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Harry Collingwood

"In Search of El Dorado"

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### Chapter One.

#### Ice!

The *Everest*, newly launched, the biggest and fastest boat in the Trans-Atlantic services, was on her maiden voyage to New York. The fortunes of that voyage concern our story simply from the fact that it brought our two adventurers together and helped to show the manly stuff of which they were made. Thereafter the sea was not for them, but the far-off swamps and forests of the mighty Amazon Valley, where most amazing adventures befel them. On the *Everest* Dick Cavendish was fifth officer.

The run from Liverpool to Queenstown was made under easy steam in order that the ship might arrive off the Irish port at a reasonable hour in the morning; but no sooner were the Irish passengers and the supplementary mails shipped than the word went quietly round among the officers that the "Old Man" was bent upon breaking the best previous record for the run across the herring pond and setting up a new one unassailable by any other craft than the *Everest* herself. And certainly when, as the liner passed Daunt Rock lightship shortly after nine o'clock on the Sunday morning following her departure from Liverpool, and the moment was carefully noted by chronometer, the omens were all most favourable for the weather was fine, though cold, with a light northerly wind and smooth water, and with her turbines running at top speed the chief engineer reported that the hands in the stokeholds were keeping a full head of steam without difficulty. At noon the patent log showed that the *Everest* was within a fraction of eighty miles from the lightship; and Captain Prowse already began to picture himself as holding the blue ribbon of the Atlantic.

And so things continued without a hitch or break of any description until half the journey across the Atlantic had been accomplished; the weather remained fine, with light winds, no sea, and very little swell to speak of, while the ship ran as smoothly and steadily as though she were travelling on land-locked waters instead of in mid-Atlantic.

Meanwhile she kept in almost hourly touch with other ships going east or west, reporting her position and progress and asking from time to time for the latest news; but it was not until Tuesday afternoon, about three o'clock, local time, that she got any intelligence of the slightest moment, this being a message from the homeward bound liner *Bolivia*, to the following effect—

"Warning! S.S. *Bolivia*, New York—Liverpool, Latitude 45 degrees, 7 minutes North, Longitude 37 degrees, 57 minutes West. Just cleared large area consisting of detached masses of field ice with several bergs, through which we have been working for the last three hours. Very dangerous. Advise ships approaching it to observe utmost caution, particularly at night time."

This message was duly handed to Captain Prowse in his own cabin by the wireless operator, who waited while the skipper read it, to see whether the latter desired to address any inquiry to the *Bolivia*. But after cogitating over it for two or three minutes, the skipper crumpled up the paper and thrust it into his pocket, saying—

"All right, 'Sparks', that'll do. And—look here, youngster—just keep this message strictly to yourself, d'ye see? Don't say a word to anybody about it. I'll see that all necessary precautions are taken; but I don't want the news of there being ice ahead to be talked about; it'll only make the passengers unnecessarily nervous and uneasy; and I don't want that. Besides, it will be easy enough to alter the course a few degrees south if it should be found desirable. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered 'Sparks,' lingering for a moment at the cabin door. "Anything else, sir?"

"No," answered the skipper, "nothing more at present, thank you. But keep your ears open for any further messages."

The operator saluted and vanished; whereupon the skipper produced the chart of the North Atlantic, by the aid of which he was navigating the ship, spread it open upon the table, and studied it intently. A pencil mark consisting of a number of straight lines—the junction of each of which with the next was indicated by a dot surrounded by a small circle, against which was a note indicating the date, hour and moment of the ship's arrival at each particular spot—showed the track of the ship across the ocean from her point of departure abreast of Daunt Rock, and a thinner, lighter pencil line extending on to New York marked the still untravelling portion of the route. Taking a pencil, parallel ruler and pair of dividers in his hand, Captain Prowse proceeded carefully to jot down the position of the *Bolivia*, as indicated by her message; having done which he gave vent to a sigh of relief; for he saw that the course which he was pursuing would take the *Everest* some sixty miles to the north of that point.

"Thank God! that's all right," he murmured. "There's nothing to fear. That patch of drift ice is not in the least likely to extend as far north as our track. Besides, with the precautions that we are observing—taking the sea temperature every half-hour, and so on—and the maintenance of a good look-out, we are perfectly safe. I suppose I ought to tell Brown" (the chief officer) "about this message; but I won't—no; I'll keep it to myself, for the chap's as nervous as a cat, and would want to slow down as soon as the dusk comes. And I don't want that; I mean to make this a record passage, and don't intend to be frightened into losing several precious hours merely because a ship sixty miles to the south'ard of my track reports a little floating ice. No; I'll just issue instructions that everybody is to be on the alert and keep a specially sharp look-out, and let it go at that."

Having come to which conclusion, Captain Prowse left his cabin and joined the officer of the watch on the bridge.

"By Jove! What glorious weather we are having," he remarked genially, as the officer came to his side. "I cannot remember such a spell of it as we have had ever since leaving Queenstown. What's she doing, Mr Dacre?"

"Twenty-six point six, sir, at the last reading of the log, about half an hour ago," answered the second officer; "and she hasn't slackened down any. At this rate we ought to be berthed in New York by noon the day after to-morrow, with a record passage to our credit."

"Ay," agreed the skipper, "that's what I am hoping for in a quiet way. It will be a feather in our caps if we can pull the thing off—and please the owners, too. Have you seen any sign of ice yet?"

"Not yet, sir," answered Dacre, "though I suppose we may expect to see some at almost any moment, now. But the temperature of the water remains quite steady. It is only half a degree colder than it was this time yesterday, and that is no more than one would reasonably expect about here."

"Quite so," assented the skipper. "Well, let the temperature continue to be taken every half-hour regularly, and keep the look-outs on the alert. We don't want any accidents—or even any narrow escapes, on our first trip. The officers of the fleet have a reputation for carefulness, and we must live up to it. Let me know at once if any ice is sighted."

"Certainly, sir," replied the second officer, as the skipper turned away and retired to his cabin.

At half-past nine o'clock that night the ship's band was playing in the grand lounge, and most of the first-class passengers who were not in the smoke-room were promenading or sitting about in that spacious and handsome apartment, listening to the music, or chatting together in couples or little groups. The smoke-room, too, was pretty well occupied, a few of the men reading while the rest were either seated at the tables, playing poker, or standing round watching the play.

At the same hour a little party of the ship's officers who were off duty, of whom Dick Cavendish was one, were gathered in the ward-room, engaged in the conduct of an informal smoking-concert, and Dick was standing at the piano warbling "Dear Heart" to the doctor's accompaniment—it is no longer the fashion for sailors to sing sea-songs—when the proceedings were abruptly interrupted by a jolt—it was scarcely severe enough to merit the term "shock"—instantly followed by a perceptible lifting of the ship's bows and a slight list of her to starboard, while to her smooth, steady, gliding progress succeeded a rapid succession of jerks, accompanied by a sound of rending, distinctly audible in the ward-room in the dead silence that suddenly fell upon the party. Then the bows of the ship were felt to dip and her stern to rise, while her speed slackened so abruptly that those who were standing only retained their footing with difficulty; a final jar, succeeded by a crash, came, and the ship once more settled to her bearings, floating smoothly and tranquilly as before.

By this time the occupants of the ward-room were all upon their feet, staring at one another, speechless, with horrified eyes. But as the stern of the ship settled and she again came to her bearings, Mr Brown, the chief officer, who was one of the party, exclaimed:

"Ice—by the Living Jingo!—and we've hit it! More than that she's torn the bottom off herself, unless I'm very greatly mistaken; and in another minute there'll be the deuce and all to pay—a panic, as likely as not. To your stations, gentlemen, and remember—the first thing to be done is to keep the boat deck clear. Come on!" And he led the way up the companion-ladder to the deck.

As Dick emerged into the open air, the first thing of which he became conscious was a distinctly keener edge of chill in the atmosphere; next, that the ship's engines had stopped; and third, that the second-class passengers were swarming out of their quarters like angry bees, each demanding of the other to be told what had happened. They were evidently heading with one accord for the promenade deck, doubtless *en route* for the boat deck; and Dick only reached the foot of the ladder in the nick of time to meet the rush of the foremost.

"Hillo!" he cried, good-humouredly, planting himself square in front of the ladder. "Whither away, good people? No, no; that is the first-class quarters; you know that you have no right on the promenade deck. Keep to your own part of the ship, please."

The crowd checked at the cool authoritativeness of Dick's tones; but a big, burly man elbowed his way through the crush until he came face to face with the young officer.

"Out of the way, youngster," he shouted. "Who are you, to talk of 'right' at a time like this? The ship is on the rocks and sinking, and—"

"Oh, my dear good man," interrupted Dick, wearily. "You make me tired. Why do you start talking about things of which you know nothing, and try to frighten your fellow passengers? You are the sort of chap who yells blue murder if the lights in a picture theatre go out before you think they ought, and starts a panic in which a lot of women and children get badly hurt. Rocks! Why, we're hundreds of miles from the nearest land. And as to the ship sinking, don't you know that she's unsinkable—that she *can't* sink? The fact is that we've hit a bit of ice in the darkness, and all the bumping that you felt was just the ice being broken up by the ship as she ran past it. Now, take my advice, all of you; go back to your cabins and turn in, or some of you will be catching bad colds. Where are the parents of those children in night-dresses? Whoever they are, they ought to be ashamed of themselves for bringing the poor little kiddies into the cold in that rig! Take 'em below and put 'em to bed again, there's good people. And go to bed yourselves; it's the most comfortable place in the ship on a night like this. I wish I had the chance to go there."

Dick's one idea in talking had been to subdue the tendency towards panic which he had observed in the crowd before him, and to a certain extent he had succeeded. That is to say, the parents of the children in nightgowns had sheepishly herded their flock back into the deck-house, while a few of the other passengers had followed them. But the majority still lingered, waiting perhaps to hear further particulars. And these the big, burly man—who, from his somewhat "loud" costume, might be taken for a pugilist or a doubtful frequenter of race courses—seemed determined to have. Dick's sarcasm had produced no more effect upon him than rain does upon a duck, and he still stood staring aggressively at the young officer.

"That's all very well," he declared truculently; "but if there's no danger, what are all them sailors so busy about the boats up there for?"

The boat deck was by this time a scene of feverish but orderly activity, every available seaman being mustered there, busily engaged, under the supervision of the chief and second officers, on the task of stripping the boats of their canvas, casting them loose, hoisting them out of their chocks, and swinging them outboard ready for lowering.

"Why, you chump," answered Dick, "they are doing that for the express purpose of reassuring people like yourself, who always go badly scared if they get half a chance. Besides, it is one of the standing orders of the ship, and gives the men a bit of exercise in handling the boats. They will hang there for a bit, and then they will be swung inboard and stowed again. Now,—*please* go back to your cabins, all of you, and make yourselves comfortable. Or, if you don't care to do that—if you are determined to hang about out here on deck in the cold, at least go and put some warm clothes on. For I tell you candidly that it may be an hour or more before those boats are swung in and stowed."

"All right!" returned Dick's opponent, "I'll stay where I am until that's done, and chance it. I'd rather have a cold than be drowned in my cabin, like a rat in a trap."

"Very well," retorted Dick. "Do as you please, by all means. It's your look-out, not mine. Only you are setting a very bad example to the others. And by this time to-morrow you will all be sorry that you did not take my advice."

Meanwhile, from where Dick stood, at the foot of the ladder leading to the promenade deck, he could hear the purser up there suavely assuring a crowd of first-class passengers that there was not the slightest occasion for alarm, that the boats were merely being swung out as a precautionary measure always adopted in such cases, and that if they would kindly retire to the dining-saloon they would find a hot supper awaiting them which he had taken it upon himself to order, just to fortify his charges against any possible ill effects from the cold to which they were so foolishly exposing themselves. And while he spoke, the purser was busily but very politely shepherding the promenade deck crowd toward the doorway giving access to the dining-saloon.

But above the suavely jocular accents of the purser's voice Dick's quick ears caught other and more sinister sounds, to wit, the persistent crackling of the ship's wireless installation, and he very shrewdly suspected that that meant something much more serious and important than "Sparks" swapping good-nights with some other operator—that, in short, it meant nothing less than that most urgent of all wireless calls, the S.O.S. of a ship in dire distress summoning other ships to her aid. Further than that, although the work of preparing the boats for lowering was proceeding in a perfectly quiet and orderly manner, Dick was conscious, even above the roar of escaping steam, of a strenuous haste in the movements of the men engaged upon the task, as well as of a certain note of sharpness and urgency in the tones of the officers who were supervising the work, all of which combined to impress upon the young officer the conviction that matters were taking a distinctly serious turn for the *Everest*.

In the brief interval during which the above impressions were printing themselves upon Dick's consciousness, a few of the people confronting him had turned, and, in a half-hearted, hesitant way, were drifting back toward the entrance of the deck-house, although the greater part of them seemed disposed to follow the burly man's example and remain where they were until authoritatively assured that all was well with the ship. It was during this momentary lull that a brass-buttoned steward came nimbly down the ladder before which Cavendish was standing, and said to him:

"Purser's compliments, sir, and would you be so good as to tell the second-class passengers that, on account of their bein' disturbed by the ship hittin' a lump of ice, and turnin' out in the cold, tea, coffee, and hot soup is bein' served in the dinin'-room to warm 'em up a bit before they goes to their beds."

"Right-o!" answered Dick. "I will inform them at once. Ladies and gentlemen," he continued, "lest you should not all have heard the message which the steward has just delivered, let me repeat it. It is a message from the purser to the effect that since so many of you have unfortunately been scared out of your warm cabins by the collision of the ship

with a small piece of ice, tea, coffee, and hot soup are now being served in the dining-room to those who care to have something to warm them before turning in. If you take my advice, you will lose no time in going below to get it, because only a limited quantity will be served, and those who get below first will have the best chance. Good-night, all of you. Turn in as soon as you have had your hot drink, and get a good night's rest."

And therewith the young man turned and with much deliberation ascended the ladder, his intention in so doing being to convey the impression that the scare was over and the entire incident ended.

The ruse was brilliantly successful, for the moment at least, for when, upon reaching the head of the ladder, he turned to see what was happening on the deck which he had just left, he saw that the whole crowd of second-class passengers was in full retreat, with the burly man elbowing his way through it, that he might secure his full share of whatever might happen to be going in the dining-room.

Pausing for a moment to watch the gradual disappearance of the people through the deck-house door, Dick waited until the last of them had vanished, and then darted along the now deserted promenade deck and up the ladder to the boat deck, where he found himself in the midst of a scene of the most strenuous activity; the men still feverishly working at the task of clearing and swinging out the boats, the officers supervising and assisting in the work, as though every second of time were more precious than gold, stewards hurrying up from below with provisions with which to stock the boats, and the captain on the bridge overlooking all, the whole deck brilliantly illuminated by every available electric lamp, while overhead the steam still roared out of the pipes, and the crackle of the wireless obtruded itself insistently through all other sounds.

Cavendish knew that Mr Brown, the chief officer, was up here somewhere, and he presently found him and briefly reported what had happened down on the main deck.

"Good!" returned Brown. "But go back and guard the head of the ladder leading from the main to the promenade deck. We're holed in nearly every compartment, and the leaks are gaining upon us in spite of the steam pumps. The ship's doomed—that's the long and the short of it; nothing can save her; and as soon as all the boats are ready there will be a call for the women and children. Your duty then will be to see that no men from the second-class are allowed to slip past you until all women and children have been safely got off. Likely enough some of the men may try to rush you. Got a revolver?"

"I have a pair down in my cabin, but—"

"Good!" interrupted Brown. "Don't waste time going down to fetch them. Collar a steward and tell him to get them for you. Now, off you go. Those people down below may take the alarm again at any moment. One word more. When all the women and children are up, don't let any men pass you until you get word from me. Now—scoot!"

Dick "scooted," dispatching a steward for his revolvers on the way, not that he had the slightest intention of using them; but he knew how efficacious a revolver—even though empty—is in stopping a rush, and he decided that it would be a good thing to have them. A minute later—his visit to the boat deck having occupied some ten minutes—he reached his post at the head of the ladder which he was to guard—just in time. For as he posted himself, the head of the burly man swung into view, wagging from side to side as its owner climbed the ladder, with quite a little crowd behind him, while others were streaming out on deck.

"What! my friend, you here again?" exclaimed Dick as he planted himself at the head of the ladder, with a hand grasping the rail on either side of him, thus converting himself into a human closed gate. "Have you come to tell me that there were not enough hot drinks to go round and that you didn't get your fair share? No you don't"—as the man strove to dislodge Cavendish from his position—"your place is down there on the main deck, as I've told you before—ah! would you? Then take that, as a little lesson that when you're aboard ship you must behave yourself and obey orders!"

"That" was a blow straight between the eyes, administered to the burly man, who now seemed determined to fight his way up to the boat deck at all costs. The fellow went reeling back under the impact of the blow, and would undoubtedly have fallen some ten feet to the deck below had he not been caught and supported by the people beneath him on the ladder. These instantly raised a loud clamour, in which the words "Shame! shame!" were distinctly audible, while some of the women began to cry and manifest a disposition to become hysterical. Then another big man suddenly started to elbow his way through the crowd now thickly grouped about the foot of the ladder which Dick was guarding, shouting, as he came—

"Here, let me get at him. Officer or no officer, I'll soon shift him!"

"Yes, yes; that's right, governor," shouted others, also pressing forward. "Let's get him out of the way. What right has he got to keep us down here while the ship's sinking? Our lives are just as good as other people's, and we've a right to save 'em if we can."

Dick saw that a crisis was imminent and that unless he acted with decision the people on the deck below would very quickly get out of hand. Luckily for him, the steward whom he had dispatched for his revolvers at this moment appeared, thrust the weapons into his hand, and dashed off again without saying a word. The youngster was reluctant to display the weapons, for he was by no means sure that the sight of them would produce the desired effect. Yet there seemed to be no alternative, for the little band of men below—some eight or ten in number—were evidently determined to force the passage of the ladder. He therefore pointed both weapons straight at the group as he shouted:

"Halt there, you men! If you dare to move another step, I'll shoot. What do you mean by your outrageous conduct, pushing and hustling your way violently through a crowd of helpless women and children in that brutal fashion? You wouldn't do it if any of them belonged to you, and I am surprised that the husbands and fathers put up with it. Call

yourselves Englishmen? Pah! I'm ashamed of you. You make me sick!"

Dick's appeal to the husbands and fathers of those whom the gang had been hustling so roughly was a happy inspiration, and produced an immediate effect, the said husbands and fathers at once raising their voices in remonstrance, while the women also joined in, with the result that a heated altercation quickly ensued which threatened to speedily develop into a free fight. But that was only a shade less desirable than the other, wherefore, slipping his revolvers into his pockets, Dick intervened.

"Now then, below there, none of that!" he shouted. "I'll allow no fighting. The first man who strikes a blow shall be clapped in irons. And just listen to me a moment, if you please," he continued, as the faces below turned again toward him. "Will one of you men who seem so extraordinarily anxious to come up here kindly explain *why* you want to come?"

For a moment there was dead silence among the crowd, then the burly man whom Dick had struck, and who had retired crestfallen to the foot of the ladder, looked up and replied:

"The ship's sinking—you can't deny it—and our lives are worth just as much as other people's. We want to have a fair chance of saving 'em, and—"

"Stop a moment," interrupted Dick, thinking he saw a chance to create a diversion and avert the inevitable rush for a few minutes. "You say that the ship is sinking and that you want to save your lives by taking to the boats. Have you all taken the precaution to put your money and other valuables in your pockets? And have you all seen to it that you are dressed in your warmest clothes? You know," he continued, banteringly, "if you were at this moment called to get into the boats, you would be very sorry when you afterwards remembered that in your hurry you had left all your valuables behind you. And boating in this weather is a most unpleasantly cold business, I assure you."

A rather lengthy silence followed this speech of Dick's. Those whom he had addressed were thinking very seriously about what he had said touching money and valuables. Probably not one of them had dreamed of adopting the precautionary measures suggested, and many of them were painfully conscious at that moment that every penny they possessed was locked up in the trunks in their cabins. Several of them began to move hesitatingly towards the deck-house entrance. Then a man who was leading the way, suddenly halted and shouted—

"Look here, mister. Tell us the plain truth, as man to man. Is this ship going to sink, or isn't she? That's all that we want to know."

The question set Dick's mind working at lightning speed. Should he or should he not deny the dreadful truth? He felt that he could not unreservedly deny it, yet, on the other hand, unreservedly to admit it might precipitate a panic. He quickly decided that the proper thing to do would be to prepare those people for the inevitable, but to do so in such a fashion as to reassure them to the utmost possible extent. Therefore he answered:

"As man to man I tell you that we hope to take this ship safely into New York harbour. But I will not attempt to conceal from you the fact that she has sustained a certain amount of damage from her collision with a mass of ice and she is leaking a bit—stop! Don't run away until I have told you everything," he continued, as he saw the listening crowd below bracing itself for a rush. "As I have said, the ship is leaking a bit, but the steam pumps are at work—listen! you can hear the beat of them—and the water is pouring out of her almost, if not quite, as fast as it is pouring in." (This was very far from being the truth, and Dick knew it, but he considered that the circumstances justified the prevarication). "But it is a rule with this company, as it is with many others, that the moment a ship sustains any damage, however slight, the first step taken is to provide for the safety of passengers, and that is why you see the boats being got ready. If the leak should be found to be gaining on the pumps, ample notice will be given you, and plenty of time will be allowed for transferring everybody to the boats without rush or confusion of any kind. So now you know all that there is to know. If you take my advice you will all go to your cabins, dress yourselves in your warmest clothes, secure money and valuables about your persons, and then lie down and get a comfortable sleep. If it is considered desirable that you should be transferred to the boats you will be told so in good time. And don't hurry. It may be hours yet before you will be summoned to the boats—if indeed you are summoned at all."

Again Dick's eloquence had triumphed, and this time the triumph was distinctly of a more decisive character than on the previous occasion; his candour—so far as it went—had convinced the people whom he addressed that if there was any danger at all it was certainly not imminent; and in a body they turned away, intent upon acting on his advice.

Within a minute of the disappearance of the last of the second-class passengers, a loud hissing, shearing sound rent the air, heard distinctly above the now somewhat moderated roar of the escaping steam, and, leaning far out over the rail of the promenade deck, Dick was just in time to mark the heavenward flight of a rocket—the first visible signal of distress which the *Everest* had thus far made—and to see it burst, high up, into a shower of brilliant red stars. It was the light shed by these stars as they floated downward that first revealed to the young officer the fact that a thin veil of haze enveloped the ship, through which, scattered here and there, were several small blocks of field ice; while away on the starboard quarter, distant about half a mile, was a much larger mass, standing perhaps two or three feet above the water's surface, which might well be the berg that had done all the mischief. But Dick was horrified, as he stared down into the water, to note how much nearer was the surface than usual, as seen from the level of the promenade deck—quite three feet nearer, he estimated. And the ship had sunk to that extent within little more than half an hour!

The lad glanced eagerly about him. The deck below, set apart for the exclusive use of the second-class passengers, was now tenantless, but the port of every cabin was aglow with light, showing pretty conclusively that the people there were following Dick's advice. The same held good with regard to the cabins on the promenade deck; every window—and many doors as well—revealed the fact that the occupants were busy within; but even while Cavendish

looked, a few people emerged from adjacent cabins, all of them warmly clad and evidently prepared as well as they could be for the hardships of exposure in open boats. Also, far away for'ard, Dick could just distinguish that the smoke-room door was open and that men were passing in and out, their movements suggesting uneasiness and expectancy.

Again Dick glanced over the rail. The water was perfectly smooth, unwrinkled by even the faintest zephyr of a breeze, and the great ship lay almost as motionless and steady as though she were in dock. Thank God! when the moment came there ought to be no difficulty in getting the laden boats safely lowered and afloat. At the thought of the boats he glanced upward and saw that the whole of them on the starboard side were swung out and lowered sufficiently to permit of the people stepping easily into them from the deck above. Then he ran across the deck to the port side, and saw that all boats but one on that side were also ready, while the last one was even at that moment being lowered to the same level as the rest.

As Dick walked back to his station at the head of the ladder another rocket went screaming its way aloft into the black sky, and with the bursting of it the lad became conscious of the fact that the wireless was no longer insistently clamouring; there were moments now when it remained silent for quite a minute or more, followed by a few sharp cracklings, and again silence. The *Everest* had evidently at last got into touch with another ship and was exchanging confidences with her.

Dick began to feel cold up there on the promenade deck, and to promote warmth, proceeded to walk briskly to and fro athwart the broad space of deck abaft the long range of cabins. And as he did so, he caught a momentary view of one of the quartermasters entering the doorway which led toward the main companion-way, and, incidentally, to the library, ladies' boudoir, grand saloon, and dining-hall. The man held a small slip of paper in his hand, and Dick instantly surmised that the slip might be a communication from either the captain or the chief officer to the purser.

The lad paused in his walk, awaiting results. And they were not long in coming, for a few minutes later the quartermaster emerged, quickly followed by the purser, who, taking up a position midway between the smoke-room and the block of cabins abaft it—which space Dick now saw was occupied by several groups of men and women—cleared his voice and then proclaimed in ringing accents:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this paper which I hold in my hand is a message which has just been brought to me from Captain Prowse, and it contains news which I am sure will be very welcome to you all. It is to the effect that our wireless operator has succeeded in getting into touch with the *Bolivia* and acquainting the captain of that vessel with our somewhat unfortunate plight. The *Bolivia*, as some of you are doubtless aware, is homeward bound, but upon learning the news of our accident, her captain has unhesitatingly interrupted his voyage and is at this moment heading for our position as rapidly as his powerful engines will drive him. He expects to arrive alongside in about three hours from now; you have therefore the assurance of perfect safety, let what will happen. This is as gratifying news to Captain Prowse as I expect it is to you; for I may now tell you that the *Everest* is much more seriously damaged than we at first anticipated, and—purely as a measure of precaution, I assure you—the captain, in consultation with his officers, has decided temporarily to transfer all passengers to the boats, thus ensuring their safety, whatever may happen to the ship. And if the worst should come to the worst and the leak continue to gain upon us, the *Bolivia* will receive you upon her arrival and convey you to New York. It was in anticipation of some such contingency as this that I advised you all, a little while ago, to change into warmer clothing, and I am glad to see that you have taken my advice. A call for you to enter the boats—women and children first—will shortly be made; therefore, if any of you have any valuables in your cabins, let me advise you to secure them at once. Several of you have deposited money and jewels in my charge. I am now about to proceed to my office for the purpose of delivering those deposits to their rightful owners; and I shall be much obliged if you will all kindly bring your deposit notes with you to facilitate the distribution."

And, so saying, the purser, cool and imperturbable as ever, bowed and withdrew, his departure being instantly followed by a hurried rush of the passengers to their cabins.

An interval of some twenty minutes now elapsed, during which nothing particular happened, except that the second-class passengers began again to emerge from their quarters in little groups and congregate about the foot of the ladder, as though holding themselves in readiness to obey an expected call. At regular intervals distress rockets continued to be fired from the upper deck, each discharge being followed by a little movement of restlessness on the part of the rapidly increasing crowd, while Dick noticed that the ship's wireless was again insistently calling. He also noticed that the burly man and a small group of kindred spirits were quietly but unobtrusively edging their way through the gathering crowd towards the foot of the ladder, and he decided to check the movement forthwith. Therefore, raising his arm to attract attention, and then pointing downward at the culprits, he said:

"Now, look here, you men! Stop that at once, if you please. I see your game; but it won't do. You are trying to get in front of all the others, so as to be first in the boats if you are called to take to them. But it won't do, my fine fellows. If it is decided to send away the boats, the women and children will be the first to go; therefore the men will be pleased to fall in in the rear. Let all the children come forward, and their mothers with them—no, no; don't rush and crowd, for there is not the least occasion for hurry; make a lane, there—a good wide lane to the foot of the ladder—do you hear what I say? That's better—open out wider yet. So! Good! Now, you mothers, come to the front with your kiddies, and sit down on deck until further orders. Let the youngsters come up the ladder and sit down on the steps. They may come up as far as the top step, but no farther. That's right. Now, little folks, sit close together and keep each other warm. That's capital. Now you will do very well."

As Dick finished, a quartermaster, accompanied by half-a-dozen seamen, came along the deck, and while the latter ranged themselves immediately behind Cavendish, the quartermaster murmured in the young man's ear:

"They're goin' to begin launchin' the boats, sir, and the chief officer wants you up on the boat deck to help. I'm to stay here with these men, to see that there's no rush. You're to go at once, please, sir."

"Right!" responded Dick, and turned to go. Then a thought suddenly occurred to him, and he faced round to the people on the deck below, now evidently all agog to learn what fresh development was impending.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "A message has just been brought to me that the captain has decided to put you all into the boats, as a measure of safety. But I see that none of you have as yet put on life belts. You will find them in your cabins. Please go there and fetch them, and two of these men will come to you and help you to put them on. There is no hurry, so, when the call comes, please take your time, and let there be no crowding. You will get away much quicker by behaving in a quiet and orderly manner."

Then, with a few words of warning to the quartermaster and the seamen, Dick turned and made a dash for the boat deck.

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## Chapter Two.

### The Foundering of the "Everest."

Upon reaching the ladder leading to the boat deck, which was the uppermost deck of all, he found it packed with first-class passengers, among whom the word had already been passed round, so, rather than incommode them, he sprang up on the rail and swarmed up a stanchion.

Arrived on the boat deck, he found the preparations for lowering the boats complete, and he also found the captain and chief officer preparing to supervise the embarkation. These he at once joined, and upon reporting himself, was immediately stationed at the after end of the deck on the starboard side, to supervise the dispatch of four boats. The deck was now rapidly filling with passengers, who were coming up from below, both fore and aft, men, women and children indiscriminately, despite the efforts of those below to keep them apart. But they were received upon their arrival by a number of quartermasters and seamen, who firmly, but with rough courtesy, herded the men along the middle part of the deck while the women and children were allowed to go to the port and starboard sides of the deck, where the officers received them.

Dick stationed himself abreast the aftermost of his quartette of boats, and as the anxious mothers with their children came crowding up, he quickly passed them through the opening in the rail and into the boat, where the three men in charge of it received them and directed them where to place themselves. So far, there was very little confusion, except that a few women clamoured for their husbands to be allowed to go with them, so causing a certain amount of delay; but on the whole matters were going very well, and within forty minutes the whole of the boats that had been swung out were safely lowered and dispatched, with orders to lie off at least half a mile, and there wait for further orders. These boats took not only all the women and children, but also as many men as room could be found for.

But all told there still remained nearly two thousand men aboard the doomed ship, whose safety depended upon the possibility of launching the collapsible boats and life rafts before the now rapidly sinking liner foundered. And this possibility had become very questionable, for the water had gained so much that the furnace fires had been extinguished and steam was rapidly failing, with the result that the pumps were no longer working at anything like full power. Moreover, although every possible arrangement had been made to facilitate the launching of the collapsible and other craft, much still remained to be done before they would be ready to receive their complement of passengers and be dispatched. Meanwhile the *Everest* had settled so low in the water that many of those still waiting were beginning to betray much uneasiness, not to say restiveness, at the inevitable delay, this restiveness being most apparent among the steerage passengers and, in a lesser degree, among the second-class, while the first-class passengers, almost to a man, not only displayed the most perfect coolness, but even united with the officers of the ship in their efforts to allay the rapidly growing impatience of the others.

Dick saw that trouble was brewing, and stimulated his gang of workers both by voice and example, with the result that very soon he had a big collapsible boat hooked on to the davit tackles and swung outboard. But she still needed a certain amount of preparation before she would be ready to receive her living cargo, and to complete that preparation Cavendish ordered four of his gang of six men into her. Instantly a crowd of excited foreigners from the steerage, probably mistaking the action for an indication that the boat was ready, made a rush for her and, thrusting Dick and his remaining two assistants aside, hurled themselves frantically into her, shrieking and jabbering like maniacs. The result, of course, was that the boat promptly collapsed, and taking the intruders entirely by surprise, precipitated the greater number of them into the water beneath, while the four seamen in her only escaped a like fate by making a spring for and seizing the tackles and guys.

Dick, who with his two assistants had been knocked down and nearly overboard by the rush, quickly scrambled to his feet and dropped overboard every rope's end he could lay his hands upon, and by this means contrived to rescue some twenty of the now thoroughly sobered and frightened men; but, of course, this involved a most lamentable delay and loss of time; and meanwhile it became apparent to all that the ship was now fast settling in the water. Even worse than that, however, was the effect which the conviction produced upon the ignorant foreigners among the passengers. These were fast developing a tendency to panic, which manifested itself in a determination to assist the seamen; and since their efforts to assist were unaided for the most part by the smallest glimmering of knowledge as to the proper thing to do, they naturally hindered instead of helping, and not only Dick but the other officers as well soon had all their work cut out to keep the zealous but ignorant foreigners in anything like order.

The worst characteristic of panic is that it is so horribly contagious. Let a crowd of people once get the idea into their heads that they are in peril, and they will fight together like wild beasts in their anxiety to escape. And the officers of the *Everest* knew this; therefore they devoted the whole of their energies to the task of reassuring that great crowd of men who now filled the boat deck of the sinking ship, arguing, pleading, and even threatening, while the Dagos crowded around them ever more menacingly, with eyes ablaze with mingled terror and ferocity, lips contracted into

savage snarls, and hands in many cases gripping long, ugly-looking, dagger-like knives.

Then suddenly there came, unceremoniously elbowing his way through the excited crowd, the well-known form of the purser, his face wreathed with smiles, and a paper in his hand.

"Make way, there, make way, good people," he shouted. "I have good news for you. The wireless operators have succeeded in getting into touch with three more ships, and now not only the *Bolivia*, but also the *Cotopaxi*, the *Platonic*, and the *Nigerian* are hastening to our rescue and will all be alongside us in the course of a few hours. Therefore, cheer up, there is help and room for everybody on the way."

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Three cheers for the purser and his good news," shouted a man with a strong American accent; and all who understood him heartily took up the cheering; while the foreigners, who had failed to catch the meaning of the purser's remarks, at least understood from the cheering that good news of some sort had come to hand, and their attitude at once became less menacing.

"Good for you, sir," exclaimed Dick to the men who had started the cheering. "Those hurrahs of yours are worth more than diamonds to us just now. Hurry up lads with that boat and let's get her afloat. Are you ready, Simpson? Good! Now then, come along, good people, but don't crowd, there's plenty of time. Jump in, sir—" to the man with the American accent; "you deserve a place, if only in return for those cheers."

"Not I, my son," answered the man addressed—he was only about twenty-eight to thirty years of age. "I have neither wife, child, nor relative of any kind, as far as I know. Let the married folk go first. Now then, you husbands and fathers, step out. Any more for the shore?"

He spoke with a smile on his good-looking face, and that and the little jest of "Any more for the shore?" were as comforting to many a man there as all the assurances of the ship's officers had been; nay, more, for they had been accompanied by a wave of the hand toward the boat and a voluntary stepping aside that seemed to say as plain as words—"Pass along, you who are afraid. I am not, and am entirely willing to wait my turn."

But although the peril of panic was less imminent than it had been, it was by no means banished, and probably none recognised this more clearly than the American, for while the boat just filled was being lowered, he edged up to Dick and murmured:

"Say, young man, unless you are looking for trouble I would advise you to get all those Dagos out of the ship quick. I know their sort, sir, and I can tell by the look in their eyes, that the smallest thing in the way of an extra scare will just send the whole crowd jumping mad. So get rid of them in a hurry. That's my advice."

"And I believe you are right, too," answered Dick. "But I can't act on your advice, all the same. There are others who are entitled to as good a chance as the Dagos, and they must have it. There is yourself, for instance—"

"Nix! I guess not!" interrupted the American. "Of course, I know what you mean," he continued, in a low tone; "the ship can't last much longer, and a good few of us are in for a cold swim; but I guess I'll take my chance with the rest of the bathers."

The launching and the dispatch of the collapsibles was now proceeding with frantic haste, for it was no longer possible to conceal the fact that the ship's minutes were numbered, while there were still over a thousand people aboard. But the discipline was perfect, the work was going forward smoothly and with no more bustle than if the passengers were being landed upon a wharf; and if it had not been for the horribly nervous condition of the foreigners all might have been well. But they were in just that state of "nerves" when, as the American had suggested, the smallest scare would act upon them as a spark upon gunpowder; and the scare presently came, in the form of a small explosion—which might have been nothing more than the accidental discharge of a revolver somewhere down in the depths of the ship. Whatever it may have been, it was enough to turn the scale—to upset the state of delicate, unstable equilibrium prevailing, and after a momentary glance around them, the foreigners, nearly three-hundred in number, set up a yell of terror and hurled themselves in a body upon those who were at work upon the boats.

In a flash, Dick, the American, and half a dozen more were swept out through the temporary gangway by the maddened crowd, and, before they fully realised what was happening, found themselves floundering in the water alongside, while others came hurtling down on all sides. Luckily for himself, Dick went down straight—and consequently somewhat deep, and before his descent was checked his presence of mind returned. He pictured to himself exactly what was happening above him, and struck out powerfully under water, so as to escape the shower of falling bodies when he should reach the surface.

The water was bitterly cold, but Dick kept under as long as he could, swimming straight away from the ship; and when at length he rose he saw with satisfaction that he was some ten yards distant from her, and well clear of the struggling mass of men alongside, who were being added to by dozens, even as he watched.

The next moment another head broke water alongside him, and as it did so a voice which Dick instantly recognised ejaculated, amidst a fusillade of coughs and splutterings—

"B-r-r-ur! It's colder'n charity! Darn those Dagos, anyway! It was cold enough up there on the hurricane deck, but here—ugh!"

"You are right," returned Dick. "It *is* cold, and no mistake. I hope those fellows didn't hurt you in their mad rush."

"Nary a hurt," replied Dick's companion. "So it's you, young man, is it? Good! Say! although it is so tarnation cold down here, I guess we're better off than the people up there on deck. For now we'll have a chance to get clear of the



ship before she sinks, if we hustle a bit. See that star over there? I guess we'd better make a bee line for it and swim for all we're worth; then, if we're lucky we may escape being dragged down in the vortex; and perhaps we may find a boat to hang on to until something comes along and picks us up."

Dick agreeing, the pair struck out strongly in the direction of the star. But, as they swam, their ears were assailed by a veritable pandemonium of sound aboard the sinking steamer—shouts, yells, screams, and a regular fusillade of pistol shots, bearing eloquent evidence of the terrible scenes that were enacting aboard her.

As the two swimmers proceeded the mingled sounds aboard the *Everest* seemed to swell rather than diminish, to such an extent indeed that presently the American turned to Dick and gasped, through chattering teeth—

"S-s-say! s-s-seems to m-me that there's a r-reg-ular pitched b-a-attle going on aboard there—ugh! G-g-guess w-we're b-b-better off here th-th-than there—eh?"

"R-r-rather!" stammered Dick back, but he was suffering so intensely from the icy nip of the water that he felt no disposition to talk, and simply pushed ahead for all he was worth, hoping that by dint of violent exertion he might be able to conquer the numbing sensation that was gradually clogging his movements.

For another ten minutes the pair pressed forward side by side. Then suddenly Dick's companion ceased his exertions, and, with a groan, turned over on his back. He managed to stammer a question whether there were any boats at hand; and upon Dick replying in the negative the American gasped:

"Then I'm d-d-done. C-cramp all over. C-can't s-swim 'nother s-stroke. G-good-bye!"

"Good-bye be hanged!" shouted Dick, stirred to new life by his companion's extremity. "Just y-you lie as y-you are—I'll l-l-look after you."

And flinging himself on his back, Cavendish gripped the other man firmly by the collar, and, kicking out vigorously, towed him along. Some five minutes later the youngster became conscious of a sudden and very decided fall in the temperature of the water, and looking about in search of the cause, found himself within a few yards of a large cake of field ice. There, at all events, was a refuge of a sort—something that would serve the purpose of a raft, and with a few vigorous strokes he was alongside it. It was a great slab of field ice, its flat upper surface not more than six inches above water; and after a tremendous struggle Dick not only got upon the slab himself but also contrived to drag his companion up also. Their combined weight seemed to have very little effect upon the stability of the mass, merely depressing the adjacent edge perhaps a couple of inches; and, this fact ascertained, Dick lost no time, but set to work upon the body of the insensible American, pounding, rubbing, and rolling it with such vigour that not only did he at length feel the chill departing from his own limbs but also felt his companion stir and heard him groan.

"Feel better?" demanded Dick. Then, without waiting for a reply, he added: "If you can only manage to get to your feet and walk about a bit, we'll soon restore our circulation. Let me give you a lift."

"Wait," gasped the American. "Breast pocket—br-r-randy flask. Take nip and give me one."

The brandy flask was found, and after applying it to the lips of its owner, Dick took a mouthful himself before replacing the top. The effect of the spirit upon their chilled bodies was almost miraculous, a wave of warmth surged through them, and presently the American was on his feet, and, with Dick's arm linked in his, was staggering to and fro upon the surface of the ice. As the stiffness and cramp worked out of their limbs they were able to increase their pace, until within a few minutes they were trotting to and fro across the mass and feeling almost warm once more.

Meanwhile, although the sounds of conflict and confusion aboard the *Everest* still floated to the pair, horribly suggesting the awful scenes that were being enacted on her deck, the ship herself had settled so deeply in the water that only the lights in the cabins of the promenade deck and the clusters illuminating the boat deck now marked her whereabouts, and it soon became apparent that the end was very near. As a matter of fact it was even nearer than the occupants of the floe imagined, for as with one accord they paused to glance at the ship in response to an exceptionally strident outburst of sound, they beheld the line of lights suddenly incline from the horizontal, saw the slope grow steadily steeper, and then, as the great mass of the vessel's stern hove up, an indistinct blur of deeper blackness on the darkness of the night, the line of lights slid forward and vanished one after another until all had disappeared, while at the same moment a heartrending wail from hundreds of throats pealed out across the water, punctuated by a crackling volley of pistol shots.

"Gone!" ejaculated Dick's companion—and the ejaculation was almost a groan. "The unsinkable *Everest*, that triumph of human ingenuity which was finally to insure travellers against every peril of the sea, is gone, sent to the bottom by a chunk of ice so small that, we may assume, the look-outs never saw it until it was too late. And with her she has taken, I suppose, the best part of a thousand people—of whom you and I, my friend, might have been two, if those tarnation cowardly Dagos had not knocked us overboard, for which I am obliged to them, although I wasn't by a long chalk, a quarter of an hour ago. Now I guess we're just as well off here as those people are in the boats; better, maybe, for we can at least move about and keep ourselves warm here, whereas—say! What's that? See, over there! Isn't it a rocket?"

As Dick looked in the direction toward which his companion pointed, he caught a momentary glimpse of a sudden faint irradiation in the sky, followed by the appearance of a minute cluster of tiny falling stars.

"Yes," he replied, "that's a rocket all right; and it means that the *Bolivia* or one of the other ships is coming up, and is firing rockets to let us know that help is at hand. But whatever she is, she is a long way off yet, and probably will not arrive for the next half-hour at least. So let me recommend another sprint or two across the ice just to keep the blood moving in our veins."

"Correct again," returned the American, as they started off at a brisk walk. "But—say!" he continued, turning to Dick and extending his hand, "we've been so darned busy getting ourselves warm that I haven't yet found time to thank you for saving my life. But I'll do it now—"

"Saving your life?" ejaculated Dick. "I don't think I understand."

"Oh yes, I guess you do," answered the American. "Or, if you don't, I calculate I can easily enlighten you. You saved my life, young man, when you took me in tow out there and navigated me to this desirable ice floe, and don't you forget it. You may bet your bottom dollar that I shall not, and there's my hand upon it, stranger. Now, let me introduce myself. I know who you are all right; you're Mr Cavendish, late fifth officer of the unsinkable steamship *Everest*, very recently gone to the bottom. Isn't that right?"

Dick acknowledged the truth of his companion's statement, whereupon the latter resumed.

"Very good," he said. "Now, I suppose you've never heard of Wilfrid Earle, of New York, the man who undertook to hunt his way from Cairo to the Cape—"

"Oh! but of course I have," interrupted Dick. "I've read about you in the papers—and, come to think of it, I've seen your photograph also in the papers. Somehow your face seemed familiar when I noticed you a while ago on the boat deck—"

"Sure!" cut in the other. "That's me—Wilfrid Earle, the eccentric New Yorker, all right, all right. Only arrived home from Cape Town little more than a fortnight ago, with a whole caravan load of skins, horns, tusks, and so on; and now I guess they're about half a mile down, in the hull of the *Everest*. Gee! Guess you're thinking me a heartless brute for talking so lightly about the awful thing that's just happened; but, man, I've got to do it—or else go clean crazy with thinking about it. Or, better still, not think about it at all, since thinking about it won't mend matters the least little bit. Say! what are all those little lights dotted about over there?"

"Oh!" answered Dick, "they are the lights of the *Everest's* boats. Each boat was provided with a lantern, in order that they might keep together, and be the more easily found when the rescuing ships come up."

"Ah!" returned Earle. "A very excellent arrangement. But say! what about us? We have no lantern. How are we going to make our whereabouts known? Those boats are a good mile away, and—"

"I don't think we need worry very greatly about that," answered Dick. "Naturally, the *Bolivia*—or whatever the coming craft may be—will pick up the people in the boats directly she arrives; but she'll lower her own boats, too, and send them away to search the sea in the immediate neighbourhood for people who may be floating about in lifebuoys or cork jackets. There must be quite a number of them at no great distance from us—though how long they are likely to survive, drifting about in the ice-cold water, I should not like to say. But I think we may take it for granted that, once they have arrived, the rescuing ships will not quit the scene of the disaster until they have made quite sure that they have got all the survivors. They will wait about until daylight comes, without a shadow of doubt."

"Good! it is comforting to hear you say that," returned Earle. "You see, I don't know much about the sea and sailor ways, and it occurred to me that those rescuing ships might take it for granted that when they had recovered the people from the boats, they would have done all that was possible—and quit. Gee! but it's cold here on this ice. Lucky that there's no wind, or we should be frozen stiff in half an hour. We'll have another nip of brandy each; it'll do us both good. Lucky thing, too, that I had the sense to fill the flask and slip it into my pocket when I knew what had happened to the ship. I sort of foresaw some such experience as this, and concluded that a drop of brandy might be a good thing to have about one's person."

They had their nip and felt all the better for it; but it was necessary for them to keep moving briskly in order to combat the numbing chill of their wet clothes, and they resumed their pacing to and fro across their narrow block of ice.

For a time their conversation was of a desultory and fragmentary character, for they were both intently watching the progress of the approaching steamer, which continued to send up rockets until the glow of the flames from her funnels became clearly visible. Then the display of rockets suddenly ceased, no doubt because—as Dick surmised—the lights of the boats had been sighted by the eager look-outs aboard her. Then her mast-head light came into view, followed, a little later, by her port and starboard side lights; and at length the dark, scarcely discernible blotch that represented her hull lengthened out suddenly, revealing a long triple tier of brightly gleaming ports; and a few seconds later the roar of steam escaping as her engines stopped, reached the two watchers on the ice.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick, "she is among the boats at last and doubtless picking them up. Now we must keep our ears open listening for the sound of oars, or hailing, for I'll bet that the skipper will have had his boats swung out ready for lowering, and their crews standing by, long ago."

But nearly half an hour elapsed before the welcome sound of oars working in rowlocks faintly reached their ears, followed quickly by the shrill note of an officer's whistle.

"At last!" breathed Dick, in tones of profound relief. "Now is our chance, Mr Earle. We will shout together: 'Boat ahoy!' Take the time from me. Now—one, two, three, Boat ahoy-y-oy!"

The long drawn out "ahoy" had scarcely died on their lips before it was answered by an equally long blast from the whistle, to which they responded by repeating the hail at brief intervals, each answering blast of the whistle telling them that the boat was drawing nearer, until at length the faint loom of the boat showed in the darkness, and a lantern was suddenly held high above a man's head. Then they heard a voice exclaim:

"There they are, sir—two of 'em—on that block of ice!" And a minute later they were being carefully helped into the stern sheets of the boat, which was already floating deep with a load of motionless forms enwrapped in cork jackets. Whether they were living or dead it was impossible just then to say.

"Any more on the ice?" demanded the officer in charge of the boat. Then, following Dick's reply in the negative, he continued: "Right! shove off, bow! pull port! Give way all! Now it's us for the ship. Put your backs into it, lads. A minute or two may make all the difference between life and death for some of these poor chaps that we've fished up. Here, have a sip of brandy, you two. You must be frozen pretty nearly stiff."

"No brandy, thanks—unless my friend here—Mr Cavendish, fifth officer of the *Everest*—would care to have another nip. But we've already had some—filled a flask and slipped it into my pocket when I realised that the ship was going to sink—and I guess it saved our lives."

Upon Dick also declining "another nip" the officer in charge held out his hand.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr Cavendish, and to have picked you up. My name is Urquhart—'chief' of the *Bolivia*. By the way, since we got your S.O.S. and learned particulars of the smash-up, we've all been wondering how the mischief you managed to pile up your ship on a berg, after our warning of this afternoon. Was it thick at the time, or—how was it?"

"Your warning!" exclaimed Dick. "Did you warn us, then? If so, it is the first that I've heard of it."

"Oh! we warned you all right," answered Urquhart, "and got your acceptance of the message."

"The dickens!" ejaculated Dick. "That's very queer. Nobody said a word to me of any warning having been received. Yet—no, I cannot understand it. Mr Brown, our 'chief,' you know, and some seven or eight more were down in the ward-room when we hit the berg, and he seemed as much astonished as any of us. If he had heard anything about it, I think he would certainly have passed the word round, but—he didn't."

"Ah!" remarked the *Bolivia's* chief, with deep meaning. "Were you by any chance trying to break the record?"

"Well," answered Dick, "I believe the skipper had some such idea in his mind. You see we've had the most perfect weather all the way; little or no wind, and water like glass; the ship reeling off her twenty-six-and-a-half knots as steadily as clockwork, and everything going beautifully. I certainly did get a hint that Captain Prowse would like to set up a new record—"

"Exactly!" concurred Urquhart, dryly. "That, to my mind, explains everything. Your skipper got our warning—and simply suppressed it. He was out after a new record, and was willing to 'take a chance,' as the Americans say. And here is the result—a brand-new ship gone to the bottom, and, I suppose, hundreds of lives lost. How many did you muster, all told?"

"I couldn't say, exactly," answered Dick, "but probably not far short of three thousand."

"Yes; there you are!" commented Urquhart. "Three thousand; and boats for only about half of 'em. What became of your skipper? Went down with his ship, I expect."

"I'm afraid so," answered Dick. "In fact, I should not be very greatly surprised if it should prove that I am the only surviving officer."

"That so? And how did you manage to escape?" demanded Urquhart.

Whereupon Dick launched forth into the full story of the disaster. But before he had nearly finished, the boat arrived alongside the *Bolivia*, and her freight, whether living or dead, was quickly passed up on deck to the waiting doctor, who quickly distributed the units here and there about the ship, while the boat departed upon a further quest.

Dick and Earle, being both very little the worse for their adventure, were first taken below and given a hot bath; then they were led to a vacant passenger cabin, packed in hot blankets, and given a certain nauseous draught which quickly threw them into a profuse perspiration and a deep sleep, from which they emerged, some hours later, not a penny the worse for their adventure.

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## Chapter Three.

### Earle's proposition to Dick Cavendish.

It was the rays of the newly risen sun shining in through the open port that awakened Dick Cavendish on the morning following his great adventure. He was occupying the upper bunk in the cabin, and the first sound to greet his ears was the deep, regular breathing of the still sleeping Earle in the bunk beneath. Dick, being a sailor, awoke with all his senses completely about him; the occurrences of the previous night came back to his memory in a flash, and even before he opened his eyes he was fully aware that he was in the top berth of one of the *Bolivia's* cabins, and that it was the companion of his adventure who was in the bunk beneath him.

The next thing of which he was aware was the perfect stillness of the ship, the complete absence of that peculiar tremor due to the throb of the engines and the beat of the propellers when a ship is under way; and the thought that the *Bolivia* was still "standing by" caused him to open his eyes, rise up in his bunk, and peer through the open port at his elbow. The picture which then presented itself to his gaze was that of a brilliant morning, with a sky of turquoise blue faintly streaked here and there with the merest suggestion of a few mares' tails, a sea of sapphire blue wrinkling

and sparkling under the softest imaginable breathing of a westerly air of wind, the horizon obscured by a thin veil of haze that seemed to be already melting in the warmth of the sun, a great two-funnelled steamer lying motionless about a mile away, with a film of smoke issuing from her funnels and "feathers" of steam trembling at the top of her waste pipes, a whole flotilla of boats pulling slowly and apparently aimlessly hither and thither, and a few masses of ice of varying dimensions, from small fragments of a square foot in area to a great berg fully sixty feet high, thinly dotting the surface of the sea.

Presently there came to Dick's ear the sound of a quietly spoken order out on deck, followed by a subdued stir, accompanied by certain sounds which the youngster's experience told him was the prelude to the matutinal rite of scrubbing the decks, succeeded a few minutes later by the gush and splash of water and the sound of scrubbing brushes vigorously applied. Then the cabin door opened, and a steward entered bearing on a tray two cups of steaming coffee and a plate of buttered biscuits.

"Mornin', sir—mornin', gen'lemen both," remarked this functionary as a stir in the bottom berth announced that his entry had awakened its occupant. "Hope you've both slep' well and ain't feelin' none the worse for last night's happenin's."

"Good morning, steward," answered Dick. "Thank you. Answering for myself, I slept like a top, and am feeling A1 this morning. I see that we have not moved during the night, and that the boats are still out. What ship is that out there on our port beam?"

"That's the *Platonic*, sir. Arrived 'bout three hours ago. And the *Cotopaxi*—belongin' to your own company—and the *Nigerian*, they're lyin' about half a mile off to starboard of us. They comed up pretty near together, 'bout two hours ago, and all of 'em lowered their boats straight away. Don't know exactly what luck they've had. They've picked up a good many, I b'lieve, but I'm afraid very few of em'll be alive after floatin' about so many hours in the cold. Clothes genle'men? Yes, certainly. They're in the dryin' room. I dessay they're quite dry by this time. I'll fetch 'em for ye in a brace of shakes."

"How are the others getting on, steward?" demanded Earle. "You picked up everybody from the boats, I suppose? What with them and your regular passengers, the ship must be like a rabbit warren!"

"So she is, sir," grinned the steward. "They're scattered about all over her. We make up shake-downs for 'em wherever we could find a blessed inch of space. They're in the smoke-room, the ladies' boodwor, the lib'ry, the drorin'-room, dinin' saloon, the officers' quarters, and—why, some of the men is even down in the stokeholds. Oh yes, we took 'em all aboard, of course. But I expect we shall thin 'em out a good bit presently. Ye see they was all bound for Noo York, and the *Platonic* and *Nigerian* are both goin' there, so I expect they'll take the bulk of 'em between 'em. And if there's any as wants to go back home, the *Cotopaxi* and us'll take 'em. I haven't heard how they're feelin' after their spell in the boats, but I reckon they're all right. That wasn't no very great hardship for 'em, exceptin' for the kiddies. They was a bit frightened, naterally. And now, if you'll excuse me, gen'lemen, I'll go and get your clothes, for there'll be a lot to do presen'ly."

There was. For after the entire area of the surrounding sea had been carefully swept by the boats until it was ascertained that no more living or dead were to be found, there came the task of providing breakfast for everybody, in itself a task of no small magnitude under the circumstances. And while the meal was in progress, the officers of the *Bolivia* were going round among the rescued people, carefully noting the names of the survivors for transmission to England and America by wireless. Then followed the gruesome task of identifying such of the dead as had been found; after which came the separation of those who wished to go on to New York from those who wished to return to England, this in turn being followed by the trans-shipment of the rescued in accordance with the arrangement come to by a council composed of the captains of the rescuing ships.

As for Dick, it scarcely needed the interview which he had with Captain Wilson, of the *Cotopaxi*, to decide him to return to England in that ship. It was, indeed, the only thing for him to do; he had no business in New York; while, on the other hand, there would, of course, be a judicial inquiry into the circumstances connected with the loss of the *Everest*, at which his presence, as the sole surviving officer of the ship, would be imperatively required. He communicated his decision to Earle immediately that the question was raised, and was surprised, and not a little pleased, when the American announced his intention to also return to England.

"You see," the latter explained, "my only, or at least my principal, reason for going to New York fizzled out when the *Everest* took my collection of hunting trophies with her to the bottom of the Atlantic. If I went on to New York there would be nothing for me to do, while I have a scheme in my head that can be worked out in Europe as well as, or better than, in New York. Besides, to be quite frank with you, Cavendish, I've taken a very strong liking for you altogether, apart from the fact that you saved my life, and I guess I don't want to lose sight of you. And I'll tell you why. If this scheme of mine—which I have had in my mind for a long time—should eventuate, as I guess it will, I shall want you to take a hand in it. You are exactly the sort of young fellow that I have been looking for, and I guess I can make it quite worth your while to chip in with me. But I won't say any more about it just now—there will be plenty of time to talk matters over later on. Now let us go ahead and get aboard the *Cotopaxi*."

It was well on toward noon of that day before all the arrangements made were completed, and the several ships proceeded towards their respective destinations. But long before that the wireless operators had been busily engaged in transmitting the intelligence of the disaster to the two hemispheres; and by the time that the ships were dipping their ensigns to each other in farewell the newsboys of Europe and America were charging through the streets of hundreds of cities and towns, yelling in a dozen different languages, "Spechul edition! Wreck of the *Everest*! Fearful loss of life! Full partic'lars and list of the saved! Spechul!"

It was not until the Fastnet lighthouse showed above the horizon on the *Cotopaxi*'s port bow that Earle reverted to the topic of his "scheme," although there had been ample opportunity for him to do so during the eastward run, he

having privately so arranged matters with the purser that he and Cavendish were berthed in the same cabin during the voyage. But for reasons best known to himself he had devoted the opportunity thus afforded him to elicit as much as he possibly could of Dick's previous history; and Dick, open and candid as the day, and with nothing to conceal, had told a great deal more than perhaps some people would have considered quite prudent; so that when the Fastnet hove in sight, Earle knew practically all that there was to know about Dick, including even the fact that the latter had a sister, who, Earle gathered, from a number of cursory and incidental remarks, must be a girl very well worth knowing.

On this particular morning, however, when, after breakfast, the pair snugly ensconced themselves in a couple of deck chairs on the boat deck, which just then happened to be clear of other occupants than themselves, Earle suddenly broke ground with:

"Say! Cavendish, have you ever heard of the city of Manoa?"

"The *City of Manoa!*" repeated Dick. "Is she a steamer, or a sailing ship? I know the *City of Paris*, of course, and the —"

"No, no," interrupted Earle with a laugh. "Can't you get ships out of your head anyway? I'm not talking now about a ship, but about a genuine sure-'nough city, the Golden City of Manoa, to be precise. Ever heard of it?"

"Can't say I have," returned Dick, "excepting, of course, the fabled city of that name, supposed to be ruled over by a certain El Dorado, who was so enormously rich that he used to gild himself—"

"Exactly," agreed Earle. "That's the guy. And it is his city that I am trying to talk to you about. You—in common with almost everybody else—speak of it as the 'fabled' city, because, although it has been much talked about and eagerly sought, the fact that it was actually found has never been conclusively demonstrated. The story of its existence originated of course with those old Spanish conquistadors who, under that king of freebooters, Pizarro, conquered the Incas, and thereby amassed incalculable wealth. You have, of course, heard the story of his treacherous capture of the Inca Atahualpa, and of how the latter, having noticed the Spaniard's greed of gold, offered to ransom himself by filling with gold to as high as a man could reach, the room in which he was confined. That offer it was that seems to have fully opened the eyes of Pizarro and his followers to the enormous potential wealth of the country; and when, through their treacherous murder of Atahualpa, they had to a considerable extent cut off from themselves the supply of further enormous contributions, they naturally began to hunt about for the source of the wealth that had already fallen into their hands.

"It was through the inquiries thus instituted that the story of El Dorado and his golden city first came to their ears. They were told that far away in the north there lived a people called the Chibchas, a people as civilised as, and far more wealthy than, the Incas. They were given to understand that the Chibcha country abounded not only in gold but also in gems, especially emeralds, and in illustration of the bounteousness of this wealth certain customs of the Chibchas were described. The particular custom which gave rise to the legend of El Dorado was that which was observed on the occasion of the accession of a new monarch to the throne; and it was carried out somewhat after this fashion:—

"The proceedings began with elaborate religious ceremonies, including a long and rigorous fast, which was observed by the entire nation. This period of penance over, the inhabitants proceeded to the shores of Lake Guatabita, where, upon the day arranged for his coronation, the new ruler was brought forth from his place of penance, and, escorted by the priests, was led down through the assembled multitude to the margin of the lake, where the priests first smeared his body from head to foot with a certain sticky kind of earth, powdered him all over with gold dust, and then dressed him in his coronation robes, which were stiff with golden decorations and gems. This done, the new monarch entered a vessel loaded with costly ornaments of gold, emeralds, and other precious stones, where he was received by the four most important caciques, who were also clad in their most gorgeous dress, and the craft was forthwith rowed out toward the middle of the lake. Arrived here, the freight of gold and precious stones was solemnly thrown overboard as an offering to the gods who were supposed to inhabit the depths of the lake, the people ashore meanwhile celebrating the sacrifice by dancing to the accompaniment of musical instruments until the monarch returned to the shore.

"Guatabita was a sacred lake, and was the recognised receptacle for votive offerings of enormous value upon every possible occasion, and it must therefore at this day contain wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, several attempts to secure which have already been made; and it was on the shore of this lake that the golden city of Manoa was at first supposed to be situated.

"Of course, we know now that such was not the case, for the lake has been often visited, and no traces of the city have been found; but Guatabita was the original objective of the seekers of El Dorado.

"When at length it was conclusively demonstrated that Manoa was not situated upon the shore of Lake Guatabita, its existence began to be doubted for a while; but the belief, and the desire to discover it, were revived somewhere about the middle of the 16th century by a circumstantial story related by one Martinez, a lieutenant of Diego de Ordaz, who declared that, having been shipwrecked, he was taken inland to the city—which he called Omoa—and there entertained in regal fashion by El Dorado himself. So circumstantial and full of gorgeous detail was his story, that his chief Ordaz himself undertook the quest; but the search resulted only in disappointment, as did that of many others, including your own Sir Walter Raleigh.

"Now, the mistake made by all those people was, to my mind, that they did not look for Manoa in the right place. Their very eagerness misled them. So hungry were they for wealth that any old story was good enough to start them off upon a wild goose chase. I am not hungry for wealth; I have more of it than, with my moderate desires, I know what to do with. I am not a multi-millionaire, but I have quite enough to enable me to gratify all my cravings, of which

the predominant ones are exploration and hunting. I also have a hankering to ferret out secrets; and the secret, which has haunted me for years is that connected with the city of Manoa. Did or did it not exist? That is what I want to find out. For years I have been digging and delving after every scrap of information that I could possibly get track of upon the subject; and you would be surprised if you could see what a mass I have accumulated. But it was not until about a fortnight ago that, in your British Museum, I unearthed a certain manuscript which furnished me with the one definite and decisive clue I wanted. I won't bore you with details, but will just mention that with the help of this clue I have been able to worry out the situation of the much sought city within a hundred miles or so; and I have come to the definite conclusion that it lies within the territory of Peru, on the eastern slope of the Andes. And, having told you that much, I suppose you will not be greatly surprised to learn that I have determined to seek for it; for by so doing I shall be able at one and the same time to gratify my state for exploration and my love of hunting.

"You will remember, perhaps, that on the morning when we were picked up by the *Bolivia*, I told you that I had a certain scheme in my head. Well, that's the scheme. You will also probably remember that I said, if the scheme should eventuate I should want you to take a hand in it. The scheme is going to eventuate—I've taken time to think it over and make up my mind—and the question now is: Will you take a hand in it? Stop a bit, I don't want you to answer off-hand. Let me just tell you the nature of my proposition first.

"There will be plenty of danger attaching to the expedition, and that is one reason why I want you to become a member of it, because I noted your behaviour aboard the *Everest* while she was sinking. I had my eye upon you for some time before you became aware of my existence, and I could not avoid being impressed by the coolness and firmness which you displayed at a moment when those two qualities were essential to prevent the breaking out of a desperate and disastrous panic. Then you saved my life; and I confess to being a bit superstitious on that point. I have the conviction that the individual who has saved one's life is a good friend to have, and likely to bring one luck. Finally, what I have seen of you since has caused me to conceive a strong admiration of and liking for you—three good reasons, I think, for my desire that you should become a member of my party.

"Now, as to the terms which I am prepared to offer you. I shall, of course, defray all the costs of the expedition, including outfit, so that you will not be put to a cent of expense. And I will enter into a contract with you, engaging you for a definite period of three years, even though the expedition should, not last for so long as that; while, should it last longer, you will be paid full salary for the whole of the time. And I will pay you at the rate of one hundred and fifty dollars—or thirty British pounds, if you prefer it—per month, arranging with my bankers to pay in that sum every month for three years, to any bank in the United States or England that you choose to name. Now, my friend, what do you say? Will you come?"

"Do you require an answer at once?" demanded Dick.

"No, I don't," answered Earle. "Take time to think it over, if you like, between now and our arrival at Liverpool."

"Yes," said Dick. "I should like a few hours to consider the matter. For, you see, your proposal has come upon me quite unexpectedly; and it involves a break of something like three years in my career as a sailor, which may make it a bit difficult for me to take up the life again just where I lay it down. And, quite apart from that, there is the matter of the inquiry into the loss of the *Everest*. That may not come on for some time, and when it does it may be a lengthy affair. That would probably mean some months of delay; while, of course, you will be anxious to start at once, now that you have made up your mind to go."

"No," answered Earle. "I am in no hurry at all; on the contrary, two or three months of delay would be welcome rather than otherwise to me, because it would afford me time to extend my investigations a bit, with the possibility of securing further and still more definite clues."

"Then, in that case," said Dick, "I will give your proposal my most careful consideration, and let you have a definite reply before we land."

And so the matter was left, for the moment. But the proposal appealed very strongly to Dick for a variety of reasons, the chief of which was that his acceptance of it would enable him to provide for his sister Grace for at least three years. The flavour of adventure attached to the enterprise also powerfully appealed to him, for adventure was the very breath of life to him; and as for the rest—well, like all adventurous spirits, he was disposed to let the future take care of itself. Therefore, he did not wait for the arrival of the *Cotopaxi* at Liverpool, but, having thought the matter carefully over, informed Earle, on the evening of the same day, that he gratefully and gladly accepted his proposal.

The following day saw the arrival of the *Cotopaxi* at Liverpool, and as, of course, it had been known for several days beforehand that certain survivors from the *Everest* were on board her, and as, thanks to frequent wireless communications with her, the time of her arrival was known almost to a minute, and had been made public, the landing stage was packed with people when the ship drew alongside, most of them, it is true, animated by nothing more than mere morbid curiosity to gaze upon those who had recently passed through a very terrible experience, but among them were a few who had come down to welcome back to life the relatives or friends who had escaped. And among these were Mr James McGregor, the manager of the Mount S.S. Company; and with him, Grace Cavendish, the purpose of the latter being, of course, to welcome her brother, while Mr McGregor's business was to see that Dick did not prematurely fall into the hands of the reporters. Dick and Earle, being both destitute of baggage, were among the first to cross the gang plank, landing together; and thus it came about that Earle naturally saw Grace Cavendish, and was introduced to her, with results that may hereafter be disclosed. And it is significant that whereas Earle's original intention had been to proceed direct to London he now somewhat surprised Dick by informing him that he intended to take up his abode in the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, for the present.

The events of the ensuing two months, during which period the judicial inquiry into the loss of the *Everest* was prepared for and carried out, have very little to do with this story, and they may, therefore, be dismissed in a few words. It was, of course, only natural that Mr McGregor, in his capacity of manager to the company owning the lost

liner, should have frequent and long interviews with Dick and Earle, for the purpose of eliciting information upon various points connected with the disaster, as they were raised by the company's counsel, and those interviews soon resulted in the development of a strong mutual friendship between the trio, in consequence of which Dick and Earle became frequent visitors at the manager's house overlooking Prince's Park. And, quite as naturally, it soon came about that Dick informed Mr McGregor of Earle's proposal, and invited the manager's opinion as to the effect which his acceptance of it would have upon his future prospects. The result was that, after the three had fully talked the matter over together, the manager came to the conclusion that not only was the proposal much too advantageous for Dick to refuse, but that his acceptance of it would not very materially affect his maritime career, should he determine to resume it upon the termination of the adventure, ending up with the assurance that Dick might always count upon his (the manager's) influence and help.

For the rest, Dick arranged with Earle that the former's salary should be paid in monthly to Grace's credit, in a Liverpool bank, so that his sister might be effectively protected against any unforeseen reverse of fortune; while Grace made it clear that she was so happy in her present position that she would continue in it so long as the McGregors had any need of her; thus, when at length the inquiry was over and Dick was once more free, he was able to bid his sister farewell with the pleasant consciousness that her future was as secure as human foresight could make it.

The first week of August witnessed the arrival of Dick and Earle in New York, where the pair took up their abode in the latter's comfortable home in Fifth Avenue during the progress of their preparations for the great adventure. The precise nature of these preparations need not be revealed at this point of the story, since the details will appear as the narrative proceeds; the only fact that need now be mentioned being that, after long and anxious consideration of the question, Earle had finally determined that the starting point of the expedition should be the junction of the river Tecuachy with the Javari, a tributary of the Amazon, to which point he and Dick would proceed in the former's steam yacht *Mohawk*, a comfortable little craft of two hundred and fifty tons register. At this point, on the left, or northern, bank of the tributary, stands, on Peruvian soil, a small town called Conceicao, and abreast of this town the *Mohawk* came to an anchor about mid-afternoon of a certain day in the month of November, not so very many years ago.

At the moment when the yacht came to an anchor, her deck was encumbered with two long canoe-shaped craft, each measuring six feet beam by thirty feet in length. They were practically flat-bottomed, to ensure light draught, and were built in sections, to provide the maximum of portability, which quality was further ensured by the fact that the material of which they were constructed was an amalgam largely composed of aluminium. They were completely decked from stem to stern with a light covering of the same material, rendering them absolutely watertight; but by an ingenious arrangement of wing nuts these decks could be removed in a few minutes; while, by a similar arrangement, the hulls could almost as quickly be taken apart.

No sooner was the *Mohawk's* anchor down and the craft riding stem-on to the current than the crew proceeded to launch the two canoes overboard, when proof of their extreme lightness became manifest in the fact that it needed the strength of only ten men to lift each of them and heave them bodily over the rail, after which they were passed astern and secured by a painter. A number of beams and planks, all carefully cut, fitted and marked, were then brought on deck, after which half a dozen men descended to the two canoes; the beams and planks were passed down to them as required, and within an hour the whole was fitted together in the form of a double canoe, twenty feet broad, with a space of eight feet between the two hulls—with a plank deck of twenty feet width in the middle and twenty feet long. This curious looking craft was next fitted with two masts and a bowsprit, arranged to carry two standing lugs and a jib, and by the time that this was done the tropical night was descending upon the workers, and their labours for the day came to an end.

Meanwhile, an official visit had been paid to the yacht by the Inspector of Customs of Conceicao, who inquired into the reasons for the visit of the yacht, inspected her papers, and—upon learning that hunting and exploration were the objects of the expedition—levied a substantial amount in the shape of duty upon the guns, ammunition and general equipment of the party, notwithstanding the fact that the Tecuachy flowed through Brazilian territory; after which he dropped his official attitude and offered his services—for a consideration—in furthering the objects of the expedition. All that Earle needed at the moment, however, was to engage the services of a dozen natives possessing some knowledge of the country to be traversed—and also a knowledge of the Spanish language, of which the American was a fluent linguist—and these the inspector faithfully promised to produce on the morrow.

It was past the hour of noon on the following day when the inspector turned up aboard the *Mohawk* with his dozen recruits. Earle and Dick were sitting down to luncheon on the after deck, beneath the awning when they arrived; but subsequent inspection of the party seemed to justify the delay, for, so far at least as physique was concerned, the men appeared to be everything that could be desired. They were all full-blooded Indians—which Earle pronounced to be infinitely preferable to half-breeds—and seemed, so far as might be judged from appearances, to be civil, capable, and fairly intelligent fellows. They all understood Spanish, although they spoke the language but imperfectly; but when it came to questioning them upon their knowledge of the country which they would be called upon to pass through, they all frankly confessed utter ignorance of it, beyond the fact that from hearsay they understood it to be full of perils of every imaginable description. But this, they explained, had not deterred them from enlisting when they learned that their leaders were to be two white men, for they had heard that white men were possessed of strange powers, enabling them to conquer every conceivable kind of peril, while, as for themselves, they were quite willing to work hard, and fight hard, too, provided that the pay was good.

By that time the fitting and equipment of the double canoe had been completed and she was ready for an immediate start; as soon, therefore, as the new hands had been paid three months' wages in advance, which they entrusted to the inspector to transmit to their relatives, and as soon also as the inspector had been paid a certain sum as head money for his services in finding the men, the whole party quitted the yacht and got under way, heading across the river for the mouth of the Tecuachy, before entering which they saw the *Mohawk* heave up her anchor and start upon her return journey to New York.

## Chapter Four.

### The Quest begins.

The expedition consisted of fifteen persons all told, namely, Wilfrid Earle, the chief and leader; Dick Cavendish, his lieutenant; Peter, Earle's negro cook and a *chef* of surpassing skill, capable of concocting appetising dishes out of the most meagre and unpromising materials; and the twelve recruits from Conceicao, one of whom, named Inaguy, at once the most masterful and intelligent of them, Earle immediately appointed headman of the gang, with a small increase of pay, at the same time making him responsible for the good behaviour of those under him.

There was a fresh easterly breeze blowing when the double canoe—or raft, as they agreed to term her—cast off from alongside the *Mohawk*, and under its influence the craft, with one leeboard down, slid across the Javari at a speed that was as surprising as it was gratifying. And when at length she slid in between the low, forest-clad banks of the Tecuachy, the breeze was still fair for her, although the closer proximity of the shores to each other caused it to come at times in baffling flaws. Dick, as the sailor of the party, was naturally in command, and when at length the sunlight vanished from the tree-tops on the eastern shore of the stream, giving warning of the near approach of night, he ran the raft into a convenient bight on the lee shore—that the mosquitoes might not come off to them against the wind during the night—and came to an anchor in the midst of what seemed to be an unpeopled wilderness.

But if the country round about them was empty of human inhabitants—and even of this they could not be certain—it seemed to be full to overflowing of life of another sort, for no sooner had the swift tropic night descended upon the adventurers, than the hot, humid air became vibrant with sound, the dominant note of which was the *chur* and hum of myriads of insects haunting the dense forest on either hand, and the still more dense undergrowth which cumbered the soil between the trunks of the trees. This great volume of indescribable sound—amazing because of its intensity, coupled with the knowledge that it was created, for the most part, by creatures of almost microscopic dimensions—was continuous, merely rising and falling at irregular intervals, like the sough of the wind through the tree-tops; but it was constantly broken in upon by other sounds, the most prominent of which was perhaps the croaking of innumerable frogs, sounding like the rapid whirr of wooden rattles and lasting continuously for a period of several minutes, and then ceasing abruptly, as though at a signal, to recommence as abruptly a few minutes later. These sounds were commonplace enough, and after an hour or two to allow the ear to become accustomed to them, would of themselves have been soothing and conducive to somnolence rather than the reverse, but they were constantly being broken into by others so strange, and in some cases so weird, that the night threatened to be a sleepless one for at least the two white men of the party. For instance, at pretty frequent intervals there came from the depths of the forest, now here, now there, what sounded like the notes of a bell, followed perhaps by a weird unearthly scream, which would be taken up and repeated on all hands until it needed but a small effort of the imagination to convince the listener that some ghastly tragedy was being enacted in his immediate vicinity. And the effect was further heightened by strange moanings and groanings, as of people in mortal agony, queer sobbing sounds, cries as of children in distress, and, intermingled with these, savage grunts and snarlings, barking, as of angry dogs, loud whistling, coughing, roaring, sudden and violent rustlings among the underbush, an occasional loud crash proclaiming the fall of some forest giant, and, nearer at hand, sudden rushes and swirling sounds in the water about the raft.

Immediately after coming to an anchor for the night Earle had drawn forth from among the many bales and packages that were stowed on the deck of the raft a long bundle, which, upon being cast loose, resolved itself into the constituents of a double-skinned tent, the inner skin being made of loosely woven cotton canvas, while the outer skin—with six inches of air space between it and the inner—was made of light but thoroughly waterproof material, warranted by its maker to withstand even the assault of a tropical deluge. This tent the two white men quickly set up on the deck of the raft, between the two masts, when it was seen to be roomy enough to accommodate two camp beds with a table of convenient size between them, high enough for even Dick to stand upright in it, and with sufficient space between the table and the entrance to accommodate two deck chairs. When the beds were made up on the folding pallets, a lighted hurricane lamp suspended from the ridge pole of the tent, and the table laid for dinner, the interior presented an eminently cosy and comfortable appearance, and its two occupants sat down to the meal provided for them by the inestimable Peter with excellent appetites.

But they did not linger long over the pleasures of the table, for there was still work to be done before they could conscientiously seek the beds that wooed them, that work consisting in the unpacking of their weapons and ammunition, and making the former ready for instant service. This task they undertook immediately after dinner, sitting side by side just within the entrance of the tent.

Earle had been, according to Dick's notion, lavishly extravagant in the provision of firearms for the expedition, the total armoury amounting to no less than twenty-one weapons; namely, three Westley-Richards five-shot .318 repeating rifles; three Remington U.M.C. five-shot 35 repeating rifles, firing soft-nosed bullets; two 12A Standard U.M.C. fifteen-shot .22 repeating rifles—the last five being especially intended for big game and fighting; three Westley-Richards double-barrel 12-gauge smooth-bores; two Smith hammerless 10-gauged ditto; two Remington U.M.C. 12-gauge six-shot repeating smooth-bores; and six Colt Government model seven-shot .45 calibre automatic pistols. But, as Earle explained, "when you go exploring and hunting, you need a variety of weapons for different purposes; and there is also the contingency of possible loss to be considered; moreover, in a fight, with tremendously heavy odds against you, a strong battery of weapons rapidly used, will often put the enemy to flight before he has time to get to close quarters."

The two friends were busily engaged in unpacking, setting up and loading their weapons, chatting animatedly together meanwhile, and pausing from time to time to gaze contemplatively into the velvet darkness which represented the forest-clad nearer bank of the river before them, when suddenly Dick caught sight of what looked like two small greenish-yellow lamps close together that had suddenly revealed themselves in the blackness. They



were quite motionless, and the lad scarcely knew what to make of them.

"Look, Earle," he murmured. "Do you see those two small lights over there? What can they be, I wonder?"

Earle, who was intent upon his work, looked up.

"Lights!" he exclaimed. "Where? Oh, yes, I see. They are not lights, my unsophisticated youth, they are the eyes of an animal—a carnivorous animal, I judge, by the look of them—which has come down to the river to drink, and is doubtless wondering who and what the dickens we are."

He glanced eagerly about him for a moment, then pointed to one of the weapons which Dick had already put together and loaded.

"Just hand me that Remington U.M.C. rifle, old chap—it is loaded, isn't it? Good! This will be a capital chance to try it."

The eyes were still plainly visible, apparently staring steadily at the lamp-lit entrance of the tent and the two figures seated therein. Without rising from his seat, Earle slowly lifted the rifle to his shoulder, and the next instant the whip-like report of it rang out, to be instantly succeeded by a tremendous outburst of every imaginable sound from the forest, amid which the cries of countless startled birds and the sudden rush of their wings predominated. But Dick had kept his gaze steadily riveted upon those two faintly shining orbs across there in the blackness, and when the flash of the rifle lit up that blackness for the fraction of a second he caught an instantaneous glimpse of a foreshortened tawny-hided black-spotted form, with a rounded head and short ears, standing at the very edge of the water, staring steadfastly toward the raft. Then, as the vision vanished, a snarling sound, half roar, half shriek, met his ears, followed by a few convulsive splashes—then stillness.

"By Jove! I believe you've hit him," he exclaimed, excitedly starting to his feet. "It was a leopard; I saw him by the flash of the rifle."

"No; not a leopard, my son," answered Earle. "So far as I know, there are no leopards in America—except in menageries. But it may have been a panther or jaguar. Let's get into the canoe and investigate. We'll take the lantern with us, and the rifle, to guard against possible accidents."

Part of the equipment of the expedition consisted of a very handsome little fifteen-foot cedar-built canoe, intended to be towed astern of the raft, and there it now floated, attached to the raft by a slender painter. Unhooking the hurricane lamp, Dick led the way aft, followed by Earle with the rifle in his hands, and presently they had both taken their seats in the cockleshell of a craft. She was fitted with rowlocks for use, with a short pair of sculls for the especial benefit of Dick, who knew nothing as yet of how to handle a paddle. They were half way to the shore when Earle, holding up the lantern on the end of a boathook, caught sight of the motionless body of his victim lying half in and half out of the water.

"There he is, and stone dead, if I'm any judge!" he exclaimed. And even as he spoke a great black head appeared close to the body, the sound of snapping jaws was heard, and with a sudden swirl of water both head and body disappeared in the black depths, to be seen no more.

"Con-found it!" exclaimed Earle, savagely. "Now, if that isn't too bad! My first jaguar, too, and a fine one at that; and a beastly 'gator has stolen him from almost under my nose. Let up, Dick—or, rather, turn back. It's no good. That darned 'gator has got my jaguar safe down there in the mud, and we shall never see him again. Well, never mind, I daresay we shall get plenty of other chances. But I'll watch out and not be caught napping next time."

What Earle said was true; the jaguar was gone beyond hope of recovery, and the only thing to be done was to turn back. Back they accordingly went, to resume their work of putting their battery in order; nor did they cease their labours until every weapon had been unpacked, put together, thoroughly cleaned, and loaded in readiness for any emergency. Then they retired to their respective couches, and after Peter had carefully closed the mosquito curtains round them and extinguished the hurricane lamp, proceeded to "woo the drowsy god."

But the novelty of their surroundings, the enervating heat, and the multitudinous sounds that filled the night kept sleep at bay for several hours, and it was not until the cool air that usually heralds morning in the tropics blew in upon them through the open flap of the tent that they actually sank into a sound slumber, from which they were awakened only too soon by Peter with their matutinal cup of chocolate.

"I suppose," mused Dick, as he stepped out of the tent, pyjama-clad, and gazed down into the turbid waters of the river, "it would be hardly wise to indulge in a swim, though I feel that it is just the one thing I need above all others to freshen me up."

"Swim!" retorted Earle, who stood beside him. "My dear chap, I don't know the precise depth of water just here, but I would be prepared to bet a substantial sum that if a man were foolish enough to take a header off here, he would never come up again; for if he didn't stick in the mud of the bottom, that alligator who stole my jaguar last night, or some of his relations, would have him before he could come to the surface again. No, no; no swimming for us at present, my boy; we shall have to make out as best we can with our collapsible 'tubs,' which I see Peter has already filled for us, aft there. There! what did I tell you? See that? What sort of a chance do you think you would have with a chap like that?" And as he spoke he pointed to a spot not half a dozen yards away, where the head of an alligator had suddenly broken water, lazily swimming up against the current. The ripples which marked the slight movements of the brute's tail showed that he must have measured quite fifteen feet from end to end.

They bathed and breakfasted at leisure; and then, as there was no wind, and Earle did not wish to impose upon his crew the labour of sweeping the raft up-stream against the current if it could be avoided, the two white men took the

canoe, a repeating rifle and a smooth-bore, and went ashore, effecting a landing at the spot where the jaguar had been shot on the previous night, and which they now saw had been formed into a tiny bit of beach through the breaking down of the bank by the animals which evidently came to that particular spot to drink. They had no difficulty in finding the spoor of the lost jaguar, indeed it was the first thing to attract their attention upon stepping ashore, and as Earle gazed down upon the deep indentations in the plastic mud he execrated the thieving alligator afresh, for the prints were as big as the palm of his hand, indicating that the beast must have been a particularly fine specimen.

At first they experienced very little difficulty in making their way through the dense undergrowth, their plan being simply to follow the path beaten down by the animals; but after travelling about a hundred yards this path became merged into a number of others, evidently not quite so much used, and in these the going was much more difficult, the scrub not being so completely beaten down. So difficult of passage did they at length find it that they were seriously discussing the advisability of giving up the attempt and turning back, when Earle, who was leading the way, suddenly declared that he saw light ahead, and pushing resolutely on, the explorers presently burst their way into a wide open space of some ten or twelve acres extent, in which, for some unknown reason, no trees were growing, save a few scattered saplings, the tallest of which was not more than nine or ten feet high.

As they emerged into the open the pair involuntarily came to a halt, entranced by the extraordinary beauty of the scene that met their gaze. The open space, roughly circular in shape, was completely hemmed in on every side by trees, some of which were of enormous size, while the tints of their foliage varied through every shade of green, from that of the young bud to a depth of tone that was nearly black. Nor was green by any means the only tint displayed; for some of the trees appeared to be clothed with flowers of vivid flaming scarlet, instead of leaves, while the leaves of others, instead of being green, were of a deep, rich crimson hue, or a fine ruddy bronze, like that of the copper beech. And, as though this were not in itself enough of beauty, many of the more sombre foliaged trees were draped and festooned in riotous profusion with parasitic creepers, the blooms upon which would have driven a painter to distraction, so rich and varied were their tints, while the shapes of some of them were fantastic enough to suggest that Dame Nature must have been under the influence of a nightmare when she formed them. A few of them were merely giant creepers, but Earle, who possessed more than a smattering knowledge of botany, declared that most of them were orchids, several of which were new to him. The air of the place was heavy with mingled odours—one might almost have called them perfumes, were it not for a certain smack of rankness and pungency in them—and alive with birds, varying in size from that of a bumble bee up to that of a carrion crow, a few specimens of which could be seen perched here and there on the topmost branches of the tallest trees. Several of the birds were of the humming bird or sunbird species, and these, of course, gleamed and flashed in the sunlight like winged jewels, while nearly all boasted plumage of pronouncedly vivid colouring.

The two friends were still standing together on the spot where they had come to a halt when first entering the clearing, and Earle was expatiating upon the beauty and rarity of some of the orchids in their immediate neighbourhood, when they suddenly became aware of the presence of a large deer on the opposite side of the clearing. So silently had the creature come that neither of those who now stood watching him had been aware of the moment of his coming, nor could they discern the spot from which he had emerged. The animal was standing as motionless as a statue, with head erect, and he seemed to be sniffing the air, searching it for hostile odours, so to speak. He appeared to be quite unaware of their presence, a fact not very difficult to account for, since the sun was shining strongly in his eyes, while the two friends were not only standing in deep shadow, but also chanced to have come to a halt immediately behind a thick bush, which effectually hid all but their heads from the deer.

Instinctively, Earle began slowly to lift his rifle, but only to lower it again, as he murmured to Dick:

“Too far off—a good three-hundred yards if an inch. We’ll wait a bit. I believe he has not yet seen us, and if so, he may come a bit nearer. I guess this is where he comes every day to graze. Ah! I thought so”—as the animal lowered his head and began to crop the rich grass. “Crouch down and keep silent; with luck and patience we’ll get him before long.”

It was weary work, to Dick at least, crouching behind that bush, for the grass was long, and full of ticks, ants and other minute pests, which lost no time in insinuating themselves between his clothes and his skin, until the torment of his itching became almost unendurable. But Earle was, or seemed to be, inured to such trifling discomforts, and continued, motionless as a graven image, to kneel on one knee behind the bush, intently watching through its interstices the movements of the unsuspecting deer. And those movements were exasperatingly deliberate, for the grass was rich, luscious and abundant, enabling the animal to secure several mouthfuls before it became necessary for it to move by so much as a step, while, further to tax the patience of the watchers, the movements were vexatiously erratic, now here, now there, and as often as not away from rather than toward the spot where the two men crouched behind the screen of shrub.

At length Earle’s patience began to show signs of giving out. He very cautiously altered his position, changing from one knee to the other; a little later he knelt upon both knees, and a little later he sat down. Finally, finding this attitude unfavourable for shooting, he again got upon one knee. By this time, however, the insect invaders of his person were making their presence so distinctly felt that even his iron self-control was beginning to succumb to their persistence, and at length he murmured to Dick:

“Guess I’ll have to risk a long shot, after all. At this rate it may be hours before the beast will draw appreciably nearer, and meanwhile, at any moment something may happen to scare him away.” And very slowly and carefully he proceeded to raise the rifle to his shoulder.

It was while he was doing this that the deer suddenly stopped feeding, and, with his head still close to the ground, seemed gradually to stiffen until his whole body became rigid.

“What’s the matter now?” grumbled Earle, becoming rigid in his turn. “Wonder whether he has scented us. But I

guess not—at this distance. There is no wind, and—Gee! that explains it.” And he excitedly sprang to his feet, his example being instantly followed by Dick.

What had happened was this. The deer had stood perfectly rigid for perhaps half a minute, during which Earle had also suspended all movement, under the impression that the quarry had caught a momentary glimpse of something suspicious behind the screening bush. Then, while the watchers waited tensely for the next development to occur, something—for the moment it was impossible to say precisely what it was—had flashed into view from out of the long grass, within a yard or so of where the deer stood, and the next second the unfortunate creature was enveloped in the coils of a huge python. As the watchers of the unexpected tragedy sprang to their feet they distinctly heard the bones of the deer crack as the serpent constricted its coils about its victim; and then Earle, with an ejaculation of anger, sprang out from behind the bush, and, with Dick at his elbow, started at a run towards the spot as the deer sank with a groan into the long grass.

A few seconds sufficed the pair to reach their goal, or at least near enough to it for them to see that the unfortunate deer was not yet quite dead, for its hind legs, which were not involved in the coils of the python, were kicking out feebly, while its eyes gazed up at them pitifully with an expression that might easily have been interpreted into a prayer for deliverance from its sufferings. As for the python, it was already relaxing its awful grip upon the body of its victim, and had thrown off one coil as the two friends came into view. Earle, who seemed to know something of the nature of the creature, warned Dick to stand back, as the reptile was loosening itself in readiness to make a spring. But he himself evidently had no fear of the snake, for as it reared its great head and gave vent to an angry hiss, he threw up his rifle, and, standing his ground, fired a shot that went crashing through its right eye and out at the back of the skull.

The next instant Dick received a blow across the chest that not only knocked the breath out of him, but sent him to the ground with a crash, while the thrashing of the creature’s body upon the earth, as it writhed and twisted convulsively in its death agony, might have been heard from one end of the glade to the other. Earle dashed forward and quickly dragged Dick out of the way before assisting the lad to regain his feet, and it was well that he did so, for the next moment the monster was writhing and pounding upon the very spot from which Dick had been dragged. And it was quite upon the cards that, but for Earle’s prompt action, the young Englishman might have been enveloped by those writhing coils, and every bone in his body broken. As it was, no great harm was done; and as soon as Earle saw that his friend was safe, and that in its struggles the python was moving steadily away from the spot, he sprang in, and whipping out his big hunting knife, quickly drew it across the dying deer’s throat, thus terminating its sufferings.

“Poor brute!” he murmured, regarding the mangled body of the dead deer; “if I had but made up my mind and pressed the trigger a few seconds earlier, you would have been spared a good deal of terror and suffering. As it is—well, let us get back to the raft, Dick, and send a couple of men to bring in the deer. Its tongue and hind-quarters are untouched, and will afford all hands a meal of fresh meat, if we can secure it before the vultures come along. But we shall have to hurry, for unless I am mistaken, there is the vanguard of their army already.” And he pointed upwards towards a few small dark dots in the sky that had suddenly and mysteriously appeared.

They hastened back to the raft and hurriedly explained to Inaguy, the Indian headman, what had happened, and what Earle wanted done; and a few minutes later two of the blacks sprang into the canoe and paddled away to the shore, to return an hour later, with the head, hind-quarters, and skin of the deer, but with the declaration that they had been wholly unable to find the body of the python.

By this time a little breeze had sprung up from a quarter which would just enable the raft to lay her course up the reach of the river in which it then was, and the sails were accordingly set and the craft got under way. But the wind was so scant that the raft was able to do little more than hold her own against the current; and when they anchored that night, they estimated that they had covered little more than eight miles of ground.

For an entire week the journey up the stream progressed in pretty much the same deliberate fashion, at the end of which time they were detained for a whole day by a furious outburst of wind, rain, thunder and lightning, in the course of which the raft broke adrift, and, but for Dick’s skilful handling of the situation, would probably have been lost, with all the party’s belongings, and, quite possibly, a few lives as well. As it was, they were driven back some ten miles down stream before a suitable refuge could be found and the raft again safely anchored. It was the worst storm that Dick had experienced, and even Earle admitted that it far surpassed the worst that he had ever encountered, even in the interior of Africa. The wind blew with hurricane force, stripping the trees of their leaves and even of some of their branches, so that the air was full of flying débris, while the lightning flashed and the thunder roared and boomed and crashed in a continuous deafening medley of sound that might almost have excused the belief that the foundations of the earth were being torn asunder. And all the time the rain came pounding down out of the storm-riven clouds in such a deluge that it was difficult to draw one’s breath while exposed to it. But even this does not convey any very clear idea of the copiousness of the downpour, which will perhaps be more easily realised from the statement that within the short space of twenty minutes it completely filled and swamped the canoe. This storm burst upon the travellers about eleven o’clock at night, and it continued with unabated fury all through the next day until within about half an hour of sunset.

For the following three days the weather continued unsettled; then it cleared, and the raft resumed her journey. But her progress was slow, owing to the scantness of the wind, and for the next ten days they were able to accomplish only a few miles a day, the current running strong against them. Then, late on a certain afternoon, they reached a point where the bed of the river was obstructed by rapids, and the raft was moored for the night so that the banks might be explored on the morrow for portage facilities. And now it was that the real difficulties of the journey began to reveal themselves; for upon attempting to find a path through the forest, which grew right down to the water’s edge on both banks of the river, the explorers found the undergrowth to be so absolutely impenetrable that, even to make their own way through it, it was necessary to employ a gang of men to cut a path. And this was a slow process, for not only had the tough tangle of creepers, of which the underbush was chiefly composed, to be cut away, but it had to be afterwards removed from the path, so that the better part of three days was consumed in this way before a

road was cleared to the upper end of the rapids.

Then followed the laborious task of carrying the various items of their equipment up through the quarter of a mile of roughly cut pathway, which consumed the whole of another day. And finally came the dismembering of the raft itself, and the portage of its component parts and the canoe to the upper end of the rapids, where it was put together again. Thus, altogether, the intervention of those rapids involved the travellers in a loss of no less than five days.

The four which followed were much more favourable, the raft covering a distance of nearly sixty miles during that period. Then a stretch of some four miles of river bed was encountered so cumbered and choked with rocks that its navigation was impossible, and the raft had again to be taken to pieces and transported overland. And when this obstacle was at length surmounted, it was found that the channel of the stream had become so contracted that the further use of the raft as a concrete structure was out of the question; the wooden platform, with the masts and sails, as also the metal decks of the two canoe-like pontoons, were therefore abandoned, after carefully enveloping them in tarpaulins brought along for the purpose; and after their place of concealment had been marked, so that it might easily be found again in the event of the expedition returning by that route, the journey was continued in the open pontoons and the canoe. Finally, when at length the party had been travelling for nearly five weeks upon the river, they reached a point where navigation was no longer possible, even for the small canoe, and it became necessary to take to the forest, still, however, keeping in touch with the stream as nearly as possible, for the sake of the water.

It is not necessary for the purposes of this story to enlarge upon the difficulties with which the travellers now had to contend; they may be left to the imagination of the reader, merely remarking that in many places the trees grew so thickly together, and the undergrowth between them was so dense, that to accomplish a march through it of three miles between sunrise and sunset of a single day was regarded as a feat worthy of especial note. Not, however, it must be understood, that these conditions uniformly prevailed; very far from it indeed; for there were days when, from circumstances difficult to account for, the going was so comparatively easy that a distance of ten, or even twelve miles was accomplished. But this did not occur until some time after they had finally lost touch with the river and had got away from the vast plains on to higher ground, where the forest was less dense, the undergrowth much thinner—becoming in some places altogether non-existent—and where open glades became increasingly frequent and of ever extending area.

Thus far the travellers had met with no very remarkable experiences. There is nothing exciting in the work of hewing a path for oneself through miles of tough, tangled undergrowth, or in toiling thirstily hour after hour in sweltering heat, wondering meanwhile how much longer it will be before the welcome sound of trickling water will reach one's ears; even crouching in concealment for hours at a stretch, rifle in hand, in the hope that something eatable will come within shot, soon grows monotonous; while, as for the multitudinous nocturnal sounds of the forest, so weird and thrilling when first heard, the party soon became accustomed to them, and slept soundly through them all.

But, naturally, in the course of a long journey through the unexplored wilds of South America, interesting incidents are by no means uncommon, while others of a more weird and thrilling character occur occasionally, as our friends were to learn in due time. It was, however, one of the merely interesting kind that awaited them in an open glade which they entered on a certain evening, after a long and toilsome journey, just as the sun's last rays were gilding the tree-tops on the eastern side of the clearing.

The weary, sweat-drenched travellers celebrated their arrival in this wide open space with shouts of joy, for a tiny streamlet meandered through the middle of it, while in other respects it was ideal, not only as a camping place for the coming night, but also as a spot upon which to halt and recuperate for a few days—a relaxation which they had been promising themselves during the past fortnight. It was the bone-weary Indian carriers who were loudest in the expression of their rejoicing as they stumbled through the tangled grass toward the margin of the tiny stream, upon the bank of which their camp would be pitched; and as they gladly flung down their burdens on the chosen spot, they emitted a final yell of satisfaction which, to the astonishment of all, was answered, from some distance on the opposite side of the stream, by a wailing cry, as of some person—or, more probably, some creature—in extreme anguish. The cry was so peculiar, so expressive of suffering, so piercing, yet at the same time so feeble, that it instantly arrested the attention of everybody, and all stood staring tensely in the direction from which it had come.

"Hillo!" exclaimed Dick, who was the first to find his voice after the first moment of surprise had passed. "What on earth does that mean?"

"Don't know," answered Earle, who was glancing about him in search of a favourable spot upon which to pitch the tent; "but we'll soon find out. Pitch the tent anywhere you like, Peter, so long as it is not too close to the water. Where you are standing now will do quite well. Come on, Dick, and bring your rifle with you. It was somewhere over in that direction."

The pair took the brook at a bound, and, despite their fatigue, set off at a run in the direction from which the sound had proceeded. As they went, the peculiar sound—half whine, half scream—pealed out again upon the still air, thus guiding them afresh, so that in the course of a couple of minutes they reached its source.

And this was what they saw.

A young black panther—a somewhat rare animal—about three-parts grown, lying stretched out upon its left side in the long grass, apparently in a dying condition. There was a broad trail in the grass leading from the spot where it lay toward the far edge of the timber; but the trail was short, not more than a few yards long, growing less and less distinct as it receded, showing that the miserable creature had been in the clearing for several days, dragging itself slowly, and doubtless with infinite suffering, toward the water, which it had thus far failed to reach. Its coal-black coat, "watered" with the characteristic markings of the panther, also in black, was dull and staring, the result of neglect, and probably also of suffering; its tongue, dry and parched, lolled out of its open jaws, which were lightly fringed with froth; and its half-closed eyes were glassy yet burning with fever. It was in the last stage of emaciation,

its ribs and backbone showing clearly beneath its skin.

“Poor brute!” ejaculated Dick, whose sympathies were easily aroused. “It’s evidently dying, and in great pain, too. Better put it out of its misery, hadn’t we?” And he raised his rifle suggestively.

“Not on your life,” interposed Earle, hastily. “Yes, the poor beast is pretty well pegged out; but I guess we can save him, with care and a little trouble. He’s dying of hunger and thirst, that’s what is the matter with him, and that”—pointing to the creature’s enormously swollen right forepaw—“is what has brought on all the trouble. An exaggerated case of abscess, rendering it impossible for the beast to hunt, or, finally, even to walk. But I guess I can fix him all right, so far as the abscess is concerned, after which we will see if we can’t pull him round and tame him. I’m very fond of animals, and I guess he would make a fine pet, and look mighty picturesque basking on one’s hearthrug winter nights. You stay here, and I’ll bring along a hammock and a couple of ‘boys’ to tote him over to the camp. I shall be better able to see what I am doing there than here. You stay and keep the poor chap company. I believe he knows that we sympathise with him.” With which whimsical remark Earle started back hot foot for the camp, now in process of being pitched, leaving Dick to keep the dying beast company.

Now, whimsical as that idea of Earle’s might at first seem, Dick came to the conclusion that there really might be something in it; for not only did the unhappy panther show no fear of his visitors or anger at their close proximity, but there was a certain pitiful expression in his fevered eyes that, to Cavendish’s imagination at least, seemed to appeal for compassion and help. Of course, it may have been that the creature was too near dissolution to feel either anger or fear; but Dick decided that that remained to be seen. He eagerly awaited the return of Earle, and was unfeignedly relieved when, after a somewhat lengthy interval, he saw his friend returning, accompanied by two Indians bearing a lighted lantern and a hammock arranged as a stretcher.

Rejoining Dick, Earle at once got to work, displaying a quiet activity and sureness of himself that at once excited the young Englishman’s amazement and admiration. Bidding the Indians to stand back a few paces, and taking the lighted lantern from them, the American deposited a mahogany case upon the ground, which, upon being opened, proved to contain a complete surgical outfit. Withdrawing from this a sponge and a bottle, he rapidly saturated the former with the contents of the latter, and then, stepping fearlessly up to the suffering beast, he applied the sponge to its nostrils, holding it there for a short time until the creature’s eyes closed and it seemed to lapse into unconsciousness. Then, beckoning the natives to approach with the stretcher, he and Dick, with the help of the Indians, lifted the now inanimate body of the panther and deposited it upon the stretcher, which he then ordered the Indians carefully to convey to the camp, Dick leading the way with the lantern while the American paused a moment to replace the bottle and sponge and close the case. But he overtook the little procession before it was half way to the camp, and hurried on to complete his preparations for the operation which he contemplated. These preparations were complete by the time that the stretcher-bearers reached the camp, and the moment that the Indians laid down their burden, Earle handed Dick the sponge, with instructions to hold it with a gentle pressure against the panther’s mouth and nostrils. This done, the American seized a lancet, and, lifting the swollen paw, made a quick, long incision in it, upon which an amazing quantity of exceedingly offensive matter spurted out. With deft manipulations of the member, the American quickly pressed all the matter out of it, after which he carefully washed out the cavity with warm water, treated it with an antiseptic, stitched up the wound, dressed it, and finally bound it up tightly with a bandage enclosing a thick pad of cotton wool.

“There!” he exclaimed, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he completed the operation, “I guess that is fixed all right, and when the poor beast comes round, he won’t know himself, he will feel so easy and comfortable. That will do with the sponge, Dick. Now, while I clean my lancet and put matters generally straight, will you be good enough to see that the beast has water and food placed handy, so that he can get it without troubling to move? Thanks. Then we will get our supper. Food and drink, and a good long sleep, ought to work wonders for our patient, and we shall see how he shapes to-morrow. If he feels very chipper, he may decide to give us the slip during the night; but somehow I don’t think he will.”

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## Chapter Five.

### The God of the Catu Indians speaks.

That night, as the two friends sat together discussing supper, Dick learned a few fresh facts concerning his companion. He expressed his surprise and admiration at the skill and dexterity which Earle had displayed when performing the operation upon the panther’s foot; to which the American replied:

“Pooh! my dear chap, that was a mere nothing; one of the simplest surgical operations it is possible to think of. You should have seen some of the operations I have assisted at, and some in which I have been the sole operator. Why, man—but I won’t enter into details. Say! I guess I’ve never told you that I am a full-fledged physician and surgeon, have I? No. Well, I am. Been through my studentship, walked the hospitals, was chief assistant-surgeon at a big hospital in New York for nearly a year, took all my degrees—and then chucked it up and took to travelling and exploration, which was the idea that led me to qualify. Because, you see, when a man ventures beyond the pale of civilisation and has to rely absolutely upon himself, a knowledge of medicine and surgery is a big asset; indeed, had I not possessed such knowledge I should have pegged out in Central Africa, for it was solely by its means that I escaped death upon at least half-a-dozen different occasions. And the same knowledge has enabled me to save the lives of quite a number of natives. There are a few African tribes with whom I am regarded as ‘some’ medicine-man, and who would cheerfully have killed their chief and elected me in his place if I would but have said the word.”

Later on in the evening they went out together to visit their patient, and found the poor beast manifestly much easier and more comfortable. He had consumed all the water and a small portion of the food supplied, but was evidently still partially stupefied by the after effect of the anaesthetic, and showed no resentment at their approach; he even

submitted to be touched and gently stroked, seeming to be in that numb and semi-conscious condition in which one cares nothing for whatever may happen. But the fever of almost unendurable suffering had vanished from his eyes, and Earle insisted that the poor brute recognised them, and was in some vague fashion aware that he owed his relief to them. They brought him more water, which he lapped greedily out of the enamelled dish, even while Earle held it; and when at length they left him, the poor brute was tentatively trifling with the remains of the food with which they had supplied him.

With the coming of dawn on the following morning, the two friends issued from their tent, eager to enjoy the now rare luxury of a bath; and on their way they paid another visit to their patient. The brute proved to be markedly better, although still terribly weak from the long period of starvation which he had evidently undergone. He revealed his knowledge of their approach by partially baring his fangs in a sort of semi-snarl, and even made some semblance of an effort to scramble to his feet, but the attempt was clearly too much for his strength, and he subsided again. But he was now lying in a more natural and comfortable position, with his handsome head resting upon his outstretched forepaws, like a great cat, and when Earle unhesitatingly approached, and, placing his hand upon the creature's head, proceeded gently to caress it, the animal not only endured the touch, but after a minute or two actually began to purr.

From that moment the process of taming the beast synchronised with the progress of its recovery. On the second day of the halt at the rest camp the interesting invalid was able to use his feet and limp the few paces of distance from the camp to the rivulet as often as thirst demanded, but after drinking, the creature always returned to his lair near the tent, where Earle took care to feed him; and when, after a sojourn of five days on the spot, the camp was "broken" and the march was resumed, "King Cole," as the American had named his new pet, fell in and plodded along between the two white men as naturally as though he had been brought up with them from cubhood.

Thus far, the party, greatly to their own surprise, had encountered no Indians, though they had occasionally met with "signs," indicating that the country was not absolutely a desert. But on the fifth day of their resumed march they unexpectedly came upon a small party in a clearing, who incontinently fled upon their approach. A halt was at once called, and the party went temporarily into camp, while Earle, unpacking one of his bales, produced therefrom certain small hand-mirrors, a string or two of vari-coloured beads, two gaudy-looking bandanna handkerchiefs, and three cheap pocket-knives. These treasures he entrusted to the care of Inaguy, the headman, and furnishing him with an escort of two men, dispatched him in search of the elusive natives, bidding him find them and by means of the gifts which he carried, open up peaceful communication with them. For up to this time the party had been wandering more or less at random, and their leader was most anxious to get into touch with the inhabitants, so that he might question them and perchance extract some information from them which might aid him in his quest. Then, the ambassador dispatched, the party sat down to await his return with such patience as they possessed.

It was not, however, until past noon on the following day that Inaguy returned to camp alone, with a somewhat disquieting tale. From this it appeared that, having got upon the retreating Indians' trail, he and his companions had followed it up until close upon sunset, when, while passing through a narrow opening between two high rocks, they had been suddenly set upon from both front and rear, overpowered, and conveyed as captives to a certain spot, where they found the tribe of which they were in search established as dwellers in numerous rock caves in the side of a cliff.

Arrived here, they were at once taken into the presence of the chief and closely questioned as to the why and the wherefore of their presence in that region, how many in number their party were, and so on, the questioning and answering being conducted with considerable difficulty owing to Inaguy's very imperfect knowledge of the language in which he was addressed. It appeared that the chief listened to Inaguy's explanation, such as it was, with a good deal of impatience and suspicion, and finally terminated the interview by appropriating the gifts which the man bore, and condemning him and his comrades to be sacrificed, on the following morning, to a certain stone god, by way of propitiation, in the hope that the act might effect the cure of certain persons belonging to the community who were then lying apparently at the point of death, suffering from some mysterious sickness. And so terrified had Inaguy been at the prospect of a sacrificial death, with its accompanying tortures, that it had taken him the whole night to think out an argument which might possibly save the lives of himself and his companions.

This argument he had advanced when, at sunrise, he and his two companions had been led forth to die upon the altar before the great stone god; and it had consisted, first, in the narrative of how the Great White Chief in command of his party had miraculously cured a black panther which had been discovered in the last stage of dissolution, and subsequently tamed it, and secondly, in the confident assertion that the man who could do this thing could likewise cure the sick of the village, if he were approached in a becomingly humble spirit. The humble spirit, Inaguy regretfully reported, had proved conspicuous by its absence; but after much discussion a bargain had been eventually struck whereby the two followers of Inaguy were to be retained as hostages while the headman was to be released upon condition that he returned at once to the Great White Chief, conveying a message that unless the latter and his party turned up at the village before sunset, the hostages would be put to death.

It took Earle not a moment to decide what his action should be, when Inaguy brought his narrative to a conclusion. The men's lives must be saved at any cost; and since the village was situated at a considerable distance from the camp, and it would mean quick marching for the party to reach it within the stipulated time, the tent was immediately struck, and the march was at once commenced.

They arrived at the village with only a few minutes to spare, so few indeed, that they found the villagers already assembling in preparation for the sacrifice, while the sun's disc was within less than half of its own apparent diameter from the summits of a range of hills that bounded the horizon.

The first object to attract the visitors' attention was an enormous figure, some forty feet high, bearing a rude resemblance to that of a seated man, which had evidently at some remote period, been sculptured out of a solid block of black marble seemingly springing vertically out of the ground. There was nothing artistic in the conception or

execution of the image, which was a mere travesty of the human figure, every member being absurdly out of proportion, while the only features upon the modelling of which any pains had been taken were those of the face, the expression of which hideously suggested the extremes of mingled cunning and ferocity. An altar of the same black marble, about three feet high and ten feet long, stood at the feet of the figure, and this was already piled with wood in preparation for the anticipated sacrifice.

At the precise moment when the party came within sight of this extraordinary figure they also became conscious of a peculiar taint in the air suggestive of mud and rotting vegetation; and as Earle sniffed it he remarked:

“Umph! Big swamp not far off, I guess, which, apart from anything else, is enough to account for sickness in the village. Swamp fever, most likely. Say, Dick, that’s an ugly-looking guy, that idol, eh. Won’t these ginks get a startler when they hear him speak presently!”

“Speak?” repeated Dick. “How do you mean?”

“You just wait and see, sonny,” returned Earle. “Oh, yes, he’ll speak, you bet. And what he is going to say is— But here comes the chief and his principal headmen to meet us. Now, Inaguy, you be very careful in your interpretation of everything that passes, for a good deal may depend upon it. And let’s hurry; I want to get up as close as possible to that idol before the palaver begins.”

The chief of the tribe was easily distinguishable from all the rest, from the fact that he walked some half a dozen paces in front of the others, and also because of his garb, which consisted of a gaudy head-dress of variously coloured feathers and an enormous jaguar’s skin thrown over his left shoulder, half of it covering the front of his body—and the other half the rear, the two halves united at his right hip by knotting the skin of the left foreleg to the left hinder one. He was, like all the rest of his tribe, coal-black in colour, and, like his followers, was armed with a sheaf of formidable-looking barbed spears, the heads of which appeared to be made of bone or horn. They seemed to be a fine race of men, standing nearly six feet high, and their carriage was suggestive of great strength and agility, but they were undeniably ugly and repulsive of feature, the expression being that of mingled cunning and cruelty. As they drew nearer, King Cole, the black panther, began to snarl and show his fangs in an exceedingly hostile fashion, whereupon Dick hurriedly seized one of the tent ropes and deftly looped it about the animal’s neck in a standing bowline knot, at the same time soothing him by word and touch.

The two parties met and came to a halt at a point some thirty feet from the altar; and as they did so Earle waved his hand in greeting toward the figure, airily remarking as he did so:

“How do, old chap! Glad to have the pleasure of seeing you at last.”

To which, to the stupefaction of everybody, Dick included, the figure replied in a high, thin voice:

“The pleasure is mine, oh wonderful medicine-man, who has come to heal my people. Tell them that ye are my particular friends, and that they must treat you and yours well during your stay among them, upon pain of incurring my lasting anger.”

“Got that, Inaguy?” asked Earle, turning to his headman, who seemed so paralysed with amazement that he could scarcely reply in the affirmative. “Good! Then just translate to the chief and his followers what I said, and what their god answered.”

With chattering teeth and lips that quivered with terror to such an extent that he could scarcely articulate, the thoroughly frightened Inaguy obeyed his master’s order, and his astonishment and terror were so obviously genuine that they only added to the already profound effect produced upon the Indians by the seeming miracle of speech from their hitherto dumb god. Had the chief been a little less astonished than he was, it might have occurred to him to wonder why the idol had chosen to express his will in a language that needed interpretation; but obviously he was altogether too profoundly impressed by the marvellous happening for the smallest shred of suspicion to enter his mind, and upon receiving the message he immediately wheeled round, and prostrating himself with his face to the ground—an example instantly followed by those about him—mumbled a long statement which, upon being translated by Inaguy, proved to be an emphatic assurance that nothing whatever should be done that could provoke the god’s displeasure. This done, he rose to his feet and shouted an order for the immediate release of the hostages; after which he turned to Earle and Dick and reverentially bade them welcome to the village, at the same time requesting them to pitch their camp wherever they pleased.

Earle, having chosen a spot well out in the open, where anything in the nature of a sudden surprise would be difficult—though he explained to Dick that, after what had happened, he had little or no fear of anything of the kind—intimated to the chief his desire to see the sick people at once, and went off with that individual, leaving Dick to supervise the arrangement of the camp.

Meanwhile Dick, who was by no means a fool, had been thinking matters over, and had come to the conclusion that he understood the apparent mystery of the idol’s speech, and chuckled to himself over Earle’s cleverness, which had been so wonderful as to mystify even the young Englishman for the moment.

By the time that Earle reached the camp, after paying his professional visit to the sick, the camp was all in order, and supper was nearly ready. Earle was in fine feather, for not only had he discovered that the invalids were all down with swamp fever, which, severe as it was, he was confident of his ability to cure, but upon questioning the chief with regard to the great object of his quest, he had been informed that a tribe of Indians known as the Mangeromas, occupying territory many days’ march toward the south-west, were believed to possess some knowledge of a wonderful people answering to the description which Earle had given, but that the Catus—the tribe whose guests the party now were—had as little as possible to do with the Mangeromas, since the latter were an exceedingly fierce, warlike and barbarous race, more than suspected of cannibalism. This unsavoury reputation, however, affected Earle

not in the least, he was out for adventure, and was determined to have it, moreover he wanted definite information concerning El Dorado and the city of Manoa, and was prepared to take his chance, even among cannibals in order to get it.

"Well," remarked Dick, "that's all right; where you go, I go with you, even if it should be into a country where cannibals are as common as blackberries in August. And I have no doubt that, if need be, you can scare them as effectually as you did those niggers this evening. And let me tell you, while I think of it, that you did it remarkably well. Why, you puzzled even me for the moment."

"Did I, really?" demanded Earle, with every symptom of extreme gratification. "I am glad of that, for, to tell you the truth, I am a bit out of practice, and the idea did not occur to me until Inaguy mentioned the idol this afternoon. Then I thought that if, by means of ventriloquism, I could make the idol speak, it would cause our friends here to sit up and take notice, as it did. Ventriloquism, Dick, is a very useful accomplishment for a man who goes much among savages, as I have done, and it has got me out of an extremely tight corner more than once. It always appealed to me powerfully, from the time when, as a boy of seven years old, I attended a ventriloquial entertainment and heard the guy conversing with unseen people in mid-air, and heard remarks addressed to him by obviously inanimate objects. There seemed to me to be useful possibilities in it, and I started trying to do it at once, finally taking lessons from a wonderfully clever guy, who told me that my throat was specially well adapted for it. Ah! here comes Peter with supper, for which I'm glad, for I happen to be possessed of a ten dollar appetite to-night."

The meal over, Earle unpacked, his medicine chest and mixed a sufficient quantity of medicine to serve his patients through the night, and took it up to the village, where he remained nearly three hours ministering to the sick, and talking, through Inaguy, to Yahiti, the chief of the Catus. When at length he returned to the camp he was in the highest spirits, for the somewhat incomprehensible reason that Yahiti had informed him that the country lying between the Catu and the Mangeroma territories was extraordinarily difficult, and full of the most weird and terrible perils.

On the following morning the two friends were astir with the dawn, Earle having expressed a desire to inspect the great swamp in the neighbourhood, to which he attributed the epidemic of fever from which the inhabitants of the village were suffering. This swamp was situated at the distance of about a mile south-east from the village, and was of such an extent that whenever the wind blew from either the east or the south—these being the prevailing winds there—the pestiferous odours arising from it were wafted directly toward the village; and Earle's idea was to investigate, with the view of ascertaining whether anything could be done to reclaim the swamp, failing which he proposed to recommend the Catus to abandon the place and take up their abode elsewhere.

Upon reaching the swamp, it was found to lie in a shallow depression, roughly circular in shape and some three miles in diameter, its deepest part—about eight feet—being nearest the village, while at its upper extremity it was fed by a small stream of a capacity just about sufficient to neutralise the constant process of evaporation without being enough to produce an overflow. Further than that, it occupied such a position that a trench little more than a quarter of a mile in length and averaging a depth of about nine feet was all that was needed to drain the swamp by carrying off the water and discharging it into a valley some three-hundred feet deep.

An alternative scheme which Earle also investigated was the diversion of the stream which supplied the swamp with water; and this was also found possible by cutting a trench about two hundred yards long; but it was open to the objection that, in order to do it, the workers would be obliged to walk a distance of nearly twelve miles daily to and from their work, and he doubted whether the Catus were energetic enough to do it.

The task of convincing the Catus that they must do away with the swamp or abandon the village, unless they were prepared continually to suffer from fever, was a long and troublesome one, the Indians having a strong constitutional objection to anything in the nature of hard work; but Earle succeeded at length, and actually got them started on the work of cutting the drainage ditch, that scheme having been chosen as the one promising the quickest results and involving the least labour. By the time that this was done the invalids were all recovered from their sickness; and ten days after their arrival at the Catu village the exploring party resumed their march, to the loudly expressed regret of the inhabitants, who urgently pressed them to remain, and would quite possibly have detained them by force, but for fear of exciting the anger of the stone god.

The journey was resumed immediately after breakfast on a certain morning, and before the hour for the first halt arrived the party began to realise the truth of Yahiti's story that the route was full of difficulties, if not of dangers; for it lay over rugged country so thickly bestrewn with enormous boulders that Earle likened the journey to the exploration of San Francisco immediately after the earthquake. Of course, they went round the boulders when such a course was possible, but it very frequently happened that long reefs of rock projected out of the ground for miles on either hand, when, difficult though the task might be, it became easier to climb up one side and down the other, than to pass round. Two miles was the extent of their journey over that kind of country which they were able to accomplish before sunset; and when at length they camped they were little more than eight miles from the Catu village.

To travel over such country was wearisome in the extreme, but there was nothing for it but to push on, or else make a détour of unknown extent; and this idea Earle would not entertain for a moment. On the following day, therefore, they resumed their journey, although with every yard of advance the difficulties appeared to grow more formidable.

It was about mid-morning when they reached the base of a cliff some forty feet high that, being practically vertical, seemed to bar their further progress, and after contemplating it for several minutes, Earle decided to make the spot a halting place while he and Dick explored the cliff in opposite directions in search of a practicable crossing. Accordingly, while the natives were forming camp, the two white men, taking their rifles and a few cartridges, set off along the foot of the cliffs, Earle proceeding in a north-westerly direction, while Dick proceeded toward the south-east.



The rock of which the cliff was formed was, for some considerable distance in the direction followed by Dick, quartzite; but at a point about a mile from the spot where he had parted from Earle it changed to a black, bituminous limestone, studded here and there with ammonites. Dick, who knew little or nothing about geology, merely noticed the change in the character of the rock, and sauntered on, eagerly scanning its face, in the hope of finding a spot where it might be scalable by men carrying moderately heavy burdens. And at length he reached, as he believed, such a spot, where the black rock seemed to have been riven by some mighty natural convulsion, the rift forming a steep and exceedingly narrow gully leading to the summit. Naturally, he at once started to climb this gully, with the object of testing its practicability; and he had traversed nearly two-thirds of its length when, as he scrambled up, his attention was suddenly attracted to a sort of pocket in the rock, which had been laid open by a fall. What particularly attracted his attention toward this pocket was the fact that it contained a considerable number of bright green crystals, which struck him as being peculiar not only from their rich colour, but also from the fact that they were all of practically the same shape, namely hexagonal. So greatly did he admire them that he put a couple of the largest in one of his pockets, intending to show them to Earle and ask him whether perchance they were of any value. Then he pushed on again and soon reached the upper end of the gully, when he found himself, somewhat to his amazement, on a vast tableland, stretching as far as could be seen, with what looked like a big forest at a distance of some ten miles.

Having completed his survey, Dick descended the gully and returned to the camp, to find that Earle was still absent; he therefore set out to seek him and report his success. Some two miles beyond the camp he met the American returning, considerably disgusted, he having failed in his search, and at once Dick reported his triumph, incidentally producing the crystals and asking if Earle happened to know what they were.

"Know what they are?" echoed Earle, after most carefully and interestedly examining the stones. "Why, of course I do. Don't you?"

"Haven't the least idea," answered Dick. "But they struck me as being rather pretty, and I thought I would take them back to my sister as souvenirs of my travels. There are dozens more where these came from."

"Are there?" caustically remarked Earle. "Then, my dear Cavendish, permit me to congratulate you; for these two crystals are remarkably fine emeralds; and the probability is that you have accidentally stumbled upon an emerald mine rich enough to make the fortunes of a dozen men. Let's get back to camp and move on to this gully of yours. We'll overhaul it at once, and if it should prove—as I strongly suspect—to be a true emerald mine, we'll work it for a few days and ascertain something like its probable worth."

"But," protested Dick, "I didn't know that emeralds were found in South America."

"What!" ejaculated Earle, in amazement. "You ignorant sailorman! Why, some of the most famous emeralds in the world have been unearthed in this country. The Spaniards, under Pizarro, took enormous quantities of them from the Peruvians, but were never able to learn exactly where they were obtained; and the only mine now known in South America is, I believe, situated near Bogota. But I have long been convinced that this is the country, *par excellence*, for emeralds—ay, and possibly rubies and sapphires as well. Come along, man; let's go and have a look at the mine that's going to make a millionaire of you."

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## Chapter Six.

### **Emeralds—and the Death Flower.**

The two friends reached their temporary camp in good time for the mid-day meal; they therefore decided to have it before proceeding farther. As soon as the meal was over the camp was struck, and the entire party proceeded in the direction of the gully, or cleft, upon their arrival at which preparations were at once made for a possible sojourn of a few days; and while those preparations were being made, Earle and Dick, carrying a pickaxe and shovel, as well as their rifles, started to climb the cleft, bent upon examining the spot where the emeralds had been found, and, if possible, settling the question as to whether or not a mine had actually been discovered.

Their open-air life, and the toil of their recent travels had put both young men into the pink of condition; it was, therefore, not long before they reached the spot where Dick had made his momentous find. Arrived there, Earle's first act was to subject each of the crystals lying in the exposed "pocket" to a careful examination. There were fifty-four in all, of varying sizes; and when Earle had pronounced each of them to be a genuine emerald—and most of them of the first water, they were all deposited in a knapsack which they had taken with them for the purpose. This done, the American seized a pickaxe and began to dig into the face of the cliff, pausing at intervals to take a rest while Cavendish shovelled away the débris. The rock was not at all difficult to work, yielding readily to the blows of the pickaxe and coming away in lumps the size of one's fist, or even bigger, consequently it was not very long before, between them, they had excavated a cavity of considerable size. But after nearly two hours of strenuous toil without result, they retired from the hole for a time to rest, and were debating the question whether or not it was worth while to pursue the investigation any further, Earle being rather of opinion that Dick's find had been merely an isolated pocket, and that they might seek for weeks or possibly months, without finding any more emeralds, when, without the slightest warning, the hole in which they had been working suddenly caved in, laying bare a new face, some nine or ten square yards in area. And when at length the face had ceased to crumble and the dust had subsided, the first thing to attract their attention was an emerald nearly as big as a duck's egg projecting from the newly exposed rock. This they carefully dug out, afterwards proceeding to search among the fallen rock, in which they eventually found two other very fine stones.

"There!" exclaimed Earle, with a sigh of satisfaction, when at length they had thoroughly examined and cleared away the fallen rock. "I guess we've done enough; for we've demonstrated that this is a sure-'nough mine. See that stuff

round the place where we picked out the emerald? That is calcite, and this rock is a black limestone; all the indications are, therefore, in favour of this being a genuine emerald mine, which we can work, if we choose, on our return journey. Now, we'll just dig out that mass of calcite and carefully cover it up, so that in the exceedingly unlikely event of any other prospector passing this way, there will be little or nothing to attract his attention; and tomorrow, before we resume our march, we will determine the exact position of this spot by astronomical observations and make a note of it in our diaries, so that we can find the place again. Meanwhile, we have not done at all badly this afternoon, for I guess the contents of this knapsack are worth a good many thousand dollars."

It was nightfall by the time that the explorers got back to their camp, and they were bone-weary from their extraordinary exertions; but they had, as recompense, the knowledge that they had left their mine in such a condition that no mere casual visitor would be in the least likely to suspect its existence.

Immediately after breakfast on the following morning the party struck camp and proceeded to climb the cleft. It cost the Indian carriers half an hour's severe toil to accomplish the ascent, and when at length they reached the summit they were only too glad to lay down their burdens and take a rest while the two leaders, with the assistance of their pocket sextants and Earle's pocket chronometer, determined the position of the head of the gully. This done, and the calculations worked out and checked, the march was resumed; the outer edge of the forest through which their route lay being reached shortly after noon. And when at length they sat down to their mid-day meal, all hands enjoyed an unusual luxury; for about an hour before pitching camp, Dick, who chanced to be leading the way, saw and shot something as it attempted to make off through the long grass, that something proving to be a strange creature partaking, in about equal proportions, of the characteristics of a pig and a deer. Dick, of course, not being a naturalist, was unable to name the creature, and even Earle declared himself puzzled; but whatever it may have been, its flesh proved to be exceptionally tender, juicy, and delicious, and the Indians fairly gorged themselves with it.

The forest into which the party plunged when the march was resumed proved to be entirely different in character from that which they had previously traversed. To begin with, the trees were all of new and strange species, mostly bearing foliage of dark and gloomy tints; they stood much farther apart; the undergrowth was sparse, or absent altogether; and there were no orchids, or long, trailing garlands of lovely parasitic growth which had rendered the forests already traversed so strangely beautiful. Another peculiarity of the forest was that scarcely a bird was to be seen, excepting an occasional vulture or carrion crow perched upon some lightning-blasted stump. Moreover, there was a strange silence pervading the place, a silence that seemed almost uncanny, as though insects as well as birds shunned the place. Altogether, the effect of the silence, the sombre tints of the foliage, the absence of brilliant-hued blooms, and a certain subtle something in the atmosphere, was distinctly depressing. There was one redeeming feature about it, however, which was that the sparseness of the underbush and the greater space between the trunks of the trees rendered travelling comparatively easy, and the party made good progress.

As they plunged farther into the depths of the forest, however, they began to realise that its gloomy aisles were by no means so devoid of life as they had at first imagined. The first intimation of this fact came to them in the form of a sudden yell from one of the Indian carriers, who declared that he had been bitten on the leg by something; and upon investigation this proved to be the case, for the calf of his bare leg showed two tiny punctures, not more than one-eighth of an inch apart, the flesh around which, even as Earle and Dick examined the wounds, began to swell and turn a curious blue tint, while the injured man rapidly lost the power of speech and voluntary movements, though his body began to be shaken by violent tremors.

Earle now showed himself to be a man of prompt action. Whipping his keen hunting knife out of its sheath, he slashed open the flesh athwart the two punctures and then, kneeling down, applied his lips to the wound and sucked it strongly until the blood began to come, at first sluggishly and in coagulated clots, but eventually more freely. It was noticeable, too, that at first the blood was almost black in colour, but by dint of vigorous sucking it at length came freely and changed to its normal colour. Meanwhile, Dick, recalling conversations which he had had with Earle, in which the latter had described certain rough and ready methods which he had successfully adopted in treating venomous snake bites, opened a shot cartridge, extracted the powder therefrom, and with it made a squib. This he had ready long before Earle was prepared to use it; but when at length the blood was flowing freely and naturally from the wound, they laid the now comatose victim prone upon the ground, and, while Dick held the wounded limb in position, Earle applied the squib to the wound and fired it. The result was that the wound was quickly and very effectively cauterised, apparently without inflicting the slightest suffering upon the victim, who never moved a muscle while the squib spluttered and burned upon his raw flesh. Earle then quickly and deftly dressed the wound and bound it up, after which he proceeded to revive his patient by moistening his lips with raw whiskey, with which he finally drenched the man internally as soon as the unfortunate fellow was able to swallow.

But, of course, there was no more marching for the party that day, and preparations were at once made for pitching the camp. The first task was to beat the long, dry grass thoroughly, in order to drive away the snake which had bitten the man, or any other snakes which might be lurking therein. But this procedure, while it may possibly have had the desired effect, had also another, by no means desirable; for it was soon discovered that the threshing had aroused the anger of a legion of enormous black ants—fierce, venomous creatures nearly an inch long—which came swarming by thousands up out of holes in the ground, and attacked the intruders with indescribable ferocity. The unfortunate semi-naked Indians instantly scattered in ignominious flight, leaving the two white men to deal with the situation as best they could. And although Earle and Dick were, of course, fully clothed, and their bodies were therefore reasonably well protected, they were both severely bitten before, by setting fire to the grass and allowing it to blaze for a few seconds before beating it out, they were able to put the foe to flight. The burning of the grass, however, revealed the fact that the soil was everywhere honeycombed with holes, into which the creatures had doubtless retreated, ready to sally forth again upon the smallest provocation; therefore, in order to protect themselves from further attack, they cut an immense quantity of grass, strewed it over the central portion of the already burnt area, and burned it over again; after which, the ashes being first swept away with branches, they ventured to go into camp, the Indians slinking back by twos and threes as soon as they perceived that the risk of renewed hostilities was over. As for the two white men, although they bathed their hurts with dilute ammonia as quickly as they could, they

both suffered acutely, to such an extent, indeed, that they were both in a high state of fever, bordering on delirium, before midnight. Earle, however, foreseeing what was impending, mixed for himself and Dick a strong draught, which no doubt helped to avert even worse consequences, and by dawn of the following morning the fever was conquered and the sufferers sank into a somewhat troubled sleep, from which the faithful Peter would not permit them to be aroused upon any pretext whatsoever. As for the bitten man, he suffered severely for several hours, the wounded limb swelling to about three times its normal size, while acute pains shot through the whole of his tortured body; but at length these gradually grew less, until he sank into a state of coma which eventually became natural sleep, during which the swollen limb gradually resumed its normal dimensions. When he at length awoke, beyond being troubled with a dazed feeling and, of course, a considerable amount of pain arising from the cauterisation of the wound, he seemed to be little the worse for his adventure; and when at length the party struck camp and resumed their march shortly after mid-day, he was able to hobble along with the rest, although it was found necessary to relieve him of all work during that day.

Such was the first adventure of the party in that terrible forest; but there were others still worse to follow, as they soon found. Nothing very particular, however, befell them on that second day's march, for after their experiences of the previous day they were careful to conduct their march with all due precaution, Inaguy leading the way and industriously beating the grass before him with a long, slender switch, while Dick and Earle, following him on either flank, did likewise. And the wisdom of this method of procedure was manifested a dozen times or more during the afternoon's march by sudden, quick scurrying sounds in the grass immediately ahead, bearing witness to the fact that a lurking snake had been startled and was effecting a hasty retreat.

When at length the time came to pitch camp for the night, the tactics of the previous day were repeated, the grass being thoroughly burnt away over an area spacious enough to accommodate the party. And here again the wisdom of their action was made manifest; for when the ashes were swept up for removal the shrivelled remains of several centipedes and scorpions—some of them of quite unusual size—were found, which would doubtless have given trouble had not the flames rendered them harmless.

It was well on toward mid-afternoon of their third day's march through the forest when the explorers met with their next adventure. The total absence of flowers in this forest has already been remarked upon, but about the time named above it appeared as though this reproach was no longer to apply. For, after pressing through a part where both the timber and the undergrowth had been found thicker than usual, the party entered a wide open glade of considerable extent without a single tree in it. To make up for the absence of trees, however, there were, dotted about here and there in the midst of the long grass, several clumps of perfectly white flowers, ten or a dozen flowers in each clump. And as these clumps of flowers came into view, the whole party halted involuntarily, struck with amazement; for the sight was, beyond all question, the most wonderful that any of them had ever beheld. The blooms, shaped somewhat like the familiar Canterbury bell, were of absolutely gigantic proportions, some certainly not less than six feet in height, exclusive of the short, thick stem, while many were even larger than this. Each clump was surrounded by a kind of spray of still more enormous leaves, each leaf being about twelve feet long by some eight feet broad, lying almost flat upon the grass and forming a complete barricade round the clump. The air was charged with a peculiar but exceedingly pleasant fragrance, which no doubt emanated from these wonderful botanical curiosities; and after a short halt to take in the details of the extraordinary picture, Earle announced his determination to halt for the remainder of the day in the glade, in order that he might examine the flowers at leisure. Accordingly, a wide, clear space in about the centre of the glade was chosen, and preparations for pitching the camp were briskly proceeded with.

The discovery of these gigantic flowers threw Earle into a condition of quite pleasant excitement. He was a man of method, and, as such, had naturally kept a diary of the proceedings of the party from the moment of its departure from New York. Hitherto, however, the diary had been kept solely as a future aid to memory, and for his own individual purposes alone; but now the discovery of what at the moment he believed to be an entirely new species of plant, suddenly inspired him with the ambition to become enrolled in the ranks of those scientific explorers who have become famous by virtue of the remarkable character of their discoveries, and it began to dawn upon him that there were possibilities in this journey of his which might enable him to become one of the immortals of scientific discovery. So elated was he at the prospect that he could not resist the temptation to communicate his hopes to Dick, who, somewhat matter-of-fact individual though he was, nevertheless heartily sympathised with his friend's ambition, and cheerfully undertook to assist in every way possible, if Earle would but indicate the direction in which assistance might be valuable.

"I guess you can help me very shortly then," said Earle. "First of all, I am going to take a photograph from somewhere over there, showing a general view of this glade, with especial reference to the arrangement and distribution of those clusters of gigantic flowers; and when I have done that I propose to select the cluster containing the finest blooms, station myself on one of the leaves—I guess they'll bear my weight easily enough—and stand upright against a flower, so that my figure will serve as a sort of scale by which a correct idea of its size may be conveyed. And that is where you will come in. I shall want you to take the photograph of me as I stand there. I will select the spot from which the photograph is to be taken, and will focus the camera, stop down the lens to the extent required to get satisfactory definition, and generally arrange the picture; and all that you will need to do will be to remove the cap and give the proper exposure when I am ready. The light is not too good, and I intend to use the orange screen, so I guess the exposure will be rather a lengthy one, but I will determine its correct duration by means of the exposure metre; so all that you will have to do will be to remove the cap and carefully note the time. See?"

"Certainly," replied Dick, "and you may depend upon me to carry out your instructions."

The camera—a compact quarter-plate instrument, adapted for use either in the hand or mounted upon a tripod—was routed out, the fact that there were four unexposed films still in it ascertained, and the pair went off together, intent upon taking the proposed photographs.

The determination of the precise position from which to take the first picture was a rather lengthy process, for Earle

had the eye of an artist and was anxious that the result should be not only a photograph, but also a picture. A suitable spot was, however, at length found, and the photograph was taken, the correct exposure involving the uncapping of the lens for no less than forty-five seconds. Fortunately, there was no wind, consequently there was no movement, and Earle was sanguine that he had secured a thoroughly satisfactory picture.

Then came the choice of the particular clump of blooms to be photographed at close quarters, with Earle standing in the midst of them to show their enormous size. This was an even more lengthy process than the other; but at length everything was ready, and Earle, leaving Dick standing by the camera, strode across the few yards of intervening space, and proceeded to climb upon one of the monster leaves preparatory to posing himself. He did this by pressing the point of the leaf down to the ground and then stepping on it and walking up its centre, intending to pose himself at the junction of the leaf with its massive stalk, in which position he would be able to stand quite close to the enormous flower which was to be the principal object in the proposed picture.

But when Earle had traversed a little more than half the length of the huge leaf, it suddenly curled up and, to Dick's horror, completely enveloped the adventurous American's form, round which it tightly enfolded itself, while a half-smothered cry for help issued from its folds.

Leaving the camera where it was, Dick rushed forward, drawing his heavy hunting knife from its sheath as he did so, and dashing in, began to hack desperately at the stem of the leaf, believing that if he could sever it from its parent plant, he would be able to deliver his friend from its stifling embrace. But he soon found that, stout as was the blade he was wielding, and strong as was the arm that wielded it, he could do little or nothing against the marvellously tough stem which he was attempting to sever. It was as thick as his own leg and so hard and slippery that the keen blade simply slithered along it instead of biting into it; and realising his helplessness, he rushed out into the open, where he could be seen and heard from the camp, and yelled to Inaguy and Peter to bring axes, and for the rest of the men to bring along machetes.

There was a note of urgency in Dick's stentorian tones which caused all hands instantly to drop what they were doing and rush to his call; but it was nearly ten minutes before the stubborn stalk yielded to the desperate onslaught made upon it; and when at length it drooped to the ground and the party threw themselves upon it, it cost them another arduous five minutes to slit the tough, leather-like fibre of the leaf apart and haul out the imprisoned and, by that time, insensible body of their leader.

By Dick's direction they carried Earle's body to the camp, and, stripping it, laid it upon one of the camp beds already arranged in the tent. This done, Dick carefully examined the inanimate form in search of wounds or other injuries, but found nothing. The heart was beating strongly and steadily, the pulse was firm, though a trifle rapid, and the breathing was somewhat irregular; otherwise Earle's aspect was that of a man plunged in profound sleep. So completely, indeed, was this the case that after Dick had ineffectually striven by every means in his power to arouse his friend, he was fain to leave him as he was, contenting himself by remaining by the side of the bed, keeping his fingers on Earle's pulse so that he might at once become aware of any fluctuations in its beat, and awaiting the moment when a change of some sort should occur.

Hour after hour dragged its slow length along and still the American lay plunged deep in that strange slumber, the only changes in his condition being that from time to time his pulse and his heart quickened their beats and his breath came more heavily, as though the sleeper laboured under some strong excitement; until at length, about eleven o'clock, when the camp was wrapped in silence and all its members, except Dick, fast asleep, Earle suddenly opened his eyes and stared first at the lantern and then at Dick, with a puzzled and distinctly annoyed expression. At length he exclaimed:

"Hello, Dick! What the mischief are you sitting there for, looking as glum as an owl? And why on earth did you wake me? Man alive, I—"

"I didn't wake you," answered Dick, "but, all the same, I am profoundly thankful to see you awake once more, and apparently in the possession of all your senses. Do you remember what happened to you?"

"You bet I do!" answered Earle emphatically. "Shall I ever forget it? Why, man, I've been in Elysium. I've been—oh! dash it all, there are no words to describe the delights of the last few— Say! how long have I been asleep?"

Dick looked at his watch. "Getting well on for eight hours," he answered.

"Eight *hours!*" reiterated Earle, in tones of intense disgust. "Only eight *hours*, did you say? Why, man alive, if what you say be true, in those measly eight hours I have lived *years* of joy and delight unspeakable. I have beheld scenes of unearthly indescribable beauty; I have participated in pageants glorious and magnificent beyond conception; I have—oh! what's the use? If I were to talk from now until doomsday I couldn't even begin to convey to your gross mind the most feeble and shadowy notion of the joys and delights which have been mine."

He spoke rapidly in tones of feverish excitement, and his eyes were almost as luminous as those of King Cole, who sat up on his haunches, alert and quivering, on the other side of the pallet.

"Look here, old chap," said Dick anxiously, "easy on. Don't get excited, whatever you do. Your adventure of this afternoon has given you a rather bad shaking up. You've had a pretty severe shock, both mental and physical, if I'm any judge, and it looks to me very much as though you are going to be ill. Better let me mix you a soothing draught, hadn't you? Just tell me what ingredients to take, and how much of each, and I'll mix them in a brace of shakes—"

But by the time that Dick got thus far, Earle had begun to talk again, loudly and excitedly, and was sitting up on the pallet, waving his arms wildly. And when Dick attempted to force him back into a reclining position the American suddenly developed a kind of frenzy, seizing Cavendish by the throat and doing his utmost to throttle him, while King Cole, sorely puzzled at such extraordinary behaviour on the part of his two especial friends, snarled angrily and

bolted out of the tent into the velvety star-lit darkness.

So violent did Earle become, and such extraordinary strength did he develop under the influence of the delirium which had now seized him that Dick was compelled in self-defence to shout for help; and presently Peter, Inaguy, and some three or four others came rushing in, and, under the impression that the two leaders were fighting, separated them. But a few hurried words of explanation from Cavendish "put them wise" to the situation, and while by main force they restrained Earle from rising and rushing naked into the night, Dick routed out the medicine chest and, hurriedly consulting the pages of the accompanying book of instructions, prepared a strong sleeping draught, which, among them, they compelled the now violently crazy patient to swallow.

But it was nearly an hour before the potion became fully effective, and even then Earle's sleep was fitful and disturbed, his semi-coherent mutterings showing that his mind was still unhinged. To be brief, the outbreak of delirium was followed by a period of extreme weakness and profound dejection, during which the patient lost all memory of his splendid dream, and, at least temporarily, of several other things as well, so that nearly a fortnight elapsed before Earle was again well enough for the party to resume their journey.

It was while Earle was still an invalid, and before their march was resumed, that on a certain occasion, while Dick was sitting at his bedside, he besought the latter to tell him exactly what had happened on the memorable afternoon which witnessed their arrival in the glade, he apparently having forgotten everything about it. With some reluctance, after much earnest entreaty, Dick consented; and after he had related all, Earle became very thoughtful for some time. At length, however, he looked up and said:

"Yes; I am beginning to remember; it is all coming back to me—the occurrences of that afternoon, I mean. I suppose you haven't attempted to develop that negative giving the general view of the glade, have you?"

"Not I," answered Dick, "I've had too many other things to think about. But I'll do so to-night, if you like."

"I wish you would, old chap," said Earle. "If my suspicion is correct, that negative should be peculiarly interesting, and I should like it developed before we leave here, in order that if it should be imperfect, we may take another, as well as a near view of one of the clumps of blooms. By the way, did you ever happen to have heard of the Death Flower?"

"N-o, I can't say that I have," answered Dick. "Is there such a flower?"

"So it is said," responded Earle. "I remember having read somewhere of such a flower, which, it is asserted, blooms in a certain island in the Pacific. The flower is said to be big enough to allow a man to stand upright in it; but if anyone chances to be so ill-advised as to try the experiment, the experimenter falls asleep, lulled to slumber by the peculiar fragrance of the flower, and is at once favoured with the most glorious dreams, in the midst of which the flower closes its petals and suffocates him. Now, that was very much my own experience, except that I was enveloped by the leaf instead of the flower; you dug me out instead of leaving me to die; and my gorgeous dream came afterwards—at least, so I suppose—instead of while I was enveloped. It will be exceedingly interesting if it should prove that the flowers in this glade are Death Flowers, for I believe it has hitherto been understood that they flourish only in one spot in the world, namely, that small island in the Pacific, the name of which I have for the moment forgotten."

Accordingly, as soon as it was dark that night, Dick lighted the ruby lamp and proceeded very carefully to develop the precious negative, which proved to be absolutely flawless, to Earle's great delight. And on the following morning, at Earle's urgent request, Dick took out the camera and photographed at close quarters the identical clump of flowers that had so nearly proved fatal to his friend, taking care to include in the picture the severed stem and the shredded leaf which had done the mischief. And this negative also proved eminently satisfactory.

As they sat together, on that particular afternoon, examining the two negative films, Earle suddenly looked up and remarked:

"That is three times that you have saved my life, Dick; and if I have not said anything about it up to the present, you mustn't think that I am not profoundly grateful to you—"

"Oh, yes, of course, I know, old chap," interrupted Dick, who had an intense dislike to being effusively thanked for any little service that it might be in his power to render a friend. "Please oblige me by saying no more about it. At the same time, let me remark that I have not the slightest notion of what you are talking about. How do you reason it out that I've saved your life three times? I only know of—"

"Three times, I said; and three times I mean," returned Earle. "The first time was when the *Everest* sank; the second time was when you got me out of the fatal embrace of that enveloping leaf; and the third time was when you gave me that draught that sent me to sleep while I was delirious. For now that I am again in my right mind, and the danger is all over, I may as well admit that, while the delirium held me, the paramount idea in my mind was to get away from you, by hook or by crook, slip away to the flowers, and throw myself upon another leaf, so that I might enjoy a repetition of those glorious dreams and sensations that I told you of. In which case, of course, I should have died. So there you are."

"Thanks!" said Dick grimly. "I'm glad you have told me, for I shall now know exactly what to do, if anything similar should happen."

Earle's strength was slow to return to him, for there were two adverse influences with which to contend, one being the depressing influence of the forest itself in the midst of which they were encamped, while the other was the total absence of game, which necessitated their falling back upon the stock of canned and preserved food provided for such an emergency, in order to sustain the invalid and restore him to perfect health. At length, however, Earle

pronounced himself so far convalescent as to be capable of resuming the march; and one morning the party broke camp and continued their journey. The length of the marches was of course greatly curtailed, especially during the first two or three days, to fit them to the diminished powers of the invalid, and at the expiration of that time the party were fortunate enough to pass into a belt of forest of a totally different character, where game was again to be found, and from that moment Earle's progress toward complete recovery was rapid.

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## Chapter Seven.

### The Great Swamp and its weird Denizens.

It was on the eleventh day after the resumption of their march that, quite early in the afternoon, they finally emerged from the forest and found themselves upon the edge of a swamp, which stretched away ahead and on either side of them as far as the eye could reach, except that, in the extreme distance, and in the direction in which they wished to travel, there was the suggestion of firm and somewhat hilly ground which might be about thirty miles distant.

"Gee!" ejaculated Earle, as the party came to a halt by the margin of the morass-like expanse, "this promises to be a corker, Dick. Eh, what? Guess we'll have to go into camp for a bit, and explore. I don't at all like the notion of attempting to force our way across that swamp, if there is a method of working round it—as of course there is if we are prepared to travel far enough. This reminds me of Florida, where I once spent a month shooting 'gators—and other things. I guess there'll be all the 'gators we want in there, to say nothing of snakes, mosquitos, scorpions, centipedes, and other 'varmint.' No; I guess we'll go round, if we can; and if we can't, we must make dugouts, and effect the crossing in them. We'll never be able to do it any other way."

It was indeed a formidable-looking barrier, this vast expanse of swamp, that stretched itself, mile after mile, right athwart the party's course, and its aspect was as dreary and depressing as one could well imagine. All along its margin the soil was soft, boggy and treacherous, to such an extent, indeed, that while making a preliminary investigation of the ground before definitely deciding upon a location for the camp, Dick suddenly sank in to above his knees, and only succeeded in extricating himself with the utmost difficulty, assisted though he was by Earle and some half a dozen Indians, who formed themselves into a human chain and dragged him out by main force.

The entire expanse of swamp appeared to be level, with the exception of a few very trifling elevations here and there, and seemed to consist of boggy soil covered with a rank growth of coarse grass, reeds, and stunted bush, sparsely dotted here and there with a few gnarled and unwholesome-looking trees, the whole intersected by a labyrinth of canals filled with stagnant water, which wound hither and thither in a most purposeless and bewildering fashion. That insect life abounded there was manifest at the most cursory glance, for great clouds of midges or flies could be seen hovering in the air in every direction, while Earle's surmise as to the presence of alligators was abundantly confirmed by the frequent roaring of the creatures. The forest seemed to grow close up to the margin of the swamp everywhere, a mere narrow strip of open ground some twenty to thirty yards wide, dividing the two.

A fairly satisfactory site for the camp having at length been found, Earle and Dick, armed with rifle and automatic, and each accompanied by an Indian carrying a machete, set off in opposite directions to explore the margin of the swamp, in the hope of discovering a spot from which a promising start to cross might be made; while King Cole, quite unable to decide which of his masters he would accompany, finally laid down with his head between his paws and whined pitifully, refusing to be comforted by anybody.

Warned by his recent mishap, Dick was careful to give the treacherous margin of the swamp a wide berth. The route he was pursuing led about due south; and for nearly an hour he pursued his way at a good brisk pace, uneventfully and without finding anything like that of which he was in search. Eventually, however, he arrived at a point where the edge of the forest abruptly receded toward the east, leaving a wide expanse of bare soil, beyond which, at a distance of a short quarter of a mile, the swamp again appeared, stretching away limitlessly toward the south and east. Apparently, the only thing to do was to follow the northerly margin of solid ground, which seemed to trend away in a westerly direction, the direction namely in which Earle wished to travel, and this Dick accordingly did. He followed this course for about half an hour, finding the tongue of firm ground which he was traversing vary in width, from time to time, from several yards to, in places, merely enough for a man conveniently to walk upon, while it twisted hither and thither in the most erratic fashion, although on the whole it continued to push its way steadily westward toward the heart of the swamp. Then, glancing at the declining sun, he decided that he must retrace his steps if he desired to get back to camp before dark.

Thus far, the afternoon's journey had been wholly uneventful, excepting for the persistent attacks of the myriads of mosquitoes and flies which swarmed in great clouds about the two adventurers to such an extent that there were times when they were compelled to halt and beat the pests off their bodies. But now they had something else than flies and mosquitoes to think about, for they had scarcely progressed a quarter of a mile on their return when, as they approached a spot where the firm soil narrowed to a mere causeway, scarcely two feet in width, Dick, who was leading, suddenly became aware of a strange and formidable-looking creature squatting at the far extremity of the causeway, apparently awaiting their approach.

As his eyes fell upon it Cavendish came to a halt so suddenly that the Indian in his rear cannoned into him, nearly knocking him into the black water alongside.

"Steady, Moquit!" exclaimed Dick, addressing his follower in the Indian tongue, in which he was rapidly acquiring a considerable degree of proficiency. "Look ahead, Moquit. What is that thing? Have you ever seen anything like it before?"

"Never, master," answered Moquit, staring with bulging eyes at the apparition, which in its turn was staring back at them. "I like it not. Toqui preserve us!"—(Toqui was the name of Moquit's most revered god)—"it looks like a slayer

of men. Had not master better destroy it with his fire tube, lest it cross over and devour us?"

"I do not think we need greatly fear that," answered Dick, holding his rifle in readiness nevertheless. "The causeway is too narrow for the brute to cross. What, in the name of Fortune, can the beast be?" he concluded in his own tongue.

He might well wonder; for never in his life before had he seen such a creature, either alive, dead, or even in a picture. And yet—stay! As he looked at the thing more intently, there seemed to gradually float into his memory a hazy sort of recollection that he *had* seen a picture or representation of the creature which squatted there stolidly some thirty yards before him.

According to Cavendish's own subsequent description, which was confirmed in every particular by Moquit, the general impression conveyed was that of a gigantic frog, as big as an ox, but with several important modifications, one of which was that its capacious mouth was furnished with a most formidable set of sharp, curved, dagger-like teeth, of which the observers gained an excellent view, since the creature opened its mouth several times. It was a quadruped; that is to say, it was provided with four legs, but while its front legs were so short as to be little more than rudimentary, its hind legs were as long and apparently as powerful, proportionately, as those of a kangaroo. And, like a kangaroo, it was provided with a long tail, as thick at the root as its own body, tapering away to a blunt point. Indeed, as Dick remarked, he could scarcely describe the creature better than by likening it to what he conceived might be the appearance of a cross between a frog and a kangaroo. It had a pair of big, staring eyes, its toes were armed with long, murderous-looking claws, and its brownish-yellow skin was mottled all over with wart-like protuberances.

For fully five minutes, Dick supposes, he stood intently studying the peculiarities of the extraordinary creature, animated much more by curiosity than by any sense of fear, for he had somehow fully persuaded himself that the beast would not hazard the passage of that narrow causeway, while in any case a shot or two from the U.M.C. Remington, which the young Englishman carried, would of a surety put an end to the creature's career. Then, as Dick still stood watching and perhaps waiting for developments of some sort, the great brute suddenly rose upon its hind legs and, uttering a curious squealing sound, launched itself into the air with a terrific spring which Cavendish saw with consternation would bring the beast right upon him. Quick and unexpected as was the action, however, it did not take Dick wholly by surprise; on the contrary, as though by instinct, he threw up the muzzle of his rifle, pressed the trigger, and heard the bullet thud as it struck the leaping body. A loud, horrible scream escaped the brute as the bullet smote it. It writhed in mid-air, and that writhe caused it to fall into the water instead of landing upon Dick's body, as it must otherwise have done. It fell with a terrific splash which drenched Dick and Moquit, and still writhing with pain, instantly turned, with the evident intention of climbing out and attacking the two men. But by this time Dick had begun to realise the dangerous character of the creature, and, rapidly levelling his rifle again, shot it through the head as it laid its two front paws upon the bank preparatory to climbing out. With a moaning gasp, the great body relaxed and slowly settled back into the water, where it presently turned over on its back and floated, dead. Less than a minute later, while Dick and Moquit still stood staring in amazement at the weird creature, there came a sudden, violent swirling in the black water, and the heads of some six or seven enormous alligators appeared round the body. The great jaws of the reptiles opened, and the carcass was violently dragged hither and thither as the huge saurians tugged fiercely at it. Dick did not wait to see the issue of the struggle, but skipped nimbly across the causeway, with Moquit close upon his heels, and made the best of his way back to camp, where he found Earle already anxiously awaiting him.

"Well," demanded the American, as Cavendish came within hail, "have you met with any luck? I was beginning to feel a bit uneasy about you, for we seem to have struck a rather dangerous streak of country here."

"What!" exclaimed Dick. "Have you, too, been meeting with adventures, then?"

"Of a sort, yes; though nothing worth speaking about," answered Earle. "Simply met the biggest python I've ever seen; and as the beggar seemed in a quarrelsome humour and spoiling for a fight, I shot him. And you? I sort of gather from your last remark that you have met with an adventure of some sort. Is that so?"

"You bet!" answered Dick, who was almost unconsciously adopting many of Earle's expressive idioms. And he proceeded to relate in detail the occurrences of the afternoon.

"Gee!" exclaimed Earle, when his companion had finished. "That sounds interesting. I wonder what



THE HUGE LEAF SUDDENLY CURLED UP. (p. 111)

the brute can have been.” (He was referring to the strange beast which Dick had shot). “Do you think you could draw a picture of him?”

“Oh yes, after a fashion,” answered Dick, who was really rather clever with his pencil and brush in an amateurish fashion. “He was something like this.” And, whipping out his pocket-book, he rapidly produced a very spirited pencil sketch of the unknown creature.

“Gee!” repeated Earle, studying the sketch. “Say, Dick, this is intensely interesting. The thing looks absolutely new to me. And yet—I don’t quite know. Seems to me that I’ve somewhere seen something a bit like it before—”

“That’s what I thought,” said Dick; “though I’m quite prepared to swear that I never before saw the actual thing itself. I should have remembered it if I had.”

“Y-e-s, I guess you would,” returned Earle, still thoughtfully considering the sketch. At length he returned the book to Dick, remarking:

“Then you think there is just a possibility that we may be able to cross the swamp by way of that tongue of firm ground that you explored this afternoon? In that case, I guess we’ll try it. We may succeed; and if we do, it will save us a long journey round; for I was unable to find the northern end of the swamp this afternoon, although, before turning back I climbed the highest tree in the neighbourhood and carefully searched the whole of the visible country through my Goertz prismatics. We will try that tongue of land of yours to-morrow, Dick. And as for the flies and things, I guess we can beat them by enveloping our heads in gauze veils and wearing gloves. I brought some green gauze along expressly to meet such a contingency. Learned the wrinkle in Africa, where the flies and mosquitoes used to drive me pretty nearly crazy.”

An hour after sunrise on the following morning found the expedition en route, and in due time it reached the tongue of firm ground which Dick had discovered during the preceding afternoon. Here the two leaders enveloped their heads, helmets and all, in capacious veils of green gauze which Earle had produced during the preceding evening.

Earle was in exceptionally high spirits that morning. The story of Dick’s encounter with the strange beast had intensely interested him, for he was by way of being a naturalist, as well as a good many other things, and he was naturally eager to get a sight of another creature of the same species. Then a view at close quarters of the swamp added further to his excitement, for even then, in the dazzling glare of the morning sun, there was a certain suggestion of weirdness and uncanniness about the place that appealed very strongly to his imagination. To young, prosaic Dick Cavendish, a sailor pure and simple, whose only knowledge of science was that connected with navigation, the swamp was just—well, a swamp, and nothing more; but, to Earle’s higher scientific intelligence it was an absorbingly interesting mystery. For they had scarcely penetrated it to the depth of a mile before the American began to be aware that the character of his surroundings was undergoing a subtle change, the herbage underfoot, the rushes that edged the lagoons and water channels, the plants that here and there in wide patches hid the surface of the water, the ferns that decked the banks of the water-courses, were all new and strange to him; and this, in conjunction with Dick’s adventure here, less than twenty-four hours ago, generated within him a thrilling conviction that he was on the brink of great and important discoveries.

Presently Dick turned to him and said, pointing: “You see where the ground narrows away to a mere ridge, ahead there? It was just on this side of it that the queer beast was squatting when I first caught sight of him.”

“That so?” responded Earle, coming to a sudden standstill. “Halt there, men; don’t advance another step until I tell



you," he ordered, wheeling round and holding up his hand.

"Now then, Dick," he continued, "you and I will go forward, carefully examining the soil for footprints. Perhaps, if we are in luck, we may succeed in finding an impression, though I am afraid the ground is rather too dry—stay, what is this?"

Stretching out his hand to stay Dick's incautious advance, Earle went down on one knee and carefully examined a faint impression on the ground. It consisted of a slight depression in the thin dust overlaying the hard earth, practically circular in shape and about the size of the palm of a man's hand, and beyond it, at a distance of about three feet six inches, there were three somewhat deeper impressions, about a foot apart, such as might be made by the sharp claws of an animal.

"I guess this looks very much as though it might be one of the footprints of your friend," remarked Earle, after he had intently studied the impression for a full minute or more; "but it is very imperfect and indistinct; not nearly clear enough to be satisfactory. Let's go on a bit; perhaps we may find others. If not, we'll come back and examine this again. Go carefully, old chap, and if you see any other marks, don't tread on them, for goodness' sake."

Crouching low and advancing a single step at a time, as they carefully scanned the ground before them, the two friends had covered a distance of some five yards when they came upon two more impressions, a little more distinctly marked than the first. They were about six feet apart, but in line athwart the path, and suggested the idea of having been made by the landing of the creature upon the ground after a forward jump. These, too, Earle carefully examined before proceeding, and then the two friends went on to the spot where Dick had seen the thing squatting. And here, the soil being considerably more moist and clayey, they found, to Earle's intense delight, some half a dozen deep and perfectly clear imprints, only two of which had been partially obliterated by the feet of Dick and Moquit on their return after killing the beast. The imprints somewhat resembled those of a thick-toed bird, but were immensely larger than the spoor of any known bird, measuring exactly three feet nine and a quarter inches from the back of the heel to the front of the middle claw—which seemed to be some six inches longer than the two others—and two feet two inches across from one outer claw to the other; the indent showing that the middle claw was fourteen inches long.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Earle excitedly, as he rose to his full height after having made a careful figured drawing of the impression in his pocket-book—"what would I not give for enough plaster of paris to make a cast of that footprint! Guess it will make some of the professors at home sit up and take notice when they see this drawing in the book, which I mean to publish when I get back. Most of 'em won't believe it, I expect. They'll denounce it as a traveller's tale. Hold on, though, I'll take a photograph—two or three photographs—of the impressions; perhaps that will convince them. You shall stand just there, Dick, and I'll include you in one of the pictures, to act as a sort of scale."

The photographs were duly taken; and then Earle expressed the utmost anxiety to secure the carcass of the creature itself. But, as Dick reminded his companion, the creature had no sooner been killed than it became a prey to several alligators of formidable size, therefore any attempt to fish up the remains from the bottom of the canal would be certain to result in failure. And when Dick, pressing home his point, inquired whether Earle proposed to dive to the bottom in search of the body, the American reluctantly admitted that even his scientific ardour was scarcely equal to the adoption of such a course. The march was therefore resumed, after about an hour's delay, Earle consoling himself with the hope that one specimen of the unknown monster having been found in the swamp, others might also exist there, and they might be fortunate enough to encounter one or more of them.

Naturally, the party's rate of travelling was slow; for not only was Earle now constantly engaged in searching the ground for further "sign" of creatures possibly peculiar to the swamp, but halts were frequently being called while suspicious indications were carefully investigated; consequently when the mid-day halt was at length called, it was estimated that the party had not penetrated the swamp to a distance of more than some six or seven miles as the crow flies, though, of course, they had actually traversed a distance nearly half as much again. But, even so, Earle was quite satisfied with what had been done so far; while there was still no sign of a break in the continuity of the firm soil upon which they had been travelling.

The camp was pitched at a point where it widened out until there was fully a hundred yards of it between the two stretches of water to right and left, while on the right hand, or northern side of this wide space, the canal-like watercourse had given place to a sort of lagoon, nearly a mile long by about half that width. The water in this lagoon was much cleaner and more wholesome-looking than that in the canals, yet Earle considered that it would be unwise to use it for drinking purposes; he therefore selected a spot and set a couple of Indians to work to dig a pit in search of water, which he expected to find at a depth of two or three feet, such water to be first filtered and then boiled before use. And while the digging was proceeding, Earle and Dick took up a position on the summit of a low knoll a few yards away, and examined their surroundings through their prismatic glasses.

Suddenly Dick turned to his companion and pointed.

"I say, Earle," he exclaimed, "what sort of an anima is that? Surely it is not a wild boar, though it looks a bit like the pictures I have seen of them."

"Where?" demanded Earle, who had been looking in another direction. "Oh! I see," he continued, catching sight of the creature at which Dick was pointing, and which was standing at the edge of a little strip of beach, about a quarter of a mile away, on the opposite side of the water.

The two raised their glasses to their eyes and proceeded to watch the animal, which seemed to have a desire to drink, but was debating within itself the question of how far it would be prudent to enter the water even as far as would be necessary to enable it to do so. It was standing quite still, staring down into the water, and thus afforded an excellent opportunity for careful inspection.

"N-o," answered Earle slowly, after he had studied the appearance of the creature for nearly a minute—"it certainly is not a boar, though it is not altogether unlike one. But it is too big for a boar. Looks to me more like a hyaena—though of course I know there are no such creatures in this country. Also it is far too big to be a hyaena—unless it is an entirely new species. And the thing has tusks, just like a wild boar. Now, what the mischief can it be? It is rather too far off for a dead shot, or I would have a try at it; but it would be a pity to merely wound it and scare it away. Say! is there any way of getting across to the other side, short of swimming?"

"I'm afraid not," answered Dick. "And after what I saw yesterday I wouldn't give a farthing for the chance of anybody who should attempt to swim in these waters."

Dick still had his glasses to his eyes as he spoke; and even as the last words left his lips he had an impression of something stealthily moving in the long herbage some distance to the rear of the strange animal which they were watching. He was about to direct Earle's attention to the circumstance when, from the spot where he had observed the stealthy movement, a great body rose into the air with a tremendous leap and hurtling through the intervening space, descended fair and square upon the body of the creature standing by the water's edge.

"Gee-rusalem!" shouted Earle, as the harsh scream of the stricken animal pealed out on the stagnant air. "See that, Cavendish?"

"Sure!" responded Dick. "Take particular notice of that last brute, Earle; for as sure as my name is Cavendish, it is another of the same kind that I killed yesterday."

"My revered ancestors! You don't say so!" gasped Earle. "Sure?"

"Absolutely certain," averred Dick.

"But—but—man alive—" stammered Earle in his excitement, "you told me that the thing you shot yesterday was a sort of cross between a frog and a kangaroo, and that beast doesn't suggest at all that sort of idea to me. What a ferocious beast it is! He is literally tearing the other poor brute to pieces."

"Yes," agreed Dick. "And I am just now beginning to understand what a narrow squeak I had yesterday. For that fellow is exactly like the thing I killed yesterday, though, now that I see him broadside-on, the resemblance, whether to a frog or a kangaroo, is not so strong as it was when I was facing him. But there are the same long, powerful hind legs, the same almost invisible front ones, the same gaping mouth filled with strong, dagger-like teeth, the same long, thick, pointed tail—in short, the same creature from stem to stern."

"But the head of that thing is more like an alligator's than a frog's," objected Earle. "And then, look at that serrated arrangement of the skin—I suppose it is—from the back of the head to the extremity of the tail. You never said anything about that."

"No," admitted Dick, "I believe I didn't; but the other thing had it, all the same. I remember noticing it, now that you call my attention to it. I tell you that the two creatures are identical in every respect, except that this one looks to be a bit bigger than the other. Do you happen to know what the thing is called?"

"N-o, I am not sure that I do," answered Earle, "but I'll find out as soon as ever I get back to New York. I shall remember the appearance of the beast all right, now that I've actually seen it, and I guess there will be somebody who can tell me. Say! Dick, I wouldn't have missed this sight for a thousand dollars; and I'd give ten thousand to get the skin and skeleton of the brute. If I could but secure them, I'd go straight back to New York at once, and leave Manoa for another time. Isn't there *any* way by which we could get across that insignificant strip of water?"

"Not without a boat or a raft of some sort, I'm afraid," answered Dick. "And there is nothing hereabout from which we could construct even the most elementary sort of raft. Besides, before we could put anything together, even if we had the material, the brute would be gone. See, he has almost gorged the whole of his prey already."

"I've a mind to try a shot at him—and I will, too," said Earle. "Hi, there, Peter, bring me my point-three-five Remington and some cartridges. Hurry, you black angel! Perhaps if the brute is very savage, and we can attract his attention, or hurt him a bit, he may take it into his head to attack us. He could jump across the stream a little lower down, easily enough. Or he may be a swimmer. He looks a good deal more like a reptile than a beast, anyhow."

Peter, the black cook, came running up at this juncture with the Remington, and Earle, snatching it from him, quickly adjusted the back sight and throwing himself prone upon the ground, took careful aim at the formidable-looking brute, which had ceased to feed and was now squatting on its haunches, facing toward the two men. A few seconds of suspense and the rifle flashed, the hum of the bullet was heard, and then a thud as it struck. Coincident with the thud of the bullet, the great body sprang high into the air, a loud, blood-curdling scream pealed out, and then, with a succession of prodigious leaps, it disappeared among the rank herbage.

The result was a bitter disappointment for Earle, who declared that he would not move from the spot until he had satisfied himself that it was impossible to cross to the other side of the water. But, short of swimming, there was no means of crossing, for there was nothing wherewith to make a raft of even the most flimsy description. This fact being at length conclusively established, the march was resumed immediately after the conclusion of the mid-day meal.

About an hour before sunset that day, they were rather unexpectedly brought to a halt by finding themselves on a small peninsula of some five acres in extent, thrusting itself forward into a great lagoon, the waters of which stretched away on either hand for many miles, while in the direction toward which they wished to travel, the nearest point of land was distant about a mile and a half. After surveying their surroundings for some time, the two leaders agreed that it was too late in the day to retrace their steps across the narrow isthmus by which they had arrived and

seek some other route; the camp was therefore pitched on the south-westerly slope of the peninsula, quite close to a little strip of sandy beach, with a background consisting of a hummock some fifteen feet high crowned by an extensive clump of strange-looking shrubs, the nature of which Earle was anxious to investigate.

The day had been overpoweringly hot, the sun blazing down upon them unintermittently out of a cloudless sky; but now, while the camp was being pitched, a thin haze began insidiously to overspread the blue, while away toward the south-west a great bank of slatey blue cloud appeared above the ridge of the distant hills, working up against the wind and seeming to portend a thunderstorm.

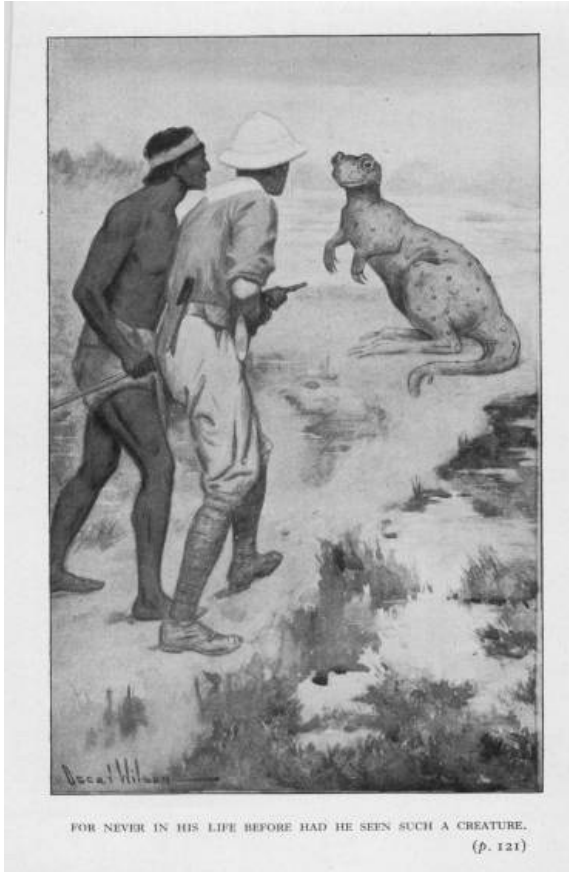
Now that they had come to a halt, the leaders mutually confessed to a feeling of great fatigue, while the listless manner in which the Indians were going about their duties showed that they, too, were longing for an opportunity to rest their weary limbs. Earle flung himself down upon the short moss-like turf bordering the strip of beach and gazed longingly at the rippling waters of the lagoon as they sparkled in the slanting rays of the declining sun. Unlike the turbid, black and almost stagnant water in the canals which they had been passing during the day's march, the tiny wavelets which rippled in upon the adjacent beach were crystal clear, and gave off the fresh, wholesome smell of pure water; and when, a little later, Earle rose languidly to his feet, and advancing a few paces to the water's edge, scooped up a handful of the liquid and tasted it, he expressed the opinion that it was quite wholesome enough for drinking purposes.

"And it is deliciously cool, too," he remarked to Dick. "For two pins I would strip and have a swim."

"Not if I know it, my friend," retorted Dick. "I grant you that the water looks almost irresistibly tempting, and I have no doubt that a swim would be amazingly refreshing—if we could only be sure of going in and coming out again unharmed. But who knows what dangers may be lurking beneath that sparkling surface? The place may be swarming with alligators, for aught that we know, and—"

"Why, you surely don't mean to say that you are afraid, Dick?"

"No, I don't," returned Dick, "and if there were any real necessity to do so, I would not hesitate a moment to plunge in and swim across to the other side. But when one knows that there is a possibility of being seized



and pulled down by an alligator, I contend that it would be folly to risk one's life merely for the pleasure of a swim. I once saw a man seized by a shark. We were becalmed in the Indian Ocean, and the fellow determined to avail himself of the opportunity to go overboard and indulge in the luxury of a salt-water bath; so he got a chum to go up into the foretopmast crosstrees and have a look round. The chum signalled all clear, and the would-be bather slipped surreptitiously over the bows, passed along the martingale stays, dropped quietly into the water, and struck out. And before he had swum three strokes a shark darted from under the ship's bottom and—that was the end of him. No, sir—look there! See that swirl? That means something big—an alligator, or a big fish of some sort, which is as likely as not to be dangerous. No; no swimming for me—or for you, either, thank you. But it wouldn't be at all a bad idea to have our portable bath-tubs set up on the sand, and have a good dip in them."

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## Chapter Eight.

### A Night Adventure in the Great Swamp.

With the setting of the sun, the gentle zephyr of a breeze that had been blowing all day dropped, and the night fell, close and suffocatingly hot. A young moon hung low over the western horizon, but the bank of thunder cloud was rising fast, and by the time that the two friends had finished their evening meal, the silver sickle of the moon had become effaced, as had the stars, by the thickening of the veil of haze which had been gradually over-spreading the heavens.

So close and breathless was the atmosphere that the two friends declared the interior of the tent to be insupportable, they therefore walked down to near the inner margin of the beach and flung themselves down upon the curious moss-like turf, to indulge in their usual after-dinner chat and watch the gathering of the storm that now seemed inevitable, while Earle smoked. For a wonder, there were neither flies, mosquitoes, nor midges on this little peninsula; there was therefore nothing but the excessive heat and the closeness of the atmosphere to interfere with their comfort. The Indians were camped on the summit of the mound, grouped as usual round a small fire, the materials for which they had collected during the day's march, and were conversing in low tones, while they, too, smoked. King Cole, who had dined luxuriously and to repletion upon a big bustard-like bird which Earle had shot an hour or two earlier, crouched at the feet of his two masters, purring contentedly.

The conversation between the two friends, which was of a desultory and discursive character, ebbed and flowed in unison with the interest of the speakers, and was punctuated with many spells of silence while the two gazed dreamily out across the glass-like surface of the lagoon, indistinguishable now in the velvet blackness, save when a faint flicker of sheet lightning momentarily illuminated it. At the beginning the night was intensely still and silent; there was not even the customary hum of insects or rolling clatter of frogs to accentuate the silence, under the influence of which the white men first, and finally the Indians, fell silent. Then the fatigue consequent upon the day's toil began to make itself felt, and after a somewhat longer spell of silence than usual, Earle allowed his body to settle back luxuriously upon the soft sward and soon gave audible evidence that he was fast asleep, whereupon Dick promptly followed his companion's example.

Their sleep was, however, destined to be of brief duration. They were both by this time so thoroughly accustomed to the ordinary nocturnal sounds of the wild that, although so fully aware of them as to be able instantly to detect anything unusual in their character, and to start up awake in a moment if the unusual note seemed to portend danger, they could still sleep soundly and refreshingly through them all. But the nocturnal sounds of this particular night were of so startling a character that sleep soon became an impossibility.

They began with a low, melancholy, distant howl which, while it penetrated the consciousness of the sleepers, failed to disturb them, because its remoteness was a guarantee against imminent danger, and nothing less than imminent danger now had the power to chase sleep from those seasoned wanderers. Nor were the howls any more effective as disturbers of the party's rest after several repetitions in varying keys. But when a weird, unearthly, blood-curdling scream rang out upon the startled air it awoke the entire party upon the instant, though the sound seemed to emanate from a considerable distance.

"What the dickens was that?" demanded Dick, sitting up and instinctively groping for his rifle.

"Give it up," returned Earle. "No, I don't though," he quickly added. "I guess it's that thing I shot at and wounded during the mid-day halt, or another of the same species."

"Y-e-s, very possibly," agreed Dick. "Look at King Cole. What is the matter with him now, I wonder?"

By the declining light of the fire on the summit of the hillock the panther could be seen, in a half-standing, half-crouching attitude, a few paces away, staring intently out across the black water, his black fur all a-bristle, and his body visibly quivering with either excitement or fear.

"King—King Cole, come here, sir! What's the matter with you, anyway?" called Earle. And the animal at once turned and crept cowering to the feet of the pair, his eyes glowing like a pair of green lamps, and his lips drawn into a silent snarl.

That the weird cry was not repeated in no wise detracted from its startling character; but although profound silence followed, it did not remain long unbroken, for a few minutes later there came the sound as of great wings sweeping hither and thither. And scarcely had this sound died away when it was succeeded by others—low moans, sighs, whistlings, grunts, bellowings, rustlings, splashings—some from a considerable distance, others apparently close at hand; some obviously from the land to the rear of the party, and others quite as obviously from the water in their front. And, most disturbing consideration of all, every one of them was absolutely unfamiliar, therefore in some vague, undefinable fashion, the more alarming. This effect was quickly made manifest by the agitated murmurings of the Indians, and the haste with which they replenished the dying fire, heaping on fuel with such a lavish hand that, for the space of a few yards all round the blaze, the light was almost as brilliant as that of day.

"Gee!" exclaimed Earle, as the weird sounds multiplied on all sides, "what would I not give for a full moon and a clear sky, just now. Bet your life, Dick, there are some very queer scenes being enacted all round us at this moment, had we but light to reveal them. I have come to the conclusion that this swamp is unique in many respects. By some freak of nature, things here are entirely different from what they are elsewhere. Even the vegetation is new and strange to me; and I am convinced that it is also the home of many forms of animal life unknown elsewhere. The exasperating part of the whole thing is that most of the creatures inhabiting it seem to be of nocturnal habit, hiding themselves during the day, and only emerging into the open at night. Just listen now to the hubbub of sound all about us. Why, the place must be fairly teeming with life! And, by a perverse combination of circumstances, we can see nothing of it—Ah! thank goodness, the lightning is becoming more vivid. I would give a good round sum for a real first-class thunderstorm; and, by ginks! I believe we are going to have it."

It seemed quite probable, for as though in response to Earle's ardently expressed desire, a brilliant flash of sheet

lightning flickered out of the now rapidly rising bank of cloud over the distant hills, illumining the landscape for the fraction of a second, during which a momentary glimpse was afforded of certain strange forms dotting the waters of the lagoon; but the illumination was too brief to leave anything more than the most vague impression of those forms upon the retina of the observers. The glimpse, however, transient as it was, revealed enough to stimulate their interest and curiosity to the highest pitch, and the two friends, with their rifles grasped ready for instant action, sprang to their feet and stood eagerly awaiting further revelation with the next flash of lightning, while the Indians, cowering round the roaring fire on the summit of the knoll, were visibly suffering the extremity of terror.

Then, while the two friends stood together awaiting the coming of another lightning flash, with King Cole quivering and shivering at their feet, a huge shape, elusively revealed in the flickering firelight, slowly emerged from the intense darkness overshadowing the lagoon, ponderously splashing through the shallows toward the beach—and toward the two white men, a pair of enormous eyes, glistening in the uncertain light of the flames, being all that could be distinctly seen. The thing—whatever it may have been—was not more than ten yards distant when first seen, and there was a gleam of such deadly malignancy in those two glistening eyes, and a suggestion of such implacable purpose in the ponderous movement of the imperfectly seen bulk, that Earle and Dick, taken completely unawares by its sudden appearance, incontinently flung up their rifles and fired, at the precise moment that King Cole, utterly demoralised by the weird apparition, sprang to his feet and fled, snarling, to the rear. The two rifles spoke as one, and instantly following the whip-like reports, the double clap of the bullets was heard—not a dull sound like that of a bullet striking yielding flesh, but a sharp crack, suggesting the impingement of lead upon unyielding bone; there was a frightful bellowing roar, a terrific splash, the spray of which flew over and far beyond the two white men, and the thing was gone.

“Well, ‘shiver my timbers!’ as you sailors are supposed to remark,” exclaimed Earle in tones of ineffable disgust. “If that doesn’t beat the band! Oh, Dick Cavendish—and Wilfrid Earle, you—you twenty-volume unabridged fools, why on earth couldn’t you have waited another two or three seconds before shootin’ and so have made sure of getting the brute? Kick me, Dick, and I’ll kick you, for we both deserve it! It was the chance of a lifetime, and we flung it away by being over-eager. I’m ashamed of you, Dick—and a blamed sight more ashamed of myself; for I am an old hand at this sort of thing, while you are comparatively fresh at it, and therefore there is some sort of excuse for you, while there is none for me.”

“But we hit him,” remonstrated Dick. “What more do you want?”

“Hit him!” retorted Earle, disgustedly. “Of course we hit him; we couldn’t help hitting him. He was as big as a house! But, my gentle boy, that wasn’t enough. We wanted to kill him, so that we might have a chance to see what he looked like. Hit him! Yes; we hit him on his skull, and the blows sounded as though his head was encased in five-inch Harveyized armour plate! If we had waited five seconds longer, we should have had a good view of him and been able to shoot him through the heart—if he happens to possess such an organ.”

“That’s all very fine,” retorted Dick. “But I’ll bet that if we had waited the extra five seconds, you would still have aimed to hit him fair between the eyes—as I did.”

“Well—yes, I guess I should,” returned Earle, his vexation suddenly evaporating. “As a matter of fact, that is the precise spot I aimed at. And as you say that you did also, we will hope that one at least of our bullets got home, and that to-morrow morning, we shall find him floating dead out there in the offing waiting to be inspected. Anyway, there is no sense in crying over spilt milk; and who knows what chances may still be in store for us. And now, Dick, while your memory is still fresh, have the goodness to describe to me exactly the impression left upon your mind by what you saw. Gee! what a time the inhabitants of this swamp seem to be having. The row is growing worse than ever.”

Dick dutifully responded to his friend’s request, but alas! his description amounted to very little more than the bald statement that the thing struck him as possessing a body about as bulky as an elephant, standing upon disproportionately short legs; that the eyes were as big round as dinner-plates; that they glared with a most unholy malevolence; and that they were spaced about thirty inches apart. These details, such as they were, corresponded with the impression produced upon Earle, who forthwith proceeded to jot down the meagre facts in his notebook by the light of the fire.

Meanwhile the “row,” as Earle had observed, seemed to be growing worse than ever, and it was presently added to by the low mutterings of distant thunder, the precursor of what threatened to be a thunderstorm of unusual violence. The flickering of sheet lightning became more frequent, while occasional flashes of forked lightning emanating from a point low down upon the south-western horizon, began to light up the surroundings for a fraction of a second with their transient glare. Soon low moaning sounds became fitfully audible far aloft, and little scurrying gusts of hot wind came sweeping across the lagoon, causing the fire on the knoll to roar and blaze with sudden intensity, while the sparks flew far inland.

“Stand by the topsail halliards!” remarked Dick, with a grin. “We are going to have it hot and heavy in a minute or two, or I’m a Dutchman!” And the words were hardly out of his mouth when, with a shrieking roar, the tempest swooped down upon them, and they abruptly sat down, to avoid being swept off their feet, while the blazing embers of the fire, snatched up by the wind, went whirling far and wide. At the same instant a flash of blindingly vivid lightning leapt from the zenith and seemed to strike the waters of the lagoon only a few yards away, while simultaneously there came a crash of thunder that caused their ears to ring and tingle, and effectually deafened them for several minutes. This was the outburst of the storm, which thereafter raged with indescribable fury for a full hour, the lightning incessantly flashing all round the little knoll with such dazzling brilliancy that the entire landscape, almost to its uttermost confines, was nearly as fully revealed as at noonday, while the thunder crashed and rattled and boomed with a nerve-shattering violence that effectually drowned all other sounds. And, to add still further to the weird impressiveness of the scene, the storm had scarcely been raging ten minutes when the swamp was seen to be on fire in several places immediately to leeward of the knoll, the dry herbage having been undoubtedly kindled by the flying embers and sparks of the fire, which had been completely swept away by the wind. For the first half-hour of

its duration the storm was a dry one, that is to say, it was unaccompanied by rain; and while the tempest raged about them Dick and Earle lay prone, side by side, watching the marvellous scene revealed by the incessant lightning flashes. And Earle afterwards confided to Dick—and, still later, to many others—that what he then beheld more than repaid him for all that the entire journey cost him, not only in money, but also in toil and privation. For although the flickering of the lightning and its almost blinding vividness were by no means conducive to accuracy of observation, he saw enough to fully confirm his previous conviction that the swamp was the habitat of several forms of life hitherto unknown and unsuspected by naturalists. True, most of the creatures seen were apparently amphibious, their forms only partially revealed as they sported or fought in the waters of the lagoon; but transient glimpses were occasionally caught of others roaming about the patches of dry ground; while all were too distant for the watchers to obtain any very clear impression of their shapes and proportions. Then the wind and the lightning suddenly ceased, pitchy darkness fell upon the scene, and the rain descended in such a deluge as is known only to those who have dwelt in the tropics, lasting until within half-an-hour of sunrise.

The appearance of the sun was hailed with feelings of unqualified delight by the entire party, for not only did the remaining clouds vanish with his uprising, but he brought what was, for once, welcome warmth with him, to the relief of the drenched and thoroughly chilled occupants of the camp, who had lain exposed for hours to the pitiless pelting of the rain—Dick and Earle suffering equally with the rest, the wind having temporarily wrecked their tent. They felt that a hot breakfast would have been indescribably welcome that morning; but such a meal was impossible, for the rain had saturated everything and rendered a fire out of the question; they were consequently obliged to content themselves with cold viands, which they consumed in haste, for they had the prospect of a busy day before them.

The problem which confronted them was, how were they to transport themselves and their belongings across the lagoon? For it was on the opposite side of it that their road lay, and if they would proceed, only two alternatives seemed open to them; one to find some means by which they could ferry themselves across, while the other was to pass round one or the other of the extremities of the lagoon. And this last meant the retracing of their steps for a considerable distance, with the prospect of a long march to follow, the lagoon extending to right and left as far as the eye could see.

It was at this crisis that Huanami, one of the bearers, a Peruvian half-breed, came to the rescue with a suggestion. During the march of the previous day, this man, it appeared, had taken note of vast quantities of a particular kind of reed growing some three or four miles back, upon the opposite side of a canal-like watercourse, along the margin of which the party had been travelling, and he was of opinion that those reeds could be used in the construction of excellent *balsas*, if they could only be got at. And he believed that it would be possible to get at them if the white lords would permit him and two or three of his comrades to go still further back to a point where, on the near side of the canal, he had noted a sufficient growth of reeds to construct a single *balsa* of a capacity which would enable him to float himself across the canal to the opposite side, where the reeds were growing in profusion. The suggestion found immediate favour with the "white lords," for it appeared to indicate the shortest way out of the difficulty; and orders were at once given to carry it into effect.

But Earle made one important modification in Huanami's proposal. After the experiences of the previous day—and, still more, of the past night—he was not at all disposed to permit two or three unarmed men to retrace their steps, unaccompanied, with the possibility that they might be set upon and destroyed by some unknown monster inhabitant of the swamp; he therefore gave orders for the entire party to countermarch, and five minutes later they were under way.

Somewhere about an hour later they reached the spot where the rushes grew on the opposite side of the canal; and it was at once apparent that there was a sufficiency to meet the requirements of the party; while at a further distance of about a mile they came to a bed containing enough rushes to construct a *balsa* capable of supporting a single man, or possibly two men. Huanami cut one of the rushes for Earle's inspection, and dividing it up into short lengths, showed that it was a bamboo-like growth, hollow in structure and divided into a series of watertight compartments by partitions occurring at every notch, rendering it exceedingly light and buoyant. The average length of the rushes was about twelve feet, but by a kind of interlacing system a raft, or *balsa*, of almost any required dimensions could be constructed.

No time was lost by the party in getting to work upon the first *balsa*, Huanami cutting great quantities of long, tough bents and plaiting them up into a kind of rope, while the rest of the Indians cut the reeds. It was necessary for them to get into the water to do this; but luckily, the reeds first attacked grew in shallow water, only up to the men's knees, and while they all worked together, shouting and splashing vigorously the while, Dick and Earle, armed with repeating rifles, mounted guard on the bank, holding themselves ready to open fire upon any marauding alligator or other creature that might threaten to interrupt the work. No interruption occurred, however, and in less than an hour the reeds were all cut and the construction of the first *balsa* was begun. Huanami proved himself an adept in the art of *balsa* construction, and when noon arrived, and with it the hour for the mid-day meal, the first *balsa* was complete and ready for service, including a pair of paddles, also ingeniously made of reeds.

When at the conclusion of the meal the *balsa* came to be tried, it was found to possess buoyancy enough to carry two men safely and comfortably; the return march along the bank to the spot where the remainder of the fleet was to be built was therefore immediately commenced, the builder and his load of impedimenta proceeding by water at the same time. The *balsa*, it may here be explained, was a very simple affair indeed, consisting merely of a flat bundle of reeds, firmly bound together in such a way as to form a sort of raft. The one already built was about ten feet long and about five feet broad, by about a foot in depth; but while strong enough for its purpose, it was, after all, very light, and quite capable of being capsized should an enterprising alligator take it into his head to attack it; during the short march to the big reed bed, therefore, Dick and Earle decided that the next *balsa* should be constructed of a capacity to accommodate the entire party, and therefore be heavy and bulky enough to resist anything short of a concerted attack by a herd of alligators. The construction of such a craft was of course a somewhat formidable undertaking, though the other Indians showed themselves apt pupils of Huanami, and the task was only completed when the sun had already disappeared and darkness was closing down upon the scene.

On the following morning the voyage across the lagoon was begun immediately after breakfast, and accomplished not only without mishap but without adventure of any kind; for, strangely enough, not one of the creatures which had been observed disporting themselves in the water during the preceding night was now visible; indeed, so far as appearances went, there might not even have been so much as a fish in the lagoon. A sharp look-out was maintained for the beast that had been shot at during the night, but neither alive or dead was anything seen of him. One fact, however, was established during the passage across, and that was, that the depth of water in the lagoon was far greater than had hitherto been suspected, a depth of no less than thirty fathoms being found nearly all the way across except quite close to the margin.

The journey across consumed close upon two hours, for the *balsa*, while buoyant enough to support the whole party and their belongings, was, from the very character of her construction, unwieldy and difficult to propel; but she arrived safely at last on the south-western shore of the lagoon. Then a number of canal-like channels being found penetrating the firm ground, as on the side already traversed, the question arose whether the journey should be resumed on foot, or an attempt should be made to continue it on the *balsa*, through the medium of the water channels. Dick was of opinion that the latter would be the more expeditious way, it being far easier for the Indians to tow the *balsa* loaded with all the belongings of the party, than it would be for them to carry their loads as heretofore; and this plan was accordingly adopted.

Unfortunately, perhaps, they were obliged to abandon the *balsa* about mid-afternoon, the water channel abruptly coming to an end, and thus necessitating a return to their original mode of travel.

Earle was profoundly disappointed that during practically the entire day's journey none of the denizens of the swamp had chosen to reveal themselves, for he had all the naturalist's enthusiasm for the discovery of new and strange creatures, and was especially anxious to secure a specimen of the "cross between a frog and a kangaroo" seen and shot by Dick, and, later, shot at by himself; but, so far as appearances went, the part of the swamp which they were now traversing might be tenantless. At length, however, just as the day's journey was drawing to a close, a bit of luck came his way. For while he and Dick were glancing about them in search of a suitable spot upon which to camp for the night, an animal suddenly made its appearance in the open, not more than fifty yards away, and Earle instantly flung up his rifle and shot it. It was as big as a donkey and resembled a hare in every respect, except that it had ears shaped like those of a mouse, while its coat was of short hair instead of fur. It was entirely new to Earle, and he was much gratified at securing it, as were the others of the party, for its flesh proved to be very juicy and palatable.

Their next adventure occurred during the afternoon of the following day. They had just passed beyond the confines of the swamp, and were travelling over somewhat rising ground toward a line of forest stretching right athwart their path, when, during a temporary halt, which Dick was utilising to scan the surrounding country through his field-glasses, he caught a momentary glimpse of what he imagined to be Indians, moving stealthily about among the boles of the trees, apparently reconnoitring the party. He directed Earle's attention to them, and after an eager search with his glasses, the American also caught sight of them, and agreed with Dick that their movements were suspicious, and that it would be wise to be prepared for a sudden attack. They loaded their repeating rifles, each stuck a pair of automatic pistols in his belt, and when the march was resumed, went on ahead, accompanied by Inaguy, with the object of establishing a parley with the strangers.

But when, some ten minutes later, they arrived at the outskirts of the forest, there was no sign of them, and no response to Inaguy's repeated calls in several different Indian dialects. It was not only a puzzling but also a disconcerting circumstance; for the failure of the strangers to reply seemed to indicate a hostile disposition; and for the party to plunge into the depths of the forest with a band of hostile Indians dogging their footsteps, or perhaps preparing to ambush them, seemed to Earle the opposite of good generalship; after considering the matter, therefore, it was decided to camp for the remainder of the day, at a sufficient distance from the forest to render a surprise attack impossible, and there await developments.

This was done, and for about an hour after the camp was pitched, sentinels being posted about halfway between it and the border of the forest to give timely notice of a threatened attack, nothing happened.

Then one of the sentinels shouted that there were people moving among the trees, upon which Dick and Earle, fully armed, moved out to reconnoitre, with King Cole as usual at their heels.

The sentinel was right, as the pair ascertained immediately that they brought their field-glasses to bear upon the part of the forest indicated by the Indian. The undergrowth, consisting mostly of bushes and shrubs, was fairly dense, rendering it impossible to see beyond a yard or two into the forest, but by diligent and patient search the two leaders were able to discern certain dark objects, which they identified as heads, moving hither and thither, and pausing from time to time to peer out at them through parted boughs. Then suddenly a frightful roar was heard, immediately taken up and answered by many others, the bushes swayed as heavy bodies irresistibly forced a way through them, and some twenty monstrous figures bounded into the open and came charging down upon the little group, emitting loud, savage roars as they came, with the foam flying from their champing jaws.

"G-r-r-eat Caesar's ghost!" exclaimed Earle in amazement, as the creatures broke cover; "what have we here, anyway? Whatever they may be, they are certainly not human. And savage—they're as full of gall as a wagon-load of catamounts! This is where we have to shoot to kill, Dick, and don't you forget it. We can't begin too soon either, so get busy, my lad. Darn that Indian! he's scooted. Well, I guess he's better out of the way after all."

Earle might well be excused for the astonishment he betrayed at the sight of the enemy. As he had said, they were certainly not human; they were, in fact, gigantic apes, somewhat resembling gorillas in their general appearance, though considerably bigger, their stature being, on Earle's first hasty estimate, quite six feet. They were covered with rather long, coarse, shaggy hair, of so dark a brown as to appear almost black, the hair of the head and face being much longer than on the rest of the body. Their arms were immensely long in proportion to their lower limbs; from their build they appeared to be endowed with amazing strength, a suggestion which was fully confirmed by the

consummate ease with which they flourished boughs of trees of formidable size with which they had armed themselves.

They came charging down upon the two white men and the now madly raging King Cole in a series of long bounds, springing from the ground and landing upon it with both feet together, each leap being accompanied by a deep, bellowing roar, the volume of which testified to immense power of lung, while their small, deeply set eyes blazed with fury.

“Shoot from the wings, inward,” ordered Earle, “then we shall not waste two bullets upon the same beast. You begin with the one on your extreme left.”

As Earle spoke he threw up his rifle, and pressing the trigger, neatly dropped the beast on the extreme right of the advancing line, while Dick brought down his mark with a broken leg. But these casualties had not the slightest effect upon the others, who continued their charge without the smallest sign of a check.

“Keep cool and shoot straight,” admonished Earle, as his rifle spoke a second time and another foe crashed to earth with a .35 soft-nosed bullet through his brain. Dick, on the other hand, very much less hardened than Earle for such a nerve-trying experience as this, grew a little flurried, and caught his next mark in the shoulder, shattering the bone and goading the beast to a condition of absolutely maniacal fury, but failing to stop him until he had sent a bullet through the brute’s lungs, when he halted, coughing up a torrent of blood. And so matters proceeded until the two men had emptied their Remingtons, the ten shots accounting for seven dead and two put *hors de combat*.

There was no time to reload, for the monsters still continued the charge, apparently quite unconscious of, or supremely indifferent to, what had happened to their companions; the two men therefore dropped their empty rifles, and each whipped a seven-shot Colt automatic from his belt, and continued his fusillade. Those Colt pistols were formidable weapons, of .45 calibre, at close quarters quite as effective as the rifles; and before the beasts succeeded in closing, all but four were down.

Of those four, King Cole tackled one, launching himself like an arrow at the creature’s throat, with a low snarl of concentrated rage, and sinking his fangs deeply in the muscular, hairy neck, the claws of his two fore feet firmly gripping the huge shoulders of the beast while the strong claws of his powerful hind feet tore open the abdomen and practically disembowelled his adversary. And as the pair went down, roaring, snarling, and fighting desperately, Earle thrust the muzzle of his Colt into the yawning jaws of another and sent the heavy bullet crashing upward through the brute’s skull at the precise instant that the powerful jaws snapped like a trap upon the barrel of the weapon.

Meanwhile, the remaining two hurled themselves upon Dick. One of them he shot clean through the heart as the brute sprang upon him, and although there can be no doubt that the creature instantly died, the momentum of his spring was sufficient to dash the lad to the ground and send his pistol flying. And before he could regain his feet or draw his remaining pistol, the last survivor was upon him, with a ponderous club upraised to dash out the youngster’s brains. Like lightning the blow fell; but instinctively and without premeditation Dick just managed to dodge it; and such was the force of the blow that the club snapped short off in the brute’s great hairy hand. And now the knowledge of boxing that the young sailor had aforesaid somewhat painfully acquired, came to his aid, for as his ferocious antagonist crouched over him, his great tusks bared and dripping foam, while the little eyes burnt red with deadly hate, Dick threw his whole strength into a right-hander, which caught the beast fair and square on the point of the chin with a crash that sent the head violently back and caused the vertebrae of the neck to crack, following up the blow with a punch in the wind that fairly knocked the beast out of time for the moment. That moment proved sufficient to save Cavendish’s life, for it afforded him time to whip the remaining pistol from his belt and discharge it full in the brute’s face as it gathered itself together for what would in all probability have proved a fatal leap, so far as Dick was concerned.

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## Chapter Nine.

### The Sculptured Rocks.

“Bravo! Dick, old chap,” exclaimed Earle, turning to his friend, with one hand outstretched in offered help while the other grasped a smoking pistol—“well fought! Are you hurt at all?”

“N-o, I think not,” replied Dick, a little doubtfully, as with the help of the other’s proffered hand he scrambled to his feet. “That fellow, there”—pointing to the body of the ape that had hurled him to the ground—“pretty nearly knocked the wind out of me, while the other did his level best to dash my brains out, and I’ve barked my knuckles rather badly against his chin; but otherwise I think I’m all right, thanks. And you?”

“I?” returned Earle. “Oh, I’m as right as rain. Say, Dick, that was something like a scrap at the last. What? Guess if it hadn’t been for old King Cole, we’d have been in rather a tight place. Look at the beggar. Ugh! he is not pleasant to look at when he’s real riled, is he? He has brought off his kill all right, and I guess we’d better leave him to it a bit. I believe I don’t particularly want to interfere with him just now. Let’s draw off a bit and have a look at one of those dead brutes out yonder. I rather want to examine one; for I guess this is an entirely new species of monkey.”

“They look to me very much like gorillas,” remarked Dick.

“They do,” agreed Earle. “But, all the same, they are not gorillas. There are no gorillas on this continent, so far as is known. The gorilla is, I believe, peculiar to Africa. And these creatures, though they certainly somewhat resemble gorillas in a general way, have certain points of difference, the most important of which is the shape of the skull, while another is their much greater bulk. I have shot several gorillas; but I never saw one to come near any of these brutes in point of size. By the way, where is the one you stopped with a broken leg? We may as well put him out of



his misery.”

The creature in question was nowhere to be seen; but they eventually got upon his trail and followed him up to the border of the forest, into which he had evidently retreated; and they came to the conclusion that, as he had contrived to get thus far, they would leave him alone and give him a chance to recover. Then they found one of the dead apes, and Earle subjected the carcass to a long and exhaustive examination, making copious notes and discoursing learnedly meanwhile, though it is to be feared that his remarks and explanations left Dick but little the wiser. It was close upon sunset when at length they returned to the camp, where they were shortly afterward joined by King Cole, once more calm and in his right mind.

They took the precaution to surround the camp with a circle of fires that night, to ward off a possible attack, posting a sentinel at each fire for the double purpose of keeping it going and maintaining a watch.

The belt of forest which the explorers entered on the following day proved to be of no very great extent, the passage through it occupying but a day and a half. Emerging from it, the party crossed a splendid savannah, abounding in game, chiefly of the antelope variety, and large birds somewhat resembling bustard, the tameness of which seemed to indicate that man was practically unknown to them, while it enabled them to replenish their larder with the utmost ease. This savannah extended for a distance of about ten miles, and terminated among the foothills of a range of mountains of very moderate height stretching right athwart the path of the explorers. Among those foothills the party pitched their camp at the end of the day's journey.

The next day's march conducted them into country the character of which was different from any hitherto traversed by them. It was exceedingly rugged and broken, treeless, the soil covered with a short, rich grass, which would have rendered it ideal as grazing country, dotted here and there with small clumps of bush, some of which were fruit-bearing, while at frequent intervals great outcrops of metamorphic rock were met with, which time and weather had in many cases wrought into extraordinary shapes.

It was near noon when the party entered a narrow ravine bordered on either side by vertical sandstone cliffs of about a hundred feet high, and here they came to a halt and pitched their camp; for no sooner had they fairly entered the ravine than they found themselves confronted by a splendid example of those extraordinary sculptured rocks which have excited the wonder and admiration of the few travellers in South America who have been fortunate enough to find them.

In the present case the sculptured rock consisted of a stretch of sandstone cliff about two hundred and fifty feet in length by about a hundred feet in height, practically vertical, the entire surface of which was covered with panels presenting a series of pictures portraying what appeared to be a genealogical record of certain customs and ceremonies, mostly of a religious character, of some gone and forgotten race of people. The work was executed in fairly high relief, and the drawing of the figures, of which there were thousands on the entire sculptured surface, evidenced artistic ability of a truly remarkable character, including a considerable knowledge of perspective. The panels portraying religious ceremonies indicated that the sun and fire were, or symbolised, the principal deities worshipped; and there was abundant evidence that human sacrifice was common. All this was, of course, absorbingly interesting to Earle, as was the light which the sculptures threw upon the personal appearance and costumes of the people portrayed. If the artist—or artists, for there must have been thousands of them to have produced such a magnificent and colossal piece of work—could be believed, the departed race boasted some exceptionally fine examples of male and female beauty, while the costumes bore more than a casual resemblance to those pictured on the ancient monuments of Egypt. Earle announced with finality that he intended to remain in camp on the spot, not only until he had minutely and exhaustively examined the sculptures, but also until he had photographed them as a whole and some separately. That probably meant at least a week's sojourn where they then were.

The proposed arrangement suited Dick Cavendish admirably, for the prolonged halt appealed to him as something very much in the nature of a holiday, especially when Earle declared that he would need no assistance in his photographic operations, so that Dick would be free to amuse himself in any way he pleased. Dick was rapidly becoming as keen a naturalist, in a way, as Earle; once or twice, during the morning's march, he had observed some particularly gorgeous butterflies flitting about, and he promised himself that he would spend at least a portion of his sojourn in the ravine in an endeavour to secure a few specimens. There was one duty, however, which he at once recognised must fall upon him, which was the supply of the camp with meat, and accordingly, upon the conclusion of the mid-day meal, when Earle started to get his photographic gear ready for the campaign among the sculptures, Dick took his rifle and, accompanied by two of the Indians, proceeded up the ravine in search of game. The country



HE SAW ENOUGH TO FULLY CONFIRM HIS PREVIOUS CONVICTION. (p. 143)

rapidly became wilder and more picturesque as they went, to such an extent indeed that Dick quickly made up his mind to pay it another and more leisurely visit; and after about an hour's tramp, which carried him into a labyrinth of rocks, he got a splendid shot at a creature strongly resembling a bighorn, which he neatly bowled over and with it triumphantly returned to camp.

On the fourth morning of the party's sojourn in the ravine, Dick, accompanied as usual by two Indians, set out, immediately after breakfast, in search of meat for the day. Game was not particularly plentiful in that region, but the lad preferred to take his chance of finding something in his accustomed haunts, rather than tramp all the way back to the savannah, and accordingly he proceeded, as usual, right up the ravine, until he arrived at a point where a branch route led off toward the left. Hitherto he had not tried his luck in that particular direction, but he decided to do so now; and after about half an hour's tramp, upon surmounting the crest of a ridge, he found himself looking down into a small circular basin, surrounded by rocky cliffs, the bottom of which was a smooth, grassy plain, in which, as luck would have it, several antelopes were grazing. The nearest of these, a fine fat buck to all appearance, was at least a thousand yards away, which was much too long a shot for Dick to risk; and he therefore set out to stalk the animal, leaving the Indians where they were to follow as soon as the buck should fall.

There were clumps of bush growing quite close up to the base of the encircling cliffs, offering admirable cover for stalking, as well as a certain amount of shelter from the sun's scorching rays, and of these Dick gladly availed himself, ultimately succeeding in bringing down the buck with a three-hundred yard shot. Then, while waiting for the Indians to come and break up the quarry, the young man flung himself down in the shadow of a clump of bush to rest.

Stretched there at length in the cool, lush grass, with the great wall of sandstone cliff towering before him, it gradually dawned upon Dick that the enormous mass of rock upon which he was gazing must be that upon the opposite face of which were those wonderful sculptured pictures which Earle was doubtless at that moment busily engaged in photographing, and the thought caused him to regard the cliff with some interest. There were no sculptures upon it, but as Dick allowed his gaze to wander over the face of the cliff his quick eye detected a sort of crack some twenty feet above the surface of the ground, out of which, as he lay regarding it, there came fluttering one of those splendid butterflies, a specimen or two of which he was so eager to obtain; and he at once made up his mind that as soon as the Indians had broken up the buck and carried it away, he would explore that crack, which looked wide enough to allow him to squeeze his body through, and access to which seemed possible by way of a number of narrow ridges and projections in the face of the rock. Accordingly, as soon as the Indians had done their work and departed—Dick having informed them that he proposed to remain in the basin for a while and examine it thoroughly—he slung his rifle over his shoulder and started to climb the rock, reaching the crack with but little difficulty.

He found that the aperture was considerably larger than it had appeared to be when viewed from below and squeezed through it with ease, to find himself in the mouth of what looked like a cave, the dimensions of which, however, it was not possible to ascertain, for within a couple of yards of the entrance he found himself in darkness. But he saw enough to stimulate his curiosity and determine him to see more; and with this object he descended to the plain and, hunting about among the bushes, soon secured a sufficiency of dry twigs and branches to serve as torches. With these and a bit of dry moss he returned to the aperture in the face of the cliff, where, before entering, he ignited the moss with the aid of a powerful burning-glass which he habitually carried about in his pocket, and then, blowing the moss into flame, kindled one of his torches.

At first sight the cave appeared to be of very circumscribed dimensions, being only just high enough for Dick to stand

upright in it, while he could touch both its sides at the same moment with his outstretched hands. But it extended back toward the heart of the cliff, and as the lad cautiously groped his way inward the crack gradually widened until at length he found himself traversing a spacious tunnel, piercing steadily deeper and deeper into the heart of the cliff. Determined now to see the full extent of the cave, and beginning to wonder whether perchance it pierced right through the rock, Dick pushed steadily on, oblivious of the fact that his stock of torches was rapidly diminishing; and when at length this fact was forced upon his attention by the necessity to kindle the last torch, it was far too late for him to think of returning, and feeling by this time convinced that there must surely be another outlet at no great distance, he set his teeth and pushed on, hoping to reach that other outlet before his last torch should be consumed. But the hope was vain, for in less than ten minutes Dick found himself in profound darkness, with still no indication of any other outlet than that by which he had entered.

Thus far the lad had gone without any difficulty; the tunnel-like passage which he had traversed for a distance of, as he estimated, nearly a mile, had been without pitfalls or complications of any kind, and he believed it would be possible for him to return by the way he had come without difficulty, even in the dark. He halted to consider the matter, debating within himself whether he should risk everything by pushing on, or whether he should go groping his way back over that long stretch of rough, rocky road in the darkness. There could be no question as to which was the more prudent of the two plans; but there was a vein of obstinacy in Cavendish's character; he hated to confess himself beaten, and a light draught of warm air coming from the direction toward which he had been heading decided him to take the more risky course of pressing onward.

Accordingly, he resumed his course, holding his rifle horizontally before him to guard himself against the chance of collision with unseen obstacles, while he carefully felt the ground before him with one foot before throwing his weight upon it. Proceeding thus cautiously, in about a quarter of an hour he became aware of a faint glimmer of greenish light on the walls of the tunnel on either hand, and a few minutes later emerged into what appeared to be a great chamber, or cavern, the interior of which was just sufficiently illuminated by the light entering through another tunnel on its opposite side, to reveal the fact that the vertical walls of the chamber were, like the cliff which was occupying Earle's attention, covered with sculptures from the floor upward as high as the light had power to reach. But it was altogether too feeble to reveal anything of the details of the sculptures, and with a mere glance about him Dick crossed the floor of the cavern—mechanically noting as he did so, that it was smooth and level—and passed into the opposite tunnel, entering which, he at once became aware that his journey was practically ended, for at a distance of but a few yards there appeared before him an irregular opening, into which, through a thick, screen of shimmering foliage, the light of day was streaming. A minute later, and he was once more in the open air, forcing his way through a tangle of bushes which effectually masked the opening from which he had just emerged.

Dick's first act, after forcing a passage for himself through the screen of bushes, was to look about him, when he found, not very greatly to his surprise, that he was within a short half-mile of the camp, the tunnel through which he had journeyed piercing the great mass of sandstone from one side to the other. Then, knowing that Earle would wish to examine the sculptured chamber, he sought some means of identifying the position of the opening, and soon found it in a peculiarly shaped projection in the face of the rock almost immediately above. This done, he made the best of his way to Earle, who was busy with his camera, and informed the American of his morning's adventure.

As Dick had anticipated, Earle manifested the utmost interest in the story of the cavern with sculptured walls, going even to the length of announcing his determination to visit it immediately after lunch. Dick accordingly proceeded to the camp and, summoning four of the Indians, instructed them to prepare a goodly supply of torches for the occasion.

When, some two hours later, the friends, accompanied by a couple of Indians—one to hold a pair of blazing torches aloft, and the other to carry the reserve supply—stood in the cavern and glanced about them, they at once became aware that they had stumbled upon a very remarkable and interesting monument. For the cavern, a great circular chamber, measuring forty-three paces in diameter—was, beyond all doubt, an ancient temple, as was made clearly manifest by the character of the sculptures on the walls. These depicted a number of different religious ceremonies, intermingled with subjects which seemed to be allegorical, but apart from the exceedingly curious scenes depicted, the most remarkable circumstance connected with the sculptures was that they were of a totally different character from those on the cliff outside, being much more crude in design and execution, and apparently of far earlier date. The fact, however, above all others, which stamped the cavern as a temple, was the presence of a hideously carved life-size idol, enshrined in a most elaborately carved niche, with a great block of stone before it which had evidently served as an altar.

The idol was a nude male figure, squatted cross-legged on a bench in the niche, its only decoration being a necklace with pendant attached. This ornament escaped the notice of the observers until they came to study the detail of the sculptured niche, when the glint of metal and a sheen of green rays attracted their attention and caused them to inspect it closely. The inspection ended in Earle taking possession of the thing, and subsequent examination revealed the fact that the chain was wrought out of pure gold, while the pendant consisted of a lozenge-shaped plate of gold nearly a quarter of an inch thick, chased all over both surfaces with strangely shaped markings or characters surrounding a great emerald. It was an unique ornament, if only from the barbaric character of its design and execution, while the emerald rendered it valuable, and Earle at once placed it round his own neck for safe keeping, voluntarily proposing to pay Dick its intrinsic value upon their return to civilisation, as his share in the profits of the discovery. He would fain have photographed the interior of the cavern but was reluctantly forced to forgo the gratification of this desire, from inability to produce artificial light of the necessary actinic value. But, to compensate for this disappointment, he spent no less than three days in the cavern, making sketches and voluminous notes.

At length, Earle having completed his photographs of the cliff, and provided against future disappointment by developing and fixing his negatives on the spot, the party moved on up the ravine, and came out upon the lower slopes of the mountain range toward which they had been steadfastly travelling from the moment when they first entered the great swamp. Two evenings later, greatly fatigued by a long day's march, they encamped near the head of a rocky pass, the steep sides of which were shaggy with bush and trees, among which a number of small monkeys

gambolled and chattered incessantly until darkness fell, staring down curiously from the branches at the intruders upon their domain.

The place looked as solitary as though it had never before been trodden by the foot of man, but watch-fires were lighted and sentinels posted about the camp as usual; and in due time the party retired to rest with that feeling of perfect security which the observance of every proper precaution, coupled with a conviction of perfect immunity from danger, is wont to inspire.

Excessive fatigue, aided doubtless by the cooler air of the mountains, caused the leaders at least to sleep heavily until the early hours of the following morning, when they were suddenly awakened by a savage snarl from King Cole, ending in a doleful moan, and they started up on their pallets, instinctively groping for their weapons, only to find themselves instantly thrust back again and their limbs pinioned by an overwhelming crowd of assailants, so many in number that the tent was packed with them. Before they fully comprehended what had happened, or, still less, realised the completeness of the disaster which had befallen them, they were so effectually bound with raw-hide thongs that they could scarcely move a finger, and in that condition were dragged forth into the open air, over the dead and mangled body of poor King Cole, to find the camp in the possession of a band of some eighty stalwart and ferocious-looking Indians, with every one of their followers, save four, like themselves, bound hand and foot. The four exceptions were the unfortunate sentinels, the corpses of whom, transfixed by spears, could be seen lying close to the smouldering watch-fires.

The captors wasted no time in any attempt to rummage the contents of the camp; on the contrary, they took each prisoner, and while half-a-dozen hemmed him in and threatened him with instant death upon the points of their spears, a seventh cast loose the thongs that bound him. Then, still threatening him, they indicated certain portions of the camp equipment and signed to him to pick it up and carry it, thus distributing the entire contents among the eleven survivors, Dick and Earle being each assigned a load like the other captives. The only exception made was in the matter of the firearms, which the captors seemed to recognise as weapons of some sort, and distributed among themselves; though from the carelessness with which they were handled, it seemed doubtful whether the method of using them was understood. This done, the leader of the marauders gave the word to march, and the entire party of captors and captives set off up the pass, each prisoner still surrounded by half a dozen Indians with spears held ever ready to strike upon the least provocation; thus it was impossible for any of them to hold converse with the others, the whites, in particular, being kept as far apart as possible, Dick being stationed with the head of the column, while Earle was compelled to march with the rearguard.

Luckily, as it at first seemed, for the captives, their march was not a long one; for upon surmounting the crest of the pass they found themselves only a short two miles from a native village, the inhabitants of which no sooner perceived the approach of the party than they turned out and greeted it with songs and dances of rejoicing, the fervour of which became almost frantic when, a little later, the presence of the two white men became known. The language of the strangers was utterly incomprehensible to Dick and Earle, and so jealously was every movement of the two watched that they found it impossible to communicate with Inaguy; but after observing their captors for some time, while they seemed to be explaining matters to the villagers, Earle gradually got the impression that the strangers had somehow obtained knowledge of the presence of the explorers in the country and had been watching them for perhaps a day or two, waiting for a favourable opportunity to fall upon the camp and take it by surprise.

Upon their arrival at the village the entire plunder of the camp was deposited in a large hut which was hastily prepared for its reception, and this done, the prisoners were once more securely bound and distributed among the huts of the village, one prisoner to a hut, the owner of which, with the several members of his family, was held responsible for his safe keeping.

The ensuing three days were spent by the captives in this village, during which nothing of moment happened except that they were kept in such rigorous confinement that none was permitted to obtain even a momentary glimpse of another, otherwise they had not much to complain about, being kindly treated, according to savage ideas of kindness. But although, during those three days, the inhabitants of the village seemed to go about their business pretty much as usual, there appeared to be an undercurrent of subdued excitement, coupled with a condition of eager expectancy, which was plain to both Earle and Dick, and which somehow produced in both a considerable amount of apprehension as to their ultimate fate.

Then, well on toward evening of the third day, a runner, hot, tired, and dusty, wearing every appearance of having travelled far and fast, arrived in the village, evidently bearing an important message or communication of some sort; for within a few minutes of his arrival the entire population of the village became imbued with a spirit of the wildest rejoicing and excitement, which lasted far into the night; and early on the following morning the prisoners were brought forth, loaded up with the baggage belonging to the explorers and, surrounded by an armed guard of sixty men, they set out upon a forward march, accompanied by the entire populace of the village, who beguiled the tedium of the journey by continually singing what seemed to be songs of a highly jubilant character.

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## **Chapter Ten.**

### **In the Hands of the Mangeromas.**

For five weary days did that company tramp up hill and down dale through rugged, mountainous country, the Indian women carrying their meagre belongings in small bundles wrapped in matting upon their bowed shoulders, while their lords and masters strode blithely along, encumbered only with the weapons they carried, making the air vibrate with their barbarous songs, the unhappy captives meanwhile, staggering under their heavy loads, being compelled to keep pace with their light-footed guard. It was not so bad for Dick and Earle as it was for their unfortunate servants, for the two white men were by this time in the very perfection of training, and capable of an amount of physical

exertion that, six months earlier, they would have regarded as impossible; moreover, they were both highly endowed with that inestimable quality known as "grit," while the miserable bearers were, in addition to their heavy loads, weighed down by a premonition that their present misery was but the prelude to an inconceivably horrible and lingering death.

Late in the evening of the fifth day, after an exceptionally long and fatiguing march, the company reached what was without doubt the capital of the country, for it covered some two hundred acres of ground, and contained dwellings capable of accommodating, at a moderate estimate, at least five thousand persons. It is true the dwellings were of the most primitive description, consisting of huts, for the most part built of wattles and palm thatch, with here and there a more pretentious structure, the walls of which were adobe, and it was indescribably filthy; yet the place was laid out with some pretension to regularity, being divided up into several wide streets, while in the centre of the town there was a wide, open space, or square, one side of which was occupied by a hideous and ungainly idol of gigantic proportions, with a long sacrificial altar at its feet, while on the other three sides stood dwellings of such pretentious character that they could only belong to the chief dignitaries of the place.

The arrival of the captives in this town—the name of which, it subsequently transpired, was Yacoahite—was the signal for an outburst of most extravagant rejoicing on the part of the inhabitants, who turned out *en masse* to witness the event, crowding about the party so persistently that it was only with the utmost difficulty that the guards, reinforced by a strong body from the town, were able by a free use of the butts of their spears, to force a passage along the streets. The delight of the populace, it appeared, was almost wholly due to the capture of the white men, who were the objects of their unquenchable curiosity, to such an extent, indeed, that it looked very much as though they had never before seen a white man. At length, however, the procession reached the central square, and after having, in obedience to signs, deposited their burdens in one of the biggest of the buildings, the prisoners were divided up and marched away, Dick and Earle, to their mutual delight, being placed together in a small hut, which was at once surrounded by an armed guard of such strength as to render escape impossible.

Fortunately, their limbs were not bound, or their movements hampered in any way, therefore the moment that the wattle door of their prison was slammed upon them and barred on the outside, the pair joyously shook hands as they exchanged greetings.

"Well, Dick, how goes it, old son?" demanded Earle, as he wrung his friend's hand. "Tired?"

"Yes, I am, a bit," admitted Dick; "tired, and thirsty too. And just look at me. Jove! I'm ashamed to be seen. I feel as though I hadn't washed for a month. And you don't look very much better, old chap. Say! what would you give for a swim in a good, deep river, free from alligators, at this moment?"

"What would I give?" repeated Earle. "Why, a thousand good American dollars, willingly. And I'm not sure that I should worry very much as to whether there were any 'gators in it, or not. By the way, how did you come off that morning when those ginks rushed the camp? Did you get hurt any?"

"Not a scratch," answered Dick. "Hadn't a chance to. The beggars were upon me and had me trussed up so that I couldn't move hand or foot, before my eyes were fairly open. Hadn't even time to make a snatch for my revolver. Did you get hurt at all?"

"Nope," replied Earle. "I was just as completely taken by surprise as you were. And I am not at all sure, Dick, but that it was as well. If we—you and I—had been able to put up a fight, we could never have beaten them off, there were too many of them. We should no doubt have killed a few, but it would have ended eventually in our meeting the same fate as poor old King Cole. Poor chap! I'm sorry they killed him."

"So am I," agreed Dick. "But I suppose it was bound to be. He would never have allowed them to lay hands upon either of us, so they would be compelled to kill him, sooner or later. And I believe he did not suffer much. They must have killed him on the spot, I think. Peace to his ashes! And now, what do you think is going to happen to us?"

"I don't know," answered Earle, suddenly adopting a much graver tone. "My motto is, 'Never say die,' for I have been in a good many tight places and have always managed somehow to get out of them. But there is a proverb to the effect that 'the pitcher which goes oft to the well gets broken at last,' and it may be that here is where I get 'broken.' I don't know; I don't care to hazard an opinion. But I wish to heaven, now, that I had not brought you along with me, Dick."

"Do you really think it as serious as all that, then?" demanded Dick.

"What do you think yourself?" retorted Earle. "What does the capture of us at all mean? Friendly disposed natives don't do that sort of thing, you know. And why, having captured us, are they taking such extreme care that we shall get no chance to escape? I'm afraid, Dick, it means that they want us for some particular purpose, of which, probably, we shall very strongly disapprove."

"You mean—?" began Dick.

"Yes," answered Earle. "Something like that. But say! don't you take what I'm saying too seriously. I give you credit for being no more afraid of death than I am, therefore I think it only right you should have an inkling of what may possibly be in store for us. But don't believe that I am going to take lying down what may be coming to us. I shall do everything I know to persuade these savages that they could not do a more unwise thing than hurt either of us. If we should by any chance be brought within earshot of that idol on the opposite side of the compound, I shall try the ventriloquial dodge again, among other things. The worst of it is that I can't speak these beggars' language; and for a man's own idol to address him in a foreign tongue is not altogether convincing, is it?"

"It is not," admitted Dick, "although it worked away back there, and it may again. Poor Grace! If it were not for her, I

should not mind so much.”

“What’s that about Grace?” demanded Earle.

“My sister, you know,” explained Dick. “I have been hoping that, in one way or another, this expedition would enable me to provide for her, so that she would not be compelled to go on very much longer earning her own living. She is all right so long as she can remain with the Mcgregors; but if anything should happen necessitating her leaving them —”

“Say, Dick, don’t you worry about that,” interrupted Earle. “Your sister is all right for three years from the signing of our contract, anyway, for she will have your pay to fall back upon if anything should go wrong during that time. And for the rest, I may as well tell you for your comfort that although, in view of this confounded expedition, I did not think it right to bind Grace to me by a definite engagement, she and I understand each other to the extent that if I should return to England within three years, she will do me the honour to become my wife. And—this of course is strictly between you and me and my lawyer in New York—if I should *not* turn up in three years, I am to be presumed to be dead, and my will is to be executed forthwith. That will was made on the day before we left New York, and by its provisions your sister inherits everything that I possess.”

“What is that you say?” demanded Dick, utterly bewildered. “My sister—Grace—inherits everything you possess?”

“Guess that’s what I said,” replied Earle, composedly.

“But—but—” stammered Dick, “I can’t understand it. Why should you leave Grace all your property?”

“For two very excellent reasons,” answered Earle, “the first of which I have already explained to you, namely, that I love her—and mean to make her my wife, please God, if we should by any chance get out of this fix. And the second is, that if we don’t and I die, I have nobody else to whom to leave my property. You look astonished, Dick; and, come to think of it, I suppose it is only natural. For while you were kept busy, way back there in Liverpool, over the inquiry into the loss of the *Everest*, I saw a good deal of your sister, with, I believe, the full approval of your friends, McGregor and his wife. I was attracted to Grace from the very first, and the more I saw of her, the greater grew my admiration of her. McGregor saw what was happening, I guess, and at length he brought me to book upon the matter, pointing out that my attentions to Grace were such as threatened ultimately to engage her affections. I was glad that he did so, for it enabled me to come to a clear understanding with myself. It enabled me to realise that your sister was the one woman in all the world for me; and the upshot was that, after a very frank exchange of views, I was able to satisfy McGregor, and ultimately to come to an understanding with Grace. But, of course, she knows nothing about my will, although I made up my mind what I would do immediately that she consented to wait for me. And the reason why I have not mentioned this matter to you before is that I preferred we should, for a time at least, remain upon our original footing as simple comrades and co-adventurers. But, say, Dick, now that I have told you, are you agreeable to accept me as your brother-in-law?”

“My dear chap,” exclaimed Dick, grasping Earle’s outstretched hand with a strength which made the latter wince —“of course I am. I have seen enough of you and your character to convince me that you will be good to Grace—if we survive long enough to return to her. And if she loves you—and I know that she would never have encouraged you if she didn’t—why—that’s all that really matters. But—poor girl, it will be worse than ever for her if we should both be wiped out.”

“It will,” agreed Earle, gloomily. There was silence in the hut for a few moments as the two friends faced the doom that seemed to be impending; but neither of them was of a pessimistic nature, and presently Earle turned to his companion and said:

“Look here, Dick, you and I have got to buck up, for Grace’s sake as well as for our own. We are not going to take it for granted that we’re down and out, just because we happen to have fallen into the hands of a lot of savages. We’re not going to take, lying down, anything and everything that they choose to hand out to us. I guess I am going to have a chance to make these ginks sit up and take notice before they have done with me, and you bet I mean to do it. Give me a quarter of an hour’s talk with them, and I’ll make them believe I’m the boss medicine-man of South America. If only we could get into touch with Inaguay and prompt him what to say, I would soon make it all right. But, anyway, I’m some conjurer as well as a ventriloquist, and it will be strange if I can’t get a chance to astonish them before the end comes.”

The two friends continued to chat far into the night, discussing various schemes of escape; but the difficulty in every case was their Indian servants, whom neither of them for a moment dreamed of deserting; and at length, quite unable to hit upon any practicable plan, they composed themselves to sleep in preparation for the possible ordeal of the morrow.

Nine days passed, however, and nothing happened, except that—as the prisoners discovered, by peeping through a small chink in the wall of the hut, by way of beguiling the time—day after day the town became more crowded with people, who seemed to be pouring into it from all directions, as though mustering for some great event; while singing, hideous blasts from trumpets made of burnt clay, and the pounding of drums made from hollowed sections of trees, created a deafening din that lasted from early dawn until far into the night. On the ninth day this state of things reached its climax, for the din lasted all through the night without intermission, raging with especial fury in the great square, in the centre of which an enormous fire was kindled, round which multitudes of people, mostly naked, danced furiously, shouting and yelling themselves hoarse, while the trumpeters and drummers seemed to vie with each other in the effort to drown all other sounds.

“I guess,” yelled Earle into Dick’s ear, when the babel of sound was at its height—“this is the eve of some great festival; and before twenty-four hours more have passed, you and I will know our fate. Now, there is just one thing that I want to say, Dick. You and I have done our level best to devise some scheme by which we might save the lives

of not only ourselves, but also of Inaguy and the rest of our followers; and we have failed.

“Now, if the worst should come to the worst, there will be no sense in throwing away our own lives because we can’t save those of the others—that would be carrying sentiment to a perfectly ridiculous extreme; therefore, in the last extremity, and if all other efforts should fail, you and I must endeavour to break away, make a sudden dash for the hut where all our belongings are stored, and get hold of a weapon or two. And if we should succeed in that, we must then be guided by circumstances, fight our way out, if there is a ghost of a chance; and if not, shoot ourselves rather than go tamely to the torture stake. How does that strike you?”

“I’m with you,” shouted Dick in reply. “I shall watch for your signal, and act directly you give the word.”

“Good!” returned Earle. And with a grip of the hand the two parted and made their way to opposite corners of the hut where, seating themselves, each in his own way proceeded to prepare himself for the anticipated tremendous ordeal of the morrow.

That ordeal seemed very near when, about an hour after dawn, the door of the hut in which Dick and Earle were confined was flung open, and a gigantic Indian, fully armed, and arrayed in a gorgeous mantle composed of the skins of brilliant plumaged birds, and with a narrow band of gold around his head, clasped to which, one above either ear, was a great scarlet and black wing, like that of a flamingo, beckoned the two prisoners forth. Hitherto they had been treated fairly well, having been supplied with three good meals per day; but no food was now offered them, and both thought the omission tragically ominous.

With a quick grip of the hand, which each felt might be his farewell to the other, the two stepped into the blazing sunlight, and, surrounded by a numerous guard, were led across the square and halted before the altar, which stood at the foot of the idol. But what a change had taken place within the last hour. The great square, as well as the streets leading to it was, with the exception of a small space, packed with people, as were the roofs of the buildings abutting on the square, yet the silence was so profound that, to use the hackneyed expression, one might have heard a pin drop. The small space left vacant consisted of an area some thirty feet square, bounded on one side by the sacrificial altar, and on the other by the front row of spectators, squatting on the ground, these evidently being, from the magnificence of their feather robes and the splendour of their barbaric ornaments, chiefs, to the number of about sixty, in the middle of whom sat an Indian who, by the superlative richness of his garb, the two white men at once decided must be the paramount chief, or king. The third side of this small open space was occupied by a front row of fantastically garbed men who eventually proved to be priests, behind whom stood a dense mass of ordinary spectators, while the fourth side was bounded by a row of nine massive posts, or stakes, to which—ominous sight—were securely bound Inaguy and the remaining eight of Earle’s followers.

Arrived at a spot some five paces from the altar, the two white men were turned with their backs to the altar and the idol, and their faces toward the long array of chiefs, and then the armed guard stationed themselves to the right and left of the prisoners, while the silence hovering over the scene seemed to become more intense than ever.

It was broken by Earle, who turned to Dick and murmured in a low voice:

“That scheme of mine for making a dash at the hut containing our weapons won’t work, Dick. We could never force our way through this crowd. I must try another stunt.”

“All right,” murmured Dick in return. “Go ahead. But I’m afraid it’s all up with us. I don’t see how—”

“You wait,” interrupted Earle, and fell silent again.

Meanwhile, all eyes were intently fixed upon the line of priests who, presently, at a signal from him who seemed to be their chief, prostrated themselves with their faces to the earth, and so remained.

For the space of some thirty seconds nothing happened. Then that vast assemblage was suddenly electrified by a loud voice, issuing apparently from the mouth of the idol, saying, in the Indian language:

“Inaguy, son of Mali, and servant of my son Toqui, speak to this people and say that if they dare to hurt so much as a hair of the heads of the white men, or of you and the others, those white men’s servants, I will visit them in my wrath and pour out upon them pestilence and famine, drought and fire, until not one remains alive. For the white man with black hair is a great medicine-man, capable of working wonders; he has come into this land to do good to my people, and it is my will that no harm shall come to him or his.”

The incredible wonder of the thing, the marvel that their god, who had never before been known to speak, should at this particular and solemn moment see fit to break his long silence, absolutely paralysed the thousands who heard the voice. They could do nothing but stare, open-mouthed, at the gigantic figure, afraid almost to breathe, lest something frightful should happen to them. There were many present who comprehended the meaning of the words, although they were spoken in a different tongue from that generally in use among them, and these began to question themselves:

“Inaguy, son of Mali! Who is he? We know no priest of that name. Is he one of us? Why does he not speak?”

Meanwhile Inaguy, who had once before witnessed such a phenomenon, was not altogether surprised that a god should again intervene to save his master; and turning his face to the idol, he cried:

“Lord, first bid them to release me. It is not meet that I, thy servant, should deliver thy message, bound here to the torture stake.”

“Nay, the man is right,” murmured Jiravai, the king, who understood Inaguy’s speech, and who began to fear that he

was like to get into very serious trouble if he was not exceedingly careful. And, rising to his feet, he looked toward Inaguy and demanded:

“Art thou Inaguy, son of Mali?”

“Lord, it is even so,” answered Inaguy.

“Then, release him,” ordered the king. Turning toward the idol and prostrating himself, he continued:

“Great Anamac, god of the Mangeromas, forgive us, thy servants. What we have done was in ignorance—”

“Tell him, Inaguy, that I am displeased with him and his people, for acting as he has done without first consulting me, and that I refuse to listen to him or communicate with him, save through thee,” interrupted the idol sternly.

At the king’s command a crowd of officious guards dashed forward, and with the hardened copper blades of their spears quickly severed Inaguy’s bonds, whereupon the latter strode forward and, puffed up with pride at again being made the mouthpiece of a god, stood before the grovelling figure of Jiravai, haughtily awaiting the moment when it should please his Majesty to rise and receive Anamac’s message. And presently the king, realising perhaps that his grovelling was not doing any good, rose to his feet, and the message was duly delivered.

“It is well,” returned Jiravai. “It must be as the Great Anamac pleases. Yet, say to him, good Inaguy, that if I have erred, it was through ignorance. To-day is his festival, and when the news was brought to me that two white men had been taken alive in my country, I rejoiced, and bade them and their followers be brought hither; for I thought that to sacrifice them upon the altar would be pleasing to him; while as for you and those with you, it was a great opportunity for— But it is as our great Lord Anamac pleases. And now, I would fain know what is his will toward the white men and you, their followers.”

Facing round, Inaguy shouted to the idol, repeating the words of the king’s apology. Whereupon the idol graciously replied:

“It is well. I know that the Mangeromas have erred through ignorance, therefore I forgive them. But it must never be permitted to happen again, for I do not forgive twice. There must be no more human sacrifices offered to me; nor must the Mangeromas ever again eat men; for both are offences in my sight. And touching these white men and their servants, it is my will that the king and his people shall make them welcome in Mangeroma, treating them as honoured guests and doing all things to help them; so shall the Mangeromas derive great profit and happiness from their visit. I have spoken.”

This message Inaguy repeated in the tongue commonly used among the Mangeromas, shouting it in tones which were distinctly audible all over the square, and for some distance beyond it.

“It is good,” answered the king. “Say to our Lord Anamac that his will shall be obeyed in all things, and the white men, ay, and ye, too, his servants, are henceforth my brothers, the sons of my father’s house.” Then, turning to the armed guards, he added, pointing to the eight figures still bound to the stakes:

“Release those men and take them to my guest house until my white brother with the black hair shall be pleased to express his wishes concerning them. As for my brothers, the white men”—he turned to the chiefs immediately about him—“make ye room for them that they may sit, the one on my right hand and the other on my left.”

These orders having been carried out, Jiravai appeared to be somewhat at a loss what to do next. For to-day was the annual festival of the Great God Anamac, and an elaborate programme of proceedings had been prepared, the chief items of which had been the offering up of the white men as a sacrifice to the god, and the torturing to death of the white men’s followers, to which festivity all the people of note throughout Mangeroma had been invited; and now, by the omission of these two “star” turns, so to speak, the whole affair was likely to fall woefully flat. In his perplexity, the king faced round toward the array of priests on the left side of the open space and, addressing the chief of them, said:

“Since the offering of human sacrifices is displeasing to our Lord Anamac, say now, O Macoma, in what other manner shall we fittingly and acceptably do honour to him on this day which is especially dedicated to his service?”

But Macoma, the chief of the priests, was in no humour just then to help his illustrious master out of a difficulty. He was an exceedingly proud and haughty man, the greatest man in Mangeroma, next to King Jiravai himself, and he felt slighted and humiliated to an intolerable extent that, before all that vast assemblage, consisting of the pick of the Mangeroma nation, Anamac should have absolutely ignored him, the chief priest, and have chosen instead to make his wishes known by the mouth of an obscure stranger, coming from heaven only knew where. Therefore, in response to the king’s question, he rose to his feet and said:

“Nay, Lord, ask me not, for I cannot answer thee. Ask rather the man Inaguy, whom it has pleased our Lord Anamac so signally to honour this day before thee and all the people. Doubtless he will be able to tell thee all that thou may’st desire to know.”

And in high dudgeon Macoma resumed his seat.

The king frowned. There was a hint of veiled insolence in Macoma’s manner that at once set his majesty’s easily kindled anger aflame; and it was not the first time that the chief of the priests had so offended, though never until now had the man dared to flout the supreme ruler of the Mangeroma nation in public, much less in the presence of all Mangeroma’s nobility. The fellow threatened to get out of hand if he were not checked, and the present moment seemed to offer an excellent opportunity not only to check Macoma’s growing insubordination, but also that of the



priesthood in general, which had for some time past manifested a disposition to claim for itself rights and privileges which Jiravai was by no means willing to concede. Therefore he said to Macoma:

“Thou can’st not answer me, Macoma? Then will I act as seems good to myself. A sacrifice of some sort has always been offered to Anamac on this day, and he shall have one now. And what better sacrifice can we offer him than those who have devoted their lives to his service? Therefore, stand forth, Macoma; we will offer thee and ten other priests, to be chosen by lot, in the place of these strangers whom our Lord Anamac has forbidden us to sacrifice.”

In a paroxysm of mingled anger and consternation Macoma sprang to his feet—as did all the rest of the priests—and for several seconds the king and the chief priest faced each other, the one smiling sardonically at the effect of the bomb which he had hurled into the enemy’s camp, while the other stood clenching and unclenching his hands as he racked his brain in the effort to find an answer to what he had sense enough to understand was a personal challenge on the part of the king, and a challenge, moreover, which, unless he could quickly find the right answer to it, might very easily result in utter disaster to himself. For Jiravai, like most savage kings, was an absolute monarch whom none might beard with impunity, and now, when it seemed too late, the chief of the priests heartily execrated that sudden ebullition of ill-humour which had in a moment brought him and ten of his following to the brink of the grave. Then, suddenly, in a flash of memory and inspiration, the right answer came to him and, lifting his head, he said:

“Be it so, as my lord the king has said. Let him sacrifice us to Anamac, if he will. Doubtless, the man Inaguy was speaking only idle words when he said that our Lord Anamac forbade human sacrifice henceforth. Sacrifice us then, O my Lord Jiravai; and let all Mangeroma see what will happen, and whether any dependence is to be placed on the words of Inaguy.”

The battle was won, and Macoma knew it. So also did the king; for absolute monarch though he was, there were certain things which he dared not do, and to go against the directly spoken word of the god Anamac, and that, too, when the word was the first which the god had ever condescended to utter—was one of them. Therefore, making the best of what he now perceived to have been a serious mistake, King Jiravai smiled across the open space at the now triumphant Macoma, and said:

“It is well, Macoma, I did but try thee. But now, perhaps, having had time to think, thou may’st be able to say what sacrifice, other than human, we may acceptably offer to Anamac.”

Macoma shook his head. The king had given him, to say nothing of the other priests, a very nasty five minutes, and even now, when the danger was past, his nerves were all a-quiver from the shock of finding himself suddenly looking into the eyes of death; moreover he was a man who did not easily forgive; he was unwilling to abate one jot of his triumph, therefore he answered:

“Nay, Lord, I am still unable to answer thee, excepting in so far as this. Let Inaguy be recalled, and let him put thy question to our Lord Anamac, and if the god refuses to reply, then I say let Inaguy be sacrificed as a deceiver.”

“Thou hast answered well, Macoma,” retorted the king. “It shall be as thou sayest; and if our lord replies through his mouth it shall be a sign that Anamac prefers Inaguy to thee, and Inaguy shall be chief priest in thy stead.”

Thus neatly did Jiravai turn the tables upon the man who, a moment before, had been congratulating himself upon having got the best of the king in a public battle of wits.

Meanwhile, Dick and Earle had been interested watchers of the scene; and although the language in which the king and the chief priest had been sparring was strange to them, they caught a word here and there which sounded so nearly like words with the same meaning in the language with which they were by this time becoming fairly conversant, that they were able to follow, without very much difficulty the general trend of the conversation, including that portion of it in which Macoma had ventured to cast a doubt upon Inaguy’s *bona fides*. And although Earle had no great liking for the task of exercising his ventriloquial powers while seated in such close proximity to the king, he felt that he must make the effort, and make it successfully, too, if Inaguy’s life was to be saved. Therefore, when a few minutes later, Inaguy was led forth, and the king put to him the question which Macoma had declared himself unable to answer, and Inaguy had in turn passed it on to the idol, the latter was heard to reply, sharply:

“Let a young bull be found, without blemish, and let him be slain upon the altar and his carcass be burned before me, and I shall be satisfied; for ye can offer me no more acceptable sacrifice than this and your obedience to my commands. It is enough. I have spoken. Henceforth, trouble me not, for I will speak no more.”

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## Chapter Eleven.

### A Definite Clue at last.

This final communication from the god Anamac was received by the vast multitude with great shouts of rejoicing, for it was accepted as putting an end finally and for ever to the practice of offering annually human sacrifices to him. And upon those occasions the choice of victims was usually made jointly by the king and the chief priest; and the choice was always of so capricious a character that, when invited to attend the festival, no man could ever know whether he would survive to return from it. Therefore the substitution of a single animal for several human victims—seldom less in number than half a dozen—was regarded as a national boon; and never, perhaps, was Anamac worshipped with more sincerity, or with more gratitude, than he was upon the day when Dick Cavendish and Wilfrid Earle so narrowly escaped dying upon his altar.

The festivities not only lasted through the entire day, but were continued far into the night, some fifty oxen being slaughtered and roasted to provide a feast for the numerous visitors whom King Jiravai had invited to Yacoahite to

participate in the great annual festival; and when at length it was all over, and the guests had departed to their respective homes, everybody agreed in the opinion that it had been the most joyous and successful festival within living experience. As for Dick and Earle, they were lodged in the king's own house, with Inaguy to act as their interpreter—that astute individual having soon made up his mind that service with the white men was safer, and likely to be more profitable in the end, than even the position of chief of the Mangeroma priests. And on the night of the festival, when the great square of Yacoahite was given up to the populace, and all the great chiefs were being entertained at a banquet given by the king, Earle, "the white man with the black hair," availed himself of the opportunity to demonstrate his capabilities as a great medicine-man by performing a few very clever conjuring tricks before the king and his guests, which the simple Mangeromas regarded as absolute miracles. It was a stroke of sound policy on Earle's part; for after seeing him cause a pack of cards to vanish into thin air, extract coins—a few of which he still had in his pocket—from the hair, ears and noses of great warriors, and perform sundry other marvels, there was not a Mangeroma in all that great assemblage who did not regard the American as something superhuman, or who would have ventured, even in the most secret recesses of his soul, to meditate treachery to him or anybody connected with him.

Taken altogether, the day had been a rather trying one for both Dick and Earle, for, to start with, neither of them had slept at all during the previous night, their minds having been in a state of extreme tension with regard to the events of the coming hours; and when at length the suspense was over and they knew that they had escaped a terrible fate by the bare skin of their teeth, the reaction, combined with the necessity to preserve during several hours a perfectly calm and unruffled demeanour in the presence of those about them, had told upon both rather severely, and especially upon Earle, upon whose cleverness and readiness of resource the safety of the entire party depended. Therefore it was with a sense of profound relief that the two friends at length found themselves alone together and free to throw off the strain to which they had been obliged to subject themselves all day.

It was well past midnight when the king's banquet having come to an end, the two white men were conducted with much deference and ceremony to an apartment in the king's house, in which, to their great delight, they found the whole of their belongings, including their two camp beds, which some thoughtful individual—who afterwards proved to have been Peter—had fixed up and prepared for their occupation. They lost no time in discarding their clothing and flinging themselves upon their pallets, for both were feeling utterly exhausted; but before surrendering themselves to sleep they exchanged a few remarks relative to the events of the past day.

"Yes," agreed Earle, in response to an observation of Dick's, "we have had an exceedingly narrow escape, Dick, and don't you forget it, a more narrow escape, indeed, than you probably realise. For example, do you know the name of this tribe of Indians?"

"Certainly," answered Dick. "I heard the king call the idol, this morning, 'Anamac, god of the Mangeromas,' so I suppose these johnnies are the Mangeromas."

"Correct, my son; they are," returned Earle. "Remember ever hearing anything about the Mangeromas?"

"Of course," returned Dick. "They are the tribe with the bad name that those Catu Indians told us about, and whom we have been looking for ever since, because they are supposed to know something of the whereabouts of the city of Manoa. Isn't that it?"

"That is it, Dick," assented Earle. "And you knew it? Well, you were so cool, so apparently unconcerned, during the whole time that our fate was hanging in the balance, that I thought you had missed the point of the king's remark."

"Not much," retorted Dick. "But why shouldn't I keep cool? What would have been the use of getting excited and anxious? That would only have given our show away and spoiled everything. But, although I may not have shown it, I don't mind admitting now, old chap, that I *was* most confoundedly anxious. For I knew that if your ventriloquial trick had been discovered, it would have been all up with us."

"You bet it would," agreed Earle. "And that was just where our narrow escape came in; for I was so nervous that, when the critical moment came, it was only by an almost superhuman effort that I was able to control my voice. However, here we are, still alive and well, thank God! And—Dick—after all, I'm glad that you are with me. A chap with a nerve like yours is worth a whole regiment of soldiers. Good-night!"

The two white men slept the sleep of exhaustion that night, to awake refreshed and re-invigorated on the following morning, with scarcely a trace remaining of the stress and strain through which they had passed on the preceding day. Inaguy and Peter presented themselves at daylight with the accustomed morning cup of chocolate; and the former, who was by this time well acquainted with his master's habits, mentioned that he had learned by inquiry, that there was a stream just outside the town in which the white lords might safely venture to bathe. Whereupon the pair sallied forth and enjoyed the now rare luxury of a swim, receiving, as they went and returned, the respectful salutations of the populace. Upon their return they found an excellent breakfast awaiting them, prepared by the indefatigable Peter from viands supplied by the king's especial order.

Earle announced his intention of accepting the king's proffered hospitality and remaining several days in Yacoahite, not only to afford his men time to recover from the hardships and sufferings which they had experienced while filling the *rôle* of prisoners doomed to the sacrifice, but also to enable him to prosecute the inquiries which he wished to make regarding the whereabouts of the city of Manoa. And he was not less anxious to stay than the king was to entertain him and get the benefit of his advice and guidance upon several burning questions which had of late been causing him uneasiness. For now that the great god Anamac had made it clear that the white strangers enjoyed his especial favour and protection, and were therefore not to be molested, but, on the contrary, were to be treated with the utmost honour and distinction, the astute Jiravai immediately arrived at the conclusion that they must certainly be something more than mere ordinary men—as witness the marvels which Earle had performed during the progress of the feast—and that consequently their advice and assistance must be of more than ordinary value, and well worth

securing. Therefore the king took Earle and Dick unreservedly into his confidence and, with the help of Inaguay as interpreter, fully laid before the pair a number of exceedingly delicate and difficult problems which were just then confronting him. And Earle, being a born diplomatist, entered into the thing with keen zest, taking the problems one by one and asking question after question until, as he put it, he had fairly "got the hang of the thing," when, by a judicious admixture of his own diplomatic instinct with Dick's shrewd common sense, it became not very difficult to find solutions of the several problems, which not only effected a general clearing of the air, but also ultimately added considerable lustre to Jiravai's name as that of a wise and powerful monarch.

The settlement of these matters of high and intricate policy took time; so that it was not until some ten days after the festival of Anamac that Earle was able to introduce to the king's notice the subject of Manoa, to ask what his majesty knew about it and its precise situation, and to request his assistance to enable the expedition to find the place.

But no sooner was Earle's project mentioned than Jiravai began to throw cold water upon it. First of all, he denied all knowledge whatsoever of any city named Manoa; and when Earle met this denial with the admission that there might possibly be some mistake in the matter of the name, explaining that it was not this that was of importance, but the fact that there was a city distinguished by certain curious and remarkable characteristics that he was anxious to find and visit, the king, while reluctantly admitting that he had certainly heard of such a city, most earnestly besought Earle at once and for ever to abandon his intention of visiting the place, since rumour had it that the inhabitants so strongly objected to the intrusion of strangers among them that, of the few who had been known to force a way in, not one had ever been known to come out again. Jiravai asserted that he knew nothing whatever about the city, beyond the above-named peculiarity, and the fact that its actual name was Ulua—bluntly adding that he desired to know no more—and he greatly doubted whether there was any Mangeroma now living who possessed more information on the subject than himself; yet, if the white lords very particularly desired it, he would cause immediate inquiries to be made. To which statement Earle replied that the white lords desired the information in question more than anything else, except to find themselves within the walls of Ulua itself; and that the king could not more conclusively demonstrate his friendship than by causing the most exhaustive inquiries to be made forthwith. And there the matter rested for nearly a fortnight, during which Earle and Dick wandered about the district together, shooting, but finding very little game; for they soon discovered that the Mangeroma country was pretty thickly inhabited, and that, between hunting and the clearing of the land for cultivation, the game had been nearly all driven away or exterminated.

At length, however, in response to the inquiries which the king caused to be made, an old man was found who asserted that, many years ago, when he was but a lad, he had been lost while engaged in a hunting expedition, and in his wanderings had actually seen, from the summit of a high hill, a great city of palaces, which he believed could be none other than the legendary city of Ulua, but that he had made no attempt to approach it, being afraid that, if he did so, he would fall into the hands of the inhabitants, and never more see his kith and kin. Asked whether he believed it possible, after all those years, to find his way back to the spot from which he had beheld the city, he replied in the affirmative, provided that he could be carried thither and back again, but not otherwise, the way being altogether too long and rough for his old limbs to traverse unaided. Arrangements were accordingly made for the construction of a litter for the accommodation of the old man, and on a certain morning the expedition set out from Yacoahite, the party now consisting of thirty men all told, including the old man, Busa, who was to serve as guide, his eight bearers, and ten additional bearers to assist in the transport of the white men's baggage.

As Busa had warned them, the way proved both long and difficult, leading as it did up and down wild ravines, along the dry and stony beds of mountain torrents, through rough and narrow passes, and by the edge of dizzy precipices where a single false step would have meant a fall of hundreds of feet through space; but after ten days of arduous travel the journey was accomplished without accident, and without any very startling adventure, the party arriving, late in a certain afternoon at a "divide," from which they looked down upon a vast basin containing a lake some thirty miles long by twenty broad, on the northern shore of which stood a city which Busa had not misrepresented when he spoke of it as a city of palaces. For a city it certainly was, covering an area of ground about four miles long by three broad, and many of its buildings seemed palatial, if one might judge by their lofty white walls and glittering roofs, shining like gold in the rays of the declining sun. Of course, it was not possible to judge very accurately the character of the buildings, or to see much detail, for the city was some twenty miles distant from the spot to which Busa had conducted the party, while the rarefaction of the atmosphere rendered even the field-glasses of little use. But that the city was actually there before their eyes was indisputable, and it was a city consisting not of a mere agglomeration of mud huts with thatched roofs, but of stately buildings of solid masonry, possessing such architectural adornments as towers, pinnacles, and domes, evidencing on the part of the inhabitants a condition of high civilisation and refinement.

From his knapsack Earle produced a folded map of the northern portion of South America which he opened and spread out on a rock. It was the most modern and up-to-date map that he had been able to procure, and it was drawn to a scale large enough to show not only every town of any importance but also innumerable villages, some of them so small that, as the party had themselves proved, they contained less than a hundred inhabitants. Yet on the part of the map upon which Earle now placed his finger, and for hundreds of miles in every direction therefrom, there was no indication of town or village, and only a mere suggestion of the mountain range through which they had lately been travelling, while even the courses of rivers were merely indicated by dotted lines; in short, the party were now, and had been for several weeks, in a region which had not been explored. But by means of astronomical observations made and worked out by Dick, the track of the party had each day been plotted upon the map, and such details as the forests they had passed through, the rivers they had crossed, the Indian villages they had met with, the great swamp, and the mountain ranges, had all been carefully plotted.

"Now," remarked Earle, pointing to a pencil mark on the map, "that is where we were at noon to-day, and we are somewhere about here now. There is no indication of a town or village of any sort anywhere near, yet just about there"—laying his finger on another point of the map—"stands yonder city on the shore of a lake, in a great basin surrounded on all sides by mountains, of the existence of which this map affords no indication. What do I deduce from that? you will ask. I will tell you, Dick. I deduce from it that yonder city is the one which, though our friend Jiravai

says it is named Ulua, has been spoken of ever since the Spanish conquest, and diligently sought, as the city of Manoa; and to us has fallen the honour and glory of having actually found it! Just think of the wonder of it, Dick. For over three and a half centuries the legend of the existence of that city has persisted, yet there is no absolutely authentic account of it having ever been reached, although hundreds, possibly thousands—if one could but know the whole truth—have most diligently and painfully sought it. And at last its discovery falls to the lot of two very undistinguished people, an Englishman and an American, as is quite in accordance with the fitness of things. Now let us make use of our remaining daylight to get down to a lower level, for, with the setting of the sun, it will be bitterly cold up here, and I have no fancy for spending the night in a temperature that will probably fall below freezing point.”

So saying, Earle folded up his map and, replacing it in his knapsack, gave the word for the party to proceed, Dick and himself taking the lead. Picking their way among towering rocks and along narrow ledges, they travelled a distance of some three miles and effected a descent of about two thousand feet before night overtook them, finally pitching their camp on a little rocky plateau under the lee of an enormous vertical cliff, which effectually sheltered them from the icy wind which sprang up and roared overhead with the force of a gale almost immediately after sunset.

Notwithstanding the shelter afforded by the cliff, however, the cold was intense, and the party, acclimatised by this time to the hot, humid atmosphere of the plains, suffered severely, the more so that they were camped among bare rocks without a vestige of vegetation of any kind, and were therefore without the materials for a fire; the return of daylight therefore found them more than ready to resume the march, in the hope that before long they would reach a region where fuel of some sort would allow them to kindle a fire and prepare a much-needed hot breakfast.

They reached such a spot after about an hour's march, camping in the shelter of a small clump of stunted pines; and here, after breakfast, Busa approached the two white men with the request that, having performed his task of guiding the party to a spot from which the “city of palaces,” could be seen, he and his bearers might now be permitted to set out upon the return journey, he and they being anxious to recross the divide during the hours of daylight, and so escape the bitter cold from which they had suffered so severely during the preceding night. The request seemed a reasonable one, for the old man's services were no longer needed; Earle therefore liberally rewarded the old fellow and his eight bearers, and dismissed them with a message of greeting and thanks to the king.

The two parties broke camp simultaneously, Busa and his bearers taking the back trail up the path which they had all descended an hour earlier, while the others, under Earle's leadership, proceeded down the mountain side at their best speed, being impatient to reach the fertile, cultivated country bordering the lake below.

But the task was not by any means so easy as it had first appeared, for they had scarcely gone a mile when they unexpectedly found themselves at the verge of a long line of precipitous cliffs overlooking the great basin in which lay the lake and the city. It was by no means a pleasant situation in which they found themselves, for they were standing upon a steep slope, clad with short, dry grass, almost as slippery as ice to walk upon, and this steep slope ended abruptly in a precipice which Earle, going down upon his stomach and peering cautiously over the edge, declared could be not less than six or seven thousand feet high. So terrible was the shock it gave him to find himself overhanging and gazing down into that dizzy void, that it induced a violent attack of vertigo, causing him to scream out that he was falling, and to beg those who were holding him to pull him back. They, of course, did so at once; but several minutes elapsed before the adventurous gazer sufficiently recovered his nerve to stand, and when he did so he was bathed in a cold perspiration, while his teeth chattered to such an extent that it was some time before he could distinctly articulate.

“Never had such a fearful shock in my life,” he afterwards explained to Dick. “Of course, I knew that the valley was an enormous depth below us, but when I undertook to peer over the edge of the cliff I did not for a moment anticipate that I was going to find myself hanging over a sheer void, thousands of feet deep. I expected to find below me a precipitous cliff seamed and scarred with innumerable irregularities and projections, by means of which an ordinarily active man might easily make his way down; but, man alive, this precipice is sheer, from top to bottom like the wall of a house, without a single projection, so far as I could see, big enough for a fly to settle upon. It was awful to find myself lying there, with my heels higher than my head, gazing down into that dizzy hollow, at the bottom of which tall trees looked no higher than pins, and to feel that if I dared to move a muscle I should inevitably go sliding over, head first!”

“Ay,” assented Dick. “I think I know the kind of feeling. I experienced something very like it myself the first time I climbed to the height of the royal yard. The hull of the ship below me looked so small, and so utterly inadequate to sustain the substantial spars about me, that, quite unconsciously, I found myself moving with the utmost precaution, lest my additional weight should capsize the ship.”

“Yes,” assented Earle. “I guess that was something like what I felt, except that, in my case, I was convinced I should never be able to get back to safety. Nevertheless, here I am, safe and sound. And now the question arises: How are we going to get down into that valley? So far as I can see the cliffs are everywhere vertical, like this one; yet there must be a way down somewhere; else how did the inhabitants of the city get there?”

“Oh yes, of course there is a way down, somewhere,” agreed Dick. “We'd better camp, hadn't we, and pursue our usual tactics, you going one way, and I the other, exploring?”

“Yes,” assented Earle. “But we won't camp just here, thank you. I should be afraid that some of us would go sliding over that cliff edge before we knew it. We will go along yonder, to the eastward, a bit. The ground looks less steep in that direction, and probably we shall find a suitable camping place before long.”

They did, about a mile and a half to the eastward; and the camp having been pitched, Earle accompanied by Inaguy, set off in one direction, while Dick, accompanied by another Indian, named Moquit, went in the other, in search of a practicable route down to the plain and the shore of the lake, the two white men taking their rifles, as usual, and

each carrying a pair of powerful binoculars slung over his shoulder.

The way taken by Dick led him back along the edge of the cliff by the route which they had traversed shortly before; and having reached the spot where Earle had taken his thrilling peep down into the abyss, the young man continued on, eventually entering a fir wood, through which he passed, bagging two brace of a species of pheasant as he went. Emerging from the wood, which was about a mile long, he found himself approaching a spot where the cliff seemed to dip somewhat, and halting for a moment to reconnoitre the prospect through his field-glasses, he became aware of the fact that work in the valley had begun for the day; for he observed smoke issuing from the chimneys of a number of detached buildings which he took to be farmhouses; while, studying the scene more intently, he was presently able to pick out the forms of numerous people apparently engaged in tilling the wide fields and at work in the orchards—as he took them to be—dotted here and there in the valley far below. Farther away, he perceived a number of small dots on the bosom of the lake, carefully watching which he at length became convinced that they were canoes, or some similar kind of craft, crossing the lake, some heading towards the city and others from it.

Some two hours later, Dick called a halt in a small pine wood, and ordered Moquit to kindle a fire and prepare a brace of the shot birds for their mid-day meal; and while this was being done the young Englishman sauntered off a little way in search of another spot from which he might advantageously effect a further reconnaissance of the valley. He found such a spot at no great distance and, unslinging his glasses, proceeded to search the valley and the face of the neighbouring cliffs from his new view point. But, look where he would, it everywhere seemed the same: vertical unscalable precipices of appalling height, and nowhere anything suggesting the existence of a road by means of which the valley might be reached.

Yet stay! As he was in the very act of removing the binoculars from his eyes his keen sight detected what appeared to be an infinitesimally small moving dot against the bare drab face of the cliff, some two miles away. Focussing his glasses afresh upon the spot, Dick watched it steadily for two or three minutes until he became certain that it was moving. Yes, moving downward along the cliff face toward the valley. Precisely what it was, he could not determine with any certainty, but he judged it to be a vehicle of some sort, a slow moving vehicle; and if so, it was of necessity travelling over a road, and that road, although it was indistinguishable from where Dick stood, was one of very easy gradient, judging from the movements of the object upon it. Satisfied now that he had made an important discovery, the lad carefully noted his surroundings, noted with equal care a number of objects which would enable him to fix the position of the road, and closing his glasses, walked briskly back to his temporary camp, where he found Moquit anxiously awaiting his return, with the birds cooked to a turn and just ready for eating.

Hurriedly dispatching his meal, Dick, with Moquit at his heels, resumed his task of exploration, proceeding first to the spot from which he had just observed the moving object, and there treating the face of the cliff to a further close scrutiny. But the object, whatever it may have been, was no longer to be seen; and, satisfied of this, Dick pressed on. Two miles farther on, still following the edge of the cliff as closely as was prudent, he halted, arrested by the sight of what, at the distance of about half a mile, had the appearance of a structure of some sort, clinging to the very verge of the cliff; and inspecting it through his binoculars, he saw that he was right in his surmise. It was a building, something in the nature of a wall, with what looked like a closed gateway in its centre. And on the parapet immediately above the gateway, there was a figure, apparently that of a sentinel, stalking slowly to and fro!

It was enough; the structure before him was undoubtedly the gateway at the head of the road giving access to the valley, and his mission was accomplished. His first impulse was to go on and view the gateway, or whatever it might be, at close quarters; but the inhabitants of the valley were evidently jealous of the intrusion of strangers, as was clear from the presence of the sentinel on the parapet; and giving the matter a few moments' consideration, Dick came to the conclusion that, before revealing his presence, it would be well to return to Earle and report. He therefore faced about forthwith and, keeping under cover as well as he could, retired in good order, pretty confident that, up to that moment, he and his follower had not been seen.

The sun was just sinking behind the mountain ridges to the westward of the mysterious city when Dick reached the camp. Earle, he found, had not yet returned, but he arrived some ten minutes later, greatly disgusted at his own want of success. He had searched the northern cliffs for a distance of some twelve miles, it appeared, and nowhere had found a spot where even a goat or a monkey might have passed up or down them. But he had penetrated to within some eight or nine miles of the city, and having viewed it at that distance and from a great height through the lenses of his powerful glasses, was fully persuaded that, let the name of the city be what it might, it was none other than that which, crowned with the halo of legend and romance, had been spoken and written of and sought for as "Manoa."

"It is a magnificent city, Dick," he exclaimed, enthusiastically; "a city of palaces embowered in gardens; and the roofs of many of its buildings are covered with gold. They *must* be," he insisted, in reply to Dick's incredulous shrug of the shoulders, "otherwise they would not gleam so brilliantly in the sun as they do. And to-morrow night, please God, we will rest our weary limbs in that same city, and perhaps, if luck is with us, make the acquaintance of El Dorado himself, or at all events, his successor."

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## Chapter Twelve.

### Guests—or Prisoners?

The camp was astir with the coming of dawn on the following morning; and after an early breakfast the expedition started, under Dick's guidance, for the gateway, which was reached shortly before noon. As the party approached, the sentinel was seen pacing to and fro across the parapet, as on the preceding afternoon; and that he was keeping a sharp look-out was manifest, for the little band had scarcely emerged from the pine wood in which Dick had halted for his mid-day meal on the preceding day, when the man was seen to pause in his monotonous march to and fro and

gaze toward them under the shadow of his hand. Then, apparently satisfied that the party were bound for the gateway, he was seen to move a few paces and bend over, with his hand to his mouth, as though shouting to someone below, after which he resumed his march as before, occasionally eyeing the strangers as they approached.

Arrived at length at the gateway, it was seen that the structure consisted of a wall, some thirty feet high, very solidly built of great blocks of masonry dressed to a perfectly smooth face, and so accurately jointed that, even at the distance of a few paces, the joints were scarcely perceptible. The wall was built with a vertical face to a height of some twenty feet, above which it swelled outward in the form known as a "bull-nose," the upper surface of which sloped so steeply upward as to render it unclimbable; so that, even if a man, or men, should climb as far as the swell of the bull-nose by means of a pole or ladder, the would-be intruders could get no farther. The wall was semi-circular in plan, jutting out from the edge of the cliff for a distance of some fifteen feet at either end and descending the face of the cliff, diminishing as it went, until it died away to nothing, some fifty feet below, rendering it an impossibility for anyone to pass round either end of it. The middle of the wall was so constructed as to form a watch-tower, some thirty feet square, with a flat roof, upon which it appeared a sentinel was always posted; and it was in the base of the watch-tower that the gateway, about ten feet wide, was pierced, the opening being filled with a pair of wooden doors of exceedingly solid construction.

As the party halted, the sentinel, who wore a burnished helmet and corselet that flashed in the sun like gold and was the colour of gold, leaned over the parapet and shouted to them what seemed to be an inquiry; but the words, though quite distinctly pronounced, were utterly unintelligible to all.

"Wants to know our business, I guess," remarked Earle. "Step forward, Inaguy, and explain that we wish to pay our respects to his majesty, El Dorado. Try him in all the dialects you happen to be acquainted with."

Inaguy accordingly stepped forward and did his best, but without avail; the sentinel, though he listened attentively to all that was said, could evidently make nothing of it, replying only with shakes of the head.

"It is the usual fate of the explorer who enters a new country," remarked Earle. "He is unable to understand or make himself understood. But there is always the language of signs to fall back upon. Let me see what I can do in that way."

Stepping forward and thus claiming the sentinel's attention, he pointed first to himself, then to Dick, then, with a comprehensive wave of the hand, to the Indian carriers, and finally to the door, motioning with his hands as though opening it. This seemed to be intelligible to the sentinel, for he nodded, and stepping aside a few paces, shouted a few words to someone below in the interior of the tower. A few moments later a second man appeared on the top of the tower and, approaching the parapet, regarded the would-be visitors intently. The inspection appeared to result satisfactorily, for a few moments later he disappeared; a short interval of waiting ensued, then the gate swung open, and he came fearlessly forward, while the gates swung to behind him, and there was a sound of ponderous bars being shot into their sockets.

Judging from the richness of his dress and the quiet dignity of his manner, the man was probably an officer. He was apparently about thirty years of age, some five feet ten inches in height, and was well-made though perhaps a trifle slight in build. In complexion he was somewhat sallow, but he was distinctly good-looking, with a somewhat Hebrew cast of features, and with coal-black hair, eyebrows, beard and moustache, the beard trimmed square, and the hair worn rather long, trimmed square across the nape of the neck, with a short fringe trimmed square across the forehead. His eyes were black and piercing, but there was a straightforward honest look in them that instantly created a favourable impression. He was attired in helmet and corselet, apparently of gold, like those worn by the sentinel, but with the addition of a splendid plume of long black feathers surmounting his helmet. Beneath his corselet appeared a sort of skirt of fine chain mail reaching to just below the knees, and his legs were protected by greaves made of the same metal as the rest of his armour. His feet were encased in buskins, a sash of black and yellow passed over his left shoulder and was knotted upon his right hip, while at his left dangled a short sword encased in a jewelled scabbard, supported by a jewelled belt or chain of broad links, all made of the same gold-like metal. As he strode forward, his eyes glancing questioningly from Earle to Dick and back again, he threw up his open right hand, palm forward, and said a few words, which sounded like a greeting, in a full but very pleasant tone of voice. Like the speech of the sentinel, his words were quite unintelligible to those addressed, but his action seemed easily interpretable as the sign of peace, and Earle instantly imitated it.

"Thanks, old chap," the American replied, beaming amiably upon the soldier; "it is good of you to say so; but I'm awfully sorry that I can't understand you. The fact is, you know, that I and my friend Cavendish"—he indicated Dick with a wave of his hand—"have come all the way from New York expressly to discover your city—which I learn is called Ulua—"

The officer instantly caught the name Ulua and repeated it, smilingly pointing in the direction of the city.

"Yes," proceeded Earle, "that is so. I guess you get me all right. We want to go in through that gate and make the acquaintance of your king, El Dorado, or whatever his name may be. Do you get that?"

All this was accompanied by much gesture, but it did not seem to be very illuminating to the officer, who merely repeated the word Ulua, pointing again toward the city. Then, pointing to himself, he pronounced the word "Adoni," following it up by pointing at Earle, and uttering a word that sounded like "Hu."

"Yes, sirree, I get you all right," was Earle's reply as he gripped the astonished man's right hand and shook it heartily, smiling in his eyes as he did so. "Gee!" he exclaimed, turning to Dick, "we're getting on like a house afire. He says his name is Adoni, and he asks who I am. Isn't that right, old golden image?"

The "old golden image" looked a trifle nonplussed for a moment, but presently repeated his last performance; upon which Earle remarked:

"Of course, I knew I wasn't mistaken. You sir," pointing, "are named Adoni—" The officer nodded. "And I," he continued pointing to himself, "am named Earle—*Earle*. You get that?"

"Adoni," replied the officer, pointing to himself, "Earle"—pointing to the owner of the name.

"Right!" agreed Earle. "You are a quite intelligent guy, if I may be permitted to say so. And this youngster's name is Dick—Dick. That's easy enough to remember, isn't it?"

"Adoni," replied the officer, again pointing to himself. "Earle—Dick," pointing first to one and then the other.

"Sure!" exclaimed Earle, delighted with the progress which he considered he was making. "I knew there must be a way of making you understand." And he proceeded to explain all over again, and speaking very slowly, with plenty of gesture, his desire that he and his party might be allowed to pass through the gate and visit the city of Ulua. It was a tedious and lengthy process, but apparently it was in the end attended with a certain measure of success, for eventually the officer shouted an order, the gate was thrown open, and, taking Dick and Earle each by an arm, Adoni led the pair through. Inaguy and the other Indians, who had grounded their burdens while the long colloquy was proceeding, hastened to resume them and follow the white men, but before they could do so their leaders were inside, and the gate was bolted and barred upon them.

Taken by surprise for the moment, Earle did not realise what was happening until it was too late; but the instant that he did so he broke free from Adoni's grasp and dashed up a flight of steps, which he saw a little ahead of him, and which he rightly guessed led up to the parapet. Arrived there he brushed aside the sentinel, who half-heartedly sought to bar his way and, rushing to the parapet, ordered Inaguy and the rest to remain where they were, and on no account to think of departing, for he would certainly arrange, sooner or later, for their admission. Then he calmly descended and surrendered himself to the astonished and somewhat amused Adoni, who said a few words which sounded as though they were intended to be reassuring.

Resuming the *rôle* of guide, Adoni now conducted the pair into a room in the rear portion of the tower, in which was a window opening, unglazed, affording a delightful view of the valley and lake, with the road leading thereto; and here they were turned over to another officer, who by signs, indicated a request that the strangers should remove their outer garments. Earle at first evinced a disposition to refuse this request, but Dick was less fastidious, and stripped to the waist without demur, whereupon the unnamed officer, who was evidently a physician of sorts, after glancing admiringly at the young Englishman's stalwart proportions and magnificent muscular development—to which he particularly drew Adoni's attention—proceeded to tap Dick on the chest and between the shoulders, listen to the action of his heart and lungs, punch him in the ribs, and act generally as though he were examining the lad on behalf of a life insurance company; finally expressing his approval of the youngster's physical condition in a manner which there was no possibility of mistaking.

Then Earle was again invited to subject himself to the same ordeal, and this time he did so without demur, stripping off first his thin linen jacket, and next the light woollen singlet which he was wearing as a substitute for a shirt.

And now came a startling surprise. For the removal of Earle's singlet revealed the curious lozenge-shaped jewel with its inset emerald, which he had removed from the neck of the idol in the sculptured cave discovered by Dick, and which the American had ever since worn round his neck for safe keeping. No sooner did the eyes of the examining officer glimpse the jewel than he uttered a strange cry, suggestive of the utmost astonishment. He gazed upon it with awe-struck eyes, drew cautiously near to inspect it more closely, half stretched forth a hand, seemingly to touch it, and then, suddenly, saying something to Adoni which seemed to suggest that a most wonderful and amazing thing had happened, prostrated himself at Earle's feet, an example which Adoni instantly followed.

"Now, what in the nation does this mean?" demanded Earle in a low voice of Dick. "Why are these two guys kowtowing to me in this fashion? Gee! They surely don't think that I'm some fancy god of theirs, come down from Olympus to visit them, as a special mark of favour, do they?"

"Well, it looks very much like it, by the way that they are carrying on," returned Dick. "I think that it might help matters a bit, both now and in the future, if you were to play up to the idea and infuse a general air of benevolent condescension into your intercourse with them. I don't see that it could possibly do any harm. Do you?"

"Don't know," answered Earle. "It might if, later on, they were to come to me and demand that I do some impossible thing for them. But, on the other hand, I guess it would be up to me to refuse, if I chose. On the whole, perhaps—and yet, I don't know—Yes, I guess I'll try it, and see how it works."

Bending down, he lightly touched the two officers upon the shoulder and, when they ventured to glance up at him, graciously signed to them to rise, which they did, with every mark of the most profound reverence. From that moment there was no further trouble. Without waiting for permission from the examining officer, Earle calmly resumed his singlet and coat, taking care now, however, to leave fully exposed the jewel, or amulet, or whatever it was, that had produced such a wonderful effect; and this done, he signed to Adoni to open the gate and admit Inaguy and the rest of the Indians, which was instantly done. In the meantime, while the Indians were with much deliberation gathering up their loads and adjusting them upon their shoulders, in response to Earle's reassuring call, Adoni and the other officer had withdrawn to a little distance and were plunged into an earnest, anxious consultation, the result of which was that, a few minutes later, a man, naked save for a sort of breech cloth wrapped about his loins, started out from the guard house and set off down the road leading to the city, as though running for his life.

As the last of the Indians passed through the gateway, the massive timber gates were closed and securely barred behind them, and Earle and Dick stepped forward to place themselves at their head, intending to resume their march toward Ulua. But Adoni, perceiving their intention, at once intervened and, firmly yet with the utmost reverence of manner, intimated by signs an earnest desire that the party would postpone their departure. He did this by standing before them in the middle of the road, with his arms outstretched as though to bar the way; then he signed to the

Indians to remove themselves to a wide plot of grass by the side of the road and deposit their burden there; and finally beckoned the two white men to accompany him into the guard house, where he conducted them into a plainly but comfortably furnished room, and signed to them a request to rest themselves upon a couple of couches which he indicated, at the same time giving them to understand that a meal would presently be served to them.

Earle, well pleased at the success which had attended his effort to penetrate to the interior of the forbidden country, signified his acquiescence by seating himself on one of the couches, whereupon Adoni, equally well pleased, withdrew, with a profound bow, leaving the two friends to themselves.

"Well," remarked Earle, rising from the couch and gazing with satisfaction upon the glorious prospect of lake and valley revealed by the window opening before which he placed himself, "we are inside the gate, and that is something achieved, anyway. For, at first, I feared that they were going to refuse us admission, and if they had done so I guess we should have found it a pretty difficult matter to get in. But our friend Adoni has evidently no authority to allow us to go on without first referring to the boss, whoever he may be; and I guess that naked runner was the bearer of a report and a request for further instructions. Now of course our line of conduct will be to conform to the manners and customs of the natives, so far as may be, and give no trouble; for our only object in coming here is to see the country and the people, and that can best be accomplished by keeping on good terms with everybody; therefore we will just let them make all the arrangements, and we will fall in with them. But I have great hopes from the possession of this jewel, which evidently has some powerful mystic significance in the eyes of these people. Adoni and the other fellow appeared to recognise it at once, and there can be no question as to the reverence with which they regard it. Judging from the behaviour of those two, the thing ought to secure us a very favourable reception at headquarters. I wish I knew the history of it."

"We shall perhaps learn that later on," returned Dick. "And I anticipate that when we do, it will prove both curious and romantic. The mere finding of it in that wonderful cavern was remarkable enough, but the astonishment and delight of Adoni at recognising it were still more remarkable, to my mind. To me, their behaviour was that of men suddenly brought face to face with something that they had almost despaired of ever seeing again."

"Yes, I guess you are right," agreed Earle. "Not that either of those two could ever have actually seen the thing, for it must have lain hidden in that cave for—well, a hundred years or more, I should say. But be that as it may, it is evidently in their eyes an object of extraordinary sanctity, and should—indeed, most probably does—confer some very special privileges upon its possessor, of which I shall feel justified in making the fullest use."

The pair were still chatting in a somewhat desultory fashion when two men, evidently servants, entered the room, bearing a table already set for a meal, and they were immediately followed by others who brought in several smoking dishes of food, a jar of a light kind of wine, an open-work metal tray heaped with small cakes, and a piled-up basket of fruit, consisting of oranges, grapes, nectarines, and one or two other kinds which neither Earle nor Dick was able to identify. The plates, dishes, and drinking-cups were unmistakably of gold, but quite plain, as were the dagger-like knives and a kind of skewer which was evidently intended to serve as a fork. The food consisted of a stew, apparently of kid's flesh, a roasted bird about the size of, and somewhat similar in flavour to, a duck, roasted yams, ears of green maize, boiled, and a dish of some kind of bean which both pronounced delicious; indeed the meal as a whole was excellent, and was done full justice to by both participants. The wine, too, if wine it was, was almost icy cold, and of exceedingly agreeable though somewhat peculiar flavour, and was apparently unfermented, for although both drank freely of it, it might have been pure water, so far as its intoxicant effect was concerned. At the conclusion of the meal Earle produced his pipe and, lighting up, sallied forth with Dick, to see how the Indian bearers were faring; his appearance, with smoke issuing from his mouth and nostrils, again so profoundly impressing the beholders that they were once more impelled to prostrate themselves as he passed by. The Indians, with characteristic philosophy, had camped on the grass plot at the side of the guard house, and had been as well cared for in their way as had their masters, and were evidently quite satisfied with the state of affairs in general.

The afternoon was well advanced when, as Dick and Earle sat in the embrasure of the window, looking out over the lake and valley, and chatting together upon the sort of reception which they might expect from the Uluans, they observed a light yellow cloud-like appearance across the lake, on that side of it upon which the city was built, and bringing their glasses to bear upon it, they perceived that it was dust, in the midst of which could be perceived the forms of horsemen and the glitter of accoutrements. After careful scrutiny, Earle pronounced the troop to be about a hundred strong, and it appeared to be advancing at a fairly rapid pace.

While the American kept his glasses bearing upon the cavalcade, Dick permitted his gaze to search the nearer landscape; and it was while he was thus engaged that he detected another and much smaller dust cloud, almost immediately beneath the guard house, on the road which wound round the south-eastern extremity of the lake toward that part of the valley where the cliff road leading to the guard house began. Focussing his glasses on this smaller dust cloud, he saw that it was caused by a group of three horsemen who were riding as if for their lives. Judging from the richness of their garb and the sumptuous trappings of their horses, they were persons of considerable consequence, and Dick, who always had an eye for detail, noticed that two of them, who rode a horse's length in the rear of the third, carried each a capacious roll or bundle of some sort strapped to the bow of his saddle. He directed Earle's attention to the little group; and together they watched it until it disappeared round a bend in the road.

"Coming here, I guess," pronounced Earle. And half an hour later his surmise proved to be correct, for, still watching from the window, the pair again sighted the trio of horsemen urging their animals at top speed up the gentle slope of the cliff road toward the guard house.

A few minutes later the trio reined up their winded and sweat-lathered steeds and dismounted at the door of the guard house, where they were met and greeted with profound respect by Adoni; and while the leader, accompanied by Adoni, entered the building, the other two busied themselves unstrapping from their saddle bows the bundles which Dick had noticed, and bearing which they presently followed their leader.



For fully twenty minutes the newcomers remained in close conference with Adoni and the officer who had acted the part of medical examiner—and whose name, it transpired, was Camma—and at the end of the conference they were conducted by the two officers into the presence of Earle and Dick. It was Adoni who presented them, naming them respectively, Acor—who subsequently proved to be the captain of King Juda's guard—Tedeck and Kedah, the two latter being lieutenants in Acor's corps. They were all fine, upstanding men, of distinctly imperious and haughty bearing—Acor perhaps exhibiting those characteristics most markedly, as was only natural, considering the exalted position which he occupied at Court, and the almost autocratic authority which he wielded; nevertheless, at the sight of Earle's talisman, they suddenly subdued their haughty demeanour to one of deep reverence, and bowed low before the American, with their hands crossed upon their breasts, while they murmured a few words, which sounded like something in the nature of an invocation. Then they turned to Dick and, with a glance of admiration at his stalwart frame, bowed again, though with somewhat less of deference than they had manifested toward Earle. As for Earle, he did his best to act up to the distinguished position into which Fate seemed to have pitch-forked him, returning the bows of the officers with a slight inclination of the head and a still slighter flexure of the body, while he gazed upon them with a kind of bland abstraction; Dick imitating his friend's deportment as closely as possible, though there was a gleam of frankness and friendliness in his eyes which Earle had not permitted to appear in his.

Notwithstanding a certain suggestion of reserve in the demeanour of the new arrivals, they could not altogether conceal the astonishment they evidently felt at the style and cut of the white men's clothes—by this time very much the worse for wear and travel stains—which afforded so marked a contrast to their own splendid habiliments. The three officers were attired alike in helmets, corselets, greaves, and gauntlets of gold plate worn over a shirt of fine chain mail, also made of gold, and were armed with short swords, encased in golden scabbards suspended from belts consisting of gold plaques linked together. But there were certain differences in the uniform of the three; for whereas the plumes which adorned the helmets of the two lieutenants were black, those of their chief were red; and whereas their helmets were perfectly plain, Acor's was richly decorated with embossed ornamentation. Also the arms of the two lieutenants were bare from corselet to gauntlet, while Acor's were clad in sleeves of thin red silk. The lieutenants' sashes were black and yellow; that of the captain red; they wore buskins of white leather, while his feet and legs were encased in golden armour to just below the knee; and lastly, his sword hilt, belt and scabbard were much more richly ornamented than theirs.

The introduction having been effected, Acor addressed himself at some length and with much gesture to Earle. Precisely what he said was of course unintelligible to the white men; but they gathered some hint of meaning from his gestures, which they interpreted—rightly, as afterwards transpired—as a sort of qualified welcome to Ulua, founded entirely upon Earle's possession of the mysterious amulet. Acor concluded his address by beckoning forward his two lieutenants and directing the attention of the white men to the contents of the bundles, which, when unrolled, proved to be two dresses made of an exceedingly fine, silky sort of woollen material. The dresses consisted of a sort of singlet without sleeves, a pair of short pants somewhat like those worn by football players, and an outer garment, cut somewhat like a shirt, but rather longer, the hem reaching to just below the knee. This garment, made quite loose, was confined at the waist by a belt. The costumes were completed by the addition of sandals and a kind of turban. But the two costumes, although similar in cut, were different in appearance; for while that which was offered for Earle's acceptance was decorated with turquoise blue braid sewn round the edges of the outer garment in a broad pattern very similar to the Greek "key" pattern, with an edging of bead fringe of the same colour, the ornamentation of the costume offered to Dick consisted of an elaborate pattern beautifully worked in red braid, with a fringe of red beads. The turbans, too, were somewhat different in shape, Earle's being considerably the higher of the two, intertwined with a rope of large blue beads, while Dick's was perfectly plain. Recognising that Acor was inviting them to accept these garments and don them, the two white men bowed their assent and took the garments, whereupon Acor and his lieutenants retired, leaving Earle and Dick to themselves. Truth to tell, the presented garments were most acceptable gifts, for not only were the clothes which the explorers were wearing grimy and tattered, but, having been originally designed for hard service, they were also unpleasantly heavy and hot, so that their owners were only too glad to discard them in favour of others much more suited to the climate, and the pair lost no time in effecting the change.

They had scarcely done so when the sound of horses' hoofs approaching up the road attracted their attention, and going to the window, they perceived a dozen horsemen, with two led horses, galloping toward the guard house. A few minutes later, these having arrived, Acor presented himself, and by signs invited the two white men to follow him. This they did, passing out of the guard house just as three servants led forth the horses of Acor and his two lieutenants, which meanwhile had been groomed and fed. Then, as the two white men stepped forth into the open, each of the newly-arrived horsemen flung up his right hand in salute and shouted a word that sounded remarkably like "Hail!" The two led horses were then brought forward, and with a gesture of deference, Acor invited his two guests—or were they prisoners?—to mount.

The horses were beautiful animals, full of mettle and fire, notwithstanding the journey which they had just performed, and they were most sumptuously caparisoned, the saddles, though differently shaped from the European or American article, being made of soft leather, thickly padded, with a handsome saddle cloth beneath, under which again was a fine net made of thin silk cord, reaching from the animal's withers to his tail, the edges of the net being fringed with small tassels.

Earle was of course an accomplished horseman, riding indeed like a cowboy, and therefore, out of a feeling of compassion for his companion, he chose what appeared to be the most mettlesome of the two proffered horses; but Dick, although a sailor, had also learned how to keep his seat upon a horse's back, and the manner in which the pair lightly swung themselves up into the saddle, and the easy grace with which they retained their seats, despite the curvetting and prancing of their steeds, evoked a low murmur of admiration from the beholders as the latter formed up round the white men.

Then, just as Adoni and Camma were bidding their strange guests a respectful farewell, Earle noticed that his Indian followers and all his goods had disappeared.

"Say!" he exclaimed, seizing Acor by the arm and pointing to the spot where the Indians had been camped a couple of hours earlier—"where are my Indians? Surely, you haven't turned them out, have you?"

The tone of voice in which the question was put and the gesture which accompanied it were evidently quite intelligible, for Acor instantly replied in deferential tones, at the same time pointing down the road; and, sure enough, after the cavalcade had proceeded about two miles, Inaguy and his companions were overtaken, trudging cheerfully along under the escort of a man who both Dick and Earle remembered having seen about the guard house earlier in the day.

The two friends, with their escort, reached the foot of the cliff road, after a ride of some six miles, shortly after the sun had disappeared behind the mountains at the western end of the valley. They were now in the valley itself, with mountains hemming them in on every hand; and as they gazed upward in wonder at the high, vertical cliffs all round them, they realised at last that they were inside an absolutely impregnable fortress, hewn out of the mountain range by the hand of Nature herself, and accessible only by air, or by the road which they had just traversed. After a thoroughly comprehensive survey of their surroundings, Earle explained to Dick that the only theory upon which he could account for so extraordinary a formation was, that thousands, or possibly even millions, of years ago the valley had been the crater of a gigantic volcano which, after the volcano had become extinct, had gradually filled with débris, leaving a depression in the middle, which in process of time, had become a lake. And, indeed, if the theory of a volcano upon so gigantic a scale could but be accepted, it looked very much as though Earle's explanation might be correct; for the soil of the valley—a belt of flat land some two miles wide, extending all round the lake—was light and friable, but extraordinarily rich, as is apt to be the case with volcanic soil, while the vertical cliffs which hemmed it in all round bore a striking resemblance to the interior of certain well-known craters.

Just clear of the foot of the cliff road the party came upon an encampment, easily recognisable as that of the body of soldiers seen advancing from the city earlier in the day; and here the night was spent, the two white men being housed in a capacious tent, most luxuriously furnished and adorned, in which, shortly after their arrival, a meal of so elaborate a description, that it might almost be termed a banquet, was served to them by a staff of reverentially obsequious servants, and in which they subsequently slept the sleep of the just, on great piles of soft rugs spread upon the short grass.

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## **Chapter Thirteen.**

### **Their First Day in Ulua.**

With the rising of the sun on the following morning, the camp became a scene of bustling activity, the soldiers grooming, feeding, and watering their horses, while a little army of servitors bestirred themselves in the kindling of fires and the preparation of a meal, prior, as the two white men surmised, to a start for the city.

Whatever might be the climatic conditions in the valley later on in the day, the early morning air was fresh, cool, and fragrant, with the mingled odours of rich pastures, luxuriant cornfields, orchards, and gardens, brilliant with many-hued flowers.

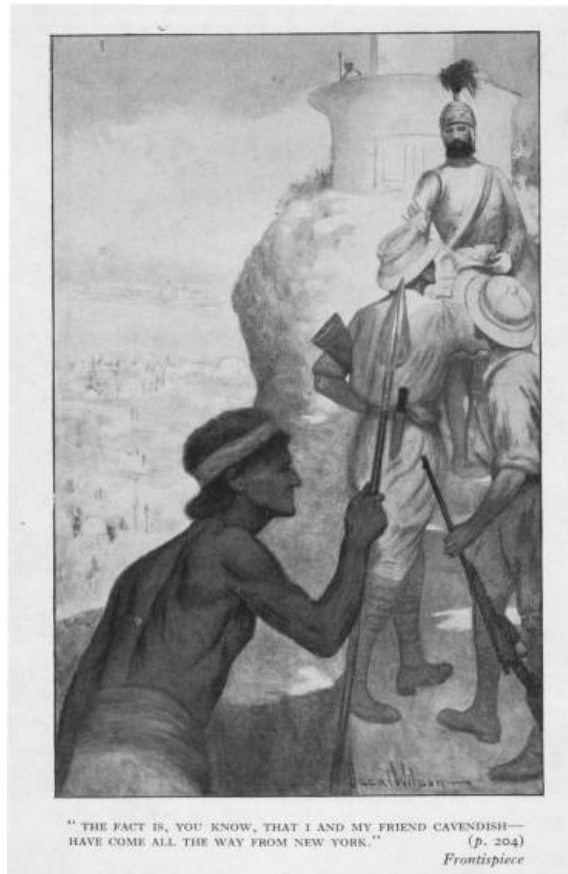
As Earle and Dick emerged from their tent, fresh and buoyant after a sound night's sleep, the troopers, very lightly clad, were mounting their horses, bare-backed, with the evident intention of taking the animals down to the lake; and the idea occurred to Dick and Earle simultaneously, that there was nothing in the world they so ardently desired at that moment as a dip in the lake, which, gently ruffled by the lightest and most balmy of zephyrs, lay shimmering invitingly in the sunshine some two miles away. With one accord, therefore, they advanced toward where the horsemen, now mounted, awaited the word of command to march. Most of the troopers had only their own individual horses to look after, but there were some twenty or so who were each also in charge of a led horse, and walking up to a couple of these, the two white men took from the somewhat surprised but submissive soldiers a horse apiece, and vaulting upon the animals' bare backs, lined up alongside the officer in command, who received them with a respectful salute. Half an hour later, Dick and Earle were sporting in the lake like a couple of mermen, to the amazement and admiration of the Uluaans, not one of whom appeared to possess the most elementary knowledge of swimming. The temperature of the water was just right to render a swim both invigorating and enjoyable, and when at length the two friends returned to camp, they were in excellent form to do justice to the breakfast which they found awaiting them.

The journey from the foot of the cliff road where the camp had been pitched, round the south-eastern extremity of the lake and so to the city, was taken at an easy pace, to spare the cattle which drew the camp carts, in which room had been found for Earle's impedimenta as well as for a few of the Indians, while those not so accommodated made no difficulty of running or walking beside the carts. The journey was devoid of incident, but the ride was an exceedingly pleasant one, since the road wound its way for the whole distance through fields and orchards, the flourishing condition of which bore eloquent testimony to the richness of the soil and the agricultural skill of the inhabitants. Here and there farms were passed which were devoted to the raising of horses, cattle, sheep, and goats, and the splendid condition of the animals was a source of constant admiration to the two white men.

The city was reached about noon, but long before then the strangers had begun to realise the splendour and magnificence of it. A peculiarity of it was that it had no suburbs, the farm lands coming right up to the gardens of the outermost houses of the city, which clustered as thickly on its outskirts as in its heart. A further peculiarity was that there were no rows of houses; each was completely detached and stood in its own grounds, the only difference being that some of the buildings were larger, more ornate, and had more extensive gardens than others. The buildings, though by no means overloaded with ornament, were exceedingly handsome in a quiet, chaste style, which Earle said reminded him very forcibly of certain Pompeiian houses; much of the ornamentation consisting of painted designs upon the white walls. All the houses appeared to be flat-roofed, and many of them had gardens on the roofs,

the shrubs and trees showing over the low parapets. Others were covered with gay awnings, beneath which some of the occupants could be seen taking their ease in hammocks. The Uluans appeared to be passionately fond of flowers, the gardens being full of them, while their condition evidenced the care with which they were tended. Fountains, too, abounded, some of those adorning the public squares being of very curious and elaborate design. The streets were very wide, few being less than a hundred feet in width, while some were considerably wider, with narrow strips of garden running down the centre, full of the most exquisite flowers interspersed with umbrageous trees. Trees also overshadowed the rather narrow sidewalks.

Ulua, however, was by no means a city devoted exclusively to luxury. There was evidently a considerable amount of business done there also, for some of the streets were occupied entirely by shops, though who, except the inhabitants, patronised them, was a question, since all the indications pointed to the fact that there was no trade done with the outside world. The commodities exposed for sale seemed to consist mainly of fruit, vegetables, flowers, confectionery, what looked like bread in various fanciful shapes, embroideries, jewellery, silks, soft woollen materials, paintings, lamps and lanterns, harness, and other goods too numerous to mention.



What surprised the visitors most of all, perhaps, in this wonderful city was the extraordinarily lavish use made of gold; to them it appeared that everything that could possibly be made of gold was of that metal; and it was not until some time afterwards that they learned that gold was the most common of the metals with the Uluans, who valued it only because of its untarnishability and beauty of colour.

The wider thoroughfares, squares, and the spacious public gardens through which the cavalcade passed contained a fair number of people, although the visitors discovered, later on, that this was the hour when most of the inhabitants who were not called abroad by business preferred to remain in the seclusion of their own houses and gardens, this being the hottest hour of the day. Naturally, Earle and Dick regarded with some curiosity the people who paused to regard them as they passed, and they came to the conclusion that, on the whole, the Uluans were a distinctly attractive-looking people, the women especially reminding Earle of the Italians, not only as regarded the regularity of their features, but also in the grace of their form and carriage.

At length the cavalcade came to a halt in a spacious and beautiful square, situated, as the visitors judged, in about the centre of the city. One side of this square was entirely occupied by an enormous, lofty, and handsome building, the central portion of which was surmounted by an immense dome, covered with plates of gold, arranged in tiers or bands of different shapes among which that of the lozenge was the most conspicuous, while each corner of the building was crowned with a smaller dome, similarly covered and ornamented. Each of the five domes bore on its summit, as a sort of finial, the figure of a winged serpent, half of its body being arranged in a coil, while the other half, with outstretched wings, was upreared in a graceful curve. A similar figure crowned a large and beautiful fountain which occupied the centre of the square, and it was noticeable that every individual who passed this figure halted and bowed profoundly to it, from which the two white men inferred that the winged serpent was a sacred symbol, evidently held in the highest veneration. This surmise ultimately proved to be correct, the winged serpent being the figure of the Uluan god Kuhlacan, who was believed to dwell at the bottom of the lake, in its centre, and at whose annual festival sacrifices of jewels of immense value were made by casting them with much ceremony into the lake, from richly decorated boats. The building with the five golden domes was, of course, the temple, sacred to Kuhlacan, in which the god was daily worshipped. Earle, whose aesthetic sense was stirred by the beauty of the fountain and the wonderful workmanship of the figure surmounting it, directed Dick's particular attention to it and descanted at some length upon the taste of the design; and Dick, while listening to his companion, could not fail to observe that Acor, the officer in charge of the escort, as well as the members of the escort, and indeed all who were gathered in the square at the moment, regarded Earle intently, with an expression of mingled wonder and

satisfaction. Acor waited respectfully while Earle was speaking and, when the latter had finished, gave the order to dismount.

At a signal from one of the officers, two troopers advanced and took charge of the horses which Earle and Dick had been riding, and then Acor, bowing respectfully to the pair, invited them by word and gesture to follow him into a building on the opposite side of the square from the temple.

This building, which, like the temple, occupied an entire side of the square, was much more elaborate, from an architectural point of view than the sacred edifice, the design of which was chaste, majestic, and rather severe, while its *vis-à-vis*—which proved to be the royal palace—was ornate and decorative in effect. It consisted of an immense block of buildings, arranged in the form of a hollow square enclosing a magnificent garden, adorned with many beautiful fountains and statues, access to which was gained through a wide and lofty archway closed by a pair of immense and beautiful gates, modelled apparently in bronze, the archway and gates being so treated as to form a distinctive feature in the general design of the building.

As Acor and his two companions approached the archway the great gates swung open, actuated by some unseen agency, and the trio passed through, saluted, as they went, by the two impassive sentries who stood on guard.

Wheeling sharply round to the left as soon as they had passed through the archway, Acor conducted his charges along a wide pathway paved with slabs of variegated marble, until they reached a lofty doorway, entering which, Earle and Dick found themselves in a spacious lofty hall, the temperature of which was delightfully cool compared with the blazing sunshine outside. They appeared to be expected, for upon their entrance, a little group of men, whose rich attire seemed to proclaim them palace officials, came forward and bowing low, were introduced by Acor, who simply pointed to each man and pronounced his name. This done, the captain of the guard gravely and respectfully saluted his charges and retired, leaving them in the hands of the little group of supposed officials.

One of these, an elderly man of very dignified mien and presence, whom Acor had named Bahrim, and who afterward turned out to be the major-domo of the palace, at once stepped forward and with a low bow, signed the two white men to follow him. He led the way to one side of the hall, where a noble staircase of elaborately sculptured marble swept upward to a wide gallery running round three of the walls, and ascending this, Earle and Dick were presently inducted into a suite of three lofty and luxurious rooms, two of which were furnished as sleeping-chambers, while the third, lighted by two lofty window openings, shaded by sun blinds, looked out over the garden. The rooms were all most sumptuously furnished, the furniture, of quaint but graceful design, being made, for the most part, of rare and beautiful woods, richly carved. In each of the sleeping-chambers there was a large marble bath, already filled with water, and on each of the couches was set out a change of apparel.

With a wave of the hand, Bahrim indicated the rooms and their contents generally, and said a few words, from the tone of which Earle judged him to be asking whether they were satisfactory; for when Earle carelessly nodded an affirmative, Bahrim smiled, as though with gratification, and clapped his hands. This proved to be a summons to two attendants, who instantly entered and made their obeisances to the white men. These Bahrim introduced by the simple process of pointing to one and saying, "Shan," and to the other, saying, "Raba."

"Thanks," said Earle; "that will do nicely." Then, as Bahrim respectfully bowed himself out, the American turned to his friend and remarked:

"Say, Dick, how is this for high? Some lodging, this. What? I wonder how long it is to lunch time? That ride has proved a fine appetiser in my case. But those baths look good. Guess I'll have a dip now. I suppose these two guys are to be our servants. Which one will you have?"

"Oh," answered Dick, "either of them will do for me. They both look reasonably decent chaps. Take your choice."

"Right!" said Earle. "Then I guess I'll have Shan, because I think his name is the easiest to remember. Come along, Shan, and help me to get out of these togs. I'm going to have a bath. See?"

Shan apparently saw, which indeed was not difficult, since Earle pointed toward the bath as he spoke. The man bowed and turned to help Earle rid himself of his clothes, while Dick, beckoning to Raba, retired to the other sleeping-chamber, and a few minutes later was also luxuriating in the coolness of the bath.

Refreshed by their dip and a delicious luncheon, the two friends were seated in the deep embrasure of one of the unglazed windows of their sitting-room, Earle lazily smoking as he and Dick discussed the advisability of sallying forth, a little later, to learn the geography of the town, when they were interrupted by the appearance of Bahrim, the major-domo, accompanied by two other men, whom he introduced respectively as Zorah and Kedah.

The former was a tall, thin, ascetic-looking man of probably sixty or sixty-five years of age. He had doubtless been, in his prime, an exceedingly handsome man, for, even now, his features were well modelled and clean cut, but his sallow skin was deeply wrinkled about the forehead, eyes, and the wings of his nostrils—his mouth and chin were hidden by a thick moustache and long, straggling grey, almost white beard. A few thin wisps of long white hair escaped from the back part of the turban which covered his head, and fell to the level of his shoulders. But perhaps the most striking feature of him after his thin, hawk-like nose, was his eyes, which were large, black and piercing. He was attired in a dress which was a replica in every respect of that which had been provided for Earle, and his carriage, as he entered the apartment, was assured, haughty, almost arrogant, that of a man of high and assured position who possessed a profound faith in himself.

He bowed to Earle with a gesture of restrained humility which contrasted oddly with the hauteur of his expression, and striding up to the American, laid his two thin, talon-like hands upon the other's shoulders, and turned him round until Earle fully faced the light. Then, bending forward, he intently scrutinised the queer jewel, or talisman, which Earle now wore fully exposed to view. And as he did so, the expression of almost defiant pride which his features had

worn upon his entrance, gradually relaxed until it vanished and gave place to one of humble conviction. Then, laying the extremities of his fingers to his forehead, he bowed very low and backing away from Earle, gradually bowing himself out of the chamber.

Meanwhile, the other man, Kedah, had stood, a profoundly interested and impressed spectator of the short scene. He, too, was an elderly man, short, rather inclined to be stout, and bald-headed save for two thick tufts of white hair that sprouted over his ears. He was attired very much like Earle, except that the garniture of his robe was emerald green, instead of turquoise blue; also, instead of a turban, he usually wore a small, close-fitting skull cap of green silk, which he had removed upon entering the apartment. In one hand he carried, as well as his skull cap, a rather clumsy-looking umbrella of green silk, modelled somewhat after the pattern of the Japanese article, while the other hand grasped a roll of what looked like thin parchment.

Upon the departure of Zorah, Kedah laid aside his umbrella and skull cap and, respectfully motioning the two white men to be seated, drew forward a small table, upon which he unrolled the parchment, revealing the fact that its inner surface was covered with small but beautifully executed drawings of a multitude of objects, such as men, women, boys, girls, infants, horses, cattle, sheep, etc. To several of these he pointed in turn, giving each its proper designation in the Uluan tongue, making his pupils—for such they were—repeat the words several times after him until they had caught the correct accent. Then, after he had named some twenty objects, he harked back to the beginning again, pointing to each object and then, by expressive motions of his hands and bushy eyebrows, requiring them to repeat as many of the names as they could remember. In this fashion they proceeded for about an hour and a half, by which time the two white men had mastered the designations of some fifty objects and were enabled to repeat them when pointed at haphazard. Kedah graciously expressed his satisfaction at their progress in a flow of words accompanied by so much action and spoken in such a tone that there was little difficulty in understanding his general meaning. This system of tuition was continued day after day, accompanied by a gradual extension of the hours of study, and, after the first week, by the introduction of short sentences, such as: "This is a table. That is a picture. There is a man. Yonder go a woman and child. Observe that crowd of people," and so on, the sentences gradually lengthening and becoming more intricate, so that by the end of two months, Kedah's pupils were not only able to gather the general sense of most of what was said to them, but also intelligibly to ask for almost anything they required.

Meanwhile, during the progress of that first lesson, certain muffled exclamations, accompanied by the sounds of heavy breathing and scuffling feet, reached the ears of the pupils from the adjoining apartments; and when, upon the conclusion of the lesson they entered those apartments, Dick and Earle had the satisfaction of finding that all their belongings had been brought up and were neatly stowed away; also that Inaguy and Moquit, two of their Indian followers, had been added to their staff of servants. And from these men they also received the satisfactory information that the rest of the Indians were lodged together and being well cared for in a chamber beneath the palace.

The afternoon was by this time so far advanced that the two white men felt they might safely venture to sally forth and see something of the city, without much fear of being unduly incommoded by the heat, and they were also curious to ascertain how far they were free agents to come and go as they pleased; they resolved, therefore, to put the matter to the test without further ado. Accordingly, each thrusting a pair of fully loaded automatics into his belt, as a measure of precaution against possible contingencies, they left their apartments and, descending the stairs, made their way to the garden quadrangle, from whence they passed, without interference, into the grand square, receiving the salute of the sentry at the gates as they went.

The temple, situate on the opposite side of the square, was naturally the first object to claim their attention, and observing that its great main entrance doors stood wide open, the pair sauntered across the square, reverentially saluted as they went by everyone they met, and passing up the long flight of steps leading to the open doorway, they boldly entered the building.

It was a magnificent structure, the rich and lavish ornamentation of its interior making ample amends for the severity of its exterior design. The four corners of the building were occupied by spacious rooms, or possibly subsidiary chapels, the doors of which were closed, but the main or principal temple was open, and into this the two friends boldly made their way, Earle declaring to Dick that he was determined to put to the test the exact measure of independence and power which the possession of the talisman conferred upon him, which he believed to be almost supreme, judging by the extraordinary reverence and veneration with which it had thus far been regarded by the Uluans.

The main temple was far and away the most spacious interior which either of them had thus far seen, Earle, after running his eye over it, expressing the opinion that its floor would accommodate at least twenty thousand persons comfortably. It was rectangular in shape, its longest dimension running east and west. Its main walls were about sixty feet high, tinted turquoise blue—as was the ceiling—with decorative designs in white. It was lighted by windows in the sides, fitted with slats instead of glass, so carefully adjusted that while admitting a sufficiency of light—when one's eyes became accustomed to the semi-obscurity—they effectually excluded rain. The centre of the ceiling was pierced by a circular aperture about one hundred feet in diameter, above which rose the majestic dome which, from the outside, had already attracted their admiring attention. This dome was supported by four enormous columns connected by arches, and its interior, while shrouded in gloom, was a mass of subdued scintillating colour, as though it were encrusted with innumerable gems and glowing enamels. The eastern wall of the interior was remarkable from the circumstance that it bore a gigantic replica of the jewel, or talisman, which Earle wore—a fact which finally and definitely confirmed the conviction already arrived at by the American that the possession of the ornament conferred upon him almost supernatural powers and authority. At a distance of some twenty feet from this eastern wall there was an immense figure—or statue—of the Winged Serpent, reproduced in the middle of the square and on the domes of the temple, and before it stood a very large altar which bore evidences that sacrifices were continually offered upon it.

Upon entering the building the two friends were under the impression that it was empty; but they had scarcely been in it ten minutes, and were standing before the altar, studying the marvellous modelling of the Winged Serpent, when a strain of music smote upon their ears, and the next moment a curtain parted and a company of priests, some sixty in number, of whom about a third were playing upon quaint-looking musical instruments, filed into the building, headed by Zorah, their acquaintance of an hour or two earlier. Advancing with slow and solemn steps they halted before the two friends and, after bowing profoundly to Earle, broke into a slow and solemn chant, which gradually changed into a kind of triumphal hymn, at the conclusion of which they again bowed until their foreheads almost touched the pavement, and then filed out again.

The two white men, completely taken aback by the solemnity and unexpectedness of this apparently impromptu ceremony, knew not what to do, and therefore did nothing, which, as afterwards transpired, was the wisest course they could possibly have adopted. For, although they were quite unaware of it at the moment, their every movement was being carefully watched, and when they entered the temple, Zorah, the high priest, was instantly informed of the fact; whereupon he marshalled his subordinate priests and carried out the ceremony above recorded, in order to do honour to the individual who, in virtue of his possession of the mysterious jewel bearing the "sign" of Kuhlacan, the Winged Serpent, was implicitly believed to be either Kuhlacan's special ambassador to the Uluans, or, possibly, a human incarnation of Kuhlacan himself. The ceremony brought home a vague inkling of this state of affairs to both of the individuals most intimately concerned, and Earle, while expressing some embarrassment and dislike of the position in which he found himself placed, announced to Dick his determination to accept it, in the hope and belief that, before leaving Ulua, it might be his good fortune to wield the authority with which he was endowed for the benefit and advantage of the people, and quite possibly, the correction of abuses.

Leaving the temple, the two friends passed out of the square and entered a road which attracted them because of its extraordinary width, the magnificence of its shade trees, the beauty of its central strip of garden, the sumptuous character of its buildings, and the air of dignity and well-being which seemed to characterise the people who were promenading it. Taken altogether, it appeared to be Ulua's most aristocratic quarter, or at least its most fashionable promenade, for the men and women who thronged it were all elegantly dressed, and all had the air of belonging to the leisured class, while the roadway was thickly sprinkled with elegant and beautifully decorated chariots, drawn by teams of two, or sometimes three, handsome horses, driven by young men who appeared to be inviting the admiration of Ulua's fair ones.

Still unobtrusively followed by a palace official, the two friends wended their way down the street, receiving the respectful homage of all who passed them. They had traversed about half the length of the street, which was about two miles long, when suddenly loud and excited cries arose behind them, punctuated by the quick clatter of galloping hoofs, and wheeling round, they beheld a beautiful chariot, the body, wheels, and pole of which were entirely covered with plates of embossed gold, coming careering along the road toward them at full speed, and swerving wildly from side to side of the road as it came, the two cream stallions which drew it having evidently bolted.

The man who drove was doing his best to regain control of his terrified and mettlesome animals, and at the same time to avoid the chariots ahead of him, the drivers of which hurriedly drew in towards the sides of the road to give the runaways a free passage; but the lad—for he was apparently still in his teens—might as well have attempted to control the elements; the horses had got their heads and seemed determined not to stop until they were tired, while it was evident that a very serious accident was inevitable, the road being thronged with vehicles, horsemen and pedestrians—the latter seeming to use the roadway quite as much as the footpaths.

And even as Dick and Earle halted and turned to ascertain the cause of the commotion, the wildly careering chariot collided with another, a wheel of which it sheared off, while the impact of the two vehicles jolted the driver of the runaways off his feet and flung him violently into the road, where he lay motionless.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dick, as the two creams came tearing along, with the reins trailing in the roadway, "the brutes will not only kill themselves, but dozens of people as well, if they are not stopped!" And before Earle could reply, or do anything to restrain him, the lad sprang into the roadway, close to the path of the runaways, and braced himself for a spring. The next instant the frantic horses were upon him; but meanwhile, with a leap, Dick had started to run in the same direction as the horses, and as they tore past, with one hand he snatched at the reins and got them, while with the other, he gripped the rear of the chariot and swung himself into it. Then, gripping the reins with a firm hand, and shouting all the time to warn those ahead, he brought a steady strain to bear upon the horses' mouths, guiding them meanwhile as best he could. And almost immediately his pull upon the reins began to tell, for his thews and sinews, hardened and tempered to the strength of steel by his long tramp from the banks of the Amazon, were very different from those of the effeminate youth who had been thrown out; and after traversing a couple of hundred yards, the animals acknowledged themselves beaten and came to a standstill without having done further damage. Then, turning the sweat-lathered animals gently round, Dick drove them at a foot pace, snorting and curvetting, back to the spot where the owner, still insensible, lay upon the footpath, being tended by sympathisers, of whom Earle was one. As Dick came up and dismounted from the chariot, which he surrendered to an official, he was greeted with loud plaudits, the people clapping their hands and shouting "Aha! aha!"

They made way for him as he came up and joined Earle, who was already bending over the insensible charioteer, feeling the youth's body and limbs.

"Any damage done?" he inquired, as he came to a stand and looked down on his friend.

"Hillo! you back?" returned Earle. "You've soon done the trick, Dick. Did you manage to stop 'em without hurting anybody else?"

"Yes, luckily," answered Dick. "Pulled 'em up, and brought 'em back again. They're in the road there, now, in charge of a fellow who, I suppose, is a sort of policeman. Is that dude hurt at all?"

"Left arm broken; but that seems to be the full extent of the damage," answered Earle. "If I could get a couple of sticks and a bandage, I'd set it while he is still insensible. Just see if you can find anything that will do, Dick, there's a good chap."

Dick looked about him, but could see nothing at all suitable until his gaze happened to fall upon the window of a house opposite him, which was closed by a kind of jalousie shutter. A couple of slats from this shutter would serve excellently, and without ceremony he wrenched two of them out and, breaking them into suitable lengths, handed them to Earle. Then, while the latter brought the ends of the fractured bone into position and held them there, Dick adjusted the splints, as directed by Earle, afterwards assisted by a bystander, binding them firmly into position with the folds of his turban, which he unwound for the purpose.

By the time that this was done the friends of the injured man had been summoned and were on the spot; and to them Earle handed over his patient, directing them by signs what to do, after which the two friends returned to the palace, amid the admiring murmurs of all whom they encountered.

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### Earle settles a Delicate Matter.

The following day was marked by two incidents, namely, a visit to Earle and Dick from the parents of Mishail, the young man who had been injured by being thrown out of his chariot, and the presentation of the two friends to Juda, the King of Ulua, and his granddaughter, the Princess Myrra.

The visit occurred shortly after the friends had finished breakfast, and the visitors were accompanied and introduced by Kedah, the individual who, on the previous day, had begun the task of instructing the two white men in the Uluan tongue.

Kedah introduced the visitors by simply indicating them and pronouncing their names, that of the man whom he introduced first being Hasca, while he named the lady Tua.

Judging by the deference which Kedah displayed toward them the visitors were people of high degree; an inference which was borne out in the first instance by the stately dignity of their manner and the richness of their garb, and afterwards by the sumptuousness of their abode, which was almost palatial in its spaciousness and the magnificence of its furnishing. Hasca was, in fact, one of the most powerful and influential nobles of Ulua, and the acquaintance which began with this visit was destined to have important results.

Hasca was a very fine specimen of Uluan manhood, some forty years of age, standing about five feet ten inches in his sandals, of swarthy complexion, with coal-black hair, beard and eyes, the latter very keen and piercing. There was a distinct touch of hauteur in his manner to Kedah; but to Dick he and his wife were friendliness itself, while to Earle they showed that deep reverence which seemed to be the invariable rule with the Uluans.

The lady Tua seemed to be some five years younger than her husband, dark, and decidedly handsome, but, like all the Uluan women of mature age, she displayed a distinct tendency to become stout.

Kedah undertook the task of explaining to his two pupils the object of the visit, and to do the old gentleman justice, he succeeded fairly well, considering the difficulties which confronted him. He talked a good deal, but speech, of itself, naturally did not count for much. He supplemented his words, however, with such a wonderful wealth of gesture, accent and tone, that the two white men found it by no means difficult to guess the general drift of his speech, especially as he adopted the novel method of further elucidating his meaning by a number of amazingly clever sketches produced upon a kind of papyrus, with the aid of a very fine brush and a small bottle of some kind of ink, which he had taken the precaution to bring with him.

With these aids, then, he managed to make Earle and Dick understand that the visit was, first, one of thanks for the assistance rendered to the unfortunate Mishail on the preceding day, and next, a request that one, or both, would be so very obliging as to visit the patient, who was either very ill, or suffering much pain—they could not quite make out which was meant—and see what could be done for him.

To this request the comrades at once willingly assented, the more readily because, having, by a piece of extraordinarily good luck, obtained entrance to what they understood was, to all intents and purposes, a forbidden city, so far as outsiders were concerned, it was now good policy on their part to establish the best possible relations with its people. Accordingly, Earle routed out his medicine case and, tucking it under his arm, signified his readiness to go at once.

As it chanced, they had not very far to go, the Hasca residence being situated less than a mile from the palace, in an even more aristocratic looking avenue than the one in which the accident had occurred. They found Mishail, the patient, lodged in a sumptuous chamber, attended by his sister Lissa, a remarkably pretty girl, some sixteen years of age.

The patient appeared to be suffering great pain, was in a high state of fever, and in a condition bordering on delirium, which indeed was not surprising, since the unhappy youth was in a room upon the outer wall of which the sun beat all day, while the shutters of the two windows were closed and heavy curtains drawn across them. The room, in fact, was as stifling as an oven, and Earle's first act was to draw apart the heavy curtains and throw wide the shutters, thus letting in both air and light. Then he looked at the injured arm, which he expected to find properly dressed, naturally supposing that upon the arrival of the lad at his home, the family physician would be summoned and the fracture carefully attended to. To his great surprise, however, he found the limb in exactly the same state as when he

had left it, with the makeshift splints still there, but shifted out of position by the restless movements of the patient, and he afterwards learned that this was because they had not dared to tamper or in any way interfere with the work of the illustrious representative of Kuhlacan!

Upon the arm being unstrapped, Earle found, as he fully expected, that the bone had become displaced and needed re-setting; and this he at once proceeded to do, having first secured all that he needed in the way of effective splints and bandages, and put his patient under chloroform. He took care that this time the job was properly done, and the patient's arm so securely strapped to his body that it could not be moved; and as soon as Mishail had recovered from his state of anaesthesia, Earle administered a draught designed to reduce the fever, and, having made his patient as comfortable as possible, left him, promising to call again some time during the evening. And, not to dwell at undue length upon the incident, it may here be said that, under Earle's skilful treatment the patient made a rapid and perfectly satisfactory recovery, to the admiration, delight, and gratitude of the entire family.

Upon leaving Hasca's house, the two friends indulged in a walk through a few of the streets that they had not yet visited; consequently it was after noon when at length they got back to the palace. Here they found Bahrim, the major-domo, in their suite anxiously awaiting their return. The poor man was evidently in a state of great excitement concerning some matter which he found himself wholly unable to explain; but by dint of signs he at length contrived to make them both understand that he desired them to bathe, and afterwards don certain festive garments, to which he respectfully directed their attention. Understanding at last what the old fellow required of them, and also that he was in a most desperate hurry, the two friends disappeared, to re-appear, about a quarter of an hour later, bathed, perfumed—by their assiduous servants, who insisted upon the process—and clad in garments of so sumptuous a character that there could be no doubt the wearers were booked for some exceedingly important ceremony.

They were immediately taken in charge by the obsequious Bahrim, who, by expressive signs, invited them to follow him. Led by the major-domo, the two friends rapidly traversed several corridors until they reached another wing of the palace, finally halting before a closed door, outside which two soldiers, clad in golden armour and armed with sword and spear, stood on guard. Signing to the white men to remain where they were, Bahrim opened the door, disclosing a drawn curtain beyond it, and closed the door behind him, only to re-appear, some two minutes later, beckoning his charges to follow him.

Not until having received the salute of the guards as they passed through the re-opened doorway, and the door was closed behind them, was the shrouding curtain withdrawn, and then Earle and Dick found themselves in a small but most sumptuously furnished apartment, at the far extremity of which were seated two people, a man and a girl.

The man was apparently between fifty and sixty years of age—and a very fine specimen of Uluan manhood, as the visitors presently discovered when he rose to his feet. Like most Uluans, he was dark complexioned, his hair, beard and moustache, all of which he wore of patriarchal length, having been originally black, though now thickly streaked with grey. His features were well formed, clean cut, and aristocratic looking, as they might well be, seeing that the man was none other than Juda, the King of Ulua, and direct descendant of a long line of kings whose origin was lost in the mists of antiquity. He wore a long sleeved garment, which reached from his throat to his feet, the colour of it being red, with a wide border containing an intricate pattern wrought in black, white and gold braid. On his head he had a kind of turban of red, black and gold, surrounded by a coronet that appeared to be made of iron, set with many beautiful stones, while its front was adorned with an aigrette of crimson feathers, fastened by a brooch which also appeared to be made of iron. A broad belt, embroidered in red, black and gold, encircled his waist, attached to which was a great cross-hilted sword which looked as though it might have originally belonged to a crusader. His feet were shod with sandals of crimson leather, and his fingers decorated with several rings, apparently of wrought iron, each of which was set with a very fine stone, either emerald, sapphire, ruby, or diamond.

Taken altogether, Juda was a remarkably imposing specimen of manhood, and a worthy progenitor of his handsome granddaughter, Myrra. She, however, unlike her grandfather, was fair as a summer's dawn, of medium height, with violet eyes, and an extraordinary wealth of ruddy-golden hair which, confined to her head by a fillet of what looked like red velvet set with precious stones, rolled thence to far below her waist in great waves. Her outer garment, sleeveless, might have been copied from those depicted on the Greek vases in the British Museum and, like her grandfather's, was red in colour, adorned with braiding in the same colours as his. Her sandals were of white leather, and she wore armlets and bracelets of beautifully worked iron encrusted with precious stones.

As the two white men, intuitively guessing the identity of those in whose presence they found themselves, walked slowly up the room, Juda and Myrra rose to their feet and stood gazing with the utmost interest at their visitors. Juda's eyes were intently fixed upon the amulet which Earle now habitually wore fully exposed to view; but after the first glance, Myrra seemed far more interested in Dick, with his stalwart frame and good-looking features.

Arrived within some half-a-dozen paces of the two august figures, Earle and Dick came to a halt and bowed, while Bahrim, who had been bowing almost to the earth during his progress up the hall, now knelt down, touched the marble pavement three times with his forehead, and then, rising to his feet, introduced the visitors in a long speech, which was of course utterly unintelligible to the white men, though they gathered from certain of Bahrim's movements and gestures that the incident of the runaway horses, of Dick stopping them, and of Earle's attentions to Mishail, the injured charioteer, formed part of the speech.

The two royal personages listened with the closest attention to Bahrim's long speech, the king nodding emphatic approval as the major-domo, with much appropriate gesture, described Dick's dash into the road and stoppage of the runaway horses, while the eyes of the princess flashed and sparkled with excitement and undisguised admiration at what, from the expression of the listeners, seemed to be a deed of most unparalleled heroism. The speech came to an end at last; and then, as Bahrim stepped back with the air of a man who has performed his duty well, Juda advanced to Earle and fixed his eyes upon the amulet, intently examining its every detail. Then, to the amazement of the two white men, he turned to the princess, addressed a few words to her, beckoned her to his side, and the next moment the royal pair had prostrated themselves at Earle's feet, with their foreheads humbly bowed to the



pavement. They remained thus for nearly five minutes, until Earle, fearing that they were never going to rise from their humble posture, bent forward, touched each lightly upon the shoulder and, extending his hands, raised them gently to their feet, when, first Juda, and then the princess, reverently took the amulet in their hands, raised it to their foreheads, and bowing low, backed to their seats. The king then drew a handsome ring from his finger and, beckoning to Dick to draw near, slipped it on to the corresponding finger of the young Englishman's hand, while the princess, following suit, transferred one of her bracelets to Dick's wrist, each with a polite little speech, which Cavendish greatly regretted his inability to understand. This little ceremony performed, Juda bowed his dismissal of his visitors, and, led by Bahrim, the pair retired to their own quarters, a good deal puzzled by, yet very much pleased with, all that had passed.

As they went Earle turned to Dick and remarked:

"Gee! Dick, I guess this is some amulet, eh, when even a king and a princess of the blood royal do homage to it. Seems to me that I'm the most important personage in this realm; and as soon as we are able to understand the language a bit, and get the hang of things, I mean to use the power and influence which it bestows for the abolition of a few of the evils which are sure to exist, either in the religion or the government of the country."

"If you take my advice, you will leave this people's religion and politics alone," remarked Dick.

"I will," agreed Earle, "if there is nothing to find fault with, but not otherwise. Gee! What's the good of possessing such power as mine, if I don't make use of it? And, civilised as these people are in some respects, they are centuries behind the rest of the world in others; and I'm prepared to bet that, when we begin to understand things a bit, we shall find that there is plenty of room for improvement in a good many directions. And it is entirely against my principles not to do good when the opportunity offers. But—well, we shall see."

And now, something like a month passed without anything occurring worthy of detailed record. Kedah, the instructor told off to teach the two white men the Uluan language, was indefatigable in the execution of his rather difficult task, while his pupils were equally indefatigable in their efforts to master the tongue spoken by all around them, with the result that they made excellent progress and were no longer obliged to remain dumb when addressed. They made a good many acquaintances, and not a few friends, chief among whom were the king and the princess, whose demeanour toward the white men was, like that of everybody else, indeed, a curious mingling of reverence and friendliness. They spent a good deal of time walking and riding about the city and its outskirts, thus in the course of time becoming intimately acquainted with every street, road, alley and by-way; while Dick early found an outlet for his superabundant energies among the shipbuilders, whose ideas concerning the most desirable model for their craft were of the crudest possible character. He also discovered that they knew nothing about sails and how to use them, and he enjoyed himself immensely in rigging one of their most suitable lighters as a fore-and-aft schooner, and then watching the crew's amazement and delight as he navigated her across the lake and back in about a quarter of the time usually occupied upon the trip.

It was about this time, when their progress under the tuition of Kedah was so far advanced that they were able to catch a glimmer of the meaning of what was said to them or in their hearing, that the two white men began to sense a suggestion of steadily growing excitement among the populace generally, accompanied, on the part of those with whom they were more intimately acquainted, by a continually increasing curiosity, not unmingled with anxiety, concerning themselves and something with which, in some mysterious manner, they (Dick and Earle) seemed to be intimately connected. They became aware that they were being keenly watched, and their slightest words and actions carefully noted, as though some word or action of extreme significance or importance on their part was being eagerly expected and watched for. More particularly was this the case with regard to Earle; but although the two friends frequently exchanged ideas upon the subject, neither of them caught the slightest clue to the mystery until Zorah, the high priest, one day sought Earle and, with the assistance of Kedah, the tutor, broached the subject of the approaching great Septennial Festival in honour of Kuhlacan, the Winged Serpent, god of the Uluans, who was supposed to have his abode at the bottom of the lake.

This was the first that either Earle or Dick had heard of the festival, but bearing in mind the fact that the amulet which he wore bore the "sign" of Kuhlacan, and that it was undoubtedly the possession of this amulet which, from the first, had inspired the Uluans with that profound reverence which had everywhere been shown him, the American at once began to suspect that the Uluans were in some way connecting his presence in the country with the approaching festival, and possibly expecting him either to take a leading part in it, or it might be, to issue some definite pronouncement in connection with it. Therefore, as soon as Earle clearly realised the attitude of the people toward him, and realised also that one or more important, perhaps vital, issues hung in the balance awaiting his pronouncement, he assumed what he deemed to be the correct oracular pose, in accordance with which he now bade Zorah set forth his statement, or propound his questions, without circumlocution.

Then the whole terrible truth came out, though it had to be wrung from Zorah bit by bit, the high priest using his utmost endeavours to induce Earle to endorse certain generalities put forward by the wily ecclesiastic. But Zorah, clever and astute as he was, was no match for the American, who simply listened to the priest's statements as he made them, one by one, and then, without comment, bade the man pass on to the next point. Earle's imperfect knowledge of the Uluan language, coupled with Zorah's rapid, excited speech, made anything like a clear understanding of the case exceedingly difficult. But Earle was in no hurry; no sooner did he get an inkling of the actual object of the high priest's visit than he determined to arrive at a perfectly clear and definite understanding of the whole case; and in this he was ably seconded by Kedah, who spared no pains to make every point advanced by Zorah intelligible.

Condensed into a few words the issue raised was as follows:

On a certain date, the anniversary of which was now rapidly approaching, an annual festival was held in honour of Kuhlacan, in the course of which offerings were made to the god by every Uluan, who, embarking in a gaily-

decorated boat, proceeded to the middle of the lake and there cast into the depths the most precious thing in his possession, usually some costly article of jewellery made especially for the purpose. But every seventh year the festival assumed a much more serious and important character, inasmuch as that, in addition to the offerings above referred to, the nation as a whole was accustomed to make a joint offering; such offering consisting of the seven most beautiful maidens, between the ages of twelve and twenty, in Ulua, who, on this great day, were dressed in magnificent garments, loaded with jewels, until they could scarcely stand for the weight of them, and then taken to the middle of the lake, where, with much ceremony, and to the accompaniment of prayers and hymns chanted by the priests, they plunged into the lake, one by one, and were of course never again seen.

This ceremony, known as the Sacrifice of the Maidens, had been observed, it appeared, from time immemorial, and was regarded by the priests—who, being celibates, had no daughters to lose—as of the utmost importance and sanctity, to such an extent, indeed, that even the slightest approach to a murmur or protest against it was denounced as an unpardonable sin. Yet, as may be easily understood, the approach of every Septennial Festival was a time of infinite anxiety to all those who happened to have daughters eligible for the sacrifice, the more so that no family, not even royalty itself, was exempt, while the choice of the maidens rested with the priests, from whose decision there was no appeal. And the barbarity of the custom was accentuated in this particular year, from the fact that Princess Myrra was both by age and her remarkable beauty, to be certainly reckoned among the eligibles, while an impression had arisen, rightly or wrongly, that the priesthood, in order to manifest and assert their power, would assuredly so arrange matters that she should be included among the fatal seven.

It is supposed that the king's opposition to the immemorial custom really took definite shape on the day upon which his orphan granddaughter entered upon her thirteenth year. Be this as it may, it was not long afterwards that Juda, pious monarch as he was, ventured to hint to Zorah his opinion that the time had arrived when the Sacrifice of the Maidens might very well be abolished. But Zorah, a zealot of zealots, would not hear of such a thing, possibly because, among other reasons, the abolition would rob him of an appreciable amount of the power which he now possessed, and which power, it was hinted, had been more than once wielded to secure—for a substantial consideration—the elimination of a name from the list of the chosen. Juda, of course, might have approached the high priest with a similar proposal on behalf of his granddaughter; but there were several reasons against it, one of which was that the king was, according to his lights, a just monarch, and would have scorned to secure the princess's exemption by any such means, while another was that he shrewdly suspected Zorah would refuse to forgo such a marked demonstration of his power and, in addition, give himself away even at the cost of an enormous bribe.

Under these circumstances the king, while not actually revolting openly from the dictum of the high priest, had instituted among the people a practice of private prayer that the Septennial Sacrifice of the Maidens might be dispensed with; and when during the actual year of the Septennial Festival Earle had unexpectedly appeared, wearing an amulet bearing the "sign" of Kuhlacan, and demanding admission to Ulua, it is not to be wondered at if all who were in any way interested in the burning question should regard his appearance as, in one form or another, an answer to their petition. Whether that answer was to be in the affirmative or the negative was what everybody, and especially Zorah, were now particularly anxious to learn.

For Earle, with his as yet imperfect knowledge of the Uluan tongue to get a clear comprehension of a somewhat intricate case, took some time, and taxed Kedah's ingenuity to its utmost extent; but Kedah happened to be a vitally interested party, and believing, in common with everybody else, that Earle was in some mysterious fashion, either the incarnation of Kuhlacan, or an ambassador and representative of the god, he determined that, by hook or by crook, the white man should be made clearly to understand every point of the case, and he succeeded.

On the other hand, as point after point was unfolded and made clear to him, the quick-witted American began to realise that there was far more in the case than, at a first glance, met the eye; it quickly resolved itself, in fact, into a struggle between the priesthood and the laity; and it needed but a single glance at the fanatical high priest's stern, inflexible expression to assure oneself that he was not at all the sort of person to yield without a struggle. To add to the difficulty, Earle had no means of knowing what sort of a backing the priests would be likely to have, should the struggle for supremacy become an open one, which was by no means improbable. There was one point, however, upon which Earle's mind was very quickly made up, since the decision seemed to be left in his hands; let the consequences be what they might, the barbarous custom of human sacrifice must be abolished. Other developments must be left to take their course; but naturally, his influence, whatever it might amount to, would be thrown into the scale on the side of right and justice.

Therefore when at length Zorah, the high priest, had fully stated his case, and was expectantly awaiting an answer, Earle turned to him and said:

"Know, O Zorah, high priest of the god whom the people of Ulua call Kuhlacan, that to settle this important question of human sacrifice is one of the reasons for my presence in this country; and it was my purpose to have made the Divine Will known as soon as I had sufficiently mastered the intricacies of your tongue to render myself intelligible; but ye have forestalled me. The matter is urgent, I know, seeing that the Septennial Festival is at hand; yet, in virtue of the 'sign' which I bear"—here he lightly touched the amulet—"it would have been better had ye abided in patience until it was convenient for me to speak. Let that pass, however; your impatience was the outcome of your zeal, and it is therefore forgiven.

"Now in the olden time the Deity whom all worship ordained that a portion of His worship should consist in the offering of sacrifices involving the shedding of blood; and, for a time, such sacrifices, accompanied of course with prayer and praise, and the living of an upright life sufficed.

"But the sacrifices of which I have just spoken were merely the figure, reminder of, and substitute for, a still greater sacrifice which in the fulness of time was made, but news of which I am the first to bring ye; and that sacrifice has rendered all others involving the shedding of blood and the destruction of life unnecessary; hence it is the will of Him whom all worship, that the Sacrifice of the Maidens shall cease for ever. I have spoken."

Evidently this was not at all the kind of pronouncement which Zorah had anticipated; he looked not only greatly surprised, but also profoundly disappointed; and there was also something in the expression of his strongly marked features which seemed to indicate that he was by no means prepared to accept Earle's dictum unless supported by proof of some sort. For a minute or more he stood silent and thoughtful, turning over the problem which presented itself to him. Then, looking up, he propounded his question.

"Lord," he said, "thou sayest that sacrifice is no longer necessary. How then shall we henceforth worship, seeing that the very essence of our worship is sacrifice?"

"Nay," answered Earle; "ye mistake me, Zorah. I said not that sacrifice is no longer necessary; but that sacrifices involving the taking of life are no longer required. Ye are accustomed to slay and burn animals upon your altars; but that is an easy thing for ye to do, involving no real sacrifice indeed, since it is only the animals who suffer. And ye make annual sacrifice by casting into the lake the most precious thing ye possess. But even that is not sufficient; ye must make sacrifices that are still more difficult, and cost ye more than that. Ye must steadfastly resist every temptation to do evil, to injure an enemy, to rob, defraud, to utter untruths, to do anything which ye know to be wrong. And ye must do this, not only at stated times set apart for worship, but ye must do it always, whenever the impulse to do evil comes. So shall ye offer the most acceptable sacrifice which it is possible for man to render to his God."

Again Zorah bent his mind to the full comprehension of all that Earle's words meant.

"Then," said he at length, "the festivals will be as heretofore, excepting that the Sacrifice of the Maidens is forbidden?"

"Even so," agreed Earle, "but with a further difference. Ye are accustomed every year to cast some very precious thing into the lake. That sacrifice also is unnecessary, since Kuhlacan has no need of jewels or ornaments of any kind. Yet, sacrifice, being an act of worship and an expression of gratitude for mercies and benefits received, is good, and therefore shall be continued, but in a different form. Here in Ulua, as elsewhere, ye have poor and sick; and henceforth your sacrifice shall take the form of ministering to them and providing them with those things necessary to their comfort and welfare which, by reason of their poverty, they are unable to provide for themselves. Therefore, henceforward it shall be that every person desiring to offer sacrifice shall, instead of casting some precious thing into the waters of the lake, take its value in money to the temple, and present it to the priests, who in their turn shall expend it in the manner which I have indicated."

Zorah nodded. "The plan seems good," he said; "yet I foresee many difficulties in the way. We shall need continual guidance from thee, lord, if the innovation is to be successfully accomplished."

"True," assented Earle. "And ye shall have all the guidance that ye need. I will speak to thee again of this. Now go in peace."

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### Dick Cavendish loses his Temper.

Earle thought he had good reason to congratulate himself upon the success with which he had grappled the problem of human sacrifice in connection with the septennial festival in honour of Kuhlacan; for, at the first, his pronouncement seemed to meet with universal approval. Yet but a few days elapsed before it was apparent that even so humanitarian an edict as Earle's, one which, it might have been supposed, would appeal more or less directly to everybody, was not without its objectors. True, those objectors were only to be found among those who had not, and were not in the least likely to have, daughters who might be reckoned as "eligible"; yet it was really surprising to find how many of these there were. Precisely *why* they objected it was very difficult to ascertain; but it was thought that the reason was that the "sacrifice" afforded an exciting spectacle to persons of a cruel, morbid and vicious disposition. Also, it soon began to be hinted that although Zorah, the high priest, had seemed to acquiesce in the innovation, the priesthood were in reality opposed to and were secretly stirring up the people to rebel against it.

Meanwhile, however, Earle had earned the undying gratitude of the king, the princess, and several of the most powerful and influential of the nobles, who treated him and Dick with greater respect and reverence than ever. The preparations for the festival proceeded apace; and to compensate the masses for the loss of the most spectacular feature of the event, Earle and Dick inaugurated a series of games and sports, with valuable prizes for those successful in them, sufficient in number to occupy the entire day; so that when that day arrived, it not only passed without any marked demonstration of dissatisfaction, but was pronounced to be a distinct improvement upon the old order of things.

True, it was not possible for those who keenly watched the demeanour of the crowd to avoid noticing that the satisfaction was by no means general; and another disconcerting fact in connection with the festival was that, when it was over and Zorah was requested to report to Earle the amount presented in the temple on that day, in lieu of the usual offerings cast into the lake, the sum named by the high priest was disappointingly meagre, amounting to less than a tenth of what had been anticipated. Earle mentioned privately to Dick his suspicion that there had been a tremendous amount of leakage somewhere, and expressed his determination to look into the matter at the earliest possible opportunity; but before he could do so his attention was distracted from it by other and more important happenings.

The first of these happenings was the sudden and wholly unexpected death of the king. When he retired to rest on the preceding night, Juda appeared to be in the enjoyment of perfect health; but when his servants entered the royal sleeping-apartment on the following morning to arouse his Majesty and attend him to the bath, he was found lying

dead upon his couch, with every indication that dissolution had taken place several hours previously. Of course, the court physicians were instantly summoned; but they could do nothing except pronounce that death had actually occurred, and that it was due to natural causes. To the great surprise of Earle and Dick, no attempt was made to hold a *post mortem*, with the object of ascertaining the actual cause of death; but a little judicious inquiry soon elicited the fact that such investigations were unknown in Ulua, the skill and knowledge of the physicians not having advanced so far. With the permission of the princess, Earle was present when the physicians viewed the body, and he was compelled to admit that there was nothing in its appearance to justify the slightest suspicion of foul play, which indeed nobody so much as hinted at. Earle gave it as his opinion that the cause of death was some obscure and unsuspected affection of the heart.

Simultaneously with the summoning of the physicians upon the discovery of the royal demise, the "Council of Nobles"—a council, the functions of which correspond in some measure with those of the British Cabinet—was summoned to the palace; and it was to the members of this that the physicians formally reported the death of the king. Thereupon steps were immediately taken for the public announcement of the event, which took place at noon of the same day, the heralds proclaiming the death of the king and the accession of the Princess Myrra to the throne, first in the square before the palace, and next in four other squares situated respectively in the northern, southern, eastern, and western quarters of the city. And at the same time the state embalmers were called in and the body was handed over to them that they might at once begin the long and elaborate process by means of which the subject is rendered practically impervious, for all time, to the influences of decay.

The young queen was now allowed a clear week of complete retirement, in order that she might give free vent to her natural grief at the loss of her grandfather, and prepare herself for the discharge of the important duties which would now devolve upon her, during which period she was left entirely to herself, and was not asked to transact business of any sort whatsoever. At the expiration of the week she emerged from her seclusion, a little pale and worn-looking, but to all appearance perfectly calm, as the two white men were rejoiced to see, for it now transpired that the religious beliefs of the Uluaans were such as to preclude anything in the nature of deep or lasting sorrow at the loss of relatives, an article of their faith being that the departed, unless they happened to be notoriously evil livers, found everlasting peace and happiness in a sort of Elysium, and that therefore there was no occasion for prolonged grief.

No sooner, however, did the young queen emerge from her temporary seclusion than she found herself face to face with a problem which, unless all the conditions are favourable, may easily resolve itself into one of the most unpleasant which a young woman so placed can be called upon to solve.

For it now appeared that Myrra occupied a position unique in the annals of Uluaan sovereignty, being the only female who had ever succeeded to the throne. All the past monarchs had been male, from time immemorial; and the fact that a female had now succeeded, and she only a young girl, filled the Council of Nobles with consternation, which is easily to be comprehended, when it is remembered that in Ulua women are regarded as being so far inferior to men that they are considered as mere chattels and but little better than domestic animals. A Council of Nobles had already been convened to discuss so novel and disconcerting a situation, at which one more than usually daring spirit had actually ventured to suggest the election of one of themselves to fill the vacated throne. But this suggestion had been promptly vetoed by Lyga, the "Keeper of Statutes," who, referring to the musty tome in which were the laws relating to the government of Ulua, reminded the council that the law of succession explicitly provides that, upon the death of the sovereign, his next immediate successor becomes monarch. Or, failing an immediate successor, through pre-decease—as in the present case—then, the immediate successor of him who should have succeeded comes to the throne. The title of Princess Myrra to the throne was thus indubitably established, and the only question really before the council was how so unique a situation was to be met. A long and heated discussion followed, in the course of which two facts were clearly established, the first of which was that, by the law of succession, Myrra was now the Queen of Ulua; and the second, that the idea of being governed by a woman was utterly distasteful to the members of the Council of Nobles. Finally, it was decided that, since by immemorial custom, the Uluaan wife was the subject of her husband, the only thing to be done was to request the queen to marry, when her husband would become virtually king. This decision was regarded as a quite satisfactory solution of the difficulty; and it was immediately proposed that a list of approved names should be there and then prepared for submission to her Majesty, and that she should be invited to select from that list the person whom she would accept as her spouse.

So far, so good. But now, at the very moment when the great difficulty appeared to have been surmounted, other and equally awkward difficulties at once began to arise. The position of husband to the queen was one which naturally appealed to every member of the council, and equally naturally, each member claimed the right to have his name included in the list. Sachar, the most powerful of the nobles—he who had suggested the election of one of themselves to fill the throne—seized a parchment and, with the air of an autocrat, at once inscribed his own name at the head of the list, without deigning to inquire whether such action was or was not acceptable to his colleagues. Then, still retaining the pen in his hand, he glanced round at the assemblage and said:

"I propose that the next name upon the list shall be that of Lyga, the Keeper of Statutes."

For a moment the members regarded each other in amazement; then, under the impression that Sachar was perpetrating an ill-timed jest of more than questionable taste, they broke into a storm of protest; for Lyga was a little wizened, dried-up man, close upon eighty years of age.

But Sachar answered their protests with a stare of haughty surprise that quickly silenced them, for not only was he the most powerful man among them, but he was also of a headstrong, domineering disposition, impatient of opposition and quick to resent anything that in the least degree savoured of it. He was by no means popular, either with his colleagues or with the people at large; but he was greatly feared, because of the immense power and influence which he commanded, and the unscrupulous manner in which he wielded it.

"What mean ye?" he fiercely demanded. "Am I to understand that ye object to Lyga as unsuitable? And if so, upon what grounds? Is he not the 'Keeper of Statutes,' and as such, the most suitable man for the position of virtual ruler

of Ulua? For who among ye knows a tithe so much as he of the laws by which we are governed; or who so likely to see that those laws are maintained in perfect integrity?"

"So far, perhaps ye are right, Sachar," retorted Lyga, who was the only man present entirely devoid of fear of the formidable noble. "But is my age to be counted as nothing? Am I a suitable consort for a girl of sixteen? Ye know that I am not; and ye know, too, that if the choice rested between me and thee, thou would'st be the chosen one. Go to! Ye are astute, Sachar, but not astute enough to deceive old Lyga. If ye are taking it upon yourself to propose names, propose those of men who shall not only be capable of efficiently discharging the duties of their exalted position, but who shall also be acceptable to her Majesty in point of age and disposition. I say that, in nominating such a man as myself, ye are lacking in respect and consideration to your sovereign."

There was a low murmur of approval at this fearless, straightforward speech from the old man, hearing which, Sachar, who perceived that his ruse had been seen through, savagely dashed down the pen and, wheeling round upon his colleagues, exclaimed:

"So ye approve of and endorse the unworthy insinuation which Lyga has preferred against me? It is well! Proceed ye with your nominations, uninfluenced by me. My aim was to nominate those who, by wisdom and experience, are most suited to rule over us, irrespective of age or other considerations. But since ye have seen fit to suspect my motives, nominate whom ye will. Understand this, however, I demand that my name shall be included, for I am at least as capable of governing as any man among ye; and understand this also, that I retain my right to vote against those nominated whom I may regard as unsuitable."

And therewith Sachar bowed to the assembly, a bow in which scorn and contempt were about equally expressed, and stalked out of the chamber.

For a few moments consternation reigned supreme among those who remained, for they knew Sachar well, and clearly understood that, quite unwittingly, they had made a bitter and implacable enemy of the most powerful and unscrupulous man in Ulua. But presently Lyga grappled with the situation and, with a few carefully chosen words, rallied his colleagues upon their alarm, which he assured them was altogether disproportioned and uncalled for, and brought them back to the business in hand, with the result that, after a long and acrimonious discussion, a list was drafted, containing some twenty names, for submission to her Majesty.

In due course the list was presented, with all the state and ceremony which so momentous an occasion demanded. And then consternation again reigned; for the young queen, after carefully perusing the list, handed it back to Sachar, who had presented it, with the calm pronouncement that none of the names therein was acceptable to her!

Thereupon the council retired in confusion; another meeting was held, another list prepared—in which Sachar insisted that his name should be included, notwithstanding the queen's previous rejection; and her Majesty was requested to name an early date for its presentation, which she did.

The second presentation took place at about half-past nine o'clock in the morning, a few minutes prior to which the Council of Nobles, having previously assembled in the antechamber, filed in and took their places. These were immediately followed by a squadron of the queen's bodyguard, fully armed, under the command of their officer, who drew them up across the lower end of the chamber, completely blocking all means of exit or entrance, except through the doorway at the upper end of the chamber, used exclusively by the monarch and his or her personal attendants. This done, a court messenger was dispatched to acquaint the queen that the council had assembled; and a few minutes later her Majesty entered, heralded by a flourish of trumpets moulded out of a sort of terra-cotta, and, accompanied by the ladies and officers of her household, among whom were Earle and Dick.

With slow and dignified step her Majesty moved to the throne and, bowing to the assembled council, seated herself, at the same time signing to the two white men to stand one on either side of her, to the undisguised astonishment of the nobles and the scarcely concealed indignation of Sachar.

A short pause now ensued while the members of council, who had risen upon the queen's entrance, seated themselves. Then Sachar, who occupied the place at the head of the table on the queen's right hand, rose to his feet and, addressing her Majesty, made a lengthy speech, in which he set forth, in considerable detail, all the reasons which had led up to the present action of the council, reminded her of her rejection of the first list presented, and in veiled dictatorial tones, ventured to express the hope that her Majesty would experience no difficulty in selecting a name from the list now about to be laid before her. Then he unrolled the parchment and, with a bow which seemed to say: "This is your last chance, so make the best of it," laid it upon the table before her.

Bowing in return, and with just the faintest suggestion of a smile lurking about her lips and in her eyes, Myrra stretched forth her hand and, taking the parchment began to read it. But no sooner had her eyes rested upon it than she laid it down again.

"How now, my Lord Sachar!" she exclaimed. "What means this?" And she laid her finger upon the place where his name again occupied the head of the list. "Have ye here the list which was first submitted to me?"

"No, your Majesty, we have it not here," answered Sachar. "Understanding that the names therein were unacceptable, we thought it unnecessary to produce it. But it can be procured in a very brief space of time, if your Majesty so desires."

"I do so desire," remarked the queen. "Let it be brought forthwith." And she sank back in her seat to await the arrival of the document.

A few minutes later Lyga, in whose charge it was, appeared with the first list, which he laid open upon the table before the queen. He wore a smile of amusement as he hobbled back to his place, for in common with most of the

members of council, he pretty shrewdly guessed what was impending, and he would very cordially welcome anything that savoured of a snub administered to the haughty and domineering Lord Sachar.

“So!” continued the queen, placing a slim forefinger upon each of the documents. “I felt sure I was not mistaken. The name of my Lord Sachar heads each of these documents. Yet I think it will be remembered that, only a few days ago, I distinctly stated that *none* of the names in this list”—tapping Number 1 with her left forefinger—“was acceptable to me. How comes it, then, that a name once rejected by me is again submitted for my approval?”

And, so saying, Myrra stretched forth her hand and, taking the reed pen which Lyga smilingly handed to her, drew it firmly and deliberately through Sachar’s sprawling signature.

For a moment there was a breathless hush, while the very atmosphere seemed to shudder in anticipation of that tempestuous and irreparable outbreak on the part of Sachar which the queen’s deliberate snub might be expected to provoke. The man’s sallow visage grew black with fury, his eyes blazed lightnings down upon the head of the girl who was smilingly erasing his name, his fists clenched until the knuckles showed white, and his beard and moustache bristled like the mane of an angry lion. Indeed, so menacing was his aspect that Dick Cavendish, with a single stride, interposed his own bulky form between that of the queen and the infuriated Sachar, into whose flashing eyes he stared so threateningly that the noble suddenly found a new object for the vials of his wrath. But Dick simply did not care a fig for Sachar or his anger; he already knew the man pretty well by reputation, and instinctively understood that there was but one way to deal with a bully, therefore he laid a heavy hand upon the noble’s shoulder, glared as savagely at him as he knew how, and whispered—a whisper which reached the ears of every occupant of the table:

“Have a care, my lord; have a care! Restrain yourself, sit down if you don’t want me to wring your neck for you!”

And Sachar, who had never in his life before been cautioned, much less threatened, sank into his seat, speechless and utterly overwhelmed with amazement, for the moment, at the discovery that there actually existed an individual who was not afraid of him.

Meanwhile, the queen, with the pen still in her hand, was thoughtfully considering the list before her and calmly and deliberately erasing name after name, until not one remained. Then, with a smile, Myrra glanced at the faces turned toward her, and remarked:

“I am sorry, my lords, that you should have been put to so much trouble to no purpose, but the names in this list are no more acceptable to me than were those in the first.”

Sachar had been watching the steady process of erasure with fast growing anger. He believed he began to see the full meaning of the queen’s action. She did not intend to wed at all if she could help it, and unless she could be compelled to do so, his chance of becoming king was gone. If she could only be induced to name some person as acceptable, he believed he could find means to persuade that person to waive the honour in his (Sachar’s) favour; but if she would not do so, what was to be done? Therefore, when the queen lightly pushed the rejected list from before her, Sachar sprang to his feet and, addressing the assembly at large, said:

“My lords, we seem to be singularly unfortunate in our endeavours to find a consort in every way acceptable to her Majesty. To me it seems possible that we may compile list after list of names regarded by ourselves as in every respect eligible, and every list shall meet with a fate like unto that now upon the table. I would therefore venture to suggest that the process be reversed, and that instead of our drafting a list and presenting it for her Majesty’s approval, the Queen be requested to prepare a list of persons acceptable to her, and submit it to us. Then we, in council assembled, will take that list, give it our most careful consideration, and decide whether there be any names in it of which we can all conscientiously approve. What say you, my lords; does my proposal seem acceptable to you?”

A momentary silence followed this proposal; then, one after another, the assembled nobles briefly expressed their acquiescence, finishing up with old Lyga, who pithily remarked:

“If her Majesty approves your proposal, my Lord Sachar, I see not why any of us should disapprove.”

“That being the case—” began Sachar. But the queen stopped him with uplifted hand.

“One moment, if you please,” she said. “If I understand the council aright, their purpose in all this talk about lists, is to hurry me into marriage, irrespective of my own inclinations. Now, my Lord Lyga, before we proceed farther into this matter, I wish to ask you, as Keeper of Statutes: Is there in existence a law compelling me to wed at the bidding of my Council of Nobles?”

“I am not aware of any such law, your Majesty,” answered Lyga. “Nay, I will go farther than this, and say that, knowing the statutes intimately as I do, there is no such law.”

“Good!” answered the queen. “I have never heard of any such law, but in view of my council’s somewhat high-handed action, I thought it possible such a law might exist, of which I had not heard. You say that there is no such law; and I trust my council will accept your assurance as proof of its non-existence. Now, one more question. Is there a law prohibiting an unmarried woman from ruling Ulua?”

“No, your Majesty, there is no such law,” answered Lyga. And the glance of triumph which he flashed at Sachar seemed to say that he was glad of it.

“Again, good!” remarked the queen. “My thanks to you, my Lord Lyga, for making this matter perfectly clear. And my thanks to you also, the members of my council, for the keen interest which you have been pleased to manifest in a matter which, now that it comes to be investigated, seems to concern me alone. Believe me, I appreciate that

interest at its true and full value; but I beg that you will not trouble yourselves further in the matter, for the thought of marriage has not yet occurred to me, and at the present moment I am not prepared to entertain a proposal from anyone. When I am, I will let you know, and the matter can be re-opened. Meanwhile, I will seize this opportunity to say that I believe I, though unmarried, shall be able, with your wise advice and assistance, to govern Ulua as efficiently as though I enjoyed the help of a husband."

For a moment the members of council were stricken dumb with amazement and consternation at the quiet, self-possessed firmness with which this young girl deliberately set herself in opposition to their combined wishes. And the worst of it was that, as they now fully realised, she was acting entirely within her rights.

They were still struggling with their emotions when Sachar, always bitterly impatient of opposition, and always accustomed to act upon the impulse of the moment, sprang to his feet, his eyes ablaze with fury, and shouted:

"My lords, fellow members of the Council of Nobles, are you going to submit without protest to this most monstrous disregard of our wishes? Because, if you are, I am not. I say that, law or no law, we will not be governed by a woman. The queen *must* and *shall* marry forthwith; and if she will not choose for herself a husband, acceptable to us all, we will choose one for her and compel her to marry him, by force, if necessary—"

He stopped suddenly and sank helplessly back into his seat, forced thereto by the irresistible pressure of Dick's hands upon his shoulders, the grip of which threatened to crush his shoulder-blades together. And, looking up, he found Dick Cavendish towering over him with a look in his eyes that seemed to spell sudden death to the rash offender. For three or four seconds Dick, still retaining that frightful and agonising grip upon Sachar's shoulders, glowered at the now writhing noble; then he shook the unfortunate man with such furious violence that Sachar's teeth not only clicked together like castanets, but they also bit his tongue through as he attempted to speak.

By this time the whole chamber was in an uproar, every man having started to his feet in terror of what should happen next. A few of the more timid ones were hastily leaving their seats and beating a precipitate retreat toward the door, only to be stopped, however, by the crossed halberds of the guard. Lyga was the only noble who seemed in nowise disconcerted by so extraordinary a happening, and he stood smiling benevolently on Dick while the latter was manhandling the enraged yet terrified Sachar. Several of the other nobles, however, anxious to curry favour with Sachar, hastened to his assistance, and strove unavailingly to break Dick's grip, while the captain of the guard, accompanied by a file of soldiers, having responded to Dick's call, now stood uncertainly by, at a loss to know whether or not he ought to obey the young Englishman's order to arrest a noble and member of the council.

This state of uncertainty on the part of the captain of the guard did not pass wholly unnoticed by those present, a few of whom loudly protested against the arrest as illegal, in that it had been ordered by one without authority.

"Ha! say you so?" cried the queen, also rising to her feet. "Then that is a matter to be easily remedied." Turning to Dick, she added:

"My Lord Dick, I appoint you Captain-General of my bodyguard, here and now. And I authorise you to arrest my Lord Sachar and lodge him in prison."

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## Chapter Sixteen.

### An Ominous Disappearance.

The startling character of the entire episode, coupled with the suddenness and utter unexpectedness of its development, and the equally unexpected firmness and decision of character manifested by the young queen, exercised such a paralysing effect upon the members of council that, as with one accord, they sank back into their seats and in silence watched the arrest and removal of Sachar from the Council Chamber. And before any of them could pull themselves together to take any definite action, the queen rose to her feet and, bowing to the assembly with a serene and most engaging smile, said:

"My lords of the council, you are dismissed."

Then, turning to the two white men, she murmured, in a voice so low that only they two caught the words:

"My lords Dick and Earle, give me the favour of your company to my own apartments. I desire to consult with ye both." And, accepting the support of Dick's proffered hand, she passed out of the Council Chamber through the doorway by which she had entered, and, followed by her retinue, made her way to the small but beautiful chamber where she and her grandfather had first received the two white men.

Arrived here, she seated herself on a daïs at the upper end of the apartment and, directing her ladies to retire to the other end of the room, where they would be out of earshot, she rested her chin upon her hand, as though in deep thought, and so remained for the space of nearly five minutes.

Then, raising her eyes, she glanced first at Dick and then at Earle, who stood respectfully before her, and said:

"My lords, I am in a strait, and desire the benefit of your advice. Ye are from the great world without, and have doubtless mingled freely with the teeming millions of whom ye have spoken to the late king, my beloved grandfather. Ye have told him of the marvellous doings of those millions, of their wonderful enterprises and inventions, and of the rivalry that exists between them; and I doubt not that, mingling with them, as ye must have done, ye have acquired wisdom, beside which the wisdom of the wisest of us in Ulua will seem foolishness.

"You did right, my Lord Dick, in ordering Sachar's arrest for his arrogant and insulting speech, but I doubt whether I

should have had the courage to take so bold a step. For I know that it will mean war between him and me—a war of plotting and scheming, if not of actual bloodshed—and I now wish to know whether, in the contest which I feel to be inevitable, I may depend upon your advice and, if necessary, your active co-operation?”

“You may, your Majesty,” answered Dick and Earle in the same breath.

“I thank you with all my heart,” returned the queen, glancing up at them with a bright smile. “I feel,” she continued, “that in the struggle which I foresee, I shall have to rely upon you almost entirely, for I believe that the members of my council will, with very few exceptions, be against me. Go, therefore, and consult together as to the steps which ye would recommend me to take; and then come to me again.”

She presented her hand, which Dick and Earle bent over and kissed respectfully before retiring from the presence.

Upon reaching their own suite of apartments, the two friends were surprised to find Lyga, the Keeper of Statutes, awaiting them. There was a look of concern, not altogether unmingled with amusement, in his expression as he rose and advanced to meet them.

“My lords,” he said, “it has just come to my ears—and I thought that ye, and you in especial, my Lord Dick, in your capacity of Captain-General of the Queen’s Bodyguard, ought to know—that Sachar, together with the officer and the file of soldiers into whose custody ye delivered him, has disappeared.”

“Disappeared!” echoed Dick. “How mean ye, my Lord Lyga?”

“Exactly as I have said,” replied Lyga. “Sachar has not been lodged in prison, as ye ordered, and the officer and file of soldiers are not in their quarters, as they should be. I rather anticipated some such occurrence, and because my sympathies are wholly with the Queen, and I am on her side, I made it my business to leave the Council Chamber immediately upon her Majesty’s departure, and follow the route that Sachar should have taken. I ascertained that he left the palace, accompanied by the officer and soldiers; but he had not reached the prison when I arrived there, and it is certain that now he will not do so. My own conviction is that, being a man of known power and almost unlimited wealth, he found no difficulty in bribing the officer and soldiers to allow him to escape, and has very possibly carried them away with him to protect them from the consequences of their treachery.”

Dick and Earle regarded each other intently for a moment, and then nodded with understanding.

“My Lord Lyga,” said Dick, “I thank you for your promptitude in bringing me this information, and also for the assurance of your sympathy with the cause of the Queen. Doubtless ye have already recognised that we, too, are wholly and unreservedly on her side, to such an extent, indeed, that we are resolved not to depart from Ulua until her Majesty and her authority are firmly established. Not only so, but we intend to do everything in our power to bring that consummation to pass. I speak for my Lord Earle as well as myself. You corroborate me, don’t you?” he added, turning to Earle.

Earle nodded emphatic assent, and Dick resumed:

“Is your sympathy with her Majesty strong enough to induce you to co-operate with us in her cause, my lord?”

“Assuredly,” assented Lyga, “else had I left ye to learn of Sachar’s escape at your leisure.”

“Good!” approved Dick. “Being strangers among you, we are naturally to a very great extent ignorant of the characters of Sachar and those who are likely to take part with him against the Queen; therefore we shall be glad to hear your opinion as to the probable outcome of Sachar’s act of defiance. How, think ye, will it end?”

“I will tell you,” answered Lyga. “Knowing Sachar and his ambitions so intimately as I do, I think this is what has happened and will happen. Sachar doubtless went direct from the Council Chamber to his own home, provided himself with all the money he could lay his hands upon at the moment, and then probably proceeded to the house of Nimri, the husband of his sister, where, having explained the happenings of this morning, he has arranged with Nimri to manage his affairs for him, collect his moneys, and provide him with such funds as he may need, from time to time. These arrangements made, Sachar will almost certainly go into hiding, and, from his place of concealment, endeavour to organise a revolt against the Queen’s authority, with the object of either dethroning her, or—if the people will not permit that—compelling her to marry him.”

“So,” said Dick, “that means something very like civil war, does it not?”

“It does,” agreed Lyga, tersely.

“And, in such an event, how think ye will it go?” demanded Earle.

Lyga considered deeply. “It is a difficult matter to forecast,” he presently replied. “On the one hand, such a thing as a revolt against the royal house has never yet occurred in Ulua, and, broadly speaking, the Uluans, as a people, will be opposed to it. For it would be an upsetting of one of Ulua’s fundamental laws, and the people at large will naturally argue that if it is possible to upset one law, it will be possible to upset others, with consequences which no man can foresee. On the other hand, Sachar is, far and away, the most powerful and influential man in the kingdom. There are few, if any, who love him, but there are many who, believing in his power, may be prepared to help him in the hope of being lavishly rewarded in the event of his being successful, while there are many more—probably thousands—who, directly or indirectly, are so dependent upon his favour that they will feel they have no choice but to help him, if called upon. And you may rest assured that he *will* call upon every man who is in the least degree under his influence. I fear it will be found that he will have a very large following.”

“In that case,” said Dick, “it appears to me that prompt and energetic action is called for. And right here, my Lord



Lyga, is where you can be of the utmost service. I know little or nothing of the laws by which Ulua is governed, while you, I understand, have them at your fingers' ends. Tell me, therefore, how far does my authority, as Captain-General of the Queen's Bodyguard, extend?"

"It extends just as far as her Majesty may be pleased to permit," answered Lyga. "You are entitled, even without obtaining her Majesty's express permission, to take whatever steps you may deem necessary for the protection of the Queen's person; and, beyond that, you have only to obtain her Majesty's permission to render lawful any act performed by you in the maintenance of law and order."

"I see," returned Dick. "It would appear, then, that my powers are tolerably wide. Are they wide enough, think you, to justify me in seizing, on behalf of the Queen, all property belonging to Sachar?"

"With what object?" demanded Lyga.

"Primarily, to deprive him of what we English term 'the sinews of war,'" replied Dick, "or, in other words, the means to organise a campaign; and secondarily, with the object of impressing upon all whom it may concern that we who are taking the side of the Queen are fully prepared to suppress with a strong hand any attempt to deprive her of any of her rights or of her liberty."

"By Kuhlacan!" ejaculated Lyga. "Are ye prepared to adopt such stringent measures? We Uluans are a little apt to deprecate force, a little apt to parley and bargain, to compromise. I think that, as a people, we are so timorous that we would concede almost anything in order to avoid strong measures. And that is where Sachar has already the advantage. He is not timorous; on the contrary, he is bold, courageous, overbearing—he frightens people into surrendering to his will. And if ye also are prepared to be firm, resolute, fearless, I believe ye will conquer; for if once the people can be brought to realise that your determination is as strong and unshrinking as that of Sachar, there are many who will fear to join him, lest he fall and they fall with him. But it will not be well that the Queen shall be personally involved in the struggle which I foresee. She must remain personally aloof, passive and detached from it. The issues will be of too grim and strenuous a character for her to be brought into personal contact with them. She is too young, too inexperienced, too tender-hearted to grapple successfully with them; at a critical moment when perhaps her throne, her liberty, possibly even her very life, may be hanging in the balance, she might be tempted to yield, rather than fight for what is rightfully her own, in order to avert bloodshed. That is a trait of her character upon which Sachar will confidently reckon, therefore we who have her interests at heart must safeguard her from the effects of untimely weakness by inducing her to invest you with full power and authority to act in her behalf as may seem to you best, without being obliged first to submit the point to her. Thus, you and Sachar, not she, will be responsible for what may happen. Does such a prospect make you shrink?"

"It does not, friend Lyga," answered Dick.

"I am glad to hear you say so," returned Lyga, "for your view accurately coincides with my own. Would that I were young enough actively to support you! But what matters? My brain will be worth more to you than thews and sinews, and I tell you, my Lord Dick, that the best my brain can offer is and shall be at all times freely yours. I am ready, if need be, to back my wisdom and cunning against Sachar's courage and strength. And now, see ye, I advise that ye take immediate steps to seize every item of Sachar's property and goods that ye can lay hands upon. Give the matter into the hands of Acor, who met ye at the gate when ye first entered Ulua; he is a good man, staunch and—I believe—faithful, and such orders as ye may give him he will execute. Meanwhile, I will retire to mine own quarters and will there prepare a parchment investing you with full power to act as you may deem necessary in defence of the Queen's peace. And to-morrow you and I will go together and beseech her Majesty to sign it."

"Jove! the plot is thickening, with a vengeance," exclaimed Dick, when Lyga had left them. "But," he continued, "what puzzles me is, how it comes that I am suddenly boosted to the front and the top in such an extraordinary manner. What I mean is, that up to the present *you* have been *persona grata* here, and now, without rhyme or reason, it seems to me, I am pitch-forked—"

Earle smiled as he laid his hand on Dick's shoulder.

"My dear chap," he said, "if, as you say, I have thus far been the more important individual of the two here in Ulua, you know as well as I do that it has been solely by virtue of this Kuhlacan amulet that I wear. But you have only to glance into one of those mirrors which reflect our images to understand in a moment why a young girl like Queen Myrra should instinctively turn to you, rather than to me when—"

"Oh, I say! that's the most utter rot, you know—" began Dick, blushing furiously. But Earle again interrupted him.

"Rot, or not, my young friend," he said, "it is human nature, which, take my word for it, is pretty much the same all the world over. Besides, you must remember that it was you who intervened so vigorously when that bouncer, Sachar, threatened the Queen; therefore it was but natural that when those other johnnies began to protest against the illegality of your order for Sachar's arrest, her Majesty should at once invest you with the necessary authority to legalise your order. And, having made you Captain-General of her bodyguard, she will of course look to you to discharge the functions of the post. And as for me, I tell you frankly that I think, in choosing you, she showed herself to be a very wise little woman; for you are accustomed to responsibility and command. You go ahead, youngster, and fear nothing. I'll back you up to the last cent, whatever you do; and always remember that whenever you feel in need of information or advice, you have wise old Lyga to fall back upon, and he is a host in himself."

Thus reassured, Dick Cavendish summoned a servant and forthwith dispatched him to the adjacent barracks in which the officers and men of the bodyguard were lodged, with a message requesting Captain Acor's immediate attendance. And when, about a quarter of an hour later, Acor put in an appearance, Dick briefly recounted to him the morning's happenings, and wound up by directing him to tell off a sufficient number of men and with them proceed to search for and arrest Sachar, to take possession of and occupy not only Sachar's residence, but every other

building belonging to the man, and to seize and lodge in a place of security all Sachar's horses, slaves, and other property capable of being moved. Acor readily undertook to do this, assuring Dick that he believed he could enumerate every item of property belonging to Sachar, and that he would permit nothing to escape him. But he expressed some doubt as to his ability to arrest Sachar, who, he doubted not, had already found a secure hiding place. Dick was greatly gratified to observe that Acor seemed ready to take orders from him without evincing the slightest symptom of envy or jealousy at the fact of Dick being put over him, for he had rather feared something of the kind from all the officers of the bodyguard.

Late in the evening, Acor returned to the palace and reported that he had seized every particle of Sachar's property, but had been unable to discover the slightest clue to the whereabouts of the man himself, all his inquiries being met with the assurance that none of his relatives had seen anything of him since his departure from his house, that morning, to attend the meeting of the Council of Nobles. Acor added that, while he had not the slightest doubt that this statement was in the main true, he had just as little doubt that certain of the persons whom he questioned had lied, and among them he strongly suspected Sachar's major-domo, and the Lord Nimri, Sachar's brother-in-law. The former of these, however, as Acor pointed out, could render no further assistance to his master, since he and his fellow servants were now under the strict surveillance of the officer who had been put in possession of Sachar's principal dwelling; while, as for Nimri, he too was under surveillance, Acor having instructed two smart, keen servants of his own to relieve each other in maintaining a strict watch upon the noble's movements and to follow him whithersoever he might go, reporting to Acor regularly as they went off duty.

At the moment it appeared to both Dick and Earle that these precautions would prove sufficient, and would doubtless lead, in the course of a day or two, to the arrest of the recalcitrant noble; but when three days had passed bringing no news of Sachar, they decided upon the adoption of further measures and, having in the meantime, with Lyga's assistance, obtained the Queen's signature to the document giving Dick *carte blanche* to act in any manner that he might deem fit, Cavendish published a Proclamation declaring Sachar an outlaw, offering a substantial reward for such information as should lead to his arrest, and pronouncing outlawry against any and all who might be found to have afforded him refuge or succour of any kind.

This drastic step, they fully believed, would result in Sachar's discovery and arrest, especially as every house belonging to Sachar, and every person suspected of being in the slightest degree likely to help or even sympathise with him, was being strictly watched; but day after day went by with no discovery made, no smallest scrap of information coming to hand; and meanwhile the preparations for the state obsequies of the late king were so far advanced that at length the date was fixed for the ceremonial, which was to be of unparalleled pomp and magnificence.

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### The Fight in the Road.

The morning of the day which was to witness the imposing ceremonial of the obsequies of the late King Juda dawned brilliantly bright and fair, to the unqualified satisfaction of the Uluans, every one of whom counted upon witnessing some portion at least of the pageant, while the greater number were resolved to see practically the whole of it, and, with that intention, arose about midnight and betook themselves along the road leading to the royal sepulchre, which was a great cavern, situate some eight miles from the city, in the interior of which the bodies of the monarchs of Ulua had been deposited from time immemorial.

With the first appearance of dawn the streets of the city had begun to assume a festive appearance, which, to Dick and Earle at least, seemed distinctly incongruous until it was explained to them by Lyga—who came to them early—that the pageant was in nowise intended to be typical of a nation mourning the loss of its monarch (the theory being that the monarch never dies), but rather of the nation doing honour to one who, after ruling them wisely and well, has laid him down to enjoy a well-earned rest.

It was not, however, to furnish this explanation that Lyga had presented himself at such an early hour, but rather to inquire what progress, if any, had been made in the quest for the missing Sachar.

Dick was obliged to reply to this that, notwithstanding his utmost efforts, and in the following up of innumerable clues which had proved to be false, he had been unable to discover the whereabouts of the missing man, who indeed had disappeared as effectually as though the earth had swallowed him up.

"I feared so; I feared so," commented Lyga, in response to Dick's explanation. "I am inclined to the belief that he is being harboured by some friend whose power and influence are so great that he believes himself strong enough to defy you. And I fear that, all this time, Sachar has been using his own influence and that of his friend to plot some scheme whereby he may secure possession of the Queen's person for a sufficient length of time to compel her to marry him. Hitherto this has been impossible, for the simple reason that, thus far, her Majesty has never left the precincts of the palace, where of course she is safe. But to-day her Majesty goes forth to render the last honours to her beloved grandfather, and to witness, according to custom, the deposition of his body in the royal sepulchre; to-day, therefore, an opportunity may arise for the conspirators to attempt to secure possession of the Queen's person, if they deem themselves strong enough. And if not to-day, the opportunity must soon present itself; for it is manifestly out of the question that her Majesty shall become virtually a prisoner in her own palace. She must of necessity frequently go abroad and show herself to the people, otherwise they would soon begin to think, and to say, that she is afraid of Sachar; and that would but strengthen Sachar's hands and weaken her own.

"But mark ye this, my lords. It is in my mind that if, as I very strongly suspect, it is Sachar's intention to secure possession of the Queen's person, the attempt is likely enough to be made to-day, for the reason that to-day all Ulua

will be abroad, and therefore it will be the easier for a large body of Sachar's adherents to assemble together, and maybe form part of the funeral procession, without exciting comment or suspicion."

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when, the great wrought copper gates at the main entrance of the palace having been swung open, the queen's chariot emerged therefrom and was carefully piloted to its station immediately in the rear of the funeral car, to which, in the meantime, twelve magnificently caparisoned white horses had been yoked, the great cloths which covered the animals from head to heel being made of purple silk, lavishly embroidered in silver thread and weighted at the edges with heavy silver tassels. Their heads were decorated with long plumes of the royal colours, and their bridles were fringed with purple silk bands, scalloped and heavily embroidered in silver. All the horses taking part in the procession, from those in the queen's chariot down to the humble vehicle drawn by a single animal, were caparisoned exactly alike, by strict regulation. And after the chariots, some of which were drawn by six horses, yoked three abreast, came those who, not being wealthy enough to own a chariot, must follow on foot.

The horses having been yoked to the funeral chariot, Dick Cavendish mounted his powerful charger and gave the order for the bodyguard to form round it and the queen's chariot, which was at once done, the troopers forming a cordon six deep, which completely enveloped the two chariots. At the same moment the great doors of the temple were thrown open, and the priests, to the number of about one hundred and fifty, clad in white robes and turbans edged with turquoise blue, filed out through the portals of the building, walking with slow and measured steps, and playing a kind of dirge upon their queer-looking musical instruments, of which the most numerous consisted of long curved trumpets formed of a kind of terra-cotta. Zorah, the high priest, marched in the van bearing aloft a pole surmounted by an effigy of Kuhlacan, the Winged Serpent, while on either side of him walked acolytes swinging censers charged with certain aromatic substances, smouldering and throwing off thin wisps of perfumed smoke.

Down the great flight of the temple steps came the priests, and across the square, until they reached the foremost files of the bodyguard, when they wheeled to the left and proceeded along the appointed route, the funeral car and the rest of the procession getting into motion close behind.

Proceeding at the solemn pace which had been set by the priests at the outset, the funeral procession slowly wended its way along the road toward the place of sepulture, the route being lined on either hand by a continuous crowd of people of the humbler classes, who knew that it would be hopeless for them to attempt to file past the bier while it stood in the great square before the palace, the time allowed for this being only sufficient to permit the nobles and the more affluent classes to pay this last tribute to their dead king; those, therefore, who could not do this adopted the alternative of assembling along the highway and casting their little bouquets of flowers upon the road when the head of the procession approached.

The journey from the square to the great plain before the rocky cliff which contained the royal sepulchre occupied practically four hours, and another two hours elapsed before the tail end of the procession arrived and was arranged in position to witness the elaborate ceremony attending the consignment of the body to its last resting place; thus it was after sunset and the brief dusk of the tropics was falling upon the plain, enveloping it in a veil of mystery and cloaking many of the movements of the enormous crowd assembled, when at length, after the observance of the final rites, the queen, followed by such nobles as were entitled to be present, and the priests emerged from the great cavern. The funeral ceremonies were over, and it now only remained for those who had taken part in them to get back to their homes as speedily as might be.

Dick, in his capacity as Captain-General of the Queen's Bodyguard, and Earle, in the character of a highly distinguished individual closely connected in some mysterious fashion with the god Kuhlacan, were awaiting her Majesty at the entrance of the cave, and immediately upon her emergence they each offered her a hand and proceeded to lead her to a chariot, which was awaiting her at some little distance, the troopers of the bodyguard closing up in the rear of the trio and thus cutting them off from everybody outside the cordon.

No sooner was this accomplished than Earle began hurriedly to address the queen in a low voice:

"Your Majesty," he said, "we have the strongest reason for suspecting that a very formidable and determined attempt will be made to secure possession of your person to-night, during the progress of our journey toward the city. There is no time to enter into even the most brief of explanations, but the point is this: My Lord Dick and I have devised a plan to frustrate this atrocious plot, and all that we need is your Majesty's immediate and unqualified assent to enable us to put the plan into effect. It involves your trusting yourself alone with me while I take you back to the city and the palace by a shorter but very lonely route. Will you do it? It is the joint plan of my Lord Dick and myself, and it is our earnest desire and entreaty that you will be graciously pleased to assent to it."

"Of course," agreed the queen, with the utmost readiness. "I will trust myself with my Lord Dick and you anywhere."

"I greatly appreciate the confidence which your Majesty is pleased to put in me," remarked Earle. "But I fear that I have not succeeded in making myself quite understood. The success of our plan demands that you come with me *alone*. My Lord Dick cannot come with us. It is necessary that he shall remain with the bodyguard."

"Necessary that he should remain?" objected the queen. "Nay, surely not. Let him turn over the command for the moment, to Acor, and come with us. It is not that I am afraid to trust myself alone with you, my lord," she added, in response to a sigh and a gesture of disappointment from Earle, "but—but—"

"Oh yes, your Majesty, of course I know," responded Earle wearily, "but what you suggest simply cannot be done. You see—Oh! hang it all," he continued, breaking into English, "tell the child that she simply *must* do as we ask; that you wish it; or she'll stand here arguing until further orders."

The unmistakable tone of annoyance and impatience with which Earle ended his speech caused the queen to glance at him with big, startled eyes; but when Dick bent over her and whispered an entreaty that she would fall in with the plan, so that he might thus be relieved of a very heavy load of anxiety, she acquiesced without further ado, while

Earle triumphantly chortled, in English:

"I told you so!"

They were by this time close to the royal chariot, near which stood a dismounted trooper, holding his horse by the bridle with one hand, while over his other arm he held unfolded the long, black military cloak in which officers and men alike were wont to envelop themselves at night time to protect their armour and accoutrements from the drenching night dews.

Without saying a word, Dick at once took the cloak from the man and wrapped it round the queen, enveloping her from head to foot; next he drew the hood over her head and so arranged it that while the girl could see clearly, her features were hidden in the deep shadow cast by the overhanging hood. And, this done, he seized her beneath the arms and tossed her light as a feather, into the saddle, carefully set her feet in the stirrups, and afterwards arranged the voluminous folds of the cloak in such a fashion that the rich dress which she wore was completely concealed. Then, one on each side of the horse's head, Dick and Earle led the animal to the head of the troop, while at a sign from Dick, the dismounted trooper entered the royal chariot and drew the curtains close.

It was by this time quite dark, save for the illumination afforded by the stars, which brilliantly studded the heavens and just shed a bare sufficiency of soft, sheeny light to reveal the white road, and the nearer trees and clumps of bush standing out against the opaque black background of the surrounding hills. So far as could be seen, there was nothing on the road ahead of the royal chariot and its escorting squadrons of horsemen, for to precede them was contrary to etiquette; therefore as soon as Dick and Earle reached the head of the returning procession they mounted their horses and gave the word to march at a trot, the two white men leading, with the queen riding between them, while the nobles, accompanied by their retinues, came closely behind, for all now seemed anxious to reach the city with as little delay as possible. In this fashion about a mile and a half of the return journey was accomplished, and a bend of the road was reached where a sort of bridle path bore sharply off to the right, forming a short cut to the city, but practicable only for horsemen or pedestrians, because of its narrowness, the road through the scrub being only wide enough to permit the passage of a single horseman. Here Earle left the escort and, closely followed by the queen, plunged into the by-path, where their forms instantly became merged in the deep shadow of the surrounding bush, while the soft, sandy character of the soil so muffled the hoof-beats of their horses as to render them inaudible above the sounds caused by the passage of the horses and chariots along the high road. Ten seconds after they had parted from the main body, Earle and his companion had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed them up, while none but the leading files of the escort had witnessed their going. Five minutes later, Dick uttered a low word of command, and a sergeant, accompanied by four files of troopers, separated themselves from the main body and pushed forward along the main road at a canter acting as scouts.

Scarcely had these men vanished in the distance when the sky on the left assumed an appearance as though being overspread by a soft golden radiance, throwing the outline of the encircling cliffs in that direction into sharp relief, the stars thereabout paled into insignificant pin points of light ere they vanished altogether, and presently up sailed the full moon into view above the hill tops, instantly flooding the valley with her soft, mysterious effulgence, until in the course of a few minutes objects were almost as clearly visible as in the light of day, while the multitudinous polished metal domes and roofs, of the distant city shimmered under the clear rays like the waters of another lake.

Some ten minutes later, a clear, shrill whistle sounded far ahead, which was the preconcerted signal announcing that the scouts had come into touch with an opposing body of some description, and Dick immediately gave the order for the bodyguard to roll up their cloaks and hold themselves ready for action. Scarcely had this been executed when the sergeant in command of the scouts came thundering back, with the intimation that a dense mass of footmen, armed with bow, spear and sword, occupied the road about half-a-mile ahead, completely blocking it, and that the officer in command—no less a personage than the missing Lord Sachar—contemptuously refused to budge an inch, and insolently demanded immediate speech with the Captain-General.

"He does, does he?" ejaculated Dick. "All right, he shall have it; and much good may it do him!"

The incident of the sergeant's return had not for a moment interrupted the progress of the bodyguard, that official having simply wheeled his horse in the road and drawn in alongside Dick as the latter came up, riding a few paces in advance. Then, keeping pace with the Captain-General, the sergeant made his brief report, before falling back into his proper place in the troop. Five minutes later, upon rounding a bend in the road, Dick found himself within fifty yards of the opposing force, which had been posted with some skill right across the road, at a point where the growth of scrub on either hand was so dense as to render it impossible for either infantry or cavalry to pass through it and so execute an outflanking movement.

"Halt!" shouted Dick to the troopers in his rear; and as the horsemen reined in and came to a standstill, he allowed his hand to drop to the butt of one of the four automatic pistols which he had taken the precaution to thrust into his belt before setting out from the palace in the morning. Drawing forth the weapon and allowing the hand which held it to drop to his side, he urged his horse forward until he was within a few yards of the front rank of the opposing force, when he drew rein, and demanded:

"Who are ye, and where is your leader? Let him stand forth and explain the meaning of this outrage. Know ye that ye are opposing the passage of the chariot of the Queen's most excellent Majesty?"

"Ay, right well do we know it, since that is our purpose," replied a man, stepping forth in response to Dick's challenge. He was dressed in a suit of complete gold armour; but since the Uluan helmet has no visor, and the light of the moon, now almost as brilliant as that of day, fell full upon his face, Dick at once recognised him as the recalcitrant Sachar.

"So it is thou, my Lord Sachar," remarked Dick. "Hast heard that there is a reward set upon thy head, and art come

forth at this untimely hour to surrender thyself?"

"Nay, not so," answered Sachar, "but to make two demands have I come, bringing with me these my faithful followers and servitors, that I may have the power to enforce my demands.

"I demand, first, the surrender of the Queen's person into my care and keeping; and second, I demand the surrender of yourself and the other stranger, your companion, in order that ye may be brought to trial for the crimes of exercising undue and pernicious influence upon the mind of the Queen, and the abolition of certain ancient rites and customs connected with the worship and honour of the great god Kuhlacan. And I warn ye beforehand, oh insolent white stranger, that it will be useless for ye to resist my demands; for though ye have some five hundred soldiers at your back, I have here as many thousands to support me, while in your rear there are thousands more who are pledged to help me. Therefore, seeing that ye are hemmed in, front and rear, and cannot possibly escape, I call upon the soldiers of the Queen's bodyguard to surrender at discretion, and thus avert the shedding of much innocent blood."

"Have ye finished?" demanded Dick. "Then—" as Sachar made no reply—"now hearken all of you unto me. Ye know that this man Sachar, once a Uluan noble, is now outlawed and a price set upon his head for threatening her most gracious Majesty, Queen Myrra—whom may God grant a long and prosperous reign—" Here the soldiers of the bodyguard broke in with loud and enthusiastic cheers. "And," continued Dick, when silence was once more restored, "ye have also now heard his audacious and treasonable demand that the Queen shall be surrendered, a prisoner, into his keeping, that he may work his wicked will upon her. Know, therefore, that, rather than concede this outlaw's treasonable demands, I will die here in the road fighting in defence of the Queen's person and liberty, and so will every man who wears her Majesty's uniform—" Here fresh cheers from the bodyguard again interrupted him. "Ye hear those cheers?" resumed Dick, as the shouts died into silence. "And know ye what they mean, oh misguided adherents of the outlawed Sachar? They mean death to you! For your own sakes, therefore, I counsel you to return to your allegiance to the Queen, surrendering Sachar to me, a prisoner, to be tried and dealt with for his offence as the law of Ulua directs. Those of you who are willing to save your lives, face about and retire with all speed, lest evil befall you."

"So!" roared Sachar, advancing upon Dick with uplifted sword, "ye would pervert my followers and terrify them into deserting me!" And he aimed a mighty blow at Dick as the pair rushed at each other. But Dick, anticipating something of the sort, had already dropped the bridle upon his charger's neck, thrust his automatic back into his belt, and whipped out the good steel sword that he had that morning deemed it advisable to substitute for the handsome but comparatively useless weapon that went with his uniform, and the next instant the two blades clashed together. The result was precisely what Dick had anticipated, the steel shattered the hardened and toughened copper blade as though the latter had been glass, and before Sachar in the least realised what had happened Dick had driven his sword hilt into his antagonist's face, causing the Uluan noble to stagger so that he would have fallen, had not Dick leaned forward in his saddle and gripped the man by the arm.

"Sergeant Mato," he called, "take this man back to the centre of the troop, bind him hand and foot, and see to it that he does not escape you. Now, followers of Sachar," he continued, "your leader is a prisoner. Will ye—"

But at that moment he was interrupted by a confused din of angry shouting, the trampling of horses, and the clinking of blade upon blade coming from the rear, showing that the armed retainers of some at least of the nobles who had attended the interment had fallen upon the bodyguard. The sounds also reached the ears of Sachar's followers and, encouraged thereby, they in their turn raised a great shout and rushed forward, with the result that in a moment a fierce battle was raging in the road, with the bodyguard attacked front and rear, while it soon became evident that the aim of the assailants was to reach the queen's chariot, doubtless in the hope of being able to secure possession of it and drive it off through the *mélée*.

For a few minutes the bodyguard were fighting at a serious disadvantage, being all jammed up tightly together round the queen's chariot, so that only a dozen or so in front and rear were able to strike a blow. But Dick and Earle, while discussing the probabilities of attack, had foreseen just such a state of affairs as now obtained, and had issued their orders accordingly. These orders were now being faithfully executed by the several officers, with the result that the troopers were gradually forcing their powerful horses through the foremost ranks of the attacking bodies, both front and rear, while other troopers closely followed them up, sabreing right and left with a full determination to make the traitors pay dearly for their treachery. As for Dick, what with his sword of steel, which sheared through copper weapons and golden armour as though they had been paper, his snapping automatics which slew people at a distance, and his fiercely plunging horse, goaded forward by an unsparing use of the spur, he seemed to the simple Uluans like the incarnation of the god of death and destruction, and after beholding some eight or ten luckless wights go down beneath his sword, they simply turned and fled from him, shrieking with terror. This, added to the confusion occasioned by the fierce onslaught of the troopers who followed closely in his rear, presently proved too much for Sachar's own particular body of retainers, and after some ten minutes of fierce fighting they broke and fled, hotly pursued by the two leading squadrons of the bodyguard.

Nor were those who attacked the bodyguard from the rear in much better case; for although they outnumbered the soldiers by something like ten to one, the cramped width of the road in which they fought nullified this advantage, while their untrained methods of fighting allowed the trained soldiers to ride and mow them down like grass, with the result that after a few minutes of strenuous fighting their courage evaporated and they, too, were seized with such overpowering panic that, to escape the vengeful sabres of the bodyguard, they sought to fly, and finding no way of escape, turned their weapons upon their own comrades and leaders, speedily inducing a state of abject panic in them also. The result was that very soon the rear attack, like that in front, ceased and became converted into a headlong flight, leaving the bodyguard victorious.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

## The Unexpected Happens.

Dick's first act on the following morning, was to dispatch to the scene of the fight a strong body of men, whose duty it would be to collect the slain and bury them in a common grave by the roadside, after the officer in command of the party had ascertained, by means of the dead men's uniforms, the names of their chiefs. Then he proceeded in person to the large building which had been hastily converted into a temporary hospital, to which the wounded had been conveyed, and took the necessary steps to discover the names of their chiefs also. The final result of this investigation was the discovery that at least five of the Council of Nobles, in addition to Sachar, had been implicated in the previous night's attack upon the Queen's Bodyguard, in the attempt to secure possession of the queen's person. Dick's next act was to dispatch to the houses of the implicated five a sergeant's guard, with instructions to the officer in command to arrest the owner—if he could be found, and to seize his property. To do the last was simple enough, but Dick was not greatly surprised to learn that, in each case, the "wanted" noble had failed to return home on the previous night, and that nobody was able to give the slightest hint as to his probable whereabouts. This, however, did not very greatly trouble the young captain-general; Sachar, the instigator and leader of the whole treasonable conspiracy, was safely lodged in durance vile, under conditions which rendered his escape a practical impossibility, the victory of the queen's troops over the rebels had been signal and complete, the queen herself was safe and sound, and Dick was disposed to think that, under the circumstances, he would have no great difficulty in stamping out the smouldering remains of the rebellion.

Nor was he mistaken, as circumstances soon proved. He proclaimed the missing nobles outlaws, announced the confiscation of their property, and offered a substantial reward for their persons, dead or alive, which, with the terrible threats against all who should dare to harbour or help them directly or indirectly, produced such a wholesome effect that, within four days, every one of the missing men had been ignominiously brought in and surrendered. And now, each man anxious only to save his own skin, not only did the five—of whom Nimri, Sachar's brother-in-law was one—proceed to lay the blame of the whole affair upon Sachar, accusing him of influencing them by alternate bribes and threats, but they also testified against certain other nobles who, but for this, might have gone scot free and unsuspected; so that ultimately no less than eleven of Ulua's most powerful and ambitious nobles found themselves in danger of losing their heads in consequence of their ambition having o'erleaped itself.

And now, Dick and Earle found themselves confronted with a difficulty, for there were no such things as civil or criminal courts of justice in Ulua, criminals being in the usual course haled before the *shiref* of the particular district in which the crime was committed, and summarily sentenced by him to such punishment as he, in his wisdom, might deem meet and adequate; while, if the crime was of a specially serious character—as in the present case—it was the monarch who pronounced judgment and determined the nature of the punishment.

But the two white men felt that it would never do to permit the young queen to be saddled with the responsibility of judging eleven rebels against her sovereign authority, and with the onus of personally determining what amount of punishment they should receive; they therefore put their heads together and, without very much difficulty, drafted a scheme for the establishment of courts of justice, somewhat similar in character to those in England, wherein criminals could be tried and sentenced by duly qualified judges; though they decided that the Uluans were not yet ripe for the introduction of the jury system. This scheme they first submitted to Lyga, who, after suggesting certain modifications calculated to adapt it more closely to the requirements and peculiarities of the Uluan character, fully approved of it and agreed to recommend it to the queen for acceptance and embodiment upon the Statute Book. This was done, and, the idea having been fully explained to the queen by Lyga, was approved by her and in due course became one of the laws of the land. Then, a court having been established, and men of suitable attainments found to serve as judges, the prisoners were in due course tried, found guilty, and sentenced. No attempt was made to clear any of the prisoners by means of clever advocacy or specious argument, the questions before the court were the straightforward ones whether or not the accused were guilty of conspiracy, and, if guilty, to what extent; and in every case the verdict was the same, every prisoner was found guilty, but not all to the same extent, some of them being able to show that, owing to the power and influence wielded by Sachar, they were practically compelled to throw in their lot with him, whether or not they approved of his designs. The result of the trial was, under the circumstances, eminently satisfactory, considering that it was the first of the kind ever held in Ulua; for the judges, instructed by Earle and Dick, devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the task of administering strict justice, without regard to the position or personality of the accused; and the trial terminated with the condemnation of Sachar, Nimri, and two others to death, with the confiscation of all their property, while the remaining seven were punished in varying degrees, some by heavy fines, and others by more or less lengthy periods of penal labour.

It was with considerable anxiety that Dick and Earle awaited and watched for the effect upon the populace of this innovation in the judicial methods of Ulua; but they had not long to wait before it became apparent that the formality and solemnity of public trial were far more effective as a deterrent than the former rough and ready methods, under which a culprit was haled before a *shiref* and summarily punished, with nobody but himself and his immediate connections being a penny the wiser; publicity and its attendant disgrace soon became more wholesomely dreaded than even fine or imprisonment, and when a period of three months had elapsed without the smallest sign of any recurrent restiveness on the part of the Council of Nobles, the two white men felt that Queen Myrra was firmly enough established upon her throne to be in no further need of their services; they therefore announced their intention to make an early departure, and proceeded to make their preparations for the return journey.

It is not putting the matter any too strongly to say that the announcement of the impending departure of the two white men from Ulua was productive of the utmost consternation and dismay. So thoroughly had the two identified themselves with every movement having for its object the improvement of previous conditions, and so far-reaching and wholesome had been their influence generally, that the inhabitants of the city had insensibly grown to regard them as heaven-sent reformers, permanently settled among them for their benefit and advantage by the especial favour of Kuhlacan, and the news that the pair were about to leave them fell upon the Uluans with something of the effect of a bolt from the blue.

And upon no one did the intelligence seem to produce so stunning and grievous an effect as upon the young queen. When, upon a certain morning, Dick and Earle, having craved audience of her Majesty, made the momentous announcement and asked her permission to depart, they were shocked and astounded at the manner in which she received the intimation. She went as white as death, sank back in the throne-like chair upon which she was seated, closed her eyes, and for a moment it looked as though she had fainted.

And then, at the sight of the queen's manifest distress, a most extraordinary revulsion of feeling swept over Dick Cavendish. Up to that moment he had regarded the projected return to civilisation as merely part and parcel of the fulfilment of his contract with Earle, as something which he had undertaken and must therefore of necessity carry out; yet now he was fully conscious for the first time that it was Earle, and not he, who had broached the subject of return, and he was conscious, moreover, of the fact that he had viewed the prospect of departure from Ulua with a singular lack of enthusiasm.

This illumination, however, remained with him only long enough to impress itself upon his mind as a flash of lightning impresses itself upon the sight, and was instantly succeeded by a rush of most extraordinary and tumultuous emotion at the young queen's extreme distress. An overwhelming sense of her utter isolation and friendlessness, a sudden realisation of her as the centre and victim of a thousand ambitious plots by unscrupulous nobles like Sachar, and of her bitter need of a strong arm and a cool head to keep and protect her in the multitudinous trials incidental to her exalted position, a quick appreciation of her extraordinary beauty, physical and mental, and—some other exquisitely sweet and tender feeling which he had no time to analyse, swept over him like a flood, causing him to forget everything but the utterly irresistible desire to comfort her and alleviate her distress; and, acting as irresponsibly as though he were in a dream, forgetful alike of Earle's presence and that of the ladies-in-waiting at the far end of the room, he sprang forward, flung himself upon his knees beside the girl, took her in his arms, and proceeded to pour forth a flood of tender incoherences, mingled with caresses, that very speedily brought back the colour to her Majesty's lips and cheeks and the light into her eyes.

"Oh, my Lord Dick," she murmured, placing her hands upon Dick's shoulders as she gazed with dilated eyes into his, "What is this you say? That you are about to leave me? Why? What have I done, and wherein have I failed in hospitality, that you should desire to go from me?"

"Nay, your Majesty," answered Dick, "nay, it is not that at all, on my soul. It is simply that we have done what we came to do in Ulua, and now, I suppose—I fear—we must—Earle and I—"

"My dear chap, don't worry about me," broke in Earle, in English, with a grin. "I am quite capable of making the return journey alone, if that is what you are thinking about; indeed, to be candid, I have for some time been contemplating such a possibility, for I foresaw all this. Why, can't you see what is the matter with the Queen? She has fallen in love with you—and you with her, though perhaps you scarcely realise it as yet—"

"By Jove! I do, though," retorted Dick, "and if I thought there was the slightest chance of what you say being true, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't stay behind and—"

"Well, ask her, man; ask her, and see what she says," returned Earle.

And Dick *did* ask her, there and then; and very simply, very sweetly, and very frankly, Myrra confessed that the idea of Dick ever leaving her was intolerable, and that if he would only consent to remain, she would gladly marry him, and defy all the nobles of Ulua to say her nay, if need be.

This understanding of course involved a considerable delay of Earle's departure, for he at once announced his determination not to leave Ulua until he had seen all prospective difficulties removed, and Dick, as Myrra's husband, securely seated upon the throne of Ulua.

And difficulties to overcome there certainly were, for to the more ambitious among the Uluan nobles the idea of the queen's marriage to an alien was distasteful in the extreme, and a very determined effort was made to stir up a popular demonstration against it. But Lyga, the Keeper of Statutes, pronounced unreservedly in favour of it, and his influence was far-reaching. The populace generally also looked upon the project with undisguised favour, for Dick had contrived in a quiet way to become exceedingly popular by the frank warmth and geniality of his manner, no less than by his conspicuous gallantry upon the occasion of the fight on the night of the late king's interment. Lastly, the nobles, finding that opposition would have no chance of success, reconciled themselves to the inevitable, each consoling himself with the reflection that although the queen had had the bad taste to reject him, she had at least had the good taste not to accept either of his rivals.

When, having come to an understanding with the queen, Dick and Earle withdrew from her Majesty's presence, Cavendish scarcely knew whether he was standing on his head or his feet; for with a few impetuous words he had completely altered his entire outlook upon life, and changed his worldly prospects to an extent which he had never thought possible, even in his wildest dreams. No more of the sea life for him; he must bid a definite and final good-bye to that once cherished hope of one day commanding another such ship as the *Everest*; and—worst of all—there was now the possibility that he might never more set eyes upon his beloved sister, Grace. In the whirlwind of tumultuous feeling that had temporarily swept him off his feet, he had momentarily forgotten her, and, but for what Earle had once in a burst of confidence confided to him upon that subject, he would now have suffered several very severe qualms of conscience. But he knew Earle by this time, knew him thoroughly, not only as the soul of honour, but as the man to whom, above all others, he would and could most safely confide Grace's happiness, and although the dear girl would doubtless shed a few tears for her lost brother, Dick felt he could trust Earle to quickly dry them.

Then again, as to the abandonment of his most cherished ambitions, Dick felt that he was but exchanging them for others of an even more important character. For he had not dwelt among the Uluans for so long without perceiving that, young and comparatively inexperienced though he was, his knowledge of the outer world fitted him to rule and

govern the remarkable people among whom he had mingled, far better and more wisely than any of the ignorant, bigoted, and narrow-minded nobles whom he had met.

Something of all this he confided to Earle when at length the two found themselves once more in the seclusion of their own apartments. But Earle soon put the youngster upon better terms with himself; he stoutly maintained that, in acting as Dick had acted, he had done the right thing, not only for the queen, but for himself as well. He pointed out at length the immense power for good which Dick, as King of the Uluans, would wield, the many reforms which it would be possible for him to introduce, the many evils which he could abolish, and, with the instinct for business characteristic of the American, he rapidly sketched out the numerous advantages to the Uluans which must result from the opening of communication between them and the outer world—an easy matter to accomplish, with the vast wealth at their command. And, as to Grace, he pooh-poohed the idea that she and Dick were never again to meet; indeed, in his enthusiasm, he more than half promised that his and Grace's honeymoon tour should include a visit to Ulua. And lastly, he touched, with the warmth and delicacy of a true friend and gentleman, upon the manifold perfections and virtues of the girl queen, and especially upon her frank and whole-hearted affection for Dick—to say nothing of his for her; so that, before their chat was over, every one of Dick's doubts and fears was dissipated and he felt free to regard himself, as indeed he was, one of the most fortunate young men in the world.

"Come to think of it, you know, Dick," remarked Earle, when at length they were able to get back naturally to more mundane matters, "this is the most lucky thing that could possibly have happened for both of us. For I have had that emerald mine of ours upon my mind for some time, and have felt a bit puzzled as to how it was to be worked to our mutual advantage. But with you as King of Ulua, the thing will be as simple as falling off a log. You will be on the spot, so to speak—for, after all, in actual mileage, the mine is really not very far from here—and it will be an easy matter for you to arrange with our friends, the Mangeromas, to work the mine and bring in the emeralds to you. Then, I have been studying my map, and according to it and our observations, I calculate that we are here only some four hundred miles from the town of Cerro de Pasco, in Peru, which appears to be connected by railway with Lima and Callao. I propose to return home by that route, roughly surveying the ground as I go, and I think it not improbable that I may discover a practicable road between the two places, by means of which you may be able to communicate with the outer world and perhaps establish a profitable trade with it. With your permission, I will take along half-a-dozen or so of good, reliable Uluans with me, sending them back to you with a detailed report of the results of my exploration as soon as I reach civilisation; then, if you think it worth while, you can get to work to make a proper road. But we can discuss all these little business matters more at length, later on. There will be plenty of time, now, before I go."

This is not a love story, but a yarn of adventure, pure and simple; all that need be said, therefore, in connection with Cavendish's wedding, is that the preparations for it, upon a scale of unusual magnificence, even for Ulua—the circumstances connected with it being in themselves very unusual—went smoothly forward, and in due time culminated, as such preparations should, in a ceremony, the splendour of which will linger long in the memory of those who were privileged to witness it. The wedding ceremony, which was performed in the temple, was immediately followed by the crowning of Dick as King, in strict accordance with Uluan precedent and usage; and thereupon Dick entered upon his new duties as a practically despotic monarch with the zest and thoroughness which had always characterised his actions, yet with a discretion and moderation which speedily lifted him to the zenith of popularity with his subjects.

Earle remained on in Ulua for a full month after the celebration of the royal wedding, and then, satisfied that all was going well with his chum, completed his preparations for departure, and finally bade farewell to Ulua and his many friends therein on the anniversary—as it happened—of the departure of himself and Dick from New York on the expedition which was destined to produce such extraordinary and far-reaching results.

He departed, laden with costly gifts from Dick, Myrra, and numerous other friends, for it turned out that the mountains which hemmed in the valley and lake of Ulua were fabulously rich in gold and precious stones, and the value of those which he took away with him amounted in itself to a princely fortune. Also he took a long letter from Dick to Grace, containing, among other items, a cordial invitation from the royal pair to visit Ulua as often and for as long a time as she pleased, together with a parcel of priceless rubies as a joint wedding gift from Dick and Myrra. A dozen, instead of half-a-dozen, Uluans accompanied Earle as far as Cerro de Pasco, in addition to Peter and the Indians who had formed part of the original expedition. The Uluans returned to the city after an absence of a trifle over three months, bringing with them a long and detailed report, accompanied by a map, from Earle, from which it appeared that the American, during an eventful journey, packed with adventure, had discovered a practicable route from Ulua into Peru; and when last heard from, Dick was busily engaged upon the task of improving this route, with a view to establishing regular communication between Ulua and the sea.

## The End.

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