

A. AMERITT
THE
BLACK
WHEEL

COMPLETED AND ILLUSTRATED
BY
HANNES BOK

A. MERRITT
THE BLACK WHEEL



COMPLETED AND ILLUSTRATED BY HANNES BOK
NEW COLLECTORS' GROUP: NEW YORK: 1947

THE BLACK WHEEL
Chapters I through VII
Copyright 1948 by Mrs E. H. Merritt
THE BLACK WHEEL
Chapters VIII through XXVII
Copyright 1948 by Hannes Bok

The first edition of
THE BLACK WHEEL
is limited to one thousand copies of which this is
Number ~~429~~ 429 . . .

THE BLACK WHEEL

By

A. MERRITT

and

HANNES BOK

Chapter I THE SUSAN ANN

It seems to me that the time has come to tell what really did happen to Big Jim Benson's show clipper, the Susan Ann. And this, obviously, includes what really did happen to those on the Susan Ann—Big Jim and his daughter Penelope, his junior partners Michael McTeague and Thaddeus Chadwick, Lady Fitz-Manton and her Russian lover Alexis Boriloff, the Rev. Dr. Swastlow and his unfortunately beautiful sister Flora; also Captain Johnson and the Susan Ann's crew.

Of course, there was the story I told when the sponge divers from Florida picked up Deborah and me in the cove of Little Palm Key. Perhaps some will remember it, although it happened all of five years ago. That the Susan Ann had been caught in a Caribbean hurricane, almost wrecked at the first stroke of it, all boats smashed, radio rig destroyed, radio operator killed; that wallowing soggy out of the hurricane she had found a haven in an uninhabited island off the Bahama Banks where she had been repaired as best we could; that still leaking and still unseaworthy she had at last set sail for Nassau only to be caught in another storm and funder with all on board except Deborah and myself. Surely some must remember. It was a good story, a reasonable story, a water-tight story that went down unquestioned. There was only one thing wrong with it—

It wasn't true.

Deborah had been Lady Fitz-Manton's personal maid. She was Scotch, a Calvinist, and her respectability so manifest that Her Ladyship once told me that she had found ten minutes' concentration upon it as good as a dose of physic. This was said in Deborah's presence and was one of her mistress's little ways of putting her in her place. It must be admitted, however, that such perfection in respectability as Deborah's was at times irritating to me.

Deborah abhorred lying. But I made it plain to her that her inevitable and only reward for telling the truth would be the lingering, singularly unpleasant martyrdom of an insane asylum; no dramatic escape to a painless Paradise on the wings of approving angels.

Then there was the double handful of jewels sewn around her waist. What would she do with these in an insane asylum? They would take them away from her at once, undoubtedly. That settled it. Scotch thrift backed her Calvinist conscience to the operating table and removed the scruple.

So the skipper of the sponge boat accepted us for what I said were—the sole survivors of the Susan Ann. Backed by that extraordinary respectability of Deborah, he did not question my story, nor did the officials and reporters at Key West and New York when we reached there.

How could I, then, have told the truth? Told of the nameless wreck and the black wheel? Or of the hell-vomit on Red Rafferty's lost beach to which those bound to the black wheel steered us?

It would have meant for me that same madhouse with which I had threatened Deborah!

But now . . . well, there is none, I think, who can be injured by the truth. I have changed my

name and practice another profession. I think also that men's minds have broadened of late, giving to the unseen more recognition. And certainly Science has narrowed that borderland between the possible and what it called the impossible not so long ago.

My name, at the time, was Ross Fenimore. I was in my early thirties, a doctor. My special interest was endocrinology, a study of the ductless glands. Having a small income, it had never been necessary for me to hang my shingle; go into private practice. I had no incumbrances; had given no hostages to fortune in the shape of either wife or children.

I had established a connection with a certain New York hospital; a sort of roving internship. It gave me the opportunities for research and studies that I desired, and laboratory facilities which otherwise I could not afford. I was a kind of medical handy-man, filling in here and there when necessity arose; assisting in operations and so on. I lived at the hospital, and had done so for the last three years.

This day, I had been assisting Kurtson in a cancer case, mamillary, a difficult one. Kurtson stepped back and slipped off his mask and gloves. The orderlies slid the patient from the operating table and wheeled her away. Kurtson is a very great surgeon, and one of the few who finishes his own job to the last stitch. I had watched his long, strong fingers working with all the artistry of a master sculptor on tissue and nerve, vein and artery; swiftly extirpating, ligaturing, remoulding, pruning, cutting out the last malignant root of the carcinoma. It was as though his hands were alive with a life all their own.

Kurtson liked me; had confidence in me. I had known that, because he called me in to help at his most difficult operations. I was very proud of that confidence.

The nurses were cleaning up. I was checking the instruments. He said formally, and with, I thought, a touch of brusqueness:

"When you have finished, come to my room."

I said: "Certainly, Dr. Kurtson."

Anxiously I tried to recall every move I had made. Where had I slipped? Kurtson wasn't like Coster, his only surgical equal in New York. Carrying on a major operation, Coster was as tense as a tomcat that sights a rival. It didn't affect his technique, but Heaven help assistant or nurse who made the slightest error. He lashed out at them with a picturesque and poisonous profanity that was a treat for others to hear, but a whip of wasps to the culprit. Kurtson's habit was to pass over a lapse at the time—unless, of course, it was serious—and administer correction in private. His impersonality in this, his inhuman detachment, were worse than Coster's variegated curses. I was no young interne or nurse forced to submit to a dressing down, but I took an immense pride in Kurtson's good opinion. It was, therefore, with acute apprehension that I entered his room.

He looked me over for a minute, then asked: "How long has it been since you had a vacation?"

"Three years."

He said: "Your hand trembled twice when you were putting on the clamps. You hesitated over riding yourself mercilessly to meet their qualifica-

the needles, and you fumbled when you handed me the silver probe."

There was no use arguing. I nodded and said: "I'm sorry."

"Nothing happened," he said. "But something might have. And next time something may. There must be perfect coordination between surgeon and assistant. The odds against us are great enough at best. When does your arrangement with the hospital end?"

I grew cold at that. Was he going to suggest that I resign?

"In three months," I answered. "The first of the year."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Renew the arrangement, if the hospital's agreeable. I'm happy here."

He shook his head. "It's time you were out on your own, if you're ever going to be. Even if it's only for a while, it gives you an experience you'll never get where you are. That aside, you need a rest. James Benson—you know of him—is a patient of mine. He has started out with his daughter, a couple of junior partners and some friends on that fancy clipper of his. Going to loaf around the Caribbean for a couple of months. The ship doctor he was going to take along disappointed him at the last moment. He has asked me to recommend another. Shall I recommend you? It pays, of course. And you would be treated as a guest."

I hesitated; after all, this was a major upset in my ordered life.

He said: "As a physician, I prescribe it. As a friend, I urge it. I can get you two months leave of absence from the hospital. You can come back and finish the last month of your arrangement. And renew it—if you still want to. I'm hoping you won't."

I asked: "Any other reason for wanting me to go?"

Now it was he who hesitated, then said: "yes, there is. Professionally, I am much interested in Benson. Personally, I greatly like him. I don't want him to have any third class, or even second class man with him if anything should happen. Not that I expect anything to happen. Physically, Benson is sound as a nut. Mentally—"

He took a turn about the room, frowning. He faced me: "Benson is an autocrat. That's how he built up his fame and fortune. Since he has practically retired, this habit of mind has grown stronger. His viewpoint is feudal. He doesn't have servants—they are retainers. This same point of view he applies equally to his associates, friends or guests. Upon a ship, a ship which he commands, there are peculiar opportunities for the expansion of this mental quality. And there are peculiar reasons why upon the Susan Ann it might so expand. Even to the point of explosion. If it does—I'd like you to be there."

Well, from Kurtson that was something indeed, and nothing now except his own command could have stopped me from going on the Susan Ann. I said: "When do I go?"

He clapped a hand on my shoulder. "Good lad! Honestly, all I think you'll have to worry about is the usual run of crew ailments. Some seasick-

ness, of course. If Lady Fitz-Manton takes a fancy to you, she'll probably develop symptoms. But she has that exalted gigolo Boriloff with her, so she probably won't."

He laughed, and with such warm relief that I felt the glow his trust in me had brought grow warmer still.

I repeated: "When do I go?"

"How soon can you go? The Susan Ann reached Miami this morning."

"If you'll arrange with the hospital," I said, "I'll hop the plane tomorrow."

"Wait for me," he said, and went out.

I marshalled what I knew of Benson, which wasn't much. Corporation counsel and famous—some called it notorious—immensely wealthy, suspected of sitting in on many a political jackpot, a fighter and a hater, a bad man to have as an enemy.

I had seen pictures of his daughter. A slim girl with broad, low forehead, determined little chin, and eyes too big for her heart-shaped face. She looked something like Reynolds' portrait of Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante. She also looked like a nice girl, and her name was Penelope.

I knew more about the Susan Ann. Benson's great-grandfather had been a skipper in the China trade back in the '40s, owner of one of the first of the Yankee clippers. It, too, had been named the Susan Ann. Benson was proud of his ancestor; collected everything he had owned that he could find. He couldn't collect the original Susan Ann because she had been long broken up, but one of his scouts had been lucky enough to unearth her plans and a crude but obviously accurate old painting of her. About five years ago, after Benson had become very rich and had turned most of his business over to his partners, he had built a clipper which outwardly was an exact copy of the original, and christened her the Susan Ann. Inside, she was fitted with modern sea-going luxury, except the Captain's quarters, which Benson used for himself, and the dining saloon. Both of these were exact copies of those in his great-grandfather Benson's boat. The reborn Susan Ann had Diesel auxiliaries, but they were never used if there was wind enough to push the clipper along.

I had gotten that far when Kurtson came back.

"It's all right," he said. "You need take only your own medical kit along. There's a complete medical and surgical outfit on the boat. Even a small laboratory. How are you off for clothes?"

I said I was fairly well provided, and could get what I lacked in a few hours.

"Well," he said, "goodbye and good luck. It ought to be a good rest."

A good rest . . . I was to remember that often.

I spent the afternoon shopping and putting my affairs in order. And Thursday morning, following a confirmatory message to Kurtson from Benson instructing me to come straight to the boat. I was streaking south on the plane to Miami.

McTeague was the first I met of the Benson party. As I got off the plane I heard my name mentioned, and my attention was focussed upon a head of red hair approaching me, about as spectacular a red head as I had ever seen. It was unruly hair, a peculiar copper, and the glaring

lights of the landing field seemed to stimulate in it a radiation of its own. I stared at it, fascinated, and then its owner laughed and I began to stammer some apology. He cut me short:

"Forget it. Score one, in your favor. If you'd ignored this torch I'd have said of you—too polite, or too sophisticated, or too unobservant to be a good doctor. Big Jim makes me sleep port. He's afraid if he put me starboard some passing mariner might see me some night and get our lights all confused."

He laughed again, and held out his hand. He was about my height, which is just two inches under six feet, and in his early thirties I judged. But his broad shoulders and deep chest gave an impression of bigness my own scrawniness cannot achieve. He had clear grey-blue eyes set rather too widely apart, a short and pugnacious nose, a square and as pugnacious a chin, cheek-bones almost as well defined as a Slav's, a wide and humorous mouth, and a good forehead. Not a beauty by any means; his face more that of a Hermes than an Apollo, but eminently likeable . . . without doubt this swift summing-up was transmuted muscularly in the grip of my hand, and was recognized as such, for his oddly searching, impersonal gaze became suddenly friendly.

"I'm McTeague," he said. "One of what is somewhat humorously called Mr. Benson's partners. If you're wondering how I knew you, Benson wired Dr. Kurtson for a minute description of you, which he sent in one thousand words, even to the shape of your ears and the scar on your right wrist. If you wonder why you are worth one thousand words of telegraphed description—rush and collect, full rate—Mr. Benson has to be cautious and cannot run the risk of any masquerading evil-doer. If you wonder why I, partner McTeague, came to collect you—it's because one of my duties is the preliminary survey of important unknowns. And if you wonder why I'm spilling all this to you using so many words, it's because I'm a lawyer and therefore couldn't think of making one word do if I can use ten."

I laughed, my liking for McTeague growing.

"Well, come along," he said. "You look O. K. to me. But Benson is our Supreme Court."

He whistled to a porter who took my bags. He led the way to a speedy looking little roadster. There was a girl in it; a slight girl whose face was almost hidden under a big-brimmed hat.

"Throw the bags in the back, son," McTeague said to the porter, and tossed him a quarter; then said to the girl: "This is Dr. Fenimore, Pen. He looks kosher to me."

The girl tipped back her hat and smiled. I recognized her as Penelope Benson. She was prettier even than her pictures. Her eyes, though too large for her face by classical standards, had nothing of the protruding aspect of the hyperthyroidic type so much admired by certain past and present painters who, of course, did not know that what they took for beauty was, in fact, disease. The color of her eyes was close to that of the Jersey Beauty Viola, which I particularly admire, and they were the only eyes I had ever found with that peculiar shade of purple. Very interesting.

Though slight, her development was admirable. Her nerve responses, I thought, must be excellent, her emotions pleasantly under control. I had the idea she could quite as happily manage a hut as a palace.

She gave me her hand and said: "If Mike is satisfied, so am I. Climb in."

McTeague swung behind the wheel, and we hummed away. Penelope said to McTeague:

"I hope Lady Fitz and Boriloff will be at the dock. Jim's all set to come in on the flow and sail on the ebb. He'll be furious if they're late."

McTeague said, morosely: "If they never reach the dock it'll still be too soon. Where did they go, Pen?"

"Shopping."

McTeague asked, nastily: "Boriloff needs some new camisoles?"

Pen giggled: "No. Randolph has some of those new bathing suits made out of glass. Lady Fitz is curious about them."

McTeague grunted: "I'll bet she is, the damned exhibitionist."

"Oh, well, let Deborah worry," said Penelope.

"Deborah," said McTeague to me, "is Lady Fitz-Manton's maid. She has fallen arches, and a morality as high as they are low. Treat Deborah for her flat feet and study her elevated morality, Doctor Fenimore—and then write a paper about which made which. Do it right, and it'll make you famous."

Pen giggled again: "How about substituting Lady Fitz for the flat feet, Mike? And throw in Boriloff. Make it a trilogy."

"No, Pen," said McTeague. "I insist that Deborah's feet are heavier in the cosmic balance than is Lady Fitz. I grant you that she's a bitch, but her roots stop far short of hell. I grant you, too, that Boriloff is a Narcissian bastard, but still only a symptom of Lady Fitz. No, I am for the flat feet. And I am for Deborah. She takes the bad taste out of my ears after I have had to listen to the other two."

"Mike," said Penelope admiringly, "you get descriptiver and descriptiver."

I had listened with some surprise. Hospital frankness I am, of course, accustomed to, but I am somewhat unused to social contacts and this conversation was beyond my depth. Penelope didn't look like the kind of girl with whom one would use such words, nor, in fact, the kind of girl who would tolerate them. Yet she seemed only amused. She asked me:

"Know anything about Lady Fitz?"

I said I didn't. She said:

"She's really quite interesting. She amuses Jim, that's my father, no end. It's why she's along. And of course she wouldn't come without Boriloff. Lady Fitz does interior decorating for very rich people who don't know enough to do it themselves. She charges enormously. Alexis Boriloff is on her payroll. She says he has a marvellous color sense. He's her lover, of course, and I don't like him. Not because he's her lover, but—oh, well," prattled Penelope, "when he kisses my hand I'm always sorry I haven't a glove on . . . you know. Still, he's amusing too—at times."

McTeague grunted. Penn said:

"But he *is* amusing, Mike. He has a beautiful baritone voice, Doctor, and after he has drunk two bottles of brandy he can sing the drunken song from Boris Godonoff to perfection. The trouble is he *will* break up the furniture. But I'm told he's not nearly as bad as some of the others have been. Lady Fitz, Doctor, is the one who invented the phrase—'A husband is as much use as a headache.' Lady Fitz's deepest emotions are stirred with difficulty. It must be something exotic. Boriloff's predecessor was a Turkish wrestler . . ." She paused.

"I think it must be glandular," she said, meditatively.

McTeague grinned. He said: "Well, the Doc'll have plenty of chance for diagnosis. And by the way, there's the Susan Ann."

We were running now along the Bay and I followed his pointing finger.

I know little about ships, but had I been a master mariner I could not have realized more fully what a thing of beauty was the Susan Ann. And even today when I think of how she looked that night, and the death of all that beauty, there is a smarting in my eyes and a heaviness on my heart. She was moving slowly into the harbor. Every sail was spread and the searchlights were on their snowiness, so that all was soft purple darkness around her and she seemed to drift, poised upon the waters. It was as though some Goddess of Ships had painted her upon the dark soft purple of sky and water. Or rather, it was as though some lovely ghost of the brave old days had put on materiality and was sailing out of the past. She was not just a ship—she was alive. And I read courage and patience in her, and strange sea-wisdom . . . and suddenly I knew why for ten thousand years in every tongue a ship is thought of and spoken of as a woman.

Those of you who do not love ships may not understand this, but those who do will understand. And again I say that when I think of the Susan Ann as I saw her that night, and think of what was her end, the tears are in my eyes and there is a weight on my heart. For I think of her less as of a ship destroyed than as of some high-spirited, gracious and lovely woman defiled and murdered . . .

How long I stared at the clipper, so realizing her, I do not know, but I became aware that McTeague had stopped the car and that he and Pen were studying me, curiously.

McTeague said to Penelope: "Love at first sight."

Penn said, seriously: "If he can put what was in his face into words, Jim will build him a hospital."

McTeague said: "I told you he was all right."

Pen said: "Now I know he is."

I said nothing, still thrilling to that swift revelation of beauty. The car sped on, and we came to the dock. The Susan Ann had dropped anchor and lay waiting, her sails cut to riding rig. McTeague turned the car over to an attendant and we hurried down to the end where a launch was waiting. A man and woman rose and greeted Penelope. I was introduced to them—Lady Fitz-Manton and Mr. Alexis Boriloff. The woman said,

indifferently: "How d'you do," in a high-pitched, rather musical voice; the man was more cordial. Beyond a cool nod, neither paid any attention to McTeague.

I looked them over as we swung out to the clipper. Lady Fitz-Manton was tall, straight and slender, with the peculiar angularity so many Englishwomen possess. Her hair was a rich auburn, short and curly; I suspected henna had much to do with its color. Her face was small and shrewd, and she had the greenest eyes; very clear, very bright, birdlike and wide apart; an excellent forehead, a determined small nose and well-shaped but thin-lipped mouth; a somewhat hard but decidedly attractive exterior.

I don't know why, but I had expected to find Boriloff effeminate in appearance. He wasn't at all. He was as masculine a looking person as I'd ever seen; a good six feet tall, not heavy, muscular, long-legged. His eyes were a curious golden brown and the heavy lids, or the tilt of them, gave them a look of half-sleepy insolence. The breadth of the face at the cheek bones and their prominence showed him pure Slav. He was clean-shaven, his lips full, sensual, mobile—the mouth of a singer or an actor. I couldn't see why McTeague had called him a Narcissian, but reflected that his definition of the term might be different from that of a medical man. One betraying sign was his ears, which were small and close to his head and distinctly pointed. He had close cropped, black hair. At first sight I rather liked Boriloff and wondered at Pen's admitted physical repulsion for him . . . or was it physical?

I turned to look at the clipper. Close, she was quite as beautiful as she had been when I had seen her from afar. More so, more friendly, more human—welcoming.

And now we were beside her. And now I was on her deck. And someone bellowed:

"Did you get him, Mike?"

At the skipper's wheel, fifty feet away, a long and gangling figure clasped sinewy hands around the spokes. His bald head glistened under the lights. He was bent forward peering at us with puckered eyes; and his nose was long and thin, his mouth wide and thin-lipped, his chin pointed like Pen's but longer and none would have called it elfin.

McTeague shouted: "Yes, sir. Here he is."

He said to me, low: "That's Benson."

But I had known it was Benson before McTeague had spoken, and the thought came that he might have well been the old Yankee skipper, his great-grandfather, and that his passion for recreating the Susan Ann went far deeper than whim.

Benson bellowed again: "Is he all right?"

McTeague shouted: "Yes. Want to talk to him?"

"Later on."

McTeague grinned. He said:

"You'll have to get used to informality on this boat. We'll stow your stuff in your cabin. You can go down and unpack, or stay up on deck and watch us go out. Benson'll be an hour before he gives up the wheel."

I decided I would stay on deck. He said: "All

right. Then come over and meet the rest of the circus."

There was a group around Penelope and he led me toward it. A square-built, demure woman was pattering up to Lady Fitz-Manton. She walked like a plump pigeon in a hurry. Her face was as placid as the outside of an egg, and she was Scotch as a scone. She took the parcels from Boriloff and pattered away.

"Deborah!" McTeague said.

He joined the group and I was introduced. There was a rotund, rosy and smiling little man in the uniform of an Episcopalian clergyman who I learned was the Rev. Dr. Swastlow. And there was a tall, slim and very dark man of about McTeague's age who was Thaddeus Chadwick, the second of Benson's junior partners.

The Rev. Dr. Swastlow seemed to be the typical rich man's parson; urbane, tolerant, precisely the kind of shepherd to explain away that misunderstanding about it being easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man into Heaven.

His sister Flora was a beauty—a langourous wave-lined brunette with eyes she knew how to use, unbobbed black hair coiled around a small head, ripe and round breasts and a mouth that assuredly could not have been among the temptations of St. Anthony. She had a soft and husky contralto, so pleasant to hear that you seldom realized it was saying nothing. I had the thought that her extraordinarily attractive exterior was quite as illusory, that there were no banked fires in Flora; that what there was of warmth lay on the surface, and that the mind behind the outward screen was decidedly chill and calculating. An insulated ice-box in a tropic setting.

None paid me much attention after the introductions, chattering among themselves as the anchor chains rattled over the winches, the sails were set and the Susan Ann's bow swung toward open sea. I listened for a time observing them closely, since until now I had never been in anything but hospital proximity with their types. When we began to rock to the open sea they dispersed. McTeague took me to my cabin. He said: "Benson will send for you, but I don't know when. Hours don't mean much to him when he's sailing the clipper. I'd get into my pajamas and sleep till he does send."

At the door he hesitated. "It's a queer crowd on board. None queerer than Big Jim himself. I hope you'll get along. I'm as queer as any. Anyway, I'm hoping you stick."

He went out. I unpacked, and put on my pajamas. I smoked a cigarette and reviewed impressions from my first brief contact. I thought of Chadwick. Rivalry for Penelope Benson might be one source, but I had the feeling that it went deeper. I thought that Flora Swastlow felt no ordinary interest in McTeague, and bore no goodwill toward Penelope. And I thought that Boriloff found Flora very interesting indeed, and that the marked acidity of some of Lady Fitz-Manton's remarks to him while I had been on deck indicated that she knew it.

A queer crowd, I reflected, even as McTeague had said. But in the light of Kurston's confidences, the one who interested me most was Benson;

standing at the helm of his ship just as his great-grandfather must have stood at the wheel of his own, voyage after voyage; thinking as he conceived that ancestor must have thought. Ruler of the small world of the Susan Ann. Its high, low and middle justice on the high seas . . . with that thought, Kurston's apprehensions grew sharper in outline.

I didn't think for long. The gentle rise and fall of the clipper was hypnotic. I went to sleep.

I woke up to find Benson sitting beside me, long legs crossed, smoking a cigarette and studying me. His eyes were cold grey under shaggy, iron-grey brows, and they had a network of fine wrinkles at the corners. Hair-lines such as those etched by sun and water at the corners of the eyes of old sailors. There was a touch of humor about the eyes, though, and a touch of it on the thin lips. I sat up and said:

"Sorry if I've kept you waiting. I expected you to send for me."

He said: "I like to watch, while he's asleep, anyone who may be of importance to me. Their minds are off guard. Wide open. I get things."

I looked at him in astonishment, not knowing whether it was a cue to laugh or nod solemn assent. He repeated:

"Yes, I get things. Things the cleverest cross-examination couldn't bring out. It's a trick I learned from my great-grandfather, Cap'n James Benson—ever hear of him?"

I said I had; that he was one of the first to sail a Yankee Clipper; a great seaman; that his ship had also been named the Susan Ann and that I understood the boat I was on was its exact duplicate. Benson was plainly pleased.

"Not the *exact* duplicate," he said. "But some day I'll make it so. This cabin, for example—"

He looked around it with plain distaste, then said: "But this thing of sleeping men . . . many a time when old Cap'n Benson couldn't get at the truth, or suspected one of his crew, he'd slip in to them in the night when they were asleep and sit there, gathering what came from the unguarded minds. Once he scotched a mutiny before it could raise its head. It's told in his own log."

I thought that such evidence would hardly stand in the courts where Benson had practiced, and that he would be the first to object to its admission if he were on the other side. But I did not say so, and considering him, was glad I had not laughed.

He changed the subject abruptly. "You're over thirty, Kurston says, and rate a master's ticket in medicine. Why aren't you sailing your own ship?"

I explained briefly my reasons for serving at the hospital. He nodded.

"But a man can be a mate too long, mister—even a first mate. Better to take your own ship out young, even if you wreck her. Why did you want to sail with me?"

I answered, a little irritated:

"Because Dr. Kurston thought you needed a good doctor on board. And because he thought I needed a good vacation."

He laughed at that. "Straight answer, and I like it. So you came both for me and for a rest? Well,

maybe you'll get it and maybe you won't. The sea is a woman, and therefore unpredictable. Things happen on the sea that couldn't happen on shore."

And many a time in the following weeks I was to remember that.

Again he abruptly changed the subject: "McTeague tells me you like the Susan Ann."

I tried to put into words something of what I had felt when I had first seen the clipper. I was sincere about it, and he knew I was. He listened impassively, watching me closely.

"And when I saw you at the wheel," I ended, "I thought—the old Susan Ann hasn't come out of the past alone . . . she's brought her old skipper with her."

"So you thought that, did you?" He got up from the chair. "So that's what you thought. Well, at any rate, you've come closer to seeing the Susan Ann as I see her than anybody else. I owe Kurtson an unexpected debt."

Pensively he rubbed his chin, then beckoned me. "Come to my cabin."

I followed him out the door. The captain's cabin, as in the old days, lay aft the wheel. He held open the door, and as I passed in I felt that I had stepped into the heart of the old clipper. The cabin stretched almost across the stern, two square ports astern, two round ones port and starboard; a window at each side of the door. Its walls were of teak, black and dully lustrous as though polished by the hands of years; across its ceiling rough-adzed beams. There was a big black table over which hung an old copper lamp; and it was no electric bulb within it which cast the solemn brown shadows about the cabin; I guessed the lamp fed with whale-oil as had been the similar, perhaps the same, lamp on the first Susan Ann. There were niches on the wall in which were other smaller lamps with hurricane shades. There was an old sea desk over which was a telltale. On each side of the cabin was a great chest. There were rich hangings from China and from India. But all these I took note of later, my eyes caught by a painting upon the wall opposite the door.

At first I thought it was a portrait of Benson. And then as I moved closer I saw that this could not be, for it was clearly old and the dress that of a sea captain of a hundred years ago. Yet line for line, feature for feature, bald head, cold grey eyes, long thin nose with flaring nostrils from which deeply extended wrinkles ran down to the corners of the thin-lipped, wide mouth, it was as the man who stood beside me might be twenty years from now. And I knew now there was something far deeper than whim in Benson's passion for his ship. In the third generation the chromosomes, that microscopic bundle of faggots in which heredity is neatly tied up, and which had made old Cap'n Benson what he was, had been duplicated; they had reproduced his physical pattern in his great-grandson. Had they also reproduced the mental pattern, that neural network in the brain called by some the personality and by others the soul? Probably; to some degree certainly; and to whatever that degree therefore the man beside me *was* the old captain. My first fleeting impression had been correct—the soul of the old Susan Ann, reincarnate in the new one,

had brought her old master with her out of the past. New flesh and bone, as she was new timber and sail—but in spirit or personality, the same. The interesting problem was — how much the same?

He said, as though he had read my thought, with a curious unquestioning certainty that without telling me I knew of whom the portrait was:

"And often when I'm at the wheel I feel that he's inside me . . . looking through my eyes, listening with my ears, his hands on the spokes as if mine were just gloves . . . yes, and here in this cabin . . ."

He broke off, a glint of suspicion in the pale eyes. "Kurtson tell you anything about that?"

I answered: "No."

But now I knew what Kurtson meant when he had warned me that there were peculiar reasons why when upon the clipper Benson's passion for dominance might expand to the point, as he had put it, of explosion.

He studied me a moment, and nodded as if satisfied.

"Sit down."

He sat silent, studying me; then launched into a monologue upon his crew. As far as possible he had picked them from the families of the men who had sailed the first Susan Ann. They were New Englanders, most of them — State of Maine men, Gloucester men, New Bedford men. Fishermen who knew sail, how to handle sail on the Newfoundland Banks four seasons through. Fourteen of them, all able seamen, salt bitten, wind beaten and sea pickled.

Captain Johnson came straight down from a Gloucester first mate of the old Susan Ann. Benson had found him up in New Brunswick, where the family had migrated. A master mariner, by God! Faithful to the old traditions steadily crowded out by these steam popinjays. Two mates, tough lads; two quartermasters, just as hard. He paid 'em well, paid them damned well, but they were worth it.

The chief engineer was MacKenzie, a black Scotchman. He liked MacKenzie—but damn his lousy engines. They didn't belong. He never used them unless he had to, tried to forget them. Still, he had to make some concession to his office — after all, he had to be where he'd said he'd be, around the time he'd said he'd be there. When his daughter married, and he didn't think that would be long, he was going to break away from the office entirely. Then he'd tear out the engines, rip out all the damned bedizened cabins, sail away on the Susan Ann as she ought to be, following old Cap'n Benson's track to the Far East.

The crew knew what he meant to do and were all for it. Even his two cooks. Good cooks, none better; a Basque named Felipe and Slam Bang, a Philadelphia nigger, pretty nearly as good, who helped Felipe; called him Slam Bang because old Cap'n Benson had a black cook named so. Old Cap'n Benson liked his eating, was choosy about it. He could live on slum and hardtack if he had to, but he didn't like it—

And then six bells rang, and Benson got up abruptly and said: "I haven't even talked to Kurtson as I have to you. I'll probably be sorry I did—but it's done me good. Good night."

He opened the door and I went back to my cabin.

Chapter II

DEBORAH LOOKS THEM OVER

It had been three o'clock when I turned in, but I was wide-awake before the sun had been up an hour. The Susan Ann had cradled me; now the whispering chuckle of ripples along her side was telling me that I had slept long enough. I looked out the port. There was a stiff following wind that whipped the crests of the waves into streaming milk-white pennons. Golden weed threaded the blue sea like a tapestry. Flying fish skittered out of water, flashed and flittered and dived like pygmy planes into foam-flecked troughs of molten sapphire. A wave raised itself, and hung for a breath so that the sun had time to make of its peak a huge emerald; poised in its gleaming heart was a barracuda, glaring about for the flying fish that had escaped it. The wave swept on, and the barracuda vanished. I took a hasty shower, dressed, and went on dock.

McTeague was leaning at the rail. Beside him was Flora Swastlow, her scanty dress whipped tight around her by the wind; pressing against McTeague. They turned as I came up, and there was a swift flicker of relief in McTeague's eyes, and as swift a flash of irritation in Flora's. She suffered nothing by daylight. She had that creamy olive skin found sometimes in its perfection with the brunette; and it was guiltless of makeup as were the scarlet lips. She was so glowingly beautiful that I wondered whether the fire that seemed to be within her might not after all be real. Whatever her feeling toward me for interrupting, she gave me courteous greeting.

McTeague said: "Cap'n Johnson's been asking about you. I'll take you to him. See you at breakfast, Flora."

We walked aft. He asked: "Have a long session with Big Jim?"

"Not so long. He seemed to think I'd do."

There was a chunky sailor at the wheel and beside him Captain Johnson, a man long and lanky as Benson himself, a weather-beaten humorous face, clear little screwed-up grey eyes and a shock of sandy hair. He held out a gnarled hand as McTeague introduced me.

"There are a few formalities," he said. "We'll go down to my cabin and get them over. After breakfast I suppose you'll want to make the customary post-port-leave inspection of the crew."

He gave brief instructions to the helmsman. As we went down the ladder I saw the flutter of Flora Swastlow's skirt not far away. So, evidently, did McTeague, for he asked whether we would mind him going with us. He loitered in the cabin after I had answered the regulation questions and signed the necessary papers; delaying us on one pretext or another until a mellow bell rang.

"Breakfast," said McTeague. "Come along. The

Master likes us to be punctual."

But he showed no great hurry when we had left Captain Johnson's cabin, and they were all at table when we entered the dining saloon. Benson sat at the head, with Pen at his right hand and Lady Fitz-Manton at his left, Boriloff beside her. The Rev. Dr. Swastlow sat beside Pen and next to him was Flora. Chadwick lolled in the chair beside her. He jumped up as we entered, stood back looking at McTeague and waved invitation to the vacant seat. There was mockery in the gesture.

McTeague flushed, and said: "Sit still, Chad. I've the Doc in tow."

Flora cast him a reproachful glance. Pen waved to me, warmly friendly. I saw Benson's sharp eyes take in the empty chair, dart to Chadwick's face, then to McTeague's, dwell for an instant on Flora and then upon Pen.

Chadwick said, contritely: "Oh, I'm sorry—I only thought—"

He sat down without saying what it was that he had thought. But McTeague's face grew redder, and Benson's eyes once more traveled swiftly over the four.

Lady Fitz's bird-like face was rapt. She said, dreamily: "This is a morning when God loves His world. Don't you feel it, Mr. McTeague?"

McTeague said: "No."

Lady Fitz started, then waggled a reproving finger: "Then you are not in harmony. You are on a wrong vibration, Mr. McTeague. You must repeat—'God loves His world. God loves everything that is in His world. I am a part of God's world. Therefore God loves me.' Over and over, until you feel that you are again in tune."

I looked at her in some astonishment, but apparently she was quite in earnest. Pen giggled, and said: "Come on, Mike. We'll all join in and help you." The Rev. Dr. Swastlow seemed slightly pained; Benson's eyes were twinkling. McTeague's face turned redder. He said, with emphasis:

"Tripe!"

Pen giggled again, and said: "Oh Mike—how rude!"

Lady Fitz said: "How crude, you mean! My word, but you *are* feeling badly, Mr. McTeague."

And the breakfast went on. It went on leisurely, and as it did so I felt more and more puzzled, more and more an outsider, more and more an observer to totally unfamiliar fauna. In my hospital experience I had, of course, come in contact with many curious phases of what one might call aberrant mentality, but never with a group that, outwardly of so normal a semblance, betrayed such peculiarities of speech and behavior.

They appeared to have no reticences. They spoke whatever came into their minds with the most appalling frankness; that is, with the exception of the Rev. Dr. Swastlow who did, however, accept everything with benign tolerance. They brought up and discussed minutely subjects that I thought fitting only for intensely private or scientific consideration. Not one, not even Benson, seemed to have any consideration for the feelings of anyone present. Although now and then one or another would grow angry, it made no difference; they continued to insult, or to discuss or analyze each other as though they were simply laboratory

specimens. I was to grow used to this during following days, but on this first morning there were moments when I was thoroughly disconcerted.

Boriloff was moody, brooding, taking no part in the talk. Lady Fitz whispered to him now and again, but he only shook his head and muttered. Toward the close of the breakfast she took his hand and patted it, and said in her clearest, clipped English:

"Alexis, tell us. What is troubling you? Your aura is clouded. Your vibrations are inharmonious. They are sinister, Alexis. They are overpowering me. Alone, I cannot combat them. Tell us what is troubling you, dear friend. Empty your mind to us, and open it. All will concentrate and fill it with good thoughts, happy thoughts. Will we not, my friends?"

She looked at us, hands outspread. I stared, startled, expecting some manifestation of amusement or at least surprise at this extraordinary appeal. But no one seemed to take it as odd. Pen trilled:

"Splendid. Of course we will concentrate. Empty your mind, Mr. Boriloff."

McTeague said: "As long as he empties it himself, it's all right with me. And I won't carry anything out."

None paid any attention to this rather unsavory implication. Boriloff arose, dramatically. He said: "I have had hell of night. Tormented, tortured." His hands went to his head, throwing it back, covering his eyes. McTeague clapped his hands, softly. He said: "Fine, Boriloff. Second act of Aida. Rhadames registers despair. Fine."

Boriloff waved, as though sweeping away some insect beneath contempt. He rested his hands on the table; he whispered: "I have had my warning. It is that which shadows my soul."

Lady Fitz paled; she whispered: "The—the serpents?"

Boriloff nodded, slowly, solemnly: "The serpents! You do not know, my friends, so I tell. When danger threatens Boriloffs—it is so for seven hundred years—three serpents come in dream. They intertwine and become one. That one serpent speaks . . ." Boriloff's voice became a vibrant hissing, quite uncanny—"Last night they came to me. They twined and became one. He spoke . . ." He shuddered, and Lady Fitz stared at him as though she had been a frightened bird before that same serpent.

Flora Swastlow whispered: "How terrible!"

Pen said: "Gosh!"

McTeague said, briskly: "Bet you ten dollars I can tell you what it said, Boriloff."

Boriloff glared at him: "What—you can tell?"

"Sure." McTeague was cheerfully confident. "Take the bet?"

Pen said: "Oh, do, Mr. Boriloff. Call his bluff. But make him put up odds. Mike's fey at times—you know, second sight and all that."

Boriloff looked about helplessly, like an actor who sees his big scene being spoiled. He managed a wolfish grin and rumbled:

"Tell."

"O.K.," said McTeague. "It said—'Alec, cut your vodkas down from three to one.' Easy," he addressed the rest of the table. "Primary Freud. Snakes—liquor. Three snakes—three liquors. Snakes turn into one—subconscious warning

to cut three drinks down to one. Why the vodka? Boriloff's pet hooch."

He arose, bowed in grotesque imitation of the Russian, said: "Thanks for the applause."

Boriloff's face was murderous. Lady Fitz said: "My word!"

Short, but she packed into it all the disgust a queen would feel at finding a cockroach in her soup. She drew Boriloff down beside her. Benson asked mildly, quite as though Boriloff were not there:

"What's the idea in getting people's hair up, Mike? Boriloff has his faults, but he's harmless and I like his voice. And now here you've put Lady Fitz all off her vibraion. What's the sense of it?"

McTeague answered earnestly: "An approving conscience, sir. Public service. The man who gets people mad is a benefactor. Better, oh better far to be a jumping bean in the frying pan scattering hot fat, than a complaisant hunk of butter meekly melting in squamous resignation."

Pen said, with unfeigned admiration: "Gosh, Mike, can you say that again?"

McTeague did.

Chadwick said, dryly: "The kind of service that gets you a knife in the back."

McTeague replied, as dryly: "You ought to know, Chad."

Chadwick laughed, but McTeague's point had bitten, for now it was Chadwick who reddened.

Shortly after, the breakfast broke up. I spent the rest of the morning looking over the crew and getting my office into shape. When I went on deck Benson was at the wheel, the Rev. Dr. Swastlow beside him, reading. The others were up on the foredeck, the women in shorts and halters, and the men in shorts, chattering and laughing, all animosities apparently forgotten; and now and then Boriloff's really fine baritone would be raised in a snatch of song.

Luncheon turned out to be a meal which anyone could have wherever he wanted, Big Jim's mandate for attendance holding only for breakfast and supper. At Captain Johnson's invitation I took mine with him, and met MacKenzie, Henderson, the first mate, and Smithson, the second; the first a typical, gaunt New Englander fishing-bank skipper, and the second a chunky hard-muscled, hard-mouthed and hard-eyed Nova Scotian who looked as though he had been hard-boiled in pots of trouble on all the seven seas. He was taciturn, and had a habit of staring as though away down deep he held some amusing opinion about one. I didn't like Smithson much at first sight—and was destined to like him still less. The radio operator was named Brookes, a fine, studious, sensitive lad of around twenty-four. Poor Brookes . . .

That afternoon I met Deborah. Recalling McTeague's and Penelope's suggestions as to her value as a study, I gave her more than an ordinary looking over. Her Scotch face with her round, slightly protruberant, innocent brown eyes, was even more placid than my first glimpse of her had told me. She had a rather wide mouth with prim lips, and a determined little round nose like a button. She looked as though there was nothing in the world that could startle, frighten or even surprise her; as though, some way, she had dis-



SQUATTERS

Hannes Bok 1947

covered that there was only one answer to every question, and that she had found it. This might be a world of illusion, but Deborah knew the Rock and clung to it like a limpet. Most marked was the truly extraordinary impression she gave of utter, complete respectability. It was almost tangible, more material than her clothing. One could no more think of Deborah having a moral lapse than a well-behaved hen hatching out a scorpion. I felt a fleeting sympathy for Lady Fitz.

Deborah, it appeared, was always "a bit uneasy" on shipboard. As she described her symptoms it became plain to me that it was less her discomfort that had brought her to me than her curiosity. There were a number of quite shrewdly phrased questions which she put to me, entirely unconnected with my capacity as ship's doctor. Among them what were my "releegous convections." She had the Scotch burr, though not marked except when deeply moved, and I will abstain from indicating much of it when quoting her. I told her that my immediate ancestors had been Presbyterians, but that I was somewhat careless about the matter. When leaving, with some simple medicine I gave her, she remarked that there was an "unco Godless company" on board, and that I might do well to recall some of the precepts my parents had taught me. Also that she would have more to say to me on this subject, since a doctor and a minister were in many ways alike, meaning no disrespect to the minister. I told her if she meant anything she might say to me would be held in the same sacred confidence, she was right. Replying that this was exactly what she meant, she left me.

For the next four days, one hour on the Susan Ann was exactly like that which had gone before. Battles at table and general truce out in the sunshine on deck. I noticed with amusement that Flora Swastlow's pursuit of McTeague grew steadily more intensive, and more subtle; the latter perhaps due to the coaching of Chadwick, whether simply to bedevil McTeague or for a more personal reason I could not determine. That Pen noticed it I was sure, but like me it only seemed to amuse her. That Boriloff had not given up his own chase of the minister's sister was very evident. And that Benson was watching the whole play with a half-cynical interest was equally so.

But one learns to adapt oneself quickly to conditions on board ship, and soon I found myself paying small attention to what, on that first morning, had so aroused my wonder. I spent much of my time in the tiny laboratory.

It was on the afternoon of the fifth day that I had a curious conversation with Deborah. She came to my office with a bag of knitting, and sat down placidly with never a by-your-leave. I was reading, lazily, had nothing to do and bade her welcome.

"Her Liddyship," explained Deborah, "is taking a nap. I have been dismissed for a time because her Liddyship tells me it would give her bad dreams to have me with her, or even near her. Her exact words, Doctor Fenimore, were—'I would be sure to have nothing but respectable dreams. I couldn't bear it. Go as far away from me as you can without walking overboard. Not that I am thinking of you, you respectable creature, but it would be inconvenient for me at the mo-

ment to have you drown!'"

For the first time I saw something like human expression on Deborah's face, a quiver of indignation; her needles shook slightly.

"Creature!" said Deborah. "*Respectable creature!* And I could walk overboard except for the inconvenience it might cause her Liddyship!"

She dropped a stitch, recovered it, and said: "And so I determined to seek for a time the companionship of a God-fearing person."

A little stunned by this entirely undeserved tribute to my piety, I could only bow and say again that she was welcome. It then developed that Deborah felt a necessity for justifying herself.

"You have no doubt wondered, Dr. Fenimore," she said, once more calm, "why I, a God-fearing, respectable Scot woman, remain with such a worldly woman as her Liddyship. I will explain. As a Calvinist, I believe in predestination. I believe that the Lord has already separated the sheep from the goats, and that this He did from His Beginning. It makes no deference what His Elect may do—their destination is Heaven. It makes no deference what good or evil these whom He has damned may do—their destination is Hell. I know that I am of the elect. I am respectable because I wish to be. But if I was unrespectable, it would make no deference. I could be," said Deborah, startlingly, "the Whore of Babylon, but my place would still be safe in Heaven. Her Liddyship, I am sorry to say, is of the predestined damned. No matter how wanton, how wicked, she cannot be more damned than she already is. Nor can her wantonness and wickedness soil me. Why, therefore, should it matter to me how wanton and wicked she may be? And besides," said Deborah, "she pays me very well. I trust that I have fully answered the question I have ob-sairved in your mind?"

I said that she had, wholly.

"Understanding why I tolerate her Liddyship, you will no doubt ask why I tolerate Mr. Boriloff, considering the relationship that undoubtedly exists between them."

"I ask nothing of the sort," I said uncomfortably. "Anyway, it's none of my business."

"I will tell you," went on Deborah, implacably. "It is because he is but a part of her Liddyship's wanton wickedness. He is nothing in himself, you pairceive. Or if he is, he *too* is one of the damned. Therefore it makes no deference to me nor lessens my own respectableness, who it is that completes her wanton wickedness. I make myself clear?"

"Crystal clear," I answered.

"There have been worse than Mr. Boriloff," continued Deborah, making an intricate loop in her knitting. "Far worse, if comparisons are possible in instruments of wanton wickedness. I mind me how they met. Her Liddyship was in the states at the time. She had a fine house on the sea. Mr. Boriloff had met her once in Paris. He is really a noble Russian. Of the old regime. He was penniless. But he had friends who contrerebuted the money for him to come to the States. He was to pay them back with fine interest if the venture proved successful. He came and re-introduced himself to her Liddyship. At first she was not much interested, although he amused her with his singing and antics and she let him live at her

house by the sea. But still, he made little progress.

"Then," said Deborah, laying down her knitting and leaning closer, "it was about two o'clock in the morning. There was none but her Leddyship and me in the house. There came a dreadful hammering at the door, like a foray. And we heard Mr. Boriloff roaring for admission. Her Leddyship moaned and shuddered and I asked if I should yet.' And then suddenly the door broke with a call the police. But her Leddyship said—'Not terrible noise. Ye ken I was all gooseflesh, but still her Leddyship would not let me call. 'I am brave, Deborah,' she said. 'I shall face him myself—whatever comes.' And then we heard Mr. Boriloff shouting and thundering up the stairs. He appeared at her Leddyship's bedroom door. He seemed very drunk, although later, as you shall see, I had my doubts. Her Leddyship shrieked and fled. Mr. Boriloff pursued. Her Leddyship was clad but in a silken nightsheeft. She sought refuge in a far room. And there Mr. Boriloff overtook her. Her Leddyship stood shuddering, with her hands over her face, but she was brave and did not scream. Then Mr. Boriloff laughed, a horrid laugh, like this—Hach-hach-hach . . ."

It was a truly demonic sound coming from that placid face. I asked:

"And then?"

"Then," said Deborah, "Mr. Boriloff reached out and tore her Leddyship's nightsheeft from her. She stood there, shuddering, face covered—stark naked. And what do you think Mr. Boriloff did?"

I answered, a little feebly: "Do you think you ought to tell me, Deborah?"

"I will tell you what he did," went on Deborah, inexorably. "He covered his own face with his hands, and cried out loudly, twice: 'Horrible! Oh, horrible!'"

"And fled!" whispered Deborah, nodding solemnly.

"And fled!" she repeated.

"It was then that her Leddyship's righteous anger burst forth, and she commanded me to call the police. It was too late. Mr. Boriloff had vanished.

"Her Leddyship," continued Deborah, "was furious. She had Mr. Boriloff sought for. She was, indeed, ready to send him to jail. But three days later she was told that he was sick, at point of death almost from remorse for what he had done. He said that when he had snatched her gown from her and had seen the pairfection of her body"—here Deborah sniffed—"he had felt that he had committed unforgivable sacrilege. He had cried out that his deed had been Horrible! Horrible! And now all he asked was her forgiveness so that he could die happy. Well, her Leddyship was quite touched. She went to Mr. Boriloff's side and took him back to her home.

"And Mr. Boriloff got well very quickly," said Deborah briskly, "and her Leddyship bought him a whole new wardrobe and a speed boat and a dog, and they have been ver-ry, ver-ry friendly ever since." Deborah gazed at me with eyes again all innocent and untroubled, face expressionless.

I said, uncomfortably, "I really don't think you should tell me all this, Deborah."

"We-eel," said Deborah, purring and dropping

into broader Scotch, "ye'll ken a body can tell things tae a doctor or a meenister, that ane wudna tae others. And there's such a muckle I could tae that this mickle is just naething. For instance, the time that Lady Brooster-Fyllson stole young Maister MacDonald from her Leddyship and kept him for twa days and nichts we-eel nigh without sleep abrushing her hair. Aye—an' that after her Leddyship had sworn to young Maister MacDonald's mother to presairve his innocence at all costs. Would ye like to hear about that?"

"No," I said, hastily. "No, no, Deborah. Really, I must go to work."

"Ah, we-eel, some other time then," said Deborah, rising and gathering up her knitting. "It is a ver-ry, ver-ry singular episode in her Leddyship's life, and ver-ry, ver-ry instructeeve."

She turned at the door: "Ye'll ken I'm liking you. And I'm liking this red rogue McTeague—he's fey at times, and has the sight. But I'd not be trusting him too much if the sight lingers long. Nae, nae! Miss Penelope—she's a clean lass, and due for sorrow. And I'd nae be trusting the Chadwick lad. There's the devil's soot in him. Aye, the devil's soot rubbed deep in him. Nor the Swastlow wench. An empty carline for the de'il's filling. The Susan Ann's a fine field for the sowing o' the de'il's seed, Dr. Fenimore. And it will be sown, Dr. Fenimore. And it comes to me that you and me will see the harvesting. Think o' that now, Dr. Fenimore. I've something of the sight, too."

She padded out the door. I laughed a little, and was vaguely uneasy, but why I should be I had not the faintest idea.

The next day there was a radio that important papers to be signed by Benson had been forwarded to Santiago. A change of course made no difference to Big Jim as long as he could grip the Susan Ann's wheel, so we swung back toward Cuba. We landed at Santiago on our ninth day out from Miami, transacted the necessary business, and swung south on the interrupted course, to Jamaica.

The first warning of the hurricane came two nights later. We had been dawdling along under light winds and were still, at our present rate of progress, a good thirty-six hours away from Kingston, our first port of call. Brookes brought down the warning near the close of dinner. It showed the center of the disturbance headed straight for us, and of unusual intensity. Captain Johnson counseled stripping sail and proceeding under Diesel to the safe and land-locked harbor of Port Antonio, some hundred miles closer to us than Kingston. Benson, after much argument, reluctantly agreed.

Brookes' message had abruptly ended a discussion which I was later many times to recall. Someone, I think Chadwick, had asked how many minutes in a day the average man who believed he was alive, actually was alive—that is, consciously and intellectually alive, and not merely a robot obeying habit and instinct. Benson had given as his opinion that one hour out of the twenty-four was a liberal estimate. The Rev. Dr. Swastlow said that no matter what the mind might be about, there was a higher faculty in man which always was alert, waking or sleeping. McTeague asked him whether he meant the soul, and the

minister answered that he did.

Lady Fitz said: "But, of course, *Mr. McTeague* doesn't believe in the *soul*."

I have never known anyone who could take outwardly innocent words and by accent, inflection and pauses turn them into something so truly poisonous as Lady Fitz could. She was such an artist at it that it must have been a gift, although certainly not one from Heaven. And in those ten words she managed to imply that McTeague was not only devoid of intelligence but a degraded creature admitted to human companionship by some gross social error of which she washed her hands. McTeague got it, and apparently it stung.

He leaned back, eyes narrowed, and asked: "A soul? What's it made of? Are they fresh minted for every womb-scalded brat? Or are the old ones cleaned up, parts repaired, and put to work again? Who looks after them, and who cans them in their mortal receptacles? When do we get them? At the moment of conception? If so, Lady Fitz, it is an unpardonable invasion of privacy. Or are they inserted after the embryo reaches a certain stage of development—for example, Lady Fitz, was yours acquired after you lost your fish-gills, or after you shed your monkey hair? Are the labor pains of women actually caused by the fitting in of this celestial tenant like those of a woman trying to get her feet into a new pair of tight shoes?"

Pen whispered: "Pretty brutal, Mike."

Lady Fitz said, white with anger: "Abominable!"

McTeague smiled: "Not at all. I'm only asking questions that should occur to any intelligent person. I seek enlightenment from one who evidently considers herself an expert."

The Rev. Dr. Swastlow said: "I will answer you. God makes the soul. It is part of His immortal essence. It is He who gives it to us from His Holy Treasury. It enters us with our first breath and it departs from us upon our last."

McTeague said: "You know, Reverend, that's a new idea to me. The mechanics, I gather, are somewhat along the lines of a vacuum cleaner. Inhaled from the Heavenly Nursery—or, as you put it, Treasury. That, of course, would explain twins, trips, quads and the Dionne quintes. They get tangled up in the storehouse and can't be untangled in time for the first inhalation. So in they all go together."

"Oh, well, Mr. McTeague, if you choose to be absurd."

"Absurd?" asked McTeague. "What's absurd about it? It's the most reasonable explanation I've ever heard. It explains why there's all the evil in the world—massacres, rapes, murders, cruelty, poverty, pestilence and what have you. God is so busy picking out souls for inhalation that He has no time for anything else. The solution would seem to be simple—call a moratorium on babies for ten or twenty years and give Him time to clean up—"

Benson roared, impatiently: "Oh shut up, Mike—all you're trying to do is get Lady Fitz's goat." He looked at Lady Fitz who, with hands clasped over her ears, eyes screwed tight shut, was murmuring prayers, or the formulae she considered prayers. "All right, you've got it, so shut up," he

added, grimly.

McTeague began, indignantly: "I was only seeking the light—"

Benson said. "I'll give you a real problem. If we're only awake and consciously in control for one hour out of the twenty-four, who is it, or who are they, in the seat of power for the other twenty-three? Don't tell me that for those hours we're just mechanisms of muscle, blood, nerve and bone moving only by instinct. I don't believe it. Nature abhors a vacuum and these fleshly tenements of ours are on the whole pretty desirable habitations—" He looked at the Rev. Dr. Swastlow. "Reverend, didn't our Lord and Saviour say that in His father's house there were many mansions? Well, in this house," and he tapped his bald head, "are many rooms. Who's in them? Some doors are sealed. Some are ajar—and then at times the tenant peeps out, even wanders about, may conceivably take charge while we are nodding. Who are they? Ancestors maybe—dispossessed from their own homes by Death. Why shouldn't they seek shelter in the flesh that is of their flesh and the bone that is of their bone? Why shouldn't they have the right to move in? Why shouldn't they take the wheel if I go to sleep at it?"

He paused as though for answer, but no one spoke; a curious stillness had dropped upon the table. He went on:

"Is it more strange the dead should walk again than that the quick should die? I forget who wrote that, but when he did he had a moment of clear vision. That in man which fights and loves and hates, hopes and despairs, dreams and creates, but hoping or despairing fights on—can this vital, fighting thing be blown out like a candle by the breath of Death? Be as though it never was? I do not believe it. Disembodied, yes—but destroyed, no. I think it far *less* strange the dead should walk than that this quick should die."

He banged a fist upon the table and glared at McTeague. I heard Lady Fitz murmuring rapidly: "God is Love. I am a part of God. Nothing can harm me. I am a part of God and I am I."

Benson said, speaking now more quietly, and more as though to himself than to us: "But what of those other disembodied ones? Waking or sleeping, the flame of life which is in us is to them a beacon. They swirl and circle around it incessantly like gulls around a lighthouse. Not the consciousnesses which were our forefathers . . . other consciousnesses drawn to the flame by we know not what unknown sympathies, unknown affinities . . . seeking entrance, always seeking entrance, and when the watchers are off guard, finding entrance . . . hiding . . . waiting its chance to—"

Lady Fitz got up with all the abruptness of a sleeping cat whose tail has been trod on. Her face was chalk white:

"Alexis! Alexis, take me on deck at once!"

Boriloff jumped to his feet, put an arm around her and led her toward the companionway. Lady Fitz for once had had enough, there was no doubt of that. Benson watched them go, blankly; the Rev. Dr. Swastlow cleared his throat as though about to speak.

Benson muttered: "Hell, I didn't mean to scare

her like that. But I meant every word of it—"

And the Brookes came in with news of the hurricane.

Yes, in the days to follow, often and often was I to recall all of this as a foreshadowing—as something that held within it, if I could only understand, some hint of explanation of what otherwise was the inexplicable. But it was too obscure . . . it was not enough, not enough . . . or perhaps a truth too great for my understanding.

Chapter III THE HURRICANE

Mid-afternoon of the next day I stood leaning at the port rail. The radio reports of the hurricane's progress had grown steadily more alarming, and the Diesels were being pushed to their full capacity. The Susan Ann raced along without a single scrap of sail. Ports had been reinforced and all ship-tight for heaviest weather. There was a queer faint shadow in the air, as though the sun shone from behind a pale yellow lens. Henderson came up and stood beside me. I asked:

"How far to Port Antonio, Henderson?"

He answered: "About seventy-five miles. We should raise land in a couple of hours."

I pointed south, and asked: "What's that?"

Something that looked like an enormous opaque wave of blackish green was lifting on the southern rim of the sea. It grew with prodigious speed into a mountain. The mountain spread out with the same speed until it blocked a tenth of the far horizon. It seemed to rush forward, tilting as it came; and then its outlines sharpened and I could see, plainly as though I had been in a plane skimming over them, thatched huts and the palms of a village on the mountain's top; on one side of the mountain top there was a thunder storm pouring rain from clouds threaded by lightnings; upon the other the sun was shining brightly.

Henderson muttered: "Mirage. That's Jamaica—the Blue Mountain."

He was staring intently, half-hunched over, the knuckles of his hands white with his grip on the rail.

Abruptly as it had appeared, the mountain vanished. The yellow screen vanished and the air became crystal clear. And then all at once, everywhere in sky and on sea, were myriads of rainbows, big and small, and patches of prismatic gleamings upon the sea as though other rainbows had melted there.

The yellow light dropped again and darkened. I heard a vast roaring from the eastward and saw something like a huge dirty yellow curtain racing upon us, and the space in which we sailed seemed suddenly to contract and the whole round rim of the sea to move in upon us.

Henderson flung me toward the forecabin and ran aft where Benson crouched like a boxer over the wheel. I threw the door open and crashed it behind me. There was vast incredible bellowing as though the clipper had been a toy ship

swung at the mouth of a roaring giant. The bellowing climbed to a shrill shrieking, then changed to a high-pitched drone.

The Susan Ann lifted; slowly at first, as though she had slid into some gigantic elevator; lifted faster, then paused and hung teetering, sickeningly. I gripped the edge of a bunk and clung to it.

There came a thundering blow against the side of the Susan Ann like the fist of the Archangel of the Deep. She heeled beneath it until the floor of the forecabin almost became the port wall and the port wall its ceiling.

Slowly she righted, shivering but gaining strength each moment. The forecabin floor was a foot deep in swirling water. Outside was a high pitched droning like the hum of a gigantic dynamo. The air in the forecabin seemed thick so that each breath was an effort against huge invisible hands that squeezed the chest as a strangler's hands would squeeze the throat. Abruptly the pressure lessened and the ship began to throb under a spaced, deliberate battering of combers swung like sledges in the grip of the hurricane. Between the blows she vibrated to the droning, pitched higher now, and unceasing.

The door to the galley opened and the black cook Slam Bang crawled in. He shouted but I could not make out his words. He beckoned and I lurched over to him. I managed to catch: "Juan. . . into the galley I found the Basque had been hamed pow'ful bad." Crawling with him I found that he was harmed powerful bad indeed. His neck was broken. The first smash of the hurricane had evidently shot him head first against the galley stove. There was nothing I could do for the Basque. I managed to creep back to the little laboratory. It was awash and pretty well wrecked. I groped about, retrieving what I could.

McTeague staggered in. He was naked to the waist and face and chest were red with blood running from a deep cut over his left eye. He said: "Close it up quick, I've got to get back to the wheel."

I dressed it as best I could; it should have been sewed but that was out of the question. I said: "What chance have we got, McTeague? Don't sugar-coat."

He answered: "Damned little. Brookes is gone. The foremast snapped. Crashed the radio house. Left nothing of the radio and not much of Brookes. Peters, the second, and Duffy, that nice New Bedford lad, are washed away."

"Juan's dead," I told him.

He stiffened as I swabbed the cut with iodine: "Day Jones got a swell cook. But hell, probably he'll be looking after us all again before long."

He said, as I fastened the last piece of adhesive: "Get everybody into the dining salon and keep them there. Give Boriloff a Mickey Finn and let him roll. He's showing his yellow. Collins, the room steward, will look after them. So will Pen. Then stay in the fo'c'sle unless Pen sends for you. That's where the crew will come as they need you."

We were in the hurricane for thirty-eight hours. There were brief minutes of breathless calm which were worse than the clamor of the tempest, for they were like the silence that broods over

the threshold of the Door of Death. Then the wings of the hurricane would swoop upon those pools of silence and they were no more. There were brief moments when the sea was flattened as though trodden down by the feet of that same Archangel of the Deep whose fist had first smitten us . . . as he passed, the places where he had trodden spewed geysers from a thousand bruised mouths, a mad jungle of spouting water which was instantly mowed down and swept under by roaring returning combers.

And always overhead was the maddening drone of the wind and beneath it the hissing counterpoint of the surges.

Thirty-eight hours of this in lesser and greater degree and the hurricane loosed us with almost the same abruptness with which it had gripped us. But before it did so it dealt us one last blow—and the worst.

But at last a dullness, a lethargy, born of the constant clamor, the incessant violent motion and the unremitting imminence of death dropped upon most of us—but never upon Benson battling for the life of his ship as the old Cap'n must many times have battled for his.

I had heard faintly a confused uproar aft and the shouting of men. The Susan Ann veered, swung to starboard and lay wallowing in the troughs of the waves. She lifted heavily, swung crazily sideways down a long slope.

And suddenly it occurred to me that the hurricane might turn out to be the catalyst that Kurtson feared; that Benson would stay in mental masquerade too long; the strain and stress be the mold to press into permanency that self-induced and carefully nurtured other personality which was his escape from reality. Lose control and be submerged—forever. A hurricane changeling. It was with considerable uneasiness that I thought over that possibility. Nor was my apprehension lessened by a remark of McTeague's.

It was the morning of the storm's second day. He had stumbled into the forecabin, haggard and brine-soaked.

"I think Jim's going to pull us through," he said. "What I'm wondering is whether it wouldn't be better for him if he didn't."

"That's a queer thing to say, Mike."

"Don't play dumb. You know what I mean as well as I do. Too little Big Jim up there at the wheel—too much the old Cap'n."

I said with certitude I didn't feel: "Nonsense—if you're thinking what I think you are. Soon as the danger is over Big Jim will be Big Jim again."

He shook his head: "Maybe . . . maybe not. Pen's worried too."

I said: "More nonsense. It's the strain that's telling on her. It's telling on all of us. How's Chadwick behaving? I haven't seen him."

He grinned: "Too damn well. I hate his guts but reluctantly I admit he's got plenty of them for me to hate."

And with that he went out.

If Pen were worried or afraid for her father she did not reveal it to me. She went about helping me—for while the sea took no more toll of lives from the Susan Ann there were many

minor injuries to look after—she helped me, I say, clear-eyed, serene, sympathetic and apparently fearless. The Swastlows, both of them sick almost to death, were a total loss; as was Boriloff, drinking himself from stupor to stupor with bottle after bottle of brandy.

It was Lady Fitz-Manton's reaction to the peril that most surprised me. She clung to hope with what I can describe only as a passionate composure, retreating at intervals to the inner shrine of her faith, and repeating over and over again like a priestess her formulas of prayer and assertions of unqualified Belief in the Divine Intervention to bring her safe to port.

"The tempest cannot harm me; the sea cannot harm me; I am a part of God and nothing can harm me; I am a part of God and cannot die!"

Over and over again she would intone these phrases or others bearing the same burden, raptly, with absolute conviction, hands clasped, eyes upturned. It was extremely interesting; a curious psychological phenomena which I observed minutely to report to Kurtson if we escaped; allied to the formula of the former Dr. Coue with his formula of, "Every day in every way I am getting better and better." At any rate, the procedure was past dispute a perfect prophylactic against terror.

And Deborah was unshaken and unshakeable; a rock to cling to, using one of her own phrases. Placid, unruffled, she went about attending to Lady Fitz and Flora Swastlow. There was no fire in the galley, of course, and no power nor lights beyond those of the flashes, so cooking was impossible. But Slam Bang and Deborah managed to concoct something nourishing and palatable enough from the cans and odds and ends. During one peculiarly distressing stretch, I said to her:

"You don't seem to fear we're going down, Deborah. Why? Is it what you call the sight?"

"We-eel ye ken, Dr. Feenimore," she dropped into her seldom used broad Scotch, looking at me askance, "ye ken there may be something of that in it. But there are worse things than going down in the clean sea, nor am I saying I hae not the thocht that it might be best for the ship and a' if we did. But maistly it is that whether we gae down or stay up it was a' ordained from the beginning and it fashes naething to greet since we canna change what hae been ordained."

"In that case," I said, somewhat irritably, "since we can neither help nor harm, why shouldn't we just lie back and let her sink or swim?"

"Ah," she answered earnestly, "but ye ken a' that has been ordained too—ye can do naething but what has been predestined ye shall do. If it is predestined that ye shall lay down your hands, ye canna lift them. If it is ordained ye should use them, ye canna lay them down. Ye canna do ain mickle thing, nae matter how sma', that ye were nae predestined to do."

"I've no argument to meet that, Deborah," I said, and I laughed.

"But I'll tell ye ain thing," Deborah said, and started to go. "I'll tell ye ain true thing. A thing the sight tells *Me*. This ship will survive the tempest. She will not go down into the clean sea until—"

"Until?" I prompted as she hesitated.

"Until the De'il has had his day on her," said Deborah grimly. "Until the De'il has had his day and his way. Now Dr. Fenimore, hug that if it's any comfort."

As grimly as she had spoken, back stiff and uncompromising, she flatfootedly waddled out. She made, I suppose, a rather absurd little figure, but for some reason I felt no desire to laugh.

It was shortly after this conversation that the hurricane dealt us its final and worst blow. Yet to call it worst is gross understatement. It was the circumstance which opened the door for all that evil which was to come. The door to the port passageway flung open, and McTeague balanced himself on the water-swept threshold.

"Benson's hurt," he shouted. "We got him to his cabin. Come along. Quick."

As we staggered along the passageway, he said: "We shipped a cross-sea, over the port quarter. It drove a chunk of spar straight through the wheel and smashed it. It hit Benson. Don't know how bad he's hurt, but he's out. By luck, they've just finished crating up a sea anchor. It's over now. If it don't hold, God help us—"

He opened the door of Benson's cabin. Benson was stretched upon his bunk, Pen kneeling beside him, Chadwick standing at his feet. I glanced involuntarily at the portrait of the old Cap'n. The face of the man lying before me had taken on years. Line for line, feature for feature, it was the face of the portrait. All minor differences had been wiped away. There was the thin-lipped mouth, set uncompromisingly; there were deep furrows from flaring nostrils to the corners of the mouth; there were the sunken eyes etched with a thousand tiny wrinkles.

I examined Benson. There was a sizeable lump on the back of his head, but no evidence of fracture. This and a jagged three inch tear above the right ankle were the only outward signs of injury. His heart was functioning well, his breathing deep and regular. I thought that exhaustion was responsible more than anything else for his condition and that the blow upon the head had only hastened a collapse which normally could not have been far off. There might, of course, have been a slight concussion, and he would certainly limp for a time. But he had been lucky and the longer he could sleep the better it would be for him. I gave this as my opinion. Pen arose and went swiftly out to hide, I surmized, a good crying fit of relief. I gave Benson a minimum hypo to peg the sleep, dressed the leg wound and settled down to watch him.

Two hours later we passed out of the hurricane with the same abruptness we had passed into it. The sea was rough enough, but the comparative quiet after the cessation of the high droning was like some concentrated oil of peace soothing the tormented auditory centres of the brain. The great balloon of canvas and cordage that was the sea anchor held and kept our bow fairly steady against the wind and sea.

Benson slept on. Even in that deep slumber his face did not soften. It remained hard and set and old—old. The face of the portrait.

Chapter IV BENSON'S HAVEN

It was seventy hours later we sighted the island; first by the sea-blink, a patch of faint opalescence in the blue sky close to the horizon; then as we swept closer the mirage lifted the island, pulling it into towering cliffs of white sand and gigantic, spindling vegetation; closer still, and it shrunk to a squatting blueblack smudge some twenty miles away.

For twenty of those hours Benson had been in deepest sleep. It was characteristic that upon awakening he had sent first for Captain Johnson to ask about the condition of the Susan Ann. Only after he had thoroughly informed himself upon that did he send for me to ask about his own condition. His face had regained much of its normal appearance. Most of the marks of age had disappeared, the lines were not so deeply etched, and the eyes were less sunken. And his voice was his own resonant one, with nothing of the querulous, slightly whinnying pitch of the Cap'n's, nor did his phraseology contain any of the antiquated idioms of the other's.

Yet as I went over him, I became increasingly aware of some far-reaching change, some profound emotional disturbance; of a mental tension which was reflected in his muscular reactions. It was as though his will were focused upon keeping himself—himself. Like an almost spent swimmer straining to keep his head above water; fighting against submergence; struggling against some force striving to draw him down.

The head swelling had diminished greatly, but he winced as I felt around it. He insisted upon having the dressings removed from the leg wound and upon examining it himself. After I had redressed it he did not ask me how soon he could get on his feet again. He heaved out of his bunk, limped over to the locker where were his clothes, and telling me to send McTeague down to help him out on the deck, dismissed me.

Thereafter he kept to the deck and to his cabin. Curious and disquieting to me was his avoidance of Pen. He was gentle with her, kindly to her, but he kept away from her as much as he could, or rather, he kept her away from him. Almost it seemed as though he were afraid of her. If the crew noticed it, they put it down to Benson's anxiety over the plight of the ship. I know that those who gathered around the table in the dining saloon demanded an explanation of her father's behavior and empty chair that Pen was sedulous in encouraging.

And what the hurricane had done to the clipper was enough to bruise the heart of anyone who loved her as Benson did. All her beauty had been torn from her. She was a battered sea hag. We had staggered out of the tempest with the foremast a stump, mizzenmast so weakened it could not have stood a rag of sail even if there had been a yard to hold it. The aft spar was not in bad shape, but useless since the wheel was broken and we had to depend upon the sea-anchor to keep head against wind and wave.

And the clipper was leaking badly, the crew

working continually at the pumps. All the boats had been smashed except the Captain's gig, a dory and a small dinghy, all three of which had inexplicably escaped injury. The engine room was flooded, the Diesels helpless and one of them hopeless of repair.

The current had caught us during the night and was carrying us on at the rate of about three knots an hour. The wind had lulled, the sea was placid. Observations showed that we were off the southeastern edge of the Bahama Bank, about a hundred and fifty miles east of the Caicos group, north of Haiti. The chart showed a small island in the vicinity marked "doubtful." We had seen no other ship, but sooner or later we would be picked up. That seemed certain.

But Benson did not want to be picked up. MacKenzie and his assistant Barnes had managed to patch up one of the Diesels so that intermittently it ran feebly.

A make-shift steering gear had been rigged up, and a jury-mast had been spliced on the fore-mast stump. With this equipment Benson stubbornly swore he could take the Susan Ann to any port. He would listen to no argument.

But at first sight of the island his savage obstinacy, his taciturnity, had dropped from him. I was close by the aft deck at the moment and heard him shouting for Captain Johnson who was then aft. McTeague came clattering down the ladder, grinning wildly. I checked him:

"What's up, Mike?"

"Big Jim's come to," he answered. "And holy seven-toed hell, will that make Pen happy! It's an island darling. And it's a damned sight better doctor than you are."

"What are you talking about, Mike?"

"The island, sweetheart, the island! Good old Doc Island that made Big Jim himself again. We're going to that island and lift Susie's face or what-has-she. That is, if there's a haven we can turn into a beauty parlor."

"But Mike, how can we get in?"

"The faltering Diesel aided by hearts of oak and shoulders of brawn, lad. Push and tow—Lord, listen to Big Jim bellow, boy! I never thought that voice would start this heart's joy springs welling! Delay me no longer, darling, I fly to Pen to tell her Poppa wants her—at last."

Closer and closer crept the island, and closer, until we were a scant half mile from shore. And here the current shifted, carrying us along that shore. There was no sign of break or place to anchor. High sand dunes arose almost perpendicularly from a white and narrow beach, but the shallows ran out far toward us. Upon the tops of the dunes and spaced with curious regularity were patches of bushes and occasional palms. They looked for all the world like bunches of grey-green hair growing sparsely over the foreheads of giants whose faces were beneath the water. There was no dune which did not have its single palm or cluster of them, their feathered fronds like plumes thrust into bizarre top-knots.

I heard Benson shouting again. He was pointing and waving the glasses with which he had been scanning the shore. There was quite a group upon the wheel deck—Lady Fitz and Boriloff, The Swastlows as well as Pen. I joined them and

Benson, to my surprise, gave me exuberant welcome, handed me the glasses and roared: "Look, saw-bones! Benson's Haven—no, Benson's Luck, by God! Look—over there!"

I raised the glasses and saw a break in the dunes, a narrow channel beyond which glistened wide water, a lagoon. But could we reach it? Uncannily, as once before, Benson read my thought: "Of course we'll reach it. Benson's Luck, I tell you!"

The dory was dropped at port, six oars and the huskiest of the crew managing it, the gig at starboard since the dory would have the heaviest work in warping the bow against the current. Their hawsers lengthened and drew taut. The protesting Diesel limped, but nursed by Mackenzie, did not faint. The clipper edged across the current. Now we were at the mouth of the channel. Foot by foot the Susan Ann crept into it.

The channel was deep but narrow, fangs of coral only a few feet under water menaced on each side. Nature had set them with the same odd regularity as the vegetation of the dunes, so that they were like widely-spaced teeth, and the clipper stole between them as though they were set in the jaws of some gigantic sleeping sea-monster which might at any moment awaken and crunch her.

The beach along the sea had been like the handle of a scythe. The channel's curving beach at the right of us was like the back of the scythe's blade. Between us and it, the coral fangs clustered close. The left beach was curved too, but not with the sweeping grace of the other side. It was irregular and shallow, bordered with thickets of mangrove, and little clusters of mangroves waded out as though challenging our progress.

Behind us, the sun had touched the horizon; lengthened and poured molten red gold into the sea like an enormous globular smelter which suddenly had been opened. The sun had sunk beneath the horizon when we reached the end of the channel. There the high-hummocked beach at our right turned sharply inward, forming a hook over and around which we could not see.

We floated into the lagoon. It was wide and deep and crystal clear; lucent emerald in the fading light. On its bottom were corals, and waving sea-fans and sea anemones like pulsating living amethysts, medusae with waving crests like fantastic flowers clinging to the coral, and brilliantly colored fish darted through the fronds of fairy forests of ferns. The beaches of the lagoon were shallow silver scallops, curving one into the other in shell-like arcs, and their clean sands were pale rose in the twilight.

The lagoon was sheltered on the east by the rise of the island. It was a perfect harbor. We floated on a few hundred feet. The winches hummed, the anchor chains rattled and we came to rest. We were a little beyond the turn of the spit. Its hooked tip swung in almost to the shore. Clearly here was water behind it, perhaps a secondary lagoon, perhaps only a pool. Whatever was there, the high dunes hid it.

Dinner was a silent one. Benson sat with us for the first time since the hurricane had struck. But his talk was entirely with Captain Johnson about the clipper. Boriloff was in one of his sullen moods and all the others appeared to find their thoughts

the better company. They seemed to share a vague depression to which I found myself not immune. The truth was, I thought, we were all feeling the reaction from the tension of the past few days.

I went to my cabin but could not rest, and afterwhile came out on deck. It was a dark night, the moon had not yet risen and the stars were dim. I stood looking over the rail toward the hooked sand-spit. McTeague came up beside me. He stood still for minutes, staring like me at the darkness which veiled the hook.

"Like it, Ross?"

"No." The definiteness of my reply surprised even myself.

"Why not? It's a beautiful place—and Benson's luck, you know."

"I don't know why. Do you like it, Mike?"

Before he could answer the muted bell of the Susan Ann struck six swift strokes—eleven o'clock.

"Why don't you like—"

"Listen."

Out of the blackness shrouding the sand-hook came the stroke of a ship's bell. It seemed to come from the hook—but also it seemed to come from infinite distances. Once it struck, and twice and thrice—and thrice again, echoing the bell of the clipper. Then came a thin shrill whistle, like the whistle of a curlew high in air . . . or like the ghost of a bos'n's pipe.

I felt a queer cold prickling on the backs of my hands and on my forehead. McTeague leaned far over the rail, listening. No other sound followed. He straightened:

"Maybe that's why we don't like it."

"There must be a ship there," I said inanely.

"Without doubt. But what kind of a ship? And who was the bos'n calling?"

He shivered, then shook his broad shoulders.

"Well, I'll know tomorrow. Good night." He walked away.

I felt strangely disinclined to stand alone upon the deck. I went back to my cabin.

Chapter V

THE NAMELESS WRECK

I didn't sleep very well. Once I got up, slipped out on deck and stared over at the hook. The moon was in its last quarter and low and red. It made the still surface of the lagoon look as though it had a thin scum of blood over it. A fish jumped and the ripples spread sluggishly as though a stone had been dropped into a lake of blood. The hill was a solid wall of black topped by fantastic battlements of palm fronds and tree branch.

Shortly after dawn I dressed, and went on deck. McTeague was there. I said:

"Hello, Mike. How did you sleep?"

"Lousily; you don't look like any dew-drenched daisy. What was it?"

"Too many ghost bells. Too many spectral bos'n's piping."

He laughed. "Same symptoms. Same cause. Imagination—maybe. The lagoon's gorgeous but

maybe not as safe as it looks. See the shore."

But first I studied the hook. It was of white sand and not a trace of vegetation on it. Over-topping it from behind by fully thirty feet was an immense sand cliff. Estimating its angle from the deck and its apparent distance beyond the spit, I gave it a height of at least seventy-five feet from water level. Its face looked raw and new as if a gigantic shovel had recently sliced it down. I looked from it over the lagoon and it was indeed lovely, its surface rippling like watered silk of sapphire and peacock blues and greens, the color of emeralds both clear and cloudy, and of milky jades. But the morning sun revealed what the setting sun had hidden. The hand of the hurricane had been heavy on the island. Behind the little curving beaches was a tangle of torn vegetation, palms and pines and vines, and wide swathes had been cut in the wooded slopes of the hill.

McTeague said: "More than wind did that. Some big waves must have swept over the dunes right into the lagoon. Most likely that's what cut down that big dune over there. If so, I shouldn't think we'd find much water behind the hook—" he hesitated, then added—"not enough to float a ship anyway."

At breakfast, Pen's chair was empty. Benson grunted that she had a headache. Everyone was in high spirits, the perils and distress of the hurricane foreshortened into only an unusually exciting experience. Someone asked Benson how long he thought the stay at the island would be. He answered curtly, as long as it would take him to put his ship in a shape to his liking. Then quite as though he felt that he had made some false step he gave a quick furtive glance around the table and added almost apologetically that it probably would take no longer than a few days and that he hoped no one would be greatly inconvenienced by being out of the world that long.

Now this seemed to me most peculiar, and by McTeague's expression I could see that he too felt something amiss. I was sure that it would never occur to Big Jim to be at all apologetic for anything he wanted to do, and I was equally certain the old Cap'n of the first Susan Ann had been quite an autocratic. I wondered whether McTeague had not been unduly optimistic about Benson having "come to." And suddenly I remembered a case famous in medical history in which the secondary personality, self-induced as in Benson's, had assumed dominance and for a time had hid itself behind the masque of the primary personality. Not being so familiar with the habits of thought of the one who had created, or recreated it, as that one was with its own, might it not have thought that the arrogance with which it had first replied was out of character? By precisely similar a stumble had the usurping personality in the case to which I have referred been unmasked.

Or could it be that there had been a fusion of the two personalities into one which was neither Big Jim Benson nor the old Cap'n? Compounded of portions of the mentality of both, of course, but essentially a third personality whose reactions were unpredictable from any knowledge of the other two. A stranger.

Very swiftly these thoughts crossed my mind,

and as swiftly that this would explain Benson's avoidance of Pen—that the fear I had sensed was fear that she might discover the masquerade, for who was so likely to do so as Benson's own daughter! And now I realized that I had felt something wrong in Benson's behavior when the island had been sighted. The exuberance had not rung true. It had not been feigned, but it had been over drawn—overacted.

But the first hypothesis contained equally as good an explanation for all this—the old Cap'n once more in control of his ship—sure of it, but not so sure of how his new vessel of flesh responded to mental wind and tide . . .

I thrust the puzzle out of my mind, for only the future could give the answer. I heard Flora exclaim that it was all adorable, just like being wrecked on a desert island with all modern conveniences. The Rev. Dr. Swastlow observed with mock unction that perhaps there were heathen to convert and he could raise himself to a Bishopric. Boriloff thought there would be good fishing, maybe even good hunting, and posed and sang snatches of Russian hunting songs. But Lady Fitz sat silent, unresponsive and preoccupied. Suddenly she broke her silence.

"I say, you know, I heard the most extraordinary sounds last night! I was in bed endeavoring to sleep. We rang six bells. And a few seconds later I heard six bells ring again. The sound seemed to come from over there—" She pointed to the hook—"and they had the most extr'ord'nary effect upon me. Then there was a whistling—mournful, perfectly ghastly. Quite! Alexis said to me—"

Lady Fitz stopped abruptly, it probably having occurred to her that some speculation might be aroused as to how Alexis came to be in such close proximity while she was wooing slumber. She went on, unruffled: "At any rate, they gave me the most peculiar sensations. Indescribable. Quite! Did anyone else hear them?"

I was about to speak when I caught McTeague's eye and the slight shake of his head.

"I too was in my cabine, strangely restless," Boriloff hastened to cover Lady Fitz's indiscretion. "I heard. Lady Fitz-Manton and I compared notes this morning. I had been thinking of old Russia, and heart was sad. Then came bell sounds—they beat upon my heart like dead loved voices—" He covered his eyes dramatically, his voice throbbled with sorrow. "They made me feel—ah, but I would not know how to say in the Russian . . . but in the English, ah . . . what is the word?" His hands went up in a graceful gesture of despair.

"Stinko!" said McTeague. "Or maybe—pediculous. Or you might like lousy better."

Boriloff deflated and glared at McTeague. Lady Fitz said:

"Well, my word!" in her highest, clearest tone.

McTeague said: "Well, Lady Fitz, let him say it in Russian then. I was only trying to be helpful."

Lady Fitz raised her carefully plucked brows, looked through her lorgnette at McTeague as though he were some strange animal, and wonderingly repeated: "My word!"

Boriloff said icily: "I was describing impres-

sions of sounds on higher planes—poetic, on plane of sacred memories, Mr. McTeague. So I would not use such word . . . I do not use such words . . ." His shrug implied that one who did was little more than dirt, and not such clean dirt at that.

"I don't see why you don't," McTeague said earnestly. "They're perfectly good words. And you ought to know a lot about the pediculae, Boriloff. You could hardly have crawled over the Russian border without making some friends. And you, Lady Fitz, surely you know about the facts of life by now—or should. You ought to know that there are such things as lice. Why," McTeague went on with enthusiasm, "what would we have done in the foxholes without them? Sometimes they were our only relaxation. We would lay our shirts on the bottom and bet on whose shirt got to the mark first. You're a horse addict, Boriloff. But I'll bet you'd like a louse race better. Anyway, if you object to pediculous or lousy, how about cootyish?"

Boriloff said something in vicious, spitting Russian. McTeague listened politely and nodded:

"Quite! Quite! I agree with you. Yet the study of the pediculae is absorbing. They cover a world-wide field. There are plant lice and fish lice. Elephants as well as whales have their own varieties. Even lice have lice, as Pope wrote about fleas. I don't mean The Pope, Boriloff—Pope was an English poet but you wouldn't know that. I paraphrase Pope—big lice have little lice upon their backs to bite 'em, and little lice have still less lice and so on ad infinitum. There are even human lice—parasites—"

"Mike, that's enough." It was Pen's voice from the doorway.

McTeague said sulkily: "Oh, all right. I was only trying to be instructive."

Boriloff's face was murderous, his lips white, and he looked like a big cat tensed for a spring. Lady Fitz touched his hand and murmured something in Russian. He relaxed, smiled lazily at McTeague and purred:

"Very instructive. I have learned much. I will not forget."

McTeague yawned. "Any time your memory needs refreshing, call on me."

Pen came slowly to the table and sat down. Chadwick asked: "How's the headache, Pen?"

"Much better—thanks, Chad."

Lady Fitz said: "Darling, I'm so glad. You won't mind if Alexis and I go on deck, will you? I feel need of the Divine Father's own clean air."

She looked sweetly but pointedly at McTeague. Pen said absently: "Of course not, Lady Fitz."

Benson looked up sharply, shook his head like a man who had been half asleep—and only then did I know that he had not been paying the slightest attention to McTeague and the others, had probably not even heard what had been said.

"Lady Fitz, Johnson is going to take the gig and look around for a likely place to beach," he said. "Maybe you and Boriloff would like to go along. Reverend, how about you and Flora? Pen will—"

"Pen won't," said Penelope, sipping her coffee, her eyes downcast. "She's not up to it."

"You are coming, Mr. Benson?" asked Lady Fitz.

I was a little surprised when Benson answered no, that he had business to go over with Chadwick and McTeague. In that event, said Lady Fitz, interrupting him pointedly, she would be delighted to go, and so it seemed would be the Reverend Dr. Swastlow. Flora did not seem so pleased. Benson arose, saying he would go with them to see they got off safely. Pen waited until they were out of earshot, then looked at McTeague.

"Mike, what made you go after Boriloff like that?"

"Go after Boriloff? Why, Pen, I was only discussing cooties. If he took it personally, was that my fault?"

"Come clean, Mike. Why did you do it?"

"Well," said McTeague, "call it an experiment."

"For what purpose?" Pen pursued inexorably.

"Goat-getting," laughed Chadwick. "Well, it was an excellent job, Mike. But you've made another bad enemy."

"Another?" drawled McTeague. A slow flush crept under Chadwick's dark skin. There was a sudden tension. Pen broke it. She sent her cup and saucer shattering to the floor. She jumped to her feet, all blue gone from her eyes, pupils dilated.

"Damn this place and damn this ship! I hate them! And soon I'll be hating everybody on it just as you all hate each other. And that goes for you too, Mike."

She swung out. McTeague watched her go, expressionlessly. He said to me, ignoring Chadwick: "Let's go up, Ross."

We went on deck. I said: "What is the matter with you, Mike? Without provocation you hand Boriloff a line of talk calculated to make him rub his teeth with poison and bite you. You ruffle all Lady Fitz' feathers and stick an inch of needle into Chadwick. What for?"

He answered surprisingly: "I wasn't shooting at Boriloff or Lady Fitz. I don't give a damn about them! I was aiming at Big Jim. Pen guessed it and that's what made her so savage."

I said: "I don't believe he heard a word of it."

"And that's what worries me" said McTeague. He looked over at the hook. "I wonder what he wants with me. What I'd like to do is cut over there and see what's behind it. Suppose we take the dory and do it anyway."

"With me," said Pen. She had slipped up to us unnoticed, and I saw that she had regained her poise. She smiled at McTeague and held out her hand:

"Sorry, Mike. I was a bit on the edgy side. I—I didn't get much sleep last night."

"Don't apologize to me," McTeague said. Big Jim came to us as he spoke. "I'm the one who's the dastard." Then, aware of Benson: "My wires seem crossed today, sir. Let me have the dory and I'll straighten myself out with a bit of exercise—take the Doc with me to see what it's like behind the hook over there."

Benson growled: "That's a good idea. I'd like to see what's there myself. We'll all go. Maybe it will cure Pen's headache."

McTeague asked: "Won't the others think we shipped them off just to get rid of them for an excursion of our own?"

"To hell with them!" roared Big Jim. "I do what I please on my own ship! Come on Chad."

He said: "I'd damned sight rather go alone. Without Pen anyway."

McTeague watched them go, frowning.

As we drew close, the water shoaled. Before we reached the tip it was so shallow that the dory scraped. We were about ten feet from the beach and McTeague and I slipped over the side and managed to drag us a few feet closer. Chadwick, I noticed with amusement, made no move to help. McTeague stretched out his arms, picked Pen up like a baby and carried her ashore. He went back, bent beside the boat and offered his shoulders to big Jim. Benson shouting laughter stuck his legs across them, and McTeague bore his two hundred and twenty pounds as though they had been twenty.

Benson slid off McTeague's back. Rid of our weights, the dory was riding high and drifting. Chadwick shouted: "Hey, Mike! Pull me in." McTeague stuck a thumb to his nose and cried: "Wade, you sissy!" Big Jim bellowed: "Wade, damn you! And bring that dory ashore with you."

McTeague, an arm about Pen's waist, started scrambling up the sandy slope. I was close behind them. Benson followed more leisurely. Half up, I looked back. Chadwick was wading to shore up to his thighs, towing the dory behind him. I could hear him swearing. So could Benson, for his big body was shaking with laughter so that he could hardly make his way up the shifting surface of the dune.

I turned, and saw that McTeague and Pen had reached the top. He was standing motionless, looking down at something I could not as yet see. There was a queer stiffness, a queer rigidity, about him like a pointer which had sighted his bird. Pen knelt beside him, staring, and as motionless. I scrambled up beside them, and followed their gaze.

The hook had hidden a roughly circular pool, about two hundred feet across. There was only a couple of feet of water in it. I thought that once it might have been far deeper, and that the waves which had cut down the great dune had filled it with the dune's sand. There was something black sticking out from the dune . . . it was the stern of a ship . . . black . . . its splintered rudder resting at the edge of the shallow pool.

It was upright, and it was stark and bare, washed clean of the sand to the stump of its after mast. It stood out against the white of the sand like a silhouette against white paper. Except the splintered rudder, it seemed intact. I could see the wheel and binnacle . . . a black wheel . . . so black that it seemed to draw the darkness of the deck on which it stood into itself . . . to stand apart . . . to command.

Wheel and binnacle seemed unmarred. The bow of the ship was buried in the dune, thrust deep within it. All of the ship except the afterdeck was anchored under thousands of tons of sand.

There was something vaguely sinister about that black deck thrusting from the dune. Something vaguely desperate in the clutch of the dune upon it—as though the dune held fast to something that never ought to have been bared; as though the dune was trying to draw back into itself that which had been bared.

And it was as though the black afterdeck was

straining as desperately to free the part still buried. I mean, it was not just the stern of a wrecked ship jutting from the sands. There was nothing static about it. Dune and ship were dynamic; the dune gripping and dragging in—the stern straining to pull the ship loose. Suddenly I thought I saw the wheel shift, as though invisible hands had turned it, and it was borne to me that the struggle of ship and dune was centred at the black wheel . . . for an instant, definitely, I knew that this was so—and then the perception, illusion, whatever it had been, was gone. There was only the stern of a buried ship sticking out of a sand dune, that and no more.

But I wondered whether McTeague and Pen had seen, or were seeing, what I thought I had. Neither had moved nor spoken, absorbed in the wreck.

Benson came panting up beside me, Chadwick at his heels. Benson stared, then said incredulously: "A ship! An old ship! And my God, look at her . . . as good as when she was afloat! What's in her?"

He slid down the sand to the narrow beach, started in a stumbling run toward the wreck. McTeague abruptly came to life, leaped down the slope after him. As he passed Benson, I saw Big Jim put out a hand to stop him, but McTeague only shook his head and went swiftly on. Chadwick lifted Pen to her feet. She glanced at me and I saw on her face and in her eyes a vague and puzzled fear. She said: "Come on," and the three of us trailed in the wake of the others. Two-thirds of the distance to the wreck we overtook Big Jim. He was puffing and angry.

"Damn'd cheeky upstart!" he gasped. "Ran ahead of me. My right to board that boat first. Hurry!"

But when we reached the wreck, McTeague was waiting for us; he had made no attempt to board it. Instead, he was staring up at the stern with a puzzled frown.

"There's no name on her," he said. "And that's queer. She's old . . . but her timbers are sound . . . staunch enough still to sail . . . if she can manage to get herself loose," he added oddly.

I started—McTeague was echoing my own fleeting fantastic thought.

"Get herself loose!" snorted Benson. "I'll uncover her. Hell, Mike, she's a virgin. I'll find out what's in her."

Chadwick said: "She doesn't look much like a virgin to me. Pretty experienced, I'd say. See those closed ports—I'll bet there's cannon rusting behind them. And look over there—just where the sand grips her up by the rail. If that wasn't made by a twenty pound ball or chain shot I'll row you all back."

We looked at where he was pointing. The rail was broken at the spot and the hull beneath it splintered around a gaping hole three feet across.

Pen said, breathlessly: "Didn't pirates sail nameless ships? I've read so somewhere, I'm sure. Maybe it's a pirate ship. Maybe that's why I felt so—" She hesitated. "She's an evil ship," she said at last. "I don't like her."

"A pirate!" Big Jim bellowed, and did an ungainly dance step. "With maybe the loot still in

her. And we stand here chattering. I'm going up. How the hell can we?" He ran along the hull, then back and around the starboard side of it.

McTeague said: "The sand shelves down from the dune on each side of her, where the dune covers her. It's going to be slippery going—but maybe it can be done."

He looked at the steep ramp of sand that fell from the port side, shook his head, said, "Wait a minute," and walked around the stern, Benson striding beside him. "No tricks, you monkey. I'm the first to board her. Understand that?" There was a cunning gleam in his eyes and I thought that all his cupidity had been aroused by Pen's mention of pirates. McTeague shrugged his broad shoulders. "Idea of taking siezin, I suppose. Unfurling the flag of Benson upon the undiscovered deck—" Benson growled: "The ship's mine. Whatever there is, you'll get what I give you—"

They passed out of hearing, but Benson's tone had been more savage than I had ever heard it. When they came back, his face was set and sullen, the big jaw squared, his eyes smouldering. McTeague said, indifferently: "If there's any choice of sides, it's this one. I want to point out though that the dune doesn't look any too secure, and that anything might start the sand rolling down. Having issued this storm warning—go ahead, if you feel that way."

Benson glared at him and started to climb the ramp. He had not climbed two yards before it began to give way under his feet. A wave of it hissed down, and covered him. With difficulty we dug him out, half-strangled. McTeague said quietly: "There's a rope ladder in the dory." Benson wheezed malevolently: "Then go get it. What were you doing? Keeping it for yourself?"

McTeague's face hardened, his eyes became bleak as when Benson had taunted him about leaving the Susan Ann.

"I could hardly have known the wreck was here—" he began, but Big Jim cut him short. What with chagrin over his slip, impatience, and frustration of his will to get aboard the wreck at once, he had lost all control.

"To hell with your explanations," he bellowed. "Go get it."

Without a word, McTeague turned and strode off toward the dory. While he was gone, Big Jim grunted and cursed, and I waited in uncomfortable silence. Pen's big eyes were filled with tears, but Chadwick only watched him, with a shadow of his cynical smile, as though he were enjoying his chief's exhibition. McTeague came back with the ladder. He threw it down at Benson's feet, and waited. There was no softening of his face nor did he glance at Pen.

Benson roared: "Well, fasten it. That's what you had it for, wasn't it?"

McTeague picked up the ladder and threw it to the bulwarks again and again. The grapple hooks were small and would not hold. Chadwick tried it, and so did I without success. Finally Benson grabbed it and glaring at McTeague said: "Let somebody try who wants to make it stick." But the ladder would not hold.

McTeague said: "Oh, hell," and caught it from Benson's hand. He turned to the three of us and said, coldly: "I am going up and fasten this so you can all come. Understand me, Chadwick; you too, Dr. Fenimore, that I go aboard solely as the representative of Mr. Benson — or whatever rights he may think may accrue to first aboard, I relinquish. So far as I am concerned, the wreck and all that is in it belongs to Mr. Benson—or he belongs to it," he ended, again oddly enough.

Without another word, he threw the ladder over his shoulders, passed to the stern and swarmed up it, using the projections and the splintered rudder for foot holds and purchase.

He paused at the top, apparently looking over the exposed deck. For an instant his red head blazed as though, in the drenching sunlight, some lucid ray more powerful than those of the sun had swiftly been centred on it and then as swiftly been withdrawn. It was precisely like that, and it was disturbing.

A minute passed, and several more, but McTeague did not reappear. Benson chafed, his irritation growing. He shouted: "McTeague! What are you doing up there? Throw down that ladder."

There was another short interval, and then McTeague looked down at us. His face was a sallow white and his eyes were those of a man who had been aroused from a deep sleep and not yet wholly awake. He stared at us blankly as though he did not know us—as though, indeed, he had heard but did not see us. His gaze left us, roaming vaguely about the shore.

Benson shouted again, furiously: "The ladder, damn you! The ladder!"

McTeague started, perceptibly; seemed abruptly to become aware of us. He uncoiled the ropes, fastened the grapnels and dropped the ladder over. It hung within a foot of the sand. Benson jumped for it and with McTeague steadying it from the deck and Chadwick and I from the sand, swarmed up with surprising agility. Pen climbed after him. Chadwick next, then myself, considerably handicapped by having no one to steady the ladder from below. McTeague reached down and drew me over the rail. He seemed normal again; his eyes had lost that vaguely terrifying vagueness, although something wary and puzzled lay deep within them.

He said: "Take a look at this," and walked over to the mast stump. Bracketed to it was a ship's bell. The years had plated the metal with a vivid green patina, but it was uncorroded. I felt a surprising relief, as if a burden I had not been conscious of bearing had been lifted. I cried: "That's the bell we heard, Mike. The wind must have swung it."

McTeague said, drily: "An educated wind that had been taught to strike five bells, I suppose. But what with? Look closer."

I looked. There was no striker. The bolts that had held it were in place, but the bell was tongueless. I rapped upon the rim. There was a short angry clang. McTeague gripped my wrist and said sharply: "Don't do that again!" His hand was cold, his palm sweating.

And suddenly I knew that McTeague was

afraid, and was straining every nerve to keep from showing it.

Benson bellowed: "Hey, Mike, come up here!"

He was standing by the black wheel, and apparently all his ill temper had passed, for he was laughing with Chadwick and gesticulating. But Pen was not laughing. She had moved away from the wheel and stood at the top of a short flight of steps that led up from the main deck to the wheel deck. I thought she watched McTeague approach with a curious intentness.

I saw that the deck on which she waited was from five to six feet higher than that which McTeague and I trod, and that beside the companion steps was a heavy door evidently opening into some alley or cabin under the wheel deck. Driven into and spaced across the threshold were ten heavy spikes half a foot apart. They protruded from the deck in a foot high *cheveux de frise*. Other spikes had been driven slantingly along each side of the door. It was plain that the door opened outward, as of course upon a ship it would for reasons any sailing man understands, and that whoever had driven the spikes had intended to seal it tight as long as spikes and door should last.

Seal it against someone, or something, within.

I was about to speak to McTeague, and didn't. He was looking at Pen with that same curious intentness, walking slowly, reluctantly, as though against his will.

As I set foot on the companion steps after him, it came to me that the deck was singularly clean. The planks were as though swept and washed and holy-stoned. There was a little mound of sand heaped or piled between the edge of the spiked door and the steps, but that was all.

The others were clustered around the wheel and I heard Benson say, exultantly: "It's perfect, Mike! Perfect! It'll be no job at all to fit it and the binnacle on the Susan Ann. By God, I'd tear the old wheel out of her to do it even if it wasn't smashed!"

I stepped up beside the wheel and looked at it. It was a beautiful thing, some dense, grainless wood of a peculiar jetty blackness. It was, indeed, as if carved from dully polished jet rather than from wood. And it was perfect, unmarred by scratch or blemish. But the most singular part of it was its rim. This was a six inch wide, shallowly convex band which circled the hub and through which the spokes seemed to pierce. Upon the rim had been cut the outlines of hands, the backs of hands, the fingers bent as though clutching something. I counted them, and there were eighteen of them, and as I studied them more closely I saw that they were in pairs and that no two pairs were alike. Also, it was plain that whoever had carved them had been no mean artist, and that he had worked from living models, for each pair of hands had its distinct individuality. Each pair was crossed at the wrist, and over it and under it another pair was crossed, so that the eighteen hands with wrists and a part of the forearm, these traced only faintly, formed an interlocking pattern. One pair was that of a woman, the hands long and slender, fingers delicately tapering—but strong, and with a strange suggestion of cruelty. There was another pair of hands which, breaking

the design, were poised at a more acute angle . . . as though their grip were firmer, stronger . . . but whose shape and symmetry told of breeding . . . patrician hands . . .

It was strange how these details kept crowding one upon the other . . . details this moment unseen and plain the next—as though the black wheel were revealing itself . . . and now it seemed to me that the band on which the hands were carved became translucent . . . and that the hands were not carved upon it but were within it . . . and that each of them gripped a spoke of the black wheel . . . but that the master grip was that of those shapely hands that broke the design . . . and that the hands were alive . . .

I wrenched my eyes away with a sudden surge of repulsion, touched with panic. I saw that Benson was on his knees beside the wheel examining its supports and muttering, Chadwick watching him with that same secret, cynical delight. But Pen was staring at the hands, rapt as I had been, and with growing horror in the great blue eyes; and that McTeague standing close to the side of the wheel was watching her, somberly, grimly, yet poised as though awaiting some signal to dart upon her and thrust her away.

And suddenly the black wheel moved. It turned and the spokes swung toward McTeague. The swing had been purposeful, deliberate as if an unseen hand had turned it. I heard Pen scream . . .

Then I saw that the spokes which had come to rest in front of McTeague were those held by that patrician pair which seemed to dominate the others—and it was as if they held it steady there—offering it to McTeague.

Chapter VI

THE BLACK WHEEL SPINS

Benson lifted his head. He said, savagely: "Who turned that wheel? What made you yelp, Pen?"

Pen did not answer. Her hands were clasped over her breasts; her eyes dark with fear were fastened on McTeague.

Benson lumbered to his feet. He gripped the spokes of the wheel, strained to turn it. The wheel did not move. He dropped the spokes and took a menacing step toward McTeague. His teeth were bared, his heavy lids half covering the bloodshot eyes; he snarled at McTeague: "What the hell did you do to that wheel?"

He looked at Pen: "You're white. What did he do to you?"

Pen went up to him, put her little hands on his shoulders; she said, shakily: "Father, there's something . . . dreadfully wrong . . . here. I know it. You haven't been like yourself ever since you saw this ship. Won't you let it be—let the sands cover it again . . ."

He pushed her away, thrust his head at McTeague, face congested, heavy lids half closing over bloodshot eyes; he said: "So! That's it, eh? Been working on my daughter, have you, McTeague? What's your game, anyway?" He took a step closer, big fists clenched. "First you come

to me with a sour faced warning to get out quick. Then you try sneaking over here with Fenimore—with a scaling ladder in the dory. What else did you bring with you, McTeague? And you managed to be the first up here—and you took a hell of a while to show yourself. What were you doing?"

His fury growing, he gripped the spokes of the black wheel and tried to turn it and could not. He spat at McTeague: "You swung it—and I can't. And now you're working on Pen to pry me loose. What is it you know, McTeague? And what did you do with yourself last night? What is it you know—what did you do when you were over here? Come clean—you sneaking—!"

Pen said, frantically: "Oh, Father—don't! Please, Mike—he doesn't mean it!"

McTeague, unheeding her, said to Benson contemptuously: "You're crazy."

Benson quivered; his face grew blacker: "I'm crazy, eh? So that's your answer! All right, take the wheel—if you can't turn it, I'll believe you."

McTeague's hands went out to grip the spokes; his eyes dropped to the interlaced hands and a curious indecision crept into them. He stepped back from the wheel; he said sullenly: "No."

"Got him!" Benson looked at Chadwick and laughed. "Got him, Chad. That called his bluff."

Chadwick was enjoying the scene. There could be no doubt of that. But he did not answer Benson's laugh, only kept his gaze upon the two of them with a faint mocking speculation in his black eyes. McTeague's face was very pale and though he spoke evenly it was with manifest effort. He said to Benson:

"Listen, sir. I never heard of, thought of nor saw this place until we ran into it yesterday. I have no knowledge of this ship whatever. As for last night, I give you my word I did not leave the clipper. Before ever seeing this ship, I told you that I disliked the island. Since boarding it, I find my dislike intensified and—justified. But I still have no evidence to support my dislike—none, at least, that would satisfy you. So put it down to my superstition. I have not discussed these—superstitions—with Pen, nor even mentioned them. And that is all the explanation I am inclined to make. And if you don't like it," he ended, with a sudden cold ferocity as foreign to what I knew of McTeague as was Benson's viciousness to what I knew of him, "if you don't believe it, you can go to hell and broil there."

Chadwick interposed, smoothly: "There is another explanation, sir. Deborah is sure that Mike is sometimes what she terms 'fey.' That he has the gift of seeing things others cannot. Second sight, in a fashion. Perhaps that is what has been active in this matter."

Benson growled, incredulously. Chadwick went on, still with the same smooth malice: "But you, yourself, have so often trusted to Mike's impressions when he has had no more evidence to support them than in the present case. One might argue that, indeed, you have only yourself to blame."

The glance he gave McTeague was filled with covert mockery. McTeague stood listening to him, impassively, but his mouth was grim. Benson growled a curse, Chadwick went on:

"But if this explanation does not satisfy you, there is perhaps another. Mike always tells the truth—as he sees it, of course. You know how sensitive he is to—ah, environment. Suppose that last night he went to sleep upon the clipper with his fears heavy upon him. Suppose that in his sleep he swam—I do not see how he could have taken a boat without the watch knowing it—unless, of course—but that is unthinkable of Mike. That he should bribe the watch, I mean. No, in his sleep he swam here, boarded the wreck, stored his mind with—ah, impressions. One of them how to manipulate the wheel—"

McTeague's left hand shot out and gripped a spoke of the wheel. Instantly, his face hardened, his eyes grew bleak; he spoke with an oddly blurred accent and with a coldness that held in it something deadly. He said: "Enough, Pedro! Ye're nearing the end of my patience with your snake tongue and the poison in your mind behind it—"

Left hand still gripping the wheel, he bent forward with his right, slapped Chadwick across the face. All the strength of the great shoulder was behind that blow, and Chadwick went down before it like a smitten marionette, rolling back into the stern scuppers. He staggered up, looking dazedly at McTeague.

And a stillness dropped upon the deck, and I felt as though invisible cords had been tautened; as though a cobweb's strands had suddenly been drawn taut to meet the shock of impact of some great fly. And I felt that many unseen eyes were centred on McTeague, willing him—willing him to some action . . . but what that action was, I could not read.

Only for a breath did the queer tension hold, and then McTeague dropped his hand from the wheel. He stood staring at Chadwick, puzzlement in his gaze, as though he did not know him. Then recognition came abruptly, and with it realization of what he had done, for he looked at Pen miserably, then sprang over to Chadwick, still on his knees, and lifted him to his feet.

And now Benson and Pen and I were beside them. Chadwick tore himself loose from McTeague and took a step back, face murderous. Benson stepped between them. It was as though that swift and vicious blow had jarred him into his normal self.

He shook his massive grey head as if to rid his brain of cobwebs. He said:

"That was a hell of a thing to do, Mike!"

McTeague said slowly, with a queer puzzlement and distress: "I know it was, sir. And I don't know why . . . would you stand aside, sir?" And as Benson did so, he went up to Chadwick. "Chad, I'm damned sorry. You angered me with your talk . . . but that was no reason for striking you. And without warning. Here—" he thrust his red head forward—"take a slam at me in return. And hard as you want."

Chadwick's hand went to his reddened cheek; he answered slowly: "No. I don't quite collect a debt like that."

Benson said: "Oh, come now, Chad. Mike's apologized. Damn it, it seems to me I've been riding him pretty hard myself and if his temper

got the best of him, I'm most to blame. Damn it, I wouldn't blame him if he'd slammed me down instead of you. Come now, shake hands and let's all forget it."

Pen said: "Oh, Chad—please do!" and held her hands out to him.

Chadwick looked at Benson for a moment, speculatively; turned his back to us for another moment, and when he turned again, hatred and vindictiveness were gone. His face wore its familiar, half-mocking smile. He held a hand out to McTeague.

"O.K., Mike. The boss admits he was wrong, so we'll call it apologies all round and wipe it out."

Benson boomed, delightedly: "Fine!" He chuckled. "And damned if I don't believe there's something in Mike's hunch after all."

Pen gasped: "Then you won't take the wheel!"

Benson laughed: "Well, daughter, I wouldn't go as far as that. Then there's that matter of the cabin to be looked into . . ."

But out of deference to Pen he ended explorations summarily. Yet I knew and she knew—he would return. And though he gazed hopefully for her pleasure, as we returned to the Susan Ann, she did not smile for him.

Chapter VII IN THE SPIKED CABIN

Dinner had a queer atmosphere of unreality about it; I had an irritating feeling that the nameless wreck was more material than the Susan Ann; it the substance and she the shadow. No feeling, however irrational, being without a cause, I finally ascribed the genesis of this one to McTeague's superstitious imaginings and forebodings and the unfamiliar emotional disturbances I had experienced beside the black wheel. These latter, without doubt, had been due to nervous instability induced by the strain of the past few days and nights. Nevertheless, although I now knew its origin, the faintly nightmarish oppression persisted.

Of the five of us who had boarded the wreck, only Pen and Chadwick seemed to be unaffected. Now and then I thought that Pen was doing a bit of acting; perhaps Chadwick too. Benson was grimly preoccupied, his cold eyes resting occasionally upon McTeague with a certain dour speculation. Lady Fitz's gay chatter met small response from him. Both she and Boriloff were bubbling over their excursion, Boriloff abounding in dramatic descriptions which ordinarily would have set McTeague off, but he ate abstractedly, answering only when spoken to, and quite as often not answering at all. Flora Swastlow fairly pulsed with animation. They had planned an exploring expedition for the morrow—there was good shooting on the island, put in Boriloff—Pen and Chadwick and McTeague would go along, of course.

Much of Flora's animation fled when Benson brusquely interrupted her, saying that Pen could do as she pleased, but he had use for McTeague

and Chadwick. Captain Johnson might be able to spare them a couple of the crew for rough work or emergency. Captain Johnson gave him a sharp glance, then nodded. Flora pouted and said in that case they'd better call the party off till later. Boriloff pouted and said that he was going even if he had to go alone. The Rev. Dr. Swastlow was looking at Benson for his cue. Benson said autocratically that they would go as they had planned; they were better off the clipper than on her while the beaching was in progress and the repairing begun. On second thought, better too that Pen should go with them. He said: "I suggest you leave as soon after breakfast as possible. Captain Johnson, will you make the necessary arrangements?"

He arose abruptly, glowered at McTeague and said: "McTeague, come to my cabin when you've finished," and stalked out. Pen, looking startled and angry, half arose to follow him, caught McTeague's eye, and sank back.

The dinner broke up soon after that, and I was very glad to have it end. I went on deck with the others. It was a moonless night, the stars half veiled by thin clouds. To my surprise, the deck lights suddenly leaped into full illumination. Under the lights a wide circle of the lagoon showed pellucidly clear. The Susan Ann seemed to float in the middle of an immense bubble of pale emerald. Beyond the circle of the bubble was nothing but vague and mistily black palisades that curved and enclosed us. McTeague and Pen strolled aft toward Benson's cabin. The others clustered along the rail, looking down at the fish which, attracted by the glow, swam about as in a huge aquarium.

A quarter of an hour passed, and Pen did not reappear. I wondered whether she had gone in with McTeague to her father. A little later the Swastlows, Lady Fitz and Boriloff went to their cabins, pleading sleepiness. Chadwick loitered beside me at the rail. He seemed, for him, ill at ease, and I thought that there was something he wanted to say to me. Then I realized that his attention was centred on Benson's quarters and that he too thought Pen might be there, and that he was waiting for her. I said I was going to the laboratory and asked if he would like to come with me. He did not answer—I doubt whether he heard me. When I turned at the head of the companionway he was still standing at the rail, gaze fixed on Benson's cabin.

I dropped into my own cabin before going to the laboratory—and there was Pen.

She said, breathlessly: "I thought you were never coming. Lock the door and speak low."

"Where's Chad?" she asked when I had done this. I told her where I had left him, and that I thought he was waiting for her. She listened with a faintly malicious smile.

I waited—surely it was not to ascertain Chadwick's whereabouts that she had hidden herself in my cabin . . . what did she want? It was with a distinct shock that I heard her ask the question I had least expected.

"Is my father—insane?"

I gaped at her, not knowing how to reply. She said: "Be as brutally frank as you choose, but be truthful. I am no tender blossom."

I began, somewhat helplessly: "You know your father so much better than I, Miss Benson—"

She interrupted angrily: "Please answer me—do you think my father sane?"

Then, as I still hesitated, she said, earnestly: "Kurtson must have told you something about Father. And he must have trusted you or he'd never have sent you here. Jim has told you things, too—I know that. Also I'm entirely familiar with his obsessions about that damned old ancestor. I've seen him step into that mental marionette many times, and so has Captain Johnson. What I want to know is whether he's stepped in once too often."

Here was sanity and here was keenness of observation unclouded by superstition. I determined, unprofessional as it might be, to tell her the conclusions I had come to, after my first conversation with her father, conclusions which the happenings of the afternoon had settled rather than disturbed.

I asked: "What makes you fear that?"

"His behaviour on the wreck, of course," she answered.

I said: "No, I don't think your father is at all insane. Even should his imagination betray him further than it did this afternoon, still it would not be insanity. You have asked for my diagnosis of him. Very well—"

I told her precisely what Kurtson had said to me, and what it was he feared; sketched the essential points of my interview with Benson the night I had come aboard, and finally gave her my interpretation of the case. She listened without interruption, then sat thinking.

"You know," she said at last, musing, "I think it's because part of Jim never grew up—like Peter Pan. You know boys want to be Indian Chiefs, or engineers, or pirates, or firemen and what not. While they're still boys they think themselves Indian Chiefs and cowboys and all, and act and talk as though they were. But after a while they forget it. Jim worked hard, never had a chance to play. Then something turned his mind to the old Cap'n. It was a sort of vacation, a rest, an escape to think of what the old Cap'n would do in thus and so, picture himself not in the office but at the wheel of the old Susan Ann, and not Big Jim Benson—maybe then not so big—but as the old Cap'n. And it grew and it grew and it grew—like drugs, or liquor. He needed bigger doses and took them . . . Yes, I see it now . . ."

I looked at Pen with real admiration, for this was indeed putting the case with a commonsense clarity.

"The Susan Ann opened wider the door of escape . . . it was as if a boy who'd been dreaming himself an Indian Chief had been given an Indian suit and a pony, and bow and arrows and a tepee . . . yes, now I see . . . but still it was play . . . and Jim knew it was play. And then the hurricane happens, and the wreck over there, and that—that wheel . . ." She shivered.

"There's something wrong about that wreck, Dr. Fenimore," Pen said. "Or whether there is or isn't it's wrong for Jim. It isn't the treasure that may be on it. Jim's got enough money. He doesn't want any more. It's not greed. But wouldn't the finding of such a wreck with all its possibilities of treasure be exactly what would have fired all

the old Cap'n's greed, stiffened his will to get it, stiffened all his ruthlessness and he was ruthless . . . mightn't all this be so strong that my father would *be* the old Cap'n? Or rather, so strengthen that part of his brain where he has built up the old Cap'n that his own part would be submerged? Wipe out that personality which is Jim Benson? For at least a time . . . and in that time what might not this phantom which had been my father do?"

I looked at the girl with increased admiration. It had been soundly reasoned; not phrased as would have a psychiatrist, but absolutely sound. She had made clear to me what I had realized more vaguely—precisely what it was that Kurtson had feared . . . Some catalyst that would fuse Benson and that personality into the dominant one, or perhaps even replace wholly its creator.

She watched me, the blue of her eyes almost black with the fear she controlled so well.

I said: "You have summed the matter up perfectly, Miss Benson. The danger you describe is there. But I do not think the transition would be long-lived—not long enough for serious harm. Your father's own personality is too strong, his own memories too deeply engraved, his own will too arrogant to surrender for long."

But I was not so sure, and I think she sensed I was not.

She said: "Such cases have been, Dr. Fenimore, and with men quite as self-centred as my father. Furthermore, this personality he has built up is not an invader, but a part of himself that he remade. And lives have been wrecked in a matter of minutes."

She clasped her hands, and I saw the knuckles whiten. She said, as if to herself: "If only I could be sure of Mike! But that wheel . . . oh, that cursed wheel . . ."

I said, deliberately roughly: "Nonsense! You are talking like a hysterical girl!"

She said: "Am I? Then what was the matter with Mike? Why did he knock Chad down? Why did he say the things he did? Why did the wheel move for him and no one else?"

I said, even more roughly: "Now you're talking plain damned rot. Your nerves are frayed like Mike's and everybody else's."

"I wish I could believe you." She shook her head and arose. "Open the door a crack and see whether anybody's out in the alley, will you, please."

There was no one in the alley. She hesitated at the threshold, thrust out her hand. "Anyway—you're one to be trusted. And I myself heard that bell and the piping."

She slipped away. I turned back to my cabin, considerably disturbed, and angry at myself. I am possibly one of the least imaginative of men; certainly I am of the least suspicious. But I had the feeling of a veil, a cobweb of superstition, meshing me. I definitely did not like it. I went to the laboratory and tried to put the whole matter from my mind for a time at least, in thoroughly practical work.

Busied thus, I forgot the passing of time, and was amazed to hear two strokes of the ship bell. I translated this, I never could get used to the bells, as one o'clock. I looked out the port, and

saw that the boat was still brilliantly illuminated, and wondered why. I supposed it had something to do with the procedure on the morrow and turned back to my test tubes.

I heard the door open softly and saw McTeague. He closed it softly. He had on a loose white jacket. "Big Jim is going back . . . come with us!" I got my jacket and followed quietly after McTeague to the boat deck, where Big Jim and Chadwick waited beside a dory. We got in and McTeague rowed us noiselessly over.

Big Jim went directly to the wheel—as though drawn by unseen hands—looked at the wheel; touched it. He turned to the others and said, shortly: "What is on your minds?"

Chatwick said: "Well, for one thing, I think that our crew is a pretty hard boiled lot. I think if we bring anybody over to take the wheel, they're going to arrive at the same conclusions we have. I think they're going to look this boat through thoroughly—and take what they can get. And I don't think we can stop them. So—"

"So?" asked Benson, and I saw that his eyes were beginning again to be bloodshot, and the look of cunning creeping into them.

"So," said Chadwick, "I think we might just as well look it over ourselves first, keep the crew away from poking into this hold, take what is worthwhile, and at the last moment, when the Susan Ann is as ship-shape as she can be made, lift out the wheel—if you still want it—Mike can do that all by himself, and explain where we found it as you please."

Chapter VIII IN THE SPIKED CABIN (Continued)

Chadwick had given Benson his opinion as to what we should do—look the wreck over, seize its prizes, and have McTeague transfer the wheel to the Susan Ann.

"And that's your thought?" Big Jim asked, smiling unctuously. I mean it literally—the smile which spread across his face darkened and blemished it, as heavy oil creeping over clear bright water smoothes its ripples. Very obviously Benson was in full accord with Chadwick's counsel, yet it was difficult to decide if he were smiling in sympathy with him or—laughing at him.

"And you, Mike. What's your angle?"

McTeague said bitterly: "So kind of you to inquire! However, since you've stuck your chin out, I hope you can take the wallop. I say—call the boys over from the Susan Ann. Let 'em poke and pry to their little heart's content, until they've reduced this hulk to matchwood, it may be. And it wouldn't be a bad idea if they burned the matches afterward."

"But—the wheel?"

"Oh, the wheel," McTeague answered casually, as if he had all but forgotten it. "Let 'em play hoop with it, or make it into a merry-go-round"—his jaw set and his voice hardened—"just as long as it's kept clear of the Susan Ann!"

Benson's teeth were still visible, but his mouth-corners sloped so low that they were bared in a soundless snarl. He must have known how McTeague would answer—yet the red-head had disappointed him sorely.

McTeague rapped out: "Cap'n, don't look at me like that—as if I'd just kicked the family pooch! You've known all along how I've felt. And you wanted a straight answer."

He flashed at Chadwick: "Hereafter, don't be so damned generous with my services. The wheel may wind up on the Susan Ann, but you can lay odds on one thing — if it does, I won't have carried it there. And the transit won't have been made with my blessing."

He spoke now for the pair of them: "I've said I don't like this island and this wreck, and it still goes. I'm here, yes—but not on my own. Under orders."

He raised his voice as if his next words were not solely for us but for other ears on the wreck as well. "As far as I'm concerned, I want nothing to do with this hulk, nor with anything on her!"

Benson's tone thrilled with resentment, meek as he sought to keep it. "Mike, you know we need the wheel. Maybe if you'd look at it a little closer, you'd see—"

McTeague said coldly: "Look, sir—I said I had no evidence to support my dislike of both island and wheel. Well, I recant. I have! It's their effect on us. You and I have been together a long time, and we've laughed through thick and thin. But all of what we've gone through has been like one prolonged, carefree holiday. Now that we've stumbled on this island and hulk—the party's over, and I'm seeing for the first time that side of you which never goes to parties. The hell of it is not merely that I'm discovering hitherto hidden facets of your character—but some of my own. And I don't like them."

He held out an imploring palm. "Cap'n—let's vamoose from this hell-hole before we take on protective coloring and become devils! Forget we ever saw this wreck!"

Benson had listened pensively and with respect. I thought I had seen pity in his expression. He sighed, and it was blown away on the breath. "The past is the past, lad," he said gruffly. "We can't go back to it."

McTeague turned away helplessly, his mouth twitching. We were too far from the lagoon to hear even the faintest whisper, should one have arisen, from its glassy water. There was no breeze, and had there been one, there was no bush on the dune, no shred of rigging on the wreck, within which it could have rustled.

Until this moment I had not realized the intensity of the silence. People contrast the city's clangor with the country's quiet, but it is only a comparative calm, filled as it is with the sough of wind, insect-murmurs, occasional barking of dogs or a night-bird's cry. This was the utter silence of a sound-proofed vault; the silence—of death itself!

I saw Chadwick's black eyes slide sidewise as if to intercept some quick, furtive movement amidships. Big Jim tipped his head, listening. All of us harkened to that silence.

A fragment of crusted sand broke from the top of the shorn dune and trickled down the slope toward the deck. The acute receptivity of our hearing amplified its faint hiss into the onrush of a glass avalanche! Big Jim jumped, sweeping his light in that direction. Chadwick swore faintly. I underwent something like instantaneous refrigeration, as if tiny ice-crystals formed in every pore.

"Christ!" Big Jim said, lowering his light. "That sounded like a pack of dinosaurs!"

The spell of the silence—its expectancy, its suspense—was broken. But Chadwick in twisting its effects to his own advantage saw to it that it was not truly broken at all. I was beginning to admire the man as a superb, if untutored, psychologist. I had no inkling then of what might be his purpose in forever directing Benson's animosity against McTeague; at the most, I thought it was only that of an artist triumphantly coaxing music from an intractable instrument.

He said amusedly: "That was a good trick, Mike! It almost worked."

McTeague braked whatever train of thought he was riding; waited, it seemed while his mind reviewed Chadwick's gibe. He asked sharply: "Trick? What trick? I won't deny I'm as good as the next man, but I'm damned if I can see how I could have knocked down a fistful of sand at forty yards, and without moving a muscle! What do you think me, a remote-control magician?"

"I wasn't meaning the sand," Chadwick said.

He asked, apparently in all innocence, but harking back to Benson's suspicions of the forenoon: "Is that the way you worked on Pen? A hold-over from courtroom trickery, eh? Kidding the jury into a responsive mood so that when you'd drop a firecracker in their midst they'd think it a bomb! Great stuff, Mike."

The black eyes flicked Benson as if to judge the impact of this taunt. McTeague shivered, restraining himself, I knew, from brute vengeance. Big Jim's lips tightened; his brows drew into a scowl; but whatever his feeling he did not vent it.

He broke the tension between McTeague and Chadwick by turning swiftly, bruskiy, to me. He asked: "And you, Fenimore—what do you think we should do about the wheel?"

I said: "Don't ask me, sir. I hold no opinion whatsoever. You're the head of this expedition. What you say goes."

He chuckled, then sobered. "Forget I'm the boss. I must have the honest response from all of you."

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I've nothing to say. I'm only a spectator."

He chuckled again. "A witness, eh? Well, I guess it'll do."

And to all of us: "You've spoken your pieces; now I'll deliver mine. I want the wheel and whatever else this black sea-baby has to offer. And I've sensed the restiveness of the Susan Ann's crew. If we make a few more trips of this sort, they'll come nosing over here in spite of any precautions. So we'll deflower this pickaninny tonight. Pen's asleep"—he glowered at McTeague—"and won't know anything about it until it's all over. And if you're so afraid of the wheel, McTeague, you needn't touch it. I can handle that detail myself. To begin with — let's have a look into the cabin. I gather, Pride of Americanised Erin, you're not averse to removing the spikes from the door?"

Without a word, McTeague started away. Benson barked: "Where are you going?"

McTeague stopped. "You don't think I can draw the spikes out with my teeth, do you? I'm after tools."

He crossed the deck to the heaped implements we had brought. He returned oddly weary—perhaps woefully resigned were the better term—than the mere weight of crowbar, shovel, chisels and mallet could possibly have entailed. He halted stiffly before Benson, awaiting orders. Big Jim's light, swinging to the spiked portal, was a pointing finger.

McTeague tramped toward the door but paused before the drift of sand there. It was rounded like a grave. Chadwick sauntered leisurely after him, then I. Benson moved up until, like McTeague, he was toeing the sand.

Both stood staring down at it—with misgivings,

I thought. The hard-packed grains sparkled silvern. The reflection they cast up to Benson's face was—singular. He appeared thinner, the jowls quite gone, his cheekbones in sharp relief and the eye-wrinkles harshly etched.

I recognized that face — he had worn it during the height of the hurricane while I had tended him in his cabin; the face of the portrait above his bunk—that of the old Cap'n.

Atop the mount, as if carefully placed there, was a bosun's call, with no drifting of sand to indicate that wind had uncovered it. The pipe had the look of having been carefully, recently laid. Awaiting our discovery.

Chadwick bent, took it up. Somberly Benson watched him; McTeague drew a little away. Chadwick did not blow into the call, but his fingers curved over it, closed and clinched—the signal summoning all hands. He offered the pipe to Benson, who made no move of acceptance. He eyed it a moment as though he did not quite like it himself, then dropped it into a pocket. His look at McTeague accused him of putting the pipe on the sand.

McTeague muttered: "There's more there than that, I think. What? Well, maybe the bones of the man who drove those spikes in."

It would have been another good opportunity for Chadwick to interpose some derogatory remark about superstition or McTeague's setting the stage for future effects. Benson usurped it. He whispered, awestruck, as if realising the truth of something he had dreamed: "Slam Bang's bones!"

The comment did not strike McTeague as it did Chadwick or me; he took it at its worth. I felt the sudden jar of Chadwick's gaze. Big Jim's remark was irrational, inasmuch as, in all likelihood at that particular moment, Slam Bang was sound asleep aboard the Susan Ann. Even if he were not, he could hardly have become mere osseous remains since the time we had last seen him.

Chadwick shook his head, significantly.

McTeague said tonelessly: "Slam Bang's—I wouldn't know. And maybe they're not there now, after all. They may have been washed away when—"

The implements clattered to the planking as he dropped them in a backward leap, galvanised by some inner spark. At the same time Benson uttered an incoherent exclamation, his light falling from his hand. There was an instant's confusion; I danced aside, dodging the rebound of the clanking tools.

The tone of the crowbar was much like that of a deep bell. Its clang shocked both men out of whatever had gripped them. By the light of the fallen flash I saw Benson rigid with surprise, his mouth agape, one large, finely-moulded hand lifted in dismay. I caught only the tail-end of the look between him and the Irishman; it was one I could not fathom.

Then Benson and Chadwick both had bent to retrieve the light; McTeague and I reached for the fallen tools.

Benson asked wonderingly and eagerly, like a hopeful student questioning a teacher: "What happened, Mike?"

McTeague straightened, implements in hand. "I don't know, sir. I seemed to—to remember

something."

"Yes?" Benson asked quickly, but McTeague had turned to me.

"Doc, you know the rule for what I mean. It was that feeling of something just about to happen that has happened already a long time before."

But before I could explain the phenomenon of double-memory, he snapped to nobody in particular: "It's this damned ship, that's what! Take my advice, and let her rot—"

Chadwick interposed silkily: "Another bit of showmanship, Mike?"

McTeague's knuckles paled on the shaft of the crowbar. He glared defiance at Chadwick, wrathfully strode around the mound and to the spiked door. He felt tentatively of one of the great pins; twisted it.

"Loose," he said, lowering his tools. He worked the spike free. "It's as if hands have been yanking on this for years." Then, reassuring himself: "But then, they were driven in when she was afloat and the wood damp. While she was under the sand the wood dried out and shrunk, losing its grip."

Chadwick, a shade diffidently, aided him. Big Jim hesitated a moment, then set to work on the opposite jamb. I was pleased that the three took up all the doorway's space. I was not superstitious, yet I would not have twisted willingly one of those long nails loose—though why, I did not know.

One after another they removed the spikes, and with curious ease.

"Seems like they want to come out of their own volition," Big Jim observed, sounding both astonished and uneasy.

Chadwick could not resist the raillery: "Perhaps what's locked inside is helping us by pushing outward—eh, Mike?"

McTeague vouchsafed no answer, not even so much as a glance, but his silence was inspired eloquence.

The last spike was out. McTeague cleared his throat. "I feel as if this will prove either the end of the world, or the beginning—as if going inside will trip off a trap-gun. But if that's the way you want it, Cap'n—" Benson was silent; his eyes glittered.

"Well," sighed McTeague, "here we go!"

He pulled on the door and it opened. Chadwick snapped on his light. The two rays drove down a sanded companionway, first to another door, then to the pair flanking it. I sniffed a faint, indefinable odor and discerned a suspicion of mist. It reflected our lights greenish, slightly diffusing them. It was as if the passage were illuminated by dying afterglow.

Benson raised one foot over the coaming, but did not proceed immediately down the companion. He looked from one of us to another. Then with a short grunt of a laugh, he entered. Close behind went Chadwick, I next. McTeague came slowly. I peeped to him. His head was craned toward that far door. He was sniffing as suspiciously as the dog which scents a danger too unreal for human perception.

I realised that his vanity drew him onward; that had Chadwick not been present, he would have turned tail. And how I have wished, ever

since, that he had!

Chadwick paused at the door to the right. Benson said: "Give us the shovel, Mike." Then: "Where the hell are you? Come for'ard, nothing's going to bite you!"

He held both Chadwick's light and his own while the dark man broke into the sand and turned it from the door. It was not very deep, but its crust was almost as firm as concrete. Once it was penetrated, however, the grains beneath were like powder.

Chadwick stood away from the door. Benson caught its handle and tugged, and it ripped from the top hinge. Chadwick's shovel fell as he caught the panel and assisted Benson in swinging it. We looked on the first step of a ladder communicating between decks; the rest was under sand.

"Hell!" Benson spat in disgust. "The hold's gut-full—we'd need a steam-scoop to clear it."

He rammed the door forcefully shut; Chadwick cleared the one opposite. It opened on what must have been a private locker or slop-chest. From its sand Chadwick excavated felted fibers which once must have been fabric, and wooden boxes which disintegrated as his shovel struck them. They had contained brittle cindery fragments of what might have been preserved meat.

He cleaned the approach to the third portal, that one which the lights first had shown, and indubitably the opening into the cabin proper. Benson reached to pull on it—

A plank creaked underfoot, sharp as a shot. From the deck outside sounded other creakings as if to answer the first—the noises a settling building makes. Though Benson's fingers scarcely made contact with the ring-catch of the door, it swung outward slowly, somehow ominously—as if, as Chadwick had suggested, what was sealed within were attempting to aid us, eager for its release.

We looked into that cabin—closed for how long, I thought—and thought wrongly—only God alone could know.

We didn't need our flashes. I fancied at first that the livid light came through the ports, and glanced at them—they were so diminutive that each could barely admit the passage of a clenched hand!

No, the light was pure phosphorescence, fox-fire, the glimmer of decay—but of an intensity verging on the phenomenal. It was bright as the illuminated figures on my watch-face.

We saw walls of teak, cracked and splotched by grey mould. There were remnants of tapestries falling in time-gnawed tatters, no trace of their patterns perceptible. I saw dark paintings in warped carved frames, the sagging canvas water-soaked into meaningless glooms. There were several sea-chests, white-topped with sand; carved chairs tumbled in the corners.

The sand over the floor was about a foot in depth and unevenly distributed, heaviest under the ports; it must have filtered in while the ship was immersed. In the center of the cabin was a great black table. As I glimpsed the figure bent over it, I heard a sound midway between a gulp and a sob from McTeague. His face was as white as the sand; haggard as though he had not slept since birth. I had seen his courage victor over the

hurricane, and was surprised that it faltered now.

The form at the table must have come into balance while settling across the table's edge. Its knees were slightly buckled, and the arms outstretched on the table, the head on the wood and turned from us.

It was a man, or had been one. His clothing still hung about him, but shredded and faded beyond all recognition of style or period. The exposed flesh had shrivelled and turned leathery yellow; he was virtually a mummy. Some of the virid glimmers emanated from him, shaping a wan nimbus. About the head fell tousled strands of red hair.

Between his hands was a great round cup, golden and two-handled. Scattered near it were gold and jewels that flared in our lights like the refractive eyes of cats. As though the cup, containing wine of wealth, had spilled.

Benson forgot a degree of his trepidation, Chadwick of all whatever he might have had. Both started for the table, Benson lagging a step behind the other.

McTeague's eyes were closed. The green glow made his pallor that of death. He trembled; I slipped a steadying arm around him. He pushed me away, grumbling peevishly.

"I'm all right!" It was his voice but not his face. Cautiously, as though he might drop through a hidden trapdoor, he worked into the cabin, but not toward the table where waited Chadwick and Big Jim.

Though Chadwick's eyes held steady to the cup, Benson's strayed from it; for reasons of his own, he was keeping strict watch on all of us. Was it from greed? If not—what else?

McTeague plodded both deliberately and reluctantly, as a doomed man approaches his executioner, to a black blotch in the sands. He stopped, gazed down.

Big Jim called: "Hey, Mike—and you there, Sawbones!"

We turned—I saw McTeague nodding to himself with an unpleasant brand of satisfaction, the kind of nod a frustrated spinster might bestow on the peccadillo committed by some favorite scapegrace. We went to the table. Benson was pointing to the cup, but not touching it.

"Look" he bade. "Must have been pirates at that!" Then: "What's eating you, Mike? A pirate ship and some loot—but instead of being wrought up about it, you're cold as a mackerel!"

McTeague might have replied justifiably that Benson was also as singularly lacking in jubilation; instead he gestured toward the blot on the sand. "Ask—them!"

"Ask who?" Benson frowned in that direction, discovered the blotch. He hastened to it, squatted studying it, his expression that of one who, disbelieving fairy tales, glimpses a flying form on a broomstick.

McTeague said shakily: "More evidence, sir, as to why I distrust this layout. They've been lying here waiting. They're the educated winds that struck the bell and blew the pipe. They knew we'd come in answer. And we're here. And if we've the sense God gave us—we'll let the matter drop just as it is and beat it."

He added wryly: "Although I think that now, even if we did tear out of here hell-for-leather,

it's too late to do it Scot-free. We've opened Pandora's box. It's going to be just as impossible for us to restore what's come out as it was for Pandora."

And incisively to Chadwick: "Figure out this piece of showmanship if you can!"

Chadwick, stooping beside Big Jim, looked over a shoulder. "Cool off, Mike—you'd think I've an axe to grind."

"No, go ahead," McTeague encouraged, most amiably. "I'm curious. How did I manage?"

"Very well. When you swam over here last night—always providing you didn't bribe the crew for the use of the boat—you looked into this cabin. That's why the spikes came out so easily for us—they'd been removed previously and replaced. The sand's hard, and your footprints wouldn't show. And if that's not the solution of your amazing foreknowledge, then your second sight has been working overtime. But I'm a lawyer. I've never heard of second sight standing as courtroom evidence. Not, at least, since the days of the witch trials."

Benson, not eying either man but still studying the blot, tensed his whole bent body into one enormous ear.

"And the motive?"

"Must I be really so blunt? The Captain has often been swayed in his decisions by your hunches. It wouldn't hurt to increase your reputation for infallibility. It might come in handy at some future date, should you like to persuade Captain Benson to invest a large sum to your advantage."

McTeague turned; I said: "To a doctor, Mike, Chad's theory is more plausible than second sight. But I cannot agree with his estimate of your character. I would call your apparent prescience—coincidence."

Chadwick purred: "If it is second sight, Mike, put it to the test. What else is under this sand, besides the owner of these hands?"

The little ice cubes formed all over me again. I asked: "Hands?"

I knelt beside Benson. The blotch was a pair of wasted black hands, crossed at the wrists and protruding from the sand. They were hauntingly familiar—

McTeague clarified my thoughts: "They're on the wheel! What's lying there was—one of the models!"

Chapter IX

IN THE SPIKED CABIN (Continued)

Chadwick cooed: "Excellent! What else?"

Despite his pallor, McTeague was sweating. He passed a palm over his brow. "The sight just comes as it pleases—I can't force it." He flung out his hand in a petulant gesture, striking the shoulder of the mummy at the table and dislodging it.

With a series of little snapping sounds, it rocked—I thought that it would fall away from us. But one of the knees cracked sharply and it tumbled back again in the direction of the blow. It fell on its side, the stiff arms about McTeague's ankles, as if the dead were making an appeal to the quick.

I had seen several such instances of apparent

animation after death in the dissecting rooms of medical colleges; all of them entirely explicable, and in as macabre an atmosphere. Nonetheless, I was a bit taken aback by the mere abruptness of the happenstance, though nowhere near McTeague's extent. His eyes bulged, and a warm, living flush toned the cadaverous white of his cheeks—the flush, I was afraid, of hysteria.

Gingerly he stepped from the ring made by those wooden dead arms. Now that it had fallen, the body no longer cast off a greenish glow. It darkened even as a lump of swamp fire loses its light after handling.

"Come outside a while, Mike," I soothed. "A little air—"

Again he warded me back. "Keep clear—I don't need air!" Then, fuzzily: "If it's air you're wanting—"

He strode unsteadily to a port and smashed it with his fist, went to another and broke it. "Cross ventilation," he said with a sour grin, and walked over to Benson and Chadwick.

The dark man broke the caked sand with blows from the shovel's blade, then scooped away the loose powder beneath his fingers. The shrivelled black hands were crossed on a breast black as the table, as the wheel itself. The face which Chadwick bared was sunken-cheeked, hollow-eyed, its thick lips drawn back by shrinkage from yellow teeth. Kinky hair crisped from the crown. It was the preserved head of a negro.

Chadwick, finicking away last traces of sand from it, started. He had found something more, an angle of creased black skin like the corner of a battered black Gladstone—the shoulder of a second buried form.

"Six of them," McTeague muttered. Narrowly Benson surveyed him. "You'll find six of them there!"

Chadwick demurred: "There are nine sets of hands on the wheel, not only half a dozen."

McTeague sighed drowsily: "One was thrown overboard, or there'd be seven." He scanned the red-pollled mummy. "He's the eighth. And the ninth—the ninth—" He looked oddly at Big Jim who quickly turned to watch Chadwick's progress.

Benson remarked: "'Embalmed in amber all the pirates lie'—that's a quotation I don't know from whom, but applicable."

And guardedly: "Mummies! Why were they spiked in here as if they were ravening beasts? What harm to a living man could a mummy do?" Again he narrowed his eyes at McTeague.

Just for an instant, the Irishman's hands clenched. He said: "Our friend Red over there was no mummy when they locked him in!"

Chadwick, cleaning the sand from the second figure, observed: "This is simply a shot in the dark, but if there are more mummies, even less than the six which Mike says are here—and if they're negroes—maybe they weren't mummies when this cabin was sealed."

"How's that?" barked Benson, swerving his trenchant eyes to the man.

"This could have been a slave ship," Chadwick expounded. "From the lines of her, I'd say she was built when the trade was flourishing. We know that the slave-dealers weren't very particular about the welfare, physical or mental, of their

black merchandise. They were as much concerned over profit as they were unconcerned over sanitation. A lot of their charges died simply for lack of breathing space in the cramped quarters afforded them. Others died because the ship's motion rubbed the skin from their bones as they lay chained to the bare planking. When one had an infectious disease, it frequently spread throughout the entire company—in which case the uncontaminated crew could do little else than seal the hold, scuttle or fire the ship, and push off in boats."

He said: "This ship was scuttled probably by gunfire from another member on the convoy." Benson smiled. "We saw the marks outside of ball-and-chain shot, which went out of custom with the advent of steam—placing this ship at least as far back as a hundred years ago and upholding the slave-theory."

"Very well. When this ship was sunk, the prisoned negroes and the red-head drowned. They couldn't get out—but neither could fish get in to pick the bodies clean to the bone. The salt water preserved the corpses. Later on, a particularly catastrophic storm or undersea disturbance threw this hulk ashore and covered it with sand. The water drained out, and the brine-pickled bodies dried into mummies."

Benson asked incredulously: "With their hands all folded on their breasts?"

He indicated Chadwick's second find, whose upper half was now uncovered. Like the first it was a negro, and its hands were crossed on its bosom.

Chadwick set to digging farther away in search of a third. He said: "Well, then they were mummies before the ship was sunk, and remained in their laid out positions even after their soaking." But Benson shook his head over this conjecture.

"Funny," he commented, "that the red-head landed leaning against the table. And if they were mummies before the sinking"—he returned to his former thought—"why should they have been locked in here?"

"Perhaps the carrot-top wasn't. Red-heads are notorious trouble-makers. Perhaps the crew was superstitious and didn't like him and his mummies."

Abruptly Benson arose. "Leave off, Chad!" And irritably: "Better leave those bodies alone."

Chadwick, still grubbing, explained: "Legal habits are hard to shake. I'm looking for complete evidence to substantiate Mike's claim of second sight."

"Leave off!" Benson repeated, stalking back to the table.

"Why?" Chadwick asked. "They've been dead for a long while; if they were diseased, the germs have long since starved. And if I can prove the existence of second sight, think of its practical advantages!"

"Well, have your own way," Jim relented.

I warned: "If the mummies were diseased, Chad, it might be better to shun them. Germs are strange little beasts and not solely responsible for the list of all ailments. And dust is an ideal vehicle for the spreading of virus diseases."

He looked up. "Ah, then you subscribe to the curse of Tut-ankh-amen's tomb?"

Jim was at the table, scanning the cup and jewels. He did not touch them. His eyes strayed to the red-haired body, lifted from it to McTea-

gue's coppery thatch.

He sounded pleading: "This cup and these trinkets can't do him any good now—somebody may as well have them!" But still he made no move toward them.

McTeague strode brusquely to the table, swept the jewels into a compact pile and dropped them clinking into the cup. There were golden chains, a necklace, a bent bracelet, rings and large unmounted stones.

"Here," he said shortly. "Take them!" It was as if he were surrendering his own belongings. Benson's fingers curled around the cup's handles, his gaze again taking in the mummy's red locks, then McTeague's.

He shook the cup, rattling its contents. The sound banished any qualm as a shaman's rattles are supposed to affright disease.

He set the cup back on the table, but not too near the titian-tressed mummy. He went to the jumble of chairs, levelling his light on them the better to ascertain their carvings. One he lifted and let fall back.

"Warped beyond hope," he mourned. "Pity. Beautiful workmanship." He toed the wreckage of the others. "None worth bothering about." All the same he took up several of the crooked fragments and laid them on the table beside the cup.

He examined the hasps of one of the chests. They were mere strata of rust and disintegrated at his touch. The curved lid was plastered with hard sand. He wrenched on it and it snapped from its hinges. His light played into the box; the clothing it had contained was rotted and ravelled to a tangle of drab waste like matted fleece.

McTeague approached the chest with the same proprietary air, as before. He rummaged among its rags as if familiar with them, and lifted out a long bar wrapped in stiff silk which, brittle as papeer ash, flaked under his touch and fell away. Silk so bright that I had thought it cloth of gold; its dropping fragments sparkled under Jim's light like golden coins or the wings of yellow butterflies. I would have gathered some for closer inspection, but they powdered under my fingers.

The length of bubbled ruse they had swathed was an old English cut-and-thrust sword. Benson seemed as excited as if it were in perfect condition, and eagerly welcomed our comments.

McTeague found two percussion-lock pistols in fair shape. "That's all in this chest," he said, as if declaring his property to customs officials, and strode on to the next.

Its hasps held firm despite their rust. He wormed his fingers under the lid and strained. The wood cracked with a soft pop, parted in the velvet-soft splinters of ancient decay. He tumbled the fragments aside and searched the chest, Benson assisting by holding his light to advantage.

The green light was fading from the cabin, its dusk deepening to night. I checked the validity of this impression by consulting the luminous figures on my watch; they had grown clearly legible, brighter than the phosphorescence which hitherto had nullified them. Perhaps the shattering of the ports and resultant currents of fresh air had diminished the glimmers. It was a quarter of four.

Chadwick's torch was propped on its side atop a hummock of sand raised to accommodate it; his

digging had disclosed two more of the black mummies, one lying partly over the other, both facing downward.

"Four of them so far—there must be something after all in second sight! Or else—"

He did not mention the alternative, but snatched up his light and proceeded to the fresh possibilities of another expanse of deep sand.

From the second chest McTeague salvaged a sculpture in ivory about ten inches in depth and five in breadth and thickness. His exclamation and Benson's brought Chadwick and myself closer. Aside from black cracks running along the grain of the piece, and its having yellowed to the hue of Ming amber, it was in splendid condition.

"African," Jim pronounced, ears pricked for our judgments.

"Looks like the slave theory holds water at that," Chadwick said.

It was an ugly little figure, streamlined though squat, its bullet-head and slit-eyes reminiscent of Easter Island's statues. From an anatomical standpoint it was rather overwhelming female.

"That's the inventory," McTeague said regretfully, rising from the chest. "The rest is just rags." The third coffer yielded nothing but litter like that in a well-weathered bird-nest.

Chadwick resumed his excavations. Jim went to the sand-spread bed at the far bulkhead. The remnants of its canopy hung listlessly from its posts like ragged pennons. He slapped the posts and disappointedly remarked that, damn it, if he thought they'd bear transporting, he'd move them and have copies made, but he doubted they'd take that much punishment.

"So that's all," he grieved—a child who, having opened the last of a lengthy list of Christmas packages, still yearns for something further.

"Got a fifth!" Chadwick announced from his labors. "There may be another, or more. As evidence goes, it's fairly conclusive. Mike, your being fey does have at least one advantage—you've managed to impress me."

"Thanks for the compliment," McTeague said crossly. "Just keep in mind that my being fey has its disadvantages too." There were at least three implications in that retort.

To Benson he observed: "It's late, sir. If we're not back on the Susan Ann soon, Pen will be up; she'll miss us and maybe spill the beans by organising a rescue party."

Jim agreed none too happily. "I want the wheel, and it'll be daylight by the time it's loose. Well, maybe we can make another trip and tunnel into the hold's sand. I'd hoped we could crawl through to the buried bow."

He and Chadwick gathered up the night's finds. A jerk of his head summoned us outside.

McTeague hesitated. "Just a minute!"

He hurried to the red-haired mummy, lifted it easily, carried it over to the bed and laid it on its side. He said somberly: "Poor old Red—there's not much left of him!"

He fumbled at the mummy's breast, then looked quickly, furtively, to us. I know he was wondering if we had discerned him tucking from sight the locket which had slipped from the rags at the body's throat. He approached us somewhat shame-faced.

"He was at that table so long," he explained sheepishly, "that I felt he was entitled to lie down at last."

Chadwick turned on his heel and started along the companionway. Benson smiled. Had his arms not been laden with booty he must have given McTeague a commending pat. He hastened after Chadwick, calling for him to slow down.

Under cover of that cry and its answer, McTeague whispered. "You saw, Doc, but don't give me away! It was his own locket, and he should keep it. I think there's a miniature in it of someone he loved."

I gave him the pat which Benson had forgone. I liked Mike indeed.

A few weak wisps of phosphorescence accompanied us outside into the night. We paused to breathe deeply, and the fresh air was like a cool bath; I felt wholesomely clean. Jim passed the sword, pistols and carved bits of wood to my keeping; the cup and ivory figurine he tendered to Chadwick's care.

It did not take as long as he had reckoned to remove the wheel from its standard; Chadwick twitted that the wheel wanted to come loose. While Benson pried at the rusted ironwork, the ship creaked again—sharp and treble crepitations like distant raucous laughter.

McTeague did not watch. First he went to the door and shut it; a strong draught had been hissing out as though the cabin were breathing relief. He roved to the taffrail, staring over the rise of sand toward the wan luminescence rising from the hidden Susan Ann's lights.

With every scrape of Jim's tools, with every bird-like sound from the creaking ship, he winced. His fingers clenched the broken railing.

"It's off!" Benson exulted. "You can relax, Mike. Good Friday's over."

The wheel was not very heavy, I saw, when Jim hefted it and carried it to the ladder. Above him, cool and clear as a note from a crystal gong, I saw the morning star.

"Over the side with you, Mike!" Benson commanded. "Then you, Medico. Chad will pass down the loot."

The Irishman pivoted, making a last survey of the deck. He smiled crookedly at the bell on the riven mast. Then he vented a deep breath, marched to the ladder, clambered down the ropes, and waited holding his light on me. I descended. Chadwick came halfway down and relayed our finds from Benson to me. Benson followed, the wheel hanging in the crook of his arm. Chadwick relieved him of it and brought it the rest of the way.

We looked up the ship's side; it was like a black thunderhead blotting out the stars. The snapping sounds still arose from it.

Chadwick said: "As long as the sand completely covered it and the pressure was constant, it was all right. But it doesn't seem able to stand the uneven weight."

The sounds loudened to the grind of Arctic floes. Jim said uncomfortably: "Looks like we got out just in time!"

He caught up the wheel, sped over the sand with it. A hundred yards from the hulk we stopped, turned.

From the cabin's smashed ports the last of the phosphorescence swirled upward in vague streamers, like melting moths aspiring to the far candle-flame stars. The dune collapsed. With a roar like the shriek of steam it rolled down on the ship, heavy and inexorable as Thor's hammer.

There was a tremendous acceleration of the crackling like the sound of a savagely crumpled matchbox amplified a thousandfold—a wooden shriek! The wreathing phosphorescence was blotted out. A cloud of dust swept toward us like a phantom tidal wave. We were choked; we coughed.

We stood silent quite a while, staring at where the wreck had been, each of us with his thoughts. Then Benson said: "Well—that seems to be that."

McTeague muttered: "Pandora's box broken by those who escaped from it! They'll not be imprisoned again."

Benson stooped and shifted the wheel to his back. He labored up the ridge, as if somehow the wheel had added an extra weight. He slid a little backward in the loose sand with every step he took.

He was happy to rest on the crest of the rise. The eastern sky was warming rapidly to the lavender blush heralding sunrise. The Susan Ann's lights shone sickly yellow. In twenty minutes, with that suddenness of the tropics, it would be full daylight.

McTeague offered, apropos of his allusion to Pandora: "It's a wise Djinn who shatters the bottle in which he was sealed. For the last time, sir, and never again—are you determined to carry this wheel aboard?"

Benson replied sharply: "It was settled—long ago."

McTeague shrugged. "All right, Skipper. You've made the final choice, and I'll stick by it."

Benson scanned the fallen dune, now an uninteresting mound, pigeon blue with the glow of dawn. He turned to us.

"I will tell you now . . . You guessed correctly, Mike. There is something uncanny about this wheel. I know it from evidence which, for the present, I prefer to keep private. That's why I've taken precautions not to influence any of you, in any way, in your reactions to it. And also it's why, Mike, I raised such a stink when I thought you might be swaying Pen to your viewpoint."

"I've let you examine for yourselves, and in your own way, all the clues concerning the wheel. I've encouraged you to state your opinions as to how the clues sum up. I brought you here, not so much as my assistants, than as witnesses. And each of you knows now, or will discover in time to come, why you were selected especially above all others."

"I could have brought more here than just you three, but I was afraid of the confusion accompanying a crowd. Some of you would be bound to miss the unearthing of clues by others while engaged in investigations of your own. And I want no hearsay involved in the final verdict on this matter."

McTeague was puzzled, though agreeable; Chadwick less puzzled than embarrassed. Jim must have scored on points outside my reckoning.

"At the moment," Benson finished, "I'm not say-

ing just what I personally see in the wheel. What I'm about to say will sound odd, but you'll have to take my word that it's gospel—and both of you, Mike and Chad, have been with me long enough to know the weight of the word of a Benson. Maybe my family has a reputation for shrewdness, but it's an honorable sort. I tell you this—no harm will come to you through the wheel; not unless you deliberately set yourselves in opposition to it and its effects. There's no need to fear it. Fear," he said, as if speaking from vast and sad experience, "is always its own defeat."

Then, curtly: "Now that it's all off my chest, we'll go home to the Susan Ann. Unless you have questions to ask."

Chadwick said slowly, as if choosing his phraseology with care: "You may think you've told us a great deal, Captain. I feel you still haven't told us enough."

"I told you," Benson said, "you'll have to trust me. All I want is that you remember what I've said. You'll see its meaning later on."

Chadwick bowed in rather grudging acquiescence. It did not then occur to me that Benson might be perpetrating a clever psychological trick on us; that by encouraging our speculation on the wheel in conjunction with his admonitions, we must therefore arrive at conclusions he had ordained.

I considered his lecture in the same light as McTeague's superstitious qualms and sentimentalism—the expression of an inhibited nature through the outlet of romantic yearnings, the hope that wistful wishing might create high adventure.

Benson's whetted gaze asked my response.

I said: "Like a dwarfed tree, a Beardsley drawing or a Baudelaire poem, the wheel is beautiful, with a purposefully warped and thus unnatural beauty. I dislike it on that ground. I certainly don't fear it. Both you and Mike have been beguiled by various entirely explicable coincidences into a belief that the wheel can affect your welfare. In so doing, you endure it with a personality. That's the procedure of low-type, primitive mentalities, and the basis of all religion—hardly to be expected from adults of your background."

Benson had eyed me as I had seen him eying Lady Fitz. I amused him!

McTeague retorted cannily: "It's many the inanimate object that affects our welfare! Gold can't get up and do battle of its own volition, but possession of it can found or raze an empire. What's a flag but a colored cloth? But men will fight and die to revenge an insult to it."

"Nevertheless," I replied, somewhat offended, "I must caution you against ascribing vitality to the wheel." I hesitated to add such practice, the slipshod reliance on false values, was the root of all psychic aberrations. Big Jim was touchy about slurs against his old Cap'n fixation.

Perhaps he perceived my unspoken objection and chose to prevent my voicing it. He said peremptorily: "We've killed enough time with such guff. Let's be moving." He hoisted the wheel on his back again.

We stumbled down the grade toward the dory. He yawned. "God, I'm tired!"

The sun broke from the water while we loaded

the boat. As McTeague rowed us to the Susan Ann, the yellow light made sulphur of the sand and brass of the lagoon. The ship herself appeared carved from topaz and amber against the peacock-blue enamel of the sky.

The frantic scramble of the burning ripples blinded me. I turned my head from them and still another glare tortured me; it rose from the cup and gems in Chadwick's hands.

Benson sat with the wheel against his knees. His finely-cut hands stroked it as sensitively as if it were in sooth a living, beloved being.

A white gleam shone from the Susan Ann like a pearl in gold. Pen was at the rail in a flowing snowy wrapper. She did not wave; she was leaning on her crossed arms, gravely regarding us. I thought of the Blessed Damozel leaning out from the golden bar of Heaven.

Chadwick tucked the cup behind the flap of his coat. "No use advertising," he said, "in case there are other early birds on the wing."

Even as he spoke, Smithson appeared beside Pen. She glanced uneasily at him and edged away. Then she saw the wheel. Her eyes opened wide; her mouth tightened to a line; she struck the rail with a tiny fist. The celestial fled from her beauty; she quivered, a white flame of fury.

Smithson beckoned the man on watch, sent him down the sea-ladder to steady our boat, nosing the Susan Ann's skin. Big Jim braced himself and handed the wheel to the fellow, who almost dropped it. Perhaps the carved hands startled him, but he behaved as if the wood burned him. He recovered himself and took it up to Smithson.

Pen darted in Smithson's way as he leaned to grasp the wheel. "Father—you can't bring that aboard!"

Gently but firmly Benson answered: "Quiet, child. I know what I'm doing."

She cried to the rest of us: "Mike—Dr. Fenimore—Chad! I'll hate you forever if you let him do it!"

Benson gestured curtly to Smithson, who coolly lifted the girl by the elbows and set her out of the way. McTeague grunted and I flushed hotly. Pen stood with a hand to her lips, gaping incredulously at Smithson. He had entirely dismissed her from his thoughts and was taking the wheel. She stamped her foot, but before she could gasp out her indignation, Benson cajoled:

"Come now, child—no mutinies! Else"—he forced a chuckle—"I'll put you in irons."

She stood obdurate. He wheedled: "I've brought you some things you'll like—"

I saw the look of inquiry which Smithson gave Chadwick while backing from the rail with the wheel. And I did not like the sly quirk of the mouth- corners by which Chadwick answered him. It was something I would remember.

Benson climbed the ladder unhurriedly; McTeague stood with a hand on a rung, chafing with impatience and gazing helplessly, imploringly, to Pen. She fumed to Benson: "You knew I wouldn't want anything—most of all, anything from over there!"

Benson cleared the rail; immediately McTeague spurted up the ladder. I carried up my burden which I had wrapped sling-fashion in my coat. After me came Chadwick. The man on the ladder

took charge of the dory.

Pen was pressed close to McTeague, her face on his breast. She was no longer withholding her tears; he was timidly stroking her hair. Chadwick halted beside them; McTeague snatched his hand from Pen's tresses and stiffened. There was an awkward pause.

Then Pen recoiled from McTeague, turned briefly to wipe her eyes. She faced us again, contemplating Chadwick coldly, McTeague dubiously; her regard for me was like that of a betrayed child. I warmed with shame as if I had wilfully wronged her.

She blurted despairingly: "Oh, it's no use—you're all together, hand over fist!" And abruptly heeled, ran toward her cabin.

Smithson was fingering the wheel curiously, as if its texture afforded novel tactile sensations. Benson jealously shouldered him away, as though truly it lived and he loved it—and its affection for him could be alienated. He lifted it, but with little alacrity—he was fatigued. He started for his quarters, summoning us with an imperative jerk of his head.

To Smithson he said sharply: "Not a word about this, understand?"

The man nodded perfunctorily. I peeped back at him a few steps later. He was straightening as if he had just retrieved something which he—or one of us—had dropped.

Mike parted from us to stow away his implements. I laid my burden on Benson's table. He said thickly: "Better trot off to your bunk."

I said: "Good night then, sir. Or rather, good morning." He merely nodded. I closed the door on him and Chadwick. My last glimpse caught him huddled over the wheel like a miser counting his board.

The eyes of the old Cap'n's portrait also seemed fixed on the wheel.

Chapter X CLOUDS

Collins unintentionally woke me fairly early when he came to tidy my cabin. He apologized cursorily and retired, but I could not go back to sleep. I dressed and sought breakfast.

Apparently Chadwick had slept as little as I, or not at all. He was alone in the dining saloon, dawdling over a cup of coffee and a cigarette. He scanned me expressionlessly as I approached, his eyes sharp and disconcerting.

It was only courteous to take the place beside him, but I disliked doing so. Just as every fresh contact with McTeague strengthened my liking for him, so each meeting with Chadwick accentuated what I can call only an intuitional distrust of him.

He blew out a blue stream of smoke and smiled politely as I wished him good morning and seated myself. He did not turn his head toward the door, but the too black eyes took quick note that we were still alone. He leaned toward me, it seemed hesitating over something he wished to say, and evidently something extremely confidential. Before he could produce a syllable, Lady Fitz breezed in, unattended by Boriloff. His mouth closed with a snap and he pulled from me as if we had been plotting murder.

"Good morrow, good morrow!" Lady Fitz carolled, her eyes sparkled exuberantly on us, but nonetheless she selected a chair removed considerably from ours. She wore something pale-blue and sporting which went very well with her auburn hair. In both dress and coiffure she was a trifle disarranged; carefully so. I could imagine her adding those finishing touches to Deborah's services not only in the interest of looking gracefully windblown and wholesome, but to have the last word over the Scotswoman.

She twittered: "Oh, the wonderful sun! It is like a flaming yellow dove. It hovers over the world like a messenger from Above!"

Had McTeague been present, he must have remarked inevitably that he hoped the dove would not behave in the manner of hovering birds in general, since its being the sun could disastrously complicate matters.

The Englishwoman stared blankly ahead as if she had swallowed something violently disagreeing with her, then trilled: "I say! A poem! What a fortunate way to begin a new day—oh, another one!"

And as we eyed her glumly, she went on undaunted: "I awoke with my heart filled with song, but I hardly fancied that I could express it!"

Before we could inquire if she had expressed all of it, her manner became flat and rather coldly practical. "I heard a queer cracking sound last night, and this morning I observed that the dune behind the hook has tumbled down. Mysterious, is it not? One would suspect this island haunted. We must go over and see what happened."

Chadwick said suavely: "The dune was soaked by the storm, Lady Fitz-Manton, and a part of it washed away. What was left couldn't hold together, in drying out, and fell. That's all."

She asked: "Oh?" in an unsatisfied tone, and devoted the next several minutes giving her order to the steward, stressing its mode of preparation to such elaborate length that it would have been simpler for her to go to the galley and assemble her wants for herself.

Chadwick drained his cup, stumped out his cigarette and arose. He excused himself with an especially bright smile which I might have considered charming, had I not apprehended its utter insincerity. He loitered an instant by the door, watching me.

Lady Fitz, making sure of his complete departure, surprised me by remarking. "An utterly artificial non-entity! So very unlike you, my good Doctor!"

But then, her experiences with the Russian and his predecessors must have sharpened her perspicacity. And if nothing else, it was a wonderful opening for her to consult me unofficially on medical subjects. As soon as decently possible, I excused myself and went out on deck.

Pen was at the rail morosely watching Captain Johnson and MacKenzie, who, in the gig, were furthering yesterday's explorations along the portside beach, scouting for a suitable cove wherein to install the Susan Ann for repairs.

I said: "Miss Benson, I've forgotten neither the look you gave me earlier today, nor what you said. I'm hoping both arose from unreasoning pique and did not constitute your true opinion of me."

"You mean what I said about your being hand over fist with the others?" She turned. "I'd been worrying. I hadn't slept. I was terribly tired, angry and I am afraid irresponsible. Doctor, you know I trust you." Her eyes added that if she didn't, she would not have come to my cabin last night. And without doubt they were the most beautiful eyes ever I could hope to see.

I said earnestly: "I don't wish to pry into your affairs. But something's troubling you deeply, something more than mere dread of the black wheel. It's not from curiosity that I want you to confide in me."

She said pensively: "I suppose I do look out of sorts. I don't like wearing my heart on my sleeve, though it can't be so very noticeable among all the others." She said, lifting her head and smiling: "I've been brooding about Father and that d-damned wheel! He hasn't sleep at all. He's sitting in his cabin, stroking the wheel and muttering to it as if he'd found some long-lost crony. He ought to have memorized every atom of it by now—but that doesn't deter him."

And desolately: "I'd give anything if we'd never come on this trip. But now that I look back on it—it all seems fated."

"In what way?" But she would not tell me.

"Nor is that the whole of it," she hurried on. "When I said Father's treating the wheel like a reconciled friend, I meant it—as if it has a personality. No," she corrected herself, "there's no doubt to it—the wheel does have a personality! Either it's alive or something alive is within it. I'm certain!"

Then, laughing shallowly, not at all sure of herself: "But that's crazy-talk, isn't it? Nevertheless it's my belief—or rather, my hope. It's just got to be that!"

She was resentfully silent as though she had told me too much for my comfort. We looked to the island. A shadow marched across it. It came from one of a number of little clouds leisurely promenading across the sun, wreathing over its face like beauty contestants before the judges' stand.

Pen's silence was disconcerting. I said doggedly: "Beautiful!"

She followed my gaze. "Yes, damned beautiful. So are tigers and pythons. Beautiful but dangerous. I've an idea that this island is more dangerous than either. And what's more. I've the idea you share my sentiment."

"Then you've still not told me everything, Miss Benson."

"No?"

"No. From what I know of you, you're too level-headed ever to hold forth with what you call 'crazy-talk' without valid reason. And if you habitually repress your deeper feelings, your coming to me last night means that you're uncommonly perturbed about something—more so, perhaps, than you care to reveal. But, Miss Benson—I want to help you!"

"You're right. But I don't want to say anything further. I must solve my problems for myself if I want to be strong. And I do, if only for Jim's sake!"

Her eyes flicked beyond me; she whispered: "Chad's coming—I can't bear seeing him!" She hurried away.

So I had been accurate in assuming that the possibility of her father's insanity had been troubling her for longer than she had mentioned. I wondered what connection it might have with her impression that the wheel was alive.

Chadwick came to me, lounged against the rail, looking after Pen's hasty retreat.

"Once we're married," he drawled, "it will amuse me to watch poor fools fall in love with her, when all the time I'll be knowing no force on earth can budge her from me."

As a simple statement of recognized devotion it was one thing; as a subtle warning, quite another. I asked: "Oh, you're engaged?"

He looked politely chagrined. "You hadn't heard? But of course!"

I reflected that it could hardly be considered a felicitous arrangement among the others if they had refrained from reference to it. I had always thought Pen as much attracted to McTeague as he was obviously to her. Chadwick must have shared my feelings, betrothal or not, which was why he seized every opportunity to belittle McTeague.

It is a psychological axiom that a person is jealous only of what is not his own. I recalled Pen's clinging to McTeague just after the wheel had been brought aboard. It had been done unconsciously, but it had revealed where her affections were centered. Why, if Pen loved McTeague, did she not break off the engagement to Chadwick? What hold could he have over her?

I shot a random arrow. "You seem about to speak to me a while back—and it looked as if it were mighty important. But Lady Fitz interrupted you."

Someone must have told Chadwick of the mesmeric effect of his eyes, and he had never forgotten it. I flinched as they roved me knowingly.

He said easily: "I was about to inquire if Pen were ill. I saw her coming from your cabin last night. As her intended, I should be informed if anything's—bothering her."

I did not know to what he was leading, but I was determined to give him no help in arriving at it. I said: "Rest assured, it's nothing serious."

His gaze tugged on me like little hooks cast to catch truth. "If you're thinking what I'm thinking—perhaps it is."

That could have been taken any number of ways, none of which appealed to me. And though to my knowledge Chadwick had never gone by the name of Pedro, I agreed with McTeague that he had a snake's tongue.

He moved so that he could scan the island. I doubt if that was what he was seeing. He said: "You're in an enviable spot in your berth here. A bit like God. People tell you things, as a doctor, they'd never tell anyone else. You can know precisely what's going on around you, where everyone else has to guess. Maybe it's the Hippocratic oath keeping you silent—maybe just good business sense. Either way, I like it—and liking it, like you. You'd make a good friend—and I always deal my friends in on anything good, in a financial way. Think of that."

I saw his general meaning if not the specific one. I did not answer sharply, primarily because it would have made him defensive. My interest was mainly in helping Pen, and from Chadwick's hinting I could discern that she was indeed more

involved than she had cared to admit.

I said: "It never hurts anyone to think."

He laughed shortly, cunningly, and sauntered away.

And suddenly I was glad that I had not antagonized him. He had offered me a baited hook and had swallowed his own bait—by which I mean that, in seeking to learn how much of Pen's affairs I knew, he had betrayed the fact that something existed for me to know. What was that something?

His hold on Pen! That which shackled her to him despite her loving McTeague.

Yet he wanted my assistance, so his hold must be a precarious one. And how did it tie in with Pen's fear of the wheel and her suspicion of Jim's sanity?

Suppose Chadwick had claimed to Pen that he had proof that Benson was demented; she loved her father and would marry Chadwick to protect him. And though Boriloff was a fortune-hunter, at least his methods were not so despicable as Chadwick's. I had rather liked the Russian, but I could understand in the light of my suppositions why Pen resented him—he was stamped with Chadwick's brand.

Came the query—if Chadwick had such proof, and it must be conclusive to influence a girl of Pen's caliber—what was it, and where had he obtained it?

His eternal disparaging of McTeague was not only from jealousy over Pen, but an attempt to lever McTeague entirely from the scope of the Bensons—possibly because he sensed a formidable foe in the red-head were Pen to turn to him; possibly because McTeague could produce information contrary to Chadwick's.

Ordinarily I preferred keeping clear of others' affairs, but this case must be an exception. The happiness of Pen was becoming very dear to me, even though I might never have an active part in it. Clearly I must present my guesswork to McTeague, but in such a manner that it would not goad him into rash reckoning with Chadwick.

How I was to effect this I could not decide, but trusted that I could find a way.

There were still some important pieces absent from the puzzle. For one thing, the ground for Pen's assertion that this voyage had been fated. For another, her desire that something animate be within the wheel. Still another, the reason for the oddly discriminative effects of pipe, bell and wheel on the various members of the Susan Ann's entourage.

One of the roving clouds dropped its shadow on the Susan Ann and passed away.

I wished that the shadow in my heart would pass as quickly.

Chapter XI RED RAFFERTY

That afternoon, while pottering about my office, I heard Benson bawling wrathfully for Captain Johnson. The quality of his voice, rather than its tone, startled me. It was querulous, whinnying, as if he were suffering an asthmatic attack. I went to the door and looked down the companion.

Benson was stamping belligerently toward Johnson's cabin, McTeague trailing him and expostulating. Benson thumped his fist on Johnson's door

and without waiting for leave, stormed within. In a moment he was out again.

"Johnson! Johnson! Where's the corrupt swab stowed himself?"

He tramped muttering down the passage. McTeague shrugged and let him proceed alone.

I hissed to the Irishman. He turned, saw me, and hurried over. I whispered: "What's eating him?"

McTeague brushed past me into my office and wearily edged on a stool. He dug into a pocket for his pipe. His face was drawn.

He said, flipping his match into the waste-tin: "Much as I love the old bastard, there are times when I'd also love to ornament his backside with a few deftly placed footprints!"

He laughed, a short dry cackle like the crunch of stale bread. "This damned see-sawing has got me down. We get to this island and I'm happy thinking that the old buzzard's going to straighten out from the old Cap'n seizure—I'm happy as a kid when the red schoolhouse burns down. Then we have to find the wreck and that damned blasted wheel! Now he's off again, the old Cap'n again—this time with trimmings!"

"But what—?"

"Smithson took some men ashore to cut down trees for the bitts and jack-timbers we'll need when we beach the Susan Ann. He's illuminated with the bright idea of moseying off with a shovel while his men are busy with saws and axes. The fallen dune looks like a choice spot for digging, so he starts there—and hey presto, at that moment Big Jim falls temporarily out of love with the wheel and gets the equally brilliant idea of taking a gander at how things are progressing aboard and ashore. He spots Smithson all by his lonesome on the dune and flies straight out of his foot-gear. How dare the dastard gold-brick when the Cap'n's in a rush to put the Susan Ann back in shape? I'm collared. Nothing will do but that I row the old man over to the dune in no time flat."

He paused to draw on his pipe. "All the way over the water, he turns the air a lovely, liquid sapphire-blue with epithets and curses of which I, an acknowledged connoisseur of the picturesquely impure, never encountered whether in dives or by an extensive perusal of the least expurgated of banned books. It's safe to say we get to the dune so quickly because that explosion of profanity is nothing more nor less than jet propulsion."

He gusted smoke. "The Cap'n tears over to Smithson and dishes out some more of this chromatic tirade. Smithson lets it bounce off him like hail on a tin roof—just stands with that cast-iron face of his looking blank. When the Cap'n takes a breather, Smithson remarks innocently that as long as his men do the work expected of them there's no reason for a stink—and in any case, he's accountable to Captain Johnson, not the Susan Ann's owner."

"Not that I care two hoots and a holler for Smithson, but the man's right. There's always a certain amount of shirking on any job, and a wise skipper—and owner—lets it pass without comment. And damn it, Smithson saw us coming aboard with all that junk this morning. Why shouldn't he hunt himself up a few souvenirs? Why should the big-shots always get the breaks?"

"Yes, but what happened?"

"Well, Big Jim in his role of old Cap'n delivers a four-star performance of flying off the handle. He makes to grab the shovel and pile-drive Smithson neck-deep in the sand. Only Smithson gets the shovel first and looks as if maybe he'll anticipate the Cap'n and do some pile-driving on his own. Whereat the Cap'n flares up like a mortified fuschia with neon attachments. It doesn't faze Smithson, who is still looking mighty suggestive with the shovel. So, rather than soil his mitts on such low-life scum—and I think he really meant it—the Cap'n does a spin and marches back to the boat. And don't think it was discretion being the better part of valor. Far from it!

"While I'm rowing him back, he erupts his determination to see Smithson in irons and the rest of the crew under the gun, with more of the sizzling profanity adding a nice overall sulphur-and-brimstone effect. By the time we get here, he should have cooled off, but instead of that he's worked himself up into incandescence, and I'm seriously wondering if I shouldn't konk his cranium with an oar, or get you to shoot some bug-juice into him to shut him up. And that's that. And it's more than plenty."

I said: "It's only a fit of rage. It'll pass off. It's hardly anything to fret over."

"You think not? Brother, you don't know the crew! They're all descendants of the original Susan Ann's men—babies who tussled with the Malay pirates the way we play scrimmage, just for the hell of it. Peters, who was washed away in the hurricane, told me some of the tales he'd heard of that original gang—how they finished off two junk-loads of pirates and set 'em adrift in a state of decoratively dismembered attitudes which makes what the squaws did to Custer's massacred men look like nursery fun."

"When it comes to sheer downright deviltry, these boys are decided improvements on their forebears. A couple more of these rages, and they'll decide the Cap'n's ready for the looney-bin—and he'll be the one in irons or under the gun. Not they."

I could not believe that. I protested: "But he picked them himself! They're devoted to him—"

He knocked out his pipe in the saucer of crystals I had been growing. He said: "It's been a hundred years since the first Susan Ann's crew split up, losing track not only one man of the other, but of the Benson establishment. Most of this bunch never heard of the old Cap'n and wouldn't be here now if Big Jim hadn't been sentimental and dug their names out of the old Susan's logs and lists. They're here for cash, and seem to think they're damned high-and-mighty, since a millionaire troubled to look 'em up and bribe 'em to leave whatever jobs they were holding. What do you think Jim's paying them?"

I had no idea. He told me, and I was amazed.

He said: "Just the exorbitant salaries he's paying is enough to make 'em suspicious. There's trouble brewing—Peters knew what it was, but he was too disgusted to tip me off. It happened he was one who liked Big Jim. I'd hoped to get wind of what's on the fire; Smithson's attitude is one indication that it's just about ready to serve. And what the old Cap'n's doing this very minute isn't going to smooth things any."

We listened; faintly we could hear Benson's shrill tones.

I laughed at the idea of mutiny. "McTeague, you're so sleepy you're having a nightmare while wide awake. Get to your berth and catch some rest—"

"Rest!" he chuckled, leaving the stool. He stretched and yawned. "Doc, I've never gone for perversions, but let me tell you I can hardly wait for the embrace of Morpheus. Right now, though, it's my duty to keep the Cap'n from alienating Johnson's affections forever."

He made for the door and paused. He cocked a wistful eye: "I feel like a wet rawhide on a shaky frame—one of us is going to snap. You wouldn't have any alcoholic medicine to cure that, would you?"

"If you'd like a sedative—"

"Sedative nothing! I'll be needing Dutch courage if the Cap'n manages to find Johnson. There's bound to be bloodshed, and I'm not kidding."

I diluted some grain alcohol for him. He grinned. "Hope there weren't any bodies preserved in this!" He gulped it down, tossed the tumbler to me and strode out.

I returned to my chores. I lacked perhaps an hour of dinner-time when one of the men, Perry, rushed in without knocking. "Grab your gear, sir, and come quick!"

I took up my medical kit. "What is it?" I had ascribed McTeague's dire predictions to his frayed nerves, but this abrupt alarm furnished them with the semblance of reality. Before Perry could answer I heard someone singing, or rather roaring in what would have been, if controlled, a fine baritone.

"McTeague," Perry said. "You can hear him all over the ship." He hurried down the passage; I had to sprint to overtake him. "Drunk," he said—or the word's least-refined equivalent—I thought there was a tinge of envy in his tone. "Cap'n Johnson wants that you shut him up 'fore Mr. Benson hears him."

Had we been proceeding less swiftly, I would have inquired the reason why Mr. Benson shouldn't hear him. But I needed my breath. The tatters of song loudened and knitted together as we approached not McTeague's but Henderson's quarters; abruptly they choked off to a gurgle.

We entered Henderson's cabin. McTeague was on the first mate's bunk, Henderson leaning heavily on him, holding him down. His hand was clamped forcibly on McTeague's mouth. The air was sharp with rotgut.

Perry discreetly retired. Henderson looked to me. "Have you got something to knock him cold instantly and close his mouth? The quicker the better!"

And viciously: "I don't care if it throws him into the middle of next week!" He had snatched his hand from the red-head's mouth just in time to avoid having it bitten. McTeague burst into song again and tried to sit up. It was a song I had not heard before, and seemed to be in Gaelic. Henderson pushed him flat on his back and rammed a pillow over his mouth. "Bite that, damn you!"

While loading the ampule into the hypodermic I asked: "What's up?"

"Plenty. I wouldn't tell you, but you'd find

out anyway, sooner or later. Only, keep mum about it until it's gone the rounds—there'll be grief enough then; no use rushing it."

McTeague groped and thrashed about. His said, trying to catch one of his flailing arms.

Reluctantly Henderson lifted away the pillow. Even while gasping for wind, McTeague was inclined to vocalize. Henderson stood with the pillow ready to thrust it down again if the volume of the singing arose beyond normal proportions.

He said: "Mr. Benson and Captain Johnson, disagreed about the behavior of some of the hands. To my mind, Mr. Benson was in the wrong! McTeague barged in trying to be peacemaker and got nowhere. He went out and joshed the saloon messman into giving him a bottle and got tight. But that's not the half of it."

McTeague's strained condition had made him an easy victim to the effects of liquor, and the drink I had given him had probaby inspired him to desire for another; I felt rather bad about it.

Henderson said, above McTeague's crooning: "Smithson and others passed by, and McTeague must have decided to woo their good-will. He invited them to a drink. I heard noise, went in, and found all of them higher than the Himalayas. If Benson had seen it, there'd have been hell-and-a-half to pay. The others weren't quite as soused as McTeague, so I had them tanked up on black coffee and brought McTeague here to keep him quiet—God knows what he's apt to blurt! If Benson should get an earful of this, topside of his spat with Johnson—well, whoever said that Hell hath no fury simply lacked experience."

I had bared the red-head's arm, swabbed ether on it, and plunged my needle. He seemed to feel nothing. "It'll take some time," I warned, "before he goes under."

"Can you manage him? I've got to see how the others are coming," Henderson said, rapping wood. I nodded. He dropped the pillow and hurried out.

McTeague endeavored to lift a hand and wave. "Ahoy! Passing—or stopping?"

Then: "My heart an' soul, if it's not the birthday I've been celebrati'—a bit of a rebirth it is from the flames of Purgatory these two hundred years!" His eyes watered. "It's afther drownin' me sorrows I've been, as who has the better right! A hell of a birth—"

He whimpered; not the repellent sobs of a man's self-pity but the broken weeping of a man unutterably weary and forced far beyond the peak of endurance.

"But it's singin' I ought to be, not snivellin' like a woman. Singin' for the comin' back in the world again an' the life they wheedled from me by their wailin' an' bought with their finements o' gold!"

He said somberly: "Yet who's the one as will sing for comin' back to a life that's no life at all, but totted out like grog from the barrel? Where's my mistress Bridget now, I'm afther askin' you—an' what can I be doin' for them that's long dead, on a ship that's the work of the Devil?"

Once more he sought to raise himself, to bring his face near my own as he whispered—I could scarcely catch the words: "Or is it, you may be thinkin', they'll be afther comin' aboard to me—

the six o' them?"

Then he was sobbing again; gradually the little gasps lessened; he dropped into sleep. He had sloughed off his inhibitions under the influence of the liquor, and had been simply airing his deep-rooted dislike for Benson's playing at being the old Cap'n. Also he had been greatly touched by the locket on the mummy in the wreck, and he feared the wheel. These, combining illogically in drunken fantasy, were enough to prompt his saying almost anything.

Henderson returned. I left McTeague in his care, suggesting that he have the Irishman carried to his own birth rather than inconvenience Henderson unduly by staying where he was.

Henderson replied that he preferred having McTeague where an eye could be kept on him, and would I please have a look at Morgan, the messman, whose liquor had not settled well. I did that. Then I returned to my office, disposed of my bag, washed up and went to the dining saloon for dinner.

Pen was not present; I wondered uneasily why. Neither did Benson make a showing, which was not entirely unsuspected—he might be keeping to his cabin from embarrassment over his fit of anger, which more than one might have witnessed; or again, he might be brooding over the black wheel. In either case his attitude was hardly salubrious. I resolved to drop in on him later on one pretext or another.

Collins the room steward served us, since the regular messman's participation in McTeague's spree had left him in no shape for waiting table.

The Swastlows, Lady Fitz and Boriloff had been on a tour of exploration, a most disappointing one, said Lady Fitz. She had expected more of the isle than mere sand and vegetation. She did not elucidate just what else she had hoped, but she did give Boriloff a look of irritation, as if he had something to do with it.

Boriloff must have felt that a little advertising would restore him in her favor, and recounted a hunting-tale of Old Russia in which he figured Homerically—though if he looked at all his age, he could not have been much more than an infant at the time. Chadwick listened with evident appreciation, but his mouth drooped maliciously.

Reverend Swastlow remarked that it was indeed a fine story and that it was too bad Captain Benson was not present to hear it. He asked me if the Captain were ill, and whether I had looked in on him.

Lady Fitz announced that personally she was pleased by the Captain's absence. She had always numbered him among her dearest friends, especially after having done over his Philadelphia residence, but he had made a dreadful and indelible impression on her with his talk of ghosts and spirit-possession the night before the hurricane. It had colored her feeling toward him ever since, she said, and she for one would be only too pleased to be back in Miami again.

I wondered how much of this resentment was due to her day's disappointment, and was fairly certain that, should Benson's New York establishment require a doing over, Lady Fitz would be pleased to remunerate him among her cherished circle—for a stiff, blueblood fee, of course.

"I have come to look upon Captain Benson,"

she declared, "as one possessed of a fiend. What of others, and thereby make way for the entrance but a fiend would attempt to undermine the morale of fiends into them? Devils, like myself, love company—providing that the two are not synonymous. But if indeed a fiend has entered the Captain—why?"

Apparently at that time she had not heard of Benson's obsession.

"You will bear me out in the truth of this, Dr. Swastlow—ghosts are those souls who cannot rise to the shining kingdom because of something left undone on earth. What can this spirit in Captain Benson be seeking to accomplish if it is not something wicked? And whose spirit is it? Why did it die before its evil work was done?"

I decided to pump McTeague as to what he knew concerning the ends of both the first ship and Benson's great-grandparent. Or failing that, ask Pen. And though I did not then dream it, I had tripped upon the crux of the entire puzzle—from the beginnings of what Pen had called this fated trip through Chadwick's hold upon her and the eventual tragedy wreaked by the black wheel.

After dinner I knocked on Benson's door. In the thin, querulous voice of that afternoon he asked who it was. I named myself. He shouted testily that he was shipshape and would be blown if he'd open up to a pill-roller. He could damn well care for himself, he called, and I could go ahead and do something anatomically impossible to myself.

I went for a look at McTeague. Henderson had put him in his own cabin after all, once certain that the red-head would make no more trouble. McTeague slept so soundly and well that I was reminded of my own weariness.

I went to my cabin and to bed.

Chapter XII

SEEDS FOR DREAM GARDENS

When McTeague awoke, the following afternoon, he was a little shy with me—I imagined from chagrin at the nuisance he had caused.

I said: "Don't be unhappy over yesterday, Mike. It's bound to happen sooner or later to anybody. You got wound up too tight, and the spring snapped."

He said dourly: "I'm not upset because I got squiffed. I'm glad I did! Now I feel like a million fresh from the mint." Nevertheless, he hesitated and swallowed perceptibly. He asked: "On your honor, Doc—what did I spill while I was under the weather?"

"A lot of rubbish that didn't add up."

"No, tell me—exactly what was it?" I told him. "And what did you make of it?"

"Just what I said—rubbish! All the waste gumming up your internal machinery was cleaned out—a psychic physic, as it were."

He considered glumly: "Yes, it's possible but hardly probable you'd have two cases of the old Cap'n on the same ship."

I laughed. "Whoever you thought you were, Mike—it wasn't the old Cap'n."

He moved impatiently, as though contemplating the addition of something to the subject; then changed his mind and turned away. I inquired what he had shelved; he shrugged, sighed and

said vaguely: "Maybe." Nor could I get more from him.

He asked if I'd seen Benson, which I hadn't. We went out on deck. Under Henderson's and Smithson's direction, men were sinking bitts in the sand along the cove selected by Johnson for beaching; others were piling long timbers hewn and hauled from the wooded portion of the island.

Lady Fitz was regarding the brawnier men with the idle pleasure of the chronic window-shopper. Boriloff, fidgeting beside her, occasionally stole an appreciative glance at Flora, who had attired herself in a scrap of sun-suit and had posted herself in a place where she could not only see but be seen. She stirred eagerly toward McTeague, and he hastily retired. I noticed Swastlow on a deck chair with a book in hand, but he was not reading. Frequently his eyes lifted from the print to his sister, and they were resentful.

At the dinner table, Pen was present and rather testily supplying excuses for Benson's absence. Slam Bang, not Collins, served us—and as he passed around the table he wept. I do not mean that he sobbed openly, but a steady stream of tears rolled from his eyes. When occasion prevented him from leaving the room, he would turn from us to dry them.

I knew that he was extremely devoted to Pen and the Captain; perhaps that was why Chadwick detested him. Chadwick was up to his usual form in matters of unpleasantness, for as Slam Bang placed his coffee before him he drawled:

"What can be the trouble with our domestics? We've had three messmen in as many nights! I understand that our regular steward was taken ill yesterday"—his tone and his look at McTeague appraised us that he knew the nature of that illness—"and Collins substituted for him. But why are you taking Collins' place tonight, Slam Bang?"

The negro faltered. Pen said quickly: "Obviously that's a leading question, Chad."

Chadwick said smoothly and as quickly: "But a necessary one. Look at poor Lady Fitz. The presence of a weeping steward has quite spoiled her dinner."

Now Lady Fitz had done right well by every morsel set before her, and was quite prepared to do the same with her coffee, but at Chadwick's words she pushed her cup from her and managed to look aggrieved—Boriloff immediately adjusting himself to a complementary attitude of solicitousness, though it meant the curtailment of his covert ogling of Flora Swastlow.

Pen's mouth set firmly, and she would have chastened Chadwick, but Slam Bang blurted: "Mo'gan's still got the mis-ries, suh. An' Collins an' me, we don't get 'long. He don't like wo'kin' in the galley. He say he's got mo' than his share jus' pickin' up afteh you folks."

Titch, titch," Chadwick remarked, rather than clucking his tongue. "Execrable grammar! But the connotation is perspicuous. Has Captain Johnson, or better still, Captain Benson, been acquainted with this deplorable temper of affairs?" Slam Bang with your command of the language, Chad, use more words of four syllables—unless it requires a thesaurus. Just remember when you start baiting Slam Bang, I'm part of the carnival,

and you're yelling 'Hey, Rube!'

Lady Fitz murmured with delicate anguish: "Slam Bang—it is a name from a comic sheet. I loathe slapstick."

Chadwick rounded his eyes at McTeague. "I'm merely concerned for Slam Bang's welfare. It's shocking to think that, with Felipe gone, he must cook for a whole shipload of people and—as if that's not enough—serve table besides. It's unjust! Perhaps that is why he is crying. What, would you stand unmoved while a fellow man weeps uncomfited?"

"One of them in particular, yes! And I'm sitting, not standing."

Lady Fitz cut in. "It is true that one must take interest in one's fellow creatures. But there must be those moments when one is removed from their problems, moments when one must rest and meditate in tranquility, gathering fresh strength for the good fight. It is as inconsiderate, not to say ill-bred, of a servant to exhibit his feelings in the presence of his employers as it would be for one of them to display them before him. Slam Bang—under her breath she repeated that it was a horrid name—"you will cease this weeping until we have left the table. Else I shall call in my maid to replace you!" It seemed an inference that such a contingency was a fate worse than death.

I interjected: "I believe it's something beyond Slam Bang's control, Lady Fitz." Pen gazed at me gratefully. "It may be that Slam Bang is suffering from a mild conjunctivitis—nothing serious, I'm sure," I added as the Englishwoman recoiled. "I'll have a look at him later on."

Slam Bang said: "Ain' nothin' ailin' mah eyes, suh. Theh fine as chittlin's."

"But then why are you crying?" Flora asked, really curious.

"Ah ain' feelin' put upon, Miss. Ah guess Ah ain' cryin' on no 'coun' soevah."

"Well!" Lady Fitz exclaimed, disgusted.

The Reverend Swastlow inquired: "And when did this interesting phenomenon begin?"

"Ah been feedin' Cap'n Benson in his cabin, suh, an' Ah seen"—he wavered, and I wondered if he had been forbidden mentioning the wheel as yet—"Ah seen a duppy. Suthin' lak a sperrit."

So he too felt that the wheel was alive!

"Was it someone you knew?" McTeague asked.

The negro shook his head. "Ah don' know fo' shuah, Mist' Mike. If you can rec'noze suthin' you ain' neveh seen, Ah rec'nized it. Ah didn' feel no wretchedness, but Ah began crying—an' Ah'm wantin' to stop. It don't do no good to cry fo' no reason. But Ah can't." He wiped his eyes again.

Spirits were in Lady Fitz' province. She queried: "You mean you saw a ghost?" Slam Bang nodded gravely, the movement of his head sending a fresh drop rolling down his bony cheek.

She said grandly: "My good fellow, there's no cause whatever for sorrow! Though in your case it was doubtless an accident, the Initiate sees ghosts very frequently. They are actual forces and, as such, exert an influence on the delicate equilibrium of the nervous system. But they are the souls of our dearly beloved, and neither can nor would do harm."

Now this was somewhat at variance with her talk of the earthbound on the preceding night,

but none seemed aware of the discrepancy. And if Lady Fitz believed in what she was expounding, then she was betraying schizophrenic symptoms.

McTeague jibed: "Why do the dearly beloved bother to come back, if their world is the Heaven we've been told it is? Are they out slumming?"

Her Ladyship sniffed. "Since you ask, they return to comfort us with tidings of Peace. And they also return to right the wrongs perpetrated while in the flesh, or to help their loved ones."

To Slam Bang: "If you fear them, you can dispel them simply by saying, 'I am part of God. Evil cannot touch God. Therefore Evil cannot touch me!'"

Slam Bang answered: "Jus' sayin' prayers won't make this one go, Ma'am—Ah said 'em plenty!" He remembered his duties and slipped from Chadwick's place to pass Flora her cup.

McTeague sought to shift the topic. He commented: "Your metaphysics confuse me, Lady Fitz. Why is it that we are a part of God?"

She took on that cooing tone reserved for Things Divine and addressing pet animals. "Because His thought made us. Thus a part of Him is in all of us."

He bowed his head in agreement. "But didn't God create—everything?"

She was uncertain, knowing of yore the traps it pleased him to set for her. Finally she conceded: "If He had not, something would exist besides Himself, and He would not be the Almighty. Yes—He created everything."

"Fine." McTeague wet his lips. "If He made everything, He made Evil as well as Good. And therefore, since we're part of Him, we're just as likely to draw evil upon us as Good."

She stared as if hypnotized. Then she said inclusively: "Last night I remarked that I felt a fiend was amongst us, seeking to destroy our peace of mind. I was wrong, Mr. McTeague. There are two such fiends! And you are one of them!"

She glanced swiftly to Pen, who erstwhile had been her protectress, but Pen was outraged by the attack on Slam Bang and avoided her eye. It was fortunate for the Englishwoman that Pen did not know the identity of the other fiend.

McTeague probably would have pursued the course of his logic to the conclusion that, since God had made him evil as he was, he was still as much a part of his maker as Lady Fitz, and that if he were a fiend, she was equally one with him.

She anticipated that. Briskly she arose and tapped Boriloff's shoulder; he jumped up. She said witheringly: "Mr. McTeague, I pity you! And God did not make you, for you have no soul!" Since she claimed that God had made everything, it was a neat implication that McTeague did not exist.

And to all of us she announced: "I am going outside to commune with the clean freshness of Nature Undeified. I will open the gates of my soul to receive His unstinted bounty, and perhaps"—her look flung acid at McTeague—"I will pray for you!"

He conceded: "That's right kind of you. Maybe it will do me good. Only—make sure of one thing, Lady Fitz."

Boriloff had offered her his arm, but she lin-

gered fascinated despite herself. "And pray, what is that?"

"When you open the gates of your soul, just be certain that only the good side of God gets in!"

From the look on her visage it seemed apropos advice. Pen stirred and said listlessly: "Oh, do hush, Mike. You've topped your quota."

Lady Fitz observed icily: "Yes, it's about time you intervened, Miss Benson. I trust you've not been representing your father while allowing me to be insulted? If I had foreseen in the slightest this treatment to which I have been subjected, this merciless persecution, this unflagging disparagement of my most private sentiments—you may rest convinced that I would have declined his invitation."

McTeague said: "The word 'private,' Lady Fitz, implies something known strictly to oneself. If I have deprecated any of your sentiments, they've been only your public ones."

"Mike!" Pen murmured admonitorily. Then, stiffly: "Lady Fitz-Manton, you know very well that my father's intentions were the best when he asked you to come with us. If you believe them to be otherwise, I suggest that you visit him. If after that you are still uncertain, it is safe to say that Captain Johnson will have you taken as swiftly as possible in the launch to the Caicos. There you can book passage to Port au Prince or Santiago, and from either of them to your home. Without," she added candidly, "expense on your part."

Lady Fitz balanced between triumph and dismay. She had been spoiling for combat, but I doubt she had expected defeat from this quarter. McTeague said: "Yes, this trip isn't costing you and your gigolo anything—and you can't expect perfection for nothing." He was leading up to some point, but as yet I could not envision it.

Now Pen jumped up; Chadwick, with ironic observance of etiquette, also stood. "Mike, you've gone far too far! And you'll apologise—not only to Lady Fitz-Manton, but to Jim and me!"

Boriloff was really angry. His color had thinned to a jaundiced white. But his overemphasis nullified any sympathy I had felt for him. "Mc—a Boriloff—a gigolo!" He slapped his hands to his heart as if to restrain its leaping out among us. Lady Fitz was calm—the deadly calm presaging earthquake.

"Mr. McTeague, I disliked you on sight. You reminded me of my first husband. He was also a fiend."

Her voice shook: "You know absolutely nothing of the principle of Affinity, yet in your provincial ignorance, you presume to demean my relationship with Mr. Boriloff—"

McTeague was as red as Boriloff was white. He had thrust back his chair and was rising very slowly, like smoke on a windless day. "A provincial fiend, Lady Fitz? I like that! It has a rollicking, Breughel touch—"

I cleared my throat, hoping to distract their attention and terminate the scene. If I had been a woman, I would have simulated a faint; that would have done it. Pen opened her mouth to rebuke McTeague further, but an imperious wave of Lady Fitz' hand checked her.

Lady Fitz cried more tremulously than ever: "As

usual, you evade responsibility by diverting your statements into other channels! This time I will countenance no such evasion. We will have this thing out—"

Her voice cracked to a falsetto squeak. At her next words, Pen and I stared aghast; Slam Bang backed awkwardly toward the door. Chadwick hesitated and sat down; the Reverend Swastlow conjured up that exquisitely pained aspect beyond which he never ventured to express disapprobation. His sister seemed not to listen—not from good breeding but rather as if indifferent to what was happening; as if dreaming.

Lady Fitz delivered herself of the most nauseous epithets I have ever heard; the coarsest of fishwives could not have used them without blushing. She concluded with what was to her the gravest insult of all. "And I've heard also of niggers with Irish surnames!"

There were two answering crashes. Slam Bang had dropped his tray; McTeague's chair toppled over.

Very carefully, as if the table were a structure of balanced cards, McTeague skirted it on his way to Lady Fitz. She was panting and smiling peculiarly, it seemed welcoming him with malignant joy. Her fingers clenched Boriloff's arm so tightly that he winced and pried at them, but without removing his eyes from McTeague.

Emotion when carried to the extreme partakes of its opposite. Lady Fitz must have loathed McTeague unutterably, for her awaiting of him smacked of a bestial hunger.

Still smiling, she whispered: "You—will strike me! You—will dare lay hands on me, defile me—" And oozed toward him, quivering. Boriloff held her back.

Both Pen and I were paralyzed by our disgust. Chadwick was regarding his coffee cup with a trace of cold pleasure; Swastlow was delicately perturbed as before. Flora still dreamed.

McTeague stopped short. "No, Lady Fitz, I won't honor you by touching you. And although I've not participated in the curious diversions you so expertly described, I'll concede that I'm no angel of light. But you'll keep Slam Bang out of this! If you hadn't been so damned unfeeling about him in the first place, I wouldn't have persecuted you, and whatever else you've claimed."

Still she trembled before him, a bubble of saliva on her lips. He went on: "We have a saying in what you call the States which suits you to a T. Only it's a vulgarity, and since I've had more than my fill of vulgarity, I'll parody it. You're human—just as human as any of us, do you hear? —Slam Bang included. And on a hot day, you don't give off Chanel Number Five any more than the rest of us. Is that clear?"

From Boriloff's throat came a low canine growl. McTeague ignored it. He said: "For your edification, Lady Fitz, the negro is not the stupid, superstitious figure of low comedy which your socially blind caste-system pretends. Archaeologists have found traces of negro civilisations dating back thousands of years before Christ—so ancient that their history has been confused with myth, especially since their conquerors destroyed all their records."

"They were as highly developed as the Egyptian and Aztec cultures before ever the Britons were



MAMBA LOA—

— Hansie Bok 1947

invaded by the Angles. In fact, the Egyptian system is supposed to be a direct offshoot of the negro's. As recently as the fifteenth century, in what is now Liberia, there were black universities which the Europeans esteemed so highly that they deemed it a privilege to attend them."

Pen went determinedly around the table and laid her hand peremptorily on McTeague's shoulder. He shrugged it off.

"There were Negro kings in Egypt, and black rajahs in India. There are colored saints on the Catholic calendar. Haroun al-Raschid's favored poet, and Bilal the friend of Mohammed were negroes. A few names you might recognize are those of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Christophe of Haiti; Bridgewater, Beethoven's confidant; Dorantes, the discoverer of the southwestern United States. Alexandre Dumas and Pushkin were of colored stock. It was because of the bravery shown by negro soldiers in the Revolutionary War that Congress adopted the Ordinance of 1787 forbidding the importation of slaves. Nor were slaves the fleabitten savages popularly supposed. Records show that many were venerable scholars. I needn't mention the great colored artists, pictorial and otherwise, of the present day."

"Mike," Pen pleaded, but less forcefully than before; she felt, evidently, that what he was saying was justified. She gazed puzzledly at Lady Fitz, who hung on every word of the red-head's as a parched man gloats over each drop of water. Perhaps this was one of those exotic situations the Englishwoman so favored.

Slam Bang had been stooping over the china he had broken; had listened, nodding now and again. McTeague reached his objective. "In conclusion, Lady Fitz—if you'll apologize to Slam Bang, I'll do the same to you. And what's more, I'll really mean it."

It was the renewal of Boriloff's growl which brought her from her trance. She could have seated herself again and disregarded McTeague, putting him effectively and quietly in his place. Or she could have walked out. She did neither. Apparently she wished for more exotic emotionalism. She dragged on Boriloff. "Alexis, be a man! Get me out of this! I'm going mad!"

McTeague stepped back. "You needn't appeal for rescue, Lady Fitz. I've had my say. Nothing's preventing your making an exit."

Boriloff jostled her aside, stepped up to the red-head. Haughtily he flicked his fingertips across McTeague's cheek. The Irishman tensed as if to strike back, and not lightly. He saw that Boriloff would careen either against Lady Fitz or the dreaming Flora, and withheld the blow.

Lady Fitz hid her face in her hands. Chadwick arose and slipped a steadying arm around her, guiding her toward the door. It was interesting that he had refrained from intervention until matters had reached this state. I had the impression that he had done so deliberately. Slam Bang took up his tray and hastened away.

"Ha!" Boriloff husked. "I challenge you to a duel on the sands, in the name of the lady's honor. At once—immediately!"

Pen tugged on Mike; again he shook her off. He said cheerfully: "Fine! Fists at no paces."

Boriloff started and drew himself regally straight. "You think perhaps I am a moujik, to

fight with the hands?" Relievedly: "I rescind my offer of equal combat. You are but only too common."

It was then that McTeague let fly at him with a nicety of calculation which hurtled Boriloff clear of the table. Lady Fitz shrieked, broke from Chadwick and fled. Pen gasped and reached blindly toward me. Boriloff lay sprawling for a moment, then partially raised himself on an elbow, working his jaw.

McTeague said frigidly: "May I realise all my other ambitions as perfectly as this!"

Pen snatched her hand from mine and hurried to assist the Russian in rising. McTeague leaned casually against the table, but he trembled nonetheless. Boriloff scrambled cringing to his feet, perceived that he was not further threatened, and stalked out majestically.

Pen said quietly: "Well, Mike—I hope you're satisfied."

He said sheepishly: "I am, and I'm not sorry. She had it coming to her, and so did he."

Swastlow murmured: "To understand is to forgive."

McTeague snapped: "Oh, goody! We know all about why criminals are the naughty persons they are, so let's forgive them, open up our jails, and improve Society."

Swastlow returned to looking afflicted. I said: "But Mike, you're only making things worse by riding Lady Fitz. Obviously she has paranoiac tendencies, or she wouldn't identify herself with God—nor need a man like Boriloff to bolster her ego. You'll give her a persecution complex if you don't let her alone."

He had no chance for answer. Flora said drowsily: "Africa! Africa sleeps."

"What the hell's Africa got to do with—" McTeague began, as we turned to her. She was gazing raptly ahead, seeing, I thought, something within herself. She went on imperturbably:

"He who has built a tower to the stars must renew his strength in sleep—so Africa sleeps. Nations on other continents have robbed and still are robbing that tower, stripping it stone for stone for the erection of their own palaces. And they dare mock the Sleeper, who dreams by the razed foundations; they mock Him, forgetting that their structures are reared from stolen stones."

"They do not realise the potentialities of those purloined fragments—they have reassembled them with little regard for more than surface aspect. And the arts of Sleeping Africa are symbols; rituals of sacred invincible mysteries. The new palaces are planned unlike that one which was, and still is being, ravaged."

We listened mystified.

"To know history is also to know that Time is a wheel. The mark on its rim which has passed, will return. The hour which once was struck will strike again. Africa will awaken to command the robber nations, through the symbols they have thieved—for He knows what none else suspects, the powers inherent in those symbols. Then will arrive—the Hour of Fulfilment, the Black Hour of Africa!"

And in a whisper: "Africa's wheel of time, the black wheel of the black man, grinds the face of the dark continent, its spokes the ticking seconds of pain and blood and sacrifice. And many hands are

on that wheel to guide it—not only mine! The hands—on the black wheel—”

Abruptly she ceased this rhapsody, and her gaze was no longer introspective. She held up and inspected her slim fingers. We edged nearer.

“But that’s inane,” she said in a more natural tone. “My hands are on no wheel—they’re right here before me. And I don’t give two raps for Africa!”

She jumped as if just aware of us. She blushed becomingly. “Excuse me—I’ve been woolgathering out loud.”

We were still under the spell of her oration, or we would have reassured her that she had not bored us. She said uncertainly: “I wasn’t particularly paying attention to what I said. Something just came into my mind and I spoke it—like quoting poetry.”

Swiftly she swerved to her brother. He comforted: “It was most interesting, my dear. Also most esoteric. Like something from William Blake.”

Pen said: “You must have been in Jim’s cabin.”

Flora’s eyes hardened. “Meaning?”

McTeague volunteered: “You mentioned the black wheel.”

“You mean, then, that there really is one? And in Captain Benson’s cabin? How utterly amazing!”

She pondered: “I wish I knew who wrote what I was quoting.” She shrugged languorously. “I can’t remember.”

There was a space of silence in which the eyes of Pen, McTeague and Chadwick roved busily from one to the other. Swastlow said genially: “An interesting coincidence—” and proceeded to another subject.

Henderson appeared at the door, caught McTeague’s attention and beckoned him. “Captain Benson wants you,” he said and popped from sight.

McTeague observed: “Lady Fitz probably posted a *lettre de cachet*. Now for the axe.” He excused himself and went out.

Flora was troubled by speculative glances from Pen and Chadwick, though they simulated rapid interest in Swastlow’s discourse. She broke into his informal lecture by announcing that she had a headache, and would we mind if she retired. Pen said it might be well if we all adjourned and gave Slam Bang an opportunity to clean up. Swastlow conducted Flora to her door; then we talked idly on deck until I judged that the negro had finished his chores, when I took my departure. I wanted to prescribe for his eyes.

First I went to Benson’s cabin; he still refused to see me. I visited Flora to give her a sedative in the event that her headache was real. She had changed into a diaphanous lace negligee and not only appeared overwhelmingly seductive, but rather defiantly sought to play that part. It was with difficulty that I restricted my thoughts to their official plane. She was, I knew, reassuring herself that whatever her mental failings, as indicated by her subconscious lapse, they were more than overshadowed by her physical attractions.

When I came to the negro, he was sullenly on his dignity, resentfully aloof. McTeague’s defense of him and his race had depressed rather than elated him, possibly by renewing the sting of those sore points against which defense had

been necessary. It was hardly the time to ask about duppies, and I forebore. Since those of his race are specially immune to many forms of infectious eye-disease, I concluded that nothing was seriously amiss, and bathed his eyes in a saline solution. However I deemed it advisable to isolate him until treatment indicated improvement, and told him that I would ask Johnson to assign another man to his duties.

He said mournfully: “Cap’n won’ lak it, Doct’ Fen’mo’—ain’ nobody can take mah place.”

But I persisted. By that time it was late; the others had separated. I heard Boriloff singing, sweetly and sadly, as I passed Lady Fitz’ cabin on the way to my own. Probably, like Flora, he was reviewing his accomplishments before an appreciative audience to restore his self-esteem.

And that ended another day aboard the Susan Ann.

Chapter XIII THE BLACK PRIESTESS

With the morning flood-tide, Johnson posted a leadsman and himself at the Susan Ann’s bow. To his signals on a bell and the control of the men in the dory and the launch, the Susan Ann’s crippled Diesel falteringly pushed her into the inlet selected for beaching. It was a narrow but deep gash in the coral rocks and an ideal if natural drydock.

Benson came forth to oversee the procedure and for a time, as if he had given the old Cap’n complete dominance, seemed grimly delighted at disapproving of every measure Johnson took. Johnson humored him, and his cocksure attitude degenerated to a defiant one. When he was forced to recognize the greetings of Lady Fitz and those others who had come to watch, he wavered, lost his poise entirely, stammered that Johnson had forged the Susan Ann into the inlet “snug as a finger in a glove” and fled.

During slack water, Henderson’s men hitched hawsers from the gunnel and masts to the bitts set up along the beach; Smithson directed others in the place of the jack-timbers. As the tide ran out, men went overside in slings and in the dory to begin stripping, replanking and caulking.

Throughout the day, Lady Fitz and Boriloff dined in her cabin, and whenever they encountered McTeague, withdrew at once. This tickled him and he put in frequent, ill-timed appearances for the sake of discommoding them. Lady Fitz complained to Benson, who, feebly threatened McTeague with a flogging unless he apologized for his mischief—though that was scarcely the name he gave it. I learned this when the red-head stopped by for a smoke and a bit of a chat.

He said grinning: “Her Highness has more crust than a bread-stick. She was having tea in her cabin when I went to eat humble-pie, and she fired the teapot at me. I expended all my energies in rapid retreat, so I haven’t apologized. She wants to be coaxed, and you can bet your daddy’s gold watch I’m going to have a high old time doing it!”

I said: “Mike, I wasn’t joking when I asked you to stop teasing her. There’s a real danger that you’ll further her delusions of persecution. I see signs of them in her already.”

The blue faded from his eyes; they were the

grey of clouded ice. He said tartly: "Coddling a sick man won't make him want to convalesce. And any time somebody lights into a friend of mine—that's asking for trouble."

Since he was in such a pugnacious mood I thought it best to postpone my inquiries as to Chadwick's relationship with Pen. We talked a little more about trifling things and he took himself away.

At table, Morgan was back on duty. The Rev. Dr. Swastlow announced, with a note of hope in his bantering tone, that since the hurricane had consumed a Sunday and prevented his holding of religious services, he would make up for it tomorrow, it being the Sabbath, in the midst of a palm-clump of ecclesiastical design. One would think, he added with a humorous twinkle, that the Lord had planted it specially for the purpose of worship. He invited our attendance. Either the man's worldly ambition outweighed his religious scruples, or he had placed himself in our irreverent company against all his principles for the benefit of someone besides himself.

I saw his fond look at his sister, and knew.

I was not hypocrite enough to take advantage of his offer, but Lady Fitz availed herself of the opportunity. She must not have found it as stimulating as she would have liked, for Deborah, dropping into my office for another of her illuminating chats, announced that Her Ladyship had remained on the island to hold private, supplementary services of her own.

She had brought her knitting, but soon abandoned it because the hammers of the workmen conflicted with the rhythm of her needles. She wriggled uncomfortably on the stool, whose edges she considerably overlapped, and declared: "Her Liddyship is tr-r-remendous put oot about the doin' o' manual labor on the Lord's day, and has betaken hersell off to the island for a wee bit conversation wi' God. Also she is satisfying her curiosity by discoursing wi' Him on the flattened dune that's been occasioning her so ver'ry much bemusement." She chuckled wryly.

I thought to forestall any further innuendos by remarking: "I'm surprised that you're knitting of a Sunday, Deborah."

She held up the unfinished cardigan, frowned at a knot a few rows down, and began to unravel the stitches.

"Tis my thought that the De'il finds wor-rk for idle hands, Dr. Fenimore. And the Almighty takes less offense at a guid bit o' honest wor-rk than the sinful thochts o' the unbusied mind."

Then, determinedly back to her purpose: "'Tis na a wor-rk o' piety to coonsel your Maker frae a piece o' the De'il's doing, as Her Liddyship intends. 'Tis na proper to be sharing your sool wi' the Almighty whilst probing the bosom o' the Infernal."

"It seems to me to be the orthodox practice," I rebuked her.

"Ye jest, Dr. Fenimore. Ye display a lack o' the respect due the forces o' guid and evil. But I dinna hold it agin ye, for i' all ither respects you're a God-fearing gentleman and it's predestined ye'll see the error i' your ways and forsake them."

She said: "Naetheless, Dr. Fenimore, I hae the

notion it's best ye peeped into the sight and speed the ordained turning o' your feet to the str-rait paths o' the Divine. How'd ye like a glint into the future?"

"Very much—but I haven't your gift, Deborah."

"But ye shall hae the lend o' it," she answered complacently, and disengaged herself from the stool. "Ye hae but to stand before me wi' an open mind and rest your left foot on my right—whereupon ye'll share wi' me my knowledge o' the wor-rks we are soon to witness i' the deed—i' the testimony o' our Lord, amen."

When I had done this, she reached up and planted her right hand atop my crown. Her bright little eyes cut into mine. "Ye sur-r-render willingly all betwixt my hand and foot?"

I assented, repressing a smile.

"Then close your een—and speak what ye see."

I expected nothing but the after-image of those sparkling little eyes, and that was what I saw. But in what is known in cinema parlance as a "dolly sho" I traveled swiftly backward from those eyes until all of Deborah was discernable. She had lost considerable weight, was seated on a snowbank in the midst of a driving blizzard, and was weeping.

The vision faded. I waited, but nothing replaced it. Deborah removed her hand. "Ye saw," she said triumphantly. "Ye ken!"

"Deborah," a groaned, "you'll hate me for this—but all I beheld was yourself on a pile of snow and crying."

"Aye, that was i' the bygone, and true enough. It deals wi' my being i' the sairvice o' Her Liddyship. We must try again."

But as she lifted her hand, some of the hammering ceased, and a hubbub of voices substituted. I heard Boriloff's among it, calling my name. I jumped for the door.

Boriloff was stalking down the passage with the wooden dignity of a Shakespearean tragedian, Lady Fitz limp in his arms. Behind came the Swastlows, the Reverend important and devout and Flora less concerned for Lady Fitz than admiring the Russian's strength. I pointed to the cot and Boriloff spread his lady upon it. I shoosed out the Swastlows and closed the door on them.

Once he had disposed of Lady Fitz, Boriloff lost his dramatic manner and stepped back from her, dazed and not a little puzzled.

He said: "We stand upon the sand. I am removed from her, who has gone into Silence. Of sudden she trembles! She cries forth! She falls in faint! I think perhaps she makes the joke with her beloved Alexei. A little I lift her to kiss. She does not look at me. I have quick anger and slap her—you understand," he added quickly, "only as play. Still she does not look. I am frightened that she dies, leaving me lonely without comfort. But no, her heart beats so—so—"

He flapped a hand to demonstrate, and was aggrieved that I was more interested in Lady Fitz' condition than his description. Apparently she had suffered a mild case of sunstroke. The pulse was full and slow, her color a trifle feverish, her skin warm and dry.

"A stroke in an old woman," Boriloff began, but after a hasty glance at Lady Fitz he amended: "In a woman full-flowered, it is of a ser-

iousness, no?" It was patent that he was mainly concerned for the financial outcome of such an event.

Then his demeanour altered abruptly to what was either a consummate mendacity or a most touching sincerity. He dropped to his knees, pressing Lady Fitz' lax hand to his mouth.

"Speak to Alexei!" Deborah studied him with incredulous eyes as though he were performing a feat of magic. "If only to cry the bad names of anger, speak, *Pitckka!*"

There was a tap at the door; I nodded to Deborah, who opened it. Pen peeped in. I explained what had happened, that it was nothing serious, and she went away. It was more difficult getting Boriloff outside.

"I go," he proclaimed sulkily, "but I wait at the door like the dog of faith!"

Deborah, shutting the door on him, sighed: "Aye, the hand o' the Lord is wondrous i' the wielding! Wha would hae thocht his love so staunch? And staunch it maun be, else he wouldna be greeting when she canna heed."

And in answer to my look of query: "Aye, 'tis plainly manifest Dr. Fenimore, that her Ledyship is deeply a swoon, look ye—her knees are showing!" And knobby ones they were that Her Ledyship is vastly consairned that nane look on her knees—as well may she be," she added spitefully, drawing down the Englishwoman's hem.

"It's a touch too much of the sun, Deborah. Has it happened before?"

"'Tis a single question, Doctor, but requiring double answer. Muckle's the time she's fallen senseless indoors and out, but mickle's the time she dinna fa' i' graceful position, nor looking her best, nor aught but i' the presence o' a man."

I pillowed Lady Fitz' head and set Deborah to work sponging the woman's throat and hands with icewater. The door opened. Boriloff asked: "She lives?" I closed the portal on him and locked it.

Lady Fitz reacted to Deborah's lavage by pushing violently away and moaning: "Blind—and black! My eyes! Where is my eyes?"

Then, as if conscious enough to resent any criticism of her grammar: "Where is he who sees for me?"

And again, hopelessly: "Blind — and black!"

Her head lolled. She struck out, found my hand and felt up along the sleeve. And with a shriek, again fell limp.

From this second collapse she awakened sobbing. "I'm black — black with sin! Don't touch me!"

I don't know which one of us, Deborah or myself, was more surprised. Lady Fitz' communication with her Maker must have been apocalyptic, to say the least.

She shrugged off my patting hand. "There, now, Lady Fitz-Manton — you're quite all right."

"I'm not all right. I'm black—oh, God! Black!"

"Look at your hand, it's white. Come now, look at it."

"How can I? I'm blind!"

I rolled her over despite her objections. She subsided, lay impassive, staring fixedly through me. I took a small flash from the table and blinked it

at her eyes. Their pupils contracted. I said: "You see the light."

Deborah was practical. "Your knees, Your Ledyship. They're showing."

Lady Fitz at once sat up straight, adjusted her skirt, and gasped. She held her hand extended, gazing blankly at it. "I'm not black! I'm not blind!"

I asked suspiciously, remembering her appetite: "What did you have for lunch?"

Deborah immediately started rattling off the menu, but Lady Fitz' imperious gesture checked her. Lady Fitz said regally: "You may leave us, Woman."

Deborah regarded her dubiously, me admonitorily. She made a grunt of resignation, waddled to the table for her knitting, and trotted out. I heard Boriloff babbling to her in the passage.

Lady Fitz said coldly: "A cigarette, if you please." I gave her one, lighted it, and placed an ashtray at her disposal. "It would appear that I have made something of a precious ass of myself. As far as personal feelings between us go, Dr. Fenimore, I do not care to correct the impression. I know my secret heart, and my motives are of the highest, however anyone else may interpret them. Still, I should like to avail myself of your professional judgement and compare the views of a materialist with my own."

"If I can serve you, Lady Fitz-Manton."

The tip of her cigarette greatly interested her as she said: "I have had an amazing dream. I hesitate to pronounce it a revelation simply because I am not physically blind nor black. But the voice of our Divine Father is often metaphorical, and it might be in a figurative sense"—but she seemed dubious—"that I am both blind and black. In any case, I am certain that a most strawd'n'ry message has been vouchsafed me from —"

She looked rather indignantly at the ceiling and as injuredly at the floor. "From precisely—whom—I cannot as yet determine. But if your scope includes a working knowledge of psychoanalysis, perhaps you can name my informant. I may proceed?"

I nodded. She stretched herself comfortably on the cot, with a prime regard for the concealment of her knees. The ashtray she placed conveniently on her almost too incredibly well-developed bosom.

"You may remember, Dr. Fenimore, that on the morning after our arrival here, I mentioned having heard sounds in the night. They were bell-notes and a whistling, of a most disquieting sort with the key in which the murmur of the lagoon was pitched. I am extremely sensitive to sound. These noises—jangled in a most strawd'n'ry way on my nerves, like—like I should imagine the cry of a lost soul. "If," she added determinedly, "our Heavenly Father could ever allow a soul to become lost, which in His infinite mercy He most certainly could not."

"These sounds came from the direction of the dune which tumbled down the following night. It was as though some unseen power were seeking to draw our attention to the dune. The coincidence of the sounds and the dune's collapse disturbed me. I had to visit the dune. I thought my unwavering belief in Divine Protection would

safeguard me. Well, I have been punished for my curiosity, Dr. Fenimore—how terribly punished you shall learn."

She blinked; she must have been staring too long at the ceiling and had tired her eyes.

She said: "Dear Alexis stayed discreetly in the background while I communed with my Maker. Alexis can be quite considerate. I opened my whole being to the Lord of All. I doubt you have ever done this, so I will explain the procedure. One must close the eyes"—she closed hers—"and shut off all external vision. One must deafen oneself to all sound. Indeed one must blank out all physical perceptions, for the sensations of the grossly material will naturely eclipse the infinitely more delicate perceptions of the soul. One cannot see God save through the inner eye, the pineal gland. I imagine that this is why you, who are interested mainly in material phenomena, have never seen Him."

I wondered who had initiated Lady Fitz in this morbid perversion of the imagination. Of all mental stumbling blocks, religious mania, the basis of a good third of criminal motivation, is the easiest to create and the hardest to surmount.

"When one has succeeded in closing his senses to his surroundings. Dr. Fenimore, the frail senses of the soul begin to function. One is aware of ineffable radiance which is not light alone, but music also, as vast and intricate as that which might roll from millions of crystal bells—ranging in size from the microscopic, such as germs might ring, to the prodigious such as suns might strike!"

Had I been in a quibbling humor, I might have taken exception to the soul's having but five senses when surely, being of a higher order than the body, it should afford more advantages. Also, being immaterial, it was puzzling that it could possess senses in the first place.

"One rests in the splendor," she said, "as free of the aging wretchedness of mundane existence as if one were again the blithe essence which he was before birth. And one culls fresh strength for the material strife to which he must, alas, return."

Her eyes remained closed. She continued sleepily: "It was in such a state of bliss that I committed the sin of curiosity. I was not content with His boundless bounty. I wished to know what had called me to the dune. I was answered—and punished by that answer. All our wishes are granted us, Doctor, if we are strong-willed enough. But there is a price for everything, good and bad. Therefore one must be cautious as to his wishes.

"My ecstasy winged away. I awoke—but not in my own body. I was a prisoner in a lightless cell! And as a prisoner knows the name of the institution in which he is confined, so I knew the name and state of the shell in which I was pent. As the prisoner is aware of, but cannot rebuff, the tempest which batters the building housing him, so I felt the sensations touching my new dwelling-place. And as the prisoner is helplessly inactive as long as the door is locked on him—so was I. If the structure is bombed, the prisoner is destroyed with it. Such was my condition, Dr. Fenimore, in Irsuley's body. Irsuley"—she squirmed—"who was blind and black!"

"As Irsuley lived out her life, I experienced all which befell her, but was incapable of exerting the least influence on her thoughts and deeds. At

last my thwarted will turned from the struggle and subsided in passive resignation. It was as though I had become—Irsuley herself."

Deeper, richer, flowed her voice.

"And who was I, Irsuley?"

"I was mambaloo, priestess in Kumbi-Kumbi in Ghana, once greatest of all the African empires. More than priestess! Through me the gods spoke and performed their will! I had sacrificed my eyes to them that my soul might never see none but them. And I saw them—yes, I saw them—"

Her voice lifted back to a more normal pitch.

"Doctor, Irsuley knew of a light which was also sound and scent, taste and touch—very similar to that Divine Presence I have described. So similar, that it was easy for me to slip from my vibration into hers. But the light was a—black light. Like that purplish glow which causes fluorescence. The music was a thundrous roaring of savage drums, beaten in delirious frenzy by little things smaller than insects and larger than the ogres of nursery tales. The fragrance was that of a stupendous jungle such as must have towered blossoming in the Age of Reptiles. The taste was poisonously acidulous and overwhelmingly desirable, like a dream-producing drug distilled from serpent-venom and which though loathing it, one craves. It ate away the tongue in a rapturous agony that was like a holy martyrdom, and like, too, a blistering parody of the wafer at Holy Communion."

Her tone slipped lower.

"I have spoken of the soul as having senses, but only figuratively. In describing what another has not experienced, one must employ the terms of his past sensations. To be with God is to be—aware; to know everything transpiring in the past and present and future with no regard to sequence. Chaos, He seems—and is not. But one who has been with God can no more explain it than a butterfly can explain its transfiguration to a caterpillar."

And now her voice was deeper than before.

"Because I, Irsuley, had parted with my physical sight in the service of the gods, I had need of one to see for me on earth. My work called for nicety in proportional values, which in my unseeing state I was unable to compute. This, then, was the duty of he who was my eyes—to report and measure in detail whatever prospect confronted me.

"His loyalty must not swerve! Therefore I bound him doubly to me, not only through respect for my power, but through love for my body. Black though I was and blind—I was beautiful. Beauty is the messenger of the gods. It snares the senses in awe and wonder while importing its wisdom to the captive heart.

"By your modern standards I was a witch. To an extent I controlled forces which you would term supernatural. We of Africa were close to earth and sensitive to its moods—so much a part of earth indeed that among us were some who could sway those moods to advantage.

"Nature is blind and operates on instinct alone, and often miscalculates. And we who are made of dust and water, of fire and air—is it not meet that we should influence that of which we are a portion?"

She said impatiently: "Ah, yes—you would object that one cell of a body cannot command all the others."

I started—it was exactly the question I would have raised.

"But you forget the brain cells," she went on, "and the impulses which, emanating from them, drive the other cells of the body into the committing of some action. Yes, in a very limited manner I was given domination over earth and its forces. Mistress was I of wind and rain. The tribes of Ghana were chiefly agrarian. We mambaloas for centuries had nourished and protected their crops, each of us ruling the elements in our locality as a chieftain rules the members of his clan."

She hesitated. "Perhaps I can explain my powers more aptly by an illustration. Tell me, have you ever known the presence of something without having seen it?"

I answered: "As a child, yes. I was afraid of the dark. I'd never actually encountered the bogeyman and dragons of fairy-tales, but I knew down to the last whisker and scale what they were like."

"No, I do not mean that. Sight had nothing to do with Kumbi-Kumbi as I knew it. My blindness was a quiet blackness motionless as black glass. The city was a vibration in the blackness, one beating against me moth-light and sledge-heavy. A vibration more than tactile. Like supersonic waves it affected my nerves in various ways. It was taste also and scent—the pungent smell of stone which one makes by pounding pebbles together, striking sparks.

"The long walls and the scattered edifices stretched from earth to sky as pillars of unseen vibration, pillars varying in thickness, depending upon what made them. They were like harp-strings of incredible thickness plucked by unnameable fingers and quivering. I heard them—the sustained rhythms of the marching walls, the random chords which were buildings, the grace-notes which were people moving about. But as the forest's trunks merge together into one mass, obscuring what lies beyond—so did they. It was a wall of vibration made by the innumerable harp-strings blending with distance into one. And of vibrations behind them I knew nothing. With every step I took, the effect changed—as my new angle of position revealed a gap here among the pillars, or closed one there among them.

"The sky was an emptiness, a part of the tranquil blackness save when clouds passed overhead and I felt and heard them, touched and tasted them. And what, you may ask, was that quiet, vacant blackness in which existed the vibrations of city and people? It was the calm of the gods, the emotion of the earth itself! The man-made vibrations broke that calm—but by directing their moving into new arrangements I could equalise the tension between them, make harmony of them. Such was my duty as mambaloo. But an intermediary was essential—one who could identify me the nature of that which produced each vibration, and the feasibility of shifting its position. Without such an intermediary I was helpless.

"Now I must necessarily deviate, speaking of my people, for their character has a bearing on my story.

"They were so near the earth that they were less like animate beings than fertile black soil awaiting cultivation. At one time they had known no evil. As children are amoral until trained to

be otherwise, so were they, and thus among them was no amatory jealousy nor rancor. Nor was there greed, for what could be desired where there was more than a sufficiency for all? Nor hate—for without envy there is no motive for hate.

"My people were children in a paradise for children. And therein lay the wherefore of their downfall!

"Far to the north in the colder climes were bands of sickly white men who, though not yet masters of the earth's secrets, dared yearn for the higher lore of the distant stars! But one cannot climb the ladder without stepping on its successive rungs. Had they been versed in earth-lore, then might the wisdom of the stars have been available to them.

"Therein lay their wickedness, for to court that for which one is unprepared is to invite disaster. They neglected the earth and in turn it neglected them. Their lands became waste, and they knew not the means for restoring it to plenty. They roved seeking pastures fresh and green. Nomads, they knew hunger, and from hunger arose greed. From greed, each passion begetting the other, came envy and hatred and war. When at last they paused to build, it was less because they had discovered the green pastures they had sought than from need of defense, one party fearing the other.

"So their skill was artificial and evil. On such faulty foundations they dared rear what they chose to call their civilizations—and small wonder, therefore, that from time one and another of those structures crashed into the dust.

"Survivors of those crumpled cultures were driven abroad by those yet flourishing. They took refuge in Ghana, but were prideful and vengeful. They could not forget those who had persecuted them.

"As happy children who share their toys gladly—until corrupted by their elders to selfishness—so my people gave to these newcomers their produce and taught them simple craftsmanship. In our naive sincerity, we deemed all others sincere.

"The white aliens took what we gave them. Thus fortified, they returned to their enemies to take vengeance. They stayed at the sites of victory and developed our lent arts along channels alien to us. What we had made for comfort and delight they improved, to impress and awe their rivals to subordination.

"Thus when those of the north again were driven back to us by their fellows, they brought with them their innovations on our artistry. We of Ghana were delighted by these novelties which we did not understand, nor recognized them as distortions of our own arts. We desired them—and what is desire but hunger? And what comes from hunger but greed and envy, hate and war?

"So began our degradation. He who runs with jackals soon learns to bark! We were children still, but corrupted ones. To possess a tawdry little of what tempted us, we gave much, much—and need stalked our lands. When there was nothing more to barter, we turned one against another. Brother sold brother into slavery; the gods were forgotten save by a few. The gods of earth, forgotten—and they turned their faces from us. The desert swept down on Ghana, as if the angry gods would broom away all life and shape the land anew for more deserving ones to come.

"Came then another scourge, the fanatic Moslems! They lived by, and worshipped, the sword—albeit they gave lip-service to a kindly memory they called The Prophet. They believed that who did not reverence their god of steel must perish.

"They slew our priests, pillaged our temples, destroyed the tablets of our ancient, happy history. They sold the populace into bondage, or impressed the men into their ranks, that war might be waged incessantly until all the world was theirs—though what then they would have done with it I do not know—nor, do I think, did they.

"It was at such a time that I, Irsuley, was born. A little laughter I heard among my fettered kinsmen, but enough to set me wondering at their tears. Of greenery I saw enough to question the encroaching desert. And because of my earnest enquiries, those of my people who remembered the legends of olden Ghana took me by stealth to their secret shrines.

"There I first beheld the gods. There I was schooled in the sacred lore. And once the gods had revealed themselves to me, I resolved never to lose sight of them. With my own hands"—she shivered—"I plucked out my eyes and laid them upon the altar.

"Much as I learned, it was but little compared to that forgotten! I could command nature, but only to a limited degree—else I would have sought unaided to throw off the hated Moslem yoke. It was not the gods' wish but my own devout one. I would free my people! And therein was my sin. The gods had given me power to use only as they saw fit. And I turned that power to my own ends. It was sacrilegious presumption! Any cause can be measured by its effect, and all which befell me later proves my cause a wrong one." Her cigarette was smouldering dangerously close to her fingers, but she did not notice the heat. I leaned over and plucked it from her hand.

She went on, unconcerned: "Now there were other holy ones in Ghana who served the gods with me, and felt as I about our conquerors. By themselves they were not sufficiently strong to drive out the enemy. Yet if they and I united, our combined strength could harass the Moslems. In all there were seven of us, not numbering he who was my eyes. And we would have triumphed over the Moslems except—we were betrayed.

"Betrayed—by one of those whom we sought to liberate. For it is ever the Beloved who sells his Master for temporal gain.

"The Moslems attacked us in our secret fane. We escaped, all but one—Ouela was carried away! Without him we were seriously handicapped, for not always could we restrain the forces which we unleashed, save by the intuitive advice of Ouela, whose spirit was more elemental than any other's.

"We remaining six struck back at the Moslems. But the blight which fell on them claimed our countrymen also, and served no purpose because both parties shared it.

"We offered to purchase Ouela from his captors by giving them the treasures from our hidden haven. They sensed their danger! They sent Ouela westward into slavery, and ever they hunted us others.

"Then we determined to follow Oueli and win him back from whatever hands into which he

might arrive. Under cover of night and storm we convened in the desert, shouldered all the treasure we could bear, and crept westward. Without Ouela's guidance I could not control the storm, and while it obliterated our footprints and hid us from pursuit we paid in anguish for that concealment. The sand lashed us with barbed whips. It was wryly humorous! And so came the first taste of our punishment for our sin.

"To the tangled jungles of the west we came, and knew we were on the right track—for the slave-paths were bordered by the bones of those who had perished along the way. Our tempest wounded but veiled us. And we came at last to what never we had seen before—the sea.

"Here we were safe, for here the Moslems came but as traders with their human wares. Manti the king received us as his guests, fearful of our might and grateful for our gifts. It was by his efforts that we learned Ouela's fate.

"Ouela had been taken overseas to the isle of Hispaniola, governed by the avaricious Spaniards, enemies of the Moslems. We planned to fare to this isle, though never before had we seen sea nor ships. The Spaniards need not know our reason for following Ouela, and once he was in our midst, we should be invincible. And should the Spaniards learn then, and believe, they could not harm us.

"To our host the king came a white trader whom my eyes said had hair like bright flame. His name was . . . was Raff . . . was Rafferty. He had known much suffering from war and would not deal in slaves. He traded for gold and ivory and the silks of the . . . the Ashantis.

"Him we approached and told something of our plight. Partly he was moved by pity and partly by the trinkets we offered him. They were the merest fraction of our wealth, but still, to him, of great value. And though he wished to be in his homeland with one he loved, he agreed to carry us to Hispaniola.

"We set sail. We who knew nothing of the sea were ill and helpless, and I could not see the gods because of my illness which intervened. The voyage was long, the supplies low. Rafferty . . . yes, I am certain it was the name . . . one forgets, resting with the gods . . . Rafferty became impatient for his beloved one. He drank too much of wine to dispel his unhappiness.

"Now those who served on his ship were a varied lot and some had been brigands. They had wondered at our presence, and one who professed overmuch to be Rafferty's friend was more curious than any. He it was who, when Rafferty had drunken deeply, pricked him into trustful blurting of the gems he had received and his grand dreams for their use.

"The friend who was no friend spread this information among the others. There was short, spirited combat—and Rafferty and we helpless black folk were taken captive and penned together. And so great was our treasure that in mockery the evil ones flung back to us that which had been Rafferty's.

"Then that most wicked one, whose name I do not recall, remembered a speck of sand above Hispaniola, lost among many others, where the sea-robbers with whom he had sailed stored plunder. Thither we would be taken, our treasure

laid away, and thence we would go to Hispaniola, to be sold as slaves. And still we were too helpless from the sickness of the sea to thwart them by casting a spell on them.

"To that secret sand-speck we were carried and our wealth concealed in the rock. But we were on land again; with the eating of green things our health returned. Chukhur conjured a blinding dust of the earth and another wafted it to the treasure, that none but ourselves might touch it without loss of sight. The evil ones were blinded and sought us with swords and smoke-sticks . . . pistols.

"Rafferty cried that they must not seize the vessel lest they make away with it and we die undiscovered on the cloven isle. We took the ship for ourselves, and wormed our way between the many dots of sand until we were at sea again. It was Rafferty's hope to sail to inhabited land and with the few jewels left us—his own, but still of great worth—purchase assistance for the recovery of our wealth; since without it Ouela was forever lost, our travail pointless, and our intention to liberate Ghana come to nothing.

"But with the eating of the food on the ship, our illness returned. We would have returned to the isle, trusting to trickery to pry the wicked ones from their fortifications in the rock. The hastening winds I raised could not be guided and carried us past our mark. Our food dwindled away. Death sported on the waters and laughed at us. We encountered no other vessel; we were in a zone of thieves where honest voyagers had no business.

"The sea held us as an insect is gripped by rosin. Our need for food was great; for water, greater. When I called for rain, we were borne still farther into unfrequented waters. Then we made the blood-vow that, should one or another of us perish, those remaining would pursue our aim to the end, that Ouela know at least we had not willed to fail him. In token of the vow Bamir carved our hands on the wheel of our ship.

"M'Komba withered and died, but we did not give his body to the sea. No—Chukhur by his art kept the soul of M'Komba pent within his body, that even after death it serve us. Rafferty feared it, yet because of the vow in which he had joined was forced to tolerate it. He went mad. The orders he gave for the hoisting and tacking of sail were senseless.

"Swiftly we . . . died. One's last breath stole the other's. And I too passed away. But still I was not dead."

Her fingers twitched.

"No. I was not dead. I was with the gods once more. In ecstasy.

" . . . but as if I remembered pain, there were instants when my consciousness plunged spinning from the high, timeless realm of the black jubilation . . . to the deck of a ship. And I stumbled among others whom I thought I . . . knew. And we would have made greeting save that our throats were choked and dry . . . so very dry."

She tossed uneasily; I reached for her, afraid she might tumble from the table. It had been no pleasant dream, and her recounting of it no pleasant task for her. She quieted. She sighed:

"I could not think so clearly as before. Water

. . . to loosen my shrivelling flesh! I called forth the winds and the rain. Then, how much later I do not know, I heard voices . . . the language Rafferty had spoken among his own people. A hand touched me. I heard a cry. I tried to speak but . . . my throat . . . not the same . . .

"I heard another voice employing the dialect of Manti's tribes. It addressed me as an evil spirit and bade me begone. Nor could I answer, defend myself.

"I was lifted. I would have struggled, but my muscles were stiff, wooden. I was carried and thrown down. There was the sound of a hammer. The door would not open. We pushed on it, all of us, pushed on it, but we were too weak. We were straws leaning lightly on a brick wall.

"We threw our protest to him who held the hammer and his pounding ceased. We heard the hammer fall, knew we had killed him . . . and did not care.

"Distant sounds like thunderclaps, a flinching concussion as if Shanto the Smiter had dived from the clouds to crush us. A slow cradling motion. Then water—Water!"

She moistened her lips.

"Salt water—which destroys the spells of earth. Salt crystals which deflect the subtle currents of the earth. No longer could we move. We lay inert. But our vow held us in the stiff bodies. There—there is a gap—then the water was—no more. But still we could not move.

"I heard a faint far call, indefinitely sustained. I had no means to make reply save by speaking through the wind. It whirled the distant voice closer; clearer it became and clearer—the voice of freedom, promising release. Soon I should return to the pulsant shadows which are the black splendors of the gods. The vow could be fulfilled, if—"

Her voice cracked. " . . . If . . . "

Abruptly she cleared her throat, said in her customary tone: "That voice of freedom—it was your voice, Doctor, blent with Deborah's. I found myself—here. I had seen—only a vision. But was it not a true one? Why did the dune summon me, unless to reveal the treasure within it?"

She turned her head to look into my eyes; did not like what she found in them, and averted her face. She sent forth a well-kept hand, palm open: "Another cigarette."

She lay smoking a while. "Doctor, if it was a dream, you can explain it. Otherwise I shall relate my experience to Captain Benson and we shall dig for the buried gold. But—I would prefer not to make an ass of myself a second time."

I said: "The material for your dream dates to your quarrel, the night before last, with McTeague. He is something of a spellbinder, which considering his profession is only natural. His talk scraped some of your mental sore spots and set up a conflict within yourself, as it did also with Miss Swastlow. You have probably heard that, after you and Mr. Boriloff had gone, she gave us, in a tired and thus somewhat dissociated state, her interpretation of his lecture. In her case and yours the fundamentals are the same."

"Yes, I heard about it," she said thoughtfully. "But the McTeague person said nothing about Ghana—or a black priestess—"

Well, I had dissected her dream during its nar-

ration. Now I gave her my analysis point for point. I began:

"When you complained to Captain Benson about McTeague's insulting you, did you enter his cabin?"

"I would rather not have done so, but yes, I did."

"What did you see there?"

"Oh, many things I had seen before—the portrait, for example, of the old sea-captain he resembles. And a wheel—the black wheel—" She started!

I said: "Quite so, Lady Fitz-Manton. You saw the black wheel there. Its peculiarity impressed you—perhaps you wondered about its strange carvings."

She agreed. I said: "Three nights ago you spoke of Captain Benson as possessed of a fiend because he had frightened you"—she gestured protestingly—"Let us say, because he had irritated you, then, with his talk of spirit-possession. Dreams, no matter how senseless they may strike us, are the subconscious expression of fears and wishes. Very well—you were perturbed by the thought of ghostly incursion, and so in your dream you showed your preference to possess rather than be possessed. Thus you entered into Irsuley's body."

"McTeague accused you of social blindness. Your subconscious self expressed this fear by portraying you as sightless. In the sense of a wish, you sought to counteract this blindness by enumerating compensations should such an event befall you. First you reminded yourself that"—I had to be delicate here—"you are much blessed by the Almighty. If you were blind, it was at least in the service of the Supreme Being. Also you had a lover who could see for you."

I was treading shaky ground again. "This was your reminder of Mr. Boriloff. I believe that you are uncertain as to his true feelings toward you. In your dream you held him both by love and by your spiritual powers—which symbols when translated to waking terms can be interpreted as being your physical charms plus your social and financial influence. I can at least settle your doubts on this score—while you were unconscious, Mr. Boriloff was so worried about you that he was near to tears."

That pleased her, though she took care to conceal it.

I went on: "Your scene with McTeague over your attitude toward the negro, Slam Bang, upset you severely. You had hoped to calm Slam Bang by spiritual advice—so in your dream you enlarged on the wish by seeing yourself as a priestess over his people."

"You wanted Slam Bang to profit by your advice, which he did not follow, so the people whom he represented neglected their gods, and despite all your efforts, continued to do so. Therefore they were conquered by those whom you hated—came under the influence of McTeague and Captain Benson, whom you distrust."

"A red-headed Irishman promised to help you—this was your reaction to McTeague's criticism, a wish that he would cooperate rather than carp at you. Your giving him the name of Rafferty signifies your wish that he were another person, or at least different than he is at present."

"The Irishman of your dream became inebriated and betrayed you—I believe you frequently regard McTeague's behavior as so excessive that it can be excusable only on the ground of insobriety." I did not explain that McTeague's betrayal had consisted of naming Boriloff as gigolo. "Thereupon you were in the hands of your persecutors—which means that McTeague's effrontery has caused you embarrassment before your friends, whom you would not wish to become your enemies."

"In your dream these people became your enemies indeed, and took your treasures from you, but you still retained your supernatural powers. In other words, you feared that McTeague would turn them against you, with a resultant loss of important social benefits; but should it befall you, still you could take comfort in God."

"They sought to abandon you, but you turned the tables on them by seizing their ship. Rather than make enemies of those aboard the Susan Anne, you would prefer beating them to it—the same as a worker prefers resigning his position than being fired from it. Your mind then dwelt on what would happen if you did so, and answered itself with gloomy scenes of starvation and death—which means that the social status of the Bensons is of prime importance with you—is food and life itself, for it provides you with contacts useful in your professional life."

"You wished to find help in regaining the lost treasure—should you become separated from the Bensons, someone of equal munificence must replace them. In that case you could recover the treasure—your present desirable position. The fact that whoever touched your treasure would be blinded, means that you would resent anyone stepping into your shoes."

"As each member of your party died—and they were all merely different aspects of your own personality, Lady Fitz-Manton—they appeared in token on the wheel. The wheel, which you saw in Captain Benson's cabin, stands as a symbol for him. Just as the wheel which guides a ship is its most important segment, so is Captain Benson the most important personage aboard the Susan Ann."

"That he is represented by the wheel is also manifest inasmuch as the ship is—ah, an amatory symbol. It may be that you find Captain Benson's outlook upon your—ah, amatory views—somewhat cramping. The hands on the wheel thus represent various appetites of yours which you are forced to kill off or inhibit. You would like to see him sharing or condoning these desires, thus freeing you to act as you might prefer. In your dream these aspects did show upon him—as hands on the wheel. But your anxiety made them dead or repressed hands."

She demurred: "But why was I limited in my powers? Why did I need Ouela to control them?"

"You are aware of doubts. Ouela signified the answer to them."

She tossed her auburn ringlets. "I need no spiritual assistance!"

"Then why were you ever perturbed in the first place about the talk of spirit-possession?"

She silently, rather grimly, began to grind the stump of her cigarette to shreds. I did not miss the little symptomatic action—the cigarette, if it

had borne a name, would have been known as Dr. Fenimore.

I said: "You feel in yourself that something is lacking, Lady Fitz-Manton, for in your dream the use of your powers could not quite save you. They blew you farther from your treasure and farther. There is where your dream made you aware of committing a sin. You had set yourself up against your gods, or—in waking terms—you went against the dictates of your conscience both in defying the demands of good breeding and in your castigation of McTeague and Slam Bang."

She wriggled uneasily and quickly completed her havoc of the cigarette. She said finally, ruminatively: "A great deal of what you have does have a certain bearing upon—upon my circumstances. Nevertheless—"

I said cheerfully: "My analysis was a brief one. Exhaustive treatments of far simpler dreams have filled a number of fat volumes. We might take, for instance, the names of your dream and track them down to their sources—"

She interrupted hurriedly: "No, I think I've had enough, thank you!" Apparently she preferred certain episodes of her past to remain secret.

She got down from the table. "Thank you, Doctor—thanks most immensely! And it was good of you to clarify Mr. Boriloff's regard for me."

"Not at all," I replied as she went to the door. "I should advise you to lie down for a while, rather than venture into the sun again. Does your head ache? An ice-pack will help."

Just before stepping out, she said triumphantly: "But you haven't explained the whistling, the bell-sounds, and the tumbling down of the dune. I didn't dream them, you know."

It emphasized her paranoiac thought-pattern. It was easier for her to make a divine revelation of a dream than to face a few unpleasant facts about herself.

I said: "Mr. Chadwick explained the dune's collapse on the following morning. The bell notes were echoes of our own thrown back from the dune. The whistling was doubtless the cry of a nocturnal bird."

"Ah," she said, which might have meant anything, and stole out. I had accounted satisfactorily for her dream, and gave it no second thought just then.

But only a little later I was to remember—and wonder.

Chapter XIV THE RAFFERTY STORY

That same day McTeague visited me. He was distressingly haggard and appeared to be losing weight. I asked: "Did you apologize to Lady Fitz?"

He gestured unbelievably, pushing air toward me with the flat of a hand. "You'll say I've lost my mind, but—maybe I had the old trollop all wrong, or maybe she really wants to practice that phoney religion she preaches. Or maybe—he grinned—"she thought she'd heap coals on my strawberry-blond noggin. It's an age of miracles! I met her in the alley not long back, and—she apologized to me!"

He added sombrely: "Not that you'd be far wrong in thinking I've lost my mind."

"What do you mean, Mike?"

"I mean," he said dourly, "that since it makes you feel important to fuss around with your damned slides and bottles, I've bracing news for you. There's some more thrilling work to add to your programme. You've another case of the old Cap'n."

He thumped his chest. "Me!"

I laughed. He grumbled: "You think it's funny! Wait 'til you hear the details. Then you can laugh 'til you bust—and have still more exciting work sewing up your sides again."

I asked: "What is it, another bad dream?" I was thinking of Lady Fitz, not his drunken babbling of three nights previous.

"Bad dream! Don't talk like that, Doc." He was hurt. "I've had one after another—a whole damned parade of 'em. It makes no difference if I'm asleep or awake—they keep trooping in like murderers returning to the scene of the crime. Or ghosts haunting the X that marks the spot. By themselves they don't make much sense. But add them up—" He spread out his hands ineffectually.

"But don't you think I'm a weak sister, Doc. I've kept them to myself three long nights and two long days. It's time I aired them out. Dreams"—he asked—"or memories?"

I sat down. "Say on."

"If they didn't lap so perfectly into each other, I'd call 'em dreams. But if they're memories—how can I remember what's never happened? In Jim's case I can understand it—he did a lot of homework before being promoted to being the old Cap'n. But I seem to have developed a dual personality overnight. No," he corrected himself, "not overnight, but within the last few days, ever since I heard the pipe and bell. Maybe even a little before that."

"I can't offer an opinion, Mike, without particulars."

"Particulars is it? You'll get 'em."

He took out tobacco pouch and pipe. "I had my warnings. I knew there was something cockeyed about this place the night we were together and heard the bell and bosun's call. When I saw the wreck and the wheel, I knew there was something even fishier afoot. The way the hands wove around the wheel reminded me of the pattern on a diamondback rattlesnake. I had a notion it was a damned sight more dangerous. When I put my hands on the wheel—I seemed to recognize Chad for someone else, but someone baked from the same batter. Someone who had a wallop and a lot worse due him—so I socked him."

He thumbed tobacco in his pipe.

"The spikes around the cabin door gave me the jumping jeebies. They were like Ogham, the old Celtic line-writing, spelling capital-D disaster. The sand in front of them shrieked murder, I don't know why. How could I have known unless I had a hand in that murder? It was just a mound of sand."

"A grave-shaped one," I interpolated, "and a mere matter of association of ideas. You said Slam Bang's bones were in it."

"Jim did, not I. All I said was—there were bones. That's why I'm so rattled. What has the old Cap'n to do with what I seem to remember? Jim was the old Cap'n when he said it, you know."

And he was referring not to the present Slam Bang but the one who served on the original Susan Ann."

I remembered and was puzzled, not so much by what McTeague was saying as by why he was saying it.

He continued: "Off and on, while we ransacked the sealed cabin, I'd get little flashes—previews of coming attractions. But hunches are one thing, and fully developed memories another. Unless you believe in reincarnation, which I don't."

He sucked a match-flare into the bowl of his pipe.

"Ever since, these dreams have kept regurgitating until I've got ulcers in the mental belly. Jim's cyclonic session with Smithson was the emetic feather. I thought I'd blow my cork unless I got away from the situation. So I chiseled a bottle from Morgan and got stewed.

"Immediately the previews turned into full-length features and in fast-motion. I wasn't McTeague any more nor on the Susan Ann. I was Phelim-Owen Rafferty, Red for short. What are you jumping about?"

"Did I jump?"

"Looked to me like you did."

"Mike, where did you dig up the name of Rafferty?"

"What do you mean, dig it up? It came with the rest of the wash. As for digging it up, though—that's apt! Because Red Rafferty is none other than our titian-tressed friend in the wreck—him that's buried under the dune with the locket on his heart. You know what's in the locket? Bridget's picture."

He said: "But let's not anticipate. We McTeagues came from West Connacht only four generations ago, but even so Jim's precious theory of ancestral memories won't hold water. According to my knowledge, Rafferty had no issue, and even if he had, none of his offspring witnessed what happened to him and consequently couldn't hand down the memories of what did. You see? I've never been in Ireland, and outside of seeing glimpses of it in a few travelogs, I haven't the dimmest idea of what it's like. I hadn't that is," he amended. "Though since making Red's acquaintance, I've gotten to know the old sod pretty well—not as it is but as it was, oh, I guess around two hundred years ago.

"They're not such pretty memories either. Yes, there are a few pleasant ones, such as walking with my arm around Bridget's waist on the rutty roads where the grey stone walls are lined with fuschia bushes—and stealing a kiss and her liking it. Doc, I'm off my nut, but—I'm falling in love with a girl dead for two centuries!

"And thatching her cottage for her. Doc, I've learned a new trade. I can thatch a mean cottage now. I always thought they nailed on the thatch like an overlap of brooms. They don't—they put down clay first and bind the straw with willow withes stuck in the clay like croquet hoops.

"But that's off the trail. The thing begins when I remember Bridget's brother Naughtan killed in church during Mass by a British raiding-party. And the Londoners packing us out of our lands and hunting us down. Bridget and I got away by taking ship from Donegal for Normandy. I remember," he said, "and what has it to do with

Michael McTeague?"

He closed his eyes, perhaps the better to review what he had chosen to call his memories.

"There was a hell of a boom in African trade in those days. One voyage could make a man rich. The Tirconnell O'Neill got me the loan of a ship; in three trips I had one of my own, the sloop that's under the dune. Her name was Bridget."

On his first venture as master of this sloop, he had met Irsuley at the court of Manti, king of the Tooth Shores, which was an olden name for the Slave Coast. From this point onward his story paralleled Lady Fitz', the only dissimilarities being the point of view from which it was told, and its ending—for Rafferty had not been sightless and had seen what the priestess had but guessed.

I listened stupefied to this recital. I had believed Lady Fitz' tale a dream—an uncommonly vivid one to be sure, and my analysis had been given in good faith. That McTeague should also have a dream coinciding in exact detail with hers was scarcely possible, even if both had sprung from identical impressions stored by their subconscious selves. No two minds ever work precisely alike; their behavior is based upon an intricate pattern of conditioning from accidentals. It is safe to say that though two people were to share the same breath from birth to death, duplicating each other's experiences to the last hair's breadth, still they would not think alike.

Therefore either Lady Fitz or McTeague alone might have dreamed of Irsuley, but certainly both had not done so. Either McTeague had learned of her vision and was parodying it to irritate me, or she had learned of his. It was that, or—the spirit-invasion on which Benson had speculated. Reincarnation was out of the question as far as I was concerned. Also ancestral memories—unless Lady Fitz had black forebears. If so, she certainly evinced no transmitted characteristics of the race.

Something very dishonest must be behind one, even both, of these stories. I interrupted McTeague's recounting of Black Pedro, his mate, effacing the Bridget's name when the crew had taken over.

"McTeague!"

He was so thoroughly immersed in his ghostly identity that he had forgotten his own name. That in itself was suspicious. I said: "Rafferty!"

He winced, blinked. "Yes?"

"When Lady Fitz apologized to you—what did she say?"

"Lady—Lady Fitz?" He thought a moment. "Oh! Why, she didn't say anything as I recall, beyond that she was sorry for her outburst of the other night, and would I forgive her. Then she just turned both red and around and walked away. Why?"

"What did you say to her?"

"Not a blessed word—didn't get a chance." I asked if he were sure. He was positive.

I waved him off and he took up his tale. He had temporarily lost his reason through the shock of the dead M'Komba rising to walk the deck; his impressions became incoherent. On regaining sanity he found that all the black folk must have died and become as mysteriously, blasphemously revived as had been M'Komba, for all moved in the same wooden and listless manner as if func-

tioning by clockwork.

Himself he was curiously stiff, nor could he always focus his eyes properly. It was only when Irsuley summoned rain that his muscles loosened and his sight sharpened.

He was no longer afraid of M'Komba. Now he felt kinship with him, perhaps because they were both so alike in their halting movements—the kinship I had noted displayed by two stranger clients coming to my office and chatting in the lobby, discovering they were afflicted by the same disease.

It was hard to think, he said. Yet, he knew that there were day and night, but they were not intervals of time. They merely occurred to supply him with sun and stars for steering. The sails had fallen away; the wind had snapped the masts, but still he held the wheel and turned it.

Then he had seen—the Susan Ann. It was during one of those periods of drouth and he was too stiff to do more than ineptly lift an arm to hail it. His vocal cords were shrunken leather. A boat had come from the Susan Ann. He had thrown down a length of rope but it had fallen apart as the boatmen seized it.

By dint of grapples the men boarded the derelict. He saw one in outlandish dress—Cap'n Benson. The Cap'n questioned him but because of his rigid throat he could not answer. The Cap'n bellowed an order and some of the men went back to the Susan Ann. They returned with a negro—Slam Bang they called him, but he was not the same as the Susan Ann's namesake.

Irsuley and the others terrified him; he would have fled to the boat had not the Cap'n ordered him held fast. He cried out at Irsuley in her own tongue, and identified her and her companions as dead things. The Cap'n laughed at him and touched Irsuley. Slam Bang whimpered that if cut she would not bleed.

One of the men swiped at Kolubo, he who saw for Irsuley, with a knife. There was no blood. The men were dumbfounded. With oaths they swarmed around Kolubo, first scratching, then hacking him. No man could have lived after what they did to him—yet what parts of him were still joined together writhed on the planks and struggled to arise. It was some time before Rafferty realised that he must intervene—it was so difficult to think! He moved stiffly to save Kolubo. Too stiffly. In revulsion the men threw the torpidly wriggling fragments overboard.

One of them spoke of leprosy permitting knife-thrusts without blood. They became terrified and broached burning the ship. The Cap'n ordered them to seal the black folk and the red-head in the cabin. Rafferty was carried, weakly striking at them, inside. He remembered the cup and jewels and dragged himself toward them to offer them to the Cap'n.

He heard hammering. The door was sealed. He and the six blacks strained vainly against the portals. Irsuley raised an invoking hand, there were screeches and the hammering ceased.

Feebly he managed to gain a port opening toward the Susan Ann. By that time the boat had reached it. There was a flash of cannon fire and the Bridget heeled sinking.

She was almost entirely underwater before the streams trickled into the cabin. As it filled, the

green glow of the ports deepened to blackness and strange blue stars flashed by, or paused to peep in. Rafferty floated. The cabin was filled with water. There was no air, but Rafferty, buoyed against the ceiling, did not sink nor drown. Vaguely he wondered at it.

After a time the water penetrated his body. Suddenly there was a terrible coldness as if his bones had become ice. He tried to pray. The others were settling; he crossed their hands on their breasts because that seemed fitting. He went to the table for a last look at the jewels, that cupful of pebbles which had brought him to this. He could not rise from them.

Blackness. Blackness and cold. He existed, but he did not know who nor where he was, nor why he was there. Only his hands could feel. They were paralyzed. At times he thought they held another's wrists. Then nothing mattered except that it was so very black and cold.

There was a strange vibration below him. He felt himself born up and higher. Water rushed about his hands as though someone washed them for him. A great pressure gripped them. Sand.

Still there was the blackness but not the cold. After a while the pressure was removed by flowing coldness and his hands were warm. They felt sunlight! He was happy, happy! The touch of the warm sun was like freedom, like release.

He heard voices. Heard—his own voice, the voice of Mike McTeague! And the Cap'n again, And now he knew that everything would work itself out if only he could get back into himself, into Mike McTeague, and explain to him. Explain what? Nothing . . . everything . . . simply explain . . .

McTeague shook himself. "And that's the hell of it. He comes and he goes. I get mixed up, thinking his thoughts are mine. I'm lonesome for Bridget, who's been dead so long, and I see the electric lights and the clothes people are wearing as if for the first time. They scare me. They scare Rafferty, and he—goes away. But when he gets accustomed to the unfamiliar things, he may stay for keeps." His pipe had gone out and he lighted it again. "I told you Doc—it's another case of the old Cap'n. Only, what's the Cap'n got to do with Rafferty? If what I've dreamed or remembered is Grade A—then it's something he's been mighty careful to keep to himself. Though it might explain some of his actions on the wreck."

I remarked rather curtly: "You've gone rather far, Mike, for a joke. At least, however poor, that's what I hope it is."

"Joke!" He looked over the match flame. "You think I cooked it up just to kid you?" He shook out the flame and rolled the matchwood between his fingers. "Rather grim, don't you think—and jokes are supposed to be funny."

I did not wish to offend him by accusations. I had always liked him and had no reason to doubt him, notwithstanding Benson's claim that he was influencing Pen, and Chadwick's sneers about his showmanship. On the other hand, I had no great love for Lady Fitz—now that I thought of it, her touch of the sun had been extremely light. And if she had lied to me, it also explained Boriloff's sudden, exhibitionistic regard for her. But why had she brought her tale to me?

McTeague said sadly: "I know what I've told

you is pretty incredible, but I've been serious all along."

I asked: "Whom else did you tell about this?"

He chuckled. "McTeague may be unbalanced, but he's not that screwy, Doc. Not yet. I'd hardly tell Jim when I'm not sure myself what it is. He'd pounce on the idea, true or false, like a showgirl hooking a mink coat. It would be prime material to add to his script of the old Cap'n, and if he doesn't know about it on his own, he's better off that way—he's difficult enough as it is. I've my pride, so I wouldn't tell Pen—I don't want her to think I'm a copy-cat, nor do I want to frighten her, which I would. I'd hardly confide in Flora—she'd have me ravished before I could finish the first sentence. I'd not tell the dear Reverend; he'd twist it into a religious message if he didn't use it for more practical ends. You know my feelings toward Her Majesty, the Volga Boatman and Chad. I'd hardly be wanting to vindicate the Cap'n, would I? And Deborah and I haven't batted the breeze since the hurricane. So who's left except yourself?"

"Johnson, Slam Bang, a whole raft of them."

"No, Doc—you're the only one, at least when it comes to this sort of slum. Hell, why do you think I broke down and came here?"

"I'm wondering."

His look was part surprise, the rest disgust. "Do you think I really want to be Red Rafferty? Don't you realize what that would mean if I were? that humankind may be under the thumb of invading horrors beyond its control, and that death—as death alone—isn't so much to be feared as life, which is something obscene?"

He snapped: "I came to you because I don't want it to be true. I want you to break it down by impersonal, cold-blooded reasoning."

"Can't you do that yourself?"

The disgust in his eyes deepened. "Doc, you should know me by now. Imaginative as hell—or I'd not be a good lawyer. And my second sight is the straight goods, or at least it has been so far. I can prove that I'm Rafferty easier than not. And I'll lay you odds that if we were ashore to do some library research, the Rafferty story will check. I'd soon know what's what. But we're not."

"Checking won't do any special good," I answered. "The subconscious is famous as a most adhesive flypaper, catching and holding suggestions which the conscious mind hasn't heard buzzing past its screens. Your story might check, yes. But merely because your subconscious recalls pages of past reading that your conscious mind didn't bother to absorb."

"Well, then—explain me away."

"Why," I asked, "among the sizeable list of vehicles present on the Susan Ann, should Rafferty's spirit single you out? Why not Boriloff, say, or one of the crew?"

He countered: "Tell me, Doc—if you could be reborn, would you come back as a man or a woman?"

"As a man, naturally."

"Why?"

"I suppose because I'd rather be a man than a woman, that's all."

He nodded, pleased. "Would you come back as a white man or a negro?"

I caught his drift. "White, of course. Because"—I added carefully—"a white man has more advantages."

"You see?" he queried. "You'd come back as much like your present self as possible."

"Wrong. I'd rather be a man, and white, but there the resemblance to my current incarnation ceases. Rather than be a doctor I'd be a number of things."

"Suppose, though, you'd left a ticklish operation undone and had to come back to finish it. You'd need delicately responsive hands. You'd be a doctor then?" I shrugged and nodded halfheartedly. "The rest is obvious. Rafferty picked me because I'm more like himself than any other within reach. He can—handle me better."

I said: "If that's the case, what about Irsuley and her friends? Why shouldn't they come back also?"

"Maybe they will," he responded glumly. "Irsuley would fasten herself on the most beautiful woman—my God!" His eyes opened wide. "Pen!"

I counterfeited a little laugh. "Easy, Mike. You've dreamed, not remembered."

And as I had diagnosed Lady Fitz' vision, I set to work on his. And though my efforts comforted him, they had the opposite effect on me. I was beginning to discern the elasticity of the psycho-analytic approach. It enabled one to ascribe as many motivations to a given thought or deed as might emanate from vindictive clubwomen judging the innocent misstep of someone they wished to exclude from their bridge group. But then, I doubted that any practitioner had ever been confronted by a case like this—an identical dream shared by two.

It was a choice of a hoax or the unprecedented acceptance, and on insubstantial evidence, of a terrifying and utterly abnormal phenomenon.

A solution occurred to me. "McTeague," I asked, "the things you blurted while intoxicated all had bearing on what you've told me; did Chadwick visit you while you were—"

"Blotto?" he supplied. "I can't remember. Why all the stress on someone having heard this before?"

I said ineptly that I feared it might reach Benson. It satisfied him and he left whistling a rollicking tune. But he had forgotten what I had not—Benson's mention of Slam Bang's bones, being under the mound of sand. And the negro's unaccountable weeping caused by sight of the wheel.

There was an answer somewhere, somehow, to all of this. But I felt that it was a long way off. And I hoped it would measure to my requirements. Otherwise—

I preferred not to contemplate the alternative, which would destroy not only my world but myself along with it.

I sent at once for Slam Bang.

Chapter XV

EZZULIE AND ROSALIE

Although not an ophthalmologist, I knew that among racial types the negro is specially exempt from trachoma. There is a direct continuity between eyes and nasal membrane through the tear-ducts, and because of its extensive lymphatic and vascular system, the conjunctiva is frequently affected by rheumatic and other systemic aberrations.

tions.

It was not impossible that Slam Bang's trouble was a secondary effect of asthma or eczema. Should his affliction be due to some allergy, I must track it down. In any case, it was essential that he give me his pathological history.

I had told him this much when his lifted hand cut me short.

"If it's all'gy, Doct' Fen'mo'—theh ain' nothin' you can do 'bout it, less'n you wan' make Cap'n Benson almaghty so'."

"Ah, yes," I replied a little angrily. "You're allergic to the black wheel, is that it?"

His face lengthened, melancholy. He cogitated, twiddling his fingers. "Doct' Fen'mo'—yuh a smaht man. Do names mean suthin'?"

As I hesitated, the negro said: "Beca'se mah bo'n name ain' Slam Bang. Doct' Fen'mo'. It's Abra'm Lincoln Washin'ton—an' eveh since Ah been call' Slam Bang afteh the ol' Cap'n's fest cook, been standin' in need of a rabbit's foot. Ah been wond'rin' if maybe Ah wen' back to mah ol' name, Ad'h shake the hoodoo off."

"And what's been your bad luck, aside from eye trouble?"

"Collins the stewa'd, he neveh did cotton to me, suh. He don' lak mah strewin' 'roun' the tobacco, suh. Ah sprinkle it loose in front of mah do come ev'ry sundown. Theh's duppies in the black wheel, suh, an' theh goin' git me if Ah don' take cautions."

"A duppy can coun' only to nine, suh. If you sprinkle tobacco seed in front of yo' do', he stay to coun' it—an' neveh git in. Ah don' have no tobacco seed, suh, so Ah use cut-up cigahs. But it don' seem to work," he added morosely.

I asked: "But just what is a duppy?"

"When Ah was no talleh'n a weeny chick, mah Mammy tol' me 'bout duppy sticks, ca'se mah Uncle Boaz, he had one. When some'un dies, suh, what's been a nat'ral all his life—a nat'ral is somebody can look into time an' cast spells—you can bet yo' lucky cloveh, he's change into a duppy. You got to keep him in his grave bah nailin' his clo'es down, an' sprinkle him with salt an' compellance powdeh. Ca'se when a duppy leave his body, he ain' got no mo' heart an' mind to tell him how to behave. If he breathe on you, he make you sick, an' if he touch you, then you come down with mis'ries."

"Them as want the duppy's poweh has to be its heart an' mind. Tha's what mah Uncle Boaz done. He took him a stick o' pimento wood an' roast it shuah 'nough slow 'til the bahk fall loose. He bury it in the grave 'til the duppy git in it. He dig it up an' bind it with wire so the duppy git dizzy if it try comin' out, on 'coun' of the mo'n nine circles it got to run roun'. An' he baptize it with a name, an' afteh that, ain' nobody goin' mess roun' doin' him no hurt, ca'se theh 'fraid he turn the duppy on 'em."

My mental comment on this preposterous superstition was that the stick's efficacy lay not in its supposedly captive soul but in the irrational belief that souls could be captured.

He said: "The wheel's a right 'nough duppy wheel. Doct' Fen'mo'—soon's Ah seen it Ah felt the same way lak when Ah see Uncle Boaz' cane."

"You touched it?"

His eyes widened until their whites were ivory rings. "No, suh! But Ah git a mis'ry from it, jus' the same. Mah Mammy tol' me 'bout suthin' else. 'Bout—'bout—"

He swallowed with an effort and scanned me unhappily. "Bout—Her!"

"You mean, about Mammy herself?"

"Not Mammy huhse'f. Bout—Her. You shouldn' dast say no name of suthin' you don' hankeh to call," he warned. "The Her Ah'm talkin' 'bout is—a goddess, suh. The love-goddess of mah people."

I laughed. "What, you're afraid to summon—love?"

"Don' you chuckle lak that, Doct' Fen'mo', less you know what you chucklin' goin' do. She's a high yelleh gal, shuah 'nough, with mo' curves than a balky river. She wehs a gol' ring an' a gol' chain on Huh neck, an' comes Thuhdays an' Sat'days lookin' fo' men to git. Huh mos' fun is bustin' up the plans of young gals in love. She calls theh men from them by dreams of shiny gol'—'til fin'ly they see Huh an' know who's callin'. An' they got to go to Huh. If you give Huh the go-by you git bad luck an' bad health all the rest of yo' days. An' she so jealous, you betteh lea re vo' true-lovin' gal fo' she think to make yo' gal trouble too."

I had reason not to smile at this balderdash. I asked: "And since you've seen the wheel, you've dreamed of—Her? But surely the favor of a goddess is nothing to weep about as you've been doing. Or do you love some girl back home and fear you'll have to break off with her because of—this goddess?"

"Ah ain' got no gal, Doct' Fen'mo'. That ain' why She call me. Ah been wicked to Ezzulie in mah dreams—"

He stopped, gaped, threw a hand over his mouth. "Ah spoke Huh name!"

I too had gasped—barring his accent it was practically the appellation of Lady Fitz' priestess. "Slam Bang—have you mentioned your dreams to anyone? Have you named—Her—to anybody?"

He drew himself up with dignity. "Suh, Ah have trouble 'nough 'thout coaxin' no mo' bumps on mah nose. Ah don' wan' ev'rybody laughin' at me fo' a supehstitious niggeh, jus' ca'se they don' know what mah Mammy tol' me."

I waved for him to proceed. He said: "Ah dream jus' as real as Ah'm sittin' heah—Ah don' wan' lovin' Huh an' Ah sen' Huh away. Ah lock Huh up in a black closet, suh, an' fasten the do' with spikes."

I flinched at this and asked him to repeat it, which he did. I queried: "Was Captain Benson in your dream?"

He regarded me askance as though, reading his mind, I might also have a duppy at my beck.

"Yes, suh. Ah dream it's ca'se he tell me to sen' Huh away that Ah lock Huh up. An' it's no good, suh! Ca'se if She come durin' wakin' hours, Ah would use hoss-sense, suh. Ah wouldn' make Huh mad at me bah tellin' Huh to go away. But in mah dream, Ah can' he'p mahse'f. Ah git rid of Huh jus' lak Ah ain' mahse'f at all, but some' un else."

Unless he were jesting, this made a total of four cases of the old Cap'n on board. The long arm of coincidence must be vastly more elastic

than supposed, to extend to such a limit!

I asked: "And then what?"

"Then Ah dream Ah die, Doct' Fen'mo'. Ah dream Ah lock Huh up, an' Ah fell down dead. Tha's all. But it's a premonition, suh. She tell me bah the dream Ah'm goin' to die."

I questioned him for further details, but though he reiterated his dreams several times, I could glean nothing further from them. They were extremely vague even to the colored man, who regarded them only as an omen. He maintained that it was for this reason that he wept, but nonetheless I gave him a thorough examination. Aside from a slight irritation, I found no other distressful condition. I strengthened his eye-rinse with a trace of adrenalin, treated him, and sent him away.

I considered my facts. The stories of Lady Fitz, McTeague and Slam Bang agreed a little too well to be mere products of chance. Pen regarded the wheel as alive—I wondered if for reasons she feared to state lest I ridicule them. Had she also—dreamed?

Had Benson certain knowledge concerning the old Cap'n which he preferred to keep private? Did Pen share that knowledge—or had Chadwick's hold on her something to do with it?

I had no right to pry into Benson's affairs, but neither had he nor anyone else a right to perpetrate so fantastic a hoax on me. And if hoax it was not, then my prying would be justified, since it would indicate that an abnormal and sinister influence was toying with the lives of us on the Susan Ann—with consequences which were apt to be as grave as they were unpredictable.

I resolved to visit Benson and sound him out concerning the old Cap'n—a rather graceless task in any case, and a hopeless one if he sensed and resented my purpose. A thought was evolving in the back of my head, but even I could not hazard the form which eventually it would assume. Following its development was like watching a cloud-wisp drifting stately across the sky, unfurling at the horizon in a lacy flower form yet reaching the zenith perhaps as a vast and chalky visage, a twisted chimera or a dancer with trailing scarves.

When Benson welcomed me into his cabin he was quite his normal self—a little subdued, but still Big Jim. He sat not far from his great-grandfather's portrait and it was as though two men watched me.

I said: "Doctor's report, sir—Lady Fitz has been ill today."

He answered equably: "She's always having illness of one sort or another, whenever she needn't foot the bill. What was it this time?"

"A slight touch of sunstroke. Nothing important." He nodded, and that seemed to finish the subject. I said hurriedly: "She's a hypochondriac then?"

"Not so much as Boriloff. She probably contracted the idea from him. She brought him along, you know, for a rest cure."

I didn't know. Benson explained:

"Ah, yes, whenever poor, misunderstood Alexis feels he's not receiving proper respect, he dreams that something terrible is about to happen to him, and we must be kind to one whose days are num-

bered. Or he gets drunk and demolishes apartments, someone else's, preferably. Then we appreciate his sensitive temperament. Or he becomes fetchingly ill, and we pity his agony. With his looks and his voice, he can get away with it, but it's a shame he doesn't apply them to honest effort—say, the concert stage; he'd be bound to make a killing. But no, he wasn't born to work—so I hear tell. And it's so much simpler to get what he wants with a minimum of effort."

I said: "I've wondered what you see in them—Boriloff and Lady Fitz, Swastlow and his sister."

I had scored a hit where I was but taking aim. He folded his arms, and the wrinkles from nose to mouth deepened. He said crisply: "They amuse me!" And more smoothly: "I can afford to carry my private circus about, so why not? Wouldn't you?"

Again there was a slight lapse and still I had learned nothing—except that he had invited his guests on this trip for another reason than he wanted known.

I said:

"You missed some of the action today, sir, in your circus. While Lady Fitz was recovering from her faint, she performed some exotic mental gymnastics."

He swam up to my hook, looked at it doubtfully, and swam away. "But that's a doctor's confidence, I believe."

"Oh, well," I said with assumed crassness, "I'm not betraying anything you wouldn't know. We on board are open books to you."

The flattering implications were a bit broad, and he looked both pleased and displeased. But he returned to the bait. "What, then, was it?"

I could not bring up the names of Rafferty and Irsuley, since the old Cap'n had never heard them, their bearers being—if the tales were true—unable to talk. Therefore I put McTeague's words into Lady Fitz' mouth and repeated that fraction of the Irsuley story wherein the Cap'n's men hacked Kolubo with their knives. He listened intently, his nostrils dilating and his eyes clouding grey. Over him twenty years slipped like a translucent hood.

"A most sadistic notion!" I finished.

His voice cracked into that treble, almost falsetto one in which he had berated Johnson three days before. "So—she said that, did she?" And I knew that again I had scored.

"She described it as if she'd been a witness to it," I furthered, watching him narrowly.

The crowsfeet about his canny eyes deepened, and though he did not smile, I knew he was laughing within himself — and triumphantly. I had told him nothing unexpected then—the old Cap'n did have a connection with the wreck. But what was it?

There was a danger of overstepping the mark and informing him, via my questions, more than he could inform me. But at least I held his interest now. I went back to that first mark I had hit.

"Captain, both Lady Fitz and Boriloff display the earmarks of psychoneuroses, and I'm worried. I don't think that they find this atmosphere—congenial. Boriloff is a hypochondriac and so is Lady Fitz, besides feeling that she's persecuted and

morbidly taking refuge in religious identification. They need treatment not included in my laboratory on this ship. But its progress can be arrested," —I leaned toward him to observe his reaction—"I would recommend your sending Lady Fitz and Boriloff away by launch as soon as possible. It might save a long illness later."

Now there had been a certain amount of truth in this, but I had exaggerated mainly for effect. As far as I was concerned, socially and medically, if Lady Fitz and her lover were washed overboard I would hardly miss them—except likely, as one misses a toothache.

But again I had nicked that unseen target. Benson was on the alert. Odd, how different his voice had become.

"Twill not be long, me bully, that the Susan Ann will be seaworthy. Sick or well, the lot of ye can bide here the while."

My fish was hooked; I gave it more line. I over-emphasized the need for haste. He snapped: "Ye'll kink your lip, mister, when I call the orders! I said we'll bide, and bide it'll be!"

I asked: "Does the risk of fostering insanity in people for whom you're responsible mean nothing to you?"

"Nowhere so much as another thing," he retorted. "And ye'd best thoroughfoot that tongue of yours to the lay of civility. Ye may have wormed through a parcel of books, but ye don't know everything!"

I said: "Whatever what you call this other thing may be, it must be extremely pressing, since you're willing to gamble—"

"More pressing than life itself," he snapped, turning to look at the wheel. It seemed to cheer him; he smiled pensively, wetting his lips. I turned to it also and again experienced that revulsion, almost panic, which first sight of it had roused in me.

I suppose I betrayed this feeling by my expression, for I caught myself wondering which were Irsuley's hands, and Rafferty's—which Churkhur's, Kolubo's, M'Komba's. The utter inanity of such speculation broke the wheel's witchcraft. I saw that Benson was still smiling, but not at the wheel. At me!

His eyes were alight as if they were patches of grey fog behind which the sun stubbornly glared. I remembered his boast that like his forefather, he could "get things" from other people's minds. Resentfully I thought to stare him down, and could not. Wincing, I looked away.

His voice was like silk floss: "Ye saw something in the wheel, did ye not? Now tell me," he crooned persuasively, "what is it ye saw?"

I could hardly admit what I had almost seen—the pictures supplied by Lady Fitz and her fellow-visionaries, recalled by the wheel. I said: "I see nothing except the wheel itself."

"Ye might see the wonder of it!"

That was ambiguous. I said tentatively: "It's workmanship is wondrous, if that's what you mean."

He shifted impatiently. Somehow I had disappointed him. I asked: "Captain Benson, exactly what is it so much more important to you than your own life and the welfare of others?"

He squinted at me, then chuckled dryly. "Aye, ye wonder. Ye think perchance I've not guessed

why Kurtson sent ye here, with all your mealy-mouthed blabber of loving the sea and this ship? Ye came to pry and spy on me, like all the rest! Well, know this—the hull pack of ye may pry and spy 'til ye get your bellies full. Ye'll not scud away, nary one of ye, 'til then!"

There were two old Cap'ns staring at me—one in the frame and one who had been Big Jim but a few moments ago. I said: "I'm hardly here as Kurtson's spy, sir."

"Ye'll shorten your tongue, ye sucklin' pup, if ye don't want a kiss from the cat! A spy I say ye are, and the rest with ye—but afore I'm done, ye'll give the lie to me on your backfriend suspicions!"

He regretted that he had said so much; he unlocked his arms and pointed. "Get ye instanter to the door and make end of your sauce!" As I hesitated, he jumped up and stamped his foot as one stamps to frighten a puppy. "Weigh out!"

He was in no mood for trifling, so I took my departure. At least I had learned something, unless he had been deliberately playing with me. He had seemed as sincere as the others, but one or more of them must be lying.

My next move must be to consult Pen. If I could pilot our conversation skilfully enough, she might supply further beads to the necklace of facts I was making. Late as it was, I headed for her cabin.

Unless one or all of the Irsuley-dreamers were bent on making a fool of me, there were four cases of schizoid hallucination on the ship. Not for an instant could I give credence to the absurd and untenable theory of spirit-possession.

Suppose that Benson's old Cap'n obsession had been the springboard for the Irsuley ones? The abnormalities of one neurotic can incite susceptible others to imitation of it, as I had often seen in hospitals. That Lady Fitz did have neurasthenic tendencies was obvious. Slam Bang I had not studied sufficiently to pigeonhole him one way or another. McTeague had always impressed me as supremely adjusted to his surroundings.

For the sake of argument, however, I took for granted that all were neurotics parroting Benson's behavior. Such copying, though at first similar to the traits inspiring it, eventually resolves into a scheme of conduct peculiar to the mentality behind it. As I have stated before, it is impossible that any two mental backgrounds can be facsimiles. Yet these three were so closely allied, in what should have been divergent end-products of their varying mental groundworks, that they presented identical pictures.

Assuming that even if the thought-processes of McTeague, Lady Fitz and Slam Bang corresponded perfectly, to achieve the same results among themselves would have required exposure to identical strain under identical conditions. The only strain which they could have shared, as far as I knew, was the danger of the hurricane.

Yes, it must have been then that they had heard the various names on which their stories were based, that somehow they had learned unwittingly of an ancient mission from Ghana to the New World. Even so it was incredible that, they had managed to achieve parallel results.

As I came to a turn in the passage I heard footfalls and Chadwick's voice. I paused rather

than meet him. He was singing a popular song of some time back, evidently a favorite with him, for often I had heard him hum it before, But had paid scant heed.

Now it assumed significance in my inquiry into the particulars behind the parallel dreams, for I recognized the tune by title—*Rosalie*. By a slight slur of enunciation, it was easily convertible into Irsuley or Ezzulie.

I waited until I heard a door close, then proceeded around the turn to Pen's cabin. As I lifted my hand to rap on her door, I heard muffled voices from within—hers and Chadwick's.

"You might have knocked at least! You don't own me yet, Chad." He mumbled some answer. "Isn't marrying Jim's money enough? Must you paw me besides? I don't like the touch of you, Chad."

I should not have listened, but I did, and angrily—rather hoping that Pen would call out so that I might storm to her rescue and deal to Chadwick what was due him.

He said angrily: "You'd get to like me, Pen, if you'd give yourself a chance!"

Her laugh crackled whiplike, cutting even me for whom it was not intended. "You think—you—could awaken me?"

He cried, smarting: "Providing McTeague hasn't done it already!"

She said with chilly calm: "That was beastly of you. He hasn't and never will. I'm not in love with him—oh, I think the world of him because he's everything you're not. But a bargain's a bargain, and as things stand now, if you don't have me, nobody shall. Remember—I'm beyond the pale."

And sharply: "No, Chad! Go on out!"

More sharply: "Chad! I said—go!"

He muttered, but I heard him coming to the door. I hurried away, wondering anew what was of such overwhelming importance to Pen that she was willing to exchange for it not only herself and the Benson fortune but her entire future happiness.

I returned a little later and she was sobbing. I wavered, then went back to my cabin. And if the Irsuley dreams were so disturbing to others, they were pleasant compared to the sobbing which haunted my sleep.

Chapter XVI

THE CASE FOR GHOSTS

All the next day Pen avoided me; guiltily I hoped she had not been aware of my eavesdropping. At breakfast and at lunch I attempted to engage her in conversation, which she prevented by fixing her attention doggedly to the others present.

In the afternoon Flora Swastlow came to beg a few sleeping tablets from me. She had not been sleeping well because of nightmares. In them she was not herself but was—I had already guessed as much—a black priestess of Kumbi-Kumbi in Ghana. Her story tallied perfectly with Lady Fitz'. Indeed, it added an elucidative touch concerning the sangaree or blood vow which bound the wreck's ghosts to the wheel. Each participant in the oath had tasted the others' blood.

She told me how the old Cap'n's hands came to be on the wheel—a most incredible happenstance.

"I could never forget the feel of those hands which touched me and which sank our vessel and doomed me to endless waiting! When our bodies were rendered useless to us by the salt in the seawater, we went into the wheel, where our hands were carved in token of our pledge. It could not rot because we, immortal forces within it, gave it life. As we were, so was the wheel. And because of my memory of the man's hands, their outlines were formed on the wood."

But having been blind, she did not know any more than Lady Fitz whose hands they were.

She said: "Sometimes I hear a voice—my own voice as Irsuley, speaking clearly these words: 'They shall be paid for lending us their bodies. Even should death claim them while they serve us, they shall ascend to the black ecstasy'."

"Yes, yes," I agreed wearily, glad at least that Flora was content to keep her story only a dream and not convert it into messages from Heaven or the recollections of a disembodied guest. "And have you mentioned these nightmares to anyone besides me?"

She slumped into a languorous curve, by which I apprehended that she was compensating in advance for some damning confession.

"After my absurd performance at the dinner-table, three nights ago, I hardly thought it advisable—but Chad's been so understanding that I did tell him a little. And I've seen the wheel," she added. "I dropped into Captain Benson's cabin—and in my burgundy dress," she finished defiantly, by which I gathered that she was irresistible in burgundy.

"Did your nightmares begin before or after you'd seen the wheel?"

"Some before, some after. But I'm not so stupid as everyone thinks." She pouted until her lower lip was like a tempting little fruit. "I figured it all out, and it made sense. My feelings had been hurt, and a black wheel had been mentioned, so naturally I dreamed of one."

It was something of a novelty to have a dream explained to me—I was bored by the necessity of repeating myself when interpreting them. She said: "The hands on the wheel came into the dreams after I'd seen it, so it explains itself."

"How about the names, Irsuley and Rafferty?"

"My brother was joshing me about our being stranded here. He said he hoped it wouldn't turn out like Saint Ursula's boat-ride."

"What was that?"

"She was a virgin who took to sea with ten thousand other virgins, all in one ship, to escape the advances of a pagan prince. She was three years at sea."

"And Rafferty?"

She puzzled it, meanwhile admiring the curve of her thigh. "I can't remember. But it was only a dream—it doesn't matter." Then shrewdly: "Or does it?"

I hastily assured her that it didn't. "Has your brother seen the wheel?"

"But certainly! He was in Captain Benson's cabin when I went there. The Captain invited him in especially because my brother knows all about that sort of thing."

"The Reverend is an antiquarian?"

"Good heavens, no—that's Lady Fitz' field! The pattern of the wheel interested Captain Benson. My brother in his theological research has acquired a wide knowledge of symbolic ornament, that's all."

I said, apparently playfully: "I hope the wheel hasn't given him nightmares."

She smiled wisely. "Harold is always having nightmares—he wouldn't be happy without them. Oh, I know he has the veneer of a worldly man, but there's a trace in him of Saint Anthony—you know, the one who went out in the desert and had temptations. Harold always reforms after a really good nightmare. He cuts down on cigarettes and won't touch a drop of liquor for a week or so. He used to tell me his dreams, but they were so ridiculous, especially when he tried to explain what God meant by them, that I couldn't help laughing. He's kept them to himself ever since. Poor Harold," she observed with a superior smile, "he doesn't know if he's white or black!"

She went on in a rush of confidence: "You, being a psychologist besides a neuropath and a few other things, probably guessed ages ago why Harold brought me here. The poor addled dear doesn't trust God to find a suitable catch for me. I think," she said ruminatively, "he's making the same mistake I made in my dream—setting himself up higher than God."

She shivered. "I hope he won't have to pay for it as I did in the dream!" She went on: "He fawns on Benson so that we can travel in high society until I can clamp on a likely prospect. It's hardly a religious attitude—and Harold is religious—well, on occasion. And I don't like it," she continued candidly. "The fawning, I mean. I'm not the kind of a girl Harold thinks. I don't give a damn about money—"

My thoughts strayed from her voice. Either the Reverend Harold had or hadn't shared the Irsuley contagion. I would have to delve into the matter.

It was quite possible that the wheel's pattern was a hypnotic one and could, like the devices employed in both Charcot's and Bernheim's clinics, induce a mental state of submission, a dormancy of will. Under hypnosis one can imagine himself experiencing the most outrageously implausible events—but those experiences are dictated to him by the hypnotist.

The wheel had no life nor lips to whisper suggestions to the arrested mind. Who, then, made use of the trance-states it might impose? Who else but the wheel's guardian, forever jealously beside it?

Benson!

That nebulous thought which had been so long in shaping itself at the back of my head swirled into sharp focus, no longer weaving tatters of mist but a knife-edged thunderhead.

I remembered my distrust of the wheel on first beholding it. At that time I should have, but did not, realize the significance of its impact on my consciousness. I remembered also that uneasy moment I had experienced yesterday in Benson's cabin when he had asked what I had seen in the wheel, and his disappointment that I noted nothing besides its peerless workmanship. And I

remembered his accusation that I among others was a spy, but that before he had finished, we would be seeing through his eyes.

Nor had I forgotten that plan, more important to him than his own life, involving the detention of all of us, yea or nay.

The suspicion appalled me. Why should Benson wish to impress the Irsuley story on Lady Fitz and the others? That he was capable of marked hypnotic powers was fully probable, else he might never have achieved his reputation in legal circles. Success at the bar depends mainly on a lawyer's ability to sway the jurors psychologically—to hypnotize them into acceptance of his viewpoint.

It might be that Lady Fitz was not far astray in declaring Benson possessed of a fiend. I realized now why Kurtson had been so anxious to bundle me off on this voyage. He could not come himself, so I was his proxy—and Benson had been accurate in naming me a spy. I wondered why Benson had included the others—what outside interests did they represent?

Involuntarily I groaned. Flora laughed, recalling me to her. "I know you're conventional, doctor—surprisingly so, considering your medical background. But I hardly expected to shock you!"

She went on a trifle resentfully that she supposed by misjudging me, she'd made a fool of herself again. She fluttered her eyelashes at me.

I replied consolingly that my mind had been wandering, realized that it sounded like a slur at her company, and made flattery of it by blaming her beauty. She left in a high good humor; I remained in a correlatively unhappy one.

Now it was all the more urgent that I talk with Pen.

Chapter XVII

IRSULEY AND URSULA

But Pen was every whit as desperate to remain out of my reach as I was to maneuver her into it. Why she should strive to avoid me I could not imagine. She was hardly the sort to take offense at some fancied slight. Moreover she had said that she trusted me. Did she know, somehow, that I had listened to her conversation with Chadwick?

It is true that I saw her at meals, but Benson was present, and I did not wish him to surmise that my espionage included prying information from his daughter. He was disconcertingly jovial. The old Cap'n strain predominated in him and he patronised us—the master condescending to show graciousness to his inferiors. I do not know with whom Pen was the more annoyed, him or my persistent self. At any rate she slipped away, sylphlike, whenever I came within arm's length. I knocked at her door but received no answer.

On the following day I tracked her down. The others had arranged a trip of further exploration. When I found that Pen was to be among the party, I asked to be included, in the hope that I could obtain a few private moments with her. However, when the boat left for shore, Pen was not present among the group and I was informed that, what a pity, she'd changed her mind. I remembered mendaciously that I was neglecting important experiments in my laboratory and hid there until the expedition was well away, then went

back outdoors.

The deck swarmed with workmen and was littered both with the necessities and debris of the repair-work. Benson wandered around inspecting and criticizing the hands' progress, leaping from the bluff heartiness of Big Jim to the carking cantankerousness of the old Cap'n as easily as a grasshopper from stem to stem.

The men regarded his behavior with a covert amusement and a disguised irritation which boded no good. I foresaw that should Benson persist in carrying the old Cap'n role much farther, there was bound to be trouble. A little of it had been rather appealing to the imaginations of his sailors—as long as it had not seriously inconvenienced them. A little more, and they might actively resent him—with that mounting animosity displayed by any dissenting group toward its chosen scapegoat, that object on which could be fixed all blame, not only for its own shortcomings but for other factors of discontent as well. It was from just such a womb as this that the bloodiest of revolutions were born.

Pen had ensconced herself in a chair on the focsle deck and was staring, chin in hands, over then narrow stretch of water to the shore. I crept up, cornering her.

She refused to look at me. She said expressionlessly: "Go away, Ross. Let me alone."

I was encouraged that she used my given name, not my title, and disobeyed her. "Miss Benson—it's imperative that I talk with you."

She stirred restlessly. "It's just as imperative to me that you don't. Now please go." And as I held fast: "If you don't—I will."

I said quickly: "No, please wait!" And even more quickly, for she was moving to arise: "I don't know what I could have done to anger you—but whatever you think it was—I'm sorry."

She relaxed with a hopeless twitch of her hand. A corner of her mouth quirked upward in the start of a tender little smile, but she forced it down. "You've done—nothing."

"But I must have. It's so unlike you to be unkind for no reason."

She tipped back her head and regarded me with supreme indifference. "And how do you know what I'm like?"

How did I know! But I could not frame my answer in mere words.

She answered her own query. "You don't know. Nobody does."

And suddenly fuming: "Oh, for God's sake—get away and let me have a few moments' peace!"

I said: "If it were for myself that I wished to speak, I'd go, believe me. But there's something which, for the benefit of the others, I must know. And I need your cooperation."

She brooded on the interweaving dance of the ripples, the shuttling of steel-blue threads in a giant's loom. She said hopefully: "You don't know me really—and perhaps I don't know you, either." She seemed glad about it.

Then she studied me from crown to toes, narrowing her eyes, as though she were a purchaser not too satisfied with the quality of what she contemplated buying. She made up her mind and abruptly arose.

"Better have it out and be done with it," she muttered to herself. And to me: "We'll go where

we can't be interrupted — not to my cabin, though." I wondered if she realized the psychological portent of that statement.

I suggested the laboratory and we went there. All the way, she hung a step behind me rather than take my arm, and I felt loathesomely unclean.

As a cat will inspect a strange cranny, so she warily scanned her surroundings before settling on the stool. It implied that there might be listeners concealed on the premises and I disliked it doubly—not only for its imputation that she had lost her trust in me, but that it came from her personally.

She said ruefully: "If I had any sense, I'd light out of here—before it's too late."

And gazed at me as if expecting me to read her mind and offer a comment. I said: "Miss Benson—there's something I don't know which I feel, for various reasons, I must learn. Namely—what became of the first Susan Ann and her skipper?"

She was both amused and taken back. "And that's what you wanted to see me about?" She laughed harshly. "Doctor—you certainly don't know me! From what you had me thinking—I don't believe I know myself."

She put up a hand as I would have spoken. "No, Ross—let me take over. You—you like me, don't you?" Her voice was wistful.

It was not in my realm to tell her how very much I liked her. I nodded, not trusting myself to speak, lest I reveal the depth of my liking. If only she had not been so very rich—

She said: "Then you don't want to see me hurt. And I'm going to be hurt very greatly unless I make my position clear."

She became still more wistful. "Ross, you have done something to me. Oh, not intentionally—but it's there. That's why I've been avoiding you." And rather angrily, when I did not seem to catch her thought: "That's why I'll continue to avoid you."

She went on: "I trust you—God, yes! But I'm not going to tell you this just because I trust you. Something happened the night before last—something that revealed to me—"

For an instant I was clammy with horror—had Benson infected her, too, with the Irsuley taint? Then I remembered. I said: "If you mean what passed between you and Chad—" Her eyes opened wide. "I was outside your door."

"Oh you were, were you?" It sounded angry, yet immediately she was eager. "Why, Ross—why?"

"I had to speak to you about the old Cap'n."

She formed little fists. "Doctor," she said savagely, "sometimes I suspect that, in spite of all your book-knowledge, you've a dreadfully stupid streak!"

I waited helplessly. She lost her tension. She sighed: "Ah, well . . . Ross, what I'm about to tell you is something Kurtson doesn't know. Something even Jim doesn't know. Something I'd never tell anyone—because I've been afraid. But what dawned on me the other night was the last straw that burned that bridge. I'm still afraid, with more reason than ever. So much so, that I'm glad to talk to you."

She said: "So you've worried about what became of the original Susan Ann . . . and how my great-great-grandfather met his end!" She

said: "I'd always heard that the old Cap'n died of a heart attack at home, and that then the trading firm was disbanded, the Susan Ann sold, and the family moved to Philadelphia. But it's sheer fiction invented to cover the black eye on the family escutcheon. If, that is, what Chad and I discovered is true. And evidently it is true—and since it is—"

Her eyes were as soft on me as the petals whose color they held. "That's why you've got to know—so you'll leave me alone!"

She cried furiously: "Oh, I hate Chad—hate him more than anyone else has ever hated! If it weren't for him, things would be so different! And I don't love Mike, as he accused me of doing. No; Mike's like my brother—if I could have had one. Jim's always leaned heavily on Mike, just as if he were indeed Jim's son and my brother. But Jim didn't see it that way. If ever Mike was a son to him, it was to be—a son-in-law."

"McTeague loves you," I said jealously, much as I admired him.

She shrugged. "Well, he oughtn't. It's not quite—nice. I know him too well to love him. We didn't grow up together, no—but the feeling is as though we did. He doesn't—stir me. Chad loves me, as much as he can love anything—which is precious little. He loves me mainly for what I represent—Father's money and influence, and what it can do for him. But I can't love either of them—They're so unlike what I want. They're so damned adult and—and efficient! I've mothered Jim too long, that's what's wrong with me. And the man I love must be like Jim—honest and pig-headed and—a little boy, deep down inside."

"If Mike's in love with me, he's never said anything about it. If he had, I'd soon have put him to rights. Chad did, and I tried to let him off as easily as possible. I was kind to him—Ross, please never make that mistake! It's no kindness to go out of your way for someone, against your better judgment."

"I've learned this," she said very earnestly, as if it might apply to me. "If someone loves you, but you don't feel the same way about it—he'll have to get over it eventually. Postponing the parting, to delay the hurt he's bound to get anyway, indicates a feeling of some sort on your part, amounting almost to encouragement. And in any case, it's holding him from a stab at something new. Ross," she said, "if it ever happens to you—don't make the mistake."

She went on: "I was kind to Chad. I thought that if his mind was occupied with something besides myself, he'd forget me. So I let him assist in the realization of Jim's pet ambition—the contacting of the descendants of every member of the first Susan Ann's crew. Jim hoped to collect them and make a voyage wherein everything would be as much like the old days as possible. This very voyage," she added.

"You understand, Ross. It was the small boy wanting a real sword instead of a wooden one. Jim had the money to buy a real sword, and now—maybe he'll cut himself with it if he's not careful."

"A lot of the families we traced hadn't heard of the Bensons—they'd forgotten. But one old woman asked if we meant the crazy Captain

Benson. I thought she'd heard of some amusing eccentricity and asked for particulars in front of Chad—fool that I was!

"She repeated what she'd heard from her grandfather, whose father had been among the crew. On a return voyage around the Horn, the Susan Ann was making good time for home when she sighted a vessel in distress off the Keys. Figures were moving on it, but the masts had snapped and most of the tackle hung dragging in the water."

"The Cap'n went to it in a boat and found a number of sickly negroes on it, perhaps runaway slaves. He sent for his colored cook—the original Slam Bang—who could speak an African dialect. But disease had so devoured them that they were incapable of making reply."

Here it was, the fifth version of the Irsuley story, and perhaps the genesis of them all.

"The Cap'n thought it a mercy to end their misery. He sank them on their infected vessel. Almost immediately he regretted it. The Susan Ann sailed on, but at night the Cap'n walked the deck. What he had done preyed so rapaciously on him that he ordered the Susan to put back to the spot where the vessel had been sunk."

"No trace of it could be seen, but he insisted on circling the spot and waiting. It was bound to come up, he said—but it didn't. I suppose he was hoping against hope that he wasn't really a murderer after all. What he had done, had been done in kindness. He was religious, and maybe he had realized that it's blasphemy to take God's prerogatives in hand; in dealing out death he had usurped God's powers and sinned."

"The voyage had been a long one. The crew was restless for home. Food and water were short, and much as they adored their Cap'n, they didn't understand this unnecessary and unreasonable delay. He held firm against their very practical objections—they'd not move from this area until the vessel returned to the surface, because, he told them, something of himself had gone down with it. Meaning, no doubt, his conscience. But he told them too much or too little. They didn't understand."

"They took matters into their own hands, nor can one blame them. They locked him in his cabin. He became violent when they started homeward, threatening and attacking them when they visited him. For all his gruffness he was very sensitive, and probably his men's turning upon him together with remorse did unhinge him. By the time they reached port, all the spirit was gone from him. He would merely sit for hours on end with his hands crossed in his lap, mumbling incoherently."

"He was like that for years. The Bensons kept him indoors away from everybody, but occasionally he'd have a lucid spell. He'd steal down to the waterfront, where he'd go from one ship to another, begging to be taken aboard and offering vast sums if he could be carried to Key waters. He became the town laughingstock, and the rest of his proud family with him. So they sold the firm and the Susan Ann, moved away, and that was the last ever heard of the old Cap'n."

"Of course I laughed at this story. So did Chad. The old woman was furious at our maligning her grandfather's veracity and ordered us out. And from that time onward, Chad and I carefully,

guardedly, checked the stories of families that hadn't seen each other in decades, families no longer aware of each other's existence. Not all of them remembered the crazy sea-captain. But those who did gave the same outline.

"I was terrified then. If it were insanity, it must be hereditary, because Jim's play-acting was not theatrics at all but the symptoms of madness! A lot of little things I had overheard as idiosyncrasies were suddenly revealed as indications of growing derangement.

"I was terrified—not only for Jim but for myself, because I was under Jim's shadow. I could never hope for love, nor marriage—nor children! But he must never know—the shock of learning what I had learned might hasten his complete degeneration. I tried to dissuade him from collecting the crew's descendants for this voyage. Not knowing my reasons, naturally he refused. He'd sunk too deeply into the old Cap'n habit ever to break from it. Being the old Cap'n was his whole life, and if I took that from him, I'd be the same as his killer."

I comforted: "Many forms of mental aberration are not hereditary."

She responded gloomily: "They might as well be, in our case. Everything we have is tied up in investments. Rather crazy investments, capriciously but shrewdly made. Devastatingly shrewd, you may be sure—it was in the old Cap'n role that Jim made them. He liked to be master, to know that one turn of his finger could mean the fortunes, even the lives, of others. He not only played with his own life, but with those of whomever he came in contact. And power is a duty, not a toy. We Bensons never seem to learn."

She said hastily: "Understand, there was nothing dishonest in what Jim did. But some of the arrangements were—well, peculiar."

"There are lots of disgruntled people who'd be only too glad to suspect my father of insanity, and perhaps add whatever they could to spread and heighten popular suspicion—since if it meant release from their contracts with him and his agents, it would be to their benefit. Singly they're helpless—together they're invincible. As for myself, I'd be wrecked. You know what rumor can do. Nobody would have me, even if I brandished a million certifications of health."

"Chad showed his true colors. He loved me, he swore, enough to bear my taint. He promised to keep quiet about all this, not only to Jim but to the world at large—providing I'd marry him."

"Were I to refuse—well, he was young and ambitious, and life didn't mean much to him without my love, he said. Not so much, anyway, that he could afford to miss such a glittering opportunity as this, merely for the sake of scruples. So what could I do except agree to marry him—and keep postponing the actual date as long as possible, in the hope that a miracle would happen!"

I cried hotly: "You could have seen Kurtson!"

"I was afraid that if Kurtson took steps to qualify Jim's mental state, Jim would suspect the reason. And if he were insane—he might fly to pieces irrevocably. If not—well, we know, don't we, how nearly his deliberate self-delusion approaches madness? The old Cap'n is too much a part of him to be set wilfully aside. Sacrificing that part of himself—even if he could do it—in

the interests of preserving his other faculties, would leave him old, broken and empty, with nothing to live for. Ross, I love my father! I couldn't risk that happening to him."

"As he is now, he might go along until the end of his days. Why spoil it? So I didn't see Kurtson."

She said: "Mike doesn't know what I've learned. Nor Lady Fitz and that Russian. Nor the Swastlows. A few of the crew have heard it from their families, yes—so Chad is friendly with them, he says to keep them quiet. I wonder! Chad's an opportunist, and I happen to know he's sunk borrowed money into those firms who'd like to topple the Benson figurehead. Win or lose, Chad's bound to profit one way or the other. And my holding him off from a definite wedding-date is taxing his patience. This can't go on indefinitely."

"If I were to renege on my promise to marry him, he might prove that Jim's insane, producing evidence overruling any doctor's decree to the opposite. He could get such proof from statements of the crew, provided he could goad Jim into some rashly violent—preferably criminal—action. And you know Jim's temper! Therefore I've got to keep Chad feeling sure I'll stick to our bargain. And now something's spoiling it—"

She looked reproachfully at me and away. "It's not going to be so easy for me as it was before. And it wasn't really easy then."

She said: "That's why I want to believe in Father's theory that ghosts can enter and use us—because it would solve everything!"

And somberly: "There's another of my quandaries. The only way I can believe in my father's sanity and my own is to resort to a perfectly demented type of reasoning. Oh, Ross—I'm at my wits' end!"

"That's why I visited you, the night he fetched the wheel from the wreck. I wanted to sound you out. You cheered me a little by agreeing that he needn't be insane to behave as he's been doing. And you worried me because you brushed away any accounting for the pipe and bell I heard, and Mike's conduct on the wreck. You intimated that I was clear-headed and practical. I don't want to believe in ghosts any more than you do—except that it would straighten everything out. After all, what proof have I of ghosts' existence? Have I ever met one?"

She paused. Then a sudden rush of wonder swept her. She gasped at the revelation. "Perhaps all my life I've been too near the river to see the water! Perhaps I've—lived with—a ghost! Perhaps what I thought was Jim in masquerade was really—the old Cap'n himself!"

I said sharply: "Miss Benson! Please!"

"Well, what exactly is a ghost?" she asked defiantly. "Lady Fitz maintains they're the souls of dead persons returning to finish work left undone. But you don't believe in souls, do you? Though everyone, from the earliest childhood, is taught to believe in them. Instead of adling poor little children, why can't religion and science get together?"

I said: "I don't believe in ghosts in the sense that they are the still-vital personalities of bodies which have perished. But I do believe in the haunting, compelling force of associative impressions—otherwise known as memories."

She said: "You've never actually seen a thought. If you cut open a man's head, I can guarantee you'd not find a solitary thought in it. Nor would you find his soul. You believe in one but not the other. Why?"

"Because I have seen thoughts—expressed by the body in terms of actions."

She furthered: "You know nothing of my thoughts, except what my words or actions reveal to you. If I were to lie very still, my mind could be working furiously, but you'd have no way of knowing. Unless you were capable of telepathy."

"You don't know anything more about thoughts than you do about electricity. Both are immaterial forces, but both are bound by physical laws nevertheless. Even today nobody can say precisely what electricity is—yet men know how to generate and employ it."

"In the process known as psychiatry, you can take my thoughts and remould them according to your wish—through the purely physical device of words which you might speak. Those words, translated from physical vibrations of sound back into thought, would have their effect on my mind. It's evident, then, that the spiritual—or psychic, mental, whatever name you like for it—must be expressed to the material world by material means."

"If the body perishes, why shouldn't the soul still live? Can you prove that it doesn't? But if it does go on—it has no material medium through which to express itself on this physical plane, and so its living existence passes unsuspected. Except by those sensitive enough to receive its emanations. I mean—spiritualistic mediums and the like."

I said tartly: "It strikes me as peculiar that only the hypersensitive and hysterical natures—such as Lady Fitz—can see and commune with phantoms. It would seem that the departed restrict their appearances severely to neuropathic and psychopathic persons. And that argues against the Here-after, not for it."

She asked: "Then Lady Fitz' ghosts are — only hallucinations? Imaginary perceptions of non-existent things, reported by impaired senses?"

I bent my head in acquiescence.

She asked: "But Ross— isn't it true that when our normal perceptions are atrophied or destroyed by disease, other faculties replace them? I'm hardly well-read in medicine, but I've heard of blind men whose hearing became phenomenally acute after they lost their sight. So acute, that they could apprehend sounds in the supersonic range, beyond all normal hearing. It was proven, you know, by mechanical devices which could register the presence of those sound-waves."

"Similarly, some blind persons have been reported as perceiving light-impulses ordinarily invisible to the average, healthy eye—I mean those infra-red vibrations which you and I can discern only through special viewing-filters."

I admitted: "There have been a few such cases, yes. However, think of the hundreds of thousands of disabled persons whose perceptions never arose beyond the plane of normality."

"Ah," she said, "but perhaps they could see and hear—yes, even feel—what we cannot. Only there were no devices on hand to prove the fact."

She went on: "You don't believe, but I want to. Let's return to the old Cap'n and his survival as

a force after physical death.

"He had no body through which to manifest the fact that something of himself still lived. I agree that something as intangible as a ghost cannot manipulate material—else the old Cap'n could have taken pencil and paper and left his messages."

"That's why ghosts need mediums to bring themselves to our level. They need the lend of a body to accomplish any physical act—as the old Cap'n required Jim's. And Jim was only too happy to oblige him."

I warned: "Careful, Miss Benson. You're arguing to support your father's sanity. But if ghosts are perceptible mainly through deranged senses—then your father's unhealthy, whether physically or mentally."

She asked: "Is Lady Fitz insane, because she believes as oddly as she does? Is Deborah, because she has occasionally peeped into the future? Is Mike, because now and then he glimpses something nobody else does—but which can be proved later on as true sight? Doctor, you've admitted yourself that few people have baffled science for years on end."

She stated triumphantly: "Therefore, Jim needn't be unhealthy in any way whatsoever. Only—fey."

"But why," I asked, "should the old Cap'n limit himself to Jim's body? Why shouldn't he enter—yours?"

She smiled. "For one thing, Ross, I'm virgin. You know the belief concerning virgins. Nothing from Outside can harm them or enter them, try as it may. It's the ones around the virgin who suffer. In legendary times, whenever there was a dragon to be tamed or an unicorn subdued—it was always a virgin who did it, whether a pure maiden or a spotless Galahad. That's the meaning of the Beauty and Beast story. Why," she went on relentlessly, "you're virgin yourself!"

It was true, but nevertheless I blushed. My people had been puritanically strict. I had not experienced love until my late teens. In medical school I had been too zealous to assimilate the facts requisite for perfect professional practice, rather than joining my fellow-students on their nocturnal expeditions in quest of purely sensuous stimulation. Physical and mentally I was now mature, but where love was concerned, I had remained adolescent. And I was a bit touchy about it.

"For another thing," Pen said, "the Cap'n loved expediency. He'd been a man and he'd find it rather difficult being a woman. There'd be certain—physical differences—to obstruct him and waste his time. A ghost, I'm sure, chooses a body most like the one it lost. Perhaps that's another reason why people in general don't recognize that ghosts are dwelling with them."

"Ghosts," she said enthusiastically, "enter only those through whom they can operate, people much as they once were themselves. And the possessed believe their thoughts are their own."

"If you study life, you can't help seeing that like attracts like. It's rather hard to see it immediately in people, I admit—but if you're kind, in the long run your kindness is returned to you. And if it works physically, it works psychically. It's a poor law that won't work two ways."

"Getting back to the Cap'n. He couldn't rest

after the dissolution of his body. My father's physical likeness to him was a help, and my father's desire to emulate the Cap'n's way of life amounted to an unwitting mediumship which not only opened the way for the old Cap'n, but practically dragged him back. I told you that this was a fated trip—and talking it out with you like this, I'm beginning to understand why.

"If the old Cap'n is inside Jim—and he is—he may have brought with him not simply knowledge from the past, but of the Beyond as well. People thought him insane, and he might like to prove he wasn't. To clear his own name, yes—but also Jim's and mine.

"There was something besides sick negroes on the ship the Cap'n sank—I'm positive! I think"—she hesitated, then asserted staunchly—"I think the black wheel was on it! The wreck in the dune was the ship the Cap'n sank!"

She leaned forward, more beautiful than I had seen her since Miami. As the sun, emerging from clouds scatters gold on the waters, so hope breaking through her despondency made her radiant. She seized my hands.

"Oh, Ross—I'm so glad, so damned glad you made me come here, even though I didn't want to do it! Trying to straighten things out with you has made me see them clearly myself. Now I see the reason for everything! Why Jim was so mean to Mike about the wreck and about Mike's maybe influencing me—he was afraid if we disturbed any of his clues or backed down we'd ruin the Cap'n's plan! Why," she gasped, "he must have known all along! And I needn't have promised Chad anything! Everything's changed, and"—the softness of her eyes induced a corresponding softness in my heart—"and now—oh, I'm so glad we've had this talk!"

I should have been glad also, and wasn't. Now I had Benson's motive for hypnotizing Lady Fitz, McTeague and the others—not excluding Pen. Of all the world's tricksters, none is efficient as a madman, simply because no normal mind would ever tackle a problem from the warped approach of a demented one. And there was no doubt in my mind that Benson was insane and potentially dangerous. Spirit possession was of course out of the question.

Jim had started playing the Cap'n role as an escape; it was so satisfactory that he sank himself completely in it, arousing adverse comment. The finding of the wreck and the wheel had given him an opportunity to force others into delusions similar to his own self-induced one. And none could criticize his conduct whose own was equally censorable.

I said: "Doesn't it strike you as suspiciously fortunate that the hurricane should throw us, of all places, to this island, complete with wreck and wheel? I can understand natural causes throwing the wreck ashore, but I can't understand the altogether too fortuitous coincidence of Jim, in the guise of the old Cap'n, finding it. The chances are infinitely against it."

She said: "Well, I can. If ghosts are the living forces I think I've shown them to be—why shouldn't they be able to manipulate other forces? Don't some of the presences at seances reveal themselves as chilly winds and lights and sounds? Etheric disturbances! You and I are physical be-

ings and can handle physical objects. Why shouldn't they be able to manipulate other forces? Don't some of the presences at seances reveal themselves as chilly winds and lights and sounds? Etheric disturbances! You and I are physical beings and can handle physical objects. Why shouldn't the same law apply to the elemental handling the elemental? The Cap'n's ghost made the hurricane, of course. It was calculated to drive us into the drift of this island. He deliberately smashed the wheel so that it would have to be replaced, because he wanted the black wheel on the Susan Ann. He blew the pipe and rang the bell to attract us to the wreck, so we'd be sure to find the wheel. Apparently he's not sure of the hold he has on Jim, and was taking no chances. Or it might have been that Jim couldn't believe the knowledge that the Cap'n brought from—Beyond—and refused to act without proof."

I thought again of McTeague's "educated winds" and his assertion, corroborated by Lady Fitz and Flora, that both storm and summons had been the doing of Rafferty and Irsuley. Pen's suppositions followed the same line too disconcertingly well to be mere reckoning. Either it was, as I had suspected before, a hoax of some sort—or Benson was hypnotizing his daughter as well as the others.

Pen said: "I knew that there was something wrong with that piping and bell-ringing. I felt that something was odd about the wheel, and I'm sure you did too. The old Cap'n must have had the same reaction, so long ago—it made him afraid and he sank the ship. He was a brave man, Ross, so whatever crystallized his fear into action must have been—very terrible!"

"Ross, the old Cap'n's hands are limned on the wheel! They're so like Father's that I noted it instantly. As if they were—the shadows of my father's hands. That was why I feared the wheel, I see now. But I couldn't tell you or anyone else then. You'd all have dismissed it as coincidence."

"The Cap'n sank the ship—but that didn't end his business with the wheel which had frightened him into sinking it. Remember, he said that a part of him had gone down with it, that part we call the conscience, and which you've defined as the psychological interpretation of the soul. If the ship bobbed to the surface, undoing the harm he'd done—he could regain what he'd lost through his overpowering fear."

"The Cap'n's body died, but his soul—or mind—couldn't proceed to the next plane of spiritual evolution. The wheel bound him to this level; he had to undo his wrong, but hadn't the body required for doing so. He used my father, and now through Jim he has the wheel again."

I said: "Fine. Now he should go to rest, his mission accomplished, and Jim will be himself again."

Her lips twisted angrily: "It's not that easy! In regaining the wheel, he's only started his work! He has to extricate himself from the brand of madness, and Jim and me along with it. Perhaps he can't do it to the very people who pronounced him crazy, but he can to their descendants, which is as near to the real thing as he can get—and who knows what ghosts of their forefathers look from their eyes?"

"Now you can see why this trip was fated. Jim

invited Her Ladyship, Boriloff and the Swastolows for a purpose—because he thought they amused him. But the Cap'n was behind that thought. The Cap'n recognized something useful in Lady Fitz and the rest, something he could use honorably, and something not to be found in the average person—say, the men in our crew.

"If the sinking of the wheel left the Cap'n with something undone—didn't it leave its owners in the same plight? The Cap'n has to pay for his wrong. Gaining the wheel isn't complete payment. He had to provide the negroes with suitable human vehicles through which they could carry their unfinished business to completion."

I shook my head over her, marvelling that so lovely and heretofore sensible a girl could consider such fancies seriously.

I said: "Assuming that your theory is fact, and the occult laws behind it equally true—isn't the Cap'n robbing Peter to pay Paul? He would divert Lady Fitz and others from their chosen courses of living by placing them at the disposal of ghosts."

"Like draws like, and if Lady Fitz and the rest are taken over by the ghosts, it is because they will wish, wittingly or no, to be thus taken. They'll accept what will eventually come to them anyway, regardless of time or place; they'll yield to influences which in one form or another are bound to tempt them. The Cap'n has merely arranged their meeting. He's no more responsible for the outcome than the agent who introduces buyer to salesman. He doesn't force them to terms; the decision is their own; all he wants is his commission."

"And I'm sure Lady Fitz wouldn't undertake any dealings with the dead without first making sure of payment. She's extremely mercenary, and I can't imagine her going to the least bother without first making a contract."

I remembered Flora's statement, in the character of Irsuley, that those who surrendered themselves should receive reward.

Pen's theory certainly accounted for every piece of the puzzle—but no more than my own, which was based on practicalities.

I asked: "And to whom—besides myself—have you told this surmise?"

She laughed uneasily. "That's a funny question, Ross. Why should I tell anyone? This is the first time I've postulated it in words even to myself."

"If you've guessed the whole thing correctly—what's held Jim back from confiding in you from the very beginning?"

"He doesn't know I've learned of the Cap'n's supposed insanity. He probably thinks that if he were to tell me, he'd frighten me—it's all so fantastic, so close to madness! He may think that after he proves the point—then it will be time to explain."

It was all too ingenious, I felt, to be her own invention. "Tell me, when your father saw that you feared the wheel—didn't he ask what you saw in it?"

"What I used to fear," she amended. "Why, yes, he asked. But I was too bewildered at the time to commit myself. Now I not only can, but will."

Suddenly she reddened. "That was another funny question, Ross. Why shouldn't Jim ask why

I disliked the wheel? And why were you curious about my telling anyone my theory of the old Cap'n?"

"It's hardly a sane theory," I said. "They might think—" I paused meaningfully. And instead of allaying her doubts, I raised them.

"Funny questions and a funnier answer," she mused. "You don't believe in ghosts, so you must have some premise of your own behind such questions. What is it, Ross?"

I could hardly tell her that Benson was proving himself sane by making the other inhabitants of his world equally mad as himself!

She asked: "What was it that set you wondering how the old Cap'n died? Why did you have to come to me instead of asking Jim himself? What's he done to make you so inquisitive?"

I started to say: "It's really nothing—" but she cut me off with a wave of her hand; she curled it into a fist and rested her chin on it, cogitating. She murmured: "I'm thinking along your lines, Ross. Being—scientific."

She sat up straight. "I think," she said coldly, "I'm arriving at your conclusion. Either Jim's done something—irrational—or you've heard of it, and you want to check. It was probably something he's done as the Cap'n, in regard to the wheel. You've asked if I've told my ideas to anyone, so evidently they're not new to you. But who except myself would have any reason to think them? Unless it was someone who's established contact with the outsiders—I have it! Flora!"

"We all thought her dissertation on Africa was a bit odd—even she. But you don't believe in ghosts, so you'd think—"

Her face paled to frozen horror. "Oh, God! You think Jim's lost his mind at last, been enslaved by his own delusion and preying on me with hints to delude me with him! Preying also on Flora—and maybe others! Madness loves company—is that it? You think that, do you? Answer me!"

I said, wretchedly: "I'm not a witch-doctor; I can't cure by magic mumbo-jumbo. I have to know my physiology before I can operate. And I have to base my conjectures on strict fact, not ghosts."

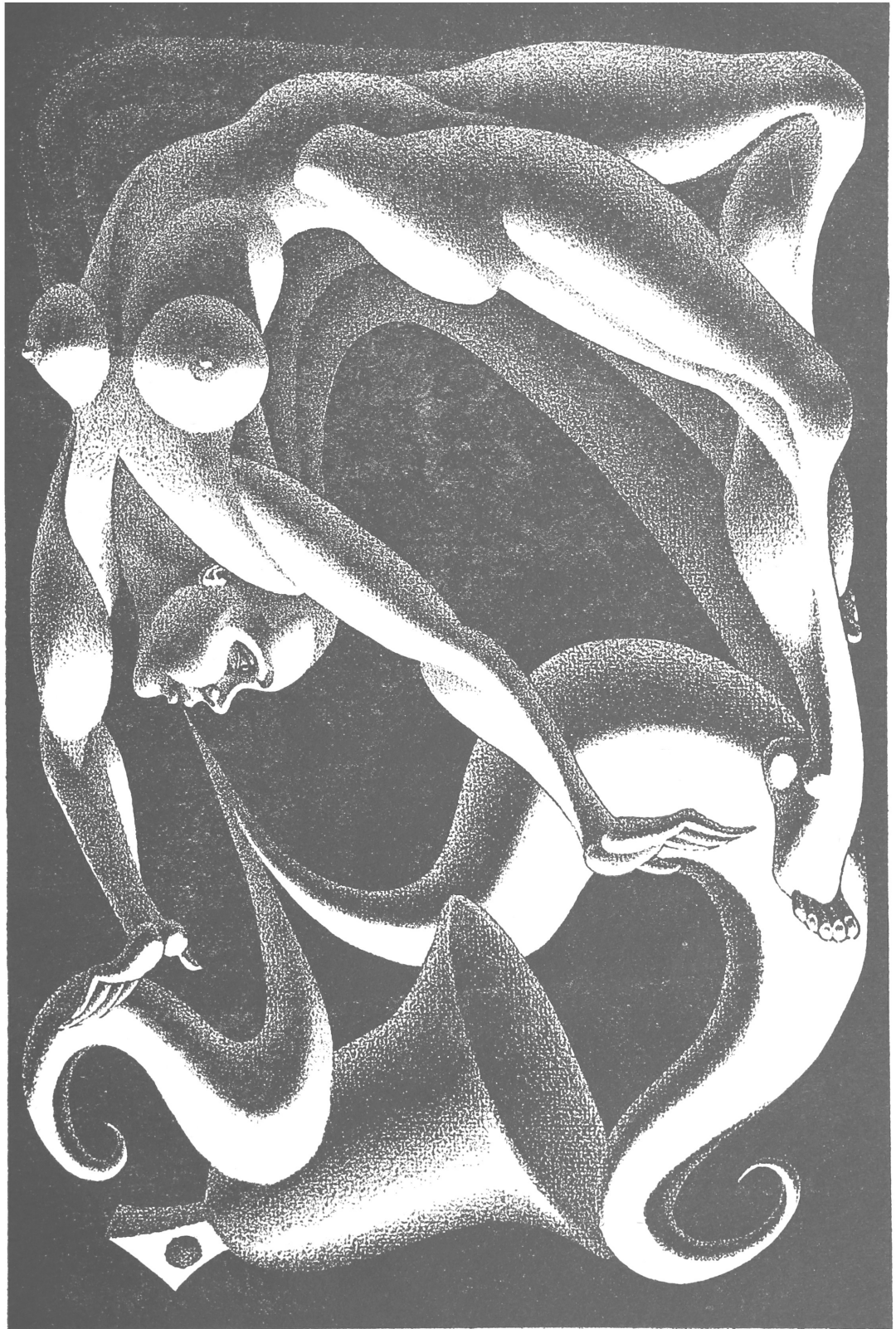
Now she blazed with rage. "You've learned that all men have one head, and if you had a two-headed patient, you'd let him die rather than admit you were wrong! Well, I believe what I've told you—and Flora's case proves it! And you'll do nothing against my father and the old Cap'n—do you hear?"

She jumped off the stool, marched stiffly toward the door. I hastened after her. Whatever she would do, she must not relate my doubts to Benson—God alone could tell what retaliation he would make if he thought his mad purpose was to be thwarted. "Miss Benson—please—give me time—"

She paused. "Time? You need none!" She laughed, but it sounded like forlorn little sobs. "I was afraid to come here with you—afraid I'd welsh on my promise to Chad in spite of myself. Doctor, this may amaze or amuse you—but I imagined that I had fallen in love with you!"

I was stunned both with joy and chagrin. Consciously I admitted to myself what I had known ever since first meeting her—I loved her.

"But Miss Benson—but Pen—"



EDUCATED WIND -

Hans Bellmer - 1947

"I prefer the title," she said, sniffing. Clumsily I attempted to draw her to me, trusting that her sentiments could not have been reversed completely in so short a while, and that a kiss would overcome her resistance—but she slapped down my hands as a scolding mother will do to a child who has not washed them before inspection.

"Good day, Doctor!"

And she was gone.

Chapter XVIII

LORE OF THE WHEEL

Whether Pen did confide to her father my suspicions, I do not know—but in the next few days he refused to acknowledge me except on such occasions as the barest courtesy demanded. Pen herself ignored me coldly when it came to direct communication, but taunted me cruelly by bestowing marked attention on Chadwick, who was not so naive as to betray bewilderment or undue pleasure.

McTeague, visiting me, jumped at a sound I had not heard. "Are you deaf, Doc, that you didn't catch it?"

Was it true, then, that to establish rapport with the Irsuley wraiths, the derangement of a faculty was requisite?

The incursions of Rafferty's personality still troubled him. By now, contrary to my explications and arguments—which were counter-suggestions against whatever hypnotic hints Benson might be instilling—McTeague believed that Rafferty was indeed a vital, if disembodied, spirit.

"I'm so blinking balled-up with his jumping in and out of me that I'd like to give him the helm just for a few moments' peace—if only he'd take it. But I see now that he'll never get full control, no matter how willing I may be to step into the background."

He rapped his chest. "This is my body and my personality has evolved from, and because of, it. Red can use one or both only where it or they coincide with what is—and was—his own. 'Birds of a feather,' you know—only Red and I aren't exactly alike, and the flocking's too haphazard for comfort. I never know when he's going to pop in for a friendly visit and take over the proceedings, making me look like an absent-minded fool. I started to tell the good Reverend a joke and wound up with a shipwreck in which I figured actively—in the time of George the First. Luckily he thought I was spoofing him."

"If he causes you trouble, why don't you get rid of Rafferty?"

McTeague's eyes jumped from me and remained away. "I—can't," he said finally, reluctantly. "I know you'll think I'm nuts, but—well, I told you I've rather a crush on Bridget. She's been waiting all this time for Red to join her, and I've promised to help him out for her sake."

"Help him out! How?"

"Have you forgotten he's stuck here on earth until he touches the treasure?"

"Ah, yes, the treasure's hidden on a remote desert island, just like in *The Rover Boys at Sea*, or *Pirate Plunder*. Red will lead you to it, I suppose."

"I know how to get there," he said stubbornly.

"You think you know; you can't prove anything 'til you've tried. And just how are you go-

ing to persuade Captain Benson to make the necessary detour for stopping off at Red's island?"

He flushed. "That's been gnawing on me. I don't dare tell the Cap'n about Red. He'll think I've either taken off into the stratosphere or I'm trying to pull a fast one, making fun of his own obsession."

That was amusing, considering that Benson had placed Rafferty in McTeague's head in the first place. And extraordinarily clever of Benson to suggest that McTeague fear mentioning Rafferty to him, thus making the ghost entirely McTeague's responsibility.

The red-head said: "I think if I work things right, I can get sent away in the launch as a bad boy sent home from a party. Once out of sight, I can take over à la pirate and turn the launch to Red's island—"

I said: "No go, Mike. When I first recognized the Captain's game, I tried to have Lady Fitz and Boriloff sent to the Caicos. The Captain told me in no uncertain terms—nothing doing." And before McTeague could draw any conclusions from that statement: "Tell me—how did the old Cap'n die?"

He looked puzzled, then said: "Why, from a heart attack. Once he and his family sold out the firm and moved from his old haunts, he had nothing to live for—that's really what killed him."

"Yet you think he was the same one who sunk the wheel and Rafferty."

"Well, he could have, couldn't he?"

I asked: "Has Benson cruised these waters before?"

"Not lately. Why?"

I was wondering if Benson could have cached a hoard of gold and gems somewhere in this vicinity for later discovery. He had money enough to gratify such a whim. He might have had the idea merely to satisfy a purile longing for drama. And the chance finding of the wreck and wheel had prompted him to something far more theatrically effective.

I asked: "Were you with him when he was in this neighborhood?"

"No, I was home, busy keeping his affairs in order. What's the catch?"

I said: "Mike, when I explained your Rafferty dreams by analysis, I thought I was on the right road. Now I have another slant, but I balk at telling it to you. It's got to do with the Captain, and it's—damned derogatory. But to me it makes sense—devastatingly so."

He studied me for long; at last he rapped out: "You know I worship the old vulture. But give with the goods—I guess I can refrain from slapping your wrist no matter how bad it may be. And I'll keep my mouth shut. You mean well, however misguided you are."

I gave him both stories—Pen's and mine. I omitted Chadwick's bargain with Pen—it would, I felt, incite McTeague to open conflict and lead, when explanations were demanded, to just what I was hoping to avert, the question of Benson's sanity. I loved Pen, and my main thought was to protect her by shielding her father, keeping his reputation unsullied at all costs until we were back in port, well removed from Chadwick and any others who might profit by Benson's downfall.

To Pen's version McTeague listened with little starts of surprise and nods of approval. Through mine he fidgeted and scowled.

"God," he said when I had done, "either the Cap'n's damned misunderstood, or he's worse than Caligula and Ivan the Terrible rolled into one! But I know him, Doc, and while maybe he's a scarifying blowhard, he's no homicidal maniac. Therefore I'm inclined to side with Pen. The more I think of it, the more so."

"Lizzie Borden was a model maiden until she dispensed the forty-one whacks," I cautioned. "You're biased by your affection for Big Jim. And it explains Rafferty in the sentimental, romantic way you'd like it. We believe only what we want to believe."

He grinned. "That little aphorism is a two-edged sword, Doc. And don't look now, but maybe you've cut yourself. As for my affections prejudicing me—you know I regard you as one of us. So you hold almost the weight of the Cap'n. Or—he faltered—"at least, you did."

I said placatingly: "I'm not blaming Big Jim for what the Cap'n's doing. I've always liked him—as Big Jim."

"Don't back down, Doc, or I'll like you still less. Stick to your guns; don't be a quitter. In your slant, you're right. So's the Cap'n in his. But who's got the true slant, you or he? Everybody in the world thinks he's right according to his lights. But that's what starts wars, not stops them."

"My background," I said with dignity, "is one of accepted facts. Pen's theory is mainly baseless supposition."

"Dismount the tall horse, Doc. Facts? Yes, you know what there are of them now known. But if you haven't all the propositions in a problem, how can you expect to get the right answer? Science is proving every day the very things it ridiculed fifty years ago. And what will it admit fifty years from now that it denies today?"

He went on: "Here's the ideal chance to put your facts to the test. If Pen's right and the Cap'n's cursed by the wheel—we'll find the treasure. If not, I'll tip my hat to you. But Doc, if you find you're wrong—will you be man enough to admit it to yourself?"

I said: "If the Captain is doing what I think he's doing—there may not be any treasure. He wants to prove himself sane at your expense. And And he needs something to spur all of you into strict obedience. If you believe there's a treasure, naturally you'll follow his orders to get it. Orders which, if not leading you to death itself, will certainly lead you to inexplicably mad conduct."

He wriggled uneasily. He said: "Looking back, I think Jim's behavior on the wreck proves that he was the Cap'n."

"Looking back," I satirized, "I think that Benson was motivated first by greed and puerile excitement. Then when he saw the wheel and realized its potentialities, he formulated this crazy plan."

He asked: "What are you going to do about it? Oh, I'll keep mum. But I won't help you in any way detrimental to my Cap'n. The hypnotism idea is your baby, and you mind it."

I said: "I want to get Benson back home as soon as possible. There, we can very quietly remove him to a place of observation. In the mean-

time, I must keep all his victims away from him before he incites them into actions harmful to themselves. I intend to nullify his hypnotism by countering with suggestions of my own. I'll tell Lady Fitz, Boriloff, Swastlow and Slam Bang that the Captain is suffering some mildly contagious but not embarrassing disease."

"Well, it's your baby," he repeated. Soon afterward he left, and I saw Lady Fitz.

The Irsuley dreams, she said, were recurring. "At times it impresses me, don't you know, that the priestess really is a phantom and wishes to exercise full command over my body."

I could see what the promise of treasure had gone to Her Ladyship's mercenary head.

Lady Fitz said: "At such times I experience slight lapses wherein my consciousness is crowded aside and hers seems to look through my eyes—a most beastly feeling! But the power of prayer, my good doctor, removes her. I remind myself that God made my body, that I am a part of God, and that my body is therefore my own. But if she is a phantom, dear Doctor, I do not think her an evil one. Perhaps I am unkind not to aid her. After all," she announced, lifting her eyes piously, "we do have our crosses to bear."

Evidently the cut of a martyr's cloak had its attractions — if liberally embroidered with gems. I warned her that it might be best to stay away from Benson's cabin, and passed on to Flora, who —when I asked whether she had dreamed of Irsuley lately, started, turned color, then replied that she had not.

From Flora I went to Johnson, asking how soon we could leave the island. I said that I had given Benson a thorough examination, and his heart was in a precarious condition.

He said curtly: "We'll put to sea in a very few days. I'm already overworking the hands to retard what's rapidly developing into a perilous situation. Captain Benson's interference with the routine of repairs gets not only on my nerves but on those of my men as well. While I don't approve of the attitudes of either of them—it's worth my berth on this ship to keep peace between them. And my berth here means a lot to me. You don't want to get out of here any more swiftly than I do, I assure you."

He had not been amiss in stating that Benson's hypercritical meddling was leading to serious trouble. Soon afterward there were fist-cuffs in the focsle—Perry versus Collins, the room steward, and Collins again versus Slam Bang.

It was Benson's misfortune to blunder on the second contest. He set up court, Collins blurted defiantly that he had been involved in both encounters through his insistence that Benson was out of his mind.

"Just like your own great-grand-daddy," he added vengefully, with a telling glance at Benson.

In his best old Cap'n manner, Benson bellowed that Collins be flogged. Johnson held steadfastly to maritime legality. Benson consigned regulations to Hell-and-Sheol, and flew for Collins. Henderson and MacKenzie held him back, and for a few minutes he was insane indeed—and before witnesses—and others.

If Collins could have jumped ship then and there, he would have done so. Johnson reprimanded him severely and removed him from any duties

likely to bring him in contact with Benson or his guests.

Benson should have had the sense to retire until the incident had been forgotten. He did not, but instead increased his fault-finding inspections, doubtless braving the situation. Only when the men made it plain that they were humoring a lunatic's whims did he go into seclusion. McTeague visited him and after that the two were inseparable. Pen likewise shut herself away. I slipped imploring notes under her door but was sent no answer.

To the consternation of the workmen, one of whom fetched me in the belief that she was inebriated, Lady Fitz' Irsuley-fixation prompted her to stumble blindly about on deck. She was certain now that Irsuley was no dream, despite my contention. Injuredly she closeted herself from the others, pleading illness. She attempted including Boriloff in this self-imposed quarantine, but he soon effected escape by downing more brandy than was good for himself—and for her. He wrecked her stateroom and was summarily ejected to his own.

This growing lack of system imposed extra duties to which Johnson was forced the assignment of regular seamen. It prompted the surge of ill-feeling. Once below decks I surprised a soap-box variety of discussion concerning the intolerable depravity of wealthy idlers. Trouble was not far off.

I managed to maneuver the Rev. Dr. Swastlow into my office by asking him to explain the significance of the black wheel according to religious conventions of ornament. I was hoping that he would reveal whether he had shared in the Irsuley dreams.

He said didactically: "The faith in circular or wheel-movements and the sympathetic magic of circular symbols dates back to the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans of immemorial prehistory. From their tribes came the Indo-Europeans of today. They scattered from a base somewhere in the northern Himalayas, taking with them their language, customs and religious faith, examples of which survive today. Since their culture found its way all over the globe, there is not one religion extant wherein remnants of wheel-worship cannot be observed.

"Perhaps the most widely known use of the wheel for religious purposes is in Tibet. The prayer-wheel there is called the *Mani-chos-khor*, the 'precious religious wheel.' Identical with it is the Hindu *dharma-chakra* and the Siamese *Phra Thamma Chak*. It is not the wheel of supplication as is commonly supposed, but of praise. It is hollow and inscribed with the words *A-um mani padme hum*, which praises Buddha, the jewel in the lotus.

"The Tibetans piously use it in everyday fashion by inscribing their water-wheels with the words; by causing wheels to be turned by the heat of their cook-fires, and by posting them in the streets so that the chance touch of passersby will spin them — but always clockwise, from east to west, following the movement of the sun. From their belief that human praise turns the world on its axis may come our expression that flattery turns one's head.

"There is the Japanese *Rimbo* or Wheel of the Law; the *vajra* or lightning bolt of Vishnu in India. The Egyptian solar disc was inaugurated in that land by the Dravidian ruler Amen-hetep III, whose mother was a Hindu princess.

"The *chakra-vajra* of Vishnu the Preserver was a thin metal hoop with razor-sharp edges, twirled rapidly on the forefinger and then let fly with disastrous effect. It is sometimes represented as a svastika, which is also called the Jaina Cross, the Hermetic Cross and the *Croix Cramponnée*. Too it is represented as a wheel whose twelve spokes symbolize the twelve signs of the zodiac, thus proving its solar origin. And it is interesting to note that the ancient Scotch Gaels were reputed to fight with throwing stones—thin circular slices of rock engraved with twelve rays.

"The Brahman code demands that its followers in turning move always to the right. When done three times in succession, it is raised to the level of a blessing, and called a *dakshina*. The Hindus carry this clockwise motion even to the stirring of their foods. They still make the *pradakshina* around the tulsi plant, whose dark-blue blossom is sacred to Vishnu. And some Brahmans believe that by being spun horizontally on a cartwheel fixed atop a post, they can be lifted temporarily into the brihaspati or highest of heavens.

"The old Irish *dessel*, the Scotch *deas soil* and the ancient Roman *dextratio* were blessings bestowed by walking three times around the object to be blessed, in the direction of the sun. *Deisel* processions were performed around churches on such occasions as marriages, the churchings of women, and burials. In Ireland there is a superstition that anyone meeting misfortune by falling must spring up and turn thrice clockwise, uttering the words *deas soil*."

Had McTeague heard this, he would have said that, the Susan Ann operating on Diesel engines, she must have the best of luck.

Swastlow said: "It is the custom in some parts of Scotland for the townspeople to carry lighted torches three times around their dwellings at the close of the year, thus warding off the powers of evil. This same custom in altered form—using a flaming tar-barrel on rails instead of torches — once prevailed throughout all the British Isles and was known as 'burning the Clavie.' It was a charm against witchcraft.

"This Clavie custom, by the bye, is related to a similar procedure on Saint John's Eve not only in England, France, Prussia, Russia and Germany, but is mentioned in Euripedes' *Electra*. In all cases a cart-wheel was covered with straw, set afire, and rolled down a hill—a charm against the evil ones.

"From the Gaelic *tuath*, or 'to the left and northwards,' we get the act of *cartua-sul* or *tuathail*, which is the turning around three times toward the left—or what is known as withershins. It is supposedly a curse. A *tuathized* person denotes a stupid one, and in Gaelic the equivalent in Gaelic the equivalent to right and wrong are respectively, *deisel* and *tuathail*.

"There is a superstition in many European lands that fairies travel in whirlwinds, good or bad kinds according to the direction of spinning. The American Indians aver that the Great Manitou rides the tornadoes.

"The disc worship of Egypt began in the eighteenth dynasty. The sun was symbolised as the Universal Deity beaming on all creation. The ram-headed god Khnoum, who moulded men on a potter's wheel, was depicted enshrined in a lotus. Not only in Egypt but in all the old civilizations—Babylonia, Phoenicia, Carthage, Rome and Greece—criminals were chained to millwheels, not only bettering themselves by turning clockwise for years on end, but serving the practical purpose of grinding their warden's meal.

"There is the Orphic wheel of Grecian mystery-religion, the wheel of reincarnation—through cycles of life and death the soul arose to godhead. There is the myth of the Lapithaen king Ixion, bound to a wheel in black Tartarus for aspiring to the goddess Hera's love and falsely boasting of success. On the death of Patroclus, so Homer tells us in the Iliad, Achilles ordered chariots driven thrice around the body before it was cremated. When he killed Hector, Achilles dragged the body behind his chariot around the walls of Troy. In one of the Pythian Odes, Pindar tells of sorceresses tying the lynx-bird, like the owl, was supposedly able to turn its head completely around on its shoulders.

"The wheel-motion may be noted today in the Catholic church when the priest raises the chalice to the four directions—east, south, west and north, symbolizing that all the world is claimed by him for God. And there is wheel-motion in the processions around the church on such festivals as the Corpus Christi, Rogation, Holy Thursday, Holy Saturday, and Good Friday.

"The rose-windows of cathedrals are wheels. The figures depicted in that at Amiens are young on the upgrade and aging as the movement descends—a perfect Wheel of Life. In chapels of Brittany wheels depend from the ceiling beams, decked with bells and inscriptions; a pull on a rope will turn them and forecast the future.

"In the Bible, Jehovah rides with fiery cloud-birds or cherubim. Elijah ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot—the *mercabah* of the Hebrews, attended by the *auphanim* or the informing angels of wheels, meaning celestial orbs. The fall of Jericho is attributed to the circumnambulatory march of Joshua's army around its walls.

"Abyssinian priests march around their ark or altar in imitation of King David's dancing before Jehovah. There is an Abyssinian superstition that if a man is possessed of devils and other remedies have failed, he may be taken on Saint John's day to a crossroad. There a sheep is led around him thrice and killed in the name of the Holy Trinity, the blood marking the sufferer with the sign of the cross, curing him.

"King David's dance, that of the daughters of Shiloh, the leaping of the priests of Baal and the dance of the Amazons in the Greek mysteries—all are the same. The whirling dervishes, *Mevlevi*, perform their *zikr* from right to left to arrive at the religious ecstasy of the Brahmans on their wheels.

"There is the legend of the *Bayt-al-Maamur*; built for Allah in Paradise, whose four jasper pillars upheld a ruby dome. Around it the angels fluttered in their rainbow robes, which so pleased the Lord of Creation that he ordered its duplicate erected on earth. This is the *Kaabah* or black

stone of Mecca around which the Moslems make holy circuit. But this *tawaf* is performed from left to right; those undertaking it are qualified for heaven if they make the circumnambulation seven instead of three times; touching it each turn if possible, as the Tibetans touch their praise-wheels at every revolution.

"The ancient Gauls carried wheel-amulets, some of which were found among the relics of the Swiss lake-dwellers. They worshipped a bearded god named Saetar or Sitivrat, from whom we get our word Saturday, rather than from the Roman Saturn. Images of him, found mainly on French soil, show him standing on a great fish, holding flowers in his right hand and a wheel high in his left. This identifies him with the Hindu Satyavrata, whom Vishnu in fish-form saved from the deluge—and Vishnu represented wearing flowers about his neck and holding the *chakra* in his fourth hand.

"Saetar was the god of thunder. One of his effigies presents him haloed by a drum from which jut spokes bearing smaller drums, exactly like the gigantic thunder-wheels of the Japanese which, rolling across the sky, make thunder.

"Lui Shin, the Chinese thunder god, is half-man, half-eagle. He has the bird's beak, claws in lieu of feet, and wings besides arms. In his claws he carries the drum-tipped wheel which he sounds by striking with his sceptre.

"Thor, the Norse thunder god, is also identified with the wheel by his hammer Mjolner the Crusher, which is a fylfot or svastika.

"Anthropologists have traced the creed of the Irish Druids back to primitive Egypt—it was an offshoot of the Osirian cult of the dead. Osiris was the Egyptian sun god. There is an old Irish tale wherein the hero Cu Culainn was guided to the woman-warrior Scathach by a flaming wheel—given him by the apparition of Nuada Finnfa, god of sun and light.

"And the Irish legend of the Roth Ramhach or Rowing Wheel is but an adaptation of a very archaic one concerning the Roth Fail, Fall's Wheel. Fal, later known as Nuada Finnfa, was as I have said the sun-god of the Irish. The Roth Fail was a Wheel of Light. This connects it with the Ship of Souls in the Osirian cult.

"The sun brings light and new life to the world as it rises. Sinking in the west to darkness and death it ferries the dead to the afterworld. The menhirs of Stonehenge shape a wheel; the altars of the ancient Irish were rocks laid in outlines of ships. Prehistoric carvings in Ireland depict ships over which hovers the sun disc, exactly like representations of Osiris' sun barque. The Welsh Druids' cryptic allusions to the glass ship of Merlin, and King Arthur's crystal boat, are but paraphrases on the Osiris legend, as are also the Bretons' ship of the dead, the German vessel of the Damned, and the phantom chariot of the Swedes."

I asked: "What is the legend of the Roth Ramhach?"

He said: "The Irish Druid, Mog Ruith, having learned all that he could in his homeland, went to the school of Simon Magus the Samaritan, a celebrated warlock at that time a notorious foe of the Apostles.

"Simon aspired to outstrip the miracles of Peter

and Paul. With Mog Ruith's help he built the Roth Ramhach. It could fly like Elijah's chariot. But it met with accident and fell broken. Mog Ruith's daughter returned to Ireland with two of the fragments which she set up as pillar stones. They were reputed to blind whoever looked on them, and kill outright whoever touched them. In recording this tale the medieval monks had to transpose the name of Mog Ruith from old Irish to the Latin equivalent of *Servus Rotae* — or Slave of the Wheel."

"Later versions distorted the story. Saint Columba's for example makes the Roth Ramhach no wheel at all but a true ship. Like Thor's Skidbladner, it rides as well on land as on sea. It was not destroyed, but because of the wicked ones riding it, the ship must sail forever. On the day that it can touch earth and furl its sails, and the evil ones disembark — the end of the world will have come."

I wondered if it was herefrom that Benson had received inspiration for the Irsuley chicanery.

Swastlow went on: "Then there is the story of Buddha's wheel. When he was born, he was recognized as a future Adept because of the thousand-rayed imprints on the soles of his feet.

"He cast his laws of virtuous living into a wheel. Its spokes were the rules for pure conduct; their uniformity of length was justice; wisdom was the tyre, and modesty and thoughtfulness the hub in which the immovable axle of truth was fixed.

"When he died and was to be cremated, his disciple Maha Kassapa and five hundred brethren each walked around the pyre thrice, bowing in reverence to the wheel-marks on their dead lord's uncovered feet, after which the pyre caught fire of itself. It is still the rule in India for the light-bearer to pace three times around a *ghat* before igniting it.

"There is a second version of his death which concerns a black wheel.

"Buddha was born a man as you and I, but also a wealthy prince. So great was his pity for his less fortunate fellowmen that, when they cried to him in need, he gave them one by one his earthly possessions.

"In proportion to the material treasures he gave away, his spiritual ones increased. Lighter and lighter he became until his feet scarcely touched ground, because there was little of this world to weigh him down, but much of a higher one to draw him upward. The passing breeze could waft him hither and thither like a thread of gossamer, so pure and free was he.

"Now because he had attained so ethereal a state, he could discern that it was his heart, weighted by the suffering of his brethren, which held him to earth. And he perceived also that in distributing his belongings to those in want, he had burdened where he had sought to lighten burdens already existing.

"Thus he took his golden heart and beat it into a great golden wheel, whereon he incised his law of renunciation. He set it rolling over the world. Once in motion nothing could stop it until it had traversed every inch of the entire globe, so that all men should behold it and learn the path to Truth.

"Then freed of the last vestige of earthly weight,

Buddha ascended to Heaven. He smiled confidently as he drifted upward into the light, for he could see—dwindling as the distance increased — his golden wheel rolling eastward, chasing the black shadows of wickedness before it. And he thought that henceforth all would fare happily in the world he was leaving; that in time the souls of every living being would join him in Paradise.

"And so thinking, passed from the ken of men.

"The wondrous golden wheel rolled to the sea and into it, crossed the black ocean-depth, alarming the little fishes, and popped up on the farther shore. It conquered the east, turned south and triumphed there; then took the west and the north. All the world it had covered was enriched with Buddha's wisdom. It was an age of virtue, the lost Age of Gold.

"But alas! Without black there can be no white, without evil no good, without sin no virtue. Nothing exists except in relation to the opposite.

"For long and long the dark wisps of Evil had been fleeing ahead of the golden wheel, until — at the very last, when Buddha's law seemed to have covered all the world—the world's total of wickedness had been squeezed and compressed into a compact lump of utter and most resentful blackness, with no place to take refuge.

"Had the golden disc pushed this wicked lump off the earth, evil would have departed this life, and good with it — for without one there cannot be the other. Mankind, freed of both, would have been immortal.

"But that obstinate bundle of craft and malice found haven in the golden wheel's shadow!

"And so, when Buddha's wheel rolled to its eternal resting-place in the shrine the great One's followers had made for it—the black wheel rolled behind it, undoing all its good! There had been no provision made for the rest of a second wheel, and the wicked one continued to spin over the world.

"You have heard of the Frost-king's daughter who sits in the sky at a wheel which spins out the aurora and rainbows? Like that one, the black wheel in its flight threw off morbid illusions and sinful dreams. And thus, as before Buddha's time, the world is oppressed by delusion."

I asked: "Then you think Captain Benson's wheel was patterned after this allegorical one?"

"I have concluded that it is a wheel of fate, akin to those in the Breton churches. But as I have shown you — all wheel symbols boil down to the same thing — the cycle of black and white, life and death, good and evil. This appears to be an African variety. And in any case it is interesting simply as a work of art regardless of symbolic ramifications."

"What do the hands represent?"

He answered: "There are nine pairs of them. I won't go into the significance of magic numbers — every digit is fraught with myth. I will make special mention only of the nine handmaidens of the Welsh goddess Keridwen, who kept the fires burning beneath her cauldron with their nine breaths — her cauldron of Inspiration being nothing more than another sun-symbol and linked to the Osiris cult.

"As for the hands themselves, just as the eye signifies the soul, which grasps the spiritual, so

the hand represents the agency by which we grasp the material. The left hand is that of our destiny, the right that of our own free will. Haven't you noticed in the black wheel's pattern that the left hand is uppermost in every crossing of the wrists?"

I had not. He said: "Perhaps each pair of hands was carved to represent someone who had died while holding the wheel, even as notches are cut in gun-butt and on saber-handles."

I said: "You've set my head spinning, Dr. Swastlow, with your wheels within wheels."

"Ah," he replied deprecatingly, "I but nicked the surface."

I said: "I'm sure I'll dream of those various wheels tonight. I wonder that you haven't dreamed of them yourself!"

He did not venture upon the conversational red-plush carpet I had unrolled from him. His head angled in a fowlish jerk, as a hen might consider a furtive sound. Then he dipped into his vest for his watch, and jumped up.

"I had no idea of the time! I must be going. So pleasant—" He was out before the speech was concluded, and his haste told me nothing except that dreams were a tabu subject with him. Possibly he feared that I would, like Flora, laugh at those which came to him.

In the evening I was on deck watching the workmen busy under the lights dangling from the yards. Deborah surprised me.

"I hae been seekin' ve, Dr. Fenimore. Her Ledyship is payin' even noo the price o' her wicked wantonness. The De'il has entered her, the De'il frae i'side the wheel, o' which she talks sae mic. I see it spar-king i' her een, red as a flaught. Red is the De'il's ain color, Doctor, gin it be i' the McTeague lad's hair or the een, which are ca-ed the windows o' the sool. And sartainly Her Ledyship was but invitin' the De'il by the false reddin' o' her hair."

She murmured: "I feel the De'il gnawin' and nibblin' at my ain sool. But as I hae made mention, I am nae ain o' the damned, and a' his gnurlin' and gnobblin' will fetch him nae driddle o' guid. I am nae predestined to succumb to his ugsome wiles."

I walked her to a dark spot where we were more private. I said: "Miss Benson thinks that the De'il of the wheel has no effect on herself because she's a virgin. I'm expecting you to refute that, Deborah."

She seated herself on a stack of lumber. "Ave. I'm respectable, ye warrant—but no vaingin for a' that. Ye mind yere gliff o' mysell on the snaw-bank? Which the fit o' Her Ledyship wouldna let me explain? I will tell ye o' it now."

"In Glaisgie I was mar-r-ried to mv Alec. A puir cobbler he was, but guid the husband to me, aside fare his selfishness and lack o' releegious sentiment. Five years we were mar-r-ried and ver-ry happy. And we micht still be taegither, the twain o' oursells, were it nae for the fairst-footin' o' Hogmanav—the New Year."

"First-footing?" I repeated.

"No Christian custom, ve may be sure, but ain naetheless my Alec put mic stock in. On the new o' the year, sae the auld belief tells us, the fairst to set foot ower the threshold must be a mon — a dark-complected mon — and nae wi' empty

hands. The routh gifties he brings mean nae guid-fortune alane, but foretell what the New Year will gie. 'Tis ver-ry bad fortune that a sornin' woman enter fairst o' a', or a mon wi' an empty hand, or either o' them fair o' color — should that happen, ye may be sure the comin' year will fetch ye nowt. And the fairst-footer must be gien bountith, empty hands, woman, blonde or nae.

"Jeanie Cowan was a spinster wi' nae bairns nor menfolk to fairst-foot for her, sae on the mid-nicht strake she'd put i' her dog Jock's mouth the handle o' a basket o' guid things, and turn him oot o' doors. At her ca' he'd trot back i'side, the fairst-foot ower the threshold o' the New Year, nor empty handed and male. She'd feed him then, that when next he went ootside, he'd carry nae duck oot wi' himsell.

"Four winters gone, the Dominie was badly ta'en and I made sheeft to tend him. Well afore the midnicht bell I started for hame, but the fa' o' snaw was so thickit ye couldna gliff the hand afore yere een, mic less the lights o' neebrin' hooses. 'Twas ordained that I shouldna stray, else I couldna hae made my way, as I tauld my Alec later. But the way was slaw i' the gang, and the New Year's strake sounded or I touched the doorstep. And Alec wouldna pass me in.

"I vain I ca'ed to him that 'twas the cauld o' the beast withoot, and nae a fairst-footer could we expect abroad on sic a nicht! But Alec wouldna let me in for a' my knoitin' — for I was but a woman and empty o' hand. And the teeth o' the cauld champed on my birse. I sat on a bank o' snaw and greeted, but I micht hae been a flisk-mahoy for a' the mind Alec gid me. It was my greetin' on the snawbank at that time that ye saw by the second-sight, Dr. Fenimore."

I asked: "Why couldn't Alec step out and re-enter, thus being the first-foot himself?"

"Ave, that I ca'ed to him," she answered. "But he dima pay no heed. 'Twas feared he was o' catchin' the cauld and bein' laid in bed with nane to do his wor-rk for him. Richt thrifty he was, mv Alec."

"And the cauld nipped and harried," she sighed. "It fashed fairst mv fingers, then my feet and naze. And I kent I'd soon be fraze and 'twere better bad fortune o' the year than a dead wife to mv Alec, that had on me nae i'surance. But the Lord hadna predestined me to freeze! I ca'ed ance mair to Alec, but he dinna heed. Then I cocker-red to the back o' our cot and slipped through the window which, just like the forgetfu' man, he'd nae made sheeft to mend."

"Emptv o' hand I entered in — and sure but the New Year gid us nowt but evil fortune. Alec caught the cauld and took to bed, and a' our savings were spent for doctorin' — and bitterly he blamed me. Then I made the aith that I'd gae frae him, nor retain until I'd airned the money lost."

"And I took sairvice wi' Her Ledyship. And it is ordained that I nae see Alec until I hae airned what was lost, and prove to him the wickedness o' the heathen custom, by gieing him what the guid Lord will provide me — but nae," she added warmly, "through the agency o' Her Ledyship, who pavs mair than maist, even if stingit on extras. 'Twill come to me through the De'il's wor-rk on this ship, as ye'll be seein'."

Chapter XIX

THE IVORY EIDOLON

Johnson completed exterior repairs on the *Su-Ann* a day ahead of the minimum time-limit set himself. One could hardly blame his haste. The rancor between the crew and Benson was taking tentative steps toward an open declaration of war—in the form of unnecessary and unpleasant, however small, inconveniences for which the men apologized much too profusely as accidental. The work below decks, Johnson had decided, could be done while at sea.

At the very last minute, whether for dramatic effect or from an obscure sense of caution, Benson and McTeague brought out the black wheel and set it in place. Then Benson summoned the entire ship's company and ordered that everyone file past the wheel.

Its effect upon those who had never seen it was of immense clinical interest; I regretted that momentarily I was not quintuplets, able to observe and chart the individual reactions of that gathering. I moved among the hands to eavesdrop on their impressions.

A hell of a looking thing, they said, and so that was what it looked like—evidently all had heard of it by this time and speculated greatly as to Benson's close guard over it.

If I knew Benson, he would still guard it, lest its hypnotic effect be discovered and utilized by another, contrary to his plans.

The crew wondered in whispers what damned kind of wood the wheel was carved from, and why was Benson so cracked about it? A crazy wheel for a crazy Captain—that was the long and short of it.

As on previous occasions, the wheel was still a shock to me. To see it was to reel back from it! The dynamism of its lines struck the consciousness like a blow.

I had called its craftsman peerless, but it was more than that. Its execution was so perfect that the wheel seemed to have been self-begotten. It was so perfect that one could barely believe that human hands had made it.

Nor was it difficult to imagine that something lived within it—a *Servus Rotae*—and one need not require more than a scant knowledge of hypnotic control to take advantage of that thought.

I realized now the tremendous influence that highly finished, fearsome idols must exert on the primitive mind. The purpose of true art is to rouse mental response from the beholder—and the wheel was great art. That it was dangerous in its malignant mental effects was bad enough, but that it should be also unutterably, viciously beautiful as well made it intolerable.

It were better destroyed—and if the old Cap'n really had sunk it so long ago, he could have done so only because he had felt what I was feeling now. Yet were the task of destroying that black masterpiece mine, I would void it. I could more easily beat out a bonfire with my bare hands than lift a finger against the wheel. It was as perversely awesome as the Medusa, sight of whom turned her beholders to stone. And my observations were being echoed, if in cruder form, by the men among whom I had placed myself.

Benson was anxious that each touch the wheel.

He declaimed: "I'm inaugurating a contest, bullies! The first to find out of what wood the wheel's made stands to win a hundred dollars."

He looked older than he had any right to look. As for McTeague, his clothing hung shapelessly; he had become woefully thin. His skin was leathery yellow and I could not help recalling, with a twinge of puzzled horror, the mummy in the spiked cabin. Was his resemblance to it accidental or deliberately contrived—and by his own effort, or through Benson's artful suggestions?

Lady Fitz' cloistering of herself had been good for her. She looked less angular, not because she had added weight but rather that her carriage was improved. She was less self-consciously regal; there was something subtly attractive in her gliding walk; one thought her lissome, sinuous.

Flora, heretofore ever beautiful, was absolutely radiant—and some of the men's muttered comments centered upon her. Her beauty was not that classic, tranquil kind of Pen's but a savage, turbulent sort—as if her body were a vessel of clearest crystal in which the pent forces of cyclone and volcano boiled. Like the explosive unfurling of a scarlet flower-flame in spice-laden jungle glooms, where black and brown and purple shadows clung amorously, whispering in the voices of rustling leaves, or danced to the rhythms of muted snakeskin drums.

Looking to Pen, I thought of the Snow-maiden; she was as pallid and frail and remote as if indeed carved from delicately tinted ice. As though I were seeing only the fading memory of her.

She shot me a glance of defiance that was chilly enough as, in deference to Benson's wish, she moved resolutely forward and touched the wheel—though her fingers were shaking. They twitched while she ran them caressingly over the black hands so like Benson's, the strong-fingered broad ones resembling McTeague's.

And as if she stroked the hands of the men themselves, they nodded approvingly. I recognized more than an outward likeness to Red Rafferty in McTeague's acquiescence—he who normally had sought always to protect Pen from the wheel.

His calm cracked when Chadwick swaggered to the black circle, but Benson's grip on his arm restrained him. Chadwick paused an instant, his eyes—black as the wheel itself and only a little less disturbing—challenging the red-head. He touched a spoke of the wheel rather than the hands on it, and flinched, then clenched his hand. And smirked sardonically as he stepped away.

The Reverend Doctor Swastlow was in nowise anxious to conform to rule, but after a hasty glance of appeal to Benson, and a telling one of reassurance for Flora, he reluctantly emulated Chadwick. His round, rosy face, as he drew to make room for another, was like that of a baby on the verge of tears.

Gallantly Boriloff lent Lady Fitz his arm, walking her to the wheel. I heard murmurs of surprise from those near me, to the effect that the Englishwoman had been hiding her attractive light underneath a bushel. She bent in a beautiful curve and laid her crossed wrists over the outlines of the woman's hands: she looked up at Benson with a smile which, for sheer inscrutability, reduced that of the famed *Gioconda* to a sorry grimace. As Benson and McTeague were veiled

by the masks of Cap'n and Rafferty, so she was dominated by Irsuley.

Boriloff was as inhumanly correct in his bearing as an old Byzantine figure. Was he, I wondered, functioning as that personage known as the priestess' eyes?

Flora was her usual self. She felt the carvings as gingerly as one child, anxious to please a playmate, strokes the other's pet rat. She gazed to McTeague for his approbation; his gauntness appeared to startle her. She tightened her mouth at his sullen indifference. One of the men close at hand remarked that she must be sweet on the Irisher. She found approval when Chadwick smiled at her from the press of the crew. She looked once more at McTeague, her eyes narrowing. She was thinking, planning—what?

Johnson and Henderson examined the wheel perfunctorily; exchanged a few soft comments and beckoned MacKenzie. Deborah nudged them aside and felt placidly of the spokes, supremely confident that nothing unrespectable was her destiny. "A hundred dollars—over twenty pounds!"

I was surprised that Slam Bang was the next to advance. I had fancied him far too fearful of duppies to touch the wheel willingly. The strained muscles of his long bony face set it into a mask; he bent over the black circle from many angles. It was only when he had mingled back among the throng, beaming triumphantly, that I perceived shreds of tobacco littering the space under the wheel, and realized that he had been working a charm against its curse.

I stepped up to the wheel. Benson ran the tip of his tongue over his lips and craned forward; I saw Pen beside him, smiling a sherbet-sort of smile, sweet but chilly. Chadwick grinned knowingly as if tickled by some joke of which I were the butt, and turned his eyes to several of the hands as though they too shared his knowledge.

I could see no grain in the wheel; it was like a carved and buffed slab of coal. It was cold as dry ice, not in actual temperature but in its action on muscles and nerves. My hands tingled as if frostbitten. I had the neurasthenic sensation, common to self-conscious, introverted types, of being watched by malignant strangers—a magnification of the regard of those standing about me.

There was no doubt that the wheel was ideally an hypnotic device. Its unexpected coldness, like the rhythmic pattern, concentrated all one's consciousness to that aspect of it—the first step in any mesmeric measure.

Then some of the crew elbowed into my place. I went over to Johnson. MacKenzie was telling him that the wheel's unfamiliar wood probably gathered and stored static electricity, and that touching its spokes was like grasping a battery's electrodes. This might also account for the wheel's remarkable state of preservation, he said, if it was really as old as Captain Benson thought it.

Johnson had been told that Benson had found the wheel protruding in part from the sand of the collapsed dune; there had been no mention of the wreck.

As the tide swelled, the jack-timbers were prized away and the hawsers slipped from the bitts along the beach. The Susan Ann, with Benson at the wheel, pulled from the little cove where she had

been so speedily put to rights. One of the Diesels was dead indeed, but MacKenzie had restored the other to better than fair performance.

Benson was in a great hurry to leave the islet and we did not linger on the lagoon. The Susan Ann cut cleanly through the seaward channel, haughtily disdaining the threat of its coral teeth.

My tension slackened as I gazed at the diminishing island; there was that feeling of release from the restlessness of inactivity such as even a condemned man must experience when walked from his cell to the scaffold. In the lowering sunlight the isle lay grey-green and citron white on the peacock-blue of the shallows. I was particularly relieved when the flattened dune merged with the others and all were lost behind a blur of greenery.

The sun floated like an amber bubble on western water yellow as wine.

Not only was my own tension lessened, but that of the others. I had not been alone watching the island's evanishment. All along the stern rail the others were scattered—the Rev. Dr. Swastlow, Lady Fitz and Boriloff chatting desultorily together; Flora farther away with Chadwick and enviously eyeing Pen who, with McTeague, was close to Benson. Chadwick's face almost touched hers as he whispered. She laughed softly but very clearly, looking to see if McTeague were attentive. He was not, and she whispered something back to Chadwick.

There was no wind; no sail was aloft, but I saw a few men in the rigging, faces turned toward the site of the island; and those on deck snatched seconds from their work to peer over the rail. Smithson crackling orders at them, shared their interest.

I saw Deborah knitting vehemently with never a look at her stitches, her eyes tethered to the locale of the hidden isle. She started as though my gaze were palpable, shook her head forebodingly at me, and hastened below.

The band of orange dividing the purpling sea from the darkening sky altered to a brilliant malachite green, neutralizing the color of our faces and leaving them ghastly pale. The Susan Ann's lights blinked on, feebly yellow, hardly as bright as the hoarfrost shimmer of the evening star.

Benson remained at the wheel with McTeague and Johnson to relieve him. They had so parcelled their time that while we did not see Benson at breakfast nor McTeague at dinner, both could be present at lunch. Although, on this occasion, Benson arrived a little late.

He, the red-head and Lady Fitz seemed to have marooned their differences on the island, and the mealtime gatherings were again complete. I was still not inured to Pen's careful indifference, but since I suffered whether I saw her or not, I preferred being on hand, having a concrete reason at least for my state of misery.

Flora was seated beside McTeague, and there was a singular conflict both between the characters obsessing them and their normal selves, and—where McTeague was concerned—each other. As Rafferty he overlooked her Irsuley mannerisms—namely her habit of fingering objects as if memorizing them in Braille, and of smelling them as if labelling them by odor.

Then too she frequently drew her fingertips over her lips and cheeks as though indulging in impromptu massage or reassuring herself by the tactile sense that her complexion was smoothly perfect.

More than once I caught Lady Fitz in the throes of this same procedure, but not half so complacently pleased with its results as Flora. If one subscribed to Pen's faith in extramundane visitors, Irsuley as yet had made no choice between them.

Rafferty's table habits were in the crude side, involving considerable employment of his knife in lieu of more suitable implements, and the wiping of his mouth on his cuff. Both Swastlow and Boriloff scrutinized McTeague with distaste and the women with no small amount of puzzlement. Chadwick appeared amused by the lot of us.

It was only when Flora, as her normal self, dedicated flirtatious trivialities to McTeague that, likewise himself, he evinced his irritation. She was so anxious to monopolize his attention that she rattled out whatever drifted through her head, and even I was exhausted by her inhumanly sustained brightness.

Finally, exasperated, he thought to silence her by rudeness. He said to all of us, his voice and choice of words a mimicry of Lady Fitz: "Flora kept me company at the wheel last evening, and don't you know, she had a most strawd'n'ry experience. Tell them, dear Flora, why don't you."

She colored and sat stiffly alert. He said: "Don't be shy, dear Flora. There are no hostile vibrations among us to upset you."

Lady Fitz studied him with dubiety, as though both recognizing the raillery and convinced that he was aping her for the sake of improving his diction.

Flora said, a shade angrily: "Very well, I'll tell you. I'm probably putting my foot in my mouth, as always, but — do you remember the old fairy tale, wherein the avaricious king forced the peasant-girl to spin gold from straw? I was reminded of it while Mike was at the wheel. Only instead of gold he was spinning — shadows."

"Of course it was all due to the dim light and my eyes being so very tired that, when I looked at anything over a certain length of time, the nerves twitched and registered things that weren't there. But it seemed that — shadows unwound from the wheel. Large ragged shadows that felt their way out of it like blind drunkards groping from a grogshop door. They prowled about the deck as if looking for something they'd lost."

"They flapped and fluttered as if a wind were tearing at their rags—but there wasn't a whiff of a breeze. Some of them couldn't find whatever they wanted and came creeping back into the wheel again — like drunkards returning to a bar for another drink."

McTeague said relentlessly: "You forgot to mention that it was so frightening that you clung to me for protection."

Her expression was an accusation of gross betrayal. She said: "Anyone would have done it."

"Yes," McTeague agreed. "Chad especially — he just loves hugging me. Don't you, Chad?"

But Benson entered just then. He had the ivory figurine from the wreck, and he set it down beside his place as though it belonged there. He

greeted all of us with vehement affability — the bravado a sinking business man will display to his rising competitor. Lady Fitz stopped eating and daintily pressed her napkin to her nose, possibly in fear of contracting the figmentary disease with which I had branded the man.

He announced that we were heading for Key West, our course skirting the Bahaman banks, but we would stop at another small island only a little out of our path. There a most delightful surprise awaited us. He stroked the figurine as he spoke.

Everyone seemed to have been expecting the declaration; about the only one taken aback by the thought of delay, beside myself, was Chadwick. He glowered first at Benson, then the Swastlows and Lady Fitz.

Benson noticed it, but as he would have spoken, perhaps twitting Chadwick on his manifest unease, Flora said: "What a quaint statuette! May I see it?"

Before passing it to her, he held it so that all might see it. Swastlow perhaps had reason to be shocked by its overstressed femininity, but I could not comprehend Lady Fitz' horror, in the light of her broad experience.

"My good Captain, do you think it proper to exhibit so lewd an object in mixed company?"

Boriloff, who had first surveyed the image with a roué's leer, pulled his mouth into a severely disapproving line.

Pen said lightly: "Oh, come, Lady Fitz—it's far too ridiculous to be lewd."

"I see nothing comic whatsoever in a deliberate distortion of God's Image," Lady Fitz replied, but uncertainly, and made up for it by looking down her nose as Flora turned the figurine from one side to another.

"Odd," Flora murmured musingly.

"What's odd?" Pen asked, her interest—like Benson's and McTeague's—sharply focussed on the girl; they were like a trio of alienists clocking someone undergoing an aptitude test. Chadwick was more interested in them than Flora — a spectator of spectators.

"My mouth," Flora said, "is by now so chockful of feet that I could probably perform a toe-dance with my teeth. But—I've never seen this statue before. It didn't look at all familiar. Yet, holding it, I'm sure I've — felt — it before." Swastlow nervously cleared his throat.

She set the figure on the table with a thump, and swiftly arose. "Another attack of migraine," she snapped at all of us, coral-cheeked. "Pray excuse me. Mike, I don't suppose you'd walk me to my cabin?" There was something threatening in her stance as she awaited his reply. It was too laggard in coming, and she turned from him. "Then perhaps you will, Chad."

She swept out, hand on his arm. Pen, her father and McTeague exchanged a mutually congratulatory glance. Then Benson offered the effigy to Lady Fitz, who defensively replaced her napkin to her nostrils.

Boriloff accepted it; delicately she recoiled from him. He said: "It is, too, familiar with me." And promptly to Lady Fitz: "Kolubo's."

"Beg pardon?" McTeague asked quickly.

"It is but nothing — a Russian word," Boriloff lied, and not only I knew it but the Bensons and

McTeague. There was a clicking thud as Swastlow dropped his water tumbler and ineptly clutched at the spreading liquid, but aside from the slightest flicker, none but myself paid him heed. His round face was the yellow-white of an ailing moon, and I guessed that he had made Irsuley's acquaintance but for the first time was finding it shared.

Meanwhile Lady Fitz had dropped her napkin, snatched the image from Boriloff, and was kneading it as if it were malleable. Her eyes were tightly closed. She nodded to Boriloff as though he had asked some question.

She cast the figure on the table; it fell on its feet and rocked in a grotesque jig. She said cuttingly: "You told me you had found the black wheel in the sand, Captain Benson. Do not expect me to believe that this fetish was standing on watch over it. That would be altogether too much of a coincidence."

She went on: "I have had disturbing dreams of the wheel, which the good doctor assured me arose from my subconscious self. But I have also dreamed of this figure — and I have never seen it until this moment. I find it—most peculiar. I might say—prearranged."

Pen soothed: "Perhaps you've just been psychic."

"Perhaps," Lady Fitz agreed without looking at her. "My good doctor, I am perfectly aware that migraine is not contagious. Nevertheless, I feel an attack of it now. I think, Captain Benson, you understand what I am implying. You will kindly excuse me. Alexis!"

He helped her arise. She was barely over the threshold when Swastlow bounded from the table. He snatched up the statuette and hurled it to the floor. It shattered to flinders. With no word or look for us he ran away.

Pen went to the wreckage and began collecting it. McTeague joined her. Benson said casually: "Let the pieces lie. Collins—or rather, Perry—will sweep them up and throw them out."

He levelled his chilly, calculating gaze on me. "They're no longer of value."

His tone was a challenge. Pen, out of his field of vision, waved frantically to attract my attention; she hastily lifted a silencing finger to her lips, then pointed to the door.

I said, getting up: "I'd better see about Flora and especially Lady Fitz. Migraine might prompt her to an overdose of sedative."

I did not visit either of them. I went to my office and pondered.

It is common for practicing hypnotists to suggest that after the session their patients will respond in a prescribed manner to definite objects and situations. If Benson were the mesmerist I believed him to be, he had brought out the eidolon as some secret signal for his dupes. That they thought the statuette new to them meant only that he had ordained it thus.

On the other hand, if he were indeed the ghostly old Cap'n, none of the Irsuley-obsessed need have seen the figure previously, and he had exhibited it to observe their reactions to it, marking for himself the wheel's effect on them, rather than question them directly or rely on the word of Pen and McTeague.

In either contingency, he had thoroughly ruffled the Swastlows, Lady Fitz and Boriloff. They would doubtless come to me for explanations, and

I must invent something both plausible and satisfactory, on the order of my first analyses — if I wished to shield him. I worried as to how long I could deceive them if he persisted in his present vein.

Then Pen came to me.

Chapter XX

A CURIOUS LADY FITZ

She said nothing but merely held her arms open to me, better far than any words. I caught her close — and what started on both sides as a highly inexperienced kiss resolved into a consummately accomplished one. We were both so surprised that when our lips parted, we could do little else for an instant but cling together, marveling.

"Pen!" I whispered, and again: "Pen!"

She sighed. Then, matter-of-factly, and drawing away from me, she said: "I'm afraid of what's coming, Ross. I don't like being afraid. The old Cap'n was and look what happened because of it! I want to be strong, and loving you is my strength. And Father knows everything, so I needn't worry about Chad. But—"

She wrung her hands ineffectually. "I feel like—well, something like Juliet. Or anyway, someone who shouldn't have loved whom she did. You're my father's enemy, Ross, and therefore mine. I love him, but I love you too. And you know the old saying. 'A house divided—'"

Then her slim hands slipped up to my shoulders and we fused in another kiss—a decided improvement on the first, if perfection could be surpassed.

"I'm full of quotations," she said dreamily. "Ah, sweet mystery of life," for example. Funny, isn't it, how those asinine love-songs suddenly become true when you fall in love? Or is it simply that we become asinine along with them?"

And: "Then there's the one about loving your enemies, which I'm obeying to the letter!"

She broke away. "Enough of this," she decided, with a determined straightening of her mouth which made it in nowise less appealing. "I haven't come to bribe you with my attractions into admitting something you don't believe. I came purely out of selfishness — to be with you if only for a minute. Once the issue is settled between you and Jim — Father — the loser will be man enough to shake hands with the victor. Then I won't feel torn between you. 'When love and duty' — no, I won't finish that one."

Her lashes curved downward not at all demurely. "But by that time you may not want me."

"Want you!"

She fended me back. "No, Ross — not now. When the thing is proven your way — or his. It was just that I've been hurting myself more than you—behaving like a child! You've your own good grounds to believe as you do about Father, and I want you to cling to them until you know in your heart they're inadequate. I wouldn't want you to lie to me, pretending to see things my way when you wouldn't really. If you'd lie in one thing, you'd lie in another, and lies kill love, which is based on trust and understanding. I was afraid I'd goad you to the lie. Oh, I do love and trust you, but even so, I was afraid—"

Deep as was my feeling toward her, she had underestimated my regard for the truth. I would

have told her so, for it was this very regard which was eventually to come between us — had not Slam Bang at that moment appeared for his daily eye-treatment.

I whispered for her to stay, but she smiled a farewell at me — a perfectly ordinary smile, as far as the colored man could have seen, but as special to me as would be a diamond among rhinestones to a jeweler. She went away.

I found Slam Bang's eyes almost normal. He credited their betterment to his exorcising the wheel's duppies by scattering tobacco-dust. He did not know that Benson had discovered the shreds a few moments after their strewing and had roared that they be swept away. I bathed his eyes and sent him off, then took a turn about the deck, hoping to encounter Pen again or at any rate revel in the chance of it.

McTeague was at the wheel, his hair an orange flame above the yellowed mask of Rafferty. He nodded to me, but abstractedly. I waved but did not go to him. I was in too buoyantly enchanted a mood to risk the descent into reality which his mere appearance, not to mention his conversation, must entail.

I almost ran up against Johnson and Henderson. They had not seen me; were standing in the shadow of the cabin house, looking toward the foredeck, nudging each other and pointing, rather than risking words. Their attitude was conspiratorial—

Then I glimpsed those on whom they were spying and stopped short.

Flora Swastlow was at the port rail, and Lady Fitz with Boriloff at the starboard one. The deck house intervened between them, and neither was aware of the other. Each was, in fact, supremely unconscious of any presence save her own — and in Lady Fitz' case, Boriloff's. They were gazing aft toward Henderson, Johnson and me. It was unlikely that they could not discern us, but if they did, they did not betray it.

Flora's beauty was more jungly than I had thought; opulent and gypsy-like. About Lady Fitz there was something of this same flamboyancy — indefinable, radiating from her to impinge on another sense than sight; I suppose the intuition. One knew that she was lovely, but not how he had arrived at the knowledge.

They were like reflections, in two distorting mirrors, of one woman who was neither of them. But it was not their appearance which held Johnson and the first mate spellbound.

It was what they were doing.

Lady Fitz' hands were lifted high and writhing, like the legs of injured spiders, in a cycle of complex gestures. She seemed wig-wagging a message to the sun itself!

She dropped her arms and stood as apathetic as Boriloff. Now I saw Flora lift her own hands and flutter them in movements identical with the Englishwoman's. Since she could not see Lady Fitz, it was as though both had previously rehearsed the gestures.

Lady Fitz bent and traced with her forefinger a circle on the planking around her, then straightened. Flora did the same. Lady Fitz raised her arms again and slowly wriggled, as a snake must thresh while shedding its skin — but a chilled and

sluggish snake. She carried the writhing to no great length, however, but paused to pass a hand over her eyes as if uncertain of her choreography.

Even as she ceased, Flora took up the languorous rhythms and furthered the dance; then also paused as if uncertain of what came next. And Lady Fitz, with a glad little smirk, caught the arrested measure and developed it.

From one to the other the exotic movements shuttled, a dance like those of the Far East wherein only the upper body and arms are employed, never the legs and feet. It was as though some puppeteer planning a performance were unsure of his performers and testing them alternately, contrasting their abilities.

Their timing was flawless. Even the most highly skilled dancers, especially when simultaneously paired, are forced to count every beat of music. But here was no sound at all to guide them, nor sight of each other, only a rigorous, precise adherence to some prearranged tally. It was bewilderingly as though they danced to music inaudible to me, and my sense of hearing impaired — or was that thought a reversal of the truth?

Both were now moving in unison. That Flora should have studied anything but the latest steps or ballroom dancing was — considering her character — unlikely. Lady Fitz had probably delved into ethnological dance-forms if only for amusement. But that either should have achieved their present perfection — which would have been the envy of competent professionals — was, to use Lady Fitz' expression, "utt'ly preposterous."

And now we were backed by a good half dozen of the crew who should have been busied elsewhere. Cautiously I tugged Henderson's sleeve. He swerved. I whispered: "How long has this been going on?"

"They started about ten minutes ago," he whispered back. He narrowed his eyes at the new arrivals and softened his voice to a breath: "Are they doped? They're not drunk—they're too sure of themselves for that. They've more control than they've ever shown, sober."

He jerked his head to the men, ordering them off. A few went away, but most of them lingered. I saw no reason to explain, answering Henderson's query, that persons under hypnosis are apt to display truly amazing muscular coordination. And post-hypnotic suggestion was the only cause known to me which could have produced the terpsichorean virtuosity we were witnessing.

So this was Benson's purpose in flouting the ivory image!

I murmured: "They're probably cooking up the evening's entertainment. They have to practice somewhere. They're too engrossed to see us."

Henderson, shrugging, took my word for it.

Boriloff roused himself. He muttered something unintelligible, perhaps Russian. As though not only Lady Fitz but Flora had heard and comprehended, they pointed—Flora to her right and Lady Fitz to her left—each to the sea.

Their fingers rippled like tiny wavelets; constantly they tossed up one finger or another — like the crests of combers casting spray. The motion also suggested weaving, and the throwing in and out of special pattern forming threads. It was so artfully illusive that involuntarily I glanced overside to check its accuracy with the water it-

self.

There was still no wind whatever, but the Susan Ann's wash, as she nosed forward, was like a liquid magnification of the women's busy fingers. Weaving, and throwing back golden ravelings of sunlight — fringing with scintillant yellow the wake of the ship as far back as I could discern.

From each side of the vessel these glittering bands ran — like yellow lace dropping from a tating-shuttle; like the aureate tracks on which some progressive Afrit-king might run his be-gemmed locomotive, puffing smoke, no doubt, of vaporous Djinni.

And smoke there was! The twinkling sunbeams flung from the water were diffused by vague streamers of haze. Distance knitted them into a clearly perceptible though diaphanous cloth — like the gossamer veils on the brows of the maidens in mediaeval paintings.

The Susan Ann's steady creeping ahead gave rise to the feeling that this mist was flying from us toward the horizon, a letter inscribed in gold ink and borne by the unseen, urgent hands of sylphs — whither?

The puppeteer plying the strings of the women-marionettes was tiring of Flora; shaking her impatiently, time and again, as if displeased by her performance. I mean that the fluency of her dance was intermittently interrupted by spastic jerks.

Then as though the puppeteer had finished with her and discarded her as useless, she crumpled fainting. Henderson sped to catch her, Johnson following. The others abruptly recalled trysts with duty and hastened to keep them.

But still Lady Fitz continued to dance, and still more proficiently than heretofore. As if the puppet-master, free to lavish his entire artistry on her alone, was bent on excelling all previous effort. Her lips curved in triumph, as though she had known of competition all along, but now was acknowledged victress.

That touch of triumph was all of humanity left her. In that last brief glimpse I had of her, she was a woman no longer. Nor was what she was doing — dancing! It had arisen to a height where shape was incidental to motion. What I saw, as I hurried after Henderson, was the capricious flicker of a sun-intoxicated butterfly—the mincing sway of tall bamboos—the wayward meander of a wanton stream.

Not Lady Fitz nor any part of her personality, but the wind itself — as revealed when it ripples over grass!

Henderson carried Flora to her cabin. Before going there, I snatched one last look around the deck-house. Lady Fitz and the Russian had taken leave as though, a human wind, she had wafted him away in finale. No more haze was swirling from the ship's wash. The last threads of that which had risen were fleeing over the water's edge as though in sooth a message and already far toward its destination.

Flora revived without recollection of her exhibitionism. She said that she had been idling on deck, thinking deeply, when the sun had been too much for her and she must have fainted. I agreed that such was the case. Though what I had witnessed had been a truly remarkable — but entirely explicable — instance of

post-hypnotic compulsion, it was hardly something of which to inform her.

I said: "You were pondering, no doubt, on the ivory idol which sent you so furiously from the lunch table."

Her hair had been slightly, attractively mussed by her fall. Suddenly she was absorbed in patting it back in order. I caught the tail of her eye weighing me. It was my notice to abandon the subject, but I waited boorishly.

At last she sighed and surrendered. "Everything I've done on this damned tub has labeled me a fool. I'm not one — or if I am, then the world to which I belong is peopled by them and nobody knows the difference. But if I'm not a fool, then everyone on this ship is mad! And that surpasses reason!"

She swept out a hand and caught mine. "Doctor—no—Ross! You know the earmarks of insanity! Can you see them in me?" She was demanding a lie by appealing, not impersonally as a patient to a physician, but as woman to man. She murmured, falteringly: "I've had — hallucinations. If not — then something sinister is stalking this ship."

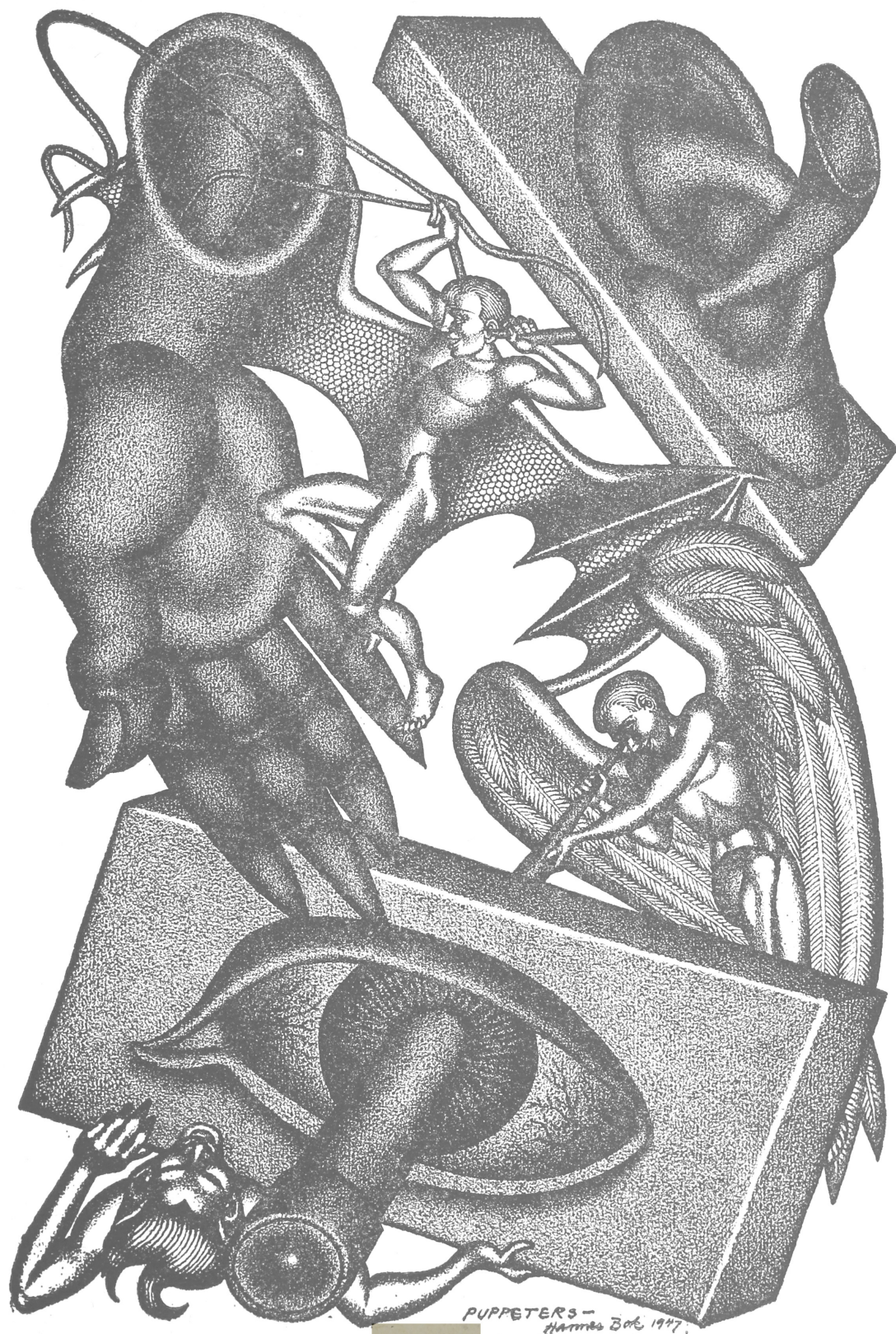
I withheld comment. She enlarged: "You asked several days ago if I were still having those—dreams—about Irsuley. I said no. I lied! I've tried to think of them only as dreams; any sane person would. But I've had—proofs—that they might mean something else."

She said: "The first proof is my speech on Africa, that Friday when Mike and Her Highness had the set-to. I don't know anything about Africa except that it's nasty, full of savages and tsetse flies, and diamonds are mined there. But Harold said I editorialized as if I'd lived there and studied it and its people for years. Later you set my mind at ease about it, in my cabin, by explaining how—under certain conditions—people are capable of rattling off whole pages of books they've read but forgotten. Nevertheless—it's proof."

"Then Harold told me that I almost ruined his Sunday service on the island by breaking into his sermon with a species of moaning that sounded like an invocation to the devil! And I've had a lapse in Chad's company. He described it to Harold, who relayed it to me. It seems Chad and I were on deck looking at the island's palms and he made a comment concerning the wind. I announced with a faraway look in my eyes that I knew all about winds, since the wind was my soul—rather a Lady Fitzian statement! I said that I not only could, but would demonstrate, and pointed to the palms, which rocked obligingly under a gust as though I'd sent it. Chad was struck by the coincidence. But," she said resentfully, "he could have kept it to himself. He certainly won't enhance my dwindling reputation by spreading a thing like that around."

"If it really happened," I said maliciously — just on the chance that Chadwick had been saying many other things better left unvoiced.

"You mean, he might have been taking advantage of the moody spell, and inventing something that didn't happen? Just to twit me? Perhaps—he's a funny duck. Then again, it might have happened as he knew Harold would tell me, so he spoke about it to Harold—to put me on my guard."



PUPPETERS -
HAMMA BOE 1947

So that I'd watch myself, and not make another such blunder in front of well, say Penelope. Chad's always been very friendly to me, queer though he is. Sometimes I think—"

She let that thought trail off into vacancy.

She said: "The ivory statue clinched the proofs. I lost my wits when I saw it. If Ursuley is no dream, God in Heaven—what is she? Hallucination, insanity—or the next thing to it! I realized I'd made a slip when I spoke about recognizing the statue. Suppose the others guessed! I couldn't trust any of them. !

By which statement I knew that, in her heart, she felt herself their inferior.

She furthered: "Then I thought of a third idea—neither dreams or insanity. And in any case, rather—wild.

"As Irsuley, I heard the voice of the man who sank Rafferty's ship. It was very much as Captain Benson's sometimes can be. Why is he so morbidly fond of the wheel? His behavior in regard to it, when Harold and I visited him in his cabin and first saw it, was eccentric. And there was something wrong with him when he unveiled the wheel so dramatically, that day we left the island."

She shivered. "Something wrong with all of us," she brooded,

And went on: "As Irsuley, I gave the ivory statue to Rafferty as part payment for his help. It meant nothing to me at the table—just looking at it. But when I touched it—I knew. Irsuley was blind. She knew the statue not by sight but by feel. And I thought—where did the Captain get the statue? And why does he love the wheel? Unless—he knows of Irsuley too! It would explain everything!"

She colored and looked away, at the same time stretching out her long and lovely legs for my admiration. "But that's pretty far-fetched, I suppose—to think that Irsuley's a ghost, haunting two of us?"

I made no answer. She said: "Far-fetched or not—I hoped I could squeeze out some information from Mike without his knowing it. About whether the Captain had been having lapses like mine. Mike wouldn't give me a tumble, as you saw. You'd think I were—gutter-spawn! So I asked Chad—I'd show that stuck-up strawberry blonde that somebody at least appreciates me!"

She peeped to ascertain whether I were admiring her legs.

I remarked: "Your brother left soon afterward. Have you talked with him? He smashed the statue."

"He did? Oh, God! Between him and me, we'll soon be walking the plank! Why did he do it?"

"He might have thought it immoral. Or," I said very carefully, "he might have had dreams in which it figured."

She sat up straight, her mouth a circle. "Are you telling me—? But it's impossible!"

Since Swastlow was bound eventually to confide in her, I fabricated an explanation applicable to both of them yet not reflecting on Benson. "Your dream was based on the wheel, a chance reference or two to Africa, and Saint Ursula—all of which you and your brother discussed together. If they were the ingredients of one dream,

why not of another? As for your lapses—your brother ambitiously brought you here among people whose social rank is higher than those with whom you keep company ordinarily. You've been riding yourself mercilessly to meet their qualifications, and the schedules of the new regime conflict both physically and mentally with the old. too many contradictory ideas and worries crowd simultaneously into your consciousness and negative each other, resulting in blank states of absent-mindedness, or lapses.

"At such times the subconscious self, which controls the involuntary actions, takes over, stubbornly intent on expressing your inhibited desires. You link these periods with an African dream in an attempt to explain them. But the explanation still does not satisfy you, and you attempt to strengthen it by seizing upon anything African as proof—such as the ivory figurine which, being African, you resolved to recognize, and finally convinced yourself that you did recognize.

"You were perhaps too confused to come to me, ask my advice, and receive the simple answer. Your confusion has led you into the intricacies of an obsession. You've put the cart before the horse by imagining that your lapses were caused by your dreams. Search your memory, You'll discover your talk on Africa came before any dream."

She brightened. "That's so."

"Since you've succeeded in establishing Irsuley as a dream-symbol of repression, you'll probably dream of her as long as you're in this group of people who repress you. Don't, I beg you, continue to mystify yourself with baseless conjectures. If at any time you have further doubts as to your sanity, don't hesitate to come to me. You," I finished casually, "or your brother,"

She tucked the long legs away as if my somewhat reluctant contemplation of them had been the real reason for settling her mind, and she didn't want to wear them out, but save them for future occasion.

She said: "Well, that's a burden off my brain! Thanks, Doctor."

I hated myself for having lied to her, even for her benefit. I was sure that I had weakened Benson's hold on her, yet preserved his reputation. I left her in the pleasant company of her mirror and proceeded to her Ladyship's cabin. Whether Lady Fitz had known that she had danced or not, she was soon to learn of it when those who had seen her remarked on it. If I spoke to her now I might deflect further rise of suspicions.

Deborah let me in, and retired herself at an airy wave from Lady Fritz. The Englishwoman and her cavalier were gloomily partaking of tea with the aspect of sipping Hemlock—Lady Fitz' in a cup, and Boriloff's in a tall tumbler, spiked with brandy and handled by a napkin.

"Ah, Doctor! I expected you," she observed, and clarified, "you've been ever most considerate."

I bowed and asked after her migraine.

"Come, you good fellow, you're not that naive! I have been wary of Captain Benson ever since I discovered that he is the tool of a fiend. It was possible that I could have dreamed of Irsuley, as you explained, because of the wheel I saw in his cabin. But I dreamed also of the ivory carving, don't you know, which I never beheld until today—and it strikes me as most amazin' that he

should have it in his possession."

I scanned Boriloff. He knew of what she was speaking. He said: "Da! The dreams of the priestess I too have been having."

I gave forth the tested and approved explication that two may dream the same if following the same blueprint.

I furthered: "You're both in the decorating line, and therefore associating an African sculpture with African dreams. Surely Benson's statue is duplicated in many museums, wherein you and Mr. Boriloff undoubtedly saw its twin, and confounded the memory with the dream."

Lady Fitz said: "Ah, but I did not recognize the carving by sight, but by touch." And indignantly: "I am not one of those morons who visit museums to finger the statues, Dr. Fenimore."

"But you have an artist's sensitive eye. It can feel line and texture as competently as any hand."

She was flattered, so she agreed. I sharpened my point: "Ergo, the Captain's statue roused within yourself the sensory memory of other African statues, memories you have incorporated into the Irsuley dream."

She carefully plumped five cubes of sugar into the tea she had mixed for me. "And if that is so, then why did the Swastlow girl behave so peculiarly and run away? One might fancy she'd dreamed of Irsuley also! It was that which crystallized my misgivings."

I said: "We all know the wheel's African. Its powerful stimulus to the imagination may have been the genesis of more than one dream of the Dark Continent. Possibly others on this ship have had dreams similar to yours, Lady Fitz. But I should advise against your making any inquiries. You might evolve purely from circumstance evidence that Irsuley might be a reality, and you are in the clutch of jealous ghosts. And you're far too intelligent for that."

She looked as intelligent as possible, and thanked me.

Chapter XXI

THE SHIP OF SOULS

I was irked by the coincidence of the mist arising only while the women had danced. That any human being could command the elements was absurd, yet I was perturbed. Often as the day drifted along, I went out to study the water both near and far, wondering in spite of myself if the fog could have been a communication with the unknown isle whereon we had found the wheel.

At sundown, McTeague caught me thus engaged. His mummy-like aspect bespoke the increasing unkemptness of his mind, and I scolded him for not taking better care of himself, corporally or otherwise.

He shrugged. "Blame Red, not me! The poor devil hasn't been in a body for so long that naturally he's bound to abuse mine—overdoing things, making up for lost time. Especially since it's not his own and he doesn't know quite how to handle it. Like a driver accustomed to model-T Fords suddenly plunked behind the wheel of a Mercedes."

"Oh, cut it out, Mike!"

"You know better," he said, rather pityingly.

Johnson had told him of Lady Fitz' dance. I

described my interviews with her and Flora. I said: "I'm sorry you believe the Cap'n's story instead of mine. But please for Jim's sake, keep him from further stunts like bringing out that statue. Else Flora and Lady Fitz will realize what he's been doing to them, and rebel. I'm doing my best to keep things as normal as possible until this trip's over and we've all parted our ways."

"Sure you are—and gumming the works with Portland cement. The success of the Cap'n's mission depends on Lady Fitz *et cetera* identifying themselves with Irsuley. Your meddling quackery makes them reject her as so much tosh. If I didn't know from experience that ghosts can't be laid simply by talk, I'd really have a grudge against you."

"Mike if I thought Benson would call of this hoax, I'd retire into the background. But to my way of thinking, he's only getting started. What he's done to the lot of you has been mere play; he's simply been testing his powers. Once he finds out how far he can lead you around—the sky may be the limit. I don't hate him, or any such thing—I consider him irresponsible, and I'm trying to protect him as much as any of you."

He shook his head with disgust. "When the Cap'n arranged for this little party through Jim, he miscalculated—and some of the damage may be his own fault because of it. The doctors in his day weren't much more than vets. They bandaged physical injuries, but they hadn't learned about splinting mental ones. The Cap'n thought he was getting one of the old-time first-aid boys when he signed you on—he didn't figure you'd go psycho-analytic."

"If you'd just stuck to old-time doctoring, Fitzie and her pals would have known almost instantly that Irsuley was authentic. They'd have let out the facts about her before they ever thought of going on the defensive—instead of clammng up because of your damned interference!"

"The Cap'n had to show them that statue! He thought that springing it on them without warning would shock them into revealing to each other that they knew of Irsuley. If they betrayed themselves—he could take it up from there. Otherwise they'd be certain to arrive at your conclusion—hypnotism. You know what bastards they are—they'd have to do something about it to show him he can't get away with anything. They might regret it later, but too late for Jim or me to fetch the treasure."

I said: "I doubt there is a treasure; if there is one, Benson planted it previously and our finding it won't prove anything one way or another. If there's not, we're off on a wild goose chase, expending valuable time in which something desperate may happen. And if Lady Fitz and her fellow victims discover that I've been lying to them to protect Benson—I'm branded as an incompetent, or his accomplice."

"You'd doubt a miracle if Jesus performed it on you in person! Ross, for God's sake—it'll be only a few days before we hit Rafferty's island. Nothing can happen and that glass vessel of King Arthur's—ships from the Osirian cult of the dead; the sun-barque which is the Ship of Souls."

Then I perceived that it was only a ragged

bank of sun-fired mist.

McTeague's hands fell away. "For a moment it looked like—Doc, the b'Jesus is plumb scared out of you!"

He gave me a comradely rap on the arm. "Sorry to've startled you. But I thought—"

He didn't have to tell me what he had thought, since for a breath I had shared the notion—that Rafferty's dead ship had broken from the dune. He said somewhat disappointedly: "Hell, it was only a freak of the fading light!"

He sighed. "Fog—but fair-weather fog. That's good. Red's beach is in a maze of reefs. If a storm caught us there—we wouldn't have a chance."

That brought him back to Rafferty and Bridget. He concluded: "When Red departs this realm of woe, I lose touch with the girl I love. I wonder if I'll join them later — when Charon ferries me over the Styx?"

He shook his broad shoulders, snorted an unhappy laugh, and sauntered away. The fog crept closer — but still there was no wind to speed it. It tiptoed silently and catlike in the wake of the Susan Ann — an enormous and cold grey cat. A fearsome and secretive sphinx with a riddle to pound.

As if called up in sympathy, a second fog arose — in my own head. My thoughts grew blurred. A numbing apathy settled on me. I was too torpid to diagnose this increasing lethargy. I could get but so far, then sink back to the starting point. Perhaps it was a mental barrier resultant from a distressed mind—an escape from frustration and weariness. Everything was becoming unreal, but not disturbingly so. It was rather pleasant — lulling. And perhaps it sired the illusion I was soon to see.

I took McTeague's advice and avoided Benson on pretense of illness. As the night advanced, I could not sleep. The lethargy was rest in itself of a phantom sort. I looked at the skulking fog, so very near us now, feeling like a very small bird charmed rigid by a basilisk, knowing but no longer caring that the coils were twisting closer.

And as fog at times will do, it flung back an echo of our ship's bell. Like the notes we had seemed to hear from the nameless wreck.

There was no moon, but the mist was lucent as if every molecule refracted a waning flame. It unfurled overhead like a great grey net flung by a giant to snare a butterfly. Then it dropped — as cold and wet as a winding-sheet on a man buried at sea.

I was helpless in it as a pupa in its cocoon. I simply stared into the translucent greyness, and it was enough.

Aft, there was a dark patch of clear night air showing as shadow, as a rift in the grey. It expanded gradually both in width and height, as if it were hearing down purposefully on the Susan Ann, enlarging with approach. And since everywhere the vapors were eddying, it was as though the shadow were not merely empty air but — substance — from which the fog was glancing. A form which would have been invisible were it not for the grey mist it cleaved and which, thrust aside, limned it.

Ship-like—

The wreck from the island!

My heart raced and rested. The wreck had been splintered under numberless tons of sand. Even had it not been crushed, none had been left on the island to dig it free, set it adrift and man it. My tired mind was wandering, that was all. My subconscious fancy speaking in waking dream.

I heard McTeague shout, a clear glad cry like the trumpet which incites to the hunt. The black ghost glided nearer, and now I was faintly pleased, vaguely amused at its resemblance to a ship — it was so perversely coincidental! Its prow nosed the Susan Ann's stern without shock. And still it slipped along, ghostly indeed, passing through the Susan Ann.

Passing through?

Or — fusing into her?

The shadowy bow swept toward me, parting and pushing the fog before it. I was strangely but not alarmingly elated — as if some inexpressible but fervent desire were about to be granted, and equally ineffably.

And I was dolorous as though that creeping blackness were the dragging scythe of the Destroying Angel.

It touched me as with a magic wand and rolled on. It was dry and warm, an electric warmth, I thought blearily. My skin prickled. There was a hum in my ears like the buzz of drowsy bees.

The clear pocket of air had forged to the Susan Ann's spirit. It went no further. Its pace had slowed to hers; it had fallen in step with her. It — rode her.

Breathlessly I awaited the promised fulfillment—

From between decks rang a raucous scream!

Like a knife it cleaved the fetters of the fog. The thin ones answering it were needles jabbing me to deeds. I did not recognize the first voice, but the other cries could have come only from Lady Fitz.

As I spurted toward the companion I heard McTeague shout urgently from the poopdeck for the watchman to take over the wheel. As I sprinted within, I heard the watchman's sharp refusal to lay hands on that muckin' Jonah. Deborah emerged in the passage as I breasted Lady Fitz's door.

"'Tis a' richt wi' Her Ledyship," she said. "She haired the scraugh, and Mr. Boriloff frightened her half asleep as she was, by sayin' the R-revolution is come!"

I sped on, overtaking startled others as I flew, including Pen. We found Benson in the crew's quarters, hemmed to the bulkhead by men only partly roused and surly. Their nightwear ranged from pajamas and underclothing to complete nudity save for socks.

Benson was white with surprise and guilt, and attempting to cover his confusion with incoherent blustering. From the threatening attitudes of the men and their rising babel of comment and outright accusation, the elements of a first-class brawl were on hand.

Evidently Benson, following the old Cap'n's lead, had taken it on himself to visit sleeping members of the crew to probe their unguarded thoughts—whether searching among them for stragglers from Irsuley's retinue, or to unriddle their animosity, I cannot say. But while the old

Cap'n's prying had scotched a mutiny in the old days, at present it was in peril of provoking one.

Neither Pen nor I were at all concerned with the dress and undress of the throng. She pushed me toward the man Darrell, who had screamed. He was sitting on the edge of his bunk bleating hysterically over and again that Benson had sought to strangle him in his sleep—goading others against the intruder. I mishandled him severely to bring him back to his senses.

It was not so much Pen's determined wedging of herself between the group picketing Benson as her voice, soaring in raging protest, that informed them of a woman's presence and diverted their thoughts to the fundamental consideration of modesty. The less clothed ones slipped either behind those more presentable or stole away.

Johnson had stamped in by now, wearing his robe. Deborah appeared. While he cleared out the men in short order, Deborah accompanied his shouts with a shrill Scotch scolding about the noise having given Her Ledyship the old-country skitters.

I had shaken Darrell into sullen silence. Pen and Henderson shepherd Benson to his cabin. I went to settle McTeague's mind anent the uproar before he impulsively abandoned the wheel and let the Susan Ann run aground.

On the way I jessed Flora's door. It was ajar. A head popped peeping out. I thought that perhaps the girl would inquire what the alarm had portended, and paused to reassure her. The head was Chadwick's and was retracted more quickly than ever a turtle's in its shell. The door closed softly.

Passing on, I surmized entirely falsely just what Chadwick might be doing in Flora's cabin at that ungodly hour. I went out to McTeague. The wheel was so sharply silhouetted against the fog that the red-head behind it was pale and ghostly insubstantial. His sunken eyes and bony cheeks, the intense stare with which he greeted me did not lessen the impression.

I told him simply that one of the men had suffered a nightmare, and McTeague could hear the details in the morning. I was glad to get to my cabin, for now, with the fog's spell off me, I realized the extent of my fatigue.

By morning the mist had disappeared entirely, and the phantom ship become only a dream.

Chapter XXII

RAFFERTY TAKES THE HELM

The Susan Ann was skirting shoal waters.

On the starboard side and looking forward, the freshening of the faded skies was as though we rode in on a crucible of liquid sapphire. On the port side the water lightened cloudily as though diluted with milk -- the shine of the white sands but a few fathoms below.

The air was so clear that the intense, indeed electric, azure of the sky was a pang in the eyes. McTeague was at the wheel, doing double duty for himself and the Cap'n. His eyes were narrowed to hairlines, and he looked less himself than ever before. But in the sunlight he was scarcely ghostly.

Johnson came to me. "Morgan brought me a complaint—if you'd call it that—this morning. Said he represented the entire crew and that it

demands unanimously that I put Benson and his guests under restraint. Said that the men are in fear for their lives from a sneak attack. I had all hands up before me, one by one, and each denied any connection with Morgan."

He declined both my office chair and a cigarette. "I don't know who started this story, but I've pieced it together from what Morgan said and the others let slip. It's too consistent to have originated in more than one mind. And maybe my men swore that they hadn't talked the matter over with Morgan but—I know them. Someone's rallying them. I'd give a lot," he said sternly, "to know who it is! Benson's not crazy, off-keel as he's been acting. But one more little fracas like last night's, and only God knows what'll follow!"

Then he gave me the story. It was my own deduction of Benson's hypnotism, but with the additional surmise that Benson was gulling Lady Fitz, McTeague, the Swastlows and Boriloff into committing murders for him, out of a mad revenge-motive on the descendants of the crew which had maltreated his great-grandfather. Therefore his dupes were potentially as dangerous as he, and the crew wanted all of them locked away -- to put it mildly.

"The argument's based mainly on the point that Benson went to so much trouble to assemble them," he said. "The ungrateful pups! They draw more pay in three months than they would in a year from the merchant marine! Well, Doctor — what do you recommend?"

For the moment I was nonplussed. I could hardly agree with the hypnotism angle, but on the other hand I could not cite Pen's unorthodox faith that a troupe of ghosts was posthumously fulfilling its destiny.

I trotted out the old tried and true method whereby I had allayed the suspicions of Flora and Lady Fitz. I invented an extremely technical and unintelligible explanation which made sense neither to Johnson nor myself, were he but educated in medical matters.

He asked impatiently if I couldn't boil it down into ordinary words. but I replied that medicine had progressed beyond Basic English. Glibly I dragged out every physiological and psychological term in my head. Finally, as though he understood the emotion, if not the thought, behind my gibberish — Johnson agreed that it might be better to temporize.

I dined with the crew, which was but one step less compromising than dining with the Cap'n. These men were loquacious enough, but from their sidelong glances I felt that my presence deterred them from uttering their more personal interests. Not a word was spoken regarding Benson's actions of the preceding night. I would have been more at ease if they had discussed the matter — unless they aired it, they could scarcely forget it.

After twilight we lay at anchor for the weaker blue of the shallows divided the sea on the starboard as well as the port side. The Susan Ann dallied in a lane between shoals. In the morning this lane led into a labyrinth of reefs. Benson, of course, was responsible for our entering the trap, even though he operated indirectly through McTeague, who was pilot. Johnson fluttered nervously about him like a gigantic gadfly, too worried to hold still for a minute. McTeague in his husky

Rafferty voice claimed that it was the ship which led him through the maze rather than the reverse, and glanced at me as if expecting me to volunteer the fact that he and I had seen the sunset sloop.

I told myself that should anything befall the Susan Ann among the reefs, Benson—who had already defiled her with his deviltry—would be her real slayer, not McTeague. And if McTeague had never been in these waters, then he was steering from charts memorized under hypnosis.

Johnson's obvious distrust was having its effect on the hands. Those on deck broke discipline frequently to peer overside and mutter comments which generally launched resentful scowls at Johnson and McTeague. Smithson reprimanded them, but indifferently.

Henderson happened along and snapped: "This is no muckin' play-house, boys! Stop slinging the lip and get some god damn' work done."

Smithson straightened from his position of ease. He snarled: "Who the hell's on watch, Henderson, me or you? We've each a definite time for singin' orders, so blow off!"

Henderson bristled under the looks the men gave him. "Well, by Christ, when I do come on I'll sweat your muckin' rear ends off!" He stalked away, his name added to the crew's black book—consistently kept and soon to be opened to us.

Pen was Benson's go-between, visiting, McTeague for a report on his progress. She paused to murmur that soon everything would be at rights—and to pat my hand furtively.

Still there was no wind, the sun now blisteringly bright in a sky incandescently aglow. Reefs lay on every side like the floes of an Arctic sea. They were vividly colorful as the patches on a peacock's widespread tail. The white of the sands, according to their depth, passed through an entire sub-spectrum of blues -- from cerulean and turquoise to the fugitive zaffer of nacre. Where the coral was massed were maroons and burgundies, vermilions and Iresine flares; cinnamon-brown and amber, metallic bronze and topaz yellow.

Shoal waters—desert of the sea! The sunken irid splotches stretched as far as eyes could travel. Among them were tiny islets, some of silvern sand alone, others of coral rock weathered grey and whitened by guano to miniature snow-capped peaks. A few were velvet-green with verdure, plumed with palms.

Lady Fitz, Flora, Boriloff and Chadwick were on the focsle deck, the Russian snapping pictures in which Flora managed to display a great deal of leg, to Her Ladyship's acid annoyance. When I climbed up to them they fell silent, as if I had interrupted extremely personal business. I went abaft to McTeague, who was more cordial.

He said: "Pirates discovered Red's island by accident when the king's ships chased them into these waters. Their ship was smaller, and they could take it through channels closed to their hunters. Neatest hangout of any."

Chuckling, he described Rafferty's island, concluding: "You can check the word-picture soon with the original. Then you'll know who's right or not—the Cap'n or you."

I said: "I'm glad the weather's fair. I hope

we light out of this neighborhood quickly. Even the lightest breeze can spit us on these coral spears."

He promised: "We won't stay long. Just long enough to pick up the treasure, turn around, and scoot out -- homeward bound. And everyone happy."

If anything could have convinced me that the Cap'n's story was the true one, it was the red-head's boundless luck at navigation. How McTeague managed to worm the ship through that gantlet of knives was only a hair's breadth short of the miraculous. We dropped anchor again at sunset, but Johnson was dissatisfied and had his men stretch hawsers to the coral fence surrounding us.

Pen talked with me in the darkness, reporting that Lady Fitz and Swastlow had spent less time eating -- which considering their appetites was unusual—than in narrowly watching Benson's every movement. "Like two kids aloofly inspecting a third who's just moved into their block," She put it. "Something's in the air, Ross, and I'm all up in the air with it. Thank God, Mike says we'll hit the island soon."

I replied that I hoped he didn't mean it literally.

When I encountered Lady Fitz on the subsequent morning, she requested coldly that I step aside and allow her to pass. I stopped for a chat with Swastlow, but he bobbed from his deck chair and flusteringly excused himself to go below. I waylaid Flora. She hesitated when I inquired what had come over the others, then said that it was probably the mood they were in. After all, there were times on a cruise when one tired of seeing even his best friend.

She eyed me guardedly as if debating whether to come out with something much more pertinent, and decided against it. We spoke listlessly for a few minutes on trifling topics until she could take leave gracefully. Several times I caught her absently fingering her cheeks and hair—not so much from vanity than as though she wondered if they hadn't changed during the night.

Shortly after noon of the following day we sighted Rafferty's island. McTeague pointed it out to me -- a formidably barren rock near the horizon, hemmed by others smaller and, in their verdancy, less forbidding.

Pen was beside us. Silently she indicated the others on the main deck -- Boriloff uneasily specifying the rock to an unhappy Lady Fitz, although recognizing some socially inferior acquaintance. And Swastlow, farther away, pressed to rail as if magnetized to the isle. Flora was promenading Chadwick up and down, convertly gazing our way to ascertain if McTeague were exhibiting jealousy. I doubt he even saw her.

Pen said: "They know the island. Ross. Ir-suley was no dream!"

I didn't argue. At sundown we were as near the rock as we could get. Benson surprised us together, and nodded to me civilly. Now that the objective was sighted he could tolerate me.

McTeague said: "Well, Cap'n -- there's my haven. Red's ship could pass through that cut over yonder, but the Susan Ann can't. We'll have to take the dory the rest of the way!"

"Now!" Benson cried eagerly.

"No, not now." McTeague answered. "It'll be

dark in a few minutes. And something tells me to wait until morning." He sniffed at the isle as if scenting some danger.

Pen continued: "Yes Father wait. Don't do anything that'll stir any further censure. We're too close to the finish to make any false steps now."

Benson trembled as if about to let loose a volley of rage, but controlled himself. He slipped an arm about Pen's waist. She flinched ever so slightly. "Right," he said -- but morosely.

At dusk not only the Irsuley dreamers were staring at Rafferty's island, but many of the crew as well. Pen's hand tightened on mine. "They know," she whispered. "Or is it that they've noticed the others watching, and are curious?"

The island was little more than a mile away. It dominated the lesser rocks as though it were an enthroned king before whom they bowed in homage. Twilight and distance tinged it with lilac and threw mantles of color on the others. It was a purpled sovereign, an amethyst monarch holding court with lieges of jacinth and jasper, rose-quartz and ruby on a floor of jade.

Night blackened the islands, the deepening darkness like the shadow of vast wings swooping low.

Chapter XXIII FLORA

We met in the dining salon at Benson's special request for a midnight supper—in celebration, he said, of our arrival. He was in extraordinary high good humor. It was the first time I had ever seen his old Cap'n face at all bouyant. Had it not been for his neighing tone and archaic idiom, one would have thought him entirely Big Jim.

McTeague beamed at him delightedly, but Pen was troubled. Perhaps she feared that something might befall to change his mood instantly, without any loss of intensity, from light-heartedness to fury.

I was as uneasy as she. While the art of dissemblance was second-nature to Flora, Boriloff and Chadwick, it was less developed in Lady Fitz and the Rev. Dr. Swastlow. Despite their pretensions they were not enjoying themselves, and I sensed for myself what Pen had been dreading—some plot had been hatched and was hovering in the air, ready to pounce.

To Boriloff gaiety, whether real or assumed, meant one thing—liquor. Under its influence he told stories and sang. Lady Fitz sought to modulate his mounting exhilaration by meaning looks and sharp little rebukes, but he ignored her. He became boisterous. But just as he was becoming a little too boisterous—he wanted to perform a Cossack dance on a table—he plunged down like the stick of an exploded rocket into black depths of despair.

He clapped his hands to his temples and rocked back and forth. "I remember," he moaned. "*Durak*—idiot that I am—I remember!"

He stared round-eyed. "It is my dream of before the storm, *da*. The snakes which warn of death to my family! So most horrid that the mind refused the remembering! But at this time I recall, because brandy has turned the mind turvy the topsy."

Lady Fitz asked, "Alexis, what is it? Tell me!"

He swerved to Benson. "The snakes," he said in recitativ monotone. "Three of them on the water. Swimming! Into one together they roll. It

bites the tail, spins to me like the hoop. The hum of bees it makes on waves; the hum speaks. 'Alosha, sinochuk,' it says, 'behold me. I come, har-binger, of evil. Now you know.' The snake scales on the hoop have pattern. Criss cross, continuous around. Like—"His eyes bulged, and he gulped as if choking on something bitten off but not chewed. "Like"

He dropped on his knees, hands clasped tightly. He beat them on his chest, his head thrown back and his eyes closed. "The black wheel!" he sang in as beautiful a baritone as ever graced the Metropolitan.

Then pitched forward senseless.

Lady Fitz wailed and flurried to him. McTeague observed with admiration, his voice tremulous notwithstanding: "Good old Alexis, a trouper to the last--Doc, will you help pry Her Barnacleship off him so we can remove him to his bunk?"

Lady Fitz allowed me to draw her away, but she reached despairingly to the unconscious man as though we were sundering them forever. The Swastlows and Chadwick consoled her. Boriloff was very flushed and his pulse racing; I suspected that he was running a fever and that I might have a case of acute alcoholism on my hands.

McTeague and I lifted him with difficulty—he must have topped two hundred, lean though he was. McTeague said: "I always thought Alexis a bit thick, but in his capacity as a doormat, I know it. On with the dance!" he called to the others as we plodded to the door. "Let joy be unrefined!"

We passed down the companion. He panted: "What's the verdict now, Doc? Dear little Alexis, the big elephant, had that dream before the hurricane—before any of us had discovered the black wheel."

"Boriloff didn't remember the dream until a moment ago," I restored, breathless as he. "Strange, isn't it, that premonitions aren't substantiated until after they've worked themselves out?"

"How else can they be, you boob? But prophecies have been recorded at the time they were made, and the writings checked when they worked out," he insisted, as we thumped the Russian abed.

"Then they were significantly indefinite ones, I parried. "I'll wager that none were explicit as to the time, place and persons involved."

We returned to the festivities. Everyone was exactly as when we had left; nobody seemed to have so much as breathed in our absence. Benson inquired perfunctorily about Boriloff.

McTeague said: "He's plastered enough to hold wallpaper, which under certain conditions can be a good thing."

Lady Fitz restrained her misgivings as to her paramour's well-being. She waxed suddenly confidential. "I have something to confess, Captain Benson. It bears on poor dear Alexis' dream. A most strawd'n'ry coincidence!"

Chadwick stiffened alertly, like a dog pricking its ears. Lady Fitz adjusted her voice to a coo. "Ah, yes. I too have dreamed. I have dreamed of —"

She broke off tantalizingly. Chadwick was smirking, Swastlow picking at one hand with the other as though about to purchase it and testing its quality. Flora wriggled restlessly.

Pen saw the trap before McTeague or I. Benson was craning toward the Englishwoman, all rapt anticipation. Pen started to babble something

to fend off the forthcoming revelation. But Lady Fitz went on relentlessly:

"I also have dreamed of the black wheel!" And silkily: "Shall I tell you what I've dreamed of it," Her tone was that of the spider inviting the fly.

Flora settled into a most uncomfortable pose. Swastlow left off the fingering of his hand and coughed nervously as though to attract Lady Fitz' attention.

Chadwick said smoothly: "We're all most interested, I'm sure."

Lady Fitz beamed at him. She crooned: "I dreamed, Captain Benson, that my name was Irsuley. I made a vow on a black wheel. And the wheel was on a ship which men from another dared sink. One of them—I dreamed—was your great-grandfather. But perhaps you know the dream already?"

She waited. Benson's eyes sparked but he held silent. She said: "The good doctor must have told you!"

Pen cut in hurriedly, rattling along without pause for punctuatory breath: "Father you know how late it is and you look so terribly tired that I think you ought to go to bed instead of wearing yourself out by staying up so late and—"

Flora said wickedly: "Etiquette, Penelope! It's ill-bred to interrupt!" And looked so satisfied as if she had driven a poniard into Pen's heart.

Benson caught the drift, or rather, he was caught in it. He asked sharply: "What's this, eh? What's doing?" And lifted a hand to silence Pen.

Lady Fitz no longer cooed but said flatly, business-like: "I have told you what I have dreamed, Captain Benson. It was the very same thing which Mr. Boriloff has dreamed. He and I must be affinities indeed to have dreamed alike, don't you think? But, ah—I have other affinities on board besides Alexis. Dear me, yes! The Reverend Swastlow is one of them. He, too, knows of Irsuley! Isn't it so?" she asked, facing him.

Flora cried hotly: "Harold, speak up! Tell him!" But the most that Swastlow could manage was to swallow heavily, nod furtively, then flash an anguished look at Benson.

Flora gusted to her feet. "And I've dreamed the same, too! And so has Chad! Dr. Fenimore mollified us with long-winded explanations that threw us off the scent. Lady Fitz-Manton and Chad that he did it deliberately, to help you. Maybe—maybe not."

She bestowed me a glance of uncertainty. She said: "But it did help you, Captain Benson, by keeping us from telling each other about our dreams. Or we'd have known a long time ago what you're trying to do to us."

Benson's jaw dropped, his brows foundered frowning in his blue eyes. He moved to arise, but Pen's firm hand on his shoulder kept him down.

Lady Fitz was peering past us. She beckoned. Boriloff was standing at the door, smiling expectantly as if awaiting applause. McTeague's fingers closed painfully on my wrist.

Flora said: "Maybe you can explain our dreams, Captain Benson, more satisfactorily than the doctor."

But Benson did not speak. He looked painfully up to Pen, then over to McTeague and me. His eyes narrowed at me; his mouth twisted.

Chadwick arose and took the floor. Boriloff crept in while he spoke and went over to stand behind Lady Fitz' chair. She clung woodenly to his hand. He saw McTeague watching him and bowed sardonically. The red-head's fingers dug more deeply in my wrist.

Chadwick was saying: "Never mind the explanations, Captain. My friends know them already. And we know your motive in tricking us to believe we've dreamed. It's—to prove yourself sane at our expense!"

Flora gasped in corroboration: "You dared use me!"

Still Benson made no reply, but deep in his throat rumbled a growl. Pen snatched her hand from his shoulder and flew between him and Chadwick. "For God's sake, Chad! Watch what you're saying!"

"I am." He surveyed her insolently. "I'm choosing my words with utmost care. Be sure of that!"

She bit into her lower lip, then flashed up a hand to slap him. One of Benson's stringy arms came to life and swept her aside before she could strike Chadwick. He looked at the dark man as one will eye a scorpion before grinding it under his heel. Slowly, as though his mouth were melting, it ran into a wicked grimace.

Chadwick shone fondly on him, but took care to edge warily backward. He said: "Yes, Captain—hate me! Think of the snake I've been in your bosom! Hate me—enough to rush into something regrettable. It will only prove my contention. You've had your way with us so far, but you've reached your peak. From now on—"

Again Pen caught Benson's shoulders as he stirred, the growl louder in his throat. "Father—no! Don't let him provoke you! Can't you see—?"

My numb wrist was tingling from McTeague's grasp. He dropped it and oozed snakily toward Chadwick, who sidestepped defensively, tensing for the coming tussle. But Flora thrust herself between them.

"Don't you touch Chad! He's right, and you can't stop him now—nor any of us! Nobody," she was shrieking, "can stop us!"

McTeague's face, close to hers, was so hotly wrathful that she would have shrivelled. It but kindled an answering spark. Beautiful and blazing, she gripped his arms. I realized then how a fire-cracker must feel as sparks twinkle up its fuse. Instinctively I inched toward Benson and Pen.

"If you'd been decent to me," Flora shouted, "if you'd been just a little bit kind, that one time when I asked you to walk me to my door—I'd have believed anything you'd have told me! I wouldn't have spoken my suspicions to Chad! But no, you've always been too damned good for me, a low-caste nobody—but all the same a somebody when it comes to serving your ends—"

Her long, scarlet nails glittered across his face. He caught her hands. Swastlow grunted an expostulation and struggled up, waving futilely. Flora did not struggle. She relaxed against McTeague, her head lolling on his wide shoulder. Like a blotter she absorbed his presence.

Two little worms of blood explored his cheek, met and mated. He said sternly to Chadwick: "Stay on, Buddy, while you're able."

I was so near Pen that she could reach out and touch me, her fingers trembling.

Chadwick asked Benson: "Shall I say on, as Mike advises? Or shall we come directly to the point?"

Swastlow, wavering weakly in the background, whimpered: "No, no!" Boriloff turned majestically and smote him with the glove of scorn. The fine wrinkles about Benson's eyes, the grooves from nose to mouth, deepened. He signalled for Chadwick to proceed.

Chadwick said: "As Flora's told you—I've dreamed of Irsuley. Dreamed—or remembered?"

"I'll admit that I was perplexed at first—but when I talked with my friends, the truth dawned on me. Your procedure in every instance was the same—that was your mistake. Each of us sees the wheel in your cabin. You ask us to touch the slimy thing, and you want to know if we see anything in it. You tell us very cleverly what we should see, and we think that we do see something—coming not from you but from the wheel itself or from memories. Cock and-bull about your great-grandfather meeting up with a black goddess.

"After we leave you, we have dreams—custom-made. The doctor calms our fears by rubber psychology. Then we start catching ourselves doing cockeyed little stunts nobody in his right mind would do. Soon it's whispered among the crew that we're a little—touched.

"It's like the practical joke wherein a fellow warns each of two people that the other is insane and must be humored, then introduces them and laughs at the results. Well, it's been no joke to the Swastlows, Lady Fitz and Boriloff. Nor is it a joke to me. I've brown-nosed you long enough, my dear Captain. Now I'm fed up. I've got your number, and henceforth you'll knuckle under to me."

Lady Fitz jumped up, prepared to flee Benson's fury. Boriloff clung to her, rather than the reverse. Swastlow drew behind them, peeping around them. Flora sighed and reluctantly pushed away from McTeague.

But Benson merely said calmly: "Ye see what ye've done, Fenimore, with yere everlasting meddling?" And to Chadwick: "Ye've spoken no news, lad. I've nicked yere game all along! Now I tell ye this—we'll go this minute to the island. We'll find the treasure. That will prove who's right."

Chadwick said disappointedly: "It'll prove nothing except that you've put it there beforehand."

Lady Fitz rather disgustingly struck away Boriloff's hands. She said coldly to Benson: "I for one wouldn't dream of leaving this ship in your company! Especially after dark, as now."

Boriloff put in his oar. "You forget perhaps the man you tried the choking?"

Their baiting of Benson so far had taken them nowhere. Chadwick looked some message to Flora. She wafted herself but a few inches from Benson as if challenging him to lay a finger on her. McTeague made a strangling noise but held motionless.

Flora said: "Oh yes, we'll leave this ship—but not with you! You'll put the launch over the side, and Chad will take us to the nearest port."

Pen laughed, the chuckle of icewater. "You'd never make port in the launch! We're miles and miles from—!"

Flora replied as coldly: "We're willing to chance it. Certainly it's no more dangerous than staying on here." She elevated her nose and glided over to her ill-concealed brother.

"God has protected us thus far," Lady Fitz said. "He will not abandon us now." And Benson's rage exploded.

He thumped his fists on his thighs. "No, begod! Ye'll not leave this ship, whatever else ye may do!"

They had been waiting for this. Chadwick asked tenderly: "And why not?"

Pen touched Benson as he climbed erect. She said swiftly: "Because it's unfair! You accuse my father, but you won't let him prove that you're wrong!" Benson turned fuming toward her, but she rushed on: "If you left now and were lost at sea—how could we ever explain it? And if you should make port safely, you'd all combine to damage my father's character!"

McTeague snarled: "Say one word against him when you're ashore, and every last cent of the Benson millions will run you down!"

Swastlow craned around his human barricade.

Benson shouted: "Quiet there!"

"We—ah—have another reason for leaving. This ship has been—ah, rather hastily repaired—and is not very seaworthy. A little wind in these waters would break her up on the reefs. That's what Johnson said."

Benson shrilled: "Forget that lily-livered lubber! If ye leave now, ye blacken my name and ruin me; I lose my ship and Johnson loses a comfortable berth. Here's my one and only chance to clear myself. I ask ye but one day more—"

"Isn't holding us against our will—kidnapping?" Lady Fitz trilled to Chadwick.

"I'm Cap'n, ye painted Jezebel, and I'm law here! Ye'll do my word or I'll lock ye away! Is it clear?"

Chadwick laughed. "You'll never get away with it—Captain." He pronounced the title as if it were supreme insult.

"Indeed not," Lady Fitz agreed whole-heartedly. "What use in pursuing your plan now, when we know that Irsuley is only a fiction?"

McTeague chuckled. "Irsuley a fiction! You've accepted her into yourself. Lady Fitz, and getting rid of her is another matter. She's worked through you before, and she'll do it again—in spite of everything. Including prayers."

"Mike!, I said. But he had turned to Benson. "Let 'em go. Cap'n! They won't get far before Irsuley drives them back!"

Chadwick's black eyes darted swiftly about as if seeking a tangible loophole. He scoffed: "The treasure mayn't be on the island. If you didn't put it there, and if it's been hidden two hundred years—someone may have come along and lifted it."

"If the radio were working," McTeague retorted, "I'd think you were right. You could have wired somebody to beat us to it. But it's there all right."

Flora snapped: "I wouldn't stay here if you provided me with an armed guard, Captain."

Both Benson and McTeague knotted their hands and glared. She simpered and drifted toward the door. "Well, I've struck up a few acquaintances

among your men. They're more my sort. Order them not to help us, and see whom they'll obey! Harold," she lilted, "are you coming? Lady Fitz-Manton? Alexis—Chad?"

I could hear Benson's teeth gritting as he spoke through them. "Ye'll not pass through that doorway, girl, if ye set any store by yer freedom."

"I'll not?" she flashed back. "Order me around just because you're captain?" She laughed. "Idiot! Madman!"

Unconcernedly, she stepped over the coaming. Benson whimpered. Pen, McTeague and I leaped at him as he launched after Flora. He slipped through our hold, his coat ripping. Flora screeched and ran.

We flew after Benson, Pen calling him softly. Chadwick hurried after us, laughing triumphantly. I heard Swastlow groaning. Flora slammed the companion door in Benson's face; as we caught up with him, she was pushing from without and he from within. He fought us off, a blow from his wildly thrown fist catching me across the eyes and tumbling me against Pen. McTeague could not manage him alone, and he drove his shoulder against the door, hurling it wide and reeling outside. I heard Flora screaming.

There were answering shouts from various quarters as we piled out on deck. Lady Fitz was with us now and calling for Boriloff, her face viciously alight. Benson had caught Flora. She pulled from him and her dress tore, and the flimsy fabric beneath it. From shoulder to waist she was bare.

As if from nowhere the entire ship's personnel had appeared. Chadwick virtuously joined our attempt to subdue Benson, and McTeague turned upon him. Men dived in to halt the fray, and for a few seconds there was spirited battle.

Flora was singing from the rail: "He's crazy, tried to kill me—crazy, tried to kill me—" She was more demented at that instant than the lot of us.

Then it was over, Chadwick and McTeague parted and glaring, Benson pinioned by Henderson and me, Pen patting his cheeks and murmuring brokenly. Flora was still chanting. I dropped Benson's arm and hurried toward her to quiet her. Pen was crying: "It's all a put-up job, Captain Johnson!"

Flora screamed and raced from me, colliding against some of the crew who goggled at her bare breast and happily, if somewhat bewilderedly, welcomed her. They fenced her from me, stepping before her. One of them shoved me back.

Chadwick was shouting: "Johnson, Benson tried to kill the girl! You've got to put him away."

Barely I heard Pen's dissenting cry above the abrupt cries from the crew, seconding Chadwick. Flora was sobbing—not that I could hear her above the tumult, but only see her; Swastlow was scuttling toward her, his hands lifted in spintserish dismay. Henderson raised his voice above the others, yelling for quiet. Johnson was uneasily looking from this side to that and chewing his knuckles.

Clearly Lady Fitz said: "Either you put him in chains, or you let down the launch for us. We're not safe here. I demand it, Captain Johnson!"

"Lock her up too!" someone bellowed. "She's nutty as he is!"

Flora's tears were having strong effect on the

men surrounding her. I heard the snick of a clasp-knife and caught the flicker of its blade. Collins was threading through the men toward Benson. I shouted warningly and sped for him. Those in front of him thought that I was charging them, and rushed me. We fell and rolled in so inextricable a tangle that our flailing arms interwove, hooking one into the other and missing their marks.

Henderson was kicking at my assailants, but his foot caught me impartially as well. My cries of, "Collins—knife!" were choked in utterance. Collins must have reached Benson during the confusion, for I heard foggily, as I struggled, sudden uproar from men and women both.

We rolled, the weight of the mass bearing upon me fettering my hands; I could not strike out. I was surprised when momentarily Henderson's face brushed mine; he had been pulled into the welter. As we spun I caught a streaking glimpse of Perry and Collins battling, saw Chadwick up on the ratlines well out of danger. My head thumped on the planks. Amid the green and white lights of the jar I saw Lady Fitz at the rail, her hands over her eyes. She was rocking back and forth and shrieking for Alexis.

A blast of dynamite caught me under the chin and I relaxed in dazed surprise. The tumbling men passed on without me.

The first thing I noticed as my head cleared was Deborah perched atop the deck-house, watching with grim satisfaction, her feet dangling. I don't know how she got there—later she said that she had jumped, which was unthinkable. To make the picture complete she should have been knitting.

I sat up, mustering fresh energy for a return into the storm, in which everyone save Chadwick, Lady Fitz and the Swastlows were involved. Stupidly I watched Benson prize himself from the reeling, bellowing fighters. They were striking indiscriminately; the brawl had developed into a free-for-all.

Benson talked purposefully toward Flora. I believe he was furious enough to kill her then. Slam Bang snaked from the milling combatants, raced felinely to Benson—intending, I think, to catch and hold him back.

In a lightning flash, Flora altered. As a drop of water whiffs away in steam from hot iron, so her terror passed. She was—and for the final time—that marvellous beauty who had danced on deck.

She tore from Swastlow. She—blazed—at Benson. More flame than woman, every cell of her body seemingly radiant, casting off green glimmers.

"You would dare touch me again!" she cried deep-voiced. "You—who held me back before! Once you set your will before mine—and suffered! Now you will repeat that mistake?"

She flowed toward him. "I, Irsuley, need you no longer! Rafferty will finish what lies before!"

Up she threw her arms in a swift but fluctuating—heiratic—gesture. Slam Bang leaped before Benson, shielding him with his black body. He croaked: "No, Ezzulie! He's mah Cap'n—don't do it!"

But already Flora's hands were streaking down, as though she were hurling something very heavy and invisible. Slam Bang threw fending hands over his face.

Simultaneously Lady Fitz had been crying: "Stop!" And more shrilly: "Stop, I say!" Now as Slam Bang leaped convulsively and dropped back, she vented a wordless shriek so shrill that it siffling in my ears.

With a prolonged, shuddering gasp, as though gigantic talons ruthlessly wrung out his breath, Slam Bang fell, heaved once, and lay flung as if crushed. That terrible visage which was not Flora's burned down on him, swung lifting to Benson. Again she raised her arms—

It was probably a twitch of the nerves of my eyes, but at that time I thought green phosphorescence rippled over Lady Fitz. "Impostress! You use my secrets against my aims? It is I who am Iruley—not you!"

It was not her voice but leaping flame expressed in singing sound. At that second the shrieking, struggling men were far and unreal. "You have slain an innocent man, binding me beyond the vow!"

Pen was beside Benson, clinging dishevelled to him as both poised in arrested action, staring at Flora and Lady Fitz. The Englishwoman's arms were sweeping upward, faster ever than Flora's, so swiftly that they blurred. They hurled the unseen weight.

There was another flicker, another jump of the eye-muscles. I saw Lady Fitz, not glowing at all gaping with incredulous horror as Flora sank slowly, dreamily, to the deck and spread out gracefully—beautiful and asleep or dead. Lady Fitz cowered back to Swastlow, who wailed and shrank from her, dropped on his knees beside his sister.

He was shaking her; I heard the sound of shots. Someone was firing in the air. I saw men closing in on Benson and Pen. I struggled up to their aid. Benson did not resist. His eyes were on Slam Bang. I arrived at the edge of a semicircle. The fight was finished. Benson, Pen, McTeague and Johnson—Henderson, MacKenzie and a few of their supporters were being held with arms twisted behind them by others. Chadwick had swung down from the ratlines, gun in hand. He took place beside Smithson and some others inflated with importance. They had guns also and were appraising their captives.

Perry lay tumbled and motionless, blood jetting rhythmically from his gashed throat. Another man was prone beside him and Collins writhing under him and sobbing.

The deck lights flared. I slipped unchallenged to Perry, too late to save him. The carotid artery had been severed along with the windpipe, and as I bent over him his back arched in a bubbling cough, the death-rattle, breaking from his neck rather than his lips in a little shower of blood.

I gave my attention to the man athwart Collins, who was clawing at me and snivelling. I shoved Collins down and let him snivel. The second man had been knifed in the lungs and was bleeding internally.

Urgently I tugged on the trouser-leg of the fellow standing nearest me. He was one of Smithson's elect and lofty with self-esteem.

"Quick! Help me get this man to the bay! I've got to operate."

He kicked my hand away. "He's one o' Ben-

son's spies—leave 'im lay!"

"He'll die without instant attention." I shouted to Chadwick and Smithson, but they callously gave no heed. Much as I disliked the risk entailed, I would have to operate on the spot. Already the stabbed man's face was purpling; he was strangling on his blood.

I scrambled up and sped for my office. I realized only subconsciously that Chadwick and his allies were judging the Benson faction by kangaroo-court procedure. I ran against men emerging from the passage, their arms laden with weapons. One dropped his burden and seized me.

"Man stabbed," I panted, wrenching from him. "Got operate quick." He let me tear myself away. When I returned with my surgical kit, the stabbed man was dead.

I went to Slam Bang, letting Collins suffer awhile—he was merely scratched and it was he more than anyone who was responsible for the present situation.

Slam Bang's heart must have been weak. His fear of Flora, as the avenging Ezzulie, had killed him. What had slain Flora was at the moment beyond me; perhaps an autopsy could tell.

I was sorry for little Swastlow. He had watched throughout my examination and now, as with so many others in the same plight, could not believe that his lovely sister was dead. He sat back on his heels, stroking Flora's hair. She was only asleep. God wouldn't let her die. If He did, then there wasn't any God.

Smithson's men stalked over to us, pried Swastlow from his sister and took charge of the sobbing Lady Fitz. She had folded over into the prenatal huddle of mental retrogression. Listlessly she submitted to them. Swastlow beat his pudgy fists at her.

"Killer! Murderess! She-devil!"

The men swore and cuffed him, heightening his hysteria. For his own sake I sought to subdue him, but the men snarled that they'd tone him down faster than medicine, and did so promptly with rabbit-punches. He sagged in their arms. They tossed him at Benson's feet.

Deborah had been plucked from her gallery seat and was lined among the captives. She seemed sternly enjoying herself, as one of the damned might enjoy the justly deserved torments of an enemy.

Johnson was yelling to be let loose and bellying commands at which the men laughed or mimicked with lumbering farcicality. Lady Fitz was outraged when thrust among the prisoners. She screamed: "But I'm with you, Chadwick! I helped you!"

Chadwick laughed at her gullibility. Smithson crowded me, grunting: "Get over and tend Collins. Mason—Barnes! Keep your eyes on him!" and when they came running: "Wait!"

He gripped me, boring his gaze into mine. His breath was rank. "We need you to look after us, but don't try nothin' funny. You'll be watched! The first sign of anythin' off-color, and you're done for—get that?"

I said nothing. His eyes slitted. "Answer, damn you—and call me Sir. I'm Captain! Don't forget it!"

I jerked from him and strode to Collins. Barnes and Mason hovered, alert. Collins could not

bear the sight of blood—if it was his own—and had fainted.

"Boriloff!" I heard Chadwick snap. "Where's the Russian?"

Lady Fitz left off her indignant protestations. Probably she imagined her lover embarked on a fearless one-man rescue-project, and she played for such time as he might require by slurring her cries of dissent to raucous gutter epithets. But she need not have incurred Chadwick's vicious blow across the mouth. Boriloff was on the focsle deck hiding under the launch. When the men found and fetched him, she aimed the barrage of appellation at him. But he was looking to where Flora lay.

Louder than Benson's ranting, Johnson was howling: "You'll never get away with this! When we get to port—"

One of Smithson's bullies put in: "You and your muckin' pals ain't never gettin' to no port!" "Right!" Chadwick raised his voice so that it carried clearly. "It's either you or us. Once you're ashore, we don't stand a chance. With Benson backing you, you'll buy the verdict of any court. Therefore we can't hold you even for ransom. Pity! What happens to you will be"—he waved airily—"oh, another unexplained tragedy of the sea. You just—disappeared."

I heard McTeague's laugh, I thought at the dark man's ludicrous posturing.

Someone yelled: "Toss 'em into the drink!"

Smithson silenced Benson with vengeful slaps. I knew how Pen would react to it, and forgot both Collins and my opportune position of neutrality which—if I preserved it—enabled me to help the prisoners. I dropped dressings and scissors and started up as Pen cried to Smithson: "Oh, you miserable coward!"

He lifted a heavy hand to strike her. Barnes shoved me on my knees again, his pistol digging my back. Chadwick had caught Smithson's wrist.

"Lay off!" he spat. "Nobody touches her—that clear?"

Smithson swung snarling at him. McTeague's mocking laugh swerved him back. "You're damn well right!" McTeague said. "You'll keep your mitts off all of us—if you've got any sense!"

"Hey?" Smithson's face puckered blackly.

McTeague grinned as if at a comic mask. "You've overlooked something, you and Black-beard Chadwick. Who steered you into this jigsaw puzzle—this rat-trap of reefs? I did! And who's going to take you out? Nobody knows the passages but me."

"Oh, I guess we'll manage," Chadwick said. But he looked sidelong, uneasily, at Smithson.

"The hell you will! All you'll manage it to pile us on a reef! And you'll sink with the rest of us."

McTeague chuckled at Chadwick's hasty glance amidships. "The boats? They won't hold the half of you! Some will have to stay behind and drown—and there's going to be hell raised when it comes to deciding who they'll be. Nobody's going to like being ditched."

Like Chadwick, he amplified his tone. "If you take to the boats, you'll have to cut each other's throats to get a seat. Real friendly-like—"

Smithson spat and caught one of McTeague's ears, twisting it savagely. McTeague observed pleasantly: "That hurts."

"Does it now?" Smithson asked with affection, and twisted more strongly. "We've got little ways of makin' you toe the line, mister!"

McTeague winced but did not stop grinning. "You think so! But when I get hurt, I lose my memory."

Smithson gaped, his grip relaxing. "Yes," McTeague went on, more gently: "Pain does funny things to me."

Chadwick tapped Smithson's shoulder, and slid into his place. "Enough pain might affect you differently."

"Nope," McTeague replied, tipping back to rub his reddening ear on the arm of the man holding him. "Hurt me too much, and you'll do permanent damage. How can a permanently disabled pilot steer a ship? Then, too, I wouldn't want to live unless I were in perfect health—I couldn't enjoy myself. So I'd get suicidal. Maybe while at the wheel."

Chadwick turned speculatively toward Pen. Her white face shone like a flower among weeds. She shrank from him. Lady Fitz squeaked and went limp, but her swoon wrenched her twisted arms, and she came out of it immediately. Mason kicked me warningly.

McTeague said: "If you're thinking of the indirect method, don't. You know how soft-hearted I am. It grieves me to see my friends hurt. How can I concentrate on my business when I'm grieving? So just be as nice to all of us as you can—and maybe I'll get you out of this jam."

"That's what you say now!" one of Smithson's bullies sneered.

McTeague snapped: "Just try something—and see what it gets you!"

"Aw, chuck 'em over!" another called.

But Chadwick and Smithson looked sharply at each other. They withdrew a few paces, Smithson beckoning his favored associates. They held brief, whispered parley. Chadwick returned to McTeague and bowed ironically. "Score one in your favor. You're safe."

"For the present," McTeague agreed dryly.

Chadwick shrugged. He asked, less urbanely: "What did you expect?" You've gained nothing—only a little time. Prolonged the agony," he added, smiling at Pen.

She looked at me. So did McTeague as he replied: "A lot can happen in a little time, Chad."

I knew his thought. Once we were out of the reefs and in open water, we would have nothing further to exchange for our safety. But guarded though I might be, in my capacity as physician I had unique opportunity to turn the tables against the mutineers.

Chadwick scoffed: "Ah, I see! You really believe the Irsuley twaddle! An African grigri is going to save you! Dream on!"

He sidled to Benson, who was silent now but bolting defiance from his eyes. "Or are you going to hypnotize the crew, one by one? No, dear Captain—you'll be shut up where they'll never see you! Mastermind!"

He resumed the whispered consultation with Smithson. I finished dressing Collins' cuts and arose. Barnes' gun felt grafted to my spine. He warned: "I'm keepin' track 'f every flap 'f your eyelashes!"

Well, it's your job," I said equably, knowing

that however severely he maintained his vigil, he could not prevent my gaining the upper hand—unless he knew something of medicine. Even the most beneficial prescription, if mishandled, can be deadly!

While Smithson arranged for the segregation and policing of the prisoners, I attended his men's hurts cheerfully and ethically, insuring my precarious liberty until such time as it was worth risking.

But as I worked I remembered the Borgias. They were never so considerate of their victims as when they were poisoning them.

Chapter XXIV

THE WHITE FOLK

Some sage has remarked that nobody is really tired who does not regard getting in bed as a new experience, by which standard I computed my weariness as the night hobbled spastically along. Even though the captives had been parcelled away, there was further violence to keep me busy.

During mopping-up operations some of the men objected to Smithson's promotions in rank, which resulted in a number of persons becoming thoroughly mauled and sent me for treatment. Chadwick's suggestion that an election of officers might settle the problem peaceably launched a political campaign wherein the more lusty candidates insured their votes by pugilistic persuasion—and another stream of injured flowed to the sick-bay.

Then there were some who backslid in Benson's favor. Before their revolt was quashed, two met death and were weighted and heaved overboard with the bodies of Slam Bang, the stabbed man and Perry. Before Flora was cast after the others, the men behaved so abominably that I came close to losing my self-control. Only the thought of Pen kept me steady.

Benson's cabin was looted, the old Cap'n's portrait cut from its frame and hung derisively upside down from the jackstaff. Smithson and Chadwick displayed Rafferty's cup and jewels, effectively preventing any desertions—they kept the men's minds on Benson, but in scarcely a favorable light.

The men crowded at the rail and on the ratlines, peering toward Rafferty's island, bawling to start at once for shore and Benson's treasure. Chadwick promised via Smithson that by dawn an expedition would take departure. But unless they wished to waste time tearing up the entire island, they'd best wait until Chadwick has ascertained the locale of the treasure from those who knew it. The faster we left these waters, the better.

"Benson won't tell," Chadwick told Smithson. "With McTeague backing him, he can't be concerned. But there are others who know, and they can be persuaded."

"Thought he worked on you?" Smithson asked.

Sure, I had the dreams, but not to the extent the others had. I wised up to them too soon." He saw me. "What the hell are you hanging around for?"

"I've finished with your men. How about my attending to the Bensons and McTeague?"

Smithson was practical and saw no point in

the doctoring of doomed persons. It was as feeding the condemned before executing them. The dawn was boiling up from the sea before I could visit Lady Fitz, Deborah and Boriloff. They were crammed in one of the tiny state-rooms heretofore occupied by the crew, now hastily cleared of anything convertible into a weapon.

Mason watched at the door. Barnes stood near me while I swabbed out Boriloff's injuries. He groaned from the iodine. Barnes sniggered contempt. Lady Fitz regarded the watchmen with the disgusted interest of a slummer confronted by beggars.

She chattered, ostensibly to me, but covertly watching Boriloff: "When Flora—died—I thought for a moment that I had made a most ghastly mistake, dear Doctor. I thought Irsuley's magic had killed her! But I prayed and the truth was revealed to me. The cook perished because he superstitiously believed Flora capable of crushing him with spiritual force. Captain Benson's mesmerism prompted me to avenge the cook by lapsing into the Irsuley personality. Flora thought that her magic could kill. Therefore she believed that mine was as strong, and died of fear."

She beseeched me: "That would be your version, would it not?" But her eyes were on the Russian. I remembered his interest in Flora and concluded that he believed Lady Fitz her slayer. She wanted to justify herself to him. "Doctor," she pleaded, "tell me!"

But I felt that I had caused enough grief by well-intentioned explanations, and devoted myself strictly and silently to the Russian.

Spitefully she said: "It is as I expected—you're indeed the tool of that fiend, Benson. Pah!" She shrugged petulantly and noticed Mason's speculative gaze.

She cried: "Oh, what is to become of us helpless, hapless women at the hands of these wild beasts! They'll—want us! And they're such powerful brutes that they'll—take us!" She appeared, none too disheartened by the prospect though she added: "Against our wills!"

I recalled Pen's jesting statement that Lady Fitz' deepest emotions were stirred mainly by the exotic. I wondered whether she was considering the fate sometimes known as worse than death from sheer decadence, or for the more basic motive of insuring her life at the cost of her dubious honor.

She clasped her hands and looked upward. No martyr in the arena could have done so well. "I should kill myself before yielding! But that would be shunning my duty. I will offer myself on the altar of sacrifice—I will go to that horrid Smithson. He will spare my friends' lives in exchange for my body."

Barnes' mouth gaped. He was less surprised than dismayed. Boriloff forgot to groan.

Lady Fitz was abruptly all dynamic purpose. "Deborah," she cried, clapping hands, attend to my hair! Oh, wretched—my gown's ripped. And stained! If there were only a mirror—"

Deborah tranquilly followed instructions. Lady Fitz observed with lofty scorn: "If you were as much a woman as I, Deborah MacRae, you'd emulate my sacrifice. But then, the Beast in Man could never be roused by a low creature of your sort and class."

Deborah went on complacently with her chores, as if to reply that her virtues were verily their own good rewards. No wonder the two had remained together in spite of all. They were compliments. In serving as Lady Fitz' scapegoat, Deborah was constantly, if left-handedly, exalted as to her moral worth.

Mason leered: "Get that—the old crow thinks Smithson'll leave her off just 'cause she's willing to—"

Lady Fitz turned scarlet and switched to another tune. "Alexis, did you hear that? Oh, contemptible!" The sky should have collapsed on Mason, and she seemed startled that it did not. "Alex, if you were a man, instead of a beastly white feather—you'd avenge that insult!"

Boriloff expectorated the bite of the iodine in proportionately biting words. "The white feather you say me—"

He tore loose the hand I was bandaging. He thumped his chest. "You do most well, *vyedma*, to make pretty the self for the caress of wild beasts—bag of bones that you are and horrible! Horrible!"

That brought to thier minds the "nightsheeft" incident reported to me by Deborah. For lack of more substantial missiles they hurled recriminations to and fro. Barnes and Mason shook heads over such lunacy and conducted me to Swastlow, Johnson and MacKenzie, pent together.

The little Reverend had cried himself asleep, MacKenzie told me. He had quoted Job about cursing God and dying. Perhaps at that moment Swastlow lay willing himself to death, but it did not perturb me, since I knew the measure of his mental strength. Certainly he was not sleeping, but shamming. His lips moved. I bent to them but could not apprehend his words.

While I set MacKenzie's dislocated shoulder, Johnson grunted indignantly and pointed to a pad of paper.

"They sent Robbins down here, saying if we'd write and sign the statement that Benson's crazy, we'll get off alive."

MacKenzie laughed. "A certificate like that would come in handy for 'em. But it wouldn't guarantee us anything. The hell with 'em! That goes for you too, Barnes and Mason."

I saw McTeague and taped his broken ribs. The little that he had to say was echoed later by Pen. Chadwick brought her to my office. She was caring for her father who—so Chadwick told me grinning—refused to let me touch or see him.

Pen said: "He's angry with you, Ross, because you were mainly responsible for upsetting his plans. He classes you with Chad." The dark man did not like that.

She went on: "But once we're out of this mess, he'll stop hating you. And we'll get out," she optimistically repeated. McTeague, at which Chadwick grinned again. "A quest that's lived two hundred years is too strong to be balked now that it's so close to fulfillment."

Her belief cheered her, but it depressed me as much as it amused Chadwick. She finished: "Father—Dad—isn't the old Cap'n any more! He's Jim again. The shock of what's happened must have driven him back to reality. I owe you something for that, Chad." Again his grin fal-

tered. "And once we're free, he'll be Jim from now on. I know it! He's told me—he's learned his lesson. That it's a tall enough order simply being oneself, without assuming another's responsibility. He's no longer a little boy playing Indian," she said, but wistfully. "He's — grown up."

Then she pleaded with Chadwick to free her father. He held off obdurately. She went back to her quarters. It was full morning now, the sky and sea so flawlessly clear that we seemed adrift within a sapphirine bubble, of which the sun and its still reflections were the highlights.

Somewhere in that latitude, someone indubitably must be greeting this same sky and sun with the joy of a fresh beginning. I was wondering gloomily if Judgement Day were to be as calm and bright.

By now my hands were shaking from combined nervousness and exhaustion. I dosed myself with caffeine citrate. My two shadows would not permit my taking it from its shelf, but procured it for me—after first inquiring into its nature and use. As a stimulant it was more psychologically than physically effective. I had conditioned myself to its use in student days when it kept me awake to cram for examinations.

"Jes', he's a dope," Mason muttered awestruck to Barnes—and slipped the bottle into his pocket.

As a runner gains his second wind, I gained a second wakefulness. I finished my work among the injured and was taken to Smithson for a report. He was occupied at the moment, and I had to remain unnoticed.

Robbins was bringing Swastlow in. The little pastor walked, falteringly, his expression aloof and visionary, as though he knew himself the one reality in a cloud of phantoms. He carried paper and pencil.

Smithson must have thought it the statements of Johnson and MacKenzie. He snatched it, moved his lips looking it over, and thrust it back. "What the hell you call this?"

"My sermon," Swastlow said drowsily. "For the first time in my life I'm going to speak the truth. Not parrot-wise as it was taught me, but as I've been privileged to see it."

Chadwick took the paper. "Here, let's see that!" Probably he thought it a history of the mutiny.

While he flashed his gaze over the crowded lines, Swastlow went mildly along: "I was not ready to teach others. That is why I failed. I thought there was no God, but now I have seen Him. I was blind and black with sin—"

That was exactly what Lady Fitz had said on another occasion.

There is only one way to live—to know oneself, because only then can one know the God within himself. I did not know myself; I was impatient. My duty to my sister was spiritual, but knowing neither myself nor God, I made it physical. To gain comfort for her body, I brought her here—to her death. I was worshiping not God but Mammon."

His voice splintered. He turned his head, blinking. Smithson was regarding him as an Eskimo might contemplate a fan.

Chadwick flung down the papers. "Just a lot of tripe!"

Slowly and carefully Swastlow retrieved them. "I do not blame Lady Fitz-Manton nor Captain

Benson for my sister's—passing away. They did not kill her. I did. But unless it had happened—I should preach falsehood forever, driving my listeners to ultimate damnation."

Now both Smithson and Chadwick were eyeing him as if he had dropped from an alien sphere. "I sinned for my sister. Now for her sake and in her name, I will spend the rest of my life warning others from my error. Perhaps it will remove the scales from the eyes of blinded others—"

Barnes jeeringly rotated his forefinger at his temple. Smithson said impatiently: "Chad tells me you know where the stuff's buried." Swastlow turned mildly inquisitive eyes on him. "You know! The stuff—the gold and jewelry." Swastlow shook his head lugubriously. "Ah, my friends—beware of wealth! Read what I have written—that true desire is born of inner need! That the fulfillment of desire is destructive unless it meets that inner need!"

He rushed on: "You do not know yourselves nor God. How can you know what your soul demands? Irsuley's treasure—mark my words—will never satisfy but only destroy you! It will wall you from self-knowledge, blind you!"

Chadwick crackled: "We don't want lectures! We just want—"

But they had to listen to Swastlow and he knew it. He waved Chadwick silent. "You want the gold because you have seen others happy with material possessions. Their happiness sprang not from the belongings themselves, put from their spiritual values, the food they give to the soul! You misconstrue. You fancy that peace comes from mere haphazard ownership. When can money purchase self-understanding? What good will Irsuley's gold do in your hands — those of irresponsible children?"

Smithson shook the little man until his false teeth slipped their moorings. Swastlow settled them back in place with his tongue. Smithson bellowed: "Can the chatter!" Show us the way to the stuff!"

"For your own salvation — no!"

Chadwick said: "We'll see about that!" He smote Swastlow on the face. The little man reeled but literally turned the other cheek. I moved forward. Barnes prodded me back. Smithson caught Swastlow's wrist and twisted it white.

Swastlow stifled a sob. "Believe me — I refuse — for your own — good", he quavered, his knees giving.

Smithson dropped his wrist. There was blood on it now. Chadwick said sourly: "Oh, let him go. Get Lady Fitz. Get her sore enough and she'll talk plenty."

Robins led Swastlow away and soon returned with the Englishwoman. Between whiles, Chadwick and Smithson discussed the treasure. Deborah had made Lady Fitz quite presentable. She wriggled indignantly from Robins' grip and planted herself before Smithson with the finality of a dropping twenty-ton safe. She opened her arms to him.

"Understand that I loathe you, but I submit to Destiny. Terrible man, I am yours!"

Smithson drew back so hastily that he knocked over his chair. Chadwick said, smiling: "You're inviolate, Lady Fitz. All we want is to know where to look for the treasure."

She snapped: "Fool; You know that Irsuley was only the Captain's invention!" And to Smithson, who had righted his chair and dropped dumbfounded on it: "Sooner or later this was bound to happen. Let us not delay the inevitable! Let me — suffer — while still I am strong."

Smithson choked reddening, but at last he roared in exceedingly vulgar terms that he had no interest in Her Ladyship, that she was this, that and still another thing. Either she'd come across with what he wanted — which positively was not her timeworn and unattractive self -- or she'd suffer aplenty, but not in any manner she had suggested.

It was perhaps that last which engendered her opposition. She stepped back, strangling even as Smithson had done. "You reject -- me? The best blood in all England! What are you, but -- "Even Smithson was taken back by her blast of invective.

Chadwick cut her off. "Don't exult in your importance! If we can't get information from you, there's still your prize package, Boriloff. Take her away —"

"Go right ahead," he invited pleasantly. "A minute ago you called Irsuley the Captain's invention. Make up your mind, Lady Fitz-Manton."

She gasped, then bit her lip, eyes downcast. "I—don't remember," she announced sullenly. Chadwick motioned to Robins, who tugged on her.

"But, oh -- I will remember!" she said savagely, as she was drawn away. "I'll show you yet --I will! When I've raised the winds -- you'll crawl to me to stop them!"

She must have been thinking of Boriloff and his estrangement since Flora's death. As she went from the room I heard her muttering: "I held him once before not only by my beauty but my power. I will hold him again -- he shall see!"

Smithson asked Chadwick: "That leaves the Russky?"

Chadwick nodded grimly. "He doesn't like the pain. He'll come across all right." He noticed me now and seized my bag. When Boriloff arrived, Chadwick had spread out forceps and scalpels and was toying with them lovingly. Boriloff broke down immediately. He'd not only tell them where the treasure lay. He'd be glad to lead them to it in person.

Chadwick beamed, dropped the implement helter-skelter in the bag, took Boriloff by the arm and strode out, beckoning Smithson with a jerk of his head.

Smithson, leaving, said: "Lock the Doc up, boys. keep your eyes peeled, just in case."

Thus it was that I did not see the first boat pull out for the island. Since I was at that moment beyond sleep, I sat making plans which, involving malpractice, I will not set down here. I never gained opportunity for effecting them. As it had through the night. Time altered with pegleg gait and bounding spurts of speed. Finally one of the men stumbled in breathless.

"Quick -- Darrell's dyin!" He panted, as we hastened down the alley. He was standin' watch outside the English bitch's door."

But Darrell was not dying. He was dead. I had no time to inquire into the cause -- but it was not necessarily Lady Fitz' magic -- for as I stooped beside him there were shouts: "All hands! All hands!"

And a thinner cry: "The Doc! Get the Doc!" Morgan was propped on the rail, steadied by the hands of the men. "Get all the guns!" he cried. "Get oakum and waste and oil -- we got to burn 'em out!" He was very pale, his eyes protruding.

"Burn 'em out?" someone asked. "Burn out Smitty an' Schwartz an' Chad?"

"And the Russian and Kemble? another called. "You nuts, or what?"

Morgan gestured feebly. If the men had not been holding him he would have tumbled over the side. He had winded himself rowing back from the island alone. "Don't ask questions -- get moving! Guns and oil and waste! There's hundreds of 'em -- white -- white like ghost! They got 'em all but me! Get moving! We got to get back quick!"

He saw me. "Bring him too -- we'll need him! Get all the lights you can -- it's dark in there! Only rush -- for Christ's sake rush!"

There was a second's stupefied pause. Then the men scrambled scattering, Morgan's panic infecting them. I went over his bruises and cuts. Where his clothing was torn, it seemed claws had raked him -- wide-spaced claws, bear-like.

Waiting for the others to return, I looked over the side, expecting to see the bodies of Slam Bang on Flora on sand water-tinted to crushed aquamarine.

I saw instead a huge black octopus lying flat on the bottom with its tentacles outspread like radiating rills of ink.

Or like a gigantic black wheel!

Chapter XXV

ON RAFFERTY'S BEACH

It was not until two boat-loads of us were on our way toward Rafferty's island that the full story was told. We left those on deck busy letting down the launch, preparing to follow us.

The island was not amethyst jewel-king now, but a great half-dome like a stone forehead thinning ancient, stony thoughts. I could discern no shore around it, only sheer grey walls of weathered coral rock jutting from the sea. Its reflection in the glassy water made it globular, a blank and sterile world hanging dead in the infinite azure of merged sea and sky.

We seemed on our way to another planet.

Then the lower hemisphere of that planet shatterer as a breeze whisked the water. The tiers of clouds in the south had risen to mountainous heights. Black-hearted, silver-edged, like swarthy swordsmen they were marching down on us. Above them and drifting westward were feathery streaks like battle smoke. That meant wind. Our work in the island must be swift.

And again I cursed Benson's suicidal stupidity in bringing the Susan Ann in the waters.

We neared the island. I saw that it was split as though cloven by Thor's thunderbolt hammer. A small ship, such as the wreck had been, could traverse that cleft. But it was far too narrow for the Susan Ann.

We entered this miniature fjord. Its pitted, neutral-toned walls were like a felt of grey and leafless twigs, matted by indomitable force -- like that impassable barrier of thorns which sheltered the Sleeping Beauty.

Smoothly, we slid into this channel, like alien

thoughts into a brain of stone. Like the breath of life entering the clay of new-made Adam. There was no sound save the splashing oras of our two boats.

It was as though the island awaited us breathlessly.

A force stronger than the oarsmen's efforts clamped on us, drew us along. I thought of Scheherezade's mountain of lodestone which sucked ships to its sheer sides and destruction. The fjord angled. We looked back. No longer could we gaze outside to the sea. We were on the threshold of another world.

One man rested oars. "There's a current sweeping us in. No need to row."

The rest drew in their blades. We drifted down that curving corridor. Its end was a gateway affording a glimpse of a central lagoon, then a strip of sand for shore, and towering coral walls spotted leopard-like with wide black cavities -- like sunken black eyes, without irises, watching us unblinkingly.

The island was an atoll thrust high from the water as if sea distrusted and rejected it. It was a circular well, its depths hidden from the outer world by its rim. It was very much the ideal pirate hideaway, doubly defended by the maze of shoals outside and by its high walls which shielded its lagoon from any wind.

I scanned the black holes in the porous rock. Morgan had said that Boriloff had led the treasure-seekers into one of them. The rock was virtually hollow because of the passages eaten through it by the sea -- twisting tunnels like the avenues eaten by termites in wood.

Morgan had said that the island had appeared uninhabited. But that was because its people had preferred not to be seen. Last night's shots must have warned them of imminent invasion and they had broomed the beach of their footprints. It was only when the treasure-hunters were deep within the caves that their occupants revealed themselves, breaking from the ambush.

Ghostly white and inhuman, Morgan had said. He alone had fought his way out.

People -- on that remote and sterile isle? Granting that the Irsuely tale was truth, still Black Pedro and his followers could not possibly have survived through two centuries, even if endowed with unprecedented longevity. And neither McTeague nor anyone else had mentioned women among those marooned when Rafferty had stolen the ship.

Had strangers found their way here as the pirates did originally -- by chance? Were there women among them? Were they fisher-folk, castaways from a wreck, or desperate slaves fleeing Haiti? Were the white folk the grandchildren of Pedro's great-grandchildren?

Nobody ever will know -- for none of them are alive now.

But what could have kept then on this bleak rock if they had wished to leave it? Surely they could have made rafts, or sent up signals!

We were wafted through the gateway as if we were milkweed fluff. The current abandoned us in the center of the lagoon. It was so deep that its waters were black, the fish flirting far below like midnight meteors. I perceived weak purple glimmers deep in the blackness, like drowned dusk-clouds. They puzzled me until I realized

that they were light seeping from outside through the island's honeycombed foundations. Undersea swept us in.

This island rested on none too stable a base.

There was shallow water along the shore for twenty feet before it pitched into darkness. Sparse, nibbled-looking vegetation studded the sand and clung precariously to the coral cliffs. The only signs of mankind were the men's footprints leading to one of the larger holes. There was no sound except our own breathing.

Morgan pointed to the cave mouth. "They're in there!"

Echoes rolled sepulchraly as if the walls gave voice: "In there—in there—there—"

Morgan curled his hands into a megaphone at his mouth, calling the names of the missing. The echoes replied in a clap of thunder. He dropped his hands. He shivered. "They must all be dead."

"Dead," the walls agreed, and as the boat rocked, it seemed that they nodded. "Dead -- "

"We'll have to go in for them."

The walls urged: "Go in -- go in!"

We pulled the boats ashore and clambered out of them. Some of us were to go in, others to wait until needed. I was among the latter. We placed the bundles of waste and cans of oil around the cave-mouth in readiness.

Cautiously the men crept in. We could hear their voices commenting on some odor. The voices grew fainter, became curiously distorted, ragged.

A shadow darkened the hollow island like a lid clamped over a kettle. The warrior clouds had passed the sun.

I wondered how there could be a treasure. If this isle were inhabited by the murderous maniacs Morgan had described, how could Benson have cached the prize?

Yet he must have done so. Else how could he have impressed on Boriloff and the others the picture of this island? If he had not been here, how could he have described to the spellbound McTeague the passages through the shoals?

Well, it must be that the white folk sometimes left this place to seek green food on the smaller but more verdant rocks. And Benson had blundered on this place at such a time.

Yes, there was one chance against thousands that Benson could have stored treasure here, after all. It was either that, or — Irsuley.

And all that I had seen of the Irsuley phenomena I had explained away materialistically. There was nothing in any of it to support Pen's belief in ghosts. Hypnotized persons -- especially those hand-picked for susceptibility and memorize them, believing if ordered that the memories stem from actual experience.

McTeague had said that Benson had been in these waters before. The crew chosen for this voyage was a totally different one than previously employed. Why -- if not to conceal from his dupes the fact that Benson had been here?

The whole scheme was diabolically clever in its hairline nicety. The only argument against it was the time involved between inception and execution. And madmen like Benson are patient where others are not.

Nonetheless, mad as I know Benson to be, all my evidence against him was so ambiguous that

I could never sway Pen's judgement. If by some miracle we managed to escape our present plight, I must pretend that her assumptions were proven correct -- or lose her.

My thoughts returned to those in the cave. Why were they so silent? How long had they been gone? Then within, muffled by distance and acoustic flaw, came the drum of shots and fuzzing cries!

The men around me rushed within. For one mad moment I thought of piling the waste at the entrance, saturating it with oil, and lighting it. Then I looked longingly toward the waiting boats. At last I followed the men.

The passage climbed and twisted, no light rounding the turns. It was nauseous with the reek of putrefying fish. I felt like a micro-organism coursing on artery through which throbbed black blood.

There was so strong an influx of air that it fluffed my hair and sang in my ears. The floor was as smooth as if polished, worn by many feet through many years. Where one would touch the walls to steady himself, they were rubbed smooth, but elsewhere they were rough.

The tunnel branched; the wind took one fork and I the other. The stench was so acrid that I coughed. Then I heard a deep-throated chuckle behind me, probably an echo of my cough, but I turned. My light fell from my fingers, glass tinkling as it blinked out.

It was pirate convention to murder the men who buried the spoils -- not because dead men tell no tales, as it is generally supposed -- but because their souls must guard the loot, frightening off intruders.

What I had seen might have been -- one of those souls!

It was white, not the pinkish white of the albino, but the enamel white of the blind newt. White even in its eyes, their balls blank or glazed.

It was naked, male, but scarcely human. The lack of sunshine in that pest-hole, an abominable diet; plus generations, it might be, of inbreeding had shaped -- a monster! It was more bones than flesh, save for its bloated, sagging belly. Sharp formed as if cruelly, wantonly wrenched at birth.

There was no neck. Wattles hung loosely from the chin down the breast. The prow-like face was more that of fish than man. Its odor was unbearably vile. Slaver hung in strings from its slack white lips.

I heard a strangled screech I had not meant to utter. I raced blindly deeper into the passage, crashing into its walls as it turned. I heard cries from ahead, but there was nothing in any direction save blind blackness. As I caught my breath I thought I heard softly pattering footfalls coming near. I struck out again, thudded against another curving wall, and feeble lights like phosphorescent eyes swerved toward me. I had found my companions.

I blurted what I had seen. They swung their lights in that direction. I saw the -- thing -- again, but now it was not alone. Two others were beside it. They chuckled and chuffed closer.

Before anyone could shoot, an alarm was raised by those in the van. We crammed together then,



THE WHITE FOLK

Hannes Bok 1944

blocking the passage, trampling each other. Lights shone ahead. Morgan's group had found us. The white creatures had slipped away.

Clinging closely together, our united groups set forth again; we shouted the names of Boril-off's party, but the passage amplified and repeated the cries so vastly that we left off because it would have drowned out any response. The corridor branched into many openings. We took one. Those in the rear walked backward, warily sweeping their lights over the trail.

I had lost all sense of direction. Up, the tunnels took us, and down again; to this side and another. Without warning we broke into a chamber filled with the beings! They were ranked ten and twelve deep from wall to wall.

There were a few men -- if those plaster-white things could be termed human—but mainly they were women, bent and misshapen, with pointed withered breasts and matted locks of colorless hair. And horrid little things like monkeys that were children. All of them milk-white, shrivelled -- wedge-faced and reeking -- obscene!

They were whimpering, the eager starved sound of a cur haunting a butcher's doorway. One of the little things squeaked sharply and scuttled forward, its small clawlike fingers the unsheathed claws of a cat.

"God!" someone gasped. "The joint's alive with 'em!"

"Mow 'em down!" another cried -- but Morgan struck down his gun.

"No! Wait!" He thrust himself before us.

"You, there! Listen—we're friends! Get that?"

He held out his hand to them, but their blank gaze did not follow the gesture. "We won't hurt you! We just want the men who came here a while ago. We're friends!"

One of the hunched creatures opened her swollen lips. "F-fens," she cooed, wagging her head and shaking her matted hair. "F-fens!"

The others repeated it, more like the guggle of water over stones than human voices. "Fens!" They nudged each other and cackled. "Fens! Fens!"

Then as one they charged us, like pent waters bursting free. We crowded back, our guns sparkling and roaring, bullets shrieking in ricochet and felling not always those for whom intended. Momentarily I was deafened by the tumult of shots and screams; the reek was so strong that it blanked itself out; the crazy sweep of the lights was like flying luminaries one glimpses in delirium.

Temporarily it was as though my senses were corrupt and unreliable, independent of muscular control and unrelated to my actions. When the instant of madness passed, I was fleeing with my companions, beating frenziedly on the backs of those before me, even as those behind me were striving to hurl me aside and crowd past. I stumbled over a falling man, was trampled by those following. Bodies rained on me, crushing the breath from me. I wriggled strangling, kicking at the teeth nipping at my ankles, striking hot-breathed little faces that must have been children's.

As a fish flirts through water, so I wriggled through the chaos to my feet. Hands tore at me, sundering my clothing. Had we been naked as

the cave-creatures, they must have caught us, but our ripping garments confused them.

I do not know how far nor where we ran, losing each other, blundering around corners into each other and battling before our cries revealed us to each other. Only a few lights were left burning. At last the most of us were together again and with but one thought -- to escape as quickly as possible from that nightmare place.

Perhaps we chanced back into the very passage of the struggle, for we found a bruised, horribly distorted thing which must have been a mere infant, flopping on the floor. Its only claim to humanity was its head and one of its hands. It squealed piercingly, snapping its little teeth. We clubbed it without compunction.

We tumbled along, a solid lump of terror. Pushed through a fissure into a large and roughly circular room. An eerie glittering checked us. It was like the distant flash of many rockets bursting simultaneously in showers of prismatic stars!

But it was not far. It was only a few yards from us.

It was Benson's treasure!

It flared agitated under our torches like prisoned rainbows frantically wresting against their chains, like the clarion calls desperate armies transmuted to frenzied flame!

Gold there was -- in coins and in nuggets like slices and splinters of suns, in chains like frozen yellow lightnings. There was ivory raw and carved, shards of daylight skies that were sapphires; lazuli like sullen midnights; great rubies brighter than coals, like candent eggs to be hatched into sunset conflagrations. Chrysoprase and emeralds green as the radiant Spring, amethysts clear and lovely as Penelope's eyes; handfuls of rough diamonds blinking chromatic, heliograph code; crystals that were fountains of living light; opals smouldering like bottled and chafing auroras.

Mingled with it were smooth shells, bits of rusted metal and fragments of bone. As if the cave-people like pack-rats and magpies adored their sparkling hoard and added to it whatever was like it. And that they worshipped the jewels was evident, for the chamber was like a temple, the treasure piled atop a huge and crudely squared flat stone—an altar.

Gold and gems once had been within a coffer, and no small one. Only its metal corners and binding remained. Much of them had corroded away. I admired Benson's infinite devotion to verisimilitude. Had I not known of his chicanery, I would have deemed the treasure as ancient as he claimed.

But if he had gone to the expense of assembling the wealth before us—why not furnish the extra detail of the rotted coffer? Antique caskets are not difficult to obtain!

Now our awestruck silence was broken as the men realized what we had found. Some rushed forward to dig into that glittering pile. But others held back, counting noses and guarding the fissure.

The man close to the hoard yelped and jumped back, colliding against the others. His jaw wagged voiceless; he gestured imperatively. They stared, then cried out. Their profanity sounded like prayers—and perhaps it was.

The treasure was—watching us!

Watching—with human eyes!

As men camouflage themselves in jungle warfare by decking themselves with leaves and ferns, so for an instant it seemed that many persons were crouched beneath that hoard, peering out on us through chinks!

We crept closer. Some had torn off their coats and knotted the sleeves at the cuffs, improvising bags to carry the jewels. They reached hesitantly toward those eyes, plucked at them. One drooped something like a badly dyed Easter egg; like a golf-ball smeared with rust. It bounced feebly and rolled into a cranny, lay looking up at us—

A human eye!

The intense black of pupil and iris was beginning to glaze; it was like a hole bored in the white. By that extreme contrast I knew it—one of Chadwick's.

The men swore further, I with them. "No use lookin' for 'em now!" one grunted. "The rats! The dirty, stinkin' white rats! They done this to 'em!"

"Grab the stuff! Grab it quick an' git!"

Half of us were wealth mad, half sobered by dread. Some scooped the mingled jewels and oddments into their sleeve-sacks; others continued the watch at the cleft.

"This is their church an' we're doin' sacrilege—why the hell don't they defend it against us? What're they doin'—massin' to rush us, comin' out?"

And the answer: "Maybe there's somethin' more important to 'em than what we're doin'. Somethin' more down to earth!"

Then: "Snap it up, there! We got to get out of here!"

They did not talk all of the pile nor even its third. They hugged their bulging, clinking coats to their chests; darted back to snatch last handfuls and cram them into their pockets. We skulked from the chamber, pressed close as if fused. We passed dim entrances, flashing our lights into each of them.

Then we reached a black opening from which throbbed growls and squeaks fluttered. One man thrust his light inside. The white things were swarming over each other so thickly packed that they were like a nest of milky snakes knotted together for warmth. Their faces smeared scarlet, they hooted and whined, fighting for and tearing ravenously at things red and raw but still recognizable. While we faltered stunned and incredulous, disgust and dismay towering into overmastering hate, we heard the smack of lips and the crack of breaking bone.

And realized then what was more important to the white folk than the treasure they worshiped!

They did not heed us. Food came even before regard for danger. From their indifference to our lights, and the reactions of the empty-handed to the sounds of gnawing, I knew them blind as the subterranean creatures they so resembled. This it was which chained them to the island environ!

I wondered how long they had dwelt here on this rock, away from the light, and whether it had to do with their blindness. Fearing the sting of the hot sun on their sensitive hides and creeping outside only after nightfall. Provided only with the barest essentials for maintenance of life; slipping back from the culture of their ancestors

to bestial savagery!

And I wondered if it was their sightlessness which had prompted their gouging out of intruders' eyes and laying them among the treasure.

Smithson, Chadwick, Boriloff and their comrades—they were beyond our aid! And much as I had loathed Chadwick, detested Smithson, I could never have wished this fate which had befallen them—nay, was befalling them still!

What we did then, I need not say. But after it was finished—and the white tribe scored heavily against us in that contest—I had seized myself a gun. We found a current of air so clean and fresh that it was like breathing scented flame. We breasted it until we broke into daylight, not through the entrance by which we had come but another, twenty feet higher and at one side.

The light was so dazzling in comparison with the caves' blackness that it stung the eyes. There was a curious droning sound. One after the other we tumbled down to the sand and lay resting. I was intoxicated with fatigue. But the horror of the white folk was too strongly behind us, and we did not linger.

Not all of us had come forth who had gone within—but we had no intention of returning to seek the missing. Nor did we kindle the waste and oakum piled on the beach. Our one desire was to leave that spot as swiftly as might be. Overhead the hum persisted.

We crowded into the gig, leaving the dory for any who might yet come forth.

Chapter XXVI

DEATH OF THE SUSAN ANN

I realized what the steady drone augured. The island was a gigantic ear-trumpet, its curved walls catching and amplifying distant murmurs inaudible to normal hearing. The organ note of the drone was the herald of the winds on their way.

My eyes were conditioned to the light—and it was nowhere so bright as I had imagined when fresh from the pall of the caves. The sky was painted somber with clouds and masses of scud raced across the uniform grey, like dark steeds charging.

The fjord's water rose and fell restlessly, as if it were breathing out sighs. Ripples skipped around the bend. An unnaturally warm breeze threw feverishly ardent arms about us. Now we could see the Susan Ann. Men were hauling the launch aboard. Something had restrained them from following our boats to the island, and looking to the southern skyline, I knew what it had been. A monstrous shadow was crouching there, huddled as though to leap. It was the ugly olive shade of faded black cloth.

We emerged from the fjord into open water, and the drone dwindled behind us. Some of the men were dipping their heads and rubbing their faces on their arms as they pulled the oars. One dropped his blade to grind his fists in his eyes. I wondered uneasily whether the white clan's blindness were infectious—certainly there was any number of septic dangers provident in the filth of their caves.

I remembered but discounted the statements of Flora and Lady Fitz that the treasure had been sprinkled with blinding dust. True, dust is an excellent medium for the transmission of toxic

bacteria, but the caves had been too dark for dust. And I was certain that if the treasure blinded it was in an allegorical sense.

The southern shadow leaped, spreading across the dirty paper of the sky like running ink. The breeze cooled, no longer amorous but mischievous, plucking our hair and gibbering in our ears. Ripples in glassy little triangles, spatter-fingered; united into solid ranks that caught us upon their backs and tossed us.

Some of the carsmen were shaking their heads as though water were in their ears—shaking the film which had slipped over their sight. One leaned over the gunwale and caught up a handful of water, dashed it into his eyes. Another lost grip on the shaft of his oar and could not find it until it ground in his chest.

A gust of colder wind butted us, and no longer mischievous but hostile. It swung the big parallel to the crest of a rising swell. We sank sickeningly, were heaved up again and driven toward a flat of coral where the waves were spreading themselves out in swaths of tattered lace.

We righted ourselves on the crest, pulled away from the coral. The wind thrust us back and we forged into it. The waves ranked into solid phalanxes and marched brandishing whitecap banners. The blackness ate half the sky.

Now I could hear the drone which the island had caught and expatiated—the sound one hears in a shell. The Susan Ann swung into the mounting gale, nosing the windward edge of the channel caging her. Those on her decks shouted to us and waved, but the blast absorbed their cries. We spurted toward her as serfs flee to their overlord's castle from the assault of the invader, stumbling on the waves as runners trip over roots and stones.

Out of the blackness as from the opened gates of a sooty palace raced lines of white sea horses in an endless charge of cavalry. They piled in confusion on the bars; they whinnied in glassy voices as they shattered in spray on the rocks and their salt blood pelted us. Louder grew the wind, no shell-sound now but an ululation—as if the blackness bayed.

We were in the Susan Ann's Lee, a scant twenty yards from her. The gusts swerved and she swung slowly upon us, threatening to crowd and crush us against the coral ridge. The hawsers mooring her held firm and we bobbed nauseously up and down in the narrow space left us. Those on deck still shouting, but their voices were torn from their mouths and hurled unheard over our heads. The jacob's ladder swung to us and we caught it, dragged ourselves scraping the ship's side.

We leaped up that ladder two and three at a time, catapulted up it as a wave threw the gig high; hanging dangling when the wave dropped and with it the boat. One of the men's shirts opened, and the coat he had stuffed into it unfolded. Out of it flickering a rainbow shower of jewels! White hands of foam swept up greedily snatching them and he cried out soundlessly, looking down—but he did not pause in his climb nor clutch the coat.

The man beside me missed his hold—he could no longer see the rungs and had clutched at air. He toppled back into the gig on the others. A wave

swept up and knotted around my waist, throwing the boat up with it. I scrambled higher just in time to avoid the crack of its against the ship.

Then we were on deck, some of the men straining on the gig's hawser, fighting the clutch of the wash to reach the davits. Others were crowding to us. The wind buffeted them against us, tumbled us all in a mass against the bulwarks.

And now of the sky only a silvery line remained in the north. It was darked than dusk, and the low cold light threw sharp shadows like a searchlight.

Identities were forgotten in that moment except by me. I gripped my gun and wriggled through the tangle of men, paused on its fringe to snatch another weapon, then reeled over the rocking deck toward the focsle companion. The shrouds were pulsing like tremendous harp strings—the wind plucking funeral music from them. I scrambled into the companionway unchallenged, caught my breath and dashed first of all to McTeague and those prisoned with him, then to Benson and Pen.

McTeague snatched the gun I proffered and darted for the main deck, Benson close behind. Pen would have clasped me close, but I feared the taint of the white people and pushed her from me. While I rescued Johnson, MacKenzie and Swastlow, entrusting my second gun to them, Pen freed Deborah and Lady Fitz.

The Susan Ann's nose ground the coral with a deep coughing sound, and she shook as if coughing indeed. I was jounced as if by earthquake. Johnson and MacKenzie flew out as soon as I had opened the door to them, but Swastlow was writing furiously and did not even look up. Scribbled sheets lay it seemed in white drifts around him.

As I made my way outside, I encountered Deborah. The Susan Ann like a huge sounding-board was throbbing with the chords of the humming shrouds. Adding this to the wailing wind, the drumming waves and the protesting creak of the masts, I could hear no word of what she screamed to me.

We fought our way outside together. The wind had caught a gull and pressed it flat on a bulkhead as if mounting a specimen or crucifying it, and its amber eye, half sealed by the third lid, burned on me as we were thrown wide-stepping toward the blinded men.

I nodded vehemently to Deborah, clapping the blind on the shoulder and pointing to the focsle. She understood and like a shepherd's collie herded them that way.

The sky was utterly black, the waves luminous bars bearing down on us and everywhere exploding in showers of whitely phosphorescent spume. The wind stung like a whip dipped in icewater.

Climbing the focsle ladder I saw Lady Fitz. Her green gown, whipping around her, blurred into a nimbus lucent as the waves. She straightened on the focsle deck as if there were no gale at all—and she was not that woman who had muttered specious prayers, berated McTeague and fumed at Boriloff. She was that other woman who had danced on deck—still Benson's plaything! She gestured imperiously to the waves as if they were friends, like Tarpeia signalling the Sabines. Did she imagine that she had raised that wind? Did she think she could control it?

I was numb from cold and weariness and did not at first feel McTeague's grasp. I was not

very successfully guiding another pair of the blind men toward the focsle. His lips whisked my ear, but I barely heard him: "Where—you going? Jim—at wheel. Need these men—got guns—won't turn against us—"

We were torn from each other before I could explain that my charges were handicapped. In my office I cupped palms to Deborah's ear and shrieked instructions. Bottles and jars rained on us as we opened the doors of the cabinets; their shattering was soundless in that ever-rising scream of the tempest. We had to root among the rolling mess to find what we needed.

I braced myself against the bulkhead, mixing an antiseptic solution for the men's eyes, most of it slopping over my hands. All the blind men but one sat apathetically on the cot, swaying in unison as the ship rolled, like savages marking the cadences of drums. That one had his coat unfolded on his lap and his fingers deep in ancient coins and jewels, his expression that of an infant about to cry. He felt of something as if to estimate its size and possible worth—a shell! Deborah was giggling. I left her attending the men and went up to fetch others.

One of them lay stunned on deck, the wind kicking him as if to roll him over. Above him stood Lady Fitz with the smile of Nemesis. Gems scattered as I moved him, rolling in the gusts like marbles, necklaces and gold chains writhing like injured snakes.

When I emerged outside again, I saw Benson at the wheel, Pen beside him and clinging to him against the grip of the gale. The Susan Ann bucked the waves, and I saw that they came armed against us. They had torn the trees from the isles, had snatched coral boulders to pelt us! I peered toward the ravished rocks. There were none! There was only a sheet of solid white roaring down to us, a sweeping Niagara!

A mooring-cable snapped with the hollow thud of monstrous drum, then another and still another. I read Benson's lips rather than heard: "If only she'll hold—meet the wave—"

He intended to ride the crest of that wave over the ridge that hemmed us in. Then we would be in an open area, could aim for Rafferty's rock and the shield it offered from the blast. Of that island, drenched with darkness, we could see nothing but the foam which leapt its walls like fitful flame.

Down thundered the white curtain, spooning under the Susan Ann, snapping the last stays holding her, lifting her lightly to hurl over the ridge. The shock of that lifting cracked one of the jury-masts from its bands, and through the tattered veils of spindrift I saw it streaking down in a tangle of lines like a titanic harpoon.

It speared the reef and wedged just long enough to deflect the Susan Ann, twisting her in the comber's hold. She was thrown aslant, the focsle and main decks flooded, Benson swept off his feet yet clinging inflexibly to the wheel. Pen was hurled to me at the taffrail. The swirling water that swarmed aboard clawed frantically for handhold, slipped away with some men and left in exchange the mass of foliage it had carried. A great flake of coral pierced the deck.

Yet, down on the main deck I saw Lady Fitz in nowise scathed, standing as easily as if nailed to

the planks. From both of her hands dangled strands of rose and azure, green and white and gold. Benson's jewels—or Irsuley's! They glimmered as if with light of their own, or as if partaking of that illusive nimbus she seemed to wear.

The thought flashed across my mind that the old saying was indeed apt — that God watched over fools and little children. Not to mention the inebriated, somnambulists and victims of mental jugglery!

I saw Johnson struggle from the froth decked momentarily in it like Poseidon in pearls. He shook the water from his eyes, gesticulating to us and then to the launch, which had been swept over-side and was riding on leash. Men were already in it and beckoning. I saw MacKenzie at the focsle companion, his uninjured arm about Swastlow, who held papers to his breast and whose face was blankly innocent as a child's.

Then the comber dropped us on the ridge. Coral horns gored the Susan Ann with a shock that coursed me as though I too had been pierced.

The seas subsided for the gathering of another wave. The Susan Ann hung tilted half out of them, spitted on the reef, the launch stranded entirely on the coral. McTeague, popping on the ladder, stopped with incredulous eyes.

Was it the sudden drop in temperature which had weakened the ancient wood of the wheel? Or another reason?

It had split! I part of its rim and a spoke were splintering in Benson's grip to powder! A part of its hands were missing!

McTeague mouthed something about boats and staggered towards us. Benson was staring stupidly at the broken wheel. Up the ladder came Lady Fitz and Swastlow. Far beyond them I saw MacKenzie and Deborah herding the blind to the rail, waving signals to those grounded launch.

Then even above the manic shriek of the tempest came the scream of snapping wood! The Susan Ann began to crack in two, sagging on the coral spear as if relaxing in death. The main deck buckled, folding in on itself. Swastlow, McTeague, Pen and I were flung in a heap -- but Lady Fitz stood unmoved, the chains of jewels in her hands.

Benson saw them, blinked, and released the wheel. Lightly she struck him with them, then dived down the ever inclining deck to McTeague and struck him also. She stepped back. Another bubbling torrent bore upon us, throwing the Susan Ann high, twisting the sharp point in her side. We toppled against the wheel -- but there was no wheel! Only fast dissolving fragments like black ice-crystals which the water bore away.

I caught Pen and lurched toward the ladder, trusting that the others would follow. She stumbled and I swept her up, carried her across the ruptured deck. The launch was fawning against the Susan Ann's side, MacKenzie dropping the blind men into it, Deborah resisting Henderson's attempts to force her over -- not so much from panic as that she didn't like him to touch her familiarly. Respectable to the last!

The wind knocked me into the mast-stump. I looked back. The others had not followed! Lady Fitz, still held by Benson's spell, still imagining herself the spirit of the storm, was facing the north, her arms held high -- summoning. Mc-

Teague, ever Benson's dupe, waited poised beside her, rapt and believing. He had seen the jewels. The curse was lifted. Rafferty was freed for Bridget -- but McTeague was going with him!

I think that Benson would have come to us, but the woman caught his arm. He hesitated, then remained. Was it because he felt responsibility for McTeague and Lady Fitz? Did his mad mind at that crucial moment believe the story it had fabricated?

His face -- Big Jim's. The Cap'n had left him -- the Cap'n, his only reason for living. Perhaps, as McTeague would follow Rafferty, so Jim chose to follow the Cap'n.

I groaned at their folly. Only Swastlow was running toward us over the river deck. I thrust Pen to Johnson and sprinted over the sharply sloping planks. But Swastlow did not catch my outstretched hand and swung himself across the breach. He thrust his papers to me, shrieked something, nodded and smiled -- and turned back!

One after another the sheets leaped from my hand, following each other like notes from a horn, flapped swirling northward like great butterflies.

Pen was beside me, shaking me, frantically pointing to her father. Her love and loyalty bound her to rescue him. She leaped the widening rift. I would have followed not from suicidal impulse, but to snatch her back to safety. I crouched to leap -- and could not!

I struck a wall of wind as against a curtain of glass and was thrown back. Pen reached imploringly to me. Beyond her I saw Lady Fitz smiling coldly and shaking her head. Her long white fingers twinkled at me -- those tapering cruel fingers of the vanished wheel!

Through the crackling of splitting timbers I heard the wind speaking Lady Fitz' words: "You would not believe! You cannot come! The ecstasy is not for you!" And to Pen: "Go to your lover, child -- while still you can!"

But Pen cried: "Father! Father!"

And the Susan Ann folded once more and wrenched away in halves, the central mast tumbling. There was nothing then but cold water in eyes and mouth and a violent tossing. The sea shook me as terror shakes a rat.

I was clutching a pinrail. The aft end of the Susan Ann had slipped yards away, far as the stars. I saw the two women and three men on it banded together and rigid as if carved. Unreal -- like effigies bolted to the wood. I thought I heard a whisper in spite of the distance and tumult. Pen's voice, broken: "Ross -- oh, my darling! One day -- you will know -- you will find me --"

Henderson was dragging me toward the waiting launch, I did not want to go. He cuffed me. I did not feel the blow, but my knees bent. The fore section of the Susan Ann was sinking slowly. The drifting stern part was riding the waves as lightly as a bubble. I could distinguish it mainly in the seething blackness because of the green flicker of Lady Fitz' dress.

Then we were in the launch. The Susan Ann's bow lifted up as though saluting us and slipped down from sight. We were sucked after it, but another tremendous wave broke over the vortex, filling it; then bumbled on to us, sweeping us to-

ward Rafferty's dome of rock.

A flat of coral lifted before us to bar the way, like the upsurge of a shattered berg -- like a gate slammed in our faces! It fell away before we could strike it. The reefs were crumbling! Enormous chunks bombarded Rafferty's island, striking sparks and flying to bits as they battered it down. I remembered its weak foundations.

Then it rocked and dipped, settling like a dead stone sun lowering its last time into the sea. It split perhaps where the fjord cut it, the two fragments falling back from each other like the halves of a sliced melon, hurling up hills of backwash that smote us aside.

Of Rafferty's isle and its white folk -- whether Pedro's descendants or the idiot children of cannibal castaways -- there was no trace! The Reefs had been sledged from existence!

It was impossible that the gig could still have been afloat, but I thought I glimpsed it and the javelins of palm-trunks that tore into it.

The little cabin of the launch was deep in water, Deborah and the blind men failing their arms splashing as it rolled as if caught in a cocktail shaker mixing some devilish drink. I was thrown to where a port had been --

From the north another gigantic wave was tumbling, as if to greet the combers from the south! Before it raced flickering white stars that skittered over the launch and beyond -- the papers Swastlow had given me. The wave broke over us, crunched us, cracking the shell of the launch for the human morsels within. There was a drear instant of semi-consciousness and the cold clasp of the sea, the irresistible kneading of its fingers on the clay of flesh as if it sought to remould us --

I floated alone in the trough of the wave, tangled in something like dragging seaweed or the tentacles of a squid. I fought it in panic until I realized that it was cordage twisted around a drifting spar. Of the launch and those who had been in it with me, I saw nothing.

But I did see the waves from north and south clash and rocket upward in a ghostly geyser--saw them twist, wrestling about each other in frantic and mountainous embrace. I thought I perceived the stern of the Susan Ann crowning that colossal mating, thought I glimpsed a glint of green.

Then a trail of ebon cloud swooped down like a great black arm plucking at the waves, as if to seize something it had dropped and snatch it back to its bosom. Cloud and water touched and clung. The sea would not yield its prize! They tugged back and forth, reeling spinning -- a waterspout.

The lesser waves paused. As if summoned, they turned toward the pillar, flowed into it, massed themselves higher about the quivering column of winding water -- swirled around and about it in serpentine maypole gyration. More and ever more were drawn into the spin!

A head broke water before me -- hands clutched futilely at nothing. The second wave flung the spar and myself toward those hands. In the boiling foam I caught and held them. It was Deborah--and with her hair in streaks across her shadow-smudged face, her eyes black patches of horror -- for the first time in her life she did not look respectable.

The wave dragged us high and higher up the

crystal slopes of that livid Everest. I could not hear its roaring — my ears long since had blanked out. But I could feel it through me as though I were a leaf in a gust. Chains of bubbles dragged us up and around that cone as though we were priests borne on litters up the spiralling steps of a Babylonian *ziggurat*. I looked down to the sea, and it was far below. From one edge to another was nothing but spinning foam.

What was it Swastlow had said about the motion of turning — the following of the sun and the *dakshinas* — the Hindus who ride revolving wheels into their highest heaven? The pillar which we circled was ever on my right — We were performing the *deas soil* then —

The pillar shook above us and swayed like a twisted tube of molten and flawed glass. I could pep into its blurred hollow core. A spark of verandancy was climbing it, around and around.

Then the hand of cloud had retrieved what it sought. It swept away, snapping the link between sea and sky. And down tumbled the column of water, like the white body of a slain giant, like the towers of the City of Glass, the collapse of a liquid sky!

Before it could strike, a little swell lifted its hands to me, held something square-edged and white to my eyes for me to read.

A sheet of Swastlow's sermon!

Then — emptiness — airless and unilluminated, with no sensation whatever save desolate duration.

Chapter XXVII BLACK PARADISE

A glimmer was born of the darkness and wafted through it, but not a star. It trailed weak reflections as though it skimmed a mirror of jet. It floated toward me, a puff of feebly luminous fog—a hazy ship. The misty prow sliced cleanly through me without shock.

And one after the other, dim faces shone and passed. Faces I knew and loved, faces I should have known and almost recognized, and the faces of strangers. The same expression was on all of them, as though the master hands which first had modeled them had refreshed them from the wear of years and stamped them anew with the artist's name.

Ecstasy—in sights to which I was blind, in song beyond mortal hearing, in tender warmth that yet could char to cinders, had I body to feel it; in scent and taste for which I had no faculties.

I could not cry to them—and could they have heard me? What was I to these beings whose nerves thrilled in sympathy to supernal harmonies? An insignificant trifle, an ugly nothing—at most, the feeble shade of needless memory!

But in the eyes I loved most I saw a tear, though the lips I had kissed were smiling. And I heard a sigh:

"One day you will know—you will find me, my darling!"

The whispered echo of all the ringing stars!

I awoke. The tempest had weakened away. Through interstices in the fractured clouds, the sun was peeping. Air and water warm, but after the calor of my dream, tepid and flat as stale beer. Deborah and I were drifting on the spar—and I

did not care very much. I closed my eyes to quest again in blackness for a vanished face and a scattered song, but I could not find them. They were only a dream.

A current carried us to a group of little islands. I was interested only—and but slightly—in landing Deborah on one of them. For myself I had no care. Pen was gone and that was—everything.

We made one of the islands. For two days and nights, so Deborah told me later, I was out of my head. She cared for me. While unconscious I babbled a great deal which she pieced together. And when I awoke, she knew as much of what had befallen aboard the Susan Ann as I.

Or more!

I was surprised and angry that the world had not ended because Pen had died. It was moving along as ever before, and I hated its unfeeling precision. I was hungry and terribly burned where Deborah had not shaded me with sand and those few rags which did not endanger her responsibility. Not far away was the largest of the islands, Little Palm-Key — that Crusoe's billet from which the sponge-divers were to take us at last. I did not know its name then, but I did know that there were trees on it, and I persuaded Deborah to straddle a large fork of driftwood while I swam her over to it.

My cigarette lighter provided the initial spark for a fire, and for a time we lived on green coconuts and water, with an occasional rough roasted crab helping out.

I was surly and about as much company to Deborah as the spirit crabs that scuttled along the sand at dusk and in the moonlight, little black eyes lifted above their pale backs on tiny stilts like gnomes' periscopes. Deborah couldn't get used to the spirit crabs, nor to the big coconut crabs that rustled around the fire at night or dropped the coconuts with a thump just as she was falling asleep.

Most of her time was spent in contemplating the sea and sending smoke-signals to non-existent ships — and scrutiny of the double handful of jewels she had sewn around her waist. When she rebuked me for my lack of interest in signaling, I replied that it was a hell of a world without a scrap of justice in it, or Pen would not have been snatched from me — and as far as I was concerned, it didn't matter if a ship never stopped to pick us up. Besides, I added sourly, if Deborah was predestined to be rescued, she would be, and please just to forget my existence.

Yet even as the monks of the Thebaid were prone to converse with specters, I was driven into discussion with her when she sought and failed to comfort me by what, to her, must have been the most extreme of measures — offering me half of her booty.

I snapped: "Keep your trash! Pen's dead. Mike's gone. The world's green poison. And this junk," I pushed her laden hand away, "can't buy the antidote."

She said calmly, tucking the gems back into her belt cannily: "Isna the antidote for poison—mair poison? Twill sicken ye to retchin' yeresell hale."

I said: "Benson was mad. He maneuvered Mike and the Swastlows, Lady Fitz and Boriloff into a state bordering on madness. He sterred the Susan Ann into a death-trap and thereby

murdered her. He subjected his dupes to dangers which killed them — thus he murdered them, too. Out of love and loyalty Pen stuck by him — and died with him. That's what love and loyalty will get you in this dirty world. I've come out with only minor injuries, and so have you," I added bitterly, detesting her. "Why? What's the sense of it?"

"Ye maun na accuse the Almighty wi'oot fairst kenning the facts."

"But I know all the facts!"

"Do ye noo?"

"I suppose you want me to say that Benson wasn't mad. That he didn't know of the nameless ship and the black wheel until the hurricane drove us to them. That he didn't plant the treasure on Rafferty's rock. That Irsuley and her ghostly colleagues employed him and others to break the tie holding them to this world. That now they are all floating around in Irsuley's heaven, enjoying the fruits of their labors."

She said: "Providence shapes our destinies. A' is foreordained. We think we ken what we will do in any gi'en situation — but we do na make the situation. God does. And it fashes us naething to speak o' freedom o' will. We are but tools i' the hands o' the Almighty — which is why ye were spared."

"God's tool, am I?"

"Ye maun tell to the waiting wairld what ye hae seen. As is predestined, 'twill create a chain o' consequences amongst those wha heed — fair-thairin' God's inscrutable plan."

"And I suppose you were spared because of work left undone?"

"Aye! I maun gie my Alec the rewards o' my vairtue, affairmin' the wrang o' the heathen custom that tairned his bonny face frae me."

I laughed wryly. "Try telling that to whoever lands here, Deborah, and you'll be clapped into an institution for the mentally deficient."

"Naetheless, 'tis what I will tell."

"If you're committed to an asylm, " I said

"Your jewels will be taken from you to defray your expenses. How can you prove anything to Alec then?"

She hadn't thought of it. I said: "I'm a doctor, and I can certify as to your insanity — brought on reasonably enough by the shocks of shipwreck, grief over Her Ladyship's death, hardships here on this island, and what not; and I'll do it — unless you stick to a story I'm going to concoct."

She asked: "Why?"

"We can't tell the facts as they happened. That Benson was mad and murdered his ship and those on it. He's dead, and the question of why he's dead is of no importance. The truth can't repair the damage done. So much of what happened aboard the Susan Ann is of coincidental or exceptional nature that it is well-nigh incredible

even to me — who was witness to it. How will the truth be received, then, by those who didn't witness it? They'll think we're lying to cover up something else. If those jewels are real, the're of tremendous value. They could have belonged to Lady Fitz. And it's not inconceivable that we couldn't have damaged all the boats save one, scuttled the ship and rowed away from it, the possessors of a tidy fortune."

I went on: "No, Deborah — we'll simply say that the Susan Ann was repaired after the first hurricane only to be destroyed by a second. Pen wanted to protect her father's good name. We can do at least that much for her."

She was obdurate. "Ye maun tell the truth! Gin ye lie to ithers, ye'll lie to yere ainsell. And lang as ye lie to yere ainsell, ye'll never ken what really happened. You seek peace o' mind, but ye can never find it gin ye do na speak truth. Therefore 'tis predestined ye will speak the truth ain day, that ye may ken to the satisfaction o' yere sool. Why wait? Is it na written i' the Holy Word that what ye cast on the waters will come back to ye? Cast out yere truth!"

But I could be as obdurate as she. It took three days and nights to soften the Calvinist rock. The possible confiscation of the jewels settled Deborah's mind. We were found by the sponge-divers, our mendacious recital accepted, and we parted.

Nor have I found inner peace. I have not lived since losing Pen. The trump of Resurrection would sound for me, if I could believe that somewhere she is happy and waiting.

True, in the lonely nights I hear a loved voice calling, and I dream repeatedly of an inky sea whereon a misty ship is circling — marking time for me in Irsuley's paradise as I mark time for it here in hell. But it proves nothing except that grief has obsessed me into the compensation of dreams.

I have had lapses like Flora's wherein I have behaved so unlike myself that one would think something from Outside had entered me — some gentle spirit which cannot rest and prompts me to deeds which will solve not only its own problem, but mine. I have emerged from those blank spells in unfamiliar places, befriended by metaphysicians, possessor of peculiar volumes which could console me and raise my hopes to the highest heaven—if I could believe them.

But I have been so facile a liar to the detriment of others that I cannot believe even myself. My obsession has led me into schizophrenia, that is all.

Five years of anguish have not been good for me. It was Kurtson who finally persuaded me to write down the truth. I can view it dispassionately on paper, he says, which I doubt. But it is facing the facts—to be cured by them or killed.

So I have written them.

And—I am waiting!

