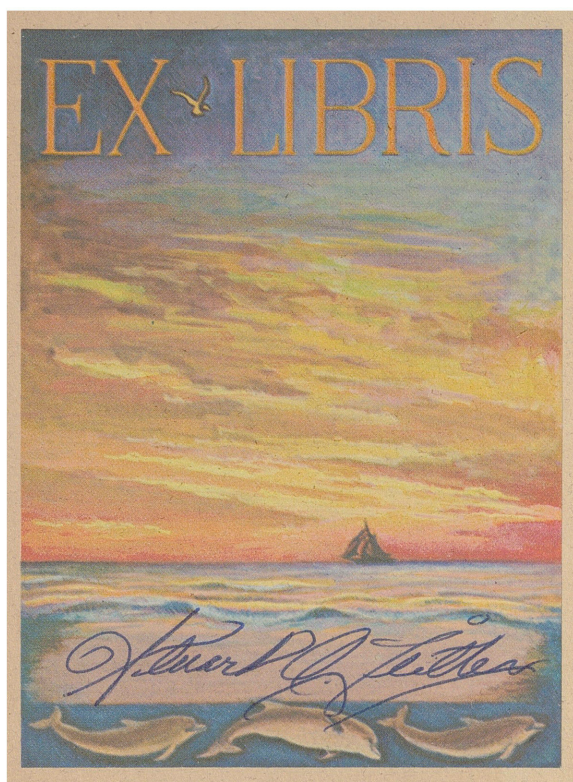


THE DIVINE SEAL

EMMA LOUISE ORCUTT





Talma.

THE DIVINE SEAL

By
EMMA LOUISE ORCUTT



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DEDICATED
TO
MY FELLOW MEMBERS ON THE BOARD
OF
MERCY WARREN CHAPTER, D. A. R.
DURING THE YEAR NINETEEN HUNDRED TWO.

ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE DIVINE SEAL

CHAPTER I

One fine evening, in the latter part of April, I was sitting at the desk in my private office. Apparently, I was running over a column of figures, but in reality, I was indulging in a pleasant reverie, when a hasty knock on the door recalled me to my senses. I recognized it as my friend, Dirube.

"Come in," I shouted.

"Hello!" greeted me as the door opened.

"Good evening," I returned. "Glad to see you. Please be seated," and I drew forth my most comfortable easy chair.

"Thank you, but I have not a moment to lose. Orders have come in regard to the expedition," he replied.

"Indeed!"

"Yes; they were received this afternoon."

"Anything definite?"

"Everything. You have been appointed my first assistant, as I requested."

"When do we start?"

"Within a week. Just as soon as the arrangements can be completed," was his astonishing reply.

"Do you believe we will be successful in our search for the wonderful Zallallah?" I inquired.

"I have the greatest faith in it. Not a doubt of it."

"Shall I see you again to-night?" I said, as he arose to go.

"Not until 10 o'clock to-morrow morning."

The Daily Evening Alaskan contained the following bit of information:

"Lenor Dirube and Uzzane Slav will accompany the Eastern Scientific Expedition to the Arctic regions. The expedition will go by steamer from Klonack to Romanzoff, thence by electra to Pt. Barrow. At the latter place the final arrangements will be made for this most extraordinary voyage, and the company will sail on the Unga, June 1. The Unga is an electric speeder supplied with ice-boats well equipped. The electrical apparatus combines the latest inventions, and it is estimated that the temperature of the boats can easily be raised to one-hundred and fifty degrees at Parry Island. There is no doubt

about the boats being able to reach the open Polar Sea. According to excavations recently made in the lost continent, Atlantis, there is, or has been in ages past, an island or continent in the Polar Sea, rich in minerals, fertile, and of wonderful civilization. The discovery of this continent and the Zallallah are the object of the expedition. At Patrick Isle, telephone connections will be made with the principal cities of the American Republic, which now embraces the greater part of the North American continent; also with the British Republic and the South American States. Phonographic letters will be sent to Asia and Africa."

Lenor Dirube was an archaeologist of great renown, and his reputation rested securely on the thoroughness of his investigations and the correctness of his statements in regard to ruins and relics.

He was perfectly familiar with the old Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Sanskrit, the ancient Chinese records, and the works of the old Greeks and Romans. He had classified the civilizations of the Continent Atlantis, and their relations to the ruins of what were formerly known as Central America and the

Mississippi Valley. His life had been spent in travel and research, and he was eminently fitted for the position of commander-in-chief of the expedition."

The aforesaid Uzzane Slav was myself. I was selected by Commander-in-Chief Dirube for two reasons. I had made a specialty of history and literature, and was master of the English and German languages as used from the eighteenth to the twenty-second centuries; which latter fact was of great value, on account of the many scientific works written during that period.

Accordingly, at noon on the first day of May, the Nalanata steamed gallantly out of Klanack harbor, Prince of Wales Island. The expedition numbered five expert archaeologists, eight civil engineers, six astronomers, professors from several Indian and negro colleges, delegates from several governments, four geologists, five hundred workmen, and two full crews.

We reached the City of On-a-mosh-ka, a distance of nine hundred miles, in sixteen hours; there we were joined by several Liberian scientists.

The weather was superb. Since the de-

struction of the greater part of the Chinese Empire of Asia by an earthquake, from some reason not as yet understood by science, the Japanese current has become almost literally a river of boiling water; and, as it has also changed its course somewhat, the western shores and isles of Alaska are magnificent in verdure and climate, while beyond the Strait nothing was changed. Gondolas, with their silken divans, glided past, their gauze draperies half concealing the beauty within. Music floated by, so soft and ethereal that a delicious languor would steal over the senses and make one utterly oblivious of the icy regions beyond the straits. In the distance, dim and vague, rose the Grey Mountains. Blue and silver islets glistened on the foamy sea. Perfumes from orange groves and spicy fields came with the breeze, and as we trailed in and out among the magical isles, flames of a thousand hues wooed us with their dewy lips. As we occasionally drew near the shores we could see the sunlight sparkle on the marble palaces and gilded domes of cities and towns.

As we sailed to the north we encountered merchant ships from every part of the civilized world—barges laden with tropical fruits;

floating palaces of silver and gold; huge men-of-war. Every kind of craft could be seen hurrying on its way, and never in the history of the world was there a commerce more varied or extensive.

As we were nearing the Harbor of Yu-kon-il-i-a, at sunset, we suddenly heard the booming of a hundred guns.

Yu-kon-il-i-a is one of the capitals of the great republic, of which there are four at the present time. The consuls, praetors, ministers and foreign ambassadors accompany the chief magistrate to each of these capitals during the assembly, which is in consultation three months at each place. The senators, governors, public justices and controllers meet at the capital assigned to their respective states; and no one in the republic is allowed to vote for the rulers of the country until able to give intelligently the principles on which the foundation of a permanent republic must rest. No man or woman can be elected to office of any kind without a certificate from the praetor of his town asserting the good character of the candidate.

The laws are so rigidly enforced that those who rise by successive steps to the highest

places in the government are worthy of the grand ovations given them. So that when we entered the harbor and were told that the National Assembly were ending their triumphal march from the capitol to the electra, we were prepared for a spectacle unrivalled in magnificence by any nation of the earth.

Eliana St. Elaine was the "Queen of the Festival," being the chief magistrate of the whole peninsula. Surrounded by husband and children, borne in a golden chariot between raised terraces of flowers which lined either side of the way, she received the acclamations of the people with imperial dignity blended with a charming kindness of manner. As the darkness increased, electric yachts sailed through the air, looking like miniature worlds on fire; while illuminated fleets below added to the blaze of glory. Scattered throughout the city were small cathedrals of flowers, nestling in high banks of moss and vines, kept moist by tiny fountains, out of whose depths floated grand music of all the ages.

If that great scientist who so many years ago invented what was then called the "phonograph" could have been present to listen to the marvelous creations developed from such

small beginning, he would have been dumb with wonder at his own invention. Within one of those little floral temples, we could hear the grand oratorios of the wonderful old masters, their chorals and symphonies making the empyrean ring with their hallelujahs. From a tiny rock, all green and fresh, would come the roulades of a group of merry birds, mingling with the glee-like music of brooks dancing over their pebbly beds. In the distance floated the soft notes of golden harps and lyres, while silver trumpets joined the melody and made the air resound with angel harmonies.

At last came the crowning glory of science, courage and beauty.

Waiting for its guests in the central square of the city was the Ispahan, a large shell of iridescent pearl, supported by silver wickerwork inlaid with gold and jewels. Attached to this were masts of the newly-discovered metal of azure color, very light and strong, from which floated silken sails and flags. Richly wrought divans were scattered about, and plates of glass could be turned to inclose it at will. In reality of great weight and strength, it looked as a fairy ship.

When the signals were given the bells of the Capitol chimed the national anthem, the party took their seats in the aerial electra, and the great crowd grew silent. Slowly and steadily the Ispahan rose in the air, floated to the right and left, up beyond our vision, then down again nearly within reach of our voices, surely and always obeying the hand of its guide. In the morning the same party were going to the top of Mt. Nippon in an iron aerial electra for the purpose of making plans for the building of an astronomical observatory; the mountain was inaccessible by any other means.

Finally the imposing ceremonies were over, the Assembly was on its way down the harbor and we were settled for the night.

CHAPTER II

"How long can we remain in Romanzoff?" inquired Prof. Devitch of Commander Dirube the following morning, as we drew near the city, which is a few miles from Yu-Kon-il-i-a.

"Twenty-four hours."

"Is that the greatest limit possible?"

"The very extent. The electra, by which the crews and workmen are to be transported to Pt. Barrow, have been specially chartered from the government for a certain length of time."

"It would be a pleasure," broke in Gen. Endicott, "to remain in this beautiful city several days, visiting the marble buildings, museums of art, fountains of rare beauty and its myriad of wonderful arches, but as our sojourn is limited to twenty-four hours I propose we devote several of them to the pavilions."

This was unanimously agreed upon, and we accordingly assembled there early in the afternoon.

A pier extends into the sea a distance of two miles. At each end of it and from the center

rise hexagonal towers two-hundred feet in height. Between these towers are suspension bridges, one above another, which serve as the foundations of the pavilions. These pavilions vary in length from twenty-five to one-hundred feet. They are paved with white marble alternating with mosaics and are decorated on the four sides with peristyles, which support galleries of exquisite architecture.

Fairy fretwork and delicate carvings grace the interior. Scattered in seeming irregularity are fountains of alabaster supported by rare pieces of sculpture, whose waters flow in sparkling jets or tinkling rills or diamond sprays, ever retaining the same crystal purity that glorified them in their mountain home.

Rustic mounds on richly-carved tripods are appropriate settings for ever-blooming flowers, while from a distance float the soft strains of invisible harps and Aeolian lyres.

At night the touch of a jeweled key floods the whole structure with brilliant lights, which transform it as by a magic wand into an enchanted palace. You can ascend the stairs or reach them by means of coaches or aerial electrica. We chose the latter, and as we stepped out on to the upper tier we were much sur-

prised at the greeting we received. Fair ladies waved their dainty lace handkerchiefs; men swung their hats and all stepped aside to allow us to pass.

"The officers and professors of the Zallallah expedition," I heard flying from mouth to mouth. We were compelled to hold an informal reception in the largest pavilion. It was a charming scene and we reluctantly bade it adieu, cherishing its memory to gladden us amid the icebergs of an Arctic sea.

We took the morning electra, leaving Romanzoff at 10 o'clock.

"All ready," shouted the guides.

"May your search for Zallallah be successful," said Gov. Holbrook, as he gave me a final hand-shake.

"Success to Zallallah!" cried the crowd, and we were off.

Over hills and mountains, through valleys and tunnels and arches we flew, arriving at Pt. Barrow in twelve hours.

"Do you anticipate finding the Unga in readiness, Assistant Slav?" asked Prof. Lonzo, an eminent archaeologist.

"Undoubtedly; orders were very strict in regard to the matter," I replied.

We found it equipped and waiting. The electrical apparatus of the iceboats, or galleys—glaces as they are called, was thoroughly examined; for upon their perfection depended the success or failure of our expedition. Congratulations poured in from various societies, and thousands came to bid us "God speed."

"Ready. Every man to his place," rang out the command.

The bustle soon ceased, and all were soon on duty. The final orders were given, and our perilous journey was begun. The wind blew cold from the sea, and though our hearts were brave and full of gladness, our lips would hum the old, sad song, "For the Queen of the Northern Isles I Die."

"Shall we find this northern fairy in the land of ice and snow?" I would ask myself.

The record said:

"In a beautiful palace
She is sweetly sleeping,
Zallallah, Zallallah."

Then followed an inscription which all the learned men of the world had been unable to read.

Below it was this:

“The key to this lies locked in sleep,
With the beautiful Zallallah.
Find her, reveal this,
And learn of ages past and ages to come.”

This tablet was found in a case of gold placed in a tomb hewn in a solid marble rock, beneath a sacred temple amid the ruins of Atlantis, whose hieroglyphics were inscribed upon it hundreds of thousands of years ago. It had lain buried beneath the bed of a mighty ocean for ages. This simple, ancient piece of stone with its hidden meaning, was the sole inspiration of each one of us.

Swiftly we sped over the Arctic waters, just touching at Nah-mah-rhat-a, running into Mystic harbor for a night, then on again till we reached Patrick Isle. There we sent messages to the Secretary at Romanzoff and established communication with every part of the world. Our next delay was at Parry Island for a few days, where ships and supplies were to be kept in readiness in case of need. Once more we resumed our journey and soon passed through Smith Sound and landed at Port Humboldt.

We were destined to practically solve the problem which had been the study of the

world for many decades; whether electricity could convey us in ease and comfort over the glaciers of Northern Greenland and reveal to us the wonders of a nation old before Atlantis was born, once so powerful and highly cultured in arts and sciences, that Egypt, Greece, and modern nations pale before it.

For hundreds of years Plato's Atlantis was supposed to be a fabulous island. Thousands of years after its destruction it again appeared above the waters of the Atlantic. Excavations have proved it to be the last remnant of a very large continent. Records in marble, bronze and gold, relics, script and written history, all reveal a country ancient even then.

Twenty years ago, beneath the ruins of an Okeanon temple in the eastern part of the Isle Atlantis, were found the written records of a million years. These had been preserved in a diamond case, inclosed in a chest of orichalcum, which was again encased in a huge reservoir of some metal entirely unknown to present nations. This treasure rested peacefully in its shrine for a million years. Then, engulfed by the mighty throes of some tremendous commotion into the very bowels of a raging volcano, it rose and fell with the boiling

surge year after year, till the hurricanes of fire gradually died away, leaving it buried beneath the bed of the ocean. Other ages came and went, and again in the cycle of continents it once more rose to its former throne as perfect in its beauty as when its youth was worshiped by the old Atlantean heroes.

The most ancient of these records refer to the religions and customs of a race which lived to the north of them. In a separate receptacle within these records there was found what is supposed to be the Zallallah inscription, though the characters are slightly changed; no more, however, than would naturally occur in the same language after a great lapse of time. The apparent care that had been used for their preservation proved that they were considered of vast importance; and it is believed that the many traditions recently found in Central America, concerning unknown records of great value, have reference to these inscriptions, for they speak of them as belonging to a land a long distance to the northward. To find this land and the beautiful Zallallah, we went forth from our homes to conquer difficulties hitherto deemed impossible.

At Port Humboldt we found a small settle-

ment of people, unique in feature and manner, who regarded us with wholesome awe. We endeavored to ascertain whether they traveled farther north and to learn something of the dangers we were liable to encounter. Either they had no ideas to communicate or no language by which to convey them, for a granite block would have been quite as serviceable.

We immediately set to work to launch our galleys-glaces, three in number—the Atti, the Mermaid and the Kallah. The well-trained crews were equally distributed among the ice-boats. Provisions, astronomical apparatus, tools and machinery were equally divided, so that if one boat was lost the expedition would not be crippled. The galleys-glaces were luxuriously appointed. The salons glittered with crystal and gold. The private apartments were fitted with the conveniences of home, and all countries and climes contributed to the menu. The whole interior was like a summer day, with its warmth and its flowers.

When all was ready we bade adieu to the Unga and its crew, and went on board. The novelty of the situation was exhilarating, but the possible fate scemewhat calmed our spirits.

Zimma stood at a respectful distance, his

face radiant with joy. Zimma was my first attendant, and his only earthly wish was to spend his life in solving mystery and to die in a mysterious way. Mystery called out every power of his soul. I speak of this as his ruling characteristic and we found it a very valuable aid to us.

“What a supreme moment!” exclaimed Prof. Lahma. “The life-blood of years condensed into sixty seconds! The intellect of centuries bursting into glory during a few of our heart-beats!”

The emotion was so intense that breathing was difficult.

At last the signal was given. Each boat gave a throb, and simultaneously shot forward.

“Truly, the lightning of Omnipotence has been chained by man to do his bidding,” reverently murmured Dr. Mayrah.

We were actually in a boat, lighted, warmed and propelled by electricity, gliding over the ice fields of the polar regions.

“Look there!” we heard Zimma call to one of his companions, being on the alert as usual.

“Wonderful!” was the answer.

We went to the inner deck to look about us.

We saw an extended plain brilliant with rubies, emeralds, sapphires and diamonds. As far as the eye could discern was one vast sheet of ice glittering as if it were composed of jewels.

A ride of half an hour changed the scene and brought us nearer the coast again.

"Do you see that mist-like gauze rolling in this direction?" remarked Commodore Panza, who was standing near me.

Within the veil we could see great palaces of ice with golden domes and silver-tipped minarets. Columns of marble whiteness and sculptured symmetry formed arcades that invited us with charming beauty to their frozen hospitality.

"We are alone in a crystallized world!" a low voice uttered.

At the remark we instinctively bowed our heads in reverence.

"I propose to go on the outer deck for a little pastime," suggested Prof. Ludwitz. Col. Richards and a few others, including myself, heartily responded to the proposal.

The secret of our ability to do this comfortably was due to tiny electro-heaters placed about our person. Their success was somewhat doubtful, as the opportunity had never

before occurred to test them at so low a temperature.

The result exceeded our most sanguine expectations, and soon all the decks presented a curious scene. Astronomers were busy making observations, professors discussed the glacial theory and all were in ecstasies over the views.

CHAPTER III

“Engineer Lincoln, give attention, please, for one moment. Is that a glacier or not? And what are those black specks on the summit?” I asked.

His large glass was soon in order.

“Thirty miles out to sea is a glacier three quarters of a mile high and several miles in length. Look for yourself,” was the reply.

I put my eye to the glass. “Yes, and the specks are human beings—three of them—and one is a young girl.”

We gazed at each other in amazement. There was no doubting it. We could see them moving and apparently in earnest conversation. Near them was a tent and smoke was distinctly seen issuing from the top of it.

Commander Dirube and others were instantly summoned and a long consultation was held.

“Can we rescue them?” “Will they eat us if we do?” “Can it be possible there are beings living at the north pole?” “Where

did they come from?" "How did they come there?"

These and a multitude of other questions rapidly presented themselves to our minds. We were looking for the ruins of an ancient civilization and not a modern people.

After due deliberation it was decided to flash a message to them. It read thus:

"Do you need assistance? Who are you and why are you there?"

Then we watched and waited. Soon we saw the girl turn her head toward us, then clasp her hands and call her two companions. We could plainly discern the puzzled look on their faces, and almost hear the laugh of joy at the faint hope of deliverance. We did not suppose they could read the message, but that they distinctly understood it to mean friendly aid for their rescue. Then, gesticulations followed, not one of which had any meaning for us, but every one revealed a native grace that was wonderful.

Our first surprise being over, we proceeded to examine more minutely their personal appearance. The girl was peerless. Long, black eyelashes softened the brilliant black eyes beneath them, and increased the beauty

of a rich olive complexion. An abundance of wavy hair defined the contour of a beautifully shaped head, and made the classic features still more attractive. Her form was fashioned after a model combining the charms of a Venus and a Hebe. Her dress was picturesque, with a suggestion in its draperies of the old classical costumes.

"Whether she be cannibal or angel," I remarked, "it is evident she belongs to a race hitherto unknown."

Her companion, who proved to be her father, had the same features, a very intellectual head and a large, well-proportioned frame.

The third member of the party possessed characteristics of the others, but did not closely resemble them.

"The proper officers will flash heliograms," was the order from Commander Dirube.

Our company could do this in at least fifty different languages, including some of the very ancient ones.

"Shall we go to your assistance?" were the words selected.

We improvised a tablet of fifty lines. Our own language was placed first on the list, as

that has become quite universal, and the others followed in as historical an order as possible.

We watched the effect with great interest. We could plainly see their eyes run slowly down the column, but no gleam of understanding was visible till they reached the very last on the list. This was written in accordance with inscriptions found in Atlantides, and which we classed as "Earliest Aryan." It was the oldest language that had ever come to light. We could not doubt that they comprehended it.

Beckoning gestures were emphatically made to us.

"When and where can they have learned that?" said half a dozen of us in concert. "It is a tongue that was used hundreds of thousands of years ago, perhaps millions."

"It is evident they have no knowledge of modern ones," I remarked.

The small aerial electra was quickly warmed and manned. An Amazonian ambassador, Gen. Randolph, of the Alaskan militia, and myself, took our seats in the car. The guide signaled and we found ourselves slowly mounting in the direction of the clouds. We half

expected it would prove a mirage, and had a little fear that we might simply furnish our unknown friends with a comfortable meal. The thirty miles were soon traversed, and we halted about a quarter of a mile above the crystal pyramid. Cheers and signs of welcome were given us. I cannot describe our feelings as we alighted on that iceberg.

All three simultaneously met us with the manners of cultured people, and we could understand some of their words of greeting. Their language was very musical and their tones rich and full.

I handed the girl a crayon and tablet, as I was curious to learn if they possessed a written language which would serve as a means of communication between us.

To our utter astonishment she filled a page with even, graceful characters which was given Gen. Randolph. It closely resembled the ancient Aryan, in which we were not sufficiently versed to decipher all of it.

Her name was Talma, her father's, Izikar, and the young man's, an upper servant, Zingwa. In some manner not understood by us, they had wandered on to this glacier, which had suddenly loosened and drifted out

to sea. We were conducted into the tent, and imagine our amazement at finding warm rooms, hot drinks, and a table spread with beautiful old pottery containing tempting viands. The utensils which served as knives, forks and spoons, of a peculiar shape, were of solid gold and silver. Many of the terra-cotta urns and bowls were inlaid with jewels.

Zingwa placed divans at our disposal, and courteously served us. During the meal a young girl came in and stood behind Talma. Most of the dishes were very palatable, but only two were familiar; these were a kind of wheaten bread and a species of fish. At the close of the meal, Izikar invoked a blessing from O-on-rath-e-nis, which we could partially interpret.

Immediately after, Zingwa drew back some rich hangings and we sat dumb with wonder at the figure coming toward us. He had the form of a man with the head of a serpent. Small, glittering, beady, black eyes, with the expression of a fiend, made us quail with terror. It seemed that one touch of the forked tongue, as it darted in and out of a hideous mouth, would be more deadly than the bite of the most poisonous asp. We instinctively

shrank from him as he approached us; and we could not refrain from an exclamation of horror as he glided along in serpentine curves, with a most diabolical light issuing from his gleaming eyes.

For an instant Talma shuddered and her lips grew pale; then, concentrating every energy of her being, she gave the creature such a look of determination and queenly power that he immediately drew back and partially reclined on a divan which happened to be unoccupied.

At the same time his features underwent a miraculous transformation. The beady eyes seemed to enlarge and to acquire a decidedly human expression; the mouth almost smiled, and a casual observer would have pronounced him to be a mild sort of person, genial and intelligent. But to me, who saw him as he first entered, he seemed to be quelling his fury only to wait the opportunity of being more hideous than ever.

A short consultation was carried on in their native tongue, at the close of which Izikar, by means of signs and a few sentences in ancient Aryan, informed me that they considered us to be friendly, and they would place

themselves in our care until circumstances enabled them to find their own home again. When we succeeded in making them understand that we were going north, their delight was almost painful.

Everything of value was placed in the *electra* by Zingwa, who also attended Talma and Izikar as they went on board. A maid, whom Talma called Monica, followed with wraps and cushions. The creature addressed as Ozomoth quietly took his seat with the rest, but we noticed that Talma always kept a position facing him, and that she seemed a little nervous and anxious. As we approached the *galleys-glaces* we could see all the decks filled with eager observers and we slowly descended amid vociferous cheers.

I informed Commander Dirube of all that I had learned in regard to the strangers and they were at once made comfortable on my own boat, the *Atti*.

A suite of rooms was given to Talma and her maid, and good, though less luxuriant quarters, were assigned to the other members of the party. Their gratitude to us for rescuing them from their perilous situation, and entertaining them so hospitably, gave good

evidence that they were accustomed to a highly civilized manner of living.

For eight of the twenty-four hours guards were put on duty and we halted for rest; and besides, there were so many beautiful views caused by mists and the long twilights peculiar to that latitude, which we wished to photograph, that much more time was occupied in traversing a hundred miles than was really necessary.

Our new friends were delightfully agreeable, excepting Ozomoth, and very much interested in our methods of business and customs of living.

They immediately began to study our language and to give us further instruction in ancient Aryan. Our progress in communicating with one another was quite remarkable. In a few days those of us best versed in the old language could sustain quite a long and profitable conversation with Izikar. Sometimes Ozomoth joined us, but his remarks were intended to perplex us in regard to everything concerning himself.

CHAPTER IV

A few days later, as we were about to halt for the hours we were accustomed to call night, we found ourselves nearing the edge of a precipice and orders were given to proceed very slowly and cautiously. In a short time we reached the brink.

Between us and the pinnacle opposite was a chasm about one-fourth of a mile in width. We studied the situation silently for a few minutes; then Zimma came quietly to my side, his face fairly beaming with joy.

"I will descend to the valley and flash heliograms," was the remark which greeted me.

"Do you understand, Zimma, that you might never return?" I replied in utter astonishment at such a proposal.

"Could I die a more glorious death?"

I looked incredulous.

"I beg you to grant the request," he continued.

The matter was discussed among the of-

ficers, councils held, and volunteers from both the Kalli and Mermaid were waiting orders. It was decided to make the attempt.

A very small electro-glaci was chosen as the safest means of conveyance; a strong cable was attached to it. This cable was worked by machinery, and if the electrical apparatus of the small iceboat should not prove powerful enough to propel the boat up the steep incline on its return, the cable could be used to draw it up.

The boat was warmed and put in order; Zimma was placed in command.

"Signal if you meet with any difficulties, however slight they may be; I will keep other iceboats in readiness to go to your assistance," was the parting advice of Commander Dirube. Zimma and his companions took their places; a little throb of power and the boat started.

The slope was gradual for nearly one quarter of a mile. At that point the descent was either so precipitous we could not see beyond, or there was a fathomless abyss.

When our brave party reached what seemed to be the edge of the glacier, they halted.

Handkerchiefs and flags were waved to us, and we returned the salutation with rousing

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cheers. Then the cable began to slowly uncoil and they were out of sight.

Izika and Talma stood on the outer deck. I passed along to join them, hoping we could have a short, uninterrupted chat, as I saw nothing of Ozomoth.

A faint blush and sparkling eyes assured me of a hearty welcome from Talma. In truth, I was becoming much interested in the girl.

Izika was intently watching the cylinder as it slowly and evenly revolved.

"What length out now?" I inquired of the operator.

"One quarter of a mile, sir."

"I do not know where we are," said Talma in ancient Aryan, "but if we are ever able to reach the top of yonder mountain of ice, I think we shall be able to find our own home." A little home-longing came into the lovely eyes.

By this time the interest of everyone was centered on the uncoiling of the cable.

"How much rope out now?" came from a voice somewhere.

"One-half mile, sir."

And still it went on unrolling.

"One mile," shouted Gen. Perry.

On and on, slowly and evenly.

"One and one-half miles," was the next announcement, and still it did not stop!

"Good two miles!" exclaimed Commander Dirube.

Our eyes never moved from the wheel.

A few seconds more and the machinery was quiet. We drew a long breath and were preparing to watch for the messages, when the cylinder creaked and was again in motion.

Another half mile and it stopped in so decided a manner that we felt assured the adventurers had touched bottom.

I then conducted Talma and Izikar to the upper deck, and found seats for them that they might have a fine view of the heliograms.

I was standing at a short distance, giving an order or two before joining them, when I heard a strange hissing sound behind me; at the same time I felt an icy breath chilling my nerves till a paralyzing sensation seemed to be creeping over my senses, slightly benumbing them.

The hissing grew louder and the breath colder.

The next that I realized, Talma grasped my arm, and with the strength of a giantess, she whirled me around. Ozomoth stood before

me. Exultation lighted up his face and his hideous eyes gleamed till they shot forth sparks of fire. Talma gave him the same look of power I had seen in the tent, and the same transformation took place. He smiled, and waving his hand gracefully towards me he said: "An immortal yields to mortal power."

He then endeavored to make himself agreeable and succeeded so well that for the first time I almost forgot the real nature of the strange being. As we took our seats I noticed Talma took the same precaution to face the monster that I had noticed when they went on board the electra. What was still more peculiar, she made him face me.

"Can it be that I am in danger of that cold, hissing breath?" I thought. "And has this girl the power and desire to protect me?"

"An immortal yields to mortal power," I repeated over and over in my mind. Many times I had considered whether it were advisable to ask Izikar for any information concerning Ozomoth, but I had felt a delicacy in intruding my curiosity about anyone whom he and Talma honored with their society.

A great running hither and thither, ac-

accompanied with shouts and cheers, attracted my attention.

"Read the heliogram," came from all sides.

The message stood out in plain, bold relief.

"We have reached the valley and are safe. I think great discoveries are before us. If you decide to follow, I would advise that you turn to the right when you reach the point at which we halted, then wind to the left a little farther on, and you will meet with no difficulty. I would also suggest that you connect the three electras by cable, in case any part of the machinery should break. With the exception of a severe bruise on my head, caused by jumping too hastily ashore, no one is harmed. My bump makes me very happy, for it is another mark won in the service of mystery. We await orders.

ZIMMA,

Acting Commander"

Under directions from Commander Dirube I immediately flashed the following reply:

"We will follow you according to suggestions.

Per order.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF"

During the preparations my duties often called me past the door of Talma's salon. Of course Ozomoth never entered it without special invitation, which I also observed was seldom given.

As I was on my way to one of the decks Izikar came out of the room and requested a private interview. He closed the door after us and motioned me to a seat near Talma.

"May I ask what power propels this boat?" he anxiously inquired.

"Electricity," I replied.

"What is that?"

"Science still fails to answer the question," I said.

Then I gave him a short explanation of its application as a motive power.

"We are about to make a perilous descent," he continued. "If any catastrophe should harm us, and I should be taken and you left, I want to leave my darling in your care. Guard her faithfully. Under such circumstances she would explain to you many things which are now mysterious."

He grasped my hand eagerly, awaiting my reply.

"Izikar," I said, "your fears are ground-

less; we shall land safely; but I promise to watch over Talma whenever and wherever she may lose her father."

I glanced at the girl. A strange, new thrill shot through my nerves, and for the first time I realized the depth of soul revealed in those large, dark eyes.

Talma was a rare combination of beauty and soul. She refined and elevated every one with whom she came in contact.

After that interchange of soul in one long look into each other's eyes, we could never be quite like strangers again. I went on deck, a new joy flooding my heart with its sunshine.

Engineer Altz of our Atti, Engineer Demar of the Callah, and Engineer Livingstone of the Mermaid, were to guide us down that icy slope.

"Ready," shouted the guide at last.

The respective keys were touched and we were off.

We followed Zimma's advice and curved to the right and left, as circumstances required. Sometimes the boats would run abreast, again we would shoot out a little in advance of the others as leader, but all glided along as

beautifully as a swan in the silver waters of a lake.

A low hum of voices here and there relieved an almost oppressive silence. I passed Talma several times; she had brought out her harp and occasionally gave us a few charming chords.

"Am I beginning to love the girl?" I questioned myself.

My earnest gaze, as I sometimes loitered near her, would cause her to look up; the delicate blush that mounted to her forehead assured my heart that sometimes her thoughts admitted me within their pure shrine.

"Is your confidence in our stanch craft somewhat restored?" I said, addressing Izikar.

"Very much; very much," was the response. "How far from our starting point are we now?"

"One mile," and I passed on, just catching a few flute-like notes accompanying the harp as I crossed to the opposite deck.

At the distance of one and one quarter miles the mercury began to slowly rise, greatly to our satisfaction.

Down, down we went, our spirits rising in proportion.

The temperature became very mild, and when we rounded a bend within half a mile of the bottom, little patches of bare ground were plainly visible. Then a few more throbs of the boat and we stopped.

Some outlet to our feelings was absolutely necessary. We laughed, cried, shook hands and behaved in quite an idiotic manner.

Izika seemed specially overjoyed, and Talma expressed many thanks for the good fortune attending us thus far.

As I stepped from the galley-glace, the first object I saw was a pair of shoes kicking vigorously some twenty feet above my head. I recognized them as belonging to Zimma, and, judging from their energetic motion, I concluded he was alive.

I turned to his comrades for an explanation.

"He saw a hole up there and felt it his duty to investigate; he became wedged in and can get neither in nor out."

"Has he been in that predicament long?"

"No, sir, only a few minutes," said one.

"We will have him all right, soon," said another.

After much pulling and prying, and a few

groans from the subject experimented on, we succeeded in bringing Zimma once more to the outside world. An addition of several bruises and bumps on head and arms, with various scratches on the face, transformed him into quite a picturesque factor in the problem of scientific research.

A hearty laugh at his expense followed, even Ozomoth seeming to think something funny had happened.

"You are reckless, I fear, Zimma," I remarked by way of consolation.

"I did almost die in glory that time, sure; but—" and he pointed to a body electro fastened on the lapel of his jacket, "thanks to my forethought, I accomplished something; this little lantern lighted up a considerable space in there. I counted three houses and saw several trees. Quite a settlement, I should judge."

"The ruins of a city!" I exclaimed. "If it prove to be such, another medal from the society at home shall be awarded you."

We considered the advisability of drilling an opening sufficiently large to allow us to enter and explore the mysteries of Zimma's settlement. The verdict was unanimously in

favor of it, and the electric drill was immediately set to work for the night.

We retired as peacefully unconcerned as we would have done in the safe City of Romanzoff.

The next morning we were all on the scene of action at an early hour, and found a large hole had been made through the thick walls of the cave. The rock was bare some distance above it, and was decidedly warm.

"The greatest precaution should be used," I suggested; "we do not know what elements we may encounter."

Strict orders were issued by Commander Dirube that no one should enter without a written passport; so that everyone sought recreation elsewhere for that day.

The steady thud of the machinery was inspiring, and contributed very much towards sustaining the excellent state of our minds. It would be difficult to find a more comfortable, enthusiastic party than we were in that desolate place, surrounded on all sides by mountains of ice two and one quarter miles high, waiting for unknown regions to be opened for our exploration.

We named the place "The Happy Valley,"

and the maps still designate it by that name.

In the afternoon I was sitting in one of the smaller salons, which opened on the inner deck, copying some memoranda.

It was unusually quiet on the Atti. Izikar I knew to be in one of the lower cabins in conversation with some of the archaeologists. I had been wondering what could be engrossing the attention of Talma at this hour, as it was the time she generally gave to exercise on the outer deck, when she passed through the room, attended by her maid. They did not observe me, as I was partly hidden by some draperies. In a few moments I heard a faint murmuring sound. The voice chanted in monotone for some seconds, the flowing liquid notes thrilling with sadness and falling in mournful, distant rhythm, like the waves of the sea, softly caressing the shore in the far-away lands of the sun.

At last, by an almost superhuman effort of the will, I arose and stepped noiselessly to the door, which was partially open.

To my utter amazement, Monica stood just outside, her head bowed in her hands, and I could see the tears trickling through her fingers as she stifled the sobs that shook her from



A few feet away . . . stood Ozomoth.

head to foot. I was on the point of speaking to her, when again that soothing, enchanting monotone of Heavenly music caused me to turn my head.

Talma was sitting on a low divan, bending slightly forward, her head leaning on one hand, while the other dropped listlessly at her side. Her beautiful face was pale with anguish, as if she saw before her a frightful abyss which she must leap or die. Her eyes, fixed in an enraptured gaze, were pleading and tearful. Gradually the tears were dried, the pleading expression changed to one of scorn and loathing; but the eyelids never quivered.

On chimed that silvery melody of matchless song. The scorn passed out of her face. A rosy hue chased away the ghastly pallor; the lips parted as with a smile; and not till then had I noticed that the lips did not move.

I glanced in the direction she seemed to be looking. A few feet away, partly concealed by curtains, stood Ozomoth. His beady, glittering eyes were steadily fixed on Talma's.

For a moment I did not comprehend the mystery. I only knew that the beautiful voice came from that strange creature, with

the serpent tongue; then, like a flash, came the thought, the serpent is charming the dove and will kill her.

The beady eyes never faltered; involuntarily the girl drew near them. My pulse almost stopped. My heart could scarcely beat; I could not move a muscle.

"Oh, save her! She cannot save herself!" and Monica fell unconscious.

I saw Talma flutter and grasp in an attempt to raise her hand, as if to grasp something for support.

Great God! What a groan! I jumped and caught Talma in my arms. For an instant a bright steel glistened in the air.

The next moment Ozomoth lay prostrate before me. I wrenched the dagger from his hand, and then bore Talma into the salon. Izikar had been called, and was just entering the opposite door. Zingwa took charge of Monica, who was only in a faint, and she quickly recovered.

I laid my beautiful burden on a sofa. Izikar and I sat down to watch her, while Monica applied restoratives.

"Will she live?" I tremblingly asked.

"Yes, she will live; my poor Talma!"

Izikar buried his face in his hands and seemed lost in thought.

How lovely Talma was! Her flowing draperies disclosed the large, beautifully molded arm, with its shapely hand, and revealed the white throat. The least perceptible motion of the breast told us she breathed. For a long time she lay in the deadly swoon, but at last the color began to sweep over her face in delicate waves, the eyelids trembled and those glorious eyes met mine.

"Thank you," she murmured, with a sweet smile, and again closing her eyes, fell into a natural sleep.

Then and there my heart opened, and received Talma with all the love it held. "My beautiful, wounded dove," I sighed, "I will protect you."

"Izikar," I said in a low tone, "I love your daughter. Will you give me your consent to love and win her?"

He glanced in the direction of the door, and I saw Ozomoth standing a few feet from us.

All the fiends of hell could not wear a more diabolical look than gleamed from his beady eyes. The tongue darted in and out, and his face had the serpent shape and look which it

had in the tent. It seemed as if the very poison of his venom would fall upon us and kill us instantly.

He quickly stepped to Izikar's side.

"Have you forgotten Nanlin?" he said.

"Do you remember the fate of Yonding-Ha?"

Izikar trembled.

"I will not abdicate my throne; no, not for Heaven itself," and he turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

"I cannot answer you, now, Assistant Slav," said Izikar, turning to me, in great agitation; "Talma is out of danger for the present, and Monica will care for her now. Let us go below."

I could not forget my peerless beauty. The soul of Talma seemed almost divine, and love came to comfort me. "I will protect her whatever happens," I resolved.

"Who and what is Ozomoth?"

I pondered over the question, and the more I wondered the more puzzled I became.

CHAPTER V

The second morning the entrance to the cave was deemed sufficiently large for all practical purposes. I was put in command of the first party to enter the chasm. I accorded to Zimma the honor of leading us into the new world he had discovered.

Our electric bull's-eye would concentrate the light and throw it in a certain direction at least two miles; besides this each one of us carried a brilliant electro lantern.

Zimma cautiously moved forward several rods within the entrance, plainly indicating the pride he felt in the distinction of leader. When particularly distinguished he carried off the honors in true military style.

We found the temperature warm and agreeable, but could discover no cause why it should be so. The trees and houses seen by Zimma proved to be rocks in those forms. Seeing nothing of importance we considered it best to explore at our leisure, and I sent back word that all could safely enter who wished to do.

It was not long before the great cavern presented the appearance of a lively city square. We had gone a considerable distance within the interior, when, as we turned a corner, we were confronted by a wall of rock fifty feet high, which seemed to extend the whole width of this uncanny place.

Zimma was on the alert. "Sir, I will bring ladders if it be your pleasure, and scale the wall."

As there was a large space between the top of the wall and the top of the cave, and as there seemed to be no other way to ascertain whether anything beyond was worth forcing an entrance through it, I gave my consent. A very short time was required to get things in readiness.

"Do not fall over on the other side, Zimma; it might be uncomfortable for you," laughed Izikar.

"A dead hero is better than a live coward," Zimma fearlessly answered. He mounted the ladder and was soon at the top.

"Can you see over the wall?" we shouted through our tubes.

"No; the top of the wall is about twenty feet wide."

"Is it smooth and level?"

"A little rough but level. I will crawl over to the other edge and investigate."

Before we could protest he was out of sight.

In a few moments he appeared at the top of the ladder and hastily descended.

"My electro lantern met with an accident," he explained to the crowd.

"Sir, I must see you alone," he said, addressing me.

We stepped to one side and he conversed in a very low tone.

"Are you confident you are not mistaken?" I questioned.

"Perfectly, sir. It did make me feel a bit queer, but I am certain of what I saw."

"Did you see it distinctly before your light became disabled?"

"I did, sir."

I quietly drew Commander Dirube's attention and he joined us. I repeated what Zimma had told me.

In answer to all inquiries we simply related that Zimma thought there might be valuable relics, and that we should immediately have the electric drills brought in and an entrance fifteen feet square cut through the rock.

Orders were given for all to retire to the galleys-glance, except the officers and workmen detailed to accomplish the work.

"Is he firm in the belief that the man is civilized?" said Commander Dirube to me in an undertone, as we stood apart watching the machinery.

"He seems to be, but I think it advisable to keep the matter quiet until we are assured of the facts of the case," was my reply.

The electric drills did their work thoroughly, quickly and with very little noise. It was a matter of only a few hours of suspense, as the rock proved to be composed of much softer material than its appearance indicated. When it was announced that the work was completed perfect silence was enforced, and Zimma and myself stealthily crept through that short tunnel. As we neared the further end we cocked our revolvers and listened intently for some minutes. Hearing no sound we stepped boldly out on the other side and found ourselves in a world of beauty.

Zimma had seen only the one man, standing directly in front of us, but at a considerable distance. About an eighth of a mile to the right a most animated scene surprised us.

The streets were full of people, hurrying in every direction.

At one corner two gentlemen were shaking hands, evidently old friends happily surprised at meeting each other. Beautiful young girls, laden with flowers, seemed to be chatting and laughing as if it were some grand holiday.

Just entering a temple were a bride and her train, the silken canopies, velvets and laces, denoting it to be a marriage of persons of wealth and culture.

Open windows and doors gave us glimpses into the interior of homes, the inmates being engaged in different occupations.

We were sure we could hear the whir of looms in the workshops, and we could plainly see the operatives.

Toddling children walked beside their nurses; stalls of books and papers were scattered at intervals along the streets, and fruit stands reminded us of our own delicious fruits in our far-away Alaskan homes.

The buildings were high and massive and displayed a wonderful skill in architecture. Gorgeous chariots were drawn by mettled steeds with rich trappings of gold and silver

and beasts of burden were hauling different kinds of merchandise.

To the left we saw beautiful groves of palms, orange trees in bloom and tropical flowers in all their luxuriance of color and abundance.

I held up my handkerchief; it slightly fluttered, showing a good circulation of air.

"Zimma, can you hear my voice?"

He looked at me with an interrogation point in his eyes.

"Perfectly well, sir."

"Does it sound clear and natural?"

"I detect no difference in it," he replied.

"Why, then, do we not hear as well as see all that throng of people?"

A smile broke over his features.

"I will go nearer and listen and shout back to you," he proposed.

"But have you noticed they keep the same positions?" I suggested.

"No, sir; they are all constantly moving," he replied.

"Watch one particular person five minutes. Do you not see the bride has not yet entered the temple? She stands exactly in the same position as when we first saw her."

We walked along several feet and stood under a banana tree, whose large, ripe clusters looked very delicious. I touched the tree; it felt like stone. I passed on to the nearest building; I touched it. It was solid rock.

"Zimma, come," I called; and we soon stood among that throng of people.

I ventured to touch the hands of a man leaning against a low balcony of a building. Solid rock.

Zimma entered a house, and it seemed as if the lady standing in the hall smiled a greeting. He touched her hand and it felt like marble.

For a few moments we were unable to speak. I could not immediately grasp the details of the situation.

"Zimma," I said, recovering a little from my surprise, "the city of live people you thought we might find is one of stone."

"We are in a petrified world."

"Some terrible calamity overtook them so suddenly they had no time to move a muscle; and Nature has shown her superior skill in her chemical laboratory and preserved them just as they are." That was my solution of the puzzle.

When the remainder of the expedition was informed of the discovery, it was a curious study of human nature to mark the effect on different temperaments. A few feared that some catastrophe might overtake us. Some thought it might be peculiar conditions of the air, and dangerous to remain. Others were ready to follow Zimma into any untrod part of the universe. Curiosity, however, finally conquered the faint-hearted, and they were ready to join us of stouter courage in exploring the mystery.

It was a grave company that passed through that underground tunnel, though Talma seemed in unusually high spirits.

Ever since that hour when I held her for a brief moment in my arms, I had been in no doubt of my own feelings. I loved the girl.

She was kind, entertaining, thoughtful, and at the same time there was an air of reserve that baffled all my attempts to ascertain whether she understood my feelings or cherished a bit of love for myself.

Her eyes sparkled and the rich color came and went in her cheeks as we neared the temple.

"We will precede this youthful bride of a

million years or more, and be present at the ceremony if you like," said I, and led the way into the interior of the building, followed by Izikar, Talma and a few others.

Imagine, if you can, the sensation experienced when we stood looking over an audience assembled ages ago, now turned to solid rock; but every color, feature, expression, perfectly preserved. Had you been there with deafened ears you could almost have taken your oath that you could see the heads of the maidens coquettishly nod and their blushes deepen as some rash lover slyly whispered a bit of love in their ear; and you would never have doubted that the lips moved or that you heard the humming of voices.

We sauntered down the aisles, occasionally sitting down beside a fine-looking old gentleman or attractive girl, so natural in posture and looking at us so pleasantly, that we could not resist the inclination to be polite and bow and beg pardon for our intrusion.

"Minister Adams," said I, addressing an eminent archaeologist standing near me, "can you form the faintest conception of the worth of this discovery to the students of science?"

Before he could answer my question we

heard a great outcry in the opposite part of the temple, accompanied by a stifled shriek. We hastened to investigate it. A door partly open had been broken from its hinges by some workmen, and disclosed the bridegroom and an attendant who were evidently ready to enter the temple to meet the bridal party at the altar.

Talma gazed at them as if spellbound by terror, while Izikar turned his head as if in prayer. I could see his hands tremble as he clasped them together.

I turned again to examine the objects which had wrought such a sudden change in the feelings of our guests. In the bridegroom I saw a tall, finely proportioned frame, a head that scientists would pronounce perfect, features a god might envy, an expression both pleasing and daring. That he was a man of character none could doubt. The impress of courage and conscience was indelibly written in the face.

The most singular fact of all was the striking resemblance he bore to Talma. The superior, soulful eyes were hers. I passed down that aisle to speak to Izikar but I saw that both he and Talma were utterly oblivious of

anyone present, and the few of us remaining in the temple kept respectfully silent.

At last Talma turned to her father. She was very pale and trembling.

"Father Izikar," she said, "it is true! Oh, it is true! It is Nanlin!" and she burst into tears.

Izikar gathered her in his arms. She could no longer control the rising sobs. It was torture to stand helpless to assuage such misery, but I felt it was a sorrow too sacred for others to share; besides I had no right to comfort my love in her terrible grief; to request her to explain it to me that I might battle the world, if need be, for her sake. I resolved to see Izikar again at the first opportunity and to let Talma know that my love and protection were hers, even if she loved another.

Izikar pressed her head close to his breast and gently stroked the shining hair, moistening it with his fast flowing tears.

"My own beloved daughter," he murmured again and again.

When the tempest of grief had exhausted itself, she raised her head, and oh! the agony in those mournful eyes.

"O father," came from her lips, "there is no help for thy daughter! She is doomed!"

"My darling Talma, if I could die for thee!" moaned Izikar, his quavering voice revealing the depths of feeling he was unable to express.

Talma's tears were dried, for there were no more tears to weep. Passion quivered in the balance with duty and love. Then the dreadful agony passed out of her face; peace hovered over it, and a beautiful smile of resignation transfigured it into one of saintly calm.

She wound her strong, rounded, beautiful arm about her father's neck.

"Father, I will not falter; I will die worthy of thy daughter. Thy house and all our people shall called me 'Blessed.'"

The beautiful soul shining through her eyes was brighter than a sunlit gem.

"Help me to be brave!" she murmured with a gentle caress.

"I dare not do otherwise," replied Izikar, "but every word of love from thy lips is a sharp, pointed steel piercing my heart and letting out its life blood! Every caress from thee adds fire to my brain!"

He bent his head to kiss the white cheek.

"Sometimes, my sweet child, I swear thou shalt not be given a sacrifice, and the destruction may come; but the people would be savage in their fear and wrath, and would put thee to death in ignominy before the doom would fall upon them."

Finally, they turned and slowly passed down the aisle, still unconscious of my presence. The rest had noiselessly left the temple. I followed quietly at a little distance behind them.

At the door they lingered beside the bride. Talma touched her forehead in a soothing, caressing way, as if her sympathy could be understood by the marble beauty. She covered the delicate hand with her own.

"You are Yonding," she cried. "Poor girl," and kissed the still, red lips.

"My poor girl!" she repeated in a broken voice.

At that instant I saw Ozomoth entering a window in the rear. I hastily turned my light and stepped behind a pillar to watch him. He caught a glimpse of Talma and Izikar as they left the steps, and went in the direction of the entrance. He looked about him, studying the faces of that strange audi-

ence, and walking up and down the aisles, till he suddenly came face to face with Nanlin, as Talma called it.

For a moment he stood perfectly motionless; then, with a most fiendish yell of exultation, he clapped his hands and leaped toward the figure in a very frenzy of joy. He walked around it, he patted it on the shoulder, he peered into its face, laughing and dancing like a maniac.

"I recognize you, my noble Nanlin. Even you, with all your wealth and kingly power, could not defy the gods. Ha, ha, ha!"

Then he slowly, stealthily crept down the aisle with that serpentine, undulating motion. You could almost discern the folds of his body as he writhed along, and see the drops of venom fall from the forked tongue, as the fire scintillated from the burning eyes.

About midway he halted. Talma and Izikar were just visible through the open door. I watched Ozomoth. That infernal smile, that was more malicious than the raging fury of a savage, revealed his inner nature.

"Ha, ha, ha! my proud Lily," he chuckled, with a leer. "You have learned what power it is that binds you with its iron shackles.

“Ha, ha, ha! my fair queen!” and he rubbed his hands in glee.

“You thought to burst the bonds, but I hold the key that unlocks them,” and his venomous smile broadened.

He stepped nearer the door and pointed to the retreating figure of Talma.

“Your haughty head shall yet bow to me; you shall yet smile on me, my fair one. Ha, ha, ha;” and he passed on out of sight.

CHAPTER VI

I saw no more of Izikar and Talma until in the early afternoon of the following day, when they came into the salon, preparatory to starting for another excursion into the Petrified World.

Izikar had aged very much within twenty-four hours; Talma was more beautiful than before. "Whatever furnace of affliction it is that she has passed through," I said to myself, "it has left its tracings on a soul more radiant than ever in its loveliness."

Her manner was as calm and winning as if there never had been a ripple of sorrow across her pathway in life. Her devotion to Izikar was simple and beautiful, and also mysterious. At times her conversation and attention would give one the impression that she was the innocent cause of her father's trouble, which did not affect her personally. Again, it would appear from remarks involuntarily dropped by Izikar, that his cup of bitterness was nothing compared with hers. A sweet, attractive dignity was one of her special char-

acteristics, and she always maintained it in her relations to Ozomoth, though I could see how her true soul loathed him and his hideous exterior.

“Why do they tolerate his presence?” I thought again.

I asked myself that question so many times, always giving a different solution of it, that I could find no new reason, and none at all that was satisfactory.

Ozomoth had remained in his own apartments through the day, and I heartily wished it might be his pleasure to do so for some days to come.

A few important details pertaining to business required my presence occasionally throughout the afternoon, so that a proposed trip was deferred until the following morning, and we sat down for a little chat.

One of the strict orders from the scientific society, under whose auspices we were acting, was that the search for Zallallah should not be mentioned to any people we might encounter. That we were in search of relics in a general way, would be the only necessary information to give; but the meeting of a family in many respects as intelligent as ourselves, was a con-

tingency not foreseen. In ancient tongues they were far our superiors.

Commander Dirube and myself held a long consultation over the matter and decided it advisable to let events determine the best method to pursue; consequently, Zallallah had never been mentioned in the presence of our guests.

As we were so reticent in regard to everything concerning our adventures in these unknown regions, we respected the same in them, and our relations with each other had been wholly free from any suspicion or inquisitiveness on the part of any one.

But we were perfectly willing to relate anything pertaining to our homes and country, and I had resolved to introduce the subject at the first favorable opportunity, and show enough interest in them to learn if they expected to ever reach their own land again.

I had also determined to acquaint Izikar with the scenes I witnessed in the temple on the part of Ozomoth, and tender him all the aid that lay in the power of the expedition, and specially offer him any service I could render. He knew my feelings in regard to Talma, and I longed to assure him that what-

ever were the feelings she entertained towards me, mine would remain unchanged; and that anything for her safety or comfort would be readily undertaken. I had not spoken to him on the subject since the memorable incident which affected Talma so strangely, for I did not wish to be obtrusive, and I hoped he would be at liberty to introduce the topic himself.

Accordingly after a few remarks on the progress of the explorations I casually introduced the idea of one's love for his native country, and gave a short description of my own state, Alaska. Turning to Izikar I inquired, "Do you anticipate reaching your home some time in the future?"

"Most assuredly I do; but you will think it almost incredible when I tell you that until we met your party we supposed we were the only race left on the earth."

"Did we alarm you with our signals?"

"On the contrary, we were rejoiced to learn of the existence of human beings somewhere near us; but we do not understand how you can accomplish such wonderful things."

I gave him a brief explanation of the application of light and electricity to achieve that particular result.

"I conclude by your clothing," I resumed, "that you have a mild climate?"

"Ah! yes. Very warm and beautiful. Flowers and fruit all the year. We should never know what it means to be cold if it were not for the tall ice peaks about us. Very good roads are constructed up some of them, and many have tents at different elevations, where they go for amusement."

"Ours was the only one at the top," remarked Talma, "and it was some distance from the brink; but our fate will undoubtedly deter all others from trying the same experiment."

"That explains your perilous position when we discovered you," I said.

"Yes," replied Izikar, "we built the tent many months ago and considered our position perfectly secure. From some unknown cause a large section of ice broke away from the solid mass around us and drifted out to sea. At first we did not realize we were drifting, so imperceptible was the motion. We noticed the crevice in time to have sprung across it and then we could easily have reached our boat. But when we knew of our danger it was too late."

"It was a peculiar sensation," said Talma, "to be floating on an immense piece of ice away from our home, to a new world perhaps, although we did not believe it was peopled. I was almost happy in the thought that we might never be found, and I should die peacefully, perchance unconsciously. Your people must die, must they not?"

"Yes," I answered.

I mentally wondered why this young girl, with pulses bounding in health, could wish to die.

"But you were glad to be rescued after all," I said, smiling.

"Indeed, I was. We naturally cling to life, you know, for the happiness the present affords, even when we know the future is black before us. Besides, I was not so selfish as to want father, Monica and Zingwa to die from my thoughtlessness, for it was I that insisted on having the tent placed so far from the edge of the ice wall," and a pained look stole into her eyes.

"Can you form any idea of the direction of your land from the top of the glacier we have descended?" I asked Izikar.

"I have no definite knowledge in regard to

"I conclude by your clothing," I resumed, "that you have a mild climate?"

"Ah! yes. Very warm and beautiful. Flowers and fruit all the year. We should never know what it means to be cold if it were not for the tall ice peaks about us. Very good roads are constructed up some of them, and many have tents at different elevations, where they go for amusement."

"Ours was the only one at the top," remarked Talma, "and it was some distance from the brink; but our fate will undoubtedly deter all others from trying the same experiment."

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it," he said, "but ever since we came on board the galley-glace, as you call your boat, I have been impressed that our home was northwest of us and that we should find it."

"How many does your tribe number?" he continued.

"Our nation numbers millions and we are only one among many," I replied.

Their astonishment was very great at such a revelation.

"Do we outnumber you?" I asked.

"Very, very much. We have only a remnant left. Our nation was once an exceedingly powerful one; but many catastrophes have greatly reduced it. We have very ancient records, however, which I have studied continually for years."

As he said this he glanced at Talma, who seemed confused, and she quietly arose and left the room.

"And I find accounts," he went on, "of many individuals, in twos and threes, scaling the lofty walls of ice that surround us, but none ever returned. I think this petrified world was once a part of our country. In fact, I have the best of evidence to prove it."

Before I could express my surprise at the

latter remark, an orderly came with a request to repair immediately to Commander Dirube's office. As I arose I said to Izikar, "Will you please grant me a private interview with you this evening in my salon?"

"At what hour?"

"Any hour that will best suit your convenience," I replied.

"I will be there at ten. At that time Monica will be with Talma for the night; anything that I can do in return for your unbounded hospitality to me and my beloved daughter will be granted most cheerfully."

The above conversation ended about four o'clock in the afternoon. An hour later I left the commander's office and leisurely sauntered along one of the outer decks; I was vainly trying to conjecture how many ages ago the people of the petrified world lived, what terrible calamity befell them, what was the name of the country, and many such knotty problems, which science and research have since made so clear.

"Is it possible," I thought, "that it once formed a part of the powerful nation spoken of by Izikar? Is it in reality a relic of his own country?"

Just then I heard a rich voice humming a particularly fine air, with which I was unacquainted; it trilled and warbled in a most delightful way. The spirit was unmistakably soaring in its flight with a light wing, and the voice followed in sweet harmony.

It was wholly unlike the charm of Ozomoth; it was soothing and peaceful, rather than passionate. But since that thrilling incident I never felt satisfied who was the originator of any chance musical rhythm I might hear, until I had assured myself of the exact whereabouts of that Evil Being.

That was the most appropriate name I could give him, and I indulged in the pleasure of using it in secret, as a safe outlet to some antipathy I had for his Satanic majesty.

I walked along to an open window and met Talma passing by. Greatly relieved I stepped through the window, and expressed my delight in finding a new means of entertainment added to our list of amusements in the Happy Valley; and I also requested another favor. She sat down by the harp and skillfully touched the strings and sang.

The voice was melody itself, but the plaintive air suggested some mysterious belief hid-

den away in the inner depths of the soul, and it ended with a melancholy cry for help.

"Why can I not save her from the sad fate she always sees before her?" I questioned.

"I will," I vowed.

Then followed a song that sang of the sea. Not a wild, tempestuous sea, with its white-capped breakers and roaring surf; but one that softly breathed of silver waves and gentle winds. A desolate sea it was, and she seemed to glance wistfully beyond it to a shore that the longing eyes could never reach.

"Sometime you have lived by the sea," I said.

"Always; our land consists of many islands; we go about in gaily-decked canoes and boats. I never lived away from the sea. Everything you tell us of your lofty mountains and great domains seems so unreal and strange."

"Do you all speak the same language?"

"We use the same languages; we speak the ancient and the modern Aryan principally."

She gave a few sentences as examples.

"Then we have the Kinke," and she wrote a few lines on a tablet which so closely resembled the ancient Chinese that at first sight I thought it was the same.

"We have the Panwah, also, which is this:" and she wrote another line in a fine, even hand. The characters bore a striking resemblance to the Indian tongues of several centuries ago.

"The Sausa is used very much; here is a verse of that."

I was astonished to see the resemblance, philologically speaking, to the old Sanscrit.

"Can it be," thought I, "that she dwells in the land that has been the cradle of nations?"

"The name of this island home?" I asked.

"Heclades."

I went to a private music stand in a corner of the room and brought out one of the liveliest, rollicking songs I could find. I believed one of the most efficacious remedies for Talma's welfare would be to surround her with as much cheer as possible.

I had fallen into the habit of thinking of her as belonging solely to me, although I was totally ignorant of her feelings in regard to the matter. I ran over the air so as to familiarize her with our written music; she proved an apt pupil and we soon made the room ring with laughter and song.

As we were finishing the last strain I heard from all quarters: "Call Assistant Slav."

"Where is Assistant Slav?"

"Have you seen Assistant Slav?"

I hastily excused myself and ran out to learn the cause of so much excitement.

"Zimma is in danger!" half a dozen subordinates cried, running up to me breathlessly.

"Zimma is in great danger, sir!"

"Where?"

"About half a mile from the entrance to the Petrified World."

"Within or without?"

"Within, sir!"

"In which direction?"

"To the left, sir."

After a few more questions I succeeded in getting enough facts to warrant immediate help and to greatly concern me in regard to rescuing him alive.

I sent a messenger to Izikar informing him of the accident, and that it would probably deter me from keeping our appointment that evening; but that if agreeable to him, I would name the same hour the following night.

We made all possible speed in reaching Zimma.

He had found a small hole in the rocks, and, as it did not appear to be a very deep one, his curiosity overcame his caution; he clambered down without due forethought as to the feasibility of clambering up again.

Much to his surprise he found earth at the bottom; and more to his surprise, he found it was too soft to bear his weight, and quickly let him down a number of feet farther than even he cared to go.

Great precaution was necessary to extricate him from his perilous position without loosening enough soil to cover him up. We succeeded, however, in bringing him to the surface once more.

He came up, bruised and bleeding and smiling; his nose had been relieved of most of its skin and divers scratches and bumps gave him quite a natural appearance.

"Zimma," said I, "I insist that you be more prudent in the future. Lively work you have given us the last two hours."

"Yes, sir," he meekly replied, but his countenance shone with self-satisfaction.

"I do not know what it is," he said, "but I have discovered something. It felt like a

great stone chest; it was of different material from any here," looking around him.

"You will investigate it, will you not, sir?"

He regarded me with a very eager expression. I should have been amused had I not known that Zimma was seldom mistaken in the importance of his discoveries.

"I will consider the matter," I replied. "At present, the specially needful thing is to return to the galley-glaze, refresh ourselves with some of the good things from Alaska and get a little sleep."

CHAPTER VII

The second day after Zimma's misfortune I entered the cave about the middle of the afternoon for the purpose of getting a little rest and recreation. I had not yet been able to give the time for an interview with Izikar and a half-hour's musical treat with Talma was all I had seen of her. Ozomoth still remained a recluse.

It was now considered perfectly safe for us to wander where we pleased, provided we remained above ground; thus it often happened that one individual would select a certain section, a second would choose a different one, and so on, as the most expeditious method of finding new sights and relics.

We had begun excavations to resurrect Zimma's huge chest, and after visiting the place to assure myself that everything was working properly, I roamed off into a spot of whose existence I had heretofore been ignorant. I was impatiently waiting for the evening, both on account of meeting Izikar and of being with Talma again.

With the exception of Monica sitting on a rustic bench, busy with her embroidery, this particular section seemed to be deserted.

It was a singularly romantic place. A forest lay on one side of a large meadow of green turf; a mountain covered with vegetation of different kinds and hues guarded the further side, while at its foot nestled a small crystal lake. The water was a reality; it almost seemed to be endowed with life. I imagined how it would sparkle if bathed in sunshine, and wondered if it were once the home of softly babbling brooks.

Before me was an enchanting arbor, all green and gold. Roses and luscious looking grapes hung in golden clusters side by side; their green vines intertwined and made a perfect bower of beauty.

Within it, I caught a glimpse of Talma toying with the rich loveliness, as though it were real. They were real once, and she caressed them as if she were whispering words of sympathy into their stony ears.

She wore a white robe that well revealed the outlines of her Hebe-like form; the comb had fallen from her hair, letting the wealth of waves fall in a raven gloss to her feet. The

sweet, pathetic voice was humming a little love ditty we had sung the night before; but in a melancholy strain which told that depths of sorrow and not of joy gave birth to the liquid notes.

Only half realizing the intent of the action, I entered the arbor and stood by her side. The eye betrays the soul; I saw in one brief glance that the finest, deepest feeling of a woman's being had come to Talma.

She loved. I was the one beloved.

"Talma," I murmured in a low voice, "do you understand what we mean by our word 'love?'"

My eyes must have interpreted the word, for a rosy blush stole over her face and neck; the eyelashes covered the drooping eyes.

"Love? Yes. We call it 'mahlah.'"

"Yes, it is the same," she replied with a coquettish smile, and a little toss of the head.

"Talma, I love you," I breathed. I took her hand in mine and pleaded for the best gift she could bestow, herself.

The great, melting, dark eyes looked into mine; for a moment the lips smiled as if about to answer the magic word.

The next moment she trembled from head

to foot, and, snatching away her hand, she burst into tears.

"Oh! don't, don't, don't say it!" she cried. "Uzzane, I must neither love nor marry you."

"You do love me, Talma. Your heart tells you that."

She became calm again. Her pallid face was composed, and the sad eyes looked steadily into mine.

"Heaven and hell would be against us! The record decrees it!"

"What record?" I asked.

"You do not understand. The holy Tajan record."

"That is superstition, my beloved."

"What is that?"

I explained it.

"No, no, no! It is eternal truth. The finger of Eternal Good and the finger of Eternal Evil have written the decree."

"Talma, my love, how can eternal good and eternal evil make the same decree? They must decree the opposite of their very natures. Do not—"

"Oh, you do not know!" she interrupted. "The curse has fallen on me."

She bravely choked back the sobs.

“It was Eternal Good who sent the punishment,” she continued. “Eternal Evil saw a benefit to itself and issued the same decree. Not to aid Eternal Good, but to aid itself.”

Talma was genuine. I knew there was no acting there. Her transparent soul was one of her greatest charms.

I gently drew her toward me and caressed her as I would a heart-broken child.

“Talma, my poor, misguided girl! Eternal Good would not wish to prevent our pure love, for it is holy. Eternal Evil cannot, for it already is. Will you—?”

She raised her hand with an imploring gesture.

“Do you not know that at our home, directly above us, is the star that marks the throne of heaven? Below the horizon, down—down—down, you come to the lowest hell. Were I to love contrary to the written decree, I and all my house would wander for endless ages in that lowest abyss. There would be nothing but woe! woe! woe! We would be tortured in the flames of the boundless fiery lake; chained to the Rock of Destiny; ever the whirlwinds of fire would scorch our souls in their terrible agony; ever the groans of the

lost would be ringing in our ears; forever and ever the voice of unconquerable doom would thunder the word 'Lost.'"

She put her hands before her face to shut out the sight.

"One kiss on those exquisite lips is worth a little of such doom," and I fearlessly gave it.

"Oh, see! The record does not lie. My doom is sealed!" and Talma pointed to the entrance of the arbor.

I looked up to see Ozomoth entering; he slowly approached us with a smile; his smile that meant destruction.

"Proud stranger," he said, looking at me with those beady eyes, "were I jealous as other suitors might be, thou shouldst be proudly conquered; but my eternal purpose cannot be changed by so hopeless a passion as thy love.

"Fair lily of Heclades," and he gracefully waved his hand to Talma, "forget not that this rival cannot escape my power. The haughty crest of Ozomoth will never bow to aught save thy own fair self."

CHAPTER VIII

Several days passed away. Twice I had attempted to see Izikar, to receive an answer to my suit for the hand of Talma; but I had been imperatively called away.

Besides, I wished to acquaint him with the scene in the arbor, thus giving him an opportunity to confide in me; and explain Ozomoth's peculiar conduct.

"Can it be possible this girl believes she is destined to marry Ozomoth?" I questioned myself.

I studied the subject in all its bearings.

"No, not for one moment can such an idea be entertained," was always the conclusion reached.

"What power can give him authority over her? Do they live under a government that has the right to dispose of the hands of its subjects? Does such a monster control the right, if it exists? Is it a financial difficulty embarrassing Izikar, and he holds the key to its solution? Why did the sight of Nanlin cause Ozomoth so much delight? Why did

it crush my poor darling's heart? Yes, mine, for I have no more doubt of Talma's love for me than I doubt I breathe."

These and a host of similar questions relating to the mystery, deprived me of many hours' sleep. I resolved to obtain consent from Commander Dirube to disclose our search for Zallallah to Izikar; I placed sufficient confidence in him to believe he would not betray the secret to Ozomoth.

With these resolutions in view, I set out one morning for an extended walk in the cave.

We had made many valuable discoveries, and gathered a fine collection of relics.

In one factory we found a young man weaving a web so fine and misty that, at first sight, we thought it was a cobweb and began to look for the spider. Some one touched it and the invisible threads were tiny mites of marble.

We found literature in abundance. We cut out one entire library belonging to a private individual; it is now in the Public Museum at Yukonilia. Every letter of the titles can be seen distinctly and scholars have succeeded in translating them all. Many of

them are scientific works, and the topics treated convince us that the people of the Petrified World were nearly our equals in civilization. The historical subjects are the most curious. Fabulous fortunes would be freely given to anyone who could successfully split the leaves of one entitled, "Memone," and translate the pages.

One treasure was guarded by me with the utmost care. In an out-of-the-way alley I came across a small bit of marble with the letters which we call z-a-l, engraved upon it.

I knew there might have been fifty names in their language, whose first three characters could mean the mystic z-a-l but I considered it a clue, nevertheless.

I passed along by the excavations of Zimma's chest. To my surprise I found they were completed and the chest raised to the surface.

I immediately dispatched a messenger to Commander Dirube, who lost no time in joining us.

Archaeologists Adams and Webber, Professors Devitch and Souza, Commander Dirube, Zimma and myself, were first to examine the contents provided there were any.

Small electric drills were used to force open the lid; the padlock and bolts were first removed; notwithstanding the many peculiar experiences we had recently passed through, there were some pale faces standing around that chest while the drills were at work.

“What if it should prove to be the Zallallah!” was a remark passed around quite frequently, and it sent the blood rapidly coursing through our veins.

We dared not hope; we said it could not be possible; and still there was not one among us that did not more than half believe in his soul we had found the Zallallah.

Click, click, worked the little drills. The lid was nearly off.

We began to fan ourselves, and to wonder why the air seemed so stifling. Zimma was almost transfigured into a celestial being, so radiant was he in his happy expectations.

Click, went the last stroke. It required eight of us with the aid of machinery to lift the heavy lid. We closed our eyes and laid it aside. The thought that it might be the ghastly stone remains of a person horribly murdered haunted us.

“May I just glance in first?” said Zimma,

with the persuasion of twenty individuals in his eyes. "Just one look, sir, to prepare you if it be anything so very terrible?"

I nodded my head.

He stepped cautiously up to the side of the chest and looked in.

Silence.

"What is it?"

Six pairs of eyes were instantly riveted on the something.

"Is it the Zallallah?"

"No," I thundered.

"There are several inscriptions on the plates of the left side," said Prof. Souza. "They have the appearance of being the same sentences in different languages."

Near the bottom we found the ancient Aryan characters, or earliest Aryan, as it is scientifically called.

We finally deciphered the following inscription:

"This is Mem-o-ne.

The last of the tribe of Dan-pho-ne.

The highest of the race of Men-li-kin.

This is the last of the House of Zallallah.

The Link between the Beast and the Being.

The tribe is now no more.

For the Zallallah is no more.

She has been created anew.

This has been preserved for ages.

Let the generations cherish it.

The Beauty of Zallallah was greater than
the Beauty of Mem-o-ne.

Therefore she was chosen.

La-rah-hin-ee is lost.

Keep the Zallallah. North."

"What is it?" again inquired Prof. Devitch."

Other members of the expedition were summoned. A strong guard was placed around the chest that Ozomoth might not venture near.

"Shall we admit Izikar to the council?" I asked.

"Although we have unlimited confidence in him, as we are under orders from the society under whose auspices we are working, I am of the opinion that it is better to defer it and see what circumstances develop," was Commander Dirube's reply.

This is what we saw:

The form of a young girl of dazzling beauty of complexion, features and shape, but she was not human.

In order to fully understand why we in-

stantly observed that she was not, you will have to look at her in the museum at Azov, in Alaska. She lies there in a most magnificent mausoleum.

The head is finely molded and of a shape and size that might denote intellect. The face has much expression, but it is not the expression of a human soul, if the term may be allowed. The hands are also peculiar, possessing characteristics of both the animal and human kingdom. The clothing is simply a wrap of leaves and flowers. The eyes are open; they look at you with a certain degree of intelligence, but they lack the expression belonging solely to the human race; that one creation of the animal kingdom, unmistakably distinguished from all others by the seal of divinity which gives it an intellectual and moral capacity. She is beautiful as a dream, but divinity of soul has not dwelt therein. It is only divinity of body.

It matters not whether she is Mem-o-ne turned to stone like the remainder of our petrified world, or whether it is a statue of Mem-o-ne. It must have been a perfect representation if the latter. The best scholars incline to the first opinion.

"The tribe is no more.

For the Zallallah is no more.

She has been created anew."

"Was it our Zallallah?" we questioned, standing over the chest and eagerly scanning the inscription again and again. "Would the inscription found among the records of a million years in the old temple of Atlantis tell us if we could translate it?"

"It is worth pulling an hour or two to get me out of the hole, isn't it?" said Zimma to me, nearly transported to paradise in his enthusiasm.

"I did not tell you, then," he continued, "but half of the time you would give a sudden jerk to the rope, whirl me over and drag me up bottom upward. When you stopped for investigations or to try new plans I would manage to get my feet, as they were naturally made to go."

"Were you not injured worse than we knew?" we anxiously inquired.

"Why did you not make it known to us?" I said.

"I was too busy thinking and rejoicing to realize how or where I was. One or two swellings on my shoulder, a bruised knee,

lame neck and a bunch or two on my head in addition to those you saw, were all the scratches I got that time, except three or four lame fingers and a sore foot; those were nothing worth mentioning."

"But what is this? Have you noticed this?" said Archaeologist Adams, as he attempted to lift a small box which he found lying at the feet of Mem-o-ne.

It was so solid and heavily bound that it required three of us to raise it. The electric drills were again set to work and soon forced open the corner.

The box contained an image, with a metal plate fitted tightly on the top of the head. On it was written in the old characters: "This is an image of Dy-do-hain, the direct ancestor of Mem-o-ne." I will not say much about this image; it is in the museum at Romanzoff, and is so purely animal I do not like to think of it as belonging to the kind that developed into the family of Mem-o-ne.

We closed the chest rather meekly, fastened it securely and had it removed to safe quarters on one of the galleys-glaces.

"Do you think the Kalli can ascend that

lofty ice mountain, carrying so weighty a burden?" I asked, as Commander Dirube and myself walked leisurely along behind the workmen.

"With perfect ease," was the reply. "You underestimate the power of those stanch electrical boats; every one of them is capable of hauling many tons more than the chest will add to its tonnage."

"How many days do you propose to remain in the petrified world?"

"Events must determine that; I am becoming impatient to get a glance beyond those peaks opposite; but while so many important discoveries are constantly surprising us, it is advisable to continue our explorations. I do not believe we shall find the Zallallah here, however."

"No," I replied. "From all knowledge obtained thus far, I think she must be north of here; the inscription of Mem-o-ne points to such a conclusion in my opinion."

"What a wonderful discovery that is!" continued the commander; "who would ever have dared to entertain the slightest expectation that we would be the possessors of such proofs of the origin of the human species?"

The Zallallah, with its records will perfect the chain; not a link broken."

"When Zimma recovers somewhat from his medals of honor, worn on such varied parts of his anatomy, in his recent explorations," I said, "I propose to have him work in a curious place I came across the other day. I was sauntering along by the lake when I came to a spot very singularly inclosed. The rocks are much sunken, but it attracted my attention particularly on account of its shape. I judge it to have been an old 'mound-tomb,' resembling those we excavated in Atlantis. As soon as Zimma recovers—"

"Zimma does not need to recover," said a voice at my elbow; "he is wholly sound, sir." An awkward bow gracefully done emphasized the remark.

"May I beg leave to ask permission to go about the work at once?" he continued, beaming with expectation.

"Surely, Zimma, it is imprudent for you to take your life in your hands again, till you have two sound knees and shoulders," I replied.

"Do I limp?" and he immediately proceeded to illustrate his remark.

By dint of grievous contortions of his much scarred face, and marvelous manipulations of his black and blue fingers, as outlets of suppressed groans, he managed to present quite a soldierly bearing.

"There!" he exclaimed, relieving himself with a long breath after the exhibition was over. "There! do you not consider me capable," he eagerly questioned. At the same time he slyly stood on one foot, that he might give the lame knee a respite, after its arduous exercise.

"Very well. Is the row boat in order and on the lake?"

"It is both, sir. I have just come from inspecting it."

"Then you may follow the path along by the lake shore about a mile and wait until I join you. The utmost secrecy, remember."

He "beamed" and hobbled away.

"I cannot explain the impression," I continued; "I have no grounds whatever for it; but I feel that our success in finding the Zallallah depends, very materially, on Ozomoth's remaining ignorant in regard to everything relating to the object of this expedition. I have sometimes thought Izikar might assist

us; but Ozomoth seems like a fatal factor in the problem. Why is it?"

Commander Dirube did not answer immediately.

"Do you wish to know, Slav," he said after a while, "who I think Ozomoth is? A direct descendant of Satan, if there ever was one. I almost feel like begging Satan's pardon for the uncomplimentary remark."

"He seems to have no special malice for anyone except Talma and myself," I replied. "In fact, I often find him engaged in animated conversation on scientific subjects with professors or the upper hands on the deck. He questions them all quite exhaustively on historical events; it seems as if he had a definite purpose in view, and puts on his most agreeable moods in order to draw out all he can. The quality of pleasing is wholly at variance with his real nature."

"Strange creature! he is beyond any analysis I can bring to dissect his human-serpent nature."

"Will you walk down to the lake with me? I must overtake Zimma."

We had reached the lake and gone several rods in the direction of the goal I sought,

when a little ahead of us, to the left, I saw Zimma creeping very cautiously along. He took his station on a piece of rock that projected from a large boulder.

My curiosity was aroused to learn what occasioned so much discretion.

"There is Ozomoth in front of the boulder," said I. "What say you to going a little nearer and watching the proceedings?"

We quietly went around to the other side of them, and concealed ourselves behind a clump of trees, where we could both see and hear the actors in the drama.

Ozomoth was striding back and forth in anger. We knew he was angry whenever the serpent face glowed in all its hideousness.

"Beauty may win the heart," he snarled, "but it is power—oh, yes! it is power that throttles the winner! Ha! ha! ha!" he chuckled.

"Honor may dazzle; but power can blacken and ruin it.

"Virtue may shine in pristine splendor; but power can slay it in infamy!

"Power that grinds with its iron heel is thrice blessed!

"Power that can topple the thrones of kings is sweet to my lips."

"Beauty and honor and virtue may possess as much power as ugliness does, you old sarpint," growled Zimma, as he put his head out one side of the rock for better observation.

Ozomoth slightly turned his head, but Zimma was out of sight in a twinkling.

Ozomoth then sat down in front of the rock, and his eyes gleamed with exultation.

"Power is the lever that moves the will," he continued. "Power!" he shook his head with satisfaction.

"Not always, my beauty," croaked Zimma, peering above the rock behind Ozomoth; "not always; love sometimes lifts it as easily as an electric motor."

"The power is mine, my bird," Ozomoth went on; then he threw back his head and laughed. "Mine—mine—mine!" he nodded and rubbed his hands from joy.

"Perhaps not," said a voice behind the rock.

"Your handsome lover cannot find her. Ha! ha! All have failed since the struggle began. She is lost. Your proud lover! Ha! ha!"

Zimma crawled to the top of the rock; he shook his fist and head vigorously, muttering with considerable energy to himself. We could read the motion of his lips.

“We will find the Her; we will find It, whoever and wherever Her may be, never you fear,” he nodded and chuckled in imitation of Ozomoth.

“Ha! ha! my fond lover!” hissed Ozomoth. You may revel in your love; I will revel in your misery.”

He arose and again began to walk rapidly up and down the little path before the rock.

“He is a fine lover, my dove, but not for you.” His voice grew softer. “I know the soul of Talma. Pure as light from Heaven. True as the Word of Eternal Truth. Steadfast and immovable as the throne of Eternal Good. But——” he paused a moment; “but if thy sweet mouth smile on him, I will tighten my coils; if thine eyes speak love to his, I will wind the coils still tighter; if thy lips meet his in vows, and thou liest in his bosom in peace—in peace? Ah, no, my dove! not in peace; never! for I will tighten my coils till they crush thee both! Ha! ha!”

He dropped his head on his bosom and

seemed lost in thought. The evil look went out of his eyes; the face grew human.

"What if I yield my power? What if I lay down my cruel scepter? What? I see the old merry sunshine in her eyes, but it is not for me; I hear the old happy voice ring out, but not for me; I read her heart in her face, and I read that it is given to another. She goes to meet her lover, beautiful, joyful; he clasps her in his arms and together they give offerings to me. I pay the ransom for their happiness?"

He suddenly leaped into the air, then stamped his foot and ground his teeth.

"No! by all the fiends of the lowest realm, I will not!"

He turned and soon disappeared.

Zimma quickly descended from his perch and met us as we were leaving our retreat; he was quite subdued by the last outburst he had witnessed.

"Did you hear him?" he whispered.

"We heard it all," replied Commander Dirube.

"Assistant Slav," continued the commander, "Zimma and I have unwittingly become the recipients of a secret."

Zimma stood with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Are you the lover, Assistant Slav?" he ejaculated. "The Her shall be found. My life is henceforth devoted to just that thing; that is my vow," and he wildly gesticulated to make it more imperative.

"What or who is the Her?" I inquired.

"I do not know," said Zimma, "but we will find it; we shall probably recognize it as soon as we see it. He did not really say the lover could have the bride, if he found the Her, but I infer he meant it."

Zimma was decidedly enthusiastic.

"Can I trust to the discretion of your tongue, Zimma?"

"A sealed book, sir. A two-hundred-electric drill could not loosen it an atom. But—may I beg leave to ask permission to kill him?" said Zimma.

I looked my surprise at such audacity.

"I do not mean to murder him in cold blood," he continued. "I need not kill him literally, only figuratively; entice him into a trap, as it were. I will find a deep hole, or make one, and lead him to believe the Her is there, and you are going to find it, unless he goes in first. I could just give him a broken

limb or two that would make him love the sweet seclusion of his own apartments for a few months. Do you not think the interest of science demands it? Also the morality of the world? not to mention your own heart, sir, if I may be allowed to say it?"

"You must do nothing without my directions, Zimma. You will remember?"

"Yes, sir; but it will be the heaviest strain my poor, frail disposition was ever put to. I hope it will remain whole; I have serious fears, sir;" and he limped away faster than ever.

"There is one thing I cannot understand," said Commander Dirube, as we watched Zimma's retreating figure grotesquely bobbing up and down. "From Ozomoth's general deportment towards you I must believe you are the lover to whom he refers; but how has he discovered what I, your most intimate friend and associate, have failed to learn?"

"Jealousy."

"Your conduct and relations with Talma have not been such as to occasion the least remark; I have never heard one."

"Jealousy is keen; it can see when it cannot hear," I replied.

"Jealousy implies a rival; can it be that Ozomoth is entitled to be called a rival of yours? Have you any clue?"

"Talma is a firm believer in some superstition. I hope to learn more about it from Izikar; and Ozomoth believes he has absolute power over Talma. On what grounds I cannot conjecture."

"Do you think it possible that he referred to our Zallallah?"

"I do not know. At first I thought he might mean Mem-o-ne; possibly he did. Did he know that anything of account had been found?"

"I saw him walk along near the guard. I'll venture to say he knows about the contents of that chest; he is so sly; he may have been in the top of a tree for aught we know."

I glanced up to see if the beady eyes were gleaming down on us.

"Mem-o-ne had been found when he indulged in that blood-curdling soliloquy; but it seems Zimma has been waiting for me," I said, as we came upon him resting on the stump of a tree. I took out my watch. "It is nearly two o'clock! We will return for our dinner, Zimma. Meet me here at four," and we hastened to the boats.

CHAPTER IX

We had been to the curious little place I have mentioned, thoroughly examined it, planned in regard to the best methods of beginning excavations the following day and were returning when Prof. Devitch met us.

"Assistant Slav, I should like a few moments' conversation, if you are at leisure," said he.

"Zimma, you may make all necessary preparations to-night," I said, addressing him, "and early in the morning you may quietly begin the work. I will see you before two o'clock."

Then Prof. Devitch and myself turned into a grove near by and found some comfortable seats.

"Whose were the hands that built these seats? And how many ages since youth and beauty occupied them?" said I. "This petrified world carries one far into the past."

"How soon we lose ourselves when we try to fathom the past or the future," returned

the professor. "But have you seen Ozomoth since we left Mem-o-ne?"

"Yes; he was giving vent to some of his evil nature."

"He came to me a short time ago," the professor continued, "and began his abominable catechising of history and relics. In the course of the conversation he made this remark: 'In your country have you ever heard mentioned the Zal—' then he suddenly checked himself, turned it into something else and went away. Do you suppose he knows about our Zallallah?"

"I fear so from what he said to-day during his amiable soliloquy. Not a word to any one at present. I will see what I can learn to-morrow."

At this point Talma and Monica entered the grove near us. I could see Izikar had stopped to examine a man of stone in the attitude of playing some stringed instrument. On first acquaintance these stone figures, so life-like, looking at us with wide-open eyes, made us feel a bit superstitious; but we became so accustomed to our marble friends that we often lunched with them and held councils in their parlors and libraries.

The musician was a young man of aristocratic birth, I judged. Izikar fondly patted him on the shoulder as if he were a beloved son.

After a few remarks, Prof. Devitch joined him. I saw the boat at the landing and proposed to Talma that we have a ride on our beautiful lake; she readily consented.

We had reached the lake; I had taken Talma's hand to help her into the boat, when Monica touched my arm and pointed to the grove.

Ozomoth was rapidly approaching us with his long, writhing strides; his eyes were like beads of fire that could slay with their withering scorn. The tongue darted in and out in his intolerable wrath. Pale and motionless, Talma seemed like a piece of marble.

"Queen of Heclades, Lily of the Land," he chanted in that deadly musical voice, "thou wearest my chains although they pierce thy flesh."

Her countenance assumed a dignity that would have honored an empress. Her glance never wavered; a deep pink began to dye her cheeks, and her eyes grew more brilliant.

Ozomoth drew nearer.



I caught Talma and swung her into the boat.

"Stand back!" she cried. "Heaven has decreed that I shall be thy bride, but the same decree consents to give me freedom from thy deadly power till yonder sun in our fair land shall sink once more. Thou wilt be accused if thou shouldst once attempt to overthrow my right."

"I will have no rival but death," he shouted; "rather than yield to any other, we will sleep beneath the waters of yon fair lake."

He made a sudden leap and caught her in his arms. With a shriek Talma tore herself away.

"Fiend!" I exclaimed, and rushed on Ozomoth with all the strength of outraged love. A knife swung over my head; with the strength of a lion I wrenched it from his grasp and threw it into the lake. I picked him up as I would a pebble and hurled him from us; then I caught Talma and swung her into the boat and pulled away before Ozomoth could regain his feet. We were alone for the first time since we parted at the arbor.

"Talma," said I, as we slowly glided over the rippling waves of our silver lake, "I must speak to you of my love."

She blushed and raised her mournful eyes, thrilling with an emotion akin to despair.

“O Uzzane, say not thou lovest me!”

Unconsciously I fell into her form of speech.

“Dost thou not feel the tie that forever binds our souls? The future——”

“I have looked into the future,” she interrupted; “the future that for others holds only a happy destiny, that weaves only garlands of love and happiness. But for me, each time the shuttle flies in and out, a new thread of misery is added.”

She shuddered, but there was a tremor in her voice that betrayed her heart.

“Dost thou love me?”

She sobbed and did not answer.

“Thou art mine, Talma, by all the laws of Heaven.”

“No, the bride of Ozomoth I must be!”

“His bride! Never! I swear it, thou shalt never be his bride.”

“It never has been done, it never can be done, the finding of Zallallah.”

“What!” I exclaimed, jumping to my feet and nearly overturning the boat; “dost thou know aught of Zallallah?”

“Dost thou know aught of Zallallah? Is

she found? Dost thou know where she lies?" Talma eagerly questioned

"What is it to thee, my love? What is Zallallah to thee?"

She dropped her eyes, and a deeper color suffused her cheek and neck. Her fingers trembled as she laid them on the edge of the boat.

"If my lover find the Zallallah, I am saved. He wins the body and soul of Talma."

I clasped her in my arms; one moment her head rested on my breast; I turned it up to mine that the eyes might answer back my love, and our lips met in one thrilling touch.

CHAPTER X

About ten o'clock the same evening, Izikar and I entered a magnificent library in one of the finest mansions in the cave. A manuscript lying on the table, with the seal broken, was addressed in Aryan characters to A. Sonzin; to him we supposed the house formerly belonged.

The luxurious chairs were still easy and inviting; but differing widely in size and shape from our modern ones. We placed our electric lamps on a mosaic table of exquisite workmanship, and I laughed as we vainly attempted, in a fit of absentmindedness, to draw our chairs a little closer. Through an open door we could see our host and other guests at a banquet table; the witty speech and genial smile were still on their lips. I could scarcely realize that their stony ears would be deaf to my tale of love.

"Izikar," I said, as I chose a chair facing them, "you already know that I love your daughter, and without doubt correctly surmise that the request for this interview was

made, that I might receive an answer to my question of a few days ago. Talma loves me; I am assured of that."

"Has she told you so?"

"Yes, in actions; not in words, because she dares not. What superstition is it that leads her to believe that Ozomoth controls her destiny? What is the Tajan record?"

"Did she mention that?"

"Yes."

"Then you have told her of your love, and she has listened. Is it so?"

"It is so," I answered.

"I will tell you what the record says. If we find our home I will show it to you.

"Ages ago a mighty ruler, Ozomoth, won the love of the most beautiful maiden of his realm, only to desert her. In her wrath she besought the Great Power for vengeance. It was granted, and the ruler was given the tongue and eyes of a serpent, to correspond with his serpent nature, as you see it revealed in Ozomoth. He could transform his features so as to assume the head of one; even his smile was known to be fatal. A very great calamity soon after came upon the people throughout the land. So great was the

distress that the nations made a vow, if the plague would be sent away, to sacrifice the most beautiful maiden of the kingdom to every descendant of the house of Ozomoth, that should bear the serpent eyes and tongue. Many believe it was from the Evil One that the maiden won her vengeance, and they offered sacrifice to both the Great Power of Good and the Great Power of Evil."

"How must the maiden die?" I asked.

"She must marry Ozomoth, and after a few months of torture worse than death, she must ascend the funeral pile and make atonement."

"Can she not sacrifice herself before marrying the fiend?" I queried.

"No, that is one of the conditions."

"Is she not allowed to ascend the funeral pile on the day she is bound to him?"

"The decree does not say; the unwritten law of the people controls the matter. If the maiden is greatly beloved, they allow it out of their affection for her; they risk the falling of displeasure on them, if it be displeasure; but if she is lightly esteemed, they will not release her from her sufferings till later. The morning may see her a bride of sorrow; the evening may witness the funeral fires of her resting place."

"Do you believe the decree was given by the Power of Eternal Good?"

"Yes; we have the proof."

"Are you willing to relate it?"

"Most gladly. When the people make their vows to it, they asked for signs, that no more plague should ever befall them if they kept their vows. The high priest went up into the great temple; the people knelt in their homes, their temples, and the by-ways. The high priest received the answer that their petition was granted; but if their vows were broken, a worse calamity still should visit them."

"Was the acceptance of the petition accompanied by any disturbance of nature?"

"Yes; a comet of wonderful brilliancy slowly marched through the heavens at midnight; great noises were heard in the air; and gleams of red lights were visible in the zenith. Great rumblings of the earth were also heard. The finger of the Great Power of Good wrote the decree on tablets of imperishable stone. You can read it."

"Do you also believe it was sanctioned and is aided by Eternal Evil?"

"Yes, we also have proof of that. It was

seen flying in the heavens and it wore the serpent face; it hovered over the temple of the high priest, and then descended into it. Beside the tablet written by the finger of Eternal Good stands one written by the finger of Eternal Evil. Beneath the decree on the latter is this: 'This decree will add many powerful souls to my kingdom. The people that neglect their vows, and maidens many, will wander with me below, below, below. For this, I aid Eternal Good.'"

"Do you sincerely believe this?"

"I do," was the reply.

"Have the maidens always kept the vow?"

"No. You have seen the bride at the door of yonder temple; that is Yonding-Ha; the bridegroom is Nanlin. The record tells us about them, and their statues are with it in the inner shrine of the tabernacle. We had wished and endeavored to teach ourselves that the record was not true in all its parts; but this petrified world is the strongest proof of its truth."

"Do you believe this was once a part of your nation?"

"I know it. This was Hexides."

"Nanlin loved Yonding-Ha; Talma's gen-

ealogy can be traced in a direct line to him; twice the curse has fallen on my house; he was a bold, handsome, dashing youth; a long piece of verse describes him and his exploits. Yonding-Ha was the loveliest of the land; 'I will never marry Ozomoth,' she said. 'I will die instead and haunt you forever.' The people had grown careless, and she was so greatly beloved; very many generations had passed away since any had been born to the house of Ozomoth with the serpent curse. The people forgot their vows. You can see what a great nation they had become, and how great must have been their wealth. Nanlin loved Yonding-Ha as you love Talma; he won her heart and soul."

"What happened, according to the record?"

"A great convulsion of nature destroyed the whole world, except the small remnant of our own land. There were thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes, whirlwinds and fires from heaven. There was no warning; the record says, 'In a twinkling it was over.' This city has been preserved as proof, and Nanlin and Yonding-Ha are witnesses."

"Do you believe the world was destroyed because Nanlin was to wed Yonding-Ha?"

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"I do. The sacrifice was not made according to their vows, and the punishment followed. Do you not believe it?"

"No, emphatically, no, Izikar."

"Have none of your nations records of its truth?"

"We have records of some great catastrophe, but not the reasons for it. Recent investigations in an island called Atlantis, which was lost beneath the waters of a great ocean for thousands of years, have proved the existence of a once mighty continent called Atlantides."

"Atlantides!" exclaimed Izikar, springing to his feet. "Atlantides! Atlantides stretched far to the south of Hexides, and was the home of yonder Nanlin! Oh!" he groaned, "it is only one more proof that our record is true. There is no escape; my daughter, my daughter!"

"Have you found any records at all?" he eagerly asked.

"Yes, the records of a million years."

"Is there anything to contradict what I have told you?" he grasped my hand as in a vise.

"You must remember that these are rec-

ords of what occurred before the destruction of the country; they have been strangely preserved through all the ages."

"Ah, yes;" and he loosened his hold with a look of despair. "Ah, yes; in my eagerness I did not remember. Atlantides, Hexides and the islands, Penlozen," he murmured, "all are gone."

"Were Nanlin and Yonding-Ha the only ones to break the vows?" I questioned.

"The only ones allowed by the people. Nan-shee and A-la-ta died from poison, their own hands holding the cup. You can hear the wailing of their souls in the lowest abyss."

"Have many been born to the house of Ozomoth with the curse upon them?"

"The record gives the names of several during the early times; it has been many hundreds of years since the last sacrifice. Oh, my beautiful child!" he sobbed.

"Do you know the soul of the girl?" he continued. "Did you say she loves you? She will be dying to save you and her people. Do you know her soul? Before it, Love hides its face. To it, Constancy yields the palm. In its presence Purity stands abashed.

"She is named the Brilliant Star of Hec-

lades. When Ozomoth came with his beady eyes and evil nature and proclaimed his power, the whole land was plunged in mourning. For seven weeks the people fasted and prayed for some sign of deliverance from their doom; nothing but lamentations could be heard. Talma lay in a deadly swoon, happy, oblivious."

"Can he not save her?"

"Yes, by offering himself; he never will; he gloats in his power."

"If you and Talma return to our home she can be protected and saved."

"And desert our people? No; they would follow us in their just anger. Honor demands that we remain faithful and steadfast; Talma would never consent. Brave and strong and true, she will be loyal to the last."

"Do you devoutly believe the whole of the Tajan record?"

"I do," replied Izikar.

I saw I could never uproot the superstition; my only hope lay in finding the Zallallah.

"Izikar!"

He looked up, pale and worn.

"Do you believe Talma can be saved by the finding of the Zallallah?"

"The Zallallah? Yes; the wicked nations lost her. The decree says: 'If the lover of the maiden doomed shall find the Zallallah, she is saved. He shall have her to wed, and Ozomoth be put in chains.'"

"Do you believe this?" I asked.

"I firmly believe it," was the reply; "but it can never be done."

"I shall find the Zallallah," I quietly answered.

"No," and he shook his head.

"We, this whole expedition, have been sent out for the sole purpose of finding it."

"What!" He clinched my hand and looked like a maniac. "Is it true? Deceive me not, lest in my bitter disappointment I smite thee to the earth. Is it true?" His eyes were savage in their eagerness.

"It is true."

"Thank Heaven. I fain would return to my salon with thee, and send for Talma; once more I wish to see the light of hope beautify her sweet face."

We returned to the Atti.

"Zingwa," said Izikar, as we reached the door of the salon, "say to Talma that her father wishes her presence."

Leading me to a seat by a window which opened on the inner deck, he drew the heavy hangings and seated himself near me.

The rules of the boat allowed no promenaders at that hour, so that we were alone and quiet.

Talma soon entered and Zingwa closed the door behind her.

Izikar rose to meet her as she came in.

"Talma, my daughter, there is hope for thee; Uzzane—Dost thou love Uzzane?"

Modesty dyed her cheek with blushes, but she was strong and brave in her love; she stood by her father's side; he gathered her hands in his and touched his lips to her brow. "Dost thou love Uzzane?"

"Yes, father, with my whole soul."

"There is hope for thee."

I arose as Izikar came towards me with Talma leaning on his arm.

He joined our hands and said: "Uzzane, I give her to thee, if thou accomplish what thou seekest."

Talma raised her head and the fearless eyes looked into mine.

"Uzzane, my heart and soul art thine. Love has come to us like a white-winged ser-

aph, to fill our souls with bliss; it brightens our pathway with holy rays from heaven; but love that forgets itself is the only love that is true. Duty beckons me with its ghastly hand, and I must follow. Courage shall never veil its face in shame because of me. Honor shall add no fairer luster to my name than this: 'She died to save the lives and souls of others.'"

Her face was transfigured with holy thought.

"If success crown thy efforts," she breathed in melody, "this hand is thine; but if propitious fate deign not to bless us, I die for thee and all my people."

"Talma, if I fail I will bless thee as the incense wafts thy purified soul to heaven; but I shall conquer. Thy love will so quicken my senses that they will guide the hand to victory; my heart will be the pilot to the hidden shrine. Come."

I opened my arms to receive her; I pressed a long kiss upon the trembling lips and we bowed our heads to receive Izikar's blessing.

When the quivering voice finished I raised Talma's lips to mine, then she glided from the room.

"Izikar," I said, as I turned to the door,

"Ozomoth must not know of this; he must not know that we are in search of the Zallallah. Good-night," and I went to my apartments.

As I closed the door of Izikar's salon a dark figure dropped the folds of the curtain at the opposite window and slyly crawled away.

"No, Ozomoth must not know," it hissed in an undertone. "You think to snatch the power from my hand? Ah-h! Ozomoth knows; he can best serve his own interests. The fires of her burning couch will not dry the blood in your heart; it is anguish that will draw it, drop by drop. Then I will taunt you with my smile of conquest; I will laugh at your groans as the daintily perfumed fagots crackle and the smoke of the incense proclaims my power. No, Ozomoth must not know. Ha! ha!" The voice went on.

"But let me think; a keen insight is needed to baffle well-laid plans. I will whet mine that already has an edge like good steel. Shall it be bitter, open defiance? or the honeyed words that conceal the deadliest poison? or the sly maneuvers that see nothing and everything? Which? Ah-h! I have it. I will hear but not understand. I will see, but

be blind. I will aid, but will season my assistance with a good supply of the spice of deceit. I will keep my eyes so keen and my wits so pungent that I can steer my craft successfully against the obstacles of fools. No, Ozo-moth must not know. Ha! ha!"

Zimma stood a few feet from him, unseen.

CHAPTER XI

“Hark!”

“What is it?” in a whisper.

“Do you not hear?”

“No.”

“Listen; do you not hear voices?”

“Yes; where are they?”

“I do not know; we will remain quiet a few moments; possibly there may be a cavern or an outlet through which the air can enter and produce weird sounds that seem to us like voices.”

“It may be the spirits of people in yonder cave, haunting the place.”

“Are you afraid, Talma?”

“Afraid, with thee, Uzzane?” she replied with a low, musical laugh, and an expression of perfect trust.

In affection and devotional language Talma and Izikar naturally used the old form, “thee and thou.”

After the evening on which we received Izikar’s blessing on our betrothal Talma was very sprightly and buoyant. Self was for-

gotten; she seemed to live wholly for others, and to me she was the embodiment of heroism.

We were on the lake that afternoon in our trim little boat, and I had proposed rowing farther up the chasm than heretofore. We found a large alcove and curiosity led us to enter it, it was within this chamber that the strange voices startled us. I decreased the the brilliancy of our lights somewhat, and we sat very still.

"No, I am not afraid," continued Talma. "Death has been my constant companion so much that it has lost its terrors. I have learned to look upon it as a release from captivity; but hope, that strong anchor of the human soul, again smiles on me; it so soothes my weary heart that if failure should be our lot I could die content, except for thy grief. While hope cheers us and love brings so much joy, I throw the future to the winds and live in the present. I will not sadden my father's life, nor darken your bright hopes with my mourning and weeping; I am going to be the same Talma that I would be if no shadow threatened my life. Perchance we may have many years before us, grand with possibilities now

hidden from view. Afraid? Talma fears nothing, for her soul is at peace."

"My darling!" and I pressed her close to my heart. The voices came and went; we could not distinguish the words or language; they sounded husky and muffled.

At one side of us I discovered a large flat stone; once it must have stood upright, but it had become misshapen and leaned to the left. I silently rowed to the edge of the water, gave the oars to Talma and went ashore. I crawled around to the further side of it, and, to my great surprise, found some quaint lettering at the top. I lighted the body-electric fastened to the lapel of my coat and examined it; I could not decipher a character. I returned to the boat and assisted Talma to reach the place.

"O Uzzane!" Her countenance lighted up with intelligence, joy and success mingling in the expression. "It is one of the languages handed down to us; I have learned it under the instruction of our masters. A little more light, please," and she translated the following:

"Here did lie the one commanded to be preserved forever. Prophecies foretell the de-

struction of our land. The people of Hexides have removed her to Heclades. The Zallalah."

At the last word we gazed at each other, speechless.

"She lies in my own home, Heclades," Talma found strength to utter.

"Uzzane," she continued, "the prophecy alludes to the great destruction of the world, because the nations forgot their vows. Do you not believe the Tajan record, now?" The beautiful girl looked up with a smile shining through her tears.

"I believe you, Talma," I answered, as I stooped and left a kiss on her brow.

An instant a cloud shadowed the features, but sunshine followed quickly and dispelled it.

"We will improve the present," she said; "we will look beyond the horrors of the future, and think only of the peace that follows them; above all, we will enjoy the bliss of our love for each other. I will be brave."

"Brave, my darling; if you were not so strong and fearless, my own courage would falter, and I would mount the fatal steps with you. My darling! You can trust me in all

else without question; can you not have faith when I tell you the record can not demand such sacrifices?"

"Uzzane, would you have me perjure my soul? Could you honor me if I believed I should ruin the bodies and souls of men by any act of mine, and still should perform the deed? And you and I would not escape. No."

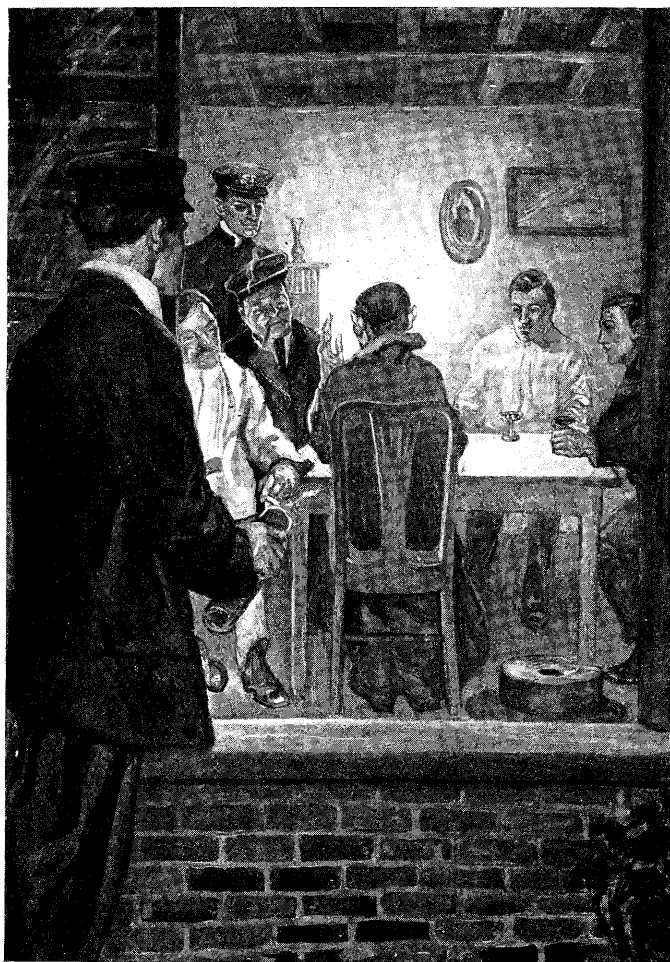
"This is another bright gleam of hope, at least," I answered, as I gave the slab a vigorous shake. It proved to be nearly split at the bottom, and I pulled and wrenched till I succeeded in breaking it off completely.

"I will return with Zimma to-night and secure it," and I hastened with Talma to the boat. We listened for the voices, but they did not come; neither did we learn whence they came till some time after.

We reached the cave about six in the afternoon; Izikar and Monica were awaiting us. I gave Talma into their care and immediately made inquiries for Zimma.

I found he had just returned from Place Curious, with a very dejected countenance.

"There is nothing there," said he, "except skeletons; it was a large tomb similar to some we found in Atlantides; the bones are much



I saw Ozomoth entertaining a few of the lower officers.

larger, and the hands resemble those of Mem-o-ne. Very sorry, sir; I was most heartily ashamed that I could bring no better report, sir. I think I never felt quite so insignificant in my life."

"It is unfortunate not to have won other laurels; however, I have met with a wonderful fortune and you may share in the glories of it by way of consolation. Not a word or look to betray our intentions, but meet me at the large boat at eight o'clock."

After leaving Zimma, I hastened to the Atti to inform Commander Dirube of our great success; I met him as I was entering the inner deck.

"Can you give me half an hour?" I asked.

"No, only fifteen minutes; I was looking for you," he replied, as we entered my salon.

I related the adventure of the afternoon and plans for the night.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I will not detain you now for a hearing of my plans; I will see you in the morning; they are in reference to leaving here. Did you see Ozomoth anywhere?"

"No. Has he not been around this afternoon?"

"I have not seen him. I intend to keep an eye on his whereabouts."

We then passed on to the supper room. Ozomoth left it as we entered.

When the time appointed for meeting Zimma drew near I walked leisurely along through the cove. The thought occurred to me that it would be advisable to ascertain, as far as I could, the probable occupation of Ozomoth for the evening. I turned into a side street, but finding no one I was about to retrace my steps, when I heard a low, hearty laugh followed by louder words. I stepped quietly to an open window and looked in. I saw Ozomoth entertaining a few of the lower officers of the expedition, with some of his wonderful exploits, and I slipped quietly away.

"We are safe from him, at least," I thought, "whatever difficulties we may encounter elsewhere."

I found Zimma waiting with everything in readiness. A few deck hands off duty were idly loitering about; I invented some excuse to send them to the galleys-glaces.

No one was visible; we quietly took our places in the boat and pulled away. As soon as we turned a bend a few rods from the land-

ing, we hoisted a brilliant light and rowed as fast as our strength would permit.

"May I inquire what we are to bring back with us?" said Zimma after a while.

I had been watching the twitching of his nose and mouth and other various contortions of countenance, which long acquaintance enabled me to read. I knew his curiosity could not be withheld much longer; once it was satisfied, he would die a martyr, rather than reveal an iota of the confidence placed in him.

"We are to bring back a stone slab, or slabs; it may have to be broken to be safe in the boat; or you may find another one," was my reply to the question.

"Is there anything written on it?"

"Yes; Talma read the inscription."

The angel! if I do not offend in calling her one. "Anything of value?" he inquired, endeavoring to appear unconcerned; but I could read the state of his mind.

"We have found what was once the burial place of Zallallah," I coolly answered; "also the name of the country to which she was removed."

"Oh—h, sir! I will start to-night."

"Not to-night, Zimma; but we are nearing the alcove; Talma and I heard voices this afternoon. Make the light quite dim, and no more talking."

We entered the alcove, and stopped to listen. No voices hovered about us; not a sound could be heard. We stole quietly along, until we were opposite the little square enclosure containing the key that might unlock the treasure and save my darling's life.

In perfect silence we steered the boat to the bank and landed. We succeeded in lifting it into the boat unharmed. Zimma was stooping to unfasten the boat, when suddenly I saw a hand fell him to the ground. The next instant it disabled our light, and then I felt it on my throat.

I grappled my foe and we were soon locked in each other's grasp. We were about equal in strength, but I surpassed my antagonist in skill. I finally freed myself from his ferocious hold and sprang to one side. I was endeavoring to find a body-electric when he again jumped at my throat. I flung him aside. He lost his footing and, catching me with a death grip, we rolled into the water.

When I came to my senses I was lying in

a boat. I peered into the darkness and stealthily put out my hand to see if it were my own boat. I could not tell. I could just hear the dip of the oars, but knew not whether it was Zimma or our unexpected foe that was plying them. I lay quietly trying to decide in what direction I was being carried. Perfect silence reigned, with the exception of the faintest noise of the oars.

When we had gone a mile or so the oars were carefully laid down and someone crawled to my side. I could feel a face bending over me. I did not move. I felt a breath on my cheek. I scarcely breathed. Then an ear was pressed to my heart to learn if it were still beating.

I gathered my forces for a herculean battle; the head was raised, and a voice close to my ear whispered: "Do you know me?"

The voice was so faint I could not recognize it, and I made no answer.

Again it said in a very low tone: "Assistant Slav."

"It is you, Zimma!" I exclaimed with a breath of relief.

"Yes. Thank Heaven, you are alive and once more conscious."

"Where are we?" I inquired.

"In our own boat," was the reply.

"In which direction are we going?"

"Towards the cave."

"Are you wounded?"

"No; I was only stunned for a few seconds; it is well for you that the fiend did his work no better."

"Did you not see him before he struck you?"

"No; I had just recovered consciousness and realized the danger we were in, when I heard you roll in the lake; I jumped in after you, dealt the rascal a stinging blow, and managed to get you out of his clutches and pull you ashore. I may have killed him. Do you think it was a spirit?" Zimma drew a little closer and whispered.

"It was no spirit that grasped my throat," I replied.

"But are you not severely hurt?"

"I think not; I gave more blows than I received; the assassin's face was protected by a helmet. My arm is somewhat lame; if you will help me get into a more comfortable position, I will find the electric bull's-eye; I have one about me. There! I am all right now.

No bones broken or sprained, but I have received a thorough drenching."

Zimma noiselessly took the oars and made one or two strokes.

"Hist!" he said, and he let them lie still in the water.

"What do you hear, Zimma?"

"Listen."

We scarcely breathed. Soon we heard the faintest splash, and then a sound as if some one were crawling up the rocks on the bank.

"How far from the alcove are we?" I whispered.

"Nearly two miles, I think."

"A mile and a half from the cave, then. Are we near the bank?"

"I do not know; I have tried to keep in mid-stream."

We waited a few moments longer, but heard nothing more. I found the bull's-eye was broken, but I succeeded in getting a very faint light and I concentrated it at one point on the bank.

The high black rocks up the mountain side were just visible, and at the foot of one we saw the figure of a man; he was clothed in a long cloak that enveloped him from head to foot.

He climbed and crawled over the rocks as if he were on level ground, and it were bright sunlight; he skipped over rough peaks as agile as a sprite. We turned our light and eagerly scanned the sides of the stream, fearing there were others lying in wait for us; there were no signs of a living thing anywhere.

We looked again at the muffled figure. He was nimbly scaling the rocks, dodging in and out among the trees that were scattered along at the top of the mountain, but he never stopped a moment. Either he did not catch the gleam from our light, or he was so intent on his own safety he did not heed it. We watched him till he was out of sight.

"Now to the cove with all speed," said I. "But what have I in my hand?" holding up to the light something I had been tightly clutching all the time.

It was a small piece of cloth.

"I must have torn it from his clothing," I said.

We examined it and found it unlike anything of our own manufacture.

"A clue to our would-be murderer," I suggested, and I placed it carefully in my pocket-book.

Nothing was missing from my person. My watch was in its accustomed place, wallet intact, what little jewelry I wore also.

We arranged the light so as to shine directly ahead, and Zimma again took up the oars.

"If you will lie still in the boat and listen I will manage the craft," he said.

It was a lonely journey in the darkness, but the precious message about the Zallallah was safe, and I would have been willing to pay much more dearly than it had cost us. Occasionally we would stand still to listen, but we never heard another sound.

We gave a sigh of relief as we reached the familiar bend in the lake and found ourselves at home once more.

"Not a syllable, Zimma, to a living soul about the work of to-night; I will attend to that; this bit of a garment will reveal the villain in good time."

Commander Dirube, Izikar, and several workmen were at the landing to meet us. We carefully transferred the stone from the boat to an electric cart, and it was soon stored away on the Mermaid.

A few years later it brought us several thou-

sand dollars, and you will find it now in Romanzoff.

"Commander Dirube, I wish to ascertain if Ozomoth is in his apartments," I remarked as we entered the Atti.

"I saw him as I started for the landing," was his reply.

"Are you positive?"

"Perfectly, for I spoke with him; but the lights are not out, and we will walk around the inner deck."

When we reached Ozomoth's rooms, we found the windows of his salon open, we glanced in as we passed by them. He was writing; a lot of manuscript lay scattered about, and he evidently had been thus occupied for some time.

"Can he have confederates among any of the crew?" I asked.

"Confederates? In what?"

"I ask as a favor that you will give orders to have every officer report to you within an hour, of the exact where-abouts this evening of every man under him. I will go to your rooms and await you."

It was very late when I bade the commander good night; every man had been ac-

counted for, and we knew that Ozomoth had no confederates among us. It was proved that he himself accompanied the officers with whom I saw him; and it was after Zimma and I left the landing.

Who could be our assailant was a query we could not answer.

CHAPTER XII

We were going to leave the petrified world. A long consultation was held and that was the decision. We took possession of the place in the name of our scientific society, sanctioned by the government, for we were accredited with such power. As many relics as we could conveniently take with us were already stowed away, and the opinion was unanimous that Zallallah would be found farther north.

She was the objective point of the expedition; the sole purpose of my life was to find her.

Every day lessened the time of Talma's freedom; every moment was more than gold; it was a diamond.

Different parties had been up the lake beyond the alcove several times. Once we thought we caught a glimpse of a tall figure in a long cloak, but it so quickly disappeared we never knew whether it was reality or imagination.

I had Izikar examine the scrap of cloth; he had seen nothing like it. We did not inform

Talma of the adventure; she had enough trouble already.

We intended to visit the cave on our return, but when that would be depended upon our success. We had become so familiar with the stone inhabitants of that strange world that we felt as if we were parting with friends.

The fine, interesting musician changed his jubilant notes to those of lamentation, as Izikar patted him on his shoulder for the last time. The lady in the hall smiled serenely as we bade her adieu, but it was the sad, sweet smile of farewell, instead of the welcome greeting of some days before. The young weaver plied his shuttle less nimbly out of regret for our departure.

Professors Adams and Ivan reluctantly gathered up their geological picks and other tools, rich in trophies. Photographers with many choice views stored away smiled at their little nucleus of wealth.

"No city ever entertained guests more royally than Hexides," Engineer Lincoln remarked. "We have had not only the freedom of the city, but of everything within it."

I caught Commander Dirube gathering up the papers in his den, and gracefully thanking

his host and hostess for their kind hospitality.

I spied Zimma perched on the top of a very high building, looking solemn.

"What attracted you up there, Zimma," I called through my pocket-tube.

"My feelings," was the unexpected reply; "I knew I ought to shed a few tears for every one of these blessed souls, that have done so nobly by us. I felt it my duty to do so, but I could not spare the time to go around to each one separately; besides, I feared the supply of tears might be unequal to the emergency; so I just climbed up here where I could overlook the whole and the same tears could do for all."

"How are you succeeding in your economical plan?" I inquired.

"Slowly," he said; "I just get two good drops started when the dangers and mysteries of the ride up yonder mountain of ice flit through my mind, and the pleasures in anticipation dry them up. I am nearly through, however, and will be right down, sir; my conscience will be appeased."

The last place to be visited by Talma and myself was the temple, that we might bid adieu to Nanlin and Yonding-Ha. As we

passed through the little tunnel for the last time, we turned and waved a sad farewell. The entrance to the cave was closed with heavy stones, cut to fit tightly the enclosure.

When we were all settled in our respective quarters on the galleys-glaces, I proposed that we preface our journey to new perils with laughter instead of dismal forebodings; accordingly, solos, duets, and choruses followed each other in quick succession. Talma held a reception and made a charming hostess. Izikar grew young, and everybody was radiant. Professors, engineers, and commanders were enthusiastic over the wonderful success thus far, and their confidence in the future was unbounded. The aerial-electra, in which some of the guides were going to ascend for the purpose of directing our route up the glacier, was equipped, and everything was in readiness.

We had just finished the good-night glee; one of those pauses occurred which sometimes fall over a company under like conditions. I was about to break it, lest it end disastrously, as far as our feelings were concerned, when several shadowy forms appeared

to be moving without, past the open doors and windows.

"Who is it, outside?" I said in a low tone to Prof. Souza, at my elbow.

Others had been attracted by the sight, and there was a general exodus to the outside decks. Before we could do or say more, we saw a group of misty forms standing several rods up the side of the glacier, and, simultaneously, a doleful chant broke the stillness. I well remember the words:

"Beware! our bones
Are bleaching stones.
Take heed! the sprites
Of dismal nights
Dance in the air;
They rouse the lair
Of sleeping demons.
Take heed! Beware!"

At its close they disappeared; the scene and chant were thrice repeated. The last time they darted back and forth, from side to side, their draperies floating out behind them; they danced in and out among the crevices in the ice, waved up and down in the air and circled gracefully around the tops of the masts. With

the aid of glasses we watched them as they glided farther and farther away; when they reached the summit they wore crowns of brilliants; there they turned to wave us adieu and disappeared. We named the phenomenon "The Dance of the Spirits."

Ozomoth smiled grimly. I looked at Izikar for an explanation, if he had any to give.

"You are not a superstitious race," he began, in answer to my look of inquiry. "Doubtless you will have little faith in my interpretation of the omen; I cannot prophesy the nature of it, but something strange is going to take place; whether for good or evil, I cannot determine. Very many years ago, when I was a lad, two persons came to us from some unknown land. At the time we supposed them to be some of our own race that had wandered away when young, and in their old age had found their way home; now I know they came from somewhere in your world, had been wrecked, and wandered to us, after enduring great hardships. Their minds were shattered; we could get no reliable information in regard to anything. On only one subject did they always relate the same tale and agree in all essentials; we thought it to be a fantasy

of the brain and gave it little heed. They told of a ship of companions being in an uncertain place, and gave a vivid account of what we have seen to-night. The chant contained the same identical lines; they believed if they had accepted the warning all would have been well. Only in their more lucid intervals were they able to give even this."

"Is that the only instance of the kind that you know of?" inquired Commander Dirube.

"The only one I can remember myself," he replied, "but I have found other instances among our records; some of them occurring more than a thousand years ago."

We were not much given to superstition; we had little faith in apparitions devoid of philosophical or scientific reasons for them; but the conditions of atmosphere, the habits of these immense glaciers, and the cause of this warm valley between them were, as yet, enigmas to us. The old motto, "Discretion is the better part of valor," came to mind; we recognized its value by taking every precaution possible, for anything and everything that we could foresee. Strict orders were given and promptly obeyed. At length the boats were quiet, the night lamps and watchmen

giving the only signs of life in our little colony.

I had just dozed off to sleep when a great rushing and roaring awakened me. I hastily sprang to my feet, I sounded the alarm to the appropriate officers and guides, and was soon on deck. A terrible gale was blowing, the rain falling in torrents, but our boats were constructed for just such an emergency.

"Every pilot to his post; every guard on duty," rang out the clear voice of Commander Dirube. The inner decks were immediately inclosed in thick metal plates, and the ice-boats were soon in readiness to float on the water if it should prove to be anything so serious. Caution was a principle of our expedition.

The waters rose rapidly, bearing us up with them. The boats were cabled together and all their force was directed against the wind, that we might not be driven onto the opposite walls of ice.

Once I met Ozomoth in one of the inner passages.

"Think not the fury of Heaven will relieve you from my power; Ozomoth's will is still supreme; the powers of good and evil keep their vows of wrath," was the greeting I received.

As the waters rose, the mercury fell; when we had ascended about a mile, the rain changed to hail; then it became one vast sheet of blinding snow. Hurricane followed hurricane till the strong metal and timbers of our stanch boats creaked and trembled. The electric motors worked bravely; all the machinery breathed evenly and easily. Now and then we threw out anchors, but there was nothing with which to grapple.

The minutes slowly rolled along; subdued voices occasionally broke the silence within. I remained with Izikar and Talma all the time I could be spared from my duties; both were calm and fearless. The roaring and howling and rattling of the storm were sublime; there were brave souls in those boats.

When the depth of the water measured one mile the winds howled less furiously and the snow abated somewhat. Not until our Happy Valley was the bed of a lake two miles deep was the tempest stilled. We steered to the north, cast anchor and were safe. Beautiful mists and rainbows smiled in all their enchanting loveliness of color; we seemed to be in a palace of purple and gold and jewels. To our surprise, the waters fell as rapidly as they

had risen; in half an hour we were left stranded on the top of a large, flat glacier.

As usual, what had really happened was the most unexpected of all; but, thanks to perfect machinery, reliable boats and cool heads, we had outridden the storm most gloriously; not only that, but were two miles on our journey, which, perchance, might have otherwise proved an impossible undertaking; the one mile remaining seemed as nothing.

After breakfast and the usual routine of duties were over, we set about endeavoring to discover the source of such a sudden little sea.

We could find nothing with our glasses or the aerial-electra; at that time, the electra had just come into use and were much smaller and less serviceable than at present. We had never found the source or mouth of the lake in the petrified world, and concluded there must be some connection between the phenomena. It saddened us somewhat to think that our friends of the cave might have been deluged. If such were the case, they had undoubtedly become accustomed to such perilous baths, and we did not allow their danger to cloud our spirits.

We deemed it best to postpone the re-

mainder of our journey a few hours, that we might look about us to learn if anything of note presented itself. Izikar and I donned a good supply of electro-heaters and furs, and started out for a walk. When about an eighth of a mile from the Atti, we heard something that sounded very much like the happy laugh of young girls; we supposed there were wild animals around, uttering such sounds, which naturalists had failed to discover.

Not being familiar with the nature of unknown beasts, we wheeled about to return for weapons. A little to the right of us we again heard merry peals of laughter, accompanied with lively chattering; soon something popped above the ice; it was a fur cap; then, two robust young girls sprang out in full view, very picturesquely dressed in skins and furs; at first they did not notice us, so absorbed were they in their chatter.

"I understand the most of it," Izikar motioned.

As they turned around, apparently with the intention of having a good run on the ice, they saw us, two strange inhabitants transgressing in their kingdom.

Their surprise was equal to ours; with a

frightened look they disappeared as mysteriously as they came.

"If I were not prepared for great revelations, I should say I am utterly astonished; I think I am as it is," said I. "Do you know any solution to this puzzle?" I inquired.

"None whatever;" Izikar began.

Before he could say more, a man popped up from the earth as if he had been shot from a cannon; another and still another followed him; for a few seconds, we all stared at each other like a group of children; they seemed peaceably inclined and to be studying our intentions.

Izikar then made a salute of greeting that he said had been handed down from the people of Atlantides; a smile of welcome broke over their features, and they came towards us with extended hands. I found I could converse quite readily with them in the ancient Aryan tongue; also, in the dialect still older, that I had learned of Izikar and Talma. We invited them to the Atti; they seemed much pleased to be thus honored, and gladly accepted our hospitality. Commander Dirube, Professors Lonzo and Devitch were sufficiently versed to interpret their speech, so that, in-

cluding Talma in the party, we were enabled to entertain our guests in quite a home-fashion. We did not communicate to them the special object of our expedition; but that we were an exploring party sent out for various purposes. When they were ready to return home we were heartily urged to accompany them. I sent for Zimma and a few of us consented to investigate the methods of complying with their request. I did not particularly relish being fired by a catapult; Zimma thought it the chief end of man, and I feared it might prove so in my case.

We found there was actually an entrance to this subterranean world; that was quite an encouraging fact, as they all appeared to shoot up through solid ice.

"You can descend by a stairway," said Omakin to me; Omakin seemed to be the leader of the party; the others were called Yonnar and Nipsing. "How long a pair of stairs is it?" I asked.

"Two miles," was the startling reply; "we prefer to ride down in the lanlan; it is much easier and saves valuable time."

I secretly wondered by what manner of means their time could be called "valuable."

"Will you please give us an explanation of the machine?" I inquired.

"With the greatest rejoicing," was the reply. "We invented it ourselves; climbing so many stairs gave us the rheumatism in our limbs, and weakened our backs. It took several years to perfect our invention, but it is complete at last."

We eyed it rather doubtfully.

"When you wish to ascend," Omakin continued, "you take a seat there," pointing to a cushioned sofa; "you are inclosed by means of these slides,"—he drew them to illustrate—"with these small apertures in the top for ventilation. There! When you are in that you are as comfortable as in your own home."

In fact, it was like a nicely furnished capacious box, resembling an elevator.

"So far, the safety of a journey seems plausible," Commander Dirube remarked, "but the principal thing is, whether the propelling capacities are assuredly safe and perfectly reliable."

"We have never met with an accident," returned Yonnar. "After you are well-seated, we touch the valve to a small engine that does the work; it is shot by steam."

"By steam!" we shouted in concert.

"That was the power of machinery before electricity came into general use," said I.

"Yes," Omakin replied, "steam does it all; you can ride slowly if you wish, but we usually prefer express time, and shoot up at about the rate we appeared to you."

"I conclude the young ladies came up the stairway," said Izikar.

"Probably. We did not know that they had been up this morning; they like the stairs when on a frolic or in no haste."

"Will some of you accompany us?" asked Nipsing.

We hesitated before replying.

"Two of us will descend and one will return, to show you there is no danger," suggested Omakin.

He and Yonnar calmly seated themselves, drew the plates, allowed us to examine the apertures for ventilation, pulled a cord as the signal, and before we could wink, they were out of sight.

"Shall you go down?" Zimma inquired, coming to me with a wistful look that I fully understood.

"Possibly; not decided," I replied.

"May I be allowed to accompany them first? A few bumps, more or less will not trouble me at all; then I can report proceedings to you by actual observation and experience, and you will be better prepared to judge of the safety of the trip."

By this time, nearly every member of the expedition was muffled and on the scene of action. Ozomoth stood a little apart, glowering at everything and everybody.

We did not wait long for the lanlan to return; it shot up in true civilized style. Zimma was so enthusiastic on first trying the novel conveyance, and being assured that the least harm could not result, I reluctantly consented. He proudly took his place beside Omakin, while I almost trembled with fear that it might cost him and all of us a valuable life.

"I gave orders to descend slowly," was the consoling remark from Omakin.

We watched the lanlan go evenly down out of sight.

We endeavored to await Zimma's return without anxiety, but found it extremely exciting to do so. Nipsing, who remained with us, was somewhat amused over our nervousness as to his possible fate.

Talma made inquiries about the girls who had favored us with a short call, and wished to accompany her father on a visit to them.

About half an hour elapsed before the lanlan made its appearance. Zimma opened the slides and stepped out alone, with the confidence born of success.

"Safe as our own boat," was Zimma's verdict. "I have a message for you from Omakin," he continued; "he invites as many as wish to dine with his people; three can ride in the lanlan." I wished Zimma to return and suggested that he take charge of Izikar and Talma on the return trip. The lanlan made quick time, and then the two professors and myself took our places; we gave the signal and started amid huzzas. Down, down, down, we sped, till, just as we thought it time to gasp for breath, the car stopped; some one opened the slides, and we met Omakin and Yonnar ready to welcome us.

We looked about us in astonishment; this underground world was patterned very closely after our own; it was rather primitive in many respects, but appeared to me as parts of our own country must have been at an earlier date.

Streets were regularly laid out at right angles; cottages of stone and dried earth looked comfortable and inviting; convenient appliances for simple manufacturing were at hand; and the people were busily engaged in their different occupations.

Some resembled the countrymen of Izikar, so he told us; others bore a striking likeness to our own. The women were well dressed in their picturesque fashions, refined and intelligent; the men were courteous and intellectual looking.

The lanlan was continually running carrying our members back and forth.

"But how did you seem to shoot up from the ground as though there were no car?" I inquired of Yonnar as we stood watching the lanlan.

"Occasionally we do not draw the slides, and give orders for the car to stop a certain distance from the top; that throws us in the manner we first appeared to you; it is not a wise practice, however."

Omakin conducted several of us to his own house, the rest of our party being entertained by different households.

We found Izikar and Talma nicely quar-

tered there, being well cared for by the two young ladies of the morning frolic. One, Menna, was Omakin's daughter; the other, Lanah, his niece, but a member of his family; they were agreeable, fine-looking girls, but different from Talma; anyone would pale beside her.

"Omakin, can you tell me how this place first became inhabited?" I inquired, after a short preliminary conversation on general topics.

"Yes," he replied, as he arose and opened a large stone chest, which proved to be a repository of valuable books and records. "We have it all here. Ages ago, two young lovers took flight from a land known as Heclades; they—"

"Heclades!" exclaimed Izikar, "that is my own country." Just then a dark shadow flitted across the room; looking up I saw Ozo-moth entering with a genial smile for his host and hostesses. I was thoroughly indignant at the intrusion, but seeing no way of relieving the situation, I bravely continued the conversation.

"Have you their names?" asked Talma.

"They are here," Omakin replied. "Zan-zo-nath and Mellah-na."

Talma grew pale. Ozomoth's smile changed to venom; Omakin glanced at us for an explanation as he witnessed the change in the serpent visage.

Izikar quietly remarked that it was a singular coincidence; "there were two of our race by that name," he said, "but they suddenly died on the same day, so our record says."

"Was Mellah-na bound to wed one by the name of Ozomoth?" Lanah inquired, with a snap of the eye that showed her to be in sympathy with the ill-fated Mellah-na.

"Such was the decree," Izikar answered, "but she loved Zanzo-nath. Some believed they drank a deadly potion given by their own hands; it could not be proven, but a dire calamity befell the people soon after; no one ever learned where they were buried."

"They drank a liquid that gave them the appearance of death; it was only sleep; the grave-digger was in league with them and assisted them to escape; here is the substance of what I have told you, followed by their signatures," and Omakin pointed it out to us.

We looked upon the writing with deep emotion. Ozomoth left the room, flinging a venomous look behind him as he disappeared.

“There is a hideous description of Ozomoth in this volume,” continued Omakin, “whom this Ozomoth resembles. May I ask if he is of the same house?”

“He is,” I replied for Izikar, who was much overcome.

Omakin glanced at Talma, then at me with a questioning look; I nodded assent, and he skillfully changed the subject.

“Is there more of the history of Mellah-na and Zanzo-nath?” Talma anxiously inquired.

“Very little. They brought a quantity of provisions and household effects with them; the grave-digger who assisted in their flight often met them with comforts and luxuries; they must have had some boat or sledge to carry them.”

“Did they live and die here?” Izikar asked.

“Yes, and their children. During their life a party of explorers, who had been wrecked, found their way hither; some of them married their daughters, and thus founded our little colony. You must remember this happened ages ago; within the last thousand or fifteen hundred years many stranded souls have found a harbor here; they brought the civiliza-

tion of their own lands with them, which accounts for many of the surprising things you notice about us. We have a ship which carries us to an island a long distance away; you did not come from that country, so there must be other islands farther away."

"How do you reach the ship?"

"We have a sledge and animals to draw it; before we trained the beasts we drew it ourselves; we go to the surface to hunt, fish and trade with the natives of the ice world."

In return for Omakin's kindness we gave a few facts in regard to our home, which greatly interested him. During the conversation the young ladies excused themselves to attend to household duties.

"Did Mellah-na and Zanzo-nath leave any records relating to Zallallah?" I inquired in a low tone.

"Oh! Certainly." The countenance of our host lighted up with pleasure in being able to give us so much information we seemed eager to obtain. "I will bring the script. I find each chief of Brazoa, the name of our town, has guarded that volume with special care, in accordance with the request of Mellah-na, written on the first page."

He produced it from the depths of the chest, locked in a receptacle by itself.

I requested Omakin to fasten the doors and draw the shades. I feared the evil, lurking eye of Ozomoth might be watching us from some hidden corner. Omakin pledged his word of honor that not a syllable in regard to it should pass his lips. We spoke only in whispers. With trembling hands and fast-beating hearts, we gathered around Omakin as he opened the precious volume. The oil used for lights seemed to shed a brighter glow, as if affected by the bright hopes suddenly awakened in us.

Omakin turned to the page. "Zallallah" was the heading. How eagerly we devoured it! We read: "The Zallallah lies on an island in Heclades; we firmly believe we found her shrine, but time was too short to continue our search, and we fled. After digging many feet beneath the surface we struck a dome belonging to some ruins; on the topmost pinnacle was a cross with an inscription nearly obliterated; the three remaining characters were 'Z—l—h.' If any unfortunate Mellah-na hereafter shall fall a victim to the fatal house of Ozomoth, let her lover search the Island

of Heclades on its farther edge. May this record save them both!"

"She is there, in Heclades!" burst out Izi-kar. He fiercely grasped my hand and his eyes were fiery with excitement. "Can you find her?" he asked.

"I will," I answered.

Omakin hastily crossed to the further end of the room, that we might be alone in our great joy; I saw him hastily wipe a tear from his own eye.

"Talma," I said, gathering her close in my arms, "Talma, my beloved, thou art mine! I must and will be victor."

I sealed the resolve with kisses on brow and cheek, and lips. "Mine, darling, mine."

"Thine," she murmured, "if our good angel guide us to conquest; thine here and forevermore. But," a holy light born of the purified soul within illumined her beautiful face, "but, if we are destined to sever our souls here, I will wait for thee in that sweet land above our polar star, my own Uzzane. Remember, in our new joy, that others, loving as we love, died on the burning altar. I must not forget."

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“None loved as thou lovest, Talma, for none ever lived with a soul fitted to receive a love like thine, my own.”

A silence of thankful joy was broken by a rap on the door.

CHAPTER XIII

Late in the evening of that wonderful day I was in my salon, thinking over our rare fortune in finding such authentic records in regard to Zallallah as Omakin had given us. I was rapidly making plans to hasten our departure in the morning, when, rap-tap, came some well-known knuckles at my door.

"Come in, Zimma," I called.

He entered with a more sedate countenance than was customary for him to wear, even under trying circumstances.

"Have a seat here, Zimma," I said, pushing out an arm chair.

He took it in silence.

Somewhat amazed, I slyly looked out from under my eyebrows and found an expression I could not read.

"Any new discoveries to report, Zimma?" I carelessly inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Mysteries?" said I.

"Great ones," was the reply, accompanied with a blush like a girl's.

"Dangerous ones?"

"Very," with a deeper blush.

"Anyone wounded?"

"Two."

I was so content and happy in my knowledge of Zallallah, in knowing the name of the land where she was resting, although its location was still in doubt, that I felt little interest in discoveries elsewhere.

"Where are they located? Here or in Brozoa?" I continued.

"In the heart," was the astonishing reply, and Zimma hung his head in dire confusion.

"Ah, ha!" I exclaimed, throwing down the pencil and paper with which I had been playing and wheeling around in front of him.

"Confide in me, Zimma; you have a faithful ally in all good investments. Whose hearts are they?"

"Menna's and mine," he said.

After the secret was out he looked up bold and proud.

"This is more sudden than the hurricane in the Happy Valley," I laughed. "How did it happen?"

"Just like this. It is difficult for me to get anyone to say 'yes.' I did succeed once,

and I had her practice the word so much, the victory was so sweet, that—well, you remember the year I was with you on that expedition to the Central States. When I had been gone six months, someone else asked the same question and she had forgotten how to say ‘no.’ I lost her and two years of smart courting; I am getting along in life and concluded to make quick work of it.”

“Have you consulted the young lady?”

“In every respect; I have just returned from there; Omakin has given his consent; Menna is making preparations, and we are to be united at eight in the morning.”

“And we are to start at ten,” I replied. “How many are bidden to the feast?”

“Commander Dirube, Talma, Izikar and yourself.”

“I wish you all joy,” I said, as he arose and bade me good night.

It was a unique wedding; the priest of Brozoa officiated; there was more kissing, more hand-shaking, more blessing, than on similar occasions with us, consequently the hour for our departure was deferred till twelve. I was very anxious to be on the move, and scarcely reconciled to the delay. I little knew the

worth of it. Those two hours turned the scales of my fate. If we had started at ten I should not be writing this; then, Lanah had no thoughts of going as companion to Menna; at eleven the decision was rendered that she must go. Lanah saved my life. She had the dark eyes, olive skin, and impulsive, southern temper of the old Spanish beauties. Her mother's name was Manuella, a circumstance which was conclusive proof to me that she inherited these tropical proclivities from the maternal side. Poor girl! The tears fill my eyes as I write these lines about her. Talma and I always kept a place in our hearts sacred to her memory. Every day since she died, her tomb has been remembered with garlands of the rarest flowers. Her passionate, southern love saved me at the cost of her own life. But on the day when Menna became a bride, the hot blood had never been aroused, and she was happy in her calm, rich beauty. Only beside Talma did her attractions seem of an ordinary kind; all others she eclipsed.

At twelve o'clock our galleys-glaces presented a scene equal to that of any seaport; Zimma and his bride shared the honors with us.

The lanlan was running at full speed,

bringing the Brozoans to bid us adieu and witness our perilous ascent up the next mountain of ice, which still towered a mile above us. Good wishes and kisses, with pressing invitations to visit them again, mingled with a few tears and heartaches. There was an understanding between Omakin and myself, that, when we found Heclades, he should be informed.

At last, all was ready and the command given to start; we shot off amid huzzas. That ride up the glacier was one of the epochs of a life. Those gallant boats marched up that wall of crystal, with the assurance of a great general marching to victory at the head of his army; they never quivered or faltered. All the way, salutes were given by us, and returned by our friends. When the top was reached, we flashed a heliogram, and laughed at their amazement, as we watched them through our glasses. One more waving of flags, and we had left them behind.

A smooth, open plain lay before us; we sped swiftly along over twenty miles of glass; then, the temperature seemed to rise; the next ten miles showed a great change. We were undecided whether to proceed directly north,

or turn to the west. Izikar examined the sky. "I advise that we halt and remain here till the usual hours of night are passed," he said, with considerable confidence. "If one or two of your astronomers will assist me, I think we can determine the best course to pursue." The desired preparations were made.

Supper was followed by an evening fraught with high hopes and fears, ending in a few hours of refreshing sleep.

When I stepped out on the inner deck before breakfast, I found Izikar awaiting me, with the most animated, joyful face I had ever seen him wear. Talma was with him, radiant with smiles. I gave her a welcome greeting, and asked Izikar for the result of his observations.

"Direct your course a little to the north-west; I think we are not far from land."

We started early; I could endure no delay. We had proceeded on our way several hours at a rapid rate, when Commander Dirube sent for me; I found him peering through a strong glass. Turning to me, he said: "I want you to look there, a little to the left; are we not coming to the brink of another petrified world? Are we not surely coming to another precipice?"

I studied the appearance of things for some time as we rapidly rode on.

“Orders should be given to slacken speed, I think,” said I, as I turned away from the lens. Zimma remained true to his nature and had already made the same discovery as ourselves. The boats proceeded very slowly as nearer and nearer the brink we glided. The temperature no longer resembled the intense cold of the Arctic regions; it was like that found on high mountains in warm latitudes. Electro-heaters were put on, and the decks of all the boats were like those of an ocean steamer, after a long voyage. We did not halt till we reached the edge. For two minutes unbroken silence reigned as we gazed at the view; then someone tossed a hat into the air.

“Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” rang out from a hundred voices.

Izikar stood in the attitude of prayer; Talma knelt with bowed head. Handkerchiefs fluttered, flags were soon floating from a dozen staffs, for the first time the guns of the galleys-glaces thundered in our ears, and the bells added their jubilant notes to the din.

Had we reached an open Polar sea?

Yes, and also—Heclades. Below us lay a

warm, changeable sea, dotted with islands clothed in rich verdure. In the center rose a volcanic mountain, in the shape of a pyramid; fire was issuing from the top and from several points elsewhere. Scores of columns of steam spurted up to different heights; some were many feet in diameter, others like tiny fountains. Fruits and flowers were growing in abundance. It was a charming little world, nestling in sunshine and beauty, one or two miles below us.

Izikar and Talma came to us with smiles.

"This is our home," said Izikar, "and we welcome you as cordially as you welcomed us. I speak for all our people."

We thanked him for their kindness.

"This is also the home of Zallallah," I said to Talma in a low tone; "that is the best of all."

Menna and Lanah were quite bewildered at the sight; Zimma was a very attentive bridegroom, and explained all that he understood himself, and some that he did not.

As soon as we could sufficiently recover from both surprise and joy we began to question.

"What is that massive building to the right,

near the fountain that looks as if it were composed of rainbows?" inquired Archaeologist Adams.

"That is the temple, Aar, where the records are preserved, and where the people worship on certain days," Izikar replied.

"The other smaller, but similar, structures scattered about are temples also, I judge," remarked Prof. Ching.

"They are. Those peculiarly shaped houses that you see to the left are our schools, and beyond them are warehouses and market places. The rooms for art and reading are on that little island near us with the beautiful lawns and low hills."

"What are those fine buildings in a group on the largest island?" Commander Dirube asked.

"That is the king's palace."

"They show fine architectural skill; the grounds are ample and artistic," the commander replied.

"Heclades is a kingdom," I said. "May we inquire the name of the king who reigns over this wonderful new world?"

Izikar looked confused. Talma stepped to her father's side, placed her arm affectionately

through his, and with an arch look, proudly said: "Father Izikar is our king; his title is, 'The Man-kin-or of Heclades.'"

"Why did you not inform us?" uttered the commander with much trepidation, while we all exclaimed our surprise.

"I did not wish to make an unseemly display of my station," was the reply. "You have rendered me all honor as it is; I only wish I may be allowed to return a little of your hospitality. At the death of her mother, Talma became the queen, according to our laws. Should I die before her, she will become the Man-kin-oo. As the reigning sovereigns of Heclades, we welcome you."

Talma, my queen, was a queen in reality; our fair "Princess of the North" was a princess indeed.

"Do you notice that a portion of this glacier is broken off, about two thousand feet from here?" continued Izikar. "And do you see the fine road leading to its summit from the landing at the base of the glacier? The iceberg on which we were floating when you found us loosened at that point, and the road was our private one leading to our pavilion. If you can manage your boats to reach that

place the descent will be less abrupt than where we are. I am in haste to see you all comfortably established with us."

We followed Izikar's advice, and soon found ourselves in a broad highway, unique in its construction. We again halted to view the pretty scene as in an amphitheater, the walls of which were mountains of ice. We noticed the city was in mourning. They believed their king was dead. It was not long before the inhabitants discovered us. We could see their puzzled, half-frightened faces. Izikar drew a silken flag from his pocket, and waved it with the royal salute; Talma made signs of greeting. They were recognized, and the badges of mourning were quickly torn down and the city soon wore a holiday attire.

As we descended the glacier, the temperature continued to rise; when within a quarter of a mile from the sea, we found the ground covered with green verdure in the place of ice. We sought a safe position for the boats and anchored them securely. By that time the royal barge, manned by the royal crew, was in waiting for Izikar and Talma. Orders were immediately issued for a large number of

barges, canoes and rafts to be placed at our disposal at all times and under all circumstances. A large concourse of people were soon assembled to greet their king and queen, whom they supposed to be lost. Their salute was unlike other nations. On approaching royalty, they would instantly turn their backs to the royal members; this symbolized the idea that they were unworthy to look at regal power. It was simply a form; the relations between the people of the Heclades and their sovereigns were in reality very beautiful. On facing about, instead of bowing or prostrating themselves, they looked up to the polar star, or its position, when invisible; this represented a prayer that their souls might attain the beautiful regions beyond, which was their Heaven. Many of the attitudes, unconsciously assumed by the youths and maidens in giving this salute, were artistically beautiful and graceful. Their hearts were in full sympathy with the ceremony, thus giving some very fine expressions to their faces.

With almost an oppressive joy, we quickly walked from the galleys-glaces to the edge of the sea. We were in Heclades, the home of Zallallah! Izikar was its king and Talma its

queen; the peerless queen of Heclades was my promised bride! Commander Dirube and myself were given luxurious lodgings on the royal island at a little distance from the palace. Zimma and Menna were quartered near us, as I should need Zimma's assistance at any moment. Lanah was to divide her time between Talma and Menna. The air was balmy and exhilarating rather than depressing. The water was almost hot; I easily understood the causes of a tropical world, although surrounded by ice-clad regions, hitherto inaccessible. Royal Island was ten miles in diameter, and the largest in Heclades. Streets, small parks and squares gave it quite a metropolitan appearance.

"Does Ozomoth reside on this island?" I inquired of Izikar, as we drew near the pier. "No," he replied; "that small island opposite our largest pavilion is his domain; he is chief of the whole of it. The fine-looking building nearest the sea is his place of residence."

"Does he frequent this island ordinarily?" I asked.

"He spends a good portion of his time here; he had been with us several days in our tent, when we drifted away."

"Only the width of a street divides these islands," I remarked. I was thinking if any precautions were necessary to protect us from his venomous nature.

Preparations were speedily made for beginning our work. Regulations in regard to our dearly prized boats were drawn up so that they were still commanded in the old systematic way.

When the people of Heclades were informed of the object of our search, private boats, houses, gold, in fact everything belonging to them, was tendered and urged upon us.

They were a cultured people; their warm climate demanded no laborious exertions in agriculture; woods and mines were at hand and easily worked; shut in, as they had been for so many ages from the rest of the world, they were free from many vices of our modern civilization. Their libraries contained literature from the time of Hexides and Atlantides, to the beginning of Izikar's reign; a richer feast than the world elsewhere contained.

Many of the fine arts of the prehistoric world had been handed down through all the ages, and were a never-failing source of wonder to us. Their museums were rich in trophies

for a hundredth part of which other nations would have paid millions. In religion, they were devout in their faith; so stern and loyal in their belief in the holy Tajan record, that Talma, the idol of their hearts, must be sacrificed; she, herself, the truest of all. A race, born and nurtured in such an atmosphere as this, generation after generation, must by a law of nature attain a high civilization.

Everything seemed favorable to our success; and yet, when I looked over the vast number of islands composing that little kingdom, and realized the actual number of days left us to win it, I would grow sick at heart, and redouble my energies. My resolution never wavered.

"On the farther edge," Mellah-na said; but, alas! we did not know her standpoint.

"Does the record give a time in the history of this land when only one island composed it?" I inquired of Izikar, as we were laying our plans on the day after our arrival.

"I think not; but there has been a time when there were fewer islands than now," he replied. "The convulsion that followed the love of Nanlin and Yonding-Ha, and buried Hexides, greatly changed this land. Minor

upheavals since have sometimes brought new land to the surface, and engulfed the points, occasionally an island will be divided, and quite a width of sea will separate the parts. O Uzzane," Izikar exclaimed. "My tears have moistened those records, day after day, searching for one ray of hope."

"Not a moment must be lost," I said, my voice trembling at the prospect of failure; "I propose that we repair to the temple, examine the records that will give the most information geologically, and determine our investigation accordingly."

On our way we were joined by Commander Dirube and Archaeologist Adams. It was a wonderful temple that we entered. Under any other circumstances, weeks would only have given me a taste of its value; that day we looked at the statues of Nanlin and Yonding-Ha, a few of the relics resembling those of the petrified world, and then entered the sacred precincts where the Tajan record was carefully guarded.

"In this manuscript," said Izikar, taking a faded, worn parchment from a costly receptacle, "is mentioned an island which we cannot locate at the present day. The best authori-

ties incline to the opinion that it was at a distance from here, and may have been destroyed."

"Is it possible that it can refer to the land visited by the inhabitants of Brozoa?" I eagerly inquired. "Can that be the island of Mellah-na, whose 'outer edge' contains the boon which gives us life in the place of death?"

The suggestion was considered worthy of attention. The result was, that in five hours from that time the Kallah, carrying a reliable crew and efficient officers, started on a return trip to Brozoa. A secret message was sent to Omakin, asking him to select a few trustworthy companions to accompany our men to his ship, and all sail for the island unknown to us.

"Possibly the island may be the one we call Iceland," Commander Dirube said, "if not, it must be a place not discovered by any other native."

"I have thought of that," I replied, "and considered it the more probable, as Iceland is seldom visited now. For several years, its extreme cold has made it an undesirable port. Since southern Alaska became so warm, Iceland has experienced extreme cold."

"There they are at the top!" exclaimed Zimma. We waved an adieu to the Kallah, and turned to consider the means for most profitably employing our time during its absence.

As I was hurrying to overtake Professor Lonzo to learn how the setting up of certain machinery progressed, I met Lanah.

She bowed rather timidly, and half stopped, as if she would like to speak with me.

"Will my uncle, Omakin, conduct your company to our island?" she inquired.

"We believe he will," I answered. "Were you ever there?"

"No. My mother came from there to Brozoa, I have been told. Assistant Slav, Lanah may be able to assist you in this vital undertaking; if she should secretly send you any clue, do not betray her."

"You shall have my protection, the protection of the whole expedition," I replied, more astounded at the deep feeling displayed than at the words themselves.

"Lanah," I continued, "have you any reason to believe that your mother had any knowledge of the Zallallah?"

"Not the slightest; no, it must be in another

way that I assist you," and she quickly passed me, going in the direction of the palace.

Ozomoth suddenly crossed the street in front of me. Where he had been lurking I could not tell. He seemed in an unusually pleasant state of mind, and I knew that meant disaster to us. I turned a corner to avoid meeting him face to face.

In five hours more the electric drills were at work, geologists were making other soundings, workmen were divided into squads that there might be no delays, and I was in my room studying up the details of numerous excavations to be started the following day.

CHAPTER XIV

“Assistant Slav,” called out Zimma a few days later, as I was gathering up my materials in one of the pavilions, preparatory to leaving it, “Assistant Slav, one moment, please,” and he came in, quite out of breath.

“Will you be so kind as to hang me by the heels till I am dead?” was the unexpected question.

“Certainly not, Zimma.”

“Will you please fasten me to a whipping post and give me one hundred lashes—strong ones, not any make-believes?” was the next request.

“No, indeed,” I replied, greatly puzzled to account for such dire distress.

“You will certainly keep me as a prisoner in disgrace for my lack of sagacity?”

“I cannot spare you an hour, Zimma. What misfortune has befallen you?”

“I have saved Ozomoth’s life! At least, I fear I have, and I deserve to have my name go down to history in ignominy. To think that

my insatiable curiosity, which, heretofore, has served me well, should play me such a trick! I despise myself."

"How did it happen?"

"I was walking along the north shore of Orange Island when I saw something wriggling along beneath the surface of the water. At first I paid no attention, but that curiosity of mine, and that love of the mysterious I have always gloried in, must needs assert itself, and I secured a boat and pole and fished it out. It was Ozomoth! He had been taken with cramps—bless the cramp if it had only been more violent—and was unable to get out of the water; he had got into quite a strong current leading to the rapids, and a little more time would have presented him to the whirlpool. I fished him out! To be sure, he might have recovered and got out himself; undoubtedly would, as he seems to be immortal and everywhere. I dare say he would, but that does not excuse my want of observation and forethought. I need to be punished."

"Would your conscience acquit you?" I asked.

"It would if I had gone right along; I should not have known."

"It is right to correct mistakes, is it not?" he asked, after a short pause.

"Perfectly," was my reply.

"It is one's duty, is it not?"

"Usually."

"I made a mistake in pulling him out; can I correct it by throwing him in, and not defraud the cramp from doing its legitimate work?"

"Oh, Zimma!" I groaned, "do not tempt me. Take these to Commander Dirube, and rejoice in a good conscience."

After he left me, I struggled with myself. If—no, not one such thought shall find a home in my heart, I said. "Can I not be as brave as that young girl? She would spurn me as unworthy of her. My soul shall never have cause to blush in the presence of her soul."

I arose and attended to my duties.

In those days events followed each other in such quick succession that we hardly recovered from one surprise when another awaited us. Sometimes they were joyful, more often discouraging, but we never allowed them to slacken our exertions or to cast a shadow of doubt over the ultimate result. Looking back

over the years that have since elapsed, I stand aghast at the obstacles surmounted by sheer force of will. Every dome that was found awakened new hope; every failure spurred us on to further action. Every morning the thought "To-day may bring us victory" kept our courage strong; every night we would say, "The Kallah may return before dawn;" but the days went by, and victory did not come; the nights brought no relief.

At last, the dreaded day of consecration came. This was a public recognition, by the unfortunate maiden, of her duties, her vows to perform the same, and the proclamation of the people; if the maiden had found a lover, he, also, had certain promises to make, and must sanction the decree in the presence of authorities. The exercises took place in the temple of Aar. Early in the morning you could see the people slowly moving towards the shrine, each bearing a choice offering of love, to be preserved within the inner sanctuary, till the last day of Talma's life; then, they were to be placed on the funeral pile and consumed with her.

At the appointed hour, I entered the temple from an ante-room and passed up to the altar;

Commander Dirube and Lanah were my attendants. With a shudder, I remembered the horrible fate of Nanlin and Yonding-Ha; "Shall I wait my bride a million years?" I whispered to my soul. When the great trumpet sounded its mournful notes, the chief high-priest ascended the altar, and the people bowed their heads. Then a vision, beautiful, wonderful, appeared. Talma came in supported by her father; she wore the royal robes of consecration; her beautiful face, rising above a cloud of misty gauze, was as white as the draperies that enveloped her, but it shone with the beauty of holiness. The royal guard attended them. Just as they reached the altar, Ozomoth entered at their left; we moved near and stood at their right.

The people raised their heads, and the high-priest chanted a blessing. The authorities and officers of the law joined him, and a guard stood behind Ozomoth. The high-priest extended his hands, and said:

"Talma, I await thee."

She glided in front of him and knelt at the altar. He took the royal crown, placing it on her brow with these words: "Talma, I crown thee Queen of Heclades. As Queen of our

kingdom, as Queen of our love, rise and take thy vows." She stood with bowed head.

"Dost thou believe the Tajan record?"

She raised her fearless eyes, and the clear, sweet voice answered, "I believe."

"Dost thou acknowledge thy duty to thy soul, to the souls of thy people, to the good of thy country, as commanded therein?"

"I acknowledge it."

"Dost thou here publicly offer thyself a sacrifice in performance of that duty?"

For an instant she shook with emotion; her eyes sought mine with all the love of her soul shining through them; then she raised them as if she sought the star which guided her, and a holy, heavenly peace rested on her features. A moment her lips moved in prayer; she bowed her head, and the words rang out, "I offer myself in performance of that duty."

The high-priest turned to Ozomoth. The deadly smile that rejoiced in the agony of others revealed his fiendish delight.

"Wilt thou die a ransom in the stead of our fair queen?"

"I will not," came in a defiant tone.

"Wilt thou release her from the vows of the House of Ozomoth?"

"I will not release her!"

"Dost thou acknowledge the one decree that saves her life, the finding of the Zallallah?"

"I acknowledge it," he replied.

"Dost thou here publicly make thy vows that thou wilt not hinder the fulfilling of such decree, that thou wilt never injure him who seeks to save our queen?"

"I make such vows," he hissed.

Again the high-priest turned to Talma.

"Is there one who loves you?" he asked.

I quickly took my place at her side. A happy light flitted over her face as I took her hand in mine.

I glanced at Ozomoth. The forked tongue darted with the rapidity of lightning; his beady eyes were eyes of fire in their wrath; the venom seemed to ooze from the deadly fangs of lips; he made a move as if to spring at me; the guard closed about him. I stood proud and firm, ready to meet a dozen Ozomoths.

The high-priest looked at me. "Dost thou here publicly profess thy love for Talma, our queen?"

"I profess it," I answered.

"Dost thou acknowledge thy search for the lost Zallallah?"

"I acknowledge it," I answered, with a triumphant glance at Ozomoth.

"If thy search should be of no avail, dost thou here publicly promise that thou wilt abide by the decree of the holy Tajan record? That thou wilt in no wise prevent our queen from fulfilling her vows, lest destruction come to this land and agony to our souls forever?"

The cold sweat dropped from my face; I saw the gleam of joy in Ozomoth's eyes, as he watched my misery. I could not reply. "I will not, cannot," I said to myself. "If I should fail, she shall not die."

"For the love you bear me, Uzzane," Talma whispered, pressing my hand, "do not desert me now."

I boldly turned so as to face the assembled people, Ozomoth and priests.

"For the love I have for your queen I promise to abide by the decree, if the Zallallah defy our search; but," and my voice increased in volume, "my search will not be in vain; your queen shall never die a martyr. I call you all to aid us to gain the victory."

The temple rang with cheers. Again Talma bowed her head to receive the consecration diadem. Izikar joined us, and amid the

hushed sobs of a nation we received the consecration blessing.

When the ceremony was over Talma was conducted to the royal gondola, which was waiting to carry her to the Dismal Cavern. Custom did not allow me to accompany her. As the procession moved down the aisle we were startled by a voice singing:

“Beware! lest your bones
Be bleaching stones.
Take heed! The sprites
Of evil nights
Lurk in the air;
They rouse the lair
Of sleeping demons.
Take heed! Beware!”

No one knew whence the voice came. Was it another warning of some calamity? I remembered the “Song of the Spirits” in the Happy Valley.

My brain was in a whirl. After all had left the temple I bowed at the altar; sobs choked my voice.

“I cannot and will not,” I groaned.

“You will not?” hissed a voice close to my ear. “You will not? Then Ozomoth will do his work.”

I sprang to my feet.

"No, I will not be conquered," I burst out in tones of thunder; "I defy you and all your house."

"Ozomoth can abide his time."

"Do you remember your vows?" I said, wheeling so as to meet him face to face.

"My vows? Ha! ha! Ozomoth's vows? Ha! ha! ha! How does Ozomoth keep his vows? Like this. When it suits his ends he keeps them to the letter; when it suits his ends they are as fragile as this little flower. I crush them as I shall one day crush you and your peerless queen, with my hand of power. Ha! ha! ha! My laugh of scorn brings comfort to my heart."

I rallied every moral force of my being.

"Begone, you coward," I exclaimed.

He took a few steps backward.

I followed, my eyes meeting his in defiance.

"Begone lest I injure against my will," I said. His cowardly soul shrank within him; it seemed to shrivel his hideous body to half its natural size. When he reached the door he turned and gave one of his satanic laughs, and quickly disappeared.

"An example of the power of simple, moral

force," I ejaculated. "Talma has a soul so strong and pure, that a look controls the beast."

When I left the temple Talma and Izikar had returned from the Dismal Cavern, the people were again quiet, and I found it was nearly night. We still retained the custom of dividing the twenty-four hours according to the methods of our own land.

I had never visited the Dismal Cavern; I had no inclination to do so, and no time to waste. Talma had thought it her duty to spend an hour a day in the doleful place, when we first came to Heclades; but she had yielded to my persuasions in that matter and crucified her feelings less often. I promised to accompany her once, after the day of consecration should be fulfilled. Now I turned in the direction of the boat that would take me to the island, hardly realizing my intentions. I had gone a short distance when I saw Lanah coming towards me.

"May I ask you if you have just left the temple bar?" she inquired, as I was about to pass her.

"I came from there a few minutes ago," I replied.

"Did you interpret the warning, sung by the invisible?" she inquired.

"I heard it, but gave it little heed at the time; I heard the same, once before, but I am not given to superstition. Can you interpret it?"

"Did you not notice when I left the group at the altar? I was the singer, and I warn you of Ozomoth. In Brozoa, we have another entrance to our colony than the one you found. When storms are approaching, a few have always sung the song you heard, at the entrance to the cave. Several times we have saved the lives of voyagers; perchance we saved yours. The cowardly soul of Ozomoth fears nothing more than the uncanny spirits he does not understand. Regardless of priest, of guard, of king, he grasped the pointed steel concealed about him, and would have pierced your heart at the altar if those weird, ghostly sounds had not held back his hand in terror. Uzzane Slay, whenever you hear those words, flee for your life. I know of dangers that you dream not of; but Talma is waiting for you." She was gone before I could reply; so many strange things were happening, I did not give it the importance I would in different sur-

roundings. I hastened back to the palace. Talma greeted me as self-possessed as if no sword hung above her head, waiting to cut off her young life; she was cheerful and girlish in her manner, although a certain dignity was always present in her bearing. She seemed equal to the burden laid upon her. Izikar eagerly scanned my features for a trace of good news. I placed our progress in as favorable a light as possible, but my own heart was sorely discouraged.

“What is that?” we all exclaimed, as a distant bugle sounded the notes of jubilee; then a shout was heard followed by another and another, till the waters and the streets rang with cheers.

We hurried to the palace door.

“It has come! It has come!”

“What? Who?”

CHAPTER XV

“The Kallah! the Kallah!” was the reply.

The royal barge was instantly ordered. Izikar, Commander Dirube, Zimma and myself were soon on our way to meet our long expected boat. Ozomoth’s canoe was just ahead; the guides were ordered to increase the speed, we shot by him, and reached the landing several seconds in advance. Izikar, with the royal guard, remained in the barge. We almost ran up the quarter of a mile in our eagerness to reach the boat.

“Welcome home,” signalled Izikar, as the officers appeared and gave the royal salute of Heclades.

“What report do you bring?” inquired Commander Dirube.

“A safe journey to Brozoa, thence to the ship, and a prosperous voyage to the island we sought,” the captain commanding replied.

“Severe gales were encountered on our return, and once our ship was nearly wrecked; but we outrode the storm, and came to harbor safe; then we were delayed a few days by

snow and winds. Omakin is with us and awaits your orders."

"Carry him word that Izikar wishes to escort him to the palace," returned the king of Heclades.

Omakin immediately presented himself. "May our efforts aid in bringing you success," he said. "I have records to be compared with yours."

We returned to the barge. "To the temple of Aar," were the orders from the king.

We entered the inner sanctuary.

"What is the name of your island?" I asked Omakin, as he proceeded to lay out his charts.

"Dohon," he replied. "It was once a part of Heclades, I find by the records. During several convulsions of the earth it has been engulfed; after many years, it would rise again to the surface."

"Is the island a storehouse of relics?" Commander Dirube inquired.

"No, and we are confident that the Zallalah is not there. Mellah-na referred to some place nearer the mountain of fire which marks the center of your kingdom."

"Blessed relief," I exclaimed, "the distance

to that port would be so great and our time is so short."

"You have some data in reference to the shrine?" Izikar questioned, with anxiety betrayed in his tone.

"I found a valuable chart. Here it is."

He laid before us an old, worn manuscript. The drawing was roughly executed, but no words or designs of the most elaborate artist were ever the cause of greater joy.

At the extreme southern portion of the chart there was marked a colored square, above it was the inscription:

"This is the shrine of Mem-o-ne."

"That represents Hexides," I shouted.

"We found Mem-o-ne, and she is the mermaid."

At some distance to the right, we found another inscription under a differently colored square. We sent for Professors Devitch and Lonzo to confirm our translation. This is it:

"The former resting place of Zallallah."

It was lying close to a body of water.

"Our Crystal Lake," said Professor Lonzo.

"We have the fragments of the shrine," I said.

We intently studied the chart.

"Here is the island of Mellah-na," I exclaimed, springing to my feet in my excitement. "Let us compare with the drawings of the present time."

But with all our charts, records and translations, we could not locate it with certainty. The most reliable information placed it in exactly the opposite direction from where we were working.

"We have never discovered the least trace of ruins there," I said, greatly perplexed. "Besides, it is near the Dismal Cavern; the people would never place her within sound of those dreadful groans."

"We must remember that the physical aspects of Heclades have been changed materially since the age of this document," Commander Dirube suggested.

"Mellah-na speaks of a dome," Izikar remarked. "They strike many domes where they are now making excavations."

"I consider that a point in favor of the chart," I answered. "Zallallah was a sacred treasure; the people were commanded to preserve her; they would naturally place her shrine in a retired place, away from traffic and the demolitions of a growing country."

Archaeologist Adams was sent for. There was no time for quibbling or hesitation. Talma's life hung in the balance. Decisions were rendered and put in operation before we left the temple.

"Were the people of Dohon in sympathy with your undertaking?" I asked Omakin, as we left the inner sanctuary and walked about the temple.

"They are a very ignorant race; almost savage, I called them," was his reply. "They rendered what aid they were able, but had no clear understanding of the value of those charts. The vaults which I found there contained all the relics of account left on the island; on its surface, at any rate."

I left orders with Zimma to conduct Omakin to whatever places he wished to visit and I hastened to Talma.

My confident smile as I greeted her chased the clouds from her face; the sun of hope again shone and illumined her beautiful eyes.

"The Kallah has returned," she said with forced calmness.

"Yes, after a successful trip," I replied.

"Do they bear good tidings?"

"Good, inasmuch as we are assured that

Zallallah lies here; ill, inasmuch as we cannot definitely locate the island of Mellah-na."

I told her all we had learned from Omakin. Every day revealed new depths of her soul; I could read that in her inmost heart she dared not trust the thought of final success.

"Come, Talma," I said at length, "we will have a ride on the sea; the strain of the last few days has faded my peerless queen."

I beckoned a trusty gondolier, and we were soon dancing over the silver waves of that sunny Polar Sea.

"It is beautiful to live, surrounded by love," breathed Talma, in husky accents, as the perfumed breezes gently rustled the curtains of our gondola. "We have a lovely home. It is easier now," she went on, "much easier since the day of consecration. O Uzzane! when I would think of your love for me, of my love for you, I would almost falter; for hours I would struggle with my better self, lest in an unguarded moment I should ruin our bodies and souls. Uzzane, whatever fate is destined to be ours, remember that Talma loved you with every power of her being. And then, my father's protecting care through all these years, for I cannot remember a mother's love,

would overwhelm me with grief. I have seen the canker of grief eat the blood till his heart is dead. I was so happy once; before we knew this doom was upon us it was joy simply to breathe."

I could only kiss the moistened eyes and cheeks in reply.

"I trembled at the altar," the pathetic voice went on; "if you had wavered at the last, I know not if my strength would have endured the test. We have taken our vows, and there is no retreat. Yes, it is less difficult now."

"Talma, my darling, is there no release for me, if fate be cruel and deny the only boon we crave?"

She looked at me with perfect faith and trust; faith in the belief of her soul; trust in her faith in me.

"There is no release," she murmured.

I shall never forget that summer day. Nature could not create a fairer scene, than that around us. The deep communion of two souls could never be richer than ours.

"Every spot is hallowed ground," Talma continued, after a pause of golden silence. "No maiden thinks she is wed without the

blessing of her queen; every mother must have good wishes for her babe; it is so little for me to do, so much for them to enjoy, that I have always tried to gratify them. Many times I have eased the pain of disease, and soothed the angry feelings of rebellious hearts; they would gladly heal the wounds of my own, but in this they are helpless."

Suddenly there rang out the song:

"Take heed! The sprites
Of evil nights
Lurk in the air."

The voice seemed to come from the clouds above us. I could see no one, but I remembered Lanah's warning. I motioned the gondolier to turn homewards; looking back, I caught sight of a figure skulking behind the shrubs of the shore nearest us.

On leaving the royal grounds, after seeing Talma safe within the palace, I met Ozomoth dressed in state costume, indulging in one of his pleasant reveries.

"Fool's errand," I heard him mutter;
"Two fools this time."

CHAPTER XVI

Omakin remained in Heclades several days. The small galley-glance, which had carried Zimma down the slope into the Happy Valley, had been refitted and pronounced equal to the trip between us and Brozoa. Izikar sent an escort to guard Omakin, and the valiant little boat glided up the glacier as evenly and airily as it had made the perilous journey down the mountain of ice. We named her the "Swan," and during the remainder of our sojourn in Heclades she made regular trips between the two points. Omakin had promised any aid he could render. We regretfully bade him adieu. I had just returned from watching the boat up the ascent, and had dropped into a pavilion to rest when I saw Zimma approaching.

"What have you been doing, Zimma?" I asked, as he came limping into the central square.

"Doing penance."

"Why?"

"Because I am an honest soul."

"No one ever doubted that."

"I may have cost Talma her life; I may have defrauded you of her love; I cheated death of its prey; I robbed yonder infernal pit of one of its brightest gems. Assistant Slav, I can never forget those cramps. I have been in a dozen dangerous chasms to-day, to pay myself for my stupidity. If we do not find the Zallallah, I will go in Talma's stead."

"Do you bring any trophies in return?" I questioned.

"None, except the usual number of bumps; there are not half as many of them as I deserve."

"You must not forget that Menna has a claim on you now."

"I remember; but is it not one of the laws of civilization to rid the world of evil?"

"Great efforts are made in that direction, I believe," was my reply.

"Is it not the duty of each individual to accomplish all he can in that direction?"

"Perhaps it is."

"Well! Ozomoth is an evil; he is one of the greatest evils. Therefore, if I rid the world of him, do I not wipe out a vast amount of evil, and at the same time leave a fine balance on the credit side of my account?"

"I fear your ethical conclusions would not bear a logical analysis. No, Zimma, remember you are under my orders, in regard to all material things. I think Ozomoth would have succeeded in living; I have not the least idea that you actually saved his life. Dismiss the thought. You may bring the canoe."

Every evening Talma and I would enjoy a ride on the sea. She was coming with Monica to gather some flowers; I led her aside to wait Zimma's return. Suddenly Lanah darted by us like a fawn; we watched her enter a canoe and paddle across to the island containing the volcanic mountain.

"Where can the girl be going?" I asked Talma, as she fastened the canoe and ran to the very brink of an old crater. "The crater has probably been extinct for thousands of years, yet it is hardly a safe place to venture carelessly," I remarked.

She seemed to be looking intently into the great mouth.

"Sometimes, I am inclined to believe the girl actually cares for Ozomoth," Talma answered. "Have you not observed how her eyes follow him whenever he is by himself?"

When others are about, she treats him with the utmost contempt."

Just then an officer came with a request to hasten to Izikar; I left Talma in Monica's care, and was about half way to the palace, when cries of "Help! help!" startled me. I turned to discover what the danger could be, but before I could make any inquiries, "Lanah has fallen down the crater! Lanah has fallen down the crater!" was the cry resounding through the streets.

Zimma was instantly on the spot, poorly concealing his delight at the prospect of another adventure. We reached the place as soon as possible.

"Zimma," said Commander Dirube, "there is but one way to rescue her, and that is for someone to enter the crater; do you wish the honor?"

"I do, Commander Dirube," was the quick reply.

"I have brought a supply of heliograms for you to carry with you. Flash necessary orders."

We let him down into the bowels of the earth, till a hearty pull on the rope suggested the idea that he wished to go no farther. The

first heliogram read: "I have found her; she is not severely wounded, but has fainted. I have secured the extra cable firmly about her person. Raise her carefully."

We obeyed orders, and in a few seconds Lanah was with us once more. As she was being lifted into one of the hand carriages used in riding about the streets, she opened her eyes, and beckoned to me. Commander Dirube and myself stepped to her side in answer to the request.

"I saw him enter the crater; find him; he left Ozomoth——" Strength failed her, and she again fell into a stupor that lasted several hours.

Meantime, we endeavored to send return messages to Zimma; only one reached him, but his came to us with amazing rapidity and distinctness.

"Lower the cable."

We let him down a quarter of a mile.

"Lower the cable," came a second time.

We dropped it gradually, till a half mile was gone over.

"Lower the cable," flashed for the third time.

We let him down a mile.

"No ruins here; nothing of value, unless a small stone case contains it; I have the case in my pocket. Draw upwards."

"Halt. Application of salve on shin," was the next bulletin.

We carefully drew him up several hundred feet.

"Halt. Application of plaster on arm," was the next order.

No more misfortunes befell him till we had him within a third of a mile from the top.

"Halt. More plaster and ointment. I hear a strange sound. Raise me slowly."

We pulled up the rope a few more hundred feet.

"Halt. I have the rascal by the throat."

The next:

"He returned the courtesy, but I have his arms pinioned."

In a few moments:

"Draw slowly."

A dozen feet or so were conquered, when the rope jerked and swayed in a manner that denoted a severe struggle. We anxiously awaited the next heliogram.

At last it came.

"Severe battle. Enemy conquered. Ap-

plication of ointment and plaster to prisoner's head. Raise us speedily to surface."

They were bruised and bleeding, but otherwise uninjured.

"Who are you?" asked Commander Dirube, looking sternly at the prisoner.

No answer.

Report was immediately made to Izikar. He returned an order for the prisoner to be conveyed to the royal dungeon, and confined to await his trial.

"He is a spy," I said.

"Yes," replied the commander, "but we will examine the case spoken of by Zimma before proceeding further."

"This is not a relic," I observed as Zimma placed it in my hands, "it has a fresh color."

It proved to contain a manuscript stolen from the Tajan record; the paper gave the exact location of the Island of Mellah-na, with directions to have excavations made unknown to us, for the purpose of discovering the Zalallah, thus thwarting our attempts.

Our only mistake in following its directions was in not remembering that the island had undoubtedly been divided.

No proof could be obtained relating to the

theft, or the time of the robbery. The laws of the land allowed a prisoner six months of preparation for trial.

Unless the Zallallah were found previous to the end of the lease it would be of little moment to me; Talma would not be alive.

Nevertheless, Lanah's accident had resulted in a benefit not to be estimated. I believe it saved weeks of hard labor and bitter disappointment.

When you, as tourists, ride down the crater of Mt. Otello in a luxurious car lighted and guided by the modern appliances of electricity, think of the dangerous descent of Zimma and of the importance of the result achieved.

On Lanah's recovery, or, rather, on her return to consciousness, she related to Talma the fact of seeing the prisoner conversing with Ozomoth, and his flight to the crater immediately after the interview. She thought he must be intent on evil, and followed to prevent it if in her power to do so. Further than this she seemed to know nothing.

Lanah developed and blossomed into a lovely creation of nature. At times she would be brilliant and mirthful, but she seemed to conceal her real nature under a forced reserve.

Several times she had been of material aid in disclosing little hindrances attempted by Ozomoth. One day I thought I understood her; the next she would contradict all my conclusions.

Zimma was keener in love affairs than I, as it proved. He came to my office for a little chat one evening. I knew some revelation burdened his soul, but I evinced no curiosity in regard to it.

"Commander Dirube is ill," was the remark introducing the subject.

"I left him an hour ago," I replied; "he seemed in usual health."

"Not physically, nor morally; mentally, I think would be the proper term," Zimma continued.

"Disheartened?"

"No, but he ought to be."

"What is your authority?"

"I know the symptoms. Shall I ever forget the mental agonies I suffered those two hours in Brozoa? He is in love; he loves Lanah, but Lanah does not love him."

Zimma looked very wise and sympathetic.

"What symptoms have you observed?"

"Oh, he watches her and sighs—I sighed

enough during those two hours in Brozoa to answer for a lifetime—and his manner toward her tells the story. You and Talma are no guides; your case is an exceptional one. Poor girl! After all, I wish your final success were as sure as his; I think he will win her, but it takes mental, moral and physical fiber to carry one through the trying ordeal.”

“Guard your tongue, Zimma,” I said, as I arose to go. “I have new plans to be put under way to-morrow. Come to me at ten.”

“Strange infatuation,” I muttered to myself as I passed down the street. I was not long in doubt in regard to the correctness of Zimma’s observations.

“Have you seen Lanah-na?” inquired Commander Dirube, as I came out of the museum at a later hour the same evening.

I looked up in surprise. The suffix, “na,” in the language of Heclades denoted great affection.

“Not recently,” I replied; “anything of special importance in regard to her?”

“Yes.”

I glanced sideways at him, and saw what was coming. I did not feel quite satisfied with his infatuation for Lanah. She was so

unlike Talma; that was all the reason I could give. Zimma's prophetic eye had prepared me, but I displayed no curiosity.

"I have concluded that you and Zimma need not control the fairies of the north," he continued, somewhat disconcerted.

"Ah, ha! I understand," I replied. "Have you learned anything of her history?"

"All that she knows herself; her father and mother were picked up in Dohon by a party of Brozoans, and they joined their colony. The father died soon after, the mother married a brother of Omakin; both died when Lanah was young, and her Uncle Omakin brought her up with his own daughter."

"She is a very beautiful girl," I answered; "probably I do not appreciate her, as no comparison can be drawn between her and the Queen of Heclades."

"Do you notice how rapidly she has advanced in knowledge and accomplishments?" said the ardent lover.

"She could not do otherwise, and be intimately associated with Talma," I answered.

"I conclude you do not approve of my intentions," he said, in a disappointed tone.

"I fear she is not worthy of you, my dear commander. You are my life-long friend and I am naturally much interested in your welfare; however, you shall have my hearty support. Your exertions in my behalf can never be repaid."

"Thank you," he said; "however, I may never need your congratulations."

"Is Lanah a coy maiden?"

"I think she has not learned her own heart yet; during the last visit of Omakin, I obtained his consent to win her if I could."

"Perhaps her heart is left in Brozoa," I suggested.

"I think not; Omakin had no clue to anything of the kind."

"May I consult with Talma?" I asked.

"With Talma and Izikar; with no one else. I do not wish to urge my suit, if she loves another."

I did not think it advisable to impart Zimma's conclusions of the matter.

"Have you examined the new excavations?" I inquired, as he started on.

"Not this afternoon. I have just come from the palace. Izikar has been examining the prisoner."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "What is the law if he finds him guilty?"

"If he is found guilty of the theft, with a deliberate intention to hinder the work of saving Talma's life, Izikar has the power, according to the record, to put him to death. If it were done with any other intention, the people have a voice in the matter; they call it a trial, but it is conducted very differently from those of our nation."

"Did you learn his name?"

"Have you not heard that he is not a native of Heclades?" he questioned, in great surprise.

"No! How did he come here?" I asked, astonished at such a revelation.

"That is the question under discussion. Omakin has been sent for, and the officers in command of the Kallah have been examined. They know nothing of the matter."

"When will Omakin be here?"

"They are watching for the boat now."

He had hardly replied to my last question, when a royal attendant approached us with due ceremony, and announced that Izikar awaited our presence in the council chamber of the palace.

We immediately complied with the request, and found Omakin had just arrived.

After the usual greetings, we were astounded to learn that the prisoner was not from Brozoa, and that Omakin knew nothing whatever in regard to him.

"Can he be from the Isle of Dohon?" I suggested.

"He resembles the inhabitants of the southern portion of that island, but how could he have been brought here unknown to any of us?" Omakin replied.

"Is it possible that Ozomoth was the means of his coming?" said Commander Dirube.

"I see no possible way for him to accomplish such a thing without its being discovered," I answered.

"Does the prisoner speak a language understood by any of us?" Omakin inquired.

"I can understand a few words. Whether he can not, or will not, answer questions, I have so far been unable to determine," Izikar replied. "I wish you to go in company with Commander Dirube and Assistant Slav, to ascertain if he came here by the command of any party, or if he wandered from home, was lost, and found us in that way."

We repaired to the prisoner's cell under the protection of the royal guard. We found him sullen and defiant. The only words we could persuade him to say, were, "bribe, home, girl."

As we left the royal gate, Lanah entered the grounds. I noticed her extreme pallor, but did not connect it with our visit to the cell. There was nothing to do but abide our time and watch for a clue to the mystery. The stolen manuscript was found, and all danger from our plans being thwarted was over for the time.

Ozomoth declared he knew nothing about the man or the case found at the bottom of the crater. When he made this unblushing statement, Lanah threw him a look of defiance, which he returned with a fiendish scowl. I knew she had a very impulsive nature, but I had never supposed her guilty of treachery.

Other important matters demanded my attention for the days following this interview, so that neither of the above subjects came to mind.

CHAPTER XVII

"Glad to meet you, Photographer Lewis," said I, shaking hands; I had just left one of the public libraries of Art Island. "I wish your assistance to-night."

"It shall be rendered with pleasure," he replied.

"You will need a large supply of chemicals prepared for obtaining instantaneous views in the dark. Bring photographers Lamson and Ivitch with you. Meet me at Commander Dirube's office at ten this evening."

"Your orders shall be obeyed. Is the matter private?"

"Strictly so," was my reply, and we separated.

"I must give directions to Zimma before it is any later," I thought to myself, and proceeded to do so with dispatch.

I then hastened to the palace to inform Izikar that preparations for the night's campaign were completed. On my way out I received a message from Talma, requesting me to see her before I left the palace.

"O Uzzane!" she exclaimed, "abandon the dangerous attempt; he will kill you," and she burst into tears.

"Talma, my poor darling, do not be alarmed. We are prepared for emergencies. I do not think Ozomoth will have an inkling of our whereabouts."

"He came onto the island a short time ago," she continued; "he means destruction to any obstacle in the way of his power; he never looked more dangerous." She was brave for herself, but timid for those she loved.

"I promise to use the utmost caution. Our success may depend on the work of to-night," I replied, tenderly caressing the frightened girl.

"And it is all for me; I cannot bear that you should suffer for me."

"No, my dear Talma; you forget that it concerns me equally with you. All will be well. Good-bye, my darling girl, until to-morrow morning."

On my way from the palace to the commander's headquarters I met Ozomoth; he beckoned me with a genial smile. I had never seen him so seemingly well disposed; but I distrusted him.

"Good afternoon, Assistant Slav," he said in a very friendly manner. "I have a private word with you."

"I was hastening to the commander's office," I replied; "will you accompany me?"

"I am much interested," he continued, as he turned about, "in the astronomical experiments of your professors. As that is a calling entirely unconnected with the vital interests at stake between us, I humbly beg your permission to remain on the Mermaid through the coming night, for the purpose of witnessing some of their marvelous undertakings. In this I trust you will believe me sincere."

I eyed him keenly. Not a muscle quivered under my searching gaze. "Better to have him deceived about our knowledge of plans," I thought. I replied, "I will consult the commander in regard to your request; undoubtedly it will be granted."

"Accept my hearty gratitude; in matters foreign to the vital point, I am pleased to confer and receive favors," and with a bow he left me.

"Villain!" I ejaculated. "Yes, monster, you can have a permit to watch the glorious heavens and earth on the Mermaid to-night!

But, my smooth-tongued Satan, you will not be there to avail yourself of it."

I found the commander greatly excited.

"Lanah has just sent me this," he said, holding a dainty note toward me. "Read it."

It contained information in detail of some of Ozomoth's plans for the evening.

"How does Lanah discover what we are unable to do, with all our assistance?" I inquired, a trifle impatiently.

"She has a keen, shrewd intellect and sharp eyes; I hope you appreciate her efforts in your behalf."

I did not press the matter; it was a tender subject with the commander, and a life-long devotion could never half return the efforts and sacrifices made by him in aiding my arduous labors.

In the morning I had been skirmishing around Orange Island, on the very outskirts of Heclades; it was a place seldom visited by the inhabitants, as it was the most remote land of the kingdom, and quite difficult of access.

As I stood looking about me, I happened to see Ozomoth slyly crawling along near the shore of a small island opposite.

"Ah, ha! my man," I said to myself, "I

think I will share this bit of adventure with you."

I concealed myself in some bushes where I had a full view of proceedings. Prone on the ground, he writhed along, the serpent face glowing in all its exultation of secret power. Every few feet he would raise his head and cast those beady eyes in every direction to make sure he was unseen; he listened at the slightest sound, so that I scarcely dared to breathe.

When he reached an old crater, he stopped and carefully peered down into its depths. Then he gave a musical note, similar to the song of one species of bird native to the country. He next crawled into the cavern, entirely out of my sight. After remaining there some time, I saw the serpent visage again appearing above the surface. The same caution was used as on entering. He had crawled some distance from the mouth of the cavern, when he stopped, looked behind him, partly raised himself from the ground, and said: "Tonight." I read the words from the motion he made as much as from the sound of the voice.

The arm of the sea extending between our respective islands was very narrow, only the

width of an ordinary street, and I was confident I heard aright. I watched him crawl to the beach, enter his canoe, land at another island, hide the boat, walk rapidly across, jump into a larger boat, take a winding course to a place near Art Island, hide the second boat and leisurely stroll around for some minutes. I had brought several pocket telescopes with me, in fact I always had more or less of them about me, and they now repaid my trouble in carrying them, as they had done many times before. I adjusted one which enabled me to see him enter his gondola used on ordinary outings, throw off an outside garment, assume a mild expression and start toward home.

That bit of observation was the clue we determined to follow out, and it was in preparation for that event that I had come to the commander's office. Of the purport of Ozo-moth's maneuvers we had no knowledge whatever. No one had the slightest conception of what we should encounter in that crater.

We had planned our campaign, however, with whetted wits. Zimma was naturally one of the leading actors. Izikar had given orders for the royal guard to station themselves near us in case their assistance should be needed.

Why they were to be there they were in absolute ignorance. Their lives paid the penalty of divulging secret orders from the king.

At the appointed time photographers Lewis, Lamson and Ivitch reported at the office. Zimma appeared soon after, his face shining with the thought of prospective honors. The form of sending a permit to Ozomoth to remain on the Mermaid had been gone through with, the officer in charge ordered to receive him honorably, and I had taken the trouble to send a special messenger to his residence to inform him the request had been granted.

Lanah informed us in her letter that Ozomoth would leave his house at eleven. We started at ten, each taking different routes which eventually brought us to Orange Island. After landing, not a loud word was to be spoken.

We knew the crater was not deep; that some time a winding stairway had been made, and that landings built of wood, or hewn out of the rock, had served as resting places. We also were aware that at the bottom there was a stream of water; its source and mouth had never been found; at least, none of the living inhabitants of Heclades had explored the river

and there were no records referring to it that seemed reliable. A very ancient chart did represent a large body of water running through a large country, even as far as I thought the island of Dohon might be. I knew that volcanic eruptions and earthquakes had occurred since then and I believed this stream had an outlet in the known world.

We noiselessly entered the yawning abyss and took our several stations. Professor Lewis arranged the different instruments, so as to obtain representations of all parts of the crater and get a perfect picture of anyone within it. Zimma and myself were stationed near the brink of the river. Zimma never made an articulate sound, but I could feel him trembling with excitement and I knew he was enjoying a quiet laugh with himself over the dangerous situation.

At length, after what seemed to us an interminable space of time, we felt that someone was looking down the crater. As he glided past the landing nearest me I recognized the slippery, writhing motion of Ozomoth. I knew it was he. When he reached the bank of the river he struck the same musical notes I heard in the morning, only on a very low key.

It was not long before we heard the faintest rustling on the water. Someone had stopped near the one we had called Ozomoth. Then a few words were spoken so indistinctly we could not understand them.

Silence for several minutes. I feared our breathing might be heard. The next movement was to produce a very dim light, which just revealed the outlines of the two figures. One we recognized as Ozomoth, as we expected; the other was unknown to us. The latter did not seem satisfied with proceedings, and talked indistinctly.

"Companion," we heard him say several times.

"He is safe," Ozomoth would answer, "but I want you to return for three more."

"No more," would be the reply, "till my friend meets me."

Ozomoth took out a handful of gold and offered to the man. He shook his head and muttered "life."

"More than this you will have," returned Ozomoth, taking out a handful of gems.

The man shook his head again. "Life, friend, home," were all we could catch that time.

I concluded it was time to act. I touched Zimma as a signal for him to start on the special part assigned to him. He carefully worked his way along in the darkness; just as he reached a point where the light fell on him he slipped; I saw the misstep, and prepared to rescue him, as I thought the noise must attract Ozomoth's attention, and I feared he might land in the water. But he caught hold of a jutting rock and succeeded in recovering his lost position. I smiled as I saw him stop and deliberately apply a generous piece of plaster to the side of his nose. The rest of us were soon in position to learn more of this singular interview, a part having crawled below the two conspirators.

Suddenly we flashed a powerful light, and Zimma stepped in front of the man as he attempted to jump into a small boat lying at his feet. For an instant Ozomoth quailed, but recovering himself, he stared at the imperial officers with the utmost disdain.

"Ha! ha! ha! Proud defender of our queen," he said, approaching me with a defiant look, "thou thought'st to bring the plans of Ozomoth to naught! and, behold, they are so clear and loyal, thou could'st have known

them in the broad light of day for the asking."

I gave him a smile of contempt.

"This man came at my bidding to render me a little service in the way of trade, and lo! the valiant seeker of the Zallallah must needs spy into it, as if the private business of a man were the property of the state."

"We will conduct him to the king," I said. "Make way for us."

"That will please me," he returned, "for then my honesty in the matter will be vindicated. I will even assist you in carrying out your wish. But," and he turned those deadly eyes of venom full upon me, "remember this: When Ozomoth sees fit to lay a scheme, it will be deeper than even the lover of Talma can fathom, with all his skill. The crest of the House of Ozomoth still reigns, and the Queen of Heclades will yet feel its power! I fear you not; neither does the heart of Ozomoth tremble lest you win success! If it did, you well might blanch beneath his look of hate. I shall not harm you. Let us hasten to acquaint the king of this masterly stroke of yours to-night." He rapidly ascended the crater, awaiting us at the top.

Like the prisoner in the royal dungeon, the

man we secured would give no information in regard to himself; we could not ascertain his name, his home or his reason for being in the place we found him. How he came there was the greatest query of all. He was conducted under strict guard to the mouth of the crater, put into the boat reserved for him, and safely landed at the dungeon. Ozomoth accompanied us with the utmost unconcern.

Izikar, Commander Dirube, and others, were anxiously looking for our return. I sent word to Talma that all was safe and successful. After making sure the prisoners were safely lodged in the comfortable quarters of the royal dungeon, on account of the lateness of the hour, we deferred further action till the following day.

I will here speak of the views obtained by the photographers in the crater. Several of Ozomoth were secured, and when you visit the National Art Gallery at Romanzoff just find your way to the extreme eastern portion of the west wing, then sit down and leisurely study that face. One view represents him talking to the strange man before we made ourselves known; another shows his look of surprise as our light flashed through the cra-

ter; a third gives a perfect representation of the beady eyes and forked tongue, during his harangue of innocence. They are the only portraits of any one belonging to the house of Ozomoth, and are valued accordingly. After you have studied the monster till you thoroughly understand his rascality, reflect on the science required to obtain such distinct views in the darkness of an old volcanic crater. Then turn to your right and behold the animated features of a daring man of middle life, with a plaster on his nose. That is Zimma. If heroism ever existed, it dwelt in that curious combination of matter and spirit called Zimma. Honor him as he deserves. The photograph of the prisoner we secured proved to be of valuable aid to us, and Professor Livingstone, the inventor of the process, has my lifelong gratitude.

At the council held on the day after our adventure, I proposed that we explore the unknown stream of water and learn if any more barbarians, as we called them, infested the regions.

Ozomoth paid no attention to our doings. He loudly informed Izikar that he was there for a little business of his own, which affected

neither individual nor state, and we were obliged to let the matter rest for the time.

Zimma, two officers, two guards and myself, went down into the old crater early in the afternoon; a strong force was left at its mouth to insure our chance of reaching the outside world once more. We examined the prisoner's boat, found it in complete order, and decided to make use of it for a part of our party, the remainder of us taking a canoe belonging to the royal navy. We had an electric attachment which would propel the boat at any desired speed.

Our electric lantern and "dome light" enabled us to see a long distance ahead; we glided down that underground current with no anxiety as to our safety, but with a great deal of curiosity as to the terminus of our trip.

"There is a solid wall in front of us," called out Officer Monroe, who was in the advance boat.

"Proceed slowly," I answered, "until we overtake you."

And so it was. A great, black wall of rock rose like a mountain barrier between us and anything beyond.

At its base there was a channel for the river

to pass along, but not room enough to allow a flat boat with a person in a prostrate position to pass through.

"No one ever succeeded in coming through there alive," Officer Monroe remarked.

"That would simply be an impossibility," I returned; "we will waste no time speculating on that; steer close to the rock on the left, and we will look about us."

A few feet from the water we found a large flat space; we succeeded in crawling to it and were both delighted and surprised to find ourselves on so good vantage ground.

"What is here? Quick!" exclaimed Zimma, pointing to something a little ahead of him.

"It is some kind of a vehicle," I answered, hurrying to examine it. "We are on the right trail."

We fastened our boats, transferred our electric propeller to the curious-looking box, and started on. Our journey was rather slow and fatiguing, as the way was rough and up grade for some distance. We eventually reached the top of what we had at first deemed an insurmountable obstacle, and found ourselves in a high tunnel. Whether it had been

made by nature or art we could not determine.

I have no correct knowledge of the distance we traversed. We did not take account of it at the time, and I have never cared to repeat the journey for the sake of obtaining the information.

"There is a strong breeze through this underground highway, at all events," remarked Professor Livingstone, after a long silence.

"I believe I discern a flavor of salt in it," I answered. Light began to dawn in the distance.

"The sea! the sea!" exclaimed Zimma.

"On at full speed," I shouted.

The cold had become quite intense, and cakes of ice appeared from time to time; we put on electro-heaters and hurried on.

"A ship! a ship!" shouted Officer Adams in great excitement.

"Halt," I ordered, as we drew near the craft. It was a small, rude affair, but seemed built for enduring rough seas. It was hauled out of the water; or we might have missed it entirely, the sea being some distance beneath us.

We found no one on board, but strong iron

manacles lay in a small chest in an inner cabin.

"This is the craft the prisoners came in," I said confidently. "We will not destroy it, but make a rough design that may prove something in the future."

"This is the way they entered Heclades," Officer Adams asserted. "There could have been only the two we have captured. Possibly they are innocent of any guilty designs."

"They are held on suspicion only," I replied. "If we find they are innocent they will be released; if not guilty, they will gladly give us their names and business. They are allowed all liberties now, except leaving the grounds."

Our return home was made memorable by several accidents and narrow escapes from being dashed in pieces on the rocks, or sent to the bottom of the river. When we were finally in the canoes we made more extended examinations of the entrance of the river into the passage we could not enter.

We believed it to have once been a large river in a country now destroyed, and that it ultimately reached our Crystal Lake in the petrified world. Our theory has since been proved to be a correct one.

When we were sufficiently near our starting point to be heard we sang out to the guards. They responded, "All is well." We replied, "All is well," and soon were in Heclades again. The next thing in order was to ascertain, if possible, the reason of the strange proceedings we had unearthed.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Is she conscious?" I asked.

"No. She has been in a raving delirium since you started on your detective trip."

"Can you understand any of her mutterings?"

"Occasionally. Once she looked at me with those pitiful, wild eyes, and said, 'Revenge will pay me.' Then she moaned till our hearts ached to hear her. There! she is beginning now; come nearer and listen."

The above conversation took place a few hours after my return from the crater. I had snatched a good sleep, and then hastened to Talma. We were talking of Lanah. The girl had been suddenly seized with a delirium so violent that it seemed it must consume the young life with its uncontrollable strength.

"Fool!" we heard her utter in a hoarse voice. "I would have torn my heart to save him, and yet I have ruined him."

"What can the girl refer to?" I asked.

"I have a vague conjecture that she fears the information given by her to Commander Dirube may in some manner bring disaster. I think she loves him." Talma replied.

"I have striven to crush the evil," the voice went on, "but the stain of inheritance is upon me. Curses on them both! No, curses on one of them! Oh, no, no, no, my heart will not let me curse them."

At times she would break into sobs so heartrending that we wondered how she could live and utter them. But at last the raging fire burned out, the tired brain rested and she fell into a peaceful sleep.

"Has Omakin been sent for?" I inquired, as we left the ante-chamber leading to the room where the sick girl lay.

"Yes, some hours ago."

I drew Talma into one of the quiet parlors of the palace, and related the whole of our experience in regard to the two strange beings in some way connected with Ozomoth, and, as I believed, with our search for the Zallallah.

"Uzzane," and the beseeching eyes looked

into mine, "never torment yourself with the vows I am doomed to fulfill. After I am dead, remember all that love could do was done. Leave this land of your trials and sorrows, find other joys and let your life be as bright and joyful as it would have been if Talma had not won your love. It grieves me to the heart that so many must suffer with me."

"My joy, my love, my soul's delight! Banish those gloomy thoughts and let me see the light of happiness make sunshine again in those glorious eyes," and I turned her face to mine. Love chased the fears away, and a rosy blush covered face and neck as she returned the kiss.

It was in moments like these that I realized the heavy burden resting on that young heart. Only now and then did the girl reveal the real sadness in her soul. She endeavored to remember all the little kindnesses she was wont to bestow, and her devotion to her father, her people, her household, never for an instant relaxed. Everyone sought her sympathy in affliction, her aid in trouble and her blessing in joy. Even as we sat, dreaming of the future, a maid entered saying that Lanah was awake

and conscious and eagerly begged for Talma's presence. I led her to the door of the ante-room, and passed on to the outer court.

"What duty will next present itself?" I questioned.

"Assistant Slav," a voice called at my elbow.

I turned to receive a message from Izikar, summoning me to the council chamber of the palace. I found Commander Dirube, Omakin, Photographer Lewis and Professor Livingstone in attendance. Izikar followed soon after.

Omakin had just come from an inner room with Lanah. She was out of danger, and insisted that her incoherent ravings had no reference to anyone or anything.

"We requested your presence, Omakin," began Izikar, "both on account of our beloved Lanah and the hope that you would be able to render important information in regard to our prisoners. If their errand is a peaceable one, we do not wish to detain them."

The king then ordered the prisoners to be brought in.

"Do you recognize them, Omakin, as belonging to the Isle of Dohon?"

"I recognize them as two pirates who occasionally infest the shores of Dohon," Omakin replied.

"Do they use a craft like the one here designated?" asked Officer Livingstone, producing the rough sketch he had made of the little ship containing the manacles.

"Their craft resembles this," Omakin replied, "but, as they never touch land, I cannot make a positive assertion."

At this, the door of the council chamber opened; Ozomoth strode in with the serpentine curves characteristic of his wrath. He took his stand at one side, facing the assembled council; turning his venomous eyes to take one sweeping glance, he addressed Izikar.

"Izikar, King of Heclades, I am here to make plain this mystery, which so greatly troubles you. Remember the House of Ozomoth caused kings to tremble before the House of Izikar had its birth. I bow the knee to none. My power rests easy on its throne. By thy faith, by the faith of thy people, by the holy Tajan record, our peerless queen is the promised bride of Ozomoth. If but for a day the serpent crest adorn her brow, yet my power is vindicated. What care I for the

puny efforts of yon strangers in our land. I pass them by as the idle dreams of a weak brain. I need to use sly arts to gain an end? Ha! ha! ha! My power is so secure, I wish the sun were brighter to make them clearer. I need to cloak my deeds, lest ruin come upon me? Ha! ha! he that hides his work acknowledges the weakness of his right to do it. I plead not my own cause; the House of Ozo-moth needs not to plead for itself. But for the sake of yonder innocent wanderers in our midst, I speak. I know the narrow, dangerous path which leads from the farther cavern to the sea. In seeking for lost works of art I came across it years ago. I did not noise my good luck abroad. What good? What ill?

“Perchance, I thought, the time may come when private trade can use it for its good. The other day, it served so well. I wished to buy some precious stones. Who deals in gems like these, cares not to show them to the multitudes; I met the vender of them in yonder cavern; an innocent act which has brought dire distress to him and you. This valiant lover of our queen suspected me of evil, watching with an eye to that intent. I had not gold enough about me; and when again I

sought to pay just debts, lo and behold! yon honored courtier deemed me guilty of offense. It is well to guard the interests of the state. I found myself surrounded by the officers of law. I care not for myself; the Tajan record gives the word, that none of the House of Ozomoth can be condemned without the proof so unmistakably clear that not a doubt remains. Such proof against them never has been found. The Tajan record says: 'He who spills the blood of Ozomoth shall die the death.'

"Chains could bind me for a time; but that prevents no evil, for no evil do I wish. If I should tremble lest the efforts of my rival, the wooer of our fair queen, should find what ages have not found, and thus deprive me of my prize, my power, then you might distrust the secret dealings of Ozomoth; but I tremble not.

"Therefore, no occasion comes that makes it necessary for a spy to follow him. It is well to guard one's interests; I blame not the one who does this, if he break no law; let him look keenly to his work, but take heed lest he deprive another of the same good right. I beg that those ill-fated owners of these gems may be released. I care not for the stones. I will return them to thee and the price I paid be-

side. There! May this release thee, as I proclaim thee innocent."

With a graceful wave of the hand, he left the room.

"It is as Ozomoth has said," Izikar began, as he rose with shaking limbs and furrowed brow, "undoubted proof of attempting to hinder the finding of Zallallah must first be obtained, ere the reigning Prince of the House of Ozomoth can be put in irons."

"I make this offer," Omakin replied. "Two prisoners charged with death escaped the law, and fled from Dohon; they were pirates captured near its shores, and found guilty of criminal offense; they were sentenced by the ruler of the island to be put to death; they broke their bonds and found refuge with some traitorous soul, who aided them to flee the island; their accomplice was never known and they were never recaptured. This happened many years ago; it may be we have secured the old offenders of the law. One wore gems of rare worth. Give me the portrait taken in the crater, showing all the gems and gold; I will send my trusty agent with it to Dohon; also have one prepared of his companion. Detain the prisoners here until we receive a message

in return. If they prove to be the same the ruler of Dohon will relieve us of them further. I have influence with him; in that case I will ask that he grant me this favor; if they will reveal the reason of their presence here, the real bargain existing between them and this Ozo-moth, their lives shall be spared, and the sentence of death be changed to one of imprisonment."

"Our gratitude to you, Omakin, can never be repaid," Izikar replied; "I accept your offer if it please the rest."

"As commander-in-chief of this expedition, I am in favor of it," was the announcement of Commander Dirube.

"As the publicly acknowledged wooer of the Queen of Heclades, I heartily accept the generous offer of our friend, Omakin, as the only means of getting any clue to this dastardly treachery," was my reply.

"Let it be put in immediate execution," was Izikar's order.

Directions were quickly dispatched to have the Swan in readiness at a certain hour; also, to adjust an electric propeller, that all speed possible might be had. An electric propeller for the rude ship which it was necessary to

sail, was commanded to be put in the outfit for the journey.

As I passed out of the council chamber, down through the corridors, out into the open court, I secretly chuckled over the thought that the boasting prince of the House of Ozomoth might not rest so easy on his throne of power if our intentions were known by him. In crossing to the square, he took the trouble to meet me, casting a look of triumph, which I would not deign to notice.

It was given out that the Swan was going to make one of its regular trips to Brozoa; we evinced no special interest in the matter; we did not appear at all anxious to hasten its departure, but every nerve was strained for its accomplishment without delay. The prisoners were placed in close confinement, and every precaution taken that no communication could pass between them and Ozomoth. When our winsome boat glided over the brow of the glacier, so stanch and true, a silent cheer went up from every heart that knew its destination, and a silent petition for its safe return.

Meanwhile, we let no opportunity pass by unimproved, that gave any encouragement

for forwarding our work. I did not allow my personal interests to affect my duties as assistant commander of the expedition, consequently I had but little time to spend in useless conjecture. Action, action, action, was my motto; eternal vigilance my aim. We believed Ozomoth to be guilty of a crime that would place him in chains, where he could not interfere with our plans or take our time to circumvent them. But nothing could be proved, and he gloried in his triumph.

Lanah rapidly recovered and grew more beautiful and brilliant each day. Her intellect was keener, her tastes finer than those whose ancestors had always lived in the cold north. She was coquettish and sparkling, and seemed less fickle and impulsive than formerly.

Talma trusted her implicitly, and Lahnah-na became the friend of all.

One morning Commander Dirube came to me with a joyful countenance. I read his face and tendered my congratulations before he could speak. In my inmost soul I lamented the fact deeply, but I was determined to rejoice with him out of my love for him.

"Yes, Assistant Slav," he said, "I have

won the jewel; accept her for my sake, but especially for her own."

"I will do so," I replied. "What a strange life this is!" I continued. "What adventures to relate when we are in our own homes once more; whether Talma shall be with me there, alas! I cannot tell. My heart fails me at times."

"Everything is being done, and with the utmost speed," he replied. "Your failure would rob my joy of half its zest."

"Now that Lanah is admitted to our circle we can discuss the return of the Swan in her presence," I said as I saw her approaching us with Omakin.

"With perfect freedom; she is often a great aid to us," he replied.

"The Swan must soon return," I remarked to Omakin, as they joined us.

"It makes a long tarry in our dear, old Brozoa, this time," Lanah lightly answered.

"It is not in Brozoa," said the commander; "it is a secret trip to Dohon. Not a word in conversation, beyond the limited circle of those who sent it."

"Is it a mission so important as that?" she asked.

I noticed she was greatly agitated, but attached no importance to the fact.

"Yes," Omakin answered. "Izika has sent to ascertain if the prisoners confined by us are the pirates who escaped from the Ruler of the Dohoni. If they prove to be the same we shall return them to his authority and hope to learn from them whether Ozomoth was in league with them for evil."

Lanah grew as white as the lily she wore. I thought she was going to faint, and attributed it to weakness caused by her recent illness.

Recovering herself, she carelessly inquired, "What then?"

"All who delay the work of finding the Zalallah to save our queen can be put to death, except Ozomoth," Izika answered, joining us; "he can be bound in chains."

"Are you ill, Lanah-na?" Omakin affectionately inquired.

She trembled so violently she could no longer conceal her emotion, and replied, "I am not strong yet, uncle, I will return to Menna."

Commander Dirube accompanied her. I watched his complete surrender, and thought to myself, "Can it be possible the girl is de-

ceiving us all?" I rejected the idea as unworthy the friend of Talma and the betrothed of my commander. I soon forgot it in the press of duties.

As the time drew near for the return of the Swan, I perfected quite a little system of espionage over the maneuvers of Ozomoth. Omakin continued firm in the belief that the Ruler of Dohon would listen favorably to his request; Lanah seemed less peculiar in many ways, and more devoted to our interests than ever. Zimma spent his superfluous energy in alternating between hope and fear; hope that the final outcome would be prosperous; fear that no more adventures were in store for him.

"If another honor should never come to you, Zimma," I remarked to him one day, during one of his spells of lamentation, "you have achieved enough to carry your name down to posterity, as 'Zimma the Undaunted.' Therefore enjoy the glory you have acquired, nor thirst for more. Our boat should have returned yesterday," I continued. "Watch and bring the tidings immediately on its appearance."

Many were the quiet talks, the enjoyable rides on the sea, so calm and silvery in that

lonely world, and the rambles among the ruins of the cities which were rapidly brought to the glaring light of day. We anxiously looked for the return of the Swan, and at the same time I almost dreaded to receive the tidings it would bring.

It had been overdue two days. I was beginning to indulge in gloomy forebodings, when I heard a hurrah outside.

"The Swan is coming! The Swan is coming!" exclaimed Zimma, bursting into my office with his usual impetuosity.

"Inform Izikar immediately," I replied, quite as excited as himself. "Take this to the commander," I continued, handing him a note; "find him without delay."

Only a short time elapsed before we were summoned to the council chamber.

"The Swan has had a successful trip, and my agent brings good news," said Omakin, as he greeted me at the door.

When all were assembled, the doors were locked and the conversation carried on in a quiet tone, that Ozomoth might not be aware of any unusual proceedings.

"Let my agent, Ivan, speak for himself," said Omakin, introducing him.

"I have just returned from the Ruler of Dohon," he began, "whither I was sent to learn if our prisoners were the pirates they are searching for. They are."

"What particular point determines this conclusion in the mind of the Ruler of Dohon?" inquired Izikar.

"The gems, as revealed in the portrait; owing to the skill of your artist, he at once recognized their peculiar tint and shape," was the satisfactory reply.

"Have the men changed in feature?" Izikar asked.

"Only what change would naturally come with age; he is well assured they are the same," Ivan answered.

"What decision do you bring in regard to my request, that he will save their lives if they reveal the nature of the trade with Ozomoth?" inquired Omakin.

"He grants your request, and wishes the prisoners to be returned to him as speedily as possible."

Many other questions were asked, suggestions made, and opinions expressed, in relation to the safest, quickest means of carrying out the plan. It was decided the Mer-

maid should be used as stronger and swifter under pressure, than the smaller boat. The officers to command were notified to report on duty at a specified time. The Swan would take Omakin to Brozoa for a few days and return to convey him back to us. We were jubilant over our success and enthusiastic over the result.

When I reflect on those days in Heclades, they seem like a dream on some distant planet, so varied was their character and so unlike our ordinary life.

After all the preliminaries were through we set ourselves briskly to work to carry out the undertaking.

The prisoners were notified of their destination; they were fierce and sullen over the decree.

When the boat was in readiness and the time came for its departure, they were led from the dungeon to the gondola waiting to convey them to the Mermaid. I walked behind the guard; Ozomoth met them at the boat. "Foul fiend," I heard one of them say, as he passed Ozomoth.

"To Brozoa by the way of Dohon," hissed Ozomoth, as I came near him; "that is well. An honest man delights to have his actions

probed, that all may see the strict integrity in all his dealings; it brings honor to himself and no great harm to those who spy. Go to Dohon; put these prisoners on the rack, and learn what they will tell you. Then return, and let Ozomoth laugh in your face at your own silliness. Ha! ha! Speed to Dohon, lest they forget the tale they are required to tell, and then return humbly to bow your will to the power of Ozomoth; his power that will be the stronger for this attempt to overthrow it. Yes, on to Dohon."

As he ceased speaking he stepped in front of the prisoners and gave a secret signal which made them shrink from him in fear.

I waited to see them all on board, and watched the journey up the glacier. On my return to my house, I saw a strained white face at an open window. When Lanah perceived me, she hastily left the inner balcony and disappeared. "What causes such sudden pallor?" I questioned myself.

"I am the bearer of good tidings," I heard the commander say just behind me; I was so absorbed in thoughts of Lanah, I had not noticed a step, and the announcement was startling. "From the works?" I said.

"No; I just left Izikar; he thinks you have not learned it, and during the excitement of the last few days, he failed to inform you. If Ozomoth be found guilty, the law adds two additional months to Talma's life."

"Oh!" I groaned, "may the Mermaid fly with the swiftness of the hurricane! Word to that effect should have been sent to the ruler of Dohon," I said in great terror.

"It has been done; nothing has been left undone. If the fiend be guilty of the deed, what is the law? Does he remain in chains till the last day of Talma's freedom?"

"He does," I replied.

"If he should seek your life?" continued the commander.

"Ozomoth at heart is a coward, but his cunning serves him in the stead of bravery," I replied. "If he should seek my life, no foot-prints would be left to trace the deed to him; another would be the one condemned. The penalty is great, but law is like a strainer with the meshes larger than the substance to go through it, with the sediment included. The time remaining is so short that all depends on the return of the Mermaid without delay; even then the prisoners may be stubborn and die

instead, or may effect a second escape, and we thus lose our cause; unless, oh, will it be! unless we find the shrine of Zallallah before it comes."

"We will strain every nerve; your cause is mine, and in this case the more zealous our efforts for ourselves, the more satisfactory they become to the legitimate business of the expedition," was the reply. "Seldom do private interests and public duties join in such complete harmony."

"I wish to say this much to you, my good friend," I said, endeavoring to conceal my emotion that the remark produced, "do not allow my perplexities to interfere with any arrangement between you and Lanah. You understand me. If you wish to celebrate your nuptials at an early date, Talma and I will heartily assist in preparation of the event."

"That is all arranged," he replied; "if success be your reward, we celebrate your happiness and our own with you. But," and he laid his hand affectionately on my shoulder, "if a life-long disappointment is to be your fate, we shall wait till the first sting of your grief is passed and then be quietly wedded in Brozoa."

"Thanks for your consideration," I answered, and entered the palace, which I had then reached, Commander Dirube passing on to give orders in my behalf; his energy never relaxed; his own love never crowded important events out of mind, and small affairs, too, received his minute attention.

Talma greeted me with smiles. "I have come from an interview with Lanah," she said, "and she has told me all. I am happy for her, happy for our good commander, and, best of all, happy for you, my joy; it lightens your burdens for a time, even if the clouds again settle black and threatening. Catch all the sunshine there is, even if it be fleeting."

"Does your heart respond with the hope you bring to mine?" I questioned.

She answered with a caress and evaded a direct reply.

"Have you observed any change in Lanah's conduct since the conversation in regard to the return of the Swan?" I inquired.

Talma hesitated before replying, then said: "I think her manner is more subdued. At times she is the same defiant, impulsive child, but I believe her heart is earnest in its love for

the worthy commander, who has won it. She is anxious for us, too. I have seen her sit for hours, watching for the Swan before it came."

Little snatches of bliss like this were all that were allowed us during those busy weeks, but they were as refreshing as an oasis in a desert. No word or act of Talma's revealed a lack of courage; and her brave advice would inspire me with ardent hope, when I felt in my heart that she was calmly looking to the result in the belief that she must die.

Every day Lanah came to me with the question, "When is the Mermaid due?" or, "Do you fear an accident will delay the Mermaid?" I well remember the pleading, eager look, but then, I thought it only her warm, responsive nature feeling deeply for those less fortunate than her own happy self; for she never was so light-hearted, so sympathetic, as in those trying days.

It was at this time that the wonderful palace was discovered, which has since been found to belong to the age of Atlantides. In it were found marbles, mosaics, bronzes and golden ornaments in profusion.

It was the home of Yonding-Ha; a likeness

of her was found in one of the rooms, also one of Nanlin, and they resembled their figures in the petrified world. One of the lamps was in the shape of a serpent, with a head resembling Ozomoth.

"I hoped to find something in this treasure," said the commander, as we were examining the relics, "which would give us the knowledge we are so ardently seeking."

"Perhaps this will reveal it," I said excitedly, taking up an old parchment from some rubbish. I turned pale as I translated it.

"What is it?" he eagerly inquired.

"Read," I replied handing it to him.

"The Zallallah lies on an island near the Isle of the Dismal Cavern."

"And it is on its outer edge," I added.

"Yes, but is the Isle of the Dismal Cavern the same now as then?" he asked. "How can we be assured of that?"

"Let us again examine the record and the charts," I replied.

The result was, that in a few hours, a strong force was added to that already at work, and new excavations were begun. We progressed slowly, it seemed to us, but every new clue obtained helped us to greater efforts.

Ozomoth looked on with scorn at every new attempt.

"His cowardly soul will never risk itself in harm to us," I said to myself; "he will find others to do the dastardly work, and chuckle at their simplicity."

He regarded our enthusiasm as worthy of contempt, but he never appeared more affable and human for so long periods of time.

"The old rascal is really growing humble," said Zimma, one evening, as we watched the air which Ozomoth at times assumed. Assumed, I say, for when a particularly fiendish passion possessed him, he took that way to conceal it.

"Not humble," I answered. "Double your vigilance when you observe humility in him."

"If the Mermaid fails to come to port before the end of another day," continued Zimma, "I have a request to make."

He said no more, fearing he should be accused of yielding to his inherent love of adventure, rather than having our welfare at heart.

I understood the hesitation and knew such a conclusion would be dishonor to the one who harbored it. "Let us hear it," I replied.

"I will take the small aerial-electra, find the

Mermaid, flash a message and learn when they expect the ship to return from Dohon," was the answer.

"But the electra cannot go so far; at least, you would be obliged to use its full capacity, and the loss of your life would follow in consequence," was my discouraging reply. "We will consider the matter, however."

The Mermaid did not come. I did not approve of taking Zimma from his reliable position with us, and succeeded in persuading him to resign the honor of such a trip in favor of some of the thoroughly trained crew.

"This is the wonderful craft which saved our lives," said Izikar as he examined the curious airship, while we were preparing it for the trip.

"I am going with them," declared Omakin, who had just returned from Brozoa. "I will deliver this package to Lanah, speak with Menna, and be ready."

I awaited his return at the aerial-electra.

"Lanah seems in trouble," he said as he joined me, sprang into the boat and they were off.

"Guard her carefully for my sake," were his farewell words.

Again I saw the same pained, white face as I passed the home of Lanah.

"I will go to Talma now," I thought, "and inform her of Omakin's request;" but when the girl appeared in answer to summons from Talma, the deadly pallor was gone, and she treated our anxiety with evident surprise. She declared that more was done for her happiness than anyone deserved; that Omakin had no cause for alarm, and that we were unnecessarily disturbed. I knew she was quietly engaged in preparing for her marriage, and must necessarily feel the contrast between her own fate and that of her beloved Talma, if our efforts failed to save Talma's life. I dismissed all fears in regard to her, and ever after I found her bright and happy to all appearance.

We did not have to wait many hours for the return of the electra. They had found the Mermaid; it had been disabled and had not yet reached the ship. But the repairs were completed and it had started on its way at the same time the electra sailed for us.

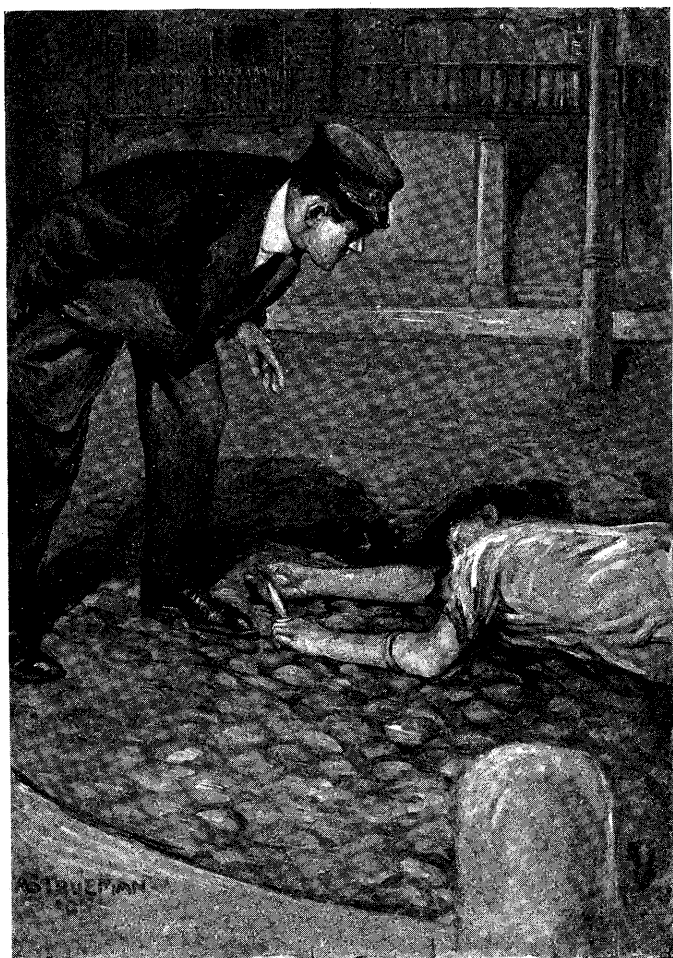
"All is well now," Omakin said in a very encouraging tone. "I sent another message to the Ruler of Dohon and he will hasten the decision; the prisoners will be granted no time

for hesitation. Ozomoth is guilty; the prisoners are the ones sought for by the Ruler of Dohon; he will surely grant my request, and in consequence the extended time will be given us."

"I have never lost courage," I replied, "but Ozomoth will demand the letter of the law; not a day, not an hour of reprieve will he grant, and he will glory in his power still more if an added hour would have given us victory."

A few days after the return of the electra I suggested to Izikar that it might be well to place iron bars across the mouths of the two old craters, lest Ozomoth find the means of bringing other pirates from Dohon, and asked, in behalf of the expedition, that it might be done. The request was granted and assistance rendered to accomplish it. On our way there we met Ozomoth. He returned with us, and, raising a large rock, he took something from under it and carelessly placing it in his pocket he left the island. We never succeeded in discovering the nature of it, but felt satisfied that another plot was in progress, which we had prevented.

Then came a day ever to be remembered.



I bent over to examine the face.

The Mermaid was hourly expected; the work at the excavations was progressing finely; so far we had been successful in circumventing Ozomoth, and everyone was in the best of spirits in consequence. Talma and I had been unusually happy in our love, and the evening was spent in animated conversation and cheerfulness.

At its close I bade Talma a cheerful good-night; our prospects gave great encouragement, and hope was never brighter. I walked briskly along, humming a lively tune as an appropriate accompaniment to my feelings, occasionally stopping to admire the beauties of this strange world, and to contrast them with the well-remembered scenes of our distant home. The streets of our island were deserted, except when an occasional clatter denoted some workman returning late from his labors, or a lover who had just left the smiles of some fair maid.

As I turned from the central square I thought I heard a rustling near me; seeing no one I started on, and had gone but a few steps when a figure rushed in front of me, a piercing shriek followed, and someone lay apparently lifeless at my feet. It all happened

so suddenly that it was over before I could realize it.

I bent over to examine the face; it was Lanah.

"Lanah," I said softly. There was no reply; not till then did I see the blood spurting from a severe wound in the head; I thought it was caused by a sharp stone against which she had struck. I hastily picked her up and carried her back to the palace, still unconscious. Aid was immediately summoned; in her hand was found a knife with a long open blade; near the heart was an ugly wound made by the knife as she fell. For hours she lay so still and white that we feared she would never know us again. When she finally opened her eyes with a look of consciousness, she quickly glanced about her till they rested on me.

"Where is Ozomoth?" she asked with a shudder. We could see him outside, wandering aimlessly through the park.

"You will not let him enter here?" she said, with an appealing, questioning expression in her eyes.

"No," replied Talma, "he never enters here; you are in our own private rooms."

"Is Izikar here?" The weak voice told of the waning strength.

He crossed over to her side.

"Can I see you alone?" she asked; she trembled with emotion.

We withdrew to the adjoining room. We could hear Lanah's voice go steadily on for awhile, and then the most pitiful sobs would choke it. Izikar seldom spoke, but whenever we heard his voice, it betrayed a feeling of mingled regret and thankfulness. When he rejoined us, he requested me to remain in the palace through the day and to occupy his rooms at night.

The next morning, a council of medical aid told us Lanah must die. Commander Dirube never left her again. We watched the young life go out. She would lie with her hand in the commander's peacefully content; now and then, her eyes would fill with tears, as she saw his grief at losing her, and felt the blessing of a strong, faithful love like his. Weakness had mellowed the fiery, passionate soul, till it had become earnest and beautiful.

"I am very sorry for you," she would whisper, as he bent lovingly over her, "but it is better as it is; I could never have made you

happy; forget me; I am not worthy of your love; not half worthy," she would moan. He kissed the white lips in reply.

Her eyes constantly sought mine; then, with an effort of the will, she would turn to the commander with a smile.

She no longer seemed the dashing, brilliant, southern beauty of yesterday morning; she had changed to a calm, pale woman of the north.

"Do not mourn for me," she would repeat again and again, as Commander Dirube caressed the little hand; "you are worthy of a better, greater love than mine; I never loved you so much as now."

When she could no longer speak aloud, she motioned for Talma to put her ear close to her lips; the hand feebly drew from under her pillow a sealed packet and placed it in Talma's hand to give to me; I put it in my pocket without looking at the superscription. She bade us all "Good-bye," and then turning to the commander she laid both hands in his.

"Do not—grieve—for me," she whispered. "You are—so good—and kind; forgive—poor Lanah."

She gave him a long farewell kiss, then closed her eyes. The life went out so quietly, we could not tell when the soul flitted to its other home.

Lanah was dead.

We dressed her in her bridal robes and laid her in a secluded spot near the warm sea she loved so well. The last rites were done according to the form used in Heclades. She looked very beautiful as she lay on the bed of roses, the ugly wound concealed by the wreath on her brow.

The priests of Heclades performed their incantations; Dr. Balzec, one of the clergy of our expedition, made a short address; this was followed by the burial song of the youths and maidens. The exercises were in the open air making the voices sound like echoes.

"Away—away—away," sang the youths.

"We go—we go—we go," responded the maidens. Then followed a chorus:

We bear her soul
To its home afar,
By the Polar Star;
We leave her soul
In its home on high
In the beautiful sky.

Her music, jewels and gifts from her lover were placed beside her in the tomb. We gave the last look during the songs of the chorus; the high-priest blessed the tomb, and we left her sleeping in her young beauty. Ozo-moth's face wore a deep scowl as he passed me on our return to the palace.

Omakin came from Brozoa with many of Lanah's companions, to honor her burial.

The sea still moans and laughs about her tomb.

A few evenings after we had laid our Lanah to rest, Talma reminded me of the packet entrusted to my care; I had entirely forgotten it during the busy days that followed her death. I thought it contained a memento to be given to friends of her old home, at the time I received it. I took it from my pocket and read above the seal:

"I have written this in the presence of Izi-kar. Never let its disclosures be known outside the circle of three. Do not sadden the life of one so true, so loyal and so brave, as my betrothed, by revealing the heart of Lanah. May you all forgive and forget her. Talma, receive my blessing."

With trembling fingers we broke the seal

and read the testimony of the dying girl. It was written with a firm hand:

“Uzzane:

“When you read this I shall be dead; I am not going to live; it was not a gash from a fall that wounded me; it was a dagger. You have known me as the girl of the cave in the cold north; I am of tropical blood. Inclosed in this I place a letter, left as a legacy to me from my mother. She was a Spanish gypsy, with the power to love and hate, as only southern blood can do. None have ever seen it; they know nothing of such a world, but there is one somewhere, warm and beautiful. Her child inherits her passion. She loved my father as I have loved you; yes, as I have loved you, and she killed her rival; she killed her own peace of soul with her, and is not at rest now. She warned me by her own rash deed; but, Uzzane, I have tried to want to kill you! For I love you with all the fiery passion of my soul.

“I have tried to hate you; but my love was stronger than my hate, and I am glad to die for you. Many times, when I have watched your care for Talma, your love for her, and hers for you, my heart would be the home of

demons; the watchful anxiety, the loving glances, the stolen kisses, would pierce me like a knife. Then I would vow if I could not win your love I would have my vengeance; the anger would have to die out, for love would smother the deadly flame. I have tried to hate Talma, but her pure, deep soul would kill the hate as quickly as my jealous passion gave it birth; besides, her fate is worse than mine; all declare you cannot find the Zallallah, and she must die. That brings no relief to me; loving her, you would never love another.

“Once I was in league with Ozomoth; at times he fears for his own power, and we planned to carry you a prisoner to the island our people visit; my love faltered, and I declared I would make the secret known if he attempted it. He is so sure of your failure that he wishes you to live that he may rejoice in his own power. But if you succeed, beware! Remember, Lanah warns you, beware! At times, he dare not trust the future; I have studied him; I have watched him, when I knew he might harm you. Last night I saw his venom in all its hideousness, when you and Talma were so happy in the thought of victory, soon. You did not see him watching

you; I knew he meant evil; I followed him; back and forth he walked, waiting for you to pass that way. I loved you; I did not care to live without you. I would not stop to think, lest my courage fail; my hot, passionate blood was boiling; I hated Ozomoth for wishing you ill, and I watched, too. I stood ready; when I saw the steel glisten I prepared to spring; when he lifted his arm I rushed in between you and death. Mourn not for me; I am happier so. I could not give up my love; better to use it for good, than to soil it by evil. Only, when you and Talma sit in loving embrace, give one little thought to Lanah, who died to make you happy.

“Again, I warn you. Here is the message I had to give you; it is a secret I learned from Ozomoth. Somewhere in the Tajan record, it speaks of a treasure lying on an island near the Dismal Cavern, or it may mean that island of Furies. He thinks the treasure referred to is the Zallallah. He says you all have overlooked the inscription. May this aid you, my loved Uzzane. Farewell. LANAH.”

We finished reading the passionate words of that strange revelation with fast-flowing tears.

"Lanah saved your life, Uzzane," Talma said between her sobs; "judge her not, poor, misguided soul! and I can never do aught for her. Oh! if I had only known how much I owe to her, that I might have given her more prayers and blessings to brighten her pathway to her distant home; she will live above yon bright star; not in yonder dismal cavern. It might have been you, lying cold and alone, in the tomb by the sea. My poor, beautiful Lanah."

"If I cannot find the Zallallah," I answered, "it were better that Lanah loved me less and lived, for I shall die with thee, my Talma, queen. My body may remain on earth, but my soul will wing its flight with thine; I shall be with thee; Lanah will have died in vain."

"What is the latest report?" Talma inquired, in a much calmer voice than when she spoke of Lanah.

"Not so favorable from the place where the last excavations have been made. Zimma has been sounding other places on different islands with more satisfactory results.

"Lanah's request must be complied with," I continued. "Commander Dirube must never know she loved another."

And he never did. Through all the years we were associated together, I kept the secret of Lanah's death. Time eventually healed the wound, and he married a lovely girl in our Alaska home; but Lanah was never forgotten. I was with him when he died; her name was among the last words of his life.

Soon after we finished reading the letter Izikar came in with Commander Dirube; we sent for Zimma and Monica, and we again set out for Lanah's tomb. Talma and I loitered a little behind, that we might converse more fully about the dead girl; Izikar and a guard kept near us.

Talma had gathered the choicest flowers to deck the tomb. "These and our tears are all we can give," she said. "Perhaps she will look down and bless us."

As we were quietly passing a pavilion we heard a voice within; we halted, and Ozo-moth's slippery, slimy tongue went on. Izikar told the guard to wait and he joined us.

"You shall not hear this, Talma," I said, but she would not leave us.

"Shall I kill him?" came in a murderous tone. "I want him to die unless he fail to find the Zallallah; yet, that great red spot on

my hand makes me shudder—even me! Strange, when I can smile at the misery of others; strange, when I can laugh at the agony of those that thwart me; but I never can blot out of sight that red stain; it was burned into my flesh by that innocent, forgiving look of Wanwan, dying. He thought he had found the Zallallah, and I thought he was Talma's lover; it was Mona he loved; the look of those glazing eyes burns my black soul; the cries of Mona ever ring in my ears; both were innocent, and I am doubly-dyed in blood. I do not like such tender-hearted spells as this to come over me; but my guilt is known only to me; 'a misstep and killed by his own sword,' was the verdict. I like better to have the fiends in me aroused to rage; then I can do my work with sweeter joy. I will wait to see the end, lest another scarlet stain of innocent blood lie beside the one on that hand; that might bring suffering to my soul; it is not my delight to suffer myself, but to see others writhe in misery. If, perchance, they, in their love and happiness, shall sometime wake the sleeping fury to full wrath, and I conceal the weapon, and alone and unseen I smite him, it will please me. Twice I

tried and failed. I should be conqueror, and would meet the penalty of the deed in yon dismal cavern. I shudder at the thought.

“No, it need not be. I will not suffer; he can never find the Zallallah; I need not do the deed; methinks I could point out the isle where she lies. Ha! ha! ha! happier to laugh at their cries at the last. I will not yield; but I will laugh. Ha! ha! ha! my Lily, you must yield or die. Ha! ha! ha! my lover; Ozomoth will let you live and suffer. Hark! The messengers are coming; I will listen; I can tell by the tone of their voices whether the news be good or ill. Ah, ah! they are pitched on a low key; defeat never loudly trumpets its shortcomings; ha! ha! they have a mournful cadence; victory heralds its approach with jubilant notes. Yes, you may live still longer; that rash girl prolonged my deadly pleasure by yielding her life for yours; that is a bit of knowledge known only by Ozomoth. Ill news again; ha! ha! ha! It will ever be ill news to you; joyful ones to me; ha! ha! But my proud girl, you both shall die, if I lose thee.”

We signaled the messengers, joined them,

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left our offerings on Lanah's grave, and returned to the palace. And still the Mermaid did not come.

"It will come to-morrow," was the last thought each night.

CHAPTER XIX

The days flew rapidly by, each drowning a spark of hope, as it proved unsuccessful. Ruin after ruin was exhumed, adding many valuable and curious additions to our store of relics. Elaborately carved ornaments, fine, silken webs, beautifully spun glass, and richly hammered metals, were among our recent curios; but these were all as naught to me, in comparison with the main object of our search. And still the Mermaid did not come.

Some of the oldest cities of the world were found beneath the mountain glaciers which surrounded Heclades; we reached them by extensive tunneling, and the most discouraging prospect was, that Zallallah might lie in one of them. I knew, that in such an event, months or years might be necessary to find her.

No barbarian race had ever inhabited Heclades. It was Hexides that first cradled the human race, and the advanced civilization from there moved north and settled Heclades.

One day Izikar, Commander Dirube and

myself were sitting in an arbor, indulging in a few moments' rest, as we looked over the warm beautiful sea.

"Izikar, have you lost all hope?" I questioned.

"My dear assistant," he replied, "in my innermost heart I have never allowed myself to indulge in any; your courage and confidence have sometimes inspired me with a transitory dream, which has made life easier; but both Talma and myself have schooled ourselves to meet the inevitable; I have read how all attempts were ever futile. O my princess, my daughter!" he groaned.

"Father!" the voice startled us, it was so near, although it was soft and musical; "Father," the girl went on, "we have been preparing for failure; you and I have tried to believe the battle would end in victory, for the sake of our dear friends, but I understand; we will help each other to bear the burden."

The commander had arisen and left the arbor; he said that girl's courage unmanned him.

"Uzzane," she said, approaching me with extended hands; I clasped them tightly and looked at the fearless eyes in silence. "Uz-

zane, my love, do not try to deceive me with false hopes. I have so long been fortifying myself to meet my destiny that I can do it bravely; let me help you at the last; the greater the expectations, the harder will it be to live and conquer the failure of them."

Izikar arose and joined the commander, who was walking up and down the beach in deep study.

"Talma," I replied, as I led her to a seat, "I shall not think of failure; if, for an instant, I entertain the idea, it will paralyze my efforts; it takes a cool head to do the best work and draw the best plans."

After a long chat on the past and future, she diffidently turned to me, with almost an arch smile on her lips, such as one might wear when about to ask a favor that had been denied, but that, the very nature of circumstances, would compel acquiescence.

"What is it, Talma?" I inquired, glad to see the sunshine again break through the clouds.

"Will you accompany me once more to the Isle of the Dismal Cavern?"

I could not refrain from smiling; it had been my special request that Talma should never go there again, but I could not refuse;

the favor was granted with a kiss. It was early evening when we landed there.

The air was balmy and the long twilight revealed the dim stars all over the beautiful dome. The clouds, fringed with rose and purple and pearl, were gorgeous in their beauty. The sound of the hammering and drilling of workmen in the distance brought cheer to our hearts.

At first a low, faint moan was all we heard.

"They are coming; they are returning from the dreadful abyss of which I told you," remarked Talma, with a sad intonation in her voice.

Gradually the moanings increased until they seemed like the wailings of intense, suppressed agony, coming from some remote region. Talma grew pale and silent. I could read the struggle in her face.

"If it were myself alone," she said, "I would be one of that unhappy throng. I would suffer there for our love and bliss on earth; but you and all my people would accompany me to that dismal abode. I should hear you cry for help, Uzzane, and I could not aid you; that would be a torment worse than to wring your heart here, and save you."

The beautiful eyes looked into mine with such perfect faith and child-like trust I could only press her hand for reply. I would not make her burden heavier by one word of my unbelief. It was the faith in which she and hundreds of generations of her race had been reared; it was a part of their very blood and soul. If Talma broke the vow she would do so at the sacrifice of everything that made her own self; hers would no longer have been a sweet, unselfish, transparent soul; it would have been marred and soiled; I could not wish to exchange the one for the other. I only whispered, "My precious darling," and kissed the trembling lips.

On and on, nearer and nearer, came those strange, weird sounds; now, like deep sighs that trembled on the air; then, rising high and shrill, and finally dying away in heavy reverberations like the mutterings of distant thunder.

"I always fancy I can hear the voices of Nanlin and Yonding-Ha," Talma said; "they have not come yet."

She shuddered as she spoke; I opened my arms and drew her close in their safe embrace.

"These arms would ever shield you, Tal-

ma-na, if you could place the same firm trust in my own faith that you have in yours. There would be laughter in the place of tears; happiness instead of sorrow; life and love in exchange for death. Oh, if it were only possible!"

"I dare not do it for the very love I bear you," she murmured; "I could not; it would kill me. It is better to die to save than live to ruin."

Again the furies came with the volume of a host of demons; my own blood curdled at the tempest of heart-broken cries. Imagine every tear and pain and anguish suffered by a million souls in a million years, condensed into one wild agony; add millions to it, and you have a faint idea of what we heard in that lone spot called "The Dismal Cavern." I no longer wondered that the people of such a faith as those of Heclades should pause and tremble. I did not allow myself to forget my knowledge of science and mystery, but for a moment I almost believed the whole world knew nothing, and this little band of devotees possessed the only true revelation. I arose and shook myself, as if awaking from a hideous nightmare.

“Come, Talma-na,” I said, “we will return; your angel spirit will be beyond the stars; I hope ours will be worthy to follow it. Oh! Can I not save you?”

I could form no satisfactory conclusion in regard to what caused the mysterious phenomena, but I mentally resolved to return at the first opportunity and investigate the place thoroughly.

As soon as we were again in the boat, and the lonely island with its hideous cavern was well behind us, I called Talma’s attention to more pleasant subjects. It was decidedly an effort for myself to throw off the doleful, frightful feeling produced by those unearthly groans. I resolved that Talma should never hear them again, and also that no time or opportunity should be given her to think of them. I thought it no crime to make her as light-hearted and cheerful as possible, even if I were obliged to give more favorable accounts of the progress of our research than I really believed. Should all efforts finally prove to be futile, I determined the last days of her life should be made endurable. I would administer a drug in my possession, which would cause a peaceful, soothing, natural

sleep; she should never realize when or how she died.

When we came in sight of the bustle and heard the noise of the many drills, and saw the eager faces and earnest labors of the workmen, and noted the efficient aid of the inhabitants of Heclades, my fears began to subside. "We must succeed," I repeated to myself. I found I had been having great confidence in one special work. My most trusty men were in charge of it, and I secretly believed we should soon unearth the resting place of Zal-lallah. I did not realize how strong a hold this belief had obtained until I saw Zimma waiting for us with an expression which I had learned was the bearer of evil tidings. "Hope may fly away and leave me helpless in my utter desolation, but Talma shall not know of it," I said to myself.

"Are you waiting for me, Zimma?" I carelessly inquired, as we stepped from the boat.

"Yes, sir; I——"

"Remain here till I join you," I interrupted; then I leisurely accompanied Talma home and left her safe with Monica.

As I walked rapidly down the street, I saw Ozomoth sitting by one of the fountains,

which were so numerous on all the islands. I supposed I had seen his countenance in the most repulsive form possible; but the sardonic smile of fiendish delight with which he greeted me as I passed him exceeded anything I had ever witnessed. I knew for a certainty that the scheme, in which I had placed implicit confidence, had failed, but my eye met his and never quailed.

"Zimma," I said in a low tone as I strode up to him with all the coolness and courage my nature could command, for I knew Ozomoth was watching me for the purpose of chuckling over my defeat, "Zimma, I know what you would tell me; it is a failure!"

"Yes, sir; nothing whatever but the ruins of an old palace, and very little left of that."

"Very well. Ozomoth is watching us. You go and give orders for the workmen to continue their excavations to the right, till further notice. Meet me in my private office as soon as possible, but not until you can enter unseen. Be doubly sure that Ozomoth gets not even an inkling of it. I will wander off in some direction, so as to put that villain on the wrong scent, if possible. Do not mention my visit to the cavern, neither inform a soul of

instructions given you concerning our interview."

He carelessly sauntered off, as though our conversation had been of the least importance, while I laughingly joined some photographers who happened along. I thought the fiend would get little satisfaction thus far.

During the hour I waited for Zimma I alternately hoped and despaired, made plans and unmade them, resolved to use strategy and determined to be as true as Talma herself. Day after day had passed, destroying my chances of success, one after another; until now I had been sanguine of victory, but the disappointment of the afternoon cast a deeper gloom over me than I was willing to admit to myself. "Action must be prompt and decisive; judgment and not impulse must dictate the action," I thought.

I finally settled upon a definite course to pursue, and was just starting in search of Commander Dirube, when his well-known knock was heard on the door.

"Glad to see you," I said, as I promptly admitted him, "I was on the point of looking you up."

"Any new revelations?" he inquired, as he took a seat.

"Yes."

A committee meeting of two was immediately held, and certain resolutions quickly passed by a majority. When Zimma finally entered we were anxiously awaiting his appearance to assist in carrying them out.

"Report before morning, if possible," said the commander, as he took leave of us. "If necessary call me up; I am becoming nervous myself. I dread to think of the result if this should fail; it seems as if it were our last hope. Remember, caution is necessary for your own safety. Good night."

Zimma and I went down to the beach, taking with us a few hand electric drills that were accurate and powerful; we selected a light, strong boat and pulled off in the opposite direction from the one we wished to go. It was growing quite dark; the beautifully colored clouds so numerous a few hours before, had given place to threatening black ones, which effectually obscured the sun as it marched around the horizon.

We rowed up, down, in and out, among the islands, but always attaining a position a little

nearer our destination, and keeping wholly out of the ordinary ways of travel at that hour. We were armed and did not propose to be unpleasantly surprised again. When we reached the Isle of the Dismal Cavern we drew the boat inland and concealed it in a hollow; the next move was to find a place of retreat for ourselves in case of need.

"Have you reason to believe that Ozomoth did not see you enter my office, Zimma?" I inquired, as we finished our preparations for safety.

"He entered his own house as I was returning from delivering your orders to the workmen; I took a circuitous route, and watched my opportunity to go in by the back passage when no one was in sight," was his reply.

"Have you ever heard it mentioned that he may have sent allies?" I asked.

"Yes, as possible, but not probable; if any, have you any idea who they are?" Zimma inquired.

"No," I replied, "if they were known, the authorities could imprison them. Izikar, himself could command them to be put to death. The decree gives only the laws in relation to Ozomoth; others in conspiracy with him

could be made to suffer its penalty; they would be discreet accordingly."

Zimma had never before visited the spot.

"I have no faith in it," he said, "and a few shrieks from nothing and nowhere would not interest me much."

But when the heart-rending sounds began in earnest, and increased till my own pulse bounded, Zimma came to my side and said: "This is a mystery of more importance than I thought; I never believed it was so terrible; my hair is standing out straight, but it is the most blessed moment of my life. What a strange belief this people have. Are you becoming the least bit tainted with the faith?"

"No," I replied, "but that makes the trouble harder to bear. Talma is a true disciple. She can no more change her faith in it than I can change my unbelief. Perfect silence now."

We set those wonderful masterpieces of the inventor's skill to work. Not a sound was made by them. There was just enough light to discern forms, not recognize them.

We tested two places without success. In the third attempt Zimma whispered: "They have struck something, sir."

"Examine again to make sure," I answered.

"I am correct in my conclusions," he soon returned.

I left the drill I was superintending at that moment with a strange delight permeating my whole being. I felt as if a whole sun had penetrated it and filled me with a blaze of glory.

The proof that we had reached ruins was unmistakable; also that they were of some solid material and in a good state of preservation. They seemed to occupy a prescribed area, outside of which there was not the least evidence of a stone or a block of wood.

My pulse bounded with joy instead of fear. I could scarcely wait a moment to have our plans in the process of execution.

We silently replaced the drills in the boat, and had just taken hold to draw it from its hiding place when my ear caught the sound of muffled oars.

"Hist, Zimma," I whispered, and we quickly entered our barricade with weapons cocked. The oars rested as the boat came near us, and the oarsman appeared to be listening. Soon the boat landed; we could discern a figure as it stepped out stealthily and moored the little

craft; he stopped to listen again for a moment, and then crept slowly along, peering into this nook and that, stealing on with the velvet paws of a cat when its eye is on its prey. An instant he was close beside us; he bent over to examine the fortifications; our fingers pressed the trigger, but evidently it was too dark to get the least trace of us, for he took a few quick steps away and listened again. We could not distinguish one mark that would give us a clue to our enemy; we supposed him to be Ozomoth, or one of his allies, if he had any. He went around the island in search of our boat, but our wise precautions exceeded even his prophetic sight.

Again he approached within a few feet of us, and again we laid our fingers on the triggers of our revolvers.

"My bird has flown this time," came in a well-known voice. There was no longer any doubt as to the identity of the villain.

"Ha! ha! ha! my fond lover!" the voice went on. "Did the sweet, soothing chorus of yonder infernal pit make even thy boastful courage quail? Ah, ha! I need not let my peace of mind be ruffled at such puny efforts as thine; but I thought it might give a bit of

pleasant change to thy monotonous life to feel my fingers of steel grip thy throat. Ha! ha! ha!" The voice grew louder.

"If my soul were not at ease about the inevitable result of thy stupendous undertaking, by all the furies of yon Dismal Cavern, I would draw thy blood; yes, if I had to suck it like a viper. Ha! ha! ha! it would be a richer feast than monarch ever tasted. What a flavor of love and courage would tickle my palate! how highly seasoned with intellectual wit! it causes me to smack my lips at the thought of it. Ha! ha! ha! Perchance the favored moment may yet come; if not, the sight of thy writhings and groanings on that day, when I shall stand conqueror of all of thee, will be even a more palatable treat."

Just then the clouds opened and let in a ray of light; the breeze fluttered the long garment he wore; the cloth matched the sample in my wallet; there was a piece torn from it, which the scrap in my possession would perfectly fit. The would-be murderer of the petrified world was found.

Ozomoth remained a few moments more, and then he quickly unfastened his canoe; the

muffled oars gave a faint signal of his departure from the island.

We did not utter a loud word, quietly remaining where we were until we were assured he would not return. The uncanny sounds of the chasm increased to their full volume, as we drew out our boat and dragged it to the water; they drowned whatever noise was unavoidable, and we made fast time on our homeward trip. Zimma left me at my own door and entered his lodgings in the block adjoining.

Not wishing to have lights, I stepped to the window to wind my watch. As I stood there I saw Ozomoth steal around the opposite corner in every day dress. He did not appear to be watching my windows, but I knew his beady eyes were fixed on them. He walked back and forth several times, crossed and re-crossed the street; he heard no sound and saw no lights; for once he was baffled.

Long before he left his room in the morning three hundred workmen and many electric drills were at work on the island of the Dismal Cavern. Six secret detectives watched every move of Ozomoth, and a secret body-guard attended every step of mine. Talma knew no-

thing of all this, but Izikar was informed and gave valuable advice in regard to it.

But there came a time at last when I was obliged to face the future; only thirty-six hours were left us to accomplish—how much we did not know. I sought Izikar and communicated to him my wishes in regard to giving Talma the potion.

“Gladly I consent,” he replied; “it will be one drop of comfort to sustain us; she will believe it a natural sleep.”

“Yes,” I returned, “and her conscience will be at rest.”

We prepared it and sent it by Monica, as a glass of cooling drink.

Preparations had already begun for the last sad rites. Every machine, every hand, every brain, were strained to the utmost in our behalf; tunnels, fissures, and chasms, opened as by magic. Occasionally a shout of exultation would be heard, only to bring a deeper gloom as one more chance was found to be lost.

At the close of the afternoon, I was sitting outside, near the window opening on the inner balcony, every nerve on the alert for the faintest sign of success. I heard a curtain

rustle within, and turning, I saw Ozomoth enter the room where Talma lay in the sweet sleep of oblivion. He glided noiselessly along and stood beside the couch of his victim.

“Thou art too fair to die, sweet Talma-na,” he murmured in a tone of melody; “thy sweet self enshrined in such a priceless casket of pearls, almost moves the heart of Ozomoth. Thou art too fair to die; love never won so peerless a martyr as thou; for it is love that has won thy heart, not duty. Duty is a ghastly wooer; it enters the heart like cold steel and kills its sweetest virtues; when duty is born, love, friendship, affection, die; it is the offspring of fear; the fear that fears for self, lest the soul be punished and it suffer. But love suffers and bleeds and dies, a divine spark in the soul. Thy love for the lives of thy people on earth; thy love for their souls, that they may find the beautiful realms whose center is marked by yon bright star above us; it is this that demands thy life. Thou art too fair to die, Talma-na! Purity will never wear a whiter name than thine; Mercy will spread its wings and seek other worlds when it loses thee.

"Thou wilt be the bride of only a day; shall I humble the serpent crest and die for thee? I love thee, Talma-na, but I hate my rival more. I love thee, but I love power still more."

The cold, slimy, glittering scorn crept into the face and transformed it from the human to the fiend.

"Ah, yes," he went on; "revenge is sweet to my palate; thou lovest not me, and I love not to die. Farewell, sweet one, till I can clasp thee in my arms, the bride of the dreaded Ozomoth."

He turned and left the room, with his hideous serpentine curves.

No word had come from Zimma; my courage was rapidly failing. The effect of the drug would soon pass off, and Talma-na would awaken to love and death.

I stepped through the window and stood where Ozomoth had stood.

"Oh, Talma-na!" I sobbed, "I must give thee up, a useless sacrifice; but I would not have thee with a soul so tarnished as thine must be, to yield thy holy faith and love to me. Die, sweet one; all hope is gone."

I bent over her and kissed the mouth that

was given the boon of dropping pearls from such a soul as hers. My soul within the kiss, somewhere in the blessed land of her peaceful dreams, touched the spirit of my beloved and was recognized; the lips smiled and answered "Thine."

The sobs could no longer be held in check. My robust, strongly-knit frame swayed in their anguish, as the light reed bends beneath the tempest.

Without, I could hear the bells of the temples mournfully tolling; the maidens and matrons were continually chanting prayers; the old men bowed in the streets and market places and pleaded for the power of Good to smile and bring me victory.

Izikar entered the room. "Does she still sleep?" he inquired.

"She is waking," I replied.

When she first opened her eyes, they wore the expression of one who had seen the glories of immortal bliss; she smiled sweetly as we spoke to her. As she grew more conscious, the pained look stole over her face, though she resolutely endeavored to conquer it. An hour of sweet communion was allotted us; at its close, the signal for the building of the

funeral pile was given from the cathedral tower. I instantly administered another portion of the drug, and she dropped into peaceful unconsciousness. "She sleeps," announced the maid, and the work was immediately begun.

CHAPTER XX

Some strange fascination constantly drew my eyes to the scene in the little park at our right. Every fagot marked off an hour from my life. The choicest inlaid woods compressed the deadly throne; rich offerings were heaped upon it; silken canopies were raised over it, which would be dropped as the torch was applied; they were parted so as to reveal the couch of velvet and lace on which the beautiful girl would lie.

I could shed no more tears; they were all dried long ago, but great drops of sweat told my agony.

Only the thought that Talma herself believed she was dying to save lives and souls, kept my reason on its throne. I saw them pour the incense upon it; it was finished. The consecration followed. As the bells tolled, the young girls came with their chaplets of flowers, singing the now well-known song beginning:

"She sleeps; our beauteous queen,
Supremely good, divinely fair."

As they scattered them around that fatal pile of magnificence, every knee was bent, every head was bowed in prayer. The high priest raised his hands and blessed it. Izikar and I stood by the couch of Talma, silent except for the tearless sobs.

A little later I went out on the balcony; Ozomoth looked up from the street below and smiled.

Returning a look of proud contempt, I hastily sought a boat and repaired to the Isle of the Dismal Cavern to rush on the excavations with all speed. People slept when and where it was necessary to do so in order to go on with the work, no more. Great progress was made and wonderful results accomplished, but the one supreme goal was still in doubt.

"I must face the stern reality; it is useless to longer flatter myself with delusive hopes," I thought.

Commander Dirube came to me. "Can anything more be done?" he asked.

"No," I replied; "success will eventually

crown our efforts, and it will take place on this island; but too late to be of any use to me and mine. Ozomoth will give no day of grace; he will carry out the law to the letter, and Talma will never ask a reprieve or accept it."

With these gloomy thoughts maddening my brain, I returned to the home of Talma in the early hours of morning. She had awakened and a messenger was waiting to deliver a request for me to meet her in the library. As I parted the draperies that led to it, she arose and greeted me with the same loving smile that she wore in happier days.

"Forty-eight hours are left us, dear Uzane," she said; "let us not sadden them with useless repinings, but enjoy the wealth of love they may contain to the utmost."

She had lost a day; only twenty-four hours remained, but we did not undeceive her; "It were better so," I said.

She requested to be taken to the Temple of Nonnar for the last time; she wished Izikar and me to accompany her, and to return by the cavern.

They dressed her in the rich draperies which were to be at once her bridal robes and her

shroud; they told her I wished it, when they brought them to her, and she calmly assented. I had the potion with me which would be given her before we returned; it would produce so heavy a sleep that she would never awaken till she awoke in another world; she would never be conscious of the agonies of her fearful death. Ozomoth should be cheated of the pleasure of witnessing my misery at the sight of her suffering; she would never suffer.

White with black emblems was the symbol of grief at Heclades; our northern Venice wore its mourning garb. That she might not witness it, we carried her closely veiled to a curtained gondola.

As we drew near the courts of the temple our attendants halted; we entered and knelt at the altar, alone; it was the saddest and sweetest hour of my life.

When we passed out I noticed a peculiar hue to the atmosphere. Before we reached the Isle of the Dismal Cavern, I could see fine, lurid flashes of light dart up from the ruins, followed by columns of smoke. A panic seized the workmen, for the excavations were very near the cavern, and they rushed to the

side of the island where we were landing, which was the farthest point from them.

Suddenly a hundred Dismal Caverns groaned; the earth trembled and the waters rushed over the land. Roar, crack, z-z-z! A dense cloud rolled up from the cavern and shrouded everything in midnight blackness. It went away as quickly as it came, and our astonished eyes beheld an unexpected scene. As we gazed, so great an awe came upon us that among that mighty throng of people perfect silence reigned; a silence so oppressive it could almost be felt.

Up from the center of the old ruin had risen a beautiful dome, its covering of silver and gold and pearls, sparkling in the sun which shone with unwonted brilliancy, dazzling us with its splendor.

Before we could recover our breath enough to speak, fiz-z! Another cloud, thicker and blacker than the first, completely enveloped us. Talma crept into my arms; Izikar laid his hands on our heads as if in blessing; faces blanched and hearts almost stopped beating; we believed we should never see another hour. Again the cloud began to lift and roll away. I glanced at Ozomoth; for the first time I saw

a humble expression on his face. A mightier power than he was at work, and he trembled for the safety of his throne.

When the darkness gradually gave place to sunlight, we clasped hands and embraced each other from joy and terror. The dome had risen several feet, and beneath it glistened an immense white rose; in its center lay a large casket made of pearls.

The air resounded with shouts and huzzas; the force of secret detectives immediately surrounded Ozomoth; I tenderly kissed Talmana. The gleam of hope once more lighting up her pale features, after the valley of resignation through which she had passed, was like the sudden bursting of a glorious sun after the gloom of a destructive hurricane.

Then came that inky cloud, more impenetrable than ever. Forks of flame from its midst darted through the heavens; the earth shook and the sea trembled; a hissing like a million boiling caldrons deafened us; the blue and gold and crimson fires rose in columns, in arches, in branching flowers.

A double guard surrounded Ozomoth; I hugged Talma to my breast and waited; every heart was bowed in reverent solemnity.

One crash that shook the universe, and all was as still as the grave. The brilliant fires faded away; the cloud grew less dense; the people once more breathed; every eye was fixed on the center of the towering mass; at last, only a thin veil concealed the structure; that was lifted. Oh, joy ineffable! The dome had risen still higher, carrying the precious white rose with it. Beneath the rose, which was supported by columns of the purest white, was an open corridor, from which, a broad circling stairway led to the center of the rose where the casket lay. The words, "The Shrine of Zallallah," shone out plainly before us. Beneath them, "She Sleeps in the Heart of the Rose."

Every knee, except Ozomoth's, bent in prayer; a triple guard watched him.

Fully five minutes passed before the intense emotion of that vast crowd could give any expression of itself. Finally a voice of exultation was heard; it was followed by another and another till the heavens rang with hosannas. The bells that tolled so mournfully a few hours before, pealed forth their loudest notes of jubilee; the guns of our galleys-glaces thundered in salute; songs, prayers, praises,

mingled and rent the air with joyous acclamations.

Talma was overcome with joy. The full significance of what had occurred could be comprehended by no one in an instant; much less by her, to whom the revelation must gradually dawn on the brain, or set it on fire. She was escorted home by a large concourse of people, I walking at her side; it was a triumphal march such as the world had never seen.

Preparations were immediately begun for unlocking the casket; directions engraved in small characters were found on the outside covering, which was pearl, inlaid with precious stones.

On a tablet in the open corridor was the "Zallallah Inscription;" the same that had been found in Atlantides, but here it was recorded in several languages, each testifying that they were one inscription. The old Aryan gave us the key to it. Here it is. The translation I give is my own, but in substance it is identical with that of Professors Bohmer, and Groix, of the Romanzoff University:

"Zallallah was reclining on a bed of white roses, with a brilliant aurora encircling

the spot where she lay. A glorious Angel of Light came and hovered over her for a moment and disappeared. Then came the Spirit of all Power and of all Good and stood by her side. He beheld the marvelous creation developed from his own wondrous beginning. The Spirit waved his wand above her, lightly touched her forehead, and dissolved into air. But He had left the impression of His own divine seal stamped upon her, and a new being was created.

“Zallallah opened her eyes and the new soul just born within her, bore her into the wonderland of knowledge and beauty. This soul had been molded and fashioned till it came from the hands of its creator a peerless thing, forming the one link uniting the human with the divine. Zallallah arose and looked about her. Her new soul led her as by the magic touch of some fairy wand, into Elysian fields of thought, where, all illumined by the light of its own immortal attributes, it wandered over the intensified beauties of earth. She roamed among the flowers, her face growing more lovely at the birth of each new thought, and reflecting the holiness of the divine nature within her. She found La-

wah-hin-ee sleeping. He had the same beautiful features and form, but the new soul within her intuitively saw the gulf which divided them. The love of her old nature was not destroyed, only strengthened and purified. The thought, 'Impart thy blessing to La-wah-hin-ee,' descended from her newborn soul. It was the first prayer ever breathed by an immortal being, and it was granted. La-wah-hin-ee opened his eyes and looked upon Zallallah. Each recognized the soul in each, and hand in hand they lived and loved."

Underneath was the following in ancient Aryan:

"Other worlds will die and other worlds be born."

For a time all was excitement and confusion; but the strict discipline of our officers and the respected authority of Izikar succeeded in restoring order and preventing delay. As the preparations were completed, the triple guard surrounded Ozomoth, with the chains ready to bind him at a given signal.

It was one of those beautiful hours of twilight, seen only in that strange land, that Talma and I wended our way through the

ever-blooming flowers to the shrine of Zallalah. We were to be the first to look upon her if she rested there; if not, we wished to be alone in our first bitter disappointment.

Quivering sheets of gold and crimson fluttered in the zenith, their wafting draperies reaching beyond the horizon; the sun was just out of sight and the moon rode majestically through the flaming sky. Canoes were slowly moving about the waters; a few birds, late to rest, trilled their good-night songs. A faint breeze rustled among the branches of the trees, covering the earth with fragrant blossoms. In the distance we could hear the chanting of the maidens as they prayed for Talma, their loved and beauteous queen.

Slowly, and with loudly-beating hearts, we mounted the azure steps and stood in the heart of the white rose. Talma was paler than its petals; I drew her to my side and put my arm about her. Soft music, sweet as the melody of invisible spirits, floated up from the corridor below; rising, swelling, rolling, crashing, then dying tremblingly away in an enchanting strain that swayed our souls and bathed our senses with a joy transferred from

Heaven to earth. The glimmering light revealed the gems which composed the tomb of Zallallah. One moment I held Talma's hand in mine; the next, I pressed the springs and touched the bolts till lid after lid was raised, and door after door flew open.

"Oh, curse me not if it should fail," cried Talma. "Gladly I would die to make thee happy."

I clasped her in my arms.

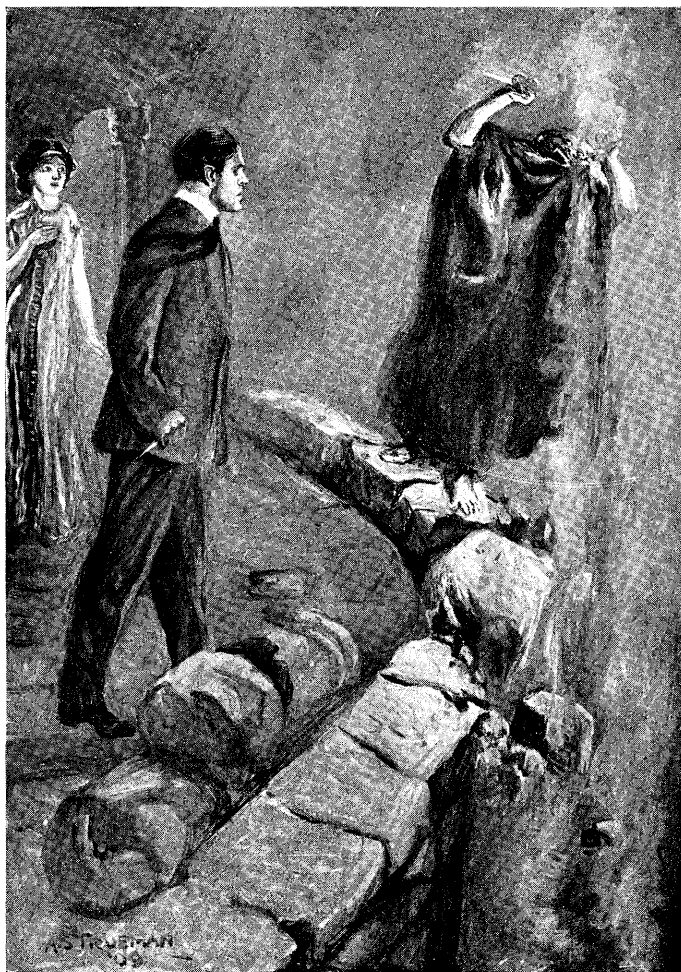
"Talma, if Zallallah lie here, thou wilt be my bride! Grant me one look into those blessed eyes, that I may read thy love."

I pressed a kiss upon the lovely lids to dry the tears.

"Courage, my love," I breathed. "Fate has saved thee till I came to claim thee."

"I have had one sweet drop of bliss, that will live enshrined in the depths of my soul through all eternity," returned the trembling lips; "it may be the last I shall ever know."

I unclasped my arm to touch the last bolt. The lingering, blighting pain of years could not equal the anguish of that moment. We gazed into each other's eyes; I put my shaking fingers on the spring; I pressed it; the lid flew back. It was done. For one brief mo-



The wall had given away and he fell backwards into the depths.

ment our lips met; then, bravely and resolutely, I turned my head; I looked down into the casket of gems. What did I behold! A form so wondrously fair that even my Talma's beauty paled beside it. On the diadem crowning her brow was an inscription. I bent over to read it. It was:

ZALLALLAH

"Talma, my love, behold," I breathed.

Trembling in every fiber of her being, she turned at the sound of my voice. We stood in silence over the shrine that held the being in whom dwelt the first created soul! Those eyes were the first to see the world as it stood revealed to an immortal creation! The power that had created her had preserved her through all time as the crowning perfection of creation's breath.

"My beloved," I whispered, "here in the presence of this being, the first to live for eternity, miraculously saved by her Creator as a monument bearing His divine seal, let us breathe our vows."

Clasping hands, we raised our eyes to Heaven. A beautiful, golden beam of light,

shining through the dome above us, rested on our heads as a benediction from on high.

How long we remained unconscious of the world, I do not know; then we caught a gleam of fire in the distance; it was the costly funeral pile crackling and blazing without its victim. I held Talma closer in my arms as we shuddered at the thought of what might have been. The odor of incense was wafted on the breeze and stifled us with its associations. When the last ember died out, silken flags floated from every pinnacle and tower; silvery trumpets and silver-tongued bells joined the chorus of hundreds of voices. Barges, canoes, gondolas, had doffed their mourning garb, and gaily decked they sported on the waters with the exuberance of life.

Suddenly, before us there rose a dark, hideous form, with glittering eyes; the fiend hissed in his raging fury till it seemed like the approach of death. Stealthily he crept toward us. I drew my dagger and waited. He writhed along on the outer wall of the ruins, directly over the steaming abyss of the Dismal Cavern. He stepped back for a final spring. My dagger was ready to meet him; then, crash! the wall had given way and he fell backwards

into the depths. A livid, hissing flame shot up from the abyss, emblematical of the fiend it contained; but the convulsive throb of the earth threw him to the surface once more and he was not yet dead. He crawled away from the shrine till he could look up at us. We stood in loving embrace. He shot a gleam from the beady eyes and raised his hand, still clenching the dagger, as if to strike. It fell lifeless at his side. The eyes expressed the words, "I am not conquered," and he was dead.

CHAPTER XXI

It is forty years since Talma and I were married and went to our Alaskan home. For thirty-eight of them we were never separated for any length of time; then she joined the spirit of Zallallah, and is waiting for me.

The day following the one on which we found the Zallallah, the Mermaid returned from Brozoa and Dohon, bearing important papers. Among them was one written by Lanah. This is it:

“Fan-ti-retta: Watch for the pirates whose lives my mother saved. You will know them by the gems they wear. They are the ones who carried my father and mother to Dohon, from some distant world we know nothing of. In return for the favor, my mother assisted them to escape and thus saved their lives. They promised to undertake any difficulties, however great, to grant a wish of hers or her kin. Tell them it is Manuella’s daughter that asks it, and they will not refuse. Ask them to sail in their rude craft to the point ex-

tending far out into the sea; their place of refuge when they fled from Dohon; tell them I wish them to take strong irons to bind a prisoner; that they will be met by one who wishes to bargain with them; their reward will be great; to go prepared to do a blacker deed, if need be. The one who will meet them knows a secret way into the earth, even to this kingdom. That he will not betray them, Manuella's daughter gives her word. Pirates, Fan-ti-retta will give you this without delay. In nine days, as you reckon, by the time of your southern world, be at the place. The one will be awaiting you. Remember, it is Manuella's daughter who demands this. I hate these northern lands. LANAH"