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SINISTER ISLAND

C. BERNARD RUTLEY

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SINISTER ISLAND

BY

C. BERNARD RUTLEY

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Illustrated by D. L. Mays

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Contents

CHAP.	Page
I. A MESSENGER OF FATE	9
II. THE MYSTERIOUS PACKET	16
III. MIDNIGHT VISITORS	24
IV. STRANGE FOOTPRINTS	34
V. KIDNAPPED	45
VI. THE HOUSE OF HORROR	59
VII. JILL	73
VIII. THE BLACK PIRATE	86
IX. ALLIES	95
X. A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY	107
XI. CASTAWAYS	122
XII. SINISTER ISLAND	131
XIII. TERROR OF THE NIGHT	143
XIV. SEA TREASURE	154
XV. GONE WITHOUT TRACE	167
XVI. THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND	176
XVII. ALONE	186
XVIII. A MESSAGE INTO SPACE	196
XIX. THE THOUSANDTH CHANCE	207

Illustrations

	Facing Page
A HUSH FELL UPON THE PASSENGERS	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“NOW THEN, WHERE’S THAT MAP?”	<u>48</u>
DAWN SUDDENLY LEFT HER SIDE	<u>160</u>
PANIC!	<u>192</u>

CHAPTER I

A Messenger of Fate

The March evening was drawing in, and a slight mist was hanging over land and sea, as Dawn Cheverill drove home along the fenland road. Dawn was an orphan, having, at the age of five, lost both her parents in an aeroplane accident, and since then she had been brought up by the man who had been her father's greatest friend. Stanford Wright, Uncle Stan as Dawn called him, was a well-known yachtsman, and he had imbued Dawn with his own love of deep waters.

The girl looked anxiously seaward, but the weather showed no signs of improving. Dash the mist! For three days it had persisted, and she was aching to try out the cutter which Uncle Stan had given her on her nineteenth birthday only the day before. Dawn's lips parted in a smile as she recalled incidents of that birthday. Uncle Stan was a born courtier. What had he said? "Your parents showed remarkable foresight when they called you Dawn, my dear." He was a pet, and certainly it had been a happy choice. Dawn was by no means conceited, but she could not help knowing that her curling golden hair and deep violet eyes matched her name, and that when to these attractions were added a perfect mouth, firm rounded chin, and a tall, slim, beautifully formed figure, she presented a picture it was easy to look at. Suddenly the smile developed into a laugh.

"You're getting swollen headed, my child," she remarked to herself, "and you know that's a thing you hate, so you'd better——"

Dawn's soliloquy ended in a sharp cry, and with a wrench of the wheel she sent the car swerving across the road, narrowly missing a huddled figure lying directly in her path. What was it? It had looked like a man. Dawn rammmed on the brakes, bringing the car to a screeching halt, and a second later she was out on the road and racing back the way she had come.

It was a man, an old man dressed in ancient and none too clean clothes. The girl spoke to him; then, as he made no reply, she dropped to her knees beside the recumbent figure. Whoever he was he was quite unconscious, and his breathing was coming and going in harsh, rasping gasps, yet there was no sign of injury. Had he fainted? There was a hot flush about his face which frightened Dawn, and after glancing up and down the road, she returned to her car and backed it till it was standing alongside the motionless form. Now for it. Dawn opened the door of the seat next to the driver's, then placing her hands under the unconscious man's arms she essayed to lift him. He was lighter than

she had expected, and now she saw how loosely the clothes hung about the thin, emaciated body. Why, he must be starving! But there was more than mere starvation behind that flushed face and harsh breathing. Dawn got the old man inside the car and lifted his legs, and with a final heave, she managed to drag him up on to the seat. Done it! But he looked horribly ill. Was he dying? For a moment terror gripped the girl, but the next she brushed it aside, and seizing a rug she wrapped it as well as she could round the inert form, having done which she sprang into the driver's seat and slammed in the clutch. There was only one place for her passenger, the hospital, and she must get him there just as quickly as she could.

“It is a bad case of pneumonia.”

Miss Maitland, matron of the Fenham Cottage Hospital, had just entered the room where Dawn had been waiting to hear the doctor's verdict.

“Will he live?” asked the girl with the suspicion of a quiver in her voice.

“I'm afraid there is little hope. He is terribly emaciated and must have been starving for some time. But you can never tell with these cases, Miss Cheverill, and, of course, we shall do our best.”

Dawn nodded her head.

“Please do,” she answered. “My guardian, Mr. Stanford Wright of Newland's Grange, will be responsible for all expenses. Have you discovered who he is?”

“No. There were no papers in his pockets or anything by which he might be identified.”

“I see.” Dawn picked up her bag from the table where she had placed it. “Well, thank you very much, matron, and I will come early to-morrow morning to inquire if I may.”

“Certainly, Miss Cheverill.” Suddenly the elder woman smiled, and her voice lost its aloof, business-like quality. “My dear,” she went on, “I think you have behaved splendidly. Not many girls of your age would have acted with such prompt decision, and if the old man does recover, it will be as much due to you as to anything we shall be able to do. Now good-bye. I must go and see how our patient is getting on.”

Dawn drove home slowly through the darkening mist. To her there was something infinitely sad and pathetic in the thought of that old man dying in the midst of strangers without a single human being by his side to whom he belonged, and she could not get him out of her thoughts. Who was he? Where had he come from, and what sort of life had he led? Probably they would never know. He would just come into her life for a day or two, and the lives of the matron, and doctor, and nurses at the hospital, and then he would pass out a nobody, not even a name, and yet, for all they knew, as a strong man he might

have experienced adventure and excitement such as rarely fell to the lot of better-known people. She would like to know. Somehow she had a feeling—— Dawn caught sight of a line of trees looming up out of the mist on her left, and turning off the road, she passed through a gateway and up a drive until she came within sight of a long, low, gabled house, the ancient brickwork of which on bright days glowed rosily in the sunshine. Lights were already gleaming from many of the downstairs rooms, and having driven her car to the garage, Dawn mounted a flight of steps to the terrace, which ran the whole length of the house, and entered a high, handsome room by the open window.

It was the room of one who was essentially an outdoor man. Trophies of the chase, fishing rods, a pair of sculls, and several similar things covered the walls, and the tall, lean, bronzed man who was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, reading a newspaper, fitted the room.

“You’re late, Dawn,” he said, looking up as the girl entered. “Anything wrong? Had a breakdown?”

“No, but I’ve had an adventure.” Dawn closed the windows and drew the heavy curtains, then crossed the room and perched herself on the broad leather arm of her guardian’s chair. “Fancy having those windows wide open with all this mist about, Uncle Stan,” she admonished. “If you knew how the maids grumble when they have to clean those cups of yours you’d be more careful.”

“Should I, my dear. Well, anyway they’re paid for it.” Brown eyes twinkled up into blue. “What about this adventure now? Don’t keep me on tenter-hooks.”

The smile died out of Dawn’s face.

“It wasn’t much of an adventure, really,” she began; “in fact, it’s something very sad,” and Dawn went on to tell of the old man she had found, and how she had taken him to hospital, and the doctor’s verdict. “I wonder who he is,” she concluded. “I’d like to know.”

“Some old tramp, most likely. Poor old chap. I’m glad you found him, Dawn. He’d probably have been there all night if you hadn’t.”

The girl nodded, and sat gazing thoughtfully into the fire for some seconds before she spoke again.

“I don’t think he is a tramp,” she said at last. “At least, not a real tramp.”

“No? What do you think he is?”

“I think he is or was a sailor.”

“A sailor! Why?”

Dawn grinned.

“Now don’t start asking for reasons and things like that, Uncle Stan,” she answered, rumpling her guardian’s hair. “As a matter of fact, I haven’t any, not proper ones. I just feel that he’s a sailor. Call it womanly intuition, if you like, and please don’t laugh, because I’m serious. Yes, I am,” seeing the smile

hovering on her companion's lips. "And I'll tell you something more, you disbeliever. I've had a queer sort of feeling growing on me ever since I left the hospital that things are going to happen to you and me, exciting things, and that somehow or other they are all bound up with that old man. Now what have you to say to that?"

"I say that it's time you went and changed for dinner," laughed Dawn's guardian. "I've often noticed that the young female of the species does get strange feelings when she is hungry. So hurry up, my dear, for there's no knowing what may happen to us if you get really famished."

Dawn stood up and crossed the room, but at the door she stopped and made a face at her companion.

"Right-o, doubter," she said, "just you wait and see. I know I'm right. When I dragged the old man into the car one sleeve of his coat pulled up, and there was a mermaid tattooed on his arm, and——"

"A mermaid!" came a shout from the arm-chair. "And you don't call that a reason. Intuition, my hat! Get out, you young baggage, or——"

A magazine came hurtling across the room, but Dawn dodged it with a laugh and shut the door, and a second later she was running up the stairs. But once in her bedroom she became serious again. Uncle might laugh but really this feeling she had of something about to happen was very queer. It was almost a premonition. Could there be anything in it? Mother had been Highland, and Scottish people were sometimes gifted that way. Perhaps she had inherited something. Perhaps! Dawn tossed her clothes on to a chair and ran into the bathroom. "Don't be a fool," she chided herself as she turned on the taps. "Uncle Stan's right. You're hungry, also you're a bit upset and sorry for the old man, that is what's affecting you, and the sooner you realize it the better." She grinned at herself in a mirror. "Premonition, indeed! Gosh!" As a matter of fact, however, Dawn's intuition was not so wide of the truth after all, and the old man, lying at that moment so near to death's door in the Fenham Cottage Hospital, was, had she and her guardian only known it, a messenger of fate.

CHAPTER II

The Mysterious Packet

Little more was said about Dawn's protégé that evening, but immediately after breakfast the next morning, the girl got out her car and drove to Fenham. She was shown straight into the matron's room, and a few minutes later Miss Maitland entered.

"Good morning, matron. How——" Something in the elder woman's face checked the inquiry on Dawn's lips, and she took a sharp step forward. "He's—he's gone?" she asked.

The matron nodded.

"Yes. He passed away early this morning. I'm sorry, Miss Cheverill. We did all we could, but it was an almost hopeless case from the start."

"I suppose so." Dawn was conscious of tears in her eyes and brushed them away. "Poor old man. Did he regain consciousness?"

"Yes, and he was very surprised to find himself in bed. So I told him how you had brought him in, and then he wanted to know all about you." The matron smiled. "I told him all I knew, and he was very grateful. He said you were a very good young lady, and almost his last request to me was that I would give you this." The speaker went to her desk, and picked up a thin, oblong packet wrapped in stained oilskin which she handed to Dawn. "He seemed to prize it very greatly, and he asked me to say that it was all he had to give you in return for your kindness to him."

"But you said yesterday evening that there was nothing of value in his pockets," said Dawn, turning the packet over in her hands and blinking back the tears which persisted in filling her eyes.

"I know. That packet was sewn into the lining of his coat, and I only found it by following his instructions." Again Miss Maitland smiled. "Your old friend was something of a mystery, Miss Cheverill. He refused to tell me his name, but I think he must have been a sailor. There was a mermaid tattooed on one arm, and that packet is wrapped in a piece of sailor's oilskin."

A sailor! So matron thought that, too. Dawn looked up sharply. All the strange thoughts of the previous evening, which had vanished with the new day, now returned with renewed strength at this additional proof of their veracity. A sailor and a mysterious packet! The feeling she had had that something was about to happen was coming true in a most startling manner. She caught the matron's eyes upon her and nodded her head.

"Yes, it is queer," she agreed. "Almost like a story." She turned the packet

over again, examining the neat stitches with which it was sewn, then slipped it into her bag. "I'll take it home and look at it," she went on. "I wonder what it is." Dawn smiled at the elder woman. "Thank you so much for all you have done, matron. I'll tell my guardian to communicate with you. I—we should like the old man to be buried nicely."

"Certainly, Miss Cheverill, and I hope you won't be disappointed in your legacy."

Dawn laughed.

"I hope I shan't, matron. Anyway, I promise to tell you all about it."

"Don't make too many promises, my dear. For all you know, there may be a great secret hidden in that packet, and the fewer who know about it the better. There, you see I haven't outgrown my childhood. Well, good-bye and good luck."

Dawn had intended doing some shopping in Fenham, but with the mysterious packet waiting to be opened, she decided that her purchases could wait to another day, and drove home at top speed, bursting in upon her guardian while he was still reading the morning paper.

"Hullo, Dawn, you're back quickly, aren't you?" he said, looking up. "How's your old friend?"

"He's gone."

"Gone!"

Dawn nodded her head, and sat down on a pouf facing her companion.

"Yes, he died early this morning."

"Poor old chap. I was afraid he might. Cheer up, my dear, you did your best, but he must have been an almost hopeless case from the first."

"So matron said. Uncle Stan, I told her you would pay for his funeral. I would like to bury him nicely. You will, won't you?"

"Of course, Dawn. I'll ring up the hospital and tell the matron. Did the old man regain consciousness?"

The girl's eyes began to twinkle.

"Yes, towards the end. He was surprised to find himself in bed and wanted to know how he got there, and matron told him all about me. Matron thinks he must have been a sailor, Uncle Stan."

"A sailor." The man looked up and saw the smile in his companion's eyes. "Ho, ho! So you're still harping on your womanly intuition, are you, miss? But a sailor. Surely that was not a difficult guess? A mermaid rather points that way, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Uncle Stan," replied Dawn demurely, "but he also left me this packet as a legacy. It was all he possessed, and he asked matron to give it to me because I had been good to him."

Dawn's guardian took the packet and turned it this way and that just as she

had done. Presently he looked up with a boyish grin.

“Buck up, my dear, say it. I can see ‘I told you so,’ hovering on your lips. This, I suppose, is the cause of those strange feelings you had last night. Well, I admit that so far you have had the best of the argument. An oilskin packet and an old sailor. This is most intriguing. Go on, Dawn, open it and let’s see what is inside. Here, have my penknife to cut the stitches.”

The oilskin was sewn together with thin catgut, but the sharp knife soon cut the fastenings, and with fingers made clumsy by excitement, Dawn drew forth a still thinner package wrapped in a piece of silk. What was she going to find? For some moments she hesitated, almost afraid to unwind the silk lest something commonplace and cheap should be revealed, then she caught sight of her guardian’s face and laughed.

“Why, Uncle Stan, I believe you’re as excited as I am,” she declared. “Won’t it be a sell if it’s something silly? Well, here goes, for better or for worse.”

She unwound the silk and disclosed a small square of folded canvas yellow and stained with age. Dawn’s eyes sparkled.

“Looks promising, Uncle, doesn’t it?” she cried. “What’ll you bet? I say it’s a map.”

“Nothing doing. It’s either a map, or a will, or something of that kind. Your man was a sailor all right, Dawn. That stuff is sailcloth.”

Dawn nodded, and gently unfolding the piece of canvas spread it out on a table by her side. For the most part it was blank, but in the middle was a faint, irregular outline and the points of the compass roughly put in, while near the bottom of the canvas was a single line of faded and almost indistinguishable writing. Dawn read it out slowly.

“‘Lion Island, latitude 18° 20’ N, longitude 179° 9’ E. Lugger with great store of pearls on board sunk at point marked X.’” The girl paused and for some seconds the silence of the room remained unbroken save for the cheerful crackling of the fire, then Dawn breathed a deep, ecstatic sigh. “It is a map, Uncle,” she whispered, as though afraid her voice might break a spell and the piece of canvas vanish before her eyes, “a real treasure map. Look, there is the island with a hill marked in the centre, and that line round the island must be a reef, and there, to the north of the island, is the cross showing where the lugger lies. Oh! Uncle Stan, isn’t it wonderful? A treasure island! You do think it’s true, don’t you?”

“I see no reason why it shouldn’t be, but that doesn’t mean that the pearls are still there.”

“But matron said the old man seemed to prize the packet very greatly, those were her actual words.”

“Yes, that’s promising, I admit. Did she tell you his name, by the way?”

“No, he refused to tell her. That was strange, wasn’t it? I wonder why.”

“H’m! a bit of a mystery man. Still that settles your right to the map, Dawn. If we don’t know who he was we can’t advertise for relatives, and no one will be coming forward who might lay claim to his possessions. I wonder why he withheld his name though. He may have thought other things more important, or there may have been some other reason. Probably we shall never know.” The speaker picked up the map and examined it more closely. “I don’t think this is as old as it looks, Dawn,” he went on. “The canvas is still perfectly sound, and the writing may have faded through exposure or from some other cause.”

The girl nodded.

“How do you think he came into possession of the map, Uncle Stan,” she asked, “and why has he never been after the pearls himself?”

“Why do treasures so often remain unrecovered by those who know about them? I’ll give you one reason. Your sailor may have been the sole survivor of the lugger’s crew, and he may have been cast up on that island. Not being a swimmer, and having no diving apparatus, he could not recover the pearls, so he made a map, and when at last he was picked up, he kept the secret to himself, hoping to return some day and recover the booty. But he never did, through lack of funds perhaps, and——” The speaker shrugged his shoulders. “There you are, Dawn, that’s one explanation. The question is, what are we going to do?”

“Do? Why we’re going after the pearls of course, Uncle. They are my legacy. Surely you’re not going to miss such a chance?”

Dawn’s companion grinned.

“No, I suppose not, though your friend’s great store of pearls may actually be of little value; people’s ideas of riches differ you know, Dawn, and——”

Dawn sprang up and catching hold of her guardian, shook him vigorously.

“Wretch!” she cried. “You’re being purposely annoying. I know you. You wouldn’t miss the chance of an adventure like this for anything. That island must be in the Pacific, otherwise why the pearls and the lugger? Can’t you imagine it? We’ll go to Australia and hire a lugger of our own, and in her we’ll go off cruising among the islands searching for our treasure. Oh, it will be marvellous! Where’s a map?” She crossed the room to a bookcase and returned bearing a large atlas which she laid on the table and opened it at a map of the Pacific. “Here we are. Latitude 18° North, longitude 179° East. It’s in the Pacific right enough. Here’s the line going right down through the middle of the ocean. Now 18° North. Why it’s almost empty sea according to this map. An unknown island, that’s what we have to find, Uncle Stan. And don’t grin like that. I’ve made up my mind, we’re going, and the next thing to decide is, how soon we can start.”

“Well, we must first lay your old friend to rest. Then we shall need to pack a few clothes, and there’ll be the house to shut up, but——”

Dawn burst out laughing.

“You dear idiot,” she cried. “I know I’m a bit excited. But you must admit that it isn’t every day a girl gets the map of a real treasure island given to her.” Dawn dragged her companion to the window from which, beyond the terrace and the green lawns, a peep of a creek and the distant sea was visible. “Look, Uncle Stan,” she went on, “the mist has gone and the sun’s coming out, so let’s go for a sail. I haven’t been out in my new cutter yet, and I want to christen her. And we’ll make plans while we’re sailing. Only please ring up matron at the hospital first.”

The man looked up at the sky, then nodded his head.

“Right-o. Give me fifteen minutes and I’ll be ready. What about getting cook to pack a luncheon basket? It looks to me as though it’s coming out warm and fine for the time of year.”

“I’ll see to it. You ’phone matron.” Dawn paused by the door. “By the way, Uncle, what price a woman’s intuition now?”

Mr. Stanford Wright raised his hands in mock surrender.

“Don’t rub it in, Dawn,” he groaned with a twinkle in his eye. “Next time you have a hunch I promise I won’t laugh.”

“Hunch indeed! I like that. You read too many thrillers, my man. All right, I’ll forgive you. Only buck up, or I’ll be ready before you.”

CHAPTER III

Midnight Visitors

Three days later the old sailor was laid to rest in Fenham churchyard. Dawn and her guardian and Miss Maitland were the only people present, for it had been impossible to advertise for relatives when no one knew the dead man's name, and the girl was very silent as she drove home by her guardian's side.

"Cheer up, Dawn," said her companion at last. "The poor old chap's life could not have been very happy, penniless and starving, and without a home."

"I know, Uncle Stan, but it seems so terribly sad. If there's any truth in that map, then in a way he was a rich man, yet there is not a single familiar face beside him when he dies. I wish I could have done something more."

"You did all you possibly could, my dear. By the way, have you told Miss Maitland about the map?"

"Yes, I promised I would, and she was desperately thrilled."

"H'm! I hope she won't talk too much. This kind of jaunt is better kept secret."

"Not she. Besides I've promised to endow a bed at the hospital if we come home with a sufficient supply of loot."

"Loot!" Dawn's companion laughed. "There's the predatory instinct, and I thought you were a well brought up young woman. Well, you'll be glad to hear, my dear, that I've booked state rooms on the *Britannia*, due to sail from Southampton to New York Thursday fortnight. As we are going on this trip we may as well do the world tour, and when we have lifted the loot, as you call it, we will come home via India and the Cape. How does that suit your ladyship?"

"It's marvellous, Uncle Stan. You are a darling. I'll have to go up to town and get some new frocks and things."

"I'll need some kit myself, so we may as well go up and spend two or three nights at an hotel. Keep your head, though, my dear. Remember that one doesn't dress for dinner on a pearling lugger."

Dawn laughed.

"I'll remember and I'll try not to run wild. I'll get slacks, and shorts, and jerseys for the lugger, and we can leave our glad-rags in Australia wherever our base may be."

Accordingly the next three days were spent in London where, in spite of her guardian's warning and her own good resolution, Dawn indulged in an orgy of shopping, and returned home the possessor of two large trunks full of

new clothes which were duly delivered at Newland's Grange.

"And I thought we were going on a treasure hunt," remarked Mr. Stanford Wright, regarding the trunks with a twinkle in his eyes. "What's the idea, Dawn? Are you going to take New York society by storm, or do you intend to try your luck at Hollywood on the way?"

Dawn looked at the trunks.

"I suppose it does seem rather a lot to a man. But, Uncle, you know what it is when a girl starts shopping. I did try, really I did, but there were so many things I needed, and others——"

"Others which you didn't need, but couldn't resist," laughed her guardian. "All right, my dear, you're welcome, and luckily the *Britannia*'s a big ship. By the way," he went on hastily, "did I tell you that, while you were buying up the west end, I went and had a glance at some Admiralty charts? I thought I might learn something about your island, but it's not marked, and no one seems to have heard of it, so it looks as though we shall have to depend entirely on your old friend's map."

"Well, that's all right," replied Dawn. "It will be far more exciting sailing by a real treasure map than by a cut and dried Admiralty chart."

The next two days passed in preparations for their departure, and then, on the third morning, Dawn had occasion to drive into Fenham. She had already visited two shops, and was about to enter a third when Miss Maitland came along the street and stopped to speak to her.

"Good morning, Miss Cheverill," said the matron. "I suppose you will soon be off now?"

"Yes, we are sailing next Thursday on the *Britannia*," answered Dawn.

The elder woman nodded.

"Well, I hope you have an enjoyable and exciting trip. Write to me, if you like, I shall be glad to hear how you are getting on. As it happens, I should have rung you up if I hadn't met you. Rather a strange thing happened yesterday afternoon. Two men and a woman arrived at the hospital, and asked to see me. They introduced themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Mr. Brown, which I don't for a moment believe were their right names, and they wanted to know if an old beggar man had recently died while in my care and been buried from the hospital. Of course I had to answer yes, and then they became very excited, and the man who called himself Mr. Brown wanted to know if there had been a mermaid tattooed on one of the dead man's arms, and if there had been any papers in his possession."

Miss Maitland paused to nod to a passer-by, while Dawn stared at her in consternation. Here was a complication. Suppose those people were relations, and had a right to the map? The matron read the question in the girl's eyes and smiled.

“You need not worry, my dear. I am quite sure my visitors were not related to your old friend. The men looked distinctly—I think the right word is tough, and the woman reminded me of a bird of prey. In fact, they were a most unpleasant looking trio, so I am afraid I was guilty of prevarication. I had to admit the mermaid, but I said I had seen no papers, which was true in a way. That seemed to upset them, and they started whispering together, and presently the woman demanded to see the old man’s clothes. But they had already been burnt, and I told them so, and then they got really angry, and at last I had to call in the hall porter before I could get rid of them.”

“Poor Miss Maitland,” gasped a vastly relieved Dawn, “how perfectly horrible for you. And you really are sure they have no right to the map?”

“As sure as I can be, my dear. They were after the map, that is certain, but from what I saw of them, I should say that had they found the old man as you found him, they would cheerfully have robbed him and then left him to die, so you need have no qualms about holding on to your legacy. Besides, the old man gave it to you, and he had a right to do what he liked with his own property.”

Dawn nodded her head.

“That’s true, and I think it was jolly sporting of you, matron, to stick up for me as you did. Those people might have caused us no end of trouble, but now that they believe the map has been destroyed, we aren’t likely to see anything more of them.”

“Well, I hope so, Miss Cheverill, but I am not quite happy in my mind about the matter, and that was why I was going to ring you up. It appears that yesterday afternoon, after they had left me, those people hung about outside the hospital and questioned all the nurses who came out. Of course it is strictly forbidden to discuss patients with strangers, but I had a young probationer helping me that night, and I have discovered that she was one of those who were questioned. Unfortunately she must have seen the wallet and overheard the old man’s instructions to me, and though she denies having told those people anything, they may have wormed some information out of her without her knowledge, and therefore they may not be so ignorant of the true whereabouts of the map as we think. Still forewarned is forearmed, and for all we know my fears may be entirely imaginary.”

“Thanks for the warning, all the same, matron,” answered Dawn. “I’ll tell my guardian, and if Messrs. Brown and Smith call we’ll send them packing.” She laughed. “You know this business is getting more exciting every day. First I discover an old sailor who bequeaths me the map of an unknown treasure island, and now the villains of the piece appear, also after the map and the treasure. I wonder how it will all end.”

“Happily and profitably, I hope. Well, good-bye, Miss Cheverill. I must get

on or I shall be late. And don't forget, those people are tough."

"I won't forget. I'll tell Uncle to get out the family arsenal in case they arrive. Good-bye."

Dawn finished her shopping and drove home. There she found her guardian in the garden, and told him what had happened.

"So, the plot thickens," he remarked when she came to an end. "I wouldn't worry about your right to the map, Dawn. It was given to you, and I expect matron was correct in what she said about those people. But we had better be on our guard. If they have discovered that we have the map they may try to get hold of it. Would you like me to take charge of the packet?"

"No thanks, Uncle. I'll put it where it will be quite safe. Besides, matron's fears may be all moonshine, and quite likely those people believe it was burnt."

Nevertheless, before she went to bed that night, Dawn carefully hid the precious map, and then promptly forgot all about Miss Maitland's visitors, and fell asleep to dream of sun-drenched coral islands, blue seas, palm trees, and great piles of magnificent pearls. At first it was a very pleasant dream, but presently it began to assume another character. Vague noises entered into it, and strange lights began to flash in and out of the pearls, making them look like watchful, sinister eyes. Dawn stirred uneasily, and instantly all the light seemed to concentrate in one great, luminous pearl which glowed with dazzling intensity. What was happening? A low whispering had taken the place of the other noises, but the light still shone full into her face, and suddenly Dawn realized that she was awake and was gazing straight at the bulb of an electric torch held by a vague, shadowy figure standing at the foot of the bed. For several moments she lay staring at the dim form, too surprised to make a sound; then, as her lips opened to utter the scream which would bring her guardian to her help, a hand came out of the darkness and closed tightly over her mouth.

It was a woman's hand, even in that moment of fear Dawn realized that, and she also caught sight of a huge opal ring which shone with a red, purplish glow in the torchlight; the next instant a woman's voice spoke to her from the shadows by the bedside.

"Don't start yapping or you'll get hurt," said the voice sharply. "My friend at the bottom of the bed has got a gun, and he won't be afraid to use it, but if you behave yourself and tell us what we want to know, you'll come to no harm. Understand? You'd better." The hand upon her mouth relaxed its pressure. "Don't speak too loudly now, but tell us what you've done with that map."

Dawn lay thinking swiftly. She did not believe that threat about the pistol. That had been intended to frighten her, and to her astonishment, she

discovered that she was not very much afraid. So matron's warning had been justified, and what was she to do now? Somehow she must——

“Speak up! Where have you hidden that map?”

Dawn turned her head in the direction of the voice.

“What map?” she asked coolly.

“Stop stalling. We've no time to waste. You know what map as well as we do. The map Ben Travers gave you, that's the map we want, and we mean to have it.”

So Ben Travers was the name of the old sailor. Aloud Dawn answered.

“Well, let me get out of bed.”

“Out of bed! What do you want to get out of bed for?”

“To get the map, of course.”

Dawn tossed aside the clothes, and without asking permission sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed. In a flash a plan had come to her, and now, taking advantage of the surprise caused by her swift action and prompt acceptance of her adversaries' demands, she suddenly lunged out with her left foot at a bedside table on which stood a china electric lamp, a number of books and a large bowl of flowers. Crash! The table overturned with a resounding thud and a loud splintering of glass and china, and in the same instant Dawn rolled over the side of the bed on to the floor.

At once pandemonium broke out.

“What are you doing, you fool?” cried an angry voice from the foot of the bed.

“It's the girl, curse her! She's overturned a table. Show a light, Hank. Let me get a hand on the young hussy and I'll——”

Dawn crawled under the bed, and what the woman would have done to her she never knew, for at that moment a door slammed along the passage, and the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching her room became audible. From the man came a furious oath.

“That's torn it, Belle!” he cried. “Come on, we must get out.”

“But you locked the door.”

“Locked the door be hanged! We shall have the whole household on us in a minute. Go on, you fool!”

The sound of hasty footsteps reached Dawn, and a moment later someone turned the handle of her door, and she heard her guardian's voice demanding to know why it was locked and what was happening. Dawn looked towards the window and saw first one dark figure and then another appear for an instant against the night sky, before they dropped out of sight, then she crawled forth from her refuge and opened the door.

“It's all right, Uncle Stan,” she said, as she switched on the light and admitted her guardian. “I've had some visitors, but no harm's done.”

“Visitors!” Mr. Wright gazed from the slim, pyjama-clad figure to the debris of books, and broken glass, and china which littered the floor. “D’you mean that someone’s been after the map?”

“A man and a woman, Uncle Stan. The man answers to the name of Hank, and the woman is called Belle, and she has a ring mounting a big purple opal on her left hand. That ought to help us recognize her if we ever see her again. I _____”

Dawn swayed, and the next instant her guardian had picked her up in his arms and carried her to the bed.

“You lie there, my dear,” he ordered. “You’ve behaved splendidly. Did you knock this table over?”

The girl nodded her head; now that the crisis was over she was feeling more shaken than she cared to admit.

“Yes,” she answered slowly. “I had to attract your attention somehow.”

“You attracted it all right. I thought the house was falling down. It’s a wonder none of the servants were wakened. Just as well though, for we shan’t have to invent explanations.” The speaker crossed to the open window, and as he did so the sound of a motor car being started up broke the outside silence. “There go your visitors,” he remarked over his shoulder. He leaned out of the window. “Hullo, there’s a ladder leaning against the wall. So that’s how they got in.” He drew in his head and went and stood at the foot of the bed where Dawn was again curled up snugly beneath the sheets. “You’re sure you’re all right, Dawn? No hurts?”

“Not one, Uncle.”

“Not afraid?”

“I don’t think so. No, I’m sure I’m not.”

“Good. You needn’t be, those people won’t come back to-night.” He set the table on its legs again, and replaced the books. “We’ll leave the debris till the morning. You’ll have to invent a nightmare or something to explain that part of the business. Now I’ll just go down and remove the ladder and everything will be O.K.”

He left the room and a few minutes later Dawn heard the gentle scrape of the ladder being removed, followed by silence. Drowsily her eyes closed, but she was not asleep when presently the door opened again and her guardian’s voice reached her in a loud whisper.

“Dawn.”

“Yes, Uncle Stan.”

“Where did you hide the map?”

A chuckle came from the direction of the bed.

“I put it in an old envelope and left it among other letters lying on the dressing-table. It was right under their eyes all the time if they’d only had the

gumption to look.”

“You’re sure it’s all right?” anxiously.

“Certain sure. It’s under my pillow at this moment.”

“Good girl.”

Dawn heard the door close and a faint chuckle receding in the distance. Uncle Stan was a real sport and as excited over their adventure as a boy. Drowsily Dawn turned over. Excited. It looked like being exciting, too. If tonight was a sample of the beginning, what would the end be like?

CHAPTER IV

Strange Footprints

“Well, my dear, how are you? None the worse for your fright, I hope,” said Mr. Wright, entering the breakfast room the next morning to find Dawn already seated before the coffee pot.

“Not a bit, thanks, Uncle Stan. How about you?”

“Fit as a fiddle.” The speaker helped himself to bacon and eggs and sat down facing his ward. The morning sun was pouring in through the tall windows, lighting up the big, handsome room and turning Dawn’s hair to a glory of gold. Her guardian looked at her admiringly. “You’re a plucky girl, my dear,” he went on. “Most young women would be showing some signs of strain after last night, but you look as fresh as a daisy.”

Dawn laughed.

“I feel it, Uncle Stan,” she answered.

“Good, and so you don’t think we ought to give up the quest?”

“Give up the quest!” cried Dawn aghast. “Why ever should we do that?”

“Well, it looks as though it may not be quite such a holiday cruise as we imagine, and if our friends of last night are in earnest, there may actually be a certain amount of danger.”

“Danger! You surely don’t think I’m afraid, Uncle Stan, and will let those wretched people scare me off? The map’s mine, and I’m going to stick to it through thick and thin.”

“No, I didn’t think you were afraid, Dawn, but I thought I should mention the possibilities of trouble which may lie before us now that there are other people after the map and they know we have it. And talking of the map, Dawn, don’t you think you had better let me take care of it?”

The girl shook her head.

“No, Uncle, I would, but I’ve thought of a better plan. We’ll do it up in a registered packet and post it to your bankers in New York. Then, when we get to New York, we can post it on again to a fresh address in Australia. That way it will be absolutely safe. You see, Uncle, we know absolutely nothing about our enemies except from matron’s rather vague description and the ring I saw upon the woman’s finger, so that there is nothing to prevent them following us half across the world. They may even take passages on board the *Britannia*, and if we carry the map about with us or keep it hidden among our luggage it will never be really safe.”

“An excellent idea, Dawn. We’ll post it to-day, and then we shall be free of

further anxieties. It is pretty evident that our enemies know about the pearls, but don't know the position of the island, otherwise why are they so desperately anxious to get hold of the map? By the way, you don't want me to report last night's affair to the police, do you?"

"The police! Good Heavens no, Uncle! They'd ask all sorts of awkward questions, and the whole story would come out, and too many people know about the map already. Let's keep it dark. I'm so thankful the servants didn't wake."

"Good, so that's settled. And I don't think you need worry any more about Hank and Belle yet awhile, Dawn. They've made their attempt and failed, and they won't make another so long as we are in the house."

In this Mr. Wright proved correct. The intervening days passed without event, and on the Thursday of their departure, Dawn and her guardian motored to Southampton, and went on board the *Britannia*. It was the first time Dawn had been on board a really big ship, and she was delighted with her state room with its daintily curtained portholes, comfortable bed and private bathroom complete with shower. As soon as she had taken in her surroundings she went and knocked at her companion's cabin next door.

"Come in." Mr. Wright looked up and seeing who it was, smiled. "Hullo, my dear, satisfied?"

"Uncle, it's wonderful, and you're a perfect pet. I never thought we were going to travel in such luxury as this."

"Didn't you? Well, it won't last all the way, you know, and as you are a prospective heiress to great riches, I thought I had better get on the right side of you while I could."

Dawn laughed.

"You fraud. Look at your own cabin. Not doing yourself so badly, are you? I bet you were thinking of your own ease as much as mine." She seated herself on a comfortable settee. "Whose table are we at, Uncle Stan? That's the correct question to ask immediately one comes on board a big liner, isn't it?"

"Absolutely, my dear, and the answer to your first question is, the captain's."

"The captain's! I say, we're honoured. I think you must be better known than I imagined."

"I fear it has more to do with the fact that we occupy two of the best state rooms in the ship. By the way, you're not expected to dress for dinner the first night out."

Dawn nodded, and presently she returned to her own cabin, and having finished her unpacking, she wandered out on to the deck. They had arrived early, and she amused herself watching the passengers coming on board, and by trying to pick out among the men and women any who might possibly have

been her visitors of a few nights before. But she saw no one who in the least awakened her suspicions, no woman wearing a ring adorned with a large, purple opal came within range of her eyes, and presently, as the time of departure approached, preparations for sailing attracted her attention. She was thus engaged when her guardian joined her.

“Been doing a little sleuthing, Dawn?” he asked, leaning on the rail by her side.

“Hardly sleuthing, Uncle Stan. I’ve been keeping my eyes open, but I haven’t seen any people who look in the least what I imagine Hank and Belle to look like.”

“That’s not very extraordinary, and there’s always the possibility, Dawn, that we are making a mountain out of a molehill. For all we know our adversaries may be miles away and quite unaware that we are on board this ship bound for New York; they may even have given up the chase altogether.”

And as the days passed without any suspicious happenings, or signs of undue interest in their concerns on the part of other passengers, Dawn began to think that her guardian must be right. The *Britannia* was not one of the fastest ships—Mr. Wright had chosen her for that very reason—and for the first few days out the weather was gloriously fine, so that only the very worst sailors were confined to their cabins. Dawn enjoyed herself thoroughly. She was easily the prettiest woman at her table, and struck up a firm friendship with Captain Strong, and when the *Britannia* suddenly encountered rough weather, which drove the bulk of the passengers to the refuge of their bunks, he was loud in his praises.

“You’re a fine sailor, Miss Cheverill,” he said when he encountered her one afternoon resolutely pacing the empty, heaving deck in spite of the howling wind and sheets of driving spray. “You’ve found your sea-legs very quickly.”

“I think I’ve had them since I was six years old,” laughed Dawn. “My guardian is very keen on yachting, and he brought me up that way.”

“Ah! that explains it. Well, keep on the sheltered side of the deck. It’s dirty weather and it looks like being dirtier before we get through.”

He saluted and passed on, and the girl continued her promenade. She revelled in this fierce, elemental strife, in the shriek of the wind, the sharp, vicious thumps of the great waves against the side of the ship, and the lashing spray. What a glorious adventure this was going to be, and all because she had picked up an old man and taken him to hospital. For an hour Dawn tramped the deck, exchanging a word now and then with other hardened pedestrians, but with her thoughts for the most part busy with Ben Travers and the mysterious island for which she was bound; then she turned towards her cabin and dry clothes. Her guardian was playing bridge with three other seasoned

sailors, and she wondered how he was getting on. She reached her state room, and opened the door. A hot shower and a read seemed indicated, and she was about to enter when she stopped with a gasp of surprise. Crossing and criss-crossing the light carpet which covered the floor of the cabin was a string of footprints not yet dry.

Dawn's first reaction was to run for her guardian, but she discarded the idea almost immediately, and, stepping inside, she closed the door. The daintily furnished cabin was empty, that she saw at a glance, but what about the bathroom? The girl stood listening, but no suspicious sounds reached her ears, and after a brief hesitation, she crossed the cabin on tip-toe and stood outside the communicating door. Again she listened. Was somebody in there, listening also? Dawn was aware of a strong inclination to flee, and knew that she must act at once if it was not to take possession of her, so gripping hold of the handle she gave it a resolute twist and flung open the door. Empty! The bathroom was empty, nevertheless someone had been there, she knew that because her towels were disarranged. Who? The woman who answered to the name of Belle, or her man accomplice, or someone else? Dawn glanced at the footmarks. They were too big for a woman. So it had been a man. Suddenly the girl remembered her guardian's cabin, and without waiting to think, she ran out into the passage and flung open the adjoining door; the next instant something like a ton weight struck her jaw and everything went black.

Dawn returned to consciousness to discover herself in her guardian's arms, with a stewardess kneeling beside her and a steward and a ship's officer hovering around. One side of her face ached horribly, and the stewardess was holding a glass to her lips. Almost unconsciously she opened her mouth and swallowed some hot, pungent liquid which made her sit up spluttering; then she caught her guardian's eyes fixed anxiously upon her, and managed a feeble grin.

"Must have slipped and banged my face against the side of the cabin," she murmured. "Silly of me. Thought I'd got my sea-legs."

Mr. Wright nodded and lifted her to her feet.

"Get her into bed, stewardess," he ordered, "and, steward, please ask the doctor to come along. Miss Cheverill has had a nasty knock, and I'd like him to have a look at her face, though I don't think any real harm has been done. Go along, Dawn. I'll come and see you in a few minutes." Then as the girl disappeared into her state room, he turned to the young officer. "Must have slipped as she said. Bit of bad luck."

"Rather, sir. Are you sure I can't do anything?"

"Nothing, thanks."

The young officer saluted and departed, and a few minutes later the doctor arrived and he and Dawn's guardian were admitted into her cabin. The

stewardess had put her to bed and the doctor sat down beside her and gently fingered her face.

“H’m!” he said after a brief examination. “If you’d been a man, young lady, I’d have said that bruise was caused by another man’s fist, and a regular knock-out blow at that. You say you slipped. Well, you’ve been lucky. Nothing’s broken, but you’ll carry that bruise and have a stiff jaw for a few days. Take my tip and stay in bed till to-morrow morning. I’ll send along some ointment which may help a bit.”

The doctor departed and a few minutes later the stewardess went away, leaving Dawn and her guardian alone. For some seconds the two regarded each other in silence, then the man spoke.

“Well?” he asked.

Dawn pointed to the footmarks still faintly visible upon the carpet.

“Footprints. So that’s it. Not yours, too big, nor the stewardess’s, she’s a little woman. Look like a man’s. Hank’s?”

“Perhaps, or a pal of his. I’d been tramping the deck, and I opened the door and saw them there.” Suddenly Dawn was out of bed and kneeling before a chest of drawers. One by one she pulled them out, disclosing piles of dainty undergarments. “Look, Uncle Stan, someone’s been searching, I can tell that by the way they’ve been refolded. Uncle, they are on board, and they’ve been searching for the map.”

“Look’s like it, but how did you come to be outside my cabin door?”

Dawn got back into bed, and sat with her knees drawn up to her chin.

“I went to look. You see when I found there was no one here I suddenly thought of your cabin. I was a fool, of course. I ought to have fetched you or a steward, as it was I opened the door and walked straight into this.” She fingered her jaw gently, then managed a lop-sided grin. “Doc was more right than he thought, Uncle. A knock-out blow, I should think it was. Still, no harm’s been done, so please don’t look so grim.”

“I feel grim, Dawn, and I’m wondering what to do. It’s getting a bit thick when they start knocking you about. If only we had some clue as to who did it I’d——”

“But, Uncle Stan, don’t you realize that, whoever he was, he never intended to attack me? I butted in on him suddenly and took him by surprise, and I suppose the only way to escape detection was to knock me out. I don’t suppose they’ll try it on again.”

Her companion smiled.

“No, I don’t suppose they will, or if they do, I hope I catch them at it. You’re a very plucky girl, Dawn. So far you’ve received all the knocks. How are you feeling?”

“Stiff but smiling. I’m so glad we posted the map. By the way, Uncle,

where do you think the man came from? I'm sure he's not among the firsts."

"Probably he and his companions are travelling second class, and he took advantage of the rough weather and empty decks to step up and start a search. Bit risky though. I wonder how he knew you were promenading the deck and I was playing bridge?"

For some seconds there was silence, then Dawn slapped her knee.

"I know, Uncle Stan. Matron said there were two men and a woman who called on her, but so far we've only made the acquaintance of Hank and Belle. They might be afraid to travel first class in case I recognized their voices or something else about them, but the second man ran no risk, and I bet you he's been among us all the time. Don't you see? He signals that the way is clear and up comes Hank. I'm sure that's how it was done."

"Very likely. Well, what do you intend doing, young woman? Are you going to obey doctor's orders?"

"Me! Of course not! They'd think I'd fallen to the prevailing sickness. I'll snooze till it's time to dress for dinner, and then I'll get up. And don't you worry about me, Uncle. I'm sure this afternoon's affair was a mistake, and most likely they're regretting it more than I am. Anyway, it takes more than a sock on the jaw to give me cold feet, so you needn't get them on my account. Now vamoose, and I'll have a nap till dinner time."

Dawn met with general commiseration over her bruised face when she made her appearance that evening. But she made light of her accident, and during pauses in the conversation, spent her time covertly examining the faces of those around her. Was one of the men eating dinner an enemy and allied with Hank and Belle to rob her of her map? From her seat she could see almost everyone in the saloon, most of them she had spoken to at one time or another, and there was not one who roused her suspicions. It was a nasty feeling, knowing that there were enemies at work who knew you but whom you did not know. Dawn shook her head as a steward offered her a dish of trifle. She realized that she was feeling more shaken than she had cared to admit, and made up her mind to go back to bed immediately after dinner. She would feel better in the morning, and affairs would seem more rosy. After all there was really no reason for worry. It was the map her rivals were concerned about, not with hitting her on the jaw, and the map was safely beyond their reach.

As Dawn had expected, a night's rest worked wonders, and she awoke the next morning in her usual happy frame of mind, to discover that the worst of the storm had passed, and that, beyond a certain stiffness and an ugly bruise upon her jaw, she was suffering no ill effects from her mishap. Even the bruise faded quickly, and by the time she and her guardian reached New York, nothing remained which could not be hidden by the skilful application of a little powder.

“Well, what is the programme now?” asked Mr. Wright when he and Dawn were installed in a comfortable hotel without any further demonstration on the part of their unknown enemies. “Do we go on at once and endeavour to outdistance our shadowers, or do we bid them defiance and dally by the way?”

“We’ll dally by the way,” laughed Dawn. “I’m not going to let those horrible people spoil my holiday, and so long as we have the map, the pearls are safe.”

“That’s the spirit, my dear, and a little dallying will probably start our foes guessing. They won’t understand how two people in possession of a map purporting to contain the secret of a great treasure can possibly break the journey to go sight-seeing.”

“Well, I hope it gives them a pain, that’s all,” replied Dawn viciously. “I wonder what the wretches will do next.”

By a strange coincidence at that very moment, in a much lower class hotel in a much lower part of the great city, two men and a woman were seated round a table, asking the same question of each other:

“What next?”

CHAPTER V

Kidnapped

The next few days were passed in an orgy of sight-seeing. Dawn, indeed, was having the time of her life. The shops thrilled her, the food thrilled her, and the shadowed streets, with the cliff-like skyscrapers towering up towards the clouds on either side, made her feel as though she had been transported to a different world, with the result that she forgot all about the unknown shadows, or at least only thought about them very rarely. And then one evening the fact that they were both under observation was again brought home to the travellers.

They had been to a theatre, and as Dawn opened her bedroom door, a faint whiff of some strong perfume assailed her nose. The girl switched on the light and looked around. The room was empty, but Dawn, who was fastidious about the scent she used, knew that some woman besides herself had been there quite recently. Who could it be? The chambermaid? But the girl would never be allowed to use that scent in the hotel. Dawn stood for some seconds surveying the room with critical eyes, then she shut the door and began opening her trunks and the drawers in which her clothes were laid away, one after the other. This time there were no badly folded garments to reveal the searcher, but in one drawer some handkerchiefs had been misplaced, in another a bag she had bought only the day before had been put back the wrong way up, and after a rapid examination, Dawn left the room and knocked on her guardian's door.

"Hullo! Who's there?"

"It's me, Dawn. Can I come in?"

"Yes."

Dawn entered the room and closed the door behind her. Her guardian was seated in an arm-chair reading, and the air was heavy with cigarette smoke. The girl puckered her nose disgustedly.

"Not much chance of smelling anything in this fug," she commented.

"What should I want to smell, my dear?" asked her guardian, laying down his book with a smile. "Rather late for a smelling game, isn't it?"

"Don't be an ass, Uncle Stan. They're back at it again."

"Who are back at what?" inquired Mr. Wright, regarding with approval the tall, slender figure in the sheath-like dress of blue taffeta who confronted him. "And where does the smell come in?"

Dawn uttered something which sounded suspiciously like a grunt, and crossing the room, she began pulling out the drawers of a cabinet. But at the

third she gave up the task, and having closed the drawer with a bang, she turned again to face her companion.

“Are all men as untidy as you?” she asked. “Why, a regiment could go through your things and you wouldn’t be any the wiser, keeping them in the pickle you do.” She moved forward and sat down on the bed. “Listen, Uncle Stan,” she went on. “Since we went out a woman has been in my room searching, I know it because though she was very careful she wasn’t quite careful enough, and some of my things have been displaced.”

Mr. Wright slowly crushed out his cigarette before replying, then: “Are you sure?”

“Perfectly.”

“How do you know it was a woman?”

“Because she was using a foul scent which is still hanging about in my room. That was why I grumbled at your smoke. I wanted to know if she had been in here, too. I suppose you didn’t notice anything?”

“I can’t say I did, Dawn. I was smoking at the time so probably I shouldn’t have noticed it if it had been here, but anyway, if our shadowers are at work again, the probability is that while the woman was searching your room, one of her confederates was going through my things. They’d save time that way. I suppose you haven’t missed anything? I mean, there is the possibility that your visitor might be an ordinary thief.”

The girl shook her head.

“No, I haven’t missed anything, besides——”

“I know. The odds are all in favour of a visit from our rivals.”

The speaker stood up, and going to a trunk rest at the bottom of the bed opened a large suit-case and looked inside.

“H’m! You’re right, Dawn, and so am I. Somebody has been going through this case with a heavy hand, and by the look of things, it wasn’t a woman.” He displayed the interior of the case, the contents of which had been roughly turned over without any attempt at concealment. “Must have been in a hurry by the way everything is left, and probably disappointed.” The speaker closed the case. “Well, that’s that. They know now we haven’t got the map with us, so perhaps they’ll leave us alone.”

Dawn shook her head.

“That doesn’t follow, Uncle Stan. They may think we carry the map about with us. By the way, what have you done with the map?”

“I went to my bankers while you were having your hair done this morning, my dear, and told them to send it on to their Brisbane branch. So that is safe for the time being. What worries me is the constant annoyance you are being subjected to, yet unless we can give our shadowers the slip, I don’t see how we can put an end to it.”

“Oh! don’t worry about that, Uncle Stan,” answered Dawn. “If they like to amuse themselves searching my things, let them. I admit it’s not pleasant, but after all we’re on a treasure hunt, and it was hoping too much that it would turn out to be an absolute picnic. Still, after to-night’s failure, perhaps they’ll give it a rest for a bit. Gosh! I’m sleepy. Think I’ll turn in. Thanks for the wonderful time you’re giving me, Uncle Stan; I’m enjoying myself immensely.” Dawn stood up and kissed her guardian on his forehead. “Good-night, and don’t smoke any more. I’m sure it’s not good for you.”

Dawn was getting so used to the “shadowers”, as Mr. Wright called them, that the thought of alien hands having been through her belongings did not disturb her unduly, and she slept like a top till the chambermaid knocked on the door and woke her the next morning. Dawn said nothing about the unknown searcher. It was unlikely that the maid knew anything, and once she started making inquiries there was no knowing where they would end. And indeed, as the days passed without any further move on the part of their rivals for the treasure, it did begin to seem as though the shadowers had given up the hunt for a while. Now and then Dawn found herself searching the faces of the people she passed in the streets and wondering if they were their enemies, but for the most part she refused to think of them and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the moment. Then came the evening when Dawn and her guardian had dinner at a fashionable restaurant and afterwards went on to a play. Dawn had put on her blue dress again, and over this she wore an evening cloak of white fur which her guardian had given her that very day. Many eyes, indeed, were turned towards the tall, graceful English girl, both in the restaurant and the theatre, and Dawn, who would not have been human had she been unaware of the glances of admiration shot in her direction, thoroughly enjoyed herself.

“It has been quite a triumphal progress, my dear,” whispered her guardian in her ear as they made their way slowly through the crowded vestibule after the play. “I think it must be that fur cloak. After all, one expects to get something for five hundred dollars.”

“Thank you, kind sir.” Dawn laughed up into his face. “Heavens, Uncle Stan, what a crowd! Hark to them yammering for taxis. I’m afraid they’ve forgotten all about the cloak.”

“Looks like it,” answered her companion as they emerged from the theatre on to the pavement. “Stop here a minute, Dawn, and I’ll see if I can get a car.”

Dawn nodded her head and moved forward towards the curb, while her guardian disappeared into the crowd. She was feeling delightfully warm although there was a distinct chilly nip in the air. With a wriggle she snuggled her face deeper into the soft fur collar. She had dreamed of a cloak like this, but she had not expected to possess one, not for years and years, and now——

“Taxi, miss?”

The girl came out of her reverie to see a taxi driver grinning at her invitingly while he leaned back and opened the door.

“Oh! yes, please. My uncle’s gone—— But he’ll be back in a minute.”

“That’s all right, miss. You jump in. I’ll wait.”

Dawn needed no second invitation. Uncle Stan might not be able to get a taxi, or if he had it wouldn’t matter. There were plenty of people who—— Suddenly Dawn’s pleasant thoughts came to an abrupt end. She had been stepping into the car, and now, in a moment, she found herself gripped and jerked forward into the dark interior so that she fell across someone’s knees. In the same instant the door slammed and the car began to move, while a rough hand closed over her mouth, choking back the scream which had risen to her lips.

The attack had been so sudden and unexpected that for some seconds Dawn lay without movement; then as the full meaning of the outrage and the ignominy of her position came to her, she began to kick and struggle with all her strength.

“Hi, hold the young hussy, can’t you?” snapped a woman’s voice from the opposite corner of the cab. “Get hold of her legs, someone, she’s kicking. B——t! Tie her up, you fools.”

Dawn felt the toe of her right foot come in contact with a soft body; then as the hand upon her mouth slackened its pressure a moment, she buried her teeth in a fleshy finger. A smothered yelp of pain greeted this assault, and the hand was hurriedly withdrawn, but before Dawn could take advantage of her brief freedom to utter a cry for help, she was seized and thrown against the rear of the cab with such force that all the breath was knocked out of her body, and the next moment it seemed to the terrified girl that she was being smothered by clutching hands, hands which gripped her, and forced a piece of rag between her teeth, and bound her arms and legs until she was completely helpless.

“That’s done it,” gasped a man’s voice at last. “Gosh, who’d think the girl had so much fight in her.”

“She’s bitten my finger half in two,” snarled a second man.

“She kicked me in the stomach,” said a woman’s voice. “Wait till I get her in a safe place, I’ll give her what for.”

“Stow it, you two,” ordered the first speaker. “You know what we want, and so long as we get it, there isn’t going to be any rough stuff. That’s agreed. We’ll be up against the law bad enough as it is over this night’s business, and we don’t want to make it worse. Understand that.”

The man’s companions growled some response, and silence settled down upon the interior of the car which seemed to Dawn, in her distraught state, to be travelling at reckless speed and to be twisting in and out the streets without

rhyme or reason. Miserably the girl leaned back against the cushions of the cab. The ropes round her legs and arms hurt her, and the gag in her mouth had a beastly taste. Where were they taking her, she wondered. What would Uncle Stan do when he discovered that she had disappeared? It seemed incredible that she could have been kidnapped from the very middle of a crowd emerging from a theatre without an outcry being raised. Yet she had heard nothing, and as far as she could tell, no attempt had been made to stop the car. Probably the very daring of the deed had been the cause of its success. No one, seeing her entering the car, would have dreamed of anything amiss. But suppose Uncle Stan had not left her, would their enemies have tried to kidnap them both? It seemed unlikely. Then the shadowers must just have been cruising round on the possibility of being able to pick her up. No doubt they had followed them to the theatre, and when Uncle left her to find a taxi, they had seized the opportunity, and now—now—what was going to happen now? Dawn had more than her share of courage, but at that moment she was a very frightened girl. These people wanted the map, and what would they do when she told them she hadn't got it? Would they believe her? Would——

The sudden termination of the wild drive through the streets brought an end to Dawn's thoughts. During the ride she had been conscious of street lamps visible through the cracks between the drawn blinds as they flashed by, but now the darkness without seemed to be as intense as the darkness within. Where could they be? Surely there should have been some lights visible? She heard the driver descend from his seat, and the next moment a door opened, and she saw the dark mass of a man's head and body in the space where the door had been.

"Here y'are," said the man. "Hop out and make it pronto."

"Were we followed?" asked one of the men in the cab.

"Followed—not likely, what d'you take me for? Come on, misters. I done my bit and brought you and the dame here, now get her out and I'll be gone. Kidnapping ain't in my line, and I only done it as a favour."

"Favour! What about the money we've paid you? All right, don't argue. Get out, Belle. Don, take hold of the girl's legs; I've got her shoulders. Quickly now. The sooner we're inside the house the better."

Dawn felt herself lifted and dragged none too gently out of the cab. She had a vague impression of a distant street lamp which seemed only to make the darkness more opaque, of tall, lightless buildings lining either side of a narrow way; then she was aware of being carried up some steps, of a door which banged behind her, and after a brief journey along a passage, she was dumped unceremoniously on to a hard settee. The next moment there came a loud click and an electric light bulb flashed on overhead, and Dawn found herself staring at two men and a woman whose faces were covered with masks of some heavy

black material.

For some seconds Dawn lay regarding her captors; then she turned her attention to the room. Filth seemed the predominating feature. The paper was peeling off the walls, the carpetless floor was black with grime, and heavy shutters, from which all paint had long ago vanished, covered the window, while the furniture consisted of the settee on which she was lying, two rickety chairs and a wooden table upon which one of the men now seated himself.

“Well, here we are,” said the man, “and no one any the wiser if we are to believe that cabby. Don, set our guest free, and, Belle, take the gag out of her mouth, and don’t look as though you wanted to scratch her face. What’s a kick in the stomach against all the pearls we’re going to have?”

So the man who was untying the ropes about her legs and arms was called Don, in which case the man sitting on the table, and who appeared to be the leader, must be Hank. Dawn regarded him for some moments; then turned her attention to the woman who was removing the gag with none too gentle hands. Instantly she recognized the perfume which she had discovered in her bedroom a few nights before, but which, in the stress of the moment, she had not noticed till then, and a second later she caught sight of the purple opal ring upon one of the woman’s fingers. Hank and Belle, the people who had visited her that night at home, and now they had her in their power. What were they going to do? The gag fell from her mouth and she drew in a deep, grateful breath of air, the next instant Don had completed the freeing of her arms and legs and she was able to sit up and stretch her cramped limbs.

“That’s better.” The man at the table was speaking again. “Sorry to have used you so roughly, Miss Cheverill, but you wouldn’t have come of your own will, so we had to bring you. Now you know what we want. We want the map old Ben Travers gave you. That map is ours and we mean to have it, so the sooner you hand it over the sooner will all this unpleasantness be ended.”

The speaker paused to see what effect his words were having, while thought after thought raced through Dawn’s mind. She did not for one moment believe the assertion that the map belonged to these people, but that made her position no easier. What should she say? To deny all knowledge of the map would be futile; on the other hand, would they believe the truth? It seemed unlikely, but there was nothing else she could say. Suddenly she realized that, now the crisis was upon her, she was much less afraid, and as the man seated on the table began to speak again, she answered with a resolute shake of her head.

“If I had the map,” she said, “I would not give it to you, but I have not got it, so anyway it is impossible to do what you want.”

“I see,” answered her questioner. “Then perhaps Mr. Wright has it, and no doubt he will part with it readily in order to ensure your safe return?”

Suddenly Dawn saw the gulf yawning at her feet. She was to be held for ransom, and the price of her freedom was the map which her guardian had made so safe that neither he nor she could touch it for many weeks to come. Nevertheless, she replied with a steady voice:

“That also is impossible. The map is not in Mr. Wright’s possession, so he cannot part with it to you or anyone else.”

“Come, come, Miss Cheverill,” replied the man, an impatient note creeping into his voice. “Someone must have the map. A few nights ago we took the liberty of searching your and your uncle’s belongings and we failed to find the map, so naturally we assumed that one or the other of you carried it about on your person. The only question which bothered us was which, and when you kindly stepped into our little trap this evening, we naturally brought you here in order that you might give us the answer we require. So let us waste no more time.”

“I am not wasting time,” replied Dawn firmly. “I have not got the map, neither has my uncle. At the moment I do not even know where it is, and if you were to offer me a million pounds I could not lay hands upon it. And now that you have your answer, don’t you think you had better take me back to my hotel? If you do so at once, and promise to trouble us no further, I will try to persuade Mr. Wright not to prosecute you for this outrage.”

“So that’s the tone you’re taking, is it?” The speaker’s voice had suddenly lost all its suavity and become harsh and uncompromising, and his eyes gleamed angrily through the slits in the mask. “Listen to me, my girl. You’re on a bad spot and you’d better come clean, or you’re in for a pile of trouble. Now then, where’s that map?”

Dawn was conscious of a horrible, sick feeling. Trouble. The man meant it, and she was in his power and the power of his companions, and even if she wanted to, she could not meet his demands. All the same she managed to keep her voice steady.

“I am telling the truth,” she answered. “I have not got the map, neither has my uncle, nor is it possible for either of us to put hands on it no matter what you do to me. That is all I have to say.”

“Is it indeed!” the woman’s voice burst in shrilly. “Don’t you believe her, Hank. Doesn’t know where the map is! That’s a likely yarn. Can’t you see, you mutt, she’s trying to confuse you. Look at the way she diddled us that night in Suffolk. Give her to me for half an hour, Hank, and I’ll guarantee that by the end of that time we shall know where the map is.”

“Shut up, Belle!” The leader’s eyes bored into Dawn for some seconds; then he turned again to the elder woman. “Don and I will go outside while you search her. The map may be hidden somewhere about her clothes, but get this; no third degree yet awhile. If you start any rough stuff on her, I’ll come in and

give you something you won't forget in a hurry. Now get on with it and make it snappy. As for you, young woman," to Dawn, "take my tip and submit, or I may alter my mind about that rough stuff. Come on, Don, we'll clear out."

Left alone the girl and the woman eyed each other. For all her slender grace Dawn was remarkably strong, and she guessed that, if the odds had been even, she could have held her own in a rough and tumble. But the odds weren't even. That awful woman had two strong men on her side, and if she resisted this ignominy——

"Give me that cloak!" Belle's shrill voice burst in upon the girl's thoughts, and suiting her action to her words, the woman reached out her hands and snatched the white evening cloak from Dawn's shoulders. "Stand up. That's right, now strip. Did you hear what I said? Strip or I'll tear the clothes off your back, and I haven't any others to give you. Go on. You heard what Hank said, make it snappy."

Almost Dawn threw discretion to the winds and flung herself upon her enemy in a frantic effort to overpower her and escape, but she checked the impulse in time. It was hopeless. Those men could not be far away, and even if she were able to gain a temporary advantage over her adversary, long before she could get away they would have come to their companion's aid. There was nothing to do but obey. Slowly she slipped the blue dress over her head, and handed the searcher one filmy garment after the other, receiving them back when the woman had satisfied herself that no map was concealed among their daintiness. Her dress, the cloak, and her shoes received the most attention, but even these were returned to her at last, and twenty minutes after the search had begun she was fully clothed again. The woman went to the door of the room and called to her companions.

"Nothing doing," she snapped as the men re-entered the room. "She hasn't got the map on her, and there's nothing on any of her clothes which might be the map. That's got you guessing, hasn't it?" she went on, noting the questioning glances of her companions. "Lucky you've got a woman with you. Never occurred to you, did it, that she might have worked the map into the pattern of one of her frillies and then destroyed the original. Still, it's no go. There's no map on her, I'll stake my life, and there was no map among her things the other night, so what's the next step? Either the big boy has it, or someone is being jolly clever. Seems to me it's time for a bit of that third degree, Hank."

The big man stood silent for several seconds while he eyed Dawn through the slits in his mask. The girl returned his glance unflinchingly. Inwardly she was very much afraid, but she was not going to show the white feather before these thugs.

"We'll shove her upstairs in one of the attics," announced the man at last.

“I can’t make up my mind about her, and we’ll see what a little cold and hunger will do before we start the rough stuff. But don’t think you’re going to get off, young lady,” he snapped at Dawn. “If you take my advice you’ll come across with all you know about that map before my patience gives out, and I hand you over to Belle’s tender mercies. Go on, you two,” to his companions. “Take her upstairs and lock her up. Put her in the back attic, that’s safe enough.”

CHAPTER VI

The House of Horror

Five minutes later Dawn was alone in the darkness of a small attic at the top of the house. She had heard the key turned in the lock, and now, as the receding footsteps of her jailers grew fainter and fainter as they descended the creaking stairs, her courage suddenly seemed to snap, and she had to press her clenched fists against her mouth to keep back the scream which rose to her lips. So for several minutes she stood in that dark, unknown room, fighting the fears which assailed her like evil goblins from all sides; then the paroxysm passed, leaving her weak and spent, and she sank in a huddled heap to the floor.

How long she remained thus Dawn did not know, but it was the cold of that high room, seeping through the thick fur of her cloak, which presently aroused her from the dull apathy into which she had sunk to a realization of her surroundings. Raising her head the girl looked about her. A small, grey square showed her the position of the skylight above her head, but otherwise the attic was in total darkness. Dawn listened. The roar of the great city fell dully upon her ears, but inside the house dead silence reigned, and presently she rose to her feet. She must do something. Perhaps the door was not as firmly locked as her captors supposed. A soft thud broke the stillness and made her start. What was that? Dawn stood listening. The sound had come from the floor at her feet, but it was not repeated, and after a brief pause, the girl bent down and felt about in the darkness with her hands. The next moment she uttered a low, brittle laugh. It was only her bag! What a state her nerves were in! She remembered now. That unspeakable woman had examined her bag, and then — Suddenly Dawn wrenched open the delicate affair of gilt mesh and began fumbling hurriedly about in the interior. Was it still there? Had that woman left — A sigh of relief escaped the girl's lips as her fingers came in contact with a slender electric torch, and a second later a thin pencil of light was probing the darkness of her prison.

That ray of light made all the difference to Dawn. Her courage returned and with it hope, and in a moment she was kneeling on the dirty floor examining the lock of the door. But the lock showed none of the signs of age she had hoped to find, and the door proved to be unexpectedly strong, and it was not long before Dawn realized that escape that way was impossible. With a sigh of disappointment the girl straightened herself and shone the torch round the attic. She had no false notions about the dangers of her position. Whatever

Uncle Stan might do, and no doubt he was already moving Heaven and Earth to find her, it seemed very unlikely that she would be traced to this deserted house. So unless she could effect her own escape, she would be at the mercy of her captors, and having gone so far, it was not likely they would prove particularly compassionate if they failed to obtain what they wanted. Dawn shivered as she thought of the woman who had searched her. She would show no mercy, she—— The girl resolutely put the disturbing thoughts aside, and concentrated her attention upon her prison. The attic was even more filthy than the room below. Great cobwebs festooned the corners of the ceiling, and in many places the plaster had crumbled from the walls revealing the laths behind. Dawn made a grimace of distaste. What a horrible place! She crossed the floor and stood staring up at the grimy skylight. It consisted of four small panes of glass let into a stout iron frame, so that even if she broke the glass she would not be able to squeeze her body through, while the whole was secured by a large padlock which looked as though nothing short of a crowbar would burst it open. So that was that. There was no way out. Dawn's heart seemed to sink right down to her shoes. But of course she might have known that they would never put her into a place from which escape was possible.

Dawn switched off her torch in order to save the battery, and leaned against the wall rather than sit down upon the dirty floor. She had a wild idea of trying to reach the skylight and breaking the glass, and then shouting for help in the hope that some sympathetic ears might hear her. Unfortunately the attic was destitute of furniture and there was no means of reaching the window in the roof, and even had she been able to put her plan into action, the first persons to hear her shouts would almost certainly be her captors. So there was another chance gone west. The girl bit her lip. What was the time, she wondered. It must be well past midnight, and that awful man Hank had said something about leaving her there to see what cold and hunger would do. That meant that she might be left alone for hours and hours. Well, no doubt that was infinitely better than being subjected to their brutalities, but it was maddening to think that she could not make use of that respite and escape. So this was how it felt to be a prisoner, helpless and in the power of enemies who would show no mercy, for instinct told Dawn that once he had shed his smooth outer veneer, Hank would stop at nothing if he thought that by so doing he could gain possession of the map.

Dawn leaned her head back against the wall and fought against a rising surge of panic which threatened to engulf her. She must not give in! With fists clenched she fought the fears which assailed her, and gradually her natural courage reasserted itself and calmness returned. Suppose she told her captors that the map was in the post, would that help? They might either disbelieve her altogether, in which case there was no knowing what they would do, or they

might hold her hostage for weeks and weeks. Dawn uttered an exclamation of self-contempt. She was actually contemplating surrender, and she was not going to surrender! Heavens, it was cold! There was a freezing draught playing round her legs. Where did it come from? The girl switched on her torch and shone the light on the wall behind her, where it revealed a black, gaping hole in the plaster near the floor. So that was the cause. The draught came through from an adjoining room. Dawn stood staring at the hole and the rotting laths behind, and for a moment her heart seemed to stop beating; then with a low cry, she dropped to her knees on the dirty floor, and regardless of ruined dress and stockings, began tearing at the laths with her bare hands. If there was another attic next door with only a lath and plaster wall between, then escape was still possible.

The laths came away easily enough, and a space about fifteen inches wide was disclosed between two uprights, with a further backing of more laths and plaster. Dawn's excitement increased. There was an adjoining room, and leaning forward, she pushed on the obstruction with her hands. But the wall of the next room was in better condition than that of the one she was in and resisted all her efforts to break it down, so presently Dawn desisted and sat back on her heels to think.

She needed more strength. She couldn't get at that plaster properly with her hands. What she wanted was a battering-ram, a loose board or something. Dawn began an exploration of the floor of the attic, but she found no loose boards, and she returned to the hole she had made empty handed. Well, there was only one thing for it, she must be her own battering-ram. The girl slipped off her cloak—no need to ruin that unnecessarily—and lying down upon her back on the grimy boards, she placed her feet against the lath and plaster partition and thrust vigorously forward. This time she felt a distinct give, but the high heels of her evening shoes hampered her, so she took them off and made a second attempt with her stockinged feet. The sound of cracking wood rewarded her efforts. Dawn's spirits rose. She was succeeding. One more effort. The girl bent her knees and, clutching at the floor-boards with her hands, pushed with all her strength against the protesting barrier; the next moment everything gave way at once, and with a rending of wood and the clatter of falling plaster, her feet went right through the wall into empty space.

Dawn withdrew her legs, and regardless of scratched and bleeding feet and ankles, peered through the hole she had made. There was a room beyond, but had her captors heard her? That falling plaster had made a tremendous noise. For several minutes the girl waited in dreadful suspense, listening for the sound of footsteps upon the stairs which would herald the approach of her jailers, but none came, and presently, with a tremulous sigh of relief, she continued her examination of the opening. It was too small to let her through,

so she set to work removing the broken laths and plaster till the opening was big enough to admit the passage of her slender body. Even so it was a tight squeeze, and her dress was badly rent before she succeeded in dragging herself through and stood up, scratched and dirty but free, in the room next to her prison chamber.

Dawn's first glance was towards the door. It was open, revealing a glimpse of a narrow passage beyond, and instantly a load seemed to be lifted off the girl's mind. Now all she had to do was to escape from the house. Were her jailers asleep? Dawn switched off her torch and crept towards the door, where she stood listening. Not a ray of light was visible, and the silence lay over everything like a brooding, tangible thing, so that to the girl, with her strained nerves, it seemed as though the old house was holding its breath while it waited for something to happen. Dawn drew her cloak more closely around her. Suddenly she felt very cold, and the journey down those dark stairs had become fraught with terror. Still it had to be done, and the longer she delayed the worse it would be. Dawn bent down and removed her shoes, and then, on stockinged feet and in complete darkness, she began to feel her way along the passage to the top of the stairs.

She reached it without mishap and stood peering over the rickety balustrade. But the same silence and darkness greeted her, unbroken by the faintest breath of sound or glimmer of light. Was it possible that her enemies were not in the house, that they had gone away and left her there alone, assured that she would be perfectly safe till they chose to return? It seemed unlikely and yet the silence was strange unless her jailers were in fact asleep. The thought that her captors might be wrapped in slumber gave Dawn confidence, and she started to descend the stairs in better heart. Nevertheless she did not relax her caution. Step by step she crept down the dark stairway, keeping close against the wall where the boards were firmer and less likely to creak, and so, after what seemed an age, she gained the first landing.

There again she stopped to listen, and as before she heard no sound, and after a brief pause she continued on her way. Twice in her progress along the landing her fingers came in contact with the wooden panels of closed doors, and she passed them by with fluttering heart, but she reached the top of the next flight of stairs in safety and resumed the descent.

This time she was less successful in concealing her movements. To the fearful girl the stairs appeared to creak with appalling loudness despite all her care, and every time the groaning boards broke the silence, she waited crouching in the darkness, with thumping heart and stilled breath, for the sounds of voices and movement which would proclaim her discovery. But no sounds came. The creaks died away, and the old house slumbered on, and so at last Dawn's questing feet told her that she had reached the bottom stair and

that another landing lay before her.

Again came the breathless pause to listen, and this time a sound reached the frightened girl. Somewhere, close at hand, someone was snoring. Dawn pressed her slim, trembling body against the unseen wall. If they should discover her now! Only one more flight of stairs and then she would be in the hall, and the front door and freedom would lie before her. Dawn repressed a strong desire to race down the stairs, and fling open the door, and flee as fast as her legs would carry her into the darkness of the night. But she mustn't do that. Some of her enemies might be in the rooms opening off the hall, or if she made a noise, they might wake and follow her, and she would not be safe until she was far away from that house of horror. Dawn stood listening for some seconds to the heavy breathing of the sleeper; then picking up her courage in both hands, she started forward again, creeping inch by inch along the dark landing until she came to the beginning of the last flight of stairs.

Dawn drew a deep breath. One deadly peril had been successfully passed, and if all her enemies were asleep on that floor, the road to freedom was clear. For the last time she began the nerve-racking descent, testing each stair with her stockinged feet before she rested her weight upon it, but even so, more than once they creaked ominously, and now that safety was so near, the desire to break into headlong flight became almost irresistible. But Dawn checked the impulse. To risk everything in a moment of panic would be madness, and so, pressed close against the wall, she stole down the dark, uncarpeted stairs until at last the hall was reached, and she saw before her a patch of greyness which marked the window over the front door.

She was down. Dawn's breath escaped in a little, fluttering sigh of relief. For a moment she stood listening, but no sound came from the room where she had been taken on her arrival, and a second later she was standing with her hand on the latch of the front door. It seemed almost too good to be true. In a moment or two she would be free. Dawn's hand dropped from the latch. A cold, frozen feeling as though icy water was flowing through her veins had suddenly permeated her whole body, while her heart seemed to stop beating. She was not alone. Somebody was outside, standing on the steps which led up from the street. Dawn uttered a low cry of despair and shrank back against the wall as, all at once, the silence of the house was broken by a loud, insistent banging as the unknown began to beat out a furious tattoo with the knocker on the closed door.

Instantly the house, so still a second before, awoke to violent life. Shouts sounded from upstairs, followed by the thud of pounding feet, and the opening of doors, and hardly knowing what she did, Dawn fled blindly towards the rear of the house, just in time to escape the beam of a powerful torch with which someone on the landing above flooded the hall with light.

“Who the blazes is making that row?” Dawn heard Hank inquire in a voice in which anger struggled with alarm.

“Open up, you fool!” replied the man outside the door. “Hurry, there’s not a moment to lose!”

Dawn groped her way down a narrow passage, and coming to a door pushed it open and crept through. She could hear footsteps hurrying down the stairs, and a moment later the front door was opened and the sound of voices reached her.

“What’s wrong?” asked Hank. “D’you want to wake the whole neighbourhood?”

“Neighbourhood be blowed!” Dawn recognized the voice of the taxi driver who had lured her into his cab. “Pal, you got to get outa here. Somebody must have seen you carry in the dame and spilled the beans. Anyway, the cops are on the way, I had it from a pal of mine in the know, so you’d better get the girl out double quick. My bus is round the corner, and if you hurry I might give you a lift, but pronto’s the word.”

A violent curse from Hank answered the cab driver, followed by the sound of someone running.

“Don, Belle,” shouted the leader of Dawn’s enemies, “get the girl down quick! D’you hear? Beat it; the cops are coming and——”

Dawn waited to hear no more. She must get away, get away quickly, or they would catch her! Pushing the door to, she switched on her torch, and saw that she was in the kitchen of the house. Evidently it had been used quite recently, for some dirty crockery littered the grimy table, but what attracted Dawn’s instant attention was a window in the opposite wall, the lower sash of which was raised slightly, letting in the cold night air.

In a moment the girl was across the room, and was raising the sash. It went up easily enough, and a quick flash of the torch revealed a back-yard beyond, and ten seconds later Dawn had scrambled over the window-sill, and was threading her way through the debris of broken cases and bottles which littered the place. The yard was surrounded by high walls, but again fortune favoured the fugitive, for a narrow door in the rear wall proved to be open, and Dawn slipped through into a dark, noisome alley just as a muffled shout of rage reached her from the house behind. They had discovered her escape. Dawn picked up her skirts and ran.

Now Dawn had reason to bless the lateness of the hour, for the dark, narrow streets through which she ran were empty, and when at last she reached a wider and better lighted thoroughfare, the first thing she saw was a taxi evidently returning from taking some late reveller home. The driver was travelling slowly as though hoping to pick up someone to make his journey back worth while, and having assured herself that he was a complete stranger,

Dawn signalled to him to stop. The man saw the sign and drew into the curb where he eyed the girl curiously.

“Been in a spot of trouble, haven’t you, missy?” he asked, his gaze travelling from her dusty cloak to her rent dress and torn stockings, through the holes in which the scratched, white flesh was visible.

“I have,” answered Dawn, suddenly acutely conscious of her dishevelled condition. “I’ve been in an accident. I——” She opened her bag and took out a five-dollar note. “Please take this just to show—just on account, and if you’ll drive me straight to the Grand Hotel, my guardian will give you two more like it. Is—is that all right?”

“Sure it is, missy,” replied the cabman heartily, while he pocketed the note. “Jump in and make yourself comfortable. There’s a rug inside. Wrap it round you to keep out the cold, and I’ll have you at the Grand in no time.”

He leaned back and opened the door, and a few seconds later Dawn was in the cab and speeding rapidly through the deserted streets. Now that she was free again and safe, she was feeling very weak and tired, but her mind was surprisingly active. What should she say when she got back to the hotel? Uncle Stan would certainly have called in the help of the police, and they would want to know what had happened, and if she told them she had been kidnapped, not only would the story of the map become public property but they might be delayed weeks while the authorities tried to trace her captors. And it was not as if she could describe them properly. The only face she had seen was the cabman’s, and he was a very minor figure in the conspiracy. No, better not say anything about the kidnapping. She would simply tell the police that she had been in an accident, and had no charge to make against anybody, and then in the morning, she and Uncle Stan would get off by the first plane they could catch to the west coast. If they did that they would almost certainly give Hank and his gang the slip, for after her escape, her kidnappers would be sure to go into hiding, and she and Uncle might be half-way across the Pacific before their rivals realized that no charge had been laid against them. Yes, that was her best plan. Dawn felt a draught of cold air, and discovered that the cab had stopped and the driver was standing by the open door.

“Here y’are, missy,” announced the man in fatherly tones. “All safe and sound, and looks to me as though they was expecting you.”

Dawn looked up. The vestibule of the hotel was ablaze with light, and as she got out of the cab, two men emerged through the swing doors. One was her guardian and he was deep in conversation with a man in uniform; the next moment he caught sight of the girl and was down the steps in a couple of bounds.

“Dawn!” he cried, taking her in his arms. “My dear, what has happened? Where have you been? Are you all right?”

“Of course I’m all right, Uncle Stan,” Dawn answered in a clear voice so that the second man could hear. “I’ve been in a bit of a mix up, that’s all.” She put her arms round his neck and kissed him. “You haven’t told them about the map, have you?” she whispered, and was answered by an almost imperceptible shake of the head. “Good.” Then louder. “You poor darling, have I made you anxious? I am so sorry. It was a mad thing to do going off like that, but——”

“Excuse me, Miss Cheverill,” the man in uniform interrupted. “I’m Sergeant Blake of the New York Police. A report came in some time ago that a young lady had been kidnapped, and when Mr. Wright reported that you had disappeared——”

“Kidnapped, Sergeant!” Dawn turned wide-open, violet eyes upon the policeman. “But you surely didn’t think it was me? You did? Oh! I am sorry. I’m afraid you must have been to a lot of trouble over nothing.”

“Nothing, miss! Excuse me, but I shouldn’t call the state you are in nothing. Looks to me as though you’ve been in a rough house.”

Dawn tilted her chin.

“Must you call attention to my clothes, Sergeant? I have just told my guardian that I have been in a bit of a mix up, but there was nothing in it, and no harm has been done, and I have no complaints. And now, if you don’t mind, I will go to bed. Good night, Sergeant, and I’m so sorry you have been put to all this unnecessary trouble.” She nodded to the dazed policeman, and turned to her guardian. “Let me have your note case for a moment, please, Uncle. Thanks.” She turned her back on the two men, and having abstracted a twenty-dollar note, walked towards the cabman who had been an interested onlooker. “Here you are,” she said, handing him the note, “and thanks so much for bringing me home.”

The cabman took the note and uttered a low exclamation of surprise as he saw its value.

“You’re welcome, missy,” he went on heartily. “Glad to have been of assistance.” He touched his cap, and took his place at the wheel. “Good night, missy. You never can trust them night clubs, you know, not even the most respectable. Some bloke starts a row and then the decent folk and their friends get dragged in. Still all’s well that ends well.”

He let in the clutch and with a broad wink which only Dawn saw, drove rapidly away. What a pet! He guessed that she had been kidnapped and yet for some reason of her own wished to keep it dark, and so he had made up that stuff about the night club to throw the police off the scent. Dawn faced about and returned to her guardian. Sergeant Blake was still there and was eyeing her suspiciously.

“What night club was that cabman alluding to, Miss Cheverill?” he asked.

Dawn slipped a hand round one of her guardian’s arms, and stared

haughtily at the policeman.

“Really, Sergeant, need I account for all my private actions? I have already expressed regret for any unnecessary trouble to which you may have been put, and I think that is enough. Come, Uncle Stan, I’m going to bed. Good night, Sergeant Blake.” She nodded to the discomfited policeman and walked up the steps and in through the swing doors. “Gosh, Uncle Stan, what a persistent man!” she said, giving her companion’s arm an affectionate squeeze. “I thought we were never going to get rid of him.”

“Well you have, but you haven’t got rid of me, young woman. What’s happened? D’you realize I’ve——”

“I know, poor darling, and I’m awfully sorry, but it hasn’t been too pleasant for me either. Listen. I’m simply dying for a bath, so give me twenty minutes and then come to my room, and I’ll tell you everything. Uncle Stan, we’ve got to plan, and plan quickly.”

CHAPTER VII

Jill

“The rogues! You know, Dawn, it goes against the grain to let them get off after this outrage.”

Forty-five minutes had passed, and Dawn, wearing a fluffy, blue bed-jacket, and with her hair forming a golden halo round her flushed face, was seated in bed with her arms clasped round her drawn-up knees. She had just finished an account of her adventures and of the decision she had come to in the cab.

“I agree, Uncle Stan,” she now answered. “I don’t like the idea myself, but don’t you see that this is our great chance to give them the slip? They’ll be terrified that the police are after them, and for a day or two at least they’ll go into hiding, and if we can get away early to-morrow, or to-day I should say, we shall probably get rid of them for good. And that’s better than hanging about here on the chance that the police may run them to earth. Besides, suppose they do, and Hank and company get sent to prison, by that time the story of the treasure will be common property, and instead of one gang of crooks after us we shall have a dozen. I am right, Uncle Stan, am I not?”

“Absolutely, my dear, and I can only say how very proud I am of you and your courage.” He laughed. “Poor Sergeant Blake, I’m afraid he hasn’t a very high opinion of your truthfulness, but that can’t be helped. Right-o, that’s settled. Now you get to sleep. I believe there’s a plane about eleven. Can you catch that?”

“Rather.”

“Good. We shall have to travel light, you know. Take just what you want, and leave the rest to be sent on.”

“I will. Good night, Uncle Stan. Gosh! it’s marvellous to be back here. D’you know, Guardy, there were times this evening when I wondered if I’d ever see you again.”

The tall, middle-aged man laid a hand on Dawn’s shoulder, and the girl caught hold of it and pressed it against her cheek.

“Poor child, I’d have given anything for this not to have happened. Try to forget about it if you can.”

“That’s what I’m going to do, darling, and we’ll hope that we never set eyes on those wretched people any more. Now you go and get some sleep, too. So long. I feel I shall snooze like a top.”

Dawn was as good as her word, and in spite of her terrifying experience,

she fell asleep at once, and did not wake till the maid knocked on her door and entered bringing her early cup of tea. Dawn wished the girl "good morning", while the events of the past night rushed through her mind; then as the maid left the room, she sprang out of bed and began to dress. She must be quick. There was a lot to do. How long had Uncle Stan been up, she wondered, and had he got seats in the plane? She slipped on a red jumper and a serviceable tweed skirt, and began packing. Her immediate needs she stowed away in a large suit-case, and then started to fill her trunks. It went against the grain to leave so many pretty things behind, but she comforted herself with the thought that she would be able to fill up any gaps at San Francisco, and anyway the most important thing was to throw their enemies off the trail. Dawn shuddered as she thought of how near to disaster she had been the night before. If they hadn't put her in the attic with the hole in the wall she might have been in that awful house at that very moment, or if not in the house, still a prisoner. A knock sounded on the door of her room, and in response to her invitation, her guardian entered.

"Hullo, my dear," he greeted her, "how are you feeling?"

"Fine, thanks, Uncle Stan."

"Good." He looked at Dawn closely, and evidently satisfied with what he saw, nodded his head. "Well, everything's fixed up. There's a plane leaving at ten-thirty, and I've been able to book cabins on a Pacific liner called the *Golden Star* which is leaving San Francisco for Brisbane the day after tomorrow. How's the packing going? I've had my breakfast, so as soon as you're ready, come down and have yours, while I see the hotel people about storing our trunks till I let them know where to send them."

The next hour and a half were a hectic rush. Dawn swallowed her breakfast while her guardian made arrangements with the hotel authorities to take temporary charge of their luggage. Then came the drive to the air-port where they arrived ten minutes before the plane was due to take off, and all the time Dawn's eyes were searching the hurrying crowds in the streets, the people on the air-field, and even their fellow passengers in the giant aeroplane for signs of their enemies. But she saw nothing to cause her alarm. There was no woman on the air-liner with a large opal ring, no men who in the least resembled Hank and Don, and as the great plane left the ground, she settled back comfortably in her chair and smiled up at her companion.

"I think we've shaken them off at last, Uncle Stan," she said. "They're in hiding, and by the time they come forth to look for us, we'll be beyond their reach."

Her guardian nodded.

"I sincerely hope you're right, Dawn. I don't mind a little rough house myself now and then, but when it comes to you getting all the knocks, I begin

to wonder if Ben Travers's map is worth the candle."

Dawn laughed.

"Don't be ridiculous, Uncle Stan," she answered. "I admit last night wasn't nice, but that's all over, and my chief grouse against those awful people is that they've made us change our plans. I wanted to see so much more of this country, and now all I look like getting is a bird's-eye view from the air."

In spite of their hasty departure, however, Dawn thoroughly enjoyed the flight across the American continent, and they reached San Francisco the following afternoon without adventure. There they learned that the *Golden Star* was sailing early the next morning, so they did some hurried shopping, and after dinner at an hotel, went straight on board.

"Mr. Stanford Wright and Miss Cheverill," said the purser. "Yes, our New York office 'phoned through booking your reservations. I'm afraid, Miss Cheverill, I shall have to ask you to share a cabin with another lady. I am sorry," as he saw the girl's face drop, "but we are very crowded this trip, and you left your booking till rather late, did you not? However, I think you will get on quite well together. She is a young lady of your own age, I should say, a Miss Howard, and she is returning to her people in Brisbane under the captain's care. Now I am sure you would like to see your cabins, and I hope you will have a pleasant voyage."

He spoke to the steward who was carrying their light luggage, and the man led them to two cabins on the upper deck.

"This is yours, sir," he said. "Number 15." The man opened the door disclosing a small but comfortably furnished state room. "Yours is a double, miss," he went on. "Number 16. I'll send the stewardess along to you. I think the other young lady has already come on board."

The steward knocked on the door of Number 16, and in reply to an invitation to enter, Dawn opened the door and stepped inside. A tall, slim girl very like herself in build but with deep chestnut-coloured hair, was kneeling before an open trunk, and as Dawn, followed by the steward carrying her luggage, entered the cabin, she looked up disclosing a charming face with red, generous lips and large, brown eyes.

"Hullo," she said, taking in Dawn's whole appearance with one swift glance, "are you my cabin mate?" Then as Dawn nodded. "I expect you've been cursing me as I've been cursing you. I was scared you might be someone awful, but it seems that I've struck lucky after all."

Dawn laughed and thanked the steward who went out, closing the door.

"I'm afraid I was rather until a moment ago," she admitted, returning the other's critical gaze. "But I'm not now."

The brown-eyed girl sat back on her heels and smiled up into Dawn's face.

"We're beginning well, anyway," she said. "I'm Gillian Howard, Jill to my

friends.”

“I’m Dawn Cheverill.”

“Dawn Cheverill—Dawn. Suits you, you know, with that hair. One of your parents must have taken a peep into the future when they named you. Well, Dawn, I’ve already taken possession of half the wardrobe and half the drawers, in case you turned out to be one of those dragons who want to bag everything, so you had better have choice of beds. Oh! I know that one’s in a pickle,” as Dawn’s eyes strayed to one bed covered with Jill’s belongings, “but you’ve only to say the word and I’ll clear it in a jiffy.”

Dawn laughed again. She had taken instant liking to her new companion, and was already thinking how much more jolly it was going to be to share a cabin than to possess one in solitary state.

“No, you stick to it, Jill,” she replied. “This one will suit me perfectly. Hullo, here’s the stewardess, and the steward with my trunk. No, thank you,” as the woman asked if there was anything she required. Then as the door closed again, she explained, “My guardian and I had some grub before we came on board.”

“Guardian?” The other girl looked up.

“Yes, I’m travelling with my guardian. I’ve—no parents—haven’t had since I was five.”

“Oh, I am sorry, Dawn, hard luck! I’m going back to mine, thank goodness. I’ve been visiting some of my mother’s relations in Boston, and now I’m being returned home, care of the captain, like a nicely done up parcel.” She tossed a pair of filmy pyjamas on to her bed. “They were jolly decent to me you know, and gave me a grand time, but—— D’you know Boston?” Dawn shook her head. “Well, it’s a very conservative city, and my father runs a small fleet of trading schooners among the Pacific islands so that I’ve spent half my life on the sea, and I’m afraid I shocked mother’s people once or twice. Hullo, who’s knocking now?”

“Must be Uncle Stan. May I bring him in and introduce him?”

“Of course.”

Jill scrambled to her feet and smoothed down her skirt, while Dawn opened the door revealing the tall figure of her guardian standing outside.

“All right, Dawn? I just came to inquire——”

“Quite, thanks, Uncle Stan, but come along in. This is Gillian Howard; Jill, my guardian, Uncle Stan, Mr. Stanford Wright, and, Uncle Stan, it will save a lot of time if you will start calling her Jill straight away.”

“Well, it seems rather quick work, but of course I am quite agreeable. How do you do, Jill? I am glad to see you and Dawn are to be cabin mates. Now are you both comfortable? Is there anything I can get either of you before you turn in?”

“Nothing at all, thank you, Mr. Wright,” answered Jill. “I’ve just been telling Dawn how relieved I am to see her. I was so afraid I might get some old thing to share the cabin with me.”

Mr. Wright smiled.

“I am sure Dawn is equally grateful, Jill. So you have everything you want. Then I’ll turn in, and happy dreams. I expect we shall be under way by the time you wake up in the morning.”

“He’s a pet,” exclaimed Jill, as the door closed. “If I had to have a guardian I’d want him to be like your Uncle Stan. By the way, is he really your uncle?”

“No, he was my father’s greatest friend.” Dawn looked at her watch. “Gosh! Jill, d’you know it’s half-past eleven? I’m going to turn in, and leave my unpacking till to-morrow. What are you going to do with all those things on your bed?”

Jill grinned.

“It is in a bit of a litter, isn’t it, but I always get like that when I unpack. I know, I’ll shove them all into this drawer and sort them out in the morning. Dawn, it’s grand our coming together like this. I’m sure we’re going to have a wonderful time.”

“Well, my dear, enjoying yourself?”

Three days had passed, and the *Golden Star* was well out on the Pacific, and Dawn, looking delightfully cool in white silk shirt, white shorts and canvas shoes, had just finished an exciting game of deck quoits.

“Gloriously, Uncle Stan,” replied the girl, dropping into the chair next her guardian’s and stretching her shapely bare legs which were already assuming a beautiful golden tan under the influence of the generous sun.

“Not worrying about our rivals, I hope?”

“Not a scrap. I’ve almost forgotten them, and I’m perfectly certain that this time we’ve given them the slip.”

“So am I. I was able to find out from the purser that we were the last people to book passages, so I think we may be quite satisfied that they are not on board.”

Dawn nodded her head.

“That’s great.” She turned impulsively towards her companion. “Uncle Stan, this is being a wonderful trip, in spite of Hank and his friends, and I wouldn’t have missed it for worlds.”

“Good, and I like your new friend, Jill. She’s sound.”

“She is that, Uncle Stan, and now that we’re alone for a few minutes, I want to talk to you about her. You know her home is in Brisbane, and her father owns a small fleet of schooners with which he trades among the Pacific islands. Well, it seems to me that he’s the very man we want. We shall have to

hire a vessel of some sort from somebody, so why not from Captain Howard? From what Jill has told me about him, he must be a real sport, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he and Jill didn't want to help man her themselves. If they did it would be great. I'd love to have Jill with me, and so I've been wondering if I might tell Jill about the map and the treasure. Would you mind? I'm sure she wouldn't breathe a word to anybody."

"No, I don't think she would," replied Mr. Wright thoughtfully, "and certainly it would be good for you to have another girl for a companion. Anyway, Dawn, the map is yours, so if you wish to take Jill into your confidence do so by all means. As a matter of fact, when you first told me about her father I thought that he might prove to be the man we wanted. He has ships and experience of the islands, two things we lack, and as I said before, I like Jill."

Dawn thanked her guardian, and that night, after the two girls had gone to bed, she told her companion the story of the map. Jill listened with open-mouthed surprise, now and then interrupting with exclamations of anger or admiration, and when at last Dawn brought her story to an end, Jill burst into excited speech.

"My dear, I think you are simply marvellous. Gosh! I should have been scared stiff if I had been kidnapped and locked up in that awful house."

Dawn laughed.

"I wasn't feeling very happy myself, I can tell you."

"No, I don't expect you were, still—— Oh, Dawn, a real treasure island! Of course there are scores of such yarns to be heard round the Pacific coasts, but this is the real thing, and——" Jill checked again, and stared at her companion. "Why are you telling me this, Dawn? Most people engaged on such a jaunt would keep it to themselves, and goodness knows, you've had enough experience of what it means to have rivals."

"I know, Jill, but you see—well, we're friends and I'd like a companion. Then we'll need a ship, and someone who knows the islands, and we thought perhaps that your father——"

"Dawn, what do you mean? Are you saying that you want me and Dad to help you?" Then as Dawn nodded, "My dear, how simply marvellous! It's unbelievable! A real treasure hunt! Why, Dad will simply jump at it. He'll be like a great schoolboy. Oh, Dawn, you utter, utter brick!" and Jill, who had been sitting on her bed, jumped up and hugged her companion.

Dawn laughed.

"Well, I'm glad you like the idea, Jill, but don't forget Hank and company. As soon as they discover we've left New York, they'll be on their way to Australia as fast as they can travel. Besides, for all we know, they may have confederates on the other side who'll be on the lookout for us, so it may not be

such a picnic as we imagine.”

“Hank and company!” repeated Jill scornfully. “Don’t worry about them any more, Dawn. I reckon Dad and Uncle Stan”—she had quickly reached the stage of calling Dawn’s guardian uncle—“will deal with them all right should they turn up, besides once we’re at sea, it’ll take some sailor to follow us. What did you say the island was called? Lion Island. I don’t think I’ve ever heard of it. And you say it’s not marked on the Admiralty charts. Well, that makes it all the more exciting. Oh, Dawn, this is wonderful? Dad’s got a small schooner called the *Osprey*. She’s a perfect witch to sail, and you and I with Dad and Uncle Stan and three or four Kanakas could man her easily. Oh dear, I am excited! I don’t believe I’ll ever get to sleep to-night.”

As a matter of fact, however, both girls fell asleep almost immediately they put out the light, and awoke the next morning in high spirits. They were, indeed, thoroughly enjoying themselves. The weather was glorious, they had numbers of friends among the other passengers, and were greatly in demand for games, and they spent their days playing deck quoits or deck tennis, taking part in tournaments, bathing in the swimming bath which the sailors had rigged up on deck, or sunning themselves till they had both become a lovely, golden brown. Then came Honolulu where the *Golden Star* stopped for some hours and there was time for trips on shore, after which the voyage was continued through the same beautiful weather.

“I think this is the most perfect sort of life I can imagine,” remarked Dawn one morning.

The *Golden Star* was three days out from Honolulu, and Dawn and Jill, having just finished a hard game of deck tennis, in which their partners had been two young ship’s officers, were leaning on the rail with their companions, staring down at the sea.

“Oh! it’s all right now, Miss Cheverill,” replied one of the young men, “but wait till the Pacific ceases to be pacific. It isn’t so pleasant then, I can tell you.”

“No, I suppose not if you’re a sailor, and have to spend hours on the bridge; still even a storm can be fun.”

“Not a real Pacific storm, Dawn,” put in Jill. “You want to meet a tornado or a cyclone in a hundred ton lugger to know what a storm at sea can be like. I remember——”

She was interrupted by an outburst of excited voices from the opposite side of the deck. Exclamations of astonishment were mingled with other utterances which sounded very like cries of fear, and then, as the four companions looked questioningly at each other, the low, regular throb of the great engines far down in the vessel’s body suddenly ceased.

“Whatever’s happening?” asked Jill.

“The ship’s stopping,” answered Dawn, straightening her slim body with a jerk and swinging round to face the direction from which the cries were coming.

“Stopping, I’ll say she is,” confirmed one of the girls’ companions in a curiously strained voice. “What the blazes——”

He started to run across the deck followed by the rest of the little party. The opposite rail was lined with people all of whom seemed to be gazing or pointing in the same direction, and as the girls stood on tip-toe to see over the heads of those in front they saw a sight which brought their hearts to their mouths. Two hundred yards away, and keeping pace with the rapidly diminishing speed of the liner, was a long, slender vessel lying half submerged in the water. She was a submarine, but what gave to her a particularly ominous and sinister appearance was the colour of her hull which was a dead black, and a group of men upon her deck gathered round a quick-firing gun the muzzle of which pointed straight at the hull of the *Golden Star*. Jill clutched hold of one of Dawn’s arms, and as she did so, a commotion broke out in the crowd near at hand, and suddenly a woman screamed.

“Let me through,” she cried, “let me through! They’re going to shoot, I tell you they’re going to shoot!”

CHAPTER VIII

The Black Pirate

As though the woman's words had broken a spell, all at once the uproar seemed to increase a hundredfold. Men shouted to one another, children screamed, women cried out shrilly in surprise and fear, and then Dawn and Jill, who were still staring at the submarine, saw a tongue of fire suddenly leap from the muzzle of the gun, followed by a sharp report, and in the same instant a shell screamed overhead carrying away in its course the upper portion of the foremast and bringing the wireless aerial crashing down.

Instantly pandemonium broke out upon the great ship. The crowd by the rail surged to and fro as though swept by a mighty hand, carrying the girls with it. Shrieks of terror, the thud of feet, and the shouts of men, some calling to their wives and children, others trying to restore calm and order, filled the air, and then, in a moment, the uproar died away as a stentorian voice, issuing from a megaphone, boomed out across the water.

"That's just in case somebody should try to send out an S.O.S.," shouted the speaker from the conning-tower of the submarine. "Now listen to me, everyone. I'm coming across, and if a hand is so much as raised against me or my companions while on your ship, the men left behind on this craft have orders to sink the liner with all on board."

The speaker signed to the men grouped about the gun, and with a scared fascination, the watching passengers saw the threatening muzzle dip till it was pointing at the liner's water-line.

"There, that'll show you that I mean business," the ruffian went on. "Now what about it, Captain Wade, of the *Golden Star*?"

"Come on board if you wish," came the curt reply from the bridge of the liner, "but don't imagine you will get away with this outrage. This is piracy."

A mocking laugh greeted the captain's reply, and a few minutes later the watchers saw a large collapsible boat launched from the submarine and five men step into her. By this time the *Golden Star* was lying motionless on the calm sea, and some of the passengers were beginning to crowd the rails again. Dawn and Jill found a place where they could watch everything, and there, a second or two later, they were joined by Mr. Wright.

"Here you are," he said in a relieved voice. "I've been searching for you two. Are you all right?"

"Yes, we're all right, Uncle Stan," answered Dawn, "but what about the people forward? Was anybody hurt by the falling mast?"

"I don't think so. They were all crowding the rails and watching the submarine and the wreckage fall away from them."

"What a mercy!" put in Jill. "But, Uncle Stan, what's the idea? Why have those men stopped us? Do you really think they are pirates?"

"They're acting like pirates, certainly, Jill, though what they are after I can't imagine."

Another passenger, a Mr. Burgess, who was leaning on the rail nearby, turned and joined in the conversation.

"I have heard a rumour that there is bullion on board," he said in a low voice. "If so, and those ruffians know about it, it would account for many things. I don't envy Captain Wade, I can tell you, what with that gun trained on the ship and the lives of five hundred passengers at stake."

"But piracy, Mr. Burgess!" protested Dawn. "I thought that died out ages ago."

"Don't you believe it, Miss Cheverill. There have always been pirates in the China seas, and I've often wondered why some modern Blackbeard hasn't adopted the submarine as a suitable craft on which to raise the black flag. Unfortunately it seems that I'm not the only one who thought along those lines," he ended with a lame laugh.

At that moment there was a stir among the crowd of frightened passengers, and two officers came pushing their way through.

"Captain Wade's compliments, ladies and gentlemen," one said, "and will you all please remain perfectly calm and take no notice of anything that happens. Especially, gentlemen, Captain Wade asks you not to interfere in any way."

"But, officer, what is going to happen to us?" cried a woman who had been lying back in a chair in a semi-fainting condition attended by her husband, but who now struggled to her feet and clutched at the speaker's arm. "Shan't we all be killed? Isn't the ship sinking?"

"Nothing will happen to you, madam. No one has been hurt, no one will be killed, and the ship is not sinking. Now pray be calm, and in a very short time, I have no doubt, we shall be on our way again."

The officer replaced the frightened lady in her chair, and with a few more reassuring words to the passengers, he and his companion passed on.

"Well, that's that," remarked Mr. Burgess. "Hullo, they're clearing the people away from round the gangway, and setting a guard of sailors. Captain Wade's not taking any chances. Don't blame him either, not with that gun pointing at our water-line. Gee! there won't be half a stink in the newspapers over this business."

The speaker strolled away, evidently with the idea of getting a closer look at the men from the submarine, while Dawn and her companions leaned farther

over the rail to obtain a better view of the boat now rapidly approaching the liner.

“Have you heard anything about bullion being on board, Uncle Stan?” asked Jill.

“Not a word, Jill; still it’s hardly a thing that would be talked about, you know. Hullo, there goes the purser, and he’s looking very worried. I should not be surprised if there is some truth in our friend’s rumour.”

“But, Uncle Stan, it’s unbelievable!” exclaimed Dawn. “How can those men ever hope to get away with piracy in these days?”

“Quite as easily as they used to, I should imagine, my dear. Think of the vastness of the Pacific and of one small submarine operating from some secret base. Her fuel would be her chief trouble, and she could renew that from the ships she holds up, and once that difficulty is surmounted, she might go on operating for a very long time. Indeed, if the leader is a man of sense, there seems to me no reason why he shouldn’t rake in all the riches he and his crew can possibly need, and then retire gracefully from the scene, leaving the navies of the world pursuing a hopeless search.”

“H’m,” remarked Dawn, smiling at her guardian, “you seem to have given the matter as much thought as Mr. Burgess, Uncle Stan. I shall soon begin to think you’re in league with the people on the submarine. Hullo, they’ve reached the ladder, and two of them are coming on board. Gosh! look at the man in front. Did you ever see such a cruel face?” Suddenly the girl shivered. “This is no joke, Uncle Stan,” she went on in a subdued voice. “That man would sink this liner with every soul on board with as little compunction as we would kill a fly. You can see it in his eyes.”

Others apparently besides Dawn felt the grim menace in the stranger’s eyes, for a hush fell upon the passengers within sight of the gangway. Both the newcomers were striking-looking men, but the one who was presumably the leader completely over-shadowed his companion in the frozen cruelty of his expression. His eyes were like twin pieces of cold, grey ice, his mouth was a straight, firm line, while his jaw looked as if it had been carved out of a block of granite so hard was it, so relentless the air of grim determination it gave to his whole face. Suddenly a woman among the crowd of watchers uttered a scream, a scream which was checked half-way as though a hand had been placed across the screamer’s mouth, and Dawn, her eyes fixed upon the leader’s face by some horrible fascination, saw a fleeting look of satisfaction pass over the cruel features. Fear! In a moment Dawn knew that the leader of the pirates lived and flourished on the fear he inspired; then the two strangers reached the deck and were being conducted by a couple of officers between two lines of sailors towards the captain’s cabin. Half a minute later they had disappeared from view, and with their going a spell seemed to be lifted from

the watchers, and everyone began to talk at once.

“Well, that’s that,” said Jill, in a small, quiet voice. “I don’t think I’m a coward, but I hope Captain Wade does what that man wants, otherwise I’m afraid we’re all for it.”

Apparently others had the same feeling, for the burst of conversation died away almost as suddenly as it had begun, and a strained, uneasy silence took its place. Twice a woman screamed somewhere on the great, motionless ship which looked so huge and impressive beside the slender shape of the submarine, yet was actually as helpless as a rabbit confronted by a stoat. Now and then, too, the low whimpering of children, oppressed by the general atmosphere of suspense and fear, could be heard, while at intervals a muttered oath came from one of the men passengers. Dawn turned round and leaned against the rail with her back to the sea. She did not want to look at that submarine any more. There was something evil, something terrible about that long, black shape. She glanced at her watch. How swiftly things happened sometimes! Less than three-quarters of an hour ago they had been playing deck tennis, and people had been laughing, and chatting, and lounging in the sun all round them, and now they seemed to be on a different ship, and the sun was still shining, yet it seemed to be a different sun. She saw Jill glance towards the captain’s cabin, and slipped a hand through one of her friend’s arms.

“I wonder what’s happening in there,” she said.

“That’s what I’ve been thinking. Poor Captain Wade; what an awful position for him.”

“Yes.”

They lapsed into silence again, and stood staring in the direction in which the two men had disappeared. Once Dawn looked over the side at the boat which had come from the submarine. The three men seated in her were calmly smoking, and seemed quite unconcerned by the fact that a few yards away were over five hundred potential enemies. They must be very sure of themselves. She turned her head away and resumed her watch towards the captain’s cabin. How much longer were they going to be? Close at hand a child began to sob, racking, terrified sobs. Then somebody said, “Ah!” and the next moment Dawn and Jill caught sight of the purser and the first officer hurrying along the deck. Their faces were set and angry, and while the purser hastened towards his office, the first officer began issuing low orders to some of the sailors. Something was happening at last, and the girls were conscious of a relaxation in the fog of suspense. Now the two strangers appeared accompanied by the captain. The leader, the man with the cruel face, walked to the side of the ship and said something in a foreign tongue, whereupon one of the men in the boat boarded the liner, bringing with him a heavy axe. The leader nodded to his companion, and he and the man with the axe went away,

and presently from the direction of the wireless operators' cabin came the sound of heavy, crashing blows. Dawn looked at her guardian.

"They're smashing the wireless," he whispered, "so that even if we rig up a fresh aerial, we shall be unable to warn other shipping or call up help when they have gone. Look, Dawn, Jill," nodding towards some sailors who were coming along the deck carrying small but apparently very heavy boxes, "Burgess was right. It is bullion they are after. Well, better that than five hundred lives."

He stopped speaking. Everybody had stopped speaking. It was as though they were all ashamed. There was something horribly ignominious in standing there, doing nothing, while five hundred people were robbed by five. Yet they were helpless. That piece of steel tubing, two hundred yards away, was stronger than all the ship's company and passengers combined. Dawn and Jill stood with set faces and fiercely clasped hands, as the heavy boxes were lowered into the collapsible boat, three at a time, and carried across to the submarine. Four journeys the boat made, and then it returned once more for the pirate leader and his companion. The latter went over the side first, while the former favoured the captain of the *Golden Star* with an ironical salute.

"I am very glad you were reasonable, Captain Wade," he said in a clear, harsh voice. "Well, bon voyage. Who knows, Captain, we may meet again."

He turned and went swiftly down the ladder into the boat, and thirty seconds later was being rowed back towards the submarine. For a couple of minutes the captain of the *Golden Star* stood watching the receding boat with a strange, fixed expression; then he seemed to throw off his lethargy and glanced at the passengers grouped around him.

"I am exceedingly sorry this has occurred, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "but it is over, and now I ask you to forget all about it, and continue the voyage as though nothing had happened."

He saluted and turning away, hastened towards the bridge, and soon the liner was moving again. All over the decks passengers stood talking together in excited groups, or like Dawn and Jill, leaned on the rail and gazed after the submarine which was rapidly growing smaller in the distance. Presently Dawn spoke:

"I suppose the *Golden Star* is the first ship the men on that submarine have held up, or we should have heard about it before. I wonder how long they'll be able to carry on before they get caught."

"Not long. Every warship in the Pacific will be after them as soon as we get into port."

"I don't know. You heard what Uncle Stan said. Jill, I've a horrid feeling that we haven't seen the last of that awful man. I hope I'm not right. He frightened me."

“Same here, Dawn. I was scared stiff he was going to sink the ship, though I hate to admit it. I expect plenty of people will get a thrill out of this when they read about it in the newspapers, but it isn’t so exciting when you take part in it yourself.”

“No.” Dawn straightened her slim body and faced the deck. “Well, I suppose we must do as Captain Wade said and try to forget all about it. Poor man, I feel terribly sorry for him. It must have been simply beastly having to give in to that awful thug.”

CHAPTER IX

Allies

Somehow, however, in spite of Captain Wade's advice, and the efforts of Dawn and Jill and several others of the younger passengers, it seemed impossible to recapture the care-free atmosphere which had been present on the *Golden Star* before the advent of the black submarine. The broken foremast was a constant reminder of the unpleasant episode, while a feeling of depression hung over everybody like a dark cloud.

"I think it's the thought of that man getting away with it which is worrying us all," said Dawn to Jill one morning as the *Golden Star* was nearing the end of the voyage. "Even now I have a sort of ashamed feeling when I think that over five hundred people had to knuckle under to a gang about thirty strong; yet what could anyone have done?"

"Nothing, Dawn. I've had the same feeling myself, and every time I think about it I realize how helpless we were. It's the man with the gun who always has the upper hand nowadays."

"Yes, and the men with the guns are usually the rogues, and the thieves, and the bad-hats, so there you are." Dawn looked towards the wrecked wireless cabin. "I wonder if the pirates guessed that our operator was trying to call up help, and if that was why they shot the aerial away," she went on. "You know, Jill, I'm sorry for the owners of this ship. They must be feeling jolly anxious. Think of it. Not a word from her for over a week after that interrupted S.O.S. They'll be imagining all sorts of awful things, and won't there be a row when they learn what actually has happened!"

Jill nodded and the friends remained silent, each thinking her own thoughts, till two other girls came to carry them off for a game of quoits, and it was not till they were in their cabin that night that the conversation was resumed.

"What are your plans when we get to Brisbane?" asked Jill. "Do you wish to see something of Australia, or are you going after the pearls at once?"

"I think Uncle Stan would like to get away as soon as your father can manage it, that is, of course, if your father agrees to come in. I believe Uncle Stan fears that we may have more trouble with Hank and company. His argument is that the map must have originated from this part of the world, and that, as they are aware of its existence, Hank and Don and Belle are probably Australians with friends in Australia who will have been instructed to look out for us. I think he's scared that they may have another shot at kidnapping me,

and he wants to get me safely away to sea as quickly as possible. I suppose he's right."

"M'yes. Kidnapping isn't a popular pastime in Australia like it is in the United States, but it's possible. Of course I don't know what Dad is doing just now, but anyway I've decided that you and Uncle Stan must come and stay with us until we can get away. I've been trying to work things out, and if I'm right, the *Osprey* should be in Brisbane about now so it's possible we may be able to get off quite quickly. You can count on Dad I feel almost sure. He'll be as keen as mustard once he hears your tale, and unless the *Osprey* has been chartered to carry any specially important cargo, we'll be able to have her I know, if she's in port. Dawn, you're not feeling nervous about Hank and company, are you?"

Dawn laughed.

"Not a bit, my dear. Naturally Uncle Stan is fed up about the way they went for me, and that makes him anxious I suppose, but personally I think we've seen the last of them. Still, if he wants to get off on the treasure cruise quickly, I'm game. Now that we're getting near to my sunken legacy, I'm beginning to feel really excited, and sight-seeing can wait till we've lifted the pearls. Anyway it's the better plan, for once we've found the pearls and they're safely in a bank they'll be beyond Hank's reach, and we shall be able to go about enjoying ourselves in peace."

Jill nodded.

"That's true. Dawn, this is going to be a wonderful adventure. D'you know there are times when I feel quite grateful to Hank. If it hadn't been for him we should never have met, and I should never have gone treasure hunting. I'm glad this voyage is almost over. It was great fun to start with, but since that wretched pirate appeared on the scene it's been a flop, and I want to get on board the *Osprey*. You'll love her, Dawn. She's teak built, copper sheathed, and a perfect daisy to handle. I remember once——"

"Now don't start reminiscing at this time of night," interrupted Dawn. "Get into bed, Jill, and go to sleep. You're *Osprey* mad. By the way, I suppose there are some cabins?"

"Cabins! Of course there are, you idiot. Why——"

"Well, I didn't know, my sweet. You said she is teak built, copper sheathed, and a daisy, but you never mentioned cabins."

Jill laughed.

"You are an ass, Dawn. But wait till you see. Ours is a duck of a cabin, and ——"

This time a chuckle of mirth interrupted the speaker.

"She sounds more like a biological freak to me than a ship," remarked Dawn. "She's a daisy, and the cabin's a duck; you'll be telling——"

A neatly aimed pillow checked further speech, and for the next few minutes a spirited pillow-fight raged to and fro in the cabin, then the contestants parted breathless and laughing.

“All right, my girl,” said Jill, “I shall say nothing more about the *Osprey* until we go on board, and then, if there’s any niceness in you, you’ll apologize.”

“I’ll apologize now, my dear,” replied Dawn, tossing back her disordered locks. “I’ve no doubt she’s all you said, and a peach into the bargain. Now don’t start again. I only said she must be a peach. Heavens! D’you know it’s past midnight? Come along, we’re losing all our beauty sleep.” She switched off the light and got into bed. “If we find the pearls, Jill, you shall have a dream of a necklace.”

“I’d rather have a real one,” came the reply from the direction of her companion’s bed, together with the sound of someone thumping a pillow into shape.

Dawn chuckled.

“That’s one up on me. Right-o. Good night, my love. There are times when I quite like you.”

“Good night, Dawn, you’re not so bad yourself. Pleasant dreams.”

Two days later the *Golden Star* reached Brisbane. News of some mishap to her had evidently got abroad, for the dock was crowded, and the passengers, lining the rails, could see people pointing at the broken stump of the foremast. Jill chuckled.

“Now things will begin to hum,” she said. “Wait till you see the evening papers. They’ll spread themselves. Piracy on the high seas; they won’t have had such a scoop for years. Hullo! There’s Dad. The darling! Oh, I am glad to see him again!” She waved her handkerchief, and Dawn and Mr. Wright saw a tall, broad-shouldered man with a tanned face and curly, brown hair wave back and begin to make his way towards the gangway which was already being pushed out from the dock. “Let’s wait here,” Jill went on. “He’ll find us quicker than if we get mixed up with the mob.”

Ten minutes later the tall man extricated himself from the crowd on deck, and was met by Jill who flung her arms round his neck.

“Hullo, my dear, welcome home.”

“Oh, Dad, it’s wonderful seeing you again! How are you? You look terribly well. And how’s Mother, is she all right?”

“As fit as a fiddle.” The speaker held the girl from him and examined her. “You’re looking grand yourself, Jill. Enjoyed your visit, I guess. But what’s the meaning of that broken mast? Dirty weather didn’t do that, besides there have been some funny rumours——”

"I know, Dad, and we'll tell you everything in a minute. It's been—well I suppose it's been exciting in a way. But first I want you to meet my friends. This is Dawn, Dad, Dawn Cheverill, and this is Mr. Stanford Wright, Uncle Stan I call him, and he's Dawn's guardian."

Dawn found her slim fingers engulfed in a huge, tanned hand, and a pair of twinkling brown eyes fixed on hers.

"Welcome to Brisbane, Miss Cheverill. How do you do, Mr. Wright? I'm very glad to meet any friends of my little girl's. We've been rather anxious about you, you know. No news for over ten days, and now that mast——"

"Sorry, Dad," interrupted Jill again, "but you must curb your natural curiosity a little longer. I've or at least Dawn has an amazing story to tell you, and—oh, it's all tremendously exciting, and we shall all be going off together very soon, so I've asked them to come and stay with us till——"

"Jill, shut up!" exclaimed Dawn in confusion. She had taken instant liking to the big, hearty, jolly-faced sailor, but for two complete strangers to be pushed on to him straight away seemed the limit. "Jill's letting her tongue run away with her, Captain Howard. It's true I have a story to tell you, but Uncle Stan and I are going to put up at an hotel——"

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Dawn," Jill broke in heatedly. "I've asked you——"

Mr. Wright interrupted with a chuckle of amusement.

"Now then, you two, don't fall out on the very last day of the voyage. Jill has made some very hospitable proposals, Captain Howard," he went on, addressing the other man, "but I agree with Dawn that an hotel——"

The big sailor held up his hand.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Wright. I understand that Jill has asked you and Miss Cheverill to be our guests. Then that stands. We don't ask people in this country to come and stay with us and then let them go into hotels. No, I'll take no refusal, and now that's settled," as Dawn and her guardian expressed their thanks, "perhaps someone will tell me why the *Golden Star* has a broken foremast, and why there's been no radio message from her for eleven days?"

"Pirates, Dad," answered Jill with a grin.

"Pirates! What the Dickens do you mean? The Chinese wouldn't tackle ——"

"No, dear, not Chinese pirates," explained his daughter patiently, "but real, modern pirates in a black submarine and with a quick-firing gun all up-to-date. That's what shot the foremast in two, and they went off with twelve boxes full of gold after smashing up the wireless cabin. Now you know what's happened, darling, so let's get off the ship. I'm longing to see Mums, and this evening you shall both hear everything, and I guarantee it will make your hairs stand on end."

Captain Howard's lips curved in a smile, but his eyes remained grave.

"Well, you certainly seem to have had an eventful voyage, but you're all safe and sound, so no harm's done. But I still don't get the hang of things. Pirates and a black submarine. Sounds like a dime novel. I suppose she's not having me on a string, Mr. Wright?"

Dawn's guardian shook his head.

"No? Well, Jill's mother will want to hear everything, so I'll be patient. Now let's collect the luggage and make tracks for home. I've a car outside the barrier, and once you're through the customs, we shan't be long."

Jill's mother turned out to be a pretty, buxom woman of about forty, who welcomed the visitors to a pleasant house on high ground overlooking the River Brisbane as though they were life-long friends and had not dropped on her without warning out of the blue. The *Golden Star* had docked early in the afternoon, but it was not until after dinner that evening that Captain and Mrs. Howard heard the story of the eventful voyage. Already they had gathered something of what had happened from the evening newspapers, which had lurid accounts of the outrage splashed in huge, black type across the front pages, but now they heard everything first-hand from Dawn and Jill, with occasional additions from Dawn's guardian. Then, at Jill's urging, Dawn told the story of the map, from the moment when she had picked up old Ben Travers from the fenland road to her escape from the kidnappers' house and the hurried departure to San Francisco.

"My dear, what a terrible time you have had!" cried Mrs. Howard, when Dawn at last came to an end. "Robbers, kidnappers, and pirates!"

She paused at a loss for words, and her husband took the opportunity to speak.

"You've certainly had your share of trouble, young woman," he said, "and I admire your pluck, but, excuse a bluff sailor's blunt question, why tell me this tale? People with a bona fide treasure map in their possession, or what appears to be one, usually keep the knowledge to themselves, and it seems to me that too many people know about your map already."

"I know, Captain Howard," replied Dawn, "but you see we need help."

She looked at her guardian who, seeing her hesitation, took up the tale.

"It's like this, Captain Howard," he began to explain. "I've done a good bit of sailing in my time, and Dawn can handle a yacht with most people, but we're not deep-sea sailors, and we know nothing about the Pacific or its islands. So when this map came into Dawn's possession, and we made up our minds to go treasure hunting, we decided that our best plan would be to charter a small vessel in Australia with a reliable crew, and in her set out to find our island. Then, by great good luck, we met your daughter, and she and Dawn struck up a friendship. From Jill Dawn learned that you owned a line of

schooners trading among the islands, and that knowledge, combined with the desire she had for Jill's company on the trip, led her to suggest that it might be possible for us to come to an arrangement with you for the use of one of your vessels. She even dared to express the hope that you might be able to spare the time to join us in the enterprise and command the ship yourself. Of course the matter must be on a strictly business footing, but Jill seemed to think that you would not be averse to the idea."

"I said you would jump at it, darling," cried Jill, unable to remain silent any longer. "Oh, Dad, isn't it wonderful? A real treasure island. Is the *Osprey* in port?"

"She's due in to-morrow."

"There you are," to Dawn. "I told you the *Osprey* would be available. We can have her, Dad, can't we?"

"Steady on, Jill." This time it was Dawn's guardian who spoke. "It's not a question of having the *Osprey*, it is whether your father will be willing to allow us to charter her——"

"Let her have her say, Mr. Wright," interposed Jill's father. "My girl and I understand each other, and, now that I come to think about it, the *Osprey* will be rather at a loose end for the next few weeks, and I seem to remember that I have a holiday owing to me, so why shouldn't we have a sea trip together. Mind you, I haven't yet seen your map, so I cannot say whether I think it genuine or not; then I've never heard of Lion Island, and you say it isn't marked on the charts, so I won't guarantee to find it for you, but we can try, and I've no doubt we shall all have a jolly good time in the trying. As for this chartering business, we'll talk that over together sometime, and not worry these young people about it."

Jill jumped up and flung her arms round her father's neck.

"What did I say?" she cried. "I said he'd jump at the idea. Look at his eyes. He's trying not to appear excited, but actually he's thrilled to the marrow. Mums, I wish you'd come too."

"No thank you, my dear, I'm no sailor unfortunately. Still it will do your father a great deal of good to get away to sea for a while. He's been on shore too long. But I'm rather worried about those people who kidnapped Dawn. What do you think, John," to her husband, "are they likely to have confederates over here?"

"It's possible, but kidnapping and that sort of thing isn't so easy here as in America. Still, we'll keep our eyes open, and as soon as the *Osprey* comes in we'll start getting her ready for sea again. I take it, Mr. Wright, you'd like to get away as quickly as possible?"

"That is our idea. I've promised to show Dawn something of the world, but that can wait till we've found the treasure, if it is to be found, and beaten our

rivals. By that time, too, Dawn may be a rich young woman, and then her poor guardian will be able to sit back while she pays the piper. So you see I'm all for getting this thing over."

"Then we'll consider it settled," laughed Captain Howard. "I'm glad you and Dawn are both sailors, for that makes the question of crew much easier. You girls are willing to pull your weight, I gather?"

"Of course," answered Dawn and Jill together.

"Good. Still we none of us want to work too hard on a pleasure trip, so I'll take four trusty Kanaka boys as crew, with perhaps a fifth to act as cook. We'd better take a diving suit in case its needed, and——"

Jill interrupted with an amused laugh.

"Didn't I tell you he'd be keen?" she cried. "If Mother let's him he'll sit up half the night making out a list of stores, I know. Well, Dawn my sweet, the Cheverill Treasure Hunting Expedition has been formed, with Mr. John Howard, captain, and Mr. Stanford Wright, first mate, acting for the owner, Miss Dawn Cheverill, who will also share the position of second mate with Miss Gillian Howard. How's that, Dawn?"

"Grand, but——"

"There are no 'buts', my dear. It's all settled, and now——"

"I was only going to say," went on Dawn mildly, "that as we are all such friends, I think we ought to share the treasure if——"

"Share the treasure!" cried Jill. "Don't be an ass, Dawn. It's sweet of you to suggest it, but it's your legacy, and goodness knows you've earned it! Never fear, my dear. Dad and I are going to get the thrill of our lives out of this voyage, and we think it jolly good of you to let us come in, don't we, Dad?"

"Sure, Jill."

"There you are, Dawn, so don't start chucking your millions away."

Dawn laughed.

"Millions! Oh, well, we'll see, but I do thank you all very much for being so terribly decent to me."

Jill grinned.

"Miss Cheverill then made a speech, and the proceedings came to an end. Actually, Dawn, it was a rottenly short speech, but we'll put it down to your emotion and overlook it this time. Gosh, look at the clock! Come on, girl, d'you realize we haven't even begun to unpack?"

CHAPTER X

A Terrible Discovery

The next day the *Osprey* sailed into port, and as soon as she had been unloaded, Jill took Dawn to see her. She was certainly a lovely little craft. With her fine lines, gleaming paint, white deck and polished metal work she looked more like a pleasure yacht than a trading schooner, and Dawn fell for her at once.

“She’s a beauty, Jill!” she exclaimed enthusiastically. “I don’t wonder you and your father are fond of her.”

Jill nodded happily.

“I’m glad you like her,” she replied. “As a matter of fact, she’s the apple of Dad’s eye, and I believe he’d rather lose all the rest of the fleet than the *Osprey*. That’s why she’s so spick and span. Every man of her crew knows it’s as much as his job is worth to let her come dirty into port. Whenever he can Dad sails her himself and I accompany him; but come below and see the cabins.”

Jill led the way down the companion-stairs, and along a passage, with cabins on either side, to a small saloon filling the width of the ship and panelled with highly polished teak. Curtained portholes and a skylight let in plenty of sunshine, and in the centre was a polished teak table.

“Not bad, is it?” said Jill with pardonable pride. “This will be our cabin.” She crossed the saloon, and opening a door in the aft partition, displayed a small, cream-enamelled state room with two comfortable bunks, a couple of wicker chairs, long drawers under the bunks for storing clothes, and portholes hung with dainty chintz curtains. “This is my cabin when I sail with Dad,” went on Jill, “and at other times it is always kept locked, so that actually no one ever uses it but me. Well, Miss Cheverill, satisfied?”

“She’s marvellous, Jill, she really is!” answered Dawn, gazing around entranced. “Honestly I never expected anything like this. I imagined we should have to rough it, but this is luxury. Are all trading schooners like this?”

“No fear. The *Osprey* is an exception. Among Dad’s friends she’s called ‘Howard’s folly’, for actually she’s not a paying concern. But Dad can afford to keep her as she is, and as I’ve explained, he uses her more or less as a private yacht in which he does just sufficient trading to cover expenses. I’m glad you like her.”

She led the way back on deck where two Kanaka boys were polishing the already spotless brass-work. They smiled at their young mistress, and Jill

spoke a few words to them in a language Dawn could not understand; then as the girls turned to leave the schooner they were met by a short, broad-shouldered man who touched his cap to them.

“Good morning, Miss Jill,” he said, “I hear your father is taking out the *Osprey* next trip.”

“That’s right, Captain Brooke.” She introduced Dawn, and the man and girl shook hands. “Dad wants a break,” Jill went on, “and Miss Cheverill and her guardian are coming with us, so we’re going to make it more or less a pleasure cruise.”

“I see.”

The man appeared to hesitate as though there was something else he wished to say, but evidently he thought better of it, for the next moment he touched his cap again, and would have passed on had not Jill stopped him.

“How are Mrs. Brooke and the baby?” she asked.

The sailor’s face broke into a beaming smile.

“Grand, Miss Jill. Tim’s just beginning to use his legs, and you should see the interest he takes in ships. We both say he’s going to be a sailor like his dad.”

“I bet he will be,” laughed Jill. “As soon as he gets a bit older you’ll be able to take him and Mrs. Brooke with you on board the *Cormorant*.”

“*Cormorant*, Miss Jill, she’s Captain John’s——”

“Gosh! have I let out a secret? Well, keep it dark, Captain Brooke, but Captain John is retiring, and Dad’s going to put you in command of the *Cormorant* next voyage. He told me so yesterday.”

“That’s real good news, Miss Jill,” replied the sailor fervently, and Dawn, watching, was aware that a look of anxiety had vanished from his eyes. “I was fearing I might have to kick my heels about a bit, but now——” The sentence ended in a boyish grin. “Thanks for telling me, Miss Jill, the wife’ll be no end bucked.”

“I’m glad. Give Tim my love. He and I are great pals you know.”

“I will. Looks a treat, doesn’t she?” glancing round the deck of the *Osprey*. “Well, I mustn’t stand here yarning. Captain Howard told me he wants to get away the day after to-morrow, and there are stores to be got on board, and several odd chores to be done, so I must get the boys busy.”

He stood aside, and the girls crossed the gangway on to the dock, and a few minutes later they were driving away in Jill’s car.

“He’s nice,” remarked Dawn, “and he was jolly glad to hear about his new job.”

“I know. Dad’s generous, but under the best masters, a skipper’s pay on these small schooners doesn’t give much opportunity for saving, not when the skipper’s married and got a baby. I must tell Dad I told him.” She looked into

the driving mirror; then scanned the crowded pavements on either side of the busy street. "Well, Dawn, I think we shall get you and Uncle Stan away all right. I've seen no signs of any watchers, and I'm certain we weren't followed this morning."

"So am I. We've been scared of shadows."

"Perhaps. Still I think it's a good plan to leave before the *Southern Cross* comes in from 'Frisco. Hank and company may be on board, you know. Very likely we'll pass the liner on the way out. Now what about some lunch, Dawn, and then shopping?"

Dawn agreed, and the rest of the day and most of the next were spent by the girls in replenishing Dawn's depleted wardrobe. There were slacks to be bought, jerseys, shorts, filmy undergarments suitable for the tropics, besides films for their cameras, books to read on the voyage, and various other things, and while the girls were thus engaged, Dawn's guardian and Jill's father were down at the docks seeing to the loading of stores, and generally helping to get the schooner ready for sea. So the eventful day arrived without any attempt being made to steal the precious map, which Mr. Wright had obtained from the bank soon after their arrival, and by noon the travellers had said "good-bye" to Mrs. Howard and were on board the *Osprey*.

"Well, we've got you safely away, young woman," said Captain Howard as the schooner glided slowly down the river, driven by her powerful auxiliary engine.

"Thanks to you and Uncle Stan, Uncle John," answered Dawn. She had early adopted the relationship. "How you managed to get everything done in such a short time I can't imagine, and I still don't think there was any need for such a terrific rush."

"No, it seems so, but you can't tell. If the people who trailed you all the way from England have any enterprise, and so far they've shown no lack of that commodity, they'll be on the *Southern Cross*, and it's just as well to get away before they find you again. It would be no fun having another craft dodging us all the time we're searching for your island, but as it is, once we're at sea, they might as well try to find a needle in a haystack as come looking for us, unless, of course, they have some idea where the island is. Hullo! See that smudge of smoke yonder, behind the headland? That is the *Southern Cross* most probably. Well, it doesn't matter if the rascals are on board, we're away."

Dawn went and leaned on the bulwark by Jill's side, and presently the great liner came into view slowly rounding the bend. Her rails were crowded with people who waved to those on board the trim-looking schooner, and as Dawn's eyes surveyed the rows of faces above she suddenly caught sight of a woman and two men, one of whom was so interested in the *Osprey* and those on her deck that he was gazing at them through a pair of binoculars. Dawn

touched Jill's arm.

"Look," she said, "d'you see them? Two men and a woman. On the upper deck, a little bit forward of the aft funnel. They're standing slightly apart from the rest of the crowd, and one man is staring at us through glasses. Got them? Now I wonder——" She turned her head. "Uncle Stan," she called out, "get a pair of glasses, quick! Oh, dash it all! No, don't trouble. They must have guessed we'd spotted them. Anyway, they've gone, lost in the crowd. But you saw them, didn't you, Jill?"

"Yes, I saw them."

"What's the excitement about?" asked Mr. Wright, as he and Captain Howard approached the girls.

"Some people on that ship," explained Jill. "Dawn saw them and pointed them out to me. One man was staring at us through a pair of glasses. Do you really think they were Hank and his pals, Dawn?"

"I'm sure they were. I didn't recognize their faces, of course, but they looked the same build, and one man was pointing straight at me and seemed to be very excited. That was before I called Jill's attention to them. Then I shouted out to you, Uncle Stan, to get the glasses, but they must have seen that we had noticed them, for suddenly they turned round and disappeared into the crowd. Seems that you two were right in getting us away to-day."

"Looks like it," agreed Captain Howard. "From all you've told me about that trio of beauties I thought they wouldn't be far behind. Still they're far enough, and even if they could step straight off that ship into another, and start pursuit immediately, they'd gain very little, for by the time they'd cleared the river we should be out of sight of land. So don't worry your pretty head about them, Dawn, my dear. Friend Hank will have to kick his heels in Brisbane till we get back."

Three hours later the prow of the *Osprey* rose dripping from the first surge of the open sea, and the voyage had begun in real earnest.

Now followed weeks of sheer delight for both girls. Except for one gale, which lasted two days, the weather remained consistently fair, and having put in at one of the larger Solomon Islands and replenished their water and certain other supplies, Captain Howard steered almost due north towards the Marshall Group beyond which lay the thousands of square miles of empty sea in which Lion Island should be found if Ben Travers's map was true.

"Do you really think there is a Lion Island, Uncle John?" Dawn asked the big man one morning when the *Osprey* was bowling along before a steady breeze under a cloudless sky.

Dawn was doing a trick at the wheel, two of the Kanakas were at work in the bows, two were below, the cook was in the galley, Jill was tidying the cabins and saloon, and Dawn's guardian was sitting smoking in a deck chair.

“I guess so, my dear,” replied the big man, gazing appreciatively at the slim, tanned figure in white shorts and shirt who swayed so gracefully to every motion of the lively little ship which her slender hands controlled with the skill of an expert. “I hardly think Ben Travers would have handed you a dud map after what you had done for him. Wonder why it’s called Lion Island. Queer name for an island in this part of the world if you come to think about it.”

“Perhaps there’s a headland or something shaped like a lion,” suggested Dawn.

“H’m, yes, maybe, quite likely in fact. Hope there is, it’ll help us to identify the place. Well, with luck, and if we don’t delay too long at the Marshalls, we ought to know within the next fortnight. Enjoying yourself, Dawn?”

“Wonderfully, Uncle John.”

“Good. I must say you’re a remarkably handy young woman on board a sailing craft. One expects it of Jill, for she was brought up to it, but I didn’t know they bred that type in the old country.”

Dawn flushed with pleasure at the well-merited praise.

“I have to thank Uncle Stan for that,” she replied. “I believe he took me for my first sail when I was five, and ever since he and I have spent all the holidays we could upon the water. Look at that island over there, Uncle John,” pointing to a small, green island, about a mile long, on the port bow. “It’s just like a beautiful emerald in a setting of turquoise blue. And see how the sun shines on the spray thrown up by the waves as they break upon the reef. Oh dear, it’s all so beautiful! It makes one wonder how anyone can bear to live in cold, wet, foggy old England.”

The big man nodded.

“Yet we all want to go back to her, my dear,” he said, “and the sight of her white cliffs rising out of the sea have cheered more hungry hearts than all the islands of the Pacific put together.”

“Yes, I suppose so. Still this is a most gorgeous holiday, whether or not we find the pearls.”

So the sunny days passed one after the other, a ceaseless round of enjoyment for the girls, neither of whom had experienced such companionship before. Not that they were lazy. They kept their watch with the others, took regular tricks at the wheel, helped with the sails, and generally looked after their men-folk, and when they weren’t busy, they basked in the sun till they were almost as brown as the Kanaka boys. At the Marshall Group they put in to an island with a long, unpronounceable name, where for twenty-four hours they seemed to be surrounded by a continuous procession of canoes filled with chattering natives, and a smiling Chinese trader supplied them with a number of things they needed from the apparently inexhaustible stocks of his store.

Then on again, leaving the Marshalls and the frequented part of the great ocean far behind, until now, with every mile the *Osprey* covered, her crew were being carried deeper and deeper into the fastnesses of a vast and lonely sea. And still the fine weather held and a brisk breeze drove them forward towards their goal.

“Dad says we should reach the island in about three days’ time if the map is correct.”

It was evening and the two girls were seated in the saloon before an open cupboard in which was installed a small but remarkably efficient receiving and transmitting wireless set. All Captain Howard’s vessels were thus provided, and every day during the voyage Jill had spent some time instructing Dawn how to operate the set until now she was almost as proficient as her friend.

“So he told me,” replied Dawn, looking up from the dial she was handling. “Getting excited, Jill? I am.” She pressed down a switch. “Let’s hear what the world has to say for itself. Do you realize, Jill, that we haven’t sighted a sail or a wisp of smoke since the last of the Marshalls dropped astern? I suppose you’re used to it, but this huge, empty ocean gives me the feeling of being in another world.”

“I know,” smiled Jill, “I feel that way, too. It’s the immensity and loneliness, I think. I never feel that way among the islands, but out here—— Dawn, what station are you getting?”

“Sydney.”

The girls gazed at each other with startled eyes; then Jill rose to her feet, and going to the door of the saloon, called to her father and Dawn’s guardian who were on deck to come down at once. The speaker, his voice startlingly clear despite the four thousand miles of sea which separated him from the *Osprey*, had been announcing the headlines of the evening news bulletin, now, as the two men entered the saloon, he began the detailed broadcast.

“Listeners will recall the shock experienced by the civilized world some weeks ago when the liner *Golden Star*, from San Francisco to Brisbane, arrived in port with her foremast shot away, and the story that she had been held up in mid-Pacific by a black submarine of unidentified nationality, the crew of which took twelve million dollars’ worth of gold bullion from the liner’s strong-room. In spite of the ocean-wide search instantly started by the navies of all nations no sign was discovered of the raider. The submarine, indeed, might never have been, so completely had she disappeared, and nothing more was heard of her until this morning when, within three hours of each other, the liners *Good Hope* from Victoria, and *Cape Horn*, from San Francisco reached Sydney with their wireless installations wrecked and the same grim tale of piracy upon the high seas. From these ships also bullion has been taken, though the amounts have not yet been disclosed, and in the case of

the *Cape Horn* a large number of very valuable jewels were included in the pirates' spoil. Apart from the intense indignation aroused by these outrages, there is much anxiety in responsible quarters occasioned by the manner in which the pirates appear to have been in possession of closely guarded information regarding the valuable cargo of the ships known to have passed through their hands. The word known is used advisedly as three or four smaller ships are considerably overdue, and it is feared that these may also have been held up by the pirates with perhaps more serious results. Warships are already preparing to undertake another search for the pirate submarine, but as the outrages both happened several days ago, there seems to be little hope of any immediate capture.

"Mr.——, the Prime Minister——"

Dawn switched off the current, and for some seconds the four companions sat gazing at each other in silence. Mr. Wright was the first to speak.

"I'm not surprised," he said. "I've been expecting another hold-up for a long time, and here it is. Queer business, you know. How do the beggars get their information about the gold?"

"Leakage high up," growled Captain Howard. "Must be. No other way."

"I think you two are taking this very coolly," cried Dawn indignantly. "Two ships in one day. You must admit it's a bit thick."

"Certainly, my dear," grinned Captain Howard, "but what can we do about it? If the navies of all nations, as our friend the announcer put it, cannot find the black submarine, I don't see that the *Osprey* has much chance. Don't worry. They'll be laid by the heels sooner or later and be made to disgorge their ill-gotten gains."

"Dawn's not worrying, Dad," put in Jill, "but I know exactly how she feels. You haven't seen the leader, and if that submarine isn't caught soon there'll be a terrible tragedy. A ship's crew will try to resist, and then——" She shrugged her shoulders expressively. "Well, let's forget it. As you say, we can't do anything. I only wish we could."

That night the wind increased, and the following day the *Osprey* sailed along under leaden skies, but they cleared with the evening, and the next morning the fine weather had returned.

It was after breakfast that the island was sighted. One of the Kanaka boys first shouted the news from the masthead, and before long a small, green dot became visible on the horizon from the deck. Dawn and Jill were both wildly excited.

"Is it our island, Uncle John?" cried Dawn, catching hold of the big man's arm.

"'Fraid not, kid. Anyway, if it is, it's too far south, and the man who made that map has got his bearings mixed up."

“But is it marked on the chart?”

“No, I’ve just looked to make sure.”

“Then it’s an unknown island, and it might be ours. We’ll go ashore, won’t we?”

“Sure, and we’ll look around for the lugger. But don’t set your heart on it, Dawn. According to the map Lion Island is still a good two hundred miles to the north.”

Dawn and Jill spent the next two hours in the bows watching the island they were approaching. It was a fairly large island. In the centre was a high hill the western side of which sloped gently to the sea, while to the east the slope was less severe and ended in a rocky promontory which jutted out into the sea for some distance before it fell sharply to the water. The whole island was covered with trees, except for the headland which was bare, and it appeared to be surrounded by a coral reef, barring one point straight ahead where a gap in the breakers proclaimed the presence of a passage into the lagoon beyond. Dawn stared long and thoughtfully at the island through a pair of binoculars.

“Can’t see anything like a Lion, can you, Jill?” she said, handing the glasses to her friend. “I’m afraid Uncle John’s right and it isn’t our island. Still it will be fun going ashore and stretching our legs. D’you think it’s inhabited?”

“Doesn’t look like it. I vote we go off on our own, Dawn, and have a bathe. Look at the blue of that lagoon. Could you want a better place for a swim?”

By this time the island was quite close, and half an hour later the *Osprey* had passed through the gap and anchor had been dropped in the still waters of the lagoon.

“Well, what’s the programme?” asked Captain Howard. “If we’re going to make a search for the sunken lugger, in case this is Lion Island, we’ll have to spend twenty-four hours here, so do you want to start searching at once or have you anything else in view?”

“The first thing we intend to do is to have a bathe,” replied Jill firmly. “Can one of the boys put us ashore in the dinghy, Dad? It will be quite safe, won’t it? If the island were inhabited we should have seen some signs of the people by this time.”

Jill’s father scanned the shore.

“Guess so. Right-o. You two go ashore and have your dip. Stanford and I will follow as soon as we’ve seen things put ship-shape, and then we’ll meet and make plans. Might climb to the top of that hill and see what lies on the other side. Don’t go too far.”

The girls needed no further permission and within a few minutes they had been rowed ashore and had sprung out on to the sandy beach. Their sole garments consisted of brief white shorts, silk shirts and shoes, and thus lightly clad, and swinging their coloured swim suits in their hands, they set off along

by the water's edge, now and then making short, exploratory expeditions into the belt of green undergrowth and trees which ran parallel with the sea. Everything they saw and heard entranced them. Gaily plumaged birds flitted from tree to tree and filled the air with song, many of the bushes were covered with fruit and flowers, stately coco-nut palms raised their heads in groups or in lonely solitude, while every moment the breeze brought to them some fresh and wonderful scent.

"Gosh, it's a perfect paradise!" cried Dawn at last as they descended the side of a low bluff which hid the *Osprey* from view. "Just look down there, Jill. The perfect bathing-place. Did you ever see anything more beautiful?"

She was pointing to a little bay almost landlocked by low, tree-covered cliffs. A tiny stream of clear water ran across a beach of golden sand which lay along the base of the cliffs, and beyond that was the lagoon, a deep amethyst blue in which the cliffs, and trees, and the white clouds floating overhead were reflected as though in a still, motionless mirror. Jill gazed entranced.

"Gosh!" she replied, "how marvellous! Come on."

The next moment the girls were racing towards the shore, and three minutes later they had shed their scanty garments and had plunged, two slim, beautiful figures, into the soft embrace of the lagoon.

That was a wonderful bathe. Both girls were expert swimmers and divers, and for two hours they amused themselves in the warm, clear water. Then they came out and flung themselves down on the sand, and for another hour they lay stretched out in the golden sunlight before Jill at last rolled over on one side and reached out a rounded arm towards her clothes.

"Better be getting back, I suppose," she said regretfully, "or the darlings will be wondering what's happened to us. Come on, Dawn, get a move on."

Dawn stretched and yawned; then stood up and began to dress.

"What a bathe!" she murmured. "I don't think I've ever known anything so perfect. Why shouldn't we stop here for a time, Jill, even if this isn't Lion Island? There's no particular hurry."

Jill nodded.

"Why not?" she replied. "It would be simply great. But let's get back now. I don't know how you feel, but I'm jolly hungry."

Hand in hand the girls set off up the beach and climbed the bluff. At the top they halted, their eyes searching the scene before them, and in the same instant two cries of astonishment and dismay came from two pairs of lips. Three hours before the *Osprey* had been in full view from the spot on which they stood, floating like a great, white gull upon the blue waters of the lagoon, but now that same lagoon lay before them bare and void of any vestige of life. Involuntarily the girls rubbed their eyes and looked again, but there was no mistake. The *Osprey* had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI

Castaways

For a whole minute Dawn and Jill stood as though rooted to the spot; then, moved by a single impulse, they started to run. What had happened? Where had the *Osprey* gone? Thought after thought flashed through the girls' minds as they raced down the side of the bluff and along the beach until they came to a breathless halt at the spot where they had come ashore. There was the mark of the dinghy's keel in the sand, there were their own footprints coming and going, but other signs of human presence there were none. The *Osprey* had vanished as though she had never been. Dawn was the first to break the strained silence.

"Do you think they've gone to look for the lugger?" she suggested.

"Dad would never have gone without telling us," answered Jill.

"I know, it sounds impossible, but they must have gone somewhere. Let's walk along the beach. If we can get round that headland perhaps we'll see them."

Jill had no better proposal to make, so the girls set off along the shore. Now and then they spoke, hazarding some wild suggestion which might account for the extraordinary disappearance of their friends, but for the most part they hurried along in silence, the prey of a horrible, nameless fear which forbade speech. So for half an hour they kept on, the cliffs of the headland looming up higher and nearer with every step; then as they rounded a low bluff, the beach came to an abrupt end, and they found further progress barred by deep water right up to the foot of the rocks.

"Well that's that," said Jill in a voice totally unlike her usually happy tones. "Dawn," she went on, catching hold of one of her companion's arms with a grip which left red finger marks on the bare flesh, "I'm afraid! Something terrible has happened, I'm sure, but what can it be?"

Dawn shook her head miserably.

"I don't know," she answered. "I'm just as scared as you are, but I can't think of any explanation. We heard nothing, no sounds. Jill, it's impossible! The *Osprey* can't have vanished into thin air."

"I know. It's impossible, yet she's disappeared."

"Well I don't believe it, I'm not going to believe it! Let's climb that hill. We'll have a view all round the island from the top, and I bet the first thing we'll see will be the *Osprey*. Come along."

Jill nodded and the girls turned inland, pushing their way rapidly through

the thick undergrowth, heedless of the scratches and bruises which soon marred their bare limbs. At first the ground was fairly level, but before long it began to rise steeply, and soon Dawn and Jill were panting with their exertions. Nevertheless they kept on with hardly a pause. In the heart of each was a great dread, and whenever their gasping lungs forced them to halt, they stared at each other with frightened eyes. What could have happened? Dawn gazed around. The birds were still singing, the sea was just as blue, the sun shone as brightly as ever; yet all beauty seemed to have vanished from the scene. Jill touched her arm and the ascent was resumed. Whenever a break in the trees allowed a glimpse of the sea below they paused to look, but no vision of the *Osprey's* gleaming hull and sails rewarded their anxious gaze, and so at last they reached the top of the hill and saw the whole island spread out beneath their feet.

There it lay, a mass of vivid green set in the blue ring of the lagoon around which the great Pacific rollers creamed ceaselessly upon the encircling reef. Ten miles to the north another island was visible, but the girls had no eyes for it or for the vast expanse of sea forming a mighty circle around them and unbroken by a single puff of smoke or white sail. Their eyes were for the lagoon, and as they searched its still waters, they clutched hold of each other in a sudden access of fear. The lagoon was empty; whichever way they looked it was devoid of any sign of the *Osprey*, and now the terrified girls could no longer hide the awful truth from themselves. The schooner and all on board had disappeared, they had disappeared as completely as though some mighty hand had picked them up and dropped them out of existence over the rim of the distant horizon.

How they spent the rest of that terrible day Dawn and Jill never remembered. They wandered out on to the headland where the cliffs dropped sheer into the water three hundred feet below. They trudged round the island, traversing every inch of the sandy beach in a desperate search for some clue which might tell them what had happened to the schooner. They even swam out from the spot where they had landed, and dived to the bottom of the lagoon to make sure that the *Osprey* had not sunk where she had been anchored, and yet, when evening came, they were as far from a solution to the mystery as ever.

“Let us go back to the cove where we bathed,” said Dawn listlessly. “There’s water there, and I saw a cave at the foot of the cliffs where we can sleep.”

Jill nodded, and in silence they made their way along the beach, over the bluff and down into the tiny bay where they had spent three such happy hours, hours which seemed centuries ago. On the way Jill picked up a couple of coconuts which had fallen to the ground, and in the cave they flung themselves full

length upon the dry sand. It was quite a commodious cave, going back a good eighteen feet into the cliff, and spreading out from the narrow opening so that it was shaped like a pear, but at the moment the girls paid no attention to their retreat. They were worn out both in body and mind and for a long time they lay without movement; then Dawn sat up and shook her friend.

“Sit up, Jill darling,” she cried. “It’s awful, I know, but we’ve got to face it. They’ve gone, vanished; now have you any idea what could possibly have happened?”

Jill sat up and shook back her hair while she brushed the sand from her face.

“Not one, Dawn,” she answered. “The *Osprey* was as sound as a bell, there’s been no sudden squall, there’s been nothing, absolutely nothing to account for her disappearance and yet she’s gone. It’s—it’s impossible, and yet it’s happened.”

“Do you think they’ve gone to that other island? Did you see it? There’s one ten miles or so to the north.”

“Yes, I saw it, but why should they go? Do you think Dad and Uncle Stan would go off and leave us willingly, and if they didn’t go willingly, how else could they have gone? This island is uninhabited, we ought to know that by this time, and—— Oh, Dawn, I’m dazed! I don’t know what to think. I sometimes wonder if this is all a horrible nightmare, and if presently we’ll wake up and find the *Osprey* there.”

“I know. I’ve been thinking the same thing. But there must be some explanation, Jill. Ships and people don’t vanish into thin air.” She drew her knees up and clasped her arms round them, and so sat gazing out through the mouth of the cave. Night had fallen and the sky was littered with stars, and after a while Dawn spoke again. “I don’t believe they’ve gone for good,” she said, speaking her thoughts slowly. “Two men such as Uncle Stan and Uncle John couldn’t simply disappear without leaving some trace. Something’s happened of course, something extraordinary, something we can’t begin to explain, but I believe we’ll see Uncle Stan and Uncle John again.” She caught hold of Jill with a grip which made her companion wince. “We’ve got to believe it, Jill!” she cried. “Don’t you see? We’ve got to believe it, otherwise we’ll go mad.”

Jill nodded.

“I understand, Dawn. You’re right of course. But Dad—I——” She choked back a sob. “Sorry, I’m a fool.”

“You’re not a fool, darling. I feel awfully bad about Uncle Stan, but he’s not my father, and I know it’s heaps worse for you. Let’s crack these coco-nuts and have supper.”

“Y-e-s. And to-morrow we must count up our assets, though that won’t

take long. D’you realize, Dawn, we neither of us possess a stitch except our swim suits and the things we have on?”

“Well, it’s warm enough,” replied Dawn, “and we have the island to ourselves, so we shan’t need many clothes. Jill, it’s no good being miserable, it’s no good being afraid. We’re here, and we’ve got to stop here for the time being, so let us make up our minds that we are going to see your father and Uncle Stan again, and then be as happy as we can. After all, if we were perfectly certain that Uncle John and Uncle Stan were coming to fetch us in a month’s time, it would be rather fun being a couple of Miss Robinson Crusoes for a bit, wouldn’t it?”

Jill reached out and grasped Dawn’s hand.

“Dawn, you’re great!” she said. “If people in the old country are all like you no wonder she always comes out on top. Now pass me that coco-nut before I get completely mushy. Gosh! I’ll sleep to-night. I don’t think I’ve ever been so tired before in my whole life.”

The coco-nuts did not prove a very satisfactory meal, but the girls were too worn out both mentally and bodily to care, and having eaten some of the soft, white flesh, they curled up on the warm sand and were instantly fast asleep. Dawn was the first to wake. The cave was a well of cool, purple shadow, but outside the sun was already shining brightly, and rising silently to her feet, so as not to disturb Jill, she stepped out into the open. There she paused a moment; then, after a backward glance at her still sleeping companion, she turned away and set off towards the top of the bluff. Without a pause she climbed, and reaching the summit, she gazed towards the spot where they had landed the day before. She had a desperate hope that she might see the *Osprey* swinging at anchor, as she and Jill had seen her in their last glimpse of her white hull and sails, but a single glance dispelled the faint expectation, and with a sigh she began to retrace her steps. The *Osprey* and all on board had vanished, and for the thousandth time Dawn asked herself what had happened and found no answer. There was no answer. The thing was inexplicable, and in spite of the warm sun a chill passed through the girl’s body. The next moment she shrugged her shoulders. It was no good going on like this. To be continually asking themselves “how” and “why” was simply to invite despair and misery; the best thing they could do was to endeavour to forget about it, to make up their minds that one day they would see Uncle Stan and Jill’s father again, and in the meanwhile to make the best they could of life. Dawn looked up at the sky. Already it seemed bluer and the sunshine brighter in face of her resolve, and when she reached the cave again, there was actually a smile upon her lips.

Dawn found Jill bending over a small pile of twigs which she had just succeeded in coaxing into flame.

“Gosh! how did you manage that?” she cried.

“My wrist watch,” answered Jill. “You know I wear a small half-hunter because it’s less likely to get broken on shipboard. The centre glass is a magnifying glass and I did the trick with that. Then I’ve found these,” pointing to some shellfish. “I thought we’d put them on to cook while we had a bathe. I saw you up there,” nodding towards the bluff. “No sign, I suppose?”

“None.”

“I was afraid so. Well, that’s that.” She was silent for some seconds; then looked up with a smile. “I’m all right, darling. I’m going to put it behind me as you suggested last night. Now be a brick and collect some more wood while I open these shells. Then we’ll have a dip, and by the time that’s over, breakfast will be ready.”

Ten minutes later the girls were swimming and splashing about in the water. It was not such a wonderful bathe as the first had been, nevertheless they enjoyed it, and when they came out they sat on the sand eating their breakfast while the sun dried them.

“That wasn’t so bad,” remarked Dawn, when the last shell had been scraped clean by the thin slivers of rock which they used as knives. “What a blessing you were wearing that watch, Jill. I had been wondering how we were going to make a fire. Now let’s see what else we’ve got.”

She went into the cave and returned with her shorts, the pockets of which she proceeded to empty.

“A dozen kirby grips,” she enumerated, laying them carefully on a rock. “If we sharpen the points they ought to make fine fish-hooks. A pen-knife, quite a good-sized one, too, and a handkerchief. That’s the lot, Jill, except this.” Dawn held up a belt made of interwoven strands of different coloured silk which she had worn with her shorts. “If we unravel this it ought to make good fishing-lines. Now what have you got?”

Jill had already spread out her contributions on the rock.

“Fourteen kirby grips,” she now counted. “I had some in my pockets and I took the rest out of my hair before we bathed yesterday; the watch, and a piece of string about three yards long. I thought we might use it to string a couple of bows if we can make the arrows.” She surveyed the little collection with her head on one side. “Not such a bad lot if you think it out, Dawn,” she went on. “Fish-hooks, means of making fire, fishing-lines, a knife, and string for a couple of bows. Many castaways, I expect, have started life with less.”

Dawn nodded.

“Yes, we’re lucky. Let’s put them all in the cave for safety. Now what’s the programme, Jill? I thought we might make another trip to the top of the hill, just for one more look round, and if we take the knife, we might cut the wood for our bows and arrows on the way. How’s that?”

“Fine, Dawn. We’ll put these things away and make up the fire, and then we’ll start.”

Jill had made the fire in a stone-lined hollow just inside the cave, now she laid some stout pieces of wood on the glowing embers, and covered the whole with flat slabs of rock.

“That ought to keep it smouldering,” she said. “Right-o, Dawn, I’m ready. Got the knife?”

Side by side the girls set off inland. The slope was less steep than at the eastern end of the island, and the climbing easier, and the girls reached the top of the hill without undue exertion. Hand in hand they stood, two slim, beautiful young figures in their brief costumes, and stared out across the island and the sea beyond. But nowhere was there any sign of human life. The *Osprey* was not there. No sail showed up white against the blue of the lagoon or on the vast expanse of the surrounding sea, and presently, after a glance at the distant island, the girls turned away.

“Well, I’m not going to climb this hill again to look for the *Osprey*,” said Jill in a voice the slight quiver of which belied the braveness of the words. “Now let’s think of our larder, Dawn. Some of the fruit on these bushes is good to eat, I know, and we want wood for bows and arrows. Roast bird will make a nice change from fish now and then.”

Dawn squeezed her friend’s hand.

“Last night you said I was great, Jill,” she whispered. “So are you.”

Jill answered with a wintry smile.

“Am I,” she said. “I don’t think I feel particularly so at the moment, but I’ll try to be.”

CHAPTER XII

Sinister Island

“Dawn, just look at this whopper.”

It was morning. A week had passed since the disappearance of the *Osprey*, and Jill was perched on a rock some distance out in the little cove, where the girls bathed, while Dawn was seated on the sand before the cave. She had already completed two stout, four-foot bows, and at the moment was busy putting the finishing touches to half a dozen arrows. Now as her companion's voice came floating across the water, Dawn looked up to see a large, silvery fish wriggling helplessly at the end of the line Jill was holding.

“Gosh! what a beauty,” Dawn shouted back. “It's the biggest we've caught yet, Jill. If you've finished, be a sport and come and help me feather these arrows. What about having that fish for dinner, and this afternoon we'll go hunting? I'm longing to try-out those bows.”

Jill shouted back some reply, and leaving her catch and lines for the moment on the rock, she slid into the water and swam back to the shore. The week in the sun had completed the girls' tanning, and they now looked like a couple of beautiful, bronze statues. With the passing days, too, their sorrow and mystification had become somewhat dulled, and though there were times when it required all their courage to face the situation, there were others when they thoroughly enjoyed the new, free life which had been thrust upon them.

“These are fine, Dawn,” said Jill, picking up one of the arrows, the points of which had been hardened in the fire.

She squatted down on the sand beside her companion, and having selected a feather from a number they had picked up during their wanderings about the island, she began to tie it to one of the shafts with thin strands of silk taken from Dawn's belt. For an hour the girls worked almost in silence; then Dawn laid down the last arrow.

“That's done,” she remarked, surveying their handywork with considerable satisfaction. “Not bad, Jill. Get your fish, darling, and shove it on the fire to cook, and then we'll have a spot of archery practice to prepare ourselves for this afternoon.”

The girls had never once let their fire go out, and having fetched the fish, which had now ceased to struggle, Jill cleaned it and sprinkled it with fragrant herbs they had found growing on the island, and then laid it on the hot stones to bake.

“Ready?” asked Dawn, who had meanwhile been stringing the bows.

“Yes.”

“Then look. That’s the target,” pointing to a large leaf hanging from the end of a bough some thirty yards away. “We must pretend it’s a bird. Right-o, Jill, you go first.”

The early attempts to hit the leaf were woeful failures. The arrows went everywhere but near the target, but presently the girls began to get the measure of their crude weapons, and by the time the fish was cooked, they had each scored a hit.

“Well, it might be worse,” laughed Jill. She laid aside her bow and knelt down by the fire. “Gosh! this fish smells good. I seem to be everlastingly hungry on this island. Oh, dash! I’ve forgotten to put the dish and plates down to warm. Never mind, it won’t matter. Fetch them, Dawn, there’s a dear.”

Dawn disappeared into the cave and returned with one large and two smaller shells which had once housed some fish of the scallop variety. These she handed to Jill, and then retraced her steps, appearing again carrying two half coco-nut shells which she filled with water from the stream, and a bunch of bananas cut that very morning in a small grove of banana trees which they had discovered a short distance inland.

“Who said that the lot of a castaway was hard?” said Dawn as she ate the soft, creamy flesh of the fish. “It doesn’t seem very hard to me.”

“That’s because we’ve been lucky,” replied Jill. She put her shell aside; then peeled a banana and lay back lazily on the sand. “If this island hadn’t been in the tropics things might have been pretty grim,” she went on, staring up at the blue sky. “Also it might have been inhabited, and the inhabitants might have been cannibals, and that would have been grimmer still. Yes, we’ve been lucky, and the whole thing would be grand fun if only—— Sorry,” with a wry smile, “I’m breaking rules. But I have been wondering, Dawn, if we ought to build a bonfire on the top of the island just in case we sight a ship.”

Dawn shook her head.

“Not yet,” she replied. “I don’t want to leave this island just at present. Suppose they returned? It’s silly, I know, but still——”

“I understand, Dawn. Sort of Marie Rose business. I have the same feeling most of the time, but at others I wonder if we ought to try to get help. Not that I know where the help is coming from, or what the helpers could do if we found them. They’d probably not believe a word of our story, and—— Gosh! here am I starting all over again. Let’s clear up and go hunting. I’m tired of fish. I want roast fowl for a change.”

Washing up the dinner things was not a lengthy business, and within ten minutes the girls, complete with bows and arrows, were making their way inland. By this time they had explored most of the island, except the eastern

headland and that part near the northern end of the promontory, and now, at Dawn's suggestion, they turned their steps in that direction. It was a glorious afternoon. The sun shone out of a sky of cloudless blue, and reaching the top of the hill in the middle of the island, they looked out across a world flooded with golden light. For a moment or two they paused, gazing out over the vast expanse of empty sea; then without a word, they began the descent to the northern shore. Here the undergrowth was thicker, and the girls had difficulty in pushing their way through. Twice they took pot-shots at birds, and twice they missed, and Jill was searching for her arrow the second time when suddenly she uttered a cry of delighted surprise which brought Dawn running to her side.

"What have you found?" she cried. "Don't say you hit the bird after all."

Jill was standing at the edge of a large space where the trees and bushes looked different from the surrounding woodland.

"Bird!" Jill scoffed. "I've found something much more valuable than a bird. Dawn, this is incredible luck. D'you see those trees?" pointing to some trees of moderate height with big, glossy leaves and from the branches of which hung numbers of large, melon-shaped fruit in various stages of ripeness. "They're bread-fruit trees, and those smaller plants over there are yams. Jolly good eating, too. Natives bake the bread-fruit on hot stones and then eat the flesh, and the roots of yams taste like potatoes when cooked. Gosh, what a find! We'll never starve now."

"But how did they get here?" asked Dawn. "The place looks like a deserted plantation."

"That's just what it is. Some natives must have cultivated it at one time, and then, for some reason, they left the island, and since then it's run wild. We'll have to come here another day and do a spot of clearing." Jill picked one of the melon-like fruit. "This is how they should be when you gather them, just on the verge of being ripe. Here's another. Now let's dig up some yams, and then, if we can bring down a bird, we'll have a feast to-night fit for a king."

The girls soon collected as many bread-fruit and yams as they could conveniently carry, and with a final look round to mark the spot, they continued on their way. Both were highly delighted with their discovery. The knowledge that they had in the plantation an almost inexhaustible supply of food gave them confidence, and when presently they came to a glade where birds were particularly numerous and brought down a brace within a minute of each other, they were jubilant.

"I'm sorry to kill the poor things, but we must live and they are plump," said Dawn, surveying their bag complacently. "That was a jolly good shot of yours, Jill. What about a dip before we go home? Look, the lagoon is just down there."

She pointed towards the beach which was visible between the trees, at the foot of a low cliff, a couple of hundred yards away.

“Good idea,” answered Jill. “We’ll leave our things here and pick them up on the way back.”

Ten minutes later the girls were in the lagoon. For an hour they swam and dived, flashing hither and thither through the water like a couple of bronze mermaids, before they came out and flung themselves down on the warm sand at the foot of the cliff. There for a while they lay, basking silently in the gorgeous sunshine; then Dawn sat up and, leaning back on her hands, gazed about her.

“I suppose this isn’t Lion Island by any chance?” she said at last. “I’ve forgotten about the pearls the last few days, but now—— What do you think, Jill?”

“I don’t think it can be.” Jill yawned and stretched lazily. “It’s two hundred miles too far south for one thing, and I don’t see why the makers of that map should have made all that error. Besides I’ve seen no signs of a sunken lugger. Have you?”

“N-o. Yes, I expect you’re right, still it’s queer that neither this island nor the one to the north are marked on the chart.”

“Yes, it’s queer,” replied Jill thoughtfully. “I suppose it’s because these islands are far away from any shipping routes. But even so——”

The words died on Jill’s lips and as one the girls turned and stared at the cliff behind them. A sound they had not heard before had all at once become audible above the crash of the breakers, the songs of birds, and the other noises of the island. It was a strange sound for such a place, a low, discordant murmur, but though it appeared to come from the cliff immediately in their rear, at the same time it sounded as though its source was an infinite distance away. Dawn was the first to recover from her surprise, and scrambling to her feet she approached the cliff.

“It comes from there, Jill,” she said, pointing to a deep crevice in the rock, and certainly, as they drew nearer the fissure, the noise increased in volume. “What on earth can it be?”

“Something to do with the sea, I expect,” replied Jill. “Probably this fissure connects with a cave, and the sound is made by the rise or fall of the tide.”

“Maybe.”

Dawn entered the fissure. It was about two feet wide and went back into the rock until lost in darkness, and no sooner had she stepped inside than the murmur seemed to divide up into individual sounds like far-away voices, the clang of hammers and other unknown noises.

“Gosh, Jill,” cried Dawn, “this is getting curiouser and curiouser. Come in here. Do you hear them? Now how do you account for those sounds?”

Jill squeezed into the fissure beside Dawn. It was cold and dank in the narrow cave compared with the warmth outside, and involuntarily the girls shivered.

“It must be the sea,” said Jill after listening for some moments. “There’s no other explanation. Come on, let’s get out. It’s uncanny.”

Dawn followed her friend into the open, and the girls made their way back to the glade. The return journey was a silent one. In spite of Jill’s certainty that the sea was in some manner responsible for the strange sounds, both she and Dawn were conscious of a vague, uneasy feeling, and they did not recover their spirits until they reached the home cave and began preparing supper.

That meal was a tremendous success. The birds were roasted to a turn, the yams and bread-fruit were delicious, and when they had finished and cleared up, the girls went and sat on a flat rock overlooking the sea.

By this time night was falling. One by one the birds ceased to sing, while overhead the sky grew darker and darker until it seemed to the two friends that they were enclosed in a vast, purple vault spangled with stars so startlingly bright that they had only to reach up their hands to pluck them from their setting.

“Why do people herd together in hot, dusty towns when there are places like this where they can live?” said Jill presently in a remote, sleepy voice.

Dawn murmured some reply. She was lying flat on the rock with her chin resting in her cupped hands, while her eyes stared out through the mouth of the cove to a vague, glimmering, white line which marked the barrier reef. Except for the ceaseless boom of the breakers the silence was so intense that it seemed sacrilege to break it. Even the breeze had died down, and the faint rustle of the leaves had given place to a hushed stillness which, as the time passed, seemed to grow deeper and more intense until it came to weigh upon the girls like some heavy, tangible thing.

“There’s a storm coming.” Again Jill broke a long silence. “Can you feel it, Dawn? It’s getting hotter. And look at the sky.”

Dawn sat up, and for the first time became aware that the stars overhead were veiled, and had changed from glorious, scintillating jewels to vague, distant points of light. A storm. Dawn drew up her legs and clasped her arms round her knees. She had never experienced a real Pacific storm and she wondered what it would be like. Jill was right. It was getting hotter. The girl stared out towards the sea. Even the boom of the breakers seemed to have taken on a more ominous note; then, as she looked beyond the white line of foam, her head jerked up with a start and, thrusting out a hand, she gripped hold of one of her companion’s arms.

“Look, Jill,” she gasped in a hushed, scared whisper. “D’you see it. Out there beyond the breakers. A light, a moving light!”

The next moment the two girls were on their feet and staring out to sea. The thing Dawn had seen was more a faint glow than an actual light, but it was there beyond any chance of imagination, and it was moving. In breathless silence the friends watched its slow progress. At times it seemed to dip out of sight behind the black ridge of a wave, then it came into view again, and so it went on, alternately appearing and disappearing, until at length it vanished behind the low cliff which formed the cove's eastern boundary. For some moments the girls stood staring at the spot where the light had been; then Dawn tugged at Jill's hand, and without a word, they ran across the beach and started to climb the bluff. A light! It couldn't possibly have been a ship, and yet——

The girls were some time reaching the top of the bluff because of the darkness, and once there they stood staring out to sea for sight of the mysterious glow. At first they could not pick it up, and they began to think that it had disappeared altogether, but presently they detected a faint luminosity far away near the end of the eastern headland, only to lose it again a minute later as it passed from view behind the rocky extremity of the island. With a sigh the watchers relaxed and looked at each other.

"What was it?" whispered Dawn. "You know more about these seas than I do, Jill. It couldn't have been a ship, for it was too low in the water. Besides, it wasn't like the light of a ship's lantern, but a sort of radiance such as——such as ——"

She paused at a loss for words, and before she could go on, a chuckle came from the darkness before her, and Jill burst out laughing.

"Gosh, what fools we've been!" she gurgled. "Can't you guess what it was, Dawn? A whale, a harmless, inoffensive whale. That was the cause of our scare, I'll bet anything you like."

"A whale! But the light, Jill. Whales don't——"

"Phosphorescence, my dear. The whale was swimming with a part of its body out of the water and the glow came from its wet skin. That's the only explanation I can think of, and I'm sure I'm right."

"I see. Well, I suppose you know what you're talking about. It might have been a whale certainly, but—— Listen, Jill! What's that sound?"

The girls had been so intent upon the mysterious light that they had not noticed the rapid change which had come over the sky, and now, as a low moaning sound fell upon their ears, they looked up and found that the stars had completely disappeared behind a pall of inky blackness. In the same instant heavy drops of rain began to fall, and even as Jill grabbed hold of Dawn's hand, and shouted to her to get back to the cave, the moaning rose to a roar, and the next moment it seemed to the friends as though all the water in the world was descending upon them in blinding sheets. Never had Dawn known

such rain before. It beat upon her and Jill in bruising, battering torrents so that they clung to each other too dazed to move, and then, before they could gather their scattered wits, the wind came, sweeping down upon them with a shriek which sounded as though all the furies in the underworld had been let loose to work their destruction.

Instinctively the girls flung themselves flat on the ground, and lay there clinging to the grass and bushes while the rain lashed at them and the first fury of the tempest passed. So for ten minutes they lay before the wind abated sufficiently to allow them to move. Even then they had to crawl forward on hands and knees, and not till they were well below the top of the bluff, and sheltered from the full fury of the blast, did they dare to stand upright.

“Are you there, Jill?”

Dawn had to shout to make her voice heard, and the darkness was so intense that she could not see a foot before her.

“Yes, here I am.”

“Where?” Dawn reached out a hand and it came in contact with a wet shoulder. “Gosh! isn’t it dark. Take care. This is the way. Let’s hang on to each other or we’ll come a cropper.”

It was a necessary precaution, for the darkness and turmoil around them made movement dangerous. Slowly, foot by foot, they felt their way down the slope, already made slippery and treacherous by the drenching rain, and not till they reached the security of the beach did they speak again.

“Thank goodness that’s over!” exclaimed Jill seriously. “A broken leg would have been no joke. Heavens, I’m cold!”

She ran into the cave and started piling wood on the fire, and within a few minutes she and Dawn were warming their chilled bodies before a cheerful blaze. For several minutes they sat in silence; then Jill spoke.

“A penny for your thoughts, Dawn,” she said, shaking out her hair and leaning forward so that it might dry in the warmth of the flames. “Why so grave?”

Dawn stirred and removed her eyes from the glowing logs.

“Are you sure that was a whale, Jill?” she asked.

“Of course, what else could it have been?”

“I don’t know, but hasn’t it struck you, Jill, that there’s something very queer about this island? First the *Osprey* disappears completely with all on board, then there were those strange sounds we heard this afternoon, and now that light. I don’t like it, Jill. It’s—it’s sinister.”

“Sinister!” Jill looked up. “Gosh, Dawn, what an idea! Cheer up, darling, the storm’s got you down. Sinister Island! Why you’ve given it a name, though I hardly think it deserves——” She checked in the middle of the sentence, and a troubled look came into her eyes. “You’re right though,” she went on. “The

Osprey, that was unaccountable, yet we've been all over the island and found nothing. Dawn, speak up, what have you got on your mind? You're making me afraid."

Dawn looked towards the black mouth of the cave outside which the storm was raging with ever-increasing fury.

"I'm sorry," she replied, "I didn't mean to scare you, and I've nothing on my mind, nothing. Quite likely you're right and the storm has given me the dumps, but I'm like you, I also am feeling just a little bit afraid."

CHAPTER XIII

Terror of the Night

The rain ceased with the morning, but for two days the storm raged with unabated fury, uprooting trees and lashing the sea into mountainous waves which poured over the protecting reef and even disturbed the serenity of the girls' cove. During that time Dawn and Jill never went far from the cave, except to replenish their supply of bananas, and most of the daylight hours were occupied in weaving a couple of baskets out of the tough stems of a creeping plant they found growing on the near-by cliff. But the third night the wind dropped, and they woke in the morning to find the sun shining out of a clear, blue sky.

"Thank goodness for sunshine!" cried Jill, splashing about in the water.

Dawn made some laughing reply and dived like a streak of light from a high rock. The grim forebodings of the night of the storm had receded into the background of their minds, and after a scanty breakfast, they shouldered their bows and arrows, and carrying their newly made baskets, they set forth to restock their larder and inspect the havoc which had been caused to their domain.

They had not far to go to find evidence of the destruction wrought by the storm. On the top of the bluff a score of trees lay upon the ground, and the first thing they saw, as they scanned the shore, was a litter of wreckage washed high up on to the beach. Anxiously the girls hurried forward, and as they reached the tangled mass of planks and cordage, Dawn looked fearfully at her friend.

"Is it?" she whispered.

Jill shook her head.

"No, it's not the *Osprey*," she replied. "This is oak and the *Osprey* is teak built. It's part of some other unlucky craft, and probably it's come a long way. There's no sign of wreckage on the reef."

"Poor things," murmured Dawn, "I wonder who they were." She pulled out a couple of planks. "This is going to be jolly useful to us, Jill," she went on. "We'll be able to build a raft, and I don't see why we shouldn't contrive a door to our cave."

"That's a bright idea, Dawn," cried Jill, "I never thought of that. And what about a table and chairs? Look at all these nails. If we knock them out we'll be able to use them again."

The girls spent some time sorting out part of the wreckage; then, warned

by the pangs of hunger that the larder was bare, they picked up their belongings and set off for the plantation. Fortunately it was in a sheltered position and had suffered little from the storm, and having filled their baskets with yams and bread-fruit, they set about the task of obtaining meat for the pot. Soon they had brought down two plump birds, and thus laden they returned home, stopping at the banana grove on the way for another bunch of fruit.

“Don’t let’s waste time cooking now,” said Dawn, as she dumped her burdens down inside the cave. “Let’s fill up with bananas. I want to get that wood round to the cove, and if we eat a big meal, we shall feel too lazy for words.”

Jill made a grimace.

“Talk about a slave-driver!” she exclaimed. “All right, I’m game. Let’s take some bananas with us and eat them on the way.”

It was a gloriously sunny afternoon. The weather, indeed, seemed to be doing its best to make up for the turmoil of the past days, and reaching the pile of wreckage, the girls set to work dragging the pieces of wood down to the water and floating them round to their cove. This quickly proved that it was going to be a longer job than they had expected. Hour after hour they laboured. As soon as they had collected enough planks at the water’s edge, they lashed them together with pieces of rope and pushed them out into the lagoon, where a convenient current helped to carry them to their new destination, but even so the afternoon had passed, and the evening was well advanced, before the weary workers were ready for the final trip. It was then that they made their greatest find. They were carrying the last pieces of timber down to the lagoon, when Dawn caught sight of the end of a small spar sticking out of the sand and unearthed a boat’s mast complete with sail attached.

“What a bit of luck!” cried Jill, when she saw the strip of canvas. “Now we’ll be able to do some real sailing. If only we had a saw, and a hammer, and _____”

“Gosh! what more do you want?” interrupted Dawn. “I think we’re jolly lucky. Come along, Jill. This is the last lot. Let’s get it round to the cove, and we’ll call it a day.”

Jill laughed, and together the girls carried the last planks down to the water’s edge and lashed them together; then, slipping into the lagoon, they started to propel the ungainly mass towards the cove. The current had slackened, but there was just sufficient to keep the wreckage moving, and thirty minutes later the friends beached the wood near their cave and dragged it up the sand out of reach of the water.

“That’s the best afternoon’s work I’ve done for years,” said Dawn, stretching herself. “Heavens, I’m tired! Let’s get one of those birds on to roast quickly or I’ll die of hunger.”

That evening the girls could talk of nothing but the raft they were going to make, and for the next three days they worked on it untiringly, leaving off only to bathe, and eat, and drink, and sleep. It was not a thing of beauty when finished, but it floated, and had a mast and sail, a tiller and a low bulwark of planks to keep the deck dry, and Dawn and Jill were inordinately proud of it.

“Let’s go for a sail right away,” cried Dawn, surveying the unwieldy craft with sparkling eyes. “We’ll go round the island, and——”

“We’ll do nothing of the sort,” interrupted Jill firmly. “Listen to me, woman. For three days I’ve laboured like a galley slave, and all I had to eat yesterday were a few wretched shellfish and stale yams, and before we do any sailing we’re going to collect some food. Already I feel like a walking skeleton, and unless I get a good meal soon I don’t know what will happen.”

Dawn laughed.

“You a skeleton!” she replied rudely, surveying her friend’s slender but robust form. “Still I expect you’re right. Yesterday was a bit of a fast. Right-o, we’ll go foraging, but remember, this afternoon I’m going for a sail even if it blows great guns.”

“Suits me,” replied Jill with a grin, “so long as I get something to eat first.”

That morning they followed the southern shore of the island, intending to visit the plantation on the way home, and presently they found themselves at the beginning of the bare, eastern headland. They had never been there since their first day on the island, and now, at Jill’s suggestion, they continued on to the end of the promontory. There were no trees and the only birds were sea-birds, and instead of ending in a point like most headlands, this one came to an abrupt conclusion in a high cliff some three hundred yards in length, which gave to the promontory the appearance of having been cut off short with a knife.

“Queer sort of place,” remarked Jill, lying flat on her face and peering over the edge of the cliff. “I wonder what’s down there. The top overhangs so much that you can’t see the bottom.”

Dawn leaned over beside her friend.

“I expect there are just rocks and water. We’ll bring the raft round here this afternoon and have a look.”

Jill nodded and continued to gaze down towards the sea. Right opposite where they lay there was another wide gap in the reef surrounding the island, and Jill was watching the churning breakers on either side, when all at once she jerked up her head with a start as a harsh, spluttering sound became audible. It appeared to come from a point immediately beneath them, and it was followed by a period of silence which was suddenly broken by a muffled crash and a long-drawn-out, shuddering scream. Three times the scream was repeated, and the third time it died away in a horrible, gurgling noise which

was accompanied by a burst of laughter so mocking and so fiendish in its cadences that the girls sprang panic-stricken to their feet, nor did they check their headlong flight till they had reached the shelter of the trees, and paused to cast terrified glances back the way they had come. But nothing unusual broke the flat expanse of the headland. There were no signs of human presence, the sea-birds wheeled to and fro entirely unconcerned, and presently the watchers withdrew their gaze from the scene and stared at each other with startled, fear-filled eyes.

“What was it?” whispered Jill between lips which had gone strangely white.

“It couldn’t have been a bird?”

Dawn asked the question as though she was hoping against hope that her companion would agree, but Jill shook her head.

“It wasn’t a bird, Dawn, and you know it. That scream and laugh were human, horribly, terribly human.”

“Yes.”

There seemed nothing more to be said, and after another scared glance back along the headland, the friends continued their hurried flight. As they hastened along they now and then cast frightened looks at each other, but for a long time neither spoke, and then it was Jill who first broke the silence.

“You were right, Dawn,” she said. “D’you remember? The night of the storm. You said there was something wrong about this island. Well, you’re right. There is something wrong, something fearfully wrong.”

“I know,” answered Dawn in the same hushed tones. “But what is it? If there are people besides ourselves on the island why have we never seen them?”

“I can’t imagine. It’s that headland, Dawn, there’s something awfully wrong with that headland.”

“Yes.”

Again the single monosyllable, and again the girls fell silent at a loss for words. All this time they had unconsciously been directing their steps towards the plantation, and now, as the familiar trees came into view, they remembered that, however frightened they were, they must eat, and they paused long enough to fill their baskets with yams and bread-fruit before they continued their retreat. This time they made straight for the cove, barely exchanging half a dozen sentences on the way, and not till they had reached the sanctuary of the cave did they broach the subject uppermost in both their minds.

“What shall we do?” asked Jill. “I’ll own, Dawn, I’m scared, scared of stopping here.”

“There’s that island to the north,” answered her companion. “We might go there. It’s calm and we have the raft, but we’ll have to wait till it’s dark, Jill. If

there are other people on this island I don't believe they know we're here, and we don't want them to see us."

"No." Jill went to the mouth of the cave and looked out, then she came back. "Yes, Dawn, there's that other island. I believe we could make it, too. Dawn, what's going on here? Have you any idea what is behind those sounds?"

"Not one, except I feel that they must in some way be connected with the disappearance of the *Osprey*. That's what makes me wonder—— Jill, I'm just as scared as you are, more perhaps, but I can't help wondering if we ought to go."

"I know. But what can we do? That scream, Dawn, and that awful laugh, they terrify me still. I'm afraid I'm a frightful coward."

"Don't talk rot, Jill. You're not a coward, or if you are then I'm one, too. I wouldn't go back to that headland now, not for a million pounds. Let's have some grub. We'll feel better after a meal, and then we'll start collecting food in readiness for the voyage."

Jill agreed, so the girls made the best meal they could off some hastily baked bread-fruit, and then started their preparations for escape. They visited the banana grove and cut several bunches of bananas. They shot five birds which they plucked and put on to roast, and they cooked more yams and bread-fruit and collected a number of coco-nuts, and by the time they had finished, they had laid in enough food for several days.

"It seems a tremendous lot for a ten-mile voyage," said Dawn, surveying the heap of food.

"I know," replied Jill, "but that other island may not be so well supplied as this one. I wish we could carry more water. We'll have to depend on those coco-nuts for drink." She looked at her companion. "Dawn," she went on, "I've been thinking about what you said this morning. You were right, of course. I was terribly panicky then, but if the horrible frights we've had have anything to do with the disappearance of the *Osprey* then we ought not to run away without at least trying to discover what happened."

Dawn nodded her head.

"I've been thinking the same thing," she answered. "How's this for an idea, Jill? Let's get everything ready to sail at once if necessary, and then to-night we'll return to the headland. It won't be so bad with darkness to hide us. Mind you, I don't say we'll discover anything, but we may, and at the same time, if we have to quit, we'll be able to get away immediately. What do you say?"

"I'm game."

So the matter was decided, and the remaining daylight was occupied by the girls in storing their food and their few precious belongings on board the raft. By the time this job was finished the sun was setting, and the friends sat down

in the mouth of the cave to await the coming of night. Now that the time for action was approaching, the thought of the proposed expedition grew more and more alarming. With every minute of waiting the frightful scream and the cruel almost maniacal laugh they had heard became fraught with greater terrors, and as darkness closed in the load of fear weighed more heavily upon them. Still neither suggested that they should relinquish the self-imposed task. In the hearts of both girls was a feeling that they could not leave the island without making some attempt to discover its sinister secret, and presently, without a word, they rose to their feet and began to climb the bluff. At the top they paused and looked back into the cove. There was sanctuary, and the rest of the island had suddenly become a No Man's Land full of hidden dangers. Involuntarily the girls shivered; then, as though impelled by some desperate resolve, they suddenly swung round and started to run down the farther side of the bluff to the beach below.

Presently there would be a moon, but at the moment the night was very dark, and gradually, as they trudged along the beach towards the headland, some of the girls' confidence returned. At least they were invisible to any enemies, if enemies there were upon the island, and coming to the western end of the headland they began to climb up from the beach below. At the summit they halted again. Except for the boom of the breakers absolute silence lay over the island. What were they to do next? They had no settled plan, and now that they were face to face with the problem of discovering the secret of that bare promontory, they began to realize their utter helplessness. What could they do? Dawn asked herself. They might—— Dawn's thoughts were cut short by feeling her right arm gripped painfully, and Jill's voice whispering in her ear.

“Did you hear?”

“Hear what?”

“Shouting, Dawn. Listen, there it is again.”

Dawn, obeyed, and almost at once her ears picked up a faint sound such as might be made by many men shouting together. It seemed a very long way off, however, but presently, as the girls stood there in tense silence, they realized that it was getting louder, until at last they were able to distinguish individual shouts and yells. With low, frightened cries the friends shrank back among the trees. What terrible thing was happening now? There was something appallingly savage about the sounds, as though a pack of human blood-hounds was on the scent, and then, in a moment, the uproar increased a hundredfold, and suddenly the horrified girls saw a score or more points of light flash up near the end of the headland and come streaming towards them through the darkness. For a moment Dawn and Jill stood rooted to the ground with sheer terror, the next a score of fierce voices were raised in a wild, savage hallo, and

springing about they burst into panic-stricken flight.

By some miracle the fugitives reached the beach whole and unhurt, but even there they did not pause but continued to flounder on through the sand until thumping hearts and bursting lungs forced them to stop. The sounds had drifted away towards the northern side of the island, at times ceasing altogether, at others breaking out with renewed zest, and presently Dawn found breath to gasp:

“What were they doing? It sounded as though they were hunting something.”

“I think they were,” answered Jill. “At first I thought they were hunting us.”

“So did I. I’ve never been more terrified in my life. Listen!”

From some spot on the farther side of the island a wild outburst of triumphant yells had suddenly broken out, and the girls clung to each other trembling until the uproar died down.

“It’s over,” said Jill presently in a small, quivering voice. “They’ve caught what they were hunting. Come on, Dawn, we can’t stop here. I’ll die of fright if I spend another day on this island.”

Dawn nodded her head in the darkness and the fugitives started forward again. Sometimes they ran, at others they plodded along through the soft sand with dogged, desperate haste, and coming at last to the cove, they clambered on board the raft and without a word, flung off the stout creeper which acted as mooring rope and began to paddle their clumsy craft out into the lagoon. An hour later they were in the open sea, and Sinister Island and all its terrors were being left behind.

CHAPTER XIV

Sea Treasure

The rising moon found the voyagers with Sinister Island well astern, and a light, southerly breeze driving them straight towards the other island to the north. The sea was calm except for a long, smooth swell which the raft rode easily, and with every mile they put behind them, the girls' spirits rose and their confidence in their craft increased.

"For a raft she's jolly good," said Jill. "She rides high, she's dry, and she answers to her helm quite well. We'll reach the island before morning, which is just as well, for we don't want the people back there to spot us."

"I wonder who they are," murmured Dawn. She was seated in the stern with one rounded arm resting on the tiller. "D'you think they are savages, Jill?"

"Might be. In all that shouting I didn't hear a single word I could understand, and yet—savages—they don't seem quite to fit into the picture, Dawn."

"No."

The girls fell silent again, each busy with her own thoughts, and presently Jill came and took the tiller, while Dawn lay down to get some sleep. So in turn they kept watch through the night, and the fresh day was just breaking as they ran in through a gap in the protecting reef and lowered sail in the lagoon surrounding their new home.

The island was smaller than the one they had left, but it was equally well wooded, and the sight of numerous birds among the trees assured the voyagers that there would be no lack of food. Confronting them was a low line of perpendicular cliffs, and seeing no sign of a possible landing-place, the girls hoisted the sail again and started to cruise round the island. For a while the cliffs increased in height; then as they rounded the eastern point, and the northern shore came into view, cries of admiration burst from two pairs of lips.

In front of the girls lay a wide bay shaped like a crescent moon. The water of the bay was a deep, azure blue and was fringed with a beach of golden sand, beyond which the island rose gradually to the higher, southern shore in slopes of vivid green. At one point a stream ran across the sand, while here and there tall, rose-coloured rocks rose out of the water of the lagoon like sentinels standing guard over some precious thing.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Dawn. "This beats Sinister Island into a cocked hat. And there doesn't seem to be a soul about, Jill. D'you think we've

got it to ourselves?”

“Looks like it. Come along, let’s get ashore. I’m starving.”

Breakfast that first morning was a jubilant meal. They had it on a flat rock by the water’s edge, and with the other island out of sight behind them, the girls laughed and chattered, conscious that a heavy load of dread had been lifted from their minds. Every now and then they paused to look about them. Tall coco-nut palms rose above the other trees, and the yellow of bananas showed among the greenery, while in the lagoon gaily coloured fishes flashed to and fro. Dawn laid down the drum-stick of a bird from which she had been picking the flesh with strong, white teeth and gazed around entranced.

“It’s wonderful!” she murmured. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything so beautiful. Look at the colour of those rocks, they——” Her words ended in a gasp of astonishment, and Jill, looking up, saw her gazing fixedly at a large mass of rock which rose out of the lagoon a short distance away; the next moment Dawn had swung round and grabbed hold of one of her companion’s arms. “Look, Jill!” she cried. “That rock. Tell me, am I dreaming or is it true? It is shaped like a lion, isn’t it?”

“Gosh!” Jill had leaned forward and looked over Dawn’s shoulder. “You’re right, Dawn, it’s a lion, a lion’s head, then this——”

“This is Lion Island!” interrupted Dawn excitedly. “My island, my treasure island, and the man who made that map had got the latitude wrong after all. Come along, Jill.”

She caught hold of her companion and dragged her to her feet.

“But where are you going?” gasped Jill. “I haven’t finished breakfast.”

“Breakfast! Who cares about breakfast? I’m going to find the lugger and you’re coming with me. Hurry. It was marked on the map as being off the north shore of the island so it can’t be far away.”

She sprang down from the rock, and catching her excitement, Jill followed her, and in a few minutes the girls were paddling the raft out on to the lagoon. For an hour they sailed to and fro, searching the blue depths for the sunken lugger. In some places the bed of the lagoon was of clean, golden sand, in others it resembled a fairy garden where rainbow-coloured fishes darted in and out among coral flowers and the green, waving stems of sea plants. But they saw no sign of any wreckage, and they were approaching the western end of the bay when Dawn, who was leaning over the prow of the raft, caught sight of a shadowy mass gripped fast between two pinnacles of rock which rose from the sandy floor of the lagoon like giant fungus. Excitedly she directed Jill to steer towards the rocks, then sprang to lower the sail, and a minute later the girls were standing side by side staring down through the transparent water at the hull of a small lugger a score of feet below the surface and half buried in the sand.

“Congratulations, Dawn,” cried Jill, hugging her companion. “We’ve found your lugger without a doubt, and it looks as though it won’t be too difficult recovering the pearls. See how she’s all battened down and the skylight closed. Must have been carried right over the reef in a storm, and I expect her crew were on deck and were all washed away except——”

She ceased speaking, for Dawn had suddenly left her side, and the next moment Jill saw her reach the deck of the lugger and bend over the skylight. For the best part of a minute she stood there, staring down into the cabin of the sunken craft, then she shot up to the surface and clambered back dripping on to the raft.

“You’re right, Jill.” Dawn laughed up into her companion’s face, while she shook the water from her hair. “I think she must have been lost just as you described. It’s almost as bright down there as it is up here, and you can see right into the cabin. You can see the lockers, and there’s a man’s seaboot lying in one corner, and some broken crockery on the floor, the remains of the unfortunate crew’s last meal, I suppose, and—— Jill, where would they keep the pearls?”

“In a metal box in one of the lockers most likely.”

“So I imagined. Then all we have to do is to get the skylight open and dive in and search. Gosh, I am excited! Come down and have a look.”

She sprang to her feet and dived off the raft into the water again, followed closely by Jill, and side by side the girls reached the wreck and stood peering down into the cabin. Everything was as Dawn described it, some sodden masses which must once have been books were even visible on a shelf attached to a bulkhead, and having seen all that was possible in a short survey, Jill spent a few seconds vainly trying to open the skylight before their lungs forced the divers back to the surface. Gasping they climbed up on to the raft and sat looking at each other.

“We’ll need something to force open the skylight,” said Jill, speaking her thoughts aloud. “We don’t want to break the glass if we can help it, for it will all fall in, and then we shall go cutting ourselves when we search for the pearls.”

Dawn nodded.

“Yes, I thought of that. I suppose we couldn’t use the companion-hatch? It’s only a step or two to the cabin, and I believe I could do it.”

“Don’t be a fool, Dawn!” replied Jill forcibly. “I don’t want your drowned body on my hands. It will be safe enough once we get the skylight open, for then we’ll have a straight path to the surface, but no companion-ways and passages for us, my girl, and don’t you dare think about it.”

“Right-o,” laughed Dawn, “I’ll be good.” She sat staring down at the lugger, and as she did so her face clouded. “If only they’d been here, Jill, it

would have been perfect, wouldn't it?" she went on, speaking slowly. "As it is I feel as though all the guilt had gone from the gingerbread."

"I know, Dawn, it's not the same, it never can be the same."

For some minutes the girls sat without speaking, each wrapped in her own thoughts, then they rose to their feet and, hoisting the sail, steered towards the shore. They had already noticed a hole in the cliff which formed the western end of the bay, and discovering this to be a cave, even more commodious than the one on Sinister Island, they deposited all their possessions inside, and then set off to explore their new domain. This proved to be considerably smaller than the island they had left, nevertheless they found a number of bread-fruit and banana trees and yams growing wild, and they returned to their new home with the comfortable conviction that, whatever else happened, they would not starve.

That evening they fed on the cold food they had brought from Sinister Island, but the next morning Jill lighted a fresh fire in a stone-lined hollow just inside the cave, and the life of the castaways resumed its normal course. Now followed several weeks of almost idyllic existence. For some reason, having discovered the whereabouts of the pearls, neither Dawn nor Jill felt any urgent desire to set about their recovery, and they spent their days hunting, fishing and bathing, or simply lying basking in the golden sunshine.

By this time the girls had become so bronzed that, apart from their hair and features, they might easily have been mistaken for a couple of native islanders, while the open-air, natural life had strengthened their bodies and hardened their muscles to such an extent that no exertion seemed to tire them. Sometimes, when the whim took them, they would swim for hours in the lagoon or ramble from one end of the island to the other, and it was during one of these excursions that they came upon a little glade tucked away in the middle of a grove of trees, and discovered the decaying remains of a primitive hut.

"This must be where Ben Travers lived while he was on the island," said Dawn, as they approached the hut. "I've often wondered why we never came across any signs of his life here."

Jill nodded her agreement.

"Wonder if there's anything useful inside," she said.

She bent her head and entered the low doorway followed by Dawn. Inside was a green twilight, and in one corner were the remains of what must have been the occupant's bed. But other furnishings there were none, and the girls were about to leave when Jill caught sight of something among a litter of leaves, and the next moment she had pulled forth an old and rusty axe.

"Here's a treasure!" she cried jubilantly. "Let's hunt round, Dawn, and perhaps we'll find something more."

But though the friends sought diligently they discovered nothing more of value, and after a while they left, carrying the axe with them.

“This is going to be jolly useful,” said Jill, as they trudged along. “D’you realize, Dawn, we’ve got something at last with which we can force open the skylight of the lugger and retrieve your pearls?”

“The pearls!” exclaimed Dawn. “Gosh! I believe I’d forgotten all about them. I suppose it’s because they are of such little use to us here. Still it will be fun diving for them. You know, Jill, we’ve been impossibly lazy. There must be heaps of things on that lugger which would be useful to us, yet for weeks we’ve made no attempt to get them.”

“Well, we’ve been quite happy, and personally I think food baked on hot stones tastes better than food cooked in a pot.”

“Yes, but we really must recover the pearls, Jill. One day we’ll be rescued, I suppose, and we’d be fools to leave them behind. We’ll start to-morrow morning. It will be something fresh to do.”

That evening the girls’ talk was almost entirely of the pearls. With the discovery of the axe, all the thrill of the treasure hunt had returned, and the next morning, after breakfast, they went on board the raft and steered towards the sunken lugger. They had brought with them two heavy lumps of coral attached to lengths of stout creeper to act as anchors, and with these they moored the raft close to the wreck; then, grasping the axe in one hand, Dawn shot down towards the deck below and began the attack on the skylight.

For an hour the friends worked, taking turn and turn about beneath the surface, interspersed with brief periods of rest, and at the end of that time, one flap of the skylight had been forced open. After that it was simply a matter of driving back the rust-eaten bolts which held the other flap in place, and the way into the cabin was clear.

“We’ll have to look out that we don’t bump our heads on that cross beam,” said Dawn, as the friends sat on the raft, resting before the real hunt for the treasure began. “Actually though there’s plenty of room if we’re moderately careful.”

Jill nodded her head. She was leaning over the side of the raft peering down towards the wreck, and presently she spoke her thoughts aloud.

“That lugger is in remarkably good preservation, you know, Dawn,” she said. “I’d say she hasn’t been there more than a few years, and certainly she isn’t anything like as old as the map appeared to be.”

“I’ve noticed that, and it bears out what Uncle Stan said. He said that the map wasn’t old. The canvas on which it was made was quite sound, and he thought that the faded, soiled look was probably caused by exposure. Quite possibly, too, Ben Travers wasn’t as old as he looked and his aged appearance was due to illness and privation. I wonder why the hull of the lugger is so

clean. I always imagined it would be covered with seaweeds and other plants.”

“Something to do with the currents, I expect,” answered Jill. “There’s quite a strong one between those fangs of rock.”

Dawn nodded, and picked up a line they had made the evening before by unravelling a piece of the rope they had brought from Sinister Island. A stone was attached to one end of the line, and now she lowered it into the water until it hung down through the open skylight, then she rose to her feet.

“Well, here goes, Jill,” she said with a grin. “Stand by to haul up the plunder.”

She was gone like a flash of warm light, and peering over the side of the raft, Jill saw her glide through the skylight and gain the floor of the cabin. Almost breathless with excitement, Jill watched the movements of her friend. She saw Dawn open one locker, look in hastily and then go to the next. From this one she took some object which she attached hurriedly to the end of the line, and three seconds later she had reached the surface again, and was laughing up into her companion’s face.

“Got it?” asked Jill, her voice trembling with excitement.

“Don’t know. It’s a box of sorts. Haul it up, there’s a dear.”

Dawn clambered back on to the raft and sat watching while Jill hauled up the line. A metal box, something like a large cash-box, was attached to the end. A rusty key projected from the lock and, lifting the box on board, Jill put it down before her friend.

“Be quick, Dawn!” she cried. “Open it.”

The box, however, refused to be opened in a hurry. The key and lock had rusted, and they had to fetch up the axe and use it on the lock before they could get the lid open, and then all they found was a sodden mass which had once been paper.

“The lugger’s log,” cried Jill disgustedly. “Gosh, what a sell!”

“Cheer up,” laughed Dawn. “I never expected to find the pearls first time. Your turn now, Jill. Down you go.”

Again the girls took it in turn to dive to the wreck, searching the lockers one by one. All manner of things they found and sent to the surface, enamelled mugs and jugs, some crockery, none the worse for its long immersion, and a number of other articles more or less useful, but they found no pearls, and at last they clambered back on to the raft and faced each other disconsolately.

“Bit of a wash-out,” remarked Dawn presently, “yet if the pearls ever were there they must be there still, for certainly no one has visited that lugger since she sank. D’you think they’re in the stern cabin, Jill?”

“Maybe, but if so it’s going to be a terribly risky job searching for them, and I don’t believe I’d dare.”

Dawn nodded.

“Bad as that,” she murmured. “But if they’re not there where can they be?” she went on. “We’ve searched all the lockers, we’ve cleared out the cupboards, and we’ve not seen a single pearl, so unless the map’s a dud, they must be _____”

Dawn stopped speaking suddenly to stare down at the wreck beneath; the next moment she uttered a whoop, and springing to her feet, dived overboard. Jill gazed after her in astonishment. She saw Dawn enter the cabin, and go to the shelf which they had noticed on their first visit to the wreck, and on which lay the remains of a row of books. In a moment the girl had swept the sodden relics to the floor, and with a thrill Jill saw her thrust a hand into a dark aperture behind and pull out a box. It was a fairly large box and Dawn put it on to the table in the centre of the cabin, and grabbed hold of the line. Jill watched, holding her breath in her excitement, while her friend attached the end of the line to the handle of the box. Was she never coming up? She couldn’t possibly stop down there any longer. Ah! Jill’s own breath escaped in a sigh as she saw Dawn shoot upwards towards the surface, and the next moment she was bending over the side of the raft, helping her companion on board.

“Got it, I’m almost sure,” gasped Dawn, lying flat on the deck and drawing in great lungfuls of air. “Gosh! I stopped down the limit that time. A sudden hunch told me to look behind those books and there it was. Pull it up, Jill, and let’s see what we’re worth.”

Jill lost no time in obeying, and within a few seconds the box had been hauled to the surface and the girls were bending over their find. Again they had to use the axe, but this time, as the lid fell back, they were not disappointed, and instead of the mushy remains of the lugger’s log, the friends saw that the box was filled almost to the brim with small, wash-leather bags. Jill uttered a gasp of amazement.

“You’ve got it all right, Dawn,” she whispered in a voice vibrating with excitement. She tilted the box, allowing the bulk of the water inside to run away, then pushed it towards Dawn. “Go on,” she urged. “It’s your treasure. Quick, darling, open one of those bags. I’m dying to see what’s inside.”

Dawn laughed, and picking out one of the bags at random, emptied the contents into the palm of her left hand. The next moment the girls were gazing at a dozen huge, flawless, black pearls.

“They must be worth hundreds of thousands.”

The words were Jill’s. Two hours had passed since she had hauled the treasure box to the surface. Immediately after seeing the black pearls, the girls had rowed to the shore and landed, and now they were seated in the mouth of their cave with the treasure spread out before them. There were hundreds of pearls. There were fifty huge globes of lustrous black each one worth a

fortune. There were pink pearls and white pearls, pearls of a lustrous creamy tinge, round pearls and pearls pear-shaped like frozen tears. On one wash-leather bag all by itself was a glowing star consisting of five pearls which had grown together, on another bag lay six similarly joined and shaped like a sickle moon. For the most part the girls sat and gazed, but now and then they reached out their hands and picked up some translucent beauty, only to replace it after a brief examination with a sigh of wonder, as though they were dreaming and expected every moment to wake up and find that the pearls were but a figment of their imagination. Presently Dawn spoke.

“Hundreds of thousands,” she murmured, as if she had just heard Jill’s words spoken some time before. “But how did the men in that lugger collect all these pearls? Surely it isn’t usual for pearlers to make such a haul?”

“Most unusual,” replied Jill, “in fact I’d say it has never been done before.” She gazed at the shimmering treasures before them. “They must either have discovered a new and incredibly rich bed of pearl oysters,” she went on, speaking slowly, “or there must have been wholesale robbery. If you ask me I’d say it was the former, for there are more pearls here than fifty pearlers gather on fifty average trips. I—— Dawn, look!”

Jill clutched hold of her companion’s arm and pointed to the north. Far away on the horizon, but coming straight towards the island was a ship.

CHAPTER XV

Gone without Trace

“For the last time, where are the pearls?”

It was the evening of the day on which the girls had brought the great treasure to the surface, but what a terrible change had come over their circumstances in a few short hours! At sight of the ship their first action had been to put the pearls back into the box and bury it in the sand beneath a rock. They had done this more as a measure of precaution than because they distrusted the newcomers, and having thus secured the treasure, they had eagerly awaited the arrival of their rescuers. As the vessel drew nearer she had proved to be a large lugger, and the girls had watched her pass through the gap in the protecting reef, and sail round the island to the northern bay. They had even waved to the single white man and the Kanaka crew, and as the anchor splashed overboard, they had peddled out on the raft to welcome the stranger. There had been no reason for alarm. Their chief feeling had been one of relief that here at last was a man of their own colour, their own race perhaps, to whom they could tell the story of the *Osprey's* disappearance, and who might help them solve the mystery which surrounded the island to the south. So they had clambered on board, calling out excited greetings, and had been met by a short, broad-shouldered man with a beaming smile. “Well, young ladies, this is a surprise,” he had said. “How ever did you come here?” Dawn and Jill could still hear the words with which he had welcomed them. They could still hear the sneering laugh which had suddenly made them swing round to confront two other men and a woman who had emerged from the companion-hatch, and they still felt the horrible, sick terror which had assailed them when they realized that these people were not friends but enemies who, by some unaccountable means, had followed them to the island. Since then there had been nothing but questions, questions, questions. Questions about the *Osprey*, about Dawn's guardian and Jill's father, about the pearls till the girls' minds reeled under the continual battering of words.

“So you will not tell me what you have done with them?”

The man who put the question was Hank. That day, for the first time, Dawn had seen his face clearly, and it made her afraid, as did the faces of the woman Belle, and the second man Don, and the captain of the lugger, whom they addressed as Smith, but she still refused to show her fear.

“How can I tell you when I don't know,” she lied bravely. “We've told you so a hundred times, must you keep on asking?”

"She's right, Hank," burst in the woman fiercely. "Why waste all this time in silly talk? Give them to me. I'll warm their backs with a rope's end, and we'll soon know the truth."

"I do not doubt it, Belle," replied the man, "but suppose, just for a moment, that they are telling the truth? Suppose they have not found the pearls? You must admit that something very strange has happened. Where is the ship on which our young friends came here, where are their companions? We do not know, and unfortunately these young ladies seem disinclined to take us into their confidence. It is annoying, but I am always opposed to unnecessary violence, and so to-night we will content ourselves with tying them to a couple of trees and seeing what hunger will do. Hunger is a great weakener of wills, and the night may bring wisdom, but I promise that, if to-morrow finds them still stubborn, you shall be allowed to try your persuasion upon them."

The girls saw the woman open her mouth to protest, but something in the speaker's face must have warned her to be silent, for no words came, and a second later, at a sign from their leader, the two other men seized hold of the girls and forced them up the beach where they bound them securely to a couple of coco-nut palms within a yard of each other.

"I'm glad we hid the pearls," said Dawn when their enemies had gone.

"So am I," answered Jill in a weary voice, "but suppose we're handed over to that woman and she does what she threatened?"

"I know. It will be awful. Don't let's think about it. Perhaps something will happen. Have they bound you tightly, Jill? Is there any chance of getting free?"

"I don't think so, I can hardly move."

"Same here. Look, they're going back to the lugger. I wonder how they found their way here. We should have been more careful, I suppose, but it never entered my head that the people on board might be Hank's gang."

"They must have had some idea of the position of the island," answered Jill. "Probably they've been cruising round for weeks, searching for it, and when they saw us, they knew that they had come to the right place."

Dawn nodded but made no answer, for indeed there seemed nothing to say. By this time night had fallen, and except for a solitary light upon the lugger, complete darkness enveloped the scene. Even the stars, which usually shone so brilliantly, were veiled by a mist, and there was no sound save the ceaseless boom of the breakers upon the reef. Slowly the time passed. The girls soon gave up straining at their bonds, finding that their efforts only increased the agony of their position, and as the hours followed each other, their misery, and hunger, and thirst increased. Now and then one of them made some remark, or would fall into an uneasy doze from which a spasm of pain, shooting through her cramped limbs, awakened her, but for the most part they stared silently before them with unseeing eyes, the prey of thoughts which grew hourly more

bitter.

Midnight came, and if anything the darkness grew more intense. The stillness, too, seemed to become deeper, and then, all at once it was broken by a faint sound barely audible against the roar of the surf. Dawn heard it and raised her head. It came from the lagoon, and the next moment, with startling suddenness, a shot rang out, followed some seconds later by a high-pitched scream and a splash.

“What was that?” gasped Jill, awaking with a start from a short, uneasy slumber.

“Sounded like a pistol-shot,” replied her companion. “Then someone screamed, and there was a splash. Perhaps they’re fighting among themselves. I hope so. Listen! What’s happening now?”

A faint creaking was coming from the spot where the lugger had been anchored, but though the girls strained their ears, they could make nothing of what was going on, except that the noises gradually receded into the distance till they died away altogether.

“Sounded like oars,” said Jill presently. “But why oars? They can’t be going away. Hullo! someone’s coming ashore.”

Faint splashings had suddenly reached the girls’ ears, accompanied by muffled sobbings as though someone was gasping for breath, and after a time a voice hailed them weakly from the water’s edge.

“Where are you? Quick! Answer me, so that I can come to you.”

“Who’s that?” asked Dawn sharply, vainly endeavouring to pierce the darkness with her eyes.

“Belle.”

“Belle!”

The girls repeated the woman’s name in amazement; then waited silently for what would happen next. Very soon the faint crunch of footsteps in the sand reached them, and two seconds later a vague, shadowy form loomed up between them.

“What are you doing here?” asked Dawn sharply.

“I’ve escaped.”

The woman’s voice was trembling, and she sounded very different to the shrill virago who had clamoured to be allowed to beat them a few hours before.

“Escaped! What’s happened out there?”

“I don’t know. I awoke suddenly to find strange men on board. Then someone fired a pistol, and I jumped out of my bunk and ran up on deck in my pyjamas. There were men everywhere, and one tried to grab hold of me, but I tore myself free, and screamed, and I was so terrified that I jumped overboard. I’m not a good swimmer and I thought I’d never get ashore, but I just managed

it, and now——”

“Now you’d better untie these ropes,” interrupted Dawn peremptorily. “Be quick!”

“Yes, yes, I’ll be quick.”

The woman’s nerve appeared to have gone completely, and to the girls she seemed ages fumbling about with the ropes before the last knots were undone and they were free. Even then they were unable to stand, and Belle had to rub their arms and legs for some time before the agony of returning circulation had passed and they were able to move about with any freedom.

By this time all sounds from the lagoon had long ago ceased, and for several minutes the girls stood at the water’s edge, staring out into the darkness, and not knowing what to do next.

“You’re sure you’ve told us everything?” said Jill to the woman standing by their side.

“Everything. I was too frightened to notice much. Besides it was dark.”

“Yes, it’s dark enough.” Jill turned towards Dawn. “Queer, isn’t it, Dawn?” she went on. “Reminds one of the *Osprey*.”

“That’s what I’m thinking. Jill,” Dawn went on with sudden decision, “take this woman into the cave and mount guard over her. If she tries any tricks tie her up. There was a time when she might have been a match for one of us, but I don’t think she’d stand much chance now. And don’t show any lights till I return.”

“But where are you going?”

“I’m going to swim out to where the lugger was anchored and find out what’s happened.”

“Swim, Dawn? But why not take the raft? We’ll both go. We’ll tie this woman up first, and then——”

“No,” interrupted Dawn. “If there’s anyone out there the raft might be seen and heard, but no one will see or hear me. Go on, Jill, do as I say. I shan’t be long.”

She shed her clothes and handed them to her companion, and without waiting for Jill to reply, she entered the water. For a moment Jill stood staring in the direction where Dawn had disappeared, then she took hold of one of Belle’s arms with no uncertain grip and urged her towards the cave.

“Step out,” she ordered gruffly, “and don’t forget what my friend said. Remember, you wanted to flog us a few hours ago, so you can’t expect us to feel very kindly towards you.”

The woman made no reply, but Jill felt her shiver. Was it fear or cold, the girl wondered.

It was half an hour before Dawn returned. She entered the cave without a sound, and kneeling down beside the embers of the fire began to feed them

with small pieces of dry wood and fan them into flame.

“She’s gone, Jill,” she said, without looking up.

“Gone!”

“Yes, gone. Vanished as though she had never been.”

“But what can have happened?”

“I don’t know, except that I imagine the same thing has happened to her as happened to the *Osprey*. It’s no good talking, and we must wait till day comes before we can decide anything.” She looked across to where the woman who had been their most vindictive enemy a short time ago sat crouching in the shadows. “You’d better come and sit by the fire,” she went on. “And take those pyjamas off and dry them, or you’ll catch your death of cold. You’re not as fit as we are. Jill, rout out some grub. I’m famished, and it will do us all good to have something to eat.”

Jill did as she was asked, and having eaten, the three women lay down close to the fire, and in spite of the hazards which they had been through, were almost instantly fast asleep. Dawn was the first to wake, and rising silently to her feet she left the cave and climbed to the highest point of their domain from which there was a clear view across the sea towards Sinister Island. Arrived there she spent some minutes staring intently at the intervening water; then she retraced her steps to the cave. Jill and Belle were still sleeping, and arousing her companion, Dawn beckoned her outside and led the way to a flat rock where they sat down side by side.

“You’re up bright and early, I must say,” yawned Jill. “Couldn’t you sleep?”

“The sun roused me, so I went up to the top of the island.”

“The Dickens you did!” Jill was wide awake now. “Did you see anything?”

“Not a sign. The sea between here and Sinister Island was as empty as the palm of your hand. And look there.” She waved towards the lagoon. “Empty, too. Another nice little mystery, Jill.”

“I know. I was thinking about it while you were swimming round the lagoon last night, and the more I thought the less I liked it.”

“I don’t like it either, but we must do it. Don’t you agree, Jill?”

“You mean go back there?” nodding her head towards the south.

“Yes. What do you think?”

“I guess you’re right, Dawn. That affair last night has put an entirely different complexion on things. The men who raided the lugger and took her away must have come from Sinister Island, and what they did to the lugger they must have done to the *Osprey*. And that means that Dad and Uncle Stan may be prisoners on the island, so we must go back and try to rescue them. That’s what you mean, isn’t it, Dawn?”

“Yes. It sounds pretty hopeless, I admit, but we shan’t be expected, that’s

one thing in our favour, and we could never be happy living on here, Jill, if we didn't make the attempt."

"No, that's true. Dawn, have you any idea who those men are?"

"I've a jolly good idea, and it explains that mysterious light we saw, and most other things."

Dawn went on talking for some minutes, and when she came to an end, Jill nodded her head in agreement.

"You must be right, Dawn. As a matter of fact, before now, I've once or twice wondered if that might be the explanation. Gosh! to think that we should have stumbled on that place when we had the whole Pacific to choose from. What about her?" nodding towards the cave. "She'll have to stop here. We daren't take her with us."

"No, that's impossible. We leave her a bow and some arrows, and a couple of fishing lines, and then if she starves it will be her own fault. We'll promise to return and take her off if all goes well, and that's the best we can do."

"That's settled then." Jill rose and stretched herself. "Let's cross to-night, Dawn," she went on. "I don't know how you feel, but the longer we put it off the more dithery I shall get."

Dawn rose and hugged her friend.

"You're not the only one who feels dithery, darling. I'm scared stiff, but it's got to be done."

CHAPTER XVI

The Secret of the Island

The girls had little to do in the way of preparation for their return to Sinister Island. They decided to leave the pearls where they were, and having collected sufficient food for twenty-four hours, they spent the rest of the day swimming in the lagoon or basking in the warm sunshine. But they were unable to enjoy themselves. The thought of the task ahead weighed heavily upon their spirits, and the presence of Belle, sitting sullenly apart, did not help matters. They had not informed the woman of their intentions, and not until the time arrived for them to start did they tell her that they were leaving the island. At first she refused to believe them; then, when she realized that they were in earnest, she begged to be allowed to accompany them, and finally, after pleadings had failed, she burst into a tirade of abuse such as the girls had never heard before. For some seconds they listened in silence, but presently a particularly offensive epithet awoke Dawn's rage, and catching hold of the woman by her shoulders, she shook her until her teeth rattled.

"Be quiet, you wretched creature!" she stormed. "D'you hear? Be quiet! If you won't I'll beat you as you wanted to beat us yesterday." She gave the woman a final shake and flung her away so that she lost her balance and fell on to the sand where she lay glaring venomously at the girls. Dawn returned the stare unmoved. "Be thankful we've promised to come back for you," she concluded. "It's a great deal more than you deserve."

She turned her back on the woman, and without another look behind, strode towards the raft. Jill followed wondering. She had never seen Dawn so angry before, and as the girls cast off the moorings and raised the sail, she glanced many times at her friend.

"I really thought you were going to beat her," she said at last.

"Well, she deserved it," retorted Dawn. "That she should start abusing us after all I've suffered from her and her friends, and considering what she wanted to do to us yesterday, got my goat. But let's forget her, Jill. We've got enough on our hands without worrying about that worthless creature."

Jill nodded her head.

"You're right," she agreed. "I only wish I could feel as safe as she is. Some people don't know when they're well off."

The voyage back to Sinister Island was as uneventful as the outward one had been. The girls took it in turn to sleep, for they knew that a great deal lay before them, and just as day was breaking, they entered the well-remembered

cove. A bathe and a swim refreshed them marvellously, and then, seated in the sunshine before their old cave, they discussed their plans.

“What’s the programme?” asked Jill. “Any ideas, Dawn?”

Dawn nodded her head slowly.

“Sort of,” she answered. “You’d better listen to me and tell me what you think of them. We’re agreed, aren’t we, Jill, that there are men on this island? Four times we’ve heard them, but not once have we seen them, unless you count the night of the hunt, so they must have a place somewhere in which they hide. Why they choose to hide, Heaven only knows, and it doesn’t matter particularly. What we want to discover is their hiding-place, and I think it must be a cave in the headland. If I’m right, and it’s used for the purpose we think it is, then it must be a jolly big cave, and I expect the entrance is under that overhang of rock, but we daren’t take the raft round the point to make sure because of the risk of being seen. How’s that?”

“Sounds O.K. so far.”

“Good. Well, I look at it like this, Jill. If your father and Uncle Stan are the prisoners of these men, then they must be in that cave, so it’s there we must go if we wish to rescue them.”

“And we dare not use the front entrance.”

“No, it’s too risky, even at night. But there’s another way in, Jill. You remember those lights we saw on the night we left here. They seemed to come out of the top of the headland, and as the men who carried them couldn’t possibly have climbed the cliff, they must have emerged from some hole, the end of a passage most likely which connects with the cave below.”

“And that’s the hole we’ve got to find,” said Jill.

“Yes, but there’s a snag. We shouldn’t stand a chance of finding the hole after dark, so we’ll have to look for it by daylight, and all the time there’ll be the danger that we may be seen and caught.”

“That’s true,” replied Jill thoughtfully, “but we’ll have to face the risk, Dawn. Somehow I don’t think it’s very great. We were on the headland twice while we were on this island and no one spotted us, so we’ll just have to hope for the best.”

“That’s what I think, Jill, and if you’re ready, I vote we start at once before we get the wind up. We’ll gain nothing by hanging about.”

Jill rose to her feet with a grimace.

“It’s up already so far as I am concerned,” she answered. “But come along. As a kid I always liked to get medicines and punishments over, and as we’ve set ourselves this job I’m all for getting it done at once.”

Five minutes later the girls were on their way. Avoiding the open beach, they approached the headland by means of the high ground in the centre of the island where the trees hid them, and as they walked they kept their eyes and

ears alert for any suspicious sounds. But they neither saw nor heard anything in the least alarming, and coming to the fringe of undergrowth, beyond which the headland stretched bare and desolate, they paused to reconnoitre.

“Looks peaceful enough, doesn’t it?” remarked Jill. “No one would think that there are violent men close at hand ready to pounce on the gallant young heroines should they see them. Gosh! I wonder if anyone ever felt less like a heroine than I do?”

“I think I could name one person,” replied Dawn with a brave attempt at a laugh. “Still it’s got to be done, so forward march.”

Outwardly bravely, but with inward trepidation, the companions left the shelter of the trees, and directed their steps towards the spot where, as far as they could remember, the lights had first appeared. Now that they knew the headland to possess some sinister secret, they expected every moment to hear a harsh challenge and to see fierce-looking men rise out of the ground on either side. But nothing happened. The sea-birds wheeled and screamed entirely unconcerned, and gradually some of the girls’ confidence returned as they realized that, for a time at least, they had the promontory to themselves.

Now began a rigorous search. Somewhere on that bleak headland Dawn and Jill were convinced there was an opening, the finding of which would be the first step towards solving the riddle of the island, but for several hours they hunted hither and thither without success. At last Jill flung herself down on the short turf to rest.

“It’s a blinking mystery,” she announced, leaning back on her hands and staring up at her companion. “We saw those lights appear out of the ground almost, and yet there’s no place from which they could have come. I suppose the bearers couldn’t have climbed the cliff?”

“I don’t think it’s possible,” answered Dawn, sitting down by Jill’s side. “Still we’ll go and have another look presently. There might be a way.”

The girls lay silently resting from their labours, and wondering what to do next. In front of them was a broad depression, the bottom of which was hidden beneath a growth of coarse bushes, and Jill was surveying them idly when suddenly she sat up with a jerk.

“What’s the matter?” asked Dawn, raising herself on one elbow.

“Nothing’s the matter,” answered Jill, “but I’ve just noticed something. See those bushes on the farther side of the hollow, Dawn? Some of the branches are broken and the leaves dead, and it appears to me as though they have been trampled down.”

“Gosh, you’re right!” exclaimed Dawn. “It looks just as though something heavy had pushed it’s way through. Well done, Jill, I believe you’ve found it.”

The girls jumped to their feet, and ran down into the hollow where a brief examination of the bushes proved that they had indeed been broken and

crushed by the passage of some heavy bodies. Dawn raised her head and with her eyes followed the line of devastation towards the centre of the clump of undergrowth.

“It’s in there, Jill,” she breathed. “The opening we’ve been searching for is in the middle of these bushes. It’s queer though that it doesn’t show signs of more use.”

“There are lots of queer things about this island,” grunted Jill, “in fact it’s altogether too queer for my liking.”

Dawn squeezed her companion’s arm.

“I know,” she answered, “it gives one a sort of uncanny feeling. Still it’s lucky for us that this place is used so little. It means that we’re less likely to meet anybody, to start with at any rate.”

She stepped in among the bushes and with Jill close behind, pushed her way towards the centre. The depression was deeper than it appeared from above, and as they progressed the undergrowth grew higher and higher, until suddenly they found themselves confronted by a low scarp of rock in the base of which was an opening some four feet high and three broad.

“We’ve found it,” whispered Dawn.

Jill nodded her head.

“Seems so,” she replied in the same low tones. “Strange how well these bushes conceal everything. Gosh, it’s dark, Dawn! How ever shall we manage without a light?”

The girls knelt down and peered into the opening. There was just sufficient light to show them the beginning of a tunnel some six feet high, the walls of which looked as though they had been blackened by fire.

“Volcanic,” murmured Jill by way of explanation. “Probably that hill behind us was once the crater of a volcano.”

Dawn agreed and lowered herself through the opening on to the hard, gritty floor of the passage.

“We’ll have to trust to our hands, Jill,” she said. “Take hold of the belt of my shorts and keep your right hand upon the wall. After all, in one way we’re safer without lights, for if we had them, we should probably give ourselves away to the people who inhabit this place.”

“You’re fine, Dawn!” whispered Jill admiringly. “You always make the best of things. Right-o, I’m fixed. Off we go.”

The journey along the passage was woefully slow. Dawn soon wished she had thought to bring a stick with which to test the floor beneath her feet, but it was too late to go back, so she advanced step by step, her outstretched hands touching the opposite walls of the passage, and never trusting her weight upon the forward foot until she had proved the ground to be secure. It was terrifying work. The darkness was so absolute that they could not even see a hand held

an inch before their eyes, and every moment Dawn dreaded that she might find her foot hanging over empty space, indeed the only thing about which they were certain was that they were going downhill. So for a long time the slow advance continued; then Dawn uttered a frightened gasp, and came to an abrupt halt.

“What’s wrong?” asked Jill anxiously.

“The left-hand wall has gone,” answered Dawn. “I can’t feel it any more. Don’t move, Jill, there may be a precipice a foot or two away for all we know.”

“Gosh!”

Jill subsided into silence and for some minutes the girls remained without moving, while every moment the darkness and solitude of that underground place pressed on them more heavily and added to the accumulation of their fears; then, with an effort, Dawn pulled herself together.

“This will never do,” she said. “We’re getting panicky, at least I am. If the men we heard that night came up, it is also possible for us to get down, lights or no light. Hang on, Jill. I’m going to keep close to the wall on our right, and _____”

Her voice died away as all at once a sound fell upon the girls’ ears. For several seconds they stood listening and Jill was the first to break the silence.

“It’s like that noise we heard the afternoon we discovered the plantation,” she cried. “Don’t you remember, Dawn? It came out of a crack in the cliff.”

“I remember,” answered Dawn. “Well, it proves we’re on the right track anyway. Forward now, and be careful.”

Again the slow advance began. The girls hugged the right-hand wall, fearful of what dangers the darkness on the left might contain, and gradually, as they moved forward, the volume of sound increased until presently the wall they were following made a sharp turn, and they saw before them a large, semicircular opening a hundred yards away, and through which a faint, grey light filtered, dimly illuminating their surroundings. With cries of surprise the girls halted and stared about them. They were in a cave formed by the widening of the tunnel down which they had first started, but beyond the opening in front there was nothing but greyness, as though the solid rock came to an abrupt end in empty space.

“The sound comes from down there,” whispered Jill.

Dawn nodded agreement, and side by side the girls continued the advance. As they approached the opening other noises became audible, a low, regular humming sound, the voices of men calling to each other, the occasional clang of a hammer, the crash of distant breakers, and the cries of sea-birds, and all appeared to be strangely magnified and reproduced as if they were being continually echoed backwards and forwards between walls of rock. What were

they going to see? Unconsciously the girls hastened their pace, and more than once they opened their mouths to speak but closed them again without saying a word; then they had reached the spot where solid ground ended, and stood gazing in mute amazement at the scene before them.

They were standing on a ledge half-way up the right-hand wall of an immense cave shaped like a huge, inverted bowl. Below them, on their right, was a great, arched opening through which daylight poured and which afforded a glimpse of the lagoon beyond. Sea-birds wheeled to and fro in the entrance to the cave or floated upon the water which covered half the floor of the vast, underground chamber, like a great swimming bath, but what held the eyes of the watchers with a terrible fascination were the sight of a number of men and the grim evidence of the activities which had brought them to that lonely spot. On a flat terrace of rock near the entrance stood several large wooden huts, while moored to a sort of natural stone quay in the centre of the cave was a long, sinister, black shape. It was a submarine, and cold chills of fear crept through the watchers' bodies as they stood gazing at the evil-looking craft which, without doubt, they had last seen from the deck of the *Golden Star*. Some men were visible upon her deck, clustered round open hatches, while others were passing to and fro between the submarine and the largest of the huts. Evidently they were provisioning the vessel for a fresh voyage; then, suddenly aware of the dangers of their position should any of the men look up, the girls stepped hastily back out of sight.

"You were right, Dawn," Jill murmured in a breathless whisper, as though afraid lest her voice should carry to the enemies below.

Dawn nodded. Yes, she was right. They had solved the mystery surrounding Sinister Island. They had found the secret base of the pirate submarine as she had believed they would, and in all probability Uncle Stan and Jill's father were prisoners in the cave beneath, but what good had they done by all their discoveries? They had no one to aid them, they could not fetch help, they were just two girls against a gang of desperate men! What could they do next?

CHAPTER XVII

Alone

“Do you think Dad and Uncle Stan are down there?”

The girls were seated well back from the ledge out of sight of the men below, and Jill had just asked the question uppermost in both their minds.

“I believe so,” answered Dawn. “Did you notice those men who were carrying things between that big hut and the submarine? There were two other men standing a little to one side who never took their eyes off the workers, and I’m sure they were guards.”

“You mean that the men we saw carrying things are prisoners?”

“Just that, Jill. If the pirates needed labourers at their base they would almost certainly take them off the ships they held up, and in that case Uncle Stan and your father are most likely among them. You remember that horrible hunt we saw on the night we escaped to Lion Island. I think one of the prisoners must have tried to get away and the pirates were hunting him.”

“Y-e-s. I expect you’re right, Dawn, but what are we going to do? Do you suggest that we go down there? Seems rather like putting our heads into the lion’s mouth.”

“I know, but if we’re careful I think we shall be all right. That ledge we were standing on just now continues right down the wall of the cave to the floor beneath. It’s a sort of inclined path, and I noticed two other things about it, Jill. It’s in shadow all the way, and it slopes downward towards the cliff so that the outer edge is higher than the inner, and most of the time, I believe we shall be out of sight of anyone below.”

“And what are we going to do when we get down? Wouldn’t it be better to wait till night, Dawn, when we can move about with less chance of being seen?”

“I’ve thought of that, Jill, but it won’t do. What we want to discover is if our men are among the prisoners, and we can only do that by going down while it’s light and seeing them with our own eyes.”

“You’re right, Dawn, I hadn’t thought of it in that way. And there’s another thing. If we can hang about in hiding until we see in which of those huts they spend the night, we may be able to rescue them when everyone else is asleep. I wonder if the pirates set guards.”

“We’ll have to chance that, Jill, but I don’t suppose they’re very strict. Even if a prisoner did escape, where could he go? He couldn’t leave the island without a boat. Personally I think that is why your father and Uncle Stan have

never made an attempt, at least as far as we know. They were afraid of leading the pirates to us.”

“Yes, I expect that’s so. Still I wonder if it would be better to wait a day or so.”

“Wait! Whatever for?”

“Oh, it’s only an idea. I believe that some of the noise we hear is made by the submarine’s diesel engines recharging the batteries for the underwater motors, and it struck me that if we wait till she goes off again there will be less men about.”

“Y-e-s, there’s something in that, Jill. On the other hand the few men that are left will be more on the alert, especially if there have been some attempts to escape lately. No, I vote we go straight ahead. I hate leaving off a job half-way through, and the longer we wait, the worse we’ll get the jitters.”

“Right-o, Dawn, I’m ready. Let’s take another look and see what the men are doing.”

This time the girls crawled forward on hands and knees and, reaching the ledge, they lay flat on their faces so that their heads were the only part of them which could be seen by anyone looking up from the cave below. Nothing seemed to have changed since their last look. Some men were still clustered round the open hatches, and others were moving backwards and forwards between the huts and the vessel, but now that they looked for them, they could distinctly see the rifles slung across the backs of the two men on guard.

“You are right, Dawn,” said Jill presently. “The men carrying things are prisoners.”

“Looks like it. Can you see your father and Uncle Stan among them?”

“No. The light’s so bad that they all look the same from up here.”

“Then let’s start, Jill. I’ve no idea what time it is, but it must be well on in the afternoon, and I don’t suppose the light lasts very long down there.”

Jill nodded, and without another word, the girls began the descent into the cave. They went bravely enough though actually they were both feeling very much afraid, but presently, finding that by hugging the wall of the cave they were hidden from their enemies below, their fears subsided slightly. The ledge was rough and uneven, and more than once they slipped and fell in the semi-darkness. Still, save for some scratches and bruises, they suffered no harm, and as they descended lower and lower, the various sounds of the cave became more distinct and they were able to distinguish individual voices. One speaker appeared to be issuing orders, and dropping flat on the rock, the companions crawled to the edge of the path and peered over. They were about fifty feet above the floor of the cave. A hundred yards away was the nearest hut, and beyond that the black shape of the submarine. Men were still moving to and fro, and someone, hidden by the huts, was shouting out instructions in a harsh

voice. The girls listened, but the man was speaking in some foreign language, and after a few seconds, they turned their attention to nearer things. The ledge they were following reached the ground within thirty yards of the water's edge, among a litter of large boulders which continued right down to the sea, and out through the entrance to the cave until hidden from sight by the jutting bastions of rock. It was an ideal place for concealment, and after a brief survey, Dawn and Jill drew back and continued their descent. Ten minutes later they were lying behind two big lumps of black rock with a convenient space between through which a large portion of the huge cave was visible.

Seen from this position the cave was even more immense than it had appeared from above, and it stretched away into the distance until lost in abysmal darkness. Immediately before the girls were the huts, the fronts of which were now visible. Lamps were burning inside, for despite the wide entrance, the light in the cave was already growing dim, but men were still moving backwards and forwards between the largest hut and the submarine, and suddenly two men appeared in the doorway bearing wooden boxes upon their shoulders. They were tall men and wore stained and ragged ducks, but despite their untrimmed hair and beards, there was no mistaking their identity. For a second they paused to say something to each other, while the light from the lamp over the doorway fell full upon their faces; then there came a sharp command from one of the men on guard, and they moved forward towards the submarine. Dawn and Jill clasped hands.

"Dad! Uncle Stan!" they murmured ecstatically in the same breath.

"Oh, Dawn, isn't it marvellous that they are alive!"

"It seems almost too good to be true, Jill. D'you know, there were times when I felt that they couldn't possibly be alive, but now——"

"Now we know that they are. Oh, Dawn, it's wonderful! I'm so happy."

The girls hugged, and then lay silently watching the scene before them. Twice again they saw the two tall, bearded men among a dozen others who seemed to be in a like state of servitude; then the prisoners entered one of the huts and nothing more was seen of them.

"That must be the hut they sleep in," whispered Jill. "Did you see, Dawn? The second from the end."

"Yes, I saw." Dawn was silent for some seconds before she went on. "I didn't see anything of Hank and his friends, did you, Jill? I wonder what happened to them."

"Killed most likely. I'm afraid I can't feel much sorrow. They were bad through and through."

"Yes, still it's rather awful. Jill, have you noticed that there's no sign of the *Osprey* or the lugger?"

"Yes, I've noticed that. I feel sure they were sunk. The pirates wouldn't

dare leave them afloat in case any of the prisoners got away in them and let the cat out of the bag. Even the report of two uncharted islands might prove fatal to their plans, and I imagine that was why they crossed to Lion Island and scuttled the lugger. And of course the same applies to the *Osprey*. These men don't want anyone fooling round the islands, and they take the most effective way of shutting unwelcome mouths. What puzzles me more is why we saw nothing of the pirates while we were on the island. One would expect them to be all over the place."

Dawn nodded her head.

"I've been wondering about that, too," she went on in the same subdued whisper, "and I think it's all part of what you've just said. These people are scared of being found out, and I believe that stony-faced captain keeps his men off the island simply as a precaution against discovery. Suppose a ship was to pass, and see huts, and smoke, and men moving about the island, the people on board would be sure to report it, and if the news of an unknown island inhabited by white men reached the navy's ears, there'd be a cruiser round here in no time."

"'M, yes, I expect you're right, Dawn."

For some minutes the girls remained silent, each thinking her own thoughts, then suddenly Dawn uttered a low chuckle.

"What price your whale with the luminous back, Jill?" she whispered. "You were so sure you were right, and all the time it must have been the submarine returning home awash, with the light from inside shining up through the open hatch of the conning-tower."

Jill rolled over on one side and faced her companion.

"I remember," she answered, unconsciously raising her voice, "and I thought myself so jolly clever, too, suggesting that it was a whale. That was the night of the storm, wasn't it? I suppose the submarine comes and goes through that gap in the reef opposite the cave, and that night she must have got home just in time. Pity she wasn't an hour later. If she had been we might never have had——"

Jill's words died away in a startled gasp as from somewhere close at hand there came the rattle of a pebble followed by a man's voice.

"Did you hear anything, Sam?" asked the speaker, and this time the words were English. "Someone talkin' over there. Sounded like a girl's voice."

"A girl, you fool!" came the reply. "You're daft. There ain't no girls on this island."

A laugh greeted these remarks.

"'Course there ain't, Bill," joined in a third voice with a marked American twang. "Yu've got a bee in your bonnet, old pal."

"A bee, 'ave I? I can't believe my own ears, can't I? I tell——"

"Aw, shut up!" groaned the third speaker. "Get a move on, pard, or we'll never get these fish we've caught cooked for supper. A girl——"

"Shut up yerself," interrupted the man who had first spoken. "I told you I 'eard a girl speakin' and I knows what I 'ears. Anyway I'm goin' to see. It came from behind them rocks."

During this brief conversation Dawn and Jill had been lying petrified with terror, now as the scrape of feet scrambling over the rocks towards them reached their ears, all the doubts and fears, so bravely held at bay during the past days and hours, suddenly descended upon them in one unreasoning wave of panic. Gone for the moment were the courage with which they had faced Hank and his companions, the cool heads which had brought them safely down the dark passage to the place where they were now lying. In a second they had become two very frightened girls, filled with a terrible dread of the unknown, and springing to their feet, they fled headlong towards the sea, leaping madly from rock to rock in the extremity of their fear.

Their appearance was greeted with a startled shout, followed by a gruff command to halt. But neither girl paid any heed; it is doubtful, indeed, if they even heard. Uppermost in the mind of each was the over-mastering need to escape from the men who served that other man with the eyes like cold, grey ice and the look of cruelty on his face which had frozen itself on to their memories that day on board the *Golden Star*. So they kept on, disregarding a second command to stop, and then, suddenly, there came a sharp report from their rear, and a bullet whined through the air above their heads.

Dawn uttered a startled cry. The men were firing at them, or were they just trying to scare them into surrender? It must be that! She glanced back. Her companion was a couple of feet behind, and twenty yards away the three men were in pursuit, and one was carrying a revolver. Dawn looked ahead. The sea was only a short distance in front, and once in the water they could escape. Jill drew level, and side by side the girls raced forward. Now they had reached the edge of the rocks, and the deep water of the lagoon lay twenty feet below. "We're safe, Jill!" cried Dawn, and shot downwards, but even as the water closed round her head, she heard a faint cry followed by a muffled report, and then she was cleaving her path through the still depths of the lagoon over which the shadows of evening were already falling.

Dawn came to the surface forty yards away and looked round for her friend. The scream she had heard was echoing in her ears and she was filled with a horrible dread, and as she glanced towards the shore, she uttered a cry of despair. Two of the men were at that moment raising Jill to her feet, while the third was looking out across the lagoon, and the next moment he caught sight of her head and shouted to her to return.

"You come back at once, my girl," he yelled, "or we'll come and fetch you,

and the more trouble you give us the less you'll like it afterwards."

Go back! If Jill was wounded then she must—— Automatically Dawn began to swim towards the shore, but at that instant Jill looked up, and seeing what Dawn was doing, made a motion with her hands as though pushing her away.

"Don't come back, Dawn!" she cried. "I've only twisted my ankle. Nothing else I——"

A hand belonging to one of her captors closed over Jill's mouth, stifling further words, but Dawn had heard enough. If Jill had only twisted her ankle then she was more use to her and the others free than a captive. Free she might still— She caught sight of the man with the pistol raising his hand, and dived. In a flash she was gone, and she was three yards away when the bullet struck the water where she had been. From the shore came a furious oath, but Dawn heard it not, and when she came to the surface again, the dark shadow of the headland hid her from her pursuers. The girl trod water while she watched her enemies. For some minutes they remained where they were, searching the lagoon with their eyes for some sign of her presence; then, with much swearing, two of the men lifted Jill, and captors and captive turned towards the cave mouth. Dawn saw them go, and having waited till they had disappeared through the entrance, she began to swim slowly along by the shore, and presently she climbed out of the water and hid herself among a great pile of boulders which at some time had fallen from the cliff above. The swift, unreasoning panic which had swept her and Jill off their feet had gone, and Dawn was once more able to think clearly. Her enemies might return with a boat to look for her, but night was coming, and certainly the last spot in which they would seek her would be outside their own front door. Meanwhile the plan she and Jill had made still held good, only now one person had to rescue three instead of two rescuing two.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Message into Space

No search was made for Dawn. She had not really expected one. Her enemies would reason that she would put as great a distance between herself and the cave as possible, and search, if search there was to be, would be postponed till the next day. Meanwhile the night lay before her, and when the pirates pictured her cowering terror-stricken somewhere among the trees upon the island, she would actually be on their very doorstep preparing for the attempt to rescue her friends.

Dawn made herself comfortable in her hiding-place and waited for night to fall. Her hardy young body, used to the sun and the rain, was not conscious of her wet garments, and she felt no fear. The spasm of panic which had racked her seemed to have swept fear clean out of her mind, leaving in its place a serene calm. She did not even contemplate failure. She had a task to perform, and if all went well, she and Jill, and Uncle Stan and Uncle John would be together again, and by morning they might all be on Lion Island where surely they could hide should their enemies come searching for them.

So passed three hours, and then Dawn slid silently into the lagoon, and struck out towards the cave. By this time it was completely dark except for the pale starshine, and the girl made no sound as she swam towards the black entrance. On the threshold she paused, treading water while she examined her surroundings. In the distance a few dim lights were visible, and the noises of the cave still reached her ears, but close at hand there was nothing but darkness and silence. Dawn swam towards the rocks over which she and Jill had fled such a short time before, and in their shadow she again stopped to listen. For ten minutes she clung to a damp boulder, with only her head protruding above the surface, and all the time her ears were straining to catch the sound of breathing, a restless movement, or any other noise which might betoken the presence of a watcher. But the surrounding stillness remained unbroken, and at last, assured that there was no enemy in her immediate neighbourhood, Dawn climbed out of the water, and began to move cautiously forward into the cave.

Twenty minutes later, unseen and unheard, she had gained the shelter of a litter of boulders at the foot of the inclined ledge down which she and Jill had come that afternoon. From her vantage point she could see the greater part of the pirates' encampment. A few men were still moving about, but judging by the noise and laughter, the majority were inside the huts, the windows of which were all shuttered or curtained so that only chinks of light were visible. Dawn

gazed towards the hut in which her guardian and Jill's father had disappeared. Was Jill there, she wondered. Had Uncle Stan and Uncle John seen her? Jill! Dawn knew how scared she would be in a similar situation and her heart went out to her friend. Jill, plucky Jill, who had forbidden her to give herself up, at all costs she must be rescued! Dawn's firm chin took on a still more determined tilt as she stared at the dimly seen huts. She must be patient though. If she made her attempt too early she might ruin everything. She must wait till all that noise and racket had died down, and the men who were making it were asleep, and then—— The sound of footsteps disturbed the girl's thoughts. Two men were approaching the spot where she lay. One appeared to be issuing instructions to the other, and as the speaker and his companion drew nearer, Dawn cowered down behind the sheltering rocks. Where had she heard those cold, metallic tones before? The next moment her mind's eye conjured up a picture of the deck of the *Golden Star*, and of a man standing by the rail and bidding an ironical farewell, and she knew. The speaker was the captain of the black submarine.

For the second time that day panic threatened Dawn, but on this occasion she met it half-way and drove it back. The men had come to a halt within six feet of her hiding-place, and peering between the boulders, the girl was just able to see two dark, shadowy figures against the pale light emanating from the huts. The second man seemed to be much younger than the pirate captain who was using a tongue Dawn could not understand; but apparently the speaker had come to the end of his instructions, for the next moment the man he had been addressing saluted, and switching on a powerful electric torch, began to climb the path up the side of the cave. For a short time the elder man stood watching him, then he turned and strode back towards the huts, and the girl behind the rocks was once more alone.

Dawn breathed a sigh of relief, and having watched the tall figure of the captain disappear in the gloom, turned her attention to the man who was mounting the path. Where was he going? He couldn't be going to look for her; yet he must have some object in climbing that steep trail. Should she follow? It would probably be hours before she dare set about her work of rescue, and meanwhile, by following the man with the torch, she might discover something important. For a moment Dawn hesitated, the next she was on her feet and was mounting the path in the rear of the man ahead.

The man never once looked back, and the dancing light was easy to follow. The bearer certainly had some definite object in view, for he climbed purposefully upwards, and not until he had almost reached the beginning of the passage did he halt. What was he up to now? Dawn watched him anxiously. He appeared to be doing something to the wall of the cave on the left of the path, and the next moment, to the girl's astonishment, he disappeared from

sight, for all the world as though he had stepped right through the solid rock.

Dawn uttered a gasp of amazement and hurried forward as fast as the darkness would allow, but she had not taken a dozen paces before the light appeared again, coming from the spot where the man had vanished. Dawn halted in sudden fear. Was he returning? If so he could hardly help seeing her. What a fool she had been to risk everything on a sudden resolve! The girl took a step backwards preparatory to headlong flight; then something about the light attracted her attention, and she paused. The light was not moving, and it had more the appearance of a steady glow than the glaring beam of a powerful torch. Dawn stood watching for some seconds but nothing happened, and presently she plucked up courage and continued her advance. This time she did not hesitate, and three minutes later she was standing in the shadows and gazing through a roughly made doorway into a small cave.

Dawn's first thought was to wonder how she and Jill had missed the cave that afternoon; then, as her glance took in the contents of the rock chamber, her eyes opened wide with astonishment. A lamp stood burning on a small table with a box of matches lying by its side, and the light fell upon the gleaming dials and switches of a large wireless receiving and transmitting set attached to the opposite wall of the cave. The man she had been following was sitting before the set with his back towards her, and through the open doorway the girl saw him fit on the head-phones and manipulate some dials and switches. So he was a wireless operator, and this was the pirates' wireless station. They were certainly up to date. What was he listening to, she wondered. News? Hardly. The pirate captain would not have issued all those instructions just for the sake of a news bulletin. No, it was something more important than news. A ship perhaps. Could he be trying to pick up the radio of a certain ship? Evidently something was coming through, for Dawn could see the man jotting down figures on a piece of paper, and in a sudden flash of intuition, she knew that she was right. These men preyed on ships, so what was more probable than that the operator in there should be trying to pick up the wireless messages from the pirates' next intended victim? Much could be learned that way. The ship's last port of call, her course, her position at the moment, knowledge which would be of vital value to anyone engaged upon the wicked trade these men were following.

For several seconds Dawn watched the wireless operator at work before she began to examine the rest of the cave. There was not much to see. A cupboard stood in one corner. On a second chair lay a crumpled newspaper, while opposite the door the wall was partly hidden by a heavy curtain which swung slowly to and fro as though stirred by a draught. Dawn stared at the curtain. What did it hide? A draught meant a current of air, and therefore there must be an opening in the opposite wall, one which went right through the cliff

and overlooked the sea. An opening in the cliff! In a moment Dawn's thoughts went back to a morning when she and Jill had been lying on the grass at the end of the headland. It had been a sunny morning, and Jill had wondered what was hidden by the overhang of rock, and they had arranged to bring the raft round that afternoon and find out, and then, all at once, the peace of their surroundings had been shattered by a harsh, spluttering sound, a crash, and a horrible scream followed by a burst of mocking laughter. How frightened they had been! They had fled panic-stricken from the spot, wondering fearfully what was happening, but now, in the light of her new knowledge, everything was terribly plain. The spluttering sound had come from that very cave. Someone—a prisoner, perhaps, who for the moment had eluded the guards—had reached the cave and had attempted to send out a call for help. But there had been interference or something, and he had only just started when the pirate captain—no one else could laugh so fiendishly—had come upon him and shot him. Dawn covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the sight her thoughts had conjured up, then the scrape of a chair brought her back to her surroundings, and she saw that the operator had finished his task and was preparing to leave the cave.

Had Dawn lingered a moment she must have been discovered, but quick as a bird, she sprang back, and, running noiselessly up the path, crouched down among the sheltering darkness. She saw the lamp extinguished and the torch switched on, after which came the sound of footsteps, and a second later the man appeared, and strode off down the rocky track to the cave below, slamming the door behind him. The girl watched him go, and as she did so there grew upon her a strange feeling of something missing. What could it be? Some action perhaps, something that man should have done, but which he had omitted to do. With her eyes she followed the bobbing light, growing smaller and smaller in the distance, and not until it had disappeared behind one of the huts did she suddenly realize what was worrying her. A key! One of the first things she had noticed on looking into the cave had been a large key in the lock of the door. A key in the door! But on coming out the man had only slammed it, he had not turned the key, he had not taken it out of the door, of that she was certain, therefore the key was still in the lock.

Dawn was inside the wireless cave, and had closed the door, and lighted the lamp almost before she knew what she was doing. For some seconds she stood taking in her surroundings, then she ran to the curtain and, pulling it aside, looked out through a large natural hole in the rock at a sky spangled with glittering stars. The girl uttered a little exclamation of delight, but she only allowed herself a single glance at the jewelled vault above before she turned her eyes towards the sea below. The headland at this point was not sheer, but sloped steeply towards the water, while six feet from where she

stood, a narrow ledge curved along the face of the cliff and disappeared behind a rocky bastion eight yards away. This time the exclamation was one of approval. There was a way of escape if needed, and dropping the curtain, Dawn swung round to face the cave. For a brief instant she wondered where the power came from to work the wireless. They must have a dynamo somewhere, or could they charge batteries off the submarine; then the crumpled paper caught her eyes, and she pounced on it, avid for news of the world without. The next moment a cry of horror burst from her lips as, sprawled in great type across the front page, she read the words:

BLACK PIRATE STRIKES AGAIN
TWENTY LIVES LOST IN OCEAN TRAGEDY

Tragedy! So Jill's prophecy had come true. Swiftly the girl read the account of a ship's crew which had resisted the pirates' demands, and how, as a consequence, twenty of their number had fallen beneath a hail of machine-gun bullets before the survivors had given in. Twenty lives lost! Dawn let the paper drop to the floor, and stood with clenched hands and flaming eyes staring towards the door. Twenty innocent men butchered! The brutes, the cowardly brutes! Oh, if she could only bring them to justice! Here she was at large in their very midst, and yet she could do nothing. Nothing! Dawn's eyes fell upon the gleaming dials and switches of the wireless installation, and in a flash her expression changed. Nothing? Was that right? Was she as helpless as she had imagined herself to be? One man had already tried to broadcast to the world news which would bring about the downfall of the vile men who skulked like beasts of prey in the cave below, why should not she make a similar attempt? The girl approached the wireless apparatus and gazed at it long and thoughtfully. Yes, she could do it. Jill had taught her enough to make the attempt possible. But suppose she failed? Suppose her message was not picked up? Suppose something went wrong, and she was detected? In that case not only would she have jeopardized her own safety, but, what was far more important, she might have thrown away the one chance of freedom left to Jill, and Uncle Stan, and Uncle John. For long seconds Dawn hesitated, then she raised her head proudly. She had made her decision. If need be the few must be sacrificed to the good of the many. The black submarine was already being prepared for another voyage in which more lives might be lost, and could she place her own safety and the safety of the three below before the greater good? No, she could not do it! She was afraid, but there was some power inside her more powerful than fear which spurred her on, and in her heart she knew that neither Jill, nor Uncle Stan, nor Uncle John would have her do otherwise.

Having made her decision Dawn's first action was to put out the lamp and run to the door. It had suddenly occurred to her that the man might return for

his key, but there was no sign of anyone ascending the path, and reassured, the girl closed the door again, this time locking it from the inside as a precaution against surprise. Thoughtfully she relighted the lamp. She must be careful how she worded the message. To give the correct position of the island was vitally important. The longitude she knew. It was $179^{\circ} 9'$ East, but the latitude marked on the map was two hundred miles too far north. That meant that she must give a bearing two hundred miles farther south, and as a degree of latitude measured roughly sixty-nine miles, and sixty-nine went into two hundred approximately three times, the latitude of the island was somewhere about $15^{\circ} 20'$ North instead of the $18^{\circ} 20'$ of the map.

Dawn checked her calculations carefully and found them correct, at least they were as nearly correct as she could hope to get. Now for the message. In a low voice she began to murmur the words to herself. "Come at once." No, that should be at the end. "Speaking from headquarters of black submarine." Dawn nodded her head. That was better. "Speaking from headquarters of black submarine. Southernmost of two uncharted islands longitude $179^{\circ} 9'$ East, latitude approximately $15^{\circ} 20'$ North. Come at once!" Twice the girl repeated the message before she was satisfied. Every sailor must by this time have heard of the black submarine, and anyone picking up the message would understand the desperate urgency of the call. Dawn seated herself before the instrument board, and after a thoughtful pause, altered some dials and switches; then, steadily, as though there were no merciless enemies within reach, she began to tap out her cry for aid.

Dot dot dot, S. Dot dash dash dot, P. One dot, E. Dot dash, A. Dash dot dash, K. Speak. Right through the message she laboriously tapped her way, and having reached the end of her signal, she put on the head-phones and, switching over, listened for a reply. But no reply came. To the desperately lonely girl the silence seemed a wall, shutting her off from the rest of her kind, and after a brief pause, she started to send forth her cry for help again. Thrice she despatched it across the empty miles of sea, and she was anxiously listening for a sign that her message had been picked up when a step sounded outside the cave, and the handle of the door was turned. The next moment a gruff voice demanded to know who was within; then, as Dawn made no answer, the speaker rapped out a savage oath, followed by a crash as the man flung himself bodily against the door.

Dawn sprang to her feet with a cry of fear, and as she did so, for the first time that night, a sound reached her across the ether. Breathlessly she paused to listen. Had her message been picked up at last? Was—— A loud report echoed through the cave, and a bullet buried itself in the lock of the door. The girl looked round with terrified eyes, and when a second shot rang out, she tore off the head-phones and ran towards the hole in the cliff. Half a minute later

she was lowering herself on to the ledge without, and just as a third bullet shattered the lock, and the heavy door burst open with a crash, Dawn crept out of sight round the jutting bastion of rock.

CHAPTER XIX

The Thousandth Chance

Dawn did not remain on the ledge. Her enemy would guess she had escaped that way and might follow, and as soon as she was out of sight of the cave, she left the shelf of rock and began to clamber down the face of the cliff. Fortunately it was not precipitous, while the starshine enabled her to see her way, and a dozen feet down she discovered a shallow hole into which she crawled. It was well she did so, for she had barely taken cover when cautious footsteps sounded on the ledge overhead and came to a halt just above the spot where she was hiding.

The man was clearly in a furious rage, for he was muttering to himself and cursing savagely, and Dawn wondered fearfully if he would carry his search farther down the cliff. If he did he could hardly help finding her, but apparently the man had no stomach for the descent, and presently the girl heard his footsteps retreating along the ledge, followed by silence.

With a sigh of relief Dawn relaxed and began to consider the new position. She had not been seen, so the pirates could not be sure that it was she who had been in the wireless cave. All they could know for certain was that some unauthorized person had been there, and what would the pirate captain do under such circumstances? Would he take alarm and escape at once in the submarine? He had not looked a man who was easily alarmed, and yet—Dawn decided that it all depended on how much he was told by the man who had disturbed her. If that man was the wireless operator, he might be afraid to admit having left the key in the lock, and say nothing about it. On the other hand, if the shots had been heard, he would have to own up, and then the pirate captain might conclude that someone had sent out an appeal for help and decide to quit. The girl shrugged her shoulders. It was no good worrying over what the pirates might do. Of much greater consequence was it to decide on her own plans. Had her message been picked up? Was that the beginning of a reply she had heard? Even if it were, there was only one chance in a thousand that a ship capable of dealing with the submarine was near enough to reach the island before the pirates got away if they had decided to leave. Still there was that thousandth chance, and while it remained, she must be ready. Dawn left her hiding-place and, after a careful survey of her surroundings, continued the descent of the cliff. She had made up her mind what she would do. She would hide somewhere within sight of the cave, so as to be on hand should a ship arrive, and if no alarm had been raised and the chance came to rescue her

friends she would make the attempt. If that was impossible, and no help came from outside, then she would go off before daybreak and conceal herself on the island, and the next evening she would repeat the programme. She might, if fortune favoured her, even revisit the wireless cave and send out another call for help.

The descent of the cliff was accomplished in safety, and within an hour Dawn had reached a point among the rocks from which she could see right into the cave. One glance assured her that to attempt a rescue that night was hopeless. The camp was wide awake, men were hurrying hither and thither, and where she lay, she could hear them calling to each other. So that was that. Dawn glanced at the submarine, and instantly something strange about her appearance attracted the girl's attention. Surely she was higher out of the water than she had been, and the next moment the watcher guessed the reason. The submarine was aground. The tide was falling, and the pirate vessel was resting on the floor of the cave, and however much the captain desired to flee, he must remain a prisoner until the water rose again.

Dawn was conscious of a fierce elation as she realized the predicament in which the pirates were placed. At least there was a chance of success if, by some miracle, the thousandth chance came off. The lights in the camp had increased, and the girl saw that the work of carrying to and fro between the huts and the submarine had begun again. What were they putting on board now? Were they loading her with the treasure they had stolen preparatory to a final departure from the island? If so then the enemy had indeed taken alarm. Dawn glanced towards the sea. If only a ship would come, a ship which could deal with the pirates as they deserved, and presently, tired of her vigil at the mouth of the cave, the girl slipped into the water and swam out to the reef where, perched on a pinnacle of coral, she could watch the starlit sea around.

How still everything was. Even the boom of the surf sounded subdued, and seated there under the great vault of purple sky, in which the stars gleamed like distant lamps, it seemed impossible to Dawn that there could be men near at hand who would kill her, and Jill, and Uncle Stan, and Uncle John with as little compunction as they would kill a fly should it suit their purpose. The girl shivered. What would be the end of it all? What strange things had happened to her, and all because she had picked up an old man from a fenland road. She had come half round the world. She had been kidnapped, she had been threatened with torture, she had been stranded on an unknown island and had found a great treasure, and now, when the end of the adventure appeared to be in sight, she had in her possession the answer to a mystery which had been troubling the world for months.

Dawn glanced back towards the cave. Signs of activity were still visible, and as she watched, a new thought came to her. Perhaps it wasn't the end of

the adventure after all. Suppose no ship had picked up her message? Suppose the pirates, fearful that their secret had been revealed, should forsake the island for good, smashing the wireless installation before they left, then the adventure might be only just beginning. They could not take the prisoners with them, so they would have to leave them behind, and there on that uncharted spot of land they might live on for years and years and years, a little island community lost and unknown to the world. The girl cupped her face in her hands. What would such a life be like? Would she be sorry never to see civilization again, or at least, not till she was middle-aged or perhaps quite old? She and Jill had had a wonderful time together, but—— Dawn's thoughts wandered on and on, picturing life as it might be on that island if the pirates fled and left them, and no ship came to take them off. Hour after hour she kept her vigil, a dark, slim figure, almost as motionless as the coral on which she sat. Now and then she looked towards the cave, at others her eyes swept the dark sea around, searching for a light which might denote the coming of help. She felt no fatigue, no fear; she had done her best, and now it was in the hands of Fate. Stealthily, like unseen women on silent feet, the minutes slipped by until at last, after a long period during which she had barely moved, Dawn suddenly stood up. What was the time? It could not be far off daybreak. Again her eyes searched the surrounding darkness, and all at once her body tensed, and she stood like a statue staring out to sea. Was it imagination or had a star on the horizon disappeared from sight? Yes, there it was again. So it actually had happened. Something had passed between her and the star. Of course it might have been a cloud, but—— Dawn began to tremble. Another star had been eclipsed and another, and a second later a fourth, higher in the sky than the previous ones, winked sharply as though, for one brief instant, the upperworks of a ship had passed between it and her vision. A ship! Dawn stood with straining eyes and ears, but the boom of the surf drowned all other sounds, and then, in a moment, a fifth star blinked, and suddenly, against the background of pale radiance, a shadowy bulk became visible. It was a ship, a ship steaming without lights! So her message had been heard, the thousandth chance had come off! Dawn watched spellbound for some seconds, then she began to clamber with desperate haste over the coral towards the gap in the reef, and three minutes later she had plunged into the sea, and was swimming, as she had never swum before, towards the now swiftly approaching vessel.

“Ship ahoy!”

Dawn's voice rang out clearly across the sea. The vessel was less than a hundred yards away, and the next moment there came an answering hail.

“I'm swimming out to you,” replied Dawn. “Slow down, but for Heaven's sake don't show a light! Understand?”

“I've got you,” replied the same voice.

It was followed by the tinkling of distant bells and the shadowy bulk began to move more slowly. Dawn prepared to swim alongside.

“Where are you?” hailed the voice from above. “Shall we lower a boat?”

“No, waste too much time,” replied Dawn. “Throw me a rope and I’ll climb on board. Here I am. Can you see me?”

She splashed in the water, tossing up a fountain of spray, and the answer came at once.

“Yes, I see you. Get ready.”

A rope fell into the sea a yard from where the girl was swimming, and she caught hold of it with both hands.

“Right-o,” she cried, “I have it.”

Immediately the rope tautened, and Dawn felt herself being drawn through the water, and almost before she realized what was happening, she had been hauled on deck and was being led down a companion-way to a lighted cabin.

Dawn blinked in the light as a man in the uniform of a British naval captain stepped to meet her; then looked down at her clinging, dripping garments and the pool of water already forming on the carpet at her feet.

“Sorry to bring such a mess on board,” she said with a smile.

The captain, he looked rather nice Dawn decided, returned the smile.

“Some dry clothes, perhaps, before——” he began, but Dawn interrupted him with a shake of her head.

“No time,” she answered. “Listen. By the way, I am Dawn Cheverill.”

“Captain Lawrence Maitland of His Majesty’s cruiser *Xeno*,” bowed the captain.

Dawn nodded.

“You received my message?” she asked.

“A wireless message about the black submarine. Did you send that?”

“Yes, I sent it. Listen now, please, for every moment is precious. There’s a headland about a mile away on your larboard beam, and in that headland is a large cave. The sea covers part of the floor, and the black submarine is in there being prepared for another voyage. I think the pirates are meaning to escape.”

“Escape!”

“Yes. I was discovered in their wireless room and that must have scared them.”

“I see.”

The captain reached for a telephone, but Dawn checked him.

“Wait one minute, please,” she begged. “The submarine’s aground at the moment owing to the low tide, and I don’t think she’ll be afloat for another hour. So she’s safe enough for the time being, and there are some other things you must know.”

The captain nodded.

“All right, Miss Cheverill, go ahead. But are you sure you’re not cold?”

“Quite, thank you. Where was I! Oh, I remember. Captain Maitland, the pirates have some prisoners in their camp, people whom they have captured at one time or another, and among them are a girl friend of mine, her father, and my guardian, Mr. Stanford Wright, so please tell your men to be careful if there’s any shooting. Then there is a second exit from the cave on the top of the headland, and if you wish to trap the whole gang, you should send some men to close it. If you like I will lead that party, while the other goes in by the main entrance. That’s all except that the men who come with me will need torches.”

Again the captain nodded.

“You certainly have everything planned, Miss Cheverill,” he said, “and presently I hope you will tell me the story which must lie behind all this. At the moment the important thing is to get the men away, and capture the gang before they can escape. I gather you have been rather out of touch with the world lately, so you will not have heard that the pirates have held up three more liners and sunk two smaller ships from which they had taken supplies, with considerable loss of life.” He picked up the telephone, and issued a number of orders before he replaced the instrument. “The men are turning out now, Miss Cheverill,” he went on. “Bit of luck the *Xeno* was in this neighbourhood, you know. When Sparks brought me your message I nearly had a fit, and within the last few hours the ship’s travelled faster than she’s done since her trials. What about times now? Your party had better get away first I imagine.”

“Yes, give us half an hour’s start if you can, please, captain,” replied Dawn. “There’s a gap in the reef directly opposite the cave mouth. The boats will have to go in through that gap, and if the party detailed for the cave see signs of the submarine preparing to leave then, of course, they must go straight in and not wait for us.” Suddenly the girl smiled. “It sounds as though I’m issuing orders, doesn’t it?” she went on. “I’m sorry, but I’ve been sitting out there on the reef watching and planning for hours, so I hope you won’t think me too bumptious.”

The captain laughed and shook his head.

“As a matter of fact, Miss Cheverill,” he answered, “I was thinking that you were a rather wonderful young lady.”

Forty-five minutes later Dawn was treading the tunnel in the headland for the second time within twenty-four hours. Now, however, it was no longer dark. In front went a young officer of marines who had introduced himself as Lieutenant Johns; then, in spite of his protests, came Dawn, and after them followed a dozen stalwart marines, armed to the teeth. Swiftly they traversed the underground way, the powerful torches lighting up the walls of blackened

rock, and coming to the place where the passage widened into a tunnel, the marines spread out and advanced in line over the uneven floor.

Dawn stared anxiously into the darkness ahead. What was happening in the cave? By this time the other party should have arrived. A series of sharp thuds suddenly fell upon their ears, and Lieutenant Johns glanced at the girl. "They're at it!" he exclaimed. He issued a sharp order and the party broke into a run, and as they advanced the sounds grew rapidly louder until the crack of individual rifles could be heard. Now the bend in the tunnel appeared in front, and Dawn burst into speech.

"The path down the side of the cave begins soon after we get round that bend," she explained.

Lieutenant Johns nodded, then turned determinedly towards the girl.

"Look here, Miss Cheverill," he began, "you must keep out of this."

"Don't be silly!" interrupted Dawn impatiently. "After all I've done, d'you think I'm going to be kept out of the finish? Go on, you're wasting time. They may be needing you down there."

Lieutenant Johns shrugged his shoulders. He could manage men, but this extraordinarily pretty girl with her stained clothes, her tanned face and limbs, and aureole of golden hair, was beyond his control, and after a brief hesitation, he ordered the advance to continue. Now they had rounded the bend, and the sound of firing grew louder, and suddenly, as they doubled forward, they realized that they were not alone. Three men had just reached the top of the path. They carried sacks over their shoulders and were gazing apprehensively back the way they had come; then, all at once, they became aware of lights and approaching footsteps, and swinging round, stood staring into the gleaming eyes of the marines' torches. Dawn gasped. Standing slightly in front of his companions, and glaring at the newcomers like a trapped beast of prey, was the captain of the black submarine.

"Put up your hands!"

Lieutenant Johns rapped out the command, and under the threatening muzzles of the marines' rifles, the three men dropped their burdens and grudgingly raised their hands above their heads.

"Good." The lieutenant advanced towards the pirates, his revolver held ready in case of treachery, and Dawn kept pace beside him. "Do you recognize any of these men, Miss Cheverill?" he asked.

"The man in the centre is the captain," answered Dawn. "I was on board the *Golden Star* when she was held up."

"So, and he and his friends are escaping with some of the loot, I suppose, leaving their comrades to face the music. What beauties!"

"Keep your gibes to yourself, English swine!" spat the pirate captain furiously. His gaze shifted to Dawn's face, and his eyes seemed to scorch the

girl so filled were they with mad rage. "So you saw me on board the *Golden Star* did you, Miss Cheverill," he said in harsh, rasping tones. "You then are the one to whom I owe all this. Speak, girl! Did you bring this cursed cruiser to the island?"

Dawn nodded. The man's pent-up fury robbed her of speech, and then, as in a bad dream, she saw his right arm flash downward and a pistol appear in his hand. In the same instant there came a sharp report from close beside her, and with a snarl of rage, the ruffian clasped his shattered arm, while the pistol he had drawn dropped harmlessly to the ground. Dawn stared at the fallen weapon, and her face went white beneath her tan.

"I think that must have been meant for me," she said presently in a small voice, turning to her companion. "Thank you so much."

Lieutenant Johns shook his head.

"Not it," he lied brazenly. "I bet he wanted to spoil my beauty. Corporal, disarm these rascals, and place three men on guard over them, and if they attempt to escape they are to be shot. Got that clear? Good. Now, Miss Cheverill, let's see what's in these bags. Jewels! Stacks of them! Well, I'm — I mean I am surprised. Hullo, the firing's ceased, so I suppose our fellows have cleared up down there. All fixed, Corporal? Very well, let three men carry these sacks, and as the fighting's over, bring the prisoners along, too, and the whole bag can go on board the cruiser together. Ready to move, Miss Cheverill?"

Dawn nodded her head.

"Right, off we go then. Gosh, what a place!" as the huge cave, now filled with darkness except for a blaze of lights below, came into view. "D'you mean to tell me, Miss Cheverill, that you and your friend came along that passage behind us and down into this cave without a light and without knowing what you were going to find?"

"More or less," answered Dawn with a faint smile.

"Then you deserve medals!" exclaimed Lieutenant Johns. "I'd have hated it like poison."

"I can't say we enjoyed it," replied Dawn. "Hullo! Someone's hailing you from below."

"That's our Number 1. Bet he's wondering what's happened to the pirate king, and won't he be bucked to see us, with pirate chief, jewels and all." He raised his voice. "All O.K., sir," he shouted. "Coming down."

It was just ten minutes later that Dawn found herself in Jill's arms, and after a rapturous embrace, turned from her to greet the two men she had been the means of saving from a horrible captivity.

"Uncle Stan, Uncle John, isn't it wonderful?" she cried, hugging and kissing them both in turn. "Are you sure you're all right?"

“Absolutely right, now that we know you and Jill are safe, my dear,” replied her guardian gravely.

Dawn gave him another hug.

“You poor dears, it must have been beastly. But it’s all over now. The pirates are all prisoners, and did Jill tell you that we’ve found the treasure? It’s simply marvellous. Pearls! you’ve never seen such pearls. Oh, I’m so happy! It’s just like a nice play, isn’t it? Everything’s ending just as it ought to end.”

It was not quite the end, however. The following day the *Xeno* visited Lion Island, and Belle was taken off and the box of pearls recovered, and then, in the evening, Dawn and Jill were the guests of honour at a dinner held in the ward-room. Captain Maitland sat at the head of the table with Dawn on his right and Jill on his left, and after he had made a speech, in which he paid tribute to their courage, and the great service they had rendered to the world in securing the capture of the black submarine, the girls’ health was drunk with enthusiasm, and then loud demands were made for a reply. Jill laughed across at Dawn.

“It’s up to you, darling,” she said.

So Dawn rose shyly to her feet.

“Thank you all very much,” she began, “and thank you, Captain Maitland, for all the kind things you have said about Jill and me. I’m afraid they’re not all deserved, but it’s nice to know that you have such thoughts about us, and—well, Jill and I are very grateful.” She paused a moment, then went on more certainly. “There’s one other matter I wish to speak about. You have all heard of our treasure, the pearls I mean. Now Captain Maitland tells us that besides the pearls we shall be entitled to rewards, amounting to over a hundred thousand pounds, which have been offered for the return of the gold and other treasure stolen by the black submarine, and which you rescued last night from the pirates’ cave. It’s all very staggering you know, at least Jill and I find it so, and—and——” She smiled round at the assembled company. “I’m afraid I’m getting rather mixed up, but what I want to say is that Jill and I have all the riches we need, and it is our wish that the rewards we receive shall be divided among the members of this ship’s crew, the prisoners who were rescued from the cave, and the dependents of those men who lost their lives resisting the pirates. Captain Maitland, Captain Howard and my guardian, Mr. Stanford Wright, have promised to see that everything is divided fairly, and—well Jill and I don’t want any thanks, because this is our thankoffering to you kind people who rescued us.”

Dawn sat down very red in the face despite her tan, and the tumultuous applause which greeted her speech only added to her confusion. The next moment Lieutenant Johns was on his feet.

“For they are jolly good fellows,” he began, and the chorus which resulted

echoed right through the ship and out across the starlit sea.

That night in their cabin Dawn and Jill looked at each other.

“Sorry it’s over, Dawn?” asked Jill, hugging her knees.

“It isn’t over,” replied Dawn. “Jill, we must get a new *Osprey*, and return to those islands one day.”

“To Sinister Island?”

Dawn shook her head.

“It won’t be Sinister Island then.”

Jill smiled at her friend.

“No, that’s true. I hadn’t thought of it in that way, darling, but of course you’re right, and the credit is all due to a girl named Dawn.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Due to copyright considerations, the illustrations by D. L. Mays (1900-1991) could not be used in this eBook.

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Sinister Island* by Cecil Bernard Rutley]