CHAPTER XVIII

ANCHORED HEARTS

Our rescue had been due to the vigilance of Tom Yeager. He had seen Bothwell slip down from the bridge and follow me to the forecastle.

The first impulse of the Arizonian had been to step out and end the campaign by a fighting finish with the Slav. But second thoughts brought wiser counsels. Blythe, called hurriedly upstairs, had agreed to his proposal to try and determine the mutiny at a stroke.

To both of them it had been clear that Bothwell surrendered the bridge because he was afraid to let me have a talk with the men alone. That my life was in great danger neither doubted.

Swiftly the men had been gathered for the sortie into the forecastle, Evelyn having volunteered to take the wheel until relieved. The success of the plan had been beyond the expectations of any.

Bothwell was the first of the prisoners to speak.

"Let me offer my congratulations, Captain Blythe," he said with suave irony.

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The lean, brown face of the Englishman expressed quiet scorn.

"Not necessary at all. It is the only result I have considered from the first. One doesn't expect to be driven from his ship by wharf rats, no matter how numerous they may be."

Bothwell laughed, debonair as ever.

"True enough, captain. My scoundrels made an awful botch of it. They played a good hand devilish badly or we should have won out."

"The devil you would! We beat you from first to last at odds against of two to one nearly. I reckon, Mr. Pirate, you undertook too big a round-up," grinned the cattleman.

"Fortunately there is always a to-morrow," retorted Bothwell with a bow.

"Sometimes it's mortgaged to Jack Ketch."

"I'll wager he doesn't foreclose, Mr. Yeager," answered Boris with a lip smile.

Blythe cut short the repartee.

"We'll put this man in a stateroom and lock him up, Sedgwick. The rest will stay here guarded by Alderson. If one of them makes a suspicious move, shoot him down like a mad dog. Understand, my man?"

"Yes, sir. I'll see they make no trouble," Alderson answered resolutely.
I made a suggestion to our captain. After a moment's consideration he accepted it.

"Very good, Mr. Sedgwick. Have Gallagher, Neidlinger, and Higgins freed. See that they clean the ship up till she is fresh as paint."

The first thing we did was to gather the bodies of the poor fellows who had fallen in the struggles for the ship. Blythe read the burial service before we sank the weighted corpses into the sea.

Under my direction the men then swabbed the decks, washed the woodwork, and scoured the copper plates until they shone.

It was not until luncheon that I found time for more than a word with Evelyn. None of us, I suppose, had suffered more than she and Miss Berry, but they made it their business to help us forget the nightmare through which we had lately passed.

I remember that Miss Wallace looked round from a gay little sally at Jimmie with a smile in her eyes. I was reaching for some fruit when her glance fell upon my hand.

"What's the matter with your fingers?" she asked quickly.

I withdrew my hand promptly. The flesh was swollen and discolored from the attentions of Boris Bothwell.
"I had a little accident—nothing of importance," was my inadequate answer.

Her gaze circled the table, passed from Sam's face to that of Jimmie and from Jimmie to Higgins, who was waiting on us. She must have read a confirmation of her intuition of a secret, for she dropped the subject at once.

"Jack crushed his hand against a piece of iron," explained the captain.

At which Miss Evelyn murmured. "Oh!" and inquired how long it would probably be before we reached the Bay of Panama.

"Using only our canvas we may reach there tomorrow night, and we may not. We can't make very good time till we start the engines again," Blythe said.

"And when are you going to start them?" Miss Berry asked.

"Don't quite know. I'm shy of engineers. The only ones I have are on a vacation," Sam answered with a smile.

They were not to enjoy one very long, however. About sunset the Argos began to rock gently on a sea no longer glassy.

"Cap says we're going to have trouble," Yeager informed me. "When you get this sultry smell in the air and that queer look in the sky there is go-
ing to be something doing. She’s going to begin to buck for fair."

I noticed that Blythe was taking in sail and that the wind was rising.

"Knock the irons off the Flemings and send Gallagher down into the engine room to stoke for them. We’ll need more hands. This thing is going to hit us like a wall of wind soon," he told me.

When I returned from the forecastle the sea had risen. As I was standing on the bridge a voice called my name. I looked down to see Evelyn on the promenade deck in a long, close-fitting waterproof coat, her hair flying a little wildly in the breeze. In the face upturned to mine was a very vivid interest.

"We’re in for it. There’s going to be a real squall," she cried delightedly.

I stepped down and tucked her arm under mine, for the deck was already tipping in the heavy run of seas.

Most of our canvas was in, and the booming wind was humming through the rest with growing power. The Argos put her nose into the whitecaps and ran like a racer, for the engines were shaking the yacht as she plowed forward.

The young woman turned to me an eager, mobile face into which the wind had whipped a rich color.
"What would you take to be somewhere else? Back in your stuffy old law office, say?"

The lurch of the staggering yacht threw her forward so that the lithe, supple body leaned against me and the breath of the dimpling lips was in my nostrils.

Just an instant she lay there, with that smile of warm eyes and rose-leaf mouth to tantalize me, before she recovered and drew back.

"Not for a thousand dollars a minute," I answered, a trumpet peal of indomitable happiness ringing in my heart.

From the wheel-house Blythe shouted a warning to be careful. His voice scarcely reached us through the singing of the wind. I nodded and took hold of the little hand that lay close to mine.

"You must be a rich man to value the pleasure of the hour so highly," she answered lightly, with a look quick and questioning at me.

The squall that had flung itself across the waters hit us in earnest now. We went down into the yawning troughs before us with drunken plunges and climbed the glassy hills beyond to be ready for another dive.

"The richest man alive if last night was not a dream."

Our fingers interlaced, palms kissing each other.
"Does it seem to you a dream?" she asked, deep in a valley of the seas.

From the top of the next comber I answered:
"It did until you joined me here, but now I know you belong to me forever, both in the land of dreams and waking."

"Did the storm teach you that?"

I looked out at the flying scud and back at the storm-bewitched girl with laughter rippling from her throat and the wild joy of a rare moment in her eyes.

"Yes, the storm. It brought you to my arms and your heart to mine."

"I think it did, Jack; the wee corner of it that was not yours already."

Her shy eyes fell and I drew her close to me. In the dusk that had fallen like a cloak over the ship her lips met mine with the sweetest surrender in the world.

So in the clamorous storm our hearts found safe anchorage.
CHAPTER XIX

SENSE AND NONSENSE

The squall passed as suddenly as it had swept upon us, and left in its wake a night of stars and moonbeats.

Apparently there was no question of returning the mutineers to the irons from which we had freed them. Alderson, Smith, Neidlinger, and Higgins were grouped together on the forecastle deck in amiable chat.

Blythe was still at the wheel, and our cheerful friend from the cattle country at the piano bawling out the identical chorus I had interrupted so ruthlessly just before the first blow of the mutiny was struck.

He was lustily singing as Evelyn and I trod the deck.

"Tom sings as if with conviction. I hope it may not be deep-rooted," I laughed.

"If you mean me——"

"I don't mean Miss Berry."

To my surprise she took the words seriously.
"It isn't so, Jack. Say it isn't so."
"Does that mean that it is?" I asked.
"No-o. Only I can't bear to think that our happiness will make anybody else unhappy."
"It doesn't appear to be making him unhappy."
"But he doesn't know—yet."
"Then he's really serious? I wasn't quite sure."
She sighed.
"I wish he wasn't. How girls can like to make men fall in love with them I can't conceive. He's such a splendid fellow, too."
"He's a man, every inch of him," I offered by way of comfort. "It won't hurt him to love a good woman even if he doesn't win her. He'll recover, but it will do him a lot of good first."
"Would you feel so complacent if it were you?" she asked slyly, with a flash of merry eyes.
We happened to be in the shadow of the smokestack. After the interlude I expounded my philosophy more at length.
"He's young yet—at least his heart is. A man has to love a nice girl or two before he is educated to know the right one when he meets her. I don't pity Yeager—not a great deal, anyhow. It's life, you know," I concluded cheerfully.
"Oh, I see. A man has to love a nice girl or two as an educative process." Her voice trailed into
the rising inflection of a question. "Then the right
girl ought to thank me for helping to prepare Mr.
Yeager for her—if I am."

"That's a point of view worth considering," I
assented.

"But I suppose she will never even know my
name," she mused.

"Most likely not," was my complacent answer.
Whereupon she let me have her thrust with a
little purr of amusement in her voice.

"Any more than I shall know what nice girls
prepared you for me."

"Touché," I conceded with a laugh. "I didn't
know you were the kind of young woman that
lays traps for a fellow to tumble into."

"And I didn't know you were a war-worn vet-
eran toughened by previous campaigns," she coun-
tered gaily. "You've been very liberally educated,
didn't you say?"

"No, I didn't say. This is how I put it to my-
self: A boy owes something to the nice girls all
about him. One would not like to think, for in-
stance, that the youths of Tennessee had been so
insensible as never to have felt a flutter when your
long lashes drifted their way," I diplomatically
suggested.

"How nicely you wrap it up," she said with her
low, soft laugh. "And must my heart have fluttered, too, for them? Unless it has, I won't be properly educated for you, shall I?"

"Ah, that's the difference. You are born perfect lovers, but we have to acquire excellence through experience."

"Oh!"

An interjection can sometimes express more than words. My sweetheart's left me wondering just what she meant. There was amusement in it, but there was, too, a demure suppression to which I had not the key.

She, too, I judged, had known a few love episodes in her life. Perhaps she had been engaged before, as is sometimes the custom among Southern girls. The thought gave me a queer little stab of pain.

Yeager came out of the deck pavilion as we passed.

"I say, let's have some music, good people."

I looked at my watch.

"My turn at the wheel. Maybe Blythe will join you."

He did. From the pilot-house I could hear his clear tenor and Evelyn's sweet soprano filling the night with music. Presently they drifted into patriotic songs, in which Tom came out strong if not
melodious. But when the piano sounded the notes of "Dixie" Evelyn's voice rose alone, clear and full-throated as that of a lark.

After being relieved by Alderson I turned in and slept round the clock. The tune of drumming engines was in my ears when I woke.

"Sam is making her walk," I thought, and when I reached the deck I learned that we had entered the Gulf of Panama. A long, low line showed dimly in the foggy distance to the left. We were running parallel with it, Prieto Point directly in front of us.

With the exception of the older Fleming, who had been transferred to the same cabin as Bothwell, all the crew were at work. Only the true men, however, were armed. From the looks cast by the former mutineers toward the blurred shore line it was plain that they looked forward to Panama with anxiety.

In the canal zone, with the flag of the United States flying to the breeze, the law would give them short shrift. We observed that whenever their duties permitted it, they drew uneasily together in earnest talk.

Blythe smiled grimly.

"Our friends don't like the wages of sin, now that pay day is at hand. I'll give you two to one,
Jack, that before an hour is up you'll see a delegation to the captain."

He was right. As Sam stepped down from the bridge, having turned the wheel over to Alderson, he was approached timidly by Neidlinger and Gallagher. Higgins, in partial payment for his share in the revolt, was taking a turn at shoveling coal in the stifling furnace room.

Gallagher touched his hat humbly.

"We'd like a word with you, Captain Blythe."

"I thought Bothwell was your captain?"

The sailor flushed.

"No, sir. We're through with him."

"Now that he's a prisoner?" suggested Sam.

"We wish we'd never let him bamboozle us, sir. It would 'a' been a sight better for a lot of poor fellows if we'd never seen him. That man's a devil, sir."

"Indeed!"

As he stood there, a lean brown man straight as a ramrod, efficient to the last inch of him, it struck me that the mutineers would get justice rather than mercy from our captain.

The sailor moistened his dry lips and went on.

"Captain Blythe, we—we're sorry we let ourselves be led into—into——"
Gallagher stumbled for a word. Sam supplied it quietly:
“Mutiny.”
“Yes, sir; if you want to put it that way, sir.”
“How else can I put it?”
“We were led astray by that man Bothwell, sir. He promised there would be no bloodshed. We’re sorry, sir.”
“I don’t doubt it,” the Englishman assented dryly.
“Begging your pardon, sir, we asks to be taken back and punished by you. Whatever you give us we’ll take and not a word out of our heads. Say a flogging and we’ll thank you kindly, sir. But don’t turn us over to the law.”
“Didn’t I tell you what would come of it, Gallagher?”
“Yes, sir; you warned us straight. But that man Bothwell had us bewitched.”
“If you’re taken ashore at Panama you’ll be hanged.”
“We know that, sir.”
Blythe considered for a minute and announced his decision sharply.
“I’ll give you another chance—you two and Higgins and young Fleming. I’ll not let you off scot-
free, but your punishment will depend on how faithful you are for the rest of the cruise.”

Once I saw a man acquitted of murder in a courtroom. The verdict was such a relief that he fainted. The captain’s unexpected clemency took these men the same way, for virtually he had untied the noose from their necks. Tears started to their eyes. Plainly they were shaken with emotion.

“You’ll not regret it, sir. We’ll be true to the death, Captain Blythe,” the Irishman promised, his white lips trembling.

After Alderson’s turn at the wheel came mine. Evelyn presently joined me in the pilot-house.

“When shall we get ashore?” she asked me.

We were at the time, I remember, passing Tabaoga Island.

“Not till morning. We’ll have to be inspected. To-night we’ll lie in the harbor.”

“How is your hand?” she asked, glancing at my bruised fingers.

I flashed a look quickly at her.

“My hand! Oh, it’s all right now.”

“Jimmie’s is better, too,” she said quietly.

In the language of my boyhood I was up a stump. So I played for time.

“Jimmie’s?”

“Yes. I have been taking care of it for him. His
fingers were not bruised much, though. It's odd, isn't it, that both of you were hurt in exactly the same place—by accident?"

I murmured that it was strange.

"So I had a little talk with him," she went on quietly.

"Yes?"

"And he told me all about it. Oh, Jack, I didn't think even Boris would do a thing like that!" She looked up at me with bright, misty eyes. "I asked Gallagher and Neidlinger about it. They both told me how brave you were."

"I'm grateful for their certificate of valor," I answered lightly.

Before I knew what she was at my sweetheart had stooped to kiss the bruises above my knuckles. I snatched my hand away.

"Don't do that," I said gruffly. "It isn't exactly—you know—right."

"Why not?" She looked at me with head flung back in characteristic fashion. "Why not? They suffered for us, the poor, bruised fingers. Why shouldn't I honor them with my poor best?"

"Oh, well!" I shrugged, embarrassed by her shining ardor, even though in my heart it pleased me.

She came close to me.
"I love you better every day, Jack. You’re splendid. Life is going to be a great, big thing for me with you."

"Even though we don’t find the treasure?" I asked, thrilling with the joy of her confession.

"We’ve found the treasure," she whispered. "I don’t give that"—she snapped her fingers with a gesture of scorn—"for all the gold that was ever buried compared to you, laddie. I just spend my time thanking God for you with all my heart."

"But you mustn’t idealize me. I’m full of faults."

"Don’t I know it? Don’t I love your faults, too, you goose? Who wants a perfect man?"

"I know, I know."

The wheel was getting very little attention, for my darling was in my arms and I was kissing softly her tumbled hair and the shadows under her glorious eyes.

"Love is like that. It doesn’t want perfection. I care more for you because you’re always wanting your own way. The tiny, powdered freckles on the side of your nose are beauty marks to me."

"You are a goose," she laughed. "But it’s true. I’ve seen lots of handsomer men than you—Boris, for example; but I’ve never seen one so good looking."
"And that's just nonsense," I told her blithely.

"Of course it's nonsense. But there is no sense so true as nonsense."

I dare say we babbled foolishly the inarticulate rhapsody all lovers find so expressive.
CHAPTER XX

THE BIG DITCH

Darkness had fallen before we dropped anchor in the harbor of Panama. It was such a night as only the tropics can produce, the stars burning close and brilliant, the full moon rising out of a silent sea. In front of us the lights of the city came twinkling out. Behind them lay the mystery of conquest.

No spot in all the western hemisphere held so much of romance as this. Drake and Pizarro had tarried here in their blustering careers, Morgan had captured and burned the city.

Many times in the past centuries the Isthmus had been won and lost, but never had such a victory been gained as that our countrymen had secured in the past half dozen years.

They had overcome yellow fever and proved that the tropics might be made a safe place for the Anglo-Saxon to live. They had driven a sword through the backbone of the continent and had built a canal through which great liners could climb up and down stairs from one ocean to another.

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The dream of the centuries had become a reality through the skill and resolution with which the sons of Uncle Sam had tackled the big ditch.

It may be guessed how anxious all of us were to get ashore. There was little sleep aboard the Argos that night. It was long past midnight, before any of us left the deck.

The truth is that the yacht had become a prison to us just as it had to Bothwell. The thought of a few days on land, where we need not watch every moment to keep our throats from being slit, was an enormous relief.

But Blythe was taking no chances with the vessel. It had been decided among us that either he, Yeager, or I should remain in charge of the Argos every minute of our stay.

I had volunteered for the first day and Yeager was to relieve me on the second.

All three of us were firmly resolved, though we had not yet broached the subject to Evelyn, that the ladies should remain in the canal zone while we continued down the coast to lift the treasure.

Before Bothwell was taken ashore he had the effrontery to ask for a talk with his cousin. Blythe did not even submit his request to her. Fleming and he were removed from the vessel while the ladies were eating breakfast with Yeager, so that
they did not even know until afterward that the men had been turned over to the authorities.

None of the reconstructed mutineers asked for shore leave. Each of them knew that if he left the ship he would be liable to arrest for a capital offense and preferred to take his chance of any punishment the captain might inflict.

The day was an endless one, but it wore away at last. The cattleman was to relieve me at breakfast time. I was up with the summer sun and had bathed, shaved, and eaten long before the city showed any sign of activity around the harbor.

"You'll like Panama," Yeager assured me after he had clambered aboard. "It's a city of madmen, plumb daffy about the big ditch. The men can't talk anything but cuts, dams, cubic feet, steam plows, and earth slides. But, by Moses, when I see what they've done it makes me glad I'm an American. Everything is the biggest in the world—the dam, the locks, the cuts, the lake, the machinery, the whole blessed works. They've set a new mark for the rest of the earth."

"What is Sam doing about getting a crew in place of our precious mutineers?" I asked.

"He's picked up several fellows already. A Yankee named Stubbs is chief engineer. Sam is shipping Jamaica niggers for firemen."
No schoolboy out for a holiday could have been half so keen to be free as I was. At the wharf I picked up a coche and was driven to the Tivoli, the hotel in the American quarter where our party was staying.

The mud and the mosquitoes of former years were gone, though the natives were as indolent as ever. It is a town of color, due largely to the assorted population. I was told by a young engineer from Gatun that forty languages are spoken on the Isthmus at present, a condition due to the number of Caribbean islanders employed by our government.

I found that the program for the day included a trip to Colon on the Isthmus railroad. Miss Berry preferred to rest quietly at the hotel, so her niece, Sam, and I set out to see the great canal.

As I look back on it now Panama means to me a series of panoramic pictures. To give more than a cursory description of our impressions is impossible. The fact is that one obliterated another so swiftly as to leave a sense only of confusion.

Take Culebra Cut, for instance, where the monsters of man's invention are biting into the mountain sides, ripping down with giant jaws loose dirt, and hauling it away on a maze of tracks.

Great hoses, under tremendous pressure, are tear-
ing at hills and washing them down. All the time there is a deafening noise, the crash of the continent’s spine being rent by dynamite, the roar of trains, the shrieks of dirt shovels blowing off steam, the stab and hammer of drills.

Man is making war on nature with amazing energy on a titanic scale. The disorder seemed hopeless, but one realized that these little figures moving about it in the man-made cañon were achieving the seemingly impossible none the less.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” Evelyn asked for the tenth time, as we looked down on a machine which had just seized a section of track and hoisted it up, rails and ties complete, to swing it over to another place.

I quoted to her Damon Runyon’s verses:

We are ants upon a mountain, but we’re leavin’ of our dent,
An’ our teeth-marks bitin’ scenery they will show the way we went;
We’re a liftin’ half-creation, and we’re changin’ it around,
Just to suit our playful purpose when we’re diggin’ in the ground.

“You Americans take the cake,” Blythe admitted. “You never tire of doing big things.”

His eyes had come back to a group of young engineers who had just entered the car. The grimy sweat had dried on their sooty faces and their
hands were black and greasy. They wore no coats and their shirts, wet from the perspiration drawn by the hot Panama sun, stuck to the muscular shoulders.

They looked like tramps from their attire, but Olympians could not have carried in their manner a blither confidence. These boys—I'll swear the oldest could have been no more than twenty-five—had undertaken to cut asunder what God has joined.

It did not matter to them in the least that they looked like coal miners. The only thing of importance was the work, the big ditch. Yet I knew that these were just such splendid fellows as our technical schools are turning out by thousands.

A few years before their thoughts had been full of cotillions and girls and the junior prom. The Isthmus had laid hold of them and hardened their muscles and bronzed their faces and given them a toughness of fiber that would last a lifetime.

They had taken on responsibility as if they had been born to it. A glow of pride in them flushed me. I was proud of the country that could fling out by hundreds of thousands such young fellows as these.

Empire, Gorgona, Gatun. From one to another we were hurried, passing through jungles such as
we of the North never dream exist. In that humid climate vegetation is prodigal beyond belief, gorgeous with spattered greens and yellows and crimsons bizarre enough to take the breath.

We ate luncheon at Colon and were back across the Isthmus at Panama a few hours later. After dinner we strolled around the city and saw the Parque de la Catedral, the Plaza Santa Ana, and the old sea wall.

It did my heart good to see broad-shouldered, alert young Americans walking with wholesome girls from home and making love to them in the same fashion their friends were doing up in "God's country."

Bothwell and his bunch of pirates began to lose themselves in the background of my mind. There was a dance at the hotel that evening. Before I had waltzed twice with Evelyn her buccaneer cousin had dissolved into a myth.

When Yeager came ashore next morning he brought a piece of news. Henry Fleming had taken a boat during the night and escaped.

"If I run across him I'll curl his hair for him," Tom promised with a look that made me think he would keep his word.

But I was not sorry Fleming had taken French leave. Neidlinger could be trusted now, and
neither Higgins nor Gallagher would go far astray without a leader.

But both the engineers had known of Bothwell's plans from the first. If I could have foreseen what effect the desertion of our second engineer was to have upon the expedition I would not have taken his disappearance so easily.

Our stay on the canal zone was a delightful one, though we were busy every minute of the time enjoying ourselves or making preparations for departure. With some difficulty Blythe picked up two engineers and a couple of firemen from Barbados and Jamaica, the latter of whom were natives. Philips was to stay at Panama until our return.

I had my share of duty aboard the Argos to do, but every minute that was my own I spent in the old city or on the works.

Evelyn surprised us by making no objection to our decree that she should remain at Panama while we took the Argos down to San Miguel Bay to lift the doubloons. In spite of her courage she was a woman. She confessed to me that she had seen bloodshed enough on the way down from California to last her a lifetime. The thought of returning so soon to the yacht had been a dreadful one to her.

On the afternoon of our last day at Panama,
Evelyn and I went out to the old sea wall for an hour together. The tide was in and from the parapet we watched the waves beat against the foot of the wall.

Away to our right was Balboa, above which rested a smoke pall from tugs, dredges, and tramp west coasters. Taboga we could just make out, and closer in a group of smaller islands the names of which I have forgotten. Beyond them all stretched the endless Pacific.

Evelyn was quieter than usual, but I had never seen her look so lovely. The poise of my dear girl’s burnished head, the untutored grace of her delicate youth, the gleam of tears behind the tremulous smile, all made mighty appeal to me.

"I’m afraid for you, Jack. That’s the truth of it. We’ve just found each other—after all these years. I don’t want to run the risk of losing you again." Ever so slightly her voice broke.

"You’ll not lose me. Do you think anything could keep me away—with the sweetest girl in the world waiting for me here?"

"I know," she smiled, a little drearily. "It sounds foolish, but I think of that dreadful man."

We had been following the cement promenade on top of the wall. I led her across it to the landward side, from which we could look down into
the yard of a prison. Under the eyes of an armed guard some prisoners were crossing to their cells. Two of them were in stripes, the third was not.

“Look,” I told her. “Bothwell is down there, locked up and guarded. He can’t escape.”

The little group below came closer. I had noticed that the prisoner not in uniform was a white man and not a native. He carried himself with a distinction one could not miss. Even before he looked up both of us knew the man was Boris Bothwell.

He stopped in his tracks, white-lipped, a devil of hatred and rage burning out of his deep-set eyes. A dullard could not have missed his thoughts. He was a prisoner in this vile hole, while I had brought the woman he loved to mock at him. The girl and the treasure would both be mine. Before him lay no hope.

I felt a sense of shame at being an unexpected witness of his degradation. As I started to draw Evelyn back a guard prodded the Slav with his bayonet point. Bothwell whirled like a tiger and sprang for the throat of the fellow. They went down together. Other guards rushed to the rescue of their companion.

We waited to see no more.
It must have been a minute before either of us spoke.

"Bad as he is, I can't help being sorry for him. It's as if a splendid lion were being worried to death by a pack of coyotes," Evelyn said with a shudder.

"Yes, there's something big even in his villainy. But you may take one bit of comfort: He can't get free to interfere with us—and he deserves all he'll get."

"I know. My reason tells me that all will be well now, but I have a feeling as if the worst were not yet over."

I tried to joke her out of it.

"It hasn't begun. You're not married to Jack Sedgwick yet."

"No; but, dear, I can't get away from the thought that you are going into danger again," she went on seriously.

"'Tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink," I quoted lightly.

"I dare say I'm a goose," she admitted.

"You are. My opinion is that you're in as much danger as we shall be."

"Is that why you are leaving me here?" she flashed back.

I laughed. In truth I did not quite believe what
I had said. For I could see no danger at all that lay in wait for her. But the events proved that I had erred only in not putting the case strongly enough. Before we returned to civilization she was to be in deadly peril.
CHAPTER XXI

A MESSAGE FROM BUCKS

In the forenoon we drew out from the harbor and followed the shore line toward the southwest, bound for that neck of the Isthmus which is known loosely as The Darien.

Before night had fallen we were rounding Brava Point into the Gulf of San Miguel, so named by Balboa because it was upon St. Michael's Day, 1513, that his eyes here first fell upon the blue waters of the Pacific.

We followed the north shore, along precipitous banks that grew higher the farther inland we went. The dense jungle came down to the water's edge and was unbroken by any sign of human habitation.

In the brilliant moonlight we passed the South and the North bays, pushing straight into the Darien Harbor by way of the Boco Chico. The tides here have a rise and fall of nearly twenty feet, but we found a little inlet close to a mangrove swamp that offered a good harborage for the night.

The warm sun was pouring over the hill when
I reached the deck next morning. We were steaming slowly past the village of La Palma along a precipitous shore heavily timbered. One could not have asked a pleasanter trip than that to the head of the harbor, at which point the Rio Tuyra pours its waters into the bay. Between La Palma and the river mouth we did not see a sign of human life.

At the distance of a rifle shot from the head of the harbor we rounded a point and saw before us a long tongue of sand running into the water.

Blythe and I spoke almost together:

"Doubloon Spit."

There could be no mistake about it. We had reached the place where Bully Evans and Nat Quinn had buried the gold ingots they had sold their souls to get. We came to anchor a couple of hundred yards from the end of the sand spit.

Neither Blythe nor I had said a word to any of the crew to indicate that we were near our journey's end, but all morning there had been an unusual excitement aboard. Now we could almost see the word run from man to man that the spot where the treasure was buried lay before us.

"You'll command the shore party to-day, Jack," Blythe announced.

"Do I draw shore duty?" Yeager asked eagerly.

"You do. I'll stay with the ship. Jack, you'll
have with you, too, Alderson, Smith, Gallagher, and one of the stokers."

"Also James A. Garfield Welch," I added.

"Also Jimmie," he nodded.

We had no reason to expect any trouble, but we went ashore armed, with the exception of Gallagher and Barbados, as we called our white-toothed, black-faced fireman.

I had our boat beached at the neck of the peninsula. While the men were drawing it up on the sand beyond reach of the tide I called to Jimmie.

"Yes, Mr. Sedgwick."

"Take off your coat."

"Are youse going to give me that licking now?" he asked, eyes big with surprise.

"How often have I told you not to ask questions? Shuck the coat."

He twisted out of it like an eel. I took it from him, turned it inside out, and opened my pocket knife. Carefully I ripped the lining at the seams. From a kind of pocket I drew an envelope. Out of the envelope I took the map that had been so closely connected with the history of Doubloon Spit.

When I say the men were surprised, I do them less than justice. One could have knocked their eyes off with a stick.
“Crikey! I didn’t know that was there,” Jimmie cried.

It had been Evelyn’s idea to sew the map in Jimmie’s coat, since that was the last place the mutineers would think of looking for it. While he had been peacefully sleeping Miss Wallace had done so neat a piece of tailoring that Jimmie did not suspect the garment had been tampered with.

We had, however, taken the precaution to take a copy of the map. During all the desperate fighting it had been lying in a shell snugly fitted into one of the chambers of a revolver in Yeager’s room.

“Beg pardon, sir. Did the boy have the map with him while he was Mr. Bothwell’s prisoner?” asked Gallagher.

“He did; but he didn’t know it.”

“Glad he didn’t, sir, because if he had that devil would have got it out of him.”

“Which no doubt would have distressed you greatly,” I answered dryly.

“I’m on the honest side now, sir,” the sailor said quietly.

“Let’s hope you stay there.”

“I intend to, sir,” he said, flushing at my words.

The chart that Tom and I looked at was a contour map of the spit and the territory adjacent to it. No doubt it had in the old days been roughly ac-
'CRIMEY! I DINT' KNOW THAT WAS THERE,' JIMMIE CRIED.
curate, but now the tongue of sand was wider than it had been by nearly a hundred years of sand deposits washed up by the tide.

Both on the map and the spit a salient feature was the grove of palms that stood on the hill just beyond the neck of the peninsula. Here plainly was the starting point of our quest. With Yeager I led the way to the clump, followed by my men carrying spades and shovels.

"Ye Grove" the clump of palms was labeled, and the great drooping tree to one side some fifty yards farther down the hill must be "Ye Umbrela Tree."

Beneath the map were the directions for finding the treasure, written in the angular hand of Nat Quinn. In order that you may understand I give these just as he had written them.

HOW TO FIND ITTE:

From inlet nearest shore go 200 paces to summit where Grove is. From most eastern palm measure 12 steps to Ye Umbrela Tree and seven beyond. Take a Be line from here thirty paces throu ye Forked Tree. Here cut a Rite Anggel N. N. E. till Tong of Spit is lost. Cast three long steps Southwest to Big Rock and dig on landward side.

(Sined)

BULLY EVANS  X  (His Mark)

NAT QUINN
While I had been poring over this map and the directions with it in my office at San Francisco it had seemed an easy thing to follow them, but in this dense, tropical jungle I found it quite another matter.

The vegetation and the underbrush were so rank that one found himself buried before he had gone three steps in them.

No doubt at the time when the survivors of the *Mary Ann* of Bristol had cached their ill-gotten doubloons a recent fire had swept this point of land so that they had found no difficulty in traversing it, but now the jungle was so thick and matted that I decided to begin by cutting roads to the palm grove and the umbrella tree.

From the yacht I got hatchets and machetes and we set to work. Before night we all had a tremendous respect for the power of resistance offered by a Panama jungle. We might almost as well have hacked at rubber.

There was none of that sturdy solidity of our northern woods. The jungle yields to every blow and springs back into place with a persistence that seems devilish. By nightfall we had made so little progress that I was discouraged.

To our right there was a mangrove swamp. As we passed its edge on the way back to the boat our
eyes beheld thousands upon thousands of birds coming there to roost for the night. Among them were many aigrette herons, white as the driven snow. I think I have never seen a bird so striking as this one.

Blythe, with Neidlinger, Higgins, our engineers, and the other fireman, took the second day on shore. Morgan was doing the cooking, and so was exempt from service. Dugan, still weak from his wound, was helping in the galley as best as he could.

All through the third day it rained hard, but on the fourth I and my detail were back on the job. We were making progress. By this time a path had been cut through to the palm grove and from it to the umbrella tree.

It was clear that a century ago the line of palms must have stretched farther down the hill, for now the nearest was at least fifty yards from the umbrella tree, instead of twelve as mentioned in the directions.

The only alternative to this was that the original umbrella tree had disappeared, and this I did not want to believe. At best one of the landmarks had gone.

We could go seven paces beyond the big tree, but "beyond" is a vague word, the point from which the measurement began having vanished.
Moreover, we encountered here another difficulty.

"Take a Be line from here thirty paces throu ye Forked Tree," we read on the chart, but the forked tree had apparently fallen and rotted long since. There were trees in the jungle, to be sure, but none of them were of sufficient age to have been in existence then.

The best I could do was to guess at the point seven paces beyond the umbrella tree and, using it as a center, draw a circle around it at thirty paces. Our machetes hacked a trail, and at one point of it we crossed the stump of a tree that had been in its day of some size.

The stump had rotted so that one could kick it to pieces with the heel of a boot. This might or might not be the remains of the forked tree, but since we were working on a chance, this struck us as a good one to try.

It was impossible to tell where the fork had been, but we made a guess at it and proceeded to follow directions.

"Here cut a Rite Anggel N. N. E. till Tong of Spit is lost."

This at least was specific and definite. North northeast we went by the compass, slashing our way through the heavy vines and shrubbery inch
by inch. We dipped over a hillock and came out of the jungle into the sand before the end of the spit was hidden by higher ground.

"Cast three long steps Souwest to Big Rock and dig on landward side."

Three steps to the southwest brought me deeper into the sand. There was no big rock in sight.

I looked at Tom. He laughed, as he had a habit of doing when in a difficulty.

"I guess we'll have to try again, Jack."

Gallagher broke in, touching his hat in apology:

"Not meaning to butt in, Mr. Sedgwick, but mightn't the rock be covered with sand? Give a hundred years and a heap of sand would wash into this cove here."

"There's sense in that. Anyhow, we'll try out your theory, Gallagher."

I marked a space about twelve by twelve upon which to begin operations. It took us an hour and a half to satisfy ourselves that nothing was hidden there.

I marked a second square, a third, and finally a fourth. Dusk fell before we had finished digging the last. Tired and dispirited we pulled back to the yacht.

During the night it came on to rain again, and for three successive days water sluiced down from
skies which never seemed empty of moisture. There was a gleam of sunshine the fourth day and though the jungle was like a shower bath Blythe took his machete and shovel squad to work.

At the end of the day they were back again. Sam had picked on a great *lignum vitae* as the forked tree named in the chart and had come to disappointment, even as I had.

In the end it was Gallagher who set us right. By this time, of course, every member of our party had the directions on the chart by heart, though several had not read the paper. We had finished luncheon and several of the men were strolling about. I was half way through my cigar when Gallagher came swinging back almost at a run.

"Beg pardon, sir. Would you mind coming with me?"

"What is it?" I asked in some excitement.

"It may not amount to anything. I don't know. But I thought I'd tell you, Mr. Sedgwick."

He had been lying down on the sand where it ran back to the jungle from the farthest inlet. Kicking idly with his heel he had come to solid stone. An examination proved to him that he was lying on a big rock covered with sand.

"You think this is the Big Rock," I said, after I had examined it.
"That's my idea. Stand here, sir, at the edge. You can't see the tongue of the spit, can you?"
"No, but that doesn't prove anything. We can't see it from this inlet at all."
"Sure about that, sir? Take three steps nor'east—long ones. Can you see the point now?"
"No, there's a hillock between."
"Take one step more."

I moved forward another yard. Over the top of the rise I could just see the sand tongue running into the bay.

Jimmie, the irrepressible, broke out impatiently.
"Don't see what he's getting at, Mr. Sedgwick. The map says to take three steps southwest to the big rock."

"Exactly, Jimmie, but we're starting from the big rock, so we have to reverse directions. By Jove, I believe you've hit on the spot, Gallagher."

I called to Alderson to bring the men with their spades. A tree more than a foot thick at the ground had grown up at the edge of the rock. We brought this down by digging at the roots. After another quarter of an hour's work Barbados unearthed a bottle. He was as proud of his find as if it had been a bar of gold.

We were all excited. The bottle was passed from hand to hand.
"We're getting warm," I cried. "This is the spot. Remember that every mother's son of you shares what we find. Five dollars to the man that first touches treasure."

There was a cheer. The men fell to work with renewed vigor. Presently Gallagher's spade hit something solid. A little scraping showed the top of an iron box.

"I claim that five, sir," cried Gallagher.

I jumped into the hole beside him. With our hands we scraped the dirt away from the sides.

"Heave away," I gave the word.

We lifted the box to the solid ground above. It was very rusty, of a good size, and heavy.

"Let's open it now," cried Jimmie, dancing with enthusiasm.

"Let's not," I vetoed. "We'll take it on board first. Five dollars to the man that finds the second box."

But there was no second box. We worked till dark at the hole. Before we left there was an excavation large enough for the cellar of a house. But not a trace of more treasure did we find.

Blythe had decided it best not to open the treasure before the men, and though the crew was plainly disappointed we stuck to that resolution.

Sam promised the men that they should see it
before we reached San Francisco, and that they should appoint two of their number to accompany the treasure to the assay office in that city to determine the value of our find and their share.

Yeager, being handier with an ax than the rest of us, broke open the lid of the chest. A piece of coarse sacking covered the contents. Blythe lifted this—and disclosed to our astonished eyes a jumble of stones and sand.

We looked at our find and at each other. Tom put our feeling into words.

"Bilked, by Moses!"

We tossed the rocks and sand upon the table and came to a piece of ragged paper folded in two. In a faint red four words were traced as if with the end of a pointed stick.

Sold, you devils! Bucks.
CHAPTER XXII

TREASURE-TROVE

Tom broke the silence again.
"Now will some one tell me who the devil is Bucks?"

It was the question in all our minds and our eyes groped helplessly in those of each other for an answer.
"Bucks! Bucks! I've heard his name somewhere."

Blythe spoke up like a flash.
"So have I, Jack. He was one of the sailors that took the Santa Theresa. Quinn gave a list of them in his story. This fellow must have escaped somehow when the ship was blown up."

"Or from the gig that set out to pursue the long boat. Perhaps when the Truxillo pounded the boat to pieces he swam to shore," I suggested.

"Yes, but Quinn does not mention that Bucks got ashore. That's funny too, because he says that he was the only man from the Santa Theresa left alive after Bully Evans was shot."

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"That is queer. But it's plain Bucks did escape. Don't you think it might be this way? When he got to shore he ran forward to tell the four who had landed with the treasure about the coming of the Truxillo. But before he reached the top of the hill he heard shots and suspected danger. So he stole forward cautiously and saw what had happened to Wall and Lobardi. Of course he wouldn't dare show himself then, for he was probably unarmed. So he kept hidden while the two survivors buried the treasure."

"Of course. Like a wise man too," assented Tom. "And when Quinn and the mate had pulled their freights he steps out and buries the gold in another place."

"Probably he waited till the Truxillo was out of the harbor," amended the Englishman.

"Sure. But the big point that sticks out like a sore thumb is that Bucks didn't fool Evans and Quinn, but us. The treasure's gone. That's a rock-bottom fact," Yeager commented.

"I'm not so sure about that," I reflected aloud. "Look here. If Bucks dug the gold up he had to rebury it somewhere. He had no way of taking the doubloons with him. He couldn't have hauled the other boxes far. Therefore, it follows that he buried them close to where he found them. The
one thing we don't know is whether he came back later and got the treasure. I'll bet he didn't. The man was a common sailor and had no means."

"Even if we give you the benefit of every doubt, the treasure is hidden. We don't know where. In a year we might not find it."

"True enough, Sam. And we might stumble on it to-morrow. Look at the facts. He was alone, probably superstitious, certainly in fear lest Bully Evans might return and find him there. More than that, he had no provisions. To get away and reach the Indians to get food would be his main thought. It was a case of life and death with him. So you can bet he chose easy digging when he transferred the treasure. That means he buried it in the sand not far from where he found it."

"You have it figured out beautifully," Sam laughed. "Well, I wish you luck."

"But you don't expect any for me. Just you wait and see."

We called the crew in and showed them what we had found, explaining the facts and our deductions from them. For we thought it better they should know just how matters stood. Their disappointment was keen, but to a man they were eager to search further.

Hitherto we had staked our chances for suc-
cess upon the map, but it was now manifest that the chart was no longer of any use. I decided first to take a look along the shore from the point where we had discovered the first box.

Fortune is a fickle jade. We had spent a week here and met only disappointment, working on careful calculations made from the directions left by Quinn. By chance Gallagher had hit on the first cache. By chance I hit on the second.

Fighting my way through the jungle just adjacent to the beach I stumbled over what I took to be a root. In some annoyance I glanced hastily at the projection—and then looked again. My foot had been caught by a bone sticking out of the ground. The odd thing was that it looked like a human bone.

I plied my machete. Within a quarter of an hour I had cleared a small square of ground and was digging with a pick. What I presently uncovered were the remains of a skeleton. An old sack, more brittle than paper, lay beneath these. This I removed. There, lying in the sand, were three bars of gold.

My heart jumped, lost a beat, hammered furiously. I looked around quickly. Alderson and Gallagher were the only men I had brought ashore with me. They were digging at haphazard in the
sand a hundred yards away. With one stroke of the pick I upended several more yellow bars.

That was enough for me. I laid aside the first three and covered the others with sand, using my foot as a spade. The three original bars I buttoned under my coat and then walked down hill to the beach.

"I'm going aboard," I told the men.

"Gallagher, you may row me out. I'll be back presently, Alderson."

I was under a tremendous suppressed excitement. Blythe met me as I came aboard and his eyes questioned mine. Without a word we moved toward the bridge pavilion and down into the saloon.

"I've had another message from Mr. Bucks," I told him.

"The deuce you say!"

"He delivered it in person this time."

The Englishman's eyes danced, but otherwise his face was immobile.

"Did he say his name was Bucks?"

"No. I'm not dead sure I have him identified correctly. As Tom would say, the brand is worn out."

"I never was any good at riddles," he admitted.

"I stumbled over a thigh bone in the jungle. It
was sticking out of the ground, where in the course of time the sand had buried the rest of the body. I have reason to think it belonged to Bucks because—"

I paused for dramatic effect, my arms folded across my chest to keep the treasure from slipping down.

"Just so, because—?"

He was as cool as an iced melon, the drawl in his voice not quickening in the least. But his eyes gave away his tense interest.

"Why, because I found a lot of these in the sand, all of them measuring up to sample." From under my coat I drew the shining yellow bars and handed them to him.

"Gold!" he cried softly. "By Jove, this is a find."

"And a lot more where those came from, or I miss my guess. There is a mound there that looks to me like a cache."

"But what was Bucks doing there?"

"That's a guess. Here is mine. It doesn't cost you a cent even if you don't accept it. After he had made the cache we'll say that he hiked off to try to find a settlement. Very likely he had no idea where to look and he found progress through the jungle impossible. After a while he wandered
back, half starved and exhausted. Perhaps his idea may have been that the *Truxillo* was still on the ground. If so, he may have wanted to offer the gold in exchange for his life. Anyhow, back he comes, to find that he is too late. The brig has gone. In his delirium he has some notion of digging up the treasure to buy food. He gets the first sack of bullion up and then quits, too weak to do any more."

"Sounds reasonable enough. The chief point is that you've found the gold. I'll order a force ashore to help you."

There is something in the very thought of treasure-trove that unsettles the most sane. Not a word was said to anybody except Tom about what I had found, but everybody on board was sure the bullion had been found.

Before the eyes of each man danced shining yellow ingots and pieces of eight. We could tell it by the eagerness with which they volunteered for shore duty.

I chose Yeager, the chief engineer—he was a lank Yankee named Stubbs—and Jamaica Ginger, as we called our second fireman. With us we took ashore a stout box, in which to pack the loose gold.

Those left on board cheered us as we pulled toward the beach, and we answered lustily their
cheer. Every man jack of us was in the best of spirits.

By this time it was late in the afternoon, but the sun was still very hot. I was careful not to let anybody work long at a stretch. As the bars of gold were uncovered we packed them in the box brought for the purpose. Every time a shovel disclosed a new find there was fresh jubilation.

While Alderson and I were resting under the shade of a mangrove the sailor made a suggestion.

"You don’t expect to get all the treasure out to-night, do you, sir?"

"No. Perhaps not by to-morrow night. It is hard digging among so many roots. And Mr. Bucks does not seem to have put it all together."

"Will you keep a guard here, Mr. Sedgwick?"

"Yes. It looks like a deserted neck of the woods, but we’ll take no chances."

"That is what I was thinking, sir. Last night I couldn’t sleep for the heat and I strung a hammock on deck. About three o’clock this morning a boat passed on its way to the mouth of the river."

"Cholo Indians, likely."

"No, sir. This was a schooner. It was some distance away, but I could make that out."

"Well, we’ll keep this place under our eye till the treasure is lifted."
About sunset I sent Gallagher, Stubbs, and Jamaica Ginger aboard with the box of treasure, the Arizonian being in charge of the boat. While I waited for its return I took a turn up the beach to catch the light breeze that was beginning to stir.

I walked toward the head of the harbor, strolling farther in that direction than any of us had yet gone. I went possibly an eighth of a mile above the spit, carrying my hat in my hand and moving in a leisurely way.

In truth I was at peace with the world. We had succeeded in our quest and found the treasure. In a few days at most I should be back at Panama with my slim sweetheart in my arms. What more could rational man ask?

Then I stopped in my stride, snatched into a sudden amazement. For there before me in the sand was the imprint of a boot made since the tide went out a few hours earlier in the day.

No flat-footed Indian had left the track. It was too sharp, too decisive, had been left plainly by a shoe of superior make.

No guess of the truth came to me, but instinctively I eased the revolver in the scabbard by my side. Of this much I was sure, that whereas I had supposed no white man except those of our party
to be within many miles, there was at least one in the immediate vicinity.

What, then, was he doing here? How had he come? Had he any intimation that there was treasure to be found? It was altogether likely that whoever this man was he had not come to this desolate spot without companions and without a very definite purpose.

Where were they, then? And how did it happen we had not seen them? The very secrecy of their presence seemed to suggest a sinister purpose.

Should I go on and follow the tracks. Or should I go back and notify Blythe at once? The latter no doubt would be the wiser course, but my impulse was to push forward and discover something more definite. As luck would have it, the decision was taken out of my hands.

Out of the jungle a man came straight toward me. The very sight of that strong, erect figure moving swiftly with easy stride tied, as it were, a stone to my heart. The man was Boris Bothwell. I was sure of it long before his face was distinguishable.

He waved a hand at me with debonair insouciance.

I waited for him without moving, my fingers on the butt of the revolver at my side.
"So happy to meet you again, dear friend," he jeered as soon as he was within hail.

"What are you doing here? How did you get out?" I demanded.

"My simple-minded youth, money goes a long way among the natives. I bought my way out, since you are curious to know."

"And you've followed us down here to make more trouble?"

"To renew our little private war. How did you guess it?"

"So you haven't had enough yet. You have come back to take another licking."

"It's a long lane that has no turning," he assured me gaily. "I give you my word that I've reached the bend, Mr. Sedgwick."

His confident audacity got on my nerves. On the surface we had all the best of the game. The trouble was that he knew the cards I held, whereas I could only guess at his.

"You are the most unmitigated villain not yet hanged!" I cried in rage.

He bowed, rakish and smiling, with all the airs of a dancing master.

"I fear you flatter me, sir."

"I warn you to keep your hands off. We're ready for you."
"I thought it only fair to warn you. That is why I am here and have the pleasure of talking with you."

"More lies. You showed yourself only because you knew I had seen your footprints."

He gave up the point with an easy laugh.

"But really I did want to talk with you. We have many interests in common. Our taste in women, for instance. By the way, did you leave Evie well?"

Triumph swam in the eyes, narrowed to slits, through which he watched me. I could not understand his derisive confidence.

"We'll not discuss that," I told him bluntly.

"As you say. I come to another common interest—the treasure. Is it running up to our hopes?"

So he knew that we had found it. No doubt he had been watching us all day through the telescope that hung at his side.

"We don't recognize any hopes you may have."

"But why not face facts? I intend to own the treasure when you have dug it up for me."

"You're of a sanguine temperament."

"Poof! Life is a game of cards. First you hold trumps, then they fall to me. It chances that now I hold the whip and ride on the crest of for-
tune's wave. Hope you don't mind mixed figures."

"You'll ride at the end of the hangman's rope," I prophesied.

"Let us look on the bright side."

"I'm trying to do that."

The man knew something that I did not. I was not bandying repartee with him for pleasure, but because I knew that if he talked long enough he would drop the card hidden up his sleeve.

What was his ace of trumps? How could he afford to sit back and let us dig up the gold? He could not be merely bluffing, for the man had been laughing at me from that first wave of the hand.

"It is unfortunate that you and I don't pull together, Mr. Sedgwick. We'd make an invincible team. You're the best enemy I ever met."

"And you're the worst I've met."

"Same thing, I assure you. We both mean compliments. But what I want to say is that it is against the law of conservation of energy for us to be opposing each other. I propose combination instead of competition."

"Be a little more definite, please."

"Chuck your friends overboard and go into partnership with me."
"Are you speaking literally, or in metaphor, captain?"

He shrugged.

"That's a mere detail. If you have compunctions we'll maroon them."

"Just what you promised the crew last time," I scored.

"Wharf rats!" He waved the point aside magnificently. "I'm proposing now a gentleman's agreement."

"Which you'll keep as long as it suits you."

"I thought you knew me better."

"What have you to offer? My friends and I can keep the treasure. Why should I ditch them for you? What's the quid pro quo?"

"You and Evie and I will go shares, third and third alike. The better man of us two will marry her. If it should be you, that will give you two-thirds."

"You're very generous."

"Oh, I intend to marry her if I can. But I'll play fair. If she has the bad taste to prefer you——"

"In the event that I should happen to be alive still," I amended. "You know how dangerous yellow fever is in the Isthmus, captain. I am afraid
that it would get me before we reached the canal zone again."

He chuckled.

"If you have a fault, my friend, it lies on the side of suspicion. When I give my word I keep it—that is, when I give it to a gentleman."

"I don't want to lead you into the temptation of revising your opinion of me and deciding that I am no gentleman."

"Come, Mr. Sedgwick. We're not two fishwives to split hairs over a trifle. I offer a compromise. Do you accept it?"

"You offer me nothing I haven't got already. A share of the treasure—that will be mine, anyhow, as soon as we have it assayed and weighed.

"You forget Evie."

"Who is safe at Panama, beyond your reach, you scoundrel. Why should I fear you as a rival since your life is forfeit as soon as you show your head?"

He could not have spoken more insolently himself. It was hot shot, but I poured it in for a purpose. The mask fell from his face. One could see the devil in his eyes now.

"You reject my offer," he said, breathing hard to repress his rising passion.

A second man had come out of the jungle and
was moving toward us. It was time to be going. I moved back a step or two, my fingers caressing the butt of a revolver.

"Yes, since I don't want to commit suicide, captain."

He suddenly lost his temper completely and hopelessly. He glared at me in a speechless rage, half of a mind to fight our quarrel out on the spot. But the advantage lay with me. All I had to do to blaze away was to tilt the point of my revolver at him without drawing it from the scabbard. Then words came, poured out of him in a torrent. He cursed me in Russian, in French, in English.

I backed from him, step by step, till I was out of range. Then, swiftly as his rage had swept upon him it died away, leaving him white and shaken. He leaned heavily upon the man who had now joined him.

Unless I was much mistaken the man was George Fleming.
CHAPTER XXIII

ABOARD THE SCHOONER

Dignity be hanged! I scudded down the beach as fast as my legs would carry me. Alderson had been left alone at the cache and my heart was in my throat.

When I saw him strolling about with his hands in his pockets I could have shouted for joy if I had had the breath. For I had half expected to find him dead.

He came forward quickly to meet me.

“A tug rounded the bend five minutes since and stopped at the yacht, Mr. Sedgwick,” he told me.

I looked out into the bay. A boat was just leaving the Argos for the shore. At the point where the sailors presently beached it I was waiting. Blythe jumped out and splashed through the shallow water to meet me. From the look on his face it was clear that something had gone wrong.

Taking me by the arm he led me a few yards along the sand.

“Bad news, Jack.”

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“What is it?”

“Miss Wallace was waylaid and kidnapped four days ago while she and her aunt were driving.”

“How do you know?”

“Miss Berry sent Philips down in a tug to let us know. But that is not the worst. The day before the kidnapping Bothwell escaped from prison. It is thought that his guards were bribed.”

I saw in a flash the cause of the Slav’s gloating triumph. Evelyn was his prisoner. He had her safely hidden somewhere in the mangrove swamps. We might dig the treasure up, but we would have to give him every cent of it in ransom for her. That was his plan, and in it lay the elements of success. For Blythe and Yeager, no more than I, would weigh gold against her safety.

We knew Bothwell. His civilization was a veneer. Disappointed of the wealth he had come seeking, the man would revenge himself on the girl who had stood in his way. I dared not think of the shame and degradation he would make her suffer.

I told Blythe of my meeting with Bothwell.

My face must have been ashen, for Sam put a hand on my shoulder.

“Keep a stiff upper lip, old chap. Bothwell won’t
hurt her until he is pushed to it. Before that time comes we'll take care of her."

"That's easy saying. But how? That prince of devils has her back there in the swamps guarded by his ruffians. We don't know where they are. This very minute she may be—— My God, think of the danger she runs!"

Blythe shook his head.

"She's safe till Bothwell gives the word. Not one of his fellows would dare lift a hand against her. The captain would shoot him like a dog."

"And Bothwell himself?"

"She's safe yet, Jack. He's playing for the treasure and to marry her, too. The man is not such a fool as to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. The hour of danger for her would be the one when he found out that he had lost the treasure."

"Let's give it to him. I'll go tell him he may have it all."

"Easy, lad, easy. We must play our cards and not throw the hand down. We must get hold of the treasure before we can make terms."

"And let Evelyn stay in his hands without making an effort to free her?" I demanded.

"Did I say that, Jack?"

"What are you going to do, then?"
"As soon as night falls we'll send a boat up the river to find out where his camp is. We'll make a reconnaissance."

"I'll go."

"Don't you think somebody less impetuous would be better, Jack? We don't want to spoil things by any premature attack."

"I'm going, Sam. That's all there is to say about that."

"All right. If you are, you are. But you'd better let me."

"You may come along if you like."

"No, if you go I'll have to stay by the ship against a possible attack. Tom will have charge of the party that watches the treasure. The deuce of it is that our force will be divided into three. I hope Bothwell does not take the occasion to make mischief."

Within the hour the tug that had brought Philips steamed back down the harbor on the return trip to Panama. With it we sent Jimmie and the steward. Dugan flatly declined to go, and since his wound was almost healed the captain let him stay.

This left us fourteen men, counting the former mutineers and the native stokers. To go with me on my night expedition I chose Alderson and
Smith. The guard for the treasure cache consisted of Yeager, Gallagher, Barbados and Stubbs. The rest were to remain with the ship.

The tide was coming in when we pulled from the Argos toward the mouth of the Tuyra. The wash of the waves made it unnecessary for us to take any precautions to muffle the sound of our oars and the darkness of the night made detection at any distance improbable.

One difficulty we did encounter. For the first few hundred yards of our journey up the river we disturbed some of the numberless birds which had settled for the night on the trees close to the banks. The flapping of their wings gave notice of our approach as plainly as if a herald had shouted it.

We carried no light. The heavy tropical jungle growth on the mud flats which extended on both sides of the river helped to increase the darkness. Our progress was slow, for we had to make sure that we did not slip past without noticing the schooner that had brought the pirates down from Panama.

The sound of voices on the water warned us that we were approaching the boat of which we were in search. Very cautiously, keeping close to the bushes along the shore, we drew near the
schooner which began to take dim shape in the darkness.

The tide was still strong, and it carried our boat across the bow of the schooner. The anchor chain was hanging and served to hold us in place, though with each lift of the tide I was afraid those on board would hear us grind against her side. Intermittently the voices came to us, though we could make out no words.

We were in a good deal of danger, for any minute one of the crew might saunter to the side of the vessel and look over. It was plain to me that we could not stay here. Either we must go forward or back.

Now back I would not go without finding whether Evelyn was here, and to try to board the schooner in attack would be sheer madness. My mind caught at a compromise.

I whispered to Alderson directions, and when the jibboom of the schooner came down with the next recession of a wave I swung myself to it by means of the chain, using the stays to brace my foot.

Here I lay for a minute getting my bearings, while the sailors in the boat below backed quietly out of sight among the shore bushes that overhung the banks.
So far as I could see the deck was deserted. Carefully I edged on to the bowsprit, crept along it, and let myself down gently to the deck. I could see now that men were lying asleep at the other end of the vessel.

One was standing with his back toward me beside the mizzen-mast. From his clothes I guessed the watch to be a native.

The voices that had come to us across the water still sounded, but more faintly than before I had come on board. Evidently they were from below.

Probably the speakers were in a cabin with the porthole open. I could not be sure, but it struck me that one of them was a woman. My impression was that she pleaded and that he threatened, for occasionally the heavier voice was raised impatiently.

From its scabbard I drew my revolver and crept forward in the shadow of the bulwarks. My life hung on a hair; so too did that of the watchman drowsing by the mast. If he looked up and turned I was lost, and so was he.

Foot by foot I stole toward the forecastle ladder, reached it, and noiselessly passed down the stairs.

I say noiselessly, yet I could hear my heart beat against my ribs as I descended. For I knew now
that the voices which came from behind the closed
door of the cabin to my right belonged to my sweet-
heart and to Boris Bothwell.

"Not I, but you," he was saying. "I'm hanged
if I take the responsibility. If you had trusted me
we might have lifted the gold without the loss of
a drop of blood."

"You are so worthy of trust!" Evelyn's voice
answered with bitterness.

"Have you ever known me to break my word?
But let that pass. You chose to reject my love and
invite that meddler Sedgwick into our affairs.
What is the result? What have you gained?"

"A knowledge of the difference between the love
of a true man and that of a false one," she an-
swered quietly.

"A true man! Oh, call him a fool and be done
with it."

"Perhaps, but I could love such folly."

He seemed to strangle his irritation in his throat.

"A lot of good it will do! You belong to me.
That is written in the book of your life, and what
is to be will be. And I'll get the treasure, too."

"Never! You call them fools, but they have out-
witted you from start to finish."

"They've pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for
me, if that is what you mean."
"And as for me, I'm only a girl, but I swear before Heaven I'd rather sink a knife into my heart than give myself to you."

He clapped his hands ironically with a deep laugh like the bay of a wolf.

"Bravo! Well done! You'd make a fortune in tragedy, Evie. But dramatics apart, you may make up your mind to it. I'm your master, and before twenty-four hours shall be your mate. Why else have I brought this broken wretch of a priest along, but to tie the knot in legal fashion? I'm a reasonable man. Since you have a taste for the conventional and decorum you shall have them. But priest or no priest, willy nilly, mine you are and shall be."

"You think everybody is a fool but yourself. Can't I see why you want the marriage? It's not to please me, but through me to give you a legal claim on the treasure."

"Why do you always stir up the devil in me? I love you. I want to please you. I'll treat you right if you'll let me."

"Then send me back to the yacht, Boris. I'll give my word to divide the treasure with you. My friends will do as I say. You don't want to break my heart, do you? Think of all the dreadful murder that has been done by you."

"Not by me, but by you and your friends. I
offered to compromise and you would not. Now it is too late. No, by God! I’ll play the game out to a fighting finish.”

She gave a sobbing little cry.

“Have you no heart?”

His voice fell a note. He moved close to her.

“Cherie, you have stolen it and hold it fast in this little palm I kiss!”

By the sounds from within she must have struggled in vain. I told myself:

“Not yet, not yet!”

“In such fashion my ancestor Bothwell wooed Mary Queen of Scots. Fain she would, but dare not. She knew he was a man and a lover out of ten thousand, and though her heart beat fast for him she was afraid. She fled, and he followed. For he was a lover not to be denied, though a king must die to clear the road. So it is with Boris, my queen.”

“You mean——?”

The catch in her voice told me she breathed fast.

He laughed, with that soft boisterousness that marked his merriment.

“Your mad Irishman is no king, but he has crossed my path enough. Next time he dies.”

“Because he has tried to serve me!”
"Because he is in my way. Reason enough for me."

The door knob was in my hand. All I had to do was to open it and shoot the man dead. But what after that? His men would swarm down and murder me before the eyes of my love. And she would be left alone with a pack of wolves which had already tasted blood.

It was the hardest ordeal of my life to keep quiet while the fellow pressed his hateful suit, pushed it with the passionate ardor of the Slav, regardless of her tears, her despair, and her helplessness.

For an hour—to make a guess at the time—she fought with all the weapons a woman has at command, fending him off as best she could with tears and sighs and entreaties.

Then I heard a man stumbling down the ladder and moved aside. If he should turn my way I was a dead man, for he must come plump against me. He knocked on the door of the cabin.

Bothwell opened and whispered with him a moment, then excused himself to his cousin, locked the door, and followed the sailor up to the deck.

I unlocked the door softly and walked into the cabin. By the dim light of a hanging lantern I made out a rough room furnished only with two
bunks, one above the other, a deal table, and two cheap chairs.

Evelyn had not heard me enter. She was standing with her back to me, leaning against the woodwork of the bed, her face buried in one arm. Despair and weariness showed in every line of the slight, drooping figure.

She must have heard me as I moved. She turned, the deep shadowy eyes gleaming with fear. Never have I seen the soul's terror more vividly flung to the surface.

I suppose that for a moment she could not believe that it was I, and not Bothwell. Perhaps she thought the ghost of me had come to say farewell to her.

She stared at me out of a face from which the color was gone, the great eyes dilating as the truth came home to her. From her throat broke a startled, stifled little cry.

"You!"

I took her in my arms and her tired body came to me. The sensitive mouth trembled, the eyes closed, a shiver of relief passed through her. She clung to me as a frightened child does to its mother, burying her soft cheeks on my shoulder.

Then came sobs. The figure of my love rocked. The horror of what she had been through engulfed
her as she told me her story in broken words, in
convulsive shivers, in silence so poignant that they
stabbed my heart like a needle.

It was such a tale as no girl should have to tell,
least of all to the man she loves. But I had come
in time—I had come in time. The knowledge of
that warmed me like champagne.

I whispered love to her as I kissed in a passion
of tenderness the golden hair, the convolutions of
the pink ears, the shadows beneath the sad, tired
eyes.

"Tell me, how did you come?" she begged.

I told her, in the fewest possible words, for it
might be that our time was brief. Briefly I out-
lined a plan for her rescue.

I would send Alderson and Smith back for aid
and would hide somewhere in the vessel during
their absence, to be ready in case she needed help.

When Blythe arrived I would join her and bar-
ricade the cabin to protect her until our friends had
won the ship.

"But if he should find you before——"

I said then what any man with the red blood
of youth still running strong in his veins would
say to the woman he loves when she is in peril.
Let it cost me what it would I was going to free
her from these wolves.
Her deep eyes, soft with love, aglow with an adorable trust, met mine for a long instant.

"Do as you will, dear. But go now—before anyone comes. And—God with us, Jack!"

Her arm slid round my neck, she drew my face down to hers, and kissed me with a passion that I had not known was in her.

"Remember, Jack—if I never see you again—no matter what happens—I love you, dearest, for ever and ever."

She whispered it brokenly, then pushed me from her toward the door.

The last glimpse I had of her she was standing there in the shadows, like a divine incarnation of love, her eyes raining upon me the soft light that is the sweetest glimpse of heaven given to a man in this storm-battered world.
CHAPTER XXIV

A RAT IN A TRAP

I groped my way forward in the darkness till I came to a room used for storing purposes. Well up near the beams was a port-hole. Too high for me to reach, I presently found a large box which I upended cautiously until it lay beneath the port. Standing on this I could look through into the heavy foliage of the bushes projecting from the shore.

Except for the lapping of the waves the night was very still. The moon rode low in the sky. A fan-shaped wedge of light silvered the inky river.

I gave the signal agreed upon between me and my men, but no answering flash of white replied to the wave of my handkerchief. Again I shook the piece of linen from the porthole, and at intervals for fully five minutes.

Did Alderson see me? Or was there a reason why he could not answer? It was impossible they could have been captured without some sound having reached me. Nor was it more likely that they had deserted their post.
The bushes stirred at last and the bow of a boat pushed through. Smith stood up so that his face was just below mine. His finger was on his lips.

" Couldn't come any sooner, sir. Captain Bothwell was leaning over the rail smoking a cigarette. I wonder he didn't see your handkerchief," he whispered.

I gave him orders concisely and the men backed the boat till the bushes hid them. For me there was nothing left to do but wait. How long it might be before Blythe would get back with a rescue party I could not tell. The men in the boat would not dare to stir from their hiding-place until the moon went under a cloud.

The tide must now be at the full, so that it would be running out strong before they got started. This would carry them swiftly back to the bay.

I found myself giving my friends two hours as a minimum before they could return to me. At the worst they should be here within four, unless my messenger met with bad luck.

But what about Bothwell? Would he force my hand before Blythe arrived? I thought it very likely. There is something in the tropical air that calls to the passion of a man, and reduces his sense of law till restraint ebbs away.

In Bothwell's case desire and interest went to-
gether. He was a criminal on more than one count, but the charges against him would in a measure fall to the ground if he could drive Evie to marry him.

Once she was his wife the kidnapping charge would not stick, and even his black record on the Argos could be made to appear the chivalry of a high-minded man saving the woman he loved from her enemies.

Moreover, his claim to the treasure would then be a valid one. The man was no fool. What he did must be done quickly. There lay before him one safe road. Since that was the path he desired above all things to follow, it was sure he would set out on it without delay.

Her scruples had hitherto held him back, because it would be better she should come of her own accord to him. But these could not hold him many hours longer.

The masterful insistence of the man had told me that, but no more plainly than his mounting passion.

I sat down on the box and waited. In that dark, stuffy hole the heat was intense. The odor of food decomposing in the moisture of the tropics did not add to my comfort.

Sitting in cushioned chairs in club rooms with
a surfeit of comfort within reach, men have argued in my presence that there is no such thing as luck. Men win because of merit; they fail only if there is some lack in themselves.

This is a pleasant gospel for those who have found success, but it does not happen to be true. Take my own case here. How could I foresee that a barefooted, half-naked black cook would come into the storeroom to get a pan of rice for next day’s dinner?

Or, as I lay crouched beside a box in the shadows beyond the dim circle illumined by his candle, how could I know whether it were best to announce myself or lie still?

I submit that the part of wisdom was to let the fellow go in peace, and this I did.

But as he turned the light for an instant swept across me. He gave a shriek and flung away both the candle and the pan of rice, bolting for the door. I called to him to stop. For answer he slammed the door—and locked it. Nor did my calls stay the slap of his retreating feet. I was caught fast as a rat in a trap.

I certainly had spilt the fat into the fire this time. Inside of five minutes the passage outside was full of men. But during that time I had been
The voices fell again to a whispered murmur. Soon there would be a rush and the door would be torn from its hinges. I made up my mind to get Bothwell if I could before the end.

Above the mutterings came clearly a frightened soprano.

“What is it, Boris? What are you going to do?”

Evelyn had come out of her room to try to save me.

“Just getting ready to massacre your friend,” her cousin answered promptly.

“Mr. Sedgwick?”

Terror shook in the voice that died in her throat. Bothwell bayed deep laughter.

“O-ho! My friend from Erin once more—for the last time. Come out and meet your welcome, Sedgwick.”

“Suppose you come and take me,” I suggested.

“By God, I will! Back with you into that room, girl.”

A door slammed and a key turned.

Still the rush did not come. I waited, nerves strung to the highest pitch. One could have counted sixty in the dead silence.

I knew that some devilish plan had come to the man and that he was working out the details of it in his mind.
“Say the word, Cap,” Fleming called to him impatiently.

“Not just yet, my worthy George. We’ll give the meddler an hour to say his prayers. But I’m all for action. Since it isn’t to be a funeral just yet, what do you say to a marriage?”

“I don’t take you.”

“Hm! Hold this passage for a few minutes, George. You’ll see what you’ll see.”

A key turned in a lock. When I heard his voice again the man had stepped inside the cabin used by Evelyn. It lay just back of the storeroom and the portholes of the two rooms were not six feet apart. Every word that was said came clearly to me.

“So you thought you’d trick me, my dear—thought you’d play a smooth trick on your trusting cousin. Fie, Evie!”

“What are you going to do to Mr. Sedgwick?” she demanded.

“There’s been some smooth work somewhere. I grant you that. How the devil did he get aboard here? He didn’t come alone. If he did, what has become of the boat? Speak up, m’amie.”

“Do you think I’d tell you even if I knew?” she asked scornfully.

He laughed softly, with diabolical enjoyment.
"I think you would—and will. I have ways to force open closed mouths, beloved."

"You would—torture me?"

"If it were necessary," he admitted coolly.

She answered in a blaze of defiance.

"Get out your iron cubes for my fingers, you black-hearted villain!"

"Not for your soft fingers, ma cherie. I kiss them one by one as a lover should. Shall we say for your friend's fingers? If you won't talk, perhaps he will."

"Are you all tiger, Boris? Isn't there somewhere in your heart a spark of manhood?" she sobbed, her spirit melted at my danger.

"Rhetorical questions, Evie. Shall we come to business? How did your soon-to-be-deceased lover come on board? Who brought him? What were his plans?"

"If I tell you, will you spare him?" she begged.

"I'll promise this," he assured her maliciously. "If you don't tell I'll not spare him."

She told all she knew except my plan of rescue. As soon as she mentioned the boat in which I had come the fellow hurried up on deck to intercept it.

I could hear a boat scraping against the side of the schooner as it was being lowered. Fleming and
two others got in and paddled back and forth among the bushes. They found nothing.

My friends had managed to slip away unseen and were headed for the Argos. You may believe that I wished them a safe and speedy voyage.

Bothwell came down the forecastle ladder swearing. He went straight to Evelyn. Before he opened the door he was all suavity once more.

"They've got away this time. Just as well perhaps. We'll be able to concentrate our attention on the wedding festivities. Can you be ready in half an hour, dear heart?"

"Ready for what?" The words choked in her throat.

"To make your lover a happy man. This is our wedding night, my dear."

"Never! I'd rather lie at the bottom of the bay. I wouldn't marry you to save my life."

"H-m! You exaggerate, as is the manner of your charming sex. Now I'll wager that you'd marry me to save—why, to save even that meddling Irishman who is listening to our talk."

She strangled a little cry of despair.

"Why do you hate him so? Is it because he is so much better and braver than you?"

"I don't hate him. He annoys me. So I step on him, just as I do on this spider."
"Don’t, Boris. I’ll give you all my share of the treasure. I’ll forgive you everything you’ve done. I’ll see that you’re not prosecuted. Be merciful for once."

"Don’t get hysterical, Evie. Sedgwick understands he has got to pay. He took a fighting chance and he has lost. It’s all in the game." The villain must have looked at his watch, and then yawned. "Past 10:30. Excuse me for a half hour while I settle your friend’s hash. Afterward I’ll be back with the priest."

"No—no! I won’t have it. Boris, if you ever loved me—Oh, God in heaven, help me now!"

I think that in her wild despair she had flung herself on her knees in front of him. Her voice shook, broke almost into a scream.

"Are these—dramatics—for yourself or for him?" Bothwell asked with a sneer.

"Don’t kill him! Don’t! I’ll do whatever you say."

"Will you marry me—at once—to-night?"

I spoke up from the porthole where I was listening.

"No, she won’t, you scoundrel! As for me, I’d advise you to catch your hare before you cook it."

"I’m on my way to catch it now, dear Sedg-
wick, just as soon as I break away from the lady,” he called back insolently.

“I’ll—marry you.” The words came from a parched throat.

“To-night,” he demanded.

“Not to-night,” she begged. “When we get back to Panama.”

“No. I’m not going to give you a chance to welch. Now—here—on this schooner.”

“Not to-night. I’m so—weary and—unstrung. I’ll do whatever you say, but—give me time to—to—Oh, I’m afraid!”

“Bothwell, you cur, come in here and you and I will see this out to a finish!” I cried in helpless fury.

“Presently, my dear Sedgwick. I’ll be there soon enough, and that’s a promise. But ladies first. You wouldn’t have me delay my wedding, would you?”

I flung myself against the door repeatedly and tried to beat it down, but my rage was useless. The lock and the hinges held. Back I went to my porthole.

“Evelyn, are you there?”

“Yes,” came the answer in a choked voice.

“Don’t do it. What are you thinking of? I’d
rather die a hundred deaths than have you marry him."

"I must, Jack. If you should be killed—and I could have prevented it—Oh, don't you see I must?"

The words were wrung from her in a cry, as if she had been a tortured child.

"Of course she must. But why make a tragedy of it? By Heaven, you wound my vanity between the pair of you. Am I not straight—as good a man as my neighbor—still young? Come, let us make an end of the heavy-villain-and-hero business. You, my dear Sedgwick, shall stand up and give the bride away. That is to say, you shall stand at your porthole. You'll find rice in a sack to scatter if you will. We want you to enjoy yourself. Don't we, Evie?" Bothwell jeered blithely.

"You devil from hell!"

"Pooh! Be reasonable, man. We can't both marry the maid, and by your leave I think the best man wins. Abrupt I may be, but every Katherine is the better for her Petruchio." He turned to her, dropping his irony for tones of curt command.

"I'll be back in twenty minutes with the parson. Be ready then."

With that he turned on his heel and left, locking the door behind him.
CHAPTER XXV

A RESCUE

Even now when it is only a memory I do not like to look back upon that twenty minutes. My poor girl was hysterical, but decided. Neither argument nor entreaty could move her from her resolution to save my life, no matter what the cost. I pleaded in vain.

"I can't let you die, Jack—I can't—I can't." So she answered all my appeals, with a kind of hopeless despair that went straight to my heart.

Through my remonstrances there broke a high-pitched voice jabbering something in Spanish of a sort. The sound of running footsteps on the deck above came to us. Some one called a warning.

"Keep back there or we'll fire!"

Then my heart leaped, for across the water came the cool, steady voice of Blythe.

"My man, I want to talk with Bothwell."

More feet pattered back and forth on the deck, and among the hurrying steps was one sharp and strong.

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“Good evening, Captain Blythe. You’re rather late for a call, aren’t you? Mr. Sedgwick was in better time. We have to thank him for an hour’s pleasant entertainment.”

I recognized the voice as belonging to Bothwell.

“If you’ve hurt a hair of his head I’ll hold you personally to account. Unless you want me to board your schooner you will at once release Mr. Sedgwick and Miss Wallace.”

“Miss Wallace has practically ceased to exist,” the Russian drawled.

“What do you mean?”

“I shall have the honor to send you cards, captain. Miss Wallace has become my wife.”

I stuck my head out of the porthole and shouted. “That’s a lie, Sam. You’re just in time to save her.”

“Are you a prisoner, Jack?”

“Yes. So is she. In the next cabin.” Someone stepped quickly across the deck and leaned over the rail above me. Bothwell’s dark face looked down into mine. He leveled a revolver at my head and fired just as I drew back.

That shot served as a signal for the attack. Bullets sang back and forth, some from the schooner, others from the boats of my friends.

As for the battle, I saw from my porthole only
the edge of it, and that but for a few moments as a boat full of men swept forward. Someone was firing with a rifle, while the others put their backs to the oars.

Presently the boat swept round the bow of the schooner and was lost to my view. But I could hear the firing of guns, the trampling of men above, and from their words could tell that the attackers were keeping their distance, even though they were firing pretty steadily from the cover of the shore bushes.

I must confess that Blythe's method of attack surprised me. How many men Bothwell had I did not know, but it was plain to me that the only way to take the ship was to rush it. We might fire at long distance for a week without doing more than keep them busy.

That I was wild to be free and in the thick of it may be guessed. Knowing as I did how matters stood between Evelyn and her cousin, I saw that she must be rescued at once to prevent the unholy marriage the Slav planned.

Strange that Sam could not see this and that he had not led a more dashing attempt at succoring the girl.

Three taps on the door of my prison jerked me round as if I had been pulled by a string. My re-
volver was in my hand. The door opened slowly and let in a man.

"That's far enough. What do you want?" I asked brusquely.

"S-sh! It's me, Mr. Sedgwick. Are you in irons?"

It was Gallagher. If I had been a Frenchman I would have kissed his ugly old mug for the sheer pleasure of seeing it. I knew now that Blythe had kept up the long distance fusillade in order to distract the attention of the defenders while Gallagher had crept close from the shore side.

I ran forward.

"Where is your boat?"

"Hidden in the bushes. Alderson is with it. Where is the lady, sir?"

In another minute Evelyn was free and standing with us in the passage. I noticed that the fire of the attackers had grown more rapid. The sound seemed closer. The demonstration was taking on the appearance of a real boarding expedition.

We climbed the forecastle ladder. I led the way, revolver in hand. From where I stood, a few steps from the top of the ladder, my eyes could sweep the forward deck.

Bothwell, the Flemings, and perhaps half a dozen dark-skinned sailors were crouching behind the
bulwarks, raising their heads above the rail only to shoot.

A constant crackling of small arms filled the air. The boats had crept nearer and were pouring a very steady fire upon the defenders.

The forward movement was only a diversion under cover of which we might have a chance to escape, but it was being executed with so much briskness and spirit that Bothwell could not guess its harmless nature.

At my signal the sailor led Evelyn quickly toward the poop. With my eyes over my left shoulder I followed at their heels. We had all but reached the stern when I heard the smack of a fist and turned in time to see a Panama peon hit the deck full length.

He had been hurrying forward and had caught sight of us. His mouth was open to shout an alarm at the time the Irishman's fist had landed against the double row of shining teeth.

The fellow rolled over and was up like an acrobat. But my revolver, pointing straight at his stomach, steadied him in an instant.

"Don't move or shout," I warned.

From the bushes Alderson had been waiting for us and his boat was in place. He flung up a rope
ladder with grappling hooks on the end. Gallagher fixed them to the rail and helped Evelyn down.

"You next," I ordered.

"Yes, sir."

"Your turn now, Sambo," I told the peon after the sailor had gone.

The fellow rolled his eyes wildly toward the stem of the vessel but found no hope from that quarter. He clambered over the rail like a monkey and went down hand after hand. I followed him.

We were huddled promiscuously in the little boat so that it rocked to the very lip. For a half a minute I was afraid we were going down, but a shift in position by Gallagher steadied the shell.

Meanwhile Alderson had thrown his muscles into the oars and we drew away steadily; fifty strokes, and the shadows had swallowed us.

Alderson pulled across the river and let the boat drift down the opposite bank. The outgoing tide carried us swiftly. We slipped past the schooner unobserved. Gallagher blew twice on a whistle and the two boats commanded by Blythe and Yeager at once drew back into safety.

Some three hundred yards farther down stream they caught up with us.

"All right, Jack?" Blythe called across to me.
"All right, Sam."

"Miss Wallace is with you, of course?"

"Yes, and one other passenger who nearly swamped us. Can you take our prisoner?"

His boat pulled up beside us and relieved us of one very frightened Panama peon. We were very glad to be rid of him, for a dozen times the waves had nearly swamped our overloaded skiff and I had been bailing every second.

A few minutes later we reached the Argos.

From Blythe I learned that Gallagher had been responsible for the plan by means of which he had rescued us. Moreover, he had insisted on taking the stellar rôle in carrying it out, dangerous as the part had been. It was his way of wiping out his share in the mutiny.
CHAPTER XXVI

THE LAST BRUSH

We resumed next morning the digging for the treasure. The shore party was made up of Blythe, Yeager, Smith, Higgins and Barbados.

Those of us left on board had a lazy time of it. I arranged watches of two to guard against any surprise on the part of the enemy either by an attack upon the yacht or by a sally along the shore upon the treasure diggers.

Having divided my men into watches, I discharged my mind of responsibility. Evelyn and I had a thousand things to tell each other. We sat on the upper deck under the tarpaulin and forgot everything except that we were lovers reunited after dreadful peril.

Youth is resilient. One would scarce have believed that this girl bubbling over with life and spirits was the same one who had been in such hopeless despair a few hours earlier.

A night’s good sleep had set her up wonderfully. Last night I had looked into tired eyes that had
not yet fully escaped from the shadows of tragedy, into the sharp oval of a colorless face from which waves of storm had washed the life.

This morning the sun shone for her.

Courage had flowed back into her heart. Swift love ran now and again through her cheeks and tinted them.

She was herself, golden and delicate, elastic and vivid as a captured nymph.

"When I left the old Argos I thought I never wanted to see the yacht again, but now I think I could be happy here all my life," she confided.

"Wouldn't you prefer to have your cousin just a few miles farther away?"

She fell grave for a moment.

"Do you think he'll try to do more mischief?"

"He'll try. That's a safe bet. But I think we have him checkmated. By night we ought to have the bulk of the treasure on board. Once we get it the Argos will show him her heels."

Four bells sounded, six, eight. Dugan came down from the bridge to report to me.

"Captain Blythe's party coming down to the beach, sir."

Two of the men were carrying a large chest. It was so heavy that every forty or fifty yards relays relieved each other. The box was brought down
to the edge of the water and loaded into a boat. Smith and Higgins took their places at the oars and Blythe stepped into the bow.

The cargo seemed to call for tackle and ropes. I had them ready before the boat reached us. Blythe superintended the hoisting of the chest, arranging the ropes so as to make a slip impossible. We hauled it safely aboard.

"Have it taken to the strong room, Sam. There's another waiting for us ashore," Blythe explained.

"Want me to go back for it?"

"No. Keep a sharp lookout for our friend up the river."

He was pulled ashore again and returned two hours later with a second chest, this time leaving Yeager and Barbados on guard at the cache. Gallagher and Alderson were sent ashore later to join Tom's party for the night watch.

A few more hours' work would be enough to lift the rest of the treasure. Already we had on board a fortune in doubloons and bars of gold, but there was still one more chest to be unearthed. We felt that we were near the end of our adventure and our spirits were high.

Blythe got out his violin and Evie sang some of her plantation songs, her soft voice falling easily into the indolent negro dialect.
My stunt was Irish stories. We dragooned the staid Morgan into playing the piano while we ragged.

It must have been close to midnight before we spoke of breaking up.

Evelyn and I took a turn on the deck. Our excuse was to get a breath of fresh air, but the truth is that we were always drifting together.

Even in the company of others our eyes had a way of sending wireless messages of which we two only understood the code.

We leaned against the rail and looked across the bay. It was a night of ragged clouds behind which the moon was screened.

"Isn't that a boat over there?" Evie asked, pointing in the direction of the river mouth.

The moon had peeped out and was flinging a slant of light over the water. I looked for a long minute.

"Yes. I believe it's Bothwell's schooner. He has slipped out unnoticed. The fellow must mean mischief."

"Oh, I hope not," said Evie, and she gave a little shiver.

A sound came faintly over the water to us from the shore.
“Did you hear that?” Evelyn turned to me, her face white in the shining moonbeam.

A second pistol shot followed the first.

“Trouble at the cache!”

I turned toward the pavilion and met Blythe. Already he was flinging a crisp order to the watch.

“Lower a boat, Neidlinger. Smith will help you. That you, Higgins? Rouse all hands from sleep. We’ve work afoot.”

Again came a faint echo across the still waters, followed by two sharper explosions. Some one had brought a rifle into action.

Blythe turned to me. “It’s my place to stand by the ship, Jack. This may be a ruse to draw us off. I can spare you one man to go ashore and see what the trouble is. Take your pick.”

I chose Smith.

“Keep a sharp lookout, Jack. He’s wily as the devil, Bothwell is. Better not land at the usual place. He may have an ambush planted.”

“All right, Sam.”

The Englishman turned to give Stubbs orders for arming the crew.

In the darkness a groping little hand found mine.

“Must you go, Jack? I—wish you would stay here.”

My arm slid around the shoulders of my girl.
"It's up to me to go, honey."

We were alone under the awning. Her soft arms went round my neck and her fingers laced themselves.

"You'll be careful, won't you? It's all so horrible. I thought it was all over, and now—— Oh, boy, I'm afraid!"

"Don't worry. Blythe will hold the ship."

"Of course. It isn't that. It's you. I don't want you to go. Let Mr. Stubbs."

I shook my head.

"No, dear. That won't do. It's my place to go. But you needn't worry. The gods take care of lovers. I'll come back all right."

Her interlaced fingers tightened behind my neck.

"Don't be reckless, then. You're so foolhardy. I couldn't bear it if—if anything happened to you."

"Nothing will happen except that I shall come back to brag of our victory," I smiled.

"If I could be sure!" she cried softly.

The sinister sound of shots had drifted to us as we talked. The boat was by this time lowered and I knew I must be gone. Gently I unclasped the knotted fingers.

"Must you go already?" She made no other protest, but slipped a plain band ring from her
finger to my hand. "I want you to have something of mine with you, so that—"

Her voice broke, but I knew she meant so that the gods of war might know she claimed ownership and send me back safe. For another instant she lay on my heart, then offered me her lips and surrendered me to my duty.

"Ready, Jack!" called Blythe cheerfully.

I ran across the deck and joined the man in the skiff. We pushed off and bent to the stroke. As our oars gripped the water the sound of another far, faint explosion drifted to us.

We landed a couple of hundred yards to the right of the spit and dragged our little boat into some bushes close to the shore.

I gave Smith instructions to stay where he was unless he heard the hooting of an owl. If the call came once he was to advance very quietly; if twice, as fast as he could cover the ground.

The mosquitoes were a veritable plague. As I moved forward they swarmed around me in a cloud. Unfortunately I had not taken the time to bring the face netting with which we all equipped ourselves when going ashore.

Before I had covered fifty yards I heard voices raised as in anger. Presently I made out the sharp,
imperious tones of Bothwell and the dogged persistent ones of Henry Fleming.

"I'll do as I please. Understand that, my man!" The words were snapped out with a steel edge to them.

"No, by thunder, you won't! I don't care about the cattleman, but Gallagher and Alderson were my shipmates. I'm no murderous pirate."

"You'll hang for one, you fool, if you're not careful. Didn't Gallagher desert to the enemy? Wasn't Alderson against us from start to finish? Didn't one of them give me this hole in my arm just now? They'll either join us or go to the sharks," Bothwell announced curtly.

From where I stood, perhaps forty yards north of the cache, I could make out that my friends were prisoners. No doubt the pirate had taken them at advantage and forced a surrender. Of Barbados I could see no sign. Later I learned that he had taken to his heels at the first shot.

Twice I gave the hoot of an owl. Falling clearly on the still night, the effect of my signal was startling.

"What was that, boss?" asked a Panamanian faintly.

"An owl, you fool," retorted Bothwell impatiently. "Come, I give you one more chance, Gal-
lagher. Will you join us and share the booty?
Or shall I blow out your brains?"

Gallagher, from where he lay on the ground, spoke out firmly:

"I'll sail no more with murderous mutineers."

"Bully for you, partner!" boomed the undaunted voice of the cattleman.

"And you, Alderson?"

"I stand with my friends, Captain Bothwell."

"The more fool you, for you'll be a long time dead. Stand back, Fleming."

As I ran forward I let out a shout.
Simultaneously a revolver cracked.

Bothwell cursed furiously, for Henry Fleming had struck up the arm of the murderer.
The Russian turned furiously on the engineer and fired point-blank at him.
The bullet must have struck him somewhere, for the man gave a cry.

Bothwell whirled upon me and fired twice as I raced across the moonlit sand.

A flash of lightning seared my shoulder but did not stop me.

"Ha! The meddler again! Stung you that time, my friend," he shouted, and fired at me a third time.

They were the last words he was ever to utter.
One moment his dark, venomous face craned toward me above the smoke of his revolver, the next it was slowly sinking to the ground in a contorted spasm of pain and rage.

For George Fleming had avenged the attempt upon his brother's life with a shot in the back.

Bothwell was dead almost before he reached the ground.

For a moment we all stood in a dead silence, adjusting our minds to the changed conditions.

Then one of the natives gave a squeal of terror and turned to run. Quick as a flash the rest of them—I counted nine and may have missed one or two—were scuttling off at his heels.

George Fleming stared at the body of his chief which lay so still on the ground with the shining moon pouring its cold light on the white face.

Then slowly his eyes came up to meet mine.

In another moment he and his brother were crashing through the lush underbrush to the beach. I judged from the rapidity with which Henry moved that he could not be much hurt. From the opposite direction Smith came running up.

I dropped to my knees beside Yeager and cut the thongs that tied his hands.

"Hurt?" I asked.

"No," he answered in deep disgust at himself.
"I stumbled over a root and hit my head against this tree right after the game opened. Gallagher and Alderson had to play it out alone. But Bothwell must have had fourteen men with him. He got Gallagher in the leg and rushed Alderson. You dropped in right handy, Jack."

"And not a minute too soon. By Jove! we ran it pretty fine this trip. Badly hurt, Gallagher?"

"No, sir. Hit in the thigh."

I examined the wound as well as I could and found it not as bad as it might have been.

"A good clean flesh wound. You're in luck, Gallagher. The last two days have more than wiped out your week of mutiny. We're all deep in your debt."

"Thank you, sir," he said, flushing with pleasure.

Here I may put it down that this was the last word Gallagher heard about his lapse from duty. He and the other reconstructed mutineers were forgiven, their fault wiped completely off the slate.

I sent Alderson down to the spit to signal the Argos for a boat. One presently arrived with Stubbs and Higgins at the oars. The little cockney was struck with awe at sight of the dead man.

"My heye, Mr. Sedgwick, 'e's got 'is at larst and none too soon. 'Ow did you do it?"

"I didn't do it. One of his friends did."
"Well, 'e 'ad it comin' to 'im, sir. But I'll sye for him that 'e was a man as well as a devil."

We helped Gallagher down to the boat and he and I were taken aboard.

The wound in my shoulder was but a scratch.

It was enough, however, to let me in for a share of the honors with Gallagher.

In truth I had done nothing but precipitate by my arrival the final tragedy; but love, they say, is blind.

It was impossible for me to persuade Evelyn that I had not been the hero of the occasion.

She could appreciate the courage of the three men who had chosen death rather than to join Bothwell in his nefarious plans, but she was caught by the melodramatic entry I had made upon the stage.

"You were one against fourteen, but that didn't stop you at all. Of course the others were brave, but——"

"Sheer nonsense, my dear. Any one can shout 'Villain, avaunt!' and prance across the sand, but there wasn't any pleasant excitement about looking Boris Bothwell in the eye and telling him to shoot and be hanged. That took sheer, cold, unadulterated nerve, and my hat's off to the three of them."
She leaned toward me out of the shadow, and the light in her eyes was wonderful.

With all the innocence of a Grecian nymph they held, too, the haunting, wistful pathos of eternal motherhood.

She yearned over me, almost as if I had been the son of her dreams.

"Boy, Jack, I'm glad it's over—so glad—so glad. I love you—and I've been afraid for you."

Desire of her, of the sweet brave spirit in its beautiful sheath of young flesh, surged up in my blood irresistibly.

I caught her to my heart and kissed the soft corn-silk hair, the deep melting eyes, the ripe red lips.

By Heaven, I had fought for her and had won her! She was the gift of love, won in stark battle from the best fighter I had ever met.

The mad Irish blood in me sang.

After all I am not the son of a filibuster for nothing.
CHAPTER XXVII

IN HARBOR

The morning found me as good as new except for a dull ache in my shoulder. I was up betimes for breakfast and ready for shore duty.

Yet I was glad to accept Blythe’s orders to stay on board as long as we remained in Darien Harbor.

It was good to avoid the sun and the mosquitoes and the moist heat of the jungle, though I felt a little guilty at lying in a hammock on the shady side of the deck with Evelyn at my side, while my friends were perspiring in the burning sand pits with shovel and pick.

Fortunately, it was only a few hours before the last of the boxes buried by Bucks was uncovered. Jamaica Ginger’s hatchet found it a good fifty yards from the others. Within an hour it had been dragged out of the dirt and brought aboard.

We sailed the same afternoon about twelve hours later than the schooner, which had quietly slipped
past us on its way to the sea in the faint light of early dawn.

That Fleming had given up the attempt to win the treasure was plain. I doubt whether his men would have followed him even if he had wished it, for he had not the dominant temper of his chief.

We dropped anchor under the lee of a little island in the Boco Chico, but our engines were throbbing again by break of day. As we puffed across the North Bay we passed the schooner almost within a stone's throw.

Henry Fleming was on deck, and half a dozen of the blacks and browns who made up the crew swarmed to the side of the vessel to see us. Blythe had made quiet preparations in case any attempt at stopping us should be made, but apparently nothing was farther from the thoughts of the enemy.

In fact several of the dusky deck hands waved us a friendly greeting as we drove swiftly past. From that day to this I have never seen any member of that crew, though a letter received last week from Gallagher—who is doing well in the cattle business in the Argentine—mentioned that he had run across Henry Fleming at Buenos Ayres.

Out of the Gulf of San Miguel we pushed past Brava Point as fast as Stubbs could send the Ar-agos. The lights of Panama called to us. They
stood for law and civilization and the blessed dominance of the old stars and stripes.

We were in a hurry to get back to the broad piazzas of its hotels, where women at their ease did fancy work and played bridge while laughing children romped without fear.

Adventure is all very well, but I have discovered that one can get a surfeit of it.

Before the division of the treasure there arose a point of morality that, oddly enough, had not been considered before. It was born of my legal conscience and for a few minutes was disturbing.

Tom and I were in Blythe's cabin with him discussing an equitable division of the spoils. Into my mind popped the consideration that we were not the owners of it all but certain remote parties in Peru.

After having fought for it and won it the treasure was not ours. The thing hit me like a blow in the face. I spoke my thought aloud. Sam looked blankly at me.

Yeager laughed grimly. There was a good deal of the primitive man still in the Arizonian.

"If they want it let them come and take it. I reckon finding is keeping."

But I knew the matter could not be settled so easily as that. A moral question had arisen and
it had to be faced. Evelyn was called into counsel.
She had an instant solution of the difficulty.
"We can't return it even if we want to. The
town of Cerro Blanco and the neighboring mines
were destroyed by an earthquake in 1819. Not a
soul at the mines escaped and only a few peasants
from the town. You will find the whole story in
Vanbrough's 'Great Earthquakes.'"
"Then, after all, we are the rightful owners."
"I'm afraid we are," she smiled.
Blythe, already as wealthy as he cared to be,
declined to accept any share of our spoils beyond
the expenses of the cruise. Each of the sailors
received a good-sized lump sum, as did also Philips
and Morgan.
Rather against the wishes of our captain the
three former mutineers shared with the rest of the
crew. We did not of course forget the relatives
of the men who had fallen in our defense.
The boatswain Caine left a widow and two chil-
dren. We put her upon a pension until she married
a grocer two years later.
We were never able to hear that she thought the
loss of husband number one anything but a good
riddance.
Jimmie's share went into a fund, which is being
managed by Yeager and me as trustees. It is
enough to keep him and his mother while the boy is being educated and to leave a small nest-egg in addition.

Yeager, of course, put his profits into cattle. Since Evelyn and I moved to Los Angeles we see a good deal of Tom and his wife. At least once during the winter we run across to his Arizona ranch for a week or two. His boy is just old enough to give his name proudly with a lisp as "Tham Blythe Yeager."

Ours is a girl. She has the golden hair and the sparkling spirit of her mother.

N. B.—The autocrat of the household has just read the last line as she leans over my shoulder. She will give me no peace till I add that the baby has the blue, Irish eyes of her dad.

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