JUNE GOLD

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by WALDRON BAILY

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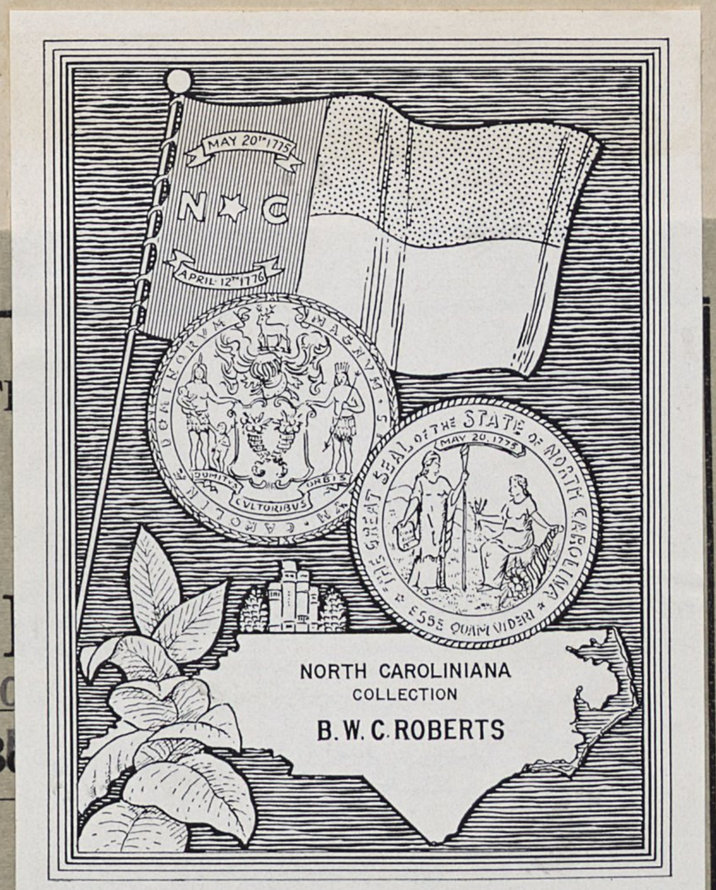

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THE healthy tang of the air and of open places is in this tale; the language of wild things; and mystery; and love.

Waldron Baily has written other stories of the little known corners of his country,—places peopled with the progeny of the original settlers of America, and themselves, in all their rather uncouth picturesqueness the only true Americans of today. But never before has he or any other author told a story of the wild section of the North Carolina coast such as is pictured in "June Gold," a story of such vivid interest and surprises that it can be compared only to the folk stories of old England as portrayed in Lorna Doone.

And Lora Humphrey is all as interesting and unusual a character as Lorna herself—Lora of the hommock lands with her strange mixture of modern education and folk lore and superstition.

Four New York men set out on a quest for modern contraband; they do not approve of Volstead; they have rebelled against the newest law of their land. But it is a far different thing (many things, in fact) which these modern adventurers find down there in the sand dunes of North Carolina from what they have set out to discover.

JUNE GOLD

THE GOD

In the girl's answering smile there was something of a far away wondering.

JUNE GOLD

BY

WALDRON BAILY

AUTHOR OF "HEART OF THE BLUE RIDGE,"
"THE HOMEWARD TRAIL," ETC.

Frontispiece by

PAUL STAHR

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JUNE GOLD

CHAPTER I

ABOVE the intermittent staccato clatter of the ticker that spoke jerkily, nervously, now hurried, now stopping a moment for breath, like a keyed-up woman, the telephone in Harrison Steele's magnificent private office tinkled low and unobtrusively. It was exactly the kind of musical sound that might have been expected in such surroundings where only the nervous ticker broke clashingly in on the subdued splendor.

Harrison Steele dropped the ticker tape that ran through his fingers, something of annoyance flitting across the face that was lined with the tenseness of his watching, and picked up the receiver.

"Send them in," he ordered as he listened to some one from the other end of the wire. He leaned back in his comfortable chair, and bit the end from a fresh cigar, his eyes on the door after one last annoyed glance at the ticker, now still for a moment.

The big mahogany portal opened softly to admit two men. One of them was a small, immaculately garbed individuai whose entire outfitting lived up to

the incipient mustache on his babyish face with the china blue eyes looking wonderingly about him. There were those who were wont to remark that Clement Ashley went through the world wondering—perhaps principally what it was all about. It was certain, however, that he had given all the rest of their world one reason to wonder. That was the why of his intimate friendship with Harrison Steele. The Wall Street man into whose private office Ashley now entered, with his inseparable companion, Billy Meade, was as much his opposite as the center meridian is the North Pole's. Harrison Steele, a man who was all his name implied; Steele, big, hard to harass, his mane of thick hair reminding of the mane of a lion, which animal he resembled in so many other respects—though the unimpressed, such as the dapper Ashley and other intimates, did not hesitate to remind the broker that there was a less impressive domestic animal remarkable principally for its stubborn qualities and its utter antipathy to being led that the big man more resembled. Polar opposites though they might be, though, it was a conceded fact that Clem Ashley—in a somewhat lesser degree, Billy Meade—and Harrison Steele, were intimates of the closest order.

Just out of the semi-dusk of the outer office of Harrison Steele, the small man stood on the threshold of the inner sanctum for a moment, his feet sunk deep

into the black velvety rug, his china blue eyes blinking in the sunlight that filtered across the deep mahogany furnished room—mahogany that caught all the glints and flung them back in prismatic gleams.

" 'Lo, Steele," began that small man. "Thought——"

"Come in and close the door and stop winking at me," commanded the big man from behind his shining glass-topped desk. "I haven't got a thing."

"Humph!" was the valiant answer. "Not even good sense. Could have told you, if you'd listened, but——"

Apparently unnoticing his friend's remark, Steele turned to the little man's companion.

"Sit down, Meade," he invited, and his hand reached for a lower drawer which he jerked open and brought into view a bottle nearly filled with an amber liquid, and bearing a label that the Volstead act had turned into something precious. Clement Ashley grinned and blinked as Steele produced the glasses.

"Something the market hasn't got yet, eh?" smiled Meade, as he turned his glass, reflectively watching the light through the amber fluid. But that the smile was rueful did not escape the keen eyes of Steele as his own glass was lifted.

"No," he declared, and his jaws clamped shut belligerently, "and won't. I'll get out entirely first, before I'd lose one bottle of that stock I've cached up

in Broad Acres. That's my fortune, and I pat myself on the back every time I think I had sense enough to stock up for a lifetime when I had the chance. Must have been something prophetic in Dad Steele when he built all that cellar room up there in the Westchester place."

"Too bad you didn't inherit some of the prophetic thing that would keep you from 'bearing it' when everybody on the Street has told you you'd come a cropper," remarked Ashley sarcastically. "Say, why d'you keep it up, Steele?"

Steele's calm eyes traveled over his small guest slowly, as though wondering how much the younger man could understand.

"Because they tried to tell me," he explained calmly. "It isn't done."

Ashley laughed shortly.

"Well, I am," was his comment. "And have been—good! So's Meade. Serves us right, though. Listening to you, instead of to everybody else—'And his name was Maude,'" he ended, with outspread hands to indicate that the entire matter was described in the last few words.

In spite of the bantering tone, Steele's face flushed unexpectedly.

"Say, Meade," he addressed the third man, "did you and Clem get hit very hard on my advice?"

Meade nodded silently, as though hesitating to admit his error, or not wanting to wound his friend. But Ashley chirped up.

"Cleaned me—of all I'm going to be cleaned—two hours ago, but——"

Steele's keen glance was solemn as he looked his friends over, but there was no hesitancy in his voice as he spoke, his determination shown only in the way his fingers snipped off the ticker tape that had been running idly through his fingers.

"Of course, you understand," he said, "that I'll not allow you to lose anything by this. I was so sure I was right—I'm not even admitting now that I wasn't," he interjected hurriedly, "and you were the only two who believed me, so——"

Ashley's interruption was drawling, sarcastic.

"So now you think you'll make a donation out of the ruins and give us back our playthings, eh?" he asked. "Well, my dear sir, that isn't done—it really isn't, you know." But Steele, knowing his friend, and seeing beneath the banter, knew that Ashley meant what he said, and that reimbursement was out of the question.

"If the time ever comes," went on Ashley, his small breast extended like a pouter pigeon's, "that I can't take my own medicine, why sir, I'll—I'll—I don't know what I'll do—I'll shave off my mustache."

What had come close to being a tension passed harmlessly enough with a laugh, but nevertheless there was foremost in the minds of each man who laughed, the story over which all the financial district had been chuckling or gloating for the week past—the story of how Harrison Steele's bullheadedness, his stubbornness, his determination to take no counsel or advice save his own, and never to admit himself in the wrong had at last brought him near to calamity in spite of the huge fortune which had been left to him by more careful speculative forbears, and which a phenomenal luck of his own (for indeed most of the big man's deals had been more often the result of "hunches" or of sentiment than of cool headed bargaining) had so greatly augmented that he had for years been known as one of the powers in the Street.

Strangely enough for a speculator, though, Harrison Steele was known as a man without enemies. "If you can leave himself out," had always been the laughing comment. For it is the rare thing that a man can augment his fortune in the market without leaving behind him a trail of disgruntled or actually inimical less fortunate. His own enemy in truth, he reflected now as, for the first time, he seemed to realize that his own stubbornness in making his bear movement on A. R. Motor Products had been so directly against the advice of all who were in a position to know. Yet

he had been so sure. His information had been faultless, he thought. There didn't seem a way possible for A. R. M. to escape a receivership long before this. And there it had been going up. Up! Up! Steadily. It was incomprehensible. More. It was disastrous. He glanced glumly at the silent ticker with its short end of tape where his strong fingers had bitten it off. There was something resentful in the glance. How dare they prove him wrong!

As if sensing his attitude and wanting to gloat, the little ticker spoke sharply.

Tch-tch—tch-tch-tch!

Once more it was spinning out for the man and his friends watching it in the silent luxurious office high above Broad Street, its story of the stormy morning on the Exchange floor. A. R. M. had advanced another point during the little machine's silence. Ashley and Meade looked eagerly and inquiringly at their big friend as he dropped the tape and his hand went toward the telephone. He shook his head at the unasked questions.

"Another point up," he informed dryly. "Just another fifty thousand gone the way of some other good dollars." His smile was a little twisted as he added: "A hundred and fifty thousand in an hour—a bit strong, even for me. Got to see a late edition—want to read the obituary——" His hand touched the tele-

phone, but Ashley drew a paper from his pocket and thrust it toward Steele.

"Here y'are—just got it."

Folded over at the financial page, the paper was ready for Steele with the story it had to tell:

A. R. MOTOR PRODUCTS TOUCHES 48 IN HEAVY TRADING

Following an unaccountable steady demand at small advances shortly after the opening of the Exchange this morning, A. R. Motor Products soared on flying wings shortly before noon, and in spite of the efforts of a well-known member who has been making a bear raid on the commodity, reached 48, twenty points higher than the lowest it reached.

It is rumored that a well-known banking house has come to the aid of the almost defunct company, and that the operation they have performed on the invalid is having the same effect that monkey glands have on an elderly invalid. No confirmation of this report could be made, however, but it is certain that with A. R. M. in the condition it is at the present that any further bear raiding will be throwing good money after bad.

Steele dropped the paper on his desk and his face was glum as he faced the others.

"Guess you're already familiar with the autopsy," was his comment. They nodded. Harrison Steele reached for the amber bottle and replenished their glasses.

Ashley was the first to speak.

"Haven't you had enough, old man?" he asked, and there was the timidity in his voice which showed concern for his friend, but an unwillingness to in any way further stir up the stubbornness which he knew might be that friend's financial ruin. He had lost enough already without going in deeper. And it would be so like Steele to bet he was right to his last farthing. Without replying, Steele again reached for his telephone.

"Get Anderson on the wire," he commanded, and his words were bitten off.

During the moments required for his order to be carried into effect, his eyes never wavered from the ticker tape with its tale of disaster. Watching him, the eyes of both the other men held pity. Why must Steele be so stubborn? Why could he not admit himself beaten for once and get out while the getting was good? Was he about to give Anderson, his broker, another ruinous order?

Steele spoke sharply into the telephone.

"Any light ahead, old man?" he asked. Silence for a moment, then:

"It just can't be, Anderson!" he exploded. "Of course I'm right—they're sure to go under sooner or later——"

Veins swelled on his forehead as he listened.

"Oh, hell!" He fairly shouted into the harmless

instrument. "I'm not licked! Won't be licked! I'll quit—quit the whole damned thing—but I won't quit licked!"

For minutes more he listened, and the lips grew into a stern straight line as his thoughts were formed.

"Say, Anderson!" he shouted suddenly. "Get this! Listen carefully and do as I say. Close me out—completely! Yes—everything—— I'm through! Close me out—lock, stock and barrel—Get that! Yes, certainly I mean it! I'm through, I tell you—t-h-r-o-u-g-h, through!"

The telephone receiver clicked on its hook with a jerk that sent the instrument reeling. Harrison Steele whirled round in his padded desk chair and the swift movement of his big foot sent the tittering ticker whirling in another direction. Before he spoke, his hand once more reached out for the now fairly well depleted amber bottle. He waved it aloft.

"Gentlemen!" he declaimed sonorously. "You see before you a well-known ex-broker! Through, but not defeated!"

Both men were looking at him curiously and wonderingly.

Meade spoke.

"But surely, Steele, you can't mean——"

"T-h-r-o-u-g-h spells through, as you heard me remark," was the big man's calm answer. "No bulling

for me to pull me out of a hole. So I've quit. You heard me. Now the celebration's about to begin. Been due for a vacation a long time—and there's the yacht in commission in the Florida waters, and ——"

"And the cellars up at Broad Acres——" put in Meade with his slow smile.

"And hurrah for the lights that shine!" Clement Ashley waved his immaculate handkerchief as he leapt from his chair. Steele glowered at him.

"Cut it, Clem!" he growled. "When did you ever hear of me going crazy? You and your bright lights——"

Ashley looked innocent.

"Can't a fellow light himself up?" he queried, wonderingly.

"Plenty of fuel up at Broad Acres," nodded Steele. "Good for many a conflagration. We'll go up there and start it—then Florida and the *Falcon* and some real fishing and a vacation. Are you on?"

Ashley pretended to consult a date book.

"Umm—umm——" he commented, his lips pursed up in perplexity. "Hate to throw Bernhardt and Jane Adams down like that, but, of course, as long as it's you, old chap, and it's your coming-out party and all that, why—er——"

Meade drained the last drop in his glass and reached for his hat and stick.

"Call your aeroplane," he remarked casually, as he rose with alacrity.

"After I've called Grayson Cardwell," answered Steele with a smile. "We losers must stick together."

CHAPTER II

IN the lives of the general run of American families whom success has crowned, there are usually two favorite steps; up from the soil, and back to it. When the fathers of the present generation had made enough from the land, whether as gentlemen farmers or just workers, it was the city for them. It is the present generation, of which Harrison Steele was a shining example, that is making the return. But the simple farmers of a day gone by would scarcely recognize the modern day "farms" that are calling the banker from his ornate office, the broker from his seat on the Exchange.

The natural beauties of Westchester County, just beyond the confines of New York City, have made it a favorite happy hunting ground for men like Steele, surfeited with wealth, who were pleased to consider themselves as going back to the soil when they had purchased a few hundred acres of ground, built palaces thereon and installed an army of servants to play with the corn and wheat and oats and cows.

Harrison Steele loved to refer to Broad Acres, his estate which had been part of the ancestral fortune

bequeathed him as his "farm." Native residents of the country surrounding his truly broad acres chose to consider it the show place of their country, and to make it the mecca for journeyings with visitors, a place at which they pointed with pride. And point was all they could do, for it was seldom that one caught more than a bird's-eye view of the big concrete mansion, sprawling its Spanish architectural length through vistas of trees, for one of the especial prides of Broad Acres' owner were the miles of concrete fence that stood man high all about the grounds, enclosing even the acres of turfed pasture land, the ordered shocks of corn, wooded hills and winding trout streams.

"Not much of a place for burglars" was a stock comment from man or woman who stood up in the passing vehicle for a better glimpse of what lay beyond the pinkish-tan masonry.

"Hmmph! You ought to see inside," was the invariable answer. "Such cellars! Such vaults! And they do say——" But it would be here that voices were lowered and secrets whispered as to the contents of those vaults.

Undoubtedly Broad Acres was a show place, though it was oftener that its glories were enjoyed by a band of carefully-selected caretakers than by the big young master of the estate who found his greater

enjoyment in an office high up above the roar of curb trading. Strictly speaking, Broad Acres was an evolution. When it had been purchased by the father of Harrison Steele, it had been a rambling farm house which he had set about to fit up so that he might enjoy his remaining years back on the farm. But somehow, the architects who were brought out from the city never seemed to do what he wanted. As a result, the simple farm house had grown by wings and ells, and finally had blossomed out with its present concrete outside, its Spanish mission predominance, its wide windows and patios—and its guarding fence.

Since coming into its present ownership on the death of the elder Steele some years before, Broad Acres had fallen into a state of innocuous desuetude from which it showed small signs of recovering, or its wide mission doors once more opening in the hospitable manner that had been the custom during the lifetime of Harrison Steele's father. In fact, the young broker had come to think of his country estate, in spite of all its grandeur, as more of a storehouse for his choicest possessions than a place in which to live. For it was with the coming of prohibition that he had showed most interest in it. Then he had found occasion to make real use of the immense cellars which undermined the sprawling edifice, even though the house itself and his father's cherished furnishings may

have had no meaning to him. Days on days swarms of men had been busy in the cellars and from mere underground store houses they had taken on the vault-like appearance of a city banking institution. At the conclusion of this work, Harrison Steele viewed the result with pride. As he turned the last key in the steel-doored vaults, filled to the tipmost top with choicest vintages and liquors that were later to be worth a king's ransom and which vast trucks had been for days busily hauling past the more or less scandalized eyes of his native neighbors, it was with a sigh of contentment that the broker pocketed his keys.

"Now, let them do their worst," he grinned to Clem Ashley who, of course, had been an interested spectator of the proceedings. "There's enough there for a lifetime—for mine, anyway."

"Well, I'll tell the world yours'll be a short and merry one, if you ever expect to get rid of that supply—even with my eager aid," was his little confidant's reply.

Harrison Steele's comment was his slow sage grin.

"They say you never can tell," he remarked non-committally.

Blest though he was with his golden spoon, and with the further advantage of unassailable inherited position, Harrison Steele was, nevertheless, a disappointment to people of his own class whenever Broad

Acres or its owner was contemplated. There were sighs, too—regretful ones, as charming matrons and eligible daughters whirled by the cultivated stretches of the show place in their upholstered limousines. Why was Harrison Steele so obstinate? Why refuse to take advantage of his position? Would he never marry?

But as years went by and he showed no such inclination—no inclination even to accept the proffered hospitality of his own class, much less to throw open the doors of Broad Acres in entertainment, it had come rather to be accepted that the owner was not a marrying man.

True, Broad Acres was some times the scene of entertaining of a sort, but such affairs were for the most part merely stag affairs and the occasion for friendly conviviality. In fairness it must be said that Steele himself took no great part. The coming of prohibition had, it is true, roused his stubborn spirit and he was determined that no man should say him nay when he chose to drink or let it alone, but to suggest that the consumption of vast quantities of liquid refreshment was either a necessity or even a recreation with him would be far from the truth. Regretfully, it must be admitted that this was not always the case with some of his friends, and some of the parties that had been held of recent date at Broad

Acres lived well up to the standard set in a freer, if not nobler day. There were rumors, too, that the swish of silken skirts and the patter of slippered feet had more than once been the accompaniment to high-pitched laughter that could not have been produced by any of the immaculate clubmen who had rolled up to the place in their racers or limousines. Harrison was a complacent host. Though he himself might not be interested, far be it from him to deny his friends the companionship they believed necessary. However, this was, as has been remarked, rumor. It was hard to know what actually went on behind those guarded walls, those steel-barred gates with their bells that must be rung before a caretaker took careful cognizance of whoever wished admittance.

Dusk was advancing over the young green of the maple-lined highway as the car which carried Harrison Steele and the companions who were to celebrate with him his retirement from active business, whirled up to the main gateway of Broad Acres. The last rays of the sun purpled and pinked and greened the clouds of sunset which silhouetted the Spanish architecture of the great house in its frame of new green things, and made greener the rhododendrons which flanked the curving driveway. Vines in their new spring dress clinging tightly to the mellow tan walls lent them something of the dignity of walls of an old

Spanish chapel. The car halted at the gate that the chauffeur might summon the caretaker. Steele had never thought it necessary to carry with him extra keys for his seldom-used country place. Not even the need of new supplies for his office or club often took him Westchesterward, for it was so much easier to have O'Keefe, the trustworthy, bring them to him.

Grayson Cardwell stretched himself lazily.

"Some hut, Steele," he drawled.

Young Ashley sniffed.

"For Lord and Lady O'Keefe—and their sisters and their cousins and their aunts," he remarked sarcastically, as he shifted his position and lighted a fresh monogrammed cigarette. "How many of them on the payroll now?"

From the gate the chauffeur turned to glance at Steele.

"Can't seem to get any answer," he told his employer in puzzled manner.

"Keep on ringing," commanded Steele, somewhat irritably. "O'Keefe's around somewhere, and I rang him up before we started so I know he's expecting us."

"Maybe he's learned the vault combination," laughed Meade. "An Irishman——"

But Steele was not listening. His eyes were on his

chauffeur who was examining the supposedly locked gates.

"Something wrong here, Mr. Steele," he announced with a small quiver of excitement. "Gates not locked at all—just a pretense—looks to me like they might-a been jimmied or something——"

In a bound Steele was beside him. A shove and the big iron gates bounded open, the huge lock that had been their protection clanging protest as it fell to the graveled drive.

"What the——" began Steele, as his eyes went lightning swift toward the house from which there was no sign of welcome or habitation. But with the uncompleted sentence, he was already running along the curved driveway with its flanking greenery toward his house. Nor did either of the other three wait for the chauffeur to clamber back to his seat and drive them through the opened gates; they, too, leapt to the ground to sprint after their host.

The incessant clamor Steele had already set up on the front door knocker when the others reached him brought no response. Its reports could be heard echoing dully, deadly, as through an empty untenanted house. Though he brought all his huge strength to bear on the door as he flung his body against it in an effort to break it down, its massiveness resisted his

efforts as it might have the puny strength of a sparrow fluttering its wings.

"Hadn't we better try a battering ram," suggested Ashley, futilely, as he flittered about, trying to raise himself to peer into windows high above his head.

But Steele was too much perturbed to hear him. Something was obviously wrong. He was going to find out what it meant.

"Damn!" he said, and he struck off for the rear of the house, careless of the trampled shrubbery that grew in the way of a shorter cut. Wonderingly his three friends trailed after him.

The kitchen door was ajar, but from within there was no sound. In the servants' sitting room off it, however, they discovered Mrs. Katherine O'Keefe, wife of the prize caretaker, and chatelaine extraordinary of Broad Acres through most of the year. But Mrs. O'Keefe did not see her master nor his guests. For the simple reason that Mrs. O'Keefe lay on a couch sleeping peacefully. The odor of chloroform still clinging to the beruffled maid's apron that was wadded across her face told its story.

"Damn!" repeated Steele, and his eyes flashed ominously.

"Hell's bells!" somewhat more elegantly ejaculated Billy Meade. Their few words were pregnant with meaning.

One thing only was in the mind of Harrison Steele. No time would he waste going through the house to see what might have happened. Only his cellars, his cherished, vaunted burglar-proof vaults concerned him. Leaving Mrs. O'Keefe to take her nap peacefully, he dashed for the cellar entrance. Careless of what they might encounter, neither Ashley, Meade, nor Grayson Cardwell were far behind. More than their peace of mind was threatened. Their thirst was at stake, and they meant to see this thing through.

In the semi-darkness of the first cellar, Steele's foot tripped over an obstacle as he leapt down the stairs. His hand sought the electric button and in the light that flashed on, the oncoming men saw that bundle move and a pair of eyes, goggling with fright, blinking in the sudden glare, gazed up at them above a masterly-made gag. Those eyes were all of Patrick O'Keefe that seemed to be alive, for he was trussed up like a fowl, his legs bent so that any amount of effort on his part would have been of no avail. Nearby, and just outside his reach, lay a shotgun with a shattered barrel, futile, maddening. But passing O'Keefe and his misery, the men's eyes searched further on in their eagerness. Directly in front of them lay the heavy door to the inner cellars and the vaults; shattered, too, like the gun; likewise futile.

Ideal master of his servants as he was generally

conceded to be, Harrison Steele for once in his life made comfort and consideration for Patrick O'Keefe a secondary matter. In one leap he was across the cellar room and through that shattered door. It was left for Clement Ashley to put his carefully trousered knees on the dust of the cellar floor and loosen the bonds of the keeper of the treasure. As Billy Meade bounded after Cardwell and Steele, he heard the small man's efforts being rewarded by a voluminous Celtic groan.

There was no need of words to explain the cellar room into which Steele and his guests emerged. The story was shouted at them by the mass of tangled steel wreckage that was scattered about the floor, and by the steel door of the burglar-proof vault which hung limply by one hinge.

Steele picked up an exploded cap.

"Dynamite!" he gritted. He had said it all in one word. But as the eyes of his two guests went past the open door to pierce the dimness of the vault, their answers were groans.

Those once so well-filled vaults were empty! Empty as the heart of a childless widower!

Sputtering and heavy breathing back of him and Steele whirled to face O'Keefe, painfully making his way toward him with the aid of the helpful Ashley. Wordless, fairly pale in his anger, Steele glowered.

"I couldn't—— It wasn't my fault, Mr. Harrison, 'dade an' it wasn't," stuttered the caretaker. "When a gang of fellys takes yer gun and smashes it before yer eyes, and just laughs at ye when ye're tied up like a piece o' bedding, what's to do? Wh-a-a-t—I——"

"Stop sputtering and tell me what happened!" commanded Steele in the tone of authority his underlings so well knew—and feared should he have cause to use it.

"Wh-h-y—er—I——"

"Have a heart, Steele! Can't you see the poor chap needs a drink?" Ashley giggled. But Meade and Cardwell only repeated their lugubrious groans as tongues wet lips.

"Shut up!" growled Steele, and to his caretaker: "Well, O'Keefe?"

With a visible effort the caretaker shook himself together and began his tale.

" 'Twas but a short time afther ye telyphoned ye'd be here, sor, that the first truck drove up, and——"

"The first?"

"Yis, sor—they was five, and——"

Steele was glowering.

"And you let five empty trucks drive in here and dynamite these vaults——" he began.

"Yis, sor—I mean no, sor—they wasn't impty, sor. Ye'll find plinty of impty cases somewheres about. As

I was sayin', the first bunch says as how they have a foine lot of vintage stuff to be delivered to you, and knowin' as ye're bringin' a party, I thinks nothin' of it when they begins to unload. Shure, I did begin to think it a bit strange as to what ye'd do with so much more when the others came along, but I didn't get no ways wise till I hears that big bang. Then I rushes down here with me gun, and it happened just as I'm tellin' ye, sor, they—they told me to be good with my popgun and four-five of 'em jumped me—and then I couldn't do nothin' till ye come——"

"But the rest of the servants?" Billy Meade put in a question in his quiet way.

"It's plowing time, and they're all at the other end of the place, sor——"

The deadly gleam in Harrison Steele's eyes was lessening. He looked at the man who was cowering before his wrath, though O'Keefe had shown he had no lack of physical courage. The master's voice was less stern as he asked:

"How many men were there?"

"Tin or twelve—I couldn't rightly say——"

"And you braced those gunmen with your old rifle, O'Keefe?" Steele's face lighted with a slow smile. "Guess you did your best for a man with no brains—no brains—wish I could have seen it——"

Ashley broke in.

"Well, fellows," he grinned, "an exciting time was apparently had by all. We look like the goats, but, offhand I'd say what we all need right now is a drink!"

"Shut up, you!" once more growled Steele.

"And the last drop we brought from the club gone an hour ago!" Grayson Cardwell was getting in the habit of groaning.

O'Keefe looked hesitant before he spoke again.

"I think I could scare ye up a quart or so, sor," he offered, but in his eyes he showed that for this generous offer he expected further lashing from his master.

"Good old scout!" murmured Ashley appreciatively, as he remembered at last to brush his trousers knees. But the smile that Steele started, slowly broadened to a grin.

"You old rascal!" he reproved. "Well, he's saved us something by holding out on me, anyway. Come on boys, we'll have the wake. Come out of the catacombs."

In the dimly-lighted dining room above, they gathered about the table with funereal faces as O'Keefe with practiced hands prepared their highballs. Each was contemplating how long the small supply would last. Suggestions were offered as to the possibility of restocking.

"Not a chance," Steele told them firmly. "I've already found that out——"

"At least it's a good thing you got out of the market when you did," reminded the ever-comforting Ashley. "You've got enough left, and there are always bootleggers, you know——"

Steele shook his head.

"Oh, some of them are safe enough if you can pay their price," offered Cardwell carelessly. "Why, I know——"

O'Keefe came softly through the door and as softly spoke as though fearful of interrupting painful rites.

"Ye're wanted on the telyphone, sor," he whispered. "Presbyterian Hospital, they say."

Steele rose quickly, wondering.

"Now what?" he commented.

As he opened the door on his return, Cardwell was still speaking.

"Now, this particular bootlegger——"

"Boys," he announced solemnly, "you can cut out the talk about bootleggers—there'll be none for me —ever!"

At the solemnity of his tone, his guests looked at him in surprise.

"That call," he explained, "was from—about Henry Russel——"

"Russel?" queried Meade. "Anything wrong?"

Henry Russel would have made the fifth of the present party had they been able to connect with him, for since student days, he, too, had been one of the inseparables.

Steele made three words of it.

"Blind!" he said. "Bootlegger's hooch!"

CHAPTER III

"BLIND!"

Billy Meade was the first to recover in the awed silence that fell on the group at Steele's announcement.

Steele noded grimly.

"Why, dammit it all," exploded Clement Ashley, slamming his hand down on the table so that the glasses tinkled, "it simply can't be! There must be some mistake! Why only yesterday I was talking to him and——"

Steele sat down like an old man. Every gesture seemed to say that he was tired, very tired.

"And," he finished slowly for Ashley, "he probably told you he had found some wonderful stuff that his bootlegger had got hold of. He did. This morning he was picked up on the street and taken to the Presbyterian Hospital. Wood alcohol—that's all! He has only just come around so that he could tell anything about himself or have his friends notified. He was one of those who was so sure of his reputable source, too, Cardwell. There's your bootleggers for you. When as fine chaps as Russel get theirs, it's

about time the prohibitionists were satisfied," he added bitterly, as he turned the remaining portion of his own drink around and around in his glass.

"One of the finest," mourned Meade. "Of course, we'll do all we can for him, but," and he glanced up at the big broker slouching in his chair, his attitude anything but that which might have been expected of the man who was prepared to be chief celebrant at his own retirement from a business that was fast making little ones out of the big ones which were credited to his bank account, "but anything we can do won't solve our own problem. Looks like a warning, eh, boys?"

"What about it, Steele?" queried Ashley, the solemnity of his own countenance a record of his feelings. "You say you won't fall for the bootleg—what you going to do? Go on the water wagon?"

Steele reached for the bell.

"Might as well bring on that last quart you cached, O'Keefe," he told his man servant, before he answered Ashley. Then, as the door closed: "Hell, no! They can't get away with it——"

Ashley's irrepressible grin lightened the gloom of his face.

"Looks like they'd made a good start," he murmured. "Think you can catch 'em?"

"Oh, I'm not talking about my own stuff—that's

gone—hope I've sense enough to know it! I mean those idiots who are trying to tell me what I shall drink or not drink when and where and as often as I like——" The set of his square jaw and the lips that were a mere line, showed that the Steele stubbornness was on the surface. "Don't know how just yet, but there must be some way——"

In silence as befitted the occasion, the group took the drink that O'Keefe poured for them. With all ceremony glasses were lifted in a mournful wordless toast. Grayson Cardwell drew his lean long figure up from his chair at the table and for a few moments paced the floor, his eyes downcast as though his thoughts were heavy ones. At the window he stopped and his unseeing glance wandered out over the wide lawn in its spring greenery, now lightly touched by the soft beams of the new moon. Then, without turning to face his companions, who sat glumly in front of the last bottle of Steele's wonderful store of liquids, he spoke, slowly, carefully, as if not quite sure of how his suggestion might be taken.

"There is a way," he hesitated—"if you're game enough to take a chance."

"As if chance was not our middle name," scoffed Ashley, while Meade smiled superiorly.

"Well?" Steele looked up inquiringly. Cardwell turned to face them.

"You have a yacht," he insinuated, "and as I understand it, a sailing master who thinks you're one of the royal family, and—and," again he hesitated as inquiring glances were leveled at him, "aren't Bermuda and the Bahamas full of real stuff, every bit as good as our late visitors carried away?"

His bomb exploded, Cardwell waited to see how the suggestion would be taken. Steele flushed slowly as it sank in.

"I may have done a great many things, but I don't believe I've ever been a criminal," he commented, but there was a shiftiness about his glance that showed a half shame-facedness—that he was even debating the matter.

Cardwell moved closer to the table.

"If you were not afraid of bootleggers and wood alcohol you'd buy their stuff, wouldn't you?" he shot at his host.

"That's different," cut in Clement Ashley. "Everybody's doing it——"

"Everybody doesn't own a yacht!" snapped Cardwell. "Now look at this thing fairly, Steele," he went on, and he dropped into the chair he had vacated and leaned across the table to emphasize his points. "You've got to have liquor—or are you willing to give up and admit yourself beaten?" Grayson Cardwell knew his man; knew that on no other point was he

so vulnerable. Steele squared his shoulders to speak, but it was Meade who broke in.

"They don't send you to Federal prison—often——" he remarked, "for buying from bootleggers, and there must be some——"

"There are none for me!" snapped Steele. "Even before I heard about Russel, I had learned enough. And I'm not talking about wood alcohol only. There's that denatured stuff, and they don't always get all the formaldehyde out. A little formaldehyde won't kill you the first or the second time, but just keep it up and see what happens! Reminds me of the motto I once saw on an old sun dial—not a very cheerful thing—*'Vulnerant omnes, ultima necat.'*"

"Take the head of the class," urged Ashley, bowing deeply. "Wouldn't have believed it! Now *my* Latin—translate, please, Professor!"

The lightness of his friend's tone in no wise lessened Steele's seriousness, but he went on as though explaining to a small boy: "A good thing for you to keep in mind, son—'They all wound; the last one kills.' No, sir, I'm off the bootleg. Here," and he reached into a vest pocket and drew out a folded clipping. "Came across this the other day, and saved it—thought I might need it with some such ignoramuses as you. You read it—aloud—Meade," offering the paper which the other took and spread out under the rays

of the electric globe which O'Keefe had switched on on his last visit.

"'Of the 1,500 samples of confiscated moonshine recently analyzed by the State Food and Drug Department,'" he read, '"not more than twenty-five samples were found free from poison. It is the condition surrounding the manufacture that introduces the element of danger. Illicit stills are hidden in thickets, fields, old out-houses, barns, dirty tenement rooms and vermin-filled cellars. The containers often are old barrels which, after repeated use, are foul and ill-smelling.

"'The unprotected, fermenting mixture attracts animal life such as flies, cockroaches, mice, rats, bugs and insects of every description. They often die in it. In many instances, the stills are only common boilers covered with filthy blankets in which alcoholic vapors are retained and wrung out into bottles. Frequently old torn-up mattresses furnish the necessary cotton for straining the finished product——'"

"Ugh!" Fastidious Ashley shivered so that the ripples in his silk shirt were plain. "Lay off, Brother Anderson—have a heart! Almost thou persuadest me——"

"Very good!" declared Grayson Cardwell. "Admitted! Now," and once more he turned to Steele and his eyes searched those of his friend keenly, "what are you going to do about it? Are you going to let them get away with it?"

As though the last words were the goad too much, Harrison Steele leapt to his feet and his big fist whanged down on the table with its empty bottle and glasses.

"No, by Jumping Jupiter," he shouted. "I won't!"

Clem Ashley licked his lips anticipatorily and his boyish grin spread across his small face. "Atta boy!" he commanded. "When do we start?"

"Shut up!" This time it was Cardwell's voice that commanded. Then, turning to the others, he went on eagerly. "I've thought it all out—it came to me while I was watching that moon lighting up the lawn out there—sailing along so calmly. You know that hunting preserve of mine down on the North Carolina coast—I've asked you all to come down with me more than once, but you've never found time. It's near a little seaport town called Swansboro, but it's the wildest spot you can well imagine. It's on part of a strip of land called Bogue Island that is separated from the mainland, and I've kept it up the year round for I've never known when I wanted to drop down there for a bit of shooting or surf fishing. That's where we'll head for first. It can be given out that we are going down for a shooting and fishing trip, and the yacht down in the Florida waters will never be even thought of, especially as we'll charter a hydroplane and fly down——"

"My sacred grandmother!" wailed Ashley. "No wonder you asked us if we were game. Next!" And he subsided with a sigh as Cardwell glowered at him, and went on with his plans.

"Don't you see how it will work out? We stop off at the hunting lodge for a day or two which will give Steele's sailing master time to prepare for a voyage, and——" and he looked about him with a grin as though what he was to add would clinch the matter, "and I don't think any thieving bootleggers have been able to drive any trucks over to Bogue Island yet——"

Little Ashley revived. A slow grin of anticipation spread over the faces of Steele and Billy Meade.

"Where'll we catch the flying boat?" queried the former.

"I think I can manage that," was Meade's contribution. "Know a chap who has one—was in France with him—wonderful flying record and all that—can be depended on, too, when it comes to keeping a secret."

"Get him!" Steele became the commanding general. "No time like the present," he added firmly. "I'm ready to start any time."

"Can't you give me time to change my pants?" Ashley looked wonderingly about him with injured innocence, but the others pretended not to notice him.

Steele glanced ruefully at the empty bottles and glasses on the shining mahogany table.

"No use staying here," he remarked with a trace of bitterness. "We can make arrangements at the club better." His hand went to the bell, and as O'Keefe, suspiciously alacritous, appeared, he ordered that the car be brought for them without delay.

"Which may be just as well, if ye'll pardon me for sayin' so, sor," O'Keefe told him. "For it do be lookin' as though dinner would be a long time comin', what with the ould woman comin' out of her sleep so hysterical, sor, and callin' on all the saints and angels to protect her——"

Steele smiled ruefully. "You can assure Mrs. O'Keefe she need have no further fear. There's no further cause here for raiders."

It was past midnight when Billy Meade finally emerged from the telephone booth where he had spent most of the evening after reaching the club to which Steele had taken them, and announced to the listening men that everything was all right.

"Thought I could locate Don Baldwin without any trouble," he told them, "but I've had to put through more long-distance calls than Steele ever did when he thought he had a winner. Got him up along the Massachusetts coast, though, and he's already started. He'll be ready for us to-morrow morning all right, and have a chance to snatch a few winks, too."

"Of course, you told him he'd be well paid, and, er—er——" Steele was a little embarrassed, for him a strange phenomenon.

Meade grinned.

"Don't know that that would have much to do with Don's taking up the thing," he said, as his hand went out for the drink a club steward offered in the same manner he had offered the same refreshment so many times before the laws of his country proclaimed he should not, "Don's keen for the sport of the thing. He don't know what's up, of course, but whatever it is, he's for it, and you can depend on him."

"And as for the other," Cardwell spoke decisively, "of course we'll all chip in, and——"

"Of course, we'll do nothing of the kind!" Harrison Steele sat up straight in the deep leather-cushioned chair in which he had been lolling and looked belligerently about him. "This is my party—as far as any paying is concerned—just understand that. I got you fellows in a hole when I thought so much of A. R. M. as a plaything, and you wouldn't let me make good. I'm at least entitled to pay for the celebration party I promised!"

Clement Ashley spread his hands wide in a gesture of acceptance and shrugged his small shoulders.

"Then everything's settled, I take it?" was his query. "Except changing my pants?"

"You can change 'em in the morning while I go to the bank," Steele soothed. "Don't believe they'd take checks in Bermuda or wherever we're going; don't believe I want to leave one behind me."

The bright sun of a May morning was touching the spires and prismatic windowed sky-scrapers with gilded designs as the bird-like hydroplane with its party of five rose lightly out of the gently lapping waves of the Hudson and soared high up past the Statue of Liberty. From the distance, the mass of steel and granite that made of Wall Street a cavern of gloom even in the bright sunshine, could be discerned by the men who had so recently seen small fortunes flit away in its environs. From their height, it all now seemed unreal, something that might have happened long ago, hardly remembered.

From the start, they had been silent. Each was busy with his own thoughts; some that would not have borne easily the light of general discussion. As usual it was Ashley who could no longer restrain himself.

"Too bad we couldn't wait for the noon editions," he said. "You see those reporter chaps waiting around wanting to know? They'll have a fine yarn, won't they? Can't you see it?

HUNTERS VIE WITH GAME THEY SEEK.

Well-know Brokers, Caught in the Rise of A. R. M. Fly Away to Catch Surer Game.

"How's that, eh? Always knew I'd missed my calling!"

"Hmph!" Steele smiled somberly. "Anything that called you'd stop mighty short when they saw you. Did you change your pants?"

Past the Statue of Liberty, past the vast hulks that marked the anchorage of the hundreds of ships in the wide harbor that lay more and more bluely in front of them, past the tip end of the island with its sky-reaching architecture growing down to the very edge of the bay, there to drop off in a line, sheerly, the hydroplane and its freight of adventurers flew, soaring higher and higher.

A dim cloud came before the vision of Harrison Steele as his eyes stared at the great height of the Woolworth building with its myriad windows touched by the sun. Through that cloud, the pile of granite turned gray. The windows were barred and narrow and high. The vision of the Federal Prison as he had once seen it at Atlanta was complete. It was with a suppressed shudder that he turned to stare down the bay where the wider waters of Sandy Hook could just be discerned. The sun was shining there. There were no clouds. With a half smothered sigh he subsided in his seat, clutching the holding belt. The world was fair. The motion was delightful. Fiercely

he told himself he was right in making this adventure which would prove him a man to whom no other man could say nay. He would enjoy it now, at any rate. For as yet there had been nothing done that savored of outlawry.

CHAPTER IV

THEOPHILUS LOPSTROP HUMPHREY leaned his rifle against the trunk of a live oak tree and turned to gaze across the inlet to the island that lay between him and the wide spread of the Atlantic beyond. One brown sinewed hand shaded his gray eyes with their overhanging growth of graying, bushy eyebrows as the still keen gaze of the rangy old man swept the wooded island with its mass of tropical growth. The slant of the sun near its meridian touched a fresh-water lakelet hidden in the tangled cluster of live oaks, bay trees, and undergrowth of lesser evergreens, vines and semi-tropical verdure that made of the island all but a jungle, hard for anything but creeping things to penetrate; it flung its mirror-like shafts across the inlet. Humphrey, watching from beneath shaded brows, saw a few specks of black circling above it, and grunted as he watched.

"Hmph!" he snorted. "Poor fools!" His eyes never wavered from the belated straggling wild ducks who were seeking to form themselves into a flock intent on joining their more enterprising brothers who

had journeyed a month or more since to Northern climes. "Consarn ef I can see why ye want to leave," he apostrophized. "Consarn ef I can see why anybody or anything wants to be a-travelin' all the time. God A'mighty never meant fer critters to be always a-movin'."

As a brief index to Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey's character, it may be mentioned that the old hunter who gazed out over the North Carolina land and seascape on this May morning, put well into practice what he preached. Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey did not believe much in moving; what moves he made were for the most part made that he might slightly change his place of resting.

"Poor fools!" he repeated, as his half pitying gaze took in the stragglers' efforts. "Why can't ye be sensible. Wild oats a plenty in them ponds, but ye got to be up and goin' some place. But I 'low ye'll be back when ye're wanted." His shaggy gray head shook sagely. "An' I'll not have to watch after ye when ye're gone."

Standing there, drawn up to his full height as he watched, it would have been hard to believe that Humphrey was a man past sixty. Old Theo would have made glad the heart of any apostle of the open air, for his sturdiness and strength were those of a man in his prime, that prime only belied by the gray

of eyebrows and hair, something in the loose-jointed movement of his great hands and feet, and in the scattered crows' feet that puckered above his high cheek bones. For more than sixty years, the hot sun and shifting winds of the North Carolina coast had been busy making those crows' feet in the countenance of Theophilus Humphrey. His home had been in the open air; his work and play and leisure with gun and rod and boat.

Had anyone mentioned the word "shiftless," now, though, he would have been favored with old Theo's most glowering glance. Old Theo was a worker. He would have told you so. He was working now. Was he not keeping an eye out on the hunting preserve of a rich New Yorker who trusted him to see that no poacher penetrated through that island jungle to carry off prizes of wild hog, or deer or wild goat, or what not?

It was strenuous work. Humphrey opened his huge mouth in a wide yawn as the fool birds circled away to the northward.

"Reckon dinner must be most ready," he observed, with a final squint at the slowly moving sun. Leisurely, as befitted one whose duty well done has earned the right, the tall old man reached for his rifle and turned to climb further up the knoll at the top of which set his rambling white-washed house with

its scaling clapboarded walls and sagging porch—a house with an outlook that took in at one sweep the whole of the surrounding country; from which could be seen the stretch of high piled sand dunes broken only by clumps of bear grass on the ocean side of the island, the wooded strip itself, and its dividing inlet; the higher "hammock" ground of the mainland, dotted with scattering houses, white in the softening distance, but scaling and white-washed like Humphrey's own domicile, on nearer view—houses perched on knolls, houses hidden in groves of bay and live oak trees—houses that sheltered other "progers" like Theophilus Humphrey. For this was the proger section of progressive North Carolina, and not even the most progressive of them all has yet found another name than proger for those particular North Carolinians who have earned the colloquial distinctive by their habits of earning a more or less precarious living through hunting a little, fishing and trapping a little, and when it can't be helped, putting in a crop a little.

Typical proger was Theophilus Humphrey, but for two years now he had been able to lord it over his fellow progers, for he was receiving actual cash for doing what he loved best to do—ever since he had become chief guide, advisor plenipotentiary and keeper of the preserve which a Northerner, a man called Grayson Cardwell, had purchased down on that North

Carolina coast and which stretched as far as eye could reach before the old man's vision as he sat on his pine board, vine-covered porch.

Keen as his youthful old eyes were, however, there was something now in that tree and underbrush-covered island across from him that he had failed to notice. Something—someone—stirred in a clump of half-grown trees, curtained with newly gray-green long-trailing Spanish moss. As the old guide bent his footsteps toward his home on the knoll, a face peered cautiously out at the retreating figure. It was a fine old face, benignant beneath the aureole of long white hair that framed the pinkish cheeks. But across it, as he gazed, there flitted a look of annoyed intolerance. One hand, visible as it held aside the screening moss, motioned some other to caution.

"Dagged old proger," muttered the owner of the silver aureole. "Thinks he owns the earth. Reckon he's gone to dinner, Ira," he went on to his unseen companion. "Reckon we can be moseying."

A second face peered through the moss screen.

"He's hell with that there old rifle of his'n, Uncle Billy Peter," complained the second man—or youth, rather, did one take into account years only, for his wizened face proclaimed he had lived years beyond his time—not well-spent years. "Seems a feller can't git nothin' to eat by rights any more sense old Theo got

his license." From beside him, the second man lifted up a freshly killed young marsh hen which he hurriedly stuffed under his worn coat. "Wall, he kain't always git away with it," he declared, as he bent low to snoop, Indian fashion, through the tall marsh grass that would hide him from watchful eyes.

The sudden sneer and narrowing eyes in the face of the elder man proclaimed his apparent benignancy but a snare and a delusion.

"I've allus had what I wanted to eat offen this here island," he commented, "and I proposes to keep on—spite of any rich man from the North'ard. Effen it hadn't a been fer him I'd a-fixed that consarned old Theo long ago——"

"'Low he'll fix we'uns now, Uncle Billy, effen we don't mosey," reminded the other, with a backward glance at the temerity of Uncle Billy Peter Willis who had come out in the open to shake his tightly clenched fist at the back of Theophilus Humphrey. But, with the reminder, discretion came, and the white-haired old man who had spent the morning poaching on Grayson Cardwell's cherished preserve, with only one small marsh hen to reward him—thanks to the watchfulness of the New Yorker's guide—bent over and sneaked through the tall grass and undergrowth. It was a most undignified exit for the richest man in the proger district—a man who, until Cardwell's ap-

pearance, had long held a mortgage over the head of the but slightly protesting Humphrey—but then, it was a necessity. Billy Peter Willis, rich man, and "stingiest soul the good Lord ever let live," was content. He once more had something for nothing; even if it was only a marsh chicken.

Worn by the exertion of his walk from his vantage point down the hill to his house (all of a hundred yards or more) old Theo Humphrey dropped down into a splint-seated chair when he reached the sheltering porch. His rifle he propped against the clapboarded wall behind him. His gaze wandered seaward —past the inlet and the island. Another black speck claimed his attention. Funny thing, that—couldn't be a gull—too black. Must be a stray duck just a-flocking by itself. Humphrey chuckled at the aptness of his own expression. But the black speck was getting larger—it was coming nearer. It was taking form.

Theo Humphrey lifted his voice in an excited shout.

"Lory!" he demanded, "Come on out here, girl. I'm consarned ef I don't think here's another of them airship things comin' along! My land o' livin', but what are we comin' to! People flying through the air jes like ducks!"

In the doorway behind the old man a girl appeared, Only a casual glance was needed to prove her his daughter. There was something about the gray of the

eyes and their shape that was unmistakable even though the girl's own eyes were big and wide with the eagerness of youth. But there, all resembance stopped. For refinement of feature and delicate coloring, Lora Humphrey might well have been the carefully nurtured product of a hothouse civilization, instead of a daughter of the hommocks, unless one took into account the health that was fairly vibrant through her slender young body. Nor was she the slattern that one might have expected after a casual visit to those other homes which dotted the landscape before her. In her crisply starched yellow gingham bungalow apron that threw into relief the dusk of her softly curling hair, she might have stepped direct from the pages of one of the magazines that lay scattered in used confusion on a small pine table at one end of the slanting porch. But that she was not for picture purposes only was proven by the dish cloth she held in one hand, evidently forgotten in her hurry to answer her father's hail.

"Did you say an airship, pap?" she inquired eagerly. "Where? Oh, I do wish they'd come by here oftener —they make me dream such dreams of other people and things——"

"Hmmph!" snorted old Theo. "Time ye was fergittin' about all them things, I'll be bound. 'Pears like sending ye to the west'ard to school, and then lettin'

ye go a-nursin' through the war time has jest about spi'lt ye for livin in the hammocks——"

"Oh, father—er, pap, I mean——" Lora Humphrey unwillingly substituted the diminutive of the hommocks country people upon which her father insisted. "Don't you ever have a thought you'd sometime like to go out of the hammocks—to where people live—*do* things?"

"Hmmph!" Old Theo's snort was more emphatic. "God A'mighty never intended his human critters to be allus a-travelin' around. Effen He did, he'd a give 'em wings——"

"Well, He's taught them how to make wings for themselves, hasn't He?" retorted the girl, as she flung the dish cloth over the back of a chair and ran down the ricketty porch steps. "Where's the airship?"

Humphrey pointed to the black spot that in the last few moments had approached so close that its outline and the black dots of passengers were clearly visible. Lora turned to fling him an excited invitation.

"Come on down to the wharf, pap," she cried. "We can see it better there—why, I do believe it's coming this way!" Her rounded brown arm went up to shade the gray eyes, no less keen than her father's, as she watched the plane that slowly began to circle and in each wide sweep came closer and closer to the earth.

The old man demurred. Not even the appearance

of the all too occasional flying machine (and there had been several to pass his ocean-front doorway since the war) could long keep him from a consideration of his usual routine.

"I want my dinner," he complained, frowning at the oncoming plane. "I'm hungry!"

"Oh, come on, pap! Be a sport! You can eat the rest of the day!" urged the girl.

With some reluctance, Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey got lumberingly to his big feet to follow his daughter whose own flying white-shod feet were carrying her swiftly down to the small planked space reaching out into the waters of the inlet and which she and her father were pleased to designate as the wharf, since it was here that their three small skiffs and one flat-bottomed duck boat were tied.

Raptly the girl gazed skyward. The big machine was making such wide swoops as it circled, now soaring a moment, now almost touching the water, that her heart was in her throat as she watched, her hands clasped tightly as she eagerly marveled at the skill that made it possible for man to fly. By the time old Theo's more leisurely progress had brought him to her side on the little wharf, the big man-bird was abreast of them. They saw the four men passengers, with their protecting belts, and the pilot who looked neither to right or left but kept his eyes straight before

him as he steered the huge machine. Hails came to them. They could make out words.

"Hallo, there, Humphrey!" yelled a voice.

"Well, I'm consarned!" All the old guide's apathy was gone. "Ef it hain't that Cardwell! A-flyin' here when the duck's are all a-flying the other way. Wonder what he wants in May!"

Lora Humphrey was not listening. Her eyes were fastened on the flying boat and the pilot whose grim white face she had seen as the boat made its last low circle. Up, up went the machine, but it careened like a wild thing as it whirred above them, and she could see the men cling to their belts as it righted itself. The put-put of the motor and its stuttering stops told even her little-experienced ears that something had suddenly gone wrong. Her strong little brown hands went upward as though in a futile effort to help the big machine that wobbled from side to side, then came down to clutch at her father's arm.

"Oh, pap!" she wailed. "They'll——"

Once more the hydroplane righted itself as Don gritted his teeth and flung his body over to balance it by sheer material weight. It was coming down again. The engine gave a sickening cough and went dead. Like the pointed nose of a retriever in full tilt, the machine sought the water. But its angle was too sharp. Don was tugging at the wheel which did not

respond any more than did the biceps of the old man which were clutched in a panicky grip by the girl who huddled at his side. Down! Down! For a moment it seemed to straighten itself out a bit. Would they make it? Lora Humphrey and her father could see the passengers who had realized their danger hurriedly pulling at their belts as their pilot tugged at his wheel. Another second! One more closer to eternity. The air that was cut by the flying-boat rushed swiftly by the faces of the two watchers. The machine struck the water. Lora Humphrey closed her eyes for the second it struck—involuntarily. She opened them as quickly at the resounding splash of the big machine as it rolled it over on its side wobbling for an infinitesimal space before it gave up the struggle and turned turtle in the green sizzling waters of the sound—fifty feet from where the girl and her father watched.

They saw the men hurled outward—saw them rise, one after the other, in that space of a moment they stood there. Save for the whirring and splashing of the propeller blades, all was dead silence. One agonized glance the girl gave her father, as her eyes looked deeply into his. No word was spoken, but with a concerted movement father and daughter leaped from the wharf and headed for the swishing waters that marked the death struggles of the big man-bird.

Youth and a greater practice served Lora Hum-

phrey, so that it was the girl, but little hampered by the clinging of her yellow gingham gown, who first reached the damaged craft where one man who was pinned beneath the cockpit, the forepart of his body submerged, his feet kicking the water into a foam, had not been able to free himself. Four other figures were striking out for the beach.

In spite of all her efforts, Lora Humphrey could not loosen the man whose efforts were growing less and less. She must dive, she knew in the moment she considered the matter, her hand resting on a propeller blade that was lapping in the water.

It was but the work of a moment for the girl who spent so much time in the water to dive and loosen the bits of *enfillage* that pinned the man she had come to rescue, but before it was accomplished his feet were no longer kicking the water.

It was a dead weight—a water-logged body—all that for the moment was left of Harrison Steele that Lora Humphrey pulled out on the shell-strewn beach a few moments later.

They were an awe-stricken company who gathered about the rescued man, but no time was lost in beginning resuscitation. Five, ten minutes went by. Harrison Steele showed no sign of returning consciousness.

"Do you think he can make it?" asked Cardwell, as

he turned exhausted eyes to Lora Humphrey who had never ceased her efforts as she mechanically pumped the half-drowned man's arms up and down.

"If he can get back his vitality after the water's out," she found breath to answer. To her father she nodded. "Go up to the house and get the jug!" she ordered. "He's coming around——"

Billy Meade stared at their patient as he turned him over and remarked dryly, as he noted the color that began to show and the fluttering eyelids: "He'll do! Never cared a great deal for water anyway."

Humphrey's lumbering long hulk made the trip to his house and returned with the jug his daughter had ordered in record time. She took it and poured down her unprotesting victim's throat his first drink of bootleg whiskey—Monkey Rum, they called it out there in the hommocks country where it was made and where they didn't know a lot about Mr. Volstead and cared a lot less. That Monkey Rum in its natural state was possessed of a flavor and odor that had been known to make many a strong man forswear moonshine forever was a matter, though, that Harrison Steele knew nothing of and cared less. His eyes opened after the second enforced swallow.

"B-r-r-r-!" said Harrison Steele.

It was his salutation to the North Carolina substitute for the thing the search for which had brought

him on its first leg to within an inch of death. Weakly he tried to sit up. Lora Humphrey drew a sigh of relief as she drew back, but it was on her face that the broker's eyes fastened in his first moments of consciousness. Then his gaze turned to take in the others.

"Where——" he began weakly.

Clement Ashley stopped for the first time since the girl had brought Steele ashore to think of himself. He started to squeeze the waters of Bogue Sound from his once immaculate sport suit.

"Where are you, you want to ask?" he queried of Steele, before the broker could find strength to finish his sentence. "Well, you're not in heaven yet, old-timer, but——" and his eyes glanced appreciatively at Lora Humphrey, whose soft, young, feminine curves were so unconsciously displayed in the water-soaked gingham bungalow apron—"but darned near it, I'd say."

Unheeding, the girl bent over the fast-rousing man.

"All right, now?" she asked soothingly.

"Will be," he coughed, "as soon as I get this cocktail of gasoline and salt water assimilated, but—but—what—what——" He stopped stammeringly.

Again it was the irrepressible Ashley who answered —Ashley, more irrepressible than ever in his happiness at his friend's narrow escape.

"You'd like to know what happened?" he queried,

and he tried, with scant success, to give to his salt-water-soaked mustache its accustomed perky tilt. "Well, I'll tell you. It looks as though one perfectly good personal-liberty party had descended flat on its more or less well-known flitter right in the Atlantic Ocean!"

CHAPTER V

"RIGHT peart fer a man who come so near a-drownin', hain't he, doc?"

Old Theo looked down at Harrison Steele who lay in bed in the spare room of the Humphrey home, with the morning sunlight streaming softly in through the white-curtained windows and making rainbows of the gay covers of his patchwork quilt with its sunrise pattern. He addressed Dr. Parson, who had again ridden over from Swansboro in the morning, after leaving the patient in the capable hands of Lora Humphrey the night before. The village doctor smiled, but there was something in his professional manner that showed he did not intend to make too easy a case of the New Yorker. Such grist did not often come to his mill.

"He has been well cared for," he offered. "I don't often have any one like Miss Lora to look after my patients, but he must stay in bed for a while and take it easy——"

Harrison Steele looked up with a smile.

"I'm not much the staying in bed kind, doctor," he said, but then his eyes wandered to Lora Humphrey

who had donned one of the uniforms she had not used since her days of nursing in an American convalescent hospital during the war, and his expression changed. "I'll be all right, I'm sure," he agreed, adding with a smile at the girl who was busying herself with his pillows, "but I guess you're right—I'm not feeling so strong——" He stretched his long length luxuriously in the bright-coverleted bed, and tried to take on the expression of an invalid.

Watching, Clement Ashley could scarcely believe his eyes. The by-play had not escaped him any more than it had Cardwell and Meade. Surprised glances passed between the friends who had never known Harrison Steele to give more than a passing glance to any woman. There was something in his eyes now, though, as he glanced at Lora Humphrey. Could that accident have gone to his head?

Ashley grinned. "Then we'll have to count you out of the party over at the lodge, eh?" he asked. "Don't feel you're going to be strong enough to take a crack at a few ducks, or marsh hens or poke out a few alligators or sea turtles with us?"

Steele shook his head weakly, his eyes surreptitiously glancing at Lora Humphrey.

"The doctor knows best," he declared. "I'm afraid it would be chilly over there, too—the lodge hasn't been opened this spring has it, Cardwell?"

"Wall, now, I reckon ye're right." It was the old man who put in his word. "I 'low it's about two blankets and a couple of comf'tables warmer over here than on the island. Ye'd better stay right here a while, and let Lory fix ye up. Jes' wait a shake, doc," he called to Dr. Parson who had got his bag closed and was rising to go. "Wait till I saddle up my pony and I'll mosey along with ye. Got to stop at Nigger Henry's cabin to git him to come up and cook fer these fellers, and goin' on in to Swansboro fer some more supplies. Kind o' low jes' now over at the lodge, 'count o' not expectin' anybody. I've got a raft o' hens and a good cow beast, but from the looks of these chaps and the way they been a-puttin' away biscuits, I 'low they'll want a sight more than milk and eggs and marsh hens."

"Don't forget to stop at the telegraph office to see if a message has come," called Cardwell, before the door closed softly behind the lumbering old man and the doctor.

For, in spite of the accident to the airplane which only the quick heroic action of Lora Humphrey had kept from ending in tragedy, they had not forgotten the original purpose of their expedition, and when the old man had hurriedly ridden on his "pony beast" to the Cedar Point Ferry and into Swansboro, the metropolis of the district with its five or six hundred

souls and its real telegraph office, he had carried with him a message to Captain McMaster at Miami to make all possible speed with the *Falcon* to Bogue Inlet. A glance at the wrecked plane had been sufficient to show that, so far as it was concerned in its present state, all bets were off. They had learned that there was a daily freight and passenger boat plying between Swansboro and Morehead City, and already Don Baldwin was making plans for salvaging his plane and taking it to the latter place where a repair station for airplanes was operated by the Government, so that he might have it put in readiness for any future use his companions should have for it.

"Didn't I tell you Don was a sport?" commented Meade, in a satisfied manner when they watched the aviator paddling around in the waters of the Inlet poking at the wreckage. "Didn't I tell you he wouldn't give up? He wants to be in this thing to the finish——"

"He'll have to get a move on, then," remarked Cardwell, dryly. "The *Falcon* can make some time!"

On the morning after the accident, the entire party had gathered in the Humphrey spare room to hear the verdict of Dr. Parson as to Steele's condition. It would put a decided crimp into their plans should the head of the party not make a rapid recovery. As they had looked at the big broker lying there so com-

fortably, however, all their doubts were at rest—at least as to his physical condition. They could hardly understand why he had not risen and come to breakfast with them. What they had seen later had been explanatory.

Lora Humphrey spoke when the doctor and her father had gone.

"You're all right?" she asked, as she gave the coverlet a final pat. "I must be looking after the dinner, now, but if you need me——" She pushed the small table beside his bed a little closer, and indicated the bell she had placed on it. "Nobody's going to think dinner's ready if they hear you ringing the dinner bell around here—it's the only one we have," apologetically.

Harrison Steele, regardless of his friends who sat watching, reached up for the girl's hands which he caught with all the eagerness of a youth.

"I'm all right," he assured, "thanks to you! You haven't even given me a good chance to thank you for what——"

Embarrassed, the girl quietly withdrew her hands.

"It was nothing—nothing—nothing——" she declared, "just what anybody——"

And before Harrison Steele could say another word, she had sped lightly from the room. The broker's friends caught the look of dawning adoration in their

companion's eyes, as the big man in the bed watched her go.

Cardwell got up and sat down on the bed.

"You're sure you feel all right?" he began, but his solicitous inquiry was interrupted by one in a still more mockingly solicitous tone from Clement Ashley.

"Say, old chaps," he inquired, as he bent a sad look on the man in the bed, "don't you think it would be better to send for a couple of head doctors?"

Steele's face flamed a deep scarlet.

"Shut up!" he roared, in the usual tone he employed to Ashley.

The other subsided.

"I guess he'll live till morning," he nodded.

But already, Steele's expression had changed; had become more serious; half apologetic; half shamefaced.

"Don't know that I blame you fellows altogether," he told them. "Don't quite understand myself, but—er—maybe that accident did do something to me—don't know that I ever thought any woman before——"

It was Meade, understanding Meade, who changed the subject.

"What about our plans?" he asked. "We'll go over to the lodge, of course——"

"All except our invalid," mocked Ashley, "who

needs it 'two blankets and a couple o' comf'tables warmer.' "

They did not notice him.

"We'll just take it easy till Captain McMaster gets here," Cardwell took up the conversation, "and I think you'll all find plenty to do over on the island—and have the time of your life hunting and fishing with old Theo as guide. Say, he's a card. Just get him to talking. Better than a vaudeville. Likes to think of himself as a devil with the ladies—or that he once was, at any rate. As far as I can make out he was once a sort of prototype of the Spaniard—what's his name, in 'The Four Horsemen' who did so much to populate his section of South America. From what he insinuates, there's more than one little tad (some older ones, too, likely) that by rights could call him 'pap.' He likes to think of himself as a pretty gay old boy, yet, too, but I believe most of his time is spent in sitting around ruminating over the time he was 'a-travelin' some as fer as wimmen were consarned.' "

A general laugh went up from the party at Cardwell's mimicry of his guide and their host.

"Pretty husky old boy, though, still—you'll have to hand him that," was Ashley's comment, as he regarded his own none too well-developed figure in its rough dried tweeds. Though he had himself not been impressed by Lora Humphrey, any more than he usually was by any pretty face, still it was a matter of much concern to the young man always so proud of his smart appearance before one of the opposite sex, that he had had to appear before the girl in such garments—more, that he would have to keep on wearing them for some time to come, for of course, it had not been possible to carry much luggage in the airplane, and each man had brought just what was necessary.

"I'll say so," nodded Cardwell, firmly. "Why, you chaps can't have any notion of the old fellow's strength—and he takes it so as a matter of course. It was that that first impressed me with him and ended with this arrangement of ours which has been so mutually satisfactory; satisfactory for the old man because he's being paid real money for doing what he likes best to do; likewise with me because I know I have the best guide and caretaker that a man could wish for, and that my lodge and game preserve are in capable hands."

"How did you ever happen to come on this place, anyhow, Cardwell?" asked Steele, his interest suddenly allowing him to forget how ill he was. "Don't believe you ever told me."

Cardwell laughed.

"More or less an accident," he began, but again it was Ashley who interrupted.

"Must one always have them to land anywhere along this part of the North Carolina coast?" he queried, wonderingly.

Cardwell went on without noticing the interruption.

"Probably you know," he related," that through Bogue Sound out here, runs the inland waterway which is the route taken by the lighter draft yachts on their winter pilgrimages between the north and the Florida waters. Most of it is pretty clear, but on the western side the sound is marshy, and the channel in this portion winds greatly—making it a pretty ticklish piece of piloting work for anyone who doesn't know the course well. I was on my way to Florida a couple of years ago, and like a lot of other yachtsmen, I thought that what I didn't know about steering wasn't in the books. The channel lights that have been placed out there by the Government are not as well located as they might be, though, and I had that partly, as well as my own foolhardiness to thank for coming to grief.

"Before I knew what had happened, I had run my craft spang up on a sand bar. We had all hands working hard for an hour, but not a thing stirring. Might have been there yet, if old Humphrey hadn't bobbed up from those marshes, poling his skiff home from a duck hunt. Well, sir, that old bird just stepped right out of his skiff into the shallow water

covering the bar, where my craft's nose was resting, ordered all hands astern, and with a grunt and a lift of those ponderous shoulders of his, he pushed us off into the deeper waters of the channel. Then he poled his skiff alongside us and chucked on deck a brace of the finest mallards you ever saw. Wouldn't take a cent, either.

"Those mallards were so fine that I kept thinking about them, and when I came back from Florida later, I stopped over here for a try at the hunting. In the end, he helped me buy the island and put up the lodge. And I'll say we've kept it one of the most exclusive a man ever owned—except for one part. Down near the end to the eastward, there's a little band of the most primitive squatters you ever saw—we'll go down and look them over some day—they've made up their minds they have a right to the place and to their living by fishing and scalloping, and I for one don't care much about taking a chance of proving them wrong. The last man who undertook to tell one of them to go away from there, I understand, was found on the beach quite as dead as the chap he had been trying to argue with. At any rate, they're beside the point. They won't interfere with our hunting and fishing, nor will they interfere with anything else we try to do if we don't bother them. Don't believe they'd

know what we were up to if we sailed right up to the beach with half the wet stuff in Bermuda——"

"Which recalls to me," put in Meade with his slow smile, "that our purpose wasn't altogether to hunt or fish or to watch Steele through any mental aberrations. What are the plans?"

Steele was considering. Somehow, as he lay there, and with the memory of Lora Humphrey's smile fresh with him, the exploit they had undertaken didn't seem half so worth while; nor did his proving that he could have his own way in spite of laws appear quite so alluring.

"I suppose we can't do much till we hear from Captain McMaster and know when he'll get here," he commented. "There isn't anything in such a rushing hurry——"

"Umm! I assume not——" Clem Ashley's smile was dry, but the twinkle in his eyes was illuminative.

"I'll be all right in a few days, no doubt," went on the man who had come so near drowning, "and we can make more complete plans. In the meantime——"

From outside came a long hail. Cardwell pulled aside the curtains to glance out.

"Hmmph!" he remarked. "Old Theo has been a travelin' some again, or we've been killing more time here with Steele than we thought. He's got the nigger with him, too. Guess we'd better 'mosey.' Well, so

long, Steele—take care of yourself." As he turned to the door, the others rose to follow.

"Now, don't go and get feverish, old man," Ashley remonstrated with the man in the bed. "We're going to need you. I, for one, can't say I can go long on North Carolina Monkey Rum." He dodged the pillow Steele flung at him in fury, and gave him a last mocking grin from the doorway.

At the wharf, Humphrey and the negro who was to cook for the party were waiting. A small launch put-putted importantly as the two stowed the few belongings of the hunting party who stepped aboard. The strong brown hands of the old guide turned the wheel and swung them about into midchannel, headed down the inlet for the landing place hidden in a grove of live oaks, with their background of virgin pine, sweet bay and cypress trees—groves themselves making other hiding places for the wild things the men in the chattering motor boat were going to seek. That island which was taking on clearer shape to the eyes of the city men guided by the big gangling North Carolinian proger was a hunters' paradise; a small, sweetly-wooded retreat for deer and turkeys; squirrels, 'possums and coons; foxes and wild cats; bears, too —and goats, hundreds of them, wild and lithe—goats like those many another hunter has climbed the Rocky Mountain fastnesses to find.

Cardwell turned his eyes from contemplation of his own island preserve as the sound of a second motor engine came to his ears.

"Halloo!" he remarked, as his eyes caught sight of a man in a swift-running gasoline surf boat which was fast coming abreast of them. "Another hunter?"

Old Theo shaded his eyes from the sun glinting on the rippling surface of the inlet with his big hand, and looked over the small craft's solitary occupant.

"That'll be Hal Everett," he informed. "Got time off from the Coast Guard likely." A knowing grin widened his big mouth till his yellow tobacco-stained teeth glowed. "I 'low he'll be on his way over to see Lory—but I mean to say she'll be kind o' too busy fer sparkin'——"

Cardwell laughed, but his attention was turned once more to the island which was looming up before them. On the face of Clement Ashley there was an impish grin as his eyes took in the brawny figure of the coast guard whose boat swept by them. In those eyes was something which seemed to wonder if Steele wasn't going to find pretty rough going with the hommocks beauty who was nursing him, if here was his rival.

CHAPTER VI

PERHAPS at some time it may have been your experience to witness a coast guard at work. If so, whatever other exciting moments may come into your life, you will never forget the thrill that came as you saw these hardy men who guard life along the length of the whole eastern coast of the United States, battling with wind and waves—exerting superhuman strength and daring to reach sea-menaced mariners. Froth-covered waves that hide the ship where cling specks of humanity waiting for aid mean nothing to these men as they ride in their surf boats into watery hills and valleys to reach an endangered vessel. And the breeches buoy! There is the thrill! As it goes sailing out across an angry sea to be caught by ship-wrecked mariners, hurled with unerring aim by the sturdy arm of a coast-guardsman!

Except when some especially spectacular rescue is made, though, news of which is sent by telegraph to the great newspapers, little is ever heard of these guards by the world at large. Only in the more isolated districts do they come into their own—spots where people are few, when the coast guards and their stations become social units. Such a place was that

portion of the North Carolina coast where lay Bogue Island and Grayson Cardwell's hunting preserve. The Coast Guard station of Bogue Inlet (as it was referred to) was on the extreme end of the island which Cardwell had purchased, but smaller stations lay all along the hilly sand of the seaward side of the island. Probably in no other stretch along the entire coast from Maine to Florida is the sea more treacherous than along this portion of coast. It is here that sudden squalls are at their greatest fury, and the danger to craft that hug the coast is here greatest because of the submerged sand bars that reach far out into the sea. Indeed, the treachery of the coast of the Carolinas, and in particular of that that lies off Bogue Island has become historical, for it was along this portion of sea coast that the pirates of old patrolled most freely in the hope of booty from endangered vessels which could be driven on the rocks; and more, history records tales of more than one pirate craft which itself became a victim of the hungry sea at this point. Though so many years have passed since either Captain Kidd or Morgan or the still more infamous Black Beard sailed the main, the descendants of the North Carolinians of the time of those pirate chiefs have never ceased to believe in tales of the treasure that was hastily buried when ships were wrecked—nor to search for it.

Like all of their kind, the crew of the Coast Guard station at Bogue Inlet were a brave and hardy lot. More than one sea-faring man safe in harbor through their efforts tells tales of brave rescues at their hands either by boat through the raging surf, or by breeches buoy whose cable was shot across a wreck when the breakers were so wild that it seemed past all efforts of mere man to conquer the monster of the deep. But situated as they were, so near that hommock country where people were few, and where human companionship was worth more than any social distinction, the men of the coast guard were luckier than some others who made life saving at sea their business in that they had become an integral part of the social community—a far greater part indeed, than others in the same locality—say the squatters on his island to whom Cardwell took exception, but whom he believed it to be the greater part of valor not to disturb.

Of all the members of the crew of the Bogue Inlet Coast Guard Station, perhaps none was so well known as Hal Everett, the brawny oarsman Cardwell's camping party had encountered. Many things had gone to make up his fame, or notoriety, one might rather say, in the community, for it could not with any truth be said that Hal was known for any especial lovable qualities, or for personal popularity. True, he had enough and to spare of that commodity in some

quarters, but the favor which he had found in the eyes of many of the women of the hommock country and in Swansboro had not further endeared him to his masculine companions. Not even with his team mates was he in anywise a favorite, for a notoriously ungovernable temper had long since given him a reputation that was not enviable, and only women who saw in him an unusually personable male of the brawny type so much admired in that country, could overlook this. Unlike most other coast guardsmen, too, he was at times inclined to look all too lovingly on the moonshine when it was clearest, and had he not been under an easy-going and good-hearted captain, he would long ago have ceased to be a member of the crew.

Old Theo summed up to Cardwell and his guests, the opinion of the neighborhood in regard to Hal Everett, as they watched the big, browned life-saver steering his small craft up the inlet with perfect knowledge of the winding channel.

"Reckon you-all 'll find you kin git along without Hal's company should he come along by the lodge. Don't nowise seem to be able to hold his licker and be friendly. Got a bad habit of momocking up folks that don't see his ways when he's like that—most of them hereabouts are skeered of him when he's been hittin' the Monkey Rum——"

Clement Ashley turned on the old man with surprise.

"But didn't you just say he was probably going to see your daughter?" he queried.

The old man shifted his quid, shot a long stream out into the waters of the sound and grinned.

"Pshaw!" he boasted. "I ain't skeered of him—and I 'low Lory, she hain't any. She can tell him the time o' day if need be—but he lies pretty low with her. Them Swansboro women been making a fool of Hal come a long time, but I will say for him he never seemed to have much time for wimmen till Lory come home——"

"Good taste, at any rate," was the little man's comment, as their boat shot into a point ashore, its nose beached neatly by the old guide with his poling stick.

Could anything favorable have been said for Hal Everett aside from a recognition of his bravery which amounted almost to recklessness, it was what Humphrey had intimated. He was used to being admired by the women of the neighborhood; it was an old story, and one that had never particularly interested him until his gaze had rested one day on Lora Humphrey, returned from the 'Westward.' He had first seen her battling with the surf on the outer side of Bogue Island, and his admiration for the girl's courage had been aroused even before he saw her. Later,

when he had come to know her, as was inevitable in that community where everyone met everyone else, he had been bowled over for the first time in his life. The girl's natural beauty, added to the grace and charm she had acquired during her stay outside the hommock country had brought him a more than willing captive to her chariot wheel. But for once in his life, Hal Everett came to realize that his sparkling black eyes and magnificent physique were not enough to make a conquest in their turn. Lora Humphrey had been civil to the coast guard, had even not repulsed his efforts at friendly relationship, but she had turned a cold shoulder on all his efforts to bring them nearer. The tales she had heard of the man's exploits when off duty at Swansboro had not furthered her would-be-wooer's interests with her. Lora Humphrey had no mind for brawls, even though the gossips admiringly told how Hal Everett had always come out winner in his favorite game of fisticuffs. Not even her disapproval, however, had dampened the man's ardor, and he had come to insist, in the vernacular of the neighborhood that the daughter of old Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey was "his girl." His attentions to her had done one thing for him. No longer did he head straight for Swansboro and Monkey Rum when off duty. It was to the home of the Humphreys that he first wended his way. It was on one

of these visits that Hal Everett was bent when he had encountered the boatload of sportsmen in charge of the man he yearned to call father-in-law. He had given them but a casual glance. He could not imagine that in any way could these men from the north be concerned in his affairs, or at least with his very present affair of being on love-making bent.

Lora Humphrey had brought her patient a steaming bowl of broth and had held it while Harrison Steele ate.

It was not of his nourishment that the broker was thinking, however, as his hand moved slowly with the spoon from bowl to mouth, friendlily guided by the girl who sat beside him in her crisp white uniform. His eyes were on the soft tint of her cosmeticless skin, on the soft tendrils of her dusky hair which the breeze from the window stirred against her curved young cheeks.

He finished the last mouthful with a regretful sigh and sank back among his pillows. Lora Humphrey put the bowl on the table and turned to shake up her patient's pillows. Neither of them had ears for the slight scraping which announced the beaching of Hal Everett's boat on the sands down beside the Humphrey's wharf.

With sudden impulse Harrison Steele caught at one

of the girl's capable hands as they smoothed the whiteness of the fluffy pillows beneath his head.

"It looks like I'm always to be more indebted to you, Miss Humphrey, doesn't it?" he asked, a smile lighting up the features that his cosmopolite life had given a tinge of hardness. "First you save me—then you wait on me like a youngster—and you won't even let me thank you——"

Lora Humphrey didn't release her hands for a moment. She smiled down at Steele, and there was something of motherly tenderness in her eyes—the tenderness so often seen in the eyes of one to whom nursing the sick back to health, making easier the ills of humankind, is a moving impulse.

"Then thank me by getting well and strong," she told him. "I know your friends will thank you, too—they looked a little woe-begone and as though they were going to miss you."

The doors of the Humphrey home were opened wide as Hal Everett swung his giant form along the upward path leading to them from the beach. He made for them. The ceremony of knocking and waiting to be invited to enter was almost an unknown thing in the countryside, so he strode across the rickety porch and through the open doors with only the creaking of a remonstrating board to announce his arrival. In the center of the "sitting room" which adjoined

the guest room to which Steele had been carried, the big coast guardsman stood stock still. A quiver shook his massive frame. Beneath the tan of many weathers, his face went white. Muscles tensed, and the great body drew less tall as his unconscious will brought him into the half crouching attitude of a mountain tiger about to spring on its prey.

It was on this strange figure with its blazing eyes and bared teeth that Lora Humphrey and Harrison Steele, roused by the sound of a hissing breath, quick drawn, looked out through the open doors of the bedroom.

"Hal!" Lora Humphrey disengaged her hands from the holding clasp of the broker and leapt the half length of the room to face Everett from the doorway. "Hal!" she repeated, but only the sneer of the man whose piercing black eyes looked over her shoulder to the strange man on the bed, answered her. All that Lora Humphrey had ever heard of this man—of the danger he meant when aroused—flashed over her. That he was aroused now as never before was only too evident. He believed there was reason—reason the girl, too, knew well, for none knew better than she how the natives of her home looked upon a woman's being in the bedroom of a strange man. That she might be there in a nurse's capacity made no difference; Hal Everett was one of those who had

never accustomed themselves to the notion. And he had seen her holding the strange man's hands. Strangely enough, though, in the moments while the girl stood there, her level gaze holding the coast guardsman who stood in the middle of the floor, it flashed over her that it was not of herself she was thinking. Steele! The man from the northern city whom she had rescued from death. No harm must come to him.

In lowered tones she spoke to Everett.

"Just take a seat on the porch, Hal," she invited, "I'll be with you in a minute."

Only a further tensing of the man's muscles answered her. His eyes, mad with the hate of a wild beast's, bored past her into the room where Steele lay on his white pillows. He started forward a step as he crouched. Lora Humphrey's hand went up toward him in an imperious movement.

"Hal Everett!" she commanded. "I have a patient here—a man who has been near death! He must not be disturbed! Do you—un-der-stand!" The last word was uttered with all the firmness of the commanding tones of a superior officer. Another sneer was her answer.

For moments—minutes, they stood facing each other—the brawny man who could have broken her in his hands, and the slender determined girl whose

level eyes were undermining his intentions as no show of human brawn could have done. Slowly the gaze of his fire-glancing black eyes lowered before that gaze. Slowly his body came out of the crouch as he half straightened.

Lora Humphrey's upraised hand came as cautiously down until it indicated the open doorway of the sitting room. When she spoke, her voice was soft—so soft that it was almost a purr.

"I think you'd better be going now, Hal," she murmured.

Wordless the big man had been since his feet had first become rooted in that spot in the sitting room through the door of which he had beheld the tableau that had maddened him. Wordless he was as he hesitated one moment more, then, with a vicious glance over the girl's shoulder at the man on the bed, he turned and stalked from the house of the woman he loved—the woman he had raised on a pedestal so high above those of her sex in the small part of the world he knew—the woman he now believed his own eyes had shown him to be faithless, or at the least, to be slightly tarnished. And it was with revenge in his half civilized heart—revenge to be had from the man he had left in the girl's home—that he flung himself headlong down the path he had traversed but a few moments before with a light heart, and leapt into his

waiting surf boat. Savage strokes with his pole hurled him far out into the sound before he headed his craft in the direction of Swansboro. Swansboro and—Monkey Rum!

For moments more Lora Humphrey stood in the doorway from which she had watched the retreat of the man she knew had come to woo her. A slight distressed sound from the motionless figure on the bed in her spare room made her turn. But her eyes showed none of the fear that a while before she had felt for Steele's safety. From his vantage point, Steele had missed no bit of the quickly-played drama. His face held deep concern, for it had needed no words to convey to him that he had been the unwitting cause of trouble between Lora and to him the unknown man whom he could have no doubt, however, held soft feelings for the girl who was already filling such an unaccustomed place in his, Steele's, own heart. But he could find no words.

"I'm sorry," was what he said at last. "If I had known——"

Lora Humphrey's merry laugh rang out.

"Oh, wasn't he funny!" she pealed. "He ought to go on the stage!"

"But——" again began Steele. He was trying to make the girl out. Was she acting for his benefit?

"Oh, you don't know Hal Everett!" she laughed.

"He—he's *so* serious!" Again the infectious laugh rang out. A laugh that for all its life didn't altogether fool the man who for so many years had made it his business to read motives and thoughts from his fellowmen's (sometimes women's) light talk and laughter. "Why, do you know," and the giggle became bubbling, "I really believe he was jealous! Wasn't it funny?"

Harrison Steele looked up into the face of the girl—a face into which the rich red blood had flowed unbidden. Something seemed to grip him inside. It was a something which he could not understand; something so new, yet so sweet, he would not have missed it for worlds of adventure. His own smile was shy (if the smile of a man of the world can be so characterized); wistful.

"Was it?" he asked simply. His eyes met those of the girl who hurried toward the door with her arms filled with the remains of his meal.

At the door Lora Humphrey stopped and held up an admonishing finger.

"Now you mustn't talk any more—for an hour or two at least," was her command. "You must sleep. And—if you do as I say, I'll let your friends come and talk to you again to-night—tell you about their shooting to-day and every thing——"

"There are so many things I would rather hear

about——" Harrison Steele's voice held the note of querulousness of a child. "I want to know all about——" Almost he had told the girl again how much he wanted to know about her. He checked himself as he added: "This is such an interesting part of the country—so little known and all that—couldn't I persuade you to tell me something about it? Wasn't it right about here that old Cap Kidd and Morgan and some of those old birds used to hang out? Seems to me I heard Cardwell bragging something of the kind——"

"Maybe he was talking about Teach's Hole," remembered the girl. "That isn't so many miles from here. It was where Edward Teach or Thatch, I believe you Northerners call our old pirate (we call him Black Beard hereabouts) came to the no-good end all the story books tell about of his kind. Oh, most anybody around here can tell you dozens and dozens of tales about Captain Kidd and Black Beard and the rest!"

"But won't you tell me?" Those who knew Harrison Steele as the commanding force in a Wall Street raid would not have recognized the pleading in his voice.

Lora Humphrey passed through the door into the sitting room and half closed it.

"Go to sleep now," she cooed, "and we'll see. Maybe!"

The door closed softly.

As she stood on the outside of the closed portal and peered out into the sunlight at the way Hal Everett had taken, a seriousness came to the eyes that a moment before had been laughing. Lora Humphrey remembered the look on the face of the man who had come to woo her. She remembered his reputation. Then there came surging over her the softness of feeling she had come to know since she had carried Harrison Steele out of the sea to life and had knelt by his side to look into his eyes opening into life. A fear—a deep fear came into her own. For the child of the hommocks was, in the vernacular of her own people "skeered" of what might happen to the man she had so unwittingly and in so short a time come to love.

CHAPTER VII

THE violet veil of the coastal twilight was dropping softly over purpling water and gray-green bays and cypresses of the hommock land when Hal Everett's surf boat once more grated on the pebbly beach of Bogue Sound a winding mile or so further down from the small wharf in front of the Humphrey home.

Hours had passed since he had poled up the inlet to visit Lora Humphrey and had seen her in such intimate converse with the strange man who had roused his ire to the danger point. They had been hours spent in the little town of Swansboro out on the point where the White Oak River mingles its flow with the more quiet waters of the Sound before passing through Bogue Inlet to the turbulent Atlantic. It had not taken the coast guardsman, maddened as he was, long to run his boat to the little town built in the water with its stores and houses on pilings. With the sureness of one who knows his destination he had poled himself right to the back door of a little store where he knew he could get what he wanted. For in the wilderness back of Bogue, there was more corn liquor

and Monkey Rum produced and brought into the small town in trade than there was mere corn from the meager fields, or grain from the still less intensely cultivated patches of grain.

Hal Everett considered himself in need of drink. Drink he got, with no effort other than asking for it in that town where the name of Volstead held as vague a meaning as though it might have been one connected with history a hundred years before. As the hot burning fluid had poured down his eager maw, more and more fixed had become his determination for revenge. Strangely enough, his ideas had not run along the usual route of physical violence. There must be something more. His drink-befuddled mind slowly worked itself around to the point of action. It was with vast surprise that the hangers-on in the little river-town store saw Hal Everett, coast guardsman on his off day, leave the urgings of his companions to have more, and leap into his boat and put off himself down stream before the close of day.

The amazing capacity of Hal Everett in matters alcoholic, however, had left him in possession of his faculties; but as his boat scraped on the beach and he leaped ankle deep into the sand, there was something in his set features to show that a new purpose had been born. Whether or not this was not greatly an alcoholic exaltation, not even he could have told, but

as he drew his boat closer inshore and turned toward the clump of trees huddling in a hilly depression all but hiding the rambling log house in their shade, Hal Everett showed that action was the thing he wanted; action the thing he was determined to have.

A hail from the water made him stop short.

"Hi, there! Goin' my way?"

Out of the dusk falling over the graying waters, Uncle Billy Peter Willis poled his skiff with the sureness of much practice beside that of Hal Everett and with an agility astonishing in one of his age leapt out on the sands.

"Howdy, Uncle Billy Peter," greeted the coastman. "Thought I'd stop by for the time of day—Huntin'?" he inquired as the old man shipped the rifle he had held in the crook of his arm.

Old man Willis, he of the benign countenance and benevolent beard, who had so successfully evaded the watchfulness of old Theo Humphrey, shook his head mournfully.

"What chance has a man to get his rights that God Almighty meant for him," he whined, "when a lot of folks from the North'ard is all time comin' down here and thinkin' they kin buy all His feathered critters that was meant for feedin' His lambs—I mean to say," and Uncle Billy Peter Willis who didn't like to spend money or effort getting food for himself

when it was flying about in another's preserve, turned and shook his fist in the direction of the Cardwell camp and Theophilus Humphrey's home. "I mean to say," he repeated, "that they've muched that proger Humphrey so's he won't let a man git a wild goat." So intent was he on his own wrongs that the old man did not notice the darkening flush that spread over Hal Everett's browned countenance at his mention of Humphrey.

"No," he went on, "no, son, I only been polin' a couple o' shoats and a bag o' eggs down to the East-'ard to Cap Taylor's boat to be took to Morehead. Even pore folks got to live, and sakes alive, but I've got my own troubles now——" He shook his white head mournfully. "That second gal o' mine dyin' like she did and leavin' me and Sal to keer for a knee baby and a breast one. Seems like they'd drink up all my cow beasts would give did I let 'em."

Uncle Billy Peter rambled on, heedless as to whether the man who had come to pass the time of day was listening or not. But it was a sharp glance he gave in Everett's direction to see whether he was noticed, as his hand slid down into the bottom of his skiff and something limp and feathered found a hiding place beneath his shabby coat.

"Come on up to the cabin," he invited, "and set

awhile. I'll be moseyin' over to the Holiness prayer meetin' right soon, and——"

Hal Everett pretended a certain shyness.

"I been a thinkin' a heap about what you been tellin' me about the Holiness folks, Uncle Billy Peter," he offered, "and seein' as I'm in what you might call a pree-carous business, I 'lowed as how I'd like to talk to you some more about that there salvation you was tellin' about, and——"

Uncle Billy Peter Willis lifted up his gnarled old hands.

"Praise be!" he thundered. "Another lamb for the fold!"

They started their climb of the short hill to the cabin in its clump of trees. A small uncertain light glimmered hesitantly from the open cabin door. Uncle Billy Peter stopped short. A sort of fury seemed to shake him.

"Well, I'm etarnally consarned," he spat out furiously. "Now what do you think of that gal of mine! Not even dark yit, and there's she with a light lit!" He hurried on ahead of his self-invited guest. "Salvation Willis!" he shouted.

Hal Everett grinned as he saw the scared face of the slight girl who appeared in the cabin doorway. Well he knew what was in store for her. For Sal Willis had committed an unpardonable crime in the

eyes of her father, head deacon in the Holiness Church of Bogue, suave old sinner masquerading under the guise of religion and its benefits, stingiest man in the world, as they called him in this their own world. Salvation Willis had wasted a quarter of a cent's worth of tallow candle, and Sal Willis must pay—some way. Of that there could be no doubt. Uncle Billy Peter always made them pay some way, be they beast or human. The visitor recalled with a smile the times that the old man's hard worked horses had had to pay—an ear of corn less at a feeding—for any time a new plow point was needed in the Willis farmyard. His eyes took in the shining surface of the old man's hat as he rushed on ahead of him—the same old hat Hal had known since he first came to the Bogue Coast-guard Station—the hat with its painted surface (Uncle Billy had painted it those many years ago to keep it from wearing out) just a little shinier with the years. Hal Everett gave but a passing thought to the trouble that was in store for Sal Willis. She was always having it with this father of hers, the richest man in the neighborhood with his vast acres of plantation land, and the poorest by his own acclamation. Once more he was congratulating himself on his own astuteness in searching out Uncle Billy Peter Willis at this, his own psychological moment, for it was through the old miser's own spleen against the

proger Humphrey and Humphrey's family, of course, that the coast guardsman sought to be avenged. The miserly old Holiness deacon was without doubt the weapon for his, Hal's, own revenge.

He sauntered leisurely after his host, gaining the shadow of the darkened cabin just as Uncle Billy Peter had said his last word to the daughter who had been wasteful enough to light a candle while the daylight still flickered.

"And don't ye ever let me ketch ye doin' it again," he heard the old man's voice rasp to the girl who whimpered slight remonstrance. "No matter ef them babies do cry. Let 'em. I'll——"

Through the doorway, Everett's big figure shut out the last of the daylight.

"Draw up a cheer and set!" the deacon invited cordially, as though nothing unusual had happened. "We'll talk over this matter ye was relatin'—— The Lord is leadin' ye——" To his daughter, he called over his shoulder as he carefully hung up the painted old hat on a wooden peg outside the door—"Bring a cheer, Sal—and mind what I tell ye about them babies gittin' more milk, or I'll mommock ye up right smart!"

Salvation Willis, bringing out the chairs for her father and his guest which they tipped against the wall of the cabin as they lighted their pipes for their

neighborly chat, paused to give Hal Everett a half admiring glance. In another environment, with enough food, without the huge burdens of caring for her father's home and working in his fields, in addition to caring for the motherless babies her sister had so carelessly died and left (the "knee baby" who could almost walk, and the "breast baby" of three months to which their grandfather had referred) would have been an attractive girl. But her wan pale face with its regular features which were the heritage of girls of this hommock country from ancestors who had come from aristocratic lines long ago in the settling of the country by those from overseas whose adventurous spirit had led them to the new land, and the curling dark hair that framed the face held no attraction for the coast guardsman. His thoughts were further up the sound, centered on the rosy beauty of the athletic, more gently cared for Lora Humphrey —and the man whose hands she had held.

As he listened to the old man talk, Hal Everett only half-consciously heard Sal Willis, a few moments later, from somewhere inside the cabin, from which also came the faint wail of a hungry child. She was crooning to the child. It disturbed him a little as he went on with his talk to the Holiness deacon who listened eagerly to what he said.

"Are you washed—in the blood——
In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless,
Are you white as snow——"

The girl was singing inside. The infant's wails ceased. Outside the grandfather leaned forward in his chair to hear what his guest was telling him.

"And then I saw——" said Hal Everett. He leaned nearer to half whisper. Old Uncle Billy Peter Willis bent his benign white head for an eager hearing. He leapt to his feet and smote one horned palm into the other.

"Jezebel!" he thundered. His voice took on the tones of wrath of the prophet of the Holiness Church of which he was an under prophet as he quoted, chanting: "'And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, the dogs shall eat Jezebel——'"

The grin that had spread over Hal Everett's face sickened a little. Even in his most revengeful moments he had not quite made up his mind that his revenge included having the curs of the neighborhood eat Lora Humphrey. And he knew well the temper of the man and the sect he represented to carry through anything in their fanatical zeal. Uncle Billy Peter subsided. He mouthed virtuously after his outburst. His thick thumb—the same thumb that earlier in the day had not hesitated to throttle the birds that by law

were the property of another man, jerked over his shoulder toward the inner cabin from which came faintly the diminuendo crooning of his daughter.

"I'll look any on 'em straight in the face and eyes," he mumbled over the quid that got in the way of the few teeth he still proudly showed in a yawning vacancy of toothless gums, "and say I must pertect *them*——"

Hal Everett nodded. The Monkey Rum of Swansboro was wearing off. It was one of the difficulties of being as hale and strong as he was.

"Um-humph!" he acquiesced. "That's why I thought the Holiness people ought to know—and if I'm to be one of them——"

"You'd not be thinkin' of bein' one of them Methodys like The-oph Humphrey and his daughter, would ye?" Willis was anxious. "Ye'd be a-courtin' hell," he added.

"When I come to the Lord——" Hal Everett, sacrilegious, unholy, worshiper only of the flesh and the material, spoke as the half-awakened "sinner," "I'll come to Him wholly, believing He can sanctify and cleanse—that I can have no pain nor sorrow effen I believe. I'll want no sinners about to cast their taint——"

Uncle Billy Peters, saint in the Holiness Church of Bogue, rose rheumatically from his chair. His

white whiskers waved in the pine-scented breeze, prophet-like. He spread his hands benignantly above the head of Hal Everett as there came a faint plaintive bleat from an underfed mother-cow in the Willis dirty farmyard: "Oh, God!" he prayed, with closed eyes uplifted: "the heathen have come into thine inheritance."

Back of the wastes of sand, the sprigs of bear grass and the haunts of giant turtles, the lodge of Grayson Cardwell lay snug and secure, swept by the gracious breezes from the Inlet and the ocean beyond through the sweet scented bays, and Virgin pines, dogwood and hollys that had taken on their spring verdure to form an almost impenetrable protecting mass about the log lodge.

On the wide porch of the lodge, with its earthy smell from the decaying leaves of the fall and winter that the industrious Henry had hastily removed, lolled the owner, Grayson Cardwell. Across from him in the porch hammock that the negro had as hastily swung while his charges were busy with their first fishing, lay Clement Ashley, for once unconscious of the fact that the turned-down collar of his sports shirt showed a distinct line of greasy reminiscence of a warm afternoon's fishing.

"Thought I had a shark on my line that time,"

ruefully he proclaimed, glancing in the direction of Meade who, from his perch on the top step was watching the changing sky line of purpling gold to duskiest blue through the tree tops. "Wouldn't have minded if I had!" he boasted.

From his own comfortable lolling in the cushioned rustic chair in the porch corner Cardwell drawled:

"You don't know a drum—yet! You got a minnow bite, probably——"

"I got wet," cut in Ashley sharply. "Clear to my waistcoat—if I'd had one——"

"To-morrow," said Cardwell, "we'll go out after the drum with mullet. Henry and Theo'll get them to-night—somehow. And get this, Clem—you can't be a beauty and get drum in the surf of the Atlantic off Bogue Island. You've got to wade to your hips——"

A shrill whistle from the inlet landing side of the island cut short the broker's dissertation on fishing.

"Halloo!" he cried. "Somebody with a message. Wonder if anything's wrong on the Humphrey side of the inlet." His sharply clapped hands brought the wide-smiling black Henry to the railing of the lodge porch.

"Leave the marsh hens to do their worst, Henry," commanded the master of the lodge. "See who's poling over."

The negro trotted obediently through the natural avenue of cypresses toward the inlet landing. In the time it took Meade to calculate the phenomenal growth of the Spanish moss that draped the bay tree beside the window of the room in which he was to stay, the black was back. He handed Cardwell a yellow envelope, which the latter tore open and carelessly tossed across the rustic porch rail to be investigated by an inquisitive lot of stragglers from a black ant colony which had not yet called it a day.

"You can take it easy, fellows," he remarked, as he laid down the message, "we can go after drum heads, or sharks, or wild goats or whatever you please that's in season—here's Captain Anderson's reply—can't get here for a week or more—— But if you're thirsty, there are still trains running from Morehead City——"

Clement Ashley yawned lazily.

"Where's that marsh hen I smell?" he asked. "Seems like I hadn't had anything to eat for a month!" Then his small face took on the Puck-like appearance his friends liked or dreaded, according to how they liked Ashley. "A week, did you say?" he queried wonderingly. "How perfectly dreadful for Steele!"

Down by the swift running little stream that emptied into the inlet a few fathoms away, the silence was suddenly disturbed by an alert-eyed rabbit that hopped excitedly from the thicket, looked about him a moment, then at the stream; once more back with haunted eyes at the underbrush through which he had forced his way. Then, without a further quiver, he leapt boldly into the running stream. Such a brave little cottontail! Bunnys weren't made for swimming! Out of the same underbrush a moment later, stalked a beady-eyed mink—with a fur coat, frayed a little but still with a striped glossiness that would have made many a Fifth Avenue lady sit up and notice. His pointed nose led his scent instinct to the brink of the swift-flowing stream. Almost across it, his beady eyes made out his quarry, floundering in the swiftness of water. Rabbits weren't made for swimming. He took off into the stream. The swift darkness of the night closed down. Good luck, Rabbit!

CHAPTER VIII

IN spite of all his wishes to the contrary, two days after Lora Humphrey had rescued him from a watery grave Harrison Steele was almost as well as he had ever been in his life. Better in some ways, for any further alcoholic stimulant than that which had first been poured down the drowning man's throat had been tabooed by the girl. Steele couldn't help getting well. It would not have been gratitude to his faithful nurse not to. The hours that kept him near her seemed fairly to fly by and had it not been for his faithful ally, Dr. Parson of Swansboro, who was still anxious that the rich New York broker should not recover too fast, those hours would have been still fewer. Thanks to him, Steele was still domiciled in the Humphrey home enjoying the ever-increasing delightful companionship of the old guide's daughter, while the others who had come to North Carolina with him on a far different mission were passing their enforced waiting in Cardwell's hunting lodge on Bogue Island, or hunting and fishing.

No longer was he propped up among the giant pil-

lows in the white-curtained spare room, though, but had been advanced to the slanting old wooden porch with its homey touch of outdoor living that the girl had accomplished with her hammock, bright colored pillows, table and books and magazines and jars of flowering plants and vines.

It was from this vantage point and his comfortable splint bottomed armchair that the broker sat two nights after his accident, idly watching the channel lights appear and the smaller flickers on land that showed the Humphrey's neighbors were lighting up their homes for the evening. From inside the house he could hear Lora singing as she completed her duties for the day. Harrison Steele sighed contentedly as he scratched a match on the splint bottomed chair and lighted his cigarette. He looked up with a smile to see the girl standing in the doorway, the lighted lamp in the room behind her forming a halo for her midnight hair. She shook an admonishing finger at him.

"Mustn't stay out so late!" she chided. "Night air isn't good for invalids."

Steele laughed.

"Wish I could think I was an invalid," he assured her. "It's the finest sensation I've ever known in my life." He looked out over the shadowy trees and pointed. "I was just wondering," he mused, "what those particular lights were way over there. They

seem to be so peculiar—sort of come and go—See! Away down beyond the point."

For a flash, the girl glanced peculiarly at her guest, then she laughed as she shaded her eyes with her hands and peered out into the darkness.

"Are you seeing the Money Lights?" she teased him. "I don't seem to see anything——"

"They're gone now," said Steele—"but Money Lights, what are they? Can't say I've ever had my way to money much lighted."

A humorous expression flitted over the girl's face, to be replaced by a half seriousness as of one who believed something even against will and better judgment. "Were they over that way?" she pointed as she spoke, and at Steele's nod, she went on: "Then it's a good thing my father didn't see them. Your party would be without a guide for a day or two, though they never would know what had become of him. Father's been chasing those money lights for a good many years now, just like most everybody else in this neighborhood, but just like everybody else, he wouldn't confess it for a new plantation. There are a lot of holes dug in the sand dunes and around Teach's Hole and Ocracobe to the Eastward that show there's been many a silent hunt, though——"

"Tell me about this Teach person, won't you?" asked Steele. "You've been promising, but you've

been so busy just waiting on me, with everything else you have to do, that you've never got around to it."

The girl came out onto the porch and sat down on the top one of the rickety wooden steps. She clasped her hands about her knees and stared out into the darkness with its flickering points of lights among the dark masses of bay trees and evergreens.

"Well, you must promise not to laugh if I do," she began. "Sometimes I tell myself I don't believe any of these stories I've been hearing all my life, but then again I know I do. One can't be brought up with legends and rumors and take them as fairy tales."

Harrison Steele solemnly made a gesture he had not made since childhood.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," he assured.

"Probably you've already heard something of the vague rumors afloat in this section of buried treasure and pirates and things," she continued. "They have some foundation in fact, for it was right here that Captain Kidd and Morgan and the still more infamous Edward Teach, or Black Beard, as he was better known, had their stamping ground. There isn't a doubt in my mind that there is treasure buried somewhere hereabout, for those naughty old pirates never had a chance to take it away—Black Beard, especially, for he was killed in that place that has become known

as Teach's Hole. There is just one thing that makes me, in spite of any better judgment I might have, believe that there really is treasure hidden somewhere hereabouts—that is, that while for ages we've heard of money seekers, we've never yet heard of any money finders. And what isn't found must still be there. And of course you know that the accumulations of those old pirates was immense; it's a matter of history."

"Good enough logic," commented Steele, as he watched the girl, the wonder growing within him as to what had happened to him where she was concerned. Why was it that this girl, out of all the women in the world, had the power to so quicken his heretofore woman-impervious heart? Her beauty—but he had known many other beautiful women. Her strange mixture of rural simplicity and *naïveté* with the polish gained from her experiences in the outer world? Steele gave it up. He leaned back, closely watching her as she gazed out into the darkness, content for the moment in the sweetness that her nearness brought to him. He wished this time could go on indefinitely. He had no mind to think of the time when she would not be with him. He spoke again.

"I'm sorry to acknowledge my ignorance," he told her, "but you'll have to tell me more about your pirates. Of course, I've always heard vaguely of Cap-

tain Kidd and Morgan, but believe I rather thought them mythical characters. As for your Black Beard—well, who was the gentleman?"

Lora Humphrey glanced up in real amaze.

"You really don't know?" Her arched eyebrows lifted. "Oh, he was very real, I assure you, and if he were wandering around here now (and hereabouts were once his haunts) we wouldn't be sitting so securely on this porch. We've been told marvelous things about him, but—wait a moment——" She jumped lightly to her feet and ran into the sitting room behind Steele. In a moment she returned bearing a heavy volume and the lamp which she placed on the small table. "You don't need to believe our legends," she went on, "just listen what the Encyclopedia has to say." She opened the volume as she spoke, stopping to give its cover a light caress. "One of my chief treasures," she offered in parenthesis. "Ah, here it is:

"'EDWARD TEACH,' she read, 'English pirate, popularly known as Black Beard, is believed to have been born at Bristol. He is said to have gone out to the West Indies during the war of the Spanish Succession, to have engaged in privateering, and after the declaration of peace (1713) to have turned pirate. But he is not actually heard of in this capacity till the end of 1716. The following year he captured a large French merchantman, re-christened her "Queen Anne's Revenge," and converted her into a warship of forty guns. His robberies and outrages in the Spanish Main, the West Indies, and on the coasts of Caro-

lina and Virginia, quickly earned him an infamous notoriety. He made his winter quarters in a convenient inlet in North Carolina——' "

"That's our own Bogue Inlet," she informed, glancing up at the man who sat watching her flushed face as it bent over the big volume laid out under the lamp whose flame was flickering unsteadily in the soft night breeze. She glanced quickly down at the printed page and read on:

" '——the governor of which Colony was not above sharing in the proceeds of his crimes——' "

Harrison Steele grinned.

"So they did it even then—the men higher up," he interpolated.

"——but the governor of Virginia at last despatched two sloops, manned from the British war ships on the station, to cut him out. On the 22nd of November, 1718, Lieutenant Maynard, commanding the attacking forces, boarded Teach's sloop, after a sharp fight, and himself shot the pirate dead——"

Lora closed the book and looked up.

"And so ended Edward Teach, or Black Beard," she said. "But if he had been a good man his memory could not have lived any more than it does hereabouts —for he never had time to get the money he had hidden, and I don't suppose there's a child in this part of

North Carolina who has grown to man or womanhood without having taken a try at finding it. Especially about Teach's Hole to the East'ard—the place he was killed——"

"Have you?" Steele asked her, a teasing light in his eyes reflected by the lamp's rays.

Strangely enough, however, Lora did not smile back.

"I know you'll laugh at me," she said, "but you must remember I was born here, and I can't help believing there is some treasure hidden somewhere, and I've always intended to search for it some time—but in a more methodical way than most. Why, you'll find hundreds of holes dug all over the sand dunes—dug by people who have stolen off by themselves when they have thought they saw the 'Money Lights,' those mysterious lights which legend says appear from time to time to show the hiding places. I know father has done it more than once. But my private opinion is that most of the lights were merely from lanterns in the hands of some other secret hunters. It has come to be such a joke that no one will admit a treasure hunting jaunt, for the joke has always been on the hunters when they have returned from their profitless expeditions. Some day I'm going to hunt, too, though, no doubt."

Harrison Steele sat ruminating. It all seemed so

unreal, this talk of pirates who had once made their stamping ground in the very locality in which he sat—a locality which could not by any stretch of the imagination seem other than it was at its peaceful present.

"I always thought I'd like to have known Teach." The girl dimpled. "He must have been such a picturesque old villain—with that long black beard of his all tied up with ribbons and curled back over his ears. Can't you picture him?"

Steele looked at her, his glance showing his approval of her straight young figure, her curling hair and the skin with its peach blow touched to a glowing by the dim light.

"You would not have stood much chance," was his admiring comment. "He would have carried you away in a jiffy, as one of his choicest treasures."

Blushing at the broad compliment, the girl caught up the book and started into the house.

"Now don't stay out here too long," she again admonished in her best professional manner. "You don't want a relapse——"

"What say we make up a two-some and have a treasure hunting party of our own some day?" the broker called out after her. "I'll promise to get as well as well if you will!"

From the doorway, the girl who was coming to have

such a disconcerting place in his scheme of things surveyed him. She was half serious, half laughing.

"You wouldn't tell?"

"Never a tell!" Steele shook his head so vigorously that the shock of thick hair protested.

"Maybe——" she began, then her laughter bubbled out. "To think," she chided, "that a wise broker from New York could stoop to digging in the sands for treasure. Seems to me I've always been told treasure for men like you came out of stocks and bonds, and somehow mysteriously out of tall stone buildings and a lot of talk and noise."

Steele seemed to take no notice of her jibing as his hand sought and found a match and he relighted the cigarette that had gone out as the girl had read to him.

"Treasure," he announced, musingly and in the admonitory tone of a philosopher, "is, I have always been led to believe, a somewhat relative term. Now it seems to me—do you remember it, I wonder—that somewhere I've heard something about a man's treasure being where his heart is——"

He looked past the smoke ring he blew to find that the girl was gone; had slipped noiselessly away. Another smoke ring went up to chase the first. He regarded them contemplatively.

"Treasure——" he murmured softly. But the soft-

ness that came into his eyes, the tenderness of the tone that whispered the word would have been illuminative to the girl who had left him could she have seen them.

It was a strange, an unusual country to which chance had led Harrison Steele, he thought. A country that was old; far older than the ever-changing new city which he had so recently left on a quest which after only these few days seemed to him so futile, so rather beneath him. Well, he thought, that hydroplane had, in a way dropped him down into his right niche. He was a pirate himself—or certainly planned becoming one. He wondered if after all he really wanted drink badly enough to take the method proposed by Cardwell, Ashley, Meade and himself to get it. Then thoughts rose up to urge him on. It was not so much the liquor he wanted, he argued. But he would not have any man, any government on earth, even his own, tell him he shouldn't have anything. He was quite as much pirate at heart right then, as any of those who had sailed the main in the old days and sought shelter in the very part of the country where he now sat and gazed out at the quiet night, felt the soft wind blowing his tanned cheek, watched the wavering lights in the cypressed darkness. They had not alone been such men as the infamous Black Beard, or Captain Kidd or Morgan who had found piracy to their liking or profit in the old days. He thought back

to his university days. There had been Sellers. Fine chap, Sellers. He had been from North Carolina. One night that little prig of a Wyckoff had been bragging, as usual, about his blue blood, his ancestry. If Wyckoff had it, it was about the only thing he had. In some way, the talk had come around to Sellers' own progenitors. Now if there was ever a gentlemen, Sellers had been one. He had been a general favorite. Steele remembered the laugh that had gone up when Sellers talked.

"Yes," he had told them, "once I thought I was just full of ancestry. I didn't think there was any one in the country who had it on me. We were such real Americans down where I came from that I thought all I had to do was to trace back and have a little chronology that would make the Almanac de Gotha look sick, so I started tracing. For a generation or so everything was all right—statesmen, a well-known professional man or two, a few rather famous orators. Then things began to get a little squally. I went on with my search a while longer—but I stopped. I got to a point where I realized if I lived just one more generation backward, I was going to find pirates. And I just wasn't going to do it!"

That was the way it was with the Carolinas. Piracy was one of the things which first flourished best when America was in the making. It had almost reached re-

spectability. But as the colonies grew more settled, it became intolerable to the inhabitants and gradually died out. Except where it lingered on the coast of North Carolina where, for many a long day it flourished because the robbers could either terrorize the scattered inhabitants or were encouraged by dishonest officials. Even when the most notorious were killed, it was a known fact that some of the very men who had been in at the death of robbers like Edward Teach had themselves taken to piracy later. So strong were the piratical traditions in the New World that even men of supposed good standing often fell into it.

A heavy crunch on the graveled path roused Steele from his revery. Theophilus Humphrey lumbered toward the lighted porch, coming from the lodge where he had seen Steele's companions settled for the night, exhausted after their day of sport. The old guide pounded up the porch steps and pulled forward a chair into which he slumped heavily.

"Howdy," he addressed his guest. "How you come on?" But without waiting for a reply, he continued. "Got a rale good skeer, son, jest a spell ago. I was moseyin' along on my way home—I left the skiff a ways down to the west'ard—a-thinkin' about that there wild hog hunt them fellers want, and a-wonderin' what that Mr. Ashley would say did he meet up with

one——" A wide smile spread over his leathered old features. Steele, too, grinned broadly at the picture conjured up. "—and suddenly the bushes parted and old Uncle Billy Peter Willis jumps right out into my face and eyes with them white whiskers of his'n wavin' in the shadders.

" 'Howdy, Uncle Billy Peter,' says I. 'What you mean jumpin' out at a man like you was a panther or somethin'?

"He didn't answer me like a white man had oughter for a minute, then his eyes was all a shinin' queer when he sort o' hissed at me:

" 'I'm saved, sanctified, and I'm er goin' to git the Holy Ghost,' says he.

" 'Fine!' says I. 'You reckon Salvation Willis is goin' to find it out?'

"He jes' kept a glarin' at me.

" 'The curse of God on all unbelievers,' says he. 'I'm goin' to git the Holy Ghost, then you'll find out something, Th'ophilus Humphrey—you and yourn!'

" 'You hadn't ought to be a techin' Monkey Rum at your age, Uncle Billy Peter,' says I. But he just lifted up both his fists and shook 'em at me and run away. But I will say the way he jumped out at me if I'd had my gun I'd a let loose both hulls at him."

"What do you suppose he meant?" asked Steele. "What has he against you?"

Old Humphrey laughed heartily.

"Oh, he's got a-plenty agin me," he averred with a knowing nod and wink. "He hain't got my farm for one thing—and he would a had it effen I hadn't got this here job with Mr. Cardwell. I hain't a-worrin' any about Uncle Billy Peter, though," he continued, "no tellin' what he meant—if anything. He's a Holinesser, and they git that way when they feel full of religion—can't say his religion has ever made him want to feed his family, though——"

Steele was interested.

"A Holinesser?" he queried, not understanding.

Humphrey nodded.

"Yes," was his explanation, "a member of the Holiness band down here. You know we got two kind o' religions down here on the coast—the Holiness and the Methodys (though the Holinessers think the Methodys are a kind o' worshipin' the devil because we don't yell so much at meeting, and have doctors when we're sick—I'm a Methody—and don't see no special salvation in handling hot lamp chimneys and pizen reptiles while a-shoutin' and hollerin' in unknown tongues). Oh, we git along—we Methodys and Holinessers, jes' like two strange cats tied up in a bag. 'Nother thing—we Methodys got only one variety o' religion—have a hard enough time gittin' that and a-holdin' it, but it appears the Holiness got

three separate and distinct brands. They git saved, then they git sanctified, then when they git the Thirty-third degree they git the Holy Ghost. They's not much livin' for 'em when they git the Holy Ghost——"

"Do they cause trouble?"

"Oh, we hain't afeared of 'em, if you mean that, but they git pretty obstreperous sometimes and then we got to run 'em out. Be better maybe, if we run 'em out for keeps." His tone of tolerance changed a bit to something more serious. "I hain't one who holds with the Holinessers," he went on. "They're fanatics, yes, sir, fanatics—and iggerant no end—and while they seem harmless enough, you never can tell what anybody's goin' to do when he gits all wrought up to a frenzy, whether it's in the name of religion or no. Sometime or other we're going to be sorry hereabouts for lettin' 'em run on so."

"Sounds rather interesting, though," commented Steele. "Sort of rural vaudeville show, I should say."

"Git Lory to take you to some of their meetin's some time," advised the old man, as he rose and pushed his chair back to the porch wall. "When you hear 'em all a gabbin' and hollerin' to oncet, you'll think we need an insane asylum for 'em, instead of a church. Well, I'm going to turn in. Got a big day planned for tomorrow on the island. Comin' in?"

Steele tossed away the end of his cigarette and rose with his host.

"This certainly is a wonderful place you have," he complimented. "I hate to go into the house at all. Think I'll feel well enough to get over to the island in a day or two for a try myself at some of that great fishing, wild boar and goat hunting you're all bragging about."

CHAPTER IX

TWICE more the moon set and the sun rose rosily over the spring sweetness of morass and wooded hills. More and more was Harrison Steele contented in the ways in which Fate had set his steps; more and more he wished for the yacht hurrying from Florida waters to be delayed. He hated to think that the calm, sweet days and delicious evening companionship with Lora Humphrey, who had awakened in him that thing of which he had hitherto not known, must soon be over. But must they? He had begun to think more than idly of their continuance. He had not yet fully accustomed himself to the thought of abandoning his benedict days, but such thoughts became more and more insistent as he watched the girl in the dainty gingham frocks she had once more donned since there was now no use for her trained nurse uniform, heard her singing about her work, as alive, as much a part of the scene about her as the thrushes that warbled by day or the whip-poorwills that made the nights musical.

Over in the lodge on the island there was more restlessness, more unwillingness to go on with their

rural existence, more fretfulness to be up and about the business that had brought them to Cardwell's lodge in this off season. Undoubtedly it was the occurrence of two nights before that had much to do with this, for it was then that Henry had mixed the last drop of Cardwell's small supply of liquid refreshment. It had been with great ceremony that the mint juleps had been accepted and the last drop drained. With the lesson of their friend Russel in mind, the hunters, thirsting for their accustomed stimulant, had not made up their minds to resorting to the native Monkey Rum or the white corn whisky which at least one of the coast guardsmen and the progers of the neighborhood consumed with so much gusto.

Clement Ashley had risen from his hammock at last with a groan. The empty glass he still held he observed gloomily. Then he had hurled it with all his force against the boll of a bay tree where it smashed to bits, some of them shining back leeringly from where they had caught in the long trailing Spanish moss.

"Good-bye, old top," he sighed. "You've done good service, but you're not needed now."

He strolled off down the paths between the shadowy trees. Meade called to him.

"What in the world are you doing, Clem—walking around out there in the dark."

Ashley's voice came to the men on the porch, hollow, lugubrious.

"I'm looking for a sail," he replied.

Rain came the next morning, with a mist that obscured the ocean across the sand dunes. Hunting was out of the question—weather did make some difference to at least two of these city sportsmen, and Cardwell seemed to have no ambition to go out alone.

"Let's get Henry to pole us across the Inlet over to the mainland," he suggested when their belated breakfast had been completed. "About time we had a look at our invalid."

"And about time we had a talk with him about our next move," agreed Meade as he lazily pushed back his rustic chair from the table with its cloth wet from the penetrating dampness that was so accentuated by the massed verdure about the lodge. "You know we haven't really had time to plan much—first leaving New York with such hurried enthusiasm, then the accident. I, for one, am for caution, too—these papers the old man has been bringing us are showing a pretty dangerous activity on the part of the Prohibition fleet."

Cardwell nodded.

"Yes," he admitted, "and we'll want to know what to do in a day or so. The *Falcon* really ought to be sighted now any time."

"Hurray! Hurray!" chimed Clem Ashley, weakly.

Two hours later black Henry poled his skiff up to the Humphrey dock. Three wet and rather woe-begone adventurers shook the drops from their clothes as best they could as they climbed out on the wetter beach. The hommock home was shrouded in the over-hanging mist, but it looked good to the men who trudged toward it, chilled by their damp clothing and the unseasonable cool that had come with the rain.

From the armchair where he was seated in the Humphrey sitting-room beside a fire of crackling logs, Harrison Steele looked up to greet his friends.

"Hello, strangers," he called, dropping his magazine on the floor beside him. " 'Come in and draw up cheers.' "

Lora Humphrey fluttered in from the rear somewhere to greet the newcomers shyly. She noticed their wet garments.

"Oh, you're wet," she commiserated. "Just sit down and dry out a bit." She looked around at them, "I prescribe coffee," she announced, professionally. She darted to the side of the fireplace and tossed a fresh stick on the fire before either of the men who leapt forward to perform the task for her could reach her. Her merry laughter rang out. "Oh, I'm used to that," she explained. "We

woodswomen are expected to do little things like that——"

"And jump into the inlet and save any stray drowning men who happen along, in the course of the day's affairs?" queried Cardwell, smiling.

Lora, too, smiled as she hurried from the room to bring coffee as though the matter were nothing.

Clement Ashley got up and leaned over Steele. He took one of his wrists and felt it. He shook his head ominously as he glanced up, first at his companions, then at the door through which the girl's pink gown had disappeared.

"Um! Um! Bad! Bad!" he concluded, with a solemn shake of his head. "There's no doubt he's a very sick man! Very sick! Recovery very unlikely!"

Steele drew his hand away while his face flushed darkly.

"Idiot!" he declared. But Ashley only sunk into his chair with a doleful shake of his head and a sigh.

"Don't even believe a good drink would do him much good!" he concluded.

"Speaking of which," broke in Cardwell, "and changing the subject to a more cheerful one, it can't be long now until we get one. Captain McMaster and the *Falcon* ought to be here most any time.

Wouldn't be surprised if he couldn't be sighted to-day, if it wasn't for this mist."

Steele raised a cautious hand, as he glanced around at the door through which Lora Humphrey had gone. Ashley grinned in his impish way, but his friend glared at him. "Don't be more of a fool than you can help, Clem," he advised. "You ought to have enough glimmering of intelligence to know we can't afford to let anyone—*anyone*—know the least thing about what we're up to. Lord, I've had hard enough time as it is explaining why that yacht is coming—been spreading it around that we had a sugar deal on in Cuba and thought we'd combine business with pleasure."

"Have you thought what you'd say in case we had to come back here?" began Cardwell, but Steele interrupted him in surprise.

"Back here?" he wondered. "Why?"

"Probably the better part of wisdom," was Meade's contribution. "Haven't you been watching the papers?"

Steele shook his head. "Too busy," he declared. He paid no heed to Ashley's chuckle, but turned as Lora Humphrey came into the room with a pot of steaming coffee and cups on a tray.

When they were again alone, Meade took up the conversation.

"See, here, Steele, I'm willing to go through with this thing—I didn't go into it blindfold in the first place, but if you think we can run a cargo of contraband into any Northern port, then you're just out of luck—that's all I can say. I'd a whole lot rather be here breaking the game laws shooting ducks than making little ones out of big ones in some prison gang. And that's about the size of it."

"I'm strong for having enough drinks myself," was Cardwell's addition, "but we've been thinking it over a lot since we've been over on the island, and I believe it would be a whole lot better to bring the stuff right back to my island—there's room a-plenty for a hundred caches (as many an old pirate could have told you)—and then we can wait for the most propitious time to get it back to Westchester by hydroplane. What do you think?"

Steele sipped his coffee meditatively.

"Do you think it's worth all the trouble?" he asked. "I've been doing a lot of thinking myself, and——" he held up his coffee cup. "This sort of stuff suits me pretty well."

Ashley rose and yawned.

"Oh, well," he said, "if you're going to back out—I'd just as soon get back and into some civilized clothes—and there isn't a bit of mustache wax in all of Cardwell's lodge—not even paraffine."

"Oh, I'll not back out," assured Steele, "but I can't help wondering if the risk is worth it—do we really want liquor as badly as all that——"

"He came to North Carolina to get a jag, and he got religion!" Ashley threw up both hands in a helpless gesture, but Steele went on, as usual, without noticing the interruption from this particular quarter.

"You're probably right, Cardwell. We'll do as you suggest, but there are two or three other things to consider. We can't just run a yacht full of liquor onto your island without knowing exactly at what moment to do it any more than we could enter the port of New York. Now it is obviously impossible to take any of the natives into our confidence, least of all old Humphrey—why, I wouldn't have him know I was breaking the law in that manner for anything in the world——"

"He or his family," amended Ashley in a murmur.

"So," continued the big broker who was playing invalid so well in his armchair propped with pillows, "some one of us will have to remain behind to keep watch and be ready to signal the yacht on its return. It might be the case that the Prohibition fleet had got wind of what we're up to by that time, so we might have to know whether to dump the stuff overboard or not——"

"That ocean struck me as pretty wet already," commented Clem Ashley as he ruefully regarded the once natty sports suit which had had its bath in the Sound. "But you can consider me at your service. I'll be self-denying—I'll stay behind."

Cardwell and Meade looked at the small man sarcastically.

"Didn't I hear you making some remark about backing out?" he asked. "No, the thing to do is to draw lots. Here," and he took from the pocket of his damp coat a pair of well-worn dice which he tossed on the floor in front of the fire. "High man is out! Agreed?" The others answered him with a nod.

On the second round, Meade and Cardwell by throwing a ten and a twelve respectively had been elected members of the party who would go on the yacht.

Ashley scooped up the dice and held them a moment, with his small head cocked on one side as he regarded the man in the armchair by the fire.

"Heard 'em call me a quitter, didn't you?" he inquired, in his tone of injured innocence. "Got to vindicate myself. I'll admit I'm not hankering for a chance to wear a striped suit, but I've got to tell you something. You haven't a chance the way Gray Cardwell has figured it out. Why, I can throw more aces than any man in the world. Tried it out too

often in the army—worse luck! What say we switch it. Low man out—eh? How's that for a game sport?" He looked at the others pridefully, then to Steele he added: "Are you on?"

"Suit yourself," Steele replied languidly.

Ashley rubbed the dice between his hands and held them out to Steele.

"Shoot!" he invited.

Steele took them and carelessly dropped them onto the floor. A five spot shone in front of him in the firelight, but the second die rolled over beside the pile of wood at the side of the hearth. On his hands and knees Ashley went after it. He groaned comically as, on moving a stick of wood a four was displayed. Then he sat crosslegged on the floor and with the dice between the palms of his hands, he caressed them, crooning to them.

"Big Dick! Big Dick! If you ever loved me, come to me now!"

He shot the dice across the floor. Near Steele's foot an ace showed plainly. In the middle of the hearth, its mate, a deuce, came to a standstill. He grinned wryly.

"Elected by an overwhelming majority!" he nodded, as he scooped up the little ivories and clambered to his feet. "Well, congratulations, old top," as he turned to Steele. "Send me some flowers and a box

of cigarettes some time when I'm far from the madding throng, with the huge gray walls curbing all my youthful enthusiasm!"

But Steele did not laugh.

"I'm sorry, Clem, old chap," he said, and his voice showed his earnestness. "I started this thing, and I wanted to finish it. I don't like my friends taking such risks for a fool scheme of mine. I want to see it through."

Cardwell yawned languidly.

"Think back," he requested, "and remember whose scheme it was. But you needn't worry. You'll have your own work cut out for you on land—and remember that if you slip, or let anything interfere with the watch you're keeping, life might never be the same again to at least three friends of yours, to say nothing of a mighty loyal captain of your yacht."

A great scuffling outside the door stopped their conversation quickly, but when the door opened to admit what might have been a dozen people from the sound, only old Theophilus Humphrey hove into sight.

"Wall, I'm consarned!" he shouted. "How'd ye git here? Thought ye'd be over on the duck ponds sich a great day. Ye'd a had a rale good time, proviđen the game warden didn't come by.

"Fine weather for ducks," was Ashley's irrelevant comment.

"Yes, sir, I was comin' right over rale soon, but I had some business I must tend to about the farm critters and some land that must be risin' for a pasture this spring. Them cow-beasts shore eat food. Not goin'?" he asked surprisedly as Cardwell and Meade rose and shook out their wet caps. "Hit's a right smart warmer over here than on the island, and Lory'll have dinner rale soon. Yes, sir, I 'low to-day hit's two blanket warmer here."

But shaking their heads in refusal of the old guide's hospitable invitation Meade and Cardwell started toward the door, with Ashley trailing behind.

"Thanks awfully, Humphrey," Cardwell refused, "but we've got to get back to make some preparations. Captain McMaster ought to be here any time, and one of those letters you brought me showed me I couldn't be fooling around hunting and fishing much longer when there's business to be attended to. But," and he indicated Steele who sat still staring at the fire, "you'll have company. Old Doc Parson thinks our friend here has had enough sea for the time being, and advises against a sea trip. So if you think you can look after him for a week or two longer and show him a little within-the-law hunting and fishing on the finest little island in the world, we'll drop back for him and pick him up after our little business matters are attended to."

Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey rubbed his hands gleefully. This suited him to the ground. His mouth had fallen when he heard Cardwell was so soon to leave, but he chirked up when he found he was not to be alone. Humphrey might hunt and fish the year round, law or no law, as all progers do, but that was nothing to the chance of showing his prowess to a "city man."

"Shore!" he boomed. "Shorest thing ye know. All the fishin' and huntin' ye ever see! Maybe we'll git one of them big boars. Oh, we'll take good keer of him, Lory and me. Won't we, Lory?"

They had not seen Lora Humphrey, who had come quietly into the room as they announced their departure. Neither had they noticed the glad light that had sprung up into her eyes as she heard their announcement that Steele was to remain behind. But it was a light which was dimmed in a moment, and it was the same shy, but hospitable country girl they had come to know who assured them of her pleasure in doing anything further for their friend. Watching them, Steele was of two minds. He was heartily disappointed that he was not to be one of the actual pirating party, now that he had made up his mind to it. It was not like Harrison Steele to remain on the side lines as a signaler while others took chances. But then his thoughts changed when his glance trav-

eled to Lora, sweet and demure as she sped her parting guests. Yes, it would be pleasant—more than that—to remain near this girl for a time longer. He could not help but admit that—and what the days might bring forth—— Well, that was still in the lap of the gods.

The three men whom negro Henry poled over to Bogue Island did not go at once to the lodge, though they promised him not to be late for their midday meal.

"Ducks to-day, Marse Cardwell," he told them, smacking his lips. "A-plenty ob 'em. Mallard, three of Cap. Humphrey's cultivated ones, yum! Yum! An' some of that there speargrass whut Cap. Taylor toted up las' trip."

"We'll be on hand, Henry, never fear," Cardwell assured his serving man. "With an appetite, too—we get it here whether we do anything or not. Just going to take a stroll down to the sand dunes to see the ocean come in."

"Yah! Yah!" yowled the negro, delightedly showing his teeth. "Doan ye say the beatenes' things, Marse Cardwell. See the ocean come in! Jes' lak you-all was talkin' about ole Numbah Six lak when I used to lib up Morehead City way to the East'ard!"

Both Meade and Ashley believed they had seen sand dunes before they had seen those which lay on the

ocean side of Cardwell's island lodge. But these *were* dunes! Sand hills and mountains, more strictly speaking, which it taxed a man's breath to climb; which made such ideal spots for the wild goats who had a chance to emulate their Rocky Mountain kindred as they leapt from sand crag to sand crag; dunes that the waters and winds of ages had piled up hill and mountain high, washing them in from the long sandy sweeps that made the ocean bed of that part of the coast—those sandy bottoms with their ever-changing formations which had wrecked more mariners whose vessels were run upon them than many a rock-bottomed shore line whose dangers could be charted.

Up one of these sand hills Cardwell clambered, followed by Meade and more leisurely by the panting Ashley. They stood for a moment looking out at the gray sea with its tossing waves and the mist that stopped their vision. Then happened one of those queer things that are forever happening on such misty foggy days. For a moment the gray pall lifted and they could see far out to sea. There (and not so many fathoms away at that), they could see the spars of a trim yacht that had dropped anchor. Cardwell glanced at his companions.

"That will be the *Falcon,*" he nodded. "This time to-morrow——"

Ashley laughed hollowly.

"Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum!" he chanted.

"Lead me to it," dryly commented the silent Meade.

Clement Ashley sat down unexpectedly at the top of a sharp slant of sand. He waved his hand as a sudden propulsion of his wiry little body shot him downward.

"Come on, then!" he shouted.

> "'Sailing! Sailing! Over the bounding main,
> For many a stormy wind shall blow,
> Ere Jack come home again.'"

At the foot of the slide, he picked himself up, gave a nautical hitch to his sports trousers, and spat into the sand.

"Rum!" he growled. "Rum! Give me r-r-rum!"

CHAPTER X

ON the top of one of the highest sand dunes Harrison Steele stood at an unearthly hour (for him) and gazed out at the sea. But the waves that had frothed and fretted and dashed themselves against the sands on the day of the rainstorm were gently lapping the golden grains in a matutinal kiss. All signs of storm had vanished and Steele's vision encompassed miles far out into the blue Atlantic to the deep violet of the sea's horizon where the sun was just peeping over the world's rim.

But it was not at the glory of the sun he gazed, nor yet at the green and gold and purpling glows that glinted on the moving mass of water. Far out at sea he could see a yacht—his yacht, the *Falcon*—which was bearing his friends and his loyal captain forth to an adventure for which he now felt that he had little of the zest he had had when it was first planned. Momentarily the yacht was drawing further away, bound for the port of Hamilton in the Bermudas where men could still slake their thirst as best appealed to them. Hamilton had been selected as the port of call when the *Falcon* sailed without the formality of

obtaining clearance papers for several reasons, the chief being that it was not so far away that the adventurers might not hope, with fair luck and barring accident, to be back on Bogue Island with their cargo intact in about ten days or two weeks.

A wish came to Steele as he stood there in safety that he might be aboard his trim vessel with his friends, might share whatever was in store with them. But swiftly, unbidden, there passed before his eyes the vision of Lora Humphrey as he had seen her but an hour or so before. She had seemed surprised to see him up so early, and going to see the yacht sail, but had waved to him gayly as she fled down the path in her bathing suit for her morning dip in the sound. It was pleasant—very—he mused, to realize that he would be here and free to enjoy her companionship for a while longer. After the yacht's return—well, that, too, was something for the future. He shifted his position and glanced speculatively at the sand dune on which he stood.

"Hmm!" he mused. "A likely spot right here. Let's see—One fagot fire if the coast is clear—two if there's danger—Hmmph!" and he smiled humorously —"sounds something like Paul Revere! Wonder what the old boy would think if he could know what so many of his countrymen are doing to the constitution of the country he went riding for?"

The jaunty yacht grew smaller as it drew nearer and nearer the glory of the horizon. Steele strained his eyes to watch the last of it. Then it disappeared, hull down, right into the rising sun. The big man drew a deep breath.

"And that's that!" he affirmed, but there was not his usual assuredness in his voice as he spoke aloud. Something unaccountable, unaccustomed had come to him. He felt a lump rising in his throat; he could not swallow it. With all the suddenness of an explosion it came to him that he had taken the first step toward breaking the law of the land of his birth. He was a pirate; nothing less. As much of a pirate as those notorious men of old who had sailed the same seas, of whom Lora Humphrey had told him. He wondered if Captain Kidd or Morgan, or Teach, he of the black beard and ribbons, had ever felt as he was feeling in taking their first steps.

Far down the coast, further inland, he could see the virgin pines and dogwoods with their starry white flowers that fringed that part of the country known as Teach's Hole. Well, here was another pirate. Two hundred years hadn't made a lot of change in human nature.

"I wonder, now," he mused, his eyes on the hiding place of the once feared high-handed sailor of the Spanish Main, "I wonder, old chap, if they ever tried

to keep your rum away from you. If they did, I don't blame you so much, after all." His expression changed to a mirthful grin. "Wonder if the old boy ever hid any of his rum along with those fabulous pearls and emeralds and gold doubloons they've been seeking so long. If he did, think I might take a chance at treasure hunting myself. Would be nice and mellowed by now."

Steele had said goodbye to his host and hostess in the Humphrey home the night before, for though he had not told them his real reason (which was that he feared his continued presence there might bring down gossip of the neighbors on the lovely girl's head) he had said that he believed it best to move over to the lodge and try a bit of hunting and fishing while he was recuperating. He had thought, as he intended seeing his yacht sail, to be off before they were up.

The sun was not three hours high when he began to realize how much he was enjoying it all. Old Theo had brought him an outfit from Swansboro that seemed the last thing in comfort. To the man to whom creased trousers, immaculate linen and stiff collars had always been such a necessity, as well as the valet to care for them and attend to himself, the change was, though novel, an exhilarating one. Briarproof khaki and snake-proof leather boots seemed the epitome of comfort. Until he heard his black serving

man's horn announcing dinner, Steele strolled through the closely grown trees and tried to penetrate the underbrush which he found could not be done save by an animal many times smaller than himself. He poked about the sand dunes, picturing to himself what the pirates of old had done when they had wandered about the place as he was wandering. He might have been a thousand miles from civilization, he thought, as he realized the only sign of life about him was the occasional bleat of a wild goat, or the chattering of marsh hens in the swamps, preparing for their brooding. Only down near the sand dunes was there a sign that man had ever been in this wilderness before. There he spied a tall post, not unlike a patrolman's box such as he had often seen in the outlying suburban districts. This, he knew, from having been told of it, was the watchman's clock device of the coast guard, which he had to punch with regularity to show that he was not neglecting his duty, out here where there was none to keep a watchful eye. It stood up conspicuously out of place in the waste of sands that reminded so of desert islands. Rather gloomy, lonely life these coast guardsmen led, he pondered. No wonder they sought for life and the companionship of women (he remembered how Everett had come to see Lora, and a frown of displeasure crossed his face) when they were off duty.

Steele's first night at the lodge was a peaceful one. Henry had supper ready while the sun was still high, and served it for him on the wide rustic porch. While he ate the delicate beaten biscuit of the southland, and enjoyed the wild honey that was served with them, he sighed with contentment as the cooling breezes that had followed the heat after the rainstorm tanned his face. Those same breezes were kicking up the waters of the Sound into little whitecaps, and their gentle murmur was more soothing than any softly tuned orchestra the broker had ever heard in the city which had been most of his life. Great pelicans, with jet markings in their white plumage stood friendlily about at the edges of the marshes, satisfied with themselves and their own picturesqueness. The noisy cackle of the marsh hens, and the chirps of Virginia rail, darting among the grasses of the shore line, chimed into the orchestration of the whitecaps like obbligato instruments.

Steele gazed past the shore line to the one opposite where lay the hommock lands. He could just make out the white-washed cottage of the Humphreys from where it was half hidden in its little grove of live oaks and pines. A queer pang shot through the man. A moment before he had had no thought of loneliness. Now as he pictured Lora Humphrey going about her household duties, mentally visioned her lithe figure

and so nearly perfect-featured face with its wild rose coloring, he had a consciousness of being more alone than he had ever been before. He wanted to be with her. He knew it. His loneliness did not come from the lack of masculine companionship as it had always come before. He found himself wondering if that companionship, or the wild parties he had so often been a member of were worth while, after all. Down here it was so peaceful. Life was so real—so worth while. And Lora——

He came out of his revery with a start as Henry placed a fresh plate of steaming biscuits before him, and set down another pitcher of milk, its top beaded with the frothiness of fresh coldness. The negro grinned.

"'Scuse me, Marse Harrison," he apologized. "Wuz you-all thinkin'? I gits that way sometimes out here—it's so lonesome like, and all them critters a-makin' a hullabaloo, and a boy gits to thinkin' of his rifle and fishin' rod—but you-all mustn't fo'git your biscuits."

"I couldn't forget them, Henry," Steele assured, as he split one open and moistened its steaming surface with yellow butter. "I don't think I've ever eaten anything so good in my life!"

The negro grinned delightedly.

"I wuz jes' thinkin', Marse Harrison," he offered,

"as how mebby you'all'd like to go for some drum fish to-morrow mawnin'—— Effen so, they's no need to wait for Marse Theo—I knows all 'bout fish,——" he drew himself up pridefully, "and I 'low I kin show you-all how, same as him."

Steele's quick glance showed him the negro's childish eagerness to serve.

"All right, Henry, I'll go you," he said. "But I'm due for a fine night's sleep first. This air is a sure cure for insomnia."

"Yas, sah! Yas sah! You-all go on—I'll fix ebery thing! Git all the rods an' reels and bait all ready tonight before layin' down time!"

"All right," once more agreed the broker. He yawned. "Think it's about 'laying down time' for me right now. Fancy being ready to retire at twilight!"

Had Harrison Steele's gray eyes been telescopic enough to have peered through the oaks and pine grove about the Humphrey home to its interior, he would not have found Lora Humphrey at the time he was thinking so deeply of her—thinking of her, in a way altogether strange to him, by her first name.

As the twilight closed down, with its soft scented breezes, the girl of the broker's thoughts knocked softly at the half-open door of Uncle Billy Peter Willis' tumble-down shanty. Inside she heard Salvation Willis crooning a native lullaby. The music hushed and a tired voice called:

"Come in!"

Lora, pushing open the door, entered the shabby room, with its clutter of broken furniture, its ragged home-made carpet, worn through to the floor in many spots, its dank odor of lightless days and stale cooking. In the center of the floor, Salvation Willis, in a low home-made rocker that creaked its protest over its burden on its one good rocker, sat with her dead sister's "breast baby" in her arms. Its small plaintive moans lent a greater dismalness to the scene that greeted the bright eyes of Lora Humphrey as she stepped inside.

"Hello, Salvation!" she called. "Hello, Babe!"

A glad light of welcome came to the dull eyes of the girl drudge who held the baby. Then she looked about her cautiously, uneasily.

"Howdy, Miss Lora," she answered. "Come—come in an' draw up a cheer!"

Lora shook her head.

"Only have a minute to stay, Sal," using the old childhood phrase. "Just dropped over to bring that prepared food for the baby I told you about. Captain Taylor brought it up from Morehead City this morning. Now don't you be afraid to give it to the baby—

I've seen it used so often in the hospital I know it will do him good. How is the little one?" she asked, coming over and bending over the two. The child only moaned, in the sickly way of a baby suffering from malnutrition. The Willis girl wagged her head mournfully.

"Porely! Porely!" she answered, then in a voice of compassion as she hugged the emaciated infant to her breast. "Pore little thing! If he could only go! He wouldn't be here now, if it wasn't for the things you fetch him, Miss Lora."

Lora straightened up and shook her finger with mock sternness at the other girl.

"Salvation Willis!" she demanded, "how often have I told you not to call me Miss Lora. Haven't you known me all my life?"

"But you've got so fine," demurred Salvation, "and eddicated, and all, and — such beautiful clothes——" Her gaze held for a moment on Lora's crisp white frock with its orange sash of organdie, then dropped shamefacedly to her own bedraggled, much faded calico mother hubbard.

"Nonsense!" Lora spoke sharply. "We were children together and played together, and you must have a pretty poor opinion of me if you think a few clothes are going to make any difference. Why, with half a

chance—and a little care of yourself, you'd be the prettiest girl in the neighborhood!"

The other shook her head.

"No chance!" she said, with the bitterness of finality. "All I'll ever git is plenty of work, but I wouldn't mind if the babies could have a chance. But pap is getting so tight about the milk, and fusses so——"

Lora Humphrey's eyes blazed.

"It's a shame! That's what it is!" she cried. "Why don't you leave him?" Guarded and cared for as she was, Lora Humphrey could not understand the tamed spirit that would put up with all that was the lot of her old friend. But Salvation only clasped the child closer.

"The babies," she demurred,"—they hain't nobody but me, and effen I——" she broke off, then added passionately: "Why, Miss—er, Lora, most of the time I'm not thinkin' of goin',—I'm wonderin' effen he's goin' to let me stay! Jes' last night he put me out, and I had to beg and plead——"

"Put you out?" Lora could not believe her ears. She could not believe that even penurious old Billy Peter Willis would let this girl who was his drudge and slave get from under his clutches.

"Umph! Humph!" Salvation nodded. "He got

bilin' mad at me at supper time, 'count o' me soppin' my bread on both sides—said I was a-ruinin' him."

"The old——" Lora forced herself to keep to herself her opinion of the father of the girl to whom she spoke. "It's a shame—that's what it is!" she repeated. "My father sending me away to school when he had to rake and scrape, and your father, who could buy and sell half the county, treating you like this—never giving you a chance. Well, I'll say one thing, Salvation Willis! You're a good girl—lots better than I am, to stay here and stand it all for the babies. But if anything of the kind happens again, you just pack up and come over to our house. Father'll see that no harm comes to you——"

Salvation Willis smiled ruefully as she listened.

"Pack up?" she repeated whimsically. "I 'low hit wouldn't take me long."

Lora turned toward the door. "I'll have to hurry," she announced. "Dark's coming on fast, and I didn't bring a lantern." She knew, without having to be told that in this house she would never be offered one in the neighborly fashion of the hommock dwellers who always offered this courtesy to belated visitors. Uncle Billy Peter would have counted the drops of oil used and made somebody pay. "Now, you give that food to the baby, and let me know how he gets on, and if he doesn't improve, we'll manage somehow to

get Dr. Parson around to see him——" She snatched up the shade hat she had dropped on entering the room. Salvation Willis regarded her guest, and tears stood in her eyes. Though her life had taught her all the restraint of her kind, something broke inside her, and she burst out passionately:

"You're just an angel, Lora Humphrey, and——"

Lora's laugh rang out to interrupt her.

"An angel!" she chaffed. "And you raised by a Holinesser! Why, Holiness angels don't wear low-necked dresses, nor bathing suits, nor go to 'furrin' lands' to school, or get to be trained nurses, nor——"

Salvation put out her hand to stop her, and even the shadows of the room did not hide the concern in her eyes as she spoke.

"Miss,—er—Lory, is that man gone?" she asked. Lora's face showed her wonderment, but Sal Willis went on: "I mean that man from the North'ard I heered ye was a-nursin' over to your house. Pap's been makin' a pretty big to-do over hit—him and that Hal Everett that's got so thick last few days—Oh, I wisht he was gone!" she ended plaintively.

Lora's face that had clouded with indignation at the girl's first reference to Billy Peter's or Hal's comment about her affairs, softened as she saw the real concern of the Willis girl. She spoke lightly.

"Now, don't you go to worrying any about me,

Sal," she said gently. "I can take care of myself—and if I couldn't my dad can take care of me. When, oh, when!" and she threw her arms out in a gesture all-embracing, "will the people around here learn that a trained nurse is doing no harm if she nurses a man who is in bed instead of a woman? No, Sal," and she came over and put her arm about the slight figure huddled in the chair, hugging the baby, "there's nothing to worry about. That man was not giving me a thought—except that he was a little grateful I think, because I pulled him out of the water, and if he had there would have been no wrong in it——"

Salvation Willis continued to weep and to shudder convulsively. She clutched Lora's hands with one of her work hardened ones.

"Just the same, I'm skeered, Lory," she tremored, "I'm skeered for ye—oh, I wisht he would go away!"

Lora patted the rumpled hair of the sitting girl.

"Sallie, child," she told her, "some day things may be different for you, and you may not always know only the sort of ignorant, fool idiots of men you've always known around here. Some day you may know gentlemen—gentlemen like Mr. Steele—and when you do, you'll know how much safer a girl is with them than with those who can think only evil." She took

the girl's head in her hands, and looked deeply in her eyes. "Don't *you* believe in me, Sal?"

Sal's look was one of adoration.

"I believe you're an angel!" she repeated, slowly and with pent-up passion in her tones.

CHAPTER XI

THE combers that were tossing in toward the sandy beach were mountain high. How often he had heard the expression, and how silly it had always seemed to exaggerate so. But these were —that was just it, mountain high. Strange looking combers, too. Topped with deep yellowish-brown froth; clear brown and sparkling. He had never seen such water before. Looked a good deal like beer had looked in the good old days when a man could look upon it. Why, it *was* beer. He could tell by the never-to-be-forgotten odor as the combers rolled in and broke in froth at his feet as he stood on the sand dunes.

But as he looked about for some receptacle to hold the amber fluid so that he might further prove by another sense that the ocean had turned to malt brew, his gaze was transfixed by another sight. There was a ship out there a-top one of those combers. In trouble, too. He could not make it out well at first, in the semi-darkness, but as it rose to the crest of the brown-white foam it took shape—a shape as queer as the combers themselves. Why, this ship was in the shape of a huge bottle, but there were people in it,

queer little figures struggling to clamber out and throw themselves into the foaming brew. Such a huge bottle. Then a comber huger than the rest rose and the bottle ship and its crew and passengers came flying toward him on the sand. He felt the impact—felt himself thrown into the wet brown sand. He was strangling. He struck out, but was only smothered more futilely in the sand. Then he felt a hand pull him out, gradually, fighting against the turmoil of sand and water that was beer. Dimly he could make out that it was a woman's hand, and as the brown brew for a moment dashed the sand from his eyes, he could see the owner of the hand. Why, it was Lora! Lora Humphrey—come to save him from that welter of beer and sand and the bottle ship that was careening so threateningly——

Harrison Steele opened his eyes to see black Henry Beck standing over him, his face one ivory-toothed grin as he pulled aside the blanket with which the broker had all but asphyxiated himslf.

"Mos' strangle yo'self that time, Marse Harrison," he said, as Steele sat up and tried to collect his senses, to wonder about the sudden disappearance of the bottle ship and the girl who was for the second time in the act of rescuing him. "Yo' all had them kivers so tight about yo' neck, I couldn't ha'dly distangle 'em!"

"Hmmph!" grunted Steele. His eyes peered out through the vine-shaded windows at the dim flicker of light that came through the moss-hung trees. "Did I yell? How'd you happen to come in just in time to pull me out of the deep dark depths of two blankets? What time is it?" He yawned sleepily and shivered slightly in the chill as he started to pull up the disordered blankets. "About two or three o'clock?"

Henry opened his mouth so wide that each of his full set of strong white teeth glittered in the dusk.

"No, sah!" he exclaimed. "No two o'clock, sah —time to git up. Ole sun'll be up over the tree tops befo' you-all kin say Jack Robinson—an' them bait is jes' a wrigglin' to be et by a drum fish. No, sah, I was jes' a-comin' in to tell yo-all that layin' down time was all over, when I seed yo-all a-wrestlin' wid dem kivers, an' a-hollerin' like all git out——"

"Hmmph!" murmured Steele. He wondered just exactly what he had been hollering all git out about, but hoped that the name of the girl who had been such a vivid rescuer in his dream had not escaped him. "All right, Henry," he agreed sleepily. "I'll turn out—be ready by the time you have breakfast set—but I must say it's the first time I ever got up in the middle of the night to go fishing." He slid, half protesting, out of bed as the negro hurried away to do his bidding.

As his man servant had prophesied, the sun was just

coming up over the tree tops as the two stepped off the lodge porch and swung off down the winding trail that led to the ocean side of the island. The city man opened his lungs deep to breathe in the salt tang of the air that came to his nostrils from the sea, scented with the odors of the aromatic growths through which it came. Little lakes, or ponds with which the island was fairly dotted came into view as they went along. Startled at the approaching footsteps, wood ducks rose from the waters with a musical whirr of wings. More than once, Steele spied an alligator slipping off his log bed into the waters beneath the ducks. It was wild, this island—there was no doubt of that.

So engrossed was Steele with his drum fishing in the breakers at which he soon promised to become adept under the wise guidance of black Henry, that the sun had risen high in the heavens before he noticed the passage of time. To the negro, however, the time was passing more slowly. He would not have noticed it had he been fishing himself, but he was put to it to find a way to pass the time while his pupil, no longer needing him, cast for the big drum. So he had set about hunting seaturtle eggs in the sands, and his triumphant yell came from time to time to the fisherman. At a particularly exuberant cry, Steele turned to glance toward the negro who was some

distance down the beach struggling with something.

"Hi, Marse Harrison," he yelled. "Got him dat time! A big fellow! Jes' come an' look!" The negro gave a final grunt and a struggle and stood back to look at his trophy. He had run down a big sea turtle and turned him over on his back so that Steele could get a good view of him.

But as Steele had turned to see Henry at the latter's cry, he had also seen some one else on the sand dunes. The appearance of another man at this wild spot brought back to him how lonely it was, how removed from civilization. He might indeed, he thought, have been a Robinson Crusoe on a desert island and Henry his man Friday. A true desert shore—save for one thing. Near where Steele was fishing was a tall post driven securely into the sands. It was, he knew, one of those scattered posts which have been erected by the coast guard, fitted with a watchman's clock which the coast guard patrolman must punch at regular intervals to prove that not even the most remote spots along the sea are left unguarded. For miles, Cardwell had told Steele, these widely separated coast-guard posts were the only signs that human beings were any more plentiful than on the shores of the wildest of the islands of the South Seas. A single post was a welcome something, too, in this wilderness of ever-changing sands. It was the one

thing that was fixed; the one thing from which calculations might be made.

It was a man in the garb of a coast guard whom Steele saw approaching the post near him as he turned to see black Henry's catch. The broker's face lighted up. Solitude might have its advantages, but already he was beginning to be a bit tired of it, and the prospect of a little chat, out here, in the wilds, with a man other than the negro who had made himself Steele's guide and teacher of drum fishing was a welcome break in what had already begun to be a bit monotonous.

Apparently unconscious that there was another human on the wide stretch of sand dunes and hollows, the man had advanced to the post and punched the clock before he turned to face Steele who advanced toward him with a smile of welcome. But that smile faded as Steele looked into the darkened face and sullen eyes of the man who confronted him. For a moment he was at a loss. Himself so gregarious, so eager for companionship, he could not imagine why the coast guardsman should be, in the language of the natives, so "stand-offish." Then he remembered. He was facing the man whom he had first seen over the shoulder of Lora Humphrey as he lay in the Humphrey's spare room recovering from his accident. The man was Hal Everett, the man whom he had been

told by the girl's father was her suitor, and whom his own eyes had told him had a bit more than resented his, Steele's, presence, in the girl's home.

Steele advanced toward Everett, who still stood stock still beside the guard post. He would speak to the man anyway. It was foolishness for the fellow to act as he had before, and was now acting. But his welcoming hand dropped to his side as he saw the guardsman scowl.

"Good morning," greeted Steele pleasantly. "Nice day—but pretty lonely out here for anything but a turtle, eh?" and his hand waved toward Henry's captured trophy as it lay on its back, its thick short legs kicking futilely in the air.

For a moment Everett did not answer. A nasty sneer curled his lips as he stuck both hands in his pockets and surveyed Steele insultingly.

"Lonely, maybe," he grunted at last, "but I can't say it hain't better than makin' the acquaintance of a man of your stripe——"

Steele flushed, and he took a step forward, but before he could speak, could resent the insult, Hal Everett went on, as he jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the resounding breakers: "Talk to the likes o' you? Hell! Why, I wouldn't lend a hand to haul you out if you was drownin' out there!"

For a moment more, Steele's muscles tensed, his jaw

protruded in the manner that his intimates could have told boded no good for an enemy, and he seemed about to spring on the insulting coast guard. Everett's eyes glinted as he braced his legs in the sand for the expected onslaught. But as suddenly as Steele's face had clouded, a sardonic smile passed over it. He stepped back with a contemptuous shrug.

"Don't know but what I'd rather go to Davy Jones' locker any time than have to submit to the humiliation of being rescued by the 'likes of you,'" he retorted, then the devil of taunting which possessed him for a moment made him fling back, as he turned away and walked over to observe Henry's turtle: "However, it's very unlikely I shall require any further efforts of gallant heroism in my behalf while I remain on Bogue Island. But," and he could not resist a meaning laugh as he added: "when I did need help, it was a brave woman who came to my rescue, and not a bally rotter!"

One minute, that drew itself out to two, then three, passed as the darkening flood of anger flushed the guardsman's face. As Steele remembered them from his first meeting with the man, his teeth were bared over his drawn-back lips in an animal snarl. The wide eyes of black Henry were popping from his head as he watched the two white men. There was nothing to it. They must clash in a moment. He looked

around for a handy weapon so that he might enter the fray. He could not let this fighting guardsman get the best of his Marse Harrison. Only Harrison Steele, himself, seemed unimpressed, and his whole attention seemed upon the turtle which he was investigating with the toe of his heavy boot. But with as great suddenness as had come his anger, another mood overtook Hal Everett. For some reason best known to himself he decided not to fight the man from the Northward—not just there and then at any rate. With a muttered oath, a hint of a future time coming, he turned on his heel and swung off down the beach, his giant strides eating up the miles of the sand dunes.

"Lawsy!" The whites of Henry's eyes rolled in the direction of the retreating man, but all his teeth were shining as he spoke to Steele. "Lawsy massy, Marse Harrison," he ejaculated in wonderment, "effen dat had been a nigger usin' such confusin' words to me, him an' me'd a fit, sho'! Humph!" and he shook his woolly head wonderingly, " 'pears lake white folkses an' niggers do things a heap diffunt!"

Steele smiled calmly.

"There was no reason for me wanting to fight the man, Henry," he explained. "I have, or at least had, nothing against him—and if he wanted to be a cad, there was no particular reason I should be one, too——"

But the negro still shook his head. He glanced at Steele a bit inquiringly, then hesitated as he stammered: "Yo-yo-all wa'nt afeared of him, was yo', Marse Harrison?"

Steele's tolerant smile deepened to a grin as he shook his head in return.

"No, Henry," he replied. "Don't believe I was. Believe I could have taken care of myself had it come to that, but—I've done a bit with the gloves in my time," he added, and it was a reminiscent smile as he recalled the real prowess he had gained in his university and since at the manly art. "No, it was just a matter of 'what's the use.' "

Misunderstanding Henry's head wobbled mournfully. A new idol had tottered a bit.

"Wisht you had a-mommicked him up a little bit, though, Marse Henry," he mourned. "He needs it. Ah tell yo-all that Hal Everett's a bad man. Fellow's got to be keerful has he a grudge agin 'um." And he gathered up the fishing tackle with Steele's morning catch as they prepared to start back to the lodge for the noonday meal, a matter which to the broker, stimulated as he was by his unwonted morning exercise, was of far greater import at the moment than any thing the coast guardsman might think of him, or how great might be the grudge he held.

Harrison Steele was idly finishing his after-dinner

cigar as he watched the flamingos daintily dressing their gaudy feathers on the edge of the swamp nearest the lodge when Henry came out to him in a twitter of excitement.

"Company, Marse Harrison," he announced proudly, and at his master's inquiring gaze, added: "That gal from the hammocks is just a-polin' her skiff right up to the landin'. She'll be here in a minute."

The man's lassitude dropped from him like a cloak. Forgetful of his desire for idleness of the moment before, he leapt to his feet and bounded down the path toward the landing on the land side of the island. Lora Humphrey was poling her slight craft into the shallow waters.

"Ahoy, there, ashore!" she called gayly. "Is the hermit of Bogue Island prepared for visitors?"

"Always! Some visitors," was the man's amended reply as he lightly caught the bow of the skiff and pulled it ashore, giving the girl his hand to assist her to alight. "Didn't know how lonesome I was till I heard your voice."

The girl laughed as she reached down for a basket in the bottom of the skiff.

"Henry may be insulted," she declared, indicating the basket as Steele took it from her, "but I had a notion that even hermits might like a bit of woman's

cookery sometimes. Besides," and her laughter was as lilting as the songs of the birds the man had heard all day in the forests, "you're still under my care, you know, and I must attend to your diet."

"Fine!" thanked the man, "and more than fine for you to bring it over yourself. Of course, I'm delighted with your gift, but the gift of your presence in the desert is a greater one."

"Then if you're so glad to see me," the girl went on, as they strolled up the tangled path toward the lodge, "you won't be bored with what I want you to do—and you won't laugh at me?"

The man shook his head decidedly. "Never a laugh," he affirmed. "I've told you that before. But what is it—have you been having an ouija message from Blackbeard or something of the sort?"

Lora Humphrey shook her finger at him warningly. "You promised not to laugh," she chided, but then something in her tone grew more serious as she went on. "Not a message exactly," she said, "but oh, Mr. Steele, I *do* want to have a try at finding that treasure —and I want you to help me. Sometimes things have come to me that make me think I could almost go right to the spot where the old pirate hid his gold doubloons and everything—I'm almost sure I would know the spot if I saw it, for it has come to me so much plainer than a dream several times—but I would

have to explore the island likely, and—and—er——" She stopped embarrassed.

Steele finished for her: "And there are other dangers here than snakes and alligators wearing their natural skins—coast guardsmen and so on, I should make a hazard." But Lora stopped him with a flush as she sunk into a cushioned chair on the lodge porch.

"No, no—not—er—Hal!" she exclaimed, and there was scorn in her eyes as she went on. "You don't think I'd be afraid of him?"

Steele laughed admiringly as he remembered how the girl had faced her admirer. "I believe you can handle him," he declared, "but——"

"Well, you know those proger squatters down on the end of the island," the girl explained. "They aren't always on their end of the island, either, and—oh, well, they're queer! The principal thing I want you to go with me for, though," she hurried on, "is that you don't belong around here, and you promised you wouldn't laugh at me. Everybody here laughs at everybody else who goes treasure hunting, but——"

Steele eyed her keenly as he sat swinging his feet from the rustic porch rail of the lodge.

"Then you think you have an idea of where to look?" he asked her. "Have you been seeing the money lights?"

She nodded soberly. "Last night," she affirmed. "At first I thought I was dreaming—probably I was—but then I got up and looked out of the window, and—and—I saw them. I almost believe I could go right to the place——"

Steele dropped down from his perch and picked up his cap that had rolled to the floor.

"Shall we have a try?" he asked, and the girl, closely watching him, saw that he was keeping his promise to take the matter as seriously as she wished.

The sun was dropping low over the sea scape a few hours later when the two came to a stop at the top of a sand dune and gazed about them. In the girl's eyes there was an expression of disappointment that was greater than the weariness brought on by their hours of tramping, as she looked about her.

"And I could have sworn I could go right to the place where I saw the lights," she complained, as she dropped down on the sand. "But I won't give up."

"Better chart that dream the next time," suggested Steele with a flicker of humor. "This is a bigger island than I thought."

As he gazed out over the turbulent waters of the Atlantic, the man's thoughts were a jumble of many ideas. How strange it all seemed! Just a day or so before, he had been high up in the granite chasms of Wall Street, with no other thoughts than the figures

a ticker was clicking forth. Now here he was, on a desert island, practically with a girl he had not known then, but whom it somehow seemed he must have known for a long, long time, perhaps ages. Somewhere out on the sea in front of them, his own yacht was sailing away on a piratical mission in his behalf, and he—he was here with this girl in all the world, seriously searching out treasure that another pirate had hidden somewhere in the sands beneath their feet two centuries before. His thoughts strayed, too, to the smart homes where smart mothers had so often tried to gain his interest in their ultra smarter daughters. His smile was a little wry as he thought of what they would say if they could see him now, could know anything of the thoughts about the girl at his side that were flitting through his bachelor mind. How had it come about? What had happened to him! He only knew that he was contented as he sat there beside her and looked out at the sea; that he had never known such contentment before. He—the woman-impervious. Then his glance strayed to the girl. He saw the deep shadows of enchantment in her wide eyes; he saw the wild rose flush on her smooth cheek; the same little curl that strayed maddeningly in that soft spot at the nape of her neck; another shiny tendril that swept her cheek—— There was a glow——

Harrison Steele was roused from his reverie by a mournful wailing from somewhere not far away. It rose and fell in solemn cadence, as it drew nearer and nearer. He sat up and looked off in the direction of the sound. Presently he could distinguish words in the half musical wails of intermingled masculine and feminine voices. Those voices held pleading. Nasal tones above the general clamor, exhorted:

"Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus, just now—
Ju-u-st now He will save you——"

Steele looked wonderingly at Lora Humphrey. She jumped to her feet with a laugh.

"Oh, I didn't know it was as late as that!" she exclaimed. "We must hurry——"

"What is it?" queried Steele, nonplussed. "A sort of North Carolina angelus?"

The girl's shoulders shrugged. "Just those proger squatters from the end of the island on their way to a Holiness meeting. They're having a sort of revival over in the meeting house in the hammocks and every Holinesser from everywhere around goes every night. Of course, it goes without saying that the squatters are all Holinessers—that's their mentality."

"You don't seem to hold a very big opinion of that particular religious sect," Steele commented with a smile.

The girl shook her head, but was serious when she spoke.

"Religion is one of the most wonderful things in the world," she said dreamily, as she started off down the trail toward the lodge. "But I can't bear fanaticism! Oh, if you only knew the harm that is done by them in the name of religion!" She was passionate in her earnestness. "You may be surprised, but I love every soul in this whole neighborhood, and I can't help regretting the harm that is coming to them through fanatics. They're ignorant enough, God help them, without being urged to greater lengths. You would understand, if you went to one of their meetings once——"

"Your father promised you'd take me, didn't he? You say they're performing every night now. How about to-morrow night?"

Lora nodded thoughtfully.

"If you really wish it, of course," she said. "But I do wish you wouldn't laugh at all of them—some of them mean so well, but they're so ignorant, and their leaders such fanatics——"

Fanatics! Again she had used the word—had shown she despised them. With a queer shudder, Steele wondered what Lora Humphrey would think if she knew that his own real mission on this island would never have been brought about had not he,

himself, and his friends, rebelled about what a certain sort of fanaticism had brought to his country. Still—there were fanatics and fanatics!

As Steele helped Lora Humphrey into her small skiff a little later, he could still hear the mournful singing from other skiff-fulls of people who were being poled toward the mainland:

> "Do not tarry; do not tarry; do not tarry just now
> Ju-u-u-st now, do not tarry——"

"To-morrow night," Steele assured the world at large as the girl took up her pole in her strong young arms and shot it far out into the stream.

CHAPTER XII

LIKE many another such community in the South where the inhabitants are the offspring of pioneers who had come thus far, settled down and gone no further, the progeny for generations following to do the same, the natives of the hommock lands surrounding Bogue Inlet were a religiously inclined sort. That is, to all intents and purposes. Church with them, prayer meeting, and when the spirit was moving particularly high among them, love feasts, camp meetings and revivals were a habit. All their lives these natives had heard the good word about strong drink being raging, but there were, alas, times of backsliding. Even among the most hidebound of them, the gentle practice of slipping backward was not uncommon, as many a well-meaning parson could testify after his siege of keeping his deacons and elders sober at Christmas time.

In the particular community of which Harrison Steele found himself so unexpectedly a member, two particular sects of religious zealots held sway. For the more intelligent, those who laid claim to more or less education, there was the Methodist church, with

its circuit-riding preacher who came at his appointed time from Swansboro to minister to his flock, leaving them to their own devices and the tender ministrations of lay brothers and sisters for the other three Sundays of the month during which he saved souls in other localities. But the Methodists seemed to bear up under the burden fairly well, and as a general thing would have gone on quite placidly in their spiritual way had it not been for the thorn in their flesh of the opposing religion seekers known in so many sections as the Holiness band. Religion, to a Holinesser, as the natives called them, was, as Steele was to come to know, more than a form. Church, its forms, their beliefs were to them the only emotional outlet for a primitive people taught by the years and their nearness to the soil a repression that would never have found vent otherwise. To them, the Holiness Church, its tenets, its practices, were the breath of life itself. To one like Steele who had never known of them, it seemed incredible, at his first telling, that sensible human beings could go to the extent of emotionalism in religion's name that was the regular practice of the adherents of the Holiness band. Faith, they claimed; faith was all—the faith their ministers told them would move the mountains as proclaimed in the Bible. Wanting visual evidence of what faith would do, they did not take it allegorically, but in their services

sought to see for themselves what might be done with their faith of the size of a good many grains of mustard seed.

Abstaining with them, was the next thing to—or rather the thing above—doing. Women of the band were abjured to abstain from even the suggestion of worldly vanity; even the men came in for much of the abjuration, the resulting picture of a worshiping band therefore holding a picturesqueness that one not inured to the beliefs and practices of a country people far removed from the influences of a latter day civilization could little realize until actually witnessed.

The May revival of the Holiness band, when visiting ministers and "overseers" from other localities swooped down on the hommock lands of Bogue was the great event of the year, rivaling in significance the summer camp meetings of the "Methodys" who did their spiritual reviving after the stagnation of the short winter with rather less religious fireworks. The revival drew great crowds from all about, and every little home of a Holiness believer was thrown open to visitors. Each day was lived through with prayer and praise and an anxious longing for the shades of night when they might gather in the small wooden church—those of them who could get in (for many camped outside on the steps, or hung in the windows, or sat in the wood carts and buggies, or draped themselves on the

picket fence surrounding the meeting house to hang on what words of reviving they could hear from such vantage points). It was at this late May revival that the harvest of souls was ripest, that brethren and sistern could shout their hardest over sinners that repented—no matter that the repentance might last but a few short weeks after the fervor of shouting was but a faint memory in the trees about the meeting house.

It was in a quaint old church that the Holiness band held their revivals—in a church instead of in camp meeting grounds as did the "Methodys," whose religious gatherings held a savor of worldliness with their parading lovers and sightseers from miles around who preferred the sawdust paths to the wooden benches in front of the exhorting ministers who sought to save them. Holinessers boasted that they went to *church!*

On the evening that Lora Humphrey had promised to take Harrison Steele to see the revivalists of the Holiness band at work, the little wooden church began to take on life activities before the sun had dropped low. Every road leading to it was filled with travelers who sought the Heaven-ward guidance they believed would be found within its portals. Buggies, drawn by horses whose drooping heads proclaimed a hard day in the fields during the season their proger masters had chosen to "put in crops"; ox-carts,

ambling along at the will of sleepy-eyed beasts of burden whose day the occasional swift-flying aeroplanes and hydroplanes becoming such familiar sights in the neighborhood proclaimed was done; "pony-beasts," ridden by youths and maidens whose repressed laughter showed their acknowledgment of the seriousness of the journey in spite of youthful exuberance; bands of trudging men and matrons and sleepy children—their goal was the wooden church where the minister who had come to bring them the word would exhort from the setting of the sun until the stars dropped low. A motion picture camera traveling along the length of the procession would have shown them all Holinessers. Here was humility of raiment. Women in calico mother hubbards (corsets were instruments of the Evil One); women in linsey woolsey, bare feet sometimes showing beneath humble garments in a way that would have been befitting a female John the Baptist; men, trailing along, or stalking on ahead, as showing their several positions in their households—but always men, whether with only the softness of silky beard of adolescence or (like Uncle Billy Peter Willis with the careless gray growth of years covering chin and chest) collarless and tieless. For be it known that collars and ties with men, as with corsets with the women were an abjuration with members of the Holiness band; as further, should a man

of the band be discovered wearing a "boiled shirt" (as occasionally happened on visits to the nearby towns), he was automatically removed from the Holiness band. During the May revivals, there were no collars and ties; there were no "boiled shirts."

It was an old church—this one of the Holiness band of Bogue Inlet—an old wooden edifice that had seen much service. But not always in the capacity it now served. There had been a time that some itinerant Catholic fathers had tried to set up their religion among the abandoned of the inlet. They had long since gone away discouraged. Following them, two or three sects had occupied the small church for a time, but always had found too well-intrenched the Methodism that dominated the progeny of an old time settler few. Then, off and on, had come the Holiness band, to make use of an abandoned edifice. Off and on—for it was no new thing with the Holiness band in Bogue, as in other sections where they took up the work their fanaticism demanded, to be driven from this stronghold, as from others—only to return.

The sun, dropping low, cast its last rays on peace and quiet, a subduedness of religious intensity, and drifted through the opened front doors down the aisles to make geometrical shadows pointing out into the small graveyard through the two doors at either side of the box-like pulpit—a graveyard filled with

forgotten members of other bands who had sought a foothold in the locality, with here and there a newer grave showing care and an upstanding headstone of rude cut granite as a memorial to a Holinesser not yet forgot. One or two green graves and headstones showing through the tangle of myrtle and long hanging Spanish moss that formed the "backyard" of the church of the Holinessers.

It was a box-like edifice, too, much like that a child first learns to draw in kindergarten. Weather boarded, and with a cupola it would have taken no steeplejack to negotiate. Once it had been painted, or whitewashed, but the proger propensities of its present worshipers had allowed its weather-boarded sides to scale. Two doors in front led to uncarpeted aisles between three sections of wooden benches—one on the left for the women, one on the right for the men—the middle sections reserved for the unregenerate, or the "courting" couples who had not as yet decided to choose right or left. In what might be designated as the chancel of the church, two sections of wooden pews, the amen corners reserved for the elect flanked the pulpit, at the top of three worn carpeted steps above which it proudly reared itself, draped with its red velvet table cover and Bible, and dignified in its position with its high-backed chair behind it. The communion wine was usually kept in a small cupboard

under the box of the pulpit, but before revival the practice had been discontinued since the son of the caretaker had been found more or less incompetent on the church steps with cracker-bread and wine both missing. The two doors, one on either side of the pulpit, opened toward the small graveyard and the mass of overhanging trees in the rear. In the day services, there was a smell of hot honeysuckles and a drowsy hum of bees, but at night there was as accompaniment to the honeysuckles the songs of whippoorwills—when they could be heard above the melee of the worshipers. Small kerosene lamps hung on the walls near the windows; lights hung low enough, with a purpose and easily detached from their sockets in front of the fly-specked reflectors that augmented in the least bit the moonlight that was the great illumination of the May revivals. Hitching posts outside a tumbling picket fence, a stile-block where equestrians might alight from "side saddles," and a rude tree-branched shelter for "horsebeasts" and various wagons outside the fence, proved that the Holiness church in times of revival took care of its own.

The last Saturday night of revival week was the great, the vital test of spirituality. Then, if ever, souls were to be saved. Harrison Steele, asking Lora Humphrey to take him to a Holiness meeting, knew nothing of this, knew nothing of time itself save that the sun

rose and set, and that with each setting, he had to climb a sand dune and repeat to himself a formula that he was more familiar with as a reminiscence of schoolboy oratory than as a real, existing thing.

"One if by land—two if by sea—hell of a thing if I get it twisted," he remarked, as he placed the last bit of tinder under the second stack of drift wood before he left his sand-dune hill top to play hookey with Lora Humphrey at a Holiness revival.

His first thought as he approached his first Holiness meeting was a distinct feeling of disappointment, as though he had been promised a knock-out at a vaudeville show and it had failed to materialize. Lora Humphrey drew rein on her horse a good hundred yards back from the "stile block" to the meeting house and put her finger to her lip.

"S-s-h!" she warned. "Don't make a sound! They haven't begun yet. We'll get off here and picket our horses out of sight. They're not always anxious for outsiders. Now, be on your good behavior, no matter what happens."

"Hmmph!" remarked Harrison Steele, characteristically, "what could?"

Only the eerie sound of the evening breeze from the Sound through the trees broke the hush of the moment. Then, as from a distance, there broke in on the man's

ears the same wailing he had heard on the island but a short time before.

"It's the old-time religion, the old-time religion,
The old-time religion—it's good enough for me——"

"We're in time," whispered Lora. "Come on."

Harrison Steele slipped the drop loop over his horse's head that he had learned once from a traffic policeman in New York—not, he remembered with a grin, as befitted an adventurer, from a cowboy or his ilk—and followed the girl who went forward decorously, smoothing the wrinkles out of a riding habit whose length of skirt and high-necked bodice would not have caught the eye of the editor of a New York pictorial, he thought, with another inward grin. But how attractive she was in it.

The silence actually pricked. Then, as though from the distance, but near at hand, he heard sonorous words. It was the visiting minister to the Holiness band, giving his text from where he stood in the box pulpit.

"Isaiah: 13–6. Howl ye! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a day of destruction from the Almighty."

A single unisoned groan from those occupying the benches flanking the pulpit—the already saved—those

in the seats of the Almighty—answered the opening words of the prophet. The trees seemed to shiver with the repressed feelings of those who had come to seek—and to howl—but so far saw no reason for it.

Lora Humphrey and Harrison Steele slipped silently into two vacant seats in the middle section of the church. Lora smiled in neighborly fashion at the girl who drew aside for her, but her smile was met gingerly by the child of the hommocks who drew her calico one-piece garment (fashionable had she but known it) aside in an unconsciously coquettish gesture to make room for Lora and the man from the Northwards.

The two were marked figures in the crush seeking salvation. The girl's smart riding habit, her finish that spoke of worlds beyond their own; the man's undoubted cosmopolitan outlook on the naïve meeting all had their influence on the crowd who either drew more together or stared openly at the intruders. Craned necks obtruded on the prayer that followed, as Lora and Steele, following the example of the companions, turned and knelt, face downward, at the seats they occupied.

Steele leaned over to whisper to Lora.

"How long must we do this?"

"Just a moment—and don't let it hurt your feelings too much"—she covered her mouth with her hand,

"you're not half as badly off as the man father loves to tell about——"

The sonorous chant of the men kneeling by the box pulpit, with the interjections of the saved in their amen corners reached the whisperers:

"He is so precious to us! Glory to His name. Oh, if the unsaved could realize the great love He has for them—He sure blesses them and feeds our souls—We pray they will sure turn from sin and——

"My knees hurt," whispered Steele. "I'm an invalid——

Lora Humphrey, knowing something of the length of improvised prayer of the Holinessers, edged a little nearer her Northern guest.

"And as I was saying," she went on, as though there had been no interlude of prayer and following a custom of many of the youth of Methodist and Holiness faith whose wooing is done on their knees, literally, "dad tells about this girl. Her name was Sallie Skinner. She was at a revival meeting, but the coast guardsman who was her sweetheart, didn't think much of that. They'd had a good deal of an argument up at Swansboro and she had left him and her only trail led to the meeting house. He came in just as all the prayer had been said and they were calling for lost souls to be saved. Down the aisle paraded our coast-guard friend. 'Glory be,' shouted the preacher, 'another looking for

salvation!' 'Not on your life,' said the coast guardsman, 'I'm lookin' for Sal Skinner——' "

Harrison Steele smiled as appreciatively as though the story had not been an old favorite in his salad days.

The prayer ended with a chorus of Amens and half eager groans as though some of the worshipers could scarcely wait until it should be their own turn to take part in the services. Steele and Lora rose and took their seats decorously, their eyes attentively on the minister, flanked by visiting brothers occupying rickety wooden chairs at either side of the pulpit. Men and women settled themselves back to listen. Even before he started his discourse, there was a wildness in the eyes of the minister which the man from New York could not but note, and wonder if there was any real message that such a fanatic might have to convey. There was repression in the very atmosphere, pregnant with a sort of emotional electricity that one felt needed but the spark to start an explosion. There was a strange quality of leadership about the man, nevertheless, which the Northerner wondered might not have accomplished much had it been bent in other than the fanatical direction it had taken.

He straightened up his tall thin body to its greatest height as he began. Then, as he warmed up to his discourse, that tall body writhed—he told them of hell,

damnation—all that the unregenerate might expect. It was a vivid picture of red hot coals and frying sinners that he pictured as the groans of the congregation grew more and more frequent. At first there had been a stillness through which the whippoorwill's songs could be heard as obbligato to the parson. Gradually they were drowned out. The speaker waved his long arms like flails. He pointed familiarly at his audience as he accused them of unregeneracy; pictured what they might expect if they did not seek and find the salvation he held out to them. Into the hawklike face there came the look of the avenger; he was not picturing a God of love or pity; his was only a God of wrath. He exhorted that they find the way to safety through the only portals open to them—the narrow, narrow path painfully tracked out to Heaven by himself and others of the Holiness faith. That his diction was anything but pure, that he frequently fell into colloquialisms in his fervor, that he so often made use of the word "sure" fell on ears all unheeding save those of Steele and his girl companion who could not refrain from slight smiles at each other at its fortieth or fiftieth repetition. The man's hearers might have been hanging on the words of the Godhead. His grip on his audience was undoubted—his oratorical power crude but powerful. In the flicker of misery that occasionally swept over his rapt countenance, it could

be seen that, according to his lights, he was fighting a death battle with the powers of darkness, but fighting them in a fanatical way that would brook no tolerance toward those who in the slightest degree thought differently from himself or the sect he represented.

From the vision of hell he first depicted, he dropped into more intimate matters. He told the hearers what they might expect in a very near future.

"A great avalanche of tribulations is hanging over the world," he thundered, his gaunt flails of arms threshing the warm, perfumed air. "No one can tell when it is going to let loose its overwhelming force upon this world and do its deadly work of devastation and carnage. It is only resting for a moment to give the Lord's people a chance to scale the heights of Pentecostal glory, but when this is done, the deluge will break, and what will take place then is sure indescribable.

"The time is so near that the first spatterings are dropping down. Oh, my brothers and sisters, it sure does behoove the people of God to strive to lay hold of their zenith of glory. It is always true that where sin abounds God gives more grace to His people. There was plenty of grace given the saints of old when they were tortured by fire. His true children shall not be dismayed. While men's hearts are failing them for fear of those things that are coming on the earth, the

saints of God shall be covered with glory. It is only a matter of a little time until people shall be compelled by an unseen force to join our ranks—the deepest spiritual people of all time. Yea, they will sure be glad to drop their silly notions and false teachings and get under the protection thrown over and around the true blue saints!

"The anti-Christ is now mustering his forces, though he has not yet made his personal appearance. His agents are at work. But, oh, if the unsaved could realize what great love Jesus has for them, they would accept him before it is too late——"

He wiped the beads of perspiration, that had gathered with his increasing fervor, from his high bony forehead. For a moment his arms dropped to his sides. Then, with the instinct that belongs only to the truly dramatic orator, he raised one hand and spoke in an intimate tone to his hearers—as though man to man.

"Sinners," he pleaded, conversationally, "Jesus is coming soon. Won't it be awful to be without God?"

For a moment more he stood in that attitude. The hush was unbroken, save by pent-up breathing. Not even the whisper of Steele caused a tremor in the atmosphere as he spoke almost inaudibly out of the corner of his mouth to Lora.

"The old chap is 'sure' an orator," he complimented. "Even makes me a bit goose-fleshy."

Through that silence, the voice of the speaker boomed out with suddenness. His discourse had ended as abruptly as it had begun. He had sensed the dramatic moment.

"Come to Jesus!" he exhorted, with a strength of lungs that shook the rafters of the building. "Now—now—is the accepted time! Turn from your sin, for ye know not the day that the Son of man cometh!"

Motionless as a statute he stood, his long bony arms outstretched over the heads of his emotional audience. A broken sob; a long tremulous sigh; a slight fluttering of electrically charged garments bespoke the first breaking of the tension.

Lora Humphrey gripped Steele's arm.

"Sit still," she advised. "Don't be surprised at what happens. They're——"

CHAPTER XIII

FROM over in the Amen corner on the woman's side of the church a woman's quavering soprano was lifted in a thin thread of song.

"Come to Jesus—come to Jesus—come to Jesus just now!"

One after another joined in as the wailing song was taken up by a sister or brother in various parts of the meeting house.

"Just now He will save you—come to Jesus just now!"

Visiting ministers stood up and looked eagerly about them, ready for the ministrations they knew to be at hand. A thin hag of a woman rose from her seat and swayed backward and forward as she covered her face with her hand.

"I've sinned! I've sinned!" she screamed. "Have mercy! I've sinned——"

An overseer made his way to her to lead her to the altar, taking her from the ministrative hands of sisters and brothers who had bounded forward to uphold her. Groans and sighs from all parts of the

church attested that the harvest of souls was ready for garnering. It seemed but the twinkling of an eye before the place was in a turmoil. Steele saw the drawn white faces of those who rose to totter forward, aided by the willing hands of the regenerate who busied themselves in leading the lost sheep to the altar before the box-like pulpit—an altar hastily improvised from turned-down chairs vacated by the visiting ministers and overseers. They groveled there, their groans of anguish rising above the exhortations of the saved, the shouts of Glory! Hallelujah! as one after another proclaimed the wanted salvation. Above the din could be heard the wails of the calico-clad woman who had started the hubbub.

"Oh, I must be saved! I've sinned! I've sinned!" she shrieked. "I must do something to be saved. I must wash the feet of the saints!"

From somewhere appeared a wobbly sister in Israel bearing a tin basin of water which she placed before the altar. In all gravity, men and women who had never ceased their singing, allowed their shoes and stockings (Steele could see that there were not many of the latter) to be removed. With tears streaming down her face, the seeker of salvation took up her task of foot washing. But when she came to the minister, his feet she dried with her drab straggly hair. One after another took up the ceremony.

"It is the foot-washing," explained Lora, not in a whisper, however, for it could not have been heard. Steele nodded, his face a study, whether to laugh or to have pity on these woods children.

Still in his bare feet, the parson clambered to his pulpit.

"The harvest is ripe, my brothers!" he boomed. "Have faith! Have faith!"

A scream from an hysterical woman in the center of the church answered his challenge.

"I have it! I have it!" she howled. Her bony arm shot up and removed the hot chimney from one of the side lamps. She waved it above her head, clutching it tightly. "See! See! It cannot burn me! I have faith!"

One after another followed her example. Hot chimneys waved aloft, amid the din of exhorters. Chimneyless lights flickered smokily and licked against the woodwork of the window jambs.

"They sure have faith the church won't burn down," was Steele's low-toned aside to his companion who only answered him with a gentle pressure on the arm to be silent. But she turned her head aside and her face was sickly white as she saw the next move of the barefooted leader. From in back of the pulpit he produced a writhing bronze copperhead which he waved aloft over his head. The reptile's

shimmery body caught all the glints of the flickering lights as it strove to get its venomous head in a position to strike at its enemy. Howls, shouts, screams of victory and fanatical believing greeted the performance. Lora Humphrey hid her face on the coat sleeve of Steele—an unconscious performance on her part which brought a thrill of delight and protective impulse to the man—as hands reached up to clutch the snake from the minister's grasp, to be passed from hand to hand amidst a babble of strange language that smote the ears queerly.

"Their supreme test of faith," Lora muttered chokily, "—and do you hear them? It has given them what they call the power to speak in unknown tongues."

To Steele's ears, the sounds were not unlike what he imagined the chattering of a primitive people would have been. Higher and higher it rose, a veritable Babel of sound. From one corner of the church a small band were singing, their song interspersed with shouts:

"It's the old time religion——
It's good enough for me——"

Quite unconscious of rivalry, from another section came a slower wailing:

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me——"

A sound of crashing glass rose above the other sounds. Another and another. Steele saw the lamp chimneys hurled onto the floor. Those already barefooted sprang forward to dance upon them. Other shoes and hose came off to be thrown feverishly aside as their owners joined in the dance.

"Glory! Hallelujah! It can't hurt me! I'm saved! I'm saved!"

A carpet was ripped up, and its tacks hastily strewn beneath the feet of the dancers. Steele took notice of the big hulk of a man who performed the service. His look was one of surprise as he turned to Lora.

"Why, isn't that——" he began.

She nodded, and there was a scornful tilt to her bright head.

"Yes, that's Hal—Hal Everett," was her answer, a contemptuous note in her voice. "He's been playing with the Holinessers for a week or more now; why, no one can guess, but I haven't a doubt he has some motive. He's deep, is Hal. Hasn't seemed even to mind the jibes of the other coast guardsmen a bit, they say, but is always with Uncle Billy Peter Willis —you remember I told you all about him, and how he never practiced his religion in his home, don't you? Uncle Billy claims Hal as his own particular convert."

"That the old fellow with the benevolent shiny face and white beard?" Steele pointed out the old man

who was in his element, exhorting, praying, shouting, dancing in his bare feet as though he were a score or more years younger. Again the girl nodded, and a humorous glint came to her eyes as she answered.

"Yes, that's Uncle Billy Peter. Perhaps he's happy over getting his feet washed. I shouldn't guess it to be a very frequent occurrence. And see—over there in the corner—the girl sitting so quietly—the girl in that faded old blue calico? That's his daughter, Salvation—Sal, they call her. Her father makes her come here, but no one knows better than I what she is thinking when she sees her father so full of this kind of religion——" The girl's voice trailed off as to her mind there came a vision of a half-starved baby to whom the religious fanatic they were watching denied the milk so necessary to the little one's life.

Instead of abating, it seemed to Steele that the religious fury of the Holinessers was but gaining strength at each newest excess. Women, unheeded by the dancing, shouting fanatics, lay here and there on floor or benches where they had fallen in a coma from sheer exhaustion. Blood stained the hands and faces and garments of the singing, sweating crowd, blood from broken glass and from sharp knives that had passed from hand to hand, but as far as any physical pain was concerned, there seemed to be none. Voices were raised louder and louder as another and another,

led from what sanity they had hitherto shown were caught in the emotional malestrom, tottered up the aisles to seek the salvation that the minister and his visiting cohorts had never ceased to urge upon them. Steele looked about him with distaste, and a slight shudder went through his frame.

"Come on," he told Lora, "let's go. I've had enough salvation for one evening."

The girl smiled up at him as she rose to follow. Neither of them saw the glance that was turned in their direction as Hal Everett, his brow clouded to the blackness of a thunderstorm, saw them for the first time. Nor did they see him quickly make his way to the side of the sweating Uncle Billy Peter, grasp his arm with a grip of steel to bring him out of his religious frenzy and whisper to him. With something of a snarl, the old man turned and saw the man from the Northward and the daughter of his enemy as they stood up and prepared to leave. A wild shout, louder, more compelling than all the rest brought a sudden check to the groans and shouting.

Uncle Billy Peter Willis stood like an avenger in the middle of the crowd of worshipers, his arm outstretched toward Steele and Lora, one gnarled old finger pointing them out. One word he thundered.

"Jezebel!"

If there had been silence following the tension of

the parson's exhortation, it was now a thousand times intensified. A hundred tongues clove to the roofs of mouths, stopped in their clatter of unknown tongues. Dancers stood stock still and stared. But the small blue eyes of Uncle Billy Peter never wavered from the two to whom he called attention. Then solemnly he began to speak.

"The Lord has delivered them into our hands," he shouted, sonorously. "They have been sent that the people of the Lord might make of them an example. Brothers and sisters, you may know nothing of it, but before you stand two people who would make of our little corner of the world a spot despised of the Lord! Let me tell you——"

And as Lora and Steele stood, transfixed, horror stricken at the venom of the old man, he poured forth vituperative accusation that could but bring gasps of amazement from their lips. In the background, leering cunningly, they could see Hal Everett.

The girl was the first to recover speech. She whirled toward her accuser.

"Uncle Billy Peter Willis," her voice rang out, clear, cuttingly, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! How dare you! You—to call yourself a Christian! You, to help anyone seek the way to God! Oh, I know you—they all know you, if they would come to their senses enough to admit it! You, with your

own grandchild dying this minute because you're too stingy to give him food! Oh, OH! You're too dreadful, you horrible old creature!" She was trembling in her righteous wrath. She did not even feel the tug Steele gave her sleeve, urging her to come with him.

But the old man stood his ground. His small eyes flashed back glance for glance.

"Jezebel!" he hurled at her once more. "'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the walls of Jezreel.'"

"Ugh!" shivered Steele. "I'd like to wring his wretched old neck. Will, too—but come, let's get out of this now!" The Northern man had seen mobs before. He did not like the temper of this one hanging on the words of the gray-bearded old fanatic, the glints in their eyes ominous. One never could tell what mobs would do. Again he urged the girl to haste, but she had not had her say.

"Billy Peter Willis," she cried, her voice vibrant with righteous indignation. "You'll hear from this—you and your whole band of make-believe religionists! You're—you're, why you're just awful!"

His sharp glance also took in the waiting throng that hesitated for his next words.

"Brothers!" he shouted. "Sisters of the Pentecostal Band—the Lord has delivered them into the hands of his anointed—this woman of scarlet and the man

from the North'ard who would bring ruination to our homes, then come here to make a mock of our religion—— Shall they go free—without chastisement from we-all, His chosen——"

Muttered grumbles answered the old man's outburst. Slowly, first one, then another edged up the aisle toward the spot where Steele was urging Lora from her seat. With cat-like stealth, a mocking smile on his lips, the light of revenge in his eyes, Hal Everett made his way through the throng toward the door through which they must pass.

"No! No! No!" came the answer, then a roar as the crowd surrounded the two about to step into the aisle. A woman's shrill shriek took up the taunt.

"Jezebel!"

One voice after another joined in—a feminine chorus, for most part, it became.

"Jezebel! Jezebel! Jezebel!"

From the first outburst, the parson had stood transfixed. It was evident that violence had had no part in his exhorting, and now he was for the moment awed, helpless to stem what his own oratory had been most responsible for. He leaped toward the front pew and mounted it in his bare bleeding feet.

"Brethern!" he shouted. "Remember where you are! Sisters!"

But his words fell on unheeding ears. They were

as blood hounds who had scented their quarry. A woman's long talon-like claw reached out and plucked at Lora's riding habit. A rip of hooks announced the tearing of the garment. It was as the blood scent. Steele, leaping in front of the girl, both arms outstretched to protect her from the advancing feminine mob, frenzied with their recent religious fever, emotionally alive to the fact that here was a concrete way in which they could show their religious superiority, was unable to check them. On they came. For the first moment, he hesitated to use his strength against women, but as hand after hand reached for the girl at his side, and his glance showed her proud, but frightened eyes, her garments from vicious onslaughts, beginning to hang in ribbons, all thought of chivalry save toward her was forgotten. One arm reached round her waist and he swung her onto the wooden bench behind him. Then, his arms working like flails, he beat back the waves of infuriated females bent on destruction. Above the melee could be heard the voice of Uncle Billy Peter urging them on.

"The Lord is on the side of right!" he bawled. "He shall rend the evil limb from limb!"

Lora Humphrey, standing on the bench beside her defender, was not inactive. Her lithe arms shot out with rhythmic precision as one assaulter after another measured her length on or between the benches.

Steele caught sight of her as he drove his right into the crowd.

"Atta girl!" he panted. "Give 'em the hell they're afraid of!"

But numbers were too many for him. The man's feminine opponents did not fight with any idea of technique. Teeth, claws, pins, broken glass—everything available was brought to bear on the man in efforts to get to the girl whom so many had called neighbor and loved, but whom now an insane fury bade only to destroy. A moment he was borne back by a fresh onslaught. Then he felt a viciously strong arm clutch him about the waist, and, taken unawares, he was pulled from his vantage point between the benches, to roll over and over on the floor beneath kicking feet in the arms of his assaulter. He felt a hot breath on his cheek; saw two fiery eyes close, then a harsh voice.

"Well, we'll have it out, me bucko!" It was the voice of Hal Everett. "Now is as good a time as any!"

Steele squirmed from the stranglehold to land a blow full in the sneering face, but it apparently only slightly dazed the hardy coast guardsman.

"You—you——" he began, but breath was precious. The man had him down again. Over and over they rolled, each struggling for advantage.

But as Steele had gone down, another champion had come to the aid of the girl defending herself from the furious women. Kicking, biting, pulling hair, using a superhuman strength to force her way through the mob, a girl in a faded blue calico gown had reached Lora Humphrey's side and leapt beside her, throwing an arm about her as with the other she struck out with vicious blows.

"Oh, Lory! Lory!" she sobbed. "It's me—I'll not let them hurt you, Lory!" Then to the oncoming crowd who had been deterred but a moment, while many of them were fighting among themselves, so insane was their reasoning, she flung out furiously: "Don't you dast touch her—you hear me? Don't you dast!"

A raucous gust of laughter answered her.

"Another one!" jeered a fat dame whose jelly-like sides were shaking in her eagerness to get near her prey. "The Lord sho' has delivered 'em to we-uns this night!"

But it was another hand that first reached the two girls clinging together on the wooden bench. Uncle Billy Peter came through the struggling mass like a rocket. With all his strength he tore his daughter's circling arms from about Lora and flung her over two benches into the aisle.

"Hussy!" he roared. "Would you interfere with

the people of the Lord in the performance of their duty? Begone! I'll 'tend to you!"

It was the same hand that gave the final rip to the skirt of Lora Humphrey that tore its protection from her and left her standing there, boyish in the tight knickers that had been beneath it, her coat hanging in shreds from torn white shoulders.

So quickly had the assault been made, so dumbfounded had been the Holiness leaders at what was taking place, that they had not gathered their wits quickly enough to stop it. Now they were trying, but with scant success. Even their exhortations, their prayers were of no avail in face of the humor of the feminine mob intent on a cumulative revenge, born partly of religious insanity, partly of long months of subconscious envy of the girl before them. But they did their best to press back the infuriated women, so that the girl was able to leap to a more protected spot. Even in her own distress, she found herself giving a quick thought to what was happening to Steele. She shut her eyes and a quick sob came to her throat, a sob that ended in a prayer, as she saw the man she knew she loved struggling on the church floor with the other man who had aspired to be her lover.

What she had not seen in those few minutes, though —what no one in all the crowd saw—was the other

girl who had been thrown aside by her own father. Salvation Willis lay for a moment, half stunned. She tried to rise, but there was a pain in her right shoulder that sickened her. She gritted her teeth and glanced toward the open church doors. No chance of escape there. The overflow from outside had filled them to overflowing in the desire to see all that could be seen. Slowly, painfully, she half raised herself to peep over the top of a bench. She groaned as she realized the uselessness of trying to go back to the aid of the girl who was her best friend. Then, with one hand, she crawled, cat-like, toward the open window nearest her. As painfully, she raised herself to grasp the sill. She glanced about her. No one was watching. Gritting her teeth for a final effort, the girl in the faded blue calico lifted herself up with the aid of her injured arm, and dropped out of sight into the darkness of the night outside.

Lora Humphrey was never able to give a coherent account of the ten minutes that followed—minutes each of which were a lifetime. She had an indistinct memory of a few men (those cooler headed ones, led by the parson and visiting clergy, she discovered later) striving with shouts and prayer and main force to stem the tide of infuriated women who sought to get at her. She saw them try to separate the two men fighting on the floor—heard the shouts of the com-

batants as they pleaded to be left alone. Then there was an infuriated roar from some of the women onlookers at the floor battle; a sort of animal-like cry of rage and bafflement. She uncovered her eyes to look. She was just in time to see Hal Everett stagger against a pew, unbalanced for a moment at an unexpected blow of his skilled opponent. Then, in the twinkling of an eye she saw Steele plant a heavy right-handed blow on the bull neck of the coast guardsman who fell heavily across a seat. He did not rise. He could not. Hal Everett was asleep for some time to come, all thought of fight gone from him for the time being. He was dreaming of the angels about which he had been listening.

A sudden roar from angry throats came from outside. It reached the doorway. Here onlookers hastily fell, or were brushed aside by the new element that entered the fray. Men piled through the doorway, rushed the unseeing mob; men armed with shotguns, with pitchforks, hammers, hastily collected weapons of all descriptions; men headed by a wild-eyed, frothing leader—Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey.

The irate father was not the first to reach his daughter's side, though. All unconscious of nearby allies, Harrison Steele turned from the man he had downed, and leapt to the side of the girl who was striving all she could to force back the women who were determined to reach her. It was a Steele few would have recognized, though, this battered, bleeding, dusty caricature of a man whose once immaculate garments hung on him in shreds. He lifted the girl in his arms and sought to force his way through the mob aided by those who had tried to protect her.

"Courage, little girl!" he whispered. "We've got 'em going! We'll be out of this in a minute!"

Such prophecy would have been doubtful of consummation had not the cohorts of Theophilus Humphrey arrived when they did. At the very sight of the determined rescuers, women who had been fighting animals but a moment before, fell back, whimpering, crying, pleading, trying to pull together their torn garments and (womanlike) make orderly disarranged hair. Uncle Billy Peter Willis slunk pulpit-ward like a scared rabbit. Theophilus Humphrey fixed him with his cold gray eye.

"You, Billy Peter Willis!" he shouted sternly. "Come here before I come and git ye! Would set your female tigers on my little gal, would ye? I've a mind to blow your useless brains out here and now, ye old hypocrite!" He raised his rifle menacingly. The white-bearded old man cringed near the pulpit.

"Now, Theo," he cried. "Ye don't know——" Then a semblance of bravado came to him, and he leered. "What ye think God A'Mighty goin' to do

to ye, harborin' a scarlet woman—be she your own daughter?"

Old Theo's rifle that had been lowered by one of the men with him once more swung to his shoulder.

His lips were set in a grim tight line.

"Say them words agin," he demanded, "and——"

It was Lora who prevented the tragedy. She flew to her father's side, tugging at the weapon.

"Pap! Oh, Pap!" she cried, her voice breaking hysterically, the only sign of what she had endured before his appearance. "Don't—don't do it! He isn't worth it! And I can't spare you!" The arm swung down at her tugging. "There's a so much better way!" She pulled her father's head down to whisper. Slowly, as though unwillingly, the father's angry lips straightened out, till a grin spread over his face. But he never took his eyes from those of the man who was his avowed enemy, the man whom all the countryside knew for what he was. He, as well as the girl, was unconscious that the church was fast being emptied, that where there had but a few moments before been a mob, were only torn bits of garments, broken glass and overturned benches. The avengers were dispersing.

Theophilus Lopstrop Humphrey grinned. He did not notice that the men who had entered the church with him were quietly herding the now exhausted

women in groups through the doorways. He nodded, pleased.

"Yes," he admitted, "that would hurt him a durned sight more than a bullet." He turned to the gaping few who remained, and to the parson who mopped his beaded forehead and shook his head in bewilderment at it all. "Neighbors," he announced, "ye-all have seen how this old buzzard tried to do for my little gal. Effen it hadn't been for her, I'd a shot him straight in his face and eyes. As for that other one," and he turned to touch the unconscious body of Hal Everett with a contemptuous cow-hide-clad toe, "wal, I 'low as how our friend from the North'ard has mommicked him up a-plenty already. Now it's your turn." He turned savagely on the old man who cringed behind his bench. "These here neighbors," he went on, "are witness to what I've got to say, an' what you're a-goin' to do. To-morrow we'll have papers drawed up, legal-like. Lory 'lows, an' I 'low she's right, that it'll hurt you hardest to be hit in your pocketbook. So now, let me tell you that from this night on, you're goin' to give them grandchildren of yours all they want to eat and wear; ye're going to feed your live stock, and——" and he lifted his finger to point impressively, "what's most of all, ye're going to give that gal of yours an eddication——"

Uncle Billy Peter Willis gulped. Surely the Lord

was laying a heavy hand on him. Old Humphrey went on.

"You agree?"

His adversary nodded. For once Billy Peter Willis was beyond speech. Humphrey swept his hand to include all his hearers.

"Ye hear, neighbors?" he inquired. "Ye're all witness? Good! And let me tell ye that gal Salvation desarves hit. Effen it hadn't been for her poppin' up out of the darkness with a busted arm and tellin' me and these here friends of mine that was a-passin' near on our way to clear out a nest o' moonshiners down toward the East'ard, no tellin' what would have happened——"

Steele smiled grimly. So that was how it had happened. He had been wondering. He inwardly gave his meed of praise to the grit of the country girl whom he had last seen being thrown over a church bench by an irate father. Lora Humphrey smiled tenderly.

"Darling Sal!" she murmured, appreciatively.

From outside came the rumble of carts and patter of horses' feet as the Holiness congregation took their homeward way. They spoke in hushed whispers. Occasionally a sob from some over-wrought woman testified to the emotionalism that had possessed her, but in the main the congregation were quietly, hurriedly leaving. Not though, without the knowledge that they

had something to talk about for many a moon to come. Holiness meetings had never been noted for being subdued; still nothing quite equal to this had ever occurred before. From down the road, one wagon-load, more brave than the others, quaveringly, hesitatingly took up a refrain, but it had lost its electric quality:

> "It's the old-time religion, the old-time religion,
> The old-time religion—it's good enough for me——"

"Do you think you can ride back all right?"

Harrison Steele was solicitous as Lora Humphrey, leaning on her father's arm stood by the side of her tethered horse. She laughed, rather a ghost of the merry laugh she had flung him a short hour before in the same spot.

"How else would I get home—unless you and pap want to make a basket of your hands and carry me? Why, of course, I can ride—but can you ride—that's more to the point? You see, I didn't get particularly injured, except in the feelings and the riding habit, but you——" There was pity in her eyes for Steele as she extended her arms to her father who lifted her to her saddle.

As they rode homeward through the star-spangled night, Steele spoke ruminatively.

"What," he asked, "was that text we heard that

long parson giving out when we got to that meeting house? I want to remember it."

Lora shook her head.

"I can't remember," she regretted, "but it was something about 'howl.' "

She could not see the humorous quirk to the big man's lips as for a moment he was silent.

"Off-hand," said Harrison Steele, "I should say they did."

CHAPTER XIV

FOUR days later the first of June had arrived. Practically all evidence of the scrimmage which Harrison Steele had had with Hal Everett had disappeared, save for a slight blue line under one eye which testified to the ferocity with which the coast guardsman had sought to use his ugly tactics of gouging. Healthy and strong as he was, Steele usually recovered from any such disability in record time. They had always said at the university that Harry Steele could show up the next day, without court plaster, after the most strenuous glove battle, when his opponent more likely than not was a subject for hospital treatment. So it was in this case. Hardened as he was, Hal Everett had not recovered as had Steele, and it had not softened his temper, or his furious desire for revenge on the man from New York, that he had been the victim of jibes and laughter from his chosen companions down at Swansboro where he had first gone for solace after his captain had laid him off for a few days in which to recuperate. "Being licked" was something that heretofore had had no place in the coast guardsman's lexicon. And in his then state, he

was not in a position to resent with his ready fists anything that might be said to him. The lump on his head where it had come in contact with the edge of the wooden bench in the church was still painful, and—what was worse—constantly reminiscent of his downfall in more ways than one. His battered countenance did not make him a thing of beauty, nor even a subject for condolence among the fair sex who hitherto had always looked on him with admiring eyes. Indeed, he more than once was able to discern distinct titters as he passed along the street, and this had in no wise gone to make his anger against Steele any the less. Hal Everett was a fallen hero. And it did not set well with him. Likely it would be some time, too, before he could resume his coast guard duties, and be alone to nurse his vengeance as he patrolled the wild coast. So, after a few such experiences as had met him in Swansboro, the big brown man had sullenly sulked off by himself. No one knew exactly where he went most of the time, but there were tales that said he could be seen at nearly any hour of the night, furiously stalking along the sand dunes, muttering to himself. Sometimes he was not stalking, either, for there was an illuminating reel to his stagger. Venders of Monkey Rum were finding in Hal Everett a steady customer.

Though rumors of his adversary's condition came to him, along with advice to beware of the man who was

known to be treacherous, Harrison Steele was not worrying. His set-to with Steele he considered a closed incident. There were other matters of more moment, more weighty, to claim his attention. First, there was the wonder of his newly recognized love for Lora Humphrey. To a man like Steele who had so successfully escaped the nets of the feminine for all the years of his young manhood, only to find himself at last a helpless captive at the feet of a girl who, undoubtedly, never even imagined it, was a wonder that needed serious contemplation. He wanted so to tell her. Whenever he saw her, the words that welled to his lips all but slipped from them. But there was a hesitancy. He could not understand it. For the first time in his life, Harrison Steele, though he had never considered himself conceited in his belief that he was good enough for any one (that was self-respect, he argued) now had an unaccountable feeling that he was unworthy. And it was the happenings of the last few weeks that had made him so. He was engaged in an enterprise that could not bear the light of day. While he was, he felt that he could not, must not, tell this wonderful girl how he felt about her.

Then there was the second thing to claim his attention. Just a week or so before, it had been the paramount thing. It was paramount now only in that it kept his lips closed as far as the girl was concerned,

and that he still felt his duty to his New York companions until such a time as he should find they were safely out of it. He was worried greatly about them. Two days before, according to his own and their calculations, the *Falcon* should have put back into Bogue Inlet. What could have happened? He reviled himself for having allowed them to take the fool journey. All the booze in the world was not worth it.

There was not much sleep for Harrison Steele during the days that followed his exciting church-going experience. It was in his head that his companions from New York would try to make the island in the darkness, if possible. Indeed, this had been the idea when the scheme of the bonfires had been devised—so his vigils on the sand dunes were late ones at night, and early—very early—ones in the morning. Often as early as three o'clock found him at his lookout, and he had come to know the night scenes as well as the day. For once in his life, he knew how darkness melted into daylight. He watched the stars and the moon go out, and the dawn come in. Not until the first rays of the sun rising far out at sea tinged the dark blue of the ocean with its rays of purple and gold and crimson and violet, did he leave his post. Old Henry was in a quandary. He went about muttering to himself.

"Dat Marse Harrison's jes' de sleepinest man," he

complained in his loneliness. "Thought he wanted to fish for drum or go gittin' marsh hens, and hyar he is a-sleepin' come dinner time."

Suffice it to explain that Steele had not taken Henry, any more than any one else, into his confidence as to his nightly prowling.

It was on a misty night that Harrison Steele slipped down the path to his sand dune. Mist was rolling in from the sea, much as it had on the night he had had his first glimpse of it off Bogue. Reaching the top of the dune, he lighted a bit of the kindling under one of his laid bonfires to see if it would work. It went out with a little sizzling sound.

"Hmmph!" muttered Steele. "Won't be much of a bonfire if they make it to-night. Doubt if they could see it in all this mist, any way. Wonder what's happened!"

He set down to begin his long, lonely vigil. As always, though, it was not so much of the fate of his friends of which he thought as of the lovely girl sleeping peacefully over in her home in the grove in the hommocks across the Sound. The first faint streaks of a battle gray dawn were lighting the mist when he aroused himself. Some sixth sense told him that something was about to happen—something was happening somewhere out there in the black expanse of sea before him. He stood up to listen. At first only

the booming of the surf on the sand was all he could hear. Then, faintly, very faintly, he caught the sounds of the explosions of an engine. That must be the *Falcon*. And she was in a hurry. Coming dangerously close inshore, too, he thought. Surely they must have warned Captain McMaster of the danger of those submerged sand hills off the coast—those dangers worse than rocks on which so many a good ship and true had floundered and foundered in other pirate days. He turned to his bonfires. There was no trouble by land. He was sure of that. His vigil had been too long this night. His hand trembled just a bit as he struck a match to light a bonfire. It would not light. Then the other. With another sizzling sound the wet tinder smothered out. A muttered imprecation as he heard the sounds at sea once more, above the surf's roar, and another match was set to the first bonfire. As it blazed weakly, then caught, he ran down the sand hill and toward the beach. He could distinctly hear the yacht's sounds now, but an augmented lighting behind him made him turn to see that both his bonfires were blazing briskly, fanned by the breeze that had sprung up with the coming morning.

"Damn!" he imprecated. "That'll beach 'em sure!"

He realized that with the lighting of the second fire he had given the signal for all haste ashore, since there was trouble by sea. One fire would have proclaimed

that all was well on land—it was taken for granted that they could tell for themselves if there was trouble at sea. "Well, it can't be helped," he mumured philosophically. "Maybe there is trouble at sea, and perhaps the old *Falcon* can stand a beaching, after all."

As if in answer to his musing, a sudden boom came across the expanse of water and mist.

"Damn!" repeated Steele. "Revenue cutter! Now for it!"

He heard the yacht's engine give an explosive sputter, then a whir; then stop. It could not be far from shore, but in the mist he could see nothing. But he knew that the yacht had stopped; beached probably, or caught on one of those ocean sand hills. He wondered what to do, and as he wondered, there came another roar across the water, farther off this time, as though the revenue cutter that was doubtless after the yacht was shooting at random. Then, as he stood there helplessly, as on a previous occasion, the mist lifted for a moment and he saw, clearly outlined against the black of the water, his own yacht; its prow set high in the air, where it had run aground. Men were hurriedly lowering a lifeboat. He saw two of them drop overboard into it, then something in heavy bags was hurriedly lowered to them. They started to pull for shore. Far out, nearer the horizon, he saw the smoke from a cutter's gun, but it was not pointed

toward his yacht. Then, as suddenly as it had lifted, the mist closed down once more.

Steele ran out waist deep through the combers to clutch the small boat that was hurriedly making its way inshore. The muffled voice of Cardwell came to him.

"Take a hand there, old top!" he said. "We'll beat 'em yet! Your two lights saved us—but say, how in Tophet did you make out Uncle Sammie's little plaything out there through all this mist! Just in time, too, I'd say—Cap McMaster was for making the Inlet——"

There was no time for Steele to explain the accident that undoubtedly was responsible for the cutter's failing to pick up its quarry. He heaved mightily on the small boat with its heavy load as the others leapt into the water to help pull it inshore. Billy Meade, as little talkative as ever, was, however, busy.

"Brought this stuff too far to have to turn it over to the revenuers," he announced. "Don't think much of vacationing in Federal pen anyhow. Got to get it ashore. Bury it—pirate stuff—all that sort of thing."

The willing hands of the three men lifted the heavy filled burlap bags from the small boat and tossed them on the beach.

"Can't leave 'em here," advised Cardwell. "Got to

bury them, as Meade says. Got to hurry after the other stuff, too—Clem Ashley'll be having a fit to get rid of it. We left him as custodian, and I will say he was game, even if he did face having that revenue cutter spot him while he was in sole possession. Here, Steele, you chase back there in those sand dunes and find a place. Dig! Not too close to shore. We'll heave back for the rest before this mist rises." Cardwell had been head of the expedition for so long that he did not now turn any authority over to Steele, or acknowledge that he was only nominal head. The habit was too strong. But Steele did not notice. Events were occurring so rapidly, that his one thought now was in obeying the coolest head, in doing what he suggested. He turned toward the sand dunes, as the small boat headed yachtward through the mist.

Twenty minutes later, the contraband cargo from Bermuda had all been removed from the *Falcon,* and was safely buried under a flattened heap of wet sand behind a high dune. Cardwell stood on the shore and stretched wearily.

"Whew!" he announced. "I've earned mine all right—could use one right now, too, if it wasn't all so safely buried——"

Clem Ashley spoke hesitantly, as though he might be considered a naughty school boy.

"Left a couple aboard," he told them. "Rheumatism, epizoötics; all that, you know. In case—too much water, you know——"

"Well, you're not quite a fool after all," was Cardwell's comment. "I'm for it! Jump in, Steele, we'll go aboard for refreshments."

To their astonishment, Harrison Steele shook his head in refusal.

"No, I think not," he said ruminatively, but Ashley broke in with a jeer.

"Well, wouldn't that freeze you?" he asked the universe at large, then to his friend: "What's the matter, old top? Got religion while we were sailing the briny?"

A broad grin, enigmatical, spread across the face of Steele.

"Religion?" he queried. "Well, *I'll* say so! Tell you all about it later. Better be getting back to the yacht, though, now—that revenuer will be calling on you soon, or I miss my guess. You'll have to receive them in state—and not such a state as you're in now—Say, though," and he seemed to think of something, as his friends started to their boat, "there's something else. We'll want to find that stuff again, and when the marks of digging are swept away, we'll have a hell of a time in this sand waste. Nobody knows better than I by now how much every bit of this shore is

alike. No wonder those old pirates lost their treasure. I've no mind to lose ours, after all this trouble, and narrow escape. I'll have to chart it." He looked about him as he spoke, then indicated the coast guard clock station near at hand. "There's the only thing along this whole blasted waste that is immovable. I'll take my markings from that." He pulled something from his ulster pocket. "Got a small compass here—found good use for it, too, when I've been prowling around."

Clem Ashley waved to him from his seat in the stern of the ship's boat.

"See you later!" he called mockingly, as the strong arms of Grayson Cardwell shot the small craft through the foam of surf. "Pray for us!"

Harrison Steele stood watching them for a moment. The light of morning was fast lifting the mist. Plainly he could see the *Falcon* as it reared itself like a frightened steed on the submerged sand reef. Its position was not in the least dangerous, he knew—as he also was sure that the yacht would in time be able to float itself, when its prow should have wedged itself further down in the sand and helped the waters to push it aside. He grinned appreciatively, too, when he saw dimly through the lifting mist that the revenue cutter had undoubtedly spied its prey and was bearing down on the coast of Bogue Island at a pretty clip.

Then he turned with his compass in hand toward the coast guard pole to begin his calculations.

A half hour later, once more from his vantage point atop the sand dune beside the charred remains of his bonfires, Steele saw the cutter bear to near the yacht, and heard the megaphoned announcement in curt tones that the officers were coming aboard.

Surprise was on the countenance of the officer in charge of the boarding party as he was met at the rail by Grayson Cardwell, immaculate in yachting flannels, his suave manner expressing delight at the visit. Lolling in deck chairs aft, a bit uncomfortable because of the yacht's tilt, but urbanity itself, Clem Ashley and Billy Meade watched the blue uniformed men clamber over the rail, then rose and came forward to extend their greetings. It was more than evident that the officer in charge was nonplused at their appearance and the manner of vessel he had come to board. It was so evidently a gentleman's pleasure yacht. Cardwell, seeing this at a glance, inwardly congratulated himself on the foresight that had caused him to insist that the entire party outfit themselves as becoming members of a yachting party while they were at Bermuda.

"I am Lieutenant Barrows," the chief officer introduced himself, "you will pardon me, I'm sure, but I—er—we thought that you——"

Cardwell smiled condescendingly, his eyebrows lifted a trifle as he replied with a nod. "I understand. You—er—thought we were engaged in what I believe is vulgarly known as rum running."

The officer nodded uncomfortably.

"Of course, it is hard for us to distinguish," he said, apologetically, "we can't trust any one, it seems, and when you refused to stand to back there——"

"Our mistake," magnanimously offered Cardwell, "but we could not imagine you meant us!" Surprise showed in his very manner. "Something went wrong with our compass last night, and we got lost in the mist, and——"

"We're not much as mariners anyhow, I imagine," came from Billy Meade, with his slow smile. "We're guests, you might say. This is the *Falcon,* owner Harrison Steele, the New York broker, you know. We have just come up from Biscayne Bay, headed for Bogue Inlet to pick up the owner who is here at Mr. Cardwell's lodge," his hand indicated his friend who bowed at the introduction, "for a bit of fishing and end season shooting, and——"

It was Clem Ashley who took up the explanation. His little face twisted humorously as he spoke.

"I'm not a sea-faring man, agreed," he commented. "If I were I'd know how to say what has happened us—but as it is I'd say we've come something of a

cropper." His small twinkling eyes swept the tilted deck.

Lieutenant Barrows was distinctly uneasy.

"I—er—I'm sure you're right," he again hesitated, "but—well, the facts of the case are that we've orders to search you for contraband——" He lifted his hand at Cardwell's shocked face to still the indignant protest he imagined about to come. "Merely perfunctory," he added, still more apologetically, "but orders——"

Grayson Cardwell bowed politely.

"By all means," he said. "What would the country be without men who obeyed orders?"

As Lieutenant Barrows disappeared through the cabin door, Clem Ashley who had again dropped into his wicker deck chair, called after him impudently: "Hope you find something! If you do, would you save a small nip for me—could use it!"

Perfunctory the search was. As Cardwell afterward explained, had he known that he and Meade and Ashley were capable of such good teamwork, they would have been saved an early morning wetting, for there was many a place aboard where their precious refreshments could have been safely hidden while the men who had brought it were successfully playing the ancient and more or less honorable game of bluff.

Back on deck, Lieutenant Barrows was profuse in apologies. He even offered aid in taking the *Falcon* off the sand bar, and it was always a favorite jest of Ashley's thereafter that there is no such aid to proficient rum runners as revenue cutters, if one only knows how to treat them. Certainly, the *Falcon* easily afloat at her anchor a short time later, was a testimony to the efficiency of the cutter crew.

Lieutenant Barrows remained aboard to see that all was well as the yacht was shifted from her position on the sands. He was making his adieus at the rail when Ashley came forward with his impish grin.

"Thanks awf'lly, old top," he thanked, "but—but I'm constrained by your kindness to tell you that I've held out on you——"

The officer's face was a study. He wheeled around, but Ashley stopped him with an uplifted hand, much as the lieutenant's had been lifted, as he turned and walked to his wicker deck chair. From under it he produced two bottles of reddish-brown liquid which he plumped down on the small wicker table. He reached for glasses, and looked at the gaping lieutenant. "Will you join us?" he asked.

Only for a moment the officer gaped. Then his face broke into a broad grin, and an anticipatory.

"Well, you did put it over, didn't you," he began,

but as Ashley calmly poured the drinks into glasses, his eyes twinkled. "Everything in moderation, has always been my theory," he remarked.

"Even the amount of liquor a vessel may safely carry?" queried Meade, smiling slowly.

The other nodded emphatically.

"Even the amount of liquor a vessel or a man may carry," he declared. "And as I was saying, far be it from me to take away a gentleman's highball—in moderation——"

Ashley passed him a filled glass, then gave others to his friends. They lifted them. Lieutenant Barrows spoke solemnly.

"Here's how!" he toasted. His head tilted back as the liquor disappeared in one gulp. "And apologies," he added, as he handed back his empty glass.

"Our privilege," declared Ashley. "Don't mention it!"

Lieutenant Barrows dropped over the rail to his waiting small boat. The three watched him pull away toward the revenue cutter waiting in the last of the lifting mist. Billy Meade smiled at his companions, a smile more deliberate, more pregnant with meaning than even his usual ones.

"'Everything in moderation,'" he quoted. "It seems to me, doesn't it to you, that our first sally into

a new occupation is what might be called a moderately successful one?"

From the sand dune, Harrison Steele watched the revenue cutter pull his yacht off the sand. His smile was a pleased one as he pictured what his companions might have said, how they had received the defenders of the law against modern piracy. He started to clamber down to make his way toward the lodge where he knew breakfast was waiting.

"Well, so far, so good," he murmured. "But it's a bit too much of a strain for a regular occupation."

At the top of another sand hill fifty yards away something stirred, but he did not see it; his back was turned to it. At first it looked like shifting sand. Then it took form as it rose higher. The growing light showed a man in a slicker, so nearly the color of the sand beneath him that it had proven a perfect camouflage in the uncertain light. A first slanting ray of the newly rising sun touched the man's face. Hal Everett's still battered features, further bloated from the night's debauchery from which he had but a short time before wakened, blinked at it. He rose to a kneeling posture to stare after Steele's retreating figure. There was venom in his bleared glance as he watched.

"So that's your lay, my fine bird!" he snarled under his breath. "Booze runnin'! Must a hid away a for-

tune in licker down in that sand. But I 'low hit'll be a considerable time before you-all ever set eyes on it again. If ever!" He showed his teeth evilly, a caricature of a grin on his face, bloated and marred, wearing the evidences of the continued debauch of Monkey Rum which he had consumed during the time of his enforced idleness. "Hmmph!" he went on, as he saw Steele's figure disappear through the lane of pines and wild oleanders, "wonder if I'd best turn him up, or keep the booze! Hmmph! Hit'd keep me from workin' some time to come—keep me in good licker, too, I 'low."

He stumbled to his feet and half tumbled down the sand dune toward the beach, headed for the coast-guard station in the distance. It had been the sound of voices in the mist that had awakened the man when Cardwell's boat had come ashore. He had been sleeping where he had fallen the night before, too overcome at last with his libations to go further. Then the slicker he had worn had proved so effectual that, though he was but fifty yards or so away from Steele's own sand hill, the latter had not seen him. So Hal Everett, through the haze of his hang-over, had seen what the men had brought ashore; seen where they had hidden it. Some canny sense, urged on by his hatred

of Steele, and what his half-consciousness told him might be a chance for further revenge, had bidden him remain quiet. So he had watched to the finish; watched quietly even while Steele was making his calculations with the compass from the coast-guard post. Now, and for quite a time before, he was in his sober senses, and he knew what to do.

It was an easy matter for him to find where whatever the burlap bags had contained were hidden. The marks were still fresh. From there he made his way to the shore. A hard twisting wrench, and the guard post was pulled from the sand in which it was imbedded. Quickly the hole was filled; quickly a peculiarly shaped shell-rock placed to mark where it had once been. Then, bearing the post over his shoulder, crouching as near the beach as he could, in case of eyes prying from the yacht, he made his way down the beach.

Fully a quarter of a mile further down the beach, at a spot so identical with the one he had lately quitted that not even a coast guardsman familiar with the place could have told the difference, he stopped. There, with grunts and painful evidence that his injuries were not yet healed, the post was once more set in place where it stood starkly, the one lone sentinel in

the waste of sandy shore. Hal Everett stood back and regarded his work.

"There, now, dang ye!" he exploded. "Hunt! When ye're through hit'll be my turn. I 'low there's no hurry."

CHAPTER XV

WITH so much liquid refreshment so near at hand, and after such an exciting time to get it there, it followed as a matter of course that the party installed at the lodge, ostensibly hunting and fishing, but in reality awaiting a report from their aviator that the hydroplane was once more all right and ready to resume its journey northward to Westchester County, should become a bit restless under an enforced abstinence.

Abstinence had been counseled by Steele, and he had been upheld by Grayson Cardwell.

"I know these natives better than you," Cardwell had told them, "and they're a deep lot. I feel as sure as Steele here that no one knows anything about what has happened, but we had better be sure. Some of those prowling progers from down Salterpath way down at the end of the preserve might have been abroad and seen things, and we can't afford to take chances. Better wait awhile and be sure, before we dig it up."

Strangely enough, it was for quite a different reason that Steele showed apathy toward his buried treasure.

He could not understand it himself, but he seemed to have lost any taste he ever had had for intoxicants of any kind. Life seemed so much better without them. He did not like the idea even in his thoughts of associating himself with Lora Humphrey with liquor on his breath. He tried again and again to put from him the thought of what she would think and say if she knew what had brought him to Bogue and of the contraband there now which his money had purchased; but it kept recurring to him. They were not pleasant thoughts. He was not accustomed to feeling as guilty, as uneasy, about any of his actions as he was now.

So, at least for the time being, he was content to let his store remain where it was, even in the face of Ashley's repeated grumblings.

"Rum! Rum! Most everywhere and not a drop to drink!" complained that gay individual moodily. "Say, what do you chaps think I took a chance on Federal prison for anyway?"

But his grumblings were overruled by Cardwell and Steele.

"You'll have parties enough," Cardwell peremptorily told him, "if you'll have a little patience. Tell you what—if you're a good little boy you can have one the night Don gets here with his air wagon. We can get it in a jiffy, eh, Steele? You've that little

map all right, eh?" addressing the big broker. "Here, let's see it." Steele obediently passed over the envelope on the back of which he had drawn his crude map when taking his compass bearings from the guard post. "Hmm," praised Cardwell. "That's plain enough—but you better hang on to it pretty tight."

"So tight that nobody else can get that way," grumbled Ashley, but as usual he was ignored.

Two days later Don Baldwin's hydroplane swooped gracefully down over the still waters of Bogue Inlet and came to rest as lightly on the inland waters' bosom. Ashley, watching it, gave a whoop of delight.

"Hurray!" he shouted. "Also 'yo! Ho! Ho! And a bottle of soda pop!"

They smiled indulgently at him, for, unless it was Steele, not one of them were averse to the promised celebration, tired out as they were with a long day's hunting and fishing. But the stars were beginning to come out, supper was over and from the kitchen Henry could be heard chanting his good-night song over the dishes before his laying down time, before the quartet sallied out to dig for treasure—a modern treasure, very modern, it is true, and unaccustomed in this land where centuries-old gold and jewels were reputed to be buried—but, nonetheless, treasure.

At the guard post they came to a stop. Steele took

out his map and the rather round-about course to where they supposed the contraband to be buried was gone over. They stopped back of a sand dune—so much resembling that where the bags had originally been buried that no one could have told the difference.

"Dig here!" ordered Steele, as he set the example by sticking his shovel into the shifty sand. Even Ashley, carefully gotten up in some of his Bermuda purchased raiment, fell too with a will. For the moment, other things were paramount to his grooming.

For the better part of an hour they dug. Only sand and more sand rewarded them. Steele's brows puckered querulously, as again and again he consulted his rude map.

"I know it's the right place," he repeated for the tenth or eleventh time. "I can't be wrong."

"Someone has blundered," bitterly regretted Ashley as he stood up, flung his shovel from him and sank into the sand with a groan, rubbing his aching arms.

For the fourth time they returned to the post and carefully went over the ground, step by step.

"He's right, according to the map," at last agreed Cardwell, "but I don't see——" He stopped and rather suspiciously eyed Steele. Ashley roused himself at the look.

"Oh, but I say, old dear," he protested to Steele,

"are you having us on? If so, enough, I should say is plenty. I'm thirsty." He sounded like a small boy teasing for cake.

Steele growled at him, and the glance he bent on the other held something of blackness.

"I need hardly say," he remarked, "that this thing is as unaccountable to me as to you. I know I made the map alone, but I am equally sure that here is where I put the stuff. What object could I possibly have——" He grabbed up his shovel. "Go on back, if any of you wish, but I'm going to have a try at tearing up this whole end of the beach." His lips were set in a grim line.

But at the end of two hours more, when they were all exhausted to the point of dropping into the holes they had dug, they had found no sign of the burlap bags. Tempers, too, were frazzled, and muscles sore.

Billy Meade straightened up suddenly, leapt from the hole in which he had been digging and flung his shovel over his shoulder.

"Dig all night if you want to," he declared, "but I'm through. All the booze in the world isn't worth it. And if you ask my opinion, I would say that someone has beaten us to it—someone who was watching when it was put here. We're damn lucky nothing worse than losing it has happened to us——"

Cardwell and Ashley, the latter with what alacrity was left in him, followed Meade's example. Steele was the last to give up.

"Oh, of course, it's all right with you chaps," he complained in a voice most unusual with his complacent self, "but I think I'd like to locate it. You're only losing a drink, but if you'll recall, I had quite a bit tied up in those burlap sacks."

"And I had quite a drink," agreed Ashley, "but we can't dig all night. To-morrow's another day."

So to-morrow was—and the next and the one following it. Hunting parties were the order of the day among Grayson Cardwell's guests at the lodge on Bogue Island, but they were strange hunting parties. They asked no guide, and investigation would have shown that, on starting out, they carried shovels and picks instead of the more usual rifles or fishing tackle. All, however, to no avail. Hal Everett had done well in going the distance he did, for in their search many hundreds of square feet felt the force of those shovels and picks. It began to look hopeless. They were, for the most part, inclined to believe what Billy Meade had suggested was the proper solution, but hope was not yet gone, and still they lingered. But they could not by any stretch of the imagination be described as a happy hunting party. Grouches were predominant; relations becoming partly strained. Still the hydroplane danced lightly on the waters of Bogue Sound and waited its cargo.

In desperation one night over the gloom that had settled over his companions, Steele determined to escape to a happier atmosphere for a time. He had kept away from the hommocks for the last few days, but now the yearning to see Lora Humphrey took hold on him and he longed to talk to her, to listen to some one talk about something save bottles that could not be found.

Henry poled him across the Sound at dusk. He found the girl swinging in her hammock on the slanting little wooden porch. In her arms she held a baby and she stopped her crooning to the child long enough to welcome Steele and to indicate that he should make himself at home. But before the man could drop into one of the splint-seated chairs that were tipped against the wall, another girl who sat on the other end of the porch swinging her bare feet from her perch and cuddling a child a little older than the baby, leapt to her feet and timidly offered the courtesy which Lora's burden had kept her from doing.

"Thought you were lost in the sand dunes," Lora laughed, "or maybe some of Hal Everett's bites were beginning to take effect after all. I must say, though, that he has proven one thing to me. I always thought before that his bark was worse than his bite." She

stopped to wave a hand at the girl who offered the chair. "This is my very dear friend, Salvation Willis, Mr. Steele," she introduced, as the other girl flushed and sought to hide her bare feet beneath totally inadequate skirts. "You have not had the chance of meeting her before," she added quickly, and, Steele thought, with a trace of chiding in her voice, "but it is to Salvation that we owe the fact that our adversaries did not follow their Biblical teaching and tear us limb from limb."

Steele gave the calicoed hommocks girl his deepest courtesy.

"I have wanted to thank Miss Willis," he deplored, "many times—but I have been a bit uncertain as to wisdom of the procedure. It seemed that I had done enough damage already without adding other victims. But," and he turned his whole attention to the daughter of Uncle Billy Peter Willis who stood awkwardly, not knowing what to do in this unexpected emergency, "I do want to thank you for what you did. I'm glad of this opportunity. It was—well, it was sporting of you—I don't know of another girl anywhere, unless it should be——" and his roving eyes took in his hostess, "who would have done what you did——"

Salvation Willis slithered to her end of the porch and clasped the small child to her as she sunk down.

"Hit—hit warn't nuthin'," she assured him, modestly. "I jes' couldn't a-bear to see 'em a-hurtin' Lory——"

"Neither could I." Steele gave the assurance, but his eyes sought those of his hostess in an effort to give stronger meaning to his simple words.

Salvation Willis clambered once more to her feet, leading the small child toward Lora Humphrey and her hammock. She reached out her arms to her for the baby.

"Gimme the 'breast baby,'" she said, "we-all must be a-moseyin' before pap comes home."

Lora held the baby a bit closer to her for a moment.

"You're sure they'll be all right?" she asked. "Enough to eat and everything——"

A slow smile spread over the country girl's face.

"Umph-humph," she nodded. "Pap's got religion—the real kind—for a spell anyhow. Even the beast critters air gittin' enough to eat."

"You see," Lora turned to Steele triumphantly. "We're missionaries! What's a black eye or so in a good cause? Why, Sal's getting ready to go to school to the Eastward, and Uncle Billy is going to have a woman in to tend the babies as they should be. And they're such fine babies!" She gave another cuddle to the sleeping bundle she held. "Come here, Little Billy," she called to the larger child who clung to the

skirts of his aunt, peeping shyly out at the man from the Northward, "come and show Mr. Steele what you can do! Remember that little piece about the Methodists?"

A little more urging, and a rather scared, but valiant young edition of Uncle Billy Peter stood on the rickety porch and twisted his pinafore as he lipsed out in quavering accents the first verse of his *chef-d'œuvre*. His high quavering accents cut into the growing stillness of the hommock night:

"My gran-dad's a preacher,
And he's a Methodist, too——
I think they're the nicest folks in the world, don't you?"

Steele's eyes were fixed on the girl in her light hammock whose own Madonna eyes were contemplating the sleeping baby she held. He heard the high quavering accents, felt that a reply was necessary. Lora was a Methodist, he had heard. He looked up at the skinny small reciter.

"Quite right! Quite right!" he averred.

Young Billy Peter went on with his recital of his own attempt to follow the teachings to shout if he were happy, and the dire results that followed. He rushed his words. He had a sort of stage fright at this sort of high-class audience. Steele only half

heard him, save at the end, when the child breathlessly finished:

"But I guess I learned a lesson,
That'll suit all little girls and boys,
When you go to Methodist meetin',
Be sure and don't make any noise."

He retired hastily behind the scant skirts of his retiring aunt. Steele applauded.

"Quite so! Quite so!" he repeated. "Then you know, son, that Methodists are different from Holinessers—I've only learned it and I'm quite a bit older than you—— Here," and his hand reached down into his pocket and pulled forth a big silver dollar at which the boy's eyes grew round. There was more of Uncle Billy Peter Willis in him than he could realize at this tender age when he did not, or could not account for the exhilaration caused by the sight of money. "Here," said Steele, "buy yourself a lolly-pop or something——"

Lora Humphrey laughed as she relinquished the baby she held to Salvation Willis.

"Maybe he'll buy a farm, but he'd have to get a long way from Bogue to know what a lolly-pop meant."

"We'll be a-moseyin'," repeated Salvation Willis.

"Got to git the babies' supper, and pap's. He's more hongry these days than common."

Lora and Steele watched the Willis girl as she slithered down the path between the shadowing pines, with one baby clinging to her skirts, another in her arms. Though slouching, her gait was a pace-eating one, and she was soon lost in the shadows of the coming night. Steele turned to the girl.

"What a wonderful thing for the people of this country that they have you!" he complimented feelingly. "What you must have done—are doing for them!"

In the girl's answering smile, there was something of a far-away wondering. She picked up the light shawl that had fallen to the floor and draped it around her organdie-clad shoulders.

"I wonder!" she said musingly. "I wonder if I am doing them good—or harm. There are so many ways of looking at things—and one way to happiness lies along the road of content. I can't say exactly that I am making them all contented with their lot—by example, at least. But I'm trying——"

For a moment more she was silent, as her eyes searched out the moon that was making its way up the horizon to cast its rays—silver rays, first rays—through the moss-hung verdure. Then she turned to look full at Steele.

"I'm trying," she repeated, "after all, I can't help it. I'm sorry for these people, just as I've been sorry for a lot of people in a whole lot different environment. I'm always sorry for people who don't understand. And I'm so sorry for them that I make a more or less fool of myself. I'm always apologizing for all I am and stand for, in an effort to make them feel contented with themselves. It's a question whether or not people should be contented. Why, I've been telling these people down here what all their blessings are, and giving them to understand that I envy them —envy even their ignorance—when the facts of the case are that I'm sorry—sorry to death for them. But can I tell them? No! I never have been able to talk to people whom I have subconsciously or consciously known to be my mental inferiors. I am always apologetic—telling them how great they are—until they believe it, and feel sorry for my inferior position.

"Why, I remember," and Steele caught the humorous little quirk to her mouth, "how I was thrown with a lot of women during my war experiences who were, or should have been, my mental superiors. I always seemed to know, somehow, away down deep inside me—you'll understand, won't you," she looked anxiously at Steele, who nodded his comprehension, "that I'm not so entirely conceited, but I did seem to feel that they—well, er—they didn't quite understand. I

could afford to be magnanimous, but in being so, I'm afraid I haven't always held my dignity. I just don't know how to talk to people who are not, well, not my sort." Steele once more nodded his complete understanding, but he was gaining an insight into the nature of Lora Humphrey that all their previous acquaintance had not given him. Lora laughed.

"There was one woman," she remembered. "She used to come often to the hospital where I was working, doing all I could to make things as easy as they could be for a lot of soldiers who would never see again, or never be themselves again. I was a graduate nurse, but all of us had forgotten any distinction that might carry in doing whatever we were asked. This woman came again and again. Poor soul, she thought so well of herself; thought she was doing so much. And yet, sometimes, I wonder if she were not in a little degree pandering to her own vanity. She was an authoress of sorts, and she spent hours reading to the soldiers—all sorts of things when they demanded it—but mostly from her own novels or poems when she got unprotesting victims. Often she took occasion to tell me how great she was, and I told her again and again how wonderful it was for her to do what she was doing. One day, after some of this sort of thing, she patted me on the arm. 'Oh, my dear,' she said, 'it'll all come to you. If you'll keep on trying

as you are, some day you'll do just as much for these poor chaps as I'm doing.' "

Steele's roar of laughter rung out on the quiet air. This sense of humor in the girl he had come to love came to him as the pleasantest of surprises. It was the one thing needful, it might seem, to make her entirely perfect in his eyes.

"Women are queer things," he commented, in the wisdom of his small experience, "they so usually think well of themselves."

"Most always too well," Lora agreed. "I can think of just another experience to prove it. There was another woman whose son was under my care. She was a woman of means, and her son had never known what it was to have his slightest wish thwarted before he went in the army. Then he was wounded. He wanted me to come home with them when he was partially convalescent, and the woman's influence was sufficient to have this whim of his granted. I rather hesitated, for I didn't just exactly like the idea of going out to service, as you might call it, in that way. We people of the hammocks may not be all that some of your high fliers are in certain sorts of culture, but we have our distinctions, and nursing under the exigencies of war and going into a private home were different things to me—with this peculiar training of mine. Anyway, I think I stood just about as much

superiority and condescension under the guise of kindness as I could. I couldn't openly rebel, because of that peculiarity of mine of never being able to talk back to my mental inferiors. But one day it was too much. The kindness that almost partook of the qualities of a tip stung me to open rebellion.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Tolliver,' " I cried in ecstasy at what she had offered. 'You are entirely too good to me. You almost make me forget that I'm a hired girl!' "

"What did she say? Hmmph!" Lora curled herself tighter into her hammock as she reminisced. "Nothing much except, in condescendingly shocked tones: 'Oh, my dear! You really mustn't think of yourself that way—we never do!' "

"Hmmph!" repeated Harrison Steele in monosyllabic reply, as he mentally pictured the girl before him as the mistress of Broad Acres.

The shadows had closed down to the very edges of the inlet and the virgin pines and cypresses were mere shadows on the landscape. They started up to listen as a halloo in the distance proclaimed the near approach of old Theophilus Humphrey, home from his long day's work in his fields in another section of the hommocks. Even a proger must work in the spring time, and Theophilus Humphrey was fast becoming a man of worth, with the windfall of real

money that had been coming in from Grayson Cardwell and his guests from the Northward.

Old Theo's greeting was a hearty one.

"Goin' to stay for supper?" he asked, and showed his real disappointment at Steele's refusal and explanation that he must get back to the island to prepare for the next day's sport of goat hunting. This was the one thing that the New York party had not yet tried, but though disappointed in their newest search, they had decided that they would not leave the island without one day's try at the sort of hunting that so many men of their acquaintance crossed the continent to get, and believed could only be found in the Rocky Mountains. But it had only taken them the few days of their residence in Bogue Island to know that not only could goats, as wild as any in those bigger mountain fastnesses be found roaming at will on the sand dunes with their only vegetation the sprig or two of bear grass peeping up here and there, but that deer there, too were plentiful, and wild hogs and a plenitude of smaller mammals that would make a summer's dream for a huntsman.

Theo Humphrey reached into his pocket and brought out a huge plug of tobacco.

"Have a chaw before ye go?" he invited with a grin.

Lora Humphrey's "Father!" was sternly remonstrative.

"Aw, no harm, Lory," he explained, as he winked hugely at their guest who rose to depart. "I promised ye I wouldn't buy any more chawin' tobacco—hit hain't jes' proper toward the East'ard where she's been schoolin'," he explained to Steele, with an affectionate nod toward his embarrassed daughter. "I promised, an' I kept my word. I got this offen a Holinesser——"

"But, father," Lora's voice was still full of rebuke for an erring child. "They may have their faults, but I know that they are not allowed tobacco in any form, and wouldn't buy it——"

Her father bit off a huge chunk of the pressed black weed. He spat voluminously through his teeth out into the sand path.

"Oh, Isaiah Fermer didn't buy this for hisself," he explained solemnly. "He boughten it for his horse—that one as has the botts!"

CHAPTER XVI

"De mawin' light am breakin'
De da'kness disampears——"

FROM the region back of the lodge black Henry was greeting the new day with his softly crooned melody with all the wailing symphony that is the gift of his race. A subdued rattle of pots and pans orchestraed the harmony, and the life-giving odor of newly made coffee wafted out on the breeze and into the open window where Harrison Steele and Clem Ashley lay sleeping the sleep of exhaustion engendered by unwonted exercise.

Steele stirred sleepily and opened his eyes. They were the words of the negro's hymn that first impressed themselves on his consciousness, but there was something more. He had a most peculiar subconscious feeling. He seemed to be waiting for something that was going to happen. Something quite nice. He had not felt this way since he was a boy, and had wakened much in the same way with the knowledge that a long-planned camping trip, his first, was about to materialize. He yawned a bit less sleepily. Now what could be going to happen that

would give him this feeling? Maybe they were going to find the cache. He laughed unhumorously. *That* wouldn't unduly excite him. As a matter of fact, he had come to care little whether it were ever found or not. If it were not for Clem and Cardwell and Billy Meade——

He found himself humming the words of the hymn the negro was crooning. Strange that he should remember it from childhood. It had been many a day since he had been in a church, but with the hummed words, there came back to him the memory of a great vaulted church, subdued lights, his own rather awe-struck feeling as he sat in the high-backed pew with his mother and father; of how he had to climb down by the aid of his mother's foot cushion when they stood up to sing.

"The sons of earth are waking,
To penitential tears——"

Harrison Steele laughed outright. He glanced over at Clem Ashley with his mouth half opened as he slept his deepest in the dawn of the new morning.

"Tears, maybe," mused Steele, a flicker of amusement on his face, "but hardly penitential, I should say. Wish they could find the old stuff and be done with it—getting to be a nuisance."

One more luxurious yawn, and the big man tumbled out of bed and made for the lodge bath room. Good

thing Cardwell had seen to having a bath, he thought as he stood under the spray and felt the new life tingle in his veins. Probably the only one in a good day's journey, too. But all through his morning ablutions, there remained with Steele that feeling of peculiar exaltation of something going to happen. What could it be? He tried to laugh it off, but it persisted, still subconsciously.

Henry grinned his wide grin when Steele strolled out back of the lodge.

"Mawnin', Marse Harrison," he greeted. "See yo-all's gittin' to know when layin' down time's ovah. Nevah could seem to make Marse Cardwell know it, and him knowin', too, that the fishes bites bes' jes' about day-break—and the wile hawgs is a-comin' out to see whut they kin fin' foh breakfus, an' the goats jes' a-caperin' ovah the sand dunes huntin' foh somfin besides beah grass——"

Steele smiled at the enthusiasm of the negro who flourished his skillet as he might have a fowling piece as he described the game of the island "jes' waitin'," as he had expressed it, for some hunter to come along and bag them.

"Hunting means a good deal in your life, doesn't it, Henry?" Steele asked smilingly as he indicated that the negro might bring him a cup of coffee and his fruit outside the lodge where he could watch the morn-

ing growing as he assuaged his also growing appetite. The black cook put a plate of steaming hot biscuits with fresh yellow butter and a cup of coffee on a tray which he set down beside Steele on the fallen log on which he had perched himself.

"Yas, sah, Marse Harrison," he admitted, "I 'low they hain't much mo' fun in the worl' than huntin', lessen hit be goin' to meetin'—Yas, sah, I 'low I done hunt 'bout most kin' o' critters de Lawd made in dese parts——"

"Ever hunt for treasure, Henry?" the broker asked abruptly. Strangely his thoughts were running in this direction this morning, probably because of the days of futile digging he himself had been doing in search of a different kind of treasure than that of which he spoke. The negro's eyes rolled.

"Lawsy Massy, not me, Marse Harrison!" he denied with a vigorous shake of his woolly head. "Plenty people hereabouts been doin' hit a long time, but we black folks—no, sah! Effen dey's any gol' hid in de sands, hit's debbil's gol'—dem lights folkses keeps a-seein', dey's de debbil goin' about wid his lantern to see his gol' hain't teched. No, sah, no gol' huntin' foh dis niggah—hard 'nough to keep the witches off without temptin' de ol' debbil, too——"

Steele smiled inwardly. It was evident that they need have no fear for their well-cached store as far as

Henry was concerned. He wondered what the man meant about witches. Such weird notions they had down here in this primitive country.

"Witches?" he asked, with lifted brows.

"Yas, sah, Marse Harrison—didn't we-all know what to do, dey wouldn' be a chicken in Bogue or the hammocks."

"What do you do?" Steele was mildly interested, for his thoughts had once more flown to the girl across the bay at the negro's mention of the word "hammocks."

"Come yo-all seen de ladders agin the houses round-about?" asked the negro. Steele nodded. He had often seen them in his wanderings in the last few weeks, and had idly wondered why all of the people seemed so indolent that they never seemed to get their roofs in condition so that the ladders might be removed. "Wall," went on Henry, "dey's for de witches. Witches in de hawks—hawks kill all de chickens. Den de ole woman in de fambly, she jes climb up de ladder an' cross her fingers on de south side de chimbley, and blooey—old Mis' Witch she go away an' de hawks kain't kill de chickens." The negro nodded solemnly as he gave his bit of wisdom for the edification of the Northern man who seemed to him, in his way, as benighted as the negro himself was to Steele.

A hail from the doorway notified Steele that the rest of the party had decided to begin the day's sport. Cardwell was calling for coffee.

"See you've had yours, Steele," he nodded. "But you might come up off your perch onto the porch while we plan for the day. Think it'll be wild hogs to-day—Ashley's so sure he can get one, he won't be happy till he tries. Of course, we'll keep our eyes open, and if we see any signs of other game, ground hogs or such, we can dig, but I'm off the shovel for one day at least."

Even the day's furious sport of wild hog hunting did not entirely erase from the broker's mind the idea he had had on waking—that something was going to happen. Even in the midst of the chase, he found himself stopping for a moment to wonder what it could be. But when the evening had come, and with it tired muscles and a desire for rest and much food, he began to feel a distinct sense of disappointment. Whatever it had been that he had been waiting for so subconsciously, had not materialized. It hardly would in the gathering shadows. He trudged wearily with his companions over the jungle island, his tread lightened by the soft carpet of pine needles and mossy gray whiskers that had fallen from the trees. The smell of roasting game assailed the huntsmen's nostrils and accelerated their gait toward the lodge. Henry was a treasure. He had everything ready.

"Now, if we could only have a cocktail," complained Clem Ashley, who had had enough of wild hog hunting for some time after his near encounter with one of the wild beasts whose charge would have resulted disastrously save for the prompt attention Cardwell, more experienced, had given the animal—"just one—life could hold nothing dearer."

Steele felt a distinct sense of annoyance.

"Oh, cut it, Clem," he admonished. "Can't your thoughts rise above booze?" But Ashley was not silenced.

"Booze can't rise above the sand," he bemoaned, as he limped hurriedly along.

As the others passed into the lodge intent on a shower and a hurried preparation for the waiting meal, Steele, a little behind the others, saw Henry from around the corner of the porch, signaling mysteriously. He went toward him. The negro slipped something into his hand.

"Dat gal of Uncle Billy Peter's she fotch dis in her skiff awhile ago," he informed. "Said let nobody see hit but yo-all——" He grinned mysteriously, enjoying the thought of being in on some secret.

Steele took the note, but even before he opened it, he felt a thrill pass from it up along his arm, a thrill that could come from nothing else than the knowledge of who had sent him the mysterious missive. Then

there flowed over him all the feeling he had had through the day. Something was going to happen. It was not too late. Something out of the usual; something most pleasant. He stepped out into the shelter of a grove of virgin pines to scan his message in seclusion.

"Dear Mr. Steele," he read;

"I've had it again—the dream. Half waking and half sleeping I've seen the lights, and they were so plain, the position in the sand dunes so decided, that I have the clearest kind of a chart in my head. This time I know I can go straight to the place indicated—even if I were blindfolded, perhaps even better if I were.

"I don't know how silly this may seem to you, but even in spite of all my newer training, there is in me the strong urge to see this through. You have promised not to laugh. and I am depending on you to help me find the treasure as you also promised.

"I know I am breaking every rule of convention in what I am going to suggest, and did the Holinessers know of it, they might have cause to think me reprehensible, but I know you'll understand. May I depend on you to slip away about nine o'clock this evening—the moon will just be rising—and meet me at the clump of cypresses just above the landing, in the direction of Salterpath? If you can have some little light with you, I'll be able to find you better than you can find me. Then—for the treasure!

"Hurriedly,

"Lora Humphrey.

"P.S. Of course, you know you're to have whichever half of it you choose."

Slipping away from his party was not the difficult thing the girl might have imagined. Long before the early twilight had settled down, Ashley was already nodding in his porch chair, and Cardwell, inside the lodge attempting to read, was ready to give it up as a bad job when the lines of his magazine were running together. Billy Meade laid down the ukelele on which he had been idly strumming, and yawned.

"Think I'll turn in," he remarked, "To-morrow, as our young friend here would remark, is another day. Comin', Steele?"

Steele shook his head.

"Think I'll have a little stroll in the twilight while I finish my cigar," he answered, as he turned lazily away from his companion. Ashley half woke.

"Haven't you strolled enough for one day?" he wanted to know, querulously. "Think you can find a drink by yourself? Well, joy be with you—I'm going to turn in with Meade." He got to his feet totteringly. "Oy, yoy, my back!" he groaned. "Save one for me if you find any," was his farewell rejoinder, as Steele started down the steps of the lodge porch. "I'm going to recuperate."

Long before nine o'clock, Steele's companions were sleeping the sleep that came as the reward of their day's strenuous hunting; sleeping with no thought that the big broker had not returned to join them. Henry,

too, had completed his chores for the night, and was audibly reporting from his cubby hole off the kitchen that his "laying down time" had come, too.

Armed with splinters of lightwood, the natives' favorite means for lighting themselves in the darkened places of the big outdoors, Steele waited the approach of Lora Humphrey. He strained his ears to hear through the darkness the swish of the pole that should herald the approach of the girl's skiff. The first light through the trees that proclaimed the moon ready to rise (as she had predicted) had made its appearance when he heard the long awaited sound. He could not see her, though, but as he heard the skiff grate lightly on the sand not far from him, he lighted one of his pieces of light wood. He started to go forward with its flickering glare.

"Stay where you are," he heard the girl's sibilant whisper. "I'll find you!" She made her way swiftly toward him.

The flare of the lightwood lit up her dancing eyes, but there was also an excitement in them brought about by the adventure that made her seem to Steele as some wood fairy of the night.

"Do you think I'm crazy, Mr. Steele?" she asked, with an odd laugh.

"I think you're delightful," the man could not restrain the admiration in his tone, "and deserve to find

—everything you want." The girl laughed lightly at the seriousness of his tone, and the meaning which she could not fail to catch.

"We must hurry," she admonished. "It'll be quite a little jaunt, in spite of my knowing exactly where we're going. Oh, Mr. Steele," she added, and there was real warmth in her tone of thanking, "it's so good of you to humor me so. I just had to have my try at treasure hunting, after that clear dream, and I couldn't go alone. Neither could I tell any one around here. I'll admit I'm not above not wishing to be laughed at."

"I'll not laugh, I promise you," said Steele soberly, but with a twinkle in his eye she could not see. "Only hope you'll find it——"

"I will," said the girl firmly. "Something tells me I cannot be mistaken and that the secrets of the pirates hereabouts will be one no longer after to-night."

"Have you thought what you're going to do with it?" Steele's query was a bit teasing, but the girl's voice was sober as she replied: "Oh, there's so much! There's always so much to do in the world,—but come, hurry, we haven't time for talk now!"

But her words gave food for thought to the man whose wealth had never done anything for others, unless one counted the good times he had afforded his friends who might have been far better off without such good times.

With his improvised torch lighting the way, man and girl started off through the underbrush. Steele noticed that Lora, like himself, wore heavy snake-proof boots, but instead of khaki breeches such as he had donned, she wore the trim knickers of her riding habit—a garment usually hidden, in deference to the prejudices of her neighbors, by a sedate skirt. The girl led the way, unerringly guiding the two through the dense growth which Steele, admiring, admitted to himself he would not have been able to negotiate alone. For the most part they went in silence. Not until they came out into the sandy wastes which lay stretching out so far from the beach with their hills of sand dunes and spears of bear grass outlined like little lines on the smudged surface of a drawing-board, did she speak.

"Let me see," she mused. She gazed about her at the monotonous landscape of sand that was just beginning to be lighted by the moon. "I think I know which way to go, but I believe I can tell better if I shut my eyes. Now, don't say a word for a minute."

The girl shut her eyes, and as she stood there swaying in the moonlight, it seemed to Steele, watching her, that there was something trance-like in her behavior. He began to wonder if there might not be such a thing, after all, as some strange sense that had come to Lora Humphrey bidding her to dig in a certain place. Out here in the eerie quiet of the sands and the moonlight,

with only the distant booming of the surf, things did not look so impossible as they might have, viewed in the light of day. Lora opened her eyes, and stood for a moment, half dizzily.

"I know now," she said simply. She darted off ahead of him, winding her way between the sand dunes leading toward the beach. Between two of them she hesitated a moment, then turned to go behind one of them. Something in their formation seemed strangely familiar to Steele, but he remembered how all that waste looked so much alike and put it down to the impressions he had gained from his wanderings among the dunes. Lora stuck the light shovel she carried into the sand.

"We'll dig right here," she commanded, but as Steele sought to take the implement from her, she waved him aside. "You use your own shovel," she told him. "There'll be work enough for two, and the time is short." She glanced up at the sky appreciatively. The moon's rays were beginning to make the place as light as it would be in late twilight. "Fine!" she commented. "We needn't be remarked by light-wood torches. That's why I picked out a good moonlight night."

For a long time they dug in silence, only their labored breathing adding its sound to the booming of the surf some distance off. Steele smiled somewhat

grimly as he thought how well he was becoming fitted for a trench digger's job in the last few days, and of how like had been the fevered digging of himself and his companions—just as silently. He could not but hesitate for a few moments though, to compare the workmanlike manner in which the girl tackled her job as compared with that of his New York friends. He was put to it to keep up with her, but, though he well knew he was doing it only because the girl wished, and without any thought whatever of what the adventure might bring in the way of reward (nothing, he was quite assured), he did not intend that she should find him lacking in enthusiasm. He dug with all the enthusiasm of one who had a more rational reason.

Before the moon was an hour higher, man and girl had excavated a hole above the top of which only her head and shoulders could be seen as she stood up to toss aside each shovel full of sand. She stopped wearily, something of discouragement in her eyes, lighted by the moon's rays, as she looked shamefacedly at Steele.

"Go on," she said, stubbornly, "call me an idiot—I know you want to—but I'm just sure there's something here——"

In her voice was a half sob of disappointment. She stuck her shovel viciously into the sand. Some-

thing like the tinkle of breaking glass was heard as the shovel struck the sand.

"Oh! Oh! I've struck something!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Steele——"

She knelt down to inspect her find. The sand was getting wet at the spot where the shovel had struck, and gave off an unmistakable aroma. The girl started to her feet as the man bent over.

"Oh! Oh!" she repeated, then in disgusted accents, "Whisky!"

"What the——" exploded Steele. "Say, how'd you know where I'd put——"

Lora Humphrey drew back from him as far as the confined space of the hole in which they stood would permit.

"Mr. Steele," she said sternly. "What is this? What do you know about it?"

For once in his life, Steele found himself unable to explain or condone any action of his own. He was tongue-tied, stammering.

"Why, I—er—why, Miss Humphrey, I say now, don't think too hardly of me—I was going to explain——" he began, but she stopped him.

"Explain that you're a modern day pirate," she finished scornfully, "and that you're using our little part of the country for this——" and her boot kicked

at the broken glass which stuck up through its burlap sack covering, a covering that so plainly covered other bottles like the broken one.

"I say now," he began again, sparring for time, "I can tell you—I've meant to all along, except——"

The girl started to clamber out of the hole she had helped dig in her search for treasure, only to discover the contraband that had been hidden by the man whom she had begun to know meant more to her than any other in the world. She had uncovered his unworthiness. A sob stuck in her throat, but she choked it back proudly, as she sought a foothold in the shifting sand. Steele leapt toward her, to remonstrate, or, through gentlemanly instinct, to help her out of her predicament, half buried as she was in a hole in the sand, partially imprisoned with a man whom her face told him she loathed.

Steele's foot caught in something half buried. He stumbled, and as he did, he heard a crash beneath his feet as of rotting timbers giving way. Then a flurry of sand, a swift flinging out of arms, clutching at the sand where no clutch could hold, a scream from the girl, a melee of arms and legs as two bodies were catapulated downward, and Steele felt the earth give way beneath his feet. Even in falling, however, he

sought to protect the girl who tumbled after him. But he was too late. He heard her head bump against an obstacle—he prayed it was not a broken bottle—and together they went down! Down! It flashed through his mind, in the unaccountable way that such inconsequential things do flash through one's mind in crises, that he was experiencing much of the same sensations he had gone through when he and his friends had come crashing down into Bogue Sound to be rescued by this girl who was now falling with him.

Only the time for the flicker of an eyelash had actually been consumed in the fall, but to Steele, whose consciousness was acute, it seemed interminable. Where were they falling to? Then, as suddenly as their tumble had started, it stopped. Sand continued for a moment to rain in upon them, but Steele knew that they would go no further. There was a feeling of solidness beneath him. But there was an acute pain in his ankle as his weight came down upon it—not so acute, though, as the pain that stabbed his heart as the girl crumbled down beside him in an inert bundle. He made a grab for her.

"Lora! Lora!" he cried wildly. "Are you hurt?"

No answer from the girl who lay so still in the sand. Unmindful of the pain in his ankle that stabbed with

knife sharpness, he reached over and picked her up in his arms. Her eyes were closed, but she was breathing.

"Oh, Lora! Lora! My little girl!" he sobbed, chokingly.

CHAPTER XVII

HARRISON STEELE had no time to think of where he was—or what he had fallen into. His whole thought was for the girl. Had she been badly hurt? One glance at the high sides of the place in which he was imprisoned showed him the uselessness of attempting to get out of the hole, twice as deep now as the one they had dug. As peculiar as his situation was, though, the hole he was in did not interest him. His whole attention was bent on that still face of the girl upturned to the moonlight that filtered down upon them. Frantically he chafed her hands, calling on her in words of endearment to speak to him. If he could only get some water—— His head bent over the girl's heart showed it beating regularly. She was only stunned by the fall. It flashed into his head that there must have been something besides sand, or even a bottle that had hit her to give such a stunning blow.

If he could only get some water!

Once more Harrison Steele looked about for some means to climb out of the cave he and Lora Humphrey had dug. Once more, the twitch of sharp agony in his

ankle showed him how impossible such a thing would be, even could he find a way. His hand, groping in the sand, laid hold of the corner of a burlap bag. In spite of his fright for the girl and his own pain, a cynical grin spread over his features. He pulled the bag toward him and, with his pocket knife, ripped it open. He dragged out a bottle whose contents showed glistening amber in the moonlight. Again that pocket knife came into requisition, and Harrison Steele's grin showed at the corners of his mouth as he opened the corkscrew in one side of the implement. His friends had so often laughed at him for carrying a boy's knife with so many attachments—"everything but the kitchen stove," they had often teased him—but he had always had it with him, a souvenir of boyhood. Now had come a real use for it.

Lora Humphrey never stirred even at the "pop" of removing the cork from the bottle. The aroma of spirits wafted about the two. Hastily he poured some of the fiery fluid down the girl's throat; as hastily he poured more on his handkerchief and began bathing her temples and face with it. He gave a sigh of relief at the girl's first moan and her unconscious movement to get away from something unpleasant.

Her eyes opened. She looked up at Steele for a moment dazedly, then——

"Whew!" said Lora Humphrey. She sat straight

up, her small nose crinkled in disgust. "Whew!" she repeated. "Take that stuff away!"

Harrison Steele laughed happily. His relief at finding that Lora was all right was more than he could tell.

"Feel all right now?" he asked her.

The girl was wiping the whisky from her face. She looked about her wonderingly.

"Yes, I'm all right," she told him, "but what happened? Where are we? I remember you stumbling, then we started to fall—something hit me——"

"Haven't had time to explore much yet," was the man's rejoinder, "but I'd hazard a guess we've tumbled into some sort of a subterranean cavern—probably dug by your pirates a long time ago——" His hand went out to feel as far as he could. "See?" he asked, as the hand came away from the side of the little cave with a broken splinter of rotting timber. "Been shored up for some purpose once, and we stumbled into it when we dug——"

The girl's face showed her disgust.

"Oh, I remember," she said, as the face was turned from him. "We didn't find treasure, but we did find——"

"Please! Please!" Steele begged, as she struggled to her feet. "I tried to tell you before—you wouldn't let me—won't you listen now?"

"I don't see how I can help it—if you insist," she remarked pointedly, "but I don't see what you can say —what real explanation there can be for—piracy!" Her lip curled in disdain.

She could not see the flush that spread over the man's face, nor could she see the firm, stubborn set of his jaw as he answered.

"Well, I will take advantage of you, if you want to put it that way, for I'm going to tell you. I've wanted to ever since the second day I saw you."

And then, while the girl stood with turned back, pretending not to hear, Harrison Steele told her how his adventure with his friends had started, and how it had reached its present stage. He was eager as he told her how he had long since repented of his folly, how he felt about it, and would give so much to undo what had been done. In spite of herself, the girl softened as she listened. There was no mistaking the reasons Harrison Steele gave for his change of heart. It was a strange love-making—in a stranger place—but love, as the world knows, knows neither time or place or reason. It was something so new to Steele, too, that the girl's heart was swept with a kind of maternal pity, such as she might have felt for a small boy caught stealing sugar.

He finished lamely.

"And it was because of what I had done—and what you might think of it—that I haven't told you any of these things before—of the way I felt, and all that, you know—I knew I wasn't worthy of you. But if I can get rid of this stuff some way, dear—Lora—could you—er would you——"

She laid her hand gently on his arm.

"We can talk about that later, can't we?" she asked. "Seems to me the thing to be done now is to get out of this place——

"How?" asked Steele. "We can still yell a bit, I fancy."

Lora peered up at the top of the hole high above them.

"Couldn't you help me get to your shoulders? I think I could climb out—then I could get a rope or something for you."

"You might, except—er—there's a little thing I forgot to mention." He ruefully indicated his foot which was stuck straight out before him in its heavy boot, a foot beginning to pain more than he liked to tell. "A bit afraid I've come a cropper with that."

The girl whirled about. Lightning-quick the expression of her face changed. Forgotten was any idea of escape from her predicament. All the maternal instinct, all the trained nurse's, in her rushed to the fore.

"Oh, you poor thing!" she cried. "And you never told me! And I——"

She dropped to her knees in the sand beside the injured foot. In spite of the man's protests that he could do for himself, she quickly and deftly removed the heavy snake-proof boot, and a quick gasp came to her throat as she saw the ankle that puffed out before her eyes as she removed the protecting sock. Steele was glad that she could not see his wince of pain, but he admitted to himself that it was a strange piece of psychology that made that pain less under the ministrations of the girl he loved. Talking softly, as she might to an injured child, Lora Humphrey tore up handkerchiefs into bandages. She looked up at Steele with a crinkle of amusement in her eyes.

"You might hand me that bottle," she laughed, "it seems to be our apothecary shop."

For the second time since its loss and dramatic discovery, Steele's cached liquid treasure performed offices that had been far from the minds of those who had brought the liquor from the Bermudas. As Lora bound up the injured ankle with professional skill, Steele found that the pain was already lessened. He laughed joyously.

"Better use for it outside than in, after all," he offered.

"I'm one who believes it's better never 'in,'" was the

girl's rejoinder. "There's always something better to take its place for any use." She gave the bandage a final pat. "There," she said, "that'll do until we can get you out."

"How?" once more queried Steele. "No one will miss me, I'm sure—not before daylight, at any rate, and you—hadn't we better yell?"

Lora's head shook a vigorous negative. "No," she said resignedly. "There's nothing to hear but the ocean and the sand, unless a coast guardsman should happen along—there must be a post somewhere near, and——" She stopped hesitatingly.

Steele nodded.

"I understand," he said. "It would be just as well if we should pick our coast guardsmen when we want to be rescued. As for me," he leaned back in the sand, "I'm satisfied." His eyes sought the girl's own, as he reached out for her hand. She drew back.

"Not now—not now," she said. "Later——" But even as she spoke, and took one backward step in the confined space of their small cave, she stumbled and caught herself by a hand pressed against the loose sand. It came tumbling down in another shower.

"Careful," admonished Steele. "We're not ready to be buried yet—we're just beginning to live. I'll be good."

"Seems like my night to stumble," ruefully re-

marked the girl. "Wonder what that was this time!" Her hands were exploring the sand where her foot had felt something. Suddenly she looked up at Steele with wide eyes and breath that came sharply. "Oh, it is! It is!" she cried, too excited to talk coherently. "I was right! I was right! See——"

"Is what?" Things were coming too fast for Steele.

"Don't you see?" Lora's eyes were like stars in the moonlight. "It's here! Where I dreamed it would be! See—here's the ring in the top of a chest! This wooden chamber we fell into must have been built to further protect it!" She tugged vigorously at the iron that resisted any such puny efforts. Steele smiled as he saw that it was truly the ring in an ancient chest which Lora had unearthed.

"All the stage settings!" he remarked. "Now if you can find a couple of doubloons or so——"

"They're there! Oh, I know they're there!" Lora was not to be discouraged. "Oh, we must get this out!"

"Guess we'll have to leave it to be rescued with us. Pretty hard on you, little girl, but we'll have to wait till daylight."

Lora abandoned her task regretfully. "Oh, if we could get out!"

"If we could——" began Steele.

"There's just one chance." The girl was thinking

hard. "One person knows where I have gone, and——"

Both stopped suddenly as a sound came out of the moonlight night above them. Faint at first, it gradually took on sound form.

"Lory! Lory! Where air ye!"

Lora laughed half hysterically. "It's Sal!" she cried, relievedly. "Salvation Willis! She knew where I'd gone and has come to find me. Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo, Sal!"

Monotonously the voice out of the darkness again called out.: Lory! Lory! Where air ye?"

"Here I am, Sal!" called Lora. "I'm in a hole—watch out or you'll be in one, too!"

A head appeared over the top edge of the sand cave—a black silhouette against the moonlit sky. Sal Willis spoke. Hers might have been the voice of an angel to Lora Humphrey, but it was laconically an unconcerned one to Harrison Steele.

"There ye be!" spoke Salvation Willis. "What ye doin' down there?"

"I'm sitting on the sand, entirely surrounded by about a million dollars, and almost as many bottles of whisky—and a man——" Lora tittered. "Can you get us out, Sal?"

"Umph-humph!" Salvation Willis showed no surprise at the peculiar situation. "Kin I git a rope. I

come a-huntin' ye, Lory—I was afeered ye might a-run across that Hal Everett. Pap's says as how his religion hain't took, an' he's on a rampage again. Jes' keep a settin' till I git back with a rope."

What might have been an interminable space of time under other circumstances, passed quickly to the two imprisoned ones until they once more heard the drawl of Salvation Willis at the top of the sand hole.

"Here I be!" she said. "Ketch!" A rope end came whirling down at their feet.

But it was just another of the disappointments of the night when they soon found that any such efforts at rescue as Salvation Willis could put forward were useless. Lora dropped the rope after her fourth or fifth attempt to negotiate the sand that shifted like quicksilver.

"You'll have to get help, Sal," she murmured weakly. "Get the people at the lodge—they'll be more kindly in their criticism than anyone hereabouts——"

"Umph-humph!" said Sal. She started to draw up her rope.

"Wait!" called Lora. She turned to Steele. "Did you mean what you said to me about wanting to get rid of—of this—stuff?" She kicked at a burlap bag at her feet. Steele nodded. "Of course I meant it—why?"

"You have your chance then," she answered, and there was a firm set to her lips, "Moreover, I'm not going to wait for you to change your mind. Sal!" she called to the girl above them. "Are you for prohibition?"

"Strong drink is raging," said Sal Willis.

"I mean," went on the girl at the bottom of the sand hole, "are you enough against it to want to get rid of some superfluous stuff to drink?"

"Wisht I could put the whol kit an' bilin' at the bottom of the sea," bitterly remarked the hommocks girl above Lora and Steele. Lora smiled sympathetically as she noted the bitterness in the girl's tone. Well she knew that Salvation Willis had in mind her own father, whose religion and office of deacon were not always proof against an appetite, and things in the Willis home, during such times (none too good at any time, either) were woeful.

"All right," Lora commanded. "Then you can start by getting rid of some." She quickly tied the end of the rope around the burlap bag nearest at hand. "Haul away, Sal!"

The burlap bag slowly disappeared over the top edge of the sand hole.

"What is hit?" demanded Salvation Willis, "and what'll I do with hit?"

"I believe the folks to the Northward call it booze,"

called Lora, with a quick humorous side glance at Steele, "but it's blood brother to Monkey Rum. Do your duty, Sal! Bury it in the sea. There's more here when you've got rid of that."

It was evidence that the fanaticism with which Salvation Willis had been imbued in her own little campaign against strong drink could make her rise to the occasion when duty called—the way she worked within the next two hours, before the first streaks of the silver and purple and crimson dawn streaked the ocean. Back in their hole in the sand, the two she left behind, talked of many things; of many things—except "ships and shoes and sealing wax; and cabbages and kings."

The head of Salvation Willis appeared at the edge of the hole with the gray of dawn to form her silhouette background.

"I drug 'um all down to the beach, and took 'um out cross the breakers and dropped 'um down Teach's Hole," she said in her calm, monotonous tones, tones that held no suggestion of the momentous thing she had done, all alone, out there in the early morning. "I took 'um out in Hal Everett's surf boat," she further informed. "He hain't goin' to know. I 'low he don't know much, fer his boat warn't even beached. I swum out to git hit, a-bobbin' in the breakers."

The compensation of things! Harrison Steele felt a new sensation—something of awe for the ruler of things as they should be. Hal Everett's boat had helped to wipe away the crime he, Steele, had contemplated, and brought so near to a conclusion. He wondered, with a queer smile, what Everett, with his own great appetite, would think could he know what his boat had carried that night. Sal Willis was speaking again.

"Yo-all want to come out now?" she asked. "Hit's most breakfast time."

"I'll say so," was Steele's fervent rejoinder to Lora's quick insistence.

"I'll git 'um," said Sal Willis, and her head disappeared.

Surprise is but a small descriptive of the manner in which the men at the lodge took the news of Steele's plight when they were awakened shortly after by the persistence of Sal Willis. Cardwell himself answered her summons—measured knockings on the lodge door, augmented by surely-aimed chunks thrown at windows indiscriminately. So intent was she, though, that she never noticed his pajamaed appearance as he sleepily came out on the lodge porch. Henry still snored peacefully. His "laying-down time" was not over.

Sal said what she had to say.

"But I say now," peevishly answered Cardwell. "What are they doing in a hole?"

"They war treasure huntin', I 'low." The Willis girl was unperturbed.

"Did they—did they—find it?" Cardwell's next query was unexpectedly eager.

"I dunno. Yo-all kin ask 'um." Her mission completed, Sal Willis turned like a frightened deer and sped away into the morning-lighted forest.

A short half hour later, Lora Humphrey and Harrison Steele breathed the ocean air that blew straight across the sands toward them instead of having to swirl into a depression to reach them. It had been no task at all for the three men (for Clem Ashley insisted that he had helped with all a man's vim) to raise Lora in the basket-like contraption they rigged up, with the aid of the aroused Henry, eager, once he was awake, for adventure. It had been rather a more difficult matter with Steele, for he had been so little able to help himself. Henry had leapt to the rescue and lowered himself into the cavern-like hole and himself fastened the rescuing ropes, in gentle manner, about the man whom he had come to admire so greatly. But the negro's eyes had about "bugged out of his haid," to quote his own experiences later described, when he was told to fasten the rope to the iron ring

that had been dug up by Lora Humphrey. The hours which the girl and Steele had spent alone while Salvation Willis was giving ceremonious burial to Steele's cache, and while she was rousing the man's friends to their aid, had not all been spent in idle conversation, no matter of how great import it might have been. With hands, and with splinters of the timbers whose rotting had caused their downfall to fortune, they had dug about the iron ring against which Lora had first stumbled to her discovery. There was no mistaking it. It was a chest—just such a chest as they had both read about in the tales by Stevenson, and about which Lora and all her neighbors and their fathers and grandfathers before them had dreamed since they had first heard the tales of Black Beard.

It was with difficulty that Lora Humphrey had been able to restrain her impatience for a view of what the chest might contain, but Harrison Steele had seen to that. There had been so much more to talk about. They had found the greatest treasure that Life has to give. What was in an ancient chest could not matter so greatly. So they had waited in their cramped quarters for rescue.

"Fasten the rope to the iron ring of that chest, Henry!" Lora Humphrey leaned over the edge of the hole to give her orders. Harrison Steele was beyond taking command. He had stood breathing that

ocean air for about two minutes after his rescue. Then had come the inevitable collapse.

"I'm sorry," he deplored. "But I've got to sit down." And he sat. Sat till they managed a litter and a wheel barrow from the lodge (the latter for the chest) to carry the wreckage home.

"Lawsy, Miss Lory, I—I—kain't!" Henry shivered with the fright of ancient legend. "Hit likely is tied straight to the debbil's tail, and I——"

"Don't be a fool, Henry!" was the girl's retort. "Must I jump down there and show a big strong man like you how to lift up a little bit o' chest——"

"Yas'm, Mis' Lory—No'm!" Henry girded on all the armor of bravado of which he was capable and the half-excavated chest was lifted out onto the sands of Bogue Island. Could it have spoken, it would probably have welcomed them. It had been so long since that chest had been lowered into the sands. Those had been different men—different times. Now there was no haughtily swearing man with his beard tied behind his ears in ribbons who gave orders, but a mere slip of a girl in sand and water-stained knickerbockers. The men who stood about did not resent her supremacy.

"It's all so much like a dream—or a story—I don't know whether I've waked up or not!"

Grayson Cardwell stood surveying his guests who had finished their breakfasts and who had gathered for the twentieth time about the tables and cushioned chairs that were glittering with tarnished gold and the fire of gems whose long burial had not dimmed their luster. Lora Humphrey's dream find had been spread out so that all might see. Lora Humphrey, herself, seated on the knee of old Theophilus Humphrey, who had been hastily summoned to the greatest event of his life, smiled, as her finger sifted through a mass of unset gems in her lap.

"Dreams don't feel so—so compact—or so hard," she commented with a smile. "Dreams aren't such bad things after all, though. Now that one of mine——"

"Wonder how much it's all worth?" Billy Meade spoke with the meaning of a man to whom gems, though with romantic attachment, are concrete things. "There was such a quantity of most everything in that chest—that old pirate didn't overlook any bets, I'd say——"

From the corner to which he had retired with a tall glass with tinkling ice and an amber liquid that had once been a not unusual sight, Clem Ashley piped up.

"He didn't!" said Clem Ashley. "Now I'd say this rum of the vintage of—say—1716—isn't at all bad——"

"Consolation!" murmured Harrison Steele, as he picked up a necklace of jade with Byzantine settings, but with his glance toward Ashley. He was wondering as the necklace slipped through his fingers just what sort of gown Lora would wear with it in Broad Acres. There was one room with a wonderful background for jade——

"Wouldn't wonder a bit if we haven't run across the record in treasure finds," commented Cardwell. "We ought to take inventory. Let's see—I've a volume here——" He stopped in front of one of his bookcases and ran his eye over the books. "Umm—here it is—'The Gold Bug'—Edgar Allan Poe. They found——" He ran his fingers down a page to the place he wanted to find. "'Diamonds—some of them exceedingly large and fine—a hundred and ten in all, and not one of them small; eighteen rubies of remarkable brilliancy; three hundred and ten emeralds, all very beautiful; and twenty-one sapphires, with an opal.' Umm! Umm!" he ran further down the page. "Check up what we're lacking," he said with an upward glance at his guests. "Umm! Umm! 'A vast quantity of gold ornaments; nearly two hundred massive finger and ear-rings; rich chains; eighty-three very large crucifixes; five great censors of great value; a prodigious golden punch bowl'—er—er——" Cardwell's moving finger skipped again—"'watches'—let's see——"

"We're shy on crucifixes," remarked Ashley from his corner once more, "but I'd say we're strong on rum!"

"Shut up!" It was Steele's usual quietus on the effervescent Ashley. "Just be satisfied with drinking what a good many thousands of men in your country to-day would give their eye teeth for, and restrain yourself——"

But, as old Humphrey deposited his daughter in his own cushioned chair and left the room at the summons of Henry, the girl noted that Steele's remonstrance had fallen on the empty air.

"As I was sayin'," remarked Ashley, as his glass waved aloft—— "so long as we couldn't find our own hard-fought-for liquor, this'll do fine!"

Steele flushed as Lora's steady eyes met his own. Cardwell, too, was not slow in noting the *faux pas*.

"Don't notice him——" he started, but Steele broke in curtly.

"Oh, she knows," he explained, bitterness accenting his sharply-cut words. "I might as well tell you now as any time—there'll be no more liquor in Broad Acres, and if——"

Billy Meade smiled his slow smile.

"Quite suits me for you to get religion, Steele," he remarked, "I admit I'm entirely fed up with it all—no taste for either Federal prison or haunting conscience—Cardwell and I have just been talking about it, eh Cardwell?"

Cardwell's smile was more energetic. "Quite so! Quite so! I've adventured enough! Want to get back into harness now! Won't matter to me if the stuff's never found——"

"I hardly think it will be."

Steele's quick glance at Lora and her answering smile were illuminative. Only Clement Ashley, from over the top of his highball glass filled with an essence distilled two centuries before, expressed disapproval.

"Where—where is it—whatd'ye do with it?" he demanded, trying to glare.

"Made a highball in the Atlantic Ocean," laughed Steele, but his laughter turned to seriousness as he turned to his other companions. He strolled over and lifted up one of the hands with which Lora Humphrey had been toying with her treasure.

"Thanks, old chaps!" he said. "I was sure you'd understand. But I do want you to know that our treasure seeking has been successful. I'm going to take back to Broad Acres—by hydroplane—the greatest treasure in the world. Isn't that so, Miss Lora Humphrey?"

How like Harrison Steele it was to vaunt his good luck, Lora Humphrey did not then know. She smiled a long, slow smile, and her breath came deeply. She felt like vaunting, too. She reached over to the table near at hand and took from it a book—one of those limp-bound decorative volumes that somehow find their way into the best regulated bachelor retreats. She pulled out the red ribbon that bound its sides together. She draped that red ribbon over the ears of Harrison Steele.

"Black Beard!" said Lora Humphrey.

THE END.

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