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BEYOND THE SKYLINE

ROBERT AITKEN

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BEYOND THE SKYLINE

BY ROBERT AITKEN

"There is a world outside the one you know,
To which for curiousness 'Ell can't compare."

WILFUL-MISSING.

B. W. HUEBSCH
NEW YORK
1909

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I AM indebted to the Editor of *The Idler* for permission to republish "The Black Sergeant," and to the Editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* for a like courtesy in connection with "A Second-class District."

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ROBERT AITKEN.

AUTHORS' CLUB,
LONDON, 1908.

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BEYOND THE SKYLINE

THE PASSING OF THE LITTLE SISTER TULA

THE stone stands by itself within a clump of trees that looks over at San Javier from no greater distance than a rifle-bullet could carry upon a charge of cordite and the proper trajectory—as has been proven, to the detriment of the tree-trunks, full of bullets embedded.

Only one of those, however, appears to have suffered in the process, and deep within the heart of that there lies a core of nickeled lead, once counted twelve rounds of Mauser ammunition, each of which on its way thither passed through the body of a woman so that she died, and the tree died also.

The woman's story is cut deep into this stone:

AQUI YACEN
LOS RESTOS MORTALES
DE LA
HERMANITA
TULA

Here lie—the Mortal Remains—of the—Little Sister—Tula—an Englishwoman—Novice—of her Order—who—passed—in Battle—at—this Spot—She gave—her—Life—for a—Country—not—her own—but—Grateful—none the less.

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But the tale I have to tell was told me by Anthony Eccles, who also loved her.

. . . . .

Faraway folk smiled in superior-wise over their morning papers when these made mention, under a humorous head-line, of the recent outbreak within the Republic; but the immediate inhabitants of the Banda found very little to laugh at in a situation which would assuredly cost them much more than faraway folk might suspect.

The Little Sisters of the Poor, in particular, looked out upon life with sorrowful eyes from under their hodden hoods while they worked, day and night, at making ready to meet that rampant death which would so shortly claim their most assiduous attention. The tall pilasters of the Mesa de Artigas were once more awash with blood, and the grey-gowned Sisters, imagining in their ignorance that human suffering might be just as pitiable there as elsewhere, wrought leagues of lint while the outlaws of Soriano and the Cerro Largo were yet hot-foot for the rendezvous along the Yí. Thereafter they sent forth such of their staff as were reputed capable of affording first aid to the wounded, and with each went a waggon-load of doctors' wares.

Death and disease played havoc among the healers also, and the strife dragged on. Recruits of the Church were called on to fill vacancies in the ranks of its veterans, and it fell to the lot of the Little Sister Tula to be ordered to San Javier, a place of trifling importance, as yet inviolate,

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but garrisoned by the Government because of its surroundings.

A bishop blessed her before she went, but, notwithstanding, she trembled with terror as the train sped northwards, thinking covetously of the safe shelter behind her in the convent on the coast whence she had set forth shrinkingly upon this her first essay into the lawless country she had sworn to serve.

Not until she and her stores had been shot forth at the railway depôt which shares with the river the doubtful honour of dealing with the traffic of San Javier, did she dare to assume the authority vested in her by virtue of her new office. But there a difficulty cropped up and had to be overcome: San Javier lay thirty miles away across the mountains, and means of transit there were none.

She threw back the hood under which she had been hiding her beauty from the bold glances of the young officers, her fellow-travellers, on the troop-train, invaded the solitary cabin into which the indifferent individual in charge of the station had retired on the departure of the long line of trucks behind their carefully crawling engine, and demanded of him transport for herself and her precious packages.

He spoke to her soothingly, and did nothing, although she laid before him urgent orders, signed and countersigned by his superiors.

"What would you?" he said, and shrugged his shoulders, so that he did not hear the sound of wheels without. "I myself am neither ox

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nor ass, and, excepting a few dogs, there is no four-footed animal procurable: the insurgents have already laid waste the land."

"In that thou liest, direct descendant of the pariah!" a voice volunteered from the doorway, and he faced about with speed, to find a big, black-bearded man looking down upon him in suchwise that he shrank visibly.

That personage did not condescend to notice him further at the moment, but turned to the shaking Sister.

"I have without," he said courteously, "a carriage and four horses, as also a cart of the most capacious. These, señorita, are at your service."

"God guard you, sir!" replied the Little Sister Tula in her halting Spanish. "If you will take me even a little way towards San Javier, I shall be very grateful."

His hot eyes held hers for an instant until she looked away, flushing furiously. He smiled, and spoke again:

"All the way—and welcome," said he, while the station-master stared, smitten with an astonishment beyond words.

A curt command sent that worthy flying to help in the loading-up of the heavy packing-cases lying about the platform. These safely deposited in the high-wheeled cart, the providential stranger installed the Sister within his own conveyance, and, entrusting her with the reins, returned to the station-house, where he cut all communication with the outer world by the simple expedient

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of smashing the telegraph-sounder. The faint-hearted guardian of such mysteries made no difficulty about handing over to him the spare instrument which lay in the safe, whereafter it was quite impossible to spread the alarming intelligence that the hospital equipment and staff destined for San Javier had been carried off into the unknown and without demur by that most notorious evil-doer Gil Navarro, commonly called El Carancho, the Carrion-Hawk.

After their departure, however, it occurred to the unfortunate official that he might manage to delay the next troop-train for long enough to send its engine south with dispatches which should greatly redound to his own credit, and he was only prevented from carrying out this praise-worthy project by the unfortunate fact that the line was then in process of being cut, both north and south of his position, by the insurgent forces, so that no more trains might be expected in the meantime.

Pacing up and down his deserted platform in great perturbation of spirit, he saw at a distance a person unknown approaching, per rail, on foot, and hid himself hastily within his now futile office, whence he was extracted by the newcomer with some difficulty and an iron-shod sprag. Under direct pressure on the part of this master-ful malignant he told his pitiful story, and, stung by the stranger's harsh criticism of his conduct, wept tears of rage, which availed him still less than did the long knife wherewith he sought to silence his unduly candid visitor. He was still

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weeping dolorously when the other departed in pursuit of the outlaw, leaving him to brood over a black eye and a multitude of minor bruises in both mind and body.

The tracks left by the heavy cart which had carried the cases were still sufficiently fresh, and Eccles followed them without faltering until dusk fell. Then he turned off the trail towards a deserted rancho, wherein he made shift to pass the night. At dawn of day he pushed on again, progressing painfully along a roadway of the roughest and in no way fitted for foot-passengers, but which led upward towards the mountains.

He paused occasionally to light his pipe and look about him, noting carefully the lie of the land. Once or twice he pursed his lips as if to whistle, but the dead desolation of the district weighed most depressingly upon his spirits, so that he made no sound save for the scliff of his boot-heels on the beds of shale which lay in his path.

At noon on the second day, and descending again beyond the summit, he was held up by a picket of the insurgent troops, and led blindfold by these into the presence of their leader, camped on the plain below.

It happened that Gil Navarro was not in the best of tempers just then, and for the space of some sixty seconds it was extremely uncertain whether the Englishman would live much longer. But his unconcerned acceptance of the situation appealed to the outlaw's vague sense of sportsmanship, and the scales of chance dipped towards present safety from sudden death.

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"You desire to take service with us?" asked El Carancho, cocking the revolver he had drawn from his belt.

"Quite so," Eccles agreed without moving a muscle.

"'Sta bueno," said the Carrion-Hawk. "I accept your offer. But, look you, Mister the Englishman, I have here two hungry dogs,"—he whistled shrilly and a couple of ugly bloodhounds ran baying from the wood behind. "You see them?" he inquired solicitously.

"I see them," answered Eccles, in no wise prepossessed, but outwardly indifferent.

"These I feed on the flesh of traitors," the Carrion-Hawk explained in a grating voice, as they sniffed about the stranger's calves with a horrid, eager growling.

"The idea," said Eccles, "is excellent. I wish you'd lend me a match—I've finished all mine."

He was given a box of matches and a bandolier, bidden to provide himself with a rifle from the first of those who should fall at his side, within the long trench skirting a clump of trees that looked over at San Javier, where he was presently installed, and left to study at his leisure the art and practice of revolution.

The St. Xavierines were making good shooting, and he was soon able to possess himself of the tools of his new trade. The trench was shallow, and more than one stray bullet found a quivering billet before he had been an hour at the business. The mortally wounded were afforded the *coup de*

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grâce by a blood-bespattered cut-throat who crept about the background with a knife in his teeth. Such as were less seriously shattered spent their strength in keeping out of this individual's way, and sometimes succeeded in doing so.

Eccles, firing ineffectually at frequent intervals, found time between shots to exchange ideas with those about him. He spoke execrable Spanish, and laughed loudly at his own mistakes. The spit of the bullets that were searching for his body he did not appear to notice, and, when the firing died down at nightfall, he found himself surprisingly popular among his less cheerful comrades, who bade against each other for his company at their camp-fires, so that he was able to wander about at will. But, for all his cunning, he could find no trace of the woman who had been carried off by El Carancho.

The Little Sister Tula knew nothing of the great danger from which she had been delivered, along with her precious packages, almost at the gates of San Javier, and the Intendente's daughter, who came forth to receive her there after her escort had hurriedly driven off, did not think fit to express any opinion upon the proceedings of one who had, on the present occasion, proved himself a friend in need. The Intendente himself, however, shook his white head when he heard her story, and let fall stray sentences which might have enlightened her had she been less preoccupied.

"A black beard, pointed—and a scar across his face: eyes that burn with all the fires; a stiffness

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of one shoulder. You cannot be aware, my Sister—— And yet he brought you here in safety, that infamous!"

Peering blindly into her face, he saw that she was beautiful, and turned away to hide the doubt which, despite himself, would look forth from his eyes. That Gil Navarro, the Carrion-Hawk, had, of his own free will, passed this woman through his lines unscathed, he found it difficult to believe.

He bade his daughter deal delicately with her in the meantime, and withdrew to talk things over with his friend the commandant. But the black-eyed Maruja was already enamoured of her new friend, and went about the village with her very willingly.

San Javier is not and never will be a nice place. The Little Sister Tula returned from her tour of inspection unprepossessed by the appearance of its single square, its one long street, its solitary spare building. The last of these had been offered her as an asylum for her stores, but she was not as yet sufficiently imbued with the broad-mindedness of her adopted compatriots to turn a church into a warehouse of her own free will.

"Pero, mira, ché," said the Miss Maruja despondently in answer to her objections. "But, look you, dear, how they are more mules than men, these villagers! It does not please them that the soldiers have been sent us, and they obstinate themselves against helping in any way. —All the houses are full, whereas the church

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is empty, and the cura, who was also loyal, deceased by the hand of the Hawk. It is the custom of the country to make use of its sacred edifices for the succouring of the stricken, and, as you will understand, we have here no choice. They are more mules than men, these villagers, and very vicious when one stirs them up."

"How many soldiers are there?" asked the Little Sister, and her cicerone answered swiftly, apparently pleased with the subject:

"One company of the Line, commanded by the Mr. Captain O'Connor, a cavalier of overwhelming courage, who—who has also made pretension to my father that he may petition me the hand."

"May you both be happy," said the Little Sister heartily. "And now, let us leave the church door open to the air until I can make arrangements to have it cleaned and the beds brought in."

"But beds there are not," Maruja explained mournfully. "A sheep-skin on the floor for each poor fellow who may come to us is all the possible. Even of blankets I cannot promise you more than my own."

The Little Sister Tula bit her lip and frowned faintly, tapping the tessellated pavement with the toe of a heelless slipper.

"I should like," said she, "to see the Mr. Captain O'Connor. He, perhaps, may be able to help us."

No suggestion more pleasing to her companion

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could she have put forward, and that capable guide led her to the trenches forthwith. There they discovered the object of their quest deep in discussion with the aged Intendente, and the two men came forward courteously to hear their appeal.

The officer commanding the troops, a dashing youth of far-off Irish extraction, promised a fatigue party. The Intendente also agreed, at his instigation, to commandeer whatever comforts might be obtainable from his sulky charges under such coercion, and thus encouraged they went away again to purchase pails and scrubbing-brushes for the cleansing of the church.

As soon as they were out of earshot the younger man turned towards his companion and spoke volubly. The Intendente, fumbling with a soiled and crumpled envelope, nodded emphatically from time to time.

"For my part," said the Mr. Captain O'Connor firmly, "I will not consent to any treaty with the rebels. That which this fellow Navarro requires of you is an insult to myself, and will be wiped out with his own blood. Let him give battle as he threatens—I am here for that purpose—but I will never comply with his insolent demand."

The Mr. Captain O'Connor stamped thrice upon his earthen battlements with a high-heeled patent-leather boot of doubtful durability, and assumed an expression of extreme determination. The Intendente wondered vaguely whether it would have made any difference had the Little Sister Tula appeared as an old woman and

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wrinkled, but soon dismissed such unprofitable speculation from his mind, turning his attention once more to the missive in his hand:

"'*Send me back the Sister of the Poor whom I delivered at your doors this morning*,'" he read aloud for the eleventh time. "'*I have need of her, and you will have none unless you dare to disobey me.*'"

"The dog!" he said slowly.

When word went forth to the villagers that Gil Navarro had delivered an ultimatum, the which had been refused, and that he would therefore attack San Javier within the hour, they beat upon their breasts, calling down curses. They could not conceive why their blood-brother, the bandit, who had harried half the Republic without molesting them, should all at once decide to make war on a harmless folk who had also helped him under the rose. But they ran to the trenches, and dug desperately at deepening them against the coming of the Carrion-Hawk.

A few of the women also volunteered their services within the now soapy church, and of these the Little Sister Tula availed herself gladly. The echoes of the enemy's first volley had not yet died away when a great Red Cross flag floated out upon the breeze above the building, affording the Carancho's marksmen an excellent opportunity of getting their range before commencing proceedings in earnest.

It would seem that Gil Navarro, who feared neither God nor man, had already repented himself of the impulse which had induced him

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to carry his innocent charge uninjured to her destination. He had also made up his mind to have her back, and offered San Javier its safety as the price of her.

The message that the Intendente sent back to him set his terrible temper ablaze, and cost the ill-fated messenger his life. Then the church bell began to toll drunkenly as the bullets spat themselves flat against it. The siege was set.

It had been in active progress for several hours before Anthony Eccles turned up to take part in it, but none of the Carancho's evil crew could afford the newcomer any information as to its object. The taking of the town would not in itself repay the trouble that would cost them; but there could be no doubt, they asseverated with oaths, that such matters were best left in the hands of their leader, who was notoriously capable of attending to his own affairs.

The hint was not thrown away, and the Englishman curbed his curiosity until he again encountered the great man himself. Of that saturnine sentimentalist he made bold but unavailing inquiry, and went back to his burrow among the leaves determined to invade the village on his own account at the earliest opportunity.

For that he had not long to wait. Gil Navarro called him up from his place in the trenches on the next morning, and, having led him apart, spoke subtly, thus:

"Sir," said he, with the air of one who confers

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a favour, "I have need of a man of nerve—to make for me a mission of great importance."

Eccles bowed. "I myself am such a man," he answered modestly.

The Carancho eyed him approvingly, and almost repented him of his purpose. But Eccles alone of all his followers had not been present at the murder of the unfortunate messenger from San Javier, and might therefore be trusted to play the part required of him.

"Will you walk up to the walls of that foredamned village, under a white flag, and tell the Intendente that I repeat my offer for the last time?" the outlaw asked; "and tell him also that if he refuse it I shall surely keep my dogs from food till I march in, giving *no* quarter."

"I will," answered Eccles the Englishman with great outward composure.

"Then go—with God," said the insurgent leader, in the idiom that is used indifferently to speed the parting guest. "I shall stop the firing for a space."

Some little difficulty was experienced in providing the envoy with a banner of reasonable whiteness, but Eccles obligingly sacrificed his own and only shirt for the purpose, and, with that a-flutter on a broken lance-staff, set out upon his perilous enterprise to the accompaniment of much covert laughter on the part of his comrades.

A long-range shot from the village sang past him, and he halted for a moment to wave his emblem of peace and goodwill. He also took the opportunity to light a cigarette.

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The troops in the Government trenches saw him coming, and, grateful for the temporary lull in the attack, held their own fire for the time being. In the distance, the Carrion-Hawk, a pair of Zeiss glasses glued to his eyes, observed his progress anxiously.

It was really a matter of moment to that worthy that he should attain his object without delay. He and his men were needed elsewhere. The sacking of San Javier would earn him reprobation rather than praise from the revolutionary Junta. But, "Dead or alive she shall be mine!" said Gil Navarro to himself, and swore sulphurously as he heard the hot fire that had been reopened on his luckless emissary.

Eccles fell forward upon his face and lay prone for a moment, staggered to his feet, stumbled, struggled forward again, and falling finally, rose no more.

El Carancho's teeth met through his lower lip, and he strode along his lines spitting crimsonly.

"Make fire again, my sons," he ordered, in his most terrible voice. "We have lost a good man, and those pigs must pay for him!"

As long as daylight lasted he wandered up and down like a man distraught; but his brain was busy, and, when the time came, he dispatched a party of picked men into the darkness with orders to effect an entrance into the village at all costs. While those were at their work, he himself set out with others, and made a bold attempt to achieve his purpose in person, only withdrawing after a notable encounter, in the course of which

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San Javier lost its military head and not a few of its civilian members.

The feint attack was also worsted, with considerable loss to both sides, and without having been able to accomplish its object. It had, however, and according to its own account, made mincemeat of the Intendente. El Carancho declared himself well satisfied with the night's work, and, having commanded that a couple of oxen should be roasted in their hides, bade his dependents eat, drink, and be merry during a brief armistice. He himself lay down at a distance under the shelter of the trees to nurse a wounded arm and make fresh plans for the morrow. Upon a branch above him he hung the head that had once graced the shoulders of the Mr. Captain O'Connor.

While these events were in progress Anthony Eccles was lying at all his length in a canvas stretcher on a shambling table once cleanly scrubbed but now indelibly stained, within the church of San Javier. Two vessels full of liquid fat, wherein floated some feebly flaming strands of cotton, cast an uncertain light on his face. The smoke-thick air was alive with groans and curses.

A woman bending over him placed a reluctant hand upon his heart.

"He does not die yet, this bandit they have brought us," she remarked to a companion busy behind her.

The wounded man opened his eyes very widely and winked. The Miss Maruja started back in alarm and turned towards the Little Sister Tula.

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"Behold, then——" she exclaimed, and the Sister looked round with lifeless eyes even as the almost defunct sat up and swung himself off the table.

"Gertrude!" cried Anthony Eccles, in a voice which charged the curt word with a long story.

The Miss Maruja sprang forward in time to catch her friend as she fell, and Eccles helped her to carry the inanimate form across to a dark corner that had been curtained off as sleeping accommodation for the Sister. They laid their burden on the ragged matting that was all the couch available, and, after a few words of explanation, he went out into the light again, turning his attention to the wounded.

The church was filling rapidly, and, before midnight, the pavement beneath its porch was covered with the dead and dying for whom there was no room under the roof itself. The Miss Maruja, having done what she could for her sister in sorrow, came and went among these horrors haggardly until the headless corpse of the commandant was carried up the steps and laid at her feet. Then she stood perfectly still for a space, staring blindly at its soaked blue tunic, its clenched hands, its high-heeled, patent-leather boots.

As soon as the firing ceased all that remained of her father was laid beside it, and thereafter she disappeared.

Anthony Eccles called upon her in vain as he strove to withstand the mob of villagers which had broken in upon him, trampling down the

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wounded without pity, clamouring for the carcase of the English Sister that they might send it out to the Carancho forthwith, and so save their own skins.

They ransacked every corner of the church, without result, and, when Eccles saw that neither of the women was there, he broke back through them, his eyes blazing madly. But he knew that nothing he could do would stay them in their purpose, and ran tremblingly towards the trenches in the hope of securing from the soldiery she had been sent to serve, protection for the Little Sister.

One o'clock clanged from the belfry behind him as he raced down the long street that led to the earthen ramparts. He could hear loud laughter ahead, and saw little lights where the watchers were striking matches. But all hope died in his heart as he learned, from the first ragged ruffian he chanced across, the motive of their untimely mirth.

"There is no need, señor," said that hero, "to trouble about the Sister. She has already betaken herself out of harm's way—from us."

"Whither?" asked Eccles hoarsely, a horrible pain at his throat.

"She crossed over to the Carancho's camp," the linesman answered, "a good half-hour ago."

The Little Sister Tula, once Gertrude Ffrench, the daughter of a God-fearing Irish family which has always prided itself on its Catholicism, was greatly given to self-sacrifice. Eccles, the Protestant, had tried for long to teach her that love

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is—or should be—stronger than fear, but, her spiritual advisers having got wind of his contention and contradicted it root and branch, she had meekly consented to be shipped abroad, beyond reach of his reasoning.

The Foreign Legion of her Church had been only too pleased to enlist a Ffrench, and, after the gates of the far-off convent had closed behind her, she had felt finally safe within the fold. But she did not yet know the wolf-like nature of man, as exemplified in Anthony Eccles.

The shock of seeing him again so suddenly, in such surroundings, had been too much for her, and, when she came to herself, she could by no means recall the more immediate past. She was lying, half dressed, on a bare bed within a darkened room. The silence without was broken by occasional outbursts of tumult. She could hear harsh voices howling her name, and, listening intently, learned from these the fate in store for herself.

She shrank back, shuddering, and closed her eyes again for a space.

The Miss Maruja came in carrying a candle, her face full of impotent anguish. To her the Sister spoke swiftly, with white lips.

"I will go," she said, "if that is the price which must be paid for the safety of San Javier. Give me my gown and hood, and I will go."

The Miss Maruja sat down by the bedside.

"Listen, Little Sister," said she. "There are two horses standing saddled without the gate.

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Such clothes as will serve you best are in the next room. Go—if you must—and take the horses with you—you may need them both. But first drink this."

She gave her a soothing draught and stayed beside her for a brief space without further speech.

But time pressed, and a little later the Sister stepped out into the street in front of the Intendente's house, and, slipping quietly away through the gloom, set forth, afoot, for the enemy's camp.

"I shall need no horses," she said to herself, and was seized of a cold, sick shivering.

"Send her in here to me," said the Carancho from his couch among the trees when he was told that she had surrendered. "And, look you —keep well without the wood till daybreak.— Come hither, little Little Sister, and bind me up this arm of mine, that I may——"

The woman, who had been waiting with bowed head to learn his pleasure, stepped forward among the shadows. The men who had brought her in turned back to their fires in the open, laughing carelessly at jests that scorched her soul as she heard them.

"This way," cried the Carrion-Hawk, raising himself again on his elbow as the approaching footsteps faltered. "Beware of that bough—it bears but unsightly fruit."

She shrank aside and hurried past the horror she had found in front of her. The Hawk held out his arms, and, as she fell on her knees before

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him without a word, the long keen knife at her garter pricked her ankle.

. . . . .

Gil Navarro, with only the hilt of the knife, hard pressed, to hold in his black heart's blood until he had seen shot down the Sister who had slain him, died as does a mad dog, making dreadful outcry. And while his now leaderless comrades were spurring, wild-eyed and afraid, away from the grisly echoes that came from within the wood, the two starved dogs left tethered beside him fell grimly silent.

Anthony Eccles, too late to save her, saw from afar, as he ran frenziedly towards the great fire which had been built up there, the slight black figure standing stiffly against a tree, facing the muzzles of many rifles.

A crackling volley rang out on the night, and he too fell forward upon his face.

It was still dark when he recovered consciousness, and pursuing his way in sore agony of mind found the camp deserted.

He turned his tired feet towards the fatal tree, and, seeing dimly under it what he was seeking, sat there beside the shattered body till day broke.

Then he rose, picked a shovel out of the nearest trench, and set himself to dig deeply.

Stooping to dislodge a stone entangled in the thick roots, he heard footsteps above him, and, rising hurriedly, was aware of the dead girl's living face peering down upon him. He sprang up out of the earth, his eyes full of anguish, and

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halted, shaking speechlessly, on the edge of the pit he had dug.

Over against him stood a slim boy, booted and spurred for travel, who also stared, without speaking. A little way off two saddled horses were cropping the trampled grass, breathing steamily in the still cold of dawn.

The boy's lips trembled. "Tony!" he said suddenly, in a dry, tense whisper, holding out both his hands.

They turned over with reverent care the poor corpse, still lying, face downwards, where it had fallen. The folds of the crushed white hood dropped back, and Anthony Eccles groaned aloud as he looked into the wide, unseeing eyes of the Miss Maruja.

He buried her there, with the head of the Mr. Captain O'Connor in her clasped hands, and, leaving the dead Carancho's dogs still mumbling some shapeless horror within the wood, rode for the frontier beside the boy who was once Gertrude Ffrench, then the Little Sister Tula.

. . . . .

The stone stands by itself within a clump of trees that looks over at San Javier, and many pious pilgrims besides myself have studied its inscription blinkingly. But only we three—Eccles, his wife and I—know who lies underneath it.

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WADDEL was the man's name—Peter Waddel—but he called himself Wăddēll, and was often annoyed in that other people failed to accent his cognomen accordingly.

He was quite unusually rich—even in aspirates, plebeian in person, and vastly vulgar. Many women, especially those with unmarried daughters, made much of him. By the majority of men he was tolerated—or toadied—for his money's sake.

He had sailed away out of his own witless world one hot summer, and, voyaging aimlessly, with Baby Babington and her mother for company, in the miniature liner which was one of his toys, chanced across another, a very different world; a world wherein he saw himself most singularly small and shameful: a grave, grey, wind-swept world—sweet, clean, and curiously scented.

Under its irresistible influence he grew strangely fretful, until, aspiring towards unusual heights, he freed himself of his most immediate incubus. London's latest pet went pettishly back to London.

"Peter's gone dotty," Miss Babington assured her wondering friends in the metropolis, and passed on to Monaco, while Peter himself, as

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if in support of her statement, mooned aimlessly about the islands until he came to ——

But where, or which island it was, matters little—to us. By chart and compass it lies east by south of Cape Farewell, a very long way from here. Great seas break green, in the short-lived sunshine, on its white sands, and on to those sands, out of a spray-splashed rainbow, had stepped, all dripping, the Princess of the Isles, ivory-limbed, dark-eyed, laughing from under thick raven locks.

Peter knew nothing of *her* history: she was no princess of Piccadilly. He merely remarked to himself, very truthfully, that she was "a deucéd fine gal," and went away in a hurry, his eyes averted: for she had nothing on but a brief bathing-dress, long since outgrown, and he felt innately that the tendencies of Trouville must by no means be indulged under these chaster skies. He went so quickly, under the spur of such unaccustomed purity of purpose, that he tripped—tripped over a tuft of grass—and fell headlong, filling his face with sand.

Ere he had recovered his perpendicular and gotten his eyesight back, the landscape was void about him, the seascape a shimmering, silver vacancy; he was once more alone in the world.

The reward of virtue seemed to him heart-breakingly inadequate.

He wandered on, wondering, forgetful for once of the sumptuous lunch awaiting him on his ship in the Castle Bay, until, like Crusoe, he was confronted by a footprint on the sand. It

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was a very small footprint, and adorably feminine. He took off his hat that he might the more conveniently think it out.

Thinking, with people like Peter, soon begets thirst. He made up his mind to break inland in search of refreshment, took two steps in that direction. Then he paused, turned back, and, kneeling down hurriedly, traced on the back of a new five-pound note a rough reproduction of the passing picture, while the salt sea, kissing away the last faint impress of its playmate's passage, lapped and crooned at the knees of his carefully immaculate flannel trousers.

Beyond the sand the earth was stone-clad. Peter stumbled as he traversed it, and wondered wearily, each time he stubbed his toes, who might inhabit such a wild waste, and why. But for the pencilled outline of a dainty foot buttoned away in his breast pocket he might have set his face seawards again and escaped. As it was he went on stubbornly, all unwitting.

From the brow of a bluff he espied, far below on a bend of the beach he had left behind, a tiny cottage—white-walled, roofed with sun-kissed gold. Thither he retraced his steps, with a stifled curse.

Footsore and perspiring he pushed his way past a tiny green gate in the rail that guarded the garden, approached a woman who stood within, white-haired, venerable, cleanly clad in patched, shabby garments. She eyed him very shrewdly, in silence.

"Er—hem!" said Peter, fumbling ineffectually

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with an eyeglass, his visage unnaturally contorted. "Er—hem!"

To this there was no reply possible, and he tried again.

"Er—c'n you—er—'blige me with—er—glass 'f water, hey?"

The dame in the doorway motioned him to a rustic seat by the porch, and hobbled indoors. Peter, peering past her as she turned her back, saw dimly the interior of the cottage. He saw, much more clearly, a most seductively stockinged foot thrust forth from under a billow of rippling lace towards a rough, tacketted shoe held loosely in two hasty hands, and sat down suddenly, drawing forth his recent work of art to study it with renewed interest.

Voices sounded vaguely from within and he cocked his ears, vulgarly, but to no purpose. His eyes were still on the back of the bank-note when a girl stepped out into the sunshine, brushing past him on her way to the well with a bucket.

His greedy glance followed her every movement, drinking in eagerly all the details of her lithe grace. She walked bewitchingly in spite of the coarse shoes which covered the silk-stockinged feet he had seen from the doorstep; the faded, old-fashioned skirt she wore was all too short to hide the entrancing ankles under it; the curves of her beautiful body were worth——

"By gad!" said Peter Waddel in a grievous whisper, "I'd sell my soul for a woman like that!"

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She filled her bucket and faced about, one arm, bare below the elbow, white and wet, shining silkily. The fat multi-millionaire sat gaping, and she passed into the cottage again, unaided.

He heard low laughter, the clatter of crockery. The elder woman brought out, on a silver salver, its blazon hidden from him by a square of embroidered damask, a glass and a crystal carafe of ice-cold water. He drank, and his wits came back to him by degrees.

"Er—'nother glass," he implored, and it was poured out. He sipped that slowly, and would have held further intercourse with his taciturn entertainer. But for all his wiles he learned little, and saw nothing more of the girl.

The *Star of the South* lay for long at anchor in the Castle Bay, and Peter tramped very often along the sand in vain search of his Aphrodite. The pangs of passion were making him bilious; but he fancied himself desperately in love, and stayed on, suffering stoically, until the crone at the cottage had come to hate the sight of him: the smouldering fire in her eyes blazed forth more fiercely each time he thrust his way into her little kingdom, and he could by no means compass speech with the girl until he called cunning to his aid, waylaying her one quiet evening in the hollow behind the house as she sauntered homewards, a couple of cows at her heels.

He bowed low before her, and spoke, "Er—good evenin', miss," in the style of the stage-door. But she looked him up and down with calm,

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unquestioning eyes, answered shortly in some strange tongue, pursued her way very placidly, ignoring his presence. And over such opportunity, so aggravatingly lost, the rich man raged to himself as he slunk shipwards under the stars. He had not been accustomed to whistle the wind in vain where women were concerned.

Extravagant impulses thronged his mind as he turned and tossed on his silken pillows. He rose at daybreak, and stayed himself with old wine, a definite purpose slowly shaping itself to his set desires. A little later he went ashore, and the *Star of the South* stood out to sea.

He spent his day in hiding, above the sands whereon what he called love had first assailed him; but the curling waves brought him no company, the shore was an aching solitude. He ate and drank often of the contents of a well-filled hamper, smoked many very expensive cigars, and so kept up his courage against the sacrifice he contemplated. Towards sunset he arose, the more resolute, and set out openly for the cottage.

A hornèd moon crept skywards from the edge of the world, and the sun's last golden glory was silvered over. The wind died down. There was no sound to be heard save the murmur of the making tide.

The mantle of night lay lightly on the Nameless Isle.

Time had taken an hour's toll of night ere the shrill, strong cry of a sea-bird rang down the startled shore, was echoed among the rocks, and died away on the water; while the man from

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whose lips it had sped was shortening his stride, had halted, sat down on the sand, smiling wistfully to himself.

"I wonder if she has forgotten—after all those weary years," he said in a low voice, and sighed.

But presently all his doubts were drowning in the dark depths of two sea-sweet eyes, that looked lovingly up into his, while the proud lips, which had gone so long athirst, were whispering sweet reproof of his unfaith.

"I shall never forget, Duncan."

"Nor I, Princess," he answered gladly, out of a laughing heart.

They were alone, by the sea, and her velvet voice thrilled in Darroch's ears like the music of a long-mute harp. The lean years which had passed since they had parted were well forgotten in the fulness of the present. The reaping of the future was not yet.

The distant throbbing of a steamer's screw recalled them to the cares of life. They sat down side by side, and hand in hand; spoke rapidly, because their time was short.

"Where's Peggy?" Duncan Darroch asked. "Did she not hear my signal?"

"She heard," the girl replied. "We had a visitor. I slipped away without her."

"She's been a faithful servant," said the man; and his companion's eyes grew dim.

"A faithful friend, dear," she corrected gently. "But for her I'd be—— She shares her small annuity with me—that's all we have between us."

He drew a short, sharp, painful breath.

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"But your own money?" he inquired, with quick concern. "Surely it was saved from the wreck when my poor father died?"

"Only a little, dear," said the girl in a whisper; "and that has gone long since to meet the mortgages. The Castle hasn't been let, you see, since the War—nearly four years now. I'm terribly poor, Duncan; and—and there's no help for it. You must give me up. You must marry some one who can help you in your profession—not one who would be worse than a hindrance to you."

But the break in her voice belied the words, and the man threw back his head, laughing.

"Must I," he retorted. "We'll see about that. The poor always stand by the poor. And, in any case, you don't look half so hard-up as I do."

He pointed to his own shabby shooting-coat, and then towards the suggestion of silken lace that showed above her shoes.

She flushed faintly, and drew in her feet.

"I've no other clothes now, dear," she said in a low voice. "These were my mother's. I wear a satin gown on Sundays, to save this outdoor suit, but both are Peggy's handiwork."

Duncan Darroch groaned: he had confessions of his own to make, and they were sticking hurtfully in his throat.

"When did you arrive?" the girl asked, more cheerfully, before he could frame words to tell his story, and he was thankful for the respite.

"Forty-eight hours ago," he answered, "and I

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came straight on. My mother died only a week before I landed."

A swift pressure of the hand spoke sympathy, and with that he was content. The dead woman had been no friend to this lonely orphan, her husband's ward, and the past was as well buried with her.

"I've only got two months' leave," said Darroch, breaking the silence which had ensued. "Just time for a quiet wedding—and then, Princess, I shall carry you off from your enchanted island. How soon can you be ready?"

The soul of the girl spoke wordless love from the windows of her misty eyes, but she schooled her lips to slight it. Alas for those who must reap where they have not sown!

"Oh, Duncan," she answered very sadly. "We're both so poor—and I haven't told you the worst yet."

The man's brow contracted in a frown of pain.

"Let's have it over," he said desperately, "and I'll table my troubles too. Then we'll shoulder the load together—somehow."

"It's the mortgages—the interest is overdue, two years and a half: and the lawyers mean to foreclose."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else," she asserted, a note of hope in her voice as she noticed that he heard her nonchalantly. "It's quite sufficient, isn't it?"

"More than sufficient," he muttered, and hope died still-born. "My own news is almost identical. I've only a hundred pounds in the

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world. My mother—I—I'm afraid we're rather extravagant as a family, and my small savings have taken wings."

A white face peered into his through the darkness.

The sound of approaching footsteps put a stop to further confidences. The girl and Darroch sat perfectly still, scarce breathing, as a fat figure passed over the sand in front of them, unconscious of their presence. It moved rapidly, muttering to itself, and presently disappeared round the spit that shoots out at the end of the bay beneath the Castle. The blast of a boatswain's pipe, the regular rhythm of oars in rowlocks, the distant echo of voices fell, in turn, on their ears. Even the faint, far-off pop of a cork was audible in the calm, and, at that, Darroch spoke again.

"There must be a boat in the Bay," he said carelessly. "I wonder who that fellow was, and where he's come from."

The girl hesitated, irresolute, but for no more than a moment, and plunged into speech, her face aflame.

"It was Mr. Waddel, the millionaire," she told him with reckless haste. "His yacht's lying in the Bay, and he's just come from the cottage. He went there to see me, Duncan, and—and he wants to pay off the mortgages."

"And you?" asked Darroch in a strained whisper. He had understood.

"I promised my father that I would never let the Isle go," she answered shakily: and said

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no more, since there was nothing more to be said.

He turned away from her to hide the pain that was quick in his eyes.

The white, creaming tide kissed tenderly the pebbles agleam at his feet. The crescent moon overhead cradled a single star which looked lovingly down on the lovers. The warm heart of the world beat audibly in the encircling arms of night. But, west by north, very bleak and bitter, and barren, lay Cape Farewell.

. . . . .

Peter Waddel, brave with the bravery begotten of good champagne, strode towards the stronghold which enshrined the mysterious maiden of his dreams, and faced the dragon on the doorstep with a determination which served to carry him over the threshold. The plea he put forward was starvation, and, although his overfed appearance proclaimed its falsity, there was no denying him the succour he craved.

"My name is—er—Wăddēll," he announced importantly, and failed to notice that the information was received with unconcern. "My boat has gone over to the mainland for letters, and won't be back till late. Merely—er—cup 'f tea—some bread 'n' butter—thanks awf'lly."

He had his wish, and sat down to eat in the presence of his Princess. Cut crystal, curious china, and crested silverware were set forth on snowy linen for his entertainment. He marvelled greatly as he masticated with uncouth relish the food set before him. What manner of people

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were these, who lived so in such surroundings? A tardy tremor of disconfidence assailed him, and he asked suddenly:

"Won't you—er—join me in—er—cup 'f tea?"

He had addressed himself to the younger woman, but it was the elder who answered him, sullenly:

"She will not sit at table with you—but with her equals."

"Oh, come now," cried Peter Waddel, delightedly. "I ain't proud—I ain't really—not a bit."

But the girl made no movement, sitting dumb by the window, her face enshadowed, and he finished his meal in silence.

He was in two minds now as to the course he should follow. Tea on the top of champagne tends towards pessimism; and, after all, a bracelet blazing with diamonds will sometimes carry a man farther than any plain gold ring. Peter had both in his pockets. He lay back in his chair, and picked his teeth, pondering deeply.

The old woman got up and left the room, returning, breathless, with a lighted lamp. Its mellow radiance fell full upon the still figure by the window. The girl turned her face to the diamond-panes, and her petticoats rustled richly.

What came over Peter Waddel at that precise moment it would be hard to explain—perhaps a swift glance from a pair of sea-sweet eyes had pled pity of him—but he leaned across the table and spoke straightforwardly, one hand on the wedding-ring.

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"Look here," he said to the elder woman, in a somewhat tremulous voice but distinctly, "I'm willing to marry her! To *marry* her—d'ye take me?"

A sea-bird cried shrilly out of the distant darkness, and he, seeing the sudden, startled glances that passed between them, sank back in his seat, eyeing them eagerly, well pleased with the impression his words had produced.

The old dame muttered quick, unintelligible phrases.

The girl, replying rapidly in liquid syllables equally incomprehensible to their guest, rose and went out. And after she had gone, the other turned towards him.

"You were saying, sir——"

Mr. Waddel sniffed aggrievedly. He was in no temper for any protracted wooing, and felt half inclined to follow the fugitive, who had not, he felt very certain, failed to gather the import of his speech whether or no she knew the tongue in which he had spoken.

"Where's she gone?" he demanded irritably.

The woman deliberated.

"She is free of the Isle," she said at length, "and need render no account to you, sir."

"Dash it all," snapped Peter. "You can surely answer a civil question civilly! Who are you, anyway? It's her I want—not you." He sulked sombrely for a time, getting no reply, and, presently, rose to go. "That'll pay my footing," said he loftily, and tossed a sovereign across the table. "If I can't find her to-night I'll be back

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to-morrow. I'm in earnest about this business, and I'll see it through—but I won't be trifled with, understand that."

"Wait a little," said the old woman, and he sat down again, not unwillingly, to hear what she had to say.

He made his way back to the yacht by moonlight, his mind full of confused imaginings. He was desperate with desire: the repulse he had received had but served to fan the flame which was still consuming him. He had never doubted that fair means would win what he wanted if foul should fail, although his enchantress might neither hear nor answer his suit in the only language he knew.

He cursed all comers on his way to the saloon, drank a quart of champagne over-quickly, and went to bed the more bewildered.

There he slept badly, certain words of the old woman's ringing in his hot ears over the ripple of the tide.

"Her name is Righinn—to such as you," the crone had returned, unabashed, after he had set forth his own princely circumstances and asked of hers.

"Rot the old witch!" he growled to himself, and rose in ill-humour. "What th' devil does she mean? 'To such as me,' indeed! Clutterbuck!"

His valet entered.

"I say, Clutterbuck, d'ye know any family 'f th' name 'f Righinn in these parts?"

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"No, sir," answered Clutterbuck, "I don't. Shall I ask the quartermaster, sir? 'E knows all the islands."

"Do," said Peter, and the man went off on his errand.

When he returned his employer was still sitting on the edge of the cot, impatiently dangling pyjama-clad legs to and fro.

"Well?" asked the millionaire eagerly.

"*Righinn*, sir," returned the valet, his features composed and respectful, his manner that of one who speaks profoundly, "is the local name of the serpent fam'ly, w'ich is supposed by the superstitious islanders to be a princess in a state of bewitchment."

"Clutterbuck," cried Mr. Waddel with sudden fury, "you're the *damnest* idiot I ever—— Get out o' this; get out o' this, *quick*!"

He shaved himself, most unhandily, and sat down to breakfast half dressed, eschewing both tea and coffee in favour of beverages more fortifying. These enabled him to endure once more the presence of the unmoved Clutterbuck, and he even grew confidential with that worthy over his first cigar.

"Look here," said he, puffing clouds of smoke while his tie was in process of construction, "I'm a bit mixed. What'd you do, Clutterbuck, if you were a bit mixed?"

"Soda and angostura, sir?" Clutterbuck suggested. "Or, per'aps," he went on hurriedly, as his master showed unmistakable symptoms of exploding again, "per'aps a wire to Miss Babington."

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Peter cooled down, and the idea found favour with him. He was feeling lonely, out of his element, and Baby Babington, despite her sobriquet, was a woman of resource. He had, moreover, taken the trouble to notify her, in the early stages of their acquaintance, that he had no least intention of making her Mrs. Waddel, and, as she had acquiesced cheerfully in the wisdom of such a decision, he was always agreeably at his ease in her society. He would send for Baby forthwith, and take counsel with her. Trust a woman to find means to cope with a woman!

"We'll weigh anchor at once," he announced, "and wire her from the nearest port. I'll meet her there with the yacht, and we'll come straight back here. Pass the word to the skipper, and tell the quartermaster I want to see him."

When the latter functionary appeared, cap in hand, in the doorway, Peter surveyed him in silence for five full minutes.

"Hey?" he asked at length.

"You sent for me, sir," said the man.

"Oh yes," Mr. Waddel agreed. "I wanted to know who this island belongs to."

"It belonged to Colonel Constantine, sir," the quartermaster replied, "but he's dead, I believe. It was heavily mortgaged, I've heard. Maybe it has changed hands. I'll find out and let you know, sir."

"I wish you would," said Peter with unaccustomed politeness. "I'm going to buy it."

. . . . .

There was no wind, and the big brown sail of

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the fishing-boat that was drifting out of the empty Castle Bay on the ebb flapped noisily against the mast. The man at the heavy tiller looked glum.

"Get the sweeps out, lads," he ordered, "and pull me inshore a bit. We can't make the pier this morning, but——"

"One of the sweeps is broken, Mr. Duncan," said a voice from forward, "and she will not travel at all without it."

Darroch flung the tiller from him, and the boat swung slowly about. The men in the bow eyed him stolidly.

"Here," he said, passing a piece of gold to the nearest. "Now roll my things in an oilskin."

"It's a terrible long way, sir," said the man doubtfully, but did as he was bidden.

Half an hour later Darroch splashed up the beach, and a faint cheer rose from the far-off boat as it floated seawards. He unbound the bundle about his shoulders, and, having hurriedly dressed himself behind a rock, set off along the shore, whistling.

The smoke of a steamer showed above the horizon, and he stopped for a moment to observe it. Something brushed the back of his neck very softly. He looked round into two dewy eyes and a radiant face.

"I saw you in the distance," said the girl tremulously. "Why did you do it, dear?"

And the bold swimmer had much to say to this maiden, although little of his news could be to her liking.

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"I saw the lawyers," he said presently, "and they will do nothing for us. Waddel holds all the mortgages—he wired the money to take them up as soon's he had ferreted out the facts about you. The overdue interest and so on amounts to about nineteen hundred pounds, and, after begging and borrowing the last penny possible, I haven't been able to scrape together more than a thousand. I offered that to account, but it was too late—he's determined to foreclose unless you——"

The girl shuddered, and he paused to take breath.

"D'ye know, dear," he continued, "that it was Waddel who ruined my father—and cost you the few thousands the poor old chap held in trust for you? Isn't it all too ghastly! And now he's taken a lease of the Isle so as to have you fast here whatever happens, and—that's his smoke beyond the Butt or I'm much mistaken." He pointed to a black cloud rising over the headland that shut them in.

The girl said no word, but stood looking down at the sand, her hands tightly clenched.

"I've been a fool—a fool!" he went on, to himself. "I ought to have been making money all those years past instead of spending it on soldiering. I've paid a long price for serving my country. Your father paid still more heavily. We mustn't sacrifice our happiness also—and for a sentiment. That would be too hard!"

She nestled more closely to him, and looked up into his face very wistfully.

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"It *is* hard, dear," she answered, "but we can endure, you and I."

"Together," he stipulated, but she shook her head.

"Together—or apart," she said simply, "and we're very near the parting."

"You shall not sell yourself," he cried hoarsely. "You must let the Isle go, sweetheart. There is no other way."

"There is a way," she replied; "and—I can't break the promise I made my father."

"And the promise you made me?" he asked, in despair.

"You can release me, Duncan," she answered sadly, "and my father cannot—now."

They turned towards the cottage, and a white yacht which had been making for the island at great speed passed across the bay before them ere they entered, so that they could both see the fat figure at the flag-pole in the stern, as the blue ensign fluttered down and up again in stately salutation.

"Curse his impudence!" said Darroch furiously to himself, and hurried his companion indoors. "I'll cut his throat for him if he comes ashore."

Mr. Waddel did not, however, see fit to forsake the safe shelter of his vessel. He had seen Duncan in the distance, had even taken the trouble to point him out to Baby Babington, who had scanned his broad back through a pair of field-glasses with considerable interest.

"That's a bad beggar," her host had informed her. "A bad beggar, Baby! I know the breed.

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His father was sole trustee for Miss Constantine, and actually attempted to shoot me in my own office after I—he had frittered away the poor girl's fortune. Like to take a run ashore, eh? And find out what's what? I'll keep Mrs. Babington company till you get back."

"Right oh," said Miss Babington shortly. "My life's not so valuable as yours, Peter, is it?"

Peter pretended not to have heard this unnecessary inquiry, and at once gave orders for the debarkation of his guest, so that Duncan Darroch, strolling along the beach moodily after lunch, an unlighted cigar in his mouth, encountered the fair stranger sauntering, all by herself, in his direction.

He looked his astonishment at sight of her in such circumstance, and she, returning his wide-eyed gaze for a moment, broke into laughter, long and low.

"Hello, old chap," she exclaimed at length, holding out her hand, tilting back the parasol which had shaded her mirthful eyes. "What on earth are *you* doing here? I had no idea that the bold buccaneer I'm to vanquish would turn out to be my old friend Duncan Darroch."

He shook hands with her limply. "Baby Babington!" he ejaculated. "Where in the name of all that's wonderful have you dropped from? I thought you were still in Simla."

"Simla!" retorted Miss Babington scornfully. "I've been three times round the world, my dear man, since I last saw Simla."

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"And what are you doing here?" asked Darroch, no less amazed.

"I'm 'resting' just at the moment—on old Peter's punt. And presently, after we've had a little chat, you and I, I'm going to chase you out of his private preserves, you poacher."

"I'm in terrible trouble, Baby," he returned gloomily. "I wish you wouldn't rag me."

Miss Babington looked him straight in the eyes for a space, but his did not drop. Hers clouded over.

"I won't, old chap," she assured him; and stifled a sigh with a laugh. "I know all about it. It was really I who put Peter up to the tricks he's been playing to get the girl, but I'd have cut off my right hand first if I had known it was you he was trying to euchre. I haven't forgotten what you did for me in India, and—— Will you take me to see her, Duncan?"

He hesitated, for only an instant, and she bit her lip.

"Never mind, then," she said in a low voice behind her parasol.

"I was on my way to the Castle," he explained lamely. "Will you come with me?"

"All right," she agreed indifferently.

The great grey keep that looks seawards from the end of the island seemed to frown forbiddingly on the two intruders as they passed across the drawbridge that spans the moat. Miss Babington looked up at its solid walls almost fearfully.

"I shouldn't much care to live here," she remarked.

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"I should," said Darroch between set teeth, and they both fell silent again.

He led her into the lofty hall, leaving wide behind him its massive doors, and the summer sun lit up many faces in tarnished frames. Torn flags tossed in the twilight overhead as the draught rose upwards. Out of dim corners peered pale, patient ghosts, steel-clad, with visors down.

The smartest frock of the season seemed singularly out of place there. The woman who wore it was ill at ease.

"Is it all like this?" she asked, in a whisper which echoed eerily from the galleries. But Darroch did not answer. His ears had caught the sound of footsteps, already past the portcullis.

He drew his companion into the shadow of a suit of armour, laying a finger on his lips as a girlish figure crossed the threshold and passed onwards into the darkness with assured steps. The woman of the world stood watching, hot-eyed.

A voice cried Darroch's name from a distant room, lingeringly, but he did not stir till a hand was laid on his arm, and Miss Babington spoke, very softly—

"Go to her, Duncan."

"And you?" he asked.

"You may trust me to look after myself," she answered with a brave assumption of unconcern, and turned back into the sunshine.

. . . . .

Peter Waddel, that proud man of millions, was in a white rage. He had been cast violently forth

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from a public place by a common person. His heart was full of bitterness, and the back of his blue yachting-jacket was full of sand.

"I'll have the law of you, you blackguard!" he screamed, shaking a fat fist in the direction of a tall, bearded individual, his aggressor, who stood, smoking a short clay pipe, in the doorway of a thatched cottage entitled "Post Office." That worthy stepped forward, and Peter fled incontinently, while the visible population hooted.

"You swore at the girl, I suppose," said Miss Babington, once more afloat, when he sought sympathy of her, "and she sent for the chucker-out. You're too tiresome, Peter."

Mr. Waddel swallowed excitedly, and waved a telegram at her.

"Read that," he yelped. "Read that, woman!"

She read, and a slow smile overspread her perfect features.

"Poor old chap!" she said shakily. "There's some excuse for you, after all. I'll split a pint with you, if you like."

"I'll split your—somebody's head for this!" said Peter savagely, and she left him.

Her mother, sitting in state at the saloon table behind a litter of correspondence, looked up anxiously as she entered.

"What's the matter, child?" asked that estimable matron, and Miss Babington ceased smiling.

"Peter's had his hand trumped," she answered. "The interest on those mortgages he's so keen about has been paid. He won't get the girl now,

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and he's rehearsing for a funeral instead of a wedding."

Mrs. Babington gazed upwards at a skylight.

"How much money did you make at Monte, Baby?" she asked reflectively.

"About two thousand," returned her dutiful daughter, "but I've spent every penny of it. I'll have to look out for another engagement now, I'm afraid."

"You're a clever girl, dear," purred Mrs. Babington, "but——"

Mr. Waddel, leaning over the transom, looked back across a world of water to where the Nameless Isle was hiding itself from him under the horizon. A tender, rose-tinted cloud stood out above the sea-rim. His mind was full of melancholy.

He was communing soulfully with himself when the quartermaster came aft to set the log.

"Righinn," he said very sorrowfully, his lips twisted, "the enchanted princess—the Princess Righinn!"

"That chap's about off his onion!" the quartermaster remarked inwardly, and, finishing his errand with all speed, he departed noiselessly.

The homeward passage of the *Star of the South* was notable for a certain naughty brilliance, and, when she encountered the Indian trooper *Serapis* off the Needles, the bulwarks of that craft were thronged with faces eager to catch a glimpse of the pleasure-ship whose name was in every paper. Peter, puffing pompously up and down his bridge, binoculars in hand, ranged alongside

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the outgoing vessel, and bowed benevolently in response to the cheers of custom; but the eyes of all men were irresistibly attracted towards a lonely figure in the stern of the long yacht.

"That's 'er!" said the rank and file in awed whispers, and the officers thought longingly of London. Only Duncan Darroch, standing by the poop-rail beside his wife, spoke unselfishly out of a full heart.

"Kiss your hand to her, dear," he commanded. "Never mind whether she's an actress or not—we shan't see her again, and I'll tell you afterwards all that she's done for us."

"I will if you wish it, Duncan," said Mrs. Darroch doubtfully, "but——"

The inert onlooker in the distance stood up suddenly to wave a tiny handkerchief.

"I *am* glad," she said to herself with passionate insistence. "I owed him his happiness—and he's far, far better with her. Thank God that I had the money!"

Mr. Waddel came down off the bridge suddenly.

"Did you see that woman kiss her hand to me?" he demanded in a choking voice. "I consider it *deucéd* bad taste on her part—and after the way she's treated me too!"

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A SECOND-CLASS DISTRICT

Betwixt a man and a woman wedded, who can judge from the outside of the wall.—*Spanish Proverb.*

"THIS is a Second-class District," remarked the Commissioner affably, and Hermann Brandt opened his eyes.

"Very!" said he, emphatically. "Have a cocktail? Hilda!"

The tall, fair woman who had been sewing silently in a corner of the verandah since breakfast-time, watching her husband out of the corners of her eyes the while, rose obediently, to fetch the gin bottle and swizzle-stick. The other necessaries for the compounding of the proffered refreshment lay at hand on the deal trestle that served the Brandt household for sideboard.

She mixed gin and water in a big tumbler, splashed in angostura bitters and curaçoa, added a dash of lemon and a dusting of sugar, whipped the mixture into a pink foam with the dexterity of long practice, and, having filled two coloured glasses with the resulting potion, stood waiting with all the admirable patience of the German housewife while the two men drank it off. Then she carried away the débris.

The Commissioner lay back in his cane

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lounging-chair with a sigh of contentment. He was short, somewhat stout, and bull-necked.

"Smart girl, your wife, Brandt," he puffed patronisingly, and mopped his moist brow with a silken handkerchief.

The trader scowled blackly.

"So?" he grunted, and looked slantly over at his guest, on whom, however, the import of the glance was wasted.

"Where did you pick her up?" drawled that dignitary with an affectation of languid unconcern that sat but ill upon his obese youthfulness.

The shrill shriek of a steam whistle saved his host the onus of explanation thus delicately asked. It sounded thrice, and the two men rose together.

"That's my launch—at last," the Commissioner announced impressively, and "Thank God!" muttered Hermann Brandt in his beard.

Perspiring black men were running excitedly to and fro upon the planking that abutted from the warehouse on to the river. The launch was still half a mile away, and was, moreover, a police-launch, so that there was no occasion for undue haste, but it is the habit of our black brethren to be spasmodically hasty, and, with them, habit is sacred. The Commissioner kicked three of them in rapid rotation, and the remainder, glad to be so governed, ceased all unnecessary activity, laughing secretly behind huge hands as the sufferers departed, rubbing.

A splash of red showed at the launch's stern, and Brandt ran a dirty Jack to the truck of the

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ragged pole on the bluff. Then he sauntered down to join his official acquaintance on the landing-stage, while Hilda, his wife, ceased sewing for a moment to follow his movements with curious eyes. Mrs. Brandt had, no doubt, reasons of her own for a certain anxiety concerning her husband's methods with the patently important representative of the Government under which they existed.

The launch puffed noisily alongside the staging, and she sat down again with a sigh that might have indicated tension relieved. But no man ever really understood Hilda Brandt, and her husband least of any: otherwise these details need not have been published here.

A thin, haggard-looking man in travel-stained khaki uniform sprang ashore and limped towards the Commissioner, holding out his right hand.

"How d'you do: how d'you do, old chap?" he said heartily. "I'm deucéd glad to see you."

"Er—how d'ye do," the Commissioner echoed perfunctorily. "You're four days late!"

The Policeman's effusion thus nipped in the bud, he found time to shake hands with Brandt, and their eyes met in a single glance that made the situation clear to the newcomer.

"Swelled head!" said he to himself surprisedly. "Sudden, and all the more deadly."

Aloud, he merely remarked:

"Morning, Brandt: how goes it?" And the trader replied in like manner.

The three white men walked slowly over to the dwelling-house together, and there were more

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cocktails. The black policemen fraternised with their commercial brethren of the factory, from whom they gleaned evil reports concerning the Commissioner's procedure and parentage, the kicked detachment exhibiting their alleged hurts immodestly. There was food for all, and, later, sleep, for it was very hot indeed.

Only Hermann Brandt and Boma, the cook, who did not trust his newest wife, remained awake throughout the sweltering afternoon.

After nightfall there was feasting. That lay within Mrs. Brandt's province, and she dealt liberally with her dependent mankind. The lean black policemen, squatting round their fires among the trees beyond the huts, rose up and blessed her frequently as they ate ; her husband's fat helpers gorged themselves without comment as a matter of custom.

When all had eaten, weird noises, indicative, to the optimist, of native music, rose from their quarters. There was much shouting, a fight, and the beating of a Mrs. Boma, to add zest to the entertainment ; then silence, by order of the Commissioner at dinner.

Hilda Brandt, at the head of her own table indoors, dispensed boiled fowl and rice, palm-oil chop, canned peaches, and whiskey, each in its due order, to her husband's guests. Then she was sent to bed.

She departed without complaint, and despite the protests of the Commissioner, who lighted her along the dark passage to her door. He returned to a room full of smoke, and, for an

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hour, the bottle passed from hand to hand in regular rotation, while he spoke at large, and his companions listened unwinkingly.

When he was empty of untruth he too went to bed, and Brandt sat straining his ears until he heard the shooting of a bolt. Then he filled his glass again, passed the bottle to the Policeman, and lay back limply.

"That man has been here for a week," he said in a grievous voice. "You must take him away quickly, or——"

"Don't fret," replied the Policeman soothingly. "We're off at daybreak."

Brandt drank thirstily, and the drink seemed to do him good. He slipped off his shoes, tiptoed down the passage to his own room, and returned with his wife, smiling.

She was clad in a loose robe of sunshiny silk, very pleasing to the eyes, her thick gold hair coiled carelessly about her head, her bare feet in low bronze slippers, showing their arched insteps as she walked. She sank into her husband's comfortable chair, her arms gleaming whitely as the sleeves rippled back from them, her face peach-pink. The Policeman also smiled, contentedly, and she smiled back at him, Hermann Brandt looking on. They were old friends, these three: they had spent many such evenings together.

Brandt, the jealous, had known the Policeman long before the beautiful Hilda had arrived from Hamburg to be at once the balm and the bane of his own existence. He spoke evil of the

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Commissioner before his wife frankly, until the other man bade him desist, for that he and the fat, bull-necked youth now snoring loudly in the distance both served the same unimpeachable Power, and it did not become him to listen longer. Nor was it, he averred, fit matter for a woman's ears.

Whereat Hilda Brandt laughed mirthfully.

"All right," said her husband grudgingly, "I'll shut up. But I tell you he's a wrong 'un. I've had him on my hands for a week, and I ought to know. Why've you been so long coming down for him? The coast launch said you'd be in on Tuesday."

"More trouble up above," the Policeman rejoined wearily. "He'll have a busy time in his rotten District—if he ever reaches it. We'll have to man-handle one or two of the villages by the way, I expect."

"How did he come to get the appointment?" Brandt asked curiously. "I thought you——"

The Policeman frowned.

"Oh, influence," he said; "the old story: second cousin to a lord, you know, and all that sort of thing. I play off my own bat."

Mrs. Brandt poured out more whiskey, and, that acting as oil upon troubled waters, there was peace. She sat late with them, sewing bead-work upon a satchel of plaited grass that was growing rapidly beautiful under her deft fingers. When she had finished it she ordered the two men to bed.

Day broke on the factory amid much stir and

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bustle. The Policeman was early afoot picking out his men from among the huts, shepherding them towards the waterside, severing with ruthless determination the tender ties that might haply have cost him more of them than he could afford to lose. In his wise hands his underlings proved morosely tractable, and his refusal to deliver up to the righteous wrath of Boma, the cook, a certain corporal of romantic tendencies, did much to restore his waning popularity amongst his own people. Before the Commissioner had got crossly out of bed the launch was whistling impatiently at the landing-stage where it lay ready, fully manned, waiting to carry him off to the wilds.

The Commissioner dressed very deliberately, resolute to show the over-officious Policeman that he was not to be hurried unnecessarily by his subordinates, lingered over coffee in the verandah with Mrs. Brandt, till that lady's husband ground his teeth with rage, and, at last, strolled down to the water's edge at a snail's pace.

"Hurry up, for Heaven's sake!" said the Policeman irritably; and the Commissioner, having stared at him officially, bade a protracted farewell to his hostess, nodded carelessly to Brandt, and stepped on board.

"Let her rip," the Policeman ordered, and the launch backed out from the pier.

The Commissioner sat down suddenly as she moved, and from under his linen tunic there slipped a woven satchel, gay with bead-work.

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He stooped swiftly, and thrust it under a thwart out of sight.

The two white men made themselves as comfortable as might be in the limited space at their disposal, stretching themselves at length on the narrow benches under the awning in the bow. The black policemen, crowded abaft the funnel, sat grumbling together as they were carried away from comfort. Only the amorous corporal was at all cheerful.

He waved a dirty white handkerchief over the stern, looking fondly back towards the scene of his latest conquest. A silken signal fluttered for a moment from the window of Mrs. Brandt's room, and was suddenly withdrawn. The corporal's grin of appreciation faded into a frown of pain, and he gave vent to a yelp of anguish, facing about with fierce determination to discover who it was that had bitten him savagely in the calf of the leg. A sharp order from the Policeman silenced him, and he sat brooding impotently over the wrong done him, while the men squatted on the grating at his feet chuckled causelessly.

The long, low factory buildings faded away in the distance, the flag above the bluff disappeared in a shimmer of steamy heat-haze, the launch turned the bend where the North Passage strikes west, and the Commissioner spoke.

"Where's that dam boy Brandt promised me?" he inquired with a lofty lack of politeness.

There was an upheaval amongst the closely

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packed black men aft, and a grinning negro was produced, like any package, for his inspection.

"What's your name, boy?" demanded the Commissioner, gratified in that the sable crew were regarding him with breathless curiosity.

"I Boma, sah. I cook-boy Boma, sah. You dash Boma dem bottle gin, sah?" ejaculated the new recruit with ingratiating humility.

"No lip," the Commissioner commanded sternly, "or I'll dash you two dozen with a good rawhide as soon's we land. That'll hearten you up quicker than gin, my lad. Go an' sit on my kit—that's your job. An', here, take this satchel. Careful, you black blackguard! If there's as much as a finger-mark on it when we arrive you'll get four dozen instead of two. D'ye hear!"

"U-wau!" grunted the listening black men in chorus, and Boma withdrew, entirely unprepossessed.

"Did Mrs. Brandt give you that?" asked the Policeman uneasily, as the satchel was carried off, and the Commissioner looked him up and down with obvious intent.

"P'r'aps she did—an' p'r'aps she didn't," he retorted, and lit a cigarette with intense deliberation. "Are you interested in Mrs. Brandt?"

The launch snored steadily on its way throughout the long, hot hours, and the burden of life lay heavy on its human freight. There was no change of scenery to break the monotony: always the same turgid brown seascape, the same low

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green banks on either hand, far off, unreal, behind the impalpable curtain of steam drawn from the simmering river by a salient sun.

It was needful also to navigate in mid-channel. The North Passage is notorious, even now: in those days it was reputed a death-trap, and worse things than death lurked about its banks. Therefore, when darkness came down, the Policeman was pardonably cross.

"We lost a good hour this morning while you were philandering with Mrs. Brandt," he said briefly, "and we'll have to lie all night in mid-stream: we can't make a landing now."

The Commissioner was cowed. Even the glories of his Commissionership seemed small and trivial in such circumstances, and he thought covetously of his comfortable clerkship at Head-quarters with a battalion in the background. He felt lonely, was ill at ease.

A comfortless night on the misty, malarious river did little to reassure him. He quarrelled fitfully with his companion in the intervals between troubled snatches of sleep, painfully aware of anxious sentries cursing him under their breath as they peered into the darkness for any sign of the swift canoes they dreaded.

Soon after daybreak the launch turned into the side-creek whereby it was proposed to effect a first landing in the district he was to rule according to his lights.

"Of course, it's only a Second-class District," he admitted to the Policeman with superfluous magnanimity, "but——"

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"A second-class district! I should think it is—look at it!" said the Policeman, whose nerves were also somewhat jangled.

The Commissioner looked, and was silent.

"Of course, you're only a Second-class Commissioner," the Policeman continued reflectively, "and——"

"*Zip! Ping!*"

A nickel-nosed bullet drilled a neat hole through the funnel behind him, and he turned to gaze across at the bank whence it had sped.

"And you'll get a second-class welcome," he concluded hastily. "They're a baddish lot about this creek."

The leafy curtain that overhung the near shore shivered slightly for a moment although there was no wind, and he hailed the steersman suddenly.

"Ram her ashore," he ordered.

The launch swung round, careening dangerously, and headed straight for the bank.

"Give her all you can," he added to the engineer.

Two men with axes crept up to the bow. The remainder sat perfectly still: their time was not yet.

The Policeman and the Commissioner drew sharp, hissing breaths between set teeth. Sparks flew from the launch's funnel, the clank of her straining engines re-echoed across the water. As she drew rapidly inshore the Policeman scrambled forward and lay down between the bowmen. Other black men squatted close at

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his heels, fumbling with the waist-belts that held their ammunition, filling their mouths with cartridges: they had often rehearsed their parts in such a piece.

"Any opening?" called the Commissioner from behind, but the Policeman did not hear him: he was too busy studying the face of the forest, and he was also too near thereto for polite conversation. He shot an arm out to the right, and the launch, following its direction, crashed into the green branches blindly, tearing its way through the tangle, biting towards the bank.

The bowmen hacked and hewed at the undergrowth. The fighting men laid down their rifles for a moment to heave and haul at the overhang. The nose of the launch struck slowly into slime, and the Policeman swung himself outboard by a stout branch, climbing hand over hand towards solid earth.

Ten black men followed him in monkey-wise, disappearing from the ken of their fellows into the gloom. The remainder held fast by their branches, breathing heavily, rolling their eyes, tense, expectant.

For five long minutes there was no sound from above. Then the Policeman's voice rang out suddenly, and the Commissioner jumped.

"We'll make our landing here," said the voice; "but you'd better sit tight for a little yet while I prospect the village: it's close behind, and seems to be empty. I'll send you word when all's safe."

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With that there was silence once more, save for the uneasy wriggling of the black men in the launch, who felt strangely forlorn without the countenance of their leader. The Commissioner uncocked his revolver, and slapped it back into the holster at his belt with a sigh of relief.

"We're in luck after all," he said to himself, prematurely.

The dull echo of a distant shot gave him the lie. A scream of terror tore the silence—another shot, more shots, much loud crying, the snapping of twigs, the thud of hurrying feet.

The Commissioner was no coward, although he lacked judgment. "Come on!" he called to the men about him.

They moved uncertainly, and some followed him slowly to the Jacob's ladder that the Police-man had shown him how to use. He pulled himself up as far as he could, dropped on to the soft, spongy soil, scrambling on hands and knees till he found firm footing. There he paused to marshal his supports; and, with these behind him, plunged through the thicket in the direction of the firing.

It was dismally dark in the forest. Gnarled tree-trunks, roofed in by thick, impenetrable layers of leaves, showed ghastly shapes in the greyness. There was stealthy movement amongst the shadows in the near distance, but the sounds of strife were fading, seemed farther off. The Commissioner pushed on briskly, and at his heels went Boma, basket in hand.

There were ten men left with the launch. Of

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these, five were wise and five foolish. The wise faced disaster where it found them, and their troubles were soon over. The foolish, having surrendered at discretion, supped death later with a long spoon.

The bones of the launch lie buried in the mud, charred, half calcined, hidden by the leaves that have grown afresh since the fierce flames of its burning ate a ragged gap in the greenery about it: other bones there are on the bank above, yellow with age, polished, picked clean, uninterred, beside the ashes of other fires.

Hilda Brandt withdrew hurriedly as soon as the Commissioner had ceased shaking her by the hand. Her husband would have followed her, but that he had suddenly caught sight of an embroidered basket which had fallen at the Commissioner's feet. He clenched his fists very tightly as he noticed the furtive movement by which the fat official sought to remedy the mischance. It was probably by the purpose of Providence that the launch had already backed out farther than a strong man might leap.

Hermann Brandt was a strong man, but there are acid accidents in life that will test the strength of the strongest. He stood silent, watching his enemy out of sight, and saw the waving of a white signal from the steamer in the distance, the answering flutter of yellow silk from his wife's window. Then he strode over to the store, his face working.

"Some one's gone off with my work!" cried

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Hilda from the verandah as he passed. "That pretty basket I was sewing for you, Hermann—I can't find it anywhere."

"So?" said he, very grimly, and went on his way.

The figures in the big ledger danced and drifted dizzily before his bloodshot vision as he pored over them. He closed it with a curse, and went back to the house, wild words trembling on his lips. His wife looked up at him with enigmatic eyes, and he was dumb before her, seeking comfort of the bottle.

The day passed dully, and at night he could not sleep. Next morning he was fast in the grip of a fever, and Hilda nursed him conscientiously, regardless of repulse.

A potent opiate administered at sunset sent him to sleep, and his wife sat down to dinner alone, placid, unperturbed. She ate with appetite, and, when word was brought her that her black maid's husband was without, a message on his mind, she bade him wait until she should have finished.

Later, she gave orders for his admission, and Boma, the cook, sidled into the room uncertainly. He was fat, and greasy, and perspiring, but obviously none the worse of his very short experience in the Commissioner's service. In his right hand he carried a satchel of plaited grass, distended to the shape of a Dutch cheese, bead-bedecked and very dirty. He laid it carefully on the table before her, and drew back, shuffling.

"Dem white man he lib for breakfas' chop," he

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explained lucidly, and placed one hand upon his stomach.

Mrs. Brandt staggered to her feet. The basket settled down softly on its side, and its contents rolled stickily across the white tablecloth.

The Policeman, arriving unexpectedly at the factory in an unseaworthy canoe with certain survivors of the disaster up-river, found Mrs. Brandt very ill and her husband at death's door. Both babbled of bare horrors, and he was glad when they recovered, leaving him free to go on his way and report at Headquarters the failure of the enterprise entrusted to him.

After due delay he was gazetted to the consequent vacancy in the administration, and sent up-river once more with two companies of troops to exact from the tribes the price payable for a white man done to death. In the plenitude of his power as an Acting-Second-class-District-Commissioner he ordered a halt by the way at Brandt's, and spent an evening with his friends there according to custom. Both were better, and no reference was made in public to past unpleasantness. But Hermann Brandt led him privately in the morning to a tiny mound on the bluff, under the shadow of the flag above, and raised his hat sullenly as the new Commissioner saluted all that was left of the old.

Boma, the cook, sitting at the door of his hut when the two men passed down to the riverside together, was not so fat as he had been, but seemed satisfied with his lot in life. He bade his wives come forth to do poojah before the Govern-

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ment, and they obeyed him with alacrity: only the late corporal's enchantress with the yellow silk handkerchief, his gift, about her head moved listlessly, the which she had reason to regret in due course.

The new Commissioner nodded curtly in answer to the salutations showered upon him by Mr. and the Mrs. Boma.

"I'll live to hang that black blackguard," he remarked hopefully to Brandt.

"Oh, Boma's all right," the trader rejoined. "Besides, we've no evidence against him. By the way, what did you do with that tablecloth? My wife can't find it anywhere; she wants to wash it."

"I put it in the fire," said the ex-Policeman, shivering in the sunshine. "It was—it wouldn't have washed."

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THE PRICE OF VICTORY

The *Magnifique* had made good time as far as the Flemish Cap, but there the first of the fog drew a close curtain across her path and spoiled all prospect of a record run.

A little later came a wireless warning from the *Majestic*, feeling her way towards the Fastnet through the thick sea-smoke, of busy times on the Banks and a big berg calving below the Virgins, whence its unwieldy progeny was wallowing westwards on the Great Circle course.

And after that there was snow, dense, incessant, through which could scarcely be seen the dim shadows of disaster and death that went squattering past the big liner, while the sensitive ears of her saloon passengers, peering disconsolately through the steamy portholes, were shocked by the sound of deep-sea curses, harsh polyglot profanity.

All the shipping of that hemisphere seemed to be bearing down upon her, but, by the grace of God, she had so far escaped collision.

It was just possible, while daylight lasted, to struggle onwards at half speed. When dusk came down, the engine-room telegraph rang for Dead Slow.

Every other precaution possible had already

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