

# The Three Blue Anchors

Ottwell Binns  
1934

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*NOVELS BY*  
**OTTWELL BINNS**

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THE VANISHED GUEST  
THE RED TOKEN  
JIM TRELAWNEY  
A TAMER OF MEN  
SNOWBIRD  
DOC. CHURSTON  
GOLD IS KING  
TRADER RANDOM  
FOREST EXILE  
THE SECRET ADVENTURE  
THE LAW OF THE HILLS  
DAN YEO  
THE THREE BLACK DOTS  
AN ADVENTURER OF THE BAY  
THE LADY OF THE MINIATURE  
A SIN OF SILENCE  
THE LIFTING OF THE SHADOW  
FLOTSAM OF THE LINE  
THE LADY OF NORTH STAR  
A HAZARD OF THE SNOWS  
BEHIND THE RANGES  
THE FLAMING CRESCENT  
THE GREY RAT

# THE THREE BLUE ANCHORS

BY  
OTTWELL BINNS

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TO

HER HIGHNESS, THE RANEE MARGARET  
OF SARAWAK,

WHO RESTORED THE ANCIENT CORNISH CROSS  
ON MY WALL.

IN SINCERE REGARD.

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## CHAPTER I

### MAMMY VENUS

It was the inn sign with the name and the device which first caught Mr. Jack Donne's fancy, and begat in him a desire for closer acquaintance. Blue Anchors as the names of taverns were common enough in the West Country. Without effort and in a mental flash he recalled three—one near Minehead, another at Indian Queens and a third in the steep street at Helston but a few miles away, where he had sampled the tap whilst watching the Furry Dancers. But the signs of each of those taverns had but a single anchor, whilst this had three, strung together by a piece of cable chain, their shanks like the radii of a circle, the flukes giving the device a dim resemblance to a Catherine wheel.

"The Three Blue Anchors," he read, and underneath the name of the landlord, "Ben Bonito," who it appeared was licensed to sell all the various ales and cordials dear to the hearts of thirsty seafaring men. The name of the tavern-keeper intrigued him almost as much as the name of the inn itself. Whilst he stared at the sign with its anchors whirling like the triple legs of the Manx coat of arms, he rolled the name over on his tongue—"Ben Bonito!"

Despite the Christian name, it had an un-English savour.

"Spanish or Italian?" he conjectured, and reflected that one found that kind of thing along the southern and western seaboard. There in old days wrecked mariners surviving the terrors of the sea, and the ruthless hands of wreckers ashore, had sometimes settled in the land, mingling their blood with that of the native stock, and passing on a heritage of black hair, eyes flashingly dark, and complexion of deeper hue than that of unmingled blood. But the name, despite its strangeness, had a familiar ring. He tried it aloud to make sure.

"Ben Bonito."

Then he nodded to himself, and his bronzed forehead became corrugated in an effort of remembrance. There was, he recalled, a Bonito in Brazil not very far from Pernambuco, also the Bonito river. Then there was that fish of the tunny family which chased the flying fish, making them take to the air. But these were plain Bonito without the Ben, and it was the latter which gave the ring of familiarity to this un-English name.

"Ben," he murmured to himself. "Ben Bonito. Ben—Ben——"

Someone cannoned into him from behind—heavily. Perched as he was on the edge of the cobbled pavement, staring up at the sign, he was in no position to survive so heavy an impact, and he shot into the dusty street. He rolled over a surprised



dog, which fled, yelping, and picked himself up, a wrathful man, swearing angrily, and intent on reprisals. But as he turned and beheld the one person who could possibly be held responsible for his discomfiture, the oath died on his lips, and an expression of utter astonishment came on his sunburnt face. The individual whose heavy encounter had toppled him from the edge of the pavement was a woman—a negress. Big-bosomed, broad-shouldered, and generally massive of figure, fashionably but flamboyantly attired, her big eyes took a rollicking gaiety as she showed double rows of white teeth in a laugh.

“Sorry, boss,” she said with a transatlantic intonation. “Ah was eyeing duh picture there; an’ Ah never see you. You ain’t gonna make a song about it, hey?”

There was something infectious in the woman’s laughter. The gaiety in her big eyes was almost childlike and very disarming to his anger. In spite of his wrathful impulse he laughed back, for the spectacle of this laughing negro woman on the quay of a little Cornish fishing port had an element of unusualness that was interesting.

“No, my coal-black mammy,” he answered, with another laugh. “We’ll leave the solo out. But I must say you shift things when you bring your tonnage into action.”

“Sure, boss!” grinned the negress cheerfully. “Two hundred an’ sixty pounds avoirdupois ain’t easy to stop when it’s moving.”

Her laughing eyes glanced down at her too ample form, then looked up, and as they did so, the laughter died out suddenly, giving place to a look of inquiry. Donne saw that their glance went beyond him, and wondering what had caused the swift change, looked round to learn the cause. Then he saw. A little man, incredibly wizened, had appeared at the door of the Three Blue Anchors. He was coatless, his shirt-sleeves were rolled up, he wore a small green baize apron; and his general air of proprietorship indicated that in all likelihood he was the innkeeper. The negress stared at him for a moment, a look of calculation crept in her eyes, then again she addressed herself to Jack Donne.

“Say, boss, aire you acquainted with dis Ben Bonito who puts his monniker so boldly on dat swing-board?”

Mr. Donne shook his head. “Don’t know the fellow from Adam.”

“Can’t say den if dat five-foot of skin-an-bone is Benito?”

The name the woman used might have been a slip, or a deliberate hiatus of the first syllable of the innkeeper’s surname, but whichever it was, it brought to Donne’s remembrance that for which he had been searching when the negress had jerked him from the pavement.

“Benito Bonito.”

That was the name for which the more familiar Ben attached to the surname had

set his mind groping—the pirate whose exploits had earned him the sobriquet of “Bonito of the Bloody Sword.” As the remembrance came to him he looked at the innkeeper again, and grinned at the thought of the ghost he had conjured up. But nevertheless it was odd that the negress should have given this meek-looking little tavern-keeper the fierce old pirate’s name; and it was none the less odd that the man should have a name so like that of the scoundrel who in old days had been the scourge of the Pacific Coast. All that passed through his mind in a flash, then the black giantess waved a fat hand in farewell, and rolled forward to the inn door.

Mr. Jack Donne, who meant to slake his thirst in the tavern, watched her progress, and wondered what her interest in the landlord could possibly be. One thing was immediately apparent to him—and that was that the innkeeper returned the interest. As he saw the black woman bearing down upon him a look of astonishment came on the man’s wizened face; and a keen light shone in his puckered eyes. That was perhaps no more than was to be expected in view of the fact that a negress must have been a rare bird in the little fishing port; but somehow Donne had a notion that the whole explanation did not lie there. Something there was beyond that, and he watched alertly, hoping to find out what it might be.

His curiosity was not immediately satisfied; but his interest was quickened sevenfold. The negress moved straight to the inn door. The small man stiffened like a terrier and looked as if he were about to deny the woman an entrance. Mr. Jack Donne, recalling his own little mishap, chuckled with delight and waited for the encounter. He had not long to wait. The negress reached the inn door. The aproned man stood with his legs straddled wide, his attitude unyielding and almost truculent. The woman could not but be aware of his unwelcoming demeanour, but she gave no sign of consciousness, and forged on like a line-of-battle ship. The innkeeper was brushed aside as if he had been a fly, and the woman passed through the doorway into the dark passage beyond, leaving the little man staring, and gulping down his wrath. Mr. Donne laughed, and wondered why the man should have regarded the woman with such disfavour. Then as the innkeeper turned and followed the woman he himself made a bee-line for the door.

Passing the threshold, he found himself in a dark passage panelled with oak. At the far end was a door which, standing wide, revealed that it led to the more domestic quarters of the inn. Right and left were other doors with indications in faded paint—“Tap Room,” “Bar Parlour.” Pausing to listen, he caught the sound of the negress’s voice giving an order:

“Noggin of Jamaica—an’ no watering, little man.”

The tone was patronising in the extreme and the words themselves were not void

of offence to any landlord with a spark of manhood. Remembering the innkeeper's terrier-like demeanour as he had stood in the doorway, Donne anticipated an explosion and waited for the retort. To his surprise there was no manifestation of anger on the part of the little man. His answer was a mere business-like echo, and as mild as milk.

"Noggin o' rum. Yes, ma'am!"

Hearing steps approaching the door of the parlour and having no desire to be caught eavesdropping, Mr. Jack Donne moved quickly forward, and met the innkeeper in the doorway. The little man halted and stared at him a little questioningly. Donne marked the stare and interpreted it, as was natural.

"Beer!" he said. "In a quart jug."

"Yessir!" answered the innkeeper, and as he moved out of the doorway, Donne passed through it to the parlour and glanced quickly round.

It was a room to take the eyes of a lover of old-fashioned things. Like the passage, it was panelled in oak dark with age. Heavy beams crossed the ceiling. The hearth was an open one, the windowseat was deep, the single table was gate-legged, of oak that shone with much polishing, and two very broad chairs of farmhouse Chippendale with three small ones to match, were entirely in keeping with the room. On one of the broad-bottomed armchairs the negress was seated, filling it to capacity, whilst her big eyes rolled round the room, apparently noting the details. She grinned as she recognised Donne, and since it was at once the handiest and most comfortable, he took the second armchair, almost facing the woman. She, it appeared, was disposed to be affable.

"Queer name this yere tavern have got, foh shuah," she remarked. "Wonder where dey picked her up?"

Mr. Jack Donne laughed and shook his head. "Don't know. Never set eyes on the sign before."

"Yuh aire jes' a stranger in dese parts, den, boss?" asked the woman with a curiosity that was patent.

"Never hit the port before," agreed Donne, "and I guess it isn't your native heath, either?"

The woman flashed her teeth in an expansive grin.

"No, boss. Ah wasn't reared in no one-hoss place like dis. Ah guess dat if ah had been ah'd hav' git out in no time at all foh duh big wide spaces, an'——"

She broke off at the sound of footsteps in the passage—quick tripping steps, proclaiming youth and lightness, very different from the innkeeper's shuffle. The footsteps approached the doorway, which the woman's big eyes watched with

curious interest, and Donne also turned his gaze that way. A moment later a girl entered the room, bearing a tray on which reposed a jug of ale, a glass, a smaller jug with water, and the rum which the negress had ordered.

Mr. Jack Donne caught his breath as he saw her. The girl was a wonder. Olive-skinned, with hair dark as the negress's crinkled locks, her sleepy eyes were like pools of night. Her features were of aquiline caste, with fine, tense nostrils, and a vivid mouth with shapely lips that owed nothing to lipstick. The ears were small and set flat, whilst from the lobes dangled a pair of jade ear-rings, which were matched by a pendant slung from a chain round her neck, and resting between the upper swell of bosoms, whose hidden beauty was hinted by what was modestly revealed.

"Un-English!" he thought to himself. "A sullen beauty, with fire somewhere under the sullenness!"

Then as the girl set the ale on the table close to his hand he met her eyes staring at him curiously. There was a flicker of flame in them, something that he found disturbing—a half-challenging look as if she were hostile to him, which, since he had never before seen her, was no more than an absurd fancy of his own.

"Shillin', please!" said the girl in a voice that had a lilt pleasing to the ear.

Without comment he set a shilling on the salver, forbearing a tip, since the girl was plainly no mere servant, and then watched her as she crossed to the negress. To Donne there was something odd in the conjunction of these two, and something not quite fitting in this white beauty waiting on that black giantess with liquor, and he wondered if the girl was conscious of the fact. It seemed so. Her bearing was almost resentful, and now there was no question of the hostility in the dark eyes. But the negress did not notice it, or if she did, was indifferent. Her big, rolling eyes considered the girl in a rude stare which brought the blood flaming to the olive cheeks, then she commented frankly:

"Golly, you shuah aire a beauty, honey!"

The girl's flush deepened. Her eyes flashed again resentfully, and Donne half-expected an explosion. But, plainly making an effort, the girl held her resentment in leash and spoke stiffly.

"One and twopence."

The negress laughed and opened the bag she carried.

"Stand-offish!" she chuckled. "But there's no need to be stuck-up. . . . There's the cash an' sixpence foh yo'self, gal."

The girl's face fairly flamed. Here was the insult from which Donne himself had steered clear; and he had a notion that it was more or less deliberate on the black woman's part. But still the girl kept her temper leashed, at least she did not give it

expression in words. In silence she picked up the price of the liquor, leaving the sixpence, then suddenly she jerked the tray, shooting the silver coin into the woman's tap. A second later she had withdrawn. The negress laughed, retrieved the sixpence from her lap, then looked at Donne.

"A spitting kitten, boss, hey? . . . An' mortal touchy! . . . Don't know yet dat money's money. . . . But she'll shuah come to ut!"

Donne forbore comment. His sympathy was with the girl; but it was possible that the negress had been innocent of offence, though he did not think so. Anyway, it was not his affair, and he looked out of the window as if he had not heard. As he did so he saw a man stalking along the quay, who provided for him the third surprise in the course of half an hour. The big negress had been one; that sullen beauty of a girl had been another, and the man on the quay was an equal starter.

He was a big man, with a tang of the sea about him, and carried himself with the assurance of one who feared neither man nor devil. His face had the deep tan of hot suns and sea winds; the eyes that looked forth challengingly were light blue and seemed lighter by contrast with the brown skin; whilst against his jawbone gleamed a pair of gold ear-rings of the sort less common now than among mariners of an older day. His dress also was a little unusual, at least for that quayside; for though he wore the high sea-boots affected by some fishermen, the trousers tucked in them were of white duck, whilst under the blue pilot-coat, he boasted a red shirt, and on his head was a broad-brimmed and rather battered panama hat.

He moved up the quay with a swing, but that he was a stranger was evident from the curious glances he darted hither and thither, and presently, when he halted to speak to a man, Mr. Donne made a bet with himself that the stranger was asking his way. He won. The fisherman to whom the man had addressed himself half-turned and pointed to the inn. The man nodded and stalked on, whilst Donne watched him with idle curiosity.

"Coming here! Finds the Cornish Riviera thirsty: and wants a drink. . . . Wonder where he hails from?"

The stranger drew nearer. Almost in the shadow of the inn he halted again and, as the two clients already within had done, he considered the sign. There was an odd look on the lean brown face, and a keenness in the ice-blue eyes as he stood there; then his rather repelling mouth twisted in a smile, and he moved on to the door of the inn.

Donne heard his footsteps come down the passage, pause for a second whilst the choice of rooms was made, then the parlour door was thrown open, and the man stepped into its cool shade. For a second, passing from the strong sunlight outside,

he apparently saw nothing of the two already there; but in that second an odd thing befell. The big negress let her glass crash to the floor, and rolled ponderously out of her chair, whilst a startled word broke from her:

“Satan!”

The newcomer stared at her and as his pale blue eyes grew accustomed to the shadows, a gleam of recognition came in them. He laughed in a way that chilled Mr. Donne more than he would have owned, then he raised his battered panama.

“Afternoon, Mammy Venus. This is a real pleasant surprise for a man on his birthday.”

The big negress gulped and gaped like an afflicted chicken, but no words came. After five or six seconds had passed the newcomer laughed again.

“Takes you between wind and water, hey?” he asked with an ironical geniality which seemed to worry the negress, for she lifted a hand and held it as if fending off some evil thing. “You weren’t expecting to see me after that little adventure in the cove, maybe?” His ice-blue eyes looked at her quizzingly, and then his face took a solemn look and he quoted lugubriously:

“And some are drowned in deep water  
And some are drowned in shore——”

“I met my fate in shore, where the little crabs come out of the weed to play, and the sand-jiggers skip like grasshoppers when the tide is out. A melancholy end for a man like me——” He laughed again with that chilling geniality. “But water will not drown a man who is born for the rope and so *REVOICI!*—Here we are again! And very pleased to see each other, as your friend here will observe.”

Then the woman found her voice. “Don’t know duh man from Abr’ham, so you’d better keep duh trap shut, Michael.”

At that warning the man swung about and staringly appraised Mr. Donne. The latter returned stare for stare, and calmly let his eyes rake the newcomer from crown to toes, resting their gaze for a moment on the belt the man wore, at which they noted a sheath-knife was hung. Then gaze met gaze again, and Mr. Donne laughed.

“You’ll know me next time we meet!”

The big man shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t expect there will be any next time.”

“Wouldn’t be so sure of that!” countered Mr. Donne. “The world’s a small place and——”

“Perdition!” ejaculated the other almost violently. “What the blazes do you mean by that?”

Mr. Jack Donne was amused at the violence. He searched his mind for a

provocative answer, but before he found it there came an interruption. The girl who had served the negress and himself entered the room and stood looking at the man Michael as if waiting for his order. The big man turned to her, and as he did so a look of admiration came on his hard face, and the blue eyes flashed with sudden ardent flame. Under his gaze, the girl shuffled her feet uncomfortably, and the quick blood dyed her cheeks. Then she spoke in a matter-of-fact voice:

“What can I get you, mister?”

The man laughed with real mirth as he answered.

“Lots of things, I assure you. But first you’ll get me a double tot of rum—Seraphina!”

There was a little pause before the name he gave her sufficient to call attention to it; and the girl looked at him in a startled way, as if wondering how he had come by the name. Donne also wondered, then smiled a little as the girl replied stiffly:

“I don’t allow strangers to use my name offhand.”

“A good rule,” laughed the man unabashed. “Maids and married women can’t be too careful. . . . Give a man an inch and as like as not he’ll take the whole yardstick. . . . But I’m not a stranger, leastways I don’t feel one, having talked about you by the hour with a man you should know very well, one who called you ‘Pheeny’ oftener than he called you Seraphina——”

“Oh, sir——” broke in the girl, an imploring note in her voice, but was immediately checked by the man.

“Not now!” he said. “We’ll straighten that out later, my dear. Just skip along for the rum—a double tot, mind you—and don’t worry your pretty head at a friend’s little slip. . . . You and me’ll have a little chat later, out on the quay, under the stars, which haven’t any ears that I ever heard tell of.”

The girl flashed a look that might have been one of understanding, then hurried from the room. Scarcely had she crossed the threshold when the negress shot a question.

“Michael—who is dat gal?”

The man laughed tantalisingly. “Curious, Mammy Venus?” he asked. “That’s the bane of all your sex—black or white. . . . You’ll get nought from me, but there’s all the quayside you can ask, not to name this gentleman, who maybe can tell you a thing or two about the maid.”

“A mistake,” answered Mr. Donne, finding himself dragged into the conversation. “I am a stranger in the port.”

“The devil you are!”

The man spoke rudely, and his light blue eyes raked the other fore and aft with

unconcealed suspicion. Mr. Donne could not fail to be aware of it, and was intrigued as he speculated on the possible cause for it. He nodded carelessly, and remembering how the fellow had halted in the street to survey the inn sign, he drew a bow at a venture with a deliberate intention to be provocative.

“A stranger with an interest in old tavern signs!”

His words certainly found a mark, though what the mark was he had not the remotest idea. The fellow leaped from the chair he had taken and cried out explosively:

“The deuce you are!”

“Particularly in Blue Anchors,” agreed Donne smilingly, and reached for the jug to replenish his glass. “Know of three,” he added nonchalantly as he poured out the beer.

“There’s one that’s given its name to a little watering place——” He broke off and lifting the tumbler drained it before finishing his remarks: “Minehead way that is. Others are in Cornwall here; but this one where we sit takes the medal.”

“Why?” demanded the other.

Mr. Donne looked almost as mysterious as he was mystified.

“Ah!” he said in tones that suggested infinitely more than his words. “That would be telling!”

“The devil! . . . It would?” ejaculated the other harshly.

“I assure you it would,” answered Mr. Donne gravely, then very conscious that he had whipped the other’s suspicions—whatever they might be—to a gallop, he helped himself to more ale, drank it, and rose. “I am loath to play gooseberry, sir. You and Mammy Venus must have quite a lot to say to each other. . . . You shall have the deck to yourselves.”

He moved swiftly to the door, which had been left slightly ajar, and opening it wide with a jerk, surprised the shrivelled Ben Bonito and the girl standing outside, plainly engaged in the reprehensible occupation of listening-in. They fell hurriedly aside on his appearance; but setting a finger to his lips, he grinned and carefully pulled-to the door behind him, leaving a chink that would serve the listeners. Then he leaned towards Mr. Bonito.

“I want a bedroom to-night,” he said. “And a cold supper. I can have them?”

The little man looked doubtful, and Mr. Donne hastily whispered in his ear.

“I’ve nothing to do with that pair in there. . . . The motor-craft out in the harbour is mine. . . . You’ve seen it?” He grinned. “I’m as respectable as the craft. We’ll call it settled, hey? . . . Good! I’ll be back at eight-thirty for the supper. . . . Give me a front room. I like to look out on a harbour. . . . So-long!”



He went down the passage whistling. When he crossed the threshold, he turned to the right, and as he passed the bar-parlour window was aware of the gleam of gold above the wire blind as the sun struck on it.

“Ear-rings! Watching!” he chuckled to himself. “Mammy Venus, too, I expect——What a peach of a name!” And chuckling still, he walked along the quayside, nonchalantly, like a man with time to waste. But for all that he was very alert, his eyes observant for obvious strangers, and busy with the shipping in the small harbour which might afford a clue to the odd pair whom he had left in the inn, and who, it seemed, were much concerned about himself.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WHISTLING MAN

The harbour held the better part of a score of fishing boats. By the quay a sailing barge with auxiliary power was unloading coal, the rattle of her winch breaking the quiet with chattering sound. Further out a small rusty steam-yacht was anchored; and not far away was his own motor-boat, little more than a decent-sized launch. The two last, he decided, were the only strange craft in port, and naturally his eyes fastened on the yacht. Had Mammy Venus or Michael of the ear-rings landed from her? Or was her presence in the harbour just a coincidence, and neither of the pair associated with her?

That both had come from her he did not believe. The negress had plainly been startled by the man's advent—and not pleased. And Michael himself had been a little surprised; or, what seemed more likely, had affected to be so. But the recognition had been mutual, each had given the other a name, and they were clearly old acquaintances yet not exactly friends. The man, as it appeared, had some grievance against the woman, and the negress was in a measure afraid of him. He recalled the fellow's quotation of Kipling, his odd comment on it; and deduced that in Mammy Venus' expectation he should have been crab-meat, instead of a lively presence in the bar-parlour of the Three Blue Anchors.

But in heaven's name, what had the odd pair to do with the quayside tavern of this little fishing port? They were quite alien to it, yet both were obviously interested in it; and the man had given that startlingly handsome girl her name—Seraphina. To be sure he had explained his knowledge of that. He had talked with someone who made a familiar diminutive of that rather fine name, and the girl had instantly understood who that one was. Then she and the wizened Ben had been eavesdropping in the passage, in a way that to say the least was not usual. He remembered the innkeeper's obvious interest when the negress had rolled into his ken, and his silent disapproval of her as a customer, which the woman had ignored. . . . That in itself was rather odd. It might be that he had a prejudice against coloured folk using his inn, but that earnest eavesdropping pointed to something more; and the familiar usage of the girl's name by Michael was further evidence that there was more than met the eye in the presence of that precious pair at the Three Blue Anchors tavern. He recalled the ear-ringed man's suspicions of himself, and laughed as he thought how he had fanned those suspicions without in the least knowing what they were or to what they related.

"Gave the fellow something to chew on!" he muttered to himself, and a second

later was brought up short by the spectacle of a man who was obviously no native.

The man was seated on a stone bollard. He was dressed in dirty dungarees, his otherwise bare feet thrust into a pair of rubber shoes, and he had a battered peaked cap upon his head. He was smoking a long cigar, and staring about him with a curiosity that no one to whom the harbour was familiar would have shown. But it was neither the man's dress nor his interest in his surroundings which arrested Mr. Donne's attention. Any unwashed fireman fresh from a stokehold might so have taken the air and indulged himself in a cigar, and there would have been nothing to remark upon the fact. But this man was a mulatto, and in view of his own recent encounter with Mammy Venus, Mr. Donne found that intriguing. Two coloured persons in a little port like this was at least one more than could have been anticipated, and he found himself wondering if there were anything in the conjunction of the two.

Lighting a cigarette he moved slowly forward, and as he drew nearer the bollard caught the mulatto's roving eyes. Mr. Donne smiled affably.

"Nice day," he said by way of a conversational opening.

"Warmish!" The other agreed, and looked at the end of his cigar, which, it appeared, had gone out.

Mr. Donne offered his match-box. The other took it, with a grin of thanks, relit the cigar, puffed a cloud of smoke, and absent-mindedly dropped the match-box into his tunic pocket. Then he spat, and in a matter-of-fact voice made an uncalled-for comment:

"Dis is a heluva hole."

Mr. Donne laughed with mirthful understanding. To a man used to the excitements of great ports, a small Cornish fishing village might well merit the other's description.

"Small!" he agreed.

"An' quiet. Might be a dam' graveyard," the mulatto commented further in manifest disgust. "Take a glimp round at it. Enough to give a man duh jim-jams an' make him drop over duh quayside."

Mr. Donne obliged by looking round. That done he laughed.

"Not exciting," he owned, then thoughtfully indicated the one bright spot in the landscape. "But there's a public-house along the quay there."

The mulatto looked in the direction of the inn with thirsty eyes, and marking the glance, Mr. Donne said tentatively. "Might do worse than stroll so far. The tap's worth it."

The other's dog-like eyes quickened a little, then he spoke hopefully.

“Say, boss, was yuh askin’ me to hev a drink?”

“I wasn’t,” Mr. Donne laughed. “But I will with pleasure. I hate imbibing alone.”

The mulatto lifted himself from the bollard. “I guess yuh sure are duh friend in need.” He turned towards the tavern and then became still and asked a question. “Yuh jest come from down there?”

Mr. Donne nodded, and the other sought further information.

“See anythin’ of a coloured lady arrayed like duh Queen of Sheba?”

“There certainly is a coloured lady drinking rum in the bar-parlour,” Mr. Donne owned, grinning at the mulatto’s description.

Disappointment clouded the other’s dog-like eyes. Slowly he turned and sank back on the bollard.

“Guess I won’t take that drink, after all, boss. No offence meant!”

The man offered no explanation of his change of mind, and Donne needed none. Whether she stood in the category of friend or enemy he could not guess, but to the mulatto it seemed that the negress was a little formidable, and either the fellow had orders not to follow her, or he was afraid of an encounter with that massive lady.

“Please yourself. No offence taken. Another time maybe I’ll have the pleasure.”

“Dat depends on how long the ole gal lies in dis one-hoss port.”

Mr. Donne did not mistake the reference. It was not Mammy Venus of whom the mulatto spoke. The man’s eyes were fixed on the rusty-looking yacht, and unquestionably the allusion was to it. But that did not make the relation between the man and the negress any clearer; for, as he reflected, the ear-ringed man who had surprised Mammy Venus might very well be the owner of that craft and the mulatto his servant. He made an attempt to draw the man out.

“Handy little craft, I should say.”

“Was!” answered the mulatto frankly.

“Well, ships like men have their day. You the owner?”

“Me!” The mulatto stared at him. “Gawd Almighty, do I look like duh owner of a craft like dat?”

“Oh,” answered Mr. Donne lightly. “You never can tell. I’ve known a millionaire who was taken for a rag-and-bone man, and who looked the part. But if you’re not the owner, I suppose it must be Mammy Venus——”

“Lor’, yuh know dat lady?”

“Had a drink with her just now down at the Three Blue Anchors——”

The mulatto lifted himself from the bollard with a suddenness that was startling, and his canine eyes stared at Donne in unconcealed astonishment.

“What did yuh say was duh name of dat tavern, sah?”

“The Three Blue Anchors! Proprietor, Ben Bonito, good accommodation for man and beast, and beer worth drinking. . . . But, I say, what’s got you, man? You look as if you’d just shaken hands with a ghost.”

The mulatto grinned and then chuckled. “Oh, dat Mammy Venus! She sure is duh wonder of duh age. . . . Duh Three Blue Anchors! An’ she never say a word!”

His chuckle became a laugh, and watching him, Mr. Donne decided that the laugh was friendly and that here was a henchman of the negress. That was informing, but his curiosity was still unsatisfied, and he continued his investigations.

“Name of the inn seems to strike you,” he said quickly. “It’s a new one to me; but I guess you’ve heard it before. Wonder if you’d mind telling me where?”

His manner may have been a shade too curious, the look on his face a little too eager. Whether it was so or not, or whether the mulatto was aware of an indiscretion on his own part, it is not to be guessed, but a jibing grin came on the man’s ugly face.

“I sure tell yuh somethin’, sah!” he said.

“Yes?”

“Go tuh hell!”

The mulatto laughed as he gave this offensive direction. But he had given it to the wrong person. Mr. Jack Donne was not the man to suffer such impertinence, least of all from a coloured man. A second later the laughter was stopped by a blow which knocked the mulatto staggering towards the edge of the quay. There was neither chain nor rail to save him and he toppled over the edge into the water, the tide, luckily, being at flood. Mr. Donne himself walked to the edge and looked over. He was in time to see the mulatto’s black head bob up above the level of the water, and as their gaze met Mr. Donne laughed.

“Teach you to be civil to your betters, I hope, little nigger boy.”

The mulatto spat forth a mouthful of salt water, spat again as the wave made by his own submersion recoiling from the harbour wall filled his mouth anew, and then marking the steps a dozen yards away, struck out in that direction. Mr. Donne, having vindicated the honour of the white race, walked away whistling a cheerful air. But before he reached the end of the little quay his whistle died, and his brows puckered in a frown of thoughtfulness. He was deeply puzzled and much intrigued by the encounters of the last half-hour, and he had the baffled feeling of one who stands at the edge of mysteries without being able to solve them.

“I’d give a pound——” he muttered to himself, and turned to look back at the inn.

Mammy Venus was just emerging, and, even at the distance she was, to Mr. Donne’s eyes she had the demeanour of an angry hen. He wondered if the ear-

ringed mariner whose appearance had so put her out of countenance had further ruffled her into a passion. A second later he had the luck to find confirmation of his suspicion. The unfortunate mulatto, emerging from his involuntary bath, lifted his dripping head above the level of the quay. Mammy Venus saw him and checked her rolling progress to speak to him. Donne was too far off to hear the words; but he saw the man point in his own direction and the negress turn to look at him. Then she turned again, stooped, and cuffed the mulatto with such violence that for the second time he was knocked into the harbour.

"Temper!" laughed Mr. Donne to himself. "Michael must have stamped upon her corns."

He walked on, reached the end of the quay and found himself confronted by a sharply-ascending street, which led to the hill behind the port. Needing exercise, he faced the ascent and presently, seated on a rock at the crest of the hill, he looked down on the town and the harbour. Of the latter he had almost a bird's-eye view, and he noted a dinghy that appeared to be making for the rusty yacht. A splash of rainbow colour in the dinghy's stern seat informed him that Mammy Venus was the passenger, and he had no doubt that the mulatto was the oarsman, though he was too far off to discern the man's features. He watched the pair climb the accommodation ladder of the yacht and disappear below, then sat there in the sunshine wondering again what was the explanation of the various odd encounters which he had witnessed and which, as he was sure, had their connecting link in the old inn.

The problem was an intriguing one, but he failed to find any solution whatever, and presently his meditations were broken into by a sound of footsteps. He looked round. An old man, plainly of the fisherman class, and as plainly beyond work, was shuffling towards him. The man as he approached gave him a friendly good day; and Mr. Donne, with a remembrance of the gossiping proclivities of retired seafarers, was altogether cordial.

"Afternoon!" he said. "Fine view you have up here, for sure."

"Be middlin' good," agreed the ancient, "for them as aren't used to it . . . But boy an' man I've looked on it for up seventy year, an' that be a goodish time for one view."

"So long!" Mr. Donne expressed surprise. "I wouldn't have given you as many birthdays by ten or a dozen."

"Zeventy-zix, I be," laughed the old man, "an' though the view be the same more or less, in them years I've zeed a goodish few changes."

"I'll wager you have, Gaffer," answered Mr. Donne. "You'll have seen men

come and go——”

“Mostly go,” wheezed the other. “Bain’t many that do come here. . . . Parson, who be cracked about ancient things, d’say that in two hunnerd years there haven’t been more nor four new family names writ in the parish register.”

“That’s a record for a place of this size, I should say.”

“Likely enough,” agreed the gossip. “But folk hereabout don’t travel much. Two ov them families came from the next parish, number three was from Zennor Churchtown, an’ only the Bonitos was rale furriners—not Cornish, I mean.”

“Bonitos?” Mr. Donne’s voice was mildly curious, but his eyes were keen. “Is that the family down at the inn?”

“Iss! ’Twas the one who came who built the place up a hunnerd an’ seventy years back, an’ gave it the name. . . . Seafaring man, he was, an’ a dark character by all accounts.”

“In what way?” asked Mr. Donne, his interest visibly quickening.

“Well, there’s tales ov his havin’ been a slaver—an’ worse; an’ ’tis sure he made a violent end.”

“How?”

“Handful ov seafaring men came along one day in a brig and landin’, they sat drinkin’ in Bonito’s house. There was a row come night, an’ next morning sure enough Bonito was found with his hands tied behind him, hanging from the bar of his inn sign; an’ the brig was gone. There’s a gentleman over to Lamorna who’ve put it all down in print with other strange happenings down here in the Duchy—for anybody to read as may want.”

“Um! . . . Is there anything more about the Bonitos?”

“No; but there might be. They’m a queer lot; an’ tales might be writ if one was gifted with the trick.”

“What sort of tales?”

“Queer ones! ’Tis said that there’m no less than five Bonitos gone away to sea, an’ only one come back.”

“May have been lost. Following the sea was a dangerous calling in the old days.”

The old gossip nodded agreement, and rumbled on: “I mind the one who came back. He’m buried up in the churchyard. I was just landed from the fishing an’ saw him come tappin’ along the quay, a blind man, with death in his face. . . . Nobody knew how he’d been blinded, but there was a white scar across his forehead an’ it may have been that. He was back no more than a month, an’ then his light went out. . . . That be forty-six years come Candlemas.” He paused and then nodded his head in the direction of the port. “Ben down at the inn be his son.”

“Nothing against him, I hope?”

“Nought but a queerness in the head sometimes, an’ that he’ m a silent man. An’ a landlord who don’t talk isn’t natural.”

“Queer in the head? How?” prompted Mr. Donne.

“Be always poring over an old drawin’ that be as like the picture on that sign of his as two peas—three blue anchors whirling like a broken wheel. . . . Be hung in the kitchen—framed; an’ ’tis said that never a night goes but when the inn be shut he d’ take it down from its hook an’ stare at it like a man possessed.”

Mr. Donne was interested by this piece of gossip.

“That’s odd!” he said.

“Mortal odd,” agreed the old man. “But ’tis a saying that every man be cracked somewhere. An’ that wold picture is Ben’s particular chink, I reckon.”

His listener offered no comment on this judgment, but harked back a little.

“That Bonito who came back blinded, was it known where he had been?”

“Somewhere furrin was all that was known. An’ he hadn’t been up to churchyard a week when a strapping nigger man came here axing after him. Played hell’s delight down to the inn when they told him that wold Ben was dead and buried; an’ wouldn’t believe it. He made to stick young Ben as he was then with a seaman’s knife, an’ was sent to gaol for twelve months by the judge at Bodmin Assizes, an’ from that day to this Ben haven’t been able to thole the sight of a coloured man.”

So that was the explanation of Mr. Bonito’s askance looks at Mammy Venus, and possibly of his eavesdropping. That experience of his early manhood had soured him against all coloured folk. But, he thought, it did not explain other things—the negress’s interest in the inn sign, the mulatto’s chuckling surprise when he had learned the name of the inn, or the ear-ringed stranger’s attitude both to Mammy Venus and the girl Seraphina. And that picture, a replica of the inn sign, over which Bonito pored every night after closing time—there was something curious about that! He groped for any possible connection between these things, but the illuminating flash of thought which might have linked them into a coherent whole did not come, and after a moment he became aware that the old man was speaking again. He caught only the end of the utterance.

“—— a blackamoor in this port for donkey’s years.”

He guessed at the words that he had missed and answered tersely:

“There’s one now—a woman—in that yacht down there. Also a half-caste.”

“Jerusalem! . . . Ee don’t say so! Then I reckon Ben Bonito’ll be in a twitter when he has the news.”



Donne did not explain that Bonito had already made the acquaintance of the negress. He was not without a hope that he might learn something more from this gossiping old man, but the hope was thwarted by an unexpected intervention. From somewhere down the hill came the sound of footsteps accompanied by that of a lively whistle. A man who could whistle coming up that hill was sound of heart and lungs and no mean pedestrian. He looked with idle curiosity in the direction of the turn where the ascending traveller must come into view. A second later, when the man Michael came into view, his interest quickened enormously.

He was alone, and as he drew nearer his pale eyes looked at Donne and the gossip seated on the rock, without so much as a flicker of recognition in them. He passed on, still whistling, and the native offered comment.

“Furriner! D’look like a mariner! Maybe he’s with that craft down there, zir.”

“Don’t think so.”

“Um! . . . Maybe out of a berth, making vor Falmouth on Shanks’s mare. Be a lean time vor sailormen just now.” The man rose. “Well, I’ll be gettin’ down-along. Must see how Ben d’take the news of the coloured folk that be in port.”

He moved off downhill, and Donne looked round for the one who had passed up the road. The man was nowhere to be seen. He looked more closely, raking the rocks and the gorse, thinking the stranger might have seated himself to take the view, but he could see nothing of him.

“Must have turned aside through the gorse,” he murmured. Slipping from the rock to the turf, he lit another cigarette, and stretching himself luxuriously, gave himself to reflection on the gossip he had heard.

He did not reflect very long. It was very warm on the turf and the monotonous murmur of the sea made for somnolence. His cigarette finished, he threw away the stub, and presently began to nod, and finally slid into a light sleep.

A little time passed before he awoke to the sound of someone whistling. The air was one that he had never heard before, a soft melody, luring and dreamy, but with an insistent, compelling note under its softness that was like a call. Lifting his head, he looked round for the whistler but failed to find him. A moment later, however, for the second time he caught the sound of footsteps coming up the road; and turning towards the crest, he watched for the newcomer, thinking to himself that here was another individual who had breath to whistle whilst climbing a steep hill. A moment later, however, he knew his mistake. The pedestrian came into view—a girl whom he recognised.

“Seraphina!”

He whispered the name in some surprise. Then he suffered a little shock. The girl

was not the siffleur. Her scarlet lips were unpursed, a little apart. Her beautiful face had a strained look. Her slumbrous dark eyes, though they faced the sun, were unblinking, and her whole demeanour was that of one oblivious of the common things about her. She reminded Donne of a Spanish girl whom once he had met in the Plaza de Oriente in Madrid sleep-walking in glorious moonlight. He repudiated the suggestion of the remembrance as swiftly as it was made. This was broad afternoon. It was sheer nonsense to imagine that——His thought broke off sharply as the girl unexpectedly halted. For a moment he thought that she had seen him, then he realised the truth. The whistling had ceased and Seraphina was listening, waiting for it to begin anew. Three seconds later the soft compelling air recommenced, and with that tense look still on her face the girl went forward, as a bird might go at the call of its mate. She passed the rock behind which Donne lay, without seeing him, and twenty yards up the road turned aside in the high gorse, and was lost to view. The whistled melody came to an abrupt end half-way through a bar; and not until then did he realise the truth. The siffleur must be the ear-ringed Michael who had come whistling up the hill. He remembered suddenly what the man had said about a meeting on the quayside under the stars which had no ears. But he had not waited for the darkness to fall. Here, on the high hill in the warm solitude of the gorse, with none but the grasshoppers to hear, the assignation was happening. The girl at the call of a stranger had left the inn—possibly in fulfilment of a whispered arrangement. But there was something mortally queer in that whistled call, something more odd still in the girl's demeanour. He stared across the hill to the gorse sizzling in the hot sunlight. A perplexed look came in his grey eyes. Then he whispered his puzzlement to the world.

“What the devil is the meaning of it all?”

### CHAPTER III

## STRANGE EVENTS OF A NIGHT

He was strangely tempted to follow the girl into the gorse in order to solve the mystery. Then he shrugged his shoulders. Scruples were a small part of his moral outfit, but he had his code. He was no Paul Pry to spy upon a pair who had sought solitude that they might talk unfetteredly. The ear-ringed man had promised the girl news of someone who contracted her name in a way that proclaimed affectionate familiarity, and no doubt she was to hear it now. Well! so far as he was concerned she should hear it alone. That decision reached, he stretched himself in the sun anew and stared absently at the harbour, but found his thoughts still centred round the girl and the man whom she had gone to meet. He wondered who so made a diminutive of her name and what news she was to hear of him—for that the one of whom the ear-ringed one was to tell her was a man he had no doubt at all.

Naturally his desultory reflections yielded no very definite result. Some secret lover, he thought, who, for some reason unable to write, had made that icy-eyed man his messenger. But that left all that was odd and mysterious just where it had been, and in no way explained the situation on which he had stumbled.

Piqued by curiosity, he kept his ears open for any footfall which might proclaim that secret interview in the gorse was ended. An hour passed, but he heard nothing. At the end of that time he changed his position so that he could have a view of the road. But no one passed either up or down, and apparently he had the whole hill to himself. Finally, he decided that Seraphina and the man whom she had gone to meet must have returned some other way; and abandoning his watch, he went down to the harbour to his launch, where for a time he busied himself writing letters and packing a small dunnage bag with personal necessities.

At half-past eight precisely he entered the Three Blue Anchors, carrying the bag. The wizened Bonito showed him to his room which, as he had requested, looked out on the harbour. Before he left him the innkeeper explained:

“Supper is laid in the living-room, parlour and taproom both being wanted for the regular trade. I hope you won’t mind, sir.”

“Not in the least,” answered Donne.

“Good. You’ll be quiet there, an’ Seraphina will look after your needs.”

Seven minutes later he descended the stairs and made his way to the living-room, which was the kitchen at the end of the passage which he had observed on first entering the inn. It was a larger room than he had expected to find, comfortably furnished, and on the table was a cold collation that was agreeably surprising. As he

entered the girl followed.

"I hope you'll find everything to your liking, sir," she said. "What will you take to drink?"

"Beer," he said. "A large tankard."

"Yes, sir."

The girl departed, and seating himself in the carving chair, as was evidently intended, he looked round. The first thing that caught his eye was the framed drawing of which the gossip had spoken—a replica of the sign outside—as the ancient had described it, "three blue anchors whirling like a broken wheel." He stared at it curiously and instantly noticed that at each side, about half-way up where a man would naturally hold it if he wished to examine the drawing closely, the frame was darker and less polished. Here, he thought, was confirmation of the gossip's story of Bonito's examination of the picture nightly—though how anyone beside the landlord could know of that, he could not guess.

He stared at it thoughtfully whilst he ate. The device was on parchment. The colour of both the parchment and the drawing itself had faded with age, and there was a peppering of rusty mildew such as is common in old engravings. As he stared at it, the thought crossed his mind that, so far from embodying any secret information, it was merely the original draft for the sign outside made for that Bonito who was the founder of the inn. But when, having finished his meal, he crossed the room to give the drawing a minute inspection, he discovered things that had not been visible from his seat at the table. In the circle of cable chain which ran through the shackles of the anchors was certain old English lettering finely drawn and faded with age. He studied closely and finally made out what looked like a double set of initials with a date arranged thus:



Three anchors engraving

The B.B. was easy enough. Unquestionably it stood for Ben Bonito who, returning from dark ways on the sea had turned into a respectable tavern-keeper. But who on earth was LI.F.N.?

Some companion and partner of the unregenerate years, he thought; and staring at the picture, wondered why Ben Bonito the first had inscribed his partner's initials on the signboard. But had he done so? He did not remember observing them on the sign outside which was probably a faithful reproduction of the first hung out to advertise the tavern, and moved by curiosity, he left the kitchen and walked down the passage to the street to make sure. His effort was wasted. Dusk was falling, and even the main features of the signboard were invisible.

"Well," he chuckled, "to-morrow is another day, and the board won't sprout wings."

Returning indoors, he did not go back to the kitchen, but turned into the taproom, where there was a considerable company—mostly local fishermen. Almost the first person that he saw was the ear-ringed Michael, engaged in an innocent game of table skittles in which he showed considerable skill.

The second person to arrest his attention as he looked round was the mulatto, seated in a rather shaded corner, and watching the ear-ringed skittle-player with more than ordinary interest. Mr. Donne wondered if "Ear-rings," as he mentally dubbed the man, was aware of the mulatto's watchfulness. He did not appear to be

so, nor did he seem conscious of the thoughtful glances which Seraphina bestowed on him from time to time from the bar. He was absorbed in his game, he laughed like a boy, when before the swinging ball the whole nine skittles were levelled; and in high good humour he called for rum for himself and ale for his defeated opponent.

Observing further, Mr. Donne presently became aware that the mulatto so intent on the ear-ringed Michael, was himself under observation. Bonito, whilst he attended to the wants of his customers, was watching the man as closely as a cat watches the mouse that is to be its victim. Here, he reflected, was another piece of evidence in support of the gossip's assertion that the innkeeper did not like coloured men. He wondered idly if Mr. Bonito's prejudice was merely due to the attack he had suffered so many years ago, or whether it had a more recondite cause in sheer racial antipathy, then presently found other things to engage his thoughts.

"Ear-rings," his game finished, had seated himself a little apart, and was staring at Seraphina with a queer intentness. The girl seemed uneasily conscious of the stare of those ice-cold eyes, and again and again her own eyes turned to meet them, then looked hastily away.

He wondered what had happened between the man and the girl in the gorse on the hill that afternoon, and what information the fellow had brought her; and as he watched was intrigued by the situation in the taproom. Whilst the customers drank their ale, played skittles and darts and dominoes, there was something developing of which they were quite oblivious. Of that development he was sure, though he had not the least inkling of its nature. Mr. Bonito was watching the mulatto. The mulatto was watching Ear-rings, and Ear-rings in turn was watching Seraphina.

"Why?"

There he found himself against a dead wall. Separate answers were obvious. Ear-rings was caught by the girl's rather bizarre beauty; the mulatto had been sent by Mammy Venus to keep an eye on the man she had unexpectedly encountered that afternoon; whilst the innkeeper was merely displaying his habitual dislike to a coloured skin. But he was convinced that there was more than that in the situation, something not so obvious, the which, if he could learn it, would reveal the triple watchers as animated by a single motive. But he could not even remotely guess the nature of it, and a little time later there was a new twist of the game.

The ear-ringed Michael caught the girl's slumbrous eyes at last and held them. Donne noticed that there was a queer light in their dark depths, and that they seemed absolutely immobile. He looked from her to the man. But for his eyes the fellow's face was like a mask, set in tense lines, with his brows contracted in a frown, his hard-lipped mouth tightly closed. But the light eyes were vividly alive. There was

sheer flame in the pupils which seemed to have widened beyond ordinary, whilst they were riveted on the girl's face.

Mr. Donne was tremendously interested and looked round to learn if anyone else was observing the queer thing that was happening in this smoky taproom. The mulatto seemed to be the only other person watching the ear-ringed man, and there was an ugly sneer on his face. Everyone else appeared to be engrossed in his own pleasure; and a particularly close contest between two expert dart-players had the attention of most.

He looked again in the direction of the bar. Seraphina's dark eyes had now their old sleepy look, and whilst he was still noting the fact, the girl turned and left the bar. He gave his attention to the man. The mean face had lost its tenseness. The forehead, now gleaming with sweat, was no longer frowning, the light eyes had a gleam of triumph, whilst the tight lips had relaxed in a half-sardonic smile. He picked up his glass, drank the rum it contained, then rising, he moved to the door.

Mr. Donne, whose position commanded a view of the passage, watched carefully and saw that he took the way which led to the street. A second later the mulatto rose from his shadowed corner and hastily followed in the other's wake. Trouble brewing, he thought, and still watched, and two or three minutes later saw a girlish form slip past the taproom door making for the street. He had no glimpse of her face, but from her height and shapely figure he decided that it must be Seraphina.

"So," he reflected, "here's the little chat out on the quay under the stars after all. This afternoon in the gorse was no more than a preliminary. Wonder if Ben Bonito knows what is happening?"

He glanced at the wizened little landlord. The man was busy mopping the zinc counter-top with a towel, and was apparently without a care. The departure of the mulatto seemingly had rolled a burden from the man's shoulders, for now he laughed at a jest of one of his customers and capped it with one of his own. If he guessed his daughter had left the house, he was untroubled; but then, he might not know that she had followed the ear-ringed Michael, or that the mulatto was at the other man's heels.

Interest for him having removed from the taproom to the quay, Mr. Donne himself decided to take the air and moved outside. He found the quay practically deserted. He walked the whole length of it without seeing anything of the trio who had left the inn; and wherever the tryst was being kept, it was most certainly not upon the harbour front. He paced the place like a sentry, and the third time as he passed the inn door he caught Bonito's voice:

"Time, gentlemen!"

Men began to leave the inn and drift in the direction of the cottages on the hill behind. One or two passed Donne on the quay and gave him a friendly good night; then, as he turned in his passing, he saw the girl hurriedly enter the inn—alone. There was no sign of the man whom she had gone forth to meet; and wondering what had become of him, he made his way to the inn door. As he reached it he met the landlord crossing the threshold.

“Going to take a breather,” Bonito explained. “Cast-iron rule of mine, rain or shine, before going to bed.”

“Sound rule, too,” agreed Donne heartily, and passed indoors in hope of having a word or two with Seraphina.

In that, however, he was disappointed. The girl did not appear, but presently he heard her moving about overhead and divined that she had gone to her room. On the kitchen table there were three candlesticks, and it was obvious that it was meant that he should help himself. All three candles had been used previously, and as he chose and lit the longest he speculated on the other two. One, no doubt, was for Bonito, but for whose use could the other be meant? Apparently there must be another guest in the inn, or possibly it was meant for some servant, though he had seen none.

Taking the long candle, he went to his room, closed the door and threw open the casement. As he did so a gust of wind blew out his candle, and without troubling to relight it, he leaned on the broad sill and stared forth into the night. There was no light on the quayside, and apart from a small pharos light at the harbour entrance, the only light in the harbour itself came from the rusty yacht, where someone was making music, a woman’s voice crooning a negro song to the thrumming of a banjo. The words drifted softly across the starlit water:

“Ezekiel saw the wheel  
’Way up in the middle of the air,  
Ezekiel saw the wheel——”

He remembered Mammy Venus and grinned to himself. One scarcely associated her with Spirituals, but the negro mind was a dark maze, its simplicity shot with ancient cunning, and its pagan standards tinged with the roseate hues of childish faith. His eyes wandered along the quayside. Nothing was visible there, and all the villagers it seemed were gone to bed. Yet he knew that somewhere out in the darkness Bonito was taking the air after his night’s labour in the stuffy taproom, and he listened for the sound of his steps returning. The singer on the old yacht crooned on:



“An’ the little wheel run by faith  
An’ the big wheel run by the grace of God;  
’Tis a wheel in a wheel,  
’Way in the middle of the air.”

Then there was a sound of voices at the far end of the quay. Someone shouted in sudden alarm.

“Holy Kerist! Yuh——”

The words ended in a choked inarticulate cry. The melody on the yacht broke off sharply. Then again the quay was silent save for a little gust of wind which, sweeping along, set the signboard of the Three Blue Anchors creaking and groaning—a most melancholy sound. Mr. Donne still stared into the darkness. That something had happened down on the quay he was sure, and he was wondering if some ill had overtaken the innkeeper and if it were any business of his to find out, when he caught a sound of feet running lightly in the direction of the inn. He leaned a little further out of the window in the hope of discovering the runner. But the man, whoever he was, kept in the shadow of the buildings and he never saw him, but he heard the inn door open and close and almost before he could move from the window, feet mounted the stairs and a door on the landing was softly closed.

“Um!” he murmured. “Here’s Ben Bonito returned from his airing in the deuce of a hurry. . . . Wonder what happened down there?”

He was still wondering when again there reached him the sound of running feet. In a trice he was back at the window staring down at the dark quay. His first thought was that someone had heard the cry which he himself had heard and was hurrying to investigate the cause; but as he listened he realised that this second runner was also running towards the inn—possibly for help.

Deciding that it might be wise to learn what had happened, he crossed swiftly to his bedroom door and softly opening it, stepped on to the landing. It commanded the stairs and the ill-lighted passage below, and scarcely had he reached the rail when he heard the outer door of the inn open and close, and this time someone shot the bolt with a violence that proclaimed a man in a hurry. The man came up the passage, making for the kitchen; and a moment later he saw that this last comer was the innkeeper. He was taken by surprise and came near to whistling aloud. Then, as in the same glance he marked Bonito’s wizened face, he was utterly startled.

The man’s face was chalk-white. His eyes had a startled look. His mouth was working as if he had quite lost control of his muscles, and it was very clear that either he had suffered a great shock or was in the grip of violent emotion. A half-whisper

drifted up the stairs to the watcher.

“My God, if——”

Mr. Donne heard no more. The landlord hastily doused the light in the passage and passed on to the kitchen, whence a moment later came a clink of glass on glass, which told its own tale. Evidently Bonito, in the stress he was enduring, found himself in need of a stimulant and was attending to the matter.

The watcher still continued to stare downwards. Though the passage light had been extinguished, a faint illumination came from an inner window of the kitchen the use of which was to light the passage by day. That window attracted him enormously and drew his curiosity like a magnet. Anyone on the stairs, half-way down, could look straight through that inner window into the kitchen, and at that moment Mr. Donne was most eager to do so. He hesitated a second or two, again caught the clink of a bottle neck on glass, then he shot a swift glance around the landing. At the bottom of one door only a faint chink of light showed, and there was no sound of movement in the room to which it belonged. He determined to risk being found on the stairs, and as silently as he could moved across the landing. Without mishap he reached the fourth stair going down, and there, stooping a little, found that he could look straight into the kitchen.

What he saw was almost commonplace. The innkeeper, with a bottle of some liquor still in his right hand, was drinking from the glass in his left. He gulped the contents hurriedly, refilled the glass, then setting bottle and glass on the table, plumped down in the chair which Mr. Donne had occupied when at supper. Resting his hands on the wide arms, Bonito closed his eyes and for a full minute sat there, looking like a waxwork image rather than a man. Then he opened his eyes and saw the filled glass standing on the table. Stretching a hand, he took up the glass and began to sip the contents with frequent pauses between the sips. By the time the glass was empty a faint colour showed in his wizened face and his eyes became alert, staring fixedly to his front. There was an intensity in his gaze which Donne found very puzzling until he remembered that on the opposite wall on a level with the man's eyes was the framed parchment with its three anchors. That the man's interest was there he had no doubt whatever, and with keen curiosity he waited for what was to follow. Would the man indulge in his reputed nightly ritual of taking the picture from its hook and staring at it as if seeking to penetrate some secret embodied there; or would he, in the reaction from the emotion he had recently exhibited, vary his practice?

He was still watching, and the innkeeper was still staring at the framed design, when the subdued click of a latch cautiously lifted came from the landing. Someone,

it seemed, was leaving one of the rooms, possibly to descend the stairs. For a second or so he hesitated, uncertain what to do. He was in something of a quandary. To be found spying on the stairs was not to his liking, whilst to turn and boldly meet the unknown one on the landing, whilst it would probably reveal the identity of the interrupter of his spying activities, would at the same time leave his larger curiosity unsatisfied. The sound of a creaking door told him he had but little time, and making his choice, he slid silently down the stairs. As he did so he heard Bonito leave his chair and move across the kitchen. Thinking the landlord might be leaving that room, he stepped further along the passage, thanking heaven that the landlord had doused the lamp, and waited watchfully in the shadow of the taproom door.

Overhead someone crossed the landing, and he saw the person descend the stairs to the vantage-place he himself had used. The new watcher was a man, and since he was almost sure there was but one other visitor in the inn, he guessed that he must be the ear-ringed Michael. A moment later, as he saw the man's ear-rings gleam in the light from the window, he found his guess confirmed.

He heard the innkeeper return to his chair, and then saw the shadowy form on the stairs lean over the rail. The movement brought the man's face full in the range of the light from the inner window, and Donne saw that whilst his pale eyes were almost blazing, the man's face wore a derisive grin as if he were contemptuously amused by whatever his spying revealed.

That grin, combined with the fiery interest in the man's eyes, intrigued Donne mightily. He wondered what was happening in the kitchen, but was unable to see, and for a full three minutes longer he remained in the concealment of the doorway, waiting and watching. Then the man on the stairs straightened himself, and he heard the fellow chuckle softly.

"Lord! what a fool!"

There was a further wait for Donne of another half-minute, then the other turned and ascended to the landing. Donne heard a board creak, but did not move from his doorway until once again he heard the click of a latch which this time proclaimed a door closing. Then he moved swiftly. In five seconds he was back on the stairs at his old vantage place, staring interestedly at the sight afforded him.

Bonito was back in his chair. His elbows rested on the table, whilst in his hands was the drawing of the Three Blue Anchors which he had taken down from the wall. He was leaning forward a little, his wizened forehead was wrinkled by a deep frown, his eyes were fixed on the framed sketch before him, staring with amazing intentness.

Mr. Donne was more interested than he had been for years. Here, he thought, was some extraordinary mystery that had to do either with the sign outside or with

that sketch of it in the landlord's hands. And, more, there were others who were aware of the fact besides Ben Bonito—Mammy Venus, certainly; that ear-ringed scoundrel upstairs beyond question; and the mulatto who had found the name of the inn a revelation.

“Brazen bells of Hades!” he ejaculated, whispering. “What can it be?”

He found no immediate answer to his question, and when after a long interval Bonito made a gesture of bafflement and restored the drawing to its place, he retreated to his room, to ponder the mystery there. Lying in bed in the dark, he reviewed all that had happened since he had landed on the quay, but without finding any clue to the mystery. Outside, a little below and to the right of his window, the inn-sign groaned painfully in the freshening wind. The old inn was full of odd little noises as if its beams and panelling made from the timbers of ancient ships felt the call of wind and sea and were straining at their pegging to break free. Once he certainly heard a rat squeak behind the wainscoting, and after that, baffled and puzzled, he fell asleep.

He awakened some time later to the sound of an opening door. Someone, he told himself, was moving in the inn—Bonito, unable to sleep, possibly, and driven to further consultation with that dumb oracle of a picture downstairs. Being disinclined for further investigation, he turned over and closed his eyes. But sleep would not come, and there were circumstances which made for wakefulness. A slight bumping sound on the stairs arrested his attention. He listened keenly. The sound was not repeated; but a couple of minutes later, as he caught the click of a bolt shot back in its socket, he jerked himself into a sitting position. Someone, it seemed, was going forth, and at that hour of the night it was an odd thing.

“Who?” he whispered into the darkness. “And why?”

The wind from the sea rattled the open casement and made the curtains wuther, momentarily drowning all other sounds. But as the gust passed he distinctly heard footfalls moving away from the inn—the footfalls of two people. In a twinkling he was out of bed and hurrying to the open window. Reaching it, he leaned out and looked up the quay from which direction the footfalls had sounded.

He saw nothing, and the wind, wuthering gustily, drowned any sound of feet there might be. Disappointed, he still remained at the window, hoping against hope for a glimpse of the persons who had left the inn. And as he did so he became aware of a fact that momentarily diverted his attention. When he had looked forth from the window, and also as he had lain awake in bed, he had been conscious of the creaking and groaning of the signboard on its stanchion, but now, despite the rising wind, the signboard was silent. That simple fact intrigued him a little.

“Peradventure it sleepeth,” he murmured to himself, and glanced downward towards the right.

Then he suffered a mild shock. The signboard was not to be seen. He leaned half-way out of the window to make sure, and against the light-coloured road below distinctly made out the outline of the iron stanchion stuck out from the wall like a gaunt and fruitless branch. And the simile held in at least one particular, for the stanchion was barren as ever was any withered bough. The fact, in view of all the other small things that had happened in relation to the signboard, startled him.

“No, by heaven!” he ejaculated. “It is not sleeping. It is on a journey.”

But where could it have gone, and what the way of its going? The wind was not sufficiently strong to have wrenched it from its fastenings, and had those fastenings yielded to ancient rust and given way, he was sure that even in his sleep he must have heard the clatter made by the board as it crashed on the stones. He wondered if it were Ben Bonito’s custom to unhook his signboard at night to preserve it from unscrupulous antiquarians or men in need of firewood. Then he laughed at the notion. He had never heard of an innkeeper who took such a precaution with his hanging sign. But the signboard had certainly vanished and——

A little lull in the wind left the night suddenly quiet, and on his ears impinged again the sound of double footfalls—one pair lighter than the other. He heard them but for half a dozen steps, then again the wind took a hand and the lesser sounds were overwhelmed. He looked up the quay, then down to the gaunt stanchion which had challenged his mind with a new puzzle, and a little impatient that he should be so baffled, voiced his sense of exasperation in a forcible whisper.

“The devil’s in this inn!”

There was nothing that he could do about it, however. To rouse the landlord, if indeed he were in the house, and inform him that his signboard had vanished would be to banish sleep for the rest of the night. Mr. Bonito did not look the kind of man to take such news calmly, and for his own peace of mind he decided to let sleeping dogs lie—at any rate until daylight. That decision made, he slipped into bed again and, shutting from his mind all disturbing thoughts and perplexing questions, presently fell asleep.

He awakened to the tune of a vociferous voice from the quay below his window. After listening for a moment he recognised the voice as that of the landlord. Anger and consternation were nicely mingled in the tones in which Mr. Bonito proclaimed to the world that some blasted thief had stolen the sign of the Three Blue Anchors, and that, as sure as Christmas, he would see that the robber went to gaol.

“But for the land’s sake, Ben,” broke in a second voice, “what do anybody want

wi' the wold sign that he should come for it like a thief in the night?"

"God knows!" answered Mr. Bonito not at all piously. "But thief in the night he is, and thief in cell he'll be just as soon as the police can find him; or I'll know——" He broke off abruptly, and then whilst Donne was still wondering why, in a voice that was utterly different he cried. "Good Lord deliver us! What's here, Amos?"

"Do look like as if they'd fished some poor soul out of the water," answered the voice of Amos.

As he caught the words, Mr. Donne had a sudden remembrance of the choked cry of alarm which he had heard from his window before retiring to rest last night. In a twinkling he was out of bed and hurrying to the open lattice. Reaching it, he looked forth. The innkeeper and the man Amos were well out in the road. Both were staring up the quay and Mr. Donne looked in that direction. Four men, bearing an improvised stretcher on which lay what looked like a corpse, were moving towards the inn. That some tragedy had occurred was plain, and Mr. Donne, the full memory of mysterious events quickening, grew intensely curious, and as the melancholy little procession drew nearer, leaned far out of the window the better to see. The men with the stretcher reached the pair in the street. Both of them looked at the form on the stretcher, and Ben Bonito gave a sudden sharp cry.

"God Almighty!"

The man Amos was more composed. "Poor soul, he be drowneded, I s'pose, an' washed up on the rocks——"

"No," broke in one of the bearers, "us took en from the harbour, top-end. An' he baint drowned; or leastways if he be, he was stabbed first. There'm a knife-handle sticking out above his heart——"

"Murder!" cried his questioner in a shocked voice.

"Murder most foul! That be certain sure, Amos, an'——"

Mr. Donne did not hear the rest. From his vantage point at the window, he could see only the lower half of the corpse, but as the man Amos moved a little, he looked right down on the dead man's face, with the jaw sagging a little, and the sightless eyes wide in the sunlight. As he did so he jumped and came near to shouting his amazement, for the dead face on which he looked was that of the mulatto.

## CHAPTER IV

### A LIGHT BREAKS

Mr. Donne hurried from the window and began to dress. Whilst he did so his mind worked at express rate. The cry he had heard last night had almost certainly been the death cry of the mulatto, checked by the knife-stroke or by a headlong plunge into the harbour. Immediately following that cry two men had come running to the inn—one a little after the other; and the second man had been Ben Bonito, who had been in such stress of emotion that he had gone to the brandy bottle for succour. The other man, almost certainly the ear-ringed Michael, had been under the unfriendly observation of the dead man in the taproom last night. Apparently he had been oblivious of that fact, but possibly after all he had not been so ignorant of the other's inimical watchfulness—and he had carried a sheath-knife in his belt. But the innkeeper had watched the mulatto, and his distaste for coloured men was known; also, he had been the one who, hurrying from the quay whence that death cry had sounded, had required a stimulant. One of those two men—Michael or Ben Bonito—was responsible for the death of the mulatto.

“Which?”

He asked his question aloud, and as he continued his hasty toilet, considered the problem judicially, and reflected aloud.

“Might be either . . . or both. . . . But why? There's a motive for all murder unless the killer is a sheer maniac. . . . I should say the betting was on Bonito.”

For a moment after reaching that conclusion he stood quite still as if action were a hindrance to thought. Then he shook his head.

“Not so sure, after all. . . . Bonito's cry just now was sincere. . . . Didn't guess till he saw him that the mulatto was the corpse!”

He resumed his toilet, aware of a gathering crowd on the quay. Voices raised in argument reached him.

“Inn be the proper place to lay him. . . . Coroner's sure to hold his court in the bar-parlour as he always do. . . . 'Tis only fitting to save the jury trouble by having the corpse handy——”

“Won't have him in my house at any price!” interrupted the voice of Ben Bonito. “I don't like niggers alive or dead, an' old Trezise's fish warehouse'll serve better than the inn. . . . Take the corpse along there. Won't interrupt no business these days, an' 'tisen't seemly that a dead man should lie in a house for public refreshment. Men can't take their drink in comfort with a corpse within a hand's reach of 'em, as you might say.”

“An’, by St. Petroc,” broke in another voice, “that be true. . . . Bonito’s right. It ’ud spoil the taste of good liquor to know that. Besides, no man could be merry without offence to the corpse. House where a man lies dead should be solemn an’ quiet, with blinds down and folk treading softly. Trezise’s fish house is the proper place, say I.”

Someone else had an opinion to offer and before he had finished delivering it, Mr. Donne was in the street and on the outskirts of the little throng. A man almost at his elbow asked a question.

“Where do the man belong to? He’s a stranger to these parts.”

“Came off that yacht that put in yesterday an’——”

“Well, where’s the yacht to, then?”

A dozen heads lifted sharply at the question, and as many pair of eyes turned in the direction of the harbour. Mr. Donne’s was among them, and as he stared towards the point where the rusty yacht had been anchored he whistled in sheer surprise.

“Gone!” ejaculated one of the men.

“Leaving behind this clay-cold corpse, drowned, and likewise stuck with a knife,” commented another quickly. “Damned fishy, I call it. An’ so’ll the constable when he hears it.”

“Won’t hear for a bit,” said another man. “Paul’s off to Truro this morning——”

“Somebody’ll have to let en know.”

Mr. Donne stared at the place where the yacht had been anchored. The fact that she had departed, leaving behind her the dead mulatto, had a sinister look. He wondered if he could have been mistaken in thinking the cry he had heard last night had come from the upper end of the quay. If it had come from the yacht——

“Fishy!” he mentally echoed, and looked at Bonito, who was standing by the dead man.

There was an odd reflective look in the innkeeper’s eyes, but nothing that betokened guilt. Yet, thought Donne, something had shaken him after closing-time last night. If that disturbing thing had not to do with the death of the mulatto what on earth could it have been?

He was still considering this question when the bearers of the dead man moved on towards Trezise’s warehouse, followed by practically all the crowd which had gathered. Indeed, only Bonito and himself remained in front of the inn; and as the landlord became aware of him he made a gesture of puzzlement.

“Queer goings-on!” he remarked. “My sign has gone, and that craft has gone, and only that dead nigger be left.”



Donne looked round. They were alone in front of the Three Blue Anchors. He looked at the windows, first at those below and then at the higher ones. There was no one to be seen there, which, in view of the considerable commotion, struck him as being a little curious; and with the thought there came to him a quick remembrance of the footsteps which he had heard in the night. An odd suspicion assailed him.

“Yes,” he said, “the sign has gone, and the yacht. Wonder if they’re the only things that have slipped their moorings in the night?”

“What do ’ee mean?” asked the innkeeper sharply.

“Well, you had another guest last night unless I am mistaken——”

He broke off as he saw Bonito’s face grow livid. Before he could resume, the landlord hurried to answer.

“So I had! . . . what about him?”

“Well, you’ll own there’s been row enough here to awaken the seven Ephesians. . . . Where is the gentleman?”

“Bobs-a-dying!” cried Mr. Bonito, considering a bedroom window next to the one from which Donne had looked forth. “The gent is sound for sure.”

“And your daughter? But perhaps she’s at the stove cooking the pilchards or ——”

He broke off at the sight of Bonito’s face. Again it had the livid look; and in his eyes there was a gleam of apprehension.

“St. Piran!” the man cried. “What strange thoughts are in your mind, sir?”

“As I said, just a wonder if your sign and Mammy Venus’s yacht are the only things that have vanished in the darkness.”

“But you’ve got reasons for the wonder?” demanded the innkeeper harshly.

“Well, nothing very definite. But in the dead of night I chanced to waken. Someone in the house was moving. Then I heard a bolt click and a bit later footsteps sounded from the quay——”

The other did not wait to hear more. He turned swiftly and ran for the open door. As he reached it he bawled loudly:

“Pheeny! Pheeny!”

He was still calling the girl’s pet name as he vanished, and Donne waited with his eyes fixed on the doorway, wondering if his guess would prove to be right or wrong. A clatter of feet on the stairs reached him, then the din of someone rapping a door noisily. He lifted his eyes to the window next to his own, and a moment later glimpsed Bonito with a distracted look upon his face.

“Ear-rings has gone, at any rate!” thought Mr. Donne aloud, in the tone of a

prophet who sees his predictions fulfilled. "Wonder if I'm right about the girl?"

Three minutes later he knew. Ben Bonito came out of the inn at a run. There was a wild look in his eyes, and his wizened face had a flush of angry excitement.

"You're right," he shouted. "They've both gone. Never put head to pillow las'n night, an' the maid's things are scattered topsy-turvy everywhere. . . . An' they've carried something away with 'em. That's the ear-ringed bandit, I guess, who've \_\_\_\_\_"

"What have they taken? The inn-sign, you think?"

"No need for them to lug that about. There was a drawing in the kitchen——"

"Ah! They have taken that?"

"Surely. The thing is gone. Cut out of the frame, an' who could take it, or who'd want to if they didn't know the truth of it?"

"But what about the sign?"

"The devil knows. Maybe that black woman who was here yesterday knows something about that."

"Or perhaps that man they are carrying along to Trezise's warehouse. He was one of the crew of the yacht."

"One or t'other," cried the innkeeper distraughtly, "an' it don't matter a pin which. 'Tis all one. The sign has gone an' the little picture has gone too, an' the maid—God help her! An' back of it all is that ear-ringed rascal, I'll swear. The Almighty set a thief's curse on him. He——"

"What makes you so sure, Bonito?"

"The niggers and he were here for the same end. I might have guessed it before if I'd had the wit of a mole. Last night, that man they've carried up to Trezise's was watching the other as cat watches a bird. I saw him——"

"So did I," broke in Mr. Donne.

"The devil, you did?" Bonito's face was twisted and ugly with suspicion as he stared darkly at his guest, then he cried again in a voice harshly accusing: "Maybe you came after the same thing?"

Donne shook his head and spoke truthfully.

"I haven't a notion of what you are talking about, my man. I just happened to notice the mulatto was watching the other fellow. That's all."

Bonito's face still betrayed suspicion, and he cried distrustfully, "You'd say that, of course! But how am I to know——"

"Wait!" intervened Donne, sharply. "I'm not used to being named for a liar; and if you weren't too wrought up to be reasonable I'd knock you down. As it is——" he checked suddenly. He wanted the landlord's whole confidence and his

explanation of the mystery, and softer methods were desirable. "Tell me something," he continued in mollifying tones. "The thing after which those others came had to do with the sign or the picture, or both, in some way?"

"Everything! . . . If you don't know without axin'."

Mr. Donne kept his temper.

"Well, I don't. . . . You can believe me or not, I don't care a button shank, but I prefer that you should accept my word, so I'll just point something out to you that may convince you."

"What's that?"

"Last night I supped in the kitchen, didn't I?"

"Yes! What of it?"

"With that framed picture staring me in the face across the table, hey?"

"It has hung there more than a hundred years."

"Yes. But just suppose I'd known all about it and had wanted to steal it, what should I have done? After my supper was served no one came in the kitchen. You and Seraphina were busy in the taproom. If I'd had any interest in that drawing and had wanted to collar it, what was there to prevent me from taking it from its hook, or cutting the drawing from the frame and walking out of the house? . . . I've a launch here, and I might have been miles away with the picture before ever you had discovered its loss. . . . That's so, isn't it?"

The suspicion faded from Mr. Bonito's face.

"Sounds reasonable, for sure," he owned, then he broke out despairingly. "But, in heaven's name, what's to be done?"

"If you were to give me an inkling of what it is all about, maybe I could tell you that," answered Donne, taking the chance offered. "Is it the loss of the girl, the sign or the picture that is worrying you most?"

"All three," answered Bonito. "They're joined together like links in a cable chain!"

"So. And that man down there"—the speaker nodded in the direction of Trezise's fish stores—"he doesn't trouble you at all?"

"Not a button."

"You didn't stick that knife into him, by any chance?"

"Me! . . . God above! You don't know what you're saying, mister!"

"You're mistaken, I do! And last night I heard a cry—from up there." Donne indicated the head of the quay. "A few minutes after someone came running down the quay and, flinging himself in the inn, shut the door and bolting it violently——" He broke off and stared shrewdly at Mr. Bonito. The man's face was ashen, his eyes

were round with fear and his skinny hands were shaking. "No need to say who it was, I suppose?"

"N-n-o!"

"You were put out. You had need of a stimulant, and the first glass of brandy you swallowed like water, and——"

"How the blazes do you know, man?"

"I was watching from the stairs and I saw you. You were badly shaken. You needed the brandy—a blind man could have told that. . . . And you'd just gone out to take the air according to custom! You will remember you told me that? Bit queer, wasn't it?"

"'Tis my heart. It takes me at times——"

"So does mine. It's a way hearts have." Mr. Donne broke off and laughed lightly. "Fudge, Mr. Bonito! Scrap the eyewash and get down to the facts. What happened last night up the quay to throw you in such a twitter? Tell me that and one or two other things, and I'll tell you what is to be done! A man who is wise won't give advice when the facts are dark to him, you know."

Bonito visibly hesitated. Donne watched him with a flicker of amusement in his eyes. Then he helped the man to make up his mind.

"It is known that you don't like coloured men, Mr. Bonito," he remarked in a casual way.

"What's that to do with it?" flashed the other, an uneasy look in his eyes.

"Nothing, I suppose," laughed Donne. "But, you know, if it leaked out that you were taking the air when that murder happened, and that you came running to the inn as if the devil were after you, as like as not you'd be called as a witness. And when the coroner started his questions——"

"Perdition, you don't mean to inform on me? I swear before God I'd no hand in that dark business."

Mr. Donne looked doubtful, and spoke like a man a little uncertain of the course to be followed.

"I don't know what I ought to do. . . . But I'm open to conviction. If you can prove to me that you——"

"Come inside!" interrupted the innkeeper. "I'll tell you the facts, an' maybe other things you want to hear. God knows I need a friend, just now."

Mr. Bonito turned on his heels and made for the inn door. Donne followed him cheerfully, a little grin of triumph on his face. When he was in the passage, the innkeeper shut and barred the door then led the way to the kitchen, and waved him to a chair. Donne took the one which he had occupied the previous night and thoughtfully

considered the empty frame which had held the sketch of the Three Blue Anchors, wondering what possible value it could be to the man who had stolen it. Then he lighted a cigarette and looked at the man whose confidence he was forcing.

"Well?" he asked.

Mr. Bonito coughed, and in a voice of extreme unhappiness related his story.

"You saw me go out last night, an' by your own account you saw me come in \_\_\_\_\_"

"Heard you!" corrected Mr. Donne. "Only saw you after—here in the kitchen. It's what happened between your going forth and returning that I want to hear about, y'know."

"Well, 'twasn't so much as you might think, though to be sure 'twas evil enough. . . . When I went out I walked straight up the quay, as my custom is, to get the fumes of drink blown out of me before going to bed. . . . Top end of the quay there's a bollard where sometimes a'nights I sit in the dark to smoke a quiet pipe. I made for it last night, an' when I got to it I was a bit surprised to find a man already squatted there. 'Twas middling dark, an' I never recognised the fellow till we were nose to nose, so to speak. Then I made out it was the mulatto. He recognised me in a twinkling and laughed.

"Evenin', Mistah Bonito," he said in an impudent way. 'Yuh sure ain't goin' treasure-huntin' at this hour of duh night.'"

"Odd sort of greeting!" broke in Mr. Donne, his curiosity enormously quickened. "What in thunder did he mean?"

"One thing at a time," answered Bonito. "Maybe I'll tell you the meaning of the greeting later. But now I'll say that knowing what I know I found the mulatto's words a revelation. I knew then why that black woman and he had come to the Blue Anchors."

"Why had they?"

"That comes later—if I make up my mind to unfold the secret. . . . Just now I'm explaining what happened. 'Treasure-hunting!' said I, answering the fellow. 'That's a damn poor game in Cornwall.'

"But not in Cocos, boss," said the nigger with a meaning laugh.

"Don't know what you mean, you crazy nigger," answered I, and, as Heaven's my witness, marched on, leaving the fellow there perched on the bollard."

The innkeeper paused, and his eyes sought Donne's face as if to assure himself that he was believed. The other, however, was as inscrutable as the sphinx, and after a moment or two Bonito resumed.

"I went half-way up the hill where there's a seat, and had just planked myself

down to have the smoke I'd promised myself on the bollard, when somebody on the yacht began to sing and twang a banjo. I was trying to catch the words, when up from the quay came a sound of angry voices. What they were saying I didn't catch, till one of them cried out in a scared kind of way. 'Holy Kerist! Yuh——' I heard no more but a sort of strangled cry, an' then a splash.

'I was sure there was something wrong. I didn't stop to light my pipe, but raced downhill to the quay. I reckon for a man running well in the sixties I made a record; but when I got to the quay there was nothing to be seen. I made for the bollard where I'd left that mulatto fellow, being sure that his was the voice I'd heard. He wasn't there, but whilst I was wondering what had befallen him, I heard a gurgling sound over the quayside. I stepped to the edge an' looked over, an' got a shock. There was a man there, clutching with one hand a rope by which a dinghy was moored, whilst t'other hand pawed the wall as feebly an' aimlessly as a dying man might grope for the next world.

"'Hallo there!' I whispered sharply, an' the fellow lifted his head, and I was sure then that it was the mulatto.

'He saw me, but I guess he didn't know me. He groaned up at me, and cursed whisperingly.

"'Hell!' he said. 'Yuh sure have finished me, yuh debbil. May yuh rot——'

'His voice stopped as suddenly as if you had slit his gullet with a knife. His head dropped on to his chest with the mouth below the water level, then his hand slid from the rope and he went down like a stone, an' never came up. . . . I didn't wait long. Them words of his and his going down like that gave me a bad turn. That he'd mistook me for another was plain as a pikestaff, but his words, if anybody had chanced to overhear 'em, were enough to hang any man to whom they'd been uttered. An' I didn't want to stand my trial for murder, so I just ran for the old inn as fast as I could. When I got here I was mortal shook up——"

"You certainly were——" Donne's voice was almost sympathetic. Then he asked abruptly. "Who d'you suppose did it?"

The innkeeper looked thoughtful. "I might make a guess."

"I'll wager on the man!" said the other with a hard laugh.

"You're thinking of that chap with the ear-rings?"

"Who else? That black woman who came here yesterday and he were old acquaintances. The mulatto was with her, and as like as not he and the other had met before, and the mulatto, as we both noticed, was watching him in the taproom, not in a friendly way, if I know anything."

"But there's a snag about that," said Bonito in a puzzled way. "I don't know that

the man ever crossed the threshold to walk on the quay after dark.”

Mr. Donne chuckled. “But I do. He left the taproom before the mulatto and he went out to the quay. The half-breed nigger followed him. And three minutes later Seraphina went out——”

“Perdition. You don’t say she went out to meet that man?”

“I haven’t a doubt of it. And it wasn’t the first meeting. They forgathered in the gorse at the top of the hill yester afternoon as I happen to know.”

“Then the devil’s in the business!” cried Bonito passionately.

“Likely enough. . . . And I can tell you this—Seraphina came back here alone last night——”

“That means Ear-rings was outside?”

“Yes! He came back just before you did—running. And went straight to his room. I heard him. Later he crept out and stood on the stairs watching you, whilst you sat in this chair holding the picture that has been stolen.”

“You don’t say?” For a moment Mr. Bonito was plainly on his beam ends.

“Flabbergasted!” commented Donne mentally. Then the other recovered a little. At any rate he found his tongue, and broke out heatedly.

“Then we’re right. The scoundrel killed the mulatto. As like as not he’s the thief who stole the little picture, and ’tis a pound to a farthing that he’s took off Seraphina.”

“I wouldn’t take the bet,” commented Donne with a hard laugh. “No thrifty man throws farthings away so recklessly.”

“But, by the saints, something’s got to be done!”

“There are the police——”

“Police be shot! Paul’s a fool, anyhow. An’ t’wont help the main business to bring the constable—an’ the coroner into it. The coroner’s a lawyer an’ an inquisitive sort of body, who’s given to questioning a man to his undoing. If he got a hint of what’s behind he’d grab it by the forelock an’ just drag it into the public view, which wouldn’t suit me one little bit.”

“Um!” Mr. Donne looked grave. “There’s more behind than meets the eye?”

“There sure is!” cried the other impulsively. “A whole shipload of treasure——”

The man broke off with the abruptness of a man betraying something that he would keep secret; and turned and stared out of the window plainly in a cold fit. Mr. Donne, his eyes gleaming with excitement, watched him, waiting for him to continue. But the innkeeper was manifestly indisposed to further confidences, and kept a stubborn face to the window.

His guest smiled a little sardonically, wondering what spur he might use to

quicken the other to revealing speech, and at the same time reviewed what he had heard. Then suddenly he laughed.

"In Cocos!" he ejaculated triumphantly.

Bonito swung round as if he had been pricked with a knife. His eyes flashed angrily, and he fairly roared.

"What the blazes do you mean by that?"

"A whole shipload of treasure,' you said," replied Donne chortling. "And the mulatto named the place—Cocos, which for a guess is Cocos Island, hey?" The speaker chuckled again, and as his mind began to connect what before had been uncorrelated things, he proclaimed his conclusions aloud. "Your missing sign and that stolen drawing—three blue anchors with lettering—had to do with the secret. . . . Mammy Venus knew that. . . . The mulatto, too. . . . Also that fellow with the ear-rings who has run off with Seraphina. Secret goes back to Benito Bonito, who vanished from his old piratical haunts and built this inn. It was because of his hoard, hidden somewhere on Cocos, that he was hanged from the stanchion of his signboard. . . . The four Bonitos lost at sea were lost looking for this treasure; and the fifth—the one who came back, blinded, with a white scar on his forehead, forty-six years ago come Candlemas, had also gone forth to search for it. . . . And you \_\_\_\_\_"

"Stop!" cried the innkeeper. "In God's name how did you learn these things?"

"A man who keeps his ears wide and eyes open, and uses his tongue judiciously can learn much," answered Mr. Donne. "Question is are you going to let me into the full secret or not?"

"I'll see you damned first!" shouted Bonito. "It's nought to do with you."

"Think so?" The other swung out of the armchair as he spoke. "Treasure-trove belongs to the man who finds it. In any case I'm joining the scramble." He thrust a hand in his pocket, produced a wallet, and drawing forth a treasury note tossed it on the table. "That will meet the score—and leave you owing me a breakfast. . . . Good morning, Bonito."

"W-where are you for?" stammered the innkeeper.

"Where d'you think, Ben?" His guest laughed gaily as he answered. "'Where the carcase is the eagles gather.' I'm for Cocos Island to meet Mammy Venus and Ear-rings and your Seraphina." He moved to the door and there waved a hand to the now dumb innkeeper, and spoke rallyingly. "God be with you, Ben, till we meet again."

He marched down the passage to the quay; the other following him with stricken eyes. For five minutes the innkeeper remained quite still, in deep cogitation, then he



muttered aloud.

“If I were to tell him everything an’ take him into partnership——”

The chug-chug of an engine in the harbour broke on his mutterings.

“My God!” he cried. “He’s off!”

That fact precipitated his decision. His hesitation vanished in a twinkling. He ran from the room and down the passage, and fairly raced for the quayside. His late guest, in his motor-boat, was already half-way across the harbour, Mr. Bonito cupped his hands.

“Stop,” he shouted. “Stop! . . . Come back.”

That his voice reached the other was certain, but whether clearly enough to be understood he was not sure. The man in the launch looked round. No doubt he saw Ben Bonito on the quay, for lifting one hand from the wheel he raised his hat and waved it ironically. Then without looking round again he raced for the harbour mouth, leaving the innkeeper staring after him with chagrined eyes.

## CHAPTER V

### AT THE CAFÉ CORDOVA

Mr. Jack Donne was not one to let the grass grow under his feet. Twenty-four days after his ironic farewell to Ben Bonito he stepped off a small steamer at Balboa, which is the Pacific end of the Panama Canal. He was travelling light, being burdened with no more than a suitcase, which he carried himself, despite the appeals of vociferous native porters, and passed on by rail to Panama City three miles away.

There he hired a conveyance and was driven through tortuous and unclean streets to a café rejoicing in the name of the Café Cordova. It was a dubious place, its clientele mostly of mixed blood, many of them carrying knives at the waist. There he consigned his suitcase to the care of the proprietor, and that done went to the restaurant, one end of which was a bar. Finding a disengaged table in a corner, he ordered a meal, and then surveyed the room with alert eyes. The company was very mixed. With a single exception of three American sailors roosting at a neighbouring table, he was the only pure-blooded white man in the room. The rest were of mixed race, representing every shade of colour from black to olive, and most of them were plainly of the predatory breed, ripe for any ruffianism or even murder.

“Mangy wolves!” he commented to himself. “Or vicious mongrels! . . . Lord! what a hotch-potch of races!”

Whilst he ate, he considered the company more closely. Apparently there was no one there to cause him any disquiet; and most certainly there was no one known to him. As his meal drew to a close, he ordered more wine, and gave his whole attention to the doorway. That he was on the look-out for someone was clear, and presently his watchfulness was rewarded. A little man, very tubby and rosy, dressed in a silk tunic shirt and white duck trousers, with canvas shoes on his otherwise bare feet, entered the café quickly, walked straight to the bar and called for rum. Mr. Donne ceased to watch the door and gave his attention to the newcomer.

The little man clipped a cigar, set his back to the bar, and began to survey the company at the tables; his eyes, quick as a bird’s, passing swiftly from one point to another. Mr. Donne watched the man with a glint of amusement in his eyes, waiting until his turn for scrutiny should arrive. Presently the searcher’s gaze fell on him and the pair looked at each other in level glance. In the little man’s eyes there came a flicker of recognition, but he made no move until Donne tapped the unoccupied chair at his table. At the signal the other picked up his glass and, walking across the room, seated himself in the vacant chair.

“In the pink, I hope, Jack?” he said with the familiarity of an old friend.

“Blooming,” was the answer. “And you, Andy?”

“Convalescent, after a touch of fever. . . Been here long?”

Mr. Donne consulted his wrist-watch and answered with precision.

“Forty-seven and a half minutes.”

Andy grinned amiably. “No time to burn, seemingly, since you reckon it to the tick?”

“No, every minute counts. You got that craft?”

“It’s over at Balboa, tanks full, grub all aboard, ready for running out any tide. . . . But what’s the game, Jack?”

“Treasure!”

“Treasure!” A flash of surprise came in the little man’s eyes, and he almost snapped—“What sort of treasure?”

“Pirate’s treasure!”

“P-pir——” Andy got no further. A gurgle of laughter choked the rest of the word. The gurgle swelled, became a very cascade and the little man shook like a jelly, the whilst he stared at his friend in mirthful amazement.

Mr. Donne showed no sign of offence. He waited until the other’s laughter, subsiding, left him in a condition to speak, and then he waited still. His friend wiped the mirthful tears from his eyes, and that done asked incredulously:

“You’re not serious, Jack?”

“Never was more serious in my life.”

“But *pirate’s* treasure! Oh, lor’! You’re pulling my leg, boy. If it was a gold mine on the Isthmus or silver down in Peru, I’d take it calmly, but pirates’ treasure is just rainbow-chasing for lunatics and suckers.”

“This isn’t!” said Mr. Donne with conviction. “Anyway, whether you stand in or not, I’m going.”

His tone was a little hard, whilst the resolute lines in his lean face convinced his friend that he meant just what he said. Andy’s round face composed itself to seriousness, and he inquired curiously:

“And where’s this pirate hoard to be retrieved?”

“Cocos Island.”

“Cocos——”

Again the little man’s risibility was too much for him. His round face creased in merry wrinkles. His eyes were half hidden in puckers of laughter. His teeth showed like those in an advertisement for some dentifrice, from his wide open mouth issued sounds that were not born of his volition, whilst his tub-like form rocked and rolled in a very paroxysm of mirth which rendered him helpless for the time being.

Again Mr. Donne waited patiently, regarding his little friend with calm eyes. Once when Andy looked as if he might choke he leaned forward and clapped him on the back with his open hand.

“Easy, Andy!” he said warningly.

“Easy!” Andy caught his breath and jerked the word almost explosively. A new gust of laughter shook him, then again he managed to gasp—“Cocos. . . Island! . . . Ho—Ho—Ho—oh! Jack Donne. . . you’ll sure be the . . . the death of me!”

“Careful!” answered Donne calmly. “Hysteria’s the devil, and you’re on the rim of it, Andy. Take in a reef or two and listen to what I’ve got to say.”

“Oh, I’ll listen! . . . Ho—ho—ho! . . . But of all the baits for suckers——”

“I know! Cocos Island is it. Can’t go into a bar in Panama or Lima without somebody trying to sell you a plan for finding treasure on Cocos. I know that well enough. If it isn’t the treasure of Lima, then it’s Davis’s secret cache. You can buy the plan to find a million for twenty dollars; and if you won’t rise so high then you can have it for a couple of drinks.”

“Don’t I know it, boy? . . . I’ve drawn maps myself—and worked the bars of ’Frisco with them—in bad days when I was fairly busted. . . . There’s always a sucker to be found if you know the game.” Andy laughed. “But it wasn’t the Gold Virgin of Lima stuck with diamonds that I baited the hook with; nor Davis’s ghostly doubloons. They’re worn a bit too smooth. . . . I used a worm nobody knows much about—treasure of a fellow whose name sounds as if it had been invented for a dime novel, but which is authentic as Mussolini’s.”

“Name?” asked Donne quietly.

“Benito Bonito——”

“Exactly!”

Something in the other’s tones caught the little man’s ear. The gleam in his eyes betrayed that his attention was caught, though still he hung poised on the edge of mirthfulness. Then he snapped.

“Mean to say you’re going to Cocos after old Bon’s treasure?”

“Yes.”

“But—Holy Christopher! . . . Cocos has been dug over till there isn’t a worm can find a nesting-place. You’re clean looney, Jack.”

“No. Or if I am, I’m not the only one. You’ve lived on this coast a goodish number of years, Andy; tell me, did you ever meet a big nigger woman fat as a turtle, who runs a yacht of sorts and goes by the name of Mammy Venus?”

“Mammy Venus!” The little man’s chubby face grew almost ludicrously serious as he echoed the name, then he leaned forward, and asked in a harsh whisper:

"Where's that she-devil come into this rainbow-chasing, boy?"

"She's after the rainbow too!"

Andy's mirthfulness vanished like a morning mist before a tropic sun. His round face grew extraordinarily serious, and his eyes took a grave look.

"The deuce! She is?"

"Without a doubt! And she isn't alone. There's a fellow in opposition. Wonder if you know him by any chance."

"What's his name?"

"Michael. That's the only one I know. But if you've met the fellow you can't mistake him. He's tall, lean-jawed, wears ear-rings that would have served one of Harry Morgan's buccaneers, and has eyes of so light a blue that you hardly notice the colour at all. A queer sort of bird, who dresses oddly, at any rate for England, and carries a sheath-knife at his belt. From what I have seen of him, I should say he was a fellow with hypnotic power——"

The little man made a gesture, and intervened.

"You needn't go any further, Jack. . . . I know the man. It's the name and the eyes and the mesmerism together that mark him. He goes by the name of Pym—Michael Pym, and once I saw him in a bar at Jamestown doing tricks with a nigger that made your skin crawl. . . . You say he's in opposition?"

"To Mammy Venus. He doesn't know I'm in the affair at all."

"Just as well! He's a real dyed-in-the-wool scoundrel, who would cut out the heart of his own father if it would serve his private interests."

"Not the sort of fellow to whose hands you'd trust a young girl, hey?"

"A girl! I'd as soon trust a suckling lamb to a wolf. The fellow has a vile reputation, if he's the man I'm thinking of."

"Not much doubt of that, I fancy."

"And he's working against Mammy Venus in this business, hey? . . . They're a star pair, and you can bet there'll be ructions. But where does the girl you mentioned come into the picture?"

"I'll tell you. It will take a little time; but I'll swear the yarn will interest you."

"All right! Full steam ahead. Have a cigar?"

Mr. Donne accepted a cigar, bit off the end, and lit the cigar from the match his friend offered. Then he began the narrative of the odd happenings in which he had played a minor part. Scarcely had he started however when his hearer interrupted him.

"Three Blue Anchors! That's a peach of a name for a tavern."

His friend nodded.

"The only one in England or anywhere else that sports the triple anchors I'll lay. And when you've heard the yarn you'll guess there's a reason for it."

He resumed his story, and the other listened with growing interest, and without interruption until the name of the owner of the inn was mentioned. Then he laughed.

"Ben Bonito! Boy, you're just leg-pulling. Things don't happen like that."

"This one does. I give you my solemn word, Andy. But don't interrupt. There's a whole lot for you to hear yet."

The little man heard the story through, and offered judgment.

"It's a daisy of a yarn. . . . I reckon Michael Pym was the fellow who scuppered the mulatto. . . . But, in heaven's name, for what did he want to walk off with the girl?"

"Can't guess, unless she knew something that Ear-rings wanted to learn."

"And who's the guy Michael Pym mentioned—the one who called her Pheeny?"

"Don't ask me. I can't tell you. That's part of the puzzle, but I reckon he is standing in this game somewhere—as like as not at Cocos."

"Seems likely. If Pym really brought a message for her, I reckon she has gone to join him. But that's a queer thing about the sign-board and that little picture of it. Who d'you think lifted them?"

"If you ask me, I should say Mammy Venus or one of her crowd got the sign, and that Michael Pym took the picture."

"Divided the tricks even, hey? . . . You think there's some clue to old Bonito's treasure in the three anchors?"

"Seems likely. Otherwise why were they stolen?"

"Search me!" replied the little man with a laugh. "But if both of them got the clue \_\_\_\_\_"

"I'm not sure that they did. There may be some difference between the picture and the sign. I hadn't the chance to compare them, owing to it having fallen dark when I went out to look at the sign."

His friend laughed. "If they're the same, there'll be a rumpus in Cocos. Michael Pym is a cold killer, and there isn't much that Mammy Venus will stick at. There's a yarn that she scuppered a whole crew of Chinkies up Cape Corrientes way. They were shark-fishing and picked up a whacking lump of ambergris—which Mammy and her lot coveted. Don't know if the yarn is true, but it gives you a line on her quality."

"I'm not scared of Mammy Venus."

"No! But if you're fool enough to follow this business, you'll want to go well-heeled. A tooth-pick ain't no good against a knife, and less against an automatic. If

I'm coming with you——”

“You are, Andy? You won't let me down?”

“No. But presently I'm going out to buy three repeating rifles and ammunition. You've got an automatic, I guess?”

“In my hip-pocket.”

The little man laughed. “Good! Coast between here and Lima isn't too well patrolled, and Cocos is off the beat of the two-cent navies down this way . . . But it's a mug's game we're on, boy . . . If any fellow but you had told me that yarn I should have thought he was taking me for a romantic kid just put into long slacks and let out of school . . . I will say that it gets you, though . . . Those chaps who hanged the original Ben on his own sign-hook weren't peeved to that extent for nothing; an' that Ben who went back slashed and blinded had been hitting trouble somewhere. Reckon he'd been after the stuff, hey?”

“Certain, I should say!”

“And those others who never went back. They missed it and got their pass-out checks instead?”

“Seems likely enough.”

“And with Mammy Venus and Michael Pym in the lay, we'll have to be right smart if we don't get ours, I reckon. Only thing is, neither of 'em will be expecting us, while we shall be on the *qui vive* for them.” The little man laughed.

“There's one thing about a place like Cocos—and that is you can go as you darn well please, and if there's shooting you can shoot back. That's the beauty of desert islands.”

He broke off with a chuckle, and the chuckle expanded to a gurgling laugh which moved Mr. Jack Donne to an inquiry.

“Something tickling you, Andy?”

“Just the idea that I, who've sold treasure maps of Cocos to suckers at ten dollars a time, should be turning sucker myself . . . Anyway, I don't have to pay.”

“You know the place middling well?”

“You bet. Could draw a chart with my eyes shut. When I was driven to that lay I looked up everything there was about it in the 'Frisco library, and did the thing in style, copying the map faithfully from an old book. 'Twas there I picked up Benito Bonito's name. Ver-versim—what the blazes is the word?”

“Verisimilitude?”

“You've got it, boy. That's the stuff for flat-catching, and any sucker who took my map to compare elsewhere couldn't help being impressed with its correctness. I had it all square—anchorages marked in—Chatham and Wafer Bays, an' so on.” He

laughed again, then pushed his chair back and rose. "You wait here. Jack. I'll step out and get them rifles and shells so that we can start pronto with the morning's tide. When I come back, I'll take you down to have a look at the motor-craft . . . She's a real beauty, I promise you."

The little man swaggered towards the door, and his friend watched his departure with smiling eyes. There was nothing heroic about Andy Winstowe's rotund figure, and his rosy face with the twinkling eyes would not have scared an infant in arms. But appearances are proverbially deceptive, and Andy justified the proverb. Fat little man as he was, with the customary good humour that goes with adipose, he was the man for a tight corner, and when those twinkling eyes set in a hard stare there was trouble for whomever the stare was meant.

"Good old Andy!" thought Mr. Donne as his friend disappeared from view; and then gave his further attention to the clientele of the café.

They were an utterly unsavoury lot, he decided, and when he found himself under observation of a man with two girls at the table with him, and saw the man speak to one of his companions and nod in his direction, he waited with some amusement for what would inevitably follow. He had not long to wait. One of the girls, a lemon-coloured quadroon, gaily arrayed, left the table and drifted slowly across the café. Aware of her coming, and very sure that he was marked for prey, he moved his chair a little to set his shoulder in the girl's view, whilst he himself stared absently in the direction of the bar, behind which was a mirror which reflected most of the room, including the entrance. He heard light steps at his side, then a not unpleasant voice sounded in his ear.

"The señor is alone. Perhaps——"

The rest he did not hear, for in the same second of time he suffered an almost shattering surprise. Reflected in the mirror he saw the outer door swing wide, a rolling laugh sounded, and into the room moved the massive figure of Mammy Venus, accompanied by the thinnest and tallest octoroon he had ever seen. He stared incredulously and then to make sure swung himself round to face the door. The lemon-coloured girl at his side shifted her position at the same moment, no doubt to bring herself to his notice, and unconsciously blocked his view.

"Sit down!" he said, almost sharply, and as the girl took the chair which Andy Winstowe had occupied, giving him a clear view of the big negress, he caught his breath. Then he looked at the girl. "I'm not alone," he said. "I am waiting for a friend who has gone to do a little shopping. But you can have a drink and keep me company till he returns." He put a five-dollar bill on the table, which, after a swift glance at the man whom she had left, the quadroon covered with her hand, then,



crumpling it up, thrust it into her corsage. Then Donne spoke again.

"The big woman there who has just come in with that lath of a man—you see her? . . . Yes," he nodded as the quadroon looked towards the negress. "That's the lady . . . Who is she?"

"Mammy Venus!" answered the girl, with a *moue* of distaste. "If you are interested in her, señor, it is well to be careful. She is a notorious person."

Mammy Venus found a table at that moment, and as she seated herself, laughed her rolling laugh once more, as a waiter hurried to her.

"Notorious?" said Donne to his companion. "She sounds a merry soul."

"They say that Satan laughs in hell. That woman might be his mate. You comprehend, señor?"

"Phew! As bad as all that! . . . Well, we live and learn. But what an out-size she is."

"An elephant!" agreed the quadroon. "And very evil. She is monstrous. The stories that are whispered make one shiver."

"So!" He allowed the assertion to go unchallenged, but sought further information. "Who is the clothes-prop?"

"I do not understand, señor. If you mean Manuel Pareja——"

"That her opposite number? Yes."

"He is a Colombian—a terrible man. They hunt together. It is a partnership of evil."

"Windy stuff!" thought Mr. Donne and aloud pressed for details. "What is their particular line?"

"Souls!"

The answer startled him with its unexpectedness, and troubled him more than he would have owned.

"I don't get you, girl," he said gruffly.

"But it is clear, if the señor thinks. Down the coast the young and comely have a price——"

"Oh! That's their dirty business," he blurted. "The swine ought to be shot."

He looked at Mammy Venus, lolling in a chair which she overflowed. She was saying something to her escort, a leering laugh on her gross face. The man replied without responsive laughter, and watching him closely, Donne did not like his looks at all, and was somehow reminded of a poisonous snake.

"Has both guile and venom!" he thought, and his eyes returned to Mammy Venus.

It was an unfortunate move. The negress's rolling eyes roving round the café, at

that precise second turned in his direction and looked straight into his own. He saw a questioning flash come in them, a doubtful look followed, and as he nonchalantly shifted his own gaze to his companion he hoped that the negress had not recognised him. He dared not glance in her direction again to make sure; but very soon he had information from his companion.

“Señor, do you know that elephant of a woman?”

“Never saw her in my life before,” averred Mr. Donne mendaciously. “And don’t want to see her again. She is too overwhelming.”

“But she is interested in you, señor. She stares steadily at you.”

“A cat may look at a king,” he quoted with a lightness he did not feel. “Let her stare.”

“She speaks to Manuel Pareja about you, I am sure. He also looks this way.”

“God strike him blind!” answered Donne fervently. “I do not like a pimp . . . Mammy still orbing me?”

“She is rising from her table. She—— Yes, it is so! She comes this way—she is staring at you, señor—I think she comes to speak with you.”

“Heaven strike her dumb! . . . Señorita, give me your hand . . . Lean across the table and lend me your lips . . . For this hour I am your lover—and that black daughter of Ham must suspect nothing else. You get me? Good!” His hand covered the thin one stretched out to him. He looked in the girl’s dark eyes and laughed like a besotted man. “Your lips——” He leaned over the table very conscious of the nearness of Mammy Venus, and kissed the full lips offered him. Then at his side he heard a chuckling laugh, out of which emerged a rather guttural voice which he remembered only too well.

“Pretty love-birds. It sure do duh heart good to behold dem.”

## CHAPTER VI

### A CLOSE CALL

It was at that point Mr. Donne looked round from his love-making. Mammy Venus was standing very near him, arms akimbo, a benevolent grin on her black face. But her eyes, as he noticed, were regarding him intently and he had no doubt whatever that she was connecting him with the man against whom she had cannoned outside the Three Blue Anchors in far-away Cornwall. But she was not sure of their single identity. Her eyes told him that, and he did his best to prevent her arriving at certainty. He eyed her nonchalantly, and then drawled nasally:

“Say, Mary, anybody ask you to butt in on this little Romeo an’ Juliet business?”

Mammy Venus showed no offence. She laughed her rolling laugh, and answered genially.

“No, sah. I jes’ step up uninvited. Ah loves fo’ to see young lovers.”

The benevolent grin was still on the woman’s face. Her aspect was wholly friendly, but her eyes still had the inquiring look and the doubt in them was accentuated. She was less sure of him than she had been a moment ago, and Mr. Donne played-up to that vigorously.

“You sure hev a queer taste, Mary—the mind of a pimp, I should say. But you aren’t wanted here, so you had better get off the grass quick, before I call the management to fire you out. Get me?”

The woman, her hands on her enormous hips, shook with genuine laughter. Her eyes were half hidden in puckers of fat, but there was a new light in them. Had she recognised him beyond doubt? He hoped not, and a moment later felt reassured. The puckers straightened out a little and he saw the big eyes clearly. They gleamed with mirth and were clear of both doubt and suspicion.

“Sah,” she said, “yuh tickle me to death. Duh management, says yuh.” She laughed again. “Yuh sure is a han’some beau, but yuh sartainly ain’t acquainted with Panama ef yuh t’ink anybody in duh Cordoba will fire Mammy Venus to duh street. Ax yoah honey if dat ain’t so.”

She leaned forward, and stretching a finger and thumb, tweaked his ear as she might have done a little boy’s. Then, laughing still, she shuffled back in the direction of her escort. Mr. Donne stared after her with blank amazement on his face. Half way to her table Mammy Venus looked back over her shoulder, her big eyes rolling with laughter. She saw him staring, and waved a fat hand in a rollicking way. Her gaiety was infectious, or so it seemed, for Mr. Donne’s amazement gave way to sudden laughter, and he waved back hilariously. But for all his outward gaiety he was

far from easy in his mind, and as Mammy Venus dropped into her chair, his disquiet was increased enormously by a remark from the lemon-coloured girl.

“Mammy Venus knows you, señor.”

“The devil!” he ejaculated. “But how can she? I’m a stranger.”

“Perhaps she makes a mistake! . . . But again she speaks to Manuel Pareja about you. And she is very serious, and both are regarding you.”

“You don’t say?”

“There is no doubt that they are interested, señor.”

Mr. Donne looked casually round the room, and in his careless survey took in the table at which Mammy Venus and her lank escort were seated. The pair were head to head in earnest conversation, and Pareja was staring directly at him. The girl it seemed was in no way mistaken in her deductions, and there was something a little ominous in that *tête-à-tête* conference across the room. Had the woman really recognised him, and covered the fact with laughter? That was more than possible; and he had a conviction that whilst in Panama it would be wise to watch his steps, for Mammy Venus’s reputation was not one to be ignored. He looked towards the door, wondering how long it would be before Andy Winstowe returned; and he was still wondering when the girl spoke again quickly.

“Ah! Manuel Pareja goes!”

He did not turn as she gave the information, but continued to watch the door, and half a minute later saw the lanky Colombian pass out of the café. Why had the fellow gone? Scarcely had he asked himself the question when the girl gave him a warning.

“Señor, if Mammy Venus is an enemy I advise you as a friend to leave this place at once.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because Manuel is a treacherous man, with many friends in the city,” answered the girl gravely.

“You think he has gone to arrange trouble for me?”

“I do not know your affairs, señor, but I think it is possible.”

“Um!” Mr. Donne asked no further questions on the point, but though he did not say so, he shared the girl’s conviction, and wondered why the big negress should suspect him of being interested in her affairs. He did not wonder long. That having met her in Cornwall he should now run against her in Panama, so quickly after, was too large a coincidence to be accepted by a suspicious mind. Possibly Mammy Venus suspected him of having trailed her across the Atlantic and through the Canal, or again, in spite of the encounter between them as strangers in the bar-parlour at the

Blue Anchors, she surmised that he might be in collusion with Michael Pym. Such a guileful woman would naturally assume guile in others, and as she had occasion to fear the earringed Pym, any suspected acquaintance of his would be regarded as an enemy. That could not be helped——

“You agree with me, señor?”

“To the direct question,” he answered frankly, “yes.”

“And you will leave before——”

“No! . . . As I told you, I await a friend.”

“But——” The girl broke off and then began again urgently. “Señor, you do not know Manuel Pareja. If you have a difference it were better to go at once before he can arrange for your undoing. You have been kind to me, and if it is the little barrel of a man who was here for whom you wait, I can give him the news of your going. . . . If you linger here as like as not there will be a commotion in the street when you leave. Knives will be drawn, and though you have nothing to do with the quarrel, it is you who will be left in the street—you comprehend?”

Mr. Donne comprehended, and found the girl’s earnestness impressive. For Andy Winstowe’s sake it might be as well to quit, since if there was an ambuscade in the street they might both be knifed. The girl saw the considering look in his face, and she spoke again persuasively.

“There is not any need that you should go far, señor. . . . Round the corner of the café there is a street where I have an apartment . . . you can await your friend there, and I will give him the news of your whereabouts.”

Mr. Donne grew suddenly suspicious. Was the girl arranging a trap for him? He looked at her keenly. Her dark eyes met his without wavering, and he was convinced that she was utterly sincere in her concern for him. But he was puzzled.

“Why should you trouble about a stranger, señorita?” he asked curiously.

The girl shrugged her shoulders. “One does evil because one must, but good because the chance offers. . . . You know what I am. That is not to be hidden.” She gave a hard little laugh and then added: “But I am convent-trained. An accident brought me to—this. But one does not forget the good. Perhaps, who knows, I shall redeem my soul.” Her hand went to her bosom, and returned to the table, where it flattened out, palm down, and gave a little push. A Yale key slid across the marble top almost into his hand. She gave another hard laugh. “You will help my salvation, señor? . . . Take the side door there. If Manuel is already waiting it will be at the door by which you entered. When you reach the street turn to the left. Count five doors on the right and mount the stairs to the first landing. My apartment is on the right again. Across the room is a door which leads to my chamber. There is a

window. Should there be need one may drop to a flat roof below, and from the parapet it is possible to lower one's self to another street. Is that clear?"

"Quite," answered Mr. Donne tersely. "Turn left in the street. Take the fifth door; and the door on the right after mounting the first flight. . . That it?"

The girl nodded. "I will bring your friend, or send him to you. . . . Now it is time for you to go, for Manuel Pareja does not let the flowers grow under his feet." She paused, and an embarrassed look came on her face, then as one ashamed she said: "You have a full wallet, señor?" At the words she caught the little cynical flash in his eyes and hurried on. "You must not miscomprehend me, señor. I am your friend. I do what I do for my salvation. . . . But I am watched. If I do not get money——"

Her eyes went to the man whom she had left with the other girl, and as Donne glanced in that direction to find the fellow watching them closely, he understood.

"God damn the scoundrel!" he said fervently. "If I had him in the street——" He broke off. "The man watches, and for your sake, señorita, I shall pay. But in your apartment I shall leave——"

"No! No! I beg you not. I serve for the good motive. You comprehend?"

He did, and having a side thought that virtue and kindness flourished in strange places, was a decently humbled man.

"My dear, I thank you. I have no doubt of your salvation. I only hope——"

"Ah!" she interjected.

"What is it?"

"That Manuel peeped in at the door. He is waiting, señor. It is time to go."

"Seems so!" He took out his wallet, flung a note openly on the table, drank up his liquor and as he set down the glass palmed the key. "My friend," he said, "I go. But I shall not forget."

A flash of the dark eyes answered him as he rose, and without more ado moved from the table. Mammy Venus was watching him with inscrutable eyes. The main door, as he observed, was a little ajar, and no doubt the lanky Colombian was waiting to signal his coming to whatever crowd of sweeps he had gathered. He threw open his drill coat that he might the easier reach his pistol in case of need, and deliberately made towards that door which stood ajar. It closed suddenly and as it did so, he chuckled and made a swift dive for the side entrance. He reached it, flung it open, and stepped out into an alley-like street where the only light was that of the lustrous stars. A figure detached itself from the shadows. Another followed. So Manuel Pareja had thought of this way out. As that crossed his mind, in the darkness he caught a faint gleam—the sheening of the starlight on a reflecting surface.

"A knife!"

As the explanation leaped in his mind, momentarily forgetting his pistol, he struck savagely at the nearest of the shadows. His knuckles found a man's face. The recipient of the blow gave a yelp of pain and staggered back on his comrade—so sharply that both went down. Mr. Donne did not wait for the pair to pick themselves up. In a trice he started to run down the gut of a street, counting the doors on the right as he went.

“One! Two! Three! Four! Five!”

The fifth door stood open, and within the passage was a Cimmerian gloom. He could see nothing, but with sounds behind him that told the discomfited pair were picking themselves up, he had little choice but to take the place on trust. He passed the threshold, felt for the door and gently closed it. Then he groped for the stairs, and was yet seeking them when he heard running feet pass the door. Another runner followed, then his hand found a rail, and his foot kicked a stair.

“Hallelujah!” he whispered, and suddenly remembering his pistol, he dragged it from his hip-pocket. Silently he began to mount the stairs, feeling his way cautiously with his free hand on the rail. He was half-way up, when he heard the men who had gone down the alley returning, and guessed that the place must be a cul-de-sac. Then a voice speaking in Spanish reached him.

“The man must have turned into one of the doorways.”

“Yes!” answered a second voice. “We must search the whole street.”

“Search away, old mole!” he whispered jeeringly and continued his ascent.

He reached what he guessed must be a landing. It was dark as pitch and he could discern nothing. Undaunted, but aware that he had no time to waste, he risked a match. As the wood kindled and the little flame grew steady he looked around. Three doors opened from the landing, whilst a second flight of stairs led to another storey. Two of the doors were on the left, and the third on the right. Blowing out the match lest its small flame should attract attention, he felt his way to the third door, and with his finger-tips searched for the key-hole. Five seconds later he found it and after a little trouble managed to fit the key into the slot. It turned easily, and stepping across the threshold into the dark room, he softly closed the door, dropped the catch, and that done, he drew a long breath of relief.

Striking another match, he looked round. There was a lamp on a small table at the side of the room, and within a couple of minutes he had it going and was making a quick survey of the apartment. There was nothing about it to call for notice. No doubt it was the replica of a hundred other rooms in Panama, even to the crucifix which hung upon the wall, with a little sconce below where three candles waited to be lit. The window, as he observed, was curtained with some heavy material, and no

doubt his light was invisible from outside.

Assured of that, carrying the lamp, he passed the second door into the girl's sleeping apartment. It was a smaller room, rather scantily furnished, and had a window with the jalousie closed. Setting down the lamp, he crossed to the window, opened the jalousie and looked forth. Below, he made out the flat roof of which the girl had spoken, and guessed that the drop was no more than seven feet—nothing for an active man.

Leaving the jalousie open, he returned to the living apartment, and after considering a moment, extinguished the lamp, and going to the window, drew the curtain and gently opened the jalousie. That done, he knelt on the floor, with his head at the level of the window-sill, and strained his ears for any sound in the alley.

He had not long to wait. There reached him the sound of feet, moving cautiously, and again whispering voices, but too indistinctly for him to know what they said. Evidently the search for him was still proceeding, and he was wondering what would happen if Andy Winstowe were to appear, when newcomers arrived. He heard a scurry of feet which announced several people, then a peremptory voice speaking in Spanish and demanding to know what had become of the English dog.

"The lanky Manuel!" he thought. "And a little peeved."

He heard someone giving a rather highly-coloured version of the little fracas at the side door of the café, which gave the narrator rather more credit than he deserved, and then the voice of the leader broke in again.

"Curse you for a fool, Marcia! . . . No doubt by this the dog is far away."

"No!" protested the other voice. "He fled up the alley and there is no outlet that way. He must be here still, for I am sure he has not returned and slipped by us."

"Then two of you go to the alley entrance and keep guard. You, José, and you, Clemente. . . . Castro, slip into the café and borrow a flash-torch. The rest will remain."

Pareja, thought Donne, was plainly a man of action with a strain of thoroughness that might prove troublesome if he took to searching the houses in the alley, and even dangerous if Andy and the girl should appear. From his place at the window he could just see the side door of the Café Cordova, and he watched it carefully, hoping that his friend's advent would be delayed.

He saw the man who had been commanded to procure the flash-torch pass the door, and presently return, flashing the torch as he did so. Its beam lit the narrow alley from end to end and revealed seven or eight men waiting there, prominent among them the tall Colombian, who took the torch and directed its beam up the alley.



“The man is not here. Two of you advance and examine the doorways.”

“The devil!” thought Mr. Donne. “He’s going to comb the place.”

He watched the two men pass up the alley, peering in the doorways as they went, though a cat would have found any of them a poor hiding-place; then one of them shouted that there was no one to be found.

“In one of the houses then!” came the reply. “If he went up the alley he must have found a refuge somewhere. . . . We will begin at the far end and work backward.”

The whole party moved forward, and the man whom they were seeking once more gave his whole attention to the café entrance. He heard a rapping at the far end of the alley, followed by the vociferous protest of a woman. A man laughed with harsh merriment.

“We shall not hurt your lover if——”

At that precise moment the café door opened, letting a flood of light into the alley and revealing two figures as they stepped forth—the girl and Andy Winstowe. The door closed, and as that end of the alley grew dark again Mr. Donne hoped for the best. From the end of the alley came a burst of laughter, someone shouted a rude jest, and as a new gust of laughter sounded, the pair in the alley made the fifth doorway.

The gods were being kind. Leaving the window, Donne hurried to the door and slid back the catch in preparation for the entrance of his friends. Scarcely had the catch clicked when from the alley there came a yell, then a guttural voice shouted something that he did not catch.

“Mammy Venus!” he ejaculated hoarsely, and with a conviction that something had gone wrong, flung open the door and, pistol in hand, stepped out on the dark landing.

The well of the staircase was black as night, but from the alley came sounds of tumult; and he was still wondering what to do, when the door below was flung open and he had a hazy glimpse of struggling forms. Then like a miniature searchlight the beam of the flash-torch illumined the tangled forms in the doorway, and he saw his friend break clear and begin to mount the stairs. At his heels followed the girl. But as she reached the second stair a hand gripped her, and a rolling laugh, the quality of which made Donne shiver, sounded through the babel. He heard Andy cry out:

“Quick, girl!”

Something flashed in the light of the torch. A scream followed which ended in a choking sob. The light went out suddenly, and he heard his friend cry again.

“You black brute!”

There was a flash, the din of a pistol shot, a man yelled, then the clatter of hurrying feet on the stairs, and three seconds later a man made the landing.

“That you, Andy?” he cried.

“Yes,” came the answer. “Which way?”

“Here!” He almost dragged the little man into the apartment; then he hesitated, and asked: “The girl?”

“Scuppered! . . . Shut the door!”

He flung to the door with a crash, shot the catch and heard the little man gasp. “We’re in a hole. . . . There’s a pack of wolves down there . . . we’ll have to shoot it out . . . and hope for the police.”

“No!” whispered Donne, as he caught the clatter of feet on the stairs. “There’s a way out. This way.”

Gripping his friend’s arm, he stumbled towards the sleeping apartment. As they passed the threshold someone flung his weight at the outer door.

“Quick!” he whispered. “The window. There’s a flat roof underneath. Drop down; I’ll hold them back.”

Andy Winstowe made no demur. The window showed dimly against the lights of the city, and groping his way to it, he clambered on to the sill.

“How far!” he asked tersely.

“Seven feet! An easy drop!” answered Donne, and faced round, pistol in hand, as again there sounded the crash of a heavy body against the door on the landing. He waited tensely, heard his friend drop on the leads below and caught his assuring call.

“O.K.!”

Then he ran for the window to the sound of splintering wood. He guessed that a panel of the landing door had yielded, and as he swung himself on the sill, heard a voice cry wrathfully:

“The catch, you fool!”

He clambered out, hung for a second at the full reach of his arms, then dropped. He alighted on his feet, was aware of a steadying hand, then caught Andy’s inquiry.

“Which way now?”

“The parapet. Sharp. There’s a street below.”

They found the parapet and looked over into a void where nothing was visible.

“Nice thing!” whispered Winstowe. “Might be dropping off the earth. But we’ve got to chance it. Here goes for death or glory.”

He climbed the parapet and dropped. From below Mr. Donne caught a squelching sound, then there reached him a whispered oath.

“Damnation!”

“What——” began his friend.

“The city’s garbage dump, for a guess. An easy drop, with a stink of hell!”

Overhead a beam of light cut the darkness like a sword. Donne clambered over the parapet hurriedly, but whilst he was still straddling it the beam of the flash-torch found him. He heard a voice cry in Spanish:

“There! Quick, Juan!”

As he dropped something flashed down the beam of light. He caught the ring of steel on the parapet and knew that a knife had been thrown. He fell on the garbage with which his friend had already made acquaintance, rolled over, and regained his feet in a twinkling. Overhead, as he looked round, someone shouted wild orders:

“This way!” whispered Winstowe in his ear. “There’s a lighted street here.”

They stumbled down a narrow way, which seemed to be a mere dump for refuse. At the end they reached a street electrically lit and there, after a single glance round, Winstowe took charge.

“Come along,” he said, “I know the city.” They took several turns, dodged round the corner of a church, cut through an alley and reached a well-lighted square.

“Santa Ana!” said Winstowe. “We may find a flivver here. Ah! The luck’s in. Over there!”

A rather decrepit Ford was parked on the other side of the square. It was for hire, and the little man waved Donne forward.

“Tumble in!” Then, having followed, he gave directions to the driver. “Balboa. And step on the gas. Fare will depend on the speed you make, so let the hearse hop.”

The half-breed grinned, and cranked his engine. It started with an appalling din that was anything but reassuring, but when the driver took his seat and let in the clutch it carried the car forward. Andy Winstowe looked back.

“Clear away,” he said. “We’re in luck to find this box of tricks so handy. . . . But I’m sorry about that girl.”

“Exactly what happened? I saw a knife gleam——”

“It wasn’t a common knife! You know how some of these buck-niggers arm themselves. It was a razor!”

“Heaven smite the man who——”

“He’s already smit. I got him with my pistol. But I didn’t get that big Mammy who was really responsible, for it was she who dragged the girl back. Laughed as she did it—the tigress!”

“I heard her.”

"When I showed up in the café and the girl clicked with me to warn me of your going, I think that Mammy Venus suspected what was forward. She followed us out of the café and shouted to some fellows in the street——"

"They were searching for me."

"Guessed that! When that black image shouted to them they ran for us. We were at the door when they reached us, and I think we should both have got clear but for that foul negress. She snatched at the girl, and whilst she held her, one of those wolves drew his razor." He broke off, and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Saints," he ejaculated, "it sends me into a cold sweat just to recall it. A clean bullet or a straight knife-thrust I can stand, but when it comes to clashing with razors it makes my flesh crawl. . . . The girl screamed once——"

"I heard her."

"Having heard more than one man cry when sudden death found him, I knew 'twas no use stopping to help. After that cry there was no earthly hope she'd pull out, so I just ran up the stairs. But if I ever meet Mammy Venus again in the flesh ——"

"You will, if we go to Cocos, I fancy."

"Cocos! I'd go to the South Pole for the chance. That was the gem of a girl—unlucky, but one of a thousand——"

"Yes! . . . Heaven rest her soul!"

"Amen to that! . . . But we're in a mess, Donne. Those wolves will put her death at our door and swear us to the gallows if we're taken in the neighbourhood."

"But we have the true story to tell," objected his friend.

"Fat lot of good that would do us . . . Panama's governed by the native mongrels. Only jurisdiction Uncle Sam has is over the sanitary arrangements, and judging from that sink we dropped into some places are overlooked. . . . But you can see the slope of the land. With a crowd to swear an information and with two corpses to show—the girl's and that of the nigger I plugged—we shouldn't have a dog's chance. . . . Anyway, we'd be delayed, and so far as this Cocos business is concerned, that would cook the goose to a golden brown, hey?"

"Almost certainly!"

"Then we've got to quit, pronto. That nigger woman doesn't know about my rakish little craft at Balboa. We'll pull out to-night and run across to Flamenco. Those rifles I bought will have to be sacrificed——"

"And my dunnage!"

"We'll pick up what we need lower down the coast, I know the place. But

we've just got to quit now, if we don't want to sit in the calaboose in leg-irons till they hang us for a brace of ruddy murderers. There's no choice."

"No," agreed Mr. Donne. "And at the thought of lingering I feel a sort of constriction about my shirt collar——"

Andy Winstowe chuckled. "Guess I know the sensation, having cause. Once, after one of the revolutions, I came near being hanged down at Lima. It was the rope that saved me."

"Saved you, Andy! How——"

"If it had been a firing-squad and me against the Plaza wall, I'd have been corpsed. But as a method of execution a ceremonial hanging takes time—anyway, it ain't so quick as a rifle party. I was stood with the rope tickling my Adam's apple, when a counter revolution broke out, and the hanging was deserted and I was left all standing, and trussed like a chicken. A boy of twelve, on the promise of a five-peso piece, cut me loose, and having had enough of revolutions, I levanted as quick as horseflesh could carry me, and haven't traded a machine-gun in Lima since."

The little man laughed as he finished his explanation and added: "Mightn't have the same luck in Panama. Anyway, I'm for pulling out whilst the way is open. Justice in Central America is apt to be sketchy, and for me it's the wide-open spaces before the calaboose every time."

"I don't like jails myself," owned Mr. Donne.

"Then we'll go out to-night. There's a moon later, and we shan't pile up anywhere."

"Also we shall know we have the start on Mammy Venus."

"There's that!" agreed the other. "But not for long, I guess. If I know her. Mammy is a go-getter; and remember it's the finish that counts. We shall have to be right smart to keep in front of the procession. You'll see, boy . . . That fat Venus isn't to be sniffed at, and I guess she'll just make the Pacific boil to get to Cocos ahead of us. And if she has the luck to get there in time to welcome us, well, I guess there will be unfriendly manifestations, not to say ructions. But that's to be looked for; an' after all, you can do most what you like on these old pirate keys, which have a simple charm of their own."

"Never a law of God or man," quoted Mr. Donne from his favourite poet.

"No statutes and enactments and such legal fallals you mean, hey? That's true, but the law's there all the same—at the end of a gun, and that's why we've got to pick up rifles somewhere on the way down. Mammy Venus an' her crowd ain't to be trusted with legal administration of that sort, I guess."

"Agreed!" said Mr. Donne. "I ought to have thought of the rifles when I air-

mailed you.”

“Oh,” laughed his friend easily, “it ain’t too late yet.”

## CHAPTER VII

### COCOS ISLAND

They ran out from Balboa at moonrise and, turning southward, made in the direction of Flamenco. As they crossed the bay Mr. Donne looked towards the twinkling lights of Panama, and wondered if Mammy Venus and her lieutenant Manuel Pareja were still searching for him. Then by a natural transition his thoughts went to the girl who, if Andy were not mistaken, had died so terribly on the steps of her home.

"I'll burn candles!" he murmured, with a touch of sentimentality.

"No, you won't!" commented Andy. "I didn't stock up with them. Paraffin's the luminant I brought."

"I was thinking of that girl! She was a Catholic, convent-trained, too! She told me. The candles I'm thinking of are for her, sort of thing they stick up before the images of saints. That girl deserves them, and a mass can hurt no one's soul!"

Andy Winstowe nodded. "Dare say you're right, boy. I'm a Protestant myself, reared Methodist-Episcopal, which party doesn't favour candles and images; but I'm not narrow-minded; and I'll light a candle or two for that girl myself, on the off-chance, and have a mass said in regular R.C. style—by a bishop, if one's to be found. . . . The bigger the gun the better, I guess, when it comes to battering the Golden Gates."

Both men were silent for a time, and Mr. Donne stared thoughtfully ahead, watching the lights of Flamenco lift from the sea; then presently his friend spoke again.

"What about that other girl—the one from the Blue Anchors? . . . Where d'you reckon she's got to, boy?"

"Heaven knows! I've racked my brains for days why Michael Pym took her with him, and I haven't hit it yet."

"Couldn't have been just because he wanted that picture in the house. Pym's not the fellow to burden himself with a petticoat when he goes treasure-hunting!"

"There's that other man—the one who called her Pheeny."

"A fool if he trusted Michael Pym to fetch his girl for him. From what you told me, Pym had only to whistle and the maid followed him like a dog."

"Something like that. As I told you, I'd a notion he hypnotised her."

"But why?"

"If we knew that, maybe we should get to the heart of this business. . . . But I can't even guess a good reason."

"A puzzler for sure," agreed his friend, and fell silent for a time. Presently, however, he asked another question. "Do you reckon Pym is ahead of us?"

"Sure to be, I should say. I had to see to things and couldn't take the first boat to Jamaica. It's likely that he got it—and the girl. In a way I hope he did, for he'll have that little drawing in which, if anywhere, the original Bonito's secret is embalmed like a fly in amber."

"You reckon we'll have to get that?"

"We've as much right to it as he has."

"But there's the chap who sent the message to Pheeny? How about him?"

"A shadow! . . . What do we know about him?"

"Well, there's Seraphina herself. What about her rights?"

"All those rights are Ben Bonito's, I guess."

"You're after pulling the nuts out of the fire for him, then?"

"No!" Mr. Donne laughed at the notion. "Treasure-trove is for the man who finds it, every time."

"Sound law!" agreed Andy. "But how if Bonito himself shows up to put in a claim?"

"There isn't one chance in a million of that. . . . You've only got to think of the facts to know it. . . . All the days of his life since his father returned blinded he's had the secret under his thumb. And what has he done about it? Just stared nightly at that framed drawing and gone to bed to dream about it. . . . He's anchored fast at that tavern of his and he'll never leave it."

"I wouldn't bet on it," answered the little man. "Human nature is the queerest mixture on earth. . . . I've known a man run meekly as a hack between the shafts for twenty years, then on a fine spring morning something stung him to kick over the traces and go out to the wide. Daresay he'd brooded on the thing for years—and the sting just gave him the push-off. . . . It's possible that Ben Bonito has had his jolt—and may be getting into action at last."

"Well," laughed Donne, "if he shows up too, there'll be a nice little picnic at Cocos. . . . But, in any case, he's harmless."

"Ever see a man run amok, Jack?"

"Twice! Once at Palembang and once in Macassar—Malays both of them. What about it?"

"Only this, I lay that an hour before they flared-up they were quiet and well-behaved citizens. The tough-hided and the rackety don't bust out that way. It's the quiet ones who've been bottling things up who flare out like volcanoes. An' Ben Bonito seemingly has been doing the bottling for years. Bottle is liable to burst under



pressure, and send Ben off at the deep end—particularly as there's pirate blood in him."

"Must be wearing thin by now," laughed Mr. Donne.

"Think so? . . . There's such things as throw-backs to the parent stock. That girl now, for instance, you said she was 'un-Englishy.' Looks as if Benito Bonito's blood might be persisting——"

"Maybe her mother's daughter," argued the other. "And there're odd strains in those Cornish villages."

"True! But one's as chancy as the other, and in any case your Ben Bonito is as likely to break out in queer fashion as not. Remember, he's the only one of his race since the original proprietor who hasn't left the inn to go a-roaming. If he starts now he'll have a big head of steam to work off, an' as like as not he'll go amok."

"Well, we shall see. . . . But I can't fancy him making a break that will bring him from his tavern to the Pacific. He's just rusted at his moorings in that little one-horse port."

"That's to be seen yet," answered Andy, and let the matter drop.

Taking watch and watch they ran down the coast till they reached a little port on San Miguel Bay, where Andy secured the rifles and Donne the outfit he needed, and having replenished the oil-tanks made a direct traverse to their destination, across a sea that was like a mirror, and under skies that were of deepest blue. In the three and a half days of their voyage they saw but four vessels, two of them coasting steamers; one a large steam-yacht, plainly on a pleasure cruise; and the fourth a big steamer which Winstowe recognised as one of the regular packets running to Honolulu, none of which afforded any cause for uneasiness. On the fourth morning just after dawn, Donne was wakened by his friend bawling loudly.

"Land-Ho!"

Scrambling out of the tiny cabin and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he saw a dim greenness through the morning mists, without definite form, but with one high cone thrust through the vapour and shining like an emerald in the sun.

"Cocos!" announced Andy, his rosy face puckered in a grin. "Hope you like its looks."

Mr. Donne did not reply, but went back to the cabin, and after a minute or so returned with a seaman's glasses. Adjusting them he stared fixedly at the island, where was focussed so much of past romance, and the hope of his own immediate present.

Whilst he watched, the mists were licked up by the sun, and the island stood clear to view—a green lonely outpost of land in the vastness of the ocean. As the

little vessel swept on, rugged hills clothed with dark verdure lifted to view—one tall cone crowned by a solitary palm with its great fronds lashing like pennons outlined clearly against the sky. High cliffs rose sheer from the sea, a headland appeared that was like a bastion to keep back the surging waters. A bay opened out, a mile or so wide between its horns, with tall hills lifted from the waterside, covered, as Donne's glasses revealed, with almost impenetrable undergrowth and trees. Andy Winstowe looked at it once, and immediately commented in the manner of a guide of a personally conducted tour.

"Chatham Bay! Note the plain, which holds the centre of the scene. The only level building land on Cocos. . . . Note also that we are the one craft in sight. Beyond that high bluff there lies another opening—Wafer Bay, reputedly so named after one Lionel Wafer, a buccaneer who came to the island with that notorious pirate, Captain Davis, of 'The Bachelor's Delight,'—see various books in the central public library at 'Frisco."

Donne heard him without giving any sign of having done so. Silently he continued to stare at the island. Flocks of sea birds wheeling above the rocky beach and gleaming whitely in the sun were the only signs of life. Habitation there was none. No smoke curled among the trees to indicate a fire and so the presence of man. The place was like a green God's-acre, inhabited only by the dead, and but for the screaming of the sea birds, and the mutter of the surges, as silent as death's self. He was very conscious of the solitude, of the apparent lack of human presences, and suddenly he voiced his feeling.

"Place is lonely as a graveyard at the witching hour."

"Makes you feel that way, boy," answered Andy. "I don't wonder. And if ghosts walk you can bet there are some darn queer ones foot it on that beach a-nights."

"Curious the way uninhabited land affects one," commented Donne. "Always gives me an odd feeling of unseen presences."

"You mean you can feel them staring at you round the corners," laughed Andy Winstowe. "Guess I know the sensation right enough. But if ghosts are the only folk we're going to butt against I ain't scared, not one little bit."

Donne continued his scrutiny of the island, carefully examining the rocks along the shore, the thick jungle behind, the steep slopes beyond for any sign of inhabitant. He found none.

"See anything of Michael Pym and that girl?" asked his companion shrewdly, guessing what was in his mind.

"Nothing."

"Then I guess we're the first to hit this rendezvous of treasure-hunters. If Pym

was there he'd be watching us, wondering who we were——”

“He won't be expecting me,” answered Mr. Donne.

“No, but he'll be on the look-out all the same, for from what you told me, Mammy Venus and he are on the same lay, an' there ain't any more flies on Michael Pym than there are on Mammy.” He laughed and then added, “We're first in the race from the look of things, and we're the only one of the three parties that hasn't a clue to guide us. We've got to wait till we can collar that from Pym or Mammy.” He chuckled. “Nice lawless business you've dragged me into, boy.”

“We shall be only stealing what was stole, Andy.”

“Oh, I ain't quarrelling about the morals of the thing. Morality and Cocos Island don't fit nohow. Piracy's in the air here, and we just do as those Romans did. But if you'll tell me how, I'll be much obliged.”

“We shall have to surprise Michael Pym or——”

“Have to hide this craft somewhere then. Them icy eyes of his are like a sea bird's. He'd spot it at once if it was in sight. . . . And, anyhow, we've got to make sure he ain't here. There's that other bay round the headland. Maybe we'll find signs of Michael there. After all, he couldn't get here on a magic carpet; and any craft he came in will advertise the fact of his presence. . . . We'll just nose carefully round and make sure. Pym ain't the sort of fellow you want to hit against unbeknown, particularly if he has a knife in his fist.”

They ran carefully onward, Donne, with the glasses, watching the green jungle for any sign of man. Rounding a high piece of coast, they saw a second bay open out with golden beach, on which the long swells of the Pacific broke in a creamy line of foam. There were more sea birds, multitudes of them, which hovered or wheeled screaming about the motor-boat, but there was no lifted mast or smoke-stack in all its reach.

“Guess we've got the place to ourselves,” commented Andy, “and can pick an anchorage at leisure. There are creeks about where we can nose in and lie hidden until the crowd comes to the picnic.”

Mr. Donne, with the glasses at his eyes, did not reply, but stared steadily down the bay. An intent look came on his face, then suddenly he spoke.

“There's smoke up there in the woods, or I am mistaken. Take a look, Andy. Down the bay at the far end of the first beach, above the place where that ribbon of water drops over the cliffs.”

Andy Winstowe took the glasses and stared intently in the direction indicated. Then he pursed his lips and whistled softly.

“Phew! . . . Smoke it is! Somebody's got a camp up there. Who do you reckon

it can be? . . . Not Mike, surely. . . . There's no craft in which he can have made the island."

"Might be a castaway," answered his friend. "Some fellow who's been wrecked and stranded here on Cocos or——"

"Wrong!" broke in Winstowe and smote a knee. "I've got the chap up there ticketed all right. . . . What about that fellow who gave the girl her pet name when he talked to Michael Pym about her?"

Mr. Donne was swept by a wave of excited conviction.

"You've hit it, Andy. I haven't a doubt you're right. It is natural the fellow should be here, waiting for Pym and the girl with the picture from the Three Blue Anchors, for it is certain he went to get both. . . . Wonder who the fellow is? . . . Seems likely that he and Pym are working together, and whilst Pym went to Cornwall he remained here, no doubt poking round after old Bonito's shekels. . . . That will explain why there's no craft here. Pym took it to make the mainland, and he'll use it to come back. . . . I must get a look at that man up there, and if desirable have a few words with him."

"Take you a goodish time to reach him, boy."

"Yes! But turn back. We don't want to be seen. The fellow might get scared and run, and I should have to hunt him all over the island."

He took a bearing on the place where the smoke curled up among the trees, then he spoke again. "If one landed and worked along the shore, it would be easier than working along the hillside. From the beach one could work straight up to the place."

Andy nodded and turned the boat to run round the point. "Got to find a safe mooring-place, first. We don't draw much water, and I noticed a little creek that might serve, if there's no rock or weed. And after breakfast we can start."

"We? . . . One of us Andy," said Mr. Donne firmly. "The other must wait with the boat. We don't want to be caught out and left marooned on Cocos. Nobody ever comes here but treasure-hunters, and if anyone stole the launch we might be left here till we died. . . . I'll go, and you'll keep watch. Remember Mammy Venus as well as Michael Pym are due here any time."

The little man grumbled at the rather unattractive task set for him, and his friend laughed at him and quoted:

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

"Where d'you get that bilge, Jack?"

"Don't remember exactly, but fellow who said it was a poet——"

"A fool, you mean!"

"Maybe he was that as well. But you can see how the thing stands. In a job of this sort we've got to keep the line of retreat open. If Michael and Mammy show up we might have to change ground in a hurry; and if we were both tangled up in the jungle and lost the boat, as like as not we'd be hunted through the trees and potted like crows. . . . Also, as I hinted, the boat's the bridge back to the mainland. Without it we're lost men, and you know it, Andy."

"Perhaps I do!" admitted Andy.

"You know it very well. And if those others make the island you'll have to get the boat to the open where she can manœuvre round ready for picking me up, and that may be trickier work than you're thinking. Anyhow, it is on those lines we act, or I don't stir a foot. I've no desire to be marooned on Cocos and live on coconuts, and crabs and sea birds for the rest of my life."

"There's wild pig here, too," laughed Andy, "or those books in the 'Frisco library lied."

"Maybe; but hot pork three hundred miles or so from the Equator isn't any catch," answered Mr. Donne; "and till we know what's what and who's who on this desert island we play cautious."

"Oh! All right," Andy laughed again. "Have your way."

Mr. Donne had his way, as he had resolved all along. When a safe mooring-place had been found, they breakfasted, and, armed with rifle and pistol and a great cane-knife, Mr. Donne went ashore. As they parted his friend gave instructions for signalling.

"In case of trouble for either of us, two quick shots, count five and then another shot. . . . That's understood!"

"Right."

"And if I have to pull out with the motor-boat, I'll fire six times and run right down the coast to the end of Wafer Bay. And you can make for the last of the beaches to be picked up."

"Yes."

"Then off you go, and luck go with you! . . . I reckon before noon you'll wish you'd stopped by the boat. It's hotting-up, and them woods have a steamy look. You'll be fairly boiled before you've gone a mile. . . . But that'll just serve you right for being so mule-headed. . . . So-long, boy."

Mr. Donne laughed, and, entering the wood, in two minutes completely lost sight of his friend. Working up and across the headland which separated him from the large bay above which he had seen the smoke, he found the going terribly hard. Among the trees the lianas grew thick. They hung from the branches like great

snakes, and aground were just a series of snares for unwary feet. Rocks, moss or creeper-grown, lifted themselves in the most unexpected places, half hidden by the lianas or lush growths about them, causing him to stumble frequently; and half the time he had to cut his way, stung all the time by hordes of vicious insects, which seemed to revel in the feast provided for them. But he was an old hand at forest travelling and persisted in ignoring everything but the line of his going, and in something like an hour, scratched in a score of places, bleeding from a nasty cut he had suffered from a mis-stroke of the cane-knife, and sweating streams, he reached the crest of the bluff, and after binding his arm, looked down on the yellow beaches of Wafer Bay.

But for the flocks of screaming sea birds they were empty of life. His eyes travelled upward to the place in the wood where he had marked the column of smoke. It was no longer visible, but that did not greatly disturb him, since probably the fire had only been kindled for breakfast and then allowed to die out, whilst the place was well marked by a high bare rock standing out of the greenery and quite unmistakable. After resting a little time, he descended the bluff to the shore. Coconut palms grew there, and he walked in the shadow of them till he came on a couple of green nuts that had somehow been dislodged. Husking them, and cutting off the tops with the cane-knife, he drank the milk, scooped out and ate some of the nut, and, refreshed, resumed his way, keeping to the firm sand, where the going was easier, and where the clouds of "browsers and biters" that infested the wood did not trouble him.

Presently he lost sight of his landmark owing to the steep slope of the hill and the height of the trees, but for the time that did not worry him. He calculated that he had yet some distance to march along the beach before he could be in line with the high rock that would give him his bearing. He tramped steadily on, beset at times by the wheeling birds, screaming about him in a way which proved they had no fear of him, and so but little acquaintance with man. But for their cries, the only other sound was the everlasting surge of the ocean, the rumbling crash of a swelling tide. Once at no great distance out on the bay he saw a sharp fin project from the sea, denoting a cruising shark. That and the birds were the only signs of life about Cocos, but though he was so much alone on that yellow beach, he was not overwhelmed by the sense of solitude. Somewhere on the hill above him was a man who had kindled a fire to cook his breakfast; and on that man he speculated as he marched——Who was he?

Someone known to Michael Pym and to the girl Seraphina—as he guessed the link between them, for when the ear-ringed Pym had appeared at the Three Blue Anchors, he had unquestionably been a stranger there. He never questioned that the

man who had kindled the fire on the hill was the one from whom Pym had got the girl's name; and as he walked, once more he wondered what could be the relationship between them.

"Sweethearts?" he questioned.

Possibly! The girl was ripe for love, and a creature to take the eye. Scarcely had he allowed himself that thought, when he had a vision of her as he had seen her climbing the hill above the little port, with the look of strain on her face, and her slumbrous eyes fixed curiously, whilst somewhere in the gorse the cold-eyed Pym whistled that luring air. The vision was very vivid. There on that sweltering beach, he saw her as clearly as he had done in the flesh, and he was more troubled now than he had been at the moment which the vision recalled. In God's name, why should a girl like that follow such an arrant scoundrel as Pym across the zones? Was the call she felt for that man up the hill upon whom he had never set eyes; or was it that of some cursed magic of that ear-ringed scoundrel?

The question worried him. Absorbed in conjecturing answers, none of which was satisfying, he marched on, and unexpectedly found himself at the edge of a creek, which, with the tide running strongly, barred his way. He turned to examine the creek and as he did so, he suffered a very considerable shock, for a little way along the bank were three huts, built of logs and palm leaves. Scarcely had he marked them, before he dodged behind one of the big rocks which there were strewn about the shore. Slipping off the safety-catch of his rifle ready for any emergency, he looked swiftly to right and left and behind him, to make sure that there was no one there to observe him; then crouching low, he stared at the huts, which on this solitary shore were even more significant than the savage's footprint was to Crusoe; and for him at least equally startling.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A SHOCKING DISCOVERY

His closer scrutiny was revealing. The huts were old—two of them in a state of decrepitude, which denied the possibility of having been recently inhabited. But it was otherwise with the third. Its palm thatch was sound, and its freedom from creeping vegetation proved that it had been repaired quite lately. The door was patched, and it was closed, whilst those of the others were broken: one sagging on a single hinge, the other blown down and lying on edge across the threshold. Other things caught his eyes. Near one of the huts was a weather-worn and broken windlass. Close to that a little heap of much-rusted tools, spades, mattocks and the like, half-grown over with lush tropic herbage, whilst apart, its handle resting against the wall of one of the huts, was another spade, less rusted, and clearly no part of that oxidised scrap-heap by the windlass. From its position, which was exactly that of such a tool set against a wall by a careful man, it looked as if it might have been recently used.

But who had used it and afterwards set it there against the wall? The man who had repaired that hut for his own habitation? That seemed likely enough, but where was the man?

His eyes went to the hut again. Was the man there? That closed door negated the idea. In this heat no man would be such a fool as to remain in that shack shutting out such coolness as came from the sea. Then where? His gaze roamed on up the creek, but not very far. Something there—a heap of earth—caught his attention. He stared at it fascinated. It was there then that the spade had been used; and instantly the thought flashed in his mind, that someone had been digging here for Bonito's treasure. . . .

Had Andy and he arrived too late? Had the man who had been here made the discovery which many men had failed to make? Was that the reason for that closed door? To be sure, until he himself had appeared, but for the sea birds there were no eyes to pry, but the natural instinct of a man who had discovered a secret treasure would be, to shut the door whilst he gloated on his new-found wealth.

He looked at the door again. Beyond the things his own fancy dictated it told him nothing, and for any sound that reached him it might well have been the door of a tomb. His eyes turned from the hut to the spade, and from that implement to the upturned soil up the creek, then came back to the closed door, and remained there.

He watched it for a full ten minutes without anything happening, then, convinced that there could be no one there and that he was wasting time, he stood upright and



moved in a bee-line to the shack. At the side there was an unglazed window, and making for that, he tried to look in. But inside there was a jalousie which was closed, the slats so arranged that he could see nothing but the roof, whilst a strip of mosquito netting tacked over it further impeded his vision.

Leaving the window, he moved round to the door and thumped with the butt of his rifle. The door shook under the vigour of his summons, but there was no answer from within. His eye caught a piece of tarred rope projecting through a hole bored through one of the rough slats of the door. It was, as he guessed, a latch-string, and after fingering it thoughtfully for a second or two, he tugged it, distinctly caught the clack of a wooden latch within, then set his shoulder to the door. It opened a little creakingly, and when it stood wide, with the strong sunlight pouring in, he stared inside. As he did so he suffered a shock far beyond that occasioned by his unexpected discovery of the huts. For lying in a hammock slung from the ridge pole was a man, his face turned a little away, and one arm hanging over the edge of the hammock in a way that at once gave him an inkling of the truth. But it was no more than an inkling that was afforded. That the man lying there in the hammock was dead he was convinced almost by that first glimpse, but it was not until he stepped in to look at the dead face that he made the shocking discovery that the man had died very recently, and by violence, his throat having been cut from ear to ear.

Mr. Donne was shocked, but he was not appalled. In the course of his roving life he had seen violent death in many forms, and indeed, strictly in obedience to the law of self-preservation, he had himself been the human instrument of more than one such end. Therefore it did not take him long to recover from the shock of his sickening discovery, and within twenty seconds, curiosity was his strongest feeling.

"Who is the fellow?" he asked himself.

Ten seconds later, with a vivid remembrance of the upturned earth and the recently used spade outside, he asked a further question:

"Who scuppered him, and fled without giving him sepulture, as plainly intended?"

And then after a yet briefer interval, came the third query, forcible in its brevity:

"Why?"

The questions were intriguing, but the answers were not apparent. He considered them for a few moments, then he went to the door, surveyed the silent creek and the empty beach and the wooded height behind. Assured that he was quite alone, he re-entered the shack and began to search in the hope of making some discovery which would help to solve the mystery.

Not much that was helpful offered itself for a long time. At one end of the hut there was a little pile of stores, mostly in tins, such as a man would have who

expected to be away from sources of supply for some time. There were three suits of much begrimed khaki drill, a couple of pairs of heavy boots, a pair of canvas shoes much broken at the toes, with various other articles of clothing. A Winchester rifle hung on an improvised rack with ammunition to match on a shelf near by, with various camp impedimenta of the customary sort. A wooden box on the shelf near the ammunition caught his eyes. He opened it, and rolling back a strip of cotton-wool, saw a dozen dynamite cartridges, the intended use of which it was easy for him to guess, for unquestionably the dead man in the hammock, like himself, must have come to Cocos to hunt for treasure. Carefully re-covering the stuff, he returned it to the shelf and continued his search, drawing blanks everywhere until he came to the person of the dead man himself. As he turned to the hammock he became aware of a slight sound which at first he took for the noise made by some beetle, but which, as he listened, resolved itself into the ticking of a watch. He thrilled a little at the discovery, which told him that the owner of the watch could not have been dead very long. The watch was in the man's tunic pocket, held by a steel chain the bar of which was passed through a button-hole in the lapel, and the merest curiosity moved him to drag it from the pocket and look at it. It was a cheap rolled-gold watch of the hunter variety, and automatically he pressed the spring. As the protecting cover jerked open he found the clue he sought—for inside was pasted a snapshot which had been cut to fit the watch.

It was the picture of a girl, just the head and shoulders, small and badly printed, but he recognised it at once for the heavy, sleepy eyes that looked forth from the snapshot in indolent challenge were those of Seraphina of the Three Blue Anchors.

That was borne on him instantly, but he examined the portrait more carefully to make sure that he was not being deceived by a chance resemblance. The examination confirmed that first lightning-like recognition. There was no room whatever for doubt. Here were the same aquiline face, hair that from its heaviness in the portrait must have been very dark, the fine tense nostrils, the ripe shapely lips, the small flat ears with the dangling ear-rings, the pendant depending from the chain round the neck—all the little things that he had marked at his first meeting with her at the Three Blue Anchors.

Almost instantly he divined the truth. The man lying in the hammock, murdered, as it seemed, whilst he had slept, was the man from whom Michael Pym had carried the message which Seraphina had heard in the gorse on the hill above the little port. From him the ear-ringed scoundrel had no doubt learned her name, and this was the man who in affection shortened it to the familiar if less elegant "Pheeny." Of that he had no doubt whatever, and he stared at the dead man's face with some curiosity. It

had nothing to attract any particular notice. The features were straight, the mouth under the gingery moustache rather coarse, the chin a little stubborn perhaps; but, unless there had been something in the closed eyes, with nothing to redeem it from commonplaceness. One would have passed the man in the street without a second glance, he thought, if indeed the tribute of the first glance had been paid.

But in what relation had he stood to the girl? Brother almost certainly he was not. That ancient gossip who had given him the history of the Bonitos whilst he had sunned himself on the hill above the inn, would scarcely have omitted such a salient fact as that Ben Bonito had a roving son. Cousin or some relation? A possibility, he thought, but one lightly dismissed, for even blood relations did not wander round with photographs of cousins or nieces pasted inside their watches. Lover? That seemed far the likeliest thing. It would explain Seraphina's sudden emotion when Pym had hinted of the man who used the pet form of her name, and it would explain also this portrait pasted in the cover of the dead man's watch. But, thought Mr. Donne, it did not explain what possible attraction this commonplace-looking man could have for a girl like Seraphina. That, however, was one of the abiding mysteries of life; and what a girl found in the other fellow was a thing so inexplicable as to be beyond worrying over. Yet as he stared at the dead face, ghastly in its pallor, he had an odd pang for which he could in no wise have accounted, and was aware of a little stirring of vanity, for which the occasion did not in any way call. He looked at the dead man again, then at the portrait inside the watch-cover, and almost involuntarily threw back his shoulders and straightened himself as a man might who was on parade. The action, to anyone understanding it, might have invited comparison to his own advantage, whilst the pang might have been one of incipient and unrecognised jealousy of the dead. A moment later he snapped the watch-cover, and stooping, slipped the bar of the chain from the tunic button-hole.

"Seraphina may like it for a keepsake," he muttered, "if ever I meet her."

He dropped watch and chain into his own tunic pocket and then calmly resumed his search. In the pockets he found the more or less usual collection which the average man carries—a pipe, a pouch, a penknife, a small bunch of keys, a wallet with paper money, but nothing that gave any further indication of the man's identity, and nothing that in any way afforded a clue to his death.

At the possible motive for the murder he could only guess; and that was of less importance than the identity of the murderer. Who had done this foul thing? Again he could only conjecture; but one thing was very clear. Somewhere on Cocos there was a man who was a killer so foul that he had not shrunk from cutting the throat of a sleeping man. Where was the assassin? As he asked himself the question he

remembered suddenly the object of his quest, which he had temporarily forgotten in his unexpected discovery of this horrific crime. That smoke on the hill must have come from the fire of the man who had committed this black crime. And whoever the man was, beyond question he was a killer who, having killed once, would kill again to cover his original crime. Recalling that unfinished grave outside, it flashed on him that he was in a position of some peril should the murderer return to finish his task. Even now, aware of the open door, the killer might be waiting in ambush to slay him when he emerged from the shack.

Those reflections were cogent, and since he had learned all that the hut had to tell him, they moved him to an immediate departure. After carefully surveying the creek from the window, and the shore from the doorway, he slipped out, closed the door behind him, and dodging round the shack, broke for the nearest trees. When he reached their shadow he halted, drew a long breath and once more surveyed the beach and the wooded hills behind. In the latter nothing moved and all was silent as the grave, whilst on the shore at the edge of the tide the sea birds screamed and foraged undisturbed.

Reassured after his little panic, Mr. Donne grinned at his own fears, and considered his further course of action.

“Might go back and put Andy wise,” he thought, “or I might go on and find out who lit that fire on the hill.”

Prudence inclined him to the former course, whilst a native stubbornness and a certain inherent recklessness pushed him out to discovery. It was the latter which won.

“No sense turning back half-way,” he mused. “That fellow’s up on the hill now for a certainty. To-morrow he may be heaven knows where. . . . Here goes!”

He continued his march; but now he kept as well as he could to the shadow of the palms which fringed the shore and avoided the open beach, where he would be an easy target for any marksman on the hill. Among the trees the going was more difficult, his pace slower; and having to follow the ups and downs in a way that was not required of him on the beach, he walked much farther to cover the same distance between two given points. After marching half an hour, he reached a place where a mass of tumbled rock, extending from the slope well out beyond the edge of the tide, gave him the choice of climbing or exposing himself by descending to the beach and either wading round or clambering over the long spit of rocks. Neither alternative appealed to him.

“Perdition!” he ejaculated impatiently, and for a moment was in the mood to return.

His stubbornness once more triumphed, and he went forward, climbing the hill, struggling among rocks, the snake-like roots of trees above ground, and the serpent-like lianas hanging from the boughs. After a time he struck a hard track which he thought must be a runway made by the wild pigs of the island, and since it seemed to make in the direction he desired to go, he followed it. The track for a little time ascended, then straightened out and seemed to run right along the hillside and parallel with the shore, for from time to time he had glimpses of the sea on his right, and was apparently climbing no higher. Then quite suddenly the path swerved before a deep cleft in the hill down which water foamed noisily, and looking carefully between the trees, he found himself on the edge of a high bluff looking down into a secluded inlet where the stream emptied. The mischance of a dislodged stone set flocks of sea birds screaming and wheeling above the inlet—a white cloud of whirring wings which was sufficient to obscure his view. With a thought that possibly here was a harbour where the motor-boat might lie in snug concealment whilst Andy and he explored in company, he waited until the birds settled, and then, lying at full length, he looked over—and suffered a surprise far greater, if not quite so horrible, as that which he had experienced in the hut down by the creek.

Below him, riding the smooth water of the inlet gracefully as any of the birds, was a large seaplane on which at least a score of gulls were perched, very much at their ease. He stared at it incredulously, rubbed his eyes to make sure, and stared again; then, convinced that what he saw was real and not an optical illusion, he pursed his lips in a soft whistle expressive of extreme amazement.

He looked again. The seaplane was neatly moored and the entrance to the cockpit was covered by an apron of canvas. That meant that not only was the owner not aboard, but also that he had no intention of immediate departure. But, in heaven's name, who was the man who, using the last invention for the elimination of distance, had brought that 'plane to Cocos?

For all her unwomanly efficiency in wickedness, he could not conceive of Mammy Venus as an air pilot. To be sure, one of her lieutenants might have that qualification, that rascally Colombian, Manuel Pareja, for instance. And it would have been an easy matter for a 'plane to leave Panama a couple of days after the departure of Andy and himself and arrive at Cocos ahead of them. He whistled again a little lugubriously at the reflection, and then for a moment his mind travelled back to that shack by the creek with that man lying in his hammock foully murdered. Mammy Venus's reputation would stand for even such a horrific thing as that; and Pareja was a man who might cut a throat with no more qualm than he would experience in slicing a nut for a drink. . . . But somehow he could not associate the giant negress with that

dainty piece of mechanism below, riding the water so gracefully. That rusty old kettle of a yacht in which she had voyaged to Cornwall and no doubt back to Panama was more her style, and much more in keeping with her rumoured activities. And that being so, he found himself considering alternatives.

“Michael Pym?”

It was conceivable that the ear-ringed scoundrel had chosen this speedy means of crossing from the mainland to Cocos. He did not know sufficient of the man to judge the probability of that, but the possibility was not to be ruled out; and the fact that he had been acquainted with that dead man in the hut, and that Seraphina might suddenly have become a bone of contention between them, strengthened the possibility. There was also an alternative motive for the murder—Bonito’s treasure. If the secret were in that drawing stolen from the kitchen of the Three Blue Anchors, Pym might well have decided to get rid of his partner and scoop the pool for himself.

But Seraphina?

He whispered the question aloud in his perplexity. He remembered that Andy had said that Michael Pym was not the man to burden himself with a petticoat on a treasure-hunt. What, then, had become of the girl?

He leaned over the cliff and glanced swiftly at the seaplane again. That measuring glance was sufficient to inform him that the machine was built for carrying a passenger as well as the pilot. It was possible then that for some obscure reason that his mind could not fathom, Pym had brought Seraphina with him to Cocos; possibly because her presence was necessary to enable him to find that which he sought. It seemed a sufficiently wild idea. That the girl could have fathomed the secret of the picture which had baffled the Bonitos of five generations, and which her own father had nightly sought to penetrate for forty years, was too fantastic for credence. Yet the only conceivable alternative was that the cold-eyed Pym, kindled to sudden passion by the girl, had done that very thing which Andy had declared he was not the man to do.

He frowned in utter perplexity, then, as a new thought flashed into his mind, his frown relaxed, and he ejaculated aloud.

“Of course! Dolt that I am.”

There was a third alternative which had suddenly occurred to him. Someone else, quite unassociated with either Pym or the negroes, had flown the seaplane to this secluded bay. Cocos was the Mecca of treasure-seekers. Within the last ten years there had been a dozen well-advertised expeditions in search of one or other of its lost treasures, and heaven alone knew how many private ventures, such as Andy’s and his, which had not been trumpeted in the newspapers of the world. That

graceful craft, floating below, had no doubt brought a pair of romantics to the search where so many had failed; and the smoke he had seen from the sea was almost certainly that of their camp-fire.

He found that probability a great relief from burdening thought, until again he recalled the dead man and the half-dug grave by the creek. It was difficult to believe that a couple of strangers landing on Cocos should immediately proceed to annihilate the one man already there, unless——He broke off, and then, a little excited, finished his thought aloud.

“By God! Yes! . . . Unless he had found the treasure!”

A moment later he was on his feet. It was incumbent on him to learn the facts before he returned to Andy; and he could not now be very far from the place where the fire had sent that smoke curling above the tree-tops. He looked round to take his bearing, and decided that if he still followed the runway which went round the inlet, he might branch off a little farther on, and climb the hill somewhere in the neighbourhood of the place he sought.

As things chanced, he had no need to leave the runway—if such it were—at all; for swinging up the hill, it led on until it brought him to a point where tall undergrowth had been cleared by a machete. The clearing, as a single glance told him, had been done very recently, for the stems of some of the more succulent plants still oozed a milky sap. At that he grew very cautious. That he was nearing the end of his immediate search he was sure, and since a track might be kept under observation by men who had need for alertness, he turned from the track into the jungle, which was an almost perfect hiding-place.

Struggling forward and making no more noise than he must, he reached the edge of a small plateau. At some not very distant time the tall jungle grass with which it had been covered had been fired. But the fire had only been partial, cutting a wide irregular swathe, on either side of which the singed blades of the high grass, blackened and browned, contrasted oddly with the lush greenness no more than a couple of yards away. The plateau was very still, with scarcely sufficient wind to make a rustling in the tall grass. It shimmered in the almost noonday heat; and as Mr. Donne looked round without seeing anything of the camp he had hoped to find, he seated himself upon a rock, smitten with a distaste for further travel.

Excitement and increasing curiosity had sustained him through the arduous labours of the morning; but he was drenched with perspiration, burning with a hundred stings, and the arm which he had had the mischance to cut was throbbing savagely, whilst in addition he was extremely weary. He stared absently across as much of the plateau as that lane, made by a fire now dead, rendered visible, and

questioned the wisdom of going farther. The return journey would certainly take some time, and little Andy might be growing anxious. But if he went to the end of that swathe he might get a glimpse of what lay beyond the plateau, and possibly discover the place he was seeking. Fighting back his indisposition for further effort, he decided that he would at least march on until he could see beyond the tall unburned grass. He was in the very act of lifting himself from his resting-place when to his ears on the hot still air was borne a sound which froze him to immobility. For perhaps three seconds he remained there still as a dead man, his ears alert but his face incredulous. Then, as the sound reached him again, he slid silently from the rock and lay at full length behind it. A moment later he slipped back the safety-catch of his rifle and, ready for desperate emergencies, again listened. Clearly on the heated air came the sound of someone whistling—the melody, that soft, luring, compelling air that was like a call, which the ear-ringed Pym had whistled among the gorse, whilst Seraphina, the tense look on her face, hurried up the hill from the quay. He recognised it instantly, and knew beyond all question who had kindled the fire the smoke of which he had seen from the sea; and knew also whose hand had held the knife that had sent a sleeping man unwaking into eternity. Then as the whistle grew more melodiously clear, very cautiously he lifted his head until his eyes, over the edge of the rock, looked on the oddest sight they had ever seen.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE DOWSER'S-ROD

Out of the tall grass emerged Michael Pym. In the crook of his left arm he carried a Mannlicher rifle, and in his right hand a heavy machete, no doubt for jungle work. But for the blue pilot-coat and the fact that in place of the battered panama he wore a wider-brimmed hat of Indian make, he was dressed much as he had been when the watcher had first seen him through the window of the Three Blue Anchors. His pale eyes had a tense look, and from his pursed lips, as he moved forwards in the sideways fashion of a crab, came that air which Donne had instantly recognised.

He was not alone. Scarcely had the watcher time to make his recognition, when out of the grass emerged a second person, dressed like Pym himself in scarlet shirt, drill breeches, top-boots and wide-brimmed hat of plaited palm-leaf. A broad splash of sunlight striking through the tall, broad-bladed jungle grass threw queer barred shadows across the newcomer, and the details of the costume were noted before Donne saw the newcomer's face clearly. When he did so his mind, if not his tongue, fairly shouted:

“Seraphina!”

There was no doubt at all about it. Dressed masculinely though she was, with light and shadow barring her face, he could not be mistaken, and as he stared at her wonderingly, with eyes avid for important detail, her unusual beauty impressed him even more keenly than it had done on the occasion of their first encounter. He had time to feel the impact of it, but no more, for queer things about her instantly demanded his attention.

To begin with, those dark slumbrous eyes of hers, like black pools in a forest, were wide in the same unwinking stare as that he had observed when she had climbed the hill to the rendezvous in the gorse with the man who now walked crabwise to watch her. Her face also had the strained look it had worn on that occasion, and her mouth was a little open, her chin tilted, and he would have wagered that she was quite unconscious of her surroundings. But that was not all. Her forearms, with the elbows against her sides, were held stiffly in front of her, and in her hands was a contraption at which he stared in doubtful astonishment, uncertain as to its nature. He looked at it more closely. It was a forked twig, and as he realised that, he had a sudden remembrance of a newspaper picture which he had seen of a water-diviner engaged in his magical task. Then the explanation broke on him flashingly.

“Good Lor’!” he whispered under his breath. “A dowser’s-rod!”

He looked at Seraphina's set face again, marked all the signs of hypnotic influence at work, and noticed the automaton-like action of the slow walk along a path, which Pym seemed to be indicating. What on earth was happening? That the girl was a water-diviner was a conclusion easily reached from the twig in her hand; and that, under hypnotic control, the fellow was using her obscure power to some end of his own was not difficult to guess; but what in heaven's name was that end? There was water enough in Cocos without the necessity of seeking it underground. Puzzled beyond measure, he continued to watch.

The man broke off his whistle, and the girl came to a standstill and remained there like a statue. Pym wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt, then setting down the machete, took from his tunic pocket a sheet of paper and consulted it with frowning intentness. A full two minutes passed, during which the pair remained so still that a number of the little yellow birds with green or red-feathered heads that abound on Cocos, dropped on the ground between chirping and foraging without the least sign of fear.

Then Pym looked up and spat a sharp oath.

"Damnation!"

The sudden expletive scared the birds, which immediately winged away over the tall grass to the trees beyond. The man looked back and forward, and then, as his pale eyes turned in the direction of the rock behind which Donne was hidden, he found it expedient to dodge below the level, out of sight. He crouched for what to him seemed an unconscionable time, his ears alert for sounds which might indicate that which his eyes could not observe. The plateau remained deadily silent; and wondering what was happening as he grew a little cramped, he considered the possibility of stepping out into the open and confronting Pym.

But there were cogent reasons against that. At the first thought of intervention, he found himself confronted with a difficulty that was almost comic. He had no *locus standi*. So far as Seraphina and her relations with that ear-ringed scoundrel was concerned, he was out of the picture. The girl was practically a stranger; Pym was even more so; and to butt in on the little drama the pair were working out was not the simplest thing in the world. He might inquire what was forward; but that would in no way serve either the purpose that had brought him to Cocos or the girl herself; and, to do himself justice, at the moment he realised he was as much concerned over one as the other. If he were to challenge Pym, as likely as not he would be told to take himself to Hell or, even more likely, be answered in a way that would put a term to his questioning for good.

True there was that murdered man down the hill. Seraphina probably knew

nothing of the tragedy; but that the man with her was the murderer he had not a shadow of a doubt. But if he challenged the man with the crime, the answer more surely than in the other case of intervention, would be a bullet; and whilst he himself was armed, the chances were a little too even and the luck too uncertain to invite that deliberately.

Besides, he must learn what Pym was about. That in some obscure way Seraphina's divining-rod had to do with old Benito Bonito's treasure was easy to guess, and he was a little impressed by Pym's occult power. The fellow might be right on the track of the treasure, and intervention would certainly spoil an intriguing experiment, and possibly ruin all chance of finding that which he coveted as ardently as Pym. That, added to the other things, decided him. He would remain hidden.

"Let the monkey pull the nuts out of the fire," he commented mentally, and as cramp twisted the muscles of his leg, wished ardently that the scoundrel would resume his magician's job.

Another minute or so passed, and no sound came to inform him that his wish was in the way of fulfilment. The cramp in his muscles became worse, so excruciating that he knew that at any cost he would be forced to stretch himself before long. Then a slight noise reached him, indicating movement. He listened intently, and the noise resolved itself into the sound of light footsteps—receding. He was sure that they were receding, and rejoicing at a deliverance, he slowly raised his head to look over the rim of his sheltering rock. Before he saw anything, a sneering laugh chilled him to the marrow, and he heard the other's sarcastic summons.

"Come out of it, rabbit!"

Then he saw. Seraphina was moving away down the lane between the grass. Pym was standing with his rifle at his shoulder and a rather wondering look on his face. Attempt at concealment was vain, and to run would certainly mean that he would be pot-shotted forthwith. There was nothing for it but to obey the summons and trust to his own swiftness of action. Accordingly, as he lifted himself up he swung his rifle forward and confronted Pym, waiting, watchfully, for what was to follow. He saw the other's eye appraise him swiftly. A puzzled look came on the man's face, he frowned heavily, and then the frown vanished and a sudden light of recognition flashed in the pale eyes.

"The devil!" he cried. "You?"

He was plainly greatly astonished. Whoever else he might have expected, it was very certain that he had entertained no expectation of a meeting with Donne. The latter recognised that and answered coolly:

"As you see!"

"You are a cursed long way from Cornwall," growled Pym, his manner betraying suspicion. "What are you doing here?"

"They who ask no questions——" began Donne smilingly. "But you will know the adage—and there is no need to repeat it. . . . And come to think of it, I might ask you the same——"

"You can ask till the cows come home, you cursed spy," broke in the other with cold ferocity.

"Spy?" protested Mr. Donne with an injured air. "I cannot think how——"

"Oh, stow the bunk! I had a suspicion back in England, and now I know. Cocos isn't on the tourist route, and a man doesn't hit it by accident. Who are you standing in with—that black image who denied you in that tavern?"

"I assure you the denial was a veracious one . . . Mammy Venus did not know me. That was our first meeting; and though we have met again since, the lady showed no signs of a passion for——"

"Blazes! Don't rot! If 'tisn't Mammy, who is it? You ain't in this alone."

"I will own it," answered Mr. Donne with a meekness that was utterly deceptive.

"Then who the Hades are you working with? You'd best own up, sharp!"

There was a threat in the man's tones, and it was not an idle one. Donne was assured of that; and he was assured of another thing also—the man had no intention of allowing him to depart. His thirst for information was dictated by a desire to know just where he stood, how many enemies he might have to contend with, and when informed of that, he would lessen the number of them without scruple. He reflected quickly. With his rifle trained, Pym had the advantage. A single motion would bring his own rifle into position, and a quick shot would do the trick; but, in the brief flash of time the motion would take, Pym would fire, and at that range would send a bullet right through him. . . . But there was still a chance. To hold a rifle at the shoulder, trained, for any length of time, is a straining thing. Even when arms and wrists are strong, without a rest for them or the rifle there is a constant and increasing tendency for the muzzle to sag. If he could keep the fellow talking a little longer, and at the end flick him on the raw and force him to fire hurriedly, his aim might be completely at fault. At any rate it seemed worth trying. With the swiftness of thought these considerations flashed through his mind, and there was but the briefest interval between the other's demand and his own reply.

"I don't see what business that is of yours," he answered stubbornly.

"You won't see anything in two jiffs if you don't come across with the news, you fool."

There was a rasp in the man's voice and, as he spoke, Mr. Donne caught the

slightest upward movement of his left hand. The strain of holding the rifle was beginning to tell. Good! But it seemed that Pym was indisposed for a lengthy conversation, and that he might shoot without warning. It would be as well to force the critical moment, and use the very little advantage on which he was calculating. He replied promptly, and a little protestingly:

“But you mightn’t believe me if I told you?”

“That’s to be seen!” There was a new note of curiosity in the other’s voice as he spoke. Then again the rasp was there. “Spit it out!”

And Mr. Donne spat his surprise, in a matter-of-fact way.

“Well! How about the man whose throat you cut——?”

He did not finish his remark. The other jumped at the words, and as his rifle muzzle jerked sharply upwards, Mr. Donne brought his own weapon into position in record time and fired. The result was utterly unexpected. There was a spit of backward flame, something that burned cut a skiver of skin from his cheek-bone to the ear, tearing the cartilage of the latter, and the rifle kicked with such force that he was knocked backward falling behind the rock where he had sheltered. In the same second came Pym’s shot and a bullet whined over him.

At that moment Mr. Donne was the most surprised man in the whole Pacific, but he did not lose his wits. As he hit the ground he rolled over like an acrobat, gained his feet, and running like a hare zig-zagged for the thick jungle no more than a few yards away. A bullet sang by him as he ran. A second hit the bole of a tree in front of him as he crashed into the undergrowth, and regardless of all things but the danger behind, drove down hill.

No more shots were fired, but he did not imagine that the peril was past. Pym had been startled into hurried action, but he was a cold-blooded villain who after that first break would act with calculation, and it behoved him to meet guile with guile. Mere hurry might well carry him into the danger from which he fled; and to run blindly on was to invite the disaster which he was mortally anxious to avoid. With those considerations in his mind, as he broke through a thick screen of lianas, he pulled up behind a tree, and listened as he had never listened in all his life before.

At first he heard nothing but the pounding of his heart, then out of the green gloom up the slope came a slight sound. Anything might have caused it, a foraging bird or some small ground creature moving in the undergrowth, and he waited for its repetition. It came again—a rustling sound, and on the heels of it another sound, the squeelching of some rank growth under a heavy foot.

“So!”

His hand went to his hip pocket for the automatic pistol of which he had boasted

to his friend Andy. Before the action was completed he was stricken with sharp dismay, missing for the first time the weight and bulge of the weapon against his hip. The pistol was gone. Possibly it had fallen out in the somersault he had made or had been jerked out in the course of his flight; but that was neither here nor there. In the jungle with such a weapon in his hand he would have been on almost equal terms with his enemy, but now with a knife only, he was a mere rabbit to be hunted and potted at sight.

It was a disturbing thought, but he did not lose his head. There was plenty of cover, and he had half the island to play hide-and-seek in. So long as he kept clear of open stretches and did not allow himself to be manœuvred down to the beach, his chances were better than might have been supposed. The sounds which he had heard told him that Pym was moving directly down the hill, no doubt following the line of his own flight as revealed in the greenery; and unless he was to be trapped between the woods and the sea it was necessary for him to alter his direction. After a little further reflection he started off to the right that being the way that would take him towards the headland beyond which Andy Winstowe waited with their little vessel.

He was almost too late. As he made the move the crang-g of a rifle close at hand and a bullet which cut a splinter from a tree near by startled him unutterably. With the knowledge that he must have been seen and that Pym was much nearer than he had imagined, for a second time he broke into headlong flight, thrusting himself through tangled growths, dodging to keep trees between himself and his pursuer, stumbling over hidden rocks and in imminent danger of suffering serious injury. In the last of these stumbles he lost his footing completely, shot forward towards a depression in the ground, slithered further, and suddenly found himself plunging through creepers and undergrowth into nothingness. He tried to check his fall by grasping at a bush as he shot past it. The bush came away in his hand and he took the full plunge into a shaft that was dark as a pit; and as he reached the bottom he was knocked senseless.

When he recovered consciousness he found that he was lying on his side on a heap of soft débris that from the odour appeared to consist of leaf mould and rotting wood, though it was too dark for him to confirm that by sight. Turning a little and looking upward he had an impression of greenish light, against which certain dark trailing things were outlined, and above them what was most certainly the branch of a considerable tree. With a full remembrance of his flight, of his fall, and of his downward plunge, he realised that he was in some kind of a pit, either an open cave, a fissure in the earth, or one dug by human agency. Cocos, he had heard, was full of

the old workings of various treasure-seekers, overgrown with creepers and rank vegetation, and he inclined to the belief that the place into which he had plunged must be one of the excavations so made, and thanked his stars that the accumulation of fallen leaves and the like had saved his life.

He stretched his limbs and craned his neck. Finding that he had suffered no serious injury he sat up. His head began to throb violently as he did so; but he did not lie down again. Instead, with his hands to his head waiting for the really violent ache to subside, he asked himself a question.

“Where is Pym?”

Had he seen him plunge into this pit-like place, and was he waiting, rifle in hand, at the rim of the hole, in case he should emerge? In that case his position was a really desperate one, and there was little hope of his ever leaving the hole alive. He recognised that frankly and decided that for the moment his best course was to remain quite still until he was sure that Michael Pym had left the neighbourhood.

As he sat there, a smarting of his ear and cheek reminded him of the unfortunate accident that had overtaken him when he had fired at Pym. His rifle had burst, and as he considered the possible cause, he decided that in his scrambles to the plateau he must by some unfortunate chance have plugged the muzzle with earth. In any case whatever the cause he had escaped lightly. So far as he could judge the injury was not serious, and when he reflected that he might have been blinded or even killed, he was thankful that things were no worse. His thoughts passed to Seraphina. He pictured her as he had seen her with the divining-rod in her hands, and again he found himself mystified. What crazy idea had impelled Pym to look for water on the plateau? And how had he known that Seraphina——

He did not finish the thought. A sound reached him from the wood and instantly his whole attention was given to what was happening above his head. He heard a sound that might have been a grunt, and almost immediately afterwards the faint plonk of footsteps reached him. A moment later there followed a rushing noise as of something running away at a great rate. A rifle shot followed close at hand and on the heels of that came a squeal of the kind that is made by only one animal on earth. Then he heard a voice exclaim in chagrined tones:

“Blazes! A pig!”

The sound of footsteps was resumed. From the noises which reached him he was sure that the fellow was forcing his way through the brushwood almost on the edge of the pit. If he were to plunge over, or to become aware of it and investigate

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The thought was unfinished when he heard the man pass on. He listened

carefully; then he drew a deep breath of relief. Pym was really going, scrambling up hill in the direction of the plateau, no doubt to join Seraphina. It was time to think of his own departure.

He began to examine the pit carefully, seeking an exit. From where he stood it was, he judged, at least fifteen feet to the top; and so far as he could make out there was little foothold in the sides for climbing. That fact awakened apprehension, and when he started to climb, only to find his second foothold give way, sending down a spate of rubble, his apprehension was increased. If the other sides offered nothing more solid in the way of hand and foot-hold he was in a perilous case, for that loose treacherous face would have defied the best of climbers. He began to feel his way round, testing the sides of the pit here and there. It seemed to be the same everywhere. When lifting his hands he found a projection, and tested it lightly with his weight, it gave way bringing with it a little avalanche of gravel and stone, to avoid which he had to jump hastily aside.

When that had happened thrice, he was really shaken and more disturbed than he owned to himself. He was as helpless as a man in a deep dungeon, from which unaided there was no escape. A panicky feeling surged in him, and for a moment he had the frantic impulse to rush round that a mouse caught in a circular trap sometimes displays, but he repressed it firmly, and methodically resumed his search, feeling the walls of the pit for anything that would offer a secure hold. He was so engaged, with his hands stretched well above the level of his head, when he touched something which hung down the wall of the pit, and which moved as his hand encountered it.

Startled he drew back, thinking it was some reptilian creature, then he remembered his matches, and striking one, he held it up. By its tiny flame he saw that the thing he had touched was the long strand of a creeper, thick almost as his own wrist and as tough-looking as leather. His heart leaped at the sight. Here was possible deliverance from that pit of darkness. If the thing were as strong as it looked and if its root-hold were firm—He did not complete the thought which shaped itself, but eagerly stretching both hands he gripped the hanging strand, and swung his feet clear of the ground. The strand held, and, its quality proved, he gave fervent expression to his feelings:

“Thank heaven!”

Athletic man as he was, having spent half his youth at sea on windjammers, the strand was as good as a rope, and to him a rope was the next thing to a ladder. Standing at his full height, he began to haul himself up, hand over hand. Presently he was sufficiently high to use his knees, and when that was possible he climbed like a



monkey, and within three minutes he was out of the pit that might have become a grave, and standing on the slope down which he had slithered to the plunge. He climbed it gingerly, and when he reached the top, suddenly sat down in the bush, all his strength gone out of him, and in the throes of nausea from the strain he had undergone.

Thereafter, for nearly ten minutes, he remained quite still, elbows on knees, his head in his hands, temporarily dead-beat and beyond further action. Gnats which were everywhere in the wood, the thin song of myriads making an unceasing hum, settled on him in scores and took toll of his blood, whilst he remained indifferent to their stings or unconscious of them. A big lizard slipped from the green stuff and crossed his foot unnoticed. Overhead a flight of birds wheeled and screamed, as if they had been startled, but if he heard them he neither looked up nor around to discover the cause. The screaming died away as the birds passed on; but the humming of the myriads of insects continued—a drowsy, monotonous, lulling music, which was suddenly broken on by a distant crack of a rifle. As that impinged on his ears it was as if he had suffered an electric shock. He leaped to his feet and stared anxiously down the hill, his head cocked forward and sideways in the attitude of a man who knows that one ear is better than two when listening keenly. A second later another shot followed, then a third.

“Andy!” he ejaculated in a whisper. “Trouble!”

Then, his fatigue quite forgotten, he began to hurry down the hill, making almost a bee-line for the sea.

## CHAPTER X

### A FOREST FIRE

Shaken though he was, and exhausted by his previous exertions and trying experiences, downhill he made a very good pace. He had the luck to strike an almost dry water-course which though it was full of boulders offered far better going than the thick bush with its trailing roots and entangling creepers. In less than a tenth of the time that it had taken him to climb he made the descent to the beach, and once in sight of it moderated his pace, and went more cautiously. Michael Pym was not a man to be ignored: nor was he likely to give up the quest of an enemy as easily as he had appeared to do. It was probable that he was somewhere on the hill, rifle in hand waiting for his quarry to break cover, and that Mr. Donne did not mean to do.

After all the rough travelling he had done, the sands of Wafer Bay were tempting to tired and bruised feet, and the faint breeze blowing up the coast was another temptation after the hot and steamy jungle with its hosts of flies and gnats. But he put both temptations aside, and before the water-course quite opened on to the beach, he climbed the steep and rocky bank, and once more passing into the jungle began to work his way in the direction of the headland beyond which Andy waited with the boat. He found travelling difficult, and was thankful when he struck another of the runways which he attributed to the wild pigs of the island, but which for anything he knew to the contrary might have been made by the feet of men passing frequently to and fro.

When the path swung upward owing to the configuration of the land, he still followed it, since on the whole it ran parallel with the beach and must, he thought, ultimately bring him to his destination. Thus it happened that presently he found himself crossing a bare open place two hundred feet or so above the shore, where a fall of stone or a small landslide had left a clean gash on the hillside. There, feeling himself safe from attack, he seated himself upon a rock to rest for a minute or two, and from that open place to survey the coast. He easily picked out the small headland beyond which the seaplane was moored; and as he considered the high woods behind he became aware of something that he had not previously noticed—a long gleaming streak which shimmered in the strong sunlight, and which seemed to drop sheer down the hill, to vanish half way down. He stared at it for a full minute before the explanation occurred to him.

“A waterfall!”

He remembered having heard that there were several spouts on Cocos that must be like that one—long cataracts which were supposed to have their origin in a small

lake high up in the hills. There was no other immediately in sight, and the one in view held his eyes rather longer than it would have done otherwise, because it seemed to be right above the inlet where the seaplane lay. Somewhere up there, he thought, was the plateau where, using Seraphina as a dowsing, Michael Pym had searched for water. With so much water about, that search seemed an utter waste of time; and he was lazily speculating what was Pym's real purpose, when something struck the rock a little way behind him.

"Phut!"

He did not stop to investigate. One thing only, a bullet, could have made that sound; and in five seconds he was in cover of the bush, and staring back for the one who had fired the shot. It was a little time before he saw him, then, half a mile away, standing on a high rock in the neighbourhood of the cascade, he discerned the figure of a man. He had no doubt that it was Pym, and since by this he had developed a wholesome fear of that cold-eyed villain, he made haste to put himself quite out of range; keeping carefully in cover, and following the runway which, as he presently found, dipped down to the three huts, in one of which lay the dead man, whose watch with Seraphina's portrait he had annexed.

It came to him then that the dead man had probably used this runway, and that it might be a track that made direct connection with the plateau and the high place from which Pym had fired his shot. He noted the possibility, but did not descend to the huts. Keeping to the cover of the woods, at long last he made the bluff and looked down on the little bay where the motor-boat was anchored. And it seemed was on the look out for him, for scarcely had he emerged from cover, when he heard a faint hail.

"Ahoy, Jack!"

He was too utterly weary to shout back, and he waved in answer, then saw the little man gesticulate and point towards the open sea. He looked in that direction, and as he did so, knew why his friend had fired the warning shots. Far out still, but coming up fast and leaving behind it a long plume of smoke was a ship, making, as it appeared, a direct course for Cocos. He waved again in indication that he had seen that to which the other had drawn his attention, and began his descent to the beach beyond.

It was some time before he reached his friend, and when he did so the tubby little man stared at him with consternation in his usually merry eyes, then he spoke tersely:

"What the heck's happened, boy?"

"A whole lot of things. Give me a drink, Andy."

Andy wasted no time. Diving into the cabin he emerged with an enamelled mug half-filled with neat rum, and handed it to his friend.

“The right stuff,” he said. “Buck you up. You look all-in, Jack.”

He watched his friend drink the spirit slowly, and from time to time turned a speculative eye to the sea. Then suddenly he spoke.

“That craft out there. You saw it, Jack?—It’s making straight for Cocos; an’ there ain’t many folk whom we’re expecting.”

“Mammy Venus——”

“My notion. If she got away the day after we quit, that fat lady is about due. . . . Guess we’d best pull out from here and move up the coast. Don’t know what crew that kettle of hers carries, but it will sure outnumber us; an’ whilst I ain’t afraid of any nigger, I don’t want to be sprayed with a machine-gun——”

“Machine-gun? You don’t mean to say——”

“Some of these niggers are modern,” the little man laughed, “an’ Mammy’s a gangster! There’s a rumour about that Gatling—an’ you can lay it’s true enough. Anyway, it’s no use waiting to find ourselves dead. There’s sea-room up the coast in Wafer Bay——”

“You’ll have to run well out,” broke in Mr. Donne. “Pym’s up there—with a Mannlicher rifle.”

“Pym! . . . Guessed as much when I put my peepers on you just now. . . . We’ll be safer a mile out; and you can tell me the yarn as we go.”

Andy said no more for the moment, but busied himself in getting the boat out of the bay. Ten minutes later they were making past the headland; and then he looked towards the oncoming vessel.

“That’s Mammy Venus’s craft, sure enough, and footing it. . . . Didn’t think the old tank could have made the pace.”

Rounding the bluff, they saw Wafer Bay with its yellow beaches and long rollers creaming up them, and as he set the boat’s nose to carry them well out, from his place at the wheel the little man surveyed the long stretch of coast.

“‘Pym!’ you said. But there ain’t so much as a raft in sight. How the deuce did the man get here?”

“On a magic carpet,” answered Mr. Donne, remembering the phrase his friend had used in the morning.

“What the blazes d’you mean, boy?”

His friend stretched a hand pointing towards the shore. “Look up the coast, Andy, and high. See that silver streak dropping down from that ledge——”

“Water chute! . . . yes.”

"Below that there's a bluff——"

"See it!" interrupted the other.

"Beyond that there is an inlet just as still as a duck pond, and there a goodish-sized air-plane is moored."

"The devil!"

"It's a two-seater; and up there," he nodded in the direction of the plateau, "is Pym with that girl from the Three Blue Anchors."

"My hat!"

Mr. Donne looked shorewards again, his eyes roving along the beach in an endeavour to pick out the three huts which he had discovered on his outward journey. He failed to find them, but he explained.

"If you took the glasses and watched the shore carefully you might glimpse three old huts——"

"There's lots in Cocos, built by treasure-seekers—*vide* various works in the 'Frisco library."

"Daresay. I only saw those three, and in one of them there's a poor chap whose throat was cut this morning whilst he was asleep in his hammock."

"Hades!" ejaculated Andy, taken by surprise.

Mr. Donne thrust a hand into his tunic pocket and drew forth the watch he had annexed.

"Here's the poor devil's watch," he said, "still ticking!" He pressed the spring and, as the cover shot back, he held the watch forward for the other to see. "And there's Seraphina's picture."

"Phew!" Andy whistled and glanced at the photograph. Then he asked. "That fellow in the hut then is likely to be the one who sent the girl the message by Michael Pym?"

"Sure thing, I should say!"

"And who d'you reckon scuppered him?"

"Pym!"

"I was sort of thinking it might be," Andy looked at his friend. "Did he give you that beauty mark you're wearing across your cheek?"

"No, though he tried to do more. The Winchester burst. Must have plugged the muzzle some way, I fancy. If it hadn't there'd have been an end of Pym. . . . But I'll tell you the whole yarn in a minute or two after I've used the iodine. This is no climate to neglect open wounds, and I've got one on the wrist too through mishandling that cane-knife. . . . I'll be back in a brace of shakes and you shall have the whole story. It'll interest you, I'll warrant."

"I'll lay it will," said the little man, and as Donne slipped into the little cabin, he looked thoughtfully in the direction of the shore, and continued to watch it until his friend returned, with a strip of plaster over the wound on his face and ear, and a bandage on his wrist.

"Now," said Donne, "I'll tell you the yarn, and you may believe as much of it as you can."

He gave a vivid account of his recent adventures, and Andy Winstowe listened without a single interruption until the end. Then he commented quietly.

"It's a dandy yarn. If I'd read it in a newspaper I'd have said that the fellow who wrote it had been hitting the rye heavily. . . . What d'you make of that water-finding business, boy?"

"Nothing! It has me stumped. There's water enough in Cocos without hunting for it with a divining-rod."

The little man nodded. "Know that! It's in all the books that them skull-and-cross-bones fellows regularly watered their ships at Cocos." He was thoughtfully silent for a moment or two then he said quietly: "It ain't reason that Pym was looking for water, so it's sense that he was looking for something else."

"What? . . . Bonito's hoard?"

"I reckon that's the ticket."

"But with a dowser's twig——" began Mr. Donne.

"Wait, Jack! Know anything about dowsers?"

"Not much, except that the twig they carry is supposed to dance and twist when they cross running water, and I don't know that I believe that very strongly. Seems to me to be a sort of magic that a witch doctor might claim."

Andy Winstowe grinned. "You ain't got enough faith, boy. That's your trouble. Not that I'm such a true believer myself. But I've heard a thing about these dowsers that's queerer than water-finding, and that is that they can find metals—gold and silver—with that little stick which they use."

"That's a middling tall claim," said Mr. Donne sceptically.

"Maybe! Don't know that the claim can be substantiated, but it explains one thing that's worried me a goodish bit since you gave me the first chapter of this dime thriller."

"What is that?"

"Explains why Seraphina has been brought to Cocos Island. That poor beggar in the hut as like as not was partner with Pym—though he'd have been luckier if he'd been partner with a tiger. . . . Must have been something between him and Seraphina, or he'd never have carried her picture pasted in his watch, so that every

mortal occasion when he looked at the time he'd glimpse her face. . . . He'd likely know that the girl was a dowser, and he'd talk to Pym about her. Pym maybe knew about dowzers finding metals as well as fluids, and as they were hunting for treasure that they hadn't found, hit on the idea of bringing the girl out here."

"But they could have got a dowser nearer at hand," objected Mr. Donne.

"They sure could. There's bushels of 'em in the States, and an advert in a 'Frisco paper would have brought 'em in by the dozen. . . . But treasure-hunting is a secret sort of business, and Mike Pym, if he thought he were on a good thing, wouldn't want the town-crier to shout the news. . . . Besides, any fellow they'd got that way when he heard what they were after would have wanted his whack. As like as not he'd have claimed an equal share, an' that ain't the sort of thing that Pym would hanker after. He'd want to scoop the whole pool—as he proved this morning by cutting his partner's throat. . . . You get me, boy? . . . Seraphina was a sure proposition, and a cheap one. That man of hers knew she had the gift, and he sent her a message to come along and bring that picture with her—for her true love's sake, as you might say."

"I'd say no such damned foolishness, Andy, and you know it. . . . But what I want to know is this—supposing you're right, why didn't he go for Seraphina himself instead of sending a scoundrel like Pym? He must have had some notion of what the blackguard was."

"Maybe! Maybe not! Suppose he had, he wouldn't trust Michael here on his lonesome in case he should find and walk off with the dibs in his absence. On the other hand, Pym may have hypnotised him same as he has done Seraphina. May have got something out of him the chap hadn't meant to tell, and then just cleared out and left the poor beggar to stew here on Cocos till he'd time to give him attention—as he did this morning, if you ain't mistaken."

"I'm not!"

"No, boy. I don't reckon you are. . . . I'm just putting a reasonable case. . . . And there's another thing to be deduced from what you told me at the Café Cordova."

"What's that?"

"Something happened here between Pym and Mammy Venus and her crowd. . . . Exactly what it was is just a guess, but from the way he joshed her in that tavern of yours, it's middling clear that the nigger woman had tried to scupper him, an' thought she'd done it. You agree to that?"

"There's nothing more certain in the whole business."

"No! . . . Well, just let the little grey cells buzz, and tell me one or two things.

Firstly, why did Mammy try to feed Pym to the little crabs he talked about? Secondly, how did Mammy come into this business, which ain't her regular line at all? And, thirdly, how did the old golliwog come to roll into that tavern in Cornwall, and if we ain't doing her an injustice, sail off with the sign-board?"

"Oh, spit out what's in your mind, Andy, and don't worry me with your infernal conundrums."

The little man grinned, and then explained.

"Well, it's like this. I guess Mammy and Pym were sitting on the same side when this racket began—playing that poor beggar back in the hut for a sucker, as like as not. Who the chap was we don't know, not proper, nor how they picked him up. But they got his secret out of him somehow, and maybe thought there was more in it than there is in most treasure secrets, and together they set out to work the innocent. Then one of them crossed the other, may have been Pym, may have been Venus. Either one is likelier than the other, an' you can bet high on both. . . . Anyway, Mammy tried to feed Pym to the crabs; made a misfire; and both of them, with an idea that part of the secret they didn't know was to be picked up there, showed up at the Three Blue Anchors, hoping to get their teeth right into it. . . . Pym was nearest the meat. He knew about that little picture in the kitchen, while, for a safe bet, he'd only told Mammy about the sign. More, he knew about Seraphina being skilled with the little twig; and as like as not he'd a genuine message from that poor devil whom he slew this morning. . . . Anyway, that's how I figure the business out; an' if you can better it, boy, I'd like to hear."

Mr. Donne pondered and shook his head. "You haven't left much out, Andy, and it seems to me you've locked the picture neatly together."

"Got a gift that way," the little man grinned. "Was a whole five weeks in hospital two years back, and jig-saw puzzles were given to the patients to keep 'em calm and their minds occupied. I did the lot an' asked for more. . . . Comes easy when you've got the knack, an' I take no credit for this one. But what I want to know is, what the heck is going to happen next?"

Mr. Donne looked across a mile of sea to the yellow beaches of Wafer Bay, then he said thoughtfully: "There's Seraphina to consider."

"Yes, an' there's Mike Pym and Mammy Venus. Both of 'em with a downer on you, my son."

"Pooh!" answered his friend with a flick of the thumb and finger.

Andy Winstowe's eyes twinkled. "Well," he drawled, "there's old Benito Bonito's cache. That's what we're after, ain't it?"

"Of course, you duffer. But if Seraphina and her little stick can help Pym to find



it she can help us.”

“I ain’t challenging that. But last time I went to church I heard a sermon which was a sound line. It was on ‘First things first,’ an’——”

“What the——”

“Wait! What I want to know is what is the first thing in this business we’re on?”

“Why, the treasure, of course!”

“An’ that girl?”

Mr. Donne looked almost embarrassed. A slow wave of blood dyed his face, and his eyes were as uneasy as those of a boy caught red-handed in some misdemeanour. Then he spoke, a little jerkily.

“As I said . . . Seraphina will be—useful!”

“Then you reckon we’ve got to get her first?”

“A sound policy,” agreed Mr. Donne. “If there’s anything in that twig business it’ll make the job easier.”

“A whole lot.” The little man laughed. Then he said with genial mockery. “Come into the open, boy, an’ don’t try to chase yourself round corners.”

“What the dickens do you mean, Andy?”

“Mean? Well, just that you an’ me have to get that girl out of Pym’s hands as fast as we know how, an’ be damned to Bonito’s dollars an’ diamonds. We ain’t either of us top-notchers for a mission Bible-class, but there’re things we don’t stand for noways. You know it, you old hypocrite, an’ you needn’t blush for it. May be a weakness, but it ain’t one to be ashamed of—not by a long chalk.”

Mr. Donne did not trouble to contradict his friend. “Well, I’ll own I’m glad you see it that way, Andy. I was hoping you might. Question is what’s to be done about it?”

The other looked towards the shore, then his eyes went to the wooded heights, and he frowned.

“Bit of a tangle across there, an’ it won’t be easy to find Pym’s camp. But we’ve got to do it or Mammy Venus will; an’ if she gets ahead of us, Lor’ knows what will happen. Might get it into her woolly pate that the girl knows more than she really does, an’ she’d use nigger ways to make her own up to things. An’ Pareja, being what he is, would go one worse. As soon as we’ve camped an’ fed an’ rested we’ll sure have to get busy. . . . Won’t take Mammy long to find out about that poor chap in the hut, an’ when she does she’ll guess that Pym is ahead of her, an’ the show will start on the tick.”

“There’s one thing in our favour,” said Mr. Donne, slowly. “The coming of the yacht will be a distraction to the fellow. If he’s on the look-out he can’t help being

aware of its arrival. And he'll be more concerned about Mammy and her crowd than about you and me."

"I sure hope so! But there ain't no telling. Pym's a tough proposition, an' he'll keep a bright look-out for both Mammy and us. You'll see."

He glanced inshore again. A deep indentation of the coast revealed itself with a tiny beach, over which coco-palms leaned towards the sea. Behind, there was the snowy gleam of plunging water. As he observed it he checked the speed, and drew his companion's attention to the place.

"There's our dock—landing-place and fresh water provided. From that point over there one could keep a look-out down the coast, and be away before any boat could happen along. Might go further an' fare worse. . . . What about it, boy?"

"Should do very nicely."

"Right! Here goes!"

He turned the wheel. The boat swept round; and they ran into the little gulf, and presently, with the boat moored, over their meal discussed further plans. In the course of the discussion Andy Winstowe revealed that, whilst he could put the thought of a girl's well-being before treasure, he was in no wise indifferent to the latter.

"There's that picture. Pym didn't grab it for nothing. We've got to get that as well as Seraphina. Maybe there's something about it that'll make things as clear as daylight or nearly so."

"Doesn't seem to have done that for Pym."

"Not yet, maybe; but any minute it may, an' when it does Seraphina's life won't be the value of two cents'-worth of peanuts. . . . As soon as the heat slackens we'll have another go for that plateau. If Pym thinks old Bonito's cache is up there, it's sure his camp ain't far away. And when we find him——"

He left the sentence unfinished, and began to prepare for the expedition, whilst his companion gave closer attention to the injuries he had suffered. About three o'clock they started, Donne being armed with the spare rifle; and climbing above the small cascade, found that the watercourse was a practicable way up the hill, sparing them the infinite labour of finding a way through the jungle. In the course of three-quarters of an hour they reached what appeared to be part of the plateau. There, whilst they rested, they looked over the tree-tops below them to the sea, and noted that the yacht, before the coming of which they had fled, was riding at anchor three-quarters of a mile out, whilst between it and the island a rowing boat was making for the shore. As he watched it, Andy spoke:

"Told you so. Mammy's not the lady to let the bats roost in her wool. As like as

not she'll take a look at that hut, and when she sees what has happened she'll guess that Michael Pym is here, and get busy. Shouldn't wonder if things were to get lively soon. . . . But we've to be first at the post."

After resting a little they moved forward, searching for the track of the fire through the tall jungle grass. It was half an hour before Andy, thrusting a painful way through the grass, stepped right into the fire-cleared area, and as quickly stepped back.

"Hit it!" he said, jubilantly. "Point is, which way do we go now?"

Since he had no idea of their position, Mr. Donne could not say; and as he agreed with his friend that the chances were even, they tossed a coin and following its indication they turned to the right, and very cautiously began to pick their way along the track of the fire, ready at any moment to leap to cover in case of need. For ten minutes or so they marched, their backs to the wind which blew strongly on the plateau. Then Donne stopped and looked backward, sniffing the air like a spaniel dog.

"Smell anything, Andy?" he inquired.

"Fire!" announced the little man after turning upwind. "That coin led us wrong. Pym's camp is somewhere at the back of us. Guess we're due to do a right about."

They returned on their steps, passed the point where they had reached the plateau, and then again Mr. Donne stopped as a blast of hot wind smote his face. There was an anxious look in his eyes as he addressed his friend.

"Hear anything, Andy?"

Andy listened. "Queer sort of humming sound, an' a faint crackle like a radio mast sparking."

"Put your face dead to the wind, and tell me how it feels."

"Thundering hot," answered Andy. "Getting sultry. Don't know what sort of thunderstorms they have on Cocos, but I should say there was one about due." He looked up at the sky, then he added, "Sky's getting overcast pretty quick."

"Overcast!" said Mr. Donne grimly. "That's smoke. Somewhere in front of us this grass has been fired."

"Fired! My stars! That means that Pym——"

"Hark!"

There were explosive sounds. The humming was fast becoming a roar. Overhead a flock of birds came downwind in panic flight, and whilst they stood a small herd of wild pigs with a tusky boar leading broke from the grass, and racing towards them at panic speed, passed them without the slightest notice.

"They know what's coming. They're scared to death . . . We've got to get out of

this quick, Andy.”

“Downhill, towards the sea!” said the little man tersely. “With this wind the fire will travel the other way.”

They made for the slope of the hill, lost themselves in the grass and heard the increasing roar which proclaimed the advancing fire.

“My God!” cried Andy. “We’ll be licked up like flies in a furnace.”

“Steady, little man . . . This way. Ah! Heaven be praised! Here’s a pig run. Come on.”

They fled along the beaten track, struck the slope of the hill, and saw the flames leap through ochre-coloured smoke well below them.

“Whole place is going up like a firework!” cried Andy, beginning to run back.

“Wait!” said Donne. “No use just running round like scared rabbits. Listen.”

The little man, his humorous eyes weeping by reason of smoke and the sting of flying ash, stood still.

“Hear nothing but that hell’s roar!” he said sharply.

“But there is something. Follow me!”

A gust of smoke swirled round them, but Donne plunged into it, as if he would meet the fire, and his companion followed, downhill, but moving to the left. They had taken not fifty steps, when Andy became aware of the sound that Donne had heard through the roar and crackle of flame.

“The crash of water!” he yelled. “Heaven be praised.”

Three minutes later they found the water—a fall shooting over a much-overhanging ledge and spouting thirty or forty feet before it touched earth again. Owing to the projecting ledge the curve of its fall was such that there was a considerable space under the cataract, strewn with boulders and lush with moss, that was no more than splashed with water. It was possible for active and desperate men to scramble down and creep under the fall; and in a very little time they were among the moss-grown rocks, breathing heavily, and staring at the veiling cascade. Presently Andy Winstowe gave a nervy laugh, which evidenced the strain of the peril they had escaped.

“Regular . . . fireproof curtain!” he shouted. “Between water an’ fire give me water every time.”

He seated himself upon one of the rocks. Donne took another, and with a forced air of nonchalance began to pack a pipe. The little man watched him almost derisively.

“Oh, no!” he shouted, to make himself heard through the din of the water, “we were not afraid!”

“Wrong, little man! I was never so funky in all my life. If we’d been caught we’d have shrivelled quicker than moths in a candle flame.”

“Don’t I know it? . . . I felt my back hairs singeing as I ran . . . How d’you think that little hell started?”

“Pym!”

“Think he saw us and fired the grass to roast us?”

“There’s an alternative! May be just clearing the ground. It was up there Seraphina was doing her dowsing trick this morning, remember. The fellow may be getting warm on the treasure.”

“Well, he’s made me warm. . . . I hope he’ll roast in his own fire.”

They fell silent. Under the curve of the water it was cool and the air was clear; but they were given glimpses of the inferno on the hillside, the whole of which appeared to be blazing. Occasionally through the din of the water came the report of a bursting tree or the crash of one plunging to the earth, and as the time passed on, and the fire still raged, Andy asked a question.

“How long d’you reckon this Guy Fawkes business’ll go on, boy?”

“Till it burns itself out.”

“And we’ll have to stop here?”

“Safest thing to do.”

“Um!”

The little man grew silent again, but presently Mr. Donne saw his lips moving and thought he caught a mutter.

“What’s that you’re saying, Andy?”

“Tell you,” grinned Andy. “Lend me your ears!” He stood up and mouthed in the fashion of an orator. “In some places of its overflowing, the rocky side of the hill being more than perpendicular and hanging over the plain beneath, the water pours down in a cataract, so as to leave a dry space under the spout, and form a kind of arch of water. The freshness which the falling water gives the air in this hot climate makes this a delightful place——”

“What the deuce——”

“S-s-h-h! That’s the buccaneer fellow I told you about—Lionel Wafer, describing Cocos. . . . When I was a cartographer peddling treasure-maps to suckers in the Barbary Coast bars at ’Frisco, that was part of the stock-in-trade. I’ve recited it that often that sometimes I say it in my slumbers. . . . But I’ll own I allus thought the fellow was a liar—till now! . . . When I meet him in heaven, I’ll apologise.” He laughed, looked round, and then gave an exclamation. “My hat!”

“My hat—what?”

“Sun’s going down, I’ll swear. It’ll be dark in ten minutes.”

“No twilight in the tropics, y’know, Andy.”

“Then we’re marooned here till morning. . . . We’ll sure be a pair of rheumatic cripples come sunrise.”

“Mayn’t be so bad as that. . . . There’s a moon remember, and if the fire burns out we’ll have a chance to quit.”

That chance came a whole three hours later when, chilled to the bone they crept out into the super-heated air, and through veiling smoke saw the full moon, the colour of an orange, over the sea. Around them here and there were flickering fires, little tufts that glowed suddenly red in the night wind, whilst smoke stung their nostrils and brought tears to their eyes. Round the curve of the hill the fire still raged, sending up myriads of glowing sparks, under a canopy of smoke which the blaze below made a murky ochre, and faintly there reached them a dull roar which even the everlasting boom of the sea could not drown.

“Nice little inferno!” commented Mr. Donne. “Wonder what Michael Pym thinks of his handiwork.” He stared round and upward towards the plateau, and as he did so stiffened like a pointer scenting game then he ejaculated tensely: “The devil.”

“Where?” asked Andy flippantly.

“Over there, little man,” Donne answered in a voice shaking with excitement. “On the edge of the flat to the right of the stump, glowing as if somebody were blowing it . . . You see——”

“A little fire!”

“No. It’s too white and steady for——”

“By the Mass! . . . A hurricane lamp.”

“Yes! The luck’s in. There can only be one man with a lamp up there.”

“Pym?”

“Who else? . . . The Lord hath delivered him into our hands.”

“Scripture!” Andy sniffed. “I ain’t a believer in miracles. Don’t be too sure, boy.”

“I’m going to make certain.”

“So’m I. But for the land’s sake go cautious. Pym ain’t a man to be took on the hop, as I reckon you ought to know. Just throw off the safety catch of your gun before you start. A quick trigger takes the trick every time.”

Then, as he caught a faint click, and Mr. Donne, turned and started up the still smoking slope, he threw off his own safety catch, made sure there was a shell in the breech, and followed at his heels.

## CHAPTER XI

### ENCOUNTERS

It was further to the white glimmer of light than it had seemed; and apart from the necessity for a cautious approach, a direct advance was not possible. Underfoot the ground was burning hot. Here and there a patch of peaty stuff, still smouldering, glowed suddenly red in the night wind, and occasionally some half-burned tuft, or partly consumed stick, crackled into flame. Every moment or two they were forced to make a detour, wasting much time, but presently they topped the edge of the plateau—and lost the light that was their guiding star.

But there, the night wind coming from the direction in which they were making, blew with refreshing coolness, and as he saw ahead the tops of tall grass against the moonlit sky, Donne understood.

“Fire started just ahead and travelled this way. The grass is still standing in front and will give us cover. But we’ve got to find a way through, and it’s a dollar to a peanut that any track we find goes slap to Pym’s camp.”

“Can’t hit it too soon for me,” answered the other. “Lead on, Macbeth.”

“Macduff was the man, Andy.”

“Was he?” The little man chuckled. “Well, if he knew his job his name doesn’t matter two hoots. Get forward, boy.”

They moved on towards the unburned grass, and within two or three minutes of reaching it, struck a way through. Something caught Donne’s foot as he moved into the opening, and, stooping, he groped to find out what it was. His hand found a rough tuft where the grass had been shorn clean away, a foot or so from the roots, and he whispered information to his companion.

“No hog-run. Track has been cut with a cane-knife. And it bears left, I fancy.”

“Which it should do,” answered Andy. “The light was somewhere that way on the edge of the slope. . . . Guess this is Pym’s private approach—no hawkers or circulars wanted. Hope we get him on the hop, but I ain’t sanguine. He’s a slim beggar, an’ I’ll lay them queer orbs of his can see in the dark like a cat’s. . . . Keep your rifle ready.”

They moved along cautiously, in single file as the track necessitated. The going was not easy, for neither the moonlight nor the glow of the fire behind them penetrated further than the tops of the tall grass stalks; the ground itself being in deep shadow. Donne, still leading, moved slowly among the impeding tufts, alert for the first glimmer of the lamp, which would reveal the camp they sought. But it was his ears that give him intimation of its nearness. Through the swish of the grass in the

wind, and the now distant roar of the fire, a man's voice lifted in anger, made itself heard.

"Perdition! but you will, girl, or I'll flay you!"

The answer to this brutal threat came in a feminine voice that seemed to be rising to hysteria.

"No! No! NO!"

"Heck!" whispered Andy, as his friend stopped to listen. "There's Pym at his devilment! We're on the tick! If——"

A scream of fear broke on his words, and as Donne started forward sundry sounds indicating hurried movements came out of the gloom ahead. Then directly in front there was a noise of running feet. Andy Winstowe voiced a conviction in a hurried whisper.

"Both coming this way! . . . Look after the girl. I'll tackle——"

In the darkness Mr. Donne became aware of a racing shadow. It stumbled, pitched forward and almost knocked him over, whilst a shuddering, inarticulate gibbering of pure terror smote his ears. Instinctively he swung an arm, gripped a waist, heard a faint moan, and was immediately aware of a dead weight on his arm.

"Fainted!" he ejaculated for Andy's information, and in the same second blinked, as the light of a swinging lantern carried knee-high lit the track between the grass.

Then there broke explosively from the bearer of the lantern an expletive indicative of utter surprise.

"Hell!"

"For God's sake, out of the way, boy," Andy Winstowe's whisper sounded in his ear. "Get her away, an' give me a clear target."

Donne, hugging the girl's sagging body closely, staggered sideways out of the track. As he did so there was a crash as Michael Pym, with admirable promptness, dropped the lantern and stamped on it with a heavy foot, leaving the track dark.

"Damn!" whispered Andy Winstowe feelingly, and fired at a venture.

Almost instantly an automatic pistol answered and a bullet sang down the track. The little man backed in the grass almost on his friend's toe, and again gave instructions.

"Get! You can't fight and help the girl, who may get hurt. I'll manage Pym. Make for the boat! Sharp! The beggar's coming."

It seemed inglorious to go—and leave Andy to battle! But Mr. Donne knew his tubby little friend very well and had no fear for him. Also there was much in what he urged. In the darkness Seraphina was just another billet for an aimless bullet, and it was incumbent to get her out of the fighting zone.



“All right!” he said. “I’ll try and make the boat. If you need help——”

“Help!” The little man chuckled. “You’ll see. . . . Quit!”

Bearing, or rather dragging his burden, Mr. Donne moved away, making a great deal more noise than he wished. As he did so there was a flash, a pistol crack, the swish of a bullet groping through the grass for a living billet, and in almost the same instant of time Andy’s rifle answered, but apparently without result.

“Shot at the flash! . . . missed!” thought Mr. Donne, and finding his burden impeded his going, reflected aloud: “This will never do.”

Halting, he gently lowered the girl to the ground. Then he slung the strap of his rifle over his shoulder, and stooping, lifted the unconscious girl, and put her over his other shoulder as if she had been a sack of potatoes. Then he continued on his way, keeping, as well as he could, parallel with the track. Soon, however, he found that, burdened as he was, progress was impossible through the giant grass, and he was driven back to the open track again. There he was able to travel more quickly, though the sound of occasional shots behind him proclaimed that in moving in the open there was considerable risk. But he told himself that a bullet was as likely to find the grass as the track, and kept on, his ears trying to gather news of what was happening behind him. He learned little that way. Now and again the sound of a shot reached him, and it seemed to him that the duellists had changed position considerably. Apparently, however, neither had suffered injury; and he found himself wondering if his friend were merely stalling Pym whilst he and Seraphina made their escape.

In a little time, however, other things demanded attention. The wind seemed to be veering and now came in hot, gusty waves on his right cheek. Further, the roar of the fire was certainly clearer and that, he thought, was rather ominous. When he reached the end of the swathe, and moved out to the burnt-out portion of the plateau, he learned the truth. The fire seemed to have doubled back, or at any rate, new fires had started lower down the hillside and between him and the sea there were a dozen places where the jungle was alight.

In some dismay he stood to consider the situation. It would be folly to try to make the cove where the boat was moored. To go down that hillside, which might any moment become a blazing inferno, would be to invite a fiery death both for the girl and himself. Whilst he reflected, he saw the fire run in a streak across a score of yards of sun-dried jungle, and a blast of hot air rising struck his eyes and nostrils stingingly. Assured that below was nothing but peril and almost certain death, he turned to stare in the other direction. There was no fire on the landward side of the plateau. The moon, shining murkily through the drifting smoke, revealed rising ground

and a hill barren of trees. He was still considering whether it might not be wise to make in that direction and, when Seraphina had revived, work round to the sea when the decision was taken from him. Below the level of the plateau, not twenty yards down the hill, he caught sight of something that moved, and as it moved glinted under the moon. He stared at it curiously, and was still staring when he heard a man's voice say in savage impatience:

“Santissima!”

Almost at the same moment the smouldering remains of a bush fanned by the wind crackled into flame and to his amazement revealed a face that even in that light he thought he recognised.

“Pareja!”

He caught the gleam of eyeballs in dark faces, proclaiming that the Colombian was not alone, and almost instantly there came a shout which told him that he had been seen. His mind worked with lightning rapidity. Here was new and unexpected peril. For himself, and even for the girl, it would be better to fall into the hands of Michael Pym than into those of the lanky Colombian half-breed. A shot sounded as he swung on his heel. He did not hear the bullet, which must have gone very wide; but he heard a voice calling on him to stand, which he ignored utterly as he moved across the plateau at a stumbling run.

He knew that, burdened as he was, he could run but a little way, and desperately he looked for cover. He found it just as the shouting behind him proclaimed that Pareja and his crew had topped the hill; and he found it by plunging straight into a very wall of grass. A forest fire will play the queerest tricks, as he knew, and as he now had proof, for whilst most of the plateau in front had been swept clean, this remained with only its outer stalks charred.

Thankful for the shelter, he thrust his way deeper into the tangle, and as he did so heard the report of a rifle at no great distance away, followed almost instantly by another, and that by an excited jabber of voices on the plateau. Plainly the running duel between Andy and Pym was continuing, and unaware of what was happening, those from whom he had fled were excited by the sound of the rifle-firing. Well, he thought, since it momentarily diverted attention from himself and the girl, the firing was a godsend, and he hoped it might continue until he was well away. But that hope was not realised. There was no more shooting for a while, and as he pressed his way deeper in the jungle grass he heard a voice shouting orders in a Spanish patois, bidding those addressed to spread out and beat the plateau. The hunt was out. In a little while his cover might be discovered, and, gasping by reason of his burden and the toil of forcing a way through the impeding stalks, he continued his slow but

desperate flight.

. . . The grass ended most unexpectedly and, despite the veiling drift of smoke, under the moon, he made out the tops of trees well below him; and a sloping hillside covered with bushes, the descent of which seemed practicable even for a burdened man. He stood looking downwards in indecision. Should he descend or not? A shout somewhere behind him put a term to his irresolution; and with a desperate feeling that it was neck or nothing he began to go down the slope.

The descent was not the simple thing it had seemed. In a very short time he reached a wide ledge, strewn with great boulders, from the edge of which he looked over into darkness. He sensed rather than saw a deep gulf which he could not pass, and kicking a loose stone he heard it fall on rock that must have been sixty or seventy feet below. The trees which he had observed obscurely from the plateau, as he now discovered, were on the further side of this abyss. There was nothing for it but to return or to explore and learn if there were any practicable way along the side of the hill.

The first course, as he decided promptly, was out of the question. As likely as not he would walk straight into the arms of the men searching the plateau; and quite apart from that, he was too exhausted to climb back, burdened with the weight of the unconscious girl. Against the alternative course there were the risks of exploring unknown country at night, for despite the moonlight the drifting whirls of smoke might easily hide some perilous place akin to this ledge. Then the thought occurred to him that it might be better to remain where he was, taking the chances, until the girl revived. There was plenty of cover among the rocks and, unless the searchers beat the place thoroughly, little chance of being observed. And as a further inducement there was the fact that, armed with a repeating rifle, short of an overwhelming rush of men, it would not be difficult to defend and hold the ledge.

He resolved to remain, and moving cautiously sought a place where he could lay the girl down and from which he could conduct the defence from cover should they be attacked. After a little search he found the very place in a nest of rocks that had slipped down from the hillside, behind which there was a mass of scree. Anyone descending that way must inevitably give notice of his approach and could be dealt with; whilst from behind the rocks he could watch the whole ledge.

Setting the still unconscious girl down, he unslung his rifle ready for action, then stretched his arms to take the cramp out of them. That done, he stood still as the rocks themselves, listening for any sound that would indicate the whereabouts of the pursuit.

The night was full of noise. From the distance came the roar of the fire, and

further away a dull background of sound—the dominant rumble of the sea. Several times there reached him the scream of birds, no doubt alarmed by the conflagration. Again, he heard a pounding of some heavy creature hurriedly changing ground and as snuffling grunts sounded in the night he guessed a wild hog, and once he thought he heard voices at some considerable distance, but was not sure. These latter sounds soon ceased, leaving only the fire's roar and the rumble of the sea; yet still he continued to listen, and after a little time became aware of a new sound, very distinct from the others—the musical sound of trickling water.

The water was somewhere not very far away, on the ledge he was certain, and the fact that it was there gave him an idea. Moving very cautiously he began to search for it, and presently discovered a tiny spring, dripping steadily from overhanging rock into a kind of natural basin, overflowing which it trickled away along the ledge to the abyss. He had lost his hat in his adventures of the morning, and as he suddenly remembered that, he was at some loss for means to convey the water to the unconscious Seraphina. His pocket held nothing that by any conceivable ingenuity could be transformed into a drinking vessel, and finally he was driven to soaking his handkerchief in the cold spring water, and then hurrying with it all dripping to the girl. He squeezed the handkerchief over her face, and damp and cold as it was laid it like a bandage on the girl's forehead.

In a short time he heard her breathe deeply; then the dark eyes opened, the arms were flung wide, and with the quick resilience of youth the girl sat up.

"Steady, Seraphina," he whispered. "And for your life, don't cry out."

He heard the girl gasp in a startled way, and saw her head bend forward as she stared at him in the darkness. Then she asked in a shaky whisper:

"W—who are you?"

"A man whom you have seen, but whom I can't hope you will remember."

"But where have I seen you?"

"At the Three Blue Anchors, your home in——"

"Dear God!"

The emotion in her voice moved him more than he would ever have thought possible, and divining something of what she was feeling, and afraid lest she should break into weeping, he deliberately tried to reduce the tension by a commonplace.

"You served me with a drink, once."

"And you remember me?" There was a note of curiosity in her tones, then she jerked in a sharp whisper, "When was it?"

Here, he thought was his opportunity to get a little closer to the realities of the moment.

“On the day that Michael Pym brought you a message from some man——”

“Some man!” The girl’s whisper had a snap in it. “The message was from my husband!”

Mr. Donne, in the language of the ring, suffered a knockout. He took the whole count, the whilst he stared at Seraphina incredulously. At the eleventh second he managed to gasp his surprise.

“Your husband! . . . I . . . I didn’t know!” Then as he remembered the dead man lying in the hut by the beach, he was shaken by profound pity, and he whispered to himself rather than to her: “God in heaven!”

At the words Seraphina leaned a little further forward.

“God in heaven,” she echoed. “Now why should you say that?”

Mr. Donne having allowed his feelings to run away with him, felt that the question was what he called a corker. And he could not escape it, even had he desired.

Seraphina was still leaning forward, waiting, and as the wind broke the smoke-cloud and the moon shone through, it revealed her dark eyes watching him with almost tigerish intentness. That fact disturbed him, and made him wonder what was behind it, but also it spurred him to take the nasty fence in front, since he must do so sooner or later.

“Well,” he said, “down by the shore over there is a hut where a man lies dead——murdered.”

“How do you know?” asked the girl quickly.

“Because, I saw him this morning,” and he felt in his tunic pocket and produced the dead man’s watch. “This is his. It has your picture inside the case, so I guess he must be——”

“You robbed him?” There was a harsh challenging note in her voice that disturbed him infinitely; and he was puzzled that she made no sort of outcry at the inference which even the dullest brain could not have escaped.

“No,” he answered. “I took the watch because it was the only means of identification that I could find.”

“You stole it after you had shot him?” The accusation which had been in her tones was in the open now, baldly stated, and he could deal with it.

“Good Lord, no! You must not think that, Seraphina. I found him quite by accident. He was dead. Lying in his hammock as if he had been taken whilst asleep——and he had not been shot——”

“Not been shot?” The girl’s whisper had a rising note which expressed incredulity. “But Pym said——”

“Ah!” Mr. Donne understood things better now. In the main that which he had

told her was stale news, which would certainly be one of the reasons why she had taken his statements so quietly. Also it was easy for him to comprehend why she had accused him of the man's death. Before the girl could continue he followed up his interjection with vigour. "Pym said I shot the man, I suppose? But as I have told you he was not shot at all. A knife had been used and his throat was cut. And the murderer was Pym. I am sure of it. I saw him up on the plateau there this morning when he and you were looking for something with a divining-rod——"

"There!" the girl broke in. "Another lie! We were not out this morning. How can I believe you about the—the other thing?"

For a moment Mr. Donne was at a loss. The girl denied to his face that which he had seen in broad daylight, and which he knew for a fact beyond challenge. Then the explanation came to him. She had been under Pym's mesmeric influence and in complete ignorance of what she did; and Pym, for his own reasons, had not told her.

"But it is the fact," he said quietly. "Pym is a big scoundrel, but possesses a queer power——"

"Don't I know that?" whispered the girl. "I've seen him make a dog go howling without having spoken a word. And he can call things, those dinky little birds in the wood that are like love-birds——"

"Not only birds!" broke in Donne. "You must know that, Seraphina."

For a space of seconds the girl did not reply; but when she did her voice was shaking.

"Maybe . . . I do! . . . Heaven deliver me! . . . I . . . I am afraid of Michael Pym. . . . When he whistles——" She broke off, and her hands jerked up in a despairing gesture then fell listlessly into her lap. Mr. Donne, understanding that she felt helpless and overwhelmed by a power that she did not comprehend, spoke reassuringly.

"Seraphina, you must not dwell on it. You must not think of it. That is the way to increase his power. You had better put the scoundrel completely out of your mind; or think of him only as the man who foully murdered your husband. Before God I swear he was the man who did that awful thing. As I was telling you this morning I met him and you with the dowser's-rod in your hand——"

"A queer tale," the girl interrupted. "I can find water. But here there's no need."

"No! I suspect he was using you to find something else than water, though you had no consciousness of what was happening at all. But we can talk of that later. What I want to tell you is that I talked with Pym face to face, across the rifles, and I accused him of murdering that man down there in the hut. I saw from his eyes that it was true—and he tried to shoot me. He is the murderer, though he should deny it a

thousand times——”

“I never thought of him,” broke in the girl. “He said that George had been shot by a stranger.” She interrupted herself. “And I watched him closely cleaning that knife of his. . . . Saints above! If I had known!”

There was a new note in her voice which rather startled her companion. Seraphina it seemed was capable of vengeful passion, and he was glad to know it since it must temper her will against Pym’s mesmeric power. But still he was puzzled by what seemed a complete absence of grief for her man and was moved to probe the matter.

“George? That was the name of your husband?”

“Yes! . . . I call him husband. And so he was . . . at the altar; but nowhere else. . . . It was my father’s wish, and he left me at the church door in Exeter, and went off to look for old Benito’s cursed treasure. . . . I’ve never seen him since; but I came here with Pym to meet him.”

“Pym really brought you a message from him, then?”

“He did! . . . George wanted me. He was on the track of the gold. But I never meant to go as I did. I never knew I’d left the Blue Anchors, till I woke up in a berth on a steamer going out of Bristol. What happened God knows. But Michael Pym was in the next cabin, and he had the little picture which had hung on the kitchen wall for donkey’s years——”

“S-s-s-h-h!” interrupted Mr. Donne as the girl’s voice under the whip of emotion rose to something beyond a whisper; and almost in the same instant he caught a sound which made him stretch a hand and cover hers, whilst almost in her ear he whispered:

“Quiet! There’s someone about!”

Seraphina showed remarkable self-possession. She remained quite still, and when from somewhere overhead there reached them the unmistakable sound of footsteps, she made no more than a little movement of the hand he held to indicate that she had heard. They remained so for a full half-minute, immovable as the rocks among which they sat; and Mr. Donne had time to wonder who the man might be, before they heard the steps again. He hoped that it might be Andy Winstowe, but waited to be assured of the fact, and whilst he waited, the unseen man revealed himself as surely as if he had shouted his name through the night. He began to whistle—the soft luring call which had sounded from the gorse when Donne had watched the girl go hurrying up the hill above her home. He felt her start and shiver, then he whispered commandingly:

“Stuff your fingers in your ears, Seraphina, and for God’s sake don’t move or

peak.”

He saw her follow that practical counsel, then he lifted his rifle, and turning silently, faced the slope of the hill, with the purpose to kill already fully shaped in his heart.



## CHAPTER XII

### MAMMY VENUS INTERVENES

The footsteps ceased, but the whistling continued, and feeling a slight movement at his side, Mr. Donne turned swiftly, afraid of what might happen. What he saw quietened his fears. Seraphina had altered her position. She was crouching face down to the rock, her hands still at her ears.

“Good girl!” he commented mentally, and finger on trigger once more gave his whole attention to the unseen siffleur.

For what appeared an intolerable time, nothing happened, save that the soft luring whistle went on, and oddly enough brought to the listener’s mind the picture of a shepherd-lad whom he had once seen piping home his sheep in Albanian hills. To that piping there had been a rather wild ending, for half a dozen bandits, who sought Mr. Donne’s life, had broken from the other side of the rocks where he was hiding, with coarse merriment had selected a sheep, taking particular care that it was young and tender, and had killed and cleaned it before his eyes, afterwards making a roast, during which operation he had slowly withdrawn to safer ground.

He grinned to himself at the vision, which a second or so later was replaced by another of Pym, standing above the terrace, whistling his damnable call, whilst his cold eyes searched among the shadows of the rocks, and mentally he gave expression to what at the moment was his supreme desire.

“God! . . . If only the beggar would step into the open!”

But Pym did not oblige. Though he continued to whistle as if he suspected that Seraphina was somewhere within sound of his call, he remained invisible. Silently as a stalking fox, Donne shifted his position a little, and lifted his head for a better view, but still he could not see the man, though from the sound of his whistling, he could be little more than a score of yards away. Then whilst he peered, the whistling ceased with startling abruptness. His first thought was that he had somehow betrayed himself and that Pym had suddenly become aware of the presence of both Seraphina and himself. A second later he knew better. Overhead there sounded a quick rush of feet. Someone shouted in Spanish and there was a noise of scuffling, during which a voice cried protestingly.

“Now, Mistah Pym, et sure ain’t no good foh yuh to kick lak——”

“Mammy Venus’s crowd!” thought Donne exultingly.

The protest was broken by a pistol shot. An unmistakable yelp of pain followed, then a triumphant laugh, a savage shout, and a ragged volley, with cries of men in pursuit. Mr. Donne nodded to himself. Pym it appeared had kicked to some tune,

and was now clear away, with Mammy Venus's lot in pursuit. Well, he thought that was nothing to cry about; and he hoped that the negress's crew would chase Michael Pym all round the island; and that Pym would then lead them into the jungle and lose them and himself. The farther they went the better, since every yard they ran made the rocky terrace a safer place for Seraphina, who had uncovered her ears and was now anxious to know what had happened.

"That man has gone?" she asked, and Mr. Donne ventured to laugh.

"At this moment I have a fancy that he is being chased by a little group of old friends who will skin him alive if they catch him."

"Who?"

"You remember that fat negress who was at the inn when Pym came——"

"That impudent blackamoor!"

"She and Pym are old acquaintances. I think they were working together before they met at the Three Blue Anchors. But there had been trouble and the negress and her crowd had tried to kill Pym. Indeed, he said as much that day in the bar-parlour; and if you ask me the business they were on together, and over which they quarrelled, had to do with the matter that brought your—er—husband to Cocos."

"You think that the black woman had met George?"

"I don't know. But Pym had; and I fancy he had wormed out of him all that he knew about Bonito's hoard, and about that little picture in the kitchen of your home. Also, he certainly knew about you."

"George must have talked to some tune!"

"Seems so; but there's a possibility that he didn't know that he had. Michael Pym may have hypnotised him——"

"You mean he made him talk, unbeknown to himself?"

"Fairly certain, I should say."

"Then George wasn't to blame?"

Mr. Donne hesitated, then exonerated the dead man.

"No more than any other man would have been who didn't know what he was doing."

"You think he really sent for me, or was that just Michael Pym's tale?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no use wrapping things up. I didn't altogether trust George. He'd worked on my father about the treasure; and as he wanted me, he persuaded my father to let him go after it, but only after he'd married me . . ." Seraphina sat quite still a moment, then added with devastating candour. "I reckon after all that the treasure came first, and why he should send for me, if he did, has me puzzled."

Donne thought he could explain that, and proceeded to do so.

“Did George know that you were a dowser, Seraphina?”

“Of course. He’d seen me find water. I was paid as much as a pound for the job.”

“Then I think that knowledge explains why he sent for you. Some water-finders claim to be able to find metals. He may have known that and thought you could help in the business. . . . That is a reasonable explanation.”

“That treasure again! . . . I knew it all along. . . . He put it first and all the time. No girl would like that!”

To that Mr. Donne had nothing to say. Privately he thought Seraphina was a little unreasonable, but he kept that to himself.

He would have liked to ask her as to the whereabouts of the picture which had been in the kitchen of the Three Blue Anchors, but the moment was not quite propitious. Seraphina’s views made him careful lest she should put him in the same category as the dead George, whose tragic death had by no means left her broken-hearted. He had an idea that the sketch was important, and a notion that if Pym had left it in his camp it would be well to secure it forthwith; but the view she might take of any effort he might make in that direction checked both interrogation and action. Seraphina seemed to think that she ought to come first, and, oddly enough, for a treasure-seeker, he shared the notion, though he was inclined to mock at himself for doing so.

Anyway, even from the point of view of the mere adventurer, it was necessary that as quickly as possible he should get the girl to a place of comparative safety. The ledge had served its purpose. The flight of Pym before that mixed crowd of Mammy’s had cleared the way for a move; and it was desirable to take the opportunity, for whilst the place would probably be safe enough through the night, morning would tell a different tale. Daylight would reveal their presence there to anybody who chanced to look; and there was always the possibility that Pym, dodging his pursuers, might return.

He stood upright and listened. The noise of the fire was receding, and there was no other sound but that of the sea. Then he spoke to the girl.

“If you feel able to walk, Seraphina, I think we might make a move.”

“Where to?” demanded the girl practically, as she stood up.

“Down the hill to the sea. I have a motor-boat, and once aboard it you should be safe from Pym.”

“He has an aeroplane.”

“Yes, I know. But that’s neither here nor there. You’ll be all right on the boat,

and I have a friend who can help to guard you.”

“You’ll take me away from this island?” asked the girl quickly.

“Of course. I shouldn’t think of leaving you here.”

“You’ll go at once? To-night?”

That was what Mr. Donne would have called a facer. He hesitated about his reply, and his hesitation was noticeable. Perhaps the girl guessed what was in his mind, for she asked abruptly:

“Why did you come here—you and your friend?”

The directness of the question left no room for evasion; and the man reflected that if Seraphina had any sense she must know that only one thing brought men to Cocos. He decided to be frank with her and make the thing clear once for all.

“Oh,” he said with a laugh, “like Pym, I came here to look for Benito Bonito’s hoard.”

“You own it!” answered the girl a little sharply, and he had a notion that there was a revival of her former suspicions of him.

“Why not? . . . I’ll tell you the whole thing, girl. When I strolled into the Three Blue Anchors the day you and I met, the very last thing in my mind was that I should ever come to this island treasure hunting——”

“Then you didn’t come to the Blue Anchors to find out things?” interjected Seraphina.

He laughed at the question, and his laughter, ringing true, convinced the girl more than his reply.

“When I crossed the threshold, I hadn’t a notion that there was anything to find out. But after I’d seen Pym and the nigger woman meet, I soon tumbled to the fact that there was something queer in the wind. Then an old gossip whom I met on the hill gave me the history of your family—which, if I may say so, was a queer one—and I remembered that there was a Bonito who was a pirate, who was supposed to have buried his treasure here and never fetched it away. The gossip told me about the little picture too, which was like the sign of your inn——”

“There’s a difference,” broke in the girl.

“Maybe! I don’t know of it. I’m just telling you what started me on this game, and I want you to believe me. He told me about the picture, and when I saw it I was interested, but could make nothing much of it. . . . But in the morning when your father found that Pym and you and the picture were gone together, the inn-sign, too ——”

“The inn-sign!” cried Seraphina in surprise. “Pym never took that!”

“No,” laughed Donne. “I fancy Mammy Venus lifted that work of art. . . . But, as

I was saying, when he found you'd gone, and that the mulatto who was drinking in the taproom had been murdered, he was mightily put out, and he talked rather wildly. 'A whole shipload of treasure,' was one of things he mentioned; and as I'd heard the mulatto mention Cocos, it was easy to guess what was in the wind, particularly for anyone who remembered about Pirate Bonito as I did. I suggested to your father that he should let me into the secret, but he wouldn't——"

"He'd already let George in, remember."

"Well, I didn't know that, and as he wouldn't have me for a partner, I told him that treasure-trove was any man's money, and just set out for Cocos as fast as I could. . . . Barring details, that's the whole story, and may God strike me dumb if it isn't true. . . . So now you have it from A to Z."

He had spoken with convincing passion, and he waited for the girl's reply. It did not come immediately, and he grew afraid lest he should have failed to bring down her distrust. As seconds passed in silence his apprehensions increased, and at last he broke out.

"For God's sake, Seraphina, speak. Say you believe me."

"If it's necessary I'll tell you—yes!"

"And you'll trust me?"

"I've nobody else to trust," answered the girl in a quivering whisper.

"That's not good enough!" he said almost harshly. "It's all or nothing with me! . . . You'll trust me, girl?"

Then Seraphina spoke frankly. "Yes; with my life."

"That's what I wanted," answered the man with a sudden exultation in his voice. "Now we know where we stand, and I swear that nought shall hurt you without having hurt me first."

"And Bonito's treasure?" asked Seraphina, harking back a little.

"Oh! That!" laughed Mr. Donne. . . . "We'll gather it, Seraphina, if it's possible. No sense in leaving good money to rust. . . . But I'll promise you this, that if it comes to a press, and I have to pick between you and a chest of jewels—the jewels can go to perdition. . . . Just that! . . . Now if you're ready we'll start."

They left the ledge, and climbed back to the plateau. As they reached it, Donne, with his hand on the girl's arm, halted.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Tell me if you hear anything moving."

For quite two minutes they stood as if turned to stone, then Seraphina whispered. "Nothing!"

"That's so," agreed Donne, "whichever way Pym and those niggers went, they're not about here."

He considered for a moment, then he said tentatively.

"I don't like to miss a chance, girl. Pym won't be at his camp, and it might be worth while to take a look round while there is an opportunity."

"You want that little picture he stole from our kitchen at home?" asked Seraphina with swift understanding.

"You've whacked the nail, my dear. It's no use leaving it in Michael Pym's hands if it is of any value. Did he carry it about with him?"

"He kept it in a little leather case," replied the girl, "with some maps and books."

"And naturally he wouldn't be carrying that when he chased you through the grass. It seems to me, Seraphina, that it would pay us to take a look round the scoundrel's camp, if we can find it."

"All one to me," answered Seraphina.

"Then we'll have a try for it. . . . We've to cut straight through this grass to the track where I met you, then turn right. It will be tough going, but that can't be helped. If you hear any sound of movement be sure to give me warning."

"I will," answered Seraphina.

They entered the grass. The passage was very difficult, but at last they reached a place where the moonlight revealed a narrow lane through the tall spears.

"We've hit it, I think," whispered Donne exultantly. "Wait. I'll make sure." Stooping, he groped about. His hand encountered tufts which had been shorn with a knife. "Not a doubt of it," he said. "We'll turn right, and we shouldn't have far to go."

He led the way down the narrow track, with Seraphina very close at his heels, and within ten minutes saw an open place with the red glow of a fire directly in front of him.

"Had Pym a fire?" he asked.

"Yes! Outside the tent."

"Tent! I hadn't thought of that."

He stared intently to his front, and beyond the fire, under the moonlight, dimly perceived the outline of a tent that, as he guessed from its comparative inconspicuousness, must be of the green, rot-proof canvas variety.

"We're right on it," he whispered. "And I don't think Pym is home yet. Our luck is in to-night. . . . But move quietly. One never knows! Pym is as cunning as a weasel."

Again they moved forward, and as they reached the open place, free of trees and jungle grass, but strewn with boulders, once more Mr. Donne halted and examined the camp closely. The fire was red embers and plainly had not been

recently replenished. Under the moonlight now he could see the tent plainly. The flies stood wide, but no one was visible, and he was sure that there was no one in the camp.

"The chance of a lifetime," he whispered cheerfully. "We'll go and take what we want, Seraphina."

They threaded a way between the rocks together; and assured there was no one in the tent, Donne entered, and striking a match looked round for the case. He found it without difficulty. It was lying open, face downwards on the ground, the books and papers which it had held scattered around. As he saw that, he voiced the conviction which gripped him in a couple of words.

"Too late!"

He had no doubt of that. Those scattered books and papers told their own story. Someone had been before him, and there was only one thing that could have been sought. As the match burned out he struck another, and kneeling on the ground as well as he could by the feeble light, swiftly examined the spilled contents of the case. The picture which had been cut from the frame in the kitchen of the Three Blue Anchors was not among them. He struck several matches whilst he searched; and at last, quite convinced of the uselessness of further searching, he stood up, and dropping the burned-out match, he whispered to Seraphina:

"The little picture has gone."

"Perhaps, after all, Michael Pym took it with him," said the girl.

"No," he answered. "That case has been searched by someone; and whoever it was took the picture. I feel it in my bones. The question is—who?"

"One of those men of that blackamoor woman, as like as not," suggested Seraphina.

"Yes!" he answered, and found support for the girl's suggestion, as he reflected that Mammy Venus had been interested in the inn-sign which was more or less the replica of the picture; and that like Pym himself she might have learned of the picture from the ill-fated George. Then he added, "That fairly gravels us."

"Oh, I don't know," said Seraphina. "I think I could draw that picture with my eyes shut, having lived with it ever since I could toddle. You don't know everything. My father was always staring at it; and there were times in my growing-up when I had to stare too, because he had an idea that my young eyes might see something that he had missed." She broke off, and then added carelessly, "But they never did."

"If you can draw it——" he began, and broke off as the girl half turned and cast a swift glance behind her. "What is it?"

"I thought I heard——"

The words broke off abruptly, as from somewhere outside the tent came the sound of a chuckling laugh; an eerie blood-curdling sound heard in the prevailing circumstances, and with a thought that Michael Pym had returned, Mr. Donne gave vent to a whispered expletive.

“Damnation!”

He lifted his rifle, and moving swiftly to get the girl behind him, stared through the open flies of the tent. He saw no one; but that someone was there he had the assurance of his ears, for again he caught the chuckling laugh expressive of mirthful triumph, and as the chuckle ended a voice hailed him:

“Ah say, boss, put down dat gun!”

He recognised the voice instantly and cried out in sheer surprise.

“Mammy Venus!”

“Sure, boss, yuh got it pat. An’ now yuh know, jest drop duh gun. Ah ain’t goin’ to do yuh no harm, but dat honey of yours an’ me hev sure got to confèr, an’ dere’s a short gun covering yuh dat close dat ef it goes off yuh’ll be messed-up terr’ble.”

Mr. Donne was not in a position to dispute the statement, but he was prepared to take chances. Inside the tent it was almost dark, and, as he reflected to himself, Mammy Venus dared not show herself so long as he held his rifle. And if she were alone, all was not lost by a long chalk. He braced himself for action, and at the same time slipped a hand to his waist.

“But what’s the great idea, Mammy?” he asked, and whilst he did so drew his knife and passed it to Seraphina.

“Dat’s noding to do with yuh, sah. Jest drop duh gun.”

“The back of the tent!” he whispered to Seraphina. “Slit it.” Then he answered the negress: “But the lady is in my charge, and you can’t expect me to do just what you want because——”

“Bottle it!” broke in Mammy. “An’ drop duh gun.”

“Well, if I must!” he said, as he heard the canvas behind him rip. “But I wouldn’t call you trustful.” He loosed his hold on the rifle barrel, but caught the sling, holding it close to his leg, in the hope that in the deep dusk of the tent his manœuvre would not be observed, and at the same time he whispered to Seraphina.

“Go!”

He heard a slight rustle, which told him that the girl had obeyed him; and then the fat negress gave further instructions.

“Now, shove duh gun outside wit’ yoah hoof.”

He threw a swift glance backward. He was alone in the tent. Mammy Venus might shoot now, and be hanged to her. He laughed as he leaped backward.



“Go to blazes!”

There was a flash—a crack, and the whine of a bullet proving that Mammy Venus was a woman of action, but unhurt he backed through the long slit in the canvas to find Seraphina outside.

“Oh!” she whispered a little frantically. “You are——”

“Not a scratch,” he answered, exultant at the thought that she should be concerned for him. “Come!”

He grabbed her hand and they began to run. Behind them sounded a whistle that might have been a bo’sun’s pipe, and Mr. Donne easily guessed that Mammy’s supporters were not far away. Still holding the girl’s hand, he plunged downhill into the trees beyond the camp, and as they almost fell into the tangle shelter, the whistle sounded again, and in response to it, there was a wild shout at no great distance away. Then stumbling in the undergrowth, Mr. Donne laughed.

“Diddled the black image! . . . They’ll never find us in this blackness. . . . Go slow and quiet, Seraphina. And don’t slip your grip. I wouldn’t lose you for worlds.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### SURPRISES

Mr. Donne's confidence was entirely justified. The darkness of the forest was a perfect veil from any pursuit. Neither Mammy Venus nor those whom she whistled to her aid ever came within hearing distance of Seraphina and himself, but whilst the blackness so far served them, it had its drawbacks. In the hurry of flight he lost all sense of direction, and within a quarter of an hour knew that the forest was no better than a dark maze for the exit of which he might grope, but never find, till daylight disclosed it. He tried in vain to get his bearings. The density of the trees hid the moon, and though he listened for the boom of the sea, in the wood it reached him so vaguely, seeming to come from all sides, that he could not decide the precise direction of it. He explained the difficulty to Seraphina, who brushed it aside as of small account.

"When the sun rises we're bound to know," she replied. "What matters is that we get a long way from that awful woman."

Donne entirely agreed with her, and decided that so long as the girl could endure, they would move on, taking care that there should be no blundering back into the enemy's hands. They struggled forward and after a time struck one of the mysterious tracks which are found here and there on Cocos. It made travelling easier, and very soon it passed out of the trees into the moonlight; and a little later, out of the small valley to which it had dipped, it began to swing uphill. The hill itself was almost bare of trees, but rocks abounded, round which the track wound to avoid the steeper places; and as they followed it, moving upward in the moonlight, Donne called a halt to survey the farther side of the valley.

Far away, the fire was still raging, but the wind now carried the smoke and ash away from them. The plateau was not so fortunate. It seemed to be wreathed in smoke, and it was quite impossible to make out any particular feature of it—still less anything of anyone who might chance to be there. As he stared, Seraphina asked an abrupt question.

"You are looking for Michael Pym?"

"No," he answered. "I am not anxious to see him, but I expect he is looking for us. . . . I was wondering about the friend I mentioned. He led Pym away from you and me, and took risks in doing so. Pym was unhurt, and I hope that doesn't mean that harm has come to Andy."

"You were to meet him somewhere, perhaps?" asked the girl.

"Down on the beach at the boat. . . . But it won't be safe for us to try that way

. . . we must wait till morning. If Andy is all right he will get in touch with us somehow.”

They went forward again, and when well up the hill came on a place where rocks had been piled obviously by human agency. The place was sheltered by the hill behind it, and from somewhere near at hand came the sound of running water. Again looking back, Donne saw the track they had followed, twisting and winding under the moon. There were a dozen points in it that from that high place could easily be commanded with a rifle. He made a sudden decision.

“I think we will camp here, until morning, Seraphina. It is no use going further into the interior, when sooner or later we must make for the sea. And this place is as good as a watch-tower. Even in this light one can see quite a long way. If you will make yourself comfortable and try to sleep, I will keep watch.”

“But I am not sleepy,” answered the girl.

“Well, then, relax and rest your limbs, in case we should have to make a bolt.”

To that Seraphina made no demur, but found a place where two rocks made a comfortable seat with support for her back; whilst Donne seated himself, rifle on knee, at a point where he could command the track leading to this old buccaneers’ stockade, as he guessed it to be. For a little time both remained silent, the man busy with his thoughts, the girl with eyes closed as if wooing sleep. But after something like twenty minutes she proved that her mind also had been active. Opening her eyes, she asked abruptly:

“What will you do with Benito’s treasure if you find it?”

“Lift it!” he answered tersely.

“You will share it with the man, Andy?”

“Fifty-fifty!” he answered. “No man shall ever say that Jack Donne went back on a friend.”

“But the treasure isn’t yours,” said Seraphina.

“Not yet! . . . But when I find it——”

“It belongs to my father, really. He’s a descendant of Benito Bonito.”

“Well now——”

Mr. Donne broke off, a little put out by the girl’s point of view. Then he laughed.

“You’re wrong, Seraphina. Pirates leave no heirs, having no right to the property they stole. That’s how the law would look at it, and treasure-trove is different from any other property. The State where it is found usually puts in a claim, but as I don’t just know whom Cocos belongs to, there won’t be any State that will be notified by me.”

“You would rob an old man, who all his life has dreamed of this treasure?”

“Not on your life. I’m not the sort that goes round trying to pick pockets.”

“But George came here as my father’s deputy, and my father is in this affair  
\_\_\_\_\_”

“So is Pym! And Mammy Venus. Would you say they ought to sit in at the division of the spoil?”

That argument evidently was without answer, for Seraphina remained silent. Mr. Donne found that silence a little trying, for after a minute or two he spoke again:

“I’ve been thinking. You are on Andy’s side and mine——”

“Who said I was?”

“Well, if Pym’s your man——”

“You know he isn’t!”

“Then maybe you mean to stand in with Mammy Venus——”

“I hate her.”

“Well, that’s sound sense, anyway. That woman is a holy terror. . . . But there’s nobody left except Andy and me; and if you’re not with us, I suppose you’ll be striking a line of your own.”

“Why not?”

That question nonplussed Mr. Donne. He did not know what to say, though in view of all the circumstances he thought the question was a foolish one; for what could the girl do on her own? He kept those thoughts to himself, however, and after a moment the girl spoke again.

“You haven’t got that little picture which, unless my father is mistaken, holds the secret of Benito’s hiding-place.”

“No! Pym seems to carry it about with him. Worse luck!”

“But if I draw it for you, from memory——”

“No need to go on, girl. You’d stand in, of course. I was going to say as much a while back, only you jumped on me and said you weren’t on the side of Andy and me.”

“I said no such thing!” answered the girl quickly. “I merely asked who said I was.”

“Well, it’s for you and nobody else to say that you are——”

“Then I’ll think it over, and tell you later,” answered Seraphina, and curling herself up snugly as a cat between the rocks, made as if she were going to sleep. But that she slept immediately, Mr. Donne doubted, for at least an hour later he would have sworn that he heard her laughing softly to herself. And that disturbed him quite a lot.

“Got something up her sleeve!” he thought to himself, and wondered what it

was. But having no inkling, he was baffled, and presently, when Seraphina really slept, he gave up the problem, and whilst he watched the track up the hill, wondered what was happening on the plateau and if the morning would bring him news of his friend.

He watched until dawn without any untoward thing happening, then he rose and stretched himself, and as he did so Seraphina awakened. She blinked and looked round. Her face was flushed. Her dark eyes were still heavy with sleep. But as they saw him they kindled with a glad light, which a moment later gave place to one of concern.

“You have watched, whilst I slept?” she asked quickly.

“Had to,” he answered cheerfully. “Couldn’t have Pym walk up and take us on the hop.”

“But I might have shared the watch,” protested the girl. “And if we’re to be partners I must do my share.”

“If we’re to be partners——” began the man, and then broke off, and asked an immediate question. “You’re going to join in, Seraphina?”

“Yes! . . . Would I have stopped with you if I hadn’t meant to do that?” she laughed lightly as she asked the question; and before he could answer it, she followed it with another. “What do we do this morning?”

“First thing is to take a look round and find out what is happening. If we climb to the top of this hill we should be able to overlook Pym’s camp and the sea on the other side.”

“Then we’ll start at once, if you don’t mind. And afterwards we might think of breakfast. I’m beginning to feel hungry.”

“We will,” he answered. “Though where it’s coming from heaven knows.”

They started for the top of the hill. The going was not easy, for the slope was covered with loose stones, treacherous to the feet, yielding unexpectedly and throwing the climbers downwards in falls that were difficult to check.

In such falls they lost in a moment what had taken minutes to achieve; and there was one place where complete disaster threatened. It was a place full of scree, which had to be crossed. Donne himself crossed it without trouble, but half-way over Seraphina slipped, fell on her side, and as she did so the whole stone-slide began to move. The girl tried to lift herself up, and the movement of the scree was accelerated, whilst from lower down the hill came the clash and clatter as of rubble shooting over a cliff. Swiftly Donne looked down and saw the stone slide ended at an edge over which it shot exactly as water shoots when it plunges over a cliff into a gulf. In the same second he cried out a sharp warning.

“Lie flat, Seraphina! Dig your toes in the earth. Stretch your arms. Don’t try to get up.”

The girl heard him through the rattle of the scree, and had the presence of mind to obey him. But the stone slide continued its movement, carrying the girl with it, and he glimpsed her face, white and strained, with something like a prayer in her dark eyes. It came to him suddenly that she knew where this moving river of stone ended, and that she must have marked the cliff as they had climbed up the hill. He saw a stone dislodged from higher up, and moving with greater momentum than the slide, whiz past her face so closely that involuntarily she closed her eyes, and as another stone shot over her, he saw a sick look come on her face, not without reason, for one of those stones striking might have been fatal as a bullet.

He followed the line of the slide, shouting counsel; then the movement slackened and the scree came to a standstill, though from below came the sound of isolated pebbles as they shot from the edge of the bluff to the depths below.

“Lie still, Seraphina,” he counselled. “Let the stones settle. . . . I’ll have you safe in a jiffy.”

The girl obeyed, and remained quite still, her elbows and toes dug in the stones, seeking for anchorage in the earth beneath. Mr. Donne worked quickly. In a twinkling he had stripped the sling from his rifle, and that done, he fastened to it the leather belt that he wore, making a rope that was altogether too short for the purpose for which it was intended. He recognised that as he finished buckling the leathers together, and for a moment he was in doubt what to do. Then deliberately he lay down his body half-way on the scree, and called to the girl.

“Catch!”

His first cast missed, but his second was sufficiently near for the girl to grip the leather with an outstretched hand. Her movement, however, set the scree in motion anew, and as it began to slither downward he cried out sharply:

“Both hands! Hang on, and kick this way with your toes.”

For a moment it seemed that he himself must be drawn into the stone slide, and as he lay there, his eyes looking straight into those of the girl, in her gaze he read the fear which was in his own heart. But he struggled back desperately, drawing her slowly towards the firm earth, whilst Seraphina helped him, levering herself with her feet against the shifting stream of stones.

Nearer and nearer she came. All his body was now on firm earth; and the next tug on his part and heave forward on hers brought her within arm’s length of him. Exultantly he clutched her hands, then her wrists, and as her hands gripped him, heaved himself backwards once more. A moment later he was on his feet, and the

girl on her knees, white-faced, shaken and sick, but safe. He waited a few seconds and then lifted her up. As he did so, her hands clutched him as if she might fall, and he put his arms round her.

“Steady,” he said quickly. “It’s all over——”

Her dark eyes opened and looked at him. The sick look had gone, and there was a flame in them that startled him.

“Seraphina!” he jerked hoarsely. “Seraphina!”

In that moment, had he yielded to surging impulse, he might have kissed her, and Seraphina would not have denied him; but with a sudden remembrance of the dead man in the hut by the shore, he repressed the impulse and forced himself to cry cheerfully:

“Better, my dear?”

Seraphina could not speak for emotion. Her eyes turned from him and stared at the still moving stones. Then, as he felt her shiver, he spoke again.

“Don’t look at the thing, Seraphina. . . . You’re through, and you don’t want to remember it. . . . It’s the kind of thing that’ll give you nightmare if you dwell on it.”

“Oh!” whispered the girl shudderingly. “It was awful.”

“Of course it was,” he answered. “I’ve seen a thing like it before over in Chili. . . . Bad as a quicksand or a rapid if you really get gripped by it. . . . But here you are on terra firma, where you can stamp your toes till they hurt.”

“But for you——” began the girl emotionally, and he saw again the flame in her eyes and felt the disturbing clutch of her hands.

But to his honour he denied himself the advantage of an accidental situation, following a fine instinct, and more than half-conscious of the thing he did. He forced a laugh, and deliberately dammed back his own emotion as well as Seraphina’s.

“That’s all right,” he said. “Partners stand by one another—no matter what the corner is, and I guess you’ll know now that you can trust me. . . . But if you feel fit it’s time we were moving out of this. If Michael Pym is prowling round, on this bare patch of hillside we’ll make a tidy target. . . . Just sit down whilst I fix up the rifle-sling and my belt.”

He released her, and Seraphina took her seat on a rock until he was ready. Then they resumed their way. Without further adventure they reached the top of the hill. The sun was shooting up from the far rim of the sea. All the island was flooded with light. The sea-birds fluttered and gleamed, there was a twittering of smaller birds close at hand, and down in the valley on the farther side of the hill three or four wild pigs were already grubbing for breakfast. From the height where they were they had a bird’s-eye view of the plateau. The jungle grass at the far end of it still smouldered.

Nearer there were the blackened tufts, and nearer again the unburned grass at the edge of which Michael Pym had his camp.

Donne surveyed the whole plateau carefully. So far as he could see, nothing moved there. Certainly there was no sign of Pym, nor of Mammy Venus and her crew, nor yet of Andy Winstowe. The whole place was silent and deserted as could be. His eyes travelled further afield. The shore proper was not visible, being cut off from view by the lie of the land, but the sea in the direction of both the bays could be seen over the tree-tops; and Donne's eyes sought for the yacht in which Mammy had arrived. He found it instantly—a small thing in the vastness of the sea. He stared at it with puzzled gaze, then lifted his eyes to shade them from the sun whilst he still stared. Seraphina noted the intent look on his face, and asked a question.

“What is it? . . . Something wrong?”

“Something I can't just get the hang of. It looks as if the yacht were getting ready to pull out. From all that smoke it seems they must be firing up—though I will say they must have some rotten fuel.”

“But if Mammy Venus is going——” began Seraphina, then broke off, and cried quickly: “They must have found Benito's hoard!”

“Maybe!” Mr. Donne was gloomy as he made the admission, then he broke out almost roughly: “But that isn't sense, Seraphina. They could hardly find it in the dark; and they had their hands full, chasing Pym. . . . In any case they can hardly have got the treasure aboard yet—if it was worth carrying off. Yet I can't believe that Mammy and her lot would quit without it. . . . She was too keen after it.”

He continued to watch the yacht, wondering how long it would be before she started. Once he imagined that he caught the rattle of the anchor cable, but knew that was quite impossible, at the distance he was from the yacht; and then Seraphina spoke.

“There's a goodish wind up here! Do you reckon it will be blowing out there?”

“It's coming right across. Must be! Why?”

“Well, if that smoke were coming only from the smoke-stack——”

“My stars!” he shouted. “I believe you've hit it, Seraphina. That craft is on fire.”

“Then Mammy and her crew have got their hands full without bothering about us or old Benito's gold.”

“They sure have,” he cried. “But I can see nobody about, and there doesn't seem to be any boat alongside. But the smoke would hide that, or it may be on the other side.”

They continued to watch. The smoke-cloud about the yacht drew denser. Once in the thick of it, Donne thought he caught a flicker of orange flame, but was not



sure, and he waited, watchful for any leaping tongue of fire that would prove beyond doubt that the yacht was really burning. Then faintly on the wind came a sound of yelling voices.

“Something happening down there,” said Seraphina almost phlegmatically.

“Yes!” he agreed. “Mammy and her crowd may have just discovered their craft is burning. They’ll put off for her in the boat they used for landing. Won’t be much use, I fancy. That fire is taking hold.”

He watched the sea in the direction of the yacht for the expected rowing-boat. It did not materialise; but three minutes later Seraphina gripped his arm.

“Look!” she cried, one arm flung out, and an index finger at full stretch. “Oh, look!”

He turned in the direction indicated, and well out and far down Wafer Bay caught sight of the motorboat driving on with a double plume of water at her bows, and behind something that was like a great sea bird which for a moment had him puzzled; then he gave a shout of understanding.

“By Hades! . . . The seaplane.”

“What——” began Seraphina.

“Andy’s got it,” he cried, shouting in his excitement. “He’s towing it away. And it’s Pierpoint Morgan’s bank to a coconut that he fired Mammy’s yacht. He doesn’t know what’s happened to you and me, and he’s marooning the whole lot till he finds out. Means, too, that they shan’t get away with the spoils. . . . Good old Andy! . . . They’ll be dancing now, watching him, and there isn’t one of them will have an eye for us. We can go where we like and nobody’ll interfere——”

“Then we’ll go where there is some breakfast to be got,” said Seraphina practically.

“To be sure!” laughed Mr. Donne. “I’m hungry as a starving crab. . . . There are stores at Pym’s camp?”

“Stacks!”

“We’ll raid them. He’ll be too busy watching his seaplane to be worrying about breakfast. . . . Come! We’ll start at once.”

“Yes,” agreed Seraphina, and then looked down the hill. “I don’t think I can cross these stones again.” She shuddered a little and the man nodded.

“No,” he agreed. “That’s not a passage to be repeated. We’ll have to find a way round. Shouldn’t be difficult with everything spread in front of us like a map.”

He examined the hillside and the country with almost exaggerated carefulness. It would never do for them to get lost in the interior of the island, when the way to safety was by the shore and the motorboat. Supposing it was Andy who had fired

the yacht, as almost certainly it was he who had towed away the seaplane, those whom he had left stranded would be in no very pleasant mood. They would be inclined to brutal reprisals; and Seraphina and he, if they fell into their hands, would no doubt be reckoned proper persons for the visitation of wrath. At all costs they must keep out of the hands of Mammy Venus and avoid the cold-eyed Pym; though so far as the latter was concerned, Mr. Donne had a feeling that he would welcome an encounter with that scoundrel, if only the meeting could be an open one and on equal terms. . . . But caution was the policy—if only for Seraphina’s sake. And until he was in touch with Andy once more there must be no harebrained actions.

After marking what seemed a feasible way to the end of the plateau where Pym’s camp lay, Seraphina and he started down the hill, making a wide detour to avoid the dangerous stone slide. In a little time they were in the thick jungle of the valley, working their way towards the opposite slope. They moved but slowly, by reason of the difficulties encountered, listening from time to time for any indication that their enemies were in the neighbourhood. They heard none, and after about two hours’ hard going they arrived at the edge of the plateau, and saw Pym’s camp, all standing, the fire dead, and the man himself nowhere in sight.

“We’re in luck, I think,” whispered Donne to Seraphina. “As I guessed, Pym is more concerned about his ’plane than about his camp. . . . But wait here until I make sure. There’s no need to walk into a trap.”

Keeping as far as possible to the undergrowth and the tall grass, he made a circuit of the camp, without finding any sign of the owner. Then he whistled and himself stepped into the open. Whilst he waited for Seraphina’s emergence, he stared round and noticed that to the left of the tent a great rock, that was like a natural monument, marked the edge of the plateau at that point. He stared at it curiously a moment, then, as Seraphina came into sight, he hurried to join her. Together they went through the absent Pym’s stores, selecting what was easily portable and adaptable to their immediate requirements, Seraphina in the meantime munching at some captain’s biscuits from a tin already broached. When they had packed as much as could conveniently be carried, Mr. Donne announced that since it was no use tempting providence, it was time to go.

“Not yet,” said Seraphina quickly, a touch of excitement in her manner and an odd triumphant gleam in her dark eyes. “You and I are partners; and between true partners there’s nought ever kept back, is there?”

“No,” answered Mr. Donne, wondering what was coming, and adding approvingly: “that’s the only sound basis for an abiding partnership that I know.”

“Then, partner, I’ve something to show you if you’ll step this way.”

Still wondering, he followed her. Seraphina walked with decision and she made straight for the rock that he had noted. When they reached it, she halted. "Now you'll shut your eyes and promise not to open them till I give the word."

"All right," he said with a laugh. "Though I'll be shot if I know what you're after, Seraphina."

"You'll know in a minute," answered the girl, her voice betraying that something unlooked for by him was about to happen. "Shut your eyes. . . . Give me your hand. Now step on seven paces. You can count them if you like, though there's no need. I'll stop you at the place."

He counted them aloud, solemnly, and though he was faithful to the agreement and kept his eyes closed, he divined easily that he had been marched round to another face of the rock.

"Halt!" said Seraphina. "Now, you can open your eyes."

He did so, staring first at Seraphina. Her face flushed; her eyes had now nothing slumbrous about them, but were dark pools in which lightning seemed to flicker, and her whole demeanour was tense and eager. What he was to look for he did not know, nor at the second did he greatly care, for Seraphina herself was enough to hold any man's gaze.

"Oh!" said he, with a moving laugh, "if only you knew how you gladden a man's eyes, Seraphina——"

"Stuff and rubbish!" intervened the girl, her manner utterly practical. "'Tisn't me I want you to look at, 'tis the miracle before your nose on the rock there!"

Then he turned, looked at the rock face in front of him, and as he did so a look of utter startlement came on his face. For a space he stared incredulously, then he cried to the girl.

"Seraphina, in heaven's name, who wrought that—in this place?"

## CHAPTER XIV

### A STARTLING DISAPPEARANCE

The thing at which he stared and which had prompted his startled inquiry was a device carved in the rock's face. At the first glimpse its likeness to that on the sign-board of the Three Blue Anchors Inn was apparent, at the second it was confirmed, though closer examination showed small differences, due perhaps to the flaking of the stone since the device had first been carved. But the essentials were there—a little worn and weakened by the sea air and the attrition of tropic storms—the three anchors whirling like a broken Catherine wheel, the cable chain through their shackles, the initials B.B. with the date 1798 in old English lettering, but the other lettering which he remembered on the drawing had either vanished or had never been there. All that he noticed in a twinkling; then he heard Seraphina's reply to his question.

"I reckon old Benito did that or made somebody else do it for him. 'Tis almost the image of our sign at home."

"Yes," he answered quickly, his mind working swiftly among the possibilities suggested by this unexpected thing. "How did you know about it? Did your father tell you?"

"No! I hadn't a notion of it until Michael Pym set me in front of it, and laughed when I cried my surprise."

"But he knew of it, and Mammy Venus, I'll vow, and maybe that man down the hill was told of it by your father."

"Maybe. But father never mentioned the rock to me, so it's all guess-work about his knowing."

"Yes! . . . But there is a difference between this carving and the drawing that Pym stole from the inn."

"You've noticed that!" said Seraphina, lifting a finger and drawing it along the roughened stone in the blank space under Benito Bonito's initials. "The letters of the name of that other man that were in the drawing are not here. Maybe they were never here, that's what Michael Pym thought; or maybe they've just rotted away. This stone is powdering." She rubbed vigorously with her forefinger to prove it, and showed him the tip of her finger, white with stone dust. Then she laughed. "Don't make no difference, though. We know that old Llewelyn's name-letters should be there."

"Old Llewelyn?" asked Mr. Donne, a little puzzled.

"That's the name the family gave him. Ll. as an initial is likely to stand for

Llewelyn——”

“It might stand for Lloyd!” said Mr. Donne quickly.

“Might!” agreed the girl. “But it doesn’t matter much either way that I can see.”

“No,” was the answer. “But this rock matters a whole lot. If Benito Bonito carved that device, there it is certain that his cache was made somewhere in the neighbourhood.”

“You aren’t the only one with that idea,” replied Seraphina with a laugh. “If you’ll look round the far side of that stone, you’ll see where folk have tried to dig under it, with a notion that old Benito’s jewels might be there.”

Mr. Donne walked round the rock. There were the remains of old excavations which proved her words, and closer examination showed traces of workings all about the rock. He was still staring at these indications of the labours of old-time treasure-hunters, when the girl spoke again. “That man Pym laughed at the idea of the jewels being buried under that rock. He said that no sheers any pirate ever rigged could have lifted that stone an’ dropped it there, and that it is just part of the solid earth as God made it at the Creation.”

Mr. Donne nodded. He had no doubt that Michael Pym’s judgment was the right one, and that even dynamite, whilst it might lift the monolith-like rock into the air, would leave its foundation in the living rock unaffected. He looked at the device again, followed each crumbling line with keen eyes, and stared particularly at the space under Benito’s initials, striving to penetrate the secret the stone held, but failed.

“If one only knew——” he began, and broke off.

“There’ve been generations of Bonitos who’ve groaned that!” commented Seraphina phlegmatically.

“But if one only had the key the whole thing would be as simple as A B C. That’s the way with these things, and here we are, mocked, with our hands almost on the treasure.”

“Maybe the little drawing would help. . . . Pym must have thought so, or why did he steal it?”

“And there’s your divining-rod! Pym believed in that too.”

“The man was a bit weak there,” said the girl brusquely. “I can find running water, but jewels and gold are different.”

Mr. Donne considered and had an idea. “But suppose the secret of the hiding-place has to do with running water? That would explain why he tried to use your gift with the dowsing-rod.”

“Maybe!” Seraphina lifted a captain’s biscuit to her mouth, bit off a piece, munched it and then spoke practically. “But lashings of treasure won’t do much good

if we die of starvation; an' breakfast time'll soon be dinner time."

In spite of his excitement and absorption in the thought of the nearness of the treasure, Mr. Donne laughed, tickled by the girl's practicalness.

"You're right of course, Seraphina. We'll have breakfast and then go into this business. If the place remains quiet, we might try your powers as a dowser——"

"They're sound enough!" broke in the girl with some asperity. "I'm not one for quackery or fraud."

"My dear, that's the last notion I'd entertain of you. What I meant was that if you found running water underground, it might prove that idea of mine. We won't go far away. . . . The secret is somewhere here, I'm sure, or old Benito would never have chiselled that device on the rock."

"We'll sit down on the other side, pic-nic fashion, if you like——"

"Yes," agreed the man after a look round. "We're bound to hear or see Pym if he shows up. Not that there's much likelihood. If I know anything he's pelting after that 'plane of his at the moment, with never a thought of Benito's cache. . . . Here's the very place—shaded from the sun."

"We want drink. There's rum in the tent," explained the girl, "but I can't drink the stuff. . . . On the other side, twenty yards away, there's a little spring, water from the rock as fresh as morning dew. I'll take the kettle an' pop along, and maybe you'll prise open one of those tins of corned beef."

Picking up Pym's kettle she moved away, and Mr. Donne after vainly searching for a tin-opener, attacked one of the cans of meat with his knife. He found it a tougher task than he had anticipated, as also a messy one, and when the task was finished, immediately he was driven to do battle for the meat with hosts of raiding flies. There were myriads of them. All the flies in Cocos seemed to have forgathered at that end of the plateau and waited for the moment when the food was available.

"Plagues of Egypt," he grunted, and swiped wildly at the buzzing crowd which seemed to grow by battalions every moment.

Finally with a spare shirt of the absent Pym he swept the hosts back sufficiently long enough to cover the meat with a tin basin, and then stood wiping the sweat from his face before a final attack on the buzzing army.

"We'll never be able to eat here!" he muttered. "Not unless we eat flies, or make a smoke smudge."

He looked round for Seraphina, half expecting to see her, kettle in hand, laughing at him; but she was not to be seen. With an occasional vicious swipe at the flies, he waited for a minute or two and still the girl did not appear. Finally he shouted to her.

"Hurry up, Seraphina. The meat is sizzling."

There was no response to his light summons, and with a vague feeling that all was not well, he listened. The droning of the flies was terrific, and any slight sound in the neighbourhood must have been drowned by it. He shouted again, this time a really earnest hail.

“Seraphina! . . . Seraphina!”

Down the hill in the wood he thought he heard a faint answering cry, but was not sure; and now really apprehensive, he snatched up his rifle and moved in the direction which the girl had taken. He walked a dozen yards and then halted to listen. The hum of the flies was less overwhelming there, and listening he caught the babble of water a little way down the hill. He gave a last hail, hoping that the girl might be playing some trick on him, and as again there was no answer, he plunged downhill in the direction from which the sound of the water came. He went no more than ten yards before finding the water, a little spout coming out of the rock, making a runnel and then vanishing in the jungle. The kettle, an enamelled iron one, which Seraphina had taken to fill, was lying on its side, with the lid set near by on a stone; but of the girl herself there was no trace.

For a moment or two he stood there appalled. That overturned kettle to his mind told its own story. Whilst the girl had stood there holding it under the spout, someone had slipped behind her, prevented her from giving so much as a warning scream, and had borne her away. Busy with the tin and with the flies, he had heard nothing; yet he had no doubt whatever that Seraphina had been neatly kidnapped.

“But who——” His mental question was only half-shaped when the answer was forthcoming. “Michael Pym!” That cold-eyed scoundrel, whom he had imagined as following his sea-plane to learn its destination, had either been in ignorance of its capture, or had realised the folly of pursuit; and with the knowledge that the whereabouts of his camp was known, had returned surreptitiously to secure such of his stores as he could carry away. And he had seen Seraphina at the spout; perhaps had watched both of them whilst they had rifled his camp; but in any case had surprised the girl and carried her away.

All that passed through his mind with the swiftness of thought which is the swiftest thing in the world; and then followed the further thought: the fellow could not have gone far. Burdened as he must be for Seraphina would not go willingly, it should be easy to overtake him and deliver the girl. He turned impulsively to go downhill, and then stopped to listen. No sound of anyone forcing a way through the jungle reached him; and it was inconceivable that a burdened man could thrust a way through that tangle without noise. Perhaps the fellow had not gone down the hill at all. Possibly he was somewhere in the thick bush near at hand, the girl choked into

silence, or kept dumb by terror of a threatening knife, anticipating the blind pursuit which would carry him well away, and leave a clear field. . . . That must be it!

He reflected for a moment, then acted as he thought the other would expect. He plunged into the jungle below, went noisily a little way, then turning, began to return, but circling about the spout at a radius of no more than thirty yards. Moving as quietly as a cat, he surveyed the whole of the immediate neighbourhood. The search took him quite a long time; it was slow work moving between the trees, slipping by the lianas, and pushing through the thick undergrowth, and in the end he found himself once more facing the spout and the fallen kettle, without having learned anything further. He had been mistaken in his calculation. The abductor had gone down the hill through the jungle after all, and whilst he himself had wasted time in a vain search, had got clean away.

Again he was swept by the feeling of dismay and apprehension which had surged at his first realisation of the bitter fact. The thought of Seraphina's plight and of the undoubted peril in which she stood, almost unmanned him. In that moment he realised that she was more to him than all Bonito's blood-stained hoard; and, in proof, in his concern for Seraphina, he gave no second thought of the treasure at all. Then a great anger swept away his dismay. But he did not rage. For all the storm that swept him, he was outwardly calm. He looked at the kettle, from the kettle to the gushing spout, and from that to the jungle. Then he spoke in a voice the tenseness of which alone indicated the emotion which was sweeping him like a tornado.

"I'll follow him till I drop. And I'll shoot him like vermin."

But he did not start immediately. He had lost so much time already that a little more could make no difference; and there was nothing to be gained by a wild plunge into the jungle in a blind pursuit. He must make preparations, eat, and arrange to take stores, for in a search that might take him half over Cocos, a man could not continue without food. Automatically he retrieved the kettle, filled it at the spout, and then climbed back to the camp. The flies were still buzzing in multitudes about the meat which he had opened and covered, and knowing that it would be almost impossible to eat because of the swarming of the insects, he let the mess remain where it was, and helped himself to biscuits.

Seated on the shady side of the great rock, he munched deliberately, thinking all the time of the course he must follow. Seraphina's captor would probably make for the neighbourhood of one of the beaches—if he did not know that his aeroplane was already lost, in all likelihood he would try to reach the little inlet where it had been moored. The man would have to go carefully because of Mammy Venus and her



crew of ruffians, who by this time must be a raging if panic-stricken crowd; and he would have to regulate his pace to Seraphina's, unless, using his mesmeric powers, he could inspire her to his own more rapid going. In any case he would have to work round to——

His thought broke off abruptly at a sound which came to him from the plateau. He was sure that he had heard footsteps, and two seconds later he most certainly caught the sound of a man whistling. For perhaps five seconds that last sound froze him to utter stillness. It was not the luring whistle to which he had listened last night, whilst Seraphina had crouched with her hands to her ears, and it had nothing of the liveliness of the whistle he had heard on the hill above the little Cornish port; it was indeed a thought lugubrious, but that it came from the same lips as the others he had no doubt whatever. He was stunned by his luck. For five seconds he did nothing, then silently he reached for his rifle, softly slipped off the safety catch, and thus prepared, raised himself on one knee, which was a good aiming position, and very cautiously peered round the rock.

The man for whom so recently he had been planning to comb the island, was coming straight to the camp down the lane between the unburned grass, and was already less than a dozen yards away. He walked with assurance, as one who did not anticipate attack; but the brows were creased in a heavy frown above the ice-blue eyes, which themselves had an absent look, as if the man meditated on unhappy things. And he was alone.

That last fact checked Mr. Donne's impulse to slay the ruffian out of hand and without warning. What had he done with Seraphina? He must know that before he slew; or the girl's state might be infinitely worse than her present one! . . . Even whilst the question shaped itself in his mind another was treading on its heels. Had Pym even been concerned in Seraphina's vanishment? He did not look at all like a man who had just carried out a successful coup; he looked, thought Mr. Donne, like a man who had lost a dollar and not found even a dime.

That he had jumped to a wrong conclusion in supposing that Pym was responsible for Seraphina's disappearance was thrust upon him stunningly. But if it were not Pym, who——

He did not finish the question. Cocos Island was not Piccadilly or Broadway. The crowds did not jostle one in its jungle paths. If it were not Pym then it must be those whom Pym himself had cause to fear. But Pym might know something and it would at least be wise to interrogate him. By the time he reached that conclusion, the man was no more than half a dozen paces from the monolith, and apparently quite unconscious of any hostile presence. Probably like Donne himself he had seen the

burning yacht and had concluded that for the immediate present he was safe from any interference by Mammy Venus or her jackals. Anyway, he approached his camp without any cautionary measures whatever, and when he was no more than three yards away, Mr. Donne thrust the muzzle of his rifle forward and gave a harsh hail.

“Stop just there, Pym, and lift them up!”

The ear-ringed ruffian stopped as if the bullet which threatened had already found him. His lean, brown face showed that he was taken utterly by surprise, but his ice-cold eyes took a sudden alertness, and it was clear that on the instant he was preparing to deal with an awkward situation. He raised his hands slowly to his ears, and his roving eyes found the speaker.

“The devil!” he cried. “You?”

Mr. Donne laughed harshly. “Whom did you expect? Mammy Venus?”

Pym shook his head, and replied easily. “Hadn’t a thought of company waiting for me. Mammy being engaged in tearing her wool and dancing a tango on the beach, and you—or so I thought—being busy with my seaplane; but I guess you left that to that fat little chum of yours. He’s a star worker to bag my ‘plane an’ Mammy’s old steam-kettle in one night. A man it would be a pleasure to meet. What’s his name?”

“He’ll tell you when you meet him, I daresay. . . . Where have you come from—just now?”

Michael Pym flicked a forefinger to dislodge a fly which had settled on his right ear lobe and laughed.

“From wandering to and fro in this damned island, since you want to know.”

Mr. Donne who had known churches in his youth and had suffered a religious training, understood the paraphrase of a classic utterance, and countered with another half-quotation, sarcastically rendered.

“Seeking whom you might devour, I guess.”

“Wrong, old man,” Pym grinned affably. “I ain’t climbed so high as the cannibal class, yet.” Then his cold eyes flashed with curiosity. “Where’s Seraphina?”

“I was just going to ask you that!”

“Flaming Tophet! . . . You were? . . . That means you’ve lost the girl?” “It does!” answered Mr. Donne grimly. “It also means I’m going to find her in double quick time or——”

“Well,” interrupted Pym, “it ain’t no good going through my pockets. I haven’t clapped eyes on the girl since you an’ your chum ran off with her last night. To tell the simple truth, I’m bone weary through hunting for her all the blessed night.”

Mr. Donne believed him—with reserve. Some portion of the hours of darkness

the fellow must have spent in dodging Mammy's jackals, but that was neither here nor there. What really mattered was that plainly he had had no hand in Seraphina's vanishment. And that confirmed his recent conviction that some of Mammy's crew had been the active agents in the girl's disappearance. Possibly Michael Pym read his thoughts, for before he could speak, the ruffian continued.

"You and I are in the same plight, seemingly. Up against Mammy Venus and her crowd, and if you'd only the shadow of a notion what that meant, you wouldn't keep me here, fingering my ears, when we ought to be pals discussing affably how to swamp the common enemy."

"Pals! You and me?" ejaculated Mr. Donne, taken by surprise but tickled by the notion.

"Why not?" demanded Pym, unabashed. "I've had worse than you; and I guess you've fared worse. It's a common interest and a common purpose that makes men pals—and you and I've got both. You want to find that girl, so do I; you're keen to find old Bonito's cache, same here; and both of us have got to look out that Mammy Venus doesn't shove us off the roster. . . . What more d'you need for us to work hand in hand like brothers?"

This exposition of the philosophy of friendship amused Mr. Donne, but at the same time interested him. That it fell short of being a perfect one he knew, but it had points that in the circumstances were worth consideration. And after a second or two's thought he asked a question.

"What's your weight of arms, Pym?"

"Meaning lethal weapons, I guess. I've what you see dangling at my waist. A .45 Colt, and a bowie-knife. Lost my rifle in a scrimmage last night."

"No secret arsenal."

"Not even a darned nail-clipper."

"Well, I've an idea that you and I might do well to talk things over——"

"Common interests, and unity is strength sort of thing—what?"

"You put it neatly. We'll declare an armistice; but I'm going to make sure that it is kept by asking you to unbuckle that belt of yours, let it slide down and then back six paces whilst I take possession of it."

"Oh, come, them's no terms at all. They're too all-fired one-sided."

"They're *the* terms!" replied Mr. Donne firmly, in his mind a remembrance of how that bowie-knife had dealt with the man George. "And if you think they're too one-sided, just take a glimpse at the muzzle of this weapon. It points your way; and if there's anything more one-sided——"

Michael Pym broke in with a rueful laugh.

“You’re the goods, chum. It ain’t no use to parley against one of your class. You’re wasted hunting for pirate’s treasure on Cocos. You sure ought to be one of those legal gents up in ’Frisco. Make a fortune that would make Rockefeller weep for envy, you would. . . . But I’ll sign the armistice, if you’ll just keep your trigger-finger steady, whilst I disarm.”

“Right! Go!”

Mr. Donne showed no slackening in his watchfulness. His rifle covering the other was steady as the rock behind him, and Michael Pym, whatever may have been in his mind, attempted no tricks. His hands dropped to the buckle of his belt. A moment later the belt itself dropped to the ground, and as it fell, the command was given.

“Right about turn, and forward six paces.”

Pym stepped out of the broken circle of his belt with some regret possibly, but did not dream of disobeying. He marched smartly forward counting the paces, and at the sixth heard the command:

“Mark time!”

He marked time in a ragged way, whilst Mr. Donne, who at the other’s first step had moved from the rock, busied himself with transferring both the Colt and the bowie to his own belt. When the operation was completed he slung his rifle over his shoulder, drew the pistol and advanced on the other.

“Halt!” he said, adding with a chuckle: “Lift up your arms, I’m just going to make sure, Pym. . . . you’ll know what that is!” “That” was the pistol digging in the small of his back; and the victim of this pleasantry, not entirely unaccustomed to the operation of which it was an integral part, grunted.

“You’re wasting time, brother.”

“Well, there’s no time-keeper on Cocos!” laughed Mr. Donne, and carefully ran his free hand over the other’s person in search for concealed weapons. He found none, and announced the fact cheerfully. “Passed with honours. . . . Now you can turn round.”

Pym turned, a thought quickly, as if he had an idea that he might snatch an advantage out of the action. But as he turned the other slipped round him, so that whilst now they faced the camp Mr. Donne was still in the rear. The ear-ringed one looked over his shoulder and grinned a little wryly.

“Faith ain’t your long suit, brother. You sure want to hit up against a backwoods camp-meeting and lay in a supply.”

“Been too childlike in my time,” laughed Mr. Donne. “I’ve even been parted from my dollars by the three-card trick, which shows my innocence. . . . But the

crooks of this world have rubbed the shine off; and I've learned guile. . . . Lead the way home, my friend, and we'll have our talk in comfort."

And since there was nothing else for it, Michael Pym, his ear-rings glinting in the sunlight, led the way towards his tent.

## CHAPTER XV

### DISASTER!

Whatever chagrin he may have felt at the turn things had taken, when they reached the tent, Pym betrayed none. He looked round coolly, noted his stores had been looted, and that the small leather case had been opened, then he grinned.

"You've left the rum, I see. As host, can I offer you a drink?"

"No thanks," answered Mr. Donne politely.

"Don't mind me having one, I hope. . . . I need nourishment after all these trials."

"Not in the least," replied the other. "Help yourself!"

Pym helped himself, drinking the neat spirit from a bottle already broached, and Mr. Donne knowing how handy a weapon a bottle may be, kept an alert eye upon him, until the bottle was lowered, the cork carefully replaced and the bottle set in shadow among some greenstuff where it had been stored for coolness. Then Pym grinned.

"Warms the cockles, and makes a man friendly disposed to the wide world. There's more Christian feeling corked up in a bottle of rum than in the best sermon that was ever spoke." He waved a friendly hand. "Take a pew, won't you. Mister—er—ah—Seraphina didn't pass me your name."

"She didn't know it," laughed Mr. Donne.

"Lucifer! You mean you come into this business a stranger?"

"Never saw the maid in my life till that hour when you rolled into the Three Blue Anchors to have your little chat with Mammy Venus."

Michael Pym whistled, then ventured to indulge his curiosity a little further. "You'll excuse me, I'm sure. Mister—er——"

"Donne." The owner of the name obliged him.

"Nice name. Short and snappy—same as Pym. But as I was saying, Mr. Donne, you'll excuse me, things being as they are, an' our relations a bit unsettled, but I'm that mystified that I'm bound to ask the question, which I hope you'll answer. You didn't know Seraphina till that day we met at that grog-shop; but I reckon that's not to say you weren't there on the business that's brought you across the seas to this god-forsaken island?"

"Then you reckon wrong," chuckled Mr. Donne. "I hadn't an inkling of the affair that afternoon. I merely went into the inn after a drink. Any other tavern would have served as well."

"Well, I'm damned!"

Pym's surprise was expressed not only by his forceful words. It was in his voice,

his face, and in his ice-blue eyes which were fixed on the other in a level smiling way, and as he watched, continued to smile.

“Surprises you, Pym?”

“Surprises! The word ain’t coined that will express what I feel.” The man made a gesture possibly to indicate the unutterable, and then went on, his eyes still fixed on Mr. Donne in an unwinking stare of apparent wonder. “You have me whipped to a frazzle. . . . You hadn’t met Seraphina, you didn’t know about this business——”

“Not the first thing.”

“But, excuse me, you were interested in old tavern signs. You hinted as much. I recall that you said that the one at that inn took the medal. Also that you made a mystery over it.”

“Oh, that was just a leg-pull.”

“A . . . a leg-pull . . . Well, I’m—shattered!”

The man stared at Donne with a stunned sort of gaze, and since every man enjoys a triumph, Mr. Donne took full pleasure of this small one. He laughed noisily.

“Another surprise for you, Pym?”

“You’re full of ’em!” owned the other ruefully. “I’m left gasping. I guess Mammy Venus and I must have given the show away between us, hey?”

“Oh, you had help. Quite a lot was let out by that mulatto whom you knifed \_\_\_\_\_,”

“Hell’s bells!” Pym stared like a man utterly flabbergasted, and continued to do so for quite an appreciable time, before he gasped. “You knew?”

“Couldn’t help. Saw him carried along the quay in the morning, and knew enough to be certain that the knifing lay between you and Bonito. It wasn’t Bonito so—well, there you are. Q.E.D. and all that.” Mr. Donne moved and finding the Colt a little heavy rested his elbow on his knee. Then he asserted himself. “Seems to me, Pym, that I’ve told you enough to call for explanations before we talk any more about partnership—what?”

The other made a gesture as if dismissing it all.

“Let bygones be bygones, is a sound rule, I guess. I ain’t going to excuse myself, but I’ve reasons for what I’ve done, as you’ll know when you’ve heard the story.”

“Hurry up with it, then. I’m due to start after Seraphina.”

“And I’m with you there—most anxious, I assure you, Mr. Donne; and the sooner we reach an understanding the better I’ll be pleased. . . . And to hurry things up, I’ll jump into the middle of the story. Back in that tavern in Cornwall you heard Mammy and me exchanging compliments, and maybe you’ll remember how stumped the nigger lady was when she saw me in the flesh. . . . That was because I was

supposed to have gone to heaven, Mammy having arranged the preliminaries.”

“Why?”

“Oh, the double-cross! . . . we were running tandem together when we knocked up against that sucker George Alcombe in Jamaica, and got the yarn of Bonito’s treasure out of him. There was more in it than there is in most treasure yarns that I ever heard, most of ’em being just fairy tales for infants and born fools; enough at any rate to make both Mammy and me keen to stand in. So I came along here with the fellow to help him seek, and Mammy followed on, and got the notion I was trying to diddle her; so to pacify her I told her a whole lot more I had pumped from George. Curious news it was, too! . . . I guess you’ve seen that fancy piece of sculpture on that rock over there?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Alcombe knew about that, and he had a fancy sort of yarn about an inn-sign that was like it, and a little picture that had detail that wasn’t on the sign, the inn-keeper, his father-in-law, rejoicing in the name of Ben Bonito. And knowing all the yarns about treasure on Cocos that was ever told, having heard a bit more about the family history of the Cornish Bonitoes, it didn’t take a Solomon to put two and two together; and I told Mammy about the family history and the sign——”

“But kept the news of the little picture to yourself, I suppose?”

“You bet I did. When you’re as well acquainted with that black tigress as I am you’ll know that where she is concerned it’s wise to keep a card up your sleeve an’ two if you can . . . Mammy proved that right enough, for as soon as she got the news she tried to scupper me and leave me to the crabs. She botched the job, and being in a hurry steamed away to interview that old sign and its owner, leaving me for dead and that sheep George to go on hunting, certain that she’d be able to diddle him of anything he picked up in her temporary absence. But she forgot one thing,” Pym chuckled. “Or maybe she never thought that a dead man would have a use for it.”

“What was that?” asked Mr. Donne interestedly.

“A motor boat that me and George had used to get here.” The man chuckled again. “There it was moored all nice and handy when I came-to; and guessing Mammy’s game, I didn’t waste time. I was in Balboa when she went through; and I followed her to Colon in a Swedish boat that was the next to go through the locks, and was so near in Limon Bay that with a sea-glass I could pick out her black but not comely features as clear as you can see a lizard on a whitewashed wall, and \_\_\_\_\_”

The man was talking rapidly now as if anxious to get to the end of a long story.



His voice had dropped to a monotone, and his eyes stared as straight into his hearer's as directly and compellingly as the eyes of The Ancient Mariner into those of the Wedding Guest. They held Mr. Pym; but though the story the man told was interesting, possibly because of his lack of sleep on the previous night, he began to find listening a strain. Once he yawned, and the narrator's voice grew even more monotonous. The wrist of the hand which held the pistol was growing tired, and he changed the position of it, resting it instead of the elbow upon his knee, and as he did so, Michael Pym also shifted his position a little, bringing himself a little nearer the rum-bottle which he had set in its cool bed among the herbage. But not for a moment did his story slacken nor his light eyes lift themselves from his hearer's face. Only once in five minutes did Mr. Donne break in on the story to which he was listening now, a trifle heavily; and his remark had really nothing to do with the interesting things that Pym was narrating.

"How those cursed flies hum!" he murmured—a remark which Pym did not allow to interrupt the course of his narrative.

But for the next minute or two it was the humming of the flies of which Mr. Donne was most aware. It really was an insistent sound, and somehow Pym's voice tuned with it in perfect harmony. He yawned again and whilst he still watched the speaker his eyes had a slightly vacant stare as of those of a man in a certain stage of inebriation, or of one who pretends interest in a story that he finds boring, whilst his thoughts are elsewhere. But Donne's thoughts were not elsewhere. In spite of the distracting buzzing of the flies he was trying to concentrate on the amazing narrative to which he was listening, and his eyes, watching the narrator almost unwinkingly, had a feeling of stiffness such as he had never experienced before. And there was something odd about Pym's eyes too. They seemed to dilate and grow and fade again in a way that Mr. Donne found both curious and distracting. Now they were like pin-points and now like great moons—a curious optical effect such as he had never observed in a man's eyes before. But the droning of the myriad flies was the real distraction. He found himself listening to that rather than to the other's rapid monotone, and for the third time he yawned, and the stare in his eyes grew more vacuous. He lost the thread of the narrative. What was that the fellow was saying? Something about that condemned mulatto watching him on the quayside at——

The thread was broken again, his mind was numbed by the everlasting smooth flow of words. If Pym didn't come to an end soon he would tell him brutally to cut the cackle and come to the hosses, and he even shaped his lips to do so, but the words never came. Instead he yawned again, and in that same second from the corner of his straining eyes he saw something moving along the ground—the most

curious phenomenon, a hand that seemed to be detached, but which was reaching for a rum-bottle that lay among the green stuff. He was fascinated by the sight and still from the corners of his eyes watched, wondering what the hand would do with the bottle when it found it. He saw the fingers close round the neck, then in the recesses of his mind recurred a thought that had previously been there about the handiness of a bottle as a weapon of offence.

That thought was like the touching of a button which rang an alarm bell in his brain. The bell pealed terrifically, startlingly, and he responded with the swiftness of a man who was accustomed to carry his life in his hand, and to pass from sleep to wakeful action in two winks of an eyelid. Even as the bottle was lifted, the cloud rolled from his mind, his wrist stiffened, his grasp of the pistol grew firm, and as he pulled the trigger the bottle was shattered to pieces by the swift bullet. With the swiftness of the bullet almost he jerked to his feet, understanding what had happened to him, the whilst he cried ragefully:

“You damned conjurer! You’d play your blasted magician’s tricks on me as you did on the girl, and on George Alcombe. By God, I’ll show you.”

He was in the mood to shoot the man out of hand; but the sight of Pym’s face checked the impulse. If ever a human countenance was the embodiment of chagrin, it was that on which he looked down so wrathfully. The man was plainly the most discomfited man in the two Americas at that moment. He had played a card that the other had forgotten, had almost taken the trick, and at the last tick had been trumped in a way that he did not understand. He sagged a little, seemed not to note the menacing pistol, and with the sleeve of his shirt wiped his face, which was steaming with perspiration. Then he croaked as of one offering an excuse:

“All’s fair in love and a fight! . . . I guess I nearly got you, Mr. Donne.”

“You did, by heaven! . . . But you reached for that bottle too soon, you blasted skunk. And now it’s my turn. Stand up, and take it like a man.”

Michael Pym stood up. The chagrin had vanished from his lean face, and as he looked at the other he inquired with sneering nonchalance: “Going to shoot me?”

“What d’you think? . . . What would you do?”

“Me!” Michael Pym had his pride and it was of an unusual order. “You’d not have heard me ask fool questions. You’d be corpsed by this.”

“Get outside! Slow time. You can whistle a slow march if you like—whistling being a gift of yours, I guess.”

Michael Pym was a scoundrel and a murderer and a good many other reprehensible things besides, but he had nerve. He moved solemnly and with measured steps into the open and he availed himself of the privilege accorded him.

He actually whistled.

“Poom! Poom!——”

Mr. Donne, who in his time had attended funerals with musical honours, recognised the opening bars of the greatest funeral march ever written. He was tickled by the man’s effrontery, as perhaps he was meant to be. He stared at the tall figure marching solemnly just ahead of him, and lifted the pistol, but his finger was irresolutely light upon the trigger. The man deserved to be shot a dozen times over; but somehow he could not bring himself to play the part of mere executioner. In a fight, in hot blood, he would have shot without a thought; but his first heat of rage had passed, and with it the wrathful impulse to slay. He hesitated, then as a thought came to him, he laughed with startling suddenness, leaped forward, and neatly kicked the scoundrel before him with the utmost contumely such a kick can express.

Whatever the recipient may have been anticipating, that contumelious kick was not in the picture. It took him utterly by surprise. The force with which it was delivered, combined with the utter unexpectedness, sent him flying forward so that he fell prone. He picked himself up with remarkable celerity. His coolness and his nonchalance, whether assumed or real, had vanished. His light eyes blazed. His lean face worked with passion. He shook his fist in wrath and in resentment of the humiliation he had suffered. A string of horrid threats poured from him, until Mr. Donne lifted the pistol and said tersely:

“Quit, you fool, whilst the going’s good!”

The man still raged blasphemously and showed no sign of going until the other spoke again.

“You have your chance. It won’t last. If you’re not going at the run by the time I can count you out, by the Lord Harry, I swear I will shoot!” He began to count aloud, slowly, like a man in a ring fight. “One! . . . two . . . three——”

Pym’s blasphemies dried up suddenly. There was a look on Mr. Donne’s face which boded ill for him if he remained. Once more he shook his fist.

“You shall roast for this, you tuppenny hero. And that girl of yours——”

The crack of the pistol cut short his threat. The bullet whizzed unpleasantly close, and he had no thought of a merely warning shot. His impression was that Donne was putting his threat into execution without waiting to finish the count and his nerve failed him. He turned on his heels swiftly, fled like a hare for the tall grass and shouted in futile rage:

“Judas!”

Donne laughed at the name from such lips and fired again to speed his going; then, as the scoundrel vanished in the jungle grass, he stood staring thoughtfully at the

point where the fugitive had vanished.

"A mistake," he thought. "The man's just vermin. I ought to have shot him. If he'd held a gun in his hand I would, as it is——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and turning, walked back to the camp. He was more shaken by the experience through which he had passed than he would have owned—albeit he had delivered himself from the grip of an occult power that he associated with witchcraft, necromancy and the whole range of black arts in which, like so many other men who openly mock, he had a kind of sneaking belief.

"If I hadn't seen that hand crawling towards the bottle——" he muttered, and at the thought felt a cold aura pass through him, pricking the skin over his spine to goose-flesh. "No wonder he got Seraphina as he did. . . . He makes me cold!"

Reaching the camp, he wasted no more time. His immediate task was to find Seraphina, and since the quest might be a long one, he made a little package of stores, and slinging it on his back by means of a guy-rope cut from the tent, he started downhill in the direction which he supposed the girl must have been taken. He found no immediate sign of her, save indications of the recent passage of someone through the jungle; and of course was not certain that whoever had passed that way was Seraphina's captor.

But it was not a clue to be neglected, and he followed arduously, without any fear that the man whom he had treated with such rude contempt would hurry on his trail. Pym, he argued, was no fool to attack an armed man, himself unarmed. The fellow would wait until he had secured a weapon of some sort, and then, no doubt, he would set out on the trail of vengeance; and when that happened he would have to look out, keenly, and all the time. But that moment had still to be reached; and in Cocos there was no gunsmith's shop at which Pym could purchase a new rifle nor many places where he could annex one. Mammy Venus and her crew were almost his sole hope, and he judged that the rascal would give that lady as wide a berth as possible under present circumstances.

Making all the haste that was possible, he reached an open place where again he had a view of the sea. The yacht was still burning, plainly quite doomed, and a little apart was a small rowing boat with three men in her, the trio for a guess helplessly watching the vessel's destruction. He looked down the bay and carefully searched the expanse of the sea for any sign of his own motor-boat and the seaplane. He saw nothing of them. But for a faint smudge of smoke on the horizon proclaiming a steamer following its lawful occasions, and the burning yacht with the rowboat near by, the sea was blank as the clear blue sky.

After thus reconnoitring, he continued on his way, but now he travelled less

quickly, and with infinite caution, knowing that he was not far from the beach in Chatham Bay, where he suspected Mammy Venus must be camped. After a little time he reached the neighbourhood of the bluff which he had climbed on the previous day, when he had set out to find the place from which rose the smoke which he had seen on the hillside. Wafer Bay with its yellow beaches stretched out before him—empty; and he moved on towards the farther side whence he might get a glimpse of the other bay. By good fortune he stumbled on the track which he himself had made the previous day, and was enabled to move forward without the infinite labour that otherwise would have been demanded of him; and in quicker time than he had hoped he reached the far side of the bluff; and creeping forward, from the shelter of the trees looked across on the rock-strewn beach beyond.

Almost the first things he saw were a couple of white tents pitched on the stretch of level land between the sea and the foot of the hills. He stared at them eagerly. At first there appeared to be no one about, but whilst he continued to watch, a big masculine-looking figure came out of one of the tents and stood with one hand shading eyes, apparently staring at the yacht. By the contours of the gross figure rather than by anything else, he recognised Mammy Venus—in a loose coat and wearing shorts; at a nearer view, for certain, a most grotesque spectacle. Two seconds later a man emerged from the second tent, and joining the negress, stood with her, apparently engaged in earnest conversation. The conversation continued for some time, and losing interest in the pair, Mr. Donne watched the tents and the neighbourhood of the camp closely for any sign of Seraphina. He found none, and was wondering if by any chance he had been mistaken in supposing that the negress or some man of hers was responsible for the girl's disappearance, when he saw the woman's companion turn sharply and stare at the steep wooded hill behind. Mammy also swung round, and with a swift intuition of what was to follow, Mr. Donne turned his eyes in that direction.

Even as he did so, out of the wood emerged three figures, one, from his height, the lanky Colombian—Manuel Pareja, the second was a tall negro, and the third Seraphina. Apparently the girl was bound in some fashion, for between her and the negro he made out something which he guessed must be a rope.

“Like a lamb to the slaughter!”

The quotation flashed through his mind with the swiftness of light as he saw her thus led, and a great wrath surged in him.

“The black swine!” he moaned between set teeth, and lying in the herbage, he thrust his rifle forward and stared through the sights. He adjusted them carefully and sighted, but he did not fire. The distance he thought was too great for absolutely safe

shooting, and he was afraid for Seraphina. He must wait until she was out of the line of fire, and then, if possible, pick off the scoundrels one by one, for on the bluff, lying concealed, he would be practically immune from any shot fired from the camp.

“If I have to shoot the whole crowd——” he whispered, but did not complete the thought.

There was a sound of movement in the bush behind him. He heard it, but before he could act or even turn, a heavy body launched itself upon him. Bony knees pinned him to the ground, and long hands, with thumbs pressed in the nape of his neck, spanned his throat, throttling him. He struggled violently, tried to throw the man off his back, released his hold of the rifle, and tore at the choking hands. Then, with the world growing black before him, and his head drumming with the pressure of blood, he remembered the knife at his belt. He groped for it, found the haft—but never drew the blade. One of the choking hands was suddenly withdrawn, and he received a shattering blow behind the ear. He had a flashing sense of utter misfortune, then it seemed that the day had grown suddenly black, and that he was falling over the edge of the world into abysmal darkness.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A DARING RUSE

The next thing of which Mr. Donne was conscious—really and fully conscious—was the sound of laughter, black laughter, as he recognised at once, and laughter that had an edge of scorn. He opened his eyes and found himself staring up at the blue sky. Further, he found that he was not only lying on his back but was bound with ropes like a mummy in its wrappings, arms to his sides, legs close together, and lashed immovably. Again the sound of negro laughter sounded, and it was borne on him swiftly that he had fallen into the hands of Mammy Venus and not into those of Michael Pym. There was little enough to rejoice about in that; but he recognised that the larger mercy was his, for the ear-ringed ruffian would no doubt have slain him out of hand. Scarcely had that thought crossed his mind when he heard Mammy speaking.

“Mistah Pym, you shuah mak’ me laugh.”

“Pym!” The name startled Mr. Donne. The rascal was here, then, in Mammy Venus’s camp, which for him was the lions’ den. What the fellow’s presence there meant he could not guess, but he strained his ears in the hope of learning, and heard Pym’s reply, cool, unperturbed, altogether genial:

“Laugh away, Mammy. You’re a humorous soul, and I’ve heard that laughter’s good for such. Anyway, it don’t disturb me one little bit, and it’ll pay you to listen to me.”

“Mebbe!” Mammy Venus chuckled. “Ah’ll listen an’ yuh bet ah’ll make yuh talk, Michael. Yuh walk into mah camp——”

“Under a flag of truce,” interrupted Pym. “You’ll not forget that, Mammy?”

Mammy’s rolling laughter sounded again. “Yuh shuah do me duh honour, Michael. Ah feel as if ah was duh President at duh White House meeting duh ambassador of another nation. . . . But ah ain’t goin’ to kid mahself wit no suchlike notion. Ah’m just Mammy Venus after duh dollars an’, by Golly, ah’s going to git them; so yuh kin just drop duh dam’ nonsense about flags of truce an’ tell me right away where dose dollahs is stacked, an’ den mebbe we’ll talk terms.”

“Mebbe?” echoed Pym a little raspily. “I don’t buy a pig in a poke.”

Mammy Venus’s laughter sounded again, and Mr. Donne, turning his head sideways, was enabled to see both her and Michael Pym. The negress was certainly a startling figure. Hatless, with a pair of enormous jade-coloured earrings thrust through the pendant lobes, she stood arms akimbo, her big mouth wide with mirth, showing smoke-discoloured teeth. Her costume was as curious as it had seemed to

Mr. Donne when he had observed it from the bluff—a very loose-fitting tunic coat of tussore worn over a shirt which, open from the throat almost to where the waist should have been, partly revealed her enormous breasts; below, supported by red braces, a pair of shorts that stopped above the knee, leaving uncovered a pair of stout legs the feet of which, rolled with fat at the ankles, were shod with white canvas shoes. At her gross middle a scarlet sash sagged with the weight of a pistol holster, which was balanced on the other side by a large sheath knife.

An amazing figure, thought Donne, but with a little knowledge of Mammy's character to give perspective, a rather terrible one. Then he looked at Pym. The man, much bedraggled, stood fronting her, with a nonchalance that in view of their past relations was superb. His face betrayed nothing of any anxiety he might be feeling and his light eyes fixed on the laughing negress had in them no glint of fear. He stood there entirely at his ease, waiting for the woman's spasm of mirth to end, and apparently indifferent to what her answer might be. That answer when it came was not one to make for confidence.

"Michael, you shuah has got it all wrong. Yuh don't buy no pig in a poke, yuh says. Well, Ah don't buy duh pig when he hav' walked straight into mah sty," Mammy chuckled with ferocious mirth. "Ah just shuts duh gate an' gets duh knife for to turn him into pork. . . . Yuh gits that, honey?"

Michael Pym's face showed no fear at this threat. A truculent gleam came in his eyes, and his lips curled a little.

"Stow that, Mammy. I'm not a kid to be scared by bogies. S'pose you stick me, how d'you think you're going to get your fat paws on Bonito's treasure? You don't know the first thing about the hiding-place, an' Cocos has been combed at random that often, that you ought to know better than to think you can walk right on to the spot an' scratch away the dirt that covers it. You surprise me, Mammy."

Once again the negress laughed. "An' ah'm goin' to surprise yuh some more, Mistah Pym. . . . Dere was a l'l picture yuh took from dat tavern across duh water \_\_\_\_\_"

"Perdition!" ejaculated Pym plainly, more than a little disturbed.

"You lost dat las' night, hey?" Mammy chuckled.

"You've got it?" cried the man.

"No. But ah have got duh tavern sign; and ah have got duh gal——"

"Fat lot of good she'll be to you," intervened Pym contemptuously. "You don't know how to use her."

"Mebbe not," Mammy grinned broadly. "But yuh do, Mistah Pym, an' yuh is goin' to tell me duh way."



"I'll see you burn first."

"No! No!" The negress wagged her head. "Yuh got duh t'ing wrong, Michael. It ain't me who will burn, but a gent who don't seem to know which leg he stands on. . . . Now yuh listen to me, sonny, an' ah'll unfold what is in mah mind. . . . Yuh does duh trick with Seraphina an' ah'll turn yuh loose, when ah gets my hands on duh jewels——"

"You mean you won't have me stand in?"

"Nebber! . . . But ah lets yuh go out of duh sty instead of roping yuh on duh killin'-block. Yuh git me, Michael? . . . Dems my terms. Generous, ah calls dem, too!"

Michael Pym was plainly of another opinion. He said so with emphasis, and repudiated the offer with scorn. He would share fifty-fifty or not at all, and Mammy Venus could do just what pleased her most. Mr. Donne, in view of all the circumstances, thought it was a very heroic declaration, and waited with interest the negress's reply. Mammy, it appeared, was in no hurry. Her hands left her side. With one she dived in her coat pocket and produced a cigar, whilst the other drew from the opposite pocket a box of safety matches. She bit off the end, spat it out, then proceeded to light the cigar, puffing luxuriously. Pym watched her with steady gaze and Mammy waved a hand.

"Remove yoah orbs, Michael. Ah don't fall to magic; and yuh are wastin' time." She took two or three more pulls at the cigar, and then spoke tersely. "Man, yuh aire a fool!"

"How?" asked Pym.

"Take a look round."

Whilst Pym obeyed her, Mr. Donne craned his neck to learn what was behind the words. The significance was immediately apparent when behind the truculent Pym he saw the tall Colombian and a full-blooded negro standing with levelled rifles. It was clear to him that Mammy Venus did not mean to let Pym leave the precincts of the camp, and that, if necessary, force would be used to keep him there. Beyond question the thing was equally clear to the man most concerned, as the sudden change in his face revealed. But the revealing look passed in a flash, and a second later his face was a mask, though in the cold eyes there was a gleam of scorn.

"Tell 'em to shoot an' be damned!" he said with vigour. "If you do you'll never see a nickel of old Bonito's hoard."

The negress wagged her head. "La! La!" she said. "Yuh forget, Michael. Ah've got duh sign, an' duh gal. Dere's somethin' on duh sign which ain't on duh stone up duh hill; an' if duh gal don't know duh meanin'——"

"She doesn't!" interrupted Pym. "You have my word for that." He laughed almost ferociously as he added: "If she had known, do you think I shouldn't have had the goods by now? . . . Seraphina knows no more than you and less than I do; but she's a tool that I can use and you can't, Mammy! Get that in your coconut, and maybe you'll talk reasonably."

The negress's big eyes stared at him thoughtfully. Apparently the man's words had shaken her a little. She puffed furiously at the cigar for a moment, and then she spoke.

"Michael, yuh shuah aire a forgetful man. Dere's Manuel behind yuh. Yuh've seen him work with a knife an' matches, an' a piece of waxed twine——"

"Torture? Pooh! You'd merely bust your own game, and you know it. . . . A man can't do what I should have to do with Seraphina when you've torn his nerves to rags. . . . And I give you my word that inside three hours with moderate luck, through that girl, I could find what we're both wanting. . . . But I'm not going to play the monkey that pulls the nuts out of the fire unless I can gobble my share. . . . I came here to make terms. You won't meet me. Well, you won't pull out the nuts or lay hands on the loot, that's all."

The man spoke with assurance, with apparent sincerity, and certainly convincingly. The negress seemed to realise that. She frowned heavily, and her fat cheeks puckered in such a way that between the frown and the pucker her eyes were almost hidden. She seemed to be weakening and inclined to temporise, for suddenly she asked:

"How much do yuh reckon dis Bonito guy cached, Michael?"

Pym made a gesture. "God knows!" he said, not piously. "The yarn is that it runs to the worth of two million or more—between gold and jewels. Those old rovers never knew when they had enough, an' buried fortunes whilst they went to hunt for new ones."

"A grasping lot!" grunted Mammy. And then fairly snapped: "Ah won't stand for no fifty-fifty. A third is as far as ah'll go. . . . Take it or leave it, Michael."

Pym appeared to consider, then he nodded. "A third to me then. But I'll want a gun an' a pocket-full of shells."

"What foh?" demanded the negress sharply.

"Oh, just to pot the little birds!" the man laughed unpleasantly. "I'm not going to be the little baa-lamb, Mammy. And that goes in the articles. A gun before I quit this camp, and a third when we unearth the treasure."

Mammy Venus laughed. "Michael, yuh shuah would drive a bargain with Satan hisself——"

“Or with his dam!” interjected Pym.

Again the negress laughed with sincere enjoyment.

“Yuh sartan’ly do know how to cast duh boquets, sonny,” she said. “An’ ah loves yuh for it. Heah’s my fist to duh bargain.”

She held out a big hand, which Pym looked at as if he were tempted to use it for a cuspidor.

“I’ll take the pistol as seal,” he said coolly. “*And* a pocketful of shells. And when I get them I’ll be ready to start.”

“Can’t hit duh gold trail too quick foh me,” answered the woman, then spoke tersely to her lieutenant.

“Manuel, pass yoah pistol to Michael, an’ a fistful of shells.”

The Colombian began to protest, but was cut off with a horrid expletive and a look from Mammy which fairly froze the protest on his lips. Livid of face, he handed the pistol to Pym, and going to one of the tents, returned with a small tin box of cartridges which the other emptied in one of his tunic pockets, thrusting the pistol in the other. Then he grinned.

“Fetch out the girl, an’ we’ll start. Better bring a spade and a pickaxe along.”

He had now a jaunty air of confidence which impressed Mr. Donne considerably. Was the scoundrel so sure of the whereabouts of old Benito’s hoard that he had no fear of failure, or was he playing a trick on the woman with the intention of turning the tables on her when the opportunity came? He could not make up his mind on the point; but since it was a case of Greek meeting Greek, it seemed to him that in event of the latter, Michael Pym was taking heavy risks. But that was the ruffian’s own affair, and there was another matter that called for immediate consideration. What was to happen to himself? Was he to be left there to roast in the sun, or was he to be thrown to the sharks in the bay?

The prospect was not rosy. Neither Mammy nor Pym would have any more compunction in killing him than they would have in swatting a fly, and from their point of view he was both a nuisance and a possible danger. He was still wondering, when Mammy gave her lanky lieutenant an order.

“Fetch out duh gal, Manuel.”

The Colombian went to one of the tents, entered, and a moment later emerged, leading forth Seraphina, with a hand grasping her arm. Mr. Donne’s eyes anxiously considered her. She was a trifle pale but more composed than he expected, and he saw her dark eyes look first at Pym, then at Mammy, and finally turn to himself. They betrayed no surprise, which fact told him that she must have been aware of his plight, but they shot a silent message of condolence which brought a measure of uplift to his

heart. Pym thrust himself further on her notice.

“Morning—or should I say afternoon, Seraphina? You sure served me a nasty trick last night, but we’re still pals, I hope.”

Mammy laughed as the girl made no reply, and chaffed Pym heavily. “Loves yuh like as if yuh was a rattlesnake, Pym.”

“Just dissembling,” replied the man with an answering laugh. “What are you going to do with that fool there?”

Mr. Donne, recognising that the fateful moment had arrived, held his breath. It was touch and go now, and everything depended on the negress’s whim. For a space of seconds the woman considered, then she laughed as if she had found something that tickled her humour.

“Duh guy came to Cocos lookin’ foh duh treasure, didn’t he Michael?”

“What else?”

“Nothing! But Ah suffers from a kind heart. Ah reckons we’ll let him help to find it. Guess he can do duh digging an’ we’ll inter him in duh place where duh treasure is found. Dat will be what duh lawyer birds call poetic justice, hey?”

“Suit me, all right,” answered Pym, “but I guess I’ll hold a line on him while we march. He’s slippery as a blob of mercury.”

Donne breathed easily once more. Things were going better than he could possibly have hoped. He had half-expected that Mammy would have disposed of him out of hand, and here was respite until the hour when the treasure was found. It was a touch of ironic humour to propose to bury him in place of the treasure he had come to seek; but the postponement of his end might be longer than Mammy anticipated, and during the time of waiting anything might happen.

He was almost light-hearted when the whole crowd started up the hill, though he had a rope round his neck the free end of which was in Pym’s hands.

“Gee, mule!” cried that worthy at the start, jerking the rope in a way that Mr. Donne found exceedingly painful.

But he made no protest. To let the scoundrel know that such actions on his part were painful to his victim would be to ask for more, and that he did not desire. Stolidly as he could he faced the difficult climb, a little amazed at the ease with which Mammy Venus took the steep way through the trees and undergrowth. As he followed just behind her, from time to time he heard her chuckle, and wondered what evilly mirthful thoughts were in her black poll. Once she looked backward past himself to Michael Pym, and as she chuckled again immediately after, he had an idea that her amusement must centre round the cold-eyed ruffian. Was she planning some wickedly treacherous stroke against him? That was likely enough. She had done it

before when she had tried to feed him to the crabs, and it was highly probable that she would make another attempt rather than part with a third of the treasure when it was found. But she had to deal now with a man who did not trust her, who every moment would be on the alert against new treachery, and who withal was armed; and Pym with a pistol in his hand was not a man to be despised. It looked as if when the crucial moment came there might be lively happenings. The man had spoken of discovering the treasure through Seraphina within three hours. Did he really believe that was possible: or was it just a tremendous bluff?

He could not make up his mind on the point; and when at last they reached the plateau, and Pym on Mammy's instructions handed him over to one of his negroes, he was still wondering. He preferred his new guard, however. The negro drew a knife, felt the edge and looked significantly at his prisoner.

"Ef yuh make a break, boss, Ah guess dis knife will slip into yuh like as ef yuh was butter. Yuh get me, sah?"

Mr. Donne got him easily enough, and acknowledged the fact with a nod. But though he was sure the threat was not an empty one, his heart was singing, for it was clear that the negro was of slack and easygoing disposition, and that as like as not he would be off-guard, which would afford an opportunity that he much desired. And his reading of the negro's character was proved almost from the moment the threat had been spoken. The black was more interested in the doings of the rest of the party than in his prisoner. For that there was perhaps a little excuse, for as they reached the neighbourhood of Pym's rifled camp, a rather sharp argument developed between Mammy and Pym about some matter of procedure, and in the end the man clinched the matter by a decisive utterance:

"You can take it or leave it, Mammy. I want quiet and I've got to be alone with Seraphina, or I can't get the concentration of mind needed for the job. That's flat."

Apparently Mammy allowed herself to be convinced, for whilst she planted her men at strategic points, Pym with the girl entered the tent, the fly of which was promptly closed. Mr. Donne, remembering the slit in the back wall, wondered if Pym meant to try to slip out that way with Seraphina, but noted that Mammy herself was at a point where she could command that way out of the tent, and dismissed the thought as outside consideration. Michael Pym it seemed meant to go through with the plan which needed Seraphina for its accomplishment; and with a remembrance of the way he had seen the girl, twig in hands, walking hypnotically on the plateau, it was easy to guess what that plan was. He meant to use Seraphina's skill as a dowser to help him to the treasure.

Mammy Venus lit another cigar. Manuel Pareja unwrapped a piece of chewing

gum, crunched it and then stood quite still but for the ceaseless working of his jaws. The three blacks, including Donne's guard, watched the tent with curious eyes.

But for the humming of the flies, silence descended on the plateau, a silence that now and again was broken by the sound of Pym's voice speaking in monotonous tones; but too indistinctly for Donne to hear what he was saying. Twenty minutes or so passed, and no one of the watchers spoke. Mammy Venus threw away the stump of her cigar, and a minute or two later began to nod. The Colombian took a flask from his pocket and as he drank gurglingly, Mr. Donne caught the odour of rum. One of Mammy's nods jerked her into wakefulness, and as she saw the flask her big eyes gleamed avidly and she held out a fat hand. Pareja passed the flask, and just as the negress's head tilted backwards with the flask at her lips, there was a sound of movement within the tent. The negress, in the very act of drinking, stopped and stared round-eyed as the fly was thrown open and Pym appeared, followed by Seraphina, carrying between her hands a forked twig in the true dowsing fashion. Her eyes were closed, and she paused irresolutely as she stepped into the open, standing a statuesque figure in the sunlight, apparently quite unconscious of the flies buzzing round her, and of Mammy and Pareja and the others, Donne included. Pym looked round, made a signal to the watchers to fall behind, then spoke quietly to the girl.

"Forward, Seraphina. Till you find the running water."

The girl moved slowly forward, apparently completely under Pym's control. The black in charge of Mr. Donne, with heaven knows what dark superstitions at work in him, gave a scared gasp and dropped the rope, but immediately retrieved it; and the whole party moved off in the wake of the pair in front, the big negress clicking her tongue in an odd way.

They passed through the stretch of jungle grass in single file. Mammy herself at Pym's heels as if she suspected some treachery on the part of that scoundrel; but apparently, he intended none. They reached the burned portion of the plateau and at a word from Pym the girl turned towards the right, making as it seemed for the slope of the hills beyond. Then through the sultry stillness of the afternoon and the monotonous rumble of the sea, Donne heard the crash of falling water, and as he remembered the fall beneath which he and Andy had sheltered from the fire, he gave a mental ejaculation.

"Glory!"

It was in his mind that they were due to find running water mighty quickly, when the twig in the girl's hand oscillated violently and she came to an abrupt halt.

"You have found the running water?" asked Pym, his light eyes ablaze with excitement. The fellow it seemed was playing a straight game.

“Yes!” was the reply given tonelessly.

“Then follow its course in the direction in which it flows.”

Seraphina moved slowly forward, the man almost at her side, the others following a little apart and at the side. The course the girl took was in the direction of the slope towards the sea, half of which was blackened or withered brown by the recent fire. Once she paused irresolutely and retraced her steps, moving towards the watchers who opened to let her through. The negro who was the prisoner’s guard, absorbed in the proceeding had pressed forward, and it chanced that Mr. Donne was the last in the group, and as he looked at Seraphina’s set face he suffered a great shock of surprise. For two seconds, no more, the girl’s eyelids were raised, and the slumbrous eyes looked straight into his own, flashing a warning message. For a moment he was almost stunned with surprise, then the truth broke on him like a flash of revealing lightning. Seraphina was in no hypnotic sleep. This whole business of searching was mere hocus-pocus; arranged by Pym to enable him and the girl to escape from Mammy’s clutches, and he himself was to be ready for the moment.

He drew a deep breath and began to consider ways and means. The rope about his neck was an effective check against his bolting and he dared not attempt to cast it off lest his guard should notice. But there was a chance and a good one. The negro held the end of the rope loosely in his hand, and a sharp tug at the proper moment would probably jerk it free. He shook with excitement as he realised that; and then as Seraphina once more resumed her forward way, walking more quickly and surely, he prepared for the moment. Pym was speaking now, counting the paces with a rising intonation that betrayed a certain excited exultation. The fellow he thought was doing the thing very well, and acting in a way that would have deceived a Solomon. Mammy and the other blacks were fairly bubbling, and Pareja’s thin face was flushed to the colour of a ruby. Plainly they felt the great moment was near. From the front came Pym’s voice.

“Fifteen! . . . Sixteen . . . Seventeen——”

The guard pressed forward, and Donne’s fingers itched to grasp the rope. But he held off, till suddenly almost at the edge of the plateau, below which unburned bush showed green in the sun, the girl halted, and all the watchers halted also. Then sharp as a pistol shot came Pym’s voice.

“Jump, girl!”

Mr. Donne was taken by surprise. He saw Seraphina leap for the slope and Pym turn and snap a pistol before he followed. For one second all was confusion, then he jerked the rope, gathering the slack as he went leaping for the bush. He heard Mammy’s stentorian voice shouting orders, saw Seraphina disappearing in the

greenery, wondered if he would ever find her again, and then away to the left caught the sound of Andy's voice.

“Scoot, boy!”



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE RIDDLE SOLVED

As he plunged into the thicker undergrowth where he saw Seraphina disappearing, Donne heard Mammy Venus roaring orders, and another voice from somewhere on the hill below him shouting angrily to the girl.

"This way! This way, girl!"

Pym, he thought, and then stumbled on the girl who had halted behind a thick screen of some lush growth, waiting for him.

"To the right," he whispered and slipped the running noose from his neck.

They stumbled forward together, and as they did so a rifle cracked on the hillside. The girl halted sharply, but he caught her hand and almost dragged her forward.

"That's my friend, Andy. Quick!"

A number of shots were fired from the plateau apparently at random, for Mr. Donne was sure he and the girl must be too well screened to be visible targets. On the heels of the shots there sounded a crashing among the bushes away to the left, and from down the hill again came Pym's hail.

"Seraphina! . . . Seraphina!"

The negress shouted savage commands, and the girl shivered and clutched nervously with the hand that Donne held.

"Don't worry," he whispered. "If I know Mammy, Pym will have most of her attention. And if she gets him now, the Lord help him . . . Ah!"

Behind a great tree-fern he saw something move. A man whistled softly, and with surging relief in his heart, he hurried Seraphina forward. Andy Winstowe stepped from behind the tree, rifle in hand, a grin on his round face.

"S-s-s-s-h-h!"

As he made the warning sound he lifted a finger. Mr. Donne promptly brought Seraphina to a halt, and they stood listening. There was plenty of shouting, then a wild yell that might have been a view-hallo, since it was immediately followed by the crack of a rifle and a chorus of discordant cries. The little man laughed softly.

"Sighted Pym, I guess——" He whispered. "Niggers are such an excitable crowd." He laughed again. "But they're welcome to him for me, and anyway they're well off our beat. . . . Follow me, an' step lively an' quietly."

He led the way through the bush, following a track that had been cut at no distant date—probably by George Alcombe, and in the course of half an hour, when all shouting and sounds of pursuit had died away completely, they arrived at a gully

running down the hill. Water trickled there, and formed shallow pools arched over by lush ferns and other greenstuff.

“There’s our road,” he said. “Goes straight down to the sea. It’s a mite rough, and there are places you’ll have to paddle, Miss Bonito, but it’s a darn sight preferable to Mammy or that cod-eyed Pym.”

Without delay he climbed down the rough bank, and Seraphina and Donne followed. As they descended, the watercourse became a deep gully, so arched by trees and overgrown bush that they moved in a green twilight quite hidden from anyone above. Twenty-five minutes of splashing and scrambling gave them a glimpse of the sea, and all other sounds were drowned by the crash of a swelling tide against rocks. The waves came creaming into the mouth of the gully, and they waded through them up to their waists, until they turned a corner to find a small dinghy beached on a narrow strip of sand.

“Craft’s round the next point, couldn’t take the risk of bringing her in here,” explained Andy. “We’ll have to pull, an’ keep close in shore. . . . It’s less than half a mile to Mammy’s camp.”

He led the way to the dinghy, and with Donne’s help pushed it to the edge of the tide. Entering, they poled the boat off, and with both men at the oars, they moved out of the creek to the sea. For a full minute no one spoke, then Andy Winstowe said laughingly:

“Neat getaway you made. Miss Bonito! . . . How did you manage it? Wasn’t devised impromptu, I’ll bet.”

“No,” answered Seraphina composedly. “It was Pym’s idea. He arranged it when we were in the tent, whilst he was supposed to be putting me under a spell. He said that unless I agreed we should both of us be shot within half-an-hour.”

“That was likely enough,” commented the little man. “Mammy’s hot stuff to cross.”

“I said that I wouldn’t do it unless we could take Mr. Donne as well.”

“That was real thoughtful of you, Seraphina,” cried Mr. Donne with fervour.

“Pym was cross at that. He said we couldn’t do anything at the moment and that we’d be lucky to get away ourselves. But he promised that once we were clear of that wicked woman, he’d do what he could to get Mr. Donne away——”

“Fat lot that would have been,” said Andy with a snort.

“Of course, I had to take his word, though I didn’t believe him much, and when we left the tent I’d made up my mind to give warning to Mr. Donne——”

“My name’s Jack, Seraphina. Too much Mr. Donne-ing makes me feel like a schoolmaster.”

“Or a city councillor!” chuckled Andy. “Jack’s the name among friends, an’ it sure saves time, Miss Bonito.”

“I did my best——”

“And you did it very well,” broke in Mr. Donne gratefully. “But what I want to know is, what happened when you went to get that water?”

“I had half-filled the kettle when I thought I heard a movement behind me. I hadn’t time to look round before a hand was put on my mouth and an arm round my throat. I tried to cry out, but I couldn’t, and when I struggled I was nearly choked; then the man who held me whispered savagely:

“Be still, señorita, or I will blind you.”

“Pareja!” ejaculated Andy. “If ever I meet him face to face I’ll mark him for that.”

“The man spoke so ferociously that I believed he meant to do what he said, and as I didn’t want to go through life blind, I gave up trying to get away, and the man carried me down the hill where a blackamoor was waiting for him. They took me down to the camp——”

“I saw you arrive, Seraphina,” broke in Mr. Donne feelingly. “I’d have shot Pareja then, but he was too far off for a safe shot with you so near him, and I decided to bide my time. I didn’t bide it long, for whilst I was watching someone jumped on me from behind, knocked me out, and the next thing I knew was when I came round lying on the sand, listening to Pym bargaining with Mammy Venus.”

“I knew you were there before that,” said Seraphina quickly. “I saw you when you were carried in, and I thought you were dead.”

The girl was silent for a second or two, and Mr. Donne saw the remembered trouble of that moment reflected in her dark eyes, and felt his heart warm towards her. Then she continued. “I wanted that blackamoor woman to let me go to you, but she wouldn’t. She laughed at me, and said that if you were my honey——”

Again the girl interrupted herself and a wave of rich blood surged from neck to brow, whilst for a moment the dark eyes revealed a very confusion of spirit. Mr. Donne saw both and understood.

“Go on—honey,” he said, with a significance on the last word that was not to be mistaken. “Mammy Venus is a hen of a foul brood, but she has eyes in her head. Anyway, truth’s truth, whoever speaks it. What else did Mammy say?”

“She said that if I wanted to save you from being flayed alive, I’d tell her everything I knew about old Benito’s treasure, and what the secret of our old sign was. . . . Just then she could have had all Benito’s jewels for me, and I told her all I knew, which wasn’t much that was helpful, and when she brought out the sign, I told

her the difference between it and the little picture——”

“But not all of it, I guess. Miss Bonito,” laughed Andy Winstowe.

“All that I knew,” protested Seraphina. “That woman seemed too savage to play tricks with, and besides, I didn’t know how much she knew.”

Andy laughed again. “Ever see the back of that drawing, young lady?”

“The back? . . . No! . . . It always hung in its frame at home.”

“An’ your old man never took it out to look behind it, I guess?”

“Neither him nor anyone else that I ever heard of. It had hung where it was for generations.”

“But Mike Pym looked at the back, an’ what he read there made him think that the money was as good as in his bank, I guess——”

“You’ve got the picture, Andy?” cried Mr. Donne.

The little man laughed till he missed his stroke and came near to catching a crab.

“You bet, boy. I lifted it last night when Pym was chasing you and Miss Bonito. Chance of going through that blighter’s tent was too good to miss an’ I took the opportunity. . . . I got the little picture, and I have it safely cached where neither Mammy nor Pym could find it, though they hunted a century. . . . It’s a revealing thing in its way, as you’ll see, boy, when you put your peepers on it. . . . That’s not to say that it is clear as a sky-sign. It ain’t, but it gives a hint; an’ if that hint was clear to Pym, then I reckon it’ll be just as clear to us when we get down to it. . . . But here we are. . . . Backwater, and I’ll swing the boat round.”

Rounding a bosky point, they came on the motorboat riding at anchor. Pulling up to her, they stepped aboard, and with the dinghy in tow, started off down the coast for a place which Andy had chosen for his camp.

“Got something there that’ll surprise you, I guess Jack.”

“No, you haven’t,” laughed Mr. Donne. “Not unless you’ve got old Benito’s loot. If you’re talking of Pym’s magic carpet, as I guess you are——”

“But how the deuce——”

“Saw you towing it, Andy! A clever move!”

“Ties Michael Pym by the leg,” chuckled the little man. “An’ if he finds that loot he won’t be able to get it away. I’ve seen to that good and well. I don’t know the first thing about air-planes, except that I ain’t risking my neck in one, but I do know about engines; an’ Mike won’t be able to start that one till he applies to me for the missing parts.”

“Good!” laughed his friend approvingly. “But how did you manage to fire the yacht?”

“Oh, that was dead easy. I guessed Mammy would have left no more than a

watch on board, and I ran alongside her last night in the full moonlight and tied up quietly. Then I went up the accommodation ladder, thinking that maybe I might have to plug whoever chanced to be aboard. . . . But I ain't got that on my conscience. There were two niggers in the cabin, and as they'd been at the rum—heavy; they were helpless as newborn babes. I just tied 'em up and got busy with the kerosene, soaking things below good and plenty so that when I lit her up there wasn't a salvage corps in creation could save her—not without opening the sea-cocks, which, lying where she was, would have just sent her to the bottom, and——”

“You didn't leave those men to burn?” cried Seraphina, in horror.

“I did not!” replied Andy with emphasis. “‘Tain't for a man like me to forestall Judgment Day.” He laughed quietly. “When I'd made sure the bonfire would go, I bundled them over into this craft, ran 'em within quarter of a mile of the beach, and made 'em swim for it.”

“Did they make the shore?”

“How'm I to know? I'd saved 'em from burning and it was up to them to save themselves from drowning, and I didn't wait to see what befell them, having urgent private affairs needing attention. . . . If they got away from the sharks, I guess I'm sorry for them, and when Mammy's through with 'em they'll wish they hadn't. . . . But there you've got the whole dime yarn, coloured prints an' all——”

“Not quite, Andy!”

“What's missing?” snapped the other.

“How you came to be up there in the woods so pat, just now.”

“Oh, that! I'd have thought you'd have guessed that bit, boy. Naturally I was keeping a lookout for you. There's a nice observation post up on the cliffs farther on—I was watching the woods with the glasses, hoping to get sight of you and Miss Bonito. I'd a nice view of Mammy's camp, and as I saw both her an' you brought in, I judged it was time to get busy.”

“Did you see Pym arrive?”

“No. I guess he was a bit of a surprise. He must have shown up when I was on my way. First thing I saw of him was when he had that rope in his hand, to lead you like a troublesome steer. . . . I was pretty close behind you going up the hill, but I hadn't a chance to get you clear, boy, though to be sure I'd have done it in the end, even if I'd had to pot that crowd one by one. . . . But Pym an' Miss Bonito here saved me that trouble. . . . What really worries me is what is going to happen next?”

“That's an easy one,” answered Mr. Donne with a short laugh, and added resolutely: “We're going to get Benito's fortune.”

Andy Winstowe whistled thoughtfully. Then he looked backward to the green

slopes above Wafer Bay.

“Tain’t going to be so dead easy. . . . There’s Pym—roaming wild. And there’s Mammy and her lot. I guess that lady is just raging an’ champing at the bit like a war horse. . . . And both of ’em know something of the whereabouts of the cache. They’ll hang around looking for it for a while, neither of ’em taking time to wonder how they’re going to get it away from Cocos when found. . . . That’s the common folly. I’ve known two fellows die of starvation up in the Andes, on the top of a silver lode they’d found, an’ had been working instead of seeing that the store shelves were stocked. As like as not that’s what’ll happen here. Mammy’ll camp on the ground, an’ Pym——”

“We can wait and outlast both!”

“Maybe,” replied Andy dryly, and said no more on the matter at the moment.

They made the place which Andy had chosen for his camp, well down the bay and a good two days’ march from Mammy’s tents; and there, since all were hungry and weary, first prepared a rough meal, and then decided to sleep, keeping watch and watch.

“First watch to me,” said Mr. Donne. “It will be dark in an hour, and I’d like to study that little picture while the light lasts.”

“You’re welcome,” chuckled Andy. “Guessing’ll keep you from falling asleep on duty, I suppose.”

The little man retrieved a wallet from the place where he had hidden it under a rock, tossed it carelessly to his friend, and since Seraphina was already in the tent which they had brought ashore, rolled himself in a blanket and promptly gave himself to sleep. Mr. Donne opened the wallet and took out the folded parchment it held. Opening it, he stared for a moment at the drawing of the Three Blue Anchors. He found nothing new there to stimulate thought; and he turned the parchment over. At first, staring at the blank centre, he felt that Andy had been playing with him, then almost beneath his thumb, running across the parchment, he caught sight of a double line of letters. The ink which had been used had faded till it was a light brown, scarcely distinguishable from the soiled surface of the parchment itself. The letters were in Old English, not too easy to read, and since they had been done by an inexpert hand, the difficulty of reading them was increased. Excited and baffled, he swore impatiently: “Damn! Why did the fellow use this tombstone lettering?”

He persisted and presently deciphered the whole of the lettering, which ran:

***The spoil is laid by the secret water-springs and the anchor is set  
by compass and the great rock.***

He read it through again, his eyes blazing, his heart drumming with excitement. Then he whispered hoarsely:

“‘The secret water-springs!’ By God! That’s why Pym needed Seraphina’s divining-rod!”

Once more he read, chewing over the words of the second line, his mind groping for their meaning.

“‘And the anchor is set by compass and the great rock.’”

What in thunder could that mean: that old Benito Bonito had laid the spoil of his bloody piracies along a compass line? That was understandable. Naturally a man concealing a great treasure in a deserted land where nature flung forth greenstuff with such prodigality that in a month a track cut with a machete was scarcely visible and hidden completely in three, would be careful to take exact bearings. A compass, yes! Beyond question. But where did the anchor come in? And the great rock?

He turned the parchment over and again considered it. There were three anchors there and one only was mentioned in that script. That was a puzzler, and when the right anchor was chosen its purpose was not clear. He stared at them until he had optical illusions. The anchors seemed to whirl like a wheel, and when he looked up and out to the sea they seemed to whirl still against the horizon’s background.

“It’s like picking the lady in the three-card trick,” he muttered. “Which ever you back, you’re wrong.”

For a moment he ceased to puzzle about the anchors and gave his thoughts to the great rock. That, he thought, might be the starting-point of the quest. Almost certainly so. The rock bore this confounded device, and the man who had carved that had not gone to all that trouble for the fun of the thing. But he had left something out, and, by Harry, yes! There had been a hint of some difference between the parchment and the inn-sign which the Bonitos had displayed to the world. “Old Llewellyn’s name-letters,” Seraphina had pointed out, were missing from the stone, whether left out deliberately or effaced by the tropic storms and the attrition of the salt airs of a century and a half. If there should be the same omission on the inn-sign, that would give those letters below Benito’s own monogram an enormous significance. Seraphina would know, and he must learn the truth at once. He rose quickly and turned to go to the tent, to find the girl standing by the open fly her dark eyes watching him with a fathomless expression.

He moved quickly to her. Shaken with excitement as he was, the beauty of her, standing there in the light of the sinking sun, was the thing that was momentarily uppermost in his mind. It shook him even more than the discovery he was on the verge of making. As he reached her there was something in her glance which broke

down all restraint, and the word that Mammy Venus had used in derisive insult rose to his lips.

“Honey!” he whispered hoarsely, everything else for the moment forgotten. “Honey! I want you.”

His whisper carried conviction. In a second the girl was in his arms, her lips warm on his, and her breasts heaving tumultuously in great sobs. In that moment of emotion Mr. Donne had the grace to remember that dead man lying in the hut in Wafer Bay. Her husband? He had never been that in reality. He had been nothing to her but a man taken at the altar to serve Ben Bonito’s ambitions for his ancestor’s treasure. A girlish fancy perhaps! Perhaps not even that! . . . But in high heaven’s name, what matter? The living must not be sacrificed for the dead; and if Seraphina had forgotten him so completely, then he deserved no better fate. In any case he was sure that her lips had not warmed to George Alcombe as they warmed to his; and no man dead or living should keep her from him.

“Honey!” he whispered again. “Honey!” and held her still closer to him.

. . . Still together in the tent door, they saw the sun like a golden ball drop suddenly from sight, and were surprised by the swift darkness of the tropics. Then, with the light gone, the man had a sudden remembrance of the parchment all crumpled in his hand.

“My stars, Seraphina, I’d quite forgotten.”

“What?” asked the girl.

“There was a question. I believe old Benito’s treasure is in sight. You remember that stone on the hill didn’t carry old Llewellyn’s name-letters under those of Benito Bonito’s?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, tell me: were those letters on the signboard of the Three Blue Anchors?”

“No,” said the girl. “Only Benito’s initials and the date. Often father and I have wondered why there should be that difference between the sign and the parchment! We could never make it out.”

“But I know!” cried Donne exultantly. “Those letters are the key of the whole thing, and the secret was not painted on the signboard that Benito Bonito first hung out to the world’s gaze.”

“But how?” asked Seraphina. “I don’t see what they can tell.”

“Nor me either at the moment, but I’ll know before the night’s out. . . . But we shall want a light——”

“There’s a little lamp in the tent,” said the girl.

“Then light it and fetch it out. We’ll sit on the beach and find the big secret



together.”

Five minutes later they were side by side on the beach, Seraphina holding the lamp, and her lover with the parchment spread on his knees. Then, after staring at the letters that, as he was convinced, held the key to the treasure-house, he suddenly asked a question.

“What makes you think the name was Llewellyn, Seraphina?”

“Oh, that was just a guess of my father’s. He could make LI into nothing else!”

“And the other letters—‘F. N.’ What did he make of them?”

“Oh, lots of things. Francis was his fancy for the F and North for the N. Didn’t matter a straw that I could ever see, the thing being so uncertain.”

“North!” ejaculated Mr. Donne, staring to the sea. “North—Francis North. . . . But Francis was just his fancy and no more. F might stand for something quite different. Fab . . . Fac . . . Fad . . . Fae . . .” He rang the changes on the alphabet till he came to T, then stopped. “Fat. That’s nothing; but. . . by Jupiter . . . fathoms . . . fathoms north!” He shook with excitement. “If I’m right, this jigsaw’s coming out. Fathoms north! Fathoms north! How many?” He stared at the parchment again intently, then suddenly he smote his knee. “Got it, by heaven!”

He laughed like a drunken man, the girl at his side momentarily forgotten, everything swept away by the excitement of discovery. Seraphina had to shake his arm to win attention.

“You’ve got it!” she said. “What is it? Tell me! I’ve a right to know.”

“A double right,” he said. “Your own and mine. Just look at that.” His index finger went to that which she and her father had taken for a name. “Double L you called that. You took it for the capital and the small l. But it isn’t. It’s Roman figuring. L and I, and it means fifty-one, and that lettering expanded runs—‘fifty-one fathoms north.’ Fifty-one fathoms north by the secret water springs; and the anchor—that one at the top for a thousand pounds—is the compass point to the north.” His arm went around her, and he cried ecstatically. “My stars, Seraphina, we’ll be as rich as kings!”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE SECRET SPRINGS

"Say, what's that you're spilling, boy?"

At the sound of the voice Mr. Donne looked round. A dim figure, but with eyes shining in the lamplight, Andy Winstowe was sat upright, looking wonderingly at his friend.

"We've hit the secret of this picture and that stone on the hill, or I'm a Dutchman, Andy. The loot is as good as ours. Just roll over here and I'll explain."

The little man, though his figure would have served him well, did not roll. Throwing his blanket aside, he stood up and walked, then dropped on the shingle by his friend.

"Well?" he asked.

Mr. Donne explained carefully, giving his reasons and referring frequently to the drawing. Andy Winstowe listened carefully and without interruption until he had finished, then after a moment he delivered judgment.

"By heck, boy! You've sure hit it! . . . All we've got to do is to hit them secret springs——"

"That's where Seraphina's dowser's-rod comes in."

"Guess you're right! And it's from that big rock with its strange device that the fathoms run, I'll bet. That F must mean fathoms. Old Benito may have been a pirate but he was a seaman too, and to measure by fathoms is a seaman's way. All we've got to do is to get command of that plateau for half a day an' then we can gather the dollars or whatever form of specie old Ben preferred. It's a cinch! Copper-bottomed, water-tight, A1 at Lloyd's or any other darn nuisance to free sailormen who don't want to be interfered with by busybodies. But we've got to get the use of that plateau for just so long as we want, or we can't rake in the goods."

"We'll do that, by hook or crook."

Andy Winstowe did not reply immediately. His round face puckered with thought. His eyes closed to shut out all that might interfere with mental processes, and when he opened them, he shot a question that didn't seem to bear on the matter at all.

"What about taking Seraphina on a little cruise round Cocos, to-morrow?"

"I don't get you, Andy. If you've gasoline to waste——"

"Don't be sarcastic, boy. I'm dead serious. That plateau and the immediate vicinity of it, as a shyster lawyer would say, ain't going to be a very healthy place for you and Seraphina and me for the next day or two . . . you must cotton to that.

There's two parties who're likely to prowls there for a bit, and both of 'em would like to get their paws on this young lady; whilst either of them'll try to pot you an' me at sight. . . . That's so, ain't it?"

"I'm not disputing that."

"No. It ain't to be disputed. But there's another item on the agenda to be considered. Ever hear of the Kilkenny cats?"

"What have cats to do with——?"

"Figure of speech, boy. Mammy's a tiger, I know; an' Michael Pym is another; but they're on opposite sides; and with all this island to play about in, and no penal code to worry 'em, I reckon that in about a week there'll be no more than a pair of furry tails for us to worry about. . . . That lot will cancel one another out. You get the idea?"

Mr. Donne got the idea, but saw a difficulty. "Suppose one of them finds the treasure whilst we're doing this joy cruise?"

"That ain't likely an' you know it. . . . Whoever does that has got to find them secret springs, an' he's got to hit that reading of yours—fifty-one fathoms north. How's he going to do it? . . . Pym, who knows more than Mammy, needs Seraphina's forked twig for the job; and Mammy, though she's as shrewd as the devil's own dam, don't even know where to start. But for you an' Seraphina an' me, that loot of old Pirate Benito's is just as safe as it was the day he cached it; an' where Mammy and Pym are concerned, we could go cruising for a year if we wanted an' leave 'em to dig a hundred more pits on Cocos, without us worrying one little bit. . . . That's the real situation, an' I guess it'll pay to leave it in their hands for a day or two, an' give Mammy a chance to get Pym, or Pym a chance to get Mammy, or both of 'em to get the other."

"But what about Pareja? . . . He's not to be overlooked."

"Who said he was?" demanded the little man, his cherubic face going suddenly grim. "Don't you worry about that swine, boy. . . . He'll get his medicine at the proper time. I ain't forgot that little girl at the Cordova Café yet. Pareja was in that business as much as Mammy—an' if I've luck he'll pay for it."

Mr. Donne considered, and considered so long that his friend grew impatient.

"You ain't worrying about the loot, Jack. There's no need. It's lain where it is for more than a century an' a half, an' I guess it ain't going to sprout wings all of a sudden."

"No," agreed Mr. Donne. Then he drew a long breath and made his decision. "I guess we'll go cruising. . . . It's the safe way for Seraphina, and it'll give that Kilkenny-cats' notion of yours a chance to work itself out."

"Then that's settled. . . . We'll sail at dawn. . . . An' now I'll resume my beauty sleep. Shake me when it's time to change watches."

At daybreak they left their camp and started on the cruise. Passing the beach, where Mammy's camp was situated well out of rifle-shot, Mr. Donne surveyed it through the binoculars and reported.

"Both tent-flies closed. Nigger with a rifle on guard. By Jove, he's spotted us; he's drumming on one of the tents! Calling Mammy, I guess." A moment later he reported again. "Guessed right. Mammy emerges—in deshabelle. Is watching us and dancing like a marionette. Thinks we're carrying away the loot, I reckon, and has a notion she is marooned."

"Will be, if I've aught to do with the business," commented Andy. "Cocos is an ideal spot for it."

They ran on, passed out of view of the camp; but with the glasses at his eyes, Mr. Donne still watched the shore, the woods, and the heights of the island.

"See any sign of Pym?" asked the other.

"None!"

"Sleeping off the excitement of last night, I reckon. . . . Well, if I know Mammy, he'll have another dose presently. With us off the map, the lady'll be able to give him all her attention. . . . Should be interesting, I guess. Case of set a thief to catch a thief; and which is the worst, Lor' only knows."

They ran down the coast, but did not circumnavigate the island. Later in the afternoon, a little bay offered itself enticingly, and Andy made a suggestion that they should anchor there.

"It'll save juice," he commented. "And we can't afford to waste too much with a four hundred mile run to the nearest filling-station. . . . Give us all the chance of a proper rest too—and a fresh man's better than a bone-tired one any day."

They anchored, and spent the next few hours there but not quite so restfully as they had hoped, for late in the afternoon, when the two men were dozing Seraphina awakened them with a sudden cry.

"Oh, look! Look!"

She was pointing seawards and both men turned swiftly in that direction. What they saw was a horizon that had narrowed amazingly and that was black as night, whilst the sea between was the colour of ink.

"My Gee!" ejaculated Andy Winstowe sharply. "We've got to get out of this. There's the father and mother of a storm coming, and we're on the weatherside. If it hits us here we'll be blown slap to the middle of Cocos. Sharp's the word, boy."

In the briefest time they had the anchor up and were away, running for the lee-

side of the island, which would afford the protection they needed. And rounding a headland they suffered a surprise. A mile away was a small cutter, its sails exceedingly white against the blackness of sea and sky. It was sailing quickly, apparently with the intention of making the island, and both men stared at it wonderingly.

“Who in thunder can be——”

“Another treasure-hunter,” chuckled Andy. “There are times when Cocos is thick with ’em. But if that fellow isn’t careful, he’ll find more than he’s looking for. A sailing cutter isn’t like a craft with her own power. . . . But that’s his affair. . . . Safety first for me.”

They made a safe anchorage just as the storm broke, and with the wind hurtling overhead and the sea whipped to great waves beyond them, lay snug as rabbits in their burrows.

“Blow itself out in two or three hours at the most,” said Andy. “These violent affairs don’t last long.”

But his anticipation was wrong. The storm continued. It lasted with brief lulls for two whole days, and when on the third day the seas died down, Andy suggested a return to their old anchorage.

“Might as well go and look for those Kilkenny tails,” he said. “I guess that lot have had time to devour each other. And we’ve still got to test that big idea of yours, boy.”

They started on the return course, lifted the beaches of Wafer Bay, and then Andy who was surveying the island through the binoculars gave an exclamation.

“Heck! The cutter piled up! . . . She’s there among the rocks—kindling-wood.”

“Wonder who ran her?”

“Guess the sharks have got that secret nicely tucked away. They swarm hereabouts.”

He continued to watch the shore, then again he found something interesting.

“Christopher!” he shouted. “There’s a fellow there at the edge of the bush, signalling like mad; but doesn’t come into the open. . . . Can’t make out his face, but from his shyness I guess he doesn’t want to be seen from the woods.”

“We’ll take a look at him,” said Mr. Donne. “If he’s the stranger who came in that cutter, he may give us news of Mammy and Pym. He can’t be shy of anybody else. I’ll run in shore.”

They turned towards the beach, and as they did so the man in the bush signalled frantically again, but he did not break cover.

“Something’s got him scared cold,” commented Andy, “or he’d come out to

meet us. Wonder what?" He broke off suddenly, and then fairly shouted. "My hat! It's Pym! . . . Run closer. We'll swap news."

There was deep water close in shore, and whilst Andy displayed a rifle prominently, Mr. Donne manœuvred the little vessel skilfully till they were within shouting distance of the man at the top of the beach. He waved something over his head.

"White flag!" chuckled Andy. "Got a handkerchief, Seraphina? Just flag-wag the fellow."

Plainly Pym interpreted the signal as proclaiming a truce. They saw him look cautiously round, then he left the bush and ran limping down to the beach to the edge of the tide.

"Beggar's lame!" said Andy. "Wonder what's bit him?"

Michael Pym was more than lame, he was a man shaken by fear. As he reached the edge of the creaming water he cried out imploringly:

"For the Lord's sake, take me off here!"

"What for?" asked Andy coolly.

"Haven't time to yarn. . . . There's a devil loose here with a scatter-gun. . . . He's somewhere in the woods behind——"

"With a scatter-gun——" began the little man in surprise.

"Nought else! . . . I ought to know. I've a charge of swan-shot in my leg. . . . An' for two days I've been chivvied like—like a partridge in the mountains. It's plain Hell——"

"Who is the fellow?"

"Lord knows! I've never put eyes on him. . . . He's as furtive as a weasel."

"Um! . . . where's Mammy?"

"Gone off round the island in that rowboat of hers with Pareja and one of the niggers. . . . This sportsman with the gun had a go at her an' put her wind up, I guess. He's a regular——"

From the wood there came a sharp report—and the sand spurted up a yard from Pym's feet.

"My God!" he yelled. "He——"

The rest of the cry was lost as he took to his heels, running lamely for the shelter of the nearest rock. As he reached them the gun cracked again, and there was a sudden scattering of lichen from the rock.

"Well, I'm spifflicated!" cried the little man, staring at a little plume of smoke that was rising from the bush at the top of the beach. Then swiftly he cupped his hands. "Ahoy, there! Ahoy!"

All three watched the bush closely for any sign of the hidden marksman. Nothing moved in the greenery and there was no response to the hail. Andy tried again.

“Ahoy! Ahoy, friend! Ahoy!”

A couple of seconds passed and then out of the bush came the oddest figure—a little man with a white linen hat pulled well down over his grubbily-bearded face, wearing an old Norfolk jacket, khaki breeches and brown leggings. Over his shoulder was the broad strap of a fisherman’s bag, which sagged heavily at his side; and carried with sportsman-like readiness across his chest was a double-barrelled gun. As he came shambling down the sand, Mr. Donne watched him with popping eyes—a look of utter incredulity on his face, whilst Andy Winstowe made mocking comment.

“Well, of all the old geesers to get Mike Pym on the run——”

He was interrupted by a sudden wild cry from Seraphina:

“Father! . . . Father!”

The little man turned on her like lightning, an amazed look in his eyes.

“That your dad, girl?” he asked. “Are you dead sure?”

“Father!” cried Seraphina again, and it was Mr. Donne who answered his friend’s question:

“That’s Ben Bonito, landlord of the Three Blue Anchors, right enough. . . . But what he’s doing here——”

“Running amok!” shouted the little man gleefully. “What did I tell you? . . . Here’s old Pirate Benito’s blood coming out. Must be a holy little terror to have got both Mammy and Pym hopping. . . . You heard Mike——”

“I’m going to take Seraphina ashore!” interrupted Mr. Donne. “Just haul to—while I pull the dinghy alongside.”

Five minutes later, the small dinghy beached on the sand, and springing out, Seraphina ran towards the odd figure awaiting her.

“Father!” she cried again. “Father!”

Ben Bonito took one hand from his gun, and pushing back the flapping brim of his linen hat stared at her with half-crazed, blood-shot eyes. Then a light of recognition came in them.

“Pheeny!”

He stumbled forward and then collapsed suddenly, sliding down to the sand like a sack suddenly emptied of its contents. Mr. Donne caught the gun as he fell, and leaving him to Seraphina, gave his attention to the rock whither Pym had fled for shelter. He saw that worthy’s head raised above the edge of the stone, his eyes wide with wonder.

“Get up, Pym!” he said tersely.

Pym obeyed him, but his gaze was still for Ben Bonito.

“My Gee!” he said. “That little runt of a beer-slinger. And he’s had me scared stiffer than a——”

“Quit!” interrupted Mr. Donne. “While the quitting’s good. You have just time to hit the bush.”

He opened the breach of the gun to make sure that the innkeeper had re-loaded, then he snapped it as Pym broke into protest.

“You aren’t going to drive me into the bush and leave me to starve?”

“Maybe Mammy’ll feed you if you ask her nicely.”

“Mammy!”

A lurid expletive followed, and Mr. Donne laughed harshly.

“There’re plenty of coconuts—and crabs! . . . Anyway, that’s your affair.”

He broke off, then once more gave the order: “Quit!”

There was a harsh ring in his voice, a look on his face which told Michael Pym that the sands of grace were running out. He cursed horridly, and turning began to limp up the beach, slowly as if to hint contempt.

“Quicker!” said Donne. “I’m going to count twenty—then shoot.”

Michael Pym looked at the line of bush. It did not take a man long to count twenty, and it was borne on him that he was wasting time. He broke into a limping run. He was breathless when he reached the bush, but he had the spirit to turn and shake his fist. The crack of the gun and a spattering of pellets too close for comfort cut short that futile demonstration, and turning hurriedly, he plunged into the trees.

. . . Later in the day when Mr. Bonito, almost his old self again, was sleeping as probably he had not done since his arrival at the island, Seraphina told the two men his story as she had heard it. It had been a broken and confused story, for he remembered only part of his own actions, but the gist of it was sufficient to account for his presence. Stung by the loss of the secret of his hereditary treasure and by Seraphina’s apparent desertion, he had been nerved at last to depart on the search on which he had meditated for most of the years of his life—the search which in a moment of weakness he had deputed to George Alcombe after binding him to the family by marriage with Seraphina. He had found a manager for the inn, and with little baggage save sheer necessities and his old sporting gun, had started within ten days for Cocos, hoping to overtake Pym and Seraphina. He had looked up the route too often not to be familiar with it; and though at Colon he was delayed for a couple of days, he must have been almost at the heels of Mr. Donne when he reached Panama.



At Balboa, since he was familiar with sailing-boats, he bought the cutter—the cutter they had seen—and with a couple of half-breed waterside loafers to help him, had sailed for the island. They had been caught by the hurricane, thrown on the rocks, and the half-breeds had perished in trying to make the beach. He had remained on the cutter, expecting every moment to be his last; then, though the wind still blew, the falling tide had made it possible to land. He had been preparing to do so, when a man had appeared clambering over the rocks towards the cutter—Michael Pym. Then he had gone to the splintered cabin for the gun and cartridges, meaning to shoot the scoundrel out of hand. He had fired and missed whilst the fellow was still among the rocks, and when the man had run for the bush he had followed, and had been stalking him ever since. . . . That was all, and had Seraphina found old Benito's hoard?

"Went amok, same as I said," commented Andy Winstowe. "Doesn't remember what he did, which is all according to Cocker. But he must have been something real merry to put the fear of God in Mammy and Pym. . . . Peppered Pym, but didn't get him outright; which is a pity! And Lord knows what he must have done to Mammy to get her on the run. . . . To look at him, sleeping like a babe, you'd never guess it of him. But then you never can tell how character'll come out in a man under pressure, same as diamonds out of coal. . . . An' talking of diamonds, when do we lift the shiners that Benito cached?"

"In the morning, I think, just after daybreak. It'll be cooler then. We'll have to leave someone in charge of the boat. I don't trust Pym."

"My job!" said the little man ruefully generous. "Can't rob old Ben of his right to be in at the death, and that scatter-gun of his will keep Pym well in the offing. . . . The job shouldn't take long if them fancy directions of yours are right."

"Can't be anything else!" answered Mr. Donne superbly confident.

. . . Exactly fifty-five minutes after dawn the little party of three stood by the great rock near Pym's deserted camp. The wild pigs had been busy among that scoundrel's possessions, but searching among the debris, Seraphina found one of her forked twigs, which wrapped in damp cotton and oiled paper had been kept moist; and taking a compass bearing from the rock due north, Seraphina, setting out on the line indicated, quickly declared running water beneath her feet.

"Keep going, till I tell you to stop," cried her lover, counting the paces.

He counted a hundred paces, making his stride carefully, and reckoning that at fifty fathoms he gave Seraphina the word to halt. There was a crash of falling water in the air, and they were almost at the point where, running from the fire, Andy and he had stumbled on the waterfall which had been their salvation. An odd look of

excited expectancy came on his face.

“March on,” he said tersely. “Slowly. Don’t lose the line of the water.”

There was a scattering of rock among the bushes just there, and walking in a line was not easy, but the girl kept on until she reached an edge of rock where the land dropped abruptly away, and from below which came the crash of the fall. Mr. Donne, shaking with excitement, lay on his stomach and looked over. Below him, running smoothly and glassily along a ledge came the underground stream which, leaping the ledge, made the fall below. He stood up with a look on his face that startled Seraphina with its intensity.

“Have I gone wrong?” she asked.

“No, dead right,” he said. “I’ve got to get down to that ledge.”

He began to cast about in the bushes, struck a flat rock thick with moss, with another below it that scarcely could have been laid where it was without human skill.

“Great Jove!” he whispered. “Steps!”

Steps they were, rudely fashioned, hidden deep in moss, and with bushes overhanging; but they led to the place where from a cavern-like mouth the underground stream issued. There was a flat ledge of rock running inward. It was water-worn smoother than chiselled marble, but it was dry save for splashings from the current. He stepped on to it, and stared into the cavern, the water running smoothly at his side. The place was sufficiently high for him to enter if he stooped a little, and he did so, moving forward carefully along the ledge. The cavern widened, but the light was bad, and he was thinking that before further examination was possible, a lamp would have to be procured, when he became aware of a recess in the rock at his side. He stared in, but could see little. He had matches, and striking one, he looked again. There was a heap of drift stuff there, and sticking out of it what looked like an iron hoop. Stooping he tugged at it, and it turned to red dust in his hands.

His mind divined the meaning of it, and he was shaken by dismay. Something had been there, an iron-bound chest, as he guessed, but sprayed always by water, bored by insects, in the process of a century and a half it had rotted clean away—not even the punk of it left. He struck another match and examined the ledge and the recess anew. There was evidence that when the underground stream was in flood, it must sweep the ledge and go swirling round that recess like running water in a pot-hole, with force enough to send even heavy stuff into the current, to be swept along the smooth rock and go hurtling into the depths below. If anywhere, he thought, old Benito’s treasure was at the bottom of the fall, scattered down a quarter of a mile of gully, covered deep with the debris of a hundred and fifty years.

He kicked the accumulated rubbish with a careless foot, groped among the muck with his hands, and encountered a hard thing what he took for a squared stone. He tried to lift it, that he might make sure. The thing moved but was wedged in some way against the corner of the recess, and he was in the mood to leave it alone, but his native stubbornness prevailed, and falling on his knees, dug at the muck with his hands until he had the thing almost uncovered. Then he struck a match, and with his nose almost touching the muck, he stared curiously. It was no stone. It was——

“My stars!” he whispered. “A box!”

Dropping the match he dug frantically. His nails broke in the energy of the effort, sharp stuff in the rubbish cut his hands, some crawling, squirming thing that had its home there bit him, but he was unconscious of hurt. It took him a whole twenty minutes to get the thing free and before he had done so he heard Seraphina shouting anxiously at the mouth of the cavern.

“Jack! . . . Jack!”

“Coming!” he cried, and three minutes later he had the thing free.

He could scarcely see it, but it was as he felt less in size than the regulation brick, but it was heavy and his numbed touch was dimly aware of chased work on its surface. The cavern was cold, but as he moved towards the entrance, he was sweating in every pore. He dared not look at the thing he carried, lest his disappointment should be too acute. As he approached the outfall, he saw Seraphina who had climbed down those awkward steps in her anxiety for him . . .

“Thank heaven you’re safe, my man!” she cried, fervently. “I was deadly afraid——What’s that?”

“Heaven knows! . . . Climb up . . . We’ll find out.” He was still in a tumult of excitement when he climbed the last step, and stood on the rock above the outfall. He looked at the thing he carried. It was metal of some kind—silver possibly. He scratched it with his knife, scoring it heavily and saw it gleam brightly in the sun. Then eager to know what it held he tried to prise it open with his knife. The blade snapped short, and he swore impatiently.

“Damnation!”

Then Seraphina’s father stepped forward. There was an odd look on his unshaven, wizened face.

“Wait lad,” he said, “till we’re down to the sea. Whatever’s there will keep; an’ ’twill be easier to carry unopened.”

Mr. Donne’s impatience was checked. He laughed at himself. “That’s wise counsel. Likely enough there’s nothing. Let’s go.”

They made the beach to find Andy in the boat, rifle in hand, watching some rocks down the coast.

"Pym's there," he laughed. "I was hoping for a pot-shot. . . . What luck?"

Mr. Donne put the tarnished, begrimed box in his hands. "Open it, Andy. . . . I haven't the nerve now."

"Nerve!"

The little man laughed, and with a sudden movement brought the box crashing downward on the thole-pin of the boat. The result was astonishing. There was a small cascade of jewelled fire, a rattle of small hard things in the boat's bottom, myriad gleams of colour that burned brightly as the morning sun—red, violet, green, and white as the sun itself.

"Heck!" cried Andy Winstowe; was dumb for a moment, and then added: "I've sure broke the Easter Egg! Lor', Donne, you were right, we'll be rich as kings."

"Old Benito's hoard," said the innkeeper solemnly. "I always believed in it, but I never hoped to touch it."

It lay there in a little heap at the bottom of the boat, with a few of the jewels scattered wide, the spoil of a hundred ships, the sack of cities, achieved by torture, by heaven only knew what bloody massacres and treachery, but itself clean and bright as if hands soiled with crime had never touched it. Whatever wealth the swirling waters had swept away from that cavern up the hill, the cream of it had been left, and lay there, a gleaming fortune. Mr. Donne permitted himself to wonder what "Benito of the Bloody Sword" must think of the scene if he were permitted to glance through the bars of Hell's gates; then his eyes lit on a ring with a single stone that burned with blue fire which was stuck in a crack of the floor-boards. He picked it up, laughed like a man drunk with rapture, then he caught the girl's hand.

"Your ring-finger, Seraphina?"

The girl thrust out the finger, her slumbrous eyes fixed on him with something almost worshipful in their depths. The ring fitted. He laughed again, kissed the grimed hand, then smote Mr. Bonito on the shoulder.

"Old man," he cried cheerfully, "I'm going to marry your daughter."

"The deuce you are," ejaculated the innkeeper.

"The deuce I am! As soon as we touch Panama. And Andy will be best man  
\_\_\_\_\_"

"The devil!" ejaculated Andy.

"And you'll give the bride away!"

"Seraphina's a Catholic," said the innkeeper, as if he had found an objection.

"Panama's Catholic enough to be the Pope's footstool. Don't worry about that,

Mr. Benito. . . . And I shall be a model son-in-law.”

“You——” Andy Winstowe laughed suddenly, then lest his laughter should be misunderstood, he looked round.

“Wonder what the Kilkenny cats would think of that. Maybe they’d agree you’d got a fitting father-in-law——”

Mr. Donne laughed. “Blood will out, little man, as you said. . . . But gather up the spoil. . . . It is time we were pulling out for Panama.”

And an hour later, with the sun beating down on the green heights of Cocos, they were nosing the blue sea northward. As they cleared the island, Mr. Donne turned and with the glasses looked shorewards; but there was no sign of Mammy Venus or of the ear-ringed Pym. Andy Winstowe, guessing what was in his mind, grinned cheerfully.

“Don’t worry, boy. Some other treasure-hunter will find their tails.”

Then he laughed and set the course for the traverse to the city of romantic fame.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Added missing word *time* in sentence . . .*and her crew of ruffians, who by this **time** must be a raging.* . .

Added missing word *a* in sentence . . .*oddly with the lush greenness no more than **a** couple of.* . .

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been retained.

[The end of *The Three Blue Anchors* by Ottwell Binns]