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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S QUEER FIND; OR, THE SECRET OF THE IRON CHEST ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 13
MAY 22, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S
QUEER FIND

OR THE SECRET
OF THE IRON CHEST

By
THE AUTHOR OF "MOTOR MATT"

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Motor Matt, a lad who is at home with every variety of motor, and whose never-failing nerve serves to carry him through difficulties that would daunt any ordinary young fellow. Because of his daring as a racer with bicycle, motor-cycle and automobile he is known as "Mile-a-minute Matt." Motor-boats, air ships and submarines come naturally in his line, and consequently he lives in an atmosphere of adventure in following up his "hobby."

Carl Pretzel, a cheerful and rollicking German boy, stout of frame as well as of heart, who is led by a fortunate accident to link his fortunes with those of Motor Matt.

Dick Ferral, a young sea dog from Canada, with all a sailor's superstitions, but in spite of all that a royal chum, ready to stand by the friend of his choice through thick and thin.

Townsend, a wealthy though eccentric gentleman, who owns a remarkable submarine boat on which our friends have seen various adventures in the past.

Whistler,
Jurgens, } a trio of rogues bent upon gaining possession of a prize.
Bangs, }

CHAPTER I.

THE HUT BY THE BAYOU.

"Lisden, vonce, you fellers! I t'ink I hear someding."

Carl Pretzel turned back from the forward rail of the *Hawk*, gave his chums, Motor Matt and Dick Ferral, a warning look, and then leaned out over the side of the air ship, his eyes on the earth below.

The *Hawk* was sweeping over the tongue of land between Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, bound for New Orleans by way of the Lower Mississippi.

Night was coming on, and the boys in the air ship had been looking anxiously for a place in which to effect a landing. Interminable stretches of cypress and live oak covered the low ground beneath them, and there did not seem to be a gap anywhere in the dense growth.

"You must have bells in your ears, mate," said Dick, in response to Carl's announcement that he had heard "something." "Dowse me if I heard any noise."

"Listen, pards, both of you," called Matt from his seat among the levers. "If you can hear a voice, down there, it will be a pretty sure sign that we're close to a clearing. We've done enough flying for to-day, and these Louisiana air currents are so changeable I don't want to do any night traveling. If you——"

"Dere it vas some more!" cried Carl excitedly. "You hear him dot time, Tick?"

"Aye, matey," answered Dick, "I heard a voice, fair enough. It was a sort of screech, as though a woman might have piped up—or a panther."

"Where away was it?" asked Matt.

"Two points off the starboard bow, Matt."

Matt shifted the rudder, thus altering the course of the *Hawk*; he also depressed the horizontal plane and threw the air ship closer to the tree tops.

"It's getting so blooming dark, down there among the trees," observed Dick, "that it's hard to see anything, but I believe I can make out a bit of a river, and an arm of it like a bayou."

"Yah, so helup me," put in Carl, "I can see dot meinseluf, I bed you. Und dere iss a light like a fire, vich geds prighter und prighter as ve go aheadt. Vat you t'ink is dot anyway, Tick?"

Before Dick could answer, the cry that had already claimed their attention was wafted up from below, this time so clear and distinct that there was no mistaking it. [Pg 2]

"*A moi! a moi!*"

It was a screech, as Dick had said, and resembled greatly the yell of some wild animal; nevertheless, the call was plainly human, for it was broken into words.

"French lingo, or I'm a Fiji!" averred Dick. "It's the same as some one calling for help. And a woman, too. No man could make a sound like that."

As if to prove Dick's words, the cry was repeated, but the words were English, now, and not French.

"Help! Help!"

"Py chiminy grickets!" gasped Carl. "Dere iss someding going on vat means drouple for der laty."

"We've got to land," declared Matt, "and see what's the matter. Can you find a place?"

Both Dick and Carl were leaning over the forward rail and staring ahead and downward.

Suddenly the tree tops broke away and a heap of blazing wood could be seen. The fire had been kindled on a cleared stretch of bayou bank, and not far from it was a log hovel. But there was no one in sight, either near the fire or around the hut.

The two boys on the lookout announced their discoveries to Motor Matt.

"We'll come down on the bayou bank," said Matt. "Give me directions, Dick."

The young Canadian, watching sharply below, called their bearings to Matt, and the *Hawk* was safely manoeuvred to the surface of the ground. The calls for aid had ceased, an ominous silence reigning in the vicinity of the fire and the hut while the boys got out their mooring ropes and secured the *Hawk* to nearby trees.

"Where's the woman in distress?" queried Dick, coming around the front end of the car and joining Matt and Carl. "She was making plenty of noise, a while ago, but she's quiet enough now."

"She may be in the hut," said Matt. "You stay here and watch the air ship, Dick, while Carl and I take a look through the shanty."

Matt pulled a blazing pine knot from the fire, and, with this to light the way, started toward the

hut. Carl dropped in at his side and they proceeded onward together. Suddenly Carl drew to a halt and laid a hand on Matt's arm.

"I tell you someding, Matt," said the Dutch boy, "und dot iss, I don'd like dis pitzness. Br-r-r! I haf some greepy feelings all droo me."

Carl could be as brave as a lion when brought company front with any danger he could understand, but he was so full of superstition that if a black cat crossed the road in front of him he was at once thrown into a panic.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Matt. "We're here to help some one who is in trouble, and we don't want to get scared at our own shadows."

"Der blace itseluf iss enough to make my shkin ged oop und valk all ofer me mit coldt feet; and den, for vy don'd we hear dat foice some more?"

There *was* a sort of weirdness about the place, and no mistake. The great live oaks, uncannily festooned with Spanish moss, completely inclosed the little clearing, bending about it in a half circle and coming down to the very edge of the bayou. The fact that there was a fire, of course, proved that human beings had been in the clearing, even if they were not there now. But there was something ghostly about the fire, and while it threw flickering shadows across the clearing it seemed only to make the darkness deeper in the depths of the wood.

"It may be, Carl," said Matt, "that the woman who was calling for help has become unconscious. That makes it all the more necessary for us to find her as quick as we can. Come on!"

Waving his torch, Matt hurried along toward the hut. The door was open, and the torch glare struck whitely against some object suspended over it.

"Vatt iss dot ofer der door, eh?" asked Carl excitedly. "Py shinks, it iss some pones! It iss a skeleton oof someding! Whoosh! Dis iss gedding on my nerfs like anyding."

The young motorist whirled on his Dutch chum.

"You go back to the air ship, Carl," said he, "and send Dick here. Your nerves are troubling you so much that you're not of much help."

Carl was only too ready to go back to the *Hawk*. With a mumbled apology for himself, he turned and hurried away. When Dick came up, a moment later, Matt was looking at the object over the door of the hovel.

"What is it, matey?" queried Dick.

"It looks like the skull of a cat, or a dog," answered Matt.

"Then I suppose it was put up there to bring luck. People around here must be a jolly lot."

"We'll see what's inside," and Matt, holding his torch high, passed through the door.

The hut contained but one room. There was a fireplace in one end, and over a bed of coals a kettle was hanging. A "shake-down" on the floor, in one corner, was covered with ragged blankets. But the strangest feature of the place was this: The whole under part of the thatched roof, and every crevice of the walls, was hung with rags, feathers, bones of cats, alligator teeth, and a thousand other objects, equally curious.

"Well, strike me lucky!" mumbled Dick. "This is a rummy old place we've got into. Between you and me and the mainmast, old ship, I'd just about as soon give it a good offing. But where's the woman that wanted help?"

The question was hardly out of Dick's mouth before it was answered by another screeching, "*A moi! a moi!*"

The call did not come from anywhere about the hut, but from outside and somewhere in the timber.

"This way, Dick!" shouted Matt, and rushed out of the hut.

"*A moi! a moi!*"

The call was again repeated, and the two boys, guiding themselves by the call, flung up the slight slope and darted in among the trees.

"Careful, matey!" panted Dick, from close behind his comrade. "There's no telling what sort of a jolly mess we're running into. Better dowse that light—it'll be safer; besides, I can see the gleam of a lantern ahead, there, through the trees."

"I just caught a sight of that myself, Dick," answered Matt, in a low voice. "Your suggestion about the torch is good," and Matt dropped the blazing fagot and crushed out the fire with his foot. "Now, then," he finished, "we'll go on, and go quietly."

A dozen yards, perhaps, brought the boys to a spot from which they could behold a scene that caused their pulses to leap.

An old crone was bound to a cypress stump, and beside her stood a man with a lithe switch.

The hag was swarthy, and her kinky hair was white. Evidently she was a mulatto. The man at her side was white. The moment Matt's eyes rested on him, the young motorist gripped Dick's arm with tense fingers.

"That man!" whispered Matt excitedly; "do you recognize him, Dick?"

"Whistler, or I'm a Hottentot!" gasped Dick.

For a moment, blank amazement held the two boys spellbound. Then, as Whistler lifted the switch and brought it viciously down on the old woman's shoulders, the spell was broken and the two boys started forward.

"Will you tell?" demanded Whistler, pausing after the blow.

"*A moi! a moi!*" screeched the woman.

"You can call till you're blue in the face," went on Whistler savagely, "and you'll not bring anybody. I'll find out from you what I want to know, Yamousa, or I'll flay you alive. Will you tell?"

At that moment, Matt and Dick broke into the lantern light. The lantern was suspended from the broken limb of a tree, and the glow was so faint that the boys had not been seen until they were close upon the man and the woman.

Whistler, with an oath of consternation, jumped backward. The next moment, he had whirled his gad and brought it down on the lantern. A crash followed, and Stygian blackness shrouded the spot. A sound of running feet, fading away in the timber, came to the boys' ears.

"Never mind Whistler, Dick," said Matt; "let's look after the woman."

CHAPTER II.

YAMOUSA.

No sound had come from the woman since the two boys had reached the scene. Groping their way to her, they found that she had become unconscious and was drooping heavily in the cords that held her bound to the stump.

"Of all the things that ever happened to us, mate," remarked Dick, "this captures the prize. We get cast away on a little turtle back in the Bahamas, and Lat Jurgens and this old hunk, Whistler, come to the island in Nemo, Jr.'s submarine. We capture the pair and leave 'em roped in our tent; then we capture the submarine. Later we send ashore for Jurgens and Whistler and the landing party reports that they have vanished. Now, dropping down here in answer to a cry of distress, we find Whistler giving an old woman a taste of the cat. Whistler, of all men! I'm fair dazed with it all."^[A]

[A] For an account of the adventures of Motor Matt and his friends in helping Archibald Townsend, otherwise Captain Nemo, Jr., recover his stolen submarine from Jurgens and his rascally followers, see No. 12 of the *MOTOR STORIES*, "Motor Matt's Peril; or, Cast Away in the Bahamas."

"So am I," said Matt, "but we'll not let that bother us now. This old woman has been brutally treated, and has fainted away. We must get her to the hut and see what we can do to revive her."

"Right-o," agreed Dick. "I've my sheath knife handy and I'll cut her loose from that stump in a brace of shakes."

Matt held the limp form upright while Dick severed the cords; then, picking the woman up, they carried her through the woods, back to the clearing, and laid her on the ragged blankets in the hut.

"I think I saw a candle on the shelf over the fireplace, Dick," said Matt. "Better light it."

Dick found the candle. It was a tallow dip stuck in an old tin candlestick. With the light in his hand, he walked to the old woman's side and bent downward.

The face of the woman was scarred and hideous. There were big gold earrings pulling down the lobes of her ears, and another large ring pierced her nose and fell down over her upper lip. Her cheeks were hollow, and the yellow skin resembled parchment. Her clothing was a motley garb of patched rags. Two claw-like hands, with finger nails an inch long, lay on the blankets beside her.

Matt lifted his eyes to Dick's with a shudder.

"She's not what you'd call Cinderella, exactly," grinned Dick, "and I don't think her beauty will ever prove fatal."

"Anyhow," said Matt, "she's a woman and needs help. That's enough for us to know."

A tin water pail stood on a bench, and there was a gourd dipper hanging over it. Matt filled the gourd and returned and dashed the water in the old woman's face.

The effect was magical. With a screech that caused the boys to start backward in consternation, the old woman sat up suddenly and glared about her, with eyes like coals. Abruptly her attention fixed itself on the boys and she began to croon in a harsh, mumbling voice:

"Si to te 'tit zozo
Et moi-meme mo te fusil
Mo sre tchoue toi—*Boum!*"

She exploded the last word like the crack of a revolver, lifting and aiming her fingers as she might have done with a weapon.

"Avast, there, old lady!" cried Dick. "We're friends of yours. Can't you understand that?"

"American?" shrilled the woman, rising slowly to her feet.

"Yes," said Matt.

"Where is ze man zat take me from my home and beat me wiz ze stick?" she demanded, crouching like a cat, while her talon-like hands clawed the air angrily.

"He ran away," answered Matt. "We cut you loose from the stump and brought you here. Do you know that man?"

The old woman staggered to the fireplace and stirred up the coals under the kettle; then she turned back, took the candle out of Dick's hand and studied his face. From Dick she turned to Matt, giving him a similar scrutiny.

Her eyes were bright and fiery—age had not seemed to dim them. As she turned from Matt, the hag gave a croaking laugh.

"I guess we'd better send the 'blue peter' to the masthead, old ship," said Dick, "trip anchor and slant away. This don't look like a comfortable berth, to me."

"You not go 'way yet," cried the woman, whirling about. "You are ze good boys, you help Yamousa, ze Obeah woman, and by gar, Yamousa help you! Sit on ze bench." [Pg 4]

She waved one hand toward the bench on which the water pail was standing. Dick, heeding a significant look from Matt, followed to the bench and sat down.

"Do you know that man who was beating you?" asked Matt, again, determined if possible to get a little information about Whistler.

"*Oui*, I know heem!" answered the woman, with a spitting snarl. "One time he work on ze sugar plantation near ze bayou, and he come many time to see Yamousa and have her tell him ze t'ings he do not know. He come now from ze Bahamas and ask about ze iron chest, and where zis Townsend take heem. But Yamousa, she no tell. For why Yamousa no tell, eh? Well, she see zat Whistler haf ze bad heart. Whistler try to beat her, *make* her tell; zen ze American boys come and drive heem away. How you get here, eh?"

"We came in an air ship," Matt answered.

"*Sacre tonnere!* I know zat you come—I seen him in ze smoke."

Yamousa had said things which had aroused the intense curiosity of the two boys. Whistler had tried to force her into telling him the whereabouts of an "iron chest." That iron chest had been found in a sea cavern of an uninhabited island among the Bahamas, had been taken aboard Townsend's submarine, and had been in the submarine when Matt and his chums turned the boat over to her owner on the Florida coast. Townsend had taken the chest to New Orleans, and Jurgens and Whistler were eager to recover it.

What the chest contained, no one knew. A man who called himself simply the "Man from Cape Town" had given Townsend a chart and secured his promise to find the chest, carry it to New Orleans, and open it in the presence of a woman whom the Cape Town man claimed was his daughter. These two were then to divide the contents between them.

The fact that Whistler, and presumably Jurgens, as well, still had designs on the chest, was surprising information for Matt and Dick. The three boys were proceeding to New Orleans in the *Hawk*, in response to a request from Townsend; and it might easily chance that the business which had led Townsend to call Motor Matt and his friends to New Orleans was to cross the evil designs of Jurgens and Whistler.

"Do you know anything about that iron chest, Yamousa?" inquired Matt.

"Not now, but I find heem out," replied the old woman. "By gar, I find out anyt'ing zat ees wanted to be known."

"You say you knew that we were coming?"

"*Oui*."

"I can't understand how you discovered that. We didn't know ourselves we were coming until we got a telegram at Palm Beach, Florida, yesterday."

"I tell by ze smoke," repeated the woman; "I read heem in ze smoke."

"What sort of a place is this, anyhow?" muttered Dick to Matt uncomfortably. "Is the old lady a fortune teller? I never took much stock in that sort of thing, you know."

"Yamousa ees ze Obeah woman," chirped the hag, her ears having evidently been sharp enough to overhear what Dick had said: "I am ze voodoo queen. I know t'ings ozzers don't know, an' ze people come from ever'where to see Yamousa—from New Orleans, *oui*, and from Algiers, Plaquemine, St. Bernard—all up and down ze river an' ze coast—zey all come to haf Yamousa tell zem t'ings zat zey don't know. I tell you ze same. You are my franes—*mes amis*—an', I do planty mooch for you. Where is ze ozzer of you? In ze smoke I see t'ree, all in ze flying boat zat come to Bayou Yamousa."

"She means Carl," muttered Dick, "and how the old Harry she knew anything about him is a fair dazer."

"In ze smoke I see heem," replied the hag, again catching Dick's words.

"I think I'm beginning to see through this a little, Dick," said Matt. "In some way, Jurgens and Whistler got off that island in the Bahamas and——"

"Zey hide in a cave till you go 'way," broke in Yamousa, "an' zen zey come out an' bymby ze boat come from ze Great Bahama an' pick zem off. *Oui, hé*, zey ees bot' ver' bad an' haf ze bad heart."

"How did you find that out, Yamousa?" asked Matt.

"Not in ze smoke, not zat, *non*. Whistler tell me."

Yamousa's knowledge, which, for the most part, seemed to be derived from unusual sources, filled Matt and Dick with growing bewilderment.

"Sink me," muttered Dick, "but my nerves are beginning to bother me. Go on, though, matey. What about Whistler?"

"Why, he's still after the iron chest, he and Jurgens. They got away from that turtle back in the Bahamas, landed in this vicinity, and Whistler came here to get this voodoo priestess to tell him where he could locate the chest."

"All my eye and Betty Martin, that! Just as though Yamousa could tell him!"

"Anyhow, Whistler must have thought so or he wouldn't be here. We saw and heard enough to convince us that what Yamousa said about his designs was true. We got here in time to drive him off and——"

Just there occurred a startling interruption. A frantic yell came from the clearing—a yell that was plainly given by Carl.

"More trouble!" boomed Dick, leaping from the bench, "and it's Carl that's flying distress signals now."

Matt did not reply, but he led the way to the door and through it into the dying glow of the fire on the bayou bank.

CHAPTER III.

THE ATTACK ON THE CAR.

Carl was having a fight. Matt and Dick were able to discover that much as they rushed from the house. And the fight was against hopeless odds, for at least a dozen men could be seen in the faint glow of the fire. They were pressing around the car, and Carl, standing in Matt's chair, was laying about him with a long-handled wrench, keeping the attacking force temporarily at bay.

"Keelhaul me!" cried Ferral, as he raced after Motor Matt. "What does that gang mean by making a dead-set at the *Hawk*? They're negroes, the lot of them!"

"There's one white man, Dick!" answered Matt. "Whistler is there. He must have recognized us in the woods and he's setting the negroes on to smash the air ship, or else capture it." [Pg 5]

"The confounded swab! He'll not find it so easy, I warrant you."

Whistler, leaving the negroes to get the better of Carl, was working at one of the mooring ropes. This made it look as though he was trying to steal the air ship rather than to destroy it.

Carl, sweeping his makeshift weapon in a fierce circle about him and now and then bowling over a negro who came too close, caught sight of his two chums hustling for the scene.

"Hoop-a-la!" Carl bellowed. "Here comes my bards, und now you fellers vas going to ged more as you t'ought. Dere vill be doings now, und don'd forged dot! Slide indo der scrimmage, Matt, you und Tick! It vas going to be some hot vones, I dell you dose."

Just then the wrench hit a negro and knocked him off his feet.

"Dot vas me," yelped Carl, "und I gif you some sambles oof vat you vas to oxford! I peen der olt Missouri Rifer, py shinks, und ven I shvell my banks den it vas dime peoples took to der hills! I vas der orichinal Pengal diger, fresh from der chungle und looking to gopple oop vatefer geds in my vay! Ach, vat a habbiness! Sooch a pooty fightd vat it iss!"

It was perhaps a sad thing, yet nevertheless true, that Carl Pretzel loved a fist fight better than he loved a square meal; and that was saying a good deal—for Carl.

While he was fighting it was his custom to waste a good deal of valuable breath boasting about his own prowess and taunting his foes. Just now he was the old Missouri River and the original Bengal tiger, both rolled into one. But he had hardly finished introducing himself to the negroes before one of them hit him with a stone. The wrench dropped from Carl's hand and he turned a back somersault over the rail of the car. Before he could get up, half a dozen husky negroes had piled on top of him and he was helpless and unable to make a move.

Matt and Dick, bearing down with all speed upon Whistler, saw their chum as he tumbled out of the car. They could not do anything for Carl at that moment, however, as Whistler had straightened erect and flung a hand to his hip.

The boys knew what that motion meant. Whistler was a desperate man, and as quick to use a revolver, when he had one, as he was to use his fists when he hadn't.

"Land on him—before he can shoot!"

As Dick yelled the words, Matt cleared the distance separating him from Whistler with a wild leap. His body struck Whistler's squarely, and with a terrific impact. Both went down and rolled over and over on the ground.

The revolver, which Whistler had just drawn from his pocket, fell from his hand. Dick saw it and was less than a second in grabbing it up.

"We've drawn Whistler's fangs, mate," he shouted to Matt, who had regained his feet. "He'll not trouble us, and this piece of cold steel will give the negroes something to think about. Break away, there!" and Dick, flourishing the weapon, jumped for the crowd that had laid hold of Carl.

The negroes, from what Matt could see of them, appeared to be laborers from some neighboring plantation. Nearly all of them were big and powerful, but ran to brute strength rather than to science.

The attack on the car, there was no doubt, had been engineered by Whistler. He recognized in Matt and his friends a source of peril, and by capturing the *Hawk* and injuring one or more of the boys, he would be able to reduce the peril to a minimum.

It had been strange, indeed, that the boys should have encountered their old enemy there on the bank of that Louisiana bayou. But Whistler, either acting for himself or in conjunction with Jurgens, was scheming to regain possession of the iron chest. Inasmuch as the chest was presumably still in the hands of Townsend, the man whom Matt and his friends were going to New Orleans to meet, there was a reason for Whistler and the boys being in that part of the country at the same time. So their meeting was not such a remarkable coincidence, after all.

The sight of the revolver threw the blacks into a panic. Those who had captured Carl sprang away from him and retreated warily toward the edge of the timber. At the same time, the others began to draw back from the car.

"Go for 'em, you cowards!" yelled Whistler, scrambling to his feet. "You're getting a dollar apiece, all around, for this, but by thunder you've got to earn it."

"Keep away from this air ship," shouted Matt sternly, posting himself near the end of the car. "The man who lays a hand on the *Hawk* does so at his own peril."

"Never mind him!" bawled Whistler, "Sail into 'em with stones if you can't do any better."

Stones could be used at fairly long range, and the negroes, screened by the shadows of the timber, began at once to act upon Whistler's suggestion. Missiles, large and small, began raining down upon the boys, banging against the car, slapping into the silken envelope of the gas bag, and menacing the motor. Something would have to be done, and quickly, or disaster would overtake the *Hawk*.

"Stay with the *Hawk*, Carl!" shouted Matt. "This way, Dick! We've got to scatter those fellows into the timber or they'll put a hole in the gas bag or do some damage to the motor."

As he spoke, Matt flung away in the direction of the timber line. With a whoop, Dick followed him. Before Matt had got half way to the timber, he was struck in the shoulder and knocked down. Half stunned, and with his whole right side feeling as though it was paralyzed, he rose to his knees.

Dick had fared little better. A rock, thrown by one of the black men, had hit the revolver he was carrying and knocked it from his hand. The weapon flew off somewhere in the darkness, and while the stones continued to hail through the air, Dick went down on all fours and tried to locate the six-shooter.

"Now you've got 'em!" came the voice of Whistler. "They've lost the gun and are all but done for. Rush 'em!"

The negroes, considering that they were only receiving a dollar each for helping Whistler, were putting a lot of vim and ginger into the one-sided combat.

Giving vent to exultant yells, they rushed from the timber and, in a few minutes more, would have overwhelmed Matt and his friends by sheer force of numbers. But the unexpected happened.

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From the door of the hut came old Yamousa, her tattered garments flying about her as she ran. Over her head she held a gleaming white skull—either of a cat or a dog—and the picture she made, gliding through the firelight, was enough to awe the fiercest of the superstitious blacks.

"Stop!" she screeched. "Zis ees somet'ing I will not have. Zese boys are my franes—*mes amis*—an' I will not haf zem hurt. You hear? T'row one more stone an' Yamousa puts *obi* on ze lot of you, ev'ry las' one. How do you like zat, you niggers? How you like ze evil eye on you?"

Instantly the headlong rush of the blacks was stopped. Halting in trepidation, they drew together, hands drooping at their sides and every ounce of hostility oozing out at their finger tips.

The boys were amazed at the old woman's power. Under the spell of their superstition, the negroes were held as by iron chains.

"Don't let the old hag fool you!" shouted Whistler. "She can't hurt you as much as those white boys can if you leave 'em alone. They came out of the sky in their bird ship, and if you don't capture them they'll put something worse than the evil eye upon you. Never mind Yamousa!"

A murmuring went up from the blacks and they began to move undecidedly.

Hissing like an enraged wild cat, Yamousa flung herself forward and laid the skull she was carrying in the forward end of the car, just where the firelight would show it to the eyes of the black men.

"Ze white man talk," she screamed, tossing her arms, "an' what he say ees nozzing. You know what Yamousa can do—how she can spoil ze luck an' bring ze long sickness. Zis air ship ees under ze protection of Obboney. Touch heem if you dare! An' zeese white boys are my franes—hurt zem an' you hurt me. Shall I put ze spell on you? Spik!"

Lifting herself to her full height, Yamousa raised her skinny arms and waved her talon-like hands. A yell of fear went up from the blacks. To a man they fell on their knees, imploring the Obeah woman not to work any evil spells.

Whistler raged and fumed, but all to no purpose. The negroes were completely dominated by Yamousa and would not listen to him.

"Zis white man who gif you ze dollar apiece to do zis what you try," went on Yamousa, "come to Yamousa's place zis night, drag her to ze stump in ze wood, tie her zere an' beat her wiz ze stick ___"

Roars of consternation went up from the blacks.

"Zese white boys save Yamousa," the hag went on, "an' now you come an' try to keel zem an' take zeir bird ship! *Sacre tonnere!* Me, I put *obi* on zat white man wiz ze black heart! You catch heem, bring heem to me, give heem blow for blow zat he struck Yamousa, an' I gif you each ze lucky charm. Zat ees better zan a dollar each, eh?"

By then the blacks were completely under Yamousa's influence. As she finished, they sprang up and made a rush for Whistler. That worthy, understanding well how cleverly he had been worsted, took to his heels and fled into the timber, the blacks whooping and yelling, and pushing him hard.

"You all right now," said Yamousa, turning to the boys with a cackling laugh. "Come back in ze house while I show you somet'ing in ze smoke."

"I don'd vant to shtay py der *Hawk* mit dot t'ing!" whooped Carl, pointing to the white skull. "My nerfs iss vorse as dey vas, a heap! Don'd leaf me alone, bards!"

"You go on with Matt, Carl," said Dick, "and I'll stay and watch the air ship. I guess there's not much danger now, anyhow. Yamousa has got the negroes under her thumb in handsome style, and Whistler will have his hands so full looking after himself that he won't be able to try any games with the air ship."

Carl was not in love with the idea of going into the house; still, he liked it better than staying out in the open all by himself. A supernatural twist had been given to the course of events and Carl was anything but easy in his mind. When Matt followed Yamousa back toward the hut, Carl took hold of his arm and kept close beside him.

CHAPTER IV.

SMOKE PICTURES.

"Sit on ze bench," said Yamousa, when they were all in the house again, pointing to the bench where Matt and Dick had rested themselves a little while before.

Carl made it a point to keep a grip on Matt, and he walked with him to the bench and snuggled up close to his side when they sat down. The Dutch boy's eyes were almost popping from his head. The queer assortment of odds and ends with which the roof and walls were decorated cast over him a baneful spell, and he was beginning to wish that he had stayed with the car.

Yamousa hobbled back and forth, getting together materials for the work she had in prospect. First, she took an earthen jar from one corner of the room and set it down in front of the boys. As she moved across the floor with the jar she sang the Creole song which Matt had already heard, finishing by aiming her finger at Carl and shrieking out the final "*boum!*"

Carl gave a howl of consternation, his feet went into the air, and he would have tumbled from the bench if Matt had not held him.

"Donnervetter!" gasped Carl huskily. "I dradder be some odder place as here. Vat's der madder mit der olt laty? She gifs me some cholts."

"Don't be afraid," whispered Matt. "She has proved herself a friend of ours."

"Yah, meppy, aber I don'd vant her to boint her finger ad me like dot some more."

Yamousa got a small box from a cupboard and emptied a brownish powder out of it into the jar; then, with a pair of tongs, she removed a live coal from the fireplace and dropped it into the jar with the powder.

A wisp of smoke floated upward, accompanied by a sizzling noise. The noise increased until it resembled the buzzing of a swarm of bees, and the smoke spread out until it filled all that part of the room, growing denser every moment.

In and out through the vapor, stumbling around the jar in a sort of dance, moved Yamousa, tossing her arms and crooning a chant.

"Di tems Missié d'Artaguette,
Hé! Ho! Hé!
C'était, c'était bon tems,
Yé té ménin monde a la baguette,
Hé! Ho! Hé!"

The boys stared breathlessly. Yamousa's candle was on the other side of the room, glowing like a coal through the vapor.

Suddenly figures began to take shape in the smoke, the filmy fog thickening in places and decreasing in others as though some invisible hand was moulding the black haze into a scene *en silhouette*.

By degrees the picture perfected itself until, at last, it lay clearly before the boys.

They saw a broad river on which a small boat was floating. There was no one in the boat, but on the stern thwart, in plain view and unmistakable, was Townsend's iron chest.

The boat and the chest heaved and rolled on the waves, and the oars in the oarlocks played up and down on the surface of the water.

Then, as the two boys watched, scarcely breathing, so great was their interest and excitement, a vague shape came gliding over the river out of the distance. Presently the shape resolved itself into the form of the air ship. The *Hawk* glided low and halted hoveringly over the boat.

There were three passengers in the air ship's car, and Matt and Carl had no difficulty in recognizing themselves and Ferral. A rope was thrown downward by Ferral, and Matt could be seen climbing over the rail and descending the rope.

On reaching the boat, Matt made the rope secure to the iron handles of the chest and Carl and Dick laid back on the rope and drew the chest upward.

The moving picture had proceeded thus far when Carl, overcome by the uncanny nature of the whole proceeding, lifted a hair-raising yell, hurled himself from the seat, and bolted for the door.

The frenzied shout seemed to destroy the spell. The smoke billowed shapelessly into a blank fog, and Matt darted from the house after Carl.

Dick, startled by the Dutch boy's shout, had run toward the cabin, meeting Carl a few yards from the air ship.

"Der olt laty vas der teufel," Carl was excitedly explaining to Dick. "She makes moofing bictures, py shinks, oudt oof nodding but shmoke. Ve see der air ship, und meinseluf, und you, und Modor Matt, und ve vas doing some t'ings vat I don'd know und vat ain'd peen done, yah, so helup me. Led's ged away from here, mitoudt losing some more time."

Carl was in a nervous condition, and while he talked he jumped up and down and flourished his arms. When he was through, he made a bolt for the *Hawk*, but Matt was close enough to catch hold of him.

"Don't get excited, Carl," said Matt. "Calm yourself down."

"How I vas going to do dot," exploded Carl, "ven I see der hocus-pocus dot olt laty make mit us? Himmelblitzen! She iss some relations mit der Olt Nick, und oof ve know ven ve vas vell off ve vill pull oudt oof here righdt away."

"Chuck it, Carl!" said Dick. "I guess there ain't anything going to hurt you. Give me a line on this, Matt. I can't overhaul Carl's talk and get much sense out of it."

Matt proceeded to describe what had taken place in the hut. Dick listened with wide eyes.

"Keelhaul me if I ever heard anything like that before!" he exclaimed, when Matt had finished. "It sounds like a yarn for the marines. You two must have been hypnotized and imagined you saw all that. Fakirs in India do stunts of that sort, but they only make people *think* they see such things; they don't really see them."

"I know ven I see somet'ing, you bed my life," fluttered Carl, "und I see der air ship, und you and Matt und meinseluf in der shmoke, und ve do t'ings schust so natural like life. It don'd vas some treams, I tell you dot. Oof—"

Carl was interrupted by a shrill cry from the hut door.

"Come once more an' see ze smoke picture! Come queek!"

"Nod me!" and Carl galloped on toward the air ship.

"We'd better go, Dick," said Matt.

"Do you think Carl will try to unmoor the *Hawk*?" returned Dick, with a hurried look in the direction Carl had gone.

"No, he won't do that."

Matt and Dick thereupon retraced their course to the hut. Yamousa had vanished from the door and the boys groped their way through the stifling, pungent vapor to the bench.

The smoke picture had already been formed and showed the interior of a room with stone walls.

On the floor of the room lay a man, bound hand and foot and, to all appearances, a prisoner. He had gray hair and mustache, and his features, although vague and indistinct, were easily recognized.

"Townsend!" whispered Matt.

"Aye!" returned Dick, "Townsend, as I live!"

The stone chamber faded into the front of a building, and along the front was a sign, the lettering of which could easily be read: "M. Crenelette, Antiques."

This second picture faded and Yamousa laid a piece of board over the top of the jar. Slowly the air cleared and the old woman stepped close to the bench, shaking her withered head until the gold rings in her ears and nose danced glimmeringly.

"You know ze man in ze stone room?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Matt, in a stifled voice.

"Ah, ha! Zat will be in New Orleans. Me, I live zere one time. Ze front of ze buildings you see has ze stone chamber in ze basement. Eet ees in Royal Street, on ze French side of Canal. You look an' you fin' ze sign, zen you get ze white-haired man away from ze enemies. Go 'way an' sleep; zen, in ze morning, I gif you breakfus, an' you go on to ze big city an' safe your frane. *Bo' soir, mes amis!* Sleep an' do not fear."

Without answer, Matt and Dick stumbled out of the house, full of wonder and bewilderment.

"Strike me lucky!" breathed Dick. "This is the first time anything like that ever crossed my hawse. The question is, is there anything in it, or is it all a fake?"

"I don't take much stock in wonder-workers like Yamousa," answered Matt, "because they usually prey upon the ignorant and the superstitious. I haven't the least notion how she make the pictures. That part of it is strange enough, and maybe, as you say, she only hypnotizes us and causes us to think we see something that isn't really in the smoke at all. But I don't see how those pictures can really mean anything, and I'm going to bunk down in the car and get some sleep."

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Matt tried to persuade himself that the smoke pictures of Yamousa were merely a trick, but somehow the idea that there *might* be something in them clung to his mind. Although his thoughts kept him unsettled and restless for a time, yet he finally fell asleep.

There was no sleep for Carl, however. He found the revolver that had been knocked out of Dick's hand by the flying stone. The mechanism had been damaged and the weapon was useless, but nevertheless Carl felt safer with it, and placed himself on guard.

Dick, like Matt, was able to get some rest, and the night passed uneventfully. It was only when morning dawned that anything of an unusual nature occurred.

A shout from Carl brought Matt and Dick to their feet. Carl had retreated until he was standing midway between the air ship and the edge of the clearing, his fearful eyes on Yamousa, who was crouching at the side of the car.

"Queek!" cried Yamousa, "hurry away. Your enemies come—I see zem in ze smoke—an' zey come close. Leesen!"

She held up one talon-like finger in token of silence. From somewhere, off in the timber, could be heard faint sounds as of some one approaching through the undergrowth.

In another moment the boys were actively at work casting off the ropes.

"Take zis," said Yamousa, handing Matt something wrapped in a piece of newspaper. "It will breeng you ze luck. You haf helped Yamousa, an' Yamousa she try to help you. But hurry; zere ees no time to lose."

Carl, gathering courage from the prospect of an early departure from that ill-omened spot, ran forward and helped Dick with the ropes.

Matt laid the small parcel Yamousa handed to him in the bottom of the car and immediately got the engine to going. The woman, meanwhile, with an apprehensive look over her shoulder, had started toward the timber.

As Dick and Carl leaped into the car, Yamousa gave a screech of warning and pointed toward the other side of the cleared space.

One look in that direction was enough for Matt. Half a dozen white men had hurried into sight. Whistler was in the lead.

"Let 'er go, matey!" yelled Dick. "They'll be on us in half a minute."

Matt, with a twist of a lever, threw the power into the machinery and the *Hawk* took the push and glided upward.

CHAPTER V.

A QUEER FIND.

Had the boys been a minute later in casting loose, there would certainly have been trouble—and

perhaps they would not have been able to get away at all.

Whistler, who was well in advance of the others, strained every nerve to reach the car, but the *Hawk* was well in the air before he reached the spot where it had been moored. Neither he, nor any of those with him, seemed to be armed. No shots were fired, and Whistler shook his fist upward and shouted maledictions.

"Py chimney," whooped Carl, "ve'll led him vistle some. He ought to be good at dot."

Swiftly the clearing vanished behind the *Hawk*, and the tops of the trees soon hid it entirely.

Carl drew a long breath.

"I vas nefer so habby ofer anyt'ing as I vas to ged away from dot blace," he averred. "Der olt voman vas pad medicine, und ve vas lucky dot ve vas able to ged away ad all."

"Avast there, matey!" answered Dick. "Yamoussa tried to be a friend of ours."

"I don'd like friendts vat iss so spookish," went on Carl, kicking the cat's skull off the front of the car and watching it tumble into the green tree tops below. "Dere iss all kindts oof drouples come oof sooch pitzness."

"She said she looked into the smoke and saw Whistler and those other fellows coming," muttered Dick.

"Meppy she dit, und meppy she saw dem, or heard dem."

"If she saw Whistler and his outfit in a smoke picture," went on Dick, "and then came to warn us, it not only proves that she means well, but that there's something in that smoke business."

Matt smiled a little.

"We'd better forget all that happened last night, pards," said he. "We can't make head or tail out of it, anyhow, and I don't believe in worrying over things you can't understand. We helped Yamoussa; and Yamoussa, in her own way, has tried to befriend us. Suppose we let it go at that and sponge out the occult part of it? The biggest, and possibly the most amazing discovery we made, was that Whistler got clear of the Bahamas and seems to have got this far on the trail of the iron chest. If Whistler is on the trail, no doubt Lat Jurgens is, also. Perhaps Townsend knew about this when he telegraphed us to come to New Orleans."

"I hope nothing has happened to Townsend," murmured Dick, his mind reverting to the smoke picture he had seen.

"There you go again," laughed Matt. "You're still thinking of what Yamoussa showed us, and imagining there may be something in it. Cut it out, Dick. If there's anything in the picture we'll know it before long. Dip into the ration bag and get out some breakfast—I'm nearly starved."

While Dick held to the post of lookout, Carl drew on the food supply and all hands ate a cold breakfast.

After the meal the boys passed an hour discussing Jurgens and Whistler, their designs on the iron chest, and the way they had probably escaped from the sand key in the Bahamas. For the most part, the discussion led nowhere. The boys could make guesses, but unless they were to put their faith in what Yamoussa told them, their talk could bring them to nothing definite.

The conversation was interrupted by Dick.

"Mississippi, ho!" he cried. "The river's dead ahead, mates, and hard under our forefoot."

"Good!" exclaimed Matt. "We'll follow the river to New Orleans."

"Where we going to keep der air ship when we reach der city?" inquired Carl.

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This was always a conundrum to the boys. The *Hawk* was so big and unwieldy, and withal so easily damaged, that to stow it away where it would be safe from wind and storm was a difficult problem.

"We might anchor the *Hawk* on some scow in the river," suggested Dick, "and then put the canvas cover over her. If we find we're going to stay in New Orleans long, it might pay to build a roof over the scow."

"That would cost too much," objected Matt. "It would take a mighty high roof to clear the top of the gas bag, and a mighty big one to cover it. Why not berth her on one of the docks? The docks are high, they're roofed, and there's always a watchman in charge."

"Right-o!" said Dick. "You've tagged on to the right rope, old ship. We'll use the docks. Stuyvesant Dock will about suit us. I was in this port once on the old *Billy Ruffin*. We coaled over in Algiers, and some of us had shore leaves. A great town, that, and—"

Carl, who had been leaning over the rail, went limp and white all of a sudden and looked around with staring eyes.

"What's the matter with you, mate?" demanded Dick, startled by the Dutch boy's manner. "Sick?"

"N-o-o," gurgled Carl, "I vas vat you call flappergasted—so astoundet mit vat I see dot I can't shpeak. Look ofer der site, und see vat you see py der rifer. Ach, du lieber! I don'd know vat to t'ink."

Matt had already swerved the *Hawk* into an upstream course. The murky waters of the Mississippi lay no more than a hundred feet below, and the light, variable winds were helping rather than retarding the air ship.

Matt and Dick both cast downward looks over the guard rail, and what they saw caused them to straighten erect and stare at each other in amazement. For a moment or two, neither could speak.

Ahead of them drifting downstream with the current was a skiff. Although there were oars over the skiff's sides, trailing in the water, the boat was empty.

In the stern sheets, however, was the iron chest!

The boys had seen that particular iron chest so many times that they were perfectly familiar with its appearance.

During the interval that passed while the lads were staring at each other, before the mental eyes of all of them floated that smoke picture seen the evening before in Yamousa's hut.

"Der olt Nick has somet'ing to do mit dot," muttered Carl, drawing one hand over his puzzled eyes.

"It's the queerest find I ever heard of!" stuttered Dick. "From the way you described that first smoke picture to me, Matt, this event is fitting into it in a way that takes my breath."

"It—it might be a coincidence," mumbled Matt, hardly knowing what to believe, now that he was face to face with such a reality.

"Coincidence nothing!" averred Dick bluntly. "Yamousa has powers we never dreamed of. She may be a clairvoyant, or something like that."

"I never took much stock in clairvoyants," demurred Matt.

"Well, anyhow, there's the chest. In some manner it's got away from Townsend."

"Exactly," said Matt, throwing aside the uncanny feeling that had come over him. "No matter how we happened to make this queer find, nor how little we understand the manner in which we made it, our duty is clear. We've got to recover the chest, find Townsend, and turn it over to him."

"Stand by, then, to go aboard the skiff," called Dick. "Port your helm, Matt. I'll do the conning for you."

"Keep away!" shouted Carl. "Don'd go near dot poat und don'd fool mit dot safe. It's pad medicine! Eferyt'ing iss pad medicine vat has anyt'ing to do mit dot olt laty. Ach, blitzten, I vish ve hatn't seen dot poat!"

But Matt and Dick knew what their duty was and paid little heed to Carl's protests.

Guided by Dick, Matt brought the *Hawk* within a dozen feet of the boat, cut off the power, and the air ship hovered in the air, motionless save for the slight influence of the wind. Dick tossed a rope over the side. Matt, leaving his seat among the levers, prepared to get over the rail and lower himself into the boat.

"Hadn't I better go, matey?" queried Dick. "I'm used to sliding up and down ropes and backstays."

"You and Carl stay here and make ready to hoist the safe aboard," replied Matt. "I'm a pretty fair hand at rope climbing."

Probably none of the boys thought, at that moment, how closely they were copying the smoke pictures shown Matt and Carl by Yamousa. That smoke scene seemed to have depicted the event with the sureness of fate.

Matt dropped over the side quickly, in order to get into the boat before the *Hawk* should drift away from it. He succeeded in carrying out his design and, still clinging to the rope, stepped from the gunwale of the skiff to one of the midship thwarts and then into the stern.

There was nothing in the boat to show who the occupant had been. A bailing tin lay in the bottom, but there was absolutely nothing else in the skiff apart from the iron chest.

"Work quickly, old ship!" Ferral called down. "The wind is freshening and we'll be blown away from you if you don't hustle."

Swiftly, Motor Matt secured the end of the rope to one of the iron handles.

"Haul away," said he, stepping back.

Carl and Dick seized the rope and began to pull. The chest rose slowly into the air; and then, when it was lifted about half way, one of the sudden gusts of wind which the *Hawk* had been encountering all along the Gulf coast struck the air ship, and she leaped sideways nearly to the shore of the river.

Carl and Dick secured the rope frantically. While the chest continued to swing below the car, Dick jumped into the levers and got the propeller going. This gave him a better command of the air ship and he attempted to manoeuvre the craft back and into Matt's vicinity.

Again and again he tried, but, as the wind was now high and shifting quickly from one quarter to another, no success attended his efforts.

"Take the chest aboard," Matt cried, standing up in the skiff and making a trumpet of his hands, "and go on to town. Berth the *Hawk* on one of the docks, if you can, and, if you can't, make a landing farther inland. I'll follow you."

There was nothing else to be done, and Matt watched the *Hawk* bear away up the river, Dick at the motor and Carl heaving in the chest by slow degrees.

FOUL PLAY.

Matt was greatly worried over the way that experience with the boat and the chest had worked out. Dick knew enough about handling the air ship to be able to look after her in ordinary weather, but those shifting air currents had bothered even Matt. It was so easy for some little thing to go wrong and either wreck or cause irreparable damage to an air ship. In that respect, an air ship was totally unlike any other craft.

But there had been no other way out of the dilemma and Matt, facing the situation with all the grace he could muster, dropped on the midship thwart, seized the oars, and headed the skiff upstream.

Fortune favored him a little, for a lugger from the oyster beds came lurching up the river, all sails set and bound for the landing. Matt hailed the lugger and the oysterman took him aboard.

He said nothing to the lugger's crew as to how he had happened to be in the skiff. Had he done that, one explanation would have led to another and it would have been necessary to speak of the iron chest—a subject which it was well enough to keep in the background.

When the lugger tied up at the landing, Matt left the skiff with her crew and went ashore. His object now was to find Carl, Dick, and the *Hawk*, and he made his way along the river front in the direction of Canal Street. He could see nothing of the *Hawk* in the air, but along the wharves he encountered several groups of roustabouts who were talking excitedly about the "flying machine" that had recently passed over the town.

By making inquiries, he learned that the *Hawk* had settled earthward in the vicinity of the Stuyvesant Docks. Instructions were given him as to the best way for finding the docks, and he hurried on.

Fully three hours had passed since the chest had been recovered and the *Hawk* and Matt had parted company. A good many things could happen in three hours, and Matt continued to feel worried.

As he was passing the Morgan Line Docks he saw Dick bearing down on him. The look of elation in Dick's face was indirect evidence that all was right with the *Hawk*.

"Hooray!" shouted the Canadian. "You were so long turning up, matey, that I was afraid something had happened to you. I hope we won't ever again part company like we did down there on the river. Confound this Louisiana wind, anyhow! It never blows twice from the same direction, seems like. You didn't row all the way to town against the current?"

"If I had, Dick," answered Matt, "I couldn't have got here before night. A lugger picked me up. Where's the *Hawk*?"

"Safely berthed on the big dock. I gave the dock watchman a five-dollar note to look after her and keep curious people away. We've stretched a rope around the air ship and no one can get within a dozen feet of her. She's as snug as possible, and there couldn't be a better place for her. Why, the dock's better than that old balloon house in South Chicago!"

"Where's Carl?"

"He went away with Bangs, and——"

"Bangs? Who's Bangs?"

"Why, he introduced himself to Carl and me as soon as we got the *Hawk* moored. He's a friend of Townsend's and has been hanging out on the levee looking for us ever since Townsend sent that telegram asking us to come. He was there by Townsend's orders, and was to tell us where to berth the *Hawk* and where to go our selves."

"I should think Townsend would have been there to meet us," observed Matt.

"Oh, that's all right—Bangs explained that point. Townsend is full of business, these days, and asked Bangs as a favor to watch for us."

"What did you do with the iron chest?"

"Bangs and Carl took it away in an express wagon. As soon as Carl delivers the chest to Townsend, he's coming back to the docks. I told him that, by that time, you'd probably be there, and that we could all go up to see Townsend. Bangs said that Carl would surely get back to the docks by noon."

As Dick finished speaking, the noon whistles took up their clamor.

"Did Bangs identify himself in any way?" asked Matt.

"Why, no," answered Dick, puzzled. "It was identification enough, I thought, to have him meet us, tell us all about Townsend, and say Townsend had sent him to watch for us."

"That might be a yarn, Dick, with not a particle of truth in it."

"But he was on the levee——"

"Everybody up and down the river front could see the *Hawk*, so you were known to be coming.

Well, maybe everything is all right. Carl went with Bangs and the chest, anyhow. He'll see that the chest is properly delivered."

"Bangs insisted on either Carl or me going with him to see Townsend," pursued Dick, "and that gives the whole business a straight look. If there was anything crooked about Bangs he wouldn't have wanted any one to go with the chest, see?"

Dick was so honest himself that he was rarely looking for treachery in others. Matt made no response to what he had just said, but turned the subject, as they walked together in the direction of the Stuyvesant Docks.

"Did you have any trouble making a landing, Dick?" he asked.

"There was a big freight boat alongside the docks and she blanketed us against the wind. If it hadn't been for the freighter, Carl and I might have had more than we could attend to. We just grazed the steamer's stacks, ducked under the dock roof, and rounded to as neat as you please. We were lucky rather than skillful, you see, for it would have been an easy matter to smash the *Hawk* into smithereens."

The boys continued on along the levee, and on every hand the queer craft that had dropped out of the sky was the topic of conversation. Not many people were allowed on the dock where the *Hawk* was moored, but there were a few curious ones clustered around the guard rope and surveying the craft.

Carl Pretzel, however, was not in evidence.

"He's probably been delayed," suggested Dick. "We'll just hang around and wait for him."

While they were waiting, the watchman came up to them.

"It's none o' my business," said he, "and I reckon you'll think I haven't any call buttin' in, but that feller that drove away with your friend, in the express wagon, hasn't got a very good character in this town."

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"Is that straight?" queried Dick.

"Straight as a plumb-line. He's as crooked as a dog's hind leg. Proctor used to run a boat on the river, but he took to drinkin' an' turned 'shady,' an' now he's not much better than a loafer. I'd have told you before, only I supposed you knew what you was doin' an' that you wouldn't thank me to interfere. I heard Proctor say, though, that your friend would sure be back here by noon. Well, it's noon, an' he ain't here. That's why I'm talkin' now."

"Proctor?" cried Dick. "Why, he said his name was Bangs."

"He's been known to change his name before now, so I ain't surprised at that. But his real name is Proctor."

The watchman went on about his business, and Matt and Dick withdrew by themselves in no very easy frame of mind.

"Dowse me!" growled Dick. "Can't Carl and I be away from you for a few hours, old ship, without making fools of ourselves? But Bangs told such a straight yarn——"

"If a trap was laid, Dick," interposed Matt, "it was a clever one and I don't see how you could avoid dropping into it. It's a pretty safe guess, I think, that there has been foul play. This fellow Proctor, or Bangs, wanted the iron chest and laid his plans to get it."

"But how could he lay his plans?" muttered Dick. "Sink me if I can understand that part of it. First off, he couldn't have known we had the iron chest, seeing that we fished it out of that skiff so recently."

Matt listened thoughtfully. He was trying to figure the matter out in his own mind, but it was a difficult problem.

"Then, again," continued Dick, "Bangs was here watching for us. If he wasn't a friend of Townsend's how could he have known we were coming?"

"From what we knew of Archibald Townsend," answered Matt, "we can bank on his being honest and square. If that's the case, he'd hardly have a friend like Bangs, would he? And certainly, if he knew Bangs, he'd hardly trust him to meet us, as Bangs told you he had done."

"I'm a swab," growled Dick, with profound self-reproach, "and Carl's a swab. We've dropped into a tangle of foul play, and it don't make it any brighter because we can't understand where Bangs got the information that enabled him to carry out his plot. I had an idea that I wouldn't let Bangs touch that iron chest until you got here, but he told such a straight story that I was argued out of my original intention. Oh, keelhaul me!"

Dick fumbled in his pocket for a handkerchief. When he drew it out, a bit of crumpled newspaper came with it.

"Ah," muttered Dick, picking up the bit of paper, "maybe Carl will have some luck. He unwrapped that little parcel Yamousa gave you as we were leaving the bayou. What do you think we found in it?"

"A rabbit's foot?"

"No, a dried frog! Carl, before he started away in the express wagon, put the frog in his pocket. He said he'd try it out before he turned it over to you. If we're right in thinking that Bangs is playing a treacherous game, then Carl will have plenty of chance to find out what the charm is

good for."

"We've got to be doing something, Dick," said Matt. "We can't hang around and wait for the dried frog to help Carl."

"We might slant away and look up that expressman," returned Dick. "He could probably tell us where he took Carl, and Bangs, and the box."

"A good tip!" exclaimed Matt. "We'll go on a still hunt for the expressman."

After reassuring himself that the *Hawk* would be safely looked after by the watchman, Matt and Dick left the docks and began hunting for the man who had been hired by Bangs to take the iron chest into the town.

CHAPTER VII.

DRIED FROGS—AND LUCK.

Mr. Bangs had a very dark complexion, black hair, black eyes, and a rosy black mustache. His face had a puffed, unhealthy look—probably due to dissipation—and his walk was a sort of slumping process which proved, beyond the power of words, that he was dead to ambition and lost to hope. In the worst sense of the term, he had ceased to live for himself and was living for others—a mere tool for the unscrupulous whenever there was a dollar to be turned.

And yet there was something very plausible about Bangs. He had an engaging way with him, whenever he desired to put it forward, and he used it to the limit when accosting Dick and Carl on the docks.

Carl, no less than Dick, believed firmly that everything was all right, and that Bangs was really the friend of Townsend and had been sent to the levee to watch for the air ship. It pleased the Dutch boy to think that he was to go with Bangs and the iron chest, and he was delighted with the dried frog amulet, which Matt had seemed to forget about since leaving the bayou.

Of course Carl believed in charms. Having a wholesome regard for Yamousa's powers, it was natural for him to have abundant faith in the dried frog. Stowing the relic away in his pocket, he mounted the express wagon with the utmost confidence, waved his hand to Dick, and then rolled away with Bangs, the expressman, and the iron chest.

Carl's "luck" began the moment the express wagon turned into Canal Street. The old, square stone flagging, in that part of town, was deeply worn. The front wheel of the wagon on Carl's side plunged into a rut, and Carl fell forward on the backs of the mules and then rolled down under their heels.

The hind heels of a mule are dangerous objects to tamper with, and in less than half a second the expressman's team got very busy.

Carl distinctly remembered pitching over upon the backs of the mules, and he had a hazy recollection of slipping down inside the pole, but after that he drew a blank. When he opened his eyes and looked around, he was sitting up in the street, supported by Bangs. The expressman was picking up his hat, and a crowd was gathering.

"It was a right smart of a jolt," grinned one of the bystanders.

"Don't you-all know it's bad business t' tampah with the south end of a mu-el goin' no'th?" asked another.

"Vas it an eart'quake?" inquired Carl, mechanically taking his hat. "Der puildings vas shdill shdanding on der shtreet, und nodding vas dorn oop mooch, aber somet'ing must haf habbened."

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"You done drapped on de mu-els," said the colored proprietor of the express wagon. "Dey's gentle, an' dey'll eat oats off'n de back of a choo-choo engyne, but dey won't stan' fo' no meddlin' wid dey feet."

"Hurt?" inquired Bangs, helping Carl erect.

"Vell," answered Carl, feeling himself all over, "dere don'd vas any vone blace vere I feel der vorst, but dere iss a goneness all ofer me, oop und down und sideways. Oof I hat a gun," he finished, his temper rising, "I vould go on a mule hunt."

Carl slapped the dust from his clothes and climbed back into the wagon. Before he gripped the seat with both hands, he transferred the dried frog from the left-hand pocket of his coat to the right-hand pocket.

"Meppy I ditn't put it in der righdt blace," he thought.

The express wagon turned from Canal Street into Royal, and from Royal into St. Peter, halting before a dingy building, with iron balconies, not far from Congo Square.

A mulatto woman sat in the doorway of the building with a basket of pralines in front of her on the walk. Carl took one handle of the chest, and Bangs the other. The chest, being of iron, was heavy. Somebody had spilled a pitcher of milk on the sidewalk and Carl's foot slipped as he crossed the wet spot. His end of the chest dropped, barking one of his shins and landing on the toes of one of his feet.

Carl gave a yell of pain and toppled over, sitting down with a good deal of force in the basket of pralines. The praline vendor had been knitting, but she sprang up, when she saw the destruction the Dutch boy was causing to her stock in trade, and tried to make a pin cushion of him with her knitting needles.

Bangs rushed to the rescue, and Carl, after placating the woman with a silver dollar, once more picked up his end of the chest and limped after Bangs.

The doorway through which they passed led them into a narrow, ill-smelling corridor, open to the sky and filled with rubbish. Out of the rubbish grew a number of untrimmed and uncared-for oleander bushes.

"Now," remarked Bangs, not unkindly, "you can sit down here and rest. I'll have the creole gentleman who lives here help me up to Townsend's room with the chest; then I'll tell Townsend about you, and he'll come down and give you a hearty greeting."

"Mebby I pedder go mit der chest?" objected Carl.

A look of pained surprise crossed Bangs' face.

"You don't think for a moment, my dear friend," said he, "that I'm trying to deceive you? I merely wish to announce your coming to my friend Townsend so that he'll come down here personally and give you welcome."

"Ach, vell go aheadt," muttered Carl, dropping down on a box near a clump of oleanders and nursing his foot.

Bangs gave a whistle. The creole gentleman, barefooted and wearing a red flannel shirt and tattered trousers, appeared in the courtyard from nowhere in particular, and he and Bangs passed a few words in French. The creole gentleman grinned a little and laid hold of one of the iron handles. Bangs took the other, and they carried the iron chest up a stairway to a gallery on the second floor.

Carl watched the two mount the stairs and pass around the gallery to a door; then the door opened and the two men and the iron chest disappeared. The creole gentleman did not show himself again, and if he left the room into which he had gone with Bangs he must have passed out by some other way than the gallery.

The moment Carl was by himself, he changed the dried frog to the breast pocket of his coat.

"I don'd got him in der righdt blace for luck," thought Carl. "Meppy dot iss pedder. Oof I lif long enough to ged der frog vere he ought to be, I bed you I haf some goot fortunes."

While Carl leaned back, and waited, there came a shrill cry from behind another clump of oleanders:

"Get out of here! Get out! Get out! Sic him, Tige!"

Carl, fearing the onslaught of a dog, snatched up a piece of wood and jumped to the top of the box. No dog came.

"Don'd you set some dogs on me!" he called. "I got as mooch righdt here as anypody. I vas vaiding for Misder Downsent. Who you vas, anyhow?"

"You're the limit!" came the shrill words. "Go soak your head! Police! Police!"

As the last word rang through the courtyard, Carl's cap was jerked off his head from behind. With an angry shout, he whirled just in time to see the branches shaking as the thief got away.

"I'm der limid, am I?" he muttered, crashing through the bushes. "Want me to go soak my headt, hey? Vell, py chiminy, I show you somet'ing."

When Carl got through the bushes the thief had disappeared, but a wild, rollicking laugh came from behind the other thicket of oleanders. Running in that direction he came upon a yellow-crested parrot chained to a perch. The parrot seemed to be getting a good deal of fun out of the situation, for he was lifting himself up and down and chuckling fiendishly.

"Vy," gasped Carl, a slow grin working its way over his face, "it vas a barrot! Pooty Poll! Sooch a nice pird vat it iss! Vant some crackers? Say somet'ing, vonce, und—"

Just at that moment, something hit Carl on the back of the head. Whirling away from the parrot, he looked upward. A black monkey was clinging to the ironwork of the gallery overhead. In one paw the monkey held Carl's cap, and with the other paw he was fishing bits of plaster out of the wall and throwing them downward.

"Und dere iss a monkey, too!" exclaimed Carl. "It looks like I vas in a menacherie. Say, you monk, gif me dot hat!"

"Sic 'im, Tige!" shrilled the parrot. "Police! police!"

The monkey chattered and flaunted the cap defiantly, at the same time getting ready to throw another piece of plaster.

"Nice leedle monk!" wheedled Carl. "Iss der leedle monkey hungry? Den come down und ged some peanuds vich I ain'd got! Pooty leedle monk! py shinks, I vill preak you in doo oof you don'd ___"

Biff!

The piece of plaster came downward, straight as a die, and landed on Carl's chin. That was more

than Carl's temper could stand, and he started up the stairway toward the gallery.

In order to get near the monkey he had to run around the gallery, past the door through which the creole gentleman and Bangs had vanished with the chest. [Pg 13]

There was a window, set in a sort of embrasure, beside the door, and one of the lights was broken out.

As Carl passed under the window, on his way around the gallery, he heard a voice that brought him to a gasping halt. All thoughts of his stolen cap, and the monkey, left his mind.

Staggering up against the balcony rail, he stood there blinking in stunned bewilderment.

"Vas I ashleep?" he whispered; "vas I treaming? I vonder oof I can pelief vat I hear, or——"

He broke off his words abruptly, turned and stepped to the wall. Here he paused just long enough to shift the dried frog from his coat to his trousers pocket, then, softly, climbed into the embrasure and peered through the broken pane of the window.

No, he had not been asleep, or dreaming.

He was peering into a room in which were two men, neither of whom was the creole gentleman.

One of the men was Bangs, and the other was—Lat Jurgens! Between them stood the iron chest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOTTERS.

"You're a good one, Proctor!" Jurgens was saying, leaning over the chest and rubbing his hands. "This is the biggest piece of luck that ever came my way. Did Whistler have anything to do with it?"

"Whistler?" returned Bangs. "How could he have anything to do with it? He's not in town."

"I know that, but he went to see the voodoo woman to try and have her give him a line on the chest. He left yesterday, and here the chest drops into our hands. It looks to me as though old Yamousa had been giving us a helping hand."

"Bosh!" returned Bangs disgustedly, "Yamousa didn't have a thing to do with it. I was waiting for that air ship to come in, accordin' to that telegram Townsend sent to Motor Matt and which you found out about. It came, but there were only two boys in the car. They landed on Stuyvesant Dock, and they hadn't any more than got the craft secured before I was right there. I told 'em the yarn we had framed up—how Townsend was expecting them but was so busy he couldn't come, so had sent me." Bangs chuckled. "They swallowed the yarn, all right," he went on. "While I was talking I saw the iron chest in the car. Say, that almost took me off my feet. However did it happen to get into the hands of those boys?"

"Pass the ante, Proctor. Didn't they tell you?"

"Nary a word. They said Motor Matt would be along, in a little while, but that's all they told me about him. I suggested that one of them go with me to take the chest to Townsend, and the Dutch boy was the one who came. He's down in the courtyard now, waiting for Townsend to come and give him a welcome."

Bangs dropped into a chair as he finished and gave vent to a low laugh.

"Didn't they ask you how Townsend had come to get separated from the chest?" asked Jurgens.

"Yes."

"And what did you tell 'em?"

"The truth; that the chest had been stolen from Townsend. Even then the two boys wouldn't tell me where they had found the chest. I reckon Motor Matt, who seems to be pretty long-headed, must have warned them to keep mum."

Jurgens continued to chuckle and rub his hands.

"Blamed if things aren't coming our way better than I had imagined they would!" he exclaimed. "This is rich, and no mistake. And you say the Dutchman is down in the court?"

"That's it."

"Waiting for me to slip down and give him the glad hand?"

"That's what he's waiting for," guffawed Bangs.

"Well, I'll give him the hand, all right, but there'll be something in it. We've got to take care of him, in some way, until——"

Whatever Jurgens' plans were concerning Carl they did not appear. Fate, at that moment, hastened events toward a conclusion.

The square window, against which Carl was leaning and listening, was far from secure. In his interest and excitement, he bore rather harder upon the window than he intended. As a result, the window suddenly gave way and Carl fell crashing with it into the room.

Just how much the dried frog in Carl's pocket had to do with the mishap is for those versed in superstitious lore to answer. Ever since he had taken possession of the charm he had encountered a run of hard luck, but everything that had so far happened to him was trivial as compared with this final catastrophe.

Before he could get to his feet he had been pounced upon by Bangs and Jurgens, dragged clear of the broken glass and held firmly down on his back.

"He's not so much of a fool as you thought, Proctor!" growled Jurgens. "He was in the window, listening."

"Much good it'll do him!" grunted Bangs. "We've got the chest, and what he discovered won't do him any good."

"You bet it won't! Get a rope."

Bangs secured a rope from somewhere in the room and Carl was expeditiously lashed by the hands and feet.

"Himmelblitzen!" ground out Carl. "You vas a humpug, Pangs! You say you vas somet'ing, und you peen somet'ing else. Py chinch, oof I hat der use oof my handts I would make you t'ink you vas hit mit some cyclones."

"Oh, come," laughed Bangs, "don't be so fierce. We've got you, and we've got the chest, and that pal of yours is away off on Stuyvesant Dock and hasn't the least notion where you are. Sing small, my fat kiskidee; it won't do you any good to take on."

"Vait, py chinks!" flamed Carl; "schust vait ondil Modor Matt findts oudt vat iss going on. Den, I bed you, someding vill hebben. I don'd know nodding, und Tick he don'd know nodding eider; aber Matt—vell, dere iss a feller vat knows more as you. Look oudt for him, dot's all."

"Where is Motor Matt?" demanded Jurgens.

"Ask me," said Carl.

"That's what I'm doing."

"Veil, keep on; und ven I dell you somet'ing, schust led me know. Churgens, you vas a pad egg, und you vill ged vat's coming by you vone oof dose tays. How you ged off dot islant in der Pahamas?"

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"Ask me," taunted Jurgens.

"Vat a frame-ooop!" muttered Carl dejectedly. "Look here, vonce: Vere iss Downsent?"

"Ask me again," said Jurgens mockingly.

"How you steal dot chest from him?"

"I don't mind telling you that," grinned Jurgens. "The information can't possibly harm us, because we'll be out of the way long before you can tell any one; and I'd like to have Motor Matt, who's been bucking us ever since we first went on the trail of the chest, know just what we've done to his friend Townsend.

"Townsend bobbed up off the levee in that submarine boat of his, a few days ago, and Whistler and I were on hand watching for him to arrive. He got here at night, unloaded the chest, and had a man start for town with it on a wheelbarrow. It was a foolish thing for Townsend to do—try to wheel the chest away with only himself and the man at the wheelbarrow to look out for it."

Jurgens paused and gave Bangs a wink.

"Townsend never got to the place he was going with that chest, eh, Proctor?" he continued. "We'd just lowered the chest into a rowboat when a couple of watchman came along. We got off from the levee to wait until the watchman got past, and then, when we went after the boat, it had disappeared. We hunted good and hard for it, but haven't seen the boat since. Whistler went to talk with a voodoo woman he used to know to see if she could tell him what became of the boat and the chest. He hasn't got back yet; but here's the chest, big as life, all safely locked and ready for us to open it. Where did you fellows pick up the chest, Dutchy?"

"Talk about der vedder," suggested Carl.

"Oh, well, if you don't want to loosen up you needn't. We knew you were coming here to help Townsend. Townsend sent you a telegram—or, rather, Cassidy, one of his men, sent the telegram the next day after we got hold of the chest. Townsend hadn't shown up on the submarine, but Cassidy had his orders, I reckon. An assistant of mine was shadowing Cassidy, and he discovered the contents of the message. After that, I had Proctor down on the river front waiting for you to arrive in the *Hawk*. Proctor was surprised when he found that you were bringing the chest with you. It was a joyful surprise for all of us, and you and Ferral dropped into Proctor's trap too easy for any use. I wonder if you've got anything of importance about your clothes? Search him, Proctor."

Carl never had much money, and very little else of any importance, in his pockets. He had nothing, now, but, as Bangs knelt beside him and began his search, Carl thought instantly of the dried frog.

So far from being a luck bringer, the frog was a hoodoo. Carl was thoroughly convinced of that; and he had a feeling that no good fortune could come his way so long as he kept Yamousa's charm in his pocket. He wanted to unload it, and he would rather unload it upon Bangs or

Jurgens than any one else. If he could give them the same run of hard luck that he had been having, it might be easier for Matt to recover the chest.

"I don'd got noddin'," said Carl, squirming and playing a part which he had swiftly mapped out for himself.

"I reckon what he says is true," Bangs reported, having discovered only a jackknife, a fishline, a stump of a lead pencil, and a ham sandwich. "He's panning out mighty slim, Jurgens. If— Ha! what's this?"

Bangs pulled the dried frog out of Carl's hip pocket, looked at it curiously and held it up for Jurgens' inspection.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Jurgens. "It looks like a dead frog."

"Gif it pack!" cried Carl, to all appearances greatly perturbed. "It vas Moder Matt's charm, his luck pringer. It don'd vas vort' anyt'ing to you."

"Motor Matt's luck bringer, eh?" muttered Bangs. "Well, from all I heard of that fellow his luck has been phenomenal. Do you want this thing, Jurgens?"

"Not I, Proctor," answered Jurgens.

"Then," went on Bangs, coolly appropriating the charm, "I'll just take it myself and see if some of Motor Matt's luck won't come my way."

"I thought you didn't believe in such things?"

"No more I don't, but I'm going to test this amulet and see what it will do for me."

"Take efervt'ing else vat I got," begged Carl, "only gif me pack dot charm!"

"Not on your life!" said Bangs. "If it's so valuable to Motor Matt it ought to be worth just as much to me."

Carl, it is needless to say, was delighted to have the trouble maker in Bangs' possession. It was the first bright spot in his experiences since leaving the docks with Bangs and the expressman.

"Get a cold chisel and a hammer, Proctor," said Jurgens, briskly; "it's high time we got the chest opened and pulled out with the treasure."

"You leaf dot chest alone!" fumed Carl.

"Yes?" laughed Jurgens. "Well, hardly. Just lie there, Dutchy, and see us dig out more treasure than you ever set eyes on in your life before. When you leave here, you can tell Townsend how we got away with the loot. Inform him, for me that Lat Jurgens wasn't born yesterday, and that it will take a better man than Nemo, Jr., to get the best of him."

At that moment, Bangs came up with a cold chisel and a hammer and fell to work on the treasure box.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HEAD OF OBBONEY.

Carl's pleasure in getting rid of the charm was rather tempered by this attack on the iron chest.

That chest had had a checkered career. Where the Man from Cape Town got it, or what he had put into it, no one knew. The Man from Cape Town had declared that it contained treasure, and he had drawn a chart, showing an uninhabited sand key in the Bahamas and indicating a cave on the key where the chest could be found.

The chest had passed rapidly into the hands of Jurgens and Whistler, then into the possession of Motor Matt and his friends, then to Townsend, then back to Jurgens, then once more to Motor Matt, and now, for the final time it seemed, to Jurgens. All these changes were attended with more or less violence and astonishing adventure.

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With keen eyes Carl watched proceedings. Sturdy blows of the hammer drove the point of the cold chisel into the old lock, destroyed its mechanism and rent it apart. As Bangs dropped his hammer and chisel and prepared to lift the lid, Jurgens approached and leaned over excitedly.

"There ought to be enough treasure in that chest," said he to Bangs, "to make Whistler and you and me independent, Proctor."

A gleam arose in Bangs' watery black eyes and a deeper red ran into his puffy face.

"All I want's enough to keep me in liquor," said Bangs.

"It's a modest ambition," returned Jurgens. "I've got other plans for myself—but every man his own way. Lift the lid."

The heavy cover grated on its hinges as Bangs pushed it back. The chest appeared to be filled with brownish particles. With a disappointed oath, Jurgens scooped up a handful of the particles and held them close to his eyes.

"Sawdust!" he exclaimed; "mahogany sawdust!" and he cast the stuff from him fiercely.

"That's your treasure, is it?" sneered Bangs. "That's what we've been workin' for, and playin' tag with the law for, and gettin' into trouble for, is it? Pah!" Bangs got up disgustedly. "I was a fool ever to go into this thing. That Man from Cape Town has been playin' a joke. Sawdust! A box of sawdust!"

Carl chuckled, but the two men were so wrought up they did not hear him, or pay any attention to him. Carl felt sure that the dried frog was getting in its work. The spell of the hoodoo was over Jurgens, and Bangs, and the iron chest.

Of course, Carl was wide of his reckoning when he allowed his thoughts to take this course. But, then, he was superstitious.

Why Yamousa, a friend of Matt's, should want to load him up with hoodoo and tell him it would bring him luck, was a point Carl had already considered. He explained that point, to his own satisfaction at least, by imagining that the charm would bring luck to Matt alone, and bad luck to everybody else. Explanations are always easy when a fellow wants to prove anything!

"Wait a minute, Proctor," called Jurgens.

Bangs had started for the door with the evident intention of going away and washing his hands of the whole affair. At this call, however, he turned back.

"Well?" he queried.

"I'll bet money there's something in here besides sawdust. Let's not form any snap judgments till we dig to the bottom."

"Pirates don't pack pieces-of-eight in sawdust!" scowled Bangs.

"Pirates didn't have anything to do with this treasure. It came from South Africa and was brought to the Spanish Main in a modern ship."

"You half told me Cap'n Kidd had stowed that away on Turtle Key!"

"I said that to get you interested, and secure your help."

"And I've rung the creole gentleman that owns this house in on the deal! Well, you'll have to make it right with him, that's all."

"I'll take care of the creole gentleman!"

With that, Jurgens turned the chest upside down, pushed it away and began kicking the heap of sawdust right and left.

Something was found—but it was not what Jurgens and Bangs seemed to hope for.

A round object rolled out of the brownish particles and stopped rolling directly at Jurgens' feet. Jurgens leaped back with a startled exclamation, and stood staring. Bangs muttered something, and backed away.

The round object was a carved head—and as hideous a bit of work as Carl had ever seen. The eyes were black and beady, and set under heavy overhanging brows; the nose was wide at its base and suggested the negroid type; the mouth had thick lips and was twisted into a grin. But it was not a mirthful grin the face wore—far from that. There was something demoniacal, menacing and uncanny in that petrified grin—something that caught the heart with clammy hands and sent chill after chill along the nerves.

Carl turned his face away. Bangs, with a terrified yell, jumped for the door, but Jurgens grabbed him before he could get out of the room.

"Hold up, you fool!" stormed Jurgens. "Are you going to run from a piece of carved wood?"

"Hanged if I want to be anywhere near that thing!" palpitated Bangs. "Let's get out of here!"

"Wait. Put a clamp on your nerves and don't make a fool of yourself."

Leaving Bangs to watch him with bulging eyes, Jurgens returned to the head and picked it up.

"There are letters carved in the top of it," said he.

"Do they spell anything?" whispered Bangs, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

"'Obboney.' That's what I make out of them."

"What's Obboney?" queried Bangs. "Does it mean anything? If it does, what?"

"Dere iss a baper in der sawdust," spoke up Carl, whose interest in the head was about as terrifying as Bangs.

Jurgens looked down, saw a bit of white in the sawdust, then reached for it and shook it clear of the brown particles. He unfolded a note, written on parchment or some sort of tanned skin.

"Well!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Bangs, anxiously.

"It's a key to the mystery. Listen."

Thereupon Bangs read the following:

"The Head of Obboney. Read and give heed, for the head of Obboney contains many things, perilous and otherwise to human beings.

"Obboney is a malicious deity of the Koromantyn, or Gold Coast negroes, of Africa; he

is the author of all evil, and when his displeasure is signified by the infliction of pestilential disorders, or otherwise, nothing will divert his anger but human sacrifices; and these sacrifices are selected from captives taken in war, or, if there be none, then from the slaves of the Koromantyns."

Jurgens paused. The paper shook in his fingers and fell fluttering to the floor. He lifted a hand to his face and rubbed his eyes.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bangs.

"I don't know," answered Jurgens, hoarsely. "Do you smell a peculiar odor in this room?"

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"I've been smelling that for several minutes. Where does it come from?"

"I—I don't know, but it seems to lay hold of muscle and brain, like—like poison."

Jurgens had been holding the head of Obboney in the crook of his left arm. Just when he finished speaking, the head dropped with a thump into the sawdust; Jurgens staggered back, tried to recover his balance, failed, and crumpled to the floor.

"Are you sick?" demanded Bangs, stepping hurriedly to Jurgens' side.

"I—I don't know what's the matter with me," whispered Jurgens. "Some—some infernal power has—has laid hold of me and—"

His head sank back, his limbs relaxed, and he lay with closed eyes, silent save for his stentorous breathing.

Carl was also conscious of a slow stupor creeping through his nerves.

"Let me oop!" he gasped, struggling to sit up. "Take der ropes off oof me und led us ged oudt oof here. Oof ve don't leaf, ve vill be deadt men before you can say Chack Ropinson!"

"But—but where does that—that odor come from?" demanded Bangs, himself rapidly losing consciousness.

"From—from der headt!" stuttered Carl, wildly. "Take it away! Trow it from der vindow! It iss pad—pad medicine! It vas a hootoo, py shinks, und—"

Carl's words faded into silence. Like Jurgens, he fell backward and began breathing heavily.

Bangs stared for a moment, then staggered toward the door, intent on reaching purer air. But he never gained the entrance. The mysterious odor claimed him and he sank to the floor with a hollow groan.

He tried to roll away, but gave a gasp and his senses left him.

Thus the malicious Obboney was doing his deadly work.

The head, lying face upward in the sawdust, grinned vindictively and the jetty eyes glittered.

Could any one have seen the carved head, just then, it would have seemed to be exulting over its power, and what its power had accomplished.

Heavier and heavier came the breathing of the sleepers, and thicker and thicker grew the odor in the room.

It seemed certain that death must overtake the three who were under the head's evil influence.

Then, suddenly, a black shape bounded into the embrasure of the window. It was the monkey, and the monkey was still playing with Carl's cap.

Standing on all four paws in the embrasure, the monkey danced up and down and surveyed the scene below him. He seemed to wonder at the silence of the figures sprawled on the floor.

His simian senses were attracted by the gleaming eyes of Obboney, and he began to chatter; in another moment he had leaped into the room, bounded to the heap of sawdust and picked up the head.

Then, like a thief fearing detection, he bounded chattering back to the window, dropping the cap and clinging with both his forepaws to the head.

In the space of a breath, he was out of the room and upon the gallery.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE TRAIL.

It looked as though Bangs, in carrying out his plot to secure the chest, had overreached himself in one important particular. The expressman he hired to carry the iron chest to the house in St. Peters Street had a stand near the railroad station, close to the levee, and it was here that Matt and Dick found him.

Prudence in carrying out his treachery should have made Bangs wary about hiring an expressman who could be found so easily. However, Bangs had probably but little time to spare, and no doubt he expected to be away from the St. Peters Street house before any one could suspect what he was up to and follow him there.

"You're the fellow who came to Stuyvesant Dock about half-past ten this morning and took away an iron chest, aren't you?" inquired Dick, facing the expressman.

"Ah reckons you-all's got de wrong pig by de ear, boss," said the darky. "Ah didn't tote no iron chest fo' nobody."

"Stow it!" cried Dick, looking at the man keenly. "You're the swab, all right."

"Positive of it, Dick?" put in Matt.

"I'd take my solemn Alfred he's the man!"

"Then," went on Matt, quietly, "Bangs has probably paid him something to keep still! I'll watch him, Dick, while you go and get a policeman."

At that, the darky rolled up the whites of his eyes, and showed other signs of trepidation.

"Hol' up dar, cap'n," he called to Dick, who had started away. "Doan' go an' hurry off daterway. Mebby Ah was de feller. What ob it?"

"Now you're talking sensibly," said Matt. "Do you remember where you took the chest?"

"Ah doan jis' riccolect," the negro answered, scratching his woolly head. "Ah wisht Ah did, sah, if it would be any help t' yo, but mah mem'ry is dat sho't Ah done kain't seem tuh remembah nuffin'."

This was so plainly a falsehood that Matt turned to Dick.

"Go on after the officer, Dick," said he. "This fellow don't intend to play fair with us. Perhaps we can take him to jail and make him talk."

"Wait, dar!" cried the darky. "You-all is so quick tuh go off an do somefin'. Yassuh, Ah reckons Ah kin remembah de place. Hit was in Toulouse Street. Ah'll take yo' dar if yo' wants tuh go."

"We'll go," answered Matt. "Get into the wagon, Dick."

The darky drove over his former course, but instead of keeping on to St. Peters he turned to the left at Toulouse, and brought up before a building two blocks from Royal.

"Dar's de bery place," said he, pointing to the building with his stump of a whip.

Matt had one of his swift "hunches" that the darky was still trying to fool them.

"You stay here with him, Dick," said he, starting to get down from the wagon. "It won't take me long to find out whether or not the chest is in that house. If it isn't there, we'll know we haven't been brought to the right place, and then we can call in the officer."

"Ah reckon yo' bettah sot right down ag'in, boss," said the expressman to Matt. "Dishyer ain't de place. Hit's on St. Peters Street, an' dis time I'll take yo' dar, hones'. 'Clar tuh goodness, Ah nebber seen sich fellers as you-all tuh stick an' hang. Now, den, we's goin' tuh de right place." [Pg 17]

He started up his mules again.

"You're going to run foul of a lot of trouble if you keep trying to fool us," warned Dick.

"Ah ain't gwine tuh try hit no mo'," returned the darky, earnestly.

"How much did Bangs give you to keep still about that iron chest?" queried Matt.

"Bangs?" echoed the darky. "Whaffur yo' call him Bangs, boss? Dat feller's name is Proctor."

"Well, Proctor, then. How much did he give you?"

"He done gib me five dollahs. Yo' ain't expectin' tuh take hit away from me, is yo'?"

"If we find you're still trying to fool us," answered Matt, severely, "we'll not only have the money taken from you, but your license, as well."

"Ah's gwine tuh do de right thing now, boss," was the earnest response. "You-all kin bank on dat."

A little later he stopped at the right place, and Matt and Dick got down from the wagon. The praline woman had repaired the damage Carl had caused her stock in trade and was still in the doorway.

"How long have you been here, aunty?" Matt asked, dropping a quarter in the negress' lap.

"All day, boss," was the answer.

"Did you see a man and a boy go in here with a big iron box?"

"Deed Ah did, sah!" said the woman, vehemently. "De fat boy done slipped on de walk an' squashed down en mah basket ob pralines. I was paid fo' dat, dough, an' dey went on into de house."

"The trail's getting hot," spoke up Dick.

"Who lives in the house?" asked Matt.

"M'sieu Rigolette."

Matt turned and pulled a bell at the door. After a minute or two some one came out on an iron balcony over the door and looked down. It was the creole gentleman, still in his bare feet and wearing his tattered trousers and flannel shirt. There was a wild, apprehensive look in his face, and he would have withdrawn as suddenly as he had appeared if Dick had not caught sight of him and given a yell.

"Ahoj there, you!"

"Vat you vant?" came the query.

"Your name Rigolette?"

"*Oui*—yes. Why?"

"Come down here," said Matt. "We want to talk with you."

"I haf done nozzing wrong," returned Rigolette, in a whining, apologetic voice.

"We don't say you have," answered Matt, fully convinced now that something unusual had taken place in the house, "and all we want you to do is to come down and talk with us."

The fellow disappeared from the balcony and presently showed himself in the door.

"Vat eet ees?" he inquired.

There was fear in his shifty eyes as he flashed them over Matt and Carl.

"Is there a man named Townsend in your house?" returned Matt.

"*Non*—no. Zere ees no man lak dat."

"A man named Jurgens, then?"

Rigolette started and hunched his shoulders.

"No, Jurgens ees not here, m'sieu."

"He's talking double, Matt," struck in Dick; "I can see it in his eyes."

"Zere ees no sooch man," cried Rigolette, "*non*, I swear eet!"

"Or Proctor?"

Rigolette quailed under Matt's steady look. The creole, with a groan, flung out his hands.

"*Oui*—yes," he murmured, "zey was here, *mais* not no more. Zat ees ze trut'."

"Where are they? And where is the German boy who came with Proctor? And the iron chest they brought with them?"

"Zat ees ze puzzle—ze riddle, wat you call. Ze chest, ah, ha, I show heem; *mais* ze boy, Proctair an' Jurgens, zey haf gone. One by one zey go, run down ze stairs lak ze wild man, zen t'roo de court and out ze door, and away. Zey was cr-r-razy, an' zey keel ze P'tit Joujou!" Rigolette wrung his hands. "Ze P'tit Joujou," he wailed.

"The more he talks," said Dick, "the less we know."

"Take us to the chest," ordered Matt, turning to the creole.

"Zen *allons*!" returned the owner of the house. "I haf done nozzing wrong, for I be ver' good Frenchmans, creole Frenchmans," he called over his shoulder.

"Something has happened, we can be jolly sure of that, matey," remarked Dick, moving along at Matt's side.

"That's an easy guess, Dick," said Matt. "The question is, what's happened?"

In the court the creole paused beside a black shape lying on the ground. It was a monkey, and the monkey, as could be seen at a glance, was dead. Its hairy arms were embracing the head of Obboney, holding it in such a position that the beady eyes stared upward into the faces of the boys.

"Wow-whoosh!" gulped Dick, starting back. "Keelhaul me if I ever saw anything like that before. Br-r-r! It sends the cold shivers up and down my spine. What do you make of it, Matt?"

Matt, an odd, uncanny feeling racing through him, bent down and examined the head.

"It looks like the head of some heathen idol, Dick," he replied. "What killed the monkey, Rigolette?" he asked.

"Zat I do not know, m'sieu," whimpered the creole. "Ze poor P'tit Joujou!"

"I smell something that's powerful strong," observed Dick, lifting his head and sniffing. "Don't you, mate?"

"Yes," said Matt, "and it's something that makes me dizzy. Where did that head come from, Rigolette?"

"Me, I do not know, m'sieu. Ze hor-r-rible head! Ou, ai, I don't like zat to be here, but I plenty scare' to take heem away from ze P'tit Joujou."

"Well," and Matt turned away, "where's the chest? Take us to the chest, Rigolette."

The creole led the way to the stairs and up to the room on the first balcony.

"Here ees w'ere zey breeng ze chest," said he, "an' zere you see heem."

With the last words he stepped into the room and pointed.

The chest, with the lid thrown back, lay to one side of the room. Near it was the pile of sawdust. Dick, catching sight of something near the heap of sawdust, stepped forward and picked the object up.

"Carl's cap!" exclaimed Matt.

"Right-o!" returned Dick. "But why should the cap be here and not Carl? We're in deep waters, matey. Look at that raffle of cord on the floor. Some one's been tied, here, and slipped the lashings. Sink me, but it must have been Carl!"

Matt whirled on the creole.

"Did Proctor and Jurgens make the boy a prisoner?" he demanded.

"I know nozzing, m'sieu," replied the creole; "I haf done nozzing wrong."

"Did you——"

Just at that moment a door opened—a door opposite the one leading upon the gallery that overlooked the court.

"Bangs!" shouted Dick, pointing to a wild figure that appeared in the doorway.

With a snarl like that of an angry panther, the figure turned and leaped for an open window. Matt and Dick both sprang in pursuit.

CHAPTER XI.

A BLACK MYSTERY.

Bangs, it seemed clear, had entered the other room through a window in the side of the house. The roof of a one-story building came close up under the window, so that it was comparatively easy to enter Rigolette's house in that manner.

And Bangs was trying to make his escape in the same way he had come. He jumped from the window to the neighboring rooftop and started for the edge of the roof.

Matt and Dick, however, were upon him before he could get over the roof's edge and drop to the ground.

Bangs fought fiercely, clawing and growling, like a wild animal. His eyes were wild, he was bareheaded and his hair was tumbled over his forehead.

"The man's crazy," said Matt.

"Is it drink did it?" asked Dick. "Has he been topping the boom too much?"

"No, it wasn't drink; it's something else. Let's get him back to Rigolette's and see if he's able to give us any information."

Getting the squirming Bangs back to the creole's was not an easy matter. However, Rigolette dropped the pieces of rope lying in the room where Carl had been confined, from the window, and the boys made their captive's wrists and ankles secure; then they heaved Bangs upward, and the creole caught him by the shoulders and dragged him through the opening.

"He ees wild," chattered Rigolette; "ever'body ees wild. I was wild myself."

"I say, Bangs!" called Dick, kneeling beside the prisoner and shaking him. "What's the matter with you?"

Bangs mumbled incoherently and stared fiercely.

"Do you think he's putting it on, mate?" said Dick, appealing to Matt.

"No, he's not putting it on. The man's really daft." Matt turned to Rigolette. "You say the boy and Jurgens were like Bangs, here?"

"*Oui*—yes," said the creole. "Zey run from ze house; now Proctair, he ees come back by ze roof. W'y he do zat w'en he could come by ze door? Zat ees a mystery."

"Aye, a black mystery!" cried Dick.

"Carl was certainly here," mused Matt; "the finding of his cap proves it. And it's almost equally clear that he was a prisoner. Something locoed him, as well as Bangs and Jurgens; and Carl, in some manner, got out of his ropes. Where is he now? That's the point. And the iron chest—was that all that was in it?" and Matt nodded toward the heap of sawdust.

At that moment the scrap of paper, which Jurgens had dropped, met his eyes. He picked it up.

"What is it, mate?" asked Dick, anxiously. "Does it shed any light?"

Matt read the paper aloud.

"Strike me lucky!" exclaimed Dick. "That head—it must have been in the box. Wasn't there anything else?"

Matt dropped to his knees excitedly and began running his fingers through the sawdust.

"That was all," said he, "the head of Obboney and this paper."

Dick laughed harshly.

"And that's the treasure Jurgens and Whistler have been hunting for!" he exclaimed. "The head of an idol—a heathen idol! I wonder what Townsend will say to this? The Man from Cape Town

seems to have pulled the wool over the eyes of everybody."

"Why didn't Jurgens take the head away with him if it was in the box?" Matt queried, thoughtfully.

"Probably he didn't think it was worth bothering with; either that or else he was too crazy to think of it."

"Go down and get the head, Dick," said Matt. "We might as well put it back in the chest and try and deliver everything to Townsend just as we found it."

"Aye, aye," answered Dick, and started.

Matt was astounded by the situation which confronted him and Dick in the creole's house. Bangs had engineered a piece of successful treachery, but, in the end, the treachery had somehow turned against him and Jurgens. What had caused the death of the monkey? And what was it that had turned the brains of Bangs, Jurgens and Carl? Bangs was clearly demented, and if Rigolette was to be believed, so were Jurgens and Carl.

And only that idol's head had been in the iron chest! Yes, truly, the affair was a mystery—and a black one.

While Matt was struggling to think of something that might help to a solution of the problem, Dick came bounding up the stairs and along the gallery.

"It's gone!" he panted.

Matt whirled on him in consternation.

"What, the head of Obboney?" he asked.

"Nothing else, old ship! It's not where we saw it and it isn't anywhere in the court. The negro woman at the door says that a man answering Jurgens' description rushed into the house and out again. He had something when he went out, but she couldn't see what it was. I'll bet it was that idol's head, mate!"

"It must have been!" exclaimed Matt. "Perhaps a little reason returned to Jurgens and he came back after the head. Did he seem to be crazy, or in any manner off his balance?"

"The woman says he looked wild, didn't say a word and went like a streak."

"Well," said Matt, regretfully, "we've been beaten out, after all. What we've got to do now is to find Carl."

"Where'll we look for him? We can go cruising around, but this is a big town and, if Carl is off his bearings, there's no telling where he'll go." [Pg 19]

"If he's very much off his bearings, the police will pick him up. And the same with Jurgens. But ___"

Matt halted and gave a glance at Rigolette, who was leaning moodily against the wall.

"Come over here, Dick," said Matt, stepping to one side. When his chum joined him, he lowered his voice so the creole could not hear what was said.

"You remember that smoke picture of Yamousa's—the one you and I saw?"

"Dowse me, mate, if I could ever forget that!"

"What do you think of Yamousa and her smoke pictures, by now?"

"Why, I'm not much of a hand to believe in things like that," replied Dick, slowly, "but that first smoke picture, showing the boat and the chest, with the *Hawk* overhead and you below—why, that was a dead ringer for what happened. Blow me tight! I'm fair dazed to account for that picture."

"So am I," continued Matt, earnestly, "but this is what I'm trying to get at. If one picture gave a truthful forecast of what was to happen, isn't it possible that the second picture was equally truthful and to be depended on?"

"More than possible, Matt—*probable*."

"Do you recollect what that second picture was?"

"Why, a room with stone walls and a man who looked like Townsend lashed by the hands and feet and lying on the floor!"

"Then, if you remember, we saw the outside of the building—or what Yamousa said was the outside of it—And the lower story was occupied by an antique shop."

"Right-o! The sign above the shop bore the name of Crenelette."

"Exactly. Now, Dick, it strikes me we ought to go down Royal Street and look for Crenelette's place of business. There's nothing we can do for Carl, just now, inasmuch as we don't know where to go to find him, and there may be something we *can* do for Townsend."

"Your head's level, matey, like it always is. We'll go on a hunt for Townsend. If the contents of the iron chest can't be recovered, we must do the next best thing and help Townsend out of a hole—provided he *is* in a hole, which seems almost certain."

Matt turned away and addressed himself to Rigolette.

"How long was Jurgens here, in your house, Rigolette?" he asked.

"Two—t'ree day, m'sieu."

"What was he doing here?"

"Zat I do not know. *Sapristi!* My head ees buzzing wit' all dese zings vat I don't onderstan'."

"You may not have been doing anything wrong, of your own knowledge, by harboring and helping Jurgens and Proctor, Rigolette, but those men are criminals, and you've got to walk pretty straight from this on if you don't want to get yourself into trouble."

"I no want ze trouble, m'sieu!" whined the creole. "I have ze trouble enough wizout making more."

"Then keep Proctor here, just as he is. He may come to himself, before long, and when he does we'll try to get back and have a talk with him. Comprenny?"

"*Oui*—yes. He ees my friend, but I keep heem lak you say. Zen, bumby, eet may be he can tell what keel ze P'tit Joujou."

"I haven't any doubt but that he can let in a good deal of light upon the mystery. We'll try and return here, in a few hours. Meanwhile, if the Dutch boy wanders back, try and keep him."

"I do w'at I can, m'sieu."

Matt and Dick, puzzled and bewildered but hoping for results from their fresh line of inquiry, inquired their way to Royal Street and turned along it in the direction of Canal.

Fortune favored them, for they had not gone a block along Royal Street before they saw an antique shop with the sign, "M. Crenelette, Antiques," over the door.

Matt and Dick went to the other side of the street and took in the appearance of the building. In every particular it conformed to the smoke picture which they had seen, miles away, in the hut of Yamousa.

"I'm all aho!" admitted Dick. "Yamousa must know a whole lot of things that scientists haven't yet discovered. That's the building, to a dot!"

"It's amazing!" murmured Matt. "Our cue seems to be a good one and it's up to us to follow it and see where it leads."

"Right-o! Heave ahead and I'll tow along, ready for anything that happens."

As the boys pushed across the street toward the door of the antique shop, a face dodged away from a second-story window. And it was a face which, if the boys had seen it, would have warned them to be on their guard.

CHAPTER XII.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

M. Crenelette was a gray-haired, benevolent looking man with mild blue eyes. It was impossible to associate him with anything in the nature of lawlessness, and the boys were tempted to think they were on the wrong track.

M. Crenelette was French, but he talked English like one to the manner born.

His establishment was a veritable junk shop.

"What can I do for you, my friends?" he asked, getting up from a desk where he had been writing.

"Have you any objections to letting us take a look through your basement?" asked Matt.

"Basement? basement?" repeated the antiquarian, puzzled.

"Yes, through the cellar under your store."

"My dear young man, there are no cellars in New Orleans. The ground is too low, and there is water too near the surface."

Once more Matt and Dick began to feel that they were making a mistake in coming to M. Crenelette.

"Is there a room in this building that is inclosed with stone walls?"

"Ah!" and M. Crenelette's face brightened, "you speak now of the vaults of the old bank. They are on the second floor. I do not use the second floor, and it was rented, a few days ago, to an American gentleman. He has not moved in, yet. What interests you in the old vault?"

"We simply want to look it over," Matt answered. "Will you show us how to get up there? If the man who rented the place hasn't moved in yet I suppose there won't be any objection?"

"Certainly not. Come this way."

The Frenchman passed out the rear of his store and pointed to an open back stairway.

"The door may be locked," said he, "and, in that case, you will be disappointed, for I have given the key to the new tenant. You might go up the stairs and try the door."

As Matt and Dick ascended the stairs, M. Crenelette posted himself to watch. The bell at his front

door suddenly tinkled, however, announcing a customer, and he had to go away.

The boys tried the door and found it open.

"The new tenant," remarked Dick, "isn't a very careful man. I wonder if his name is Jurgens?"

"Probably," said Matt, stepping into the room beyond the door.

It was a small room, and there was another door opposite the one by which he had entered.

"Dowse my toplights!" exclaimed Dick. "This doesn't look much like a bank. And then the idea of a bank being on the second floor! All my eye and Betty Martin!"

"Perhaps the bank was on the first floor and the vaults on the second," suggested Matt. "It was probably an old institution. From the looks of this building it must have been standing at the time Jackson whipped the Britishers."

"I'm a Britisher, you know, old ship," laughed Dick, "and I don't like to have you rub that Jackson fight into me. Push ahead and let's see what's in the next room."

Matt opened the door and was confronted by a windowless room as dark as Egypt. The only daylight that reached it came from the room in which the two boys were standing.

"Shiver me!" muttered Dick. "I guess we've reached the vaults, matey."

"They wouldn't have a door like this to a bank vault, Dick. We'll go in and see if there isn't a door on the other side that we can open."

Matt entered the room, groping his way through the thick gloom. Dick followed him closely.

Suddenly, the door through which they had just come slammed shut and a key was heard grating in the lock.

"Trapped!" muttered Dick. "There was some one here and laying for us."

"Quick!" called Matt, whirling around. "Try the door."

Before Dick could get back to it, Matt heard a muttered exclamation and the sound of a struggle. It was impossible to see a thing, and the young motorist could only guess at what had happened.

"Dick!" he called, leaping forward.

"Look alive, mate!" panted Dick. "Some one's got hold of me."

Before Dick had fairly finished speaking, a pair of stout arms went around Matt, and he was forced to fight on his own account and leave Dick to look after himself.

It was a struggle at close quarters, and a very unequal one. Slowly but steadily Matt was forced across the floor.

"Who are you?" he panted. "What are——"

"Whistler!" came a husky voice, "I'm closer to you, now, than I was at the bayou. Saw you coming across the street and opened the door to make it easy for you to get in. I don't know how you found out about this place, but your call here won't do you any good. You've bothered Jurgens and me as long as you're going to, and you and Ferral will never live to get away from this building!"

With that, Matt felt himself hurled roughly backward. He struck against a wall and dropped half stunned to the floor.

The next moment Dick came banging against him, and there followed the clang of an iron door, the rattle of a key, then silence.

"Matt?" called Dick, his voice echoing and reëchoing strangely.

"Here," answered Matt.

"Blest if we smoked Whistler's roll quick enough! We came easy for him—so easy that I'm ashamed of myself. The fact that he was here proves that this is a sort of headquarters for him and Jurgens."

"If this wasn't a rendezvous of theirs, of course Whistler wouldn't have been around."

"Where are we?"

"I guess," answered Motor Matt, slowly, "that we have found the old vault. That was an iron door that closed on us, if the noise it made counts for anything."

"Oh, glory!" grunted Dick, disgustedly. "How long can we stay in here without smothering to death?"

"The air seems to be fairly pure, at present—purer, in fact, than it was out in that other room. But, Whistler! Why he was the last man I was expecting to see."

"And we didn't see much of him, at that," growled Dick. "My eye, but here's a go! Whistler didn't lose much time coming in from that bayou. I wonder if he's found Jurgens, and if the two of them have got the hooks on Carl?"

"There are a whole lot of things I wish I knew, Dick," said Matt.

"Same here, matey. Whistler had some one with him, and that other man may have been Jurgens."

"Well, if it was Jurgens, then it's a cinch Jurgens wasn't so much off his balance as Rigolette led

us to believe. But I don't think it was Jurgens."

"Why not?"

"Jurgens would have said something to let us know that he had a hand in our capture."

"Right-o. Jurgens is a good deal of a boaster and likes to run up his signals whenever he gets the chance. We've had a nice time of it since we reached New Orleans, I must say! With you and me locked up, and Carl running around with his mind in a haze, I wonder what's going to become of the *Hawk*? She can't roost out there on the dock indefinitely."

"We're not going to stay locked up for long," returned Matt. "Just as soon as we catch our breath we've got to take a look around here and see if we can't get away."

"With an iron door to batter down, matey, the outlook isn't what you might call promising. I've heard of men being shut up in bank vaults, but they usually smothered. Oh, hang the luck! And hang the way we dropped into this bunch of trouble! We ought to have suspected there was some one in here when we found the door open."

"No use crying over spilt milk, Dick. Don't you think it might have been Whistler instead of Jurgens who rushed into the house of Rigolette's and took the idol's head away from Joujou?"

"One guess is as good as another," said Dick, heavily.

"Well, we'll stop guessing and try and get down to facts. Have you any matches?"

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"A pocketful."

"Then strike one and we'll find out where we are."

The floor of the room was of brick. Dick scratched a match on the floor and then got to his feet and held the light in the best position for him and Matt to make a survey of their quarters.

The room in which the boys found themselves was about ten feet square. The walls and ceiling were of stone, and there was only one opening, and this was closed with a heavy iron door.

Dick stepped to the door and pushed against it. Although rust encrusted the iron plates, yet the door rigidly resisted his push upon it.

"We might blow the door down with a stick of dynamite," said Dick, "but that's the only way we could do the trick, mate. I'm a Fiji if——"

"Look!" came hoarsely from Matt; "on the floor, there, off to the left of you!"

The flame of the match was eating close to Dick's fingers, but in the last, dying glow he swerved his eyes in the direction indicated by Matt, and an astonishing duplicate of Yamousa's second smoke picture burst on his eyes.

On the brick floor lay a man with gray hair and gray mustache, bound hand and foot and gagged.

It seemed to Matt and Dick as though they were again in the hut by the bayou and peering into the smoke arising from the earthen jar under the spell of Yamousa.

"Townsend!" gasped Dick.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE IN A TRAP.

The boys knew Archibald Townsend, otherwise Captain Nemo, Jr., of the *Grampus*, well. The matchlight was feeble, but there could be no mistake.

Both of them crept forward, and while Dick groped about with his hands to unloosen the cords that bound the prisoner, Matt removed the gag.

"King!" gasped Townsend, as soon as he could speak; "and Ferral! This is the most amazing thing I ever heard of! How is it you happen to be here?"

"That will be even more amazing, Townsend," answered Matt, "when we tell you about it. How long have you been here?"

"It must be all of two days, although there's no telling the difference between night and day in such a black hole. Gad, but it's good to see you boys again. When did you get here?"

"To-day," answered Matt.

"And it's been our busy day, too," added Dick. "We've been on the jump ever since we struck the town."

"I was so astounded when you boys were thrown in here that I could hardly think," continued Townsend. "Later, when you began to talk, what you said aroused my curiosity. You got my telegram, of course?"

"Yes, and started at once as soon as it came to hand."

"What happened to you? I might as well tell you, before you begin to talk, though, that Jurgens has got the iron chest away from me again."

"We know that," said Matt, "for we picked it up out of an empty boat in the river."

An exclamation of astonishment burst from Townsend.

"Start at once," said he, "and give me the whole of your experiences. After that I'll tell you what happened to me, and we'll have a fair understanding of the situation."

Matt and Dick, between them, related their adventures, beginning at Bayou Yamousa. Townsend was absorbed in the recital, but made no comment until the last word was spoken.

"Mystery seems to have been following mystery!" he exclaimed. "The Obeah woman has helped you, and me, in a most remarkable way. I am not particularly credulous, and that talk of yours about the smoke pictures, coming from any one else but you, would be hard to swallow. Most remarkable—in fact, astounding! By some arts of her own she seems to have thrown into the screen of smoke events that were to happen, as well as to give you a view of my situation, many miles away—a view that was complete in every particular.

"All that is strange and incomprehensible, but it is hardly a marker to the rest that happened. The head of an idol in that iron chest! I wonder if it had anything to do with the unbalancing of Jurgens, Bangs and Carl? Furthermore, I wonder how it happened that Bangs was on the levee to spring that cock-and-bull story on you when you arrived? These are all inexplicable things to me."

Townsend fell silent, apparently musing in the blank gloom.

"You are probably anxious to hear how I lost the chest a second time," he presently went on. "It happened principally because I was ignorant of the fact that our old enemies, Jurgens and Whistler, were in New Orleans. I had not heard a thing about them since they vanished so mysteriously from that little island in the Bahamas.

"As soon as the *Grampus* reached this port, I immediately laid my plans to have the iron chest removed to a place of safety. It was night, and I hired a man with a wheelbarrow to take it into town. I went with the man, but, before I left the *Grampus*, I arranged with Cassidy to send you a telegram on the following day. It was not my intention to return to the *Grampus* that night, and I expected to be busy locating the lady for whom the Man from Cape Town had asked me to look.

"While we were crossing the levee, and were in a dark and obscure place on the water front, I and the man with the wheelbarrow were set upon by a gang of roughs. The man who was wheeling the chest was knocked down and left unconscious, and I was bound, put in a closed carriage and brought here. Since that time my mind and body have both been shrouded in total darkness. Twice a day a negro has come and given me food, but I have seen nothing of either Whistler or Jurgens.

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"However, I surmised the reason for my capture and detention in this place. My scoundrelly enemies wished to keep me in limbo until they had divided the treasure in the iron chest and got well away with their booty. Yet the time I spent here has not been altogether lost. I have cultivated my negro jailer. He would tell me nothing about my captors, nor why I had been captured, but he has promised to release me if I would give him \$500. The last time he came with food I wrote a line to Cassidy telling him to pay over the money and ask no questions. The negro may get the money and then fail to carry out his part of the contract—but it was a chance I had to take."

"Isn't there any other way to get out of here except by the negro's aid?" asked Matt.

"I have had little else to do, while lying here, but turn such expedients over and over in my mind. I believe there is a way, Matt, providing we were armed with a crowbar. You will notice that the air in here is pure and wholesome—something you would not find in an air-tight vault."

"Matt noticed that, Townsend," returned Dick, "as soon as we landed in here."

"Well," pursued Townsend, "light another match, Ferral, and then watch the flame."

The match was lighted, held about a foot from the floor, and the flame was seen to be sucked sideways and downward, as though by a draught of air.

"There's a current of fresh air blowing through here," observed Matt.

"I noticed that the first time the negro brought my food to me," said Townsend. "He had a candle, and the flame of the candle, like that of the match, inclined downward and burned with a hissing sound as though fanned by a draught of air. I managed to roll about and investigate a little, tapping with my heels on the brick. There are crevices in the brick, over near the end of the vault, and I am sure that a little work with a crowbar would bring us either into the outside air, or into the shop below. But," and Townsend gave a grim laugh, "we have no crowbar; and, at the time I made my discoveries, I did not even have the use of my limbs."

"I've got a dirk, old ship," said Dick. "Give me time enough and I could dig through a stone wall with it."

"It will be just as well to wait until night," answered Townsend. "The man in the store below might hear us and he may be in league with Jurgens and Whistler."

"He's not," averred Matt, "I'll answer for that. If there was ever an honest Frenchman, he's one."

"But he's letting Jurgens and Whistler use this floor for lawless purposes."

"He doesn't know what they're using it for. In fact, he doesn't think they've moved in here yet."

"Then we might go ahead with our work," said Townsend. "Can you work in the dark, Ferral?"

"If I have to, aye, aye," answered Dick; "and it looks as though I'd have to, considering that the only light we have is furnished by matches."

"Well, start in. You can tell where the place is by the cool air along the floor. It will be a long job, and Matt and I will relieve you from time to time."

Dick lost not a moment in getting to work.

"The chances are, Townsend," observed Matt, "your negro will never have the opportunity to get into this vault again. Whistler has been away and has come back. He will take the vault key and act as jailer, if I'm any prophet."

"From what Whistler said when he and his man threw us in here," spoke up Dick, "it's my idea that he intends to leave us here to starve. He wouldn't be above that sort of thing."

"He and Jurgens," said Townsend gravely, "wouldn't be above anything. This is a rare opportunity to get all of us out of the way—too good an opportunity, I'm afraid they'll think, to be allowed to pass. We'd better depend upon our own efforts, and dig out as quick as we can. We'll have to be quick, too, before hunger and thirst get the better of us."

"Have you any idea, Townsend," asked Matt, "why that Man from Cape Town should put an idol's head in that iron chest?"

"Not the slightest," declared Townsend. "I can't believe it possible that he is trying to hoax anybody. We must not lose sight of the fact that the lady I am to look for, in this city, he claimed to be his daughter. I was to find her, you may perhaps remember, open the chest in her presence and divide the contents of the chest equally. It would be difficult for us to divide an idol's head, and there would be small gain for us, even if we did it. No, no, boys, there is something more back of this—another mystery among the many that have already put us at sea."

"Something must have turned the brains of Jurgens, Bangs and Carl," remarked Matt, "and that could not have happened until the chest had been opened. Could you make a guess as to what it was, Townsend?"

"Guesses are easy—but profitless. Bangs, you say, is a prisoner. If he recovers his wits, perhaps he will tell us what we want to know."

"That creole in St. Peters Street," put in Dick, "may not hang onto Bangs if we don't show up at the house to-night. We told him we'd come, but he may think we've slanted away for good and let Bangs go. He told us Bangs was a messmate of his."

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"Well," suggested Townsend, "there's Carl. He'll be able to tell us something when he comes to himself and finds you again. If——"

There came a snap as of broken metal from Dick's end of the vault, followed by a muttered exclamation.

"What's the matter, Ferral?" asked Townsend.

"I've broken my dirk short off at the hilt!" growled Dick. "Keelhaul me for a bungler! *Now* what are we going to do? We haven't even a knife to work with."

A pall of dejection settled over the three in the stone and iron trap. Each, perhaps, was casting vainly about in his mind for some expedient which could help them to their freedom.

Before any of them could speak, there came from the door a sound as of some one trying to push a key into the lock.

"Whistler!" whispered Matt.

"He'd not come here alone, mate," said Dick, "knowing that two of us are free and that we have surely released Townsend. If it's Whistler, you can lay something handsome he has a gang at his heels."

"No matter if he has," spoke up Townsend, "it's a chance to fight our way out of this dungeon. Group yourselves about the door and, when it opens, spring out and do what you can with your fists."

The suggestion captured the instant approval of Matt and Dick. All three of the prisoners huddled close to the door, and when the key grated, and the door was pulled ajar, they all sprang out.

Contrary to their expectations they met with no resistance. A negro with a candle had unlocked the door, and he was nearly overturned by the concerted rush of the prisoners.

"Why," cried Townsend, "it's the man who has been bringing my meals."

"Great spark plugs!" exclaimed Matt, "we know him, too. He's the fellow that hauled Bangs, Carl and the iron chest to the house in St. Peters Street!"

"Well met, old ship!" jubilated Dick. "We can forgive you a whole lot for this."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ASTOUNDING SITUATION.

From his appearance, the expressman was not feeling at all easy in his mind. His knees were knocking together, the candle was shaking in his hand, his teeth were chattering, his eyes were rolling frenziedly, and a grayish pallor had overspread his black face.

"Ah's got de feelin' dat Ah's er gone niggah," he mumbled. "Da's right, cap'n. Ah's done seen t'ings, dis ebenin', dat Ah ain't nevah gwine tuh git ober."

"You got the five hundred?" asked Townsend.

"Sho'ly, sho'ly. En Ah's er hones' niggah er Ah'd nevah come hyeh afteh what Ah seen."

"Did you have the key?"

"Whistler got de key away f'om me, along endurin' de aftehnoon, cap'n; but I come hyeh en Ah—Ah done got it back, but Ah mos' died a-doin' it. Oh, by golly, hit's de wustest t'ing Ah evah did!"

"You didn't have to kill Whistler to get the key, did you?" went on Townsend, startled by the darky's fright.

"No, no, boss, Ah ain't dat kind."

"Where's Whistler?"

"He's heah——"

"Here!"

"Da's whut! En Jurgens is heah, en anudder white man—dey's all heah."

"Where are they? What are they doing? Can't they overhear us?"

Townsend fired his questions like the reports of a Gatling, meanwhile looking about him as though to fight whatever peril might show itself.

"You ain't got tuh feah dem no mo', cap'n," went on the darky. "Ah took de key f'om Whistler, en he didn't stop me—he wasn't able. I's feelin' monsus out ob sorts wif mahse'f, en now dat Ah's let you-all loose, Ah's gwine tuh cl'ar out. Take de candle if you want tuh stay heah, but Ah's gwine."

The darky forced the candle into Townsend's hand and whirled away.

"Hold up!" cried Townsend. "Don't be in such a rush. Tell us what——"

But the negro was gone, clattering across the floor of an outer room and rushing down the outside stairs.

"What do you suppose put him in that kind of a taking, mates?" asked Dick.

"It puzzles me," answered Townsend.

"Suppose we look around," said Matt.

They were in the dark room in which Matt and Dick had had their short struggle at close quarters with Whistler and his man. Dick opened the door on the right. It led into the room that opened upon the outside stairs. The door at the head of the stairs was ajar, and the released prisoners could see that dusk had fallen outdoors.

"Nothing in this direction, mates," announced Dick. "Try that other door next to you, Matt."

Matt opened the door, and instantly a peculiar odor was perceptible.

"We've sniffed that before, Matt," said Dick.

"I remember it," returned Matt; "it was in the court of Rigolette's house. I wonder what it can be, and how we are able to smell it here?" [Pg 24]

Shielding the flaring candle with his hand, Matt stepped into the other room. In doing so he stumbled against something on the floor and stooped downward.

It was the form of Jurgens!

As Matt recoiled, startled cries came from Townsend and Dick.

"Three of 'em, or I'm a Hottentot!" exclaimed Dick. "Look, will you! And there's the head of Obboney!"

Dick's report was literally true. Lying sprawled about the floor, breathing heavily, was not only Jurgens, but Whistler and one other man, as well. They lay around the idol's head, and the head, face upward, offered a most diabolical spectacle in the candlelight.

The beady eyes gleamed and glittered, and the distorted face took on an expression it had not held in the broad light of day.

"Most remarkable!" murmured Townsend, stepping over the form of Jurgens and picking up the head. "What a monstrous thing!" he added, shuddering as he held the head up and looked into its face. "What heathen mind was ever able to conjure that out of a block of wood? The arch fiend himself must have had a hand in the work."

"But how do you account for all this layout?" queried Dick, waving his hand at the forms on the floor.

"Jurgens, after he took the head from the court of Rigolette's house," surmised Matt, "must finally have reached here with it. He arrived after you and I were thrown into the vault, Dick, and that unknown man, lying near Whistler, must have been the one who helped put us into the stone chamber. Jurgens, Whistler and the other man came into this room, and in due course they fell under the baneful spell of Obboney. I don't know what else to call it."

"That's the way of it, Matt," said Townsend; "that must have been the way of it. When the negro came here, he found these men sprawled out, just as we see them now. Negroes as a rule are

superstitious, and you can understand what a tremendous effort it must have taken for that darky to step across Jurgens, pass this head and take the key of the vault from Whistler's pocket! No wonder the fellow was half scared to death! It speaks pretty well for him that he dared to do what he did and earn the five hundred I asked Cassidy to give him."

"A main fine thing for us," remarked Dick, "that he had nerve enough for the job."

"There must be something about this head that is valuable," muttered Townsend. "It would not have been in that chest if it wasn't valuable. Still, I can't understand why the Man from Cape Town should want the chest opened and the idol's head revealed before a woman. Why, this thing is enough to send a woman into hysterics."

"He had a scheme," said Dick, "but shiver me if I can fathom it."

"I'm beginning to feel a bit queer in the head," spoke up Matt. "I wonder if I only imagine it?"

"No imagination about it, matey," declared Dick. "I'm feeling some queer myself."

"I don't see why we should," said Townsend. "What is there about this head to exert such an evil influence?"

"There must be something," returned Matt, "to stretch out fellows like Whistler and Jurgens as we see them."

"Whoosh!" exclaimed Dick. "Hear 'em breathe! Their breath seems to be coming harder and harder. I wonder if that odor could kill a man?"

"It must have killed the monkey," said Matt. "If it would kill an animal in that way, I don't see why it wouldn't kill a man."

"Have you that paper that was found in the chest, Matt?" asked Townsend.

"Yes."

"Read it to me."

Matt drew the parchment from his pocket and stepped closer to the candle which, a few moments before, he had handed to Dick.

Then, while he read the written words, Townsend kept his keen, inquiring eyes on the idol's head.

"It may be," observed Townsend, when the reading was finished, "that there is a hidden meaning in that communication. The question is, what is that hidden meaning? Does it deal with high finance, or thaumaturgy, or any of the other arts, black or white, with which princes of the black art are supposed to arm themselves? Ha! Answer me, some of you."

Matt gave a jump and stared at Dick. Dick, also startled, returned Matt's stare with interest.

Townsend was talking nonsense—and he was always a grave, earnest man with no use whatever for anything foolish or extravagant.

Was the deadly odor taking effect upon his brain?

Holding the head as Hamlet held the skull of Yorick, Townsend struck an attitude.

"Alas, poor Yorick!" he began.

But he got no further.

Just at that moment some one bounded into the room, snatched the head of Obboney from his hands and hurled it against the wall.

There was a smash, a tinkling clatter as of pebbles upon the floor, then silence.

"Ged oudt oof here! ged oudt or you vas all deadt men! Helup me, Matt, to pull dose fellers on der floor into der odder room. Ach, himmelblitzen! you don'd know vat a shance you vas daking. Aber I know—yah, so helup me!"

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"Carl!" gasped Matt, staggering toward the Dutch boy.

"You bed you," answered Carl. "Ged Downsent away, kevick! Tick, you do dot. Matt und I vill look afder der fellers on der floor."

CHAPTER XV.

THE TREASURE.

Townsend was babbling Shakespeare as Dick grabbed him and hauled him out to the room at the top of the stairway. There, seated on the landing, with the cool night air fanning his face and clearing his brain of the deadly influence of the odor, he slowly regained his poise.

Matt and Carl dragged Jurgens, Whistler and the other man out of the fatal room, and Carl, the last to leave, shut the door tightly.

A few minutes in the night air served to revive Carl, Matt and Dick. Then, quite naturally the others wanted to know what had happened to the Dutch boy, and where he had been.

Carl related his experiences in the house of Rigolette, holding his listeners spellbound with his recital.

"Afdere I dumped ofer," he went on, "I ditn't know noddin' ondis I seemed to vake oop und foundt meinseluf in a shdreed. I don' know der shdreed, und I vas losdt. Vat I vanted vas to findt my vay to der tock, und der air ship, for I got der notion dot you vould be dere, Matt, und Dick, too. I vanted to dell you vat a mess Tick und me made oof it py hafin' anyt'ing to do mit dot Pangs feller.

"Veil, I feel kindt oof hazy yet mit meinseluf, und I vander aroundt ondis id pegins to ged tark. I know vere I vant to go, aber I don'd seem to haf der sense to ask somepody vich vay it iss. Den, pumpy, I see dot Jurgens feller comin' along der shdreet. He has der headt under his arm, und he iss valking fasdt, baying no addention to any vone. I follow him, und he comes py dis blace. Oop der shdairs I come afdere him, und he valks indo dot front room. I vould haf valked in dere, too, only I see dot Whistler und anodder mans, so I packs oudt.

"You see, my mindt vas gedding clearer und clearer, und I know a leedle how to dake care oof meinseluf. I ged indo der pack room und vait, und t'ink vat I shall do; und vile I vait und t'ink, I keep vishin' und vishin' dot Matt und Tick vas somevere aroundt.

"Vell, pumpy, pooty soon, along comes dot nigger feller vat took Pangs und me und der chest py dot house vere ve vent. He comes droo der room vere I vas und goes in der odder, und I hear him yell. I shday away, und greep town der shdairs, t'inkin' I vas pedder off oudt oof der house as in id. Den I t'ink meppy I go pack, but I vait some more for der nigger feller comes down der shdairs so kevick as anyt'ing und runs away.

"All der time I vait in der air, oof course my headt vas gedding clearer mit itseluf. In a liddle vile it geds so clear dot I haf der nerf to come oop der shdairs some more. Den vat a surprises! I look in der front room und I see Whistler, und Jurgens, und der odder feller on der floor, und Matt, und Tick, und Downsents shdanding oop, und Downsents looking at der itol's headt. Den I rush in so fast as bossiple, snatch dot teufelish t'ing away, und—und—vell you know der resdt.

"It's der headt vat has der otor dot makes peobles grazzy! Und oof der headt shdays long enough py a feller, it vill make him as deadt as some mackerels. Yah, so helup me!"

Silence followed Carl's talk.

"Rigolette's monkey got the idol's head, Carl," said Matt. "The animal must have crawled in through the window that gave way under your weight, picked up the head and scampered off with it."

"Hooray for der monkey!" said Carl. "If it hatn't peen for him you vouldn't have a Dutch bard some more, Matt und Jurgens und Pangs vould have peen some goners, too."

"It seemed," said Townsend, with his usual gravity, "as though I was somewhat affected by that head."

"Sink me if you weren't, Townsend," answered Dick. "You were spouting Shakespeare and using words a fathom long."

"I have no remembrance of that—only a hazy recollection that I didn't know what I was doing. I presume the idol was carved out of some kind of wood that has that deadly odor, and that the mahogany sawdust in the iron chest helped the head to retain the baneful influence. But why should the Man from Cape Town pack the deadly thing in the chest and then ask me to open the chest in the presence of his daughter? There are features of this case which it is difficult to reconcile with the facts."

Matt started up suddenly.

"Did you break that idol's head, Carl, when you smashed it against the wall?" he asked.

"Vell, I bed you!" answered Carl. "I made oop my mindt dot I vould preak him indo a t'ousant bieces. Dot von't shtop der shmell oof der vood, aber it vill shpoil der headt, all righdt."

"We'll have to go back there," said Matt.

"Nod on your life!" cried Carl.

"We can't leave the fragments, for one thing," insisted Matt, "because they would be a source of peril to whoever found them and did not understand their power; then, for another thing, I have just thought of something."

"Of course we'll go back," said Townsend. "There can't be any danger in going into the room for a few minutes." [Pg 26]

"Den," said Carl, "der fairst t'ing vat ve do vill be to put der bieces oof der headt in my coat und tie dem oop tight; und der next t'ing afdere dot vill be to go to der rifer und shake out der bieces indo der vater. Dot vill be der lasdt oof Obboney."

"Good idea, Carl," approved Townsend. "Pull off your coat and come on."

Dick had left the candle in the room where Jurgens, Whistler and the other man were lying. The three men were lying just as when Townsend and the boys had left them, a short time before, but it was plain that their breathing was becoming easier by slow degrees.

Matt picked up the candle and preceded his companions into the front room.

The head of Obboney was not in a thousand pieces, but it had been smashed utterly beyond repair. Carl sprang forward, his coat in his hand, to pick up the pieces and wrap them in the garment. Before he got near the wall, however, he started back with a shout of surprise.

"Look!" he cried; "see dere, vonce! Vot you call dose t'ings?"

Matt held the candle nearer the floor, and the light fell over little scattered objects that gleamed like dewdrops. There were several handfuls of them, and in two or three places they were heaped up in iridescent piles.

"By Jove!" gasped Townsend, starting forward and dropping to his knees.

He picked up several of the glimmering objects and examined them under the flame of the candle; then he turned to the boys with an odd, exultant look and spoke but one word:

"Diamonds!"

"Tiamonts?" echoed Carl.

"Strike me lucky!" muttered Dick.

"Do you mean to say those are diamonds, Townsend?" queried Motor Matt.

"Yes, and of the first water. They're South African stones. There was quite a little method in the madness of the Man from Cape Town, after all. Get the pieces of the head in your coat, Carl, and put up a window, Dick. We can't take any chances with these stones while those fellows are in the next room."

Carl hurried to spread out his coat and pile the fragments of the head upon it. While he was engaged in that, Dick hoisted a window and allowed the outdoor air to purify the noxious atmosphere of the room. After that, Matt, Townsend, Dick and Carl spread their handkerchiefs upon the floor and gathered up all the scattered stones.

"You had an idea that idol's head was hollow and that there was something in it, hadn't you, Matt?" queried Townsend, as they hunted the floor over for diamonds.

"Yes," was the answer. "I dug it out of the first paragraph written on that piece of parchment. 'Read and give heed, for the head of Obboney contains many things, perilous and otherwise.' I got to thinking that those words might be read in two ways."

"It was a great scheme that," observed Townsend, "hiding a treasure of diamonds in the head of an idol which gives off a deadly odor. I wish we knew more about the Man from Cape Town and where he got the stones; but he is dead, and the mystery will no doubt always remain unsolved."

"Unless his daughter can tell us something about her father," said Matt.

"That is possible, of course. There must be fully two hundred of these stones, and they are all of the very finest. A fortune, my lads! Part of it comes to me, and out of my part we shall share and share alike."

The boys, with the exception of Carl, began to protest, but Townsend silenced them with a word.

"It is only right," he averred. "You have borne many dangers on account of that iron chest, and mere justice calls upon you to have your due share of the treasure. I shall make it my business to see that you get it."

When the last stone was gathered off the floor, and the handkerchiefs were all carefully tied up, the little bundles of stones were turned over to Townsend. He stowed them carefully away in his pockets.

"The question now arises," said he, "as to what we shall do with Jurgens, Whistler, Bangs and the unknown? No doubt we could make them smart for what they have done, not only here in New Orleans, but also for Jurgens' and Whistler's criminal work in stealing the *Grampus*. But will it pay to bother with them?"

"Not to-night," returned Matt, promptly. "The thing for you to do, Townsend, is to get safely aboard the *Grampus* as quick as you can. You have the price of a king's ransom about your clothes and it would be foolish to take any chances with it."

"Like always," chirped Carl, "Modor Matt has hit der nail rightd on der head. Vat he says goes mit me, und it ought to go mit eferypody else."

"It does," asserted Townsend. "I have lain a prisoner in that old bank vault for two days, and the inconvenience and discomfort I have been put to I shall not soon forget; but Jurgens and Whistler have been beaten at their own game. Besides, my lads, it was, on the whole, a good thing that Bangs worked his little game successfully. If he hadn't, I should have opened that iron chest in the home of a lady on St. Charles Avenue, and who knows what the consequences would have been? Jurgens and Bangs first tested the deadly effluvia of the idol's head, and we were able to profit by their experience. Yes, it is best to leave them here and allow them to recover and go their ways. The knowledge that they are beaten will be punishment enough for them."

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Having settled the matter in this way, Townsend and the boys passed the prostrate forms in the other room, gained the apartment at the head of the stairs, blew out the candle and went away.

Fifteen minutes later they were on the levee; and ten minutes after that they were boarding the *Grampus* and slipping down under her decks through the top of the conning tower.

CHAPTER XVI.

Before Carl climbed downward through the conning tower of the *Grampus*, he shook the fragments of the idol's head out of his coat upon the rounded deck of the submarine and heard them glide off and splash into the water.

"Dere vill be some foolishness among der fishes, I bed you!" he chuckled; "aber, all der same, it vas goot-py to Obboney! Und may nodding like him efer come oudt oof Africa again."

Cassidy, mate of the *Grampus*, was the only one of the crew aboard. He had had no idea of the perils through which Townsend had passed, nor of the troubles encountered by the boys. He knew, of course, that the boys had arrived, for all up and down the river front the *Hawk* was the topic of conversation.

In the conning tower of the *Grampus*, that evening, there was a spread. Cassidy opened canned goods and made coffee on an alcohol stove. The guests at the "feed" sat around with their tin plates in their laps, and while they ate they talked over recent exciting events.

Carl offered information of value by telling how the iron chest had been stolen from Townsend, placed on a boat in the river, and had then vanished while Jurgens and Whistler were dodging the watchmen.

"That boat must have been adrift on the river for two days!" exclaimed Townsend. "Strange that some one else did not find the chest instead of you boys."

"I reckon she caught in the eddies below the town and drifted back and forth until she finally got out in the current," surmised Dick. "That's the only way you can account for the fact that she wasn't picked up."

"You vas bot' wrong," asserted Carl, solemnly. "Dere vas a gaptain on dot rowpoat all der time. It vas Captain Obboney, in der chest. Nodding could habben py dot poat mit dot itol's headt apoard."

"There may be something in that," observed Townsend, half smiling and half serious. "This New Orleans affair appears to be wrapped up in a great deal of occultism. Personally, I never took much stock in occultism, but I don't know how I can dodge the facts developed by those smoke pictures."

"And then there's a whole lot more to Yamousa than just those smoke pictures," said Dick. "Whistler went to see her to find out if she couldn't tell him what had become of the chest."

"Voodooism used to be quite strong in New Orleans, among credulous blacks and superstitious whites," said Townsend. "Of course, there's nothing in voodooism as it is usually practiced, but this Yamousa seems versed in many peculiar things. Really, I don't know what to think of her."

"Well," asserted Carl, "she makes a misdake vonce in a vile."

"How so, Carl?"

"Vy, she gave Matt a charm vich vasn't no charm ad all, but a hootoo. I tried it oudt, und I know. Tick," and here Carl faced his chum, "dot dried frog don'd vas any goot as a luck pringer. It got me indo lods oof drouple. I safed dot from you, bard," and Carl shifted his gaze to Matt.

"Where is that charm now, Carl?" inquired Matt.

"Pangs dook it away from me," chuckled Carl, "und I bed you someding for nodding dot it made all der drouple for Pangs, Jurgens und Whistler."

"We might just as well explain it that way as in any other," said Townsend. "Many things have happened which defy explanation, so Carl's guess is just as good as any one's else."

"I can tell you somet'ing vich ain'd a guess," continued Carl, "und dot iss dot Jurgens hat a feller vatching Cassidy, und ven Cassidy sent dot delegram to Modor Matt, Jurgens' man vas aple to findt oudt vat vas in it. Dot's der vay Pangs habbened to be on der levee ven der air ship come down on der dock. He knowed dot ve vas coming."

"Where were you this afternoon, Cassidy?" inquired Matt.

"I took the *Grampus* over to Algiers yesterday," answered the mate, "and didn't get back until about four this afternoon."

"That's the reason we didn't see you," put in Dick. "If you had been around the levee Bangs would never have been able to pull off that game of his."

"I told Cassidy to drop over to Algiers if he thought best," said Townsend. "It was unlucky that he happened to be there at just the time he might have been of service to Matt and his friends. However, as I told you in the rooms over the antique shop, it's just as well events turned out as they have. We have won out against Jurgens and Whistler, and if they know when they're well off they'll steer clear of all of us in future."

"Dose fellers hat two hang-oudts," remarked Carl. "Vone vas ad Rigolette's blace, vere der chest vas dook from der tock, und der odder vas ofer der antique shop. Vone, I reckon, vas vere dey dook us in, und der odder vas vere dey viped us oudt. But der itol's headt fooled der lod oof us. I vish, py shinks, you couldt haf seen Jurgens und Pangs ven der chest vas obened und dey saw nodding more as sawdust!"

Carl threw back his head and laughed till he shook.

"I vasn't in der blace vere I could enchoy dot, at der time," he went on, "but I can haf fun mit it

now. Id vas a derriple tissapointment. Den, ven Jurgens kicked der headt oudt oof der sawdust, eferypody vas scart, including me. Yah, I vas as afraidt as anypody. Den, pympy, I tropped ashleep und I wasn't affraidt no more."

"You were tied, weren't you, Carl, while you were in that room at Rigolette's?"

"You bed you I vas, Matt, handt und feet."

"How did you get clear of the ropes?"

"Dot vas some mysderies. I don'd know dot, onless I vorked meinseluf loose ven I come to und vas grazzy. Anyvay, ven I vas aple to know vere I vas I vas in der shdreed und dere wasn't any ropes on me. Vat you say Rigolette call dot monkey?"

"Joujou," replied Dick.

"Den I vas mooch opliged to Chouchou. How t'ings fall oudt mit demselufs oof you leaf dem alone! Dere vas me, und Jurgens, und Pangs, lying in dot room mit der itol's headt, und passing oudt oof der game py inches, ven along comes Chouchou. He hat dook my hat, pefore dot, und I oxbect he vas looking for me to gif it pack. Anyvay, he leafs der hat und goes off mit der itol's headt, safing me, und dose odder fellers, aber killing himseluf in der operations. Yah, Chouchou vas a goot monkey, I tell you dot. Dit you see der barrot?"

"No," said Dick. "Has Rigolette a parrot?"

"Yah, so, und dot barrot make some foolishness mit me aboutt der time der monkey shdeal my cap. Vell, anyhow, it vas all ofer now, und I feel dot I can laugh at some t'ings vich ditn't blease me pefore."

"What will you and your chums do now, Matt?" inquired Townsend.

"We seem to have wound up our business in New Orleans in short order," laughed Matt, "so I suppose we had better bear away for Atlantic City."

"You haven't helped me, yet, in the work for which I wired you to come on here."

All three of the boys were startled.

"Wasn't it to help you recover that chest?" asked Matt.

"Not at all. At the time I requested Cassidy to send you the telegram, I had the chest safely in my hands and hadn't the least idea that Jurgens and Whistler were around and still had designs on it. You got here in good time to be of invaluable assistance to me, and fate so played the cards that I couldn't have won out without you—but I wanted you for something else."

"In that event," returned Matt, "we'll have to stay and give you our assistance."

"The *Hawk* has an excellent berth on the big dock and will be amply protected in case of high winds or bad weather; and, so far as I can see, you and your friends will be as well off as though you were in Atlantic City. So far as profit is concerned, there will be diamonds galore for all of you, and by this one trip to New Orleans you will have cleaned up more than you could possibly have made in a dozen years at Atlantic City."

"Tiamonts galore!" caroled the Dutch boy. "Dot soundts goot. I like tiamonts pedder as anyt'ing else, und ven you ged a whole lod, all in a punch, it makes you feel like you vas somepody. I would like to haf some oof dem set in pins, und rings, und pud dem all ofer me. I vant to be a prilliant feller," he grinned, "und I guess dot's der only vay vat I can be dot."

"To-morrow morning," went on Townsend, "I will hunt up this lady about whom the Man from Cape Town told me. Following the division of the gems, I will call on this Rigolette and, if he has not already released Bangs, will have him do so. Then, when we have a clear slate, I will lay before you the business which I have in prospect."

"Iss it easy?" queried Carl.

"No, very difficult."

"Dot's vat ve like. Anypody can do der easy t'ings, aber it dakes Modor Matt to do der hard vones."

"Carl has an armful of bouquets, to-night," laughed Matt, "and he don't care where he throws them."

"Iss id t'rilling vork?" continued Carl.

"Likely to be," smiled Townsend, "and perhaps a bit dangerous."

"Den be sure und keep id for us. All vat I ask iss, dot you cut out der foodoos. A leedle oof dose iss more as enough."

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (14) WILL CONTAIN

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OR,

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—A Friend from the Enemy's Camp—The Bag of Diamonds—A Daring Plot—On the
Road—A New Man Takes a Hand—Conclusion.

<h2>MOTOR STORIES</h2> <h3>THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION</h3>

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THE MASKED LIGHT.

San José Lighthouse shone from the back of a tunnel-like creek on a barren stretch of the Chilian seaboard. Passing ships caught its secret rays most suddenly; much in the same manner as a lonely wayfarer might be startled at a swift glance of a light far down a secret entrance.

The moment the light of San José fell upon a ship, that vessel at once hugged the land and crept warily along the inshore water. A false order, a mistake at the helm, and the "Devil's Teeth," the offshore reef, would grind her ribs to matchwood.

The light was built on top of an old chapel whose ponderous walls could have carried the Eddystone itself. This building crouched in the left-hand corner of the creek, with its back built into the angle of the cliff, which, on that side, rose plumb as a wall and ran out into deep soundings. There was, however, one break in it about eighty yards in front of the lighthouse. From this opening an overhead traveling cable passed across the creek to the mid-level of "Cassandra Mine," which honeycombed the right bank.

This latter side, though rocky, was fairly easy of ascent by means of buttress-like masses of rock jutting out from the cliff, and the rubbish shot out from the mine.

Such was the lonely creek of San José when the revolution broke out against President Balmaceda, and left us, Gilbert and myself, stranded helplessly on a foreign shore.

Nine months before, we had departed from our homes in the States, appointed engineers to the Cassandra Coppermining Company, Limited. Nine months before! and now our situation was worse than any Bowery loafer's; he, at all events, could try the station house when the nights grew colder.

"I knew it was too good to last," cried Gilbert, one morning as we awoke to find ourselves in a dismal plight. The mine was deserted: every man had gone to shoulder a musket on the principle of "compulsory volunteering." We transferred our worries by means of a letter to the head office, and then fell to unlimited euchre, awaiting instructions. Meanwhile, our funds melted away.

At last came one day of maddening heat that drove us to the shade of the mid-level of the mine. There we did what we ought to have done a month before: we held a council of war.

"We've just three and a half pesos left—that's about three dollars," quoth Gilbert sourly.

"Then we've got to tramp."

"Tramp!" echoed Gilbert, "in *that!*" and he cast an exasperated glance at the landscape. It was an

open oven. Below us, the lighthouse lenses flashed back the sunlight in such brightness that if we had not known that all the lights on the coast had been extinguished by order, we might have thought the lamps were still burning. The village huts seemed to shrink and huddle from the glare. Not a creature was abroad; the very air seemed to have swooned in the heat of that narrow creek.

And yet, over the hill crest where the village path cut the upland, a tiny speck rose to sight, and without a pause descended the slope toward us.

"Impossible!" gasped my chum, starting up in amazement. "He's stark, staring mad!"

It was a man running at a sling trot.

"Madman number two," cried Gilbert, and another speck breasted the crest, and hurriedly descended on the heels of the first comer. And then, by ones and twos, more men appeared and swung downward, hurriedly and without a halt, until we counted twenty-one of them on the slope. They came nearer and lower, and we saw sparkles of light breaking off them as they ran; then we both cried together: "Soldiers!" And at that word all the world was of interest.

By this time they were up to the first huts, and at a cry every soul rushed outside.

Some of the runners had fallen by the houses, and people began to carry water to them.

"Poor beggars," cried Gilbert, "but if they *will* run on a day like this—why on earth don't they go inside and rest peacefully?"

But that was the last thing they gave us any impression of so doing. We saw Henrico, the old sailor with the earrings and Spanish handkerchief for a cap, talking among a group of the soldiers. Now and again they looked back to the crest, and then toward our side of the creek. Something of great interest was meanwhile passing from hand to hand. Suddenly Henrico turned to the villagers, addressing them in no little heat. The soldiers seized their guns, and then, led by Henrico, the whole crowd, villagers and soldiers, began to ascend the talus of the mine. Halfway up, Henrico turned and called back to the women, "All you in siesta again." But one of them, Chloe, the sharp-tongued beauty of the village, broke away, and headed the whole crowd.

Striding along with her buoyant energy, she soon outstripped them all, and in a few minutes she appeared on the ledge in front of us, two hundred feet above the creek. For a moment she stood silent, a swarthy black-eyed beauty, holding the two plaits of her hair in outstretched hands: just in the same attitude and with just the same smile on her arched lips we saw her every morning when she called us to breakfast; for she was Henrico's niece and we lodged with him.

"Fortune, señors!" cried she. "Here are soldiers with a message; we do not read in our village; we come to you to speak it to us." And now the soldiers filed in, and Henrico proffered me a crumpled paper. I read on it: "To Capitan Barras." "Here!" cried I, "this is not for us."

"No," said a dusty, sweat-soaked soldier, "Capitan Barras is killed. I am his sergeant. Read, señor, I am the next."

"I nodded and read on:

"The enemy are reënforcing by sea. Have correct information that they intend capturing the lighthouse at San José on the 12th, and light it to guide the transports which are due to pass the inshore channel of the Devil's Teeth. Detail a command to destroy the lighthouse beyond repair. I have wired to the cruisers; latter will be able to overtake and capture transports if delayed off San José on the night of the 12th. You have six (6) hours start of the enemy.

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"RODRIQUE GOMEZ."

As I finished this terse and emphatic message the sergeant cried "Ho!" and "Is that the lighthouse?"

"Yes," sang out the villagers as one man.

"Advance!" cried the sergeant, shouldering to the front of the crowd; Chloe was already on her way out, but with a sharp, smothered cry she stopped dead in the opening, turned round, and thrust back the following men, hissing the while through her teeth:

"Silence! not a breath; the enemy!"

There came a sudden metallic rattling, a rapid snapping of rifle breeches, then dead, nervous silence.

The lighthouse was in possession of the enemy! Already a couple of soldiers leaned over the balcony round the lenses, and we could hear their voices as they sang out to a mounted officer below. About this latter, and standing at ease, were some eighty men.

"And the videttes," growled the sergeant, as he pointed to the hill crest. At this an angry murmur arose about us. They were completely outnumbered by the Balmacedians; and outmaneuvered by the fatal mischance to their captain in a skirmish at daybreak. He had been shot through the throat. With a last effort he had thrust the note into the sergeant's hands and bade him haste to San José, halting neither to fight nor to rest. This we learned afterward.

From the first appearance of the soldiers in the mine, Gilbert had been eying them with undisguised irritation. He now called out in a sharp voice for their attention.

"If you stay here those other soldiers will attack you and 'gastado' the whole set of you. And this

mine being American property and not a battle field, the best you can do is to clear out by the level on the far side before they discover you."

At this the sergeant looked blankly in his face.

"It's no good," quoth Gilbert, "you must clear out."

The sergeant's face changed. He slapped the breech of his rifle, swore a round oath, and cried heartily: "This place is our last stand; I shoot the first of my men that leaves!"

Gilbert dropped his eyelids in his tired way, and pulled out his watch.

"I give you five minutes," he said, in a level, matter-of-fact voice.

"And we," cried the sergeant, "have to destroy that lighthouse!"

Here Chloe thrust herself into the front of the gathering storm.

"The soldier has it," she cried, "the lighthouse must be destroyed. You, señors, engineer chiefs will show us the way; it will be done."

"I'll see you all hanged first," broke in Gilbert in terse English. Then he added in Spanish: "Clear out! only another two minutes." Chloe lifted her head in a passion, and her black eyes narrowed.

"Señors," she cried with scorn, "have we idled in the fetching of water when water was so scarce, for the big 'tub' every morn? and you have had meat and your coffee roasted to the hour. All; and not one pesos these months. Have we cried 'clear out' to you when you could not no more than these soldiers?"

Gilbert thrust his watch back in his shirt. We both flushed hotly, and we both found it disconcerting to look in one another's faces. But it had to be done.

"That's a bitter pill to swallow," growled he.

"It's true enough," I said.

Gilbert, with a short, grim laugh in his throat, growled out, "Well, let us begin to earn our grub."

Chloe read our decision in our faces. "Huzza," she cried, "the engineer chiefs—capitanos—will show us how to destroy it. We are the legs, the arms; they are the head. The lighthouse shall not be there to-night!"

In this manner Gilbert and I became "capitanos" in the Revolutionary army. From an inert and baffling position we were lifted on a wave, and flung into a rushing current. There was work for our hands and brains: a problem to solve, a thing to accomplish. And we were no longer weary.

Henrico and the sergeant joined us in a short council of war. And as at any moment the enemy's scouts might blunder on us and bring on a fight, we decided to retreat to a lower level, where we could hold an army corps at bay. Safe in this, Gilbert and I sat apart; the soldiers scooped out resting places, and, with their knapsacks for pillows, fell instantly asleep.

"Confound that girl," said Gilbert, "and confound the whole place and their tin-pot armies too! But it is a fine problem, eh? I suppose the only way to do it is by—well, anything else but fighting."

I quite agreed with him. But as hour after hour passed, and scheme after scheme was rejected, we began to think a little less of our abilities. We wrestled with the problem till our heads reeled. If only we could get a side glance even at a workable scheme. But no. At last Gilbert pulled out his Waterbury. "Five o'clock!" he cried, "we are undiluted frauds if we can't do it in another hour. It will be dark by six!"

Chloe had, in the meantime, crawled out by another level to report what was doing in the creek. She had just come back. The enemy were bivouacked round the lighthouse. On the upland, and commanding every approach, sentries and videttes marked the land as far as she could see.

However, she had brought one piece of comfort in the shape of a cool jar of water. As she served us she asked for news of our scheme.

"How soon do the hands and legs begin to work, capitanos?" she asked with a complacent smile. Gilbert, with a diplomatic, Spanish-fashion wave of his hand, replied: "So! so!"

"Ah, señors," said she, "I should want to do it—how? Why, shut up that lighthouse like flinging a blanket over it: so!"

"And," cried Gilbert, "that's just what we are going to do! Tell the men to be ready on the instant." As she departed he turned to me with dancing eyes.

"See?" he whispered.

"No; not an atom."

"No? Well, old man, she has struck the only plan possible! Observe the overhead traveling wire. It lands on the flat just outside the other opening, doesn't it? Well, suppose we hang a curtain—even Chloe's skirt, if it were big enough—on that wire, and run it out, and cut off the light from flashing out to seaward."

"But," I objected, "we can't make a screen big enough to intercept all the light at a hundred feet distance—it is impracticable."

He laughed in my face, and cried out:

"My boy, rays of light from lighthouses are *parallel!*"

I had forgotten this elementary fact. I cried "Eureka!" and then we faced our task: a race against time.

The men streamed up to us, heard, and set to work immediately. We requisitioned the tarpaulin covers from the bags of cement; even emptied the bags themselves. We stripped hundreds of yards of telephone wires in the galleries. We descended to a still lower level; we were all tailors, sailmakers, anything, everything. Some patched holes, while others sewed cover to cover until a sheet, fifty feet square, grew beneath our hands, sewn together with wire, and impervious to a single ray of light.

As the last hole was stilettoed with the point of a bayonet, Gilbert and I sought the upper level. We found the night had fallen. The cold sea breeze tasted like nectar after the candle-burnt atmosphere in the workshop below. Our eyes sought the lighthouse; a couple of men were in the lantern; one held a candle, and was clumsily striving to light the argand burners.

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"Good!" cried Gilbert, "they'll smash some glasses, or I'm an idiot. Now for the launch!"

We descended to our workshop. The flushed, wet faces of the screen makers confronted us, and Gilbert spoke.

"We want a volunteer to cross to the other side and clear the wire, and to signal back when ready for us to haul out the screen. It must be one of you from the village, one who knows every stone in the darkness. And one who is not afraid. Who volunteers?"

There was a silence in which we heard the water dripping in far-deep levels. Gilbert looked from face to face; in vain, it seemed. The villagers were, however, weighing the risk of failure. Chloe stepped quietly from the group, and as quietly said: "This is a woman's business; is it not so, Uncle Henrico? Who knows so well as I the rock paths through the lines of the sentinels? And if I meet them—well, I am a woman and I laugh. If I were a man—well, the end of me and our venture."

"'Tis true," growled Henrico, "Chloe must go."

He had hardly spoken before she had given a swift wave of her hand to us, and vanished up the adit.

We followed, dragging our great screen, and presently we peered out into the night. In that little time they had managed to get some at least of the lamps to burn, and now we saw a glowing circle of light. Henrico, Gilbert, and myself alone crept on to the ledge outside. Everything had to be done by touch. Henrico had been a sailor, and to him fell the delicate task of hooking the screen on to the traveling wire. Foot by foot it disappeared overhead, and presently Henrico swarmed back to us and we crept together, and laid our ears on the wire cable. It sang and hummed in the night wind like a harp string. Little jars and metallic jingles broke the even rise and fall of sound. Was it Chloe? Should we hear the signal clear or confused, loud or soft? On a sudden our doubts were settled. Our ears rang as a clear sharp blow quivered on the wire.

"Safe," we cried in delight, and soon after that came the arranged three clear blows across the wire.

In another second we were all heaving hard and fast at the traveler overhead. Foot by foot it crept along, until we saw, with breathless delight, a huge blackness slicing into the circle of light. An unforetold eclipse! It intersected it completely. Not a ray escaped seaward.

So far we had won.

Dripping with sweat, and nigh breathless, we dropped to the rock and looked toward the lighthouse. The lantern seemed to be utterly deserted. Against the lower windows of the chapel we could see the silhouettes of the guard. They were playing cards. Not an eye had seen our operations. As we rejoined the sergeant, Gilbert chuckled and said: "The game is ours! Joker, right bower, and left!"

"Not yet," quoth Henrico grimly, "the fight is at the dawn."

"Across there," added the soldier, nodding his head toward the other landing place of the wire.

We had much yet to learn of the ups and downs of war; and more, too, to learn about our mine. For we now found every villager busily polishing up a rifle; and soon, too, they were dragging up half a dozen cases of ammunition from secret places in the far levels. And we were the engineers of this same mine!

Henrico served round the ammunition. The sergeant inspected every new rifle. He handed one to each of us in such an ordinary way of routine, that we accepted them and fell immediately into line to wait the coming of events. Two hours later, the tide had fallen sufficiently to enable a crossing to be made outside the mine.

Fifteen men were to guard the other landing place of the wire.

They passed out in single file, five soldiers and ten villagers, the sergeant in command. He carried two rifles. "One for our 'advance guard,' Chloe," he said, with a laugh wrinkling his brown face as he passed us. The next instant he stepped through the opening. And so he passed from our life: a little, sinewy man, of few words, but of most prompt decision; following his trade cheerfully, and uncomplaining if in the day's march bad tools or adverse luck befell him. He died across there in the dawn; perhaps he saw the sun rise, and knew the end of the night's work; I hoped so.

It was now close upon ten o'clock, and there were about seven hours for us to keep most vigilant

and secret watch upon the lighthouse. From time to time we saw a man enter the lantern and trim the lamps. Once he stepped out on the balcony, and, leaning over the rail, quietly smoked his cigarette.

Gilbert clutched my arm like a vise. "If that man moves to the other side we are done! He will see his shadow on the screen!"

But, to our infinite joy, he passed in and down to join his comrades. Below, in the chapel, they played cards, changed sentries, and slept; all in complete unconsciousness of the ill trick we had played them.

Night was waning. Henrico pointed to a paler shadow on the crest above the creek. The wind had dropped; the air was filled with the sound of the tide seething in the rocks and weeds below us. Save that, all was still. Everything seemed to be watching and waiting.

Presently we could see one another's hands and faces. Henrico at once mustered all the defenders and posted them among the serried rocks on the talus.

It was an ambuscade in an amphitheatre. Some one dropped a musket, and, at the sound, we all glanced nervously at the lighthouse; no one stirred within, and we were crouching down—when a most horrid crash and volleying of shots broke out across the creek.

"On guard!" cried Henrico; "the patrol has found our outpost."

Even while he spoke, and even above the din, we caught the ring of quick hoarse cries of command from the lighthouse. The door was flung open and a stream of soldiers sallied forth—to instant death. From every stone of our ambuscade, spitting flashes converged on the open door. It was a butchery at such a point-blank range, and with a light behind to show the mark. The crash of our volley died away as swiftly as it commenced. For a moment I thought that not a man had escaped uninjured. Nothing but a tumbled, dark heap filled the doorway and the little circle of light. But, suddenly, from the shelter of the interior, some one struck down the candle inside with the butt end of a musket, and the darkness swallowed all up, for it was as night yet down there.

Then we became aware of the hushed silence that was about us. Not a shot resounded from the direction of our outpost. Had the attack failed or had they captured our post? Involuntarily I glanced at our screen. It was still there, now just dimly outlined on the paling sky. Gilbert called softly to Henrico to know what he thought of the silence at the other side. We saw Henrico craning over his rock, and striving to pierce the blackness at the foot of the creek; his hand was up to keep silent. At last, out of the vagueness of empty sounds, we caught a faint patter of footsteps, and, as we heard it, it came nearer and nearer: men running in desperate haste. In a trice they were below us in the shadows. Some one cried "Up here"; another called to Henrico: "They have left the post," and all in the same breath we were fighting for our lives!

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

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Page 1, changed "se" to "see" in "I can see dot meinseluf."

Page 4, added missing apostrophe to "an', I do planty."

Page 8, changed "srceech" to "screech" in "screech of warning."

Page 10, changed "all sail sets" to "all sails set." Added missing quote after "into smithereens."

Page 11, changed "anwered" to "answered" after "knew of Archibald Townsend." Changed "handkerchif" to "handkerchief" ("fumbled in his pocket for a...").

Page 17, added missing open quote to "The more he talks."

Page 21, added missing open quote to "A pocketful."

Page 28, changed "Indentities" to "Identities."

Page 30, changed "matallic" to "metallic" ("metallic rattling"). Changed "fact" to "face" in "The sergeant's face changed."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S QUEER FIND; OR, THE
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