

The Mucker

by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 1875-1950

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Chapter I

Billy Byrne.

Billy Byrne was a product of the streets and alleys of Chicago's great West Side. From Halsted to Robey, and from Grand Avenue to Lake Street there was scarce a bartender whom Billy knew not by his first name. And, in proportion to their number which was considerably less, he knew the patrolmen and plain clothes men equally as well, but not so pleasantly.

His kindergarten education had commenced in an alley back of a feed-store. Here a gang of older boys and men were wont to congregate at such times as they had naught else to occupy their time, and as the bridewell was the only place in which they ever held a job for more than a day or two, they had considerable time to devote to congregating.

They were pickpockets and second-story men, made and in the making, and all were muckers, ready to insult the first woman who passed, or pick a quarrel with any stranger who did not appear too burly. By night they plied their real vocations. By day they sat in the alley behind the feedstore and drank beer from a battered tin pail.

The question of labor involved in transporting the pail, empty, to the saloon across the street, and returning it, full, to the alley back of the feed-store was solved by the presence of admiring and envious little boys of the neighborhood who hung, wide-eyed and thrilled, about these heroes of their childish lives.

Billy Byrne, at six, was rushing the can for this noble band, and incidentally picking up his knowledge of life and the rudiments of his education. He gloried in the fact that he was personally acquainted with "Eddie" Welch, and that with his own ears he had heard "Eddie" tell the gang how he stuck up a guy on West Lake Street within fifty yards of the Twenty-eighth Precinct Police Station.

The kindergarten period lasted until Billy was ten; then he commenced "swiping" brass faucets from vacant buildings and selling them to a fence who ran a junkshop on Lincoln Street near Kinzie.

From this man he obtained the hint that graduated him to a higher grade, so that at twelve he was robbing freight cars in the yards along Kinzie Street, and it was about this same time that he commenced to find pleasure in the feel of his fist against the jaw of a fellow-man.

He had had his boyish scraps with his fellows off and on ever since he could remember; but his first real fight came when he was twelve. He had had an altercation with an erstwhile pal over the division of the returns from some freight-car booty. The gang was all present, and as words quickly gave place to blows, as they have a habit of doing in certain sections of the West Side, the men and boys formed a rough ring about the contestants.

The battle was a long one. The two were rolling about in the dust of the alley quite as often as they were upon their feet exchanging blows. There was nothing fair, nor decent, nor scientific about their methods. They gouged and bit and tore. They used knees and elbows and feet, and but for the timely presence of a brickbat beneath his fingers at the psychological moment Billy Byrne would have gone down to humiliating defeat. As it was the other boy went down, and for a week Billy remained hidden by one of the gang pending the report from the hospital.

When word came that the patient would live, Billy felt an immense load lifted from his shoulders, for he dreaded arrest and experience with the law that he had learned from childhood to deride and hate. Of course there was the loss of prestige that would naturally have accrued to him could he have been pointed out as the "guy that croaked Sheehan"; but there is always a fly in the ointment, and Billy only sighed and came out of his temporary retirement.

That battle started Billy to thinking, and the result of that mental activity was a determination to learn to handle his mitts scientifically—people of the West Side do not have hands; they are equipped by Nature with mitts and dukes. A few have paws and flippers.

He had no opportunity to realize his new dream for several years; but when he was about seventeen a neighbor's son surprised his little world by suddenly developing from an unknown teamster into a locally famous light-weight.

The young man never had been affiliated with the gang, as his escutcheon was defiled with a record of steady employment. So Billy had known nothing of the sparring lessons his young neighbor had taken, or of the work he had done at the down-town gymnasium of Larry Hilmore.

Now it happened that while the new light-weight was unknown to the charmed circle of the gang, Billy knew him fairly well by reason of the proximity of their respective parental back yards, and so when the glamour of pugilistic success haloed the young man Billy lost no time in basking in the light of reflected glory.

He saw much of his new hero all the following winter. He accompanied him to many mills, and on one glorious occasion occupied a position in the coming champion's corner. When the prize fighter toured, Billy continued to hang around Hilmore's place, running errands and doing odd jobs, the while he picked up pugilistic lore, and absorbed the spirit of the game along with the rudiments and finer points of its science, almost unconsciously. Then his ambition changed. Once he had longed to shine as a gunman; now he was determined to become a prize fighter; but the old gang still saw much of him, and he was a familiar figure about the saloon corners along Grand Avenue and Lake Street.

During this period Billy neglected the box cars on Kinzie Street, partially because he felt that he was fitted for more dignified employment, and as well for the fact that the railroad company had doubled the number of watchmen in the yards; but there were times when he felt the old yearning for excitement and adventure. These times were usually coincident with an acute financial depression in Billy's change pocket, and then he would fare forth in the still watches of the night, with a couple of boon companions and roll a souse, or stick up a saloon.

It was upon an occasion of this nature that an event occurred which was fated later to change the entire course of Billy Byrne's life. Upon the West Side the older gangs are jealous of the sanctity of their own territory. Outsiders do not trespass with impunity. From Halsted to Robey, and from Lake to Grand lay the broad hunting preserve of Kelly's gang, to which Billy had been almost born, one might say. Kelly owned the feed-store back of which the gang had loafed for years, and though himself a respectable businessman his name had been attached to the pack of hoodlums who held forth at his back door as the easiest means of locating and identifying its motley members.

The police and citizenry of this great territory were the natural enemies and prey of Kelly's gang, but as the kings of old protected the deer of their great forests from poachers, so Kelly's gang felt it incumbent upon them to safeguard the lives and property which they considered theirs by divine right. It is doubtful that they thought of the matter in just this way, but the effect was the same.

And so it was that as Billy Byrne wended homeward alone in the wee hours of the morning after emptying the cash drawer of old Schneider's saloon and locking the weeping Schneider in his own ice box, he was deeply grieved and angered to see three rank outsiders from Twelfth Street beating Patrolman Stanley Lasky with his own baton, the while they simultaneously strove to kick in his ribs with their heavy boots.

Now Lasky was no friend of Billy Byrne; but the officer had been born and raised in the district and was attached to the Twenty-eighth Precinct Station on Lake Street near Ashland Avenue, and so was part and parcel of the natural possession of the gang. Billy felt that it was entirely ethical to beat up a cop, provided you confined your efforts to those of your own district; but for a bunch of yaps from south of Twelfth Street to attempt to pull off any such coarse work in his bailiwick—why it was unthinkable.

A hero and rescuer of lesser experience than Billy Byrne would have rushed melodramatically into the midst of the fray, and in all probability have had his face pushed completely through the back of his head, for the guys from Twelfth Street were not of the rah-rah-boy type of hoodlum—they were bad men, with an upper

case B. So Billy crept stealthily along in the shadows until he was quite close to them, and behind them. On the way he had gathered up a cute little granite paving block, than which there is nothing in the world harder, not even a Twelfth Street skull. He was quite close now to one of the men—he who was wielding the officer's club to such excellent disadvantage to the officer—and then he raised the paving block only to lower it silently and suddenly upon the back of that unsuspecting head —“and then there were two.”

Before the man's companions realized what had happened Billy had possessed himself of the fallen club and struck one of them a blinding, staggering blow across the eyes. Then number three pulled his gun and fired point-blank at Billy. The bullet tore through the mucker's left shoulder. It would have sent a more highly organized and nervously inclined man to the pavement; but Billy was neither highly organized nor nervously inclined, so that about the only immediate effect it had upon him was to make him mad—before he had been but peeved—peeved at the rank crust that had permitted these cheap-skates from south of Twelfth Street to work his territory.

Thoroughly aroused, Billy was a wonder. From a long line of burly ancestors he had inherited the physique of a prize bull. From earliest childhood he had fought, always unfairly, so that he knew all the tricks of street fighting. During the past year there had been added to Billy's natural fighting ability and instinct a knowledge of the scientific end of the sport. The result was something appalling—to the gink from Twelfth Street.

Before he knew whether his shot had killed Billy his gun had been wrenched from his hand and flung across the street; he was down on the granite with a hand as hard as the paving block scrambling his facial attractions beyond hope of recall.

By this time Patrolman Lasky had staggered to his feet, and most opportunely at that, for the man whom Billy had dazed with the club was recovering. Lasky promptly put him to sleep with the butt of the gun that he had been unable to draw when first attacked, then he turned to assist Billy. But it was not Billy who needed assistance—it was the gentleman from Bohemia. With difficulty Lasky dragged Billy from his prey.

“Leave enough of him for the inquest,” pleaded Lasky.

When the wagon arrived Billy had disappeared, but Lasky had recognized him and thereafter the two had nodded pleasantly to each other upon such occasions as they chanced to meet upon the street.

Two years elapsed before the event transpired which proved a crisis in Billy's life. During this period his existence had been much the same as before. He had collected what was coming to him from careless and less muscular citizens. He had helped to stick up a half-dozen saloons. He had robbed the night men in two elevated stations, and for a while had been upon the pay-roll of a certain union and done strong arm work in all parts of the city for twenty-five dollars a week.

By day he was a general utility man about Larry Hilmore's boxing academy, and time and time again Hilmore urged him to quit drinking and live straight, for he saw in the young giant the makings of a great heavy-weight; but Billy couldn't leave the booze alone, and so the best that he got was an occasional five spot for appearing in preliminary bouts with third- and fourth-rate heavies and has-beens;

but during the three years that he had hung about Hilmore's he had acquired an enviable knowledge of the manly art of self-defense.

On the night that things really began to happen in the life of Billy Byrne that estimable gentleman was lolling in front of a saloon at the corner of Lake and Robey. The dips that congregated nightly there under the protection of the powerful politician who owned the place were commencing to assemble. Billy knew them all, and nodded to them as they passed him. He noted surprise in the faces of several as they saw him standing there. He wondered what it was all about, and determined to ask the next man who evinced even mute wonderment at his presence what was eating him.

Then Billy saw a harness bull strolling toward him from the east. It was Lasky. When Lasky saw Billy he too opened his eyes in surprise, and when he came quite close to the mucker he whispered something to him, though he kept his eyes straight ahead as though he had not seen, Billy at all.

In deference to the whispered request Billy presently strolled around the corner toward Walnut Street, but at the alley back of the saloon he turned suddenly in. A hundred yards up the alley he found Lasky in the shadow of a telephone pole.

"Wotinell are you doin' around here?" asked the patrolman. "Didn't you know that Sheehan had peached?"

Two nights before old man Schneider, goaded to desperation by the repeated raids upon his cash drawer, had shown fight when he again had been invited to elevate his hands, and the holdup men had shot him through the heart. Sheehan had been arrested on suspicion.

Billy had not been with Sheehan that night. As a matter of fact he never had trained with him, for, since the boyish battle that the two had waged, there had always been ill feeling between them; but with Lasky's words Billy knew what had happened.

"Sheehan says I done it, eh?" he questioned.

"That's what he says."

"I wasn't within a mile of Schneider's that night," protested Billy.

"The Lieut thinks different," said Lasky. "He'd be only too glad to soak you; for you've always been too slick to get nicked before. Orders is out to get you, and if I were you I'd beat it and beat it quick. I don't have to tell you why I'm handing you this, but it's all I can do for you. Now take my advice and make yourself scarce, though you'll have to go some to make your get-away now—every man on the force has your description by this time."

Billy turned without a word and walked east in the alley toward Lincoln Street. Lasky returned to Robey Street. In Lincoln Street Billy walked north to Kinzie. Here he entered the railroad yards. An hour later he was bumping out of town toward the West on a fast freight. Three weeks later he found himself in San Francisco. He had no money, but the methods that had so often replenished his depleted exchequer at home he felt would serve the same purpose here.

Being unfamiliar with San Francisco, Billy did not know where best to work, but when by accident he stumbled upon a street where there were many saloons whose patrons were obviously seafaring men Billy was distinctly elated. What could be better for his purpose than a drunken sailor?

He entered one of the saloons and stood watching a game of cards, or thus he seemed to be occupied. As a matter of fact his eyes were constantly upon the alert, roving, about the room to wherever a man was in the act of paying for a round of drinks that a fat wallet might be located.

Presently one that filled him with longing rewarded his careful watch. The man was sitting at a table a short distance from Billy. Two other men were with him. As he paid the waiter from a well-filled pocketbook he looked up to meet Billy's eyes upon him.

With a drunken smile he beckoned to the mucker to join them. Billy felt that Fate was overkind to him, and he lost no time in heeding her call. A moment later he was sitting at the table with the three sailors, and had ordered a drop of red-eye.

The stranger was very lavish in his entertainment. He scarcely waited for Billy to drain one glass before he ordered another, and once after Billy had left the table for a moment he found a fresh drink awaiting him when he returned—his host had already poured it for him.

It was this last drink that did the business.

Chapter II

Shanghaied.

When Billy opened his eyes again he could not recall, for the instant, very much of his recent past. At last he remembered with painful regret the drunken sailor it had been his intention to roll. He felt deeply chagrined that his rightful prey should have escaped him. He couldn't understand how it had happened.

"This Frisco booze must be something fierce," thought Billy.

His head ached frightfully and he was very sick. So sick that the room in which he lay seemed to be rising and falling in a horribly realistic manner. Every time it dropped it brought Billy's stomach nearly to his mouth.

Billy shut his eyes. Still the awful sensation. Billy groaned. He never had been so sick in all his life before, and, my, how his poor head did hurt. Finding that it only seemed to make matters worse when he closed his eyes Billy opened them again.

He looked about the room in which he lay. He found it a stuffy hole filled with bunks in tiers three deep around the sides. In the center of the room was a table. Above the table a lamp hung suspended from one of the wooden beams of the ceiling.

The lamp arrested Billy's attention. It was swinging back and forth rather violently. This could not be a hallucination. The room might seem to be rising and falling, but that lamp could not seem to be swinging around in any such manner if it were not really and truly swinging. He couldn't account for it. Again he shut his eyes for a moment. When he opened them to look again at the lamp he found it still swung as before.

Cautiously he slid from his bunk to the floor. It was with difficulty that he kept his feet. Still that might be but the effects of the liquor. At last he reached the table to which he clung for support while he extended one hand toward the lamp.

There was no longer any doubt! The lamp was beating back and forth like the clapper of a great bell. Where was he? Billy sought a window. He found some little round, glass-covered holes near the low ceiling at one side of the room. It was only at the greatest risk to life and limb that he managed to crawl on all fours to one of them.

As he straightened up and glanced through he was appalled at the sight that met his eyes. As far as he could see there was naught but a tumbling waste of water. And then the truth of what had happened to him broke upon his understanding.

"An' I was goin' to roll that guy!" he muttered in helpless bewilderment. "I was a-goin' to roll him, and now look here wot he has done to me!"

At that moment a light appeared above as the hatch was raised, and Billy saw the feet and legs of a large man descending the ladder from above. When the newcomer reached the floor and turned to look about his eyes met Billy's, and Billy saw that it was his host of the previous evening.

"Well, my hearty, how goes it?" asked the stranger.

"You pulled it off pretty slick," said Billy.

"What do you mean?" asked the other with a frown.

"Come off," said Billy; "you know what I mean."

"Look here," replied the other coldly. "Don't you forget that I'm mate of this ship, an' that you want to speak respectful to me if you ain't lookin' for trouble. My name's MR. Ward, an' when you speak to me say SIR. Understand?"

Billy scratched his head, and blinked his eyes. He never before had been spoken to in any such fashion—at least not since he had put on the avoirdupois of manhood. His head ached horribly and he was sick to his stomach—frightfully sick. His mind was more upon his physical suffering than upon what the mate was saying, so that quite a perceptible interval of time elapsed before the true dimensions of the affront to his dignity commenced to percolate into the befogged and pain-racked convolutions of his brain.

The mate thought that his bluster had bluffed the new hand. That was what he had come below to accomplish. Experience had taught him that an early lesson in discipline and subordination saved unpleasant encounters in the future. He also had learned that there is no better time to put a bluff of this nature across than when the victim is suffering from the after-effects of whiskey and a drug—mentality, vitality, and courage are then at their lowest ebb. A brave man often is reduced to the pitiful condition of a yellow dog when nausea sits astride his stomach.

But the mate was not acquainted with Billy Byrne of Kelly's gang. Billy's brain was befuddled, so that it took some time for an idea to wriggle its way through, but his courage was all there, and all to the good. Billy was a mucker, a hoodlum, a gangster, a thug, a tough. When he fought, his methods would have brought a flush of shame to the face of His Satanic Majesty. He had hit oftener from behind than from before. He had always taken every advantage of size and weight and numbers that he could call to his assistance. He was an insulter of girls and

women. He was a bar-room brawler, and a saloon-corner loafer. He was all that was dirty, and mean, and contemptible, and cowardly in the eyes of a brave man, and yet, notwithstanding all this, Billy Byrne was no coward. He was what he was because of training and environment. He knew no other methods; no other code. Whatever the meager ethics of his kind he would have lived up to them to the death. He never had squealed on a pal, and he never had left a wounded friend to fall into the hands of the enemy—the police.

Nor had he ever let a man speak to him, as the mate had spoken, and get away with it, and so, while he did not act as quickly as would have been his wont had his brain been clear, he did act; but the interval of time had led the mate into an erroneous conception of its cause, and into a further rash show of authority, and had thrown him off his guard as well.

“What you need,” said the mate, advancing toward Billy, “is a bash on the beezer. It’ll help you remember that you ain’t nothin’ but a dirty damn landlubber, an’ when your betters come around you’ll—”

But what Billy would have done in the presence of his betters remained stillborn in the mate’s imagination in the face of what Billy really did do to his better as that worthy swung a sudden, vicious blow at the mucker’s face.

Billy Byrne had not been scrapping with third- and fourth-rate heavies, and sparring with real, live ones for nothing. The mate’s fist whistled through empty air; the blear-eyed hunk of clay that had seemed such easy prey to him was metamorphosed on the instant into an alert, catlike bundle of steel sinews, and Billy Byrne swung that awful right with the pile-driver weight, that even The Big Smoke himself had acknowledged respect for, straight to the short ribs of his antagonist.

With a screech of surprise and pain the mate crumpled in the far corner of the forecastle, rammed halfway beneath a bunk by the force of the terrific blow. Like a tiger Billy Byrne was after him, and dragging the man out into the center of the floor space he beat and mauled him until his victim’s blood-curdling shrieks echoed through the ship from stem to stern.

When the captain, followed by a half-dozen seamen rushed down the companionway, he found Billy sitting astride the prostrate form of the mate. His great fingers circled the man’s throat, and with mighty blows he was dashing the fellow’s head against the hard floor. Another moment and murder would have been complete.

“Avast there!” cried the captain, and as though to punctuate his remark he swung the heavy stick he usually carried full upon the back of Billy’s head. It was that blow that saved the mate’s life, for when Billy came to he found himself in a dark and smelly hole, chained and padlocked to a heavy stanchion.

They kept Billy there for a week; but every day the captain visited him in an attempt to show him the error of his way. The medium used by the skipper for impressing his ideas of discipline upon Billy was a large, hard stick. At the end of the week it was necessary to carry Billy above to keep the rats from devouring him, for the continued beatings and starvation had reduced him to little more than an unconscious mass of raw and bleeding meat.

"There," remarked the skipper, as he viewed his work by the light of day, "I guess that fellow'll know his place next time an officer an' a gentleman speaks to him."

That Billy survived is one of the hitherto unrecorded miracles of the power of matter over mind. A man of intellect, of imagination, a being of nerves, would have succumbed to the shock alone; but Billy was not as these. He simply lay still and thoughtless, except for half-formed ideas of revenge, until Nature, unaided, built up what the captain had so ruthlessly torn down.

Ten days after they brought him up from the hold Billy was limping about the deck of the Halfmoon doing light manual labor. From the other sailors aboard he learned that he was not the only member of the crew who had been shanghaied. Aside from a half-dozen reckless men from the criminal classes who had signed voluntarily, either because they could not get a berth upon a decent ship, or desired to flit as quietly from the law zone of the United States as possible, not a man was there who had been signed regularly.

They were as tough and vicious a lot as Fate ever had forgathered in one forecandle, and with them Billy Byrne felt perfectly at home. His early threats of awful vengeance to be wreaked upon the mate and skipper had subsided with the rough but sensible advice of his messmates. The mate, for his part, gave no indication of harboring the assault that Billy had made upon him other than to assign the most dangerous or disagreeable duties of the ship to the mucker whenever it was possible to do so; but the result of this was to hasten Billy's nautical education, and keep him in excellent physical trim.

All traces of alcohol had long since vanished from the young man's system. His face showed the effects of his enforced abstemiousness in a marked degree. The red, puffy, blotchy complexion had given way to a clear, tanned skin; bright eyes supplanted the bleary, bloodshot things that had given the bestial expression to his face in the past. His features, always regular and strong, had taken on a peculiarly refined dignity from the salt air, the clean life, and the dangerous occupation of the deep-sea sailor, that would have put Kelly's gang to a pinch to have recognized their erstwhile crony had he suddenly appeared in their midst in the alley back of the feed-store on Grand Avenue.

With the new life Billy found himself taking on a new character. He surprised himself singing at his work—he whose whole life up to now had been devoted to dodging honest labor—whose motto had been: The world owes me a living, and it's up to me to collect it. Also, he was surprised to discover that he liked to work, that he took keen pride in striving to outdo the men who worked with him, and this spirit, despite the suspicion which the captain entertained of Billy since the episode of the forecandle, went far to making his life more endurable on board the Halfmoon, for workers such as the mucker developed into are not to be sneezed at, and though he had little idea of subordination it was worth putting up with something to keep him in condition to work. It was this line of reasoning that saved Billy's skull on one or two occasions when his impudence had been sufficient to have provoked the skipper to a personal assault upon him under ordinary conditions; and Mr. Ward, having tasted of Billy's medicine once, had no craving for another encounter with him that would entail personal conflict.

The entire crew was made up of ruffians and unhung murderers, but Skipper Simms had had little experience with seamen of any other ilk, so he handled them roughshod, using his horny fist, and the short, heavy stick that he habitually carried, in lieu of argument; but with the exception of Billy the men all had served before the mast in the past, so that ship's discipline was to some extent ingrained in them all.

Enjoying his work, the life was not an unpleasant one for the mucker. The men of the fore-castle were of the kind he had always known—there was no honor among them, no virtue, no kindness, no decency. With them Billy was at home—he scarcely missed the old gang. He made his friends among them, and his enemies. He picked quarrels, as had been his way since childhood. His science and his great strength, together with his endless stock of underhand tricks brought him out of each encounter with fresh laurels. Presently he found it difficult to pick a fight—his messmates had had enough of him. They left him severely alone.

These oft-times bloody battles engendered no deep-seated hatred in the hearts of the defeated. They were part of the day's work and play of the half-brutes that Skipper Simms had gathered together. There was only one man aboard whom Billy really hated. That was the passenger, and Billy hated him, not because of anything that the man had said or done to Billy, for he had never even so much as spoken to the mucker, but because of the fine clothes and superior air which marked him plainly to Billy as one of that loathed element of society—a gentleman.

Billy hated everything that was respectable. He had hated the smug, self-satisfied merchants of Grand Avenue. He had writhed in torture at the sight of every shiny, purring automobile that had ever passed him with its load of well-groomed men and women. A clean, stiff collar was to Billy as a red rag to a bull. Cleanliness, success, opulence, decency, spelled but one thing to Billy—physical weakness; and he hated physical weakness. His idea of indicating strength and manliness lay in displaying as much of brutality and uncouthness as possible. To assist a woman over a mud hole would have seemed to Billy an acknowledgement of pusillanimity—to stick out his foot and trip her so that she sprawled full length in it, the hall mark of bluff manliness. And so he hated, with all the strength of a strong nature, the immaculate, courteous, well-bred man who paced the deck each day smoking a fragrant cigar after his meals.

Inwardly he wondered what the dude was doing on board such a vessel as the Halfmoon, and marveled that so weak a thing dared venture among real men. Billy's contempt caused him to notice the passenger more than he would have been ready to admit. He saw that the man's face was handsome, but there was an unpleasant shiftiness to his brown eyes; and then, entirely outside of his former reasons for hating him, Billy came to loathe him intuitively, as one who was not to be trusted. Finally his dislike for the man became an obsession. He haunted, when discipline permitted, that part of the vessel where he would be most likely to encounter the object of his wrath, hoping, always hoping, that the "dude" would give him some slight pretext for "pushing in his mush," as Billy would so picturesquely have worded it.

He was loitering about the deck for this purpose one evening when he overheard part of a low-voiced conversation between the object of his wrath and Skipper

Simms—just enough to set him to wondering what was doing, and to show him that whatever it might be it was crooked and that the immaculate passenger and Skipper Simms were both “in on it.”

He questioned “Bony” Sawyer and “Red” Sanders, but neither had nearly as much information as Billy himself, and so the Halfmoon came to Honolulu and lay at anchor some hundred yards from a stanch, trim, white yacht, and none knew, other than the Halfmoon’s officers and her single passenger, the real mission of the harmless-looking little brigantine.

Chapter III

The Conspiracy.

No shore leave was granted the crew of the Halfmoon while the vessel lay off Honolulu, and deep and ominous were the grumblings of the men. Only First Officer Ward and the second mate went ashore. Skipper Simms kept the men busy painting and holystoning as a vent for their pent emotions.

Billy Byrne noticed that the passenger had abandoned his daylight strolls on deck. In fact he never once left his cabin while the Halfmoon lay at anchor until darkness had fallen; then he would come on deck, often standing for an hour at a time with eyes fastened steadily upon the brave little yacht from the canopied upper deck of which gay laughter and soft music came floating across the still water.

When Mr. Ward and the second mate came to shore a strange thing happened. They entered a third-rate hotel near the water front, engaged a room for a week, paid in advance, were in their room for half an hour and emerged clothed in civilian raiment.

Then they hastened to another hostelry—a first-class one this time, and the second mate walked ahead in frock coat and silk hat while Mr. Ward trailed behind in a neat, blue serge sack suit, carrying both bags.

At the second hotel the second mate registered as Henri Thérière, Count de Cadenet, and servant, France. His first act thereafter was to hand a note to the clerk asking that it be dispatched immediately. The note was addressed to Anthony Harding, Esq., On Board Yacht Lotus.

Count de Cadenet and his servant repaired immediately to the count’s rooms, there to await an answer to the note. Henri Thérière, the second officer of the Halfmoon, in frock coat and silk hat looked every inch a nobleman and a gentleman. What his past had been only he knew, but his polished manners, his knowledge of navigation and seamanship, and his leaning toward the ways of the martinet in his dealings with the men beneath him had led Skipper Simms to assume that he had once held a commission in the French Navy, from which he doubtless had been kicked—in disgrace.

The man was cold, cruel, of a moody disposition, and quick to anger. He had been signed as second officer for this cruise through the intervention of Divine and

Clinker. He had sailed with Simms before, but the skipper had found him too hard a customer to deal with, and had been on the point of seeking another second when Divine and Clinker discovered him on board the Halfmoon and after ten minutes' conversation with him found that he fitted so perfectly into their scheme of action that they would not hear of Simms' releasing him.

Ward had little use for the Frenchman, whose haughty manner and condescending airs grated on the sensibilities of the uncouth and boorish first officer. The duty which necessitated him acting in the capacity of Thérière's servant was about as distasteful to him as anything could be, and only served to add to his hatred for the inferior, who, in the bottom of his heart, he knew to be in every way, except upon the roster of the Halfmoon, his superior; but money can work wonders, and Divine's promise that the officers and crew of the Halfmoon would have a cool million United States dollars to divide among them in case of the success of the venture had quite effectually overcome any dislike which Mr. Ward had felt for this particular phase of his duty.

The two officers sat in silence in their room at the hotel awaiting an answer to the note they had dispatched to Anthony Harding, Esq. The parts they were to act had been carefully rehearsed on board the Halfmoon many times. Each was occupied with his own thoughts, and as they had nothing in common outside the present rascality that had brought them together, and as that subject was one not well to discuss more than necessary, there seemed no call for conversation.

On board the yacht in the harbor preparations were being made to land a small party that contemplated a motor trip up the Nuuanu Valley when a small boat drew alongside, and a messenger from the hotel handed a sealed note to one of the sailors.

From the deck of the Halfmoon Skipper Simms witnessed the transaction, smiling inwardly. Billy Byrne also saw it, but it meant nothing to him. He had been lolling upon the deck of the brigantine glaring at the yacht Lotus, hating her and the gay, well-dressed men and women he could see laughing and chatting upon her deck. They represented to him the concentrated essence of all that was pusillanimous, disgusting, loathsome in that other world that was as far separated from him as though he had been a grubworm in the manure pile back of Brady's livery stable.

He saw the note handed by the sailor to a gray-haired, smooth-faced man—a large, sleek, well-groomed man. Billy could imagine the white hands and polished nails of him. The thought was nauseating.

The man who took and opened the note was Anthony Harding, Esq. He read it, and then passed it to a young woman who stood near-by talking with other young people.

"Here, Barbara," he said, "is something of more interest to you than to me. If you wish I'll call upon him and invite him to dinner tonight."

The girl was reading the note.

*Anthony Harding, Esq.
On Board Yacht "Lotus,"
Honolulu*

My Dear Mr. Harding:

This will introduce a very dear friend of mine, Count de Cadenet, who expects to be in Honolulu about the time that you are there. The count is traveling for pleasure, and as he is entirely unacquainted upon the islands any courtesies which you may show him will be greatly appreciated.

Cordially,

L. Cortwright Divine.

The girl smiled as she finished perusing the note.

"Larry is always picking up titles and making dear friends of them," she laughed. "I wonder where he found this one."

"Or where this one found him," suggested Mr. Harding. "Well, I suppose that the least we can do is to have him aboard for dinner. We'll be leaving tomorrow, so there won't be much entertaining we can do."

"Let's pick him up on our way through town now," suggested Barbara Harding, "and take him with us for the day. That will be settling our debt to friendship, and dinner tonight can depend upon what sort of person we find the count to be."

"As you will," replied her father, and so it came about that two big touring cars drew up before the Count de Cadenet's hotel half an hour later, and Anthony Harding, Esq., entered and sent up his card.

The "count" came down in person to greet his caller. Harding saw at a glance that the man was a gentleman, and when he had introduced him to the other members of the party it was evident that they appraised him quite as had their host. Barbara Harding seemed particularly taken with the Count de Cadenet, insisting that he join those who occupied her car, and so it was that the second officer of the Halfmoon rode out of Honolulu in pleasant conversation with the object of his visit to the island.

Barbara Harding found De Cadenet an interesting man. There was no corner of the globe however remote with which he was not to some degree familiar. He was well read, and possessed the ability to discuss what he had read intelligently and entertainingly. There was no evidence of moodiness in him now. He was the personification of affability, for was he not monopolizing the society of a very beautiful, and very wealthy young lady?

The day's outing had two significant results. It put into the head of the second mate of the Halfmoon that which would have caused his skipper and the retiring Mr. Divine acute mental perturbation could they have guessed it; and it put De Cadenet into possession of information which necessitated his refusing the urgent invitation to dine upon the yacht, Lotus, that evening—the information that the party would sail the following morning en route to Manila.

"I cannot tell you," he said to Mr. Harding, "how much I regret the circumstance that must rob me of the pleasure of accepting your invitation. Only absolute necessity, I assure you, could prevent me being with you as long as possible," and though he spoke to the girl's father he looked directly into the eyes of Barbara Harding.

A young woman of less experience might have given some outward indication of the effect of this speech upon her, but whether she was pleased or otherwise the

Count de Cadenet could not guess, for she merely voiced the smiling regrets that courtesy demanded.

They left De Cadenet at his hotel, and as he bid them farewell the man turned to Barbara Harding with a low aside.

"I shall see you again, Miss Harding," he said, "very, very soon."

She could not guess what was in his mind as he voiced this rather, under the circumstances, unusual statement. Could she have, the girl would have been terror-stricken; but she saw that in his eyes which she could translate, and she wondered many times that evening whether she were pleased or angry with the message it conveyed.

The moment De Cadenet entered the hotel he hurried to the room where the impatient Mr. Ward awaited him.

"Quick!" he cried. "We must bundle out of here posthaste. They sail tomorrow morning. Your duties as valet have been light and short-lived; but I can give you an excellent recommendation should you desire to take service with another gentleman."

"That'll be about all of that, Mr. Thérière," snapped the first officer, coldly. "I did not embark upon this theatrical enterprise for amusement—I see nothing funny in it, and I wish you to remember that I am still your superior officer."

Thérière shrugged. Ward did not chance to catch the ugly look in his companion's eye. Together they gathered up their belongings, descended to the office, paid their bill, and a few moments later were changing back to their sea clothes in the little hotel where they first had engaged accommodations. Half an hour later they stepped to the deck of the Halfmoon.

Billy Byrne saw them from where he worked in the vicinity of the cabin. When they were not looking he scowled maliciously at them. They were the personal representatives of authority, and Billy hated authority in whatever guise it might be visited upon him. He hated law and order and discipline.

"I'd like to meet one of dem guys on Green Street some night," he thought.

He saw them enter the captain's cabin with the skipper, and then he saw Mr. Divine join them. Billy noted the haste displayed by the four and it set him to wondering. The scrap of conversation between Divine and Simms that he had overheard returned to him. He wanted to hear more, and as Billy was not handicapped by any overly refined notions of the ethics which frown upon eavesdropping he lost no time in transferring the scene of his labors to a point sufficiently close to one of the cabin ports to permit him to note what took place within.

What the mucker beard of that conversation made him prick up his ears. He saw that something after his own heart was doing—something crooked, and he wondered that so pusillanimous a thing as Divine could have a hand in it. It almost changed his estimate of the passenger of the Halfmoon.

The meeting broke up so suddenly that Billy had to drop to his knees to escape the observation of those within the cabin. As it was, Thérière, who had started to leave a second before the others, caught a fleeting glimpse of a face that quickly had been withdrawn from the cabin skylight as though its owner were fearful of detection.

Without a word to his companions the Frenchman left the cabin, but once outside he bounded up the companionway to the deck with the speed of a squirrel. Nor was he an instant too soon, for as he emerged from below he saw the figure of a man disappearing forward.

"Hey there, you!" he cried. "Come back here."

The mucker turned, a sulky scowl upon his lowering countenance, and the second officer saw that it was the fellow who had given Ward such a trimming the first day out.

"Oh, it's you is it, Byrne?" he said in a not unpleasant tone. "Come to my quarters a moment, I want to speak with you," and so saying he wheeled about and retraced his way below, the seaman at his heels.

"My man," said Thérière, once the two were behind the closed door of the officer's cabin, "I needn't ask how much you overheard of the conversation in the captain's cabin. If you hadn't overheard a great deal more than you should you wouldn't have been so keen to escape detection just now. What I wanted to say to you is this. Keep a close tongue in your head and stick by me in what's going to happen in the next few days. This bunch," he jerked his thumb in the direction of the captain's cabin, "are fixing their necks for halters, an' I for one don't intend to poke my head through any noose of another man's making. There's more in this thing if it's handled right, and handled without too many men in on the whack-up than we can get out of it if that man Divine has to be counted in. I've a plan of my own, an' it won't take but three or four of us to put it across.

"You don't like Ward," he continued, "and you may be almighty sure that Mr. Ward ain't losing any sleep nights over love of you. If you stick to that bunch Ward will do you out of your share as sure as you are a foot high, an' the chances are that he'll do you out of a whole lot more besides—as a matter of fact, Byrne, you're a mighty poor life insurance risk right now, with a life expectancy that's pretty near minus as long as Bender Ward is on the same ship with you. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Aw," said Billy Byrne, "I ain't afraid o' that stiff. Let him make any funny crack at me an' I'll cave in a handful of slats for him—the piker."

"That's all right too, Byrne," said Thérière. "Of course you can do it if anybody can, provided you get the chance; but Ward isn't the man to give you any chance. There may be shooting necessary within the next day or so, and there's nothing to prevent Ward letting you have it in the back, purely by accident; and if he don't do it then there'll be all kinds of opportunities for it before any of us ever see a white man's port again. He'll get you, Byrne, he's that kind.

"Now, with my proposition you'll be shut of Ward, Skipper Simms, and Divine. There'll be more money in it for you, an' you won't have to go around expecting a bullet in the small of your back every minute. What do you say? Are you game, or shall I have to go back to Skipper Simms and Ward and tell them that I caught you eavesdropping?"

"Oh, I'm game," said Billy Byrne, "if you'll promise me a square deal on the divvy."

The Frenchman extended his hand.

"Let's shake on it," he said.

Billy took the proffered palm in his.

"That's a go," he said; "but hadn't you better wise me to wot's doin'?"

"Not now," said Thérière, "someone might overhear just as you did. Wait a bit until I have a better opportunity, and I'll tell you all there is to know. In the meantime think over who'd be the best men to let into this with us—we'll need three or four more besides ourselves. Now go on deck about your duties as though nothing had happened, and if I'm a bit rougher than usual with you you'll understand that it's to avert any possible suspicion later."

"I'm next," said Billy Byrne.

Chapter IV

Piracy.

By dusk the trim little brigantine was scudding away toward the west before a wind that could not have suited her better had it been made to order at the special behest of the devil himself to speed his minions upon their devil's work.

All hands were in the best of humor. The crew had forgotten their recent rancor at not having been permitted shore leave at Honolulu in the expectancy of adventure in the near future, for there was that in the atmosphere of the Halfmoon which proclaimed louder than words the proximity of excitement, and the goal toward which they had been sailing since they left San Francisco.

Skipper Simms and Divine were elated at the luck which had brought them to Honolulu in the nick of time, and at the success of Thérière's mission at that port. They had figured upon a week at least there before the second officer of the Halfmoon could ingratiate himself sufficiently into the goodwill of the Hardings to learn their plans, and now they were congratulating themselves upon their acumen in selecting so fit an agent as the Frenchman for the work he had handled so expeditiously and so well.

Ward was pleased that he had not been forced to prolong the galling masquerade of valet to his inferior officer. He was hopeful, too, that coming events would bring to the fore an opportunity to satisfy the vengeance he had inwardly sworn against the sailor who had so roughly manhandled him a few weeks past—Thérière had not been in error in his estimate of his fellow-officer.

Billy Byrne, the arduous labor of making sail over for the time, was devoting his energies to the task of piecing out from what Thérière had told him and what he had overheard outside the skipper's cabin some sort of explanation of the work ahead.

As he pondered Thérière's proposition he saw the wisdom of it. It would give those interested a larger amount of the booty for their share. Another feature of it was that it was underhanded and that appealed strongly to the mucker. Now, if he could but devise some scheme for double-crossing Thérière the pleasure and profit of the adventure would be tripled.

It was this proposition that was occupying his attention when he caught sight of "Bony" Sawyer and "Red" Sanders emerging from the forecastle. Billy Byrne hailed them.

When the mucker had explained the possibilities of profit that were to be had by entering the conspiracy aimed at Simms and Ward the two seamen were enthusiastically for it.

"Bony" Sawyer suggested that the black cook, Blanco, was about the only other member of the crew upon whom they could depend, and at Byrne's request "Bony" promised to enlist the cooperation of the giant Ethiopian.

From early morning of the second day out of Honolulu keen eyes scanned the eastern horizon through powerful glasses, until about two bells of the afternoon watch a slight smudge became visible about two points north of east. Immediately the course of the Halfmoon was altered so that she bore almost directly north by west in an effort to come safely into the course of the steamer which was seen rising rapidly above the horizon.

The new course of the brigantine was held as long as it seemed reasonably safe without danger of being sighted under full sail by the oncoming vessel, then her head was brought into the wind, and one by one her sails were lowered and furled, as the keen eyes of Second Officer Thérière announced that there was no question but that the white hull in the distance was that of the steam pleasure yacht Lotus.

Upon the deck of the unsuspecting vessel a merry party laughed and chatted in happy ignorance of the plotters in their path. It was nearly half an hour after the Halfmoon had come to rest, drifting idly under bare poles, that the lookout upon the Lotus sighted her.

"Sailin' vessel lyin' to, west half south," he shouted, "flyin' distress signals."

In an instant guests and crew had hurried to points of vantage where they might obtain unobstructed view of the stranger, and take advantage of this break in the monotony of a long sea voyage.

Anthony Harding was on the bridge with the captain, and both men had leveled their glasses upon the distant ship.

"Can you make her out?" asked the owner.

"She's a brigantine," replied the officer, "and all that I can make out from here would indicate that everything was shipshape about her. Her canvas is neatly furled, and she is evidently well manned, for I can see a number of figures above deck apparently engaged in watching us. I'll alter our course and speak to her—we'll see what's wrong, and give her a hand if we can."

"That's right," replied Harding; "do anything you can for them."

A moment later he joined his daughter and their guests to report the meager information he had.

"How exciting," exclaimed Barbara Harding. "Of course it's not a real shipwreck, but maybe it's the next thing to it. The poor souls may have been drifting about here in the center of the Pacific without food or water for goodness knows how many weeks, and now just think how they must be lifting their voices in thanks to God for his infinite mercy in guiding us to them."

"If they've been drifting for any considerable number of weeks without food or water," hazarded Billy Mallory, "about the only things they'll need'll be what we didn't have the foresight to bring along—an undertaker and a preacher."

"Don't be horrid, Billy," returned Miss Harding. "You know perfectly well that I didn't mean weeks—I meant days; and anyway they'll be grateful to us for what we can do for them. I can scarcely wait to hear their story."

Billy Mallory was inspecting the stranger through Mr. Harding's glass. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of dismay.

"By George!" he cried. "It is serious after all. That ship's afire. Look, Mr. Harding," and he passed the glass over to his host.

And sure enough, as the owner of the Lotus found the brigantine again in the center of his lens he saw a thin column of black smoke rising amidships; but what he did not see was Mr. Ward upon the opposite side of the Halfmoon's cabin superintending the burning by the black cook of a bundle of oily rags in an iron boiler.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Harding. "This is terrible. The poor devils are panic-stricken. Look at 'em making for the boats!" and with that he dashed back to the bridge to confer with his captain.

"Yes," said that officer, "I noticed the smoke about the same time you did — funny it wasn't apparent before. I've already signaled full speed ahead, and I've instructed Mr. Foster to have the boats in readiness to lower away if we find that they're short of boats on the brigantine.

"What I can't understand," he added after a moment's silence, "is why they didn't show any signs of excitement about that fire until we came within easy sight of them—it looks funny."

"Well, we'll know in a few minutes more," returned Mr. Harding. "The chances are that the fire is just a recent addition to their predicament, whatever it may be, and that they have only just discovered it themselves."

"Then it can't have gained enough headway," insisted the captain, "to cause them any such immediate terror as would be indicated by the haste with which the whole ship's crew is tumbling into those boats; but as you say, sir, we'll have their story out of them in a few minutes now, so it's idle speculating beforehand."

The officers and men of the Halfmoon, in so far as those on board the Lotus could guess, had all entered the boats at last, and were pulling frantically away from their own ship toward the rapidly nearing yacht; but what they did not guess and could not know was that Mr. Divine paced nervously to and fro in his cabin, while Second Officer Thérière tended the smoking rags that Ward and Blanco had resigned to him that they might take their places in the boats.

Thérière had been greatly disgusted with the turn events had taken for he had determined upon a line of action that he felt sure would prove highly remunerative to himself. It had been nothing less than a bold resolve to call Blanco, Byrne, "Bony," and "Red" to his side the moment Simms and Ward revealed the true purpose of their ruse to those on board the Lotus, and with his henchmen take sides with the men of the yacht against his former companions.

As he had explained it to Billy Byrne the idea was to permit Mr. Harding to believe that Thérière and his companions had been duped by Skipper Simms—that they had had no idea of the work that they were to be called upon to perform until the last moment and that then they had done the only thing they could to protect the passengers and crew of the Lotus.

"And then," Thérière had concluded, "when they think we are a band of heroes, and the best friends they have on earth we'll just naturally be in a position to grab the whole lot of them, and collect ransoms on ten or fifteen instead of just one."

"Bully!" exclaimed the mucker. "You sure got some bean, mate."

As a matter of fact Thérière had had no intention of carrying the matter as far as he had intimated to Billy except as a last resort. He had been mightily smitten by the face and fortune of Barbara Harding and had seen in the trend of events a possible opportunity of so deeply obligating her father and herself that when he paid court to her she might fall a willing victim to his wiles. In this case he would be obliged to risk nothing, and could make away with his accomplices by explaining to Mr. Harding that he had been compelled to concoct this other scheme to obtain their assistance against Simms and Ward; then they could throw the three into irons and all would be lovely; but now that fool Ward had upset the whole thing by hitting upon this asinine fire hoax as an excuse for boarding the Lotus in force, and had further dampened Thérière's pet scheme by suggesting to Skipper Simms the danger of Thérière being recognized as they were boarding the Lotus and bringing suspicion upon them all immediately.

They all knew that a pleasure yacht like the Lotus was well supplied with small arms, and that at the first intimation of danger there would be plenty of men aboard to repel assault, and, in all probability, with entire success.

That there were excellent grounds for Thérière's belief that he could win Barbara Harding's hand with such a flying start as his daring plan would have assured him may not be questioned, for the man was cultivated, polished and, in a sinister way, good-looking. The title that he had borne upon the occasion of his visit to the yacht, was, all unknown to his accomplices, his by right of birth, so that there was nothing other than a long-dead scandal in the French Navy that might have proved a bar to an affiance such as he dreamed of. And now to be thwarted at the last moment! It was unendurable. That pig of a Ward had sealed his own death warrant, of that Thérière was convinced.

The boats were now quite close to the yacht, which had slowed down almost to a dead stop. In answer to the query of the Lotus' captain Skipper Simms was explaining their trouble.

"I'm Captain Jones," he shouted, "of the brigantine Clarinda, Frisco to Yokohama with dynamite. We disabled our rudder yesterday, an' this afternoon fire started in the hold. It's makin' headway fast now, an'll reach the dynamite most any time. You'd better take us aboard, an' get away from here as quick as you can. 'Tain't safe nowhere within five hun'erd fathom of her."

"You'd better make haste, Captain, hadn't you?" suggested Mr. Harding.

"I don't like the looks of things, sir," replied that officer. "She ain't flyin' any dynamite flag, an' if she was an' had a hold full there wouldn't be any particular danger to us, an' anyone that has ever shipped dynamite would know it, or ought to. It's not fire that detonates dynamite, it's concussion. No sir, Mr. Harding, there's something queer here—I don't like the looks of it. Why just take a good look at the faces of those men. Did you ever see such an ugly-looking pack of unhung murderers in your life, sir?"

"I must admit that they're not an overly prepossessing crowd, Norris," replied Mr. Harding. "But it's not always either fair or safe to judge strangers entirely by

appearances. I'm afraid that there's nothing else for it in the name of common humanity than to take them aboard, Norris. I'm sure your fears are entirely groundless."

"Then it's your orders, sir, to take them aboard?" asked Captain Norris.

"Yes, Captain, I think you'd better," said Mr. Harding.

"Very good, sir," replied the officer, turning to give the necessary commands.

The officers and men of the Halfmoon swarmed up the sides of the Lotus, dark-visaged, fierce, and forbidding.

"Reminds me of a boarding party of pirates," remarked Billy Mallory, as he watched Blanco, the last to throw a leg over the rail, reach the deck.

"They're not very pretty, are they?" murmured Barbara Harding, instinctively shrinking closer to her companion.

"'Pretty' scarcely describes them, Barbara," said Billy; "and do you know that somehow I am having difficulty in imagining them on their knees giving up thanks to the Lord for their rescue—that was your recent idea of 'em, you will recall."

"If you have purposely set yourself the task of being more than ordinarily disagreeable today, Billy," said Barbara sweetly, "I'm sure it will please you to know that you are succeeding."

"I'm glad I'm successful at something then," laughed the man. "I've certainly been unsuccessful enough in another matter."

"What, for example?" asked Barbara, innocently.

"Why in trying to make myself so agreeable heretofore that you'd finally consent to say 'yes' for a change."

"Now you are going to make it all the worse by being stupid," cried the girl petulantly. "Why can't you be nice, as you used to be before you got this silly notion into your head?"

"I don't think it's a silly notion to be head over heels in love with the sweetest girl on earth," cried Billy.

"Hush! Someone will hear you."

"I don't care if they do. I'd like to advertise it to the whole world. I'm proud of the fact that I love you; and you don't care enough about it to realize how really hard I'm hit—why I'd die for you, Barbara, and welcome the chance; why—My God! What's that?"

"O Billy! What are those men doing?" cried the girl. "They're shooting. They're shooting at papa! Quick, Billy! Do something. For heaven's sake do something."

On the deck below them the "rescued" crew of the "Clarinda" had surrounded Mr. Harding, Captain Norris, and most of the crew of the Lotus, flashing quick-drawn revolvers from beneath shirts and coats, and firing at two of the yacht's men who showed fight.

"Keep quiet," commanded Skipper Simms, "an' there won't none of you get hurted."

"What do you want of us?" cried Mr. Harding. "If it's money, take what you can find aboard us, and go on your way. No one will hinder you."

Skipper Simms paid no attention to him. His eyes swept aloft to the upper deck. There he saw a wide-eyed girl and a man looking down upon them. He wondered if she was the one they sought. There were other women aboard. He could see them, huddled frightened behind Harding and Norris. Some of them were young and

beautiful; but there was something about the girl above him that assured him she could be none other than Barbara Harding. To discover the truth Simms resorted to a ruse, for he knew that were he to ask Harding outright if the girl were his daughter the chances were more than even that the old man would suspect something of the nature of their visit and deny her identity.

"Who is that woman you have on board here?" he cried in an accusing tone of voice. "That's what we're a-here to find out."

"Why she's my daughter, man!" blurted Harding. "Who did you—"

"Thanks," said Skipper Simms, with a self-satisfied grin. "That's what I wanted to be sure of. Hey, you, Byrne! You're nearest the companionway—fetch the girl."

At the command the mucker turned and leaped up the stairway to the upper deck. Billy Mallory had overheard the conversation below and Simms' command to Byrne. Disengaging himself from Barbara Harding who in her terror had clutched his arm, he ran forward to the head of the stairway.

The men of the Lotus looked on in mute and helpless rage. All were covered by the guns of the boarding party—the still forms of two of their companions bearing eloquent witness to the slenderness of provocation necessary to tighten the trigger fingers of the beasts standing guard over them.

Billy Byrne never hesitated in his rush for the upper deck. The sight of the man awaiting him above but whetted his appetite for battle. The trim flannels, the white shoes, the natty cap, were to the mucker as sufficient cause for justifiable homicide as is an orange ribbon in certain portions of the West Side of Chicago on St. Patrick's Day. As were "Remember the Alamo," and "Remember the Maine" to the fighting men of the days that they were live things so were the habiliments of gentility to Billy Byrne at all times.

Billy Mallory was an older man than the mucker—twenty-four perhaps —and fully as large. For four years he had played right guard on a great eastern team, and for three he had pulled stroke upon the crew. During the two years since his graduation he had prided himself upon the maintenance of the physical supremacy that had made the name of Mallory famous in collegiate athletics; but in one vital essential he was hopelessly handicapped in combat with such as Billy Byrne, for Mallory was a gentleman.

As the mucker rushed upward toward him Mallory had all the advantage of position and preparedness, and had he done what Billy Byrne would have done under like circumstances he would have planted a kick in the midst of the mucker's facial beauties with all the power and weight and energy at his command; but Billy Mallory could no more have perpetrated a cowardly trick such as this than he could have struck a woman.

Instead, he waited, and as the mucker came on an even footing with him Mallory swung a vicious right for the man's jaw. Byrne ducked beneath the blow, came up inside Mallory's guard, and struck him three times with trip-hammer velocity and pile-driver effectiveness—once upon the jaw and twice—below the belt!

The girl, clinging to the rail, riveted by the paralysis of fright, saw her champion stagger back and half crumple to the deck. Then she saw him make a brave and desperate rally, as, though torn with agony, he lurched forward in an endeavor to clinch with the brute before him. Again the mucker struck his victim—quick

choppy hooks that rocked Mallory's head from side to side, and again the brutal blow below the belt; but with the tenacity of a bulldog the man fought for a hold upon his foe, and at last, notwithstanding Byrne's best efforts, he succeeded in closing with the mucker and dragging him to the deck.

Here the two men rolled and tumbled, Byrne biting, gouging, and kicking while Mallory devoted all of his fast-waning strength to an effort to close his fingers upon the throat of his antagonist. But the terrible punishment which the mucker had inflicted upon him overcame him at last, and as Byrne felt the man's efforts weakening he partially disengaged himself and raising himself upon one arm dealt his now almost unconscious enemy a half-dozen frightful blows upon the face.

With a shriek Barbara Harding turned from the awful sight as Billy Mallory's bloody and swollen eyes rolled up and set, while the mucker threw the inert form roughly from him. Quick to the girl's memory sprang Mallory's recent declaration, which she had thought at the time but the empty, and vainglorious boasting of the man in love—"Why I'd die for you, Barbara, and welcome the chance!"

"Poor boy! How soon, and how terribly has the chance come!" moaned the girl.

Then a rough hand fell upon her arm.

"Here, youse," a coarse voice yelled in her ear. "Come out o' de trance," and at the same time she was jerked roughly toward the companionway.

Instinctively the girl held back, and then the mucker, true to his training, true to himself, gave her arm a sudden twist that wrenched a scream of agony from her white lips.

"Den come along," growled Billy Byrne, "an' quit dis monkey business, or I'll sure twist yer flipper clean off'n yeh."

With an oath, Anthony Harding sprang forward to protect his daughter; but the butt of Ward's pistol brought him unconscious to the deck.

"Go easy there, Byrne," shouted Skipper Simms; "there ain't no call to injure the hussy—a corpse won't be worth nothing to us."

In mute terror the girl now permitted herself to be led to the deck below. Quickly she was lowered into a waiting boat. Then Skipper Simms ordered Ward to search the yacht and remove all firearms, after which he was to engage himself to navigate the vessel with her own crew under armed guard of half a dozen of the Halfmoon's cutthroats.

These things attended to, Skipper Simms with the balance of his own crew and six of the crew of the Lotus to take the places upon the brigantine of those left as a prize crew aboard the yacht returned with the girl to the Halfmoon.

The sailing vessel's sails were soon hoisted and trimmed, and in half an hour, followed by the Lotus, she was scudding briskly southward. For forty-eight hours this course was held until Simms felt assured that they were well out of the lane of regular trans-Pacific traffic.

During this time Barbara Harding had been kept below, locked in a small, untidy cabin. She had seen no one other than a great Negro who brought her meals to her three times daily—meals that she returned scarcely touched.

Now the Halfmoon was brought up into the wind where she lay with flapping canvas while Skipper Simms returned to the Lotus with the six men of the yacht's crew that he had brought aboard the brigantine with him two days before, and as many more of his own men.

Once aboard the Lotus the men were put to work with those already on the yacht. The boat's rudder was unshipped and dropped into the ocean; her fires were put out; her engines were attacked with sledges until they were little better than so much junk, and to make the slender chances of pursuit that remained to her entirely nil every ounce of coal upon her was shoveled into the Pacific. Her extra masts and spare sails followed the way of the coal and the rudder, so that when Skipper Simms and First Officer Ward left her with their own men that had been aboard her she was little better than a drifting derelict.

From her cabin window Barbara Harding had witnessed the wanton wrecking of her father's yacht, and when it was over and the crew of the brigantine had returned to their own ship she presently felt the movement of the vessel as it got under way, and soon the Lotus dropped to the stern and beyond the range of her tiny port. With a moan of hopelessness and terror the girl sank prostrate across the hard berth that spanned one end of her prison cell.

How long she lay there she did not know, but finally she was aroused by the opening of her cabin door. As she sprang to her feet ready to defend herself against what she felt might easily be some new form of danger her eyes went wide in astonishment as they rested on the face of the man who stood framed in the doorway of her cabin.

"You?" she cried.

Chapter V

Larry Divine Unmasked.

"Yes, Barbara, it is I," said Mr. Divine; "and thank God that I am here to do what little any man may do against this band of murdering pirates."

"But, Larry," cried the girl, in evident bewilderment, "how did you come to be aboard this ship? How did you get here? What are you doing amongst such as these?"

"I am a prisoner," replied the man, "just as are you. I think they intend holding us for ransom. They got me in San Francisco. Slugged me and hustled me aboard the night before they sailed."

"Where are they going to take us?" she asked.

"I do not know," he replied, "although from something I have overheard of their conversations I imagine that they have in mind some distant island far from the beaten track of commerce. There are thousands such in the Pacific that are visited by vessels scarce once in a century. There they will hold us until they can proceed with the ship to some point where they can get into communication with their agents in the States. When the ransom is paid over to these agents they will return for us and land us upon some other island where our friends can find us, or leaving us where we can divulge the location of our whereabouts to those who pay the ransom."

The girl had been looking intently at Mr. Divine during their conversation.

"They cannot have treated you very badly, Larry," she said. "You are as well groomed and well fed, apparently, as ever."

A slight flush mounting to the man's face made the girl wonder a bit though it aroused no suspicion in her mind.

"Oh, no," he hastened to assure her, "they have not treated me at all badly—why should they? If I die they can collect no ransom on me. It is the same with you, Barbara, so I think you need apprehend no harsh treatment."

"I hope you are right, Larry," she said, but the hopelessness of her air rather belied any belief that aught but harm could come from captivity with such as those who officered and manned the Halfmoon.

"It seems so remarkable," she went on, "that you should be a prisoner upon the same boat. I cannot understand it. Why only a few days ago we received and entertained a friend of yours who brought a letter from you to papa—the Count de Cadenet."

Again that telltale flush mantled the man's cheek. He cursed himself inwardly for his lack of self-control. The girl would have his whole secret out of him in another half-hour if he were not more careful.

"They made me do that," he said, jerking his thumb in the general direction of Skipper Simms' cabin. "Maybe that accounts for their bringing me along. The 'Count de Cadenet' is a fellow named Thérière, second mate of this ship. They sent him to learn your plans; when you expected sailing from Honolulu and your course. They are all crooks and villains. If I hadn't done as they bid they would have killed me."

The girl made no comment, but Divine saw the contempt in her face.

"I didn't know that they were going to do this. If I had I'd have died before I'd have written that note," he added rather lamely.

The girl was suddenly looking very sad. She was thinking of Billy Mallory who had died in an effort to save her. The mental comparison she was making between him and Mr. Divine was not overly flattering to the latter gentleman.

"They killed poor Billy," she said at last. "He tried to protect me."

Then Mr. Divine understood the trend of her thoughts. He tried to find some excuse for his cowardly act; but with the realization of the true cowardliness and treachery of it that the girl didn't even guess he understood the futility of seeking to extenuate it. He saw that the chances were excellent that after all he would be compelled to resort to force or threats to win her hand at the last.

"Billy would have done better to have bowed to the inevitable as I did," he said. "Living I am able to help you now. Dead I could not have prevented them carrying out their intentions any more than Billy has, nor could I have been here to aid you now any more than he is. I cannot see that his action helped you to any great extent, brave as it was."

"The memory of it and him will always help me," she answered quietly. "They will help me to bear whatever is before me bravely, and, when the time comes, to die bravely; for I shall always feel that upon the other side a true, brave heart is awaiting me."

The man was silent. After a moment the girl spoke again. "I think I would rather be alone, Larry," she said. "I am very unhappy and nervous. Possibly I could sleep now."

With a bow he turned and left the cabin.

For weeks the Halfmoon kept steadily on her course, a little south of west. There was no material change in the relations of those aboard her. Barbara Harding, finding herself unmolested, finally acceded to the repeated pleas of Mr. Divine, to whose society she had been driven by loneliness and fear, and appeared on deck frequently during the daylight watches. Here, one afternoon, she came face to face with Thérière for the first time since her abduction. The officer lifted his cap deferentially; but the girl met his look of expectant recognition with a cold, blank stare that passed through and beyond him as though he had been empty air.

A tinge of color rose to the man's face, and he continued on his way for a moment as though content to accept her rebuff; but after a step or two he turned suddenly and confronted her.

"Miss Harding," he said, respectfully, "I cannot blame you for the feeling of loathing and distrust you must harbor toward me; but in common justice I think you should hear me before finally condemning."

"I cannot imagine," she returned coldly, "what defense there can be for the cowardly act you perpetrated."

"I have been utterly deceived by my employers," said Thérière, hastening to take advantage of the tacit permission to explain which her reply contained. "I was given to understand that the whole thing was to be but a hoax—that I was taking part in a great practical joke that Mr. Divine was to play upon his old friends, the Hardings and their guests. Until they wrecked and deserted the Lotus in mid-ocean I had no idea that anything else was contemplated, although I felt that the matter, even before that event, had been carried quite far enough for a joke.

"They explained," he continued, "that before sailing you had expressed the hope that something really exciting and adventurous would befall the party—that you were tired of the monotonous humdrum of twentieth-century existence—that you regretted the decadence of piracy, and the expunging of romance from the seas.

"Mr. Divine, they told me, was a very wealthy young man, to whom you were engaged to be married, and that he could easily afford the great expense of the rather remarkable hoax we were supposed to be perpetrating. I saw no harm in taking part in it, especially as I knew nothing of the supposititious purpose of the cruise until just before we reached Honolulu. Before that I had been led to believe that it was but a pleasure trip to the South Pacific that Mr. Divine intended.

"You see, Miss Harding, that I have been as badly deceived as you. Won't you let me help to atone for my error by being your friend? I can assure you that you will need one whom you can trust amongst this shipload of scoundrels."

"Who am I to believe?" cried the girl. "Mr. Divine assures me that he, too, has been forced into this affair, but by threats of death rather than deception."

The expression on Mr. Thérière's face was eloquent of sarcastic incredulity.

"How about the note of introduction that I carried to your father from Mr. Divine?" asked Thérière.

"He says that he was compelled to write it at the point of a revolver," replied the girl.

"Come with me, Miss Harding," said the officer. "I think that I may be able to convince you that Mr. Divine is not on any such bad terms with Skipper Simms as would be the case were his story to you true."

As he spoke he started toward the companionway leading to the officers' cabins. Barbara Harding hesitated at the top of the stairway.

"Have no fear, Miss Harding," Thérière reassured her. "Remember that I am your friend and that I am merely attempting to prove it to your entire satisfaction. You owe it to yourself to discover as soon as possible who your friends are aboard this ship, and who your enemies."

"Very well," said the girl. "I can be in no more danger one place aboard her than another."

Thérière led her directly to his own cabin, cautioning her to silence with upraised forefinger. Softly, like skulking criminals, they entered the little compartment. Then Thérière turned and closed the door, slipping the bolt noiselessly as he did so. Barbara watched him, her heart beating rapidly with fear and suspicion.

"Here," whispered Thérière, motioning her toward his berth. "I have found it advantageous to know what goes on beyond this partition. You will find a small round hole near the head of the berth, about a foot above the bedding. Put your ear to it and listen—I think Divine is in there now."

The girl, still frightened and fearful of the man's intentions, did, nevertheless, as he bid. At first she could make out nothing beyond the partition but a confused murmur of voices, and the clink of glass, as of the touch of the neck of a bottle against a goblet. For a moment she remained in tense silence, her ear pressed to the tiny aperture. Then, distinctly, she heard the voice of Skipper Simms.

"I'm a-tellin' you, man," he was saying, "that there wan't nothin' else to be done, an' I'm a-gettin' damn sick o' hearin' you finding fault all the time with the way I been a-runnin' o' this little job."

"I'm not finding fault, Simms," returned another voice which the girl recognized immediately as Divine's; "although I do think that it was a mistake to so totally disable the Lotus as you did. Why, how on earth are we ever to return to civilization if that boat is lost? Had she been simply damaged a little, in a way that they could themselves have fixed up, the delay would have been sufficient to permit us to escape, and then, when Miss Harding was returned in safety to her father, after our marriage, they would have been so glad to be reunited that he easily could have been persuaded to drop the matter. Then another thing; you intended to demand a ransom for both Miss Harding and myself, to carry out the fiction of my having been stolen also—how can you do that if Mr. Harding be dead? And do you suppose for a moment that Miss Harding will leave a single stone unturned to bring the guilty to justice if any harm has befallen her father or his guests? If so you do not know her as well as I."

The girl turned away from the partition, her face white and drawn, her eyes inexpressibly sad. She rose to her feet, facing Thérière.

"I have heard quite enough, thank you, Mr. Thérière," she said.

"You are convinced then that I am your friend?" he asked.

"I am convinced that Mr. Divine is not," she replied non-committally.

She took a step toward the door. Thérière stood looking at her. She was unquestionably very good to look at. He could not remember ever having seen a more beautiful girl. A great desire to seize her in his arms swept over the man. Thérière had not often made any effort to harness his desires. What he wanted it

had been his custom to take—by force if necessary. He took a step toward Barbara Harding. There was a sudden light in his eyes that the girl had not before seen there, and she reached quickly toward the knob of the door.

Thérière was upon her, and then, quickly, he mastered himself, for he recalled his coolly thought-out plan based on what Divine had told him of that clause in the will of the girl's departed grandparent which stipulated that the man who shared the bequest with her must be the choice of both herself and her father. He could afford to bide his time, and play the chivalrous protector before he essayed the role of lover.

Barbara had turned a half-frightened look toward him as he advanced—in doubt as to his intentions.

"Pardon me, Miss Harding," he said; "the door is bolted—let me unlatch it for you," and very gallantly he did so, swinging the portal wide that she might pass out. "I feared interruption," he said, in explanation of the bolt.

In silence they returned to the upper deck. The intoxication of sudden passion now under control, Thérière was again master of himself and ready to play the cold, calculating, waiting game that he had determined upon. Part of his plan was to see just enough of Miss Harding to insure a place in her mind at all times; but not enough to suggest that he was forcing himself upon her. Rightly, he assumed that she would appreciate thoughtful deference to her comfort and safety under the harrowing conditions of her present existence more than a forced companionship that might entail too open devotion on his part. And so he raised his cap and left her, only urging her to call upon him at any time that he might be of service to her.

Left alone the girl became lost in unhappy reflections, and in the harrowing ordeal of attempting to readjust herself to the knowledge that Larry Divine, her lifelong friend, was the instigator of the atrocious villainy that had been perpetrated against her and her father. She found it almost equally difficult to believe that Mr. Thérière was so much more sinned against than sinning as he would have had her believe. And yet, did his story not sound even more plausible than that of Divine which she had accepted before Thérière had made it possible for her to know the truth? Why, then, was it so difficult for her to believe the Frenchman? She could not say, but in the inmost recesses of her heart she knew that she mistrusted and feared the man.

As she stood leaning against the rail, buried deep in thought, Billy Byrne passed close behind her. At sight of her a sneer curled his lip. How he hated her! Not that she ever had done aught to harm him, but rather because she represented to him in concrete form all that he had learned to hate and loathe since early childhood.

Her soft, white skin; her shapely hands and well-cared-for nails; her trim figure and perfectly fitting suit all taunted him with their superiority over him and his kind. He knew that she looked down upon him as an inferior being. She was of the class that addressed those in his walk of life as "my man." Lord, how he hated that appellation!

The intentness of his gaze upon her back had the effect so often noted by the observant, and suddenly aroused from the lethargy of her misery the girl swung around to meet the man's eyes squarely upon her. Instantly she recognized him as the brute who had killed Billy Mallory. If there had been hate in the mucker's eyes

as he looked at the girl, it was as nothing by comparison with the loathing and disgust which sprang to hers as they rested upon his sullen face.

So deep was her feeling of contempt for this man, that the sudden appearance of him before her startled a single exclamation from her.

“Coward!” came the one word, involuntarily, from her lips.

The man’s scowl deepened menacingly. He took a threatening step toward her.

“Wot’s dat?” he growled. “Don’t get gay wit me, or I’ll black dem lamps fer yeh,” and he raised a heavy fist as though to strike her.

The mucker had looked to see the girl cower before his threatened blow—that would have been ample atonement for her insult, and would have appealed greatly to his Kelly-gang sense of humor. Many a time had he threatened women thus, for the keen enjoyment of hearing their screams of fright and seeing them turn and flee in terror. When they had held their ground and opposed him, as some upon the West Side had felt sufficiently muscular to do, the mucker had not hesitated to “hand them one.” Thus only might a man uphold his reputation for bravery in the vicinage of Grand Avenue.

He had looked to see this girl of the effete and effeminate upper class swoon with terror before him; but to his intense astonishment she but stood erect and brave before him, her head high held, her eyes cold and level and unafraid. And then she spoke again.

“Coward!” she said.

Billy almost struck her; but something held his hand. What, he could not understand. Could it be that he feared this slender girl? And at this juncture, when the threat of his attitude was the most apparent, Second Officer Thérière came upon the scene. At a glance he took in the situation, and with a bound had sprung between Billy Byrne and Barbara Harding.

Chapter VI

The Mucker at Bay.

“What has this man said to you, Miss Harding?” cried Thérière. “Has he offered you harm?”

“I do not think that he would have dared strike me,” replied the girl, “though he threatened to do so. He is the coward who murdered poor Mr. Mallory upon the Lotus. He might stoop to anything after that.”

Thérière turned angrily upon Byrne.

“Go below!” he shouted. “I’ll attend to you later. If Miss Harding were not here I’d thrash you within an inch of your life now. And if I ever hear of your speaking to her again, or offering her the slightest indignity I’ll put a bullet through you so quick you won’t know what has struck you.”

“T’ell yeh will!” sneered Billy Byrne. “I got your number, yeh big stiff; an’ yeh better not get gay wit me. Dey ain’t no guy on board dis man’s ship dat can hand Billy Byrne dat kin’ o’ guff an’ get away with it—see?” and before Thérière knew

what had happened a heavy fist had caught him upon the point of the chin and lifted him clear off the deck to drop him unconscious at Miss Harding's feet.

"Yeh see wot happens to guys dat get gay wit me?" said the mucker to the girl, and then stooping over the prostrate form of the mate Billy Byrne withdrew a huge revolver from Thérière's hip pocket.

"I guess I'll need dis gat in my business purty soon," he remarked.

Then he planted a vicious kick in the face of the unconscious man and went his way to the forecastle.

"Now maybe she'll tink Billy Byrne's a coward," he thought, as he disappeared below.

Barbara Harding stood speechless with shock at the brutality and ferocity of the unexpected attack upon Thérière. Never in all her life had she dreamed that there could exist upon the face of the earth a thing in human form so devoid of honor, and chivalry, and fair play as the creature that she had just witnessed threatening a defenseless woman, and kicking an unconscious man in the face; but then Barbara Harding had never lived between Grand Avenue and Lake Street, and Halsted and Robey, where standards of masculine bravery are strange and fearful.

When she had recovered her equanimity she hastened to the head of the cabin companionway and called aloud for help. Instantly Skipper Simms and First Officer Ward rushed on deck, each carrying a revolver in readiness for the conflict with their crew that these two worthies were always expecting.

Barbara pointed out the still form of Thérière, quickly explaining what had occurred.

"It was the fellow Byrne who did it," she said. "He has gone into the forecastle now, and he has a revolver that he took from Mr. Thérière after he had fallen."

Several of the crew had now congregated about the prostrate officer.

"Here you," cried Skipper Simms to a couple of them; "you take Mr. Thérière below to his cabin, an' throw cold water in his face. Mr. Ward, get some brandy from my locker, an' try an' bring him to. The rest of you arm yourselves with crowbars and axes, an' see that that son of a sea cook don't get out on deck again alive. Hold him there 'til I get a couple of guns. Then we'll get him, damn him!"

Skipper Simms hastened below while two of the men were carrying Thérière to his cabin and Mr. Ward was fetching the brandy. A moment later Barbara Harding saw the skipper return to the upper deck with a rifle and two revolvers. The sailors whom he had detailed to keep Byrne below were gathered about the hatchway leading to the forecastle. Some of them were exchanging profane and pleasant badinage with the prisoner.

"Yeh better come up an' get killed easy-like;" one called down to the mucker. "We're apt to muss yeh all up down there in the dark with these here axes and crowbars, an' then wen we send yeh home yer pore maw won't know her little boy at all."

"Yeh come on down here, an' try mussin' me up," yelled back Billy Byrne. "I can lick de whole gang wit one han' tied behin' me—see?"

"De skipper's gorn to get his barkers, Billy," cried Bony Sawyer. "Yeh better come up an' stan' trial if he gives yeh the chanct."

"Stan' nothin'," sneered Billy. "Swell chanct I'd have wit him an' Squint Eye holdin' court over me. Not on yer life, Bony. I'm here, an' here I stays till I croaks,

but yeh better believe me, I'm goin', to croak a few before I goes, so if any of you ginks are me frien's yeh better keep outen here so's yeh won't get hurted. An' anudder ting I'm goin' to do afore I cashes in—I'm goin' to put a few of dem ginks in de cabin wise to where dey stands wit one anudder. If I don't start something before I goes out me name's not Billy Byrne."

At this juncture Skipper Simms appeared with the three weapons he had gone to his cabin to fetch. He handed one to Bony Sawyer, another to Red Sanders and a third to a man by the name of Wison.

"Now, my men," said Skipper Simms, "we will go below and bring Byrne up. Bring him alive if you can—but bring him."

No one made a move to enter the forecabin.

"Go on now, move quickly," commanded Skipper Simms sharply.

"Thought he said 'we'," remarked one of the sailors.

Skipper Simms, livid with rage, turned to search out the offender from the several men behind him.

"Who was that?" he roared. "Show me the blitherin' swab. Jes' show him to me, I tell you, an' I'll learn him. Now you," he yelled at the top of his voice, turning again to the men he had ordered into the forecabin after Billy Byrne, "you cowardly landlubbers you, get below there quick afore I kick you below."

Still no one moved to obey him. From white he went to red, and then back to white again. He fairly frothed at the mouth as he jumped up and down, cursing the men, and threatening. But all to no avail. They would not go.

"Why, Skipper," spoke up Bony Sawyer, "it's sure death for any man as goes below there. It's easier, an' safer, to starve him out."

"Starve nothin'," shrieked Skipper Simms. "Do you reckon I'm a-goin' to sit quiet here for a week an' let any blanked wharf rat own that there fo'c's'le just because I got a lot o' white-livered cowards aboard? No sir! You're a-goin' down after that would-be bad man an' fetch him up dead or alive," and with that he started menacingly toward the three who stood near the hatch, holding their firearms safely out of range of Billy Byrne below.

What would have happened had Skipper Simms completed the threatening maneuver he had undertaken can never be known, for at this moment Thérière pushed his way through the circle of men who were interested spectators of the impending tragedy.

"What's up, sir?" he asked of Simms. "Anything that I can help you with?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the skipper; "so you ain't dead after all, eh? Well that don't change the looks of things a mite. We gotta get that man outa there an' these flea-bitten imitations of men ain't got the guts to go in after him."

"He's got your gun, sir," spoke up Wison, "an' Gawd knows he be the one as'ud on'y be too glad for the chanct to use it."

"Let me see if I can't handle him, sir," said Thérière to Skipper Simms. "We don't want to lose any men if we can help it."

The skipper was only too glad to welcome this unexpected rescue from the predicament in which he had placed himself. How Thérière was to accomplish the subjugation of the mutinous sailor he could not guess, nor did he care so long as it was done without risk to his own skin.

"Now if you'll go away, sir," said Thérière, "and order the men away I'll see what I can do."

Skipper Simms did as Thérière had requested, so that presently the officer stood alone beside the hatch. Across the deck, amidships, the men had congregated to watch Thérière's operations, while beyond them stood Barbara Harding held fascinated by the grim tragedy that was unfolding before her upon this accursed vessel.

Thérière leaned over the open hatch, in full view of the waiting Byrne, ready below. There was the instant report of a firearm and a bullet whizzed close past Thérière's head.

"Avast there, Byrne!" he shouted. "It's I, Thérière. Don't shoot again, I want to speak to you."

"No monkey business now," growled the mucker in reply. "I won't miss again."

"I want to talk with you, Byrne," said Thérière in a low tone. "I'm coming down there."

"No you ain't, cul," returned Byrne; "leastways yeh ain't a-comin' down here alive."

"Yes I am, Byrne," replied Thérière, "and you don't want to be foolish about it. I'm unarmed. You can cover me with your gun until you have satisfied yourself as to that. I'm the only man on the ship that can save your life—the only man that has any reason to want to; but we've got to talk it over and we can't talk this way where there's a chance of being overheard. I'll be on the square with you if you will with me, and if we can't come to terms I'll come above again and you won't be any worse off than you are now. Here I come," and without waiting for an acceptance of his proposition the second officer of the Halfmoon slipped over the edge of the hatchway and disappeared from the sight of the watchers above.

That he was a brave man even Billy Byrne had to admit, and those above who knew nothing of the relations existing between the second mate and the sailor, who had so recently felled him, thought that his courage was little short of marvelous. Thérière's stock went up by leaps and bounds in the estimation of the sailors of the Halfmoon, for degraded though they were they could understand and appreciate physical courage of this sort, while to Barbara Harding the man's act seemed unparalleled in its utter disregard of the consequences of life and death to himself that it entailed. She suddenly was sorry that she had entertained any suspicions against Thérière—so brave a man could not be other than the soul of honor, she argued.

Once below Thérière found himself covered by his own revolver in the hands of a very desperate and a very unprincipled man. He smiled at Byrne as the latter eyed him suspiciously.

"See here, Byrne," said Thérière. "It would be foolish for me to say that I am doing this for love of you. The fact is that I need you. We cannot succeed, either one of us, alone. I think you made a fool play when you hit me today. You know that our understanding was that I was to be even a little rougher with you than usual, in order to avoid suspicion being attached to any seeming familiarity between us, should we be caught conferring together. I had the chance to bawl you out today, and I thought that you would understand that I was but taking advantage of the opportunity which it afforded to make it plain to Miss Harding

that there could be nothing other than hatred between us—it might have come in pretty handy later to have her believe that.

“If I’d had any idea that you really intended hitting me you’d have been a dead man before your fist reached me, Byrne. You took me entirely by surprise; but that’s all in the past—I’m willing to let bygones be bygones, and help you out of the pretty pickle you’ve got yourself into. Then we can go ahead with our work as though nothing had happened. What do you say?”

“I didn’t know yeh was kiddin,” replied the mucker, “or I wouldn’t have hit yeh. Yeh acted like yeh meant it.”

“Very well, that part’s understood,” said Thérière. “Now will you come out if I can square the thing with the skipper so’s you won’t get more than a day or so in irons—he’ll have to give you something to save his own face; but I promise that you’ll get your food regularly and that you won’t be beaten up the way you were before when he had you below. If he won’t agree to what I propose I give you my word to tell you so.”

“Go ahead,” said Billy Byrne; “I don’t trust nobody wen I don’t have to; but I’ll be dinged if I see any other way out of it.”

Thérière returned to the deck and seeking out the skipper drew him to one side.

“I can get him up peaceably if I can assure him that he’ll only get a day or so in the cooler, with full rations and no beatings. I think, sir, that that will be the easiest way out of it. We cannot spare a man now—if we want to get the fellow later we can always find some pretext.”

“Very well, Mr. Thérière,” replied the skipper, “I’ll leave the matter entirely in your hands—you can do what you want with the fellow; it’s you as had your face punched.”

Thérière returned immediately to the forecastle, from which he presently emerged with the erstwhile recalcitrant Byrne, and for two days the latter languished in durance vile, and that was the end of the episode, though its effects were manifold. For one thing it implanted in the heart of Thérière a personal hatred for the mucker, so that while heretofore his intention of ridding himself of the man when he no longer needed him was due purely to a matter of policy, it was now reinforced by a keen desire for personal revenge. The occurrence had also had its influence upon Barbara Harding, in that it had shown her Mr. Thérière in a new light—one that reflected credit upon him. She had thought his magnanimous treatment of the sailor little short of heroic; and it had deepened the girl’s horror of Billy Byrne until it now amounted to little short of an obsession. So vivid an impression had his brutality made upon her that she would start from deep slumber, dreaming that she was menaced by him.

After Billy was released for duty following his imprisonment, he several times passed the girl upon deck. He noticed that she shrank from him in disgust and terror; but what surprised him was that instead of the thrill of pride which he formerly would have felt at this acknowledgment of his toughness, for Billy prided himself on being a tough, he now felt a singular resentment against the girl for her attitude, so that he came to hate her even more than he had before hated. Formerly he had hated her for the things she stood for, now he hated her for herself.

Thérière was often with her now, and, less frequently, Divine; for at the second officer's suggestion Barbara had not acquainted that gentleman with the fact that she was aware of his duplicity.

"It is just as well not to let him know," said Thérière. "It gives you an advantage that would be wanting should he suspect the truth, so that now you are always in a position to be warned in plenty of time against any ulterior suggestion he may make. Keep me posted as to all he tells you of his plans, and in this way we can defeat him much more easily than as though you followed your natural inclinations and refused to hold communication of any sort with him. It might be well, Miss Harding, even to encourage him in the hope that you will wed him voluntarily. I think that that would throw him entirely off his guard, and pave the way for your early release."

"Oh, I doubt if I could do that, Mr. Thérière," exclaimed the girl. "You cannot imagine how I loathe the man now that I know him in his true colors. For years he has importuned me to marry him, and though I never cared for him in that way at all, and never could, I felt that he was a very good friend and that his constancy demanded some return on my part—my friendship and sympathy at least; but now I shiver whenever he is near me, just as I would were I to find a snake coiled close beside me. I cannot abide treachery."

"Nor I, Miss Harding," agreed Thérière glibly. "The man deserves nothing but your contempt, though for policy's sake I hope that you will find it possible to lead him on until his very treachery proves the means of your salvation, for believe me, if he has been false to you how much more quickly will he be false to Simms and Ward! He would ditch them in a minute if the opportunity presented itself for him to win you without their aid. I had thought it might be feasible to lead him into attempting to take the ship by force, and return you to San Francisco, or, better still possibly, to the nearest civilized port.

"You might, with propriety suggest this to him, telling him that you believe that I would stand ready to assist in the undertaking. I can promise you the support of several of the men—quite a sufficient number with Divine and myself, easily to take the Halfmoon away from her present officers."

"I will think over your suggestion, Mr. Thérière," replied Barbara, "and I thank you for the generous impulse that has prompted you to befriend me—heaven knows how badly I need a friend now among so many enemies. What is it, Mr. Thérière? What is the matter?"

The officer had turned his eyes casually toward the southeast as the girl spoke, and just now he had given a sudden exclamation of surprise and alarm.

"That cloud, Miss Harding," he answered. "We're in for a bad blow, and it'll be on us in a minute," and with that he started forward on a run, calling back over his shoulder, "you'd better go below at once."

Chapter VII

The Typhoon.

The storm that struck the Halfmoon took her entirely unaware. It had sprung, apparently, out of a perfectly clear sky. Both the lookout and the man at the wheel were ready to take oath that they had scanned the horizon not a half-minute before Second Mate Thérière had come racing forward bellowing for all hands on deck and ordering a sailor below to report the menacing conditions to Captain Simms.

Before that officer reached the deck Thérière had the entire crew aloft taking in sail; but though they worked with the desperation of doomed men they were only partially successful in their efforts.

The sky and sea had assumed a sickly yellowish color, except for the mighty black cloud that raced toward them, low over the water. The low moaning sound that had followed the first appearance of the storm, gave place to a sullen roar, and then, of a sudden, the thing struck the Halfmoon, ripping her remaining canvas from her as if it had been wrought from tissue paper, and with the flying canvas, spars, and cordage went the mainmast, snapping ten feet above the deck, and crashing over the starboard bow with a noise and jar that rose above the bellowing of the typhoon.

Fully half the crew of the Halfmoon either went down with the falling rigging or were crushed by the crashing weight of the mast as it hurtled against the deck. Skipper Simms rushed back and forth screaming out curses that no one heeded, and orders that there was none to fill.

Thérière, on his own responsibility, looked to the hatches. Ward with a handful of men armed with axes attempted to chop away the wreckage, for the jagged butt of the fallen mast was dashing against the ship's side with such vicious blows that it seemed but a matter of seconds ere it would stave a hole in her.

With the utmost difficulty a sea anchor was rigged and tumbled over the Halfmoon's pitching bow into the angry sea, that was rising to more gigantic proportions with each succeeding minute. This frail makeshift which at best could but keep the vessel's bow into the wind, saving her from instant engulfment in the sea's trough, seemed to Thérière but a sorry means of prolonging the agony of suspense preceding the inevitable end. That nothing could save them was the second officer's firm belief, nor was he alone in his conviction. Not only Simms and Ward, but every experienced sailor on the ship felt that the life of the Halfmoon was now but a matter of hours, possibly minutes, while those of lesser experience were equally positive that each succeeding wave must mark the termination of the lives of the vessel and her company.

The deck, washed now almost continuously by hurtling tons of storm-mad water, as one mountainous wave followed another the length of the ship, had become entirely impossible. With difficulty the men were attempting to get below between waves. All semblance of discipline had vanished. For the most part they were a pack of howling, cursing, terror-ridden beasts, fighting at the hatches with those who would have held them closed against the danger of each new assault of the sea.

Ward and Skipper Simms had been among the first to seek the precarious safety below deck. Thérière alone of the officers had remained on duty until the last, and now he was exerting his every faculty in the effort to save as many of the

men as possible without losing the ship in the doing of it. Only between waves was the entrance to the main cabins negotiable, while the forecastle hatch had been abandoned entirely after it had with difficulty been replaced following the retreat of three of the crew to that part of the ship.

The mucker stood beside Thérière as the latter beat back the men when the seas threatened. It was the man's first experience of the kind. Never had he faced death in the courage-blighting form which the grim harvester assumes when he calls unbridled Nature to do his ghastly bidding. The mucker saw the rough, brawling bullies of the forecastle reduced to white-faced, gibbering cowards, clawing and fighting to climb over one another toward the lesser danger of the cabins, while the mate fought them off, except as he found it expedient to let them pass him; he alone cool and fearless.

Byrne stood as one apart from the dangers and hysteric strivings of his fellows. Once when Thérière happened to glance in his direction the Frenchman mentally ascribed the mucker's seeming lethargy to the paralysis of abject cowardice. "The fellow is in a blue funk," thought the second mate; "I did not misjudge him—like all his kind he is a coward at heart."

Then a great wave came, following unexpectedly close upon the heels of a lesser one. It took Thérière off his guard, threw him down and hurtled him roughly across the deck, landing him in the scuppers, bleeding and stunned. The next wave would carry him overboard.

Released from surveillance the balance of the crew pushed and fought their way into the cabin—only the mucker remained without, staring first at the prostrate form of the mate and then at the open cabin hatch. Had one been watching him he might reasonably have thought that the man's mind was in a muddle of confused thoughts and fears; but such was far from the case. Billy was waiting to see if the mate would revive sufficiently to return across the deck before the next wave swept the ship. It was very interesting—he wondered what odds O'Leary would have laid against the man.

In another moment the wave would come. Billy glanced at the open cabin hatch. That would never do—the cabin would be flooded with tons of water should the next wave find the hatch still open. Billy closed it. Then he looked again toward Thérière. The man was just recovering consciousness—and the wave was coming.

Something stirred within Billy Byrne. It gripped him and made him act quickly as though by instinct to do something that no one, Billy himself least of all, would have suspected that the Grand Avenue mucker would have been capable of.

Across the deck Thérière was dragging himself painfully to his hands and knees, as though to attempt the impossible feat of crawling back to the cabin hatch. The wave was almost upon Billy. In a moment it would engulf him, and then rush on across him to tear Thérière from the deck and hurl him beyond the ship into the tumbling, watery, chaos of the sea.

The mucker saw all this, and in the instant he launched himself toward the man for whom he had no use, whose kind he hated, reaching him as the great wave broke over them, crushing them to the deck, choking and blinding them.

For a moment they were buried in the swirling maelstrom, and then as the Halfmoon rose again, shaking the watery enemy from her back, the two men were

disclosed—Thérière half over the ship's side—the mucker clinging to him with one hand, the other clutching desperately at a huge cleat upon the gunwale.

Byrne dragged the mate to the deck, and then slowly and with infinite difficulty across it to the cabin hatch. Through it he pushed the man, tumbling after him and closing the aperture just as another wave swept the Halfmoon.

Thérière was conscious and but little the worse for his experience, though badly bruised. He looked at the mucker in astonishment as the two faced each other in the cabin.

"I don't know why you did it," said Thérière.

"Neither do I," replied Billy Byrne.

"I shall not forget it, Byrne," said the officer.

"Yeh'd better," answered Billy, turning away.

The mucker was extremely puzzled to account for his act. He did not look upon it at all as a piece of heroism; but rather as a "fool play" which he should be ashamed of. The very idea! Saving the life of a gink who, despite his brutal ways, belonged to the much-despised "highbrow" class. Billy was peeved with himself.

Thérière, for his part, was surprised at the unexpected heroism of the man he had long since rated as a cowardly bully. He was fully determined to repay Byrne in so far as he could the great debt he owed him. All thoughts of revenge for the mucker's former assault upon him were dropped, and he now looked upon the man as a true friend and ally.

For three days the Halfmoon plunged helplessly upon the storm-wracked surface of the mad sea. No soul aboard her entertained more than the faintest glimmer of a hope that the ship would ride out the storm; but during the third night the wind died down, and by morning the sea had fallen sufficiently to make it safe for the men of the Halfmoon to venture upon deck.

There they found the brigantine clean-swept from stem to stern. To the north of them was land at a league or two, perhaps. Had the storm continued during the night they would have been dashed upon the coast. God-fearing men would have given thanks for their miraculous rescue; but not so these. Instead, the fear of death removed, they assumed their former bravado.

Skipper Simms boasted of the seamanship that had saved the Halfmoon—his own seamanship of course. Ward was cursing the luck that had disabled the ship at so crucial a period of her adventure, and revolving in his evil mind various possible schemes for turning the misfortune to his own advantage. Billy Byrne, sitting upon the corner of the galley table, hobnobbed with Blanco. These choice representatives of the ship's company were planning a raid on the skipper's brandy chest during the disembarkation which the sight of land had rendered not improbable.

The Halfmoon, with the wind down, wallowed heavily in the trough of the sea, but even so Barbara Harding, wearied with days of confinement in her stuffy cabin below, ventured above deck for a breath of sweet, clean air.

Scarce had she emerged from below than Thérière espied her, and hastened to her side.

"Well, Miss Harding," he exclaimed, "it seems good to see you on deck again. I can't tell you how sorry I have felt for you cooped up alone in your cabin without a single woman for companionship, and all those frightful days of danger, for there

was scarce one of us that thought the old hooker would weather so long and hard a blow. We were mighty fortunate to come through it so handily."

"Handily?" queried Barbara Harding, with a wry smile, glancing about the deck of the Halfmoon. "I cannot see that we are either through it handily or through it at all. We have no masts, no canvas, no boats; and though I am not much of a sailor, I can see that there is little likelihood of our effecting a landing on the shore ahead either with or without boats—it looks most forbidding. Then the wind has gone down, and when it comes up again it is possible that it will carry us away from the land, or if it takes us toward it, dash us to pieces at the foot of those frightful cliffs."

"I see you are too good a sailor by far to be cheered by any questionable hopes," laughed Thérière; "but you must take the will into consideration—I only wished to give you a ray of hope that might lighten your burden of apprehension. However, honestly, I do think that we may find a way to make a safe landing if the sea continues to go down as it has in the past two hours. We are not more than a league from shore, and with the jury mast and sail that the men are setting under Mr. Ward now we can work in comparative safety with a light breeze, which we should have during the afternoon. There are few coasts, however rugged they may appear at a distance, that do not offer some foothold for the wrecked mariner, and I doubt not but that we shall find this no exception to the rule."

"I hope you are right, Mr. Thérière," said the girl, "and yet I cannot but feel that my position will be less safe on land than it has been upon the Halfmoon. Once free from the restraints of discipline which tradition, custom, and law enforce upon the high seas there is no telling what atrocities these men will commit. To be quite candid, Mr. Thérière, I dread a landing worse than I dreaded the dangers of the storm through which we have just passed."

"I think you have little to fear on that score, Miss Harding," said the Frenchman. "I intend making it quite plain that I consider myself your protector once we have left the Halfmoon, and I can count on several of the men to support me. Even Mr. Divine will not dare do otherwise. Then we can set up a camp of our own apart from Skipper Simms and his faction where you will be constantly guarded until succor may be obtained."

Barbara Harding had been watching the man's face as he spoke. The memory of his consideration and respectful treatment of her during the trying weeks of her captivity had done much to erase the intuitive feeling of distrust that had tinged her thoughts of him earlier in their acquaintance, while his heroic act in descending into the forecastle in the face of the armed and desperate Byrne had thrown a glamour of romance about him that could not help but tend to fascinate a girl of Barbara Harding's type. Then there was the look she had seen in his eyes for a brief instant when she had found herself locked in his cabin on the occasion that he had revealed to her Larry Divine's duplicity. That expression no red-blooded girl could mistake, and the fact that he had subdued his passion spoke eloquently to the girl of the fineness and chivalry of his nature, so now it was with a feeling of utter trustfulness that she gladly gave herself into the keeping of Henri Thérière, Count de Cadenet, Second Officer of the Halfmoon.

"O Mr. Thérière," she cried, "if you only can but arrange it so, how relieved and almost happy I shall be. How can I ever repay you for all that you have done for me?"

Again she saw the light leap to the man's eyes—the light of a love that would not be denied much longer other than through the agency of a mighty will. Love she thought it; but the eye-light of love and lust are twin lights between which it takes much worldly wisdom to differentiate, and Barbara Harding was not worldly-wise in the ways of sin.

"Miss Harding," said Thérière, in a voice that he evidently found it difficult to control, "do not ask me now how you may repay me; I—;" but what he would have said he checked, and with an effort of will that was almost appreciable to the eye he took a fresh grip upon himself, and continued: "I am amply repaid by being able to serve you, and thus to retrieve myself in your estimation—I know that you have doubted me; that you have questioned the integrity of my acts that helped to lead up to the unfortunate affair of the Lotus. When you tell me that you no longer doubt—that you accept me as the friend I would wish to be, I shall be more than amply repaid for anything which it may have been my good fortune to have been able to accomplish for your comfort and safety."

"Then I may partially repay you at once," exclaimed the girl with a smile, "for I can assure you that you possess my friendship to the fullest, and with it, of course, my entire confidence. It is true that I doubted you at first—I doubted everyone connected with the Halfmoon. Why shouldn't I? But now I think that I am able to draw a very clear line between my friends and my enemies. There is but one upon the right side of that line—you, my friend," and with an impulsive little gesture Barbara Harding extended her hand to Thérière.

It was with almost a sheepish expression that the Frenchman took the proffered fingers, for there had been that in the frank avowal of confidence and friendship which smote upon a chord of honor in the man's soul that had not vibrated in response to a chivalrous impulse for so many long years that it had near atrophied from disuse.

Then, of a sudden, the second officer of the Halfmoon straightened to his full height. His head went high, and he took the small hand of the girl in his own strong, brown one.

"Miss Harding," he said, "I have led a hard, bitter life. I have not always done those things of which I might be most proud: but there have been times when I have remembered that I am the grandson of one of Napoleon's greatest field marshals, and that I bear a name that has been honored by a mighty nation. What you have just said to me recalls these facts most vividly to my mind—I hope, Miss Harding, that you will never regret having spoken them," and to the bottom of his heart the man meant what he said, at the moment; for inherent chivalry is as difficult to suppress or uproot as is inherent viciousness.

The girl let her hand rest in his for a moment, and as their eyes met she saw in his a truth and honesty and cleanness which revealed what Thérière might have been had Fate ordained his young manhood to different channels. And in that moment a question sprang, all unbidden and unforeseen to her mind; a question which caused her to withdraw her hand quickly from his, and which sent a slow crimson to her cheek.

Billy Byrne, slouching by, cast a bitter look of hatred upon the two. The fact that he had saved Thérière's life had not increased his love for that gentleman. He was still much puzzled to account for the strange idiocy that had prompted him to that act; and two of his fellows had felt the weight of his mighty fist when they had spoken words of rough praise for his heroism—Billy had thought that they were kidding him.

To Billy the knocking out of Thérière, and the subsequent kick which he had planted in the unconscious man's face, were true indications of manliness. He gauged such matters by standards purely Grand Avenuesque and now it enraged him to see that the girl before whose very eyes he had demonstrated his superiority over Thérière should so look with favor upon the officer.

It did not occur to Billy that he would care to have the girl look with favor upon him. Such a thought would have sent him into a berserker rage; but the fact remained that Billy felt a strong desire to cut out Thérière's heart when he saw him now in close converse with Barbara Harding—just why he felt so Billy could not have said. The truth of the matter is that Billy was far from introspective; in fact he did very little thinking. His mind had never been trained to it, as his muscles had been trained to fighting. Billy reacted more quickly to instinct than to the processes of reasoning, and on this account it was difficult for him to explain any great number of his acts or moods—it is to be doubted, however, that Billy Byrne had ever attempted to get at the bottom of his soul, if he possessed one.

Be that as it may, had Thérière known it he was very near death that moment when a summons from Skipper Simms called him aft and saved his life. Then the mucker, unseen by the officer, approached the girl. In his heart were rage and hatred, and as the girl turned at the sound of his step behind her she saw them mirrored in his dark, scowling face.

Chapter VIII

The Wreck of the HALFMOON.

Instantly Barbara Harding looked into the face of the mucker she read her danger. Why the man should hate her so she could not guess; but that he did was evidenced by the malevolent expression of his surly countenance. For a moment he stood glaring at her, and then he spoke.

"I'm wise to wot youse an' dat guy was chinnin' about," he growled, "an' I'm right here to tell youse dat you don't wanta try an' put nothin' over on me, see? Youse ain't a-goin' to double-cross Billy Byrne. I gotta good notion to han' youse wot's comin' to you. If it hadn't been fer youse I wouldn't have been here now on dis Gawd-forsaken wreck. Youse is de cause of all de trouble. Wot youse ought to get is croaked an' den dere wouldn't be nothin' to bother any of us. You an' yer bunch of kale, dey give me a swift pain. Fer half a cent I'd soak youse a wallop to de solar plexus dat would put youse to sleep fer de long count, you—you—" but here words failed Billy.

To his surprise the girl showed not the slightest indication of fear. Her head was high, and her level gaze never wavered from his own eyes. Presently a sneer of contempt curled her lip.

"You coward!" she said quietly. "To insult and threaten a woman! You are nothing but an insufferable bully, and a cowardly murderer. You murdered a man on the Lotus whose little finger held more true manhood, bravery, and worth than the whole of your great, hulking carcass. You are only fit to strike from behind, or when your victim is unsuspecting, as you did Mr. Thérière that other day. Do you think I fear a **THING** such as you—a beast without honor that kicks an unconscious man in the face? I know that you can kill me. I know that you are coward enough to do it because I am a defenseless woman; and though you may kill me, you never can make me show fear for you. That is what you wish to do—that is your idea of manliness. I had never imagined that such a thing as you lived in the guise of man; but I have read you, Mr. Byrne, since I have had occasion to notice you, and I know now that you are what is known in the great cities as a mucker. The term never meant much to me before, but I see now that it fits your kind perfectly, for in it is all the loathing and contempt that a real man—a gentleman—must feel for such as you."

As she spoke Billy Byrne's eyes narrowed; but not with the cunning of premeditated attack. He was thinking. For the first time in his life he was thinking of how he appeared in the eyes of another. Never had any human being told Billy Byrne thus coolly and succinctly what sort of person he seemed to them. In the heat of anger men of his own stamp had applied vile epithets to him, describing him luridly as such that by the simplest laws of nature he could not possibly be; but this girl had spoken coolly, and her descriptions had been explicit—backed by illustrations. She had given real reasons for her contempt, and somehow it had made that contempt seem very tangible.

One who had known Billy would have expected him to fly into a rage and attack the girl brutally after her scathing diatribe. Billy did nothing of the sort. Barbara Harding's words seemed to have taken all the fight out of him. He stood looking at her for a moment—it was one of the strange contradictions of Billy Byrne's personality that he could hold his eyes quite steady and level, meeting the gaze of another unwaveringly—and in that moment something happened to Billy Byrne's perceptive faculties. It was as though scales which had dimmed his mental vision had partially dropped away, for suddenly he saw what he had not before seen—a very beautiful girl, brave and unflinching before the brutal menace of his attitude, and though the mucker thought that he still hated her, the realization came to him that he must not raise a hand against her—that for the life of him he could not, nor ever again against any other woman. Why this change, Billy did not know, he simply knew that it was so, and with an ugly grunt he turned his back upon her and walked away.

A slight breeze had risen from the southwest since Thérière had left Barbara Harding and now all hands were busily engaged in completing the jury rigging that the Halfmoon might take advantage of the wind and make the shore that rose abruptly from the bosom of the ocean but a league away.

Before the work was completed the wind increased rapidly, so that when the tiny bit of canvas was hoisted into position it bellied bravely, and the Halfmoon moved heavily forward toward the land.

"We gotta make a mighty quick run of it," said Skipper Simms to Ward, "or we'll go to pieces on them rocks afore ever we find a landing."

"That we will if this wind rises much more," replied Ward; "and's far as I can see there ain't no more chance to make a landing there than there would be on the side of a house."

And indeed as the Halfmoon neared the towering cliffs it seemed utterly hopeless that aught else than a fly could find a foothold upon that sheer and rocky face that rose abruptly from the ocean's surface.

Some two hundred yards from the shore it became evident that there was no landing to be made directly before them, and so the course of the ship was altered to carry them along parallel to the shore in an effort to locate a cove, or beach where a landing might safely be effected.

The wind, increasing steadily, was now whipping the sea into angry breakers that dashed resoundingly against the rocky barrier of the island. To drift within reach of those frightful destroyers would mean the instant annihilation of the Halfmoon and all her company, yet this was precisely what the almost unmanageable hulk was doing at the wheel under the profane direction of Skipper Simms, while Ward and Thérière with a handful of men altered the meager sail from time to time in an effort to keep the ship off the rocks for a few moments longer.

The Halfmoon was almost upon the cliff's base when a narrow opening showed some hundred fathoms before her nose, an opening through which the sea ran in long, surging sweeps, rolling back upon itself in angry breakers that filled the aperture with swirling water and high-flung spume. To have attempted to drive the ship into such a place would have been the height of madness under ordinary circumstances. No man knew what lay beyond, nor whether the opening carried sufficient water to float the Halfmoon, though the long, powerful sweep of the sea as it entered the opening denoted considerable depth.

Skipper Simms, seeing the grim rocks rising close beside his vessel, realized that naught could keep her from them now. He saw death peering close to his face. He felt the icy breath of the Grim Reaper upon his brow. A coward at heart, he lost every vestige of his nerve at this crucial moment of his life. Leaping from the wheelhouse to the deck he ran backward and forward shrieking at the top of his lungs begging and entreating someone to save him, and offering fabulous rewards to the man who carried him safely to the shore.

The sight of their captain in a blue funk had its effect upon the majority of the crew, so that in a moment a pack of screaming, terror-ridden men had supplanted the bravos and bullies of the Halfmoon.

From the cabin companionway Barbara Harding looked upon the disgusting scene. Her lip curled in scorn at the sight of these men weeping and moaning in their fright. She saw Ward busy about one of the hatches. It was evident that he intended making a futile attempt to utilize it as a means of escape after the Halfmoon struck, for he was attaching ropes to it and dragging it toward the port

side of the ship, away from the shore. Larry Divine crouched beside the cabin and wept.

When Simms gave up the ship Barbara Harding saw the wheelmen, there had been two of them, desert their post, and almost instantly the nose of the Halfmoon turned toward the rocks; but scarcely had the men reached the deck than Thérière leaped to their place at the wheel.

Unassisted he could do little with the heavy helm. Barbara saw that he alone of all the officers and men of the brigantine was making an attempt to save the vessel. However futile the effort might be, it at least bespoke the coolness and courage of the man. With the sight of him there wrestling with death in a hopeless struggle a little wave of pride surged through the girl. Here indeed was a man! And he loved her—that she knew. Whether or no she returned his love her place was beside him now, to give what encouragement and physical aid lay in her power.

Quickly she ran to the wheelhouse. Thérière saw her and smiled.

"There's no hope, I'm afraid," he said; "but, by George, I intend to go down fighting, and not like those miserable yellow curs."

Barbara did not reply, but she grasped the spokes of the heavy wheel and tugged as he tugged. Thérière made no effort to dissuade her from the strenuous labor—every ounce of weight would help so much, and the man had a wild, mad idea that he was attempting to put into effect.

"What do you hope to do?" asked the girl. "Make that opening in the cliffs?"

Thérière nodded.

"Do you think me crazy?" he asked.

"It is such a chance as only a brave man would dare to take," she replied. "Do you think that we can get her to take it?"

"I doubt it," he answered. "With another man at the wheel we might, though."

Below them the crew of the Halfmoon ran hither and thither along the deck on the side away from the breakers. They fought with one another for useless bits of planking and cordage. The giant figure of the black cook, Blanco, rose above the others. In his hand was a huge butcher knife. When he saw a piece of wood he coveted in the hands of another he rushed upon his helpless victim with wild, bestial howls, menacing him with his gleaming weapon. Thus he was rapidly accumulating the material for a life raft.

But there was a single figure upon the deck that did not seem mad with terror. A huge fellow he was who stood leaning against the capstan watching the wild antics of his fellows with a certain wondering expression of incredulity, the while a contemptuous smile curled his lips. As Barbara Harding chanced to look in his direction he also chanced to turn his eyes toward the wheelhouse. It was the mucker.

The girl was surprised that he, the greatest coward of them all, should be showing no signs of cowardice now—probably he was paralyzed with fright. The moment that the man saw the two who were in the wheelhouse and the work that they were doing he sprang quickly toward them. At his approach the girl shrank closer to Thérière.

What new outrage did the fellow contemplate? Now he was beside her. The habitual dark scowl blackened his expression. He laid a heavy hand on Barbara Harding's arm.

"Come out o' dat," he bellowed. "Dat's no kind o' job fer a broiler."

And before either she or Thérière could guess his intention the mucker had pushed Barbara aside and taken her place at the wheel.

"Good for you, Byrne!" cried Thérière. "I needed you badly."

"Why didn't yeh say so den?" growled the man.

With the aid of Byrne's Herculean muscles and great weight the bow of the Halfmoon commenced to come slowly around so that presently she almost paralleled the cliffs again, but now she was much closer in than when Skipper Simms had deserted her to her fate—so close that Thérière had little hope of being able to carry out his plan of taking her opposite the opening and then turning and running her before the wind straight into the swirling waters of the inlet.

Now they were almost opposite the aperture and between the giant cliffs that rose on either side of the narrow entrance a sight was revealed that filled their hearts with renewed hope and rejoicing, for a tiny cove was seen to lie beyond the fissure—a cove with a long, wide, sandy beach up which the waves, broken at the entrance to the little haven, rolled with much diminished violence.

"Can you hold her alone for a second, Byrne?" asked Thérière. "We must make the turn in another moment and I've got to let out sail. The instant that you see me cut her loose put your helm hard to starboard. She'll come around easy enough I imagine, and then hold her nose straight for that opening. It's one chance in a thousand; but it's the only one. Are you game?"

"You know it, cul—go to 't," was Billy Byrne's laconic rejoinder.

As Thérière left the wheel Barbara Harding stepped to the mucker's side.

"Let me help you," she said. "We need every hand that we can get for the next few moments."

"Beat it," growled the man. "I don't want no skirts in my way."

With a flush, the girl drew back, and then turning watched Thérière where he stood ready to cut loose the sail at the proper instant. The vessel was now opposite the cleft in the cliffs. Thérière had lashed a new sheet in position. Now he cut the old one. The sail swung around until caught in position by the stout line. The mucker threw the helm hard to starboard. The nose of the brigantine swung quickly toward the rocks. The sail filled, and an instant later the ship was dashing to what seemed her inevitable doom.

Skipper Simms, seeing what Thérière had done after it was too late to prevent it, dashed madly across the deck toward his junior.

"You fool!" he shrieked. "You fool! What are you doing? Driving us straight for the rocks—murdering the whole lot of us!" and with that he sprang upon the Frenchman with maniacal fury, bearing him to the deck beneath him.

Barbara Harding saw the attack of the fear-demented man, but she was powerless to prevent it. The mucker saw it too, and grinned—he hoped that it would be a good fight; there was nothing that he enjoyed more. He was sorry that he could not take a hand in it, but the wheel demanded all his attention now, so that he was even forced to take his eyes from the combatants that he might rivet them upon the narrow entrance to the cove toward which the Halfmoon was now plowing her way at constantly increasing speed.

The other members of the ship's company, all unmindful of the battle that at another time would have commanded their undivided attention, stood with eyes

glued upon the wild channel toward which the brigantine's nose was pointed. They saw now what Skipper Simms had failed to see—the little cove beyond, and the chance for safety that the bold stroke offered if it proved successful.

With steady muscles and giant sinews the mucker stood by the wheel—nursing the erratic wreck as no one might have supposed it was in him to do. Behind him Barbara Harding watched first Thérière and Simms, and then Byrne and the swirling waters toward which he was heading the ship.

Even the strain of the moment did not prevent her from wondering at the strange contradictions of the burly young ruffian who could at one moment show such traits of cowardliness and the next rise so coolly to the highest pinnacles of courage. As she watched him occasionally now she noted for the first time the leonine contour of his head, and she was surprised to note that his features were regular and fine, and then she recalled Billy Mallory and the cowardly kick that she had seen delivered in the face of the unconscious Thérière—with a little shudder of disgust she turned away from the man at the wheel.

Thérière by this time had managed to get on top of Skipper Simms, but that worthy still clung to him with the desperation of a drowning man. The Halfmoon was rising on a great wave that would bear her well into the maelstrom of the cove's entrance. The wind had increased to the proportions of a gale, so that the brigantine was fairly racing either to her doom or her salvation—who could tell which?

Halfway through the entrance the wave dropped the ship, and with a mighty crash that threw Barbara Harding to her feet the vessel struck full amidships upon a sunken reef. Like a thing of glass she broke in two with the terrific impact, and in another instant the waters about her were filled with screaming men.

Barbara Harding felt herself hurtled from the deck as though shot from a catapult. The swirling waters engulfed her. She knew that her end had come, only the most powerful of swimmers might hope to win through that lashing hell of waters to the beach beyond. For a girl to do it was too hopeless even to contemplate; but she recalled Thérière's words of so short a time ago: "There's no hope, I'm afraid; but, by George, I intend to go down fighting," and with the recollection came a like resolve on her part—to go down fighting, and so she struck out against the powerful waters that swirled her hither and thither, now perilously close to the rocky sides of the entrance, and now into the mad chaos of the channel's center. Would to heaven that Thérière were near her, she thought, for if any could save her it would be he.

Since she had come to believe in the man's friendship and sincerity Barbara Harding had felt renewed hope of eventual salvation, and with the hope had come a desire to live which had almost been lacking for the greater part of her detention upon the Halfmoon.

Bravely she battled now against the awful odds of the mighty Pacific, but soon she felt her strength waning. More and more ineffective became her puny efforts, and at last she ceased almost entirely the futile struggle.

And then she felt a strong hand grasp her arm, and with a sudden surge she was swung over a broad shoulder. Quickly she grasped the rough shirt that covered the back of her would-be rescuer, and then commenced a battle with the waves that for many minutes, that seemed hours to the frightened girl, hung in

the balance; but at last the swimmer beneath her forged steadily and persistently toward the sandy beach to flounder out at last with an unconscious burden in his mighty arms.

As the man staggered up out of reach of the water Barbara Harding opened her eyes to look in astonishment into the face of the mucker.

Chapter IX

Oda Yorimoto.

Only four men of the Halfmoon's crew were lost in the wreck of the vessel. All had been crowded in the bow when the ship broke in two, and being far-flung by the forward part of the brigantine as it lunged toward the cove on the wave following the one which had dropped the craft upon the reef, with the exception of the four who had perished beneath the wreckage they had been able to swim safely to the beach.

Larry Divine, who had sat weeping upon the deck of the doomed ship during the time that hope had been at its lowest, had recovered his poise. Skipper Simms, subdued for the moment, soon commenced to regain his bluster. He took Thérière to task for the loss of the Halfmoon.

"An' ever we make a civilized port," he shouted, "I'll prefer charges ag'in' you, you swab you; a-losin' of the finest bark as ever weathered a storm. Ef it hadn't o' been fer you a-mutinyin' agin' me I'd a-brought her through in safety an' never lost a bloomin' soul."

"Stow it!" admonished Thérière at last; "your foolish bluster can't hide the bald fact that you deserted your post in time of danger. We're ashore now, remember, and there is no more ship for you to command, so were I you I'd be mighty careful how I talked to my betters."

"What's that!" screamed the skipper. "My betters! You frog-eatin' greaser you, I'll teach you. Here, some of you, clap this swab into irons. I'll learn him that I'm still captain of this here bunch."

Thérière laughed in the man's face; but Ward and a couple of hands who had been shown favoritism by the skipper and first mate closed menacingly toward the second officer.

The Frenchman took in the situation at a glance. They were ashore now, where they didn't think that they needed him further and the process of elimination had commenced. Well, it might as well come to a showdown now as later.

"Just a moment," said Thérière, raising his hand. "You're not going to take me alive, and I have no idea that you want to anyhow, and if you start anything in the killing line some of you are going to Davy Jones' locker along with me. The best thing for all concerned is to divide up this party now once and for all."

As he finished speaking he turned toward Billy Byrne.

"Are you and the others with me, or against me?" he asked.

"I'm ag'in' Simms," replied the mucker non-committally.

Bony Sawyer, Red Sanders, Blanco, Wison, and two others drew in behind Billy Byrne.

"We all's wid Billy," announced Blanco.

Divine and Barbara Harding stood a little apart. Both were alarmed at the sudden, hostile turn events had taken. Simms, Ward, and Thérière were the only members of the party armed. Each wore a revolver strapped about his hips. All were still dripping from their recent plunge in the ocean.

Five men stood behind Skipper Simms and Ward, but there were two revolvers upon that side of the argument. Suddenly Ward turned toward Divine.

"Are you armed, Mr. Divine?" he asked.

Divine nodded affirmatively.

"Then you'd better come over with us—it looks like we might need you to help put down this mutiny," said Ward.

Divine hesitated. He did not know which side was more likely to be victorious, and he wanted to be sure to be on the winning side. Suddenly an inspiration came to him.

"This is purely a matter to be settled by the ship's officers," he said. "I am only a prisoner, call me a passenger if you like—I have no interest whatever in the matter, and shall not take sides."

"Yes you will," said Mr. Ward, in a low, but menacing tone. "You're in too deep to try to ditch us now. If you don't stand by us we'll treat you as one of the mutineers when we're through with them, and you can come pretty near a-guessin' what they'll get."

Divine was about to reply, and the nature of his answer was suggested by the fact that he had already taken a few steps in the direction of Simms' faction, when he was stopped by the low voice of the girl behind him.

"Larry," she said, "I know all—your entire connection with this plot. If you have a spark of honor or manhood left you will do what little you can to retrieve the terrible wrong you have done me, and my father. You can never marry me. I give you my word of honor that I shall take my own life if that is the only way to thwart your plans in that direction, and so as the fortune can never be yours it seems to me that the next best thing would be to try and save me from the terrible predicament in which your cupidity has placed me. You can make the start now, Larry, by walking over and placing yourself at Mr. Thérière's disposal. He has promised to help and protect me."

A deep flush mounted to the man's neck and face. He did not turn about to face the girl he had so grievously wronged—for the life of him he could not have met her eyes. Slowly he turned, and with gaze bent upon the ground walked quickly toward Thérière.

Ward was quick to recognize the turn events had taken, and to see that it gave Thérière the balance of power, with two guns and nine men in his party against their two guns and seven men. It also was evident to him that to the other party the girl would naturally gravitate since Divine, an old acquaintance, had cast his lot with it; nor had the growing intimacy between Miss Harding and Thérière been lost upon him.

Ward knew that Simms was an arrant coward, nor was he himself overly keen for an upstanding, man-to-man encounter such as must quickly follow any

attempt upon his part to uphold the authority of Simms, or their claim upon the custody of the girl.

Intrigue and trickery were more to Mr. Ward's liking, and so he was quick to alter his plan of campaign the instant that it became evident that Divine had elected to join forces with the opposing faction.

"I reckon," he said, directing his remarks toward no one in particular, "that we've all been rather hasty in this matter, being het up as we were with the strain of what we been through an' so it seems to me, takin' into consideration that Mr. Thérière really done his best to save the ship, an' that as a matter of fact we was all mighty lucky to come out of it alive, that we'd better let bygones be bygones, for the time bein' at least, an' all of us pitch in to save what we can from the wreckage, hunt water, rig up a camp, an' get things sort o' shipshape here instid o' squabblin' amongst ourselves."

"Suit yourself," said Thérière, "it's all the same to us," and his use of the objective pronoun seemed definitely to establish the existence of his faction as a separate and distinct party.

Simms, from years of experience with his astute mate, was wont to acquiesce in anything that Ward proposed, though he had not the brains always to appreciate the purposes that prompted Ward's suggestions. Now, therefore, he nodded his approval of Squint Eye's proposal, feeling that whatever was in Ward's mind would be more likely to work out to Skipper Simms' interests than some unadvised act of Skipper Simms himself.

"Supposin'," continued Ward, "that we let two o' your men an' two o' ourn under Mr. Divine, shin up them cliffs back o' the cove an' search fer water an' a site fer camp—the rest o' us'll have our hands full with the salvage."

"Good," agreed Thérière. "Miller, you and Swenson will accompany Mr. Divine."

Ward detailed two of his men, and the party of five began the difficult ascent of the cliffs, while far above them a little brown man with beady, black eyes set in narrow fleshy slits watched them from behind a clump of bushes. Strange, medieval armor and two wicked-looking swords gave him a most warlike appearance. His temples were shaved, and a broad strip on the top of his head to just beyond the crown. His remaining hair was drawn into an unbraided queue, tied tightly at the back, and the queue then brought forward to the top of the forehead. His helmet lay in the grass at his feet. At the nearer approach of the party to the cliff top the watcher turned and melted into the forest at his back. He was Oda Yorimoto, descendant of a powerful daimio of the Ashikaga Dynasty of shoguns who had fled Japan with his faithful samurai nearly three hundred and fifty years before upon the overthrow of the Ashikaga Dynasty.

Upon this unfrequented and distant Japanese isle the exiles had retained all of their medieval military savagery, to which had been added the aboriginal ferocity of the head-hunting natives they had found there and with whom they had intermarried. The little colony, far from making any advances in arts or letters had, on the contrary, relapsed into primeval ignorance as deep as that of the natives with whom they had cast their lot—only in their arms and armor, their military training and discipline did they show any of the influence of their civilized progenitors. They were cruel, crafty, resourceful wild men trapped in the habiliments of a dead past, and armed with the keen weapons of their forbears.

They had not even the crude religion of the Malaysians they had absorbed unless a highly exaggerated propensity for head-hunting might be dignified by the name of religion. To the tender mercies of such as these were the castaways of the Halfmoon likely to be consigned, for what might sixteen men with but four revolvers among them accomplish against near a thousand savage samurai?

Thérière, Ward, Simms, and the remaining sailors at the beach busied themselves with the task of retrieving such of the wreckage and the salvage of the Halfmoon as the waves had deposited in the shallows of the beach. There were casks of fresh water, kegs of biscuit, clothing, tinned meats, and a similar heterogeneous mass of flotsam. This arduous labor consumed the best part of the afternoon, and it was not until it had been completed that Divine and his party returned to the beach.

They reported that they had discovered a spring of fresh water some three miles east of the cove and about half a mile inland, but it was decided that no attempt be made to transport the salvage of the party to the new camp site until the following morning.

Thérière and Divine erected a rude shelter for Barbara Harding close under the foot of the cliff, as far from the water as possible, while above them Oda Yorimoto watched their proceedings with beady, glittering eyes. This time a half-dozen of his fierce samurai crouched at his side. Besides their two swords these latter bore the primitive spears of their mothers' savage tribe.

Oda Yorimoto watched the white men upon the beach. Also, he watched the white girl—even more, possibly, than he watched the men. He saw the shelter that was being built, and when it was complete he saw the girl enter it, and he knew that it was for her alone. Oda Yorimoto sucked in his lips and his eyes narrowed even more than nature had intended that they should.

A fire burned before the rude domicile that Barbara Harding was to occupy, and another, larger fire roared a hundred yards to the west where the men were congregated about Blanco, who was attempting to evolve a meal from the miscellany of his larder that had been cast up by the sea. There seemed now but little to indicate that the party was divided into two bitter factions, but when the meal was over Thérière called his men to a point midway between Barbara's shelter and the main camp fire. Here he directed them to dispose themselves for the night as best they could, building a fire of their own if they chose, for with the coming of darkness the chill of the tropical night would render a fire more than acceptable.

All were thoroughly tired and exhausted, so that darkness had scarce fallen ere the entire camp seemed wrapped in slumber. And still Oda Yorimoto sat with his samurai upon the cliff's summit, beady eyes fixed upon his intended prey.

For an hour he sat thus in silence, until, assured that all were asleep before him, he arose and with a few whispered instructions commenced the descent of the cliff toward the cove below. Scarce had he started, however, with his men stringing in single file behind him, than he came to a sudden halt, for below him in the camp that lay between the girl's shelter and the westerly camp a figure had arisen stealthily from among his fellows.

It was Thérière. Cautiously he moved to a sleeper nearby whom he shook gently until he had awakened him.

"Hush, Byrne," cautioned the Frenchman. "It is I, Thérière. Help me awaken the others—see that there is no noise."

"Wot's doin'?" queried the mucker.

"We are going to break camp, and occupy the new location before that bunch of pirates can beat us to it," whispered Thérière in reply; "and," he added, "we're going to take the salvage and the girl with us."

The mucker grinned.

"Geel!" he said. "Won't dey be a sore bunch in de mornin'?"

The work of awakening the balance of the party required but a few minutes and when the plan was explained to them, all seemed delighted with the prospect of discomfiting Skipper Simms and Squint Eye. It was decided that only the eatables be carried away on the first trip, and that if a second trip was possible before dawn the clothing, canvas, and cordage that had been taken from the water might then be purloined.

Miller and Swenson were detailed to bring up the rear with Miss Harding, assisting her up the steep side of the cliff. Divine was to act as guide to the new camp, lending a hand wherever necessary in the scaling of the heights with the loot.

Cautiously the party, with the exception of Divine, Miller, and Swenson, crept toward the little pile of supplies that were heaped fifty or sixty feet from the sleeping members of Simms' faction. The three left behind walked in silence to Barbara Harding's shelter. Here Divine scratched at the piece of sail cloth which served as a door until he had succeeded in awakening the sleeper within. And from above Oda Yorimoto watched the activity in the little cove with intent and unwavering eyes.

The girl, roused from a fitful slumber, came to the doorway of her primitive abode, alarmed by this nocturnal summons.

"It is I, Larry," whispered the man. "Are you dressed?"

"Yes," replied the girl, stepping out into the moonlight. "What do you want? What has happened?"

"We are going to take you away from Simms—Thérière and I," replied the man, "and establish a safe camp of our own where they cannot molest you. Thérière and the others have gone for the supplies now and as soon as they return we further preparations to make, Barbara, please make haste, as we must get away from here as quickly as possible. Should any of Simms' people awaken there is sure to be a fight."

The girl turned back into the shelter to gather together a handful of wraps that had been saved from the wreck.

Down by the salvage Thérière, Byrne, Bony Sawyer, Red Sanders, Blanco, and Wison were selecting the goods that they wished to carry with them. It was found that two trips would be necessary to carry off the bulk of the rations, so Thérière sent the mucker to summon Miller and Swenson.

"We'll carry all that eight of us can to the top of the cliffs," he said "hide it there and then come back for the balance. We may be able to get it later if we are unable to make two trips to the camp tonight."

While they were waiting for Byrne to return with the two recruits one of the sleepers in Simms' camp stirred. Instantly the five marauders dropped stealthily to

the ground behind the boxes and casks. Only Thérière kept his eyes above the level of the top of their shelter that he might watch the movements of the enemy.

The figure sat up and looked about. It was Ward. Slowly he arose and approached the pile of salvage. Thérière drew his revolver, holding it in readiness for an emergency. Should the first mate look in the direction of Barbara Harding's shelter he must certainly see the four figures waiting there in the moonlight. Thérière turned his own head in the direction of the shelter that he might see how plainly the men there were visible. To his delight he saw that no one was in sight. Either they had seen Ward, or for the sake of greater safety from detection had moved to the opposite side of the shelter.

Ward was quite close to the boxes upon the other side of which crouched the night raiders. Thérière's finger found the trigger of his revolver. He was convinced that the mate had been disturbed by the movement in camp and was investigating. The Frenchman knew that the search would not end upon the opposite side of the salvage—in a moment Ward would be upon them. He was sorry—not for Ward, but because he had planned to carry the work out quietly and he hated to have to muss things up with a killing, especially on Barbara's account.

Ward stopped at one of the water casks. He tipped it up, filling a tin cup with water, took a long drink, set the cup back on top of the cask, and, turning, retraced his steps to his blanket. Thérière could have hugged himself. The man had suspected nothing. He merely had been thirsty and come over for a drink—in another moment he would be fast asleep once more. Sure enough, before Byrne returned with Miller and Swenson, Thérière could bear the snores of the first mate.

On the first trip to the cliff top eight men carried heavy burdens, Divine alone remaining to guard Barbara Harding. The second trip was made with equal dispatch and safety. No sound or movement came from the camp of the enemy, other than that of sleeping men. On the second trip Divine and Thérière each carried a burden up the cliffs, Miller and Swenson following with Barbara Harding, and as they came Oda Yorimoto and his samurai slunk back into the shadows that their prey might pass unobserving.

Thérière had the bulk of the loot hidden in a rocky crevice just beyond the cliff's summit. Brush torn from the mass of luxuriant tropical vegetation that covered the ground was strewn over the cache. All had been accomplished in safety and without detection. The camp beneath them still lay wrapped in silence.

The march toward the new camp, under the guidance of Divine, was immediately undertaken. On the return trip after the search for water Divine had discovered a well-marked trail along the edge of the cliffs to a point opposite the spring, and another leading from the main trail directly to the water. In his ignorance he had thought these the runways of animals, whereas they were the age-old highways of the head-hunters.

Now they presented a comparatively quick and easy approach to the destination of the mutineers, but so narrow a one as soon to convince Thérière that it was not feasible for him to move back and forth along the flank of his column. He had tried it once, but it so greatly inconvenienced and retarded the heavily laden men that

he abandoned the effort, remaining near the center of the cavalcade until the new camp was reached.

Here he found a fair-sized space about a clear and plentiful spring of cold water. Only a few low bushes dotted the grassy clearing which was almost completely surrounded by dense and impenetrable jungle. The men had deposited their burdens, and still Thérière stood waiting for the balance of his party—Miller and Swenson with Barbara Harding.

But they did not come, and when, in alarm, the entire party started back in search of them they retraced their steps to the very brink of the declivity leading to the cove before they could believe the testimony of their own perceptions—Barbara Harding and the two sailors had disappeared.

Chapter X

Barbara Captured by Head-Hunters.

When Barbara Harding, with Miller before and Swenson behind her, had taken up the march behind the loot-laden party seven dusky, noiseless shadows had emerged from the forest to follow close behind.

For half a mile the party moved along the narrow trail unmolested. Thérière had come back to exchange a half-dozen words with the girl and had again moved forward toward the head of the column. Miller was not more than twenty-five feet behind the first man ahead of him, and Miss Harding and Swenson followed at intervals of but three or four yards.

Suddenly, without warning, Swenson and Miller fell, pierced with savage spears, and at the same instant sinewy fingers gripped Barbara Harding, and a silencing hand was clapped over her mouth. There had been no sound above the muffled tread of the seamen. It had all been accomplished so quickly and so easily that the girl did not comprehend what had befallen her for several minutes.

In the darkness of the forest she could not clearly distinguish the forms or features of her abductors, though she reasoned, as was only natural, that Skipper Simms' party had become aware of the plot against them and had taken this means of thwarting a part of it; but when her captors turned directly into the mazes of the jungle, away from the coast, she began first to wonder and then to doubt, so that presently when a small clearing let the moonlight full upon them she was not surprised to discover that none of the members of the Halfmoon's company was among her guard.

Barbara Harding had not circled the globe half a dozen times for nothing. There were few races or nations with whose history, past and present, she was not fairly familiar, and so the sight that greeted her eyes was well suited to fill her with astonishment, for she found herself in the hands of what appeared to be a party of Japanese warriors of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. She recognized the medieval arms and armor, the ancient helmets, the hairdressing of the two-sworded men of old Japan. At the belts of two of her captors dangled grisly

trophies of the hunt. In the moonlight she saw that they were the heads of Miller and Swenson.

The girl was horrified. She had thought her lot before as bad as it could be, but to be in the clutches of these strange, fierce warriors of a long-dead age was unthinkably worse. That she could ever have wished to be back upon the Halfmoon would have seemed, a few days since, incredible; yet that was precisely what she longed for now.

On through the night marched the little, brown men—grim and silent—until at last they came to a small village in a valley away from the coast—a valley that lay nestled high among lofty mountains. Here were cavelike dwellings burrowed half under ground, the upper walls and thatched roofs rising scarce four feet above the level. Granaries on stilts were dotted here and there among the dwellings.

Into one of the filthy dens Barbara Harding was dragged. She found a single room in which several native and halfcaste women were sleeping, about them stretched and curled and perched a motley throng of dirty yellow children, dogs, pigs, and chickens. It was the palace of Daimio Oda Yorimoto, Lord of Yoka, as his ancestors had christened their new island home.

Once within the warren the two samurai who had guarded Barbara upon the march turned and withdrew—she was alone with Oda Yorimoto and his family. From the center of the room depended a swinging shelf upon which a great pile of grinning skulls rested. At the back of the room was a door which Barbara had not at first noticed—evidently there was another apartment to the dwelling.

The girl was given little opportunity to examine her new prison, for scarce had the guards withdrawn than Oda Yorimoto approached and grasped her by the arm.

“Come!” he said, in Japanese that was sufficiently similar to modern Nippon to be easily understood by Barbara Harding. With the word he drew her toward a sleeping mat on a raised platform at one side of the room.

One of the women awoke at the sound of the man’s voice. She looked up at Barbara in sullen hatred—otherwise she gave no indication that she saw anything unusual transpiring. It was as though an exquisite American belle were a daily visitor at the Oda Yorimoto home.

“What do you want of me?” cried the frightened girl, in Japanese.

Oda Yorimoto looked at her in astonishment. Where had this white girl learned to speak his tongue?

“I am the daimio, Oda Yorimoto,” he said. “These are my wives. Now you are one of them. Come!”

“Not yet—not here!” cried the girl clutching at a straw. “Wait. Give me time to think. If you do not harm me my father will reward you fabulously. Ten thousand koku he would gladly give to have me returned to him safely.”

Oda Yorimoto but shook his head.

“Twenty thousand koku!” cried the girl.

Still the daimio shook his head negatively.

“A hundred thousand—name your own price, if you will but not harm me.”

“Silence!” growled the man. “What are even a million koku to me who only know the word from the legends of my ancestors. We have no need for koku here, and

had we, my hills are full of the yellow metal which measures its value. No! you are my woman. Come!"

"Not here! Not here!" pleaded the girl. "There is another room— away from all these women," and she turned her eyes toward the door at the opposite side of the chamber.

Oda Yorimoto shrugged his shoulders. That would be easier than a fight, he argued, and so he led the girl toward the doorway that she had indicated. Within the room all was dark, but the daimio moved as one accustomed to the place, and as he moved through the blackness the girl at his side felt with stealthy fingers at the man's belt.

At last Oda Yorimoto reached the far side of the long chamber.

"Here!" he said, and took her by the shoulders.

"Here!" answered the girl in a low, tense voice, and at the instant that she spoke Oda Yorimoto, Lord of Yoka, felt a quick tug at his belt, and before he guessed what was to happen his own short sword had pierced his breast.

A single shriek broke from the lips of the daimio; but it was so high and shrill and like the shriek of a woman in mortal terror that the woman in the next room who heard it but smiled a crooked, wicked smile of hate and turned once more upon her pallet to sleep.

Again and again Barbara Harding plunged the sword of the brown man into the still heart, until she knew beyond peradventure of a doubt that her enemy was forevermore powerless to injure her. Then she sank, exhausted and trembling, upon the dirt floor beside the corpse.

When Thérière came to the realization that Barbara Harding was gone he jumped to the natural conclusion that Ward and Simms had discovered the ruse that he had worked upon them just in time to permit them to intercept Miller and Swenson with the girl, and carry her back to the main camp.

The others were prone to agree with him, though the mucker grumbled that "it listened fishy." However, all hands returned cautiously down the face of the cliff, expecting momentarily to be attacked by the guards which they felt sure Ward would post in expectation of a return of the mutineers, the moment they discovered that the girl had been taken from them; but to the surprise of all they reached the cove without molestation, and when they had crept cautiously to the vicinity of the sleepers they discovered that all were there, in peaceful slumber, just as they had left them a few hours before.

Silently the party retraced its steps up the cliff. Thérière and Billy Byrne brought up the rear.

"What do you make of it anyway, Byrne?" asked the Frenchman.

"If you wanta get it straight, cul," replied the mucker, "I tink youse know a whole lot more about it dan you'd like to have de rest of us tink."

"What do you mean, Byrne?" cried Thérière. "Out with it now!"

"Sure I'll out wid it. You didn't tink I was bashful didja? Wot fer did you detail dem two pikers, Miller and Swenson, to guard de skirt fer if it wasn't fer some special frame-up of yer own? Dey never been in our gang, and dats just wot you wanted 'em fer. It was easy to tip dem off to hike out wid de squab, and de first chanct you get you'll hike after dem, while we hold de bag. Tought you'd double-cross us easy, didn't yeh? Yeh cheap-skate!"

"Byrne," said Thérière, and it was easy to see that only through the strength of his will-power did he keep his temper, "you may have cause to suspect the motives of everyone connected with this outfit. I can't say that I blame you; but I want you to remember what I say to you now. There was a time when I fully intended to 'double-cross' you, as you say—that was before you saved my life. Since then I have been on the square with you not only in deed but in thought as well. I give you the word of a man whose word once meant something—I am playing square with you now except in one thing, and I shall tell you what that is at once. I do not know where Miss Harding is, or what has happened to her, and Miller, and Swenson. That is God's truth. Now for the one thing that I just mentioned. Recently I changed my intentions relative to Miss Harding. I was after the money the same as the rest—that I am free to admit; but now I don't give a rap for it, and I had intended taking advantage of the first opportunity to return Miss Harding to civilization unharmed and without the payment of a penny to anyone. The reason for my change of heart is my own affair. In all probability you wouldn't believe the sincerity or honesty of my motives should I disclose them. I am only telling you these things because you have accused me of double dealing, and I do not want the man who saved my life at the risk of his own to have the slightest grounds to doubt my honesty with him. I've been a fairly bad egg, Byrne, for a great many years; but, by George! I'm not entirely rotten yet."

Byrne was silent for a few moments. He, too, had recently come to the conclusion that possibly he was not entirely rotten either, and had in a vague and half-formed sort of way wished for the opportunity to demonstrate the fact, so he was willing to concede to another that which he craved for himself.

"Yeh listen all right, cul," he said at last; "an' I'm willin' to take yeh at yer own say-so until I learn different."

"Thanks," said Thérière tersely. "Now we can work together in the search for Miss Harding; but where, in the name of all that's holy, are we to start?"

"Why, where we seen her last, of course," replied the mucker. "Right here on top of dese bluffs."

"Then we can't do anything until daylight," said the Frenchman.

"Not a ting, and at daylight we'll most likely have a scrap on our hands from below," and the mucker jerked his thumb in the direction of the cove.

"I think," said Thérière, "that we had better spend an hour arming ourselves with sticks and stones. We've a mighty good position up here. One that we can defend splendidly from an assault from below, and if we are prepared for them we can stave 'em off for a while if we need the time to search about up here for clews to Miss Harding's whereabouts."

And so the party set to work to cut stout bludgeons from the trees about them, and pile loose fragments of rock in handy places near the cliff top. Thérière even went so far as to throw up a low breastwork across the top of the trail up which the enemy must climb to reach the summit of the cliff. When they had completed their preparations three men could have held the place against ten times their own number.

Then they lay down to sleep, leaving Blanco and Divine on guard, for it had been decided that these two, with Bony Sawyer, should be left behind on the morrow to hold the cliff top while the others were searching for clews to the

whereabouts of Barbara Harding. They were to relieve each other at guard duty during the balance of the night.

Scarce had the first suggestion of dawn lightened the eastern sky than Divine, who was again on guard, awakened Thérière. In a moment the others were aroused, and a hasty raid on the cached provisions made. The lack of water was keenly felt by all, but it was too far to the spring to chance taking the time necessary to fetch the much-craved fluid and those who were to forge into the jungle in search of Barbara Harding hoped to find water farther inland, while it was decided to dispatch Bony Sawyer to the spring for water for those who were to remain on guard at the cliff top.

A hurried breakfast was made on water-soaked ship's biscuit. Thérière and his searching party stuffed their pockets full of them, and a moment later the search was on. First the men traversed the trail toward the spring, looking for indications of the spot where Barbara Harding had ceased to follow them. The girl had worn heelless buckskin shoes at the time she was taken from the Lotus, and these left little or no spoor in the well-tramped earth of the narrow path; but a careful and minute examination on the part of Thérière finally resulted in the detection of a single small footprint a hundred yards from the point they had struck the trail after ascending the cliffs. This far at least she had been with them.

The men now spread out upon either side of the track—Thérière and Red Sanders upon one side, Byrne and Wison upon the other. Occasionally Thérière would return to the trail to search for further indications of the spoor they sought.

The party had proceeded in this fashion for nearly half a mile when suddenly they were attracted by a low exclamation from the mucker.

"Here!" he called. "Here's Miller an' the Swede, an' they sure have mussed 'em up turrible."

The others hastened in the direction of his voice, to come to a horrified halt at the sides of the headless trunks of the two sailors.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Frenchman, reverting to his mother tongue as he never did except under the stress of great excitement.

"Who done it?" queried Red Sanders, looking suspiciously at the mucker.

"Head-hunters," said Thérière. "God! What an awful fate for that poor girl!"

Billy Byrne went white.

"Yeh don't mean dat dey've lopped off her block?" he whispered in an awed voice. Something strange rose in the mucker's breast at the thought he had just voiced. He did not attempt to analyze the sensation; but it was far from joy at the suggestion that the woman he so hated had met a horrible and disgusting death at the hands of savages.

"I'm afraid not, Byrne," said Thérière, in a voice that none there would have recognized as that of the harsh and masterful second officer of the Halfmoon.

"Yer afraid not!" echoed Billy Byrne, in amazement.

"For her sake I hope that they did," said Thérière; "for such as she it would have been a far less horrible fate than the one I fear they have reserved her for."

"You mean—" queried Byrne, and then he stopped, for the realization of just what Thérière did mean swept over him quite suddenly.

There was no particular reason why Billy Byrne should have felt toward women the finer sentiments which are so cherished a possession of those men who have

been gently born and raised, even after they have learned that all women are not as was the feminine ideal of their boyhood.

Billy's mother, always foul-mouthed and quarrelsome, had been a veritable demon when drunk, and drunk she had been whenever she could, by hook or crook, raise the price of whiskey. Never, to Billy's recollection, had she spoken a word of endearment to him; and so terribly had she abused him that even while he was yet a little boy, scarce out of babyhood, he had learned to view her with a hatred as deep-rooted as is the affection of most little children for their mothers.

When he had come to man's estate he had defended himself from the woman's brutal assaults as he would have defended himself from another man—when she had struck, Billy had struck back; the only thing to his credit being that he never had struck her except in self-defense. Chastity in woman was to him a thing to joke of—he did not believe that it existed; for he judged other women by the one he knew best—his mother. And as he hated her, so he hated them all. He had doubly hated Barbara Harding since she not only was a woman, but a woman of the class he loathed.

And so it was strange and inexplicable that the suggestion of the girl's probable fate should have affected Billy Byrne as it did. He did not stop to reason about it at all—he simply knew that he felt a mad and unreasoning rage against the creatures that had borne the girl away. Outwardly Billy showed no indication of the turmoil that raged within his breast.

"We gotta find her, bo," he said to Thérière. "We gotta find the skirt."

Ordinarily Billy would have blustered about the terrible things he would do to the objects of his wrath when once he had them in his power; but now he was strangely quiet—only the firm set of his strong chin, and the steely glitter of his gray eyes gave token of the iron resolution within.

Thérière, who had been walking slowly to and fro about the dead men, now called the others to him.

"Here's their trail," he said. "If it's as plain as that all the way we won't be long in overhauling them. Come along."

Before he had the words half out of his mouth the mucker was forging ahead through the jungle along the well-marked spoor of the samurai.

"Wot kind of men do you suppose they are?" asked Red Sanders.

"Malaysian head-hunters, unquestionably," replied Thérière.

Red Sanders shuddered inwardly. The appellation had a most gruesome sound.

"Come on!" cried Thérière, and started off after the mucker, who already was out of sight in the thick forest.

Red Sanders and Wison took a few steps after the Frenchman. Thérière turned once to see that they were following him, and then a turn in the trail hid them from his view. Red Sanders stopped.

"Damme if I'm goin' to get my coconut hacked off on any such wild-goose chase as this," he said to Wison.

"The girl's more'n likely dead long ago," said the other.

"Sure she is," returned Red Sanders, "an' if we go buttin' into that there thicket we'll be dead too. Ugh! Poor Miller. Poor Swenson. It's orful. Did you see wot they done to 'em beside cuttin' off their heads?"

"Yes," whispered Wison, looking suddenly behind him.

Red Sanders gave a little start, peering in the direction that his companion had looked.

"Wot was it?" he whimpered. "Wot did you do that fer?"

"I thought I seen something move there," replied Wison. "Fer Gawd's sake let's get outen this," and without waiting for a word of assent from his companion the sailor turned and ran at breakneck speed along the little path toward the spot where Divine, Blanco, and Bony Sawyer were stationed. When they arrived Bony was just on the point of setting out for the spring to fetch water, but at sight of the frightened, breathless men he returned to hear their story.

"What's up?" shouted Divine. "You men look as though you'd seen a ghost. Where are the others?"

"They're all murdered, and their heads cut off," cried Red Sanders. "We found the bunch that got Miller, Swenson, and the girl. They'd killed 'em all and was eatin' of 'em when we jumps 'em. Before we knew wot had happened about a thousand more of the devils came runnin' up. They got us separated, and when we seen Thérière and Byrne kilt we jest natch'rally beat it. Gawd, but it was orful."

"Do you think they will follow you?" asked Divine.

At the suggestion every head turned toward the trail down which the two panic-stricken men had just come. At the same moment a hoarse shout arose from the cove below and the five looked down to see a scene of wild activity upon the beach. The defection of Thérière's party had been discovered, as well as the absence of the girl and the theft of the provisions.

Skipper Simms was dancing about like a madman. His bellowed oaths rolled up the cliffs like thunder. Presently Ward caught a glimpse of the men at the top of the cliff above him.

"There they are!" he cried.

Skipper Simms looked up.

"The swabs!" he shrieked. "A-stealin' of our grub, an' abductin' of that there pore girl. The swabs! Lemme to 'em, I say; jest lemme to 'em."

"We'd all better go to 'em," said Ward. "We've got a fight on here sure. Gather up some rocks, men, an' come along. Skipper, you're too fat to do any fightin' on that there hillside, so you better stay here an' let one o' the men take your gun," for Ward knew so well the mettle of his superior that he much preferred his absence to his presence in the face of real fighting, and with the gun in the hands of a braver man it would be vastly more effective.

Ward himself was no lover of a fight, but he saw now that starvation might stare them in the face with their food gone, and everything be lost with the loss of the girl. For food and money a much more cowardly man than Bender Ward would fight to the death.

Up the face of the cliff they hurried, expecting momentarily to be either challenged or fired upon by those above them. Divine and his party looked down with mixed emotions upon those who were ascending in so threatening a manner. They found themselves truly between the devil and the deep sea.

Ward and his men were halfway up the cliff, yet Divine had made no move to repel them. He glanced timorously toward the dark forest behind from which he momentarily expected to see the savage, snarling faces of the head-hunters appear.

"Surrender! You swabs," called Ward from below, "or we'll string the last mother's son of you to the yardarm."

For reply Blanco hurled a heavy fragment of rock at the assaulters. It grazed perilously close to Ward, against whom Blanco cherished a keen hatred. Instantly Ward's revolver barked, the bullet whistling close by Divine's head. L. Cortwrite Divine, cotillion leader, ducked behind Thérière's breastwork, where he lay sprawled upon his belly, trembling in terror.

Bony Sawyer and Red Sanders followed the example of their commander. Blanco and Wison alone made any attempt to repel the assault. The big Negro ran to Divine's side and snatched the terror-stricken man's revolver from his belt. Then turning he fired at Ward. The bullet, missing its intended victim, pierced the heart of a sailor directly behind him, and as the man crumpled to the ground, rolling down the steep declivity, his fellows sought cover.

Wison followed up the advantage with a shower of well-aimed missiles, and then hostilities ceased temporarily.

"Have they gone?" queried Divine, with trembling lips, noticing the quiet that followed the shot.

"Gone nothin'," yo big cowahd," replied Blanco. "Do yo done suppose dat two men is a-gwine to stan' off five? Ef yo white-livered skunks 'ud git up an' fight we might have a chanct. I'se a good min' to cut out yo cowahdly heart fer yo, das wot I has—a-lyin' der on yo belly settin' dat kin' o' example to yo men!"

Divine's terror had placed him beyond the reach of contumely or reproach.

"What's the use of fighting them?" he whimpered. "We should never have left them. It's all the fault of that fool Thérière. What can we do against the savages of this awful island if we divide our forces? They will pick us off a few at a time just as they picked off Miller and Swenson, Thérière and Byrne. We ought to tell Ward about it, and call this foolish battle off."

"Now you're talkin'," cried Bony Sawyer. "I'm not a-goin' to squat up here any longer with my friends a-shootin' at me from below an' a lot of wild heathen creeping down on me from above to cut off my bloomin' head."

"Same here!" chimed in Red Sanders.

Blanco looked toward Wison. For his own part the Negro would not have been averse to returning to the fold could the thing be accomplished without danger of reprisal on the part of Skipper Simms and Ward; but he knew the men so well that he feared to trust them even should they seemingly acquiesce to any such proposal. On the other hand, he reasoned, it would be as much to their advantage to have the deserters return to them as it would to the deserters themselves, for when they had heard the story told by Red Sanders and Wison of the murder of the others of the party they too would realize the necessity for maintaining the strength of the little company to its fullest.

"I don't see that we're goin' to gain nothin' by fightin' 'em," said Wison. "There ain't nothin' in it any more nohow for nobody since the girl's gorn. Let's chuck it, an' see wot terms we can make with Squint Eye."

"Well," grumbled the Negro, "I can't fight 'em alone; What yo doin' dere, Bony?"

During the conversation Bony Sawyer had been busy with a stick and a piece of rag, and now as he turned toward his companions once more they saw that he

had rigged a white flag of surrender. None interfered as he raised it above the edge of the breastwork.

Immediately there was a hail from below. It was Ward's voice.

"Surrenderin', eh? Comin' to your senses, are you?" he shouted.

Divine, feeling that immediate danger from bullets was past, raised his head above the edge of the earthwork.

"We have something to communicate, Mr. Ward," he called.

"Spit it out, then; I'm a-listenin'," called back the mate.

"Miss Harding, Mr. Thérière, Byrne, Miller, and Swenson have been captured and killed by native head-hunters," said Divine.

Ward's eyes went wide, and he blew out his cheeks in surprise. Then his face went black with an angry scowl.

"You see what you done now, you blitherin' fools, you!" he cried, "with your funny business? You gone an' killed the goose what laid the golden eggs. Thought you'd get it all, didn't you? and now nobody won't get nothin', unless it is the halter. Nice lot o' numbskulls you be, an' whimperin' 'round now expectin' of us to take you back—well, I reckon not, not on your measly lives," and with that he raised his revolver to fire again at Divine.

The society man toppled over backward into the pit behind the breastwork before Ward had a chance to pull the trigger.

"Hol' on there mate!" cried Bony Sawyer; "there ain't no call now fer gettin' excited. Wait until you hear all we gotta say. You can't blame us pore sailormen. It was this here fool dude and that scoundrel Thérière that put us up to it. They told us that you an' Skipper Simms was a-fixin' to doublecross us all an' leave us here to starve on this Gawd-forsaken islan'. Thérière said that he was with you when you planned it. That you wanted to git rid o' as many of us as you could so that you'd have more of the ransom to divide. So all we done was in self-defense, as it were.

"Why not let bygones be bygones, an' all of us join forces ag'in' these murderin' heathen? There won't be any too many of us at best—Red an' Wison seen more'n two thousan' of the man-eatin' devils. They're a-creepin' up on us from behin' right this minute, an' you can lay to that; an' the chances are that they got some special kind o' route into that there cove, an' maybe they're a-watchin' of you right now!"

Ward turned an apprehensive glance to either side. There was logic in Bony's proposal. They couldn't spare a man now. Later he could punish the offenders at his leisure—when he didn't need them any further.

"Will you swear on the Book to do your duty by Skipper Simms an' me if we take you back?" asked Ward.

"You bet," answered Bony Sawyer.

The others nodded their heads, and Divine sprang up and started down toward Ward.

"Hol' on you!" commanded the mate. "This here arrangement don' include you — it's jes' between Skipper Simms an' his sailors. You're a rank outsider, an' you butts in an' starts a mutiny. Ef you come back you gotta stand trial fer that—see?"

"You better duck, mister," advised Red Sanders; "they'll hang you sure."

Divine went white. To face trial before two such men as Simms and Ward meant death, of that he was positive. To flee into the forest meant death, almost equally

certain, and much more horrible. The man went to his knees, lifting supplicating hands to the mate.

"For God's sake, Mr. Ward," he cried, "be merciful. I was led into this by Thérière. He lied to me just as he did to the men. You can't kill me—it would be murder—they'd hang you for it."

"We'll hang for this muss you got us into anyway, if we're ever caught," growled the mate. "Ef you hadn't a-carried the girl off to be murdered we might have had enough ransom money to have got clear some way, but now you gone and cooked the whole goose fer the lot of us."

"You can collect ransom on me," cried Divine, clutching at a straw. "I'll pay a hundred thousand myself the day you set me down in a civilized port, safe and free."

Ward laughed in his face.

"You ain't got a cent, you four-flusher," he cried. "Clinker put us next to that long before we sailed from Frisco."

"Clinker lies," cried Divine. "He doesn't know anything about it—I'm rich."

"Wot's de use ob chewin' de rag 'bout all dis," cried Blanco, seeing where he might square himself with Ward and Simms easily. "Does yo' take back all us sailormen, Mr. Ward, an' promise not t' punish none o' us, ef we swear to stick by yo' all in de future?"

"Yes," replied the mate.

Blanco took a step toward Divine.

"Den yo come along too as a prisoner, white man," and the burly black grasped Divine by the scruff of the neck and forced him before him down the steep trail toward the cove, and so the mutineers returned to the command of Skipper Simms, and L. Cortwrite Divine went with them as a prisoner, charged with a crime the punishment for which has been death since men sailed the seas.

Chapter XI

The Village of Yoka.

For several minutes Barbara Harding lay where she had collapsed after the keen short sword of the daimio had freed her from the menace of his lust.

She was in a half-stupor that took cognizance only of a freezing terror and exhaustion. Presently, however, she became aware of her contact with the corpse beside her, and with a stifled cry she shrank away from it.

Slowly the girl regained her self-control and with it came the realization of the extremity of her danger. She rose to a sitting posture and turned her wide eyes toward the doorway to the adjoining room—the women and children seemed yet wrapped in slumber. It was evident that the man's scream had not disturbed them.

Barbara gained her feet and moved softly to the doorway. She wondered if she could cross the intervening space to the outer exit without detection. Once in the

open she could flee to the jungle, and then there was a chance at least that she might find her way to the coast and Thérière.

She gripped the short sword which she still held, and took a step into the larger room. One of the women turned and half roused from sleep. The girl shrank back into the darkness of the chamber she had just quitted. The woman sat up and looked around. Then she rose and threw some sticks upon the fire that burned at one side of the dwelling. She crossed to a shelf and took down a cooking utensil. Barbara saw that she was about to commence the preparation of breakfast.

All hope of escape was thus ended, and the girl cautiously closed the door between the two rooms. Then she felt about the smaller apartment for some heavy object with which to barricade herself; but her search was fruitless. Finally she bethought herself of the corpse. That would hold the door against the accident of a child or dog pushing it open—it would be better than nothing, but could she bring herself to touch the loathsome thing?

The instinct of self-preservation will work wonders even with a frail and delicate woman. Barbara Harding steeled herself to the task, and after several moments of effort she succeeded in rolling the dead man against the door. The scraping sound of the body as she dragged it into position had sent cold shivers running up her spine.

She had removed the man's long sword and armor before attempting to move him, and now she crouched beside the corpse with both the swords beside her—she would sell her life dearly. Thérière's words came back to her now as they had when she was struggling in the water after the wreck of the Halfmoon: "but, by George, I intend to go down fighting." Well, she could do no less.

She could hear the movement of several persons in the next room now. The voices of women and children came to her distinctly. Many of the words were Japanese, but others were of a tongue with which she was not familiar.

Presently her own chamber began to lighten. She looked over her shoulder and saw the first faint rays of dawn showing through a small aperture near the roof and at the opposite end of the room. She rose and moved quickly toward it. By standing on tiptoe and pulling herself up a trifle with her hands upon the sill she was able to raise her eyes above the bottom of the window frame.

Beyond she saw the forest, not a hundred yards away; but when she attempted to crawl through the opening she discovered to her chagrin that it was too small to permit the passage of her body. And then there came a knocking on the door she had just quitted, and a woman's voice calling her lord and master to his morning meal.

Barbara ran quickly across the chamber to the door, the long sword raised above her head in both hands. Again the woman knocked, this time much louder, and raised her voice as she called again upon Oda Yorimoto to come out.

The girl within was panic-stricken. What should she do? With but a little respite she might enlarge the window sufficiently to permit her to escape into the forest, but the woman at the door evidently would not be denied. Suddenly an inspiration came to her. It was a forlorn hope, but well worth putting to the test.

"Hush!" she hissed through the closed door. "Oda Yorimoto sleeps. It is his wish that he be not disturbed."

For a moment there was silence beyond the door, and then the woman grunted, and Barbara heard her turn back, muttering to herself. The girl breathed a deep sigh of relief—she had received a brief reprieve from death.

Again she turned to the window, where, with the short sword, she commenced her labor of enlarging it to permit the passage of her body. The work was necessarily slow because of the fact that it must proceed with utter noiselessness.

For an hour she worked, and then again came an interruption at the door. This time it was a man.

“Oda Yorimoto still sleeps,” whispered the girl. “Go away and do not disturb him. He will be very angry if you awaken him.”

But the man would not be put off so easily as had the woman. He still insisted.

“The daimio has ordered that there shall be a great hunt today for the heads of the sei-yo-jin who have landed upon Yoka,” persisted the man. “He will be angry indeed if we do not call him in time to accomplish the task today. Let me speak with him, woman. I do not believe that Oda Yorimoto still sleeps. Why should I believe one of the sei-yo-jin? It may be that you have bewitched the daimio,” and with that he pushed against the door.

The corpse gave a little, and the man glued his eyes to the aperture. Barbara held the sword behind her, and with her shoulder against the door attempted to reclose it.

“Go away!” she cried. “I shall be killed if you awaken Oda Yorimoto, and, if you enter, you, too, shall be killed.”

The man stepped back from the door, and Barbara could hear him in low converse with some of the women of the household. A moment later he returned, and without a word of warning threw his whole weight against the portal. The corpse slipped back enough to permit the entrance of the man’s body, and as he stumbled into the room the long sword of the Lord of Yoka fell full and keen across the back of his brown neck.

Without a sound he lunged to the floor, dead; but the women without had caught a fleeting glimpse of what had taken place within the little chamber, even before Barbara Harding could slam the door again, and with shrieks of rage and fright they rushed into the main street of the village shouting at the tops of their voices that Oda Yorimoto and Hawa Nisho had been slain by the woman of the sei-yo-jin.

Instantly, the village swarmed with samurai, women, children, and dogs. They rushed toward the hut of Oda Yorimoto, filling the outer chamber where they jabbered excitedly for several minutes, the warriors attempting to obtain a coherent story from the moaning women of the daimio’s household.

Barbara Harding crouched close to the door, listening. She knew that the crucial moment was at hand; that there were at best but a few moments for her to live. A silent prayer rose from her parted lips. She placed the sharp point of Oda Yorimoto’s short sword against her breast, and waited—waited for the coming of the men from the room beyond, snatching a few brief seconds from eternity ere she drove the weapon into her heart.

Thérière plunged through the jungle at a run for several minutes before he caught sight of the mucker.

“Are you still on the trail?” he called to the man before him.

"Sure," replied Byrne. "It's dead easy. They must o' been at least a dozen of 'em. Even a mutt like me couldn't miss it."

"We want to go carefully, Byrne," cautioned Thérière. "I've had experience with these fellows before, and I can tell you that you never know when one of 'em is near you till you feel a spear in your back, unless you're almighty watchful. We've got to make all the haste we can, of course, but it won't help Miss Harding any if we rush into an ambush and get our heads lopped off."

Byrne saw the wisdom of his companion's advice and tried to profit by it; but something which seemed to dominate him today carried him ahead at reckless, breakneck speed—the flight of an eagle would have been all too slow to meet the requirements of his unaccountable haste.

Once he found himself wondering why he was risking his life to avenge or rescue this girl whom he hated so. He tried to think that it was for the ransom—yes, that was it, the ransom. If he found her alive, and rescued her he should claim the lion's share of the booty.

Thérière too wondered why Byrne, of all the other men upon the Halfmoon the last that he should have expected to risk a thing for the sake of Miss Harding, should be the foremost in pursuit of her captors.

"I wonder how far behind Sanders and Wison are," he remarked to Byrne after they had been on the trail for the better part of an hour. "Hadn't we better wait for them to catch up with us? Four can do a whole lot more than two."

"Not wen Billy Byrne's one of de two," replied the mucker, and continued doggedly along the trail.

Another half-hour brought them suddenly in sight of a native village, and Billy Byrne was for dashing straight into the center of it and "cleaning it up," as he put it, but Thérière put his foot down firmly on that proposition, and finally Byrne saw that the other was right.

"The trail leads straight toward that place," said Thérière, "so I suppose here is where they brought her, but which of the huts she's in now we ought to try to determine before we make any attempt to rescue her. Well, by George! Now what do you think of that?"

"Tink o' wot?" asked the mucker. "Wot's eatin' yeh?"

"See those three men down there in the village, Byrne?" asked the Frenchman. "They're no more aboriginal headhunters than I am—they're Japs, man. There must be something wrong with our trailing, for it's as certain as fate itself that Japs are not head-hunters."

"There ain't been nothin' fony about our trailin', bo," insisted Byrne, "an' whether Japs are bean collectors or not here's where de ginks dat copped de doll hiked fer, an if dey ain't dere now it's because dey went t'rough an' out de odder side, see."

"Hush, Byrne," whispered Thérière. "Drop down behind this bush. Someone is coming along this other trail to the right of us," and as he spoke he dragged the mucker down beside him.

For a moment they crouched, breathless and expectant, and then the slim figure of an almost nude boy emerged from the foliage close beside and entered the trail toward the village. Upon his head he bore a bundle of firewood.

When he was directly opposite the watchers Thérière sprang suddenly upon him, clapping a silencing hand over the boy's mouth. In Japanese he whispered a command for silence.

"We shall not harm you if you keep still," he said, "and answer our questions truthfully. What village is that?"

"It is the chief city of Oda Yorimoto, Lord of Yoka," replied the youth. "I am Oda Iseka, his son."

"And the large hut in the center of the village street is the palace of Oda Yorimoto?" guessed Thérière shrewdly.

"It is."

The Frenchman was not unversed in the ways of orientals, and he guessed also that if the white girl were still alive in the village she would be in no other hut than that of the most powerful chief; but he wished to verify his deductions if possible. He knew that a direct question as to the whereabouts of the girl would call forth either a clever oriental evasion or an equally clever oriental lie.

"Does Oda Yorimoto intend slaying the white woman that was brought to his house last night?" asked Thérière.

"How should the son know the intentions of his father?" replied the boy.

"Is she still alive?" continued Thérière.

"How should I know, who was asleep when she was brought, and only heard the womenfolk this morning whispering that Oda Yorimoto had brought home a new woman the night before."

"Could you not see her with your own eyes?" asked Thérière.

"My eyes cannot pass through the door of the little room behind, in which they still were when I left to gather firewood a half hour since," retorted the youth.

"Wot's de Chink sayin'?" asked Billy Byrne, impatient of the conversation, no word of which was intelligible to him.

"He says, in substance," replied Thérière, with a grin, "that Miss Harding is still alive, and in the back room of that largest hut in the center of the village street; but," and his face clouded, "Oda Yorimoto, the chief of the tribe, is with her."

The mucker sprang to his feet with an oath, and would have bolted for the village had not Thérière laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"It is too late, my friend," he said sadly, "to make haste now. We may, if we are cautious, be able to save her life, and later, possibly, avenge her wrong. Let us act coolly, and after some manner of plan, so that we may work together, and not throw our lives away uselessly. The chance is that neither of us will come out of that village alive, but we must minimize that chance to the utmost if we are to serve Miss Harding."

"Well, wot's de word?" asked the mucker, for he saw that Thérière was right.

"The jungle approaches the village most closely on the opposite side —the side in rear of the chief's hut," pointed out Thérière. "We must circle about until we can reach that point undetected, then we may formulate further plans from what our observations there develop."

"An' dis?" Byrne shoved a thumb at Oda Iseka.

"We'll take him with us—it wouldn't be safe to let him go now."

"Why not croak him?" suggested Byrne.

"Not unless we have to," replied Thérière; "he's just a boy—we'll doubtless have all the killing we want among the men before we get out of this."

"I never did have no use fer Chinks," said the mucker, as though in extenuation of his suggestion that they murder the youth. For some unaccountable reason he had felt a sudden compunction because of his thoughtless remark. What in the world was coming over him, he wondered. He'd be wearing white pants and playing lawn tennis presently if he continued to grow much softer and more unmanly.

So the three set out through the jungle, following a trail which led around to the north of the village. Thérière walked ahead with the boy's arm in his grasp. Byrne followed closely behind. They reached their destination in the rear of Oda Yorimoto's "palace" without interruption or detection. Here they reconnoitered through the thick foliage.

"Dere's a little winder in de back of de house," said Byrne. "Dat must be where dem guys cooped up de little broiler."

"Yes," said Thérière, "it would be in the back room which the boy described. First let's tie and gag this young heathen, and then we can proceed to business without fear of alarm from him," and the Frenchman stripped a long, grass rope from about the waist of his prisoner, with which he was securely trussed up, a piece of his loin cloth being forced into his mouth as a gag, and secured there by another strip, torn from the same garment, which was passed around the back of the boy's head.

"Rather uncomfortable, I imagine," commented Thérière; "but not particularly painful or dangerous—and now to business!"

"I'm goin' to make a break fer dat winder," announced the mucker, "and youse squat here in de tall grass wid yer gat an' pick off any fresh guys dat get gay in back here. Den, if I need youse you can come a-runnin' an' open up all over de shop wid de artillery, or if I gets de lizzie outen de jug an' de Chinks push me too clost youse'll be here where yeh can pick 'em off easy-like."

"You'll be taking all the risk that way, Byrne," objected Thérière, "and that's not fair."

"One o' us is pretty sure to get hurted," explained the mucker in defense of his plan, "an, if it's a croak it's a lot better dat it be me than youse, fer the girl wouldn't be crazy about bein' lef' alone wid me—she ain't got no use fer the likes o' me. Now youse are her kin, an' so youse stay here w'ere yeh can help her after I git her out—I don't want nothing to do wid her anyhow. She gives me a swift pain, and," he added as though it were an after-thought, "I ain't got no use fer dat ransom eider—youse can have dat, too."

"Hold on, Byrne," cried Thérière; "I have something to say, too. I do not see how I can expect you to believe me; but under the circumstances, when one of us and maybe both are pretty sure to die before the day is much older, it wouldn't be worth while lying. I do not want that damned ransom any more, either. I only want to do what I can to right the wrong that I have helped to perpetrate against Miss Harding. I—I—Byrne, I love her. I shall never tell her so, for I am not the sort of man a decent girl would care to marry; but I did want the chance to make a clean breast to her of all my connection with the whole dirty business, and get her forgiveness if I could; but first I wanted to prove my repentance by helping her to

civilization in safety, and delivering her to her friends without the payment of a cent of money. I may never be able to do that now; but if I die in the attempt, and you don't, I wish that you would tell her what I have just told you. Paint me as black as you can—you couldn't commence to make me as black as I have been—but let her know that for love of her I turned white at the last minute. Byrne, she is the best girl that you or I ever saw—we're not fit to breathe the same air that she breathes. Now you can see why I should like to go first."

"I t'ought youse was soft on her," replied the mucker, "an' dat's de reason w'y youse otter not go first; but wot's de use o' chewin', les flip a coin to see w'ich goes an w'ich stays—got one?"

Thérière felt in his trousers' pocket, fishing out a dime.

"Heads, you go; tails, I go," he said and spun the silver piece in the air, catching it in the flat of his open palm.

"It's heads," said the mucker, grinning. "Gee! Wot's de racket?"

Both men turned toward the village, where a jabbering mob of half-caste Japanese had suddenly appeared in the streets, hurrying toward the hut of Oda Yorimoto.

"Somepin doin', eh?" said the mucker. "Well, here goes—s'long!" And he broke from the cover of the jungle and dashed across the clearing toward the rear of Oda Yorimoto's hut.

Chapter XII

The Fight in the Palace.

Barbara Harding heard the samurai in the room beyond her prison advancing toward the door that separated them from her. She pressed the point of the daimio's sword close to her heart. A heavy knock fell upon the door and at the same instant the girl was startled by a noise behind her—a noise at the little window at the far end of the room.

Turning to face this new danger, she was startled into a little cry of surprise to see the head and shoulders of the mucker framed in the broken square of the half-demolished window.

The girl did not know whether to feel renewed hope or utter despair. She could not forget the heroism of her rescue by this brutal fellow when the Halfmoon had gone to pieces the day before, nor could she banish from her mind his threats of violence toward her, or his brutal treatment of Mallory and Thérière. And the question arose in her mind as to whether she would be any better off in his power than in the clutches of the savage samurai.

Billy Byrne had heard the knock upon the door before which the girl knelt. He had seen the corpses of the dead men at her feet. He had observed the telltale position of the sword which the girl held to her breast and he had read much of the story of the impending tragedy at a glance.

"Cheer up, kid!" he whispered. "I'll be wid youse in a minute, an' Thérière's out here too, to help youse if I can't do it alone."

The girl turned toward the door again.

"Wait," she cried to the samurai upon the other side, "until I move the dead men, then you may come in, their bodies bar the door now."

All that kept the warriors out was the fear that possibly Oda Yorimoto might not be dead after all, and that should they force their way into the room without his permission some of them would suffer for their temerity. Naturally none of them was keen to lose his head for nothing, but the moment that the girl spoke of the dead "men" they knew that Oda Yorimoto had been slain, too, and with one accord they rushed the little door.

The girl threw all her weight against her side, while the dead men, each to the extent of his own weight, aided the woman who had killed them in her effort to repulse their fellows; and behind the three Billy Byrne kicked and tore at the mud wall about the window in a frantic effort to enlarge the aperture sufficiently to permit his huge bulk to pass through into the little room.

The mucker won to the girl's side first, and snatching Oda Yorimoto's long sword from the floor he threw his great weight against the door, and commanded the girl to make for the window and escape to the forest as quickly as she could.

"Thérière is waiting dere," he said. "He will see youse de moment yeh reach de window, and den youse will be safe."

"But you!" cried the girl. "What of you?"

"Never yeh mind me," commanded Billy Byrne. "Youse jes' do as I tells yeh, see? Now, beat it," and he gave her a rough shove toward the window.

And then, between the combined efforts of the samurai upon one side and Billy Byrne of Kelly's gang upon the other the frail door burst from its rotten hinges and fell to one side.

The first of the samurai into the little room was cleft from crown to breast bone with the keen edge of the sword of the Lord of Yoka wielded by the mighty arm of the mucker. The second took the count with a left hook to the jaw, and then all that could crowd through the little door swarmed upon the husky bruiser from Grand Avenue.

Barbara Harding took one look at the carnage behind her and then sprang to the window. At a short distance she saw the jungle and at its edge what she was sure was the figure of a man crouching in the long grass.

"Mr. Thérière!" she cried. "Quick! They are killing Byrne," and then she turned back into the room, and with the short sword which she still grasped in her hand sprang to the side of the mucker who was offering his life to save her.

Byrne cast a horrified glance at the figure fighting by his side.

"Fer de love o' Mike! Beat it!" he cried. "Duck! Git out o' here!"

But the girl only smiled up bravely into his face and kept her place beside him. The mucker tried to push her behind him with one hand while he fought with the other, but she drew away from him to come up again a little farther from him.

The samurai were pushing them closely now. Three men at a time were reaching for the mucker with their long swords. He was bleeding from numerous wounds, but at his feet lay two dead warriors, while a third crawled away with a mortal wound in his abdomen.

Barbara Harding devoted her energies to thrusting and cutting at those who tried to press past the mucker, that they might take him from behind. The battle could not last long, so unequal were the odds. She saw the room beyond filled with surging warriors all trying to force their way within reach of the great white man who battled like some demigod of old in the close, dark, evil warren of the daimio.

She shot a side glance at the man. He was wonderful! The fire of battle had transformed him. No longer was he the sullen, sulky, hulking brute she had first known upon the Halfmoon. Instead, huge, muscular, alert, he towered above his pygmy antagonists, his gray eyes gleaming, a half-smile upon his strong lips.

She saw the long sword, wielded awkwardly in his unaccustomed hands, beat down the weapons of his skilled foemen by the very ferocity of its hurtling attack. She saw it pass through a man's shoulder, cleaving bone and muscle as if they had been cheese, until it stopped two-thirds across its victim's body, cutting him almost in two.

She saw a samurai leap past her champion's guard in an attempt to close upon him with a dagger, and when she had rushed forward to thwart the fellow's design she had seen Byrne swing his mighty left to the warrior's face with a blow that might well have felled an ox. Then another leaped into closer quarters and she saw Byrne at the same instant bury his sword in the body of a dark-visaged devil who looked more Malay than Jap, and as the stricken man fell she saw the hilt of the mucker's blade wrenched from his grip by the dead body of his foe. The samurai who had closed upon Byrne at that instant found his enemy unarmed, and with a howl of delight he struck full at the broad chest with his long, thin dagger.

But Billy Byrne was not to be dispatched so easily. With his left forearm he struck up the hand that wielded the menacing blade, and then catching the fellow by the shoulder swung him around, grasped him about the waist and lifting him above his head hurled him full in the faces of the swordsmen who were pressing through the narrow doorway.

Almost simultaneously a spear shot through a tiny opening in the ranks before Billy Byrne, and with a little gasp of dismay the huge fellow pitched forward upon his face. At the same instant a shot rang out behind Barbara Harding, and Thérière leaped past her to stand across the body of the fallen mucker.

With the sound of the shot a samurai sank to the floor, dead, and the others, unaccustomed to firearms, drew back in dismay. Again Thérière fired point-blank into the crowded room, and this time two men fell, struck by the same bullet. Once more the warriors retreated, and with an exultant yell Thérière followed up his advantage by charging menacingly upon them. They stood for a moment, then wavered, turned and fled from the hut.

When Thérière turned back toward Barbara Harding he found her kneeling beside the mucker.

"Is he dead?" asked the Frenchman.

"No. Can we lift him together and get him through that window?"

"It is the only way," replied Thérière, "and we must try it."

They seized upon the huge body and dragged it to the far end of the room, but despite their best efforts the two were not able to lift the great, inert mass of flesh and bone and muscle and pass it through the tiny opening.

"What shall we do?" cried Thérière.

"We must stay here with him," replied Barbara Harding. "I could never desert the man who has fought so noble a fight for me while a breath of life remained in him."

Thérière groaned.

"Nor I," he said; "but you—he has given his life to save yours. Should you render his sacrifice of no avail now?"

"I cannot go alone," she answered simply, "and I know that you will not leave him. There is no other way—we must stay."

At this juncture the mucker opened his eyes.

"Who hit me?" he murmured. "Jes' show me de big stiff." Thérière could not repress a smile. Barbara Harding again knelt beside the man.

"No one hit you, Mr. Byrne," she said. "You were struck by a spear and are badly wounded."

Billy Byrne opened his eyes a little wider, turning them until they rested on the beautiful face of the girl so close to his.

"MR. Byrne!" he ejaculated in disgust. "Forget it. Wot do youse tink I am, one of dose paper-collar dudes?"

Then he sat up. Blood was flowing from a wound in his chest, saturating his shirt, and running slowly to the earth floor. There were two flesh wounds upon his head—one above the right eye and the other extending entirely across the left cheek from below the eye to the lobe of the ear—but these he had received earlier in the fracas. From crown to heel the man was a mass of blood. Through his crimson mask he looked at the pile of bodies in the far end of the room, and a broad grin cracked the dried blood about his mouth.

"Wot we done to dem Chinks was sure a plenty, kiddo," he remarked to Miss Harding, and then he came to his feet, seemingly as strong as ever, shaking himself like a great bull. "But I guess it's lucky youse butted in when you did, old pot," he added, turning toward Thérière; "dey jest about had me down fer de long count."

Barbara Harding was looking at the man in wide-eyed amazement. A moment before she had been expecting him, momentarily, to breathe his last—now he was standing before her talking as unconcerned as though he had not received a scratch—he seemed totally unaware of his wounds. At least he was entirely indifferent to them.

"You're pretty badly hurt, old man," said Thérière. "Do you feel able to make the attempt to get to the jungle? The Japs will be back in a moment."

"Sure!" cried Billy Byrne. "Come ahead," and he sprang for the window. "Pass de kid up to me. Quick! Dey're comin' from in back."

Thérière lifted Barbara Harding to the mucker who drew her through the opening. Then Billy extended a hand to the Frenchman, and a moment later the three stood together outside the hut.

A dozen samurai were running toward them from around the end of the "Palace." The jungle lay a hundred yards across the clearing. There was no time to be lost.

"You go first with Miss Harding," cried Thérière. "I'll cover our retreat with my revolver, following close behind you."

The mucker caught the girl in his arms, throwing her across his shoulder. The blood from his wounds smeared her hands and clothing.

"Hang tight, kiddo," he cried, and started at a brisk trot toward the forest.

Thérière kept close behind the two, reserving his fire until it could be effectively delivered. With savage yells the samurai leaped after their escaping quarry. The natives all carried the long, sharp spears of the aboriginal head-hunters. Their swords swung in their harness, and their ancient armor clanked as they ran.

It was a strange, weird picture that the oddly contrasted party presented as they raced across the clearing of this forgotten isle toward a jungle as primitive as when "the evening and the morning were the third day." An American girl of the highest social caste borne in the arms of that most vicious of all social pariahs—the criminal mucker of the slums of a great city—and defending them with drawn revolver, a French count and soldier of fortune, while in their wake streamed a yelling pack of half-caste demons clothed in the habiliments of sixteenth century Japan, and wielding the barbarous spears of the savage head-hunting aborigines whose fierce blood coursed in their veins with that of the descendants of Taka-mi-musu-bi-no-kami.

Three-quarters of the distance had been covered in safety before the samurai came within safe spear range of the trio. Thérière, seeing the danger to the girl, dropped back a few paces hoping to hold the brown warriors from her. The foremost of the pursuers raised his weapon aloft, carrying his spear hand back of his shoulder for the throw. Thérière's revolver spoke, and the man pitched forward, rolling over and over before he came to rest.

A howl of rage went up from the samurai, and a half-dozen spears leaped at long range toward Thérière. One of the weapons transfixed his thigh, bringing him to earth. Byrne was at the forest's edge as the Frenchman fell—it was the girl, though, who witnessed the catastrophe.

"Stop!" she cried. "Mr. Thérière is down."

The mucker halted, and turned his head in the direction of the Frenchman, who had raised himself to one elbow and was firing at the advancing enemy. He dropped the girl to her feet.

"Wait here!" he commanded and sprang back toward Thérière.

Before he reached him another spear had caught the man full in the chest, toppling him, unconscious, to the earth. The samurai were rushing rapidly upon the wounded officer—it was a question who would reach him first.

Thérière had been nipped in the act of reloading his revolver. It lay beside him now, the cylinder full of fresh cartridges. The mucker was first to his side, and snatching the weapon from the ground fired coolly and rapidly at the advancing Japanese. Four of them went down before that deadly fusillade; but the mucker cursed beneath his breath because of his two misses.

Byrne's stand checked the brown men momentarily, and in the succeeding lull the man lifted the unconscious Frenchman to his shoulder and bore him back to the forest. In the shelter of the jungle they laid him upon the ground. To the girl it seemed that the frightful wound in his chest must prove fatal within a few moments.

Byrne, apparently unmoved by the seriousness of Thérière's condition, removed the man's cartridge belt and buckled it about his own waist, replacing the six

empty shells in the revolver with six fresh ones. Presently he noticed the bound and gagged Oda Iseka lying in the brush behind them where he and Thérière had left him. The samurai were now sneaking cautiously toward their refuge. A sudden inspiration came to the mucker.

"Didn't I hear youse chewin' de rag wit de Chinks wen I hit de dump over dere?" he asked of Barbara.

The girl, oddly, understood him. She nodded her head, affirmatively.

"Youse savvy deyre lingo den, eh?"

"A little."

"Tell dis gazimbat to wise his pals to de fact dat I'll croak 'im, if dey don't beat it, an' let us make our get-away. Thérière says as how he's kink when his ole man croaks, an' his ole man was de guy youse put to sleep in de chicken coop," explained the mucker lucidly; "so dis slob's kink hisself now."

Barbara Harding was quick to see the strength of the man's suggestion. Stepping to the edge of the clearing in full view of the advancing enemy, with the mucker at her side, revolver in hand, she called to them in the language of their forbears to listen to her message. Then she explained that they held the son of Oda Yorimoto prisoner, and that his life would be the price of any further attack upon them.

The samurai conferred together for a moment, then one of them called out that they did not believe her, that Oda Iseka, son of Oda Yorimoto, was safe in the village.

"Wait!" replied the girl. "We will show him to you," and turning to Byrne she asked him to fetch the youth.

When the white man returned with the boy in his arms, a wail of mingled anguish and rage rose from the natives.

"If you molest us no further we shall not harm him," cried Barbara, "and when we leave your island we shall set him free; but renew your attack upon us and this white man who holds him says that he will cut out his heart and feed it to the fox," which was rather a bloodthirsty statement for so gentle a character as Barbara Harding; but she knew enough of the superstitious fears of the ancient Japanese to feel confident that this threat would have considerable weight with the subjects of the young Lord of Yoka.

Again the natives conferred in whispers. Finally he who had acted as spokesman before turned toward the strangers.

"We shall not harm you," he said, "so long as you do not harm Oda Iseka; but we shall watch you always until you leave the island, and if harm befalls him then shall you never leave, for we shall kill you all."

Barbara translated the man's words to the mucker.

"Do youse fall fer dat?" he asked.

"I think they will be careful to make no open assault upon us," replied the girl; "but never for an instant must we cease our watchfulness for at the first opportunity I am sure that they will murder us."

They turned back to Thérière now. The man still lay, unconscious and moaning, where Byrne had deposited him. The mucker removed the gag from Oda Iseka's mouth.

"Which way is water? Ask him," he said to Barbara.

The girl put the question.

"He says that straight up this ravine behind us there is a little spring," translated the girl.

Byrne lifted Thérière in his arms, after loosening Oda Iseka's feet and tethering him to his own belt with the same grass rope; then he motioned the youth up the ravine.

"Walk beside me," he said to Barbara Harding, "an' keep yer lamps peeled behind."

Thus, in silence, the party commenced the ascent of the trail which soon became rough and precipitous, while behind them, under cover of the brush, sneaked four trailing samurai.

After half an hour of the most arduous climbing the mucker commenced to feel the effects of loss of blood from his many wounds. He coughed a little now from the exertion, and when he did the blood spurted anew from the fresh wound in his breast.

Yet there was no wavering or weakness apparent to the girl who marched beside him, and she wondered at the physical endurance of the man. But when at last they came to a clear pool of water, half hidden by overhanging rocks and long masses of depending mosses, in the midst of a natural grotto of enchanting loveliness, and Oda Iseka signaled that their journey was at an end, Byrne laid Thérière gently upon the flower-starred sward, and with a little, choking gasp collapsed, unconscious, beside the Frenchman.

Barbara Harding was horror-stricken. She suddenly realized that she had commenced to feel that this giant of the slums was invulnerable, and with the thought came another—that to him she had come to look more than to Thérière for eventual rescue; and now, here she found herself in the center of a savage island, surrounded as she felt confident she was by skulking murderers, with only two dying white men and a brown hostage as companions.

And now Oda Iseka took in the situation, and with a grin of triumph raised his voice in a loud halloo.

"Come quickly, my people!" he cried; "for both the white men are dying," and from the jungle below them came an answering shout.

"We come, Oda Iseka, Lord of Yoka! Your faithful samurai come!"

Chapter XIII

A Gentleman of France.

At the sound of the harsh voices so close upon her Barbara Harding was galvanized into instant action. Springing to Byrne's side she whipped Thérière's revolver from his belt, where it reposed about the fallen mucker's hips, and with it turned like a tigress upon the youth.

"Quick!" she cried. "Tell them to go back—that I shall kill you if they come closer."

The boy shrank back in terror before the fiery eyes and menacing attitude of the white girl, and then with the terror that animated him ringing plainly in his voice he screamed to his henchmen to halt.

Relieved for a moment at least from immediate danger Barbara Harding turned her attention toward the two unconscious men at her feet. From appearances it seemed that either might breathe his last at any moment, and as she looked at Thérière a wave of compassion swept over her, and the tears welled to her eyes; yet it was to the mucker that she first ministered—why, she could not for the life of her have explained.

She dashed cold water from the spring upon his face. She bathed his wrists, and washed his wounds, tearing strips from her skirt to bandage the horrid gash upon his breast in an effort to stanch the flow of lifeblood that welled forth with the man's every breath.

And at last she was rewarded by seeing the flow of blood quelled and signs of returning consciousness appear. The mucker opened his eyes. Close above him bent the radiant vision of Barbara Harding's face. Upon his fevered forehead he felt the soothing strokes of her cool, soft hand. He closed his eyes again to battle with the effeminate realization that he enjoyed this strange, new sensation—the sensation of being ministered to by a gentle woman—and, perish the thought, by a gentlewoman!

With an effort he raised himself to one elbow, scowling at her.

"Gwan," he said; "I ain't no boob dude. Cut out de mush. Lemme be. Beat it!"

Hurt, more than she would have cared to admit, Barbara Harding turned away from her ungrateful and ungracious patient, to repeat her ministrations to the Frenchman. The mucker read in her expression something of the wound his words had inflicted, and he lay thinking upon the matter for some time, watching her deft, white fingers as they worked over the scarce breathing Thérière.

He saw her wash the blood and dirt from the ghastly wound in the man's chest, and as he watched he realized what a world of courage it must require for a woman of her stamp to do gruesome work of this sort. Never before would such a thought have occurred to him. Neither would he have cared at all for the pain his recent words to the girl might have inflicted. Instead he would have felt keen enjoyment of her discomfiture.

And now another strange new emotion took possession of him. It was none other than a desire to atone in some way for his words. What wonderful transformation was taking place in the heart of the Kelly gangster?

"Say!" he blurted out suddenly.

Barbara Harding turned questioning eyes toward him. In them was the cold, haughty aloofness again that had marked her cognizance of him upon the Halfmoon—the look that had made his hate of her burn most fiercely. It took the mucker's breath away to witness it, and it made the speech he had contemplated more difficult than ever—nay, almost impossible. He coughed nervously, and the old dark, lowering scowl returned to his brow.

"Did you speak?" asked Miss Harding, icily.

Billy Byrne cleared his throat, and then there blurted from his lips not the speech that he had intended, but a sudden, hateful rush of words which seemed to emanate from another personality, from one whom Billy Byrne once had been.

"Ain't dat boob croaked yet?" he growled.

The shock of that brutal question brought Barbara Harding to her feet. In horror she looked down at the man who had spoken thus of a brave and noble comrade in the face of death itself. Her eyes blazed angrily as hot, bitter words rushed to her lips, and then of a sudden she thought of Byrne's self-sacrificing heroism in returning to Thérière's side in the face of the advancing samurai—of the cool courage he had displayed as he carried the unconscious man back to the jungle—of the devotion, almost superhuman, that had sustained him as he struggled, uncomplaining, up the steep mountain path with the burden of the Frenchman's body the while his own lifeblood left a crimson trail behind him.

Such deeds and these words were incompatible in the same individual. There could be but one explanation—Byrne must be two men, with as totally different characters as though they had possessed separate bodies. And who may say that her hypothesis was not correct—at least it seemed that Billy Byrne was undergoing a metamorphosis, and at the instant there was still a question as to which personality should eventually dominate.

Byrne turned away from the reproach which replaced the horror in the girl's eyes, and with a tired sigh let his head fall upon his outstretched arm. The girl watched him for a moment, a puzzled expression upon her face, and then returned to work above Thérière.

The Frenchman's respiration was scarcely appreciable, yet after a time he opened his eyes and looked up wearily. At sight of the girl he smiled wanly, and tried to speak, but a fit of coughing flecked his lips with bloody foam, and again he closed his eyes. Fainter and fainter came his breathing, until it was with difficulty that the girl detected any movement of his breast whatever. She thought that he was dying, and she was afraid. Wistfully she looked toward the mucker. The man still lay with his head buried in his arm, but whether he were wrapped in thought, in slumber, or in death the girl could not tell. At the final thought she went white with terror.

Slowly she approached the man, and leaning over placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Byrne!" she whispered.

The mucker turned his face toward her. It looked tired and haggard.

"Wot is it?" he asked, and his tone was softer than she had ever heard it.

"I think Mr. Thérière is dying," she said, "and I—I—Oh, I am so afraid."

The man flushed to the roots of his hair. All that he could think of were the ugly words he had spoken a short time before—and now Thérière was dying! Byrne would have laughed had anyone suggested that he entertained any other sentiment than hatred toward the second officer of the Halfmoon—that is he would have twenty-four hours before; but now, quite unexpectedly, he realized that he didn't want Thérière to die, and then it dawned upon him that a new sentiment had been born within him—a sentiment to which he had been a stranger all his hard life—friendship.

He felt friendship for Thérière! It was unthinkable, and yet the mucker knew that it was so. Painfully he crawled over to the Frenchman's side.

"Thérière!" he whispered in the man's ear.

The officer turned his head wearily.

"Do youse know me, old pal?" asked the mucker, and Barbara Harding knew from the man's voice that there were tears in his eyes; but what she did not know was that they welled there in response to the words the mucker had just spoken—the nearest approach to words of endearment that ever had passed his lips.

Thérière reached up and took Byrne's hand. It was evident that he too had noted the unusual quality of the mucker's voice.

"Yes, old man," he said very faintly, and then "water, please."

Barbara Harding brought him a drink, holding his head against her knee while he drank. The cool liquid seemed to give him new strength for presently he spoke, quite strongly.

"I'm going, Byrne," he said; "but before I go I want to tell you that of all the brave men I ever have known I have learned within the past few days to believe that you are the bravest. A week ago I thought you were a coward—I ask your forgiveness."

"Ferget it," whispered Byrne, "fer a week ago I guess I was a coward. Dere seems to be more'n one kind o' nerve—I'm jest a-learnin' of the right kind, I guess."

"And, Byrne," continued Thérière, "don't forget what I asked of you before we tossed up to see which should enter Oda Yorimoto's house."

"I'll not ferget," said Billy.

"Good-bye, Byrne," whispered Thérière. "Take good care of Miss Harding."

"Good-bye, old pal," said the mucker. His voice broke, and two big tears rolled down the cheeks of "de toughest guy on de Wes' Side."

Barbara Harding stepped to Thérière's side.

"Good-bye, my friend," she said. "God will reward you for your friendship, your bravery, and your devotion. There must be a special honor roll in heaven for such noble men as you." Thérière smiled sadly.

"Byrne will tell you all," he said, "except who I am—he does not know that"

"Is there any message, my friend," asked the girl, "that you would like to have me deliver?"

Thérière remained silent for a moment as though thinking.

"My name," he said, "is Henri Thérière. I am the Count de Cadenet of France. There is no message, Miss Harding, other than you see fit to deliver to my relatives. They lived in Paris the last I heard of them—my brother, Jacques, was a deputy."

His voice had become so low and weak that the girl could scarce distinguish his words. He gasped once or twice, and then tried to speak again. Barbara leaned closer, her ear almost against his lips.

"Good-bye—dear." The words were almost inaudible, and then the body stiffened with a little convulsive tremor, and Henri Thérière, Count de Cadenet, passed over into the keeping of his noble ancestors.

"He's gone!" whispered the girl, dry-eyed but suffering. She had not loved this man, she realized, but she had learned to think of him as her one true friend in their little world of scoundrels and murderers. She had cared for him very much—it was entirely possible that some day she might have come to return his evident affection for her. She knew nothing of the seamy side of his hard life. She had guessed nothing of the scoundrelly duplicity that had marked his first advances toward her. She thought of him only as a true, brave gentleman, and in that she

was right, for whatever Henri Thérière might have been in the past the last few days of his life had revealed him in the true colors that birth and nature had intended him to wear through a brilliant career. In his death he had atoned for many sins.

And in those last few days he had transferred, all unknown to himself or the other man, a measure of the gentility and chivalry that were his birthright, for, unrealizing, Billy Byrne was patterning himself after the man he had hated and had come to love.

After the girl's announcement the mucker had continued to sit with bowed head staring at the ground. Afternoon had deepened into evening, and now the brief twilight of the tropics was upon them—in a few moments it would be dark.

Presently Byrne looked up. His eyes wandered about the tiny clearing. Suddenly he staggered to his feet. Barbara Harding sprang up, startled by the evident alarm in the man's attitude.

"What is it?" she whispered. "What is the matter?"

"De Chink!" he cried. "Where is de Chink?"

And, sure enough, Oda Iseka had disappeared!

The youthful daimio had taken advantage of the preoccupation of his captors during the last moments of Thérière to gnaw in two the grass rope which bound him to the mucker, and with hands still fast bound behind him had slunk into the jungle path that led toward his village.

"They will be upon us again now at any moment," whispered the girl. "What can we do?"

"We better duck," replied the mucker. "I hates to run away from a bunch of Chinks, but I guess it's up to us to beat it."

"But poor Mr. Thérière?" asked the girl.

"I'll have to bury him close by," replied the mucker. "I don't tink I could pack him very fer tonight—I don't feel jest quite fit agin yet. You wouldn't mind much if I buried him here, would you?"

"There is no other way, Mr. Byrne," replied the girl. "You mustn't think of trying to carry him far. We have done all we can for poor Mr. Thérière—you have almost given your life for him already—and it wouldn't do any good to carry his dead body with us."

"I hates to tink o' dem head-huntin' Chinks gettin' him," replied Byrne; "but maybe I kin hide his grave so's dey won't tumble to it."

"You are in no condition to carry him at all," said the girl. "I doubt if you can go far even without any burden."

The mucker grinned.

"Youse don't know me, miss," he said, and stooping he lifted the body of the Frenchman to his broad shoulder, and started up the hillside through the trackless underbrush.

It would have been an impossible feat for an ordinary man in the pink of condition, but the mucker, weak from pain and loss of blood, strode sturdily upward while the marveling girl followed close behind him. A hundred yards above the spring they came upon a little level spot, and here with the two swords of Oda Yorimoto which they still carried they scooped a shallow grave in which they placed all that was mortal of the Count de Cadenet.

Barbara Harding whispered a short prayer above the new-made grave, while the mucker stood with bowed head beside her. Then they turned to their flight again up the wild face of the savage mountain. The moon came up at last to lighten the way for them, but it was a rough and dangerous climb at best. In many places they were forced to walk hand in hand for considerable distances, and twice the mucker had lifted the girl bodily in his arms to bear her across particularly dangerous or difficult stretches.

Shortly after midnight they struck a small mountain stream up which they followed until in a natural cul-de-sac they came upon its source and found their farther progress barred by precipitous cliffs which rose above them, sheer and unscalable.

They had entered the little amphitheater through a narrow, rocky pass in the bottom of which the tiny stream flowed, and now, weak and tired, the mucker was forced to admit that he could go no farther.

"Who'd o' t'ought dat I was such a sissy?" he exclaimed disgustedly.

"I think that you are very wonderful, Mr. Byrne," replied the girl. "Few men could have gone through what you have today and been alive now."

The mucker made a deprecatory gesture.

"I suppose we gotta make de best of it," he said. "Anyhow, dis ought to make a swell joint to defend."

Weak as he was he searched about for some soft grasses which he threw in a pile beneath a stunted tree that grew well back in the hollow.

"Here's yer downy," he said, with an attempt at jocularly. "Now you'd better hit de hay, fer youse must be dead fagged."

"Thanks!" replied the girl. "I AM nearly dead."

So tired was she that she was asleep almost as soon as she had found a comfortable position in the thick mat of grass, so that she gave no thought to the strange position in which circumstance had placed her.

The sun was well up the following morning before the girl awakened, and it was several minutes before she could readjust herself to her strange surroundings. At first she thought that she was alone, but finally she discerned a giant figure standing at the opening which led from their mountain retreat.

It was the mucker, and at sight of him there swept over the girl the terrible peril of her position—alone in the savage mountains of a savage island with the murderer of Billy Mallory—the beast that had kicked the unconscious Thérière in the face—the mucker who had insulted and threatened to strike her! She shuddered at the thought. And then she recalled the man's other side, and for the life of her she could not tell whether to be afraid of him or not—it all depended upon what mood governed him. It would be best to propitiate him. She called a pleasant good morning.

Byrne turned. She was shocked at the pallor of his haggard face.

"Good morning," he said. "How did yeh sleep?"

"Oh, just splendidly, and you?" she replied.

"So-so," he answered.

She looked at him searchingly as he approached her.

"Why I don't believe that you have slept at all," she cried.

"I didn't feel very sleepy," he replied evasively.

"You sat up all night on guard!" she exclaimed. "You know you did."

"De Chinks might o' been shadowin' us—it wasn't safe to sleep," he admitted; "but I'll tear off a few dis mornin' after we find a feed of some kind."

"What can we find to eat here?" she asked.

"Dis crick is full o' fish," he explained, "an' ef youse got a pin I guess we kin rig up a scheme to hook a couple."

The girl found a pin that he said would answer very nicely, and with a shoe lace for a line and a big locust as bait the mucker set forth to angle in the little mountain torrent. The fish, unwary, and hungry thus early in the morning proved easy prey, and two casts brought forth two splendid specimens.

"I could eat a dozen of dem minnows," announced the mucker, and he cast again and again, until in twenty minutes he had a goodly mess of plump, shiny trout on the grass beside him.

With his pocketknife he cleaned and scaled them, and then between two rocks he built a fire and passing sticks through the bodies of his catch roasted them all. They had neither salt, nor pepper, nor butter, nor any other viand than the fish, but it seemed to the girl that never in her life had she tasted so palatable a meal, nor had it occurred to her until the odor of the cooking fish filled her nostrils that no food had passed her lips since the second day before—no wonder that the two ate ravenously, enjoying every mouthful of their repast.

"An' now," said Billy Byrne, "I tink I'll poun' my ear fer a few. You kin keep yer lamps peeled fer de Chinks, an' de first fony noise youse hears, w'y be sure to wake me up," and with that he rolled over upon the grass, asleep almost on the instant.

The girl, to while away the time, explored their rock-bound haven. She found that it had but a single means of ingress, the narrow pass through which the brook found outlet. Beyond the entrance she did not venture, but through it she saw, beneath, a wooded slope, and twice deer passed quite close to her, stopping at the brook to drink.

It was an ideal spot, one whose beauties appealed to her even under the harrowing conditions which had forced her to seek its precarious safety. In another land and with companions of her own kind she could well imagine the joy of a fortnight spent in such a sylvan paradise.

The thought aroused another—how long would the mucker remain a safe companion? She seemed to be continually falling from the frying pan into the fire. So far she had not been burned, but with returning strength, and the knowledge of their utter isolation could she expect this brutal thug to place any check upon his natural desires?

Why there were few men of her own station in life with whom she would have felt safe to spend a fortnight alone upon a savage, uncivilized island! She glanced at the man where he lay stretched in deep slumber. What a huge fellow he was! How helpless would she be were he to turn against her! Yet his very size; yes, and the brutality she feared, were her only salvation against every other danger than he himself. The man was physically a natural protector, for he was able to cope with odds and dangers to which an ordinary man would long since have succumbed. So she found that she was both safer and less safe because the mucker was her companion.

As she pondered the question her eyes roved toward the slope beyond the opening to the amphitheater. With a start she came to her feet, shading her eyes with her hand and peering intently at something that she could have sworn moved among the trees far below. No, she could not be mistaken—it was the figure of a man.

Swiftly she ran to Byrne, shaking him roughly by the shoulder.

“Someone is coming,” she cried, in response to his sleepy query.

Chapter XIV

The Mucker Sees a New Light.

Together the girl and the mucker approached the entrance to the amphitheater. From behind a shoulder of rock they peered down into the forest below them. For several minutes neither saw any cause for alarm.

“I guess youse must o’ been seein’ things,” said Byrne, drily.

“Yes,” said the girl, “and I see them again. Look! Quick! Down there—to the right.”

Byrne looked in the direction she indicated.

“Chinks,” he commented. “Gee! Look at ‘em comin’. Dere must be a hundred of ‘em.”

He turned a rueful glance back into the amphitheater.

“I dunno as dis place looks as good to me as it did,” he remarked. “Dose yaps wid de toad stabbers could hike up on top o’ dese cliffs an’ make it a case o’ ‘thence by carriages to Calvary’ for ours in about two shakes.”

“Yes,” said the girl, “I’m afraid it’s a regular cul-de-sac.”

“I dunno nothin’ about dat,” replied the mucker; “but I do know dat if we wants to get out o’ here we gotta get a hump on ourselves good an’ lively. Come ahead,” and with his words he ran quickly through the entrance, and turning squarely toward the right skirted the perpendicular cliffs that extended as far as they could see to be lost to view in the forest that ran up to meet them from below.

The trees and underbrush hid them from the head-hunters. There had been danger of detection but for the brief instant that they passed through the entrance of the hollow, but at the time they had chosen the enemy had been hidden in a clump of thick brush far down the slope.

For hours the two fugitives continued their flight, passing over the crest of a ridge and downward toward another valley, until by a small brook they paused to rest, hopeful that they had entirely eluded their pursuers.

Again Byrne fished, and again they sat together at a one-course meal. As they ate the man found himself looking at the girl more and more often. For several days the wonder of her beauty had been growing upon him, until now he found it difficult to take his eyes from her. Thrice she surprised him in the act of staring intently at her, and each time he had dropped his eyes guiltily. At length the girl became nervous, and then terribly frightened—was it coming so soon?

The man had talked but little during this meal, and for the life of her Barbara Harding could not think of any topic with which to distract his attention from his thoughts.

"Hadn't we better be moving on?" she asked at last.

Byrne gave a little start as though surprised in some questionable act.

"I suppose so," he said; "this ain't no place to spend the night— it's too open. We gotta find a sort o' hiding place if we can, dat a fellow kin barricade wit something."

Again they took up their seemingly hopeless march—an aimless wandering in search of they knew not what. Away from one danger to possible dangers many fold more terrible. Barbara's heart was very heavy, for again she feared and mistrusted the mucker.

They followed down the little brook now to where it emptied into a river and then down the valley beside the river which grew wider and more turbulent with every mile. Well past mid-afternoon they came opposite a small, rocky island, and as Byrne's eyes fell upon it an exclamation of gratification burst from his lips.

"Jest de place!" he cried. "We orter be able to hide dere forever."

"But how are we to get there?" asked the girl, looking fearfully at the turbulent river.

"It ain't deep," Byrne assured her. "Come ahead; I'll carry yeh acrost," and without waiting for a reply he gathered her in his arms and started down the bank.

What with the thoughts that had occupied his mind off and on during the afternoon the sudden and close contact of the girl's warm young body close to his took Billy Byrne's breath away, and sent the hot blood coursing through his veins. It was with the utmost difficulty that he restrained a mad desire to crush her to him and cover her face with kisses.

And then the fatal thought came to him—why should he restrain himself? What was this girl to him? Had he not always hated her and her kind? Did she not look with loathing and contempt upon him? And to whom did her life belong anyway but to him—had he not saved it twice? What difference would it make? They'd never come out of this savage world alive, and if he didn't take her some monkey-faced Chink would get her.

They were in the middle of the stream now. Byrne's arms already had commenced to tighten upon the girl. With a sudden tug he strove to pull her face down to his; but she put both hands upon his shoulders and held his lips at arms' length. And her wide eyes looked full into the glowing gray ones of the mucker. And each saw in the other's something that held their looks for a full minute.

Barbara saw what she had feared, but she saw too something else that gave her a quick, pulsing hope—a look of honest love, or could she be mistaken? And the mucker saw the true eyes of the woman he loved without knowing that he loved her, and he saw the plea for pity and protection in them.

"Don't," whispered the girl. "Please don't, you frighten me."

A week ago Billy Byrne would have laughed at such a plea. Doubtless, too, he would have struck the girl in the face for her resistance. He did neither now, which spoke volumes for the change that was taking place within him, but neither did he relax his hold upon her, or take his burning eyes from her frightened ones.

Thus he strode through the turbulent, shallow river to clamber up the bank onto the island. In his soul the battle still raged, but he had by no means relinquished his intention to have his way with the girl. Fear, numb, freezing fear, was in the girl's eyes now. The mucker read it there as plain as print, and had she not said that she was frightened? That was what he had wanted to accomplish back there upon the Halfmoon—to frighten her. He would have enjoyed the sight, but he had not been able to accomplish the thing. Now she not only showed that she was frightened—she had admitted it, and it gave the mucker no pleasure—on the contrary it made him unaccountably uncomfortable.

And then came the last straw—tears welled to those lovely eyes. A choking sob wracked the girl's frame—"And just when I was learning to trust you so!" she cried.

They had reached the top of the bank, now, and the man, still holding her in his arms, stood upon a mat of jungle grass beneath a great tree. Slowly he lowered her to her feet. The madness of desire still gripped him; but now there was another force at work combating the evil that had predominated before.

Thérière's words came back to him: "Good-bye, Byrne; take good care of Miss Harding," and his admission to the Frenchman during that last conversation with the dying man: "—a week ago I guess I was a coward. Dere seems to be more'n one kind o' nerve—I'm just a-learnin' of the right kind, I guess."

He had been standing with eyes upon the ground, his heavy hand still gripping the girl's arm. He looked into her face again. She was waiting there, her great eyes upon his filled with fear and questioning, like a prisoner before the bar awaiting the sentence of her judge.

As the man looked at Barbara Harding standing there before him he saw her in a strange new light, and a sudden realization of the truth flashed upon him. He saw that he could not harm her now, or ever, for he loved her!

And with the awakening there came to Billy Byrne the withering, numbing knowledge that his love must forever be a hopeless one—that this girl of the aristocracy could never be for such as he.

Barbara Harding, still looking questioningly at him, saw the change that came across his countenance—she saw the swift pain that shot to the man's eyes, and she wondered. His fingers released their grasp upon her arm. His hands fell limply to his sides.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "Please don't be afraid o' me. I couldn't hurt youse if I tried."

A deep sigh of relief broke from the girl's lips—relief and joy; and she realized that its cause was as much that the man had proved true to the new estimate she had recently placed upon him as that the danger to herself had passed.

"Come," said Billy Byrne, "we'd better move in a bit out o' sight o' de mainland, an' look fer a place to make camp. I reckon we'd orter rest here for a few days till we git in shape ag'in. I know youse must be dead beat, an' I sure am, all right, all right."

Together they sought a favorable site for their new home, and it was as though the horrid specter of a few moments before had never risen to menace them, for the girl felt that a great burden of apprehension had been lifted forever from her

shoulders, and though a dull ache gnawed at the mucker's heart, still he was happier than he had ever been before—happy to be near the woman he loved.

With the long sword of Oda Yorimoto, Billy Byrne cut saplings and bamboo and the fronds of fan palms, and with long tough grasses bound them together into the semblance of a rude hut. Barbara gathered leaves and grasses with which she covered the floor.

"Number One, Riverside Drive," said the mucker, with a grin, when the work was completed; "an' now I'll go down on de river front an' build de Bowery."

"Oh, are you from New York?" asked the girl.

"Not on yer life," replied Billy Byrne. "I'm from good ol' Chi; but I been to Noo York twice wit de Goose Island Kid, an' so I knows all about it. De roughnecks belongs on de Bowery, so dat's wot we'll call my dump down by de river. You're a highbrow, so youse gotta live on Riverside Drive, see?" and the mucker laughed at his little pleasantry.

But the girl did not laugh with him. Instead she looked troubled.

"Wouldn't you rather be a 'highbrow' too?" she asked, "and live up on Riverside Drive, right across the street from me?"

"I don't belong," said the mucker gruffly.

"Wouldn't you rather belong?" insisted the girl.

All his life Billy had looked with contempt upon the hated, pusillanimous highbrows, and now to be asked if he would not rather be one! It was unthinkable, and yet, strange to relate, he realized an odd longing to be like Thérière, and Billy Mallory; yes, in some respects like Divine, even. He wanted to be more like the men that the woman he loved knew best.

"It's too late fer me ever to belong, now," he said ruefully. "Yeh gotta be borned to it. Gee! Wouldn't I look funny in wite pants, an' one o' dem dinky, little 'Willie-off-de-yacht' lids?"

Even Barbara had to laugh at the picture the man's words raised to her imagination.

"I didn't mean that," she hastened to explain. "I didn't mean that you must necessarily dress like them; but BE like them—act like them—talk like them, as Mr. Thérière did, you know. He was a gentleman."

"An' I'm not," said Billy.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," the girl hastened to explain.

"Well, whether youse meant it or not, it's so," said the mucker. "I ain't no gent—I'm a mucker. I have your word for it, you know—yeh said so that time on de Halfmoon, an' I ain't fergot it; but youse was right—I am a mucker. I ain't never learned how to be anything else. I ain't never wanted to be anything else until today. Now, I'd like to be a gent; but it's too late."

"Won't you try?" asked the girl. "For my sake?"

"Go to't," returned the mucker cheerfully; "I'd even wear side whiskers fer youse."

"Horrors!" exclaimed Barbara Harding. "I couldn't look at you if you did."

"Well, then, tell me wot youse do want me to do."

Barbara discovered that her task was to be a difficult one if she were to accomplish it without wounding the man's feelings; but she determined to strike while the iron was hot and risk offending him—why she should be interested in

the regeneration of Mr. Billy Byrne it never once occurred to her to ask herself. She hesitated a moment before speaking.

"One of the first things you must do, Mr. Byrne," she said, "is to learn to speak correctly. You mustn't say 'youse' for 'you,' or 'wot' for 'what'—you must try to talk as I talk. No one in the world speaks any language faultlessly, but there are certain more or less obvious irregularities of grammar and pronunciation that are particularly distasteful to people of refinement, and which are easy to guard against if one be careful."

"All right," said Billy Byrne, "youse—you kin pitch in an' learn me wot—whatever you want to an' I'll do me best to talk like a dude—fer your sake."

And so the mucker's education commenced, and as there was little else for the two to do it progressed rapidly, for once started the man grew keenly interested, spurred on by the evident pleasure which his self-appointed tutor took in his progress—further it meant just so much more of close companionship with her.

For three weeks they never left the little island except to gather fruit which grew hard by on the adjacent mainland. Byrne's wounds had troubled him considerably—at times he had been threatened with blood poisoning. His temperature had mounted once to alarming heights, and for a whole night Barbara Harding had sat beside him bathing his forehead and easing his sufferings as far as it lay within her power to do; but at last the wonderful vitality of the man had saved him. He was much weakened though and neither of them had thought it safe to attempt to seek the coast until he had fully regained his old-time strength.

So far but little had occurred to give them alarm. Twice they had seen natives on the mainland—evidently hunting parties; but no sign of pursuit had developed. Those whom they had seen had been pure-blood Malays—there had been no samurai among them; but their savage, warlike appearance had warned the two against revealing their presence.

They had subsisted upon fish and fruit principally since they had come to the island. Occasionally this diet had been relieved by messes of wild fowl and fox that Byrne had been successful in snaring with a primitive trap of his own invention; but lately the prey had become wary, and even the fish seemed less plentiful. After two days of fruit diet, Byrne announced his intention of undertaking a hunting trip upon the mainland.

"A mess of venison wouldn't taste half bad," he remarked.

"Yes," cried the girl, "I'm nearly famished for meat—it seems as though I could almost eat it raw."

"I know that I could," stated Billy. "Lord help the deer that gets within range of this old gat of Thérière's, and you may not get even a mouthful—I'm that hungry I'll probably eat it all, hoof, hide, and horns, before ever I get any of it back here to you."

"You'd better not," laughed the girl. "Good-bye and good luck; but please don't go very far—I shall be terribly lonely and frightened while you are away."

"Maybe you'd better come along," suggested Billy.

"No, I should be in the way—you can't hunt deer with a gallery, and get any."

"Well, I'll stay within hailing distance, and you can look for me back any time between now and sundown. Good-bye," and he picked his way down the bank into

the river, while from behind a bush upon the mainland two wicked, black eyes watched his movements and those of the girl on the shore behind him while a long, sinewy, brown hand closed more tightly upon a heavy war spear, and steel muscles tensed for the savage spring and the swift throw.

The girl watched Billy Byrne forging his way through the swift rapids. What a mighty engine of strength and endurance he was! What a man! Yes, brute! And strange to relate Barbara Harding found herself admiring the very brutality that once had been repellent to her. She saw him leap lightly to the opposite bank, and then she saw a quick movement in a bush close at his side. She did not know what manner of thing had caused it, but her intuition warned her that behind that concealing screen lay mortal danger to the unconscious man.

"Billy!" she cried, the unaccustomed name bursting from her lips involuntarily. "In the bush at your left—look out!"

At the note of warning in her voice Byrne had turned at her first word—it was all that saved his life. He saw the half-naked savage and the out-shooting spear arm, and as he would, instinctively, have ducked a right-for-the-head in the squared circle of his other days, he ducked now, side stepping to the right, and the heavy weapon sped harmlessly over his shoulder.

The warrior, with a growl of rage, drew his sharp parang, leaping to close quarters. Barbara Harding saw Byrne whip Thérière's revolver from its holster, and snap it in the face of the savage; but to her horror the cartridge failed to explode, and before he could fire again the warrior was upon him.

The girl saw the white man leap to one side to escape the furious cut aimed at him by his foe, and then she saw him turn with the agility of a panther and spring to close quarters with the wild man. Byrne's left arm went around the Malay's neck, and with his heavy right fist he rained blow after blow upon the brown face.

The savage dropped his useless parang—clawing and biting at the mighty creature in whose power he found himself; but never once did those terrific, relentless blows cease to fall upon his unprotected face.

The sole witness to this battle primeval stood spellbound at the sight of the fierce, brutal ferocity of the white man, and the lion-like strength he exhibited. Slowly but surely he was beating the face of his antagonist into an unrecognizable pulp—with his bare hands he had met and was killing an armed warrior. It was incredible! Not even Thérière or Billy Mallory could have done such a thing. Billy Mallory! And she was gazing with admiration upon his murderer!

Chapter XV

The Rescue.

After Byrne had dropped the lifeless form of his enemy to the ground he turned and retraced his steps toward the island, a broad grin upon his face as he climbed to the girl's side.

"I guess I'd better overhaul this gat," he said, "and stick around home. It isn't safe to leave you alone here—I can see that pretty plainly. Gee, supposin' I'd got out of sight before he showed himself!" And the man shuddered visibly at the thought.

The girl had not spoken and the man looked up suddenly, attracted by her silence. He saw a look of horror in her eyes, such as he had seen there once before when he had kicked the unconscious Thérière that time upon the Halfmoon.

"What's the matter?" he asked, alarmed. "What have I done now? I had to croak the stiff—he'd have got me sure if I hadn't, and then he'd have got you, too. I had to do it for your sake—I'm sorry you saw it."

"It isn't that," she said slowly. "That was very brave, and very wonderful. It's Mr. Mallory I'm thinking of. O Billy! How could you do it?"

The man hung his head.

"Please don't," he begged. "I'd give my life to bring him back again, for your sake. I know now that you loved him, and I've tried to do all I could to atone for what I did to him; just as I tried to play white with Thérière when I found that he loved you, and intended to be on the square with you. He was your kind, and I hoped that by helping him to win you fairly it might help to wipe out what I had done to Mallory. I see that nothing ever can wipe that out. I've got to go through life regretting it because you have taught me what a brutal, cowardly thing I did. If it hadn't been for you I'd always have been proud of it—but you and Thérière taught me to look at things in a different way than I ever had learned to before. I'm not sorry for that—I'm glad, for if remorse is a part of my punishment I'll take it gladly and welcome the chance to get a little of what's coming to me. Only please don't look at me that way any more—it's more than I can stand, from you."

It was the first time that the man ever had opened his heart in any such whole-souled way to her, and it touched the girl more than she would have cared to admit.

"It would be silly to tell you that I ever can forget that terrible affair," she said; "but somehow I feel that the man who did that was an entirely different man from the man who has been so brave and chivalrous in his treatment of me during the past few weeks."

"It was me that did it, though," he said; "you can't get away from that. It'll always stick in your memory, so that you can never think of Mr. Mallory without thinking of the damned beast that murdered him—God! and I thought it smart!

"But you have no idea how I was raised, Miss Harding," he went on. "Not that that's any excuse for the thing I did; but it does make it seem a wonder that I ever could have made a start even at being decent. I never was well acquainted with any human being that wasn't a thief, or a pickpocket, or a murderer—and they were all beasts, each in his own particular way, only they weren't as decent as dumb beasts.

"I wasn't as crafty as most of them, so I had to hold my own by brute force, and I did it; but, gad, how I accomplished it. The idea of fighting fair," he laughed at the thought, "was utterly unknown to me. If I'd ever have tried it I'd have seen my finish in a hurry. No one fought fair in my gang, or in any other gang that I ever ran up against. It was an honor to kill a man, and if you accomplished it by

kicking him to death when he was unconscious it detracted nothing from the glory of your exploit—it was what you did, not how you did it, that counted.

“I could have been decent, though, if I’d wanted to. Other fellows who were born and raised near me were decent enough. They got good jobs and stuck to them, and lived straight; but they made me sick—I looked down on them, and spent my time hanging around saloon corners rushing the can and insulting women—I didn’t want to be decent—not until I met you, and learned to—to,” he hesitated, stammering, and the red blood crept up his neck and across his face, “and learned to want your respect.”

It wasn’t what he had intended saying and the girl knew it. There sprang into her mind a sudden wish to hear Billy Byrne say the words that he had dared not say; but she promptly checked the desire, and a moment later a qualm of self-disgust came over her because of the weakness that had prompted her to entertain such a wish in connection with a person of this man’s station in life.

Days ran into weeks, and still the two remained upon their little island refuge. Byrne found first one excuse and then another to delay the march to the sea. He knew that it must be made sooner or later, and he knew, too, that its commencement would mark the beginning of the end of his association with Miss Harding, and that after that was ended life would be a dreary waste.

Either they would be picked up by a passing vessel or murdered by the natives, but in the latter event his separation from the woman he loved would be no more certain or absolute than in her return to her own people, for Billy Byrne knew that he “didn’t belong” in any society that knew Miss Barbara Harding, and he feared that once they had regained civilization there would be a return on the girl’s part to the old haughty aloofness, and that again he would be to her only a creature of a lower order, such as she and her kind addressed with a patronizing air as, “my man.”

He intended, of course, to make every possible attempt to restore her to her home; but, he argued, was it wrong to snatch a few golden hours of happiness in return for his service, and as partial recompense for the lifetime of lonely misery that must be his when the woman he loved had passed out of his life forever? Billy thought not, and so he tarried on upon “Manhattan Island,” as Barbara had christened it, and he lived in the second finest residence in town upon the opposite side of “Riverside Drive” from the palatial home of Miss Harding.

Nearly two months had passed before Billy’s stock of excuses and delay ran out, and a definite date was set for the commencement of the journey.

“I believe,” Miss Harding had said, “that you do not wish to be rescued at all. Most of your reasons for postponing the trip have been trivial and ridiculous—possibly you are afraid of the dangers that may lie before us,” she added, banteringly.

“I’m afraid you’ve hit it off about right,” he replied with a grin. “I don’t want to be rescued, and I am very much afraid of what lies before—me.”

“Before YOU?”

“I’m going to lose you, any way you look at it, and—and— oh, can’t you see that I love you?” he blurted out, despite all his good intentions.

Barbara Harding looked at him for a moment, and then she did the one thing that could have hurt him most—she laughed.

The color mounted to Billy Byrne's face, and then he went very white.

The girl started to say something, and at the same instant there came faintly to them from the mainland the sound of hoarse shouting, and of shots.

Byrne turned and started on a run in the direction of the firing, the girl following closely behind. At the island's edge he motioned her to stop.

"Wait here, it will be safer," he said. "There may be white men there—those shots sound like it, but again there may not. I want to find out before they see you, whoever they are."

The sound of firing had ceased now, but loud yelling was distinctly audible from down the river. Byrne took a step down the bank toward the water.

"Wait!" whispered the girl. "Here they come now, we can see them from here in a moment," and she dragged the mucker down behind a bush.

In silence the two watched the approaching party.

"They're the Chinks," announced Byrne, who insisted on using this word to describe the proud and haughty samurai.

"Yes, and there are two white men with them," whispered Barbara Harding, a note of suppressed excitement in her voice.

"Prisoners," said Byrne. "Some of the precious bunch from the Halfmoon doubtless."

The samurai were moving straight up the edge of the river. In a few minutes they would pass within a hundred feet of the island. Billy and the girl crouched low behind their shelter.

"I don't recognize them," said the man.

"Why—why—O Mr. Byrne, it can't be possible!" cried the girl with suppressed excitement. "Those two men are Captain Norris and Mr. Foster, mate of the Lotus!"

Byrne half rose to his feet. The party was opposite their hiding place now.

"Sit tight," he whispered. "I'm goin' to get 'em," and then, fiercely "for your sake, because I love you—now laugh," and he was gone.

He ran lightly down the river bank unnoticed by the samurai who had already passed the island. In one hand he bore the long war spear of the head-hunter he had slain. At his belt hung the long sword of Oda Yorimoto, and in its holster reposed the revolver of the Count de Cadenet.

Barbara Harding watched him as he forded the river, and clambered up the opposite bank. She saw him spring rapidly after the samurai and their prisoners. She saw his spear hand go up, and then from the deep lungs of the man rose a savage yell that would have done credit to a whole tribe of Apaches.

The warriors turned in time to see the heavy spear flying toward them and then, as he dashed into their midst, Billy Byrne drew his revolver and fired to right and left. The two prisoners took advantage of the consternation of their guards to grapple with them and possess themselves of weapons.

There had been but six samurai in the party, two had fallen before Byrne's initial onslaught, but the other four, recovered from their first surprise, turned now to battle with all the terrific ferocity of their kind.

Again, at a crucial moment, had Thérière's revolver missed fire, and in disgust Byrne discarded it, falling back upon the long sword with which he was no match for the samurai. Norris snatched Byrne's spear from the ground, and ran it

through the body of one of the Japs who was pressing Byrne too closely. Odds were even now—they fought three against three.

Norris still clung to the spear—it was by far the most effective weapon against the long swords of the samurai. With it he killed his antagonist and then rushed to the assistance of Foster.

Barbara Harding from the island saw that Byrne's foe was pressing him closely. The white man had no chance against the superior swordsmanship of the samurai. She saw that the mucker was trying to get past the Jap's guard and get his hands upon him, but it was evident that the man was too crafty and skilled a fighter to permit of that. There could be but one outcome to that duel unless Byrne had assistance, and that mighty quickly. The girl grasped the short sword that she constantly wore now, and rushed into the river. She had never before crossed it except in Byrne's arms. She found the current swift and strong. It almost swept her off her feet before she was halfway across, but she never for an instant thought of abandoning her effort.

After what seemed an eternity she floundered out upon the mainland, and when she reached the top of the bank she saw to her delight that Byrne was still on his feet, fighting. Foster and Norris were pushing their man back—they were in no danger.

Quickly she ran toward Byrne and the samurai. She saw a wicked smile upon the brown face of the little warrior, and then she saw his gleaming sword twist in a sudden feint, and as Byrne lunged out awkwardly to parry the expected blow the keen edge swerved and came down upon his head.

She was an instant too late to save, but just in time to avenge—scarcely had the samurai's sword touched the mucker than the point of Oda Yorimoto's short sword, wielded by the fair hand of Barbara Harding, plunged into his heart. With a shriek he collapsed beside the body of his victim.

Barbara Harding threw herself beside Byrne. Apparently life was extinct. With a little cry of horror the girl put her ear close to the man's lips. She could hear nothing.

"Come back! Come back!" she wailed. "Forgive me that cruel laugh. O Billy! Billy! I love you!" and the daughter of old Anthony Harding, multimillionaire and scion of the oldest aristocracy that America boasts, took the head of the Grand Avenue mucker in her arms and covered the white, bloody face with kisses—and in the midst of it Billy Byrne opened his eyes.

She was caught in the act. There was no escape, and as a crimson flush suffused her face Billy Byrne put his arms about her and drew her down until their lips met, and this time she did not put her hands upon his shoulders and push him away. "I love you, Billy," she said simply.

"Remember who and what I am," he cautioned, fearful lest this great happiness be stolen away from him because she had forgotten for the moment.

"I love you Billy," she answered, "for what you are."

"Forever?"

"Until death do us part!"

And then Norris and Foster, having dispatched their man, came running up.

"Is he badly hurt, madam?" cried Captain Norris.

"I don't know," replied Miss Harding; "I'm just trying to help him up, Captain Norris," she laboriously explained in an effort to account for her arms about Billy's neck.

Norris gave a start of surprise at hearing his name.

"Who are you?" he cried. "How do you know me?" and as the girl turned her face toward him, "Miss Harding! Thank God, Miss Harding, you are safe."

"But where on earth did you come from?" asked Barbara.

"It's a long story, Miss Harding," replied the officer, "and the ending of it is going to be pretty hard on you—you must try to bear up though."

"You don't mean that father is dead?" she asked, a look of terror coming to her eyes.

"Not that—we hope," replied Norris. "He has been taken prisoner by these half-breed devils on the island. I doubt if they have killed him—we were going to his rescue when we ourselves were captured. He and Mr. Mallory were taken three days ago."

"Mallory!" shouted Billy Byrne, who had entirely recovered from the blow that had merely served to stun him for a moment. "Is Mallory alive?"

"He was yesterday," replied Norris; "these fellows from whom you so bravely rescued us told us that much."

"Thank God!" whispered Billy Byrne.

"What made you think he was dead?" inquired the officer, looking closely at Byrne as though trying to place him.

Another man might have attempted to evade the question but the new Billy Byrne was no coward in any department of his moral or physical structure.

"Because I thought that I had killed him," he replied, "the day that we took the Lotus."

Captain Norris looked at the speaker in undisguised horror.

"You!" he cried. "You were one of those damned cut-throats! You the man that nearly killed poor Mr. Mallory! Miss Harding, has he offered you any indignities?"

"Don't judge him rashly, Captain Norris," said the girl. "But for him I should have been dead and worse than dead long since. Some day I will tell you of his heroism and his chivalry, and don't forget, Captain, that he has just saved you and Mr. Foster from captivity and probable death."

"That's right," exclaimed the officer, "and I want to thank him; but I don't understand about Mallory."

"Never mind about him now," said Billy Byrne. "If he's alive that's all that counts—I haven't got his blood on my hands. Go on with your story."

"Well, after that gang of pirates left us," continued the captain, "we rigged an extra wireless that they didn't know we had, and it wasn't long before we raised the warship Alaska. Her commander put a crew on board the Lotus with machinists and everything necessary to patch her up—coaled and provisioned her and then lay by while we got her in running order. It didn't take near as long as you would have imagined. Then we set out in company with the warship to search for the 'Clarinda,' as your Captain Simms called her. We got on her track through a pirate junk just north of Luzon—he said he'd heard from the natives of a little out-of-the-way island near Formosa that a brigantine had been wrecked there in

the recent typhoon, and his description of the vessel led us to believe that it might be the 'Clarinda,' or Halfmoon.

"We made the island, and after considerable search found the survivors. Each of 'em tried to lay the blame on the others, but finally they all agreed that a man by the name of Thérière with a seaman called Byrne, had taken you into the interior, and that they had believed you dead until a few days since they had captured one of the natives and learned that you had all escaped, and were wandering in some part of the island unknown to them.

"Then we set out with a company of marines to find you. Your father, impatient of the seeming slowness of the officer in command, pushed ahead with Mr. Mallory, Mr. Poster, and myself, and two of the men of the Lotus whom he had brought along with us.

"Three days ago we were attacked and your father and Mr. Mallory taken prisoners. The rest of us escaped, and endeavored to make our way back to the marines, but we became confused and have been wandering aimlessly about the island ever since until we were surprised by these natives a few moments ago. Both the seamen were killed in this last fight and Mr. Foster and myself taken prisoners—the rest you know."

Byrne was on his feet now. He found his sword and revolver and replaced them in his belt.

"You men stay here on the island and take care of Miss Harding," he said. "If I don't come back the marines will find you sooner or later, or you can make your way to the coast, and work around toward the cove. Good-bye, Miss Harding."

"Where are you going?" cried the girl.

"To get your father—and Mr. Mallory," said the mucker.

Chapter XVI

The Supreme Sacrifice.

Through the balance of the day and all during the long night Billy Byrne swung along his lonely way, retracing the familiar steps of the journey that had brought Barbara Harding and himself to the little island in the turbulent river.

Just before dawn he came to the edge of the clearing behind the dwelling of the late Oda Yorimoto. Somewhere within the silent village he was sure that the two prisoners lay.

During the long march he had thrashed over again and again all that the success of his rash venture would mean to him. Of all those who might conceivably stand between him and the woman he loved—the woman who had just acknowledged that she loved him—these two men were the most to be feared.

Billy Byrne did not for a moment believe that Anthony Harding would look with favor upon the Grand Avenue mucker as a prospective son-in-law. And then there was Mallory! He was sure that Barbara had loved this man, and now should he be restored to her as from the grave there seemed little doubt but that the old love

would be aroused in the girl's breast. The truth of the matter was that Billy Byrne could not conceive the truth of the testimony of his own ears—even now he scarce dared believe that the wonderful Miss Harding loved him—him, the despised mucker!

But the depth of the man's love for the girl, and the genuineness of his new-found character were proven beyond question by the relentless severity with which he put away every thought of himself and the consequences to him in the matter he had undertaken.

FOR HER SAKE! had become his slogan. What though the results sent him to a savage death, or to a life of lonely misery, or to the arms of his beloved! In the face of duty the result was all the same to Billy Byrne.

For a moment he stood looking at the moon-bathed village, listening for any sign of wakefulness or life, then with all the stealth of an Indian, and with the trained wariness of the thief that he had been, the mucker slunk noiselessly across the clearing to the shadows of the nearest hut.

He listened beneath the window through which he and Barbara and Thérière had made their escape a few weeks before. There was no sound from within. Cautiously he raised himself to the sill, and a moment later dropped into the inky darkness of the interior.

With groping hands he felt about the room—it was unoccupied. Then he passed to the door at the far end. Cautiously he opened it until a narrow crack gave him a view of the dimly lighted chamber beyond. Within all seemed asleep. The mucker pushed the door still further open and stepped within —so must he search every hut within the village until he had found those he sought?

They were not there, and on silent feet that disturbed not even the lightly slumbering curs the man passed out by the front entrance into the street beyond.

Through a second and third hut he made his precarious way. In the fourth a man stirred as Byrne stood upon the opposite side of the room from the door—with a catlike bound the mucker was beside him. Would the fellow awake? Billy scarce breathed. The samurai turned restlessly, and then, with a start, sat up with wide-open eyes. At the same instant iron fingers closed upon his throat and the long sword of his dead daimio passed through his heart.

Byrne held the corpse until he was positive that life was extinct, then he dropped it quietly back upon its pallet, and departed to search the adjoining dwelling. Here he found a large front room, and a smaller chamber in the rear — an arrangement similar to that in the daimio's house.

The front room revealed no clue to the missing men. Within the smaller, rear room Byrne heard the subdued hum of whispered conversation just as he was about to open the door. Like a graven image he stood in silence, his ear glued to the frail door. For a moment he listened thus and then his heart gave a throb of exultation, and he could have shouted aloud in thanksgiving—the men were conversing in English!

Quietly Byrne pushed open the door far enough to admit his body. Those within ceased speaking immediately. Byrne closed the door behind him, advancing until he felt one of the occupants of the room. The man shrank from his touch.

"I guess we're done for, Mallory," said the man in a low tone; "they've come for us."

"Sh-sh," warned the mucker. "Are you and Mallory alone?"

"Yes—for God's sake who are you and where did you come from?" asked the surprised Mr. Harding.

"Be still," admonished Byrne, feeling for the cords that he knew must bind the captive.

He found them presently and with his jackknife cut them asunder. Then he released Mallory.

"Follow me," he said, "but go quietly. Take off your shoes if you have 'em on, and hang 'em around your neck—tie the ends of the laces together."

The men did as he bid and a moment later he was leading them across the room, filled with sleeping men, women, children, and domestic animals. At the far side stood a rack filled with long swords. Byrne removed two without the faintest suspicion of a noise. He handed one to each of his companions, cautioning them to silence with a gesture.

But neither Anthony Harding nor Billy Mallory had had second-story experience, and the former struck his weapon accidentally against the door frame with a resounding clatter that brought half the inmates of the room, wide-eyed, to sitting postures. The sight that met the natives' eyes had them on their feet, yelling like madmen, and dashing toward their escaping prisoners, in an instant.

"Quick!" shouted Billy Byrne. "Follow me!"

Down the village street the three men ran, but the shouts of the natives had brought armed samurai to every door with a celerity that was uncanny, and in another moment the fugitives found themselves surrounded by a pack of howling warriors who cut at them with long swords from every side, blocking their retreat and hemming them in in every direction.

Byrne called to his companions to close in, back to back, and thus, the gangster in advance, the three slowly fought their way toward the end of the narrow street and the jungle beyond. The mucker fought with his long sword in one hand and Thérière's revolver in the other—hewing a way toward freedom for the two men whom he knew would take his love from him.

Beneath the brilliant tropic moon that lighted the scene almost as brilliantly as might the sun himself the battle waged, and though the odds were painfully uneven the white men moved steadily, though slowly, toward the jungle. It was evident that the natives feared the giant white who led the three. Anthony Harding, familiar with Japanese, could translate sufficient of their jargon to be sure of that, had not the respectful distance most of them kept from Byrne been ample proof.

Out of the village street they came at last into the clearing. The warriors danced about them, yelling threats and taunts the while they made occasional dashes to close quarters that they might deliver a swift sword cut and retreat again before the great white devil could get them with the sword that had been Oda Yorimoto's, or the strange fire stick that spoke in such a terrifying voice.

Fifty feet from the jungle Mallory went down with a spear through the calf of his leg. Byrne saw him fall, and dropping back lifted the man to his feet, supporting him with one arm as the two backed slowly in front of the onpressing natives.

The spears were flying thick and fast now, for the samurai all were upon the same side of the enemy and there was no danger of injuring one of their own

number with their flying weapons as there had been when the host entirely surrounded the three men, and when the whites at last entered the tall grasses of the jungle a perfect shower of spears followed them.

With the volley Byrne went down—he had been the principal target for the samurai and three of the heavy shafts had pierced his body. Two were buried in his chest and one in his abdomen.

Anthony Harding was horrified. Both his companions were down, and the savages were pressing closely on toward their hiding place. Mallory sat upon the ground trying to tear the spear from his leg. Finally he was successful. Byrne, still conscious, called to Harding to pull the three shafts from him.

“What are we to do?” cried the older man. “They will get us again as sure as fate.”

“They haven’t got us yet,” said Billy. “Wait, I got a scheme. Can you walk, Mallory?”

Mallory staggered to his feet.

“I’ll see,” he said, and then: “Yes, I can make it.”

“Good,” exclaimed Byrne. “Now listen. Almost due north, across this range of hills behind us is a valley. In the center of the valley is a river. It is a good fifteen-hour march for a well man—it will take Mallory and you longer. Follow down the river till you come to a little island—it should be the first one from where you strike the river. On that island you will find Miss Harding, Norris, and Foster. Now hurry.”

“But you, man!” exclaimed Mallory. “We can’t leave you.”

“Never!” said Anthony Harding.

“You’ll have to, though,” replied Billy. “That’s part of the scheme. It won’t work any other way.” He raised his revolver and fired a single shot in the direction of the howling savages. “That’s to let ‘em know we’re still here,” he said. “I’ll keep that up, off and on, as long as I can. It’ll fool ‘em into thinking that we’re all here, and cover your escape. See?”

“I won’t do it,” said Mallory.

“Yes you will,” replied the mucker. “It’s not any of us that counts—it’s Miss Harding. As many as can have got to get back to her just as quick as the Lord’ll let us. I can’t, so you two’ll have to. I’m done for—a blind man could see that. It wouldn’t do a bit of good for you two to hang around here and get killed, waitin’ for me to die; but it would do a lot of harm, for it might mean that Miss Harding would be lost too.”

“You say my daughter is on this island you speak of, with Norris and Foster—is she quite safe and well?” asked Harding.

“Perfectly,” said Byrne; “and now beat it—you’re wasting a lot of precious time.”

“For Barbara’s sake it looks like the only way,” said Anthony Harding, “but it seems wicked and cowardly to desert a noble fellow like you, sir.”

“It is wicked,” said Billy Mallory. “There must be some other way. By the way, old man, who are you anyhow, and how did you happen to be here?”

Byrne turned his face upward so that the full moon lighted his features clearly.

“There is no other way, Mallory,” he said. “Now take a good look at me—don’t you recognize me?”

Mallory gazed intently at the strong face looking into his. He shook his head.

"There is something familiar about your face," he said; "but I cannot place you. Nor does it make any difference who you are—you have risked your life to save ours and I shall not leave you. Let Mr. Harding go—it is not necessary for both to stay."

"You will both go," insisted Byrne; "and you will find that it does make a big difference who I am. I hadn't intended telling you, but I see there is no other way. I'm the mucker that nearly killed you on board the Lotus, Mallory. I'm the fellow that man-handled Miss Harding until even that beast of a Simms made me quit, and Miss Harding has been alone with me on this island for weeks—now go!"

He turned away so that they could no longer see his face, with the mental anguish that he knew must be writ large upon it, and commenced firing toward the natives once more.

Anthony Harding stood with white face and clinched hands during Byrne's recital of his identity. At its close he took a threatening step toward the prostrate man, raising his long sword, with a muffled oath. Billy Mallory sprang before him, catching his upraised arm.

"Don't!" he whispered. "Think what we owe him now. Come!" and the two men turned north into the jungle while Billy Byrne lay upon his belly in the tall grass firing from time to time into the direction from which came an occasional spear.

Anthony Harding and Billy Mallory kept on in silence along their dismal way. The crack of the mucker's revolver, growing fainter and fainter, as they drew away from the scene of conflict, apprised the men that their rescuer still lived.

After a time the distant reports ceased. The two walked on in silence for a few minutes.

"He's gone," whispered Mallory.

Anthony Harding made no response. They did not hear any further firing behind them. On and on they trudged. Night turned to day. Day rolled slowly on into night once more. And still they staggered on, footsore and weary. Mallory suffered excruciating agony from his wound. There were times when it seemed that it would be impossible for him to continue another yard; but then the thought that Barbara Harding was somewhere ahead of them, and that in a short time now they must be with her once more kept him doggedly at his painful task.

They had reached the river and were following slowly down its bank. The moon, full and gorgeous, flooded the landscape with silvery light.

"Look!" exclaimed Mallory. "The island!"

"Thank God!" whispered Harding, fervently.

On the bank opposite they stopped and hallooed. Almost instantly three figures rushed from the interior of the island to the shore before them—two men and a woman.

"Barbara!" cried Anthony Harding. "O my daughter! My daughter!"

Norris and Foster hastened through the river and brought the two men to the island. Barbara Harding threw herself into her father's arms. A moment later she had grasped Mallory's outstretched hands, and then she looked beyond them for another.

"Mr. Byrne?" she asked. "Where is Mr. Byrne?"

"He is dead," said Anthony Harding.

The girl looked, wide-eyed and uncomprehending, at her father for a full minute.

“Dead!” she moaned, and fell unconscious at his feet.

Chapter XVII

Home Again.

Billy Byrne continued to fire intermittently for half an hour after the two men had left him. Then he fired several shots in quick succession, and dragging himself to his hands and knees crawled laboriously and painfully back into the jungle in search of a hiding place where he might die in peace.

He had progressed some hundred yards when he felt the earth give way beneath him. He clutched frantically about for support, but there was none, and with a sickening lunge he plunged downward into Stygian darkness.

His fall was a short one, and he brought up with a painful thud at the bottom of a deer pit—a covered trap which the natives dig to catch their fleet-footed prey.

The pain of his wounds after the fall was excruciating. His head whirled dizzily. He knew that he was dying, and then all went black.

When consciousness returned to the mucker it was daylight. The sky above shone through the ragged hole that his falling body had broken in the pit’s covering the night before.

“Geel!” muttered the mucker; “and I thought that I was dead!”

His wounds had ceased to bleed, but he was very weak and stiff and sore.

“I guess I’m too tough to croak!” he thought.

He wondered if the two men would reach Barbara in safety. He hoped so. Mallory loved her, and he was sure that Barbara had loved Mallory. He wanted her to be happy. No thought of jealousy entered his mind. Mallory was her kind. Mallory “belonged.” He didn’t. He was a mucker. How would he have looked training with her bunch. She would have been ashamed of him, and he couldn’t have stood that. No, it was better as it had turned out. He’d squared himself for the beast he’d been to her, and he’d squared himself with Mallory, too. At least they’d have only decent thoughts of him, dead; but alive, that would be an entirely different thing. He would be in the way. He would be a constant embarrassment to them all, for they would feel that they’d have to be nice to him in return for what he had done for them. The thought made the mucker sick.

“I’d rather croak,” he murmured.

But he didn’t “croak”—instead, he waxed stronger, and toward evening the pangs of hunger and thirst drove him to consider means for escaping from his hiding place, and searching for food and water.

He waited until after dark, and then he crawled, with utmost difficulty, from the deep pit. He had heard nothing of the natives since the night before, and now, in the open, there came to him but the faint sounds of the village life across the clearing.

Byrne dragged himself toward the trail that led to the spring where poor Thérière had died. It took him a long time to reach it, but at last he was

successful. The clear, cold water helped to revive and strengthen him. Then he sought food. Some wild fruit partially satisfied him for the moment, and he commenced the laborious task of retracing his steps toward "Manhattan Island."

The trail that he had passed over in fifteen hours as he had hastened to the rescue of Anthony Harding and Billy Mallory required the better part of three days now. Occasionally he wondered why in the world he was traversing it anyway. Hadn't he wanted to die, and leave Barbara free? But life is sweet, and the red blood still flowed strong in the veins of the mucker.

"I can go my own way," he thought, "and not bother her; but I'll be dinged if I want to croak in this God-forsaken hole—Grand Avenue for mine, when it comes to passing in my checks. Gee! but I'd like to hear the rattle of the Lake Street 'L' and see the dolls coming down the station steps by Skidmore's when the crowd comes home from the Loop at night."

Billy Byrne was homesick. And then, too, his heart was very heavy and sad because of the great love he had found—a love which he realized was as hopeless as it was great. He had the memory, though, of the girl's arms about his neck, and her dear lips crushed to his for a brief instant, and her words—ah, those words! They would ring in Billy's head forever: "I love you, Billy, for what you ARE."

And a sudden resolve came into the mucker's mind as he whispered those words over and over again to himself. "I can't have her," he said. "She isn't for the likes of me; but if I can't live with her, I can live for her—as she'd want me to live, and, s'help me, those words'll keep me straight. If she ever hears of Billy Byrne again it won't be anything to make her ashamed that she had her arms around him, kissing him, and telling him that she loved him."

At the river's edge across from the little island Billy came to a halt. He had reached the point near midnight, and hesitated to cross over and disturb the party at that hour. At last, however, he decided to cross quietly, and lie down near *her* hut until morning.

The crossing was most difficult, for he was very weak, but at last he came to the opposite bank and drew himself up to lie panting for a few minutes on the sloping bank. Then he crawled on again up to the top, and staggering to his feet made his way cautiously toward the two huts. All was quiet. He assumed that the party was asleep, and so he lay down near the rude shelter he had constructed for Barbara Harding, and fell asleep.

It was broad daylight when he awoke—the sun was fully three hours high, and yet no one was stirring. For the first time misgivings commenced to assail Billy's mind. Could it be possible? He crossed over to his own hut and entered—it was deserted. Then he ran to Barbara's—it, too, was unoccupied. They had gone!

All during the painful trip from the village to the island Billy had momentarily expected to meet a party of rescuers coming back for him. He had not been exactly disappointed, but a queer little lump had risen to his throat as the days passed and no help had come, and now this was the final blow. They had deserted him! Left him wounded and dying on this savage island without taking the trouble to assure themselves that he really was dead! It was incredible!

"But was it?" thought Billy. "Didn't I tell them that I was dying? I thought so myself, and there is no reason why they shouldn't have thought so too. I suppose I shouldn't blame them, and I don't; but I wouldn't have left them that way and not

come back. They had a warship full of blue jackets and marines—there wouldn't have been much danger to them."

Presently it occurred to him that the party may have returned to the coast to get the marines, and that even now they were searching for him. He hastened to return to the mainland, and once more he took up his wearisome journey.

That night he reached the coast. Early the next morning he commenced his search for the man-of-war. By walking entirely around the island he should find her he felt sure.

Shortly after noon he scaled a high promontory which jutted out into the sea. From its summit he had an unobstructed view of the broad Pacific. His heart leaped to his throat, for there but a short distance out were a great battleship and a trim white yacht—the Alaska and the Lotus! They were steaming slowly out to sea.

He was just in time! Filled with happiness the mucker ran to the point of the promontory and stripping off his shirt waved it high above his head, the while he shouted at the top of his lungs; but the vessels kept on their course, giving no answering signal.

For half an hour the man continued his futile efforts to attract the attention of someone on board either craft, but to his dismay he saw them grow smaller and smaller until in a few hours they passed over the rim of the world, disappearing from his view forever.

Weak, wounded, and despairing, Billy sank to the ground, burying his face in his arms, and there the moon found him when she rose, and he was still there when she passed from the western sky.

For three months Billy Byrne lived his lonely life upon the wild island. The trapping and fishing were good and there was a plentiful supply of good water. He regained his lost strength, recovering entirely from his wounds. The natives did not molest him, for he had stumbled upon a section of the shore which they considered bewitched and to which none of them would come under any circumstances.

One morning, at the beginning of his fourth month of solitude, the mucker saw a smudge of smoke upon the horizon. Slowly it increased in volume and the speck beneath it resolved itself into the hull of a steamer. Closer and closer to the island it came.

Billy gathered together a quantity of dry brush and lighted a signal fire on the lofty point from which he had seen the Alaska and the Lotus disappear. As it commenced to blaze freely he threw fresh, green boughs upon it until a vertical column of smoke arose high above the island.

In breathless suspense Billy watched the movements of the steamer. At first it seemed that she would pass without taking notice of his signal, but at last he saw that she was changing her course and moving directly toward the island.

Close in she came, for the sea was calm and the water deep, and when Billy was sure that those on board saw him and his frantic waving, he hurried, stumbling and falling, down the steep face of the cliff to the tiny beach at its foot.

Already a boat had been lowered and was putting in for land. Billy waded out to the end of the short shelving beach and waited.

The sight that met the eyes of the rescuers was one that filled them with awe, for they saw before them a huge, giant of a white man, half-naked except for a few tattered rags, who wore the long sword of an ancient samurai at his side, a modern revolver at his hip, and bore in his brawny hand the heavy war spear of a head-hunter. Long black hair, and a huge beard covered the man's head and face, but clean gray eyes shone from out of the tangle, and a broad grin welcomed them.

"Oh, you white men!" shouted the mucker. "You certainly do look good to me."

Six months later a big, smooth-faced giant in ill-fitting sea togs strolled up Sixth Avenue. It was Billy Byrne—broke, but happy; Grand Avenue was less than a thousand miles away!

"Geel!" he murmured; "but it's good to be home again!"

There were places in New York where Billy would find acquaintances. One in particular he recalled—a little, third-floor gymnasium not far distant from the Battery. Thither he turned his steps now. As he entered the stuffy room in which two big fellows, stripped to the waist, were sparring, a stout, low-browed man sitting in a back-tilted chair against one wall looked up inquiringly. Billy crossed over to him, with outstretched hand.

"Howdy, Professor!" he said.

"Yeh got me, kid," replied Professor Cassidy, taking the proffered hand.

"I was up here with Larry Hilmore and the Goose Island Kid a year or so ago—my name's Byrne," exclaimed Billy.

"Sure," said the professor; "I gotcha now. You're de guy 'at Larry was a tellin' me about. He said you'd be a great heavy if you'd leave de booze alone."

Billy smiled and nodded.

"You don't look much like a booze fighter now," remarked Cassidy.

"And I ain't" said the mucker. "I've been on the wagon for most a year, and I'm never comin' down."

"That's right, kid," said the professor; "but wots the good word? Wot you doin' in little ol' Noo York?"

"Lookin' for a job," said Billy.

"Strip!" commanded Professor Cassidy. "I'm lookin' for sparrin' partners for a gink dat's goin' to clean up de Big Smoke—if he'll ever come back an' scrap."

"You're on," said Billy, commencing to divest himself of his outer clothing.

Stripped to the waist he displayed as wondrous a set of muscles as even Professor Cassidy had ever seen. The man waxed enthusiastic over them.

"You sure ought to have some wallop up your sleeve," he said, admiringly. He then introduced Billy to the Harlem Hurricane, and Battling Dago Pete. "Pete's de guy I was tellin' you about," explained Professor Cassidy. "He's got such a wallop dat I can't keep no sparrin' partners for him. The Hurricane here's de only bloke wit de guts to stay wit him—he's a fiend for punishment, Hurricane is; he jest natchrly eats it.

"If you're broke I'll give you your keep as long as you stay wit Pete an' don't get cold feet, an' I'll fix up a mill for you now an' then so's you kin pull down a little coin fer yourself. Are you game?"

"You know it," said Billy.

"All to the good then," said the professor gaily; "now you put on the mitts an' spell Hurricane for a couple o' rounds."

Billy slipped his huge hands into the tight-fitting gloves.

"It's been more'n a year since I had these on," he said, "an' I may be a little slow an' stale at first; but after I get warmed up I'll do better."

Cassidy grinned and winked at Hurricane. "He won't never get warmed up," Hurricane confided; "Pete'll knock his block off in about two minutes," and the men settled back to watch the fun with ill-concealed amusement written upon their faces.

What happened within the next few minutes in the stuffy little room of Professor Cassidy's third-floor "gymnasium" marks an epoch in the professor's life—he still talks of it, and doubtless shall until the Great Referee counts him out in the Last Round.

The two men sparred for a moment, gaging one another. Then Battling Dago Pete swung a vicious left that landed square on Billy's face. It was a blow that might have felled an ox; but Billy only shook his head—it scarce seemed to jar him. Pete had half lowered his hands as he recovered from the blow, so sure he was that it would finish his new sparring partner, and now before he could regain his guard the mucker tore into him like a whirlwind. That single blow to the face seemed to have brought back to Billy Byrne all that he ever had known of the manly art of self-defense.

Battling Dago Pete landed a few more before the fight was over, but as any old fighter will tell you there is nothing more discouraging than to discover that your most effective blows do not faze your opponent, and only the knowledge of what a defeat at the hands of a new sparring partner would mean to his future, kept him plugging away at the hopeless task of attempting to knock out this mountain of bone and muscle.

For a few minutes Billy Byrne played with his man, hitting him when and where he would. He fought, crouching, much as Jeffries used to fight, and in his size and strength was much that reminded Cassidy of the fallen idol that in his heart of hearts he still worshiped.

And then, like a panther, the mucker sprang in with a vicious left hook to the jaw, followed, with lightning rapidity, by a right upper cut to the chin that lifted Battling Dago Pete a foot from the floor to drop him, unconscious, against the foot of the further wall.

It was a clean knock-out, and when Cassidy and Hurricane got through ministering to the fallen man, and indications of returning consciousness were apparent, the professor turned to Billy.

"Got any more 'hopes' lyin' around loose?" asked the mucker with a grin. "I guess the big dinge's safe for a while yet."

"Not if you'll keep on stayin' away from the booze, kid," said Professor Cassidy, "an' let me handle you."

"I gotcha Steve," said Billy; "go to it; but first, stake me to a feed. The front side of my stomach's wrapped around my back bone."

Chapter XVIII

The Gulf Between.

For three months Billy met has-beens, and third-and fourth-rate fighters from New York and its environs. He thrashed them all —usually by the knockout route and finally local sports commenced talking about him a bit, and he was matched up with second-raters from other cities.

These men he cleaned up as handily as he had the others, so that it was apparent to fight fandom that the big, quiet “unknown” was a comer; and pretty soon Professor Cassidy received an offer from another trainer-manager to match Billy against a real “hope” who stood in the forefront of hopedom.

This other manager stated that he thought the mill would prove excellent practice for his man who was having difficulty in finding opponents. Professor Cassidy thought so too, and grinned for two hours straight after reading the challenge.

The details of the fight were quickly arranged. In accordance with the state regulations it was to be a ten round, no decision bout—the weight of the gloves was prescribed by law.

The name of the “white hope” against whom Billy was to go was sufficient to draw a fair house, and there were some there who had seen Billy in other fights and looked for a good mill. When the “coming champion,” as Billy’s opponent was introduced, stepped into the ring he received a hearty round of applause, whereas there was but a scattered ripple of handclapping to greet the mucker. It was the first time he ever had stepped into a ring with a first-rate fighter, and as he saw the huge muscles of his antagonist and recalled the stories he had heard of his prowess and science, Billy, for the first time in his life, felt a tremor of nervousness.

His eyes wandered across the ropes to the sea of faces turned up toward him, and all of a sudden Billy Byrne went into a blue funk. Professor Cassidy, shrewd and experienced, saw it even as soon as Billy realized it—he saw the fading of his high hopes—he saw his castles in Spain tumbling in ruins about his ears—he saw his huge giant lying prone within that squared circle as the hand of the referee rose and fell in cadence to the ticking of seconds that would count his man out.

“Here,” he whispered, “take a swig o’ this,” and he pressed a bottle toward Billy’s lips.

Billy shook his head. The stuff had kept him down all his life—he had sworn never to touch another drop of it, and he never would, whether he lost this and every other fight he ever fought. He had sworn to leave it alone for *her* sake! And then the gong called him to the center of the ring.

Billy knew that he was afraid—he thought that he was afraid of the big, trained fighter who faced him; but Cassidy knew that it was a plain case of stage fright that had gripped his man. He knew, too, that it would be enough to defeat Billy’s every chance for victory, and after the big “white hope” had felled Billy twice in the first minute of the first round Cassidy knew that it was all over but the shouting.

The fans, many of them, were laughing, and yelling derogatory remarks at Billy.

“Stan’ up an’ fight, yeh big stiff!” and “Back to de farm fer youse!” and then, high above the others a shrill voice cried “Coward! Coward!”

The word penetrated Billy's hopeless, muddled brain. Coward! she had called him that once, and then she had changed her mind. Thérière had thought him a coward, yet as he died he had said that he was the bravest man he ever had known. Billy recalled the yelling samurai with their keen swords and terrible spears. He saw the little room in the "palace" of Oda Yorimoto, and again he faced the brown devils who had hacked and hewed and stabbed at him that day as he fought to save the woman he loved. Coward! What was there in this padded ring for a man to fear who had faced death as Billy had faced it, and without an instant's consciousness of the meaning of the word fear? What was wrong with him, and then the shouts and curses and taunts of the crowd smote upon his ears, and he knew. It was the crowd! Again the heavy fist of the "coming champion" brought Billy to the mat, and then, before further damage could be done him, the gong saved him.

It was a surprised and chastened mucker that walked with bent head to his corner after the first round. The "white hope" was grinning and confident, and so he returned to the center of the ring for the second round. During the short interval Billy had thrashed the whole thing out. The crowd had gotten on his nerves. He was trying to fight the whole crowd instead of just one man—he would do better in this round; but the first thing that happened after he faced his opponent sent the fans into delirious ecstasies of shouting and hooting.

Billy swung his right for his foe's jaw—a terrible blow that would have ended the fight had it landed—but the man side-stepped it, and Billy's momentum carried him sprawling upon his face. When he regained his feet the "white hope" was waiting for him, and Billy went down again to lie there, quite still, while the hand of the referee marked the seconds: One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Billy opened his eyes. Seven. Billy sat up. Eight. The meaning of that monotonous count finally percolated to the mucker's numbed perceptive faculties. He was being counted out! Nine! Like a flash he was on his feet. He had forgotten the crowd. Rage—cool, calculating rage possessed him—not the feverish, hysterical variety that takes its victim's brains away.

They had been counting out the man whom Barbara Harding had once loved!—the man she had thought the bravest in the world!—they were making a monkey and a coward of him! He'd show them!

The "white hope" was waiting for him. Billy was scarce off his knees before the man rushed at him wickedly, a smile playing about his lips. It was to be the last of that smile, however. Billy met the rush with his old familiar crouch, and stopped his man with a straight to the body.

Cassidy saw it and almost smiled. He didn't think that Billy could come back—but at least he was fighting for a minute in his old form.

The surprised "hope" rushed in to punish his presuming foe. The crowd was silent. Billy ducked beneath a vicious left swing and put a right to the side of the "hope's" head that sent the man to his knees. Then came the gong.

In the third round Billy fought carefully. He had made up his mind that he would show this bunch of pikers that he knew how to box, so that none might say that he had won with a lucky punch, for Billy intended to win.

The round was one which might fill with delight the soul of the fan who knows the finer points of the game. And when it was over, while little damage had been

done on either side, it left no shadow of a doubt in the minds of those who knew that the unknown fighter was the more skilful boxer.

Then came the fourth round. Of course there was no question in the minds of the majority of the spectators as to who would win the fight. The stranger had merely shown one of those sudden and ephemeral bursts of form that occasionally are witnessed in every branch of sport; but he couldn't last against such a man as the "white hope"—they looked for a knock-out any minute now. Nor did they look in vain.

Billy was quite satisfied with the work he had done in the preceding round. Now he would show them another style of fighting! And he did. From the tap of the gong he rushed his opponent about the ring at will. He hit him when and where he pleased. The man was absolutely helpless before him. With left and right hooks Billy rocked the "coming champion's" head from side to side. He landed upon the swelling optics of his victim as he listed.

Thrice he rushed him to the ropes, and once the man fell through them into the laps of the hooting spectators—only now they were not hooting Billy. Until the gong Billy played with his man as a cat might play with a mouse; yet not once had he landed a knock-out blow.

"Why didn't you finish him?" cried Professor Cassidy, as Billy returned to his corner after the round. "You had 'im goin' man—why in the world didn't yeh finish him?"

"I didn't want to," said Billy; "not in that round. I'm reserving the finish for the fifth round, and if you want to win some money you can take the hunch!"

"Do you mean it?" asked Cassidy.

"Sure," said Billy. "You might make more by laying that I'd make him take the count in the first minute of the round—you can place a hundred of mine on that, if you will, please."

Cassidy took the hunch, and a moment later as the two men faced each other he regretted his act, for to his surprise the "white hope" came up for the fifth round smiling and confident once more.

"Someone's been handin' him an earful," grumbled Cassidy, "an' it might be all he needed to take 'im through the first minute of the round, and maybe the whole round—I've seen that did lots o' times."

As the two men met the "white hope" was the aggressor. He rushed in to close quarters aiming a stinging blow at Billy's face, and then to Cassidy's chagrin and the crowd's wonder, the mucker lowered his guard and took the wallop full on the jaw. The blow seemed never to jar him the least. The "hope" swung again, and there stood Billy Byrne, like a huge bronze statue taking blow after blow that would have put an ordinary man down for the count.

The fans saw and appreciated the spectacular bravado of the act, and they went wild. Cheer on cheer rose, hoarse and deafening, to the rafters. The "white hope" lost his self-control and what little remained of his short temper, and deliberately struck Billy a foul blow, but before the referee could interfere the mucker swung another just such blow as he had missed and fallen with in the second round; but this time he did not miss—his mighty fist caught the "coming champion" on the point of the chin, lifted him off his feet and landed him halfway through the ropes. There he lay while the referee tolled off the count of ten, and as the official took

Billy's hand in his and raised it aloft in signal that he had won the fight the fickle crowd cheered and screamed in a delirium of joy.

Cassidy crawled through the ropes and threw his arms around Billy.

"I knew youse could do it, kid!" he screamed. "You're as good as made now, an' you're de next champ, or I never seen one."

The following morning the sporting sheets hailed "Sailor" Byrne as the greatest "white hope" of them all. Flashlights of him filled a quarter of a page. There were interviews with him. Interviews with the man he had defeated. Interviews with Cassidy. Interviews with the referee. Interviews with everybody, and all were agreed that he was the most likely heavy since Jeffries. Corbett admitted that, while in his prime he could doubtless have bested the new wonder, he would have found him a tough customer.

Everyone said that Byrne's future was assured. There was not a man in sight who could touch him, and none who had seen him fight the night before but would have staked his last dollar on him in a mill with the black champion.

Cassidy wired a challenge to the Negro's manager, and received an answer that was most favorable. The terms were, as usual, rather one-sided but Cassidy accepted them, and it seemed before noon that a fight was assured.

Billy was more nearly happy again than he had been since the day he had renounced Barbara Harding to the man he thought she loved. He read and re-read the accounts in the papers, and then searching for more references to himself off the sporting page he ran upon the very name that had been constantly in his thoughts for all these months—Harding.

Persistent rumor has it that the engagement of the beautiful Miss Harding to Wm. J. Mallory has been broken. Miss Harding could not be seen at her father's home up to a late hour last night. Mr. Mallory refused to discuss the matter, but would not deny the rumor.

There was more, but that was all that Billy Byrne read. The paper dropped from his hand. Battles and championships faded from his thoughts. He sat with his eyes bent upon the floor, and his mind was thousands of miles away across the broad Pacific upon a little island in the midst of a turbulent stream.

And far uptown another sat with the same paper in her hand. Barbara Harding was glancing through the sporting sheet in search of the scores of yesterday's woman's golf tournament. And as she searched her eyes suddenly became riveted upon the picture of a giant man, and she forgot about tournaments and low scores. Hastily she searched the heads and text until she came upon the name—"Sailor' Byrne!"

Yes! It must be he. Greedily she read and re-read all that had been written about him. Yes, she, Barbara Harding, scion of an aristocratic house —ultra-society girl, read and re-read the accounts of a brutal prize fight.

A half hour later a messenger boy found "Sailor" Byrne the center of an admiring throng in Professor Cassidy's third-floor gymnasium. With worshipping eyes taking in his new hero from head to foot the youth handed Byrne a note.

He stood staring at the heavy weight until he had perused it.

"Any answer?" he asked.

"No answer, kid," replied Byrne, "that I can't take myself," and he tossed a dollar to the worshipping boy.

An hour later Billy Byrne was ascending the broad, white steps that led to the entrance of Anthony Harding's New York house. The servant who answered his ring eyed him suspiciously, for Billy Byrne still dressed like a teamster on holiday. He had no card!

"Tell Miss Harding that Mr. Byrne has come," he said.

The servant left him standing in the hallway, and started to ascend the great staircase, but halfway up he met Miss Harding coming down.

"Never mind, Smith," she said. "I am expecting Mr. Byrne," and then seeing that the fellow had not seated her visitor she added, "He is a very dear friend." Smith faded quickly from the scene.

"Billy!" cried the girl, rushing toward him with out-stretched hands. "O Billy, we thought you were dead. How long have you been here? Why haven't you been to see me?"

Byrne hesitated.

A great, mad hope had been surging through his being since he had read of the broken engagement and received the girl's note. And now in her eyes, in her whole attitude, he could read, as unmistakably as though her lips had formed the words that he had not hoped in vain.

But some strange influence had seemed suddenly to come to work upon him. Even in the brief moment of his entrance into the magnificence of Anthony Harding's home he had felt a strange little stricture of the throat—a choking, half-suffocating sensation.

The attitude of the servant, the splendor of the furnishings, the stateliness of the great hall, and the apartments opening upon it—all had whispered to him that he did not "belong."

And now Barbara, clothed in some wondrous foreign creation, belied by her very appearance the expression that suffused her eyes.

No, Billy Byrne, the mucker, did not belong there. Nor ever could he belong, more than Barbara ever could have "belonged" on Grand Avenue. And Billy Byrne knew it now. His heart went cold. The bottom seemed suddenly to have dropped out of his life.

Bravely he had battled to forget this wonderful creature, or, rather, his hopeless love for her—her he could never forget. But the note from her, and the sight of her had but served to rekindle the old fire within his breast.

He thought quickly. His own life or happiness did not count. Nothing counted now but Barbara. He had seen the lovelight in her eyes. He thanked God that he had realized what it all would have meant, before he let her see that he had seen it.

"I've been back several months," he said presently, in answer to her question; "but I got sense enough to stay where I belong. Gee! Wouldn't I look great comin' up here buttin' in, wit youse bunch of highlifes?"

Billy slapped his thigh resoundingly and laughed in stentorian tones that caused the eyebrows of the sensitive Smith on the floor above to elevate in shocked horror.

"Den dere was de mills. I couldn't break away from me work, could I, to chase a bunch of skirts?"

Barbara felt a qualm of keen disappointment that Billy had fallen again into the old dialect that she had all but eradicated during those days upon distant "Manhattan Island."

"I wouldn't o' come up atal," he went on, "if I hadn't o' read in de poiper how youse an' Mallory had busted. I t'ought I'd breeze in an' see wot de trouble was."

His eyes had been averted, mostly, as he talked. Now he swung suddenly upon her.

"He's on de square, ain't he?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Barbara. She was not quite sure whether to feel offended, or not. But the memory of Billy's antecedents came to his rescue. Of course he didn't know that it was such terribly bad form to broach such a subject to her, she thought.

"Well, then," continued the mucker, "wot's up? Mallory's de guy fer youse. Youse loved him or youse wouldn't have got engaged to him."

The statement was almost an interrogation.

Barbara nodded affirmatively.

"You see, Billy," she started, "I have always known Mr. Mallory, and always thought that I loved him until—until—" There was no answering light in Billy's eyes—no encouragement for the words that were on her lips. She halted lamely. "Then," she went on presently, "we became engaged after we reached New York. We all thought you dead," she concluded simply.

"Do you think as much of him now as you did when you promised to marry him?" he asked, ignoring her reference to himself and all that it implied.

Barbara nodded.

"What is at the bottom of this row?" persisted Billy. He had fallen back into the decent pronunciation that Barbara had taught him, but neither noticed the change. For a moment he had forgotten that he was playing a part. Then he recollected.

"Nothing much," replied the girl. "I couldn't rid myself of the feeling that they had murdered you, by leaving you back there alone and wounded. I began to think 'coward' every time I saw Mr. Mallory. I couldn't marry him, feeling that way toward him, and, Billy, I really never LOVED him as— as—" Again she stumbled, but the mucker made no attempt to grasp the opportunity opened before him.

Instead he crossed the library to the telephone. Running through the book he came presently upon the number he sought. A moment later he had his connection.

"Is this Mallory?" he asked.

"I'm Byrne—Billy Byrne. De guy dat cracked your puss fer youse on de Lotus."

"Dead, hell! Not me. Say, I'm up here at Barbara's."

"Yes, dat's wot I said. She wants youse to beat it up here's swift as youse kin beat it."

Barbara Harding stepped forward. Her eyes were blazing.

"How dare you?" she cried, attempting to seize the telephone from Billy's grasp.

He turned his huge frame between her and the instrument. "Git a move!" he shouted into the mouthpiece. "Good-bye!" and he hung up.

Then he turned back toward the angry girl.

"Look here," he said. "Once youse was strong on de sob stuff wit me, tellin' me how noble I was, an' all de different tings youse would do fer me to repay all I done fer youse. Now youse got de chanct."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, puzzled. "What can I do for you?"

"Youse kin do dis fer me. When Mallory gits here youse kin tell him dat de engagement is all on again—see!"

In the wide eyes of the girl Billy read a deeper hurt than he had dreamed of. He had thought that it would not be difficult for her to turn back from the vulgar mucker to the polished gentleman. And when he saw that she was suffering, and guessed that it was because he had tried to crush her love by brute force he could carry the game no further.

"O Barbara," he cried, "can't you see that Mallory is your kind— that HE is a fit mate for you. I have learned since I came into this house a few minutes ago the unbridgeable chasm that stretches between Billy Byrne, the mucker, and such as you. Once I aspired; but now I know just as you must have always known, that a single lifetime is far too short for a man to cover the distance from Grand Avenue to Riverside Drive.

"I want you to be happy, Barbara, just as I intend to be. Back there in Chicago there are plenty of girls on Grand Avenue as straight and clean and fine as they make 'em on Riverside Drive. Girls of my own kind, they are, and I'm going back there to find the one that God intended for me. You've taught me what a good girl can do toward making a man of a beast. You've taught me pride and self-respect. You've taught me so much that I'd rather that I'd died back there beneath the spears of Oda Iseka's warriors than live here beneath the sneers and contempt of servants, and the pity and condescension of your friends.

"I want you to be happy, Barbara, and so I want you to promise me that you'll marry Billy Mallory. There isn't any man on earth quite good enough for you; but Mallory comes nearer to it than anyone I know. I've heard 'em talking about him around town since I came back—and there isn't a rotten story chalked up against him nowhere, and that's a lot more than you can say for ninety-nine of a hundred New Yorkers that are talked about at all.

"And Mallory's a man, too—the kind that every woman ought to have, only they ain't enough of 'em to go 'round. Do you remember how he stood up there on the deck of the Lotus and fought fair against my dirty tricks? He's a man and a gentleman, Barbara—the sort you can be proud of, and that's the sort you got to have. You see I know you.

"And he fought against those fellows of Yoka in the street of Oda Iseka's village like a man should fight. There ain't any yellow in him, Barbara, and he didn't leave me until there seemed no other way, even in the face of the things I told them to make them go. Don't harbor that against him—I only wonder that he didn't croak me; your dad wanted to, and Mallory wouldn't let him."

"They never told me that," said Barbara.

The bell rang.

"Here he is now," said Billy. "Good-bye—I'd rather not see him. Smith'll let me out the servants' door. Guess that'll make him feel better. You'll do as I ask, Barbara?"

He had paused at the door, turning toward her as he asked the final question.

The girl stood facing him. Her eyes were dim with unshed tears. Billy Byrne swam before them in a hazy mist.

“You’ll do as I ask, Barbara!” he repeated, but this time it was a command.

As Mallory entered the room Barbara heard the door of the servants’ entrance slam behind Billy Byrne.
