

Spanish Doubloons

Camilla Kenyon

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SPANISH DOUBLOONS

BY CAMILLA KENYON

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LOUIS ROGERS

1919

To L. T.

In recognition of her faith in me.

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Spanish Doubloons

I

AN AUNT ERRANT

Never had life seemed more fair and smiling than at the moment when Aunt Jane's letter descended upon me like a bolt from the blue. The fact is, I was taking a vacation from Aunt Jane. Being an orphan, I was supposed to be under Aunt Jane's wing, but this was the merest polite fiction, and I am sure that no hen with one chicken worries about it more than I did about Aunt Jane. I had spent the last three years, since Aunt Susan died and left Aunt Jane with all that money and no one to look after her but me, in snatching her from the brink of disaster. Her most recent and narrow escape was from a velvet-tongued person of half her years who turned out to be a convict on parole. She had her hand-bag packed for the elopement when I confronted her with this unpleasant fact. When she came to she was bitter instead of grateful, and went about for weeks presenting a spectacle of blighted affections which was too much for the most self-approving conscience. So it ended with my packing her off to New York, where I wrote to her frequently and kindly, urging her not to mind me but to stay as long as she liked.

Meanwhile I came up to the ranch for a long holiday with Bess and the baby, a holiday which had already stretched itself out to

Thanksgiving, and threatened to last until Christmas. People wrote alluringly from town, but what had town to offer compared with a saddle-horse to yourself, and a litter of collie pups to play with, and a baby just learning to walk? I even began to consider ranching as a career, and to picture myself striding over my broad acres in top-boots and corduroys.

As to Aunt Jane, my state of mind was fatuously calm. She was staying with cousins, who live in a suburb and are frightfully respectable. I was sure they numbered no convicts among their acquaintance, or indeed any one from whom Aunt Jane was likely to require rescuing. And if it came to a retired missionary I was perfectly willing.

But the cousins and their respectability are of the passive order, whereas to manage Aunt Jane demands aggressive and continuous action. Hence the bolt from the blue above alluded to.

I was swinging tranquilly in the hammock, I remember, when Bess brought my letters and then hurried away because the baby had fallen down-stairs. Unwarned by the slightest premonitory thrill, I kept Aunt Jane's letter till the last and skimmed through all the others. I should be thankful, I suppose, that the peace soon to be so rudely shattered was prolonged for those few moments. I recalled afterward, but dimly, as though a gulf of ages yawned between, that I had been quite interested in six pages of prattle about the Patterson dance.

At last I came to Aunt Jane. I ripped open the envelope and drew out the letter--a fat one, but then Aunt Jane's letters are always fat. She says herself that she is of those whose souls flow freely forth in ink but are frozen by the cold eye of an unsympathetic listener. Nevertheless, as I spread out the close-filled pages I felt a mild wonder. Writing so large, so black, so staggering, so madly underlined, must indicate something above, even Aunt Jane's usual emotional level. Perhaps in sober truth there was a missionary-experiment to "Find Capital after , or ;" Twenty minutes later I staggered into Bess's room.

"Hush!" she said. "Don't wake the baby!"

"Baby or no baby," I whispered savagely, "I've got to have a time-table. I leave for the city tonight to catch the first steamer for Panama!"

Later, while the baby slumbered and I packed experiment to "Find Period in middle" explained. This was difficult; not that Bess is as a general thing obtuse, but because the picture of Aunt Jane embarking for some wild, lone isle of the Pacific as the head of a treasure-seeking expedition was enough to shake the strongest intellect. And yet, amid the welter of ink and eloquence which filled those fateful pages, there was the cold hard fact confronting you. Aunt Jane was going to look for buried treasure, in company with one Violet Higglesby-Browne, whom she sprung on you without the slightest explanation, as though alluding to the Queen of Sheba or the Siamese twins. By beginning at the end and reading backward--Aunt Jane's letters are usually most intelligible that way--you managed to piece together some explanation of this Miss Higglesby-Browne and her place in the scheme of things. It was

through Miss Browne, whom she had met at a lecture upon Soul-Development, that Aunt Jane had come to realize her claims as an Individual upon the Cosmos, also to discover that she was by nature a woman of affairs with a talent for directing large enterprises, although *adverse influences* had hitherto kept her from recognizing her powers. There was a dark significance in these italics, though whether they meant me or the family lawyer I was not sure.

Miss Higglesby-Browne, however, had assisted Aunt Jane to find herself, and as a consequence Aunt Jane, for the comparatively trifling outlay needful to finance the Harding-Browne expedition, would shortly be the richer by one-fourth of a vast treasure of Spanish doubloons. The knowledge of this hoard was Miss Higglesby-Browne's alone. It had been revealed to her by a dying sailor in a London hospital, whither she had gone on a mission of kindness--you gathered that Miss Browne was precisely the sort to take advantage when people were helpless and unable to fly from her. Why the dying sailor chose to make Miss Browne the repository of his secret, I don't know--this still remains for me the unsolved mystery. But when the sailor closed his eyes the secret and the map--of course there was a map--had become Miss Higglesby-Browne's.

Miss Browne now had clear before her the road to fortune, but unfortunately it led across the sea and quite out of the route of steamer travel. Capital in excess of Miss Browne's resources was required. London proving cold before its great opportunity, Miss Browne had shaken off its dust and come to New York, where a mysteriously potent influence had guided her to Aunt Jane. Through Miss Browne's great organizing abilities, not to speak of those newly brought to light in Aunt Jane, a party of staunch comrades had been assembled, a steamer engaged to meet them at Panama, and it was ho, for the island in the blue Pacific main!

With this lyrical outburst Aunt Jane concluded the body of her letter. A small cramped post-script informed me that it was against Miss H.-B.'s wishes that she revealed their plans to any one, but that she did want to hear from me before they sailed from Panama, where a letter might reach her if I was prompt. However, if it did not she would try not to worry, for Miss Browne was very psychic, and she felt sure that any strong vibration from me would reach her via Miss B., and she was my always loving Jane Harding.

"And of course," I explained to Bess as I hurled things into my bags, "if a letter can reach her so can I. At least I must take the chance of it. What those people are up to I don't know--probably they mean to hold her for ransom and murder her outright if it is not forthcoming. Or perhaps some of them will marry her and share the spoils with Miss Higglesby-Browne. Anyway, I must get to Panama in time to save her."

"Or you might go along to the island," suggested Bess.

I paused to glare at her.

"Bess! And let them murder me too?"

"Or marry you--" cooed Bess.

One month later I was climbing out of a lumbering hack before the Tivoli hotel, which rises square and white and imposing on the low green height above the old Spanish city of Panama. In spite of the melting tropical heat there was a chill fear at my heart, the fear that Aunt Jane and her band of treasure-seekers had already departed on their quest. In that case I foresaw that whatever narrow margin of faith my fellow-voyagers on the City of Quito had had in me would shrink to nothingness. I had been obliged to be so queer and clam-like about the whole extraordinary rendezvous--for how could I expose Aunt Jane's madness to the multitude?--that I felt it would take the actual bodily presence of my aunt to convince them that she was not a myth, or at least of the wrong sex for aunts. To have traveled so far in the desperate hope of heading off Aunt Jane, only to be frustrated and to lose my character besides! It would be a stroke too much from fate, I told myself rebelliously, as I crossed the broad gallery and plunged into the cool dimness of the lobby in the wake of the bellboys who, discerning a helpless prey, had swooped en masse upon my bags.

"Miss Jane Harding?" repeated the clerk, and at the cool negation of his tone my heart gave a sickening downward swoop. "Miss Jane Harding and party have left the hotel!"

"For--for the island?" I gasped.

He raised his eyebrows. "Can't say, I'm sure." He gave me an appraising stare. Perhaps the woe in my face touched him, for he descended from the eminence of the hotel clerk where he dwelt apart sufficiently to add, "Is it important that you should see her?"

"I am her niece. I have come all the way from San Francisco expecting to join her here."

The clerk meditated, his shrewd eyes piercing the very secrets of my soul.

"She knew nothing about it," I hastened to add. "I intended it for a surprise."

This candor helped my cause. "Well," he said, "that explains her not leaving any word. As you are her niece, I suppose it will do no harm to tell you that Miss Harding and her party embarked this morning on the freighter Rufus Smith, and I think it very likely that the steamer has not left port. If you like I will send a man to the water-front with you and you may be able to go on board and have a talk with your aunt."

Did I thank him? I have often wondered when I waked up in the night. I have a vision of myself dashing out of the hotel, and then the hack that brought me is bearing me away. Bellboys hurled my bags in after me, and I threw them largess recklessly. Some arch-bellboy or other potentate had mounted to the seat beside the driver. Madly we clattered over cobbled ways. Out on the smooth waters of the roadstead lay ships great and small, ships with stripped masts and smokeless funnels, others with faint gray spirals wreathing upward from their stacks. Was one of these the Rufus Smith, and would I reach her--or him--before the thin gray feather became a thick black plume? I thought of my aunt at the mercy of these unknown adventurers with whom she had set forth,

helpless as a little fat pigeon among hawks, and I felt, desperately, that I must reach her, must save her from them and bring her safe back to shore. How I was to do this at the eleventh hour plus about fifty-seven minutes as at present I hadn't considered. But experience had taught me that once in my clutches Aunt Jane would offer about as much resistance as a slightly melted wax doll. She gets so soft that you are almost afraid to touch her for fear of leaving dents.

So to get there, get there, get there, was the one prayer of my soul.

I got there, in a boat hastily commandeered by the hotel clerk's deputy. I suppose he thought me a belated passenger for the Rufus Smith, for my baggage followed me into the boat. "_Pronto_" he shouted to the native boatman as we put off. "_Pronto_" I urged at intervals, my eyes upon the funnels of the _Rufus Smith_, where the outpouring smoke was thickening alarmingly. We brought up under the side of the little steamer, and the wide surprised face of a Swedish deckhand stared down at us.

"Let me aboard! I must come aboard!" I cried.

Other faces appeared, then a rope-ladder. Somehow I was mounting it--a dizzy feat to which only the tumult of my emotions made me indifferent. Bare brawny arms of sailors clutched at me and drew me to the deck. There at once I was the center of a circle of speechless and astonished persons, all men but one.

"Well?" demanded a large breezy voice. "What's this mean? What do you want aboard my ship?"

I looked up at a red-faced man in a large straw hat.

"I want my aunt," I explained.

"Your aunt?" he roared. "Why the devil should you think I've got your aunt?"

"You have got her," I replied with firmness. "I don't see her, but she's here somewhere."

The captain of the _Rufus Smith_ shook two large red fists above his head.

"Another lunatic!" he shouted. "I'd as soon have a white horse and a minister aboard as to go to sea in a floating bedlam!"

As the captain's angry thunder died away came the small anxious voice of Aunt Jane.

"What's the matter? Oh, please tell me what's the matter!" she was saying as she edged her way into the group. In her severely cut khaki suit she looked like a plump little dumpling that had got into a sausage wrapping by mistake. Her eyes, round, pale, blinking a little in the tropical glare, roved over the circle until they lit on me. Right where she stood Aunt Jane petrified. She endeavored to shriek, but achieved instead only a strangled wheeze. Her poor little chin dropped until it disappeared

altogether in the folds of her plump neck, and she remained speechless, stricken, immobile as a wax figure in an exhibition.

"Aunt Jane," I said, "you must come right back to shore with me." I spoke calmly, for unless you are perfectly calm with Aunt Jane you fluster her.

She replied only by a slight gobbling in her throat, but the other woman spoke in a loud voice, addressed not to me but to the universe in general.

"The Young Person is mad!" It was an unmistakably British intonation.

This then was Miss Violet Higglesby-Browne, I saw a grim, bony, stocky shape, in a companion costume to my aunt's. Around the edges of her cork helmet her short iron-gray hair visibly bristled. She had a massive head, and a seamed and rugged countenance which did its best to live down the humiliation of a ridiculous little nose with no bridge. By what prophetic irony she had been named Violet is the secret of those powers which seem to love a laugh at mankind's expense.

But what riveted my eyes was the deadly glare with which hers were turned on me. I saw that not only was she as certain of my identity as though she had guided me from my first tottering steps, but that in a flash she had grasped my motives, aims and purposes, and meant once for all to face, out-general and defeat me with great slaughter.

So she announced to the company with deliberation, "The Young Person is mad!"

It nettled me extremely.

"Mad!" I flung back at her. "Because I wish to save my poor aunt from such a situation as this? It would be charitable to infer madness in those who have led her into it!" When I reviewed this speech afterward I realized that it was not, under the circumstances, the best calculated to win me friends.

"Jane!" said Miss Higglesby-Browne in deep and awful tones, "the time has come to prove your strength!"

Aunt Jane proved it by uttering a shrill yelp, and clutching her hair with a reckless disregard of its having originally been that of a total stranger. So severe were her shrieks and struggles that it was with difficulty that she was borne below in the arms of two strong men.

I had seen Aunt Jane in hysterics before--she had them that time about the convict. I was not frightened, but I hurried after her--neck and neck with Miss Browne. It was fifteen minutes before Aunt Jane came to, and then she would only moan. I bathed her head, and held her hand, and did all the regulation things, under the baleful eye of Miss Browne, who steadfastly refused to go away, but sat glaring like a gorgon who sees her prey about to be snatched from her.

In the midst of my ministrations I awoke suddenly to a rhythmic heave and throb which pervaded the ship. Dropping Aunt Jane's hand I rushed on deck. There lay the various pieces of my baggage, and in the distance the boat with the two brown rowers was skipping shoreward over the ripples.

As for the Rufus Smith, she was under weigh, and heading out of the roadstead for the open sea.

I dashed aft to the captain, who stood issuing orders in the voice of an aggrieved fog-horn.

"Captain!" I cried, "wait; turn around! You must put my aunt and me ashore!"

He whirled on me, showing a crimson angry face. "Turn around, is it, turn around?" he shouted. "Do you suppose I can loaf about the harbor here a-waitin' on your aunt's fits? You come aboard without me askin'. Now you can go along with the rest. This here ship has got her course set for Frisco, pickin' up Leeward Island on the way, and anybody that ain't goin' in that direction is welcome to jump overboard."

That is how I happened to go to Leeward Island.

II

APOLLO AND SOME OTHERS

The Rufus Smith, tramp freighter, had been chartered to convey the Harding-Browne expedition to Leeward Island, which lies about three hundred miles west of Panama, and could be picked up by the freighter in her course. She was a little dingy boat with such small accommodation that I can not imagine where the majority of her passengers stowed themselves away. My aunt and Miss Browne had a stateroom between them the size of a packing-box, and somebody turned out and resigned another to me. I retired there to dress for dinner after several dismal hours spent in attendance on Aunt Jane, who had passed from great imaginary suffering into the quite genuine anguish of seasickness. In the haste of my departure from San Francisco I had not brought a trunk, so the best I was able to produce in the way of a crusher for Miss Higglesby-Browne and her fellow-passengers was a cool little white gown, which would shine at least by contrast with Miss Browne's severely utilitarian costume. White is becoming to my hair, which narrow-minded persons term red, but which has been known to cause the more discriminating to draw heavily on the dictionary for adjectives. My face is small and heart-shaped, with features strictly for use and not for ornament, but fortunately inconspicuous. As for my eyes, I think tawny quite the nicest word, though Aunt Jane calls them hazel and I have even heard whispers of green.

Five minutes after the gong sounded I walked into the cabin. Miss Browne, Captain Watkins of the freighter, and half a dozen men were already at the table. I slid unobtrusively into the one vacant place, fortunately remote from the captain, who glared at me

savagely, as though still embittered by the recollection of my aunt's fits.

"Gentlemen," said Miss Browne in icy tones, "Miss Virginia Harding."

Two of the men rose, the others stared and ducked. Except for Miss Browne and the captain, I had received on coming aboard only the most blurred impression of my fellow-voyagers. I remembered them merely as a composite of khaki and cork helmets and astounded staring faces. But I felt that as the abettors of Miss Browne a hostile and sinister atmosphere enveloped them all.

Being thus in the camp of the enemy, I sat down in silence and devoted myself to my soup. The majority of my companions did likewise--audibly. But presently I heard a voice at my left:

"I say, what a jolly good sailor you seem to be--pity your aunt's not!"

I looked up and saw Apollo sitting beside me. Or rather, shall I say a young man who might have walked straight out of an advertisement for a ready-made clothing house, so ideal and impossible was his beauty. He was very tall--I had to tilt my chin quite painfully to look up at him--and from the loose collar of his silk shirt his throat rose like a column. His skin was a beautiful clear pink and white just tinged with tan--like a meringue that has been in the oven for two minutes exactly. He had a straight, chiseled profile and his hair was thick and chestnut and wavy and he had clear sea-gray eyes. To give him at once his full name and titles, he was the Honorable Cuthbert Patrick Ruthmore Vane, of High Staunton Manor, Kent, England. But as I was ignorant of this, I can truthfully say that his looks stunned me purely on their own merits.

Outwardly calm, I replied, "Yes, its too bad, but then who ever dreamed that Aunt Jane would go adventuring at her time of life? I thought nobody over the age of thirteen, and then boys, ever went treasure-hunting."

"Ah, but lads of thirteen couldn't well come such a distance on their own, you know," returned Apollo, with the kindest air of making allowance for the female intellect.

I hurriedly turned the subject.

"I really can't imagine Aunt Jane on a desert island. You should see her behave on the mere suspicion of a mouse! What will she do if she meets a cannibal and he tries to eat her?"

"Oh, really, now," argued the paragon earnestly, "I'm quite sure there's no danger of that, don't you know? I believe there are no natives at all on the island, or else quite tame ones, I forget which, and here are four of us chaps, with no end of revolvers and things--shooting-irons, as you call them in America. Mr. Shaw--sitting opposite Miss Browne, you know--is rather running things, so if you feel nervous you should talk to him. Was with the South Polar Expedition and all that--knows no end about this sort of thing--wouldn't for a moment think of letting ladies run the risk of being eaten. Really I hope you aren't in a funk about

the cannibals--especially as with so many missionary Johnnies about they are most likely all converted."

"It's so comforting to think of it in that light!" I said fervently. At the same time I peeped around Apollo for a glimpse of the experienced Mr. Shaw. I saw a strong-featured, weather-beaten profile, the face of a man somewhere in his thirties, and looking, from this side view at least, not only stern but grim. He was talking quietly to the captain, whose manner toward him was almost civil.

I made up my mind at once that the backbone of the party, and inevitably the leader in its projected villainies, whatever they might be, was this rugged-looking Mr. Shaw. You couldn't fancy him as the misled follower of anybody, even the terrific Violet.

As it seemed an unpropitious moment for taking counsel with Mr. Shaw about cannibals, I tried another tack with the beautiful youth at my side.

"How did you like Panama? I fancy the old town is very picturesque."

"Oh, rather!" assented Mr. Vane. "At least, that is what those painter chaps call it--met a couple of 'em at the hotel. Beastly little narrow streets and houses in a shocking state and all that. I like to see property kept up, myself."

"I am afraid," I said severely, "that you are a philistine!"

He blinked a little. "Ah--quite so!" he murmured, recovering himself gallantly. "One of those chaps that backed Goliath against David, what?"

From this conversational impasse we were rescued by the interposition of the gentleman opposite, whose small twinkling eyes had been taking me in with intentness.

"I did some flittin' about that little old burg on my own hook," he informed us, "and what I got to say is, it needs wakin' up. Yes, sir, a bunch of live ones from the U.S.A. would shake up that little old graveyard so you wouldn't know it. I might have took a hand in it myself, if I hadn't have met up with Miss Browne and your a'nt. Yes, sir, I had a slick little proposition or two up my sleeve. Backed by some of the biggest capital in the U.S.A.--in fact, there's a bunch of fellers up there in God's country that's pretty sore on old H.H. for passin' things up this way. Kep' the wires hummin' for two-three days, till they seen I wasn't to be switched, and then the Old Man himself--no use mentionin' names, but I guess you know who I mean--Wall Street would, quick enough, anyway--the Old Man himself threatened to put his yacht in commission and come down to find out what sort of little game H. H. was playin' on him. But I done like Br'er Rabbit--jes lay low. Hamilton H. Tubbs knows a good thing when he sees it about as quick as the next one--and he knows enough to keep mum about it too!"

"None can appreciate more profoundly than myself your ability to maintain that reserve so necessary to the success of this expedition," remarked Miss Browne weightily from the far end of the

table. "It is to be wished that other members of our party, though tenderly esteemed, and never more than now when weakness of body temporarily overpowers strength of soul, had shared your powers of secrecy!"

This shaft was aimed quite obviously at me, and as at the moment I could think of nothing in reply short of hurling a plate I sank into a silence which seemed to be contagious, for it spread throughout the table. Three or four rough-looking men, of whom one, a certain Captain Magnus, belonged to our party and the rest to the ship, continued vigorously to hack their way through the meal with clattering knives and forks. Of other sounds there was none. Such gloom weighed heavily on the genial spirit of Mr. Tubbs, and he lightened it by rising to propose a toast.

"Ladies and gentlemen, to her now unfortunately laid low by the pangs of *mal de mer*--our friend and bony dear, Miss Harding!"

This was bewildering, for neither by friend nor foe could Aunt Jane be called bony. Later, in the light of Mr. Tubbs's passion for classical allusion, I decided to translate it *bona dea*, and consider the family complimented. At the moment I sat stunned, but Miss Browne, with greater self-possession, majestically inclined her head and said:

"In the name of our absent friend, I thank you." In spite of wistful looks from the beautiful youth as we rose from the table, and the allurements of a tropic moon, I remained constant to duty and Aunt Jane, and immured myself in her stateroom, where I passed an enlivening evening listening to her moans. She showed a faint returning spark of life when I mentioned Cuthbert Vane, and raised her head to murmur that he was Honorable and she understood though not the heir still likely to inherit and perhaps after all Providence--

The unspoken end of Aunt Jane's sentence pursued me into dreams in which an unknown gentleman obligingly broke his neck riding to hounds and left Apollo heir to the title and estates.

III

I ENGAGE THE ENEMY

It was fortunate that I slept well in my narrow berth on board the Rufus Smith, for the next day was one of trial. Aunt Jane had recovered what Mr. Tubbs, with deprecating coughs behind his hand, alluded to as her sea-legs, and staggered forth wanly, leaning on the arm of Miss Higglesby-Browne. Yes, of Miss Browne, while I, Aunt Jane's own niece, trotted meekly in the rear with a cushion. Already I had begun to realize how fatally I had underrated the lady of the hyphen, in imagining I had only to come and see and conquer Aunt Jane. The grim and bony one had made hay while the sun shone--while I was idling in California, and those criminally supine cousins were allowing Aunt Jane to run about New York at her own wild will. Miss Higglesby-Browne had her own collar and tag on Aunt Jane now, while she, so complete was her perversion, fairly

hugged her slavery and called it freedom. Yes, she talked about her Emancipation and her Soul-force and her Individuality, prattling away like a child that has learned its lesson well.

"Mercy, aunty, what long words!" I cried gaily, sitting down beside her and patting her hand. Usually I can do anything with her when I pet her up a bit. But the eye of Miss Higglesby-Browne was on her--and Aunt Jane actually drew a little away.

"Really, Virginia," she said, feebly endeavoring to rise to the occasion as she knew Miss Browne would have her rise, "really, while it's very nice to see you and all that, still I hope you realize that I have had a--a deep Soul-experience, and that I am no longer to be--trifled with and--and treated as if I were--amusing. I am really at a loss to imagine why you came. I wrote you that I was in the company of _trusted friends_."

"Friends?" I echoed aggrievedly. "Friends are all very well, of course, but when you and I have just each other, aunty, I think it is unkind of you to expect me to stay thousands of miles away from you all by myself."

"But it was you who sent me to New York, and insisted on my staying there!" she cried. Evidently she had been living over her wrongs.

"Yes--but how different!" I interrupted hastily. "There were the cousins--of course I have to spare you sometimes to the rest of the family!" Aunt Jane is strong on family feeling, and frequently reproaches me with my lack of it.

But in expecting Aunt Jane to soften at this I reckoned without Miss Higglesby-Browne. A dart from the cold gray eyes galvanized my aunt into a sudden rigid erectness.

"My dear Virginia," she said with quavering severity, "let me remind you that there are ties even dearer than those of blood--soul-affinities, you know, and--and, in short, in my dear friend Miss Higglesby-Browne I have met for the first time in my life with a--a Sympathetic Intelligence that understands Me!"

So that was Violet's line! I surveyed the Sympathetic Intelligence with a smiling interest.

"Really, how nice! And of course you feel quite sure that on your side you thoroughly understand--Miss Higglesby-Browne?"

Miss Browne's hair was rather like a clothesbrush in her mildest moods. In her rising wrath it seemed to quiver like a lion's mane.

"Miss Harding," she said, in the chest-tones she reserved for critical moments, "has a nature impossible to deceive, because itself incapable of deception. Miss Harding and I first met--on this present plane--in an atmosphere unusually favorable to soul-revelation. I knew at once that here was the appointed comrade, while in Miss Harding there was the immediate recognition of a complementary spiritual force."

"It's perfectly true, Virginia," exclaimed Aunt Jane, beginning to cry. "You and Susan and everybody have always treated me as if I

were a child and didn't know what I wanted, when the fact is I always have known _perfectly well_!" The last words issued in a wail from the depths of her handkerchief.

"You mean, I suppose," I exploded, "that what you have always wanted was to go off on this perfectly crazy chase after imaginary treasure!" There, now I had gone and done it. Of course it was my red hair.

"Jane," uttered Miss Higglesby-Browne in deep and awful tones, "do you or do you not realize how strangely prophetic were the warnings I gave you from the first--that if you revealed our plans malignant Influences would be brought to bear? Be strong, Jane--cling to the Dynamic Thought!"

"I'm clinging!" sniffed Aunt Jane, dabbing away her tears. I never saw any one get so pink about the eyes and nose at the smallest sign of weeping, and yet she is always doing it. "Really, Virginia," she broke out in a whimper, "it is not kind to say, I suppose, but I would just as soon you hadn't come! Just when I was learning to expand my individuality--and then you come and somehow make it seem so much more difficult!"

I rose. "Very well, Aunt Jane," I said coldly. "Expand all you like. When you get to the bursting point I'll do my best to save the pieces. For the present I suppose I had better leave you to company so much more favorable to your soul development!" And I walked away with my head in the air.

It was so much in the air, and the deck of the _Rufus Smith_ was so unstable, that I fell over a coil of rope and fetched up in the arms of the Honorable Cuthbert Vane. Fortunately this occurred around the corner of the deck-house, out of sight of my aunt and Miss Browne, so the latter was unable to shed the lurid light on the episode which she doubtless would if she had seen it. Mr. Vane stood the shock well and promptly set me on my feet.

"I say!" he exclaimed sympathetically, "not hurt, are you? Beastly nuisance, you know, these ropes lying about--regular man-traps, I call 'em."

"Thanks, I'm quite all right," I said, and as I spoke two large genuine tears welled up into my eyes. I hadn't realized till I felt them smarting on my eyelids how deeply hurt I was at the unnatural behavior of Aunt Jane.

"Ah--I'm afraid you are really not quite all right!" returned the Honorable Cuthbert with profound concern. "Tell me what's the matter--please do!"

I shook my head. "It's nothing--you couldn't help me. It's just--Aunt Jane."

"Your aunt? Has she been kicking-up a bit? I thought she looked rather a mild sort."

"Oh--mild! That's just it--so mild that she has let this awful Higglesby-Browne person get possession of her body and soul."

"Oh, I say, aren't you a bit rough on Miss Browne? Thought she was a rather remarkable old party--goes in strong for intellect and all that, you know."

"That's just what fooled Aunt Jane so--but, I thought a man would know better." My feathers were ruffled again.

"Well, fact is, I'm not so much up in that sort of thing myself," he admitted modestly. "Rather took her word for it and all that, you know. There's Shaw, though--cleverest chap going, I assure you. I rather fancy Miss Browne couldn't pull the wool over _his_ eyes much."

"She evidently did, though," I said snappishly, "since he's let her rope him in for such a wild goose chase as this!" In my heart I felt convinced that the clever Mr. Shaw was merely Miss Browne's partner in imposture.

"Oh, really, now. Miss Harding, you don't think it's that--that the thing's all moonshine?" He stared at me in grieved surprise.

"Why, what else can it be?" I demanded, driven by my wrongs to the cruelty of shattering his illusions. "Who ever heard of a pirate's treasure that wasn't moonshine? The moment I had read Aunt Jane's letter telling of the perfectly absurd business she was setting out on I rushed down by the first boat. Of course I meant to take her back with me, to put a stop to all this madness; but I was too late--and you're glad of it, I dare say!"

"I can't help being glad, you know," he replied, the color rising to his ingenuous cheeks. "It's so frightfully jolly having you along. Only I'm sorry you came against your will. Rather fancy you had it in your head that we were a band of cutthroats, eh? Well, the fact is I don't know much about the two chaps Miss Browne picked up, though I suspect they are a very decent sort. That odd fish, Captain Magnus, now--he was quite Miss Browne's own find, I assure you. And as to old H. H.--Tubbs, you know--Miss Browne met up with him on the boat coming down. The rum old chap got on her soft side somehow, and first thing she had appointed him secretary and treasurer--as though we were a meeting of something. Shaw was quite a bit upset about it. He and I were a week later in arriving--came straight on from England with the supplies, while Miss Browne fixed things up with the little black-and-tan country that owns the island. I say, Miss Harding, you're bound to like Shaw no end when you know him--he's such a wonderfully clever chap!"

I had no wish to blight his faith in the superlative Mr. Shaw, and said nothing. This evidently pained him, and as we stood leaning on the rail in the shadow of the deck-house, watching the blue water slide by, he continued to sound the praises of his idol. It seemed that as soon as Miss Browne had beguiled Aunt Jane into financing her scheme--a feat equivalent to robbing an infant-class scholar of his Sunday-school nickel--she had cast about for a worthy leader for the forthcoming Harding-Browne expedition. All the winds of fame were bearing abroad just then the name of a certain young explorer who had lately added another continent or two to the British Empire. Linked with his were other names, those of his fellow adventurers, which shone only less brightly than that of their chief. One Dugald Shaw had been among the great man's

most trusted lieutenants, but now, on the organizing of the second expedition, he was left behind in London, only half recovered of a wound received in the Antarctic. The hook of a block and tackle had caught him, ripped his forehead open from cheek to temple, and for a time threatened the sight of the eye. Slowly, under the care of the London surgeons, he had recovered, and the eye was saved. Meanwhile his old companions had taken again the path of glory, and were far on their way back to the ice-fields of the South Pole. Only Dugald Shaw was left behind.

"And so," the even voice flowed on, "when I ran on to him in London he was feeling fearfully low, I do assure you. A chap of his sort naturally hates to think he's on the shelf. I had known him since I was a little 'un, when we used to go to Scotland for our holidays, and he would be home from sea and staying with his cousin at the manse. He'd make us boats and spin all sorts of yarns, and we thought him a bigger man than the admiral of the fleet.

"Well, old Shaw was fancying there was nothing for it but to go back to his place with the P. & O., which seemed a bit flat after what he'd been having, and meant he would never get beyond being the captain of a liner, and not that for a good many years to come, when a cable came from this Miss Higglesby-Brown offering him command of this expedition. As neither of us had ever heard of Miss Higglesby-Browne, we were both a bit floored for a time. But Shaw smoked a pipe on it, and then he said, 'Old chap, if they'll give me my figure, I'm their man.' And I said, 'Quite so, old chap, and I'll go along, too.'

"I had to argue quite a bit, but in the end the dear old boy let me come--after wiring the pater and what not. And I do assure you, Miss Harding, it strikes me as no end of a lark--besides expecting it to put old Shaw on his feet and give us hatfuls of money all round."

Well, it was a plausible story, and I had no doubt, so far as the Honorable Cuthbert was concerned, an absolutely truthful one. The beautiful youth was manifestly as guileless as a small boy playing pirate with a wooden sword. But as to Mr. Shaw, who could tell that it hadn't after all been a trumped-up affair between Miss Browne and him--that his surprise at the message was not assumed to throw dust in the eyes of his young and trusting friend? Are even the most valiant adventurers invariably honest? Left behind by his companions because of his injury, his chance of an enduring fame cut off, with no prospects but those of an officer on an ocean liner, might he not lend a ready ear to a scheme for plucking a fat and willing pigeon? So great was my faith in Aunt Jane's gullibility, so dark my distrust of Miss Browne, that all connected with the enterprise lay under the cloud of my suspicion. The Honorable Mr. Vane I had already so far exculpated as to wonder if he were not in some way being victimized too; but Mr. Shaw, after even a casual glimpse of him, one couldn't picture as a victim. I felt that he must have gone into the enterprise with his eyes open to its absurdity, and fully aware that the only gold to be won by anybody must come out of the pocket of Aunt Jane.

As these reflections passed through my mind I looked up and saw the subject of them approaching. He lifted his helmet, but met my eyes unsmilingly, with a sort of sober scrutiny. He had the tanned skin

of a sailor, and brown hair cropped close and showing a trace of gray. This and a certain dour grim look he had made me at first consider him quite middle-aged, though I knew later that he was not yet thirty-five. As to the grimness, perhaps, I unwillingly conceded, part of it was due to the scar which seamed the right temple to the eyebrow, in a straight livid line. But it was a grim face anyway, strong-jawed, with piercing steel-blue eyes.

He was welcomed by Mr. Vane with a joyous thump on the shoulder-blade. "I say, old man, Miss Harding has turned out to be the most fearful doubting Thomas--thinks the whole scheme quite mad and all that sort of thing. I'm far too great a duffer to convert her, but perhaps you might, don't you know?"

Mr. Shaw looked at me steadily. His eyes were the kind that seem to see all and reveal nothing. I felt a hot spark of defiance rising in my own.

"And indeed it is too bad," he said coolly, "that the trip should not be more to Miss Harding's liking." The rough edges of his Scotch burr had been smoothed down by much wandering, but you knew at once on which side of the Solway he had seen the light.

"It is not a question of my liking," I retorted, trying to preserve an unmoved and lofty demeanor, though my heart was beating rather quickly at finding myself actually crossing swords with the redoubtable adventurer, this man who had often faced death, I could not refuse to believe, as steadily as he was facing me now.

"It is not at all a question of my liking or not liking the trip, but of the trip itself being--quite the wildest thing ever heard of out of a story-book." Harsher terms had sprung first to my lips, but had somehow failed to get beyond them.

"Ah--yet the world would be the poorer if certain wild trips had not been taken. I seem to remember one Christopher Columbus, for instance."

By a vivid lightning-flash of wrath I felt that this adventurer was laughing at me a little under his sober exterior--even stirring me up as one does an angry kitten.

"Yes," I flared out, "but Columbus did not inveigle a confiding old lady to go along with him!" Of course Aunt Jane is not, properly speaking, an old lady, but it was much more effective to pose her as one for the moment.

It was certainly effective, to judge by the sudden firm setting of his mouth.

"Lad," he said quietly, "lend a hand below, will you? They are overhauling some of our stuff 'tween decks."

He waited until the Honorable Cuthbert, looking rather dazed, had retired. We stood facing each other, my breath coming rather hurriedly. There was a kind of still force about this mastered anger of the dour Scot, like the brooding of black clouds that at any moment may send forth their devastating fire. Yet I myself was not endowed with red hair for nothing.

"Miss Harding," he said slowly, "that was a bitter word you said."

My head went up.

"Bitter, perhaps," I flung back, "but is it not true? It is for you to answer."

"No, it is not for me to answer, because it is not for you to ask. But since you talk of inveigling, let me give the history of my connection with the expedition. You will understand then that I had nothing to do with organizing it, but was merely engaged to do my best to carry it through to success."

"I have already heard a version of the matter from Mr. Vane."

"And you think he is in the conspiracy too?" "Certainly not," I replied hastily. "I mean--of course, I know he told me exactly what he believes himself."

"Yes, you would take the lad's word, of course." This with a slight but significant emphasis of which he was perhaps unconscious. "Then I suppose you consider that he was inveigled too?"

"I am not required to consider Mr. Vane's status at all," I replied with dignity. "It is my aunt whom I wish to protect." And suddenly to my dismay my voice grew husky. I had to turn my head aside and blink hard at the sea. I seemed to be encountering fearful and unexpected odds in my endeavor to rescue Aunt Jane.

He stood looking down at me--he was a big man, though of lesser height than the superb Cuthbert--in a way I couldn't quite understand. And what I don't understand always makes me uncomfortable.

"Very well," he said after a pause. "Maybe your opportunity will come. It would be a pity indeed if Miss Harding were to require no protecting and a young lady here with such a good will to it. But if you will take the suggestion of a man of rather broader experience than your own, you will wait until the occasion arises. It is bad generalship, really, to waste your ammunition like this."

"I dare say I am not a master of strategy," I cried, furious at myself for my moment of weakness and at him for the softening tone which had crept into his voice. "I am merely--honest. And when I see Aunt Jane hypnotized--by this Violet person--"

"And indeed I have seen no reason to think that Miss Higglesby-Browne is not a most excellent lady," interrupted Mr. Shaw stiffly. "And let me say this, Miss Harding: here we are all together, whether we wish to be or no, and for six weeks or more on the island we shall see no faces but our own. Are we to be divided from the beginning by quarrels? Are maybe even the men of us to be set by the ears through the bickering of women?"

Like the nick of a whip came the certainty that he was thinking of the Honorable Cuthbert, and that I was the rock on which their David-and-Jonathan friendship might split. Otherwise I suppose Miss Higglesby-Browne and I might have clawed each other forever

without interference from him.

"Really," I said with--I hope--well-simulated scorn, "since I am quite alone against half a dozen of you, I should think you could count on putting down any rebellion on my part very easily. I repeat, I had no other object in coming along--though I was really _kidnaped_ along--than to look after my aunt. The affairs of the party otherwise--or its personnel---do not interest me at all. As to the treasure, of course I know perfectly well that there isn't any."

And I turned my back and looked steadily out to sea. After a moment or two I heard him turn on his heel and go away. It was none too soon, for I had already begun to feel unostentatiously for my handkerchief. Any way, I had had the last word--

The rest of my day was lonely, for the beautiful youth, probably by malevolent design, was kept busy between decks. Mr. Tubbs danced attendance on Aunt Jane and Miss Browne, so assiduously that I already began to see some of my worst fears realized. There was nothing for me to do but to retire to my berth and peruse a tattered copy of _Huckleberry Finn_ which I found in the cabin.

At dinner, having the Honorable Cuthbert at my elbow, it was easier than not to ignore every one else. The small keen eyes of Mr. Tubbs, under his lofty and polished dome of thought, watched us knowingly. You saw that he was getting ready to assume a bless-you-my-children attitude and even to take credit somehow as match-maker. He related anecdotes, in which, as an emissary of Cupid, he played a benevolent and leading role. One detected, too, a grin, ugly and unmirthful, on the unprepossessing countenance of Captain Magnus. I was indifferent. The man my gaiety was intended for sat at the far end of the table. I had to wipe out the memory of my wet eyes that afternoon.

Directly dinner was at an end, remorselessly he led the Honorable Cuthbert away. I retired to Huckleberry Finn. But a face with a scar running to the eyebrow looked up at me from the pages, and I held colloquies with it in which I said all the brilliant and cutting things which had occurred to me too late.

I was thus engaged when a cry rang through the ship: "Land ho!"

IV

THE ISLE OF FORTUNE

I dropped my book and ran on deck. Every one else was already there. I joined the row at the rail, indifferent, for the moment, to the fact that to display so much interest in their ridiculous island involved a descent from my pinnacle. Indeed, the chill altitude of pinnacles never agrees with me for long at a time, so that I am obliged to descend at intervals to breathe the air on the common level.

The great gleaming orb of the tropic moon was blinding as the sun.

Away to the faint translucent line of the horizon rolled an infinity of shining sea. Straight ahead rose a dark conical mass. It was the mountainous shape of Leeward Island.

Everybody was craning to get a clearer view. "Hail, isle of Fortune!" exclaimed Miss Browne. I think my aunt would not have been surprised if it had begun to rain doubloons upon the deck.

"I bet we don't put it over some on them original Argonaut fellers, hey?" cried Mr. Tubbs.

Higher and higher across the sky-line cut the dark crest of the island as the freighter steamed valiantly ahead. She had a manner all her own of progressing by a series of headlong lunges, followed by a nerve-racking pause before she found her equilibrium again. But she managed to wallow forward at a good gait, and the island grew clearer momentarily. Sheer and formidable from the sea rose a line of black cliffs, and above them a single peak threw its shadow far across the water. Faintly we made out the white line of the breakers foaming at the foot of the cliffs.

We coasted slowly along, looking for the mouth of the little bay. Meanwhile we had collected our belongings, and stood grouped about the deck, ready for the first thrilling plunge into adventure. My aunt and Miss Browne had tied huge green veils over their cork helmets, and were clumping about in tremendous hobnailed boots. I could not hope to rival this severely military get-up, but I had a blue linen skirt and a white middie, and trusted that my small stock of similar garments would last out our time on the island. All the luggage I was allowed to take was in a traveling bag and a gunny-sack, obligingly donated by the cook. Speaking of cooks, I found we had one of our own along, a coal-black negro with grizzled wool, an unctuous voice, and the manners of an old-school family retainer. So far as I know, his name was Cookie. I suppose he had received another once from his sponsors in baptism, but if so, it was buried in oblivion.

Now a narrow gleaming gap appeared in the wall of cliffs, and the freighter whistled and lay to. There began a bustle at the davits, and shouts of "Lower away!" and for the first time it swept over me that we were to be put ashore in boats. Simultaneously this fact swept over Aunt Jane, and I think also over Miss Browne, for I saw her fling one wild glance around, as though in search of some impossible means of retreat. But she took the blow in a grim silence, while Aunt Jane burst out in lamentation. She would not, could not go in a boat. She had heard all her life that small boats were most unsafe. A little girl had been drowned in a lake near where she was visiting once through going in a boat. Why didn't the captain sail right up to the island as she had expected and put us ashore? Even at Panama with only a little way to go she had felt it suicidal--here it was not to be thought of.

But the preparations for this desperate step went on apace, and no one heeded Aunt Jane but Mr. Tubbs, who had hastened to succor beauty in distress, and mingled broken exhortations to courage with hints that if his opinion had been attended to all would be well.

Then Aunt Jane clutched at Mr. Shaw's coat lapel as he went by, and he stopped long enough to explain patiently that vessels of the

freighter's size could not enter the bay, and that there really was no danger, and that Aunt Jane might wait if she liked till the last boat, as it would take several trips to transfer us and our baggage. I supposed of course that this would include me, and stood leaning on the rail, watching the first boat with Mr. Shaw, Captain Magnus and the cook, fade to a dark speck on the water, when Mr. Vane appeared at my elbow.

"Ready, Miss Harding? You are to go in the next boat, with me. I asked especially."

"Oh, thanks!" I cried fervently. He would be much nicer than Mr. Tubbs to cling to as I went down--indeed, he was so tall that if it were at all a shallow place I might use him as a stepping-stone and survive. I hoped drowning men didn't gurgle very much--meanwhile Mr. Vane had disappeared over the side, and a sailor was lifting me and setting my reluctant feet on the strands of the ladder.

"Good-by, auntie !" I cried, as I began the descent. "Don't blame yourself too much. Everybody has to go some time, you know, and they say drowning's easy."

With a stifled cry Aunt Jane forsook Mr. Tubbs and flew to the rail. I was already out of reach.

"Oh, Virginia!" she wailed. "Oh, my dear child! If it should be the last parting!"

"Give my jewelry and things to Bess's baby!" I found strength to call back. What with the wallowing of the steamer and the natural instability of rope-ladders I seemed a mere atom tossed about in a swaying, reeling universe. _What will Aunt Jane do_? flashed through my mind, and I wished I had waited to see. Then the arms of the Honorable Mr. Vane received me. The strong rowers bent their backs, and the boat shot out over the mile or two of bright water between us and the island. Great slow swells lifted us. We dipped with a soothing, cradle-like motion. I forgot to be afraid, in the delight of the warm wind that fanned our cheeks, of the moonbeams that on the crest of every ripple were splintered to a thousand dancing lights. I forgot fear, forgot Miss Higglesby-Browne, forgot the harshness of the Scotch character.

"Oh, glorious, glorious!" I cried to Cuthbert Vane.

"Not so dusty, eh?" he came back in their ridiculous English slang. Now an American would have said _some little old moon that_! We certainly have our points of superiority.

All around the island white charging lines of breakers foamed on ragged half-seen reefs. You saw the flash of foam leaping half the height of the black cliffs. The thunder of the surf was in our ears, now rising to wild clamor, fierce, hungry, menacing, now dying to a vast broken mutter. Now our boat felt the lift of the great shoreward rollers, and sprang forward like a living thing. The other boat, empty of all but the rowers and returning from the island to the ship, passed us with a hail. We steered warily away from a wild welter of foam at the end of a long point, and shot beyond it on the heave of a great swell into quiet water. We were in the little bay under the shadow of the frowning cliffs.

At the head of the bay, a quarter of a mile away, lay a broad white beach shining under the moon. At the edge of dark woods beyond a fire burned redly. It threw into relief the black moving shapes of men upon the sand. The waters of the cove broke upon the beach in a white lacework of foam.

Straight for the sand the sailors drove the boat. She struck it with a jar, grinding forward heavily. The men sprang overboard, wading half-way to the waist. And the arms of the Honorable Cuthbert Vane had snatched me up and were bearing me safe and dry to shore.

The sailors hauled on the boat, dragging it up the beach, and I saw the Scotchman lending them a hand. The hard dry sand was crunching under the heels of Mr. Vane. I wriggled a little and Apollo, who had grown absent-minded apparently, set me down.

Mr. Shaw approached and the two men greeted each other in their offhand British way. As we couldn't well, under the circumstances, maintain a fiction of mutual invisibility, Mr. Shaw, with a certain obvious hesitation, turned to me.

"Only lady passenger, eh? Hope you're not wet through. Cookie's making coffee over yonder."

"I say, Shaw," cried the beautiful youth enthusiastically, "Miss Harding's the most ripping sport, you know! Not the least nervous about the trip, I assure you."

"I was," I announced, moved to defiance by the neighborhood of Mr. Shaw. "Before we started I was so afraid that if you had listened you might have heard my teeth chattering. But I had at least the comforting thought that if I did go to my end it would not be simply in pursuit of sordid gain!"

"And indeed that was almost a waste of noble sentiment under the circumstances," answered the dour Scot, with the fleeting shadow of an enraging smile. "Such disappointingly calm weather as it is! See that Miss Harding has some coffee, Bert."

I promised myself, as I went with Mr. Vane toward the fire, that some day I would find the weapon that would penetrate the Scotchman's armor--and would use it mercilessly.

Cookie, in his white attire, and with his black shining face and ivory teeth gleaming in the ruddy firelight, looked like a converted cannibal--perhaps won from his errors by one of Mr. Vane's missionary Johnnies. He received us with unctuous warmth.

"Well, now, 'clar to goodness if it ain't the li'le lady! How come you git ashore all dry lak you is? Yes, sah, Cookie'll git you-all some'n hot immejusly." He wafted me with stately gestures to a seat on an overturned iron kettle, and served my coffee with an air appropriate to mahogany and plate. It was something to see him wait on Cuthbert Vane. As Cookie told me later, in the course of our rapidly developing friendship, "dat young gemmun am sure one ob de quality." To indicate the certainty of Cookie's instinct, Miss Higglesby-Browne was never more to him than "dat pusson." and the

cold aloofness of his manner toward her, which yet never sank to impertinence, would have done credit to a duke.

On the beach Mr. Shaw, Captain Magnus and the sailors were toiling, unloading and piling up stores. Rather laggingly, Apollo joined them. I was glad, for a heavy fatigue was stealing over me. Cookie, taking note of my sagging head, brought me somebody's dunnage bag for a pillow. I felt him drawing a tarpaulin over me as I sank into bottomless depths of sleep.

I opened my eyes to the dying stars. The moon had set. Black shapes of tree and boulder loomed portentous through the ashen dimness that precedes the dawn. I heard men shouting, "Here she comes!" "Stand by to lend a hand!" In haste I scrambled up and tore for the beach. I must witness the landing of Aunt Jane.

"Where are they, where are they?" I demanded, rubbing my sleepy eyes.

"Why didn't you stay by the fire and have your nap out?" asked Mr. Shaw, in a tone which seemed to have forgotten for the moment to be frigid--perhaps because I hadn't yet waked up enough to have my quills in good pricking order.

"Nap? Do you think that for all the treasure ever buried by a pirate I would miss the spectacle of Aunt Jane and Miss Browne arriving? I expect it to compensate me for all I have suffered on this trip so far."

"See what it is, Bert," exclaimed the Scotchman, "to have a truly gentle and forgiving nature--how it brings its own reward. I'm afraid you and I miss a great deal in life, lad."

The beautiful youth pondered this.

"I don't know," he replied, "what you say sounds quite fit and proper for the parson, and all that, of course, but I fancy you are a bit out in supposing that Miss Harding is so forgiving, old man."

"I didn't know that you thought so badly of me, too!" I said timidly. I couldn't help it--the temptation was too great.

"I? Oh, really, now, you can't think that!" Through the dusk I saw that he was flushing hotly.

"Lad," said the Scotchman in a suddenly harsh voice, "lend a hand with this rope, will you?" And in the dusk I turned away to hide my triumphant smiles. I had found the weak spot of my foe--as Mr. Tubbs might have said, I was wise to Achilles's heel.

And now through the dawn-twilight that lay upon the cove the boat drew near that bore Mr. Tubbs and his fair charges. I saw the three cork helmets grouped together in the stern. Then the foaming fringe of wavelets caught the boat, hurled it forward, seemed all but to engulf it out leaped the sailors. Out leaped Mr. Tubbs, and disappeared at once beneath the waves. Shrill and prolonged rose the shrieks of my aunt and Miss Higglesby-Browne. Valiantly Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert Vane had rushed into the deep. Each now appeared staggering up the steep, foam-swept strand under a struggling

burden. Even after they were safely deposited on the sand. Miss Browne and my aunt continued to shriek.

"Save, save Mr. Tubbs!" implored Aunt Jane. But Mr. Tubbs, overlooked by all but this thoughtful friend, had cannily saved himself. He advanced upon us dripping.

"A close call!" he sang out cheerfully. "Thought one time old Nep had got a strangle-hold all right. Thinks I, I guess there'll be something doing when Wall Street gets this news--that old H. H. is food for the finny denizens of the deep!"

"Such an event, Mr. Tubbs," pronounced Violet, who had recovered her form with surprising swiftness, "might well have sent its vibrations through the financial arteries of the world!"

"It would have been most--most shocking!" quavered poor Aunt Jane with feeling. She was piteously striving to extricate herself from the folds of the green veil.

I came to her assistance. The poor plump little woman was trembling from head to foot.

"It was a most--unusual experience," she told me as I unwound her. "Probably extremely--unifying to the soul-forces and all that, as Miss Browne says, but for the moment--unsettling. Is my helmet on straight, dear? I think it is a little severe for my type of face, don't you? There was a sweet little hat in a Fifth Avenue shop--simple and yet so chic. I thought it just the thing, but Miss Browne said no, helmets were always worn--Coffee? Oh, my dear child, how thankful I shall be!"

And Aunt Jane clung to me as of yore as I led her up the beach.

V

THE CAPTAIN'S LEGACY

When in my tender years I was taken to the matinee, usually the most thrilling feature of the spectacle to me was the scene depicted on the drop-curtain. I know not why only the decorators of drop-curtains are inspired to create landscapes of such strange enchantment, of a beauty which not alone beguiles the senses--I speak from the standpoint of the ten-year-old--but throws wide to fancy the gate of dreams. Directly I was seated--in the body--and had had my hat taken off and been told not to wriggle, I vaulted airily over the unconscious audience, over an orchestra engaged in tuning up, and was lost in the marvelous landscape of the drop-curtain. The adventures which I had there put to shame any which the raising of the curtain permitted to be seen upon the stage.

I had never hoped to recover in this prosaic world my long-lost paradise of the drop-curtain, but morning revealed it to me here on Leeward Island. Here was the feathery foliage, the gushing springs, the gorgeous flowers of that enchanted land. And here

were the soft and intoxicating perfumes that I had imagined in my curtain landscape.

Leeward Island measures roughly four miles across from east to west by three from north to south. The core of the island is the peak, rising to a height of nearly three thousand feet. At its base on three sides lies a plateau, its edges gnawed away by the sea to the underlying rocky skeleton. On the southeastern quarter the peak drops by a series of great precipices straight into the sea.

Back from the cove stretches a little hollow, its floor rising gently to the level of the plateau. Innumerable clear springs which burst from the mountain converge to a limpid stream, which winds through the hollow to fall into the little bay. All the plateau and much of the peak are clothed with woods, a beautiful bright green against the sapphire of sea and sky. High above all other growth wave the feathery tops of the cocoa-palms, which flourish here luxuriantly. You saw them in their thousands, slender and swaying, tossing all together in the light sea-wind their crowns of nodding plumes.

The palms were nowhere more abundant than in the hollow by the cove where our camp was made, and their size and the regularity of their order spoke of cultivation. Guavas, oranges and lemons grew here, too, and many beautiful banana-palms. The rank forest growth had been so thoroughly cleared out that it had not yet returned, except stealthily in the shape of brilliant-flowered creepers which wound their sinuous way from tree to tree, like fair Delilahs striving to overcome arboreal Samsons by their wiles. They were rankest beside the stream, which ran at one edge of the hollow under the rise of the plateau.

At the side of the clearing toward the stream stood a hut, built of cocoa-palm logs. Its roof of palm-thatch had been scattered by storms. Nearer the stream on a bench were an old decaying wash-tub and a board. A broken frying-pan and a rusty axe-head lay in the grass.

In the hut itself were a rude bedstead, a small table, and a cupboard made of boxes. I was excited at first, and fancied we had come upon the dwelling of a marooned pirate. Without taking the trouble to combat this opinion, Mr. Shaw explained to Cuthbert Vane that a copra gatherer had once lived here, and that the place must have yielded such a profit that he was only surprised to find it deserted now. Behind this cool, unemphatic speech I sensed an ironic zest in the destruction of my pirate.

After their thrilling experience of being ferried from the _Rufus Smith_ to the island, my aunt and Miss Browne had been easily persuaded to dispose themselves for naps. Aunt Jane, however, could not be at rest until Mr. Tubbs had been restored by a cordial which she extracted with much effort from the depths of her hand-bag. He partook with gravity and the rolled up eyes of gratitude, and retired grimacing to comfort himself from a private bottle of his own.

The boats of the _Rufus Smith_ had departed from the island, and our relations with humanity were severed. The thought of our isolation awed and fascinated me as I sat meditatively upon a keg

of nails watching the miracle of the tropic dawn. The men were hard at work with bales and boxes, except Mr. Tubbs, who gave advice. It must have been valuable advice, for he assured everybody that a word from his lips had invariably been enough to make Wall Street sit up and take notice. But it is a far cry from Wall Street to Leeward Island. Mr. Tubbs, ignored, sought refuge with me at last, and pointed out the beauties of Aroarer as she rose from the embrace of Neptune.

"Aroarer Borealis, to be accurate," he explained, "but they didn't use parties' surnames much in classic times."

The glad cry of breakfast put an end to Mr. Tubbs's exposition of mythology.

So does dull reality clog the feet of dreams that it proved impossible to begin the day by digging up the treasure. Camp had to be arranged, for folk must eat and sleep even with the wealth of the Indies to be had for the turning of a sod. The cabin was reroofed and set apart as the bower of Aunt Jane and Miss Browne. I declined to make a third in this sanctuary. You could tell by looking at her that Violet was the sort of person who would inevitably sleep out loud.

"Hang me up in a tree or anywhere," I insisted, and it ended by my having a tarpaulin shelter rigged up in a group of cocoa-palms.

Among our earliest discoveries on the island was one regrettable from the point of view of romance, though rich in practical advantages; the woods were the abode of numerous wild pigs. This is not to write a new chapter on the geographical distribution of the pig, for they were of the humdrum domestic variety, and had doubtless appertained to the copra gatherer's establishment. But you should have seen how clean, how seemly, how self-respecting were our Leeward Island pigs to realize how profoundly the pig of Christian lands is a debased and slandered animal. These quadrupeds would have strengthened Jean Jacques's belief in the primitive virtue of man before civilization debauched him. And I shall always paraphrase the familiar line to read: "When wild in woods the noble porker ran."

Aunt Jane had been dreadfully alarmed by the pigs, and wanted to keep me immured in the cabin o' nights so that I should not be eaten. But nothing less than a Bengal tiger would have driven me to such extremity.

"Though if a pig should eat me," I suggested, "you might mark him to avoid becoming a cannibal at second hand. I should hate to think of you, Aunt Jane, as the family tomb!"

"Virginia, you are most unfeeling," said Aunt Jane, getting pink about the eyelids.

"Ah, I didn't know you Americans went in much for family tombs?" remarked the beautiful youth interestedly.

"No, we do our best to keep out of them," I assured him, and he walked off meditatively revolving this.

If the beautiful youth had been beautiful on shipboard, in the informal costume he affected on the island he was more splendid still. His white cotton shirt and trousers showed him lithe and lean and muscular. His bared arms and chest were like cream solidified to flesh. Instead of his nose peeling like common noses in the hot salt air, every kiss of the sun only gave his skin a warmer, richer glow. With his striped silk sash of red and blue about his waist, and his crown of ambrosial chestnut curls--a development due to the absence of a barber--the Honorable Cuthbert would certainly have been hailed by the natives, if there had been any, as the island's god.

Camp was made in the early hours of the day. Then came luncheon, prepared with skill by Cookie, and eaten from a table of packing-cases laid in the shade. Afterward every one, hot and weary, retired for a siesta. It was now the cool as well as the dry season on the island, yet the heat of the sun at midday was terrific. But the temperature brought us neither illness nor even any great degree of lassitude. Always around the island blew the faint cooling breath of the sea. No marsh or stagnant water bred insect pests or fever. Every day while we were there the men worked hard, and grew lean and sun-browned, and thrived on it. Every afternoon with unfailing regularity a light shower fell, but in twenty minutes it was over and the sun shone again, greedily lapping up the moisture that glittered on the leaves. And forever the sea sang a low muttering bass to the faint threnody of the wind in the palms.

On this first day we gathered in the cool of the afternoon about our table of packing-boxes for an event which even I, whose role was that of skeptic, found exciting. Miss Browne was at last to produce her map and reveal the secret of the island. So far, except in general terms, she had imparted it to no one. Everybody, in coming along, had been buying a pig in a poke--though to be sure Aunt Jane had paid for it. The Scotchman, Cuthbert Vane had told me incidentally, had insured himself against loss by demanding a retaining fee beforehand. Somehow my opinion, both of his honesty and of his intelligence, had risen since I knew this. As to Cuthbert Vane, he had come purely in a spirit of adventure, and had paid his own expenses from the start.

However, now the great moment was at hand. But before it comes, I will here set down the treasure-story of Leeward Island, as I gathered it later, a little here and there, and pieced it together into a coherent whole through many dreaming hours.

In 1820, the city of Lima, in Peru, being threatened by the revolutionaries under Bolivar and San Martin, cautious folk began to take thought for their possessions. To send them out upon the high seas under a foreign flag seemed to offer the best hope of safety, and soon there was more gold afloat on the Pacific than at any time since the sailing of the great plate-galleons of the seventeenth century. Captain Sampson, of the brig Bonny Lass, found himself with a passenger for nowhere in particular in the shape of a certain Spanish merchant of great wealth, reputed custodian of the private funds of the bishop of Lima. This gentleman brought with him, besides some scanty personal baggage--for he took ship in haste--a great iron-bound chest. Four stout sailors of the Bonny Lass staggered under the weight of it.

The Bonny Lass cruised north along the coast, the passenger desiring to put in at Panama in the hope that word might reach him there of quieter times at home. But somewhere off Ecuador on a dark and starless night the merchant of Lima vanished overboard--"and what could you expect," asked Captain Sampson in effect, "when a lubber like him would stay on deck in a gale?" Strange to say, the merchant's body-servant met the fate of the heedless also.

Shrugging his shoulders at the carelessness of passengers, Captain Sampson bore away to Leeward Island, perhaps from curiosity to see this old refuge of the buccaneers, where the spoils of the sack of Guayaquil were said to have been buried. Who knows but that he, too, was bent on treasure-seeking? Be that as it may, the little brig found her way into the bay on the northeast side of the island, where she anchored. Water was needed, and there is refreshment in tropic fruits after a diet of salt horse and hardtack. So all hands had a holiday ashore, where the captain did not disdain to join them. Only he went apart, and had other occupation than swarming up the palms for cocoanuts.

One fancies, then, a moonless night, a crew sleeping off double grog, generously allowed them by the captain; a boat putting off from the Bonny Lass, in which were captain, mate, and one Bill Halliwell, able seaman, a man of mighty muscle; and as freight an object large, angular and ponderous, so that the boat lagged heavily beneath the rowers' strokes.

Later, Bill, the simple seaman, grows presumptuous on the strength of this excursion with his betters. It is a word and a blow with the captain of the Bonny Lass, and Bill is conveniently disposed of. Dead, as well as living, he serves the purpose of the captain, but of that later.

Away sailed the Bonny Lass, sailing once for all out of the story. As for Captain Sampson, there is a long gap in his history, hazily filled by the story of his having been lieutenant to Benito Bonito, and one of the two survivors when Bonito's black flag was brought down by the British frigate Espiegle. But sober history knows nothing of him until he reappears years later, an aged and broken man, in a back street of Bristol. Here was living a certain Hopperdown, who had been boatswain on the Bonny Lass at the time that she so regrettably lost her passengers overboard. He too had been at Leeward Island, and may have somewhat wondered and questioned as to the happenings during the brig's brief stay there. He saw and recognized his old skipper hobbling along the Bristol quays, and perhaps from pity took the shabby creature home with him. Hopperdown dealt in sailors' slops, and had a snug room or two behind the shop. Here for a while the former Captain Sampson dwelt, and after a swift illness here he died. With the hand of death upon him, his grim lips at last gave up their secret. With stiffening fingers he traced a rough map, to refresh Hopperdown's memory after the lapse of time since either had seen the wave-beaten cliffs of Leeward Island. For Captain Sampson had never been able to return to claim the treasure which he had left to Bill Halliwell's silent guardianship. Somehow he had lost his own vessel, and there would be rumors about, no doubt, which would make it difficult for him to get another. If he had, indeed,

sailed with Bonito, he had kept his secret from his formidable commander. Even as he had dealt with Bill Halliwell, so might Bonito deal by him--or at least the lion's share must be yielded to the pirate captain. And the passion of Captain Sampson's life had come to be his gold--his hidden hoard on far-off Leeward Island. It was his, now, all his. The only other who knew its hiding-place, his former mate, had been killed in Havana in a tavern brawl. The secret of the bright unattainable treasure was all the captain's own. He dreamed of the doubloons, gloated over them, longed for them with a ceaseless gnawing passion of desire. And in the end he died, in Hopperdown's little shop in the narrow Bristol by-street.

Hopperdown, an aging man himself, and in his humble way contented, fell straightway victim to the gold-virus. He sold all he had, and bought passage in a sailing ship for Valparaiso, trusting that once so far on the way he would find means to accomplish the rest. But the raging of the fever in his thin old blood brought him to his bed, and the ship sailed without him. Before she was midway in the Atlantic Hopperdown was dead.

The old man died in the house of a niece, to whom by way of legacy he left his map. For the satisfaction of his anxious mind, still poring on the treasure, she wrote down what she could grasp of his instructions, and then, being an unimaginative woman, gave the matter little further heed. For years the map lay among other papers in a drawer, and here it was at length discovered by her son, himself a sailor. He learned from her its history, and having been in the Pacific, and heard the tales and rumors that cling about Leeward Island like the everlasting surf of its encompassing seas, this grand-nephew of old Hopperdown's, by name David Jenkins, became for the rest of his days a follower of the *ignis fatuus*. An untaught, suspicious, grasping man, he rejected, or knew not how to set about, the one course which offered the least hope, which was to trade his secret for the means of profiting by it. Ah his restless, hungry life he spent in wandering up and down the seas, ever on the watch for some dimly imagined chance by which he might come at the treasure. And so at last he wandered into the London hospital where he died.

And to me the wildest feature of the whole wild tale was that at the last he should have parted with the cherished secret of a lifetime to Miss Higglesby-Browne.

In a general way, every one of us knew this history. Even I had had an outline of it from Cuthbert Vane. But so far nobody had seen the map. And now we were to see it; the time that intervened before that great event had already dwindled to minutes, to seconds--

But no; for Miss Browne arose and began to make a speech. The beginning of it dealt in a large and generalizing manner with comradeship and loyalty, and the necessity of the proper mental attitude in approaching the business we had in hand. I did not listen closely. The truth is, I wanted to see that map. Under the spell of the island, I had almost begun to believe in the chest of doubloons.

Suddenly I awoke with a start to the fact that Miss Browne was

talking about me. Yes, I, indubitably, was the Young Person whose motives in attaching herself to the party were so at variance with the amity and mutual confidence which filled all other breasts. It was I who had sought to deprive the party of the presence, counsel and support of a member lacking whom it would have been but a body without a soul. It was I who had uttered words which were painful and astounding to one conscious of unimpugnable motives. In the days of toil to come, we were reminded, the Young Person, to wit, myself, would have no share. She would be but skeptic, critic, drone in the busy hive. Thus it was obvious that the Young Person could not with any trace of justice claim part or lot in the treasure. Were it not well, then, that the Young Person be required to make formal and written renunciation of all interest in the golden hoard soon to reward the faith and enterprise of the Harding-Browne expedition? Miss Browne requested the sense of the meeting on the matter.

Under the fire of this arraignment I sat hot-cheeked and incredulous, while a general wave of agitation seemed to stir the drowsy atmosphere. Aunt Jane was quivering, her round eyes fixed on Miss Higglesby-Browne like a fascinated rabbit's on a serpent. Mr. Hamilton H. Tubbs had pursed his lips to an inaudible whistle, and alternately regarded the summits of the palms and stole swift ferret-glances at the faces of the company. Captain Magnus had taken a sheath-knife from his belt and was balancing it on one finger, casting about him now and then a furtive, crooked, roving look, to meet which made you feel like a party to some hidden crime. Mr. Vane had remained for some time in happy unconsciousness of the significance of Miss Browne's oration. It was something to see it gradually penetrate to his perceptions, vexing the alabaster brow with a faint wrinkle of perplexity, then

suffusing his cheeks with agonized and indignant blushes. "Oh, I say, really, you know!" hovered in unspoken protest on his tongue. He threw imploring looks at Mr. Shaw, who alone of all the party sat imperturbable, except for a viciously bitten lip.

Miss Higglesby-Browne had drawn a deep breath, preparatory to resuming her verbal ramble, but I sprang to my feet.

"Miss Browne," I said, in tones less coldly calm than I could have wished, "if you have thought it necessary to--to orate at this length merely to tell me that I am to have no share in this ridiculous treasure of yours, you have wasted a great deal of energy. In the first place, I don't believe in your treasure." (Which, of course, despite my temporary lapse, I really didn't.) "I think you are--sillier than any grown-up people I ever saw. In the second place, anything you do find you are welcome to keep. Do you think I came along with people who didn't want me, and have turned my own aunt against me, for the sake of filthy lucre? Did I come intentionally at all, or because I was shanghaied and couldn't help myself? Aunt Jane!" I demanded, turning to my stricken relative, who was gazing in anguish and doubt from Miss Browne to me, "haven't you one spark left of family pride--I don't talk of affection any longer--that you sit still and hear me made speeches at in this fashion? Have you grown so sordid and grasping that you can think of nothing but this blood-stained pirate gold?"

Aunt Jane burst into tears.

"Good gracious, Virginia," she wailed, "how shocking of you to say such things! I am sure we all got along very pleasantly until you came--and in that dreadfully sudden way. You might at least have been considerate enough to wire beforehand. As to blood-stains, there was a preparation your Aunt Susan had that got them out beautifully--I remember the time the little boy's nose bled on the drawing-room rug. But I should think just washing the gold would do very well!"

It was impossible to feel that these remarks helped greatly to clear the situation. I opened my mouth, but Miss Browne was beforehand with me.

"Miss Virginia Harding has herself admitted that she has no just or equitable claim to participate in the profits of this expedition--I believe I give the gist of your words, Miss Harding?"

"Have it your own way," I said, shrugging.

"I move, then, Mr. Secretary"--Miss Browne inclined her head in a stately manner toward Mr. Tubbs--"that you offer for Miss Virginia Harding's signature the document prepared by you."

"Oh, I say!" broke out Mr. Vane suddenly, "I call this rotten, you know!"

"In case of objection by any person," said Miss Browne loftily, "the matter may be put to a vote. All those in favor say aye!"

An irregular fire of eyes followed. Mr. Tubbs gave his with a cough meant so far as possible to neutralize its effect--with a view to some future turning of the tables. Captain Magnus responded with a sudden bellow, which caused him to drop the gleaming knife within an inch of Aunt Jane's toe. Mr. Shaw said briefly, "I think the distribution of the treasure, if any is recovered, should be that agreed upon by the original members of the party. Aye!"

Aunt Jane's assenting voice issued from the depths of her handkerchief, which was rapidly becoming so briny and inadequate that I passed her mine. From Cuthbert Vane alone there came a steadfast no--and the Scotchman put a hand on the boy's shoulder with a smile which was like sudden sunlight in a bleak sky.

Mr. Tubbs then produced a legal-looking document which I took to be the original agreement of the members of the expedition. Beneath their signatures he had inscribed a sort of codicil, by which I relinquished all claim on any treasure recovered by the party. Mr. Tubbs took evident pride in the numerous aforesaid and thereofs and other rolling legal phrases of his composition, and Miss Browne listened with satisfaction as he read it off, as though each word had been a nail in the coffin of my hopes. I signed the clause in a bold and defiant hand, under the attentive eyes of the company. A sort of sigh went round, as though something of vast moment had been concluded. And indeed it had, for now the way was clear for Violet's map.

I suppose that with a due regard for my dignity I should have risen and departed. I had been so definitely relegated to the position of outsider that to remain to witness the unveiling of the great mystery seemed indecently intrusive. Let it be granted, then, that I ought to have got up with stately grace and gone away. Only, I did nothing of the sort. In spite of my exclusion from all its material benefits, I had an amateur's appreciation of that map. I felt that I should gloat over it. Perhaps of all those present I alone, free from sordid hopes, would get the true romantic zest and essence of it--

Covertly I watched the faces around me. Mr. Tubbs's eyes had grown bright; he licked his dry lips. His nose, tip-tilted and slightly bulbous, took on a more than usually roseate hue. Captain Magnus, who was of a restless and jerky habit at the best of times, was like a leashed animal scenting blood. Beneath his open shirt you saw the quick rise and fall of his hairy chest. His lips, drawn back wolfishly, displayed yellow, fang-like teeth. Under the raw crude greed of the man you seemed to glimpse something indescribably vulpine and ferocious.

The face of Dugald Shaw was controlled, but there was a slight rigidity in its quiet. A pulse beat rapidly in his cheek. All worldly good, all hope of place, power, independence, hung for him on the contents of the small flat package, wrapped in oil-silk, which Miss Browne was at this moment withdrawing from her pocket.

Only Cuthbert Vane, seated next to me, maintained without effort his serenity. For him the whole affair belonged in the category known as sporting, where a gentleman played his stake and accepted with equanimity the issue.

As Miss Browne undid the oil-silk package everybody held his breath, except poor Aunt Jane, who most inopportunistly swallowed a gnat and choked.

The dead sailor's legacy consisted of a single sheet of time-stained paper. Two-thirds of the sheet was covered by a roughly-drawn sketch in faded ink, giving the outline of the island shores as we had seen them from the Rufus Smith. Here was the cove, with the name it bears in the Admiralty charts--Lantern Bay--written in, and a dotted line indicating the channel. North of the bay the shore line was carried for only a little distance. On the south was shown the long tongue of land which protects the anchorage, and which ends in some detached rocks or islets. At a point on the seaward side of the tongue of land, about on a line with the head of the bay, the sketch ended in a swift backward stroke of the pen which gave something the effect of a cross.

To all appearance the map was merely to give Hopperdown his directions for entering the cove. There was absolutely no mark upon it to show where the treasure had been buried.

Now for the writing on the sheet below the map. It was in another hand than that which had written Lantern Bay across the face of the cove, and which, though labored, was precise and clear. This other was an uneven, wavering scrawl:

He said it is in a Cave with 2 mouths near by the grave of Bill Halliwell which was cut down for he new to much. He said you can bring a boat to the cave at the half Tide but beware the turn for the pull is strong. He said to find the Grave again look for the stone at the head marked B. H. and a Cross Bones. In the Chest is gold Dubloons, a vast lot, also a silver Cross which he said leve for the Grave for he said Bill walks and that's unlucky_.

That was all. A fairly clear direction for any friend who had attended the obsequies of Bill and knew where to look for the stone marked B. H. and a cross-bones, but to perfect strangers it was vague.

A blank look crept into the intent faces about the table.

"It--it don't happen to say in more detail just precisely where that cave might be looked for?" inquired Mr. Tubbs hopefully.

"In more detail?" repeated Miss Browne challengingly. "Pray, Mr. Tubbs, what further detail could be required?"

"A good deal more, I am afraid," remarked the Scotchman grimly.

Miss Browne whirled upon him. In her cold eye a spark had kindled. And suddenly I had a new vision of her. I saw her no longer as the deluder of Aunt Jane, but as herself the deluded. Her belief in the treasure was an obsession. This map was her talisman, her way of escape from an existence which had been drab and dull enough, I dare say.

"Mr. Shaw, we are given not one, but several infallible landmarks. The cave has two mouths, it can be approached by sea, it is IN the immediate neighborhood of the grave of William Halliwell, which is to be recognized by its headstone. As the area of our search is circumscribed by the narrow limits of this island, I fail to see what further marks of identification can be required."

"A grave ninety years old and hidden beneath a tropical jungle is not an easy thing to find, Miss Browne. As to caves, I doubt but they are numerous. The formation here makes it more than likely. And there'll be more than one with two mouths, I'm thinking."

"Mr. Shaw"--Miss Browne gave the effect of drawing herself up in line of battle--"I feel that I must give expression to the thought which comes to me at this moment. It is this--that if the members of this party are to be chilled by carping doubts, the wave of enthusiasm which has floated us thus far must inevitably recede, leaving us flotsam on a barren shore. What can one weak woman--pardon, my unfaltering Jane!--two women, achieve against the thought of failure firmly held by him to whom, we looked to lead us boldly in our forward dash? Mr. Shaw, this is no time for crawling earthworm tactics. It is with the bold and sweeping glance of the eagle that we must survey this island, until, the proper point discerned, we swoop with majestic flight upon our predestined goal!"

Miss Browne was somewhat exhausted by this effort, and paused for breath, whereupon Mr. Tubbs, anxious to retrieve his recent blunder, seized with dexterity this opportunity.

"I get you. Miss Browne, I get you," said Mr. Tubbs with conviction. "Victory ain't within the grasp of any individual that carries a heart like a cold pancake in his bosom. What this party needs is pep, and if them that was calculated on to supply it don't, why there's others which is not given to blowin' their own horn, but which might at a pinch dash forward like Arnold--no relation to Benedict--among the spears. I may be rather a man or thought than action, ma'am, and at present far from my native heath, which is the financial centers of the country, but if I remember right it was Ulysses done the dome-work for the Greeks, while certain persons that was depended on sulked in their tents. Miss Higglesby-Browne, you can count--count, I say--on old H. H.!"

"I thank you, Mr. Tubbs, I thank you!" replied Miss Browne with emotion. As for Aunt Jane, she gazed upon the noble countenance of Mr. Tubbs with such ecstatic admiration that her little nose quivered like a guinea-pig's.

VI

THE CAVE WITH TWO MOUTHS

Obscure as were the directions which Hopperdown's niece had taken from his dying lips, one point at least was clear--the treasure-cave opened on the sea. This seemed an immense simplification of the problem, until you discovered that the great wall of cliffs was honeycombed with fissures. The limestone rock of which the island was composed was porous as a sponge. You could stand on the edge of the cliffs and watch the green water slide in and out of unseen caverns at your feet, and hear the sullen thunder of the waves that broke far in under the land.

One of the boats which had conveyed us from the Rufus Smith had been left with us, and in it Mr. Shaw, with the Honorable Cuthbert and Captain Magnus, made a preliminary voyage of discovery. This yielded the information above set down, plus, however, the thrilling and significant fact that a cave seemingly predestined to be the hiding-place of treasure, and moreover a cave with the specified two openings, ran under the point which protected the anchorage on the south, connecting the cove with the sea.

Although in their survey of the coast the voyagers had covered only a little distance on either side of the entrance to the bay, the discovery of this great double-doored sea-chamber under the point turned all thoughts from further explorations. Only the Scotchman remained exasperatingly calm and declined to admit that the treasure was as good as found. He refused to be swept off his feet even by Mr. Tubbs's undertaking to double everybody's money within a year, through the favor of certain financial parties with whom he was intimate.

"I'll wait till I see the color of my money before I reckon the interest on it," he remarked. "It's true the cave would be a likely and convenient place for hiding the chest; the question is: Wouldn't it be too likely and convenient? Sampson would maybe not

choose the spot of all others where the first comer who had got wind of the story would be certain to look."

Miss Browne, at this, exchanged darkly significant glances with her two main supporters, and Mr. Tubbs came to the fore with an offer to clinch matters by discovering the grave of Bill Halliwell, with its marked stone, on the point above the cave within twenty-four hours.

"Look for it if you like," replied Mr. Shaw impatiently. "But don't forget that your tombstone is neither more nor less than such a boulder as there are thousands of on the island, and buried under the tropic growth of ninety years besides."

Miss Browne murmured to Aunt Jane, in a loud aside, that she well understood now why the eminent explorer had not discovered the South Pole, and Aunt Jane murmured back that to her there had always been something so sacred about a tombstone that she couldn't help wondering if Mr. Shaw's attitude were really quite reverential.

"Well, friends," remarked Mr. Tubbs, "there's them that sees nothin' but the hole in the doughnut, and there's them that see the doughnut that's around the hole. I ain't ashamed to say that old H. H. is in the doughnut class. Why, the Old Man himself used to remark--I guess it ain't news to some here about me bein' on the inside with most of the leadin' financial lights of the country--he used to remark, 'Tubbs has it in him to bull the market on a Black Friday.' Ladies, I ain't one that's inclined to boast, but I jest want to warn you not to be too astonished when H. H. makes acquaintance with that tombstone, which I'm willin' to lay he does yet."

"Well, good luck to you," said the grim Scot, "and let me likewise warn all hands not to be too astonished if we find that the treasure is not in the cave. But I'll admit it is as good a place as any for beginning the search, and there will be none gladder than I if it turns out that I was no judge of the workings of Captain Sampson's mind."

The cave which was now the center of our hopes--I say our, because somehow or other I found myself hoping and fearing along with the rest, though carefully concealing it--ran under the point at its farther end. The sea-mouth of the cave was protected from the full swell of the ocean by some huge detached rocks rising a little way offshore, which caught and broke the waves. The distance was about sixty feet from mouth to mouth, and back of this transverse passage a great vaulted chamber stretched far under the land. The walls of the chamber rose sheer to a height of fifteen feet or more, when a broad ledge broke their smoothness. From this ledge opened cracks and fissures under the roof, suggesting in the dim light infinite possibilities in the way of hiding-places. Besides these, a wide stretch of sand at the upper end of the chamber, which was bare at low tide, invited exploration. At high water the sea flooded the cavern to its farthest extremity and beat upon the walls. Then there was a great surge and roar of waters through the passage from mouth to mouth, and at turn of tide--in hopeful agreement with the legend--the suck and commotion of a whirlpool, almost, as the sea drew back its waves. Now and again, it was to prove, even the water-worn pavement between the two archways was left bare, and one

could walk dry-shod along the rocks under the high land of the point from the beach to the cave. But this was at the very bottom of the ebb. Mostly the lower end of the cave was flooded, and the explorers went back and forth in the boat.

A certain drawback to boating in our island waters was the presence of hungry hordes of sharks. You might forget them for a moment and sit happily trailing your fingers overboard, and then a huge moving shadow would darken the water, and you saw the ripple cut by a darting fin and the flash of a livid belly as the monster rolled over, ready for his mouthful. I could not but admire the thoughtfulness of Mr. Tubbs, who since his submergence on the occasion of arriving had been as delicate about water as a cat, in committing himself to strictly land operations in the search for Bill Halliwell's tombstone.

Owing, I suppose, to the stoniness of the soil, the woods upon the point were less dense than elsewhere, and made an agreeable parade ground for Mr. Tubbs and his two companions--for he was accompanied in these daring explorations with unswerving fidelity by Aunt Jane and Miss Higglesby-Browne. Each of the three carried an umbrella, and they went solemnly in single file, Mr. Tubbs in the lead to ward off peril in the shape of snakes or jungle beasts.

"To think of what that man exposes himself to for our sakes!" Aunt Jane said to me with emotion. "With no protection but his own bravery in case anything were to spring out!"

But nothing ever did spring out but an angry old sow with a litter of piglets, before which the three umbrellas beat a rapid retreat.

The routine of life on the island was now established for every one but me, who belonged neither to the land nor sea divisions, but dangled forlornly between them like Mahomet's coffin. Aunt Jane had made a magnanimous effort to attach me to the umbrella contingent, and I had felt almost disposed to accept, in order to witness the resultant delight of Miss Higglesby-Browne. But on second thoughts I declined, even though Aunt Jane was thus left unguarded to the blandishments of Mr. Tubbs, preferring, like the little bird in the play, to flock all alone, except when the Honorable Cuthbert could escape from his toil in the cave.

What with the genius of Cookie and the fruitfulness of our island, not to speak of supplies from the Army and Navy Stores, we lived like sybarites, There were fish from stream and sea, cocoanuts and bananas and oranges from the trees in the clearing. I had hopes of yams and breadfruit also, but if they grew on Leeward none of us had a speaking acquaintance with them. Cookie did wonders with the pigs that were shot and brought in to him, though I never could sit down with appetite to a massacred infant served up on a platter, which is just what little pigs look like,

"Jes' yo' cas' yo' eye on dis yere innahcent," Cookie would request, as he placed the suckling before Mr. Tubbs. "Tendah as a new-bo'n babe, he am. Jes' lak he been tucked up to sleep by his mammy. Sho' now, how yo' got de heart to stick de knife in him, Mistah Tubbs?"

It was significant that Mr. Tubbs, after occupying for a day or two

an undistinguished middle place at the board, had somehow slid into the carver's post at the head of the table. Flanking him were the two ladies, so that the Land Forces formed a solid and imposing phalanx. Everybody else had a sense of sitting in outer darkness, particularly I, whom fate had placed opposite Captain Magnus. Since landing on the island, Captain Magnus had forsworn the effeminacy of forks. Loaded to the hilt, his knife would approach his cavernous mouth and disappear in it. Yet when it emerged Captain Magnus was alive. Where did it go? This was a question that agitated me daily.

The history of Captain Magnus was obscure. It was certain that he had his captain's papers, though how he had mastered the science of navigation sufficiently to obtain them was a problem. Though he held a British navigator's license, he did not appear to be an Englishman. None of us ever knew, I think, from what country he originally came. His rough, mumbling, unready speech might have been picked up in any of the seaports of the English-speaking world. His manners smacked of the fore-castle, and he was altogether so difficult to classify that I used to toy with the theory that he had murdered the real Captain Magnus for his papers and was masquerading in his character.

The captain, as Mr. Vane had remarked, was Miss Browne's own find. Before the objections of Mr. Shaw--evidently a Negative Influence from the beginning--had caused her to abandon the scheme. Miss Browne had planned to charter a vessel in New York and sail around the Horn to the island. While nursing this project she had formed an extensive acquaintance with persons frequenting the New York water-front, among whom was Captain Magnus. As I heard her remark, he was the one nautical character whom she found sympathetic, by which I judge that the others were skeptical and rude. Being sympathetic, Captain Magnus found it an easy matter to attach himself to the expedition--or perhaps it was Violet who annexed him. I don't know which.

Mr. Vane used to view the remarkable gastronomic feats of Captain Magnus with the innocent and quite unscornful curiosity of a little boy watching the bears in the zoo. Evidently he felt that a horizon hitherto bounded mainly by High Staunton Manor was being greatly enlarged. I knew now that the Honorable Cuthbert's father was a baron, and that he was the younger of two sons, and that the elder was an invalid, so that the beautiful youth was quite certain in the long run to be Lord Grasmere. I had remained stolid under this information, feelingly imparted by Aunt Jane. I had refused to ask questions about High Staunton Manor. For already there was a vast amount of superfluous chaperoning being done. I couldn't speak to the b. y.--which is short for beautiful youth--without Violet's cold gray eye being trained upon us. And Aunt Jane grew flustered directly, and I could see her planning an embroidery design of coronets, or whatever is the proper headgear of barons, for my trousseau. Mr. Tubbs had essayed to be facetious on the matter, but I had coldly quenched him.

But Mr. Shaw was much the worst. My most innocent remark to the beautiful youth appeared to rouse suspicion in his self-constituted guardian. If he did not say in so many words, Beware, dear lad, she's stringing you! or whatever the English of that is, it was because nobody could so wound the faith in the b. y.'s candid eyes.

But to see the fluttering, anxious wing the Scotchman tried to spread over that babe of six-feet-two you would have thought me a man-eating tigress. And I laughed, and flaunted my indifference in his sober face, and went away with bitten lips to the hammock they had swung for me among the palms--

The Honorable Cuthbert had a voice, a big, rich, ringing baritone like floods of golden honey. He had also a ridiculous little ukulele, on which he accompanied himself with a rhythmic strumming. When, like the sudden falling of a curtain, dusky, velvet, star-spangled, the wonderful tropic night came down, we used to build a little fire upon the beach and sit around it. Then Cuthbert Vane would sing. Of all his repertory, made up of music-hall ditties, American ragtime, and sweet old half-forgotten ballads, we liked best a certain wild rollicking song, picked up I don't know where, but wonderfully effective on that island where Davis, and Benito Bonito, and many another of the roving gentry--not to mention that less picturesque villain, Captain Sampson of the Bonny Lass--had resorted between their flings with fortune.

Oh, who's, who's with me for the free life of a rover?
Oh, who's, who's with me for to sail the broad seas over?
In every port we have gold to fling,
And what care we though the end is to swing?
Sing ho, sing hey, this life's but a day,
So live it free as a rover may.

Oh, who's, who's with me at Fortune's call to wander?
Then, lads, to sea--and ashore with gold to squander!
We'll set our course for the Spanish Main
Where the great plate-galleons steer for Spain.
Sing ho, sing hey, this life's but a day,
Then live it free as a rover may.

Then leave toil and cold to the lubbers that will bear it.
The world's fat with gold, and we're the lads to share it.
What though swift death is the rover's lot?
We've played the game and we'll pay the shot.
Sing ho, sing hey, this life's but a day,
Then live it free as a rover may.

"Sing ho, sing hey!" echoed the audience in a loud discordant roar. Cookie over his dishpan flinging it back in a tremendous basso. Cookie was the noble youth's only musical rival, and when he had finished his work we would invite him to join us at the fire and regale us with plantation melodies and camp-meeting hymns. The negro's melodious thunder mingled with the murmur of wind and wave like a kindred note, and the strange plaintive rhythm of his artless songs took one back and back, far up the stream of life, until a fire upon a beach seemed one's ancestral hearth and home.

I realized that life on Leeward Island might rapidly become a process of reversion.

A BABBIT'S FOOT

It was fortunate that Cookie knew nothing of the solitary grave somewhere on the island, with its stone marked with B. H. and a cross-bones, nor that the inhabitant thereof was supposed to walk. If he had, I think the strange spectacle of a lone negro in a small boat rowing lustily for the American continent might soon have been witnessed on the Pacific by any eyes that were there to see. And we could ill have spared either boat or cook.

Yet even though unvexed by this gruesome knowledge, after two or three days I noticed that Cookie was ill at ease. As the leisure member of the party, I enjoyed more of Cookie's society than the rest. On this occasion while the morning was still in its early freshness he was permitting me to make fudge. But his usual joviality was gone. I saw that he glanced over his shoulder at intervals, muttering darkly to himself. Also that a rabbit's foot was slung conspicuously about his neck.

Having made my fudge and set the pan on a stone in the stream to cool, I was about to retire with a view to conducting a limited exploring expedition of my own. The immunity of the umbrellas and the assurances of Mr. Shaw--not personally directed to me, of course; the armed truce under which we lived did not permit of that--had convinced me that I had not to dread anything more ferocious than the pigs, and the wildest of them would retire before a stick or stone. Besides, I boasted a little automatic, which I carried strapped about my waist in a businesslike manner. Mr. Vane had almost got me to the point where I could shoot it off without shutting my eyes.

Thus equipped, I was about to set off into the woods. Secretly I had been rehearsing a dramatic scene, with myself in the leading role:

Treasure-seekers assembled, including a cold and cynical Scot. Enter Virginia Harding. She wears an expression elaborately casual, but there is a light of concealed triumph in her eye.

Aunt Jane: You thoughtless child, where have you been? Really, my state of mind about you--etc., etc.

V. H.: Only for a stroll, dear aunt. And by the way, in case it's of interest to any one, I might mention that during my walk I fell over a boulder which happened to be marked with the letters B. H. and a cross-bones.

Immense commotion and excitement. Every gaze turned to V. H. (including that of cynical Scot) while on every cheek is the blush of shame at remembering that this is the same Young Person whom Miss Higglesby-Browne was permitted to cut off by treaty from the ranks of the authorised treasure-seekers.

Lured by this pleasing vision I had turned my back on Cookie and the camp, when I was arrested by an exclamation:

"Miss Jinny!"

I turned to, find Cookie gazing after me with an expression which, in the familiar phrase of fiction, I could not interpret, though among its ingredients were doubt and anguish. Cookie, too, looked pale. I don't in the least know how he managed it, but that was the impression he conveyed, dusky as he was.

"Miss Jinny, it mos' look lak yo' 'bout to go perambulatin' in dese yere woods?"

"I am, Cookie," I admitted.

The whites of Cookie's eyes became alarmingly conspicuous. Drawing near in a stealthy manner he whispered:

"Yo' bettah not, Miss Jinny!"

"Better not?" I repeated, staring.

He answered with a portentous head-shake.

"Oh, nonsense, Cookie!" I said impatiently, "There's not a thing on the island but the pigs!"

"Miss Jinny," he solemnly replied, "dey's pigs and pigs."

"Yes, but pigs _is_ pigs, you know," I answered, laughing. I was about to walk on, but once more Cookie intervened.

"Dey's pigs and pigs, chile--live ones and--dead ones.

"Dead ones? Of course--haven't we been eating them?"

"Yo' won't neveh eat dis yere kind o' dead pig, Miss Jinny. It's--it's a ha'nt!"

The murder was out. Cookie leaned against a cocoa-palm and wiped his ebon brow.

Persistently questioned, he told at last how, today and yesterday, arising in the dim dawn to build his fire before the camp was stirring, he had seen lurking at the edge of the clearing a white four-footed shape. It was a pig, yet not a pig; its ghostly hue, its noiseless movements, divided it from all proper mundane porkers by the dreadful gulf which divides the living from the dead. The first morning Cookie, doubtful of his senses, had flung a stone and the spectral Thing had vanished like a shadow. On its second appearance, having had a day and a night for meditation, he had known better than to commit such an outrage upon the possessor of ghostly powers, and had resorted to prayer instead. This had answered quite as well, for the phantom pig had dissolved like the morning mists. While the sun blazed, what with his devotions and his rabbit's foot and a cross of twigs nailed to a tree. Cookie felt a fair degree of security. But his teeth chattered in his head at the thought of approaching night. Meanwhile he could not in conscience permit me to venture forth into the path of this horror, which might, for all we knew, be lurking in the jungle shadows even through the daylight hours. Also, though he did not avow this motive, I believe he found my company very reassuring.

It is immensely easier to face a ghost in the sustaining presence of other flesh and blood.

"Cookie," said I sternly, "you've been drinking too much cocoanut-milk and it has gone to your head. What you saw was just a plain ordinary pig."

Cookie disputed this, citing the pale hue of the apparition as against the fact that all our island pigs were black.

"Then there happens to be a blond pig among them that we haven't seen," I assured him.

But the pig of flesh, Cookie reminded me, was a heavy lumbering creature. This Shape was silent as a moonbeam. There was also about it a dreadful appearance of stealth and secrecy--Cookie's eyes bulged at the recollection. Nothing living but a witch's cat could have disappeared from Cookie's vision as did the ghostly pig.

For a moment I wavered in my determination. What if the island had its wild creatures after all? But neither lynx nor panther nor any other beast of prey is white, except a polar bear, and it would be unusual to meet one on a tropical island.

I decided that Cookie's pig was after all a pig, though still in the flesh. I thought I remembered having seen quite fair pigs, which would pass for white with a frightened negro in the dim light of dawn. So far only black pigs had been visible, but perhaps the light ones were shyer and kept to the remote parts of the island. I consoled Cookie as best I could by promising to cross my fingers if I heard or saw anything suspicious, and struck out into the woods,

For all my brave words to Cookie, I had no intention of going very far afield. From the shore of the cove I had observed that the ground behind the clearing rose to the summit of a low ridge, perhaps four hundred feet in height, which jutted from the base of the peak. From this ridge I thought I might see something more of the island than the limited environment of Lantern Bay.

As the woods shut out the last glimpse of the white tents in the clearing, as even the familiar sound of the surf died down to a faint, half-imagined whisper mingling with the rustling of the palms overhead, I experienced a certain discomfort, which persons given to harsh and unqualified terms might have called fear. It seemed to me as if a very strong cord at the rear of my belt were jerking me back toward the inglorious safety of camp. Fortunately there came to me a vision of the three umbrellas and of Mr. Tubbs heroically exposing his devoted bosom to non-existent perils, and I resolved that the superior smiles with which I had greeted Aunt Jane's recital should not rise up to shame me now. I fingered my automatic and marched on up the hill, trying not to gasp when a leaf rustled or a cocoanut dropped in the woods.

There was little undergrowth between the crowding trunks of the cocoa-palms. Far overhead their fronds mingled in a green thatch, through which a soft light filtered down. Here and there the close ranks of the palms were broken by an outcropping of rock, glaring up hot and sunbeaten at a distant patch of the sky. The air of the

forest was still and languid, its heat tempered like that of a room with drawn blinds.

I gained the summit of the ridge, and stood upon a bare rock platform, scantily sheltered by a few trees, large shrubs rather, with a smooth waxy leaf of vivid green. On the left rose the great mass of the peak. From far above among its crags a beautiful foamy waterfall came hurtling down. Before me the ground fell away to the level of the low plateau, or mesa, as we say in California, which made up the greater part of the island. Cutting into the green of this was the gleaming curve of a little bay, which in Mr. Shaw's chart of the island showed slightly larger than our cove. Part of it was hidden by the shoulder of the peak, but enough was visible to give a beautiful variety to the picture, which was set in a silver frame of sea.

I had not dreamed of getting a view so glorious from the little eminence of the ridge. Here was an item of news to take back to camp. Having with great originality christened the place Lookout, I turned to go. And as I turned I saw a shape vanish into the woods.

It was an animal, not a human shape. And it was light-footed and swift and noiseless--and it was white. It had, indeed, every distinguishing trait of Cookie's phantom pig. Only it was not a pig. My brief shadowy glimpse of it had told me that. I knew what it was not, but what it was I could not, as I stood there rooted, even guess,

Would it attack me, or should I only die of fright? I wondered if my heart were weak, and hoped it was, so that I should not live to feel the teeth of the unknown Thing sink in my flesh. I thought of my revolver and after an infinity of time managed to draw it from the case. My fingers seemed at once nervelessly limp and woodenly rigid. This was not at all the dauntless front with which I had dreamed of meeting danger. I had fancied myself with my automatic making a rather pretty picture as a young Amazon--but I had now a dreadful fear that my revolver might spasmodically go off and wound the Thing, and then even if it had meditated letting me go it would certainly attack me. Nevertheless I clung to my revolver as to my last hope.

I began to edge away crab-wise into the wood. Like a metronome I said to myself over and over monotonously, _don't run, don't run_! Dim legends about the power of the human eye floated through my brain. But how quell the creature with my eye when I could not see it? As for the hopeless expedient of screaming, I hadn't courage for it. I was silent, as I would fain have been invisible. Only my dry lips kept muttering soundlessly, _don't run, don't run_!

I did not run. Instead, I stepped on a smooth surface of rock and slid downhill like a human toboggan until I fetched up against a dead log. I discovered it to be a dead log after a confused interval during which I vaguely believed myself to have been swallowed by an alligator. While the alligator illusion endured I must have lain comatose and immovable. Indeed, when my senses began to come back I was still quite inert. I experienced that curious tranquillity which is said to visit those who are actually within the jaws of death. There I lay prone, absolutely at the

mercy of the mysterious white prowler of the forest--and I did not care. The whole petty business of living seemed a long way behind me now.

Languidly at last I opened my eyes. Within three yards of me, in the open rock-paved glade where I had fallen, stood the Thing.

As softly as I had opened my eyes I shut them. I had an annoyed conviction that they were deceiving me--a very unworthy thing for eyes to do that were soon to be closed in death. Again I lifted my lids. Yes, there it was--only now it had put an ear back and was sniffing at me with a mingling of interest and apprehension..

The strange beast of the jungle was a white bull-terrier.

Abruptly I sat up. The terrier gave a startled sidewise bound, but paused again and stood regarding me.

"Here, pup! Here, pup! Nice, nice doggums!" I said in soothing accents.

The dog gave a low whine and stood shivering, eager but afraid. I continued my blandishments. Little by little the forlorn creature drew nearer, until I put out a cautious hand and stroked his ears. He dodged affrightedly, but presently crept back again. Soon his head was against my knee, and he was devouring my hand with avid caresses. Some time, before his abandonment on the island, he had been a well-brought-up and petted animal. Months or years of wild life had estranged him from humanity, yet at the human touch the old devotion woke again.

The thing now was to lure him back to camp and restore him to the happy service of his gods. I rose and picked up my pistol, which had regained my confidence by not going off when I dropped it. With another alluring, "Here, doggums!" I started on my way. He shrank, trembled, hesitated, then was after me with a bound. So we went on through the forest. As we neared the camp the four-footed castaway's diffidence increased. I had to pet and coax. But at last I brought him triumphantly across the Rubicon of the little stream, and marched him into camp under the astounded eyes of Cookie.

At sight of the negro the dog growled softly and crouched against my skirt. Cookie stood like an effigy of amazement done in black and white.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Miss Jinny," he burst out at last, "am dat de ghos'-pig?"

"It was, Cookie, but I changed him into a live dog by crossing my fingers. Mind your rabbit's foot. He might eat it, and then very likely we'd have a ghost on our hands again. But I think he'll stay a dog for the present."

"Yo' go 'long, Miss Jinny," said Cookie valiantly. "Yo' think I scared of any ghos' what lower hissel to be a live white mong'ol dog? Yere, yo' ki-yi, yo' bettah mek friends with ol' Cookie, 'cause he got charge o' de grub. Yere's a li'le fat ma'ow bone what mebbe come off'n yo' own grandchile, but yo' ain' goin' to

mind dat now yo' is trans formulated dis yere way." And evidently the reincarnated ghost-pig did not.

With the midday reunion my hour of distinction arrived. The tale of the ghost-pig was told from the beginning by Cookie, with high tributes to my courage in sallying forth in pursuit of the phantom. Even those holding other views of the genesis of the white dog were amazed at his presence on the island. In spite of Cookie's aspersions, the creature was no mongrel, but a thoroughbred of points. Not by any means a dog which some little South American coaster might have abandoned here when it put in for water. The most reasonable hypothesis seemed to be that he had belonged to the copra gatherer, and was for some reason left behind on his master's departure. But who that had loved a dog enough to make it the companion of his solitude would go away and leave it? The thing seemed to me incredible. Yet here, otherwise unaccounted for, was the corporeal presence of the dog.

I had named the terrier in the first ten minutes of our acquaintance. Crusoe was the designation by which he was presented to his new associates. It was good to see how swiftly the habits of civilization returned to him. Soon he was getting under foot and courting caresses as eagerly as though all his life he had lived on human bounty, instead of bringing down his own game in royal freedom. Yet with all his well-bred geniality there was no wandering of his allegiance. I was his undisputed queen and lady paramount.

Crusoe, then, became a member of the party in good and regular standing--much more so than his mistress. Mr. Tubbs compared him not unfavorably with a remarkable animal of his own, for which the New York Kennel Club had bidden him name his own price, only to be refused with scorn. Violet tolerated him. Aunt Jane called him a dear weenty pettums love. Captain Magnus kicked him when he thought I was not looking, Cuthbert Vane chummed with him in frankest comradeship, and Mr. Shaw softened toward him to an extent which made me mainly murmur _Love me, love my dog_--only reversed. Not that I _in the least_ wanted to be loved, only you feel it an impertinence in a person who so palpably does not love you to endeavor to engage the affections of your bull-terrier.

As to Cookie, he magnanimously consented to overlook Crusoe's dubious past as a ghost-pig, and fed him so liberally that the terrier's lean and graceful form threatened to assume the contours of a beer-keg.

VIII

AN EXCURSION AND AN ALARM

As the only person who had yet discovered anything on the island, I was now invested with a certain importance. Also, I had a playfellow and companion for future walks, in lieu of Cuthbert Vane, held down tight to the thankless toil of treasure-hunting by his stem taskmaster. But at the same time I was provided with an annoying, because unanswerable, question which had lodged at the

back of my mind like a crumb in the throat:

By what strange chance had the copra gatherer gone away and left Crusoe on the island?

Since the discovery of Crusoe the former inhabitant of the cabin in the clearing had been much in my thoughts. I had been dissatisfied with him from the beginning, first, because he was not a pirate, and also because he had left behind no relic more fitting than a washtub. Not a locket, not a journal, not his own wasted form stretched upon a pallet--

I had expressed these sentiments to Cuthbert Vane, who replied that in view of the washtub it was certain that the hermit of the island had not been a pirate, as he understood they never washed. I said neither did any orthodox hermit, to which Mr. Vane rejoined that he probably was not orthodox but a Dissenter. He said Dissenters were so apt to be peculiar, don't you know?

One morning, instead of starting directly after breakfast for the cave, Mr. Shaw busied himself in front of the supply tent with certain explosives which were to be used in the digging operations later. The neighborhood of these explosives was a great trial to Aunt Jane, who was constantly expecting them to go off. I rather expected it too, and used to shudder at the thought that if we all went soaring heavenward together we might come down inextricably mixed. Then when the Rufus Smith returned and they tried to sort us out before interment, I might have portions of Violet, for instance, attributed to me. In that case I felt that, like Bill Halliwell, I should walk.

Having inquired of the Honorable Cuthbert and found that for an hour or two the boat would not be in requisition, I permitted the beautiful youth to understand that I would not decline an invitation to be rowed about the cove. Mr. Shaw had left his marine glasses lying about, and I had been doing some exploring with them. Under the great cliffs on the north shore of the bay I had seen an object that excited my curiosity. It seemed to be the hull of a small vessel, lying on the narrow strip of rocks and sand under the cliff. Now wreckage anywhere fills me with sad and romantic thoughts, but on the shore of a desolate island even a barrel-hoop seems to suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange. I therefore commanded the b. y. to row me over to the spot where the derelict lay.

I lay back idly in the stern as the boat skimmed over the smooth water beneath the strokes of my splendid oarsman. More than ever he looked like the island god. Every day he grew more brown and brawny, more superb in his physical vigor. But his hands, once so beautiful, were getting rough and hard with toil. There was a great raw bruise on his arm. I exclaimed pityingly.

"Oh, it's nothing. We get knocked about a bit by the sea in the cave now and then."

"You mean you are risking your lives every day for the sake of this legendary treasure that you have no _reasonable_ reason to suppose is there."

"Perhaps not," he admitted, "but then it's such good fun looking, you know."

"That's according to one's idea of fun," I said ironically.

"Oh, well, a chap can't spend his days on flowery beds of ease, of course. Really, I find this story-book kind of thing we're doing is warm stuff, as you Americans say. And then there's Shaw--think of the difference it will make to the dear old chap if we find the gold--buy a ship of his own and snap his fingers at the P. & O."

"And you'll go along as cabin-boy or something?" "Fraid not," he said quite simply. "A chap has his bit to do at home, you know."

The cliffs on the north shore of the cove were considerably higher than on the other side. The wreck lay close in, driven high upon the narrow shelf of rocks and sand at the base of the sheer ascent. Sand had heaped up around her hull and flung itself across her deck like a white winding-sheet. Surprisingly, the vessel was a very small one, a little sloop, indeed, much like the fragile pleasure-boats that cluster under the Sausalito shore at home. The single mast had been broken off short, and the stump of the bowsprit was visible, like a finger beckoning for rescue from the crawling sand. She was embedded most deeply at the stem, and forward of the sand-heaped cockpit the roof of the small cabin was still clear.

"Poor forlorn little boat!" I said. "What in the world do you suppose brought such a mite of a thing to this unheard-of spot?"

"Perhaps she belonged to the copra chap. One man could handle her."

"What would he want with her? A small boat like this is better for fishing and rowing about the cove."

"Perhaps she brought him here from Panama, though he couldn't have counted on taking back a very bulky cargo."

"Then why leave her strewn about on the rocks? And besides"--here the puzzle of Crusoe recurred to me and seemed to link itself with this--"then how did he get away himself?"

But my oarsman was much more at home on the solid ground of fact than on the uncharted waters of the hypothetical.

"Don't know, I'm sure," he returned uninterestedly. Evidently the hermit had got away, so why concern one's self about the method? I am sure the Light Brigade must have been made up of Cuthbert Vanes. "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die--"

We rowed in close under the port bow of the sloop, and on the rail I made out a string of faded letters. I began excitedly to spell them out.

"I--s--I--oh, Island Queen! You see she did belong here. Probably she brought the original porcine Adam and Eve to the island."

"Luckily forgot the snake, though!" remarked the Honorable Bertie with unlooked-for vivacity. For so far Aunt Jane's trembling anticipations had been unfulfilled by the sight of a single snake, a fact laid by me to the credit of St. Patrick and by Cookie to that of the pigs.

"Snakes 'd jes' be oysters on de half shell to dem pigs," declared Cookie.

As we rowed away from the melancholy little derelict I saw that near by a narrow gully gave access to the top of the cliff, and I resolved that I would avail myself of this path to visit the Island Queen again. My mind continued to dwell upon the unknown figure of the copra gatherer. Perhaps the loss of his sloop had condemned him to weary months or years of solitude upon the island, before the rare glimmer of a sail or the trail of a steamer's smoke upon the horizon gladdened his longing eyes. Hadn't he grown very tired of pork, and didn't his soul to this day revolt at a ham sandwich? What would he say if he ever discovered that he might have brought away a harvest of gold instead of copra from the island? Last but not least, did not his heart and conscience, if he by chance possessed them, ache horribly at the thought of the forsaken Crusoe?

Suddenly I turned to Cuthbert Vane.

"How do you know, really, that he ever did leave the island?" I demanded.

"Who--the copra chap? Well, why else was the cabin cleared out so carefully--no clothes left about or anything?"

"That's true," I acknowledged. The last occupant of the hut had evidently made a very deliberate and orderly business of packing up to go.

We drifted about the cove for a while, then steered into the dim murmuring shadow of the treasure-cavern. It was filled with dark-green, lispings water, and a continual resonant whispering in which you seemed to catch half-framed words, and the low ripple of laughter. Mr. Vane indicated the point at which they had arrived in their exploration among the fissures opening from the ledge.

The place held me with its fascination, but we dared not linger long, for as the tide turned one man would have much ado to manage the boat. So we slid through the archway into the bright sunshine of the cove, and headed for the camp.

As we neared the beach we saw a figure pacing it. I knew that free stride. It was Dugald Shaw. And quite unexpectedly my heart began to beat with staccato quickness. Dugald Shaw, who didn't like me and never looked at me--except just sometimes, when he was perfectly sure I didn't know it. Dugald Shaw, the silent, unboastful man who had striven and starved and frozen on the dreadful southern ice-fields, who had shared the Viking deeds of the heroes--whom just to think of warmed my heart with a safe, cuddled, little-girl feeling that I had never known since I was a child on my father's knee. There he was, waiting for us, and splashing into the foam to help Cuthbert beach the boat--he for

whom a thousand years ago the skalds would have made a saga--

The boy hailed him cheerfully as we sprang out upon the sand. But the Scotchman was unsmiling.

"Make haste after your tools, lad," he ordered. "We'll have fine work now to get inside the cave before the turn."

Those were his words; his tone and his grim look meant, "So in spite of all my care you are being beguiled by a minx--"

It was his tone that I answered.

"Oh, don't scold Mr. Vane!" I implored. "Every paradise has its serpent, and as there are no others here I suppose I am it. Of course all lady serpents who know their business have red hair. Don't blame Mr. Vane for what was naturally all my fault."

Not a line of his face changed. Indeed, before my most vicious stabs it never did change. Though of course it would have been much more civil of him, and far less maddening, to show himself a little bit annoyed.

"To be sure it seems unreasonable to blame the lad," he agreed soberly, "but then he happens to be under my authority."

"Meaning, I suppose, that you would much prefer to blame me," I choked.

"There's logic, no doubt, in striking at the root of the trouble," he admitted, with an air of calm detachment.

"Then strike," I said furiously, "strike, why don't you, and not beat about the bush so!" Because then he would be quite hopelessly in the wrong, and I could adopt any of several roles--the coldly haughty, the wounded but forgiving, etc., with great enjoyment.

But without a change in his glacial manner he quite casually remarked:

"It would seem I had struck--home."

I walked away wishing the dynamite would go off, even if I had to be mixed with Violet till the last trump.

Fortunately nobody undertook to exercise any guardianship over Crusoe, and the little white dog bore me faithful company in my rambles. Mostly these were confined to the neighborhood of the cove. I never ventured beyond Lookout ridge, but there I went often with Crusoe, and we would sit upon a rock and talk to each other about our first encounter there, and the fright he had given me. Everybody else had gone, gazed and admired. But the only constant pilgrim, besides myself, was, of all people, Captain Magnus. Soon between us we had worn a path through the woods to the top of the ridge. The captain's unexpected ardor for scenery carried him thither whenever he had half an hour to spare from the work in the cave. Needless to say, Crusoe and I timed our visits so as not to conflict with his. A less discreet beast than Crusoe would long ere this have sampled the captain's calves, for the

sailor missed no sly chance to exasperate the animal. But the wise dog contented himself with such manifestations as a lifted lip and twitching ears, for he had his own code of behavior, and was not to be goaded into departing from it.

One day, as Crusoe and I came down from the ridge, we met Captain Magnus ascending. I had in my hand a small metal-backed mirror, which I had found, surprisingly, lying in a mossy cleft between the rocks. It was a thing such as a man might carry in his pocket, though on the island it seemed unlikely that any one would do' so. I at once attributed the mirror to Captain Magnus, for I knew that no one else had been to the ridge for days. I was wondering as I walked along whether by some sublime law of compensation the captain really thought himself beautiful, and sought this retired spot to admire not the view but his own physiognomy.

When the captain saw me he stopped full in the path. There was a growth of fern on either side. I approached slowly, and, as he did not move, paused, and held out the mirror.

"I think you must have dropped this, Captain Magnus. I found it on the rocks."

For an instant his face changed. His evasive eyes were turned to me searchingly and sharply. He took the glass from my hand and slipped it into his pocket. I made a movement to pass on, then stopped, with a faint dawning of discomfort. For the heavy figure of the captain still blocked the path..

A dark flush had come into the man's face. His yellow teeth showed between his parted lips. His eyes had a swimming brightness.

"What's your hurry?" he remarked, with a certain insinuating emphasis.

I began to tremble.

"I am on my way back to camp, Captain Magnus. Please let me pass."

"It won't do no harm if you're a little late. There ain't no one there keepin' tab. Ain't you always a-strayin' off with the Honorable? I ain't so pretty, but--"

"You are impertinent. Let me pass."

"Oh, I'm impert'nent, am I? That means fresh, maybe. I'm a plain man and don't use frills on my langwidge. Well, when I meets a little skirt that takes my eyes there ain't no harm in lettin' her know it, is there? Maybe the Honorable could say it nicer--"

With a forward stride he laid a hand upon my arm. I shook him off and stepped back. Fear clutched my throat. I had left my revolver in my quarters. Oh, the dreadful denseness of these woods, the certainty that no wildest cry of mine could pierce them!

And then Crusoe, who had been waiting quietly behind me in the path, slipped in between us. Every hair on his neck was bristling. The lifted upper lip snarled unmistakably. He gave me a swift glance which said, _Shall I spring_?

Quite suddenly the gorilla blandishments of Captain Magnus came to an end.

"Say," he said harshly, "hold back that dog, will you? I don't want to kill the cur."

"You had better not," I returned coldly. "I should have to explain how it happened, you know. As it is I shall say nothing. But I shall not forget my revolver again when I go to walk."

And Crusoe and I went swiftly down the path which the captain no longer disputed.

IX

"LASSIE, LASSIE. . ."

Two or three days later occurred a painful episode. The small unsuspected germ of it had lain ambushed in a discourse of Mr. Shaw's, delivered shortly after our arrival on the island, on the multifarious uses of the cocoa-palm. He told how the juice from the unexpanded flower-spathes is drawn off to form a potent toddy, so that where every prospect pleases man may still be vile. Cookie, experimentally disposed, set to work. Mr. Vane, also experimentally, sampled the results of Cookie's efforts. The liquor had merely been allowed to ferment, whereas a complicated process is necessary for the manufacture of the true arrack, but enough had been achieved to bring about dire consequences for Cuthbert Vane, who had found the liquid cool and refreshing, and was skeptical about its potency.

Aunt Jane took the matter very hard, and rebuked the ribald mirth of Mr. Tubbs. He had to shed tears over a devastating poem called "The Drunkard's Home," before she would forgive him. Cookie made his peace by engaging to vote the prohibition ticket at the next election. My own excuses for the unfortunate were taken in very ill part. My aunt said she had always understood that life in the tropics was very relaxing to the moral fiber, and mine was certainly affected--and besides she wasn't certain that barons wore coronets anyhow.

Mr. Shaw was disturbed over Cuthbert, who was not at all bad, only queer and sleepy, and had to be led away to slumber in retirement. Also, it was an exceptionally low tide and Mr. Shaw had counted on taking advantage of it to work in the cave. Now Cuthbert was laid up--

"You and I will have to manage by ourselves, Magnus."

"Nothing doing--boat got to be patched up--go out there without it and get caught!" growled the captain.

"Well, lend a hand, then. We can be ready with the boat inside an hour."

The captain hesitated queerly. His wandering eyes seemed to be searching in every quarter for something they did not find. At last he mumbled that he thought he felt a touch of the sun, and had decided to lay off for the afternoon and make his way across the island. He said he wanted to shoot water-fowl and that they had all been frightened away from the cove, but that with the glass he had seen them from Lookout thickly about the other bay.

"Very well," said the Scotchman coldly. "I suppose you must suit yourself. I can get the boat in shape without help, I dare say." I saw him presently looking in an annoyed and puzzled fashion after the vanishing figure of the sailor.

Mr. Tubbs and the umbrellas soon disappeared into the woods. I believe the search for Bill Halliwell's tombstone was no longer very actively pursued, and that the trio spent their time ensconced in a snug little nook with hammocks and cushions, where Mr. Tubbs beguiled the time with reading aloud--Aunt Jane and Violet both being provided with literature--and relating anecdotes of his rise to greatness in the financial centers of the country. I more than suspected Mr. Tubbs of feeling that such a bird in the hand as Aunt Jane was worth many doubloons in the bush. But in spite of uneasiness about the future, for the present I rested secure in the certainty that they could not elope from the island, and that there was no one on it with authority to metamorphose Aunt Jane into Mrs. Hamilton H. Tubbs.

The waters of the cove had receded until a fringe of rocks under the high land of the point, usually covered, had been left bare. I had watched the emergence of their black jagged surfaces for some time before it occurred to me that they offered a means of access to the cave. The cave--place of fascination and mystery! Here was the opportunity of all others to explore it, unhampered by any one, just Crusoe and I alone, in the fashion that left me freest to indulge my dreams.

I waited until the Scotchman's back was safely turned, because if he saw me setting forth on this excursion he was quite certain to command me to return, and I had no intention of submitting to his dictatorial ways and yet was not sure how I was successfully to defy him. I believed him capable of haling me back by force, while tears or even swoons left him unmoved. Of course he would take the absurd ground that the cave was dangerous, in the face of the glaring fact that a girl who had come to this island solely to protect Aunt Jane ought certainly to be able to protect herself. Besides, what right had he to care if I was drowned, anyhow?

But of course I was not going to be.

The retreating tide had left deep pools behind, each a little cosmos of fairy seaweeds and tiny scuttling crabs and rich and wonderful forms of life which were strange to me. Crusoe and I were very much interested, and lingered a good deal on the way. But at last we reached the great archway, and passed with a suddenness which was like a plunge into cool water from the hot glare of the tropic sunshine into the green shadow of the cavern.

At the lower end, between the two arches, a black, water-worn rock paving rang under one's feet. Further in under the point the floor

of the cave was covered with white sand. All the great shadowy place was murmuring like a vast sea-shell. Beyond the southern archway spread the limitless heaving plain of the Pacific. Near at hand bare black rocks rose from the surges, like skeletons of the land that the sea had devoured. And after a while these walls that supported the cavern roof would be nibbled away, and the roof would fall, and the waves roar victorious over the ruins.

I wished I could visit the place in darkness. It would be thrice as mysterious, filled with its hollow whispering echoes, as in the day. I dreamed of it as it might have been when a boat from the Bonny Lass crept in, and the faint winking eye of a lantern struck a gleam from the dark waters and showed nothing all around but blackness, and more blackness.

From the ledge far above my head led off those narrow, teasing crevices in which the three explorers did their unrewarded burrowing. I could see the strands of a rope ladder lying coiled at the edge of the shelf, where it was secured by spikes. The men dragged down the ladder with a boat-hook when they wanted to ascend. I looked about with a hope that perhaps they had left the boat-hook somewhere.

I found no boat-hook but instead a spade, which had been driven deep into the sand and left, too firmly imbedded for the tide to bear away. At once a burning hope that I, alone and unassisted, might bring to light the treasure of the Bonny Lass seethed in my veins. I jerked the spade loose and fell to.

I now discovered the great truth that digging for treasure is the most thrilling and absorbing occupation known to man. Time ceased to be, and the weight of the damp and close-packed sand seemed, that of feathers. This temporary state of exaltation passed, to be sure, and the sand got very heavy, and my back ached, but still I dug. Crusoe watched proceedings interestedly at first, then wandered off on business of his own. Presently he returned and began to fuss about and bark. He was a restless little beast, wanting to be always on the move. He came and tugged at my skirt, uttering an uneasy whine.

"Be quiet, Crusoe!" I commanded, threatening him with my spade. The madness of the treasure-lust possessed me. I was panting now, and my hands began to feel like baseball mitts, but still I dug. Crusoe had ceased to importune me; vaguely I was aware that he had got tired and run off. I toiled on, pausing now and then for breath. I was leaning on my spade, rather dejectedly considering the modest excavation I had achieved, when I felt a little cool splash at my feet. Dropping my spade I whirled around--and a shriek echoed through the cave as I saw pouring into it the dark insidious torrent of the returning tide.

How had I forgotten it, that deadly thing, muttering to itself out there, ready to spring back like an unleashed beast? Crusoe had warned me--and then he had forsaken me, and I was alone.

And yet at first, wild as my terror was, I had no thought but that somehow I could escape. That these waters were for me the very face of death, sure and relentless, terrible and slow, did not at once seize hold upon my heart.

Frantically I sprang for the entrance on the cove. The floor of the cave was sloping, and the water deepened swiftly as I advanced. Soon I was floundering to my knees, and on the instant a great wave rushed in, drenching me to the waist, dazing me with its spray and uproar, and driving me back to the far end of the cave.

With a dreadful hollow sucking sound the surge retreated. I staggered again toward the archway that was my only door to life. The water was deeper now, and swiftly came another fierce inrush of the sea that drove me back. Between the two archways a terrible current was setting. It poured along with the rush of a mountain river, wild, dark, tumultuous.

I had fled to the far end of the cave, but the sea pursued me. Swiftly the water climbed--it flung me against the wall, then dragged me back. I clutched at the naked rock with bleeding fingers.

Again, after a paroxysm during which I had seemed to stand a great way off and listen to my own shrieks, there came to me a moment of calm. I knew that my one tenuous thread of hope lay in launching myself into that wild flood that was tearing through into the cove. I was not a strong swimmer, but a buoyant one. I might find refuge on some half-submerged rock on the shores of the cove--at least I should perish in the open, in the sunlight, not trapped like a desperate rat. And I began to fight my way toward the opening.

And then a dreadful vision flashed across my mind, weighed down my feet like lead, choked back even the cry from my frozen lips. Sharks! The black cutting fin, the livid belly, the dreadful jaws opening--no, no, better to die here, better the clean embrace of the waters--_if indeed the sharks did not come into the cave_.

And then I think I went quite mad. I remember trying to climb up to the ledge which hung beetling fifteen feet above. Afterward my poor hands showed how desperately. And I remember that once I slipped and went clear under, and how I choked and strangled in the salt water. For my mouth was always open, screaming, screaming continually.

And when I saw the boat fighting its way inch by inch into the cave I was sure that it was a vision, and that only my own wild beseeching of him to save me had made the face of Dugald Shaw arise before my dying eyes. Dugald Shaw was still mending the boat on the shore of the cove, and this was a mocking phantom.

Only the warm human clasp of the arms that drew me into the boat made me believe in him.

The boat bobbed quietly in the eddy at the far end of the cave, while a wet, sobbing, choking heap clung to Dugald Shaw. I clasped him about the neck and would not let him go, for fear that I should find myself alone again, perishing in the dark water. My head was on his breast, and he was pressing back my wet hair with strong and tender hands.

What was this he was saying? "My lassie, my little, little lassie!"

And no less incredible than this it was to feel his cheek pressed, very gently, against my hair--

After a little my self-control came back to me. I stopped my senseless childish crying, lifted my head and tried to speak. I could only whisper, "You came, you came!"

"Of course I came!" he said huskily. "There, don't tremble so--you are safe--safe in my arms!"

After a while he lifted me into the stern and began to maneuver the boat out of the cave. I suppose at another time I should have realized the peril of it. The fierce flow through the archway all but swamped us, the current threatened to hurl us against the rocks, but I felt no fear. He had come to save me, and he would. All at once the dreadful shadow of the cavern was left behind, and the sunshine immersed my chilled body like a draught of wine. I lay huddled in the stern, my cheek upon my hand, as he rowed swiftly across the cove and drove the boat upon the beach.

Everybody but Captain Magnus was assembled there, including Crusoe. Crusoe it was who had given warning of my danger. Like a wise little dog, when I ignored his admonitions he had run home. At first his uneasiness and troubled barking had got no notice. Once or twice the Scotchman, worried by his fretfulness, had ordered him away. Then across his preoccupied mind there flashed a doubt. He laid down his tools and spoke to the animal. Instantly Crusoe dashed for the rocks, barking and crying with eagerness. But the path was closed, the tide was hurrying in, and Crusoe whined pitifully as he crept back and crouched against the man who of course knew better than a little dog what must be done.

Then Mr. Shaw understood. He snatched the painter of the boat and dragged it down the beach. He was shoving off as Cookie, roused by Crusoe's barking, appeared from the seclusion of his afternoon siesta. To him were borne the Scotchman's parting words:

"Virginia Harding--in the cave--hot blankets--may be drowning--"

"And at dat," said Cookie, relating his part in the near-tragedy with unctiousness, "I jes' natchully plumped right down on mah ma'ah bones and wrestled with de Lawd in prayah."

This unique proceeding on Cookie's part necessarily awoke the interest both of the recovered Cuthbert Vane, just emerging after his prolonged slumbers, and of the trio who had that moment returned from the woods. Importuned for an explanation, Cookie arose from his devotional posture and put the portentous query:

"Mistah Vane, sah, be dey any propah coffin-wood on dis yere island?"

Instantly connecting my absence with this terrible question, Aunt Jane shrieked and fell into the arms of Mr. Tubbs. I got the story from Cuthbert Vane, and I must say I was unpleasantly struck by the facility with which my aunt seemed to have fallen into Mr. Tubbs's embrace--as if with the ease of habit. Mr. Tubbs, it appeared, had staggered a little under his fair burden, which was not to be wondered at, for Aunt Jane is of an overflowing style of figure and

Mr. Tubbs more remarkable for brain than brawn. Violet, however, had remained admirably calm, and exhorted Aunt Jane to remember that whatever happened it was all for the best.

"Poor Violet," I commented. "To think that after all it didn't happen!"

A slow flush rose to the cheeks of the beautiful youth. He was sitting beside the hammock, where I was supposed to be recuperating. Of course it was to please Aunt Jane that I had to be an invalid, and she had insisted on mounting guard and reading aloud from one of Miss Browne's books about Psycho-evolution or something until Cuthbert Vane came along and relieved her--and me.

"It would have happened, though," said the Honorable Cuthbert solemnly, "if it hadn't been for old Shaw. I can't get over it, Vir--Miss Virginia, that I wasn't on deck myself, you know. Here's old Dugald been doing the heroic all his life, and now he gets his chance again while I'm sleeping off those bally cocoanuts. It's hard on a chap. I--I wish it had been me."

However dubious his grammar, there was no mistaking the look that brightened like the dawn in the depths of his clear eyes. My breath went from me suddenly.

"Oh," I cried excitedly, "isn't that---yes, I _thought_ it was the dinner gong!"

For as if in response to my dire need, the clang of Cookie's gong echoed through the island silences.

X

WHAT CRUSOE AND I FOUND

When after those poignant moments in the boat I met Dugald Shaw in commonplace fashion at the table, a sudden, queer, altogether unprecedented shyness seized me. I sat looking down at my plate with the gaucherie of a silly child.

The episode of the afternoon provided Mr. Tubbs with ammunition for a perfect fusillade of wit. He warned Mr. Shaw that hereafter he might expect Neptune to have a grudge against him for having robbed the sea-god of his beauteous prey. I said I thought most likely it was not Neptune that was robbed but sharks, but sharks not being classic, Mr. Tubbs would have none of them. He said he believed that if Mr. Shaw had not inopportunistically arrived, Neptune with his tripod would soon have up-reared upon the wave.

"Oh--_tripod_, Mr. Tubbs?" I said inquiringly.

"Yes, sure," he returned undaunted. "Them camera supports is named for it, you know. But of course this gay gink of a Sandy had to come buttin' in. Too bad the Honorable Bertie had partook so free. He'd have looked the part all right when it come to rescuin' beauty

in distress. But Fortune bein' a lady and naturally capricious, she hands the stunt over to old Sobersides here."

Just then old Sobersides cut across the flow of Mr. Tubbs's sprightly conversation and with a certain harshness of tone asked Captain Magnus if he had had good sport on the other side of the island. Captain Magnus, as usual, had seemed to feel that time consecrated to eating was wasted in conversation. At this point-blank question he started confusedly, stuttered, and finally explained that though he had taken a rifle he had carried along pistol cartridges, so had come home with an empty bag.

At this moment I happened to be looking at Cookie, who was setting down a dish before Mr. Tubbs. The negro started visibly, and rolled his eyes at Captain Magnus with astonishment depicted in every dusky feature. He said nothing, although went to take part in our conversation as it suited him, but I saw him shake his great grizzled head in a disturbed and puzzled fashion as he turned away.

After this a chill settled on the table. You felt a disturbance in the air, as though wireless currents were crossing and recrossing in general confusion. Mr. Tubbs began again on the topic of my rescue, and said it was too bad Mr. Shaw's name wasn't Paul, because then we'd be Paul and Virginia, he, he! My aunt said encouragingly, how true! because they had lived on an island, hadn't they? She had read the book many years ago, and had mostly forgotten it, not having Mr. Tubbs's marvelous memory, but she believed there was something quite sad about the end, though very sweet. She agreed with Mr. Tubbs that Mr. Vane would have looked most picturesque going to the rescue on account of his sash, and it was too bad he had not been able, but never mind, it was most kind of Mr. Shaw, and she was sure her niece appreciated it though she was afraid she hadn't thanked Mr. Shaw properly.

By this time it was perfectly clear that Mr. Shaw had been most inconsiderate in dashing out after me in that thoughtless manner. He should have waked Cuthbert Vane and helped him to array himself becomingly in the sash and then sent for a moving-picture man to go out in another boat and immortalize the touching scene. All this came seething to my lips, but I managed to suppress it. It was only on Cuthbert Vane's account. As for my aunt and Mr. Tubbs, I could have bumped their heads together as remorselessly as two cocoanuts. I understood Aunt Jane, of course. In spite of the Honorable Cuthbert's recent lapse, her imagination still played about certain little cards which should announce to an envious world my engagement to the Honorable Cuthbert Patrick Ruthmore Vane, of High Staunton Manor, Kent. So such a faux pas as my rescue from drowning by a penniless Scotch seaman couldn't but figure in her mind as a grievance.

I stole a glance at the recipient of these sorry thanks. His face was set and--once I should have called it grim, but I knew better now. There was nothing I could say or do. Any words of mine would have sounded forced and puerile. What he had done was so far beyond thanks that spoken gratitude belittled it. And yet, suppose he thought that like the rest I had wished another in his place? Did he think that--could he, with the memory of my arms about his neck?

I only knew that because of the foolish hateful words that had been said, the gulf between us was wider than before.

I sat dumb, consumed with misery and hoping that perhaps I might meet his glance and so tell him silently all that words would only mar. But he never looked at me. And then the first bitterness, which had made even Cuthbert seem disloyal in wishing himself in his friend's place, passed, and gave way to dreary doubt. Cuthbert knew, of course, that he himself would have prized--what to Dugald Shaw was a matter of indifference. Yes, that was it, and the worst that Dugald Shaw was suffering now was boredom at hearing the affair so everlastingly discussed.

So I began talking very fast to Mr. Vane and we were very gay and he tied his own necktie on Crusoe on consideration that he be held hereafter jointly. And--because I saw that Dugald Shaw was looking now--I smiled lingeringly into the eyes of the beautiful youth and said all right, perhaps we needn't quarrel over our mutual dog, and then skipped off lightsomely, feeling exactly like a scorpion that has been wounding itself with its own sting.

As I passed Cookie at his dishpan a sudden thought struck me.

"Cookie," I remarked, "you had a frightfully queer look just now when Captain Magnus told about having taken the wrong cartridges. What was the matter?"

Cookie took his hands out of the water and wiped off the suds, casting about stealthy and mysterious glances. Then he rolled a dubious eye at me.

"What was it, Cookie?" I urged.

"War am Cap'n now?"

"Down on the beach; he can't possibly hear you."

"You won't say nothin' to git Cookie in a rumpus?"

"Cross my heart to die, Cookie."

"Well, den"--Cookie spoke in a hoarse whisper--"Cap'n say he forgit to take his gun ca'tridges. Miss Jinny, when he come back, I see him empty his gun ca'tridges out'n his belt and put back his pistol cartridges. So dere now!"

I turned from Cookie, too surprised to speak. Why had Captain Magnus been at pains to invent a lie about so trivial a matter? I recalled, too, that Mr. Shaw's question had confused him, that he had hesitated and stammered before answering it. Why? Was he a bad shot and ashamed of it? Had he preferred to say that he had taken the wrong ammunition rather than admit that he could get no bag? That must be the explanation, because there was no other. Certainly no imaginable errand but the one assigned could have taken the captain to the other side of the island.

Several days went by, and still the treasure was unfound. Of course, as the unexplored space in the cave contracted, so daily the probability grew stronger that Fortune would shed her golden

smile upon us before night. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that the optimistic spirits of most were beginning to flag a little. Only Mr. Shaw, though banned as a confirmed doubter and pessimist, now by the exercise of will kept the others to their task. It took all Cuthbert Vane's loyalty, plus an indisposition to be called a slacker, to strive against the temptation to renounce treasure-hunting in favor of roaming with Crusoe and me. As for Captain Magnus, his restlessness was manifest. Several times he had suggested blowing the lid off the island with dynamite, as the shortest method of getting at the gold. He was always vanishing on solitary excursions inland.

Mr. Tubbs remarked, scornfully, that a man with a nose for money ought to have smelted out the chest before this, but if his own nasal powers were of that character he did not offer to employ them in the service of the expedition. Miss Higglesby-Browne, however, had taken to retiring to the hut for long private sessions with herself. My aunt reverentially explained their purpose. The hiding-place of the chest being of course known to the Universal Wisdom, all Violet had to do was to put herself in harmony and the knowledge would be hers. The difficulty was that you had first to overcome your Mundane Consciousness. To accomplish this Violet was struggling in the solitude of the hut.

Meanwhile Mr. Tubbs sat at the feet of Aunt Jane, reading aloud from a volume entitled *‘Paeans of Passion’*, by a celebrated lady lyric poet of our own land.

After my meeting with Captain Magnus in the forest, Lookout Ridge was barred to me. Crusoe and I must do our rambling in other directions. This being so, I bethought me again of the wrecked sloop lying under the cliffs on the north shore of the cove. I remembered that there had seemed to be a way down the cliffs. I resolved to visit the sloop again. The terrible practicality of the beautiful youth made it difficult to indulge in romantic musings in his presence. And to me a derelict brings a keener tang of romance than any other relic of man's multitudinous and futile strivings.

The descent of the gully proved an easy matter, and soon I was on the sand beside the derelict. Sand had heaped up around her hull, and filled her cockpit level with the rail, and drifted down the companion, stuffing the little cabin nearly to the roof. Only the bow rose free from the white smother of sand. Whatever wounds there were in her buried sides were hidden. You felt that some wild caprice of the storm had lifted her and set her down here, not too roughly, then whirled away and left her to the sand.

Crusoe slipped into the narrow space under the roof of the cabin, and I leaned idly down to watch him through a warped seam between the planks. Then I found that I was looking, not at Crusoe, but into a little dim enclosure like a locker, in which some small object faintly caught the light. With a revived hope of finding relics I got out my knife--a present from Cuthbert Vane--and set briskly to work widening the seam.

I penetrated finally into a small locker or cubby-hole, set in the angle under the roof of the cabin, and, as subsequent investigation showed, so placed as to attract no notice from the casual eye. I

ascertained this by lying down and wriggling my head and shoulders into the cabin. In other words, I had happened on a little private depository, in which the owner of the sloop might stow away certain small matters that concerned him intimately. Yet the contents of the locker at first seemed trifling. They were an old-fashioned chased silver shoe-buckle, and a brown-covered manuscript book.

The book had suffered much from dampness, whether of rains or the wash of the sea. The imitation leather cover was flaking off, and the leaves were stuck together. I seated myself on the cabin roof, extracted a hairpin, and began carefully separating the close-written pages. The first three or four were quite illegible, the ink having run. Then the writing became clearer. I made out a word here and there:

. . . . directions vague my grandfather
man a ruffian but no motive police of
Havana frightful den grandfather made
sure registry _Bonny Lass_

And at that I gave a small excited shriek which brought Crusoe to me in a hurry. What had he to do, the writer of this journal, what had he to do with the _Bonny Lass_?

Breathlessly I read on:

. . . . thought captain still living but not
sure lost Benito Bon

I closed the book. Now, while the coast was clear, I must get back to camp. It would take hours, perhaps days, to decipher the journal which had suddenly become of such supreme importance. I must smuggle it unobserved into my own quarters, where I could read at my leisure. As I set out I dropped the silver shoe-buckle into my pocket, smiling to think that it was I who had discovered the first bit of precious metal on the island. Yet the book in my hand, I felt instinctively, was of more value than many shoe-buckles.

Safely in my hammock, with a pillow under which I could slip the book in case of interruption, I resumed the reading. From this point on, although the writing was somewhat faded, it was all, with a little effort, legible.

THE DIARY

If Sampson did live to tell his secret, then any day there may be a sail in the offing. And still I can not find it! Oh, if my grandfather had been more worldly wise! If he hadn't been too intent on the eternal welfare of the man he rescued from the Havana tavern brawl to question him about his story. A cave on Leeward Island--near by a stone marked with the letters B. H. and a cross-bones--_I told the captain_, said the poor dying wretch, _we wouldn't have no luck after playing it that low down on Bill_! So I presume Bill lies under the stone.

Well, all I have is in this venture. The old farm paid for the _Island Queen_--or will, if I don't get back in time to prevent

foreclosure. All my staid New England relatives think me mad. A copra gatherer! A fine career for a minister's son! Think how your father scrimped to send you to college--Aunt Sarah reproached me. Well, when I get home with my Spanish doubloons there will be another story to tell. I won't be poor crazy Peter then. And Helen--oh, how often I wish I had told her everything! It was too much to ask her to trust me blindly as I did. But from the moment I came across the story in grandfather's old, half-forgotten diary--by the way, the diary habit seems to run in the family--a very passion of secrecy has possessed me. If I had told Helen, I should have had to dread that even in her sweet sleep she might whisper something to put that ferret, her stepmother, on the scent. Oh, Helen, trust me, trust me!

December 25. I have a calendar with me, so I am not reduced to notching a stick to keep track of the days. I mark each off carefully in the calendar. If I were to forget to do this, even for a day or two, I believe I should quite lose track. The days are so terribly alike!

My predecessor here in the copra-gathering business, old Heintz, really left me a very snug establishment. It was odd that I should have run across him at Panama that way. I sounded him on the question of treasure. He said placidly that of course the island had been the resort of Edward Davis and Benito Bonito and others of the black flag gentry, and he thought it very likely they had left some of their spoils behind them, but though he had done a little investigating as he had time he had come on nothing but a ship's lantern, a large iron kettle, and the golden setting of a bracelet from which the jewels had been removed. He had already disposed of the bracelet. The kettle I found here, and sank in the spring to keep the water clear. (Where it still is. V. H.) Evidently old Heintz knew nothing of the Bonny Lass. This was an immense satisfaction, as it proves that the story can not have been noised about.

Christmas Day! I wonder what they are all doing at home? December 28. Of course the cave under the point is the logical place. I have been unable to find any stone marked B. H. on the ground above it, but I fear that a search after Bill's tombstone would be hopeless. Although the formation of the island is of the sort to contain numerous caves, still they must be considerably less plentiful than possible tombstones. Under circumstances such as those of the mate's story, it seems to me that all the probabilities point to their concealing the chest in the cave with an opening on the bay. It must have been necessary for them to act as quickly as possible, that their absence from the ship might go unnoticed--though I believe the three conspirators had made the crew drunk. Then to get the boat, laden with the heavy chest, through the surf to any of the other caves--if the various cracks and fissures I have seen are indeed properly to be called caves--would be stiff work for three men. Yes, everything indicates the cavern under the point. The only question is, isn't it indicated too clearly? Would a smooth old scoundrel such as this Captain Sampson must have been have hidden his treasure in the very place certain to be ransacked if the secret ever got out? Unless it was deeply buried, which it could have been only at certain stages of the tide, even old Heintz would have been apt to come across it in the course of his desultory researches for the

riches of the buccaneers. And I am certain placid old Heintz did not mislead me. Besides, at Panama, he was making arrangements to go with some other Germans on a small business venture to Samoa, which he would not have been likely to do if he had just unearthed a vast fortune in buried treasure. Still, I shall explore the cave thoroughly, though with little hope.

Oh, Helen, if I could watch these tropic stars with you to-night!

January 6. I think I am through with the cave under the point--the Cavern of the Two Arches, I have named it. It is a dangerous place to work in alone, and my little skiff has been badly battered several times. But I peered into every crevice in the walls, and sounded the sands with a drill. I suppose I would have made a more thorough job of it if I had not been convinced from the first that the chest was not there. It was not reason that told me so--I know I may well be attributing too much subtlety of mind to Captain Sampson--but that strange guiding instinct--to put it in its lowest terms--which I know in my heart I must follow if I would succeed. Shall I ever forget the feeling that stirred me when first I turned the pages of my grandfather's diary and saw there, in his faded writing, the story of the mate of the Bonny Lass, who died in Havana in my grandfather's arms? My grandfather had gone as supercargo in his own ship, and while he did a good stroke of business in Havana--trust his shrewd Yankee instincts for that--he managed to combine the service of God with that of Mammon. Many a poor drunken sailor, taking his fling ashore in the bright, treacherous, plague-ridden city, found in him a friend, as did the mate of the Bonny Lass in his dying hour. Oh, if my good grandfather had but made sure from the man's own lips exactly where the treasure lay! It is enough to make one fancy that the unknown Bill, who paid for too much knowledge with his life, has his own fashion of guarding the hoard. But I ramble. I was going to say, that from the moment when I learned from my grandfather's diary of the existence of the treasure, I have been driven by an impulse more overmastering than anything I have ever experienced in my life. It was, I believe, what old-fashioned pious folk would call a leading. The impetus seemed somehow to come from outside my own organism. All my life I had been irresolute, the sport of circumstances, trifling with this and that, unable to set my face steadfastly toward any goal. Yet never, since I have trodden this path, have I looked to right or left. I have defied both human opinion and the obstacles which an unfriendly fate has thrown in my way. All alone, I, a sailor hitherto of pleasure-craft among the bays and islands of the New England coast, put forth in my little sloop for a voyage of three hundred miles on the loneliest wastes of the Pacific. All alone, did I say? No, there was Benjy the faithful. His head is at my knee as I write. He knows, I think, that his master's mood is sad to-night. Oh, Helen, if you ever see these lines, will you realize how I have longed for you--how it sometimes seems that my soul must tear itself loose from my body and speed to you across half a world?

February 1. Since my last record my time has been well filled. In the Island Queen I have been surveying the coasts of my domain, sailing as close in as I dared, and taking note of every crevice that might be the mouth of a cave. Then, either in the rowboat or by scrambling down the cliffs, I visit the indicated point. It is bitterly hard labor, but it has its compensations. I am growing

hale and strong, brown and muscular. Aunt Sarah won't offer me any more of her miserable decoctions when I go home. Heading first toward the north, I am systematically making the rounds of the island, for, after all, how do I know for certain that Captain Sampson buried his treasure near the east anchorage? For greater security he may have chosen the other side, where there is another bay, I should judge deeper and freer of rocks than this one, though more open to storms.

So far I have discovered half a dozen caves, most of them quite small. Any one of them seemed such a likely place that at first I was quite hopeful. But I have found nothing. Usually, the floor of the cave beneath a few inches of sand is rock. Only in the great cave under the point have I found sand to any depth. The formation in some cases is little more than a hardened clay, but to excavate it would require long toil, probably blasting--and I have no explosives. And I go always on the principle that Captain Sampson and his two assistants had not time for any elaborate work of concealment. Most likely they laid the chest in some natural niche. Sailors are unskilled in the use of such implements as spades, and besides, the very heart of the undertaking was haste and secrecy. They must have worked at night and between two tides, for few of the caves can be reached except at the ebb. And I take it as certain that the cave must have opened directly on the sea. For three men to transport such a weight and bulk by land would be sheer impossibility.

February 10. To-day a strange, strange thing happened--so strange, so wonderful and glorious that it ought to be recorded in luminous ink. And I owe it all to Benjy! Little dog, you shall go in a golden collar and eat lamb-chops every day! This morning--

Across my absorption in the diary cut the unwelcome clangor of Cookie's gong. Right on the breathless edge of discovery I was summoned, with my thrilling secret in my breast, to join my unsuspecting companions. I hid the book carefully in my cot. Not until the light of to-morrow morning could I return to its perusal. How I was to survive the interval I did not know. But on one point my mind was made up--no one should dream of the existence of the diary until I knew all that it had to impart.

XI

MISS BROWNE HAS A VISION

Perhaps because of the secret excitement under which I was laboring, I seemed that evening unusually aware of the emotional fluctuations of those about me. Violet looked grimmer than ever, so that I judged her struggles with her mundane consciousness to have been exceptionally severe. Captain Magnus seemed even beyond his wont restless, loose-jointed and wandering-eyed, and performed extraordinary feats of sword-swallowing. Mr. Shaw was very silent, and his forehead knitted now and then into a reflective frown. As for myself, I had much ado to hide my abstraction, and turned cold from head to foot with alarm when I heard my own voice addressing Crusoe as Benjy.

A faint ripple of surprise passed round the table.

"Named your dog over again, Miss Jinny?" inquired Mr. Tubbs. Mr. Tubbs had adopted a facetiously paternal manner toward me. I knew in anticipation of the moment when he would invite me to call him Uncle Ham.

"I say, you know," expostulated Cuthbert Vane, "I thought Crusoe rather a nice name. Never heard of any chap named Benjy that lived on an island."

"When I was a little girl, Virginia," remarked Aunt Jane, with the air of immense age and wisdom which she occasionally assumed, "my grandmother--your great-grandmother, of course, my love--would never allow me to name my dolls a second time. She did not approve of changeableness. And I am sure it must be partly due to your great-grandmother's teaching that I always know my own mind directly about everything. She was quite a remarkable woman, and very firm. Firmness has been considered a family trait with us. When her husband died--your great-grandfather, you know, dear--she rose above her grief and made him take some very disagreeable medicine to the very last, long after the doctors had given up hope. As some relation or other said, I think your Great-Aunt Susan's father-in-law, anybody else would have allowed poor John Harding to die in peace, but trust Eliza to be firm to the end."

Under cover of this bit of family history I tried to rally from my confusion, but I knew my cheeks were burning. Looks of deepening surprise greeted the scarlet emblems of discomfiture that I hung out.

"By heck, bet there's a feller at home named Benjy!" cackled Mr. Tubbs shrilly, and for once I blessed him.

Aunt Jane turned upon him her round innocent eyes.

"Oh, no, Mr. Tubbs," she assured him, "I don't think a single one of them was named Benjy!"

The laughter which followed this gave me time to get myself in hand again.

"Crusoe it is and will be," I asserted. "Like Great-Grandmother Harding, I don't approve of changeableness. It happens that a girl I know at home has a dog named Benjy." Which happened fortunately to be true, for otherwise I should have been obliged to invent it. But the girl is a cat, and the dog a miserable little high-bred something, all shivers and no hair. I should never have thought of him in the same breath with Crusoe.

That evening Mr. Shaw addressed the gathering at the camp-fire--which we made small and bright, and then sat well away from because of the heat--and in a few words gave it as his opinion that any further search in the cave under the point was useless. (If he had known the strange confirmatory echo which this awoke in my mind!) He proposed that the shore of the island to a reasonable distance on either side of the bay-entrance should be surveyed, with a view to discover whether some other cave did not exist which

would answer the description given by the dying Hopperdown as well as that first explored.

Mr. Shaw's words were addressed to the ladies, the organizer and financier, respectively, of the expedition, to the very deliberate exclusion of Mr. Tubbs. But he might as well have made up his mind to recognize the triumvirate. Enthroned on a camp-chair sat Aunt Jane, like a little goddess of the Dollar Sign, and on one hand Mr. Tubbs smiled blandly, and on the other Violet gloomed. You saw that in secret council Mr. Shaw's announcement had been foreseen and deliberated upon.

Mr. Tubbs, who understood very well the role of power behind the throne, left it to Violet to reply. And Miss Browne, who carried an invisible rostrum with her wherever she went, now alertly mounted it.

"My friends," she began, "those dwelling on a plane where the Material is all may fail to grasp the thought which I shall put before you this evening. They may not understand that if a different psychic atmosphere had existed on this island from the first we should not now be gazing into a blank wall of Doubt. My friends, this expedition was, so to speak, called from the Void by Thought. Thought it was, as realized in steamships and other ephemeral forms, which bore us thither over rolling seas. How then can it be otherwise than that Thought should influence our fortunes--that success should be unable to materialize before a persistent attitude of Negation? My friends, you will perceive that there is no break in this sequence of ideas; all is remorseless logic.

"In order to withdraw myself from this atmosphere of Negation, for these several days past I have sought seclusion. There in silence I have asserted the power of Positive over Negative Thought, gazing meanwhile into the profound depths of the All. My friends, an answer has been vouchsafed us; I have had a vision of that for which we seek. Now at last, in a spirit of glad confidence, we may advance. For, my friends, the chest is buried--in sand."

With this triumphant announcement Miss Higglesby-Browne sat down. A heavy silence succeeded. It was broken by a murmur from Mr. Tubbs.

"Wonderful--that's what I call wonderful! Talk about the eloquence of the ancients--I believe, by gum, this is on a par with Congressional oratory!"

"A vision, Miss Browne," said Mr. Shaw gravely, "must be an interesting thing. I have never seen one myself, having no talents that way, but in the little Scotch town of Dumbiedykes where I was born there was an old lady with a remarkable gift of the second sight. Simple folk, not being acquainted with the proper terms to fit the case, called her the Wise Woman. Well, one day my aunt had been to the neighboring town of Micklestane, five miles off, and on the way back to Dumbiedykes she lost her purse. It had three sovereigns in it--a great sum to my aunt. In her trouble of mind she hurried to the Wise Woman--a thing to make her pious father turn in his grave. The Wise Woman--gazed into the All, I suppose, and told my aunt not to fret herself, for she had had a vision of

the purse and _it lay somewhere on the food between Micklestane and Dumbiedykes_.

"Now, Miss Browne, I'll take the liberty of drawing a moral from this Story to fit the present instance: _where on the road between Micklestane and Dumbiedykes is the chest_?"

Though startled at the audacity of Mr. Shaw, I was unprepared for the spasm of absolute fury that convulsed Miss Browne's countenance.

"Mr. Shaw," she thundered, "if you intend to draw a parallel between me and an ignorant Scotch peasant--!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Shaw calmly, "forebye the Wise Woman was a most respectable person and had a grandson in the kirk. The point is, can you indicate with any degree of exactness the whereabouts of the chest? For there is a good deal of sand on the shores of this island."

"Oh, but Mr. Shaw!" interposed Aunt Jane tremulously. "In the sand--why, I am sure that is such a helpful thought! It shows quite plainly that the chest is not buried in--in a rock, you know." She gave the effect of a person trying to deflect a thunderstorm with a palm-leaf fan.

"Dynamite---dynamite--blow the lid off the island!" mumbled Captain Magnus.

"If any one has a definite plan to propose," said Mr. Shaw, "I am very ready to consider it. I have understood myself from the first to be acting under the directions of the ladies who planned this expedition. As a mere matter of honesty to my employers, I should feel bound to spare no effort to find the treasure, even if my own interests were not so vitally concerned. Considering its importance to myself, no one can well suppose that I am not doing all in my power to bring the chest to light. Tomorrow, if the sea is favorable, it is my intention to set out in the boat to determine the character of such other caves as exist on the island. I'll want you with me, lad, and you too, Magnus."

Captain Magnus looked more ill at ease than usual. "Did you think o' rowin' the whole way round the dinged chunk o' rock?" he inquired.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Shaw with an impatient frown. So the man, in addition to his other unattractive qualities, was turning out a shirk! Hitherto, with his strength and feverish if intermittent energy, plus an almost uncanny skill with boats, he had been of value. "Certainly not. We are going to make a careful survey of the cliffs, and explore every likely opening as thoroughly as possible. It will be slow work and hard. As to circumnavigating the island, I see no point in it, for I don't believe the chest can have been carried any great distance from the cove."

"Oh--all right," said Captain Magnus.

Mr. Tubbs, who had been whispering with Aunt Jane and Miss Browne, now with a very made-to-order casualness proposed to the two ladies

that they take a stroll on the beach. This meant that the triumvirate were to withdraw for discussion, and amounted to notice that henceforth the counsels of the company would be divided.

Captain Magnus, after an uneasy wriggle or two, said he guessed he'd turn in. Cookie's snores were already audible between splashes of the waves on the sands. The Scotchman, Cuthbert Vane and I continued to sit by the dying fire. Mr. Shaw had got out his pipe and sat silently puffing at it. He might have been sitting in solitude on the topmost crag of the island, so remote seemed that impassive presence. Was it possible that ever, except in the sweet madness of a dream, I had been in his arms, pillowed and cherished there, that he had called me lassie--

I lifted my eyes to the kind honest gaze of Cuthbert Vane. It was as faithful as Crusoe's and no more embarrassing. A great impulse of affection moved me. I was near putting out a hand to pat his splendid head. Oh, how easy, comfortable, and calm would be a life with Cuthbert Vane! I wasn't thinking about the title now--Cuthbert would be quite worth while for himself. For a moment I almost saw with Aunt Jane's eyes. Fancy trotting him out before the girls! stole insidiously into my mind. How much more dazzling than a plain Scotch sailor--

I turned in bitterness and yearning from the silent figure by the fire.

I think in an earlier lifetime I must have been a huntress and loved to pursue the game that fled.

XII

THE ISLAND QUEEN'S FREIGHT

I woke next morning with a great thrill of exhilaration. Perhaps before the sun went down again I should know the secret of the island.

The two divisions of our party, which were designated by me privately the Land and Sea Forces, went their separate ways directly after breakfast, which we ate in the cool of earliest morning, I could retire to the perusal of the journal which I had recovered from the wrecked sloop without fear of interruption.

I resumed my reading with the entry of February 10.

This morning, having grown very tired of fish, of which I get plenty every time I go out in the boat by dragging a line behind, I decided to stay ashore and hunt pig. I set out across the base of the point, nearly due south--whereas I had been working along the coast to the north of the cove. On my right the slope of the mountain rose steeply, and as I approached the south shore the rise of the peak became more abrupt, and great jutting crags leaned out over the tree-tops below.

I reached the edge of the cliffs and found that on my right hand the mountain dropped in a sheer precipice from hundreds of feet above me straight into the sea. I considered, and made up my mind that by striking back some distance one might by a very rough climb gain the top of the precipice, and so swing around the shoulder of the mountain. I did not feel inclined to attempt it. The cliffs at this point offered no means of descent, and the few yards of sand which the receding tide had left bare at their foot led nowhere.

So far I had seen no pig, and I began to think they must all be feeding on the other side of the island. I turned to go back, and at that moment I heard an outcry in the bushes and Benjy came tearing out at the heels of a fine young porker. I threw up my gun to fire, but the evolutions of Benjy and the pig were such that I was as likely to hit one as the other. The pig, of course, made desperate efforts to escape from the cul-de-sac in which he found himself. His only hope was to get back into the woods on the point. Benjy kept him headed off successfully, and I began to edge up, watching my chance for a shot. Suddenly the pig came dashing straight toward me--oblivious, I suppose, to everything but the white snapping terror at his heels. Taken by surprise, I fired--and missed. The pig shot between my knees, Benjy after him. I withstood the shock of the pig, but not of Benjy. I fell, clawing wildly, into a matted mass of creepers that covered the ground beside me.

I got to my feet quickly, dragging the whole mass of vines up with me. Then I saw that they had covered a curiously regular little patch of ground, outlined at intervals with small stones. At one end was a larger stone.

The patch was narrow, about six feet long--instantly suggestive of a grave. But swift beyond all process of reason was the certainty that flashed into my mind. I fell on my knees beside the stone at the head and pulled away the torn vine-tendrils. I saw the letters B. H. and an attempt at cross-bones rudely cut into the surface of the stone.

I closed my eyes and tried to steady myself. I thought, I am seeing things. _This is the mere projection of the vision which has been in my mind so long_.

I opened my eyes, and lo, the fantasy, if fantasy it were, remained. I smote with my fist upon the stone. The stone was solid--it bruised the flesh. And as I saw the blood run, I screamed aloud like a madman, "_It's real, real, real_!"

Under the stone lay the guardian of the treasure of the _Bonny Lass_--And his secret was within my grasp.

I don't know how long I crouched beside the stone, as drunk with joy as any hasheesh toper with his drug. I roused at last to find Benjy at my shoulder, thrusting his cool nose against my feverish cheek. I suppose he didn't understand my ignoring him so, or thought I scorned him for losing out in his race with the pig. Yet when I think of what I owe that pig I could swear never to taste pork again.

Brought back to earth and sanity, I rose and began to consider my surroundings. Somewhere close at hand was the mouth of the cave--but where? The cliffs, as I have already said, were too steep for descent. Nothing but a fly could have crawled down them. I turned to the craggy face of the mountain. There, surely, must be the entrance to the cave! For hours I clambered among the rocks, risking mangled limbs and sunstroke--and found no cave. I came back at last, wearily, to the grave. There lay the dust of the brain that had known all--and a wild impulse came to me to tear away the earth with my bare hands, to dig deep, deep--and then with listening ear wait for a whispered word.

I put the delirious fancy from me and moved away to the edge of the cliffs. Looking down, I saw a narrow sloping shelf which dropped from the brink to a distance of ten or twelve feet below, where it met a slight projection of the rock. I had seen it before, of course, but it had carried no significance for my mind. Now I stepped down upon the ledge and followed it to its end in the angle of the rock.

Snugly hidden in the angle was a low doorway leading into blackness.

Now of course I ought in prudence to have gone back to the hut and got matches and a lantern and a rope before I set foot in the darkness of that unknown place. But what had I to do to-day with prudence--Fortune had me by the hand! In I went boldly, Benjy at my heels. The passage turned sharply, and for a little way we walked in blackness. Then it veered again, and a faint and far-off light seemed to filter its way to us through a web woven of the very stuff of night. The floor sloped a little downward. I felt my way with my feet, and came to a step--another. I was going along a descending passage, cut at its steepest into rough, irregular stairs. With either hand I could touch the walls. All the while the light grew clearer. Presently, by another sharp turn, I found myself in a cave, some thirty feet in depth by eighteen across, with an opening on the narrow strip of beach I had seen from the top of the cliffs.

The roof is high, with an effect of Gothic arches. Near the mouth is a tiny spring of ice-cold water, which has worn a clean rock-channel for itself to the sea. Otherwise the cave is perfectly dry. The shining white sand of its floor is above the highest watermark on the cliffs outside. There is no doubt in my mind that in the great buccaneering days of the seventeenth century, and probably much later, the place was the haunt of pirates. One fancies that Captain Sampson of the Bonny Lass may have known of it before he brought the treasure to the island. There were queer folk to be met with in those days in the Western Ocean! The cave is cool at blazing midday, and secret, I fancy, even from the sea, because of the droop of great rock-eaves above its mouth. Either for the keeping of stores or as a hiding-place for men or treasure it would be admirable. Yes, the cave has seen many a fierce, sea-tanned face and tarry pigtail, and echoed to strange oaths and wild sea-songs. Men had carved those steps in the passage--thirty-two of them. In the sand of the floor, as I kicked it up with my feet, hoping rather childishly to strike the corner of the chest, I found the hilt and part of the blade of a rusty cutlass, and a chased silver shoe-buckle. I shall take the buckle home to Helen--and yet how trivial it will seem, with all

else that I have to offer her! Nevertheless she will prize it as my gift, and because it comes from the place to which some kind angel led me for her sake.

I left the cave and hurried back to the cabin for a spade, walking on air, breaking with snatches of song the terrible stillness of the woods, where one hears only the high fitful sighing of the wind, or the eternal mutter of the sea. As I came out of the hut with the spade over my shoulder I waved my hand to the _Island Queen_ riding at anchor.

"You'll soon be showing a clean pair of heels to Leeward, old girl!" I cried. Back in the cave, I set to work feverishly, making the light sand fly. I began at the rear of the cavern, reasoning that there the sand would lie at greater depth, also that it would be above the wash of the heaviest storms. At the end of half an hour, at a point close to the angle of the wall my spade struck a hard surface. It lay, I should judge, under about two feet of sand. Soon I had laid bare a patch of dark wood which rang under my knuckles almost like iron. A little more, and I had cleared away the sand from the top of a large chest with a convex lid, heavily bound in brass.

Furiously I flung the sand aside until the chest stood free for half its depth--which is roughly three feet. It has handles at the ends, great hand-wrought loops of metal. I tugged my hardest, but the chest seemed fast in its place as the native rock. I laughed exultantly. The weight meant gold--gold! I had hammer and chisel with me, and with these I forced the massive ancient locks. There were three of them, one for each strip of brass which bound the chest. Then I flung up the lid.

No glittering treasure dazzled me. I saw only a surface of stained canvas, tucked in carefully around the edges. This I tore off and flung aside--eclipsing poor Benjy, who was a most interested spectator of my strange proceedings. Still no gleam of gold, merely demure rows of plump brown bags. With both hands I reached for them. Oh, to grasp them all! I had to be content with two, because they were so heavy, so blessedly heavy!

I spread the square of canvas on the sand, cut the strings from the bags, and poured out--gold, gold! All fair shining golden coins they were, not a paltry silver piece among them! And they made a soft golden music as they fell in a glorious yellow heap.

I don't know how long I sat there, playing with my gold, running it through my fingers, clinking the coins together in my palm. Benjy came and sniffed at them indifferently, unable to understand his master's preoccupation. He thrust his nose into my face and barked, and said as clearly as with words, _Come, hunt pig_!

"Benjy," I said, "we'll leave the pork alone just now. We have work enough to count our money. We're rich, old boy, rich, rich!"

Of course, I don't yet know exactly what the value of the treasure is. I have counted the bags in the chest; there are one hundred and forty-eight. Each, so far as I have determined, contains one thousand doubloons, which makes a total of one hundred and forty-eight thousand. Estimating each coin, for the sake of even

figures, at a value of seven dollars--a safe minimum--you get one million, thirty-six thousand dollars. And as many of the coins are ancient, I ought to reap a harvest from collectors.

Besides the coin, I found, rather surprisingly, laid between the upper layers of bags, a silver crucifix about nine inches long. It is of very quaint old workmanship, and badly tarnished. Its money value must be very trifling, compared to the same bulk of golden coins. I think it must have had some special character of sacredness which led to its preservation here. It is strange to find such a relic among a treasure so stained by blood and crime.

And now I have to think about moving the gold. First of all I must get the chest itself aboard the Island Queen. This means that I shall have to empty it and leave the gold in the cave, while I get the chest out by sea. When the chest is safely in the cabin of the sloop--where it won't leave much room for Benjy and his master, I'm afraid--I will take the bags of coin out by the land entrance. I can't think of risking my precious doubloons in the voyage around the point.

Of course I should have liked to get to the task to-day, but after the first mad thrill of the great event was over, I found myself as weak and unnerved as a woman. So by a great effort I came away and left my glorious golden hoard. Now I dream and gloat, playing with the idea that to-morrow I shall find it all a fantasy. The pleasure of this is, of course, that all the while I know this wildest of all Arabian fairy tales to be as real as the most drab and sober fact of my hitherto colorless life.

After all, on the way back from the cave Benjy brought down a pig. So he is as well pleased with the day as I am. Now I am sitting in the doorway of my cabin, writing up my journal, and trying to calm down enough to go to bed. If it were not for the swift fading of daylight, I would go back to the cave for another peep into the chest. But all round the island the sea is moaning with that peculiarly melancholy note that comes with the falling of night. The sea-birds have risen from the cove and gone wheeling off in troops to their nests on the cliffs. Somehow a curious dislike, almost fear, of this wild, sea-girt, solitary place has come over me. I long for the sound of human voices, the touch of human hands. I think of the dead man lying there at the door of the cave, its silent guardian for so long. I suppose he brooded once on the thought of the gold as I do--perhaps he has been brooding so these ninety years! I wonder if he is pleased that I, a stranger, have come into possession of his secret hoard at last?

Oh, Helen, turn your heavenly face on me--be my refuge from these shuddering unwholesome thoughts! The gold is for you--for you! Surely that must cleanse it of its stains, must loose the clutch of the dead hands that strive to hold it!

February 11. This morning I was early at the cave. Yes, there it was, the same wonder-chest that I had dreamed of all night long. It was absurd how the tightness in my breast relaxed.

I began at once the work of removing the bags from the chest and stacking them in the corner of the cave. It was a fatiguing job, I

had to stoop so. At the bottom of the chest I found a small portfolio of very fine leather containing documents in Spanish. They bear an official seal. Although I should be interested to know their meaning, I think I shall destroy them. They weaken my feeling of ownership; I suppose there is a slight flavor of lawlessness in my carrying off the gold from the island like this. Very likely the little Spanish-American state which has some claim to overlordship here would dispute my right to the treasure-trove.

I spent so much time unloading the chest and poring over the papers, trying, by means of my ill-remembered Latin, to make out the sense of the kindred Spanish, that before I was ready to go for my boat the tide was up and pounding on the rocks below the cave. I find that only at certain stages of the tide is the cave approachable by sea. At the turn after high water, for instance, there is such a terrific undertow that it sets up a small maelstrom among the reefs lying off the island. At low tide is the time to come.

February 12. Got the chest out of the cave, though it was a difficult job. I don't know of what wood the thing is built--some South American hardwood, I fancy--but it weighs like metal. The heavy brass clampings count for something, of course. Luckily there was no sea, and I had a smooth passage around the point, I laughed rather ruefully as I passed the Cave of the Two Arches. To think of the toil I wasted there! I wish Benjy had encountered the fateful pig a little sooner.

Got the chest aboard the Island Queen and stowed in the cabin. Not room left to swing a kitten. Contrived an elaborate arrangement of ropes and spikes to keep it in place in a heavy sea.

In the afternoon began moving the gold. It's the deuce of a job.

February 15. Been hard at it for three days. Most of the gold moved. Have to think too of provisions and water for the trip. I am making rather a liberal allowance, in case of being blown out of my course by a tropical gale.

February 16. On board the Island Queen. Have moved my traps from the hut and am sleeping on the sloop. Want to be near the gold. "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also," and in this case the body as well. To-morrow I have only to bring the last of the gold aboard--a trifling matter--and then go out with the ebb. I would have got all the bags on board to-day, but I noticed a worn stretch in the cable holding the sloop and stopped to repair it. I can't have the sloop going on the rocks in case a blow comes up to-night. There are only about a load and a half of bags left in the cave.

A queer notion seized me to-day about the crucifix, when I was bringing it from the cave. It seemed to float into my brain--I can't say from what quarter--that I had better leave the crucifix for Bill. It wasn't more than he had a right to, really--and there is no virtue in a cross-bones to make a man sleep well.

Of course I put the absurd idea from me, and brought the crucifix aboard along with the rest of the gold. I shall be glad when I know that the vines have again covered that lonely-looking gravestone from sight. I can't help feeling my own glorious good fortune to be somehow an affront to poor unlucky Bill.

To-morrow one last trip to the cave, and then hey, for home and Helen!

The diary ended here.

I closed the book, and stared with unseeing eyes into the green shadows of the encompassing woods. What happened to the writer of the diary on that last trip to the cave? For he had never left the island. Crusoe was here to prove it, as well as the wreck of the Island Queen. And, in all human probability, under the sand which choked the cabin of the derelict was the long-sought chest of Spanish doubloons.

But what was the mysterious fate of Peter? Had he fallen, overboard from the sloop and been drowned? Had he returned to the cave--and was he there still? It was all a mystery--but a mystery which I burned to solve.

Of course I might have solved it, very quickly, merely by communicating the extraordinary knowledge which had come to me to my companions. But for the present at least I meant to keep this astounding secret for my own. Somehow or other, by guile or lucky circumstance, I must bring it about that the document I had signed at Miss Browne's behest was canceled. Was I, who all unaided had discovered, or as good as discovered, the vainly-sought-for treasure, to disclose its whereabouts to those who would deny me the smallest claim upon its contents? Was I to see all those "fair, shining golden coins," parceled out between Miss Browne, and Mr. Tubbs, and Captain Magnus (the three who loomed large in my indignant thoughts), and not possess a single one myself? Or perhaps accept a little stingy present of a few? I really wasn't very covetous about the money, taken just as money; but considered as buried treasure it made my mouth water.

Then besides, while I kept my secret I had power; everybody's destiny was in my hands. This was a sweet thought. I felt that I should enjoy going about with a deceptive meekness, and taking the severest snubs from Miss Browne, knowing that at any moment I could blossom forth into the most exalted and thrilling importance. Also, not only did I want a share in the treasure myself, but I wanted, if possible, to divide it up on a different basis from the present. I wanted Cuthbert Vane to have a lot of it--and I should have been much better pleased not to let Mr. Tubbs or Captain Magnus have any. I did not crave to enrich Violet, and I thought Aunt Jane had already more money than was good for her. Give her another half-million, and Mr. Tubbs would commit bigamy, if necessary, for her sake.

And then there was Dugald Shaw, who had saved my life, and who seemed to have forgotten it, and that I had ever had my arms about his neck--and who was poor--and brave--

Yes, decidedly, I should keep my secret yet while, till I saw how the cards were going to fall.

XIII

I BRING TO LIGHT A CLUE

My first and all but overpowering impulse was to possess myself of a spade and dash for the wreck of the Island Queen. Sober second thought restrained me. Merely to get there and back would consume much time, for the descent of the cliffs, and still more the climb up again, was a toilsome affair. Also, reflection showed me that to dig through the damp close-packed sand of the cabin would be no trifling task, for I should be hampered by the need of throwing out the excavated sand behind me through the narrow companionway. I could achieve my end, no doubt, by patient burrowing, but it would require much more time than I had at my command before the noon-day sounding of Cookie's gong. I must not be seen departing or returning with a spade, but make off with the implement in a stealthy and burglarious manner. Above all, I must not risk betraying my secret through impatience.

But there was nothing to forbid an immediate pilgrimage to the much-sought gravestone with its sinister symbol. The account in Peter's diary of his adventure with the pig placed the grave with such exactness that I had no doubt of finding it easily. That done, I would know very nearly where to look for the cave--and in order to bid defiance to a certain chill sense of reluctance which beset me at the thought of the cave I started out at once, skirting the clearing with much circumspection, for it seemed to me that even the sight of my vanishing back must shout of mystery to Cookie droning hymns among his pots and pans. Crusoe, of course, came with me, happily unconscious of his own strange relation to our quest.

Following in the steps of Peter, who seemed in an airy and uncomfortable fashion to be bearing me company, I struck across the point, at the base of the rough slope which marks the first rise of the peak. As I neared the sea on the other side great crags began to overhang the path, which was, of course, no path, but merely the line of least resistance through the woods. Soon the noise of the sea, of which one was never altogether free on the island, though it reaches the recesses of the forest only as a vast nameless murmur, broke in heightened clamor on my ears. I heard the waves roaring and dashing on rocks far below--and then I stood at the dizzy edge of the plateau looking out over the illimitable gleaming reaches of the sea.

Somewhere in this angle between the ragged margin of the cliffs and the abrupt rise of the craggy mountainside, according to Peter's journal, lay the grave. I began systematically to poke with a stick I carried into every low-growing mass of vines or bushes. Because of the comparatively rocky, sterile soil the woods were thinner here, and the undergrowth was greater. Only the very definite localization of the grave by the accommodating diarist gave any hope of finding it.

And then, quite suddenly, I found it. My proddings had displaced a matted mass of ground-creeper. Beneath, looking raw and naked without its leafy covering, was the "curiously regular little patch of ground, outlined at intervals with small stones." Panic-stricken beetles scuttled for refuge. A great green slug undulated painfully across his suddenly denuded pasture, A whole small world found itself hurled back to chaos.

At the head of the grave lay a large, smoothly-rounded stone. I knelt and brushed away some obstinate vine-tendrils, and the letters "B. H." revealed themselves, cut deeply and irregularly into the sloping face of the stone. Below was the half-intelligible symbol of the crossed bones.

There was something in the utter loneliness of the place that caught my breath sharply. At once I had the feeling of a marauder. Here slept the guardian of the treasure--and yet in defiance of him I meant to have it. So, too, had Peter--and I didn't know yet what he had managed to do to Peter--but I guessed from his journal that Peter had been a slightly morbid person. He had let the wild solitude of the island frighten him. He had indulged foolish fancies about crucifixes. He had in fact let the defenses of his will be undermined ever so little--and then of course there was no telling what They could do to you.

With an impatient shiver I got up quickly from my knees. What abominable nonsense I had been talking--was there a miasma about that old grave that affected one? I whistled to Crusoe, who was trotting busily about on mysterious intelligence conveyed to him by his nose. He ran to me joyfully, and I stooped and patted his warm vigorous body.

"Let Bill walk, Crusoe," I remarked, "let him! He needn't be a dog in the manger about the treasure, anyhow."

Now came the moment which I had been trying not to think about. I had to find the entrance to the cave, and then go into it or part with my own esteem forever. I went and peered over the cliff. I had an unacknowledged hope that the shelf of which Peter had written had been rent off by some cataclysm and that I could not possibly get down to the doorway in the rock. My hope was vain. The ledge was there--not an inviting ledge, nor one on which the unacrobatically inclined would have any impulse to saunter, but a perfectly good ledge, on which I had not the slightest excuse for declining to venture. Seventy feet below I saw a narrow strip of sand, from which the tide was receding. It ran along under the great precipice which rose on my right, forming the face of the mountain on the south side. On that strip of sand the old hiding-place of the-pirates opened. I thought I saw the overhanging eaves of rock of which the diary had spoken.

There was truly nothing dangerous about the ledge. It was nearly three feet wide, and had an easy downward trend. Yet you heard the hungry roar of the surf below, and try as you would not to, caught glimpses of the white swirl of it. I moved cautiously, keeping close to the face of the cliff. Crusoe, to my annoyance, sprang down upon the ledge after me. I had a feeling that he must certainly trip me as I picked my way gingerly along.

An angle in the rock--a low dark entrance-way--it was all as Peter had described it. I peered in--nothing but impenetrable blackness. I took a hesitating step. The passage veered sharply, as the diary had recorded. Once around the corner, there would be nothing but darkness anywhere. One would go stumbling on, feeling with feet and hands--hands cold with the dread of what they might be going to touch. For, suddenly portentous and overwhelming, there rose before me the unanswered question of what had become of Peter on that last visit to the cave. Unanswered--and unanswerable except in one way: by going in to see.

But if by any strange chance--where all chances were strange--he were still there, I did not want to see. I did not like to contemplate his possible neighborhood. Indeed, he grew enormously more real to me with every instant I stood there, and whereas I had so far thought principally about the treasure, I now began to think with intensity of Peter. What ironic stroke of fate had cut him down in the very moment of his triumph? Had he ever reached the cave to bring away the last of the doubloons? Were they still waiting there unclaimed? Had he fallen victim to some extraordinary mischance on the way back to the Island Queen? Had a storm come up on that last night, and the weakened cable parted, and the Island Queen gone on the rocks, drowning Peter in the cabin with his gold? Then how had Crusoe got away, Crusoe, who feared the waves so, and would bark at them and then turn tail and run?

Speaking of Crusoe, where was he? I realized that a moment ago he had plunged into the passage. I heard the patter of his feet--a pause. A queer, dismal little whine echoed along the passage. I heard Crusoe returning--but before his nose appeared around the angle of the tunnel, his mistress had reached the top of the cliff at a bound and was vanishing at a brisk pace into the woods.

With bitterness, as I pursued my way to camp, I realized that I was not a heroine. Here was a mystery--it was the business of a heroine to solve it. Now that I was safely away from the cave, I began to feel the itch of a torturing curiosity. How, without going into the terrifying place alone, should I find out what was there? Should I pretend to have accidentally discovered the grave, lead the party to it, and then--again accidentally--discover the tunnel? This plan had its merits--but I discarded it, for fear that something would be found in the cave to direct attention to the Island Queen. Then I reflected that very likely the explorers would work round the island far enough to find the sea-mouth of the cave. This would take matters entirely out of my hands. I should perhaps be enlightened as to the fate of Peter and the last remaining bags of doubloons, but might also have to share the secret of the derelict with the rest. And then all my dreams of playing fairy godmother and showering down on certain heads--like coals of fire--torrents of beautiful golden doubloons, would be over.

On the whole I could not tell whether I burned with impatience to have the cave discovered, or was cold with the fear of it.

And then, so vigorous is the instinct to see one's self in heroic postures, I found I was trying to cheat myself with the pretense

that I meant presently to abstract Aunt Jane's electric torch and returning to the tunnel-mouth plunge in dauntlessly.

XIV

MR. TUBBS INTERRUPTS

I had determined as an offset to my pusillanimous behavior about the cave to show a dogged industry in the matter of the Island Queen. It would take me a long while to get down through the sand to the chest, but I resolved to accomplish it, and borrowed of Cookie, without his knowledge, a large iron spoon which I thought I could wield more easily than a heavy spade. Besides, Cookie would be less sleuth-like in getting on the trail of his missing property than Mr. Shaw--though there would be a certain piquancy in having that martinet hale me before him for stealing a spade.

But that afternoon I was tired and hot--it really called for a grimmer resolve than mine to shovel sand through the languor of a Leeward Island afternoon. Instead, I slept in my hammock, and dreamed that I was queen of a cannibal island, draped in necklaces made of the doubloons now hidden under the sand in the cabin of the derelict.

Later, the wailing of Cookie was heard in the land, and I had to restore the spoon to free Crusoe of the charge of having stolen it. I said I had wanted it to dig with. But of course it occurred to no one that it was the treasure I had expected to dig up with Cookie's spoon. It was touching to see the universal faith in the trivial nature of my employments, to know that every one imagined themselves to be seriously occupied, while I was merely a girl--there is no common denominator for the qualifying adjective--who roamed about idly with a dog, and that no one dreamed that we had thus come to be potentially among the richest dogs and girls in these latitudes.

A more serious obstacle to my explorations on the Island Queen presented itself next day. Instead of putting to sea, Mr. Shaw and Captain Magnus hauled the boat up on the beach and set to work to repair it. The wild work of exploring the coast had left the boat with leaky seams and a damaged gunwale. The preceding day had been filled with hardship and danger--so much so that my heart sank a little at the recountal of it. You saw the little boat threading its way among the reefs, tossed like seaweed by the white teeth of gnawing waves, screamed at by angry gulls whose homes were those clefts and caves which the boat invaded. And all this, poor little boat, on a hopeless quest--for no reward but peril and wounds. Captain Magnus had a bruised and bleeding wrist, but refused to have it dressed, vaunting his hardihood with a savage pride. Cuthbert Vane, however, had a sprained thumb which could not be ignored, and on the strength of which he was dismissed from the boat-repairing contingent, and thrown on my hands to entertain. So of course I had to renounce all thoughts of visiting the sloop. I should not have dared to go there anyway, with Mr. Shaw and the captain able more or less to overlook my motions from the beach, for I was quite morbidly afraid of attracting attention to the

derelict. It seemed to me a happy miracle that no one but myself had taken any interest in her, or been inspired to ask by what chance so small a boat had come to be wrecked upon these desolate shores. Fortunately in her position in the shadow of the cliff she was inconspicuous, so that she might easily have been taken for the half of a large boat instead of the whole of a small one, or she must before this have drawn the questioning notice of the Scotchman. As to the captain, his attention was all set on the effort to discover the cave, and his intelligence was not lively enough to start on an entirely new tack by itself. And the Honorable Cuthbert viewed derelicts as he viewed the planetary bodies; somehow in the course of nature they happened.

So, dissembling my excitements and anxieties, I swung placidly in my hammock, and near by sat the beautiful youth with his thumb carried tenderly in a bandage. In my preoccupied state of mind, to entertain him might have seemed by no means an idle pastime, if he hadn't unexpectedly developed a talkative streak himself. Was it merely my being so distraught, or was it quite another reason, that led him to open up so suddenly about his Kentish home? Strange to say, instead of panting for the title, Cuthbert wanted his brother to go on living, though there was something queer about his spine, poor fellow, and the doctors said he couldn't possibly-- Of course I was surprised at Cuthbert's views, for I had always thought that if there were a title in your family your sentiments toward those who kept you out of it were necessarily murderous, and your tears crocodile when you pretended to weep over their biers. But Cuthbert's feelings were so human that I mentally apologized to the nobility. As to High Staunton Manor, I adored it. It is mostly Jacobean, but with an ancient Tudor wing, and it has a chapel and a ghost and a secret staircase and a frightfully beautiful and wicked ancestress hanging in the hall--I mean a portrait of her--and quantities of oak paneling quite black with age, and silver that was hidden in the family tombs when Cromwell's soldiers came, and a chamber where Elizabeth once slept, and other romantic details too numerous to mention. It is all a little bit run down and shabby, for lack of money to keep it up, and of course on that account all the more entrancing. Naturally the less money the more aristocracy, for it meant that the family had never descended to marrying coal miners and brewers--which comment is my own, for Cuthbert was quite destitute of swank.

The present Lord Grasmere lived up to his position so completely that he had the gout and sat with his foot on a cushion exactly like all the elderly aristocrats you ever heard of, only when I inquired if his lordship cursed his valet and flung plates at the footmen when his foot hurt him his son was much shocked and pained. He did not realize so well as I--from an extensive course of novel-reading--that such is the usual behavior of titled persons.

It was delightful, there in the hot stillness of the island, with the palms rustling faintly overhead, to hear of that cool, mossy, ancient place. I asked eager questions--I repeated gloatingly fragments of description--I wondered enviously what it would be like to have anything so old and proud and beautiful in your very blood--when suddenly I realized that, misled by my enthusiasm, Cuthbert was saying something which must not be said--that he was about to offer the shelter of that ancient roof to me. To me, whose heart could never nest there, but must be ever on the wing, a

wild bird of passage in the track of a ship--

I sat up with a galvanic start. "Oh--listen--didn't you hear something?" I desperately broke in. For somehow I must stop him. I didn't want our nice jolly friendship spoiled--and besides, fancy being cooped up on an island with a man you have refused! Especially when all the while you'd be wanting so to pet and console him!

But with his calm doggedness Cuthbert began again--"I was a bit afraid the old place would have seemed too quiet and dull to you--" when the day was saved and my interruption strangely justified by a shrill outcry from the camp.

I knew that high falsetto tone. It was the voice of Mr. Tubbs, but pitched in a key of quite insane excitement. I sprang up and ran, Crusoe and the Honorable Cuthbert at my heels. There in the midst of the camp Mr. Tubbs stood, the center of a group who were regarding him with astonished looks. Mr. Shaw and the captain had left their tinkering, Cookie his saucepans, and Aunt Jane and Violet had come hurrying from the hut. Among us all stood Mr. Tubbs with folded arms, looking round upon the company with an extraordinary air of complacency and triumph.

"What is it, oh, what is it, Mr. Tubbs?" cried Aunt Jane, fluttering with the consciousness of her proprietorship.

But Mr. Tubbs glanced at her as indifferently as a sated turkey-buzzard at a morsel which has ceased to tempt him.

"Mr. Tubbs," commanded Violet, "speak--explain yourself!"

"Come, out with it, Tubbs," advised Mr. Shaw.

Then the lips of Mr. Tubbs parted, and from them issued this solitary word:

"Eureka!"

"What?" screamed Miss Higglesby-Browne. "_You have found it_?"

Solemnly Mr. Tubbs inclined his head.

"Eureka!" he repeated. "I have found it!"

Amidst the exclamations, the questions, the general commotion which ensued, I had room for only one thought--that Mr. Tubbs had somehow discovered the treasure in the cabin of the Island Queen. Indeed, I should have shrieked the words aloud, but for a providential dumbness that fell upon me. Meanwhile Mr. Tubbs had unfolded his arms from their Napoleonic posture on his bosom long enough to wave his hand for silence.

"Friends," he began, "it has been known from the start that there was a landmark on this little old island that would give any party discovering the same a line on that chest of money right away. There's been some that was too high up in the exploring business to waste time looking for landmarks. They had rather do more fancy stunts, where what with surf, and sharks, and bangin' up the boat,

they could make a good show of gettin' busy. But old Ham Tubbs, he don't let on to be a hero. Jest a plain man o' business--that's old H. H. Consequence is, he leaves the other fellers have the brass band, while he sets out on the q. t. to run a certain little clue to earth. And, ladies and gentlemen, he's run it!"

"You have found--you have found the treasure!" shrilled Aunt Jane.

Contrary to his bland custom, Mr. Tubbs frowned at her darkly.

"I said I found the _clue_," he corrected. "Of course, it's the same thing. Ladies and gentlemen, not to appear to be a hot-air artist, I will tell you in a word, that I have located the tombstone of one William Halliwell, deceased!"

Of course. Not once had I thought of it. Bare, stark, glaring up at the sun, lay the stone carved with the letters and the cross-bones. Forgetting in the haste of my departure to replace the vines upon the grave, I had left the stone to shout its secret to the first comer. And that had happened to be Mr. Tubbs. Happened, I say, for I knew that he had not had the slightest notion where to look for the grave of Bill Halliwell. This running to earth of clues was purely an affair of his own picturesque imagination.

I wondered uneasily what he had made of the uprooted vines--but he would lay them to the pigs, no doubt. In the countenance of Mr. Tubbs, flushed and exultant, there was no suspicion that the secret was not all his own.

Miss Higglesby-Browne had been settling her helmet more firmly upon her wiry locks. She had a closed umbrella beneath her arm, and she drew and brandished it like a saber as she took a long stride forward.

"Mr. Tubbs," she commanded, "lead on!"

But Mr. Tubbs did not lead on. He stood quite still, regarding Miss Browne with a smile of infinite slyness.

"Oh, no indeed!" he said. "Old H. H. wasn't born yesterday. It may have struck you that to possess the sole and exclusive knowledge of the whereabouts of a million or two--ratin' it low--is some considerable of an asset. And it's one I ain't got the least idee of partin' with unless for inducements held out."

Aunt Jane gave a faint shriek. I had been silently debating what my own course should be in the face of this unexpected development. Suddenly I saw my way quite clear. I would say nothing. Mr. Tubbs should reveal his own perfidy. And the curtain should ring down upon the play, leaving Mr. Tubbs foiled all around, bereft both of the treasure and of Aunt Jane. Oh, how I would enjoy the farce as it was played by the unconscious actors! How I would step in at the end to reward virtue and punish guilt! And how I would point the moral, later, very gently to Aunt Jane, an Aunt Jane all penitence and docility!

Little I dreamed what surprises ensuing acts of the play were to hold for me, or of their astounding contrast with the farce of my

joyous imagination.

I took no part in the storm that raged round Mr. Tubbs. It is said that in the heart of the tempest there is calm, and this great truth of natural philosophy Mr. Tubbs exemplified. His face adorned by a seraphic, buttery smile, he stood unmoved, while Miss Higglesby-Browne uttered cyclonic exhortations and reproaches, while Aunt Jane sobbed and said, "_Oh, Mr. Tubbs_!" while Mr. Shaw strove to make himself heard above the din. He did at least succeed in extracting from the traitor a definite statement of terms. These were nothing less than fifty per cent. of the treasure, secured to him by a document signed, sealed and delivered into his own hands. To a suggestion that as he had discovered the all-important tombstone so might some one else, he replied with tranquillity that he thought not, as he had taken precautions against such an eventuality. In other words, as I was later to discover, the wily Mr. Tubbs had contrived to raise the boulder from its bed and push it over the cliff into the sea, afterward replacing the mass of vines upon the grave.

As to the entrance to the tunnel, it was apparent to me that Mr. Tubbs had not yet discovered it. Even if he had, I am certain that he would have been no more heroic than myself about exploring it, though there was no missing Peter to haunt his imagination. But with the grave as a starting-point, there could be no question as to the ultimate discovery of the cave.

I was so eager myself to see the inside of the cave, and to know whatever it had to reveal of the fate of Peter, that I was inclined to wish Mr. Tubbs success in driving his hard bargain, especially as it would profit him nothing in the end. But this sentiment was exclusively my own. On all hands indignation greeted the rigorous demands of Mr. Tubbs. With a righteous joy, I saw the fabric of Aunt Jane's illusions shaken by the rude blast of reality. Would it be riven quite in twain? I was dubious, for Aunt Jane's illusions have a toughness in striking contrast to the uncertain nature of her ideas in general. Darker and darker disclosures of Mr. Tubbs's perfidy would be required. But judging from his present recklessness, they would be forthcoming. For where was the Tubbs of yesterday--the honey-tongued, the suave, the anxiously obsequious Tubbs? Gone, quite gone. Instead, here was a Tubbs who cocked his helmet rakishly, and leered round upon the company, deaf to the claims of loyalty, the pleas of friendship, the voice of tenderness--Aunt Jane's.

Manfully Miss Higglesby-Browne stormed up and down the beach. She demanded of Mr. Shaw, of Cuthbert Vane, of Captain Magnus, each and severally, that Mr. Tubbs be compelled to disgorge his secret. You saw that she would not have shrunk from a regimen of racks and thumbscrews. But there were no racks or thumbscrews on the island. Of course we could have invented various instruments of torture--I felt I could have developed some ingenuity that way myself--but too fatally well Mr. Tubbs knew the civilized prejudices of those with whom he had to deal. With perfect impunity he could strut about the camp, sure that no weapons worse than words would be brought to bear upon him, that he would not even be turned away from the general board to browse on cocoanuts in solitude.

Long ago Mr. Shaw had left the field to Violet and with a curt

shrug had turned his back and stood looking out over the cove, stroking his chin reflectively. Miss Browne's eloquence had risen to amazing flights, and she already had Mr. Tubbs inextricably mixed with. Ananias and Sapphira, when the Scotchman broke in upon her ruthlessly.

"Friends," he said, "so far as I can see we have been put a good bit ahead by this morning's work. First, we know that the grave which should be our landmark has not been entirely obliterated by the jungle, as I had thought most likely. Second, we know that it is on this side of the island, for the reason that this chap Tubbs hasn't nerve to go much beyond shouting distance by himself. Third, as Tubbs has tried this hold-up business I believe we should consider the agreement by which he was to receive a sixteenth share null and void, and decide here and now that he gets nothing whatever. Fourth, the boat is now pretty well to rights, and as soon as we have a snack Bert and Magnus and I will set out, in twice as good heart as before, having had the story that brought us here confirmed for the first time. So Tubbs and his tombstone can go to thunder."

"I can, can I?" cried Mr. Tubbs. "Say, are you a human iceberg, to talk that cool before a man's own face? Say, I'll--"

But Cuthbert Vane broke in.

"Three rousing cheers, old boy!" he cried to the Scotchman enthusiastically. "Always did think the chap a frightful bounder, don't you know? We'll stand by old Shaw, won't we, Magnus?" Which comradely outbreak showed the excess of the beautiful youth's emotions, for usually he turned a large cold shoulder on the captain, though managing in some mysterious manner to be perfectly civil all the time. Perhaps you have to be born at High Staunton Manor or its equivalent to possess the art of relegating people to immense distances without seeming to administer even the gentlest shove.

But unfortunately the effect of the Honorable Cuthbert's cordiality was lost, so far as the object of it was concerned, because of the surprising fact, only now remarked by any one, that Captain Magnus had disappeared.

XV

SOME SECRET DIPLOMACY

The evanishment of Captain Magnus, though quite unlooked for at so critical a moment, was too much in keeping with his eccentric and unsocial ways to arouse much comment. Everybody looked about with mild ejaculations of surprise, and then forgot about the matter.

Whistling a Scotch tune, Dugald Shaw set to work again on the boat. In the face of difficulty or opposition he always grew more brisk and cheerful. I used to wonder whether in the event of a tornado he would not warm into positive geniality. Perhaps it would not have needed a tornado, if I had not begun by suspecting him of

conspiring against Aunt Jane's pocket, or if the Triumvirate, inspired by Mr. Tubbs, had not sat in gloomy judgment on his every movement. Or if he hadn't been reproached so for saving me from the cave, instead of leaving it to Cuthbert Vane--

But now under the stimulus of speaking his mind about Mr. Tubbs the Scotchman whistled as he worked, and slapped the noble youth affectionately on the back when he came and got in the way with anxious industry.

As I wanted to observe developments--a very necessary thing when you are playing Providence--I chose a central position in the shade and pulled out some very smudgy tating, a sort of Penelope's web which there was no prospect of my ever completing, but which served admirably to give me an appearance of occupation at critical moments.

Mr. Tubbs also had sought a shady spot and was fanning himself with his helmet. From time to time he hummed, in a manner determinedly gay. However he might disguise it from himself, this time Mr. Tubbs had overshot his mark. In the first thrill of his great discovery he had thought the game was in his hands. He had looked for an instant capitulation.

The truth was, since our arrival on the island Mr. Tubbs had felt himself the spoiled child of fortune. Aunt Jane and Miss Higglesby-Browne were the joint commanders of the expedition, and he commanded them. The Scotchman's theoretical rank as leader had involved merely the acceptance of all the responsibility and blame, while authority rested with the petticoat government dominated by the bland and wily Tubbs.

Had Mr. Tubbs but continued bland and wily, had he taken his fair confederates into his counsels, who knows how fat a share of the treasure they might have voted him. But he had abandoned his safe nook behind the throne, and sought to come out into the open as dictator. *_Sic semper tyrannis_*. So had the mighty fallen.

Faced with the failure of his *_coup d'etat_*, Mr. Tubbs's situation was, to say the least, awkward. He had risked all, and lost it. But he maintained an air of jaunty self-confidence, slightly tinged with irony. It was all very well, he seemed to imply, for us to try to get along without H. H. We would discover the impossibility of it soon enough.

Aunt Jane, drooping, had been led away to the cabin by Miss Higglesby-Browne. You now heard the voice of Violet in exhortation, mingled with Aunt Jane's sobs. I seemed to see that an ear of Mr. Tubbs was cocked attentively in that direction, He had indeed erred in the very wantonness of triumph, for a single glance would have kept Aunt Jane loyal and prodigal of excuses for him in the face of any treachery. Not even Violet could have clapped the lid on the up-welling fount of sentiment in Aunt Jane's heart. Only the cold condemning eye of H. H. himself had congealed that tepid flood.

The morning wore on with ever-increasing heat, and as nothing happened I began to find my watchful waiting dull. Crusoe, worn out perhaps by some private nocturnal pig-hunt, slept heavily where

the drip of the spring over the brim of old Heintz's kettle cooled the air. Aunt Jane's sobs had ceased, and only a low murmur of voices came from the cabin. I began to consider whether it would not be well to take a walk with Cuthbert Vane and discover the tombstone all over again. I knew nothing, of course, of Mr. Tubbs's drastic measures with the celebrated landmark. As to Cuthbert's interrupted courtship, I depended on the vast excitement of discovering the cave to distract his mind from it. For that was the idea, of course--Cuthbert Vane and I would explore the cave, and then whenever I liked I could prick the bubble of Mr. Tubbs's ambitions, without relating the whole strange story of the diary and the Island Queen. I was immensely pleased already by the elimination of Mr. Tubbs from the number of those who need have a finger in the golden pie. I thought that perhaps with time and patience I might coax events to play still further into my hand.

But meanwhile the cave drew me like a magnet. I jealously desired to be the first to see it, to snatch from Mr. Tubbs the honors of discovery. And I wanted to know about poor Peter--and, the doubloons that he had gone back to fetch.

But already Captain Magnus had forsaken the post of duty and departed on an unknown errand. Could I ask Cuthbert Vane to do it, too? And then I smiled a smile that was half proud. I might ask him--but he would refuse me. In Cuthbert's simple code, certain things were "done," certain others not. Among the nots was to fail in standing by a friend. And just now Cuthbert was standing by Dugald Shaw. Therefore nods and becks and wreathed smiles were vain. In Cuthbert's quiet, easy-mannered, thick-headed way he could turn his back calmly on the face of love and follow the harsh call of duty even to death. It would not occur to him not to. And he never would suspect himself of being a hero--that would be quite the nicest part of it.

And yet I knew poor Cuthbert was an exploded superstition, an anachronism, part of a vanishing order of things, and that the ideal which was replacing him was a boiler-plated monster with clock-work heart and brain, named Efficiency. And that Cuthbert must go, along with his Jacobean manor and his family ghost, and the oaks in the park, and everything else that couldn't prove its right to live except by being fine and lovely and full of garnered sweetness of the past--

At this point in my meditations the door of the cabin opened and Miss Browne came out, looking sternly resolute. Aunt Jane followed, very pink about the eyes and nose. She threw an anxious fluttering glance at Mr. Tubbs, who sat up briskly, and in a nervous manner polished with a large bandana that barren zone, his cranium, which looked torrid enough to scorch the very feet of the flies that walked on it. It was clear that on the lips of Miss Browne there hovered some important announcement, which might well be vital to the fortunes of Mr. Tubbs.

With a commanding gesture Miss Browne signaled the rest to approach. Mr. Tubbs bounced up with alacrity. Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert obeyed less promptly, but they obeyed. Meanwhile Violet waited, looking implacable as fate.

"And where is Captain Magnus?" she demanded, glancing about her.

But no one knew what had become of Captain Magnus.

As for myself, I continued to sit in the shade and tat. But I could hear with ease all that was said.

"Mr. Tubbs," began Miss Browne, "your recent claims have been matter of prolonged consideration between Miss Harding and myself. We feel--we can not but feel--that there was a harshness in your announcement of them, an apparent concentration on your own interests, ill befitting a member of this expedition. Also, that in actual substance, they were excessive. Not half, Mr. Tubbs; oh, no, not half! But one-quarter, Miss Harding and myself, as the joint heads of the Harding-Browne expedition, are inclined to think no more than the reward which is your due. We suggest, therefore, a simple way out of the difficulty, Mr. Dugald Shaw was engaged on liberal terms to find the treasure. He has not found the treasure. He has not found the slightest clue to its present whereabouts. Mr. Tubbs, on the contrary, has found a clue. It is a clue of the first importance. It is equivalent almost to the actual discovery of the chest. Therefore let Mr. Shaw, convinced I am sure by this calm presentation of the matter of the justice of such a course, resign his claim to a fourth share of the treasure in favor of Mr. Hamilton H. Tubbs, and agree to receive instead the former allotment of Mr. Tubbs, namely, one-sixteenth."

Having offered this remarkable suggestion, Miss Browne folded her arms and waited for it to bear fruit.

It did--in the enthusiastic response of Mr. Tubbs. Having already played his highest trump and missed the trick, he now found himself with an entirely fresh hand dealt to him by the obliging Miss Higglesby-Browne. The care in his countenance yielded to beaming smiles.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "To think of your takin' old H. H. that literal! O' course, havin' formed my habits in the financial centers of the country, I named a stiff price at first--a stiff price, I won't deny. But that's jest the leetle way of a man used to handlin' large affairs--nothin' else to it, I do assure you. The Old Man himself used to say, 'There's old H. H.--you'd think he'd eat the paint off a house, he'll show up that graspin' in a deal. And all the time it's jest love of the game. Let him know he's goin' to win out, and bless you, old H. H. will swing right round and fair force the profits on the other party. H. H. is slicker than soap to handle, if only you handle him right.' Can I say without hard feelin's that jest now H. H. was not handled right? Instead o' bein' joshed with, as he looked for, he was took up short, and even them which he might have expected to show confidence"--here Mr. Tubbs cast a reproachful eye at Aunt Jane--"run off with the notion that he meant jest what he said. All he'd done for this expedition, his loyalty and faith to same, was forgotten, and he was thought of as a self-seeker and Voracious Shark!" The pain of these recollections dammed the torrent of Mr. Tubbs's speech.

"Oh, Mr. Tubbs!" breathed Aunt Jane heart-brokenly, and of course a tear trickled gently down her nose, following the path of many previous tears which had already left their saline traces.

Mr. Tubbs managed in some impossible fashion to roll one eye tenderly at Aunt Jane, while keeping the other fastened shrewdly on the remainder of his audience.

"Miss Higglesby-Browne and Miss Jane Harding," he resumed, "I accept. It would astonish them as has only known H. H. on his financial side to see him agree to a reduction of profits like this without a kick. But I'm a man of impulse, I am. Get me on my soft side and a kitten ain't more impulsive than old H. H. And o' course the business of this expedition ain't jest business to me. It's--er--friendship, and--er--sentiment--in short, there's feelin's that is more than worth their weight in gold!"

At these significant words the agitation of Aunt Jane was extreme. Was it possible that Mr. Tubbs was declaring himself in the presence of others--and was a response demanded from herself--would his sensitive nature, so lately wounded by cruel suspicion, interpret her silence as fatal to his hopes? But while she struggled between maiden shyness and the fear of crushing Mr. Tubbs the conversation had swept on.

"Mr. Shaw," said Miss Browne, "you have heard Mr. Tubbs, in the interest of the expedition, liberally consent to reduce his claim by one-half. Doubtless, if only in a spirit of emulation, you will attempt to match this conduct by canceling our present agreement and consenting to another crediting you with the former sixteenth share of Mr. Tubbs."

"Don't do it, Shaw--hold the fort, old boy!" broke in Cuthbert Vane. "I say, Miss Browne, this is a bally shame!"

Miss Browne had always treated the prospective Lord Grasmere with distinguished politeness. Even now her air was mild though lofty.

"Mr. Vane, I must beg leave to remind you that the object of this expedition was yet unattained when Mr. Tubbs, by following clues ignored by others, brought success within our reach. Mr. Dugald Shaw having conspicuously failed--"

"Failed!" repeated Cuthbert, with unprecedented energy. "Failed! I say, that's too bad of you, Miss Browne. Wasn't everybody here a lot keener than old Shaw about mucking in that silly cave where those Johnnies would have had hard work to bury anything unless they were mermaids? Didn't the old chap risk his neck a dozen times a day while this Christopher Columbus stayed high and dry ashore? Suppose he did find the tombstone by stubbing his silly toes on it--so far he hasn't found the cave, much less the box of guineas or whatever those foreign chaps call their money. Let Mr. Tubbs go sit on the tombstone if he likes. Shaw and I can find the cave quite on our own, can't we, Shaw?"

"Mr. Vane," replied the still deferential Violet, "as a member of the British aristocracy, it is not to be supposed that you would view financial matters with the same eye as those of us of the Middle Classes, who, unhappily perhaps for our finer feelings, have been obliged to experience the harsh contacts of common life. Your devotion to Mr. Shaw has a romantic ardor which I can not but admire. But permit us also our enthusiasm for the perspicacity of

Mr. Tubbs, to which we owe the wealth now within our grasp."

Mr. Shaw now spoke for the first time.

"Miss Browne, I do not recognize the justice of your standpoint in this matter. I have done and am still prepared to do my best in this business of the treasure. If Mr. Tubbs will not give his information except for a bribe, I say--let him keep it. We are no worse off without it than we were before, and you were then confident of success. My intention, ma'am, is to hold you to our original agreement. I shall continue the search for the treasure on the same lines as at present."

"One moment," said Miss Browne haughtily. She had never spoken otherwise than haughtily to Mr. Shaw since the episode of the Wise Woman of Dumbiedykes. "One moment, Jane--and you, Mr. Tubbs--"

She drew them aside, and they moved off out of earshot, where they stood with their backs to us and their heads together.

It was my opportunity. Violet herself had proposed that the original agreement--the agreement which bound me to ask for no share of the treasure--should be canceled. Nothing now was necessary to the ripening of my hopes but to induce Dugald Shaw to immolate himself. Would he do so--on my bare word? There was no time to explain anything--he must trust me.

I sprang up and dashed over to the pair who stood looking gloomily out to sea. They turned in surprise and stared down, the two big men, into my flushed up-tilted face.

"Mr. Shaw," I whispered quickly, "you must do as Miss Browne wishes." In my earnestness I laid a hand upon his arm. He regarded me bewilderedly.

"You must--you must!" I urged. "You'll spoil everything if you refuse!"

The surprise in his face yielded to a look composed of many elements, but which was mainly hard and bitter.

"And still I shall refuse," he said sardonically.

"Oh, no, no," I implored, "you don't understand! I--oh, if you would only believe that I am your friend!"

His face changed subtly. It was still questioning and guarded, but with a softening in it, too.

"Why don't you believe it?" I whispered unsteadily. "Do you forget that I owe you my life?"

And at the recollection of that day in the sea-cave the scarlet burned in my cheeks and my head drooped. But I saw how the lines about his mouth relaxed. "Surely you must know that I would repay you if I could!" I hurried on. "And not by--treachery."

He laughed suddenly. "Treachery? No! I think you would always be an open foe."

"Indeed I would!" I answered with a flash of wrath. Then, as I remembered the need of haste, I spoke in an intense quick whisper. "Listen--I can't explain, there isn't time. I can only ask you to trust me--to agree to what Miss Browne wishes. Everything--you don't dream how much--depends on it!" For I felt that I would let the treasure lie hidden in the Island Queen forever rather than that Mr. Tubbs should, under the original contract, claim a share of it.

The doubt had quite left his face.

"I do trust you, little Virginia," he said gently. "Yes, I trust in your honesty, heaven knows, child. But permit me to question your wisdom in desiring to enrich our friend Tubbs."

"Enrich him--enrich him! The best I wish him is unlimited gruel in an almshouse somewhere. No! What I want is to get that wretched paper of Miss Browne's nullified. Afterward we can divide things up as we like--"

Bewilderment, shot with a gleam of half-incredulous understanding, seemed to transfix him. We stood a long moment, our eyes challenging each other, exchanging their countersign of faith and steadfastness. Then slowly he held out his hand. I laid mine in it--we stood hand in hand, comrades at last. Without more words he turned away and strode over to the council of three.

I now became aware of Cuthbert Vane, whom perplexity had carried far beyond the bounds of speech and imprisoned in a sort of torpor. He was showing faint symptoms of revival, and had got as far as "I say--?" uttered in the tone of one who finds himself moving about in worlds not realized, when the near-by group dissolved and moved rapidly toward us. Miss Browne, exultant, beaming, was in the van. She set her substantial feet down like a charger pawing the earth. You might almost have said that Violet pranced. Aunt Jane was round-eyed and twittering. Mr. Tubbs wore a look of suppressed astonishment, almost of perturbation. What's his game? was the question in the sophisticated eye of Mr. Tubbs. But the Scotchman had when he chose a perfect poker face. The great game of bluff would have suited him to a nicety. Mr. Tubbs interrogated that inexpressive countenance in vain.

Miss Browne advanced on Cuthbert Vane and seized both his hands in an ardent clasp.

"Mr. Vane," she said with solemnity, "I thank you--in the name of this expedition I thank you--for the influence you have exerted upon your friend!"

And this seemed to be to the noble youth the most stunning of all the shocks of that eventful morning.

Now came the matter of drawing up the new agreement. It was a canny Scot indeed who, acting on the hint I had just given him, finally settled its terms. In the first place, the previous agreement was declared null and void. In the second, Mr. Tubbs was to have his fourth only if the treasure were discovered through his direct agency. And it was under this condition and no other that

Dugald Shaw bound himself to relinquish his original claim. Virginia Harding signed a new renunciatory clause, but it bore only on treasure _discovered by Mr. Tubbs_. Indeed, the entire contract was of force only if Mr. Tubbs fulfilled his part of it, and fell to pieces if he did not. Which was exactly what I wanted.

Miss Browne and Mr. Tubbs demurred a little at the wording on which Mr. Shaw insisted, but Mr. Tubbs's confidence in the infallibility of the tombstone was so great that no real objection was interposed. No difficulty was made of the absence of Captain Magnus, as his interests were unaffected by the change. Space was left for his signature. Mine came last of all, as that of a mere interloper and hanger-on. I added it and handed the paper demurely across to Violet, who consigned it to an apparently bottomless pocket. Copies were to be made after lunch.

My demonstrations of joy at this happy issue of my hopes had to be confined to a smile--in which for a startled instant Violet had seemed to sense the triumph. It was still on my lips as with a general movement we rose from the table about which we had been grouped during the absorbing business of drawing up the contract. Cookie had been clamoring for us to leave, that he might spread the table for lunch. I had opened my mouth to call to him, "All right, Cookie!" when a shrill volley of barks from Crusoe shattered the stillness of the drowsy air. In the same instant the voice of Cookie, raised to a sharp note of alarm, rang through the camp:

"_My Gawd, what all dis yere mean_?"

I turned, to look into the muzzle of a rifle.

XVI

LIKE A CHAPTER FROM THE PAST

Five men had emerged from the woods behind the clearing, so quietly that they were in the center of the camp before Crusoe's shrill bark, or the outcry of the cook, warned us of their presence. By that time they had us covered. Three of them carried rifles, the other two revolvers. One of these was Captain Magnus.

Advancing a step or two before the others he ordered us to throw up our hands. Perhaps he meant only the men--but my hands and Aunt Jane's and Miss Higglesby-Browne's also went up with celerity. He grinned into our astounded faces with a wolfish baring of his yellow teeth.

"Never guessed I wasn't here jest to do the shovel work, but might have my own little side-show to bring off, hey?" he inquired of no one in particular. "Here, Slinker, help me truss 'em up."

The man addressed thrust his pistol in his belt and came forward, and with his help the hands of the Scotchman, Cuthbert Vane and Mr. Tubbs were securely tied. They were searched for arms, and the sheath-knives which Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert carried at their belts were taken away. The three prisoners were then ordered to seat

themselves in a row on the trunk of a prostrate palm.

The whole thing had happened in the strangest silence. Except for a feeble moaning from Aunt Jane, like the bleating of a sheep, which broke forth at intervals, nobody spoke or made a sound. The three riflemen in the background, standing like images with their weapons raised, looked like a well-trained chorus in an opera.

And indeed it was all extraordinarily like something on a stage. Slinker, for instance. He had a prowling, sidelong fashion of moving about, and enormous yellow mustaches like a Viking. Surely some artist in the make-up line had invented Slinker! And the burly fellow in the background, with the black whiskers--too bad he'd forgotten his earrings---

But I awoke to the horrid reality of it all as Captain Magnus, smiling his wolfish smile, turned and approached me.

"Well, boys," he remarked to his followers, who had now lowered their weapons and were standing about at ease, "here's the little pippin I was tellin' of. 'Fraid we give her a little scare bustin' in so sudden, so she ain't quite so bright and smilin' as I like to see. Its all right, girlie; you'll soon cheer up when you find out you're go'in' to be the little queen o' this camp. Things will be all your way now--so long as you treat me right." And the abominable creature thrust forth a hairy paw and deliberately chucked me under the chin.

I heard a roar from the log--and coincidently from Captain Magnus. For with the instant response of an automaton--consciously I had nothing at all to do with it--I had reached up and briskly boxed the captain's ears.

Furiously he caught my wrist. "Ah, you red-headed little devil, you'll pay for this! I ain't pretty, oh, no! I ain't a handsome mooncalf like the Honorable; I ain't got a title, nor girly pink cheeks, nor fine gentleman ways. No walks with the likes o' me, no tatey-tates in the woods--oh, no! Well, it's goin' to be another story now, girlie. I guess you can learn to like my looks, with a little help from my fist now and then, jest as well as you done the Honorable's. I guess it won't be long before I have you crawlin' on your knees to me for a word o' kindness. I guess--"

"Aw, stow that soft stuff, Magnus," advised Slinker. "You can do your spoonin' with the gal later on. We're here to git that gold, and don't you forget it. Plenty o' time afterwards to spark the wimmen."

"That's the talk," chimed in Blackbeard. "Don't run us on a lee shore for the sake of a skirt. Skirts is thicker'n herring in every port, ain't they?"

"I got a score to settle with this one," growled Magnus sullenly, but his grasp loosened on my arm, and I slipped from him and fled to Aunt Jane--yes, to Aunt Jane--and clung to her convulsively. The poor little woman was crying, of course, making a low inarticulate whimper like a frightened child. Miss Higglesby-Browne seemed to have petrified. Her skin had a withered look, and a fine network of lines showed on it, suddenly clear,

like a tracery on parchment. Beyond her I saw the face of Dugald Shaw, gray with a steely wrath. A gun had been trained anew on him and Cuthbert, and the bearer thereof was arguing with them profanely. I suppose the prisoners had threatened outbreak at the spectacle of the chin-chucking.

No one had bothered to secure Cookie, and he knelt among the pots and pans of his open-air kitchen, pouring forth petitions in a steady stream. Blackboard, who seemed a jovial brute, burst into a loud guffaw.

"Ha, ha! Look at old Soot-and-Cinders gittin' hisself ready for glory!" He approached the negro and aimed at him a kick which Cookie, arising with unexpected nimbleness, contrived to dodge. "Looky here, darky, git busy dishin' up the grub, will you? I could stand one good feed after the forecandle slops we been livin' on."

Blackbeard, whom his companions addressed indiscriminately as "Captain," or "Tony," seemed to exercise a certain authority. He went over to the prisoners on the log and inspected their bonds.

"You'll do; can't git loose nohow," he announced. Then, with a savage frown, "But no monkey business. First o' that I see, its a dose o' cold lead for youse, savvy?"

He turned to us women.

"Well, chickabiddies, we ain't treated you harsh, I hope? Now I don't care about tyin' youse up, in case we can help it, so jest be good girls, and I'll let youse run around loose for a while."

But Magnus struck in with an oath.

"Loose? You're turnin' soft, I say. The future Mrs. M. there--which I mean to make her if she behaves right--she's a handful, she is. There ain't no low trick she won't play on us if she gets the chance. Better tie her up, I say."

"Magnus," responded Tony with severity, "it'd make a person think to hear you talk that you wasn't no gentleman. If you can't keep little Red-top in order without you tie her, why, then hand her over to a guy what can. I bet I wouldn't have a speck o' trouble with her--her and me would git along as sweet as two turtle-doves."

"You dry up, Tony," said Magnus, lowering. "I'll look after my own affairs of the heart. Anyway, here's them two old hens what have been makin' me sick with their jabber and nonsense all these weeks. Ain't I goin' to have a chance to get square?"

"Here, youse!" struck in Slinker, "quit your jawin'! Here's a feed we ain't seen the like of in weeks."

Tony thereupon ordered the women to sit down on the ground in the shade and not move under penalty of "gettin' a wing clipped." We obeyed in silence and looked on while the pirates with wolfish voracity devoured the meal which had been meant for us. They had pocket-flasks with them, and as they attacked them with frequency the talk grew louder and wilder. By degrees it was possible to

comprehend the extraordinary disaster which had befallen us, at least in a sketchy outline of which the detail was filled in later. Tony, it appeared, was the master of a small power-schooner which had been fitting out in San Francisco for a filibustering trip to the Mexican coast. His three companions were the crew. None was of the old hearty breed of sailors, but wharf-rats pure and simple, city-dregs whom chance had led to follow the sea. Tony, in whom one detected a certain rough force and ability, was an Italian, an outlaw specimen of the breed which mans the fishing fleet putting forth from the harbor of San Francisco. When and where he and Magnus had been friends I do not know. But no sooner had the wisdom of Miss Browne imparted the great secret to her chance acquaintance of the New York wharves, than he had communicated with his old pal Tony. The power-schooner with her unlawful cargo stole out through the gate, made her delivery in the Mexican port, took on fresh supplies, and stood away for Leeward Island. The western anchorage had received and snugly hidden her. Captain Magnus, meanwhile, by means of a mirror flashed from Lookout, had maintained communication with his friends, and even visited them under cover of the supposed shooting expedition. And now, while we had been striving to overcome the recalcitrancy of Mr. Tubbs, Captain Magnus had taken a short cut to the same end. You felt that the secret of Mr. Tubbs would be extracted, if need be, by no delicate methods.

But Mr. Tubbs's character possessed none of that unreasonable obstinacy which would make harsh measures necessary under such conditions. His countenance, as the illuminating conversation of the pirates had proceeded, lost the speckled appearance which had characterized it at the height of his terrors. Something like his normal hue returned. He sat up straighter, moistened his dry lips, and looked around upon us, yes, even upon Aunt Jane and Miss Higglesby-Browne, with whom he had been so lately and so tenderly reconciled, with a sidelong, calculating glance. After the pirates had eaten, the prisoners on the log were covered with a rifle and their hands untied, while Cookie, in a lugubrious silence made eloquent by his rolling eyes, passed around among us the remnants of the food. No one can be said to have eaten with appetite except Mr. Tubbs, who received his portion with wordy gratitude and devoured it with seeming gusto. The pirates, full-fed, with pipes in mouths, were inclined to be affable and jocular. "Feeding the animals," as Slinker called it, seemed to afford them much agreeable diversion. Even Magnus had lost in a degree his usual sullenness, and was wreathed in simian smiles. The intense terror and revulsion which he inspired in me kept my unwilling eyes constantly wandering in his direction. Yet under all the terror was a bedrock confidence that there was, there must be somehow in the essence of things, an eternal rightness which would keep me safe from Captain Magnus. And as I looked across at Dugald Shaw and met for an instant his steady watchful eyes, I managed a swift little smile--a rather wan smile, I dare say, but still a smile.

Cuthbert Vane caught, so to speak, the tail of it, and was electrified. I saw his lips form at Mr. Shaw's ear the words, Wonderful little sport, by jove! For some time after our capture by the pirates Cuthbert's state had been one of settled incredulity. Even when they tied his hands he had continued to contemplate the invaders as illusions. It was, this remarkable episode, altogether a thing without precedent--and what was that

but another name for the impossible? And then slowly, by painful degrees--you saw them reflected in his candid face--it grew upon him that it was precisely the impossible, the unprecedented, that was happening.

A curious stiffening came over Cuthbert Vane. For the first time in my knowledge of him he showed the consciousness--instead of only the sub-consciousness--of the difference between Norman blood and the ordinary sanguine fluid. His shoulders squared; he lost his habitual easy lounge and sat erect and tall. Something stern and aquiline showed through the smooth beauty of his face, so that you thought of effigies of crusading knights stretched on their ancient tombs in High Staunton church. He was their true descendant after all, this slow, calm, gentle-mannered Cuthbert. It was a young lion that I had been playing with, and the claws were there, strong and terrible in their velvet sheath.

Captain Tony, having finished his pipe, knocked the ashes out against the heel of his boot and put the pipe in his pocket.

"Well," he said, stretching, "I'd ruther have a nap, but business is business, so let's get down to it. Which o' them guys has the line on the stuff, Magnus?"

"Old Baldy, here," returned Magnus, with a nod at Mr. Tubbs. "Old Washtubs I call him generally, ha, ha!"

"Then looky here, Washtubs," said Tony, addressing Mr. Tubbs with sudden sternness, "maybe you could bluff these here soft guys, but we're a different breed o' cats, we are. Whatever you know, you'll come through with it and come quick, or it'll be the worse for your hide, see?"

Mr. Tubbs rose from the log with promptness.

"Captain," he said earnestly, "from long experience in the financial centers of the country, I have got to be a man what understands human nature. The minute I looked at you, I seen it in your eye that there wasn't no use in tryin' to bluff you. What's more, I don't want to. Once he gets with a congenial crowd, there ain't a feller anywheres that will do more in the cause o' friendship than old Hamilton H. Tubbs. And you are a congenial crowd, you boys--gosh, but you do look good to me after the bunch o' stiffs I been playin' up to here! All I ask is, to let me in on it with you, and I'll be glad to put you wise to the best tricks of a sly old fox who ain't ever been caught yet without two holes to his burrow. I won't ask no half, nor no quarter, either, though I jest signed up for that amount with the old girl here. But give me freedom, and a bunch o' live wires like you boys! I've near froze into a plaster figure o' Virtue, what with talkin' like a Sunday-school class, and sparkin' one old maid, and makin' out like I wouldn't melt butter with the other. So H. H. will ship along of you, mates, and we'll off to the China coast somewheres where the spendin' is good and the police not too nosy, and try how far a trunkful of doubloons will go!"

With a choky little gurgle in her throat Aunt Jane fell limply against me. It was too much. All day long she had been tossed back and forth like a shuttlecock by the battledore of emotion.

She had borne the shock of Mr. Tubbs's sordid greed for gold, his disloyalty to the expedition, his coldness to herself; she had been shaken by the tender stress of the reconciliation, had been captured by pirates, and now suffered the supreme blow of this final revelation of the treachery of Tubbs. To hear her romance described as the sparking of an old maid--and by the sparker! From Miss Higglesby-Browne had come a snort of fury, but she said nothing, having apparently no confidence in the effect of oratory on pirates. She did not even exhort Aunt Jane, but left it to me to sustain my drooping aunt as best I could.

As Mr. Tubbs made his whole-hearted and magnanimous proposal Captain Tony opened his small black eyes and contemplated him with attention. At the conclusion he appeared to meditate. Then he glanced round upon his fellows.

"What say, boys? Shall we ship old Washtubs on the schooner and let him have his fling along with us? Eh?" And as Captain Tony uttered these words the lid of his left eye eclipsed for an instant that intelligent optic.

From the pirates came a scattering volley of assents. "All right--hooray for old Washtubs--sure, close the deal."

"All right, Washtubs, the boys are willing. So I guess, though this island is the very lid of the hot place, and when I come again it's going to be with an iceberg in tow to keep the air cooled off, I guess we better be moving toward that chest of doubloons."

It was arranged that Slinker and a cross-eyed man named Horny should remain at the camp on guard. As a measure of precaution Cookie, too, was bound, and Aunt Jane, Miss Browne and I ordered into the cabin. The three remaining pirates, armed with our spades and picks and dispensing a great deal of jocular profanity, set out for the cave under the guidance of Mr. Tubbs.

Thankful as I was for the departure of Captain Magnus, I underwent torments in the stifling interior of the cabin. Aunt Jane wept piteously. I had almost a fellow-feeling with Miss Higglesby-Browne when she relapsed from her rigidity for a moment and turning on Aunt Jane fiercely ordered her to be still. This completed the wreck of Aunt Jane's universe. Its two main props had now fallen, and she was left sitting solitary amid the ruins. She subsided into a lachrymose heap in the corner of the cabin, where I let her remain for the time, it was really such a comfort to have her out of the way. At last I heard a faint moan:

"Virginia!"

I went to her. "Yes, auntie?"

"Virginia," she murmured weakly, "I think I shall not live to leave the island, even if I am not--not executed. In fact, I have a feeling now as though the end were approaching. I have always known that my heart was not strong, even if your Aunt Susan _did_ call it indigestion. But oh, my dear child, it is not my digestion, it is my heart that has been wounded! To have reposed such confidence in a Serpent! To realize that I might have been impaled upon its fangs! Oh, my dear, faithful child, what would I

have done if you had not clung to me although I permitted Serpents to turn me from you! But I am cruelly punished. All I ask is that some day--when you are married and happy, dear--you will remove from this desolate spot the poor remains of her who--of her who--" Sobs choked Aunt Jane's utterance.

"Jane--" began Miss Higglesby-Browne.

"I was speaking to my niece," replied Aunt Jane with unutterable dignity from her corner. Her small features had all but disappeared in her swollen face, and her hair had slipped down at a rakish angle over one eye. But, of course, being Aunt Jane, she must choose this moment to be queenly.

"There, there, auntie," I said soothingly, "of course you are not going to leave your bones on this island. If you did, you know, you and Bill Halliwell might ha'n't around together--think how cozy! (Here Aunt Jane gave a convulsive shudder.) As to my being married, if you were betting just now on anybody's chances they would have to be Captain Magnus's, wouldn't they?"

"Good gracious, Virginia!" shrieked Aunt Jane faintly. But I went on relentlessly, determined to distract her mind from thoughts of her approaching end.

"All things considered, I suppose I really ought to ask you to put my affairs in order when you get back. If I am carried off by the pirates, naturally I shall have to jump overboard at once, though I dislike the idea of drowning, and especially of being eaten by sharks. Would you mind putting up a little headstone--it needn't cost much--in the family plot, with just 'Virginia' on it? And anything of mine that you don't want yourself I'd like Bess to have for the baby, please. Ask her when the little duck is old enough to tell her my sad story--"

By this time Aunt Jane was sobbing loudly and waving her little hands about in wild beseeching.

"Oh, my precious girl, a headstone! My love, would I grudge you a monument --all white marble--little angels--'From her heart-broken aunt'? Oh, why, why are we not safe at home together? Why was I lured away to wander about the world with perfect strangers? Why--"

"Jane!" broke in Miss Browne again in awful tones. But at that moment the door of the cabin opened and the face of Slinker peered in.

"Say," he remarked, "there ain't no sense in you girls stayin' cooped up here that I see. I guess me and Horny can stand you off if you try to rush us. Come out and cool off a little."

The great heat of the day was over and the sun already dropping behind the peak of the island. Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert had been allowed to sit in the shade, and I thought their wrists were not too tightly bound for comfort. Cookie had been released, and under the eye of Horny was getting supper. Crusoe had earlier in the day received a kick in the ribs from Captain Magnus, fortunately too much occupied with the prisoners to pursue his vengeance further,

and had fled precipitately, to my enormous relief. The dog was quite wise enough to know that he would help me best by keeping out of the clutches of our common foe. I hoped he had gone back to his solitary pig-chasing, though I thought I had caught a glimpse of him once at the edge of the wood. But at least he knew better than to venture into the clearing.

I tried to pass in a casual manner close to Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert--who looked more of a crusading Norman than ever--in hopes of a whispered word, but was impeded by Aunt Jane, who clung to me tottering. So I led her to a seat and deposited her, with the sympathetic assistance of Slinker.

"Now, now, old girl, cheer up!" he admonished her. "Between you and me, old Washtubs ain't worth crying over. Sooner or later he'd of give you the slip, no matter how tight a rein you kep' on him."

As Slinker turned away after this effort at consolation he came face to face with Miss Higglesby-Browne. I suppose in the stress of surprising and capturing the camp he had not been struck with her peculiarities. Just now, between the indignity of her captive state and the insubordination of Aunt Jane, Miss Browne's aspect was considerably grimmer than usual. Slinker favored her with a stare, followed by a prolonged whistle.

"Say," he remarked to me in a confidential undertone, though pitched quite loud enough for Miss Browne's ears, "is it real? Would it have bendable j'int's, now, same as you and me?"

Miss Browne whirled upon him.

"Old your tongue, you 'orrid brute!" she shrieked.

So, in the twinkling of an eye, Miss Higglesby-Browne, fallen forever from her high estate, was strewn in metaphorical fragments at our feet. I turned away, feeling it time to draw the veil of charity upon the scene. Not so Slinker. He looked about him carefully on the ground.

"Lady drop anything?" he inquired solicitously.

What might have transpired, had Miss Higglesby-Browne had time to gather breath, I dare not think, but just then there came from the woods the sound of footsteps and voices, and the three pirates and Mr. Tubbs entered the clearing. A thrill ran through the camp. Captors and captives forgot all else but the great, the burning question--had the treasure been discovered? And I am sure that no one was so thrilled as I, although in my mind the question took another form.

For now I was going to know what had been waiting for me there in the cave, when I stood yesterday at its black entrance, afraid to go in.

FROM DEAD HANDS

At the head of the file, Captain Tony advanced through the clearing, and what with his flowing black beard, his portly form, and a certain dramatic swagger which he possessed, he looked so entirely Italian and operatic that you expected to hear him at any moment burst out in a sonorous basso. With a sweeping gesture he flung down upon the table two brown canvas bags, which opened and discharged from gaping mouths a flood of golden coins.

His histrionic instinct equal to the high demands of the moment, Captain Tony stood with folded arms and gazed upon us with a haughty and exultant smile.

Slinker and the cross-eyed man shouted aloud. They ran and clutched at the coins with a savage greed.

"Gold, gold--the real stuff! It's the doubloons all right--where's the rest of 'em?" These cries broke from Slinker and Horny confusedly as the gold slid jingling between their eager fingers.

"The rest of 'em is--where they is," pronounced Tony oracularly. "Somewheres in the sand of the cave, of course. We'll dig 'em up to-morrow morning.

"What was the point in not digging 'em all up while you was about it?" demanded Slinker, lowering. "What was the good o' digging up jest these here couple o' bag's and quitting?"

"Because we didn't dig 'em up," responded Tony darkly. "Because these was all ready and waiting. Because all we had to do was to say 'Thankee,' to the feller that handed 'em out."

"I say," interposed one of the party nervously, "what's the good of that kind of talk? They ain't any sense in hunting trouble, that ever I heard of!" He glanced over his shoulder uneasily.

The rest burst out in a guffaw.

"Chris is scared. He's been a-going along looking behind him ever since. Chris will have bad dreams to-night--he'll yell if a owl hoots." But I thought there was a false note in the laughter of more than one.

"Oh, of course," remarked Slinker with indignant irony, "me and Horny ain't interested in this at all. We jest stayed bumming round camp here 'cause we was tired. When you're through with this sort of bunk and feel like getting down to business, why jest mention it, and maybe if we ain't got nothing better to do we'll listen to you."

"I was jest telling you, wasn't I?" demanded Tony. "Only that fool Chris had to butt in. We got these here bags of doubloons, as I says, without havin' to dig for 'em--oncet we had found the cave, which it's no thanks to old Washtubs we ain't looking for it yet. We got these here bags right out of the fists of a skeleton. Most of him was under a rock, which had fell from the roof and pinned him down amidships. Must of squashed him like a beetle, I guess. But he'd still kep' his hold on the bags." I turned aside, for

fear that any one should see how white I was. Much too white to be accounted for even by this grisly story. To the rest, these poor bones might indeed bear mute witness to a tragedy, but a tragedy lacking outlines, vague, impersonal, without poignancy. To me, they told with dreadful clearness the last sad chapter of the tale of Peter, Peter who had made me so intimately his confidante, whose love and hopes and solitary strivings I knew all about. Struck down in the moment of his triumph by a great stupid lump of soulless stone, by a blind, relentless mechanism which had been at work from the beginning, timing that rock to fall--just then. Not the moment before, not the moment after, out of an eternity of moments, but at that one instant when Peter stooped for the last of his brown bags--and then I rejected this, and knew that there was nothing stupid or blind about it--and wondered whether it were instead malicious, and whether all might have been well with Peter if he had obeyed the voice that bade him leave the crucifix for Bill--

Vaguely I heard around me a babble of exclamations and conjectures. Murmurs of interest rose even from our captive band. Then came Slinker's voice, loud with sudden fear:

"Say, you don't suppose the--the Bones would of got away with the rest of the coin somehow, do you?" he demanded.

"Got away with it?" Tony contemptuously thrust aside the possibility. "Got away with it how? He sure didn't leave the island with it, did he? Would he of dug it up from one place jest to bury it in another? Huh! Must of wanted to work if he did! Now my notion is that this happened to one of the guys that was burying the gold, and that the rest jest left him there for a sort of scarecrow to keep other people out of the cave."

"But the gold?" protested Slinker. "They wouldn't leave that for a scarecrow, would they?"

"Maybe not," admitted Tony, "but suppose that feller died awful slow, and went on hollering and clutching at the bags? And they couldn't of got that rock off'n him without a block and tackle, or done much to make things easy for him if they had, him being jest a smear, as you may say. Well, that cave wouldn't be a pleasant place to stay in, would it? And no one would have the nerve to snatch them bags away to bury 'em, 'cause a dying man, especially when he dies hard, can have an awful grip. So what they done was just to shovel the sand in on the gold they'd stowed away and light out quick. And what we got to do to-morrow is to go there and dig it up."

If the ingenuity of this reasoning was more remarkable than its logic, the pirates were not the men to find fault with it. Indeed, how many human hopes have been bolstered up with arguments no sounder? Desire is the most eloquent of advocates, and the five ruffians had only to listen to its voice to enjoy in anticipation all the fruits of their iniquitous schemes. The sight of the golden coins intoxicated them. They played with the doubloons like children, jingling them in their calloused palms, guessing at weight and value, calculating their equivalent in the joy of living. Laughter and oaths resounded. Mr. Tubbs, with a somewhat anxious air, endeavored to keep himself well to the fore, claiming

a share in the triumph with the rest. There was only the thinnest veil of concealment over the pirates' mockery. "Old Washtubs" was ironically encouraged in his role of boon companion. His air of swaggering recklessness, of elderly dare-deviltry, provoked uproarious amusement. When they sat down to supper Mr. Tubbs was installed at the head of the table. They hailed him as the discoverer who had made their fortunes. From their talk it was clear that there had been much difficulty about finding the cave, and that for a time Mr. Tubbs's position had been precarious. Finally Captain Magnus had stumbled upon the entrance.

"Jest in time," as he grimly reminded Mr. Tubbs, "to save you a header over the cliff."

"Ha, ha!" cackled Mr. Tubbs hysterically, "you boys will have your little joke, eh? Knew well enough you couldn't get along without the old man, didn't you? Knew you was goin' to need an old financial head to square things in certain quarters--a head what understands how to slip a little coin into the scales o' justice to make 'em tilt the right way. Oh, you can't fool the old man, he, he!"

While the marauders enjoyed their supper, the women prisoners were bidden to "set down and stay sot," within sweep of Captain Tony's eye. Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert Vane still held the position they had occupied all afternoon, with their backs propped against a palm tree. Occasionally they exchanged a whisper, but for the most part were silent, their cork helmets jammed low over their watchful eyes. I was deeply curious to know what Mr. Shaw had made of the strange story of the skeleton in the cave. He could hardly have accepted Captain Tony's explanation of it, which displayed, indeed, an imperfect knowledge of the legend of the Bonny Lass. Might not the Scotchman, by linking this extraordinary discovery with my unexplained request of him this morning, have arrived already at some glimmering of the truth? I hoped so, and longed to impart to him my own sure knowledge that the confident expectations of the freebooters for the morrow were doomed to disappointment. There seemed a measure of comfort in this assurance, for our moment of greatest peril well might be that in which the pirates, with the gold in their possession and on the point of fleeing from the island, recalled the respectable because so truthful maxim that dead men tell no tales. Therefore in the postponement of the crucial moment lay our best hope of rescue or escape.

On the other hand, I fancied them returning from the cave surly and disappointed, ready to vent their wrath on us. All, except the unspeakable Magnus, had shown so far a rough good nature, even amusement at our plight, but you felt the snarl at the corner of the grinning lips. You knew they would be undependable as savages or vicious children, who find pleasure in inflicting pain. And then there was always my own hideous danger as the favored of the wolfish captain--

And I wondered, desperately, if I might buy safety for us all at the price of the secret of the Island Queen, if a promise from the five scoundrels around the table would have more meaning than their wild boasts and shoutings now?

And now the night that I unutterably dreaded was upon us. But the

pirates still thought of nothing but the gold. They had exhausted their own portable supplies of liquor, and were loud in their denunciations of our bone-dry camp, as they termed it. Mr. Tubbs enlarged upon the annoyance which Mr. Shaw's restrictions in this matter had been to him, and regretted that he had long ago exhausted the small amount of spirituous refreshment which he had been able to smuggle in. Tony, however, was of another mind. "And a good thing, too," he declared, "that you guys can't booze yourselves blind before morning, or there wouldn't be much gold took out of that there cave to-morrow. Once we make port somewheres with that chest of treasure aboard you can pour down enough to irrigate the Mojave Desert if you like."

It was Tony, too, who intercepted a tentative movement of Captain Magnus in my direction, and ordered me into the cabin with my aunt and Miss Browne. Through the walls of the hut we heard loud and eager talk of the morrow and its certain golden harvest as the pirates made their dispositions for the night. Then the voices trailed off sleepily and silence succeeded, broken only by the ceaseless murmur of the waves around the island.

XVIII

OF WHICH COOKIE IS THE HERO

Next morning I came out of the hut in time to see Mr. Shaw and his companion in duress led forth from the sleeping quarters which they had shared with their captors. They were moored as before to a palm tree, by a rope having a play of two or three feet, and their hands unbound while they made a hasty breakfast under the eye of a watchful sentinel. Then their wrists were tied again, not painfully, but with a firmness which made any slipping of their bonds impossible.

While the pirates were breakfasting a spirited dispute took place among them as to who should go to the treasure cave and who stay in camp to guard the prisoners. Slinker and Horny urged with justice that as they had missed all the excitement of the preceding day it was their turn to visit the cave. There not only the probable rapture of exhuming the chest awaited them, but the certain privilege of inspecting "the Bones." This ghastly relic seemed to exercise an immense fascination upon their imaginations, a fascination not unmingled with superstitious dread. The right to see the Bones, then, Slinker and Horny passionately claimed. Tony supported them, and it ended with Chris and Captain Magnus being told off as our guards for the morning.

At this Chris raised a feeble lamentation, but he was evidently a person whose objections nobody was accustomed to heed. Captain Magnus, who might with plausibility have urged claims superior to those of all the rest, assented to the arrangement with a willingness which filled me with boding. I had caught his restless furtive eye fixed gloatingly upon me more than once. I saw that he was aware of my terror, and exulted in it, and took a feline pleasure in playing me, as it were, and letting me realize by slow degrees what his power over me would be when he chose finally to

exert it. My best hope for the present, once the merciful or prudent Tony was out of sight, lay in this disposition of my tormentor to sit quiescent and anticipate the future. Nevertheless, in leaving the cabin I had slipped into my blouse a small penknife which I had found in Aunt Jane's bag. It was quite new, and I satisfied myself that the blades were keen. My own large sheath-knife and my revolver I had been deprived of at the suggestion of the thoughtful Magnus. I had surrendered them unprotestingly, fearful of all things that my possessions might be ransacked and Peter's diary, though hidden with much art at the bottom of a bag, be brought to light. For I might yet sell the secret of the Island Queen at a price which should redeem us all.

Unobtrusively clutching for comfort at the penknife in my blouse, I watched the departure of the pirates, including my protector Tony. They had taken Mr. Tubbs with them, although he had magnanimously offered to remain behind and help guard the camp. Evidently his experience of the previous day had not filled him with confidence in his new friends. It might be quite possible that he intended, if left behind, to turn his coat again and assist us in a break for liberty. If so, he was defeated by the perspicacious Tony, who observed that when he found a pal that suited him as well as Washtubs he liked to keep him under his own eye. With a spade over his reluctant shoulder, and many a dubious backward glance, Mr. Tubbs followed the file into the woods.

Aunt Jane had a bad headache, and as nobody objected she had remained in the cabin. Miss Browne and I had been informed by Tony that we might do as we liked so long as we did not attempt to leave the clearing. Already Violet had betaken herself to a camp-chair in the shade and was reading a work entitled *Thoughts on the Involute Spirality of the Immaterial*. Except for the prisoners tied to the palm tree, the camp presented superficially a scene of peace. Cookie busied himself with a great show of briskness in his kitchen. Because of the immense circumspection of his behavior he was being allowed a considerable degree of freedom. He served his new masters apparently as zealously as he had served us, but enveloped in a portentous silence. "Yes, sah--no, sah," were the only words which Cookie in captivity had been heard to utter. Yet from time to time I had caught a glance of dark significance from Cookie's rolling eye, and I felt that he was loyal, and that this enforced servitude to the unkempt fraternity of pirates was a degradation which touched him to the quick.

I had followed the example of Miss Higglesby-Browne as regards the camp-chair and the book. What the book was I have not the least idea, but I perused it with an appearance of profound abstraction which I hoped might discourage advances on the part of Captain Magnus. Also I made sure that the penknife was within instant reach. Meanwhile my ears, and at cautious intervals my eyes, kept me informed of the movements of our guards.

For a considerable time the two ruffians, lethargic after an enormous breakfast, lay about idly in the shade and smoked. As I listened to their lazy, fragmentary conversation vast gulfs of mental vacuity seemed to open before me. I wondered whether after all wicked people were just stupid people--and then I thought of Aunt Jane--who was certainly not wicked--

As the heat increased a voice of lamentation broke from Chris. He was dry--dry enough to drink up the condemned ocean. No, he didn't want spring water, which Cookie obsequiously tendered him; he wanted a _drink_ --wouldn't anybody but a fool nigger know that? There was plenty of the real stuff aboard the schooner, on the other side of the--adjective--island. Why had they, with incredible lack of forethought, brought along nothing but their pocket flasks? Why hadn't they sent the adjective nigger back for more? Where was the bottle or two that had been rooted out last night from the medical stores? Empty? Every last drop gone down somebody's greedy gullet? The adjectives came thick and fast as Chris hurled the bottle into the bay, where it swam bobbingly upon the ripples. Captain Magnus agreed with the gist of Chris's remarks, but deprecated, in a truly philosophical spirit, their unprofitable heat. There wasn't any liquor, so what was the good of making an adjective row? Hadn't he endured the equivalent of Chris's present sufferings for weeks? He was biding his time, he was. Plenty of drink by and by, plenty of all that makes life soft and easy. He bet there wouldn't many hit any higher spots than him. He bet there was one little girl that would be looked on as lucky, in case she was a good little girl and encouraged him to show his natural kindness. And I was favored with a blood-curdling leer from across the camp, of which I had put as much as possible between myself and the object of my dread.

But now, like a huge black Ganymede, appeared Cookie, bearing cups and a large stone crock.

"It suhtinly am a fact, Mistah Chris, sah," said Cookie, "dat dey is a mighty unspirituous fluidity 'bout dis yere spring watah. Down war I is come from no pussons of de Four Hund'ed ain't eveh 'customed to partake of such. But the sassiety I has been in lately round dis yere camp ain't of de convivulous ordah; ole Cookie had to keep it dark dat he got his li'le drop o' comfort on de side. Dis yere's only home-made stuff, sah. 'Tain't what I could offah to a gennelmun if so be I is got the makin's of a genuwine old-style julep what is de beverage of de fust fam'lies. But bein' as it is, it am mighty coolin', sah, and it got a li'le kick to it--not much, but jes' 'bout enough to make a gennelmun feel lak he is one."

Cookie's tones dripped humility and propitiation. He offered the brimming cup cringingly to the pale-eyed, red-nosed Chris, who reached for it with alacrity, drank deep, smacked his lips meditatively, and after a moment passed the cup back.

"'Tain't so worse," he said approvingly. "Anyhow, it's _drink_!"

Magnus suddenly began to laugh.

"S'elp me, it's the same dope what laid out the Honorable!" he chortled. "Here, darky, let's have a swig of it!"

Cookie complied, joining respectfully in the captain's mirth.

"I guess you-all is got stronger haids den dat young gennelmun!" he remarked. "Dis yere ole niggah has help hissef mighty freely and dat Prohibitionist Miss Harding ain't eveh found it out. Fac' is, it am puffeckly harmless 'cept when de haid is weak."

False, false Cookie! Black brother in perfidy to Mr. Tubbs! One friend the less to be depended on if a chance for freedom ever came to us! A hot flush of surprise and anger dyed my cheeks, and I felt the indignant pang of faith betrayed. I had been as sure of Cookie's devotion as of Crusoe's--which reminded me that the little dog had not returned to camp since he fled before the onslaught of the vengeful captain.

Cookie refilled the pirates' cups, and set the crock beside them on the ground.

"In case you gennelmun feels yo'selfs a li'le thursty later on," he remarked. He was retiring, when Captain Magnus called to him.

"Blackie, this ain't bad. It's coolin', but thin--a real nice ladylike sort of drink, I should say. Suppose you take a swig over to Miss Jinny there with my compliments--I'm one to always treat a lady generous if she gives me half a chance."

Obediently Cookie hastened for another cup, set it on a tray, and approached me with his old-time ornate manner. I faced him with a withering look, but, unmindful, he bowed, presenting me the cup, and interposing his bulky person between me and the deeply-quaffing pirates. At the same time his voice reached me, pitched in a low and anxious key.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Miss Jinny, spill it out! It am mighty powerful dope--it done fumented twice as long as befo'--it am boun' to give dat trash de blind-staggahs sho'tly!"

Instantly I understood, and a thrill of relief and of hope inexpressible shot through me. I raised to the troubled black face a glance which I trust was eloquent--it must needs have been to express the thankfulness I felt. Cookie responded with a solemn and convulsive wink--and I put the cup to my lips and after a brief parade of drinking passed it back to Cookie, spilling the contents on the ground en route.

Cookie retired with his tray in his most impressive cake-walk fashion, and in passing announced to Captain Magnus that "Miss Jinny say she mos' suhtinly am obligated to de gennelmun to' de refreshment of dis yere acidulous beverage." Which bare-faced mendacity provoked a loud roar of amusement from the sentinels, who were still sampling the cooling contents of the stone crock.

"Learning to like what I do already, hey?" guffawed the captain, and he called on Chris to drain another cup with him to the lady of his choice.

I have believed since that dragging, interminable time which I now lived through, that complete despair, where you rest quite finally on bedrock and have nothing to dread in the way of further tumbles, must be a much happier state than the dreadful one of oscillating between hope and fear. For a leaden-footed eternity, it seemed to me, I oscillated, longing for, yet dreading, the signs that Cookie's powerful dope had begun to work upon our guards--for might not the first symptoms be quite different from the anticipated blind staggers? Fancy a murderous maniac pair reeling about the

clearing, with death-vomiting revolvers and gleaming knives!

And then suddenly time, which had dragged so slowly, appeared to gallop, and the morning to be fleeing past, so that every wave that broke upon the beach was the footfalls of the returning pirates. Long, long before that thirsty, garrulous pair grew still and torpid their companions must return--

And I saw Cookie, his stratagem discovered, dangling from a convenient tree.

Gradually the rough disjointed talk of the sailors began to languish. Covertly watching, I saw that Chris's head had begun to droop. His body, propped comfortably against a tree, sagged a little. The hand that held the cup was lifted, stretched out in the direction of the enticing jar, then forgetting its errand fell heavily. After a few spasmodic twitchings of the eyelids and uneasy grunts, Chris slumbered.

Captain Magnus was of tougher fiber. But he, too, grew silent and there was a certain meal-sack limpness about his attitude. His dulled eyes stared dreamily. All at once with a jerk he roused himself, turned over, and administered to the sleeping Chris a prod with his large boot.

"Hey, there, wake up! What right you got to be asleep at the switch?" But Chris only breathed more heavily.

Captain Magnus himself heaved a tremendous yawn, settled back in greater comfort against his sustaining tree, and closed his eyes. I waited, counting the seconds by the beating of the blood in my ears. In the background Cookie hovered apprehensively. Plainly he would go on hovering unless loud snores from the pirates gave him assurance. For myself, I sat fingering my penknife, wondering whether I ought to rush over and plunge it into the sleepers' throats. This would be heroic and practical, but unpleasant. If, on the other hand, I merely tried to free the prisoners and Captain Magnus woke, what then? The palm where they were tied was a dozen yards from me, much nearer to the guards, and within range of even their most languid glance. Beyond the prisoners was Miss Browne, glaring uncomprehendingly over the edge of her book. There was no help in Miss Browne.

I left my seat and stole on feet which seemed to stir every leaf and twig to loud complaint toward the captive pair. Tense, motionless, with burning eyes, they waited. There was a movement from Captain Magnus; he yawned, turned and muttered. I stood stricken, my heart beating with loud thumps against my ribs. But the captain's eyes remained closed.

"Virginia--quick, Virginia!" Dugald Shaw was stretching out his bound hands to me, and I had dropped on my knees before him and begun to cut at the knotted cords. They were tough strong cords, and I was hacking at them feverishly when something bounded across the clearing and flung itself upon me. Crusoe, of course!--and wild with the joy of reunion. I strangled a cry of dismay, and with one hand tried to thrust him off while I cut through the rope with the other.

"Down, Crusoe!" I kept desperately whispering. But Crusoe was unused to whispered orders. He kept bounding up on me, intent to fulfil an unachieved ambition of licking my ear. Cuthbert Vane tried, under his breath, to lure him away. But Crusoe's emotions were all for me, and swiftly becoming uncontrollable they burst forth in a volley of shrill yelps.

A loud cry answered them. It came from Captain Magnus, who had scrambled to his feet and was staggering across the clearing. One hand was groping at his belt--it was flourished in the air with the gleam of a knife in it--and staggering and shouting the captain came on.

"Ah, you would, would you? I'll teach you--but first I settle _him_, the porridge-eatin' Scotch swine--"

The reeling figure with the knife was right above me. I sprang up, in my hand the little two-inch weapon which was all I had for my defense--and Dugald Shaw's. There were loud noises in my ears, the shouting of men, and a shrill continuous note which I have since realized came from the lungs of Miss Higglesby-Browne. Magnus made a lunge forward--the arm with the knife descended. I caught it--wrenched at it frantically--striving blindly to wield my little penknife, whether or not with deadly intent I don't know to this day. He turned on me savagely, and the penknife was whirled from my hand as he caught my wrist in a terrible clutch.

All I remember after that is the terrible steely grip of the captain's arms and a face, flushed, wild-eyed, horrible, that was close to mine and inevitably coming closer, though I fought and tore at it--of hot feverish lips whose touch I knew would scorch me to the soul--and then I was suddenly free, and falling, falling, a long way through darkness.

XIX

THE YOUNG PERSON SCORES

My first memory is of voices, and after that I was shot swiftly out of a tunnel from an immense distance and opened my eyes upon the same world which I had left at some indefinite period in the past. Faces, at first very large, by and by adjusted themselves in a proper perspective and became quite recognizable and familiar. There was Aunt Jane's, very tearful, and Miss Higglesby-Browne's, very glum, and the Honorable Cuthbert's, very anxious and a little dazed, and Cookie's, very, very black. The face of Dugald Shaw I did not see, for the quite intelligible reason that I was lying with my head upon his shoulder.

As soon as I realized this I sat up suddenly, while every one exclaimed at once, "There, she's quite all right--see how her color is coming back!"

People kept Aunt Jane from flinging herself upon me and soothed her into calm while I found out what had happened. The penknife that I had lost in my struggle with Captain Magnus had fallen at the

Scotchman's feet. Wrenching himself free of his all but severed bonds he had seized the knife, slashed through the rope that held him to the tree, and flung himself on Captain Magnus. It was a brief struggle--a fist neatly planted on the ruffian's jaw had ended it, and the captain, half dazed from his potations, went down limply.

Meanwhile Cookie had appeared upon the scene flourishing a kitchen knife, though intending it for no more bloody purpose than the setting free of Cuthbert Vane. Throughout the fray Chris slumbered undisturbed, and he and the unconscious Magnus were now reposing side by side, until they should awake to find themselves neatly trussed up with Cookie's clothes-lines.

But my poor brave Crusoe dragged a broken leg, from a kick bestowed on him by Captain Magnus, at whom he had flown valiantly in my defense.

So far so good; we had signally defeated our two guards, and the camp was ours. But what about the pirates who were still in the cave and would shortly be returning from it? They were three armed and sturdy ruffians, not to include Mr. Tubbs, whose habits were strictly non-combative. It would mean a battle to the death.

Our best hope would be to wait in ambush behind the trees of the clearing--I mean for Dugald Shaw and Cuthbert Vane to do it--and shoot down the unsuspecting pirates as they returned. This desperate plan, which so unpleasantly resembled murder, cast gloom on every brow.

"It's the women, lad," said the Scotchman in a low voice to Cuthbert. "It's--it's Virginia." And Cuthbert heavily assented.

Seeing myself as the motif of such slaughter shocked my mind suddenly back to clearness.

"Oh," I cried, "not that! Why not surprise them in the cave, and make them stay there? One man could guard the entrance easily--and afterward we could build it up with logs or something."

Everybody stared.

"A remarkably neat scheme," said Mr. Shaw, "but impossible of application, I'm afraid, because none of us knows where to find the cave."

I shook my head.

"I know!"

There was a lengthy silence. People looked at one another, and their eyes said, _This has been too much for her_!

"I _know_," I impatiently repeated. "I can take you straight there. I found the tombstone before Mr. Tubbs did, and the cave too. Come, let's not waste time. We must hurry--they'll be getting back!"

Amazement, still more than half incredulous, surged round me. Then

Mr. Shaw said rapidly:

"You're right. Of course, if you have found the cave, the best thing we can do is to keep them shut up in it. But we must move fast--perhaps we're too late already. If they have found the chest they may by now be starting for camp with the first load of doubloons."

Again I shook my head.

"They haven't found the gold," I assured him.

The astonished faces grew more anxious. "It sho' have told on li'le Miss Jinny's brain," muttered Cookie to himself.

"They haven't found the gold," I reiterated with emphasis, "because the gold is not in the cave. Don't ask me how I know, because there isn't time to tell you. There was no gold there but the two bags that the pirates brought back last night. The--the skeleton moved it all out."

"My Lawd!" groaned Cookie, staggering backward.

"Virginia! I had no idea you were superstitious!" quavered Aunt Jane.

"I say, do take some sleeping tablets or something and quiet your nerves!" implored Cuthbert with the tenderest solicitude.

In my exasperation I stamped my foot.

"And while we are arguing here the pirates may be starting back to camp! And then we'll have to kill them and go home and give ourselves up to be hanged! Please, please, come with me and let me show you that I know!" I lifted my eyes to the intent face of Dugald Shaw.

"All right," he said tersely. "I think you do know. How and what, we'll find out later." Rapidly he made his plan, got together the things needful for its execution, looked to the bonds of the still dazed and drowsy prisoners, posted Cookie in their neighborhood with a pair of pistols, and commanded Aunt Jane to dry her tears and look after Miss Higglesby-Browne, who had dismayed every one by most inopportunistly toppling over in a perfectly genuine swoon.

Then the Scotchman, Cuthbert Vane and I set off through the woods. The men were heavily armed, and I had recovered my own little revolver and restored it to my belt. Mr. Shaw had seen to this, and had said to me, very quietly:

"You know, Virginia, if things don't go our way, it may be necessary for you to use it--on yourself."

And I nodded assentingly.

We went in silence through the green hush of the woods, moving in single file. My place as guide was in the van, but Mr. Shaw deposed me from it and went ahead himself, while Cuthbert Vane brought up the rear. No one spoke, even to whisper. I guided

Dugald Shaw, when needful, by a light touch upon the arm. Our enterprise was one of utmost danger. At any moment we might hear the steps and voices of the returning pirates. Thus fore-warned, we might of course retreat into the woods and let them pass, ourselves unseen. But then, what of those whom we had left in camp? Could we leave them undefended to the vengeance of Captain Magnus? No, if we met the pirates it was their lives or ours--and I recall with incredulity my resolution to imbed five of my six bullets in a pirate before I turned the sixth upon myself. I reflected with satisfaction that five bullets should be a fatal dose to any pirate unless an exceptionally tough one. And I hoped he would not be tough--

But I tell myself with shudders that it was not I, but some extraordinary recrudescence of a primitive self, that indulged these lethal gloatings.

No steps but our own, no voices but of birds, broke the stillness of the woods. We moved onward swiftly, and presently the noise of the sea came to us with the sudden loudness that I remembered. I paused, signaled caution to my companions, and crept on.

We passed the grave, and I saw that the vines had been torn aside again, and that the tombstone was gone. We came to the brink of the cliff, and I pointed silently downward along the ledge to the angle in which lay the mouth of the cave. My breath came quickly, for at any instant a head might be thrust forth from the opening. Already the sun was mounting toward the zenith. The noontide heat and stillness was casting its drowsy spell upon the island. The air seemed thicker, the breeze more languid. And all this meant meal-time--and the thoughts of hungry pirates turning toward camp.

My hope was that they were still preoccupied with the fruitless search in the cave.

Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert dropped down upon the ledge. Though under whispered orders to retreat I could not, but hung over the edge of the cliff, eager and breathless. Then with a bound the men were beside me. Mr. Shaw caught my hand, and we rushed together into the woods.

A quake, a roar, a shower of flying rocks. It was over--the dynamite had done its work, whether successfully or not remained to be seen. After a little the Scotchman ventured back. He returned to us where we waited in the woods--Cuthbert to mount guard over me--with a cleared face.

"It's all right," he said. "The entrance is completely blocked. I set the charge six feet inside, but the roof is down clear to the mouth. Poor wretches--they have all come pouring out upon the sand--"

All three of us went back to the edge of the cliff. Seventy feet below, on the narrow strip of sand before the sea-mouth of the cave, we saw the figures of four men, who ran wildly about and sought for a foothold on the sheer face of the cliff. As we stood watching them, with, on my part, at least, unexpected qualms of pity and a cold interior sensation very unlike triumph, they discovered us. Then for the first time, I suppose, they understood

the nature of their disaster. We could not hear their cries, but we saw arms stretched out to us, fists frantically shaken, hands lifted in prayer. We saw Mr. Tubbs flop down upon his unaccustomed knees--it was all rather horrible.

I drew back, shivering. "It won't be for long, of course," I said uncertainly, "just till the steamer comes--and we'll give them lots to eat--but I suppose they think--they will soon be just a lot more skeletons--" And here I was threatened with a moist anticlimax to my late Amazonian mood.

Why should the frequent and natural phenomena of tears produce such panic in the male breast? At a mere April dewiness about my lashes these two strong men quaked.

"Don't--don't cry!" implored Cuthbert earnestly.

"It's been too much for her!" exclaimed the once dour Scot in tones of anguish. "Hurry, lad--we must find her some water--"

"Nonsense," I interposed, winking rapidly. "Just think of some way to calm those creatures, so that I shan't see them in my dreams, begging and beseeching--" For I had not forgotten the immensity of my debt to Tony.

So a note was written on a leaf torn from a pocketbook and thrown over the cliff weighted with a stone. The captives swooped upon it. Followed then a vivid pantomime by Tony, expressive of eased if unrepentant minds, while Mr. Tubbs, by gestures, indicated that though sadly misunderstood, old H. H. was still our friend and benefactor.

It was an attentive group to which on our return to camp I related the circumstances which had made possible our late exploit of imprisoning the pirates in the cave. The tale of my achievements, though recounted with due modesty, seemed to put the finishing touch to the extinction of Violet, for she wilted finally and forever, and was henceforth even bullied by Aunt Jane. The diary of Peter was produced, and passed about with awe from hand to hand. Yesterday's discovery in the cave had rounded out the history of Peter to a melancholy completion. But though we knew the end we guessed in vain at the beginning, at Peter's name, at that of the old grandfather whose thrifty piety had brought him to Havana and to the acquaintance of the dying mate of the Bonny Lass, at the whereabouts of the old New England farm which had been mortgaged to buy the Island Queen, at the identity of Helen, who waited still, perhaps, for the lover who never would return.

But even our regrets for Peter did not chill the exultation with which we thought of the treasure-chest waiting there under the sand in the cabin of the Island Queen.

All afternoon we talked of it. That, for the present, was all we could do. There were the two prisoners in camp to be guarded--and they had presently awakened and made remarks of a strongly personal and unpleasant trend on discovering their situation. There was Crusoe invalidated, and needing petting, and getting it from everybody on the score of his romantic past as Benjy as well as of his present virtues. The broken leg had been cleverly set by

Dugald--somehow in the late upheaval _Miss_ and _Mister_ had dropped quite out of our vocabularies--with Cuthbert as surgeon's assistant and me holding the chloroform to the patient's nose. There was the fatigue and reaction from excitement which everybody felt, and Peter's diary to be read, and golden dreams to be indulged. And there was the delicate question to be discussed, of how the treasure should be divided.

"Why, it all belongs to Virginia, of course," said Cuthbert, opening his eyes at the thought of any other view being taken but this obvious one.

"Nonsense!" I hastily interposed. "My finding the diary was just an accident; I'll take a share of it--no more."

Here Miss Browne murmured something half inaudible about "--confined to members of the Expedition--" but subsided for lack of encouragement.

"I suggest," said Dugald, "that our numbers having most fortunately diminished and there being, on the basis of Peter's calculations, enough to enrich us all, that we should share and share alike." And this proposal was received with acclamations, as was a second from the same source, devoting a certain percentage of each share to Cookie, to whom the news of his good fortune was to come later as a great surprise.

As an earnest of our riches, we had the two bags of doubloons which the pirates had recovered from the fleshless fingers of the dead man. They were old worn coins, most of them, many dating from the seventeenth century, and bearing the effigies of successive kings of Spain. Each disk of rich, yellow Peruvian gold, dug from the earth by wretched sweating slaves and bearing the name of a narrow rigid tyrant, had a history, doubtless, more wild and bloody than even that we knew. The merchant of Lima and his servant, Bill Halliwell, and afterward poor Peter had died for them. For their sake we had been captives in fear of death, and for their sake now four wretched beings were prisoners in the treasure-cave and two more cursed, fate and their bonds within hearing of our outraged ears. And who knew how much more of crime and blood and violence we should send forth into the world with the long-buried treasure? Who knew--and, ah, me, who cared? So riotous was the gold-lust in my veins that I think if I had known the chest to be another Pandora's box I should still have cried out to open it.

Shortly before sundown Cuthbert and Cookie were despatched by Dugald Shaw to the cliff above the cave with supplies for the inhumed pirates. These were let down by rope. A note was brought up on the rope, signed by Mr. Tubbs, and containing strangely jumbled exhortations, prayers and threats. A second descent of the rope elicited another missive, neatly folded and addressed in the same hand to Miss Jane Harding. Cuthbert gave this privately to me, but its contents must forever be unknown, for it went, unread, into Cookie's fire. I had no mind to find Aunt Jane, with her umbrella as a parachute, vanishing over the cliffs to seek the arms of a repentant Tubbs.

The fly in the ointment of our satisfaction, and the one remaining obstacle to our possession of the treasure, was the presence of the

two pirates in our midst. They were not nice pirates. They were quite the least choice of the collection. Chris, when he was not swearing, wept moistly, and so touched the heart of Aunt Jane that we lived in fear of her letting him go if she got the opportunity. He told her that he had lost an aunt in his tender youth, of whom she reminded him in the most striking way, and that if this long-mourned relative had lived he felt he should have been a better man and not led away against his higher nature by the chance of falling in with bad companions. Aunt Jane thought her resemblance to Chris's aunt a remarkable coincidence and an opportunity for appealing to his better self which should be improved. She wanted to improve it by untying his hands, because he had sprained his wrist in his childhood and it was sensitive. He had sprained it in rescuing a little companion from drowning, the child of a drunkard who had unfeelingly thrown his offspring down a well. This episode had been an example to Chris which had kept him from drinking all his life, until he had fallen into his present rough company.

Aunt Jane took it very hard that the Scotchman seemed quite unfeeling about Chris's wrist. She said it seemed very strange to her in a man who had so recently known the sorrows of captivity himself. She said she supposed even suffering would not soften some natures.

As to Magnus, his state of sullen fury made him indifferent even to threats of punishment. He swore with a determination and fluency worthy of a better cause. For myself, I could not endure his neighborhood. It seemed to me I could not live through the days that must intervene before the arrival of the Rufus Smith in the constant presence of this wretch.

More than all, it made Dugald and Cuthbert unwilling to leave the camp together. There was always the possibility that the two ruffians might find means to free themselves, and, with none but Cookie and the women present, to obtain control of the firearms and the camp. For the negro, once the men were free, could not surely be depended on to face them. Loyal he was, and valiant in his fashion, but old and with the habit of submission. One did not see him standing up for long before two berserker-mad ruffians.

What to do with the pirates continued for a day and a night a knotty problem.

It was Cuthbert Vane who solved it, and with the simplicity of genius.

"Why not send 'em down to their chums the way we do the eats?" he asked.

It seemed at first incredibly fantastic, but the more you thought of it the more practical it grew. It was characteristic of Cuthbert not to see it as fantastic. For him the sharp edges of fact were never shaded off into the dim and nebulous. Cuthbert, when he saw things at all, saw them steadily and whole. He would let down the writhing, swearing Magnus over the cliff as tranquilly as he let down loaves of bread, aware merely of its needing more muscular effort. Only he would take immense care not to hurt him.

Dire outcries greeted the decision. Aunt Jane wept, and Chris wept, and said this never could have happened to him if his aunt had lived. Oaths flowed from Captain Magnus in a turgid stream. Nevertheless the twain were led away, firmly bound, and guarded by Dugald, Cuthbert and the negro. And the remarkable program proposed by Cuthbert Vane was triumphantly carried out. Six prisoners now occupied the old cave of the buccaneers.

With the camp freed from the presence of the pirates all need of watchfulness was over. The prisoners in the cave were provided with no implements but spades, whereas dynamite and crowbars would be necessary to force a way through the debris which choked the mouth of the tunnel. A looking over of the ground at the daily feeding time would be enough.

To-morrow's sun would see our hopes crowned and all our toil rewarded by the recovery of the treasure from the Island Queen.

XX

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

Next morning an event occurred sufficiently astonishing to divert our thoughts from even the all-important topic of the Island Queen. Cookie, who had been up on the high land of the point gathering firewood, came rushing back to announce that a steamer had appeared in the offing. All the party dropped their occupations and ran to look. That the Rufus Smith had returned at an unexpectedly early date was of course the natural explanation of the appearance of a vessel in these lonely seas. But through the glass the new arrival turned out to be not the tubby freighter but a stranger of clean-cut, rakish build, lying low in the water and designed for speed rather than carrying capacity.

A mile offshore she lay to, and a boat left her side. Wondering and disquieted, we returned to the beach to await her coming. Was it another pirate? What possible errand could bring a steamer to this remote, unvisited, all but forgotten little island? Had somebody else heard the story of the Bonny Lass and come after the doubloons, unknowing that we were beforehand with them? If so, must we do battle for our rights?

The boat shot in between the points and skimmed swiftly over the rippling surface of the cove, under the rhythmic strokes of half a dozen flashing oars. The rowers wore a trim white uniform, and in the stern a tall figure, likewise white-clad, turned toward us a dark face under a pith helmet.

As the oarsmen drove the boat upon the beach the man in the stern sprang agilely ashore. Dugald Shaw stepped forward, and the stranger approached, doffing his helmet courteously.

"You are the American and English party who landed here some weeks ago from the Rufus Smith?"

His English was easy and correct, though spoken with a pronounced

Spanish accent. His dark high-featured face was the face of a Spaniard. And his grace was the grace of a Spaniard, as he bowed sweepingly and handed Mr. Shaw a card.

"Senor Don Enrique Gonzales," said Dugald, bowing in his stiff-necked fashion, "I am very happy to meet you. But as you represent His Excellency the President of the Republic of Santa Marina I suppose you come on business, Senior Gonzales?"

"Precisely. I am enchanted that you apprehend the fact without the tiresomeness of explanations. For business is a cold, usually a disagreeable affair, is it not so? That being the case, let us get it over."

"First do us the honor to be seated, Senor Gonzales."

Comfortably bestowed in a camp-chair in the shade, the Spaniard resumed:

"My friend, this island belongs, as of course you are aware, to the republic of which I have the honor to be a citizen. All rights and privileges, such as harvesting the copra crop, are strictly conserved by the republic. All persons desiring such are required to negotiate with the Minister of State of the Republic. And how much more, when it is a question of treasure--of a very large treasure, Senor?"

The Scotchman's face was dark.

"I had understood," he replied, without looking in the direction of Miss Higglesby-Browne, who seemed in the last few moments to have undergone some mysterious shrinking process, "that negotiations in the proper quarter had been undertaken and brought to a successful conclusion--that in short we were here with the express permission of the government of Santa Marina."

This was a challenge which Miss Browne could not but meet.

"I had," she said hoarsely, "I had the assurance of a--a person high in the financial circles of the United States, that through his--his influence with the government of Santa Marina it would not be necessary--in short, that he could fix the President--I employ his own terms--for a considerable sum, which I--which my friend Miss Harding gave him."

"And the name of this influential person?" inquired the Santa Maritan, suavely.

"Hamilton H. Tubbs," croaked Miss Browne.

Senor Gonzales smiled.

"I remember the name well, madam. It is that of the pretended holder of a concession from our government, who a few years ago induced a number of American school-teachers and clergymen and other financially innocent persons to invest in imaginary coffee plantations. He had in some doubtful fashion become possessed of a little entirely worthless land, which formed the basis of his transactions. His frauds were discovered while he was in our

country, and he was obliged to leave between two days, according to your so picturesque idiom. Needless to say his application for permission to visit Leeward Island for any purpose would instantly have been refused, but as a matter of fact it was never made."

In a benumbed silence we met the blow. The riches that had seemed within our grasp would never be ours. We had no claim upon them, for all our toil and peril; no right even to be here upon the island. Suddenly I began to laugh; faces wearing various shades of shocked surprise were turned on me. Still I laughed.

"Don't you see," I cried, "how ridiculous it all is? All the time it is we who have been pirates!"

The Spaniard gave me a smile made brilliant by the gleam of smoldering black eyes and the shine of white teeth.

"Senorita, with all regret, I must agree."

"Miss Virginia Harding," said Miss Browne with all her old severity, rejuvenated apparently by this opportunity to put me in my place, "would do well to consult her dictionary, before applying opprobrious terms to persons of respectability. A pirate is one who commits robbery upon the high seas. If such a crime lies at the door of any member of this expedition I am unaware of it."

"What's in a name?" remarked Dugald Shaw, shrugging. "We were after other people's property, anyway. I am very sorry about it, Senor Gonzales, but I would like to ask, if you don't mind telling, how you happened to learn of our being here, so long as it was not through the authentic channels. On general principles, I tried to keep the matter quiet."

"We learned in a manner somewhat--what do you say?--curious," returned the Spaniard, who, having presented the men with cigars and by permission lighted one himself, was making himself extremely at home and appeared to have no immediate intention of haling us away to captivity in Santa Marinaran dungeons. "But before I go further, kindly tell me whether you have had any--ah--visitors during your stay on the island?"

"We have," Mr. Shaw replied, "very troublesome ones."

The Spaniard smiled.

"Then answer your own question. These men, while unloading a contraband cargo in a port of Mexico near the southern border, grew too merry in a wineshop, and let it be known where they were bound when again they put to sea. The news, after some delay, found its way to our capital. At once the navy of the republic was despatched to investigate the matter. It is the navy of Santa Marina, ladies and gentlemen, which at this moment guards the entrance of the bay." And Senor Gonzales waved an ironic hand in the direction of the little steamer lying off the island,

"On the way here I put in at Panama, where certain inquiries were satisfactorily answered. There were those in that port who had made a shrewd guess at the destination of the party which had shipped on the Rufus Smith. I then pursued my course to Leeward.

But admit, my friends, that I have not by my arrival, caused you any material loss. Except that I have unfortunately been compelled to present you to yourselves in the character of--as says the young lady--pirates--madam, I speak under correction--I have done you no injury, eh? And that for the simple reason that you have not discovered what you sought, and hence can not be required to surrender it."

We looked at one another doubtfully. The ambiguous words of the Spaniard, the something humorous and mocking which lay behind his courtly manner, put us quite in the dark.

"Senor Gonzales," replied the Scotchman, after a moment's hesitation, "it is true that so far only a negligible amount of what we came to find has rewarded us. But I can not in honesty conceal from you that we know where to look for the rest of it, and that we had certainly expected to leave the island with it in our possession."

The dark indolent eyes of our visitor grew suddenly keen. Half-veiled by the heavy lashes, they searched the face of Dugald Shaw. It seemed that what they found in that bold and open countenance satisfied them. His own face cleared again.

"I think we speak at cross-purposes, Mr. Shaw," he said courteously, "and that we may better understand each other, I am going to tell you a little story. At about this season, two years ago, the navy of Santa Marina, the same which now lies off the island, was making a voyage of inspection along the coast of the republic. It was decided to include Leeward in the cruise, as it had been unvisited for a considerable time. I hold no naval rank--indeed, we are not a seafaring people, and the captain of La Golondrina is a person from Massachusetts, Jeremiah Bowles by name, but as the representative of His Excellency I accompanied La Golondrina. On our arrival at Leeward I came ashore in the boat, and found to my surprise a small sloop at anchor in the cove. About the clearing were the signs of recent habitation, yet I knew that the old German who had had the copra concession here had been gone for some time. There were no personal trifles left in the hut, however, and indeed it was plain that weeks had passed since there had been any one about. No one responded to our shouts and calls.

"I turned my attention to the sloop. In the cabin, besides a few clothes, I found something that interested me very much--a large brass-bound chest, of an antique type such as is common enough in my own country.

"Of course I had heard of the many legends of treasure buried on Leeward Island. Consequently I was somewhat prepared to find in the chest, what in fact I did find there, over a million dollars in old Spanish coins.

"These coins, which were packed in strong canvas bags, were, as you may fancy, very quickly transferred to the cutter. We did not trouble ourselves with the unwieldy chest, and it remains, I suppose, in the cabin of the sloop, which I observed as we crossed the cove to have been washed up upon the rocks.

"As my curiosity was extremely piqued regarding the owner of the sloop, the manner in which he had discovered the treasure, and still more his extraordinary disappearance, I should have wished to make a thorough search of the island. But the season for storms was shortly to begin, and already the weather signs were so threatening that Captain Bowles was reluctant to remain longer in the neighborhood of the island, which has a bad name for dangerous shoals and reefs. For the same reason it was thought unwise to risk a man or two aboard the sloop to sail her to the mainland. Indeed, we ourselves were glad to get safely home with our doubloons in the teeth of a tropical gale."

"This is a very interesting story, Senor Gonzales," said Dugald Shaw quietly, "and as you say, your visit here deprives us of nothing, but merely saves us further unprofitable labor. We are grateful to you."

The Spaniard bowed.

"You do me too much honor. But as you remark, the story is interesting. It has also the element of mystery. For there remains the question of what became of the owner of the sloop. His final preparations for leaving the island had evidently been made, his possessions removed from the hut, provisions for the voyage brought on board the sloop--and then he had vanished. What had befallen him? Did the gold carry with it some deadly influence? One plays, as it were, with this idea, imagining the so melancholy and bloody history of these old doubloons. How, in the first place, had he found them? Through chance--by following some authentic clue? And then, in the moment of success, he disappears--pouf!" And Senor Gonzales disposed of the unknown by blowing him airily from the tips of his fingers.

"However, we have the treasure--the main point, is it not? But I have often wondered--"

"If you would like to hear the rest of the story," said Mr. Shaw, "we are in a position to enlighten you. That we are so, is due entirely to this young lady, Miss Virginia Harding."

The Spaniard rose, and made obeisance profoundly. He resumed his seat, prepared to listen--no longer the government official, but the cordial and interested guest and friend.

The story, of course, was a long one. Everybody took a hand in the telling, even Cookie, who was summoned from his retirement in the kitchen to receive the glory due him as a successful strategist. The journal of Peter was produced, and the bags of doubloons handed over to the representative of the little republic. I even offered to resign the silver shoe-buckle which I had found in the secret locker on the Island Queen, but this excess of honesty received its due reward.

"The doubloons being now in the possession of the Santa Marinar nation, I beg that you will consider as your own the Island Queen and all it may contain," said Don Enrique to me with as magnificent an air as though the sand-filled hulk of a wrecked sloop were really a choice gift to bestow on a young woman.

Plans were discussed for transferring the pirates from the cave to the cutter, for they were to be taken to Santa Marina to meet whatever punishment was thought fit for their rather indefinite ill-doing. They had not murdered us, they had robbed us of nothing but the provisions they had eaten, they had, after all, as much right on the island as ourselves. Yet there remained their high-handed conduct in invading our camp and treating us as prisoners, with the threat of darker possibilities. I fancy that Santa Marinaran justice works mainly by rule of thumb, and that the courts do not embarrass themselves much with precedents. Only I hope they did not shoot the picturesque Tony against a wall.[*]

The power-schooner, manned by a crew from the cutter, was to be taken to Santa Marina also. Senor Gonzales remained with us for the day as our guest, and on the next the boats from the cutter took off the pirates from the cave. We did not see them again. Through the convenient elasticity of Santa Marinaran procedure, Mr. Tubbs was herded along with the rest, although he might plausibly, if hypocritically, have pleaded that he had complied with the will of the invaders under duress. Aunt Jane wept very much, and handed me Paeans of Passion with the request that she might never see it again.

We parted from Senor Gonzales not without regrets. It was an impressive leave-taking--indeed, Senor, Gonzales in his least word and gesture was impressive. Also, he managed subtly and respectfully to impart to me the knowledge that he shared Titian's tastes in the matter of hair. On his departure he made a pretty little speech, full of compliments and floral specimens, and bestowed upon me--as being mine by right, he earnestly protested--the two bags of Spanish doubloons.

[*]Since the above was written, Mr. Shaw has run across Tony on the San Francisco water-front. Tony tells him that they got off with three months' imprisonment. The American consul interested himself and the schooner was restored to her owners, who were Tony's relations and hence did not prosecute. Before the discharged prisoners left the republic Captain Magnus was stabbed over a card game by a native. Mr. Tubbs married a wealthy half-caste woman, the owner of a fine plantation, but a perfectly genuine Mrs. Tubbs from Peoria turned up later, and the too much married H. H. was obliged to achieve one of his over-night flittings.

XXI

THE BISHOP'S CHEST

W3 waited nine days for the coming of the Rufus Smith. During that time an episode occurred as a result of which I sat one morning by myself on the rocks beside the sloop, on which such ardent hopes had been centered, only like the derelict itself to be wrecked at last. It was a lonely spot and I wanted to be alone. I felt abused, and sad, and sore. I realized that I was destined to do nothing but harm in this world, and to hurt people I was fond of, and be misunderstood by every one, and to live on--if I wasn't

lucky enough to meet with a premature and sudden end--into a sour, lonely, crabbed old age, when I would wish to goodness I had married anybody, and might even finish by applying to a Matrimonial Agency.

As I sat nursing these melancholy thoughts I heard a footstep. I did not look up--for I knew the footstep. I should have known it if it had trodden over my grave.

"I take it you are not wanting company, you have come so far out of the way of it," said Dugald Shaw.

Still I did not look up.

"Nobody seemed to want _me_," I remarked sulkily, after a pause. He made no reply, but seated himself upon the rocks. For a little there was silence.

"Virginia," he said abruptly, "I'm thinking you have hurt the lad."

"Oh," I burst out, "that is all you think of--the lad, the lad! How about me? Don't you suppose it hurt me too?"

"No," he made deliberate answer. "I was not sure of that. I thought maybe you liked having men at your feet."

"Liked it? Liked to wound Cuthbert--_Cuthbert_? Oh, if only it had not happened, if we could have gone on being friends! It was all my fault for going with him into the cave. It was after you had buried the skeleton, and I wanted to see poor Peter's resting-place. And we spoke of Helen, and it was all frightfully melancholy and tender, and all at once he--he said it. And I meant he never should!" In the soreness of my heart I began to weep.

"There, lassie, there, don't cry!" he said gently. "The boy didn't speak of it, of course. But I knew how it must be. It has hit him hard, I am afraid."

"I suppose," I wept, "you would have had me marry him whether I wanted to or not, just to keep from hurting him."

"No," he answered quickly. "I did not say that--I did not say that I would have had you marry him. No, lass, I did not say that."

"Then why are you scolding me?" I asked in a choked whisper.

"Scolding you? I was not. It was only that--that I love the lad--and I wish you both so well--I thought perhaps there was some mistake, and--it would not matter about me, if I could see you both happy."

"There is a mistake," I said clearly. "It is a great mistake, Dugald Shaw, that you should come to me and court me--for some one else."

There was silence for a while, the kind of silence when you hear your heartbeats.

When he spoke his voice was unsteady.

"But the boy has everything to offer you--his ancient name, his splendid unstained youth, a heart that is all loyalty. He is strong and brave and beautiful. Virginia, why couldn't you love him?"

"I could not love him," I replied, very low, "because my love was not mine any more to give. It belongs to--some one else. Is his name ancient? I don't know. It is his, and he ennoble it. Cuthbert has youth, but youth is only promise. In the man I love I find fulfilment. And he is loyal and brave and honest--I am afraid he isn't beautiful, but I love him the better for his scars--"

After that I sat quite still, and I knew it depended on the next half minute whether I went all the days of my life crowned and glorious with happiness, or buried my shame and heartbreak under the waters of the cove.

And then Dugald Shaw took me in his arms.

By and by he said huskily:

"Beloved, I had no right to ask you to share such a life as mine must be--the life of a poor sailor."

At this I raised my head from its nestling-place and laughed.

"Ask me? Silly, I asked you! Of course you could have refused me, but I depended on your not having the courage."

"And indeed that is a charge I'll not allow--that I am so little of a man as to let my courting be done for me. No, no, it was my love compelling you that made you speak the words you did--the love of a selfish man who should have thought only of shielding you from the hardships of such a wandering, homeless life as mine."

"Well, Heaven reward you for your selfishness," I said earnestly. "I am thankful you were not so noble as to let me throw myself at your head in vain. I have been doing it for ever so long, in fact, but it is such a thick Scotch head that I dare say I made no impression."

"Sweet imp! You'll pay for that--oh, Virginia, if I had only something to offer you!"

"You can offer me something that I want very much, if you will, and at no cost but to your strong right arm."

"It is an arm which is at your service for life--but what am I to do with it now? And indeed I think it is very well employed at this moment."

"But it must be employed much more strenuously," I remarked, moving a little away, "if you are to get me what I want. Before you came, I was meditating possible ways of getting it for myself. I wanted it for a melancholy relic--a sort of mausoleum in which all my hopes were buried. Now its purpose is quite different; it is to be my bride's chest and hold the dowry which I shall bring to one Dugald Shaw."

"You mean _the_ chest--the chest that held the Spanish doubloons--that lies under the sand in the sloop?"

"Exactly. And now I shall know whether you are the true prince or not, because he always succeeds in the tasks he undertakes to win the princess."

It was low tide, such a tide as had all but lured me to my death in the cave. One could go and come from the beach along the rocks, without climbing the steep path up the cliff. It was not long before Dugald was back again with spade and pick. He tore off the shrunken, sun-dried boards from the cabin roof, and fell to work.

It was not, after all, a labor of Hercules. The cabin was small and the chest large. I watched with the pride of proprietorship the swift ease with which the steel-sinewed arms of the Scot made the caked sand fly. Then the spade struck something which sent back a dull metallic sound through the muffling sand.

I gave a little shriek of excitement. Hardly could I have been more thrilled if I had believed the chest still to contain the treasure of which it had been ravished. It was filled to its brass-bound lid with romance, if not with gold.

A little more and it lay clear to our view, a convex surface of dark smoky brown, crossed by three massive strips of tarnished brass. Dugald dug down until the chest stood free to half its height; then by its handles--I recognized the "great hand-wrought loops of metal," of the diary--we dragged it from its bed, and drew it forth into the cockpit.

For a little while we sat before it in happy contemplation. It was indeed for its own sake quite well worth having, that sturdy old chest. Even in an antique shop I should have succumbed to it at once; how much more when we had dug it up ourselves from a wrecked sloop on a desert island, and knew all its bloody and delightful history.

At length, kneeling before it, I raised with an effort the heavy lid.

"Empty, of course--no more brown bags. But oh, Dugald, had ever a girl such a wonderful bride's chest as this? O--oh!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, only there is a crack in the bottom, running all the way along where it joins the side."

"Warped a bit, I suppose. No matter, it can be easily repaired--crack? I say, lassie, look here!"

Under the pressure of Dugald's fingers the floor of the chest was swinging upward on an invisible hinge. Between it and the true bottom was a space of about three inches in depth. It seemed to be filled with a layer of yellowed cotton-wool.

For a long moment we held our breath, gazing at each other with

eyes which asked the same question. Then Dugald lifted a corner of the sheet of cotton and plucked it away.

At once all the hues of the rainbow seemed to be flashing and sparkling before us. Rubies were there like great drops of the blood that the chest and its treasure had wrung from the hearts of men; sapphires, mirroring the blue of the tropic sky; emeralds, green as the island verdure; pearls, white as the milk of the cocoanuts and softly luminous as the phosphorescent foam which broke on the beach in the darkness. And there were diamonds that caught gleams of all the others' beauty, and then mocked them with a matchless splendor.

Some of the stones lay loose upon their bed of cotton; others were in massive settings of curious old-time workmanship. Every gem was of exceptional size and beauty, the pearls, I knew at once, were the rarest I had ever looked upon. They were strung in a necklace, and had a very beautiful pendant of mingled pearls and diamonds.

There were nine heavy bracelets, all jewel-set; twenty-three rings, eight of them for the hand of a man. Some of these rings contained the finest of the diamonds, except for three splendid unset stones. There were numbers of elaborate old-fashioned earrings, two rope-like chains of gold adorned with jewels at intervals, and several jeweled lockets. There was a solid gold snuff-box, engraved with a coat of arms and ornamented with seventeen fine emeralds. There were, besides the three diamonds, eighty-two unset stones, among them, wrapped by itself in cotton, a ruby of extraordinary size and luster. And there was a sort of coronet or tiara, sown all over with clear white brilliants.

There is the inventory, not entirely complete, of the treasure which we found hidden under the false bottom of the chest, a treasure whose existence none of those who had striven and slain and perished for the sake of the Spanish doubloons can have suspected. The secret of it died with the first guardian of the chest, the merchant of Lima who went overboard from the Bonny Lass on that stormy night ninety years ago. Now sea and sun and sand had done their work and warped the wood of the chest enough to make us masters of its mystery. And we sat in the sand-heaped cock-pit of the wrecked sloop, playing like children with our sparkling toys.

Ours? Yes, for whether or not there were an infection of piracy in the very air of the island, so that to seize with the high hand, to hold with the iron grasp, seemed the law of life, we decided without a qualm against the surrender of our treasure-trove to its technical owners. Technical only; for one felt that, in essence, all talk of ownership by this man or that had long ago become idle. Fate had held the treasure in fee to give or to withhold. Senor Gonzales had had his chance at the chest, and he had missed the secret of the hidden hoard, had left it to lie forgotten under the sand until in some tropic storm it should be engulfed by the waters of the cove. More than this, had he not most specifically made over to me the Island Queen and all that it contained? This was a title clear enough to satisfy the most exacting formalist. And we were not formalists, nor inclined in any quibbling spirit to question the decrees of Fortune. As treasure-hunters, we had been her devotees too long.

So after all it was not my scornful skepticism but the high faith of Miss Higglesby-Browne which was justified by the event, and the Harding-Browne expedition left the island well repaid for its toils and perils. Plus the two bags of doubloons, which were added to the spoils, the treasure brought us a sum so goodly that I dare not name it, for fear of the apparition of Senor Gonzales and the Santa Marinan navy looming up to demand restitution. Like true comrades, we divided share and share alike, and be sure that no one grudged Cookie the percentage Which each was taxed for his benefit.

Certain of the rarest; jewels were not sold, but found their way to me as gifts of the Expedition severally and collectively. The brightest of the diamonds now shines in my engagement ring. Cuthbert, by the way, showed up so splendidly when I explained to him about the engagement--that the responsibility was entirely mine, not Dugald's--that I earnestly wished I were twins so that one of me could have married the beautiful youth--which indeed I had wished a little all the time.

And now I come to the purpose of this story--for though well concealed it has had one from the beginning. It is to let Helen, whoever and wherever she may be, if still of this world, know of the fate of Peter, and to tell her that when she asks for them she is to have my most cherished relics of the island, Peter's journal and the silver shoe-buckle which he found in the sand of the treasure-cave and was taking home to her.

Only, she must let me keep Crusoe, please.

THE END

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