

Ends of the earth: Stories

Gaunt, Mary (1861-1942)

A digital text sponsored by
Australian Literature Electronic Gateway

University of Sydney Library

Sydney

2002



<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/oztexts>

© University of Sydney Library.

The texts and Images are not to be used for commercial purposes without permission

Source Text:

Prepared from the print edition published by T. Werner Laurie London
1916

All quotation marks are retained as data.

First Published: 1916

A823.91 *setis australian etexts women writers short stories 1910-1939*

Ends of the earth

Stories

London

T. Werner Laurie

1916

A SCRAP OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I do not know how other people write short stories, but for myself I seldom do it unless I come across an incident that interests me deeply or some scene that cries out to be illustrated. I know I never write a successful short story unless one of these conditions is fulfilled, so it comes that in collecting together this book I seem to be going step by step once again through my own life.

I was a baby of six when the wanderings of my parents took me to Gippsland in the south of Victoria, and the vivid green of the dense tea-tree scrub impressed itself on my mind. There I first remember seeing the Australian aboriginal, and there I first heard, without comprehending the grim tragedy that lay behind, the story of the brig that was wrecked on Ninety Mile Beach, and the white woman who lived with the blacks and despairingly traced initials on the forest trees. My father was a commissioner, then called a warden, of the goldfields, and he used to tell us tales of the early days and the strange people he had come across, and how in the wild rush for gold it often happened that the criminal ended a gentleman and the gentleman a criminal, and we children in our turn speculated what our father would have done had an old friend come to him with a price upon his head. So when I grew older I wrote "A Dilemma."

We grew up, we little band of children, and scattered literally to the ends of the earth — the boys first, and I remember how I listened enthralled when one of the sailor boys told me how his boat had been adrift in December for a whole day and night south of the Horn, how bitter cold it had been, how the sea rose up round them and the sky fitted over like a lid, and how they feared the ship would never find them and dreaded their fate if it did not. Many years later I wrote "The Mate's Salvage," and he corrected it for me and did the seamanship. Later on he told me an accident of a little war in which he was a looker-on, and the tight fit the Americans were in when the Colt jammed. Of course I wrote that. It was too good to miss, with its tropical setting; and then to my amusement the Colt people wrote to me to say that the Colt never jammed. It was impossible, and if I would visit their warehouse they would demonstrate why. They evidently thought I was interested in munitions — I who did not know one end of a gun from another, and shouldn't have recognised a Colt if I had met it.

I married and went to live in the pretty little town of Warrnambool on the south coast of Victoria, and there I made the acquaintance of the gentleman who ran an illicit whisky still. Everybody knew it, and I remember his offer to my husband, "Sure, Doctor dear, leave the bit gayrden gate open wan night an' it's jist a keg I'll be lavin' yez on the verandy. It'll warm, yer heart these could nights, an' not a sowl the wiser at all, at all." My father, a judge by that time, tried the case, and laughed at the manners and customs of the folks of my new home.

And the years, after all not so very many years, went on, and I was a widow earning my living by my pen. I found nothing inspiring in the London streets, so of necessity I fell back upon the incidents of my youth for material, and as I

succeeded, and money allowed, I wandered farther afield.

“Peter Addie and the Ju-ju” reminds me of a weird night I spent alone on Anum Mountain, and the long trek by night from Ho to Palime in the heart of that Togo land we have just taken from the Germans. As the lights my carriers bore flashed on the wet trees, there grew up in me a little fear and the strong feeling that when I had time I must make a story with some such setting.

And when I came back from West Africa I went to China — China of the ages. I remember one summer day drifting down the canal outside the walls of Peking, my companions “The Woman who did not Care” and a man who had served the British American Tobacco Company. Together we three worked out the story, lunching in a grassy graveyard, the people, courteous and unwashed, who hoped to occupy that graveyard in the future, sitting round us in a ring waiting patiently for our scraps. I went farther inland, where no one but a missionary would go, and living with some American missionaries just outside a walled city, I met the man who told me the incident of the old gun in the gateway and the armed men hanging threatening over the city walls. Indeed I did more, for I went on till I almost reached the city of the story. But White Wolf, the great robber chief, held the land in terror, and my men came to me saying that he either held the city Sui Te Chou or besieged it. I might have acted my own tale had I gone a day's journey farther, only then I think the end would have been tragedy.

So I turned in my tracks and went north, north to the mighty rivers and the far eastern shores of Siberia, just wakened to their summer trade, to the Island of Saghalien which used to seem to me the end of the earth; and before I turned west again I too had seen lying in the mouth of the great Amur River the sealing schooners that my brother had told me of when, years before, together we wrote “North Of 53°.”

The Graphic published “North Of 53°” and “The Good Samaritan,” a true tale of Tasmania, Pearson's Magazine published “A Dilemma” and “When the Colt Jammed” — all four long before I had realised the value of copyright; therefore am I much indebted to the editors of these papers for permission to republish in book form. “Sergeant Mahone” first saw the light in the Sphere, and neither Mr Shorter nor I can remember the terms on which I sold it; but whatever they were I have his good wishes for its success and he has my thanks.

And since I am being grateful to people, in addition to Mrs Lang who helped me choose the stories, I really think I ought to be grateful to and indeed dedicate the whole book to the enterprising publisher who not only helped me to see strange sights but who has the pluck to bring out a book for me at such a time.

For the doings have been of deepest interest. If my readers get out of the book a tenth of the interest I have had in collecting the information and writing the stories, I shall be well paid. A tenth did I say? A hundredth would more than pay me.

And last but not least — nay greatest of all — when I look over this record of my life, there comes to me a curious knowledge, a knowledge that can only come with the passing of years. A tiny girl once watched the daybreak, the red and gold of the sky barred by the trunks of the great Gippsland gums that stood up against

the skyline, and realised, possibly for the first time in her life, the beauty of the dawn. The years passed, years full of joy and sorrow, and a woman, a woman who had drunk of life's cup, watched another dawn come up across the green fields and rugged hills of Saghalién, watched the light like arrows of gold cut through the mists that for ever envelop the island, watched and saw the beauty of the northern even as the child had seen the beauty of the subtropical dawn in the faraway south; and then the woman knew that the mind — the soul — what you will — that received these impressions belongs to no time, that part of her was not young in the little child, but it was no older in the woman who felt she had been to the ends of the earth, even as it will not be old if it be granted her to fill life's allotted span, it is of no age because it is eternal.

MARY GAUNT.

MARY HAVEN,
NEW ELTHAM, KENT.

The Doctor's Drive

“THE Mails has got to go through.”

Peter Miles was store-keeper and postmaster at Bilson's, and had been store-keeper there ever since Bilson's was any place at all, and postmaster ever since the Government had seen fit to open a post-office. His motto was, and he stuck to it, “The mails has got to go through.” Rain or sunshine, flood or drought, snow or fire, “the mails has got to go through.” And this January day the wind was howling like a demon possessed. Down through the narrow gully it tore, a veritable blast from a fiery furnace—the green things shrivelled up before its breath, the tall trees, their great branches tossed hither and thither like twigs, bent and snapped, and every now and then one was rent up by the roots and, falling, crashed among its fellows, and with its wide-spreading roots, which left mother earth so reluctantly, brought away part of the hillside; even above the howling of the wind could be heard the slow slipping and sliding of the loosened earth as it fell towards the roadway. No sunshine to-day, no scrap of blue sky, the heavy clouds hung low, clouds of smoke they were, and the strong smell of that smoke and the aromatic scent of burning gum leaves was heavy in the air.

Just in front of the little store stood the mail-coach, and the horses were being yoked up—only a small coach today, but there were four horses—four horses that were laying back their ears and kicking and plunging as if they did not like the job before them. The driver, a tall, lithe young fellow of five- and-twenty, with a slouch hat drawn down over his eyes and fastened with a leather thong under his chin, stood watching the final touches being put to the harness and the mail bags being brought out and flung into the boot and put on top of the coach. There were a good many mail bags to-day; usually the big coach would have taken them through, but the weather was so threatening that Miles on his own responsibility had decided to send them along in the little coach he kept for emergencies. “The mails has got to go through,” and the sooner they got through the better on a day like this.

“No passengers?” asked the driver laconically. “You'd better send a man along to help then, case of trouble.”

Peter Miles looked thoughtfully down the road and rubbed his bald

forehead hard.

“I was thinking —” he began, and then hesitated, and one of the stable helps, with his hair coming through the broken crown of his straw hat, laughed ironically.

“Sweet day for a *passer*,” he said; “the hills'll be in a blaze long before you reach Bethambia.”

“Lucky if we reach Bethambia unsinged, eh, old man?” said the coach-driver grimly, as he gathered up the reins and prepared to mount the box. “Now which of you fellows is coming along? ”

Still Peter Miles shaded his eyes and looked along the road. The howling of the wind deadened all other sounds, and the thick smoke and haze made it impossible to see very far; still he looked out expectantly and delayed the coach yet another five minutes. The secrets of the telegraph were his, and he could not betray them; but he knew well enough the contents of that urgent telegram he had sent along to the doctor an hour ago. There was still time for him to catch the coach, and he hesitated to let it go without him.

The horses grew more impatient, and so did the driver.

“Come, old man,” he said, “give the word. You're risking our lives.”

“Hold on, one minute. Here he is! Here he is!”

Through the haze and smoke dashed a man on horseback.

“Here, I say, hold on a minute; I'm coming too.”

“Better not, doctor,” said the lean coachman, “we're going to have a hell of a time.”

“Must”, said Dr. Smith, dropping from his horse and throwing his bag inside the coach. “Now shall I come up in front? ”

The driver nodded.

“Look after my horse, Miles,” cried the doctor, scrambling to the box-seat and settling himself there.

It was lucky he was young and active, for the horses were more impatient than ever now, and the driver, with a quite unnecessary crack of his whip, gave them their heads.

“It'll be hell for leather, Mat,” cried he of the straw hat, as the stable helpers jumped aside to let the swaying coach pass, and Mat nodded his head.

Up the road, straight up the hill, swept the horses right in the teeth of the wind, and Bilson's was left behind in the gathering haze.

“Where're you goin' to, doctor?” asked Mat as they steadied down to a trot, for the hill was steep and the wind strong.

“To Coulson's — just this side of Bethambia, isn't it?”

A faint smile stole over Mat Jackson's impassive face.

“Eh, I thought they'd be wantin' you there. It's her first, you see, and Jim

Coulson's mighty set on her. But it's an uncommon awkward time she's chosen."

"They always do," murmured the other out of the depths of his experience. "Never mind, they'll take it more coolly next time."

"I'd have ridden through, if I was you," said the driver. "You'd have done it easier."

But the other shook his head.

"I've been riding all the morning," said he. "And I never got to bed at all last night. I reckoned on getting some sleep in the coach once we get through this smother."

"Lordy! we ain't goin' to get through this. All the ranges are on fire way back there. I reckon we'll be lucky if we get through at all. It's gettin' worse."

"Ye gods and little fishes! It can't be worse."

"Oh, can't it? just you wait an' see." "I'm bound to get through."

"So's the mails. And once we top this hill it'll be neck or nothing with us. Say the word, doctor; will you go back?" And the driver slightly checked his horses.

"Can't we get through?"

He raised his head. The smoke made his eyes smart, and he pulled down his hat over them, but it was little good, it was all round them, heavy and dense. On either hand the tree-tops were shut out as by a pall, and even the leaders were only visible to the men on the box as through a dense grey haze.

Mat, the driver, took a long breath, then pushed back the flapping brim of his hat, and, standing up, took a long look round.

Nothing but dense grey smoke and trees swaying and tossing in the wind seen dimly through it.

"Well, we mout get through. I've seen it worse — only the farther we go, the less chance of getting back if it's too bad to go on. And it ain't pleasant, let me tell you, to be roasted alive without any preliminary preparation. And it's kinder anticipatin'."

The doctor smiled grimly.

"As bad as that?" he said.

"Well," drawled the driver, "it mout be, and it mout not. The wind mout drop, you know, or it mout shift, or it mout rain, or it moutn't be as bad as I think. There's a hundred chances agin things goin' wrong. But if we meet the fire two or three miles on ahead there, I tell you, doctor, it isn't much I'd give for your chance of seein' Jim Coulson's wife through her trouble. But then again, we moutn't meet the fire; but I'm telling you the truth, if I hadn't the mails behind me it's on the back track I'd be this minute."

“And if the mails can get through, I can,” said the doctor. “I reckon we'll go on, Mat.”

“Right you are, boss,” and he leaned over and touched the off leader, who was fretting herself into a foam over the smoke, with his long whip.

Then the doctor pulled down his straw hat over his eyes again, and in spite of the discomfort of his seat and his doubts as to the safety of his situation, fell into an uneasy doze. The heat was overpowering, the smoke grew denser than ever, and every now and then he was dreamily aware that his companion was exhorting him to keep awake, to hold up and look out that he did not fall off. He was rather afraid of this last accident himself, and grasped the iron rail of the boxseat with a firm hand, and then kept starting wide awake, thinking he had lost it. If he could only have wakened himself up thoroughly, he would have made an effort and gone inside as safer, but dead beat as he was the smoke and the heat made him drowsier than ever, and he kept putting it off and putting it off till of a sudden the horses were pulled to a standstill with a jerk that threw them on to their haunches.

“God Almighty!” he heard Mat's voice in horror and dread. “We're dead men!”

Then he sat upright in a moment, and rubbed his eyes.

It was darker now much darker, though it was but two o'clock in the afternoon, the wind was wilder than ever as it tore shrieking through the trees, and the smoke denser and more choking; but that was not the worst, for right ahead, directly in their path, was a lurid glare thrown right on the heavy smoke banks.

The doctor sat up and rubbed his eyes sleepily, for the moment hardly grasping the gravity of the situation.

“What's the matter, Mat?”

The coach-driver pointed with his whip.

“The fire, right ahead,” he said. “Both sides of the track, too. The scrub's thick and the track's narrow. We're dead men, doctor.”

The doctor stood up and looked back; but the driver anticipated his thought.

“No good, doctor, we can't go back. The fire'd be on us before you could say Jack Robinson. And it would stop with us all the way. It's due south is Bilson's, and the wind's dead from the north.”

The solitary passenger looked to the right and left, but the scrub was close and thick; the country was poor enough, but the messmate grew up thick and bushy, and in between was tea-tree and bracken and twining creepers and prickly shrubs of which he did not know the names. But it was close enough; there was no escape that way either for man or beast.

"It's sorter different when it comes to the point, doctor isn't it?" said the driver. "All very well to talk o' gettin' the mails through, neck or nothing, till you have to do it; but to drive into that muck of smoke an' fire — the Lord ha' mercy upon us."

"Is it the only way?"

"The only way. We're not above three miles from Bethambia." And he brought down the whip heavily across the horses' backs. "Now then, fellows, for all you're worth."

The doctor put his hand down and gripped firmly the rail as the coach plunged forward and rocked from side to side; but he said nothing. There was nothing left for him to say.

"Let's get it over, in God's name," cried the driver, and he lashed the horses to a hard gallop. They kicked and plunged and snorted in terror, for the breath of the fire was upon them now, but the hand that held them was firm and strong, and the cruel whip came down on their backs unerringly. There was no turning back for them either.

The hot wind was hotter than ever now: the mouth of the furnace was open, and it was pouring forth smoke and flame. The reek of it was in their nostrils, and the doctor pulled his hat down closely over his face.

"Look out you don't choke and fall off," said the driver grimly. "I couldn't stop if I wanted to."

"All right," said his companion, and looking out again he noted that the air was full of burning gum leaves. They fell on the frightened horses and on the mail bags, and his own coat was already smouldering in one or two places, and right ahead was the fire. On either side scrub and bracken and tall trees were all one mass of flame, and momentarily it came nearer, borne on the fierce wind.

The horses saw it too and stopped dead, plunging and fighting to be free, and though Mat stood up in his seat and lashed them with a hand made desperate by stern necessity, they were desperate too, and they swerved aside and turned from, the track to the right, bringing the coach sharply against a tree trunk.

"Good Lord!" cried Mat in desperation. "Rats in a hole!"

"We'll have to blindfold them" said the doctor. "Give me that necktie of yours, they'll never face it as it is — and your handkerchief. Now, don't leave me behind."

It is hardly an easy matter to blindfold a horse at any time, but never surely did it take so long as that day, when the minutes were so precious. Young Willie Smith cursed the fate that had sent him out from civilisation many times, as he struggled for that plunging off leader's head, but it was done at last — all four horses were blindfolded, and he scrambled up to the

box again as the driver lashed them to a gallop.

He wondered if it would be a good move. How could those terrified horses take the coach along that rough track, now scattered over with living coals as the burning branches and twigs fell upon it? But it was their only chance. Mat's hands were firm and strong, and the horses answered to the guiding rein. The fire was on either hand now, their faces were blistering under the heat, every piece of wood and ironwork was too hot to touch, and the horses stumbled every now and then where a fall would mean certain death. He bowed his head in his hands. This was the end then. All his high hopes, all his ambition, and his little sweetheart waiting for him so patiently till he could make a home for her up here among the mountains. All, all was lost; this was the end. How long now, how long? Then the driver's voice broke in on his reverie.

“The mails are afire, doctor. Couldn't you put them out? Take this waterproof apron.”

The waterproof apron had been pulled up to shield their own legs; but no matter — if Mat were so faithful to his trust, he could not be less so, and with his pocket-knife he ripped it up, and turning round threw it across the mail bags. It didn't half cover them, and he had to crawl half over them and put out the blaze with his fingers. Sometimes he managed to get the waterproof in between his bare hand and the fire, but always that was not practicable, and the mails were such inflammable material, before he got one place out another would be alight. His hands grew sore and painful but he hardly noticed it, only the smoke was so choking and the heat so fierce he could only wonder they held on so long.

First one horse stumbled, then another, but the practised hand of the driver drew them to their feet again. The off leader was down on her knees once, and the coach gave such a lurch he gave up all for lost, while he mechanically laid his arm across the corner of the woodwork that burst into flame.

“Do that again,” said Mat between his teeth, “and it's all up with us.” But the mare, helped by his guiding hand, struggled to her feet again.

A burning branch fell right across the top of the coach, miraculously sparing the two men on the box-seat, and the doctor, with a great effort, flung it off. Another fell right in front of the horses, but the track luckily was wider here, and Mat managed to draw horses and coach a little aside. It was only clever hands that did it at that headlong pace, but it was done, and they were a little nearer the end.

How long? How long?

Eyebrows, eyelashes, hair were all singed by the flames; the curtains in the coach windows were on fire, and the horses — their scanty harness was

red-hot, and the white handkerchief he had tied round the eyes of one of the leaders was already smouldering. The end must come soon now, things could not go on like this any longer.

“Woa, there. Steady, good mare. Hold up, will you?” And the whip came down with a heavy crack across the backs of the stumbling horses.

Crash! And a tall tree fell close alongside them, and men and coach and horses received the burst of sparks that flew around them.

“It is the end,” cried the doctor, his lips cracked and swollen and his mouth dry and parched, yet still making one last effort to put out with his bare, burnt hands the fire that was kindling afresh among the mails.

“By the living God! no,” shouted the driver. “We're through! My God! we're through!”

Then the other man turned his head and looked through the dense haze with red-rimmed, smoke-weary eyes, and he saw that his companion spoke the truth. Behind them, was the fire, behind them the flames dancing yellow and red and blue in the heavy smoke, and here — here was only the path of the fire, hot wind, heavy smoke, dense and thick as ever. The breath of the fire had passed, and every living thing was dead. The tall trees were blackened, smoking skeletons, in which the red fire still smouldered, and the air was full of the soft, white, powdery ash that had once been bark and green leaves. But they were safe, safe! and in a few more yards Mat drew up the horses, and they put out the last remnants of the fire that had clung to the coach.

Then they were off again, and in another five minutes were clattering down the road into the township of Bethambia.

The township had fought for its life, and at the first roadside cottage they came across a little knot of men armed with branches and sacks, and looking scarcely less dishevelled than the newcomers themselves. These had been beating back the fire from the township.

“And it was a mighty close shave,” said one of them, stepping forward. “But, lordy! Mat, whatever brought ye through on a day like this?”

“The mails, Jim Coulson,” said Mat, drawing himself up with dignity, “has got to go through, an' they're through. An' here's the doctor for your missus.”

Then a woman made her appearance in the doorway, winding up her hands in her long white apron.

“Is it the doctor?” she asked. “Oh, doctor, I'm that sorry, but the baby was born more than half an hour ago. Just as fine a child as ever you set eyes on, bless him!”

The Ways of God

“DONE!” The two men looked at one another blankly. “Done!”

It was twilight, and the night was coming, though it was only seven o'clock. The sky was heavy and lowering, with a promise of snow in it; the wind cutting and chill; behind them the rock rose up sheltering a little, and before them the fire blazed and danced, sending up every now and then a shower of sparks as the logs burned and rolled against each other. Fire was the only cheery, comfortable thing they had found in all the wilds of Labrador.

The half-breed was desperately hurt. Fate had been unkind all through, but this it seemed to Lester was the very worst thing that could have befallen them. They could not abandon him, and to stay meant death. The wind moaned through the dwarf fir trees, and Corder looked at him questioningly out of hollow, cavernous eyes. His gaunt cheek had fallen in, and his lips quivered a little.

“If it weren't for Louie,” he said.

There is always the woman, the woman who sits and waits at home. But he could not think of the girl whom Corder was going to marry; his thoughts were so full of another woman. He looked into the heart of the fire, and he seemed to see her rocking slowly backwards and forwards with the child, his child, in her arms. The firelight gleamed on her golden hair, he saw the child's hand nestle in the laces at her neck—mother and child, the eternal symbol—he could not keep his thoughts to the matter in hand. Were privation, hunger and cold and bitter disappointment making him lightheaded?

“One of us must push on,” he heard Corder's voice saying, “and one'll stop behind and look after the poor chap. We can't be more than five days off the Post now?”

But he did not state it as a fact, he asked a question.

“The Skipper,” they had always called the half-breed guide, the man who knew the way, the Skipper “says he thinks it's five days off, but he wasn't very certain.” In his own ears his voice sounded dead and monotonous, and Corder took him up passionately.

“It can't be more than five days off! Man! we're starving now!”

There! It was out! They had never acknowledged it before. They had plodded steadily on, as cheerfully as they might, ignoring the rapidly diminishing provisions, joking over the handful of pease meal. Was not the Hudson Bay Company's Post quite close, and then they would be within reach of civilisation and all that civilisation meant to them?

But now they were facing things, and it seemed to mean death, certain death.

Cordner sat down on a log and spread out his thin hands to the blaze. His chum noticed they were but skin and bone. For all the tan, he could see the blaze through them.

“See here, John,” he said, “you’re the stronger of us two. We’ve not much to boast of, either of us. This expedition has pretty near finished us. We’ve been walking on the edge of a precipice for the last week, and it seems we’ve gone over ker-flop. Without the Skipper——”

He paused, and Lester looked intently into the fire. Slowly—slowly the woman rocked herself backwards and forwards; he heard the little creak of the chair, saw her smile as she bent over the child. Was she thinking of him? Would their child suffice her, after the first shock? How she had clung to him when the moment for parting had come. “Dear, forgive me, forgive me. I can’t—I can’t let you go.”

But he had gone, and now he came back to the present, and Cordner’s tired voice was speaking.

“We can’t abandon the Skipper. He’s been telling me,” his voice shook a little, “that that’s what his own people would do, just leave him to take his chance. He hardly seems to expect us under the circumstances to do anything else, but I told him we’re not heathen Indians——”

“No,” said Lester, and it seemed to him his wife raised her face and looked at him long and lovingly. The firelight made long bars up to his eyes, and he would not look at his friend lest the other should see the tears.

“Of course, that’s what I said,” went on Cordner deliberately, “one of us will stay with him while the other pushes on and gets help.”

“Help,” echoed Lester; then he looked round him and laughed. Cordner’s words had broken up his dream. There was no woman to look at him with tender eyes. There was only a fire in the wilderness, a tent of balloon silk huddling under a rock, and a bitter wind moaning through the dwarf firs.

“Don’t laugh, man,” said the other, hastily, “for God’s sake, don’t laugh. We *must* get help if we’re to get out of this. Think—think of the women who are waiting for us.”

“Yes.” Lester was a man of few words.

“Very well, then.” There was something feverish in Cordner’s manner, a sort of tense excitement that the other felt and understood. “One of us must go, and that one must be you.”

“I! I couldn’t leave you, Ted.”

She was back in the fire now, holding out her hand and beckoning. So vivid was the vision that he had to restrain himself from calling her by name.

"I'm the weakest of all three. It would be simply suicidal to send me out with any hope of my getting through alone." Cordner put his hand up to his mouth, and Lester wondered if he, too, were seeing visions in the fire. "I must stay and look after the Skipper, and if you get through——"

He paused, and the other man burst out, "My God! I can't leave you, I can't, I can't. There's not above three pounds of peasemeal left, five days there, and say three days back——"

"Don't look at it that way. Men have lived on less, and, remember, you're our only hope."

"I." His voice stuck in his throat. If it is hard to plod on starving, worn out, cold, it is a thousand times worse to sit down deliberately and wait.

"John, I know you'll do your best." Cordner's voice was steady. "If you knew how I'm counting on seeing Louie again."

So he, too, saw visions in the fire.

Nothing more was said on the subject. When they rose in the morning it seemed to be the accepted fact that he was to go. The half-breed was not conscious, but Cordner stood up in the dim light of the early morning, and helped him gather together the few things he was to take with him. He declined to take any of the peasemeal.

"I'll have a chance of getting game," he said, touching his Winchester.

"But——"

"Have some sense, Ted. I'll take one pinch of tobacco, that's all. No, no, there's not three pipefuls there. Do you think I don't know what it'll be to wait all those long hours. Now, I must go."

He had not thought how hard it would be to leave him. The other held out his hand, and they stood looking at one another.

"You'll tell Louie——"

"You'll tell her yourself."

It was a dark morning. The wind shrieked round the rock that sheltered the little tent in a mournful minor wail, and on its breath came the weird sounds of the wilderness, the beating of the rain amongst the stones, the cry of the rushing river as it fretted on its rocky course, the snapping of the fir branches, and the honk honk of the wild geese as they flew in a triangle overhead.

"In a week, Ted, hold out for a week. I'll be back in a week," and he stepped out, and presently, when he looked back, the tent was hidden by rock and tree; he was alone in the wilderness.

A sense of loneliness seized upon him. He had known all along that the pinch would come in the last few days, the days before they reached Hamilton Inlet, but he had reckoned on the feeling that goes so far with the traveller, that this *was* the last; the hardships would soon be over. But now

the guide was dying, and his comrade was behind, waiting, and the unknown rose up before him, mysterious, terrible. Suppose he missed the way, wandered but for a day, then not only would he perish, but also the man who waited behind, who had let him go without a murmur.

If he went not a step out of his way, there must at least elapse eight days, eight terrible, foodless days—eight days—eight days—eight days—his feet marched to it, the wind moaned it through the trees, the river shrieked it. They stretched away before him, long, interminable as the road he was to go; eternity itself seemed not more terrible than those eight days. He would count it five, he said to himself, he would count it five, because the next three would be bringing food and warmth and hope to the waiting men, and he tramped on over the stones and moss through the poor little starved forest, and said to himself, “Five, five, only five.”

Then he left the forest. The river widened a little and flowed north-east through rocky country that was hard to pass over, because it was so stony and rough. Here and there was a wind-beaten tree, here and there a stunted bush, and again, in sheltered corners of the stones, patches of green-stuff, moss, and small, creeping, vine-like plants. He looked to his feet and among the green he saw something bright and red and hard. He stooped—berries. He gathered and ate and filled his pockets. They were crude and harsh, but he had set out on his journey on a spoonful of peasemeal, and, as he ate, the thought came to him that he ought to go back and tell Corder that these berries were within three hours of him.

“Eight days, eight days, eight days,” sang the river loud and insistent, and turning back would make it eight and a half, and then he closed his eyes and saw again his wife's face and read the prayer that was ever on her lips, “Come back to me, come back to me, I cannot live without you.”

He was so weary, but even when he sat down with his back to a stone, the urgency of his errand would not let him rest.

“Eight days, eight, eight days,” shrieked the very stones, and it seemed to him he was putting his own desires before the need of his friend, the friend who was waiting so patiently, whose only hope was in him. It was all very well for him to rest and save himself. He would be all right in the end; he would go to those loving arms. He had three days to the good, but what about Corder? Every moment he delayed put off his rescue.

Now and again he roused himself as he plodded on, telling himself these were feverish fancies; a man must take necessary rest; these fears were born of his weakened condition. But the moment he sat down to rest they came back again, crowding in on his brain until sitting still was no rest, until ease was only to be bought by a steady pushing on, though every bone in his body ached, though his eyes closed for very weariness, and he woke

with a start to find he was sleeping as he walked. But he tramped on through the long, long day, and at last, in the late afternoon, the sun set in the south-west behind a bank of clouds with only the faintest tinge of brightness in those clouds to show where he was, and common sense told the weary traveller he must try and sleep, though all the little devils that shrieked from behind the stones should stand round him, mocking that he was wasting his time, stealing his friend's life.

He gathered together with difficulty a few sticks, and, under the shelter of a rock, built himself a little fire and crouched over it. If it had not been for Cordner and the half-breed, away behind there, he would not have been all unhappy, for he saw his wife's face in the glowing coals; he was going to her. Four days now, four days now, sang the river in a lullaby, and he dropped into an uneasy sleep.

He wakened in the morning to a white world. Trees, rocks, stones, moss, all were shrouded in white, all harsh angles were gone, for the wind had died, and the snow lay just where it had fallen. The place where his fire had been was just a softly rounded heap of white.

He rose with a feeling of dismay. Winter, winter. It had stopped snowing, but, if much more fell, the way would soon be impassable for him, and the little mocking devils that were in the river and behind the rocks began again. True, they said, "Seven days, seven days," now, but at the back of his mind was an uneasy feeling that the eighth day had been wasted, that he had not used it to the profit of his comrades waiting behind there.

"What else could I have done?" he cried, and rose to his feet. Before him stretched the white way he should go, and he started off again, munching for his breakfast some of the crude, hard berries he had put in his pocket the night before.

It was one long struggle. He lifted one foot and deliberately put it before the other. It seemed to him it would be too much effort to make another step, but he made it, and yet another, and in all the still white world not a creature moved, not a thing stirred. Once a little wind blew up a swirl of snow, then it died down, and again he was alone with the stillness. Four days from the Post, four long, weary, hopeless days. He neither looked behind him nor before him now. When he thought, it was of a woman slowly rocking before the fire with a child in her arms, and then he found himself murmuring again, "Four days, four days, four days."

And at midday he came to a sudden halt. There was a trail on the white carpet of snow, a strongly-marked trail going north.

It roused him from his lethargy, and he rubbed his eyes and looked at it again. Caribou! And they had long given up looking for caribou. He had thought to find a porcupine, or, maybe, some ptarmigan, but a great

caribou! Meat and life for all of them! What luck! And the wind was blowing from it to him. It seemed to him the woman he had watched all the morning sprang to her feet and held up the child eager and glad, and he turned away from his path, away to the north, and followed the trail of the caribou.

Hope lent him strength. It must be a straggler from the great herd that crosses Labrador in the autumn. The tracks were fresh. Could he kill it? Was he risking everything, his own life, his friend's, his wife's happiness, all that made life dear? The question loomed large as he stumbled on. An hour passed. He had no difficulty in following the trail in the newly-fallen snow; another hour, and his feet grew leaden again, and the mocking little devils hidden behind every snow-covered excrescence cried, "Four days and a half, four days and a half! To-night it will be five days again!"

But still before him lay the trail, plainly marked in the snow; it would be madness to go back now, and he pushed on till a dull feeling came over him that this was a dream-world he was in, a phantom trail he was following, that he might follow, follow till he dropped in his tracks and died there in the wilderness.

"Dear God!" he cried, "not that, not that. Have pity!"

And then he lost the trail. It went right up to a bare plain of rock, off the slightly sloping surface of which the little wind had blown the snow and on the bare rock the hoofs had made no mark. It was only a little plateau, and beyond was a small patch of spruce, dwarfed and stunted. The very thought of seeking again for the trail filled him with dismay. He could tramp on, one foot after the other, all the way to Hamilton Inlet, but he could not seek for that trail. He was nearly five hours out of his track now—five hours added to the long tale that must elapse before he reached help. All the little devils behind the rocks shrieked in chorus, shrieked with delight, and his wife's face in the firelight looked white, worn, and reproachful. It was a foretaste of the end, for now he knew he would never reach her, never see her again, never touch those golden curls, never feel those soft lips against his. He was going to die, Cordner was going to die, the half-breed was already dead, and he dropped down quietly on the rock with the feeling that this was the end; and even as he fell he saw a movement among the spruce branches, a movement that was not caused by the wind, and knew he had come up with his quarry at last!

And then fear took possession of him. Suppose he missed! He was afraid even to move lest the great reindeer should hear and flee. It seemed to him to take ages to rise to his knees, aeons to fit his Winchester to his shoulder; all the heavens were full of the sound he made. His arms trembled, the whole landscape waved before his eyes, and then he brought all his will to

bear to calm himself, took steady aim at the hairy shoulder he could just see between the branches, and fired.

“Crack!”

He fired twice, and then he rose to his feet, trembling. He heard a crashing among the trees, and the bitterness of death was in his heart, for he thought the beast had fled, and he knew he had no strength to follow; and then, as the smoke cleared, there came a stillness, and he lurched forward to the edge of the wood.

He hoped for nothing; this was just his last effort. It was hardly worth while, but he might stumble forward just a little farther.

What was that dark thing lying on the snow? Spruce branches? He rubbed his eyes, made one desperate rush forward, and there at his feet, its lifeblood crimsoning the snow, lay the caribou he had stalked.

He dropped on his face again, sobbing softly to himself, but it was not despair this time. Here was life—life and hope and gladness; he would hold his wife in his arms again, he would kiss his child, all the world was at his feet; and presently he struggled up and made a fire and broiled a steak of the deer meat.

He ate carefully and with restraint, for he was a starving man, but it seemed to him his life was ebbing back to his veins; the loneliness passed for a moment, the little fire here under the spruce seemed the very acme of comfort, and before he quite realised what he was doing he had dropped asleep. His sleep, too, was deep and refreshing, but he woke with a start to find that the night was falling and the little fire was dead.

But he was satisfied. He had food and the wherewithal to make a fire. He could have shouted and danced for joy, for the way to Hamilton Inlet seemed so short now. Such a little way, and home and happiness were within his grasp. And as he cooked his evening meal he was more than content. He was strong now. He would march some way to-night, some way towards home and wife and child and happiness.

And then doubt came to him again. The mocking little devils among the branches of the spruce cried out, “A whole day gone. A whole day gone. You are full, but Corder is starving, starving, starving!”

He knew it was only fancy, and he hung the caribou meat up among the branches; then he took as much as he could upon his shoulders, and started to retrace his steps to the river. He abandoned his Winchester because it was heavy, and it was better to take meat, and then he plodded on, figuring out to himself how far on his way he would get to-night. There should be a moon if the clouds lifted sufficiently to let it be seen, but at least the song of the river would guide him.

He heard it at last out of the darkness, and he dropped on to a stone to

rest for a little. Four days to Hamilton Inlet, and he had meat enough and to spare. The longing in him to get there grew intense. He would not camp here, he had slept this afternoon; he would push on through the darkness, guided by the sound of the rushing water; he would walk till he was weary, and then light a fire and sleep.

And then it seemed to him out of the darkness all the devils that had haunted him rose up, shrieking, "You are abandoning your friend, deserting him, deserting him, deserting him. You are full, and he is starving. The meanest thing in the world is surely the man who abandons his friend!"

He rose to his feet and shook his fist. "I am bringing him help," he said aloud, and though the darkness had been full of shouting voices, his own sounded loud and strange above them all. Abandon Corder? What else could he do but push on to Hamilton Inlet?

He might take him back this meat. All round him voices were shouting it. But go back? It would put off the day of their rescue; it would lengthen their stay in the wilderness. Who could tell if, after he had gone back, he would yet have strength to reach the deer meat in the spruce wood? His life might be spent in a backward and forward tramp until the caribou was all gone, and then—and then—— His wife was beckoning him down the trail by the river, and he stretched out his arms to her.

"Dear, I will come."

He rose to his feet resolutely, walked half-a-dozen steps, and then turned back. He had meat, and Corder must share, aye, if it cost him his life and her happiness, Corder must share, and he went back on his own tracks again.

And through the darkness he plodded on. There was no rift in the clouds. The wind rose in a dreary moan, and a driving sleet began to fall that cut his face like knives. The load he carried was a dead weight, and there was no lift in his feet as he felt his way among the rocks by the river. He hardly knew what he expected. There was no hope in the river's song now, for life was ebbing, and hope was dead.

At last, stumbling for very weariness, he crawled along till he sheltered a little under the lee of a rock and lay there, too weary and heart-sick even to make a fire, dozing and waking, dozing and waking, till the sullen dawn broke, and he saw before him the rocky, weary way he had traversed yesterday morning. Yesterday morning! Thirty hours still to the camp! He gathered a few sticks and lighted a fire, preparing to broil himself a steak, and then he paused. It was so much waste for him to eat. The meat must go to Corder and the half-breed; he would come back to that he had hung in the spruce wood.

It was a disappointment. He was hungry now, hungrier than he had been the night before, when he had grown accustomed to his hunger, and he looked longingly at the meat. But no; he might eat once at the camp, not more, and he rested his elbows on his knees, and his chin on his hands, and stared into the glowing coals. The fire was a bright red eye in the surrounding greyness, and he warmed his chilled feet and tried to conjure up his wife's face.

But it would not come. He bowed his head. The sweet woman had vanished out of his life then. Never more, never more, wailed the river. He would do his duty, and for the rest——

He rose and kicked the fire into a blaze, because he would have the last of its warmth before he went on, and, turning, stooped to his pack.

He heard a shout. For a second he started, then stooped to his pack again. He must stagger on, and for the shout he had heard so many voices, the mocking devils never left him, and he had wakened to the crying of the river.

Again came the shout and he looked up. The flames were dancing before his eyes, and he could see nothing but them and the whiteness of the snow. He dropped the pack and looked round, and now the call came quite distinctly.

“Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!”

He made a hollow of his hands and shaded his eyes, peering out into the driving snow. The sleet was gone, it was snow now, whirling and dancing and turning the place into fairyland. Were there two dark figures advancing? Corder and the Skipper! The Skipper all right, and they could go on together! His heart beat suffocatingly. A dream, a dream! He looked again and rubbed his eyes. A dream—was it a dream? Two figures muffled to the eyes were coming towards him. He noted the woollen scarf of one blowing out in the breeze, and remembered that they had not a woollen scarf among them, and one of the men was square and short.

How plainly he could see them. He had seen his wife and child, but he had seen them differently. She had sat in her chair as if she had been by her own fireside, while these men might have been out here in Labrador. They bent a little before the cutting wind; on their shoulders the snow seemed to be piling up. Who were they? What did they mean? The mocking devils he had only known were there, and heard in a sort of minor key, which, though it rang in his ears so loud, was yet subordinate to the sounds of the wild. He could hear these men's footsteps. They came closer, and he stood still, staring.

“Hallo!” said the leader again. “In the name of God, who are ye?”

“John Lester.” His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and his name

sounded strange in his own ears.

His questioner stepped out quickly and laid his hands on his shoulders.

“Mon, are ye clean daft? What are ye doin’ on the Little Muskrat River? John Lester sud be well doon the Beaver on the way to Hamilton Inlet the noo.”

“I am John Lester,” he managed to say. “The Little Muskrat? Isn't this the Beaver?”

“Gude sakes! The Beaver! Ye're thretty hour north o' the Beaver, an' the roughest country in the world lies atween. John Lester! I am Ian MacDonald, the factor at Hamilton Inlet.”

Lester dropped as if he had been shot. Now the burden had gone his strength had gone, and not until they had given him some hot tea and chafed his hands and broiled some steak for him did he recover sufficiently to explain where Cordner and the half-breed were.

“Thretty hour, say ye? Na, na, not for strong men. Ye'll come along to my camp an' rest ye there, an' Tam an' me an' anither breed I hae alon' 'll see after the ithers. We've juist been lookin' round a bit. There's always a chance of a little game before the place closes for the winter, an' y'll no be sayin' the time's been wasted.”

And when, a month later, Lester sat by his own fireside again, and took his wife in his arms, he told her how he had sacrificed all hope of her for the sake of taking back food to his comrade.

Her arms were round him, his head on her breast.

“Oh, my dear, my dear!”

“And,” he went on, “if I had not—if I had not—— The Skipper was all wrong; we were following down the wrong river, going blindly out into the wilderness. If I had held on after I shot the caribou instead of turning back—MacDonald was turning back when he saw the glint of my fire—if I had gone on—if he had passed but half an hour earlier—if the breed had not fallen and hurt himself——”

He looked in her face and saw the tears on her cheeks.

“Oh, my dear,” she said, “my dearest, who shall understand the ways of God!”

When the Colt Jammed

“HIP, hip, hooray!” Lieutenant Henry Miller, of the U.S.A. ship, *President Lincoln*, flung his exceedingly battered sun hat skimming up into the dark recesses of the cathedral roof, where it stuck on a little image up there. “Here's a chance for glory at last. Got orders to see if the waterworks are clear, and by heaven if they aren't——”

“Well, you can't go without your hat, sir,” suggested Ensign Campbell.

“Oh, you be hanged for a cautious Scotchman. Stir yourself now, Campbell. I'll take you and little Cody there. Oh yes, you young beggar, grin, but it's just possible you'll be wishing yourself back in the stuffy old cathedral with the two towers at Tondo before we're through. And I'll have O'Regan and sixty men. It's a beastly nuisance we haven't a carriage for that Colt. But we'll just have to hump it. That's the advantage of a Colt.”

“Sometimes,” opined Campbell, as he gathered himself up off the stone floor and neatly knocked down his superior officer's hat, and the image of the patron saint as well, “sometimes it's anything but an advantage.”

“If you want to run, I admit, but then we ain't going to run. Now then, eighty rounds apiece for the men, and we ought to be there in an hour.”

Outside the cathedral it was a blaze of heat. The hot sun of the Philippines poured down relentlessly. Inside, where the smell of the incense still lingered even after a week's occupation by American sailors, there was darkness and just a semblance of coolness.

Little Cadet William Cody staggered and blinked his eyes as he came out, and then he straightened himself, looked at his leader, and remembered that he was going out possibly to his first fight.

“Heavy firing toward Caloocan,” said Miller lightly. “They're kept pretty busy there, I reckon. We ought to have a good chance for the waterworks, if we've any luck at all. Now, O'Regan,” to the bo'sun's mate, “you shall take the advance guard, Indian file, muzzles out. Walk along by the channels there, ten on each side of the road, and you drop in the channels at the first alarm. Must have been made for us, Campbell,” he said gaily. “Those channels are ready-made rifle pits.”

There was none of the pomp of war about the workmanlike little party. The men were simply in their blue shirts and trousers and their big sun hats, and the three officers wore shirts belonging to the marine detachments.

Ahead was O'Regan with the advance guard, and a little distance behind came the main body with the officers and the Colt automatic gun. Two men carried the gun, and behind came another man with the tripod on

which it was mounted folded together on his shoulders. Two more men carried the limber boxes with the ammunition. A very handy way to carry a gun, as Miller remarked to his comrade.

They were well out of the town now, well beyond the reach of the houses, but there was no sign of life in the paddy-fields. Then a man from the advance guard came running back.

“Please, sir, O'Regan says the stone bridge across the watercourse is all blown up.”

“The dickens he does. Did he expect the enemy to leave the bridges for him to attack them dryshod?”

“No, sir, he didn't,” said the bluejacket simply. “He's waded and it's waist deep; but they've dug pitfalls in the road beyond.”

“By Jove, we'll have to take to the paddy-fields then. It doesn't matter though, none of them about. Tell O'Regan to get back to the road again as soon as he can, Parker.”

“Don't let the advance guard get too far ahead, sir,” urged Campbell, as they reached the watercourse and plunged in one after the other. In front they could see the advance guard squelching through the soft mud of the paddy-fields. Cody was doing all he knew to keep his youthful head above water, Miller and Campbell were looking after the rapidly disappearing advance guard, and thus it happened that no one saw that the bluejackets carrying the limber boxes stumbled, and for one moment they and their precious burden disappeared beneath the sluggish waters. They raised scared and streaming faces, and the men beside them laughed.

“Hold your blooming tongues,” suggested one, “and there's no damage done. The sun's enough to dry a blessed iceberg, and they,” with a thumb pointing at his officers, “ll never drop to it.”

And so it happened, the little rift within the lute that by and by would bring destruction upon them all. They were all streaming as they came out. Who was to notice if some men were a little wetter than the rest?

There came a whiz and a ping and a bullet flew wide, though each man started as if the bullet had been specially moulded for him. “There, I told you, sir,” said Campbell, “O'Regan is too far ahead.”

“O'Regan understands his job. I wish to heaven you understood yours half as well,” said Miller sharply.

“There, there,” cried Cody eagerly, “there they are. Let's at 'em, sir.”

There they were, a little band of men in long white crape shirts hanging over their trousers and big shabby straw hats, a patch of white against the green of the paddy-field. They scattered and fled before the advancing Americans, and Miller turned into his course again.

“A stray lot,” he said; “why, they never returned our fire.”

“Won't you follow them up, sir? They did fire first.”

“Not I. Our business is with the waterworks. They can't be heavily garrisoned. All that heavy firing out Caloocan way is all in our favour. No one'll heed a little rumpus over here. And if we take those waterworks it's promotion for the lot of us, my boy.”

“Well, we'll deserve it,” said Campbell.

Again there came a dropping fire in their left rear, but only a bullet or two whistled wide, and Henry Miller shrugged his shoulders and laughed as the ensign looked back.

“Out of range,” said he, “out of range; the trouble will be in front. Come on, men, we mustn't let O'Regan get too far ahead,” and, indeed, the bluejackets were mere dark spots on the green paddy-field.

But they could not move so fast with the gun, and already the fire was coming closer in the rear, and to the left the white-shirted men were showing in numbers.

“Zit, zit, zit” came the bullets, and the man on the left of the gun dropped on his face with his head pillowed on his arm in the mud among the green rice.

“Hallo!” said Miller, “this'll never do. We must give them a lesson. Bugler!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Sound ‘Lie down.’”

Down dropped the men as the notes of the bugle rang out.

“Mr Cody, let your rear half company fire volleys by sections. Bring the Colt here.”

For just about thirty seconds the Colt belched forth one continuous stream of lead and flame that no living thing could stand against, and directly in its path lay a few scattered white-shirted figures. The others disappeared. Then they came to the webbing that had been wet and already dried again in the fierce heat and the Colt jammed.

“Hallo, Birt!” called Miller sharply to the gunner, as the fatal deadly silence told him something had gone wrong.

“Jammed, sir,” said the gunner, lifting his face streaked with sweat and dirt. “I can't do nothing. She won't gee.”

“By Jove!” muttered Campbell.

“It'll be all right in a minute, and if it isn't we'll get back to the road and fight our way through,” said Miller quietly. “Lie down, you Cody there, what business is it of yours? Are you afraid of getting your best shirt messed?”

Cody laughed. He was one mass of mud from head to foot, the bullets were beginning to zit, zit, zit overhead again, the Colt was still silent, here

was his superior officer joking him about the state of his shirt, and behold he was not afraid.

“Lie down, men, lie down.” Miller tried his hand at forcing the webbing through the red-hot gun, the white figures in the distance grew more and more numerous, and quicker and quicker came the shriek of the bullets overhead. Right and left and to the rear came the Filipinos; it seemed as if the paddy-fields were alive with them. There were some even in front of them cutting them off from O'Regan and the advance guard.

“Now, men, steady, pick your men and fire,” cried Miller, as a bullet found the range again and ploughed a cruel red streak up the gunner's burnt hand.

A volley rang out, and for one moment the advancing enemy dropped back, and, racing back at the double came O'Regan and fifteen of his men.

“The others is on the way, sir,” he announced ruefully; “sure it's mesilf wouldn't have left 'em, but they was down on their faces in the mud, and they wouldn't be persuaded to move at all at all.”

“Lie down, lie down. We'll have to fall back on the road if we can't get this gun to go.”

The Filipinos were all round them now, concealed more or less among the green rice. They had got their range, too, and their bullets were telling among the compact little group of Americans. One or two of the bluejackets were moaning pitifully, having gotten hurts that were beyond the power of men to bear in silence, the mud was beginning to be streaked with blood, and the gun's crew, with hands all scorched with the red-hot gun, were cursing freely.

“Oh!” groaned the gunner, as he looked at his hands hopelessly, “why ain't it got a water-jacket like the Britishers' Maxims!”

“It's no go,” said the ensign, “we're doing no good here, sir; we're in the open, and every man jack will be dead meat if we stay!”

Miller turned on him sharply.

“We're bound for the——” Then with a long-drawn sigh he threw up his hands and sank into the mud.

For a moment he felt only as if some force had knocked him over, and then it came with a rush, a terrible cruel grinding pain that took his breath away and seemed dragging the life out of him. He could not even moan; it seemed he could hardly draw his breath. There was the tropical sky overhead, the blades of green rice outlined against it now, and the soft yielding mud on which he was lying. He must get to the waterworks. It was his chance in life, the thing that was to give him fame, the girl he loved— As he thought of her soft brown eyes, he pressed his palms on the mud and made an effort to raise himself, and the pain dragged him back, the

man beside him was shrieking aloud, and then he heard Campbell's voice.

"Cody, we've got to retire; they've got us on toast. Bugler, sound the retreat."

Zit, zit, zit went the bullets; another shriek, and then the notes of the bugle rang out shrill above all the din. He tried to protest, to say he was still leader, that he did not intend to retire, but it seemed he had no command over his own voice; the pain had gripped him, and only a moan came from his lips.

"We can't take the gun, sir," came the gunner's voice. "It'll only hamper us. It's no good to them without ammunition."

"No. Watson and you, Birt, carry Lieutenant Miller. Waterfield's dead—leave him. There's Hammond—O'Regan, tell two of your men to carry him."

They were going back—back to the road, to the ready-made trenches. But they were leaving the gun, the precious gun, and they had forgotten in their hurry the bolt. The men picked Miller up hurriedly, it was no time to be nice, and, hampered with so many wounded, he knew that they were retiring in good order—that Campbell had them wonderfully well in hand. After all perhaps it was the only thing to be done. They had been trapped. Then he clasped his arm more firmly round Birt's neck and gathered all his strength.

"The bolt," he gasped, and there came a rush of blood with the words, "the bolt."

Like a flash it came upon them all. They had forgotten the bolt: take the bolt and the gun would be so much hoop-iron; leave it, and it was a good sound gun only jammed.

Campbell looked back uncertainly. The white shirts were showing through the rice, there was a shout of triumph here and there, the bullets were flying round them, and they were hampered with their wounded now; they could not fight their way back.

"Cody," he began.

"I'll go, sir," said Cody, and without another word he turned and raced back, the half-liquid mud splashing beneath his flying feet. He heard a volley ring out behind him and he knew that Campbell was doing his best to clear the way for him; but it gave him a curious sensation of being between two fires. He did not like the firing behind him, he would rather face it, and the blazing sun and the stench of the mud seemed to take all the strength out of him.

He was crawling. Would a bullet find him? Would he be carried out as poor Miller had been? And even as he ran he thought of the short stature and thread paper figure that had been such a grief to him. Other fellows

were men at eighteen, and he was not five feet, the stature of a child—less mark for a bullet.

And then he laughed and wondered that he thought of such things now when he was going to his death.

The gun was quite close now, and coming up fast was a white-shirted little man hardly bigger than he was himself, and he drew his revolver and let fly, and wondered dimly as he saw him drop in the green rice. He could not have hurt him surely; he hoped not; he was only disappearing again as they all did if you tried to come to close quarters, and he reached the gun. It was cold now and there was a lull in the enemy's firing. Did they fear that he, single-handed, might get that gun into working order again?

The next moment he had drawn the bolt and dropped it inside his jersey, and he turned and was fleeing for his life towards the little body of bluejackets who were crouching in the rice waiting for him.

It was like a nightmare that coming back; the mud clogged his feet, the sweat poured down his face. Every moment he expected to feel a bullet in his back, and he clutched the bolt inside his jersey with a desperate feeling that he must at least get it safe back. A bullet came tearing through his big sun hat, another made him wince as it sung past his ear; the mud grew stiffer and stiffer, and just as he felt he could carry on not a moment longer, he was among his own people again.

Miller, his face and shirt all stained with blood, was looking at him with desperately anxious eyes, Campbell cried: "Well done, youngster," and Birt, the gunner—oblivious for once of all discipline—brought his heavy hand down on his shoulder.

"Jumping Jehosaphat! But the little cock's a rare game one."

He drew one long breath of relief and then the march began again, at the double too, the bullets sang round them, the blazing sky was overhead, but they struggled on and five terrible minutes saw them safely through the watercourse and ensconced in the trenches at the side of the road, and Cody with all his strength gone out of him was lying flat on his back staring up at the sky wildly gasping for breath. The bolt was safe, the gun was useless, but he could not have gone another yard to save life or honour.

The Filipinos did not advance; possibly they too knew that those channels would make deadly rifle pits.

The Americans waited a little and rested; then the forlorn little party crawled back with their wounded to report themselves at the old cathedral with the two towers at Tondo.

"Ten men missing, sir," reported Ensign Campbell miserably. "We brought back nine with us. They were too strong for us. It meant

annihilation to stay. Lieutenant Miller's badly hit, sir, only spoke once to remind us we'd left the bolt behind us."

"And the bolt?" questioned Captain Pollard sternly.

"Mr Cody went back, sir, a quarter of a mile in the teeth of the enemy's fire and got it."

"Well done, Mr Cody. It's such men as you go to the making of a nation," said his captain quietly, and Cody forgot his small stature, his boyish appearance, and knew he had his foot on the first rung of the ladder that leads to fame. And Miller, tossing and turning in a high fever, could not forget, in his delirium, that he had failed, that circumstances had been too strong for him. Would ever the God of Battles give him a like chance again?

The First Australian Love Story

“MASTER,” the question came calm and stern, and the voice of the captain, brave Francis Pelsart, rose clear above the roar of the waves and the wail of the terrified women, “where are we?”

“God knows,” said the young master solemnly, “I do not.”

Far as the eye could see stretched the milk-white water. The full moon in the cloudless heavens made it light as day and gave them no hope of succour, and the waves were already making great breaches in the bulwarks. The good ship *Batavia* had made her last voyage, and she would leave her bones on this unknown reef. Where were they? These brave mariners of the seventeenth century had sailed out into unknown seas; days ago they had lost their consort, and now they themselves were hard and fast on some unknown reef on the coast of the mythical Great South Land. All they knew was that the nearest civilisation was at Batavia, thousands of miles away to the north, and the master turned away with a sigh. All that man could do he had done, and now they must end here. His blue eyes had a worn and weary look. Dearer to him than his life was his ship, and dearer than his ship was Audine Van Heeren. But truly he must lose them both.

He himself had brought them to destruction.

“Master,” Francis Pelsart was as calm as if no danger threatened, “there are three hundred souls aboard this ship, and you and I are answerable to God for them.”

“I know,” said the master, “but no boat could live in such a sea, and we have but the shallop and the little skiff left.”

“We must wait for the dawning then. Is there nothing else?”

“We have done all else that man may do,” and Jacob Webhays looked round the decks. Everything movable was gone already. The spare yards and sails, the coils of rope, the water casks and the harness casks, the stands of arms, all the boats save two, even the brass cannon, had been thrown overboard in the hope of lightening the ship, and the great mainmast had been cut away by the board; but in the darkness, for the clouds had hidden the moon, they had not succeeded in freeing it from the tangle of rigging, and now it lay a new danger to leeward, as it ground against the ship's side with every wash of the waves. Bad seamanship, it seemed to Webhays, but what could he do with a crew half mad with terror. He and Pelsart and the supercargo were, it seemed to him, the only sane men left on board the doomed ship. Those who were not mad with terror were so with drink, and the captain had lost all control over them. True, the chaplain, Van Heeren, was sober enough, but he was so busy

preparing for the next world he was no good for this.

Now, as Pelsart turned away anxiously, the master felt a light touch on his arm, and the chaplain's daughter, Audine, stood beside him. He put his arm round her, and she clung to him as she looked out over the waste of waters.

“Must we die?”

“Heart of my heart! The ship is not gone yet. The storm is moderating, and we may reach the land. If it were only the sea! But the crew have broken open the wine casks and——”

He held her close to him, and she could feel his heart beating.

“I do not fear the men,” she whispered, “only——only the supercargo.”

The gloom on Webhays' face deepened.

“He is my superior officer,”¹ he said, “but——” He did not finish the sentence, but the gleam of a knife in his right hand ended it for the girl beside him.

What a night it was! The crew were past all discipline, drinking, rioting, fighting, and the master could only stand in the shelter of the high bulwarks, with the girl in his arms, and wait for the dawn. What if some wave, higher and stronger than the rest, should find them out, and sweep them from their hiding-place? Again and again during the long night they heard a rioter swept to his death with a shriek or a drunken laugh, and worse things might yet happen than to die with Audine Van Heeren in his arms.

But the dawn came at length, and with the dawn the sea moderated wonderfully, so much so that the young master crept aft again, and held council with Pelsart and with the supercargo, whom he hated, and then looked up a crew of six men sober enough to man the little skiff, and under his command go and explore the islands.

There were three of them, and he came back and reported them only sand-banks and rocks, barren and desolate enough, but at least safer than the ship.

All day long the skiff and the shallop toiled backwards and forwards, landing those three hundred souls and bringing away provisions and the lighter baggage; but at sundown they had nearly done. Pelsart himself was in the shallop, and the next journey would be the last, when they would bring away the supercargo and the few men remaining on board the wreck with him.

But as the boat approached the island their ears were greeted once more with the sounds of strife, and with cries that there was no water on the island, and only those who had command of the boats could hope for succour.

At a word from the master the sailors lay on their oars.

“Master,” said Pelsart beside him, “once the boats touch the shore we are lost. What do you advise?”

“I think,” said the master, slowly, “we are not far from the Great South Land which De Nuyts told of. If the boats go there you will surely find water, and can return with it. Besides,” he looked up, “the sky is threatening. There will be rain before morning; a storm, too, or I mistake,” as a great gust of wind tore at the frail boats.

Pelsart demurred. How, he asked, could he desert the people entrusted to his charge, who trusted in him?

“They may trust in your honour,” said Webhays, grimly, “but at present they will tear you in pieces to get at the boats.”

Then he stood up and began to strip.

“For myself,” said he, “I have that on shore I cannot leave, and I will give your honour's message to your people that you have gone to look for water, and will return as soon as you have found it to punish the guilty and reward those who have been true and faithful.”

Then he plunged overboard, and was swept away in the boiling waves. Pelsart made as if he would do likewise, but his crew laid violent hands on him. Were they all to perish, they asked angrily. He must find the Great South Land for them, and help them bring back water for the whole ship's company. They would not even allow him to go back to the ship for his supercargo. And so as Webhays scrambled breathless and half-drowned on the rocky shores of Hautman's Abrolhos the people round him were yelling execrations at the shallop and the little skiff now away on the horizon, and getting smaller and smaller every moment.

But Webhays' heart was full of exultation as he caught fondly at a loving hand held timidly out to him. There was plenty of rain in that stormy sky. If it only rained half as hard as it had done the day before it would be a strange thing if they could not catch sufficient water to last them for a month at least. They had some food, there was fish in the sea in plenty, and above all—above all—parted from them by a waste of impassable water, was his enemy, and the man Audine Van Heeren dreaded. It was a hard and cruel age, and Webhays would have liked nothing better than to know that Jerom Cornelis was safely drowned. So many had been drowned during the past twenty-four hours. Why not he? No one would miss him, save perhaps the wife in Texel, who would be better without him.

Then he turned away from the sea, and set himself to soothe the angry, excited people who thought themselves deserted, giving them Pelsart's message, pointing to the threatening sky, and urging on them to make every preparation for catching the precious water which soon would be

God-given. At first no one heeded him but Audine and her father, and with their aid he began to strengthen a natural reservoir in the rocks, and to scrape down gutters which should lead the rain into it. One by one the others joined them—the women first, and the little children, and then the men; and when his rough reservoir was complete, Webhays, with a sign of gratitude that his superior officer was safe on the wreck, set himself to collect together the provisions they had brought ashore, and to make some sort of shelter for them and for the people against the coming storm. It was midnight before he rested; the clouds were scurrying across the sky wildly, and the moonlight came only in fitful gleams now. Out of the shelter where the women were sleeping came creeping Audine, her fair hair blown about her shoulders, and put a loving hand in his.

“We are safe now,” she whispered. “God bless you; God bless you.” And Webhays, looking up at the gathering storm, and feeling the first cold blast of rain on his face, and thinking of his enemy out there on the wreck, answered, “Yes, thank God; I think we are safe.”

And that storm raged for nearly a week, and yet there were signs of life on board the *Batavia*. On the island they were happy enough, in spite of it. The rain had given them all the water they wanted for some time to come. The master doled out the provisions carefully, and every day under his guidance he sent out fishing parties, who caught enough and more than enough to supply their wants. He broke open a bale or two of merchandise, and gave clothes to those who needed them most, and though it was a desolate, barren island, the little colony began to wear an air of cheerfulness and order which made the old chaplain hold up his hands and bless the good God for all his mercies. His daughter was more inclined to bless God for having sent them Jacob Webhays. And still there was no sign of the returning boats, and still there was life on board the wreck.

Then one Sunday morning broke clear and fine, and the master, looking out to sea, saw between them and the wreck a floating spar, and on it he spied the figure of a man wildly waving to him as if for succour. But what succour could he give? Already the wreckage was beginning to drift ashore, and by and by they might possibly make a rough boat out of it, sufficient to pass from island to island, but as yet they had no means of reaching the broken spar. If the waves did not drive it ashore, the man clinging to it must perish. And the next day he was still there, holding out despairing hands towards them—a little closer, but still too far off to be helped. But the next day the wind and the waves had driven him so far in they could plainly distinguish his features, and behold it was Jerom Cornelis, the supercargo. He was barely sensible now, or he might have swam ashore; a strong man might easily reach him from the island. And

yet no one made a movement. Strong within these old Dutchmen lived the superstition that he who rescued a life from the greedy sea must give his own life in exchange; and who would give his life for Jerom Cornelis? So they watched the spar all day, till as the sun drew into the west it began to drift out again with the tide.

“He will die,” said Audine pityingly, “and he has fought hard for his life.”

“He need not die,” said her lover, “but I doubt we shall have trouble if he lands here.”

“That is as God pleases,” said the girl piously.

“And I am to be God's instrument,” said Webhays. “A woman should be gentle and tender-hearted, but——”

Another look in her eyes, and he had waded into the sea, and before the waves were breast high, had caught the spar and was bringing it ashore. Once on dry land there were willing hands enough to succour the supercargo, and two or three days saw him as well as ever again, while Webhays was bitterly repenting his mercy, and even gentle Audine Van Heeren felt it would have been a kindness to those on shore to have left him to drown.

Another week, and peace no longer reigned among the little colony of castaways. The supercargo had taken command. He denied the master all authority, and had sent him fishing to the farthest corner of the island, and he had got about him a band of the worst of the crew and passengers. These he called his bodyguard, and they were sworn to do his bidding, even to the shedding of blood. The women began to draw away timorously from him and his followers, and to keep the little children out of his sight; for it was rumoured that the provisions, now recklessly expended, were becoming short, and Cornelis and his bodyguard already grumbled openly at so much flour and meat going to the women, and children, and weaklings. The young girls—there were ten of them—they said, were well enough, but for the old women, and those past their first bloom, and the little children, and the sick men—— The unfinished sentence was ominous, and the terror grew and grew, and there was no sign yet of Pelsart's return. Indeed, Cornelis had gathered together all the arms, and redistributed them to the eighty odd ruffians he called his bodyguard, and they said openly that when Pelsart did return, either in the boats or with a ship, the best thing they could do was to seize him and his ship. They would be free lances of the sea.

And Webhays, fishing for the sustenance of the little community, heard all these things, and was powerless to help. Truly he had taken an evil thing out of the sea.

Out of the wreckage they had built now a fair-sized skiff, and a smaller one, and all he could think of was to take Audine in the little skiff, and escape to the other islands, or even to the mainland. He pondered these things without being able to see daylight, and then one night Audine met him under the cliff, whereon grew a little stunted tea-tree, the only signs of vegetation on the island.

“Hush,” she whispered, putting her hand on his lips in the darkness. “I have terrible things to tell you.”

“Well.” He held her so tight he hurt her.

“It has come,” she moaned, “it has come. I should never have asked you to save a man from the sea.”

“What, my heart, what?”

“Cornelis. I am to be his mistress,” she whispered. “He has given me till to-morrow to come quietly—if I don't——”

“I will kill him,” breathed Webhays between his teeth. “There are plenty will help us.”

“Not one,” moaned the girl, “not one. The rest of the girls go to his bodyguard. Not one will help us. You are the only man they fear, and they will kill you. I am afraid to die, I am afraid to live, God help me.”

“Where is the boat?”

“Too well guarded.”

“The little skiff?”

“Round in the cove. Franz had it fishing.”

But already the grim work had begun. On the cold night air there rose a cry of horror and terror, the wail of fear-stricken women and frightened children, and then a shout of triumph.

Webhays dragged the girl down under the shadow of the cliff, and they listened again. They were powerless to help.

Again and again came the cry of terror, then followed wild shrieks of pain, the sounds of a scuffle, and rude laughter.

“They are murdering them, the helpless ones!”

He drew the girl's hood over her ears and held her close against himself, to shut out those horrible cries. Then he drew his knife; if die she must, this woman he loved, she should die quietly and by loving hands. But the sounds of strife moved farther away from them, and he breathed again. But something must be done, and that quickly.

“If I put you in the little skiff,” he asked, “can you row to the other island and tell them what has happened? Tell them to come over and help us, if they can.”

“I can't. I couldn't. I will die here with you.”

He thought a moment. It was little good his staying there. The best thing

he could do would be to induce the men on the other islands to come over and conquer these pirates.

He whispered this resolution to the girl, and together they crept softly down to the cove and into the little skiff. It was such a tiny, frail thing; he doubted whether it would take them across the three-quarters of a mile of rough water that lay between them and the nearest island, but when they reached it safely he made up his mind to go still farther. They were a weakly lot on this rock, eking out a precarious existence on fish and rain water, while on the farther island were stout men far more likely to be of use in this crisis. It meant another half-mile of stormy water, but they landed at last, dripping wet, and worn and weary, and five-and-thirty men stood round a little fire of driftwood and listened to their tale.

“And we have no boat,” said Dirk Flamand, swearing an oath loud and deep, “nothing but the raft there.”

“And no arms,” said his mate, “but these,” and he showed a stave broken from a barrel and shod with nails.

“They will serve,” said Webhays, “indeed they must serve, for if we do not go over there they will surely come here after us.”

Some of the men looked as if they considered these newcomers anything but desirable guests, and the girl saw it.

“They will come,” she said, pushing back her damp hood, “whether we are here or no. They must have your provisions. On the island the food is nearly done.”

And then Dirk Flamand swore another oath that if they took the bread and the little remaining meat it would be when he was a dead man. The master swore a like oath, and one by one the others joined in. And at the only place where a boat might land they made a breastwork of stones, and lay down behind it. As for the girl, they took little notice of her—their own lives were at stake, and her lover made her a nook by a little fire, and she lay down there and slept for very weariness, sure that for the present at least no harm could happen to her.

And all that night and the next day and the night after they were at peace, but the next morning the men on the look-out reported that the skiff towing a raft was making for the other island, and they knew that the unfortunates there were doomed. The wind was blowing steadily towards them, and there came down on it terrible cries of pain and terror, that told only too plainly of the horrid work that was being done.

And in the afternoon the boat with the long raft towing behind came towards them, and they could see plainly it was full of men armed to the teeth with pikes and swords and muskets.

“Courage, sweetheart, courage,” whispered Webhays. “I have a knife,

and at the very worst it is one pang and all will be over.” Cold comfort at most for one's sweetheart, but she looked up and smiled bravely back at him.

A squall of rain hid the boat from sight, and one hopeful spirit shouted they were all drowned, but the rain that blotted out everything cleared off, and the boat was close at hand full of yelling, shouting fiends, and they saw that Cornelis was leading them.

Nearer, nearer, and the men with their frail staves in their hands waited behind their breastwork with beating hearts. Then with a shout the boat was driven up the beach, and a storm of stones assailed the invaders. It stopped them for a moment, but not for long. They began to rush up the wet and stony beach, and the defenders, lightly armed as they were, came out to meet them, and it was a hand-to-hand tussle. The cumbersome firearms of those days were practically useless, but the pikes inflicted many an ugly wound, and even those nail-shod staves gave good account of themselves, wielded as they were by stout arms, and men fighting for their lives. Up and down the beach they struggled, and the girl looking on listened to their panting, long-drawn breaths, to their curses and cries of pain. How would it end? How would it end? She knelt and prayed, and wrung her hands to heaven, and looked hopelessly round the horizon. But theirs was the only ship that ever had sailed in these unknown seas. There was no help to be looked for there.

And Webhays went straight for his enemy, the man he had drawn from the cruel sea. Up and down the beach they two wrestled, and neither man would let go, and neither had the advantage. First the pirate was on top, and then the master shook him off, and held him down upon the sand. A tuft of green pig's face gave Cornelis a rest for his foot, and he shook off his adversary, and they stood glaring at each other. Webhays made a dash at him with his knife, but he warded it off with his arm from any vital part, though the red blood stained the sand. It was war to the death; there could be no quarter. The master drove him down towards the sea. He turned and was up the shore again, scattering the hot ashes of the fire with his feet. The others were fighting still, but the fight was being fought out between their leaders. The girl who dreaded him so snatched a brand from the fire to defend herself with, and he laughed in her face.

“Your turn comes next, Mistress,” he said, and as the burning brand struck him on the knee, he shouted with an oath that he would make her pay for this.

But the master was upon him, and he had him at a disadvantage, for his back was to a little chasm in the cliff at least ten feet deep.

“Now, it is my turn; now, now,” cried Webhays, and he rushed on, and

back stepped his opponent into the hole behind him.

And there came a cry from the girl, "A sail! A sail! Thank the good God, a sail!"

That ended it. In one moment all eyes were turned on the sail. It must be, it was, Pelsart returning, and back to their boats rushed the invaders. It was their business now to make a good story to their chief, or if possible to capture his ship, supposing they carried out Cornelis' plan.

But Cornelis was lying a helpless prisoner with a broken leg, and how Pelsart punished those mutineers is a matter of history.

The girl looked out over the sea at the rapidly approaching ship.

"We are safe, sweetheart, safe," whispered her weary lover. "Thank God, thank God!"

"For you," said the girl, "for you."

And the setting sun shed his rosy rays on the first love story that ever was told on Australian shores.¹

¹ In June, 1629, the Dutch East Indiaman *Batavia* was cast away on the shoals known as Hautman's Abrolhos, not far from where Geraldton now stands. There being no water discoverable, Francis Pelsart, her commander, took the boats, and went to seek it, and, failing to find it, went north to Batavia for succour. In his absence Jerom Cornelis, the supercargo, took command, and, gathering the strongest about him, fell on and slew the weak. He designed to seize Pelsart and his ship when he should return, but this design was frustrated, chiefly, if we may believe the old chronicle, by the bravery of one named Webhays. Pelsart tried the mutineers, who had slain at least 120 of their comrades, and condemned some to death on the spot, while two, at least, he marooned on the desolate coast of West Australia. A full account of the wreck may be found in "Harris's Voyages."

¹ It must be remembered that in the seventeenth century in these old trading ventures the supercargo was a most important official, the representative of all the trading houses whose goods the ship carried. He ranked next to the captain, and should perhaps rather have been called the chief trader. The master of a ship less than a hundred years ago was concerned solely with the navigation of the ship and took his orders from the captain.

The Humbling of Sergeant Mahone

THE first winter rains had come with a vengeance. The sun had set and the rain driving before a cutting west wind was coming down in torrents. It had washed the limestone streets of the little seaport town clean; they were slippery and slimy now, almost dangerous to walk upon, and the gas lamps at far distances apart—for gas is dear at Warrnambool—sent out long streaks of light that were reflected on the wet surfaces as in a mirror, and the gutters were running as high as the kerb. All the foot passengers had pulled their collars up above their ears and buttoned their coats close round them. The water streamed from the mackintosh cape of Sergeant Mahone, it trickled off his shiny helmet into his eyes, and his little pointed beard and fierce moustache were limp with wet.

It was a miserable winter's evening, and as he strolled along he whistled to himself a suitable tune, "A policeman's lot is not a happy one."

Another man came along the street briskly. He had on only a little short jacket, but he held up his head and put his hands in his pockets as if he defied the elements to hurt him. When he reached the sergeant he swung himself half round on his heels, and pursing up his lips, sent out a sound that was half a defiance and wholly a challenge. Sergeant Mahone stopped dead and the other man looked him full in the face in the gathering darkness and then went on. The light from the lamps streamed out of the big druggist's shop and showed every feature, and the sergeant knew him at once.

"That scamp Bryan O'Daly," he said. "Now what devilment is he up to?"

Bryan O'Daly's sins were many. He was known well to the police, but at present he was not wanted on any specific charge, and Sergeant Mahone as he walked on began turning over in his own mind what particular iniquity he might be meditating, for that was a challenge, he was sure enough of that. Burglary? No; burglary was not in Bryan's line. Assault? He had often enough been up for assault, but that was only when he got the drink in him, and was not premeditated. This was evidently premeditated. Bryan wasn't a bad sort if it weren't for that chronic trouble connected with that private still, and, of course—he brought down his hand on his thigh with a sounding smack—of course he was going to run a load of whisky down to the port, and he challenged him to stop him. Sergeant Mahone leaned up against the wall and laughed aloud. And O'Daly thought himself a better man than the whole force of the police ranged against him; and he laughed so loud and so long that the druggist coming to his door to see what fool had the heart to laugh on such a dismal night, remonstrated with him.

“Well, upon my word, sergeant, it's luck that must have come your way. Such a day, too. Pass a little of it on. Nothing to-day has come in at these doors bar five lodge prescriptions and a donkey who wanted a sixpenny bottle of lavender and musk. It won't pay for the gas let alone the rent.”

“Ah, my boy,” said the sergeant, wiping his eyes, “we've got to look smart these times. It isn't once in a blue moon such a stroke of luck comes to a chap as I've had to-night,” and he vanished in the darkness and the rain in the direction of the police station.

The inspector listened to his story dubiously.

“It was just a piece of cheek on his part possibly.”

“Cheek, was it? He's the cheek of the old gentleman himself, the misbegotten beggar, but he meant it this time, sir. ‘I'll be runnin' a load of stuff as has never paid duty some time this week or next an' I dare ye to stop me.’ I'm as sure of it as if he said them very words.”

“Well, well, and it wouldn't tell us much if he did say them.”

The inspector was much inclined to leave Bryan O'Daly alone. He had a high respect for that gentleman's abilities.

“Sure,” said the sergeant earnestly, “it can come but one way. His selection's away out Nirrandira way, and the tea-tree scrub's that thick a cow couldn't get through let alone a load of whisky, and they can only cross the river at the bridge at Allansford. To be sure there's Slippery Jim's ford, but it's ten miles up and a devil of a crossing in the winter. If they want to bring the whisky down to Warrnambool, and they do, of course, it'll have to cross the bridge at Allansford. Give me a couple of men, sir, and I'll hold them like winking.”

It was another wet, wintry night when the sergeant and his two men took up their position on the lee side of a big box-thorn hedge on the Allansford road. The bridge was just beneath them, and when every now and again the moon burst through the heavy clouds they caught glimpses of the water running at the bottom of the high banks. Just opposite them was a farmhouse, and the stacks loomed large masses against the wintry sky, and from the chimney every now and then there came a burst of sparks that told of a roaring fire within. It was mighty dull work waiting, and men and horses were fidgeting wearily before even the watch had begun.

“May we light a pipe?” asked one of the troopers.

“Oh yes, it's an open road, and a whiff of tobacco will tell no tales. But mind now, no colloguing with the girls. It's the women spoil these little games.”

“Faith,” said the other man, “there's only O'Brien's girl to be talking to in this God-forsaken place, and I'm thinking you've the whip hand of us there, sergeant.”

The sergeant smiled in the darkness. He certainly did flatter himself that Maggie O'Brien looked with a favourable eye on his stalwart proportions, and he had every intention, once he had brought off this little affair, to ask her to come and take possession of those comfortable quarters of his in the police camp. But on one thing he was determined—she should have no hand in this business.

It was a dreary night—so long and dreary. Once a belated wood cart passed, once a man riding like mad for the doctor, once a woman crying as if her heart were breaking. There might be tragedy behind all these—very likely there was—but the sergeant kept his men back and they passed. Then there came a long stretch of still, dark, cold, wet night when the minutes dragged like hours, and nothing happened to break the monotony. Long before the dawn broke, cold and grey and reluctant, the people at the farmhouse opposite were astir. The watchers could see the lanterns flitting about the milking yards, and by and by more than one cart passed on its way to the creamery.

Sergeant Mahone rose and stretched himself, and a trooper came trotting casually along the road.

“Here's our relief. Better luck to-morrow, boys.”

The next night was not so wet, but the wind was keen and cold and the sergeant was beginning to weary of his self-imposed task. Still he was not going to confess himself beaten. That stuff must come into Warrnambool, and it must come along this same road. There was no other way.

Nothing came along the road that night. It almost seemed as if all traffic had stopped, and it was very dull and cold. The men moved about uneasily, then hitched their horses to the post and rail fence and lay down under the hedge to get what shelter they could from the cutting wind. A sort of shadow seemed to cross the road a little higher up, and the sergeant started when he felt a hand on his arm. He would have spoken, but the hand quickly travelled to his lips.

“Whisht, don't be givin' me away, sergeant dear. It's yoursilf sure. I thought I seen ye last night. And what are yez waitin' for out in the cowld for the love av God?”

It was Maggie O'Brien, and the sergeant felt his heart glow, and it was no longer a bitter night.

“Whisht, me darling,” he said. “I can't be telling ye my business. Run in now like a good girl. It's warmth and comfort ye've brought with your sweet self. Go in now.” And bolder than he had ever been, he drew her towards him and would have imprinted a kiss on the lips so close to his own. She yielded a moment, then drew herself quickly away.

“Get away with ye now. Ye're spillin' the tea. I'm just after bringing yez a

quart pot of tea, and the scones is just out av the oven. But don't be tellin' a soul now. Me father'd pretty nigh kill me if he caught me." She started to go back and then paused a moment. "Yez can give the other poor chaps some, but don't be sayin' 'twas me as brought it," and she vanished in the darkness and the wild wind covered the sound of her footsteps.

Now a quart pot of hot tea, well sugared and with plenty of cream in it, and another pot full to the brim of light, feathery, well-buttered scones straight from the oven is surely a very innocent love gift, and surely on a cold night a very welcome one. Not the stern inspector himself could have seen guile in such a present, and the sergeant called to the other two and shared it amicably with them.

"Ask no questions now, and be thankful," said he, and Mounted Constable Campbell gave Mounted Constable O'Neill a poke in the ribs that made him choke over his first drink of tea, but they neither said a word.

Such a long night. Would it never end? The novelty had worn off, and more than once the sergeant had to shake his men into wakefulness. And nothing happened. Once a stray horse lolloped along as if something had startled it, and again a couple of calves strayed up as if looking for a suitable resting place. But nothing else happened, nothing at all. Sergeant Mahone began to think that Bryan O'Daly's crowing was just a piece of bravado to keep him on the alert and wear his life out.

He was very much of this opinion when the dawn broke, and he roused up his now nodding men and took them back to Warrnambool; but evening saw him starting out once more. He must have meant something, thought the sergeant. At any rate he would see the week out.

It was a worse night than ever. A biting wind came from the east that swept right across the road and made the box-thorn hedge that had stood them in such good stead for the last two nights as a breakwind of no use at all. The men groaned and the patient horses hunched themselves up and shivered in the bitter wind. Now if this night, too, were going to be a fruitless vigil their case would be hard indeed. One consolation the sergeant had that the men could not share. He hoped that before the evening had worn away Maggie O'Brien would pay him a visit. She had come about seven o'clock the night before, and not unnaturally as seven o'clock approached he expected her again.

But eight came, nine came; still no Maggie. By half-past he had given up hope, and was as cross and grumpy as the men themselves. He drew his cape up over his face and huddled down close to his horse, when suddenly up to his nostrils was wafted the grateful odour he had been expecting all the evening, the smell of warm tea and hot buttered scones, and Maggie

was beside him. Where she had come from heaven could only tell, but the sergeant was too pleased to see her to ask any questions.

“Is it yourself, Maggie darling?”

“I couldn't get away before,” she whispered, “till that bold boy, Terence, was in bed. 'Tis the devil is in him for keepin' his eye on me. But, oh, sergeant darlin', 'tis an awful place yez got. Ye have to be holdin' on to everything for yer life,” as her shawl blew out behind her like a sail.

With one hand the gallant sergeant relieved her of the tea and scones, with the other he held down the shawl round her waist. She did not resist him, and he could see the light in her eyes and feel her warm breath on his cheek.

“Oh, sergeant dear, must ye stay out in the cowld here? It'll be the death of yez, to say nothing of the horses.”

“It doesn't matter about us,” whispered back the amorous sergeant, “but if anything happens to the horses there'll be the devil to pay.”

“'Tis a mercy if they don't take cowld here in the wind,” said she. “See now, I'll open the gate and ye can put them in the shed in the paddock there. There's room for yez, too, if ye like. But don't tell father for the love av God, and come out before the milkin' in the mornin'.”

The sergeant considered a moment. It was undoubtedly a good offer, and it was made for love of him. He would accept it in the spirit in which it was made.

“God bless ye for a sweet colleen!”

The gate was locked, but the girl, who had grown bolder now and did not seem to mind if the men did see her, took a small key from her pocket and undid the padlock. She pointed to the shed looming up faintly against the dark sky.

“Yez can keep a good look-out along the road from there without bein' in the wind at all at all.”

The sergeant wanted to come back with her but she refused to let him. Her father, she declared, was wandering round, “restless like wid the wind,” and might ask questions.

It was delightfully comfortable in the shed out of reach of the shrieking wind. They all three ate hot scones and drank tea, and the sergeant leaned up against the wall and indulged in dreams of wildest happiness. If he got these smugglers he could have nothing left to wish for. Whether he got them or not he was a very happy man. The shed was close to the road. He would have sheltered there before but that the heavy gate was locked; but this little girl had made everything easy for him, God bless her! And if the night passed slowly it was not passing unpleasantly.

Nothing came along the road, nothing at all. Then about midnight

Maggie came again. Her shawl was wrapped tight round her head and she was sobbing bitterly.

“For the love av God, sergeant, come outside wan minit.”

The other men turned their heads discreetly aside. The sergeant was going it strong, they thought; and for a quiet, decent-spoken girl, Maggie O'Brien was making the running.

“Och sergeant, oh sergeant! How'll my tongue be tellin' yez?”

“What is it, Maggie, my girl?” asked the sergeant tenderly, fully making up his mind that her father had found out about the tea and scones, and was making things unpleasant. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her that she knew she had only to name the day, and the sooner the better, so that he was not much distressed.

“Oh that I should ever tell yez!”

“It's all right, my girl, sure 'tis all right.”

“Oh sure, 'tis all wrong it is. Me father's in the drink, dacint man, and it's murdherin' me mother he is. Come quick for the love av God!”

“Hold on, I'll get Campbell and——”

“Oh, sergeant dear, don't be shamin' me before them, an' me father, too, that's a dacint man when he hasn't the drink in him. It's not yoursilf he'd be mindin' but the other two.” She flung out her hands as if to show she would have none of them.

O'Brien was only a little wizened man. The sergeant thought he could overcome him with one hand if necessary; so he just shouted back:

“Keep a good look-out, boys, I'll be back in a brace of shakes,” and followed her across the road and into the farmyard.

It was very dark here among the buildings, and he could not have found his way at all but that a warm hand stole into his and guided him. Everything was very still but for the shrieking of the wind among the roofs, and he was going to remark there were no sounds of a scuffle when an exclamation of “Oh, murdher!” reached his ears, but it did not sound as if the person who cried out were really in fear of her life.

“'Tis all right, mavourneen, he isn't hurting her.”

“Come in here,” said the girl, quickly drawing him into a little room with a brick floor and a tiny window high up in the wall. There was a guttering candle standing on one of the shelves, and he could see it was used as a place to keep the milk buckets and milk cans in. Everything was ready to begin work before dawn in the morning. “Maybe he's quiet now and I wouldn't have ye in if he is. Stay here and I'll slip round and see.”

She gave the hand she held a tender squeeze and was out of the door without waiting for an answer, closing it after her. The sergeant thought he heard the bolt shot and the sound of scampering feet, and a cold sweat

broke out over him as he began to think he had been sold. He strode up and put his stalwart shoulder to the door and shook it violently. But it was a stout door and it stood firm. He called, "Maggie, Maggie O'Brien!" and his tones were by no means loverlike.

"Oh, sergeant dear," came back the answer in quavering tones, "sure 'tis that thief av the world, Terence, has played an ill trick on us."

"Open the door, I say, open it."

"Sure, 'tis Terence has the key. Kape quiet, sergeant dear, or me father'll be hearin' us." Her voice was broken with sobs now, whether of laughter or tears the unlucky policeman could not tell, but he strongly suspected the former. His love was dying rapidly; still she was on the right side of the door, and it behoved him to see what blarney would do.

"Sure, Maggie dear, 'tis a bolt," said he. "Undo it now and I'll give yez the purtiest ring to be had in Warrnambool."

But she was adamant to his blandishments.

"I'll be findin' Terence," said she, and he heard her going out into the yard again.

The sergeant turned round, and in spite of his long training and discipline he smashed every tin and bucket he could lay his hands on; he yelled, he shouted, he flung himself against the door, and for all the effect it had upon the household they might have been dead. Then he paused and rested, looking grimly at the destruction he had wrought, and through the open window—that window which was too small for a man to pass through—he heard, borne on the wild wind, the sound he had waited so long to hear, the sound of heavily-laden drays coming down the road.

The language that respectable non-commissioned officer of police made use of on that occasion ought to have raised the roof, but it had absolutely no effect on the door. He listened desperately, there was a challenge, he knew it was Campbell's voice, and—Mahone cursed him solemnly for a born idiot—he only shouted:

"Hold up there, Bryan O'Daly, hold up or I'll make ye."

"Serves me right," groaned the poor prisoner, "for leaving things to a fool-headed recruit. He's not such a fool as to take any notice of that. Ride after him, ride after him," he yelled at the top of his voice, "don't let him out of your sight."

Alas, the wind that brought their voices down to him carried his away. Besides, Maggie O'Brien had very kindly locked the gate again, and they had no means of getting the horses out of the paddock, as they refused to jump in the dark.

But O'Neill made another effort.

"Stop in the King's name," he shouted, "or I'll fire," and the report of two

carbines rang out.

“Worse than useless if they didn't shoot one of the horses,” groaned the unlucky sergeant as he heard the horses lashed to a gallop and fleeing down the road to the bridge. Even now a determined man might stop them at the bridge, and he yelled and shouted again, “O'Brien, O'Brien, I call on you to help in the King's name.”

The constables were getting their horses out of the paddock by the summary method of breaking down the fence. He could hear them at it, but it was too late now. The drays were out of earshot, and he heard, too, a shambling footstep coming along to his door.

The bolt was shot back, and Farmer O'Brien stood before him, a candle in one hand, while with the other he was scratching his head sleepily.

“Faix! is hell broke loose? Och! sergeant!”

“Why didn't you come before?” asked the sergeant, angrily shaking him. “Haven't I been shouting fit to raise the dead the last hour?”

“Och, faix, who'd be thinkin' 'twas the sergeant of perlice was smashin' my milk cans? Sure the boys does be always stravagin' after Maggie, and I thought she'd locked wan in for the fun av the thing. He'd pay up for certin.”

The sergeant groaned and threw the old man aside. In the gloom he caught sight of other forms and heard some stifled laughter. Then he dashed across the road, got his horse, and clattered down across the bridge.

But it was too late. The whisky was safely brought into Warrnambool and shipped for Melbourne. A nice little keg was also left on the veranda of the police station as a delicate present.

And that was not the end of it either, for Bryan O'Daly sued the police for sticking him up and firing on him when he was peacefully engaged in travelling along the main road with a couple of carts laden with skim milk from the Allansford butter factory.

“Oh yes, to be sure, 'twas late, but wan of the carts had broken down early in the evenin', an' 't isn't poor folks can be payin' attention to the time when there's work to be done. An' how was the likes av him to know it was the perlice? He thought they was stickin' him up, an' he beat his horses to a gallop, an' 'twas only the Virgin herself saved him when they fired on him.”

And the judge severely reprimanded the police for interfering with an honest farmer and putting him in danger of his life, and he left the court triumphant, and married Maggie O'Brien before the month was out.

And at Warrnambool they always call whisky skim milk.

The Cost of the Boat

THE thunder of the surf on the lee shore filled the air, but it did not drown the singing of the women as they beat out the tappa cloth and kept time to the beating of the hammers. Luli, hushing her baby to rest, and watching her husband, the big white man with the fiery red beard, listened, and felt triumphant, too. She would have liked to join those singers, but she was the wife of the white man, and pride forbade, so she listened, and beat time softly with her hands while her husband slept.

“Oh, my phalangi, my phalangi, the white man, the red-haired white man,” they sang; “he has built us a boat, a boat. She is like the white man's ships; she has windows that twinkle in the sun, she is long and straight as a cocoa palm, and forty young men it takes to pull her across the waves. Oh, my phalangi, great shall his reward be. La, la-lo, la-la-la,” they sang, and in a minor key other voices took up the song, “Oh, my phalangi, my phalangi, hark to the band, the band; it is the white man's band,” and then another sound broke in which certainly even triumphant Luli could not describe as musical, for it was suspiciously like a sailing-ship's fog-horn. It was, in fact, a fog-horn which Paul Richon had simply annexed from a stranded copra schooner fast going to pieces on the outer reef. He had sold it to the men of Lofola for the promise of much copra, and taught them how to use it. At the sound of the hoarse blast Richon turned over, rubbed his eyes, and sat up.

“Hallo, Luli, what's all this row about? They launched the boat last week, and made tow-row enough then to last them for a month of Sundays.”

Luli looked at him proudly. “The people of Ngati are coming—two canoes of thirty men each—to make talolo. Smidi builded them a boat, but it is no match for what my master has built.”

Richon lent lazily against the door-post and looked out across the still waters of the lagoon, marked on the other side by a few pandanus and a couple of cocoa-nut palms. To the little barrier at the door crawled the ubiquitous hermit crab, in all variety of shells, and old Tafua in a fishing canoe fished in eternal competition with the small boys spearing in the shallow water. There was nothing to break the monotony—blue sea, blue sky, white sand; so had the reef looked when Richon came there three years before, so would it look long after he was dead and gone. Not that he thought of that. His half-yearly struggle with the supercargo of the steamer from Sydney, touching the price of copra, took up all his thoughts.

“Feasting!” he said. “The devil! And that boat not paid for yet. I suppose the men from Soloma will be over next, and they'll be feasting all the

niggers between here and the Fijis. Luli, you will go down to Suevi, and tell him I'll allow no feastings in this yere village till my boat is paid for. Go now. Vamoos."

Luli rose to her feet, a graceful figure in her soft white cotton frock. Her silky black hair was smoothly brushed and rolled in a great coil on top of her head; there were red bibiscus flowers behind her ears, a wreath of sweet-scented white flowers round her neck, and her dark eyes were like stars—a comely, pretty girl of eighteen, with teeth like pearls, and just a tinge of colour showing through the brown of her cheeks. She left her baby lying on the mat at her feet, and held out her hands deprecatingly.

"Paul, the men of Lofola must entertain the men of Ngati! You would not shame the village!"

"Oh, rats! Shame the village! The village is shamed already. Eight hundred dollars they owe me, and not so much as a pound of copra have they brought in yet. I'll shame them if they don't look out. Go down and tell Suevi if they don't ante up before they entertain these niggers, I'll bag the band; and if that don't bring them to their senses, I'll have the oars, and get the first man-of-war that comes along to burn their blooming village. Vamoos now."

Still she looked at him with beseeching eyes. Surely this great, strong white man would make easier terms than that. He would not send her to her people, to her father, with such a message.

"Are you going, Luli?" he thundered, as a fresh burst of singing came to his ears.

The girl hesitated, and looked at him with piteous eyes. He was her god, poor little girl, in her eyes he could do no wrong; still it was a cruel message to take to her own people, and she made no movement.

Richon looked at her a moment angrily, then he put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her lightly aside.

"Frightened, you silly little goose! What the dickens does it matter what a parcel of buck niggers think? You don't want that baby of yours to starve, I suppose, do you?" and he gave her a little shake. Then he stepped out of the gloom of the hut into the brilliant tropical sunshine.

The singing was louder now, the voices of the men were joining in, and far across the sea came the sound of other voices singing a strain of their own. He swore loud and deep as he made for the clump of dark green bananas that barred his view of the gap in the reef, and then the sound of running feet behind him made him turn, and he faced Suevi, a tall, lithe, dark man, young still, for all he was Luli's father. Richon stood squarely in front of the chief, and laid his hand on his arm.

"Hi, you black beggar, where the dickens are you going to?"

Suevi disengaged himself gently.

“Richon,” he said reproachfully, “the young men of Ngati come.” It seemed to him that even the great and all-powerful white man must accept such an excuse.

Louder and louder blared the fog-horn, and wilder grew the singing. Even the thunder of the surf could not drown it.

“The young men of Ngati come in the boat that Smidi has built, but it is not a boat like the boat of the young men of Lofola.”

“The young men of Lofola be hanged! The young men of Lofola will pay for the boat if they want it. At present the boat is mine, do you hear, Suevi—the boat is mine?”

The chief looked at him, and held out his hands much as his daughter had done but a few minutes ago.

“We will pay, Richon; we will pay at once. The young men shall go and get in the copra at once.”

Three or four long, lanky pigs came racing past, driven by a naked, yelling boy. The preparations for the feast were beginning, and Richon cursed again at the waste. They would feast for the next two days, and then the village would be broke for the next three months.

“Look here, Suevi,” he said, “pay me at once.”

The chief did not understand much English, but he understood that.

“I will send out the young men to gather in the copra at once,” he said soothingly, trying to slip past. “We are poor, and the mission-house has taken much copra to build it.”

“Be hanged,” said the trader; “if you——” But the chief had slipped past, and was running down to the beach where the young men were already up to their waists in water, and the boats of the Ngati men, with their singing crews, were already just coming through the gap in the reef.

Richon followed sullenly. One of the boats was but an ordinary native canoe, but the other was a big white boat, with fifteen oars to a side, and louder and louder grew the singing. The Ngati men sang of their beautiful boat that skimmed over the water like a gull—the beautiful boat that Smidi, the trader, had made for seven hundred dollars' worth of copra. Louder than ever brayed the fog-horn, “the band,” and the Lofola men dashed into the water, chanting the praises of their boat, which was bigger and better in every way. On came the Ngati men—on, on, and shouting voices and pointing hands showed them where to beach their boat. On they came, on, on; and as they got into shallow water the crews jumped overboard, all but the chiefs. The Lofola men dashed into the water to help them, and they beached Smidi's masterpiece alongside Richon's. Then it was clearly seen that the men of Lofola had not boasted without cause.

In truth, she was a wonderful boat as she lay there on the white sand. Twenty oars on each side she carried, and her sides were built up in bulwarks, and, though there was no deck, these bulwarks were pierced with ports with windows in them. The body of the boat was white, and all the top part was painted a brilliant red. Her stem rose up in a wonderful carved figurehead, and her stern had miniature railings, like a man-of-war. A splendid boat, truly, no Samoan village could wish for a better; and Richon walked round her with the newcomers, and listened to the admiring remarks of the men from the other island.

The chief was a young man—younger than Suevi—and while the preparations for the feast were going on apace Richon suddenly found this chief beside him.

“It is a beautiful boat, oh, white man!” he said.

“Be d——d,” said Richon laconically. He was beginning to be tired of hearing the praises of his boat. He began to feel that a little substantial copra towards the eight hundred dollars that was owed him would be more to the point.

“It is a better boat than Smidi has built the young men of Ngati.”

“D——n,” said the trader again, and then he added suddenly, “Have you paid Smidi?”

“In full, oh, white man. Why not? There is plenty of copra in our village. The trader has not been for a year, and my young men are industrious. There is plenty of copra. But the boat of Smidi is not like the boat of Richon. The boat of Richon is worth much copra.”

“Probably it is, but Richon ain't got any.”

The chief evidently had a proposition to make, and was debating in his own mind how to put it. This white man belonged to the village of Lofola, and the village would not be exactly pleased if he interfered with their vested rights. Then he plunged.

“Will the white man make the young men of Ngati a boat like that?”

“If the young men of Ngati will pay me eight hundred dollars' worth of copra I will make them a—— Hold on, chief. Do you like this boat? It belongs to me—you savez—to me—to me. For eight hundred dollars in copra I will sell you that boat.”

The chief looked at him doubtfully for a moment, then his eyes wandered to the beautiful boat. No village among all the islands had such a boat, and there was store of copra in their village.

“The young men of Lofola——” began Lofola's guest doubtfully.

“Hang the young men of Lofola! If they want a boat they must pay for it. They know that well enough. See you here, chief. See that schooner?” He pointed to a little trading schooner that lay at anchor inside the reef. “You

put eight hundred dollars' worth of copra on board Misi O'Brien's schooner soon as you go back, and then you shall have the boat. She is yours."

The chief's dark eyes glistened, and he nodded once or twice, and Richon chuckled to himself, for he felt that he was thoroughly understood. If they had the copra, and he doubted not that they had, they would pay, and take the boat, and his spirits rose, and he watched the feasting and the singing with a mind more at peace with the world.

Eight hundred dollars' worth of copra on board O'Brien's schooner, and already he had shipped about six hundred dollars' worth, and he had not seen civilisation for over three long years. He would go back to Sydney and have a roaring time of it. My word, what a time he could have with one thousand four hundred dollars in his pocket; he would cut the reef and all the stinking niggers. Pah! how they reeked of cocoa-nut oil. He never wanted to see one of their kind again. Once away, back to the reef he would never come. He would save enough money to go pearling about Torres Straits. That trade gave a man a chance of making his pile. Money did not come in in dribbles there as it did here—or, rather, as it did not here. Luli could go back to her people; and then the man paused in his thoughts, and noted the long black shadows of the cocoa-nut palms creeping across the sands. Luli could go back to her people, of course—but—but—— And no one could have been more astonished at his feelings than he was himself. It actually gave him a pang to think of parting with Luli—Luli, with the soft eyes and golden skin—Luli, whom he never considered in any way—Luli, his chattel and slave. She should go back to her own people, and—he ground his heels into the sand and spat forcibly—he could easily get a Japanese wife. The Japanese women, O'Brien said——

D——n! he would have none of your almond-eyed, flat-faced women; but at least he could not have Luli and the brat hanging on to him, and bothering him. She should have the hut and all his things, and she should go back to her own people, and he marched back to his hut, and when he found it was empty he cursed all women by his gods.

But Luli was not away long. Presently, just as the sun was setting, she came stealing back, and looked at him with somewhat scared eyes.

"Paul, is it true, is it true?" she whispered, as she slipped about making preparations for his supper. "Old Tisino has said that you have sold the boat, the boat of the young men of Lofola, to the chief Tamatanni for much copra. You would not sell the boat of the young men, my husband?" and she came and looked up beseechingly.

"And there you're mistaken, Luli, my girl. Why should I not sell my own boat? If Suevi and his people won't give the copra, Tamatanni and his people will."

She set before him plantains baked and folded in green leaves, and roast pork from the village feast, and she opened a green cocoa-nut, and poured in a goodly nip of whisky, for so the trader liked his drink, and she sat beside him, and looked at him with soft, tender eyes, and smoothed his knee with her little brown hand. He remembered he was leaving her, and he patted her hand once or twice, and her eyes glowed, and her lips murmured all manner of tender things in her own soft tongue. She was pretty and dainty, he thought in his own rough way; and yet some day, he supposed, after he had left her, she would grow old and withered like old Tisino, who had been a white man's wife once, they said.

And when he had finished his meal he strolled down to the village again. It was full moon, and the golden light made everything light as day, save where the deep, dark shadows made blackest night. And all the village was feasting. He smiled now to himself as he listened to the loud singing, all in praise of the boat which was not theirs, and never would be theirs; and when the braying of the fog-horn broke in, and almost drowned the singing, he simply laughed aloud, marched straight up to Levi Levi, the vice-chief, who was proudly blowing it, and snatched it out of his hand.

“My friend, you'll earn that there horn before you perform, and I'm inclined to think the earnings'll come too late.”

Levi Levi looked at him in blank astonishment, and the singing for a moment died down. Was it possible—was it actually possible—that their white man, their own white man, was putting this insult upon them before the young men of Ngati? Then the singing rose again, loud and clear.

“He has taken the band, the band, oh, my phalangi; he has taken the band. From Levi Levi he has taken the band.”

“He has,” said Richon. “He has indeed, and, what's more, he intends to stick to it,” and as he strode back to his hut he laughed, for it seemed to him the singing took on a wailing sound.

Luli looked at him with pitiful eyes as he came into the hut and hung up the fog-horn over his bunk. Poor little girl, the delight of the day had gone for her. A very woman she was by her two loves; for she loved her own people, the men of the reef, and she loved the big stranger whose preference had given her honour in their eyes, and now, behold, her people and her white man were at variance. And fear came into her heart, for she knew what the end of that would be. Tisino said all white men went away, always, always, always; and she had pointed to her own son, the big, ugly “affi-tassi” (half-caste), as evidence thereof. Would Paul go away and leave her, and would she grow old like Tisino, who was all wrinkles; and would her little Paul be like Tisino's son? True, Paul had married her in the mission-house after the white man's fashion, and she wore on the third

finger of her left hand a ring after the fashion of the women of Paul's own people; but she knew too much about the ways of the average South Sea trader to think that that would keep him for a moment. He had taken from her people their treasured band, and that was the beginning of the end. The boat would go next, and then he would go in Misi O'Brien's schooner; and she leaned up against the wall and nursed her baby, and sobbed silently, so that she might not wake the sleeping white man whom she loved. She had been so sure of her power over him till to-day, and now she felt that power was but a poor, weak thing. He belonged to another world than hers, and he meant to leave her.

And next day the feasting still went on, but the attitude of the villagers had changed towards their white man. He felt it the moment he stepped outside his hut. Suevi avoided him. When he would have spoken to him the chief slipped away. Levi Levi would not even look his way; no one offered him plantains, no one asked him to help at the feast. The people sang only of the Ngati men now, and their approaching departure. He went back to his hut, and brought out the fog-horn, but no one came near him; no one so much as looked at it, though he knew well enough that, next to the boat, it was their most treasured possession.

Then he got into his canoe, and paddled across the lagoon to O'Brien's schooner, and with that gentleman made all arrangements for his approaching departure.

"You'd better stop now," suggested O'Brien. "Them niggers get mighty nasty when they're crossed."

Richon hesitated. "There's fifty dollars' worth of copra owing me I think I can get in," he said. "It 'ud be a pity to leave it, and I reckon the buck nigger ain't born yet can scare Paul Richon," and not even to himself would he acknowledge that he wanted to look once more at Luli's dark eyes, to feel the touch of her soft little hand once again.

And yet it was time he was gone. Very reluctantly he acknowledged that to himself. The night had fallen when he landed on the reef again, and as he walked across the sand in the bright moonlight the throwing wands of the playing boys came suspiciously near his head, and yet no older man cuffed the boys for their impertinence to the honoured white man. He was honoured no longer. Unless he promised them the boat, promised to allow them to pay in their own time, which would be never now, his reign was over. Time he cleared out; certainly time he cleared out—he would go this very night.

As he entered the hut Luli sprang forward and caught him in her arms.

"Paul, Paul!" and as the moonlight fell full on her face he saw she had been crying. It spoiled her beauty, and he thought it had only been her

beauty that he had cared about.

“Get out, you little fool!” he said. “What's the matter?”

“I thought you had gone; I thought you would never come back. And you have come back, you have come,” and the tender love deepened in her eyes.

“When the boys of your people shy their throwing wands at my head it's time for me to git,” he said, but he put his arm around her not unkindly. “The young men will be throwing something heavier before long.”

“It is the boat,” she murmured.

“I've sold the boat to the Ngati men,” he said. Where was the good of hiding the fact any longer? He would go on board the schooner now, at once. He wondered why he lingered. What a fool he was risking his life for a girl's fair face. It made him angry to think he hesitated to shake off those tender, clinging hands. “Let go now, Luli, you little fool; what are you crying for?”

Still she clung to him. “You are leaving me, you are leaving me, and you married me in the mission-house, in the white man's fashion, and you said you would keep me when I was old—old as Tisino.”

“Oh, get out, Luli, you little idiot; I'll come back when this row has blown over.”

“Yes, yes, you'll come back,” she pleaded; “but take me with you on board Misi O'Brien's schooner. Who will cook your food and wash your clothes? Take me, take me!”

He burst into a roar of laughter, and stepped outside into the brilliant moonlight, the girl still clinging to him. Had she but known it, there was little real mirth in that laughter. The picture of himself in O'Brien's dirty, evil-smelling schooner without her was not attractive, and he needed to promise himself over and over again a jolly good spree in Sydney before he could reconcile himself to it. Who ever heard of a man sticking to his native wife? The thing was preposterous. How O'Brien would yell at the idea of his hesitating a moment!

“Take me,” pleaded the soft voice in his ear; “take me,” and her hands held his against her breast. The voice grew softer and firmer and more caressing, for somehow she felt that she was gaining her point, and a wondering gladness grew in her heart. He would not treat her as old Tisino had been treated, her great, good, white man. He must go, she saw that; but he would take her with him, and her anxious voice grew more tender and more triumphant. “You will take me, you will take me.”

“By the living Jingo, I shall be the laughing-stock of the South Pacific.”

“Oh, my white man,” she whispered proudly. “I said you were great and good. Who is there like my white man? Let us go back now, and gather

together the things and the band, for it is time for us to go. Before the sun comes up out of the sea we must go, for my people are angry."

"Little goose, I didn't say I would take you, and you'll be lonely away from your own people."

"Come, come," she pleaded; "the night is passing."

The revelry in honour of the Ngati men had reached a stage when feasters and feasted alike slept the sleep of the overfed. The village was still and silent, save for an occasional shout or song from the boys, who were feasting now their elders had finished.

They had stopped opposite the big clump of bananas, and Richon looked down on Luli's fair face, and saw that her bright eyes looked tender and happy through her tears.

"Who'd 'a thought I'd 'a been such an all-fired idiot?" he said. "For the snap——"

A short, sharp bark from the clump of bananas—"zip, zip," and in one moment he was stupidly staring at Luli. She had fallen against him, and a broad, red stain that grew and grew was deepening on her cotton frock. He put his arms round her, and pillowed her head on his shoulder, and a great fear came into his heart. She was not going to be a drag upon him after all.

"Luli, Luli, silly little Luli." It was the tenderest term he knew, and tenderness sat strangely on his unaccustomed lips.

But she understood, and the soft eyes looked up lovingly. All that was good in the hard, rough South Sea trader the little Samoan girl had found.

"You must go," she gasped. "You must go; and you will take little——"

Then the light died out of her eyes, and her hands fell. The girl he had tried to leave behind him had left him.

For a moment he looked at her dazed, then he picked her up and carried her back to the hut, and laid her on her own mat. The child on the floor crept over and patted its mother's dead face, but he took no notice. He loaded his revolver, thrust it into his belt, and marched straight down to the chief's house. There was only one man on the reef had a rifle, and that was Suevi, and he only had four cartridges. He had not purposely killed his daughter, Richon knew. Only for one man would he waste a cartridge, and that shot had been for the owner of the boat.

The mats were drawn all round the house. It stood out plainly in the moonlight, and signified that the chief slept. The trader knew better. He stepped up and roughly drew the mats aside, and, as the moonlight streamed in, he saw Suevi on his mat apparently sleeping. Just above his head hung the precious Snider, the Snider that had not been fired for more than a year to his certain knowledge. Richon snatched it down, and put his nose to the breech.

“I thought so. That shot was intended for me, was it? Then, Mr Suevi, we'll——”

But the chief saw his hand on his revolver, and darted for his hatchet. Quick as thought he dashed across the hut, but Richon was quicker. He got between him and the village. Suevi turned, and as he passed dealt the white man a savage blow that cut into his shoulder, then he made for the cocoa-nut palms. First he was in the moonlight, then he was in the shadow, and Richon was dazed by the blow, but he was not going to let the man who had slain Luli escape him, and he ran, stumbling, after him. He was quite close to him, and the next time the dark figure appeared clean cut against the white sand he fired. There was a sharp cry that told him he had not missed. The figure reeled a moment, but it gained the shadow, and he went after it. Now, now to get another shot in, and then the canoe and O'Brien's trading schooner. He listened, but he could hear nothing but the thunder of the surf and the wind in the palm fronds. Then something moved just behind him. He turned quickly. A hatchet came hurtling through the air, and as the chief staggered forward he fell over the body of his white man, who preceded him to the unknown land by but a few minutes.

Old Schmidt, a solid, phlegmatic German from Nukaililai, has taken over the station at Lofola.

Schmidt says he does not build boats.

Peter Addie and the Ju-Ju

“OH Mother!” said Addie, mopping his bald head, “why did I leave my happy home in Stepney?” But he spoke in English, and the deputation didn't understand what he meant. What they did understand, and what they feared, was that the white man who had come to their village was going to take his incalculable benefits away from them. The headman leaned forward a little; a little fringe of white hair grew on his chin, and he was clad in a sopping blue toga-like garment which in his agitation he was screwing up into a rope round his waist.

“What the dickens do they want?” asked Addie of his servant, who acted as interpreter.

He sat in the doorway of a palm-thatched hut. The weeping sky was grey and sodden, and the rain came straight down as if it were poured out of a bucket. The narrow village street was worn into little waterways down which raced the water; the shade trees in the open dripped ceaselessly, so did the eaves of the huts; the forest which pressed in on the village was shrouded in a heavy mist; even the scavenger vultures had given up work and were perched forlornly on the tops of the huts with drooping wet wings.

“So they want the benefits of my sweet society,” said Addie, scratching his head, “an' it's suthin' to be wanted even by a nigger; but Lord love you, my friend, what have you got to offer?”

The headman had a great deal to say about the advantages of the village, and Addie listened patiently.

“Kola nut,” said he to himself. “I believe you, my boy, there's money in kola nut; but the attentions of thirty-five different varieties of skeeters an' twenty-two different sorts of flyin' ants sorter tones things down, an' when I ain't got no whisky, nor flour, nor sugar, an' it's rained every day an' all day long for a week—no, my friend, unless you have suthin' better to offer,” and he put his remarks into forcible and much more grammatical Hausa, which Benjy interpreted into the jargon of the men before him.

“The great master,” said the headman, bowing humbly, “will bring prosperity to the land.”

“Well, the land at present,” said Addie, “is keepin' me mighty short of commons. I don't feel the land is doin' its share.”

The headman bowed again.

“Oh master,” he said, “the chickens shall be brought in.”

“An' seein' I'm about as sick of chicken as I well could be of anythin' 'cept jam,” opined Addie, “you might exercise your inventive genius. But

where are all the blamed chickens?"

He might be sick of chicken, but he had to fill up with something, and he evidently had no faith in the inventive genius he invoked.

"The master shall have chicken, very good chicken, plump——"

The man at the headman's elbow had taken up the tale volubly, but he was cut short by a sound—wild, weird, long-drawn and ear-piercing. It swept right across the village. From the damp, sodden forest on one side it came, and went quavering away into the damp, sodden forest at the other. The deputation turned grey, and rushed, trembling, to hide its face against the streaming mud walls of the white man's hut, as if only safety could be found there.

"Mother, look at Dick!" cried Addie, starting up. The wail came again, rose to its full height and then, quavering, died away. Even Addie's own headman had grown ashen with terror and came a little closer to his master.

Addie gripped him by the collar of his shirt and shook him.

"There," he said, "if your teeth must chatter, let 'em do it with a will. What is it, Benjy?"

"Master," said Benjy, "it is an evil spirit that afflicts the village."

"An evil spirit is it? He makes noise enough about it. The evil that I've met comes along quiet. Talk about the heathen in his blindness; this spirit's evidently found him deaf. An' what does the evil spirit do?"

"He has smitten the headman's mother so that her eyes fail to see, his brother's wives have no children, and he has sent a crying——"

"You needn't go into the cryin'," said Addie in English. "I've heard that. Anythin' else?"

"There is disease in the plantains——"

"There is," acquiesced Addie solemnly; "nastier I never met. Don't mention it."

"The rain——"

"An' you needn't tell me about the rain," he added with suffering patience.

"And they have offered chickens——"

"Oh they have, have they? That accounts for the shortage."

"Master, to-night they make big Ju-ju, and then the evil spirit will go."

"Oh will it?" said Addie resignedly. "For heaven's sake let 'em make big Ju-ju, or anythin' else they like, but if I'm to stay I must have chicken. If the Lord knows the African pullet, which is doubtful, He knows I don't ask much, but if I'm to stay I must have it."

And that night in the steaming heat and the pouring rain Addie, looking out on life from his hut door, was startled to see a procession tramping slowly along the village street. A couple of grass torches sputtered in the

rain, the tom-toms beat insistently, now loud and strong, now dying away, and the procession was led by the chief medicine man, a wrinkled, white-headed old negro with an apron of grass and leopard tails, a necklace of human small bones and his hair decorated with leopard claws. In his hands he held a couple of human skulls, which he clashed together, chanting a low and monotonous chant.

“Nice old party,” said Addie, looking to his revolver.

Behind him walked the headmen of the village, with heads bowed. Raised aloft in their midst was a platform, and on it, shown up clearly in the flickering torchlight, was a small and chubby, naked child. Round her neck was a string of red beads, and the little body was all painted with some white pigment. She did not look happy, poor mite, and had been wailing bitterly. The little fists had rubbed rings round her eyes, and the rain had run the white pigment into streaks.

“What the h——” cried Addie, stepping forward, but the faithful Benjy pulled him back so hastily that he slipped and fell on the slippery clay and came into the hut on his hands and knees. By the time he had corrected Benjy in a manner suited to the offence, the procession had passed on; the people were but murky smudges on the misty darkness, and there was only the beating of the tom-toms and the yellow blur of the torches to tell that anything unusual had happened.

“Do that again, Benjy,” said Addie, “an' I'll put the fear of the Lord into you,” and he went back for his revolver.

“Master,” apologised the man, “it no be good look upon 'em Ju-ju.”

“That,” said Addie, “is all very well, but what are they doin' with that poor little nipper? The others were wadin' in an' havin' a good time, but she worn't.”

“Master,” implored the man, “you go die. Dere be plenty more mammy picken lib.”

Addie stopped for a moment with an uncomfortable feeling.

“Benjy,” he said, and the tubby little trader sank his voice before the horror of the thing, “they're not goin' to *kill* the poor little nipper?”

He asked the question, but he did not need the answer. He knew. The village was in dire straits: the rains were prolonged unduly, the plantains were rotten, other food there was none, and he knew, none better, that to these people the time seemed now to have arrived for strong measures. Something more valuable than a goat or a hen must be offered to the offended deity if things were to mend. That is how it would appear to the African mind. And he was the only white man, as far as he knew, within miles of the place.

“Dey no go kill him,” said Benjy, sinking his voice and looking round as

if he feared he should be overheard; “he belong Ju-ju.”

Addie sat himself down on the only stool the hut contained, and looked out on the pouring rain with a troubled countenance.

Benjy offered such consolation as occurred to him.

“He no be your picken.”

“No, he ain't my picken,” laughed Addie ruefully. “What a blamed nuisance a conscience is. To think twenty years of tradin' ain't got rid of mine,” and he shook his head solemnly. He rose and put his revolver in his belt.

“Now, Benjy,” he said, “you can please yourself. I'm goin' to inspect the Ju-ju.”

“Master,” protested the man again, “you go die.”

“Well, life ain't been that pleasant of late,” reflected Addie aloud, “an' addin' an uneasy conscience to it——”

“Master,” cried Benjy vehemently, “dis be bad palaver. Some white man go for Ju-ju house, an' Ju-ju vexed too much.”

“A white man!” Addie stopped in astonishment. He thought he was the first white man who had visited this village. “A white man! Where did he come from?”

That Benjy did not know. He rather thought he had come from the big water, meaning the Niger, and he had no doubt as to his fate. There could be but one fate for the white man who meddled with so great a Ju-ju. “He lib for dead. And,” he dropped into Hausa, “Ju-ju had torn the flesh from his bones and scattered it.” He did not wish his master to share the unknown man's fate.

His master was much his way of thinking, but, as he said, he was troubled with a conscience, and he resolutely went out into the rain, with Benjy following reluctantly at his heels. He feared lest his master should risk too much, but he feared to be left alone without him.

The faint light of the flickering torches was blotted out now; the rain was coming down steadily, and fainter and fainter and more distant came the sound of the tom-toms. In their direction Addie followed. The sound of the rushing rain blotted out all other sounds; the pouring water and the dark night wrapped him round like some living thing, and inspired him with awe and fear for all his sound common sense, and thankful was he that his servant kept so close.

Narrower and narrower grew the path they followed; the forest pressed in on them, the rain took their very breath away, and then the leaves overhead closed in and it was a tunnel—a leafy tunnel that he could feel and not see—and the water was coming in at every interstice, and the sound of it was dull, monotonous, all-pervading, the want of air was stifling.

Addie plodded on, hardly knowing where he was going or what he expected to see. Then, just as the path was widening a little, there burst on the sound of the rain another, ear-piercing, blood-curdling, the sound that had disturbed the deputation of the morning. Benjy, with a muffled yell, clutched at his master, and Addie jumped back fully five feet. But a very pressing and a very material danger brought his wits to work. He heard the sound of hurried flight ahead, and in a second had pressed Benjy back against the dense tangled mass of the forest wall that held them in; and not one moment too soon, for presently, in full flight, tumbling over one another in their fear, came the procession that had passed his hut but a short time before.

In the dense darkness he could not see them; their torches were gone, it was evidently each man for himself. He could hear their cries of fear, the plashing of their hurried footsteps in the water; he could smell the rank smell of the negro above the dank, close vegetable smell of the forest; and more than one touched him as he fled, but none seemed to realise that the secrets of their ghastly faith were in danger.

When the tumultuous array had rushed past, Addie stood up with a long-drawn sigh, and turned his face resolutely in the direction whence the disorganised company had fled.

“Master, master,” implored Benjy frantically.

“You cut, Benjy, if you don't like it,” said his master imperturbably; “do you think I hanker after the job? Mother! You bet I don't. But where's that picken? I didn't hear her comin' along.” And he marched resolutely on, Benjy, afraid to go back by himself, and afraid to stay there alone, following reluctantly in his wake.

The forest cleared a little. He could see that even in the gloom. Instead of dense leafage there was a little sky overhead, the rain came straight down out of it instead of percolating through the branches, and there came to his nostrils an offensive odour—organic matter rotting. He thought he could see in the centre of the clearing a thatched hut, and he knew he must have reached his goal.

“A tall smell like that——” he began, but Benjy clutched him, imploring silence, and the wisdom of it appealed to Addie. He did not want any man who might have been brave enough to stay behind to know that he, the white man, had endeavoured to penetrate their mysteries unless he was sure it would do some good.

Out of the rain and darkness came the piercing cry again, much louder this time, and Benjy, terror getting the better of respect, clutched at his master. Addie felt his courage ebbing. A street training is good up to a certain point. Rain and loneliness and darkness, Addie had suffered them

all in his youth, and why—why he asked himself should he let such simple things terrify him here. But there is a vein of superstition in all of us who have imagination, a fear of the unreal and unknown that will not be stifled and kept down, and, uneducated child of a great city as he was, Addie had it in a greater degree than he knew himself. He feared, though what he feared he could not have told. He said to himself that he only feared the violence of the people of the village, but he walked warily, he looked to right and left, he listened intently, and he almost forgot the good revolver at his belt. After all, what can weapons do against the powers of darkness? But he walked steadily on. The ground was soft with the beating rain, and soft, too, with something else. Addie knew he was walking over decay. He knew not what he might tread on next; every footstep made him shudder, and he realised with dismay that every nerve in his body was shrinking with fear lest there really might be something in that gross superstition of the natives.

He forgot the child he had come in search of in his effort to keep his fears under proper control, to force himself to go forward, to hide from the man at his heels how near he was to giving way. Slowly, slowly, and the filth and rottenness under foot grew more horrible, the stench more stifling. There was something sinister in the steady plash of the falling rain.

But he went on though his heart was in his throat and there was a beating in his ears that drowned all other sounds. The rain was on his face and on his bare head, the warm rain of the Tropics, and behold it was cold and clammy, and then the Ju-ju hut loomed up a darker splotch on the darkness. Could he go in? Could he? Dare he?

He would gladly have turned and fled now from the uncanny place, but that close behind him he could hear Benjy gasping and gurgling with terror. It sounded so human it encouraged him to go on. His courage was in both hands, clasped tight. Another step across the rotting filth, another, another. Peter Addie had known what fear was before, but always he had feared a tangible foe, now he feared something he could neither see nor hear nor understand.

The other white man who had dared this thing had died—died—so his thoughts ran in painful jerks, and how long had he suffered, how long had he taken to die—what had he suffered? They were close against the Ju-ju house now. He could see the loom of it against the darkness and the falling rain, and—oh comforting sound!—he could hear Benjy's teeth chattering. Nothing had happened—of course nothing would happen. Presently when he was sheltered he would strike a match.

What was that?

Surely it was another sound beside their own stealthy movements, a still,

slow movement inside the Ju-ju house. He heard Benjy give a sob of terror, a sob that reassured him because of the humanity of it. He turned to reprove him, and then when he turned again something had altered. He saw a gleam of light, weird and unearthly, guarding the threshold. It rose, it hung in mid air, it seemed to come forward. Addie had a sensation as of clutching hands, of some mighty thing bending forward. He felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, there was a horrible creepy sensation at his spine, something was crushing his heart; a ghastly spell was upon him. Whatever happened he knew he could not lift a finger to defend himself. The unearthly light grew, widened, it rose higher in the air. Addie crouched before it. What must be, must be, even if the end were death.

And then help came.

Benjy's nerves and his pluck and his faith in his master gave out together, and with a wild yell he turned and fled. It broke the spell. If he could do nothing else Addie felt all at once that he could run away, and he followed in the footsteps of his servant across filth and rottenness and decay. At the edge of the forest he caught him up, and the man let out another shriek as he felt his hand on his shoulder.

Addie shook him well, and into his arms he put all the force of his own disappointment.

“Blamed if I didn't scoot like a bloomin' frightened rabbit,” he said to himself; but when Benjy twisted himself out of his wrathful hands and flew like the wind in the direction of the village, Peter Addie found it took him all his courage to retreat soberly and quietly. Not for all the kola nut in Africa would he have dared go back. If he had heard but the slightest movement behind him that he could not trace to the rain forcing its way through the leaves, he knew he would have fled in a panic; but nothing did happen, and he reached the safety of his leaky hut and kicked off his filthy boots. But he did not kick Benjy.

“Oughter be kicked meself,” he said remorsefully. “I ain't no better than a heathen nigger. Who'd 'a thought I'd enjoyed the blessin's of civilisation? An' what's become of that poor little nipper? She ain't nothen to me. Oh Lord! Oh Lord! What a bloomin' noosiance a conscience is! I guess I must send for the Commissioner.”

He felt cheap and small and mightily ashamed of himself. But there was nothing else for it. Next day there wasn't even a chicken to be had, and he was reduced to eating bad kenky like the men. The rain was persistent, and terrifying cries came out of the forest. Addie thought of departing bag and baggage, but whether he would or no, the thought of the forlorn little child offered for sacrifice came between him and his ease of mind.

“Oh d—— it,” said the little trader, “a black picken too,” and he wrote off to the nearest district Commissioner.

“Come at once,” was the tenor of his note; “they're sacrificing little girls, and I'm blessed if I know what becomes of them.”

And the D.C. on the whole was glad to have something to relieve the deadly monotony of his life, and sooner than Addie could have believed possible, on the first fine day they had had for weeks, down the tunnellike path that led to the village came a hammock with John Everad, D.C., lolling back in it, and at his heels half-a-dozen workmanlike black policemen with red fezes on their heads and carbines over their shoulders.

Addie went out to welcome him.

“Glad to see you,” said the Commissioner.

“I'm damn glad to see you,” said Peter Addie, holding out his hand. “An' I'm sorry I've nothen to offer but jam. We're out of chicken.”

“What's the row?”

“Hanged if I know. I just dassent raid the beastly place on my lonesome. If it warn't for that blessed little picken who after all ain't nothen to me, I'd clear out an' leave the bloomin' hole. Blest if I know what a trader's doin' with a conscience.”

“Well, I've come hell for leather to help you, Addie,” said the Commissioner cheerfully, “and I don't see myself doing that for most of the traders on this coast. Now suppose we——”

Out of the forest again came that long-drawn, weird cry. The villagers, crowding to look at the white men, raised a howl of terror, and the representatives of law and order jumped in the most unseemly manner.

“Now I call that obligin',” said Addie.

The Commissioner was out of his hammock like a shot. “Six policemen, you and I,” he said briskly. “We ought to be able to hold all this village off if they object to our investigating.”

“Lord love you!” said Addie, and he did not think it necessary to mention his own terrors; they had vanished before the daylight, the D.C., and the policemen, “they're in such a blessed funk, they'll be almost glad for a couple of white men to look into things.”

“Come on then.”

And once more Addie found himself tramping along the path that led to the village Ju-ju house, and it was very different to creeping through alone in the darkness and the rain as he had done before.

“The last time I gave it up as a bad job,” he said remorsefully, “an' I've had the poor little picken on me conscience ever since.”

“Here we are, I think,” said the Commissioner as the forest lightened, the hard cobalt blue sky showed through the all-pervading green, and there

rose to their nostrils the horrible smell of decay.

“Phew!” said Everad, “there's something to be said for the missionary!”

“That's a matter of taste,” said Addie imperturbably. “The nigger likes his stinks tall, and, bless you, the nigger don't get much that he likes in this village.”

“Well, he gets stinks,” said the D.C. solemnly. “Now the question is, couldn't we make it a comfort to the people to have the place burned down. I always work by the barometer myself. The glass is going up.”

“You're goin' to run in a miracle on 'em an' fetch the fine weather?”

The lean brown young fellow looked up into the hard blue sky. “The fine weather's come. They can see that for themselves. You arranged for that. I'll ensure it. Now that old rotten cotton tree——”

Out of the forest close beside them came again that long-drawn cry. Addie started, but it was not half so terrifying in the broad daylight, with the sunshine flickering down between the leaves and the British Empire in bush shirt and sun helmet beside him.

“I believe,” said the D.C., one hand on the Ju-ju house, the other switching his stick lightly against the posts of the door, “I could do that with a cab whistle.”

“Mother, look at Dick!” cried Addie, and on the other side of the little clearing the leaves of the dense forest parted and out of the gloom into the brilliant tropical sunshine there stalked a tall figure simply clad in a very battered helmet and the ragged remains of a red shirt. His lean brown legs were bare, and on his feet were rough attempts at sandals.

The two white men stood stock still, and the figure came straight towards them.

“Good Lord!” said the Commissioner with a gasp.

“It's I who should say that,” said the newcomer.

“English, by the Lord Harry!” cried Addie.

The D.C. had his eyes on the man's hands.

“A flute,” he said, “so you did it with a flute?”

“Broken,” said the stranger, as if he would not take too much credit, and he held up a musical instrument as damaged and forlorn as himself.

“I said a cab whistle,” murmured the D.C. with infinite satisfaction, for your Government official, however good a fellow he may be in private, does like to show himself right in the eyes of those he rules over.

At the entrance to the clearing now were pressing a little crowd of the villagers. They were taking the disturbing of their holy places quietly; things had apparently gone so badly of late that it might be they were of opinion they could hardly be worse. Addie thought of his hurried flight a night or so ago, and was bitterly ashamed.

“An' now may I ask,” said he, “what the dickens you mean by scarin' the life out of a decent quiet countryside, bringing his Majesty's Commissioner sixty mile from his happy home, an' makin' your meals of innercent little black pickens?”

“And what do you mean?” asked the stranger whimsically, “by letting them feed me up with black pickens when all I asked was a decent rooster. I've the beginnings of a baby farm behind there, and the job it's been to keep that nursery going. Such an appetite as it's got! I was not intended for a family man.”

“Mother!” cried Addie.

“What's the meaning of it all?” asked the D.C., not as if he were asking for information for himself, but just in order that Addie and the policemen and the villagers crowding into the open might have the thing explained to them, for a Government official does not need anything explained, he knows everything.

“My name's Thomas Gregory,” said the stranger; “I've been looking into the fetish worship and——” He hesitated.

“Got yourself into trouble,” said the D.C. “Of course you would. Are you the white man who meddled with the Ju-ju here?”

“I merely satisfied my curiosity,” said Gregory, “at least I tried to.”

“And what are you doing here now?”

“Sounds as if you thought I were having a good time. I'm stopping now because I can't get away. I scared them with the whistle, and they kindly sacrificed chickens; but I tell you it got on my nerves when they took to sacrificing little girls.”

Addie gave a sigh. “That little gal has been awful on me conscience.”

“Not half as bad as having her on your hands,” retorted the stranger. “It was pretty nearly finished though when two of them got up sufficient courage to come back and see how Ju-ju liked his gift. I thought I was done for.”

The little trader groaned.

“Oh Lord! The things we don't know! You don't mean to say it was you scared me that night I came to investigate.”

The lean face under the battered helmet broadened into a smile. “Never—never was so scared in my life. I thought I was done for. I reached for the god himself, and went for the intruder. My word, it was lucky you fled! The faithful have stuck him full of nails, and I'd have let you have it. You never spoke. How could I guess you were a white man?”

“The light,” said Addie shamefacedly.

The other laughed. “He does show up in the dark, doesn't he? Phosphorescent light from decaying wood I take it. They anoint their god

with all sorts of nastiness. Now what am I to do with that picken?”

“Hand her over to the missionaries,” said the Commissioner. “I’ll see about that. Unless,” he turned to Addie, who was still meditating sadly on his own lack of pluck, “the village will take her back.”

“Wouldn’t touch her with a barge pole.”

“Cheer up,” said Gregory, “it was worse for me than you. If I could only have guessed there was a white man so close! You’re thinking it was bad for you, but you’ll never realise the awful time I put in. Now if either of you gentlemen will give me a pair of trousers and help me down to the coast, I guess I’ve done with Africa.”

A Dilemma

O. H. M. S.

£200 REWARD

Gregory Carter, sometimes known as Nightfall Carter, having been outlawed by Her Majesty's Government of the Colony of Victoria for breaking gaol and committing various offences that endanger the lives and safety of Her Majesty's lieges, the above reward is offered for his body, alive or dead. He is thirty years of age, six feet high, fair hair, blue eyes, good-looking, and has a scar on his right cheek. A reward of £5 will be paid to anyone giving notice of his whereabouts at the police camp, Deadman's.

BY ORDER.

JOCELYN RUTHVEN, *Gold Commissioner.*

“ALIVE or dead,” repeated the man who was reading it in the waning light, and then he laughed softly to himself. “Good-looking? Am I good-looking? Well, my poor old mother thought I was, thinks so still, perhaps, and Rosalie made no bones about telling me so,” and he swore feelingly. “Alive or dead, alive or dead! Well, it will be dead, Your Majesty, it will be dead, Jocelyn Ruthven; that you may swear to.”

The cold night wind was sighing down the gully, driving a drizzling, misty rain before it. As he turned away the wet branches of the messmate and tea-tree and golden wattle swung back in his face and beat on his shoulders, and he shook himself more than once to shake the wet away.

“Brooker Crace,” he said to himself, “you've about come to the end of your tether.”

And then he swore an oath as he thought of the gold commissioner.

“Why should I be here starving and he a bloated trap living in luxury, hunting down an old chum. He was a good fellow Jocelyn in the old days, but I could always lick him,” and he stretched out a sinewy arm and shook his fist in the air. But the fist trembled a little; the weather was cold and wet in the ranges, and he had had little enough to eat for the last week, barely enough to keep body and soul together. A strong man takes starvation hardly. He felt wolfish as the hunger gripped him, and he had nothing to stay it but a little tasteless wattle gum.

He reached the top of the ridge and looked down on the twinkling lights of the camp below. Deadman's of course. And Ruthven was commissioner there now. Not three years since they had landed in the colony, and Ruthven was gold commissioner putting a price on his old friend's head, and that friend stood looking down on the camp, a fugitive and an outlaw

starving and at bay.

How the twinkling lights beckoned him through the mist and rain. Should he go down and ask his old companion for a warm bed and some supper, just for old sake's sake? No, his old friend had put a price on his head. That he did not know it was he did not alter the fact. He would know him when his dead body was brought before him.

Then he started. Why not? As well go out with a flare, as go out he must. Could any misery be greater than dying by inches of starvation and cold on the ranges here. He would go down and stick up the camp. He would hold up Her Majesty's commissioner himself, and then he would die, but it would be a better death than that by starvation and hunger.

And down the hill he went straight for the police camp, and the only prayer he put up was that no one would see and recognise him before he was face to face with the gold commissioner. It should be a hand to hand fight—his life or Ruthven's—possibly his life and Ruthven's, and then things would be square. After all, it would not be a bad way of going out of the world, all things being considered. He was going to die, and he looked to his pistols, and went straight down the hill.

It was dark now, quite dark, and a shiver ran through him involuntarily as a challenge rang out, and he could not see the face of the challenger; but then he remembered he could not be seen either.

“Mr Ruthven is the commissioner here, isn't he?”

“What do you want with Mr Ruthven? He's just about to have his dinner.”

The outlaw hesitated a half-second; but, after all, all is fair in war, and it was war to the knife between him and the gold commissioner.

“Tell him his old schoolmate, Brooker Crace, asks for his hospitality.”

He had thought how he should put it, and the formal words came best. He felt that the trooper was eyeing him doubtfully as much as to say that the commissioner's friend was very dilapidated; but, then, men came to see their friends in all sorts of guises in the 'fifties.

The trooper called another.

“Tell the commissioner, Wynne, his old schoolmate, Brooker Crace, asks for his hospitality.”

Crace stood waiting, and the water ran down his back in little cold streams. He had reached the end now. This would certainly be death within the next ten minutes; but, at any rate, he would make his taking remembered, and his hand felt for his pistol. He never doubted but that the moment he came into the light Ruthven would recognise Nightfall Carter, the bushranger, who had terrorised the country for the last three months.

How dared he keep him waiting. Should he march up and tear aside the

curtain?

Even as he decided he could wait no longer, the tent curtain was flung aside, and in the bright light stood a figure in the undress uniform of a cavalry officer, shouting a hearty welcome through the darkness.

“Brooker, old chap, is it you? Come in, come in; who'd have thought of seeing you?”

“And he hasn't seen me yet,” thought the wretched fugitive as the trooper made way for him, and, clutching at his pistols, he stepped into the light, a ragged, unkempt figure, carrying his head defiantly.

“Brooker, old man, come in, come in,” the commissioner laid a friendly hand on his shoulder, “I'm delighted to see you, delighted.” And how could he shoot when those eyes were so kindly, that clasp so warm and friendly.

He had expected an order to throw up his hands the moment he stepped into the light, and then he would have known what to do; but as it was, he stood looking down at himself, travel-stained, ragged, torn, and the other saw his glance and thought he understood.

“We do come to queer places in life, don't we, old man, occasionally? Let an old chum lend you a change. Come into my bed tent. Dinner'll be ready in a few minutes. I daresay you'll be glad of it.”

He thought of that notice up on the ridge there, £200 for his body, alive or dead, signed by Jocelyn Ruthven, and then he allowed himself to be taken into the next tent and left there to change.

There was only a curtain between the tents, and the hunted man, as he put on the clean sweet clothes and left his rags on the floor, listened with straining ears to all that went on in the other room. He heard someone come up and salute.

“Why, Sells,” said Ruthven's voice.

“If you please, sir, Merivale says,” the sergeant's voice was low, but it was clear and distinct, and the outlaw had the ears of a hare, “that Nightfall Carter is in your tent.”

There was a pause, a second's pause, and Crace clutched his pistol. Now was his time; should he rush in?

“He's a clever chap is Merivale,” said the commissioner's laughing voice. “I see promotion sticking out for him all along the line. There's nobody in my tent, sergeant, but my old schoolmate Mr Crace. He's a bit down on his luck, it's true, but it's rough he should be taken for a bushranger.”

“Yes, sir,” said the sergeant's calm voice. “Merivale is a good man, too.”

“Yes, he is. I won't remember it against him. Sergeant, tell my orderly I shall probably want Bluebell to-night. Brooker, old man.”

The curtain was flung back and the man dressed as the commissioner's double looked at him with defiant eyes. He felt that Ruthven shrank before

his look and he wondered vaguely why. He clutched his pistol. Now, should he shoot him now, or should he wait for the call to throw up his hands, for in Ruthven's face he saw that he too believed that Merivale's keen eyes had not deceived him.

For a moment the two men stood looking at each other, and the hunted eyes, defiant, yet beseeching in spite of themselves, looked straight into the accusing eyes opposite. Then the accusation changed to kindly pity.

“Brooker, old man, did you hear that? They want you for a bushranger. Nice goings-on for the gold commissioner. They'd break me to a certainty if I connived at the escape of Nightfall Carter in the guise of an old friend. Come along in to dinner,” and he laid a hand on his shoulder.

Crace still clutched the pistol. He might want to use it any moment.

“Do you remember when we two lads played brigands in Crutchett Wood, and supped off old Crutchett's partridges! Nice young scamp I was. Do you remember we held it was always etiquette to hide our weapons when we were being entertained by the enemy, to affect a security even if we didn't feel it.”

“If you only knew,” began the hunted man, and to his own surprise his voice broke.

“But I don't know,” said the commissioner quickly. “The only enemy hereabouts is Nightfall Carter, that Merivale took you for, and he's hiding in the ranges, poor wretch.”

Crace slipped his pistol under his tunic.

“What would happen if you did hide Nightfall Carter?”

“Knowingly? I'd be broke, of course. Imprisoned probably; compounding a felony, isn't it?”

“And promoted for catching him?” How queer his own voice sounded.

“Oh, well, that's as it may be, but I haven't the chance of catching him. I hear he's got clean away the other side of the Border. Come and have some dinner, and then I can lend you a horse, or you can stay the night, as you please.”

Once more Crace looked at his host curiously.

He was starving, and a dainty dinner was a thing he had not seen since they two parted. For a moment or two they ate in silence, then Crace asked unsteadily:

“You think Carter a rank bad 'un?”

Ruthven looked at him keenly.

“Well, what do you think yourself? He's no saint, and there's a price on his head.”

“He hasn't done half the things that have been set down to him, that I'll swear.”

“More than likely,” said Ruthven; “but I can't forgive him shooting that poor old thing on Baker's Crest.”

“What poor old thing?”

Ruthven laid down his knife and fork and looked him in the face steadily.

“That poor old woman sticks in my gizzard, I can tell you. When I think of her shot in cold blood—I—hanging's too good for the man who did it.”

Brooker Crace bent across the table solemnly.

“Jocelyn Ruthven, I never heard of that old woman on my—I swear,” he said earnestly; “but,” he added, “Nightfall Carter might say the same. All the crimes in the country for the last six months past have been laid to his charge.”

“I wonder if the poor beggar would like to make a fresh start. Have some more chicken, Brooker. He's a tough old campaigner, but I can't afford to be particular.”

“A fresh start!” said Crace. “My God if he could, if he only could! But with a price on his head——”

The servant came in, handing round potatoes, and Crace helped himself mechanically.

“He might—he might, you know,” said Ruthven carelessly. “He's across the Border I have no doubt, and once in Sydney, getting away to California is easy enough. Are you going to stop with me to-night, Brooker, or must you go on?”

A wild gust of wind blew against the tent, and the sound of pouring rain was in their ears. Crace looked round him at the comfortable baize-lined tent, at the cosy fire.

“I must get on,” he said, “I must get on. There's a—situation I shall lose if I don't get there to-morrow morning, and,” he added with a bitter laugh, “I can't afford to lose much nowadays.”

“I'll give you Bluebell,” said the commissioner; “you can pay me for her the year after next. Have you finished? Well, I won't try to keep you. It's a wild night, and the sooner you are at your destination the better. Here though,” Ruthven went to a big box in the corner. A man's bank in those old days was as often as not his breeches' pocket. Ruthven kept his pay in a box, and drew out a roll of notes. “Here, old man, let me be your banker. I ruined my own life very successfully a short time back. I've no particular need of these, and if they can help you to make a fresh start——”

Crace took them mechanically, but there were hot tears on his cheek.

“Here, orderly, orderly, tell them to send round Bluebell and saddle up the Colonel as well. Mr Crace has bought Bluebell, and I'll ride a bit of the way with him.”

Up the gully swept the wind, bringing the driving rain before it, a dismal,

dreary winter's night, and the two men rode out of the camp in silence.

And this was the man he had come down to kill, this was the man—he had—come—down—to—shoot. That was what the horses' hoof-beats said on the stones; that was what the rushing creek cried; that was what the rain shrieked, beating in his face like stinging whips.

He tried to speak but he could find no voice, and at last, when the commissioner pulled up and pointed to the track gleaming faintly white in the darkness, he laid his hand on his arm.

“Jocelyn, I want to tell you——”

“Don't tell me—don't tell me anything, for God's sake,” said Ruthven in unfeigned alarm. “I'm the gold commissioner on Deadman's and I'm bound to take Nightfall Carter if I have the smallest inkling of his whereabouts.”

“Nightfall Carter is dead; whatever happens, he is dead,” said Crace, like a man who is taking a vow.

“I hope so with all my heart,” said Ruthven; “and look here, old man, you're sure he didn't kill the old woman on Baker's Crest?”

“On my—yes,” more firmly, “on my honour.”

Ruthven stretched out his hand and grasped his old chum's.

“Good-bye, old man, good-bye. I must get back. Good-bye and good luck go with you.”

“How am I to thank——” His voice was husky, and Ruthven cut him short.

“Good-bye. You'd have done as much I know for old sake's sake; good-bye,” and he wheeled his horse and clattered back to camp.

Sweetbriar in the Desert

ANDREW LATIMER gave a long sigh and shifted his bluey uneasily from one shoulder to the other. He was just a little out of his reckoning, and he had not been within sight of human habitation for a couple of days. In this desolate country, stations were few and far between. At Yalla Yalla he and his mate had got enough flour and salt meat, they reckoned, to carry them on to the lonely station that lay half-way to Port Vincent, and since leaving there they had met no signs of settlement. They did not expect to meet any.

A man in the bush must have a mate, but Andrew, looking at his, wondered with a sudden imperious wonder how the Fates had ever thrown him, a man of birth and education, with this forlorn, foul-mouthed old wreck. Possibly it was the case in which extremes meet. He, with his Oxford training, had been superior to the average bushman, just as Wall-eyed Bill had been inferior, and so the two friendless ones had drifted together. He had looked at Bill thoughtfully that last night at Yalla Yalla, and in the morning, finding a broken triangle of looking-glass hung against the slab wall of the travellers' hut, he had looked at himself equally thoughtfully.

After all, there was not so very much difference between them. His beard was ragged, his hair unkempt, his cheeks were lean and brown, and there were great lines at the corners of his eyes and round his mouth. His shirt was open at the throat, and the button was gone; it was not over clean, his trousers were moleskins of a doubtful colour, and his boots—well they had tramped many weary miles, and they do not have anyone to clean boots in the travellers' huts. How different he was—he suddenly seemed to realise it—how different from the good-looking, spick-and-span young Englishman who had come out to Australia to make his fortune only three years before!

He thought of that man now as he tramped on steadily by his mate's side. A man full of hope for the future, a man well dressed and needing all the comforts, not to say the luxuries, of life, a man who intended to stay in Australia only till he had made his fortune—say three years at the very most—and then back to England and culture and comfort. He had had five hundred pounds in his pocket then. And now? He felt uneasily in his trousers' pocket; there was just a little silver threepence there, not enough to buy a drink in this thirsty land. He picked out the threepence and looked at it as it lay on the palm of his hand, and then he heard his mate chuckle.

“Is that all yer got, mate? Well, a cove can always get tucker out back,

anyway.”

Yes, after all, in the bush a man could always have food for the asking. It struck him how low he had fallen, actually begging his bread, and feeling no shame. He looked at his mate and asked a question he had never thought to ask in all the long months they had wandered together.

“Bill, where did you come from? You weren't always on the wallaby?”

Wall-eyed Bill stood stock still and shifted his swag uneasily as his mate had done. Overhead was the faraway sky, hard bright blue from horizon to horizon, and underneath was the rolling grass country, all brown grass bending its head to the gentle breeze, and away in the distance a shimmer of something white that might be water, only it seemed unlikely there could be any water in such a place.

“No,” said Bill slowly, and suddenly into his speech there came something that Andrew Latimer had never heard before, a tone of refinement that made him look up quickly. “No, I wasn't always on the wallaby. Christ! that I should come to this! God bless my soul!” the bitterness went from his voice and surprise took its place, “did you smell that? Did you smell the sweetbriar?”

Latimer looked at his mate in astonishment. Was he going mad? Here, with the brown grass under his feet and the blue sky overhead, he was asking him did he smell the sweetbriar. Could anything be more ridiculous? He was thinking of a carefully tended English garden surely—a garden waking up at the first touch of summer, after the long winter sleep. Was he going mad? Men did that sometimes in the bush.

“Wall-eye,” he began, and then the old, familiar term that he had used hundreds of times struck him as unkind, to say the least of it. One side of the man's face had been blown away, and his eye was gone, giving him a peculiarly vacant look like a blank wall, but surely it was a misfortune that should be treated tenderly. “Mate,” he said kindly, “you're dreaming. How could there be sweetbriar here?”

“I don't know,” said the man, with a quick catch of the breath that made him quite unlike the slouchy old swagman Andrew had known. “It is sweetbriar. It makes me think of the days when I was young, the golden-haired girl I kissed——”

He broke off with a little hard laugh and turned fiercely on the man beside him.

“Latimer,” he said, dropping the old, familiar Christian name, the old, familiar Australian drawl, and speaking as one man speaks to another in the rush and hurry of the world, “what are you doing here wasting your life? You're just drifting. What's a job of fencing here and splitting there, and a little shearing now and then, to a man of your education?”

"I am only doing the same as you are," said Latimer lamely, and then he started, for to his nostrils, too, came the scent of the sweetbriar.

"I?" said the older man bitterly. "You don't mean to say you're setting up me for an example. I went under about the time you were getting your first birching."

He laughed, and Latimer echoed the laugh, and the other turned on him savagely.

"Oh, laugh," he said, "laugh like the world. I don't know why I bother my head about you. You think an unfortunate wretch like I am only fit to be mocked at."

"I don't," said Latimer soberly. "I assure you I don't. I am sorry and——"

"Don't be mawkishly sentimental. I've made my bed, and I've got to lie on it, and I don't know that for myself I'd have things different. There's the fresh air and the sunshine, and, after all, come to think of it, human nature's much the same in the traveller's hut out back here as it is in a London club or drawing-room."

Andrew straightened himself. "Still, a London drawing-room——" There was a wistfulness in his tones. "Think of the pretty English girls with their pink and white complexions, think of the dainty women——"

"Don't think of them. The best woman's a devil, taken any way. For a good many years I excepted the pretty little girl I kissed when I was nineteen. Did I kiss her, by the way? No, I don't believe I ever dared so much. We put women on a pedestal at nineteen, and they spend their time breaking that pedestal, the fools! I looked and longed in an English garden, and the smell of the sweetbriar was in my nostrils. What an ass I was!"

"You don't know that," said Latimer; "she might have been all that you fancied her."

"The chances are against it. I've learned enough about women since to—— Well, anyhow, I've paid her the compliment of remembering her."

"Is that more than you have done for the other women who have come into your life?"

"A long sight more. Well, there's one I remembered, the she-devil who cost me this," and he touched his scarred cheek. "No, take an older man's advice. Never trust a woman. Even when she loves you she'll make you pay for it—aye, and pay heavily too."

"Talking about women and love here!" said Latimer mockingly, but he could not help wondering at the change that had come over his companion. "Much chance I have of either in my life."

"That's it. You go back to civilisation. Don't waste your life here. Take my advice."

"Who cares what becomes of me?"

“You care yourself. Never think anyone else cares. Don't count on anyone else to help you, to go one hairbreadth out of their way for your sake, because they won't—man or woman, they won't. Well, a woman will sometimes, but she makes you pay in the end. Believe me, my dear chap, there's nothing disinterested in this world. You pull yourself together and get out of this. It only wants a little effort. Not half the effort that's required to tramp along in this burning sun over this infernal desert.

Latimer looked at him plodding along in the scorching, pitiless sunshine, a weary, bent man dragging one ill-shod foot wearily after the other, a man who had no faith in tenderness or love, no belief in the kindness of human nature. He felt he hated him for one brief second, and then he pitied him. And yet it shamed him to think he had fallen so low that this man was his mate. He would get out, he would. There was a man he knew in Adelaide, he would go to him and ask him to give him another chance, for his father's sake to give him another chance. The thought that he must do it or sink like this was galling. He lifted his eyes again. The white shimmer in the distance was nearer now, much nearer.

“Water?” he said wonderingly. He wanted to break away from his thoughts. “Surely it is water.”

“Salt,” said the other man succinctly, “it's salt.”

Salt. Yes, of course it was salt, one of that great chain of salt lakes that for so long barred Sturt's progress north. They walked down to the margin, and it lay before them in the sunlight glittering like snow; on every side rolled away the grassy plain, and the smell of the sweetbriar was stronger than ever.

“Why, it comes from the salt,” said Latimer, and the other flung himself down on the ground as if utterly worn out.

“Yes,” he said quietly, in the new voice his mate was so unaccustomed to, “I remember now, it comes from the salt. It makes me thirsty, that glittering salt. Have you any water, Latimer? My bag's dry. Not that there's any reason you should give me yours.”

Andrew looked at his own canvas bag. There was not much in it, evaporation is very rapid under that fierce sun; but what there was he poured into a pannikin and handed to his mate, who drank it off at one gulp, without even a “Thank you.”

“More, a little more,” but he did not swear, he who had the reputation of being the foulest-mouthed man between Cape York and the Leeuwin.

“I have no more,” said Andrew. “I doubt if there's any more between here and Port Vincent. But it can't be very far now, perhaps not a matter of twenty miles—forty at the very most. We're a little out of the track, I think; but, after all, that's nothing, we'll soon find it.”

The other man laughed, and then, throwing off his swag, lay back with a sigh.

"It's not nothing to me," he said. "I can't do another step. I'm about played out."

"We can't camp till we find water," said Latimer, looking over the glittering salt lake that, when he closed his eyes, mocked him with its promise of green fields and dewy, flowering hedgerows. "To camp by this salt pan would be just courting death."

"And I drank the last of the water. Latimer, you're a fool! Do you know where we are?"

"Well, we're on the Peninsula now. If we walk to the east, we must strike the sea; and coasting along the shore, we're bound to fetch Port Vincent."

"Perhaps a three days' tramp," said the other, letting his fingers close on the blades of grass. "You must go by yourself, my dear chap. I'm not on the wallaby any longer."

"Mate!" Andrew came and bent over him.

"Only another old swaggy going to his long last home. Buck up, mate! It's an everyday occurrence. And look here, it is not much good giving advice, I know, but do look after yourself a bit in the future. You're too soft. I weathered you in the matter of that water. We ought to have shared. By Jove! smell the sweetbriar! I feel as if that golden-haired girl must be coming along presently."

"Mate, mate!" There was distress in Latimer's tone. What was he to do with a man whose mind was wandering? They were miles from help, miles from water. "Pull yourself together. You want to get back to her."

Wall-eyed Bill looked the young man straight in the face.

"Get back to her. That's in the past, man. She's an old harridan now, I reckon. Well"—his voice was very weary—"I thought a lot of her once, so we'll give her the benefit of the doubt and say she only grew into a fool. She drifted, I guess, like I did. I always chose the easy way, always, or—perhaps I shouldn't be here. I wonder if she did. The smell of the sweetbriar made me think of her. I haven't done it for years. They say it's so easy to go down, Latimer, but it isn't. In one way it's mighty hard."

The deep caw of a crow broke the stillness, and Latimer, looking up, saw black specks coming across the blue sky—one, two, three, four, and more were winging their way towards them. Harbingers of death they seemed. How did they know that they two were here without water on the borders of the salt lake? Oh, they would wait, those crows. Many a time had he seen them stalking round a dying beast, waiting till their turn should come.

"Man, man!" he said, putting his hand on the other man's shoulder. He was shocked to find how thin he was, merely a bag of bones. Had this

despised mate of his been dying under his very eyes, dying as he tramped, and he had never noticed? A great scorn of himself, a great pity for his mate, filled his heart. “Man, man, friend, pull yourself together! I'll help you. Isn't there anyone for whose sake you want to get back?”

“I tell you,” said the other, falling back again on the ground and pillowing his head on his swag—and his voice still had the mocking tone—“there isn't anyone for whose sake I'd trouble to cross a road. What does the world care for me?” and he put his hand over his scarred face as if he could not bear the light of the sun upon it.

Andrew Latimer rose to his feet then. He drove away the waiting crows and he walked down to the salt lake. A salt lake does not necessarily imply water. This one did not; it was smooth, white, glittering salt, like so much coarse snow crystals, and Latimer stepped on to it vaguely. It was possible there might be a little water towards the centre, and he held his billy in his hand and walked slowly away from the shore. The water would be salt, but he might at least bathe his mate's face. He looked round him. It was indescribably desolate. There was the lake of glittering white crystals, and all around the country rose in a gentle curve, brown and dreary, with just here and there one or two lonely trees, ragged and bent almost to the ground in a vain endeavour to escape the strong winds. There was not a bird or a beast to be seen save crows; there was not the sound of an insect to be heard in the hot, still air. The salt crunched loud beneath his feet, and, looking down, he saw that his footsteps were marked apparently in blood. It was eerie. A little farther out and he began to sink slowly in the moist salt as in a quicksand, and water like blood oozed up over his boots, and he could only return as aimlessly as he had set out.

What could he do? How could he stay here? Already the thirst was catching at his throat. He knew only too well how quickly a man succumbs to the cruel enemy. He looked up into the deep, dark blue overhead, and thought longingly of the cool grey English skies, and then he thought of the man lying there in the garish sunshine, the cynical old swagman to whom he was bound by all the ties of bush honour. Could he leave a dying comrade? No, a thousand times no. Could he carry him that unknown number of miles that lay between them and Port Vincent? And to stay meant death to them both, certain death. There were no two words about it. To stay there twenty-four hours in this sweltering heat meant death. The strong, sweet scent of the sweetbriar, so incongruous, so out of place, seemed to be emphasising it—certain death. Such a tiny thing as the fallen man looked in the great waste, just a heap of worn-out clothes, with the waiting crows around. As he came back they fluttered away.

“Mate, you must let me help you,” and he put his arm round him and

raised his head to his shoulder.

“Do you think I'm worth saving, Latimer?”

Perhaps in the bottom of his heart Andrew did not think it, a cynical man who had wasted his life and come to this; but because of this vagrant thought, he spoke roughly.

“For pity's sake, don't be a fool! I'll manage to hump you somehow. We can't possibly stay here.”

“Go on, man, go on. What's the good of risking your life for Wall-eyed Bill, a man who never cared a cuss for you—or anyone else, for that matter. You get back to civilisation and begin again.”

“I'm going to begin again,” said Andrew with determination, and he spoke slowly because the desire for life was strong in him. He saw it a goodly thing. “I'm going to make a better thing of my life, but I'm hanged if I'll begin by deserting my mate.”

The other put his rough, toil-worn hand on his just for a moment.

“You fool, you d——d fool! You can't begin again if you stay by me. Good Lord! how my head is swimming! No,” as Latimer tried to raise him; “won't you let me have ten minutes' peace? You would if you knew how tired I am.”

There was such weariness in his voice that for very pity Andrew desisted. Ten minutes was not much to give a comrade who was sick and weary, and yet the place had got on his nerves, the crows looked menacing, the scent of the sweetbriar was mocking; it seemed to him that every moment was hours lost, and minutes were of consequence.

“Come!” he said roughly, with a roughness born of dire necessity; “once we get to water, you'll be better.”

“Water?” said the sick man sharply, “I never expected to appreciate water so much. That's another of life's lessons, I suppose; and, like most of life's lessons, it comes when we are not in a position to profit by it. I'll never taste water again. How the sweetbriar makes me think of it! With all this sweetbriar about, there must be water.”

“I'm going to take you to water.” Latimer spoke in a whisper and spoke fiercely.

“Let me alone. Just five minutes. You go ahead and get help, and come back for me. We can't be very far from Port Vincent.”

“Too far to leave you behind,” said Latimer stolidly, though the crows seemed to be saying that his mate was right. It was the only way. He could only get on and get help. To stay here meant that both lives must be sacrificed.

“Supposing you can't get me along?” There was a little mock in the tones.

“I can only try.”

“Suppose I'm past all help? I may be.”

“Then”—Latimer spoke very deliberately—“I'll stay here and see you through. It isn't a quarter of an hour since you lay down. Things can't be so bad.”

Was it only a quarter of an hour? It seemed to him hours and days and weeks since he had first smelled the smell of the sweetbriar—that scent that here in this sweltering heat had filled his heart with a desire for better things—and behold! already death in an awful guise was staring him in the face!

“Man, we must start!” he said fiercely. “I'll carry you. You're only a bag of bones. I never noticed,” he added a little remorsefully, “how thin you were.”

“Just give me three minutes—only three minutes,” prayed the sick man. “This isn't much of a world, but how do we know what is coming after?”

Latimer answered impatiently. What was the good of moralising on the chances of a future world and letting the sands of life run out in this manner.

“Hang it all!” he said. “All I'm asking of you is a chance in this world. It's quite good enough for me.”

The man on the ground looked at him enviously.

“A strong young fellow like you will get down to Port Vincent easily enough.”

“Yes,” said Latimer, softening again. The man was ill, very ill. He would stay by him; he would try to carry him to water; and if he would do so much for him, he might as well put a curb on his tongue. What was the good of offering his life in surly fashion? His life? Well, of course, if he stayed, it would come to that. There were no two ways about it. To stay by this man meant offering him his life—his young, fresh, strong life—just to soothe the last hours of a cynical, worn-out rake who would not even understand the sacrifice, and would not appreciate it if he did. The taste of it was bitter in his mouth. Even though they were both dying, he felt he could hardly curb his tongue.

“Well, why don't you go?” The sick man's voice was mocking.

“If you think,” said Latimer grimly, “I'm such a mean hound as to leave you, you're much mistaken. Two minutes more and then I hump you.”

“Only two minutes?”

“Only two minutes.” Latimer sat down and began impatiently breaking off the tops of the grass.

“It'll mean death to both of us.”

“You never know your luck.”

“I'm not worth saving.”

“Perhaps not. I shall try.”

“At the risk of your life?”

“Rot!”

“Think of England, and the life the sweetbriar reminds you of.”

“My God!” cried Andrew, “I do think of it. Do you think it's easy to sit here and see you waste my chances?”

“And I've always taken the easiest way,” said the tired, cultured voice with the little mock in it. “I'm going to do it for the last time.”

“If you see an easy way out of this,” said Andrew, “you're cleverer than I took you for.”

“Nevertheless”—and the twisted face smiled—“there's a mighty easy way for me. It has its drawbacks, of course; but, then, everything has some drawback.” He raised himself on his elbow and looked slowly round the horizon—brown, rolling plain and hard blue sky and sparkling, white salt.

“I wish,” he said suddenly, “I had kissed that girl. The women I have kissed since! And I never did more than touch her hand!”

“Are you mad?” cried Andrew angrily.

“They say you go back to your youth at the end.” He caught Latimer's reluctant hand. “Well, I've found out there's one decent chap in the world. As I said before, it *is* unlucky life's lessons so often come too late. Smell the sweetbriar. I'm glad it was here at last.”

He pressed Andrew's hand, and then Andrew saw that in the other he was holding a little phial, and before he could stop him he had poured the contents into his mouth.

Latimer started up in horror. One convulsion and it was all over. Truly he had chosen the easier way—the easier way for Andrew Latimer. The crows fluttered away as he moved, a little wind sprang up, a cool, scented breeze, and before him lay, plain and easy for a strong man, the way to Port Vincent and safety. The kingdoms of the earth were at his feet, bought at a price.

Roger Blake, Scallawag

A HOWLING wind was blowing, and most of the ground was in the air. It filled eyes and ears and mouth with dust he knew was filthy, and Roger Blake swore vigorously. His China pony, a vicious little brute, bucked and kicked and danced along sideways, and otherwise showed his objections to a North China dust storm.

“You were born to it, you little beast,” cried Blake, losing his temper, and bringing down his lithe cane with force upon the pony's flank.

To do him justice, with all his faults—and from Urga to Peking, and from Peking to Shanghai, Roger Blake was known as a “wrong 'un”—he was merciful to his beast, only this weather and the obstinate pony combined were too much for him. The dust storm and the welting combined were too much for the last remnants of the thing the pony called his temper, and he took several cat jumps along the very edge of the high bank. How high it was Blake could not see, for the depths were hidden in the whirling dust, and before he could get the pony in hand again they were sounding it.

Over they went, but it wasn't very deep. Instinctively Blake flung himself clear, and behold the ground on which he landed was soft enough. He still had the reins, and was congratulating himself, as he endeavoured to scramble to his feet, that he was unhurt, when the pony reared up and brought his forefeet down on the prostrate man's left leg.

“That does it,” said Blake, with an oath, as he sank back on the heaped dust; but he did not let go the reins, and his mount, perhaps somewhat shaken himself from his fall, stood perfectly still, with drooping head and tail gently flicking the dust from his flanks.

The man on the ground, with his free hand, felt his leg gingerly.

“Broken,” was his verdict, and he was so dismayed that he forgot the usual curse.

He lay still for a moment, considering the situation. Faintly, through the roar of the storm, came the sound of a man's voice urging on an obstinate animal—his servant making a few remarks to the pack mule.

“Tseng Jen, Tseng Jen,” he called.

Through the dust, up the sunken road that he himself had missed in the haze, came a tall Chinaman bestriding a small, meek donkey, and lugging after him an ill-conditioned mule.

He slipped from his donkey, and, with the lead of the mule still in his hand, stood bewailing his master.

Blake tossed his pony's reins to his boy, and took both his hands to his

injured leg. The result was a groan or two, and then he considered the situation. He had been in holes before, and always managed to climb out.

“Other leg,” he meditated.

The last time he had broken his leg was when he had been flung, for flagrant cheating, over the porch of the gambling saloon he had kept at New Chang. He had come through that all right. This, he reckoned, was not nearly such a bad break, and he might pull through even though he was in the heart of China. The thing now was to get the bone properly set. He was bound to Kiang Fu, where he hoped to sell arms—strictly under the rose—to an agent of that robber and scoundrel, White Wolf. But Kiang Fu was all of forty *li* away, and he must get shelter somewhere nearer than that.

Tseng Jen went on bewailing his evil fortune at the top of his voice, till Blake, having got his scattered senses in some sort of order, cut him short.

“How far is the nearest town?”

A Chinaman does not find it easy to answer a simple question directly, and Tseng Jen wandered off into a catalogue of all the desirable towns with welcoming inns, where it would have been so much more convenient that the disaster should have happened. But Blake had not drifted about the country ever since the Boxer trouble without having some working idea of where he was going.

“How far,” he asked, “is Ping Hsien?”

Tseng Jen put up his free hand and scratched his head. He still wore a queue, and, as he had not been shaven for at least three days, when he lifted his round black silk cap with the little red silk button on the top, he presented to view a very respectable blacking-brush.

“Ping Hsien, master, is but a small place, walled, and right off the main road.”

“Damn,” said Blake resignedly in English. “How far off the main road?” he went on in the vernacular.

“It is ten *li*.”

And again Blake said “Damn,” for how was a man with a broken leg to go over three miles, and what was he to do when he got there?

He wondered if there was a Mission Station, and then he laughed grimly as a pain shot up his leg. What had such as he to do with a Mission Station? But something had to be done.

He made Tseng Jen take from the mule load a towel, and, tearing it into strips, with many a groan, he bound to his leg, to keep some semblance of straightness in it, the cane he carried. He had to make shift with it, for it is useless to look for so much as a chip of wood by the wayside in China.

Then there was nothing else for it; at whatever cost he must mount the donkey. Tseng protested, and prophesied evil; but he lent his strong arm at

his master's bidding, and presently a mournful little procession, consisting of a pony and a pack mule led by a troubled-looking Chinaman, and a foreigner seated with set teeth and grim mouth on the rump of a donkey, one bound leg stretched along its back, went slowly along that dusty sunken road.

At first Blake could see nothing else but those banks and the rough road with deep wheel tracks, hard frozen, running on in front of them. To him it seemed interminable. Then the banks disappeared, a lot of tumbled graves appeared on either side, and in front of them rose the castellated wall of a small town. It was a very small town, and the wall was somewhat tumbledown, but it *was* a town, and the man on the donkey, aching in every limb, thought thankfully that at least here he could rest.

In the gateway, where they sold pots and cakes, he was stared at, as foreigners always are stared at in the interior; but he went on to the nearest inn, turned into the courtyard, and submitted to be carried inside by Tseng Jen and a coolie. They laid him on the *k'ang*, and he opened his set teeth and called for whisky.

The landlord himself brought it, and volunteered information.

There was a foreign teacher in the town, and the teacher's old wife tended the sick.

“Whoop! Whirroo! The deuce she does! Tote her along,” said Roger Blake in English, and he thought sardonically it was the very first time in his chequered career he had been glad to hear of missionaries.

The landlord said he had sent to tell the honourable gentleman, and doubtless the *tai tai* would come too. She always did if anyone was sick; and Blake, more relieved than he could have imagined possible, lay back on the *k'ang*, and ordered more whisky with a more hopeful curse.

It was a dirty little inn, an inn used by carters, and no very well-to-do carters came along the byways to this hole-and-corner little city.

“Room for a thousand merchant guests,” had been the proclamation over the entrance way, and inside on the grimy walls the manager prayed his guests to be careful about fire, and declared more than once that he would not be responsible for valuables unless they were entrusted to his care. Blake lay very still, for every movement sent a pang through his leg; he took bad spirits enough to deaden thought, and he dozed a little, and when he wakened the landlord was ushering into the room a tall, slight Chinaman.

He started up with a blasphemous exclamation that died on his lips, for when he looked again he saw that this was no Chinaman. It was old China, though; the China of the last century. The man who came in was clad like an ordinary coolie, in a blue cotton blouse and peg-top trousers caught in at

the ankles. His head was shaven, all but a tail of thick yellow hair, which fell down in a heavy plait to the hem of his blouse. His smooth face was tanned a little by exposure, but his complexion was as clear as a girl's, and his big blue eyes, shaded by a fringe of long, thick lashes, were dreamy and far away.

So handsome was he that even the unbecoming, outlandish mode of dressing his hair took little from his beauty. It shone out markedly in that dingy, filthy room, and Blake drew a breath of deep surprise. This was not his idea of a missionary, and his eyes wandered to the woman who had followed him. His wife? Surely not. She was, like him, dressed as a Chinese of the coolie class in blue cotton, with a loose blouse and peg-top trousers; her grey hair was drawn back into a knot at the back of her head, and was sleek and neat like a Chinese woman's, without a hair out of place; her complexion was somewhat weatherbeaten, her piercing grey eyes twinkled kindly, she had a set of most excellent white teeth, and she was at least fifteen or twenty years older than the man. She it was who spoke.

"Hi, ya!" she said. "What have we here?"

"I have broken my leg, madam," said Blake courteously. "If you or"—he hesitated—"your husband——"

"I haven't a husband, young man," said the missionary woman, with a little cheerful laugh that rang full of the joy of life. "I've managed to get along without any encumbrance." And not only by her voice, but by a certain independence in her bearing, the Englishman recognised that she came from the other side of the Atlantic. "Now let's have a look at this broken leg. I'm not a doctor, but a simple broken bone——"

Blake's eyes wandered to the man's face, the man who had said nothing as yet, but was looking at him, Blake thought, as intently as if he were praying for him, demanding his soul of God. Probably he was.

"And it's no use your looking at Decimus," the woman went on, coming forward and laying gentle hands on him—the hurt man noticed how strong and shapely and capable were those hands—"he couldn't be trusted to mend a broken pitcher. He's come along for propriety. I guess these simple people would have fifty fits if a young, beautiful, and unprotected female like me poked her nose into this inn by herself. H'm!"—she had taken off the rough bandages and was feeling the leg gently—"broke the small bone, did you? It's a perfectly good leg, and you shouldn't break it here in the interior."

"It was a good leg," said Roger, won in spite of himself by her cheery kindness, "but since I have damaged it, tell me what I can do," and he hoped he did not reek very badly of whisky. He felt instinctively that these people would dislike the smell of spirits, and would despise the man who

drowned his pain in drink.

“I guess you'd better come along to the Mission Station one time. Don't you say, Decimus?”

“Of course, Althea; what else?” said the man quietly, and his voice was rich and full, but dreamy and not of this world.

“If you'll let me,” began Blake; but the missionary woman tapped his boot with a little laugh.

“Here's where we come in. You come just right along and keep quiet till you're well,” and she turned to the landlord of the inn and began giving directions, and presently Blake found himself being borne in a litter to the Mission Station.

It was in a little compound, in a little street close against the crumbling wall, a small and humble place built Chinese fashion; but it looked a home. Another woman came out, a homely girl with a troubled little face freckled like a turkey's egg, and redeemed from plainness by a pair of soft, wistful, dark eyes—eyes that said to the watching newcomer, though they did not know it themselves, that they longed more for the simple joys of this world than for that unknown future glory in which her husband was absorbed. For the young man with the face of a saint was her husband. The other woman introduced them to the stranger.

“This is Decimus Collinson, Congregationalist missionary from Connecticut,” said she, “and this is Janie, his wife. I'm Althea Trelling, also missionary from the same State. It's generally handier to know folk's names. So there you are. We are at your service.”

“It is,” admitted Blake, getting over the clumsiness which makes it so difficult for an Englishman to name himself. “I'm Roger Blake”—he hesitated a moment how to describe himself, and then added, with a little laugh—“Scallawag, at your mercy.”

Just for a moment there was silence, and Blake, a little dismayed, saw pity in the older woman's eyes. The man had apparently forgotten him, and the younger woman was looking with all her eyes at her husband.

“We're glad to have you,” said Miss Trelling simply. “We're so far out 't isn't often a foreigner comes along our way, and we make the most of him when he does. But we're not looking after you properly. Come right away, Janie, and let's see him safely into bed.”

And that was how it went always in the long days that followed.

Miss Althea Trelling managed everything for the Mission, Janie adored her husband and did exactly what the older woman suggested, and Decimus Collinson followed out her directions when he remembered, and at other times disregarded them dreamily, because he was absorbed in something that seemed to him more important.

They set Blake's leg. They made shift to put it in plaster of Paris, doing the best they could with the Chinese *shih kao*; and when he was able to go about on crutches, they let him, at his earnest request, for he could not help seeing they were poor, share expenses. They would never have done it, he thought, had they had the slightest idea how that money was earned.

He watched with interest the humble little household, and, with his keen, worldly eyes, he saw how a man absorbed in things not of this world, and very sure he was about his Master's business, could cause a woman almost as much unhappiness as the most selfish brute that ever walked this earth.

He, scallawag and wastrel, conceived a great pity for the wife of the man who was certainly a saint on earth. Decimus Collinson denied himself all things that go to make life pleasant—denied himself, without a backward thought, and the man looking on saw that poor little Janie Collinson, upheld by no high ideals, craving only for a warm fireside and a husband responsive to her tenderness, was eating her heart out in loneliness, and was trying to do it with a brave face.

“I must go,” said the missionary one morning, pushing away his breakfast as he laid down a torn scrap of paper on which something was written in smudgy Chinese characters; “old Mr Hu sends to say his son is off again. That opium is a terrible curse. He has gone to Tong Chuang. If I can reach him and persuade him——”

Something passed over the face of the young wife. It was hardly like a cloud hiding the sun, because the cloud was always there, but it was as if the cloud deepened.

“Reverend——” said Blake, wondering how he could help.

“I am not ordained,” said Collinson. “I have told you before. It is my dearest hope, and some day——”

“Oh, well,” said Blake hastily, “it's just a manner of speech. What good *can* you do by going to Tong Chuang? When a man's on the terrible tear, it's best to let him have his whack. No earthly thing that I know of will turn him.”

Decimus Collinson looked at Blake without seeing him.

“No earthly thing that I know of will turn him, either,” he said sadly. “But prayer will do it. I have failed—I have failed some ways. How is it, Lord, I cannot help this man? I have failed—I have failed,” and he was so simply, genuinely cast down, that Blake, his whole soul rebelling, could say not one word.

He watched him make rapid preparations for departure, watched him go with his scanty equipment, watched the little girl with the wistful eyes walk by his side to the gate, saw her dismissed casually by a man whose whole thoughts were given over to something that seemed to him higher, and saw

her creeping back to her room with a look of hopeless perplexity and sorrow on her face, that he knew he could never clear away. Then he looked at Miss Trelling, and gave vent to his feelings in one round, resonant oath.

“Mr Blake!” she said in remonstrance.

“Miss Althea, don't you feel like that yourself?”

“I don't know that I do,” she said. “Why shouldn't he go? It is his business.”

“Why shouldn't he stop and look after his wife?”

“The burden of men's souls is very heavy, Mr Blake.”

“I'd rather see him think a little about the burden he's making a woman's heart carry,” said Blake, a little surprised at his own poetic flight. “I tell you what, Miss Althea. What Mrs Decimus wants is a petticoat and a baby in her lap.”

She looked at him with shrewd, kindly eyes. It came to Blake with something of a pang that never since the days of his childhood, when his mother's hand had been on his shoulder, had any woman looked at him with such selfless kindness. If any had—if any had—well, would he have written himself down “Roger Blake, Scallawag”?

“You think that?” said Miss Althea. “Well, they say the missionaries are to give up Chinese dress, and I guess we are going to manage the baby.”

“Oh,” said Blake, “poor little woman. Why in—” he swallowed a word Miss Trelling would not have liked, “doesn't he stay at home and care for her a little?”

“His business here——” began Miss Trelling, but Blake cut her short.

“*You* manage to combine the Lord's work and a very healthy interest in your relations and friends, with some left over for the strays,” said Blake emphatically.

She smiled at him rather sadly.

“You don't know what Decimus can do when he is really moved,” she said. “He's like his father, just as like as like. When you had gotten really inside the dreaminess there was no one could win you like Decimus Collinson.” She spoke reminiscently, tenderly. “You'd never think this Decimus and I had the same mother, would you? I take after my mother, and he—well, not much of his mother went to the making of Decimus.”

“More's the pity,” said Blake. “A little leavening of your common sense would be good for the Reverend. How the dickens did he ever get such a good little wife?”

“I guess I managed that for him,” said his halfsister with a smile, “just between you and me. Janie wanted him, and if I hadn't, there was a real bad woman would have gotten hold of him; but I'm thinking sometimes it was

rough on Janie. But there, I did the best I could. I judged by his father. He was three years older than me, and he married my mother, and I don't think he ever looked back."

"He must have come courting you and got astray," said Blake, and suddenly the hot colour that flooded the woman's face right to the roots of her iron-grey hair told him he had hit the mark. He looked round for something to change the conversation, and Tseng Jen came across the courtyard with a little, long Chinese note in his hand. He beckoned him over gladly.

But the contents of that note brought him to an unpleasant predicament that had been faintly shadowed the day they carried him into the Mission. He had not let it trouble him much. Men of his stamp do not look ahead too far. They cannot afford to. And now the evil was upon him and had to be faced. He made up his mind hastily what to do.

"Miss Althea, do you know why I came here?" he asked.

"Why, no," she said. "I never thought. You must have some business, I suppose. This broken leg must have upset you more than a bit."

"No," he said, and he spoke rather slowly, and he wondered why he was making a clean breast of it to this woman. He was about his business, a business she, of course, would disapprove of, but a man must live, and he had found life hard enough. "I could write, and though Tseng Jen isn't very bright, he can be trusted to take a letter."

"Just so," said she, her eyes on her knitting; and now that he was enlightened he saw that she was intent on some little garment, and somewhere dimly in his heart came a pity for the woman who must needs expend all her tenderness on other people's children.

"Well, he took the letters."

She looked up at him with a smile. "Of course, I know that. Now, what are you trying to tell me, Mr Blake?"

"The letters were to White Wolf."

She nodded, but a look of surprise came into her keen grey eyes.

"I came here to sell him arms," said Blake defiantly

She said nothing, only looked at him.

"A man must live," he said in answer to the look.

Then she spoke.

"You saw that man who came into the compound this morning with both his hands cut off?" He nodded reluctantly. "White Wolf. You saw that woman weeping over her little dead baby?" He didn't even nod this time. "White Wolf again."

"Well, I want the Reverend back," said Blake, "for White Wolf is certainly going to attack Ping Hsien, and though they wouldn't touch you, I

guess, if they knew, you never can tell what may happen when the row begins. I've been wasting myself trying to instil a wholesome fear into the Reverend this ten days, but——”

“You might as well have talked to the town pump.”

“He's been full of Hu Ling and the opium,” and he nipped a curse word between his teeth.

“Mr Blake! Mr Blake!”

It was as if what he had told her was slowly sinking in, and the reproach in her tones stung him like the flick of a whip across his face, and he sought to defend himself.

“Do you know why Ping Hsien has not been attacked before?”

“It is on the road to nowhere,” she said. “God is good. He has us in his keeping.”

“There's a good lot of *kaoliang* stored here that White Wolf wants for his braves, and if I had not been here——”

“Mr Blake, is this true——?”

“On my——” He was going to say “honour,” but there came to him a sudden recollection of what North China would say to Roger Blake's honour, and he changed the expression. “I wouldn't lie to you, Miss Althea. You may bet your bottom dollar that's the reason why we haven't been attacked, but I can't hold things long, and if I don't see that contract carried out I can't hold him at all.”

“Mr Blake! Mr Blake! Decimus! And Janie!”

“Don't look as if I'd done it,” he implored. “You're the only woman I know who has ever been good to me, unselfishly good, and I'd do a deal for you. I didn't raise White Wolf. I haven't sold him so much as a single cartridge; but I came to do it, and if I don't there's going to be trouble.”

“And that boy,” moaned Althea Treling, “and poor little Janie, and the baby that's coming! Oh dear Lord! show us a way!”

“I can sell White Wolf ten thousand cartridges,” went on Blake simply, “make a bargain with him, and we can clear out.”

“For pity's sake!” cried the woman, horrified, “and leave these poor people at his mercy!”

“He will come, anyhow,” said Blake significantly.

“No, no, for heaven's sake don't sell him the cartridges, Mr Blake. If we have done anything to help you——”

“You have, you certainly have.”

“Then for heaven's sake have pity, and don't sell him the cartridges.”

“I put my all, my pitiful little all into those rifles and cartridges,” said Blake bitterly. “The parcel's waiting for me at Kiang Fu, labelled iron pots and walnuts, and if I don't sell it I'm a ruined man.”

The knitting dropped on the stone floor as Althea Treling rose to her feet, a homely-looking woman in the unbecoming Chinese dress that denied her tall, angular figure the dignity of skirts.

“Roger Blake,” she said, clasping her hands, “are you going to buy gold that is soaked in the blood of unfortunate women and little helpless children?”

“I'm hanged if I expect so much luck as that,” said Blake, with a laugh that had no joy in it; “it won't run even to much silver, but it's my all.”

“Mr Blake, for the love of God, if we've helped you, don't bring this shame upon us.”

“It's the only way to save you,” protested Blake again.

“Neither Janie, nor I, nor Decimus—oh, certainly not Decimus, since he's his father's son—would be saved at such a cost.”

“You would rather die?”

“Of course we would rather die. God forbid that we should think differently.”

She spoke so simply, so quietly, that her words carried conviction.

Blake rose up with a sigh and reached for his crutch.

“I was a blamed fool ever to hope any different,” said he.

“What are you going to do?” she asked, and in her voice was a trace of the wistful anxiety she was trying to keep out of her looks.

“Bring the Rev. Decimus back, if I have to yank him in by the scruff of his neck,” he said savagely. “Confound the souls of these people. We've got to see about the saving of our own bodies, and look slick about it, I can tell you. You see to the packing, and we'll make for Kiang Fu.” He turned away from the earnest grey eyes that were constraining him against his will, and, with a flood of angry blasphemy such as she had never in her life heard, called to Tseng Jen to bring him a donkey, and to be quick about it.

“You may hurt your leg if you ride,” called out Miss Treling. “I can't guarantee that plaster.”

But he looked back at her with a scowl that had held a dozen howling coolies in check, and remonstrance died on her lips.

The Rev. Decimus, as Blake persisted in calling him, had of necessity walked so persistently ever since he had come to China that he was a past-master at the business, and he was half way to Tong Chuang before Blake overtook him. He paid no attention to a couple of hails, but he looked up with questioning eyes as the man on the donkey rode straight across his path

“You've got to come back, Reverend,” said Blake curtly.

“Oh no,” said Collinson gently. “I am bound for Tong Chuang. I must have Hu Ling's soul.”

“And the devil or White Wolf may have your wife's body, I conclude, while you go shilly-shallying into heaven,” said Blake angrily, and he leant over and took the astonished young man by the shoulder and shook him until a pain shot up his own injured leg. “Do you know that White Wolf's likely to come down on Ping Hsien to-morrow or the next day? You may take your Bible oath if it doesn't snow or rain, and it won't, he'll have been through it by next Sunday.”

“Janie—White Wolf—Janie,” repeated the bewildered young man, looking at his guest as if he thought he had suddenly gone mad.

“I'm sick as a poisoned cat of this talk about souls and the saving of them,” went on Blake angrily, “when you neglect the poor little girl who loves you and who is needing all your care. Shameful isn't the word. She looks at you with dog's eyes, begging just a kind look, and you're wrapped up in a stinking, besotted, opium-smoking lot of Chinamen, who aren't likely to be a scrap of good to any man. The Lord can range 'em up and make their bloomin' souls white I guess if He wants to.”

And then he swore an oath that made the young man shrink away from him in disgust and horror, and added:

“I don't believe you've sense enough to come in out of the rain, let alone convert a Chinaman. Do you think it 'ud please the Lord if he was like you?”

Decimus Collinson stood still for a moment, his hand to his eyes, as if a great light were beating in on them. At length he said slowly, as if something had been revealed to him:

“There may be some truth in what you say. There may be. My God, if this man should speak truth!”

“There is. You may bet on that, wholeheartedly,” said Blake, and he was surprised to find the relief with which he heard the words. After all, what was it to him whether little Janie Collinson was happy or not?

“And this man, this man,” went on Collinson in the tones of one but half awake, “this man I brought to my house——” He paused, and Blake took it up.

“This foul-mouthed, God-forsaken brute, whom you took in and sheltered, asking neither whence he came nor where he was going, nor what he was doing, this man sees what you in your single-hearted zeal have overlooked. You've laid him, you and yours, under a heavy obligation. Come, Reverend, let's make a bargain. I'll keep a decent tongue in my head, you'll look at your wife just occasionally—it hurts me to see her watching you, makes me feel a bounder—and together we'll do the best we can to get her and Miss Althea—I guess the Lord reckons her the best of the lot of us—away from this town before White Wolf goes through it.”

“Will White Wolf go through the town?” asked Collinson, still as one awaking from a dream.

“He will, you can stake your immortal soul on that,” said Blake emphatically, and the other never thought to ask him why he was so sure.

“Then—then—we must warn the people and go for——” He looked ahead of him helplessly, as if his thoughts were still drawn towards Tong Chuang.

“We must go for Kiang Fu,” said Blake decisively. “It's a walled city, and they'll defend it or try to make terms.”

“He will not touch us missionaries.”

“He will—he surely will,” asseverated Blake, who had the best of all reasons for thinking that White Wolf was not likely to be merciful to the people who had sheltered him. “I might make terms, but Miss Althea says it is out of the question. You'd rather die than accept life at such a price, and, such being the case, the only thing is to scoot. We can't be lost in the population—at least, your women certainly can't travel far and fast enough. A cart would about finish up your missus, so the only thing is Kiang Fu.”

“But you can?”

“And leave you? I'll see you hanged, drawn, and quartered first. Come along, Reverend. We can't let the grass grow. We must clear this afternoon.”

Janie Collinson left that compound, her first home of her own, with tears in her eyes, a smile upon her lips, and a face from which the wistful look was gone. Blake looked across at Miss Althea and smiled. It was so evident she did not care if all her poor little household goods were burnt and destroyed, and what did she care for the possible wrecking of the Mission? The man she loved so passionately was bending over her tenderly, anxiously, like a lover, making her feel that she was all the world to him, and in her heart she blessed White Wolf and the dire necessity that was driving them out, fleeing for their lives to a walled city.

Only Miss Althea of the three thoroughly grasped the reason why they were so fleeing, only she thoroughly understood that the man they had sheltered was at the bottom of it all, and she busied herself cheerfully about the business of packing the scanty possessions they could take with them, helped Blake in every way, and said not one word of reproach.

“Miss Althea, you're a woman in a thousand,” he said, as he stood by the mule litter in which the two women were going to ride.

They went along slowly to the main road, and by four o'clock in the afternoon the mountains began to rise on either side of them, and the road itself, narrow and winding, was sunk between high banks.

Man of one idea as Collinson was, he had thought of no one but his wife

once Blake's rough speech had waked him to his shortcomings. Blake saw then the truth of his sister's boast. The man had charm.

No more tender, thoughtful husband could be found upon this earth than he who rode a donkey alongside the mule litter, and the dark eyes that looked out from the little freckled face there were so brimming over with happiness that Blake turned his own away. It made him feel lonely to think that never, in all probability, could he make such happiness for any woman. And then he looked at Miss Althea, and she gave a little sigh and a smile.

"And he never forgets," she said. "Get us out of this, if you can, and let them be happy, and the Lord will bless you a thousandfold."

"I doubt the blessing," said Blake, "but I'll do the best I can. I give you my word for that."

"Ah, never doubt the blessing," said the woman who, to all appearance, had got so little out of life; and Blake rode on in front and pondered over it.

The north wind blew cutting and cold. It had snowed heavily a couple of days before, so there was no dust, and the frost held the land in a merciless grip. It was February, but there was no sign of spring in the air as yet.

On they went and on, passing little fields covered in snow and nestling among jagged rocks blackened and charred as if a fire had passed over them. Here and there was a wilted tree, and here and there was a gravestone with a heavily chiselled inscription, and once there was a tablet to the memory of a man who in past ages had mended the road.

At length they found themselves on a narrow track on one side of which was a precipice, on the other side a steep, grey brick wall forty feet high. Ahead the wall came out in a semicircle, and right in the fairway was a gate heavily barred—the wall and West Gate of the city of Kiang Fu.

But why was the gate barred before sundown? Blake looked behind. After him came the mule litter, filling up the roadway; it was impossible to turn without flinging mules and litter down the precipice. Behind was Collinson, and three laden mules in the rear brought up the small possessions of the four foreigners. Why was the gate barred? Was the danger from White Wolf pressing?

Blake raised his voice in a shout, and even as he did so he saw men running along, leaning over the parapet of the wall above his head, and he saw, too, they were armed with old matchlocks and with long spears.

The cold rays of the setting sun lighted up the old grey walls. Here and there were the bare branches of a little shrub growing out of them, and here and there they were uneven where they had been cracked by the rain; but they had been repaired, and the sun-light caught the points of the spears and was reflected on the gun-barrels and on the silver that adorned the

stocks of some of the guns. It lighted up, too, the yellow faces that looked down on the newcomers threateningly.

“*Sha, sha—kill, kill!*” they shouted. “Friend of White Wolf *sha!*”

So his reputation had followed him here, and there was no turning back. There was the mule litter with the women just behind. And then the great gates were flung open, and right in the fairway stood an old cannon. He could see quite plainly the dragons carved all round the muzzle, so close was he; and, worse still, beside it stood a man with a piece of burning rope in his hand. A movement, and the match would be applied to the touch-hole, the whole charge would sweep down the narrow road, and the little company would be swept out of existence: he, Roger Blake who wrote himself down failure, the woman who had succoured him, the girl who was just tasting bliss, the man whose beauty had so struck him—all, all must die.

“I come in peace—I come in peace!” cried Blake, flinging down on the ground his rifle and revolver, and snatching the knife from his boot, he threw it handle forward in front of him, and then raised his hands to show that they were empty. “I come in peace, and the teachers have done naught but good.”

The man who stood there was a soldier of the old sort. He wore a doublet of dark blue embroidered with red characters, and on his head was a blue, folded cloth, while his eyes were shaded from the sun by a sort of lampshade. He bent a little closer to the gun, and Blake could see behind him in the gateway quite a cluster of his fellows, while the walls above were manning rapidly, and the faces that peered over were very threatening.

And yet a temptation came to Blake. Should he surprise them all by slipping round the arc of the gateway and get on into the country beyond? It was well worth the risk. The evening was falling fast, and the chances were the coming night would hide all trace of him. He could join White Wolf, and together they could come back and sack the city and get his little all. The missionaries—his going might precipitate the firing of that gun, and then they would all be killed to a certainty; but if once they passed the gates, his impression was they would be safe enough.

But could they pass the gate? Could they? Anyhow, it was no fault of his if they had not, in the years they had been here, made sufficient impression to be welcomed. His staying or going could not make any difference one way or another. Yet—

“Stay your hand,” he said—and it seemed to him it was not he who spoke, but some other man with whom he had no doings—“stay your hand. I come in peace. Let me and these teachers in, and I pledge you by my

father's grave that I will show you how to keep off White Wolf.

The hand of the old-world soldier with his old-world match moved ever so little from the gun. The westering sun, falling full into the gateway, showed up every little detail—the cracks in the mortar, the wrought-iron hinges of the great doors, the lumbering wooden wheels of the gun-carriage, even the worn footgear of the man beside it, and there was still time to get away—more of a chance now. But even these people upon the walls threatening him with gun and spear could be trusted to keep their word.

“Lo, we have come to help,” he went on. “The cry of the country suffering under White Wolf has reached my ears, and I can give you guns and cartridges—guns such as the foreigners and the great Northern army use. Let us in. If you do not believe, ask the teacher if I do not speak truth.”

A man pressed forward and pushed aside the gunner. Some whisperings of modern equipment had reached him, and he wore an ordinary German khaki cap and khaki jacket, but a silken petticoat was about his nether man.

The way was clear, and he, Blake, had only to stumble round the arc of the wall and roll down where the slope was steepest. He would trust a regiment to shoot from the wall with those guns they had, and he would bet every time on their missing, even if the target were a haystack.

But if he went, what would they do to the mission-aries? Nothing, nothing—surely nothing. He could make it up to them afterwards. The man who had pushed aside the gunner was evidently the Captain of the Guard.

“How can you help?” he asked—“you with your little company?”

“In your city,” said Blake, “I have stored guns and cartridges. Let me in and I will show you. If I speak not truth, you can kill me. Ask the teachers if I did not tell them there were arms stored and hidden in your city. We are but a small company—look for yourselves; but if you let me come in peace, I will surely show you how to arm your men and beat off White Wolf, and the country round Kiang Fu shall have peace, and great will be your glory.”

Still they hesitated. But the match was not near the gun, and he was sure now he could get away. He would go. Why not? Why not? He had made them a fair offer, and they were rejecting it. It was only fair to himself now that he should go.

Althea Trelling slipped down at the back of the foremost mule and, stooping under the shaft, came and joined him.

“Do you want to die?” she cried to the people on the wall—“you and your mothers and your fathers and your little children? If you do not let this man in to get you the arms, you will surely die. I speak truth. Can you stand against White Wolf with that?” —and she pointed with scorn to the

old-world gun and the little company beside it. "Let us in. What can so small a company do against so many? If we speak not truth, can you not kill us?"

And Blake groaned. His little all! His little all! He was to make no terms, and this meant he must start life again penniless here in the heart of China.

He did not even look at Miss Althea as the Captain of the Guard, in his queer rig-out, came forward and looked at them both gravely. Once inside, he might withhold the name of the place where the arms were hidden till he had exacted at least a promise of some small return. He looked back. Decimus Collinson was standing beside the mule litter, holding his wife's hand. Together they were waiting—for life or death? Miss Althea's eyes followed his.

"Your doing," she said. "God bless you!"

And to Blake's unaccustomed eyes came the hot burning of unshed tears.

"Before Born," he said in his best Chinese, turning to the Captain of the Guard, "on the west street of your city, close to the Bell Tower, is the inn of the Heavenly Peace, and there are large packing-cases addressed to 'Bei.' Open and take enough guns and ammunition to fight off White Wolf. They are my sole possessions, and because of my elder sister here, the teacher, I put them freely at your service."

"The Before Born," said the Captain of the Guard, bowing almost to the ground, "is heaven-sent. Enter, then, you and your company," and with a wave of his hand he motioned aside the ancient gun-carriage.

Blake limped forward, and Miss Althea followed in his wake—true Chinese fashion.

He thought she did not understand, but she did.

"The blessing of God was surely upon this city," she said. "When He sent you to our compound."

"Let's hope there's something left over for me," said Roger Blake, Scallawag, "for," he added below his breath, "I surely am a ruined man."

The Dire Peril of Sergeant Sells

THE Night-Owl and Slim Jim and Maddy Slade, to say nothing of the other man, who had stuck up the police magistrate of Barren Plains and taken 400*l.* for his ransom, were coming to the conclusion that he had bought his life too cheaply. Certain it was that since the sticking up of MacDonald there had been no rest for them. They had crossed the border again to their old haunts on the Victorian side, in the mountains about the head-waters of the Murray, but the police were too active for their comfort. It was watch day and night. The wild dogs that had their lairs among the stones and rocks in the hills led a more peaceful life.

“My word,” said Slim Jim, “it was a bad day for us when we stuck up the beak at Barren Plains.”

“He keeps them others hot on our track,” said Maddy thoughtfully.

She was lying at full length along a shelf of rock, staring up at the roof of the cave above her. Her pretty face looked fagged and weary; there were lines in it and dark hollows under the eyes. A hunted life among the hills was no life for a woman, thought Slim Jim pitifully, and now the wind that was rushing down the gully was like a breath from a furnace, and here was all the long hot day to be got through.

“If the traps find me here they'll have to take me,” she said wearily, looking across at her companion. “I'd rather be dead than move a step.”

“Why don't you cut it, Maddy?” he asked. “You ain't as deep in as we are, an' it's a dog's life.”

She smiled faintly, and he went on.

“Surely you ain't stoppin' for Pete—not now?”

“No, I don't believe I'm a-stopping for Pete—not now. I was a blamed fool 'bout him once't, but—but—— Why don't you cut it yourself, Jim?”

“I'm goin' to first chance. Down South Australia way they want farm hands bad, every one on 'em's cut for the goldfields. There won't be many questions asked, you bet, if a chap keeps straight.”

The woman—she was but a girl in years, though the hard life had set its seal on her face—turned and looked at him wistfully.

Once not so very long ago he had been at her beck and call; it was for her sake he was an outlaw with a price upon his head. Then, when she cared so little, she had been all in all to him and her wish was his law, but now—now—when she was weary and worn out, when it was growing upon her that Slim Jim was her very life, he talked calmly of leaving her, leaving her to such a life.

She sighed and clasped her hands together. No woman likes to give

herself away, not even a poor outcast such as this, the worn and faded mistress of the Night-Owl, worn and faded before she was twenty.

Slim Jim heard the sigh. "O Maddy!" he said with a sudden burst of passion, "and it might have been so different!"

She put her hands before her face and burst into tears. "It was my fault," she moaned, "mine—mine. God! it was my fault. I brought you to this, an' what'll I do without you?"

He put out his hand and touched hers gently. "It's a dog's life, Maddy," he said. "I've been stoppin' on 'cos I thought I helped you some."

"You did, you did," she sobbed; "O my God! you do. How'll I do without you?"

"Maddy, I can't stop much longer. The Night-Owl an' me—if he don't kill me, I'll kill him an' be hanged for it. And, Maddy, you're the Night-Owl's girl, you know."

She drew herself to a sitting posture, and the colour crept slowly to her cheeks. "Not now," she said, "not now. He's dead sick of me this long while—an'—an'—there's a woman down on the Buckland."

"O Maddy! Poor girl!"

"No, no, I'm glad, I'm that thankful. Jim, I was mad, I think, once't, an' now I hate him."

Slim Jim turned away with a sigh. If she had spoiled his life she had spoiled her own, but oh the pity of it! And he could not—no, he could not—take the Night-Owl's leavings.

"Don't mind me, Jim," said Maddy, quietly wiping her eyes and lying back on her earthy couch. "I'm all right. I can take care of myself, but you cut, first chance. You've been better to me than any man in the world, and I'm that thankful I can't tell you. Now you look out for yourself an' cut."

"Who's goin' to cut?" asked a red-headed man, coming into the cave from outside. "Can't cut far with a fire like this."

"Fire, Pete!" Maddy sat up. "Is there a fire?"

"Is there a fire?" jeered the Night-Owl. "Can't you smell it? The biggest bush fire since the country was settled, an' I guess I've done for the trap. Where's Blue Charlie?"

Maddy looked round carelessly. "I'm sure I don't know. He ain't been here this long while."

"Well, if he gets caught in the fire 'tain't no fault of mine. He's a blasted idiot if he can't look out for himself."

In truth, though it was not ten o'clock in the morning, it was growing quite dark. The sun was visible as a round red ball hanging in the dense pall of smoke, the wind roared hot and horrible down the gully, and on its breath came borne sheets of bark and burning branches and leaves. Only

dimly through the driving smoke could they see the other side of the gully; the mountain at its head was invisible, and so was its mouth, hidden by the clouds of driving smoke.

Maddy looked out and drew in a mouthful of smoke that made her choke.

The Night-Owl laughed and gave her a push, which sent her stumbling across to her own platform again.

“Oh, Charlie will be killed!” she cried.

“Serve 'im right, too,” said the Night-Owl; “but I guess he's pretty tough. I heard you talkin' 'bout cuttin'. I guess you'd better. I'm goin' to cut myself now. I guess I've made things too hot to hold us any longer.”

Maddy looked across wearily at Slim Jim. What new villainy was this? “What've you done, Pete?” she asked.

“It's the sergeant this time,” chuckled Pete. “Sergeant Sells himself. I guess his goose is about cooked.”

“Have you killed him?”

“Killed him? D—— your eyes, you bet the Night-Owl can go one better'n that.”

“What have you done with him then?” asked Slim Jim, rising to his feet.

There was a threatening look in his eyes, and the Night-Owl laid his hand on his pistols.

“Look here, young feller, none o' that now. You leave the trap an' me to work it out our own way.”

“What did you do to him?”

“Not much. Guess his horse had most to do with it. I was comin' down by Derwent Jack's when I see suthin' on the ground, an' I'm blest if it warn't Sergeant Sells. His horse had chucked him an' broke his leg, so he said, an' he oughter know. It had left for home an' he was lyin' there.”

“Pete, what did you do?” asked the woman breathlessly.

“Do? I'd a long score agin' that sergeant. I sorter guessed he couldn't make for home with one leg, but just to make sure I tipped a log that was handy on to him. He's right in the track of the fire; he'll shrivel, sure enough.”

Slim Jim rose up and caught him by the throat. “They say you're the devil's own,” he said, “and I b'lieve you are.”

He swayed him backwards and forwards for a moment, then he flung him down.

“Where? Derwent Jack's? Along the track? It's mighty lonely at any time. An' the fire's comin' right down along it. I'll have to help him if I die for it.”

“Do,” snarled the bushranger on the ground; “just do, an' the traps'll be comin' after his d——d nag, an' they'll ketch you friskin' along an' string you up for aidin' an' abettin', if they don't shoot on sight.”

"I'll have to risk it," said Slim Jim.

"An' the fire'll ketch you," went on the other. "He's likely roast meat by now. An' a d——d good riddance to the pair of you."

But Slim Jim was outside and into the cave where they kept the horses, with the girl beside him.

"O Jim, take care of yourself!"

"Yes, yes,"

"An' if you can save the sergeant, if it ain't too late, likely he'll be able to help you out this."

"I dunno."

Ordinary outsiders had not much faith in the kindness of the police in those days. What chance would a bushranger have?

He was mounted now on the best of the three horses the little hollow in the hills contained.

"Look here, Maddy, I've washed my hands of the gang. I believe Blue Charlie's cut. We must leave the Night-Owl to himself. I'll do the best I can for the sergeant, an' then I'll come back here an' see what I can do for you. I won't desert you, my girl. You wait here for a bit an' I'll turn up as soon as I can."

It was rough work clambering down the hillside, and the pungent smoke was in his nostrils and blinding his eyes; the way was steep and rocky too, but the active little horse was surefooted as a cat, and she slipped and slid and scrambled down that hillside in the murky darkness in a way that astonished Slim Jim himself. Down this hill, up the next, and down its rocky side again among the tea-tree and native cherry and golden wattle, and there at the bottom of the gully lay the track which ran past Derwent Jack's, four miles away. Only four miles, but the wind was blowing a hurricane; it was dark as night almost now, and the round red globe that hung in the north but faintly illumined the pall that spread over the earth. Slim Jim was up on top of the ridge now, and the gully beneath on either hand was hidden in rolling smoke. He paused to give his mare breathing space, and he listened intently. There was the wind howling, there was the swish and moan of it as it swept through the tree-tops, and was it fancy that above the howling of the blast he could hear the crackling of the flames?

Hardly. Some leaves all alight swept out of the burning darkness, into which he must force the mare, and she started back and snorted in affright. Jim stopped. Should he go on? Was it not certain death? Death sure and horrible. It would do Sergeant Sells little good if he too died just because the Night-Owl had been a fiend incarnate. Some time the searchers would find the two blackened corpses, and if they knew who he was they would never guess the errand on which he had come. Better turn back now, now

while there was yet time. He had promised to take care of Maddy; he would turn back and join her, and they two could make their escape to South Australia. After this fire the confusion would be so great that they might easily slip away unnoticed, and once there—— Ah, once there! What was Maddy to him, what could she ever be to him?—Maddy—Maddy, whom he remembered so bright and confident and lovable only eighteen months ago, and now—now she was just the cast-off mistress of the Night-Owl, a man who was not only a bushranger and an outlaw—he was that himself—but at least his hands were clean. He had killed a trap, certainly, but that was in the heat of battle; he had not stained his hands with blood since, and to be mixed up with him in a thing that was worse than the most cold-blooded murder he had ever heard of! No, if it cost him his life he would save Sergeant Sells, and if he too died in the effort—well, what matter? There was not much to live for.

His eyes were streaming with tears now; the acrid smoke made them smart. It got into his lungs and brought on a paroxysm of coughing; the strong wind kept pushing him back, urging him, it seemed, away from the danger it was sweeping down on him so fast.

There was a red glow in the sky now, and it was all he could do to force his horse forward; she shrank and shivered and backed till he was obliged to dismount and lead her. And all the while it seemed to him the face of Maddy Slade went on before him—not Maddy, hollow-eyed and weary, as he had left her, but Maddy, bright, sparkling and roguish, with just a touch of softness in her bright dark eyes—Maddy as she was once, before sorrow had come upon her—Maddy as she might be again if they came out of this with honour, if they saved the sergeant, and—— “Woa, good horse, come on, come on. We're quite close now—the smoke is in your eyes and in your nostrils—it is nothing, nothing—the lighted leaves that fall on you are like red-hot coals. It is nothing, nothing; they hardly leave a mark, and once we have found him we race for safety.”

There was an ominous glow now on the dark cloud right ahead, and on either side it was dark, a hot darkness that might be felt. He knew he must turn soon, but it must be somewhere hereabouts, and he tied his neckerchief over the mare's eyes, pulled his hat down over his own, and coo-eyed at the top of his voice.

And the man he was looking for was within ten yards of him. The Night-Owl had not thought it necessary to move him out of the track; who was likely to come along there when all the homesteads in the countryside were fighting for existence? Sergeant Sells realised this thoroughly. He lay there on his back on the hard ground and listened to the howling of the wind, and watched the smoke rushing thicker and thicker across the heavens. The

pain of his broken leg pinned down by the heavy log seemed to dull his faculties, and for a little he could think of nothing else but the pain and how he was to bear it. He raised himself on his elbow and tried to push at the log, and then fell back with a groan. He might as well have tried to push the mountain itself. If he only had a pistol and could die—die now and end it all. It was not death he feared, only that it should come in this horrible form. The world knew well enough his life had been a dead failure, but, O God! what agony this was! If he could only die now. The fire was coming quickly, the smoke grew thicker and thicker; it was dark up above now, but here close to the ground where he lay the air was purer than anywhere else. He was not likely to suffocate till the flames were right upon him. The Night-Owl—God! he was a beast of prey—a beast—no, no beast could have thought of a death so lingering and horrible. And the pain in his leg grew worse and worse, but he knew—he knew it would not kill him.

He looked up above him, and dimly through the gloom he could see the branches of the great gum trees bending before the wild wind. The sun was a bright crimson ball at first, then the clouds drifted across (Unclear:)it and dimmed it to the colour of blood, and then—gradually—gradually it faded out till it was a faint blotch on the dark grey enveloping clouds, and a glow that was not the sun began spreading and spreading on either hand.

It was coming, it was coming. He put his hands behind his head and raised himself up to look, though the pain in his leg was agonising. This death would be more painful and horrible still. The trees seemed to burst into little flashes of light, as one may see the prisoned gas in a coal fire do. It was come then, it was come. He fell back and closed his eyes. If that fiend had only left him his pistols! The place was like an oven, but he could not die yet for all his pain; not till it was a burning, fiery furnace would his end come.

What was that? God! Through the smoke and murk it came, and it sounded like a coo-ey. He started up, and the wrench he gave his leg laid him flat again.

Who could possibly be coo-eying here? No one but the Night-Owl knew of his dilemma, and, much as he might wish to gloat over his helplessness, he would not be the man to put his life in danger to do it, and anyone coo-eying was in imminent danger of his life. Already the fire was sweeping across the country. It was the howling of the wind, or he was getting light-headed. Light-headed, thank God!

“My God!” he prayed, “do this thing for me, this thing. Put me out of my misery quick; make me light-headed that I may not know.”

Then there came another coo-ey, long-drawn, clear, above the howling

wind and the moaning branches and the crackling of the fire, and close beside him— “Coo-o-o-ey!”

His lips were parched and dry, and his tongue felt too large for his mouth. Was he light-headed? Was God answering his prayer? Then, in spite of the pain it caused him, he raised himself on his elbows and answered back with another long-drawn-out coo-ey. And he fell back cursing himself for a fool. Who could it be but the Night-Owl coming to gloat over him?

He put his arm across his face and wiped the sweat away with his sleeve. It could be but the Night-Owl. Then out of the heavy smoke wreaths— there were little dancing flames above his head—there stepped a man with his hand before his face, and behind him came a horse. And the man stooped over him and peered into his face with bleared, smoke-reddened eyes.

“Sergeant Sells?”

“Yes,” he said, feeling like one speaking in a dream, “but it’ll be all up with both of us soon. Who are you? Better clear out, young fellow, while you can.”

“I came for you,” said Slim Jim laconically. “Hold the mare,” and he put the reins into his hands, “hold her for all you’re worth. She’s all we have to depend on now.”

Sells gripped the reins mechanically, and the mare stood quietly enough now that her eyes were bandaged. She pawed the earth a little, but she did not offer to break away.

Slim Jim caught the end of the log that was across the sergeant’s knees. It was not very heavy for him standing in an upright position, though it had served effectually to prison Sells; but then his leg was broken, and it is doubtful if he could have gone far even if he had been free. One heave and it was crashing back among the undergrowth that seemed on the point of breaking into a blaze.

Slim Jim raised the fallen man’s head in his arms.

“Now I’ll hurt you, I’m afraid. Sing out when you can’t stand it any longer. Put your arm round my neck. That’s right. We haven’t a second to spare. I ain’t sure that we’ll get through now!”

“Give me your pistol, man, and clear out,” said the trooper.

Jim laughed grimly as he made a desperate effort to hoist the helpless man into the saddle.

“None of that now,” he said with an oath. “Nancy an’ me here, we’re riskin’ our lives to get you safe outer this, an’ you’ve got to do your part. They’ll be hangin’ me for murder else.”

It was no easy matter to get him into the saddle. He set his teeth hard and

gripped Slim Jim's shoulder with one hand, while with the other he caught the pommel of the saddle; but the mare started back in affright, and he fell and could not repress a groan. He began to feel faint and sick with pain now, but the laboured breathing of his companion served to help him to keep his senses. He could not, he must not fail this man who had come to him in his direst need. If the trooper was nearly done for, the sweat was running down Slim Jim's face in little streams before he was seated swaying in the saddle.

Jim put his flask to his lips.

“Here, man, take a sip. It'll hearten you up.”

The sergeant drank and handed it back gratefully.

“Get up behind me, James Brock.”

Jim started. He had not heard his own name for many a long day.

“That's all right, sergeant,” he said. “I'm goin' to lead the mare. She'll go best that way. She's pretty nigh lost her senses through fear, poor beast.”

What a ride it was! Jim caught the mare's headstall and raced along before the wind as hard as he could go. All the sick man behind him could do was to clutch at the saddle and hold on as well as he could. The fire was up with them, flying along through the tree-tops; it could not be long before the scrub below ignited, and then what would their lives be worth? “Come on, good mare, come on.” The smoke seemed stupefying him, weighing him down; could he, could he, keep on? He looked back ever and again at the swaying figure in the dim haze behind him; as long as he was there he *must* keep on—both their lives depended on him, and Maddy's life and happiness, too, it seemed. He felt a sharp, stinging pain in his shoulder, and before he could lift a hand the man behind had stretched forward and extinguished the fire. Another—and that was out —and another. It could not last long. The trooper was not fit to do it; another and he would topple over, and his labour would be all in vain, for he was done now, and knew well enough he would never be able to put him in the saddle again once he fell out.

“Blast you!” he said angrily, as the sergeant very helplessly put out his shirt for the fourth time, “can't you let a fellow burn if he wants to? You sit in the saddle, and be d—d to you!”

They were on the top of the rise now, and the air was a little clearer, and Slim Jim paused to try and get breath.

Behind them the hill seemed a very sea of fire, and it was stretching out wide arms of smoke and flame to encircle them.

“Sergeant,” said Slim Jim bitterly, “I guess we're done. I don't see you're a crack better off than when I found you. I'm blamed if we can get out of this.”

The trooper put a heavy hand on his shoulder.

“A thousand times better off if we die now! A man named Robinson, one of Selby's shepherds, had a hut hereabouts. Could we reach it?”

“Where's the good? He's got a wife an' a kid—”

“There's a water-hole there,” gasped the sergeant.

“Right you are,” cried Jim cheerfully. He had actually forgotten all about that water-hole.

They turned off the broad track, and it was a wild scramble through the half-mile of scrub that lay between it and Robinson's clearing. Jim's heart sank more than once. It was a small point—suppose they missed it? Then, indeed, they might throw up their hands, for when this scrub caught, as catch it would in a very few minutes—it was alight already in several places—there would be no hope for them if they were in it.

And then, just as he was giving up hope, the sergeant bent over and gasped faintly, “A little to the left, a little to the left,” and he turned the mare's head and saw they were on the edge of the clearing. Not before it was time, for the trooper had sunk down helpless to the ground.

It was such a tiny clearing, and the small house alongside a very shrunken water-hole was just dimly visible through the grey haze.

A man started up, and without a word helped Jim to carry his companion to the water.

“Put him in the water, it ain't too deep; my missus'll do what she can for him. Help us save the shanty, mate.”

And they saved it.

It was a terrible, wearing, cruel fight, but at four o'clock that afternoon, when the rain came down in torrents, the little home was still safe; the trooper was delirious, and the weary woman, who had put her baby in a hole scooped in the ground and covered it with a wet sack while she worked with the men, turned and caught Jim's hand and kissed his face with a passion of weeping.

“You come straight from heaven, I do b'lieve,” she sobbed. “The good God sent you.” And the man wrung his hand.

“Mate, mate, I b'lieve the missus is right. I never could ha' done it alone.”

Jim broke into a hoarse burst of laughter. His eyes were nearly burnt out of his head; his hair was singed and his beard gone.

“D'ye know who I am?” he cried; “when you do you won't say much for me. I'm Slim Jim, the bushranger. Now I must be off. Let 'em know at the camp, mate, about the sergeant, will you? An' don't let up on me for a bit. I want to cut an' start afresh. Do that for me, mate, will you? The sergeant, he won't be able to tell for a day or two.”

The other man wrung his hand again heartily.

“God be with you, Slim Jim!” called out the woman as he rode away through the desolate, blackened country, through the pouring rain; and her blessing seemed to linger with him as he reached the cave and saw Maddy's anxious face looking out for him.

“We're goin' to start afresh, Maddy,” he said gently. “We'll slip away across the hills to-morrow an' start afresh. I guess I've earned it.”

It was January '98, the height of the cruel hot summer, and the fire was sweeping down through the long dry grass on to the homestead—the great homestead that was like a township, owned by Block & Sons.

Such a fight as they had for it, but the buildings and the garnered harvests were saved, and the old man and his stalwart sons and grandsons trooped into the big dining-hall, where grandma, with snow-white hair and bright, sparkling, roguish black eyes, waited for them at the head of the table.

“Twas the worst fire I've seen,” said her eldest son, throwing down his hat and mopping his hot face.

She looked across at her husband.

He smiled into her eyes kindly.

“Twasn't near so bad, Maddy, as the fire that gave the sergeant such a narrow squeak for his life near Deadman's there, way back in the 'fifties.”

A Good Samaritan

THEY talk about the West Coast now; but, my word, they ought to have seen it before they found gold and silver and tin there, and the Government of Tasmania was just beginning to wake up to the fact that there was unexplored, unexploited land there that possibly might, some day, be valuable. I was in the Lands Department then. No, I'm not now. I tried to do my duty, and the man who tried to do his duty in those days ended by being sacked, and I was sacked in the end. For my own good, no doubt; but that's quite another story. What I was going to tell you was of the occasion on which I played Good Samaritan. It sounds beautiful—yes, I admit, it sounds beautiful; but somehow, like one's duty to the Lands Department of Tasmania in the old days, it didn't work out properly.

Well, I was chief surveyor at Scarf, on the West Coast. Scarf wasn't a town, it wasn't even a township. I don't know that you'd even have dignified it by the name of hamlet. It was in my day just two or three shacks set at the head of what in Norway would be called a fiord, and in Tasmania we didn't give any particular name to at all. A little steamer came in about once a fortnight and tied up to the frail little pier, and brought stores round from Hobart, and if it was very rough—well she didn't come, and we made out as best we could without. We were the Government Surveyor and his party, I being the surveyor in charge, with a couple of young assistants and a few men under me, chainmen, storemen, a cook and a couple of boys. We were the aristocracy of the place, and the rest of the society was made up of the few settlers dotted about inland. I suppose now that the land was being surveyed for their benefit, but neither I nor they thought so then. Our chief use in their eyes was as lenders of tools. Hammers and axes were greatly in request. I've known a man walk ten miles to borrow an adze, and every man who had an axe sharpened it on the Government grindstone. As I say, they didn't care a mite about the opening up of the country, but they did take a very great interest in the Government tools.

It was wild country: steep hills densely timbered, scrub it would take you a day to push forward a mile in, and a rainfall they measured by the yard. They had a certain wild grandeur of their own, those mist-covered hills; but in those days I don't know that I appreciated it, and I remember seeing anything but beauty in them when one wet day in July I found I had to get twenty miles back to a place they called King to interview a subordinate of mine who was coming down another fifteen miles to meet me and confer on some question connected with a corduroy road.

You don't know anything about corduroy roads in England, I am told. Really, I don't know that you are any losers. But in those days about Scarf, when we had any roads at all, they were mostly corduroy. A feminine friend of mine tells me she only knows corduroy velvet, and, after all, corduroy velvet is very like a corduroy road in miniature. To make a corduroy road—you can only do it in heavily timbered country—you chop down the trees that stand in the way, cut them into the lengths you want, and lay them, side by side, filling up the interstices with mud, earth, stones, sand, and smaller branches, in fact anything you can lay hold of that you think will make that road durable and substantial, and when you've finished travelling over it would make angels weep.

It was a corduroy road up to King; also since it was July and Scarf on the West Coast, it is hardly necessary to say it was raining like the very dickens. The little creeks coming down from the hills were rushing streams, the trees were shrouded in mist, so were the hill-tops, and the road was a yellow quagmire. However, the weather wasn't like to clear, so I started with my little swag on my back, for there was no other mode of progression possible in those days than by Shank's pony.

The road to King was up-hill, also it lay at the bottom of two slopes, so that it formed a very natural and convenient watercourse for all the rain that fell on those hills. And if a corduroy road is bad when it is dry, it is the very devil and all when it is kneedeep in a sort of stiff, sticky, gluey material that is neither honest earth nor water. But it had to be faced, so up I went. Up, and up, and up. Gentle Annie, they called it. There's always a Gentle Annie among those hills, simply because it's not quite as steep and impossible and back-breaking as those around.

Well, the scrub on either side was dense, and the trees stood tall and close like serried giants. In between was fern and creeper, supple Jack and tea-tree, but you could see no great distance anywhere; it was all blotted out by the mist and rain.

When I had walked, I suppose, a good five miles, and was warm, not to say hot, with the exertion, I suddenly saw ahead of me out on the road the legs of a man. There was a body attached, of course, but that was hidden by the thick scrub he was leaning up against. Now, I knew a man must be pretty well petered out when he sat down to rest in that mud in that soaking rain, and when I came up I found I was right.

He was a man I didn't know at all. He'd probably come in from out back for stores, for the steamer was at the pier, and he leaned back against the scrub so wearily that he never raised his eyes when I came up, though, heaven knows, travellers were few and far between on the road to King.

“Hallo, mate!”

“Hallo!” answered the man grudgingly and unwillingly.

“Petered out?”

“No,” in a mind-your-own-business sort of tone. But I had come up Gentle Annie with only my little swag on my back, and I saw he had a great pack.

“You've got a pretty heavy load.”

“No”—he relented a little—“it's nothen when you're used to it.”

“I don't know. Coming up Gentle Annie's no joke. Let's see what you have got.”

He didn't seem to like it, but my intentions were good, and I looked.

Well, he had thirty pounds of flour, several tins of preserved meat, a heap of other odds and ends, and of all things in this wicked world to be hauling up Gentle Annie—a grindstone.

I expressed my surprise in no measured terms.

“You're not bein' asked to carry it,” said he ungraciously.

No, I wasn't, but I didn't see quite how I was to let him toil on under such a load and go light myself.

“What in heaven's name do you want a grindstone for?” I asked, aggrieved that he should have put me in such a predicament. “There's the Government one at Scarf.”

Then it was he who was aggrieved.

“Yes, there is,” said he, “and that little”—and here he made some very uncomplimentary remarks upon my personal appearance which I will not quote because they were not true—“keeps the key of the store. It's easier to get into heaven than to get at the Government grindstone”—I assure my readers that that also was untrue. I only exercised reasonable care. “Besides, what's the good of a grindstone at Scarf when I quambly twenty mile away in the forest. Reason enough for hawkin' up a grindstone. An' I ain't askin' you to carry it.”

That was just my grievance. Sitting there tired out with thirty pounds of flour and other odds and ends as well as the grindstone, he certainly was asking me to carry something, and I found the corduroy road bad enough when I humped my own little swag.

“Look here, I'll give you a hand when you're rested.”

“I ain't askin' you,” he said again, turning away ungraciously.

“Nonsense. What shall I take—the flour or the grindstone?”

He looked at me a little scornfully.

“You ain't up to it.”

That settled the matter. I took the grindstone.

Now a grindstone is an awkward thing to carry at any time; up a corduroy road knee-deep in sticky mud, a road that goes for ever upwards,

it is almost an impossible thing. In five minutes I had repented, in ten I was in sympathetic accord with those much-maligned men, the Priest and the Levite; but, of course, I said nothing. I had undertaken to carry that grindstone, and carry it I had to. It would have been humiliating to give in now.

I had slung it over my shoulder, and as I quelched forward into the mud it hit and hit hard the top of my shoulder; then as I drew my leg out of the sticky mess, it fell back and hit my back—hit it just a little harder, for it took a certain amount of energy to get out of the mud. When it seemed to me that a raw hole had been worked in my back I put my left hand behind to catch it, and when that was so bruised and sore I could stand it no longer, I put my right. Oh, that was a journey! It was raining, and it was cold, but the sweat poured off my face and ran into my eyes, and, let me tell you, sweat in your eyes stings. Squish, squash! Every step was an effort; the weight made the mud work into my boots through the laces, and there were all sorts of stones and sand in that mud. I ached in every bone, I was bruised all over, I could have fallen down by the wayside in the mud panting for breath; but the one thing I could not do was to give up that grindstone. Partly I pitied the poor beggar who would have to carry it, and partly I could not own myself beaten; but I did consider once when we stopped and boiled a billyful of tea—mine—whether I would have one of those solid haloes or one of those streaky things that go off into nothingness. I decided in favour of the streaky ones. I had had enough of round solids with that grindstone for the remainder of my natural life. And when we went on again— well, I consider I did my share of purgatory on that corduroy road to King. As for my friend, he was a man of magnificent silences. He plodded on more as if he were conferring a favour on me than I on him.

I was just about played out, wondering how I could best break it to him and save my own dignity, that I did not intend to carry that blamed thing one yard farther, when we came to a narrow track through the bush and my companion stopped dead.

He pointed his thumb over his shoulder.

“That's my way, mate. I guess you're going to King.”

I said nothing. I didn't ask his name or where he was going to, or what he was, or where he dwelt. I simply handed over that grindstone in silence. He took it in silence without even a word of thanks, and I watched him go up the narrow track between the tall trees in the pouring rain. When he had disappeared I sat down—in the mud—stretched out my arms, and relieved my feelings. Why cuss words do that I can't say, but they do, or rather they did on the West Coast in those days. Then I resumed my weary tramp to

King and got there just before nightfall.

My subordinate wasn't there. For that matter nobody was there. King was just a little plateau in the surrounding mountains where we expected a town to spring up in time, but, as yet, no one had put up so much as a hut. I didn't see even a native bear, and I'd lost my matches. I remembered I'd a box when we boiled our tea, and I remembered putting them down on a log and looking for them when we got up to go on, and, as they weren't there, thinking I had put them in my pocket. Now I knew my grumpy companion must have pocketed them. Anyhow, here was I, worn out, miles from anywhere, the rain coming down as steadily as ever, and without the where-withal to light a fire. Once more I realised how wise and farseeing were the Priest and the Levite, and I arranged a piece of bark against a tree trunk and, wet, stiff, and weary, spent the night there.

Next day I went back. It isn't quite as bad going down a corduroy road as climbing up it; but it's pretty bad, especially when your back and arms are stiff and bruised, and your feet are worked raw with sand and gravel. So it took me the best part of the next day to reach Scarf.

We didn't live luxuriously in those days, but I did raise a man to cook me an evening meal and get me some hot water to bathe my sore feet in before I turned in. Just as I was thinking of the blankets my headsman appeared on the scene looking a little upset.

"Look here, boss," said he, "the Government store's been broken into."

It was annoying, but I could only ask "When?"

"I don't know. I've got the key, and I haven't been asked for anything since the day before yesterday. It must have been last night or the night before, I guess. Some of them riff-raff down to meet the steamer."

"Anything gone?" After all there wasn't anything of any great value in the place.

"I can't seem to miss anything but the grindstone. That's clean gone."

"Great Scot!" I knew then that for ten weary miles I had carried my own grindstone away from its happy home; that if I had only taken the trouble to look at it I might have seen the Government arrow upon it, and—well that's why I swore off playing the Good Samaritan for many a long day; and as for haloes— I never look at a stained-glass window but I remember how I toiled up that corduroy road and at every step my own grindstone hit me and hit me hard in the back.

The Mate's Salvage

SO low was the stern that every wave carried the boat high above it. Every second they expected to see the *Peaceful Hind* go, and yet there was one man still on board. He stood there on the half round, clinging to the poop railing, as if he meditated climbing down that way. Tom Curtis, first mate, and in command of the boat, chafed and cursed. They were risking their lives for this man—this man who had rushed below, been forgotten, and turned up at the last moment. The men were impatient. It was not fair.

“It's only Pedro; he went back for his crucifix,” said the carpenter. “Let him drown. It ain't worth riskin' things for a bloomin' Dago.”

“Jump,” ordered Curtis, “jump! It's your only chance.”

And then the wretched man jumped.

“Blow my rags!” yelled the carpenter. “She's on top of us! Back, back!”

The ship seemed to give a long sigh, like a living thing in pain. The man struck the water with a splash close beside the boat, and the mate reached out over the gunwale till he was all but within reach. In the murk and darkness he could just dimly see him, a smudge against the white foam.

“Give way, men!” he shouted, thinking only for the moment of the man struggling for life among those waves. But he might have saved his breath, for the men took no notice of the order. Their own straits were too desperate. Luckily, the send of the wave carried the boat almost on top of the unfortunate Dago, and Curtis got his hand under the collar of his oilskins.

“Back, back all!” he yelled.

“Back like blazes!” cried the carpenter, and he seized stroke's oar and pulled with all his might.

It was a terrible strain. The sea tore at the heavy man in oilskins, and it seemed to the mate that he must leave go or be himself pulled from the boat. None of the men gave any heed. All their thought, naturally enough, was to get away from the sinking ship. To be caught in the suction was death to all of them. Should he let go? What was this man? A miserable Dago, who had risked all their lives by lingering—an idle shirker, drunken ashore, next to useless at sea. What was the good of giving up everything for him— all hope of life, all thought of seeing again the wife who waited for him at home? And yet, because we are all better than we know ourselves, he hung on. He would give the man another minute's chance for his life. Presently his numbing fingers must loose their hold, or he himself be drawn overboard.

In his ears rang a dull explosion. The *Peaceful Hind* chucked her bows in

the air and went down by the stern, the imprisoned air under the hatches blowing them off to get free. There was a terrible swirl, the boat swung round, striking the floating wreckage sharply, the men backed, and for the moment Curtis thought all was over with them. He shut his eyes and gave up hope, but his fingers still clutched at the oilskin collar. He made one more effort, and, putting out all his strength, hauled the drowning man to the gunwale. Bow woke to the situation, let his oar swing fore and aft, and hauled him in.

“You're the mate's salvage,” he gasped, shoving the shivering, wet heap on to the bottom boards of the boat. “I guess you ain't worth it.”

Tom Curtis drew a long, shuddering sigh of relief. There was not much to choose between a boat adrift in the South Seas on a bitter night and the sea itself—possibly the sea might be more peaceful—but at least he had the satisfaction of knowing he had not failed. The *Peaceful Hind* had just ended her career against an iceberg, and here he was in command of the surviving boat, afloat, certainly, but leaking like a sieve, with the men pulling for dear life. He wondered at the feeling of satisfaction he experienced in hauling this last man on board.

The man himself sat huddled up against his knees muttering, and he saw that he was telling his beads.

“Oh, stow that!” said the carpenter roughly. “Riskin' our blessed necks for that there bloomin' crucifix of yourn! Here, chuck it!” and he reached over and would have snatched the rosary from the Dago's trembling hands.

“*Madre de Dios!*” he shrieked.

“Let him alone,” said Curtis sharply. “I risked more than you, and we're all right now.”

He could have laughed when he said it. All right! The moon had set, and it was black as pitch, with gusty squalls heavily laden with snow coming up from windward. There was nothing to do but to keep the boat's head to sea and wait for daylight. And it was so cold—so bitter cold. He had thought it cold keeping watch on deck a little over three hours ago—three hours that seemed to have been about a hundred years long—but it was midsummer heat compared to this. The wind blew steadily from the south, and the sky gradually cleared. One by one the brilliant constellations of the southern heavens stood out in the dark sky, clear and bright and cold, and their light was like sharp steel, so keen was it. It was a long night—a cruel, long night.

The more he thought, the more Curtis realised how hopeless was their state. He tried crouching there under the thwarts to sum up their chances—their very pitiful chances.

They had biscuits and water, but how long could men last on biscuits and

water in such cold?

“Do you think we have any chance, sir?” asked Dixon, the stalwart young apprentice, who crouched beside him.

“Oh yes, my lad!” He could not die—he would not die—with his wife waiting for him at home. “We’re right in the track of ships.”

“Three weeks since we seen a sail,” said the carpenter.

“An’ der weder dat dick,” said Muntz, the Dutch whaler, “ve ain’t seen der old ’ooker’s bows most of der time.”

“Let alone it’s bein’ dark sixteen hours outer the twenty-four,” said the carpenter, with relentless accuracy. “How far off are we from the land, sir?”

“A hundred south of the Horn, I guess, there or thereabouts.” But he knew that he was not very sure.

“We’ve got to be picked up,” said the man with conviction. “ ’Tain’t no good makin’ for the land. I’ve seen it. Last v’yage but two I was off the Horn, an’ a dreary, God-forsaken hole it is. There ain’t enough shelter for a louse, let alone a human being.”

And Curtis, too, had seen the Horn looming up out of the eternal mists which surround it, and he agreed there was not much hope there. Their slender chance lay in passing ships, and, as the carpenter said, they had not sighted a ship for three weeks—and five days, the mate might have added.

But no one knew better than he the uselessness of looking on the black side, and presently he got the boat before the wind, and was shaping a course north by west. With reluctance he took off his oilskin, and with still greater reluctance he induced three of the men to part with theirs, and, hitching them all together, lashed them to the boat-hook for a yard, tossed up a spare oar for a mast, and, as the wind filled the improvised sail, all the men save two, who were still at the oars, were able to come aft and huddle together in the stern.

The boat tore through the water. The big waves rose up behind them, apparently ready to engulf them; but each carried them on its crest into the trough of the sea, and then the next one, just as threatening, would take its place. Dark as it was, those racing waves tired Curtis’s eyes. The sob, sob of the water against the side of the boat reminded him of a woman crying—of Unity, his wife, sobbing and clinging round his neck when they parted. And to think of her then seemed more than he could bear—a helpless woman, with a child in her arms, left to battle with the world alone. The thought added a fresh bitterness to the biting wind—it deepened the darkness.

By and by the men asked for tucker. It was more a demand than a request, and Curtis served out a biscuit apiece, and declined to give them

any more. They grumbled, but they gave way, and after that slight meal there was nothing to be done. The night was interminable. After what seemed like ages, Dixon, who had dropped asleep, awoke, and suggested he should take the tiller; and the mate accepted gratefully, and, resigning command to the lad, he slipped to the bottom of the boat, and, before he could have believed it possible, was oblivious to all his surroundings.

When he awoke, the dawn, dark and lowering, but still daylight, had come. There was a faint gleam of light in the north-east—the rising sun—and he knew it must be somewhere about nine o'clock in the morning. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and saw that the men were just finishing off another scanty meal.

“They would have it, sir,” said Dixon apologetically.

He looked round on their tired faces—some of them looked threatening—on the dull, leaden waves, rising now high above the little boat, now seeming to fall away from it, leaving them on the brink of a dark precipice. He saw the following birds riding so easily and so lightly on those waves, and the prospect was so drearily hopeless he would gladly have closed his eyes again. Oh, Unity, Unity! Oh, dear wife! He had been in straits before, but surely never in such desperate straits as this. Oh, little wife!

“Tucker, Mr Curtis,” said Dixon, and tossed him a biscuit.

It fell short, and the carpenter caught it. The mate held out his hand, but the man only nodded his head and began cramming it into his mouth.

“Hand over that biscuit, Harding!” he said, with an angry oath.

“You just hand over them tins,” said the man, with his mouth full. “We ain't a-goin' to starve no longer. We're a-gettin' to the Horn at the rate of knots.”

“You said yourself, Harding,” said the mate, putting constraint upon himself, “it wasn't any good looking for food or shelter there.”

Harding did not answer, but the Dutchman next him did.

“Ve got nodings of a schance,” he said, “and I vote ve has a blow-out before ve goes unter.”

“Yes, yes,” one or two others joined in; “we'll have a blow-out, for once in a way. There ain't no bloomin' Shippin' Act here.”

“Men—” began the mate sternly.

“Look here, mister,” said the carpenter, “you ain't any better than we are here, an' we don't see starvin' on a biscuit apiece an' a teaspoonful of water. Give us a good swig at the water,” and he reached over for the breaker beside the mate.

“Men,” protested Curtis earnestly, “for heaven's sake, don't be fools! Our only chance is in preserving discipline.”

“Dat for you!” said the Dutchman insolently, and he let his oar swing and took a long drink.

Before he had done, the next man had grabbed the breaker, and there was a general scrimmage.

It was mutiny—rank mutiny. Curtis felt it, but what could he do? He and Dixon, the apprentice, were only two against nine. His eyes wandered from one face to the other, and read no hope there. The men had reached that point where discipline, they thought, could help them no longer. They would stick at nothing; they were desperate men. They had their drink, and the carpenter flung back the empty breaker at his feet; and then again there was silence—the silence that comes after the first mutterings of a storm, a sullen silence, in which the men took their turns at the oars quietly, huddling together between-whiles, apparently sleeping.

How long the time was—how terribly long, and yet the daylight lasted barely eight hours! The sea began to get up, the clouds scurried across the sky faster and faster, hiding the moon, and the wind strengthened to a gale.

Then it took them all they knew to keep their boat before the wind and bail her when she shipped a sea, as she did again and again. Oh, the bitter cold of those icy waters as they rushed into the boat, the dirge that was in the howling of the wind, and the cry of the penguins, that never seemed to mind the storm! Every moment they expected to be their last, and yet they kept above water.

“Oh, Unity, Unity, my wife!” For Curtis all the night was alive with thoughts of her. Should he ever see her again—should he? His arms ached with steering the unmanageable boat, the icy-cold water lapped round his feet, his eyes smarted with the watching, the wind, and the salt sea spray. What would be the end? Only he must live—he must not give up his hold on life lightly—he must see his wife again.

It grew more and more difficult, as the night advanced, to rouse the men out to take the oars or to bail. They were not openly mutinous, but they were doggedly so. They would not go to the oars. To his orders they paid no attention, to his entreaties came always the same answer:

“It ain't no good. Let her rip.”

And the worst of it was, he sympathised with them. Where was the good? What were they rowing for? What hoping for? If it had not been for the thought of Unity's clinging arms, her tender, tear-stained face, he thought he should have done just as they were doing.

The gale passed, and they were still afloat, but the men cheered a little and demanded more biscuit.

“You have had it all,” said the mate.

“Heigh-ho, boys,” said the carpenter, “a short life an' a merry one! Who

wants to hang out long in this beastly climate?”

And the end seemed very close indeed then.

He dozed, and when he awakened, the day had broken again, if it could be called day, and the air was thick and white with a snowstorm. Looking upwards, the millions of white flakes were falling softly, softly; there was not a breath of wind. The men had taken down the sail and wrapped themselves in their oilskins. The sea was calm, and the only sound was the soft lap, lap of the water against the boat, and the hoarse moans of the men as they stirred in their uneasy sleep.

The day passed, and it was night again. The hours were one long, weary ache of hunger and cold. The snow went—it had filled their breakers—and the moon rose chill and white, and then there was a spell of darkness, and then the dull, lowering daylight again. Curtis and Dixon changed places mechanically, and the mate only remembered he was steering because the tiller ropes burnt like bars of red-hot iron into his hands.

There was no more tobacco among them now, and when the third morning dawned, the faces of the men were haggard and worn, their eyes were hollow and wild, and their cheeks had fallen in. Three days in an open boat was not long; it was the cold that had done it.

“Mr Curtis,” asked one, “do you see a sail, sir?”

A sail! In a sail lay their only hope. They seemed to lie in the bottom of a hollow depression, and the sea rose up round them on every side, and over all, like a lid, lay the heavy clouds that hid away the sky. Nothing broke the monotony—nothing save the birds that followed.

The mate tried to put a ring of hopefulness into his voice. “Not yet, my lad.”

But the men were muttering among themselves. Their faces looked wolfish in the dim light, and ghastly stories of shipwreck and suffering came uppermost in his mind. They began to talk mysteriously of drawing lots—of one dying that the others might live—and though he felt Dixon clutch his arm convulsively, at first he took no notice. Then he heard himself remonstrating:

“Be men, be men, not howling, God-forsaken scoundrels!”

Then their voices were all raised at once, and their knives were out. But men do not come to such a pass as that easily. The tumult subsided, and they agreed to wait, and the day closed in. The night was one long, weary ache of hopelessness, and the dawn came again, and Curtis was brought back to consciousness by Dixon's hand on his arm and his voice in his ear, with a horrified quiver in it:

“Mr Curtis, they're going to draw lots!”

“No, no!”

“Truth!”

It was calm enough. The dull, grey waters seemed to rise up on every side, and overhead was the dull, grey, lowering sky, with, to the north, a faint gleam of light where the sun should have been. The faintest wind was stirring, hardly enough to ruffle the crests of the waves, and there was nothing in sight but sea and sky, save the white sea-birds calmly breasting the swell, keeping always the same distance from the boat, now rising high above it, now down in the trough of the sea, happy and peaceful and at home. One of the men had tied a bit of his scarlet handkerchief to a hook at the end of a long string, and was dangling it overboard. It floated on the surface some way from the boat. So it had floated when darkness fell, and so it floated still. Curtis noted it idly, as men do notice trifles in moments of great extremity—the only bit of colour in all the wide seascape. At his feet lay the Dago, whether sleeping or unconscious he could not tell, and at his side was Dixon, his round, boyish face white and drawn, with a great horror written upon it. The men were all huddled together in the middle of the boat, talking, and their faces were wolfish and eager.

“I tells you,” said the Dutchman, who was an old whaler and a good seaman, “it is no goot us all peggin' out. I vas on der *Sovoie* ven she nipped in der ice, an' ve valked two hundret mile to der Danish mission station. Dere vas tree men die on dat roat, but, my vort, no vun ask how he die! If he not die, ve all be deat. I tells you true.”

“Aye, aye,” said more than one voice, “we'll all die else! We're dyin' now!”

But in some voices—they were husky now, and weak—it was a sort of protest. Were it not better that one man should die for the saving of the rest? they seemed to ask. They were dying—they were certainly dying fast. Curtis could not doubt that a couple of days would see the end of the strongest among them. And it was thirty days since they had seen a sail!

He roused himself.

“Men,” he protested, “don't—don't—better go under.”

“Why,” taunted the carpenter, “you're pretty near done for as it is! It won't make much difference to you.”

Curtis doubled his fist, and, at the risk of upsetting the boat, hit him a blow on the point of the jaw that sent him reeling back, but he was miserably conscious himself how little force there was in the blow. Harding picked himself up. It was the kind of argument he understood, and he bore no malice.

The mate turned to the men.

“For heaven's sake, let's die decently!”

“That's just it,” said the carpenter; “we don't want to die—not all of us.”

“We may see a ship before night.”

“You said that yesterday, an' there's nary a ship. Here, Muntz, hand over your cap. Maybe you won't need it again, old chap.”

Muntz handed it over solemnly. There was a sort of cool daring about him, as if he defied Fate.

“I'd as soon die keevick,” he said nonchalantly, and young Dixon drew a long, sobbing sigh.

Curtis said nothing. The blow he had struck the carpenter only showed him his own weakness. He sat there quietly with the tiller ropes of the boat burning into the palms of his hands. They were nine men to two.

“Pedro,” went on the carpenter's relentless voice, and he stooped and laid a hand on the Dago at the mate's feet, “hand over that there necklace of yourn.”

The Dago protested shrilly and grasped his rosary.

“*Madre de Dios!*” he shrieked. “*Madre de Dios!* It is *sacré*—what you call holy! The Holy Father himself—”

He might as well have spoken to the wind. At a sign from the carpenter, Muntz and a big negro held him down and took the rosary from him.

He began calling out in Spanish that they would all be accursed, that some evil fate would befall them, but nobody paid any attention, possibly because it would have been difficult to find a tighter corner than that they were already in.

Curtis wondered dully, as if the matter did not concern him, how they were going to cast lots with beads. The carpenter snapped the string.

“One—two—three—eleven of us.” He began counting them into Muntz's cap, and all eyes watched him. They were roughly-carved dark stone beads, but one was of lighter colour. The carpenter held it up. Curtis looked at it. What did it all matter now? Leaden sea around him, leaden sky overhead, desperate men threatening a deed that must leave a stain for ever. If it had not been for the boy at his side, he would have flung himself into the sea.

“There ain't must to choose, 'cept for the colour,” said the carpenter, dropping the bead into the cap with the others. “I holds the cap so, you can see, and the man who picks that there blue bead—”

He did not finish the sentence; there was no need. He held the cap like a bag.

“Are we all ready, mates?”

For one moment there was silence. Then “Aye,” came the answer, “aye!” Not one dissentient voice. Even the Dago assented.

“I have nothing to do with this,” said Curtis.

“Nor I,” said Dixon, and the boyish voice shook.

“That's all very well,” said the carpenter. “Think we don't know it's bad? We do. But you show us another way.”

There lay the horror of it; it was the only alternative.

“Better one man should die than ten,” went on the carpenter. “That's logic. Now, mister, you take first chance.”

“I tell you I have nothing to do with it.”

“Right you are!” said the carpenter, with a sort of ghastly cheerfulness. “We'll draw for you.”

Curtis looked at the men. After all, since he must take a chance, whether he would or not, he had better draw for himself.

“I will draw,” he said, “but, mind, I have no hand in the business. I'd rather be dead than let my wife know I'd saved my life at such a cost. If I draw that blue bead, I fight, and I help any other man who draws it.” And then he put his hand into the cap and drew out a brown bead. He wondered at himself as he dropped back into his seat again. The water was lapping against the boat's side with a sort of yearning in it. “Rest is here, rest is here,” it seemed to say. “Why are you troubled, for here is rest?” And then Dixon drew, and drew blank. A sigh went up from the men.

“Remember,” said Curtis steadily, “Dixon and I fight for the man who loses. Three against eight are not such bad odds.” And he reached out for a boat stretcher.

He never knew himself whether he had done it on purpose or not. One hand still held the tiller ropes, and from his fingers, dead and numb from the cold, the stretcher slipped, and, falling against the carpenter's hand, numb and cold too, spilled all the beads on the bottom boards of the boat. Only the fatal blue bead remained in the cap.

“Good for you, sir!” cried young Dixon, drawing his knife.

A wild, angry yelp arose. Muntz's yellow teeth showed between his black lips, and there was an evil look on his face.

“We half decide. Von man moost die. Vy not der mate? If he make troubles ober der lots, vy not der mate?”

“That's murder,” said the carpenter, putting the thoughts of the others into words. And Dixon crouched lower, but let the gleam of his knife be seen.

“An' if it is murder?” said the whaler, stepping forward. But the carpenter, sturdy Englishman as he was at bottom, thrust forward his foot, and the man stumbled to his knees.

“Ve tries again,” he said sullenly, picking himself up.

“We tries again,” said the carpenter, and he looked threateningly at Curtis, and began counting out the remainder of the brown beads into the cap. Then he held it out to the mate.

“I have drawn.”

“If you don't draw,” said the carpenter threateningly, “we draw for you. You brought it on yourself.”

And then fear fell upon the sturdy mate, who had faced death often. One of these beads meant death to a man—to him possibly. The temptation came to him to toss the beads out into the boat, and this time to jump into the sea and end it all. He had borne all he could bear; he wanted to be dead before things should happen he could only think of with bated breath. He looked round at the grey, still sea, at the men's unyielding faces, at the red rag of bait trailing over the gunwale, at the sea-birds serene and calm, and then his eye caught Dixon's anxious, pinched young face. That decided him. He could not leave the lad. And so thinking, he put out his hand and drew. The carpenter snatched away the cap quickly, as if he feared he might put back the bead.

A heavy sigh went up from the men, and then they were quiet, silenced, awed by the horror of the thing.

Curtis did not shout or yell, he did not call upon his God to help him, he did not appeal to the men who would be his executioners; he only sat there, stupidly gazing at the bead, wondering, as our minds do wonder in crises, as if they were detached from us, how that bit of blue turquoise came in this place. Of course, it did not matter—nothing mattered now—only that Unity, his wife, should not know. And then, even in his extremity, or perhaps because of his extremity, came thought for her loneliness.

How long would these men wait? How long would they wait?

“Men,” he cried, and he looked at the brooding faces, “I will give you two hundred pounds for my life!”

But there was silence, and he could hear the deep-drawn breaths and the sob, sob of the water alongside, the cry of a sea-bird from a distance.

“Will you?”

Muntz broke the spell with a harsh laugh.

“An' vat is der goot of twenty hundret pound to mens dat is starvin'?” and he looked round. “Tomorrow we all be deats!”

It was sound logic. The sands of life were running out quickly. He wondered that he had thought it worth while asking.

“Don't tell my wife,” he said to Dixon.

“Tell her yourself, sir,” said the boy, and he tightened his hold on his knife. A watery gleam of sunshine caught on the bright blade, and seemed to emphasise the fact that they were all preparing to die, “We'll fight 'em. Pedro, you skunk, you're the mate's salvage. None of the others would have risked their little fingers for you.”

The Dago looked at them out of his hollow eyes, but he made no

movement.

“It is fair—it is fair,” said Muntz.

“Oh, fair enough,” growled the carpenter, “but, mates, it's an awful job!”

And the mate was glad, in a curiously impersonal way, to hear him say so. He thought of his own patriotism with a pitying wonder, but he wanted the Englishmen to die with hands clean.

“We'll fight,” said Dixon. “It doesn't matter much if we do upset the boat.”

“We're sure to do that.” And he thought curiously that he who was speaking would be dead before half an hour was over their heads, and Dixon would be dead, and these men who were willing to save their lives at such a terrible price.

The men whispered together, then they turned their backs, all save the Dutch whaler and the gaunt Dago. So he had saved him for this!

“No chance of sending a message?” said Dixon.

“Not the least in the world. They will know”—the thought of his poor, little, lonely wife wrung his heart—“we must have thought of them at the last, Dixon; it's the best way.”

“Much the best,” said the boy quietly. Only a lad of eighteen, but some of our merchant officers are made of fine stuff.

Muntz made a step forward, and as he did so, the Dago lurched across him, and he stumbled, recovered himself, staggered, and Curtis in a moment held the boat stretcher threateningly over him. He lay there, biting the bottom boards like a mad thing, and the Dago sat down, as if he were waiting, whether to help or to hinder, the mate could not have told. The whole thing looked like an accident, and yet—

He looked at the boy.

“Not yet,” he said; “it hasn't come yet.”

“But it will come,” said the carpenter over his shoulder. “You've drawn the bead, and it'll come before night. What else is there?”

Nothing but to pray and hope death would come very quickly—nothing else to hope for in all the world. They had not quite screwed themselves up to the horror of the thing, but it would grow familiar, and next time they would act. He knew that well enough. There would be no hesitation; it would be death. And then Muntz turned over and voiced the same thought.

“To-night,” he said, as if stating an incontrovertible fact, “dere vill be but von vay—der vay ve took on der *Sovoie*.”

How calm the sea was—how still! And nothing in sight save the great birds, emphasising the loneliness, accentuating it. The mate looked round the horizon. Nothing—nothing! Grey sky and grey sea blending, and the little boat a toy thing in the waste of waters. The men looked at him, and it

seemed to him as if their hollow eyes were reproaching him. They would slay him, and the remembrance would stain their whole lives. Away to the horizon again his eyes wandered, and he fancied he saw a faint smudge upon it that had not been there before. He raised his hand, more to concentrate his vision than to shade his eyes.

The men followed his gaze eagerly.

And then the thing came that he had feared and dreaded so unspeakably.

“He is foolin' yous, mates!” cried Muntz, scrambling to his feet and coming towards him with his long knife in his hand. Curtis let go the tiller ropes and raised the stretcher, but the next moment the lean figure of the Dago was between them. This time it was no accident; he was there of deliberate purpose. His breath came hard, but he said nothing, and Dixon raised a shout.

“Good for you, Pedro!”

The others rose. “Put down your hands,” cried the carpenter angrily; “we don't want to harm you, you fool!” But Dixon lurched forward, and the next second the boat was over.

The icy-cold water closed over Curtis's head; it rushed in his ears with a roaring sound that seemed but the continuation of the clamour in the boat. Someone was clinging to him like grim death. He went down, down; then he shook off the clutching hands, and rose again to a deathly stillness. There was not even the lap, lap of the water that had sounded in his ears for so many days.

For a moment he was disappointed; he had gone through so much, and he was still alive. The worst was still to come. Something touched him, and he clutched an oar, and he heard a voice hail him cheerily.

“Hallo, sir! Sorry I grabbed you so hard. All serene! I knew we'd beat 'em.”

“Dixon!”

“I don't see the men have bettered the situation,” said the apprentice coolly.

The boat was floating bottom uppermost close at hand, and here and there above the water were the heads of the men, looking like round, dark balls. Most of them could swim, but one or two of them were struggling. Curtis laughed grimly, and shoved his oar towards a man who was throwing up his hands. He saw it was Muntz, but was beyond taking in the irony of the situation. The end for all of them could not be long now. The Dago had done this for him—the only thing he could do. But where was he? He could not see him, but indeed he was too weary to think. What did it matter?

“Can we right her?”

But no. The whale-boat was heavy; they were starved and numb with cold. Their fingers slipped along her streaming sides like the helpless hands of little children. One by one they reached her, though, till the tale was complete, but there was no one of them equal to scrambling up and getting astride her keel. And, oh, the bitter cold of that icy water!

“Is this the end, sir?” The boy's voice tried to be cheery still.

And Curtis made no answer. There was no answer. The fact was self-evident, but the Dago close beside them spoke.

“It ees de end,” he said. “I vas de mate's salvage, and I not can do more.” And, as if he were very tired, he loosed his hold on the slippery sides of the boat.

“Hold on, man!” exhorted Curtis. But the man turned and looked at him with hollow, tired eyes, and then, before he quite realised it, the mate was watching the white face fade away beneath the green waters— down, down, till he saw but a white speck, and then it was gone, and he was staring after it dully, and there was a throbbing in his ears that seemed to him like the moaning of a woman in grief—so would Unity grieve for him—a moaning that filled sea and sky with its hopelessness. Overhead now were poised the sea-birds that had floated behind the boat so long. Closer and closer and closer they swooped. He knew what that meant. Perhaps the Dago had chosen wisely, if he had chosen. He had not an ounce of strength in his arms, and louder and louder and louder in his ears came the sound of a woman moaning hopelessly. It beat in on his brain, and though he leaned his head against the wet side of the boat, he could not shut it out. “Oh, Unity, Unity!” It grew louder and louder; it was the beating of her heart.

“A ship! A ship!” The cry came from Dixon “She's on top of us!”

How they shouted, those despairing men clinging to the upturned boat!

“All together, men—all together!” cried the mate; but their voices were weak and hoarse, and it seemed at first to the officer of the watch on board R.M.S. *Auckland* but a penguin's cry.

Again and again! The mate felt he could hold on not a moment longer. It was the throbbing of the steamer's engines that had made the moaning, and she was passing fast. Another shout, and there came an answering hail.

“Himmel,” said Muntz, “I gifs up der sea!”

The Woman Who did not Care

OUTSIDE in the courtyard, in the brilliant sunshine of Northern China, a hen was cackling loudly, cheerfully proclaiming to the world that she had done her duty by her owners; but Lin was emphatic, and he raised his hand in appropriate gesticulation.

“Chicken he bad bird, missie,” he declared. “Tell one lie!”

Anne Slade turned away angrily.

“It'll be curried chicken, then, for tiffin as usual. Go away, Lin. How I hate, hate, hate China! How I hate—”

The door opened, and there came in quickly a tall young fellow without a collar, and his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

“What do you hate, Anne?” he asked, with a little trace of anxiety in his voice; and the tall young woman with the red hair and the humorous mouth turned on him promptly.

“You,” she said, “for one thing! You took the risk, you know, Tom, and I told you I should if I found myself bored. Bored? Good gracious! Do you think I'm only bored? And then you come in with your sleeves rolled up looking—like—keeping shop, I suppose.”

For a second Tom Slade's face fell. He wanted to please his wife, but he was beginning to know that the last way to do that was to give in to her. He suspected he ought to take her by the shoulders when she was in one of these moods, and shake her, but he was not quite prepared to do that yet.

“It keeps them clean when I do lean over the counter, anyhow,” he said; “and it's cool.”

She turned away, and he resisted a temptation to put his hands on her shoulders and draw her towards him.

“Anne,” he said, with a little hesitation, because when you are desperately anxious, and desperately anxious to please at the same time, the situation becomes a little difficult, “I'm not liking the look of things at all in the town. I think I'll send you in to Peking.”

She whisked round, with a flirt of her skirts, the scanty short white skirts of 1913, and made a little laughing face at him.

“How are you going to do that, I'd like to know? With Mrs Paterson?”

The laughter in her eyes comforted him a little. He felt nearer to her when she laughed in friendly fashion; perhaps she did not quite mean all she said.

“The Rev. Paterson is sending his wife, and he was saying to me—”

“The campaigns of the most righteous missions against the British American Tobacco Company will now cease!” proclaimed Anne, dancing

across the stone floor on the tips of her toes, and just touching his shoulder as she passed. "Hostilities will be resumed when the most enlightened and illustrious Republic of China— What can the most enlightened Republic do, Tommy? Burn the illustrious mission?"

"If they burn the mission the B.A.T. will go, too," said Slade gloomily, brought back to his first anxiety; and he seated himself on the edge of the table, and caught his wife's hand, and held her—held her gently but firmly. "Listen, little girl. They say there's going to be trouble, and if there's trouble Si No Fu is no place for a woman."

Anne took his shirt between her fingers, and considered the pattern thoughtfully.

"If there's no place for me in Si No Fu— Oh, Tommy, I did not think it would be you who would be tired!"

For the moment Slade forgot the expression of his feelings towards her in the deeper thought of her possible danger and his desperate anxiety. He pushed her aside as if he had forgotten her existence, and marched up and down the stone-paved floor. The big room was very empty. It contained only a table, a couple of easy-chairs, four ordinary wooden chairs, and a plain Chinese-made sideboard, but it looked comfortable, and it felt homelike. Anne saw to that. She had an eye to the eternal fitness of things, and the quaintly coloured china on the sideboard toned with the heavy beams that supported the roof.

She watched her husband a moment.

"Tom," she said, "you're worried. Don't be worried. Thank Heaven for anything that takes your thoughts away from the eternal selling of Rooster and Peacock cigarettes, and the consideration of where the next poster is to be, and whether it had not better be upside down to attract attention. I like you like this, and I'm not going away with Mrs Paterson!"

"I'm not at all sure that Mrs Paterson is going to get away," said Slade, passing over the compliment that at another time he would have welcomed. "Now undoubtedly the mission compound would be easier of defence than this."

"They have not even a popgun!" said Anne, with a little laugh that showed her white teeth.

"The blithering idiots! What the —"—Slade used language that at another time his wife would have told him was inexcusable—"did they come here for?"

"For exactly the same reason as you came, my dear boy, to earn an honest livelihood, and for the sake of the Chinese soul; but as they don't seem to have any converts—even their No. 1 boy is a heathen— I should think they were beginning to be a bit doubtful as to the Chinese soul. If we

go down to the mission compound, Tommy, do you think we can hold it?" Her eyes were dancing. Blue they were—or green?—he could never tell which; but here she was, instead of being afraid, simply excited and interested. "Oh, Tommy, fancy Mrs Paterson handing out cartridges! She'll waddle, poor dear, and she'll—"

Outside in the roadway, which was just beyond the wall of the dining-room, a blank wall, in which there was no window, came the tramp of marching men, a bugle called shrilly; and then there rose on the air the sound of a Chinese war song. The woman listened a moment, listened curiously, and her husband noticed that on her fair face was only curiosity—no sign of fear.

"Mrs Paterson says that song does not sound true. I think it does. What do you think?"

"It sounds barbaric," said Slade, with a shudder; and she knew that he did not fear for himself.

"Tom," she said, with a little laugh, "you are improving. Barbaric just expresses it."

He turned on her then.

"Aren't you afraid? Don't you understand the meaning of this?"

She looked at him, and made a little face.

"Oh, Tom, Tom, really and truly, is there any danger? You don't mean it? Shall we have to fight? No such luck!"

"What I'm afraid of—" said Slade; and suddenly he realised, as we all do sometimes, that the very voicing of the fear that had been growing all the week had brought it appreciably nearer. This that he dreaded was not some hazy, indefinable thing that might possibly happen; it was a concrete fact to be faced now. "Good God, Anne! You've got to get down to Peking quick!"

"With Mrs Paterson?" The war song swelled loud. It was as if the singers had stopped just outside in the roadway and sang with meaning. The girl held up her finger. "Hark! Does that sound as if they were going to let Mrs Paterson and me down to Peking? Silly old boy." She put up her long, thin, artistic fingers, and of her free will touched his cheek. "Let's be thankful for anything, anything that will break up this deadly dullness. Now we are going to live."

"It may be," said Slade fiercely, "that we are going to die."

"Oh, all right," said Anne cheerfully; "don't make a fuss about it. Let's die, then. How'll they kill us? I hope they'll finish Mrs Paterson decently, because she's a good soul, really. What's that, Tom?"

There came a sharp knocking at the gate of the courtyard, and then the sound of leather-shod feet along the cobbled stone path that led up to the

veranda.

“Mr Slade. . . . Mr Slade. . . .”

“It's Mr McLeod, Tom,” whispered the girl, and she was trembling with excitement, pleasurable excitement. He realised that, and asked himself was he glad—did he want her to be afraid? “The last time the Chinese expressed themselves on the subject of missions they took one of his eyes, and he wasn't any beauty before. This makes him look awfully lopsided. Tom, if you lose an eye or a nose, I'll never speak to you again.”

“Mr Slade.”

He was at the door and his voice was insistent.

“Come in, Mr McLeod,” said Slade, and the door was pushed open and there entered a long, lean man with the face of an ascetic marred by the loss of an eye. He thrust forward his little scrubby grey beard.

“It is weel we hae mair to rely on than our ainsels,” he said. “The wurrd has come by telegraph for us all to come in, an' Mrs Paterson thinks—”

Once more the war song burst out loud and insistent, drowning his voice, and Anne held out her hand.

“Think of something else, Mr McLeod. We're not getting down to Peking quite so easily as all that.”

“The Lord has delivered me fra' one risin',” said McLeod solemnly, “an' A'm no minded—”

“They won't let the B.A.T. Company off as easily as they did the missionaries,” she interrupted. “I've just been explaining to my husband, Mr McLeod, that if he loses his nose I'll consider it just cause for a divorce.”

“It pleases ye to be fleepant,” said McLeod sourly, “an' there is a time for a' things. This is no the time for lightmindedness.”

“Gracious!” said Anne. “We'd better take it smiling. There'll be plenty of time for the other thing. What are we to do?”

“Get down to the mission station,” said Slade. “It'll be easier defended.”

“We canna' defend it. We ha' no the means.”

“Damn,” said Slade, and he lifted his rifle from the wall, and from a drawer in the table produced a revolver. Anne laid her fingers on the revolver, and then she spoke very gently, for she admired her husband's skill with his weapons as she admired all power, and she felt that the fates were against him. What could one armed man, though he were a crack shot, do against those shouting fiends outside? He would be overwhelmed by mere numbers.

“I'm sure Tom could account for ten men, but what then? There are two thousand soldiers alone in this town.” And Slade looked at her gratefully.

“It hasna' come to that yet,” said the missionary, drawing his fingers

thoughtfully through his beard, and Anne looked at the round-faced clock hanging on the wall. It was not a quarter of an hour since Lin had taken away the character of the hen, since she had been discontented at the thought of her tiffin, and now tiffin was of no account. Tom had come in in the ordinary way, just a little anxious. But things were happening, decidedly things were happening. She knew those two men were wondering whether it would be possible to get down to the mission house. Nothing apparently had changed, and yet that was the question in their minds—was it possible to get down to the missionary compound?”

“At least,” said Slade, looking at his wife with undisguised anxiety in his eyes, “we'd be nearer the wall, and if we could slip over and get down to the company's next station—”

“It may be burnt,” said Anne, and she felt her first thrill of horror.

“No, no, this is only a local thing, and it will pass. I shall send Lin with a note to Grainger, and if he can help us— Anne, you'll get a scratch tiffin to-day.”

“The matter o' food,” said the Scots missionary, looking at Anné dourly out of his one eye, “is a small matter. We maun pray heaven—”

“Oh dear!” said Anne. “I'm sure heaven will appreciate us all the better if we put the wits given us by that same heaven to some good account.”

“Ye'll juist come awa' doun to the mission hoose,” said the Scotsman. “If we ha' to dee 'tis company-like to dee togethir, but we'll maybe no dee. They're queer folk, and they bark a long bit afore they bite. Pit on your hat at once, Mrs Slade, an' come awa'.”

Anne looked at her husband, his hand still on his rifle, looked at the first home she had come to, remembered how she had wearied of it, regretted many things, and felt with a sharp and curious little pain that the time had gone by for regrets. They were living now, or dying, and no fear, only a sense of wonder and strangeness, was on her. She put on her hat, a soft straw with a scarf twisted round it, and her husband followed her into the bedroom, his revolver in his hand.

He put his arm round her.

“Anne,” he said, “if this should be—” And then she flung away from him with a little laugh.

“Oh, Tommy, all this sentiment about a walk with the Scots meenister. I presume we'll come back tomorrow morning, and the soldiers will go on singing war songs that mean nothing, and you'll go on selling Rooster cigarettes till the end of the chapter.”

“I wish to God, my darling—”

“Oh, for goodness gracious' sake don't let's be sentimental. We're ready, Mr McLeod,” and she gathered up a bundle of things for the night, stuffed

them into a little bag, and was in the dining-room again. "Don't say the woman kept you waiting."

Slade had put a cartridge belt full of cartridges round his body; he put on a coat to cover it, slipped the revolver into one pocket, and filled the other up with cartridges for it.

His wife looked impatient and tapped her foot on the floor, but the older man merely smiled.

"If there's mischief brewing," said he, "they airms are worse than useless. Speak to the boys an' say ye're tiffinin' at the mission, an' maybe ye'll no be back till the morn."

Out in the street Anne found herself between the two men, carrying her own little bundle, because the missionary never thought to relieve her of it, and her husband's hands were full. It vexed her to carry that bundle, and the street seemed strangely full of people strangely quiet.

The street was narrow, with blank walls on either side, with an ornamental doorway here and there. But the doors were closed, and it seemed to her that the little seated, conventional stone lions that guarded each side of them had taken on a strangely sinister look. It was summer time, and it had rained the night before, so that she was obliged to pick her way among the mud and filth. And all the people seemed looking at them.

There were soldiers in unfinished khaki, with their queues cut off and their black hair standing out untidily under their flat German uniform caps. There were men in blue with bamboos across their shoulders, and their baskets and burdens slung from them. There were women with flowers in their hair, and feet like tiny hoofs, leaning up against the wall. The man they bought their fruit from was giving his birds an airing; one was perched on a stick, and the other was in its cage with the cover rolled up. He looked at Anne furtively, and looked away as she passed.

Down at the end of the street she could see the grey mass of the city wall, and the green of the bushes that grew on its top. The sun poured down with the fierce heat that comes after rain, and tells how the rain is coming again, and she felt there was something uncanny in the air.

"It's just the same as ever," she said; "quieter, if anything."

"A'm thinking," said the missionary, "it's too quiet. You are waitin'."

Anne quickened her pace; her husband drew close beside her, and the people fell away as they passed. They reached the wall, but there was no gate just here, and they were perforce obliged to walk along beside it still in a narrow, muddy way, and still among the people who lifted up their hands and pointed with their long, unclean forefingers. They said something, something that she could not understand.

She looked at her husband, and his face was set, and the old feeling of

vexation was uppermost in her mind. He proposed to live among these people all his life, and he would not trouble to learn the language. Then she looked at the missionary, but his blind side was towards her, and it told her nothing.

“What are they saying?” she asked impatiently.

“They say we gang to our death,” said he, and he said it as if he took a certain grim satisfaction in frightening her.

A couple of mangy wonks, the scavenger dogs of all Chinese cities, lay right in her path, and on either side pressed the people.

“It is not far to the mission now,” she said.

“Run for it, Anne, if there's a row; it'll make my mind easier,” said Slade, and they were right upon the dogs that lay in the way. Slade kicked one, just stirred it with his toe, and as if it were the signal, the people were upon them. There was a shout and a savage yell the like of which she had never heard before from human throats. She felt her husband drag her back against the wall, and then she saw that he had his rifle at his shoulder, and the missionary on the other side had the revolver in his hand.

“Mon,” he said, and the old Adam was uppermost, “shoot up the street. Clear the way for your woman.” And suiting the action to the word he let fly with the revolver. Some of the plaster chipped from a house on the other side of the road, and that side of the street cleared as if by magic.

“Rin awa', Mrs Slade!” cried McLeod.

“And leave you?” she said.

“Be damned to you,” he said; “will ye no rin?” And he caught her hand, and, pulling her after him, began running along the narrow way between the walls of the houses and the city wall. She heard the report of her husband's rifle, and then his quick footsteps running to catch them up.

“Two men down,” he said, and his voice came pantingly, as if he had been running a long way, and were out of breath. “Once inside the mission compound—”

“We're in the Lord's hands,” said McLeod, and she felt his words the more convincing because he had sworn a moment before. They were not a hundred feet away now, and then out of a narrow, filthy alley-way just opposite the missionary compound gates came swarming another crowd.

The missionary caught her by the arm, and as if it were a signal, Slade turned, and with his rifle faced the people.

“Let me stay,” she gasped, with a feeling that he was facing them alone. But the missionary had a strong right arm, and he swept her on right up to the door of the compound. It opened, and another pair of arms came out and dragged her in; but looking over her shoulder she saw that between her and her husband the crowd had surged.

“Zip, zip, zip!” went the rifle bullets, and then they ceased suddenly, and a wild howl rose on the air.

“Tom, Tom!” she called, but McLeod had shut and barred the gate, and he turned on her, still with that grim satisfaction in his tones.

“He is beyond our aid. No use letting they folk in till we maun.”

“We can't desert him!” cried Anne angrily, and stepped towards the door, but a little fat woman ran out and flung her arms round her.

“Oh, my poor dear, my poor dear! It is out of our hands. We are powerless to help. He is your dearest, I know—”

Anne pushed her off angrily.

“To leave him outside! We might have helped. He might have got in!” And she ran to the gate.

The hubbub and noise seemed receding, and McLeod calmly stood in front of the door.

“Mrs Slade, ye'll juist bide quiet. Yer mon trusted ye to me. I dinna ken hoo he fares, but I do ken it's death sure to open that gate. Ye'll bide quiet wi' Mrs Paterson, an' I'll keep the gate. 'Tis the way Mr Slade would have it.”

“I've never done what he wanted in my life,” fumed Anne.

“Ye'll mind him the noo, then,” said the missionary. “I'll hae no heesitation in tyin' ye wi' rope. Go to Mrs Paterson!”

Anne stood still for a moment. Was this man threatening her with indignity? Were they all facing death? A lump rose in her throat. For Tom or herself she could not have told, only she knew she was trembling, and this man must see it.

“Go ye in to Mrs Paterson,” said he, and she obeyed him, because it was cheap to quarrel. And Tom was dead! Dead! Dead! She kept saying it over to herself, but the words meant nothing to her. They were only words. He couldn't be dead, and it was mean to hide behind the stone walls when he was overwhelmed by numbers. Tom was equal to ten Chinamen, she was sure of that, only it was mean to leave him; and if it hadn't been for that foolish missionary— She walked very slowly into the big, bare dining-room, and her eyes caught the texts on the wall. Somebody had run riot in green and gold, perhaps they were Mrs Paterson's favourite colours; very likely she thought them most effective.

Mrs Paterson was kneeling on the floor against the table, her fair cheek buried in her arms. She was just moaning softly to herself, “Oh, oh, oh, and Reuben is ten to-day, and he was such a sweet little baby! Willie!” She lifted her head as Anne came in, and then dropped it again. Anne was nothing to her. “My little boy! My little boy!”

And her boy was down at Chefoo, safe at school, thought Anne, in spite

of herself. For she did not want to think of Mrs Paterson's boy; she wanted to think what she, Anne, ought to do. It was, of course, absurd to think that anything had happened to Tom. How could it? Of course it could not. But she could not sit still, and she walked up and down the room like a caged beast, and wondered what the texts meant. It was easier to wonder what the texts meant than to think of anything else.

There was one in Old-English letters in gold over a pea-green lake with purple rushes in it, and a golden saucer behind; and then there were some in Chinese characters with a green river meandering among them. Up and down, up and down she walked. And outside it seemed that the tumult died down to a subdued roar. How still it was! Her footsteps on the stone floor echoed loudly, and she seemed to hear every rustle of the kneeling woman's dress. There grew up in her a certain anger that she should be so foolish as to wear wide cotton skirts and to have them stiffly starched. How could any woman look even pathetic in a voluminous skirt that billowed round her like an enormous speckled pincushion? And she thought she was going to die, and that she, Anne, was going to die, and that—

No, no! She was thinking of little Reuben at school. Anne had seen Reuben, and she did not like him, but this woman was thinking about him. Up and down marched Anne, up and down. Outside there was no longer even an angry murmur. There was silence, and it was getting dark. She looked out of the window over the little compound wherein grew a solitary acacia tree, and through its feathery branches she could see the sky black and lowering. Then there came a flash of lightning, and almost upon it a deep crash of thunder. Mrs Paterson sat down on the floor like a little startled animal.

“Oh, that was close!” she said, with more than a hint of fear in her voice, and Anne laughed aloud. The laugh seemed to echo in the silence that followed the crash, and there came a sigh through the air. Outside in the courtyard stood the two men. She could see them through a window looking up at the black sky—the dour, tall Scotsman, capable and efficient—she had to acknowledge that—and the little, round, tubby Englishman with the pursed-up mouth and the red in his cheeks that made her think of an innocent boy. She hated them—she hated them both! What did they intend to do? They couldn't leave Tom outside. And then down came the rain, torrential rain, blurring the outlines of the veranda opposite, and making the acacia one smudge of vivid green.

The two men came in, Paterson rubbing his hands together, and behind them came a mission servant clad in stripped galatea, with a crumpled tablecloth under his arm. They were actually going to have tiffin.

“Get up, Evangeline,” said her husband, and the woman on the floor

meekly obeyed, rubbing her hand across her eyes like a little child. "The best thing that could happen," he went on; "the very best thing. Till this rain stops we are safe. And if, as you say, McLeod, Mr Slade sent for Mr Grainger—"

"Did he?" Anne heard herself asking. Oh, if Mr Grainger from Nan Po would come and do something! If only these people would do something! The rushing rain was a relief, but she felt if they did not let her out she would tear the tablecloth from the table and scream aloud.

"He gied a wee line to your boy," said McLeod, still looking at her with suspicion out of his deep-set eye, "but I couldna say it would be delivered."

"We don't want any tiffin! We can't eat any tiffin!" stormed Anne ineffectively.

And nobody paid the least attention to her. The stolid Chinaman in the striped galatea jumper, with his black hair cut like a bottle-brush because the missionary's wife thought servants were cleaner without their queues, went on laying the table in a casual sort of way; Mrs Paterson kept putting the knives and forks straight as he laid them down; Mr Paterson, who wore a yellow waistcoat and no coat, hitched his thumbs in the armholes, and looked at her furtively; and McLeod—she felt he was the more honest—marched up and down, openly avoiding her eye.

"We must do something! We must do something!" she heard her own voice saying.

"Ma wuman," came McLeod's voice, "we canna do aught but wait."

"We can pray," said Mrs Paterson, and she spoke very reverently and quietly, very sympathetically.

But Anne turned away. Pray! She wanted to *do* something. She did not want to think what might have happened behind that howling mob when the rifle stopped speaking.

"I'll go now," said Anne.

"No," said McLeod, and he meant it.

"At least I can go to my room."

Mrs Paterson looked at her husband, and then led the way along the veranda. Anne gathered dimly that she was apologising for the bareness of the room, saying something about sheets and towels, but she paid no attention. What did a bare room matter so long as she was alone and could think? Then the little, fair woman, whom she could look down upon, said something about tiffin, and Anne turned upon her.

"I always did hate tiffin! Oh, if you won't do something, why won't you leave me alone?"

And then she was alone, and it wasn't any better, because she found she was still thinking of that howling mob and Tom behind it. Of course, it was

Tom's own fault. He was always clumsy. Any other man with a rifle in his hand and a wall handy could have established himself against an unarmed mob. And she drove away the uncomfortable thought that he had not made for the wall because he was covering her retreat. That was nonsense, of course. He ought to have been able to hold his own. All the men she had ever heard of would have done better than that. She looked out into the courtyard, into the blur of rain. What were they doing?

Praying, of course. And then the long, narrow room that was her bedroom grew stifling. She could not breathe, and she was out on the veranda looking into the dining-room windows. Yes, her intuitions had been right. They were all three on their knees. Mrs Paterson's face was on her husband's shoulder, and his head was on hers, and the speckled dress rose up in fat waves, enveloping them both, while McLeod knelt upright and grim, his one eye closed and his hands uplifted in passionate supplication. They were praying for—for themselves! No; instinctively she knew they were putting her husband, the man whose trade they abhorred from the bottom of their souls, first. And even as she thought, she knew the opportunity had come, and she ran lightly across the courtyard, the pouring rain drowning her footsteps, and as she arrived at the gate she knew another of her intuitions was true—the gatekeeper had taken advantage of the rain to desert his post.

She did not know what she hoped, or why she so ardently desired to be outside, but in a second she had opened the door and was out in the street, with the rain that was her protection beating down upon her defenceless head.

And the street was empty, or nearly so. There were two sodden, blue-clad figures lying out in the mud and filth, and there were half-a-dozen yellow dogs sitting upon their haunches watching them.

Dead? Dead? Is that what Tom had done? She shuddered, and then there came over her a sense of triumph. He looked well in shirt and trousers with his rifle over his arm. He was her man, and, of course, these cowardly Chinese could not hurt him. How empty the street was, and how muddy! Ugh! She stepped daintily, and yet swiftly, for she feared lest McLeod should open that piercing eye and discover she had gone, and there was not a living thing in the whole street save those dogs with slavering jaws. At them she would not look as she ran along by the wall, angry because she could not help splashing her white skirts. She did not ask herself where she was going. She knew. She was going back to her own house, the premises of the B.A.T. Company. If they had been looted— But she would not think of that. Of course, Tom would make his way there.

She turned the corner into the street, and there was no one visible in the

pouring rain but a man with long, unkempt hair, and for all clothes a piece of sacking huddled round him. His dirty bare legs stuck out below it, and he came towards her, prostrating himself and whining. She could not understand what he said, but she knew what he wanted; and she spurned him, as she had always spurned the beggars. She was angry that he was there, because before him she could not run as she wanted to do. But she walked fast, and he followed, whining, just as if she were not utterly alone, and those blue-clad figures did not lie out stark in the next street. She came at last to the sight she always had scorned, the gorgeous peacock spreading his tail, and stood before the fast-closed door of her own house knocking loudly. She had never thought of this. How was she to get in, supposing Tom did not hear? She knocked more impatiently, and the beggar in the mud dropped down to his haunches, and held out his hand and bowed his head. She was at his mercy. She was at his mercy. Why did he not take? But his attitude gave her courage, and she knocked again assertively, angrily. Then she heard shuffling footsteps, the steps of the old gatekeeper—the man she had always said was too old for his duties. He said something in Chinese she could not understand.

“Open! Open, Wong!” she cried angrily; and the door opened in a narrow crack, and the beggar at her feet became more imploring. She felt in her pockets. She had no money; she never had.

“Give him ten cash, Wong!” she cried as she stepped inside.

The gatekeeper stared at her, but obeyed, and the beggar grubbed in the mud for the money, and beat his head on the ground in gratitude.

“Fasten the door! Where master?” And for a moment her heart stood still as she listened for the answer.

“He go out,” said Wong, fastening the gate, and a wave of anger swept over Anne.

How dare Tom frighten her? It was so like him to be out when she particularly wanted him, when she had been softened by unnecessary fears. If he had been in, there was no knowing what might have happened; but now he was out, and after her experience at the mission house— She walked into the dining-room, and Lin was counting the spoons.

“Lin,” she cried, to be sure, “where master?”

“No savvy,” said Lin, putting the tablespoons very neatly in one heap and beginning on the dessertspoons.

“He come home?”

“No,” said Lin, “he not home.”

Something started beating in Anne's head again, something that the thought of Tom's being there had stilled.

“Where is he?”

“No savvy,” said Lin, stooping over the spoons and forks the directors of the B.A.T. Company denominated silver.

“Lin, he send you letter!” she said angrily, remembering what McLeod had said.

How still was the house! Outside was the rush and roar of the rain; but inside, here in the dining-room, she could hear the subdued sounds of spoon and fork touching one another.

Lin just flickered an eyelid, but otherwise his face remained impassive; and presently she was wondering if that flicker was not all her imagination. Was there danger, or was there not? If there was danger, why was not the house looted? And since the house was not looted, where was Tom?

She went into her own room. Everything was exactly as she had left it. Tom's pyjamas were on the floor, where they had fallen when she had stuffed her own nightgown into her little bag. She came back to the dining-room, and Lin was transferring the spoons and forks to the sideboard drawer.

“Lin, you tell master I want him.”

“No can,” said Lin serenely.

She went into the office. The Chinese clerks and interpreters were not there. Had Tom sent them out, or were they staying away till they saw what was going to happen? The majority of Chinamen were, according to Tom, trimmers, waiting to see which way the cat would jump. In the light of Tom's talk she saw what had happened. The mob had got out of hand for a moment; then the rain had calmed them, as it always does in China, and everybody was waiting to see what would happen next. If the balance of public opinion were in favour of looting and killing the foreigner, then they would be looted and killed; but if public opinion inclined to take their money and regard them as fools, to be exploited for the benefit of the sons of Han, then they would receive all outward courtesy and many apologies for the disturbance. But meanwhile nothing would happen while this rain lasted, this torrential August rain. It beat on the roof, it overflowed the gutters, the courtyard was flooded, it was the only sound that broke the intolerable silence. She could not stand the silence. Inaction was becoming unbearable. There was soda-water and whisky in the sideboard, and she made Lin give her some. And then she heard a beating at the gate, and someone being admitted.

Tom? No. McLeod, grimmer than ever.

“I wash my hands o' ye,” he said. “While the rain lasts ye're safe, bit after— I canna leave the mission hoose.”

“I did not ask you to leave the mission house,” she said. And then, anxiety getting the better of her. “Mr McLeod, where do you think Tom

is?”

“They have ta'en him an' haud him fast somewhere.”

“But they'll let him go now the rain has come?”

“Did ye no see the corpses forby there?” he asked sternly. “Ye canna undo yon. I tell ye he knows them, an' they daurna loose him.”

“If we could find out where he is, if we could get word to Mr Grainger—” And she put an appeal into her voice that made the dour old Scotsman look at her again.

“Weel,” he said, “I'll go an' inquire. Will ye go back to Mrs Paterson for company?”

“Mrs Paterson is not company,” said Anne disdainfully.

“Bide ye here, then,” said he. “Ye're safe while it rains. After that, the Lord alone kens.” And he was gone.

“Lin,” she asked the stolid Chinaman again, “you can find master? I give you”—she hesitated, and the irrepressible humour asserted itself even now. How much did she assess her husband at?—“twenty dollars, suppose you can find master.”

“No can,” said he again.

But there was not the definite finality about the last assertion there had been about the first.

“Suppose cook can find or Wong,” she said emphatically. “My pay he twenty dollar if have found him before rain stop.”

Lin hesitated, and swept the feather duster round the table legs, peeped into the sideboard drawer, as if perchance the silver might have taken to itself legs since last he looked.

“Maybe cook can,” said he at last, and was gone.

And then she sat and waited, and listened to the rain, and the minutes dragged themselves into hours. She tried to read, but how could she read? The letters looked an unmeaning jumble, or the pounding rain set itself to the swing of the verse, and drowned it. She could not sit, she could not walk about, to lie down was out of the question, to look out into the empty courtyard with the asparagus fern and the sodden tuberose and glossy-leaved camelias was distracting. Two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock. They were only midway through the summer afternoon, and Lin came in to lay the afternoon tea.

She could have shrieked aloud. She had dreamed of the excitement of a rising, of the clash of battle, the tense feeling while life hung in the balance, but this—this—this waiting—it was beyond conception, beyond all bearing; she could have beaten her hands, and screamed aloud. And Lin laid the table as carefully as usual. He brought in the tea, and hot little scones, well buttered, and a pot of melon jam from Australia. She drank

the tea feverishly, she even ate a scone, though it tasted like sawdust, and she asked:

“Can find master, Lin?”

But Lin was cautious.

“Maybe cook can find master, night-time. He say must take care. Chinaman have caught master.”

In a moment she was on her feet.

“Take me to him! You must take me to him!”

“No can,” said Lin, relapsing into stolidity. “Cook know.” He looked at her furtively. “Maybe cook can take note.”

She flew to her room and her writing-table, and as the blank paper stared up at her her hand was paralysed. What should one write to one's husband—a prisoner among the Chinese? She would know what to say to him, but what to put on paper—

She was back in the dining-room again.

“Cook no can bring master?”

Lin shook his head.

“Cook must take missie to master.”

Again Lin shook his head.

“Suppose Mr Grainger come.”

In a moment she was alive and keen again. Mr Grainger and all the men from the company's big place at Nan Po, with any other Europeans they could muster. Why, that meant—

“Lin, you take note to Mr Grainger?”

“No take to Mr Grainger,” asserted Lin.

“Master send word to Mr Grainger?”

“Suppose Mr Grainger he get note, suppose he no get note,” said Lin. “Suppose he come allee same?”

Oh, suppose he came all the same. And Tom was all right. Only—only she must see Tom.

“I give cook fifty dollars he take me to master,” she said.

“No can,” said Lin, apparently on principle, and went out; but he came in again a moment or two later.

He fidgeted round the room for a minute or two, applied a feather duster energetically to the sideboard, settled three chairs that were not out of line, and then finally approached the subject.

“Missie give cook twenty-five dollars now, twenty-five dollars tomorrow morning can do.”

Anne considered. She had not twenty-five dollars, and had not the least idea where she could get them.

“What time cook take me? Now?”

Lin shook his head.

“More better night-time. So no man can see.”

“When dark I give cook note for twenty-five dollars.”

Lin hesitated a moment; then nodded.

The hours dragged. Never in her life, it seemed to Anne, had hours so dragged. She raged against her foolishness in coming to such a place, in marrying such a man, against the fate which had turned a rising which promised some excitement into something that made life more burdensome than before. She raved against Tom, and cried, and condemned McLeod to the nethermost hell, and nothing seemed to happen; no one was one whit the worse, and there was no one to pay the least attention. She, Anne Slade, who was always the centre of attraction, was apparently alone and forgotten.

It grew dark, and still it rained; and then Lin came in, and began stolidly laying the table for dinner.

“Lin,” she said, “what time cook take me to master?”

“By-'em-by,” said Lin. “Chicken, stewed peaches for dinner.”

She turned away angrily; this life was stifling her. And then McLeod came back. The water trickled off his raincoat on to the stone floor, and lay in little pools, his boots were splashed with mud, and when he took off his forlorn straw hat his lank hair was wet with perspiration. It stood in great drops on his forehead, and trickled down his cheek into his stubbly beard.

He looked at the dinner preparations sarcastically.

“Ye're wise to mak' yerself comfortable, Mrs Slade.”

“I have nothing to do with it!” she stormed. “If this is a rising, why have I my dinner as usual? And if it isn't, where is Tom?”

“Ye'er husband,” he said slowly, weighing his words as if he would see what effect they would have upon her, and sparing her nothing, “is in a little house in Shan Chiang quarter. I hear that they ha' pitted out his e'en.”

All the room went whirling round with Anne, and she caught hold of the table, but the man before her was merciless.

“Why didn't you bring him with you?” she panted. And the thought of Tom rose up before her. Tom strong and agile, Tom in white shirt and trousers, with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows.

“The Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and bound him with fetters of brass, and he did grind in the prison house.” Blind Samson! In all the world where could blind Samson find happiness? She had spent a long, dreary, objectless day, and all Tom's days would be objectless.

“Ye'll come awa doon to the mission hoose.”

“I'll do no such thing!”

“Then bide whaur ye are for a mannerless lassie!” And he turned on his

heel.

She was after him like a flash.

“Mr McLeod, Mr McLeod, we must do something!”

“We canna do aught. Come ye doon to the mission.”

“I will not!”

“Bide ye here, then!” And he was gone.

And then she ran into her room, and flung herself down on the bed. She buried her face in the pillows to see what it would be like to be in the dark. She rose up, and put the thought behind her, and brushed her hair, and changed her dress, and picked out the daintiest lace collar she had, and put it on and surveyed herself in the glass. It was not true what they said about Tom. Of course he was all right.

Lin came, announcing dinner, and she took a little soup and some stewed peaches, and sent the rest away. Then wrote out a note, in which she promised to pay Wu Meng, cook, twenty-five dollars, and demanded of Lin that at once she should be taken to her husband.

What did she care for the rain? This suspense was not to be borne. It was characteristic of her that she did not ask Lin whether the missionary was right; she was determined he should not be right.

She put on a stitched tweed hat and a long grey waterproof, and then presently she was in the street in the pouring rain with a little Chinaman clad in yellow oiled paper, and the darkness enfolded them. The rain was coming down as hard as ever, and the street was half mud and half water and wholly offensive. But for once she did not mind. She could have shouted for joy. At last she was doing something.

How still it was! She listened hard, and the only sound above the rain was their footsteps squelching through the mud; then a child cried in a house somewhere near, and it was as if someone promptly stifled it. There were no lights, no signs of people, no signs of life. Everyone was effacing themselves to see what would happen. They turned into another alley and still there was nothing but the darkness, the silence and the rain—no crack or crevice revealed a light. It might have been a city of the dead.

She was mud and filth above her ankles, and Wu Meng was going very slowly, and then suddenly out on the stillness and the rain came cutting another sound—the tramp of shod feet, half-a-dozen men at least moving rapidly. Soldiers? Instinctively she came nearer and caught the cook by the shoulder.

“Take me to master, quick, then you can go.” And the sound of the marching men was coming closer.

The cook was shivering with terror. He stood opposite a blank mud wall that apparently was dissolving into the filth of the road. There was no door,

and her heart sank. What was the good of bringing her to a mud wall which was slowly returning to its original elements.

“You pay back that note!” she said angrily.

“Missie wait,” said Wu Meng, and thrust the stick he carried into the wall before him, and the whole thing, as if it had been waiting but for that, collapsed into a heap of mud and water. There was a breach through which, by making herself very dirty, she could crawl.

“Master wait,” said Wu Meng sententiously, and Anne waded knee-deep in unspeakable filth and stooped under the broken thatch of the roof.

When Tom Slade saw the mob rushing from the alley for one second he gave over all for lost. His wife, his wife, in the hands of these fiends! The awful thought lent strength to his arm, and without thought for himself, only with the desire to shelter her as long as possible, he faced the oncoming mob, and the rifle took toll. What execution he did he never knew; he was seeing red, and he was prepared to kill remorselessly. Not for one moment did he remember that his back was exposed. In front he could hold them.

“Zip, zip!” went the rifle bullets. He missed, and cursed himself. The bullet found its billet, and he rejoiced and stepped a little backward, and then someone hit him over the head. He half turned, but a dozen arms were holding him fast, and blows were raining down on his head and shoulders. He did not shout. What was the good of shouting? There was no one to help.

Something with a stinging, sickening pain caught him in the eye, and he thought that his wife's career in China was ended. If she came out of this alive she could go back to England, and his life insurance!

The thoughts crowded even as he fought, and he could not fight against so many. For all his struggles they had got his rifle; they had tied his hands behind his back so tightly that the circulation was stopped, and they dragged him on through the muddy street.

The blood was running down his face from his left eye. The pain was intolerable, but he was glad he was spared one thing. Anne could not see him. Anne could not scorn him. She would have a chance for her life.

He was sure they had reached the mission house, and then—if Grainger came! If—if—! The agony of it! There was no good worrying about himself. His life was ended.

They dragged him on through the street, and they yelled at him, and the cords at his wrists cut into his flesh, and the pain in his eye was biting. They thrust him into a sort of outhouse with a mud floor, and they flung him down and bound his ankles, bringing the rope up and fastening it to the beam above his head, and then they went out and shut a crazy door and left

him—left him to his own thoughts—to die. It must be to die, but how long?

Again and again he asked himself the question—how long?

He was in a small square mud outhouse. It was absolutely empty. There was no window, only a rough board door, and the sunlight came creeping underneath it, and for all there was no furniture the place was rank and foul with the smell of human occupancy. He was fast bound. The cramp was in all his limbs, and one side of his face felt like a huge swollen, throbbing ball. And Anne had said that if he lost an eye she would consider it just cause for a divorce. Well, she wouldn't have to divorce him because he was going to die.

It was a good thing he was going to die because he would never be presentable again. His arms and feet would rot off, one side of his face—!

If he could have ended things there and then he would have done so.

The sunlight under the door vanished; it came again; he watched it even as his thoughts ran riot. Of course it was going to rain, and for one moment his heart gave a leap of gratitude, for if it rained the mission would be safe till Grainger could come, and Anne— his Anne, who could look sweet and tender, who was always piquant and fascinating—would be safe. But if it rained no one would come near him, and how could he bear the long agonising hours? A groan of unutterable anguish broke from his lips. How? How? He had nothing to hope for but death.

Grainger must come too late for him, for how could he wish to live maimed and disfigured when all his love was given to a woman who set such store by beauty of form and face. If he died, she would be sorry, he knew; she would see him at his best, but if he lived—! No good thinking about living because he was not going to live; the only question was how soon he could escape from this misery, this physical and mental pain.

He heard the crash of the thunder, and the beating of the rain on the thatched roof and against the mud walls kept time to the throb of his agony, the beat of his blood against his bonds, the aching and swelling of the side of his face. If he could only have touched it! He flung himself to one side, but the rope across the beam never gave, and the wrench but made the pain more intolerable.

If the minutes were hours to Anne they were age-long days to her husband, and, look what way he would, he had nothing to pray for but that she might be safe, and he might know it and die—die quickly.

Once or twice it seemed to him he sank into unconsciousness, but always the pain brought him back to unbearable life again, and the rain rained on till the thatch was sodden and the mud floor on which he was lying was slimy. The walls were slimy, too, and the thought came to him that if they

had not bound him so tightly he might have made his way out through such frail barriers! Oh, but they were wily devils; they knew that as well as he did.

It was dark now—dark, after ages of suffering, and still the rain was coming down steadily. The mob would be quiet, and if Grainger had got his message! Had he worded it strongly enough?

It set itself to the pain in his ankles and wrists, to the cramp in his arms and legs, to the throbbing in his eye. His eye was a great capital letter that spread itself out of all proportion, and Anne loved proportion. But what matter? He would never see Anne again. She would be safe, because of the rain; but he— He wondered what he would give to know she was safe; he wondered why he loved her so madly. He was dying—painfully dying. He wanted to know she was safe, and then to die quickly. He was, of course, better dead; common sense told him that—far better dead. . . .

“Better dead—better dead!” The words ran in his swollen veins, and then they set themselves fiery red against the mud walls—the mud walls that were slowly dissolving away, and would leave him presently exposed in his helplessness and humiliation in the mocking street.

But he would not know! Oh, luckily, he would not know! Already there was a buzzing and a roaring in his ears; then the wall had given, and there was a rush of rain-washed air that was infinitely refreshing, even though it was only the air of a filthy alley in a cramped little Chinese city. And then—then he knew he had lost his senses; this must be the beginning of the end.

Someone stumbled over him, and Anne's hands were on his face.

“Oh, Tommy, Tommy!” Her voice had a queer little break in it. When death comes one fancies things, and he might have thought she was glad to say his name again. “Tommy, do you like lying in all this filth? There isn't much excitement about this sort of rising, is there?”

It was Anne. She was speaking in hurried gasps, and in the darkness her soft fingers were feeling all down him—down to his feet, over his face; cool and gentle they felt against the throbbing flesh.

“I'm going to die, Anne!” he heard himself saying, in a hoarse, dry voice. “It was good of you to come; but run, dear, run back to the mission! You'll be all right while this rain lasts—and Grainger!”

“Oh, Tommy”—there was a little laughing impatience in the voice—”this is the silliest rising! All mud and dirty water and waiting. I really prefer you selling Rooster cigarettes. Now, what awful ropes! It's lucky I'm a woman of forethought, and put your pocket-knife in my pocket!”

It was Anne! It was Anne! He tried to gather together his failing senses, moved his head—the only part of him he was capable of moving—and felt

her soft cheek against his.

“Goose, goose!” Her hands were fumbling with his bonds. “I really think it's very hard to have a husband who has such a mighty poor opinion of his wife. Oh, what a disgusting mess! How I do hate China! Your hands—Tommy, your hands are simply horrid!”

And with her own soft palms she was trying to restore the circulation.

“Anne, Anne”—and he did not want her to see his face; he had no control over his own voice, and he was afraid of breaking down—“loose my feet and run back to the mission!”

She was cutting the ropes at his feet, and he lay back helpless, though the beating blood in his arms was such exquisite agony he could have cried aloud.

“There!” Anne's voice was triumphant, even though it was subdued. “Now, can you stand up in a minute, Tommy?”

He could not even feel he had feet, but he lied—lied as he had lied many a time to her.

“Yes, in a minute, when the circulation comes back. Run now—run down to the mission, and I'll overtake you. If we can get away before this rain stops—”

He had reached his limit; he could not speak another word. When she was gone—

But she was not gone. She came to his head, and lifted it on to her knee; and he knew it must be all congealed blood and filth. How cool her fingers were! And what was his face like? Had they smashed his eye?—he wondered whether it was still there. It felt like fire.

She had come—that was heaven! She had been almost tender now, if she would go before she showed him she loathed him.

“Tommy, what have you let them do to your face?”

Her handkerchief was cool and clean, and had a fresh scent of lavender about it.

“Go, Anne!” he said hoarsely, because there was a lump in his throat that would not let him speak.

“Really, I have never met a husband who cared so little for the society of his wife! And she even dared to defy the McLeod for him!” And she laughed. “Tommy—”

There was another sound in the street now. It had been growing louder, but they had been so occupied they had paid no attention; the sound of men marching up the street. Tramp, tramp! They were quite close. There was the clash of arms, and an unmistakable English voice speaking.

“If we don't find him, I'll burn down the rotten little city! Somebody shall pay!”

“It will be hereabouts!” came McLeod's voice.

“Grainger!” cried Slade; and his voice broke.

“Mr McLeod!” cried Anne; and hers was triumphant.

And then they came wading in through mud and filth—six armed men and the missionary, waving a smoky little lantern.

The light fell on Anne. The tweed hat, pushed back, formed a frame for her red hair; her sparkling eyes and her white face alight with excitement. Slade saw her. Thank God—thank God, it was all right! Grainger would see she was safe, whatever happened; and then, because he had endured all he could and the strength was gone out of him, he put his arm up and hid his face. He set his teeth and drew a long breath. He was going to live, and he was disfigured.

“Mrs Slade! How did you get here? My lord, Slade, you're a lucky beggar!”

“Of all the misbegotten lassies!” said McLeod, the unforgiving.

“Here, let's look at you!” said Grainger, stooping over him and lifting up his arm.

McLeod threw the lantern light over his face, and his head was on her lap. She would see—she must see every hideous detail!

“Sure, they've mussed you up some, I guess!” said a long lean American. “We'll take it out of the Tutuh's hide! What do you say, Grainger?”

“Ye've pit the fear o' the Lord in him a'ready,” said McLeod. “Get this lad awa' doon to the mission, an' we're a' richt till the next risin'!”

They slung him between them on a rough litter made out of their belts and his own bonds, and presently they were at the mission house, and McLeod had attended to his wounds; and, for all his desperate anxiety, he had not dared put into words his fears. He was going to live, and he was disfigured. He was alone with Anne. She had washed and put on clean things, and was bending over him. He dared not look at her.

“You got more excitement out of it, I think, Tommy, than any one of us,” she said.

Half his face was enveloped in bandages, and he was painfully conscious of it. The bandages alone would have made him unhappy, and when he remembered what they hid—

He looked straight up at her as she stood there, tall, fair, and good to look upon.

“It isn't my fault I'm alive!” he said, with passionate bitterness. “I know you'll loathe—I'm going farther into the interior, and you can take half my pay and go back home to England, and—”

For a moment the fair face above him looked astonished; then it crumpled up, and the next moment she was on her knees by the bedside,

and her arms had drawn his head against her breast. Very, very tender was their clasp.

“Tommy, Tommy, all this fuss about a wounded eye! Mr McLeod says that a little careful nursing will do away with all necessity for—divorce proceedings!” And it was her voice that broke, her tears that were raining down upon his face. “My dear, my dear!” And her wet cheek was pressed against his; her soft lips met his and lingered there.

The Lost White Woman

THE brig was a wreck. Now and again through the foaming breakers they could see the dark mass of her stern, but the white water covered it and it was gone; a spar or two came washing ashore and some of the deck hamper, but it was utterly impossible that any living thing could be aboard the *Britannia*. On the beach stood the little band of survivors, three men and a woman. It was a November day, the storm had passed, overhead was a cloudless blue sky, and the bright sun was rapidly drying their damp clothes and putting a little warmth into their frozen limbs. The woman, hardly more than a girl she was, drew her red cloak round her and shivered drearily. She felt sick and ill and terrified, and she wished with all her heart that the sea had not been so merciful.

“Heart up, my pretty,” said the old man beside her, putting a kindly hand on her shoulder.

“Where are we?” she asked.

The old man looked towards the mate who was carefully nursing a broken arm.

“Ninety Mile Beach, I think,” said he, sinking down on the sand, “the Gippsland coast.”

And in 1839 they knew less about Gippsland than we do about Central Africa. Behind them was dense tea-tree scrub, its dark green tops vivid and bright in the sunshine, and before them the long yellow stretch of sand that went right away to the horizon, and the treacherous sea sparkling and dancing in the sunlight.

“We can walk back to the settlement,” suggested the old sailor.

But the mate shook his head.

“Scrub's too dense, so I've heard, and there's Corner Inlet and Western Port to be negotiated if we go round the coast. No, bo'sun, Twofold Bay's our only hope,” and he looked pitifully at the woman.

“Then we'd better start at once,” said the bo'sun, and he put one arm round her, lifted her to her feet, and turned his sturdy old face to the east. The other two quietly followed him.

They had no food, they had no water, they had absolutely nothing but what they stood up in, and for all they knew, the thick scrub on their left hand might be swarming with blood-thirsty savages.

At noon they came to some rocks jutting out into the sea. They searched and found shell-fish, and their overpowering thirst they quenched at a rill of water that came out of the scrub. The woman was done, and so was the mate. They had just as soon lie down and die there as crawl a step farther,

and since the others would not leave them, they all lay down and rested in the shade of the tea-tree. They slept, too, and they kept no watch. There might be lurking savages, but their plight could hardly be worse. Death possibly would not be so cruel as that weary tramp along the coast to Twofold Bay.

And at evening death came. Just as the sun was setting and the swift darkness coming down on the land, there were strange rustlings in the scrub about them, so soft and gentle it might have been the wind among the leaves, only there was no wind.

Ellen Hammond heard it first. She pushed her thick hair back from her ears and sat up and listened, then her eyes fell on a dark hand beside a tea-tree stem; she stifled a cry, and in a moment the scrub was alive with leaping, dancing figures. There came a flight of spears; the old man beside her died with a moan, and the other two scrambled to their feet. But their eyes were heavy with sleep; they had only their fists to defend themselves with, and those black figures, with skeletons marked on them in white, outnumbered them ten to one.

The unhappy woman crouching there saw them butchered before her eyes, and crouched still lower. It was useless her trying to escape, and she covered her face with her long, fair hair, gave a yearning, tender thought to the husband and home she had been going to in Sydney, and bent her head to meet her fate. Oh that it might come quickly! That it might come quickly! The white men had died so quietly, with scarce a groan, and now there was in her ears only the uncouth yabbering of savage tongues. How horrible, how weird, how unearthly it all seemed! But still death did not come.

And then a new terror seized her; she thought no more of husband and home, she only realised she was alone and unprotected among those horrible savages, and she envied with all her heart the quiet men beside her. The suspense was more than she could bear, and she sprang to her feet with a terrified cry, and started down for the beach. If she could but reach the sea, the kindly sea, then would all her troubles be over.

But she had not gone half-a-dozen steps before strong hands were laid upon her, she was turned round sharply, and found herself facing a stalwart savage with a bearded face smeared with grease and a piece of bone stuck in his hair. He uttered a sort of grunt of astonishment and admiration. Probably in all his days he had not seen anything so fair as this English girl, with the sunny hair about her shoulders and her blue eyes wide with horror and terror. He appeared to be a sort of chief amongst them, for he pushed off the others who came crowding round, and put his hand on her shoulder. It made her shudder, but she dared not shake it off. At least he

kept the other savages away, and she closed her eyes to shut out the sight of them stripping the dead men who had been her friends all this long, weary day.

At last the hand on her shoulder began to urge her forward, and the whole band went in single file through the scrub. It was dark now, and the savages were evidently afraid. They huddled close together, and moved in silence. The tea-tree was high above their heads; sometimes it met and shut out the dark sky, but generally she could see a star looking down on her, reminding her of her courting days, when she and Tom had looked at the stars together, and it comforted her somehow, though she could hardly have told how. By and by they passed the belt of tea-tree, the scrub and undergrowth were different now, and immense trees towered overhead; then the ground cleared a little, there were little points of leaping flame in the darkness, shrill coo-eyes, the guttural sound of many voices shouting in an uncouth, barbarous tongue, and the pattering of bare feet, and she knew they had reached the blacks' camp.

She was so weary now nothing seemed to matter. She would have dropped to the ground but for the strong hand on her shoulder. A stick in a small fire, a blackfellow's fire, leaped into sudden light, and she saw she was standing beside a hollow tree, and that the interior seemed to be carpeted with soft rotten wood and dead leaves, and with a touch and a kindly look at her captor—necessity had made her diplomatic—she slipped inside and dropped down there, and with the shouts of the people still in her ears she fell into a sleep that was almost a stupor.

“I tell you what, my man,” said Captain Dana of the Native Police, not unkindly, “you'd very much better let us go alone. See here, you're nothing much of a bushman, and you won't be any mortal good to us. You go back to the settlement like a good fellow, and I'll send Bullet here along to put you on the right track. If there's a white woman there—”

“If—if—” stammered Hammond, whose dark hair was already streaked with grey, and whose young face had many lines in it. “When that stockman from Western Port way saw no less than two trees with E. H. marked on them. I—I—”

“And you know,” said Dana soothingly, “the average stockman will see anything that's worth a glass of rum.”

“And that leaf he picked up out of Dr Jamieson's big bible. He swears there was something written on it in charcoal when first he saw it, but it got rubbed off in his trousers' pocket.”

“It might have been there before the blacks raided Jamieson's station,” mused Dana, “and—well—it's but a slender clue, specially as we can't read it. Look here, do you know, Hammond—I mean—do you understand—”

what I mean is, if there's a woman with the blacks we're bound to find her, and we'll bring her in any way. My dear fellow, you haven't realised what the life of a woman among them is like, what she'd be after two or three months, let alone two or three years!"

The unhappy man groaned, and the policeman thought he was going to see reason.

"We'll hand her over to the first white woman we come across, and then you shall see her when she's properly clothed and—"

"I'm going on with you," said the man sullenly.

"On your head be it then," and Dana rolled his blanket round him, put his head on his saddle and his feet to the fire, and stared up at the stars, musing on the impracticability of white men and black troopers. Occasionally he looked round and saw his men dimly in the darkness out of range of the firelight, and the white man, full in the blaze, with his head buried in his hands.

"I don't suppose," said he to himself, "there is any danger, but if some wandering scallawag of a warrigal does throw a spear that ends it, I don't suppose the poor devil'll mind very much."

It was weary work trailing through the dense forests. It was late autumn, too, and the rain—it rained every day; the ground was a quagmire—soft, loose ground on which the foot of a white man had never trod; the huge trees, the trailing creepers, the fern, and the tea-tree loomed up dimly through the mist and the rain, and the four black troopers were as miserable as only black fellows can be. Only the stern command of their leader kept them going forward. Whenever they came to a sheltered spot they were anxious to "quamby" there, and whenever they got the chance they gorged themselves so with food that there was serious danger of the supplies running short. As for the other white man, he grew more like a ghost every day. Even if he found the woman he loved, would it not be better for him and her that she should be dead? How were they ever to blot out those cruel years? And what must she have suffered! What must she be suffering still! Oh God! Oh God! No wonder he spent sleepless nights and watched the dawn come creeping slowly, grey and dreary, through the dripping bush.

They found traces of the aborigines more than once. More than once Bullet, a big black trooper, came back saying that "Plenty blackfellow yanem from scrub," but never did they get a sight of them, though they found their deserted fires over and over again.

"One day more and we must turn back," said Dana at last. "No, Mr Hammond, it's no good protesting. I assure you we haven't two days' flour left, and if I didn't go the troopers would go without me. There's not much

chivalry among these sons of darkness. Back to Jamieson's station we must go. If he can lend us some rations, well, we'll come back for another two days, and that's all I can promise you."

And that day Bullet found a tree and pointed it out to Dana. It was marked, as if with some rude instrument unskilled fingers had tried to cut thereon the letters E. H. And it was freshly done. Dana looked at it gravely, and the man beside him trembled like a leaf. The sun was bright in a cloudless sky to-day, and his face was ghastly.

"Well," said the leader kindly.

Hammond moistened his dry lips.

"It is—it must be—"

"I think so too."

The day was bright and fairly warm, and the troopers went gaily ahead. The blacks had passed that way, and they were following quickly. A broken twig, a little trampled grass, to the eyes of the white men there was nothing, but Bullet went ahead briskly and they followed in silence.

Hammond was sick with weariness and suspense. He could hardly sit his horse.

"I see nothing," he said anxiously. "Can they possibly be following anything?"

"It's as plain as the high road," said Captain Dana. "It won't be long now. We shall come upon them before night, and then at least we shall learn something."

By and by Bullet stopped short and came back to his leader.

"Plenty blackfellow this time sit down alonga waterhole."

"Then," said Dana, dismounting, "we'll leave the horses here and creep in on them. Here, Johnny Warrington, you sit down alonga yarramen."

Johnny Warrington didn't exactly seem to like being left alone in the gathering darkness with the horses, but there was no gainsaying Captain Dana's orders. He would have liked to have left Hammond, too, but one glance at the man's strained, anxious face stopped him.

It was getting dark now, the outlines of the tree trunks were hazy with the evening mists. Captain Dana followed close behind Bullet, and behind him came Hammond. He knew that the other two troopers were on either side, but the gathering gloom hid them from him. He could see nothing but the tall, slight figure of the leader of the black troopers.

So impressive had been the command for silence that he hardly dared breathe; the others slipped along like ghosts, only his own footsteps seemed to ring out above all other sounds. He was thankful for the wind that arose and rustled the leaves of the trees overhead, for the mocking laugh of a belated jackass, for the mournful hoot of the little white owl that

flitted like a lost soul across their path.

Then the figure in front came to a halt, and, turning, caught his hand and pointed to three fiery eyes that looked out of a background of gloom.

“Blackfellows' fires,” said Dana, “at the bottom of the gully. We'll get a little closer and make a rush when I say ‘Go.’ ”

The minutes seemed to crawl, they were stretching themselves into hours, the very sound of his heart beating seemed to fill all the night; then there was the sharp snap of a breaking branch. He had trodden on it.

“You fool,” said Dana's voice angrily. “Go; now go,” he shouted, and he ran forward.

Then followed a scene of wild confusion in the dying light. The troopers raced forward with a savage yell. The blacks in the camp returned it with a cry of unmistakable terror. There was a flight of spears, and then another as the troopers closed. And then came the sharp report of the white man's firearms.

Dana swore an angry oath.

“Who did that?” But there was no reply. The camp was vacant, and its late occupants were rapidly scuttling away into the scrub. Only there was a dark form lay close to one of the little fires. Hammond stood still bewildered, and Dana cried to his men to see that they weren't all speared from the scrub.

The opossum skin rug at the fire moved feebly, and a woman's voice with a sob in it cried:

“Are you white men?”

In a moment Hammond was at her side, and Dana had stirred the smouldering fire to a blaze. It was a white face that lay there among the folds of the rug, a very white face, the hair all round it like an aureole was flaxen, but alas, there was a dark stain on the fur and it was growing larger every minute.

“Nellie! Nellie! Nellie! My God! At last!”

She put up a feeble hand and touched his face. There were still the ragged remains of a sleeve on the thin arm.

“I'm glad, I'm glad, sweetheart. I have wanted you so much.”

The tears were blinding his eyes and raining down on the face that was growing so still.

“Man,” said Dana's pitying voice, “she is dying.”

“No, no.”

She turned her face into his shoulder.

“Tom, Tom dear.”

Dana bared his head. In the bright firelight they were a target for every spear from out the blackness of the surrounding scrub. But he reckoned

that a blackfellow when he was scared was scared badly, and would not stop to see if things might not be mended.

A moment or two passed, and Captain Dana touched his shoulder again.

“Dead,” said he. “She is dead. God rest her soul.”

“Who shot her?” said Dana when he told the story to his particular friend in Melbourne a fortnight later; “well, between ourselves, just between ourselves, you know, I think it was Hammond himself. There were two reports, and I've dismissed Racy Bob from the force for firing without orders; the beggar was pining to get back to his tribe and would have made himself scarce in a week if I hadn't, and I've made Hammond clearly understand that he didn't. He thinks I've eyes that see the bullets in the air, but if the bullet that came whistling past my arm didn't bury itself in the opossum skin rug I'm a Dutchman.”

“She was better dead,” said Captain Lonsdale quietly; “much better dead. But you're right, we'll keep the story quiet.”

And so quiet did they keep it that many people to this day think that the white woman who was captured by the Gippsland blacks was never found.

“North of 53°”

“There is never a law of God or man runs North of 53°”

“WULL, ma lassie,” said Captain Angus McPhail, of the sealing schooner, *Seadrift*, “ye’ll be comin’ roon to ma opeenion before lang a’ mak’ no doot,” and he turned the quid in his cheek slowly.

O Hannah San looked at him out of her narrow, dark eyes, and there was no doubt in her mind. It was a good thing, of course, to attract the attention of the captain. He was part owner, too. There was wealth behind him—witness that smart schooner in the harbour there, with her taper masts and neatly painted sides, and witness his own dress. Did he not wear a waistcoat where other men were content with merely a shirt, and the gold chain that stretched across that waistcoat was heavy and strong. Everything about him spoke to her of wealth. If she pleased him, and she did please him very much, he would spend money here, indeed he would do more, he would take her away from this miserable place where she was to all intents and purposes a slave—body and soul. And O Hannah San, with the blood of her English father beating in her veins, had inherited something of his independence. She could not so invariably smile at fate as did the Japanese women around her.

She was pretty and dainty in her simple kimono of soft pearl grey, embroidered with black and white storks, that set off so well the faint colour in her cheeks. Her hair was not done Japanese fashion. It was drawn back from her face and plaited in a long plait that hung down below her waist. It marked the European blood in her, and made her look still more childish and out of place in this drinking-hell.

The door stood wide open, and the July sun streamed in on to the dirty floor and across the counter slopped with beer and spirits. There were men there from all quarters of the earth, and O Hannah San and two gentle Japanese girls waited on them. They all sought O Hannah San, while O Hannah San’s dark eyes roved to fair-haired Olaf Olsen, the mate of the *Seadrift*.

His shirt was torn, his trousers were tarry, his feet were encased in boots of undressed deerskin, and there was no gold chain to ostentatiously proclaim his wealth; but his blue eyes smiled back at her, and his square jaw told of strength and determination. O Hannah San’s heart went out to him. With his strong arm he would do more for her than the skipper with all his wealth. She loved him, this poor little half-caste Japanese girl who had nothing but her beauty to offer, and he loved her, this burly American Swede who was bound hand and foot to the hard Dundee skipper, who

would certainly brook no rival.

Now he came forward slowly, a little reluctantly.

“I reckon it's about time we slipped our moorings, Mister. The cruiser'll be off in a day or two. She's only waiting for her mails, and the *Oisha Maru* 'll be in from Tokyo any time now.”

“Oh, rats! It'll mak' na differ for a day or twa. The Rusky cruiser's there all the same.”

Through the open doorway of the weatherboard house they could see the cruiser with the British ensign flying, her yellow funnels, and the water streaming from her sides as she rolled in the swell. A smart ship, one of the bulwarks of Britain's power; but McPhail, one of Britain's sons, snapped his fingers scornfully.

“What matter about the cruiser when we're in the fog? It'll be all one then, eh, O Hannah San?” and he chucked the girl under the chin.

The colour rushed to Olsen's weather-beaten cheeks, and he clenched his fists. O Hannah San drew back. Always with her woman's wit she tried to prevent these two men from coming to blows. She loved the mate, but she was woman enough to know the advantage of keeping the skipper at her beck and call; and now, even as she drew back, she smiled saucily, though Olsen frowned.

The skipper leaned his elbows on the dirty counter.

“You an' me'll be marrit,” he said, with a calm air of proprietorship that goaded the mate to wrath; “when a' coom back.”

Olsen's face was black as thunder. He stretched out his hands, and the girl thought he was going to take his skipper and pitch him out of the bar.

“Time enough to talk about that, Captain,” she said lightly. “You haven't gone yet!”

“Ma certy! We'll mend that,” cried the skipper, bringing his fist down with a bang that made the glasses jingle. “Get the crew together, Mister. We'll start this very night, an' when we coom back with a full hold, O Hannah San, a'll marry ye honest an' square if a' ha' to fetch a pairson from Tokyo to do it.”

Olsen frowned, and the girl, with the width of the dirty bar counter between them, made him a mocking little curtsy.

He turned savagely on the mate.

“If that crew isna aboard by four o'clock a'll set fire to every boozin' ken between here and Edermo. Move yourself now, quick an' lively.”

The girl looked across at Olsen, as the skipper was quick to notice. She stood for a moment, then slipped behind the dingy cretonne curtain that made a little private room for the girls behind the bar.

One of the little Japanese girls started the ancient musical box. Perhaps

she foresaw trouble and thought that music might soothe the savage breasts. But half the teeth were broken. It had been used as a weapon of offence and defence too often.

“The last Rose of Summer left blooming—burr— buzz—b-u-z-z,” went the musical box, doing its best.

“Now you get an' rouse those lazy blackguards out, Mister,” raged the skipper, “for the mud hook comes up at four, crew or no crew.”

Olsen's angry eyes were fixed on a little dainty brown hand that waved and pointed through the other end of the curtain.

“Aye, aye, Mister,” he said mechanically.

“Burr—burr—b-u-z-z,” went the musical box. A tender dark face appeared for a moment at the curtain, and the next second the mate, with an access of zeal, had dashed among the drinking men.

Flat-nosed Indians, Chinese, Kanakas, men from all the earth were to be found here, and Olsen caught a big Irishman by the shoulder.

“Now then, O'Hara, look alive. Move yourself, move now. The old man's starting at four sharp. Where's Stinker Jim?”

“At the ‘Black ‘Diamond’; where else?” growled O'Hara, who had his own reasons for not wanting to go to sea in a hurry; and Olsen, hustling the men as he passed, slipped out of the bar and was in a second round in the shadow of the dirty weather-board house, where stood a little figure in her dainty Japanese dress, stretching out her arms to him, all her coquetry and sauciness gone.

In a moment he had taken her in his arms, her head was on his breast, and she was sobbing heart-brokenly.

“You're not going—not now—not this moment. I can't let you go.”

He put his face down to hers.

“Oh, steady, little girl, steady. Don't cry. Before you've properly missed me you'll see the old schooner drifting round the point inward bound with a full hold,” and he rubbed his rough cheek against her soft one. But for all his cheery words, there was a sinking at his heart that he did not like.

“Dear, dear, dear.” Her little clinging hands went up round his neck. “Suppose you never come back again.” She caught her breath with a little sob. “Black Peterson was in here last week dismasted in the *Bounding Billow*, and he says there are no seal at all on the way up, and you'll be for raiding the rookeries then, and that means Vladivostock and a Russian prison, and I'll never see you any more.”

“You'll be able to beg me off,” he said with a laugh, “when the skipper of the Rusky cruiser comes south. No, no, little woman, never fear. The price of skins has gone up. I'm getting twenty-five shares this trip, an' when we've paid off you an' I'll take a schooner away south to the pearlers on the

Great Barrier. No typhoons, no fogs there, little girl.”

She raised her face, smiling for a moment through her tears. A schooner with him, in summer seas; surely the world could hold no greater joy. Then a new fear assailed her.

“He—he—” she breathed, “the old man, he hates you.”

“And I hate him—when you're by,” he said fiercely, and his claspings hands hurt her.

“He'll—he'll kill you.” She was accustomed to deeds of violence, and she thought he might.

The man laughed aloud. “I'd like to see him,” he said, throwing back his head. “Come, little girl, I guess I'll have to get. He'll raise Cain if those men ain't aboard, and I'll have to carry most of 'em, you bet.”

“O Hannah San! O Hannah San!” came a shrill and angry call from the house. The old hag who owned her was calling, and she drew his rough face down to hers for one brief moment, then released him and slipped silently away.

“'Nother of them sealers under weigh, sir,” reported the smart signalman in the ward-room of the cruiser, where the officer of the day was busily engaged in tossing for sherry and bitters.

“We'll hoist the colours an' just dip to 'em. It's as well to be ceevil,” said McPhail.

And slowly the red ensign floating on the land breeze descended from peak to taffrail showing out clear against the dark hills of Hakodate with the little Japanese town nestling at their foot. The last rays of the setting sun caught the full white sails, and the chanty of the men, as they catted the anchor, came mournfully across the waters to the ears of the little girl they had left behind them.

“For there's lots of gold
So I've been told,
On the banks of the Santa Anna.”

“Pea soup,” grunted the skipper.

“I reckon,” said the mate, “it's a d—d sight thicker than any our food-spoiler whacks out.”

The great mainsail overhead idly flapped as the *Seadrift* rolled to the slight swell. The hands were lying lazily about the decks after dinner smoking, and the two men were standing by the wheel. There was friction. Neither, perhaps, would have acknowledged that so slight a thing as a woman could have influenced them in any way; but the fact remained that the skipper, looking at the mate, remembered that a little slip of a girl had preferred him, and had only laughed a little mocking laugh when he—part

owner of the *Seadrift*—had, before the whole crowd, openly announced his intention of marrying her; and then Olsen could not but remember that, while he was penniless, the skipper had the cash and could buy the girl outright if he wished, whatever her views on the subject. A little half-caste Japanese girl doesn't count for much in Hakodate. But might is apt to be right there too, thought the mate grimly, as he looked at his clenched fists and the muscles of his arms.

“I could almost swear,” he said, “I smelt the land in the middle watch last night. D'ye reckon we're to the nor'ard of Petropaulski yet?”

“Aye, she's been movin' through the water always two or three knots sin' we sighted yon volcano in the Kuriles, an' the Kurosiwo current ought to have been helping us on a bit. Dom they seals.” He leaned over the taffrail and spit into the water. “Three weeks out, right in the track of the seals comin' north, an' never a pelt.”

“Land, O! There's the land!” shouted the mate, snatching his pipe out of his mouth and pointing. The schooner had drifted to the edge of the fog, and three miles to leeward they could see a mountain deep in snow from beach to summit, far away in the clouds.

“Yon's Kamskatscka. That's Cape Shipmunski. A ken it weel,” said the skipper. “On the sandy beach abreast of us there's a big lot of walrus hauls up. A've a guid mind to go in an' luik for 'em. There was a professor man askin' for skins to stuff for museums down Tokyo way.”

The mate's suppressed fury burst out now it had a legitimate object to vent itself upon. He swung round.

“Museums to blazes! You don't reckon we've come all this way collectin' old walrus hides for professors. It's come to this, (Unclear:)Cap'en. We've an empty hold. The seals are only in one place. I calculate we'd better look for 'em there.”

“Mon, mon,” it was not sink or swim with the skipper this venture, “ye're vera anxeeous for employment in they mercury mines or to know what a Ween-chester bullet feels like.”

“Mercury mines be blowed; and if it comes to shooting we can give as good as we get, I guess.”

The fog was heavy and wet and cold, and the thought of a schooner and a loving little girl in summer seas was tantalising—and far away—for an empty hold and payment by the share system meant landing at San Francisco or Hakodate with empty pockets. The skipper could afford to fail for one voyage. The thought came to the mate that he would prefer it just for this once. It would put him, Olsen, right out of the running, and the thought stung. He turned to the men.

“Empty pockets at 'Frisco, boys,” he mocked, and the shot told.

A curse or two went out into the fog, and then a voice cried loud and insistent:

“The rookeries! We'll make for the rookeries!”

“A've no mind,” cut in the skipper dryly, “to spend the rest of ma days in a mercury mine.”

“Be blowed! We can go an' look.”

“You hold your jaw, O'Hara. I'm cap'en of this ship.”

“Cap'en or no cap'en,” growled the Irishman, “cap'ens have fallen overboard before now. We're a pretty hard case crowd down for'ard, an' we ain't up here for the good of our healths only. The mate's roight. If he says the word we'll go with him an' skin every seal in the place, an' the blanked fur company's men as well if they go shovin' their oars in.”

“That'll do, O'Hara. That'll do you. Hold your jaw. You dry up,” said Olsen. “The skipper's all right.”

But he had sown the seed.

McPhail looked at the threatening faces for a moment. Hard-bitten Scotchman as he was, he did not like giving in. His desire was for an empty ship and a quick return, but the crew were not to be denied. He was one man against the lot, and he knew that O'Hara's threat was not an idle one. He gave in with what grace he might.

“Wull, wull, ma lads, remember a'll do no mair than luik. There's no hairm in luikin'. The Lord send no cruiser catches us within the thretty-mile leemit,” and he threw the last words sullenly at the jubilant mate.

“Cruiser! In this fog! We've good papers and a clean hold, and it 'ud take a better man than the navigator of the Rusky or the British cruiser to say whether we're within the thirty-mile limit or not.”

“I guess we'll take the risk,” shouted the men, and the skipper turned to the man at the wheel.

“Port your helm, then, ye dommed fule. Keep her east by south.”

For three days the schooner jogged steadily along through the fog. On the second day McPhail was lucky enough to get sights which gave him a good position abreast of the islands he was heading for so unwillingly. Then the fog came down again thicker than ever. It moved in waves, and every now and again the men on the fo'c'sle were just dim figures to the man at the wheel. Sea, sky, half the ship were swallowed up in the dimness, and it was weirdly still. The only sound that broke the silence was the slop of the waves against the schooner's side, and the flapping of her sails against her masts. The lazy leaden waves heaved under the fog, and McPhail took up his position beside the man at the wheel and watched them sullenly.

He wondered in his dull, stolid way would they risk a raid on the rookeries. If they risked and succeeded it would put money in his pocket,

but if they failed— well, his would be the greater loss. He looked at the restless, anxious mate and knew that what he, the skipper, wanted, was to get back just as they were with empty holds and a clean ship.

Between him and his mate was an armed neutrality. They spoke when they had to, that was all, and the crew were with Olsen; but McPhail knew they could have done nothing had the mate stood in with the skipper. And he knew, too, he would have been loyal but for that girl away in Hakodate. Their ship, their liberty, their lives, were all weighed down in the balance by the slim figure of the little girl in a pearl grey kimono with black and white storks upon it. He nursed his wrath and bitterness, and cursed the mate by all his gods.

Then suddenly out of the gloom, making every man jump, came the hoarse hoot of a sailing ship's foghorn quite close to them.

“Wonder what a whaler's doing hereaway,” said the mate. “The whaleman should be farther north by now.”

The skipper looked at him with scorn. “An' ye ca' yersel' a sealer! I spiered ye'd never been beyont the tail o' the toon pier. Ye never heard a whaleman troublin' to sound his foghorn. Yon's a cruiser, Rusky or British. They bank their fires an' cruise under canvas within the leemit.”

Then over the top of the fog came slowly into view the topgallants'les of a man-of-war, and they heard the pipes of the boatswain's mate “calling away” a cutter, and knew that they, too, had been seen, for the fog in these seas is sometimes little more than forty feet high, and the masts of ships close to one another may plainly be seen, while the hulls are shrouded by a thick curtain of fog.

And now the skipper and the mate must stand together. They dropped below, and in a second the skipper had put away the chart and spread out an old one on the table.

“Here away's the ship's poseetion at noon to-day, Mister,” he said, making a pencil mark on the chart forty miles south of their real position, and abreast of Petropaulski, “we're a-lookin' for Petropaulski, ye ken. You keep your tongue amidships, an' a'll spin 'em a yarn.”

When they came on deck again the man-of-war's cutter was only a couple of ship's lengths away. The white boat was hardly discernible, only the black badges with the gilt initial letter in her bows showed up clearly, and the red cross in the white ensign flying at her stern made a spot of brilliant colour on the dull grey of sea and fog. The next second the boat was scraping alongside, and a young lieutenant came over the side, the collar of his monkey-jacket turned up about his ears, his sword banging against the bulwarks as he stepped over.

“You're a sealer by the looks of you,” he said.

“Aye, sur,” said the skipper, “an' an unlucky one.”

“Well, I suppose you know you're within the thirty-mile limit, and as such you're liable to arrest for poaching.”

“Gude save us! The thretty-mile leemit! Wull, wull, wull! Would ye no have a luik at the chart, sir?”

“Yes, I will, and your papers and the hold as well.”

“Mr Olsen, get the main hatch off. Wull ye juist step doon into the cabin, sur?”

“This,” he pointed to the chart, “is my poseetion by dead reckonin' to-day. A'm workin' in for Petropaulski, an' reckon to reach it on the next board, ye ken.”

The lieutenant laughed and pointed to their real position.

“Gude save us!” sighed the skipper. “It'll tak' me a week workin' back against this current.”

A brief inspection of the empty hold followed. Whatever might be their intentions they certainly had not poached as yet, and the young officer got into his boat again, saying he would explain to his captain, and warning McPhail to get out of the limit at once.

By this time the vessels had drifted out of sight and hearing.

“Your course back is west by nor', sur,” said McPhail, civilly, hanging over the bulwarks; and then he put his hands to his mouth and shouted, “Get the hands up, Mr Olsen. We'll put the ship about.”

In a few seconds the boat was swallowed in the dense fog, and McPhail wiped his brow and stroked his hair with his fur cap.

“That was a close call, Mister. A British gaol's better than the mercury mines, but— Ma lads, we'll put the ship about.”

There was a threatening murmur.

“We know where one cruiser is, anyhow,” said Olsen. “He's astern of us. I reckon we'll go on.”

For a moment the two men looked at one another, measuring each other like two angry dogs.

“Cheer O for the skipper, boys! He stood by us like a trump,” said Olsen, and turned on his heel with a laugh, and the hard-bitten Dundee skipper knew he must go on. He might have made known his plight to the lieutenant, but his trade was sealing, and where would he have got another crew had he betrayed this one. And the ship went on her course.

During the evening the wind freshened, blowing steadily off the land, clearing away the fog, only to be succeeded by driving rain and sleet. They could see no farther, and it was bitter cold, and cut their faces like knives. There was a subdued excitement in the ship. Would the mate really see them through? The old man had behaved well about the cruiser, and they

cheered him when he came on deck after supper, but he only shook his fist at them.

“You dommed fules,” he said. “There's the Rusky to reckon wi' yet, an', anyhow, a'll mak' ye pay.”

But the men thought with a full hold he would forget his anger. They knew nothing of the storm of jealous fury raging at his heart.

“Ye'll gang yer ain gait,” he said, and went below again. Olsen watched his broad back in the glimmer of the companion light. He, too, was excited, far more excited than the men, for with him lay the responsibility. It was a different thing to talk of raiding the seal rookeries and to do it, to know that it would be all settled in the course of the next few hours. Even if they got the pelts they would have to run the gauntlet of the two cruisers. But visions of O Hannah San and a peaceful schooner running between the islands and Sydney with copra rose up before him, and filled him with a desperate longing.

“Make or break, the pool or nothing,” he muttered, as he shook the water from his oilskins. Money he must have, therefore seals he must get, and since the legitimate trade on the high seas had failed, the only alternative was a dash for the fur company's preserves.

“Breaker ahead—I tink—I hear him,” the hoarse voice of the Russian Finn at the wheel broke in on his reverie.

“The rookery, by thunder! It's the roar of the seals! It's a weather shore, no breakers there. What a landfall to make!” And again the sick feelings of intense anxiety gripped at his heart. “It ought to be a good omen—such a landfall, in such weather!”

“The de'il they say luiks after his own,” said a gruff voice behind him, and slewing round he saw the oil-skinned figure of McPhail close behind him, his enemy—well, not his enemy exactly, but his rival. Another couple of hours would settle it. If they sailed south of Hakodate with a full hold then he would have no rival. And if they failed—

They were not going to fail. He turned away and knocked his pipe out over the bulwarks, and answered the skipper neither by word or look.

Aft came O'Hara to relieve the wheel, and the mate pointed with his pipe into the gloom.

“The rookeries,” he said, as coolly as he could, “a matter of five mile away.”

“The devil!” cried O'Hara, and then he yelled at the top of his voice for benefit of the watch on deck and the watch below, “the rookeries, boys! The rookeries, you sons of sea cooks! Rouse out there! Who's for the shore? Rouse out there, rouse out!”

Up came tumbling the men, shrouded figures in the gloom and wet. The

slanting decks were streaming with water, the binnacle light showed but a feeble glimmer, and overhead the spread of sails was dark against the lowering sky. The sleet driven before a biting wind cut their faces, but the roar of the seals was plainly to be heard above the sough of the wind in the sails and the slop of the sea against the ship's sides.

They would go for those seals. Olsen knew it as he looked at them straining their eyes out into the gloom, and the skipper knew he was helpless in the hands of his men.

“Shall we try for them, boys?” asked the mate. “I'd better get the boat cleared away.”

“Aye,” came the answer like one man.

“Men,” came the skipper's voice in remonstrance, “it's takin' big reesks. There's no fresh deal, ye ken. If ye don't get they pelts there's a gran' chance o' the mercury mines, an' a'm layin' odds on them.”

“See here, Cap'en,” said Olsen angrily. “We're lookin' for seals, I take it, and they're ahead of us. The sub-agents' men will be all in their huts to win'ard of the rookeries; not a thing'll be heard above the roar of the seals. It's black as blazes and thick as a hedge. A boatful of good men, and four hours clear darkness, never had men such a chance.”

There was a chorus of assent from the men. They were like eager dogs on the leash.

“I'll tak' no hand in it, I tell ye,” said the skipper angrily. “It's agin the law.”

Captain Angus McPhail setting up as a law-abiding citizen would only have moved the men to laughter another time, but now it moved them only to wrath.

“Shove him overboard,” came an angry voice out of the darkness.

But the mate recognised the voice. He crossed the sliding deck, and with one blow of his heavy fist felled the man. He had no reason to love McPhail. At the bottom of his heart he knew well enough it was not honesty that was troubling the skipper, but a desire to thwart him, Olaf Olsen, to send him back to port a beggar; but as one of the after-guard he was loyal to a certain extent.

“Stow that,” said he. “If the skipper ain't with us, he ain't agin us. O'Hara and I can settle it. Now then, lads, we'll take the fores'le and stays'le off her. The less sail, the less chance of being seen.”

The roar of the seals was getting louder and louder as they drew in. Presently, sail had been shortened, the whale-boat cleared away and lowered over the side close to the water, and a couple of hands were busy passing over clubs and skinning knives and other implements.

“Sandy,” ordered the mate, “jump down to my cabin and pass up those

Winchesters underneath the settee.”

“Mon, mon,” remonstrated the skipper, “that's a hangin' matter for all of us. The raidin's bad eneuch, an' means chokee for those that ha' the meesfortune to be caught, but this yon is a hangin' matter for all of us.”

“Oh, that's all right,” said the mate cheerfully. “If that infernal Rusky takes a hand in the game we'll be prepared to see him, and raise him every time. I'll take fifteen of you men. It's a big load for the boat, and most of you'll have to swim off, I'm thinkin',” he added with a chuckle, the excitement was taking hold of him, “when we've a full load of skins.”

Just faintly through the driving sleet and rain they could make out land, with the rocks only a few hundred yards away, and the mate reflected they must be perfectly invisible from the shore. The schooner was hove to, and the boat pulled silently away in the direction of the rocks. The six remaining men, one of whom was the Chinese cook and steward, hung over the bulwarks, straining their eyes out into the gloom. Intense excitement kept them silent, and presently the skipper joined them. He had the sullen air of a beaten man, but even on him the situation had its effect. The excitement was catching. Another hour would settle it, and send them back to Hakodate with a fuller hold than ever they had had yet, or else—

“By gum,” muttered O'Hara, “it's thicker than a mud hedge.”

The skipper stirred uneasily. There was a little break in the clouds, and for one second a bright star twinkled down on them.

“Good luck to you,” said O'Hara.

“Dom you for a scatter-brained Irish fule!” broke in the skipper angrily. “I dinna like the luik of it at all. The infernal rain's takin' off, a' think. If there's trouble, ma lads, ye'll juist shelter under the bulwarks an' tak' na notice.”

“Trouble,” scoffed O'Hara.

“The rain's takin' off, a' tell ye.”

The skipper was right. The rain that had come down so steadily and persistently since they had left the fog, was just taking off when they needed it most. If it had only held on another hour—but it was not going to hold on another hour. The crew leaning over the bulwarks saw first the sea, then the rocks, the beach, and the sand hillocks behind the beach, clearly outlined. They could see their boat and the men at work among the seals. One cursed, one spit in the water. O'Hara, with Irish optimism, opined it would be all right, and then on the sandhills one or two figures appeared for a second and disappeared. The men could be seen running through the seals towards the boat.

The skipper raised his voice and cursed the mate, and cursed the men by all his gods. Then he turned to O'Hara.

“Guve me the wheel. Juist pass up they rifles out of the cabin an' put some ammuneetion on the skylight. Quick, now! Look lively! If yon Rusky has a bang at me maybe it wouldna be ceevil no to return it.”

O'Hara looked at him a second, then jumped to obey him, and hardly was he back again than above the roar of the seals came the short, sharp bark of the Winchesters.

“Up wi' ye. Hoist the fores'le. Let draw the head sheets,” roared the skipper, as the fusillade increased.

One or two men dropped by the boat, whether wounded or to take cover they could not tell. Others frantically endeavoured to get her afloat, while the subagent's people, evidently in force, were firing from the tops of the sandhills.

The skipper's attention was taken off for a moment by the necessity for giving his undivided attention to getting sail on the ship with his limited crew, and when he again looked the boat was afloat, drifting before the wind, no sign of life in her, and there were one or two dark figures on the outer rocks which might have been dead seals, but looked suspiciously like men.

He spun the wheel hard up and shouted to the men to slack away the main sheets. He was no coward, but he had been dragged into this against his will.

“It's na guid, it's na guid,” he shouted. “Yon lot's done for. We maun juist save our ain skins.”

Not even O'Hara made any remonstrance. He was captain of his own ship once more. By this time the schooner was attracting the enemy's fire, but the bullets fell short.

“There's a seal—no—it's a man swimming toward us. It's one of them Flat-noses, Boney, I reckon,” shouted O'Hara.

The skipper hesitated one second.

“We'll go back for him,” he said. “Put your helm down. Haud aft your sheets.”

Smartly the schooner came up to the wind, and in a few minutes Boney was on board. His cheek was laid open by a bullet, and he gesticulated wildly. As far as he knew four or five men were among the seals; the rest were in the boat, most of them hit more or less. The sub-agent's men were too many for them. They hadn't had a chance. The mate had a broken arm.

The schooner was rapidly coming into the fire zone, and the bullets were coming their way again, though they were still falling short, and they could see a boat being rapidly hauled over the sandhills. Not one of them but knew what that meant. If they in their crippled condition were caught by the sub-agent and his well-armed men it was good-bye to the girls of

Hakodate and San Francisco for many a long day to come. It was absolute ruin to the skipper.

“Are you goin' afther the mate?” asked O'Hara.

“Aye,” came the answer promptly; “a'll no see a man sent to the mines if a' can help it. Get a grapnel along the starboard side, O'Hara. You stand by to chuck it into the boat as we pass. The rest of you lie close under the weather bulwarks, an' fire on yon sandhills. Ye'll maybe not hit much but sand, but perhaps ye'll deemoralise their fire.”

The lead was now coming in earnest. “Zip! zip! zip!” splinters of wood in all directions. The schooner held on gallantly, the only man on her decks visible being McPhail, who was kneeling by the wheel, which raised him just high enough to see over the bulwarks. It would be a very close call if she got through, for his boat lay within thirty yards of the visible rocks, and probably among lots of invisible ones, and it also would bring him within about one hundred and fifty yards of the riflemen on the sandhills.

The hard Scotchman wondered for a moment was it good enough. What was he doing this for? The mate had brought it on himself, even if he were not already dead, and for the others that might be living, what did they matter, one gaol was pretty much the same as another. A spin of the wheel, and in a few minutes he would be in safety, heading away for Hakodate with no obstacle now between him and O Hannah San. He had everything to lose and nothing to gain, and this sentiment was not business. But he held on.

“Zip!” and he felt a pain in his shoulder, but it was not until he saw the red stain coming out on his flannel shirt that it dawned on him he had been hit.

They were rapidly closing down on the boat.

“Stand by!” he shouted to O'Hara, “an' the rest of ye pump lead for all ye're worth.”

The rocks looked as if the schooner must strike them, so narrow did the little stretch of water between seem.

“Bang!” came the boat alongside the schooner.

“Heave!” shouted McPhail.

For one second O'Hara's head and arm appeared above the sheltering bulwarks. The grapnel took a firm hold against the thwart of the boat, and almost the same instant the mate appeared over the side, one arm hanging limp, and he rushed aft and crouched down on the deck.

“Whizz!” went the wheel.

The skipper's voice rang out. “Slack away every—”

He half rose and pitched forward on his face, with his hands outstretched. The mate, with his one hand grabbing at the wheel mechanically, noticed

the little trickle of blood reddening the damp deck.

“Here you, O'Hara,” he shouted, “give a hand to the cap'en.”

But no one could help the skipper now. He had given his last order. He had fought his last fight. A brave if lawless sailor had gone to his own place—his place till the sea shall give up her dead, and the smart little ship, towing her boat with its dead and wounded alongside, swung round on her course like a graceful seabird heading for the open sea.
