FAR GOLD

ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

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Author of "The Mutiny of the Flying Spray"

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Part One

ARICHAT

CHAPTER I

A Spanish Coin

SPROTT GABEREAU was rich because he was contented, contented because he was rich. But, as you shall see, his contentment, priceless beyond rubies, was evanescent as morning mist.

With the sealing fleets of the Southern Ocean he had amassed a tidy fortune, tidy as fortunes go in Nova Scotia, and was able to say, “Thank God, I can afford to pay for my desires.”

His home, situated at the end of a long street of silver poplars, was built in the style of Normandy, with high gables, whitewashed walls, massive shutters, and little dormer windows peeking out amid the apple blossoms in the springtime. The venerable house had belonged to sire and grandsire from those brave days when Louisburg was the Dunkirk of America.

There was a mile-long street athwart the town, grass-grown and shaded, a street of sylvan solitude, listening to the muffled note of breakers. Though out of sight of the blue vista, this mile-long street was ever sighing back to its

crooning mother. A place of stirring past, of sleeping present, of quaint beauty, of quiet charm—Arichat with its song of the sea.

Captain Gabereau referred to this haven in his native tongue as "un refuge sûr." Here, behind protecting heads, Acadian folk had found indeed a sure refuge, from storms of persecution, from storms of the outer ocean.

To step ashore in Arichat was to step back a century in time. A few miles of sea channel had been a wall against the changing years. Nova Scotia, on the mainland, belonged to the modern world. Isle Madame, with its little town, set there like some pearl of price, belonged to the old world and to the long ago.

Coming in from sea, one saw first Jerseyman's Island with its fish stations bearing the names of the Huguenots. High and lifted up above the port the twin spires of the cathedral were set to watch departing mariners like Notre Dame de la Guarde. Along the wharves one heard strange speech reminiscent of the voyagers of Saint Malo. In the evenings, when the pretty girls came out, one caught a glimpse of Norman caps and kirtles.

Here, the old spiritual kingdom had not yet departed. Fishermen bound to seaward in the mornings were haunted by the call for matins. Those that stood in for the foreland in evening fog tuned their ear not merely for the bell buoy, but for the Angelus coming faintly from Our Lady on the hill.

Sprott Gabereau was born at Arichat fifty years before. The town had always seemed to him like a little bit of heaven—his life had known much of the other extreme. He sprang from a race of Acadian peasants for nigh two centuries racy of the same soil, the kind that put down their roots like the

mighty oak. Change was utterly foreign to their nature. At least, this was true until the generation to which the ubiquitous Sprott belonged. His was a sort of vagabondism in the blood.

Speaking of master mariners, we encounter something truly epic when we behold Captain Gabereau fitting out his little schooner at Arichat for sealing expeditions that were to take him to the farthest seas. The Falklands, South Georgia, the Crozets, Vancouver Island, the Behring Sea, the Japan Grounds, all were alike to him.

Neither law of God nor man could hold him back when there was prospect of large gain. For poaching on the Russian sealing preserve he had done time in the salt mines of Siberia. But his indomitable spirit, which could bluff the Horn in a tiny schooner, was not the kind to quail before the Russian guard. After eleven months in the mines, his chain mate died. Tearing off the bonds binding him to the dead man, he began a terrific journey which old sealers still point to as a supreme example of endurance.

Back in ’Frisco, he rejoined his vessel. Dreading a repetition of their Skipper’s awful experiences, all hands were for putting back. But Sprott was not the kind to traverse two oceans for nothing. Straightway, he set out for the forbidden ground, and after chucking the devil under the chin, came back with a priceless cargo of skins, preaching as always from his favorite text, “The bold man seldom gets hurt.”

It was all in the day’s work for Sprott to watch the Nova Scotian shore go down astern, and sight nothing again until he picked up the high coast of Staten Land in the boisterous regions of the Horn.

Hunting for South Sea seals, he would circumnavigate the globe, in high south latitudes, spending months on end in lonely desolate seas, frequently Antarctic coasts, uncharted, unexplored.

Whether lost in wintry blizzards of the roaring forties, or in the sure refuge of his native isle, always and everywhere, he was self-contained, and self-sustained; a calm, steadfast, and enduring man, gracing with Drake and Cook the name of Navigator.

The *South China Herald* of Hongkong once referred to Sprott Gabereau as "the most outstanding figure in the seal fisheries of four oceans." With day's work done, with rovings ended, little did he think that all this was mere training, as it were, for quest of the treasure at the end of the world.

Gabereau sighed with satisfaction as he listened to the evening benediction sounding from the twin spires on the hill. There was something heartsome in the sight of his high chimney sending up its smoke like incense in the gloaming.

The garden where he sat was full of pleasant odor, of honeysuckle, of thyme, of lilac, blending with the farther aroma of sweet clover.

For a passer-by, the swinging gate opened welcomingly. The stranger who had landed that afternoon in the mail boat stood for a moment irresolute, gazing through the mass of bloom at the house beyond. He who was to be the destroyer of the peace of this quiet home did not enter, but stood for a moment to spy out the land, and then, having satisfied a momentary interest, passed on toward the village.

Captain Gabereau heard him pause, and though he could not see, bent to listen as those footsteps rang out with something of strange challenge, conveying a quick,

aggressive movement that sounded alien to the leisurely genius of this place.

Night came down quietly over the port. Breezes from the outer harbor whispered in the tree tops, lights began to twinkle up and down the mile-long street. The note of wheeling sea birds answered to the curlew's call. Whatever of strife or turmoil there might be upon this earth seemed far away, remote and distant, as though Isle Madame itself were some serene untroubled star. Even the passage of time was unnoticed by Gabereau as he sat in that fathomless tranquillity.

Almost before he knew it, closing hour had come, and Yvonne, tripping blithely along with Paul, her sweetheart. There was the accustomed parting at the gate: whispers, caresses, and fond sighs, indicative alike of mating birds and mating lovers. Then, after many murmurs at last the fond good-by, and with a rush, Yvonne came toward the Captain's chair, flinging her arms around him from behind.

"Hey, there, blinding me, so's I can't see your sweetheart, eh?"

The girl danced away tingling with suppressed excitement. A dark-eyed blonde. Who could mistake that blending? Eyes of night, contrasted by hair of golden flax.

Beside the rough uncouthness of the Skipper, she appeared delectable and dainty as some bandbox beauty. There was about her a strange blending of weakness and of strength, a blending as of the clinging vine and the mountain ash, suggestive of a girl that could lean upon a man abjectly helpless, and who, upon occasion, could stand entirely on her own.

She came to Gabereau, as to her father, and yet, there was a reticence about her, a sort of highborn reserve that made the rough old sea dog instinctively aware of something better.

"And what's the news to-night, my pretty?"

Yvonne drew back, aglow with imminent expectancy.

Holding her hands behind her, she exclaimed:

"Guess what I've got here, Old Snookums?"

"Laces."

"No."

"Ribbons."

"No."

"You'd never, never guess."

"All right, I'll give it up, then. Let's see?"

The girl disclosed her hand, and there, in the open palm, lay a Spanish gold coin.

The eyes of Sprott Gabereau narrowed sharply. There was a quick intake of the breath.

"Where did you get that, girlie?"

"From a dark looking man with a pointed beard who came into the store to-night to buy supplies."

The calm and steadfast mariner who could gaze imperturbably at the eye of a hurricane was visibly moved. Taking the coin from the girl's outstretched palm, he gazed rapturously upon its gleam of gold, whilst from within he felt the surging of long dormant passion.

In that moment, Sprott Gabereau was suddenly poor, because he was discontented, he was discontented because he was poor.

CHAPTER II

The Black Case

GABEREAU did not sleep soundly. After he had kissed Yvonne good night there were strange presentiments that came to ward off slumber.

Yvonne, his adopted daughter, knew nothing of her kith or kin. As a baby girl she had been rescued from an abandoned lifeboat in those lonely and desolate seas somewhere below the Fifties south. Captain Gabereau in his sealing schooner, rounding the Horn from the Behring Sea, had overhauled a bobbing craft in which he found a dead mother, and child still living.

Along with the rescued babe, he had taken from the lifeboat a black chart case, of japanned metal, which bore a crown stamped upon its upper face. This crown was instantaneously recognized as the mark that Andrea Ferrara, a Spanish swordsmith, had once graven upon Scottish broadswords of peculiar excellence.

The meaning of that embossed Ferrara crown put Gabereau into a fever of excitement. Here was a clew from him who had raped the richest cathedral treasures of the south. The Skipper and Dirk Dugas, his mate, sworn to secrecy, opened the case together. The cover had rusted on with sea water, and required prodigious tussling back and forth before the top finally loosened and came away. At the sudden opening, there tumbled out a lone Spanish gold coin, and another chart case hermetically sealed together with a parchment communication. Skipper and mate bent over and examined the coin; as they gazed upon its yellow gleam, an answering

light came into their own hard faces. This doubloon was a rare appetizer.

The parchment had been rolled like a chart, and tied with a silk string. At first touch, the rotted string burst open. Both were greatly surprised as they unrolled the parchment. The sheet was so large that one naturally inferred a long communication, giving all instructions, with perhaps some personal expressions of the pirate.

Instead of drawn-out detail, the whole message was written in india ink with a quill pen, in pithy conciseness. It read:

> *This inner chart case, bearing with it a curse, was sealed with the sign of the cross by a dead hand. If any but the rightful one shall break this seal, ruin and misery shall be his portion.*
>
> (signed) *Andrea Ferrara.*

Under the name, was the famous seal of the Spanish crown.

Gabereau was a stolid, unimaginative person, but holding that inner chart case, in that moment, a cold clammy fear took hold of him, as though a dead hand of the long ago was raised in warning against him.

Greatly to the disgust of mate Dugas, the Skipper, in respect for this presentiment, refused for the time being to break the seal.

Thus had begun that chapter of calamities which from the coming of the black case dogged the sealing schooner like fell death. Driving before the Westerlies, they had crashed in fog upon a hidden berg, and found themselves embayed completely in the ice. Limping out of that death trap, *in*

extremis, they were finally towed into Punta Arenas by a Chilean cruiser.

In that town at the end of the world, where it never does to inquire into one's past, Gabereau entered upon a chapter of murder and intrigue, all centering around his unopened clew to the Ferrara treasure.

Bold as a lion, he held his own against the worst, and finally, in spite of assassins and cutthroats, effected his repairs, and got away again to sea. But, before he was out of the Straits of Magellan, Dugas had inflamed the crew to mutiny, so reluctant were all hands to turn their back upon the hoped-for treasure.

Hitting fast and hard, the masterful Skipper had stifled the first flames of revolt, then, and as an awful warning, he had placed the recalcitrant mate in an open boat and left him bobbing about helplessly without oars on trackless ocean.

"That'll teach ye to start yer shines aboard my vessel," was the Captain's parting shot.

To which the raging mate replied:

"I'll get you, Sprott Gabereau! I'll get you, yet, even if I have to come up from the cellar o' Hell."

Gabereau's answer was a taunting laugh, while his vessel held to her homing course.

Many times, on that northward passage, he had fondly fingered the mysterious chart case, promising himself that once ashore he would brave the curse, and break the seal. Then, with a new vessel and a trusty crew, he would sail away again and claim that vast pirate hoard, greater even than that of Captain Kidd, for was not Ferrara in his day reputed the richest man in the Americas?

Gabereau remembered having heard his grandsire tell across the fire: “Why, the jewels alone, packed in nineteen boxes, were worth £517,000. But that isn’t half of it. There are precious stones, and specie, and silver bullion, and gold, and ivory, the finest possessions of some of the grandest cathedrals of South America.”

But always, after these glowing pictures would come that cold and clammy dread, so that the rest of the voyage for Gabereau was an amazing mixture of exaltation and depression.

There was nothing psychical or metaphysical in the make of this sealing skipper. The appeal to reason with him had always taken the form of “a kick in the slats” or a “sock in the jaw.” Fists and feet were the only persuaders with which he was acquainted. Argument was something which his forthright, downright nature could not abide. But in spite of a breastplate of triple armor, from the moment that he came by this grim possession, he found himself continually the prey of fear and dread.

“This thing will do ye no good, throw it overboard,” one voice would adjure.

Then, another voice would caution: “Hold fast! Hold fast! Do not let this secret go.”

So he, who was bold as a lion and utterly fearless, began to find in the unseen a dread that he had never known in the fury of the Horn. But in spite of doubts and fears, the avarice of the man, deepest instinct of his nature, saw to it that he kept this mysterious case.

On Christmas Eve, in sight of the lights of home, while her skipper was filled with dreams of far treasure, his sealing schooner, the *Santa Anna*, driving before it with everything

lugged on, crashed into a sunken derelict, and foundered by the head, before a single boat could be manned.

Over the reefs of Petit de Grat, where the North Atlantic retched and thundered, on a piece of broken wreckage Sprott Gabereau had been swept into a sandy cove, as into a cradle of sheltering love. With him out of the angry sea he had brought the babe Yvonne, and the chart case, the clew to the forbidden treasure.

CHAPTER III

Disturbing Memories

BACK in Arichat, when Gabereau confessed his perplexity to Monsieur le Curé, there had been nothing equivocal in that good man's advice.

"Throw it away; nothing good will ever come of it."

Conscience told Gabereau that he should heed this word, but still he hesitated, for conscience was never strong in his matter-of-fact make-up.

"Nay, I care not what Monsieur le Curé says; that black case belongs to Yvonne. I will keep it for her."

With this, he had hidden the source of perplexity out of sight, and out of remembrance in a secret drawer at the bottom of an old camphorwood sea chest. Perhaps it would not have come to mind to-night but for the sight of that gold coin which Yvonne had thrust under his eyes. This glimpse has awakened a past, not dead, merely slumbering.

To think of Yvonne was to think of gold. She carried with her the lure of fortune. He had but to glimpse the doubloon held out in her pretty hand, and the call of treasure was

sounding in his veins. He told himself that he could be content with what he had, but he could not be content when he thought of her, a daughter of Old France ordained for purple and fine linen. The simple folk of Arichat could do quite well with the product of their carding and their spinning, but Yvonne was made for something better.

At the pretext of thinking only of the girl, Gabereau got out of bed, and taking up the golden coin, from the mantel, he stood in the moonlight gazing upon its yellow sheen.

Visions of wealth began to crowd upon him; as he stood there in the mystic shadows, that room became for him indeed a place for enkindling visions.

He looked out of the window at plowed fields, at snake fences, at forest clearings, everywhere evidences of labor incessant. The toil of generations had claimed this land in the beginning, and the toil of generations had been ceaselessly required to hold it for a pittance.

“No one ever got rich on the soil in Arichat,” complained Gabereau, bitterly.

His thought went to sire, and grandsire, who had spent their lives for those plowed fields, and who had finally gone to the churchyard, leaving naught but the eternal challenge of the soil.

Then, his eye turned toward Jerseyman’s Island, toward the fish curing stations, and toward the sea, which Monsieur le Curé styled “The Blessed Mary’s Treasury.”

At Michaelmas, they had a sermon of thanksgiving, for the fishermen on account of the wealth which they had taken from the fisheries.

Gazing at the gleam of Spanish gold, Sprott Gabereau experienced a revulsion at this talk of "wealth."

"Call it wealth!" he muttered. "Why our fisher folk are chain-gang slaves, worse than them that toil in salt mines. What do the poor fools get for all their toiling? The father builds a vessel, and thereby dooms his sons forevermore to be groundhogs of the sea. Aye, it's a poor, poor country, and what's more they are all poor, poor people," said Sprott bitterly. "And what have I got to show for years of toil put into this hillside? Nothing more than my fathers. They were fools, but I was a bigger fool, for I knew better."

Gazing fondly at the doubloon, there came to him a flood of new desires. With the touch of gold he was suddenly conscious of those unnumbered good things which Arichat, a quaint, impoverished seaport, could never offer.

As he was placing the coin back again upon the mantel, his eye caught a text hanging above, a text which had hung in the house ever since the first Gabereau carved out the joists of their dwelling from the forest primeval:

Success to the Fisheries
and
Speed the Plow

The sight of this text in his present mood threw Sprott Gabereau into a sudden fury; it seemed to hang there for the express purpose of flaunting him.

Ripping down the old frame from above the mantel, he flung it out of the window with an oath. Then, returning to his bed, tried to sleep, but somehow rest and composure would not come.

At length, moved by curiosity, he arose, lifted the heavy cover of the old sea chest, and there in its secret drawer was the case of japanned metal, just as it had appeared on that morning when he took it from the dead grasp of Yvonne's mother.

Gabereau was not given to nervous apprehension, but a shiver ran through him, as his hand closed upon the cold metal. At that same moment afar in the night there came a long drawn cry. He started ominously.

"God be about us, what's that?"

Then, as the cry sounded again, he recovered his composure.

"Only a heron flying low over the marshes. I seem to be getting into a bad state. The trouble is, every little thing seems to have an unhallowed meaning, when one gets ahold of this accursed case."

Like one who steeled himself for some desperate deed, Gabereau advanced to strike a light; the moon was waning and it was growing dark. While he was still fumbling for a match, there came an unmistakable footfall on the gravel pathway.

Once again, high tensed nerves went taut, while his heart seemed to sound against his very eardrums.

But in spite of apprehension, his presence of mind did not forsake him. Placing the black case back in its secret drawer, he went stealthily down the stairs, and stole out into the night.

He was prepared to meet the most desperate assault, as he issued forth, but was not prepared to hear the voice of

Yvonne from her dormer window, whispering love messages to Paul.

He came up to his bedroom, again, mumbling great oaths that had not done service since his days in the sealing fleet.

"God only knows what I'm comin' to. A pretty kettle o' fish it is, when a man can't get out o' his own honest bed without jumping at every slightest whisper. Sure the heron's cry was as good as a murder, an' them two sweethearts, God bless 'em, were worse than a mutiny."

Taking out a bottle of rum, he helped himself to a stout jorum, and then returned to his bed. But something would not let him sleep; perhaps it was the rum, perhaps it was the pictures awakened by the gold coin, perhaps it was the fever of excitement into which he had thrown himself by withdrawing the black case.

At all events, he fell to thinking on the fact that he had never been able to lay his hand upon that accursed case without alarming sensations within. It had been so twenty years before. It was so to-night. As if the spirit of the dead was still on sentinel duty there to guard momentous secrets.

The more Gabereau thought about it, the more resentful he got of his own fears.

The thought of the gold coin, and the awakening fires of avarice were causing him to put his nervous apprehensions to one side, and to view the whole thing calmly and dispassionately, when the chimes of the cathedral began to sound for midnight.

Gabereau's ears were strained for the last stroke, when somewhere down the village street he caught the same nervous, apprehensive footsteps that had awakened his interest early in the evening.

Something told him that the swift walking stranger was coming to his own house, and in the next instant, sure enough, the gate opened, and there was the crunch of gravel on the garden pathway.

Before the untimely arrival had time to knock, Gabereau threw up his window, calling.

"Hi, what d'ye want down there?"

"To see Captain Gabereau."

"A pretty time o' night for a stranger to be making calls. Go on, I'll see ye to-morrow."

"No, I can't wait, it's got to be to-night."

"And what's yer errand?"

"You must come down to find that out."

"But what if I won't. No decent folk ever come calling at Arichat at this ungodly hour."

"I can't hold myself to customs in the back o' beyond," said the stranger, dryly. "You've traveled around too much in your day, Captain, to sit on ceremony. I've got something important, that ought to be enough."

"All right, wait a minute, and I'll be there," growled the Captain.

A moment later he descended the stairs, fastening his trousers as he came.

Lighting the lamp in the hallway, the great iron bolt was thrown back, the door flung open, and the captain stood there on the threshold, peering out into impenetrable gloom. Whilst he stood thus, against all expectation, a strong arm suddenly shot out of the darkness and sent him reeling down the doorstep on to the pathway below. In a twinkling, the

stranger, who had been standing without, had jumped inside, and banged and bolted the door in the Captain's face.

CHAPTER IV

Barred Out

AT first Gabereau was too dazed to take in what had happened. As he picked himself up, it dawned upon him that his house had been entered by some unknown and dangerous stranger, that he himself was virtually a prisoner, outside his own door.

At thought of the black case within, he was filled with sudden panic. As long as he held that secret in safety, its spell remained quiescent, but now that it might be snatched away, horror seized hold upon him.

That black case never seemed so desirable as now, just beyond his grasp.

With a bellow of rage, he rushed against the door, crashing into it with might and main. But the stout oak, and the heavy bolt were made to withstand just such assault, and his frantic efforts were expended in vain.

In that moment of hesitating impotence, to add to his agony, there came a scream from Yvonne's window, which spluttered out as though some one had just bound and gagged her.

Turning from the impassable door, Gabereau next essayed the windows, but every one was closed with a heavy shutter secured from within. The lower floor of his home was indeed in fit condition to stand siege, like some feudal stronghold. It was the custom of the sealing skippers, after a long and

successful voyage, often to bring much wealth into the house for safe-keeping, hence all entrances were doubly fortified.

Cursing the defenses which so effectively barred him out of his own domain, he went from shutter to shutter, pounding and tearing until his hands were in a frightful state, with torn finger nails and bleeding knuckles.

The mere thought of losing that black case plunged him into such frantic fear that the power of calm reasoning seemed to have utterly forsaken him, with the result that he kept up his futile attacks on doors and windows until nigh exhausted.

Finally, withdrawing for a moment, panting and spent, a faint glimmering of reason began to assert itself.

"This thing is making a fool of me," he muttered. "I must be steady."

With a calmer consideration came the idea of forcing an entrance by one of the upper windows. No sooner was the idea in mind, than he was off to the barn.

He was back in a jiffy, and was just placing the ladder against Yvonne's open window, when he heard a stealthy footstep behind him on the gravel.

Whirling about, the Skipper found himself face to face with a black-looking giant, who on first sight appeared almost gigantic. There in the moonlight by his copper-colored skin, painted face, black hair close upon the forehead, brilliant eyes, and massive brawn, Gabereau recognized him as a Yhagan Indian, an Antarctic Highlander, from the region of Cape Horn. He was almost bare to the cold night winds, but that autumn air was a mere summer kiss to one accustomed to pass shelterless and naked in a land of fierce and freezing storms.

The Captain was a six foot heavyweight, a giant among his own race, but this Yhagan was fully a head taller, with a physical development like one of the sons of Anak.

His countenance at first seemed stupid, but on closer inspection Gabereau caught a gleam of low cunning, that flashed through the dull mask. The face, darker than that of a Canadian Indian, was painted and bedaubed, a broad line of red alternating with a stripe of black.

He spoke in a heavy, deep voice, with gutteral tones.

"Yo' waitee 'ere, Mis'er."

Gabereau's answer was to stoop down and hurl a heavy rock at the savage's head, but, for all his great size, he was agile as a panther. Ducking, so that the missile just glanced across his shoulder, he sprang upon the retreating Skipper, who fought furiously. But the odds were altogether too great.

"Yo' waitee 'ere, Mis'er. Yo' no movee, see?"

With this injunction, he proceeded to tie Gabereau securely hand and foot against the ladder, splaying his arms and legs, and chuckling to himself, with a merry, contagious laugh, at the trick which he was playing upon the white man.

When, at last, the Skipper was effectively secured, the Yhagan vanished as mysteriously as he had come, leaving the spread-eagled skipper to his own devices. For some time, he struggled to break the thongs, but the binding was too secure, and finally he gave it up as hopeless.

Later there came footsteps, as of some one departing through the back entry, and then once more the abandoned silence of the outer darkness.

All through that awful night, Gabereau remained there a prisoner, lashed to a ladder outside his own home. His

physical discomfiture was excruciating; as the hours dragged on, the cruel torture of the thongs increased, but this was nothing to the mental agony which he endured as he told himself that every hour his enemy would be getting farther and farther away with the black chart case, with its promise of wealth untold.

Again, and again, he lamented that he had not long before opened up the secret of the black case.

"It's the great, grand fool I was," he told himself. "Ye never appreciate what ye have till some one comes to snatch it from ye."

Just after dawn, his nephew, Paul, came up to do some early chores around the place. Great was his consternation to find his unexpected prisoner.

When Paul had cast off the thongs, the Skipper lost no time in doubling round to the rear, where, as he expected, the door was still standing open.

Not waiting to give any explanation to his astounded nephew, the Skipper rushed straight into the house.

"Whew, they sure have made one frightful hurrah's nest out of this place," he muttered.

All the lower rooms were in disorder, but for some mysterious reason, his own bedroom appeared undisturbed.

With feverish apprehension, Gabereau went straight to the secret drawer which the Chinese craftsman had so cunningly concealed. He hardly dared to open it. Holding his breath in dread lest the worst should have happened, he pulled it out, and there, against all expectation, he still found the inner case, safe as ever. He was just starting to breathe a sigh of

relief, when Paul suddenly rushed in, his strong face tensed with horror.

Just then, at peace with the world, Gabereau beamed upon him.

"Well, what's up, young feller?"

"My God, Uncle Sprott, Yvonne is gone!"

CHAPTER V

Best Beloved

IN that soul-revealing moment, Sprott Gabereau knew that the black chart case, this mysterious possession, had indeed become more precious to him than his little Yvonne. As long as he retained the clew to the Ferrara treasure, nothing mattered, nothing else could matter. He received the news of the girl's disappearance with philosophic calm. But Paul, on the other hand, was almost beside himself in frantic fear.

"We must give a general alarm, Uncle Sprott, and get the whole town out in search of her."

"We'll do no such thing."

"But we can't merely trust to ourselves."

"We must trust to ourselves. Not a word of this can be noised about the village."

"Why?" Paul was aghast.

"Because, there are matters at stake in this affair, Paul, far beyond your ken."

"I don't understand. Nothing in the world can be more important to me than my Yvonne; if we do not know where she is, everything should be put to one side until we find her."

“Not so fast, not so fast, my lad. Your love has made you too impetuous. I shall not leave a stone unturned in helping to find her. But the matter must be kept strictly between ourselves. I can’t tell you just what is behind this thing. It will suffice to let you know that there are matters at stake in this affair far beyond the personal considerations of you or me, or anyone else.”

“But let us be going, then. While we wait here, dear knows where they have taken my sweetheart.”

“They can’t snatch her off Isle Madame without our knowing it. So just keep calm, and make haste slowly.”

“What course would you suggest?”

“Simple enough, whoever they are, if they try to get away with her, they must go either by the mail boat, or aboard one of them coasters lying in the harbor. We’ll take a dory first, and go out and see that they ain’t aboard any o’ them vessels in the stream.”

“All right then, hurry, hurry,” admonished Paul, as he started to lead the way.

But Gabereau still hung back, looking for a place in which to hide the secret case, dreading lest some one might come and rob him, during his absence.

While he was still temporizing, there came a ripple of bell-like laughter from the garden, and in another moment, Yvonne herself burst in upon them, fully dressed, and flushed from a walk in the brisk morning air, looking none the worse for her misadventure of the previous night.

At the girl’s unexpected appearance, Paul rushed forward, clasping her in his arms, smothering her with caresses,

fondling her wavy golden hair, reveling in the flashes of deep love which her eyes gave back to him.

"Oh, darling, darling, I was nearly crazy when I found that you were gone. I can't tell you how glad I am that you've come back."

"I couldn't leave my own dear Paul," she answered simply, pledging her words with a rapturous kiss.

With a love that believed, and trusted, Paul had no doubts, no questions.

But his uncle was different. As soon as the lovers had broken away, he let out a snort of rage, exclaiming:

"That's nice actions. Are ye a man, Paul Gabereau, or are ye just a softie, and a village bumpkin?"

Paul turned upon his accuser in amazement, while he continued, "Why don't ye ask her where she's been?"

"I believe in her always."

"Umph. It's more than I do. Never seen the woman yet I'd trust to midnight prowlings. This thing looks mighty funny."

"Well, I'd believe in my little Yvonne, whatever happened," said Paul, with his arm around her, his every attitude expressive of completest trust and faith.

Disgusted by his nephew's attitude, and still harboring doubts, Gabereau demanded of the girl point-blank,

"Where were you, anyway?"

Looking him squarely in the eyes, she answered, "I can't tell you, Uncle Sprott."

"Can't tell me," thundered the other.

"No."

"Well, things are coming to a pretty pass when a young lass can go out in the middle of the night with robbers who break into my house, and then come back in the morning, and bleat out, 'I can't tell you.' Where were you anyway, and who was it that you went off with?"

This time the girl merely shook her head, while the old Skipper swore furiously at his own inability to extract from her any slightest clew.

But the storm that came between them was of short duration, like a hard squall quickly past.

Detecting the stern look softening on the grim, hard face, Yvonne suddenly and impulsively threw herself upon him, exclaiming,

"Oh, you dear Old Snookums, what made you say such dreadful things?"

As the Skipper bowed over the black chart case, his face suddenly seemed to grow old and gray. With quick sympathy, Yvonne noticed it.

"I wasn't the only one that went away," she whispered.

While his eyes still questioned, she continued,

"You know, if you ever love anything better than me, you Old Snookums, your little Yvonne may be gone for keeps."

CHAPTER VI

The Unwelcome Stranger

FROM the loiterers around the village store, Gabereau heard rumors next day that did much to disturb his peace of mind. A light had appeared in the haunted house, the

night before, and suspicious characters had been seen going thither, hiding their movements under cover of darkness.

The description of a tall, black looking fellow, with a pointed beard, at once made Gabereau think of Dirk Dugas, his treacherous mate. At the very thought of Dugas, a baleful shadow seemed to pass over the peaceful harbor, lying there in sunshine blue as an angel's eye.

Punta Arenas, and Hell holes on the other side of the world, might give asylum to this villain, but what was he doing breaking in upon the pure tranquillity of Isle Madame? After so many years, why the intrusion? Why couldn't he stay in his own place? Why couldn't he keep to his own pack?

The more Gabereau thought about it, the more enraged he became at this intrusion. He had sought out Arichat, as a sanctuary, as a place inviolate. He had come back here above all because of Yvonne, because of her he had settled down to the peace of this Acadian village. Peace, he told himself, was all he wanted, but what peace could remain if this knave had found him out?

From Baptiste LeBlanc, former cook of his sealing schooner, he heard a confirmation of that which he already feared.

Baptiste joined him on the road home, with the exclamation,

"Hey, Cappen, who d'ye s'pose I met las' night?"

"Search me."

"Well, I'll bet ye couldn't guess if I gave a thousand chances. Dirk Dugas is back again."

“How do you know?” Gabereau’s voice sounded with a sharp, irascible note.

“Because, I seen him with me own eyes.”

“Where?” In spite of his usual self-control, a feverish agitation had taken hold of Gabereau. Baptiste looked at him, amazed.

“I met him comin’ down Main Street, saw him fair and square right under the light. Even before we met, I was thinkin’ about him, perhaps because I heard his footsteps, them quick, sly, stealthy steps that always seems like Dugas.

“It was about a half hour after midnight, I’d been havin’ a few drinks with some o’ the boys on one o’ them rum runners from Saint Pierre, an’ if it hadn’t a bin fer seein’ him fair and square under the light, I would ’ave thought that it was just the booze that was makin’ me imagine things.

“First I heard them footsteps, that always made me feel creepy like, and next thing, with his slouch hat over his eyes, an’ his head down, Dugas goes by me, doin’ his best to keep from bein’ recognized. But there’s one ugly looking cuss that ye can’t do no mistakin’ of, whether ye meet him on the Barbary Coast, or here right under the shadow of Our Lady.”

“What makes ye so sure?” continued the Captain, still hoping against hope, that Baptiste’s encounter had been the hallucination of a troubled brain.

In the next instant, he realized that this rumor was true beyond a peradventure.

From under his coat Baptiste drew forth the outer chart case.

“I picked this thing up halfway toward your place. I knowed at once that it was the same black case that we’d

taken off that lifeboat, down in the Fifties south, and I knowed then that I wasn't dreamin' when I seen him go sneakin' by me, in the shadow, with his hat pulled over his eyes."

Gabereau saw, in a flash, what had caused the intruder of the night before to ransack the lower part of the house, and then to leave his own room untouched. He had evidently mistaken the outer case for the object of his search, and had made off with it at once. Later, on the road, in his anxiety, he had opened the case to find that he had unwittingly been fooled, and in disgust had thrown the false clew into the gutter.

Gabereau adjured Baptiste to keep to himself what he knew about this matter.

"It will only make trouble in the town, so don't say a word about it," was his parting shot.

"Don't worry, Cappen, I won't say a word," he replied.

But this rare titbit was too good a piece of village gossip not to be shared with at least two or three boon companions, with the result that the whole town was soon agog with fabulous tales of the black case, of hints at far-off treasure, and of dread yarns pertaining to Dirk Dugas, accounted dead, now ushered so strangely into their midst.

A still greater surprise was waiting for Sprott Gabereau, when he returned to his own home.

He had once said, "I never know what to expect next, when I'm up against Dirk Dugas."

As though to bear out this saying, there was the sleek and oily fellow waiting for him in his own parlor, as bland and

calm as though his errand were the most commonplace occurrence.

Gabereau was thankful that Yvonne was out, so that he could express himself freely.

"What the Hell are ye doin' here?"

"Ah, good morning, Captain Gabereau. You're getting gray, I see, like all the rest of us. But alas, you are no more polite than you used to be."

"Polite, you'll find out from the toe o' my boot how polite I am. This is a white man's home ye're in now, no place here for dirty greasers. Why the devil can't you stay where you belong?"

"I belong anywhere that's on the trail of treasure, Captain. I've been searching for the Ferrara fortune all the way from Nome to Diego Ramirez. There isn't a place on the North Pacific, or the South Pacific, where old Ferrara laid his keel, that I haven't covered. Men who are following after a quest for years, my Captain, are not turned aside easily, as you may imagine."

"Well, what d'ye want to come dogging me for? What have I got to do with ye an' yer cursed treasure?"

"Ye know that, Captain, without asking."

"And what do ye want of me, now?"

"The same thing we wanted from you twenty years ago, at Punta Arenas."

"But ye didn't get it at Punta Arenas, and what's more ye won't get it in Arichat."

"That remains to be seen." The sleek, oily tone changed to sharp incisiveness.

"Are ye comin' up here to threaten me?"

“No, we’re up here to do something more than threaten. You got away last time with the case and your life. This time, you’ll give up one or the other, perhaps both.”

There was something of unexpected decisiveness in the speaker’s voice.

“You are talking pretty cocky, ain’t ye, Dirk Dugas?”

“Aye, an’ I got a reason to.”

“How’s that?”

“Cause, this time, I ain’t here fer myself. You and me both know, Skipper, that there is a curse on the wrong man, if he breaks that seal.”

“And who’s the right one, pray?”

“Don Juan Ferrara, my Captain, when we next sail to find his treasure.”

“An’ who might he be?”

“The rightful heir of all this fortune.”

“Ye mean, he hopes he is, but I’ll tell ye, the heir to this fortune is the guy who holds its secret.”

“Well, we’ll have that secret, don’t you fret, Sprott Gabereau. Our schooner’s fittin’ out over there on the mainland in Canso; we’re supposed to be bound fer the sealin’ grounds o’ the Southern Ocean, but everybody knows our real destination is the island where old Ferrara hid his treasure, and when we sail we’re taking that there black chart case with us, as sealed orders.”

“You are, eh!”

“Yea, because it’s ours, by right.”

“Well, it’s mine by might,” thundered the Skipper, rising in sudden fury, “and you get out of this house, you dirty, low-

down, crawling snake, get out o' here, and don't let me ever see your face around again, fer if I do, I'll turn yer head backward so far it'll never look for'ard."

Recognizing the ring of the man master, the erstwhile mate made haste to go, while Gabereau sped the parting guest with a rousing lift from the toe of a heavy brogan.

CHAPTER VII

Ferrara's Treasure

EVER since she had brought the gold coin home, that night, Yvonne had been fired by the excitement of the village. Paul, of less ebullient nature, answered her bubblings over with exclamations of distrust. It was Yvonne's own idea to take her doubting lover up to hear the truth, from Monsieur le Curé. She felt sure that he at least would be able to give them something beyond the mere chaff and winnowings of gossip.

They found the good priest, after supper, seated in the rectory garden, gazing with reflective eye on a sunset sea that fringed the peace of their blessed isle. His face lighted up as he saw them enter the rectory gate. With grave dignity, he bade them welcome, motioning them into a seat, beneath the trees.

"Well, what is it, to-night, my children?"

"We have come, Father, to ask you to tell us about the Ferrara treasure."

"You've got the fever, eh?"

"No. We just wanted to hear about it."

"Well, I hope it will never be more than that, my dears."

“Why, Father?”

“It is a very fetching story, but at the same time very dangerous for the peace of our parish.”

After lighting his pipe, and stretching his feet out on the seat before him, Monsieur le Curé took up the tale.

“You’ve both heard of the haunted house?”

“Oh, yes, back of the town, on top of the hill.”

“Well, that place once belonged to a man named Andrea Ferrara, a descendant of the famous Spanish swordsmith, of the same name. Over a hundred years ago, this young fellow arrived in Arichat, apprenticed to one of the Jersey Companies. He remained here as a clerk for five years. Then, tiring of the humdrum life of the fisheries store, he finally broke away, and went to sea, where his decision of character quickly advanced him to the position of master.

“During the Revolutionary War of the thirteen colonies, with letters of marque from the British Government, he went forth to raid American shipping. His career as a privateer was tremendously remunerative.

“With the signing of the peace, he was still wedded to the life of the freebooter. As a man of sagacity and judgment, he was not the kind to run amuck against the Great Powers, so, with that discretion which always marked him, he transferred his operations from the North Atlantic to the South Pacific.

“Making his base on Desolation Island, he preyed successfully upon Spanish shipping for a score of years.

“From the time he sailed away from Arichat as a privateer, his home town knew him no more, until he came back incredibly wealthy and incredibly famous.

“Many rumors were current as to how he acquired his fabulous wealth. There is no doubt that a large part of it came from raping the cathedral treasures of South America, as no reverence for man or God restrained his predatory expeditions.

“During his years of absence from here, he had assumed terrible proportions as a blood-thirsty cutthroat and brigand. Great was the surprise of his fellow townsmen, when they beheld the retired pirate coming ashore with all the quiet, ascetic dignity of some old justice of the peace. Possessed of the courtly reticence of a Spanish Don, the very restraint of the man commanded respect from those who had been loudest in denunciation.

“Cutting off entirely from past associations, Ferrara set out to enjoy his ill-gotten gains. In his day, he was reputed to be the richest man in British America. With the feudal instinct in his blood, he started to build up a manorial estate on the finest situation in Isle Madame.

“He brought back here with him a wife, whom he had married at Valparaiso. They had four boys born of their union, and to them the elder Ferrara looked with pride as the future scions of a great house. A soaring ambition burning in his soul, backed up with his incredible riches, made it appear as though all things were possible.

“But there was a breakdown somewhere in his pompous schemings. Perhaps it was merely the caprice of chance. Perhaps it was because wealth which comes with evil brings evil. At all events, the retired pirate never got much pleasure out of all his gains.

“Morgan, the famous buccaneer of the Spanish Main, after an amazingly remunerative career, was able to wash his face,

to become a vestryman in the Church of England, a governor of Jamaica, and finally, in the fullness of time, was knighted by his Sovereign.

"Andrea Ferrara was wont to meditate on the career of friend Morgan, which began sulphurously and ended with the odor of sanctity. A career like this was exactly to his own taste, but the hand of Fate was against him.

"He was always more or less ostracized by the upright people of our parish. As worthy servants of the soil, they were not easily led away from an appreciation of clear and honest values. And so the man of incredible riches dwelt apart, more lonely and isolated ashore in his sumptuous home than he had ever been afloat on his pirate craft.

"Sensitive, proud, high-spirited, he was stung to the quick by the social stigma which rested on him. This was his first disappointment. A still more bitter pill awaited him as his sons came to manhood, each striving to outdo the other in lechery and debauchery. The first son ran away with a chambermaid, the second flaunted the parish with a brazen strumpet, and the other two got so low that no amount of their father's money could serve as whitewash.

"Finally, in utter shame and heartsickness, the old pirate ordered his vessel, the *Carmentcia*, to be made ready for sea. Some of the good people of the community allowed that His Majesty's cruisers should be warned of this sinister preparation. But the Mayor expressed the general opinion when he said:

" 'Let him go. God knows, it's the easiest and safest way of ridding the parish of his unwholesome brood.'

"The last incident before he sailed did much to soften the hearts of the people.

“On the day prior to embarkation, large cases filled with jewels and specie, were carried down and stowed in the hold of the *Carmentcia*. At this unexpected occurrence, the two worthless sons, who still remained, suddenly showed a spark of interest in their sire, and both alike came down to the vessel to plead for another chance.

“Andrea Ferrara listened to their pleadings with a supercilious smile on his don-like face. He heard them through to the end, then, without a word, went into his cabin and came out again with a handful of gold coins.

“At sight of this, the faces of the sons brightened. But their hopes soon faded, for in the next instant, the father pitched the handful of precious coins over the taffrail and watched them sink into the sea.

“ ‘What a thing to do!’ both sons exclaimed, aghast.

“Ignoring their shocked manner, Ferrara held out his empty hand.

“ ‘Where is the money I had?’

“ ‘It is gone.’

“ ‘You threw it away like a fool.’

“ ‘Aye, my sons, and that’s the way you have done with your opportunity.’

“ ‘But, just give us one more chance, Father. Just one more chance,’ they pleaded.

“ ‘No, no, never again will I be responsible for such miserable and unworthy curs. The worst of my scoundrels and cutthroats afloat was the soul of honor compared to such as you. Not one more cent of the wealth Andrea Ferrara will pass on. At least, not unless you can pay the price. If you ever

again get your hands on this gold of mine it will cost you as much to find it as it did for your father to gain it.'

"That was the old pirate's last word. Next day the *Carmentcia* weighed anchor and sailed out through the Western Passage."

When Monsieur le Curé had finished his story, Paul still sat there gazing steadfast and unmoved at the quiet night coming up out of the sea; for him it was merely a story. Not so Yvonne. For her, somewhere beyond the rim of that mysterious sky line, fancy was already beckoning.

"My, I wish that I were a boy," she sighed, half aloud, half to herself.

"Why in the world should you wish for such an unnatural thing as that?" inquired Monsieur le Curé.

"Because, then, I could go after the treasure," she said in an awed whisper.

"Tut, tut, you shouldn't even mention such a thing, my dear," chided the priest. Notwithstanding the chiding, Yvonne went home to dream of just such quests.

CHAPTER VIII

The Haunted House

THE house of Andrea Ferrara, called Domremy, was situated a short distance outside of the town, on a lonely stretch of road leading out to the back of the parish.

The house itself was built on a windy promontory overlooking the harbor and the outer sea. Time was when gardens smiled inside the great stone gates. When the lawns and grounds were kept with scrupulous care. But generations

of disuse had given to the place an atmosphere of abandoned wretchedness.

The gates were broken down. The wooden picket fence had long since rotted. Grass and shrubs grew over the driveway, while the forest itself was slowly advancing, closing in again on what had once been a glorious landscape of lawns and gardens.

Children coming home from school used to commit themselves to acts of frightful hardihood by pausing to peek around the stone gateposts, but a scream of excitement from some one always served to send the whole pack at full cry down the hill.

The children were not the only ones that held a horror of this place. Their elders and betters who had to pass there on windy, darksome nights felt a sudden tightening of the breath, which did not relax again until they were well along the Marsh Road.

Some were inclined to speak lightly of this, as an idle superstition. It was easy enough to ridicule unknown horrors in the safety of the town, but out on the lonely road after dark, listening to the thunder of a northern sea, it was quite another story.

Domremy had become a dead hand in a living present. Behind the town of Arichat it was a sepulcher for melancholy memories.

No blithesome smoke was ever seen curling from its chimneys, no ray of sunlight was ever permitted to steal through its fast closed shutters.

Baptiste LeBlanc, who had a forge down the Marsh Road, used to tell of hearing wailing voices from the place in the dead of night. Once, those cries had sounded so human that

the hardy smith, armed with his heavy sledge, had approached as far as the outer gateway. Then, something in the spirit of the forest answering back to the haunted house caused him to drop his sledge and flee for dear life.

Telling about it afterwards by the glow of his own forge, Baptiste declared,

"Christ's cross be o'er me, I seen old Andrea Ferrara himself. 'Twas him and no other walkin' up an down in front o' the drive, a-wringin' his hands, and wailing like some soul in purgatory."

"Why didn't ye take a swipe at him, Baptiste, wi' yer sledge?" inquired one of the scornful.

"Go on, try it yerself," chided the smith, safe in his reputation as bravest of the brave.

Had it not been for the fabulous wealth of the old Arichat pirate, the haunted house would doubtless have been allowed to lapse into oblivion. But such is the resuscitative power of treasure, that the ghost of Andrea Ferrara renewed its youth with each succeeding generation.

Mothers told stories to the little ones about him, always with the warning,

"If you aren't good children, Andrea Ferrara'll get you."

In Sunday sermons, in the church of Our Lady, Monsieur le Curé used to point to the deserted house as a horrible example of that which was the root of all evil.

Ever since this place had been left like an open wound in the parish, there had been an especial meaning in the priest's prayer to the Blessed Mary,

"O Holy Mother, we beseech of thee to keep us from the lust of wealth. Help us to set our minds and hearts upon thy

treasury alone."

But in spite of the warnings of loving mothers, in spite of exhortations of the man of God, there were those in the parish whose minds were ever returning to the fascinating shadow of Andrea Ferrara, as it hovered over the peace of that Acadian town.

There were tales that were told by the adventurous spirits, after dark across the firelight, of the treasure, of its possible hiding place, of its quest, and of its vast proportions, an amount large enough to make rich every man in the parish.

According to legend, Andrea Ferrara had sailed away to the southward with his chests of gold. He was gone for two years, and then one day when the story of him had ceased to be the news of the village, he had come again, returning as a common passenger upon a coasting packet.

The rich pirate had at first landed with pomp and circumstance. He had come back again bowed, decrepit, penniless and forlorn.

Finding his way to the haunted house, he lived there until his death, five years later. Where there had formerly been servants and luxury in abundance, there followed penury and frugality.

The old man dwelt utterly alone, like his peasant sires, existing almost entirely on the product of the soil. On rare occasions, he would come into town to purchase necessities from the store of the fish company, always paying for the same with a coin of Spanish gold.

The good folk of the community had made up their minds that his treasure was buried at some inaccessible spot at the end of the seas, and were prepared to dismiss him as a

primary interest, when suddenly the sight of his Spanish gold set the whole community agog.

From that time until his death, he was never wanting in attention, but no word escaped him as to what he had done with his treasure.

His unworthy sons, who were all present at his deathbed, saw his lips sealed forever, without the slightest hint as to where they could find an answer to that question which had become to them the be-all and end-all of existence.

After Andrea Ferrara had been laid away in the hallowed ground under the shadow of Our Lady, the four sons sailed away, each going his own direction, each sworn by a great oath to let the others know if he should find a clew to the hidden treasure.

Three generations had come and gone since then. Three generations had squandered their lives trying to find the lost fortune. Just when Arichat was beginning to think of them as mythical figures, there came that Spanish gold coin, brought in in exchange for supplies at the fisheries store.

And then, as though that gold coin itself had been a bugle call, there had come out of nowhere he who claimed to be the last heir of the Ferraras.

CHAPTER IX

The Light

IN the old days when Domremy was in its prime, a light used to appear in the cupola atop the roof of the great house.

In the splendid era this light did not arouse attention, since the house was always a mass of illumination after dark. But when the old pirate returned to his self-inflicted asceticism, the shutters were closed and barred everywhere, except aloft there in that eerie spot, companioned by the wheeling gulls.

Up there, it was rumored that Ferrara used to live with ghosts of bygone revelries. Every night when the rest of the house was darkened, that light would appear with such regularity that fishermen beating in toward the outer channel took from it their bearing to guide them into harbor.

Why did Andrea Ferrara, so parsimonious in all else, squander oil so freely for that night-long vigil? What was the purpose of enkindling that star at twilight and keeping it bright until the cry of day?

Some said that he still had money hoarded away, and that he spent his nights counting it over, finding his only joy in this miserly devotion. The appearance of a solitary gold doubloon from time to time at the fisheries store lent color to that tale.

Others, not wishing to impute iniquity, declared that he was troubled with remorse, and that he placed the light in the cupola as a guide for mariners beyond the Outer Head, doing this as a penance for the many noble ships which in earlier days he had lured to destruction by his false light on Desolation Island.

Whether for avarice, or penance, that lamp in the cupola burned on as long as his flickering life remained. On his deathbed, he still sent his sons up to tend it. When at last he had gone to the churchyard, navigators of the outer channel in the nighttime had reason to bemoan him, as they looked in vain for his vanished star.

And now, after all these years, the old gleam was appearing again in the haunted tower of Domremy.

Paul Gabereau, nephew of Captain Sprott, was the first to spy it. He had been out with a fishing boat on the middle ground, and late one evening, burst in upon the loafers at the store, exclaiming,

"My God, they've lit the light again up there on top o' the haunted house."

"Go 'long," chided Baptiste. "Ye've been drinkin' whisky blanc, Paul. You've been seein' things, that's what. Lucky you was inside early with a jag like that."

"All right, you can say I was drinkin'. I s'pose you was drinkin' too the night you left your sledge outside the gate and beat it for your missus."

"No, sir. I wasn't drinkin' that night. I was sober as a judge."

"Well, you wasn't a bit more sober then than I am now, Baptiste; come on out here an' I'll soon show ye."

At this general invitation, all hands trooped out of the store exclaiming,

"Yes, come along, might as well take a look."

"Ye'll soon find out he's drunk," grunted the doubter, who, to show his superiority, remained behind alone, smoking his pipe, and mumbling to himself, "Pack o' fools, runnin' after a crazy drunk."

But he was soon to learn the difference. A few moments later the crowd returned hushed and awed.

"What's up?" inquired Baptiste.

"It's there, all right," came back in chorus. "Ain't no mistake about it."

Still doubting, Baptiste went out to see for himself. What he saw prevented him from returning to the gossips round friendly cracker barrels. Instead, he went straight up the street to the home of his friend Gabereau, who, as usual, was seated alone in the garden, waiting for closing time and Yvonne's return.

"Hullo, Baptiste, what's on your mind?"

"I come to tell ye, Skipper, that the light's lit again up there in Ferrara's cupola."

Sprott was not slow of comprehension.

Without a word of explanation, he entered the house and returned a few minutes later shoving a Webley service revolver into his hip.

"Just stay here, Baptiste, for a while, will ye?"

"But what d'ye want me to stay for, Skipper?"

"So's there'll be some one with Yvonne, in case I don't get back till late."

"Wish that I was goin' with ye."

"Not this time, my friend. There'll be plenty o' chance yet. And tell Yvonne if she gets back before I do, that I had a business call, and not to worry."

Gabereau set out directly for the haunted house. Probably he was the only man in all that highly superstitious community that did not give a pinch of snuff for the unknown horrors that had been imputed to this spot.

He now went to church every Sunday, on Yvonne's account. But the old-timers used to smile to see him there, remembering how he used to declare in his sealing days, "I'm afraid of neither God, man nor Saint Michael."

Ideas of a God of vengeful justice, of haunting spirits, and returning ghosts of the wicked never bothered his bluff, matter-of-fact existence.

In his earlier years, with blatant atheism, he had gloried in the chance to ridicule the superstitions of the simple folk of the town. Then something fine in his nature, awakened by the childlike faith of Yvonne, had taught him at least the outward show of reverence, but there was nothing but contempt in his heart for the haunted house legends that surrounded Domremy.

Swinging along, he soon came in sight of the cupola, and there, sure enough, shining through the tree tops, was the light that had caused such terrific flutterings.

"The poor fools think that's a ghost, eh? Well I know mighty well who that ghost is; what I want to know now is just what the tricky snake is doin' up there. He'll be up to no good, that's sure."

Walking boldly past the stone gateposts, Gabereau entered the overgrown lawn in front, where he had to walk warily to keep from tripping amid the dwarf spruce and lichen.

At the front door, he paused and listened. Not a sound, except the whispering pines and hemlocks. The house loomed before him like some mighty sepulcher, an emblem of death in the midst of a living forest.

With stealth, so as not to betray himself, he tried the great front door, but found it barred securely.

Coming around to the windows along the side, he grabbed hold of a rotten shutter, which at the first strong pull came away, and fell at his feet with a loud crash. At this undue disturbance, he crouched in the shadow and waited, unaware of what guard Dugas might have on duty. But there was no

sight nor sound of anyone, and, reassured, he sprung up to the window, this time testing thoroughly before trusting to his grip.

Letting himself down inside the haunted house, he found the place full of the stifling odor of disuse. Crawling warily over the rotting floors there came the sound of giant rats scurrying hither and yon. The rats were more real and startling to him in that moment than a regiment of ghosts, and when one of these ghoulish creatures ran across his shoulders, he had his first yearning for the clear outer air.

There was thick darkness everywhere, and his progress at best was groping and uncertain. On hands and knees he worked his passage out into the hallway, where he waited for some time, listening attentively. Reassured by the absence of any movement, other than that of the rats, he lit a match as a guide toward the stairway.

The stairs were in such rickety condition that he did not dare to trust himself, without lighting a match to make sure at every step. Thus his progress upward was painfully slow.

Once, about midway up, the planking was so uncertain that he was prepared for an imminent plunge, but maneuvering as cautiously as though he were going aloft with frayed seizings on the ratlins, he came at last without mishap to the upper landing.

Above this was another narrower stairway, in better preservation, which brought him to the top story. Here, as his supply of matches was giving out, he began to feel his way again.

At the end of a long hallway, impeded with lumber and broken furniture, he found a ladder leading to the cupola.

With relief he saw that the ladder was new and had been recently secured at top and bottom, by pieces of stout marlin.

Before committing himself to the last assault, the canny Gabereau made sure of his avenue for retreat. He was too well aware of the nature of his foe to leave the rear line unexamined.

He found a window handy to the ladder, and after considerable pulling he succeeded in detaching the shutter, which he was hauling inside when the decayed wood crumbled in his hands, and away went the bulk of the heavy screen crashing down with an infinite clatter.

Almost instantaneously with the noise of the falling screen, he heard some one stirring above.

"That fixed it," Gabereau muttered to himself as he crouched hastily behind a couple of old boxes.

There was a sudden lifting of the slide above, and as a yellow gleam appeared, he caught a glimpse of Dirk Dugas climbing stealthily down the ladder.

In the hiding place behind the boxes, Gabereau pulled out his gun and waited, but to his surprise there was nothing suspicious in the movements of the fellow coming down the ladder. He descended slowly, with utmost unconcern, and once on the floor, stood dimly outlined by the gleam from above. Turning on a flash light, he made his way down the hall to some interior recess, where he disappeared.

Gabereau strained his ears to listen, and then, just when curiosity was about to get the better of him, Dugas reappeared with a heavy bag upon his shoulder; although a powerful man, he strained under the load.

Arriving back at the foot of the ladder, he dropped the bag upon the ground, at which something happened that put even the cool and stolid Gabereau into a state of wild excitement.

As the bag dropped, there came the clink of coins. There was no mistaking that note. It sounded in the straining ears of Gabereau with overwhelming power.

In that moment, a blind, unreasoning lust seized hold of him. The same burning fever that had been started by the sight of that piece of Spanish gold returned to him with a fury that was increased a thousandfold. Avarice was rooted in the very soul of Sprott Gabereau, and now he knew what it was to lust after gold, just as some men lust after women.

Seizing his heavy service revolver, he covered the unsuspecting Dugas as he stood, an irresistible target, fair under the gleam from the garret landing.

In that burning moment, all his being was consumed in blind, inchoate passion. Trembling with an excitement that one never would have dreamed of imputing to his stolid nature, he gazed pantingly across the sight of his gun.

CHAPTER X

The Burden

IT was the clinking sound that caused Sprott Gabereau to stay his hand. There was hypnotic power in the jingle of coin to awaken undreamed ecstasies within his soul.

Here was wealth beyond imagining, a treasure vast and unlimited lying close to hand. At first glimpse of that bag he took it for granted that this was but one of unnumbered bags

that made up the hidden fortune of Andrea Ferrara. Then the thought flashed over him,

If Dugas had the whole of it here, why did he make such desperate attempts to steal from him the black case?

If he had the whole treasure, why was he so consumed in his desire to arrive at the sealed secret?

With such questions flashing upon his mind, the madness that had seized Sprott Gabereau passed like a March squall, and left him in the cool afterthought with his gun sagging impotently.

"My God, what's coming over me?" he mused, as he replaced his gun in his hip. "I'll have to watch myself again, when I'm in a place like this."

With hungry eyes he saw Dugas tie a stout rope to the precious load, and lift it, hand over hand, into the cupola. Once the bag had jingled down safely on that upper floor, the trapdoor leading thither was closed, and Gabereau, straining his every sense, found himself again in darkness.

For some time he remained in his hiding place, attempting to collect his thoughts, and to view the whole affair calmly and with reason.

Obviously, Dirk Dugas was the one who had given out that Spanish coin, that came ultimately to his hands through Yvonne. Where that golden doubloon came from, there were hundreds, yea, thousands more.

As Sprott thought of this, his heartbeat quickened. A cold, calculating attitude was difficult indeed in sight of such untold reward. Already in his own mind, he was the possessor of this gold. Whatever obstacles might intervene

were swept away in the imperious assumption of one great desire.

A faint sound of some one counting out money above called him back to action.

“Yes, he’s got the first lead on this fortune,” he muttered. “But I’ve got something more, or I know for sure he wouldn’t be coming after me so strong to get my secret.

“I’m going to see just what he’s doing up there. But I won’t start anything to-night, if I can help it.”

With this resolve he came out from his hiding place, and started to climb up the ladder to discover what might be passing in the place of the far-shining light.

When he had come to the top, with his head against the trap door, he paused and listened. From somewhere within sounded the clink, clink, clink of counting out a steady stream of coins. Below, everything in the haunted house was silent as the grave.

At last, committing himself to a decisive move, Gabereau put his shoulders under the trapdoor, and slowly lifted. As his head came through to the upper surface, he beheld with satisfaction that the entrance into the cupola was in the shape of an outer hallway, beyond which Dugas was now busily engaged.

Thanks to this fortunate arrangement, the invader was able to take up his station and spy on what was going on within, without being observed himself.

Leaving the trap open, he crawled on all fours toward a pencil of yellow light that came through a large crack in the doorway.

Up in the high turret, the wind was moaning dismally, while the place seemed to sway unsteadily like the foretop in a gale. But Gabereau now had ears and eyes for only one thing. Approaching the door stealthily, he knelt there, and putting his eyes to the crack, gazed with avid interest at what might be transpiring within.

The sight that met his eye was one to thrill the soul of the coldest, hardest miser. There, at a long wooden table, sat Dugas, engaged at the pleasant pastime of counting out a small mountain of golden coins. There were Spanish doubloons, French louis, English sovereigns and many others which even the far-wandering Gabereau could not distinguish.

But he noted the fact that by far the greater number of coins that Dugas counted were a variety current in Spanish countries of South America. There was no doubt who had suffered most from the piratical fury of Andrea Ferrara.

Gabereau noticed that the old countinghouse table was fitted up with drawers, into which, ever anon, Dugas swept a small pile of gold as he completed this or that tally.

Over the long, broad table of mahogany, still in good repair, there hung the strangest contrivance, a combination of lantern and reading lamp, obviously from some princely Spanish galleon of the long ago. It was of Moorish design, of beaten brass, constructed in such cunning manner that the light was shed abroad from the front window of the turret; while, at the same time, a sort of burnished brass reflector caused it to illuminate the broad surface of the countinghouse table beneath.

So this was the secret of the star that had guided mariners for so many years. It was lit primarily by a miser who was

engaged at the sordid occupation of counting out his gold.

Dirk Dugas, as he sat at the table, was facing the door, so that he was in full view of Sprott Gabereau as he pressed up hard against the keyhole.

Like Gabereau, Dugas was obviously infected with the lust of gold. If there was naught else to be respected, here at least he was face to face with that which stirred up his deepest veneration. In that moment, he might indeed have been a high priest performing some sacred rite, so reverently did he handle each golden coin.

Impressed by that same worshipful spirit, Sprott Gabereau clean forgot all else, he too had joined with heart and soul in the agape, or love feast, when without the slightest warning, the door against which he was leaning heavily, gave way precipitately, and the unsuspecting Skipper, with all his two hundred and forty pounds, was plunged across the sacred threshold.

CHAPTER XI

The Fight in the Gold-room

AT the first alarm, Dugas roused from his worshipful attitude, leaped into fighting preparedness. With a quick lunge of a stick, lying close to hand, he smashed the hanging lamp, plunging the room into inky darkness. Then, with a vault across the table, he landed fair upon the intruder.

Gabereau was aware of a pair of iron-shod boots that kicked his face and head and chest. Maddened by this unscrupulous attack, the leonine Skipper fastened upon one

of the kicking legs, and with a grunting heave, brought his foe crashing down in a heap beside him on the floor.

In their fall they upended the great mahogany table, and with it, massed-up piles of gold went pouring forth in a perfect flood of jangling metal.

At the feel of so much wealth, lapping up about them, both fighters were filled with a sudden mad intoxication. In an instant, with the touch of gold, they had forgotten one another, forgotten their grudges, forgotten all else in the one overmastering motive to grab the lion's share of that treasure, spilled like so much dust beneath their feet.

Working frantically with both hands, Dirk Dugas began to shovel the coins into his own corner, while Gabereau, catching the fever, started at once, in equally frantic haste, to sweep back the greatest possible amount into his own section.

Both of them now struggled more arduously for the lion's share of gold than they had struggled for their lives. Their breath came in short panting gasps, the very pounding of their hearts seemed to be audible in that stifling lair.

Not a word passed between them, there was scarce a second's pause for respite. Gabereau knew that every last one of those stray coins added to the toll of happiness; nothing else mattered, nothing else could matter. Here was that for which men suffered cold, and heat, and storm, and bitter seas. That for which they endured toil and drudgery unending.

Lack of this same gold had made his fathers, and his fathers' fathers slaves and helots of the soil. Lack of gold had caused him to brave the Horn, and to trespass on the sealing preserves of the farthest ocean. Lack of gold made it worth while to endure the salt mines of Siberia, made it worth

while, when once free, to risk everything again on the same career of desperate chancing.

As in a lightning flash, Gabereau saw the entire past of his strenuous far faring life as one continual quest for gold.

And after all the struggle, all the sacrifice, what had he gained? How much had his lifetime of effort yielded him? Not a tithe of the wealth that was now trembling around in an inert mass beneath his feet.

Yea, here was a chance that gathered up into a breathless moment all the possibilities of many lifetimes. Here was such a chance as one had never had before, such a chance as one would never have again.

He could not fathom what was passing in the mind of his opponent; he only knew that Dugas was also working like the furies.

At first there seemed to be plenty to keep both occupied, and then, as the piles grew larger behind, and more attenuated before, the spirit of emulation and cupidity was engendered.

Gabereau's hand closed upon a stray coin after which Dugas was also reaching, and he was greeted with a sullen snarl,

"Your stuff, eh?"

"Yes, mine, by God, every bit I hold."

"An' where did ye git it?"

"By helpin' myself, the same as ye."

"But it's mine, I tell ye," snarled out Dugas. "It's all mine, held for the heir to the Ferraras."

"Umph, you mean for the heir to the Earl o' Hell's ridin' breeches. Don't come around here with any o' yer heir stuff, Dugas. You're a bastard son o' the Barbary Coast, born on a

woodpile and nursed in the hogwash. A room in the penitentiary is your estate, and a corner o' the potter's field, after the gallows, is your family burying ground. I know ye, and I know yer jailbird breed."

At this torrent of denunciation, Dugas momentarily ceased to be a maniac in a wild fight for gold. With the staccato note of that well remembered voice, he was back again as mate under Sprott Gabereau, under the only complete man master that he had ever known.

In that moment, over his passion clouded brain, there came a ray of sense.

Against all expectation, he suddenly dropped his fanatical whine, and spoke with calm conciliation.

"Look at here, Skipper. You and me are a couple o' jays."

"Umph, ye are, all right."

"And so are you."

"What's comin' into yer mind now?"

"Well, I was just thinkin' what fools we two were to keep on fightin' each other, when if we had any sense, we might both be lousy with money, and have more than we might use up in fifty lifetimes."

"What in the world are ye driving at?"

"Just this, the gold which we're fightin' for here, like a couple o' idiots, isn't a tithe of the gold that's still hidden away, waiting for us to go and find it."

"And where are we going to find it?"

"Ah, that's the secret that you got locked up in that black case which you took off o' the dead woman down off the Horn."

"Ye seem to know a hell o' a lot."

“Aye, I ain’t been on the trail o’ the Ferrara treasure this twenty year without finding out some secrets. I’ve got a pretty good idea where the old feller landed his chests off the *Carmentcia*. All I’m needin’ now is the chart to guide me to the exact spot where he buried ’em. And you’re the one Skipper that’s got that chart.”

“And what’s more, I’m the one that’s goin’ to bloody well hang on.”

“But what’s the good o’ hangin’ on? It ain’t doin’ you, nor me, nor anyone else no good hidden away in that black case. I told ye that down South there, twenty year ago, and I’m tellin’ here again to-night. There’s plenty fer us both, Skipper, an’ what’s more, we’ve got the money to fit out the expedition to go and fetch the rest o’ the treasure.”

Here Sprott Gabereau’s curiosity overcame antipathy.

“Tell me where ye got the funds. How did ye come by this bag o’ gold?”

“We got it through the last heir o’ the Ferraras.”

Gabereau let out a snort of disgust.

“I didn’t ask ye, Dugas, fer any more o’ yer fairy tales that ye cooked up when ye was doin’ time. I asked ye straight and plain, tell me how ye come by this bag o’ gold.”

“That’s my own business, Sprott Gabereau. Ye can play with me, as I told ye, and get rich and as the best, or ye can stay alone, and die a poor lunkhead of Arichat, to be buried with nothin’ in the back o’ beyond.

“You’re gettin’ old, Skipper, and so am I. If we’re going to get this treasure, we’ve wasted altogether too much time. For pity’s sake, let’s be reasonable. Let’s make a decent arrangement while we can.”

"A decent arrangement with you?"

"Sure."

"Well, I'd just as soon make an arrangement with the Archbishop o' Hell."

"But look at the money you'll have if you will only come to satisfactory terms with us."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that if you will only agree to let us in on the secret of that black case of yours, we'll agree to let you have half of the gold in this room right now."

"Oh, ye will, will ye? Ye always were a cool cucumber. Let me have half o' what's in this room, eh? Already I got more than three quarters of it behind me, and what's more I'm goin' to have the whole bag o' tricks as my very own, before I get out o' here this night."

"But every cent of this money is mine!" The voice of Dirk Dugas rose to an outraged scream, as he sprang at the other, biting and snarling, with all the fierceness of a cornered rat.

Gabereau shook him off, and sent him crashing across the floor. But with a sob of overmastering rage he was up and at him again.

Thus began one of the strangest fights ever staged between two hated rivals. Surrounded by impenetrable gloom, in narrowest quarters, over a quivering floor, that rang with crashing gold, the two fought with mad frenzy.

In the light, Gabereau could have broken the spine of Dirk Dugas, as he might have broken a cornstalk, but darkness was the ally of the sneak. Once, twice, thrice, he sailed in, landing vicious kicks at the mighty Skipper, causing him to roar like a maddened bull.

“If I get my hands on you,” he threatened, “the devils ’ill be playing hurley with your head to-night on the streets o’ Hell.”

Nothing daunted, Dugas flung himself upon his opponent, this time burying his teeth in Gabereau’s throat, whereat the other started to gouge out his eyes, causing him to let go his deathlike grip at the throat.

With his adversary still clinging to him, the Skipper, by far the abler and stronger of the twain, rose and sent Dugas across the room with a thunderous jar, causing their eerie perch to give forth an ominous note. Crossbeams and rafters had all rotted until the cupola itself was scarcely more secure than a house of cards. And still, grandly oblivious to the threatenings under their feet, the money-maddened pair fought on.

Recovering from a momentary daze, Dugas pulled out a knife, and crawling along stealthily, attempted to disembowel his foe with a nigger-twist trick, familiar in low sailor dives.

In the darkness he missed, and the point of his knife was broken sharp off by the leather holster on the other’s hip. By the same motion, the gun was jarred out of its pocket and rattled away at their feet.

Quick as lightning the Skipper reached forth with his foot and kicked both gun and knife out of the room, growling,

“Ain’t goin’ to be no weapons here but fists an’ feet. But, by God, there ain’t goin’ to be nothin’ barred. Come on, ye low-down dirty dog, your coffin’s hangin’ on the collar beams.”

The sly, snakelike Dugas was edging and crawling toward the door.

Realizing his intention, Gabereau caught him with a terrific kick, that nigh unshipped his jaw.

"None o' yer crawlin' after the gun. Get away from that door, or I'll smash every bone in yer sneaking carcass."

With the odds against him, Dugas hopped back warily into the farther corner, where he waited at bay, his position only partly concealed, because of his fierce and telltale breathing.

He expected imminent attack, but once more the master mind returned to the main issue, and Gabereau began to help himself in a calculating manner from the largest pile of specie. Again something more dominant even than the instinct for preservation urged Dugas to the fray. He came at Gabereau this time with head down, adopting the ramming tactics of a goat. As they crashed together, louder than all other noises, there arose the unmistakable protest of straining rafters.

In a moment of horror, Dirk Dugas became aware that the rotting floor was giving way.

"My God, look out, or we'll both be gone!"

But Gabereau, in that moment, had become plain crazy. For him, all thought of safety had completely vanished. With Dugas stumbling from panic, the mighty skipper leaped into the air and landed upon him with the clatter of a thousand bricks. At the impact, a first dull groan of pain rose suddenly to a shriek of horror, as outraged timbers burst asunder, while victor and vanquished, with a jangling flood of gold, went plunging down into a black abyss.

CHAPTER XII

GREAT alarm was felt at the nonreturn of the Skipper to his home that night. Baptiste, in a moment of amazing hardihood, ventured as far as the gates of the haunted house; then something snapped in his overwrought nerves, and turning pellmell, he did not cease running until he was back again in the safe precincts of the village.

After that first effort, nothing could persuade the highly superstitious smith to venture out again, during the hours of darkness.

On the following morning, observing every injunction, he waited not merely until the cock had crowed, but also until the sun was well across the yardarm, before trusting himself again to that dread abode.

Walking warily, even in the daylight, he came around to the back of the haunted house. Forcing open a door, he entered as charily as though he expected to be greeted by the sight of a corpse laid out on the stretching board.

Within, he found nothing but silence and shadows. He called, and only the scurrying rats gave answer to his hollow echo.

"Don't like the look of it," he muttered to himself, "but I 'spose we got to take a chance, so here goes."

With muscles tensed, carrying a two-pound hammer, the giant smith came up the dim stairs, and there, at last, on the upper floor, he discovered the prostrate Gabereau, still unconscious, sprawled out where he had fallen in a heap from the caved-in rafters.

There was no sign of any other person, nor of evil spirits, and Baptiste began to breathe more easily.

Bending over to examine his friend, the smith was suddenly struck by the yellow glint of a couple of gold coins lying beside him on the floor. Picking them up hastily, he started to search the place for more, but to his great chagrin, found that some one had evidently just swept the floor.

"Whoever it was, done the job up well," muttered he.

As though in answer to his ruminations, a sudden creaking of the wind in the empty rafters recalled old fears. Pocketing the two gold coins, and fearing lest the ghosts which had done such evil to his friend might also leap forth to wreak vengeance upon him, Baptiste shouldered the prostrate Skipper, without further delay, and started to struggle laboriously down the rickety stairs, and at last, with a vast sigh of relief, he issued forth into the clean, clear light of day.

Once outside in the barnyard, he placed his burden in the buggy, and drove straight back to the Gabereau home.

Yvonne was almost beside herself at their arrival, but the injured man by this time had partly regained consciousness, and was able to speak thickly,

"Ish—nuthin'—floor fell in; nuthin'—lil' girl."

Doctor Fisette, who arrived a short time later, was afraid at first about his ribs, but a further examination showed that no bones were broken.

"I guess the trouble is that he has suffered from a severe concussion," said the Doctor. "He must be kept quiet, with nothing to cause undue excitement. The trouble has been the shock to his system. Whatever happens, don't let him leave his bed for several days."

Seeing that his friend was in safe hands, and with complete confidence in his recuperative ability, Baptiste sauntered

forth, and answering to a sure urge, turned his footsteps toward the village. There was something burning in his pocket, which had to be declared, to all and sundry, something which seemed indeed worthy of a town crier.

It was mail time when Baptiste arrived outside the general store. As usual at that hour, the congregation of gossips was complete.

Bursting with great tidings, the smith approached them. News of the mishap to Captain Gabereau had already been noised about the village, and he was plied with questions, which he answered in a tantalizing manner.

"What's up with ye, Baptiste?" inquired Gus Terrio. "You're generally the biggest gas bag on Isle Madame, an' now, by gosh, you're as dumb as a clam. Did them ghosts burn yer tongue out?"

"How many of 'em did ye see up there?" chimed in another.

"I seen somethin' a blame sight more'n ghosts," muttered the smith, significantly.

"I'll bet ye did," concurred Gus. " 'Spose ye seen half the folks from the churchyard who was up there to meet ye?"

"I seen somethin' that you'd give yer eyeteeth to see, Gus Terrio."

"What was that?"

The smith could not contain his secret longer. Plunging his hand into a pocket, he pulled out the two gold coins which he had picked up beside the recumbent Gabereau, and passed them round among the crowd.

"There you are," he announced triumphantly. "Now ye can see with yer own eyes."

At once the spark of casual interest was fanned into flame, as all hands bent over the undreamed discovery.

“Mon Dieu, it’s the same kind o’ Spanish gold that Andrea Ferrara used to bring down to the fishery stores.”

“Aye, it’s the very same.”

“An’ what’s more, there must be lots up there where these come from.”

“Ain’t no doubt about it.”

Everyone was speaking at once, with the hushed tone of vast excitement. Everyone in imagination was already tiptoeing along the threshold of a fortune. The very air had become momentous.

Just as the crowd stood there in that pregnant moment, who should appear but Monsieur le Curé.

“What have we here, my children?”

Baptiste slid the gold coins into his pocket, and stood back sheepishly, while each waited for the other.

“Is there none to answer?”

Finally, Gus Terrio offered a halting explanation of what had happened.

At tidings of the discovery in the haunted house, the brow of the priest clouded darkly.

“I am sorry to hear this news, my children.”

“For what should ye be sorry, Monsieur le Curé? Don’t ye want us to have the good things that money will buy?”

“Ah, I wish you to have all the good things that come as a reward of honest toil, from the soil, or from the sea. But I tremble for you when I see in your hands gold which cost you nothing.”

“We don’t understand.”

“Well, what does it say in the Good Book? ‘By the sweat of your brow ye shall eat your bread.’ Those that learn that lesson live content. Because of that, our land has been a happy, blessed land. But I tell you, my children, a blight will rest upon this little island, if the love of gold once drops its poison in our veins.”

“But what’s the matter with this gold?” persisted Terrio. “It’s all the same. There ain’t no difference, is there?”

“Aye, and there is, though. There is good gold, that is the reward of the good workman. And then there is the bad gold, that comes with evil, that can never bring aught but evil in its train.”

Some one grunted dubiously, but the priest continued,

“This idea may be old-fashioned in the modern world outside, my children. But thanks to the guardian angel of our happy isle, we have been able to dwell apart, a peculiar people, possessing that peace that is beyond the price of pearls.”

“But look at the good things that ye can buy with this,” demanded Baptiste, holding out the coins in mute appeal.

The sight of the shining metal at once seemed to outweigh the words of the man of God, his counsel smacked of the remote, but the gold seemed near and real.

“When ye want food or shelter, it’s gold that speaks.”

“Aye, an’ when ye need shoes, gold gets ’em.”

“Whenever ye ask fer anything, ain’t it gold that pays the price?”

“Nay, nay, my children, it’s work that pays the price. If you want clothes, you must work for them. If you want food you

must work for it. Yea, and I'll say more, if ye want happiness, you must work for it."

"I'd be happy if I had nothin' to do, and plenty to pay with," broke in Gus Terrio.

"No, you wouldn't, Gus, my lad. God ordained that men should get up in the morning to find their toil, that they should lie down at night, weary and content. This has been the way in our parish for over a hundred years. God grant that it may never get to be old-fashioned here to pay with toil for our desires.

"The worst thing in the world, my children, is the tiring business of doing nothing. That is part of the emptiness that comes to those who try to buy things with fools' gold.

"From the time your fathers started to clear away the stumps and till this soil, we've been learning not to expect something for nothing. Woe betide us, now, if any of our people are lured away from the fisheries, and from the plow, to seek after that which satisfieth not."

The crowd before the general store turned away, unpersuaded, all except Paul Gabereau; he alone found perplexity in the warning of Monsieur le Curé.

CHAPTER XIII

The Captain of the "Ushuaia"

AS soon as Sprott Gabereau had recovered from his misadventure in the haunted house, he returned thither to spy out the land. But, outside of the broken rafters and the caved-in floor, not a clew remained to mark out the strange happenings that had occurred there.

What of the midnight visitant?

What of the bag of gold?

These questions harassed the Skipper incessantly, but on that lurid battle in the gold-room the curtain had been rung down, as on an evanescent dream. Gone all hint of treasure. Gone the light. Gone the sinister shadow of Dirk Dugas.

In season, and out, Gabereau's mind was forever reverting to this vexing problem, which always left him mystified.

One evening the Skipper was seated in his garden as usual, waiting for the closing hour, when his quick ear caught the sound of Yvonne returning with an unrecognized companion. He could hardly believe he heard aright. Paul had been keeping company with his adopted daughter so long that it seemed incredible to think of another cutting in.

Who was the gallant that dared to make so bold? What right had he to attempt such a thing? Conduct like this was not allowable in Arichat.

Gabereau swung around heavily in his chair. He was prepared to give the high-handed village bumpkin a cool reception. But he was not prepared for the gay Lothario whom Yvonne led up the pathway.

Gabereau's first impression told him that the approaching stranger was about the finest looking fellow that he had ever seen. Indeed, this chap was altogether too good-looking to suit the roughneck strain of the sealing skipper.

Tall, dark, trim, there was about him the courtly grace of a Spanish Don, unmistakably of the ruling class, instinct with pride and power. His lean figure adumbrated splendid physical fitness. The brightness of his eye, the freshness of his skin, the sprightliness of his step spoke of youth, but a

graying about the temples hinted at maturer years. A young old man, or an old young man. He was dressed in the correct appointments of a Corinthian, blue serge jacket, white ducks, white shoes, peak cap with gold badge of fouled anchor, on his sleeve a commodore's four rows of black braid.

Noting the rows of braid, Gabereau muttered to himself,

"Admiral of the window frame pinkeys, eh!"

In the next instant, Yvonne summoned the skipper to the common civilities:

"Uncle Sprott, get up and meet my friend, Captain Don Juan."

Although the Skipper hated this stranger at sight, there was one person from whom he took his orders; accordingly, he arose with a grunted:

"Howdy."

"Good evening, sir." The stranger bowed slightly. His manners were as correct as his clothes, at which Sprott marked him down a peg lower in his estimation.

"What are you, a Spick?"

"You mean Spanish?"

"Yea, Spick or Spanish, they're all the same to me."

"I have the honor, sir, to be a citizen of the Argentine."

"Born there, were ye?"

"No, my family came from Virginia, emigrated to South America when I was a lad."

"And what's the idea o' them glad rags ye'r wearin'? They've got ye all dolled out like a Christmas tree."

In spite of Yvonne's frantic signals from behind the other's back, Sprott tried to be as insulting as possible, but his thrusts

drew only a bland smile.

"I expect a yachtsman's rig does look a bit like musical comedy to a real old sea dog like yourself, Captain."

"Umph, afternoon tea regattas is all right fer them that likes 'em, but it ain't a man's game."

"I agree with you there, sir. This harbor bar stuff's no good. I'd sooner smash around outside in a hard blow; there's where you'll find who's kissin' Polly."

"You really go out to sea, then, do you?"

"Oh, yes, occasionally." The face of the stranger still wore its bland, unruffled smile. Sprott found himself increasingly vexed by his invincible poise.

"What's your business down in the Argentine?" he inquired.

"I graduated from the Naval School, and for many years was an officer in the navy."

"But you're only a spring chicken."

"I'm older than I look, sir."

"Are you still in the navy?"

"No, I'm on the retired list, on account of being on the wrong side in an attempted revolution."

"What are you doing, now?"

"That's my own personal affair, sir."

This last was spoken with an even, incisive tone, that went through Gabereau like a knife. Hating anything that savored of the Latin countries, he yearned to kick this Spanish cavalier clean over the sea wall, but something warned him that here was a type that could not be so easily disposed of.

Making the best of a bad job, the Skipper sat down and proceeded to play gooseberry for the rest of the evening; but the visitor was too much of a gentleman to ignore the host, and throughout all his conversation, was continually deferring to Gabereau, who answered in monosyllables, and elected to remain on the outside, until talk casually turned to the subject of the Ferrara treasure.

"Did you ever hear of Andrea Ferrara?"

"I should say so; ever since I can remember."

"And how did you happen to know of him 'way down in South America?"

"Why, that was where he left his indelible mark, sir. The golden statues from Lima Cathedral, the vanished crown jewels from the short-lived Brazilian Empire, the Cardinal's diamond miter from the Episcopal Palace at Guayaquil—the man who got away with loot like that had one claim at least to continuing renown."

In spite of his personal antipathies, Gabereau was forced to admit that here was one who spoke with authority. Drawing his chair into the circle, he listened while Don Juan descanted further, on the vastness of the Ferrara treasure.

"Do you think that anyone will ever find that treasure?" inquired Yvonne, with a wee small voice, almost whispering from the thrill of wondrous tales.

"Of course, they will, my dear," answered Don Juan, with easy assumption.

"I'm not so sure about that," growled the Skipper.

"No doubt about it, sir," retorted Don Juan. "Somebody will find it, all right, and when he does he will have more power in his hands than many kings and emperors."

Yvonne was not the only one that was fired by his easy faith. When the stranger had finally gone, Gabereau went to his room, determined that very night to open the chart case and find its secret.

He had been a fool. Procrastination would never get him anywhere. What was all this talk about the seal, and the curse of a dead hand? What was it but the invention of a master mind to keep back fools and cowards?

After closing the shutter, and locking his bedroom door, Gabereau took the inner case from its hiding place, and without further ado was preparing to break the seal of the dead hand, when there came an unmistakable creak of some one walking warily in bare feet in the outer hallway.

With his fingers already clutching that fatal seal, a cold shiver passed through the Captain's body, and in sudden, awful dread he waited, as though some fiend were crouching at his door.

For fully a quarter of an hour, in paralyzed impotence, he sat there, while the bright moonlight flooded the room. Although he could not see what was without, he felt certain that eyes were peering at him through the keyhole.

Finally, not daring to tempt the situation further, he placed the case beneath his pillow, and spent the rest of the night in sleepless apprehension, starting up at every imagined sound, as though his bedroom itself were some beleaguered fastness.

The following morning at breakfast, he was in bitter mood, while Yvonne, across the table at the coffee, looked as if she too had missed much sleep.

Half through the breakfast, Gabereau burst out: "Who was the Spick that you brought around last night?"

“He’s the Captain of the *Ushuaia*, and I think he’s simply wonderful. You weren’t nice at all to him, Uncle Sprott.”

“Umph. What’s the *Ushuaia*, that white schooner that’s been lying in the stream for the past week?”

“No, she isn’t a schooner, she’s a private yacht,” answered Yvonne, unwilling to have anything but a grandee touch to the splendid Don Juan.

“Have you ever seen this Spanish guy before?”

“Yes, several times.”

“You’re not at all particular about your company, are you?”

“Why, he’s the most fascinating person I ever met.”

“He’s too damned fascinating.”

The wrathful Skipper brought his fist down upon the table with a crash that nearly broke the china.

“Now listen, Yvonne, don’t let me ever hear of your meeting that feller again. D’ye hear me?”

“Yes, I hear you.”

Yvonne’s proud head suddenly tilted upward, saucy nose, dimpled chin, supercilious eyebrows, alike instinct with high disdain. The roughneck Skipper somehow did not feel at home at sight of such lofty defiance. He could give categorical commands to a crew, but somehow this little Miss Independence was always flaunting him to his face.

With his first mandate already as good as repudiated, he inquired, “What’s that fellow doin’ snoopin’ around here, anyway?”

“I guess he’s got as much right around as anybody,” was Yvonne’s testy answer.

Much disgruntled, Gabereau went up on the back porch, and getting out his spyglass, trained it on the *Ushuaia*, the fair white schooner lying there like a painted ship in the calm blue of the inner harbor.

Studying her clean, clear lines, and her beautiful sheer, graceful as the swoop of a swallow, he was constrained to admiration; her designer had indeed called forth a thing of beauty. What took the Captain's eye was the blending of grace and strength. Here was no mere pleasure craft, but a storm bird in the truest sense, called forth to meet the grimmest testings of the ocean.

While the Captain was still gauging the mightiness of her spars, he saw something which caused his heart to go "phutt." Out of the vessel's foc'sle, there emerged a dark looking savage, almost naked, with copper-colored skin, and painted face. Rising to his full height, he towered above the deck hands, an unmistakable Yhagan giant.

CHAPTER XIV

Early Callers

GABEREAU was still fingering his spyglass with trembling hand, when Yvonne called, "Some one's here to see you, Uncle Sprott."

As he came down the stairs, there, seated before him in his front parlor, cool as an icicle, sat Yvonne's visitor of the night before. Beside him, Dirk Dugas smirked at his former Skipper with the assurance of a small boy thumbing his nose to a bully from safe security.

As he entered the parlor, what disgusted Gabereau most of all was the fact that Yvonne had joined the group, and was seated on the arm of a chair, prattling away to the strangers.

Turning to her darkly, Gabereau suggested, “You better go out, Yvonne.”

“Oh, no, let her stay,” pleaded Don Juan, “We mustn’t have any secrets between us, you know.”

“Secrets, what d’ye mean by secrets?”

“Just what I say, Captain Gabereau. You have been keeping a secret hidden away here in your house for the past twenty years.”

“What business is that to you?”

“That’s just what I’ve come to talk to you about.”

“Well, judging by the skunks that you keep company with, the less we have to say to each other the better.”

“I know, sir, you don’t care for Dugas, my mate here; but he happens to be my *alter ego* when it comes to that which is now the be-all and end-all of my existence. You asked me last night what my business was in South America; well, I might as well tell you plainly, in the Southern Ocean, in Arichat harbor, or wherever I happen to lay the keel of the *Ushuaia*, I have only one business.”

“And that?”

“To find the Ferrara treasure.”

“I guess you’ve bit off more’n you can chew, Mister Spick.”

“That remains to be seen, sir. At all events, I am not the kind of man to be deterred by slight obstacles.”

“Like myself, for instance,” growled Gabereau.

“Exactly. You will be a mere pawn on the board, sir, if you start to obstruct me.”

“You seem to be most confident!”

“Aye, and there’s nothing can stop me. I’d ride over my dead brother’s carcass, if he stood between me and the Ferrara fortune.”

In the eye of the speaker, at that moment, Sprott detected a fanatical light, as of a smoldering fire that might at any moment burst into a conflagration. He was not the easy fellow that he had at first appeared. Under the jaunty garb of the Corinthian was a heart that beat with one all-consuming purpose.

But Gabereau, a man of rock, begotten of the hardy brine, was not the kind to give because of threatenings.

“And so ye came up here this morning to bulldoze, did ye?”

Gabereau’s voice sounded sharp. His wrath was rising, but the other sat cool and debonair.

“Don’t lose your temper, sir. We are up here on a mission that calls for rationality.”

“I ain’t askin’ ye fer any insults in my own home, Mister Spick.”

“You are the one who appears to be doing the insulting.”

“What the hell are ye givin’ us? I’ll damn soon—”

The stranger’s hand was raised imperiously.

“Please cut out the swearing.”

“Wha’d ye mean?”

“Why, don’t you see there is a lady present?”

Sprott had always prided himself on his deportment before Yvonne. There was something mortifying in this rebuke.

Sensing a momentary advantage, Don Juan continued, “I can see, Captain, that my mate is evidently *persona non grata* with you; but waiving such trivial considerations, why can’t we come to a fair understanding?”

“Why should we?”

“Because the secret chart case which you have, by rights is mine.”

“How d’ye make that out?”

“I am the last of the Ferraras.”

It was easy for Gabereau to pooh-pooh this claim when advanced by Dirk Dugas, but somehow it carried now a ring of authenticity.

“You mean that you are their heir, eh?”

“Precisely. I wouldn’t be coming to you claiming the case if I wasn’t. All I am asking you, sir, is to be reasonable. Produce that case, and I will give you my promise of your own fair share of the reward.”

“My share of the reward. That’s generous of ye, ain’t it? But possession is nine points of the law, my friend, and what I have I’ll hold. If that there treasure is good enough fer you to chase all over the world after, I guess it won’t do no hurt fer me to take a hand myself.”

“You mean that you’d have the audacity to fit out an expedition on your own?”

“I always was a sky-high gambler, Mister.”

Here, Yvonne, who had been listening breathlessly to every word that passed, suddenly broke in, “But, Uncle Sprott, you surely wouldn’t hold that case, if it wasn’t yours.”

Turning ponderously in his chair, the big Skipper cast a baleful eye upon the interrupter.

"You just keep your oar out of this."

"But, Uncle Sprott—"

"Whir—umm—ph—um." Struggling with an overmastering rage the Skipper let out a terrific series of deep grunts, like a sea lion, coming to the surface.

"Not another word out of you, Yvonne. I'm master in my own house, and I'll have you know it. And as fer ye, me two skunks, that door over there which you come in through, is the hole you can take to get out of, and you git, as fast as God'lmighty'll let ye."

With the furious Skipper rising ominously, Dirk Dugas hastened to make his exit.

But Don Juan, refusing to be stampeded, backed away slowly, exclaiming,

"You wouldn't give us that case decently, and like a gentleman, so you may now bide the consequence."

CHAPTER XV

The Secret

GABEREAU went away that morning, telling Yvonne that he would not be back until late in the evening.

There was a schooner lying in the roads off Lennox Passage which was being put up for sale on account of an Admiralty claim. With reawakening of interest in such matters, the Skipper thought that he might as well take a look at this vessel.

He started out on foot for the village of West Arichat, planning to get there in time for lunch with his friend, Captain Paddy Mack, an old crony of the sealing days, who promised to put him aboard the schooner by motor boat.

About halfway on his journey, for some inexplicable reason, the Skipper had a presentiment that he should turn back.

In dogged persistence he still kept on, remonstrating with himself, aloud.

“God only knows what’s getting into ye these days, Sprott Gabereau. Seems ye can’t start out to cross over into the next parish without some kind o’ crazy ideas coming into yer head, sayin’,

“ ‘Ye better turn back, ye better turn back.’ ”

In spite of the efforts to reassure himself, the idea of something amiss began to grow upon him.

“It’s always that pesky case,” he complained; “first thing in the morning, last thing in the evening, and any time through the night. Never know when it’s goin’ to get ye. Damn thing’s worse than a crying baby. Sometimes, by gosh, I think I’d a bin wise if I’d taken the advice of Monsieur le Curé and chucked the thing into the sea.”

Then the thought of his rivals began to come to him, and with the spirit of emulation which they engendered, the chart case again took on its priceless aspect. The more Gabereau thought of the headlong Don Juan and his quest, the more his own desire was whetted, while still that inner voice kept urging him within:

“You better turn back! You better turn back!”

Finally, with an exclamation of disgust, as though he had ceased to be master of his own movements, he decided to postpone his trip to view the schooner, and directed his steps again toward his own place.

It was about noon when he got back home. All was quiet in the garden. With no one in sight, he entered softly through the kitchen. At first, there was no sound, and he had about decided that the house was empty, when a slight stir caught his ear from above.

In an instant he was on the *qui vive*. Tiptoeing to the landing, there came a stir as of somebody moving stealthily, followed by a slight undetermined note, that sounded like a piece of parchment being straightened out upon the floor.

Running noiselessly up the stairs, without slightest sound or knock to announce his coming, Gabereau burst suddenly into his own room.

As the door was being pushed back, a girl screamed; and there, stretched out on the floor before him, Gabereau beheld Yvonne, with the inner case, the case of mystery, lying open beside her. She was stretched at full length upon the floor, face forward, supporting her head with the weight on her elbows. Before her was an old piece of crumpled parchment, gray with time, pregnant with significance.

The girl had gone into a sudden paroxysm at the unlooked-for intrusion, but seeing that it was only her Uncle Sprott, she smiled up into his face with the utmost unconcern.

Gabereau stood for a moment aghast, as though his eyes deceived him. The secret of the inner chart case, that unknown something which he had feared unspeakably, was there reposing harmlessly beneath the pretty elbows of Yvonne. The Skipper really acted at first as though he

expected the thing to bite her; because of his preoccupation, the girl was delivered from a hurricane of wrath, to which she might otherwise have been exposed.

"What are you doing with that, Yvonne?" His voice sounded hollow, and tense.

"Just finding out what the black case had to say, Uncle Sprott."

"But don't you know better than that?"

"What do you mean, Old Snookums? I always liked rummaging through your things, and you never forbade me."

"But this is different."

"I know it is, that's why I like it so much more."

"And how in the world did you ever get the idea of that secret drawer?"

"By rummaging around, of course."

"But can't you read, my child? Didn't you see what was written around the case? Didn't you realize the curse that was there, sealed with a dead hand?"

"Pooh," said Yvonne with supreme indifference, "I'd been hearing everybody talk about this case, morning, noon and night, ever since the stranger brought that gold coin in the store. Then at nights you got acting so funny, that I had to take a wee peek in the keyhole to see what was the matter with you."

"Whirr—umm—ph!"

The old walrus let out a snort, but she ignored it, and continued, with most disarming frankness:

"You were so funny, Uncle Sprott, last night when you stood there in your nightshirt in the moonlight, with that case in your hand, I had to pinch myself to keep from laughing.

You looked just like a small boy in school who was scared that he was going to get a licking.

"I never saw you scared of anything in the world before, and I made up my mind right off, that I was going to open that case first chance I got. So here it is with its awful secret, a lot of gibberish that doesn't mean anything in the world, as far as I can see. Come, take a look."

Forgetting his accustomed heavy-weight manner, Gabereau was promptly down on all fours beside her, scanning the ancient gray parchment with hungry eyes.

He recognized at once the precise handwriting, done with india ink and quill in the same hand as the first, a masterpiece of conciseness. Succinct and to the point. For the Skipper at least there was no mistaking its meaning, as he read the words in a voice vibrant with suppressed emotion.

Top of Cape Horn.
Approach from Pacific side.
Lat. 55° 58′ 4″ S. Long. 57° 16′ W.
Landing, Dislocation Estuary.
Shingle beach on South affords protection.
Landing party haul up boats.
Ascent advisable E.N.E. side.
Summit to northward, facing lagoon.
Highest point of all,
In rent of granite rock.
(signed), *Andrea Ferrara.*

Under the signature appeared the accustomed seal of the Spanish crown.

On the opposite side of the parchment was a chart denoting the approach by sea.

"Do you know what that means?" inquired the Skipper, his eyes dancing with sudden madness.

"What does it mean, Uncle Sprott."

"It means that all we've got to do is to land on that shingle beach, and follow out instructions, and as your Spick friend said, we'll have more wealth than many kings and emperors."

With that, the staid and dour old Skipper, in an exultant rush, suddenly seized Yvonne by the waist and started dancing her around the room, all the time letting out whoops of joyous delight.

"And are you really going to go after the treasure?" panted Yvonne, the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them suddenly at her feet.

"Am I going!" exclaimed the Skipper, giving her a resounding kiss. "Why God bless yer soul fer opening up the secret. Now then, me Pretty, just watch the water boilin' in my wake. I'll hang me hat on top of old Cape Stiff before they've time to rattle down the riggin'. Whoop! Hurrah!"

Once again the Skipper was off in a whirlwind reel.

CHAPTER XVI

Fitting Out

CAPTAIN GABEREAU lost no time in preparing for sea. The news spread like wildfire that he had purchased the schooner *Quickstep*, one of the stanchest vessels of the Lunenburg fishing fleet, which he straightway rechristened the *Acadian*. The *Acadian* was especially strong, X braced

across the break, with nine sets of iron knees, built to stand any amount of driving and heavy weather. It was her blending of speed and strength that won the heart of Captain Gabereau.

Under the hands of skillful workmen, many changes in her appointments were made. The forecastle was extended to provide additional sleeping room for the crew. A galley was built below decks adjoining the foc'sle, giving ample accommodation for the cook.

A large dining and living room was built in aft, next the cabin, where the crew could enjoy their meals in comfort, and occupy pleasantly the long hours below, reading books and magazines or playing the sealer's favorite game of forty-fives. The vessel was bound on a long voyage, and the well-being of the crew was not to be overlooked.

When the *Acadian* came into Arichat harbor, one afternoon, everybody was amazed at the speed with which the changes had been effected.

Riding to her anchor in the stream, she looked like any ordinary fisherman, but on coming aboard many changes were noted: tons of ballast had been put in the bottom, and floored over to prevent shifting in heavy weather; steel tanks for fresh water were placed in the after end; stores and provisions filled every available corner, not occupied by spare sails, bags of salt, and extra spars and gear.

On deck, there were fewer changes to note, except that a large booby hatch had been provided to facilitate entrance to the hold in dirty weather, a new suit of sails had bent on, and all running rigging had been renewed.

On either side of the hatch, were nested four boats, eight in all, strong, rakish looking craft, eighteen feet long, four feet

wide, carvel-built, with more than the usual sheer line, each fitted with spar and sail, as well as two pairs of ash sweeps. A close observer would also have noticed in each boat, a long-handled gaff, two water-tight boxes, one for food, the other for ammunition. These boats appeared to be the center of attraction, for the old-timers of Arichat knew that their type was only used for one purpose. By this token, it was announced to all that the *Acadian* was bound for the Southern Ocean on a seal-hunting expedition.

Down in the cabin, coated with vaseline to prevent rusting, were racks containing Parker & Greener double-barrel shotguns, two for each hunter, ready for use when the sealing grounds should be reached.

While preparing for sea, Gabereau began to make his headquarters in an inn in the village called the Fleur de Lis. Here, in an upper room, behind closed doors, he held conferences with numberless strange characters that began mysteriously to appear from unheard-of outports.

As these visitors, one by one, flocked into town, they seemed to bring into the peace and quiet of Isle Madame, the turmoil and strife of another world.

The bar of the Fleur de Lis echoed to incessant brawls. Hitherto, Terrio the proprietor had been accustomed to close his bar at nine o'clock, for lack of custom. With the coming of this gambling, drinking, fighting and carousing set, he was often doing a roaring trade until the wee small hours of the morning.

The good folk of Arichat would have grown impatient with such company in ordinary circumstance. But here was something to be tolerated, nay more, to be welcomed with open arms, for the delectable hell's broth which Gabereau

had introduced into the town could be interpreted as having only one meaning, the South Sea seal, that dark splendor, precious as the golden fleece, was again calling forth the argonauts.

With the sealing business being revived, Terrio, an old reprobate, said, "Of course, ye expect to see these lads paint the port pink." But pink was too pale a color for robustious sealers, they painted the place crimson and vermilion. In their own expression, they "took the town to pieces and heard her tick."

Among those who came and went from Gabereau's upper room, were recognized more than one of the wildcat Skippers who had already lived great stories in the Behring Sea, defying the cruisers of the Czar and Uncle Sam, in order to poach on the forbidden zone for seals.

There was Wild Alec MacLean, who years before had burst upon the 'Frisco water front with his tremendous mustache, and started forth upon a career of far adventure. Finally, forbidden the flag of his own country, he had sailed off for the smoky seas, under the Mexican ensign.

There was Captain MacAuley, who once calmly invited himself to dinner with the commandant of the Russian guards at Commanderofski Islands, while his men took spoil of the herds.

There was Rory MacAskill, one of the imprisoned captains in the Russian henhouse at Petropavlovski, hero of Kipling's " 'Twixt the Devil and the Deep Sea," when the Russian cruiser *Zebioka* seized the schooners *Maria*, *Carmelite*, *Rosie*, *Olson*, and *Vancouver Belle*. MacAskill had twice been a prisoner of the Siberian authorities, and thrice had suffered confiscation.

The lure of gain was the perpetual loadstone which had drawn this international poaching fraternity into the zone of Russian reprisal. From the moment these fellows set foot aboard their craft, they were nothing less than pirates banded together to rob under arms, desperate adventurers all, and picked shots. Now, after years of peace, they were again answering the same call.

Down in the bar parlor of the Fleur de Lis, one heard great stories of the desperate nature of the sealing business, of hunters lost at sea adrift for days in open boats, of storms, and raids, and death from the rifles of the guards, of guerrilla wars at Copper Island, of chases, and marvelous escapes on the Northern grounds, of iron fisted seamen bucking into the Arctic gales, of wildcat skippers, of hard-bitten killers and vagabond crews.

Then, the yarns would shift to the Southern Ocean, to the fierce and stormy regions of the Horn, where men dared as mightily against the Roaring Forties as in the Behring Sea. There were yarns of tiny schooners, visiting lost islands, and Antarctic coasts where man before had never dared to sail. Always the priceless sealskin was the lure for desperate chancing.

After the sealing business had been so long in abeyance, it was small wonder that people began to wag their heads, to look significantly at the *Acadian* riding to her anchor in the harbor.

"Aye, she's after something more than seals."

At suggestions like this, Gabereau grew purple with rage.

"Of course I'm after seals, seals and nothing else but seals," he exclaimed sententiously.

Then, came the announcement that the *Ushuaia*, that white pleasure yacht in the harbor, was also preparing for the same quest.

At this news, Gabereau and his companions in the Fleur de Lis were more secret than ever in their comings and goings, while increasingly an air of stealth began to come over the preparations of the rival vessels. The *Ushuaia*, which for the week past had been lying alongside, at the battery wharf, cast off, and towed out into the stream.

Visitors had been frequent before, but now they were suddenly forbidden from either vessel. At all hours of the day or night a watchman was always warning off possible loiterers happening to be handy.

One of the *Acadian's* crew, who went down to the *Ushuaia*, under cover of darkness, to see how far they had progressed, came back with his dory almost awash, telling how some one aboard the *Ushuaia*, as he made fast to their moorings, had suddenly bored holes in his bottom with a high powered rifle.

"He didn't even warn me," said the righteously indignant boatman. "Just opened fire, the minute I grabbed ahold of his moorin' chains."

"And what did you do?" inquired Captain Gabereau.

"Sure, I started pullin' fer the shore. Thought I'd be drowned before I got here."

"Pity ye wasn't, ye bunglin' fool," was the Skipper's caustic rejoinder. "Don't ever come round and ask for a job from me again."

The man hired for the next job was blessed with more of the secret resource of the sealers.

With the *Ushuaia* openly preparing for the Southern Ocean, dark hints were let out that she would change her mind. That the yachting skipper was suffering from a brain storm, that he would never really carry out his purpose.

As the preparations of the *Ushuaia* went on apace, these hints were changed to open threats, and the tough company of Terrio's bar began to announce significantly,

"If that bloody Spick in his fancy yacht thinks he's followin' after us fellers, on this here sealin' expedition, why, he's got another think comin' to him."

One of the *Ushuaia's* crew, who happened to be there, wanted to know,

"Can't another vessel fit out fer the South Sea sealin' grounds as well as ye?"

"No, they can't," was the defiant answer, at which statement a score of couples at once started stepping it out, in the bar parlor, and doubtless would have effectually finished the Terrio joint had not Gabereau and three of his trusties burst down upon them from above, and cleaned the whole fighting mass out into the street.

The *Ushuaia's* men were still righteously indignant as they broke away, snorting,

"I guess we've got as much right in this sealing game as a bunch of Bluenose herring-chokers."

To which Gabereau replied, "You can tell yer Skipper that if he thinks he's goin' to start chasin' us across the ocean, he'll never git his craft outside this harbor."

CHAPTER XVII

Suspicions

A VILLAGE like Arichat was not the place in which a young girl could meet a strange man without having it noised about by all.

Out of deference to village gossips, Don Juan was cautious as possible, so as to avoid the breath of scandal, but trivial meetings, that might have passed unobserved elsewhere, were enough in Arichat to set all tongues a-wagging.

One evening, Paul came to call on Yvonne, at the accustomed hour, only to find her away, and Gabereau pacing the garden, swearing great oaths, and declaring what he would do to put a stop to this continuing defiance.

Paul was a tall, powerfully built fellow, the promise of physical prowess was in him, albeit undeveloped. As a clerk in a general store, he spent his days at a business despised by the strenuous Sprott, who was forever declaring,

"Behind a counter's no place for a man. Out to sea's where you ought to be, me lad, out there where they'll give ye blood and iron in place o' milk and water."

Drawing up before his nephew abruptly this night, the Skipper snapped:

"What's the matter with you, Paul, that ye can't hold this lass? What's the matter with ye, eh?"

"The fault is not mine," answered Paul.

"Whose is it, then?"

"Yours."

"Mine!"

Gabereau was thunderstruck, but Paul continued, "Aye, if you'd left that black case behind you, or if you had thrown

the cursed thing into the sea, nothing would have come between me and Yvonne. The case is the cause of all our trouble."

"That's a nice alibi for a lover that hasn't got backbone enough to put up his dukes and hold a girl against all comers."

"Yvonne is not the kind that you can hold that way, Uncle Sprott."

"Umph, that's the way I'd hold her. At the first peep of another sail upon the sky line, I'd wade right in and clean 'em up."

"It's all right for you to say what you would do, if you were in my place, but I notice that you yourself don't seem to have any success in making Yvonne follow your desires."

"She's a thankless little vixen," burst out Gabereau.

"Oh, no, she isn't, Uncle Sprott, she's just getting foolish about this gold, the same as you are, the same as almost everyone else in the parish; the gold has gone to the heads of everyone, and it's the gold that's stealing away my sweetheart."

"And how about that feller that she's snoopin' about with?"

"It's the gold that brings 'em together."

"You think so, eh?"

"Indeed, Yvonne told me that was all that made her go with the stranger."

"And you believed her?"

"I'd believe in Yvonne, no matter what happened."

"Goes to show what a fool you are, me boy. Little you know about women. I never seen the female yet I'd trust the

length of me nose with another man. Lying and deceit is the very life and breath of 'em; we are strong, they are weak, so they are forever planning how they can deceive us. It's as natural for a woman to lie, as it is for a man to fight."

"You are wrong when you say that," retorted Paul, with sudden fierceness.

But Gabereau merely raised his hand.

"Not so fast, young feller, not so fast. I know what I'm talking about, this time. You come up here to-night to meet Yvonne; she told ye she'd be here, didn't she?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, you took it for granted she'd be here, she lets you think that she's in love with you, still keeps on playing the old sweetheart game, just the same as she used to, and all the time, while she's luring you on, like some poor decoy, she's back o' the scenes carrying on a shameless affair with this snake in the grass from the Argentine."

"He doesn't look like such a bad sort; indeed, he must have the stuff in him."

"Why?"

"Because Yvonne likes him, and ye can't fool her when it comes to a man; she can look right through him, like a glass window; she knows a good sight quicker than you or me who's the sham and who ain't."

Gabereau threw up his hands in a helpless gesture.

"You think she's all angel, me lad, but you've got a thing or two to learn. Since you have such perfect trust in her, it wouldn't hurt for ye to know the kind o' company she's keeping. I've seen and heard things that prove the worst suspicions that we might have about her affair with this

damned Spick. Never seen nothing yet that talked the Spanish tongue that I'd trust with a lady, leastaways with an innocent little lass like Yvonne."

"But this fellow's not really a Spick, he came from Virginia to begin with."

"You mean he says so, but he can't bluff me, he's all Spick, I tell ye, and the lowest, trickiest kind at that."

Seeing that Paul was still unpersuaded, Sprott suddenly lowered his voice to a confidential whisper,

"Where was Yvonne when she disappeared so sudden, and didn't show up again till the morning? Where was she, then?"

Paul paled slightly, but did not answer, while the Skipper continued,

"Who was the man she brought home with her, last night, when she thought she'd find me away?

"Who was it that she was with, yesterday, till long after dark, up in the haunted house?

"Who is it that she's with, right now, in the office up there behind the fisheries store?

"You don't know, Paul, you don't know anything. But I'll tell who it is she's with in every kind of secret place, the whole town of Arichat knows it, if you don't—it's that damned cradle-snatching paramour of a Don Juan, and he's the feller she's with at this very minute."

As Gabereau hissed these words, with taunting accent, Paul suddenly lost that splendid calm, which always seemed to belong to him as a part of the very genius of the place in which he dwelt. At Sprott's insinuation, passion suddenly blanched his cheeks.

"How do you know he's up there now?"

“Baptiste told me, only just before you came.”

Paul did not hesitate. He spoke with deadly decisiveness,

“All right, then, let us get up there.”

Shooting the detested Don Juan in cold blood was hardly according to ethics of Sprott Gabereau. But now, on account of the wrath that was in his nephew, he felt that the Latin gentleman’s death warrant was as good as signed.

Paul Gabereau, the man in gray, who dwelt in the peace of this Acadian isle, was not above the primal passion that fights for a woman.

Under that calm, imperturbable exterior there slept the furies. Watching him in this moment, Sprott was confident of the result.

On the way, he offered his nephew a gun, but the other refused.

“By God, I wouldn’t rob me naked fists,” he said, between clenched teeth.

Arrived at the fisheries store, Paul was for bursting right into the place with bold defiance, but the wily Skipper cautioned that he had better spy out the land.

“Catch him in the act, then smite him down.” This advice added twelve months to the life of the man within. Murder would unquestionably have accompanied Paul Gabereau if he had come at Don Juan at that frenzied moment without forewarning.

At the other’s suggestion, turning aside from the direct attack, like a stalking lion, he followed the lead of his companion. As they came around by the back of the great dark building, a ray of light came from under the closed blind.

Drawing close to the window, both bent and listened intently, but could see nothing, hear nothing.

Paul was drawing off, as though to smash in the pane, when Sprott, always canny, put his finger to his lip as a sign for silence, and then, with infinite precaution, he started to raise the window.

As the opening gave a little, there came to them the low murmur of voices, then, in a breath of wind, the blind drew back ever so slightly. Paul caught a flashing glimpse of the scene within. Instead of the amorous picture which the evil imaginings of his Uncle Sprott had conjured up, he beheld Don Juan seated near the lamp at the table reading, and at the far side of the room, Yvonne, demurely listening.

There was nothing at all incriminating in this procedure, but what of the book!

Paul bent his ear and listened, what he heard was even more surprising than what he had seen. Don Juan was reading to the girl from one of Tennyson's poems, and then, as the two without still listened, they caught the words distinctly:

"Honor the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong,
Honor the King,—else wherefore born?"

At this, the consuming fury suddenly left Paul Gabereau with a gasp. Completely mystified, he turned away, muttering half aloud:

"My God, and who'd 'ave ever thought it!"

CHAPTER XVIII

PREPARATIONS aboard the *Ushuaia*, in spite of threats and warnings, were pushed with utmost speed. The *Acadian* had gained a considerable start, but Don Juan was a driver.

Gabereau was disgusted that he knew so little of the movements of his rival, which were carried on behind an impenetrable veil of secrecy. By good luck, one afternoon, he learned from a drunken sailor of the *Ushuaia*, that their whole crew were temporarily in quarters on Jerseyman's Island, on account of the changes which the carpenters were effecting in foc'sle and cabin.

This news was snatched up with avidity. That evening there was an unusually long conclave in Terrio's tavern. Those who were awake late were aware that the light was still burning in that upper room. All night a high wind came roaring down the outer harbor, filling the darkness with phosphorescent foam. In the morning, when the storm had abated, there was the *Ushuaia*, ashore on the sand, below Stan Binet's store.

Fifty yards to the right or to the left, she would have pounded to pieces. But as it was she suffered no serious damage, beyond the springing of a few seams.

According to the explanation which was at first given out, she had dragged her anchors.

But the holding ground in Arichat harbor was too good to allow any such mishap; while the finding of the body of the night watchman of the *Ushuaia* caused all the good folk of the port to shake their heads dubiously, and declare:

“Some one slipped her moorin’s in the night; that’s how she come to be ashore, and what’s more, the drowning was no accident.”

The natives were particular not to noise their suspicions abroad too loudly, for fear of any incriminating results, for the town itself was naturally in favor of the local vessel. Hence, mishaps to the foreign rival were looked upon as blessings in disguise.

On account of the uncertainty of the condition of his vessel’s keel, Don Juan had the *Ushuaia* run up on the marine slip.

He had intended to go up to Halifax for greater safety. But the ways there were already occupied, so placing an extra heavy guard around the *Ushuaia*, he had her hauled up at MacNair’s Cove, in the strait of Canso, a few hours’ sail from Arichat.

In spite of every precaution, however, during noonday lunch hour, while all hands were preoccupied at their dinner pails, a cloud of smoke was suddenly seen issuing from the schooner’s cabin. A minute later, another cloud of the same black smoke was rising ominously from the forepeak.

“Fire! Fire!” Screaming at the top of his lungs, Dirk Dugas was the first to give the alarm, rushing aboard the threatened vessel just as Gatty, one of Gabereau’s henchmen, was making good his escape around the far end of the slip.

For the next half hour, the *Ushuaia’s* gang, assisted by half the town of MacNair’s fought furiously. Twice the blaze was subjected in one place, only to break out anew in unexpected quarter, due to the slow smoldering fuses which Gatty had concealed all through her hull.

When the fire was finally conquered, the *Ushuaia's* crew were a picture of black, grimed fury, while dull oaths told of retribution that was waiting for the lads aboard the *Acadian*, when their turn should come.

Mingling Anglo-Saxon damns with the abjurgations of a foreign tongue, Dirk Dugas shook his fist in the direction where he had seen Gatty vanish, yelling:

"By God, we'll get you yet."

Down at Arichat, friends thumped Gabereau in the ribs, and muttered with a wink:

"Pretty good, eh!"

"What d'ye mean?"

"Slip his moorin's, then fire him on the ways, pretty good, by gosh."

Gabereau would smile tolerantly at this chaff, but his eye darkened when on every street corner he began to have it imputed to him, not merely that he was responsible for the foul play upon his enemy, but also that they were both fitting out for some ulterior motive beside the quest for seals.

Gabereau made short with all such suggestions.

It was Yvonne, herself, who finally faced him as to his real purpose.

A fortnight after the attempt to fire the *Ushuaia*, the Skipper had thought that he had put an effectual crimp in his rival. Just as they were finishing breakfast, there, with the sunlight glinting on her snow white canvas, was the *Ushuaia*, fairer than ever, ramping in through the Western Passage.

It was a clear, blue morning, late in September, with a booming wind, and a foam-laced harbor. Gabereau was gazing reflectively out of the seaward window, when

suddenly he caught sight of that billow of cloud piled heeling canvas. With a bone in her teeth, the glorious white schooner bore straight up the harbor, and came in under the lee of Jerseyman's Island, to her accustomed anchorage. There she shot up into the wind, let go her headsails, while the sound of her anchor running out floated with anything but musical sweetness to the ears of Captain Gabereau.

The Skipper wanted to swear, but on account of Yvonne he satisfied himself by exclaiming:

"Well, I'll be gol-ding-danged!"

"What's the matter, Uncle Sprott?"

"Oh, nothing. I just had a corn pinch me."

"You mean you just had a glimpse of the *Ushuaia* that nearly knocked the wind out of you."

"What are you talking about?" All the weight and dignity of two hundred and forty pounds was behind that exclamation, but the saucy little head that flung out defiance on the opposite side of the breakfast table refused to be impressed.

"You make me sick," the girl burst out, with a sudden fierceness.

"Whirr—umph—umph." The sea lion with submarine roarings started to come to the surface, but the girl this time was in no way to be deterred.

"Never mind making noises like that to mask the cheap feeling you have for yourself. Strutting up and down this town telling everybody that you are fitting out again for a sealing expedition."

"So I am."

“Well, there isn’t anybody in Arichat who is a big enough fool to believe that now.”

“Why?”

“Why, from the way you’ve been actin’ it’s plain as the nose on your face that you’re after something a good sight more important than seals.”

“And what might that be, pray?”

“You’re after the Ferrara treasure.”

“And what if I said I wasn’t?”

“I’d say you were a liar.” Yvonne shot out this last with utmost venom. “You men make me sick, you are so thick in your upper story, no girl or woman would ever make the mistakes you do.”

“Oh, no, of course not.”

“And the worst of it is, the thicker your heads are, the better opinion you have of yourselves. But I want to tell you right now, Uncle Sprott, I’m ashamed of you. Here you are starting out on a treasure expedition, after something that isn’t yours anyway.”

“Whose is it?”

“It belongs to Don Juan. That treasure is his, when it is found, and the clew to the treasure is also his.”

“That remains to be seen, my impudent young hussy.” Sprott’s temper was beginning to leave him.

Usually, when it came to fireworks he had nothing on the little vixen that sat opposite to him. But this occasion was different.

In a sudden white coldness, Yvonne refused to speak; she sat rather in silence, supercilious contempt in every line of

her fine features. From the power of her restraint, Gabereau and his dudgeon were suddenly stricken.

For some time the rough Skipper sat there, too much humbled to carry on the quarrel, too proud to admit himself in error.

He had never loved anyone in all his life as he had Yvonne; every hair of her golden head was precious unto him; there had been squalls and tempests, both were quick to wrath, but always after storm, the sunshine of forgiveness was the sweetest time of all, when the repentant girl would come to the repentant Skipper, climb upon his knee, put her arms about him, and with her cheek against his rough face, whisper in his ear:

"I'm so, so sorry, Uncle Sprott."

Suddenly abashed, subdued, Gabereau let his head fall, waiting for the girl to come with healing.

But this time, however, unlike the other occasions, she still sat in silent aloofness, her every attitude reminding the rough Skipper of the vast worlds that stretched between them.

For the first time in all his life, like a drowning man clutching for a straw, Gabereau began to take backwater, exclaiming in contrite tones:

"I'm so sorry, little one."

But enchanting walls of darkness still enwrapped her.

Gabereau bent his ear for the first whispering of love, looked to those dark eyes, for the first returning gleam of sympathy, but love and sympathy alike were vanished.

"What's the matter, little one, don't you care for your Old Snookums any more?"

“After the things which you have said about me, Uncle Sprott, pet phrases sit ill upon your tongue.”

Sprott found himself under a tumbling mountain, while those clear accusing words seared themselves into his very soul. “After some of the things you have said about me!”

In a sudden wave of humility, he wanted to go over to Yvonne and crave forgiveness, he would have crawled to her on his very knees, but the heinousness of that which he had imputed to her seemed to render him unutterably unworthy.

For some time, he sat there abjectly, the kettle singing away on the hearth, the clock ticking, the seaward window sending up its old familiar croon, the soft light of morning falling on Yvonne’s flaxen hair.

“Go to her on your knees,” some voice within was whispering. Sprott recognized the voice of his good angel. Almost persuaded, he listened for a hesitating moment. If he had followed that voice, heartstrings, strained and taut, might never have been broken.

Is it chance, or is it fate that gives a distracting glimpse from the window, when love is just ready to flee from the door? Looking over the golden glory of Yvonne’s bright head, just at that pregnant moment, Sprott caught sight of the sunlit topsails of the *Ushuaia*.

Out there, across wind-crinkled blue, another voice, not his good angel, called him. Answering to that other call, he passed out of the house, and turned toward the port, leaving darkness between himself and the most loving heart that he had ever known.

CHAPTER XIX

SPROTT GABEREAU left the supper room above Terrio's bar about midnight.

Throughout that day he had been especially busy. On account of the unexpected sight of the *Ushuaia* in the harbor, final preparations aboard the *Acadian* had consequently been rushed in frantic haste, and now, at last, everything was ready. His vessel had her clearance papers, and the morning's tide would see her dropping the Nova Scotian coast astern.

Gabereau had only one regret, that none of his own were to accompany him. That night Paul had again refused, declaring, "I belong to the soil of Arichat; here I will remain."

It was a night of inky darkness, relieved only by phosphorescent surf, marking in impenetrable gloom the meeting place of land and sea.

Gabereau picking his steps, walking warily as became such a night, fell to thinking of Yvonne, the first time she had entered his mind since morning.

With thought of her came a pang. Why had he allowed the treasure to come between them? Was Paul right when he said it was not worth the quest? No, no, that kind of talk might do for Paul, but not for him. With the roving blood, he was born to follow the lure. But why couldn't he take Yvonne with him upon this great adventure? Was she not also bound to dreams beyond the sky line?

Wrapped entirely with his own thoughts, Gabereau did not even hear a footstep; when, without the slightest warning, Quinquaig, the Yhagan Indian, suddenly loomed up beside him in the darkness, a pair of eyes, like black diamonds in the

night, peered close into his own. There was a warm breath upon his cheek, even before he had time to utter a cry his mouth was effectually gagged with a fist full of spun yarn. There was the sensation of a running bowline made fast about his arms and legs. In a sickening revulsion, he found himself being carried swiftly down a steep embankment, toward the line of fringing surf.

Gabereau expected to be pitched bodily into the sea. But when they arrived at the water's edge, he was conscious of a boat grounding there, while out of somewhere came the voice of Dirk Dugas, "Got him, all right, Quinquaig?"

"Aye, me got him."

Helpless, either to yell or fight, like a sack of potatoes, the Skipper was dumped into the bottom of an empty dory, while somewhere another boat was shoving off, then with a pull upon the dory's painter, and a bobbing motion, the tiny craft was towed seaward.

For fully an hour, without a word being spoken, there was the steady pull upon the tow rope, then the painter was cast off, while the great swells declared that they rode somewhere outside on the open ocean.

As his guideless dory was suddenly cast adrift, the voice of Dirk Dugas floated back to him through windblown tumult, with some taunting fling.

It was calm when Gabereau was first abandoned, but as time passed, by the increasing kick and lift of the dory, he was aware that wind and sea were alike rising. To remain helpless under such conditions would be suicide. With the instinct born of generations of seamen, Gabereau struggled in order to meet the rising challenge of the deep.

As he lashed and kicked against his bonds, the dory suddenly pushed her nose into a breaking crest, and came out with her bottom full of water.

This would never do.

The Skipper became more canny as he recognized the “Old Friend, Old Enemy” closing in upon him.

Lying in the slopping brine, sometimes almost submerged, he crawled toward the thwart, amidship, where, working with an upward motion, he began to chafe the rope across his chest. Where the mighty muscles of his shoulders bulged, there seemed to be an effective barrier. But painfully and unceasingly he kept at it, until at last, with the giving way of all his upper clothing, the ropes slipped up about his neck. In another instant he was free, free from his bonds, but not from the sea.

Without oar, or sail, tossed everlastingly, whither was he going?

As though in answer to this question, faintly from far away there came the bay of breakers. Somewhere, down under his lee, an iron bound coast was calling. No sound is more alarming to the mariner, and yet in that moment, Gabereau heard it as a note of joy.

Helpless as a tossing chip, from the first sound of those baying breakers, doubts and fears fled. The wind was inshore, and the sea would yet be cheated.

After the casting off of his bonds, Gabereau had no slightest warning until his dory struck with a terrific crash, shattering her bows like eggshell, while the racing seas carried her, jumping, bumping, pounding at the intervening barrier.

Nothing could be seen but flying spray, and foam, and surging swell, while along the starboard side large rocks, with huge seas breaking over them, were dimly discernible.

Quick as thought, Gabereau jumped from the shattered dory. Breakers reached out and bore him down, they mauled him like a tiger, but he kept his grip, dazed and wondering, and so tore himself from the clutches of the never-pitying sea.

The dawn was breaking by the time that he had finally climbed up over the outer rocks, and on to the firm land, with its welcoming earth, and its sweet-smelling grasses, a thousand times more sweet after breathing the pungent brine.

Climbing up to the highest point, Gabereau beheld in the dip of the hill a church spire, and a settlement, and knew he had come ashore on the outer coast, beyond Petit de Grat. Weary and wet as he was, with indomitable will he started out at once for Arichat.

Striking straight across the island, he passed through a wild, forsaken waste of granite rock, and bog, and moss; again and again his feet sank deep in the morass, but pressing on after several miles he came at last to the post road, which, dipping down into the valley, then twisting round, brought him suddenly into full view of the harbor, fairer than ever in the dawning.

But, at that moment, something caused the glad heart of Gabereau, so miraculously snatched from the deep, suddenly to forget its song of praise.

There in the lower harbor, off Jerseyman's Island, a looked-for sight was missing.

The *Ushuaia* had already sailed!

The rest of that journey to his home was for Sprott Gabereau a nightmare of dread and apprehension.

Before he had entered the house, Paul met him, pale anguish written on his face.

“What is it, lad?” he inquired huskily.

“Yvonne has gone,” answered Paul with a sob.

Still master, Gabereau pushed on as though he did not hear. All else might go, there was one thing only that he could not part with.

Rushing into his room, the Skipper opened the camphorwood sea chest. With trembling hands he turned to the hidden drawer. Then, suddenly, like a crashing of some mighty shaft, he sank into an abject heap, muttering, “My God, they’ve got the secret case!”

Part II

CAPE HORN

CHAPTER XX

A Delectable Hell's Broth

ONE hour after their discovery of loss of the black case, the schooner *Acadian* had broken ground, and taking on a splendid slant, was standing out past Jerseyman's Light.

Just as they were casting their anchor, Captain Gabereau was hailed by a nondescript gang who had been shadowing him for considerable time at the Fleur de Lis. Coming alongside in a boat, these fellows pleaded vociferously for a place in the foc'sle.

The Skipper was rather against taking them.

"We got twenty men aboard now. No room for any Dagos here."

"But ye're in fer some hot fightin', Skipper. The other vessel's sailed wi' twenty-eight before the stick. If it comes to dirty work, ye want enough to take care of yerself."

"That's right," assented MacLean the mate, known as "Wild Alec," who was standing by, looking over the crew with anything but favor.

"We ain't got none too many fer a man-o'-war, anyways."

"But how about room?"

"That's easy, double up a few of 'em. If the killin' starts, ye can't pick up no extras off the Horn."

"All right, then," the Skipper assented; but he viewed the foreign-looking recruits with anything but favor, as they came tumbling over the side.

"If we'd a-scoured hell with a fine tooth comb, we couldn't a got a more low-down, sneakin' bunch of curs."

"All the better fer the rough stuff," observed Wild Alec.

"Perhaps," assented the Skipper, dubiously, as he turned to replace the man at the wheel. It was always his custom to depend upon himself until they dropped the land astern.

Paul, against expectation, had joined them at the last moment.

When his uncle attempted to cheer him with a word about the treasure, he replied gloomily, "It's not that, it's something else I'm after."

Down in the *Acadian's* foc'sle, Paul now began to experience a sinking feeling at the pit of the stomach as he regarded the wild, hairy gang destined to be his bunk mates to the other side of the world. As the robustious fellows, in various stages of inebriation, sent up a howling discord of shrieks and curses, it seemed as though they had been gathered from the very dregs of Sheol. While one set up a strident love song, another was heard threatening to carve the heart and gizzard out of somebody.

The Dagos, who came aboard last, began to make themselves at home forthwith, dumping their dunnage into the nearest bunks, and helping themselves with alacrity to long swigs out of a jug of forty overproof rum, free for all, on the foc'sle table.

No one knew how the jug got there, but it certainly did its part to send the *Acadian* to sea in roaring style. With a twenty-five knot gale offshore, the sturdy vessel, under four lowers, went running before it like a stormy petrel.

Late in the forenoon, with the wind rising, and an ugly cross sea making, the Skipper bellowed, “All hands on deck, to reef the mains’l.”

Even upon a rum clouded brain, the voice of Sprott Gabereau sounded with the urge of doom. All hands replied to the order, except the Dagos, who, full of warm comfort from the jug, repaired to their bunks, announcing that they didn’t intend to get out “fer any Skipper this side of hell.”

Wild Alec gave them one warning, then shouted back,

“Them Dagos ain’t up yet, sir.”

“All right, I’ll fix ’em,” said Sprott. Spinning his wheel with sudden fury, he slapped his vessel’s bows into a cresting grayback, bringing a solid wall of water across the weather bow, and sending a perfect Niagara pouring down into the foc’sle, through the open scuttle butt.

In the next instant, the half drowned Dagos emerged from below, spitting brine, drenched to the skin, and shouting lustily.

As they emerged, Wild Alec met them with the toe of his boot, kicking them severally into the seething waist, while the Skipper admonished, “Now then, next time ye’r called aboard this vessel, turn out, or we’ll wash ye out.”

To the dip of the swell and the whistle of the gale, all hands were struggling manfully with reef points. All except the Dagos, who were still hanging back, surly and resentful.

Leaving the wheel to another, the Skipper admonished, “There’s a squall comin’, mind yer weather helm, and don’t let her gripe.”

Then, stepping lightly, in spite of his two hundred and forty pounds, he landed on the slackers, driving them to it, until they felt as though the vessel were lined with brass knuckles and dynamite.

At first, there was a snarling remonstrance, but as they were driven for’ard to the wet work in the waist, their impudence wilted, while the Skipper returned to the wheel, grunting,

“A cold bath soon knocks the fight out of some nations!”

By nightfall, a full gale was upon them. Listening to the storm-stripped, humming bolt ropes, Gabereau stood with exultant heart by the kicking wheel. Down there somewhere in the dark and wildering night, he seemed to be smelling out a trail, following like a bloodhound on the scent.

Once off soundings, the anchors were secured, and the *Acadian’s* nose was pointed to the eastward.

“We’ll fetch a ways across, and then let her run down the trades,” said the Skipper.

Every day a sharp lookout was kept for the *Ushuaia*, but there was no sign of her.

Every day brought its fights in the foc’sle, and fights on deck. A wild, hairy, bloody crew. Paul, with his peace-loving spirit, was rudely shocked. But Skipper and Mate alike saw that he stood up to his end.

When this or that uncouth sealer infringed upon the rights of the calm, peace-loving clerk, it was always the delight of his Uncle to pitch him into the fray, exclaiming, “Put up yer

dukes! Down there at Cape Horn, me boy, there ain't no chance fer nothin' else but fightin' men. Down there, nothin' goes but naked fists agin a naked ocean. And when ye come to Hell holes like Punta Arenas, ye'll find that a guy that ain't fit to fight, ain't fit to live."

While Captain Gabereau cultivated a battling spirit among his crew, and winked at continued personal affrays as conducive to warlike efficiency, he never for one instant tolerated the slightest breach of discipline from the crew in regard to himself. He was Captain, El Supremo, Lord Paramount on his own poop.

Most of the crew, from the Japanese cook to Wild Alec MacLean were indebted to the Skipper for favors in the old poaching fraternity. Yen, the cook, had on one occasion been condemned to death by the Siberian guard, as one of the crew of the *Mie Maru*. The faithful little Jap was never tired of declaring how Captain Gabereau had obtained his reprieve from the Russian authorities.

Faring southward, the *Acadian* carried a hard crew, bound together by a certain loyal adhesion to their Captain, bound together also by the lure of far-off treasure, for which they were willing to fight, to journey, to endure, unendingly.

There was only one hostile note aboard the sealing schooner, the gang of nondescripts, styled the "Dagos," picked up at the last moment. Shaking his head dubiously, the Skipper often muttered,

"Wish I'd left them sneakin', underhanded curs ashore."

CHAPTER XXI

The Affair in the Doldrums

RUNNING before the Trades, the *Acadian* tasted sea life at i best: clear, blue, halcyon days with leagues and leagues forever trampled down astern. In the 5th parallel of north latitude, the good breeze faded.

The dreary, drifting, heart-breaking grip of the Doldrums began.

Day after day, the sun rose like a ball of fire, shining unpityingly from a copper sky; night brought no surcease from consuming heat. All hands cursed fervently the windless furnace of the world. Without steerage way, the helmsman stood idly to wheel, while in twenty-four hours the vessel made perhaps only a bare mile of headway.

It was on their tenth night in the Doldrums, that Captain Gabereau, coming on deck in his pajamas for a breath of air, had his attention directed to a misty apparition barely perceptible against the blanket of darkness.

Bringing out his night glass, he studied it intently for some time, then snapping down his glass, he exclaimed half aloud, "My God, it's her."

At this involuntary exclamation, he started back, as though he had published some great secret. But every man on deck was asleep, everything in keeping with a sleeping ship and a sleeping ocean.

"What d'ye make out yonder?"

After a momentary studying through the night glass, the mate replied, "The *Ushuaia*; ain't no mistakin' it."

At this, both clasped hands, involuntarily.

"All right, Mister. Rouse out all hands, man four boats, doubled up, two hunters, and two rowers to each. Tell 'em, 'mum's the word.' Put out number five boat for ourselves."

Fifteen minutes later, the raiding party left the *Acadian*, as silently as though they were borne on a hidden tide.

Before leaving, it was agreed that they should follow the Skipper's boat which was to be the first to board the other vessel. As soon as the coast was declared clear, the signal was to be given for the rest to come over the side.

Along with Skipper and Mate, in first boat, were Paul and Yen, the Japanese cook. It was a kind of superstition on the Skipper's part to desire the faithful little Jap near him in a crisis.

As they rowed silently over the oily calm, Paul inquired, "What is it that you want over there, Uncle Sprott."

"We're going to get that black case back," was the subdued answer.

Paul had hoped that they were after Yvonne, and his heart fell.

"But, haven't you already read the secret?"

"Aye, but there is a chart on the back of parchment, showing landing, and exact location of treasure. Without that, we would be hopeless in our quest for the treasure."

"And what about Yvonne?" inquired Paul.

"We'll bring her along, too, if she wants to come."

Sprott already entertained his doubts in this particular.

When they were nearly alongside, the Skipper put up his hand as a signal for the other boats to hold back.

Before them, the yacht loomed up like some white winged specter in the night. Her running lights were burning, and the glow from the binnacle disclosed a dim figure lounging forward, but no sign of life appeared. Wheel and lookout

alike were evidently sleeping under the universal spell of a Doldrum night.

Coming up under the starboard quarter, Skipper and Mate vaulted lightly aboard. There, draped across the wheel, appearing almost uncanny in his attitude, was Quinquaig, the Yhagan Indian. One blow of a heaver, and this dangerous customer was suddenly harmless. While the Skipper laid him out quietly on the deck, and bound him securely, the Mate went forward to likewise attend to the lookout.

"Here's where ye and me get square, me bloody savage," muttered Gabereau, as he filled the Yhagan's mouth with sennit, to prevent any untimely alarm.

A moment later, MacLean returned, announcing, "I give that there lookout a bump on the head that'll close his yap fer a while. Coming back, I slid the bolt on the foc'sle hatch, that'll keep three quarters of 'em out o' the scrap."

"That's good. Now then, tell the boats to draw alongside, and let the sealers come aboard."

"We ought to be able to handle it alone, now," opined the Mate.

"I'm not taking any chances—too much at stake. Bring 'em aboard."

While the Skipper was still making his dispositions without, he did not notice Paul slyly, on all fours, creeping into the *Ushuaia's* cabin.

In Paul's mind there was only one idea. Somewhere within that cabin was the one who was dearer to him than life. Forgetting all else, he started on his one and only quest. Within, in the first stateroom, the steward was snoring away. On the opposite side was the pantry, then the officers' mess

room. Creeping further along, Paul came out into the chart room, which loomed before him like a well of blackness.

There was no light burning anywhere in the after section. Feeling his way straight across, he opened a door at the far end, which led into the lazaretto. Coming back into the chart room, he went over to a stateroom to starboard from which a light was streaming. Opening the door silently, he stole across the threshold. The place was lit by an electric lamp, and there, on the bunk, was the sleeping form of Don Juan.

Overcome with curiosity, Paul bent over to study his face; the highborn patrician cast of countenance, the hawklike nose, the sensitive mouth, the strong dominating chin, which created a kind of confidence. But in repose, he looked older far than Paul had at first imagined.

What did Yvonne see in one of such ripe years? The bond between them could not be the affinity of youth. It could not be love. It could not be anything else but the treasure.

With such thoughts, Paul was turning absentmindedly to continue his quest, when, with vast clatter, he knocked an adjacent chronometer on to the cabin floor.

Awakened by this sudden din, Don Juan opened his eyes, gazing vacantly for a moment, then as recognition stole over him, the lids began to close menacingly.

“What are you doing here?” the challenge came with sharp staccato note. At the same instant, without warning, he leaped upon the intruder.

Surprised, and overwhelmed, before the unexpected attack, Paul went over backward, the Don gripping him by the throat, strangling him like a dog.

“What are you doing in my stateroom?”

It was the loss of breath, and the instinct for preservation that finally scourged the slow-moving, peace-loving Paul into whirling action.

Doubling up his knees, he caught his adversary fair in the stomach, thus gaining momentary freedom.

But all Paul's agility and strength seemed to have wilted, from a knock on the head, received in his backward fall.

As though he were a dog, and as such worthy of no better treatment, the Don again started to reach for his throat. Paul pawed the air, like a kitten in the clutch of a hound. His arms and legs swayed impotently, his breath gurgled. With everything going black, suddenly, the door crashed in, and the giant Sprott precipitated himself upon the victor with cyclonic force.

Sprott landed just once, and it was all over; the Don lay stretched there, as stiff and cold as Quinquaig on the poop.

Ignoring his nephew, who was rising groggily, Sprott at once began to ransack the locker.

He was prepared for a long hunt, but against all expectation, there in the first drawer which he opened, appeared the much coveted chart case with its pregnant Ferrara crown.

Letting out a whoop of joy, the Skipper started for the door.

"Come on, come on, this is all we want! Let's get out of here."

Paul was starting to obey, when a horrified shriek detained him. There, on the threshold, in a pink kimono, stood Yvonne, gazing down in agony at the prostrate figure of the Don.

"Oh, oh, what have you done?"

"Yvonne! Yvonne!"

Paul rushed toward her expectantly, but she recoiled at his approach, then turning deathly pale, she shuddered, gasping, "Don't touch me."

"But what is it? What is it?"

"Oh, you brutes, you cowards," she gasped with a flood of tears, pushing past them and kneeling down, she began with utmost affection, to raise the head of the unconscious Don.

Completely ignoring her, Sprott Gabereau bent and patted her on the shoulder, saying soothingly, "Come on, little one, aren't you coming with us?"

"No, never! never!"

Then seeing a gash in the Don's head, she burst into a flood of tears, crooning, "Oh, the brutes."

In a daze, Paul suffered himself to be herded out, and remained more or less impervious to all succeeding happenings, until they were back again aboard their own vessel.

CHAPTER XXII

The Seal Hunt

EARLY in November, the *Acadian* was in the Southern Ocean, where seals might daily be expected. Still holding steadily to his course, the Skipper, with the hunting instinct in his veins, could not withstand the temptation to keep a bright lookout for possible game.

He and Wild Alec had disagreed over this, as the Mate from past experience feared possible legal complications.

“We’re after something a blame sight better than pelts, just now, Skipper, and my advice to you is to lay off the seal hunt till after we land the treasure.”

“I agree with you in the main,” assented Gabereau. “But, in case we run across a flock o’ good skins around here, there ain’t nothin’ against puttin’ our boats over and pickin’ up a few odd thousand dollars, is there?”

“Wouldn’t be no harm in the days when you used to be sealin’, Skipper, but times has changed since then.”

“Changed be damned.”

“All right, I’m only tellin’ ye. Don’t forget the *Agnes Donahue* seized at Montevideo, and classed as pirate, fer havin’ a load of pelts aboard.”

“But they can’t interfere with me out here, we’re outside the limit.”

“That won’t cut no ice with them guys. Just let some one spot ye, and lay the information, and then, one o’ these Spick gunboats will be out to do the rest.”

“Ah, you’ve spent so much time in Russian jails, that they’ve got yer wind up. This ain’t the Smoky Seas, and if any seals come my way, you bet yer sweet life I’m goin’ to take a chance.”

“All right, I warned ye,” muttered Wild Alec, with pious unction, turning on his heel, hoping nevertheless that he might have just one more fling at what the dashing members of his fraternity styled “the greatest hunt.”

Their chance came without delay. Early the following morning, from the masthead sounded the cry, “Seals on the port bow!”

Immediately there was a rush from cabin and foc'sle, while Captain Sprott bellowed, "Number one boat over."

No engine crew answering an alarm of fire were quicker than those sealers. Tackles were manned, and in a jiffy the boat was alongside, guns and ammunition were passed down, and Wild Alec and his steerer were away.

From the masthead, in that same instant, came another hail, "Seals on the starboard bow."

Quickly followed the order, "Number two boat over."

This was answered with a shouting chorus from the deck hands tailing on to the falls.

Within an hour, all the eight boats of the *Acadian* had taken the water, and joined in the hunt; while the vessel under shortened canvas, with only the Captain, Paul, and Yen the cook, remaining aboard, was kept jogging within easy distance, to pick up the hunters when night came on.

Occasionally, the welcome sound of a gun came to those on board, and Gabereau knew that seals were being taken, and there would be rich pelts in his hold before nightfall.

All through the morning, the Captain was in excellent spirits, the possibility of gain, of any kind whatsoever, was for his grasping nature the purest delight.

Coming out on deck, after the midday meal, whistling a tune, snapping his fingers, and stepping in fine fettle, he came up to relieve Paul at the wheel. The sight of a gray mist, on the horizon, caused his carefree face to suddenly take on a graver look.

"Fog making up to the southward," he grunted.

"Goin' to signal 'em to come in?" inquired Paul.

"No fear."

"But ye may lose 'em!"

"Not if I know anything about it."

The fog thickened, until the *Acadian* was wrapped in an impenetrable wall of glistening gray. In dripping oilskins, the Skipper stood to the wheel, while for'ard, they were sounding the patent fog horn.

With eye and ear tuned to every slightest change of wind and weather, the Skipper was continually keeping himself aware of the possible position of his men. With all bearings vanished in an impenetrable fog, he was still the master, the guardian of his own. His was that mariner's uncanny sense, sufficient, and far-reaching, on which the lives of men depended.

As the afternoon wore on, the Skipper began to note with uneasiness that a strong current was running to the northward.

"Make it kind of bad fer some of 'em comin' back," he muttered.

Some of the boats ranged miles away in their search. There was now very little wind, not enough to enable them to step their masts and sail back to the *Acadian*.

"Be a long hard pull against that current. Guess I better call 'em in.

"All right, then, Cook, fire the swivel."

The swivel was a small brass cannon, mounted on the vessel's deck, and was a predetermined signal when fired for all hands to cease from the hunt and return to the parent vessel.

For the next hour, at repeated intervals, the gun was fired, and then, out of the fog, came the first hail, and a boat

loomed up from the mist.

"What luck, boys?"

"Got five skins."

"In good condition?"

"Aye, in the pink."

"Bully for you."

Singly, and in pairs, they returned, while the toll of seals kept mounting, until they had a grand total of over forty skins in all, and what was better yet, the mate's boat brought in a couple of sea otters, rarest variety, worth at least two hundred guineas apiece.

Before dark, seven boats were safely alongside; but now, with the night well upon them, the Skipper began to have misgivings regarding the last hunter.

"Who was it?"

"Two of the Dagos."

At any other time, uncomplimentary remarks would have been made, at the mere mention of these foreigners; but now, humanity blotted out antipathy, and no matter how they were regarded as mess mates, lost out there somewhere on that cold ocean, theirs was a universal call.

It was at this juncture that the skill and experience of Captain Gabereau were brought into play. By carefully calculating the strength of the current and the drift of his vessel he made use of what little wind there was and headed the *Acadian* in the direction he thought the missing boat should be.

The entire crew remained on deck, straining their ears to hear an answering shot from their mates, who were

somewhere near, but who might easily be lost in the fog and darkness.

Hour after hour passed, the gun being fired and the patent fog horn blown regularly. The suspense increasing, as they were hundreds of miles away from land, out of the ordinary route of ships, and if not picked up that night, the chances of doing so on the morrow were much less.

As the hours dragged by without sight or sound of the missing men, a feeling of hopelessness began to take hold of the crew, but "never say die" was the spirit of their Skipper. When the hand at the fog horn began to weary, he sang out,

"Keep her goin', there, keep her goin'. Dunno what minute we may be on to 'em."

Once, from for'ard, Paul sang back, "Starboard your helm."

As the Skipper brought her up to the wind, all hands peered intently into the wall of glistening night, but could distinguish nothing but wraithlike shapes of the fog.

"What did ye see?"

"Looked like a boat, dead ahead, but guess it was nothin'," came back the disappointed answer.

Shortly before midnight, Yen the cook, blessed with the best ears aboard, suddenly cried out, "I thought I heard a gun."

"Where away?"

"Over the weather quarter."

All hands strained their ears in the signified direction, without result.

"Pooh, I guess they're a couple o' false alarms."

"Them two's got wheels in the belfry."

It began to look as though Yen in his anxiety was the victim of hallucinations.

The vessel, meanwhile, was reaching ahead, and the swivel gun was again fired. As the boom died away, suddenly out of the impenetrable mist, rang out two shots, in quick succession.

"A-h-o-y there, A-h-o—y."

At the unmistakable challenge from the darkness, a mighty shout went up from the *Acadian's* deck, which reached the anxious hands in the sealing boat.

By a little maneuvering on the part of Captain Sprott, the missing boat was soon brought alongside, and the two occupants came bounding over the rail. Yen, the cook, took them into his keeping, and soon a bountiful hot supper was spread before them, while the *Acadian* was again laid upon her course.

The Skipper, weary from his ceaseless vigil at the wheel, saw the watch set, and after descending into the cabin, was just preparing to turn in, when there came a knock on the companion slide.

"Hullo."

"You down there, Skip?"

"Aye."

In the next instant, Baptiste entered the cabin, carefully shutting the slide behind him.

Approaching the Skipper's bunk, he gazed furtively about.

"Anyone else in here?"

"No, an' what's on yer mind?"

"I seen somethin' to-night, Skipper, that's got me kinda creepy."

“Spit it out.”

“Well, I don’t like the actions o’ them two Dagos since they was picked up.”

“What’s the matter with ’em?”

“May be nothin’ but imagination,” said Baptiste, with apologetic tone. “But, I didn’t like the way them two came over the side. Did ye notice anything strange.”

“No, I was keeping an eye to the boat, and didn’t have no time fer lookin’ ’em over.”

“Well, I noticed ’em particular like, and I’ll tell you they didn’t come aboard, sir, like men what was dog weary, as had been lost fer hours in an open boat.

“That was the first thing that got me suspicious like. Then, after their supper, I seen the whole o’ that Dago gang whisperin’ and powwowing together in their own tongue, as if there was some great doings afoot.”

“Them foreigners is always up to shines like that; they’re born crazy.”

“That’s right enough, Skipper, but how are ye goin’ to explain the spry way they come over the side?”

“Feelin’ so good to be back home again.”

“I don’t agree with ye, there. These beggars ain’t got any guts anyway, as we both knows. One four hour watch in stiff weather is too much fer ’em, and I’m a-goin’ to tell ye, Skip, if they was all that time in an open boat, they’d a bin damn near dead when they come aboard.”

“And what in the name o’ common sense are ye drivin’ at?” said the Skipper with a yawn.

“I think them spying greasers was visitin’ of some one while they was away from here, to-day.”

“Nonsense, how in the world could that happen?”

Baptiste, glancing again about the cabin with furtive look, lowered his voice to an awed whisper,

“Because, I think I seen another vessel, out there this afternoon.”

At this, the Skipper dropped his casual manner. In an instant, he was all attention.

“When was this?”

“ ’Bout the middle o’ the afternoon watch, just when the fog was shuttin’ in good and proper. I heard our swivel somewhere down to looard, and then, seemed to me up to weather I caught sight of another schooner hove to. I yells out to Barney, who was rowin’ with his back to her, to look round, and next minute, in the fog, neither o’ us could see nothin’.

“Barney said I was dreamin’, and I wouldn’t a said no more about it, if I hadn’t had my suspicions worked up by what I’ve seen since them greasers has come aboard. That’s why I thought I’d better tell you, Skip.”

“You did the right thing, me man. Never know what’s comin’ from a gang like that. I was a fool ever to have shipped ’em. Tell the mate to come down here.”

When Wild Alec entered, the Skipper told him of Baptiste’s suspicions.

“Looks to me as if them Dagos has been up to some dirty work.”

“Wouldn’t put it past ’em.”

“Did they get any seals to-day?”

“Nary one.”

“The only boat that didn’t bring back some pelts?”

"Yea, they was the only one."

"Well, they was up to some hellery, out there, no mistakin' it. See that they are watched sharp from now on, Mister."

"Leave it to me."

When the mate had gone, Gabereau arose, took the fatal chart case from a drawer and placed it under his pillow, together with a loaded revolver, and then, weary of the sixteen-hour vigil by the wheel, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

Short Shrift for Traitors

PAUL GABEREAU had the "grave-yard" watch, that morning, from four to eight, so called because at that time one's vitality is lowest, and it is hardest to keep awake.

The man at the wheel was steering full and by, while, ever and anon, Paul passed foc'sle to the break and back.

Finally, he sank down in the lee of the windlass, shivering from Antarctic winds, very different from the balmy kiss of the Trades.

The night was remarkably still, and the vessel, with sheets well off, was rushing through unrelieved blackness.

With teeth chattering, Paul muttered half aloud, "What a beautiful night for a murder!"

As though in answer to his gruesome suggestion, came the sound of some one tampering with the foc'sle slide, and in the next instant, Gomez, leader of the Dago gang, emerged, followed stealthily by his villainous associates.

Unaware of Paul's presence, the five of them clustered on the for'ard side of the companion, so as to be out of sight of the wheel, and conversed together in subdued tones.

"I got the mate fixed all right."

"How d'ye know?"

"Doped his cocoa at midnight, when he was muggin' up by the shack locker."

"He generally takes a look on deck just before the dawn, but he won't trouble us this mornin'."

"How about de wheel and lookout?"

"Sandbag 'em, an' do it quick."

At this suggestion, all hands trooped aft, evidently expecting to find both members of the watch upon the poop. Following at safe distance, Paul was in time to see Gomez suddenly spring upon the helmsman, before he had time to utter a sound.

As they could find no trace of the lookout, they concluded that he was in the cabin, and Gomez ordered:

"Now then, swing out de boat, and don't make no noise about it. Take yer time, dere won't be no one showin' his peep on deck fer another hour yet. Bunglin' always comes trying to do a job too fast."

When the sealing boat had taken the water, some one inquired,

"And how about de Skipper?"

"You leave him to me. I'll do him up quicker than greased lightnin'. Then, soon as I get me hands on that there chart case we'll be ready fer a get-away."

Still slouching in hiding, on the other side of the after house, Paul heard the gang moving for'ard, while Gomez

himself stole softly round to the companion, and started to fumble with the catch.

Just as he threw the slide back, preparatory to entering the cabin, the Dago was aware of some one leaping for him from the weather side. In the next instant, with an ugly snarl, he went down under, while the cabin slide, which he was holding, crashed off its hinges with a frightful clatter.

The crashing of the slide was like a general alarm.

Round from the other end came the rest of the Dagos, wondering how their strategy had miscarried. In an instant Paul was fighting the whole gang single-handed; but, it was a different Paul from the soft clerk of Arichat. Already his thews were setting into iron, while out of the calflike pacifist was emerging the dangerous fighter.

As Gomez rushed him, a vicious kick in the groin stayed his charge.

Crack!

Bang!

Crack!

Paul's blows landed neat and clean upon the ugly faces of two other gangsters.

"Come on, ye dirty vermin. Come on!" he taunted. From the first taste of a good old Anglo-Saxon drubbing, the greasers hesitated.

Entering into the intoxication of the fight, Paul daringly started to rush them backward across the deck, but in this he had forgotten the low-down tactics of his foe.

For a moment they feinted, as though to give way before him, and then as he came on, Gomez suddenly pulled out something from his hip. A silver streak in the moonlight, and

his knife descended. Paul ducked, but not quite soon enough, and missing his breast, the dirk carved an ugly gash across his shoulder.

There was a sharp pain, a fainting sensation, then, in a burst of courage, as he swayed unsteadily, Gomez started to close in upon him, snarling, "I'll rip the bloody tripes out o' yez fer this."

Weakening from his wound, with the whole horde closing in upon him, things were looking desperate for the lone-hand fighter. With a terrific lash of his sea boot he knocked Gomez back, as he tried to grip him by the throat.

The leader's knife was raised again, when the massive Skipper was momentarily framed in the companion. What he saw was an instant call to action.

Picking up an iron belaying pin, that was lying on top of the after house, the Skipper caught Gomez a terrific blow in the back of the head, crashing in his skull like eggshell. The leader of the gangsters dropped in his tracks, while the rest of the greasers, in horror at the doughty avenger, suddenly started to flee toward the waist.

Meanwhile, roused by the uproar, the hands were beginning to streak up from the foc'sle.

"Head 'em off, there," yelled the Skipper.

Like a bunch of wild steers, they were gradually rounded up, and brought to, in the waist. Still holding them at bay, Captain Gabereau chanced to look down and caught sight of the boat, which they had already lowered away into the water.

"What's that boat doin' over the side?" he thundered.

"It wasn't hauled in, when we come aboard," wailed the belated pair.

“Like Hell, it wasn’t. I seen it nested wi’ me own eyes,” said Baptiste LeBlanc. “And besides, that ain’t their boat anyway.”

“What boat is it?”

“That’s number one, theirs was number eight.”

Turning with a sharp incisive note, the Skipper commanded,

“Get that boat swung in again.”

All hands rushed to obey, but the Skipper detained them.

“No, this is their job. Let ’em do their own dirty work. There’ll be no more o’ this business o’ white men helpin’ greasers.”

When number one boat was securely nested on its accustomed chocks, the Skipper sang out,

“Now then, you lyin’, sneakin’, thievin’ sons of Belial, cast off the lashings o’ number eight.”

The greasers hung back with a snarl.

Swaying his belaying pin, Sprott advanced upon them.

“Did ye hear me?”

To drive home the order, he gave the nearest gangster a resounding crack across the shoulder blade, causing him to yell with pain.

“Jump to it, or I’ll smash every bone in yer skulking carcass.”

At this, they lost no time in obeying, and without further ceremony, the Skipper ordered, “Now, then, into that boat with ye.”

A scream of horror rose at this ultimatum.

“It’s murder!”

“We ain’t goin’ out there, alone, to-night.”

“That’s where ye was plannin’ to go, and now, by God, ye’re goin’ to carry out yer plan. Over with ye, and no more o’ yer chin music.”

As the gangsters still held back, in dread of the vast night, and the inky sea, the Skipper suddenly grabbed the nearest of them by the neck and thigh, and lifting him like a sack of meal, he sent him crashing down into the sealing boat, smashing the after thwart from the force of his impact. While he lay there, in a senseless heap, Sprott rushed the other three, who lost no time in scrambling over the side into the bobbing craft.

When the four were safely aboard, the Skipper sang out, “All right, then, pitch that corpse in with ’em. They can take him along for beefsteak.”

Some one pitched the body of Gomez unceremoniously into the boat, and the Skipper bellowed, “Cast off the swine!”

As the tiny craft vanished into the starlit ocean, Baptiste exclaimed, “That’s a good riddance, but wasn’t ye a bit hard on ’em, Skipper?”

“Not half as hard as they’d a bin on ye, if they’d a got a chance at yer throat.”

“But, it’s pretty bad to turn ’em loose, to be lost upon the trackless ocean.”

“Lost, Hell! They’ll soon hear their own Spick tongue again.”

“What, away out here at sea?”

“Sure, look.”

Baptiste looked, and there, far up to weather, a rocket suddenly shot up, like a yellow trailing snake, into the

darkened sky.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Iron Door

PUNTA ARENAS, the most southerly outpost of civilization, stands as the warder of the Never Never Country.

The Argonauts must have had this haven as their ultimate port of call, when they fared forth for the golden fleece.

Ulysses must have breathed the spirit of this place when he left the droning fireside "to seek, to strive, to find, and not to yield."

The Poet must have gazed from the hilltop of this town when he sang of "something lost behind the ranges."

Beyond Magellan's Straits, is a region of stupendous scenery, in a land so remote that it will always be preserved against the encroachments of mankind. Stark cliffs, ancient glaciers, Antarctic beaches form as it were an iron door for this forbidden realm. Punta Arenas, facing southward, beholds always the challenge of that fast closed door.

Here, in the Roaring Forties and the Shrieking Fifties, is the home of the gales, where the everlasting Westerlies are begotten.

Here, the weather outerlies of a continent stand defiant to the ocean's uttermost in fury. Here, winged with thunder, crash the league-long graybeards of Cape Horn. Here is the fiercest meeting place of land and sea.

Across the mountain cliffs of Tierra del Fuego, the hand of God has written, "Thus Far—No Farther." And yet, beyond

these frowning and forbidden forelands, Gold, Mystery, and Adventure still sing their siren song.

Punta Arenas was born out of the lust for far-off gain. A penal colony murdered its governor and started to answer the lure beyond the mountains. The end of their story was twenty-four yardarms on a full rigged ship, and a man hung at every yardarm.

There were the Yankee skippers, who after treating their crews to a living hell afloat, "ran 'em ashore," at Sandy Point, to escape paying to them rightful wages. There were Gauchos, who quitted the ranges, to look for the "pay dirt." There were sealers and whalers, who quitted the search for pelts and blubber, for the "nuggets as big as kernels of corn."

There never was a more robustious and daring Gold Camp than this town flying the tricolor of Chile, referred to in state papers as "La Colonia de Magellanes."

Neither Australia nor California, in their roughest days, afforded the dangers, nor did they make the showings of gold —real placer gold for the poor man to dig—that were offered by the gold diggings of Cape Horn.

It might, indeed, be truly said that every second man in Punta Arenas at this period was after gold. But in the words of one of the argonauts, there were many more skeletons of dead miners than authentic records of wealth acquired in Tierra del Fuego; while those that got away with the dust generally left it in the Cape Horn metropolis. For Punta Arenas was to this region what 'Frisco was to California, what Virginia City was to the deserts of Nevada.

There were a hundred licensed bars in the town, run by a hundred women, for the publican business here was entirely in the hands of the fair sex.

During the daytime, it was the custom of these saloon owning ladies to sit in front of their establishments, knitting and exchanging remarks with the passers-by.

Why so many young widows? one might inquire.

Go down to the mole and see a twenty-five foot catboat sail away and disappear around by Mount Sarmiento, a catboat sailing out to meet the worst of Cape Horn weather!

Five or six months pass. The bars begin to rumor that the *Rippling Wave* is due again.

Women on the beach begin to scan each sail. Still other months pass by, months of fruitless waiting, and fruitless watching. No word ever comes back of the ill-fated *Rippling Wave*, and one by one the waiting women on the beach turn to the saloon business, and swell the numbers of the licensed bars.

Everybody in Punta Arenas had done his part, or her part, to swell the prospectors' army, answering the unrestrainable longing for wild adventure, and that kindred longing to find the promise of great fortune.

Here was a town where it did not do to inquire too closely into one's past. Jailbirds, murderers, assassins, conspirators, and bad men from all the world were gathered here. Too much curiosity had often ended with twelve inches of cold steel, invariably cold steel, because the knife was preferred here to the six shooter.

It was well to lay off a man's past in Punta Arenas. You were fairly safe to venture on his future, which was the quest for gold. But to say that is not enough, while they sought the placer gold of the Horn, which often netted hard workers as much as ten and twenty dollars a day, they were far from satisfied with such reward, and for every miner, and indeed

for every bar lass, as well, Punta Arenas always found its greatest dreams gathered up in the fortune of Andrea Ferrara.

It was on this Sandy Point itself, half a century before the town was born, that the old pirate used to make his base.

When he came back to bury his treasure, this was the last point that he touched, and then, after the job was done, back here he came for ballast.

Of course, with such tradition, the town was alive with rumors. Arichat talked of the Ferrara treasure as a fairy story for the fireside. Punta Arenas cherished the tradition as a living challenge to forth-faring and endeavor.

Ask any miner loafing about the bar, "Were you ever out hunting for the Ferrara treasure?"

Watch his eyes flash as he answers, "Was I? I'd like to have the pay fer all the months I've spent o' the trail o' that pirate gold."

"And have many others been after it?"

"Every man that goes minin' has taken a whack at it."

CHAPTER XXV

Disposing of the Secret

KNOWING Punta Arenas as the inevitable spider's web of Cape Horn gold seekers, Wild Alec was against the *Acadian's* putting in there as a port of call.

"But how are we going to dispose of our sealskins, if we don't reship 'em?" remonstrated the Skipper.

"Dunno, but there's a good place to steer clear of, Skipper. Las' time I was in there, seemed to me the whole colony

wasn't more'n a cable's length away from Hell. Ordinarily, I don't mind stickin' round such places, but not when we're on the trail o' the Ferrara treasure, with the old pirate's own chart fer our sailin' directions. Don't forget that every crook in that town has been aiming to get his slice out o' this same treasure, and if they knowed you had the clew, it would be a damn sight different down here than it was in Isle Madame."

Sprott Gabereau saw the force of his Mate's advice. Remembering past experiences in this port of murder and intrigue, he was sorely tempted to pitch over his sealskins, and steer a course straight for the Horn.

Indeed, he went so far as to bring up some of the skins on deck, with the idea of transshipment to a passing coaster. But the crew of this Chilean vessel were obviously a bunch of cutthroats. To pitch the priceless pelts into the sea would have been about as wise as trusting them in such hands. As the two sea otter skins, worth at least four hundred guineas, were laid on the hatches, the Skipper's cupidity mastered his caution, and he sang out:

"Here, take them pelts back into the hold."

"What's up?"

"I'm going to deliver them myself to the steamship agents."

"Ye'll live to regret it."

"I guess not."

"But this ain't worth it, Skipper."

"Umph, I'm payin' the expenses o' this here expedition, and be gosh, I ain't throwin' away the chance to pick up a thousand guineas fer nothin'."

“What’s a thousand guineas compared to what we’re after?”

“A bird in the hand’s worth two in the bush,” answered the Skipper; and thus ending the parley, he directed his course to the port of ill repute.

The harbor, where they came to anchor, was really an open roadstead of the sea, where were congregated a large fleet of coal hulks and coasters. Just ahead of the *Acadian* was a trim little cruiser flying the tricolor of Chile, while farther out to seaward was a large German bark that had just arrived the day before with coal from Cardiff. Besides these, a score or more of schooners, sloops, and catboats, the trading and prospecting fleet of the regions, bobbed about and tugged at the cables, under the smart urge of the Westerlies, while lighters were passing continually among the fleet.

Paul looked in vain for a glimpse of the *Ushuaia*. Evidently, they had beaten them in the windward work coming through the straits. Standing for’ard in the chains, he saw the waterside settlement, backed by its grassy, rolling hills, above which rose the mountains, green with fadeless verdure. Snow-capped peaks, far away in the Cordilleras, and the biting, everlasting wind, prevented any cozy feelings regarding the green of the landscape.

A steel blue sea, and a cold, hard sky were reminders that eternal snow was not far distant.

Four streets ran from the beach up over the gentle slopes, streets yellow with sand, then black with mud and glistening bright with amber pools. A restless, vagrant population kicked up the sand and mud and splashed through pools of stagnant water. The houses were of wood, roofs of zinc and corrugated iron, but more singular still was the fact that every

building appeared new, a shining mass of pine boards, and zinc-white iron. Where paint was indulged in, the prevailing color was a brilliant pink.

As soon as the *Acadian* let go her anchor, she was surrounded by a host of small boats seeking orders from grocery and ship's chandlery firms ashore.

Several of the invaders, overanxious to beat their rivals, already started to come aboard, when they were warned off by a roaring bellow from the Skipper.

"Get back there with ye."

"Back with ye."

One aggressive fellow, who still held his ground in the forechains, was pitched bodily into the sea, by the belligerent mate, who was not slow to realize his Skipper's intention in repelling boarders.

Warned by the icy bath which greeted their over-anxious compeer, the rest of the fleet scattered pellmell, and the Bluenose schooner was given a wide berth by the sisterhood of small boats during the remainder of her stay in port.

When they were scattering, the Skipper shook his fist, glowering darkly, "Let that be a warnin' to ye, not to get too nosey round this craft."

Then, turning to his crew, he announced:

"Now then, me lads, we've got a secret aboard here that we can't take no chances with. For that reason, we can't allow a damn soul from the port aboard, except the person who comes to give us pratique. Don't forget that port there's the Devil's Half Acre. The less we have to do with it the better. If anyone but the Port Doctor tries to horn in here, he is to be pitched overboard, and be damned to 'im. No talk, no

chin music, into the sea with 'im, if there's any more trouble afterwards, just leave that to me. D'ye understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir." From the heartiness of the reply there was no doubt that a cool reception awaited any possible spies that might put out from the Devil's Half Acre.

Before going ashore, Gabereau sent for Paul to come into his cabin.

Paul found his uncle seated at the table, with the black chart case lying before him.

"You never was very strong on this here Ferrara treasure, was ye?" said the Skipper.

"No, sir. I think that the thing will do us more harm than good, before we're through with it. I still believe in what Monsieur le Curé said back in Arichat."

"And what was that?"

"Money that comes with evil brings evil."

"Bah. I've heard 'em talk on tainted money, but the only taint fer me is, 'tain't enough."

Paul started to reply, but his uncle interrupted:

"No, never mind opening up on any of your second-hand sermons down here, lad. Punta Arenas is a hell of a long ways off from Isle Madame. Monsieur le Curé talks about the Kingdom o' God, but right here and now we're in the devil's own dominion. We've started on this thing, and we're goin' to see it through."

Paul nodded his head in assent.

"You're goin' to stand by me in this thing, ain't ye, Paul?"

"I'll stand by you, whatever happens."

At this, Gabereau rose from his seat, with a burst of Gallic enthusiasm, and shook his nephew's hand effusively, "God bless ye, me lad. I knew ye would."

"But what good am I to you?"

"It's little ye know o' a treasure hunt, me son, or ye wouldn't be askin' that question. Treasure makes men forget love, honor, and everything else, in the fever of desire."

"Yea, just like you and poor little Yvonne," said Paul bitterly.

"Aye, I guess we're both smitten with the same attack," assented Gabereau. "But the lucky thing is that you are on this trip with us, and you are the only one I know that isn't liable to madness. You're like the feller that goes to the plague camp immune."

"And what's that got to do with it?"

"Why, everything. If you can't get the plague, you can go in, and you can come out again. Without some one like that, we'd stand a poor chance."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Come ashore with me in Punta Arenas, and I'll show ye. They may take lots of gold out of the mines in this God-forsaken country, but before they're through, they always blow it in again in that infernal port. When a man starts on the gold trail, it seems as if there ain't no such thing as getting clear."

"All of which goes to prove what a rotten business we're embarked upon."

Again the Skipper raised his hand in protest.

"My dear fellow, you really ought to have gone in for the church. You can't lay off them sermons, but as I was saying,

before, I'm glad I've got ye all the same, because I know you'll stick by me."

"Through thick and thin," assented Paul.

"Aye, and because ye're a good Gabereau, and not a bad one, like your uncle, I'll bank on you till Hell freezes."

With this, the Skipper opened the case, and taking out the roll of parchment, opened it and began to scan the chart of the landing, which the old Pirate had sketched on the reverse side.

Then, folding the whole thing carefully, he explained, "This is the thing we've got to watch from now on, Paul. From the minute we go ashore, at Punta Arenas, we're in a hotbed of conspiracy. I know, fer I've been there before. For that reason, I want to put this parchment with its directions into a safe place."

"And what do you call safe?"

"Not aboard this schooner, that's sure."

"Don't you think it's all right in the cabin?"

"Wouldn't dare to leave it here. Don't know what guy may take the idea o' makin' off with it while we're gone."

"Well, the best thing then is to carry it on our own person."

"Exactly. But I think you had better take it, instead of me."

"How's that?"

"Because, if any dirty work is started, they're sure to expect to find the chart on my person. For that reason, Paul, I want you to let me sew this thing into your inside pocket, and wherever you are, don't let this jacket get away from you."

"Aye, aye," said Paul, opening his coat, while the Skipper, with thread and needle, set to work.

When this task was completed, he exclaimed,

"And one thing more, Paul, if any dirty work starts while we're ashore, don't you wait to see what happens, just make off with the chart and leave me alone."

"Don't like to do that."

"I'll take care o' meself, all right, you take care of the chart.

"But, of course, I'm only doing all this for a precaution. Don't really expect any trouble, long as we can get away again before the *Ushuaia* arrives; there's no one round here that knows us, or will ever have the slightest suspicion that we've got this secret. If there was, you can bet your boots, I wouldn't be taking any chance and going ashore, no, not for a thousand guineas' worth o' pelts, nor fer five times that."

With the chart finally disposed of, Paul and the Skipper set off for the shore.

A long wooden and iron pier furnished a landing, at the end of which stood a new wood and iron hotel, two stories high, having a barroom in the corner next to the pier.

The Skipper, intent on the business in hand, was pressing on toward the town, when the door of the bar opened, and a gray-haired old pirate lurched out of the bar, and stood fairly before them. Paul noted his brick-red face, accentuated by his hoary head, piercing black eye, and fierce beak of a nose.

For a moment, he barred their progress, gazing, as one who reached into the misty, long-gone past.

Then, just as the two were starting to press forward, he exclaimed, "Sprott Gabereau, eh? Who'd a thought that we'd 'ave ever seen ye again? But they always come back to this devil's land."

CHAPTER XXVI

Dan Sloggett's Story

THE blunt Skipper could not veil his displeasure at this unlooked-for recognition. Here, on his first step ashore, he had walked right plumb into the very thing most dreaded. But the individual who blocked his way was not the kind to be easily shaken.

"Don't ye remember me, Sprott Gabereau? I'm ten years older than ye, but by the look o' yer waistline, I'm ten years younger in carcass."

"Who are you, anyway?" Sprott's voice was gruff with evident displeasure.

"Don't even remember my name, eh?" here the old pirate let out a hearty laugh. "Ha, ha, ha. By rights, I ought to keep ye guessing. Come in the bar, here, and I'll show ye something, Sprott, that may jog yer memory."

There was no withstanding this imperious acquaintance, so the two followed him into the bar. As they entered, there on the wall to the right he motioned toward a large picture, representing a group of eighteen men posed in the attitude of troopers repelling a charge; the leader, astride a couple of dead Indians, was none other than their new acquaintance, recognizable, in spite of time's changes, by the hawk-like nose and strutful mien.

"Remember me, now, Old-timer?"

A strange transformation came over Sprott's face as he regarded this picture; suspicion and restraint fled. With a sudden warming up of the cold exterior, he grasped the other by the hand.

“My God, if it ain’t Dan Sloggett.”

“His soul-case, at least, Old-timer; ain’t much o’ the soul left, though, after twenty-five years in this devil’s land. You went away to a decent country; you’ve been living in a safe domain.”

“How do you know?”

“Can tell by the look o’ ye. But, what in the world ever brought ye back to this sink of iniquity?”

“Sealin’, in the blood, couldn’t get it out.”

“Got some skins with ye now?”

“Aye, about forty-five here for transshipment, and a couple otters.”

“Good man. We’ll take ye to the agents to get it fixed up, but first let’s have a smile. And who’s the young feller with ye? Yer son?”

“No, my nephew. Paul, meet my friend, Dan Sloggett.”

“How do you do, sir?”

“Howd’y, young feller?”

“Now, come over here again till I show you that picture. See anyone you recognize there?”

“Yes,” said Paul, “that’s you, isn’t it?”

“Anyone else you recognize?”

“No.”

“Who’s this?”

“Couldn’t say.”

“Well, that nice looking, slim chap, is your pot-bellied Uncle Sprott. Don’t wonder ye couldn’t recognize him. A slick, easy life does play hell with some of ’em.”

“And tell me what this picture represents.”

“Well, ye see your uncle and I was shipmates together once aboard a sealing schooner called the *Santa Anna*, with one o’ them hazin’ Yankee skippers fer a master. When he had a full cargo of skins, he started hazin’ us so everlastingly, that first place we touched in, we lads beat it. That place happened to be Punta Arenas.

“While we was on the beach, here, we heard o’ gold over yonder, and o’ course, like all young bloods, we got the fever.

“It was the month of September when we started out, spring in these latitudes, but snow was so deep that we had to clear our way for miles with shovels. Then, the brush was so thick that we had to begin carving our way by axes. In time, we arrived at the Santa Maria River, where we found eight men at work sluicing out about seven hundred grains of gold a day. This wasn’t wages, so we kept pushin’ on and on, discovering capes, rivers, and ranges o’ hills, with here and there more placer gold.

“Finally, we fell in with the Indians, about eighty o’ them, all armed with bows. They surprised us with a shower of arrows, and we turned loose with Winchesters. That picture ye see there, son, represents the end o’ the fight, and the dark, handsome looking gent, in the rear is yer Uncle Sprott. Leastways, that’s the man he used to be.”

“Now, then, let’s get over to the bar and have a drink.”

While the two old-timers were recollecting together, Paul had a chance to observe a number of Gauchos, South American cowboys, who were lined up along the bar.

A Frenchman, obviously a stranger, unaccustomed to Gaucho ways, wanted a smoke. He had cigarettes, but no matches, and what was very much worse for him, he did not know the etiquette for the occasion.

Placing a cigarette in his mouth, in politest terms, he asked the favor of a light from a Gaucho, who was puffing a cigarette stub.

"With pleasure," said the fellow and handed over his burning stub.

The Frenchman lit his own cigarette, and was soon puffing away. Then, he made his fatal error. Instead of returning the worthless stub with thanks, he dropped it on the floor instead, which was an insult.

It implied that the Gaucho had been smoking a too short stub. *Caramba!* That Frenchman was impaled on a twelve inch blade, before he knew what had happened.

As he was a guest in the hotel, the bartender carried him within, with the blood pouring out of his mouth. Paul was shocked at what had transpired so unexpectedly, but Dan Sloggett and Sprott Gabereau talked on, as indifferently as though Gaucho knifings were of no more consequence than swatting a fly.

Stepping down the bar, Paul listened again to the amazing reminiscences.

"Yea, I been on the trail o' gold out o' this God-forsaken port for over twenty-five years now, Sprott."

"Did ye ever strike it lucky?"

"No, not that ye could boast of. Seems to me this business is like all other speculating, they never let ye take it away. No matter how much I'd make out in the bush, ye always blow it all in, again, just as soon as ye got back to town."

"Ought to a had more sense," grunted the judicious Sprott.

"Aye, but we ain't all as wise as the old Bluenose Skinflint. I always remember you as a shipmate, Sprott; you had a one-

way pocket; money went in, but it didn't come out. Bet you've got your first nickel yet."

As though to answer this challenge, Sprott called laughingly for another round of drinks, while his long lost friend, waxing increasingly voluble, opened up with an account of his last expedition.

"Wasn't off that time for gold," he remarked significantly.

"What were you after?"

"I was off fer the Ferrara treasure."

The eyes of the Skipper narrowed, while the look of the sly fox instinctively crept into his hard, grasping features. Thoroughly occupied with his recital, Dan Sloggett proceeded:

"Yes, sir. I got a bay named after me, Sloggett Bay is what they call it, but I came near leavin' more than me name there. And it was all on account o' this cursed treasure.

"Come to think of it, I'd like to know how many brave fellows have scattered their bones across the Straits there, lookin' fer them everlastin' chests o' Andrea Ferrara.

"Well, no one lives in this place long without gettin' the bug, and o' course, I got it, along with the rest.

"A feller come in here one night with a catboat full o' bullet holes, and the decks red with blood. I happened to be on the landing, as he come ashore, and seein' he was nigh frozen to death, I took him in to bunk with me. He was pretty well tuckered out when he landed, but he soon picked up, and then one day he told me that he and his mates had been down after Ferarra's treasure, and had fallen foul of the Yhagans. But what got me goin' was that he had one o' them Spanish gold doubloons which them Indians give him, before they

had the falling out. What's more, they told him that there were chests full of it, down there in a place where I'd already been, after common pay dirt.

"The place was on the south coast of Tierra del Fuego, about forty miles west of the Strait of Le Maire. More expeditions have been fitted out to go there than to any two diggings besides. They always get gold, and they always lose lives.

"Indeed, I'll tell you, Sprott, more lives have been lost at Sloggett Bay, than at all the rest o' the Cape Horn diggin's, and that's sayin' a lot."

"You bet ye."

"Well, I wouldn't a taken no more trips down there just fer common gold. But when it was for the Ferrara treasure, that was different.

"We had a chance, just then, to buy up a good stout sealing schooner, called the *Constance*, so we formed a syndicate, and fourteen of us chaps bought her fer the Ferrara treasure expedition. There'd been lots o' expeditions before us fellers, but we had that Spanish gold doubloon to bank on, so, of course, we made up our minds that ours was the schooner that was going to come back ballasted with Golden Virgins and diamond crucifixes.

"We arrived at Sloggett Bay without mishap, and moored our craft with long cables and chains, and made everything snug and safe as experienced sealers and sailors could suggest; ye see, we was all deep-sea chaps, and no greenhorns at that game.

"Have ye ever been down at Sloggett Bay, Sprott?"

"No."

“You’re lucky, then. I hope ye never will. They call it a bay, but it is really no bay at all, merely a roadstead with sheltering walls on the northerly and westerly sides, and good holding ground fer yer anchors. For a northerly or westerly gale, the shelter is the best, but the seas from the southeast drive in in appalling fury. Indeed, any southerly gale is dangerous, for the whirling squalls slew a boat around until broadside to the combers, and then ye’re in the belly o’ Hell before you can say ‘Scat.’

“Well, we were a hardy, happy-go-lucky gang, aboard the *Constance*. We knew that we were after big game, and fer that reason troubles that would have fretted petty little pay-dirt miners never touched us. We were big fellers, and we were happy, even when it was cold enough to freeze the hinges o’ Hell.

“We worked all of every low tide, and ate and slept during high water. According to the dope our pardner had from the Indians, these here chests were buried under the high water mark, so o’ course, we couldn’t work double tides, as we would a done, otherwise. Ye see we was so crazy fer that treasure, that we didn’t hardly want to take time to eat or sleep.

“Well, we was so red-hot in gettin’ after the stuff, that we made one terrible mistake. We slept in our schooner, to save time. We was all so dead beat, when we knocked off, that we didn’t even have a man to spare to keep a lookout.

“One night, we went to sleep, as usual, absolutely all in, from a hard day’s labor. Then, while we was all sleeping, along comes one o’ them rip snorters o’ the real old Cape Stiff variety.

"The *Constance* was picked up on a great grand-father of a wave, comin' out of eternity, and smashed into kindling wood, on that ironbound shore.

"There was only one feller in that gang left alive, and that was me, and curiously enough, I come through without a scratch."

"Didn't you know anything about it?" inquired Paul, aghast.

"Nary a thing. There I was, asleep like a babe in a cradle. I remember dreamin' there was a storm, and then, next thing I knew, I woke up lying on the beach, with the wreckage o' the poor old *Constance* lyin' all around me."

"And what did ye do then, Dan?" inquired Sprott.

"What did I do, why sure I camped on the beach, and worked away at low water, 'tween the tides, still lookin' fer the Ferrara treasure."

"And ye never found it?"

"No," answered the miner, with a disgusted tone in his voice, "Just when I was plumb sure I was about on to them there chests, a Government cruiser come along and picked me off."

CHAPTER XXVII

Petite Raymonde

SPROTT GABEREAU and Dan Sloggett passed up the pier-head bar arm in arm. The two old shipmates were nicely jingled. But Paul, who brought up in the rear, was steady as a church.

Together they went to steamship agents, where Sprott arranged the necessary details for the transshipment of his sealskins to London, in one of the Pacific Mail steamers, due to call there the following Monday.

With this business attended to, the Skipper was intent on returning to his vessel, but Dan Sloggett would not hear of it.

“Blow in here after midday, and go off before sunset! Nothin’ doing, Old-timer, you’re just goin’ to stay along wi’ yer shipmate.”

With the convivial glow of a few drinks, Sprott was a far different man from the canny, calculating individual who had talked with Paul down in the cabin, a short time before.

“Where away, then?” he inquired, as they stood in the street, before the Plaza, looking at the dingy and dilapidated residence of the Governor.

“There’s only one place here.”

“And that?”

“A joint run by a little kid called Raymonde, just outside the town. Ye can have a good game of baccarat, always a chance to drop or lose a hundred up there in an hour, and as I remember ye, Sprott, ye used to be quite a boy fer ruinin’ the bank.”

“Stud poker’s good enough fer me, now.”

“All right, let her be poker,” agreed Dan. “But I’ll promise, before ye get there, ye’ll find something up at Raymonde’s better than any gambling table, and that the little lass herself. The boys all call her the Belle o’ Cape Horn. Don’t see, fer the life o’ me, how such a little dish o’ peaches and cream was ever set down in this vile hole.”

“It’s hard to imagine what brings some wimmen to some places.”

“Umph, it’s easy to imagine what brought this little gold digger to this place. She’s the biggest sky-high gambler, bo, that ever come down the pike; only a little handful o’ fluff, that ye could trot upon yer knee; but, take it from me, she’s one o’ them what belongs to the old days when we used to have lions and tigers in the woods. Now we got nothin’ but chipmunks.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“Why, she’s a gambler, kind that’ud play with ten thousand head o’ sheep in the jack pot.”

“Sounds like a kid that’ud take a chance.”

“Ain’t never seen the man yet that could call her bluff; she’s the greatest gambler in this town, in pants or petticoats, and no mistakin’ it.”

While Dan talked on the charms of his lady, they climbed the high hill above the town. Lagging behind, Paul turned to regale himself with the splendid panorama that stretched at their feet. The yellowish hills of Tierra del Fuego rose in the east, beyond the broad blue waters of the Strait. The snowcapped peaks of Mount Sarmiento, and its glistening sisterhood, appeared above the horizon at the south, while in the west the evergreen mountains rose boldly from the water’s edge. And there, right in front of these dark-green mountains, lay the zinc and pink town, the most absurd foreground to a magnificent landscape that was ever imagined.

While Paul was still lost in wonder at this unrivaled prospect, his companions called him, and together they turned in at a gateway which led up to a neat red house, built

somewhat on the model of an ancient colonial mansion of the Southern States. In front, there was a yard full of flower beds, coaxed on, even at that season. A glass conservatory, at the side, was set apart for great masses of potted flowers and shrubs. In the front of the house, wild fuschias made the most display, while ferns and lichens were artistically laid out to delight the eye by their very unexpectedness.

As they stood there, the door burst open, and a clear, treble voice called.

"Why, hullo, Dan, old dear."

Beside the two rough men the girl looked fragile as a piece of Dresden china. Bringing up the rear, Paul noticed that there was a certain athletic vigor about her, as she leaped fairly into the arms of the giant Dan, smothering him with kisses, nestling and purring up against him, like a little pussy.

This was the rough miner's portion of love and affection, waiting by the garden gate. Feigning to be disgusted, he fumed, "Hey, get off o' me, will ye!"

At which, Petite Raymonde bounded to her feet, pouting, and then dancing off again, exclaimed, "And who are your friends, Dan?"

"Friends, Hell, these ain't friends, they're shipmates."

"Oh, oh, isn't that wonderful!"

"Remember the picture, kid, down at the pier-head bar, o' me and some more o' the boys, holdin' off the Indians?"

"I should say I do."

"Well, this great big walrus, here, Cap'n Gabereau, is one o' them boys."

As one of the family, it was Sprott's turn to get a hug and kiss, which he was not at all backward about receiving.

Raymonde patted him affectionately, exclaiming, “D’ye know what I’m goin’ to call you?”

“What?”

“Old Uncle Pug. You’ve got a face on you like a great big pug dog; you’re so ugly you’re almost pretty, Uncle Pug.” This rechristening was followed by another kiss.

“And now,” said Dan, “here’s a young feller, far too young fer you. This is Paul Gabereau, so you can treat him as if you was his mother.”

“His grandmother, you mean,” said Raymonde, coming on with some more kisses, at which Paul turned and fled, to the accompaniment of roars of laughter from the others.

Back and forth around the garden they raced, Paul as fearful of the kissing woman, as though she were one of the daughters of the Sirens.

He was quick, but she was quicker, and catching him suddenly, like a flash of light, she tapped him lightly on the shoulder, calling “Tag!”

“Kiss him,” admonished Dan. But the girl’s answer was to fling away, disdainful.

As she ushered them in, Dan inquired, “Anyone up here this afternoon at the tables?”

“Not a soul.”

“Well, what’s the chance fer a game of draw poker?”

“All the chance in the world, old dear, but let’s sit down first and have a talk. I haven’t seen a stranger from the outside world for months and months.”

At a signal from Raymonde, an oily looking Chilean, in a white coat, brought them several rounds of drinks, while

under the combined influence of Bacchus and Venus, Sprott waxed increasingly convivial.

As they drank and talked, the idea of poker and baccarat seemed to fade into the distance. Captain Gabereau had been all over the seas, and Petite Raymonde was not without far interests. Somewhere, at the end of the world, at the end of the seas, her amazing mind was bent on one sure quest, at least, so thought Paul, as he sat slightly out of the inner ring, drinking less, and listening more.

Now and again, Raymonde turned to urge upon him a potent concoction, but the young cock was not as easy as the wise old roosters.

Finally, it was Gabereau himself who broached the subject of the Ferrara treasure.

"Of course, you've heard of it?" he inquired of Raymonde.

She, who had been plying him with questions from all over the seas, answered in most casual manner,

"I should like to know who hasn't."

Sitting apart, Paul seemed to see a flash passing between her and Old Dan.

At this, he fell to thinking of Yvonne and Don Juan. Youth and Age strangely joined. And here it was again, only more glaring in its contrast of beauty and the beast. What could ever bring these two together? Here again was one of those sexless unions, consummated by the love of gain. Paul's mind was wandering on this subject, when Sprott inquired.

"And what d'ye know about this Ferrara family, they came from my home town of Arichat. Ever heard of any of 'em at Punta Arenas?"

"I should say so. We knew them all, down here."

“Tell me about them.”

“Well, first there was Andrea, the old Pirate himself. Half a century before this town was born, he used to land on Sandy Point for wood and water, and this was his last place to call, just before he buried his treasure.”

“And what about his sons?”

“The whole four generations of ’em have been here. The first was a prisoner in the old penal colony. The next was a sailor, the third generation was represented by a son who was here as governor, and then his son was an officer in the Argentine navy.”

“Why wasn’t he in the Chilean navy?”

“On account of his father, the former governor, plotting a revolution; the Ferraras were always in revolutions.”

“And what’s the name of this last chap?”

“Captain Don Juan, he’s the one that claims to be the last heir to the treasure. And what’s more, he’s the one who says he’s bound to get it.” Petite Raymonde uttered this last with a fine inflection of sarcasm, which did not fail to strike an appreciative chord.

While they were still absorbed in talk over the Ferraras, the sleek looking Chilean came in to remind his mistress that it was time for supper.

With the early night of the high south latitudes already coming on, Paul began to gaze anxiously at the lengthening shadows without. Somehow, on account of all that he had heard of Punta Arenas, he did not relish walking down those dark streets with that secret sewed against his breast. There was fear, it seemed, for any who touched that fatal parchment.

With this agitation within, he rose and announced,

"I guess we had better be going, before it gets too dark."

But Dan Sloggett pulled him imperiously into his seat again.

"Stay right where ye be, young feller. We'll bide here for a bite o' supper, and then I'll see the two o' ye down to the landing. How does that suit ye, Sprott?"

"Sure, that's O. K., Dan."

In spite of Paul's misgivings, in the gathering gloom, such feelings seemed to flee as they sat under a bright light at a table where the viands were a pure delight, after long months of hard fare upon a sealing schooner.

At the end of the supper, Petite Raymonde went out to fix the coffee, bringing in each steaming cup herself.

"This is for you, old Uncle Pug.

"And this is for the boy that's never been kissed," she exclaimed, as she placed Paul's cup beside him.

Everyone, even the dour Paul, was in fine spirits, by this time, and he joined as loud as any in the general laughter.

Shortly after the drinking of the coffee, they all rose and went into the big room, where suddenly, without the slightest premeditation, the Skipper went over and laid himself out on the sofa, announcing drowsily, "I'm tired, I'm goin' to—"

Even before he finished speaking, he had trailed off into sleep.

Sitting in a great chair before the fire, Paul felt a great peace stealing over him; the fire was so warm, the room so cozy, everything had such a soothing, softening influence, his eyes closed, for just a moment, and in an instant, he, too, had lapsed into profoundest slumber.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Pursuit

PAUL was the first to awaken from that mysterious and stupefying sleep. Where was he? What had happened?

He opened his eyes to gaze upon a room where twilight was thickening. The fires had gone out, and everything felt bleak and cold. As he looked about, there, stretched out on the sofa, was the bulky form of the Skipper, announcing his presence by stertorous breathing.

Paul roused himself, and stood erect. He was stiff in every joint, while his head seemed misty and confused.

"Br-r-r, it's cold," he exclaimed, as breath appeared like smoke in the chill air. Then, regarding the abandoned rooms, the past began to return dimly. He remembered that they had been there with Dan Sloggett, Petite Raymonde had given them coffee, and they had slept, it seemed, for ages.

A ray of dawning light began to appear. He reached frantically for the sewed-up pocket, in the breast of his coat, then suddenly burst forth in dismay, "My God, they've got it."

In a moment, he was vigorously shaking his uncle, who was at first too thick to apprehend anything.

"Wha's—er-ma-t-r?"

"Wake up! Wake up! They've stolen our secret!"

At this information, the dazed Skipper seemed to leap into consciousness. Gripping Paul fiercely by the shoulders, he growled, "What're ye givin' us!"

“Yes, it’s gone,” said Paul, presenting to view the inner pocket of his coat, which had been cut neatly away, with something sharp as a razor.

Sprott was not as long as his nephew in leaping to conclusions.

“I see it all now,” he gasped bitterly. “Like a poor fool, I come up here with that Dan Sloggett, and a good skin full o’ booze. Dan and his little hussy done the rest. They doped our coffee with laudanum or something, last night, and, while we’ve been sleeping the clock round, them two have been making a clean get-away.”

“Where d’ye ’spose they went?”

“Don’t ask fool questions. Only one place fer them, and what’s more, they’re a pair o’ Cape Horn storm birds. Come on, we ain’t goin’ to let the grass grow under our feet.”

Directing their steps to the water front, Sprott spent the next hour picking up clews of the missing Dan.

Had he been seen?

Yes, late last night, he was there, along with Petite Raymonde, strange union, wasn’t it. Said that he was eloping with the girl.

What were they doing?

Fitting up his prospecting yawl, the *Mary G.* Seemed in an uncommon hurry. Worked all night. Everyone thought that he was off on some new prospecting venture, likely had a tip, but what got them guessing was the supplies he took aboard, no mining implements, no lumber for sluicing, just provisions, and he took an everlasting whack of the same.

What time did he sail?

Just as soon as it was daylight, to navigate over the bars. He and his girl cast off, and before long they were out of sight.

Which way?

To the eastward.

It was long after dark by the time Sprott had gained all this information, but once sure of the others' movements, he did not hesitate in his own plans.

Before the following dawn cast its rosy hues upon the snow-clad peaks, the Skipper, Paul, Wild Alec MacLean, Baptiste LeBlanc, and Yen, the faithful Jap, were headed to the eastward, in a ten ton sloop, which they had purchased from a mining gang, and stocked up for a long cruise.

At first, they had intended setting out in the schooner, but the navigation of labyrinthine bays and shallow channels warned the Skipper that a small boat, of light draft, was preferable.

"If we didn't have the same kind of craft as them two, they'd be able to sneak into places where we couldn't follow, an' it'ud be nothin' fer 'em to give us the slip."

The bartender at the pier-head hotel, in seeing them off, spoke a word of warning:

"There's two things you fellers want to look out for, the willawaws, them squalls that drop down off the mountains, like sudden death, they're always apt to get ye while ye're out in the channel. Then, when ye're alongside the shore, the Alaculoofs won't give ye no peace. Never know what minute you'll have 'em attackin' ye, and if ye meet 'em, boys, remember ye're up against the most crafty, sneakin', murderin', relentless savages on this earth."

What the bartender told them did not appeal to Paul, but the others had all had vast experience of the white man in conflict with inferior races; a row of Winchester rifles in the cabin below was the secret of their calm serenity.

"These are the little beauties to take care of savages," remarked Wild Alec MacLean, as he examined the breechblock of each rifle.

"These are the darlings that'll bring us home."

All of them, except the Jap, were consummate boat handlers. The art and craft of the small boat was second nature to the Bluenose breed, cradled in the wintry deep off their own hard Nova Scotian shore.

Wild Alec and the Skipper, as ex-sealers, were both well acquainted with the navigation of the Straits. At the Mate's suggestion, they took on a pilot and cast off from the landing at Punta Arenas, about midnight, and after a short sail, came to, and anchored at Laredo Bay, where the pilot left them, with a parting advice:

"In getting through these Straits, ye'll do most by working with the tides, and don't forget that seamen here have always got to be guided by the age of the moon."

At the first stirrings of the easterly current, about nine in the morning, they cast off, intending to make the next anchorage in Gregory Bay. On account of the dangerous nature of these waters, it was necessary to know exactly where one could find refuge, as the possibility of thick and boisterous weather always had to be reckoned with.

After leaving Laredo Bay, they gave Cape Porpesse a wide berth, past Santa Marta Island, and edged away for the narrows. When abreast of Cape Gregory, noticing that the

end of the eastward current was at hand, the Skipper sang out:

"Inside the bay there's where we'll anchor till the Westerly drift is over."

"D'ye remember the way in there, MacLean?"

"Aye, I'll take her in."

"No, I'll hang on to the wheel. Give us the direction."

"Stand right on there, till ye're abreast o' the cape."

"Aye, aye."

When the sandy land of the cape was in range with the western extremity of high table-land, MacLean sang out:

"Guess we're almost on to the anchorage now."

"Will ye let go the killick?"

"No, just a bit yet. The hummock should be well open to the northward, before we come to."

When Valle Point and hillocks near it were distinctly visible, the mate sang out, "All right, let go yer mudhook."

"Guess you know this here bay, all right."

"Like me own back yard."

While they were riding at their moorings, Sprott got out his glass and began to study the Fugian shore. Suddenly, he handed his glass over to the Mate, inquiring,

"What do you make that out to be just ahead there, in close to the land?"

"That's a yawl! S'help me if we haven't got a line on 'em already."

As the current and wind were now both ahead, Skipper, Mate, and Paul put off in the dinghy to investigate.

As they came nearer, it became apparent that the yawl was none other than the *Mary G.*, which Dan Sloggett had formerly pointed out to the Skipper off the pier-head landing. The strange fact about her was that she rode in the tideway with mainsail up, and jibs unstopped.

"Looks mighty queer."

"Must have left her in one gosh awful hurry."

As they came warily alongside, Paul, who was in the bows, stood up to look into the cockpit of the yawl, at which a cry of horror escaped him.

The tiller and stern sheets were red with blood.

On the sides of the cuddy were a number of holes where Winchester bullets had come through from below, while two hideous looking harpoons, about seven feet long, were impaled against the slide.

"The Alaculoofs," muttered the Skipper, aghast. "Fer once, Dan Sloggett musta got caught unawares."

CHAPTER XXIX

An Indian Engagement

WHILE they were still regarding the blood on the abandoned yawl, there came an unearthly series of shrieks, and a flotilla of six Indian war canoes, manned in all by about fifty half naked savages, hove in sight from around the foreland.

They were paddling furiously, and were evidently the worse for liquor.

Wild Alec and the Skipper exchanged significant glances:

“Crazy drunk.”

“Got into Sloggett’s rum.”

Bringing up the Winchesters, Yen passed them out, giving to each man a hundred rounds of ammunition.

“Now then,” cautioned the Skipper, “don’t open fire till I give the word. We’ve got to get the secret chart back, and if they’ve polished off old Dan, the chances are that they’ll have the parchment in their own possession, so it’s no good to unduly antagonize them.”

Looking down the sights of his rifle, Wild Alec grunted, “I got a bean on the chief, right now, damn shame not to polish ’im off.”

“Hold your fire,” repeated the Skipper.

The war canoes approached at high speed, and as they drew nearer, to their horror, the crew of the sloop beheld the bloody head of Dan Sloggett, impaled on a spear in the bow of the leading canoe.

So this was the last of that doughty Argonaut. He who had cheated the unbridled fury of the ocean at Sloggett Bay, had at last come to his final reckoning at the hands of the crafty Alaculoofs.

How had he met his death?

What of Petite Raymonde?

What now of the clew to the treasure?

These and a host of other questions were passing through Paul’s mind, as the deadly flotilla drew nearer.

Suddenly, Sprott Gabereau fired across the nearest canoe, puncturing it just above the water line, and at the same time, giving imperious signal to halt.

As the drunken savages still came on, the Skipper muttered:

"All right, boys, let 'em have it, aim just below their water line. Sink, but don't kill."

"Hell, why not kill the swine?" snarled Wild Alec.

"Because, we've got to try to get that chart from 'em, ye fool; if we start killin', that'll be the end of it."

With a perfect fusillade of rifle bullets under her water line, the war canoe began slowly to settle in the water. In sudden dismay, the savages held up, and a few moments later were rescued from their sinking craft by the following canoes.

This time, the others bethought themselves to obey the mandate of the rifles, and came to, resting on their paddles, while the Skipper hailed them, announcing that the chief, and his rowers, could come within talking distance, the rest to hold off.

The chief, as he stood up in the bow of his canoe, wore a shirt and a blanket. His head looked about three sizes too big for his body, which was large enough, but the head, with its tousled, shaggy mane, appeared tremendous in contrast. The nose was flat, the mouth brutal, the eyes sly, while the total effect of the face was sinister and threatening. No wild beast of the forest could have appeared more menacing than this aboriginal creature.

In spite of his appearance, he spoke fluent English, which he said he had learned from a missionary at Beagle Channel; evidently the gift of tongues was the only virtue that had been bestowed by the mission.

“What happened to the crew of that boat there?” demanded the Skipper.

“We kill man,” announced the chief, with a sardonic grin.

“What did you do that for?”

“We come to trade with him; he go down into cabin, and fire at us with gun, kill one, two, three, our men; we get mad and go after him, cut his head right off.”

“And where’s the girl?”

“She’s back on hill.” Here the chief pointed to the blue ridge of the Fugian shore. “We take her off the boat, after we kill white man. She no want to come; we drag her by the hair. She fight, scratch, and bite, like wildcat. Me goin’ to take her for wife; she get knife, kill one, two men. I don’t want her no more for wife, take her out and tie her under trees on hill, yonder.”

“What did you tie her under trees for?”

A hideous smirk came over the chief. “Me tie her under there for beasts to feed on.”

At this piece of sardonic humor, he let out a high neighing laugh, in which all his boat crew joined lustily.

“And what do you want now?”

“Rum.”

“Bring back that girl, and we’ll give you plenty rum.”

After a parley among themselves, some were evidently intent on charging the white men, but the row of Winchesters had already made an example, and so, electing the course of discretion, they agreed to bring the girl back, in return for the rum. At which they all withdrew.

About an hour later, the chief’s canoe appeared, alone. When he was near enough for converse, the Skipper covered

him with his rifle.

"Just stay where you are! And, now, then, where's the girl?"

"Can no bring her."

"Why's that?"

"Panther, there first. You give me rum now?"

"No."

At this, with a sudden burst of overmastering rage, the Alaculoofs dropped their paddles, and grasping their harpoons, started to attack the handful of despised whites.

Wild Alec was slightly wounded by the first harpoon thrown, but in the next instant, he shot the chief through the heart, and then, with a grunt of satisfaction, watched his friends polish off a couple more. This was too much for the savages, and without delay they beat a hasty retreat.

That night, under cover of darkness, the Skipper and Yen were put ashore in the dinghy, in order to go up the hill indicated and look for the secret, and incidentally to gather up the bones of the girl. They both carried their Winchesters and setting out confidently, vanished into the brush. That was the last that was seen of them. The wilderness swallowed them completely.

As the hill indicated was only about a mile away, they should have been there and back easily inside an hour, but hour after hour passed without a trace of them.

The Mate and Paul, who rowed them ashore, grew more and more alarmed, as they waited just off the beach in the dinghy.

After midnight, when hope for the missing pair was almost abandoned, a piercing scream came over the silent water

from the direction of the sloop.

Rowing back with all haste, Paul and the Mate were just in time to hear the distant sound of retreating paddles, and coming aboard, there was Baptiste LeBlanc's decapitated frame sprawled across the cuddy, his body pierced with half a dozen harpoons, his useless rifle still clutched in his cold grasp.

All through the rest of that night, the two survivors kept watch for signal fires on the shore, from the missing Skipper, but there was no sign. Long before dawn, the Mate had abandoned hope.

"No use," he announced, "we might as well haul up the killick and head back fer port."

To his consternation, Paul announced,

"No, sir, I'm not going to leave here until I take one more chance ashore there, to see what I can find."

"You'll find yer grave, along with the rest of 'em."

But to the Mate's disgust, argument was vain, and placing his rifle in the dinghy, Paul started boldly for the shore.

CHAPTER XXX

The Rescue

AS Paul Gabereau came upon the beach, he saw above him the dark outline of mountains standing clear against the moonlit sky. In order to escape detection, he pulled his dinghy up along the shingle, and rolled it under a thick beechwood growth.

Then, standing on the fringe of the thicket, he strained to listen to those voices that rise at nighttime on the fringes of

the forest, the note of an opossum, the far-off cry of a loon, the swish of wind in the tree tops, and the low croon of the tide.

Beyond the sounds of nature, there was nothing alarming, and he set out, walking warily, with rifle cocked, in the direction of the hill top. The ascent was slow, and greatly impeded by the thickness of the brush, but Paul was an experienced woodsman and knew how to make his way.

Moving with greatest stealth, with eyes and ears alert, he halted at every threatening sound. Twice, he was sure that he heard approaching footsteps, and waited with finger on the trigger, but only the night winds answered his alarm.

Using the stars, twinkling above the tree tops, he held his sense of direction. After nearly an hour's climbing, painstakingly slow, the rush of wind announced that he was on the crest.

It was somewhere up here that the chief had pointed, but now which was the way?

Pondering this question for some moments, he finally decided first to move out to the right, but in a short time realized that he was on the downward slope, and in order to keep to the crest, he was forced to retrace his steps.

For the next hour, with untiring patience, guided by the profoundest lore of the woodsman, Paul proceeded to sweep back and forth across that forest hill.

Even his infinite patience was becoming exhausted, when his ear was directed to a purring sound, like that of a giant cat.

A panther!

With this thought, Paul again instinctively felt for his rifle, and a cold, clammy fear came over him, not knowing from what tree this monster might spring upon him. He had heard of the terrible ferocity of this animal that came out of the woods to play with a lonely wayfarer, like a cat with a mouse, and then at last to crush and eat him.

The purring sound came nearer, drew away, came nearer once again. But there was no sight of the animal. In a sudden panic, forgetting all else, Paul pulled his trigger. At the report, the whole night seemed to send back a thousand echoes, and then, as he strained to listen, there came the unmistakable sound of a woman's voice, crying,

"Don't shoot it! Don't shoot it!"

Following the sound of that cry, Paul burst out into a brief clearing, and there, tied to a tree with hands behind her, was Petite Raymonde, while, to add to the gruesomeness of the situation, up and down in front of her a monstrous panther, fully nine feet in length, was cavorting about as joyously as a playful kitten.

At sight of this puissant animal, Paul's blood seemed to freeze in his veins.

Utterly ignoring him, the panther continued to purr, and roll over, and gallop from side to side, and make no end of kittenlike motions, all because of the exuberance of its youthful spirits. Then, most amazing of all, it returned to rub itself lovingly against the body of the girl, in motions of gentlest friendship.

It was Raymonde who spoke first. Seeing Paul at last in the dim moonlight, she let out a rapturous cry of joy, not unlike that of their first meeting, but this time the voice was woefully weak.

“Oh, oh, Paul, I can’t believe that’s you.”

Paul was still fingering his rifle, and eying the panther with suspicion, when she called, “Don’t harm him, whatever you do, don’t harm him.”

“Why?”

“Because the dear creature has saved my life. You know down here they call the panther the ‘friend of man,’ and so indeed I found him to be. As soon as those frightful savages tied me here and went away, that dear old panther came out of the woods, purring as if he couldn’t say how glad he was to see me, and he’s been sticking by me ever since.”

“Have you been here long?” inquired Paul, as he proceeded to undo her thongs.

“Two nights and a day. And if it hadn’t have been for my friend the panther, you wouldn’t have found anything here but my bones.”

“How’s that?”

“Because, he drove away the jaguars and other beasts of prey that came to destroy me.”

With this new ally of the wilderness, known as the “friend of man,” Paul found himself strangely confident, and carrying the exhausted girl, he started down again to the beach.

All the way, the faithful panther trailed them, and still stood there, keeping up its endless kittenlike motions, when they were at last safely embarked in the dinghy, and on the way back to the cutter.

By the time they arrived aboard, the girl was in a comatose state.

MacLean, who heard them coming, could hardly believe his ears, when Paul shouted that he had brought the girl back alive.

All through the following day, the two of them kept a bright lookout for Yen and the missing Skipper, but there was no more sign of them, and finally, toward evening, with the tide starting to run westward, with their last hope extinguished, they proceeded to get under way.

Paul's eyes were misty with tears as he looked back at the shadow of that great and terrible wilderness, where the much loved form of his Uncle Sprott had disappeared. It was easy to think of some men as dead, but the jaunty Skipper seemed to carry with him the very gift of life.

The last sound of him had been a note of jolly laughter. Paul shuddered as he now regarded the mountains of Tierra del Fuego, rising before him, lowering, black, ominous. Verily, here was the iron door.

Rest aboard the sloop did much to revive Raymonde, who was possessed with that greatest of all aids to recovery, a resilient spirit.

By the second day she was able to sit up and chat with all her accustomed vivacity. But underneath this liveliness, there was evident a restraint, not there on their first meeting.

Just past twilight of the second day, the ill-starred craft arrived back at Punta Arenas, and was made fast alongside of the pier-head jetty. As it was supper time, there were no idlers about to witness the return of the forlorn hope.

MacLean, without even the formality of a good-by, went into the nearest bar, and left the girl standing there alone in the gathering gloom, leaning, with a sudden pitiful weakness,

upon the strong arm of Paul Gabereau. In that moment, repression and restraint seemed to fade away.

Clutching at him, with both hands upon the lapels of his coat, standing a-tiptoe, gazing with all her woman's soul into his eyes, she gasped, "Paul, darling."

As Paul bent toward her, she kissed him, not the kiss of passion, but the kiss of childhood's trust and faith. Then, as they parted, she slipped something into his hand.

"What's this?"

"It's the secret chart, don't lose it next time, darling."

CHAPTER XXXI

A Stormy Meeting

WHEN Petite Raymonde had gone, with the fatal chart again committed to his keeping, Paul now felt as though a sacred trust had come into his hands. The chart itself was like a challenge from his Uncle Sprott to keep the faith.

With a new and sudden sense of responsibility, he turned to pierce through the thick gloom at the riding lights of the *Acadian*, anchored far out there in the stream. With the Skipper gone, and with their sealed orders now committed unto him, Paul, in that moment, seemed to pass into the consciousness of command.

What of the crew?

What of their vessel?

With all the events that had transpired in the past few days, another world seemed to have cut off all the past. With these thoughts, he was just turning to call a boatman, when through

the mist and the rain he saw a dainty girlish figure coming toward him. Paul's heart suddenly gave a bound of joy, no matter what worlds of distance might separate him from the past, here was one whose beloved suzerainty remained.

With his whole being aflame with joy, he turned to greet her, "Yvonne."

But no answering light came into the eye of the girl.

Looking at Paul, with a cold, accusing glance, she exclaimed bitterly, "I expected better things than that of you, Paul Gabereau."

"I don't understand you, Yvonne," his voice was almost piteous in its supplication.

Reaching forward, he started to embrace her, but she drew away, as though the mere idea were repugnant.

"Don't touch me!"

"Why, what is it?"

"You ought to know, without asking such questions to make a mockery."

The bright glow that had suffused Paul's face at the first glimpse of his beloved, was suddenly changed to a look of deepest anguish.

"Oh, darling, what have I done to hurt you?"

Unmoved by his obvious grief, Yvonne still looked bitterly into his eyes. Where once the light of love had glowed, there appeared now a coldness almost akin to hate.

Paul was for a moment like a man who sees, but refuses to comprehend. Then, at the bitter recoil of his devotion, flung as it were into his own teeth, he underwent a strange and furious transformation.

From the suppliant, he passed in a twinkling to the hell of wounded pride.

To Yvonne's amazement, she saw an answering flash of fire come into those calm blue eyes, that had never before looked at her with aught but tenderest emotion.

"I'll make you say you're sorry yet for this, Yvonne."

"You'll be sorry for yourself, before you're through, you poor softie."

"You shouldn't talk to me like that."

"I'll tell you what I know you are," she rasped, stamping her foot bitterly. "You couldn't even call your soul your own; just a poor tool, to sneak around and steal at night, and then run like a coward. If you wanted that chart case, why didn't you come and try to get it in an open fight like a real man?"

"But, I—"

"Never mind telling me any of your poor excuses, you didn't have spine and backbone enough to stand up for your own opinion. You were the one that had no use for the Ferrara treasure, the one that preached over again the grand sermons of Monsieur le Curé. You were the one that belonged to the soil of Arichat. Nothing in the world could have persuaded you to get out and chase after fool's gold.

"Oh, you talked wonderfully, back home, didn't you, Mister Paul! No, nothing would make you leave the dear old place. And then, when thieves came to break into our cabin, in the night, who was it but our goody-goody Paul that was sneakin' on behind?"

Again Paul started to interrupt, but in the fury of her accusation the girl could not be brooked, "And, as if it wasn't

enough for you to play the hypocrite in other things, now you must come flaunting me to my face, in the name of love."

"When did I ever fail you?"

"Even the darkness has eyes, you simpleton. Even the Pierhead Hotel has windows. Do you suppose I didn't see?"

Again Paul was mystified, and completely at sea, he was still struggling to offer up an explanation, when he saw the lean, trim figure of Don Juan approaching.

He could only talk with Yvonne, but here was something on which he could vent his passion. Every breath of his being, at that moment, was calling him to fight. The insolence of this proud Don was more than flesh and blood could bear.

Paul started for him, but suddenly Yvonne had placed herself between them.

"No, you won't touch him."

"My dear, if this bumpkin wants satisfaction, let him come on. I have already had the pleasure of feeling my hands at his throat, and if he had been man enough to fight his battles alone, I assure you he would have had his neck wrung in short order."

"Just let me get one more chance at you, and it will be some one else's neck."

"Really?"

As the Don bowed graciously, the storm of passion, which had swept Paul so fiercely, seemed to pass. Into his clouded face there came again the old serenity. Looking on amazed, Yvonne saw that it was the same Paul, and yet not the same. This time, behind the calm exterior there was the suggestion of conflict and of strife.

Speaking as one who had suddenly returned to reason, he said to the Don, “I’ll apologize for what I said to you.”

“Er, what do you mean?”

“I mean that you are a gray-headed old man. I forgot myself.”

This time, it was the Don’s turn to lose his poise.

“I’m a gray-headed old man, eh? All right, me young sprout, just keep on trying to buck me, and see where you get off.

“I might tell you for your convenience that since arriving here I’ve had your schooner, the *Acadian*, put under arrest by the Chilean authorities for poaching seals.”

“Meaning what?”

“Return that chart case you stole from me, and even yet there’s time for us to come together.”

At this, a conciliatory look came into the Don’s face, while Yvonne, noticing the other’s hesitation, flung out, “What can you do, anyway?”

Paul’s answer was to turn upon his heel.

CHAPTER XXXII

Detention

A WAVE of helplessness swept over Paul Gabereau as he turned away. Their predicament was not pleasant to contemplate. But more unpleasant still were those sneering rebukes, all of which seemed to be gathered up by the challenge of Yvonne.

“What can you do, anyway?”

The contempt behind that fling stung him like whips of a scorpion.

In the girl's eyes, the Don had been all-powerful, while he, Paul, had seemed to stand out by contrast as a supreme example of ineptitude.

Yes, what could he do?

The more he thought of their stormy interview, the more nettled he became. It was not his nature to give way to bitterness; instead a calm determination began to take hold of him.

Don Juan believed he played his trump when he had the vessel seized. But there was another side to his despised rival, which he was yet to learn.

Inquiry at the customhouse disclosed the fact that the *Acadian* was under arrest, charged with about every marine offense from smuggling to piracy.

Out in the stream, the seized schooner rode under close surveillance of a government cruiser. The sails and running rigging had all been stripped off, and there on her mainmast was the broad arrow signifying that she was forfeit by the decree of the naval commandant.

Joining forces with that veteran blockade runner, Wild Alec MacLean, the *Acadian's* crew were not long in determining upon a course of action.

"Keep out of sight, and move softly," was the essence of MacLean's advice.

To allay suspicion, Paul fitted out the sloop, and taking half their complement, disappeared on a feigned gold hunting and prospecting expedition.

The rest went off on various trumped-up jobs, and with them out of sight and out of mind, the guard of the seized vessel began to acquire that familiarity that breeds contempt.

After dark, one night, with vigilance relaxing, Paul landed his crew at the far end of Sandy Point, and warned by MacLean that the coast was clear, they trooped into town, singly, and in pairs.

MacLean, meanwhile, had discovered where the sails and rigging were stored, and plans were effected for their recovery. By half past nine o'clock, it was bright starlight, with a favorable southeast wind blowing. Paul and his men left their hiding places, and moving in toward the water front, were fortunate not to meet anyone on the way. They arrived at the customs warehouse, just as the clock struck eleven.

Observing some lights, yet burning in the houses, MacLean said, "Better stand by just a bit."

They waited patiently until all lights were extinguished, and then proceeded down to the wharf, where they lost no time in putting themselves inside the building containing the *Acadian's* sails, rigging, and other gear.

These they took charge of, and soon had them aboard the vessel. Finding that they had made some mistake in the sails, having got a set belonging to another schooner, they were obliged to return, which caused vexatious delay.

MacLean did the swearing for the crowd. "Always the way, when every minute counts."

"Can't be helped," replied the philosophic Paul.

On their second trip ashore, coming around by the sheds, they encountered an unsuspecting night watchman. Before he had time to give the alarm, MacLean had pinioned him from

behind. Tied and gagged effectually, he was dumped on the floor of the warehouse, and locked up. After the necessary gear was obtained, this time they were careful to see that no mistake was made.

By one o'clock, the running rigging was in order, sails were bent, everything was in readiness for a getaway.

All was still. Not a word had been uttered, nor an unnecessary sound made during these preparations. MacLean was just starting to put sail on her, when the whining of the sheaves and creaking of blocks suddenly brought the adjacent guardship into action.

Almost instantaneously, there sounded the long drawn note of a bosun's whistle, a rush of feet, the whir of boat falls, and the splash of a cutter taking the water.

Before the crew of the *Acadian* had time to sheet home, a lieutenant from the cruiser was alongside, shouting out in the blustering dark, "Ahoy there! Ahoy!"

Sauntering toward the waist, Wild Alec MacLean regarded him with affected indifference.

Paul noticed that he had two huge pieces of granite rock handy, which he had placed there beforehand, as a precautionary measure.

Cocking his head, MacLean, inquired, "What d'ye want?"

"Tell cap-it-ain to come abore!" the naval officer replied, struggling with his English.

"You go to hell."

Recognizing the pungency of MacLean's vernacular, the lieutenant started to draw his gun. But Wild Alec was too quick for him. Seizing one of the great bowlders, he crashed

it down into their frail craft, smashing the bottom of the same like matchwood.

In an instant, the entire boarding party were swimming for their lives, shrieking out to the cruiser for help.

MacLean, at once, had one of their boats swung out, and without hesitating, jumped into it. Everyone expected that he was going to the rescue, but as his boat ranged alongside, he called, “Now, then, pass us a few fathoms o’ cable.”

A number of sealers leaped to obey, and with the iron cable aboard, he called for two men to accompany him.

Thoroughly mystified, all hands stood straining into the dark, wondering and waiting, not knowing what to do next.

“Where’s the Mate gone?”

“What’s he up to?”

“Search me.”

“He’ll get ’em, though, don’t you fret. He’s got as many tricks up his sleeve, as a dog’s got fleas.”

The cruiser was so busy rescuing their shipmates from drowning that MacLean’s movements were unobserved, and finally, after an absence of about five minutes, he and his party returned to the schooner.

Not waiting to secure their boat, the three of them leaped aboard by the forechains.

Rushing aft, MacLean took the wheel, bellowing as he did so, “Is she clear for’ard?”

“Aye, aye.”

“All right, then, let her go!”

Moorings were slipped in a thrice, the unshackled cable went splashing overboard, sheets and halyard were given a

last pull, and the saucy little craft filled away, and began to show a clean pair of heels, as she passed out of the anchorage.

Because of adjacent shipping, it was not prudent for the cruiser to open fire, and her captain at once rang for full speed ahead.

In an instant, there came a terrific roar, followed by a crashing, rending, churning sound, as though the whole sea were being rent asunder.

Aboard the cruiser, there was first a panic, then consternation gave way to maddening rage, as it was discovered that some one had entwined a network of iron cable inextricably around their screw.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Storm-hounded

WHEN they cleared from Punta Arenas, MacLean, well acquainted with the region, looked dubiously at the weather prospects.

All through the hours of darkness, and all through the following day, he kept an eye peeled, not merely for the threat of a pursuing cruiser, but for the more ominous threat of a pursuing gale.

“I don’t like the look of that sky,” he observed, toward evening. “Guess we’d better begin to think o’ shelter.”

“Haven’t put enough distance between us and Punta Arenas,” objected Paul.

“May be thinking o’ something more’n Punta Arenas soon, by the look o’ things.”

“Why, it ain’t blowin’ much.”

“That’s just what’s got me worried. Winds from the eastward invariably begin gently, down here. But when ye get a southerly touch to it, with banks o’ large white clouds, having hard edges, appearing rounded and solid, ye can get ready for wild squalls, o’ the Cape Stiff variety, what they call ‘snow and blow and snow again.’

“When that stuff’s comin’, ye want to be on to good holding ground, under a lee, with both anchors out.”

“You seem to have a wholesome fear of these waters,” observed Paul.

“I know ’em,” replied the Mate grimly. “If the weather is thick, and it’s comin’ on that way now, the navigation o’ this strait is livin’ hell.”

“How’s that?”

“There’s a dozen reasons: because o’ incomplete surveys, lack of aids to navigation, great distances between anchorages, lack of good anchorages, strong currents, and narrow limits for workin’ ship; there’s only a few o’ the curses.”

Toward twilight, passing the Marta Bank and edging away from the narrows, a furious succession of willawaws swept down upon them. With the squalls almost continuous, the Mate muttered,

“By God, here comes the dirt!”

Steering northward, he directed his course for a safe anchorage inside Gregory Bay.

Before they were abreast of the Cape, everything was suddenly blotted out, in a howling, driving blizzard. For several minutes, in the midst of that wild inferno, the tiny

schooner was borne over almost on her beam ends, while a tiny rag of canvas sent her tearing along with the water boiling clean up to her hatches.

Hearing the sudden roar of breakers sounding dimly, all hands aboard the schooner began to feel as though the thickness of that squall were a death cap drawn across their eyes to blot out their doom.

The agony of suspense in such a moment was exquisite, but MacLean's hand never faltered at the wheel, it was a leap in the dark, but there was no time to turn backward.

Then came a break, disclosing for the fraction of a second the bold outline of the Cape, which was blotted out again in driving snow. This momentary flash was enough. Gauging his time correctly, the Mate shot behind the protecting heads, and coming up into the wind, sang out,

"Let go your jibs.

"Let go your anchor."

It seemed as though they had been fortunate in just lighting upon the right anchorage, and all hands were beginning to thank their stars, when through the gray whirling blanket, the lynx-eyed Mate had a sudden apparition.

Paul caught it too, like a wraith of the storm, and the two looked at one another.

"What did ye see?"

"Couldn't swear, but seemed to me like the cruiser."

"We'll be caught like a rat in a trap if they get us inside here."

While the two of them were hesitating, not knowing what to do next, they heard the sound of splashing oars, the slight

bumping of a boat, and with a shouting from for'ard, a man came up over the side.

"Who's that?"

Both started toward the break, peering apprehensively, prepared for another boarding party from the cruiser; indeed, they were prepared for anything except what appeared, as out of the blanket of whirling snow emerged the massive shoulders and burly frame of Captain Sprott Gabereau, arriving, in that moment, as though he had been blown in on the very wings of the storm.

While the surprised members of his crew still regarded him as an apparition, he suddenly let out an oath that sounded anything but ethereal.

"What the hell are ye doin' bringin' this vessel in here?"

The Mate, who was most accustomed to Captain Sprott, was the first to recover from the shock.

"We're in here because we was chased out o' Punta Arenas."

"Who chased ye?"

"That Spick had us put under arrest, but we made a get-away, last night, and we've been crackin' on ever since, tryin' to put all the water we could astern twixt us and Sandy Point."

"Why such an all-fired hurry?"

" 'Cause they're after us, first fer breakin' away from arrest, and second fer foulin' the propeller o' the government cruiser."

The Skipper still looked puzzled.

"I don't understand this cruiser business, just explain that to me again."

Briefly, MacLean told of how he had sunk the naval lieutenant, and given the whole boarding party a “damned good bath” as he called it, then he went to tell of the method by which he had effectually crippled their motive power.

The face of the Skipper grew increasingly grave, and he edged his way toward the wheel.

“What’s the matter, Skipper, d’ye think I treated them too rough?”

“No, that ain’t what’s worryin’ me.”

“What’s up, then?”

“Why, that selfsame cruiser’s at the end o’ this bay, at this very moment. Lucky fer you that the weather’s thick or she’d a blown ye into smithereens. I know these dirty Spicks; ye don’t give them a bath and get away with it, not if they can help it.”

While the Skipper was speaking, he had cast the lashing of the wheel, and looking at signs of clearing, suddenly sang out, “Stand by for’ard, and break out the anchor.”

As the anchor came in, he began to put sail to her, and tack out into the teeth of the howling sou’easter.

The prospect without was foreboding in the extreme. Standing beside the Skipper, at the wheel, the Mate began to expostulate, “My God, it’s suicide to drive her out into weather like that.”

“Aye, an’ it’s a damn sight worse than suicide to stay inside that bay till that cruiser gets a chance to limber up her guns.”

“She can’—”

“My God, look at that, will ye!”

Behind them, a driving blast had suddenly swept the bay, like a smoky chimney, revealing the fleeing schooner silhouetted clear against the hard rim of the horizon.

Just off the Cape were tide rips and a terrific cross sea. In an attempt to weather the promontory, the Skipper began to crack on, muttering, “Punish her! Punish her!”

Under the terrific strain, it seemed as if the canvas would be ripped clean out of the bolt ropes.

“She’s down too much by the head.”

There was an instantaneous rush of feet along the deck, while all hands moved instinctively to give their vessel her finest racing trim.

“That’s better.”

“Guess we’ll make it now.”

As though to mock their easy faith, a flash, a boom, a muffled roar!

The whole bay behind them seemed to waken with reverberations, and a shot came skipping across the *Acadian’s* bows.

“He’ll heave her to.”

But, no, she still went slathering on into the teeth of it, unhesitating, unwavering.

“Lord, but she’s sailin’ now.”

“Put it to her!” roared the Skipper, as all hands shook out the reefs.

“Watch her go!”

“Ain’t she a daisy!”

Another shot from the cutter’s gun, another, and another. A hole was bored clean through the foresail, sheeted home as

stiff as iron.

With a rending shriek, her main-topmast was shot clattering down.

"Up there, and clear away the hamper."

Aft, once, twice, shells exploded in the water.

Gabereau did not even deign to glance behind.

Leaning on his wheel, like a jockey on his mount, he kept muttering continual encouragement,

"Come on, girl, come on, show 'em yer heels."

Shooting her nose into the seas, her every shroud and stay seemed to send up a shriek of protest, while the unrelenting hand upon the wheel still held her to it.

There was a loud, high singing in the air, as another shell went whizzing close above their heads.

Then, whirling past the iron cape, fog again had come to wrap its blanket round the bay.

With tension ended, the mate called out,

"Shall we ease the sheets?"

But, still in the thick, unseeing gloom, the Skipper's voice resounded, "Punish her! Punish her!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

A Man Bewitched

THE *Acadian* was running her easting down in the Brave West Winds that roar forever round the Horn.

The Fifties south are desolate and terrible seas, deep troughed, crested white, shrieking for destruction.

East, a half south, the tiny schooner was racing before the gale, a narrow band of straining canvas holding like iron against the void immensity.

Hercule LeBlanc, another name for Strongheart, stood to the wheel, secured to the after bitts. Again, and yet again, the vessel was nigh pooped. Maddened seas howled out against the helmsman. Blood dimmed his eye, where the kicking wheel had caught him. But he held his course, steadfast, unflinching, a man of rock, begotten of the hardy brine.

One look behind, one faltering hand, and the tiny schooner would have broached to,—to utter destruction.

The *Acadian* appeared like a half tide rock. White and green pouring in cascades over the weather bulwarks, and back again to leeward as she rolled; her waist was a seething maelstrom.

The wheel was spinning around the whole time, hard up, and hard down, before the crash of league-long graybeards.

Wild Alec MacLean, who was conning the helmsman, had fallen strangely silent.

All night the mate had stood there ordering and adjuring to the shock and kick of heavy seas. He too had lashed himself, so that no power could force him to retreat.

MacLean trembled from that wet, pervasive cold that penetrated to his very bones. Haggard, blue-lipped, wan, he stood behind the helmsman, a wretched figure of a man, not yet recovered from his wound, plainly too old for such a contest. Yet somehow, under his deplorable exterior, there lurked the spirit of the master. In spite of chattering teeth, and palsied frame, there was nothing uncertain in the tone of his command.

“Meet her!

“Ease her off a bit!

“Steady.

“Now then, meet her, again!”

Occasionally, the Mate appeared to be in a comatose state. Then, to give the lie to such appearance, he would leap forward and offer the mightiest aid in grinding the wheel up or down.

As night waned, a strange change began to come over the Mate. The helmsman realized that his orders were becoming fewer and fewer, until at last it was apparent that he had ceased from conning the ship.

At the wheel, Hercule wondered what had happened, but he could not look behind. Here was the place where the slightest error would be paid for with the lives of all.

Dawn, breaking through the cloud banks of a windy sky, disclosed a scene of terrifying magnificence. Mile on mile of long green valleys soaring upward into snowy peaks, tumbling down and rolling onward, that vast and awful panorama, known only unto real sailors, known unto them as “God’s Own Ocean.”

The *Acadian*, riding aloft upon a giant graybeard, paused with her bowsprit piercing heaven. There, just at that soaring moment, across the whitecapped ranges Wild Alec saw amid the shifting mountains a mountain that endured,—it was Cape Horn!

It was the Mate alone who caught the first glimpse of that gaunt and specter-haunting rock, gazing like a man bewitched.

They had not made sufficient southing!

Now, toward that bastion based in surge, the *Acadian*, almost before the wind, was driving like a bride of the sea prepared for her dance with death.

What had happened in the brain of the Mate?

What strange hypnosis had he found in that brief glimpse?

For Wild Alec MacLean, this fatal Cape suddenly seemed to be possessed of occult power, exercising over him a fascination like that of a bird in a serpent's eye.

Hanging weakly to the after rail the whole soul and heart of the man was rushing out in answer to some weird attraction. He seemed to have said good-by to all his senses, like one who moved dimly in a realm of shadows. From the resourceful master of the sea, in a twinkling, he had metamorphosed into one possessed.

Just as the magnetism of that grim Cape had been known to disarrange a compass, so now, just as surely, it was reaching forth to cast a Circean spell upon the dazed mind of the Mate. Yea, the Cape Horn madness was upon him.

Coming up from below, with ear tuned to the everlasting graybeards, Captain Gabereau caught an unaccustomed note. Across the vast diapason of the deep there came to him the crash and thunder of an ironbound shore.

One glance above the companion, and the Skipper knew the worst. Anon, they rode the crests, and there, far down the wind, rising like a massive tombstone in a sailors' graveyard, was Cape Stiff, a palsy-smiting apparition that few ever saw under their lee, and lived to tell about.

They had, through MacLean's madness, come into a pocket where chancing and desperate sailing was their only hope.

Rushing forward to the foc'sle, the Skipper sounded the alarm; almost in the same instant, all hands were streaking up on the deck, not even waiting to get "oiled up" at the imminency of that call.

Some came in their shirt tails, almost bare to the bitter night. All alike were smart as paint in answering to the call. All knew that their lives, in that moment, were hanging in the balance.

"Cape Stiff's right under our lee!" shrieked the Skipper. Nothing more was needed for the call to stations.

They were tearing along under four lowers, an incredible press of canvas, but taking the wheel, the Skipper shouted, "Haul in yer sheets there."

As the booms came in, he pointed her up close into the wind, in an effort to claw past the weathermost outerly of the Cape.

As she answered to her helm, he called, "Now then, chuck all the reefs out of her."

With the *Acadian* already plunging deeply by the head the three-reefed mainsail seemed all that such a craft could bear. In a rush of fear, some one called, "She can't stand it, Skipper."

"Better die crackin' on than runnin' off," came back the answer.

"Shake out them reefs, I tell ye!"

"All of 'em?"

"Yea, all of 'em."

Under the tremendous press of canvas the schooner began to claw up, and eat into the very eye of the wind.

The giant seas were boiling clean up to her hatches, while beyond the foc'sle head it was unlivable for bursting seas.

"If he keeps it up like this, he'll drive her bows straight under."

"We'll be in the belly o' Hell in another minute."

Everyone was sending up his protest, but the Skipper never wavered.

Hearing a devout soul, near by, sending up a prayer to Michael and to Mary, suddenly seemed to throw Sprott Gabereau into a blind frenzy. Fighting tooth and nail, at such a moment, a prayer was something he could not abide. Turning toward the suppliant, he bellowed:

"No Mary and no Michael'll save ye now, aboard this hooded hooker. If it's prayers yer wantin', then haul fer the salvation o' yer souls on them bitched-up sheets and halyards."

All hands grunting and groaning away at the ropes, while his whiplash voice rang out again, "Break yer backs on it. Haul away there, till she's fast as a board."

With the vessel burying herself in a manner to stop one's heartbeat, the lynx eye of the skipper was watching, gauging continually.

Would she make it?

Were they eating into the wind sufficiently to claw off from that grip of death?

At first, it looked as though the spell of the Cape was being shaken off, and then, with increasing horror, the headland was again observed closing in on their lee.

"She won't make."

As though in defiance to such a wail, the Skipper suddenly ripped out, “Put the staysail to her.”

“My God, she’ll never stand it.”

“We’ll be dead if we try that, Skipper.”

“We’ll be dead if we don’t,” was the laconic answer.

As the great fisherman’s staysail was swayed up, and sheeted home, the *Acadian* seemed fairly to eat her way into the teeth of the gale. With the added pressure, there was an instantaneous jump in the racing schooner, as though she knew what was expected of her, and had steeled herself for the desperate effort.

At the wheel, Sprott Gabereau was fighting like a man possessed, not too bold, not too cautious, he availed himself of every lull and slant to drive his vessel across the long, fierce, swooping combers.

Such furious driving was enough to stop the heartbeat.

In the fiercest onslaughts, the *Acadian* went over so far that it seemed as though she would never come up. But the very racing speed of the vessel was her own deliverance. As they pitched into every black abyss, fingers itched to ease the sheets, but always the whiplash voice was urging, “Haul ’em in there, flat as a board.”

In the mad conflict with the mighty staysail, the very thought of their own security seemed to have been blotted out, as they fought furiously with sheets and halyards.

Under the incredible press of canvas, the schooner fairly ate into the eye of the wind, burying herself for’ard, with everything going blue. It was one of those sailing moments of divinest daring, where courage lifted men into the realm of

gods, while the whiplash voice of Gabereau was heard, still urging on his crew.

"Put it to her. Put it to her."

Then, as though in answer to such unheard-of chancing, there came an ominous, ripping tear.

"Whir-rip-p-p—bang!"

Ending with a report like gunfire, the fore-topmast under its unhallowed strain, had suddenly carried away.

"My God, we're done!"

"But, no. Look! Look!"

There was a gradual consciousness of smoother water, and gazing back, they saw behind them the menace of that grim Southern Gateman. They had cleared the weather outerlies.

CHAPTER XXXV

The Fiord

AFTER weathering the farthest jutting out point of Cape Stiff, the *Acadian* had unexpectedly sailed into a calm landlocked fiord, protected from the raging gales without by huge cliffs, one of those labyrinthine channels making up the fretwork of an ocean-harried shore.

The swift transition from life-and-death conflict to the peace behind the foreland came almost as a thumping shock. A moment before, all hands were fighting for their very breath, now miraculously they had been plunged into peace profound.

Without, the unending cannonade of breakers; within, a quiet swell rolling up upon a shelving beach.

Once behind the headland, there was not enough wind for them to make toward the shore, nor yet again to stand out to the open sea. They were completely becalmed.

With the sails flapping idly, they took a cast of their lead, and finding themselves in eighteen fathoms, sandy bottom, let go their anchor, while the Skipper himself ran up to the main crosstrees with his glass, to spy out the land.

He saw shores bold and steep-to, mountains sharp pointed, with difficult ascents, thickly overgrown with evergreen trees and shrubs, rising from the base to within several hundred feet of the summit.

They were about two miles from the head of the cove, and about midway from either side. The Skipper observed that their berth was quite secure, although exposed to the willawaws which might rush down from the mountain with great violence.

Pulling out from his pocket the chart of Andrea Ferrara, the Skipper read:

"*Landing, Dislocation Estuary.*
"*Shingle beach on south affords protection....*"

After reading this, he once more studied the shore with his glass, and then, assured by the landmarks, with a sudden exultant rush, he came swooping down the backstay.

Several of the crew crowded forward as he landed on the deck, looking to him expectantly, while the Mate edged in.

"D'ye know where we are, MacLean?"

"No, ain't got the slightest."

“Well, I’ll tell ye,” said the Skipper, his eyes dancing with new fire.

“We’re right plumb on to the Cove.”

“Ye don’t mean it.”

“Aye, by damn near puttin’ us ashore, Mate, ye’ve put us up against Easy Street fer the rest of our lives. This is the place they’ve all been huntin’ for. That there beach is Dislocation Estuary, checking it off with the pirate’s old chart here, there ain’t no shadow o’ doubt.”

A sudden “Bravo” escaped from MacLean, while the Captain continued excitedly,

“Yea, all we’ve got to do is to land on that there shingle beach, and follow out these here instructions.”

“And when will we make the landing, Skipper?”

“Right off, this very mornin’.”

“Ye won’t even wait for to-morrow and a full day?”

“Wait fer nothin’. God only knows how long this wind’ll hold favorable. Won’t be long, that’s sure, an’ if we’re goin’ after the treasure, now’s the time.”

Accordingly, it was arranged that the Skipper, Paul, and the Mate should go together.

A feverish excitement ran through the crew as soon as it was known that they were about to try to effect a landing at the foot of Cape Horn.

There was a deal of muttering among the sealers, as the boat was prepared for launching. Finally, as spokesman for the rest, Anselme Constant came up to the Captain to say that the crew were afraid to see both of their officers abandon them.

Faced by this direct challenge, Gabereau, against his previous intention, was forced to let all hands in on the secret.

Standing by the boats, in the waist, he exclaimed:

"I didn't intend to tell ye, men, until we came back, but I suppose I might as well let ye know first as last. The truth is, we've got the secret of Ferrara's treasure, and the Mate and I are going to make a landing while chance holds good. We'll be back again late to-night, or first thing in the morning."

"And where do we come in?" This last in a general chorus.

Several of the sealers appeared threatening, when the Skipper put up his hand. "Steady, men, not too fast now. Ye'll all get your share, same as the rest."

"How's that?"

"Well, if we find it, we're goin' to split three ways, one share Skipper, one share to Paul and Mate, one share to the rest of you. Is that agreeable?"

A lusty cheer from the crew was the answer, showing their enthusiastic support, when they saw their own gain, and at once all hands fell to assisting in the preparations for the landing party.

One man was to be taken along, and all volunteered for the job, but the Captain had already picked out a Chilote, from Lemuy Island, in Ancud Gulf, who, as a native of this archipelago, was naturally best acquainted with conditions.

Toward noon, the landing party shoved off from the *Acadian*, and headed for the beach. At the time, it was still calm within the estuary, while a long ground swell rolled in gently toward the shore.

Guided by the line of white shingle, they effected a landing, jumping out into the surf as soon as she grounded, and standing to their waists in water, ran the boat high and dry beyond the reach of breakers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Scaling Cape Horn

THE Skipper, who held the parchment guide, read out:

"*Ascent, advisable E.N.E. side.*"

"All right, we'll have to strike around in that direction."

At first, the way was through clumps of stunted oak and mountain fir, until they reached a height of two hundred feet. The first ascent was comparatively easy, as they were able to follow the bed of an old stream on their upward way.

"Lucky thing we've got the dry season," exclaimed the Skipper.

"Aye, we've got nothin' but luck this time," countered MacLean.

But the Captain's brow clouded at his exultant tone.

"Wait till we're back, before we start crowing, Mate."

"Aye, and ye're right there, Skipper."

About two hundred feet up, the forest growth began to give way, and the scenery changed to open shelves of smooth rock, with scrub and stunted vegetation.

The rocks at times opposed their way so that they had to drag themselves over or around by the aid of bushes. While clawing over a ten-foot bowlder, the Captain fell heavily

from the top, but his fall was fortunately broken by the thick undergrowth below.

Once, under one of the bushes, a massive black snake was seen, and the Chilote, who was leading at the time, turned and fled back with a cry of terror. Nothing would persuade him to go on again until the snake had been dispatched.

Little by little, vegetation began to die out, as they rose, until, beyond seven hundred feet, there remained nothing but bare rock, and naked earth. The going, by this time, had become extremely difficult, owing to the abrupt masses of granite that blocked the way. To add to the arduousness of the climb, from frequent falls across the bowlders the Captain was now walking with a painful limp.

At a height of a thousand feet, the air was penetrating. The biting Antarctic winds up there seemed to search their vitals. With clothing soaked from wet bushes, the cold was doubly accentuated.

All were glad when at last they reached a large cave formed by three rocks, where the Captain ordered a halt to prepare a meal, and dry out their clothes, before proceeding to the last and most arduous part of the ascent.

The Chilote, an accomplished mountaineer, had thoughtfully brought with him faggots, and a bag of coals, and soon they had a small fire going inside of the cave, where they were able to steep a cup of hot tea and dry out the dampness from their feet.

“If yer feet are warm and dry, the rest of it ain’t so bad,” remarked Paul, who was the least fatigued of all.

After finishing the light lunch, which in that cold, biting air was like new heat in the boilers, their spirits were immensely revived.

Standing under the high mouth of the cave, they gazed southward at an almost limitless panorama, stretching on and on into the wastes of the Cape Horn Seas.

Viewing those seas from this untroubled height, Gabereau felt like one who had been miraculously lifted above the storms and baser passions.

Beneath his feet was that boisterous water whose very mention was a holy terror to all sailors, and there he was viewing it with the serene indifference of some Jove on high. A peculiar elation was in his heart at that moment, when suddenly he was brought back to normal by a rush and whir above the cave, and two giant eagles rose overhead and rested on the ledge above, hanging there threateningly, as though ready to swoop down upon them.

In the cave they noticed innumerable bones and feathers. The Chilote cautioned a swift retreat, since they were disturbing the birds' roost, and stood to fare ill if such giants of the air should open up with an attack.

After the halt for lunch, they began the real battle for the summit.

"My God, it's almost straight up and down," Paul wailed with dismay, as he bent backward to contemplate the barrier that opposed.

"We can't make it," chimed in the Chilote, who had about come to the end of his endurance, and was ready to cry halt. But there was no such spirit in Sprott Gabereau.

Taking out the parchment, he read the last instruction,

"*Summit to northward, facing lagoon.*
"*Highest point of all.*
"*In rent of granite.*"

No matter how the Chilote might waver, this last put new and sudden fire into the other two, and with a will they at once set themselves to the last round.

For over an hour, they literally clawed up over the side of a sheer wall.

By observing that prime principle of climbing, to keep three points of suspension, two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand, they were enabled to do what at first glance would have appeared impossible. At length, by jamming their arms and legs into the rents of the rocks, they managed to reach the second highest peak, where, as mentioned in the parchment, there appeared a lagoon of clear blue water.

Gabereau, lusting for the treasure, could not help pausing on that last plateau, to take in the solitary magnificence that stretched out at his feet. The vastness and desolation of the surroundings was truly appalling.

On all sides were the vast silences of nature, even the wind, at that height, was hushed and waiting.

It seemed as though man had never been there before, as though he would never be there again. No sign of growing shrub, or bush, or tree, no animate object of any kind, not even a wheeling eagle.

A world of unutterable solitude, of rock, of ice, of snow.

To the north were the great multitudes of reefs and islands and great channels, to the west the golden shafts of the dying

sun, to the south the league-long stretches of a polar ocean.

Struggling, panting, and bleeding over the last crest, Sprott Gabereau lay for a time helpless in the snow, then with a return of his splendid strength, he gathered himself and stood erect; he was on the topmost point of the Horn. He had surmounted the mightiest barrier at the end of the world. With his heart thumping, there was a song of conquest within.

He was trembling along the threshold of his great desire. In spite of every obstacle he was about to grasp that for which countless seekers had striven in vain.

While he stood there, panting, exultant, MacLean also came over the crest. Although possessed of far inferior physical strength, MacLean was one of those who could rise to any emergency, through the prowess of unyielding spirit. As he came over the last escarpment, a sudden vertigo seized him; he had driven his engine to the limit of endurance; that last cruel spurt brought him to the summit utterly spent and shaken.

Throwing his hands to his eyes, in sudden pain, he staggered precariously, only the swift hand of the Skipper prevented him from plunging on to the rocks hundreds of feet below.

Leading the exhausted man back to a place of safety, Gabereau allowed him to collapse in the snow, while he at once set about to read the last instruction on the precious parchment.

"*Summit to northward facing lagoon*—That's where we are now," he muttered.

Looking down, in a northerly direction, the Captain saw, right under his eye, a sort of table-land, with a lagoon on its

summit, its infinite blue set off in rare contrast by the drifting snow of the surrounding shore. This crest had the appearance of a volcano, and probably had been in a former time.

Turning his back on the lagoon, he saw before him a lone barrier of naked granite, rising like some cathedral carved by nature atop the world.

Directly in front of him stood Cap-piece of Cape Horn, towering up like some lonely spire, a combination of greenstone and feldspar.

Gabereau read the last words on the parchment with a sudden ecstasy.

"*Highest point of all,*
"*In rent of granite rock.*"

There could be no doubt after the explicitness of the instructions.

Coming up to the granite barrier, he examined it closely, and then his heart gave a great jump, for there, sure enough, was the rent running like a giant sword-thrust athwart the entire face of the wall.

Slowly, with breath coming short from excitement, he began to edge his way upward along that ugly rent, twice, from undue eagerness, he almost lost his grip, and then at last, at the very crown of that cathedral of granite, his eye caught something jammed securely into the rocky fissure.

It was a black case, similar to the one which he had found in the rescued lifeboat. Struggling to disengage this case, Gabereau nearly plunged downward to destruction. The top of the case gave way, and but for the iron gluing of his feet into the fissure, he would have broken his neck.

As it was, he hung there for several moments head downward, still clasping fatuously the top of the fatal case.

In that sickening moment, he felt a sudden revulsion, as if there were something fatal in the mere touch of the case.

When at last he succeeded in worming back again into safety, he found himself regarding the case, still secure in its century-old resting place, with a feeling akin to the awe of childhood.

This time, he worked more cautiously than before, and finally the whole thing was loosened and came away.

At the same moment, a hand touched him, and MacLean returned the top of the case, which had fallen near him in the snow.

The voice of the Mate sounded in his ear, like the voice of one who had come to his supreme hour,

"Open it! Open it!" he importuned.

"Wait till we get back again below."

"No, no! Open it now."

Digging his feet securely into the fissure of the rock, so that both hands were disengaged, Gabereau pulled out an inner case, sealed completely, and bearing upon its face the unmistakable Ferrara crown.

Wrapped around this inner case, and secured by the Ferrara seals, was a piece of parchment on which was written with india ink a communication in the same precise hand as the first message.

Turning the case over, so that the writing was right side up, Sprott Gabereau read aloud:

As I went far to gain, so he who would inherit must go far to find. A curse is resting on this fortune. It came with evil, and in the end can bring naught but evil.

The clew within may lead to sorrow, and a grave at the end of the world. Be warned, for it is at the peril of all happiness that ye open this case.

(Signed)

Andrea Ferrara.

As soon as Gabereau had ceased reading, the Mate burst out again, impetuously:

"Open it! Open it!"

There was a tone of iron decision in the voice of the Skipper, as he answered:

"Not yet."

CHAPTER XXXVII

A Curtain of Mystery

WHILE Sprott Gabereau clung to the eerie fissure of rock, he felt a wild impulse to throw the secret case headlong into the void.

Clasping that for which he had paid with incredible risk, now that it was in his hand, its attendant curse filled him with dread.

By this time, the sun was waning. Below he could see that night was already gathering.

The deathlike stillness and gloom of those far valleys was intense, their very silence reached out to him with a disturbing portent.

Up there on the summit of that riven cape, there was no living thing, nothing but rock and ice and snow. In the intenseness of the cold Sprott Gabereau shivered.

An unutterable foreboding came over him. He who had been rubbing clothes with death all his life, for the first time knew that hesitation which is the precursor of craven fear.

Looking down from that void immensity, doubts began to assail him.

What if the night should find him on the sheer side of that mountain wall?

What if he should lose his footstep in the darkness?

What if one of those Cape Horn blizzards should catch him on that unprotected mountain? And what of that unknown dread that came with this wretched case?

The sky-high gambler was counting the stakes. The headlong plunger had begun to hesitate. Safety last had changed to safety first. The bold man began to wonder what affliction had mysteriously laid hold upon him.

“I’ve a good mind to chuck this accursed case to Hell,” he remarked aloud.

At which a vigorous expostulation broke out from MacLean.

“Are ye goin’ crazy, Skipper?”

“I never was any wiser than I am right now.”

“Well, what are ye talkin’ fool stuff about throwin’ away that which all the world would give anything to possess. I guess the air’s gone to your head.”

“No, it’s the curse that’s gone to my head, and what’s more it’s gone to my very soul.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that something has given me cold feet. Something has made me into a weak-kneed, chicken-hearted coward.”

“It’s the high air that’s affecting ye, Skipper. I know it often gets a feller off his rocker. Why the Hell should ye be afraid o’ a tin case?”

“It ain’t the case.”

“What is it, then?”

“It’s the curse o’ the dead hand, sealed wi’ the cross, that I’m afraid of.”

“Ballyhack to that kind o’ twaddle.”

“Aye, ye may be able to say that, MacLean, but I can’t.”

“Why can’t ye?”

“Because there are some things I learned from Monsieur le Curé, in childhood back in Arichat, that I cannot begin to forget. Every boy that ever came out o’ Arichat has heard o’ the curse on Ferrara’s treasure.

“I thought that I’d forgotten all about it, or that I could have snapped my fingers in the face of all such talk; I thought, just as you say, that it was twaddle, but now, at the end of the world, with the secret o’ this treasure in my hand, I feel just as I used to when I was a wee lad, terrified and callin’ for me mother in the awful dark.”

The voice of MacLean took on a note of weariness.

“Ye’ve got it bad, Skipper. You’re crazy as a March hare. Never thought I’d live to see a hard-headed customer like Sprott Gabereau turn so light in the upper story. But ye ain’t to blame. Ye ain’t the first one who’s gone dippy because o’

high altitudes. It's bad fer lots o' 'em. Here, hand me over the case."

The Skipper obeyed, in a half-hearted manner, and MacLean, subject to the exact opposite effect, felt a thrill of exhilaration as he placed the precious inner tube back in its outer case, and made it safe in his reefer pocket.

With the accursed thing out of his hands, Sprott Gabereau knew instant relief, and the two started to work their way downward, while MacLean took upon himself the task of bucking up the Captain's spirit.

"We're all right, now. We'll make that cave as a shelter fer the night, and then, as soon as it's light in the morning, we'll start on the last lap back to the vessel."

On the plateau, by the lagoon, they halted to eat a ship's biscuit, meager fare at best, but the biting air had made them ravenous.

The downward trip, as the Skipper expected, was far more difficult and dangerous than the ascent. But a strange self-sufficiency seemed to be imparted to Wild Alec MacLean from the magic touch of the secret case. Always he was uttering encouragement, always in the crisis he was near to proffer aid.

"Just go easy there, Skipper. Give us your hand. Easy now. Lean on me. There, ye're all right now."

Blackness, closing down, still found them struggling interminably on that never-ending wall of granite. MacLean, a Judique Highlander, had been scaling the cliffs and mountains from his boyhood. Such a test might have appalled a mere sailor, who always required a rope or spar to cling to. But the mountaineer, on the other hand, could go spiderlike

against the sheerest precipice. For the time being, at least, the Mate had become the master.

It was ten o'clock, when MacLean leading the way stumbled at last upon the friendly cave. Here, as expected, they found the Chilote and Paul huddled up together in a corner, with the only blanket. Crawling in beside them, like so many creatures of the wild, they were soon fast asleep.

At the first cry of day, all hands were stirring. Another hardtack biscuit apiece, and they began upon the last lap of the journey to the schooner.

The deathlike stillness of the small gullies they had to traverse was intense. The only living things they disturbed, besides the eagles, were two very small and starved little mice, who seemed too indifferent of their fate to move out of the road.

About the middle of the morning, they arrived back at the shingly beach, and Gabereau's fears began to leave him. There was the *Acadian*, riding securely within the headland while the calm within still continued.

Outside the heads, a thick fog was hanging like the black drapery of a theater curtain. Beyond that curtain was the terror of the Horn. But within, everything remained serene, as though the cove itself were a sanctuary, inviolate from the ragings of the outer ocean.

As Gabereau came on to the shingly beach and found their boat high and dry, just as might have been expected, he suffered a revulsion of feeling. A wave of shame swept over him at the remembrance of his own quavering before the terror of the heights.

"Yea, I guess ye were right, MacLean. It was the rare air up there that went to me head."

“It sure did. You was plain lunatic crazy. If it hadn’t been for me, you’d ’ave tossed this whole business into perdition.”

Saying this, MacLean removed the black case from his reefer, whilst both of them gazed fondly, yearningly, at its pregnant Ferrara crown.

“Better open it right away.”

“All right, let’s just come over here.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Dunno, but whenever I come to monkey with this secret, I always get a queer kind o’ feeling.”

The Mate handed over the chart case, and at this unexpected outburst, he exclaimed, “At it again, eh. My God, Skipper, what’s the matter wi’ ye? Seems ye can’t touch this thing without goin’ dippy. Here, hand it back to me.”

The Mate was just starting to open it, when something in the eye of the Chilote caused Gabereau to raise a restraining hand.

Drawing the Mate aside, he expostulated, “We don’t know what this secret’s goin’ to be. Whatever it is, we don’t aim to have that Chilote blabbing it to the whole crew.”

“Right you are,” assented the Mate; and so, in the interests of secrecy, they withdrew to a wooded dingle. Paul was invited to accompany them, but replied that he had no desire to learn what the case contained.

Gabereau and the Mate were gone for about half an hour. When they returned, the Skipper was carrying the case, which he handed to Paul.

“Here, take this, and carry it back to the vessel, keep tight hold of it, and when you get aboard, tell four boats to come back here.”

“Shall I return with them?”

“No, you take care of that case, and remain aboard. Tell the boys we want ’em here, to fetch wood and water.”

“And something else,” remarked the Chilote, with a leer.

Ignoring him, the Skipper urged, “Hurry up. Get off quickly, now.”

As Paul placed the secret in his breast pocket, he also experienced the same fear that had formerly troubled his uncle. For their ilk, at least, this strange chart case was a thing accursed.

The boat was successfully launched, and they jumped in and started away.

The *Acadian* was lying about two miles off, and the ensign, going up to her peak, told them that their movements were observed from aboard.

Seeing only one meaning, in the two remaining behind, the Chilote was in finest spirits. He had not dwelt all his lifetime in this archipelago without catching the fever that went with the name Ferrara. Expressing his feelings, he burst out:

“Talkin’ o’ bad luck, and curses, I’d like to know if this ain’t comin’ through with the finest kind o’ luck. ’Twas good luck that almost cast us ashore. ’Twas good luck that weathered the Cape, ’twas good luck that landed us on this beach. And now, here we are walkin’ right back as if everything was made to order.”

In the best spirits, rejoicing in the clear morning air, the Chilote fell to discussing what he would do with his share of the pirate gold.

“First thing I’ll have will be a good home back there at Punta Arenas. I’m through with work. I’ll start out for me

good times now; get one o' them women that keeps a saloon, and marry her, and have her for me own. And—!"

This pleasant romancing was suddenly cut short by an exclamation from Paul, who was in the bow. The man at the oars turned to look over his shoulder, and he too let out a cry of terror.

Well might he tremble with a sudden ague. Unobserved by them, the fog, which had been lingering about the headland, had stolen into the bay. They were about a mile from the shore, about a mile from the vessel, and now, without compass, or any other guide, they were lost in an impenetrable blanket of gloom.

While the Chilote was romancing, Cape Horn had merely been sleeping.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Whither?

IN a sudden panic, both men set themselves rowing with might and main in the direction where it appeared to them that the vessel was lying.

Frantically they bent to the oars, while Paul, in the bows, kept up a continual shouting and hallooing to attract attention. But no sound came back out of that impenetrable blanket of gloom.

A glistening wall rose on every hand, shutting out completely all sight and sound.

Twice, the Chilote, who had a voice like the bull of Bashan, sent out a mighty roar, but it sounded hollow and empty against the fog, without the slightest answer.

Sometimes, they imagined that they saw the dim loom of spars, or heard the muffled note of a vessel's bell, but it proved to be only the baseless fabric of the mist.

As they rowed on and on without the slightest idea of direction, it became apparent that the slow, easy undulation of the inner cove was gradually changing to a wicked swell.

"My God, we must be going straight out to sea," cried Paul.

"If we do, we'll go plumb to Hell."

"Better swing around, and row back toward the shore."

"Back toward the shore! Happy chance we got o' knowin' where the shore is, off two or three miles in a fog, thick as pea soup."

"But can't we let the ground swell take us in?"

"Dunno about that. Seems to me the tide'll be past the flood by now, and like as not, the ebb'll be settin' to seaward like a mill race."

The Chilote was becoming more and more apprehensive, calling out every few moments at something, which turned out always to be phantasies of a disordered brain.

They rowed in what seemed the opposite direction from the ground swell, with the hope of winning back to calmer water, but the harder they rowed, the more alarming the prospect became.

"Look out."

The hail from forward was not in time, and in their impetuousness they sent the tiny craft crashing head on into a breaking crest, coming out drenched, with half a ton of water washing up to their knees inside the dory.

"Another like that, and we'll sink deado."

Paul, in the meantime, had gone back to the oars, exclaiming, “Here, you damned Spick, stop yer yammerin’ and bail this out. Bail, I tell ye, bail.”

Using their sou’westers as bailers, they soon had the water out of her, after which they allowed the dory to drift aimlessly, Paul merely dipping an oar occasionally to meet a nasty one.

Soon, however, this casual handling was not enough; it was necessary to keep constantly on the alert, to prevent a big fellow from swamping them, or causing them to broach to.

The Chilote was at it again, in his terrified alarms, while even Paul began to eye with discomfiture the deepening of the oncoming seas.

Graybearded, deep-troughed, roaring, white with foam, there was no doubt from whence they came, offsprings of mightier giants.

By this time, all casualness had gone. It had become a grim, stand-up fight, a battle of life or death, in which there was no respite, no breathing space, no thought of quarter. The men in the dory knew that they were at it for their lives.

The Chilote bailed for all he was worth, while Paul, a past master in the art of handling boats in surf, always countered just in time to meet a blow.

One minute too early, one minute too late, would have been their undoing, but his judgment was unerring.

They had given up all thought of looking for the vessel, their one idea, now, to keep afloat, and meet these wicked seas.

All about them, everywhere, was the impenetrable gloom, while an ugly cross sea added a thousandfold to its menace.

Fog, fog, fog. Wherever the eye turned, and underneath, snarling, racing combers, going by like wolves of prey.

Gazing at those swooping seas, the Chilote became delirious, rising up in the bows and shouting, until he threatened to capsize the boat.

"For Christ's sake, sit down," cautioned Paul, after a close squeak.

The Chilote's answer was to rise again, screaming out, "There they are! There they are!"

Reaching for the maniac, Paul brought him back with a crash, striking his head against the forward thwart, in such a manner as to jar the panic out of him.

"Now then, quit that fool stuff, or you'll have us both overboard."

By this time, Paul himself was beginning to be harassed by those same unknown, unrealizable fears that had assailed the Skipper on the summit.

For him, it seemed as though this menacing fog and all these raping seas were but the evils that attended the cursed case.

"Did you get that?" There was a catch in the voice.

"Breakers ahead!" came back from the Chilote.

In the same instant, out of the gloom, came the crash of seas upon a rocky shore.

There was the unmistakable swish, riding high along a shoaling bottom, and then the thundering reverberation as the comber broke into a mass of skyward foam.

No need of any word of command at this dire warning. The Chilote had seized a pair of oars, and together they bent their backs in a superhuman effort to pull clear.

Death, in its most overwhelming form, was baying along that rocky coast line. And yet, in the gloom, they knew not which way to turn. Their tiny craft was as a snowflake tossed everlastingly upon the wings of storm.

It was this utter helplessness that so far unmanned them. As long as one could do something, as long even as the brain could give direction, there was a chance for quiet mastery, but the abdication of hand, and brain, alike, left the outworks of man's composure utterly shattered.

More than once, in that awful baying of the attendant breakers, the Chilote shrieked out like a woman. It was as though he listened to wild beasts loosed to devour them. Waiting, in helpless impotency, they could not even see the maddening leap of the destroyer.

Just when the back scend of those crashing seas was falling in upon them, their oars seemed suddenly to grip the water, and there was the deeper green, with the crazy plunging of the dory, gradually easing off into a more normal lift and fall.

The Chilote wiped sweat from his brow, which was as the sweat of death.

"What's happened?"

"Must have swung past a headland."

"Never thought we'd come out o' that alive."

"May be a pity we didn't crash, an' be through with it."

"Why?"

"Because these Cape Horn fogs often set in tight for days. If we're in for that, now, we'd a been luckier to smash head on, than to wait for starvation and brain fever."

After the shock of the breakers, a sickening depression came over Paul Gabereau. Poignant and distressful, he had

the feeling of one who was irretrievably lost.

To go forward was to risk the murder of Cape Horn seas.

To go backward was to flirt with the disaster of the breakers.

He did not know what to do, nor whither to turn. It was this abdication of sovereignty that brought on the consciousness of the very depths.

During all this interminable agony, Paul felt that fatal case pressing against his breast, like some chill hand of fate.

Sometimes, he thought of plucking the thing out and throwing it from him. But in his abject condition, the power of resolution seemed to have forsaken him.

He had fallen into the grip of forces beyond his own control, as though he had sold himself to the devil, and now was doomed to await the devil's pay.

These abject and helpless ruminations were suddenly broken in upon by the dim apparition of a flying jibboom, looming ghastly and spectral in the fog.

In the next instant, before they could utter a cry, the dory crashed with frightful impact against a vessel's curving forefoot.

Quick as lightning, Paul jumped, and catching something, started to come in hand over hand along the bobstay.

As he climbed across the knightheads, some one reached forth to pull him in.

"What vessel is this?" he panted.

"*Ushuaia*," was the answer.

Part Three

SOUTHERN OCEAN

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Headlong Quest

AFT in the cabin of the *Ushuaia*, Paul came face to face with Yvonne, but there was nothing warm or glowing in her welcome. At first, when he was brought aboard, with his head bleeding, she seemed frightfully concerned, for fear that he had been injured from a glancing blow from the dolphin striker.

Seeing that he was none the worse for his experience, she retired again, veiling all feeling behind a cold exterior.

When he attempted to draw her out, she gave back the same accusing look that had so distressed him on their previous encounter.

"Aren't you glad to see me?"

"I'm never glad to see a thief."

"Still harping on that chart case?"

"It wasn't yours, and you had no business to come and steal it, like a thief in the night."

"I didn't come to steal the cursed thing."

"What did you come for?"

"I came for you."

The proud face of the girl reflected supercilious contempt.

Ignoring this, Paul suddenly focused her attention by producing the black case from his breast.

Recognizing the Ferrara crown, petulance gave way to livest interest.

“Oh, oh, you’ve really brought it back, have you?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“What is this, then.”

“This is the second clew, which we got up there on top of Cape Horn.”

In an instant, Yvonne was dancing with excitement; rushing toward Paul, she almost looked as though she would have kissed him, and then, on second thought, darting across to the Don’s stateroom, she called, “Come here, come here, Dinkums, just see what Paul has brought.”

As the second chart case was placed upon the cabin table, the grave dignity of the Don was lost in feverish excitement, his hand trembled, his eye shone, while his staid, quiet speech gave way to bubbling effusions. He and Yvonne seemed to be intoxicated at the mere sight of the Ferrara crown. Paul alone sat unmoved, immune to its magic spell.

With the girl nestling close against him, Don Juan read in a thrilling voice the message written around the inner case.

> *As I went far to gain, so he who would inherit must go far to find. A curse is resting on this fortune. It came with evil, and in the end can bring naught but evil.*
>
> *The clew within may lead to sorrow, and a grave at the end of the world. Be*

warned, for it is at the peril of all
happiness that ye open this case.

When the Don had finished reading this doleful message, he threw back his head and laughed heartily.

Then, with burning fingers, he started to break open the cover. But a hand restrained him. It was Yvonne.

“Don’t! Don’t!” she importuned, looking into his eyes, with sudden pleading.

The Don’s answer was an imperious shrug. Casting the gentle hand aside, he went on tussling until at last the thing gave way, and out came a parchment, similar to the first.

By the torn strings, it was evident that Sprott Gabereau and the Mate had already been reading its message.

Straightening out the communication upon the chart-room table, the Don read aloud,

Prince Edward Island Group.
Lay course for Boot Rock.
Lat. 46° 48′ S.
Long. 37° 43′ 45" E.
Cave immediately eastward of principal Lava Valley.
Position may be ascertained by cross bearing;
Shoal in channel between Islands bearing N.N.E.
And most northerly cove bearing N.W. (mag.)
(signed), *Andrea Ferrara*.

When the first excitement was over, Don Juan summoned his sailing master and directed that the course be at once laid for the Prince Edward Island group, handing him the longitude and latitude given on the parchment.

With the vessel now definitely on the trail of treasure, Don Juan metamorphosed from a querulous and crabbed individual into the most urbane and pleasing host.

Whatever rivalry he had formerly felt toward Paul was blotted out. Expressing himself in politest Castilian, he declared to the shipwrecked stranger, “This vessel is yours, my friend. Do not hesitate to command whatever you desire.”

But while Yvonne was still thrilled at the good news that had suddenly come to them, for some strange reason, her manner toward Paul in nowise softened.

“Won’t you even give a welcome to a shipwrecked stranger, like the Don?”

“I am not as polite as he. I say exactly what I mean.”

“But aren’t you glad to see me?”

“No, I am not.”

Thoroughly mystified, Paul exclaimed: “I brought back the clew to the treasure. It will do you no good, but I brought it back; why, then, are you still angry with me?”

Seeing the earnest look upon his face, the flush of excitement passed from the girl, while her own brow clouded, “What else is there, that is keeping us apart?”

For some time, she sat in silence, while he still pleaded, “Do, do tell me, Yvonne, what has come between us.”

At length, breaking her silence, she said accusingly, “You, of all persons, ought to know.”

Upon Paul’s unwilling mind, at that moment, there flashed the picture of the Don. Up till then, he had refused to believe such a thing. But now, in spite of a sort of childlike faith, he began to entertain black doubts.

Had she fallen for this gallant Spaniard?

Why their endearing titles?

Why their familiar looks?

Did she really prefer this patrician, after all?

As time passed, with doubts, like bad spirits, rising between them, the lovers, aboard the same vessel, were farther apart than if they had been separated by the widest ocean.

While Paul wrestled with his baffling problems, indifferent alike to love or hate, the *Ushuaia* held her course.

Before the brave West Winds, the wonderful schooner proved herself a storm bird in the truest sense, reeling off her two hundred a day, for days on end.

With such famous going, everyone aboard was in the finest spirits, everyone, except the disconsolate Paul, who kept to himself, watching morosely the tokens of affection between Yvonne and the Don. There was the most obvious attachment between them, and yet it was not the kind to stir up jealous rage, it was rather the sexless, passionless love that links up youth and age.

Paul wanted some one on whom to fasten the blame for stealing his sweetheart. The Don seemed to offer the closest excuse. And yet, here was not a full-blooded and imperious rival against whom he could hurl himself in mortal combat. Here was rather a stranger, playing his part upon the stage, thrusting himself between two lovers, not so much from his own volition, as from the intervention of some powers beyond.

To Paul, it seemed as though the *Ushuaia*, Don Juan, Yvonne, and all hands aboard were being hurled toward some far destiny by the mandate of the gods.

From the time they pointed their nose toward the Prince Edward group, winds and waves were with them. Some days, they were running under bare poles, always keeping the steadfast Westerlies just a little on their quarter.

Across long, foam-streaked, tumbling mountains, they raced to the accompaniment of roaring winds and bursting seas, the boisterous brethren of the high south latitudes.

League-long graybeards shouldered the tiny schooner to the right and left, pouring over both rails, until they looked more like a diving bell than a well-formed vessel. Invincible alike to the onslaught of wind or sea, the Don held steadfast to his course.

On the twenty-first day, with the passage of the south Atlantic about completed, the sailing master began to look anxiously for his landfall.

Picking up a lonely rock, four thousand miles away, in the fiercest grip of the Roaring Forties, was all in the day for a sealing skipper, but it was a little too much for the overwrought nerves of the yachting captain.

As the weather thickened, with the snow-and-blow variety, the sailing master was in favor of hauling to the northward, and then running down upon the island. But Don Juan and the mate were both too headlong and impetuous to brook any such delay. A lifetime of quest was not to be embarrassed by mere whims of caution.

Early on the morning of the twenty-first day, the sailing master suggested, “We might be out of our direction, might be an error of latitude; we haven’t had an observation for days.”

“That’s all right,” replied Dugas. “I’m used to running down this group in the sealers, could make ’em blindfold.

One of the islands is four thousand feet high, and long as we come on there by daylight, we can pick her off miles to seaward."

Later, with the weather thickening, the sailing master again came to suggest that they ought to haul up to the northward.

But the Don and Dugas were still confident of their reckoning, especially Dugas, who declared, "I ain't been running half my life in this kind o' weather, without learning a few o' the tricks."

And so the sailing master went off dubious, and muttering, "God knows, I warned ye, that's all."

At four bells, in the afternoon watch, they were on the port tack, plowing their way through heavy seas, the wind blowing a full gale, with hail, rain, sleet, and snow. Under four lowers, the *Ushuaia* sped before it like a thing possessed.

Paul Gabereau had joined the sailing master on the poop. He also had grown apprehensive from the strain of carrying on.

"Don't like the look of it!" he muttered.

Wheel and lookout were relieved, and then, just as the watch was going below, a cry rang out above the moaning of the wind,

"Land on the starboard bow!"

A moment later, before the officer on deck could answer the cry, there followed the shout, "Breakers ahead!"

All hands were on deck in a jiffy. There was no panic, their master was a seaman to the last instant.

"Haul in on your main, and jib sheets there!"

The vessel was braced sharp up, in the hope that she would weather the headland. But it was soon apparent that this could not be done, and they very wisely decided to wear her short round.

“Leggo the mainsheet!”

“Hard up your helm.”

As quick as lightning this order was obeyed, but already they were drifting closer to the breakers. Suddenly, there came a tearing crash.

They had struck a sunken reef with great force, but in the next instant were over it, and afloat again.

While all hands were hesitating at the sheets, not knowing what to do next, amid the awful din, a voice sounded, “Leggo the halyards.”

What had happened?

It seemed as though they had been swept into a cave of the furies, with seething, roaring, boiling water. In every direction, the seas were white as carded wool, leaping up, and shrieking out against them with all the unbridled rage of an unbridled ocean.

Already, the combers had begun to swoop across their settling waist.

As the first great roller passed, Paul watched his chance, and dodged into the cabin. There he found Yvonne, huddling into a far corner, as though trying to escape from the pursuer. The girl was almost beside herself in frantic fear.

“Oh, Paul, are we lost?”

Patting her reassuringly, Paul exclaimed, “There, there, just keep calm, girlie, and everything will be all right.”

"But listen!" Yvonne's voice ended in a shriek, as another roaring comber came shouldering its way across the doomed vessel.

The falls were suddenly cast clear of the belaying pins, and down came the sails with a run, adding to the infinite furor by their thunderous slatting, as though possessed with devils hungry for destruction.

Imbued with new terror, Yvonne shrank back, "I can't go. I can't go."

Without, cries, groans, and fury. Within, Paul still retained his matchless poise.

Soothing the girl gently, he helped her adjust her life belt, and then, watching for a smooth, he banged open the cabin slide, and together they made a run for the top of the after house.

CHAPTER XL

Out of the Sea

"CLEAR the boats!"

There was a rush to obey, but the charging white horses forced all hands back out of the waist.

"Couldn't get a boat launched in this."

"If ye did she wouldn't have an earthly."

The man at the wheel, who was still standing by, a silent sentinel, called out, "Can I leave now, Skipper?"

"Yes, it's every man for himself now."

As he let go the spokes of the wheel, a big sea caught the rudder, spinning it round at whirling speed. Then the rudder

itself struck a rock and away it went in shattered pieces.

By this time, the vessel seemed to have stopped drifting. Clinging fast to Yvonne, Paul noticed on their port side a big tunnel in the face of a cliff, which seemed to run right through to the other side. It appeared to be about thirty feet high, and about half as wide.

The noise the wind made driving through this tunnel was awe-inspiring, while to add to the unseen terrors, a-whirling snow squalls were continually blotting out everything in a blanket of feathery flakes.

At the Skipper's direction, all watched their chance between the seas, and rushed for'ard, to the foc'sle head, which at first was raised at a high angle.

Once there, their predicament appeared to be worse than on top the after house, as the seas began to come over heavier, and some one announced, "She's settling by the head."

No one had the slightest idea what to do next.

Dugas, who was mainly responsible for this predicament, with supreme indifference, got out his pipe for a last smoke.

"Anybody got a match?"

A box was handed to him. As the Mate returned it, the sailor was about to throw it over the side, when Paul stayed his hand, and he passed the box over to him.

This little incident did more than anything else to reassure Yvonne.

"What are you keeping those matches for?" she inquired.

"To get warm with, when we're ashore," was the cheery answer.

"Now then, let's get aft again. It's safer there."

Together Paul and Yvonne started to rush again to the after house.

Before they arrived there, the *Ushuaia* shipped a great grandfather of a sea, foam-crested, boiling white. It burst clean over them, while they clung to the rail like limpets, their feet being washed out until they were parallel with the rail. There was a moment of agonizing suspense, and then the sea was gone. But what a sight, a second afterward! They seemed to be in a valley of water with the sea rising higher and higher both to port and starboard, then, with a curve of white foam it came down from all sides, like the closing in of an ocean grave.

This time, Yvonne was torn from the rail, and swirled around like a chip.

Paul thought that she was lost, and forgetting all idea of self, he dived after her. Both of them were miraculously washed up with great force against the leeward rigging, just below the sheerpole. Catching Yvonne and holding her with a grip like death, Paul waited until the water had subsided, then swung her round into the ratlins.

With the instinct of self-preservation, the girl needed no further urging, up she sped without a stop, as far as the masthead, where she was assisted out on to the crosstrees.

By now, the waist was well awash. Looking down, Paul exclaimed, “She’s taking the green uns over both bulwarks.”

The seas were running higher and higher, and it began to appear as though the masts would go, for the stays would be eased one moment, and the next would be as taut as iron. Gazing about him in desperation, Paul saw that it was about thirty feet from the crosstrees to the cliff.

Several hands who had also swarmed up, began to mutter, “Better get there, while the goin’s good.”

“Got to swing to the cliff, nothin’ else for it.”

Some one cut away a piece of rope, but it was not long enough, and he went inboard to cut away another with his knife. The knife was unfortunately dropped, so he had to give up, the other end of the running rigging being still on the belaying pins down under.

The mast was getting very shaky, by this time, and as he expected it to go at any minute, Paul threw away his sea boots, and closed in toward Yvonne, determined to fight to the end for the preservation of her life.

A number of the crew came swarming aloft, bringing with them the end of the staysail halyard, which had broken adrift, and had fortunately been secured.

“Now, if we can cut away the other end we’ll make it.”

With a clasp knife between his teeth, Paul pulled himself up the topmast stay, hand over hand as far as the topmast head, where, supporting himself with one foot over the springstay, he cut away the staysail halyard, which was immediately appropriated by the hands below.

Just as he was preparing to descend, looking toward the cliff, through the grim, gray, whirling mist, Paul thought that he could descry a human face.

Hardly believing his eyes, he peered downward, and then in a momentary clearing, he was amazed to see Quinquaig, the Yhagan Indian. Afterwards, it was learned that he got ashore from the fore-topmast.

As Paul came down with this news, it gave the rest great heart, and even Yvonne, who from numbing terror, had

seemed almost insensible, suddenly came to, exclaiming, “We’ll get there yet.”

One end of the staysail halyard was made fast to the masthead, the other was thrown to Quinquaig, who promptly secured it to a rock.

By means of this line, a passage of escape was opened up. With the masts swaying more dangerously, and apt to go at any moment, there was a sudden surge of all hands.

Quick as lightning, Paul’s sheath knife flashed in the air, hissing through clenched teeth, he threatened, “Get back. Girl first!”

But how was she to negotiate that life line? She was no sailor, accustomed to swinging through high spaces.

While Dugas and one or two of the malcontents growled at the delay, a bowline was swiftly contrived by means of which Yvonne was in another instant swung across on to the cliff; where Quinquaig reached forth to clasp her.

With the girl in safety, all hands followed, shooting down the life line with lightning rapidity.

Once on the cliff, it was discovered that two more of the crew were hanging precariously to a lower ledge. They were in a far worse predicament than those above, for they could go neither up or down, as the cliff overhung the ledge they were on. Had they not been saved by the hands above they must have perished.

A line was lowered to them, and after a time it blew inwards, where they could reach it. They were then drawn upwards over the sharp, projecting rocks which cut them horribly. But in spite of everything they hung on, and were at last added to the survivors on the upper ledge.

After this, the roll was called, and it was found that there were eighteen missing, out of a complement of twenty-eight. Among the missing were the sailing master, who stood to his post of duty to the last minute, and probably received his deathblow from the main boom.

Clinging precariously to the edge of that cliff, in the teeth of the wildest ocean, with night and storm, their prospect was not pleasing to contemplate; and yet, in that same moment, with Yvonne snuggling against him, there was a great peace in Paul's heart. He, not the gallant Spaniard, was her strong man in the hour of testing. After months and months of deep depression, here in elemental conflict, Paul tasted something of the cave man's joy of conquest.

Don Juan throughout all the crisis had evidenced scant interest in Yvonne, and now, encountering Dirk Dugas, he showed what was his paramount concern.

Dugas, noticing his drawn and bloody face, inquired, "How are ye, Chief. You're looking bad."

"Bah, don't worry about me," said the Don, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "I'm all right, but what's got me stumped is where's the chart case."

"I've got the parchment in my pocket here," replied Dugas, reassuringly. "I didn't take no chance, and went in and bagged it, just as soon as the schooner struck."

As the Mate handed over the precious document to Don Juan, that individual received it with a fervent "Thank God!"

So long as the Ferrara secret was in his keeping, nothing else mattered, nothing else could matter.

CHAPTER XLI

Marooned

DURING the rest of the night, the survivors huddled together under the lee of a pile of broken crags.

The island, on the side where they had come ashore, was bare and treeless; nothing apparent but grim, unyielding rock, the base of a mighty mountain, harassed everlastingly by the breath of the Westerlies.

The cold and exposure before morning was intense. Seeing that Yvonne was sleeping from sheer exhaustion, Paul took off his greatcoat and wrapped it round her. With her own thick clothing, under heavy oilskins, she was comparatively warm. But Paul had to get up and thrash about continually to keep his blood circulating.

Once he went over to the cliff, where they had effected their landing, and gazed shuddering at the wreck. In the uncertain light, dim forms could still be descried clinging to the fore rigging, but any attempt to go to their rescue seemed out of the question.

Peering through the gloom, Paul caught sight of a man holding fast at the end of the flying jib boom, submerged, ever and anon, by recurrent seas, and yet, with amazing fortitude, still clinging there.

Moved by heart-rending cries for help, Paul made a desperate effort to get to the fellow by the main crosstrees, and thence along the spring-stay, but the swaying of the foremast cut off this approach, and he was forced to retreat to safety.

As successive combers mauled away at the jib boom, the cries grew weaker, and then silence announced that there was one less enduring agony aboard the *Ushuaia*.

To the wan watchers on the cliffs, it seemed that that awful night would never pass. Finally, with the first peep of dawn, they started out on a reconnaissance. As the mast was still standing, several hands took a chance, and climbing back upon the wreck, were able to salve the main-topsail, which was still in gaskets. This piece of canvas, together with odd lengths of rope, promised to be invaluable for the future.

While they were on the foc'sle head, on the previous evening, Dirk Dugas had mentioned that there was a food depot, on the island, on the westward side.

A diligent search was made, in hopes that this report might prove true, but no trace of anything was to be found.

During the day, they subsisted on raw mollyhawks, and penguins' eggs, which were very plentiful. The island was also a hatching ground for albatross, whose young offered good food, but there was no fire to roast them; the matches, as yet, being too wet to ignite.

By noon, it was suggested that as they had come in on the exposed weather side, it would be advisable to move across to the lee shore. Accordingly, a start was made, the party proceeding along around the base of the mountain.

As they moved off, Paul looked backward at the remains of the *Ushuaia*, where the last sign of life had vanished. Her masts had gone, only the stub of the jib boom appeared, while the seas were making a clean breach of her.

In that moment, the Don and Dirk Dugas were already discussing the possibilities of finding Ferrara's clew upon this island. For them the loss of the ship, sailing master, and a

gallant company, was already blotted out, before that one consuming passion of the treasure seeker.

There was something so heartless, and profane in this, that Paul winced, an emotion which did not pass unnoticed, for Yvonne gave him an understanding flash.

The rock of the island was the kind to wear out the stoutest shoe leather, in short order, and as they progressed slowly, Paul had reason to regret that he had parted with his sea boots.

Painfully and laboriously, across endless obstacles, they made their way at the rate of less than a mile an hour. There was no path. Lava bowlders and jagged red-brown volcanic rock opposed them in every direction.

Night found them only a short distance along the coast, where they camped, using the canvas of the topsail for a shelter.

On the following day, they arrived at a sandy cove, behind two protecting capes. At the head of this cove were shelters, built by sealers, a welcome sight, greeted with shouts of joy, as the possible promise of a food depot.

"Here's the place I was tellin' ye about," announced Dugas, triumphantly, while everyone rushed forward to explore the huts.

To their great disappointment, nothing of consequence was to be found there. Instead of the expected food depot, Paul encountered, with a sinking heart, a simple wooden cross which he deciphered in the uncertain evening light:

> *Erected by the crew of the* S.S. Scotland
> *over the remains of seven men who*
> *apparently died of starvation and were*

buried by the crew of the Flying Scud *3 Sept. 1869.*

Yvonne who had come up unnoticed, read this harrowing inscription, before he could turn her away, then flinging herself upon him, she burst into tears, crying, “Oh, Paul, Paul, isn’t that awful?”

Patting her fondly, Paul murmured, “There, there, don’t cry, little girl. Such things won’t happen to us.”

“Why not?”

“Because, there are enough of the old sealing crowd to take care of ourselves in a place like this. Besides, look at our advantages. See what we’ve got: here’s matches.”

“But they won’t burn.”

“They will as soon as they’re dry. Just wait; soon we’ll have fire, and then we’ll have warmth, and roast young albatross; it’s just like roast chicken. We’ve got lots of fresh water. Here’s Kerguelen cabbage, growing all about on this sheltered cove, and there’s no limit to the eggs we can get. Look at this, will ye.”

As he spoke, he held up an albatross egg, bigger than his fist.

“No need o’ starvin’, when ye got hens like that layin’ for you.”

In spite of herself, Yvonne was forced to laugh at such enthusiasm, and face things with a lighter heart.

Before many days passed, just as Paul had foretold, the ongoing of their life was thoroughly well ordered.

A light was at last coaxed from the wet matches, and with fire the shipwrecked crew suddenly rose to an infinitely warmer, brighter, cheerier world.

An old-pattern gun and ammunition left in the hut by some sealers, together with an ax, seemed to fill the measure of desire.

“A gun to bring down game, and an ax to feed the fire; what more could we want?” exclaimed Paul, with a whoop.

In the beginning, they cooked everything by putting it in the flames, but afterwards made a mud oven and roasted the food on a spit. The banked-up fire was kept going continually.

With the barest of creature comforts attended to, and subsistence assured, Don Juan and Dirk Dugas started at once to scour the island in search for the hidden clew.

Again and again, at night before the fire, they would read aloud the instructions on Ferrara’s parchment, and then debate as to which island was implied in the message. They were on Marion, the larger of the two. Twelve miles away, across the channel, visible on a fair day, was Prince Edward Island, where Don Juan became increasingly convinced the clew of the treasure was hidden.

Dugas and the Don would stand together for hours, on a high bluff, gazing across that narrow but wild stretch of water, exclaiming, “We ought to be able to make it.”

Fired with this all-consuming purpose, they finally decided to build a canvas boat, but as they had already cut up the sail for blankets and clothes, their problem was greatly increased.

But where there’s a will there’s a way, and in the following three weeks they managed to construct a boat of canvas and sticks. To do this, they had to put in pieces of clothes and blankets, and sew them together. The sewing was effected by means of a small bone from one of the birds, with a hole bored in it; a bit of wire being used to make the hole.

All through this madcap venture, Paul uttered solemn forebodings, but nothing would stay the treasure seekers.

One fine morning, they started boldly to cross the stormy, intervening water, in their cockleshell. Before they were out of the cove, the frail craft was swept ashore and smashed to pieces by the sea, its occupants narrowly escaping with their lives.

"That ought to be a warning to you," was Paul's caution, but nothing daunted, the gold-intoxicated pair at once set about upon the construction of another boat, Dugas declaring that the season was now continually improving.

"All right, I warned you," was the parting shot, as he desisted from vain advice.

To add to Paul's perplexity, Yvonne, as their condition improved, was again growing cool toward him. There had been times, in the crises, when she appeared ready to throw herself into his arms, and then, always, some strange shadow seemed to cross her mind.

It was plain that the girl, at least, was beginning to share with him in his revulsion against Ferrara's curse. But sympathy between them apparently ended here.

In spite of all that had happened, there was an increasing consciousness of darkness between, increasing unhappiness.

With the second boat finally completed, preparations were made on a bright, clear morning to run out of the cove. This time, they had an improvised sail, and, with a beam wind and favorable current, it was thought that they could now easily weather the heads.

"Once outside, on a day like this, we can stand across there easy," averred Dugas.

The two busied with the boat, were just preparing to cast off, when some one let out a shout, “Look! Look!”

“My God, what’s coming!”

At the signal, all eyes turned instinctively toward the seaward cape, where a flying jib boom appeared, followed by the headsails of a schooner. As the vessel ranged onward to clear the headland, all four lowers quickly burst into view. Then, fairly off the channel, hauling the wind abeam, she came ramping straight into the cove.

According to sealing skippers, the danger mark on an uncharted coast is just inside the heads. But the stranger did not hesitate. Unquestionably, her master was laying his keel upon sure ground. Holding to his course, with utmost confidence, he swept in toward an anchorage, and shot up into the wind, about a quarter of a mile offshore, while the sudden thunder of his hawse pipe filled the cove with merry music.

Even before she was riding to her moorings, Paul recognized the schooner’s swoop and sheer. With a burst of joy, he shouted, “It’s the *Acadian*!”

CHAPTER XLII

Mysteries

THE law of hospitality was strong in the Bluenose breed. Finding his rivals in such dire straits, awakened the better nature of Sprott Gabereau. After hearing from the Don their story of wreck and disaster, he at once offered to receive all the survivors aboard the *Acadian*.

Don Juan was rather taken aback at the wholeheartedness of the invitation, and exclaimed, “But you don’t seem to remember, sir, the bad blood which has passed between us.”

“Bah,” replied Sprott, “I can afford to wipe that out, when I’m the master of a well-found schooner, and you poor blighters are clinging by your eyeteeth to the place that God forgot.”

Without more ado, the *Ushuaia’s* crowd were transferred to the *Acadian*, where improvised quarters were soon prepared for them.

In the cabin, the Skipper had his first meeting with Yvonne, who attempted to kiss him with fond endearment, but he drew back gruffly.

“Why, what have I done to hurt you, Uncle Sprott?”

“It’s a far better man than me you’ve hurt, my lass.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“No need of asking fool questions. You had a lover who would have followed you through Hell, and, by God, what’s more, he has followed you, too.”

“Followed me!” Yvonne’s golden head tossed with its proud, imperious fling.

“You needn’t tell me such things, any longer, Uncle Sprott.”

“It’s a fact, all the same.”

“I wish I could believe,” said the girl with sudden wistfulness.

Sprott had a yearning to burst out in blasphemy, but compromised by subterranean rumblings.

“Whirr—umph—umph. What the devil’s the matter with you, Yvonne? Sometimes, I really think that you are still in

love with Paul, and then, sometimes, I believe you hate him worse than poison."

A whimsical mist, clouding the eyes that a moment before were blazing, acted as a still further mystifier for the hard-bit Skipper.

"Why is it that a woman always has to mix things up so much? I like a person to say yea or nay, but that sure ain't the way with petticoats. By gosh, I don't know much about 'em, but I'm comin' to think that wimmen are just like ships, always go the opposite from the way their tiller's pointin'."

"Oh, Uncle Sprott, you haven't got any reason to say things about poor little me."

"Poor little you! Huh, I like that! I ain't losing no pity on a girl that can play with a man's affections the way you've done with Paul. 'Pears to me, your style is to say 'No' every time you mean 'Yes,' to run away from a feller every time you want to run toward him, in short, always to do the exact opposite from what you want to do, and so mix up the whole world fer yer sweetheart, fer yerself, and fer everyone else concerned."

Here Sprott leaned forward, and suddenly spat into the stove with a report like a revolver.

"Umph, wimmen are too much fer me. Why in Hell can't they be straight, like men are? Why can't they be on the level? Why can't they be fair and square?"

Yvonne soothingly patted the old walrus on the back, "But we are not the same as men, Old Snookums."

Hearing the term of well-beloved endearment, Sprott instantly began to thaw, but keeping up his mock severity, he

protested: “Why can’t you come out in the open, and be what you really are, instead of always keepin’ a feller guessin’?”

“I’m not going to have any boy think I’m easy,” answered Yvonne.

“Whirr—umph—umph. Do you love Paul, or do you not?” This question came with point bluntness.

“Before you start asking questions like that, Old Snookums, you’d better find out first if he loves me.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“Because, perhaps there’s some one else.”

“Some one else!” The Skipper almost jumped out of his chair at the presumptuousness of such a statement.

“Yes, and what’s more, I know there’s some one else.”

“Rot.”

“It’s true, I tell you. I saw Paul kiss her!”

There was a sudden flaming up of resentment, as Yvonne made this statement.

“I don’t believe it.”

“There wasn’t any mistake, there couldn’t be. I saw it with my own eyes.”

“Your eyes were wrong, that time, little girl. Paul Gabereau only has one sweetheart, and he’ll be true to her, no matter how false she is to him.”

“You shouldn’t say such mean, mean things.”

“Some folks never like hard truth. They’d sooner have soft lies.”

“Meaning me?”

“Of course, and who the devil else d’ye s’pose I’d mean?”

Proud defiance flashed again in the girl’s dark eyes.

“You’d stick up for Paul, whatever happened.”

“I’d stick up for him, because I know he’s the only one in the whole gang of us out here that isn’t crazy-mad after Ferrara gold. Paul is after something else.”

“What?”

“A girl.”

“That’s right enough, but the question is, who is the girl?”

“To him, there never was anyone else, and what’s more, there never can be anyone else.”

“Men are awful wise in their conceit,” taunted Yvonne. “But, here is a case, Uncle Sprott, where you don’t know as much as you think you do.

“Don’t come around here talking to me about your Paul, who’s only after one girl, who always had one, and only one. You sailor men are all the same; tell your sweetie that she’s the only, only; swear to her that there couldn’t be another, and then go right off to find new sweethearts in every port of call.”

“That kind of talk might apply to most of us, Yvonne, I’ll admit that this one-man-and-one-woman stuff is scarce fer them that go down to the sea in ships. But that’s the truth, when it comes to Paul Gabereau.”

“And anyway, what right have you, of all persons, to be talkin’ like this?”

Gabereau turned to gaze with accusation at the girl.

“Didn’t you go off with some one else?”

“I only went after the gold.”

“Umph, that’s what Paul says. He believes in you, no matter what happens. He’s got the kind o’ love that asks no

questions. He's stuck to you through thick and thin, to a girl that ain't fit to wipe the dust off of his boots."

"I think you're getting awfully nasty, Uncle Sprott."

"Of course, because I'm telling ye the truth."

"You don't know as much as you think you do."

"All right, then, answer me one question."

"What?"

"Who's this Spick feller that you skipped with?"

Quick as a flash, Yvonne countered, "And who's the girl Paul kissed that night on the landing at Punta Arenas?"

CHAPTER XLIII

The Last Clew

FOR several days the *Acadian* remained in the safe shelter of Steamboat Cove, under the mighty shadow of Marion.

Gabereau, who had been there before, informed them that the island was over four thousand feet high, and about thirty-six miles around. The weather was so hazy that they could never get a clear view of the summit, shrouded in continual mist.

The line of coast was composed of black, volcanic cliffs, much worn away by the action of the waves.

Looking shoreward, there appeared three conical hillocks, like small craters of a volcano, of deep red color. The South Cape, forming the nearest headland to the anchorage, had a perpendicular face, the termination of a long terrace-like projection from the foot of the hills. The lower levels were

covered with small trees, moss, and coarse grass. Beyond a thousand feet, everything was wrapped in snow.

Long lines of seaweed extended outward from the cape, whilst strong eddies of tide, occasioned probably by their meeting at this point, seemed to indicate concealed danger.

The adjacent coast was populated by a vast number of strange creatures. Throughout the night scratching noises came from the rocks, suggestive of a tin-pan band, which the Skipper informed them was the calling of penguins. In the daytime, these penguins appeared like flocks of wizened-up old men.

Preëminent among the denizens of this waste place of the sea, was the wandering albatross, the very Queen of the Southern Ocean, with a wing-spread of from ten to fifteen feet, snow-white breast and black markings.

Holding forth on this glorious bird, Gabereau declared, "I've seen that there albatross breasting the mightiest gales, and sleepin' in the breath of the wildest storms. They live all the time at sea."

"What brings them here?" inquired Paul.

"They only visit these desolate spots of the high latitudes during the breeding season."

Observing them on the wing called forth a burst of admiration to which the Skipper replied: "I've watched that stranger on the bleakest stretches off the Horn, with the wind howling eighty miles, fleatin' up there with never a flicker."

"Can they fly fast?"

The Skipper had to spit, to express his contempt for such questions.

“Can they fly fast? Why, s’help me, when that there albatross chooses to race with man, he can pass his running clippers, as though they were standin’ still.”

On Marion Island, besides gulls, shags, mollyhawks, and the like, there appeared large numbers of seals and sea lions, and frequent shoals of porpoises and whales.

The seals lay out in the sun, on the rocky shore, in some places clustered so thickly that not a vestige of rock could be seen.

They were most inquisitive creatures and raised their heads to gaze round-eyed at the *Acadian*. If the crew of the vessel shouted at them, the whole party would glide and tumble off into the water. A few moments later, their tiny heads would bob up in every direction, while round, pathetic eyes were fixed upon the strange invader. Disturbed by the shouts of the crew, sea lions, some of them monstrous fellows, came crashing down into the water, at the first alarm. But later, reassured, they returned scrambling up the rocks with finlike flappers.

Whilst the *Acadian’s* crew and the rescued party were busy taking on a supply of fuel and water, everything went as smoothly as though there had never been a rift between them.

Then, on the second evening, seated in the cabin, Gabereau broached the subject of the treasure.

“What about the chart case that we took from the Horn?” he inquired.

The cordiality and harmony that had prevailed congealed at mere mention of the case.

“I’ve got it,” answered the Don, sharply.

“And what are you going to do with it?”

For a moment, the Don hesitated, then on second thought spoke frankly, “Well, to tell the truth, that’s just the question I was going to put to you. We’ve hunted high and low, in all the places that might be referred to ashore there, and have come to the conclusion that it’s not there, but across on Prince Edward Island.”

“I doubt it,” replied Gabereau.

“What makes you feel that way?”

“Because, as I remember, when MacLean and I read the parchment, at the Horn, it gave cross bearings between Boot Rock and a lava valley.”

“That’s right. But, we’re beginning to think that the valley is somewhere on the other side of the channel.”

“Impossible. That cross bearing must be taken on Marion. The trouble with you fellows that don’t know anything about this game, as we sealers do, is that you always get mixed up so easily.”

“But Dirk Dugas here is a sealer,” said the Don.

“Yea, after a fashion,” drawled Sprott, casting a contemptuous glance at the one referred to.

While Don Juan was bringing out the Ferrara parchment, and stretching it out on the chart table, Paul suddenly remonstrated, “I wish that you’d chuck that thing overboard.”

Everyone, except Yvonne, looked at him with incredulity.

“I don’t understand you, my friend,” remonstrated the Don. “Chuck this overboard!”

“Certainly; it’s about time, isn’t it?”

“You talk nonsense.”

“All the men that have been lost on this foolish quest, thus far, ought to make you see that it is something more than

nonsense."

"We couldn't help the wreck, could we?"

"Yes, if you hadn't gone mad in your feverish desire to get to the gold."

"Bah. That wreck was something beyond our control. Pray, who else is there, besides those who went down with the wreck?"

"God only knows how many have been lost," replied Paul, wearily. "I know this wretched Ferrara fortune was the cause of Dan Sloggett losing his head. It was the cause of Baptiste LeBlanc leaving his hearth and home to find a freezing grave in the *Magellanes*.

"When I saw old Baptiste's body, all hacked to pieces, by the Alaculoofs, d'ye know what came to me?"

"What?"

"I thought of the time the poor fellow went off with the gold coins from the haunted house, laughing at the warning of Monsieur le Curé. He thought that the priest back in Arichat was talking foolishness. When I saw him sprawled out there, with those harpoons run through his chest, there seemed to be a voice inside of me, crying, 'Who's the fool now, Baptiste LeBlanc?' "

"We needn't say any more about the poor old smith. God rest his soul." Here Paul crossed himself devoutly. "But I say to you all, if you're going to learn anything, you better begin now, before it's too late."

The Don started to reply, but Gabereau cut in: "By gosh, they should have sent you up to the seminary, up there with the reverend brothers is where you belong. But no one's askin' fer fire-and-brimstone dodgers on this trip. I ain't

never done no time at mass or penance, and what's more I ain't goin' to start at this God-forsaken end o' the world.

"I believe that the devil takes care of his own, and that's good enough for me."

"Oh, Uncle Sprott, what a terrible thing to say," burst in Yvonne, who had been sitting silently by.

With his eyes resting hungrily on Ferrara crown, Sprott Gabereau had forgotten even the semblance of reverence, which he always affected for Yvonne's sake.

Meeting her remonstrance gruffly, he burst out, "Priests and prelates ain't got no place in the Roarin' Forties. There's neither law o' God or man down here, that's why it ain't no place fer wimmen, and that's why the likes o' you should a stayed at home."

"That doesn't sound a bit like you," remonstrated Paul. "The way you are talking now, goes to show how this wretched gold makes fools of you all."

Then, leaning over, and pointing to the chart case, with a sudden burst of prophetic fire, he inquired: "Did you read the curse, written around that case? Did you read what it said about those who follow this quest to sorrow and a grave at the end of the world? Did you read that?"

"Sure, I read it. Take more than that to scarce yer Uncle Sprott, me son. Can't stampede me on none o' them there curses; makes no difference whether it's sealed with the cross, or with a pair o' horns."

With his eye fixed in a hard, grasping glance upon that fatal case, Sprott exclaimed:

"I've been workin' all my life fer the devil, and there ain't goin' to be no suckin' round the Almighty at the last from

me. No, sir, when my time comes, I'm goin' to Hell like a man; and take my dose."

Shocked at such blasphemy, Yvonne fled from the cabin, whilst the coarse laughter of the sealers served to egg the Skipper on in his remarks.

Through it all, the Don sat with a supercilious smile upon his haughty face.

When the Skipper had done his worst, he bowed slightly in the direction of Paul, inquiring, "And pray, what would you have us do, friend Paul?"

"There's only one thing to do."

"What's that?"

"Chuck that cursed case into the sea, and point this vessel's prow for home."

"Scared something'll happen to ye, eh!"

"No, it's not myself I'm scared about."

"Who is it, then?"

"Yvonne."

Even the Don seemed to be touched by this remark, but Sprott, who was now studying the parchment with keen and hungry eyes, called him back to the paramount concern. As the two of them began to give their attention to the old Pirate's message, all other thoughts were swiftly blotted out.

Muttering half aloud, Sprott ruminated, "I know exactly where that lava valley is, it's around to the nor'ard o' the cove; that's where ye can get yer cross bearings all right. Yes, I'll be hanged if I don't even think I remember the cave itself."

The Don's answer was to give his erstwhile rival a resounding thump on the back, while they pledged

themselves to stand together in the future quest.

The following morning, as soon as it was light, Sprott and the Don put off for the cove.

About six hours later, they returned, in high spirits, and went down straightway into the cabin where, to Paul's chagrin, they presented another chart case.

"Where did you find it?"

"Up there in the cave, at head o' that lava valley. Takes an old sealin' skipper to show these yachting Johnnies how to do."

The case had not yet been opened, and Sprott lost no time in breaking the seals.

As usual, there was an inner case, bearing around it the accustomed precise handwriting.

In sudden feverish anxiety, Sprott read aloud:

THE LAST CLEW

Laughingly, he burst out, "Nothing about a curse this time."

"Aye, the curse is for the fools that fall by the way," remarked the Don, with a heartless note.

Suddenly a hush fell over the cabin, as the inner parchment was produced. Here, at least, was something that impinged upon the awe and reverence of this gold-intoxicated pair.

Breaking the strings, and stretching out the communication on the table, the Skipper read:

Royal Company Islands.
Lat. 49° 40′ S.
Long. 144° 0′ E.
Commissioners Bay.
Anchorage 16 fathoms.
Landing at creek.
Haul boats well up.
Position treasure marked by cairn.
Dig in sand to Northward.
Brass-bound chests.
(sgd.) *Andrea Ferrara.*

The reading of this message was greeted by a resounding whoop from the Don, while the Skipper jumped up, and started waltzing Yvonne about, just as he had done on the reading of the first message. The girl also had caught the maddening intoxication of the moment.

Laughing over Sprott's mighty shoulder, she called out, "Cheer up, Paul, old thing, gold is nothing to cry over."

CHAPTER XLIV

Bad Blood

THE Royal Company Islands, according to the chart, were situated to the southward of Australia, in boisterous seas of high latitudes.

This was one of the few waste places of the Southern Ocean with which the far-roaming Sprott was not acquainted. But Dirk Dugas, who always laid claim to a sufficiency of knowledge, held forth at length upon the looked-for Islands.

Whenever his former mate opened up on this subject, the Skipper, if he happened to be handy, cut in with sneers, winding up with the remark, “The only thing that keeps me from wiping you off the map is that it ’ud be a crime to shoot ye.”

It was indeed a black day that brought this ill-assorted pair together. The world itself was scarce wide enough to contain such hate as theirs. What, then, might not be expected with this twain locked up in the narrow confines of a schooner?

If some were born for love, Sprott Gabereau and Dirk Dugas were foreordained for hate.

The hatred between them was no will-o’-the-wisp affair. It was a demiurgic passion, appearing in a realm of common mortals, like a gift of the evil gods.

Observing these two exchanging malefic glances, one might well inquire what force outside of Hell could ever cause such rank antipathy.

Mayhap the answer to this query lay with the curse of Old Ferrara. At all events, something more than a coin of Spanish gold emerged when these two opened up Ferrara’s chart case. Ever since the day that Sprott Gabereau and Dirk Dugas first clashed across the case, murder slept between them.

On coming aboard the *Acadian*, with the rest of the *Ushuaia’s* crowd, Dugas was inclined to regard himself as a passenger, but was soon disabused.

Finding him unoccupied, on the first day out from Marion, the Skipper ordered, “Lay below there, you; and down on yer prayer-handles and clean out the bilges.”

This was about as filthy and loathsome a job as could be invented.

On his dignity, as an ex-mate, Dugas held back, refusing to obey, with the result that Gabereau had an excuse to manhandle him, which he proceeded to do with alacrity and dispatch.

Day after day, the *Acadian* held strongly to her course, drawing ever nearer and nearer to the isles of treasure, while in season and out Gabereau continued his unmerciful hazing of Dirk Dugas.

That fight in the gold-room, long before, was always haunting Gabereau, causing him to mutter to himself, "Here's where him and me get equal."

Dugas knew better than to try to fight back against this mighty tormentor, accepting it all with dumb submission.

Sometimes the Don would seek to interfere, at which the Skipper would invariably reply:

"Don't make any bones about it, one or the other of us ain't going to arrive at the Royal Company Islands; one or the other of us is going over the side with a lump of coal at his heels, before we bring up at that last anchorage!"

One afternoon, after Dugas had been manhandled more unmercifully than ever, he crawled away groaning into his bunk in the forepeak, and lay there, apparently dead to the world.

Paul, who had the watch off, was disturbed for fear the poor wretch was going to pass away, he seemed to have come to such dire extremities.

When he went off to sleep, Paul was haunted by groans and stertorous breathing. He could hardly believe he heard aright when, on awakening, a few hours later, the voice of

Dugas came to him in earnest conversation with several of the *Ushuaia's* former crew.

After this, as Paul lay in his bunk, he made it his business to watch the suspicious corner in the forepeak; he experienced alarm, when various members of the *Acadian's* crew, as well as the *Ushuaia's*, began to foregather with the scheming Dugas.

"He doesn't mean anything good by those meetings, that's sure," Paul afterwards declared to the Skipper, who pooh-poohed the idea, and satisfied himself by merely booting Dugas around that much the harder, when next he encountered him on deck.

Whisperings and secret conclaves below continued, while, on the quarter-deck above, Sprott Gabereau walked defiant, declaring that he was ready for all mutinies that Dugas and his vermin could invent.

The trouble began at midnight, a hundred miles off the expected Islands. At supper, that night, sitting at the end of the foc'sle table, the Skipper had announced:

"I guess we ought to make our anchorage in Commissioners Bay about noon to-morrow, if this wind holds steady."

A buzz of conviviality greeted this information. During the rest of the evening, all hands were especially excited at the prospect of the morrow. In the excitement, the suspicious communings of Dugas and his friends passed unnoticed, by all except Paul, who remarked on them to the Skipper, only to meet with the same rebuff as formerly.

At midnight, the next watch came on deck, wheel and lookout were relieved, and the others were just going below, when Dugas and ten men, armed with the guns of the sealers,

suddenly emerged from the foc'sle, and started to drive all hands before them.

Sprott Gabereau was standing unconcernedly at the far end of the after house. As Dugas spotted him, he called, "Get that son of a—!"

Half a dozen guns banged off at once, bullets ricochetting all over the house, while Dugas, still leading on, cried, "Did ye get him?"

He was still calling out this question, when the corner by the companion slide began to spit fire, with sudden and deadly precision.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice, the revolver behind the slide spoke.

There was a scream from Dugas, whose leg had been shattered above the knee, followed by other screams and groans. Almost before they knew what had transpired, the leading four of the mutineers were sprawled out on the deck.

This was too much for the remainder, who turned and fled, while the canny Skipper emerged from behind cover, taking pot shots at the retreating mob.

Two minutes after Dugas began his blustering charge, the whole fiasco was over, while Gabereau, advancing along the deck, did not even need the precaution of a refilled chamber.

Bending over the first man, who turned out to be one of his own crew, he inquired, "What the devil made you start out on this?"

"Dugas told me you intended to hog all the gold," was the panting answer.

"Aye, and what of it?"

“He said that with the sealing guns, we could soon have the ship, and then, to-morrow, we could have all the treasure for ourselves.”

“Umph, and I hope ye’ll like the treasure ye’ve got in the calf o’ yer leg, now.”

As others of the crew came out to assist in the removing of the casualties, the Skipper himself picked up the groaning Dugas, and carried him down to his bunk in the forepeak, standing there and gloating over him, as he writhed in agony.

“Thought ye was goin’ to put it over Sprott Gabereau, eh? I told ye, first time we met, not to start runnin’ athwart my hawse, ye poor fool; now, by God, I got ye polished up to the Queen’s taste.

“Tell my crew I’d keep ’em away from their share o’ treasure, eh?

“Tell ’em how easy it ’ud be to put it over the old stiff from Arichat, eh?

“Tell ’em how big the treasure was, eh?

“Tell ’em how many chests o’ gold they’ll have to divide among themselves, eh?

“Tell ’em how many times you beat me to it, eh?”

Finally, tiring of his abuse, the Skipper desisted, declaring:

“To hell with pouring water on a drowned rat.”

As he turned away, from under clenched teeth Dirk Dugas let out a snarl that sounded like a man whose spirit, at least, was not yet broken.

Catching that defiant note, Gabereau wheeled, while the two exchanged fierce glances, but the fiercest, at that moment, were those of the bloody figure on the bunk.

“He may be down, but he’s not out,” was Paul’s observation, as he met the Skipper later, stamping up and down upon the poop.

Gabereau did not deign to answer, but stood long and earnestly staring into the night. Somewhere, not far ahead in that blanket of darkness, was the Ferrara fortune, that loadstone of wealth, for which so many had suffered and died.

“I’d ride over my own brother’s carcass, if he stood between me and them Islands,” he suddenly snorted.

“Same here,” burst in a voice, sounding like the fervent “Amen” to a prayer. Glancing about, Gabereau was startled to see Don Juan, close beside him.

For some time the two of them remained, with their very souls rushing out to those Islands just ahead.

It was a long time before they retired to the cabin, but Paul, who had been watching them, remained upon the deck. When at last, he turned to his bunk, he could not sleep. Strange premonitions came to haunt him, to keep him tossing, twisting feverishly. Finally, abandoning the idea of repose, he got up and went out again on deck, walking up and down upon the weather quarter.

Two bells of the middle watch had just gone, when, gazing toward the bow, Paul thought he descried a fork of flame; in the next instant, with an acrid cloud the whole forepeak burst into conflagration. Standing there, aghast, Paul seemed to see in this sudden outburst, that same fierceness that had glowed in the eyes of Dugas.

CHAPTER XLV

The Open Boat

THE fire from the peak spread so rapidly that soon the whole for'ard section of the *Acadian* was a seething mass of lurid flame; the illumination mounting with terrifying refulgence into the darkness of the night.

At the first alarm, all hands were literally erupted from the fore scuttle, bursting up into the free air as though impelled by some volcanic force beneath. There was a wild unreasoning fear. Everybody was running about to no purpose, with frantic calls of: "Out with the boats. Man the tackle, there."

One boat had already taken the water, and was being paid astern, when Sprott Gabereau emerged, with his imperturbable command.

"Who ordered ye to the boats?"

"No one."

"Well, what the Hell are ye doin', tailin' on to the falls? Get out o' this wi' ye."

As the crowd still hesitated, weak-kneed, irresolute, the mighty Skipper walked toward them, as a lion might bear down upon a flock of sheep.

"Git out o' this, ye yellow-livered curs."

Involuntarily, all hands obeyed.

"Now, then, for'ard, there, and fight that fire. Into it, every last mother's son o' ye."

In an instant, that whiplash voice was compelling the entire crew, with unescapable urgency of its command.

"Go to it, you sons o'—, there ain't nothin' now to save ye, but the leapin' lightnin' in yer heels."

In spite of the appalling threat that loomed before him, there was no thought of quitting in the stout heart of the Skipper.

"Off wi' the hatches!

"Rig the head-pump.

"Now, then, get after it."

Leading the way, Gabereau disappeared 'tween decks, to carry the war against the foe whose threatenings were momentarily increasing down there in the bowels of his ship.

Alow and aloft, everything was in a state of indescribable confusion, with slatting sails, slamming booms, thrashing tackle, whining of gear, jamming pumps, rushing water, shouts, warnings, and relayed words of commands.

Paul, who had followed close after the intrepid Skipper into the hold, was advancing with the rest, when at the breaking down of a partition with the axes, a solid wall of roaring flame suddenly burst into view.

At that moment, the appalling magnitude of the fire smote him with frenzied, unreasoning dread. In a flash, it came over him that all hope was gone; no living man could ever gain the mastery over such raging and unbridled fury.

In that terror-smiting moment, he had only one fear: answering that urge, he turned and scrambled back again upon the deck.

Where was Yvonne? What had become of her?

Rushing aft, and down into the cabin, he burst into the little stateroom, where she slept.

"Yvonne! Yvonne!"

There came back no answer, and to his consternation, he found the stateroom empty. The bed had recently been slept

in, but its occupant was gone.

Almost beside himself, Paul came out again into the cabin, shouting, “Yvonne! Yvonne! Where are you?”

The cabin, like the inner stateroom, was abandoned. In a blind panic he bounded up the companion, and out again on deck, now bright as day from the illumination for’ard.

Over the jargon and discord, his voice sounded again, “Yvonne! Yvonne!”

Up from the lee quarter, there floated a clear bell-like voice. Hardly believing his eyes, Paul leaned over the rail, to look down into the upturned face of the girl, seated amidships in one of the boats, while Don Juan, standing astern, was just in the act of casting off.

As the distance between them was already yawning, Paul jumped, landing headforemost across a helter-skelter of blankets and supplies.

Using a sculling oar, the Don pulled away from under the schooner’s lee, and in the next instant, their tiny craft met the vast lift and urge of the open sea.

“Get out your sweeps and row there,” directed the Don.

Without further remark, Paul did as he was bidden, while the *Acadian* flamed up before them into the lurid night.

As they rowed away, with the distance between themselves and the parent vessel increasing, it seemed as though they were cutting themselves off from their old, sure world; the schooner was small enough, but now they were a mere tiny speck tossed everlastingly upon an infinity of night and sea.

For Paul, everything was passing as in a dream, but there was nothing hesitating or uncertain in the orders of the Don.

Studying a compass, astern, he proceeded to give directions upon a definite course.

"Up a little.

"Keep her a bit more before the wind.

"Now then, steady so.

"We didn't get away any too soon. The jig's up for the rest of 'em, if they don't abandon ship pretty smartly."

"Shall we stand by, to join with the other boats?" inquired Paul.

"Not on your life," replied the Don, who was again studying his compass. "We've got our nose pointed toward the Royal Company Islands, and we're quite able to keep on that course by ourselves."

While Paul worked steadily at the oars, the Don and Yvonne busied themselves making everything snug aboard the sealing boat. There was a frightful hurrah's nest at first, but things soon began to assume a shipshape appearance.

Looking on, Paul marveled at the mass of supplies that they had got away with: blankets, oilskins, boxes of hardtack, cans of bully beef, breakers of water, oars, tholepins, spars, and sails.

Nothing essential seemed to have been forgotten, right down to chronometer and sextant. And yet, there was nothing there that they could do without. The whole thing did not create the impression of a sudden alarm, and a frantic departure: it suggested rather a careful and calculated preparation.

Paul was looking back with a troubled glance, toward the waning reflection of the burning schooner, when the Don,

seeming to read his thoughts, called out, “Do you know anything about handling small boats?”

Yvonne answered for him.

“There isn’t anything he doesn’t know about it. He’s been sailing cats and dories out of Arichat into all kinds of weather, ever since he was a kid.”

Cheered by this information, the Don spelled him at the oars, exclaiming, “All right, step the mast, and put the sail to her.”

With the nimble dexterity of a born boat-handler, Paul soon had the spritsail adjusted, and a steering oar out astern, secured by a grummet to the after thole-pin.

As soon as the sheet was paid off sufficiently, Don Juan hauled in his oars, amidships, and away they went, dancing up and down across the long-backed rollers.

For some moments the Don studied his compass, then looking up he directed, “Keep the wind just on your quarter; if she holds true we’ll fetch Commissioners Bay by noon to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XLVI

Love and the Mighty Sea

ALL through the remaining hours of darkness, Paul held the sealing boat to her course.

With sea and sky turning gray in the morning light, Don Juan spelled him at the steering oar, while Yvonne spread out a breakfast of bully beef, hardtack and water.

It was bitterly cold, with a piercing wind. Shuddering from the blast, the Don fell to cheering himself by talking about

how soon they would make the looked-for Islands.

"We were only sixty miles off, last night, when we abandoned ship. I checked it off on my own chart, here; judging by the run we made since then, I'd say we're a good thirty miles on the way. Another five or six hours, and we ought to be going ashore inside Commissioners Bay."

"That sounds good," answered Yvonne, who was warmly wrapped in fleece-lined greatcoat and heavy blanket.

She and the Don were beginning to wax enthusiastic about the prospects, when Paul cut them short.

"Don't like to disappoint you, but chances are slim for making that place to-day."

"What do you mean?"

"The wind is hauling. Looks to me as if we're in for a sou'easter, and if it comes to that, they're generally rip-snorters, down here."

The Don attempted to pooh-pooh this statement, but Yvonne interrupted, "I guess you'll find he's right, Dinkums. Uncle Sprott always used to say that Paul was as good a weather prophet as any barometer."

The other shrugged his shoulders, and deigned to make light of this statement, but the kick and lift of the sea was increasingly felt in the tiny boat, while it became more and more difficult to hold her to her course.

The Don, in his headlong impetuousness, began to express his disgust, which passed gradually into silent apprehension, as the might of the ocean began to rise.

Seeing the look upon his face, Paul again spelled him at the steering oar, taking his place in the stern-sheets, grasping the kicking sweep, calm and unperturbed. Before this, he had

already hauled in the spritsail, and reefed down to a tiny leg of mutton.

When Yvonne looked at the worried Don, she was filled with misgiving, then, turning to meet the steadfast eye of her lover, she thought of something greater even than the wrath of the Southern Ocean.

Before the morning was far spent, true to the prophecy already uttered, the wind began to head them, until it was apparent that they could no longer hold to their course.

Nothing daunted, Paul clewed up the sail, unstepped the mast, and addressed himself with might and main to the oars. But with wind and sea quickly rising, in spite of his skill their boat began to fill with water.

The Don, in his impetuousness to get there, kept urging a continuance at the rowing, until at last Paul was forced to declare, “We’ll take a chance o’ foundering if we keep on bucking into seas like that.”

Yvonne, by this time, was growing panicky, as she watched the graybeards thundering by.

“We can’t live long in this.” There was a hint of despair in the girl’s voice.

The Don grunted and swore at the miscarriage of his plans. As far as he was concerned, nothing else mattered. For his part, Yvonne was forgotten. But Paul paused to pat soothingly upon her shoulder.

“Cheer up, little girl, it’s not so bad.”

“But what can we do now, Paul?”

“Leave it to me; I got a dodge that’ll make us ride easy.”

“What are you going to do?” grunted the Don.

“Put out a drogue.”

Again there came a stream of expletives, at the enforced delay.

Ignoring this, Paul took spars, sail, and a couple of oars, lashing them securely together, and cast them off at the bow on the end of a long mooring line.

"That'll fix her," he muttered.

Riding to the drogue, the boat eased off, while the sail helped to break the force of the seas from for'ard.

Coming back to the girl, Paul declared, encouragingly: "There you are. We're as snug now as a sea gull sleeping with its head under its wing. These sou'easters are bad, but they never last long, and soon we'll have the wind swinging into the west, and then we'll be runnin' again for the Islands."

In spite of Paul's efforts at cheer, as the hours dragged by, the weather prospects grew steadily worse.

By the end of that first long, weary day there was no single ray of cheer. Darkness came down upon them like a fell avenger, with night and storm. Both men were now bailing for life.

Once a whitecap crashed inboard, leaving them a quarter full of water. Heavy and logy from the added weight, the boat was slow in coming up.

"My God, another like that, and we're done," wailed out the Don.

Quick as thought, Paul leaped for'ard and picking up a piece of tarpaulin, lashed it in such a manner that the whole bow was protected from further breaking seas.

Again and again, through the night, with the boat leaping and pounding to the drogue, Yvonne cried out with fear. But

no matter how the crescendo of the storm might threaten, there was always near by a sympathetic hand, always a soothing voice. Between her alarms, Yvonne looked on in wonder; the clerk she had thought of in Arichat as the softie, here emerged as the able man, a master in the art and craft of the sea.

While Don Juan swore and cursed at the evil luck which held him back from his one headlong quest, Paul, while addressing himself to the exacting effort at the bailing, found time continually to think of her whom he loved.

In spite of fears and tears, at the occasional touch of a strong hand Yvonne smiled up into the darkness. In such moments, she tasted something of that profound communion that comes where hardship knits two souls together.

The long gray dawn of the second day came on with laggard step, as though unwilling to view the misery of the darkling ocean.

Gazing wild-eyed, Yvonne became aware, in the growing day, of terrors mercifully veiled in the night. Black seas, foam-flecked, like dogs from Hell, went howling by. The wrath of the Southern Ocean was still rising.

Hollow-eyed, blue-lipped, haggard, Don Juan stood grimly to the bailing. Age was telling upon his bodily resistance. In the uncertain morning light, he appeared years older than the dashing cavalier of former times.

But underneath the weakening frame, his heart beat with its one quenchless purpose, which expressed itself, ever and anon, by curses at the powers that stayed them.

“Always our luck,” he muttered. “There’s blood and damnation on every step of the trail.”

During the morning, a gradual but imperceptible change came over the sea. The wind was hauling again, while intermittently, patches of sunlight began to appear above the driving scud and wrack.

By ten o'clock, the storm had abated sufficiently to permit taking in the drogue. Paul, who had been continually watching the wind, at last announced, "All right, I guess we'll be able to make sail again."

Back upon their course, and once more running free, the Don's spirits began to rise.

By noon, when he was able to get a shot at the sun, with his sextant, his mercurial soul was once more on high, whilst he chanted in gladsome chorus:

"We'll make it yet. We'll make it yet."

With both latitude and longitude worked out, he pricked a mark on the map, which showed their position to be seventy-five miles to the westward of the longed-for haven.

With the sun coming out, and all prospects brightening, the Don announced, "Just keep her quartering and you'll be all right. We'll have to take it watch and watch, from now on. I'll turn in first. Wake me at four, then I'll stand my trick."

Whereat, the Don laid himself down upon a pile of blankets, and without further consideration for aught else, was soon fast asleep, leaving Paul and Yvonne gazing fondly into each other's eyes.

A mere sealing boat, a tiny speck tossed everlastingly in the infinity of waters.

What was there?

Love afloat in the Roaring Forties. One spark, quenchless even against the mighty sea.

CHAPTER XLVII

Unspoken Dread

THE boy and girl were both dog weary, but something in their hearts kept each awake, each yearning toward the other.

Brave, strong, constant, and enduring, in that revealing moment Yvonne beheld her lover as a new creation. Back in the easy peace of Arichat, she had belonged to him, as something that "just happened," a sweetheart that came by chance, a mere windfall from the lap of the gods. Here, she recognized Paul as a strangely different person, as the battling conqueror, who would brave all things, suffer all things, endure all things, in order that he might again claim by strife her who had once been his by mere caprice.

His every action the past far-faring months, told Yvonne more plainly than words, that she was his woman, not in some pale, passive sense, but his woman, worth fighting for to the end of the world.

Black doubts and fears, that had been crowding in upon Yvonne, seemed suddenly to have been blown away by the breath of a single night.

Her face was wan and tired, her lips were blue with cold, her golden hair was wet and draggled. In that moment, every adoring artifice was missing, and yet, gazing into her dark eyes, Paul knew that he had never looked upon such beauty, for shining there, beneath all else, he saw the misty light of love.

"What did you come for, Paul?" she asked, leaning toward him, with lips parted.

“For you, darling,” he answered.

“Did you ever love anyone else?”

“Never in this world, darling. For me, there was only one Yvonne. There never could be another.”

The girl pretended to speak as one who doubted. But whatever expression she affected, no pretense could cloud the clear, untroubled shining of her eyes.

“Who was the girl that my Paul kissed on the landing at Punta Arenas?”

“Petite Raymonde.”

“And who was she, my love?”

Briefly, Paul told the story of the theft of the black chart case by Sloggett and his fair accomplice, of their pursuit, of the consequent tragedies, of the rescue of the girl and of her ultimate restoration of the case.

“And that’s why she kissed me,” he declared, simply.

When he had finished his story, Yvonne’s eyes were dim with tears. Suddenly she bent toward him, as though swayed by unseen winds.

Involuntarily, their lips met, in one long, burning, rapturous kiss. Then, a following sea, causing their tiny craft to gripe, called the lover back to his oar.

Turning to look toward the Don, who still slept, Yvonne inquired:

“Is there anything you want me to explain, my Paul?”

“No, nothing, love.”

“But haven’t you got doubts because of me?”

“No, I never doubted you, except once.”

“When was that?”

“When the Don first started to come around. Uncle Sprott filled my mind with a lot of hideous ideas, and then egged me on, until I was ready to imagine the blackest things he told me.”

“What changed your mind?”

“We went to spy on you, like sneaking thieves; went up prepared to see the worst.”

“And what did you see?”

“Some one reading you something fine, up there in the office behind the fisheries store.”

At this, Yvonne again looked toward the Don, with a sudden twinge of grief.

“I wish that you could have known him on his better side, Paul. On one side, he’s so noble, so chivalrous, so good.”

“We both know what’s the matter with him, darling; he’s like Uncle Sprott, like poor old Baptiste, and all the others.”

“Yes, he’s just plain crazy because of the Ferrara fortune. But he’s worse, Paul, than any of the rest.”

“Why?”

“Because his fathers for successive generations have lived for nothing else. He was born with the curse in his veins.”

As Paul’s face reflected naught but sympathy, Yvonne inquired again,

“And don’t you want to ask me any questions about him, dearest?”

“No, nothing more than you have told.”

“Not after I have run away with him, and gone so far on this wild quest?”

“I don’t believe you went for him. I believe you went because you had gone daft, like all the rest of them, because of the gold.”

With a sudden depth of earnestness in her voice, Yvonne declared:

“You have been far, far better to me, Paul, than I have been to you. You trusted in me, always. You listened to no breath of scandal. You harbored no evil reports. Through every kind of cloud and darkness, your faith in me was just the same. That’s why I feel like such a miserable little worm when I come back to you.”

“Oh, dearest, you shouldn’t say such things.”

“It’s true, though. I’ve been the one full of mean imaginings. I saw Petite Raymonde kiss you in the dark, and after that I couldn’t think of anything too bad.

“Every time I saw you, after you left Arichat, I called you a hypocrite, mad for the gold. Because I was like that, of course, I thought that you were just the same.”

“And how do you feel about it, now, darling?”

“I hate and loathe the very name Ferrara. It all came over me, last night, while we were fighting out the storm, I just watched you, and somebody else, in the crisis, and I saw all of a sudden how true were some of those old things that Monsieur le Curé used to tell us back there in the glebe-house garden.

“Everything, ever since we left upon this trip, has been bad, and all the time it has been getting worse. That awful business of the fire was the most terrible thing of all.”

Again Yvonne looked toward the sleeping Don, and shuddered. Lowering her voice to an awed whisper, “There

was something strange about how this boat got away. It didn't all just come by chance. I am not afraid of the ocean, Paul dear, not so long as I am here with you. But there is still something I'm afraid of."

"What is that, my love?"

She did not answer, but turned back with horror, as the Don, awakening suddenly, called out her name.

CHAPTER XLVIII

The Royal Company Islands

ON working out his sights, the navigator twice found that they were only twenty miles from the longed-for Islands, almost close enough to glimpse the looming mountains. Then, before the joyous cry of "Land ho!" could be raised, head winds carried them again far off their course, their tiny craft the plaything of titanic forces.

Don Juan sank steadily into the Golgotha of lost causes. If the failure of a lifetime was bitter, how much more so the frustration of many lifetimes. Generations of Ferraras, drowned and beaten, were still clamoring in him for that quest which had become the be-all and end-all of their family line.

As long as his tiny boat was on her course, Don Juan rode upon the heights, but with each setback, his mercurial soul was plunged in a yet deeper hell. It seemed as though the very curse of Andrea Ferrara was in league with this baffling shore, as though the old Pirate himself had placed sentinels on guard, there, even in the teeth of the prevailing Westerlies.

“I can’t understand it,” whined the Don. “The sailing directories say that we ought to have a dead run for Commissioners Bay, and here we are still as far away from the anchorage as we were on the first night that we took to the boat.”

Disappointment and delay were not the only fears that assailed them. Finally, at the end of food and water, their situation was desperate in the extreme.

The ravages of age were writ large upon the wretched Don. The triple armor of Youth, vouchsafed to the lovers, was denied to him. According to all expectation, he should long since have ceased to function, but while his body was as good as dead, his spirit remained invincible.

Lying sprawled out in the bottom of the boat, with limbs numb, with features ashen, it appeared as though he had succumbed. Then, to give the lie to all appearances, he would raise his cheek to the opposing winds, and, still sensing prohibition, would burst forth into blasphemy, whose bitterness increased as his body weakened.

When hope itself was gone, as though the evil spell were somehow broken, the wind began to haul around again into the old familiar quarter.

In his most abandoned state, the Don was not sunk too far to sense the change. As their boat, of her own accord, began to set steadily to the westward, he watched the compass with avid gaze, then broke out quaveringly:

“Still looks as though we had a chance.”

A tattered rag of a man, a mere wisp of decrepitude, he crawled for’ard and attempted to step the mast.

Under the weight, he sank helplessly, but Paul was soon beside him, and between them, after long struggle, they managed to get the boat again under sail, with her nose in the desired direction.

As the morning advanced, without food, without water, the Don gathered fresh succor, from amazing hidden springs.

By noon, he, whom the dawn had beheld stricken as a corpse, was busily engaged in the problem of navigation, raised from the dead, as it were, once more to shoot the sun.

When the reckoning was completed, he made his mark, as usual, upon the chart, calling out:

"My God, we're going to make it!"

Paul and Yvonne, throughout the entire morning, had appeared apathetic to all mutterings. At the unexpected call, both cried simultaneously, "Where are we?"

"Only nine miles off, we've crossed that everlasting curtain of head winds. There's nothing now to stop us."

"But where are the Islands?" inquired Paul, still dubious.

"There, dead ahead."

Paul looked, and saw only the looming fog.

"Can't see anything."

"No, it's thick off here, just as one might expect, with mist from the mountains. But we've got our course laid fair, this time. With a leading wind there's nothing to it, running down our latitude."

Paul, working with a will, soon had the spritsail opened out, and with the sheet well off they went reeling off the miles.

After some time of eager driving, the Don announced, "She's steppin' up toward five knots; another hour, and we'll

be there."

"How far are we, now?"

"Can't be more than five miles off. Keep a bright lookout."

"Wish this fog would clear."

"Long as the wind holds, never mind the fog."

"But, if we keep drivin' her, like this, first thing ye know we'll be crashin' head on, just as we did at Marion."

"Don't give a rap whether we crash her, or beach her, as long as we make it. Just let me get the feel of fists and feet against the rocks, and all Hell won't be able to claw me off."

As the fog began gradually to disperse, there came to them the sound of breakers, at which Paul instinctively shrank back, whilst the Don set up a cracked cheer:

"Hurrah, we're comin' on to shoal water."

"Without a cast o' the lead! This is worse than runnin' in in the dark."

"But look, the fog's still lifting!"

In his impetuosity, the Don stood up in the boat, almost capsizing them by his abruptness.

As the encompassing blanket of gloom was steadily raised, the horizon marched farther and farther away, disclosing new creatures on every hand. Here and there, schools of porpoise, while an occasional sea lion appeared in close proximity. Paul suggested that they might shoot one for food, but the Don, in his headlong impetuousness, would hear of no delay.

The sight of animal life in such abundance began to foster in the sea-weary trio an added yearning for the land.

Yvonne was thrilled as the black mists were scurrying and fleeing before them. Here and there a lacing of foam told of

shoals, while the water began to take on a hue reminiscent of the rock of the Prince Edward group.

"These islands must be volcanic."

Paul was speaking casually, when the Don again leaped to his feet, and stood, gazing wide-eyed, astounded.

The last wisp of fog had suddenly been swept away, and there, clear to the horizon's rim, they beheld the bare, hard face of the sea, a lifting, melancholy waste of endless waters, a part of that unimpeded highway extending from the Cape of Storms to the pitch of the Horn.

Prepared for the palpitant shadow of a mighty mountain, now, instead, they beheld only the diaphanous blue of sky and sea.

In the sudden shock of this disclosure, the soul balked at that which the sense declared. What sorcery had thus infringed upon prescriptive rights? In momentary daze the Don was inclined to fall back upon the notion of the supernatural, but he was too much of a rationalist to rest long upon such nebulous conclusions.

"I can't understand it," he exclaimed aloud.

"Do you suppose the compass has been disarranged?"

"No, there's the needle pointing true."

"And the working out of your position?"

"No doubt about it. Our bearings were pretty much at sea, but after we got that last shot at the sun today, everything was clear. Here's where we pricked our position at noon. Running down our latitude we've made sufficient easting since to have arrived at Commissioners Bay. And yet, here's the sea-floor clean and clear as though the whole thing had been swept at dawn."

At that twilight hour, the vast azure-tinted bosom of the deep was tinged with rose and gold. A brooding spirit seemed to dwell upon the waters. Sensing something of its mystic power, Yvonne exclaimed in awe,

"Perhaps God was here!"

"Bah," sneered the Don, with fine contempt.

"But isn't this just what we might have expected?" ventured Paul.

"What d'ye mean?"

"They've played every kind of a trick in hiding the gold. Perhaps this is only another false scent. Perhaps the islands were never here at all."

"Impossible. There they are marked right out upon the chart. Nothing could be plainer, could it?"

"Well, something must have shifted then."

"Nonsense. I'm concerned with facts, not fancies. These islands have been here ever since mariners first started to navigate the Great Southern Ocean. They were here when Andrea Ferrara left his clew; they were here when our sealing Skipper made his voyages; and now, without the slightest warning the whole bag o' tricks has vanished clean."

With a gradual intelligence, Paul burst out,

"It looks to me as though this was one of these volcanic formations that you read about, a kind of ocean mountain, that rises for a time, then goes tumbling down again into the sea."

With all his heart and soul set upon one cherished goal, it was not for the Don to acquiesce. But, in spite of protestations, faith was waning.

A long and pregnant silence followed, in which the meaning of it all began to dawn at last with crudest disillusion. After endless and enduring struggle, in spite of hopes and fears, here was stark dénouement,—disenchantment at the end of dreams.

The mighty sea out of which these islands rose had opened up and swallowed them. Not a trace of the lone archipelago remained.

Naught remained to tell the story but an occasional plume of breaking sea, and the rusted hue in the water reminiscent of red volcanic ash.

All around upon the surface of the deep swarming seals were seeking endlessly for missing rookeries, while in the blue, above, sea birds called in vain for nesting-places they had known.

The Royal Company Islands had vanished forever from the sight of sun and moon and stars. Here at the end of the world, at the end of the seas, God Himself had taken the Ferrara treasure.

While they were dumb, smitten, staring against the aura of the west, already blazing into sunset, their eyes were attracted by another sight—a New Bedford whaler, coming grandly along, a white ridge of foam curving from her sharp forefoot, her dingy sails touched with glory from the dying day.

As Paul and Yvonne burst out together in a joyous shout, the meaning of it all was finally borne in upon the unwilling mind of the Don. Seated amidships, reclining on the lee gunnel, he suddenly collapsed, and plunged headlong into the lap of a rising wave.

With rare presence of mind, Yvonne reached forth and grasped him, then as quickly loosed her hand.

“He’s dead,” she muttered.

In an understanding silence, Paul took the sobbing girl into his arms. For some moments, she nestled there against him, crying softly. Then, as it became increasingly clear that the whaler had sighted them and that their rescue was assured, Paul bent to kiss away the tears.

“Are you afraid, now, little girlie?”

“No, no, there’s nothing more I dread, dear Paul. I am yours, and you are mine.”

Part Four

UN REFUGE SÛR

CHAPTER XLIX

"Sailor Home from the Sea"

PAUL and Yvonne came back to Arichat like swallows winging northward in the springtime. Even on the farthest seas they knew the spell of home, and now, with love united, the longed-for shore loomed up before them as the land of heart's desire.

Gazing at the twin spires of Our Lady on the hill, the lovers were suddenly aware of those unnumbered things which wealth could never buy. There was something spiritual in the very air of the place, recalling once again the words of Monsieur le Curé;

"Remember, my children, nothing keeps so well as a good heart."

In the mellow afterglow of nightfall, Isle Madame reached forth with welcome. Passing down the mile-long street of Norman poplars they heard the Angelus. Listening to that note in the gathering gloom their childhood home seemed to have taken unto itself something of the timeless and the eternal. Around this isle the encircling sea served as a wall against the changing years. Here still remained a cherished segment of the long ago.

Lights began to twinkle in little dormer windows. Other lights shone back from the fishing fleet, where the harbor

stretched in vast, black pools of silence.

No matter how the storms might rage, here was a sanctuary, an abiding-place inviolate. After the long harassment of the outer ocean, here, at last, was the sure refuge—Arichat with its song of the sea.

Oh the peace of it! Oh the love of it!

Yvonne burst into rhapsodies, while Paul, holding tightly to her hand, feasted his eyes on this untroubled haven, where nighttime knew no fear, where darkness brought naught else but benediction.

Together they came down the quiet, grass-grown street to that well-remembered gateway, and gazed through a mass of bloom at the great house beyond, with its air of calm security.

Everything about the place appeared the same. It seemed as though nothing in Arichat could ever change. Yet, in that hesitating moment, both felt premonitory warnings, as though upon the threshold of some dread discovery.

With wistful yearning they sniffed the fragrant air, sweet with scent of thyme and honeysuckle, still sweeter to them after long breathing of the pungent brine.

Who dwelt in the old place now?

What unknown master might be here?

They had expected to find the homestead left desolate, but smoke curled up blithely from the chimney, while the red glow of the mullioned windows beckoned to them through the darkness.

With a strange blending of joy and fear, they came up the sanded pathway, and then Yvonne, who was leading, rushed forward with a sudden cry, as a burly figure, seated before the house, uprose to meet them.

“Uncle Sprott! Uncle Sprott!”

In the next instant, with childish abandon, the girl flung her arms around the great bear, kissing him just as she used to on return after closing hour.

Paul welcomed his uncle as though face to face with some one from the unreturning grave. After the first greetings, Sprott was calm and collected as ever, accepting the demonstrations of Yvonne with a cool restraint betokening something rankling within.

“How in the world did you ever get home?”

“Sailed back o’ course; ain’t no chance fer walkin’ on the water.”

“But what about the fire?”

“Bah, I soon fixed that, and what’s more fixed Dirk Dugas to boot; his coffin was hangin’ on the collar beams the minute he started to cut athwart my hawse. I was bound to get there, and there wasn’t anything could stop me.”

“And did you win?”

“Yea, only to find that God ’lmighty had swallowed up the island, like the moon scoffs off a cloud. That’s why I’m back here, in the end, empty-handed as I was in the beginning.”

“We thought you were gone for sure, this time.”

“Didn’t I tell ye, the devil takes care of his own?”

“Oh, Uncle Sprott!” Yvonne chided.

Unheeding, and looking dourly past her he demanded,

“Still stuck on this fickle lass, eh, Paul?”

“Always,” came back the unhesitating answer.

“Umph, I wouldn’t take no one else’s leavings.”

At this, Yvonne faced him squarely.

"What do you mean, Uncle Sprott?"

"Exactly what I say, young miss. Ye ran off wi' another feller. An' now, when he's given ye the go-by, ye've got the nerve to come back here wi' yer first love. That kind o' stuff might do fer some, but not fer mine."

Proud defiance rang out in the girl's clear treble.

"I never had any other sweetheart in the world but Paul."

"Well, then, who was the Spanish guy ye skipped with?"

With a sudden welling of emotion, she exclaimed, "He was my father."

At this amazing divulgence, Sprott Gabereau, for once, lost his imperturbability. Palsy seemed to smite him as he came tremblingly, abjectly toward the girl. Folding her into his arms, he patted her shoulder soothingly.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, little girlie."

After they had kissed, and made up, he said, "Now tell me all about it."

"I didn't know at first, Old Snookums. I knew nothing more than you. And then, when Don Juan came, he pledged me not to tell his secret.

"You see, my father at one time was a political prisoner in Ushuaia, a province of the Argentine, situated away down there almost beside Cape Horn. He was sent there because of plotting in a revolution, but he didn't mind, as it gave him a chance, as he thought, to get nearer to the Ferrara treasure. That was the only thing for which he lived.

"Finally, he escaped from Ushuaia in an open boat, with my mother, and started for Punta Arenas. On the way, I was born, and then we all fell into the hands of the Yhagans, who turned the boat adrift with my mother, myself, and the cursed

chart case. In time my mother died from exposure, she really gave her life to save her babe. So that was how you came to rescue me, Uncle Sprott, under such strange circumstances.

"My father was for years held captive by the Yhagans. Then, escaping to Punta Arenas, he fell in with Dirk Dugas, and together they dogged your trail for the missing chart case. That was what brought them up here and started all the trouble."

When the girl had finished her story, Sprott Gabereau spoke slowly, as though thinking aloud.

"Yea, Monsieur le Curé was right after all. It's the great, grand fool I was that I didn't heed his word in the beginning, and throw away that cursed case when I first brought it back to Arichat. The worst thing that ever came to our blessed isle was the curse locked up in there by the hand of Andrea Ferrara. Aye, it's meself that was the biggest fool."

Then turning toward Yvonne, the rough old sea dog asked with rare humility, "Will ye forgive me, little girlie?"

"Of course I will, Old Snookums," she declared, sealing her word with a glowing kiss.

"You're all right, Uncle Sprott, old dear. You're like a crusty bear, with a big heart underneath. Of course you had to lose your head over the gold, just like all the rest. There is only one person who never changed. When everyone else went crazy over the treasure, he remained just the same, constant and true. He asked no questions, he entertained no doubts, no fears. He loved me only. He was steadfast always."

Going over to Paul, who stood apart, Yvonne threw her arms about him, exclaiming, "Here's where the last of the Ferraras finds the dearest treasure."

Sprott's eyes were misty with unexpected emotion, as he led the way toward the house.

Pausing upon the step, he raised his arm to indicate the hills of their heritance that stretched before them, bathed in lunar radiance beneath a crescent moon. They beheld first the rolling uplands, the plowed fields, the forest clearings, held by generations of Acadians as servants of the soil. Then their eyes turned toward the harbor, to Jerseyman's Island, to the fish-curing stations, emblematic of the Blessed Mary's Treasury.

As they stood there in silent contemplation, something of the peace of the hills and the strength of the sea seemed to be imparted to them.

"And to think that one would ever leave a home like this."

Coming into the house, Sprott led them to the living room, exclaiming, "There's something here that belonged to our people ever since they first carved out this dwelling from the forest. Once, with Ferrara's fever in my veins, I ripped it down. But now, with all the madness over, I've hung it up again. And for your own dear sakes I hope that you will always keep it where it is."

Standing there, they beheld over the mantle a sealing rifle and a crucifix, suspended in strange union, beneath a text announcing in ancient script:

Success to the Fisheries
and
Speed the Plow

THE END

[The end of *Far Gold* by Arthur Hunt Chute]