, what wind stirred blew fitfully from the west. It was only when they began to fire their guns from Welper's launch that the fleet's wandering attention was brought to bear upon surrounding waters.

But already *The Moccasin* was rushing down on them through the red dusk when Ray Wirt's first yell of warning alarmed the motley mariners of Tiger Island.

Then, bang! bang! bang! spoke their rifles, shotguns, and pistols; and then came a tumult of shouting from every boat as *The Moccasin*, at full speed,

struck Wirt's old smack abaft the stern, crashed into the bow of the boat beyond, staggered, backed, pivoted, rushed upon the next boat and cut her almost in two.

Wirt's smack had heeled over, spilled out her crew, rifles and all, and they were splashing and floundering and cursing in five feet of horribly cold water, and striving to climb up upon the wrecked smack.

The second boat, torn open, had settled swiftly; her crew, chin deep, rolled drunken and terrified eyes at *The Moccasin*. The third boat, on her beam ends, was being frantically clawed at by her wading or swimming crew.

One of the launches had turned tail and was already disappearing into the ruddy murk of evening; the other three, firing frenziedly, were running parallel to *The Moccasin*, which was now going like a runaway horse and creating havoc among the sailboats.

And now, from every side rifle and shotgun blazed at *The Moccasin*; a hail of buckshot and soft-nosed bullets saluted her.

Lanier, steering and lying prone in the engine-pit, passed tarred waste and oakum to Dirck with his free hand, and the boy stuffed the bullet-holes where water squirted through. Mayne, flat on his belly in a mess of bilge and oil, ran the engine and took Lanier's orders as the latter ventured to peer out over the gunwales.

But the increasing storm of lead could no longer be endured; that was evident to everybody. There were two bullet holes in Lanier's cap when he lowered his head and gave orders to Mayne to back out of the mess.

As *The Moccasin* won free, and was turning, she ran foul of a launch, and onto the deck, forward, and into the engine-pit, jumped four dark, raging and cursing shapes with the dull glint of knife and pistol playing among them.

Lanier, on his knees, swung his rifle and knocked the Portuguese diver overboard; Mayne and Dirck fired upward into the faces of the men above them.

Two fell overboard; the remaining man, Harry Senix, stood swaying and screaming forward, gouts of blood squirting from his belly, white face and hands striped with it—and all the while firing a wavering pistol blindly, without aim, into the engine-pit of *The Moccasin*.

"You dirty squealer!" he shrieked at Lanier, "I'll do your business for you now, by God!—"

A lurch of the launch sent him sprawling across the turtle deck; his pistol exploded, fell into the sea; and Senix rolled as the launch rolled and fell with a sodden thud across the gunwales.

His scarred hands still clawed at space; his deathly features were convulsed.

For a little while he hung there, balanced, his mouth open, and his eyes,

too. Then he shrank, collapsed; and, as *The Moccasin* rushed through gathering darkness, the bow-wave washed the corpse overboard.

After a little while: “Is anybody hurt?” demanded Lanier.

“All safe here,” replied Mayne.

“Nothing to mention,” said Dirck, in a voice which trembled with the pride and joy within him.

“Are you hit?” inquired Lanier sharply. “Take the helm, Don!”

He crawled over to Dirck, played his torch over him: “You got it in the left arm. . . . Wait a moment—”

But the bone was intact under the nasty, tearing track of a bullet; and, when *The Moccasin* was out of range, Lanier washed and bandaged the wound.

It was the moment of the boy’s life. No wealth, no honours offered, ever could have bought such a moment from him. He felt weak with loss of blood, a little dazed by the bullet’s shock. But never had any boy known such supreme happiness.

“It’s nothing,” he said. He was utterly content with that perfect enjoyment of youth that worships the picturesque and would give life itself to figure as the central interest in any dramatic situation.

And when Lanier said simply: “You’ve all the nerve you need, old chap; I want no better man in a scrap,” Dirck tasted all that all healthy youth was born to dream of, to long for.

Lanier rose from the pit, seated himself in the stern, and took the tiller. The engine was racing; Mayne went forward and lay flat on deck, rifle in hand.

“Take a shot at those boats around the cofferdam,” said Lanier.

Mayne fired; flashes came from cofferdam and barge and bullets whanged and whined overhead until *The Moccasin* was out of range.

Astern it was difficult to make out the Tiger Island fleet,—a few blots here and there.

“Don’t you think we’d better make another dash at them?” said Dirck, trying to speak modestly.

“That’s a blood-thirsty young gentleman,” said Lanier to Mayne, with a short laugh. And, to Dirck: “I think they’re done for, old chap. I don’t think they’ll try to land on Place-of-Swans, now. They’ll all flock around the cofferdam and try to loot it, but it won’t pay them—”

From across the water came the reports of rifles.

“By jove,” said Lanier, “they *have* landed, and our people are firing on them from the Old Manse!”

He turned the launch instantly, heading for Red Moon Island. But it was only when *The Moccasin* was close in shore that its crew made out four boats rowing hastily away.

Mayne opened fire on them; Dirck contrived to use his rifle, resting it on

the port gunwale; but the hostile craft were clearly anxious to get away, and very soon became lost in the thickening darkness.

And now, as *The Moccasin* rounded Red Moon Island and passed in between it and Loveless Land, an exclamation from Donald Mayne drew Lanier's attention.

Away to the eastward, over the sea-dunes by Old Inlet, a rocket soared up into the night sky and burst, blood-red. Another followed; another; then a fourth rocket exploded in a shower of green stars; and a second followed, also green.

"Well," drawled Mayne, "what do you know about that, John?"

"The old fox," said Lanier. "That's what I thought he'd do, Donnie. . . . He's done for, now. . . . Barney Welper has run his race. So has Sam Potter. And Dan Supple. . . . And Renton is dead—and Harry Senix. . . . At seven o'clock to-night the Forty Club was pulled. . . . Every crook in it is under lock and key at this moment. . . . And elsewhere, too—in Rio, in San Francisco, in London, Paris, Brussels—what a net-haul, Don!"

After a silence: "Well," he said with a sigh, "we've been years at it, and it's over—it's finished to-night. . . . Civilisation is likely to have a respite. . . . But nothing more than that, Don. . . . If all the crooks on earth were gathered in at a given moment, in ten years they'd be as numerous as ever. . . . Perhaps even cleverer than ever. . . . God knows. . . . It's a never-ending fight. . . . How are you feeling, Dirck?"

"Fine!"

"We'll fix you up. Your sister will see to you. Donnie, what's that over yonder?—over there beyond the Old Man's?"

"That's a big power boat," said Mayne, presently, "coming like the deuce."

Lanier said sharply: "*They* haven't any such boat, have they?"

Dirck now made her out: "It's the big Revenue power boat from Norfolk," he said.

"Signal her, Don," said Lanier.

Mayne stood up, levelled his electric torch, and flashed the International Police Signal.

Instantly from the big launch the answering signal sparkled.

As she altered her course and sped in nearer, Lanier hailed her.

"Your men from Norfolk, Mr. Lanier," came the reply across the water.

"All right," shouted Lanier. "Welper and Potter are on their way to *The Mandril*. They're canned. Senix and Renton are dead. Mayne knows where to find the Wyvern woman. But there's a rough gang from Tiger Island loafing around these waters. You might as well round them and run them in to Norfolk. Sweep up between here and Tiger Island, due north."

"Aye, aye, Sir!"

“Head her in toward Loveless Land,” said Donald Mayne. “There’s somebody down on the dock there with a lantern. . . . I think it’s your sister,” he added to Dirck.

It was. When she saw her brother standing on deck with his left arm in an extemporised sling, she handed the lantern to Lanier; Mayne fended off the launch as it slowed down; Maddaleen sprang lightly to the deck:

“What’s the matter, Dirck?”

“Scratched,” he said carelessly, trying to extirpate every trace of pride from his voice.

The girl laid one hand tenderly on her brother’s shoulder and turned to Lanier with the question in her eyes.

“We’ll take him over to the house and sterilise it,” said Lanier. “I think it is not a mortal injury,” he added, smiling at Dirck.

The boy laughed boisterously. Laughter is the safety-valve at such moments, and it relieved Dirck enormously.

“You had a good time out yon, I reckon,” said Old Jake, grim in his envy and disappointment. “We had no excitement here—just fired a shot or two at four of ’em off Red Moon. . . . Next time,” he added almost savagely, “you got to take *me*, Mr. Lanier.”

“I promise,” said Lanier, laughing.

“I hope,” said Old Jake, resentfully, “you weren’t mean enough to shoot ’em all. There’s few left, I hope.”

“Plenty, Captain Jake. They may cool their heels in Norfolk jail a while, but they’ll be out again sometime, and then you can square it with Bert Mewling and Ray Wirt if you like.”

To Maddaleen he said: “It’s really all over. Your servants can come back to the house now.” And again to Jake: “Your men had better fetch back our gold at once. If you’ll jump in you can take *The Moccasin* back for them.”

Old Jake got in and sat forward, still thoroughly disgusted with his luck.

To Dirck, Mayne said: “I’m a pretty good surgeon. I’ll fix you up if you like.”

“Thanks,” said the boy, “I’d be delighted.” He was having a wonderful time.

“Everything you’ll need is on the top shelf of the emergency locker in your bathroom,” said his sister. She added, to Mayne, “We keep first-aid material. There are no physicians nearer than Norfolk.”

When the launch stopped at the dock, Mayne took the rear-door key from Lanier, flashed his torch, and aided the boy to land. Then Lanier sprang ashore and, with rather a mischievous impulse, bent over and lifted the girl to the wharf.

“You didn’t have to do that!” she said indignantly. Then, seeing the

expression on his face, she laughed, accepted his arm, and fell into step beside him; and in silence they walked across the grass to the rear door.

Mayne and Dirck already had gone in; the door swung open.

"Dirck isn't seriously hurt; it's a very slight flesh-wound," said Lanier.

"I'll run up and look at him. . . . And I'll come back," said Maddaleen, naïvely. It was her instinct that spoke, not her brain, which had not had time to consider the paramount instinct of her new love—the absolute necessity of being alone with the beloved.

Lanier paced the grass. After interminable minutes his lady-love came downstairs to the back door.

She wore no hat—another miracle of instinct.

They seemed to know where to go—further marvellous display of blind intuition.

In the little stone summer-house they seated themselves. After a few moments she gave him her hands. Her youthful heart was very full; very tremulous.

"Do you remember our first evening here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You knew I was in love with you then?"

"Yes."

"Were you, too?" he asked in a voice unsteady with lover's hopes and masculine stupidity.

"No."

"Oh."

The girl's hands trembled in his.

". . . But I am—now," she said. . . . After a long while she turned her head and gave him her lips.

Mayne came out on the front porch:

"Where are you, John?" he called.

"Here!" replied Lanier, irritated.

"Oh. Well, Dirck's all right. I put him to bed and he's asleep—" walking across the grass toward the summer-house whence Lanier's voice had proceeded.

"May I tell Don?" he whispered. "He's my closest friend."

"Yes, dearest, if you wish."

And, when Mayne walked up: "Donnie, Miss Loveless has just promised to marry me. . . . And I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my feet. . . . Please tell her I'm respectable."

Coming out of a clear sky, the affair staggered Mr. Mayne, but he got away

with it very creditably; his cordiality was genuine and acceptable; he lingered exactly long enough; he took his departure gracefully and with dignity.

As he was going, Lanier said: “By the way, Don, don’t let the Wyvern woman get away. . . . You say you know where you can find her?”

“Yes—if I want her.”

“What do you mean? Of course we want her.”

“I—am not sure,” murmured Mayne as he turned away in darkness.

END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.
Inconsistency in accents has been retained.
The correct spelling of l’Ollonois vs l’Olonnois is unknown.
There was no section II in *Number Six, The Adventure at Place-of-Swans*.

[The end of *The Mystery Lady* by Robert W. Chambers]