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THE  
HIDDEN KINGDOM



M. LYNN HAMILTON



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THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

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THE HUNTER OF THE YEARS,  
LAETA,  
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# THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

by

M. LYNN HAMILTON  
(*Hamilton-Lewis*)



Published by  
N. WENTWORTH-EVANS.

*First published, 1932.*

—  
Printed in Australia  
by  
H. HEARNE & CO. PTY. LTD.,  
PARAGON PRINTERS,  
Melbourne - - - Victoria.

588308

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PROLOGUE.

*There are more things in Heaven and Earth  
than men wot of.*



## PROLOGUE.

(Publisher's Note.)

To My Readers,—

The arm of Coincidence is long. A striking example is afforded in this curious happening. . . .

In February, 1915, as I was on my way to Egypt, via California, to pick up some special information for Headquarters, I met Eric Skrine, who told me a fantastic story of a hidden kingdom, so-called, in North-West Australia. In all things I found him to be level-headed, and quite sane, so had no reason to doubt a statement which was backed up by his dainty little wife.

The fact that I was in a devious fashion interested in publishing, made me tell him that I would have liked first offer of the story. This, he said, was Dr. Zaring's affair, but that he would be seeing Zaring some time, and we might do business.

The intervention of the long-protracted Great War put ordinary thoughts out of my mind. Somewhere, somehow, I calculated, I would come across the printed story in good time. I was at pains to look up the book during the years '19 and '20.

No publisher had trace of it.

In 1922 I looked up Zaring in Wellington, N.Z.; however, he was on a world tour with his wife and three kiddies.

I did not make mention of Skrine's tale, purposing to check up on it myself, though I know the North-West of Australia fairly well, and am most sceptical. To October of this year, '31, my work has kept me further south . . . and THEN it was that the arm of Coincidence reached out and held me. I got a letter from Skrine, which advised of the intending arrival of Zaring's manuscript at my Melbourne Club address, which I had given him as a "permanent" at the time of our travelling together on the good old "Niagara."

He told me that some misfortune of war had caused the loss at sea of Zaring's original publisher's copy, that the duplicate had been too safely put by for him, Skrine, by the Denis Hotel folk at Dublin, and had only been resurrected after his meeting Zaring abroad in June this year, and been asked what he had done with it, where he had been, and a thousand and one questions, all of which led to Zaring having suggested that he should send me the story for publication, even at so late a date.

So here it is; nor, to my mind, does its seventeen summers make its debut at all unseemly.

N. WENTWORTH-EVANS.







**A HIDDEN KINGDOM.**

Being the account of a five weeks' captivity in an unknown natural fortress, situate in the N.W. of Australia. Compiled by Louis Zaring.

Edited by M. LYNN HAMILTON.



**EDITOR'S NOTE.**

Dr. Zaring's manuscript has been submitted to several readers, all of whom comment favourably on the unique interest of his story. One curious fact has been noted, viz., the similarity between actual incident and the opening episode of Mr. Max Pemberton's "Impregnable City." In both a medical man is abducted for attendance on a securely-hidden captive; in both there is only one entrance to the "city"—in Pemberton's, by way of a subaqueous passage, and in Zaring's adventure by means of a subterranean river-way. When Pemberton's rich fancy conceived so impossible a happening nearly twenty years ago, he would not have believed it possible that an echo of it would be materialised in the prosaic twentieth century.

Dr. Zaring's allusion to the prolific field for mining, and his conviction that untold wealth exists in the hidden kingdom, both in metals and precious stones, has led to the formation of a syndicate, which has approached the Administrator with a view to leasing the area for prospecting purposes, which lease may be granted immediately upon cessation of the hostilities between Great Britain and her allies against the Huns and their supporters.

Extraordinary developments naturally may be predicted for the near future.

I have been advised also, before going to press, of an offer by a well-known intrepid aviator to locate Ordsborough in his Sopwith biplane, though he—like myself—may receive his call at any moment to proceed to the Front.

M. LYNN HAMILTON,  
Editor.

Melbourne, March 31st, '15.



## FOREWORD .

My thanks are due to the Earl of Beverley and to Mr. Hugh Waring for their kind assistance in filling in blanks in my narrative, that otherwise must have been left to general speculation.

I cannot venture any suggestion as to the fate of the Ordsborough population, should the "Naiad" have been destroyed with the Colonel, and perhaps Vetsera, aboard. If they were desirous of staying in the little kingdom, it is sufficiently self-supporting to permit of this being done.

Should Ian Vetsera have escaped the explosion on October 31st, it is probable that he is ruling the principality, though he should have reappeared now that his country definitely needs him. Darwin reports uncalled-for mails since the month of November, 1914.

LOUIS ZARING,

B.A., M.D., Ch.M., T.C.D.

Sydney, December 29th, 1914.



## DECLARATION.

The following narrative is, to the best of my knowledge, true in those particulars relating to the sudden disappearance of Dr. Louis Zaring of this city on Friday, September 11th, 1914, and his subsequent return in January, 1915.

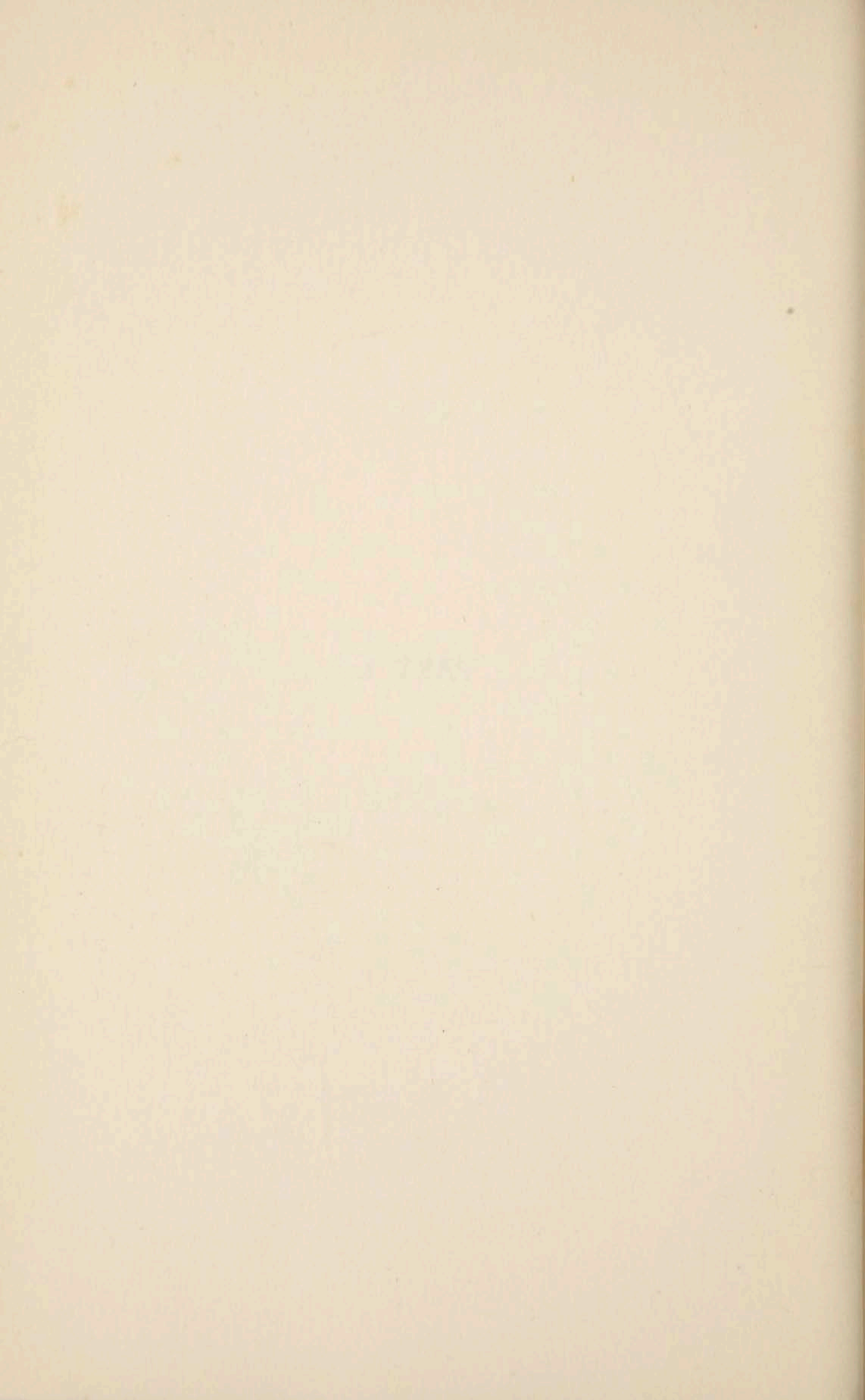
The Harbour Authorities report the arrival of an unsignalled pleasure yacht at daybreak on the 11th, and her departure, without inspection, at noon the same date, which occasioned much speculation owing to the stringency of war precautions.

(Signed) WM. HALSTON,  
Supt. of Police,  
Wellington, N.Z.





PART I.



I, Louis Zaring, B.A., Ch.M., T.C.D., have returned almost "from the dead," and am convinced that my story of the past few weeks will astound Australians, because I am able to tell of the existence in the N.W. of their continent of a habitable tableland, about 600 feet above sea level, area 10,000 acres; also, of the existence of a broad, deep, swift-flowing river therefrom of some 85 miles in length.

I am aware that these plain facts should have been gradually "sprung on" readers in the unfolding of my narrative; but this is my initiation in story-writing, and I am sorely afraid that want of practice will make of it a prosaic, stilted statement, without any graceful broidering of humour or pathos! Sentiment, also, I foresee, will be reduced to a minimum, since there are so many able writers whose poorest work must necessarily, by contrast, caricature what I might attempt in that direction.

My wife tells me that I have so thoroughly disregarded both herself and our son, she is assured I could not have worried so abnormally over them, as I now profess to have done.

However, as my concern has been merely to outline the progression of incident, and to leave the psychological to those who understand the intricacies of adequately portraying it, I feel certain of absolution on this count, at the hands of the public! Moreover, Cecile is an incorrigible tease, and in her innermost heart would hate our emotions being dissected for other than ourselves.

Having now paved the way towards leniency for all defects in the mechanical construction of my fairy-like chronicle (a craven's way, surely, of accepting defeat before it is pressed upon him!), I shall recount my adventures from the very beginning.

Early in September, 1914 (the 11th, to be exact), I was about to mount my bicycle in order to ride a short distance to a special patient's house, immediately after the morning's consultation hours were closed, when a tall, clean-shaven, good-looking man, immaculately attired, crossed the road to intercept me.

With a courteous lifting of his hat, he bade me "Good-morning," and offered apology for detaining me.

"You are Dr. Louis Zaring, are you not?" he inquired pleasantly, speaking with a broadness of vowel I had always associated with Americans.

On my assenting, he glanced at his watch and appeared to hesitate a moment.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" I asked. "If it is a consultation you wish, I shall be happy to suit your convenience now, if the matter is pressing!"

"You are on your way to a case," he said, slowly, "and I hardly like to ask you such a great favour, even though, of course, whatever time you give me will be paid for!"

"The case is not urgent," I replied; "indeed, I am probably not expected there until noon. Will you come this way!"

As I spoke, I leaned my wheel against the fence, and moved towards the surgery door.

"Pardon me," he said quickly, "the consultation is not for myself. The case I am asking you to advise upon has many curious particulars. If you will oblige by accompanying me, I can speak more fully as we proceed!"

There was no need to re-enter the surgery. In my hand-bag I carried every necessity, nor had I any anxiety concerning my morning's round, for my practice has grown so in the few years I have been settled in Wellington that it is mostly consultant, and also gives me ample time for my duties as examining medical officer for recruits. I immediately acquiesced by taking my bicycle again, and prepared to lead it.

"Your machine will not be needed," said my new client. "If I may be accorded the privilege, I shall offer you a quicker form of locomotion!"

As he said this, a queer smile for a second twisted the corners of his mouth—a singularly determined feature, by the way, as also was his chin, square and resolute.

I bowed assent, and slipped the wheel inside my side gate as we walked past in the direction of the quay.

"As you may have noticed," he continued, waving one strong hand in the direction of the harbour, which lay like a giant opal in its emerald setting of beautiful hills, "there are no fewer than four vessels newly arrived in the roadstead, awaiting the Quarantine officer. It is impossible to tolerate such delay, when the case I am conducting you to is imperatively urgent, and when the first vessel to arrive had actually to wait half an hour before even the Customs officials boarded her!"

"Are you then from one of these boats?" I asked, "for if so, how is it you have not had the advice of the inspecting doctor? Otherwise I fail to solve the mystery of your being allowed to land—not that I presume to insinuate you carry any virulent disease," I finished, smiling, "but our officials are frequently pig-headed."

"Your curiosity does not belie your reputation as a scientist of unusual powers of observation and deduction," he said. "I shall be happy to present

my papers of clearance to you when we board my yacht!"

His sarcasm amounted almost to impertinence, though his suave tone implied no intentional offence.

As he spoke, I glanced round the harbour. There was no yacht there, but, thinking that doubtless she had been securely berthed according to some new war regulation, an unbidden question died on my lips.

"You are interested in research work," my client continued, shooting a calculating glance at me from his keen brown eyes, "or at least, so I have observed from reading the medical journal. Your paper on 'Malarial Dysentery' was exceptionally logical and well thought out!"

It was my turn to look at him in a coolly appraising style. What possibly was his vocation in life?

"You believe in the small fish of the Barbadoes as an antidote to the ravages endured from the raids of our tiger mosquitoes? Well, the West Indies is certainly becoming immune. This touches a question I myself am greatly interested in," he said, his sentence ending with the curiously anti-climatical preposition.

In a quiet, unobtrusive fashion, enlarging upon the subject, he held me under a spell of such learned and scientific discourse that, almost with a start of surprise, I found myself embarking in a small motor-launch held ready at the Central Pier of Lambton Quay.

"My little craft is round that headland," he said, "and since you now enter upon a term of hospitality as my guest, permit me to introduce myself! Philipson Ord, at your service!"

He presented his card, bowing with his hand over his heart as he did so, a more sweeping gesture being out of question in face of the gathering momentum of the launch.

As we rounded the headland I little dreamt it would be my last look at the quaint, hill-built capital, for four long, adventurous months. Silent and exquisite, the circle of hills closed in upon her, and we were spreading a wide wake of foam behind us, making for the windy, choppy Straits.

I cast a fleeting regret shorewards, to soothe any misgivings I had as to the length of time I might be delayed from my morning's "case," but Colonel Ord had abandoned himself to the incident in hand, and lay back on the cushioned seat of the so-called "cabin," a cheery smile on his lips, and a shaft of sunlight beaming on his crinkly brown hair, which grew straight back from a good forehead, without sign of parting.

"A pleasant morning," he said, "and a pleasant companion! What more should man wish you? Mitchell!" calling to one of the two neat sailors in charge of the launch; and to me, "You will, I hope, join me in a glass of wine. I have a specially fine white Vintage."

For one moment I experienced a feeling that almost I might describe as premonitory. Then I signified my acceptance of his genial courtesy, and drank in keen appreciation the excellent Chablis that Mitchell brought; its perfume and bouquet were unsurpassable. In the rare pleasure of tasting such wine, I quite overlooked the offence for which Colonel Ord apologised—that Mitchell had taken upon himself the duties of server, and had not permitted me to help myself.

"He is new to the game," Ord explained, "and has more experience of saloon methods!"

Instantly I knew Ord to be, in heart, American, though previously no suggestion of this had escaped him, other than the broadness of his vowels, which many might have attributed to Celtic origin.

I saw the white ribbon of foam gradually rise until it met the blue of the morning sky; I saw the hills outside, on my right, sink into a mist of green and red; I felt the throb of the engine pulsing through my veins, a great chill seemed to envelop me, and I knew that either death or unconsciousness was overwhelming me . . . !

When I came to, I discovered myself to be a prisoner in a fair-sized cabin, artificially illuminated. The port was barely large enough for me to pass my head through, and the door had evidently been bolted on the outside. From what I could see through the porthole, I imagined the yacht to be perhaps 200 tons; from the rate of progress, noting the lift and fall of heavy ocean rollers, I judged our pace to be very nearly 25 knots an hour, possibly more. A fact that struck me as curiously significant was an entire absence of roll. The vessel met wave after wave with a steadiness that I found to be uncanny.

In answer to the summons of my electric bell, a white-jacketed steward unceremoniously opened the cabin door, and intimated that he was at my service. The coolness of his bearing, although deferential, disclosed to me what I had already recognised as patent. I was indeed a prisoner, with evidently not a solitary chance of escape, though in no present danger of being ill-used.

"Is Colonel Ord ready to make me an explanation, steward?" I asked, quietly enough, but with a hell-fire of fury behind my words.

"My name is Craddle," he answered, ignoring my question, "and your own is Zaring, I am led to believe. We are on an equality on this boat, although my own part of the brotherhood happens to be stewarding—a role I've played for ten years now, in the Colonel's service!"



"Why 'the Colonel,' then, if you are his equal?" I retorted savagely; "surely it would be more to the point to call him 'Ord!'"

"The Colonel is top-man," he said gravely, "and is the only boss in the whole caboosh!"

"A boss in a brotherhood?" I asked scathingly; "surely your so-named brotherhood is on a par with present-day socialism! We are all brothers but the man who says we must be!"

The fellow turned surlily away. "If you want to preach, you can air your views to the Colonel. They're no good to me!"

He moved off, and I followed him. Along a short passage we went, and into a sort of lounge. As I entered, Colonel Ord rose from a writing desk (a Cutler, by the way), and came forward, his face solemn.

"You will pardon me for interrupting right now a very natural rigmarole of righteous indignation and bluster," he said, motioning for me to be seated. "I accept as said, every legitimate insult you may feel constrained to offer; I acknowledge the apparent enormity of my misdeed; but, despite rage and argument, I have justification for this abduction, in the service I can put you in the way of, to the Ord brotherhood. Probably you may find unusual facilities for research work in this place we are now bound for! I beg you to stammer out your mad fury!"

In spite of myself, I could not help smiling at his acceptable invitation, which, by its very disarming element, made my incoherent, unvoiced anger entirely vanish.

"Presumably your ethics are reasonable, Colonel Ord," I said, "although we may differ in points of view. Your conduct has satisfied you; I can only place my services at your disposal, provided that you will be equally considerate, and furnish me with data

as to our destination, the work you would have me undertake, and the likely period of my detention."

His keen eyes searched for the reason of my easy capitulation.

"Are you the thousandth man?" he asked, "or have you the saving sense of humour?"

"Whoever acknowledges to being of the nine hundred and ninety-nine has no humour," I retorted. "May I, in turn, ask a question? Are you ascribing my docility to any deep-laid scheme of escape? If so, I assure you that I see no likelihood at present, and therefore have no plan in mind. At the same time, I think it incumbent on me to confess that I may try to evade your surveillance at the first port of call! Moreover, my abduction will lead to your having arrayed against you the Dominion's military authorities."

"Confessions and considerations worthy of you, Dr. Zaring," he said, smiling now; "but with equal candour, I acknowledge your remarks were foreseen, and the chances of success attending them duly noted. Our first port of call is some fortnight distant, possibly less. The depth of the sea averages a thousand fathoms hereabouts, and the last land we sighted was Stephen Island—a swim of close on a hundred miles."

"With true philosophic calm, I accept the inevitable, Colonel Ord," I said, aware of a fascination in the man that compelled a certain amiability. "Perhaps fourteen days may reconcile me to my newly-carved destiny, and to an excellent host!"

"You're some man," he said, tossing back his head, with an infectious laugh. "Let us dine, as it is close on sundown, and let us drink to our better acquaintance. My last meal was breakfast! One rule of the Clan is to share and share alike, and, your Chablis

overcoming you, as my guest it became me to observe a similar period of fasting!"

The small saloon table was well appointed, and the dinner incomparable. Moet et Chandon gave forth an even richer perfume than the Bordeaux vintage; a feast of good things, and a flow of wit reached a happy zenith over Hamid cigarettes and Turkish coffee.

During the evening, I asked the reason of our extraordinary freedom from roll.

Ord smoked in silence for some moments before shooting a solitary comment at me. "We have precessional control on the same principles as the gyroscope!" he said, "but ours are 'active!' In plain English, we have stabilisers."

To another enquiry as to the brilliant lights, flickerless, barely coloured even, he flung me a short: "Ever heard of the Crescent Air Gas? S'pose you haven't, for the simple reason that it's exploited by an Australasian firm. If it had a Dutch name it would be the universal rage. Saw it back in a town in Victoria—Ballarat! Have rigged up an almost similar plant here. It's as cheap as air; burns better than electricity."

. . . . .

In my subsequent observations I noted two incredible facts. One was our means of transit. The fuel used was block-oil, which had the effect of transforming the engine-room (associated always with dust and grime, intolerable heat, and half-stripped, blackened, furnace-feeders!) into a veritable drawing-room. The alley-ways were covered with carpet; the stokers wore ducks! Refrigerators and filters were worked in conjunction with the ordinary

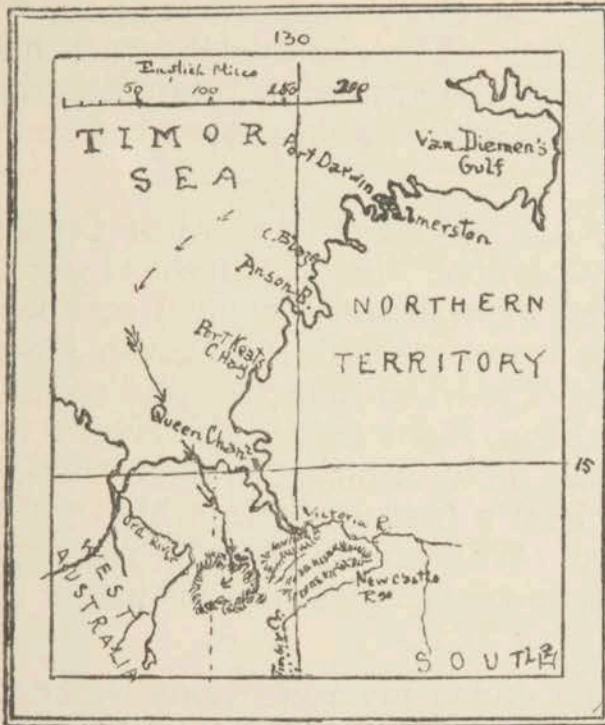
means of propulsion. The second fact that caused me amazement was the set of propellers—twin-screws both fore and aft. The forward blades were set in curious fashion permitting of use should the stern blades fail. However, this did not in any degree impede the clean, steady cut of the yacht's knife-like bow.

On the fifth day the weather became unmistakably warmer; by the seventh, we were uncomfortably hot; thereafter we endured sweltering days, and cold, star-lit nights. I gathered that we were in the semi-tropics, and, from the general position of the sun and stars, I guessed we were in the vicinity of Australia. Few and far between atolls hinted at a proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, but Colonel Ord remained silent on the point of our destination, and kept compass and log from any chance peruser. Indeed, the chart-room was the only part of the vessel I had not explored.

After thirteen days of idyllic steaming, we sighted land to port, just about midday, and lay-to in the shelter of a narrow headland. At the turn of the tide we made for an obelisk of limestone rock, to starboard, about three miles inland—to all appearances, we were about to beach.

Once past the rock, the bell signalled its sharp order, the vessel's nose swung round; we steamed ahead for a few moments; the bell rapped out again, and the gallant little craft slipped in behind the rock, gaining a stretch of water absolutely hidden from the gulf, with which it ran parallel. The narrow headland proved to be the shell of the real headland which now lay on our left, and which hooked later into a broad, deep river, whose existence could never be suspected, and along which we steamed quickly for some hours. My observation of the general out-

lines would make the double inlet appear something like this:—



→→ Arrows mark supposed route to Ordsborough.  
It will be noted that an Ord's River runs in the vicinity having no connection with Colonel Ord's dependency.

I have since approximated the position at 15.5 N. by 130.12 W., or very close to the imaginary subdivisional line between the States of Western and South Australia.

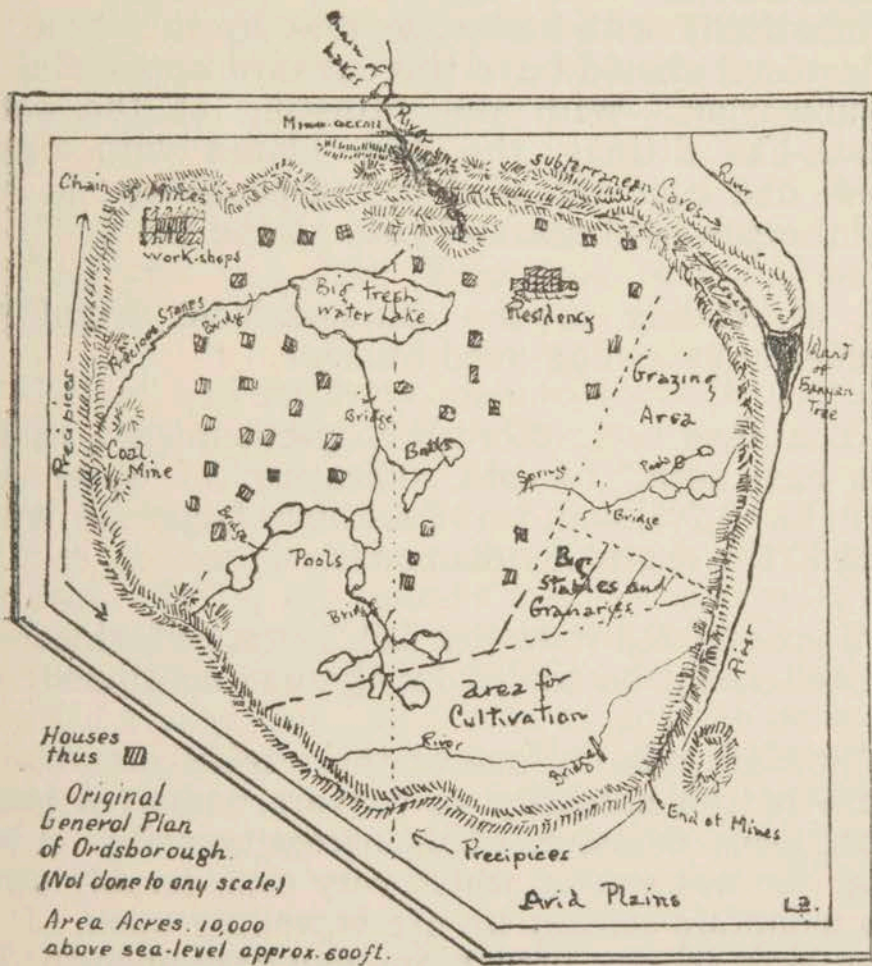
A full eighty miles of majestic river lay behind us, due north, before the bell rapped out its signal, "Dead Slow!" At a snail's pace we drew near to a check in the steady flow of the river, where an untroubled centreway definitely drew out of sinuous ripples. A shade to port we held, and, as the

troubled water slid astern, I glanced down and discovered the cause of the ripples. A wall or barrier of rock lay from bank to bank, just under the level of the river as it then stood; the placid centreway was doubtless a break in this inverted "bridge," either natural, or as I strongly suspect, judging from after events, artificial. (The obstructing rock might very easily have been dynamited without littering up the river-bed to any appreciable extent.)

Our way had lain between high banks, mostly sheer rock, draped in Nature's lightest, most feathery fern growth and tropical creepers. Now, however, the towering cliffs had given place to tree-clad flats and blue-lilied margins, and some few hundred yards ahead, right across the river's course, lay a range of tall mountains. "So this, then," thought I, "is the robber's fastness. In which gully lies his bark humpy? Wherein am I to be recompensed for leaving a three-years' wife and an infant son?"

The Colonel ended my reflections by appearing on deck; hitherto the chart-room had claimed his presence almost unendingly.

"Good-afternoon, Zaring," he said, "or rather, I suppose it is rightly 'evening.' One soon loses count of passing hours in this Arcadia. And here there are no unpleasant echoes of war." He turned abruptly to issue orders to the one or two ordinary seamen, and, almost as in a state of hallucination, I saw them lay hold of bevelling that I had considered to be mere superfluous ornamentation, and, from opposite sides of the deck, they slowly pulled to the roof of the small "bridge" what seemed to be aluminium "rollers," on the principle of a Cutler desk-top, but the sound rang heavier than the white metal, although apparently lighter than steel.



As the rollers clipped together above the bridge, I noticed that the yacht was slowly settling down at the bows. The men casually repeated the performance with the aft half of the deck, and, by the gradual righting of herself, I guessed that whatever compartments were vacated by the rollers filled automatically with water, so that by this time the little vessel should have the outward appearance of a submarine. With the adjusting of the outer, sheath-like fittings, the deck blazed with lights. These had been attended to independently, as also had the powerful search-lights at the bows.

I, descending to the dining-saloon, found the Colonel in exceeding good humour.

"You have been afforded a spectacle such as few men have seen," he said, indicating the upper deck with his left hand, on the third finger of which blazed four enormous diamonds.

"I appreciated it to the full," I replied, sincere in my belief, but he smiled kindly, and continued:

"You are missing one of the world's marvels because of the necessity to convert ourselves into a subaqueous monster. This necessity arises chiefly after the wet season, which very considerably swells the mountain-stream we are travelling upon. However, very shortly I trust you may gaze upon the last few galleries of a modern waterway that is unsurpassable in any quarter of the globe!"

My face evidently expressed my incredulity and incomprehension. He flashed a swift, keen glance at me, and asked blandly, "So your thirst after knowledge is assuaged?"



"Far from it!" I retorted; "indeed, on the contrary, I have a perfect arsenal of questions to fire at you! But your time has been so fully occupied, Colonel, that I dare not venture to intrude myself even now!"

"Come, come!" he said, good-humouredly, "if you will be reasonably concise in your titles for treatises, I shall gladly accommodate you—that is, within reason, and my powers!"

"Well," I began, "as we must waste time dining, I shall give you first, 'Smokeless fuel, and how to utilise it!'"

Colonel Ord leisurely glanced through the menu, and gave the steward a brief order.

"Have you never heard of that simplest of processes—consuming one's own smoke? As a matter of fact, Zaring, my process is so far a novelty that, in its ultimate stage, I have at my command a gas that is a fire-extinguisher. Should this vessel be ignited at any time, all I have to do is to pump this gas—a by-product of my block-oil fuel—on the flames. I have put out a hell-fire by 10 cubic feet of it. The storage is by the engines. Title Number Two?"

I looked at his fine, clever face as one might look on an apparition!

"'Submarines' methods of dodging enemies!'" I remarked at last, mechanically almost, for I had no notion of his purpose in sinking his vessel within a stone's throw of a barrier of mountains, in a deserted country.

"Our enemy is this range of mountains through which we are now passing by the simple method of steaming up the underground river," he said quietly, but proudly. "I am convinced that my small kingdom is impregnable on all sides, excepting only through this one vital spot. We are, I think, about half-way through the subterranean tunnel, whose total length is five miles. The galleries of which I spoke are the vast caves which give birth to this river, as each cave holds a big lake in its centre, connected by a canal with the next one, and so forth. My best river, inside Ordsborough, becomes lost in a miraculous fashion, and doubtless reaches these cave-lakes by soakage."

"Am I to understand that we are steaming up this river through the heart of the mountains we saw, last, straight ahead?" I asked.

"We are!"

"And is this submarine process the only way of attaining your property?"

"It is, Zaring! At all events, to every intent and purpose. As a matter of fact, I have made the passage without docking spars or funnel in the dry season. At present the river is full and reaches the top of its course."

"Yes, the spars and funnel," I ruminated; and aloud, "I suppose, Colonel, that your slender masts are on the telescoping toast-fork principle, and the funnel shuts up like a camp-mug?"

"Your hypotheses are correct!"

"Then, may I enquire by what means the atmosphere in this saloon is so fresh and invigorating? I

can scarcely credit you with the brain of a score of inventors rolled into one. Is there any method whereby the vitiated air is re-oxygenated?"

"You have guessed rightly, my very excellent friend," he said, pushing back his soup-plate and leaning his arms on the table's edge. "From every cornice, as soon as my little craft scuttles into her shell, the stoppers slide out of the artificial ventilators. As at all ordinary times, the atmosphere is kept cool and sweet by a slightly-altered ozonator. Are you satisfied?"

I ordered "lobster mayonnaise" without casting a look on the menu. Regretfully the steward intimated that it was "chicken." I nodded assent, and continued to regard the man opposite me as though he were a *rara avis*.

"Perhaps, doctor, if you felt my pulse you might diagnose my case better," he said gently; "I am one of those shy creatures who dislikes protruding the tongue!"

As he spoke, the first engineer abruptly announced through the speaking tube by the Colonel's chair: "Phillipson Cave, sir!"

"Right-oh!" answered the Colonel. "Take her through."

Turning to me, he said: "In quarter of an hour you will step ashore in Ordsborough!"

"So called, I presume, because Colonel Ord has burrowed through to it," said I, and, in fine spirits, the adventurer laughed at my observation, and "reckoned" we would be "some pals soon."



PART II.



A magnificent young moon was just rising as I set foot on this unknown land. She lifted her smiling face over the distant trees of a mighty range, and silvered the huge stretch of country that lay cupped in the gigantic Hand of the Mountains. As far as the eye could distinguish, lay park-lands and lawns, houses, gardens, lakes, rivers, paddocks, and areas of cultivation. Closer to, behind us, towered the massive pyramid through which we had passed on the unknown reaches of its hidden river.

I assure you, the wonder of it all struck awe and reverence into my heart.

Several people greeted us when we emerged upon the granite pavement that led toward the little kingdom, from the landing-stage of the lake, lying just within the nearby cave. These folk represented various nationalities, but they all showed deference to Colonel Ord.

"This is Louis Zaring, brothers," he cried, cheerily accepting their warm welcome; "he has a young alphabet after his name, which implies he is a doctor of no small learning. And you, Zaring, will soon give the names they carry here, to these good brothers of yours! Craddle, take my kit along to the Residency, and fix up the room next mine for Zaring!"

He stepped forward as he spoke and laid a detaining hand on the shoulder of a tall, dark, foreign-looking man, who had turned to follow the steward.

"A moment, Vetsera! How is—Ellice?"

An almost imperceptible hesitation preceded the unexpected pronunciation of this name.

It gave me a slight shock to find that this settlement included women, though why I should have expected otherwise, I am unable to explain. Moreover, plainly, the woman had been referred to by her Christian name.

Was that one of Ord's strange idiosyncrasies?

"The pain is greatly lessened, Colonel," the man answered, speaking in stilted fashion; "she has appreciated your thought in making enquiry from Hobart."

"Then the code call-letters were accepted? That is good," he said, dropping his hand. "I am pleased improvement has been maintained. I have secured the services of this doctor for the benefit of — Ellice!"

So this, then, was my "case"—a sick woman some 7,900 miles from my surgery! Fate surely makes pawns of us at times!

Ord turned to me, his eyes soft, his stern lips oddly curved.

"If you are not too fatigued, may I ask you to get your instrument-bag—oh, I see you have it!—and come with me. I have brought you here to benefit the Clan generally, Zaring, because there are many things that need to be set right; conditions of living are best regulated by a medically-trained mind! But principally do I require your skill to get Ellice Denver up and about again. She was," he frowned as he spoke, "scrambling among some rocky escarpments, and slipping, injured some part of her anatomy, which has caused her excruciating suffering!"

"And the recompense?" I asked, quick to seize on the first advantageous proposition offered.

"If you fail — death!" he said, thickly. But I heard the tears in his voice, and knew that to succeed would be to gratify him as far as it was humanly possible.



"So you entertain the populace with such half-civilised side-shows as executions?" I enquired, more airily than the occasion justified. "Is it some new device that you wish to try on my ready carcase, Colonel?"

"You are pleased to jest!" he said shortly; "it will please me if you occasion no opportunity to recast the gallows!"

I laughed. "Gallows sounds far too nineteenth century for you, Colonel Ord! Will you not favor me with a treatise on this subject also?"

He stopped and swung round on me. By the moonlight I could see a dumb appeal in his eyes; he appeared, in his eloquent distress, almost lovable.

"I have told you that death is the penalty for failure in this principality," he said, very earnestly and slowly, "but I do not desire to terrorise or unnerve you in the slightest. If the task is beyond your power to accomplish, I shall set out for other help. You, however, will remain here, as I have planned. But I shall not forget it against you, Zaring, if another, whom I may bring, shall succeed."

I answered him quite simply that I had always hitherto done my best; no man can do more.

We walked on in silence, after this interruption, across soft-grassed lawns, past brightly-lit, shining houses, under heavily-scented trees, and through rustling palm-groves. At length we came to a big stretch of building, apparently unprotected by fence or boundary of any sort. We crossed a soft lawn and mounted some white steps, and crossed a wide verandah, which gave on to a spacious entrance hall.

"This," said Colonel Ord, "is the Residency. Good-evening, Clarke! Thank you, we had a nice trip! Yes, good weather. This is the Doctor—Louis Zaring. Take him to Ellice Denver's room, if she is awake, and, later, bring him to my diggings to report."

Clarke and I acknowledged the introduction and proceeded along the corridor and through a mosquito-proof door into a smaller hall, which ended in a suite of rooms, one opening from the other.

The man, Clarke, who was conducting me, stopped at the second door and knocked deferentially.

A woman's voice answered, bidding him enter. The sweet, mellow tones prepared me for someone out of the ordinary, so I was not completely taken by surprise when I was ushered into the presence of a truly beautiful woman.

She was lying on a couch, under a cluster of brilliant lights. Her face was pale, of perfect contour, her mouth delicately curved and sweetly wistful because of a tiny droop at the corners. Large dark-blue eyes looked fearlessly at this unheralded new-comer—eyes of almost a violet colour, the black ring of the iris making them deep and mystical; the lashes were heavy and curling, the brows arched and narrowly pencilled; her nose straight and small; the soft chin, round and dimpled; hers was a picture-face, hauntingly beautiful.

This, my first impression, I knew later, to be far from a complete grouping of her inimitable grace and charm. With each meeting she showed fresh perfections of thought, character, and expression. Had it, I wondered, occurred to mortal man to dare aspire to this divine creature?

She dissipated my unmannerly silence and speculation by a low-voiced enquiry:

“Clarke tells me you are a—you are Dr. Louis Zaring! I am truly glad to offer you a welcome to this far-away place. Possibly you are in need of the cheeriest and most comforting of welcomes.”

I glanced round as Clarke closed the door behind him, and rapidly surveyed the room, to ascertain what chance there might be of anyone overhearing our conversation.

Plainly she was understanding, and her cautious sympathy, while disclosing that she suffered in dreary exile, could never be misconstrued as treasonable.

Instantly she comprehended my silence to be, as it was, vigilant rather than reluctant. She beckoned to me to take the chair by the couch-side, and shook her head.

"No one can overhear if you will come nearer. Fortunately should any spy upon us, our unheard conversation can be attributed to the privacy between doctor and patient."

I spoke then for the first time.

"Your intuition has not erred, Miss Denver! I am truly sore at heart because of my unwarrantable abduction, though the soreness must greatly diminish since I can here be of service to you!"

"No, no," she said, hastily, "I am not suffering now. And yet, my accident is the only means I have had, or can have, of secret talk with those who resent this compulsory transplanting too far from congenial soil. Every word I say, Dr. Zaring, places me in your power. You have only to report my treasonable speech to the Colonel, and I shall probably at last pay the extreme penalty. Yet, I must speak, for I have suffered so long. I have been waiting and watching, day after day, hour by hour, whenever the Colonel's absence has meant that he has planned some new scheme to help complete his monarchy—I have been waiting and watching for such a one as you to come to my help. Oh! I can trust you, Dr. Zaring! I have learnt to read faces,

and yours has only goodness and loyalty to ideal, strength and pure purpose, at the back of that quiet smile and those steady eyes. I must speak, and I must use this opportunity before it is denied me. Will you help me—will you let me share your escape?”

“If anything were needed to make me promise you the last ounce of strength in my body, it is this proof of the faith and trust of a noble woman. I will not ask you how you so surely determined my unyielding resolve, but escape I will, and when I do, may it please God that you go with me!”

Without any idea of heroics or of melodrama I spoke. She divined my sincerity and gave me thanks such as only she can give. She bent her beautiful head, hiding her face for an instant in her hands; slowly she mastered her overwhelming emotion, and turned to me, her lips quivering, her eyes brilliant with unshed tears.

“I am afraid I am overstrung,” she said softly, “you will pardon this weakness, I know; I cannot express my deep gratitude! . . . And now, Dr. Zaring,” she continued, eager and brave again, “we must plan at all events for our next meeting. Oh! if anything should prevent it! But it cannot; you will come again, won’t you? Say I am not quite strong . . .”

“Would it not be better to at all events pretend to fulfil the mission that brought me from my far-away home, Miss Denver?” I interrupted. “The Colonel told me you had met with an accident, and that you were in great pain. My instructions are to alleviate this, or perish in the event of failure!”

“Let me tell you all,” she said, speaking low and rapidly. “I have been here just two years. I met Colonel Ord on the Continent, where I was spending

my honeymoon"—a spasm of pain crossed her delicate face—"for I am not unmarried as the people here are led to believe, but the Colonel forced my rings from me when he stole me from my husband, and has given it out here that I am crazed on this one subject, and that it is his pleasure to gratify my whim and give me a husband as soon as may be—to wit, himself! He paid me most marked attention for the short period he knew us, before he committed this terrible crime of separating husband and wife. He is in constant communication with the outside world, and has led me to believe that my husband is dead! Oh! but it cannot be true! Osmund trusted me in everything! He would never kill himself, thinking that I have been faithless."

She pressed her hands to her eyes, and seemed to brace herself afresh. "Were it even possible for me to marry Colonel Ord, I could not, because there is no priest, and the marriage would not be more than civil—a legal tie in a lawless place! It is monstrous! And so I have lain awake at night torturing myself with the intricate mazes of escape. I have tried so many times and so many ways, and have always failed. Because of his—his—liking for me, the Colonel refuses to punish me as others have been punished who have tried and failed. Even death that way would be preferable to the slow dying of hope, and to these unending scenes of stormy passion and useless argument. He will never let me go, and I welcome death more readily than the position as his so-called wife! Just six weeks ago, I tried to make my way out through the caves. The river was too full, and on the rocks I slipped and fell when hue and cry was raised after me. They just saved me from drowning and carried me here, and by degrees I came to, and thought that my only hope of being left to myself was to pretend to this dislocation. It is a deception that I hate, and yet,

how else can I secure to myself the cessation of most odious attentions? I have wept for hours, Dr. Zaring, from bitter disappointment, and, of course, my gaolers have translated it as 'pain.' Indeed, no greater pain could befall my body than this suffering of mind I have undergone for two interminable, sorrowful years! . . . And I must still be ill, denying myself the solace of the dear sunshine and fresh, tender air, in order to avoid Colonel Ord, and to provide the means for our planning!"

"Has the Colonel not forced an entrance here?" I asked, marvelling at the man's unlikely self-control.

"He besought an interview the day following my baulked escape, and told me that he was going South for professional help for me, and that meanwhile I must obey absolutely any ruling of Vetsera, while considering his entire monarchy at my command. Truly I have been dreading his return, for I thought he would bring a nurse with him, who would curtail the small liberty I now enjoy!"

I rose and picked up my case of instruments; on the book-littered table I opened it and took therefrom a tape-measure.

"Be kind enough to allow me to examine the hip," I said, in an ordinary conversational tone. "If you are in such pain as you have described, I am more than afraid that your injury is serious. It is most unfortunate that no qualified person was at hand six weeks ago, to reduce the inflammation, and possibly the dislocation! I could examine you better if you could manage to reach the table, or shall I get help to lift you on to it?"

As I spoke, I crossed quickly to the door and threw it open, calling Clarke sharply by name as I did so. It occasioned me no surprise to see the receding forms of two persons, beyond the entrance door of

the suite, and to discover Clarke in that straightening-up attitude that betokens recent application of an ear to a keyhole.

"Oh, there you are, Clarke!" I said, as if the discovery had given me neither amaze nor pleasure; "it was thoughtful of you to wait within call. I need your help to lift the patient on to the table; the couch is awkward for an examination of an injury such as hers!"

Briskly I returned to Ellice Denver's side, and gently took up my position by her feet, directing the man to place his hands under her shoulders.

"One moment," I said, "these books will be uncomfortable bedding!" and pulled the table-cover to one side, sweeping the books to the floor as I did so. The crash of their fall brought a strange face to the opening of the door. Apparently unconscious of this extreme surveillance, I returned to the couch, and between us Clarke and I lifted Ellice on to the table.

The man surprised me by his rough attention to her comfort. Awkwardly he thrust a small pillow beneath her head, and was rewarded by a gracious smile. Then he stood watching me as I carefully measured from each ankle to hip.

Softly I whistled under my breath as though surprised out of professional calm. Glancing up, I caught his eyes fixed suspiciously on me.

"If this place boasts many of an equal courage with the patient's," I said slowly, "it is a kingdom of heroes and heroines!"

"Is she badly hurt, then?" he asked. "I was thinking she'd bruised her wing some, since she didn't try flying in the Colonel's absence."

"I am afraid my flying days are over, Clarke," Ellice said, touching his arm gently as she spoke, "and I think I have been most ungrateful to try at all, since you all seem to want me to stay."

He looked down at her with unwilling tenderness in his expression.

"You know best who wants you most," he said, almost as though it hurt him to urge a plea in his "boss's" favour, "but I reckon we don't want the bottom to fall out of everything, like it will if you go."

"I'm sure trying hard to be good," she laughed. "Haven't you noticed how model a prisoner I have been since that disastrous day late in July?"

Meanwhile I had busied myself with the tape, and now glanced round at him.

"Tell me," I said, "how soon can you take a message to the Colonel?"

"Inside of three minutes!"

"Then I would like him to know as soon as possible that the trouble is undoubtedly dislocation—a minor dislocation of the hip." He turned to go. "And let me have a basin of water and a towel," I said, feeling confident that I was providing for a full five minutes more to finish our necessarily interrupted conversation. But I heard him pass the order to the unseen fourth as he closed the door behind him.

Swiftly I spoke to Ellice.

"I heard the click of the key-shield, and thought we were being spied upon. Decided on the hip business, but now it's going to be slipped right before Ord can come. In case there's a spy anywhere at hand, you'd better let me do some osteopathic twistings of your right foot. Remember it is the right



hip that's out. Do you hear me?—the right, so that you are right when you say the right. And I must see you every day to keep it in place. If they baulk me, I rely on you to get something else radically wrong. Moreover it won't mar our acting our parts if you can work up a groan or two if Ord happens in, and I'll fix it a moment or two after!"

My Dublin University degrees should have taken fright and fled at the weird and stealthy movements I occasioned Ellice Denver's foot to make. She lay with closed eyes, hard put to submitting to this serious farce. The door-handle turned, and a moan of such genuine pain escaped her that I knew, without looking, who the intruder was.

Brotherhoods, plus anxiety, evidently dispense with the civility of a knock before entering, from whoever is top-dog!

I straightened the limb, and ran the measure from ankle to hip again.

"Thank heaven!" I said, and heaved a very real sigh of relief. "Do you feel any ease? The worst is over, Miss Denver. Did you feel the bone slipping into place?"

But she did not answer me, and a glance at her death-like pallor told me more plainly than her own pathetic story how Ord's passion had blighted her life.

He walked over to the couch and leaned heavily against its head, his eyes afire. His attitude gave me the impression of a snake about to strike.

"Her endurance must not be over-taxed," he said, and I met his blazing eyes with a steady, compelling look.

"Miss Denver has fainted," I said. "She is very weak, and the test of her courage was severer than either of us anticipated. May I ask for some eau-de-cologne and a fan?"

It did not suit my purpose to have him there when she should revive, but her eyes opened as he hurried off, and some colour crept back to her cheeks.

"No! I had not fainted," she whispered, "but the sight of him after all I have gone through in this last six weeks, unnerved me. How wicked it is to hate him so!"

"When he returns I shall get rid of him if I possibly can," I said, bending to her ear while speaking, "and if you are afraid of him, I shall try what can be done in the way of my sleeping somewhere within call!"

"How good you are!" she murmured. "Let me be sitting up when he returns, because I cannot bear his hand near me to help me."

As I assisted her to a sitting posture, the unseen fourth appeared, after asking admission, with a jug, basin, and towel. My protective attitude as a prop did not sufficiently commend itself, in the event of jealousy being a component of Ord's character, so I suggested to the patient the advisability of testing the completeness of the cure.

"See if you can bear your weight on that foot now," I said, "and if so, I shall support you while you walk to the couch!"

She thanked me, and slipped off the table, taking my arm as an aid. The couch was barely reached before Ord hurried back. He stopped short in the doorway, plainly relieved that the faint had been of such short duration, and marvelling at the invalid's speedy convalescence.

"Strikes me, Zaring, you are the right man," he said, and to Ellice, as he stepped beside the couch, he extended a welcoming hand. "Three cheers for a queen among women!" he exclaimed. "My! but

you've lost a mighty bit of colour, little though I expected your roses to last, the lot you've been through!"

"Thank you, Colonel, for your wire from Hobart," she said, steeling herself to meet his handshake; "you were kind to make enquiry. I am a great deal better now, thanks to the doctor you have brought me. The pain is almost all gone from my hip."

"I'm glad of it, Ellice," he said, laying an approving hand on my shoulder. "I owe Zaring my peace of mind, because he has fixed you up so splendidly. . . ."

"I am glad it was possible, so far," I cut in, "but don't owe me anything until Miss Denver is back to health again. Unfortunately, she has been so pulled down by this accident, that it will be wise for her to avoid every excitement, and to rest for some days. The pulse is feeble, and her nerves are on edge a bit, I'm afraid. If you will be good enough to have a trained nurse sleeping within call, it will mean that this nervous prostration may dissipate. The vitality is low, and should not be strained!"

Ord's keen eyes removed from their long scrutiny of Ellice's beautiful face, and fastened their calculating glance on mine. I gave back a steady, unwavering appeal.

"You ask the impossible," he said, laughing savagely; "there are fifty women in the town, but not one of them would I trust to be near her. Will not Clarke do? He's devoted to her, would waken at the slightest call—for that matter, I'll have an electric bell fitted to this room from the bedroom, and Clarke can sleep here!"

"Certainly he will do," I agreed cheerily, "if Miss Denver consents. For the sake of company one of these women might move in to the bedroom for a

few nights. A woman is always handy in the case of collapse. If I may see Clarke now, I'll instruct him what to do in case Miss Denver's heart should give out!"

A sudden paling of his brown skin told me that my Parthian shot had struck Ord hard. He tossed his head back, with a mockery of that infectious laugh I had once heard from him, and clapped me jovially on the back.

"You medical men have a happy knack of leaving work to other folk," he said. "It strikes me that no one can attend to this same job better than you yourself. I brought you here to look after this case. Now, what's to prevent you doing the trained-nurse stunt?"

I hesitated for a fraction of a minute, then I turned to Ellice.

"Would such an arrangement be agreeable to you, Miss Denver?" I asked.

"I have every confidence in you, Doctor, and can rely upon Colonel Ord's discrimination. If he chooses you for this position of trust, I am pleased to comply with his wishes!"

"Then Clarke will fix up some sort of shake-down for you here," said Ord to me, "and the electric bell can be attached wherever you wish. If you are able to manage by yourself, we'll dispense with the services of these women. I don't think they are the sort to play lady's-maid, even for the Clan's interest."

"Often it is that way," I said, beginning to put straight the small articles in my case; "these brotherhood businesses are more or less run without the sisters. Anyhow, we'll do without them a bit longer, though it seems to me, Colonel, you have been

too lenient with the women, or this room would have been lined with them now, all ready to offer some hindrance!"

"I'll send Craddle along to show you your room, Zaring," said the Colonel, plainly too preoccupied to comment on my ruminations, "and this bell can be fixed up right away. I have some spare portable batteries. Where will you have your shake-down?"

"In the outer room will be quite near enough, and will not cause Miss Denver any inconvenience. A couple of rugs will fix me up—I'm used to camps and roughing it a bit. Miss Denver, are you able to get to bed unassisted?"

"Thank you, doctor, I can manage, as I have been doing for the past few weeks. The relief is truly marvellous." She smiled patiently, her subtle meaning reaching me alone.

"As the hour is late, then, we had better leave you to rest a while before retiring. Remember, I shall be within call, should you feel another of those attacks coming on. Until to-morrow, good-bye, and I wish you sound sleep."

"Yes," said Ord, taking her slender hand, "don't let any false thoughtfulness prevent you from ringing up Zaring if you need him. Good-night, Ellice; I'll come round some time in the morning."

He released his grasp and turned away.

"Clarke will obey your directions, Zaring," he called over his shoulder, and, ushering the fourth man out in front of him, he passed along the corridor, and through the mosquito-proof door.

"So far so good," said Ellice Denver, her great eyes lighting her sad face. "He seems to have implicit trust in you. How pathetic that we must one day betray him. But he should expect no greater

consideration than he has given. Good-night, Dr. Zaring, and so many, many times I will think of you with thanks and fresh hope."

I passed out of her presence feeling most strangely comforted. In some secret fashion her woman's instinct had fathomed my own hurt, and had paid me a tribute of silent acknowledgment.

I went across the entrance hall to the wide verandah, and there I paused. The night was richly beautiful, holding a thousand scents in its velvety dimnesses, scattering stretches of silvery moonlight across shafts of golden lamplight. A horse neighed in the wonderful stillness, and some nightbird gave a startled cry. Then voices broke the silence once more, coming near.

As I stepped back into shadow, the Colonel called to me: "Here is Craddle at last. The rascal is no good on land, Zaring, though I block him taking his wife to sea!"

This, therefore, was the Colonel's hold on his seamen—a wife, perhaps children, and plenty of food and every comfort.

Later, I learnt that money was a large factor in the Clan's brotherhood, each member being bound for a period of ten years, and receiving a substantial income. Nor was the Colonel a millionaire, but his country held untold wealth. Alluvial gold might be had for the trouble of picking it up from the bed of an old creek; there was tin, copper, and wolfram besides, and a huge seam of coal; and in a gully where once a waterfall had glorified the lovely setting of ferns and palms and tropical creepers, might be found valuable sapphires and topazes—some of the rough stones larger than duck eggs.

I was to learn, moreover, that each outcast had a grievance, fancied or real, against that particular

strata of society in which he had moved. One was an unrecognised artist, another a misunderstood essayist, a third an ex-governor of one of the outlying provinces, while others were drawn from the seething discontent of political life, embassies, or ordinary manufactories.

To his credit be it said, Colonel Ord's hobby of securing the geniuses of the different callings had been the means of stocking his small kingdom with advanced thinkers, and some remarkable inventors.

In Ordsborough it was possible to have made to order any article one might name, from a pin to a submarine. There was even then in process of completion, as faultless a non-rigid airship as human brains could devise, following the instruction of a Zeppelin trainee, too long restricted by German red tape.

But no hint of these workshops ever intruded on the Utopian simplicity of the ordinary life of the hamlet; the whirr and din of machinery were kept in the background, only to be roused when some need must be supplied. Everything, too, was machine-made—a big motor engine and induction plant running the shuttles of the loom one week, and supplying power for shaving iron plates the next. There was no hurry, no strife, no undue quarrelling, no rancour. Each gave his service to the brotherhood in return for what everyone else did for him.

Life, I found, was mostly a delightful picnic, in a climate as equable and mild as the most fastidious could imagine.

Every week bulky mails came in from Port Darwin by boat—the Colonel generally sending down a small craft after the pattern of his own launch, with mails from those inside, though everyone was required on oath to give no further address than Palmerston

P.O., Northern Territory, and all matter was supervised by Ord. These facts I learned gradually.

Ellice alone was exempted from the rule. But, otherwise, every consideration was shown for her entertainment and diversion. The newest novels and fashion papers were regularly received by her, but no word from her went out.

She was indeed hopelessly situated. I went to sleep confounding the Colonel for an impudent scoundrel because of the little I then knew of his selfish, forgivable villainies; nor was it any comfort to know that I would be charmed indeed to have his carcase on which to practise dissection.

In Miss Denver's interests I slept with my spring shakedown across the outer door of her suite.



PART III.



The next morning the Colonel interviewed my charge, and left her with a heightened temperature and a racing pulse. Plainly I foresaw a very serious nervous breakdown if he persisted in forcing his company upon her, and yet, for the life of me, I could not imagine how to circumvent it without causing him to flagrantly overbear my objection.

However, I relied on bluff and tact to carry me past a very awkward corner, and broached the subject to him before luncheon was served.

He was in his "diggings," a commodious room, high-ceilinged and insect-proof, whose walls were lined with books of all kinds.

"I really am rather anxious about Miss Denver's health," I said, abruptly introducing the subject, "and she is of so reticent a nature that even to her physician she will give no reason for this extraordinary condition she has worried herself into. It is patent that some great force is sapping her vitality; she has not the power of resistance that an octogenarian in a dying state might reasonably be expected to have; her heart is flabby, instead of being springy and decided in beat; her patience and sweetness of disposition alone save her from giving way to the irritation that heralds a nervous collapse, and afterwards, perhaps, the mad-house; and so I've come to you to ask you, if you have any consideration for Miss Denver, to absolutely forbid her visitors. She exerts herself to be amiable to those friends of hers who have been daily bringing her flowers. This morning she had, besides yourself, five others, and each visit left her with less vim than before. All I know is that, if she continues to

wear her small strength out in this way, by Christmas we shall be planting our regrets on a newly-turned mound!"

Ord had listened to my long harangue with increasing agitation. As I ended, I noticed, with surprise, his eyes dimming.

"Poor little woman!" he commented gently; "poor little untamed bird! Well, Zaring, her visitors will be forbidden. Nor shall I see her myself oftener than you will allow me. Will that satisfy you?"

"Partly," I said, "but by so doing I am left in complete charge, and I scarcely like to be held responsible should she, perhaps, go out mountain-climbing again!"

"I see! You and I understand one another, Zaring. Yes, she may try the mountain-climbing, and so may you, for that matter, since I am perfectly well aware that you will make any bid for escape that comes your way. We can discuss this later—terms and conditions and so forth. Anyhow, I think I can trust you with her up to the time she is getting about as usual, eh, Zaring?"

"I am sufficiently interested in Miss Denver to wish to see her well again," I answered, "but I most assuredly do not vouch for any reciprocal interest on the patient's side. If my presence causes Miss Denver resentment, I trust you will remember I fulfil my obligations most thoroughly if I resign from the case."

"She'll like you all right in time, I dare say," he said, his gratification showing in his altered tone, "but if you feel any bones about it, tell her from me that I will not penalise you if by any chance she wants to be done with you!"

"Thank you, I shall assure her that I am insured against loss through dislike or mere nerves. But seriously, Colonel, I am not at all convinced that rest alone will fit her up completely. Have you a dispensary here, for, if so, I must have so-and-so,

so-and-so, and so-and-so!" naming three little-used, little-stocked drugs. "A nerve food is about the only thing we can rely on definitely. Nourishing food is necessary, but her whole system is too severely undermined for her to assimilate as much as would be required to build her strength up again!"

"I have not these drugs in the dispensary," he said, "but I shall send down to Sydney for them at once. The yacht can go to-night, and I'll send Vetsera in her."

"I'll see what you have. Perhaps others may be nearly as suitable. I know several you might chance to have!"

It did not fit my plans that the yacht should return quite so soon to civilisation without taking, perhaps, a precious cargo outward. I intended no definite arrangement until I had consulted with Ellice.

"I'll tell you her story some day," Ord said. "It may interest you to hear how I saved her from a downright rotter. I expect a good bit of her worry is on my account."

We went in to luncheon, I feeling decidedly mystified. Despite appearances being against him, might not Ord be the real hero of this play?

Later I saw Ellice again, and acquainted her with the result of my interview.

"What show have you of slipping on board the yacht before she goes out?"

"None at all," she answered. "I have smuggled aboard once or twice, but the Colonel is too wise, and has the entire boat searched every time she is ready. Generally they search her at the Red Lake, where they close up for the subterranean passage. No, there is no chance that way."

"If it were myself, I would suggest a tow-rope and a climbing aboard after the search. But you could never dream of that way!"

"Unseen?" she asked, "but that is impossible, since she is shuttered when they search, and the tunnel is too long for one to emerge alive were one to be towed along. Besides, those dreadful screws! I once tried the tow-line when the river was low!"

She shuddered, and a fierce anger gripped me that there should be any need for this delicately-made, beautiful woman to hazard her life in this fashion. But I did not let my rage waste time in useless denunciation.

"Have you tried going aboard as cargo? Surely ingots go out sometimes, or boxes of stones. I was up in the hills this morning with the Colonel, and saw his stonehouses!"

"No! The hold is always pumped full of that fire-extinguisher gas they make from the smoke of the engines! The boats are quite out of the question!"

Then a sudden thought occurred to me. Had I not heard of a wireless call, code initials, a message to her?

She nodded. "Yes, we have a long-distance station," she said; "a sound amplifier of breaking contacts, an automatic receiver and an annotator. But the Colonel has very wisely excluded a transmitting instrument from its equipment, and the key of the house is either in his or Vetsera's keeping!"

"If you can trust me," I said, very quietly, "may I not know the names of those——?"

"Yes, yes," she said, eagerly interrupting, "I want you to know these who are with us now. Vetsera," she lowered her voice, "is one, but will not permit me to escape until I have served the 'brotherhood' for half its term—five years—though he is restless indeed since the outbreak of this dreadful war so

involves his country—he is of Austrian birth! The first engineer, Eric Skrine, is the other. He has asked me to wait until this dirigible is ready, but that may be years, and may not even fly then. And all this time I can get no word to Osmund to tell him that I am still living!”

“Will you, now, tell me your husband’s surname? Perhaps we may together concoct some method of communicating with him!”

She drew a deep breath, and a crimson flush spread over her fair skin.

“I married him as Osmund Roxburgh,” she said slowly, “but the Colonel tells me it is not the name he is known by, in England!”

“Did you not meet him at home?”

“We met on board ship, and many of those people I knew intimately, knew him also as Osmund Roxburgh. He had been in South Africa, big game shooting and exploring for some years. He married me from my Aunt’s house in Kentucky, and we went across to the Continent for our honeymoon. A man I had met in Switzerland encountered me alone one day, and begged leave to present his friend, Colonel Ord. When the introduction had been made, I corrected this man in my new name. ‘Not Miss Denver,’ I told him, ‘but Mrs. Roxburgh now.’ He laughed, and said: ‘What! Married to Osmund, are you, and Mrs. Roxburgh? That is a good joke!’ I did not understand him, but his words have recurred to me several times, because of these untruths the Colonel has endeavoured to instil into my mind.”

Up to this, my control had been excellent. Now, however, I stumbled hot-foot on the solution of the mystery.

“Have you never seen a paper?” I cried. “Do you not know that you are both right—you and the Colonel? Thank heaven you have spoken to me, because I can clear up a great share of this muddle.

You **did** marry Osmund Roxburgh, but the supposed joke was that you evidently accepted the position of Countess of Beverley without knowledge of the title. Osmund Roxburgh disappeared into the heart of Africa for years, and, as heir to Lord Beverley, was missing for some time. He reappeared, seeking his wife, last heard of at Baireuth, and whose maiden name was Ellice Denver. No wonder your name was so strangely familiar to me, and no wonder that 'Osmund' was tantalising too!"

She did not speak for many seconds after this astounding declaration. Then she held out both her hands to me, and rested them in mine as though they had been weary doves come home to rest.

"How thankful I am for what you have told me! How good God is to me! Oh, and is it right for me to be so bitter against Colonel Ord? He may have acted under a misapprehension. I shall get really well from this hour! Oh, but I am glad that you have come to help me!"



PART IV.



A few days after my interview with Ellice, I stood waiting for Eric Skrine, chief engineer, to join me. Above my head, soft glories of a crimson, flowering bankenia were heralded by the misty red of breaking blossoms, around me lay the long vistas of green lawns, of sun-flecked murmuring trees, and away in the distance, deep silver-blue mistiness stretched out its subtle draperies over sparkling water-ways, and finally mingled with the light purple of the far-away mountains.

Skrine was installing a new machine in one of the "shops," but was due to conduct me across to Phillipson Range at three o'clock.

Time in this land of plenty was reckoned by the sun, but, because of the tropical latitude, the days were always long and balmy. The Colonel's toy—a carillon in the Residency tower—chimed out its pretty three of the clock, and almost immediately Skrine joined me, with a brief apology for his delay. He was tall and fair, evidently of Irish descent, his face plain and good-humoured.

"I understand you are to be shown the battlements this afternoon, Zaring! I was wondering how long you would believe yourself a State prisoner without proving it. But we'll go by way of the springs, to show you how medieval is this North Australian territory!"

We crossed several of these lawns which I have passingly mentioned before, but which merit a lengthier description because of the excellence of their upkeep.

The grass was a heavy English variety, more like rye than anything else, with a substantial sub-growth of buffalo. Here and there, beside a tree, would be a pipe and tap fitted with a swivel spray. The pressure of water was strong. The mowing was done weekly by a horse-machine, and roller combined.

Verandahs of unusual width framed every house, the posts generally being covered by exquisite creepers. These verandahs, with their attendant houses—all built on a socket and roll shutter plan, of the same steel-like material I had noticed on the yacht—were set on the lawns, without fence or division hedge, wherever their occupants had decided. Each house was named after its owner. There were, in all, about forty.

“Which is your home?” I asked Skrine, knowing, from what Ellice had said, that his heart was not fixed.

“My home is the works, and the yacht,” he said, whilst indicating the stables among a belt of trees where we were first bound. “If the Colonel had not put work in my way I would not be dreaming of a settled home, as it is—away in the South. I could not bring a woman here, where there is nothing but agnosticism, and where she would have no congenial companionship. I am speaking frankly to you, Zaring, because the Colonel confessed to what I knew was natural—that you are only kept here by force. You will get back to your home if you can, but take my word, honest and heart-felt, you CANNOT. See here, I have been in exile for seven years. I did not sign on—I was forced to surrender, with the promise of a big wage (I am getting two thousand a year and spending perhaps twenty pounds of it), and that my place would be filled at the first opportunity. The Colonel thinks I have forgotten. I have not. The likelihood is that

I will not get out at all. But I have not learnt German for nothing, neither have I mastered the details of dirigible-driving. I am going to risk a try, the only way I see possible."

"Miss Denver told me," I said, "and, moreover, I am sure you are wise in persuading her to attempt nothing lightly. She is breaking her heart, but, luckily, I came in the best possible hour. She has had a tragic two years, suffering as only such a sensitive woman can, because of a mistake which I have been able to rectify. It is perfectly true that she is married, and I was able to tell her that her husband is still searching for her. Yet, even were this mistake rectified to the Colonel's satisfaction, I do not believe he would let her go!"

Skrine stopped and faced me.

"What you tell me is fairly startling. I have always believed her to be unmarried, but with some lover back home. There's even more of a reason now why she and I (and you, if you will come) should make a try in that dirigible."

"Forget what I have told you in case it causes you any awkwardness before the Colonel," I advised him, "but while we are speaking so freely on the subject, we may as well put forward every possibility!"

"Let us get the horses first," he said. "There are such things in this place as wireless telephones. The Colonel is not backward in any of the latest improvements, and I have a creepy feeling whenever we are near timber. Ten yards from a disc does the trick!"

So we gaily chaffed each other's riding experiences, and talked flattering small talk about the Colonel himself. Probably he heard every word of our lavish praise of him, because that evening's

meal found him in one of his rare good humours, when one was half compelled to yield to his fascination and brilliant wit.

. . . . .

However, we selected the two best nags in the stables, and had them rigged up by a fellow of the name of Smelly! Even though appropriate by occupation, I should have felt justified in changing such a label in the Colonel's new kingdom. But Smelly appeared consciously pleased with himself and his granite-paved stables. Very probably he would have resented a classier appellation.

We rode briskly to the Springs—a chain of clear pools, shallow enough to permit of our seeing the sapphire-colored limestone bottoms, and fringed about by graceful palms and light timber. For half a mile or more these limpid, wide-spreading mirrors of sunlight doubled, and wound in and out, and ultimately formed the permanent source of the charming river that flowed through Ordsborough.

The "baths" were fenced off, every inch of the erection covered in luxuriant creeper-growth. The pools selected were banked with the palest of pink marble, and floored with the same stone. Several stands were placed at intervals for the convenience of holding bathers' clothes. The greatest depth was probably twelve feet, and the water was tepid during the colder months, and deliciously cool in summer—a peculiarity I have noticed before in semi-tropical countries.

Closer to the hamlet was the big pool reserved for the womenfolk. To judge from the laughter and cries, it was a recreation largely availed of at that very time.

Skrine and I pushed on to the Ranges, after letting our beasts sample the freshness of the pools.

Away on a clear plain we passed through the only fence in Ordsborough, which had been built to keep cattle, sheep, goats, and unused horses from the cultivated areas. Here we settled our horses to a steady walk, and resumed our discussion.

"The Colonel is really a fine fellow, if his ideas *are* a bit too radical for me," said Skrine. "I am betting two to one—ten to one to be a sport!—that his telescope is on us now. Lucky it has no ears! But he'll spy us out to make sure I show you the most thrilling of the battlements. He is so sure none of us has a hope of getting clear that he has given a man or two a bag of tucker, a water-skin, and a horse, and told him to try! Only one didn't come back, and I can point out the neat pile of white he makes out there on the trackless Downs!"

The prospects of escape indeed seemed remote. "If you are capable of running the yacht on your own, why can't we make for it that way?"

"First, it takes a knowledge of the two bars, which I've never been able to get, though I'd gladly risk it. And second, the very moment we attempt to duck under the rock bridge you might have noticed on the way up (just before the Passage) we'd be blown to smithereens. The Colonel has planted a mine right across the gap he made for himself, which is only disconnected for any authorised passage. Vetsera and the Colonel are the only two who know the trick!"

"Very good then, get Vetsera to join!"

"He would, if it wasn't for his blamed conscience that makes him stick here for another three years unless this German business may get him to move.

He signed on in exceptional circumstances, though I can't quite find out what his job is, beyond ruling the roost in the Colonel's absences, and disconnecting the bridge-mine!"

"Well, look here, Skrine, what chance is there of getting the Colonel to take Miss Denver for a trip, and we'll stop at nothing short of murder?"

"It would do, provided we reckoned the chances for these people to starve out, and got the very few outside stores we really needed, down to them in time. But it would take a thicker head than the Colonel's not to foresee such a dodge as that. If he's sitting at table and the guest opposite offers to blow his brains out, there is a convenient leaf in the festive board that flattens the chap's nose and knocks his little gun out of his hand, all without the Colonel doing more than lift the point of his toe to a knob on the leg of the table. That is one of many precautions and pleasant surprises for the fratricide! Nothing short of drugs will do it, and you will notice that the Colonel makes his steward a taster!"

"No way of bribing the same steward?"

"My poor chap, you can't bribe a fellow who is earning more gold than ten lives would use up. I have a notion that Craddle gets as much, if not more, than I get. No, there's no way out but for the Colonel to snuff out 'on his Pat Malone,' and that doesn't seem probable when he's not fifty yet and hasn't played ducks and drakes!"

We were mounting the foot of the ranges as we spoke, and would soon be among the tall timber, possibly tell-tale. At any rate, we tacitly adopted a different topic, and pushed on at a good pace.

The trees were more magnificent specimens of their kind than ever I had imagined. Some of the



trunks must have been a clear 150 feet without a branch. Several boles were so large that, as Skrine and I separated to ride round, we each thought the other was engaging in a game of 'hunt the 'possum.' But I can vouch for myself, I rode at the same pace right ahead.

Later on the ascent grew so steep that we were compelled to leave the horses and climb on foot. This was most arduous and painful, involving torn clothing and many a sorry slip. But by six o'clock we reached the lowest point, and abruptly came on the solution of the why and wherefore of Ordsborough's stern impregnability.

Sheer from where we stood, the mountain fell away in precipice—a drop of some three thousand feet to a bald white plain, apparently illimitable, and undoubtedly without a single track.

"How did the other chap get down?" I asked, involuntarily drawing back from the edge.

Skrine hesitated.

"No one really knows," he said; "he could not have fallen on his feet, because that's him out there by that clump of red ant-hills. If he got down by the scarps, he must have had a chap in here to help, because there was a steel hawser and pulley missing from the shops the day after. But I don't envy a man the job of lumping a load like that up this gentle slope, do you? Anyway, there's poor old Vane, or what's left of him, and he was that within forty-eight hours after we first missed him."

I drew closer to Skrine.

"It seems to me there may be some sort of chance the other side," I said cautiously. "If you remember, the range that is tunnelled through, is steep enough, but has none of this landslip business!"

"We can see about half a mile of that range," said Skrine, "and that's all of it that is even moderately Alpinish! But wherever there's a chance, the Colonel himself has been pleased to plant mines round about; you never know when you're going to strike one, and there's a plain notice from end to end of the easy bit, and a wire or two to keep folk off the grass!"

"The Colonel is fairly slick with his mines, Skrine!" I said angrily. "Don't you think that may be a bluff?"

"I don't care to prove it myself," said Skrine, laughing, "nor would I have the pluck to send a poor unsuspecting dog rabbiting thereabouts."

"Then I will!" I said, "before I give up my last hope."

"He'll be too light. Try a bullock," said Skrine, and, though he appeared to joke about the suggestion, I thought it might take some beating.

In my mind's eye I already saw a homely cow wandering in the prohibited area, and, from a neatly constructed bag, a white and steady fluid ran to mark her safe progress.

"You've seen the short way down," said Skrine, at last, "so we can make tracks now for the long."

Within three quarters of an hour we were riding homewards. By dark the Colonel was asking me if I had selected my route, for, if so, dinner was served, if I would partake of it before quitting!

. . . . .

One item alone caused my sanguine plan a moment's anxiety. What would be done on the far

side of that mountain range? Could we carry sufficient food to last us in the event of our finding ourselves hundreds of miles from human habitation? Then it occurred to me that, if we could communicate with the outside world in any way, and bid our friends be waiting beyond the "duck-under" bridge, we might indeed reach safety again.

How then to communicate? And how best to fix the time for the meeting? Within how many months could a boat be chartered, and make that hidden inlet and the 85 miles of river? And how might we learn of that same readiness?

I took my plan and my doubts to Ellice, when the Colonel's anxiety prompted him to ask me to ascertain if his interview with her had wearied or over-excited her.

I found it necessary to delay my own news in order to hear hers. She led me to understand that the Colonel had touched on that subject so near to him, and had given her needless pain. So, too, in the course of persuasion, he had spoken of her husband slightingly, and she had advanced the plea of a possible misconception. Then he had said to her, leaving her in anger: "You are not Mrs. Osmund Roxburgh! You are no man's wife, but by heaven, some day, you will be mine! I am going to give you a clear six months to get well enough to listen to me, then I'll take you, take you, take you, do you hear?"

Three times he had repeated this threat, each time emphasising it with passionate earnestness.

"So I have only six months more of freedom," she said, her eyes blinded by her despairing grief.

So I told her my plan and the frail chance of escape that way.

On entering, I had warned her of the wireless telephone, and to provide against the likelihood of

them even then transmitting our conversation, I spoke loudly, as if just concluding an examination, and told her cheerfully that she was gaining ground rapidly. After some odd chit-chat, I returned to Ord.

Almost his first word proved that Skrine's surmise was probably correct.

"I am glad Ellice is better," he said, stopping for a moment his quiet pacing of the room, and before I had spoken at all.

"My face has belied me," I answered, "for indeed I am more than sorry to have to report I found her in a state of coma." (This was to account for my whispered warning, and for the first few minutes of silence, if indeed the secret 'phones were installed! I have since had qualms concerning the first night's talk, but presume that my very strangeness made Ord confident and careless!) "It took some little time to arouse her, and the subsequent depression made me willing to buoy her up rather at the cost of exact truth!" (My plotting soul further wilted at this hypocritical remark.)

But Ord seemed satisfied.

"Oh!" he said shortly, and suddenly resumed his seat by the table, picking up a book that had slipped to the floor.

"See here, Zaring," he continued, "I'd like you to know that Miss Denver's health is of the supremest importance to me. When she is well enough, I want her to unite her future to mine. I have reached middle age without a suggestion of passion, and now I have not a thought outside her. She thinks she can never care for me. I will make her! She is the kind of woman a man must rush off her feet. So, Zaring, whatever you need for her—you were talking of some nerve food the first morning you were here!—you let me know and I'll send for it!"

A sudden thought occurred to me—a heaven-sent inspiration.

What could prevent me writing a prescription which would cause the Sydney or Brisbane chemist to communicate with the police? It would be feasible if I knew certainly that Ord could read no Latin.

“The thing that will set her up is used only amongst medical men, Ord—or I could write out the formula, which is lengthy, if I were certain of the chemist’s ability to secure a particular component. It is too late to-night, however, and Miss Denver may have gained something by the stuff I gave her just now.”

I staved off the sending away for the drugs for a day or so—just time enough to permit of some sort of experiment with the cow and the mines. It would be madness to risk a message unless the passage out were possible.

Then, casually, I led the talk to literature, and commented on the splendid library Ord had collected.

“There are a few medico’s references,” he said, “but I had no turn for chemistry, and the infernal jargon bothers me!”

“Oh!” I said, “you’ve gone in for deeper, more original study than most! I should like to read the Germans in their handbooks, or the French, but it is far too much graft for me, too, with my imperfect knowledge of both languages!”

“Oh, these are in English,” he said, taking my masterly bait, “but they are too full of odd Latin for me to get any satisfaction from them. German and French, and a smattering of most Continental languages—Zulu and Arabic thrown in—I do know. But I have dodged Latin since I was in knickers!”

In my own double-facedness, I thought this might be a clever counter-stroke, but, before I wrote my prescription, I was sure that Ord had guilelessly spoken the exact truth.

PART V.





Vetsera lived in the Residency, the Colonel's right-hand man and most intimate companion. It occurred to me that he might seek to detain Ellice Denver for the three years in order that her opposition might gradually be worn away, at the same time posing as her friend and an intending escaper, so that he might secure her confidence and help to frustrate her plans for liberty.

I did not know him so well as I had already become acquainted with several others in this beautiful little kingdom; he struck me as a recluse, an enigma; his manner was stiff enough to prevent friendliness, on the odd chance of tricking him into self-betrayal of any sort. But, in spite of these drawbacks, I decided to try what luck I might have in the way of determining his real attitude towards Ellice.

Skrine had been sent to Darwin (or Palmerston as it is known outside of itself!) for the mails, and the Colonel was busy inspecting the Schutt-Lanz airship, in which the German had introduced some new improvement—two swinging cars on the middle line fore and aft, and two fixed side cars, the pilot car being forward—so it fitted my purpose excellently when Vetsera and I met on the Residency lawn, and strolled slowly on together.

"How is the patient?" he enquired in his curious stilted fashion. "Does she not progress?"

"She has made very little appreciable headway," I answered, "nor will she regain her normal health until the chief cause of her anxiety is removed."

"And that is——?"

"That, sir, is perhaps best told you by the patient herself! You have no right to try to obtain more information than is given to the rest of Ordsborough's people!"

My deliberate provocation, from its extreme unwarrantedness, had the desired result. He blazed into sudden fury, though outwardly he preserved his calm demeanour.

"You speak through ignorance—I overlook it. M'selle has herself trusted me with most implicit confidence. What hitherto caused her grief has received every comfort with which I felt free to console her."

"Doubtless, sir, doubtless," I agreed, "but this consolation is outside of your powers. She has spoken to you of her wish to return to her own country, M. Vetsera?"

A quick, black frown settled on his brows.

He looked at me searchingly, and answered me after some moments' hesitation:

"I also wish to return to my country. I am not free to return. She is free to wish; she is not free to return."

"And yet, M'sieur," I ventured, "I believe you are free to return, but not free to wish."

He smiled. "You guess me exactly, Doctor. I may resign my position at any time, but I am best where I am until a certain event takes place, when I shall have to return where I am known."

"Then, sir, why not assist Miss Denver to attain her liberty? You are free; you alone can assist her. Are you desirous of forcing a much-wronged woman to her death?"

"What is your meaning?" sharply.

"Her slow progress towards health shows a tremendous leeway—if she has no hope of return to happiness she will die!"

"She can find happiness here, if she will not be so obstinate," he answered slowly, "and already I have told her that I can take her hence in not more than three years now. It may be even sooner, since matters move swiftly when a people would avenge their beloved Emperor."

"Your 'maybe,' M'sieur, will not prevent her from another useless attempt on her own account," I said, ignoring his last strange sentence. "She has confided to me that she has several times sought an outlet. Now she is driven to believe that the Colonel's warning on the River Range (that mines are guarding the only way to freedom!) is mostly bluff—a pretence, M'sieur. Her next essay is to be by way of the notice-board, the wire fence, and the mines!"

Vetsera's face blanched suddenly. His fear was plain.

"We must deter her," he cried hoarsely. "It is madness, madness. She must be warned! Why, the life of a goat is not safe there; the chain of mines is unbroken!"

"Bunkum!" I said, scoffingly, "what is to prevent one taking a flock of goats and driving them before, to explode the mines and ensure a clear passage?"

"Madness! Madness!" he repeated, his dark face still white. "A flock of goats—one mine perhaps out of the way, but others are beyond, and others again! By the time that the third mine was sprung, the warning would have been conveyed to the Colonel, and pursuit have started before the summit of the range could be attained. M'lle Denver must be prevented from this mad scheme!"

"Unless she is locked up, M'sieur, it will be her only way, since you refuse to help her otherwise!"

"The river-passage is impossible, sir. I have an oath to observe!"

"An oath?" I repeated scornfully. "Is there honour, then, in this place?"

"Has not a lily grown from a bed of mire, Doctor? Ah! but you cannot understand. I am free to go only when my own country needs me. She does not need me yet; thus am I not free!"

"Does an outcast boast a country, M'sieur?" I asked, my eyes holding his, which blazed like red coals.

He drew himself to his full height—a brave, soldierly figure of about six feet—and tossed back his head with that same air of inborn command that so strongly characterised Ord. "Ian Vetsera, an insignificant count in the great Doctor Zaring's total of men is known in Austria as John, the Arch-Duke! Is Austria outcast? Ian Vetsera is pleased, however, to overlook an insult that was offered through ignorance."

I stopped as though turned to stone. If the man had any mania, it had never before showed, nor was there any reason to doubt this staggering statement. I recalled the little I remembered of the tragic death of Rudolph, the Crown Prince, in that little hunting lodge at Myerling (was that not the name?), and of the terrible fate of the exquisite Marie—Marie—Marie? What was she called? In a flash it came to me. This man held her memory sacred, perpetuating it in this unknown land where men's names were of small account. The portrait of the Comtesse Larische, her hair in a thick cap of plaits, recurred to my mind's eye, and, underneath, the short notice of her book of memoirs! She, Larische, was this man's cousin, and had written for all the world to read the sad and awful end of Marie Vetsera.

I held out my hand impulsively, though the man was indeed a Grand-Duke, though his country was at war against my own.

"I offer you my apology, M'sieur," I said, deeply moved, "and a thousand regrets that my thoughtless speech has forced such a confidence from you!"

He held my hand an instant, his brilliant eyes searching mine.

"Many considerations hold me back from an immediate attempt to succour the poor prisoner yonder," he said, "but if you will risk anything for her, I can—well, perhaps I can forget the mine some day when the Colonel has gone down-river! . . . Perhaps! . . . If a day comes when the Colonel and I go down together, as several times we have, some years ago now, and the engineer, Skrine, is left behind, as once before, then it will be good for you to make the passage, but leave at least no later than a day after. I risk much when I strain my oath to admit even this!"

Then in silence we walked towards the Residency. At the entrance hall we paused to comment on the huge flight of screaming parrots passing overhead, and I asked Vetsera to accompany me to Ellice's suite.

He smiled sadly, and a wistful note crept into his voice. "It is best for my peace that I see as little as possible of M'amselle. She is a woman that to see is to love, and I am not as free to consider such possibilities as perhaps he who has no other claim."

"Her husband, M'sieur, is no freer to think of her than you are! Are you surprised? I have come latest from the world, and I know the world's small talk. The Colonel's prisoner is the wife of the Earl of Beverley! My statement is able to be proved by Miss Denver's own account of her abduction!"

A spasm of inarticulate rage crossed Vetsera's face. His hand instinctively swept to where a sword and pistols might have hung. It was the primitive instinct of a long line of gentlemen to avenge a stinging insult.

“Does Colonel Ord know of this circumstance?”

“Perhaps it is unwise to talk here,” I said; “there are many places where one may listen unobserved, and in this place——”

“The walls have ears!” he finished for me. “Therefore, M’sieur, let us proceed to Madame’s suite, and finish our conversation together!”

Ellice met us in the outer room, and gladly welcomed us.

“Stay here, my dear friends,” she said. “I am suspicious of the fixings at the side of my cabinet in the inner room. Here, though, there seems to be nothing, and I have closed the door between!”

“There is nothing to listen here,” said Vetsera; “I can vouch for that! Madame, our good Doctor has acquainted me with one slight hint of the true state of affairs. Hardly can I curb my impatience to force the Colonel to restitute you to your bereaved husband. You have indeed been grievously wronged, and I remove, therefore, my last objection to your planning instant liberation!”

“My story is short enough,” she said, smiling bravely, “but there is a slight excuse for the Colonel, since he believes he saved me from a non-marriage. Returning to America from South Africa, M’sieur Vetsera, I met a man called Osmund Roxburgh, and we married in Kentucky, and went to the Continent for our honeymoon. I have told you this before, remember, but you had heard and believed Colonel Ord’s version beforehand. In Baireuth, one day, I met an old acquaintance who, it seems, must have been better read in the current social notes than I. This man knew what I myself did not know—that Osmund, my husband, had succeeded to the title of Earl of Beverley either before or after our marriage, I am still ignorant as to which. Plainly, his comments on my own astonishing ignorance as to who my husband really was, led Colonel Ord, his com-

panion at the time, to believe I had been duped into a false marriage. I can so clearly remember the Colonel's subsequent leading remarks, and my husband's smiling evasions. I believe Osmund had kept his succession a surprise for me on our return from Bavaria. But I thought nothing of the very earnest desire Colonel Ord evinced to make his company desirable to me! One evening a telegram came to me to tell me that my husband had met with a terrible accident at a place called Bamberg. He had gone motoring with one of the hotel acquaintances, and had promised to return early. It was then past seven o'clock, cold and wet, and I had waited dinner for him! Hurrying to the motor I had ordered to take me to Bamberg, the proprietor detained me a moment and handed me a glass of wine. He suggested that I might faint were I to set out on a journey of forty miles without nourishment. I could not bear to wait for any food, and drank the wine quickly, and ran down to the waiting car. In my haste I dismissed a sudden suspicion that somehow the driver seemed familiar in figure, though heavily coated and bespectacled—it is difficult to forget the unusual squareness and breadth of the Colonel's shoulders—and within a few minutes of setting out on the Würzburg Road I had lost all count of time and distance. It was three o'clock in the morning by my wristlet watch when I awoke, and I knew by the narrowness of my bed that I was in a ship's cabin! I had entered upon my series of adventures. The Colonel tells me we embarked at Frankfort, and made the mouth of the Rhine by moon. He offered me no violence, except on the one occasion when he demanded my wedding ring, remarking that I was to consider myself Miss Denver again. Since then he has extended me a cold courtesy, and persisted in believing my marriage to have been invalid. That, M'sieur Vetsera, is the history of my short misfortunes!"

What a woman! Fearless and uncomplaining in face of a catastrophe that might have robbed a less serene character of reason!

Vetsera listened, silently sympathetic.

Now that she had finished, he leaned towards her as she lay back in the depth of my armchair, and spoke very slowly.

"Madame la Comtesse has but to ascertain that Colonel Ord acted so from no mistake, and Ian Vetsera's services are at her disposal."

Ellice looked at him, her violet eyes moist with eager gratefulness.

"I thank a good God daily that I have such true friends. . . . I shall ask the Colonel at my first opportunity!"

"And now, if Madame—Miss Denver!—will excuse me, I must be ready to receive the mail when the boat returns. The passage has been open this last hour."

Bowing low, the Arch-Duke of Austria left us. Without delay I told Ellice of my idea of a prescription, and invisible ink, conveying the knowledge of our whereabouts. An escape by the River Range had been effectively barred by Vetsera's very genuine anxiety when I had told him that Ellice meant to try that way some time; but the better news was mine to give her—that the yacht would one day take Ord and Vetsera downstream, and that the passage by some device would remain open for us perhaps for twelve hours. At all events, a message must certainly be sent to the outer world to prepare a safeguard for us should we be able only to get as far as the "duck-under" bridge gap, in the little mail-boat. It would be Ellice, Skrine, and myself, then, who would attempt the passage, and perhaps soon!



Not long afterwards Skrine returned, and I cautiously admitted him to our secret. He was all impatience to set out in the dirigible as the speedier means of escape, but agreed to make the attempt we were devising if it should offer itself sooner than the completion of the Schutte-Lanz. One condition he imposed re the sending of the prescription, and that was to exempt him, as far as possible, from being the deliverer of the prescription, in case the Colonel accused him of complicity.

"It's not that I'm funking it, but there's no good in taking undue risks, is there? Besides, I'm sworn in to talk to nobody outside of our own people here, or on matters relating strictly to business. Otherwise I might have got clear at Darwin some months ago. Miss Denver being left alone has kept me back, for one reason! The Colonel's happy and economical plan of execution is, to my mind, worse than being thrown to the lions! A fellow doesn't have very long to consider things when a lion chaws him up, but to have ants, the size of muscat grapes, eat a beggar clean as marble, isn't much fun—never saw it done, but the Colonel has half a dozen of his executioners in a handy glass case to show the intending defaulter. Where he stores his pit of them is known only to himself! But I must get along to Miss Denver. The Colonel sent her up this paper!"

As he turned away, a happy thought arrested him.

"Half a moment, Zaring! In case the Colonel asks what our confab was about, tell him we were discussing the tidal arosial beyond Port Darwin—the greatest in the world, you know. Chuck in a few facts about 30 feet tides running at five miles or more an hour, and the undermining of any rising land. Talk about the absence of true reef-building coral off this coast, and you'll set him on a favorite theme, and give him a reason why he has had to have his glasses on us for the last five minutes."

I took the bull by the horns shortly afterwards, and had the extreme pleasure of listening to a most interesting theory on supposed land subsidence, besides most patently disarming suspicion. When Vetsera joined us at the dinner table, the Colonel's concise, well-stocked mind was too busy recalling evidences of various world-known geologists to permit of his noticing the awkward silences of Ian Vetsera.

. . . . .

After a cup of fragrant coffee and a very good cigar, I strolled off to the laboratory to fix up my invisible ink. Bluestone and copper sulphate would have served the purpose, but I found some cobalt nitrate, which answered even better, inasmuch as everyone knows, the writing that heat brings out can be obliterated by the application of moisture.

Armed with the ink, I returned to my room to receive a message from Clarke that Miss Denver was not so well, and needed me.

I was frankly anxious, fearing that the events of the exciting afternoon had upset her, but she merely summarised her symptoms, and, laying a warning finger to her lips, pointed out a small paragraph in the Personal of the Sydney "Morning Herald."

I read it with starting eyeballs. It stated boldly and simply: "Lord Beverley is at present staying at Petty's Hotel. His purpose is to institute fresh search for his missing wife, in and around Sydney."

"This couch is uncomfortable for you, Miss Denver. If you were lying on your bed, you would feel easier. There is no need for alarm," I continued, speaking loudly (so that the hidden 'phones might convey the intelligence to Ord, who, I had no doubt, was supervising our conversation), "but you will need to rest for a few days. May I assist you to your room? This faintness will pass!"

Halfway across her bedroom floor I detained her.

"Here is a bottle of ink, and here is a prescription tablet. Use a clean nib and write a message to your husband. I will guard the outer room, and will prepare what I will say later on. When you are ready, ring for me. Use only one sheet!"

I drew the curtains closer and went out, closing the door behind me. But no interruption occurred, and at length her bell called me from the outer room. As I knocked at her door and entered, she called to me:

"Oh! please forgive me for troubling you, Doctor, but I should so much like a glass of cold water, and I dare not move yet!"

"No trouble at all, Miss Denver," I answered cheerily; "I am here by the Colonel's orders to do what I can for you!"

"Would you not do it for me without his orders?" she called after me, and, for the satisfaction of the 'phones, I said shortly:

"Possibly I might. It is a pleasure at all times to serve a lady. But naturally one considers the Colonel's wishes first!"

As I gave her the water she slipped ink, pen, and paper into my pocket, and whispered a request that the "Herald" might somehow be destroyed.

Bidding her a good-night and sound rest, I withdrew, and, in the outer room, lit a cigarette, and permitted the match to burn out a half-dozen lines or so of printed paper, which I then turned inside out, so that the report of a recent fall in wheat was "missing."

Then I detached the top sheet of the small pad, and wrote my own instructions below, tore it off, and regummed on the two sheets, written sides facing downwards. One was Ellice's message to her husband; the other, and top sheet, was my message to the chemists. Both sheets would be used in my

prescriptions, and it only remained for me to force the Colonel's hand, and in his presence write the Latin formula that would instruct the dispenser how to proceed with the wary task in hand.

I know nothing of Ellice's communication. My own read thus: "I, who write this, am the Dr. Louis Zaring, of Wellington, N.Z., whose disappearance doubtlessly was reported there. I am detained against my will in the fastnesses that lie at the end of a river of some 80 miles length, whose outlet to the sea is by means of a hidden inlet, west of Port Darwin, and situated about 15.5 N. by 130.12 W., close to the imaginary line between S.A. and W.A. This river penetrates a range of mountains, which circles the habitable tableland where we are imprisoned, with only the river as means of escape, when our gaoler shall be absent. Send these two prescriptions to the Earl of Beverley, Petty's Hotel, and devise means for him to answer on copies of these prescriptions. Prepare cobalt nitrate solution for ink, clean nib, Deceive bearer re reason for copy. Meanwhile, secure a 100-bottle of Parke and Davis Lecithin pills, 1½ grams, and box them in lots of 25. Charge for all time and trouble."

"To the Earl of Beverley,—'Ellice Denver' is here. We can make the river some time, as far as the natural rock barrier lying 800 yards from mountains, where there is a floating mine. Follow grey, small mail-boat from Darwin some Monday to find hidden river mouth, but keep boat out of sight if landing is effected. Space limited.—Louis Zaring."

My prescriptions were completed on the stroke of ten o'clock. A whim seized me to wander outside and smoke in the balmy night.

Colonel Ord was pacing up and down in front of his "diggings." He joined me, and we walked slowly backwards and forwards, keeping always within sight of the narrow shaft of light between the creepers that marked Ellice's room.

"How is she to-night?" he asked, without any preliminary. "Clarke says she needed you."

"Mostly nerves, Colonel. She is highly strung and something still worries her. The heart action is very weak!"

"Can't you do anything? You talked the other day about special stuff for her. Is it not procurable? I have told you I am ready to get anything she needs!"

I smoked a while before answering.

"You will grant me, Colonel, that the situation is a little difficult. You might spend a small fortune in artificial foods for her, and still have her no stronger. What is necessary to a case like this—one in ten thousand, thank heaven!—is actual brain food, organic in form and very difficult to procure. I know what I want, and very probably, even though naturally I cannot sign the prescription, I might secure it, if the chemist had time. Hustling means the hurried preparation of the chief constituent, and its loss in efficacy. Were I in Sydney, say, and could myself interview a chemist of ordinary intelligence—not one of these illiterate apprentices—I might—but why talk of impossibilities?" I broke off, with tantalising suddenness.

Ord flicked the ash from his cigar.

"I can't let you go, Zaring, even for that. You are too precious, and you know too much! But, supposing you wrote out the name of this stuff, I could go down to Sydney, if you like, and get it for you, and give 'em plenty time, and, what's more, I could ask for the head man, and tell him it is a special thing and must be specially attended to!"

My brains worked quickly. If Beverley were up country, how could a return message be provided for? I must speculate a little on the chemist's intelligence, and impress on Ord that this thing to be secured might have to be actually manufactured.

"You could risk it, Colonel. But I tell you that on the only other occasion I have had to use this nerve food it took the laboratory a fortnight to produce. It is a phospho-glyceride. Probably the Sydney chemists are more alive than most, and you will not have longer than perhaps a day or so to wait. But if you are going, it's just as well to let you know that this stuff isn't picked up like acorns. Besides, it has to be converted into a takable form—pillules, for instance!"

"Do you know all you want?" he asked, his old brusque manner returning. "If so, I'll trouble you to step inside and make out the list!"

"As you like!" I said shortly, "but there's this to consider! A month on this stuff will make Miss Denver feel like trying her wings again!"

"Get her to stretching 'em again, Zaring, and I'll persuade her not to try 'em. Come on, man, come to my room, there's ink and paper there!"

He strode before me, his steps once more aggressively confident, his head held high in his own autocratic fashion. In his library he switched on the lights, and pointed me to his chair.

I seated myself, and selected a bunch of writing paper and a broad-nibbed pen. The blood drummed in my ears; I have seldom felt so excited.

"What chemist, Colonel, and what name for the patient? Her own may put her away if her people are still looking for her!"

His keen brown eyes riveted themselves on my face.

"You are right!" he said, meditating; "she may not have been forgotten by the world! Call her—call her! . . . I'm bothered if I can get a name suitable for her! Call her anything you can get hold of, Zaring, and suggest some chemist yourself. I'm not up in such matters!"

"No more am I," I said, carelessly, "but I think you can depend on Freat; he's a clever chap, and conscientious. He hangs out somewhere near Petty's, down that side street, past the Wentworth! How does 'Miss Cecile Waring' strike you?"

I held my breath.

"Just the thing!" he said quickly, eagerly, "and Freat's will do!"

So I had forced the Colonel's hand, astute and masterly as he was. With a casual assent, I wrote the chemist's name, the "Co." of whom was the head man of the establishment, by name Hugh Waring, the brother of my own sweet wife—Cecile Waring!

I had not dared to hope for such a possibility. I wrote the patient's alias, the date, and then hurriedly felt in my coat pocket. "By George!" I cried excitedly, "I have the luck that's generally yours, I think, Colonel! If I can't sign my name, here's what is almost as genuine—some prescription paper that is only sold to doctors! Jove! I wonder what else I have in my pocket!" and I hauled forth my prepared tablet, several old letters that I had carried away with me, some of our quaint Wellington tram tickets (whereon the conductors cancel the number of rides taken), and a pocket book.

To hide my feverish eagerness, I pretended to examine these carefully.

Ord's impatient voice broke in on my tender recollections:—

"For heaven's sake, man, get that prescription made out! Can't you look at all that rot afterwards! . . . Pardon, Zaring! I'm getting nervy, too . . . Write it out, old man, like a decent chap, and give it me!"

I swept the trifles aside with a fine show of irritation.

"Can't see where the blamed hurry is," I said shortly. "You can't start before daybreak!"

"I'm starting right now," he answered, his chin square. "Inside of a fortnight I'll be back with it!"

I laughed: "How easy to send you off, and try my own wings! This is a happy scheme of mine!"

He pushed the ink nearer me, still on edge to be up and doing for this woman he loved. Behind all my resentment, I admired him mightily, and felt sorry for him with a sympathy that separation from my wife had quickened.

"Try your wings by all means, and don't let it be a Vane effort!" he said quickly, "but look out for Vetsera if he finds you playing pranks with the little torpedo. He tolerates no strangers in the Caves!"

"I'll have a lesson in dirigibles then, Colonel, for I tell you frankly that I mean to get back to my wife some time, as soon as Miss Denver's health is better, and I can leave without a guilty conscience!"

"My! Zaring! But you're as game as they're made!" Ord said, smiling his intense delight at my announcement. "If there was time now I could tell you the plans I have for getting your wife up here too. Your work isn't done yet; there's the malarial fever to stamp out here first. But we can talk ways and means and pay and beans later! Get this done for me now! Yes, that prescription paper is certainly more professional. Sign 'S.J.,' and I'll tell 'em, if they ask, it's Silas Jebb, an old pal of mine, by the way!" Then he watched me as I wrote, after consulting the discarded sheet, again, the heading, date, and name.



To assist those unfamiliar with the usual signs, I append a translation of quantities on my first page:—

Re-Ferri tartari, 8 grains  
Pot. iodide, 5 grains  
Tr digitalis, 10 minims  
Hic crypticum,  $\frac{1}{2}$  drachm  
Nuntium, 3 drachms  
Scr Iptum, 2 grains  
Calefacta, 20 minims  
Spt Chloroformi, 10 minims  
Infus Calumbae, 1 oz.  
3 x per diem

Ellice's message I ensured by a second formula that gave directions for the careful preparation of some lecithin pillules, or, failing every effort to compose either, an order for somatose, which is well enough known as a remedy in convalescence to need no Latin dictionary.

"There they are, Ord!" I said, initialling both, and folding the two sheets together, after a careful perusal. "Don't lose 'em, specially the long rigmarole!"

"Here's an envelope, Zaring," he said, whipping one out of his desk-shelf; "put 'em in, and address it. It wouldn't be a bad dodge to endorse it 'Per special messenger!' so that they'll ask no questions, and I can leave it and tell 'em I'll call in six hours or so to see if it's ready!"

I looked at him, a dim suspicion crossing my mind. If he were playing with the mouse he was confoundedly cruel in his way of it. But mouse or no, I sealed the envelope also, at his own request, and, by 11 o'clock, he was on his way south, and I, tossing restlessly on my comfortable bed, already regretting that I had so wholeheartedly invited the ants as big as muscat grapes to make their next meal from my carcass!

The deed was done, however, and worry could not save me from the consequences of a rash blunder; but the days passed slowly and torturingly, and at last came October 16th, the date of Ord's expected return, barring delays.

PART VI.



Being a few notes by Hugh Waring, of Frean & Co., chemists, Sydney.

My brother-in-law, Louis Zaring, has asked me to write an account of what happened on October 8th, 1914. I am not sure that events are very clear in my memory, for they moved apace, and with such unusual developments, that I am doubtful if I was awake! But, if I am imagining facts, they must be presented, for the simple reason I know of nothing else to write.

About 10 o'clock on the above date, one of the apprentices brought me a sealed envelope addressed to Frean & Co. As Mr. Frean has not been an active participant in the business for some months, I opened the note, asking if there was any answer required.

"A gentleman brought it in a few minutes ago, sir, and said he would call back at 6 for the preparation!"

The note was a prescription, and presented such complex features that, had the messenger waited, I should courteously have suggested: "Can you wait for this? It will take a little time to make out!"

In general substance, the prescription was for a tonic, but items 4, 5, 6, and 7 were not listed in any apothecary's dictionary. Who in the name of chemistry had heard of *Scr Iptum*, *Hic crypticum*! *Calefacta*! *Nuntium*! *Hic crypticum*, indeed! This was too cryptic for me. But, as I reasoned, a most amazing feature presented itself. The name of the patient for whom the mixture was intended, and the maiden name of my own sister, were one and the

same; moreover, Waring is not a common name. I glanced at the initials, S.J. Not the half-conscious L.Z. I had expected! As this fact slowly filtered to my brain, I connected the prescription with the extraordinary disappearance of my sister's husband. If this was from him, he necessarily was alive, but, if alive, why had he not reported himself? I turned to the second sheet. A demand for a supply of a lecithin, which is seldom used and almost unknown in Australia (though stocked by a Sydney company), except in the forms of patent nerve foods. The whole happening was wrapped in mystery. Then a detective mania seized me. I eliminated the unknown drugs, and wrote the names on a sheet of paper. Instantly my schoolboy Latin came to my aid. "A secret message is concealed here. Apply heat!" In twenty seconds my brother-in-law's communication lay before me. I took up my hat and went straight over to Petty's. Lord Beverley was in, fortunately, and received me with great geniality. He is a tall man, with the fine-cut features of the old aristocracy. His eyes are a luminous brown, with laughter and sadness hidden in them. His lips—clean, firm lines—impressed me because of their seal of tragedy. He appeared to me to be momentarily expecting great news. His gaze at times was fixed and brooding; at others, vividly alert.

I briefly outlined the morning's events, and handed him Zaring's note.

His face had become positively radiant as I spoke. When he took the note into his own hands, they shook visibly. He sighed, and gave me the sheet.

"Where is the other paper?" he asked, wearily: "I can scarcely bear this good news you bring me, but I have somehow been expecting some exquisite joy to come to me for more than a week, and, happy as I feel now, there is an unsatisfied sense behind it all. At the back of my mind I am disappointed!"

"Why, to be sure," I said, "there is a second form, but I did not heat it, as this is signed and seemed complete!"

Beverley rose with alacrity.

"Let me go back with you, Mr. Waring. I am persuaded the other sheet contains a message from my wife, who has been lost to me for two long years."

As we drove quickly to Frea's, he acquainted me with details of his tragic honeymoon. In turn, I told him of my connection with Louis Zaring.

"Then will you not cable to his wife!" he exclaimed. "I will most gladly send one for you, if you will permit me. It will save her some hours' unnecessary suffering!"

His sympathy was a pleasant trait to reflect upon. I sent a messenger to the Post Office, on our return, which seemed to afford Lord Beverley a slight satisfaction. And then we arranged matters so that the unknown messenger might not be detained.

Copies of the prescriptions were made in a close imitation of Zaring's scholarly handwriting, omitting the unknown drugs; next, the Lecithin pillules were obtained from the manufacturers' representatives, and placed in lots of 25, each box sealed in a white wrapper, and on the outside cover of the box that held them was the magic instruction, "Calefacta." On the inside top of this bigger box Lord Beverley wrote in the nitrate solution his brief acknowledgment of Zaring's intimation, so worded as to frustrate any chance reading with understanding. He next implored me to write directions as to the administration of the lecithin, and to enclose it with the prescriptions. On the back of, and through these directions, Beverley wrote a letter to his wife.

Beverley spent the day getting together a crew and provisioning a small steam yacht to go north, but, before six o'clock, he added a few lines to the cover of the box, and a second (or third) postscript to his wife's letter in case any accident should happen to the box. Then he asked for a seat behind the dispensary back counter, and waited for the unknown messenger.

At a quarter to six, I saw him steady himself from falling, after he had looked into the shop on the entrance of a customer, and from the death-like pallor of his face I knew that our man had come.

I stepped forward myself to attend to him. The newcomer was not strikingly tall, but his high-poised head, stern, clean-shaven mouth, and alert, critical glance, together with his short, curt enquiry, stamped him as one accustomed to command and accustomed also to instant obedience. His jaw closed tightly when at rest, almost as if the man's whole force of character centred where teeth shut on teeth.

"I left two prescriptions this morning to be prepared. I understand there may be some difficulty in procuring the stuff," he said, his eyes challenging me to question him.

"We were in the fortunate position of having a small supply to hand by the last English mail. A chemist in Melbourne ordered some of the stuff through this firm's agents out here. They cabled for a little in excess of what was required!"

"Is the preparation ready then?" shortly.

"I have made up the pillules as directed," I said, "but the doctor—I am not familiar with the initials, S.J.—may not have had occasion to use this nerve food for some years (it is little known!), so I have taken the liberty to copy a few of the German



chemists' remarks on the best administration of this particular lecithin!"

Here I brought to light the four small boxes in the larger box.

"These are placed in small boxes to keep them as unexposed to the air as possible. I have sealed each to insure against staleness. This outside box is airtight, and will minimise chances."

"Is the other tonic ready?"

"Yes, sir, the two are here—the liquid tonic and the Calefacta. Will you take the prescriptions, and shall I give you the directions I have written out, in case you may be seeing Doctor——?"

"Silas Jebb!" he said, more abruptly than before. "Yes, give both to me."

He stowed the two envelopes away in his inner pocket, impatiently tapped with one hand on the glass showcase while I made up the small parcel, and, when I meekly suggested to this despotic messenger that the cost would be fifteen shillings and sixpence, he tossed a sovereign indifferently on the case, where it clinked and spun itself silent.

"Make the dollar out in perfume!" he said, an unmistakable "a" creeping into the last word, and I added a small bottle of German otto of violets.

Then the messenger strode out of the shop as though the world were his, and I returned to Lord Beverley, whose face was still white, but absolutely mask-like.

"In my wife's letter," he said, "she proved how grand a woman she is; she did not trouble to tell me the name of the man who had stolen her from me! He is called Ord! We met him whilst in Bavaria. Curiously enough, he is the last I have ever thought

about in connection with her disappearance. Mr. Waring, I follow that man's route to-night, as soon as my men can get ready."

Then Lord Beverley shook me warmly by the hand, and went out.

The next time we met—but that is not for me to recount. Zaring has asked me to omit it.

(End of notes by Hugh Waring.)

Friday, October 16th, passed, and the dark moonless night closed in, bringing the tang of a cold southerly wind across the ranges.

My anxiety was wearing me out. Time and again Ellice had tried her best to soothe my maddening fears and restlessness, but the suspense was gradually becoming intolerable.

Vetsera, on his way to the Lake Caves, called to me.

"Come, Doctor," he said; "I have a pretty sight for you. This dark night makes the lamps be lighted, and the caves, at dark, are a pretty sight indeed!"

"When is the Colonel due?" I asked, joining him, and offering him one of the same person's cigars. "He told me he would make it in a fortnight, but I am afraid the stuff he has gone for cannot be got under five weeks, if it has to be sent for!"

"He already has passed the passage," Vetsera answered me; "I come but now from closing the connection! The yacht should be in the river tunnel à l'instant!"

A great calm fell on me, despite my unreasoning agitation of a few moments previously. I found it possible to talk in an ordinary manner to Vetsera, and later to meet Colonel Ord without trepidation.

At the massive stone entrance to the Lake Caves we paused a moment while Vetsera switched on the lights.

A scene of incomparable beauty flashed into existence. The vast chamber in which lay the last lake and the landing stage became outlined in a hundred or more iridescent globes; the Blue Lake reflected each glow in tiny streamers, which denoted the existence of some steady current. The canal connecting with the second and larger lake gleamed like a strip of silver, stretching its bright ribbon to meet the scintillating surface of the big lake beyond, which was lighted by myriad lamps hidden in the recesses of the chamber in which it lay. As far as I could see, the silver gleams stretched on and on, through numberless chambers and through arches which grew smaller and narrower, until at the turn, beyond which lay the Pink, and lastly the Red Lake, a brilliant searchlight advanced, and I knew that Ord's yacht was coming.

The landing was like some strange scene in the theatre. Figures appeared, dreamy and silent; the illuminated boat berthed in absolute quiet, and the Colonel stepped quickly to the landing stage.

Seeing us, he advanced immediately, his cheery acknowledgment of our welcome a further alleviator of my fears.

As we walked toward the Residency he gave us a jocular account of his day in Sydney. He had dined at the Australia, and had met an old friend, who had magically become a Lieutenant-Colonel, and was in brave khaki.

"But, you know," he laughed, "he didn't give me the glad hand till I had assured him I had been more'n a mummy this past eight and twenty years! He tells me my sorrowing relatives erected a large headstone for me in '88, scarce two years after I'd done the disappearing trick. Seems a rare pity to go make it idle! . . ."

Then he turned good-humouredly to me. "I have gotten the stuff, Zaring, and a page of instructions thrown in, plus an interview with as civil a chemist as I've met, all for fifteen shillings! I thought they'd be rustling me for as many sovereigns. Golly, but you don't know what expensive stuff is, Zaring!"

In his library he gave me the purchase, and watched me while I untied the package.

"Keep 'em airtight," he said. "Here's the chap's instructions! You'd best keep the prescriptions yourself, hadn't you? Then you can't charge me with them! . . . How is Miss Denver, better?"

"I think she has greatly improved. Indeed, I was wondering if she might not be induced to take a short ride some day soon!"

"I'll send her horse up to-morrow," he said. "Perhaps, as it's too late for me to go round to her, you'll tell her it would give me pleasure to accompany her any hour she feels fit!"

I assured him that his message would be delivered, and left him, after carefully picking up every scrap of wrapper.

In my own quarters I applied heat to the cardboard box as it directed by a large "Calefacta," and hastily memorised the message on the inside lid. Next I tried both prescriptions (which I ascertained were a clever copy of my own), and the four white wrappers, but failed to find any message for Ellice.

Lastly, the despised "instructions" yielded up their secret, and I hastened to Ellice with the precious missive, leaving a sheet of moist blotting paper to obliterate the writing on the box lid.

Half an hour later I returned, and found her as radiantly happy as any human being might ever appear. Her face was alight with a wonderful joy; in her sweet voice was a note of vibrant tenderness; her eyes still held in their dark-blue depths the mysteries of hidden glories.

She took both my hands in hers with that impulsive gesture so becoming to her, and drew me to the sofa, where she seated herself and motioned me beside her.

"He will come," she said softly, her lips smiling. "I shall see him soon! Oh, dear Dr. Zaring, how much happiness you have brought me! I shall never forget all you have done for me!"

What an unparalleled woman! No shallow asseveration of a fact that must be where such as she was concerned, that her husband had never doubted her! No sentimental reiteration of her past anguish of mind! No empty exhibition of present solitude, but just the simple dignity of ineffable content and silent gratitude for the goodness of an all-wise Father! "He will come—I shall see him soon!" Her husband's coming; her own nearing happiness to so soon see him! The beauty and loyalty of her love filled me with a sense of awe, of reverence. Almost could I have offered her homage that her soul was so pure and so lofty.

"He will come!" The cry of faith, of hope, of longing—the balm for suffering, doubt, and fear! What man might ever reach this womanly height of spiritual perfection! Then she turned to me swiftly. "Oh, how selfish I am!" she said. "I have forgotten you! Osmund had a cable sent to your poor wife!"

And I knew that my sweet wife's words would be the same! How unsurpassable some women are!

As I left Ellice, brokenly bidding her good-night, my own heart sang its tireless refrain: "Yes, I am coming!—I shall see you soon!"

And I had forgotten to deliver Ord's message.

PART VII.





The next afternoon Ord took Ellice out riding.

Her grace is at all times noticeable, but on horseback she is superb. The Colonel was a splendid figure in the saddle, too, and an adept. He wore what suited both himself and the climate—a khaki helmet, silk jacket, and riding trousers of the same colour, and smart puttees. A flush of crimson tie on the soft shirt became him remarkably well. Given no previous attachment, I reckoned a woman would have very little chance of not yielding to his fascination.

Ellice mounted from the steps, at my injunction, to lessen any chance of setting her dislocation astray again. She wore a riding dress of a dark blue holland, and a white helmet, collar, and gauntlets. On her dark chestnut mare—a progeny of Flycatcher, by the way, and bearing that sire's mark of the two hind stockings—she made as exquisite a picture as one could desire. Her escort, on his flea-bitten grey, the wide stretch of lawns, the bursting into flower of gorgeous wattles and scarlet gums, the hazy blue distance, the purple range, and the intense colour of the blue Australian sky, made a background of unusual beauty.

As she and Ord rode slowly off, I sighed with a real regret that Fate had made it impossible for them to mate.

Vetsera came along the verandah and asked permission to join me. His expression had become habitually gloomy since the time Ellice had told him her story. I liked him greatly for it, because it augured that he would indeed help her by every means in his power.

"Is she not most beautiful?" he said, looking after the receding riders. "So often it has seemed to me that she embodies the ideal of Wagner! Is there likely to be a fairer Isolde? Sad indeed it is that Sir Tristan cannot be. I have it in me to applaud a Pagan passion, and yet I revolt from the thought of the torment of King Mark for his beloved Queen! Yes, Tristan can never be. I myself shall see to it."

"I have heard from King Mark," I said quietly, "and if ever immortal love is between two human souls, it is between this husband and wife! Maybe the Colonel stands for King Mark, and Osmund Roxburgh is Tristan to her Isolde!"

Vetsera drew closer to me, and laid his hand on my arm.

"What madness is this, M'sieur!" he said. "Is it that Madame's grief has indeed affected you? I beg of you to be collected."

"Come with me," I said. "We can talk in riddles here safe enough, but there are some riddles read that have never been spoken!"

In my room I handed him the lid of the box. He gazed at it, turning it all ways, and finally shook his head sadly. "It is as I feared!"

I laughed. It was good to have so successful a joke with him, though I was touched by his exhibition of sincere regard for me.

I lighted my radiator, and held the cover to the globes, Vetsera watching the message emerge under his eyes. Surprise prevented speech.

He took the cardboard and read:—

"Thank Heaven you are near my wife, Dr. Zaring. I can rest in comparative ease of mind until such time as Providence may reunite us, knowing she is not friendless. This evening I leave Sydney for Port Darwin, where I shall endeavour to follow the grey

mail-boat on the 21st. If we lose her we can only wait the next week, when we certainly shall not fail. Watch for rockets on and after the 21st, at midnight, when watchful eyes may be sleepful. Shall make the river if possible by your points, and, by end of month at latest, shall be camped back of the bridge you speak of. Cabled your wife to-day. Keep up a good heart. Au-revoir.—Beverley, October 8th, '14, Frean's, Sydney."

Then Vetsera showed himself a true man.

"My deepest apology is yours, Doctor," he said gravely. "On one occasion I spoke slightly to you. I must rectify my error by acknowledging you now as clever a diplomat as I am a stupid blunderer!" In my ear he whispered: "Inform me of the first midnight. The next day or so it will be necessary for the Colonel and me to go down river for stores. The dry season is close to us, and will be the worst for years. It will be necessary to go soon, before the stream is too low!"

I gripped his hand, and silently wrung it. The Grand-Duke is worthy of his title as a peer among men. I offered him expression of regret that I had found it necessary to anger him. With a courtly wave of his hand and a shrug of his shoulders, he dismissed the matter.

We spent the afternoon in pleasant converse, and Vetsera assisted Ellice to dismount when she and Ord returned, shortly before five o'clock.

I noticed that she still sustained her air of sweet tranquility (which I knew was rooted in the cloistral calm of her reflections!), but her delicate skin was stained a deeper tint than usual, and in her smile was the tender grieving of a madonna. She thanked Vetsera for his attention, and remarked what a delightful ride she had had.

"The Colonel has been such a very charming companion that I feel keenly the wide difference between us!" she said, gaily dropping him a mock curtsy. "Were I the Colonel, I should not hide my light under this bushel of solitude. How far might his gleams not stray, athwart the wide world outside!"

"Whatever light may be mine, Miss Denver, I assure you is a reflection of your own bright charm! Why, see how glum Vetsera radiates in your sunshine, and Zaring is beaming like a new moon."

And, setting spurs in his horse, the Colonel cantered away, leading the chestnut mare.

Vetsera moved closer to Ellice, and asked her some question.

"Yes, he has acted so from a misapprehension," she said, "but refuses to acknowledge it can be such. He knows nothing of the new knowledge I possess, and believes I have not spoken of what happened to anyone here. I asked him to ascertain from either of you whether you supported him. If you say I am not a married woman, I shall abide by what eventuates!"

"In face of the evidence the Doctor produced an hour or so ago, I shall challenge Ord before he contracts any tie with you!" Vetsera said, and, with a quick change of subject, asked me might it not be as well to destroy the tale-bearer? "I am going along to the works now," he said. "There is a big furnace refining a few score tons of coal, for we are economic here, wasting nothing. Coal gives us motor spirit, sulphate of ammonia, naphtha, and a deal of useful by-products! For the present, adieu!"

. . . . .  
After dinner the Colonel abruptly invited me to have a chat.

"See here, Zaring," he said, "I'm going to state a case to you and would like you to give me your point of view. I hold that a man is responsible to himself alone. My creed isn't orthodox, but it's sound. We're put in this world to do the best we can for ourselves, and to make things happy for other people. Live straight, and make living better worth while for others. If you see anything weak that's likely to be hurt because it's too small to look after itself, give it a lift out. Leave whipping the hurter to the general adjustment of the universe! Do you get me?"

"Yes! You are more merciful than those who advocate the survival of the fittest! You help the weak! Fire on!"

Ord's expression changed slightly. "No, you hit me there, Zaring! I believe I save the weaker thing if it's likely to benefit me personally! But here's the case. I meet a woman who says she is Mrs. John Jones. The man who knows her husband says to me afterwards: 'She is no more John Jones than you are. She is married to the Earl of Smithfield!' So I say: 'Isn't it likely she is Mrs. Jones, Countess of Smithfield? Titles are the plaguest things to work out! Can't she be Mrs. Jones as well?' And he says: 'Work it out for yourself, old chap; I'm not out for arithmetic!' So, Zaring, I get hold of Burke's latest edition, and look up Jones and Smithfield. What I find is that John Jones married him a wife two years before, and that leaves the woman I met—adrift. So I pick her up and bring her aboard my craft. She refuses to forget the rotter that tricked her, and will have nothing to do with me, although I have told her she hasn't a leg to stand on. Can you locate a way out of the difficulty? Is there any legal objection to the marriage between her and me?"

I shifted my position so that the light fell full on my face.

“Colonel Ord,” I began, “it is an unusual case, and one very difficult to judge. As you state it, there seems no way out—the woman apparently contracted a bigamous marriage! But do I understand you to say you took the law into your own hands, and spirited this woman away from the man she believed her husband? If so, knowing how women reason, I should say that you have the last chance on earth of winning her! Could any woman love the hand that shattered her idol?”

The brown eyes narrowed.

“That is outside the question! I want your opinion on the other—is she legally bound to a man who has married already? Of course she’s not! Any dunderhead could see that.”

“I answered you, Colonel! I said that your case was apparently proved! But might there not be some flaw in your chain of evidence? Might not another John Jones—a nephew, perhaps—succeed to the title of his uncle, Earl of Smithfield, who dies without issue, and might not John Jones have succeeded to that same title only so short a time before that he was not aware of either death or succession?”

“That doesn’t hold water!” he said shortly. “How could the chief man concerned know nothing, and a casual outsider know everything?”

“In a given set of circumstances, his ignorance is conceivable! Supposing he were wrapped up in business, and never had time to look at the papers, and supposing his business to be a secret mission, it is possible that the Earl’s executors would not know of any address to acquaint him with the unexpected news!”

Ord rose and commenced his rapid pacing of the room. After a while he halted in front of me and spoke deliberately.

"Supposing, then, such surmise is correct, the sin of wrongfully abducting the wife has been committed already through ignorance! Is an unconscious sin a sin all the same?"

And there I made my mistake.

"Undoubtedly!" I said gravely.

"All right, then! The sin is done. A man is responsible to himself alone. I played for keeps, unknowing that my play was forbidden. I won the stake fairly. I shall keep it. Good-night, Zaring! don't let my morals, or my lack of 'em, worry you. Hoe your own row as straight as you can, and, if you have time, help another chap along with his! But this shift I'm out to hoe my own row!"

As he strode from the room I heard him say as if to himself: "I can't give her up now!"

And I went out, knowing that, by a false move, I must strain my eyes eastward every midnight for the rockets that might never have needed firing!

. . . . .

The mails were brought in on the 21st, a Wednesday, and that night and every night following I kept my lonely vigil. But no streak of fire showed in the horizon, and the week slowly dragged by.

True there was much festivity at the Residency, "Ordsborough and his wife" being invited to make merry at supper and song, at which feast none was fairer than Ellice and none gayer than Ord. We had singing, too, of unparalleled excellence, the singer being one of the Colonel's earliest trapped birds, a dark-browed Russian operatic star—Stephanie, by name—who had (I believe) willingly been decoyed to the Colonel's far away kingdom.

I consoled myself with consigning him to her rich charms when Ellice should have gone.

Then the 28th came, when Vetsera went downstream early to Darwin, because Skrine was ill of malaria. At ten o'clock the same night I overheard Vetsera advising a trip as soon as possible with the big boat for stores, because of the rapid drying of the river.

"Its shrinkage is unusual," he said, "but we have had almost no wet season, and I fear sadly a drought!"

And I heard Ord say: "If you feel capable of it, we'll make the bay to-night, then. I'll go along with you, since Skrine is ill, poor chap! Can't get Radcliff, that clever radium chemist from Sydney, yet awhile, though! We'll leave him for our next trip!"

Behind Vetsera's hesitation I divined his care for our escape. Then he answered: "Right, Colonel, the yacht is ready now, and the men fit!"

A few minutes later he grasped me by the hand.

"We go downstream again to-night," he said. "Make it as soon as you can. My undying regards to Madame!"

In a moment he was gone, and a few yards further on the Colonel and Craddle joined him, Craddle carrying the Colonel's traps, which were in a state of constant readiness.

The Colonel did not send me any message on leaving, which seemed to me strange, but I went to Skrine, and acquainted him with the news, and asked him to get ready. He was luckily only malaria-stricken in order to remain at home for the rocket, which he calculated was due about now.



Ellice, Skrine, and I stood ready to make an instant start by eleven o'clock. We each had an electric torch, a water-bag, as much food as we could carry, a revolver and 25 bullets, a small shotgun and 50 cartridges. Skrine went down to the stage first, to allay suspicion should any of the settlement see us and watch; also he purposed to make up three swags for the food and extras for us to take ashore if we had to abandon the boat by the duck-under bridge.

We were prepared for any contingency.

I put on my borrowed boots and coat, and switched off the lights in my room before venturing out. Fortunately, the night was patchily dark. The moon was not due to rise until after midnight.

I joined Skrine on board, and a little later Ellice whistled softly to us, and stepped on to the stage. She, too, had on a heavy coat, and, I noticed, was wearing stout shoes.

"I suppose you both have your helmets," she whispered. "I brought mine, and a box of matches in case we want a fire any time. What time shall we leave?"

But we were already off, the Colonel's noiseless engines making it impossible to tell when exactly we broke contact with shore.

Skrine flashed on the headlight for a moment to get his bearing, and we drifted silently down the first lake. Near the canal he let the bow-light shine continuously because of the danger in making so narrow a passage in the dark. The chances were remote that any of the Clan would come to the Lake Caves so late. Ord had a clear three-quarters of an hour's start of us, and would probably push ahead as quickly as possible.

Ellice and I stood by Skrine, in a tense state of nerves, one or another of us expressing whatever hope occurred to us.

"If such a thing should happen as shipwreck," said Skrine, "just swim for the side of the caves; there's a ledge about four feet under water, I've discovered, and, as we get further downstream, the depth is less. At the Pink Lake it might even be dry, some early summer!"

"What would happen if we met the other boat in the tunnel passage?" said Ellice. "These swags of ours wouldn't be much use then."

"Nor would we! It would be all up with us in such a case; we'd be lucky to get out alive."

I had been reviewing Vetsera's unusual move, when he had returned from Darwin a short while before, and ventured to put my thoughts forward for endorsement.

"I have been thinking over matters," I said, "and I conclude that Vetsera has allowed the pursuer a near view of his heels. He would necessarily imagine that Beverley would make his attempt of the river to-morrow, so wanted to get Ord off to-night, to leave a clear run. He couldn't guess how long Beverley might hold off, considering this is the 28th of the month!"

Ellice turned suddenly back, and grasped my arm.

"Oh, don't suggest it," she whispered fiercely. "It would be such a terrible blunder. If Osmund saw the boat to-day and followed, he would track her right up! He might even now be in the river, and Colonel Ord will come across him, trespassing, and—oh dear! Mr. Skrine, has the Colonel any more mines than that one?"

Skrine was steering through the curving waterway leading to the Pink Lake which directly joined the last—the Red Lake—you will remember.

"I think there is the one mine only, Miss Denver," he said, using the long familiar form of address, "and there are no sharpshooters aboard the 'Naiad,' so your husband will be all right. By the way, do pardon my slip. Miss Denver is so much easier."

"As we are comrades, why not call me Ellice?" she said gently. "It was the custom back there, and I resented it then, though now I ask it because it will please me so to be numbered among your friends—yours and Doctor Zaring's, if you both care to!"

"It is an honour, Miss—Ellice! Thanks a thousand times. My own elegant nomer is Eric."

"I know! Thank you, too! And yours, Dr. Zaring, is Louis! May I?"

"It is a privilege I had not dared to hope for, Ellice," I said. "I shall always treasure the memory of the sweet manner of its bestowal. It will complete the gift to hear my Christian name on your lips."

She laughed softly—a musical cadence like the silver carolling of a limpid stream.

"We are boys and girl together," she said, "escaping from a very kindly ogre! Eric, which side of the shutters shall I pull? We are nearly to the Red Lake now, and I want to be in readiness!"

"By heaven!" Skrine gasped. "We're pulled up ourselves, I think. Look at the lake!"

We looked!

The whole surface was tenderly aglow, lighted from the bottom. Golden gleams shot across the rippling surface. As we watched, paralysed into silence and inaction, the tender pink was rapidly changing into a heavy red; we seemed to be gazing at a vivid, burning ruby.

"It's the 'Naiad' coming back," said Ellice. "Oh, Eric, drive us to the side of the cave! Look, let us try to shelter behind that out-jutting rock!"

Skrine had not stopped his engines, and instantly steered for the scanty protection she had suggested, but the sides of our craft grazed against rock while about four feet out from the wall. "The rock ledge!" said Skrine, as we ran on the momentum of our own speed, the engines now being stopped, into the slight cover. "Zaring, see if you can feel it! Here's a pole!"

I felt over the boat's side. It was almost on a level with the deck, about a foot under water.

"It's here," I said, "quite close. Shall we make it, and shove the boat out? Then we can trust to Vetsera to come back for us, and we sha'n't be taken aboard, anyway!"

Skrine cut off the light!

"We'll be found here, and can't get back, and the Colonel won't pass us if we just lie-to! Yes, we'll have to abandon the boat and risk it. If he passes her, I'll swim out and bring her back, because she'll drift!"

Ellice, calm and courageous, had gathered the swags, and flashed her torch for a moment as she stepped unassisted into the dark water, which rose to her knees. Skrine and I followed, and the second flash of a torch showed us a cleft in the narrow rockhead, into which we thankfully pushed.

The whole of the Red Lake (or Phillipson Cave) must by now have been ablaze with the returned yacht's lights, because our own cave was dimly alight also. The sound of voices came to us, echoing across the roof, and every moment the lights drew nearer.

"It's our only hope!" said Skrine. "Keep close together! Jove what a wonderful thing! The ledge isn't known to exist, I believe. I found it myself by accident."

From our hiding place we watched the lake we had left. Soon it was as clear as day, and the little grey boat lay revealed, drifting steadily to the Red Lake. As the "Naiad" drew near, she slowly swung round, and across the outlet, drawn thereto by the intense suction of the forward blades.

"Thank heaven we're clear of her!" said Skrine, shivering. "Those blooming ants will miss their breakfast to-morrow!"

Then we heard the Colonel's exclamation of surprise, and quick order to the second engineer.

The light became stationary, and we knew that the "Naiad" had stopped.

"The boat has dragged her moorings, perhaps," came Vetsera's deliberate voice. "Shall we not then make fast a rope and tow her?"

"Craddle, go aboard with this rope," called the Colonel. "She'll be alongside in a jiffy!"

An instant later we heard the metallic bump of steel against steel. Then the light moved slowly on, and presently the boats passed on up the Pink Lake, two jewelled caskets, trailing fingers of gold, sending rays even into our dark recess of rock. Finally they moved slowly round the bend in the stream, leaving us in comparative safety and darkness.

Ellice sighed sharply. I asked her if she were feeling faint.

"No, only a little cold—from fear, I fancy!"—she answered. "We all got wet, didn't we?"

"Look here," said Skrine. "I think this ledge is almost sure to continue right round to the first lake. I'll volunteer to track it and see what hope there is of rescue. So long as Ord doesn't find us gone from our beds, he'll not suspect we were on the 'Mermaid.' We can get back before our absence is discovered, and make another shot later on!"

"If the river is so low, I shall swim through the tunnel," Ellice said, a hard note in her voice. "You say there is breathing space after the first dive from the Red Lake up to the last dive out to daylight!"

"Yes, but the dive is about 50 yards clear swim both ends! Can't do it!"

"Well, do as you suggest, and bring the 'Mermaid' along again!" she said. "I am not going to the Residency again. If I fail now, I fail for good and all."

"I can try," Skrine answered, "and if I don't get back before five o'clock you'll know I've been sent to the ant-heap. I'll let Vetsera know where you are, in such case!" He prepared, as he spoke, for an immediate start, and pressed the button of his torch. The brilliant light showed us that we might have pushed even further into the cleft of rock. A narrow rift ran back a few yards from behind the lip against which Ellice was leaning.

"I'm going to explore this first," I announced, and brought my own torch to bear on the dark line.

It opened up before me, and a few yards on, about four feet from the ledge, a fairly big hole lay revealed. I called to the others, and together we conjectured as to the likelihood of this hole being the bed of some small stream that, in the wet season, would supplement the flow of the Pink Lake.

Presently Skrine exclaimed excitedly: "There is some sort of stream, I know. Last dry, there wasn't much water in the lakes, and a rain-cloud burst beyond the S.E. ranges the day before I was going down for mails. I can remember quite distinctly hearing a waterfall from about this self-same spot, and thought to myself that some day we'd find another river-bed somewhere about!"

"You volunteered for the ledge track. I volunteer for this. Give me a leg up, Skrine!" and I crawled through the opening. Half a dozen yards further on the narrow passage gave entrance to a cave as large as the Red Lake cave. I stumbled hurriedly on, over a flinty floor, and followed the wall until a second opening led me into an even more spacious chamber. Then I went back for Skrine and Ellice.

They could scarcely believe the good news.

Ellice was assisted by us both to climb into the narrow passage, and Skrine tossed up the swags before getting in himself.

We traversed the first and second chambers, and found the opening to another, far larger and almost bewitchingly beautiful. From every part of the roof dripped stalactites, as dazzling in the light of our torches as ever I have seen even diamonds. From the black pebbles of the floor rose stalagmites, mostly round, and sometimes cylindrical, but often shaped like crystal water-lilies. Where there were most of these lilies, the floor was frosted also, and had the appearance of a snow-swept pond.

We went from cavern to cavern, keeping our bearings as best we could, discovering more gorgeous groupings of these pristine wonders in every cave. In one, especially, we were struck dumb with amazement and awe. A narrow entrance, draped in the fleeciest of "shawls," led to a hall, likewise draped. Here and there stood marbles, as realistic as any roughly finished sculpture, and often exhibiting natural colours that made us fancy some geni had been at work in this studio.

One group contained a fallen antelope, and the massive shoulders of a lion. Another was the cameo profile of a pretty child, in natural tones of pink. A waterfall broke from a ridge in the high-up roof,

and frothed at our feet. We looked fearfully at one another, each thinking the sense of hearing must have deserted him, but the waterfall's first frothing descent remained fixed—it was petrified.

We stumbled and slipped through each fresh cave, too anxious to be able to devote time and speech in admiration. My watch read four o'clock as we left the last stalactite behind us, and in front of us was a damp passage, narrowed to about fourteen feet by eight, mostly ironstone, the earth lying in patches where falls impeded the way. Round boulders were strewn everywhere, making progress slow.

An hour's dreary, discouraging walking brought us to our second surprise. A broken spear lay by a heap of crimson and green feathers. Skrine picked it up curiously.

"Looks as if blacks were about," he said quietly. "I believe there is an outlet, because, if the chap who put this spear here got in, we can get out. It may take time to find, but we'll make it!"

Ellice unstrapped her swag and got out her revolver.

"I'm going to be prepared for emergencies," she remarked, her fortitude making the action perfectly sane. "The Colonel said that most of the blacks about here are cannibalistic!"

"Then we'll prepare too," I said, forthwith unbuckling my own and extracting my small weapon. "And how about some food before we go on again? I'm famished!"

"Why not let us have some food, and a slight rest!" she suggested. "I would love a cup of tea, wouldn't you? There's this thermos full!"

Utterly improvident, we sat down there and then and feasted. The hot tea gave us new life, and never had junks of bread and cold beef seemed so palatable.



"I'll leave my swag open," said Ellice, "because I'm thinking we can't be caught here, and we are not likely to find Osmund before we see his rocket go up—to-night it will be, I suppose!—so why can't we rest?"

"Skrine and I will push on a bit," I said, "and find out if there's any further trace of the owner of this paraphernalia. We might be at the end of our journey, and we might be able to find a drier camp. At all events, if you are not afraid to be left here for ten minutes or so, we'll see what is to be seen!"

"I shan't mind," laughed Ellice bravely, "but be sure to whistle gaily on your return, or you might never forgive yourselves!" and she held up her Browning.

So we pushed on, leaving Ellice to her short nap.

The passage continued much the same for about a quarter of a mile, then lifted gradually, finally disclosing a fair-sized cave in which was a most extraordinary-looking prehistoric monster, or so it appeared by the light of our torches.

It had a hundred tentacles twined about each other, and a thick head. A dull yellow eye completed it. Apparently its tail was in the roof somewhere. Skrine and I advanced very cautiously indeed, our revolvers handy. Then we gave way to irresistible laughter. The transition from anxiety to absurd relief was too sudden.

The monster was nothing worse than the roots of some huge tree; far away up, a tiny shaft of light filtered along the trunk. If the worst came, we might perhaps get out by climbing up among the twisted roots, and breaking away what evidently was a thin crust of earth!

But our next thought was for Ellice. The cave was dry and roomy. As we turned on our tracks we noticed a second heap of multicoloured feathers, and the evident disarrangement of some large boulders.

"Signs of life, right enough," commented Skrine. "Say I keep a guard here, Zaring, and you get back to Miss—Ellice! If you hear shooting, bustle up. We might as well fight in this nice, large dining hall, as make convenient quivers for the chaps who own the spear."

I hurried away, and, being in no sense desirous of either becoming a quiver or a bullet holder, I whistled myself breathless on the return trip. Ellice laughed gaily at Skrine's happy suggestion, and offered to carry his swag. This item we had overlooked in the general interest of the newer discoveries.

Not long afterwards we joined the Irishman, our "bundles on our shoulders," and found him in a state of intense excitement.

"Look here," he said, exhibiting the wing of a goose. "Say there's no one here? I reckon we've struck a bad patch. If it was merely the feathers, I'd suggest dingoes or Tasmanian tigers. As it is, I reckon we've fallen into the fire!"

"What would eat you quicker? Ants or cannibals?" asked Ellice gravely. "I think I'll risk the latter!"

"You never have run any risk of the ants," Skrine returned. "Ord liked you too well to give the ants such a delicious meal! But if you don't mind the blacks, I'm certain sure I don't! What of you, Zaring?"

"I have been waiting for you to convince yourself you're not scared, Skrine," I said, chaffing him. "As a matter of fact, we could have nothing much to fear from cannibals. If they are uncivilised enough to still eat their enemies, they won't know much about these handy little guns we have, and, with decent shooting, we can account for 60 or 80 of the beggars!"

"That's about the extent of a tribe," said Ellice, "leaving the lubras and piccaninnies out of the slaughter. Well, let's rest here. I have already had a short slumber. Shall I guard the next passageway, while you two poor men have some sort of rest?"

After much discussion, we agreed, on her promising to call us at the end of an hour. We extinguished the torches and wrapped ourselves up in our blankets. When we awoke, a thin shaft of sunlight was streaking down the trunk of the tree at whose roots we were resting, and a thin spiral of smoke was mingling with the sunlight.

Ellice had kindled a fire, using the scraps of old wood littering the floor for that purpose. She chided us for not sleeping longer. "I am only half through the drying of my skirts," she said, her eyes full of merriment. "My shoon and silken hose are delightfully dry. I was most feared you might open your eyes to discover me barefoot!"

We were very apologetic, and very reproofing, but she laughed at us, and assured us that she had no fears at all of the smoke warning the Colonel of our whereabouts.

"I have also been entertaining a guest, or, I should say, the host of this establishment! While you dreamed sweet dreams, I heard a stone falling in that passage, and didn't like to awaken you so soon. Therefore, I sat very still and waited. By and bye this feeble light grew brighter, and I dimly distinguished the form of one solitary blackfellow. He and I stared at one another for a very long time, and then I opened my little torch, and he said, 'Missus big mob cheeky fellow all right!' I was so astounded. Then he and I became quite amiable, and he said if I could light a fire he would go and spear some fish or catch a duck. Since the fire is lighted, I may as well be using it."

We also were astounded, and just as much because of Ellice's pluck as on the other score—the appearance of a black with a knowledge of English, and evidently alone, in these underground passages.

“He says he lives here because an unkind gentleman of the Willeroo tribe wishes to sing him dead,” she continued blythely. “If he hides, this same gentleman cannot get at his dilly-bag to put the bone in, that he's been singing over and pointing at him. So my friend is here for some time. He talks quite a lot of funny English, and his name is Bobby Big-Tooth!”

As she spoke we became aware of the person in question. He seemed to have risen from the ground. In his hand he carried a green and grey duck.

“Good-morning, Bobby Big-Tooth,” I called cheerily. “Come in and let us have a look at you! How many others of your tribe have you behind you?”

A quaint old blackfellow he was, his body absolutely unclothed except for a tasselled belt of human hair, plaited, which he wore with quiet dignity. His arms and body were covered with scars, evidence that he had learned many things in the schools of his tribe—each corroboree is a species of university, and a scar marks each attendance. His hair was grizzled, and his mouth held very few teeth.

“Me bin catch duck alonga billabong!” he said, diffidently approaching and holding out his spoil.

“Right oh! old man,” said Skrine. “Whisk the feathers off and we'll toast him over the fire, with your assistance. Meantime, what's your little game living downstairs like this?”

The poor old chap looked decidedly perplexed. He turned to Ellice for assistance in his difficulty. Evidently he regarded her as a fine specimen of womanhood.

"Don't tease him, Eric, please," she implored. "He's very kind to have brought us this nice bird. When he has had breakfast we'll get him to show us the way out!"

Bobby Big-Tooth said very little either before or after the meal, but we gathered that he could show us the way over a saltbush plain to some station he knew of, for the small sum of a stick of "chew bac." He refused to accompany us, urging that his enemy might see his trail and follow him up with the vile piece of bone to which he kept alluding, as if it were some Act of Parliament.

"Me no go longa white fellow big mob camp," he said. "Debbil-debbil catch me, my word! Last night big mob white fellow sit down longa river; big fire-stick go screeching in sky. Me plenty frightened!"

"Do you hear?" cried Ellice, her cheeks flaming. "He means the rocket, of course. It must have gone up last night!"

Little by little we extorted from him the news that meant so much to us. His broken English and queer idioms confused us at first, but, after exercising a deal of patience, we learnt that the "fire-stick" had gone up at about midnight.

Bobby Big-Tooth, however, refused to go out during the day, averring that his homely enemy was afraid only of the dark; therefore, at nightfall, Bobby would go forth and find the "plenty mob white fellow all right."

After our breakfast (11 o'clock, by the way!) we packed up and asked Bobby Big-Tooth to show us the way out. It proved to be only a hundred yards or so further on, and we emerged into the free and glorious sunlight just before noon.

The exit was through a narrow tunnel whose mouth was effectively concealed because of the palms and banyan roots that crowded up the rocks so care-

lessly overlapping each other. We drew in deep draughts of the hot, scented air, and pushed past the palm-grove, and out into as free an area as we could command.

We saw a truly lovely sight. We were on an island, in the midst of either a slow-moving river, or in a lagoon. On every shore grew reeds and grasses, and on the water's surface floated great leaves—perhaps 36 inches across—and, from these, lifted the slender stalks of immense crimson, blue, and golden water-lilies. Birds were everywhere—geese, big and small, ducks, shags, and, on the lily-leaves, gorgeous parrots and crimson-crested cockatoos. Nearer to the shore were the long-legged birds—brilliant native companions, cranes of all kinds, and jabiroos. There were doubtless plenty of crocodiles also.

Off the end of our island, the calm water broke into a swirl, and coursed swiftly away towards the north.

We next explored the ferny nooks under the huge banyan, and lastly took an afternoon stroll among the branches of this enormous tree, whose balconies and passages were laced together by the million stays that fell from branch to branch, and so on, to the grassy turf beneath.

What a wonderful tree that banyan is! What a marvel of shade and gentle curves, each new branch sending down its prop to support the grand old tree through its centuries of age.

By four o'clock, in the blazing heat, we had discovered one of these natural rock bridges or submerged walls. From our island across to the other shore lay this span, about a foot under water.

“That is one way over!” said Ellice, “but I am going to paddle over when we go. I could not bear to get wet again without any occasion for it! When

the rocket goes up to-night, let us light a big fire at the end of this dear island, and then we can cross this bridge when Osmund comes!"

"We'll bribe Old Buck-Tooth to cut along to his camp. We can't risk a fire, if the rocket should have happened to be Ord's signal that our escape was known," said Skrine. "I'll go 'alonga the big mob white fellow's camp' if you agree. I might not get back very soon, but if it is not Ord, I'll commandeer the party to effect our rescue!"

"Let us have some food now," I suggested; "it's past five, and I can't say that I appreciate starvation diet, after the recent princely fare of Ordsborough!"

It took us a good half-hour to find our way back, however, and we were on the point of accusing Big-Tooth of treachery, when we hit on our particular group of palms, and regained the cave, where our genial host was still slumbering.

Ellice spread the board while we attended to the culinary department. A wondering shout from her brought us bounding to her side, where she was examining the "head" of the prehistoric monster, her torch supplementing the waning daylight.

She pointed to the "eye," exclaiming: "If that isn't gold, I'm not responsible!"

In a few minutes Skrine and I had gouged out the eye in a lump of gravelly clay. It was an immense nugget, just inconveniently heavy.

We stared at one another in speechlessness.

"Big-Tooth might want to pocket it as it's apparently his cave," said Ellice at last. "Why not put it in a swag?"

"These 'why nots' of yours are most excellent notions," I said. "Let's toss up who is to have the honor of carrying the spoil for Ellice!"

"No money on me!" said Skrine. "I've the lot banked at Darwin!"

"You're dodging work again, you beggar," I chaffed; "but, as you're subject to malaria, I will be kind and accept the honour!"

So the nugget went into my swag, and I may as well state here that Ellice insisted on "carrying is keeps," and because I was undeniably the poor one of the three of us, I accepted a share in its ultimate value.

Towards dark we heard the weirdest of noises—a mixture of sardonic mirth and curious trilling. Bobby Big-Tooth rushed out of the cave in a state of high excitement, and we followed him. Once on the island, a strange sight met us; the whole surface of the water was black with myriads of "flying foxes," mostly about a foot in length; like a black mantle, rising and falling and ever-moving, these shimmering dark creatures swept past us, and lifted in a vast cloud like drifting smoke, over the tree-tops, making east for food. It was a very unusual sight. The passing of these creatures must have taken a full fifteen minutes from the time we appeared. Old Bobby Big-Tooth had captured several for his supper, but we drew the line at sharing his tasty meal. He informed us that the blacks used to steal these "flying foxes" in the day-time as they hung from the branches in a pine-forest (Leichardt pine, I suppose) not far distant.

We kept to the cave until close on midnight, resting and watching the time. At a quarter to midnight we braved the mosquitoes, and went out into the breathless, starry night. The moon was late in rising, being near the full, but the luminous sky held millions of silver stars, which almost imitated her lustre!

"I very much wish we could have let poor M'sieur Vetsera know we weren't drowned," Ellice said. "Do you think we could get word to him? I might even write to Colonel Ord and tell him we aren't dead!"



"He'll kidnap you again," said Skrine. "As it is, I'll yank my money out of Darwin as soon as I can get a transfer through, and change my name for good and all. I'm not at all keen to be snapped up again—I've been gone long enough now; seven years is a pretty stiff spell to put away in longing to be home!"

"Surely civilisation is enough to prevent Ord from any more tomfoolery," I said hotly. "It is only necessary to warn the public, and they will not entertain this gilded conjurer unawares. I shall return to Wellington, but, of course, may not remain there very long!"

"Folk won't believe your tale, Zaring," said Skrine. "If I were you I'd write it up. Plenty of Australian editors might like a story like that to revive romantic interest in this country!"

"Not a bad idea," I said. "Would you permit me to use you as copy, Ellice?"

"Willingly," she said; "ask me anything and it will be granted you—oh! look, Eric, the rocket!"

As she spoke a rocket shrieked into the sky not a mile away.

"I'm off," said Skrine. "Come on, Bobby. I'll give you plenty 'chew-bac' when we find the boss over there where the fire-stick is!"

Ellice and I escorted the two adventurers to the rock-bridge. Skrine followed the old black, a stick in both hands to feel the width of the passage. He refused to go barefoot, alleging the presence of a lady as a sufficient deterrent, but it was wise of him not to risk any sharpnesses of the rock which might, of course, have permanently disabled him.

On the other shore, he paused to flash his torch, and, making a hollow of his two hands, called to us:

“Very wide, and as smooth as pavement. Au-revoir.” Then the ti-tree scrub swallowed up both men, and Ellice and I retreated for a half-hour to the cave-mouth, whose entrance we had marked by the swags.

PART VIII.



(Being notes by Osmund, Earl of Beverley.)

My very good friend, Louis Zaring, tells me he is writing an abbreviated account of his exploits since September last. He has asked me to add my own literary excellence to his effort, and has threatened me with all manner of scathing descriptions if I refuse to write up my own share.

Readers, please note! Any flattering notice of me or my heroism that may appear in these pages which he has refused to hand over to me for correction, has been extorted from his pen, under penalty of my heavy displeasure! It is due to one, if one's name is in fiction—no matter how true!—to be accorded every virtue and grace possible. Anyhow, I'm limited to about a thousand words, so had better make a start with the uninteresting portion.

Zaring tells me I need not begin at the beginning, which, after all, I wouldn't have done, because my own story can beat any that he can tell, and I'll be able some day to sell out an edition of thousands in the first few months. I'm to begin at where Hugh Waring, the Sydney chemist, left off.

Well, I didn't leave that night, in spite of my boast, for the simple reason that I couldn't get a commodore for the steam-tub I had chartered, and had to wait until October 9th, before my kind friend, the Admiral, sent me along his own particular pilot. I went North to Palmerston, and arrived on the 20th—a Sunday—late in the afternoon.

I shall not forget my first night in the curious little Port.

The whole populace viewed me from various points of vantage as an introduction to the general run of things; then night fell! What with the wails of curlews from shore, and odd minor chanting from camps of blacks round about, the malicious chuckles of very large bats (with tails, I understand!), and the jabbering of the pearl-fishers in the anchored luggers, I didn't have one ounce of slumber.

Next day I had a slight jaunt along the coast, toward the particular spot Zaring had described. It must have been about four in the afternoon when I first sighted the grey mail-boat, steaming at a good 20 knots for Palmerston. We got about, and followed her, to ascertain if she made the port. Then we hove to.

At dusk, some time before 8 o'clock, we made her out again, a line of bright light, and tracked her as far as possible. I could not explain, at the time, why the lights were suddenly extinguished, but the engineer, Mr. Skrine, tells me, since, that they were not sure what we were up to, and sank the mail-boat by means of their water-compartment system, to prevent uncomfortable scrutiny.

Skrine says he made the inlet in this fashion, before rising to the surface again.

We returned to Darwin port, and anchored in the roadstead, where we remained for a week, provisioning being our only communication with the land, except for one day's futile enquiry on my part to locate the grey mail-boat's exact destination. The postmaster informed me that he thought Ord lived "out west." He knew nothing definite.

On the 28th the grey boat came into the harbor again, as we steamed out. We made for a point beyond that which marked her sudden appearance the week previously, and, as the moon would not rise

until late, and the night would be probably dark, we risked lying without lights, and waited for the boat. She came far sooner than I had calculated, a thin grey line low down in the water, ablaze with light from stem to stern, though it was only just dusk.

We were anchored off a narrow headland, and felt the awkwardness of our strategic position.

The boat, however, slewed round into the small bay, sheltered by the headland from the ferocious wash of the Timor Sea, and we were able to reach this bay in time to see her make directly for the cliff face, slip behind a great pyramid of rock, and disappear altogether.

We lost no time in attempting the same trick, judging that the grey boat's skipper would only take whatever bar there might be on a full tide. As luck favoured us this time, we shot in behind the rock with absolute ease. Before us lay a deep, broad river, hemmed in by precipitous cliffs, and around the far turn the grey boat's lights were vanishing.

Darkness came very quickly, but we went on steadily, feeling our way around the bend and following the lights ahead.

After, I suppose, some 2½ hours' solid steaming, the blackness of the huge cliff walls gave place to more open country. Plains fell away, and wooded shores. On ahead the lights had mysteriously vanished again, this time for good and all.

We anchored in midstream, not attempting to illuminate our own boat, determining to make as far as we dared next day. It never entered my mind that any boat would come downstream that same night, but this is what actually happened.

The commodore summoned me on deck at about eleven o'clock.

"The watch reported lights ahead," he said, "so I thought it best to acquaint you with the fact."

I went up on deck, and there, sure enough, was a yacht, bigger far than the grey mail-boat, coming down on us at a great rate. She was even more extensively illuminated than the other.

"Fireworks ain't in it, sir," said one of the men, deferentially touching his cap. "Are you going to let 'em ram you like a bloomin' Armada?"

"Let's light up, Captain," I said. "I suppose it's the only thing to do to avoid collision!"

So we, too, sent out long fingers of light to greet this impetuous stranger.

She slowed down quickly, and drifted on a little, the river current being fairly strong. A voice I recognised as Ord's addressed us through the speaking trumpet.

"What craft are you?" he called. "Are you not aware you are on private property?"

"Answer for me, Captain," said I. "He may recognise my voice!"

"We're on a river, sir, that is open to traffic as any highway is," shouted my brave commodore. "Who are you that you don't know the laws of the land you're leasing?"

"You overstep law, my friend," retorted the Colonel, "if you imagine a river frontage is not private property! I will trouble you to anchor in the inlet at the mouth of this river; there the ownership is uncontested!"

"Very well, sir, if you wish it, we will do so! May I suggest that you accompany us, and we can then get outside the three-mile limit for prohibited liquors, to offer you hospitality!"

"I will follow shortly," the Colonel said—we were pretty close to one another now, and the night was clear for speaking purposes—and called an order to his engineer.



The yacht immediately backed off us, her engines hard astern, but so terrific was the suction (owing, Skrine tells me, to the novel propeller at her bows!) that we almost dragged our anchor and followed her.

In a few minutes the lights had disappeared from off the face of the waters, in much the same magical way of her predecessor.

"Land men and stores, sir," the Captain advised, "and I'll hang off, in the inlet, for a few days. I can watch for your rockets, and if you fire off three in quick succession any night, I will be keeping a good look-out, and come up straight away to pick you up here!"

"My dear fellow," I remonstrated, "I'm not going to clear off altogether for this man, Ord. He wants the right-of-way for some urgent trip he is making. Land me, stores, and rockets, and get back to the bay until he passes you, maybe to-morrow morning some time—what time is it now? Half-past eleven? Can you land me here?"

So I was landed, I and my man, half-a-dozen seamen, and a cook. The stores came ashore later, and camping outfit. By twelve o'clock I had sent up the first rocket (somewhat unwisely, I thought), and my small vessel was slowly turning in the broad river; but no yacht returned from the overshadowing darkness of the tall mountains beyond.

At dawn, I shifted my camp to the east of this range, going through some of the most marvellous forest I have ever seen. The stupendous growth of the trees fairly awed me. We came across a camp of natives, all of whom exhibited signs of intense fear, and fled precipitately. After a while one of these returned, and, with much

gesticulation, asked for tobacco. We learned from him that the others had not had much experience of whites, but had preferred "going bush." Our informer had at one time been an intimate of a Roper River black, called Goggle-Eye (who, I now learn, was one of the characters in that most fascinating Australian story: "We of the Never-Never"), and had been persuaded that the white fellow was "a big mob good fellow all right."

It amused me to notice how this term seems to be almost universal among Northern Territory aborigines, but it served the purpose well enough, I suppose, of saving us from being speared.

The heat was pretty well intolerable. I registered a sun temperature of 145 degrees, and was informed, on my boasting of this later, that many of the Plains' temperatures run up in the hot season to 160 degrees. And this was only the early suggestion of November—to be correct, October 29th.

We camped in a belt of magnificent timber, where we found some sort of comfort.

The grass was green, the shade dense, and the noxious flying insects far enough away. I cogitated on the reason of Ord's sudden appearance last night. It gave me a slight shock to suppose he might have received an alarm through some scouts, and have been conveying his captive away.

If so, I might camp in this fair forest until we had used up all the firewood, without Ellice appearing on the scene.

We were about three-quarters of a mile from the place where we had landed, probably a half-mile from this river-bar Zaring has no doubt described in foregoing pages.

At midnight on the same date we sent up another rocket, and most impatiently my man and I waited a half-hour before setting out, with our friendly black as guide, for this same river. We were on the very point of departure when the old black glided off into the filtering moonlight, and returned in a few minutes with two men—a white and a native, both of whom were silent but observant.

“Are you from the Colonel?” the white asked. “I’ve been watching your camp and want to know if you are on your own, or not.”

His very wariness apprised me of the fact that he was not over-eager to meet the same man.

“I am on my own,” I said; “here by appointment.”

“Did you send up that rocket fifteen minutes or so past?”

“Yes, a signal to some friends of mine,” I answered, and immediately he held out his hand.

“I am Eric Skrine, late chief engineer to Colonel Ord,” he said. “I have with me Dr. Zaring and the Countess of Beverley. If you will follow me I can lead you to them!”

I gave him my card (though he seemed disdainful of any credential), which he examined by the aid of a small hand-torch he was carrying. Then he looked round the camp.

“How many men to hold out in case of siege?” he asked.

“Eight, all told. Why?”

“Because the rocket will let Ord know where help can come from, and he may be here in less than quarter of an hour. He will by now have

discovered our absence. If you can strike camp, send these men back to the boat—you have a boat? No?—well, let them get back a mile or so until daylight. The blacks will track them. You come along with me!”

I turned to my faithful man, and instructed him to interview the Colonel should he arrive, and meanwhile to shift the camp a good bit back.

“Have you rifles?” asked Skrine. “If it’s not blacks in these parts, it’s scrub cattle. So keep a good look-out for them both. Bobby Big-Tooth, tell your pal to go ‘alonga big mob cheeky white fella’ and shy off other black-fellows if they don’t want plenty debbil-debbils after ’em!”

Skrine’s native jabbered earnestly to our camp adherent, and then the three of us set off together at a smart pace south.

I think this about the end of my limit. I need only say that I had been like the disconsolate peri outside Paradise for two long horrible years, and now I was on the very threshold—and across a bridge of rock, a foot under water, I opened the door again.

Ellice, my beautiful wife, was, if possible, more beautiful, more wonderfully lovely, than ever before. I rather think we left poor old Zaring and Skrine out in the cold, but I know they both understood. I’ll finish my part of the narrative at this juncture. I’m on my second honeymoon now, and, besides, it’s Christmas, so I will chance cutting the purely rhapsodical short!

PART IX.



After half-an-hour's restlessness, Ellice averred that she knew Beverley was coming.

"Oh, I can feel!" she said, impetuously. "I know he is close. I could sing aloud for very happiness, and all through you and Eric, you two grand men! Oh, think of it! I will see him soon!"

She got up numberless times and walked out from the shade of the banyan into the now bright moonlight that centred round her radiant beauty. I warned her of the danger she ran in exposing herself so foolishly should Ord be, by any chance, near. But she defied me, her restlessness giving place to utter recklessness.

"I know it was Osmund's rocket!" she said. "Oh! do please still be good to me. How can I wait when he is so near? May I not try the bridge? It would be so perfect to go and meet him!"

"Ellice," I began, very stern and dictatorial, "you are exposing me to danger by your very natural excitement. I am not likely to leave you, should Ord appear, and . . ."

She came up, very repentant, and sat down once more, trying to regain her usual tranquillity. Almost as though to test her command of herself, she turned her back on the rock-bridge and kept up a light-hearted conversation, mostly reminiscent.

Thus it came about that I, from where I sat, saw the procession of three as it noiselessly made the river passage, Bobby Big-Tooth in the lead, Skrine bringing up the rear. Had the Earl been first, and Ellice sighted him, I do not believe she could have resisted the impulse to rush to him. Probably we would have had the delightful anticlimax of fishing them both out from among a tangle of crimson water-lilies and crocodiles.

But the worst did not happen.

"Ellice," I said, "you have the self-control of a man! Can you sit exactly as you are for the space of two minutes?"

"Oh, I will try!" she said breathlessly, and I hastened to the rock-bridge, seized Beverley by the hand in a most undignified manner, shook it vigorously, and managed to whisper (though there was a lump like a pigeon's egg in my throat): "Come quickly and quietly. She is here waiting!" and piloted him between the plantation of banyan roots, to the grove of feathery palms.

"She is just round there," I said, indicating the pile of rocks, and, as I turned away, I heard their welcoming cry! I fancy I was sentimental enough to let fall a tear from each eye, but I knew just how his arms had gone out for her, and I knew, too, just how her low cry had preceded the rapture of their lips meeting, after so long a parting—and by God's good providence, a like happiness was mine within a month.

. . . . .  
Skrine refuses to add anything to this, and I am in doubt as to Vetsera's fate, also the Colonel's.



I am very probably exaggerating incidents, but if I briefly capitulate the happenings of the next few hours, I will leave my story as it is—incomplete, except for my own, and the Beverleys', return to a usual life.

At daybreak Skrine and I went in search of the camp, accompanied by Bobby, who trailed a large branch behind him in order to obliterate all tracks. This process, Skrine tells me, he made Skrine observe the night before, but we were both exempted from the branch business for a reason only known to Bobby himself. Perhaps he intended to return to his tribe; at all events, we were not penalised on his account.

By seven o'clock we had reached the camp, and ascertained that a man on horseback—a flea-bitten grey!—had passed through at daybreak, and had asked for tidings of three persons, two men and a woman, as well as warning the campers that they were trespassing.

"I told him we were after scrub bulls," said Roberts, the head man, "and would leave his estate by nightfall. At the same time, I had sent a message to the Captain of the steam-yacht, at the place we landed, but there was no sign of him, so the chap came back!"

By next nightfall we were all encamped on the island waiting the report of Roberts, sent out to watch if the Colonel went down-river. He came back about fifteen minutes after a terrific explosion had shaken the very ground on which we stood.

Beverley feared that his Captain might have attempted the passage and struck the mine. But Roberts reported differently. He stated that he was on the look-out, when he saw the lights appearing where last they had been seen two nights before.

Apprehensive lest he might be observed, he moved deeper into the scrub. Almost as he turned, the explosion occurred just out of sight, and, though he waited some time, the yacht did not appear. Nor could he see any floating wreckage.

Whether the mine blew up the yacht, or the yacht, by some means, exploded on its own account, we cannot tell. Everything rests on surmise.

Beverley sent Roberts back, bidding him stay until daybreak, knowing that the probabilities were the Captain would not wait in the outside bay any longer than the two nights for the Colonel to get out.

To make doubly sure, he sent a second man off a mile or so to send up three rockets. By four o'clock in the morning of October 31st, the steam-yacht had anchored off the original place of landing, and Roberts had come back for us.

At six o'clock, Ellice was asleep in her state-room, and we were entering the last reach of Ord's river. Steaming easily, we entered the beautiful Sydney Heads at daybreak on Thursday, November 12th, 1914; the coves and bays of Sydney Harbour are never so dreamily glorious as at dawn. The soft-wooded slopes bent graciously to the sheeny sea, an amethyst veil draped the cruel Gap, and wreathed to the foot of the slender light-house. Across the silences floated the melancholy cry of the gulls, the distant echoes of a kookaburra's mirth, or the full-throated melody of a magpie.

We breakfasted for the last time together, and exchanged invitations to visit, and to correspond.

"We must never, never lose sight of you," said Ellice, "and, as soon as we can, we mean to go to Wellington and tell Mrs. Zaring how much we think of you."

Her husband is what Australians term a "good sport," or a "white man." He is an entertaining companion, whom I shall greatly miss, and has a fund of rare anecdote and experience at his command (doubtless acquired throughout years of wandering and narrow escapes).

He and Ellice proposed a short visit to the Blue Mountains, and asked me to join them. On such an occasion as this, I refused most cheerily.

Skrine intended going south for his fiancée, from whom he has been parted for seven years, when his bank transfers were through. He will take her to his homeland in early January, and has in mind the trans-American route.

Both Ellice and Skrine refuse to add any notes whatsoever to this, and I am reluctantly obliged to leave it, as it were, incomplete.

Ellice tells me her share of it "would be merely paeans of praise, to testify to the courage and goodness of the real hero of the affair," which my wife assures me might be Skrine, Beverley, Vetsera, or even Ord himself.

My wife regrets that, throughout, there is only a hint of possible villainy, and no "honest, outright, black-as-jet villain" to effectually colour the drabness of plain narrative. She suggests also that I should have invented thrilling and hair-breadth adventures, impossible situations, and much melodrama. She tells me my "quaint earnestness" would make any reader at all, be he never so sceptical, content to be deceived, and, indeed, even "an accessory after the fact."

That last paragraph must be a surprise to the reader as it was to me, though I am tempted to omit it on the score of its being an anti-climax, and of too personal a nature.

On the evening of the day we arrived in Sydney, I went up to the home of my brother-in-law, in pretty Hunter's Hill. Slowly I mounted the incline leading to his new and charming villa, and even more slowly closed his big gates behind me. I could not fix the nature of a woeful craving in me, until—out of the gathering dusk, a vision in a white dress flew to meet me, and then I knew what I so terribly needed!—it was Cecile!

## AFTERWORD.

Since this chronicle of mine was handed to my editor-friend, M. Lynn Hamilton, I received a communication from Mr. Skrine, which may be of interest to those who have possibly speculated on much in "A Hidden Kingdom."

The sole date given is on the Honolulu post mark, for February 27th, '15, but he evidently wrote aboard the "Niagara," en route for America; perhaps a certain light-hearted carelessness (induced by newly-acquired freedom, and the happy companionship of his wife!) accounts for the omission.

I take upon myself the full responsibility of sub-joining his letter, in toto.

. . . . .  
"Dear Zaring,

"Seven years away from the joys of civilisation have made me seven years better able to enjoy the gifts of the little Gods! It's hoping the same for you, I am, for I couldn't wish you better! My only regret is that I didn't drop the money-making sooner, and be content with a small salary—and Kitty—though this dratted scrap over the other side means I'll have to join up if it doesn't settle by Easter! Ambition is the very divvle to block happiness. I reckon a man doesn't know what's in life until he gets spliced—but wouldn't it be Purgatory with the wrong girl?

"Kitty and I are as happy as big sunflowers. She hasn't altered a bit, and says the same of me. We are going to look you up some day, when we can put in a few weeks in New Zealand. They tell us you

can't beat the South Island for mountains anywhere in the world, including the renowned Hartz and Alps themselves. Anyway, the mud-boiling propensities of Rotorua (where they don't have fires at all, but jab a kerosene case two feet in the earth wherein to do all their cooking!—and boiling water is everlastingly on the boil all over the place, in the gutters even!) are enough to interest us. Had to stop there for breath; I reckon I might have tried a few notes for that book of yours (how's it getting on, by the way?) if I'd known I was so long-winded. Let's have a look at it in the manuscript, if you can be bothered sending a copy—c/o Denis's Hotel, Dublin, will find me for a few months.

“And while I am thinking of that yarn, it strikes me you are very likely wondering why I didn't drop to it, on the long ago October 21st, last year, that the boat following us was Beverley's. As a matter of fact, you will remember I knew no details, and I couldn't be sure that the same boat was not some spy from curious Darwin. Craddle was so deuced officious, too, offering his comments and advice. I wouldn't put it past him to have told the whole affair to Ord, and, as I didn't report anything myself, very likely Ord smelt a rat. Then the same thing happened when Vetsera went along on the 28th, and probably Craddle saw Beverley's craft on that date, too. Ord then decided to ascertain for himself how matters stood. That's why he fell in with Vetsera's notion of going back right away. I reckon Ord only found us gone the next day, and hunted for us in the ranges first. Next morning he went downstream with his groom and his grey in the 'Mermaid,' and roamed round a while to see if we'd by any chance broken through his mines and come down the other side. Poor fellow! I'm sorry for him, alive or dead—he had the makings of a Napoleon in him.

"If he and Vetsera had to toss up which should chase after the unknown boat that might have carried off his captives, I guess Ord would let Vetsera through the mine-passage all right. There'd be no sense in sending him to 'Kingdom-Come' to look for us. But if Ord went, I wouldn't put it past likelihood that something happened to the mine. Vetsera and Ord may have had a row about Ellice, and the rights of the matter; Ord may have clamped Vetsera in chokee, and the chaps left to look after the opening of the passage probably manipulated it badly—on purpose! They'd be safe with one boat, once they knew how to work her. Anyhow, the Colonel would have his knife in old Vet., simply to ease his feelings a bit, don't you think?

"Kitty and I are going per Southern Pacific, the millionaire's express, when we get to San Fran., though the chief attraction is Harriman's trestling across Salt Lake. Jove, that's a stupendous piece of work, that Lucin Cut-off. I've had a longing for years to SEE it, though I know what had to be done well enough.

"There's a tip-top civil engineer on board, name of Wentworth-Evans, an M.I.D. lad, who is going back to Egypt, via England; we have had some lengthy confabs. He's a really fine sort, and as keen as nuts on our yarn re Ordsborough.

"Well, I expect you will be blessing me for this uninteresting screed. I hope you and the wife and heir are all in good form. Have you heard from the Beverleys at all?

"Good-bye, old man, and good luck.

"Very sincerely yours,

"E. SKRINE.

"T.S.S. 'Niagara,' 20,000 tons displacement (not bad?). Nearing Sandwich Islands."







Wholly set up and printed in Australia by  
H. HEARNE & CO. PTY. LTD.,  
Paragon Printers,  
285-7 Latrobe Street, Melbourne.

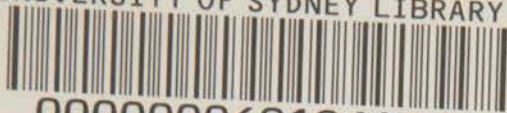


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