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Author: Harry Collingwood

Illustrator: E. S. Hodgson

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FIRST MATE: THE STORY OF A STRANGE CRUISE \*\*\*

Harry Collingwood

"The First Mate"

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## Chapter One.

### The "Stella Maris" and Mrs Vansittart.

"Well, young man, what do you think of her?"

The question was addressed to me in a very pleasantly modulated female voice, carrying just the slightest suspicion of an American accent. For the fraction of a second I was a wee bit startled. I had not had the ghost of a suspicion that anyone was nearer me than the gang of labourers who were busily engaged in unloading a big delivery wagon and transferring the contents, in the shape of numerous packing cases, to the deck of the vessel which I was scrutinising. It was afternoon of a grey day in the latter part of October three years ago; and the scene was one of the wharves of the east basin of the London Docks, round which I had been prowling in search of a ship. I had been thus engaged ever since nine o'clock that morning, interviewing skippers and mates, so far unsuccessfully, when I was "brought up all standing" by finding myself in close proximity to a white-hulled, ship-rigged craft of, I estimated, some two thousand five hundred tons measurement.

She was steel-built, with steel lower masts, bowsprit, and lower and topsail yards; and even if she had not been sporting the ensign of the New York Yacht Club at her ensign staff and its burgee at her main royal-mast-head, I should still have known her for a yacht from the perfection of her lines, the dainty and exquisite beauty of her shape, the whiteness of her decks (notwithstanding their somewhat littered condition), the beautiful modelling of her boats, her polished teak rails, and generally the high finish and perfect cleanliness of her deck fittings. She was as heavily rigged as a frigate; moreover, although no guns were visible, I observed that her main-deck bulwarks were pierced with six ports of a side, in the wake of which steel racers were bolted to the deck; also she sported hammock rails, which I had never seen before except in pictures of old-fashioned wooden men-o'-war. A gilt cable moulding ornamented her sheer strake; a beautifully carved and gilded full-length figure of a woman wearing a star of cut-glass facets on her forehead formed her figurehead; and her quarters were adorned with a considerable amount of gilded scroll-work. Her elliptical stern bore, in large gilded block letters, the words: *Stella Maris*. New York.

As the enquiry with which I have opened this story reached my ears, I wheeled round and found myself face to face with a little lady. She was very richly dressed in silk and furs, quite colourless as to complexion, but with a fine pair of deep violet eyes and a quantity of dark chestnut hair loosely coiled under an immense hat rigged with black ostrich plumes. I put her down in my own mind as being something over thirty-six years of age, and I subsequently learned that I was not very far out.

Her eyes were dancing with amusement as I wheeled sharply round upon her; and as my hand went up to my cap she laughed a low, musical laugh.

"Guess I startled you some, didn't I?" she remarked in that pleasant voice of hers. "You were so completely absorbed by the charms of *Stella Maris* that you had neither eyes nor ears for anybody else. Well, what do you think of her?"

I was bareheaded by this time, but still a trifle confused at the suddenness and unconventionality of my companion's address; yet I quickly recovered my equanimity.

"She is the most lovely craft I ever set eyes on, bar none," I answered with enthusiasm.

"Yes, she is a real daisy," agreed my companion. "Do you know what she is?"

"I know what she ought to be," I said; "and that is, flagship of the Club. But I see by her burgee that she is merely the property of one of its members."

"That is so," returned the lady; "but I guess it's good enough. Say, would you like to go aboard and have a look at her from inside?"

"Indeed I should, if her owner would not—"

I hesitated.

"Well, come along, then," cut in my companion. "I'm the owner, and I promise you that I won't."

So saying, my strange acquaintance led the way to a narrow gang plank stretching from the wharf to the ship's poop. Laughingly declining my proffered assistance, she tripped lightly along it, and as lightly sprang down upon the deck of narrow planking paid with white-lead instead of the more usual pitch.

Allowing me a few moments to look round, my companion presently led me forward to the break of the poop, where, standing at the head of one of the ladders leading down to the main-deck, I obtained a view of the whole length of the ship. The first thing to attract my attention was the wheelhouse, a teak structure raised upon massive steel standards, lofty enough to allow the helmsman a clear view ahead and astern.

Some ten feet ahead of it was the after hatchway, the coamings of which stood about eighteen inches high, and, like those aboard a man-o'-war, were protected by rails and stanchions. The hatchway was open, and there was a ladder leading down through it. Just beyond this was the mainmast; a little way forward of which was the main-hatch, also open, and, like the other, protected by rails and stanchions. Beyond this hatchway there stood, in chocks, a fine powerful screw launch, about forty feet long by ten feet beam; and just ahead of her rose the foremast. Before the foremast gaped the fore-hatchway, also open; then came a handsome capstan; and ahead of it, leaving just comfortable room to work, rose the bulkhead of the turtle-back topgallant forecabin. In addition to the launch, the vessel carried four other boats in davits, namely, two cutters, some thirty-five feet long, and two whaler gigs, each about twenty-five feet long.

My companion—or hostess, rather, I suppose I ought to call her—allowed me to stand about five minutes at the break of the poop, as I ran my eye over the deck and noted, with many approving comments, the various items that especially appealed to me. Then she invited me to accompany her below.

I will spare the reader a detailed description of the apartments—I cannot call them cabins—to which I was now conducted; suffice it to say that, in their several ways, they were a combination of magnificence, luxury, and comfort that seemed to me almost incredible, remembering that I was aboard a ship.

Having duly expressed my admiration for these truly beautiful and luxurious apartments, I was shown two other but much smaller rooms, one on either side of the companion stairway. These two rooms occupied the extreme fore end of the poop, and could be entered from the main-deck as well as from the vestibule. The one on the starboard side was the chart-room, and was fitted up with a bookshelf crammed with nautical works of various descriptions, a table large enough to spread a good big chart upon, a cabinet in which reposed a complete set of the most recently published charts, a case containing no less than four chronometers, and a cupboard wherein were securely packed a whole battery of sextants and other instruments. The corresponding room on the port side was fitted up as a writing room, and here the log slate was kept and the logbook written up from time to time. Here also the ship's clock and a very fine aneroid barometer were securely bolted to the bulkhead, side by side, in such a position that they could be seen from outside by merely glancing through the window. And near them, hung in gimbals from a long bracket, was a very fine Fitzroy mercurial barometer.

My hostess seemed genuinely gratified at the admiration which I freely expressed, especially for the noble array of charts and nautical instruments; these, to be quite candid, appealing to me even more strongly than the sumptuous elegance of the drawing and dining-rooms. She smiled brightly as I expatiated with enthusiasm upon these matters, and when at length I paused, she said:

"Now let us go below, and I will show you the officers' and men's quarters."

We descended from the vestibule by way of a staircase at the back of the main companion, and presently entered the wardroom, which adjoined the dining-room, but was only about half its size. This was the living-room of the executive officers of the ship, and was a very fine, comfortable room, although, of course, its fittings and furnishings were much less sumptuous than those belonging exclusively to the owner.

On the side of the ship opposite the wardroom, and with a good wide passage between the two, was the block of officers' cabins, the comfort and convenience of which left nothing to be desired. Next came the petty officers' berthage, of which the same may be said, although, as was to be expected, the space here was rather more restricted, and the fittings somewhat plainer than in those of the other officers.

Next came the kitchen—it would be an outrage to dub such a place a "galley"—and forward of it again came the men's quarters, a great, airy place, well-lighted by scuttles in the ship's sides, with sleeping accommodation for eighty men. This consisted of two tiers of hammocks, forty hammocks on either side of the room, their head-clews suspended from hooks bolted to the sides of the ship; while the foot-clews were secured to steel stanchions hinged to the deck above, and so arranged that they could be triced up out of the way when required, leaving ample room for the men's mess tables.

I very willingly and very fully expressed my admiration for everything shown me, not only because all was well worthy of admiration, but also because I saw that it gratified my hostess, who explained to me that she had planned everything herself.

At length my inspection of the beautiful and wonderful ship came to an end. As we ascended to the deck by way of

the fore-hatch ladder my hostess remarked:

"There! I guess that's all there is to show. And,"—glancing at an elegant little watch which she wore attached to a bracelet—"my stars, if it ain't just five o'clock! I want my tea. Do you drink tea, young man?"

"I should really enjoy a cup of tea, madam, if you would be so kind as to offer me one," I said.

"Are you a teetotaler, then?" the lady asked.

"Well, no; hardly that," I replied. "That is to say, I have never formally forsworn intoxicants; but I very rarely take them—never, indeed, I may say, except when I have been exposed for several hours to extreme cold, or have been wet to the skin, or something of that kind. Even then I am inclined to think a cup of scalding hot coffee really does one more good."

"Well, I guess you're as nearly right as makes no matter," returned my hostess. "Now, just you come into my drawing-room, and I'll give you a cup of real good tea. Ah! there is Lizette, my chief stewardess. I guess she is looking for me to tell me that tea is served, so come along."

The lady was right in her surmise, for the trig, decidedly pretty, and exceedingly capable-looking young woman, in a black dress, with white cap and apron, who at that moment stepped out on deck, came forward and duly made the anticipated announcement.

It was a distinctly novel experience for me to find myself seated in that elegant apartment, drinking the most delicious tea I had ever tasted out of a hand-painted cup of china which I knew must be worth its weight in gold, munching cakes and biscuits of wonderful flavour, and being treated quite as an equal by this smartly dressed and vivacious American lady. Not the least of her charms was that she had the knack of putting one absolutely at one's ease; and presently she began to question me about myself.

"I guess I don't know now whether I've done you any kindness in inviting you aboard to see over the *Stella Maris*," she said. "I reckon your own ship will seem a bit dowdy in comparison, won't she?"

"I am sure she will—when I find her," I replied. "Unfortunately, I haven't a ship just now; indeed, I had been prowling round the docks all day looking for one when the sight of your yacht brought me up all standing. I love a pretty ship, and anxious though I am to get another berth, I could not deny myself the pleasure of taking a good look at her."

"Y-e-s," my companion agreed; "I can understand that feeling and sympathise with it too. There's nothing made by the hand of man that I admire more than a handsome ship. And so you're out of a berth, Mr—"

"Leigh," I supplied; "Walter Leigh, at your service, madam."

"Thank you!" she answered. "Any relation to the Lees of Virginia?"

"No," I said, "I am afraid not. I am a Leigh of Devon, you know—L-e-i-g-h, not L double e."

"I see," she responded. "Well, Mr Leigh, if it's not a rude question to ask, how do you come to be out of employment?"

"Not through any misconduct of mine, I am happy to say," I answered. "The way of it is this. The City line of ships—the line in which I served and have only recently completed my apprenticeship—is amalgamating with, or, rather, is being absorbed by, the firm of Hepburn Brothers, the one-time rivals of the City line. Hepburns are, of course, taking over many of the City officers, as well as the ships. But Mr Clayton, Hepburns' present manager, was once master of a City liner in which I was serving; and—well, something happened which caused Clayton to lose his berth, and unfortunately for me it was through me that the matter came to light. Consequently, now that Clayton has the chance to do me a bad turn, he is doing it by refusing to take me on with the new firm."

"Is that so? Well, I call that real mean," exclaimed my hostess, in accents of indignation. "And is that the reason why you have not been able to get other employment?"

"Oh, no!" I said, "excepting, of course, so far as Hepburn Brothers are concerned. My failure to-day arises simply from the fact that none of the skippers I have spoken to happen to have any vacancies."

"Nothing wrong with your discharge, I suppose?"

"Nothing whatever," I answered, whipping the document out of my pocket and handing it to her.

She read it carefully and handed it back.

"Thank you!" she said. "I guess that looks all right. How old are you, Mr Leigh?"

"I shall be eighteen on the ninth of next December," I replied, beginning now to wonder whether this questioning was likely to lead to anything, or whether it was merely the result of kindly curiosity on the part of my hostess.

"Eighteen!" she exclaimed. "Well, I declare to goodness I'd have said you were at least three years older, if I'd been asked to guess. Only eighteen! And what kind of a berth have you been looking for, may I ask?"

"Well," I said, "I had it in my mind to get into some big craft as third mate, if I could find an opening. It would afford me a chance to work up for my ticket, which I am naturally anxious to obtain as soon as possible."

"Sure," she agreed. "And do you know anything about navigation? But I guess you do, by the way that you looked at

those charts and instruments just now.”

“Oh, yes!” I said; “I rather fancy myself as a navigator. Navigation is quite a hobby of mine.”

“Tell me how much you know,” she said. “I’m something of a navigator myself. In fact, Mr Leigh, I am one of the few women who hold a master’s certificate and are qualified to take command of a ship sailing to any part of the world. I am captain of this yacht, in fact as well as in name; I brought her across from New York to the Nore without the ghost of a hitch, and I guess I can take her the rest of the trip round the world, upon which we are bound. Now, go ahead and tell me what you know about navigation.”

I named the several problems in navigation, one or more of which I had been accustomed to practise daily and nightly under my late skipper; and the lady was graciously pleased to express her cordial approval of my knowledge.

“Yes,” she said; “if you can do all those things I guess you are pretty good—quite as good, in fact, as Neil Kennedy, my chief officer, and he is no slouch as a navigator. Now, Mr Leigh, I have not been putting you through your facings just out of sheer feminine curiosity; I’ve been doing it with a purpose. I am Mrs Cornelia Vansittart, wife of Julius Vansittart of New York, engineer, the inventor of the Vansittart gasoline engine. I am passionately fond of yachting, so my husband made me a present of the *Stella Maris*, and consented to my making a voyage in her round the world. She is a good ship, and I have a good crew; but I have only two mates, and Kennedy says that in a ship of this size, and on such a cruise as we are contemplating, I ought to have a third. At first I didn’t propose to do anything of the kind, for I don’t like being told by anybody what I ought to do, or to have; but somehow, when I saw you lost in admiration of my ship, I sort of took a fancy to you. I like the look of you, and thought that if I must have a third mate, I’d like one something like you; so I invited you to come aboard, that I might have a chance to talk to you and find out if you came up to sample. I mean to have a good time this trip, and I mean that my officers and crew shall have a good time too, if it rests with me. I’ve taken a whole lot of trouble to pick the right sort of men to man this ship, and I’ve come to the conclusion that you are the right sort. So if you care to accept the position I am ready to ship you as third mate of the *Stella Maris*. The pay is thirty per, with all found, uniforms included. Now, what do you say?”

I had a sufficient knowledge of American colloquialisms to be aware that the expression “thirty per” meant thirty dollars—or six pounds—per month, which was considerably better than I had hoped for, or was at all likely to get elsewhere. I liked the ship, and I was immensely taken with my prospective new skipper; therefore I at once unhesitatingly and gratefully accepted the offer.

I was then gracefully dismissed, with instructions to be prepared to “sign on” at eleven o’clock on the morrow, and to have my dunnage aboard not later than noon, since the yacht would haul out of dock and proceed down the river early in the afternoon.

I had taken my leave of Mrs Vansittart, and was already out on deck on my way to the gangway, when the lady rushed after me and called upon me to stop, exclaiming:

“Sakes alive! what’s come over me? I declare to goodness I clean forgot that you haven’t yet been measured for your uniforms. Colson,”—to one of the seamen who were engaged in striking packing cases down below—“pass the word for Mr Grimwood, please. Mr Grimwood,” she explained, “is the purser. I’ll turn you over to him, and he will take you to the tailor, who will soon rig you out.”

A shout down the after hatchway resulted in Mr Grimwood’s prompt appearance on deck, and to him I was in due form introduced.

“Mr Grimwood,” said Mrs Vansittart, “this is Mr Walter Leigh—L-e-i-g-h, you know—who will sign on at eleven o’clock to-morrow morning as third mate of this ship. I want you to take him below to Snip, who will measure him for his uniforms. Please tell Snip to arrange things so that Mr Leigh’s working uniform shall be ready for him by noon. When you have done that, have the goodness to assign a cabin to Mr Leigh; and at the same time I’d like you to introduce him to the rest of the wardroom officers. You’ll see to that? Thank you! Once more, good afternoon, Mr Leigh!”

As the lady turned and left us, Grimwood chuckled.

“So the skipper’s taken Kennedy’s advice, after all, to ship a third mate,” he remarked. “Guess he’s put one over Briscoe this time, anyway. Briscoe’s our ‘second’, you know, and he bet Kennedy that he couldn’t persuade Mrs Vansittart to ship a ‘third’. Kennedy’ll be a bit set up when he hears the news, because, between you and me, he doesn’t take overmuch stock in Briscoe, and has held all along that we ought to have a third mate to take his place if necessary. Oh, yes, Briscoe’s all right, so far as he goes; but he doesn’t go far enough. He’s not exactly the right sort of man for a ship of this kind, and I think that, for once in a way, Mrs Vansittart made a mistake when she picked him. But I guess you’d better not take too much notice of what I say; I don’t want to prejudice you against him.”

We found Snip—by the way, that was the tailor’s actual name, and not a nickname, as I had at first imagined—comfortably ensconced in a little, well-lighted workroom under the topgallant forecabin. He quickly took my measure, promising, somewhat to my amazement, to have my working uniform ready for me to try on as early on the following morning as I chose to come aboard—the earlier the better, he assured me. This matter settled, the purser—to whom I took an immediate liking—led me aft and down below to the wardroom, where we found Mr Neil Kennedy, the chief officer, Mr Alexander Mackenzie, the chief engineer, and Doctor Stephen Harper, the ship’s medico, chatting and smoking together. To these I was introduced by Grimwood; and I was at once admitted as a member of the fraternity with much cordiality.

I liked those three men immensely. Neil Kennedy was a huge man, standing six feet three in his socks, as I afterwards learned, and being bulky in proportion, was the sort of man that a “hazing” skipper would at once have singled out as eminently suited to keep a refractory crew in order and get the last ounce of work out of the laziest skulker. But it happened that Kennedy was not that sort of man at all. Although admirably fitted by Nature for the

part, he was not the typical quarterdeck tyrant and bully, but a genial, merry, great-hearted Irish-American of the very best stamp. He could, however, if occasion demanded it, display a sternness and severity of manner well calculated to subdue the most recklessly insubordinate of mariners. His voice was like the bellow of a bull, and could be heard from the taffrail to the flying jib-boom end in anything short of a full-grown hurricane.

The doctor was quite another type of man—tall, lean, clean-shaven, slightly bald, with a pair of piercing black eyes that seemed to look a man through and through. Possessed of a quiet, well-modulated and cultured voice, and a deliberate yet firm manner of speaking, he was apparently a man of high attainments, and unmistakably a gentleman.

As for Mackenzie, the chief engineer, he was but a trifle less formidable in appearance than Kennedy—red-haired, with a shaggy red beard and moustache, the former of which he had a trick of pushing up over his mouth and nose when he was meditating deeply, and immense hands as hairy as a monkey's. He was apparently between forty and fifty years of age, and had been domiciled in America for the last twenty years, which he had spent in Mr Vansittart's workshops, but his accent was as broad as though he had just come straight from Glasgow. He happened to make some passing reference to a certain Mackintosh as being busy with "the engines down below"; and when I enquired with some surprise what engines he referred to, he exclaimed:

"Hoots, laddie! D'ye no' ken that we're an auxiliary-screw, then?"

"Auxiliary-screw!" I ejaculated. "No, certainly not. I had a good look at the craft before I came aboard, but I saw no sign of a propeller. And besides, where is your funnel?"

"Funnel, man!" he retorted. "We ha'e no need o' a funnel. Our engines are operated by gasoline, and we ha'e ane o' twa hunner and feefty horse-power, giving the ship a speed o' seven knots, forbye anither ane o' a hunner and feefty to drive the dynamos and work the capstan and winches. Man, I tell ye this bonnie boat is richt up-to-date, and dinna forget it. As to the propeller, naiturally ye wadna see't, the watter bein' sae thick."

At Kennedy's pressing invitation I remained aboard to dine, and incidentally to be introduced to the remaining members of the wardroom mess—Mr Samuel Briscoe, the second officer, and Mr Robert Mackintosh, the second engineer. Before the meal was over I had come to agree with the purser that in selecting Briscoe for her second officer Mrs Vansittart had not been quite so happily inspired as in the case of the other members of the mess. He was a pasty-faced fellow of about forty years of age, baggy under his watery-looking, almost colourless blue eyes, slow in his movements, glum and churlish of manner, and unpolished of speech; also I had a suspicion that he was more addicted to drink than was at all desirable in a man occupying such a responsible position in such a ship. He would doubtless have done well enough as "dicky" in an ordinary wind-jammer, but on the quarterdeck of such a craft as the *Stella Maris* I considered he was distinctly out of place.

During the progress of the meal I learned that, as I had already suspected, the yacht was a brand-new ship, this being her first voyage. Her exact measurement, it appeared, was two thousand six hundred and seventeen tons. She had originated in the office of Herreshoff, the world-famous yacht designer, and embraced in her construction every last refinement known to the most up-to-date naval constructor. She had been built to the order of Mr Julius Vansittart, the multi-millionaire engineer and steel magnate, as a birthday present to his wife. Mrs Vansittart's passion was yachting, and she was wont to knock about New York Bay, the Hudson River, and Long Island Sound, with occasional adventurous stretches down the coast as far as Delaware Bay, or even to Baltimore, in a sturdy little ten-ton sloop, the while she studied seamanship and navigation and Mr Vansittart attended to his business.

I further learned that the lady's boast to me, that she was captain of the yacht in fact as well as in name, was literally true, she having not only picked and shipped the entire crew, officers as well as men, but taken command of the ship when the pilot left her, and sailed and navigated her across the Atlantic and up the English Channel with no more assistance from her officers than a shipmaster usually receives.

"I tell you, sor, it's a treat to see her put this ship about, blow high, blow low," Kennedy remarked admiringly; "though how the mischief she learned the way to handle a square-rigger it puzzles the sowl of me to know."

It transpired that Mrs Vansittart was accompanied on this trip by her daughter Anthea, aged sixteen—"as bonnie a lassie as you e'er set eyes upon," Mackintosh interjected—and her son Julius, a lad of twelve—"and thoroughly spoiled at that, more's the pity," the doctor added. There was also a certain Reverend Henry James Monroe, M.A., a middle-aged, refined, and very scholarly man, who served in the dual capacity of chaplain of the ship and tutor to the aforesaid Julius. He was one of the saloon party, and was held in the highest honour and respect by Mrs Vansittart, who deferred to his opinion in all things save in the matter of discipline where her darling boy was concerned. I also learned that the yacht was manned by a crew of no less than eighty seamen, every one of whom was rated as A.B.; so that, with the saloon party, officers, petty officers, stewards, and stewardesses, we should make the respectable muster of one hundred and eight all told when we went to sea on the morrow.

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## Chapter Two.

### We go to Sea.

It was past nine o'clock, and a cold, dreary night, with a drizzle of rain, when at length I quitted the hospitable wardroom of the yacht and wended my way back to my rather frowsy lodging in Nightingale Lane. Arrived there, I forthwith proceeded to write a letter to my mother, whose home was in the picturesque little village of Newton Ferrers, near Plymouth, informing her of my good fortune in having secured so satisfactory a berth, and explaining my inability to run down and see her before my departure owing to the fact that we were to sail on the following day. Then, having posted my letter, I got my few traps together, bundled them all into my sea chest, and turned in to take

my last sleep on English soil for many a long day to come.

I was up and astir again by seven o'clock the next morning, my first move being to go along to the yacht and interview Snip, the tailor, in accordance with my arrangement of the previous evening. To my amazement, I found that the man, with characteristic American "hustle", had got my working suit of uniform far enough advanced for me to try it on. The cut and fit proved to be everything: that could be desired, and I was faithfully promised that the suit should be ready for me to don upon joining the ship after signing articles.

In keeping with our pretensions to be a "swagger" ship and crew, the wardroom mess took lunch, instead of dinner, at one o'clock, dining at seven o'clock in the evening. This was the hour adopted by the saloon party, who, I learned, were regularly reinforced by one or more members of the wardroom contingent, by special invitation from Mrs Vansittart.

It was just two o'clock in the afternoon when the boatswain piped "All hands unmoor ship"; and by half-past two we were through the dock gates and heading down the river, impelled by our own engine.

Bearing out what Kennedy and the others had already told me as to Mrs Vansittart being the actual as well as nominal captain of the yacht, at the call of "All hands" the lady had appeared on deck. She was arrayed in an exceedingly neat and workmanlike costume of navy-blue serge, the jacket of which was fastened with gilt buttons bearing the insignia of the New York Yacht Club, the cuffs being adorned with four rows of gold braid, the top row showing the "executive curl", while her smartly dressed chestnut hair was surmounted by a navy cap of the most approved pattern, the peak edged with the usual trimming of a wreath of oak leaves embroidered in gold thread, while the front of the cap bore the New York Yacht Club badge.

True, she did not give her orders respecting the unmooring of the ship directly to the crew, as this would probably have resulted in unduly straining her voice, singularly sweet and pure in quality, of which, as I subsequently discovered, she was very justly proud. She gave her orders to Kennedy, who acted as her *aide* and repeated them in trumpet-like notes that could be distinctly heard all over the ship.

It was then, while we were hauling out of dock, that I got my first glimpse of Miss Anthea, Master Julius, and the Reverend Henry James Monroe, all of whom came on deck to witness the passage of the ship through the dock gates and down the river. I was stationed in the waist, and therefore only obtained at that moment a comparatively distant glimpse of the saloon party on the poop, but even that sufficed to confirm the testimony of the second engineer as to Miss Anthea's physical charms. But I did not altogether like her expression, which was a blank, save for a hint of hauteur mingled with dissatisfaction at things in general.

Her brother was so exactly like her in features that the two might have been twins, but he was a good three inches shorter than his sister, as well as a trifle thinner in the face. He talked incessantly in a sharp, high-pitched, and most unmusical voice, the unattractiveness of which was further heightened by a pronounced nasal American accent. From such scraps of his conversation as reached me from time to time I gathered that his talk was almost wholly about himself, his doings, his opinions, his likes and dislikes—chiefly the latter. I liked his expression even less than that of his sister. It was a most objectionable mingling of peevishness, insolence, and self-assurance; while his manner, even to his mother, was domineering and dictatorial to a perfectly disgusting degree. There was no doubt in my mind that he had been thoroughly spoiled from the moment of his birth onward, and the process was still going on, if I was anything of a judge of such matters.

As regards the Reverend Mr Monroe, all I need say about him at this juncture was that he appeared to answer in every respect to the verbal portrait that had been drawn of him in the wardroom during the preceding evening.

Shortly after we had cleared the dock gates I got a message from Snip requesting me to present myself in his workshop as early as possible to try on my mess jacket and waistcoat; which, like the new rig I had donned little more than an hour earlier, I found fitted me excellently. I was promised that the entire suit should be ready for me in time for mess that night (it appeared that everything was done in tip-top style aboard the *Stella Maris*).

About five o'clock, Marsh, the chief steward, presented himself with a message from Mrs Vansittart, requesting the pleasure of my company at dinner at seven o'clock, which invitation I of course accepted, as in duty bound.

We were just abreast the eastern extremity of Canvey Island when the second bugle call sounded for dinner. I was by that time dressed and quite ready, and joined Kennedy, who had also been invited; and together we repaired to the drawing-room, where Mrs Vansittart, gorgeously attired and wearing many diamonds, very graciously received us and then proceeded to introduce me in due form to the parson, her daughter, and her son.

As regards the parson, I need only say that his manner was everything that the most fastidious person could possibly desire. He was a gentleman, in the highest sense of that often misused term; and although his conversation subsequently, during dinner, evidenced that he was a most erudite and finished scholar, there was nothing of the pedant about him. Information exuded from him naturally and simply because he could not help it; it seemed impossible to broach a topic upon which his knowledge was not complete, and he was brilliant without the slightest apparent effort.

As for Miss Anthea, she looked lovely in a perfectly simple white satin dinner frock, her only jewellery being a thin gold necklet, from which was suspended a very fine opal in a quaint and curious gold setting. She acknowledged my introduction to her with the slightest possible inclination of her head, and thereafter ignored my existence for the rest of the evening. And her brother's greeting of me was equally frigid.

Mrs Vansittart's graceful and kindly geniality, however, made ample amends for the disdainful attitude of her children. She chatted in animated fashion with Monroe, Kennedy, and me for some minutes, and then Marsh, the chief steward, appeared with the announcement that dinner was served. Thereupon she turned to me and said:

"Mr Leigh, you are the stranger of the party to-night; do me the favour to take me down to dinner."

That dinner—as indeed were all those at which I was subsequently a guest—was a banquet. The viands were the choicest of their several kinds, and perfectly prepared; the wines were of rare vintages—at least so Monroe asserted (I was no judge of wines, and contented myself with a single glass of sherry taken with my soup); and the table appointments were on a par with the food and the sumptuous character of the apartment in which the meal was served. There were choice flowers in profusion upon the table; a fire burned cosily in the handsome fireplace; and the table was brilliantly illuminated by handsome, softly shaded electric candelabra of massive silver.

The finishing touch to the enjoyment of the meal was given by Mrs Vansittart's charming manner and sparkling conversation. For the moment we were not her servants but her welcome guests, and she contrived to make us feel this without the faintest suggestion of condescension. She was both brilliant and witty, and in some subtle manner peculiar to herself she not only put us perfectly at our ease, but also put us upon our mettle, so that I at least found myself saying clever things of which I had not before believed myself in the least capable.

It was all so very different from what I had hitherto been accustomed to that I could scarcely persuade myself I was not dreaming some splendid and unusually vivid dream; and I heartily congratulated myself upon the lucky chance which had thrown me into the midst of such delightful surroundings. The dinner, although smartly served, demanded three-quarters of an hour for its consumption; and at its close our hostess took wine with us all, nodded to her daughter, and, rising from the table, retired to the drawing-room.

When the ladies disappeared, Monroe, Kennedy, and young Vansittart resumed their seats, somewhat to my surprise; and a moment later Marsh brought forward cigars, cigarettes, and a jar of choice tobacco. I had been picked for the first mate's watch, and it was our eight hours out that night, consequently by rights I ought to have been on deck at that moment; therefore, as soon as Mrs Vansittart and her daughter vanished, I turned to Kennedy and said:

"If you gentlemen will excuse me, I'll run away and change, and go on deck. I am in your watch, you know, Mr Kennedy, and ought to be on duty now—"

"Bring yourself to an anchor, me bhoy," interrupted Kennedy, pointing to the chair alongside him. "Do ye shmoke? No? Quite right; shmoking is very bad for growing lads," with a glance at Master Julius, who was coolly lighting a cigarette. "If ye don't shmoke ye can at least sit and listen to Mr Monroe's and my illuminatin' conversation until it's time for us to join the ladies. Mrs Vansittart—God bless her kind heart!—allows us just half an hour for an after-dinner shmoke; then she expects us to join her in the drawing-room until ten o'clock, and to contribute, each in our separate ways, toward the entertainment of the rest. Do ye sing by anny chance?"

I modestly replied that I did, a little, and that in a very amateurish way I also played the fiddle. I may as well frankly confess that in my inmost heart I rather prided myself upon my musical accomplishments, music being a perfect passion with me. I had often been complimented upon the quality of my baritone voice and my manner of using it, while some who might be supposed to be competent judges had told me that I ought to have devoted my energies to becoming a professional violinist. But I was careful not to say anything of this.

"Good! That's capital!" exclaimed Monroe. "Mrs Vansittart will be pleased to hear that, I know; for she is devoted to music, is herself a brilliant musician, and will warmly welcome anyone who can contribute in the slightest degree to the pleasure of our evenings. You have the trick of telling a story well, too, Leigh; our hostess thoroughly enjoyed the humour of that yarn of yours. You should cultivate the art of story-telling; there are very few people who are able to tell a story really well."

"Guess that's all nonsense, Mr Monroe," remarked Master Julius. "It's the easiest thing in the world to talk. Anybody can do it."

"Well—yes, I suppose anybody can," returned Monroe. "But," he continued, meaningly, "it is not everybody who can talk sense, Julius. Moreover, the art of conversation consists in knowing when to talk—and when to be silent."

Master Julius, however, did not agree with this. He argued the point with Monroe so volubly and persistently that anything like general conversation became impossible, and he kept it up until Kennedy, with a glance at the clock on the mantelpiece, deposited his cigar stub in an ash tray and announced that the half-hour was up, and that it was time to adjourn to the drawing-room.

"Ah, here you are!" exclaimed Mrs Vansittart, who was seated at the open piano as we filed into the drawing-room, Master Julius well in advance. The boy marched straight across the room, without taking the slightest notice of his mother, and seated himself beside his sister, who occupied a settee in the far corner, and was apparently so deeply absorbed in a book that she was unaware of our entrance.

"Now, then," continued our hostess, "it has gone one bell, and we have not very much time to spare. Which of you gentlemen will favour us with a song?"

"I suggest, madam, that you should call upon Mr Leigh," said Monroe. "In response to a leading question put to him by our friend Kennedy, the young man has pleaded guilty to a limited ability as a singer, and he has also admitted that there are times when he scrapes upon a fiddle. Knowing Britishers as I do, it is my experience that when one of them goes so far as to say he can play or sing at all, he—or she—can usually do it pretty well; I am therefore not without hope that in Leigh we shall find we have a valuable addition to our stock of musical talent."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Mrs Vansittart vivaciously. "Well, I am glad; for I believe I have heard every one of your songs at least half a dozen times, Mr Monroe; and Mr Kennedy's too, to say nothing about the doctor and the purser. Do you sing and play by ear, or from music, Mr Leigh?"

I explained that I did both, but preferred to have the music before me; and in answer to a further question I admitted the existence of certain books and sheets of music among my other belongings. Thereupon I was ordered off to my cabin, with instructions to fetch them and my fiddle forthwith. When I returned, Kennedy was trolling forth the song "Kathleen Mavourneen" in a deep, rich bass voice that made the spacious apartment ring again, while Mrs Vansittart accompanied him on the piano. But for all the attention that the youngsters gave to the song they might as well have been deaf!

When the song was finished, Mrs Vansittart beckoned me to her, and, taking my music from me, glanced through it. Among it were two volumes of *Standard English Songs*, a book of songs by Schubert, a book of sacred melodies consisting chiefly of solos and duets from the oratorios, another containing a selection of songs from various operas, and, in sheet, a few ballads and a quantity of music specially composed for the violin. As she glanced through my budget, our hostess volubly expressed her delight, and was pleased to compliment me very highly upon the taste which had dictated my choice. Then, opening one of the books of English songs and placing it before her on the piano, she invited me to sing "Twickenham Ferry". The song happened to be rather a favourite of mine, and when I noticed the exquisite perfection with which she played the few bars of the introduction I just let myself go, and was rewarded for my pains by receiving what sounded like very genuine and hearty applause when the song came to an end.

Then Monroe, who was gifted with a really beautiful tenor voice, sang with much taste and feeling an old plantation song; after which Mrs Vansittart sang in Italian. Then, by way of a change, we had Gounod's "Ave Maria", Mrs Vansittart playing the accompaniment on the piano while I played the air on my fiddle and Monroe joined in with an obligato on the organ. So, in a very delightful way, to me at least, the evening was passed until four bells chimed out, when we closed the concert by rendering "Hail, Columbia!" with all the vocal and instrumental strength at our command.

As Kennedy and I took our leave, Mrs Vansittart very graciously thanked us both for giving her the pleasure of our company, and expressed the hope that we should spend together many equally enjoyable evenings; but Miss Vansittart scarcely deigned to acknowledge, by the curtest nod of her head, our farewell bows. As for the boy, he was, or pretended to be, fast asleep.

Taking my beloved fiddle with me, I hurried away to my cabin, placed the instrument safely in my bunk, shifted hurriedly into my working clothes, and went on deck, where I was presently joined by Kennedy. The pilot was in charge on the poop, and Mrs Vansittart, wrapped in a voluminous cloak, was also up there, taking a look round and a brief promenade before turning in; so the first mate and I fell into step and walked fore and aft in the waist, between the break of the poop and the fore rigging.

It was a lovely night, very clear and brilliantly starlit. There was no moon, the satellite, then well advanced in her fourth quarter, not rising until toward morning; and it was very cold, a light breeze from the north-east having sprung up about the end of the second dog-watch. We were by that time well down toward the mouth of the Thames estuary, the Tongue lightship being about a point and a half before our port beam, while Margate lights were broad on our starboard bow, the ship heading a trifle to the south of east as she edged in toward the land preparatory to hauling round the North Foreland.

There was a small easterly swell running, just enough to impart motion to the ship and let us know that we were afloat, and we were slipping along at a fine rate upon the last of the ebb tide, and as smoothly and as free from vibration as though we had been under sail.

We rounded the North Foreland just before midnight; and when at eight bells Mr Briscoe came on deck to relieve Mr Kennedy I heard the latter instruct him to get the ship under canvas, and, as soon as she was under command, stop the engine and have the propeller feathered. Then I went below, very tired, to snatch four hours' sleep before turning out to keep the morning watch.

I tumbled into my bunk and instantly fell asleep, only to be awakened the next moment, as it seemed to me, by a quartermaster, who informed me, as he switched on the light, that it wanted ten minutes to eight bells. Accordingly I hopped out of bed, washed and dressed, and was in the act of ascending the poop ladder when eight bells struck.

I found the ship under all plain sail, heading south-west, with the lights of Dover just abaft the starboard beam, some five miles distant; and was informed by Mr Briscoe that the pilot had left us about half an hour earlier, and that we were now "on our own". There was a fine fresh breeze blowing from the north-east, and we were sweeping along in fine style, with squared yards and the mainsail brailed up. After a good look at the sky the first mate gave it as his opinion that the wind was going to haul round more from the eastward, accordingly as soon as the watches had been changed he gave the order to set fore, main, and mizen royal, topgallant, and topmast studding sails on both sides, and lower studding sails for'ard. Now came the advantage of our strong crew; for although we were working with the port watch only, we had the whole of those studding sails set in less than half an hour; whereas, had we been manned after the rate of an ordinary merchantman of our tonnage, the job would have kept us busy during the entire watch. As soon as we were through with this work Mr Kennedy instructed me to ship and set the patent log, which I did, taking the exact time when it started, and noting what it registered fifteen minutes later. The result was that we found we were doing just twelve knots, with the wind dead aft and our head sails practically becalmed by our after canvas.

The first mate's prophecy concerning the easting of the wind proved a true one, for when we hauled up a couple of points after rounding Dungeness it followed us, keeping dead astern. At four bells (six o'clock) we mustered holystones and scrubbing-brushes, attached the hose to the fire hydrant, and industriously washed, scrubbed, and holystoned the decks and cleaned paintwork for an hour, after which the planks were thoroughly squeegeed and dried. Then all hands went to work to polish brasswork until eight bells, by which time the ship looked as spick and span as if she had been kept under a glass case, just removed.



When eight bells struck, Beachy Head bore North-North-West by compass, distant fourteen miles. Prompt at the stroke of the bell, Mrs Vansittart came up on deck, dressed in her blue serge seagoing rig, and bade us a cheery good morning. After receiving Kennedy's report and verifying the bearing and distance of the headland, she gave orders for the course to be altered to west-half-south for the run down channel.

It was at this time a clear and brilliant morning, the sky a hard blue, streaked here and there with mare's tails, the sun, pallid and without warmth, hanging low over the French coast well on our port quarter. The breeze was blowing fresh and very keen, although, running before it as we were, we did not feel anything like the full strength of it. Of this we could only get a correct idea by observing the run of the short, bottle-green channel surges breaking in foam all round us, and the way in which a few brigs and schooners, the former under single-reefed topsails, beating up channel, lay down to it and flung the spray over their weather catheads. There were a good many craft going our way too, both steam and sail, the latter, like ourselves, making the utmost of the good fair wind by showing to it every rag that they could spread. But we overhauled and passed them, one after the other, with the utmost ease; and when, a little later, the breeze freshened, we began to give some of the steamers the go-by as well.

By noon we had brought Selsea Bill square abeam, some sixteen miles distant; and at two o'clock in the afternoon, when I went on deck after luncheon, Saint Catharine's was a point abaft the beam, distant eight miles. At nine o'clock that night we were abreast of the Start, when, Mrs Vansittart having determined our distance from the Point by a couple of bearings taken an hour apart, ordered the studding sails to be taken in and the royals and mizen topgallant sail to be furled. We then "took our departure", and, hauling our wind on the port tack, shaped a course for Ushant, which was sighted and passed at three bells in the following morning watch, our next port of call being, as I now learned, Lisbon.

During the day occupied by our run down channel all hands had an easy time of it, there being nothing much for them to do except keep the ship clean and take an occasional pull at a halyard or brace. I therefore had ample time to take stock of the crew and improve my acquaintance with my shipmates generally.

As regards the crew, I had an idea that in a quiet way they were watching me and seeking to "reckon me up". I was a "Britisher", the only one in the ship; and my experience of Americans, which up to that time had been but slight, led me to the belief that the people, taken as a whole, held the Britisher in but light esteem. I therefore decided that, so far at least as the crew of the *Stella Maris* was concerned, the reputation of my countrymen was to some extent in my hands, and I determined to let slip no opportunity to vindicate it. I was the more strengthened in this resolution by hearing the boy Julius remark to his sister, in tones which I felt were fully intended to reach my ear, that "he had no use for Britishers, and took no stock in them, for they were never of much account."

I do not know whether my brother officers shared the lad's view, or whether they, as I half-suspected the men of doing, were quietly waiting to see of what stuff I was made; but, in either case, they never, with the solitary exception of Briscoe, the second mate, permitted such an attitude to appear. On the contrary, they were genial, cordial, and friendly in a very marked degree, so that within the first twenty-four hours of our being at sea I felt thoroughly at home with all of them. If I had a preference for any above the others it was for Monroe, the boy's tutor, and Harper, the medico of the ship, both of whom were extremely broad-minded men, in addition to being exceptionally well informed and polished in manner. As for our skipper, the more I saw of her the better I liked her. I soon discovered that nothing escaped her notice; she was as smart a seaman as Kennedy himself; she was an expert navigator; the heavens and their portents were an open book to her; she issued her orders with the utmost confidence and decision, and never hesitated to find fault if things did not please her; and yet with it all she was most gracious and friendly in her manner to us all, from the highest to the lowest.

As for Miss Anthea, I am bound to admit that, with the exception of Monroe and the doctor, she treated us all alike with the utmost impartiality, merely acknowledging our salutes with a careless, scarcely perceptible inclination of the head, and otherwise completely ignoring our existence. Her amusements, while on deck, consisted of reading, playing bull, shuffle-board, or deck quoits with her brother, promenading the poop with her mother, and occasionally condescending to exchange a few remarks with the parson or the doctor. But she was a musician of rare ability, and possessed a soprano singing voice of exquisite richness and purity, as I had frequent opportunity of judging by hearing her playing and singing in the drawing-room below while I was on duty on the poop.

That Mrs Vansittart was an ardent sportswoman was evident from the very outset by the way in which she sailed the yacht. She "carried on" consistently, day and night, as though we were sailing in a race, and no sooner were we past Ushant, and the breeze showed signs of freshening, than she ordered preventer backstays rigged fore and aft, and hung on to her canvas until our lee rail was awash and the lee main-deck flooded to such an extent from the topgallant forecastle to the poop that its passage became an impossibility except by swimming.

We swept across the Bay like smoke driven by a strong breeze, overhauling and passing everything that was going our way, excepting a big Cape liner; and we actually held our own with her for some hours, until the breeze eased up sufficiently to allow the steamer to draw gradually away from us. We must have presented a most beautiful picture to the people aboard that boat as we swept along for a time neck and neck with her, our snow-white cotton canvas gleaming in the brilliant sunlight or flecked with sweeping blue shadows as the yacht rushed through and over the foaming surges with the water all aboil about her and every perfectly cut sail, to her three royals, accurately set and drawing like a team of cart horses.

The fresh easterly breeze which had swept us down channel in such splendid style lasted long enough to carry us to the mouth of the Tagus shortly after nine o'clock in the morning of our fifth day out from London; and by noon of that day we were riding at anchor off the city of Lisbon. Here we remained two days, our next destination being the island of Madeira.

From Madeira we went on to Teneriffe, and from Teneriffe to Gibraltar; after which we gradually worked our way up the Mediterranean, calling in at a number of interesting places on the way. We were at Ajaccio on Christmas Day; and

it was characteristic of our skipper that she so arranged matters as to spend the day aboard with us, giving the crew a rare good time and inviting the whole of her officers to dine with her in the evening.

We left Ajaccio on the evening of New Year's Day, and, passing through the Straits of Bonifacio, headed for the Bay of Naples, where we arrived at nine o'clock on the morning of the third of January. From Naples we proceeded to Messina; thence to Malta, Athens, Constantinople, and Jaffa, where we were all afforded an opportunity to make the trip to Jerusalem; and from Jaffa we proceeded to Port Said, where, after remaining at anchor some four or five hours, we ran through the Canal during the night, with an enormous searchlight suspended from our bowsprit end to light us on our way. We anchored at Suez the next day, and Mrs Vansittart then announced that we should remain there at least a week, during which the men would be granted daily leave, while the officers were to make their own arrangements, subject to the approval of Kennedy, who was left in charge. I thus had an opportunity not only to visit Cairo, but also to take a run out to the Pyramids and the Sphinx. As a matter of fact we remained at Suez nearly a fortnight, awaiting our skipper's return, when we hove up our anchor and proceeded down the Gulf of Suez into the Red Sea, duly noting Mount Sinai on our port hand as we passed it.

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## Chapter Three.

### An Indian Ocean Hurricane.

I am not writing this story as a mere diary of travel, and will therefore push on as rapidly as possible to the point where the real living interest of the voyage began, contenting myself with a mere brief reference to the various spots at which we touched. We took eight days to make the passage to Aden, where we arrived early on a certain morning, leaving at five o'clock the same afternoon, after a visit to the famous Tanks. Our next port of call was Zanzibar, whence we proceeded to Durban, in Natal. From Durban we proceeded to Mauritius, remaining in Port Louis harbour two days to permit of a visit to that extraordinary natural curiosity, the Peter Botte Mountain.

From Mauritius we sailed for Colombo. The weather was glorious when we left Port Louis, and for two days afterward, with moderate breezes from the south-east; toward sunset, on our third day out, however, we began to notice signs of a change. The barometer had started to decline shortly after noon; and as the afternoon advanced the breeze weakened, so that from a speed of fourteen knots we dropped down to a bare five, although we were under royals, had all our staysails set, and were showing our whole flight of starboard studding sails as well, the wind being about a point and a half abaft the beam. At the same time the aspect of the sky underwent a subtle change. The clear, rich blue of the vault became gradually obscured by a veil, at first scarcely perceptible, of dirty, whitish-grey haze, from which, by the time of sunset, every trace of blue had completely vanished.

Gradually, too, the sun became shorn of his rays, although there was no perceptible diminution of heat, until at length when the great luminary was upon the point of sinking below the horizon, he had changed into the semblance of a huge, shapeless mass of molten copper hanging suspended in the midst of an almost equally shapeless conglomeration of flame and smoke. Then he slowly vanished from view; the flaming, smoky western sky seemed to blaze up for a few moments into a still fiercer conflagration, the hues deepened until they became a mingling of blood and soot, when with startling suddenness they died out and an inky blackness enveloped the ship. At the same time the small remains of the wind died away, leaving the yacht rolling and lurching heavily upon a sea that seemed to have no run in it, but heaved itself up into great hummocks, only to subside again in the same purposeless manner.

It was drawing on toward the end of the first dog-watch, and as a matter of fact I was off duty. But one never spends a dog-watch below in the tropics if it can be avoided, and Kennedy and I had gone up on the poop together to watch the sunset and discuss with Briscoe, the second mate, the meaning of the portents. Kennedy had never before been in that part of the world, but I had, and while he did not quite know what to make of the aspect of the sky, I had already made up my mind pretty well regarding what was in store for us, and had expressed my opinion as to what we might expect. The first mate did not altogether agree with me, and had proposed that we should refer the matter to Briscoe, who, like myself, knew, or professed to know, the Indian Ocean pretty well. So up we went; and presently, when the last gleam of light was vanishing from the sky, Kennedy beckoned Briscoe to him and said:

"Well, Mr Briscoe, what d'ye think all that grand show away to the west'ard means? Mr Leigh here, who has been in these parts before, says he believes we're in for a hurricane."

"Hurricane be hanged!" retorted Briscoe, who always seemed to find a peculiar pleasure in belittling any opinion that I might express. "What we are in for is a thunderstorm that will make some of ye sit up and take notice. I guess it will bring with it some pretty considerable squalls, so it will be a good plan to stow a few of them flyin' kites of ours. They're doin' no good anyway, and will only thrash themselves threadbare if we leave 'em abroad."

"That's so, and I guess you'd better see about it at once, Mr Briscoe," remarked Mrs Vansittart, emerging from the companion at that moment. She had apparently heard Briscoe's last words as she came up the companion way. "I've just been looking up the weather remarks in the *Indian Ocean Directory*," she continued; "and from what it says I guess there's a hurricane brewing, Mr Kennedy, so—"

"Why," interrupted Kennedy, "that's what Mr Leigh here says. But Mr Briscoe, who ought to know something about the Indian Ocean, says no, it's only going to be a thunderstorm, probably accompanied by heavy squalls."

"And do you know the Indian Ocean, Mr Leigh? Have you ever been here before?" demanded the skipper.

"Several times, madam," I answered. "And once I was caught in a hurricane which dismasted us. The appearance of the sky then was very much what it was this evening, while the barometer behaved pretty similarly to what ours has been doing."

"Then that settles it," exclaimed Mrs Vansittart. "There are two to one—the *Indian Ocean Directory* and Mr Leigh against you, Mr Briscoe; and I guess we'll prepare for the hurricane. Stow all the light canvas; stow everything, in fact, except the fore and main topsails and the fore-topmast staysail; then we shall be ready for anything that comes—eh, Mr Leigh?"

"Assuredly much better prepared than we are at the present moment," I said. "But if I may be permitted to offer a suggestion—"

"You may, Mr Leigh," replied the skipper. "Yes; go ahead. What do you advise?"

"Well, madam," I said, "since you are good enough to give me leave, I would advise that the staysail be stowed also, the topsail yards lowered to the caps,"—we carried patent reefing topsails—"the royal and topgallant yards and topgallant masts sent down on deck, as well as the studding sails out of the tops; and that extra lashings be put upon the boats and booms. Then I have no doubt we shall ride out whatever may come with reasonable comfort and safety. And when it comes, I would heave the ship to with her close-reefed fore topsail aback; also I would have a small tarpaulin ready to lash in the weather mizen rigging in case the topsails should blow away. Finally, I would direct Mackenzie to see that his engine is all ready for starting at a moment's notice, if need be."

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed Mrs Vansittart, "do you really believe it's going to be so bad as all that?"

"I certainly think it not at all improbable, madam," I said.

"Then I guess we'll do as you say," exclaimed the lady. "It's the right thing to err on the safe side, and I won't take any chances. But it will be bad for the men to have to work in this darkness. When does the moon rise?"

"She is due to rise at about eight forty-five to-night," I said. "But I am afraid it will be useless for us to look for any help from her; we shall get no light from her to-night."

"You think not?" she said. "Then—ah! there is four bells," as Briscoe, having descended to the main-deck, came up on the poop and struck the bell. "Let the men get to work at once, Mr Kennedy, both watches, and see that Mr Leigh's suggestions are carried out. And, say, I guess I won't risk having the topsails blown away; we'll furl everything while we're about it; and if the hurricane comes we'll heave to under bare poles. How will that do, Mr Leigh?"

"Admirably, madam," I replied. "You will then have done everything possible to provide for the safety of the ship; and when the blow comes, as I feel sure it will, there will be no need to risk the lives of any of the crew."

The necessary orders were at once given, and we all repaired to our several stations. My duty was to supervise operations on the mizenmast, Kennedy having charge of the men working upon the mainmast, and Briscoe supervising those upon the foremast, and when I went aft I found Miss Anthea and her brother seated in a couple of basket chairs by the taffrail. It was necessary for me to stand quite close to them for a few minutes; and I had no sooner taken up my position than I heard the boy say to his sister, in tones loud enough to reach my ears:

"Say, 'Thea, why does Momma pay so much attention to what the Britisher says? I guess I don't like it—and I don't like him, either. I am going to speak to her about it. Who is he, that he is to be consulted before Kennedy and Briscoe? They're Amuricans, while he is only a Britisher, and they've been to sea longer than he has; and anyway, an Amurican is a darn sight better than a Britisher any day."

"Yes, I guess you are right, Ju," replied the young lady; "only you need not allow your dislike to betray you into vulgarity. I hate Englishmen, but I do not find it necessary to use the word 'darn', and I wish you wouldn't; it is only common, vulgar people who use it. And I wouldn't speak to Momma either, if I were you; it is not worth while. Momma thinks the man is clever, but, of course, he isn't, and she will find it out sooner or later."

So that was it! I had often wondered at the attitude of latent hostility of these two youngsters toward me; and now I understood. They hated Englishmen! Well, their hatred did not trouble me in the least; it was passive, or at all events was only so far active as to prompt them now and then to make offensive remarks in my hearing, and taking into consideration who and what they were, I could put up with a good deal of that. But it had the effect of putting me upon my mettle. I was determined to prove to them that they were mistaken in their estimate of Englishmen, not because I attached any value personally to their good or bad opinion, but because eventually they would be man and woman, if they lived, and, from the position which their wealth would give them, would have the power of influencing the opinion of their fellow countrymen to a certain limited extent. I felt that it was my duty to do what I could to lessen the unreasoning dislike of my fellow countrymen which I had noticed in so many Americans.

It was at this time a dead calm, with a very heavy, confused swell running, so that the only sounds heard, apart from our own voices, were the wash and gurgle of the water alongside, as the ship wallowed uneasily, the loud rustle and flap of the canvas aloft, and the creaking of the spars. Moreover, it was intensely dark—to such an extent indeed that I found it impossible to superintend operations from the deck. Presently, therefore, I sprang into the mizen rigging and made my way aloft to the mizen topmast crosstrees, from which I directed the operation of sending down the royal and topgallant yards, and afterwards took a hand in sending down the topgallant mast, having the satisfaction of finding, when I returned to the deck, that we on the mizenmast had beaten both Briscoe and Kennedy. I reckoned that, on board a well-disciplined, old-fashioned British man-o'-war, the task of sending down royal and topgallant yards and masts and stowing all canvas would have been accomplished, under similar circumstances, in about twelve minutes, at the utmost; but it took us thirty-five minutes by the ship's clock. This I thought not at all bad, however; for in the first place we were nothing like so heavily manned as a man-o'-war of our size would have been, nor had our hands the constant practice in such evolutions that a frigate's crew would have had. But the main thing was that our lady skipper was satisfied, and was good enough to say so.

It remained intensely dark until close upon ten o'clock that night, when the thinnest imaginable suggestion of

moonlight came filtering weakly through the dense curtain of cloud that now overspread the heavens, just enough of it to enable us to see objects close at hand and avoid hurting ourselves by running foul of them, as we had been doing while moving about the decks. The weather still remained stark calm, and the ship was rolling so furiously that I should not have been at all surprised to see the masts go over the side at any moment. The gear was all good and new, however, and held bravely; but the motion was so intensely disagreeable, and we shipped so much water over both rails, flooding the main-deck and necessitating the battening down of the hatches, that at length Mrs Vansittart gave orders to start the engine, and the ship was then put stem-on to the swell, which had now become more regular, setting out from about North-North-East. This action brought us immediate relief, as it enabled the helmsman to keep the ship out of the trough, though the violent rolling was exchanged for almost as violent a pitching. But the thunderstorm which Briscoe still persistently maintained was coming, failed to eventuate; and hour after hour dragged away with no indication of any immediate change, save that the feeble glimmer of moonlight, instead of increasing, gradually died away again, leaving us in almost as bad a plight as before.

At midnight, when I went on deck to keep the middle watch, Mrs Vansittart was still up; and I thought that her temper seemed to be rather on edge, perhaps owing to the strain of the long-spun-out suspense. At least she responded rather sharply to Kennedy's and my greeting when we joined her on the poop.

I thought that perhaps Briscoe had been talking to her during his watch, and doing his best to discredit my judgment, for no sooner had we joined her than she turned upon me, and, in very incisive tones, informed me that she had come to the conclusion that I had been mistaken, and that there was going to be no hurricane after all, otherwise it would have come before then. But I knew that the Indian Ocean hurricane sometimes takes a long time brewing; indeed, in the case of my previous experience it had threatened for more than ten hours before it actually burst upon us. I explained this to her; and also said that there was nothing in the aspect of the weather to make me alter my original opinion. We were still engaged in debating the matter when a peculiar low, moaning sound became audible in the air, rapidly increasing to a weird, unearthly howl, and a wild, scuffling gust of hot wind swept over us from the north and went whining away astern of us until we lost sound of it altogether.

"It is coming at last, madam," I said; "we shall probably have three or four more such gusts as that, each lasting longer than the one preceding it, and—"

"And, begorra, here comes number two, now!" exclaimed Kennedy, as a similar sound once more became audible; and with a vicious swoop another gust smote us so fiercely that the yacht stopped dead, unable to make headway against it. For a full minute or more it seemed as though half a dozen separate and distinct winds were battling together for the mastery, the yacht being the centre and focus round which the battle raged. We on the poop were buffeted helplessly this way and that, so that it was only with the utmost difficulty we could keep our feet; indeed, Mrs Vansittart was literally lifted off her feet for a moment and blown across the deck with such violence that, had she not luckily been forced straight into my arms, so that I was able to catch and hold her, she would probably have been seriously injured by being dashed furiously against the poop rail.

She thanked me breathlessly as I dragged her by main force to the mizenmast and passed a couple of turns of the topgallant halyard round her waist, securing her to a belaying pin; and by the time that this was done the gust, like the first, had passed. I begged her to go below, before worse happened, assuring her that Kennedy, who was in charge, would know exactly what to do; but the little lady was grit to the backbone, and positively refused to leave the deck. On the contrary, she ordered Kennedy to counter-brace the yards with the head yards aback, and then heave the ship to on the port tack, after which everybody but ourselves and the look-outs was to go below, and while she was giving these orders she deftly passed a few more turns of the halyard about herself, so that she could not possibly be blown away unless the mizenmast was blown out of the ship. Also she begged the loan of my black silk neck scarf, which she tied over her head and under her chin, so that her yachting cap might not be blown overboard, as mine had been.

By this time the air all about us was in a state of continuous agitation, the wind sometimes swooping down upon us in savage gusts, and anon easing up for a moment until it was scarcely more than a zephyr; but these lulls momentarily became of briefer duration, until in the space of about ten minutes it was blowing hard but very unsteadily, the heavy gusts following each other with ever-increasing rapidity. And now we felt the full benefit of our earlier preparations; for with the counter-bracing of the yards—a task accomplished in less than a minute—everything that was possible had been done; and all that remained was to ride out the gale as best we could.

We were now afforded an opportunity—the first that had ever occurred, as Kennedy yelled for my information—to see what a really magnificent sea boat we had under our feet, for under the scourging of that terrible wind the sea rose with appalling rapidity, notwithstanding that the top of every sea, as it rose, was torn off and swept to leeward in blinding and drenching clouds of spindrift. And although our engine had been stopped, the ship lay to in the most perfect manner, heading well up into the wind and taking the seas, as they came at her, as buoyantly as a gull, shipping very little water except what came aboard in the form of spindrift or scud water, with an occasional spattering over the weather cathead.

But this was only the beginning of the hurricane—merely its awakening, so to speak. With the passage of the minutes the wind steadily increased in strength until the wailing and shrieking of it through the spars and rigging aloft resembled the tones of a mighty organ, drowning every other sound; while the yacht lay down to it until her lee rail was completely buried and the water was right up to her main-hatch coamings. As the wind increased, however, we rode somewhat easier, for after a time it became impossible for the sea to rise; indeed, the strength of the wind was such that it actually flattened the sea down, every wave, as it reared its head, being swept away as a deluge of spray. The air was full of it—as full as it is of water during a tropical shower; and the only manner in which we could distinguish it from rain was by the salt taste of it upon our lips.

I think the worst feature of it all, however, was the hideous darkness in which we were enwrapped; for outside the small circle of light emanating from the skylights it was impossible to see anything save a faint, ghostly white

radiance representing the phosphorescent surface of the foaming sea, in the midst of which the hull of the yacht stood out black, vague, and shapeless, it being impossible to see the whole length of her because of the dense clouds of spindrift which enveloped us.

At length it occurred to me to wonder how our lady skipper was faring in the midst of this awful turmoil of wind and sea; and, watching my opportunity, I made a dash for the spot where, dimly outlined in the sheen of light from the foremost skylight, I could just distinguish her form huddled up against the foot of the mizen mast. As I reached her I noticed that she seemed to be hanging limply in her lashings, and, stooping closer, I presently discovered that the plucky little lady had fainted. The buffeting of the wind and the pitiless incessant pelting of the spray had been too much for her; and unable to call for assistance, or to escape unaided, she had succumbed. This fact established, I lost no time in summoning Kennedy to my assistance, when, having cast her adrift, we managed between us to convey her safely to the companion and carry her below to her cabin. We then roused the doctor and Lizette, the chief stewardess, and turned her over to their care, after which we left her there and returned to the deck to complete our watch.

I think that middle watch was the longest four hours that I had ever spent, chiefly because of its extreme discomfort and the fact that there was nothing to do. First of all, I was drenched to the skin, the conversation in which I was engaged with Mrs Vansittart when the hurricane started having rendered it impossible for me to go below and get into my oilskins. Then there was the unceasing buffeting of the wind, which seemed at times as though it would drag me limb from limb. There was also the continuous scourging of the spray, which stung like the lash of a million whips; and finally, there was the oppression of a very real anxiety, for, as I think I have mentioned, the yacht was as heavily rigged as a frigate, and notwithstanding the relief afforded by sending down her tophammer, she lay down so alarmingly that at length I began seriously to question whether it would not eventually end in her turning turtle. Eight bells came at length, however; and when shortly afterward I got below, shed my streaming garments, towelled myself dry, and tumbled into my bunk, my discomfort and anxiety promptly left me as I sank into a sound and dreamless sleep.

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## **Chapter Four.**

### **I save Julius's Life.**

When, shortly before eight bells, I was called by the wardroom steward, I at once became aware that a change of some sort had occurred in the weather. For, on the one hand, the list of the ship to starboard seemed to be no longer so heavy as it had been when I turned in; while, on the other, the motion was far and away greater—so violent indeed was it that, seasoned as I was to the movements of a heaving deck, I experienced the greatest difficulty in maintaining my balance. When presently I went on deck, my previous impressions were fully confirmed; for although it was still blowing a whole gale, the maniacal fury of the hurricane was past, while the sea, no longer flattened down and kept practically level by the irresistible strength of the tempest, had risen rapidly and was now an almost terrifying sight to behold. Especially was this the case when the ship settled into the trough, with one great foaming liquid mountain rushing away to leeward of her, while another enormous grey-back, towering above us as high as our lower mast-heads, came swooping down upon us from to windward with hissing angry crest, threatening to hurl itself bodily down upon our decks and sink us out of hand.

Yet that threat was never fulfilled, for the yacht was behaving magnificently. She came to in most perfect style as she climbed the breast of each oncoming comber, heeling steeply to it the while and turning up a bold weather bow to meet its onslaught. Then, as the crest curled in over her turtle-back topgallant forecastle, smothering it in whirling and blowing foam and spray, she would swing upright and, with a lift of her stern and an easy weather roll, go sliding down into the trough beyond, her head paying off as she did so. And although she was still under bare poles, with her head yards aback, I could see, upon looking over the side, that she was forging ahead at a speed of about a knot and a half.

But although the wind was no longer blowing with hurricane force it still had the strength of a heavy gale, and while a reference to the barometer showed that the mercury had begun to rise, there was no other sign of improvement in the weather. The sky was almost as black and threatening in its aspect as ever, with innumerable shreds and tatters of dirty whitish-grey cloud sweeping athwart at a speed that made one giddy to look at; while there could be no question that the sea was gathering height, weight, and volume with the passage of every minute. The air was still heavily charged with flying spume and spindrift, necessitating the use of oilskins and sou'westers, and keeping our spars, rigging, and decks streaming; but we could see with tolerable clearness for at least a mile in every direction.

Yet although the general feeling out on deck was one of dampness and discomfort, we had not the added misery of cold to deal with. On the contrary, it was so warm that shortly after I went on deck, having breakfasted, I felt my long oilskin coat and sea boots so uncomfortably warm that I presently slipped below again for a moment, and, removing them and my socks, donned a short oilskin jacket and returned to the deck barefooted, for the sake of the greater comfort. I took it for granted that Miss Anthea would never dream of turning out in such weather, while I felt sure that Mrs Vansittart would excuse me, under the circumstances, the more so as she had often before come on deck while we were paddling about, barelegged, washing decks. And indeed when, shortly afterward, she emerged through the companion way, encased in a thin mackintosh reaching to the hem of her dress, and with a light sou'-wester on her head which in nowise detracted from her good looks, she at once set me at my ease by laughingly complimenting me upon the sensible character of my attire. Then, in a very different tone of voice, she thanked me for having come to her rescue on the previous night when, overcome by the terrific buffeting of the hurricane, she had swooned while lashed to the mast.

We—that is to say, Mrs Vansittart, Kennedy, and I—were still standing together under the lee of the wheelhouse, discussing the weather generally, and the probable duration of the gale in particular, when the boy Julius came up

from below, emerging from the companion way at the precise moment when the ship, with a terrific lee roll, was climbing to the summit of an exceptionally heavy sea. Precisely how it happened I could not possibly say, it occurred so suddenly, and moreover I only saw the last part of it; but I imagine that the lad must have lost, or inadvertently released, his hold upon the side of the companion at the critical moment when the velocity of the ship's roll was at its highest. Be that as it may, Julius no sooner stepped out on deck than he went with a run straight to the lee rail of the poop, fetched up against it with a force that must have knocked the breath out of him, and then—although the rail was breast-high to him—in some inconceivable fashion seemed to lurch forward upon it, turn a complete somersault over it, and plunge headlong into the sea. It was Mrs Vansittart's shriek of "Julius!" and her look of petrified horror, that caused me to wheel round, and I was just in time to see the lad go whirling over the rail.

One's thoughts move with lightning-like rapidity in moments of emergency, and as I saw the boy going I thought, "Kennedy is no good; those heavy sea boots of his would drag him down and sink him in a few seconds; I must go myself!" And as the thought flashed through my brain I tore off my oilskin jacket and, shouting to Kennedy, "Lifebuoy—bend to signal halyards!" made a dash for the rail, while Mrs Vansittart's shrieks lent wings to my feet.

As I reached the rail the ship topped the surge, which went rushing and roaring away beneath her and to leeward in a tremendous boil of foam, in the rear of which there was a space of almost glass-smooth indigo-coloured water, down through which I thought I saw something that might be the boy's body. Without hesitating an instant I vaulted the rail, landing upon the curved turtle-back outboard, flung my hands above my head, and plunged straight for the spot where, a moment before, I thought I had seen the lad's body.

I went deep, kicking and striking out vigorously as I felt the water close about me, for the thought occurred to me that if the boy had really hurt himself badly when colliding with the rail, he would probably not rise to the surface at all, but would slowly sink. As I forced my way downward I looked about me, and presently saw a glimmering white something far below which might be the object of my quest, for the boy was dressed entirely in white. Desperately I urged myself downward, the gloom increasing with every stroke; and at length, when I felt as though my lungs would burst and I could not retain my breath another second, I grabbed something, I scarcely knew what, and turning, struck upward toward the blue glimmer of light far overhead.

How I managed to hold my breath during that seemingly endless climb to the surface I cannot say, but I did it somehow, my head emerging from the water at the very instant when the air escaped from my lungs in one long gasp. I quickly filled them again, looked to see what I had brought to the surface with me, and found that, as I expected, it was the apparently lifeless form of Master Julius. I had grabbed the lad by his ankle, so that he hung head downward in my grasp. That would never do; so, treading water vigorously, I shifted the position of the body until I had the head resting upon my shoulder; and at that moment I felt myself being hove up, up, up, and the next instant a very mountain of water went hissing and roaring over my head, plunging me helplessly hither and thither and momentarily threatening to tear my prize from my hold.

As soon as I had again got my breath, I looked round for the yacht. She was nowhere in sight; but presently, as I began to wonder what had become of her, I saw her topmast-heads swing into view beyond the head of the comber that had just swept past me, and then up she swept until the whole of her hull was visible. I saw a crowd of people gathered aft by the taffrail, and others in the rigging, all peering out under the sharp of their hands in various directions. Then, as the craft surmounted the grey-back and came sliding down its weather slope, rolling to windward until I could see nearly half her main-deck, one of the figures suddenly pointed toward me, and in an instant every face turned my way, while one man, whom I presently recognised as Kennedy, put one hand to the side of his mouth, as though shouting, while he pointed with the other.

Not a word could I hear, however, for my ears were still full of water, while such sound as entered them was merely the hiss and roar of the sea. But I guessed what the mate was pointing at, the more readily as I saw one man paying out a thin line over the rail; so I looked eagerly about me, and presently saw, some thirty fathoms away, a white lifebuoy floating in the midst of a wide surface of foam, the ship at this time being perhaps twice as far from me as the lifebuoy. But just as I started to strike out for the buoy, another heavy sea swept over me, treating me pretty much as the first had done, and all but suffocating me into the bargain.

I thought that, hampered as I was with the boy's inert body, I should never reach the buoy, for I seemed utterly unable to make so much as an inch of progress in that frightful sea; and once, after I had been overwhelmed about a dozen times, the thought came to me that if I wanted to save myself I must give up the idea of saving the body, which after all would be a useless task, since I felt certain that the lad was dead. But no; I could not return to the ship and face the lad's mother empty-handed. I could picture her despair under such circumstances, for Julius was Mrs Vansittart's only son, and, spoiled as he was, I believed that she loved him more than her husband, more than her daughter, more than her own life. No, it was not to be thought of; I had undertaken the task and I must execute it. I had raised her hopes, and I would not disappoint them if God would only give me strength to reach that buoy.

At length, after what seemed like a century of effort, I did reach it, and, laying my hand upon its nearest rim, tilted it over my head and under my armpits, at the very moment—as I afterward learned—when those aboard had paid out four sets of signal halyards to the bare end of the fourth set!

And now came the delicate and difficult task of hauling me alongside in the shortest possible space of time, without parting the halyards on the one hand or drowning me on the other. But Kennedy was the man for the job. Even as I vaulted the rail and plunged into the water his active mind, aided by past experience, had enabled him not only to grasp the full import of my hasty words concerning the lifebuoy and the signal halyards, but also to foresee exactly what must inevitably happen. And while he was in the very act of unreeving the peak ensign halyards, preparatory to bending them on to the lifebuoy which his ready knife had slashed off the taffrail, he was shouting for somebody to pass the word for Mackenzie, the engineer.

When Mac, already issuing from his cabin to learn what all the sudden outcry was about, received the message and

came rushing aft in response to the call, he in turn was fully prepared for the order which Kennedy gave him, to go below and set his engine going dead easy astern. Thus by the time that I reached and got into the buoy, the ship's way through the water was stopped, and, highly dangerous though such a proceeding undoubtedly was, under the circumstances, they were able to haul me gradually alongside and up under the counter without mishap, the engine of course being stopped again at the right moment. And when once they had got me under the lee quarter of the ship all the rest was of course comparatively easy. Two of the hands standing by hove me a couple of standing bowlines on ropes' ends, one of which I slipped over the inanimate Julius's head and under his armpits; and when I saw that they had got the body safely in over the rail I slipped into the other myself, and was hauled aboard amid the triumphant yells of the crew—to swoon as my feet touched the deck.

But there was nothing much the matter with me. I had swooned simply through over-exertion, coupled perhaps with the reaction at finding myself once more safely aboard the yacht; and Harper, the surgeon, having had the foresight to order someone to stand by with brandy as a restorative, in case of need, they soon brought me round again. By Kennedy's orders I was helped below to my cabin, to turn in and rest for a bit, learning, as I went, that Harper and the boy's mother had taken charge of the lad the moment that he was hauled aboard, and had carried him below to his cabin. I afterward heard, however, that before she quitted the deck, Mrs Vansittart had given orders that she was to be informed, at the earliest possible opportunity, how things were going with me; and I further learned that, upon being told I was doing well, she fell upon her knees by the side of her boy's bed and, bursting into tears, sobbed forth audible thanks to God for my preservation.

As for me, after vomiting a considerable quantity of salt water, I was helped to undress, given a vigorous towelling, and put into my bunk, where, having swallowed a tumblerful of hot brandy and water, I quickly dropped off to sleep, and remained asleep until after four bells of the afternoon watch had struck. Then, feeling pretty much my former self, although a bit shaky on my pins, and very sore about the chest, I turned out, donned a dry suit of clothes, and sallied forth to the wardroom, with the twofold object of ascertaining if there was any news as to Master Julius's fate and getting something to eat.

Upon entering the wardroom I found Kennedy, Mackenzie, Grimwood the purser, and, somewhat to my astonishment, the doctor, present and chatting animatedly. Moreover, I gathered that they were talking about me, for as I passed through the open doorway Kennedy looked up and exclaimed:

“And begorra here's himself, no less! Talk of the—Here, bring yourself to an anchor on the sofa, lad, and let's have a look at ye! Faith! but your morning's experience has taken it out of ye, by the looks of ut. But never ye mind that, me bhoy, ye'll weather it all right, and ye'll always have the memory of havin' done a gallant thing, whatever happens. By the Piper, lad, we're all proud of ye, from the skipper downward.”

They all came crowding round me as I sank upon the sofa, and insisted upon shaking hands with me, saying so many nice and complimentary things to me that I presently began to feel quite abashed. Then Harper interfered authoritatively.

“There!” he exclaimed, waving the crowd away, “that will do, you chaps. Let up upon the youngster a bit and give him a chance. What you want,” he continued, turning to me and laying his fingers upon my pulse, “is a meal first—not a heavy meal, but something good and nourishing, and then another spell of sleep. Mac, have the goodness to press the button for the steward, and I'll give him an order. How is your appetite, my British hero?”

“Why,” said I, “to confess the truth I turned out because I felt hungry, and came in here with the hope of getting something to eat. But, Doctor, I want to know about the boy. I did the best I could for him, and was determined to bring him back with me if I was fortunate enough to fetch the ship again; but I felt certain there was no life left in him, even before I got hold of the buoy.”

“And that is just where you were mistaken, young man. Oh! here you are, steward,” as that individual entered in response to the summons of the bell. “I want you to go to the cook and tell him—from me, you understand—to give you a good big basin of that chicken broth I instructed him to prepare, and bring it here for Mr Leigh, with a slice of bread from a loaf baked yesterday, if anything of the sort remains. Then, when you have brought the broth, go to Mr Marsh and ask him to give you a small bottle of Mumm, and bring it along here. Now get a move on, and let me have those things quick.”

“Well, Doctor, what about Master Julius?” I prompted, as the steward retired.

“Why, as it happened, he was not dead when we hauled him aboard,” replied Harper, “though he was so near to it that it cost me two solid hours or more of strenuous work to restore animation. But I believe I shall pull him through now, with luck. He dropped off to sleep about half an hour ago, and I left him in charge of his mother and the chief stewardess, with instructions to send for me upon the instant of his waking. How do you like your broth?”

“It is delicious,” I replied, “and I am enjoying it; although I feel a bit mean in taking it, for I suppose it was prepared for Julius, wasn't it?”

“Don't you trouble about that, young un,” returned the doctor. “The cook has my orders; and if he has attended to them—as I have no doubt he has—there will be plenty for the pair of you. Will you have some more?”

But I declined; I had had quite sufficient, I said. Thereupon Harper opened the half-bottle of wine which the steward had brought, poured the contents into a tumbler, and ordered me to toss it off and then go back to my bunk and get another sleep.

“Sleep just as long as you care to,” he said, “and don't worry about watches until I give you leave. A night in ought to fix you up again, I think; but we will see what you look like when you turn out for breakfast to-morrow.”

I was soon asleep again, but the first bugle call for dinner awakened me, and, feeling a good deal better, I turned out and dressed, noticing, as I did so, that the ship's movements were very much easier and more rhythmical than when I had lain down. Indeed, I had the feeling that she was sailing again; and, glancing through my porthole, I found that this was so, and that the weather had cleared. The sea, now a deep sapphire blue, had gone down very considerably, the sky was clear of clouds, and upon looking more closely at the water I was able to detect the shadow of the ship upon it, and thereby determine that she was under her three topsails, courses, fore-topmast staysail, and spanker. And by the swirl of yeast past my port I estimated that she must be reeling off about eight knots.

While I was still engaged in dressing there came a gentle tap at my door, to which I answered "Come!" whereupon the door opened and Harper entered.

"So you are turning out again," he said, after standing and looking at me a moment. "How do you find yourself?"

"Oh! ever so much better," I replied; "indeed, I think I may say that I am practically all right again. The soreness of my chest is all but gone, and—"

"Let me feel your pulse," he commanded; and I stretched out my arm to him.

He laid his finger on my pulse and kept it there for about half a minute.

"Yes," he said, "you'll do; nothing very much the matter with you. Now, look here, boy, Mrs Vansittart has instructed me to come and see how you are getting on, and to say that if you feel equal to it, she would like you to join the saloon party at dinner to-night—just themselves, you and I, you know, alone. The fact is that they are all eager to tell you what they feel about your exploit of this morning, and they will not be happy until they have done so. Do you feel equal to the ordeal; or shall I go back and say that they must excuse you for a little while longer? I think you can stand it, you know. What say you?"

"Oh, yes!" I replied, "I dare say I can stand it. I suppose it will have to come sometime, so I might as well get it over and done with. But, I say, Doctor, just give them a hint to go easy with their thanks, will you, there's a good fellow. If there is one thing I hate more than anything else, it is being made a fuss of. You understand me?"

"Why, of course I do, my dear chap," was the reply. "It is frightfully trying, I know; but you mustn't grudge them the satisfaction of expressing their gratitude to you—see? I'll take care that they shall not carry the thing too far. I'll tell 'em that you're not in condition to stand very much excitement just yet. Well, then, so long. See you again later."

As soon as I had finished dressing I seated myself in the very comfortable revolving chair in front of my writing desk, to await the second bugle call to dinner; but I had scarcely done so when a steward came along to my cabin, bearing a medicine glass containing a draught which he said the doctor had sent me, with instructions that I was to take it at once. I accordingly tossed it off; and a few minutes later the second dinner call sounded, and I made my way aft and up the companion way to the drawing-room, where I found Mrs Vansittart, her daughter, Monroe, and the doctor already assembled.

As one of the stewards flung open the door and announced me, Mrs Vansittart came forward, seized my hands in both of hers, and looked up into my face with eyes that were swimming with tears. For a moment her lips quivered, speechless; then, recovering command of herself, she said:

"Welcome—a thousand welcomes, Mr Leigh! Doctor Harper has explained to us that it is only by making a great effort you find yourself able to meet us to-night and give us a chance to express our lifelong gratitude to you for your noble, gallant deed." Again her emotion overcame her; and presently, after a brave but ineffectual struggle to be formal and restrained, she suddenly let herself go, and, bursting into tears, exclaimed:

"Oh! you dear, dear boy, Walter, how can I ever thank you enough? I am a happy, grateful woman to-night, for the doctor has just assured me that Julius will certainly recover; whereas, but for you, he would—would—have been—" She could get no further; so in lieu of words the dear lady lifted my hands to her lips and kissed them repeatedly. Then, to my intense relief, Harper stepped forward, and, gently taking her by the arm, led her to a seat, saying:

"Now, my dear lady, this will never do, you know. You must pull yourself together, or I shall have another case upon my sick list. If I had suspected that this was going to happen I would not have allowed Leigh to come to you so soon. This has been a very trying day for you, I know, but—"

"Yes, it has, Doctor," she sobbed, "and of course it has upset me a bit; but just leave me alone for a minute or two, and I shall be all right again."

While she was saying this, Miss Anthea came forward, and, frankly extending her hand, expressed her own thanks to me for having saved her brother's life. "And, Mr Leigh," she continued in a low voice, "I take back every one of those horrid things that I've said about Englishmen in your hearing. I am downright ashamed of myself. Will you forgive me?"

"Why, of course I will, very freely and willingly," I said. "Please forget all about them, as I shall."

"Thank you!" she said. "My brother—"

But at this moment Marsh flung open the door, and, in his most impressive manner, announced that dinner was served, thus putting an end to what I felt to be a most embarrassing situation.

"You are to take me down to dinner, if you please, Mr Leigh," said Miss Anthea, linking her arm in mine. "I insisted upon it," she explained, "because I want to make you understand how sorry and ashamed I am at the way I have behaved to you all through the voyage—"



"But," I said, "I thought it was agreed that that should be all forgotten."

"So it shall be," she said, "since you are so generous as to wish it. But before we entirely relegate the matter to oblivion, I want to explain that my stupid prejudice against Englishmen is not at all founded upon experience, for the few Englishmen whom I have met—true, they have been very few—have all been unexceptionable. I don't know why it is, but it seems to be the fashion for us Americans to speak and think of Englishmen as being of a different clay from ourselves, something infinitely inferior to us in every respect—effete, and all that sort of thing; and so much is this the case that a good many of us really come to believe it at last. There! I have made my confession, cried *peccavi*, and have been forgiven; and I feel ever so much happier. Now, please tell me about yourself. I want to know whether you have quite recovered from the effect of your dreadful exertions this morning. My! I don't believe I shall ever forget how I felt when I rushed up on deck to find out what all the confusion was about, and saw you swimming in the water, ever so far away, with Julius hanging over your shoulder."

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## Chapter Five.

### We fall in with a Derelict; and meet with an Accident.

That evening, short though it was—for Harper insisted that we should all retire early—was the most delightful that I had ever spent, although everybody would persist in talking of what they termed my "exploit", the ladies telling me over and over again how profound was their gratitude to me for saving the life of the being who was evidently, to them, the most important person in the world, while the men said all sorts of complimentary and flattering things about my courage in plunging overboard in such a tremendous sea, and so on, so that my cheeks were aflame with blushes all the time. But the absolute sincerity of their gratitude and admiration and the friendly warmth of their feeling toward me were so transparently evident in everything they said, that despite the feeling of embarrassment that oppressed me, I was very happy, the more so that nothing was said or even hinted at concerning a reward for what I had done. For—perhaps because of my youth—my pride was intensely sensitive; and while I greatly valued their gratitude and friendship—and I may as well be frank enough to add, their admiration—any hint of reward would have wounded my self-respect to the quick.

In consequence of the doctor's injunction as to our early retirement that night, we did not adjourn to the drawing-room, as usual, but when the cloth was removed Mrs Vansittart announced her intention of remaining with us while we sipped our coffee and Harper and Monroe smoked their cigars; and Miss Anthea also remained. And it was then that I learned how very narrow had been the escape of the lad Julius from drowning.

It appeared that when, owing to the sudden and violent lurch of the ship, he had been hurled athwart the deck and against the lee rail of the poop, the impact of his body upon the hard wood was so severe that the breath was completely knocked out of him, while the pain must have been so great as practically to paralyse him for the moment and render him quite unable to do anything to help himself. Hence the probability was that, once in the water, he would have sunk for good and all, and that but for my promptitude in diving after him he would never again have been seen. And when at length he was got aboard, he was so nearly gone that Harper's skill and resources were taxed to their uttermost for more than two hours before any sign of returning animation manifested itself; while it was not until the afternoon was well advanced that the medico was able to assert with assurance that the lad would recover. Even so, there was the probability that, with all the care and skilful treatment he could possibly receive, it would be at least three or four days before Julius could be up and about again.

According to routine, it was my eight hours out that night; but Harper's fiat had already gone forth that I was to spend the whole night in my bunk. Therefore upon leaving the dining-room I at once retired to my cabin, turned in, and slept soundly until I was called at eight o'clock on the following morning, when I arose, thoroughly recuperated, and feeling as well as ever.

The first thing I noticed, while dressing, was that it was a brilliantly fine morning, for the sunshine was streaming powerfully in through my port, flooding the cabin with its radiance; and the next thing was that the ship's motion was easy and buoyant, from which I inferred that the gale was over and that we had passed beyond the area over which it had swept. But in this last supposition I was mistaken, as was to appear later. Still, when I went on deck everything went to justify the belief, for the sky was cloudless, the wind had sunk to a royal breeze from the eastward, the sea had gone down, leaving nothing but a long low northerly swell, and we were reeling off our twelve knots easily and comfortably, as I learned had been the case ever since midnight.

When I climbed to the poop, Mrs Vansittart was already there, attired in a fine-weather rig of white, with a white cover on her yachting cap. She immediately came up to me and, shaking hands, expressed the hope that I had entirely recovered from the effects of yesterday's ducking and exertions. Then, as I replied in the affirmative and in return enquired how her son was progressing, she deftly drew me aft to the taffrail, out of earshot of Briscoe, the second mate, who was sourly regarding us both, and said:

"Now, Walter, there is just a word or two that I want to say to you, and this is as good an opportunity as any to say it. I will not repeat what I said to you last night in reference to my gratitude to you for saving dear Julius's life, for I hope I then made it quite clear to you that I shall always regard myself as under an obligation to you which it will be quite impossible for me ever adequately to repay. But this is what I wish you to understand. I have decided that in the interests of good discipline, and to guard against the possibility of arousing unworthy jealousy,"—here, whether by accident or design, she allowed her gaze to rest for a moment upon the second mate's somewhat ungainly figure—"I shall treat you, while on duty, precisely as I do my other officers, making no distinction whatever in my behaviour between you and them. I feel sure that you would prefer it so; would you not? Of course. Very well, then, that is clearly understood between us; but I thought it best to mention the matter, so that there shall be no misapprehension.

"And now, as to Julius. The dear boy is very much better, I am thankful to say; but Dr Harper thinks it is best that he should remain in bed for to-day at least. I find that he has not the faintest recollection of what happened to him after he fell into the water until he came to himself in his bed, so I have told him everything, and made it perfectly clear to him that he owes his life to you. Of course he is grateful, and wishes you to go down and see him a little later on in order that he may personally thank you; but—well—if he should seem not quite so grateful to you as he ought to be I beg that you will not think badly of him, Walter. Having been unconscious all the time that he was in the water, I can quite understand—cannot you?—that he is unable to appreciate very clearly the awful risk you ran in effecting his rescue, and the magnitude of his indebtedness to you. And—yes—there is another thing. He is an only son—and—well, I am beginning to think that perhaps we have all united together to spoil him a bit, so that, you see—"

The poor lady was becoming more and more embarrassed with every word she uttered, I therefore thought it high time to come to her relief; so I said:

"Dear madam, I beg that you will not distress yourself by attempting any further explanation. I see exactly how the matter stands; and believe me, I shall not be in the smallest degree disappointed if I find that Julius's gratitude is less eloquent in its expression than your own. After all, he is still very young; he has no knowledge of what actually happened, except what you have told him; and I doubt very much whether any boy of his age possesses the capacity to conjure up a very lively feeling of gratitude for an obligation of which he knows nothing except from hearsay. Therefore I hope that you will not allow yourself to worry over any seeming lukewarmness on his part."

"Thank you, Walter; a thousand thanks!" she said, laying her hand upon my arm. "It is generous of you to feel about it as you do, and it increases the load of my obligation to you. But I see that you perfectly understand, so I will say no more about it. As soon as Dr Harper says you can see Julius, I will send for you."

The interview with Julius took place shortly after six bells in the forenoon watch, the boy's mother and the doctor being present; and after what the former had said to me by way of preparation, I was not at all surprised to find that Master Julius's thanks were expressed in a very perfunctory, offhand manner, with not much of the ring of sincerity about them. But I made allowances for him, for I saw that the lad was still only in the early stage of convalescence; also, it was perfectly clear that he did not in the least realise the fact that he had all but lost his life.

The cabin in which he lay was very large, light, airy, and most beautifully furnished, with every convenience and luxury that the most fastidious person could possibly desire; and it was quite painful to see its occupant, on his handsome and capacious brass bedstead, under a most beautiful embroidered silk coverlet, and surrounded by everything that heart could wish for, lying there wan, peevish, irritable, dissatisfied with everybody and everything, seemingly because his doting parents had gratified his every whim and humoured his every caprice. It was quite evident that he regarded me with almost if not quite as great distaste as ever; he even seemed to consider it a grievance that he owed his life to a despised Britisher; and seeing how acutely his mother was distressed at his ungracious manner toward me, I contented myself by saying a few words of sympathy with him on his illness, and brought my visit to a speedy close.

Five bells in the afternoon watch had just been struck, and I was once more on duty, when a man who had been sent aloft to attend to some small matter hailed the deck from the main topsail yard to report that, some ten miles distant, and broad on our weather beam, there was something that had the appearance of a dismayed wreck. In reply to this the skipper, who was on deck, requested Kennedy to take the ship's telescope up into the main topmast crosstrees and ascertain what the object really was. This was done; and in due time the mate came down and reported that the object, as seen through the glass, proved to be a biggish lump of a craft, either a ship or a barque, totally dismayed, with the wreckage of her spars still floating alongside, and to all appearance derelict. We at once hauled our wind, and shortly afterward tacked; and by eight bells we were up with the wreck and hove to within biscuit-toss to leeward of the craft. Then Briscoe, the second mate, in charge of one of the whalers, was sent away to give the derelict—for such she seemed to be—an overhaul.

The craft was a wooden vessel, of about our own tonnage, painted black with a broad white ribbon chequered with false ports; she had a Dutch look about her; and, from her model, was evidently somewhat elderly. She had been ship-rigged, and from the appearance of the wreckage alongside had been caught unawares, very probably by the recent hurricane, and dismayed. She had a short, full poop, and as she rolled heavily toward us we caught sight of what looked like the shattered framework of a deckhouse close abaft the stump of her foremast; also, there were the remains of two boats dangling from davits on her quarters; from all of which appearances we concluded that she had passed through a pretty desperate experience.

But what had become of her crew? There had been no sign of them when we closed with and hailed her, nor had any of them appeared since; yet the wreckage of the boats hanging from her davits made it difficult for us to believe that they had abandoned the ship. True, there was no sign of a longboat such as is usually stowed on the main-hatch of a merchantman, but we could hardly believe that the crew had taken to her in preference to the two quarter boats; for after the fall of the spars it would have been difficult to launch so heavy a boat, unless indeed they had run her overboard, fisherman fashion, through the wide gap in her bulwarks amidships on both sides, where not only the planking but also the stanchions had been swept away.

Shortly after the departure of Briscoe we drifted into a position which enabled us to get a view of the stranger's stern. This confirmed our first surmise respecting her origin, for beneath a row of smashed cabin windows we read the words: "Anna Waarden. Amsterdam."

Briscoe remained aboard the wreck about three-quarters of an hour; and, upon his return, reported that the craft was derelict, and that there was nothing to show how the crew had left her, except that it appeared to have been with the utmost suddenness, for there was no sign of their having taken anything with them. Even the ship's papers—which he found in the captain's stateroom and brought away with him—had been left behind; and that the disaster could only have occurred very recently was proved by the logbook, which had been entered up to within a few hours of the

moment when the hurricane struck us, while Briscoe had found the chronometer still going.

He added that he had sounded the well and found barely a foot of water in it; and that, after careful examination, he had come to the conclusion that the hull was sound. If Mrs Vansittart would supply him with a crew, he believed he could fit the craft with a jury rig and take her into port. The logbook showed that she had sailed from Batavia, homeward bound for Amsterdam, sixteen days before the date upon which we fell in with her; while her papers made it clear that she was laden with a cargo quite rich enough to justify the attempt at salvage. The result of this report was that Mrs Vansittart summoned the crew aft, explained to them, through Kennedy, the nature of the second mate's report and his request to be allowed to salve the hull and cargo, and then called for volunteers for the job.

The prospect of salvage money proved tempting enough to induce some twenty men to come forward, of whom Kennedy chose fifteen, including the boatswain's and carpenter's mates; whereupon the purser was instructed to make up the men's accounts to date and pay them off. While the first part of this business—namely, the making up of the accounts—was being attended to, those who had volunteered went below and packed their kits, then brought them on deck and threw them into the first cutter, which Mrs Vansittart gave them, after which they went aboard the Hollander and got to work.

The arrangement was that if Briscoe found the ship sound, he was, if possible, to follow us to Colombo. If the yacht should be there upon his arrival, he was to turn over his salvaged vessel to the proper authorities, and, with his crew, rejoin the *Stella Maris*. But if for any reason this plan should be found impracticable, he was to act according to his own discretion, preferably navigating the ship to the nearest port at which she could be refitted, and thence taking her home.

Half an hour afterward Grimwood, the purser, reported that he had made up his accounts and withdrawn from the safe the amount of money required to pay off the volunteers, whereupon I was ordered to take the whaler, which was still in the water, veered astern, convey the purser aboard the other craft, and, while he was engaged upon his business, take a look round and consult with Briscoe, to determine whether the latter had all that he was likely to require.

Investigation showed, as was of course to be expected, that the craft was amply supplied with provisions and water for a long voyage, and also that both were undamaged, while she was also well found in every other respect. As soon, therefore, as the purser had finished his task—not without having some of his accounts disputed—we bade the adventurers farewell, wished them a safe and prosperous voyage, climbed down into our boat, and returned to the yacht, which, after I had made my report to the skipper, filled away and proceeded for Colombo, just as the sun was dipping below the horizon.

I may mention here that we saw no more of Briscoe and his crew. They did not turn up at Colombo during our sojourn there; and it was not until long afterward that I learned that, after a very protracted and adventurous voyage, the *Anna Waarden* safely reached Durban, where she refitted, ultimately arriving safely in Amsterdam.

At ten o'clock in the morning of the fifth day after parting company with Briscoe, we entered Colombo harbour and came to an anchor in six fathoms. The boy Julius was by this time sufficiently recovered to show once more on deck, but his health was still such as to cause his mother some anxiety; therefore, after anxious consultation with Harper, it was arranged that he should be taken up to Kandy and given a fortnight's thorough change of air and scene. The whole party—that is to say, Mrs Vansittart, her son and daughter, and Monroe—therefore packed up their traps and went ashore immediately after luncheon; and we saw no more of them for a full fortnight. At least we saw no more of them down aboard the yacht; but after they had been gone some three or four days Kennedy received an invitation to go up to Kandy, to dine and spend the next day there; and when he returned he brought with him a similar invitation for me, it being now impossible for us both to be out of the ship together, since, immediately upon Briscoe's departure, I had been temporarily promoted to the position of second mate, with the promise of permanent confirmation in the event of Briscoe not rejoining us. So in my turn, up I went to Kandy, and enjoyed the trip immensely, being most warmly received by everybody except Julius, who seemed wholly unable to conquer his antipathy toward me.

When the party returned to the yacht they were all, Julius included, looking vastly better for their sojourn among the hills; indeed the boy appeared better in health than I had ever seen him before, and I thought there was a shade of improvement in his temper also. They came aboard about half-past five o'clock in the evening, and, we having been previously warned by letter, the moment that they stepped in on deck we hove up our anchor, started our engine, and proceeded to sea, in order that we might avoid spending the night in the insufferable heat of the harbour. We kept the engine going until we had rounded Dondra Head and were heading north, with Adam's Peak square off our port beam, when we made sail, bound for Calcutta, where we arrived exactly a week later.

We lay at Calcutta a whole month, during which Mrs Vansittart and her party toured India from end to end, seeing, according to her own account, everything worth seeing. And while she was thus engaged, we of the wardroom did our modest best to enjoy ourselves, first of all seeing everything that was worth seeing in and about the city; and afterward engaging a native pilot to take us in the motor launch to the Sunderbunds, where, braving malaria, snakes, and all other perils, we spent a week shooting, the four of us who constituted the party bagging seven tigers between us, to say nothing of other and less formidable game.

From Calcutta we sailed for Moulmein, where we remained four days, getting a hurried glimpse of Burma and the Burmese; then we sailed for Singapore, at the southern extremity of the Malay Peninsula. But on the night of our third day out from Moulmein, while we were bowling merrily along with a spanking wind abeam, reeling off a good twelve knots by the log, we struck something which we conjectured to be a piece of practically submerged wreckage; for when we afterwards came to investigate the matter, the look-out on the forecastle head vowed by all his gods that, although he was keenly alert, he had seen nothing. The incident occurred during the middle watch, while Kennedy was in charge, consequently I was below and asleep at the time. But I was awakened by the shock, although

it was not very severe. Kennedy rushed aft to the taffrail to see if he could catch a glimpse of the object, whatever it might be; but although the night was starlit it was too dark to see very distinctly, and although he imagined that, as he stood there at gaze, he saw something break water some eight or ten fathoms astern, he could not be sure.

He wheeled about, and, running forward to the break of the poop, gave orders to let fly the royal and topgallant halyards and sheets and to back the mainyard, also instructing the carpenter to sound the pump well. For a few moments, while these things were doing, there was some confusion, what with the watch bustling about the decks, and those below rushing up on deck to see what had happened—among them being Mrs Vansittart, who appeared on the poop wrapped in a dressing-gown. But presently the ship was brought to the wind and hove to, and the confusion began to subside, especially when the carpenter reported that the ship was making no water.

Mrs Vansittart, apprehensive that we might have run down some small native craft, ordered our remaining cutter to be lowered and sent me away in charge to investigate; but after pulling about for more than an hour I was unable to find anything, and at length returned to the ship in response to a rocket recall. Meanwhile, the carpenter had been below, and, after a most careful investigation, had returned with the report that he could find no indication that the ship had sustained the slightest damage; consequently, upon my return, the cutter was hoisted up and sail was again made. But on the morrow, with the arrival of daylight, the discovery was made that all three blades of our propeller had been completely shorn off, a mishap which, a little later on, resulted in landing us in what might have been a very awkward mess.

Possibly this accident may have had the effect of reminding our lady skipper of something that had all but slipped her memory. Be that as it may, the loss of our propeller blades had no sooner been discovered than she issued certain orders, in response to which several heavy cases were swayed up on deck and opened, with the result that when the sun went down that night the *Stella Maris* was an armed ship, sporting two main-deck batteries of beautiful four-inch quick-firing guns of the most up-to-date pattern, six of a side, with two one-pound Hotchkisses on her fore-castle, and four Maxims on her poop.

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## Chapter Six.

### Kennedy's Banshee.

It was shortly after noon, on our fifth day out from Moulmein, and we were just within the Malacca Strait, when the wind began to fail us; and by two bells in the first dog-watch it had fallen stark calm, and the yacht's head was slowly boxing the compass. We were close enough in with the land to see from the deck the ridge of the mountain range that forms the backbone, as it were, of the Malay Peninsula, though not the coast line itself; but there were quite a number of islands in sight, some of which were of respectable size, while there were others that could not have had an area of more than a few acres—some of them indeed being scarcely more than rocks. Most of them, however, seemed inhabited, for even on some of the smallest we were able, with the help of our telescopes, to distinguish one or more ramshackle huts, some perched on the top of long, stilt-like poles; also there were at least a hundred small fishing craft in sight, as well as a few proas, probably coasting craft, becalmed like ourselves.

"Now," said Mrs Vansittart, addressing herself to Kennedy and me as we sat upon the poop rail, longing for the sun to go down and leave us the comparative coolness of the night, "here is just where we miss our propeller. If it had not been for that accident I guess we could have started the engine; and we should at least have had the draught caused by the ship's passage through the water to cool us; whereas we shall have to wait where we are and just simmer until a breeze springs up again. And I guess I see no sign of one as yet, while the glass stands very high. Mr Leigh, do you happen to know whether there is such a thing as a dry dock at Singapore?"

"I have never been to Singapore," I replied, "so I cannot say for certain; but I seem to recollect having heard such a thing mentioned. Does not the Directory say anything about it?"

"There now! I declare to goodness that I never thought to look," exclaimed the lady. "But," she continued, "I'll go and do so now; and if there happens to be a dock there big enough to take in this vessel, I guess I will have the *Stella Maris* docked and cleaned and another propeller fixed. We've got a spare one down below; and I guess Mackenzie is man enough to fit it, once we get into harbour, even if there is no dock—though I hope there will be one. I'll turn up the Directory now, and see what it says;" and therewith she descended to the chart-room, fanning herself with a palm-leaf fan as she went.

As soon as Mrs Vansittart was fairly out of earshot, Kennedy turned to me and said:

"Ever been through here before?"

"No," I replied. "The nearest I have ever been to it was two passages through Sunda on a voyage to and from Canton."

"M-m!" returned Kennedy. "Did anything out of the common happen to ye that voyage?"

"N-o, I think not," said I, trying to remember precisely what, if anything, had happened. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," replied my companion, "chiefly, I think, because yonder's the Malay coast, and here we are, a valuable ship, becalmed, and helpless because we've lost the blades of our propeller."

"Oh! but that is sheer nonsense," I said. "You are thinking about pirates, I suppose. But, my dear chap, with the incoming of steam, piracy went out, because it no longer paid to be a pirate. You never hear of such a thing in these days."

"Not very often, I admit," agreed Kennedy. "Yet it was only about a week before we sailed from New York that I read in the *Herald* a story of a ship being picked up derelict, in this same Strait; and when she was boarded, her crew, consisting of twenty-seven men, were found lying about her decks, murdered; while her main-hatchway was open, and the signs that she had been plundered were as plain as large print."

"Indeed!" I said. "I do not remember hearing anything of that case. Anyhow, it only happens once in a blue moon. And I don't think that, with our pretty double row of teeth and our Maxims and Hotchkisses for close-quarter fighting, we need be very greatly afraid."

"No," agreed Kennedy, with a laugh. "I guess ye're right there, me lad. Wid those guns, and hands enough to fight them, I calculate we are well fixed, and could beat off a whole fleet of proas. But I'm rale sorry that the skipper didn't think of havin' them mounted before, so that the men might have had a chance to practise the workin' of them a bit. An' there's another thing—But here comes the skipper; I guess I'll spake to her about it."

At that moment Mrs Vansittart returned to the poop with the information that, according to the Directory, Singapore possessed a dry dock capable of taking in the *Stella Maris*; and, that being the case, she would have the ship docked and the spare propeller fitted as soon as possible after our arrival.

"And a very wise thing, too, ma'am," agreed Kennedy. "I am only sorry that we haven't got it shipped this very minute."

"Are you?" returned Mrs Vansittart, looking up sharply as she detected the serious tone of the first mate's voice. "Why? Any reason in particular?"

"Sure!" answered Kennedy. "As I was sayin' to Leigh a minute ago, yonder is the Malay coast, and here are we, becalmed and unable to move. Now, I don't want to raise a scare, there's no need for it, but I hold that it's better to be ready for a thing, even if it doesn't happen, than to be caught unprepared. No doubt ye're well aware, ma'am, that the Malays have the name of bein' always ready to undertake a piratical job if they think there's half a chance of ut bein' successful; and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if anybody was to tell me that hundreds of eyes have been watchin' us all this afternoon and their owners speculatin' as to the sort of reception they'd meet with if a few hundred were to come off to us some time durin' the small hours of the mornin'. Av course we may not be here then; a breeze may spring up and carry us far enough away. But then again, it mayn't, and in my opinion the bettin' is against it; therefore, if I may be allowed to offer a suggestion, it would be somethin' like this.

"I'd recommend ye to send for Bledsoe, the gunner, and ordher him to tell off crews to every one of these guns. Then let him explain to the captain of each gun how the thing works; and afther he has done that, send him down to the magazine and let him sort out a few rounds of ammunition for each gun and have them handy to send up on deck. Also let each gun be loaded, ready in case of need. If not needed, the charges can easily be withdrawn and sent below again to-morrow, while, if they are, they'll be ready. Also, it might be quite worth while to have the small arms ready for servin' out at a moment's notice."

"My!" exclaimed Mrs Vansittart, "are you quite serious, Mr Kennedy? Because, if you are, it sounds as though we might be in for a real big fight. What do you think, Mr Leigh?"

"I fully agree with Mr Kennedy, madam," said I; "not so much because I anticipate an attack upon the ship, as that I clearly see the force of his argument as to the advantage of preparedness."

"Yes," agreed Mrs Vansittart; "I guess you are both right, and I will act upon your advice, Mr Kennedy. Please send for the gunner and tell him what to do. I had something of this sort in my mind when I gave the order for those guns to be put on board."

By the promptitude with which Kennedy sent for the gunner, and, when he arrived, mustered the crew, I could clearly see that the good man was distinctly anxious, although I did not believe he had much cause to be so. Still, I quite agreed with him that the wise and proper thing was to be prepared for every possible contingency, and I cheerfully did my share of the work. Fortunately, Bledsoe was an ex-man-o'-war's-man, and had held a gunner's warrant in the United States navy; he therefore knew his business from A to Z, and gave us all the help that we needed.

First, all hands were mustered and paraded; then a crew was told off to each gun, including the Hotchkisses and Maxims—Kennedy undertaking the supervision of the Hotchkisses, and I that of the Maxims. Bledsoe next took each gun's crew separately in hand, showed one how to work their weapon, and left them to practise the movements of loading, sighting, firing, and sponging, while he passed on to the next, until both batteries were assiduously engaged in repeating the several motions time after time. Finally he worked his way round to me, explained the mechanism of the Maxim, and showed how the belts of cartridges were fixed and the gun was handled. It was very simple, and I picked the whole thing up in a few minutes, the weapon being to so large an extent automatic. Finally every piece was loaded, ten rounds for each were brought on deck, the covers were put on, and the hands were piped down.

It was my eight hours in that night; and by this time it had come to be a regular custom and a recognised thing for me to dine in the saloon on such occasions, that is to say, every other night, the arrangement with regard to Kennedy being similar, so that he and I dined in the saloon on alternate nights, the doctor, the purser, and the two engineers forming the other guests. Thus as soon as our exercise with the guns was over I rushed off below, took a tepid bath, and then dressed for dinner, completing my preparations just in time to respond to the second bugle call. There was some disposition to make merry over Kennedy's "scare", as the boy Julius would persist in designating it; but as the lad was the only one who seemed to regard the matter purely from the jocular point of view, the conversation was soon steered in another and more agreeable direction, and we spent a very pleasant evening, breaking up shortly after ten o'clock.

Before retiring to my cabin I went up on deck to take a look round. It was a most glorious night, still a breathless

calm, the heavens perfectly clear, save for a low cloud bank hanging over the land, the stars shining brilliantly, and a half-moon shedding a soft, mysterious radiance upon the scene powerful enough to enable us to distinguish with tolerable clearness the nearer islands and some half a dozen craft lying becalmed within two miles of us, inshore. The moon would set about midnight; yet even then we should still have the stars, if the night remained clear.

Kennedy was seated in a deck chair, with a powerful night glass reposing upon his knees, when I went up on the poop; and he informed me that although he had been keeping a careful watch upon matters inshore, he had seen nothing whatever of a suspicious character.

"But then," he explained, "I didn't expect to. If those Malays are as 'cute as I take them to be, and are cherishing designs against us, you may bet your bottom dollar that they'll be careful not to do anything that would appear to us in the least suspicious. I may be a fool, but things look almost too quiet, ashore there, to be wholly satisfactory to me. I would rather see a little more movement, a fishing boat or two coming out, or something like that. Why, I've known cases where, a ship bein' becalmed as we are, widin a few miles of the shore, the natives have come off in scores wid fruit and fish and curios to sell; but those chaps ashore there have kept most religiously away from us. Ah, well! that cloud yonder is risin'—slowly, I admit, still it's risin', and I hope it'll bring a breeze wid it, if it's only enough to give us steerage way. I don't like things as they are, not the least little bit."

"Why, man," I exclaimed, "what is the matter with you to-night? If I didn't know better I should be almost inclined to think you were afraid!"

"Afraid, is ut?" he laughed. "Begorra! what would I be afraid of, in such a ship as this, wid all those beautiful guns and what not to purtect us? No, Leigh, it's not afraid I am, as you know well; and yet I have a curious feelin'—I can't describe ut, but it's a sort of feelin' of—Howly Sailor!—what in the nation is that? Did ye hear it, boy?"

Hear it? I should think so; and so had every other individual on deck, if one might judge by the sudden silence that fell upon the men grouped about the fore deck, followed by an equally sudden fusillade of low, quick ejaculations and the swift rush of bare feet to the rails. It began as a low, weird moan, which rose rapidly to a sort of sobbing wail and culminated in a sharp, unearthly scream that sent cold shivers running down my spine and caused the hairs of my head to bristle upon my scalp. It seemed to come from the water almost immediately under our bows. I saw a little crowd of men spring up the ladder leading to the topgallant forecandle, rush to the rail, and peer eagerly down into the black water. Then one of them straightened up suddenly and hailed:

"Poop, there! did ye hear that strange cry, sir?"

"Ay, ay," answered Kennedy, "I heard it right enough. D'ye suppose I'm deaf? What is ut, anyway, that's makin' it?"

There was a brief but animated confab on the forecandle, and then the voice that had hailed came back:

"Can't see anything anywhere, sir; but the sound seemed to come from away yonder, on the starboard bow."

Instantly there arose a hubbub of protesting voices, one of which, louder than the rest, could be heard exclaiming:

"You chump! what d'ye mean by sayin' that? Don't ye know the difference between starboard and port? It was away off here to port that the sound came from."

But this assertion in turn was contradicted by the first speaker and his adherents, so that in less than a minute a strenuous argument was proceeding on the forecandle, both parties to which, it seemed to me, were in the wrong.

"Ay, ay, there ye are," commented Kennedy. "Nobody knows where the sound came from. 'Twas the *banshee*, me bhoy, that's what ut was; and some Oirishman aboard this good ship is goin' to lose the number of his mess shortly."

"Oh, nonsense!" I exclaimed. "You surely do not believe that—"

I had got so far with my protest when again the blood-curdling cry rang out over the dark water, this time sounding more distant than before. Once more a clamorous dispute arose on the forecandle as to the direction from which the sound proceeded, for, curiously enough, no two individuals seemed quite agreed upon the point, while even I felt it impossible to make an authoritative statement as to whether the cry arose from ahead or astern. And, in the midst of the discussion, up came the saloon party, *en masse*, to enquire what was the matter.

I was, for some not very definite reason, glad that Kennedy did not again assert his *banshee* theory; he merely stated the facts of the case, leaving the others to draw their own conclusions. The boy, Julius, no sooner heard the chief mate's statement than he was ready with an explanation. In a high-pitched tone of voice, which could be distinctly heard from one end of the ship to the other, he positively asserted that the cries were those of a sea bird, although I had never in my life heard a sea bird utter such terrible sounds, nor had the men forward, if one might judge by the low, contemptuous laughter from the forecandle with which the assertion was greeted. But although Kennedy demurred, the boy insisted that he was right; he knew all about it, and finally rushed off to his cabin for some book, a certain passage in which, he declared, would support his contention. And I seized the opportunity thus afforded to retire in good order to my own cabin.

When I went on deck again, at eight bells, the moon was just on the point of ruddily setting, while the cloud bank which I had noticed earlier in the evening hanging low over the land had risen until its upper edge was almost over our mast-heads, blotting out about half the stars. It was now so dark away to the eastward that nothing whatever could be seen, not even the faintest loom of the nearest islands; while, if it had not been for a faintly glimmering light here and there, we could not have told that there were any craft of any kind in our neighbourhood. There had been no repetition of those strange, weird sounds that had startled us all earlier in the night, so Kennedy informed me; but he was still firmly convinced that they had emanated from the banshee, and when I laughingly tried to argue him out

of his conviction he took me up rather sharply with the assertion that, had I been of Irish birth or extraction, I would know better than to make light of the matter. To my amazement, he seemed quite depressed and low-spirited at the mere mention of it, so I quickly dropped the subject and asked him if during his watch he had observed anything to confirm his earlier suspicion that we might possibly be attacked. He admitted that he had not, but added:

"I niver expected to see annything so long as the light lasted. It's now that they'll be beginnin' to make a musther if those ginks mane comin' off to us at all, so for the love o' Mike keep your eyes skinned and your ears wide open all through your watch. We can keep them off aisily, if we only get warnin' enough; but if by anny chance they can conthrive to creep up close enough to take us unawares and lay us aboard, they may take the ship through sheer force av numbers."

"Why," said I, "you talk as though you felt absolutely certain that an attack will be made upon the ship! I can't understand you a bit to-night, and that's a fact."

"Faith, boy, I cannot undherstand mesilf," replied Kennedy, seriously. "I've never before felt as I do this blessed night; but somehow I *know* that something's goin' to happen. And then, there's the banshee—"

"Oh," I interrupted, "banshee be hanged! I thought you were much too sensible a fellow to be moved by superstitions of any kind. Now, take my advice—you've got a touch of the sun. Go down to the doc, get him to give you a good stiff dose of quinine, and turn in. You'll feel a different man when you are roused at eight bells and find that the ship is all right. And as to anything creeping up and taking us unawares, you may trust me to see that nothing of that sort happens. I will keep a bright look-out, never fear."

"Well, I hope ye will, that's all," returned Kennedy, as he stepped toward the head of the poop ladder on his way below. "And, by the by, there's one precaution ye may as well take. Unship the side lights and stow them somewhere handy but where their gleam will not show. They're quite useless, since we're becalmed, unless a steamer should happen along, and if she does ye'll see her lights and hear her propeller in plenty of time to show her where ye are. And mask the skylights, too. Then, maybe, if annybody comes lookin' for us wid evil intentions, they'll not find us. Good night—and keep a bright look-out."

With this final caution the first mate took himself off, much to my relief; for, truth to tell, his undisguised anxiety and uneasiness were beginning to get a bit upon my nerves. As soon as he was out of the way I went forward and, in obedience to what I took to be his order, caused the red and green side lights to be unshipped and placed inboard, just inside the topgallant forecastle door, at the same time cautioning the look-outs to keep their eyes skinned, as we were in somewhat dangerous waters. Then I went aft, masked the skylights, and slipped into the saloon for a moment to extinguish all the lights save one, and draw the blinds across the open ports.

This task took me less than a couple of minutes, and then I returned to the poop and took a good look round. But I could see nothing except four dim glimmers of light spaced at irregular intervals, which I took to be the lights of the becalmed craft which we had seen inshore of us earlier in the evening. And as for sound, there was nothing to be heard save an occasional faint gurgle of water under the counter when the ship lifted to the almost invisible swell, accompanied by a low flap of canvas aloft, a gentle patter of reef points, or the slight creak of a parral or block sheave; but so breathlessly still was the night that these sounds, faint as they really were, sounded almost appallingly loud. There was not the smallest murmur of subdued talk for'ard, for the watch had curled themselves up in the most comfortable places they could find in order to steal a "caulk", and I did not attempt to disturb them, knowing that at my first call they would be upon their feet in a moment.

To keep myself awake I proceeded to pace the poop to and fro in my rubber-soled shoes, taking care to avoid passing over that portion of the deck which formed the roof of our lady skipper's stateroom; and while I was thus engaged I nearly collided with a ghostly figure which proved, upon investigation, to be that of Monroe, the tutor parson, in pyjamas and slippers. He explained that he found it too hot to sleep below, so had come up on deck in the hope of being able to cool off a bit prior to having another try. He fell into step alongside me, and began to talk in a low voice, presently turning the conversation to Kennedy and the queerness of his seemingly rooted conviction that we should be attacked. I let him talk on until he appeared to have said all that he had to say upon the subject and was about to go below again, when I said to him:

"I am glad that you came up on deck, because it affords me an opportunity to say something that Kennedy's queer talk has rather forced upon my mind. It is this. If by any chance we should be attacked, will you undertake to see that Mrs Vansittart, her daughter, and the boy are, any or all of them, prevented from coming on deck? Their presence here under such circumstances could be of no possible assistance to us; on the contrary, it would be a distinct hindrance."

"Yes," acknowledged Monroe; "I see what you mean. But suppose that any of them should take it into their heads to come on deck, how am I to prevent them? I have no authority over them, not even over the boy."

"You must bring your moral suasion to bear upon her, if need be," I said. "Point out to her that the beating off of a piratical attack—Oh! hang it, what bosh I am talking, to be sure; as though there was the least likelihood of such a thing! The talk of that ass Kennedy seems to have hypnotised me as well as himself! But to return to what I was saying—if such an utterly improbable thing should happen, point out to her that fighting is men's work, and that the presence of women and children would be worse than useless at such a time. Let her remain below herself, and exercise her authority over that boy of hers to make him stay below also. I don't suppose that Miss Anthea would need any persuading."

"No," agreed Monroe; "she is all right, and on the whole a very sensible girl, despite her foolish pride. But let me give you a hint, Leigh. In the event of, as you say, such an exceedingly unlikely thing as an attack occurring, don't trust too much to my powers of persuasion, but act upon your own responsibility. Lock the door of the drawing-room, and

Mrs Vansittart will be unable to get out on deck, however anxious she may be; and then slip down below and lock Master Julius into his cabin; that is all you will need to do. There will probably be a row afterward, but I will back you up by saying that what you did was done by my advice. And now, good night! I feel a trifle cooler than I did, and hope I shall be able to—Hallo! Listen! Did you hear anything?”

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## Chapter Seven.

### Attacked by Pirates.

We both halted and listened intently, Monroe with one foot on the top step of the companion, on his way below.

“What did you think you heard?” I questioned in a half-whisper.

“Well, I can scarcely say,” was the low-spoken reply. “As a matter of fact, I am not sure that I heard anything. I am beginning to think that Kennedy’s stupid talk must have affected us all aft here, more or less, but it certainly seemed to me that while I was bidding you good night just now I caught the faintest suggestion of—Ah! by Jove! there it is again. Did you catch it?”

“Yes,” I said, “unless—But no; I don’t believe it was imagination. I thought I heard a sound like the groaning of an oar against a thole pin, some distance off in that direction,” with a flourish of my hand toward the east.

“Yes,” agreed Monroe; “that describes the sound exactly. Surely Kennedy’s apprehensions cannot have been well-founded, after all, can they?”

“Don’t know in the least,” I returned; “but I guess we shall, very soon now. Meanwhile, since it must be obvious to you that I cannot possibly leave the deck at this juncture, perhaps you will have the goodness to slip down below and do that key-turning trick you suggested to me just now.”

“Sure! I will,” answered the parson. “It was my advice, and I will take the responsibility of carrying it out,” and he vanished down the companion way.

As he disappeared I went down the poop ladder at a run, hurried forward, and made my way to the forecabin head, where I found the look-out leaning against the guard rail with his arms folded and his chin sunk upon his chest. He was not asleep, for as he heard the light patter of my shoes upon the ladder he straightened himself and turned to see who was coming; but I had a very shrewd suspicion that the stillness of the night had induced in him a condition very much the reverse of alertness.

“Is that Johnson?” I demanded sharply.

“No, sir,” he replied. “I’m Maguire.”

“Then, Maguire,” I said, “I am afraid you have not been keeping quite so wideawake as you ought, considering that it’s your look-out. For instance, have you heard any unusual sounds, such as you ought to have reported, since you came on watch?”

“No, sir,” replied the man. “And as to—”

“That will do,” I interrupted. “Now, pull yourself together and listen.”

We both set ourselves intently to listen, but before half a dozen seconds had passed I heard loud voices—those of Monroe and the boy, and, almost immediately afterward, that of Mrs Vansittart—the parson’s in remonstrance, the boy’s in loud and angry protest, and that of the lady in anxious enquiry. It seemed as though Monroe had somehow mismanaged his rather delicate task, for as I started to go aft again I heard the lad shout, “I *will* go on deck if I feel like it, and you, Monroe, aren’t going to stop me. And as for the Britisher, do you think I care what he says?” But here Mrs Vansittart cut in with an injunction to Julius to hold his tongue, following it up with an enquiry as to what all the fuss was about. I felt that it was time I took a hand; so, cautioning Maguire to keep a bright look-out and listen for all he was worth, I sprang down the forecabin ladder on my way aft. And as I did so I ran into a couple of men who had just crept out from beneath the launch, evidently curious to learn what the disturbance was about.

Halting for a moment, I ordered the two men to rouse the watch quietly, and stand by for an “All hands” call, and then continued on my way aft, meeting the trio just by the foot of the poop ladder. Mrs Vansittart was evidently in something of a temper, for, as I joined the party, she turned sharply and demanded:

“Is that Mr Leigh?”

“It is, madam,” I replied. “Hush, Julius!” I continued, for the boy also had turned angrily upon me. “Pray stop your outcry, for Heaven’s sake! Silence is of vital importance to us all at this moment, for we may be on the very verge of a crisis. Mr Monroe and I are both of opinion that we very recently heard certain sounds that—”

“I know all about that,” interrupted Mrs Vansittart; “Mr Monroe has already explained that to me. What I want to know now is by what right you presumed to instruct him to lock the door of the drawing-room, and so prevent me from coming out on deck?”

“Yes,” added the boy, in that high-pitched, clamorous voice of his, which would carry so far over the water on such a night, “and what right have you to order me to be locked in my cabin? Who are you, I should like to know—”



"Craft on the port quarter—two of 'em—three—four—a whole fleet of small craft headin' dead for us!" yelled the lookout at this moment.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated, "then Kennedy's extraordinary premonition was right after all;" and, unceremoniously quitting the little group under the break of the poop, I rushed forward, shouting:

"All hands to general quarters! Throw open the ports. Off with the gun covers; slew the guns, and point them out through the ports. Pass the word for the gunner, and send him aft to me." Then I turned and went aft again, once more encountering the saloon party, now made complete by the appearance of Miss Anthea, clad, like her mother, in a very becoming dressing-gown.

"Madam," said I, addressing Mrs Vansittart, "there is no time for explanation at this moment, for, unless I am very greatly mistaken, we are about to be attacked by a fleet of pirate craft. But I most earnestly beseech you to retire below, taking your son and daughter with you out of harm's way. If my suspicions are well-founded, none of you can be of the slightest assistance on deck, while at any moment we may have shot flying about our ears, and—"

"Yes," the skipper agreed, "you are quite right. Mr Leigh is perfectly right, Julius, therefore I order you to go to your cabin at once. And you too, Anthea. Mr Monroe, if Julius will not go quietly, I authorise you to use such force as may be necessary to compel him to go. And when you have seen him safe in his cabin, lock him in, and bring me the key. Now, sir,"—very haughtily to me—"be good enough to accompany me to the poop, and let us see what justification there is for all this sudden alarm and confusion."

It was very evident that the lady was tremendously indignant with me. And at this, when I came to think of it, I was not greatly surprised, for it certainly was a tremendous liberty for a second officer to consent to, much less order, the locking of a skipper and owner in her own cabin. I therefore followed her, very much crestfallen, up the poop ladder, and at once looked away out over the port quarter in search of the supposed pirate fleet.

It was at this time so very dark that for several seconds I could see nothing. The moon had set, and the bank of cloud already referred to had overspread more than half the sky; moreover, a mist had come creeping up from the eastward, not dense enough to merit the name of fog, yet sufficiently thick to dim the light of the stars still shining in the western half of the heavens, while it added still more to the darkness which gloomed away to the eastward of us. But presently, down in the midst of the dusky blackness broad on our port quarter, I caught a glimpse of a small, indeterminate shape of still deeper blackness, then another, and another, and another, until I had counted ten of them; and concentrating my gaze intently upon them, I felt sure I could occasionally distinguish a small, evanescent, silvery gleam like that of sea fire stirred into brilliance by the slow passage of a moving object through the water.

"Yes," I exclaimed, pointing, "there they come, ten of them, if not more. Have you any particular orders to give, madam, or will you leave the defence of the ship to Mr Kennedy and me?"

"Why, of course I leave it to Kennedy—and you—to do the best you can," replied Mrs Vansittart. "I know nothing at all about fighting tactics; and I shall not attempt to interfere. Further than that, I shall go below—although I do not like the idea of quitting the deck at the approach of an enemy—for I am sensible enough to recognise that I can do no good up here, and should only be in the way. But, Walter, never, under any circumstances whatever, again dream of turning a key upon me. It was a most unwarrantable liberty, which not even such a crisis as this can justify; and for a few minutes I was really furiously angry with you. But I believe what you did was done with the very best of intentions, so I will say no more about it. Now, here comes Kennedy, so I will just say a word or two to him, and then go. Take care of yourself, my dear boy, and see that you do not get hurt."

There was no time for me to express my gratitude to the lady for her exceeding kindness in thus overlooking what at best could only be described as a serious error of judgment—although, even so, I could not refrain from reminding myself that the fault originated with Monroe—for at that moment the first mate came bounding up the poop ladder, struggling into his jacket as he came.

"Whoopee!" he shouted, as he reached the level of the poop. "What did I tell ye, bhoy? Where are the shpalpeens? Show 'em to me—Oh! beg your pardon, ma'am; I didn't expect to find you here—"

"Where did you expect I should be, then, pray, Mr Kennedy?" demanded the skipper. "Hiding in the shaft tunnel, I suppose—"

"By the piper! ye might be in a worse place than that same, ma'am. Up here, for instance," interrupted Kennedy. But Mrs Vansittart was in no mood to discuss that unfortunate subject any further, just then at all events; she therefore cut in upon the first mate's remarks by saying:

"Now, that will do, Mr Kennedy. Please listen to me, for time is pressing. I have just been explaining to Mr Leigh that I know nothing about fighting, therefore I shall leave you and him to do the best you can for our defence, and go below out of the way, since I can be of no use up here. Good night, and take care of yourselves! And let me know when it is all over." With which the lady took herself off, to our intense relief.

"Now, then," exclaimed Kennedy, turning to me, "where are the cut-throat pirates that I'm after hearin' about?"

"There they are, less than half a mile off," I replied, pointing. "They are coming along very slowly, hoping to catch us unawares, perhaps. But, goodness knows, that young rip, Julius, was making noise enough just now to be heard at double that distance, and to show that some of us at least are broad awake." Then I briefly explained what orders I had so far given, and waited to hear what he had to say.

"Have the small arms been served out yet?" he demanded.

"Not yet," I answered. "But they are ready at a moment's notice."

"Right!" he approved. "Let them be served out at once; a cutlass and a brace of fully loaded automatics to each man, not forgettin' our noble selves. With these Maxims we shall not need any rifles, I guess."

I turned away to issue this order, when I was met at the head of the poop ladder by Bledsoe, the gunner.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"I did, Bledsoe," said I. "Come up. Mr Kennedy is here, and he may have some orders for you." Then I turned to Kennedy and said:

"Here is the gunner. I sent for him a few minutes ago, thinking you might wish to see him. Also, I had it in my mind to order him to send a few portfires up on deck. It occurred to me that if those fellows insist on closing with us, it would be a good plan to have a hand up in the maintop with some portfires; it would enable us to see what we are doing."

"It would that," agreed Kennedy; "and we'll do ut. See to it, Mr Bledsoe, if ye please. And ye may also send up some ammunition for the four-inches and Maxims. I guess we'll not need the Hotchkisses. That'll do, gunner; let's have that ammunition quick. Mr Leigh, be good enough to attend to that matter of the shmall arms, and then come back here and take charge of the Maxims. It's about time we let those ginks know that we're awake, so I'll step down to the main-deck and see about throwin' a shot over 'em."

We descended to the main-deck together, all hands being by that time on deck and at stations; and while I went below to attend to the sending up and distribution of the cutlasses and automatics, Kennedy planted himself in rear of Number 2 gun of the port battery. A minute later the deep, ringing report and jar of the discharge were heard and felt, but with what effect I knew not, being on the deck beneath. A minute later a second gun roared overhead, and while my ears were still ringing with the report I heard the boom of a distant gun, and listened breathlessly for the impact of the shot. I heard nothing, however, so concluded that the missile had flown wide. By the time that our third gun spoke my task below was completed; I therefore snatched at a cutlass, buckled the belt round my waist, took a brace of automatic pistols from the man who was loading them, thrust them into my belt, and rushed up on deck. I encountered Kennedy near the foot of the poop ladder, reported to him what I had done, and received from him the order to go up on the poop and open fire with the Maxims forthwith.

"We've hit one of thim, and she seems to be sinkin'," he said; "but the rest of the divvies are comin' for us like mad, wid their sweeps churnin' up the wather like the paddles of one av your London tugs. Shtop 'em from layin' us aboard, if ye can, bhoy. We want no hand-to-hand fightin' wid thim, for they'll outnumber us ten to one, I calculate." He added this last item in a confidential whisper.

I dashed up on the poop, and, to my great satisfaction, found both the Maxims manned and well supplied with ammunition. But although it was now easy enough to hear the grind and splash of the sweeps with which the attackers were urging their craft through the water, ay, and even to hear their shouts of encouragement to each other, the darkness and the mist together still combined to render them too indistinctly visible to permit of effective firing from our Maxims. I therefore shouted to Kennedy a suggestion that he should order the man in the maintop to light his portfires, so that we might have light to see what we were about. And Kennedy was in the very act of giving the order when three of the approaching craft fired upon us almost at the same instant; and a *moment* later I heard a sharp, splintering crash, followed by a dull, crunching sound below me on the main-deck. One of the enemy's round shot had got home through our port bulwark, so far as I could judge.

I was in a perfect fever of impatience to get additional light, though it were ever so little, and had about made up my mind to open fire with the Maxims without further delay, for the approaching craft were by this time perilously close—not more than two cables' lengths distant, I believe—when I caught a faint flicker of light from aloft, and the next instant the baleful, blue-white glare of a portfire illuminated the scene and revealed ten small sailing craft foaming down upon us under the impulse of from twelve to sixteen powerfully-manned sweeps apiece. Each craft carried a gun, which looked to be about the calibre of a twelve-pound smooth-bore, mounted in the eyes of her; their decks were crowded with Malays of most ferocious, malignant, and determined aspect, and I caught the gleam and flash of the light from innumerable krisses and rifle barrels as their owners waved them above their heads in savage anticipation of presently getting to close-quarters with us.

It was evident that we were confronted with a most formidable and dangerous situation, demanding the utmost promptitude of action, and I at once turned to the crew of the port Maxim, with the command upon my lips to them to open fire, when a cry of horror arose from the gun's crew on the main-deck immediately below where I was standing, and a man, looking up to me and pointing with his hand, shouted that the mate was killed. Glancing down over the poop rail, I saw the body of poor Kennedy stretched out on the deck in the midst of a pool of blood, with the top of his head shot away, doubtless by the round shot that, a few seconds earlier, I had heard crash through the bulwarks.

"Let them have the contents of every gun that will bear!" I shouted. Then turning to the Maxim crews, I added: "Open fire upon them—the nearest craft first; and clear their decks of men, if you can, before they get alongside."

The light was the only thing that our lads—and the pirates too, apparently—had been waiting for, for the next moment the guns of our port battery crashed forth, one after the other, while our port Maxim—the only one of the two that could be brought to bear—started its savage thud-thudding tattoo, and in less than half a minute the ship was enveloped in a cloud of acrid smoke which, hanging motionless in the stagnant air, effectually cloaked the approach of the attacking force, and as effectually prevented anything like accurate shooting.

Nor were the enemy one whit behindhand in availing themselves of the assistance afforded by the light of the portfires; indeed, they had rather the best of it, for although the hull of the yacht was speedily enveloped in smoke, the portfire brilliantly illuminated our canvas, and thus afforded them an excellent guide in aiming. And now the

round shot began to fly thick and fast, while bullets and slugs hummed and sang about our ears like a swarm of angry hornets. Luckily for us, the aim of the pirates was atrociously bad—probably the fire of our Maxim disconcerted them—and although we afterward found that five round shot had passed through our sails, only one struck our hull, while, by what seemed like a miracle, the bullets all missed our bodies, though in many cases by only the merest hair's-breadth. For perhaps half a minute the fire of the pirates was maintained with the utmost fury, and then all in a moment it died away to a few desultory shots, which presently ceased.

Putting my whistle to my lips, I blew a shrill blast upon it, which I followed up with the order:

“Main-deck guns, cease firing!” And as I uttered the words I thought I felt a faint draught of air upon my face. I was not mistaken, for at the same moment the heavy pall of smoke which enveloped us began lazily to shape itself into fantastic wreaths that slowly swept away to the westward, while our lighter canvas rustled gently, and then filled to a small air from the eastward. As it happened, our sails were correctly trimmed, so that all that was needed was just to allow the ship to come up to her proper course when she gathered way.

Meanwhile, with the dispersion of the smoke, we were able once more to get a glimpse of the enemy, and that glimpse revealed them to be in full flight. They must have suffered frightfully from our fire before their courage gave way, for of the ten craft which constituted the original attacking force only six were now visible, while every one of these appeared to be more or less in difficulties—three of them, indeed, very much more than less. I perceived that only one of the half-dozen appeared to be working her full complement of sweeps, while another was hobbling off under the impulse of but a single pair. Shells, though they be of but four-inches diameter, are capable of inflicting serious damage when they hit and explode.

The breeze, which at first came away as a mere breathing, gained steadily in strength, until the yacht was sliding along at a six-knot pace, and it would have been easy for us to have overtaken our audacious attackers and sunk them out of hand. But I had my doubts as to whether any of them would remain afloat long enough to get back to the small hidden harbour from which they had emerged; while in any case it seemed to me that the rascals had received so severe a punishment that it would be long before they again attempted to attack a seemingly helpless ship. I therefore allowed them to go their way without further molestation, and, boarding the fore and main tacks, brought the ship to her course. This done, I gave orders for the guns to be secured, the charges to be drawn, the unused ammunition to be returned to the magazine, and the small arms to the armourer, and the decks to be cleared up generally.

Meanwhile poor Kennedy's body had been carried forward and laid upon the fore-hatch, covered over with a tarpaulin. Poor chap! I was sincerely grieved at his loss, for he was both a first-rate seaman and a thoroughly stanch messmate. And as, passing round the deck to satisfy myself that all my orders had been satisfactorily executed, I paused for a moment to gaze regretfully at the shrouded form under the tarpaulin, I could not help wondering a little at the memory that he, the only victim, should have been the one to have experienced a premonition, practically amounting to certainty, not only of the encounter, but also, as I now felt convinced, that it would prove fatal to him.

Having completed my inspection of the decks, and satisfied myself that everything was all right, I called the boatswain aft to take temporary charge, and then entered the drawing-room, intending to pass through it to the door of Mrs Vansittart's cabin, to make my report. But on entering the apartment I was surprised to find the lady seated there, fully dressed, and evidently waiting with some impatience for news. As I advanced she rose to her feet and held out her hand to me.

“Well, Walter,” she exclaimed, “it is all over—the dreadful fighting, I mean—and you are unhurt. Is it not so?” Then, as I briefly replied in the affirmative, she continued: “But why are you looking so serious? And why have you come to me instead of Mr Kennedy? I most sincerely hope that nothing dreadful has happened.”

“We have got off much more easily than at one moment I dared to hope,” I said. “But I grieve to inform you that the fight has cost us the life of one man, and he the man whom we can least of all afford to lose. You will guess at once that I mean poor Kennedy, who was killed by a round shot—the only shot that did any damage worth mentioning.”

For a moment Mrs Vansittart seemed scarcely able to credit my news. I believe that up to then she had never quite realised the fact of our peril; but now that one of our men had actually lost his life it was suddenly brought home to her with startling vividness, and she was correspondingly upset. She stared at me unbelievably, gasped: “What? Neil Kennedy killed? Oh, Walter, you cannot possibly mean it!” and then, as I nodded my head, she sank back into her chair and burst into tears. I thought it best to let her have her cry out in peace, for tears seem to be the natural safety valve of a woman's emotions; and while she sat there with her face buried in her hands and the tears streaming through her fingers, Miss Anthea, Monroe, and Julius came up from below. Of course they all wanted to know what was the matter, and I was obliged to explain. In the course of the explanation, which took something of the form of a brief narrative of the entire adventure, I happened to remark:

“What puzzles me more than anything is how it happened that those fellows were able to find us so accurately on so dark a night. I took the greatest care to mask all our lights effectually; yet when we first sighted them they were heading as straight for us as if we were in plain sight.”

“And so we were,” remarked Monroe; “for which we have to thank our young friend Julius, here. When, in obedience to his mother's command, I took him below to his cabin before the fight began, I not only found the open port of his cabin uncovered, but all three of the electric-lights ablaze, so that the port must have shown up in the dark like a lighthouse. The young gentleman explained to me that he couldn't sleep because of the heat, and had therefore been reading in bed!”

## A Weird and Startling Experience.

The untimely death of poor Kennedy resulted in my being promoted to the position of first mate of the *Stella Maris*, young as I was; while the boatswain, who knew nothing of navigation, but was an excellent seaman, was temporarily given the post of second mate, until someone more suited to the position could be found.

At ten o'clock in the morning following our brush with the Malays the hands were mustered for church parade, as on Sundays, and Kennedy's body was committed to the deep with all solemnity. Monroe read the burial service so impressively that even the lad Julius was visibly affected, while Mrs Vansittart and her daughter—both of them attired in black for the occasion—wept freely. Three days later we arrived in Singapore, and on the following day the yacht was docked for examination and the fitting of the spare propeller.

Upon examination the hull was found to be quite undamaged, yet we must have hit the wreckage, or whatever it was that we ran foul of, a pretty severe blow, for not only was the weed completely scoured off the ship's bottom where contact had occurred, but the anti-fouling composition had also been removed as effectually as though a scraper had been employed.

We stayed at Singapore exactly a week, and then, with bottom scraped clean, two fresh coats of anti-fouling composition applied, the outside of the hull, up to the level of the rail, repainted, and our spare propeller fitted, we sailed for Hong-Kong. It was Mrs Vansittart's intention to ship a second and a third mate at Singapore; but she forbore to do so, no suitable men happening to be available during our stay. The temporary arrangement was therefore allowed to stand a little longer, our lady skipper hoping to find what she required at Hong-Kong.

We went to sea in fine weather, and made excellent but uneventful progress during the first four days of the trip. Then, on our fourth night out, when we were in the neighbourhood of the Vanguard Bank, the wind fell light, and finally died away, leaving us becalmed, very much as had happened with us in the Strait of Malacca. This time, however, there was neither land nor craft in sight, and we were therefore under no apprehension of a repetition of our experiences on that occasion. I ought, by the way, to have stated that upon our arrival at Singapore we duly reported our adventure to the authorities, with the result that the British gunboat *Cormorant* was dispatched to the scene of the outrage. But we were given to understand that it would probably prove exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to lay hands upon the guilty parties; and as a matter of fact we afterwards learned that the only result of the *Cormorant's* visit to the spot was the discovery of a considerable quantity of wreckage and several dead bodies floating about.

As I have said, the wind began to drop late in the afternoon of our fourth day out from Singapore, and by eight bells of the second dog-watch we had lost steerage way. As soon as this happened the matter was reported to Mrs Vansittart, and I enquired whether she wished the engine to be started; but she replied that she was in no especial hurry to reach Hong-Kong, and therefore, as there was no particular reason for pushing on, she would not waste gasoline. The engine was therefore permitted to remain inactive, but we furled all our light canvas, to save wear and tear, and hauled up our courses, leaving the ship under topsails, topgallant sails, and jib.

The fact is that none of us quite knew what to make of the weather. The glass stood fairly high, with a rising rather than a falling tendency, yet the sky was hazy without being exactly overcast. Nor, considering where we were, was the weather particularly hot; the atmosphere, however, seemed surcharged with damp, although no rain fell. With the going down of the sun it fell exceedingly dark, for the moon was far advanced in her last quarter, and did not rise until very late—or rather in the early morning—while the haze was thick enough to shut out the light of the stars effectually. The water was smooth, excepting for a low, easterly swell to remind us of the breeze that had died away.

It chanced to be my eight hours in that night, and, as had become a firmly-established custom on such occasions, I was dining with the saloon party, with all of whom, excepting Julius, I was now upon excellent terms. Mrs Vansittart had graciously listened to my explanation of, and accepted my apologies for, the colossal liberty I had taken in suggesting that she should be locked in her cabin on the memorable night of the piratical attack upon us; and not only had she freely forgiven me, but I believe that, after I had fully explained the motives which actuated me, she felt almost inclined to admit that I was to a certain extent justified. Possibly she would have admitted this but for the fact that such an admission might have been subversive of discipline. Monroe and I had always got on splendidly together; and even the once haughty Miss Anthea had at length thawed completely, even to the extent of singing duets with me and playing my accompaniments while I sang or fiddled. It was only the boy whom I seemed utterly unable to placate; he had taken a violent dislike to me from the very first, and not even the fact that I had undoubtedly saved his life seemed to make any apparent difference in his attitude toward me.

Since leaving Singapore we had resumed our musical evenings after dinner, temporarily interrupted by Kennedy's death, and we were enjoying ourselves as usual on the evening of which I am now speaking when, while I was playing a violin solo to Miss Anthea's accompaniment, we were all startled by a sudden but very slight jarring sensation, as though the ship had lightly touched the ground for a moment. I knew that we were in the neighbourhood of the Vanguard, Prince Consort, and Prince of Wales Banks, and although I also knew that, according to our position as determined that afternoon, and the course and distance since run, we ought to be far enough away from them to be perfectly safe, the thought for a moment seized me that in some extraordinary and wholly unaccountable manner we might have been mistaken. Flinging down my violin, I rushed out on deck, closely followed by Mrs Vansittart and Monroe.

On reaching the deck I found that the jar had already created quite a small commotion, the boatswain's watch being all on the alert, while the hands below, awakened by the unaccustomed sensation, were swarming up to learn what had happened. Parker, the boatswain, was shouting for one hand to bring along the hand lead, and to another to bring a lighted lantern.

My first glance was over the side; but it was so dark that I could see nothing save a faint gleam under the lighted

ports. Then the men with the lead line and lantern came along, and we took several casts of the lead. "No bottom", was the report; but even while the line was being coiled up after the last cast, the same sensation was again experienced, this time a little stronger. And then, while we were debating what it could possibly mean, one of the hands from forward came along and reassured us.

"I know what it is, sir," he explained. "I've felt the very same thing before, and not very far from here, too—while we was lyin' in Manila harbour. We couldn't make out what the mischief it was at first; but when the skipper went ashore shortly afterwards they told him that there'd been a slight shock of earthquake."

The explanation seemed quite reasonable and satisfactory, so after some little further talk we returned to the drawing-room and resumed our music. But shortly afterward we were again disturbed twice by recurrences of the same phenomenon; we accordingly gave it up, and I went off to my cabin, debating within myself whether I should change into my working rig or turn in.

Finally I decided upon the former alternative, since I did not feel much inclined for sleep, and when I had effected the change I went up on deck, thinking that possibly a spell of fresh air would bring on the desired drowsiness.

As I reached the main-deck four bells (ten o'clock) were struck, and the look-out had just responded with the stereotyped cry of "All's well!" when there occurred another shock, so violent and protracted that some of the hands cried out in terror. It is difficult to gauge the passage of time accurately at such a moment, but I think this shock must have lasted nearly, if not quite, two minutes; and the sensation to which I can most nearly compare it is that of a ship being swept and jolted over the rough surface of a coral reef by a red-hot tide.

So strong and so alarming was the shock that it created something almost amounting to panic among the crew, a few of whom, in their alarm, raised a cry to launch the boats; and it was not without some difficulty that they were eventually persuaded that the yacht was quite uninjured, and that they were therefore far safer on her deck than they could possibly be in any boat. I was not greatly surprised at their alarm, for the phenomenon was of so unusual and startling a character that, to confess the truth, I felt my own self-possession a little inclined to "wilt", as my companions would probably have put it.

Meanwhile the saloon party, like everybody else, had rushed on deck in alarm, and were eagerly discussing the occurrence. Monroe assured the two ladies that they need not be in the least degree uneasy, since, strange as the phenomenon might be to us, it was really not so very extraordinary or unusual, especially in the region where we now found ourselves; and he was making good headway in his effort to reassure his audience when suddenly there occurred another and still more violent shock. This was so pronounced that it set the sea all a-quiver with ripples, which seemed to run in the direction of all the points of the compass, crossing and recrossing each other at every conceivable angle with such rapidity that the "shaling" of the water was like that of a strong rapid, while the interlacing—so to speak—of the ripples created a sort of network of miniature breakers, easily visible because of the phosphorescence set up.

The jar and jolting of this last shock were so severe that I really began to entertain serious fears as to whether the ship could withstand them. It seemed to me that if the thing continued very long every rivet in her would be shaken or torn out of place, and the entire fabric must fall to pieces; for the deck was now quivering and jolting so violently that, to maintain our footing, we all instinctively clung to the nearest thing we could lay hands upon.

I must confess that I was more than a little astonished at the courage manifested by Mrs Vansittart and her daughter. There could be no doubt that they were greatly alarmed, yet they were more self-possessed than any of the rest of us—so much so, indeed, that Mrs Vansittart's voice was almost steady as she directed me to find Mackenzie and instruct him to start the engine. "I think I should feel more comfortable if we had the ship under command," she explained.

I had just executed this commission and returned to the poop, and the ship was already beginning to gather way, when above the hiss of the agitated water a low rumble became audible, increasing with, inconceivable rapidity to a frightful, deafening roar. The vibrations grew still more violent, and suddenly, with an awful, ear-splitting explosion, we saw a great column of flame shoot high into the air, some two miles away and almost directly ahead of us. It looked for all the world as though a gigantic cannon, planted vertically in the sea, muzzle upward, had been discharged, except that the flash of fire, instead of being only momentary, as in the case of a gun, was continuous. It remained visible for quite ten minutes, and probably endured for a much longer period. The emission of flame was accompanied by a frightful roaring sound, like that of a thousand blast furnaces, intermingled with frequent terrific explosions; and we continued to hear these long after we had lost sight of the fire.

At the first outburst of flame I instinctively sprang to the wheelhouse and ordered the dazed and terrified quartermaster to put his helm hard a-port, and let the ship sweep round in a complete half-circle, so that we might get away from the dangerous spot as speedily as possible. But we had hardly begun to turn, in response to our hard-over helm, before dense clouds of steam commenced to rise from the water round about the flame; and these soon obscured it to such an extent that the glare, which at first was almost as strong as daylight, rapidly dwindled until it became merely a great shapeless luminous blotch, growing less and less brilliant until we lost sight of it altogether as we went at full speed ahead away from it. But it was quite a quarter of an hour before we were fairly clear of the extraordinary danger that had so suddenly leaped up in our path; and within the first minute following the explosion great masses of incandescent rock mingled with flaming cinders began to fall about us on all sides, so that I regard it as nothing short of a miracle that none of the larger masses fell upon our decks. Had they done so, we must inevitably have been destroyed. As it was, we were kept busy with the hose for fully half an hour extinguishing the cinders that fell upon our deck.

Not the least remarkable circumstance connected with the phenomenon was that soon after we started the pumps the water rapidly became so hot that the men could not bear the contact of it upon their bare feet, and were obliged

to don their sea boots hurriedly. At first we were fearful that the dense clouds of steam generated by the flame would spread and overtake us; but we were spared this, for almost immediately a small breeze sprang up, blowing toward the fire, and as we advanced it strengthened until it became quite a stiff breeze. To this circumstance I attribute the fact that none of our sails were set on fire by the falling cinders, for it necessitated the hurried clewing up and furling of all our canvas.

For a full hour we travelled south at full speed; and then, having apparently run beyond the limit of the danger zone, we shifted our helm and headed east until daylight, when, perceiving no sign of the eruption, and the wind having drawn round from the eastward, we set our canvas and stopped the engine. A week later we arrived at Hong-Kong without further adventure, and were amazed to learn that nothing was known there of the submarine volcanic outburst—for such, of course, it was—from which we had so narrowly escaped destruction. Nor, although we remained a week in the roadstead, during which several craft arrived from the south, and two from the Philippines, could we learn that any others than ourselves had beheld the phenomenon.

Before our arrival at Singapore it had been Mrs Vansittart's intention to proceed from that port to Manila, she being somewhat curious to see something of the United States' farthest East possession on our way north. But the United States' consul at Singapore had very strongly dissuaded her from making such a visit; we therefore skipped the Philippines, and, after spending a week at Hong-Kong, during which the saloon party made a trip to Canton and back, weighed and stood out of the harbour *en route* for Yokohama.

We had a good run up through the China Sea, doing the trip in ten days from port to port without being obliged to use the engine at all. Arrived in the magical land of the chrysanthemum, our lady skipper "spread herself", as she graphically expressed it, devoting a full month to the exploration of the country, and returning to the ship loaded down with priceless treasures of porcelain, pictures, carving and lacquer work, mostly designed as presents for her more stay-at-home friends in "little old N'York", when she should get back. Of course her children went with her, and Monroe, equally of course, "went along" as escort.

While Mrs Vansittart and her party were enjoying themselves the crew also had an opportunity to see something of what many regard as the most wonderful country and people in the world, the same generous rule with regard to shore leave prevailing here as elsewhere. For myself, I did not see nearly as much of the country as I should have liked, for it unfortunately happened that at the time of our visit the relations between Japan and the United States were somewhat strained in connection with the settlement of Japanese subjects on United States soil, and the Stars and Stripes was not altogether welcome in Japanese ports. Indeed, within the first week of our arrival in Yokohama harbour we had reason to suspect that a malicious attempt had been made either to damage or to destroy the yacht; and as she was in my charge during the owner's absence I did not care to leave her for more than a day at a time—and only once as long as that. But of course it must be understood that such ill feeling as undoubtedly existed was only openly manifested by private persons, and those almost entirely of the lower classes. Official Japan was the very essence of politeness and urbanity whenever we came into contact with it.

There was just one element of regret for Mrs Vansittart in her visit to Japan, and that was the unfortunate fact that Monroe developed typhoid on the very day of the party's return to Yokohama, and had to be left behind in hospital. She would most willingly have prolonged her stay until the patient's recovery; but Harper, our doctor, intervened, pointing out that, since our next cruise was to be among the Pacific Islands, it would be most inadvisable for a person newly recovered from typhoid to accompany us, as a relapse would almost certainly follow; and that the better plan would be to arrange for Monroe's return home direct by mail boat via 'Frisco. This was accordingly done, Mrs Vansittart making every arrangement for the care and comfort of the patient during his sojourn in Yokohama, and his journey to New York in all ease and comfort afterward, before giving the word for our departure.

We hove our anchor out of the mud of Yokohama harbour at ten o'clock on a certain lovely September morning, which, as Mrs Vansittart informed me incidentally, happened to be the anniversary of the yacht's departure from New York. Starting our engine, we proceeded down Yedo Bay, through Uraga Strait, and so to sea, passing Cape Mela about eight bells in the afternoon watch. Then, to a fine spanking westerly breeze, we set all plain sail and headed south for the Ladrões.

I arrive now at a point where, for a space of over two months, I find no entry in my diary of any incident worthy of special mention; this period may therefore be dismissed with the simple remark that it was spent in visiting several of the most interesting islands in the Pacific archipelago.

We sailed from Taputeuea, in the Gilbert Group, in the middle of November, and for more than a week we headed west, making good headway on the whole, although there were times when we were detained by vexatious calms, to counterbalance which we "carried on" when the wind favoured us and we had a clear sea ahead.

Such happened to be the case on a certain day in the first week of December. We had a slashing easterly breeze behind us, and fine clear weather; and the chart told us that there were no lurking dangers in our path; we therefore gave the yacht the whole flight of studding sails on both sides, and laid ourselves out to make up a little of our lost time. And we were doing so in handsome style, too, for the ship reeled off her fourteen knots hour after hour until the end of the afternoon watch, when the wind suddenly hauled four points to the southward and freshened; and although this shift of wind necessitated our handing our star board studding sails, it gave our fore-and-aft canvas a chance to put in some good work, which it did, the ship's speed going up to sixteen knots within the next hour. And for a sailing ship, sixteen knots is a very respectable speed, let me tell you, although I can recall more than one occasion when we logged nineteen, and that not only for a brief spell, but for three or four hours at a stretch. Still, sixteen knots is a pretty good pace; and it was an exhilarating sight to watch the rush of the white yacht over that glorious sapphire sea, with every sail accurately set and trimmed and tugging at the beautiful hull like a team of cart horses, the long, weighty swell chasing us, wind-whipped and capped with seething crests of snow-white foam, while the great, glass-smooth bow wave went roaring away on either hand with its hissing and leaping crown of froth sparkling like gems in the rays of the declining sun.

I think Mrs Vansittart was never more proud of her beautiful ship than she was on that particular evening, as she stood with me on the poop and critically marked our rush through the water and every perfection of hull, spar, and sail. The yacht was a lovely picture, even as beheld by us from her poop; but I would have given a trifle for the privilege of seeing her as she must have appeared at such a moment from a passing ship, had there been such a craft. But, as it happened, there was not; we had the sea to ourselves, for we chanced just then to be traversing a stretch of water very rarely frequented by craft of any description.

It happened to be my eight hours out on that particular night, and when, at eight bells of the first watch, I turned the ship over to Parker, the boatswain, we were still reeling off our sixteen knots, with a fresh, steady breeze from the south-east. It was a dark night, for the moon was only two days old, and had set long ago, while a thin veil of cloud hid most of the stars. Had we been in much-frequented waters I should perhaps have considered it a bit reckless to drive the ship so hard through the darkness; but we were not, and I retired to my cabin with an easy mind, and, undressing at once, tumbled into my bunk and fell sound asleep almost as my head touched the pillow.

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## Chapter Nine.

### Wrecked!

How long I slept I have no means of knowing. All I can remember is that from a sound, dreamless sleep, I was startled into sudden wakefulness by experiencing a shock of such tremendous violence that my first real consciousness of anything being amiss was caused by me finding myself hurled headlong out of my bunk to the deck of my cabin. I fell so awkwardly that I seemed to land fair upon my right temple, and, after an instant of sharp pain, I forthwith lost all consciousness for a length of time that must have been considerable, although I never had the means to guess it even approximately. But I remember one thing distinctly. Even as I was in the very act of falling, a terrific rending crash sounded in my ears, and the thought flashed through my brain: "There go the masts by the board!"

The return of consciousness manifested itself in a hazy and quite detached perception that I was being violently shaken by the shoulder; while a voice, pitched in aggrieved and petulant tones—which I presently recognised as those of the lad, Julius—exhorted me to "Wake up!" At first these exhortations produced no particular effect upon me. I was aware of them, but that was all; they had no definite meaning so far as I was concerned. I did not even trouble to ask myself why I should wake up. Then after a period of silence, during which I perhaps slipped back into unconsciousness, I became aware that water was being vigorously dashed in my face, while Julius's voice resumed its petulant appeal.

"Oh, I say, dash it all! do wake up, Leigh," I heard the boy exclaim. "Wake up, I tell you! Momma's blocked into her cabin, and Sis and I can't get her out. And you're the only one of the crew left!"

I suppose my wits must have been reasserting themselves by that time, for these words conveyed some sort of definite meaning to me, especially that last statement: "You're the only one of the crew left." The only one of the crew! What crew? Why, of course, the crew of the *Stella Maris*, in which I had some recollection of having spent a very pleasant time. Then, as memory began to work, I recalled the tremendous shock which had hurled me, scarcely awake, out of my bunk, and the jarring, rending crash that had reached my ears in the very act of falling. What did these things mean? I asked myself, and the answer came without much groping for. What could they mean, except that some disaster had overtaken the yacht?

I opened my eyes, and by the light of a rapidly growing dawn perceived, first, that I was still in my own cabin, and secondly, that Julius was bending over me with a water jug in one hand and a tumbler in the other, from the latter of which he had just dashed a quantity of water in my face. Also I was conscious of a splitting headache, and a burning, smarting sensation in the right temple. I put up my hand, passed it over the seat of the pain, and was immediately conscious of an increased smart. As I lowered my hand I looked at it stupidly: it was smeared with blood.

"Oh, that's nothing!" commented the boy, as I looked questioningly at the ruddy stain; "you've cut your forehead a bit, that's all. Thank goodness, you've woke up at last! I thought at first you'd handed in your checks. Now, I say, just get up and come with me to the drawing-room. Momma's somehow pinned in her cabin, and I want you to get her out."

"All right!" I said; "I'll come. But what has happened to the ship? She seems to be—"

"I dunno," replied the boy. "She's wrecked, that's all that I can tell you. Her three masts are broken; and, exceptin' Momma, 'Thea, and I, you're the only person left."

"The only person left!" I ejaculated, as I staggered to my feet. "Good Heavens, boy, what do you mean?"

"Just exactly what I say," returned Master Julius. "And see here, you," he continued aggressively, "don't you dare to call me 'boy' again. I don't like it, and I won't have it. See?"

"Certainly," I replied, with a smile at the lad's astonishing touchiness at such a moment; "I both see and hear. All right! I apologise. And now, what is this you say about your mother? She is jammed in her cabin and can't get out? I will go and attend to her first; and when she has been released I must look into that other matter of the missing crew."

"I guess the first thing you'll do after you've got Momma out of her cabin will be to get my breakfast ready, and don't you forget it!" retorted the boy.

While we talked I had been hastily dressing, and until I had finished I said nothing. I suppose it was the blow on the

head that I had received, coupled with the growing consciousness that some disaster, far more frightful than I had thus far dreamed of, had befallen us, that made me suddenly irritable and short-tempered then. Anyhow, the lad's manner jarred upon me at the moment to such an extent that, as I was about to lead the way through the doorway of my cabin, I halted and turned upon the youngster.

"Look here, my lad," I said. "If what you say is true, that only your mother, your sister, you and I are left aboard this ship, somebody will have to take charge of things, and that somebody will be myself. There will be a multitude of things to be done, and you will have to lend a hand. And I will see that you do so. Henceforth it will be I who will give orders; and—understand me, my young friend—if I give you an order, you will execute it, or I'll know the reason why. Hitherto, it seems to me, you have been spoiled by too much indulgence; but if this ship proves to be a wreck, as I more than suspect is the case, there will be no more spoiling for you, and I'll see if I cannot make something like a man of you. Now, just turn that saying over in your mind, and don't let me have any more of your nonsense. Now we will go and see what can be done for your mother. Come along!"

For a moment I really thought that the boy meant to strike me, but I kept my eyes steadily staring into his, and presently I saw that I had mastered him, for the moment at all events. The gleam of mingled anger and defiance faded out of his eyes, and he muttered: "All right! let's go."

As we wended our way from my cabin to the drawing-room, abaft which Mrs Vansittart's cabin was situate, I had time to note several matters. The first of these was that the ship was evidently hard and fast aground; for although she rolled slightly from time to time the motion was not continuous like that of a floating ship, but intermittent, with intervals when she did not move at all, but lay motionless with a list to starboard. Also, when she moved, there was a gritty, grinding sound, which at once suggested to me that she was lying upon a bed of coral. There was also another sound, a bumping sound, accompanied by a perceptible jar of the hull, recurring at frequent and pretty regular intervals, which I set down to the bumping of wreckage alongside. The next thing I observed was that the lee side of the deck was about a foot or more deep in water, showing that a very considerable quantity must have come below, the greater part of it probably through the hatchways, although some had no doubt come in through the open ports.

Then I went up the hatchway ladder to the main-deck. Heavens! what a picture of wreck and ruin I there beheld! The three hollow steel masts were snapped off close to the deck, and now, with all attached, were over the starboard side, still fast to the hull by the standing and running gear, which lay, a confused raffle of wire and hemp, across the deck. The mizenmast, heel upward, leaned against the side of the poop in a slanting position, showing that it had fallen forward as well as sideways; and immediately to leeward, in the water that heaved and seethed round us, rose and fell a tangle of wrecked spars, sails, and rigging. Every inch of the bulwarks, from poop to topgallant forecastle on both sides, had disappeared, leaving only the bent and broken steel stanchions standing here and there. The deckhouses were gone, as were every one of the boats except the motor launch, and even she was represented only by a shattered, fragmentary skeleton. Four of the six main-deck guns in the starboard battery were either smashed or missing altogether; and, in short, the whole appearance of the main-deck was such as to suggest that the ship had been repeatedly swept from end to end by a succession of tremendously heavy seas.

All these things I observed during my brief passage from the after hatchway to the face of the poop. I also observed that no land was in sight from the main-deck; therefore, if we had hit an unknown atoll during the night, it must be so small as to be entirely hidden by the poop.

Followed submissively enough by the boy, who now seemed tongue-tied, I passed through the cabin into the drawing-room; and it gave me quite a sharp pain to see the dreadful havoc that had been wrought in that splendid apartment since I had left it only a few hours before. For not only had all the ports been left open during the night, for the sake of coolness, but the skylight and companion had both been swept away, and, from the appearance of things, tons of water must have flooded the place. Even now, when it had had time to drain away to a small extent, the lee side of the room was flooded to the depth of fully four feet, and chairs, ottomans, table, grand piano, organ—the latter capsized—in fact, everything movable had settled away to leeward, and now lay in a confused heap in the water. The rich carpet was everywhere sodden, several of the electric-light shades were smashed, two or three of the pictures had fallen; in short, the destruction was practically complete. And there, in the midst of all the ruin, stood poor little Anthea, a most forlorn and pathetic-looking object.

I hastened toward her with the idea of saying something comforting, though what I could have said I am sure I don't know. Happily, she forestalled me by coming to meet me with outstretched hands.

"Oh! Mr Leigh," she exclaimed, "isn't this just awful! I am so glad you are here, for Momma is in her cabin and can't get out; and Jule and I haven't been strong enough to help her. She says that the wardrobe has fallen across her door, and she cannot move it."

"All right!" I said; "I will see what I can do to help her;" and I moved toward the door in question.

"But don't you think you had better get some of the men to help you?" demanded the girl. "I guess that wardrobe is a pretty heavy piece of furniture and—But what are you looking at me like that for? And what have you done to your head?"

"Hasn't Julius told you?" I asked, ignoring the last question.

"Told me what?" returned Anthea. Then, without waiting for a reply, she continued. "No, he hasn't told me a thing. In fact, I haven't seen him since he left me nearly an hour ago to get help. Of course I know that we're wrecked, and goodness knows that's bad enough. There's nothing worse than that to tell, is there?"

"I don't know for certain," I said, "but I fear so. Julius says that we three and your mother are all that remain of the entire ship's company; but I pray Heaven that he may be mistaken. However, we will free your mother; and then I will take a good look round. I have scarcely had a chance to see anything yet."



I walked up to the closed door of Mrs Vansittart's cabin, Anthea and Julius accompanying me, and knocked.

"It is Walter Leigh," I cried. "Julius tells me that you are blockaded in your room, madam, and cannot force your way out. May I see what I can do?"

"Pray do, if you please," was the response. "I have been shut up here for hours, terrified and half-drowned, and I want to get out. Have you anybody there to help you?"

"Only Julius," I replied. "But I daresay we can manage, between us."

"I don't believe you can," retorted Mrs Vansittart. "There is a wardrobe right across the door, and it is so heavy that I cannot move it. Still, you may try."

"Right!" I replied. "Stand clear, if you please. Now, Julius, put your shoulder to the door, close to the frame, and throw your whole weight upon it. I will help you."

But the door would not move, strive as we might, and soon I realised that the lad was a hindrance rather than a help. So I told him to stand aside, and was then able to bring my whole weight and strength to bear. Presently I felt the door move, ever so little; I had started it, and after some minutes of strenuous heaving I managed to force it so far open that, with a little tight squeezing, I might push myself through the aperture. This I did, having first asked permission; and, once inside the room, I managed to shift the blockading wardrobe without very much difficulty, and so to release the imprisoned lady.

When I had hooked back the door, so that the way was open, Mrs Vansittart turned to me and said:

"Thank you, ever so much, Walter! And now, tell me, what dreadful thing has happened? We are stranded, are we not, and—What is the matter with your head? You are bleeding! Tell me the worst, Walter! Whatever it is, I believe I can bear it."

"To confess the truth, madam," I said, "I scarcely know yet what is the full extent of our misfortune. That the ship is ashore—on a coral reef, as I believe—and totally dismantled, is certain; and I fear that that is not the worst of it. Julius tells me that we four are the only survivors of the entire ship's company, but I can hardly believe that. There must be some of the crew left somewhere in the ship, although I saw no sign of them when I came here from my cabin. Probably I should not have been here now but for the fact that when the ship struck I was hurled out of my bunk with such violence that I was stunned; and it was Julius who found and revived me. With your permission, I will now take a thorough look round, and then return to you with my report."

"Please do so," assented Mrs Vansittart. "Search the ship thoroughly from end to end, and then let me know exactly how matters stand. I am sure it cannot be anything like so bad as you say. Some of the poor fellows may have been, indeed probably were, swept away by those awful seas that broke over the ship when she first struck; but all of them! Oh, no, it cannot be so bad as that; it would be too terrible!"

"I will go at once," I said. "But I beg that you will prepare yourself for bad news; for, from what I saw on deck just now, on my way here, I am afraid my report will be a very distressing one."

Therewith I hurried away, for I saw that the poor lady was quite overwhelmed, and would probably be relieved to find herself alone for a time. I searched the ship thoroughly, penetrating to every part of her in which it was possible for a man to hide himself, but found nobody, until at length I made my way to the stewardesses' quarters. There, huddled up in the cabin which they shared between them, I discovered the chief and assistant stewardess, quite unhurt but half-crazy with terror—so frightened, indeed, that it was only with the greatest difficulty I at length succeeded in persuading them that all danger was over for the present, and induced them to join their mistress in the drawing-room.

Then I proceeded to investigate the condition of the wreck. The yacht had been constructed like a liner, with a double bottom; and the conclusion at which I arrived was that the actual bottom of the ship was so seriously damaged that she would never float again, but that the inner skin was intact; and that the water in her interior, of which there was a very considerable quantity, had all come in through the hatchways and ports.

With regard to the loss of the crew, I believed I could understand exactly how it had come about; for, wherever I went, whether to the men's berthage in the 'tween decks or to the officers' cabins, the indications were the same, and pointed to the conviction that when the ship struck, every man below leaped out of his bunk or hammock and dashed up on deck in something of a panic, where they were washed overboard, with the watch already on deck, by the terrific seas that must at once have swept the ship from stem to stern, their awful power being sufficiently evidenced by the scene of destruction presented by the decks.

Having completed my investigation below, I ascended to the poop, shinning up by one of the port mizen shrouds, which trailed across the deck and hung down over the face of the poop, both ladders being missing; and when I got up there and was able to see all round the ship, I thought I began to understand a little more clearly what had happened during the darkness of the preceding night.

I found that the ship had piled herself up on a small atoll, some two miles in diameter, only a very small portion of which—less than a hundred yards in length—showed above water. This portion, consisting of a low bank of sand, the highest point of which could not, I estimated, be more than three feet above the level of the ocean's surface, lay directly astern of the ship, distant about half a mile. From the position which the wreck then occupied I surmised that in the darkness of the preceding night we must have rushed headlong upon the weathermost portion of the reef, and beaten through the terrific surf that everlastingly broke upon it. Our decks had been swept of everything animate and inanimate in the process, until the vessel had settled down on the top of the reef in the comparatively smooth water

that then surrounded us, which, though it boiled and seethed all round the wreck, had power only to cause her to stir gently and at intervals upon her coral bed when an extra heavy swell swept across the reef.

Of course the wreck ought not to have occurred; but Parker, the boatswain, who was in charge of the ship when she piled herself up, unfortunately happened to overhear Mrs Vansittart remark, only the day before the disaster, that we were then in a part of the ocean which was not only very sparsely used, but, according to the charts, was supposed to be absolutely void of dangers. Hence I imagine he must not only have grown careless himself, but must also have permitted the look-outs to become so also; with the result that, on such a pitch-dark night as the preceding one had been, the ship would be absolutely on top of the danger, and escape from it impossible, before its existence was discovered.

Well, our plight, although bad enough in all conscience, might easily have been a good deal worse. For if the ship had remained afloat a few minutes longer than she actually did, she would have driven completely across the reef and sunk in the lagoon, when probably the whole of us who happened to be below would have gone down with her, and the disaster would have been complete. As it was, there were half a dozen of us who had escaped drowning, although our prospects for the future were anything but brilliant. To start with, the diminutive sandbank astern of the wreck was impossible as a place of prolonged residence, though we might, perhaps, if driven to it, contrive to exist for a few days upon the shellfish which no doubt might be collected along the margin of the inner beach, assisted, perhaps, by a few sea-birds' eggs. But there was no fresh water, so far as I could discover with the aid of the ship's telescope, nor was there so much as a blade of grass in the way of shelter.

Therefore it was perfectly evident that we must stick to the wreck until something came along to take us off, or until I could put together something in the nature of a craft or raft capable of being handled under sail and of making a voyage to the nearest civilised land. That, as anyone who has used the sea will know, was a pretty tall order for a young fellow like myself, with such assistance only as four women and a boy could afford me. Of course there was the possibility that the wreck might break up during the next gale. But I hardly thought she would, because she must have driven to her present berth while last night's breeze was at its height, and from the look of things generally I doubted whether a sea heavy enough to destroy her would ever reach us where we then lay. The reef would break it up and render it practically harmless before it could get so far as the spot which we occupied.

Still, I realised that it would not be wise to trust too much to that belief; and I determined to get to work upon some sort of craft at the earliest moment possible. Meanwhile, however, since under the most favourable circumstances the wreck must obviously be our home for some time to come, unless indeed we should be lucky enough to be seen and taken off, the first thing to be done was to clear the ship of water and get the cabins dry again as speedily as possible; and I determined that I would make that my first job.

Having now decided upon something in the nature of a plan of campaign, I returned to the drawing-room, descending to it by way of the companion—the stairway of which was still intact—with the object of making my report to Mrs Vansittart and submitting my plans for her approval. But when I reached the apartment I found the occupants in the very act of descending to the dining-room, in order to partake of breakfast. This had been prepared by the two stewardesses, the senior of whom—the young Frenchwoman, Lizette Charpentier, who also acted as Mrs Vansittart's maid—had just made her appearance with the information that the meal was ready. I therefore decided to postpone what I had to say until after breakfast, believing that everybody would be the better able to listen to bad news if they were first fortified with a good meal.

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## Chapter Ten.

### Adapting Ourselves to Circumstances.

To ward off the enquiries that sprang to Mrs Vansittart's lips the moment I appeared was a little difficult, but I managed it by simply declining to say a word until after breakfast. When, however, we presently all sat down at the table together, I soon perceived that the task of breaking to her the full extent of the night's disaster, to which I had been looking forward with dread, was likely to be less painful than I had anticipated. For Mrs Vansittart was far too experienced in nautical matters to be easily deceived. Moreover, during my absence there had been time for her to think, and to draw her own conclusions, not only from what she saw and heard, but also from what she failed to see and hear—particularly the sound of men's voices and footsteps. So that, as the meal progressed, I began to understand that it would require very little effort on my part to bring complete realisation home to her.

Poor lady! I felt very sorry for her—not so much on account of the possible hardships, privations, and dangers that only too probably awaited her, for she was "grit" all through, and I knew that she would face them all without a murmur; but it was easy to see that she was grieving over the terrible loss of life that had attended the disaster. Also, I rather imagined she blamed herself for it. For when I ventured to beg her not to take the matter too much to heart, she looked at me through her tears and retorted:

"How can I help taking it to heart, Walter? If I had been content to enjoy life in the same way that other women of my class do, this would never have happened. But I must needs go gadding about the world in a yacht; and this is what has come of it!"

I replied that yachting was not in itself more dangerous than many other forms of amusement which could easily be named; that thousands indulged in it year after year with impunity; and that what had befallen us was neither more nor less than a pure accident, for which she certainly could in nowise hold herself responsible, since she had navigated the ship with skill and the observance of every necessary precaution. I went on to say that the accident had arisen simply from the existence of a coral reef which nobody had thus far suspected. But my arguments, sound as I felt them to be, seemed to influence the lady very little, if at all. I could only hope that time, reflection, and the

difficulties that lay before us would gradually divert her thoughts from the sorrow that just then seemed to possess her.

At the conclusion of the meal I took her up on the poop and allowed her to view our surroundings, expounded my theory of the various happenings that had brought us to our present pass, and explained the steps which I suggested should be immediately taken. To which she responded by saying:

“Very well, Walter. Whatever you think necessary do, and we will all help you to the utmost of our ability. I can sail and navigate a ship, as you have seen, but there my seamanship ends. I have not the knowledge, the skill, the experience, the intuitiveness and imaginativeness to deal adequately with, such a matter as a shipwreck. And when people are in such a plight as ourselves it is the man who must take hold of the situation and handle it. I trust entirely to you to do what you think best; and, as I said before, we women will help you all we can.”

I thanked her very heartily for her trust in me, and proposed that we should forthwith set to work, our first task being to free the habitable portions of the ship from water, so that they might become dry and comfortable again with the least possible delay. And I suggested that we should begin with her own sleeping cabin, to which she made no objection.

“There is one other matter,” I added, “which demands our immediate attention. We must at once determine the exact position of the wreck, and, having done so, must prepare a statement briefly setting forth our plight and requesting assistance. This statement must be copied out several times—as many times as you please, indeed—and the copies, enclosed in sealed bottles, sent adrift at, say, daily intervals. It will be strange indeed if, out of four or five dozen bottles, not one is picked up.”

The suggestion appealed to Mrs Vansittart. She pronounced the idea a good one, and as the time and conditions were alike favourable we forthwith proceeded to carry it out, she first taking a set of five sights for the determination of the longitude while I noted the chronometer times, and then, vice versa, I taking the sextant and she the chronometer. Then we adjourned to the chart-room and worked out our calculations independently, the results agreeing within ten seconds of longitude, or a difference of only a few hundred feet. This, of course, was quite near enough for all practical purposes, but it did not completely satisfy either of us, Mrs Vansittart being, like myself, something of a stickler for absolute accuracy. We therefore tried again, this time working the problem of “equal altitudes”, and before the day was out we had arrived at identical results, both as to latitude and longitude.

Then, while I tackled the task of clearing our living quarters of water, Mrs Vansittart set to work to draft out a statement setting forth the circumstances of the wreck and appealing for help. I have still a copy of the document in my possession, which runs as follows:—

“Yacht *Stella Maris*; New York Yacht Club, U.S.A.;  
Mrs Cornelia Vansittart, Owner.  
Latitude — North; Longitude — East.

“To all whom it may concern.

“The full-rigged, auxiliary-screw yacht *Stella Maris*, stranded on an uncharted coral reef, situate in the above-mentioned position, during the night of Wednesday the — day of December, 19—, with the lamentable loss of all hands excepting the owner, her son and daughter, chief officer Walter Leigh, of Newton Ferrers, Devonshire, England; Lizette Charpentier, chief stewardess, and Susie Blaine, second stewardess, both of New York, U.S.A.

“As the only land in sight is a very small, bare sandbank, quite uninhabitable, the above-named survivors are remaining upon the wreck, which, although totally dismasted and badly bilged, will afford them a refuge so long as the weather remains fine, but may break up during the next gale that chances to occur.

“Mrs Vansittart offers a reward of ten thousand dollars (American), and the reimbursement of all expenses incurred, to the person or persons who will effect the rescue of herself and her companions in misfortune; and the finder of this document is earnestly besought to make public its contents as soon as found.

Signed: “Cornelia Vansittart.”

The first copy of this appeal was dispatched that very day, by the simple process of wrapping it carefully in oiled silk, inserting it in an empty bottle, which was tightly corked and sealed, and heaving it overboard to take its chance. As I stood watching the bottle’s progress I was gratified to see that there was a one-knot current setting across the reef, which I hoped would carry it clear into the open sea; though whether it would ever be found by anyone capable of making intelligent use of it was quite another matter. The chances of it being seen were small, and of its recovery still less. But I determined to increase both before dispatching the next message; and this I did by routing out some paint and setting the boy Julius to the task of painting a number of bottles all over in alternate bands of red and white. An ordinary floating bottle might be seen and passed without the smallest effort to pick it up, even though all the conditions for recovery should be favourable. But I argued that if a bottle were seen bearing distinguishing marks that were obviously put upon it with the object of attracting attention, the person sighting it might reasonably conclude that it would be worth while to salve it and ascertain its contents.

If the sight of our first call for help drifting placidly seaward across the lagoon was an agreeable sight, there was another which appeared later on that was by no means so agreeable—the dorsal fins of several sharks cruising lazily here and there about the lagoon. I thought I could make a pretty shrewd guess at the meaning of their presence there, I therefore devised a number of pretexts for keeping everybody off the poop, so that there might be as little chance as possible of anyone beholding the gruesome sight.

There were so many matters demanding immediate attention that it was difficult to determine which of them should

first be taken in hand. But as the weather was fine, and the barometer stood high, exhibiting a tendency to rise still higher and thus promising a continuance of fine weather, it was agreed that, for health's sake, the living quarters should be cleared of water and thoroughly aired and made wholesome first of all. This was accordingly done, the task keeping us all busily employed for the best part of three days. Then provision had to be made against the further flooding of Mrs Vansittart's cabin and the drawing-room by rain, for, as has already been mentioned, the skylights and companion had been swept away, and the corresponding apertures in the deck were quite open and unprotected.

Very fortunately, a large quantity of timber scantling and planking of various kinds and dimensions had been shipped by our far-seeing owner, for the purpose of effecting repairs at sea, if required. As soon as the cabins had been cleared of water, therefore, some of this timber was brought on deck; and with the aid of the carpenter's tools, Julius and I proceeded to plank over the openings, and make them weather-proof by covering the planking with tarpaulins tightly nailed over them.

When I first invited the boy to help me he refused point-blank, upon two distinct pleas: the first of which was that he saw no reason why he should work at all, seeing that I was there to do what needed to be done; while, in the second place, if he chose to work at all he would do only such work as he pleased, and in any case was not going to be ordered about by any darned Britisher. So I just let him severely alone, and for the first day he loafed about, smoking cigarettes and pretending to fish in the troubled water over the side.

When, however, on the second day, seeing that I needed help, his mother and sister came to my assistance, the sight of them working while he idled was too much for even his spoiled and selfish temper; and with many grumbings and mutterings below his breath he ordered his mother away and took her place. But so intractable was he, so unwilling to receive the slightest suggestion or hint from a "darned Britisher", and so determined to do things his own way or not at all, that eventually I had to tell him plainly he must consent to do as he was told, or drop work altogether. Finally he gave in, mainly in consequence of his sister's outspoken comments upon his behaviour, but it was with a very bad grace.

Having made the living quarters of the ship once more habitable and safe against bad weather, the next task undertaken was the salving of the sails and as many of the spars and as much of the rigging as possible. This was a lengthy and heavy job, in the performance of which it became necessary for me to be frequently over the side, in the water, cutting the sails from the yards and stays, clearing and unreeving rigging, and so on. It would have been exceedingly dangerous had the sharks which I had seen during the first few days remained in the lagoon; but they seemed to have gone again, for I saw nothing of them.

Although their absence enabled me to work with the utmost freedom, I could not make very rapid headway, single-handed, in the water; while the hoisting inboard of the heavier spars and sails, assisted though we were with such appliances as a derrick, tackles, snatch-blocks, and the winch, taxed our energies to the very utmost. It was done at last, however, and most thankful was I when the last spar it was possible for us to secure came up over the side; for not only had we saved a considerable quantity of material that might possibly prove of the utmost value to us, but we had also rid ourselves of the menace of having the ship holed by the wreckage bumping alongside.

This big task was completed exactly six weeks from the day upon which the wreck had occurred, all of us working strenuously from dawn to dark day after day, excepting Sundays, which Mrs Vansittart insisted should be observed as days of rest, during which she conducted a service, morning and evening, in the drawing-room. Christmas Day, which occurred three weeks after the wreck, was also observed as a holiday; and despite our forlorn and rather precarious situation, we contrived to make a fairly jolly day of it, the only discordant element being the boy Julius, who early became sulky for some unaccountable reason, and spent the entire day upon the topgallant fore-castle with a rifle, shooting at sea-birds and wasting some two hundred rounds of ball cartridge. I felt strongly inclined several times to take the rifle forcibly from him, but the mere hint of such a thing seemed to distress his mother so keenly that I did not refer to it a second time. Yet I must confess that I bitterly begrudged the utterly useless expenditure of so many good and, in our case, valuable cartridges.

Now, it must not be supposed that, in our anxiety to recover as much wreckage as possible, we forgot to keep a diligent look-out for passing ships, for we did not. Nor did we neglect to dispatch a copy of our appeal for help, securely sealed up in a bottle, regularly every day. But thus far the horizon had remained blank while daylight lasted; therefore if perchance any ships had passed us, they must have done so during the night. Up to this we had all been working so hard that we had deemed it hardly worth while to sacrifice our hours of rest for the very doubtful advantage of maintaining a night watch; but with the conclusion of what we considered our heaviest task, so far as actual labour was concerned, we decided that it might be of advantage to keep a look-out at night time, at least during the moonlit nights. We should then be able to see a passing ship at such a distance as would enable us to attract her attention by means of a flare. Accordingly it was arranged that four of us, namely, Julius, the two stewardesses, and I, should each take one watch in succession.

In that latitude, which was only a few degrees north of the Line, day and night were approximately of equal length, and for all practical purposes the night might be reckoned as beginning at six p.m., and ending at six a.m. Therefore if each of us kept a watch of three hours, we should cover the twelve hours between us. But by this arrangement the same person would keep one particular watch every night, and, of course, the least arduous of the watches would be that from six o'clock to nine o'clock p.m.; I therefore decided to split this watch into two dog-watches of one and a half hours each, by which arrangement the regularity would be broken, and each of us would get the benefit of the first dog-watch in succession, which seemed to be not only a fair but a desirable thing.

To keep a night watch, however, without possessing the means to attract the notice of a passing ship, would be useless. I therefore constructed a sort of framework consisting of four twelve-foot planks, which I set up on edge in the form of a square enclosure on the after extremity of the poop, securing them firmly to the deck planking by means of battens. The planks were nine inches wide, consequently when my work was complete I had a kind of open

box twelve feet square and nine inches deep in which to light my flare. But something was needed to protect the deck from the action of the fire; my next act, therefore, was to nail together a sort of light raft, consisting of six fifteen-foot planks laid side by side and secured to each other by cross battens, the forward ends being bevelled to reduce the resistance to the raft's passage through the water. Then I fixed up an arrangement on each side of the raft whereby, with the aid of rowlocks, I could work a pair of sculls and so propel the raft through the water. This job took me two days to complete, but when it was done I had a raft that would sustain not only my own weight but something to spare. I placed upon it a couple of wash-deck tubs, put a shovel in one of them, and paddled myself ashore to the small sandbank about half a mile away.

As I rowed away from the wreck, standing up to my work and facing forward, fisherman fashion, I took a rather wide sweep, whereby I was enabled to obtain a good view of her. A pitiful sight she presented, bereft of her three masts, with her jib-boom snapped short off, odds and ends of rigging trailing overboard, a great gap in her starboard bulwarks, and the fair whiteness of her hull disfigured here and there with rust streaks. She sat with a list to starboard, and was a trifle down by the head, from which latter circumstance I concluded that her forefoot and bottom forward were the most seriously damaged parts of her, as, indeed, it was only reasonable to suppose, seeing that she must have hit the reef stem-on. But, oh! it was distressing to look at that still beautiful though dishevelled hull and reflect that she had been brought to her present lamentable condition by pure negligence.

The raft travelled more easily through the water than I had dared to hope, and in about a quarter of an hour I reached the sandbank and sprang ashore, taking the precaution to secure the raft by a painter made fast to one of the oars, the loom of which I drove well into the sand. Then I walked to the highest point of the bank and looked about me.

With the exception of a few bunches of dry and rotting seaweed, the bank was as bare as the back of my hand, but a colony of gulls had settled upon it, and by their cries indicated the resentment which they felt at my intrusion. I looked round to see if I could discover any eggs, for fresh gulls' eggs are not at all bad eating, and would perhaps afford a welcome change of diet to the women folk; but I found none, so concluded that it was not just then the season for them. The bank measured, by pacing, a little over eighty yards long by some forty broad; and I diligently examined the seaward side of it to see whether perchance there might be a spring of fresh water gushing out of it. I hardly expected that there would be, and was therefore not greatly disappointed at failing to find any such thing. But I found the margin liberally strewn with small shellfish, as well as with numerous empty shells, some of which were so exquisite, both in form and in colouring, that I could not resist the temptation to waste a few minutes in securing specimens of the most beautiful for the delectation of Mrs Vansittart and her daughter. This done, I returned to the raft, hauled it broadside on to the beach, and proceeded to fill my two wash-deck tubs with sand, with which I designed to fill my square box-like arrangement on the poop as a protection for the deck from the flames of my projected flare. Needless to say, two tubs of sand did not go very far toward filling the box, and it was not until the following evening that I had everything ready. Then, with a goodly pile of combustibles, consisting of dry seaweed, chips, kindling wood, and coal, heaped up in the middle of my sandbox, I had everything ready for lighting a flare at a moment's notice.

Our most pressing necessities having been attended to, I found time to attend to the matter which seemed to come next in importance. Hitherto we had been favoured with the finest of fine weather—nothing but the bluest of skies, often without the smallest shred of cloud, no rain, and only the most gentle of zephyrs. But I knew that such a condition of things could not last for ever. A change must inevitably come sooner or later; and if that change should chance to take the form of a gale from the southward, I had scarcely a shadow of doubt that, unless it should happen to be of the very briefest character, the wreck would go to pieces under our feet. Therefore it seemed to me that the task which now clamoured most loudly for our immediate attention was the construction of a craft of some sort which would enable us to escape in the last resort.

Now, there are very few tasks in connection with his craft which mercantile Jack cannot perform in a more or less efficient manner. He can unrig his ship, and rig her afresh. If any of her spars should be sprung, he can fix them up in such a fashion that they will serve their purpose very well until a new spar can be procured. He can knot and splice rigging; he can patch or rope a sail; and there are a thousand other things that he can do very deftly. But there is one thing which he cannot do, unless he has served an apprenticeship, or at least part of an apprenticeship to it, and that is—build a boat. He can repair a damaged boat, I grant you, put in a new plank, or replace a damaged timber. But to build a boat, as we understand the term, is altogether beyond him. The best that he can do is to construct some sort of a makeshift; and the problem that now confronted me was, what form was my makeshift to take?

First, what were my requirements? If it came to our being obliged to abandon the wreck, either through stress of weather or because of a conviction that our appeals for help had gone astray and that we must give up all hope of rescue and effect our own deliverance, it would mean a boat voyage. This in its turn would mean that the craft must be a good sea boat, capable of facing any weather, weathery, a reasonably good sailer, and big enough to accommodate six people—four of whom were women, whose comfort and welfare must receive special consideration—together with a stock of provisions and water sufficient to last us all for, say, five weeks at least. I had already discussed this matter with Mrs Vansittart, and she had expressed a determination to try for Manila, in such a case, that being an American possession. Secondly, had we the materials, and had I the skill and strength to build such a boat, with such assistance as my companions could afford me? That was the question which now demanded an answer, and, in consultation with Mrs Vansittart, I now diligently proceeded to seek the reply.

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## Chapter Eleven.

### A Suspicious Sail heaves in Sight.

As I have already hinted, I was no boat builder. I knew a good boat when I saw her, and I had a very fair notion of the

correct proportions of such a craft; but when it came to the point of draughting a vessel's lines, I very soon discovered, upon making the attempt, that I was all at sea. Nor could Mrs Vansittart help me. As a matter of fact, we quickly came to the conclusion that we knew just enough of the subject to be painfully conscious of our own ignorance. Of course I might have laid a keel, attached to it a stem and stern post, and then, with the help of a few moulds, roughed out something resembling a boat; but when in imagination I had got thus far, I found myself face to face with the mystery of properly shaping the planks, and, when this was done, of bending them to the correct curves. Then I realised that the job was too much for me.

It was clear that a boat of the usual form was out of the question, so something very much simpler must be thought out—something that should be all straight lines, or if there were any curves they must be of such a character as to be producible without such special apparatus as, for instance, a steaming trunk.

Then Mrs Vansittart and I began to overhaul our memories in search of the most simple form of floating craft that we had ever seen, and it was not long before we decided that the Thames punt "filled the bill". That craft, so familiar to frequenters of the reaches of the Thames, and examples of which may be seen in Boulter's Lock any Sunday in summer, is, as everybody knows, a thing of straight lines, flat-bottomed, flat-sided—in fact, an open box, with its two ends sloping instead of perpendicular; and we quickly decided that anyone with enough of the carpenter's skill to knock a box together ought to be able to build a punt. Later on we discovered that we were not quite right in this assumption, but it was sufficiently encouraging to form a basis upon which to make a start.

Now, a sea voyage in an open boat is something to be attempted only as a last resource. A trip of a few hours' duration in suitable weather is all very well; it is, indeed, a very enjoyable experience. But in a gale, when one is exposed hour after hour to the fury of the elements, is in momentary danger of being capsized, and has to bale for dear life!

Well, those who have been through it know what that means. I had been through it, therefore I knew that for those delicately nurtured women it was not to be thought of for a moment; our boat must be decked, that was a certainty.

This decision led naturally to the question of one of the principal dimensions—namely, the depth—of the proposed craft. She must be deep enough under her deck at least to allow her occupants to lie down and sleep in comfort. After careful consideration we fixed the depth at five feet in the clear. With that as a ruling dimension it was not difficult to decide that a suitable beam or breadth would be ten feet. After much consideration we fixed the length at thirty feet on the water-line, which, we decided, would afford sufficient room for ourselves, our immediate and indispensable belongings, and a sufficient supply of food and water to carry us to our journey's end. Taking pencil and paper, we proceeded to draught out the boat, that we might see how she looked, and estimate the quantity of material needed for her construction.

Our first sketch showed the contours of a Thames punt, pure and simple; but when we pictured her in a heavy seaway, and endeavoured to imagine what her behaviour would be under such circumstances, we quickly came to the conclusion that certain modifications were imperative. These we proceeded to make forthwith; the final result being a craft of the dimensions already determined upon, flat-bottomed in cross section, but curved fore and aft, and with enough sheer to lift the fore end of her well above water. Being flat-bottomed, she would naturally be of light draught, and would consequently make a good deal of leeway when close-hauled, unless some special provision could be made to meet the case. We therefore decided to extend her two flat sides nine inches below her bottom, so as to form two keels; and, thus provided, we believed she would prove to be fairly weatherly. She was to be decked all over, with only a small cockpit aft; and light was to be furnished to her interior by four of the glass ports or windows to be removed from the wreck. She was to be sloop-rigged. The completed and finally approved design cost us an afternoon to produce, but when it was done we were very well satisfied with it. We believed that the craft ought to behave fairly well, even in heavy weather; while the design was so simple as to demand no special skill in carrying it out, and such loose timber as we had, supplemented by a certain quantity of deck planking, would be sufficient for our purpose.

The next thing to be done was to proceed with the actual work, and this we did forthwith.

I am not going to inflict upon the patient reader any wearisome details of our work, step by step; I believe they may safely be left to his imagination; moreover, I have other and more interesting things to tell. I will therefore dismiss this part of my story by mentioning that, although the work of building our craft proved to be considerably less easy than we had anticipated, chiefly because of my lack of knowledge of the details of carpentry, we made very fair progress after the first two or three days, and especially after I had acquired the knack of handling a plane properly. But I had to do every stroke of the actual work myself. The women merely helped me by holding the various parts in place while I bored the holes or drove the nails; and Julius positively refused to lend the slightest assistance, because, forsooth, he had not been consulted during the preparation of the plans! He would sit smoking cigarettes and fishing, and watch, unmoved, his mother and sister, to say nothing of the two stewardesses, straining themselves to help me to lift heavy weights and bend the stout bottom planks to the required curve. Also—chiefly, I think, because he knew that I objected—he would persist in shooting at the gulls with a rifle; until at length, in a fit of exasperation, I risked his mother's displeasure and put an end to the wastage by locking up the ammunition and taking possession of the key.

I have already mentioned the arrangement which we had made in the matter of night watches. This, of course, only applied to those nights when the moon afforded light enough to permit a passing ship to be seen. My instructions were that, in the event of a sail being sighted, I was to be called at once, when I would decide as to the advisability or otherwise of making a flare to attract the attention of her crew. I was quite prepared to receive Master Julius's refusal to participate in these night watches, but, strangely enough, he did not; and thereby hangs a tale.

The watches had been established a month or more, and no sail had been seen. Then, on a certain morning, when Julius called me at three o'clock—my watch followed his—I went on deck and, to my amazement, discovered the flare

which I had prepared to serve as a signal blazing brilliantly, having evidently been lighted for quite a quarter of an hour. The full moon was hanging high in a cloudless sky, and the stars were shining with their usual tropical brilliance, but so bright was the light of the flames that I could see nothing outside the rail of the wreck. I therefore descended to the boy's cabin, and, entering without ceremony, demanded to be informed of his reason for lighting the fire.

"Because I saw a ship," he replied.

"Saw a ship!" I repeated. "Then why did you not at once come down and call me? You surely cannot have forgotten that I made it clearly understood I was to be called if a ship should heave in sight, and that nobody was to light the fire without first consulting me?"

To this there was no reply, the lad merely lying in his bed and scowling sulkily at me. I repeated the question in a slightly different form.

"Naw," he answered at length, "I didn't forget. But I guess it's about time that you understood I ain't going to take any orders from you."

"But," I remonstrated, "your mother has given me full power to act as I think best, under all circumstances. I presume that, young as you are, you have sense enough to understand that in any community, however small, there must be a leader whom all the rest must obey. Under no circumstances is this more imperative than in such a case as ours. You surely do not consider that you should be our head and leader, do you?"

"You bet I do," was his amazing reply. "Anyhow," he continued, "I'm not going to obey you, Mister Britisher, so you may clear out and leave me to have my sleep. And see here, since you don't like the way I keep watch, I won't do it any more. Now, git!"

I "got" with some precipitation, lest I should lose my grip upon myself and give the youth the trouncing that he so richly deserved. I desired above all things to avoid that, for I knew that nothing would distress his mother so much as that her darling should be chastised, though ever so lightly.

Returning to the deck, I found the fire still blazing high, for, not content with merely kindling the flare, Master Julius had taken the trouble to fling the whole of our reserve stock of fuel upon it. There was the merest breathing of wind out from the eastward, and this fanned the smoke right along our deck. It made my eyes smart to such an extent that I was compelled to get down off the poop and shelter myself under the break of it, but even here, out of direct range of the glare, I found it impossible to see anything outboard, the mere reflection of the flames being bright enough to dazzle me.

I awaited the coming of daylight, and the appearance of the alleged ship, with the utmost eagerness, not altogether unmingled with anxiety. On the beach of one of the islands which we had visited shortly before the wreck of the yacht, I had observed the ribs of what had once been a fine ship; and the Scotsman who had taken up his abode on the island as a trader in copra and shell had told me a grisly story concerning that ship, which had haunted my memory from the moment when I had awakened to find the *Stella Maris* piled up on the coral reef. That story was to the effect that the ship had one morning been sighted ashore on the beach, apparently undamaged, but with no sign of a crew aboard her; and when the Scotsman at length succeeded in boarding her, he had found twenty-three corpses lying about her decks in a state of putrefaction that rendered the craft a veritable pest-house and precluded all possibility of close examination. But the deck and bulwarks were so abundantly smeared and bespattered with dry blood as to point unmistakably to the fact of a general slaughter of the crew; while the open hatches and the state of the cargo showed that the ship had been pretty effectually plundered.

My informant added that, while such cases were rare, there was reason for believing that the adjacent seas were haunted by certain individuals who made it their business to hunt for wrecks for the sake of what could be salvaged from them, and were not above perpetrating a little piracy when the conditions were favourable.

It was the memory of this story that had caused me to give such explicit instructions, that I was to be informed of the presence of a stranger in our neighbourhood before making our plight known by the ignition of the flare. The unruly youngster had wilfully disobeyed me, with the result that, for all he or I knew to the contrary, the attentions of a band of ruthless outlaws or bloodthirsty pirates had possibly been invited. I could only hope that this might not be the case, and that the stranger, if stranger there really was, would prove to be honest; but I was by no means easy in my mind about it.

When one's imagination becomes obsessed by an unpleasant idea there is a natural tendency for anxiety to grow while one is held in suspense; at all events it was so with me on that particular occasion, for it seemed to me that daylight would never come. Meanwhile, however, our flare, after blazing fiercely for a full half-hour, gradually died down and finally burned itself out; and I made no attempt to replenish it, for I knew that, whatever the result might be, its work was effectually done. All that remained was to await the result as patiently as might be.

As soon as the flames had died down sufficiently to allow of my seeing anything, I got the ship's night glass and diligently searched the entire horizon with it, and presently picked up something that gradually resolved itself into a craft which, from its stunted rig, I set down in my own mind as a junk. With the solitary exception, perhaps, of a Malay proa, a Chinese junk was the very last kind of craft that, under the circumstances, I desired to see. While of course it is by no means the case that every Chinese junk carries a pirate crew, the Chinese generally, and especially Chinese seamen, are regarded by Europeans with a certain measure of dubiety as possessing a code of morals peculiarly their own, and of such a character that I, for one, would hesitate long before placing myself and, still more, my companions in their hands and at their mercy. Still, there was nothing for it now but to wait and see how matters would turn out.

When I first saw her, the doubtful craft was in the south-western board, some seven miles distant, heading to the southward, apparently close-hauled, and moving very slowly. As I have said, the wind was a mere breathing; and although the moon was now well down in the western sky and the stranger's sails were in shadow, there was a certain indefinable something in their appearance which told me that they were wrinkling and collapsing with every heave of the swell. I kept the telescope bearing steadily upon her, for she was drawing down toward that part of the sea which was shimmering in liquid silver under the moon's rays, and I knew that when she reached that radiant path I should get a clean, sharply-cut silhouette of her and be able to determine her exact character with some certainty. As luck would have it, however, she tacked before reaching the moon's track, and I was still left in a state of some doubt, although doubt was fast giving way to apprehension. In any case, unless the breeze should freshen, which it might with the coming of the dawn, several hours must elapse before the stranger could arrive at the reef, if she was making for it, as seemed certain.

At length, after what appeared to me an interminable period of suspense, the blackness of the eastern sky melted into a pallor that spread along the horizon even as I watched it, revealing the long, low hummocks of swell slowly heaving in ebony. The lower stars dimmed and vanished as the pallor strengthened and warmed into a delicate primrose tint, spreading to right and left and upward as it did so. Then star after star went out before the advance of the light that turned the indigo of the zenith into purest ultramarine; the primrose hue in the east flushed into orange; a great shaft of white light shot suddenly upward from its midst, and a spark of molten, flaming gold sprang into view, darting a long line of liquid fire across the gently heaving bosom of the sea. The spark grew into a throbbing, palpitating, dazzling blaze; and in an instant it was day: the stars had disappeared, the sky glowed in purest sapphire, the placid ocean laughed under the beams of the triumphant sun. The air, which a few minutes before had carried a sudden touch of chill in it, came warm to the skin, the breeze freshened a trifle; and at length I was able to secure a clear and convincing view of the stranger. She was indeed a junk, as I had surmised; and she was now undoubtedly beating up toward the reef. But for that headstrong boy's wilful disobedience of my instructions, she might have held on upon her original course and by this time been hull-down, with the wreck out of sight from her deck.

There was now no possibility of our evading a visit from her crew; but, thank goodness! there would be ample time to prepare for that visit. I reckoned that unless the breeze continued to freshen, she could not possibly reach us in less than six or seven hours. The question with me was, what sort of reception were we to give her when at length she should arrive? There was, of course, the possibility that her crew might be just plain, honest traders. In that case we might regard ourselves as rescued from our imprisonment on the reef; and, having regard to the precariousness of our situation on a wreck that would perhaps go to pieces in the next gale—which might spring up at any moment—it was important, especially for the women folk, that no chance of rescue should be let slip.

The junk might be heading for us in response to one of the many urgent calls for succour which we had sent out sealed up in empty bottles. My spirits rose a little at the thought, only to sink again at the reflection which succeeded it. It was in the highest degree improbable, if perchance one of our messages should fall into the hands of a Chinese seaman, that he would be able to comprehend and act upon it.

It was a rather perplexing problem for a young fellow like myself to be confronted with; but the decision at which I ultimately arrived was that, while recognising the possibility of the junk's crew being friends, it would be wise to be prepared to meet them as enemies. Having come to this decision, I went below and called the stewardesses, who, since the wreck, had assumed charge of the domestic arrangements—Susie, the second stewardess, proving herself to be a past mistress of the culinary art.

I allowed the others to sleep on, for there was no reason why I should prematurely awaken Mrs Vansittart, only perhaps to worry her needlessly by pouring into her ears the tale of my doubts and fears; but at eight o'clock she and her daughter came on deck, and caught me watching the slowly moving junk, with the telescope glued to my eye. They looked, and an exclamation of delight burst from their lips, to be instantly followed by a demand from Mrs Vansittart why I had not at once called her to impart the good news. Of course I had to explain at length to them the uncertain state of mind under which I was labouring, as already indicated.

"But you fired the flare, Mr Leigh," exclaimed Anthea, pointing to the frame on the poop, from which a thin haze of smoke still arose. "Why did you do that if you felt uncertain as to the character of that junk?"

"No," I said, "your brother did that, on his own responsibility; and he, if anybody, must bear the blame. I am sorry that he did it, because if that junk is indeed coming in response to our call for help, we may be sure that there is somebody aboard her who is navigator enough to find his way to the reef without the need of a special signal from us. Whereas if it be, as I am somewhat disposed to fear—"

"There may be a fight before us—I suppose that is what you mean," interposed Mrs Vansittart. "Oh, well," she continued, "we have plenty of weapons and ammunition, and are not afraid of a few Chinamen. I am sure the dear boy did what he considered the proper thing—"

"Oh, Momma," cut in Anthea, "for goodness gracious sake don't talk such foolishness. It was a stupid, a wrong thing to do, after Mr Leigh had given explicit orders that—"

"It was, was it? Then you take that, and just mind your own business!" exclaimed a well-known quarrelsome voice behind us, and the next instant Master Julius, who had crept up noiselessly behind us in his rubber-soled deck shoes, smote his sister a resounding box on the ear.

As a rule I am a most placid-tempered person, but somehow that blow instantly aroused in me a fury that made me "see red" for a moment. Wheeling sharply, I seized the boy by the scruff of the neck and shook him until his teeth fairly rattled in his head.



"You young ruffian!" I exclaimed, "how dare you strike your sister? You deserve a downright good thrashing for such a deed, and—mark you this, boy!—if ever you so much as attempt to do such a thing again and I get to hear of it, I will rope's-end you until you can neither stand, sit, nor lie down. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" And I flung him from me with such violence that he went staggering along the deck for three or four yards before he recovered himself.

Of course there was at once a pretty to-do. Anthea was crying—more, I think, at the mortification of being struck than for any other reason; while Mrs Vansittart instantly went into violent hysterics, shrieking that her darling boy was being murdered. The young gentleman himself meanwhile slunk away down the companion stairs, eyeing me as he went, as though by no means certain that I would not yet fall upon him and inflict the punishment that he must have known he richly deserved. Then up rushed the two stewardesses, in response to Mrs Vansittart's shrieks, and between them and Anthea she was piloted below, and, it is to be presumed, ministered to and restored, for the shrieks and outcries presently died away.

About half an hour afterward Lizette, the head stewardess, summoned me to breakfast, at the same time explaining that Mrs Vansittart was taking the meal in her own room, with Julius.

"She is dr-r-readfully angree with you, Monsieur Leigh," the girl informed me; "but do not you care. It is time that somebody should take that boy in hand. He is everey day growing more execr-r-rable!"

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## Chapter Twelve.

### The Conversion of Julius.

When I went down to breakfast, Anthea and Lizette were already in the dining-room. The former had quite recovered her composure, although her eyelids were still a trifle red and swollen, while her small, beautifully-shaped ear was crimson from the force of the blow which it had received. I have already mentioned that this young lady's attitude toward me had completely changed from the moment when I saved her brother's life; her frosty and almost insolent aloofness had entirely disappeared, giving place to a frank and cordial friendliness of disposition rivalling that of her mother, which I admit was mightily agreeable to me. In short, I believed her to be intensely grateful for what I had done on that occasion, and perfectly willing that I should know it. So now I was not at all surprised when, upon my entrance, she came forward and, laying her hand upon my arm, said:

"Oh! Mr Leigh, I cannot tell you how dreadfully sorry I am for what has happened. Momma is frightfully angry with you for what she is pleased to term your violent and cowardly behaviour to Julius—they are her words, please remember, not mine: but I think, indeed I am almost certain, that upon reflection she will recognise that no man could stand by and permit to pass, unreprieved, such an outrage as that wretched boy inflicted upon me. The fact is—I can see it for myself now—we have all combined together to spoil Julius, with the result that he has become a thoroughly selfish, conceited, unfeeling, unmanageable boy; and it is high time that somebody should intervene. But that somebody must not be you, Mr Leigh; you have no right to interfere, you know, and I am sure that Momma would never tolerate anything of the kind from you.

"At the same time I feel impelled to say,"—and here her eyes sparkled and an amused smile lighted up her face—"that I believe your interference has done Julius good. You frightened him, and I think he will feel that henceforth he will have to behave a little more circumspectly while you are around. But I want you, please, to promise me that you will not interfere with him again. I will take up the matter. I will talk very seriously to Momma and see if I cannot open her eyes to the very serious wrong and injury that we are all doing to the boy by petting and pampering him, and humouring his every whim, however outrageous it may be. So you will give me your promise to be very patient with him, won't you? I know that he has been atrociously rude and provocative to you, but—"

"Please say no more," I interrupted. "I think I may safely promise you that no rudeness or provocation on his part, levelled at me personally, shall be allowed to move me in the slightest degree. But if ever the young monkey again dares to lift his hand against you in my presence, I'll—I'll—"

"Yes, yes, I know; you needn't say it," she interrupted in turn, and once more her eyes sparkled with merriment; "it will be something too awful for words. Well, I'll tell Julius what you say, and perhaps the information may have a good effect upon him. And now let us to breakfast, for I see Lizette is in a perfect terror lest the coffee should be allowed to go cold."

We sat down to breakfast opposite each other and chatted more merrily and intimately together than we had ever done before. But when the meal was over we put merriment aside, for there was the approaching junk to be thought of and provided for. When we rose from the table I requested Anthea to procure from her mother the keys of the magazine and bring them to me, as I proposed to make every possible provision for the defence of the wreck, should such unhappily prove to be necessary. And while she went to her mother for the required keys, I made my way up on to the poop and took another look at the junk.

There she was, close-hauled on the port tack, and evidently working up for the reef. But she was a slow tub, and the breeze was still so light that her sails barely remained "asleep" as she heaved and rolled ponderously upon the long, low, Pacific swell. I plainly saw that I should have ample time for such preparations as it would be possible to make for her reception.

I flung a look round the horizon and searched the sky for weather signs. The sky was clear as a bell, of a deep, rich, ultramarine tint in the zenith; shading off by imperceptible gradations to a soft, warm colourlessness at the horizon. There was not the slightest hint of haze or cloud in the whole of the visible vault, and the breeze was a mere warm breathing, with nothing to indicate that it might possibly freshen. Would that it would fall calm before the junk could

enter the lagoon! In that case we should be able to judge of her friendliness or otherwise by the number of boats which she would dispatch to us. I went to the flag locker, drew forth our Club ensign, and ran it up, reversed, to the head of the ensign staff—which, for a wonder, had escaped the general destruction—in the hope that this would evoke some sort of response from the crew of the junk, to serve in some measure as a guide to me. I had just belayed the halyards when Anthea came to me with the keys.

She glanced from me to the flag and back again, questioningly, and I explained.

"I see," she said. "Very well; here are the keys, but I do hope it will not be necessary to fight. I remember the Malacca Straits affair, when we had the entire crew to help us in defending the ship. Do you think that, situated as we now are, we should have any chance?"

"I don't see why not," I replied. "Although we are a wreck we can still show a rather formidable set of teeth,"—waving my hand toward the main-deck guns—"to say nothing of the two Maxims, upon which I shall principally pin my faith. The only thing that we must guard against is letting the rascals get too close before plainly declaring their intentions. But that should not be difficult."

"Supposing they are enemies, and should beat us, what do you think our fate would be?" demanded the girl, coming close to me and laying her hand upon my arm in the earnestness of her questioning.

I drew in my breath sharply at the mere suggestion. "They must not be allowed to beat us," I exclaimed harshly. "Such a possibility will not bear thinking of."

"Ah! I understand. So you think it might be as bad as that," returned my companion; and I saw the colour ebb from her cheeks and lips, leaving them white as marble, while her fingers closed like a vice upon my arm. "But if you should be hurt," she continued, "what would happen then?"

"It *mustn't* happen," I exclaimed; "it *mustn't*! I must take precautions of some sort to provide against such a possibility."

"Of course," she eagerly agreed. "But, supposing that in spite of your precautions you should be hurt—or killed,"—she shivered violently—"what then?"

"I will tell you," I said, seizing both her hands in mine and crushing them, I fear, in the passion of horror which her persistence conjured up. "I will give you, your mother, and the stewardesses a revolver each, and if by evil chance that junk should prove to be an enemy, and should get the upper hand of us, you must shoot yourselves, rather than fall alive into the hands of the Chinamen! Of course you need not take such a desperate step until the very last moment, when it has become evident that escape is impossible; but when that moment arrives—do you think you will have the courage to do as I say?"

"Yes," she whispered hoarsely. "I shall—and I will. But—oh! Walter, I hope, I pray, that we may none of us be driven to that frightful alternative. Now I must leave you, for I want to have a good heart-to-heart talk with Momma. But I shall see you again before—before—"

"Yes, yes," I said hurriedly, for I saw that the poor girl was becoming a trifle overwrought, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that her emotion carried something of a contagious character with it. It was necessary to get away from emotionalism and down to the commonplaces of life once more, so I nodded smilingly at Anthea and ran briskly below, jingling the keys in my hand as I went.

I had said that I should pin my faith principally to the Maxims, if it came to a fight, and so I fully meant to do; at the same time, I by no means overlooked the fact that a four-inch shell or two might prove very convincing arguments, under certain conditions. I therefore began my preparations by conveying eight shells and a corresponding number of cartridges up on deck and loading them into the eight main-deck guns that still remained to us, after carefully sponging out the latter. Next, I gave my attention to the Maxims, preparing them for action with meticulous care, overhauling, cleaning, and oiling the mechanism of them, satisfying myself that they were in perfect working order, placing a belt of cartridges in position in each, and taking care to have an abundant supply of relays in hand. While doing all these things I kept one eye pretty constantly upon the junk, in the hope that she would respond to the display of our ensign by hoisting some sort of signal which I might interpret as that of a friend coming to our rescue in answer to our appeals for help. But she showed no bunting beyond a small whiff at her mainmast head, which meant nothing.

Having prepared our artillery, I next turned my attention to the subject of magazine rifles, a dozen of which I brought up on deck. These I loaded and laid handy on the poop, near the Maxims, with a box of cartridges, although I doubted whether, after all our other weapons had played their part, there would be much opportunity to use them. Finally I produced and loaded six revolvers, two of which I thrust into the belt of a cutlass girded round my waist, while the other four I designed for the use of the women in the last dreadful resort. The boy I did not greatly trouble about, feeling pretty certain that he would look after himself.

I had finished all my preparations, and was sitting on the poop rail, intently scanning the slowly approaching junk through the ship's telescope, and taking due note of such details and particulars as were thus brought within my ken, when the slight rustle of feminine garments at my side caused me to lower the glass. Mrs Vansittart was standing at my elbow. She was still very pale, and her eyelids were swollen and red with recent weeping, but she smiled wanly as she offered me her hand.

"Walter," she said, and there was a tremor in her voice as she spoke, while the blood surged up into her cheeks for a moment—"I want to apologise. I am afraid—"

"No, certainly not, dear lady!" I cried, seizing her hand; "you must not dream of such a thing. On the contrary, it is for me to apologise to you for my sudden and violent ebullition of temper; and I do, most heartily. I cannot imagine what it was that possessed me just then, but—"

Her smile broadened and brightened a little as she raised her left hand to silence me.

"You must let me speak, Walter—let me say what I want to say," she resumed. "Anthea has been talking to me, and she said things that have opened my eyes to what I fear I must call my own folly. She has made me see that I have been altogether wrong in my attitude toward Julius. She has shown me that in the blindness and intensity of my affection for him—he is my only son, you know, Walter—I have indulged him and allowed him to have his own way in everything to such an extent that, unless we are all very careful, he will be utterly spoiled, ruined, and rendered totally unfit to go out into the world and take a worthy place there when the time comes for him to do so. There have been occasions before to-day when I have been troubled by suspicions that something was going wrong with the dear boy, that I was not doing my duty toward him as a wise mother should, but it was not until within the last half-hour that my eyes have been completely opened; and now I intend to adopt an entirely different attitude toward him. But the trouble is that I don't know how to set about it. How were you brought up, Walter?"

I could not avoid smiling at the naïveté of this question, yet I could also sympathise with the questioner.

"Well," said I, "naturally I loved my parents, and they as naturally loved me, but they never allowed their affection to blind them to the little childish faults and failings which, like all other children, I suppose, I soon developed; and they diligently devoted themselves to the task of checking these, so that in addition to loving my parents I was soon taught to honour and obey them. Then, when I was five years old, I was sent to school, where, mixing with other boys, any especial conceit of myself that I might have had was quickly nipped in the bud. At school, in addition to a fair, useful education, I was taught to reverence and respect my seniors and superiors, to be obedient, to submit to discipline, to be honest and truthful, to despise selfishness and viciousness, to fear God and honour the king. That, in brief, was the way of my bringing up, Mrs Vansittart. And although many of the things that I learned had to be hammered into me with a cane wielded by a willing and vigorous arm, I can truthfully assert that I am not a whit the worse, but rather the better for it to-day."

My companion regarded me smilingly for some moments. Then she said:

"So that is the story of how you came to be what you are! Well, Walter, I am compelled to admit that your parents were wiser than Mr Vansittart and I have been. But I am going to alter my methods now, and I can only pray that it may not be too late. You and I must talk further upon this matter later on. I think that perhaps you may be able to help me. Now, what about that junk? You were looking at her through the glass when I came up: have you been able to discover anything that would afford us a clue to her character?"

"Not very much," I replied; "but I am bound to confess that what I have seen is not altogether reassuring. For instance, she has not responded to the display of our ensign; and I believe that she would have done so in one form or another if she were coming to our rescue, in answer to our appeals for assistance. Then, although I cannot see her decks very well because of her high bulwarks, she appears to be carrying a good many men—too many, I think, for an honest craft of her size. I notice also that she has a gun—an eighteen-pound smooth-bore, I judge, from its appearance—mounted on her fore-castle, while if you will look at her through the glass, you will see three ports in her port bulwarks through which protrude the muzzles of other cannon. These look like twelve-pounders; and I have not the slightest doubt that there are three more of the same kind grinning through her starboard bulwark."

"Yes," replied Mrs Vansittart, peering through the telescope which I had handed to her. "I see the guns you mention, and I can catch through the portholes glimpses of a number of men moving about the deck. As you say, there appears to be a good many of them; but do you really regard that as a sinister sign? Would not any vessel trading in these waters carry a good strong crew, and guns for self-defence?"

"No doubt she would," I agreed; "and we can only hope that yonder junk is such a craft. We shall know for certain in about two hours from now; in any case I am quite ready for her."

Mrs Vansittart looked round at my preparations and smiled.

"Yes," she assented, "your preparations certainly appear to be reasonably complete. You have done what you could, Walter, haven't you? Well, I am going below, for the sun is terribly hot, and I must not get a headache just now, if I can possibly avoid it. Of course we shall all come and help you, if there is any fighting to be done."

"Indeed," I exclaimed, "I beg that none of you will dream of doing anything of the kind! You would only be a source of anxiety and embarrassment to me. I would rather not have even Julius; for I could not trust him. He is not amenable to discipline, and it is quite on the cards that at a critical moment he might take it into his head to do the wrong thing, with disastrous consequences to us all."

"Very well, we shall see," was the smiling reply as my lady skipper disappeared down the companion way.

Again I took up the telescope to resume my study of the junk, which I continued to do for the next half-hour or more. Then Master Julius made his appearance on deck. He came straight up to me, and as I looked at him, expecting some fresh unpleasantness, I detected a new expression in his eyes and on his features. The look of sullenness and discontent had disappeared, and he actually smiled as, looking me square in the eye, he held out his hand and exclaimed:

"Say, Mr Leigh, let's be friends, shall we?"

"Sure, old chap!" I replied, adopting an Americanism with which I had become quite familiar, as I grasped his

outstretched hand; "the very best of friends, if you like. Why shouldn't we be? I am perfectly willing, if you are."

"Then it's a deal," he answered, seating himself at my side on the poop rail. "Say!" he continued, "do you think we're going to have to fight that junk?"

"It is impossible to say, as yet," I replied. "I hope not; but if it should be necessary, do you want to take a hand?"

"Bet your life I do!" exclaimed the boy. "That's what I've come up to talk about. Momma says that you won't let me help because I'm not amenable to discipline, and you're afraid that I won't do as I'm told. If I promise you, on my word of honour as a gentleman, that I'll do exactly as you tell me, will you let me come in?"

"Certainly I will, and be delighted to have your help," I replied.

"Then it's a deal," repeated the lad, again offering his hand.

I must confess that I was both puzzled and astounded at the sudden and amazing change that had come over the boy; but the secret soon came out. It appeared that both his mother and his sister had been talking to him as it seemed he had never before been talked to in his life. They had told him a number of home truths in language that it seemed there was no possibility of misunderstanding; and they had done all this so convincingly that the dormant spirit of good that was in him had been effectually awakened. The withering scorn with which his sister had commented upon his behaviour in general and the offensive and contemptible traits of character that he had flaunted so flagrantly in all our faces had scorched and shrivelled his boyish soul; the picture of himself as others saw him was so repulsive that he had been overwhelmed with shame and—better still—repentance, and, if he was to be believed, had caused him to determine upon an altogether new line of action for the future.

Scorn, contempt, contumely, dislike, are disagreeable things to swallow, and now that his mother and sister had drawn aside the veil and allowed him to get a glimpse of their real opinion of him, it was rather more than he could bear. His pride and self-respect had been grievously hurt; he did not like to be despised and detested, so he was going now to make everybody respect and admire him. I had no very great faith in this conversion, I must confess—it seemed altogether too sudden to be genuine; but I was not going to say or do anything that might neutralise any good that might have been done. I listened with interest to all that the boy had to say, and replied encouragingly and sympathetically; and so the time passed until Lizette appeared to summon us to luncheon, when the junk was still some two miles in the offing, and working in very slowly. There was no sign of any intention to hoist out boats, or attempt to communicate with us in any way, so I knew that I should have sufficient time to snatch a mouthful of food before the moment for action should arrive, and I descended to the dining-room with an easy mind.

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### We are attacked by Chinese Pirate Wreckers.

We had finished luncheon, and were all on deck watching the junk, when, about half-past two o'clock—she having by that time arrived within about a mile of the lagoon entrance—we saw her heave to; and a minute or two later it became evident that she was preparing to launch a boat, or boats. She was now close enough in for us to see, with the aid of the telescope, pretty nearly everything that was happening aboard her, and I was far from reassured when I noticed that the man upon the poop—probably the junk's captain—who was directing operations, wore a formidable-looking broad-bladed Chinese yatagan girded to his side, while, when he faced in our direction once or twice, pointing, I felt almost certain that I could detect one, if not a brace of pistols in his belt.

Presently we saw a boat of very respectable dimensions rise above the junk's bulwarks and slowly disappear over her lee rail; and this was followed by a second, and a third of at least equal size.

"Three boats!" I exclaimed. "That settles it. If she were here upon a friendly mission she would not send in three boats to take off half a dozen people. She is a wrecker, and only too probably a pirate as well. Her people know that there are survivors on this wreck—our flare during the night and our ensign to-day will have told them that much—but they do not know how many of us there are; so her skipper is sending in enough men to make quite sure of us, as he believes. And guns, too, by George!" I continued, as I saw an old-fashioned smooth-bore cannon in slings top the rail. "The rascals mean business, that is quite evident; but so do I. I am going below to bring up half a dozen more shells; it is just possible that we may need them. Meanwhile, madam, will you kindly keep an eye on the junk while I am gone, and report to me what you have *seen* when I return?"

Thrusting the glass into Mrs Vansittart's hands, I hurried away to the magazine and brought out six additional shells, with the necessary cartridges, and, conveying them up on deck, placed them conveniently near the guns of the port battery, which I now saw were the only main-deck pieces that were at all likely to be of use to us.

Having at length completed my task, I rejoined the little group upon the poop. I saw that the boats had already pushed off from the junk, and were pulling at a good pace toward the opening in the reef, while the junk herself had filled away again, and was beating up in the same direction.

"There are three boats, Walter, as you see," said Mrs Vansittart, handing over the telescope to me; "and if you look at them carefully through the glass you will also see that they are crowded with men—at least twenty in each boat, I should say. I dare say you will also notice, as I did, the glint of the sun upon many weapons; and, unless I am very greatly mistaken, each boat has a gun mounted in her bows. I am afraid there can be no possible doubt as to the intentions of those men."

"No," I agreed, as I raised the telescope to my eye; "no doubt whatever. They mean to wipe us out if they can, and

then plunder the wreck. But they will not do that while I am alive and able to resist them. Now," I continued, "you two ladies have each a revolver, and so have the stewardesses. They are fully loaded; and I have already explained to Miss Anthea why I have given them to you. I most fervently hope that there will be no need for you to use them in that way; but should there be—and one never knows; I may be bowled over and killed, or rendered helpless by a shot or a pike-thrust—I implore you not to hesitate too long. It would be infinitely better that you should die instantly and painlessly by a well-directed pistol shot than that you should fall alive into the hands of a crew of Chinese pirates."

The colour ebbed away from the cheeks of Mrs Vansittart and her daughter as I uttered the concluding words, but I saw a look of firmness and determination tightening about their lips while the elder lady said:

"Have no fear for us, Walter. I hope, with you, that we may not be driven to any such desperate step; but should we be, we both have courage enough to take it, and so, I think, have the two maids."

"Thank you!" I replied. "It is a relief to me to hear you speak so bravely. But do not act, I pray you, until the very last moment—until it has become clear beyond all question that everything is lost. Now, since those boats are within easy range, I will just give them a hint that we want to have nothing to do with them, and that they had better keep their distance."

I swung myself down off the poop on to the main-deck, and, running to the forward gun of the port battery, which was the gun that could best be brought to bear on the advancing boats at that moment, I levelled the piece, aiming to strike the water at a point a few fathoms ahead of the middle boat of the three—they were advancing in line abreast. I calculated that the shot would rebound and fly over the heads of her crew close enough to frighten them a bit and make them think twice before advancing any farther. It was a rather difficult and risky shot—risky for those in the boat, I mean—but I pulled it off successfully. The shell dashed up a great column of snow-white spray, which completely hid the boat for a moment; and when this cleared away I saw that all the boats' crews were holding water, evidently taken a good deal by surprise, and apparently undecided what to do.

"Bravo, Walter; a beautiful shot!" exclaimed Mrs Vansittart, and I saw her snatch up the telescope and peer through it. She held it to her eye for a full minute; then, without lowering the instrument, she cried:

"There is a man standing up in the stern-sheets of the middle boat apparently haranguing the crews, for he is flourishing his arms about a great deal. Ah! he has stepped down again; and now—yes—the oarsmen are giving way again. The two outside boats look as though they were turning back—no, they are only opening out into wider order, and are coming on again. Try them with another shot, Walter. Perhaps if you can hit one of those boats the others may be induced to go back."

"Ay, ay!" I replied, with a flourish of my arm; and I carefully sponged out and reloaded the piece. But I did not now want the boats to return; I wanted them to come on and be destroyed. I was by this time convinced that the matter must be fought out to the bitter end, and that we must destroy that junk and the whole of her crew if we would not be ourselves destroyed. If the boats were driven back the vessel would hang about, watching her opportunity, or possibly return some night during the dark and take us unawares. It was their lives or ours that hung in the balance; therefore when I had reloaded the piece I ran my eye along the sights, and was in the act of training them upon the middle boat, when my attention was distracted for a moment by the distant boom of a gun. Looking up, I saw that the junk had fired. I knew by the ring of the report that the gun was shotted, and presently I saw the shot come skipping toward us just inside the reef; but it fell a good way short, and I turned to my own gun again.

But now, when I wanted actually to hit the mark, I found that it was not quite so easy as I had imagined. To aim straight was easy enough, but even where they were the boats presented but a small mark, and they were constantly disappearing in the trough of the swell. It was therefore necessary for me to wait until my particular target reappeared before firing, and although the next two shots went very near indeed they did not actually hit. Meanwhile the junk was firing rapidly, making short tacks to keep as nearly abreast of us as might be, and her shot were gradually dropping nearer to us. Seeing this, I insisted that the ladies at least should go below, as now a shot might at any moment come aboard us. Julius begged hard to be allowed to remain, and, his mother raising no objection, I willingly consented, as there was no knowing when I might be glad of his assistance.

The three boats were now so close to the passage through the reef that they were obliged to alter their formation to "line ahead" in order to pass through it; and it was at this moment that, with my fourth shot, I caught the leading boat fair and square, and literally blew her to pieces. I thought that perhaps this might check the advance of the remaining two boats; but not a bit of it. They did not even pause to pick up any of the survivors of the leading boat's crew—probably there were no survivors—but came on with a blood-curdling yell that evoked a faint shriek from, I thought, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the companion. Almost immediately afterward a round shot from the junk struck the water at a little distance away, and then went humming directly over my head, so close that I felt the wind of it.

At this juncture I became aware of the fact that the wind, what little there was of it, was falling lighter; our ensign was drooping from its staff all but dead, while the junk's sails were flapping with her every roll, and the little curl of water about her bows had all but disappeared. This afforded me a grain of comfort, for she could not draw very much nearer, though, to be sure, she was near enough already if her gunners' eyes were but straight enough to hit us; my great hope was that her heavy rolling would distract their aim, and so cause their shot either to fall short of or to fly over us. But I had no time to meditate at length upon these chances; the two boats were drawing dangerously near, and I must stop them by hook or by crook before they actually got alongside. I therefore quickly recharged my piece and carefully pointed it at the inner end of the passage through the reef. I had barely got this done to my satisfaction, when the leading boat thrust her nose through. Bang! The four-inch barked out its greeting, and a moment later that boat disappeared in flame and smoke, to my intense relief.

Mentally I patted myself on the back. "Now, surely," I thought, "that remaining boat will turn tail, and I shall have a

chance to wipe her out on her way back to the junk!" But no; on she came, her crew yelling like demons, and churning the placid waters of the lagoon into foam with their oars. They sprang to their feet at each stroke, that they might throw the whole weight of their bodies into it, while a man standing in the stern-sheets frantically waved a most murderous-looking blade above his head. I jumped to the next gun—there was no time to reload now—and hastily levelled it. As I did so I saw a flash burst from her bows, followed by a gust of smoke; the ball struck the waterway close by my feet and hurtled past, sending a shower of splinters flying, and this distracted my aim. I missed, and the shot harmlessly struck the water some distance astern of the boat, to be greeted by its occupants with a yell of mingled triumph and derision.

Matters were becoming frightfully critical now. Should I have time for another shot, I wondered? As the thought flashed through my brain a rifle shot rang out from the poop, and, glancing that way, I saw the boy Julius with a Remington repeater at his shoulder aiming at the rapidly advancing boat. And—what I had absolutely forgotten—I saw also the Maxims standing there, ready for action! To dash up on to the poop and level the port Maxim at the enemy was the work of but a moment, and the next instant the deadly little weapon was thudding away, pouring its leaden stream fair into the boat. At that range—a bare three hundred yards—it was impossible to miss, and in a few seconds every occupant of the boat was either dead or wounded; the oars trailed motionless in the water, the boat lost her way, and in less than a minute it became evident that the craft was sinking, literally riddled with that leaden hail.

"Hurrah!" I yelled. "There goes the last of them, and, thank God, that danger's over! Now for the junk herself. She must be settled, or there will be no safety for us."

I made my way down to the main-deck again, very nearly tumbling head over heels over Mrs Vansittart and her daughter, whom I found seated upon the stairs of the companion way. I paused just long enough to explain the situation to them, and then rushed out on deck in time to see the last boat, submerged to her gunwale, slowly roll over and go down bows first, leaving a few forms feebly struggling on the surface.

The junk was by this time completely becalmed and had lost her way; nevertheless she maintained a fairly steady fire upon us, and some of her shot came so unpleasantly close that I thought it well to order Julius down off the poop, where he could be of no further use. I got to work with the main-deck guns again, and, possibly because I could take all the time I pleased over the aiming, did some very neat shooting. I fired six shells in all at the junk, every one of which but the first went home—three of them close to her water-line.

They were destructive missiles, those shells, bursting as they hit and blowing great holes in the junk's sides; and it soon became apparent that the vessel was sinking rapidly. I therefore ceased firing and went up on to the poop to see the last of her. But she died game, for her crew maintained a steady fire upon us until she foundered, her last shot being fired at the very moment when she was plunging stern first beneath the waves. And by an unlucky chance that last shot came slap aboard the wreck, struck the teak poop rail within a foot of where I stood, and scattered a number of splinters, one of which, a heavy one, caught me in the side of the head, very nearly scalped me, and sent me reeling to the deck senseless.

I recovered consciousness slowly, my first sensation being that the top of my head seemed to be on fire. Then I became aware that I was being partially supported by somebody's knee behind my shoulders, and that my head was being bathed. Finally I opened my eyes, to find Mrs Vansittart bending over me with a sponge in her hand, which she was just withdrawing from a basin of bloodstained water, while the boy Julius supported me in a semi-recumbent position as I lay on the deck.

"Ah, that is better!" exclaimed Mrs Vansittart, as she bent over me. "He is coming to himself. Lizette," raising her voice; "hurry with that brandy. Is your head very painful, Walter?"

"It feels as though it were being held much too close to a fierce fire," I replied, "and, in addition, it is aching most atrociously. It is most unfortunate that—"

"Yes, it is indeed, you poor boy!" replied Mrs Vansittart as I paused, a feeling of deadly nausea sweeping over me. "Ah," she continued, as the chief stewardess appeared with a tumbler in her hand, "here is the brandy! Sip this, Walter; it will revive you. And as soon as you are able to move, we must get you below, and I must attend to your head and dress it properly. Then you must go to bed and endeavour to get some sleep. You have taken splendid care of us this morning, and now it will be our turn to take care of you."

"Oh, thank you very much!" I murmured; "but I hope this unlucky blow on the head is not going to make me a nuisance to you. As to turning in, I simply cannot do it. A careful watch must be maintained for several hours yet, lest some of the men from that junk should swim to the wreck and get aboard us. Even so few as half a dozen able-bodied Chinamen could make a lot of trouble for us just now."

"Yes," agreed Julius, "they could. But I guess I'm not going to give them the chance. You'll just have to turn in, as Momma says, and leave me to look after things. And, see here, Mr Leigh, don't you worry about anything. I'll keep a look-out, and if any swimming Chinks come meandering around here, I'll just give 'em socks, you bet!"

This was reassuring; for if the boy was willing to undertake the duty he could quite easily keep a considerable number of swimmers at a distance with the assistance of a Remington. A few sips of brandy served to restore my strength greatly; and presently, with the help of Mrs Vansittart and Lizette, I was able to make my way below to the drawing-room. There I passed a particularly unpleasant three-quarters of an hour while the lady skipper snipped most of my hair off and afterwards coaxed the lacerated scalp back into place, securing it in position with straps of sticking plaster and finishing off by a dressing of healing ointment and bandages.

When all was done, the two stewardesses helped me to my own cabin; and after they had left me I somehow managed to undress and get into my bunk, which I was glad enough to do, for I was beginning to feel distinctly ill. I

have a hazy recollection that after I had been in my bunk a little while, Mrs Vansittart came to me and administered a dose of medicine, which she told me was intended to make me sleep. Then I seemed to pass into a condition wherein I was the victim of a long succession of hideous nightmares, during which I was either perpetually battling with a thousand awful perils, or was lying helpless in the hands of cruel and relentless savages, who were inflicting the most dreadful torments upon me.

It was a close, muggy, and suffocatingly hot day when I at length emerged from this condition of extreme mental and physical suffering. My cabin port stood wide open close to my head, but not even the faintest breath of air came through it. Presently I became aware of a sound which I quickly identified as that of a torrential downpour of tropical rain lashing the surface of the sea outside and the deck above. I stirred uneasily in my bunk, wondering vaguely how long I had lain there, and strove to rise upon my elbow, that I might look through the port. But I might as well have striven to lift the deck over my head; I seemed not to have an ounce of strength left in me, and I sank my head back upon the pillow with a weary sigh. As I did so I became aware of a slight movement beside my bunk, and, turning my eyes in that direction, I saw Miss Anthea in the act of rising to her feet from a chair immediately beneath the port. She had a book in her hand, which she placed face down upon the top of the desk beside her as she rose to her feet. Then, coming to the side of the bunk, she bent over me and gazed into my eyes. Gradually a little smile of gratification illuminated her somewhat pale and worn features and her eyes, which, I noticed, had a very weary look, as though from prolonged sleeplessness.

Presently, as I smiled in answer, she spoke.

"You are feeling better, Wal—Mr Leigh?" she asked. "Do you know me?"

"Assuredly, Miss Anthea," I answered. "Why should I not know you?" I spoke with most disconcerting difficulty; my words halted, and my lips seemed scarcely capable of forming them.

"Oh! but that is splendid," she exclaimed, straightening her body and clasping her hands together after the manner of a girl who hears good news. "You are feeling better?" she persisted.

"Have I been ill, then?" I stupidly asked. Indeed my mind was at that moment tenanted merely by a mass of most confused and incoherent memories, of which I could make little or nothing.

"You have indeed," she replied; "dreadfully ill, raving in delirium, and so violent that it is a miracle you did not do yourself or some of us a serious injury. But," she continued, stopping me as I attempted to speak, "thank God, that is over now, I hope; and all that remains is for you to take as much nourishment as you can, do as you are told, and get well and strong again as quickly as possible. I must run away and leave you for a few minutes to tell Momma the good news, and arrange to have some food prepared for you."

With a nod and a smile of encouragement she left the cabin, and a minute or two later Mrs Vansittart entered it. She stepped quickly up to the side of my bunk, looked at me, and presently laid her slim, cool fingers upon my pulse, holding them there for several seconds.

"Ah!" she commented, as she removed them at length, "I guess you are oceans better than you were at this time yesterday. The fever is gone, and your skin is delightfully cool and moist; moreover, you are in your right mind once more, and that is something gained. I expect the wound in your head is healing, although we haven't been able to look at it properly for nearly a week. But we will attend to it now, as soon as you have taken a little food. My stars, Walter, we have had a time with you! Lucky for us all that you have taken it into your head to become sensible again, or I guess we'd all have been sick people in another day or two. Do you know how long you've been ill?"

"No," I answered; "but I am afraid that it has been much too long. I don't know where to find words in which to express my regret for—"

"Regret!" she repeated. "Regret nothing! You couldn't help it, my dear boy. You got hurt in defending us, and it was just our duty to look after and nurse you as best we could; and that is all there is to it. You have been ill ten whole days. This is the eleventh morning since the junk appeared. During the best part of those ten days you have been raving in delirium, with occasional outbreaks of violence, when it taxed the energies of all five of us to the utmost to restrain you. Oh, I guess we have had some very lively times with you, Walter, off and on! But, thank God! that is all over now and—Ah! here comes Lizette with some broth for you. We have been hoping for this change for the last five or six hours, and have got all ready for it.

"Now, Lizette, I guess you've got to climb right up on to this chair, seat yourself on the edge of the bunk, and support Mr Leigh in a sitting posture while I feed him. Take care that you don't hurt his head. So—that's right; lean back against the head of the bunk, and rest his head against your shoulder. Gently, girl, gently! I reckon the poor boy is aching all over with weakness. There, that's all right! Are you pretty comfortable, Walter? Good! Now then, all that you've got to do is, just drink this broth right away, rest yourself for a spell, and then I'll come along again and dress that wound on your head."

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### The Gale.

Another week elapsed before I could convince Mrs Vansittart that I was strong enough to be permitted to rise from my bunk and sit in a chair for a short time; but after that my recovery was rapid. My wound healed nicely, my strength returned, and five days later I was able to dress and, with assistance, make my way up on to the main-deck, where Julius, helped by the others—with a forethought for which I should certainly never have given him credit—had

rigged up a sort of makeshift awning for my especial benefit. I learned, with the utmost satisfaction, that since the memorable morning of the junk's appearance the boy had behaved with almost unbelievable goodness. The talking-to which he had received from his sister seemed to have awakened his better nature, and now they assured me that—as indeed it seemed—he was everything that could be desired. Of one thing at least there could be no possible mistake: his strange antipathy to me had entirely vanished, and he now seemed anxious to be as friendly and agreeable as before he had been objectionable.

It was nearly six weeks after the appearance of the junk when at length I felt strong enough to resume my boat-building operations, and even then I was only able at first to do such comparatively light work as shaping and planing planks. Gradually, however, I got back again to the heavier work which came from time to time when it was necessary to shift the framework of the hull while working upon it. Every day witnessed a certain amount of progress, until at length the open shell was finished and caulked. Then by our combined efforts we placed the boat in position ready for launching, bows first, off our sloping deck, since she was now so heavy that no further lifting would be possible. This brought the time on to five months and a few days from the date of the wreck, during the whole of which period we had been favoured with glorious weather, except for a few days of calms, accompanied by heavy rain, about the time when I was emerging from my state of delirium.

But a few days after we had completed the shell of the boat, and while I was preparing the planking with which to lay her deck, there occurred signs of a change. The wind, which usually blew a moderate breeze from the eastward, died away to a calm, and the sky became veiled by a thin film of haze that gradually thickened until the sun was completely blotted out. The atmosphere grew almost unbearably sultry, so that we seemed to breathe only with the utmost difficulty, while work, even the lightest, became almost impossible. The barometer fell so rapidly that even the veriest tyro in weather lore could not have mistaken the signs; and that night, or rather in the small hours of morning, a thunderstorm broke over us, the like of which for violence and duration I had never seen.

It started dry, and for four hours the heavens were incessantly ablaze with lightnings, the vividness and alarming character of which it is quite impossible to describe, while the continuous crash of thunder, immediately overhead as it seemed, was terrific, causing the very wreck herself to tremble with its vibrations. As I left my cabin and went up on deck to watch it, I felt that sooner or later the wreck must inevitably be struck; and indeed I frequently thought she actually had been, for the lightning seemed to be playing all about her. But I suppose she escaped somehow; or at least, if she was struck, no apparent damage was done.

Then, about the time when daylight was beginning to make itself apparent, it suddenly began to rain, the warm fresh water from the clouds pelting down in a perfect deluge and totally obscuring everything beyond a hundred yards' radius. The water poured off the decks in cataracts, while from the poop it gushed through a scupper which discharged on to the main-deck as though flowing from the spout of a pump. In ten minutes the decks were as effectually cleansed as though they had been scrubbed with soap and water. Thinking it a pity that so much delicious fresh water should be permitted to run to waste, I went below and brought up several small breakers and proceeded to fill them, one after the other, until I had the lot, numbering about twenty, brimming full. And all this time the thunderstorm continued to rage with unabated fury.

The filling of the breakers during the continuance of that terrific deluge naturally resulted in my getting wet through to the skin. Upon the completion of my task, therefore, I retired to my cabin and effected a complete change of garments; and I had barely finished my toilet when I heard the sound of the gong summoning the party to breakfast.

While I was discarding my drenched garments and donning dry ones, I became aware of the fact that the thunderstorm was at last easing up a little. The lightning flashes were no longer a continuous blaze; the thunder no longer was one continuous, uninterrupted crash and crackle and boom, like the firing of two enormous fleets engaged in fighting a fiercely-contested action, but each peal was separate and distinct, with momentarily increasing intervals between the peals. Thus when we presently met and sat down to breakfast, conversation of a sort was possible, although by no means easy. The topic of the moment was of course the storm, and I was not at all surprised to learn that the entire party had been thoroughly terrified, and were by no means reassured even now, when it was indisputable that the storm was passing.

We were all rather inclined to be silent at that meal. Mrs Vansittart and her daughter both confessed to the possession of distracting headaches, the result, no doubt, of their terror, and even Julius was in a distinctly subdued mood; nobody but myself ate at all heartily, and I think they were all glad when I laid down my knife and fork and made it possible for them to rise from the table. The ladies and Julius announced their intention to retire to their respective cabins in the hope of obtaining relief in slumber; and as work on deck was quite out of the question so long as the rain continued, I decided to follow their example, having myself lost some hours of sleep. I accordingly carried out my resolution, and soon sank into a condition of semi-oblivion, during which I was only partially conscious of the fact that, although the rain was still sluicing in torrents, the thunder and lightning had dwindled away to a few distant rumblings and occasional flashes. Finally this consciousness also passed and I fell sound asleep.

When I awoke rather more than an hour later, I at once became aware that both the rain and the thunder had entirely ceased. It was still so dark that until I referred to my watch I had the impression that I must have overslept myself, and that the night was coming on. Then I flung open the port of my cabin, which had been closed to exclude the rain, and, poking my head out, saw that the sky was still overcast with enormous masses of blackish, lurid-looking cloud which, as I watched, I saw were working slowly in a strange writhing fashion, as though agitated by several conflicting internal forces.

I went up on deck, and observed that the overcast condition of the sky, of which I had obtained a partial view from my cabin port, extended in every direction, right down to the horizon. A visit to the chart-house revealed the fact that the barometer still stood alarmingly low; and it was this fact, perhaps, in conjunction with the disquieting aspect of the sky, that subconsciously awakened in me a sudden anxiety to hasten my work upon the craft which, for want of a better name, I have spoken of as a boat.



Be that as it may, I remember that I flung off the light jacket which, for appearance' sake, I wore at meal times and when otherwise in the company of the ladies, and set to work as though my very life depended upon it. As I have already mentioned, the shell of the boat was finished, caulked, and placed in position ready for launching; and in addition to this the beams upon which the deck was to be laid were fitted and fixed, and the planking planed up and roughly cut to shape. My next task, therefore, was to complete the fitting of the planks and the nailing of them in position, which I at once proceeded to do, with the fixed determination to finish the job before dark. This determination I carried out, although it necessitated my working for an hour by lantern light; and when at length I knocked off, I had the satisfaction of leaving the boat completely decked with the exception of the cockpit, the coaming of which I also insisted on fixing before I could persuade myself to lay down my tools.

The day had been one of lowering, breathless calm, with an insufferably close atmosphere that rendered hard work exceedingly trying, and the black, working canopy of cloud that overhung us continued to writhe and twist itself into the most extraordinary shapes, while it showed no sign of dispersing. This state of affairs continued until about four o'clock in the afternoon, when a light, puffy, southerly breeze sprang up which gradually freshened until, when at length I ceased work for the day, it was blowing quite gustily, while a sea came rolling in over the reef that soon caused the wreck occasionally to rock lightly upon her coral bed.

I was very tired after my strenuous labours that day; moreover, I had not yet fully recovered the strength that I had lost during my illness; therefore, under ordinary circumstances, I should have gone to my cabin and turned in soon after dinner. But as it was, I felt uneasy. I did not at all like the look of the weather; I felt convinced that we were booked for a blow, possibly a heavy one; and a further reference to the barometer fully confirmed me in that conviction. If my foreboding should prove to be correct, what would be the probable result? Should the wreck but remain where she was, we would no doubt be all right, and nothing worse would befall us than possibly an unpleasant and anxious night. But if she did not, what then? She would gradually bump her way over the few yards of the inner edge of the reef and then reach the lagoon, in which she would probably founder, unless, indeed, she remained afloat long enough to drive across it and fetch up again on the opposite reef.

That was a possibility that I had long since recognised; but now, as I looked out into the night and dimly saw the breakers thundering in upon the outer end of the reef, shattering themselves into a wall of madly-leaping water thirty feet high, and then continuing their course across the reef in the form of foam-flecked waves, the power of which was rapidly dissipated as they swept inward toward the wreck, I began to doubt whether the *Stella Maris* would ever again shift her berth. It is true that those waves, as they swirled and foamed about her, had power enough to cause the hull to rock a little now and again; but as to lifting her bodily and throwing her into the lagoon—well, I thought it unlikely. I reflected that when, in the first instance, she piled herself up, there was a strong breeze blowing and a heavy sea running, and that she had hit the reef stem-on under a heavy press of sail; yet she had not then been flung right across the reef. The seas had brought her so far, and then their power had failed to move her an inch farther. Why should not that be the case now?

There was something comforting, almost reassuring, about this line of argument; yet at the back of my mind there was another something that seemed to tell me I must not take my data too much for granted—that there was another possibility of which I must not permit myself quite to lose sight. I therefore set myself to answer the question, in the event of that other possibility happening, How were we to meet it? There was but one answer—with the boat; and unfinished and destitute of equipment as she was, we should undoubtedly be obliged to trust ourselves to her if the worst came to the worst.

This point settled, the next question I asked myself was: What should we require to take with us, supposing that it should come to our being obliged to take to the boat in a hurry—that night, in fact? Provisions and water, of course, in such abundance as the boat's capacity would permit; a pair of oars, a coil of line, a baler, a bucket, a few tools; say, half a dozen rifles, and a good supply of ammunition for same. But why tools? I may be asked. Because if once we were compelled to trust ourselves to a boat without mast or sails, we should be compelled to go practically wherever the wind chose to drive us, and that might be to an uninhabited island, where tools would be worth their weight in gold.

The carpenter's chest stood on the deck close by the boat—I had been using the tools only a few hours earlier—and the thought came to me that they might as well be in as out of her. I therefore emptied the chest, since it was too heavy for me to lift full, and, having decided upon the most suitable spot for it, I stowed it inside the boat, and then proceeded carefully to replace its contents. This done, I hunted up a pair of twelve-foot oars and put them aboard; found a pair of rowlocks, and then, remembering that I had as yet made no provision for shipping them, proceeded to cut out a good stout pair of cleats, which I firmly secured to the gunwale of the boat. There was plenty of rope lying about the deck, neatly done up in coils—the salvage of the running gear; and from this I selected the mizen topgallant halyard as of suitable size, putting it into the boat, unstopping it, and bending one end to a hole in the stem head which I bored for the purpose.

Having gone so far, I decided that I would complete my preparations, so that in the event of our being driven to the last extremity, we might be ready. I considered a little as to what I would next put into the boat, and fixed upon a case of ammunition, which I would stow alongside the carpenter's chest, it being desirable, in order to secure stability, that the heaviest articles should be at the bottom. Accordingly I dived below to the magazine. Now, our Remington-rifle cartridges were done up in small tin boxes of one hundred each, sealed up in air-tight tin cases, which were in turn stowed in stout wooden chests each containing one hundred tins; consequently each chest contained ten thousand rounds. This was a large quantity, yet not too large, I decided, considering the uncertainties of our position; I therefore emptied a case—which, apart from its contents, was fairly heavy to drag up on deck—carried it up to the boat, stowed it in position, and then returned for the small tin cases.

The transport and stowage of these occupied some time, involving several journeys up and down between the deck and the magazine, and when I had finished this job I was distinctly tired. Nevertheless I brought up six Remingtons, a cutlass, a brace of automatic pistols, and a box of cartridges for the latter, and stowed them all in the boat before

knocking off for a rest. The work had given me an appetite, and since it was now close upon midnight, I went below and routed out a good substantial cold meal, which I consumed while I rested. Then—why attempt to conceal the truth?—overcome, I suppose, by my unusual and protracted exertions, I fell asleep as I sat.

I remember that as I slept I dreamed that we were away back there at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca, where we lost the blades of our propeller. I felt again the shock of our collision with the supposed wreckage to which we attributed the loss, and the start I gave awoke me. I instantly became aware that it was blowing heavily, for the howl and whoop of the gale came distinctly to my ears; also the wreck was rolling heavily from side to side, and for a moment I thought she was afloat, until her harsh grinding upon the coral reached me above the tumultuous crying of the wind. I staggered to my feet, for I realised that matters were becoming serious. At that instant I felt the hull lift as the wreck heeled over, and come down again with a jar that all but jolted me off my feet; also, unless I was greatly mistaken, I caught, among the other sounds, the thud of water falling heavily on deck.

I made a spring for the ladder, and in a couple of seconds was out on deck, to find myself in the midst of a living gale. Coming up out of a lighted room, I found the night intensely dark; yet as I stood there by the open hatchway, clinging to the main fife-rail, I presently became dimly aware of my more immediate surroundings. As it chanced, it was about the time of full moon, and although the planet herself was completely hidden by the dense masses of cloud that drove wildly athwart the firmament, her light filtered through. Presently I was able to see as far as the outer edge of the reef, where the surf, brilliantly phosphorescent, plunged madly down upon it and burst into leaping fountains of spray that came driving over the wreck like heavy rain, though I knew it was not rain by the bitter, salt taste of it on my lips. The surface of the water all round the wreck and on either hand—in fact, over the whole of the weather portion of the reef—was a mass of swirling, phosphorescent foam, which rose and fell as the rollers came sweeping across the reef. It was these rollers that were causing the ship to roll on her bed of coral, while occasionally one heavier than the others would lift her bodily, break furiously over her, and shift her a foot or more toward the inner edge of the reef, as I judged by the feel of her, before it dashed her down again.

Instinctively my glances flew to where the boat should lie. Yes, thank God! she was still where I had left her, held down mainly, I believed, by the weight of the things that I had put in her, for when a sea broke over the deck the water surged past her to leeward with quite weight enough to wash her off had she been empty. I rushed at her, snatched the rope which I had bent to her stem head, led it across the deck to the stump of a stanchion, and made it fast with a clove hitch, thus ensuring that the boat should not be washed off the deck so long as the rope held. Then I stood for a minute or two, looking about me and taking careful note of all the details of the situation.

It was in all essentials the complete realisation of the fear which had haunted me ever since the wreck, and which, but a short time before, I had been inclined to deride as highly improbable—the gale, the heavy sea sweeping in across the reef, and the only question whether the wreck would be battered to pieces where she lay or be washed off to founder in the deeper water of the lagoon. A heavier sea than any that had preceded it, surging in at that moment and making a clean breach over the wreck, washed me off my feet, and would have swept me overboard had I not chanced to have in my hand the rope by which I had secured the boat. It lifted the wreck, slued her nearly half round, and swept her a good fathom nearer that danger point, the inner edge of the reef; and I began to realise that the peril was imminent, and momentarily growing more so, and that immediate action was necessary.

Without pausing to consider further, I rushed below and hammered at the cabin doors of Anthea and Julius, which were contiguous; and upon receiving a reply, shouted to them to dress at once and join me with all speed in the drawing-room. Then I sped to the stewardesses' quarters, roused them, and finally made my way to Mrs Vansittart's cabin, where I met the lady, fully dressed, just emerging.

She must have read in my countenance that there was trouble ahead, for she came forward at once with outstretched hands, exclaiming:

“What is it, Walter? Does this dreadful gale mean danger to us?”

“It does indeed, madam, I greatly fear,” I replied; and I proceeded to explain the situation rapidly to her. While I was doing so, Anthea and her brother made their appearance.

Naturally, they were all greatly discomposed at my statement of the imminence of our danger, but never for a moment did they flinch. On the contrary, the women appeared to be a good deal more calm and composed than I was. They asked what they were to do, and when I told them, set to work quietly but expeditiously collecting a quantity of food of various kinds in tins, being assisted in this by the two stewardesses, who now came upon the scene.

Meanwhile, the wreck had been bumping more and more heavily as we stood and hurriedly conversed; sea after sea had broken over her, with ever-increasing violence, and I was now in a very fever of anxiety touching the safety of the boat. As soon, therefore, as I had started my little crew to work, I rushed out on deck again, to see how matters were going there.

I was no sooner in the open than I perceived that, even during my short absence from the deck, the conditions had changed very materially for the worse. The wind was now blowing with hurricane force, and evidently piling up the water on the reef, for the seas that now swept across it were momentarily gaining in power and weight, almost every one that reached the wreck lifting her bodily and shifting her a fathom or so, ever in the fatal direction of the edge of the reef. But the worst feature of the case, after all, was that, while shifting the wreck, the seas had canted her, so that she now lay fair and square broadside on to them, and every one that struck her made a clean breach over her, and threatened either to destroy or to sweep away our boat. This, even as I stood, was lifted, and would have been washed away but for the restraint of the rope by which I had secured her. I could see plainly, however, that the rope would not bear the strain much longer than a few minutes, or perhaps even seconds, and that if we should lose the boat our doom would be sealed. I therefore rushed back to the drawing-room, called the little party together, bade

them take as much as they could carry, and, watching their chance, make a dash for the boat. I set the example by gathering in my arms as many tins and bottles as my hands and arms would hold, rushed out on deck, just missed being washed overboard, and hurriedly tumbled my load into the cockpit anyhow. Then I suddenly remembered that as yet there was no water in the boat, and I dashed aft to where I had left the water breakers which I had filled with rain water, passing the other members of the party on my way.

“Do not attempt to return for another load,” I shouted to them as I passed; “get into the boat and stow yourselves under her deck; your weight will be more useful there than anywhere else. I will attend to the rest.” Seizing one of the breakers, I proceeded to roll it quickly along the deck until, after a hazardous and adventurous journey, I arrived at the boat, into which, with Julius’s assistance, I lifted it. We both got into the cockpit to stow the breaker securely—the women having already entered and stowed themselves away—when, just as matters were satisfactorily arranged and I was in the very act of leaving the boat to secure another armful of provisions, a tremendous sea struck the wreck, heeling her over until her starboard waterway was buried. The breaking sea swept the deck like a cataract, lifting the boat clean off it, just as I sprang back into the cockpit; there was a little jerk and a twang as the rope parted, and in an instant we were afloat and driving rapidly away to leeward across the lagoon.

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### We are compelled to leave the Reef.

For perhaps half a dozen seconds I stood there motionless in the cockpit of the dancing boat, paralysed with dismay. There we were, six people, adrift in a contraption of a craft that I could not even be sure was water-tight, and about the behaviour of which I was absolutely ignorant. We were without mast or sail, and had only a small quantity of provisions and about fourteen gallons of water, to furnish us with food and drink for Heaven alone knew how long!

Recognising the vital necessity for instant action, however, I groped for an oar, found it, and threw it out over the lee quarter of the boat, at the same time staring into the darkness in an endeavour to locate the sandbank. That, now, was our only hope, for to drive out to sea in such a craft as ours on such a night as that simply meant our speedy destruction. The boat, low as she sat on the water, without even so much as a naked mast for the wind to act upon, was skimming along at a surprising speed, and would soon be in the open ocean unless I could find the sandbank and secure her to it.

I thought for a moment of the bearings of the bank in relation to the position of the ship and the direction of the wind, and then, having decided this point, I brought the boat to the wind on the starboard tack, so to speak, found that she answered her helm better than I had dared to hope, forging ahead with the pressure of the wind on her weather side, and some ten minutes later had the satisfaction of feeling her ground and bring up dead upon something that could be none other than the bank which I was so anxious to reach. But the moment that she grounded, the waves, although they were not very much more than mere ripples here, began to slop in over her weather side. That, I knew, would never do, for if it did nothing worse it would at least interfere with the comfort of my passengers. Therefore, since I was already wet through to the skin, I nipped over the side into knee-deep water, put my shoulder under the boat’s slanting bow, shoved her afloat again and, with the broken painter in my hand, waded along the margin of the bank, towing the boat after me, until presently I had worked her round to the lee side of the bank. For a few yards’ breadth the water here was perfectly smooth, and I grounded her afresh, dragging her up as high as I could on the bank and anchoring her by her painter to an oar thrust as deep into the sand as I could force it. I clambered back into the boat, thrust my head in under the deck, and shouted:

“Are you all here?”

“Yes; we are all here, and quite safe—so far,” answered Mrs Vansittart. “But what has happened, Walter? We have been washed off the wreck, have we not?”

“Yes,” I replied, “and are now grounded on the lee margin of the sandbank, where I believe we are reasonably safe, provided that we don’t strike adrift—and I think there is not much fear of that. We must remain here for the rest of the night, and indeed until the gale subsides; then, if the wreck is still above water, we will return to her and complete the equipment of this boat and our preparations for a voyage.”

“You say, ‘if the wreck is still above water’. Is there any possibility that she may not be?” demanded Mrs Vansittart.

“I very greatly fear so,” I said. “When we involuntarily left her she was being steadily driven ever nearer to the edge of the reef; and if she passes that point I believe she will sink like a stone. Still, there is no use in anticipating the worst. I would recommend you to compose yourselves to sleep, if you can, until daylight; then we shall know for certain exactly how we stand. By the way, is the boat leaking at all?”

For a few seconds there was no reply; Mrs Vansittart was evidently feeling round for indications of a leak. Presently she spoke.

“There has been a little water here, Walter,” she replied, “but I believe it all came in through the cockpit, in the form of spray, and now no doubt it has all run aft with the tilt of the boat. There is nothing worse now than a little damp.”

“I am sorry,” I said; “but I am afraid you will have to make the best of things as they are. Luckily it is anything but cold, and if you can but get to sleep you will soon forget your discomforts. I will keep a look-out.”

So saying I backed out from under the deck, and in the first place proceeded to search for the water complained of. I found it right aft, as Mrs Vansittart had suggested, and in order to test the tightness of the boat I baled it all out, or at least as much of it as could be got rid of with the baler, leaving no more than perhaps half a tumblerful. Then, wading

ashore, I sat down on the sand, with my back against the upright oar to which the boat was moored, and began to review the situation. Five minutes later, despite my soaked clothing and my general state of discomfort, I was fast asleep.

When I awoke, the sun was just showing on the eastern horizon. The sky was clear, save for a few tattered fragments of ragged-looking scud that speedily disappeared, the wind had died down to a piping, topsail breeze, and the sea-birds, which had evidently been driven out to sea by the gale, were wearily winging their way back to the sandbank, filling the brisk, clean morning air with their mournful cries. I looked for the wreck, but the reef was bare. She had vanished, leaving not a trace behind her, save a few planks remaining of the stock from which I had built the boat; these, upon looking more carefully about me, I saw floating in a little bunch near the middle of the lagoon. My clothes had dried upon me during my sleep, and I was feeling just a trifle chilled, but the air was already warming up, and a brisk walk along the edge of the water and back again soon restored my circulation.

I climbed aboard the boat and, barefooted, padded softly along the deck until I reached the cockpit, into which I dropped softly; then, peering in under the deck, I looked to see whether any of the occupants were stirring. They all appeared to be asleep except the boy, who, as soon as my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I saw was sitting up, rubbing his eyes and yawning. He presently saw me and was evidently about to speak, but I silenced him with a gesture, and beckoned him to come to me in the cockpit. He obeyed, and when he was standing beside me, staring round him in wonderment, I pointed out the floating planks to him and said:

"It has just occurred to me, Julius, that one of those planks, or rather, a small portion of one of them, will be exceedingly useful to us. I am therefore going to swim off and fetch one; and I want you to stand here and keep watch while I am gone. If anyone wakes and wants to come out from below, just tell them that I am having a swim, and that I shall be much obliged if they will stay below until I return and am dressed. My clothes are dry now, and I don't want to wet them again, so I shall strip. You understand?"

"Sure! I get you all right," answered the lad. "I won't let any of them out until you are ready to be seen again. Better 'git' as quickly as you can, hadn't you?"

I nodded, and, springing up on the deck, quickly threw off my clothes, spread them in the sun so that any lingering moisture might be dried out of them during my absence, and, dropping lightly to the sand, dashed into the water and struck out. I was gone about half an hour, and it was not until I was returning with my captured plank that the thought of possible sharks occurred to me. However, I saw none, and got safely back to the bank, where, having hauled up my plank, I at once proceeded to dress in my now thoroughly dry clothes. The swim had greatly refreshed me and I felt in excellent form for a good hearty breakfast. But alas! I remembered our slender stock of provisions, and stifled my longings as best I could.

Presently the women folk emerged, one after the other, and, standing in the cockpit, looked about them in something approaching amazement at the change which the passage of a few hours had effected. When they entered the boat about midnight, a black hurricane was raging; and now it was a brilliantly beautiful morning. But Mrs Vansittart was greatly concerned on account of the disappearance of the wreck. She realised as clearly as I did all that it involved; and leaping down upon the sand with my assistance, she walked with me to the highest point of the bank, and intently surveyed the aspect of the sea. The question which we had to decide was whether or not it was yet safe for us to put to sea. Had we been provided with a mast and sails, I would not have hesitated a moment; indeed the breeze, if a trifle fresh, would have swept us along at a merry pace and soon brought land of some sort into our ken. But in our present condition the risk of being overrun and swamped was as yet too great. It was, however, of vital importance that we should make a start at the earliest possible moment, for our stock of food and water was exceedingly meagre, though it would have to suffice until we were either picked up or could reach a more kindly shore than the sandbank.

But in any case we could not make a start for at least half an hour, for my experience of the previous night, during our brief passage from the wreck to the sandbank, had shown me that, in the absence of a rudder—which I had not yet made—provision for a steering oar was an absolute necessity. Hence my anxiety, a little earlier, to secure one of the floating planks.

We were by this time all eager for breakfast, therefore before doing anything else we took careful account of our stock of food and water, and estimated that, with care, it might be made to last us all a week. This was better than I had dared to hope; for it would be strange indeed if in the course of a week we did not fall in with a craft of some sort, or reach solid earth which would afford us at least the means of sustaining life. We measured out an allowance of food sufficient to serve for one meal in accordance with the scale agreed upon, and quickly disposed of it. Upon opening the water breaker, however, I was vexed to find that it was not full to the bung-hole, as I had confidently expected to find it. On the contrary, there was quite a gallon short, which I supposed must have been lost while rolling it along the wreck's deck the previous night. That missing gallon or so we should have to make up by slightly curtailing each person's allowance, unless indeed we were blessed with a shower or two of rain during our voyage.

Having quickly disposed of my rather meagre breakfast, I got out the tool chest, and, using the plank which I had retrieved, made a cleat for the reception of a rowlock. This I firmly fixed to the boat's transom, so that, when necessary, we could use one of the oars to steer with; or for sculling purposes. The job occupied me for the best part of an hour; and when it was finished I suggested that, since we were doing no good where we were, it might be worth our while to take a cruise about the lagoon and see whether we could find any flotsam from the wreck that would be of any value to us. This we did, but we found nothing except a few planks, half a dozen of which we hauled in and laid on the boat's deck to dry, upon the off-chance of their eventually proving useful to us.

Then we made our way to the spot where we thought the wreck had sunk, and eventually found her submerged within about forty fathoms of the inner edge of the reef, showing that she must have gone down almost immediately after being washed clear. There was about a fathom and a half of water over her poop, and as we gazed down upon

the craft, clearly visible through the crystal waters of the lagoon, poor Mrs Vansittart shed a few pardonable tears over the grave of the ship of which she had been so proud, and which she had loved so well.

We were agreeably surprised to find that our so-called boat, bulky and clumsy as she looked to the eye, proved quite easy to propel with a pair of oars handled by Julius and myself—except, indeed, when we tried to force her to windward. Then she became decidedly heavy and sluggish in her movements, which showed us that it would be hopeless to dream of shaping a course other than to leeward, or at best with the wind abeam. The wind was, at the moment, blowing briskly from the southward, which was a fair wind for the Caroline group, in one of which—if we could only manage to hit the right one—we might hope to meet with hospitality at least, if not the actual means to return to civilisation. After some discussion, therefore, we determined, as the wind seemed inclined to moderate a little, to risk a start without further delay, since, if our boat was to be of any real service to us, she ought to be able to live in such a sea as was now running outside.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when we reached the open sea; and the first discovery which we made with regard to our boat was that, thanks to her double keel, she would forge ahead with the wind anywhere at all abaft the beam—not at any great speed, certainly, with the wind only about one point free, but still fast enough to enable us to control her with a steering oar. When we bore up before the wind, she moved under the impetus of the breeze almost as fast as we had been able to row her in the lagoon. Our second discovery with regard to her was no less pleasing. Owing to the peculiar shape of her floor, which, it will be remembered, sloped up fore and aft somewhat after the fashion of that of a fishing punt, she rode the seas with extraordinary buoyancy, and as dry as a bone.

Being without either chart or compass, we could not, of course, steer any definite course, and therefore kept our craft dead before the wind and sea. Julius and I each wielded an oar until the boy was tired, when Susie, the second stewardess, who was a fine, strong, strapping girl, took a spell, and soon picked up the trick of rowing. When she was tired, Lizette, the chief stewardess, must needs try her hand; but she proved much less adaptable than her assistant, and did little more than blister her hands. Julius then took another spell, and by the time he was tired I was tired too. We therefore gave up rowing for a bit, and Mrs Vansittart undertook to steer the boat by means of an oar over the stern. By this time we had dropped the reef out of sight astern, and were beginning to realise fully that we were veritable castaways—a fact which I think had never hitherto quite come home to any of us.

The thing that worried me most was the absence of sail on the boat. Now that we had definitely and irretrievably embarked ourselves and our fortunes in her, I wanted to get over the ground at a good pace instead of drifting snail-like before wind and sea; and I set myself to consider whether, with the materials at my command, I could not rig up something that would serve the purpose of a mast and sail. I had the best part of a coil of good useful line in the boat, half a dozen three-by-nine-inch planks, each of which was twelve feet in length—and that was all, excepting of course that priceless treasure, the carpenter's chest.

As I stood looking contemplatively at the planks it occurred to me that three of them, say, placed edge to edge, and reared upright on the boat's deck, would catch quite an appreciable amount of wind, and no sooner had the idea suggested itself to me than I got to work. My first act was to take one of the planks and saw off an end two feet six inches in length. This piece I next sawed into six equal strips, or battens, a task which occupied me much longer than I had anticipated, chiefly on account of the limited space in which I was obliged to work, and because I had nothing but the boat's gunwale to steady the plank against. But I got my six battens at last, and four of them I nailed at equal intervals of about two feet three inches across three planks laid close together side by side, while I nailed a fifth athwartships on the deck at the point where I intended to rear my planks. The length of the battens being three inches more than the combined width of the three planks, the projecting ends of the top batten afforded me a very convenient shoulder for the support of my shrouds and stay, which I cut from my coil of line.

Having got these all fixed and seized, I reared my structure on end against the deck batten, with the assistance of Julius and the two stewardesses, set up the shrouds and stay, nailed another batten in front of the contraption, to keep it in place, and behold! I had a mast and sail in one, twelve feet long and two feet three inches wide, capable of catching and holding quite an appreciable amount of wind. That this was actually the case at once became apparent, the boat's speed quickly rising to about three knots, while she did not now lose way when she sank into the trough of the sea.

I was so pleased with the success of my experiment that I immediately began to elaborate the original idea. My new scheme was to saw one of the planks into very thin veneer-like sheets, nail them together at the edges, and make veritable sails out of them; but an hour's work sufficed to convince me that to saw a three-inch plank into even quarter-inch boards with an ordinary handsaw demanded far more skill in carpentry than I possessed.

The afternoon and night passed quietly; and shortly after sunrise the feminine members of the party made their appearance. Upon enquiry I was informed that they had all passed a comfortable night and slept well. They were quite cheerful and courageous; indeed, I was amazed to see how quickly and thoroughly they all adapted themselves to circumstances, although, in the case of Mrs Vansittart and her daughter at least, this was their first experience of anything in the nature of real hardship.

We breakfasted early that morning, all of us declaring ourselves to be more than ready for the meal. Then we experienced a most unpleasant shock, for upon serving out the first allowance of water for the day, we discovered that our stock had suffered a further mysterious depletion during the night, which, upon investigation, proved to be due to a leaky breaker. The leak was not a very serious one, certainly, and the staves seemed to be taking up a bit and the leak growing less; still, we had lost about three pints, which was half a pint apiece, and it was not difficult to picture conditions under which this might make all the difference to us between life and death.

The day passed like the night, uneventfully. The breeze held steady, and we continued to blow along northward, Mrs Vansittart and her daughter taking spell and spell at the steering oar while I endeavoured to make up my arrears of

sleep. Of course a sharp look-out was maintained, in the hope that either a sail or land might be sighted; but although the air was crystal-clear the horizon remained bare throughout its entire circle. Toward nightfall the wind manifested a tendency to drop, and shortly after midnight it fell dead, so that when Julius aroused me at two o'clock in the morning I found the boat heaving gently upon an oil-smooth swell.

This calm, if it should last for any length of time, would be nothing short of a disaster. It was of vital importance that we should find either a ship or a shore capable of providing us with sustenance within the next four or five days, or we should all be subjected to the horrors of starvation. I positively dreaded to think of what might be the effect of this upon the women; therefore, that we might not lie there absolutely helpless, I started to scull the boat with the steering oar. But she was heavy for this style of propulsion, and I estimated that our progress did not amount to more than three-quarters of a mile per hour.

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## Chapter Sixteen.

### Perishing of Hunger and Thirst.

It was a night of great discomfort, a storm of wind and rain arising, and the day which followed was little if any better, the same weather conditions prevailing throughout. I continued to scull the boat at intervals all through the day, but it was horribly distressing work, the distress being aggravated by the knowledge that it was all for so small a result, since I estimated that by the end of the day we had accomplished little more than six miles of progress.

It was about four o'clock that afternoon when my fast-failing energies received a fresh stimulus. I had been wearily toiling at the oar for about an hour, facing west so that I might be guided in my course by the pale blotch of light which represented the position of the sun, when a cry from Julius, who was the only alert member of the party, caused me to turn my head. I saw him pointing eagerly toward the north-eastern quarter.

"Aren't those the masts of a ship over yonder, Mr Leigh?" the boy asked, and looking in the direction of his pointing finger I caught sight, as the boat lifted over a swell, of two microscopic objects which I at once recognised as a vessel's mast-heads. They stood out fairly clear against the gloomy background of lowering sky, and after a prolonged scrutiny of them I came to the conclusion that they belonged to a small schooner, some fifteen miles distant—probably one of the craft that make a business of trading among the islands of the western and southern Pacific.

"You are right, Julius, they are," I cried eagerly. "Do you feel equal to handling an oar for an hour or two?"

"You bet I do," answered the lad with equal eagerness. "I am equal to doing anything that will help us to get out of this beastly boat and on to a ship once more."

"Right!" I exclaimed. "Come along, then, and let us see what we can do. That craft is only about fifteen miles off, and if this calm will last long enough we are bound to fetch her," and I hastened to adjust the rowlocks into position for using both oars.

Meanwhile, our remarks had stirred the rest of the party from listlessness into action—they all sat up and looked eagerly at the two tiny pin-points on the horizon; and Mrs Vansittart, climbing down into the cockpit, exclaimed:

"Yes, I guess that is a ship, all right, and we've got to reach her. I'll help you, Jule; your strength and mine together ought to be equal to Walter's, so between us we shall keep the boat going straight."

But the stewardesses, good plucky girls, would not agree to this. With one voice they declared that they were not going to sit still and let their mistress work; so the end of it was that they arranged to take one oar, both working at it at once, while Julius volunteered to help me. Presently we had the two mast-heads bearing straight ahead, and the boat moving through the water at the rate of about three miles an hour, the two girls, being perfectly fresh, doing quite as much work as Julius and myself.

Strenuously we toiled, and when at length the light failed us we had risen the craft sufficiently to determine that she was a fore-and-aft schooner. Then our difficulties began, for there were no stars, and within ten minutes of the time of sunset it fell pitch-dark, from which moment our course was largely a matter of guesswork. The two girls and Julius declared that they were so tired and their hands were so raw that they could do no more; whereupon Mrs Vansittart and Anthea took one oar, while I laboured on at the other. But by this time I, too, was weak and trembling with exhaustion to such an extent that I could scarcely lift the blade of my oar out of the water, while my thirst was so intolerable that at length I was fairly driven to the proposal that we should all risk the indulgence in an extra ration of water.

Even this revived me but for a few minutes, and finally I had to confess to a feeling of such dizziness and confusion that I could no longer be responsible for the course of the boat, and had to beg Mrs Vansittart to assume that duty. The next hour was one of absolute torment to me. My arms felt as though they were about to drop out of their sockets, my back ached intolerably, every breath I drew was like a knife piercing my lungs, my head throbbled as though it would burst, and my eyes were sightless. Then there came a small four-knot breeze out from about North-North-West, which was too shy a wind for us with our unadjustable substitute for a sail; and with the knowledge that unless the schooner happened to be bound in our direction we should miss her, and all our efforts would be thrown away, I dropped insensible in the cockpit and so remained for a full hour or more, despite the efforts of the others to revive me.

When at length I came to myself, a brisk westerly breeze was blowing, and the boat was scudding before it, with Mrs Vansittart at the steering oar. The moon was just rising, but so little of her light as yet came filtering through the veil

of cloud which overspread the sky that it was impossible to see anything more than the faint sheen of her light upon the briskly rippling surface of the sea; and although we scanned the whole visible horizon in search of a light that should indicate the position of the schooner, our search was unrewarded.

To be brief, we saw no more of that schooner. As the night progressed the wind increased until by morning it was blowing so strongly that we could do nothing but run before it. Luckily, our craft proved to be an unexpectedly good sea boat, and scudded dry, although her behaviour was at times so unlike that of the boat of normal model that we were somewhat puzzled as to what was going to happen next. We scudded all that day, and the whole of the succeeding night, by which time the wind had raised what was, to us, such a formidable sea that we deemed it wise to heave to, lest some heavier sea than usual should break aboard and swamp us. With great difficulty and considerable danger to ourselves, we therefore lowered the arrangement of planks that served us as mast and sail combined, and, bending our painter to them, rode to them as to a sea anchor.

By this time I was feeling really ill. Hard work and exhaustion were telling upon me with increasing severity almost hourly, and now upon the top of these came bitter anxiety.

My heart ached for my companions, especially the women folk. They did their utmost to seem cheerful, but it was pitiable to see the dreadful languor of their movements, their hollow cheeks, the dark markings under their eyes and, above all, the terrible look of suffering and despair that was beginning to reveal itself in the eyes themselves. Yet not a word of discouragement or complaint passed their black and cracking lips; they simply lay about, moving as little as possible, and endured silently. As for me, I could think of nothing, do nothing to help them. It was horrible!

That gale lasted four interminable days before it blew itself out, which it did later in the afternoon; and about sunset of the same day we consumed the last scrap of food that remained to us. Then, with moans of utter despair, those poor dear women crawled into their lair beneath the deck—to die, as they and I verily believed. As for Julius, he was nearly as bad as they were, but those last days in the wreck and the nine days in the boat had wrought a miracle in him. All the perversity and selfishness of character that had before distinguished him had gone, and he had come out of the fires of adversity and suffering purged, a new and a right gallant, manly boy—how manly I did not know until some time afterward, when it came out that, watching me and observing that I took a trifle less food and water than I served out to others, he had surreptitiously returned a portion of his own meagre allowance. Poor boy! so far as usefulness was concerned, he was already as good as dead, for he could do nothing but just lie where he had flung himself down, utterly exhausted, and moan piteously.

Being naturally robust, I still retained a small modicum of strength. This I utilised by hauling in the sea anchor, and, with superhuman exertion, setting it up in place again, not so much with any hope that it would blow us to land, as that it might attract attention aboard some passing ship and lead them to bear down upon and rescue us. This last bit of exertion finished me off, too, and I had not enough strength left even to stagger aft to the cockpit; I simply collapsed on the deck and knew no more.

I must have lain thus all through the night, for when at length consciousness returned it was broad day, with the sun about an hour high in a sky of exquisite stainless blue. The long hours of unconsciousness or sleep—perhaps it partook of both—had somewhat restored me, and I sat up, staring about me.

Merciful heaven! were my eyes deceiving me? Had I gone crazy, or was what I beheld real? I stared and stared with eyes that seemed to be starting out of my head, but the vision—if vision it was—remained stable. There lay a fair island, with trees that seemed to wave gently in the brisk morning breeze, and a hill that might almost be termed a mountain nearly in its centre. That island was dead to leeward of us, and all that we had to do was to run down to it and land upon it, if God would only be merciful enough to allow the fair breeze to last.

With a queer kind of croaking shriek, the memory of which disturbs my sleep even now occasionally, but which I intended to be a yell of rejoicing, I staggered to my feet, stumbled aft to the cockpit, and half leaped, half tumbled into it. I shipped the rowlock in the after cleat, got out the steering oar, and, with labour that made me groan and pant, contrived to head the boat toward that glorious vision of an island, for we had been drifting toward it broadside on. Then I bent down to where the lad Julius lay unconscious at my feet, and, shaking him roughly by the shoulder, called on him to awake, for there was land in sight not more than four miles away. For some time the poor boy made no response to my efforts to arouse him, and I began to think that he was dead, when suddenly he opened his eyes and whispered:

“Land? Land? Who talks of land?”

“I do, my hearty!” I replied. “I—Walter Leigh. Wake up, old chap, and see for yourself!”

“I—I—don’t—think—I can,” the poor boy gasped. “I—don’t seem—to—to—. Can you—help—me—Mr—?”

“Oh, hang the Mister!” I exclaimed. “That’s done with, long ago. Here, give me your hand, old man. That’s it! Now—heave with a will. That’s right—steady, boy!—grip the coaming. There you are! Now then, look straight ahead and tell me what you see.”

The boy stared out over the boat’s bows for a long minute or more, and never shall I forget the look of exquisite rapture that gradually grew in his glassy eyes as he stared. Then suddenly down he dropped again into the bottom of the boat and covered his poor emaciated face with his hands, as he gave vent to a storm of dry, choking sobs.

I stooped and patted him on the shoulder encouragingly.

“There!” I exclaimed soothingly, “that’s all right, old man. Cry if you want to; but when you’ve done, slip in and see if you can make your mother and sister understand that there’s land in sight, and that we shall reach it in about two hours.”

"Yes, yes, I will," whispered the boy. "It was of them I was thinking."

He got upon his hands and knees and crawled in under the deck, where he remained about five minutes or thereabout. Then he reappeared, his eyes wide with horror.

"Walter," he gasped, "Walter, I can't rouse them. I—I—guess they're dead!"

"Dead!" I croaked. "Oh, no, surely not! It would be too cruel that they should have endured so much, only to perish when all that we need is within sight. Take the dipper—there is still a little water left—and see if you can get them to swallow a drop or two; then, if they will take any at all, give them a good drink—half a dipper each, but no more, mind you. Tell them that in two hours we shall be ashore on the fairest island God's sun ever shone upon. Go at once, old boy; a few minutes may make all the difference between life and death. I would go myself, but I am afraid you are too weak to stand and steer."

"No, no, I'm not," he protested. "I can steer all right. And I'd ever so much rather that you went in there than I. You will manage better than I could. And—and, Walter, I'm afraid—afraid that I—that they wouldn't wake for me."

I thought I saw what was the matter with the lad; he feared that his mother and sister were dead, and shrank from converting that fear into certainty. I therefore surrendered the steering oar to him, and, drawing a small quantity of water from the almost empty cask, crept in under the deck, where I found the four women lying, each by herself, as far apart from the others as possible, all of them apparently dead. Yet although the place smelt close and stuffy enough, I could detect no trace of the taint which, in a hot climate, so quickly betrays the presence of death, and with renewed hope I proceeded to my task.

I happened to turn to Miss Anthea first, and although the light in there was too subdued to enable me to distinguish very clearly the ravages wrought by slow starvation, the ease with which I, feeble as I was, raised her poor emaciated form into a semi-sitting posture was eloquent enough. She lay, with closed eyes, quite inanimate in my arms; but upon bending over her I thought I could detect that she still breathed, although I was by no means certain. I dipped my finger in the pannikin of water which I had brought with me, and moistened her dry, cracked lips, repeating the operation two or three times. Presently I distinctly heard her sigh, and saw that she was making a feeble effort to lick her lips, whereupon I held the pannikin to them and allowed a little water to trickle into her mouth. This she endeavoured to swallow, but the effort was so painful as to extort a low groan from her. Then she opened her eyes and looked about her vacantly, as though she did not recognise her surroundings; but when she found me bending over her she smiled faintly—a smile which strangely gladdened my heart.

"You are feeling better?" I whispered. "Try to swallow a little more of this water; but hold it in your mouth for a moment or two first, then I will give you more. Listen: there is land in sight, a most lovely island embowered in richest verdure, where I am sure we shall be able to get all the food we need. It is quite near, so near that we shall be there in about two hours from now. Surely you can hold out two hours longer if I give you enough water to quench your thirst?"

She smiled again. "Land, do you say?" she whispered. "Land—and food? Oh, yes, I am sure I can; the mere thought of it will sustain me. But are you sure, Walter—quite sure?"

"Absolutely certain," I answered. "Julius has seen it, too, and is steering the boat straight for it. Now, drink a little more water, and then let me help you to get into the fresh air. You will feel ever so much better out there on deck."

She drank again, this time avidly, almost savagely, her small teeth clenching on the rim of the pannikin and her poor thin fingers grasping it tightly when I attempted to remove it from her lips. When, knowing that, in her condition, to drink freely would be hurtful to her, I forcibly removed the pannikin, the poor girl cried pitifully, and whispered that I was cruel; but I presently pacified her with the promise of a little more as soon as she was outside. At last, with less difficulty than I had anticipated, I got her out on deck, where, after the administration of about a quarter of a pint of water, with just a suspicion of brandy in it, she revived in the most marvellous manner.

Then I went below again, and, pursuing the same tactics with the others, eventually had the happiness to restore them all to animation and get them out on deck, where they sat feasting their eyes upon the glorious prospect that was gradually unfolding itself before them. To achieve this result I had to expend the very last drop of water that could be coaxed from the breaker; and as I did so I realised to the full what the torments of Tantalus must have been. Not a drop had passed my own lips during the previous twelve hours, and to witness the ecstasy with which the others absorbed the precious liquid was almost more than I could endure in my then weak state.

As we crept slowly in toward the island we naturally obtained a more distinct view of its characteristics. Let me try to describe them. From north to south I judged the island to measure a little over eight miles long. At about a third of its length from the north end there occurred a sort of peak, to which the land sloped in every direction from its extremities, which seemed to consist of rocky cliffs ranging from about forty to perhaps two hundred feet in height, except towards the north, where the soil sloped gently down to a white sandy beach about half a mile in length. Within about a mile and a half of the southern extremity there was another elevation, a sort of knoll, and about a mile further south another knoll, about half the height of its neighbour. The cliffs were almost black in colour; but above them there were glimpses of most inviting grassy slopes peeping coyly out from between great masses of umbrageous trees, among which I felt it would be strange if we did not find fruit trees of some sort. Indeed, I detected certain palms that I was morally certain were coconut palms, while, unless my eyes deceived me, I believed I could also descry foliage that strongly suggested the idea of plantain or banana trees. About a hundred yards from the southern extremity of the island, and quite detached from it, there towered out of the sea a great vertical column of black rock, like a rugged pillar with a rounded top, which looked quite inaccessible.

Naturally I headed the boat, in the first instance, for the only bit of beach in sight. But when we had arrived within about a mile of the shore I detected a break in the cliffs which seemed to hint at the existence of a small harbour



near the southern part of the island, between the two knolls recently mentioned, and I at once headed the boat for this spot, finding the wind just free enough to permit us to reach it.

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### The Island.

Some twenty minutes later the boat slid in between two cliffs, about seventy feet high, and we found ourselves in a channel a quarter of a mile wide, trending south-east for nearly half a mile. Then, on our left hand, the cliff towered up boldly in the form of a headland to about a hundred feet in height, while the shore on the right fell away, forming a sort of cove a mile wide, at the widest point of which the grass-covered soil sloped steeply down to the water's edge, rising again in the form of a cliff as the cove took a bend away toward the north-east. The rocky cliffs seemed to be composed of basalt, with a thick covering of rich deep-red soil, upon which vegetation flourished luxuriantly. The breeze, following the trend of the channel—the water in which seemed deep enough to float a battleship—wafted us gently forward, and I headed the boat for the point where the grass sloped down to the water's edge, this being the only visible spot where landing was possible. When we had nearly reached it the inner end of the cove became revealed, and I saw, about a mile and a quarter farther on, a small strip of sandy beach that offered an ideal landing-place, and, sweeping the boat's head round, I steered for it. At that point, which was now on our left hand, the miniature estuary narrowed to a stream scarcely wider than the length of the boat. That it was fresh water was beyond a doubt, for at the far end of the gorge we saw the water foaming steeply down in a series of tiny cascades, which stretched away upward until they reached more than halfway to the peak that formed the highest point of the island.

As we crept slowly toward our chosen landing-place, under the impulse of the sculling oar—the wind having by this time failed us—we began to get ever nearer glimpses of the beauties of the island. The rocky face of the cliff on either hand was splashed with colour from numerous small flowering shrubs that seemed to spring from invisible clefts in the basalt, while close down by the water's edge great clumps of maidenhair and other ferns grew in extravagant luxuriance. But these things were observed as it were subconsciously, every eye in the boat being fixed intently upon the little strip of beach toward which we were heading, while the longing to feel our feet once more on terra firma grew more intense as the minutes slipped by. We had not the remotest idea whether or not the island was inhabited, though we scarcely thought it possible that such a paradise could be devoid of inhabitants; but if the beach toward which we were heading had suddenly become black with hostile natives, I am quite sure that, feeble as we were, we would have fought desperately for the right to land, and either won that right or perished in the attempt.

No natives appeared, however. There was no sign of life that we could discern, save a few gaudily plumaged birds that flitted hither and thither, sometimes sweeping right over the boat, as though curious to ascertain what new thing this was that invaded their solitude; and presently the craft that had been our home for ten days—which seemed more like months to us—slid with a thin grating sound on to the sand, and stopped.

Scarcely waiting to lay in my oar, I scrambled out of the cockpit, reeled along the deck, dropped over the overhanging bow on to the hot sand, and held up my arms to help the others ashore. The first to come was Mrs Vansittart, who was followed by her daughter and the two stewardesses, Julius bringing up the rear; and when at length we were all ashore, Mrs Vansittart said, or rather whispered, for she had all but lost her voice:

“Before we do anything else, or move another step, let us all go down on our knees and return thanks to Almighty God for His great mercy in bringing us to this delectable land.” And we did so, then and there, with tears of deep and sincere gratitude.

It was by this time about ten o'clock in the morning, yet so deep and narrow was the gorge in which we found ourselves that the beach where we stood was still in shadow and the air comparatively cool. Therefore, after I had taken care to secure the boat to a great boulder of basalt that lay conveniently at hand, I suggested that all should remain where they were while I went prospecting for fruit; and to this they agreed. Then, a thought suddenly striking me, I waded into the water, scooped up a palmful, and tasted it. It was deliciously sweet and cool; and I turned to the rest and said:

“This water is perfectly fresh. You may therefore drink of it; but drink in moderation, I beg you, taking just a mouthful at a time every few minutes until your thirst is quenched; for if you drink too freely after your long abstinence, the effect may be harmful instead of restorative.”

I set them an example by taking a small quantity only and just washing out my mouth with it before starting upon my quest. But how delicious that taste of clean, sweet water was to me, only those who have gone nigh to perishing of thirst can ever know.

Resolutely resisting the almost overpowering temptation to drink freely and quench the thirst that scorched me like a fire, I left the water and allowed my gaze to wander over the face of the cliff that towered some eighty feet aloft from the inner margin of the beach. I soon saw that, steep as at first sight it appeared to be, there were so many flat fragments protruding from its face that the scaling of it would be a comparatively easy matter; and, assuring my companions that I would not be gone longer than I could possibly help, I began the ascent.

I soon discovered that in undertaking to climb that cliff I had been reckoning without my host—that is to say, I had failed to take account of my weakness; and before I was halfway up I felt that I should never reach the top. But after an arduous climb of some twenty minutes, during which I experienced at least a dozen narrow escapes from pitching headlong to the bottom, I flung myself over the top edge and lay gasping for breath on the long sweet grass that waved about me.

What a glorious prospect it was that now revealed itself to my enraptured eyes! On my left front, distant about a mile, rose the higher of the two knolls to which I have before referred, while square away to my right, and distant perhaps two miles, towered the bald peak that was the highest point in the island. The ground in front of me, as I lay, rose somewhat steeply to a kind of ridge that seemed to run from one to the other of the two elevations I have just mentioned, and the whole of the ground not clothed with grass was studded with great clumps of splendid trees. Some of these were thickly starred with flowers, while here and there were coconut palms with their smooth, curving trunks, smaller trees which might possibly be fruit-bearing, and a profusion of plantains or bananas, among the long pendulous green leaves of which I could distinguish, even where I lay, great clusters of ripe yellow fruit.

The sight of that fruit was enough for me; it was even more entrancing than the glorious landscape that unrolled itself to right and left. Postponing the contemplation of the latter to a more convenient season, I rose to my feet, staggered forward, and, a few minutes later, found myself gathering a quantity of the golden fruit, even then allowing myself time to choose the best and ripest. Then, with a dozen or more bananas in the hollow of my arm, I returned to the edge of the cliff at a point a hundred yards or so to the north of where I had made my ascent. I at once saw that here the cliff was of a much more practicable character than where I had ascended; and negotiating the descent with very little difficulty, I soon had the intense satisfaction not only of seeing each of the other members of the party devouring a banana with indescribable avidity, but also of eating one myself; and I can safely say that never in my life have I so thoroughly enjoyed food as I did that banana.

But what was one banana to people who were on the very brink of perishing from starvation? It only served to whet their appetite for more. I would not, however, allow them to have any more just then; I was cruel to be kind, and resolutely turned a deaf ear alike to their entreaties and their reproaches, as I did to the cravings of my own ravenous hunger. I insisted that at least half an hour should elapse before they ate again, and I kept to my word. But no sooner had the half-hour expired than we again fell to and consumed another banana each, after which I insisted on everybody taking an hour's rest. This we did? and at the end of the hour we all felt so much better that it was resolved to attempt an ascent to the plateau without further delay.

We took the longer but easier route; and, after a toilsome climb that occupied nearly half an hour, reached our goal. The women folk were too utterly exhausted to do other than stretch themselves out on the grass and feast their eyes upon the glories of the scene; but, feeling that we might all now with safety venture upon another light meal, Julius and I set off in search of what we might find, and soon returned with three fine coconuts. These I stripped of their outer husk with my knife; and a few minutes later we were all feasting upon the sweet, delicate fruit, after having shared the milk among us. Finally, through a careful and judicious system of feeding, by about four o'clock in the afternoon we had contrived to allay our hunger and thirst and to recover enough strength to enable us to move about and accomplish short distances without undue fatigue.

My next concern was to find some sort of refuge in which to pass the coming night. Of course, in the last resort it would be quite possible for us to return to the boat and sleep on board her as usual; but that idea had no charms for me. The under-deck quarters were very confined and altogether inadequate for the accommodation of the four women; moreover, I imagined that they would be willing to put up with a certain amount of discomfort if by doing so they could secure a greater measure of privacy than the boat afforded. I therefore set off upon an exploring expedition to see what I could find.

I was not going to be too particular at the outset. The weather was fine and the temperature high enough to allow us all to sleep with comfort in the open air; but there was the heavy dew of the tropical night to be considered, which I feared might be productive of fever and ague to people in our debilitated condition. My immediate ambition therefore extended no further than to find in a suitable spot some tree, of thick enough foliage and with widespreading branches near enough the ground to afford good protection from the dew, beneath which beds of dry fern, or something of that sort, might be arranged for the night. On the morrow I would see if I could not contrive something more effective in the shape of a hut; while ultimately, if circumstances seemed to demand it, I might seriously consider the possibility of erecting some simple form of house. As to the situation of our sleeping quarters, which I recognised would be, for the time being, our abode, I decided that it ought to be as near as possible to water. I therefore began my exploration by following the course of the cliff edge upward toward where the stream came tumbling down the ravine.

A walk of about a mile brought me to a point where the ledge which I had been traversing terminated abruptly. In the face of the cliff on my left, at the point where it cut across and blocked the narrow ledge where I was standing, there was an irregularly-shaped hole or fissure about two feet wide by perhaps five feet high which looked very much like the mouth of a cave, and I determined to explore it; but upon attempting to reach it I found it impossible of access, the rocky face of the cliff was so absolutely smooth, so completely devoid of the smallest projection, that not even a monkey could have reached it.

I looked around me again, this time taking especial notice of my more immediate surroundings. If that opening happened to be really the mouth of a cave, and could be made easily accessible, it ought to form an ideal dwelling. There was pure sweet water in abundance far exceeding our utmost requirements; the spot was unapproachable except by way of the narrow ledge along which I had come, and could therefore be easily defended in case of need; and the cave, if cave it really was, ought to be at least as dry and roomy as any house that I could possibly build.

But how was I to gain entrance? There was but one way that I could think of—by means of a ladder. I determined to construct one forthwith, and set off upon my return journey with the intention of going to the boat and procuring the axe from the carpenter's tool chest. However, by the time I rejoined the others—who, it seemed, were beginning to feel some anxiety as to what had become of me—the sun was so low in the heavens that I at once perceived the impossibility of carrying out my plan that night. I therefore searched for and soon found two suitable trees, within easy hail of each other, under one of which the women might sleep comfortably on soft beds of dry grass, while Julius and I took possession of the other. When we had all partaken of a moderate meal of bananas, the sun had set and the night was fast closing down upon us; we therefore wended our way to our respective trees, flung ourselves down

upon our grassy couches, and were soon wrapped in the sweet oblivion of dreamless sleep.

The following morning found me awake with the rising of the sun. I felt amazingly refreshed by my night's sleep, and quite strong, comparatively speaking. I saw that Julius had awakened, and I invited him to go with me and have a swimming lesson, for the boy could not swim a stroke, and I had decided it was high time he should learn. So we started off, noting as we went that the women folk seemed to be still asleep under their own particular tree.

We walked to the cliff edge and looked down upon the beach; the boat was still there, exactly as we had left her.

Stripping to the buff, we deposited our clothes on the boat's deck and entered the water, which was of just the right temperature to be refreshing; and while I swam delightedly hither and thither, Master Julius, who was extremely fastidious in the matter of personal cleanliness, carefully removed all traces of the grime that had unavoidably accumulated during the voyage from the reef. Then, my swim ended, I did the same, after which I gave my companion his first swimming lesson, the boy showing such aptitude, and acquitting himself so well, that when we finally left the water he was actually able to swim a stroke or two unaided. Before dressing we explored the upper end of the harbour, where the stream discharged into it, and were fortunate enough to find a spot at which, in about three to four feet of water, the women could bathe with enjoyment and absolute safety.

Having dressed, I entered the boat and procured the carpenter's axe, after which we ascended to the top of the cliff. Near there we met Mrs Vansittart and her daughter, both of whom declared themselves greatly the better for a sound and refreshing night's rest. They were about to prospect for a spot where they might enjoy the luxury that Julius and I had just been indulging in; so, leaving the boy to direct them to the place which we had discovered, and afterwards to gather bananas for our breakfast, I shouldered the axe and set off northward, intent upon an exploration of the aperture in the cliff, which I believed might prove to be the mouth of a cave.

As I went I looked keenly about me for a sapling or small tree that might serve as a ladder, and before long I came upon exactly the kind of thing I wanted. It was a young tree, somewhat resembling a yew, about twenty feet high, with a number of branches springing from its trunk close together and radiating in all directions, the lowest branch being about seven feet from the ground. This tree I at once attacked, and, the wood being soft, while the axe was keen, it fell some ten minutes later. Lopping off as much of the upper part of the trunk as I considered too slim and weak for my purpose, I found that by cutting off the lower part, just below the bottom branch, I should have a nice straight pole about twelve feet long. This I did, afterward lopping off all the branches to within about six inches of the trunk—the stumps to serve as rungs or steps. There was my ladder complete, and light enough to be easily handled. I hoisted it on my shoulder, and, carrying the axe in my hand in case I should need it, proceeded along the ledge to its extremity.

Here I reared my "ladder" against the cliff face, and found, as I had expected, that it was just of a nice convenient length, enabling me to reach the opening with the utmost ease.

As I had fully expected, the cleft proved to be the mouth of a cavern, for as I stood at the top of the ladder and peered in, I saw that it extended some way back into the cliff, widening as it went. How far it extended I could not tell, but when my eyes became somewhat accustomed to the gloom I was able to trace the passage—for such it seemed to be—inward for a distance of at least ten feet, beyond which was black darkness.

Having seen thus much, I should not have been human had I not desired to see more. I therefore climbed into the opening, and, with all due precaution, proceeded to investigate a little farther. The floor of the entrance, if I may so term it, was very awkwardly shaped, resembling a V, so that in reality there was no floor at all, properly speaking, but merely the rough sides of the cleft meeting together at the bottom. A little way in, however—about six or eight feet from the face of the cliff—the sides began to fall away from each other, leaving a surface that might be walked on without much difficulty; and I told myself that if in other respects the cavern proved suitable as a dwelling, the awkward character of the entrance might easily be rectified.

Still making my way carefully, with a watchful eye for possible snakes—I had seen none thus far, and had not the least idea whether or not there were any on the island; still, it was as well to be careful—I gradually worked inward until I estimated that I was at least twenty feet from the mouth, and here I was obliged to bring my explorations to a temporary end for lack of light. But by careful pacing from side to side, I found that the passage was at this point some eighteen feet wide, with a tolerably flat floor, while its height was such that I could not reach it with my upstretched arm. Its length I could not tell, but it seemed to extend considerably farther inward; to determine just how far, however, I should need a torch. I therefore decided to return to the rest of the party, report upon my find, and bring them back with me after breakfast, that they might pass an opinion upon its possibilities.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

### The War Canoes.

Our breakfast that morning consisted of bananas, mangoes, and coconuts, all of which the island seemed to produce in profusion, as well, no doubt, as many other fruits, when we should have time to seek for them. At present our main concern was to establish ourselves in a shelter of some sort, where we should find complete protection in every kind of weather; and all expressed themselves as eager to inspect the cavern of which I had been telling them. To do this effectually torches were needed, and the means to kindle them. The latter was fortunately at hand in the shape of a large and powerful magnifying lens, with which Julius was fond of amusing himself and which he habitually carried in his pocket. With regard to torches—well, doubtless dry branches could be found lying about under the trees; or, failing these, flambeaux could be made of dry grass bound up into bundles. We decided that dry branches would best serve our purpose, and accordingly Julius and I plunged into the nearest clump of timber in search of what we required, quickly returning with a bundle each, as big as we could conveniently carry, bound together with long strips

of "monkey rope", of which there seemed to be an inexhaustible quantity in the woods. It was necessary to carry our fire with us, since the path we should have to traverse to reach the cave, as well as the cave itself, lay in a deep ravine, into which the sun's rays struck only for about three hours during the course of a day. We therefore collected a little heap of dry grass and leaves, set fire to it by concentrating the sun's rays upon it through Julius's burning-glass, and from it ignited a branch, which I carried along with us.

The distance from our temporary camp to the cave was about a mile and a quarter, but we took nearly an hour to cover it, for directly we entered the gorge there were frequent pauses to admire the splendid vistas which every bend of the path opened out. But in due time we reached the cavern and entered it, when other torches were kindled, so that each member of the party might be provided with a light.

It soon became apparent that the cavern was spacious enough to accommodate a very much larger party than ours. It was so extensive, indeed, that we were obliged to defer its complete exploration for lack of a sufficient number of torches; but we saw enough of it to determine us to enter upon its occupation forthwith. Accordingly I made my way to the beach where we had left the boat, and proceeded to transfer our few belongings from her to the cavern. Those belongings were not very many, consisting, in fact, merely of the empty water breaker, the arms and ammunition, the carpenter's chest, and the few planks that I had found afloat in the lagoon after the sinking of the wreck; and I succeeded in effecting the transfer of the whole before sunset.

Thus far I had been much too busy to attempt anything in the nature of an exploration of the entire island; but now that a safe shelter had been found for the party—and one capable of being very effectively defended, too, if the necessity should arise—I felt it was high time to make myself fully acquainted with our new home and its capabilities as at least a temporary abode. I was especially anxious to ascertain beyond all question whether it harboured any other inhabitants than ourselves; therefore, on the morning after we had installed ourselves in the cavern, I took a rifle, filled my pockets with cartridges, and set out with the intention of making the complete circuit of the island. I left Julius in charge, and warned my companions not to be anxious on my account, should I not return by nightfall, as I meant to take my time and explore the island thoroughly before returning.

Starting from the cavern immediately after breakfast, I proceeded southward, and, descending to the beach, indulged in a swim as a preliminary. Then, returning to the top of the cliff, I continued my way southward until I reached a point overlooking the harbour entrance, from which I struck inland toward one of the two inferior elevations previously mentioned.

The base of this mound was completely surrounded by trees, intermingled with an undergrowth so dense that it was only with difficulty I was enabled to force a way through it. I wished to reach the top of the mound, if possible, because it appeared to be a very suitable spot upon which to build a big flare for the purpose of attracting the attention of ships, should any such chance to heave in sight; I therefore persevered, and eventually came out at the base of the elevation, which was clear of trees. Then I started to climb, and after an hour's arduous toil reached its summit, the sides being exceedingly steep and consisting for the most part of fine ashes, from which I suspected that I was climbing the cone of an extinct volcano. This suspicion was fully verified when I arrived at the top; for I found myself upon a narrow platform, roughly elliptical in shape and some half a dozen yards wide, from which I gazed down into the interior of a crater some two hundred feet deep, the sides of which were nearly vertical, while the bottom was apparently a shallow pool of stagnant water.

The rim would serve admirably as a site upon which to build a bonfire; but the sides were so steep and the soil so loose that I foresaw it would be difficult, almost to the point of impossibility, to climb them with a load. I therefore decided to see whether the peak near the centre of the island offered better facilities. But before descending I took a good long look round the horizon, and was not very greatly surprised to discover that there were no less than seven separate and distinct indications of land to the northward, the nearest of which I judged could not be very far away.

I walked round the rim of the crater to its northern side and made my descent there, *en route* for the peak near the centre of the island, having first fully satisfied myself that the sea all round was entirely bare of craft of any description. My way now lay again through timber and more or less dense scrub, beyond which I found a small patch of open grass land, and then more timber. But now, for some inscrutable reason, there was little or no scrub. The trees were more lofty and wider apart, and intermingled with what I may term the timber trees were a fair number bearing fruit, among which I found several specimens of the breadfruit, and an abundance of mangoes, guavas, custard and star apples, plantains, bananas, and a few other varieties; thus there was the assurance of an ample supply of food so long as we might be compelled to remain upon the island.

It was past noon when I reached the base of the peak; and I had no sooner come to it than I perceived, from the ashes and scoriae that thickly strewed its sides, that it also was a volcano. Yet I was determined to climb to its summit, if possible, if only for the perfect panorama of the entire island that I knew I should obtain from there; so I rested for a little while, utilising the time by making a good meal of fruit, and then addressed myself to my task.

The sides of this volcano were not nearly so steep as those of the other; the dust and ashes, however, were just as fine, rendering the task of climbing the slope extremely difficult. But I had learned wisdom by this time, and instead of attempting the ascent in a straight line from base to summit, I described a spiral round the peak, and in this way accomplished the ascent in almost as short a time as, and with far less fatigue than, if I had attempted to go up by the shortest way.

My conviction that this peak also was the vent of a volcano was verified the moment that I reached the summit, the general aspect and character of this and the other being almost identical. The rim on which I now stood was, however, quite three hundred feet higher than the first; the view from it was consequently much more extensive, and in addition to the seven indications of land seen from the top of the mound, I was now able to trace three more quite distinctly, while in the farthest distance I thought I could descry the faint loom of still more land. This, however, was not all, for far away to the northward—so far as to be no more than just visible—I caught a hint of a faint, pearly

gleam on the horizon, which I felt certain could only be that of the sun on a ship's white sails; and my heart swelled with thankfulness, for here was an unmistakable assurance that craft of some sort occasionally visited these waters.

Having at length thoroughly searched the entire circle of the horizon, I turned my gaze nearer home and proceeded to view the island, the whole of which lay spread out beneath me like a large-scale relief map.

I scarcely know how to describe it. The nearest thing to which I can compare the shape of its plan, is a Ghoorka's *khookri*, or heavy knife, the point directed northward, the edge facing west, with a widening of the blade near its junction with the handle, this widening being broken into by the little harbour at the upper end of which our boat lay. The surface of the island was very irregular, and was almost completely covered with trees of various kinds, interspersed with small patches of open grass land. The island rose sheer from the sea everywhere except in one spot inside the harbour, where the grass sloped down to the water's edge, and at another spot on the north-western shore, where, for a length of about a mile, the land sloped seaward to a strip of white beach.

The source of the rivulet which discharged into the sea appeared to be situated about three-quarters of a mile south of the spot whereon I stood; and from that point it was easy for the eye to follow its course past our cavern and down its steep, rocky course to the harbour. The whole of the ravine which it traversed lay open to my gaze, and I was now able to assure myself with full conviction that our cavern could only be approached from one direction, namely, the narrow ledge which we had traversed to reach it.

The island was to all appearance uninhabited, save by ourselves. There were no canoes on the beach to the north-west, nor any sign of smoke indicating the existence of a village; yet, if not near the harbour, that is where a village would certainly be, since it was the only place where men could possibly beach their canoes—and the idea of inhabitants of an island without canoes was unthinkable. Nevertheless, although I felt convinced that our party were the only people on the island, I determined to make my exploration complete. Accordingly, after a long, last, lingering look round me, I plunged down the northern slope of the cone, and pushed northward through the forest; arriving at the most northern extremity of the island, dead tired, about sunset.

I camped in the open that night, finding abundance of food wherewith to satisfy my hunger, but no water. This latter, however, was of trivial importance, since the fruit staved off any excessive feeling of thirst; yet it tended to confirm my conviction that there were no natives to be found in this part of the island. On the following morning I followed the western line of the cliffs until I reached the beach aforementioned, when I descended to it and most carefully examined its whole surface in search of human footprints. I found not the slightest trace of one on the entire stretch of beach; therefore, perfectly satisfied at last that we had the whole island to ourselves, I shaped a course for "home", as I already began mentally to name the cavern, reaching it about mid-afternoon.

I found that during my absence the others had been busying themselves in a variety of ways to make our cavern comfortably habitable. Julius, for instance, had collected a quantity of stones, which he had so arranged at the mouth of the cavern that the V-shaped floor had been nicely levelled up and made smooth, so that it was now possible to pass in and out without the risk of badly spraining one's ankles; while the women had collected enough dry fern to make comfortable beds for us all. Also, the interior of the cavern had been more carefully and systematically examined, with the result that three separate and distinct but adjoining chambers had been found, two of which would serve admirably for sleeping apartments, while a third and very lofty one had a large hole in its roof, situated apparently in the midst of a clump of trees, admitting sufficient light to make it quite pleasantly habitable as a general living and working room.

This, of course, was all very well and quite as we would have it; it was a wise and reasonable policy to make ourselves as comfortable as we could during our sojourn upon the island. But how long was that sojourn to last? That was the matter now uppermost in my thoughts. Were we to sit down and wait patiently until something should come along and take us off, or were we to take the initiative and, while availing ourselves of the hospitality of the island, contrive some means whereby, failing other help, we might effect our own rescue by making our way to some civilised spot from which it would be possible to return to our respective homes? I had been thinking a good deal of late about my poor mother in her little house at Newton Ferrers. It was now over five months since the *Stella Maris* had been cast away, and more than six since I had last written home; and I knew that by this time the dear soul would be fretting her heart out with anxiety on my account. I was therefore growing every day more eager and determined to find a way of deliverance, if only that the maternal anxiety might be allayed.

But what could I do? There was the boat, certainly; but after our recent dreadful experiences in her I knew that nothing would induce Mrs Vansittart to undertake another boat voyage. She had already said so with much emphasis, and the others had echoed her resolution; and, indeed, I could not blame them. A single experience of that kind was quite enough for a lifetime. Had we possessed a sail, matters might have been different, for despite the queer model of our craft she had proved to be an excellent sea boat, quite as good, indeed, as a boat of the usual shape; but to be at sea in her without a sail was to be simply at the mercy of wind and wave. I racked my brains to distraction in the effort to evolve some practicable plan for obtaining a sail, even going to the length of endeavouring to weave one of grass; but it was no good, for as soon as the grass dried it became so tender and brittle that it would never have borne the pressure of even a very moderate breeze, much less a gale.

About a month later, when after numerous experiments I had found myself obliged to abandon all hope in that direction, chance—or rather, investigation in another direction—revived my hopes, and I began to believe that I could see my way.

It was about two months from the time when we were driven out of the wreck and compelled to commit ourselves and our fortunes to the mercy of the open sea, and by this time our clothing had become so dilapidated that the necessity for something to replace it was growing urgent. Therefore, while I busied myself daily upon the task of conveying combustible material to the summit of the Peak—as we had named the highest point on the island—that we might be able to kindle a fire and raise a big smoke in the event of a sail heaving in sight, and while Julius

undertook to find a daily supply of food for the party, the women explored the island in search of some material that might be converted into clothing.

By the merest accident they at length found what they believed might serve. It was the inner bark of a certain tree, and consisted of long white threads or filaments which, after being steeped in water for some time, could be separated from each other, and which proved to be so exceedingly tough that we were able to make excellent fishing lines of them, and so secure a most welcome addition to our daily diet. The threads were rather coarse, but we believed that they might be worked up into a kind of sheeting which, while perhaps rather stiff and uncomfortable when fashioned into garments, would make a very good sail; and I devoted every moment of my spare time to the gathering and preparation of the stuff, my idea being that after I had made a suit of sails for the boat, if the others still refused to undertake a second boat voyage, they might agree to my going away alone in search of help.

But about a month later, when the four women were busily and laboriously engaged upon the tedious task of weaving by hand our stock of thread into a coarse, tough cloth, a dramatic interruption of our labours occurred which, but for the mercy of God, might have had a most tragic ending.

I had by this time accumulated upon the top of the Peak a sufficient quantity of material to make a blaze and smoke that might be seen in clear weather at least thirty miles away, and I had therefore ceased to devote my whole time to adding to the pile, employing myself instead in industriously collecting the thread-like bark out of which we were making our cloth. Nevertheless it was a habit of mine to wend my way to the summit every morning immediately after breakfast, in order to take a good look round on the chance of a sail being in sight; and I repeated the excursion daily after our midday meal, collecting a load of combustibles on my way and carrying them up with me, in order that in any case my journey might not be quite useless.

It was during my afternoon journey on the day in question that, having reached the summit of the Peak and sent a long, searching, but fruitless look round the horizon, I turned to descend by a short cut which my frequent passages down had beaten in the loose, friable soil, when I was arrested in the very act of plunging down the slope, and my blood turned to ice, by the sight of a great war canoe crowded with natives, just emerging from under the cover of the western cliffs and heading southward, as though bound for our little harbour. As I still stood gaping at her, scarcely able to credit the evidence of my eyes, another, and another, and another followed, making four in all, each manned by some forty or fifty natives. They had been creeping along so close inshore that at first they had been invisible to me, hidden by the high cliffs; but a curve of the shore line had caused them to head out a little farther to the westward, and so brought them within my range of vision.

Suddenly I became aware of signs of commotion in the leading canoe. There was a cessation of paddling, arms were uplifted and flourished, and the next moment I realised with horror that my figure, standing out clear and clean-cut against the pure azure of the sky, had been detected. The natives were pointing and directing each other's attention to me; indeed, I almost believed that I could catch, above the soft sough of the wind, the faint sound of their voices shouting to each other as they pointed. Then the gesticulating suddenly ceased, the paddles were resumed, churning the water into foam with the energy thrown into each stroke, and the canoes raced forward at fully double their original speed.

Waiting to see no more, I plunged recklessly down the slope, running, sliding, stumbling, and once rolling headlong in my frantic haste to get back to the cavern. I felt assured that, whatever their original purpose might have been, those savages would now most assuredly land, if only to hunt for me and secure my head as a trophy. It would be a race between them and me as to who could reach the cavern first; moreover, there was the horrid possibility that some of the women, or Julius, might be abroad and fall into their hands; in which case, God help them!

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## **Chapter Nineteen.**

### **The Rescue.**

Never in my life, I think, had I run so fast as I did that afternoon, while covering the mile and a half of ground that lay between the base of the Peak and the nearest point at which I could overlook the harbour. It was imperative that I should reach this point before returning to the cavern, since it might very easily happen that Julius had launched the boat and was in mid-harbour, fishing, as he had been wont to do of late; and if so, he must be saved at all costs.

I had a rifle with me, and a pocketful of cartridges, it having become a habit with me to carry them whenever I went abroad; and I believed that at a pinch I might be able, by good shooting, to hold the savages off long enough to enable the boy to land and make good his escape. Luckily, when I arrived at the point for which I was aiming, the first object to catch my eye was our boat, empty and moored in her usual place; and the beach was entirely bare from end to end. Scarcely had I satisfied myself of this when the sharp nose of the leading canoe shot into view past the point where the narrow entrance widened out and the harbour proper began; and before I had time to withdraw from the edge of the cliff a yell of delight conveyed to me the unpleasant news that I had again been seen.

I had, however, by this time got my wind again after my long run, so, keeping far enough back from the edge of the cliff to ensure my invisibility from below, I started at a long, swinging trot for the cavern, and was fortunate enough to run into Julius, loaded with a big bunch of bananas, just at the point where the narrow ledge leading to the cavern began. He was on his way back from a stroll, and, happening to sight a particularly attractive bunch of the fruit, had determined to take it home with him. We were practically safe now, since anywhere along this narrow ledge, all the way to the cavern, a single person armed with a rifle could defend and hold the road so long as his supply of ammunition lasted. I therefore slowed my pace to a walk, and, taking the bananas from the boy and handing the rifle and cartridges to him in return, I rapidly explained the situation to him, and bade him play the part of rearguard while I carried the fruit, the weight of which was almost too great for him. I felt tolerably certain that we could reach the

cavern before being overtaken, as we did.

"Is everybody at home?" I shouted, as, having climbed into the cave after Julius, and drawn up the ladder behind me to prevent its unauthorised use, I made my way toward the inner apartment which we used as a living-room.

"Yes," came the reply in Mrs Vansittart's voice; "everybody, that is to say, but Julius—"

"He is here with me," I cut in, as I entered the room and saw all four of the women diligently engaged upon the tedious task of weaving their cloth. "I met him at the beginning of the path, and brought him home with me, also this fine bunch of bananas which some good fairy prompted him to cut. We must use them carefully, for they, with what else we may have in the cavern, may have to last us for several days."

"Why? What do you mean, Walter?" demanded Mrs Vansittart in a tone of alarm, while the others paused in their work to listen.

"He means that four big war canoes loaded with savages have just entered the harbour; and the chances are that we may have to stand a siege," cut in Julius, who had followed me in.

"Hillo!" I exclaimed in surprise. "You here? That will never do. Just trot back to the mouth of the cavern, keeping enough in the darkness to avoid being seen from outside, and keep a look-out while I explain things to your mother. Then I will come and relieve you. If you see anything of the savages give a low whistle, and I will join you. Cut, now; and keep your eyes skinned. How are we off for water, Mrs Vansittart?"

"Oh, I don't know! I think we have the breaker about half-full," replied the lady.

"That will do; it will be ample for us all until to-night," I said. "Then I must slip out in the darkness and endeavour to fill it."

I then proceeded to relate at length all that I had seen, but kept my fears to myself, merely impressing upon my little audience the necessity for staying well within the cavern, out of sight. I did not attempt to conceal that I quite expected the savages would subject the entire island to a thorough search, which might possibly extend over three or four days; but I expressed the opinion that if we could but remain completely hidden during that time they would depart, rather than waste further time in hunting for one man—for of course they had seen only me, and could not possibly know that I had any companions.

"Oh, but this is awful!" exclaimed Mrs Vansittart, when I had finished. "Just think of what might have happened if you had not come when you did! Anthea and I were beginning to feel tired and a bit headachy with sitting so long over this horrid weaving, and so were Lizette and Susie; and we were all talking about going out for a good long walk just as you came in. Why, we might all have been captured and carried off—"

The mere contemplation of such a fate, with all that it implied, was too much for the poor lady, and reduced her to speechlessness.

"You are right," I assented. "Lucky that I turned up in time to prevent you. As it is, I am afraid that we must regard our boat as lost to us. The beggars will be sure to see her—indeed, they cannot avoid doing so—and if they don't take her with them when they go, they will almost certainly destroy her out of pure spite. But 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof'. We must keep our spirits up and our powder dry. And speaking of powder reminds me that it will only be a reasonable precaution to open a few boxes of cartridges, and load all our rifles. By Jove! it was a happy inspiration that prompted me to put them into the boat. Even then I had a suspicion that they might be useful some day."

I got out all our weapons and loaded them, filled my pockets with cartridges, carried the loaded rifles to the outer cavern, where they would be handy, and then joined Julius, whom I found lying prone, rifle in hand, maintaining a careful watch on the ledge, which, so far as we knew, was the only possible approach to our cavern. The boy informed me that thus far he had seen nothing of the savages, at which piece of information I scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry. It was, of course, just barely possible that the enemy, having first seen me on the summit of the Peak, might come to the conclusion that my lair was somewhere in that direction, and hunt round about there for me. On the other hand, I had been told that the Pacific islanders, taking them as a whole, were by no means unintelligent, and they would naturally think, upon finding the boat, that I would make my habitat as near her as possible, and accordingly proceed to hunt for signs of me in her immediate neighbourhood. Besides, they had last seen me on the cliff top, and if they were at all expert at tracking they should be able to pick up my spoor without much difficulty. The thing I most greatly feared was that, suspecting me to be lurking in the neighbourhood, a few of them had gone into ambush at no great distance, hoping that I should ultimately show myself, while the rest were scouring the island.

Julius and I maintained our watch until nightfall; then, as soon as it was as dark as it was likely to be that night, I made arrangements for replenishing our stock of fresh water. Julius was to mount guard in the mouth of the cavern with his rifle, keeping a sharp look-out along the ledge, which was just visible enough in the starlight to permit of the boy being able to detect the approach of an enemy; and if he saw anyone coming he was to give me warning, and shoot if necessary to cover my retreat. For my part, I was to take our only bucket, fill it with water, and pass it up to Susie, who was to receive it in the mouth of the cavern, carry it to the breaker, and empty it into the latter until it was full.

It was not a long job, for the breaker was only of small capacity. We accomplished it in less than ten minutes, without interruption of any kind, winding up by taking the full bucket into the cavern, as a supplementary supply, and then drawing up the ladder after us.

The cavern was now provisioned and watered for at least four days. We could endure for that length of time without much difficulty or hardship, after which, I ventured to hope, our anxiety respecting the savages would be at an end. I relieved Julius as guard, and sent him to the inner cavern to get some food and a few hours' sleep prior to relieving me in turn.

I fondly believed that the existence of our cavern was unknown, and that we had been fortunate enough to replenish our stock of water unobserved; but I afterward had reason to suspect the contrary. I maintained a keen watch at the mouth of the cavern until about midnight, my estimate of the time being based upon the position and posture of the Southern Cross in the sky—that constellation being visible from the mouth of the cavern—when Mrs Vansittart came stealing out to me with the whispered enquiry as to whether I was not tired enough to require a relief. As a matter of fact I was, and did not hesitate to say so, since the night was quiet, I had seen nothing of a suspicious character, and Julius had had a good long rest. The lady retired, and presently Julius came along, gaping and yawning, and stretched himself out beside me. I remained with him, conversing in low whispers, for about ten minutes, until I was satisfied that he was broad awake, and then, with a final word of caution, I left him and retreated to my own couch, where I soon fell asleep.

I had been asleep about an hour when I was startled into instant wakefulness by the sound of five rifle shots fired in quick succession; and, rushing to the mouth of the cavern, I found Julius in a high state of excitement. Seizing my arm as I came beside him, he exclaimed:

"See that, Walter?"

Looking in the direction toward which the lad pointed, I was able to descry just dimly a motionless something lying in the pathway, about ten yards from the mouth of the cavern, while something else, still more dimly visible, but recognisable as a little crowd of men, appeared about twice as far away, evidently in somewhat hasty retreat.

"I believe I hit him," continued Julius, his teeth chattering with excitement as he fidgeted with his rifle.

"Hit him!" I interrupted; "I should think there is very little doubt about that. The man appears to be dead."

As the words left my lips we were joined by the women folk, who, awakened by the rifle shots, came in a body to where we stood, clamouring to know what was the matter.

"Let me tell you just what happened," interposed the boy. "I was lying down here, watching the path, with my rifle beside me, as I had been doing ever since Walter left me. Everything was quite quiet; I had not seen a thing, or heard a sound, and I was beginning to feel a bit sleepy. So I stood up and moved about a bit to keep myself awake, since Walter had told me it was of the utmost importance that a good look-out should be kept. I just walked across and across the mouth of the cavern, three steps this way and three that, watching the path all the time; and about ten minutes ago, or thereabout, I thought I saw a sort of shadow or darkness that I had not noticed before out there at the far end of the path.

"I stood still and watched; and presently I was sure that there was something moving, and coming nearer; so I grabbed my rifle and lay down, waiting, with my Remington pointing straight at 'em. Nearer and nearer they came, until at last I was certain that what I saw was two savages carrying something on their shoulders, with other savages behind 'em. I waited until they were so close that I felt I couldn't miss, and then I let drive—five shots, one after the other, right into the thick of 'em. That savage lyin' there flung up his arms and keeled over, while the other chap seemed to stagger a bit, I thought, and I heard something fall that sounded as if they'd dropped a pole; then the whole crowd turned and scooted. But I'm pretty sure that I hit another chap as well as the one lyin' out there."

"Excellent!" I exclaimed. "You have done splendidly, Julius, and saved us all from a very ugly surprise. Now, ladies, the danger is over for the present, therefore you may retire and finish your sleep in peace. As for you and I, Julius, we will get out our ladder, and, while you watch with your rifle, I will slip out and roll that fellow over the edge into the torrent; we don't want him lying there."

So said, so done. We lowered the ladder and I climbed down it to the pathway, with a loaded revolver in my hand as a precautionary measure, for during our cruise among the islands I had heard one or two rather gruesome stories of the craftiness and ferocity of certain savages while out on the warpath. But in the present instance my precaution was needless. The prostrate savage was quite dead, and I pushed him over the edge of the pathway into the torrent that roared over its precipitous rocky bed some thirty feet below, whence the body would doubtless be swept along until it reached the harbour. Then I found the thing that he and another had been carrying, and put it safely inside the cavern. It was the trunk of a young tree, trimmed in similar fashion to our own ladder; from which circumstance I inferred that, lurking somewhere unseen, possibly among the bushes on the other side of the ravine, some of the savages must not only have seen us replenishing our water supply, but also have noted the character of the contrivance which we used for gaining access to the interior of the cavern, and copied it.

Toward the afternoon of next day I proposed that I should set out upon a reconnoitring expedition, leaving Julius on guard, my intention being to go along the ledge to a point from which I could obtain a view of the beach, and so ascertain whether the canoes were still there. But the others would not hear of this; they denounced the project as both unnecessary and dangerous; and when they found that this argument scarcely sufficed to dissuade me, Mrs Vansittart flatly refused her consent, asserting that if any mishap should befall me, Julius alone would be utterly unable to protect the rest of them, and they must inevitably fall into the hands of the savages. To this I could find no effective reply, for there was just enough truth in it to be almost convincing; so I agreed to defer my expedition until at least the following day. There was some discussion among us, I remember, as to where the savages had come from, and why they had called at the island: as to the former, it was impossible to say; while my own opinion was that their visit to our island was for the purpose of replenishing their supply of food and water.

All that night and the next, and through the intervening days, we kept rigorous watch and ward, while our supply of



food and water dwindled until we were almost as badly off as during our last days in the boat. A further attempt to replenish our stock of water, which I made in desperation during the night of the fourth day of our investment, showed that our enemies were not only still present, but as watchful and pertinacious as ever. And that night, or rather in the early hours of the following morning, came the climax, when the wily foe made a last desperate attempt to rush our defences and overpower us by force of numbers.

I had taken the first night watch, from six until ten, and Julius the middle watch from ten until two o'clock in the morning, when I relieved him. He had informed me that he had neither seen nor heard anything of a disquieting nature during his watch, and had left me about ten minutes or thereabout, when, as I lay prone near the entrance of the cavern, with my gaze intently fixed upon the path outside, a slight rustling sound came to my ear. I could not at first locate it, so I crept closer and closer still to the opening, until my head was actually protruding beyond the portal. As I glanced cautiously about me, keenly alert to draw back at the first swish of a spear, I felt something, which I presently identified as fine dust, dropping lightly upon my neck and head. I drew my head back instantly, suspecting a ruse, and waited.

The next thing of which I became aware was a slight crackling sound, followed by a faint flicker of light that rapidly grew stronger as I watched. It came from somewhere immediately above the cavern entrance, and a few seconds later down came an immense bundle of blazing brushwood, which hung suspended immediately in front of the upper part of the opening, brilliantly illuminating the place where I lay. The next instant some thirty or more spears and darts came flying across the ravine into the entrance, impinging sharply upon the rocky side of the cavern to my right and then falling to the ground with a rattle that quickly brought Julius to my side.

He gasped with astonishment as he saw the blazing bundle, and the spears and darts lying upon the floor of the cavern. But this was no time for explanations, for I heard the pad of many running feet at no great distance, drawing rapidly nearer, and recognised that a determined attack was about to be made upon us. The blazing brushwood served the double purpose of brilliantly illuminating the mouth of the cavern and dazzling our eyes, pretty effectually preventing our seeing what was happening outside; so I drew Julius into the shelter of a projection behind which I had already ensconced myself, and whispered:

"Your rifle, quick! Then get back to the inner cave, warn the women not to come out on any account, and bring out our whole stock of cartridges. This promises to be serious."

The projecting ledge of rock behind which I had sheltered chanced to be most conveniently placed and shaped for the defence of the cavern entrance. It was broad enough to afford me and two or three more complete shelter, while there was a nick in its outer edge of just the right height and size to serve as a rest for a rifle barrel. Standing comfortably behind this, I placed the barrel of my repeater in the nick, levelled it at the spot where I expected the first of our foes to appear, and calmly waited.

I had not long to wait. Julius had just rejoined me with his pockets stuffed full of cartridges, and had murmured, "Momma and the others are all right; they promised not to come out. You shoot, and I'll reload," when the fast-increasing sound of the padding feet suddenly ceased just outside the cavern entrance. I heard a few guttural words spoken that sounded like muttered orders, and then came the light thud of a ladder-like pole placed in position. I saw its upper extremity distinctly in the light of the fire overhead, and sighted my rifle directly upon it, ready to deflect the muzzle to right or left on the instant, as might be necessary. As the pole dropped lightly into position a shrill whistle sounded, and on the instant a perfect storm of spears, darts, and stones came whirring into the cavern, some of them splintering on the sides, but the major portion falling far in beyond us, causing me to pray fervently that the women would have the sense to keep well under cover. The next instant the hideously decorated head of a savage rose into view as he ascended the ladder; but before he had risen another foot my rifle cracked and he whirled backward into the blackness without a cry.

I had but bare time to eject the spent shell and jerk another cartridge into place when a second head appeared, only to be disposed of in the same fashion, and this was followed by a third, which I neatly plugged between the eyes. While this was happening, the shower of spears, darts, and stones—the two latter in particular—continued unabated.

With the extinction of the third man there came a pause, of which I took advantage to exchange my partially-emptied Remington for another, while Julius attended to the reloading. But the pause was not a long one. Presently I saw the top of the pole moving again, and in another moment a fourth head appeared. This savage, however, was a clever one; he was not going to be shot through the head if he could help it, for when his cranium rose into view it was being rapidly jerked from side to side, so I waited until his body appeared, and then plugged him through the lungs. So the attack continued, the enemy displaying the most dogged and indomitable determination, as well as the most extraordinary and disconcerting cunning, and maintaining an incessant fire of darts and stones—they seemed to be saving the remainder of their spears—while as fast as the blazing faggots burned out they were replaced by others. Evidently this attack had been carefully thought out and the most elaborate preparations made for it.

Then, at the moment when I was beginning to ask myself seriously how much longer this thing was going to last, and which party would be able to hold out longest, a most dramatic interruption came,—nothing less than the boom of a heavy gun from close in under the cliffs, not far from the harbour's mouth. A moment later I perceived, through the flickering light of the blazing faggot, the white glare of a searchlight focusing itself upon the path outside. There was a yell of dismay from the attacking force, loud shouts, and then the quick thud of swiftly retreating feet as the savages broke and fled. But before they could possibly have reached the end of the path another gun spoke, the report being immediately followed by an explosion, accompanied by a terrible outburst of yells and shrieks. Amid these I believed I heard the sharp patter of shrapnel on the face of the cliff, while other yells arose from the party who had been attending to the business of keeping up the supply of burning faggots above the opening of the cavern.

We were saved! By some extraordinary combination of circumstances a ship—and a ship of war at that—had come

upon the scene at the very crisis of our fortunes, and, attracted possibly by the light of the blazing faggots, had approached near enough to hear the sound of our rifle fire, doubtless greatly intensified by the reverberations of the cavern, and probably guessing pretty shrewdly at what it all meant, had intervened in the very nick of time!

“Hurrah!” I shouted, “hurrah! A ship! A ship! And the savages have fled. Go and tell your mother and the others, Julius. I will keep a look-out here.”

But there was no need for Julius to play the part of messenger; for the report of the guns, followed by my jubilant exclamations, brought the others forth with a rush from the innermost recesses of the cavern, eager to know just exactly what had happened.

The rest of my story can soon be told.

To Mr Julius Vansittart, absorbed in the conduct and management of his mammoth engineering business, the thought one morning occurred that a considerable time had elapsed since he had last received news of his wife and family, and that another letter from them must be about due. On referring to the last letter received, and noting the date of its arrival, he instantly perceived that another letter was not only due, but considerably overdue; and knowing how regular and methodical his wife was in the matter of correspondence, it did not take him very long to arrive at the conclusion that something must have gone wrong with the yacht. This conclusion once arrived at, he “got a move on” and “humped himself” (as he himself expressed it). The consequence was that—Vansittart being a man of powerful influence—it was not long before the admiral in command of the U.S. squadron stationed in the Pacific received a communication from Washington, acquainting him with the most recent and contemplated future movements of the *Stella Maris*, as furnished by Mr Vansittart, coupled with the information that she was overdue, and an instruction to dispatch a vessel in search of the missing yacht. The result of this was the dramatic arrival of the U.S. gunboat *Jefferson* off our island at the psychological moment.

It appeared that she had already been engaged for nearly a month in a systematic search for the yacht, during which she had picked up no less than three of the bottles which we had dispatched from the reef, containing our appeals for help, and had accordingly visited the scene of the disaster, only to discover the sunken wreck of the yacht in the lagoon. Surmising, or rather hoping that we might somehow have contrived to effect our escape, the commander of the *Jefferson*, after a careful study of the prevailing winds and currents in those waters, had mapped out a definite plan, in pursuance of which, after unsuccessful calls at a number of other islands, he had headed for the one upon which we had found shelter. It had been sighted just before dark, and the *Jefferson* had headed for it at half speed, intending to lay to in the offing upon arrival, and send a boat ashore in the morning.

But when still some ten miles off the land a light—the light of the savages’ blazing faggots—had been seen; and, regarding this as a possible signal, the command for full speed ahead had been rung down to the engine room. When the *Jefferson* arrived close under the cliffs and the searchlight had been turned on, the fact that a fight of some sort was in progress had become evident, and, making a shrewd guess at the actual state of affairs, the *Jefferson* had taken a hand, with the result already recorded. By the aid of her searchlight and the sounding lead, the gunboat then cautiously groped her way into the harbour and came to an anchor about half a mile from the beach upon which lay the four big war canoes and our apology for a boat. The sight of these not only suggested to the astute commander that at last he had got upon our track, but also confirmed his surmise as to the state of affairs ashore; and no sooner was the anchor down than he dispatched a heavily-armed boat, the officer of which was instructed to make his way instantly to the cave and investigate. The meeting was, for both parties, a joyous one; and as no savages had been seen by the landing party—they had evidently fled into the woods—we lost no time in making our way to the beach, taking our rifles and ammunition with us, and from the beach to the *Jefferson*, where we were cordially welcomed and highly complimented upon the vigorous defence of the cavern which we had put up. To our infinite satisfaction we found that, acting upon instructions, the commander of the gunboat had brought with him a well-selected wardrobe for each of us, on the off-chance of his search proving successful and the articles being needed. Consequently when, a few hours later, we all sat down to breakfast in the commander’s private cabin, we scarcely recognised each other, clad as we now were once more in the garb of civilisation in place of our discarded rags.

The war canoes and our boat were burnt where they lay on the beach, thus leaving the savages prisoners on the island; and, this done, we got under way for Manila, where we arrived nine days later.

From Manila a cable message was dispatched to Mr Vansittart, immediately upon our arrival, informing him of our safety. And on the following day a reply came from him expressing his delight at the news, together with a cabled credit on the bank for funds amply sufficient to convey the entire party to New York—where, via Yokohama and San Francisco, we eventually arrived safely, by a freak of coincidence, two years to a day from the date of our departure from London.

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