

eBook

Adventures in Southern Seas

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Adventures in Southern Seas

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ADVENTURES IN SOUTHERN SEAS

CHAPTER I

I FALL INTO CAPTIVITY

Let those who read this narrative doubt not its veracity. There be much in Nature that we wot not of, and many strange countries to explore. The monsters who roamed the earth in ancient times, as their fossil bones attest, are still to be seen in those regions hitherto unvisited by white men, and in the fathomless depths of uncharted seas leviathans find a home.

Peter Ecoores Van Bu was born upon the island of Urk, in the Zuider Zee, in the year 1596, and was brought up a fisher-lad until the coming to the island of a priest, to whom my parents, ambitious for my advancement, entrusted my education in the arts of reading and writing, accomplishments in little vogue at this time. Hence it comes that I am able to set down here a record of perils and adventures by sea and land which may prove entertaining reading to those who have never travelled beyond the limits of their own countries.

My parents, who had stinted themselves to provide my education, placed me when I was eighteen years old in a merchant's office at Amsterdam, where I became acquainted with Dirk Hartog, a famous navigator, who, a year later, invited me to become his secretary and engraver of charts on board the ship "Endraght", being then commissioned for a voyage of discovery to the South, and having obtained a reluctant consent from my master, De Decker, the merchant, to Hartog's proposal I gladly abandoned the office desk for the sea.

The discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492 had given rise to a theory that a vast continent known as Terra Australis existed in the South, and Portuguese and Spanish ships had made report from time to time of this southern land. It was to confirm or dispel this belief that the voyage of Dirk Hartog was made.

For many months after leaving Amsterdam we sailed south, touching at some islands to obtain vegetable food and replenish our water-casks. Worn out with hardship, our crew more than once showed signs of mutiny. Sometimes for weeks together we lay becalmed in the tropics, when the air hung like a pall of vapour from the sky, and the pitch boiled and blistered in the seams of the deck-planks. In other seasons we were driven by storm and stress. But at length, in spite of every obstacle, an unbroken coast stretched before us far as the eye could reach. For three days we sailed past verdure-covered hills, white, sandy beaches, and bluff headlands, until Hartog felt assured the Great South Continent was at last in very truth before him.

The day upon which Hartog determined to land was bright and fine; the place a sandy beach upon which the waves broke in frothy spume. We were all keen to be ashore after so long a spell of the sea, and I reckoned myself in luck to be chosen as one of the boat's crew to land the captain.

"Let Peter come," said Hartog when the boat was alongside. "I would have him engrave a plate to be set in some safe place, so that it may be known that I, Dirk Hartog, landed here, to any who may come after me."

When we had come to the shore Hartog, taking the boat's crew with him, set off inland, leaving me to my work. The plate was soon finished, when I fastened it to a rock out of reach of the waves.

It bore the following inscription:

"1616

"On the 25th of October arrived here the ship 'Endraght,' of Amsterdam; first supercargo Gilles Miebas Van Luck; Captain Dirk Hartog, of Amsterdam. She set sail again on the 27th of the same month. Bantum was second supercargo; Janstins first pilot.

"Peter Ecoores Van Bu, in the year 1616."

I engraved the date upon which the ship was to sail according to directions given me by the captain, though whether the "Endraght" did sail at that time I cannot say, by reason of an adventure which befell me.

When I had finished my work I began to think in what manner I might employ myself until my companions returned, and, perceiving a grove of trees not far distant from where I stood, I determined to rest a while in the shade. As I penetrated these silent forests I beheld sights wholly novel. Parrots and paroquets flew among the trees, as also large white birds with sulphur crests, the like of which I had never seen before. Presently I came to a stream which took its course through a valley, and, kneeling, I was about to quench my thirst when I felt a hand upon my shoulder. Springing to my feet, I was confronted by a band of savages, many of whom held their spears its though about to strike. They were all quite naked, their bodies marked with white streaks. I tried to make them understand I came as a friend, and endeavoured to retrace my steps to the open, where I hoped my shipmates might see me and effect a rescue, but I now perceived that whichever way I turned my path was barred by these wild men. The savages now began to jabber to each other in a jargon which I could not comprehend, and presently two of them laid hold of me, one by each arm, and in spite of my protests and such resistance as I made, forced me through the scrub inland. Some of the tribe followed, others went on ahead, flitting like shadows among the trees, the journey being performed at a rate which made it hard for me to keep pace with them.

All day we continued to penetrate the bush toward the interior of the country, and just before dark we came to a native village, where we found the tribe assembled at their camp fires. There must have been several hundred blacks in this camp, and many gathered round to look at me, although they did not appear to regard me with as much curiosity as might have been expected, from which I conjectured that white men were not unknown to them.

After a meal of fish and wild duck, together with a pasty kind of bread made from the bulrush root, which I found palatable, I was permitted to lie down in one of their gunyahs upon a bed of freshly-picked leaves, where, in spite of my anxieties, I soon fell asleep.

Toward morning I awoke to a full conviction of my sorry plight. The camp was in darkness, save for the glow of the fires and the light of the stars, which shine with a wonderful brilliancy in these southern skies. The cry of some night bird came from the bush beyond the camp. All else was still, but a crouching form at the entrance to the gunyah warned me I was a prisoner. There was no need, however, to set a guard upon me, for without a guide I knew I could never reach the coast, so that even if I succeeded in making my escape from the savages, I must perish miserably in the bush.

My thoughts now turned to home and friends whom it seemed unlikely I would ever meet again. Dirk Hartog and the crew of the "Endraght", though rough as became the hardy lives they led, had always shown a kindly disposition toward me. They would miss me, and speak of me perhaps, until, in the changing events of their adventurous career, I would be forgotten. My parents also would mourn me as dead. But there was one at Urk who would miss me more than friends or parents; Anna Holstein, to whom I had plighted my troth, and to whom I looked to be wed on my return. Anna was above me in station as the world goes. Her father was the Governor of Urk, who would not willingly give his daughter in marriage to a poor lad such as I. But who in love is wise? Who reckons worldly wealth when love, the spirit and spring of the universe, awakens in the soul? Like birds who call their mates with love-learned songs, Anna and I loved each other, so that nothing but death could part us. I had promised Anna I would return rich from my voyage as others had done, when her father might be the more inclined to look with favour upon my suit. Well---here was the end of my promises, and my hopes---death, or, still worse, life among a savage and barbarous people.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK CANNIBALS OF NEW HOLLAND

On the morning after my capture by the black cannibals of New Holland, at daybreak, I was driven, out of the gunyah in which I had passed the night, to be looked at by the tribe, who had now collected in great numbers, and who encircled me with a ring of hazel eyes. Their complexion was black, their hair woolly, and many of them were quite naked, as though they lived in a state of brute nature. There did not appear to be anyone in recognized authority among them, for they all talked their outlandish jargon at the same time, and, presently, they began to search me for such small articles of personal property as I possessed. My engraving tools and a sailor's sewing kit, given me by Anna, were taken from me, but to my great good fortune they did not rob me of my dagger-knife, or my flint and steel which lay concealed in the inner pocket of my leathern belt, nor of a lock of Anna's hair which I carried in a silken bag round my neck; and in the possession of which I found much comfort in my present predicament. My clothes did not interest my captors, and I was thankful not to be deprived of them.

I was now startled to observe that some of the natives carried at their girdles a human skull, but I subsequently learned that these trophies were not, as I had at first supposed, the result of a massacre, but were the drinking-cups of these people, who appeared to be the most debased in the scale of humanity I had ever encountered.

During the morning, although I could see that a watch was kept upon me, I was allowed my liberty, and, in spite of my wretched plight, I became interested in observing the natives at their daily occupations, one of which consisted in the capture of wild-fowl from a lagoon close to the camp by the ingenious method of floating upon their quarry submerged up to their necks in water, their heads covered by a mass of weeds and bulrushes. When among the birds they suddenly drew some of them under the surface without appearing to disturb the others.

And now a loud noise made by the beating of spears and waddies attracted my attention, when I came to the conclusion some tribal ceremony was in progress, and shortly afterward a number of youths were led in procession through the camp. These young men presented a strong and muscular appearance. Their naked bodies bore evidence of ill-usage; purple weals and open sores upon their backs and shoulders appeared to have been inflicted by the severe and long-continued stroke of the lash.

After a dirge-like song had been sung, a number of the elder warriors stepped forward, and with a piece of quartz formed a deep incision in the nape or the neck of each youth, cutting broad gashes from shoulder to hip, all the while repeating rapidly the following curious incantation:

"Kangar-marra---marra,
Kano-marra-marra,
Pilbirri-marra-marra."

A bunch of green leaves was then fastened round each middle and above this a girdle of human hair. They then blackened with charcoal, and their wounds plastered with clay in order to form the hands of gristle which they regard as an ornament upon their flesh. During this performance the lads showed no sign of pain, although their sufferings must have been very severe. Further ceremonies then took place, in which the women played a part too degrading to be here set down.

That night a feast was held, with dancing, in honour of the morning's ceremonies. The night was warm and the moon shone with a wonderful brilliancy, casting deep shadows upon the earth. In the distance rose a pillar of sparks and fire, which marked the place where the performers were preparing for the corroboree, a name given to their dancing by these savages, and presently 200 men and 60 boys in nudity came from among the forest trees. Each dancer was provided with a bunch of leaves fastened above the knee, which, as they stamped in unison, made a loud switching noise. These natives were painted from shoulder to hip, with five or six stripes rising from the breast, their faces streaked with white perpendicular lines, making it appear as the dancing of dead men's bones. For some time the dancers continued to stamp to and fro, and then, assembling at a fire that burned close by, they simultaneously sat down. Other dancers then took their places, dressed in fur cloaks, and wearing white and yellow feathers in their hair, their black visages rendered hideous by fish-bones stuck through the cartilage of the nose above their thick lips. These singular beings stamped their way backward and forward, giving vent to yells of excitement, and causing their bodies to tremble and twitch in the most surprising manner. The last act of this strange drama represented the warriors sitting cross-legged round the fire, when suddenly they simultaneously stretched out their right arms as if pointing to some distant object, at the same time displaying their teeth and rolling their eyes, and then, springing to their feet, they uttered a shout that echoed for miles over the surrounding country.

And now the preparations for a feast began. A number of women and young girls brought baskets of fish, roasted birds, and prepared bulrush root, whilst some very large eggs, such as I had never seen the like before, with green shells were stacked upon the grass. Strange-looking animals also, together with snakes and lizards, were stewed in clay vessels, while the savages gathered round in gloating anticipation of this repulsive food. When all was prepared one of the women gave a peculiar cry, when there came from among the trees the young men who had that morning undergone the baptism of initiation, each carrying upon his shoulder a bundle wrapped in reeds and bulrushes. Arrived in front of one who now acted as chief, much laid down his burden, exposing the contents---the body of a native child!---half roasted and drawn---the "long pig" of the cannibals!

Overcome by what I had seen, I sought my gunyah, where I passed the night a prey to the most dismal forebodings. Next morning I became ill, with violent pains and headache, which incapacitated me for some days, during which time a lubra named Moira sat beside me, apparently anxious to do what lay in her power to ease my sufferings.

Helped by the words I had learnt in my former intercourse with savages at the islands we had visited in the early part of the voyage, I was soon able to make myself understood to Moira, and to understand what she said when I confided to her my desire to escape to the sea coast. At first she would only shake her head, but I became so insistent that at length she consented to help me. A tribal ceremony was very shortly to be celebrated, so Moira informed me, when the night would be favourable for the success of our project, since the tribe would then be assembled at the camp fires. On that night, moreover, there was no moon until late, and we trusted to be able to slip away in the darkness unobserved.

I had always been impatient of my captivity, but now that escape was in sight I could scarcely control my desire to be rid of these savages. I counted the days, dreading lest some change in the manner of my captivity might prevent the carrying

out of the plan we had formed; but all went well until the time came when Moira whispered to me our chance had come.

The tribe were assembled at the camp fire, engaged in one of their many rites to propitiate the evil spirits whom alone they worship. Beyond the glow, darkness complete and compelling hung like a pall. The stars were hid by a curtain of clouds.

"Come," I whispered to Moira, and reckless of consequences, we fled into the pitch black of the scrub.

CHAPTER III

THE ONLY WHITE MAN IN NEW HOLLAND

After leaving the blacks' camp I made my way through the forest, guided by Moira, who could see in the dark. I was fearful lest we might be pursued, in which case I resolved I would not be taken alive. Moira, however, did not believe that we would be followed. Her people, she told me, were afraid to enter the forest at night, when evil spirits were supposed to be abroad, and indeed her own terror was so great that I realized her devotion to me in having braved, for my sake, the superstition in which she had been reared.

Moira was right in thinking we would not be followed, for no attempt was made to follow us. But now a fresh anxiety arose. There were shapes among the trees which were visible to Moira, though I could not see them, which caused her such terror that I was obliged almost to carry her, and I sometimes thought by the chill of her body that she had died in my arms. With the dawn, however, the shapes disappeared, and Moira's fears were dispelled.

Daylight found us several miles on our way to the coast, which we made, as I reckoned, about noon, to the north of where I had first landed. The cliffs here were high and rocky, the waves breaking at the foot in fountains of spray. The sky was dull and overcast, which betokened a storm. A number of white birds with yellow crests, such as I had seen on my first landing, flew inland, and several fur-coated animals, with heads resembling deer, and powerful tails, hopped across the stubble to the shelter of the trees. The prospect was a dreary one, and a feeling of melancholy oppressed me, which I found it hard to dispel.

Moira did her best to cheer me, but I could not rid myself of the dread of being the only white man upon this desolate shore. When we had walked for some distance we came to a sandy beach, where we found a cave in which to shelter from the storm which now burst upon us. For an hour or more the elements raged with a fury only to be equalled in the tropics. Lightning flashed and thunder rolled, whilst rain fell with the force of a deluge. Then, suddenly, the storm passed, and the sun shone with renewed splendour, decking the dripping foliage with myriads of raindrop gems.

We had depended for food since leaving the blacks' camp upon a supply of dried fish and prepared bulrush root, which Moira had brought with her in her dilly-bag, but we were now compelled to seek fresh means for our support. Moira collected a quantity of shellfish, for the cooking of which I made a fire of some dried wood. Moira showed the greatest astonishment and some alarm at my flint and steel, which I now used for the first time in her presence. Nothing would persuade her to touch it. She regarded it as something beyond her comprehension, as a fetish to be worshipped. When we had finished our meal we fell asleep, worn out by the fatigues of the long journey.

And now began for me a life of dull monotony, with days devoted to watching the ocean, and sleepless nights of anxiety and despair. I had built a beacon upon the highest part of the cliff above our cave, to be fired in case of sighting a ship, and every morning, with the dawn, I mounted to this look-out to scan the horizon. Here I remained all day, and when darkness drove me to the shelter of the cave I tried to persuade myself that each night in this lonesome place would be my last.

Had it not been for Moira I must have perished from want and neglect, for I could not bring myself to do anything for my personal comfort lest it might seem I had abandoned hope of rescue. But Moira was never idle. She worked for both, and displayed such ingenuity in converting to our use what Nature provided that we lacked nothing for our support. To begin with, she made an oven of baked clay, in which to cook our food. Next she plaited fishing lines from grass-tree fibre, and fashioned hooks from the bones of slaughtered birds and animals, to catch the fish which abounded near the rocks. With the aid of my Sailor's knife she made a bow and arrows to shoot the hopping animals, the flesh of which when roasted resembled venison, while their fur-coated skins made us warm sleeping mats. She even succeeded, after much labour, in constructing a canoe, in which to paddle along the coast, and sometimes, when it was calm, for some distance out to sea; nor did she appear to regret the loneliness of our lives. But I could not bring myself to take part in her work. Hour after hour, in moody silence, I paced the cliff beside the beacon, scanning the ocean, and speculating upon my chances of rescue.

If I had not been so absorbed in my selfish thoughts I might possibly have prevented a catastrophe which afterward caused me much self-reproach. Moira had more than once told me that food had mysteriously disappeared from a cave in which she kept a store of meat for our use, and she showed me where the rocks in front of this cave had been scraped of seaweed and mussel-shells as though by the passage of some cumbersome body. But I gave no heed to her anxieties, and although she urged me to shift our camp I would not leave the beacon lest a ship might pass during my absence.

Of the dreadful consequences which followed my selfishness it now only remains for me to tell.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEA SPIDER

I was occupied one midday, as usual, scanning the horizon from the top of the cliff near the beacon in search of a passing vessel, when I noticed Moira urging her canoe toward the shore at a rapid pace. In the wake of the canoe a disturbance of the water betokened the presence of some denizen of the deep, and Moira's action in making for the rocks at top speed betrayed her terror of whatever it was that followed her. Hastily descending the cliff I ran to her assistance, when I saw Moira spring on to a flat rock upon which she generally landed from her canoe. At the same moment a snaky tentacle rose out of the sea and caught her, while other tentacles quickly enveloped her. The monster now dragged its shiny bulk upon the rock, and except in a nightmare surely no man had beheld such a creature before. It resembled a monstrous spider, but out of all proportion to anything in Nature. Its eyes, like white saucers with jet black centres, stared from its flat head, and the tentacles with which it seized its prey were provided with suckers to hold what they fastened upon.

Even in her extremity Moira thought more of my safety than her own. "Go back!" she cried. "You cannot help me. The sea devil has the strength of ten men."

Not heeding her warning I continued to advance to her assistance but as I approached the sea-spider drew back into its native element, and presently sank with its prey beneath the waves.

In my first feeling of dismay for what had happened, I could not believe that Moira had been taken from me, and as I remembered my ingratitude to her and thought of how surly I had become, absorbed in my own trouble, I threw myself down upon the rocks in an agony of remorse. Alas, poor Moira! Faithful friend! True heart, and loyal to death! A thousand times I reproached myself with my neglect of her, but my regrets were unavailing, and my repentance came too late.

It now became necessary if I would live to provide myself with food, and in this enforced occupation I obtained some relief from the dejection which had formerly obsessed me. I found no difficulty in procuring fish, and I quickly became

expert with Moira's bow and arrows. Salt, also, I gathered from the rocks, and some roots which Moira had shown me served as vegetables. Of water I had an abundance from a fresh-water lagoon near by. So that I lacked nothing for my support. But although my body was nourished, my mind became so oppressed by solitude that, at times, I even thought of returning to the blacks and conforming to their ways, and had it not been that I knew them to be cannibals I might have spent the remainder of my life among them, so intense had become my longing to meet with others of my kind.

Another cause for anxiety now made me consider whether I had not better move my habitation to some cave along the coast. Within a week from the carrying off of Moira by the sea-spider, I began to miss supplies of fish and flesh which I kept in the storehouse cave. Strange sounds, also, as of some heavy body dragging itself over the rocks kept me awake at night, and filled me with alarm. Could it be that the monster was once more paying its visits to the cave? The sounds continued during the night, but with the break of dawn they ceased.

One morning, however, when I had resolved upon moving my camp, on mounting the cliff I sighted a vessel which I recognized as the "Endraght", coming up the coast from the south. In a frenzy of excitement I lighted the beacon and taking a silk handkerchief from my neck I waved it to attract attention. A dread overpowered me that my signals might not be observed, and had the ship passed without seeing me I verily believe I would have cast myself from the cliff on which I stood to certain death upon the rocks below. But now I saw that the vessel was heading for the shore, and presently a boat put off for the beach. Carried away by the thought of my salvation, I waded knee deep to meet my comrades, and climbing into the boat I soon found myself on board the "Endraght".

So wild-looking and unkempt had I become that at first my shipmates did not know me, but when they recognized me I was given a hearty welcome.

"Of a truth, Peter," said Hartog, smiling at my sorry appearance, "I have small wonder the cannibals did not make a meal off one so skinny." And, indeed, the hard life I had led on the island had reduced me to a bag of bones. But when I had washed and trimmed my hair and after I had clothed myself from my own sea-chest Hartog declared me fit to become, once more, his secretary.

I sat late that night with my comrades, to whom I recounted my adventures, and when I reflected upon the dangers I had passed I could scarcely contain my joy at my rescue from a fate worse than death.

CHAPTER V

THE VOYAGE CONTINUED

Dirk Hartog, convinced that he had discovered the continent known as Terra Australis, determined now to seek the gold and gems which this fabled land was said to contain. The "Endraght" was accordingly brought to anchor near to the mouth of a river on the coast, and preparations were made to explore the stream in one of the ship's boats for some distance along its banks. In the course of the afternoon we attempted a landing, but as the boat neared the shore a number of natives ran down to the water's edge with spears in their hands, and with loud cries forbade our progress. A present of some nails and beads thrown among them seemed, for the moment, to produce a good effect, but on our attempt to land being renewed the natives again showed signs of opposition. Hartog endeavoured to make them understand that no injury was intended, but his friendly advances met with no success. A musket was then fired amongst them, which was replied to by a flight of spears, but no damage was done on either side. One of the natives then threw a stone at our boat, which was answered by a discharge of small shot, which struck him in the legs, causing him to jump like one of the hopping animals I had seen on the island. When we pointed our muskets again he and his companions made off into the bush. We then landed, thinking the contest at an end, but we had scarcely quitted the boat when the blacks returned, carrying shields for their defence. They approached us and threw spears, but with no result. Another

musket shot convinced them their shields were no protection against our firearms, when they again disappeared.

We then walked up to the blacks' camp and examined with much curiosity the primitive nature of their dwellings. Then, leaving some beads and pieces of cloth in exchange for some spears, which we took away with us, we returned to our boat, observing on our way several light canoes, each made of a single piece of bark, bent and laced up at both ends. In the evening two boats' crews were sent away fishing, and they caught in two hauls of the seine nearly three hundredweight of fish. Hartog, after our first landing, made many friendly overtures to the natives, who would not, however, hold any communication with us, from which we came to the conclusion that other navigators had been here before us, not so well disposed.

With regard to the gold and precious stones we expected to find, our inspection of the blacks' camp convinced us that nothing of the kind existed, at all events, in this part of the country. Such ornaments or utensils as the natives seemed to possess were of the crudest description, made of wood or clay, or consisting of shells and pebbles from the seashore. The stories of fabulous wealth, therefore, to be found in this new land appeared to be myths. It was to seek for treasure that the "Endraght" had been equipped by a number of merchants at Amsterdam, of whom my master, De Decker, made one, and we realized how disappointed they would be if we returned empty-handed. Our crew, also, began to show signs of discontent, and to murmur at having been brought so far on a fool's errand. It was only Dirk Hartog's indomitable personality that prevented a mutiny.

It was this same sordid greed for gain which had caused Christopher Columbus to be sent home in chains from America because he had failed to find gold. The acquisition of new countries did not interest those who equipped the navigators of this time. For this reason, no attempt was made by Hartog to take possession of any of the countries we visited. It was to find treasure he had been sent out, and should he return without it he might look for a surly welcome.

Yet Hartog himself, I am convinced, with the spirit of a great navigator, found satisfaction in having accomplished so long a voyage, to reach the goal for which he sailed.

"Can I help it, Peter," he said to me one evening when we sat together in his cabin examining the charts I had drawn under his directions, "that the natives of this country are poor? Gold, ivory, precious stones, spices even, seem not to exist in the South as they do in the East. Did I make this country, that I should be held responsible for what it contains?"

But, although he spoke thus, I could see he was bitterly disappointed at finding the land we had come so far to seek little better than a wilderness, and the people upon it so poor that they went entirely naked, and devoured each other in order to satisfy their hunger. I tried to cheer him by reminding him we might yet find chances to enrich ourselves before returning home, but I could see he was troubled by the thought that the voyage he had accomplished with so much skill and daring might prove resultless in the accumulation of wealth. In order to hearten the crew with fresh adventure, the course of the "Endraght" was now directed toward the islands of the Pacific. These islands were reported to abound in pearl shell, and whilst cruising among them we looked forward to obtaining a supply of pearls which might compensate the merchants at Amsterdam for the expense of our voyage, and send us all home rich men.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIGHT ON THE SANDS

I must now tell of all incident I would willingly have left unrecorded, but as I have undertaken to set down here, in the order of its sequence, each event which took place upon my voyages with Dirk Hartog on southern seas, I must not, as a faithful chronicler, omit to record each happening in its order.

Now it so fell out that our first supercargo, Gilles Miebas Van Luck, bore me a grudge, although I could recall no act on my part upon which to attribute it, unless it be that I had gained the favour of the captain, of which I could see Van Luck was jealous. From the first Van Luck made no secret of his dislike of me, and more than once he complained to Hartog that by reason of my youth; I being at the time of sailing but nineteen years old, it would be more seemly if I took my meals with the men in the forecabin instead of in the cabin. But Hartog had overruled his objections. As his secretary he maintained I was entitled to berth with the officers, and after my rescue from the inhospitable shores of Terra Australis I continued to occupy my former place at the captain's table, although I would as lief have messed with the men sooner than have been the cause of a quarrel.

At length matters came to a climax, when Van Luck ordered me to set about some menial work which I did not consider compatible with my position as the captain's secretary, and which, therefore, I declined to perform. In his rage at my refusal Van Luck came at me with a belaying pin in his hand, but I had fought many a battle with the fisher lads upon the sands at Urk, and was well able to take my own part, so that when Van Luck was almost upon me I nimbly stepped aside, and with a trick I had been taught by an old smuggler at Urk, I tripped him as he passed so that he fell into the scuppers, when, with a muttered oath, he scrambled to his feet, and, plucking a pistol from his belt, he would have shot me had not Hartog at this moment appeared on deck, and commanded him to throw down his arms.

"How now," said Hartog, "am I captain of this ship or not? What means this mutiny? Come both of you to my cabin that I may hear the case and see justice done."

Without so much as a look at either of us Hartog then descended to his state room, whither we followed him in shamefaced silence, for when the captain spoke we knew he must be obeyed.

When Hartog had heard what we had to say, and the argument advanced by each on his own behalf, he delivered judgment in the following terms:

"You are both of you in the wrong," said he. "Peter should not have refused to obey an order without referring the matter to me, and you Van Luck ought not to have taken the law into your own hands when I, your captain, am the proper judge upon such matters. Still I am willing to overlook your dereliction of duty (though by every rule of the sea you are both deserving of death at the yard arm) provided that at the first suitable place, and time, you fight out your quarrel as man to man, and pass me your words that, whatever the result, the survivor, or victor, shall bear the other no ill will."

This was a favourite method of Hartog's for settling disputes that were occasionally bound to arise among his crew upon so long a voyage. Order upon the ship, he maintained, must, for the common safety, be rigidly observed, but if bad blood arose between men of high spirit and hot temper, the malcontents were landed at some convenient place where, in the presence of the ship's company to see fair play, they fought the matter out, afterwards returning on board with their ardour cooled, and their anger properly chastened. This plan, on the whole, was found to work well. Sometimes one and sometimes both of the combatants were killed, but, as a rule, the matter was settled without the sacrifice of life, and the parties returned from their blood-letting the better friends.

After hearing Hartog's decision we both bowed and retired, and, in the terms of our promise, resumed the ordinary routine of our duties as though nothing out of the common had occurred. But the news of the coming fight spread among the crew and became the subject of gossip throughout the ship.

I was now near twenty-one and Van Luck was three years my senior, we being all young men on board the "Endraght"; but I had led a hardy life, and my spell ashore had taken off superfluous flesh, and left me active and alert, with muscles like steel, an advantage not given to my older antagonist, who had, perforce, lived a monotonous existence for months past on shipboard. So I looked forward to the coming trial of strength and endurance with some degree of confidence,

notwithstanding that Van Luck and his supporters promised me I would lose both my ears as forfeit, if not my life, in the encounter.

The discussion over the right at length became so keen that Hartog, fearing it might lead to further disputes, determined to get it over as soon as possible, and for this purpose he altered the ship's course to an island he sighted on the horizon which we made during the same afternoon, when we came to anchor in a natural harbour formed by a coral reef and opposite to a hard sandy beach well suited to the matter in hand.

At daybreak the following morning we landed two boats' crews on the beach, only the watch being left on board, who would nevertheless be able to see the fight from over the ship's bulwarks. It was a fine summer's morning, with little wind and no sea. The waves broke in crisp diamond sparkles upon the sand, and the feathery palms and coconut trees, with which the island abounded, imparted to the place a fairy-like aspect such as the hand of man could never design. The island appeared to be uninhabited and it seemed likely we would have the arena to ourselves, although our men were armed in order to repel attack.

When Hartog had taken up a position upon a spot he had selected as suitable for the contest, he explained the conditions under which the dispute was to be settled. The fight won to be to the death, or until either party confessed himself vanquished or was unable to continue, and in no case was malice to be shown after the event, whatever might be the result. Having then proclaimed strict silence he ordered us to make ready and begin. Both my opponent and I were now stripped to the waist, our singlets being used as bandages for the right arm to protect it from a chance wound from the dagger knives with which we were armed, we being allowed no other weapon. My adversary was stouter than I, but we were both of a height, and what I lacked in strength I made up for in agility.

And now we began to circle each other, waiting an opportunity to strike, which presently came to my opponent, who aimed a blow at me which I caught when his blade was within an inch of my heart. Putting forth my strength I strove to force his hand so that with his own blade he might kill or wound himself, but after a desperate struggle he broke away. Not a word was spoken by the onlookers, and no sound was heard save only the tread of our feet as we circled and waited for a chance to strike again.

It now occurred to me that since my adversary had proved himself the stronger when I had tried to force his hand, my better plan would be to tire him if possible before taking the offensive again, and to this end I led him on, always nimbly avoiding the strokes he aimed at me instead of spending my strength by attempting to oppose them, and this method proved so successful that I presently had the satisfaction of observing in my opponent evident signs of exhaustion. Realizing his impotence, and now beside himself with anger, Van Luck suddenly rushed upon me, when, using a trick I had learnt, I tripped him so that he fell, dropping his knife, which, before he could recover it, I secured. By all the rules of the game he was now at my mercy, and I called upon him to surrender, but, with a scowl, he refused to give in. The advantage I had gained now entitled me to stab him to death where he stood, or to cut off his ears if I had the mind to do it, but I could not bring myself to kill, or maim, an unarmed man. I therefore threw down both knives at Hartog's feet, and returned once more to the fight with bare hands. My superior agility now began to tell in my favour, and I found I was the better boxer and wrestler of the two, so that I rained blows upon my opponent, some of which drew blood. He then tried to clinch with me, but I had waited for this, and when he seized me in his powerful grip I held myself as I had been taught to do by my friend the smuggler, so that when he tried to throw me, he himself, by his own weight and a dexterous twist I gave him, was hurled over my head some distance along the sand, where he fell upon the broad of his back the breath being knocked clean out of his body. For some time he lay to all appearance dead, and it being evident he would not be able to continue the fight, Hartog awarded me the victory, and, later, when Van Luck regained consciousness, he ordered him to shake hands with me, which he did with an ill grace, though of a surety I bore him no malice.

"Peter," said Hartog to me when we were alone together in his cabin after the fight, "henceforth I look upon you as my comrade as well as my secretary; but do not, on that account, believe I shall be less strict to enforce discipline upon you equally with all under my command. At the great distance we are from home it behoves some one to be in authority, if we are ever to see the Netherlands again. Promise me then to set a curb upon your temper, and when Van Luck is able to resume his duties after the drubbing you have given him, let there be no bad blood between you."

I gave my promise willingly, and I can honestly say that, on my part, I bore no grudge against Van Luck, nor against any man of the ship's company, though I could see that Van Luck would never forgive me for having bested him, nor could I disguise from myself the fact that there were some among the crew who sided with him.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPIRIT OF DISCORD

The days which followed my fight with Van Luck were full of anxiety for those who were responsible for the safety of the ship. It was evident that a spirit of discord had begun to show itself among the crew, which threatened a mutiny. Janstins, the pilot, whom we knew to be trustworthy, did not attempt to hide the peril that was brewing in the forecabin.

"Those lubbers for'ard," he said when Hartog, he, and I sat together one evening in the cabin, "will make trouble if they can. They are a pig-headed lot, and a dozen apiece at the gratings would do them no harm. But while they outnumber us, as they do, three to one, we must avoid a quarrel. Besides, if we got the upper hand, and drove the scum into the sea, we'd be undermanned for the voyage, and unable to weather the first storm that came upon us."

"What is it they want?" asked Hartog impatiently. "Am I a wizard to conjure gold and jewels out of the wilderness? They knew the chances they took when they set sail, and will have their wages paid in full, whereas I shall receive nothing but abuse, so that in this they are in better case than I, their captain."

"Granted you are right," answered Janstins, "yet these dunderheads will not view the matter with such common sense. They believe that gold and jewels are to be found, but we have not the wit to find them."

"Who has told them this?" demanded Hartog with a frown. "They must have a leader amongst them whom we wot not of. If I find him I'll send him adrift upon the sea to look for the treasure he speaks of with none to hinder him."

It was the first time I had seen Hartog so deeply angered, aroused as he was by the rumoured treachery that was being hatched against his command, and when he spoke of the punishment most dreaded by seamen, of being cast adrift in an open boat with three days' provisions, I knew full well he would not hesitate to inflict this penalty upon whomsoever might be found attempting to undermine his authority.

At these consultations held by the officers in the cabin, I noticed Van Luck was never present. He made an excuse for his absence that, as first officer, his place was on deck when the captain was below. Although this could not be disputed, yet I bethought me he might have found an opportunity to add his voice to our councils had he the inclination to do it. But as yet I had no proof of treachery against Van Luck, and although I suspected him, I was loath to voice my suspicions lest my action might be attributed to malice for his scurvy treatment of me.

As luck would have it, an incident now occurred which, for the time, diverted the men's minds from the dangerous brooding in which they had indulged. A dark line appeared on the horizon, which at first we took for a breeze, but which, as it swept down upon us, proved to be a prodigious number of flying fish. These delicate creatures rose out of the water like silver clouds, and as they passed over our vessel numbers fell upon our decks. These fish are excellent

eating, and of those that fell aboard of us we soon had an ample supply. Hartog, as much to give the crew some novel occupation as from any other motive, set the men to work salting and drying the fish, so that we secured three barrels full, as an addition to our ordinary fare, which was very acceptable. The flying fish were pursued by a shoal of dolphins, which continued to play round our ship for several days, and some of these we captured with the line and converted into food.

In the excitement of the sport the sailors soon forgot their mutinous conduct, and resumed something of their former cheerfulness. Like children, seamen are easily led and readily influenced.

"I thank Providence," declared Hartog, "for the draught of fishes sent to us at so opportune a time; but for their coming I doubt we would have been at each other's throats ere this."

And indeed there is more in chance and circumstance than most believe.

I observed that Van Luck took no part in the fishing. The sport in which the seamen were engaged appeared to afford him more irritation than amusement.

I often wondered that Hartog did not note the surly demeanour of his chief officer. But he did not appear to do so, and it was no part of my duty to make mischief between the captain and his first mate.

When the fishing and salting were over, a breeze sprang up which freshened to half a gale---before which we scudded under furled mizzen and foresails. The men had now plenty to do, and there was no time for brooding or lamenting over lost hopes. It is mostly during a calm, when the ship rides motionless upon a painted sea, that mutinous and rebellious thoughts arise among seamen. When the vessel is ploughing her way through storm and stress, each man seems a part of the ship and to have an interest in her voyage. It is then, too, that the word of command carries weight and meaning, and the knowledge of common dependence upon the captain makes for obedience and discipline, so that while the gale lasted we had no fear of mutiny.

At the end of a week, during which time we covered many leagues of sea, the weather moderated, when we found ourselves once more among the islands of the South Seas, and the thoughts of being again on shore, and the adventures that might be in store for us, put to flight less wholesome and healthy thoughts.

By the time we came in sight of the islands Janstins had recovered his spirits, and Hartog his good humour. Janstins, who was of a sanguine disposition, began to speculate upon our chances of finding treasure, and Hartog predicted that fortune stood upon the shores of one of these pleasant islands to welcome us, and send us home rich men.

"It is not in nature, Peter," he said to me, "that precious stones and metals exist only in the Old World. They are as much the elements of the earth as rocks and water. It only needs a patient search to discover a mine of wealth, as yet untouched by civilized man."

I did not like to discourage him, but, young as I was, I knew how fickle a jade is fortune, giving to one with both hands, and from another withholding that which he most deserves.

Besides, who could tell, among these countless islands or the Pacific, upon, which one Nature had lavished her wealth?

As we approached the land I noticed that Van Luck appeared to have lost the influence he had acquired over the crew, many of whom seemed now as anxious to avoid him as before they had been inclined to follow him. He was, therefore, left much to his own devices, which, from his surly manner, did not seem to be pleasant company.

"I am resolved, Peter," said Hartog to me, "not to return home without sufficient treasure, at all events, to pay for the expenses of this voyage. So make up your mind to grow old among savages unless luck brings us a ransom from this banishment. My reputation, nay more, my honour, is pledged not to go back empty-handed, and I'd face greater perils than any we have encountered sooner than tell those money-grubbers at Amsterdam their principal would not be returned to them with interest."

I could understand the captain's dilemma, but I sighed when I thought of the time that might elapse before I would again see my betrothed.

CHAPTER VIII

PEARL ISLAND

For some weeks after sighting the South Sea Islands we continued to cruise among them, visiting many places, some of which were unknown to former navigators.

The weather at this time was calm and fine, but one day when in the open sea a tempest drove us among a number of islands, most of which appeared to be little better than barren rocks. As we approached, however, we observed one of large size, mountainous, well wooded, and fertile, and here we hoped to find the fresh water and vegetable food of which we stood in need. On rounding a coral reef which made a natural breakwater, we anchored in a quiet bay opposite a beach, and a party of us made ready to go ashore.

The waters of this bay were blue as the sky above, and we could see in the depths below a marine garden of seaweed and coral, and what interested us more, a great quantity of pearl shell. As we rowed towards the shore the beach became thronged with natives who appeared by their gestures to be full of wonder at the sight of our vessel. The people here were of a light coffee colour, with wavy hair. The men, of large stature, well formed, and dressed with a degree of taste far in advance of any of the savages we had hitherto met with. Elaborate devices were tattooed upon the exposed parts of their bodies; a petticoat of finely-plaited cloth reached from waist to knee; beautiful necklets made from red and white coral hung round their necks; while their hair was frizzled like a mop upon their heads, powdered red or yellow. The women were similarly attired, save that their petticoats were longer and their hair hung straight, while the children went entirely naked except for garlands of bright flowers. No weapons were carried by these islanders, and upon landing we found them friendly, and inclined to offer us hospitality.

The houses in the town to which they welcomed us are of a beehive shape; the sides open during the day, but closed at nights by blinds made from the leaves of the coconut tree. The floor is formed of powdered white coral, and is very clean. The town was built in a semi-circle facing the beach. In the centre was the king's house, a building of the same construction as the others, but of larger size. Beautifully-made mats and wooden bowls formed the only furniture in these dwellings, some of the mats being trimmed with red feathers, while others resembled shaggy white wool rugs, which, on closer inspection, proved to be made from the bark of a dwarf hibiscus, with which the islands abound, bearing a bright red flower. The food of the islanders consists of fish, coconuts, taro, yams, and breadfruit, of which there is a plentiful supply.

In return for their hospitality, Hartog distributed among the natives pieces of bright-coloured cloth, beads, knives, and other trifles, which, in the eyes of these simple savages, were so many wonders hitherto undreamed of.

When we had been some days upon the island Hartog expressed to the king his desire to obtain the pearl shells of which we could see an abundance at the bottom of the bay, within easy reach of an expert diver, and as these islanders were as much at home in the water as upon land, we soon had a pile of shell upon the beach which some of the crew set to work

to open; but although we opened a great number of shells very few pearls were found, and none of any special value.

When the king observed what we were in search of he offered Hartog for his acceptance a number of pearls, some of large size and perfect colour, which from time to time he had collected.

"'Twill be enough to satisfy the merchants," said Hartog to me when he had safely locked up this treasure on board the "Endraght", "but nothing over, unless we can add to the collection by our own exertions." But although we continued to open shells for several days no great haul of pearls was made. The pearl shell we shipped, knowing that it would fetch a good price at Amsterdam.

Hartog was so relieved at having secured something that would repay the expenses of the voyage that he recovered his natural buoyancy of spirits which had lately been oppressed by the prospect of returning home empty-handed.

"'Tis wonderful, the power of money, Peter," he said to me one evening when we were counting, in secret, the pearls which the king of the island had given him; "we have come through some perils, as you know, but I give you my word I was never so afraid of anything as of going back without money's worth to satisfy the men who put their capital into this voyage. It was that which broke the great heart of Columbus, and I'd have become a pirate sooner than return empty-handed. The pious rogues who sent us out, and who never miss their churchgoing, would not have cared whence the money came so long as it filled their pouches."

Hartog had not confided the secret of the king's present to any but me, as he feared the crew, disappointed in the treasure hunt which they had been promised, might try to take forcible possession of it. He was so absorbed in counting the pearls and in speculating upon their value that he gave no heed to the possibility of being spied upon. But since I was to have no share in them, the pearls did not interest me as much as they did the captain, and I allowed my eyes to wander, when, in a flash of summer lightning, I saw the face of Van Luck looking down upon us from the skylight above our heads.

Making an excuse to go on deck, I stole cautiously up the companion-stairs, expecting to catch Van Luck red-handed in the act of playing the spy upon us, but when I reached the skylight I could see no sign of him. From where I stood, however, I was able to observe the captain counting the pearls, and I determined to warn him to have a cover made for the skylight, or a blind inside that might be drawn to ensure privacy. But I did not think it would be wise to say anything about my suspicion. It would be hard to prove, and might be set down to malice, though honestly I bore Van Luck no ill will.

CHAPTER IX

MUTINY

A month after leaving Pearl Island, when it became known to the crew of the "Endraght" that a course had been set for home without having obtained the treasure which had been the object of the voyage, the spirit of discontent in the fore-castle which had previously shown itself, became so marked as to threaten a mutiny. Had it not been that we held all the arms and ammunition aft, there would have been little doubt of the seamen refusing duty. As it was, they went about their work in so surly a manner, that if Hartog had not kept a check upon his temper, a serious outbreak on more than one occasion would have occurred.

"I cannot think what evil influence is at work among the men," said Hartog to me one evening, when we sat together alone in the cabin, for Van Luck, except at meals, seldom joined us. "As sailors, they ought to know that treasure hunts often prove disappointing, and they will each receive a good round sum in back pay when the crew is disbanded after the

voyage. What, then, would they gain by mutiny? Without a navigator they would either lose the ship, or, if they succeeded in making a port, they would become food for the galleys. Knowing sailors as I do, I cannot understand, in present circumstances, what it is that fosters rebellion, unless some influence is at work that we wot not of."

It was then that I thought it my duty to tell the captain of my suspicions regarding Van Luck, and of how I had seen him looking down upon us through the skylight at the counting of the pearls.

Hartog was amazed at such treachery on the part of his first officer. His own nature was so open that he found it hard to credit deception in others. My disclosures, however, enlightened him on much that was taking place, and he bade me keep him advised of anything further I might see or hear. To this end, I made frequent excuses for spending my time in the fore-castle among the men, pretending I found the companionship in the cabin irksome. I had not been long among them before I discovered a plot that was hatching to take the ship. Hartog and I, together with those who would not join in the mutiny, were to be set adrift with three days' provisions in one of the boats, when Van Luck would navigate the "Endraght" to the nearest port, promising to divide the pearls, the value of which he had greatly exaggerated, equally among all hands, share and share alike.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and I had no sooner divulged the plan of the mutineers to the captain than Hartog began to consider how we might meet the situation. Janstins, the pilot, the ship's carpenter, and three of the crew we knew we could depend upon, and they were instructed where to find arms and ammunition, and told to rally to us aft at the first signs of mutiny. Having completed these arrangements, Hartog's next step was to bring matters to a climax, for he argued rightly there was nothing to be gained, and much might be lost, by delay.

Stepping boldly upon his quarterdeck, he now issued his orders in his old peremptory style, and, upon one of the crew not moving smartly, he threatened him with a dozen at the ship's gratings. The man turned insolently, and demanded to know to whom Hartog was speaking, while, at the same moment Van Luck, who was standing near, remonstrated with the captain on the man's behalf. I had never seen Hartog really roused before. In two quick strides he was beside Van Luck, and picking him up as easily as if he had been a child, he flung him from the poop on to the deck below. At the same moment the mutineers made a rush aft, but those who were loyal to us were before them, and we presented such a formidable front that the rebels fell back, taking Van Luck with them. Hartog now turned the brass cannon, which had already been loaded upon the mutineers where they crowded together in the fore part of the vessel, swearing he would fire upon them if they did not instantly surrender. A hurried consultation followed, after which Van Luck stepped forward as spokesman. He complained that the crew had not been fairly dealt by. They had suffered much hardship, he said, and it was understood that all treasure obtained on the voyage was to be shared among them, whereas it appeared that the captain was concealing a parcel of pearls of sufficient value to make them all rich men. To this Hartog replied as follows:

"I am captain of this vessel, and I claim the right to do as I please. The pearls you speak of none of you helped to obtain, and they will be used to pay the expenses of the voyage, including what may be found to be due to each man as wages when the when the ship is paid off. As for you, Van Luck, who have acted the spy and played traitor, you may expect nothing from me but the fate you intended for those who have stood by me. The others may now return to duty."

It was then seen that Van Luck had no followers, for rebels are ever prone to abandon their leader when their cause is lost.

I would have pleaded with Hartog, even then, to spare Van Luck from being cast adrift upon the sea, but I knew no word of mine would change his purpose. Besides, an example must be made, and in the rough life we led the administration of justice was the prerogative of the captain alone. A boat was therefore prepared, three days' provisions were placed on board of her, and Van Luck was sent upon what promised to be his last voyage.

For as long as the boat remained in sight we could see that the castaway made no effort, either with the sail or the oars, to shape a course in any direction. He appeared to have abandoned hope, and to have made up his mind to let the wind and the waves carry him whithersoever they would. At length the boat appeared but a speck upon the ocean, and finally it vanished beyond the horizon.

For some time after the quelling of the mutiny Hartog maintained strict discipline among officers and crew, issuing his orders in the peremptory manner of one accustomed to command, and seldom speaking to any except upon matters connected with the ship. But when order was restored his mood changed, and we resumed our friendly chats together in the cabin. He never referred to Van Luck, whom he seemed to have wiped from the slate of his recollection, nor did he again allude to the mutiny. Once, when I touched upon it, he had cut me short, and I could see from his manner that all reference to it must henceforth be taboo. But I could not help sometimes recalling the picture of the boat with the solitary man on board of her, drifting upon the grey waste of sea, and I often wondered if Dirk Hartog had been able to obliterate that picture from his mind.

We now once more sailed in familiar waters, and passed many vessels as we neared home, where we arrived, without mishap, towards the end of the year 1620, after an absence of nearly five years, which was not regarded at that time as a voyage of unusual duration.

CHAPTER X

EMBARK ON A SECOND VOYAGE

On my arrival at Amsterdam I obtained leave from my master, De Decker, to visit my parents, and was received by them at my home at Urk with a great show of affection, which, however, I found to be somewhat lessened when it was known I had come back with empty pockets. My father urged me to give up the sea, and to stick more closely to the business of a merchant at Amsterdam, for which my education had fitted me, and my mother extorted from me a half-willing promise that I would follow my father's advice. I also met Anna Holstein, to whom I related my adventures; nor did I conceal from her that my worldly condition was not yet sufficiently improved to warrant my making formal proposals for her hand in marriage.

My mother pronounced my appearance much improved, when she heard of my attachment to Anna she declared me to be a fit mate for any lady in the land.

"Of a truth, Peter," she said, "thou art become a proper man, like thy father was before thee, and in my day a young man of spirit chose his wife where he would. My own parents made objections to my being married to your father without some payment to them in goods or money, to compensate for the expense of my upbringing. But Abel Van Bu, thy father, came to our house one June morning and bade me make ready to marry him that very day, a clerk in holy orders being come to Urk to mate together those islanders who were willing to be wed according to the rites of the Church, and Abel's manner was so masterful that neither I nor my parents dared say him nay. This is how I came to marry your father, my son, and were I a man such as thou, art, I would take the girl of my choosing, in the same manner as thy father did."

But although I laughingly agreed with my mother, I knew that such a way of proceeding would not answer with Anna Holstein. Anna was rich. It would have shamed me to go to her, a penniless husband. Still, love is blind, and that Anna and I loved each other was not to be denied; so, one evening, by the Zuider Zee, we once more plighted our troth.

It was then that Anna confided to me a trouble of which she had kept the knowledge secret, fearing it might vex me, to the neglect of my work at Amsterdam. I had become so absorbed in my love for her, that I had given no thought to the

question of others paying their court. Yet that such should be the case was but natural. Anna was young, beautiful, and wealthy, the only child of a proud noble, so that when Count Hendrick Luitken proposed for her, Anna's father regarded his suit with approval, and recommended him to his daughter's good graces. But Anna, whose heart was wholly mine, had evaded the Count's attentions, although she dared not openly reject him, lest the clandestine love we bore each other might become known by reason of too close questioning, so she had been compelled to play the part of a wilful maid who did not know her own mind, and could not be made to see how advantageous the alliance proposed for her would be.

"I could never marry anyone but you, Peter," she whispered to me, as we sat together on the terrace of the palace by the Zuider Zee, after she had confided to me her anxieties, "but I find it hard to keep up the deception that I am heart-whole and fancy-free, and yet indifferent to Count Hendrick's attentions. Indeed, my father openly upbraids me with being fickle, inconstant, unmaidenly, and I know not what besides, until I am driven to my wit's end to keep the peace between us. Yet I doubt not, if he knew the truth, he would marry me willy-nilly to Count Hendrick Luitken by force."

"Then it would be to a corpse he would marry you," I cried, "for sooner than see you wedded to Count Luitken I would strangle him with my bare hands if he refused to meet me as an equal in fair fight."

"Dear Peter," whispered Anna, as she nestled closer to me, "if I cannot marry you I'll marry none other, and the Church does not now sanction marriage vows given unwillingly. If they drive me to it I can at least seek the cloister or the grave."

"Do not speak so, dear Anna," I entreated. "We are both young, and by patience and industry I may yet win a place in the world."

But although I spoke hopefully I could see but little prospect of my advancement at Amsterdam. My master, De Decker, the merchant, in whose house I was employed, told me plainly that I need expect nothing more than a clerkship so long as I remained in his service. His son, then a boy at school, would inherit his business, and it might be many years before I could hope to buy a partnership in it. De Decker's business at this time, moreover, was not in a very flourishing condition. It seemed, therefore, not improbable that I would lose my clerkship unless it improved.

In these circumstances I was approached by Dirk Hartog some twelve months after the return of the "Endraght", who offered to take me as first officer on the "Arms of Amsterdam", a new vessel upon which he was about to make a second voyage of discovery to the South.

"It is not because we met no luck with the 'Endraght' that there is nothing to be gained, Peter," he said. "There is an island I have heard of which, if we can strike it, will make us rich men. Nothing venture, nothing win, and there is little prospect here for a man like you to make money by quill-driving."

His words impressed me, as well they might, for the love of adventure was strong within me, and I reflected that in my present calling of a merchant's clerk I could not hope to obtain an independence for many years---perhaps not at all. De Decker, also, appeared anxious that I should go. The sale of the pearls which the king of Pearl Island had given Hartog had more than repaid the merchants for sending out the "Endraght", and with the "Arms of Amsterdam" they hoped to accumulate further treasure. I was influenced also by Hartog's description of the Island of Gems, and the more I thought of the offer he had made me the more I liked it. Finally, I agreed to sign on for this second voyage, and, taking leave of Anna and my parents, I embarked upon the "Arms of Amsterdam", and set sail once more for southern seas.

CHAPTER XI

A SECOND VOYAGE WITH HARTOG TO THE SOUTH

For three months after leaving the North Sea we sailed south, meeting with no land until we sighted a group of islands which Hartog believed to be the group that the Spaniard Cortes attempted to explore in 1519, when one of his ships was burned by the hostile natives, while he and his crew escaped with difficulty in the other vessel. These islands are mountainous, well wooded, and apparently fertile. In most places that we saw the trees were very thick, with spreading branches, in which we perceived houses to be built, which looked like the nests of some large bird. We approached the land with caution, for we knew from experience that the tides in the vicinity of the South Sea Islands are very irregular, and seem to be much affected by the prevailing winds and currents. There is only one tide in the twenty-four hours. The flood-tide sets to the north, and the ebb to the south. It therefore behoved us to choose a safe anchorage, which, after consultation, we finally decided upon, selecting a spot sheltered from the prevailing wind, in deep water, close to a beach and opposite to a stream.

Two boats were then lowered and manned, Hartog taking charge of one and I of the other. The natives, who had assembled in great numbers on the beach, did not appear so surprised at the sight of our vessel as might have been expected. As the boats drew near, some of them waded out to meet us, showing no fear, but rather an anxiety to welcome us. They were all entirely naked except for a strip of tapa cloth, which formed a tee-band around the middle and hung down behind like a tail. This was probably the reason for the reports given by the earlier navigators of the existence of tailed men in these regions.

Some of the natives wore feathers in their hair, and all had fish bones thrust through the cartilage of the nose, which gave them a ferocious aspect. Even young boys wore sticks in the same fashion. The women were attired in petticoats of white tapa cloth, which hung down in strips from a girdle round their waists.

Before trusting ourselves among these savages we gave them, as peace offerings, coloured beads and bright pieces of cloth. Our presents were well received, but immediately on becoming possessed of them the natives laid them at the feet of a young man who stood apart from the crowd, surrounded by several tall and fierce-looking savages. From this we concluded the young man to be the king of the country, though we wondered he should be so young, as the leadership amongst savages generally goes to the strongest.

We then showed the natives our water-casks, and, pointing to a stream close by, made them understand we desired to fill them, to which they offered no objection, so that we at once began to water the ship. When we had finished our task we were invited by signs to go to the king, and, being well armed against treachery, we boldly marched up in a body to the king's house, which we found to be an immense building, nearly 300 feet long and 30 feet wide. It had a high peaked portico, supported by posts 80 feet high, from which a thatched roof narrowed and tapered away to the end, where it reached the level of the ground. The house resembled nothing so much as an enormous telescope, and here the king lived with his numerous wives and families, together with all his relatives and immediate retainers.

From the knowledge I had picked up on my travels, particularly during the time I was captive among the black cannibals of New Holland, I had acquired the art of understanding, either by words or signs, what savage people wished, by their language, to convey, which to most would have been unintelligible, and from what I could gather it appeared that the young king, who had but lately inherited his kingdom from his father, whose tomb, perched on the top of a tree, was pointed out to us, was threatened with war by a neighbouring chief, the former king's hereditary enemy, and that if we would help him vanquish his opponent he was willing to hand over to us the property of other white men which had been left upon the island in years gone by.

When I had imparted this proposition, so far as I was able to understand it, to Hartog, he expressed a wish to see the white men's treasure, and on my repeating this request to the king's councillors, we were invited to accompany them to a

part of the island where we were shown what were undoubtedly the remains of Cortes' vessel, the one that was burnt and abandoned to the savages. There did not at first sight appear to be anything of value among the ancient relics, but I noticed some iron boxes, which had rusted at the locks, so that it became difficult to open them. With the aid of a crowbar, however, which I sent for from the ship, we were able to prise the lid off one of them, when it was found to be filled with Spanish money, much gold coin being amongst it. There were twelve iron boxes, and we reckoned that each box contained money to the value of two thousand English pounds. At the sight of this treasure Hartog readily consented to assist the king of the islands against his enemies by every means in his power, and an agreement was come to accordingly. Hartog then ordered the specie to be taken on board, when we attended a council of the chiefs to ascertain the part it was proposed for us to play in the war, I acting as interpreter.

It then appeared that a number of canoes were expected shortly to arrive from the adjacent islands. They would be met by the young king's fleet, when a naval battle would take place; but the issue was doubtful, since the hostile chief possessed many more canoes than the young king did. It was to neutralize this disadvantage that our services were required.

Now the "Arms of Amsterdam" was a more powerful vessel than the "Endraght", mounting four guns, so we had little doubt but that we would be able to render valuable assistance to the young king in the defence of his country, and having pledged ourselves to support him we returned to our ship, well pleased with our adventure.

Next day the beating of war drums and much commotion ashore announced the approach of the enemy fleet, and having loaded our cannon we stood out to meet them. Twenty war canoes belonging to the king, each containing 100 men armed with spears and clubs, put off to take part in the battle. They were far outnumbered, however, by the hostile fleet, which now approached. At the sight of our ship the oncoming war canoes appeared to hesitate, and for some minutes ceased rowing, but presently they advanced again in the form of a crescent, evidently intending by their superior line of battle to surround us. We were now midway between the opposing fleets, and when the enemy canoes were well within range Hartog delivered a broadside, which had the most remarkable effect ever witnessed in a naval engagement. Not wishing to kill the natives if it could be avoided, since the quarrel was not ours, Hartog directed that the first broadside should be fired over the heads of the advancing savages, but the result was the same as if we had sunk or crippled the hostile fleet. At the flash and sound of the cannon, with black smoke rolling across the water towards them, the savages turned and fled, driving their canoes back to the place whence they had come at a pace which sent the foam flying from the paddles. But the most unexpected part of our interference was that the savages on board the king's canoes appeared to be as terrified as were the enemy, for they also turned and fled towards the shore. So we had the satisfaction of seeing the opposing fleets flying from each other without blood being shed.

Having thus brought matters to a satisfactory conclusion, and fulfilled our agreement with the young king to drive off the enemy fleet, we continued our voyage, well satisfied with our first transaction.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEA SERPENT

For some days after leaving Cortes' island the weather continued fine and the sea calm, but a strong breeze then springing up from the north-west made it necessary to shorten sail. While so engaged we sighted a number of whales, which swam to meet us. Never before had I seen so strange a spectacle. Their vast numbers, their great bulk, and their quick evolutions impressed me with wonder.

The whales in these parts are fearless of man. They have not yet learned to regard him as an enemy. This fearlessness, however, although remarkable, was not to our liking, for some of the whales came so close to us that our decks were

often deluged by the water which they spouted upon them.

One day, some little time after this adventure, the weather having moderated to a calm, a number of ripples appeared upon the sea, which at first we took to be a breeze, but on drifting among them we found the phenomenon to be caused by a number of water snakes, varying in size from a few inches to many feet in length. Some of them appeared to be asleep, whilst others reared their heads at us, although they made no attempt to attack us. Suddenly they disappeared, as though scared by the approach of a common enemy.

We had now been for some days becalmed, and at length we began to fear we had drifted into a dead sea, where the wind never rose, and the currents ran in a circle. The sun by day blistered the decks so that the tar bubbled in the seams. The nights were more tolerable, but the air below had become so foul that the cabins were deserted for the open. A musty smell rose out of the water, and made it hard to breathe the oppressive atmosphere. We lay about the deck exhausted, like a company of sick men.

One night the watch came aft to where Hartog and I were trying to obtain some rest, with the report that a monstrous shape had been noticed passing under the vessel, and on looking to leeward we could see that the water was agitated by some large body. Hartog inclined to the belief that the disturbance was caused by a number of whales, the one following the other, but the men declared the shape they had seen was a monster of amazing proportions. Both Hartog and the men were equally resolved upon their respective theories; but while they were arguing the matter, and the dawn being now come, all doubts were set at rest by the appearance of a prodigy so incredible that I scarce dare set down, in this plain tale, a description of it. Within fifty yards from the vessel a serpent's head, not unlike those we had seen, but infinitely larger, rose above the surface of the water, and presently a great water-snake began to swim slowly round our ship in decreasing circles. Its length could not have been less than 200 feet, while its girth, in the middle, was almost that of a fair-sized whale, tapering towards the head and tail. Lashing the sea around it into foam, the serpent drew closer until it looked as though it would crush the ship in its folds. Hartog, the only man amongst us who preserved his presence of mind, ordered our guns to be loaded and fired at the monster. This was done, but our broadside had no more effect upon the leviathan than to cause it to swerve from its circling movement, when it made off with incredible speed towards the horizon, whence it returned apparently bent upon destroying us.

We now gave ourselves up for lost, when suddenly out of the sea rose another huge bulk, resembling the sea-spider which had carried off poor Moira, but ten times larger, when a combat ensued between the leviathans which created waves around our vessel, and caused her to rock and plunge as in a storm. The battle raged for the best part of an hour, and sometimes when the monsters came near it seemed likely that the ship would be swamped by the volume of water which they lashed into the air. Suddenly the combat terminated by both monsters disappearing into the depths without our being able to ascertain which had proved the victor.

So that some record of this remarkable combat might be preserved, I set down upon paper a description of it, intending to deposit it among the public archives on my return home. I had read that such leviathans existed, and had been seen by early Phoenician mariners, though I had always regarded their existence more in the light of fable than fact.

And now, a breeze springing up, we were once more enabled to continue our voyage. Some of the crew were anxious to return home in order to spend their share of the Spanish money found on Cortes' island, but Hartog would not consent to such a proposal. He had set his heart upon finding the Island of Gems, of the existence of which he was firmly convinced, though our chances of finding it among the numerous islands of the South Seas appeared remote. The captain, however, would have his way, and a course was set accordingly. We were soon again among the islands, where we found the people more intelligent than those upon the continent of New Holland. Their language, although consisting of many dialects, possessed some universal key words, of which, by this time, I had acquired a knowledge which enabled me to make myself understood of the various tribes of savages we met with, and to understand also their meaning when

they wanted to convey it to us. To this I attributed the friendly reception which, on the whole, was given to us. Attacks upon strangers, made by these savages, are not so much from any natural hostility towards them as from an inability to understand that they intend no harm---consequently I was generally able to establish friendly intercourse between us and the tribes we visited. Besides this, our ship possessed such a powerful armament that, if molested, we had no fear but that we would be able to protect ourselves.

We made many inquiries from the savages concerning the Island of Gems, but none seemed to have heard of it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FLOATING ISLAND

Soon after leaving the islands of the South Seas we encountered heavy weather, a tempest, the worst we had experienced, driving us before it to the south. The storm lasted for more than a week without abatement, and during this time we covered many leagues of sea. Owing to the sun being obscured, it was impossible to ascertain our whereabouts, but Hartog reckoned we had passed through the Straits set down on an early chart as named after Le Maire. But for skilful handling we would have lost our ship, so prolonged was the gale, and when, at length, the weather moderated, we found that much damage had been done to our rigging and deck-gear. This made it necessary for us to effect repairs, and while so engaged we continued to run before the wind to the south. As we proceeded, the cold became intense, while the wind gradually decreased. One morning, at sunrise, a snow-covered land rose before our astonished eyes. The sun shining upon it produced an effect which, for beauty, I had never seen, equalled. Immense ranges of mountains rose from a flat surface, their summits lost in fleecy clouds, while from one of the mountain tops, incredible as it may appear, belched smoke and fire as from the crater of an active volcano. It may well be believed with what astonishment we beheld a burning mountain in the midst of snow and ice. We coasted for some distance along the shore of this new continent, which formed an ice barrier rising in a long perpendicular line from the sea, making a landing impossible.

When the repairs to our ship had been effected, we hauled our wind, and stood away northward, when we found ourselves surrounded by masses of floating ice. In no record of any voyage that Hartog or I knew of is any mention made of this phenomenon, so we concluded we were the first to see it. The farther we went the more numerous became the icebergs, and the more difficult the navigation owing to fogs and mists. The whole surface of the water as far as the eye could reach was covered by dense masses of ice, and had not the breeze freshened so that we were able to avoid the ice pack, we might never have made our way to the open sea. Some of the icebergs were beautifully formed, and the countless prisms of which they were composed glowed in the sun's rays with the delicate colour of the rainbow.

Next day the wind had fallen to a calm, and we rode upon a sea of glass. We had left the pack ice, but before us stretched an island of such extent that the end of it could not be seen. This island rose to the height of twenty feet. It was perfectly flat, with steep, perpendicular sides, which made it inaccessible to man. From the masthead, however, it was possible to observe its surface, which we saw to be covered by a vast number of penguins, so we knew a landing must be available somewhere, for these birds are wingless. This island was composed entirely of ice, it being, as Hartog reckoned, a glacier which had broken off from the main continent into the sea. It was drifting north, and would gradually melt in the warmer atmosphere to which the current was taking it, but many years must elapse before this would happen.

That evening we remained in the vicinity of the island. The twilight of this region in which we now found ourselves continued without fading into night, and to add to the beauty of the scene an aureola appeared in the sky. It was a sight, once seen, never to be forgotten. A world of perpetual day.

With the return of sunlight Hartog determined, if possible, to effect a landing, and leaving the "Arms of Amsterdam" in charge of Janstins, the cutter was manned, in which the captain and I set out for the shore. After pulling for some

distance; and when almost out of sight of our ship, we came to a kind of platform where the ice was broken, making it possible to climb to the top of the island. We had no sooner set foot there than we were surrounded by penguins. They came waddling towards us in the most comical fashion, nor were they in the least afraid of us. The presence of man for the first time in these latitudes appeared to inspire them more with curiosity than alarm.

The attentions shown us by these remarkable birds, however, soon caused us considerable inconvenience. They crowded upon us in such numbers that it was difficult to force our way through them, either farther on to the island or back to the boat. Some of them stood four feet high, and although they made no attempt to molest us, the bulk of their bodies (the ones at the back pressing upon those in front) made it difficult to push by. It was like passing along a densely-crowded thoroughfare. So numerous became the penguins that Hartog ordered a return to the boat. We did not like to kill these birds, as they appeared harmless, and the trust they showed in us was surprising. When we came to the landing place we found it covered with small fur-coated seals, who also showed no fear of us, and made no attempt to escape when we approached them. The skins of these creatures we knew to be rare and of value, so we were impelled to slaughter some of them for their fur coats, and also to give us a supply of fresh meat; but their large brown eyes looked at us so sorrowfully when we attacked them that we had not the heart to kill more than was necessary for our immediate needs. It was too much like murder.

The penguins followed us down to the landing-place, until it was full to overflowing. Some of the birds pushed the others into the water in their eagerness to witness the killing of the seals, which they appeared to be discussing with much interest.

A breeze springing up, we returned to the ship, and toward evening, still steering northward, the floating island was lost to view.

We were now in better spirits than heretofore. We had filled our water tanks from the ice floes, and supplied ourselves with sufficient fresh seal meat to last until we came to a warmer climate, to begin again our search for the Island of Gems. The men we had with us upon this voyage were a better class than were the crew of the "Endraght", and we had no fear of mutiny. There were grumblings occasionally at the length of the voyage, but these vanished at each fresh adventure. Sailors, as a rule, are easily led, and if there is no evil influence at work among them they seldom incline to mutiny when they know that the safety of all depends upon discipline and obedience to the captain's orders.

CHAPTER XIV

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

Most of the islands we visited on our return to the South Seas we found to be inhabited. But some, although well-wooded, and possessing a luxuriant vegetation, were unoccupied except by sea-fowl. It was toward one of these islands we now directed our course in order to fill our water tanks, when we observed a solitary figure upon the beach whose hair and beard hung down in a tangled mass upon his chest and shoulders, while the skins of some small fur-coated animal, roughly sewn together, made him a covering for his body unlike any we had seen adopted by savage tribes. His attitude, moreover, as he stood upon the beach, shading his eyes and gazing intently at us as we rowed towards the shore, suggested the European rather than, the savage, and upon coming close up to him we knew him to be some castaway marooned upon the island. He appeared to have lost the power of speech, although he made guttural sounds when he saw us, and, what was more remarkable, he seemed to recognize us.

It then came to me in a flash that this solitary man was none other than Van Luck, whom we had last seen drifting away from the "Endraght" upon his lonely voyage after the mutiny, and, in pity at the sight of his forlorn condition, I held out my hand to him in reconciliation. So great, however, was his hatred of me, which he had probably nursed, that, instead

of taking my hand, he rushed upon me and tried to strangle me, in which he might have succeeded had not others of our party come to my assistance. He seemed demented, and he had acquired such strength during his exile that it was as much as four men could do to hold him down. But, notwithstanding his unprovoked attack upon me, I felt I could not abandon him again to his solitude. I therefore ordered him to be taken on board our vessel, where Hartog would be the judge of his ultimate fate.

Hartog's surprise at seeing his old officer in such a deplorable condition was equal to my own, but the terrible change which years of solitude had wrought in Van Luck appealed to the humane side of the captain's nature so forcibly that he determined to give the castaway a chance of redemption.

After some days, during which Van Luck was cared for, he began to regain some semblance to his former self. He also, by degrees, remembered his native tongue, but he spoke in a halting manner like a child. While we remained at this island we visited the cave in which Van Luck had lived during the time he had been marooned. It contained nothing belonging to the boat in which he had been set adrift, from which we inferred the boat had been lost at the time when he was washed ashore. He seemed to have subsisted chiefly upon turtles, of which there were numbers basking upon the beach, and also upon a small species of squirrel, of the skins of which, roughly sewn together, his robe was made, but we could find no sign of a fire, so we concluded he had devoured his food raw. There were streams and springs on the islands from which to quench his thirst, but his sufferings must have been very severe during his enforced solitude, nor was it a matter for wonder that his mind had become deranged.

But although Hartog took pity upon Van Luck to the extent of taking him off the island, he would not admit him to his old place in the cabin at the officers' mess, so he lived with the seamen in the fore-castle, where his jealousy wanted to send me on our first voyage. This, however, did not seem to trouble him. He seldom spoke, but went about such work as was given him without complaint. Sometimes he would stand for hours watching the sea, with his hand shading his eyes, in the same attitude as we had found him.

I could see that Hartog was troubled by this man's appearance, as indeed was I also. It seemed a reproach to us to have been the means of bringing a fellow-creature into such a condition. Yet we had acted as necessity demanded and in no spirit of malice or revenge. Still, the consequences which had sprung from my fight with Van Luck and his subsequent part in the mutiny were not such as we cared to contemplate. If judges could see those whom they sentence after they have endured their punishment they would pause before passing fresh sentences upon wrongdoers, however guilty.

I could see that Van Luck attributed to me all his misfortunes, for he watched me closely, but when I spoke to him he shifted his gaze uneasily, as though afraid to look me in the face. I can honestly say I felt nothing but pity for him, and I made allowance for his animosity toward me when I remembered his cruel punishment.

"Of a truth, Peter," said Hartog to me one evening when we sat together in the cabin, "I had better have shot Van Luck than let him live to become what he is. Never again will I send a man adrift upon such a voyage, though by all the rules of the sea the mutinous dog deserved what he got for his treachery. It was not his fault that you and I were not marooned instead of him."

I did not answer, but had I then known the malice in Van, Luck toward me, of which I shall hereafter tell, the compassion which I felt for him would have been lessened.

CHAPTER XV

THE SEAWEED SEA

Of all the adventures through which we had passed, perhaps there was none so dangerous as that which now befell us. We had shaped our course to the east, on the look-out for a new group of islands, among which Hartog expected to find the Island of Gems, when, one morning, we observed the horizon to have assumed a black look as though a storm was brewing, but on nearing this phenomenon, we found it to consist of an immense growth of seaweed floating upon the ocean, and extending as far as the eye could reach.

The course we were steering would have carried us into the midst of the weed, so we hauled our wind, and coasted along it to the south, hoping either to find an opening through which we might pass, or to come to the end of the floating mass, but the farther we proceeded the thicker the weed became, while other masses now appeared to larboard, so that we feared we might be enmeshed in such a manner that we would find it impossible to extricate ourselves. I had read of a sea covered by a weed which held ships entangled as in a net, and I feared that this was the danger into which fate had now led us. Portions of the kelp detached from the main mass, which floated alongside the ship, proved it to be a growth of extraordinary strength, the weed extending twenty feet and more below the surface of the water, and being so tough that two of our men between them were unable to break a specimen we drew on board, so that if we should become entangled in the kelp, we knew that death by slow starvation, when our provisions were exhausted, would await us.

During the day upon which we first sighted this phenomenon we attempted every manoeuvre of navigation to keep the ship clear of the weed, but in spite of all we could do, and the ceaseless watch Hartog and I between us kept on deck, the dawn of the next day found the ship as stationary as though we had run ashore.

"Nothing but a gale from the right quarter can save us, Peter," said Hartog when we held a consultation together in the cabin, "and even a gale will not help us unless it comes soon and before the weed gathers."

I knew what he said was plain truth, yet I advised we should keep a brave face before the men, as nothing would be gained by provoking a scare.

Notwithstanding our assumed cheerfulness, however, we could see the crew were becoming alarmed, and as each day added to the accumulation of the weed which collected between us and the open sea, anxious looks were turned to the horizon in the hope of detecting the long-expected breeze.

So as to give the men occupation, and prevent their brooding, Hartog gave directions to man the boats in order that an attempt might be made to tow the ship through the weed, but after two days' fruitless effort the attempt was abandoned. It was dreadful to contemplate our impotence in the face of this danger, which hourly grew upon us. The seaweed, in itself so harmless that it becomes the sport of children when washed ashore upon the beaches at home, here, in its original and monstrous growth became more terrifying than all the Leviathans of the deep. There was something irresistible in this brown mantle which drew its folds so silently and yet so surely around us that even Dirk Hartog's indomitable spirit quailed at the thought of what might be before us. "What demon led us hither, Peter?" he said to me when a week had passed, and we still rode motionless in the grip of the seaweed. "Of all the perils which mariners must face, whoever heard of a ship's company being brought to their doom by floating kelp?"

I told him of the sea of which I had read, and which I believed we had come to. He listened to me with patience, and then relapsed into a reverie, from which I found it impossible to arouse him.

On coming on deck I detected Van Luck at his old game of sowing discord among the men. They did not, however, appear to pay much attention to what he said. He had now no authority over them, and none but Janstins and Bantum, who were with us on this second voyage, remembered him as the first officer of the "Endraght". The ingratitude of the man, however, after the consideration we had shown him, angered me, and I spoke to him roughly, and ordered him to quit the deck.

"Take heed," I warned him, "that I do not have you put in irons, or sent adrift upon a second voyage."

Van Luck obeyed me with a scowl, and slunk below, but I could see an evil light in his eyes which I attributed to madness, though I was subsequently to learn there was much method in it. I did not like to add to Hartog's anxieties by telling him of Van Luck's conduct, and, indeed, when I considered our present predicament, it seemed unlikely that Van Luck, or anybody else, could do us much harm or good.

And now another event occurred to add to our perplexities. The kelp around the vessel suddenly became alive with a small species of black crab. These creatures must have scented the food from our vessel, and they came in millions to besiege us in order to devour it. The deck was soon black with them, and they swarmed below in ever-increasing numbers. Nothing escaped them, and most of our provisions were quickly demolished. We killed them in thousands, and the stench from their crushed bodies almost drove us out of our minds, but other thousands quickly filled their places, and the crustaceans continued to pour down the hatches like black streams of evil-smelling water.

But this visitation, dreadful though it was, eventually proved our salvation. The weed, now alive with marine life, lost its density, and when, at length, the breeze came, we could feel we were making headway. But had we not been able to force our passage into the open I verily believe we would all have been devoured alive by black crabs, which swarmed upon us. As it was, many of the men suffered severely from the bites of these creatures, and weeks elapsed before the ship was clear of them and the stench which they had brought aboard. But when the breeze freshened from the right quarter, and we felt our vessel moving toward the open sea, we were too thankful for our escape from a horrible death to think of the lesser evils from which we suffered, though the destruction of such a considerable quantity of our stores was a serious loss, and set Hartog thinking as to whether our immediate return to Amsterdam was not imperative.

"I had made up my mind for another year in these latitudes, Peter," he said, "and I am loath to go back without setting foot upon the Island of Gems, but man is but a straw in the hands of Destiny, and who am I to set myself against the decrees of Fate?" So with mixed feelings of disappointment and pleasure we once more found ourselves homeward bound.

I had hoped that from this voyage I might return a rich man, able to make honourable proposals to Count Holstein for his daughter's hand, but it seemed now that fortune was not to be won so easily. My share of the treasure found on Cortes' island might enrich me sufficiently to buy a small interest in my master's business, but this was all I could hope for, and the bright dreams which Hartog and I had formed of the Island of Gems seemed about to dissolve, as is the way with phantoms, into thin air.

But who can trace the course of Destiny, or fathom the mysteries of Fate?

CHAPTER XVI

THE ISLAND OF GEMS

For some weeks after getting free from the kelp we experienced fine weather, with favourable winds and a smooth sea, when, almost without warning, a storm broke upon us with hurricane force. All hands were ordered to shorten sail, no easy task in the fury of a gale. As chief officer I took command in the fore part of the vessel, while Hartog issued his orders aft. The sea ran so high, often breaking over the bows and swamping the decks, that I ordered the men to attach themselves by lifelines to the foremast, and I also secured myself in the same way. As sometimes happens at sea in the heart of a storm, a succession of rollers followed each other, making it impossible to do more than hang on until they pass, and during one of these intervals I observed Van Luck, whose presence I had forgotten in the hurry of the moment, standing by the foremast with a knife in his hand. I was powerless to reach him from where I stood, and a moment later

the lifeline which held me to the foremast was severed, when, despite a desperate effort which I made to retain my hold, I was swept into the sea.

For a time, which seemed to me an eternity, I was under water, but when I rose to the surface I could see the ship at some distance from me, fighting her way through the storm. I was almost suffocated by the spray which continually blew over me, and the heavy sea boots which I wore, filling with water, threatened to drag me down. I had given myself up for lost, when I noticed a spar floating near, which must have been washed overboard with me, and, making an effort, I succeeded in laying hold of it, so that I managed to keep afloat. Thus holding to the spar and swimming, sometimes with one hand and sometimes with the other, I kept my head above water until my feet touched ground, when I waded upon the shore of an island, where I fell down exhausted, and for the time lost consciousness.

When I came to myself it was almost dark. I had fortunately been carried by a current upon the leeward side of the island, so that I was protected from the wind and sea, but my limbs felt numb and cold, while the blood coursed feebly in my veins. I felt too weary to move, and presently I fell asleep, from which I awoke, as I judged, about midnight, much refreshed.

I was now once more haunted by the thought of being marooned in a strange country, so that I remained awake, bemoaning my fate and blaming myself for not having taken better precautions against such a mishap. These reflections led me so far that I began to form a project against my life, but the dawn dissipated my gloomy ideas, when I made up my mind to trust to Providence, which had protected me through so many perils.

I then mounted the high land to scan the horizon, but no sign of the ship could I see, so I knew myself to be again a castaway. The island appeared to be one of considerable size, very fertile and well watered. The verdure inland was unusually luxuriant, even for the tropics. From the centre of the island rose a mountain, with a smoke-cloud banging upon it, which proved it to be an active volcano.

The storm had passed, and the weather was pleasant, the heat not excessive, being tempered with a land breeze. I descended after a while into a valley, where I noticed a number of fresh-water ponds, at one of which I knelt down to drink, when I perceived a prodigious quantity of bivalve shells of one single species, which formed a kind of beach, in breadth about fifteen feet. The water in the pond was clear, and although it was deep, the sand and shells at the bottom of it were easily seen.

Whilst I was admiring their beauties I was startled by the approach of a party of natives, the leader of whom, a tall, muscular savage, marched in front of the others, who followed him with some degree of order. From the crown of his head to his waist he was plastered with a red pigment, his frizzled-out hair being ornamented with the plumes of the bird of Paradise. His dress, composed of tapa cloth, shells, and feathers, was more elaborate than any I had seen in the islands. In his hand he carried a spear tipped with white quartz. His followers were decked in similar fashion. Raising his right arm in token of friendship, an overture to which I responded, the chief then addressed me in the same dialect to that used at Cortes' island, which I had little difficulty in understanding, although some of the words puzzled me.

"Whence come you?" said he. "From the sun or the sea?"

"From the sea, O chief, whither I will return when my friends, the white spirits, come for me," I answered.

This reply did not seem to surprise my interrogator, who now desired me to follow him. After proceeding for some distance through a luxuriant forest we came to what appeared to be the gates of a town. Two large perpendicular stones rose to the height of fourteen feet above the ground. These pillars must have been twelve feet through at the base, and five feet on top, while a still larger stone, some sixteen feet long and four feet thick, was mortised into the perpendicular

columns. It was difficult to understand how such huge stones could be quarried and transported inland by a people possessing so few mechanical appliances as these savages, but to my inquiry regarding this curious gateway I was answered that the stones had been there as long as any could remember, having been placed in position by supernatural agency.

At the gate of the city crouched some miserable specimens of humanity: old men and women, haggard, shrivelled, and naked. These unfortunates, I afterwards learned, were the aged and infirm, too feeble to perform their share of the work of the tribe and condemned to remain at the gateway, dependent for food upon such charity as might be given them. On entering the town we passed a number of warriors, all fine, athletic men, dressed in the same style as those who accompanied us, and painted with stripes of red, yellow, and white pigment.

I was now received by a commanding figure, whom I took to be the king. He was even more gorgeously dressed than the others, with strings of bright stones round his neck and Paradise plumes in his hair, while upon his head was a circlet composed of human teeth, set in clay, in the centre of which glowed an opal of extraordinary fire. His face was sullen and cruel, and his hazel eyes, with their dark lashes and yellow-tinged whites, gave to his countenance an expression scarcely human. Near to him stood a group of young men, their bodies plastered with a bright red pigment, who appeared to be his personal attendants, or slaves.

This savage now addressed me, asking the same questions as the other chief, to which I returned similar answers. I was then led to a house with a beehive-shaped roof, where food was brought to me, consisting of coconuts and bananas, with a luscious kind of fruit I had never before tasted, but which I found very palatable. After my meal I was taken before the queen.

CHAPTER XVII

QUEEN MELANNIE

The queen was white---indeed very pale---with large dark eyes, and brown hair that hung down in its natural beauty, untouched by the pigments with which the savages convert their own hair into mops. She was dressed in a robe of white tapa cloth with strings of bright shells and gold ornaments upon her neck and arms. Upon her head was a diadem of white clay encrusted with uncut gems. The throne upon which she sat was of polished marble. Her left hand rested upon the woolly head of a black boy, who showed his white teeth as we entered. In her right hand she carried a human skull. The queen, though very beautiful, looked sad. She could not have been more than eighteen years old, and it was evident she came from European descent, and was in no way related to the savages by whom she was surrounded.

And now I bethought me if I would gain favour I must make a present to the queen, and remembering a small mirror I had with me, set in a silver frame, which Anna had given me as a parting gift, I took it from my pocket and presented it to Queen Melannie, the name by which her people addressed her. It cost me a pang to part with it, but I reflected that if these savages killed me, as seemed likely unless I could ingratiate myself with them, the mirror would, with equal certainty, pass into their hands as if I voluntarily surrendered it.

The queen uttered an exclamation of surprise when she caught sight of her face in the looking glass, nor could some of her attendants who stood near resist the temptation to look over her shoulder in order to see the reflection of their own faces also. Nothing that I could have given the queen would have pleased her more. My present at once brought me into favour, for all appeared to regard such a prodigy as the work of immortals.

Queen Melannie, having appropriated Anna's mirror, and finding I understood what she said to me, then dismissed her attendants and invited me to a private audience. I asked her how she, a white lady, came to be among savages, but she

could tell me nothing except that she remembered standing upon the beach as a child, alone, when it was very cold, and that she cried very much, until the natives had brought her into this house, where she had been reared and cared for ever since.

"They tell me I was born of the sea," she said, "but I do not believe that, for I seem to remember other faces, like yours, before I came here."

It was then plain to me that this poor girl had been shipwrecked as a child, and cast upon this island. It was sad to think that one so beautiful should be condemned to live among savages, but I reflected that my own case was no better, for it seemed unlikely I would return to civilization. Melannie appeared to place full confidence in me from our first meeting.

"I am not really queen," she said. "Ackbau is king, and I must do as he tells me. He makes me speak his words, but sometimes I would rather not say what he bids me."

I sympathized with her, for I could readily understand why this Ackbau, who was the chief before whom I had been taken, chose her to be his mouthpiece. She had become a goddess to the tribe, and it was thought she could speak nothing wrong. So that by using her as his medium Ackbau gained his ends without accepting responsibility.

Whilst I was talking to the queen I could not help admiring the jewels in her diadem, and seeing I was pleased with them she invited me to accompany her to a rock cavern near to her dwelling, where I saw such an accumulation of wealth that I began to picture myself among the richest of men. The floor of this cave was carpeted with gold dust, and nuggets of the same precious metal were piled high against its walls. But what caused me to rub my eyes in wonder was a slab of opal, which seemed ablaze with the fire it contained. Upon this priceless table were strewn a collection of gems, which, from the knowledge I had acquired in De Decker's office at Amsterdam, I knew to be of great value, but which did not appear to be so regarded by the queen, for when she had presented me with a double handful she still seemed to consider herself in my debt for the mirror and some other trifles I had given her. I now knew that I had come to the Island of Gems of which Hartog had spoken. But, alas! of what use was all this wealth, since I could not spend it in this place, and it seemed improbable I would ever go back to my own country?

Melannie now returned to her dwelling, which I subsequently found she seldom left, except at night, which accounted for the fairness of her skin. All festivals were held at night, by moonlight, and what struck me as peculiar was the absence of fire. Fish and shellfish were eaten raw, but many subsisted entirely upon coconuts and fruit, which grew upon the island in great profusion.

The native city in which I now found myself consisted of a number of dwellings of beehive shape, thatched with grass, and usually about twelve feet high. The queen's house was about three times as large as the others, and was placed in the centre of the town, with an avenue of trees, and a clear space before it for tribal dances or meetings. Ackbau also lived in a large house. On the reserve around the queen's palace, the older men spent most of the day in gossiping, or playing upon reed pipes, which furnished their sole musical instrument. The younger men made nets, mended weapons, or shaped stones for their slings. The natives in this island did not appear to understand the use of the bow and arrow, their only weapons being clubs, slings, and spears. The spears were made of hard wood, polished and inlaid with pearl shell and beaten gold. The slings were of plaited fibre, the stones being rounded like an egg. The clubs were of various shapes, some with rounded heads, and others bent and pointed like a pick.

CHAPTER XVIII

A QUEEN'S FAVOURITE

Three days after my coming to the Island of Gems I discovered, to my embarrassment, that Queen Melannie regarded me with more than royal favour. It had been her custom to seclude herself from her people except upon occasions, but now she preferred to walk with me daily upon the cliffs, or among the rich foliage, which made a natural garden in the valleys. None molested us, for those to whom the queen showed favour were taboo to the rest of the tribe, so that as long as I retained her goodwill I was safe. But who would be dependent upon a woman's whim?

"You do not love me, Peter," she said, for I had told her my name, "not as I love you. Your blood is cold. It does not run warm as mine does when I hold you to me."

I tried to pacify her, but she would not be satisfied.

"You do not love me! You cannot love me!" she repeated. "They want me to give you to the snake god. Why should I keep you if you do not love me?"

This was the first time she had threatened me, and I began to realize that the love she professed was tempered by a degree of venom which at any moment might consign me to some cruel death.

Surely no man was placed in such a dilemma as that in which I now found myself. In all my adventures I had never felt so helpless as I did when dealing with this wilful queen. I dared not tell her of my love for Anna Holstein, for I knew that such a confession would quickly seal my doom. Yet I could not return her love, for Anna was never out of my thoughts. Meanwhile Ackbau watched us closely, content to bide his time.

The people upon this island were unlike any I had previously met with. I conjectured that in ages past some tribe of Indians had migrated to it, for that Indian blood flowed in the veins of its present inhabitants seemed beyond doubt. Their intelligence exceeded that of aborigines, and their language contained words of Hindu origin. As for the queen, I set her down for a Portuguese maiden, whose mother must have accompanied the captain of some trading vessel, probably in search of the Island of Gems, when, by a stroke of fate, the ship, with all hands, had foundered, leaving Melannie the sole survivor.

Ackbau seldom spoke to me, and when he did his tone was unfriendly. "The white man will make good sport at the coming of the snake god," he said to me once when I had angered him by walking out with the queen, and those with him had laughed, and had looked at me in a manner that made me speculate upon what cruel fate it was to which they, in their own minds, had already consigned me.

Of the tortures practised by the islanders upon those who offended them, I was not left long in doubt. There had lately been a war, so Melannie told me, between this people and those of an adjacent island in which some captives had been taken who, according to custom, would be offered in sacrifice to propitiate one of the many evil spirits whom these benighted people worship. On the day of the sacrifice I was bidden to be present, and not daring to refuse, I accompanied the queen to a barren spot at the foot of the mountain where some gaunt trees rose out of a bed of lava. Here we found Ackbau haranguing the victims, and describing to them the tortures they would shortly be called upon to suffer. One of the captives had been prepared for the sacrifice, and, but for the gravity of his position, his appearance might have excited mirth. His body was encased in a kind of basket from which his head, arms, and legs protruded, giving him the appearance of a gigantic insect. To the top of the basket, or tamgky, to give it its native name, was attached a rope of flax, the end of which had been thrown over a branch of one of the trees to the height of about forty feet from the ground. By command of Ackbau, a file of warriors now began to pull upon this rope, when the victim was drawn up to the branch over his head, where Melannie told me he would be allowed to remain until, in the course of time, the rope rotted away, when the skeleton would fall to the ground. The object of enclosing the vital parts of the victim in a basket was that death might come as slowly as possible. Some would live, so the queen assured me, for many

days, during which time of agony their faces and the exposed parts of their bodies would be devoured by ants and other venomous insects. Yet Melannie sat unmoved by the sight of these tortures, and even smiled when the poor wretch had been drawn up to his awful doom, and cried out in his agony. For that smile I felt that I could kill her.

Unable to control myself in the presence of such barbarities, I abruptly left the place of execution and began to ascend the mountain, at the foot of which the sacrifices were made, which I could see was the cause of a commotion among the natives. As none offered to stay me, however, I continued my way up the steep sides, which I found to be composed of rocks and scoria, with occasional patches of coarse grass. Among the slag of metals between the crevices of the rocks I unearthed a number of gems, though none so large as those which Melannie had given me, which I added to the collection I carried in a belt I had made for the purpose. I knew it was unlikely these bits of coloured crystal would ever be of value to me, but I carried them in the hope that some day I might be rescued, when I would return home possessed of the wealth I had coveted, and which I had risked my life to obtain.

As I explored the mountain I could hear the rumbling of the volcanic fire within, while as I proceeded a rain of fine dust descended, making further progress disagreeable. Earth tremors also warned me that the crust here was thin, and therefore dangerous. The mountain seemed on the verge of eruption, and I wondered that no alarm for the safety of the town built at the foot of it had been shown by Melannie and her people. But I remembered that volcanoes, like all great works of Nature, measure time by the lapse of ages, and that a thousand years will often pass between the convulsions of the internal fires which find an outlet through the earth's craters. The smoke and heat of the mountain, however, reminded me of my tinder-box, and I gathered some flints, of which there were a number lying round, before returning to my dwelling in the native town. I had kept my ability to make fire, so far, secret, but if my life was threatened I resolved to kindle a conflagration that would sweep the island.

When the queen and her followers returned from the place of execution Melannie sent for me.

"Have a care, Peter," she said. "We are ruled here by customs which may not be changed. Already Ackbau is jealous of the favour I have shown you. To go upon the mountain, which is forbidden country, may be made an argument in favour of thy death, from which even I cannot save you."

I pleaded an excuse for infringing the taboo, but Melannie shook her head. Then she embraced me and begged me to forgive her ill-humour.

"You will not leave me, Peter," she pleaded. "You are strong---stronger than Ackbau, and will protect me from him."

"But you are queen, are you not?" I answered.

"Yes, I am queen," replied Melannie, "but I do not love my people as I should do. I wish they would make Ackbau king, so that I might be free as others are."

She tried to embrace me, but I disengaged myself from her. I could not take her to my heart, coming, as she did, a willing spectator from the place of sacrifice.

CHAPTER XIX

I BECOME CHIEF COOK

I now resolved to introduce the cooking of food upon the island. From the fish and clams which the natives offered me in their raw state I turned in disgust, but I reflected that, cooked, they would make excellent eating. I was tired of fruit,

and craved a more substantial diet. How long I might be compelled to remain upon this island I knew not. Perhaps I was destined to spend the rest of my life upon it. Why, then, should I be deprived of the luxury of cooking my food, when, with my flint and steel, I possessed the means of making a fire?

When I spoke of my intention to Melannie she failed to grasp my meaning. She had no notion of fire except in connexion with the smoke on the mountain, and when I told her I could make fire like that and convert it to my use, she became incredulous.

"If you can make fire, Peter," she said, "you are greater than all the gods upon the island. Whoever heard of making fire?"

In order to convince her, and to test the effect which my fire might have upon these islanders, I invited her to accompany me to a remote part of the island, seldom visited, where I had already constructed a fire-place and collected a quantity of fuel, of which there was an abundance lying round. She came with me fearlessly, for she trusted me entirely, and her intelligence, which was superior to the islanders', made her less superstitious than the savages over whom she nominally reigned. When she saw the dried wood and leaves I had collected in my fire-place she appeared to think I had become suddenly demented, as sometimes happened to the people on the island, when they were thought to be possessed by evil spirits.

When I took up my flint and steel, however, and began to strike sparks on to the prepared tinder, she drew back alarmed, although her woman's curiosity conquered her desire to run away. But when the sparks lighted the dried leaves, causing the wood to crackle and burn, she would have fled if I had not detained her.

"There is no magic in fire-making, Melannie," I said, trying to allay her fears; "all white men make fires. It is as necessary to them as air and water."

But it was hard to convince the queen of this. She looked at my fire, which now burned brightly, with wonder and alarm. "Of a truth, Peter," she said, "thy magic is beyond me. I know now thou art indeed come from the sun. No man born of men could work such marvel."

I had brought with me a fine fish, caught that morning from the rocks, which I had sealed and cleaned with my dagger-knife, and I now toasted it over the hot coals, after which I enjoyed the most satisfying meal I had tasted since I had been cast upon the island. I induced Melannie to eat some of the fish, which she found so much to her liking that her fear of the fire changed to admiration for what it could do.

"When my people eat of this delicious food," she said, "they will worship you."

I had no desire to be worshipped. All I asked was permission to eat my grilled fish in peace. But Melannie was so delighted with her meal that she made me promise to prepare a fish each day for our mutual enjoyment. For some days we continued to dine by stealth. Fish were plentiful, and we also found the bivalves I had noticed on my first landing round the fresh water pools very palatable.

At length our daily absence from the village, always at the same hour, excited suspicion, and spies were set upon us, who reported we were making another smoke mountain, which led to a surprise visit from Ackbau, who came upon us one day when our meal was preparing. I had made some rude vessels of clay, hardened by fire, in which to boil the shell-fish, and with these simmering in the pot, and a fine rock cod grilling upon the hot coals, we were awaiting our dinner with pleasurable anticipation, when Ackbau appeared.

He was too astonished at what he saw to find fault, and when, later, he had eaten of grilled cod and boiled clams, seasoned with salt and cut-up bananas, a recipe which Melannie, with her woman's instinct, had invented for the preparation of this delicacy, he was so pleased with his food that he forgot to be ill-tempered.

After this surprise visit from Ackbau our privacy was at an end. Next day the whole council came to dinner. They brought with them a quantity of fish and clams, which they wanted cooked, and it became necessary to make fresh fires, and to instruct them in the art of cooking. This was soon done, for the natives, when shown our simple methods, very quickly began to understand what was required of them, and they became so interested in the cookery that for the time being all other business on the island was suspended. Soon the whole tribe took part in the cooking, and fires burned all along the shore at which fish and clams prepared as Melannie directed were converted into luscious banquets for the astonished islanders. Nothing else was thought of but cooking and eating, and the natives often gorged themselves to such an extent that they were unable for hours to stir from the spot.

This soon gave rise to disagreements and led to quarrels, until at length Ackbau, who in his own way was a born organizer, called the council together and enacted laws for the regulation of the cookery.

By these laws cooks were appointed, of whom I was made chief, and it became an offence, punishable by death, for any except those duly qualified to indulge in cooking. Regulations were also made for the distribution of food, and each day, at stated hours, the tribe assembled round the fires, when they were served with their portions, which they greedily devoured. There were no birds upon the island, or I might have added game to our bill of fare, but turtles were plentiful, and, when captured, were cooked under my directions in a manner which convinced the savages that I was of divine origin. The method of fire-making I kept to myself, rightly conceiving that so long as I preserved this secret my life would be spared.

But notwithstanding the improvement in their mode of living which I had brought to these people by the introduction of the use of fire amongst them, I could see that Ackbau still regarded me with disfavour. His cruel nature, moreover, began to suggest to him another use to which fire might be applied. One of his slaves inadvertently picked up a burning brand, which burnt his fingers, and the pain which it caused suggested to Ackbau that fire might be employed in torture. He ruled by fear, and the fear of fire had now become universal among the islanders. Ackbau spoke to me privately with regard to the making of this new element, and even offered to give me a seat on the council if I would surrender to him my flint and steel, but I told him that to me alone was committed the power of making fire, and that any other attempting it would bring upon himself inevitable disaster. Ackbau's ambition to become a fire-maker was checked for the moment, but I could see it was not satisfied.

CHAPTER XX

THE SNAKE GOD

I was now to meet with a surprise. The chief deity worshipped by the people of the Island of Gems was a snake god, a monster who at regular intervals visited a coral cave rising out of a pool of water said to be fathomless, from which I conjectured it was connected with the sea. The water in this pool was of a deep blue colour, salt to the taste, which further convinced me of its link with the ocean. On the first night of each full moon a human sacrifice was offered, with which the monster retreated into the coral cave, where it remained feasting upon its victim three days. During this period the natives continued without sleep, and fasting. At the end of three days the snake god disappeared, nor was it seen again until its next periodical visit.

There ran, a legend among the people of the Island of Gems that if a human sacrifice was not made to the snake god at the time of its coming, the island would be destroyed and its people exterminated, so that great care was taken to provide

the monster with its accustomed tribute. Prisoners of war, and all strangers found upon the island, were, in the first place, offered to the snake god, and, failing these, a victim was chosen among the tribe.

It now appeared, so far as I could gather from Ackbau, who made no secret of his intentions regarding me, that had it not been, for the arrival of another stranger upon the island, I myself would have been offered as a sacrifice to the snake god at his next coming, and it was for this reason I had been received with apparent friendship. But a fresh captive being taken soon after I had been washed ashore had caused a change of plan very much to my advantage. Queen Melannie also had interested herself in my favour, and had refused to speak words at the secret council which would have decreed my death. But I might assure myself, said Ackbau, that my fate was only delayed, and at the coming of the snake god, next after the one immediately expected, my death had been decided upon. I appealed to Melannie, but she could only confirm what Ackbau had told me.

"I cannot save you, Peter," she said, "unless you will become my husband, when, if you are strong, we may overcome Ackbau, and rule as king and queen upon this island. But if that cannot be, let us escape by a means that I know of."

I put aside the question of marriage, but I eagerly embraced the proposal to escape.

Melannie then led me, secretly, by a path known only to Ackbau, the council, and herself, to a rock cavern close to the water's edge, in which was kept a ship's boat, which the queen told me had been washed ashore at the same time when, she was found crying upon the beach. It was a well-built, serviceable cutter, with spare oars, and a sail stowed under the thwarts, just as they had been placed in her when she had put to sea, but there was neither food nor water in the boat, although I discovered a water-tank forward, which could readily be filled from one of the many streams on the island. I became so excited at the prospect of escape that Melannie looked grave.

"You are glad to go, Peter," she said. "Go, then; take the boat, and leave me to my fate."

"Not so, Melannie," I answered. "I will take you with me, and restore you to your own people. It is not meet that a white girl, such as thou, should abide with savages."

At these words Melannie recovered her gaiety.

"Let me go with thee, Peter," she said, clapping her hands with pleasure. "It is all I ask. But if we would not be followed by war canoes, which could easily overtake us, we must use much cunning in the manner of our going."

We then took counsel together, when Melannie advised that our best chance to escape would be at the time of the coming of the snake god. When the monster appeared, and for three days afterward, while it remained in the coral cave, the savages would be held to the spot by their traditions from which nothing would induce them to depart. We might then slip away unobserved, and be out of sight of land before the ceremonies in connexion with the sacrifice were over. This appearing to be our opportunity, we at once set about making preparations. From a stream near the cave I filled the boat's water-tank, and we collected a quantity of coconuts, bananas, and other fruits, which we stowed on board; nor did I forget to take some of the largest gems from the treasure cave, which I stuffed into my belt with the others. The gold I did not touch. It was heavy to carry, and its transport might have caused suspicion. We also launched the boat, with some difficulty, into a natural boat harbour formed by a coral reef, so that no time might be lost in getting away. All being ready, we waited impatiently for the day upon which we had planned to set out upon our voyage.

During this time I observed a change upon the mountain in the centre of the island. The smoke cloud, which always hovered over it, had increased until it hung like a funeral pall over the top of the volcano. Loud rumblings also were heard like distant thunder, while earth tremors were constantly felt. I mentioned these matters to Melannie, but she did

not appear to attach any importance to them.

"The mountain was always like that," she said. "Perhaps the evil spirits who live there are angry." But I knew from my reading and experience that these signs and portents were such as heralded an eruption. In the excitement of leaving the island, however, I forgot my anxieties with regard to the volcano.

I now questioned Melannie with regard to the white stranger whose coming had saved me from being offered as a sacrifice to the snake god. At first she refused to tell me anything concerning him, but when I pressed her she conducted me to a cavern in which the captive was confined. The door of this dungeon was a swinging rock, which Melannie caused to open by some means of which she knew the secret, when the wretched man who was reserved for the sacrifice was seen crouching in darkness at the farther end of the cave. He came toward us bent double. There was a scared look upon his face. The light dazzled him. I knew him at once, and held my breath. It was Van Luck. When he saw me he threw himself upon his knees and implored me to save him, but I told him I had no power to avert his death even if I would. In answer to my question as to how he came upon the island, he answered, that almost at the same time as I had been washed overboard he himself had been precipitated by a wave into the sea.

"Well, Van Luck," I said to him. "It seemeth to me that the hand of Providence is in this business. But for your conduct we had both now been on board the 'Arms of Amsterdam,' yet no sooner was I cast into the sea by your treachery than you were made to follow me, to be brought to this island, where, but for your coming, I would have been subject to the cruel fate which now awaits you."

"Mercy!" he cried. "I do not fear death. But the death that I am to suffer is not for a human to contemplate. If you cannot save me, at least kill me, so that I may escape the torture of being devoured alive."

But I was powerless to aid him, and at a sign from Melannie, who was fearful lest our visit might be discovered, I stepped back, as the rock at the mouth of the cave returned to its place, and consigned the miserable captive to a darkness from which he would not emerge until the time for the sacrifice.

CHAPTER XXI

A PLAN OF ESCAPE

I was now of two minds, whether to make terms with Ackbau or to endeavour to escape with Melannie from the Island of Gems in the boat we had made ready for sea. On the one hand was immediate safety, and the prospect of some ship calling at the island in which I might return to civilization. On the other was a hazardous journey alone with a young girl, who could not be expected to realize the dangers which lay before her. Was I justified, I asked myself, in exposing the queen to the tragedy which might await us upon the ocean? If captured I had no doubt that both of us would be condemned by Ackbau to a cruel death, and if we succeeded in getting away how should we exist until some chance vessel came to our rescue? I mentioned my fears to Melannie, but she would not hear of abandoning the project we had formed.

"Let us go, Peter," she urged. "Nothing but death, or worse, awaits us here. As for you, at the next coming of the snake god after the one that is about to take place you will assuredly be offered as a sacrifice, for I may tell you that a solemn vow has been made by the council to that effect. While I, at the same time, am to be given in marriage to Ackbau, a fate from which I shrink more than from death. Why, then, should we exchange the chance of reaching the country you speak of for the tortures which must certainly await us here? Let us trust ourselves to the sea rather than cling to this land of sorrow. If we perish, we perish."

I could not but agree that her argument contained much good sense, and I admired the courage with which she was ready to face the worst that Fate might have in store for us.

"Let it be so then, Melannie," I answered. "May heaven deal with me as I deal with thee in protecting us both from evil."

After arriving at this decision we agreed there must be no turning back, and it only now remained to await the night upon which the unfortunate Van Luck would be offered to the snake god in order to make good our escape. Meanwhile we were allowed to wander about the island together as before. Ackbau having obtained the decree of the council for my death, and his own marriage with the queen, could afford to wait, nor did he appear anxious to deprive Melannie of the pleasure which she found in my company, until I was removed from his path. Melannie, although arrived at woman's estate, was but a child at heart, and, as a child, he knew she would be content to let things drift until the moment for my execution was at hand, when it would be too late even for the queen to prevent it.

I had now become much attached to Melannie, feeling for her as for a dear sister. Her love for me I could not return, since all my love was given to my betrothed, but next to Anna I loved Melannie more than anyone in the world.

So far as the islanders were concerned, I was now left to my own devices. My fire-making had lost its novelty, and since it was discovered that one fire could be lighted from another my flint and steel had depreciated in value. In order to conciliate Ackbau I offered to explain to him the secret of my fire-making, but he answered coldly that he himself knew how to make fire by taking a burning brand from one fire and thrusting it among dried wood and leaves, of which there were great quantities on the island, as fire had never been alight there before.

"But if your fire should go out you would not know how to light it again," I argued.

"I will take care that it does not go out," answered Ackbau.

The cooking also which I had taught them was easily performed by certain members of the tribe told off for that purpose, and I noticed that much secrecy was observed in the preparation of food. This secret was revealed to me in a startling manner when I unexpectedly came upon Ackbau and some members of the council seated together enjoying a stew of what I could see was human flesh. For, indeed, what else could it be, seeing there were no animals upon the island? I mastered my horror as well as I could, for I was now in great dread of these savages, who, since they had acquired the taste for meat, appeared to have become far more ferocious and cruel than before resorting to the dreadful practice of cannibalism. My discovery, however, made me more than ever determined to rescue Melannie from the companionship of these wretches who called her their queen. It was better, I argued, for her to die in her youth and innocence upon the sea, if Providence so willed, than to become the wife of such a man as Ackbau.

I did not confide to Melannie my dreadful discovery, but she was not slow in noticing a change in the demeanour of the men with whom she formerly had daily intercourse. Those who had become eaters of human flesh avoided her, and even Ackbau seemed ashamed to intrude himself upon her.

"What is it, Peter?" she asked me, and I read the questioning fear in her eyes.

I did my best to pacify her, but I could see that the repugnance with which she regarded Ackbau now almost amounted to a mania.

"I feel inclined to run from Ackbau when I see him," she said. "If he touched me I am sure that I would scream."

"You will soon be beyond his power," I answered. "Do not think of him, and you will not fear him."

"Oh, Peter, take me away, I am frightened!" she sobbed. "Do not let Ackbau and the others come near me. They have done something. I don't know what it is. But they are not as they were before they made the fire. Perhaps a curse is upon them for having stolen the secret from the smoke mountain."

I tried to comfort her, but I could see that the poor child was greatly alarmed, and I determined to speak to Ackbau regarding the abominable practice in which he was engaged.

"Had I known that my fire-making would have made a cannibal of thee, Ackbau," I said, "I would never have kindled the element upon this island. Fire is a useful and necessary article in the life of a good man, but it becomes a curse if put to evil purposes."

"It is a curse then that will fall most heavily upon thee," answered Ackbau. "As for me, this is my country, and I am king of its customs." But although he pretended to resent my interference, I could see that Ackbau was ashamed of what he had done, and henceforth he avoided Melannie, and seldom entered the queen's presence, so that I gained what I had in view by remonstrating with him.

The thought of the fire, however, and the effect which the making of it had upon these savages, set me pondering whether this element was really the primary cause of cannibalism.

No savages whom I ever met devour raw flesh, whether human or animal, so that the eating of meat by men would seem to be an acquired habit. Fruit and water appear to be the natural food and drink of man, all else being artificial and vicious.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NIGHT OF THE SACRIFICE

At last the night came when the snake god was to appear. The moon shone with wonderful brilliancy, sending a path of dancing light from the island across the sea to the horizon. The air was heavy as though presaging a storm. On the mountain the black pall was conspicuous against the star-spangled sky. A red glow from the crater illumined the dark smoke-cloud hanging over it. The silence was broken by the continued playing of reed pipes, making wonderful music. Melannie sat upon a throne, close to the pool in front of the coral cave, in which the stars were reflected as in a mirror. Ackbau and other chiefs stood near her. The queen was pale, but her dark eyes were resolute. She smiled when I looked at her, to give me encouragement. Her subjects were assembled round the pool in a triple line. Presently the beating of a war-drum announced the arrival of a procession, which advanced slowly to the pool, bearing a litter upon which, bound hand and foot, was stretched the unfortunate Van Luck. When they had come to the edge of the pool they set the litter down and withdrew.

I had no cause to love Van Luck, yet there was something in his helpless misery which appealed to me, and made it impossible for me to abandon him to his fate without an effort to save him. Besides, he was of my race, a white man. I could not leave him to be butchered by savages.

And now the waters of the pool began to be agitated by the rising of the leviathan from its depths, and suddenly a monstrous head, mounted upon a neck full twenty feet long, rose out of the water. The body of the creature resembled that of a turtle, only ten times larger than the biggest turtle I had ever beheld. Thrice the monster circled the pool. Then it began slowly to approach the litter upon which Van Luck lay, more dead than alive with the terror that had come upon him. I could bear no more, and, throwing prudence to the winds, I ran to help him. I was just in time to drag him beyond reach of the monster, who made a rush to the edge of the pool when he saw his prey being taken from him.

A great shout arose from the savages, who seemed amazed at the act of sacrilege I had committed. The reed pipes stopped playing. Melannie rose from her throne pale and trembling. Ackbau advanced towards me with a threatening gesture.

"This must not be, Ackbau," I said, pointing to where Van Luck lay at my feet gazing at the monster in mute terror. "I will prevent it." Ackbau gave some directions, when a number of savages advanced, evidently with the intention of taking me alive, so that I might be given to the monster, which continued to swim round the pool lashing the water into foam, and stretching its neck from side to side in anger at having been robbed of its prey.

But now a new diversion arose which caused a panic among the savages. We had all been so engrossed by what was taking place at the pool that no heed had been given to the mountain. With a mighty roar which shook the island to its foundations the volcano broke into eruption. The crust had given way, and the internal fires, held in check, belched from the crater. Huge rocks and stones glowing red hot were thrown to incredible heights. The earth rocked and opened, so that many were engulfed.

Streams of lava began to descend. The pool sank, leaving a deep pit into which the monster disappeared. The prophecy was about to be fulfilled. The snake god had been robbed of its tribute, and the island with all upon it was to be destroyed. In, their terror the savages raced for the seashore. Nothing was remembered but self-preservation.

I now released Van Luck from his bonds, and bidding him and Melannie follow me, I led the way along the secret path to where the boat lay, ready to put to sea. I was rewarded for my rescue of Van Luck by his ability to help me. Not a breath of wind stirred, so that we could not use the sail, and it became necessary to sweep the boat with the oars away from the burning island. Alone I could not have accomplished this, and I doubt if Melannie could have helped me, ignorant as she was of the use of the heavy oar. But Van Luck and I had no difficulty in sweeping the boat out to sea. Thus does Providence recompense a merciful action.

When we had gained a safe distance from the island we rested awhile in order to look back on the strangest and most terrific sight I had ever beheld. The island seemed to be blown to atoms. Flames and masses of rock shot up from the quickly-widening crater until the island, which had lately risen like a beauty-spot in the ocean, became a mass of fire. The lava, now pouring in red-hot streams into the sea, caused steam-clouds to rise, so that the island disappeared behind a luminous veil. None of the savages escaped, for we saw no canoes making from the shore. Thus vanished the Island of Gems, with its treasure of jewels and gold, the dross of the world, in the pursuit of which so many risk their lives.

A light breeze now coming from the south-east, we hoisted the sails, and taking the helm, I placed Van Luck in charge of the foresail, whilst Melannie and I sat together in the stern. The queen did not appear to regret the loss of her country.

"I am queen no longer," she said, clapping her hands at the thought of her freedom. "Ackbau cannot frighten me any more, nor shall I see again those dreadful sights I was compelled to witness."

"You will be happy," I whispered, "among your own people. You will be rich also, for half my jewels will make you wealthy in the land to which you are going."

"Nay, Peter," she answered. "I need not take your jewels. I have jewels of my own. When I saw that you valued the bright stones, I knew they would be of value to me also. I have a bagful of jewels, larger than yours, and brighter." And, laughing to see the surprise she had given me, Melannie drew out a handful of gems from a bag which she carried at her girdle, which glowed with a wonderful lustre under the light of the moon.

It was then that I saw Van Luck watching us from the bow of the boat. His countenance wore a cunning, greedy look, and his eyes were fastened upon the jewels in Melannie's hand.

"Put them away," I whispered. "Such toys are often the cause of much trouble."

Melannie replaced the jewels, but seemed disappointed at my words.

"I thought you would be glad I had brought away the bright stones," she said. "But if they are unlucky I will cast them into the sea."

"Nay, Melannie," I answered. "Keep them, for they will make you the richest among the women of your own country. But do not show them to anyone or let it be known that you have them with you, should we fall in with a passing ship, or they may cause our ruin, perhaps our death." Melannie seemed to understand me, but her pleasure in the bright stones had received a check since her display of them had brought a rebuke from my lips.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT THE MERCY OF THE SEA

When morning broke on the day after our escape from the burning island we shaped a course with the wind, for I had no fixed purpose, and our only hope of returning to civilization lay in a chance meeting with some passing vessel. Yet I knew how remote that chance would be. The sea in these latitudes was not in the course of trade between any of the countries of the known world, and voyages of discovery such as those undertaken by Dirk Hartog and other navigators of the time were few and far between. Still I conceived it to be my duty to make the best use of the means which Providence had placed in my hands of returning to home and friends, and as the cutter danced over the waves, and the salt spray moistened our faces, I felt my spirits rise.

Melannie, in her new-found freedom, was like a happy child.

"Let us sail on for ever, Peter," she said. "I never want to put my foot on land again."

I tried to tell her that we could not live long upon the ocean; that our food and water would fail us; and that unless we fell in with a ship, or landed upon some friendly island, our doom was sealed. But Melannie refused to look upon the graver side of our situation, and seemed so happy and contented that I did not like to spoil her enjoyment with my dismal forebodings. Time enough, I thought, to meet trouble when it comes. Meanwhile we continued our voyage as a pleasure trip, eating the fruit we had brought with us when we felt hungry, and quenching our thirst from the boat's water-tank, with no care for the future.

During this time Van Luck resumed his former air of abstraction, which I had noticed in him on board the "Arms of Amsterdam". For hours at a time he would remain silent, looking across the sea with his hand shading his eyes in the watchful attitude which had become habitual to him during his solitary vigils at the island upon which we had found him. If spoken to when this fit was upon him, he would not answer, nor did he, at such times, appear to realize where he was. I could see that his mind was deranged, and I dreaded some violent outbreak, such as that which had come over him when, by his treachery, I was cast into the sea. But Melannie showed no fear of him; in, her delight at being with me upon the ocean away from the savages, among whom she had been reared, she seemed to have forgotten his presence.

For the next week after leaving what had been once the Island of Gems, we experienced a spell of fine weather, with bright sun and cool breeze. The elements seemed kind to the exiled queen without a throne, who had trusted herself to

the wind and the sea, and but for the anxiety which I felt for the future, the voyage would have been a pleasant one.

In order to protect Melannie from the heat of midday, and to ensure her some measure of privacy, I constructed a temporary cabin for her, with some spare canvas which I found on board the boat, but at night she preferred to sleep in the open so that she might watch the stars, which shone with extraordinary brilliancy. It was then that I lowered the sails when our boat drifted upon the moonlit sea. Melannie would at such times creep into my arms, and with her head pillowed upon, my breast would listen to the wonders I had to tell of the world of white people to which I hoped I was taking her.

"Something warns me I shall never see that country, Peter," she said to me one night with a sigh, "but I like to hear you speak of it. It must be a happy land where there are no black men to frighten a poor girl and make her weep. But I shall not see it. The white spirits would not welcome me to their country if they knew of the sights I had seen and the pain I had caused to be inflicted on those whom Ackbau hated."

"It was not your will, but Ackbau's, Melannie, which caused such suffering," I answered. "None could blame you for being the mouthpiece of his villainy."

But Melannie shook her head.

"The white man's country is not for me, Peter," she declared sorrowfully. "I am too steeped in blood to take the white girls' hands in friendship."

Then she clung to me weeping, with her head upon my breast, and so she would sob herself to sleep like a child disappointed in play.

But, knowing her history, I could not find it in my heart to blame her for what had been done at the dictation of others. I pictured her a queen, among the whites, by reason of her wealth from the sale of her jewels, who would doubtless have many noble suitors at her feet. Her beauty was such as I had never seen equalled, and her imperious and sometimes wilful ways only added to her indescribable charms. It was now forced upon me that unless help came soon we must starve. Our stock of fruit was almost exhausted, and scarce three quarts of water remained in the tank. I had not been able to impress upon Melannie the necessity for economy in our eating and drinking. She had always been used to an abundance of simple fare, and, like a child, lived for the hour, with no thought of the future. Van Luck had also been in the habit of helping himself to what he wanted from our stock, nor had I liked to interfere with him lest I might cause trouble. But now I resolved to take a firmer stand with both my passengers.

To add to my anxieties I could see that Van Luck had been attracted by the bag of jewels which Melannie had so imprudently displayed on the night of our escape from the burning island. He was continually watching it when his eyes were not employed in gazing across the sea, and once I caught him creeping toward Melannie when she slept as if with the intention of robbing her of the treasure. I spoke to him roughly, and ordered him back to the fore part of the boat. He obeyed, but his looks were so threatening that I momentarily expected him to attack me.

I now determined to keep awake while Melannie slept in order that I might watch Van Luck, and I impressed upon the queen that she must never sleep when I slept. Thus we continued for some nights, keeping watch and watch about. But I soon found I could not trust Melannie, for when I awoke I discovered her to be asleep. But in this, as in all else, Melannie was such a child that I could not find it in my heart to scold her.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW MY SECOND VOYAGE ENDED

I now resolved to place Van Luck under restraint, for it was plain to me he was not responsible for his actions, and with this object in view I went forward one morning with a rope in my hand, intending to secure him in some way from harming himself and others. As I approached him Van Luck, who seemed to divine my purpose, drew back with a savage, animal-like growl. I tried to pacify him by speaking kindly, but he suddenly sprang at me with a knife in his hand. I caught his arm before he could strike, and we fell together upon the thwarts of the boat, locked in a deadly embrace. Van Luck was a powerful man, and his madness seemed to give him double strength. I called to Melannie to keep away from us, but afraid for my safety, and fearless of her own, she hurried to my assistance. "Get my knife," I whispered, for I was unable to draw it myself from its sheath by my side. The brave girl stooped to do my bidding, when the madman, at the same moment, wrenched his arm free and struck her. Melannie fell with a low moan upon the thwart beside me, and Van Luck, snatching the bag of gems from where it hung at her girdle, retreated with his prize to the stern.

I was soon upon my feet, and lifting Melannie into a more easy position, I turned my attention to Van Luck. He was sitting in the stern, handling the gems and mumbling over them, and when he saw me he clutched the bag, and, springing up, made as though to run from me, unmindful of the fact that we were tossing in mid-ocean. Without turning his head from looking back at me, he stumbled blindly into the sea, where he soon became lost amid the grey waves that rose on every side.

When I returned to Melannie I could see that she was sinking fast. I did my best to staunch the blood which flowed from her breast. But her whitened face, upon which the dews of death were gathering, warned me she had not many moments to live.

"Kiss me, Peter," she whispered. "It is better that I should go. You do not love me; you cannot love me as I love you. There is some one else whom you love. I know it; I have felt it. Go to her, Peter, but do not quite forget me."

These were her last words, and, when I kissed her, Melannie, Queen of the Island of Gems, had crossed the waters of the Great Divide. Next day I consigned her body to the deep wrapped in her robe of white tapa cloth which formed her shroud.

I was now alone upon the waste of waters, with barely three days' provisions between me and a slow and painful death. To add to my anxieties I could see that the weather, which had been calm and fine since my leaving the island, was about to change. Storm clouds gathered on the horizon. The sun was obscured. Rain fell, and the wind rose until it blew with the force of a tempest. I managed, with difficulty, to unship the sail, and devoted myself to baling the boat, which threatened at any moment to be swamped by the green water which came aboard of her. All that day, and the next, I was driven by the storm whither I knew not. The fruit which remained from our store was now rendered uneatable by reason of the salt water, in which it washed from side to side as the boat tossed and buffeted upon her way. I was famished and numb with cold. Yet, even in my extremity, I clung to life, and my last act of consciousness was to secure myself by a rope to the thwart upon which I lay.

I was brought back to life by a flask of spirits held to my lips, and upon opening my eyes I became conscious of a bronzed, kindly face looking down at me in the water-logged boat.

"Hold up, lad," said my preserver in English, a language with which I was well acquainted. "We'll have you aboard the 'Seagull' in a jiff, and to-morrow you'll be as fit as a buck rat."

I then saw that a ship's boat was alongside the cutter, manned by four men. The weather had by this time moderated, but the sea ran high. It was therefore no easy matter to shift me from the cutter into the boat, for I was helpless and weak as a child from exposure to wind and sea. But willing hands at length effected the transfer, when we made for the "Seagull", which lay hove to half a mile distant.

On coming aboard this vessel I was taken below and treated with great kindness, when, after my wet clothes had been set to dry, I was put into a warm bunk, a bowl of hot soup being brought to me, which, when I had taken it, sent me into a sound sleep. I awoke much refreshed, and on resuming my clothes I was glad to find that the belt in which I carried my jewels had not been interfered with. I thought it more prudent not to make mention of these gems, for I well knew that if they were found upon me I should not be allowed to keep them. The captain, having heard so much of my story as I chose to tell, promised me a passage to England, whither his ship was bound.

I found the crew of the brig "Seagull" to be a rough lot, of mixed nationalities, but Captain Bland, who was in command, was an Englishman returning home after a voyage of two years in these latitudes. Upon learning my rating on the "Arms of Amsterdam" he made me his second mate, in place of one who had died shortly before my coming on board the brig.

It may be imagined with what a thankful heart I welcomed a change from the companionship of savages to that of civilized men, and when I remembered the projects I had formed against my life I realized how unwise it is to become the arbiter of one's own fate.

I voyaged in the English ship without mishap so long as we sailed upon uncharted seas, but when we entered home waters we kept a sharp look-out for pirates and free-booters, who at this time took toll from all whom they encountered. Off the coast of Africa we exchanged signals with passing vessels, from whom we learnt that pirates had been sighted in close proximity, and one morning we noticed two schooners bearing down upon us. As the wind was in favour of the pirates, for such we judged them to be, we could not hope to outrun them, our ship being foul after her long voyage, so the men were mustered and made ready for action.

While these preparations were on foot I could not help admiring the cool and fearless manner in which the English sailors set about their work. There was no hurry or confusion in their methods. Each man knew his duty, and was ready to do it.

With shouts and yells from the pirates on board of her, one of the schooners now ranged alongside, and the grappling irons were hove athwart our bulwarks. I sent a shower of grape from the gun, of which I had charge, upon the deck of the schooner, killing four of the pirates and wounding others, but this failed to stop the boarding party, who now swarmed upon us. The fight became general, and, led by Captain Bland, we engaged the robbers with such goodwill that we had almost succeeded in driving them over the side when the second schooner came up, and a fresh horde of ruffians joined in the attack. Retreating aft, we again made a stand, though it was evident that, in the end, we must be overpowered, outnumbered, as we were, three to one.

Still we continued to fight on with no thought of surrender, for we knew that capture would mean death by walking the plank. Four of the English on our side were killed, besides seven or eight of those of other nationalities, whilst many were wounded. The decks were slippery with blood, and a gathering mist made it impossible to ascertain the extent of our losses. Captain Bland now placed himself beside me, and together we held the pirates at bay.

"This can't last, Van Bu," he said, "and I am resolved that my ship shall not fall into the hands of these scoundrels."

"What can you do?" I answered, without pausing in my defence.

"I'll fire the magazine sooner than let them take her," replied Bland. "Keep them in check for a while and we'll sink together."

With these words he sprang to the hatchway while I continued to fight on, expecting every moment to be blown with all hands into eternity.

I had given up hope, and the suspense of awaiting the expected catastrophe was so acute that I had almost made up my mind to throw myself overboard and take my chance with the sharks, when two square sails emerged out of the smoke, and the hull of a man-o'-war, with a wide spread of canvas, ranged alongside, while a number of English man-o'-war's men, led by an officer, sprang upon our decks. At the sight of the King's men the pirates flung themselves headlong aboard their schooners, and endeavoured to make off, but they were soon captured and brought back, to be afterwards tried and hanged at the yard-arm.

When the man-o'-war's men boarded us, I ran down the companion stairs in search of the captain, whom I found lying senseless at the foot of the ladder. Fortunately for him, and for all of us, he had been stunned by a blow from one of the pirates as he descended, and was thus prevented from carrying out his desperate resolve to fire the magazine.

This was my last adventure upon the voyage, and some weeks later, without further mishap, we sighted a Dutch vessel bound for Amsterdam, to which, at my request, I was transferred.

CHAPTER XXV

I ARRIVE AT AMSTERDAM

My first care after arriving at Amsterdam was to interview the goldsmiths with a view to disposing of the jewels I had brought from the Island of Gems, which proved to be of such value that I realized a considerable sum by the sale of a small portion, for I wished to keep some of the best as a wedding present for Anna.

I lost no time in sending my compliments to the Count of Holstein, with a request that I might be allowed to call upon him. He consented to receive me, and I hastened to the Count's palace, where I found the old nobleman prostrated with grief at the continued and unexplained illness of his only child; but when Anna had seen me, and satisfied herself of my return, she recovered so rapidly that her father, on hearing from me my improved condition, and the sentiments which I entertained for his daughter, gladly gave his consent to our union.

From Anna I learnt of the persecution to which she had been subject from Count Hendrick Luitken, which had mainly been the cause of her illness. Convinced that she would never accept him willingly, Count Hendrick, unknown to her father, had attempted to abduct her to his country estate. With the aid of one of her attendants Anna had made her escape, and believing me dead, while fearing further persecution, she had determined, should she be restored to health, to seek the cloister as her only safe refuge. As her tale proceeded I found it hard to restrain myself from starting off at once in pursuit of the villain who had treated my loved one so shamefully, and I promised myself to bring him to account when the opportunity should arise.

I next sought Hartog at the tavern which I knew he frequented. When he saw me he cried out, "Is it you or your ghost, Peter? I had never looked to see thee again, lad. I'd sooner have thee back than salvage all the gold in the Orient."

I thanked him for his welcome, which I knew to be genuine, and taking a seat at his right hand, I began to tell him of my adventures since we last met. When he heard it was owing to the treachery of Van Luck I had been cast into the sea to be washed ashore on the Island of Gems, and of the subsequent fate of the island and of Van Luck, he became so interested

that he promised to meet me later, when I could give him a more detailed account of all that had befallen me. I offered to share with him my jewels, but to this he would not consent.

"Nay, Peter," he said, "I take no treasure that I had no hand in getting. I am no pirate to rob a friend to whom chance and opportunity have proved kind, but if it would please thee to give me a keepsake, I will wear one of thy jewels set as a brooch, as a reminder of thy goodwill. I am, moreover, in no need of money, for the gold we took at Cortes' island proved of greater value than I expected, and of this your share, together with the wages due to you, I will see to it is honestly paid by the merchants at Amsterdam. Besides, who knows we may sail together again?" But at this I shook my head.

"No more voyages for me, Hartog," I said, "I have had my share of the rough side of life, and will now be content with the smooth."

"And you not thirty!" laughed Hartog. "Nay, Peter, I'll never believe it of you, that having tasted of adventure, you will be satisfied with a humdrum life ashore."

I was now rich by the sale of my jewels, and able to choose for myself my future mode of life. Count Holstein advised me in the disposal of my wealth, and a fine estate being for sale not far from his own, I purchased it.

I urged my parents, who still resided upon the Island of Urk, where my father followed the occupation of a fisherman, to give up this mode of earning a livelihood and retire into private life, when I promised to make them a handsome allowance. But they would not consent to abandon their independence.

"I am not an old man, Peter," said my father, when I spoke to him on the subject, "and I have, I hope, still many useful years' work in me. I have always been a fisherman. My father was a fisherman, and so was his father before him. Fishing is the only work I understand. It is honest work. Why then should I live in idleness upon thy bounty, when I can still play my part in the world?"

I could not but see the force of his argument, so I contented myself with making my parents comfortable in the old home by adding many improvements which my mother desired but could not afford, while I presented my father with a new fishing-boat fitted with all the latest improvements.

It is wonderful, the power of money. It brought a new happiness into the lives of my parents, and it made my mother look ten years younger. My father also, and my two brothers, who were all fishermen, had now come to regard me as the flower of the flock. Yet they had not scrupled to knock me about, with little ceremony, in the days of my boyhood; nor do I think they would have been behindhand in finding fault with me for my folly, had I returned from my second voyage as poor and needy as from the first. But such is life, and a man must take what comes, and make the best of it and not the worst; so I accepted my new role as the patron saint of my family with philosophy and content.

Anna approved my parents' decision not to give up their independence. She came with me to see my mother, and I soon found that, as true women, there was no inequality between them. Anna had lost her own mother when she was too young to remember, and she clung to her new mother that was to be with an affection born of her loving nature.

In a word, my jewels had brought me the only true happiness which wealth can give---the power of making others happy.

CHAPTER XXVI

HAPPILY MARRIED

I now resolved to bring Count Hendrick Luitken to account for his treatment of Anna, though I did not desire that Anna's name should appear in the matter, so that gossip might be avoided. I therefore bided my time, and waited an opportunity which soon came.

The Count of Holstein had resigned the governorship of Urk, and now kept a fine establishment at Amsterdam, to which he frequently invited company, and at one of his banquets I met, as I expected, Count Hendrick Luitken.

As a merchant's clerk, and afterwards as a seaman, the Count had taken no notice of me, but now that I was rich and betrothed to Anna, he could do no less than treat me with consideration when he met me at her father's house.

The banquet was sumptuous, and no effort was spared to make it worthy of the late Governor's hospitality. Only men were invited, no women being present, so that free scope was given for the gluttony and drunkenness which usually prevailed at such entertainments. Great joints of beef and venison vanished like melting snow before the keen-set appetites of the diners, and goblets of wine disappeared down thirsty throats until all present were more or less under the influence of liquor. Toward the end of the entertainment, some horse-play was indulged in by the younger guests, among whom Count Hendrick Luitken was conspicuous. I could see he was the worse for liquor, and as often happens to those under the influence of strong drink, his veneer gave place to a quarrelsome arrogance in which his true disposition was displayed. Accompanied by some of his friends as boisterous as himself, he came over to where I was sitting, and, planting himself in a vacant chair on the other side of the table in front of me, he asked rudely how the fishing trade prospered at Urk.

I felt the blood mount to my face as I answered that for all I knew to the contrary it prospered well enough, although I had for some years past been away from Urk, and could therefore not answer the question as fully as I might otherwise have done.

"You've been a pirate since you gave up the fishing," sneered the Count, "and to some purpose if report speaks true."

For answer I threw the wine which stood in a half-emptied goblet at my elbow in his face.

The Count sprang to his feet, the red wine dripping from his handsome doublet, while his face worked with passion.

"Insolent!" he cried, when he had mastered himself sufficiently to articulate. "My rank will not let me fight you, but I have influence enough to punish you as you deserve."

"No difference in rank exists between us, my lord," I answered, "and I claim the right to cross swords in an affair of honour with all save those of royal blood. Grant me the satisfaction I demand, or I will brand you as a braggart and a coward throughout every town of the Netherlands."

I could see that the Count changed colour at my words. As the son of a fisherman he could have pleaded his nobility as an excuse for not meeting me, and had me punished by the law, but he had forgotten that my betrothal to Anna carried with it a dignity equal to his own, or I doubt he had been so ready with his tongue.

A hasty consultation was held among those who were with him, from which it appeared I was judged to be in the right, for presently the count turned and said to me, with a surly frown, "At dawn, then, in the courtyard," and quitted the hall.

Such scenes were not uncommon at this time, and beyond a question or two in our immediate vicinity, but little notice was taken of what had occurred. But Hugh Bergin, a friend who offered to second me in my affair with the count, advised some rest before the hour of meeting, which was now almost at hand, for it was said the count was a skilful swordsman, who had never yet failed to kill or maim his adversary in a duel.

Hugh Bergin and I were first in the courtyard at break of day, and here we were presently joined by the count and his seconds.

Count Hendrick Luitken and I now stepped forward, and, the rapiers having been handed to us, we fell to the task of trying to kill one another according to the rules of the duello.

At first I parried the count's attack, in order that I might learn the extent of his boasted skill, but I soon found myself to be his equal, if not his superior, in sword play, for I had spent much of my spare time in the gymnasium at Amsterdam, where I had become the favourite pupil of the instructor.

The count, I thought, seemed surprised at my cunning in fence, and lost the confident smile with which he had first regarded me. Presently I felt the point of my rapier touch his tunic upon the breast, and, in my sensitive grasp, I knew that my blade had encountered steel. The look which I gave him must have conveyed to him the knowledge that I had discovered his treachery, for he set his lips and attacked me with even greater fury than before, but my blood was up, and I beat his guard down with such force that I was presently enabled, by a trick I had learnt, known as binding the blade, to wrest the weapon from his hand. The seconds would now have interfered, but my temper was not to be restrained, and, to the astonishment of those present, I seized the count by the throat, and, tearing open his tunic, laid bare a breastplate which he wore next his skin. No blow that I could have struck this cowardly noble would have hurt him so much as this exposure. With shamefaced looks his seconds led him away. This was the last I saw of him, for he soon after left Holland, and took service with the Spaniards, with whom he had long been in league. Some years later he was condemned as a heretic, and suffered death by torture at the hands of the Inquisition.

Nothing now stood between me and my marriage with Anna, which was duly celebrated with much pomp at the Count of Holstein's town palace, after which Anna and I retired to my country estate, there to live, as I thought, the rest of our days in peace.

Dirk Hartog, to whom I bade good-bye after the wedding, for his restless spirit was away again upon a fresh voyage, predicted I would one day become weary of inaction.

"If ever the roving spirit comes over thee, Peter," he said as he wrung my hand at parting, "there's always a place for thee aboard my ship. Travel once tasted is a lodestone that draws the spirit from the cosiest corner to fresh adventure."

But at this I shook my head. "Here is my lodestone," I said, and I pressed Anna to my heart.

But who can foretell the future, or predict the decrees of Fate?

CHAPTER XXVII

ONCE MORE TO THE SOUTH

Five years of wedded happiness followed my return to Amsterdam from my second voyage with Dirk Hartog into the Southern Seas.

I had now come to regard myself as being past the age of adventure. My income was large, my estate substantial; and the wealth I had brought back with me from the Island of Gems, shrewdly invested by my father-in-law, the Count of Holstein, enabled me to maintain a position compatible with the dignity of the noble family into which, through my marriage with Anna Holstein, I was admitted a member. Nothing, therefore, was farther from my thoughts and inclinations than a return to the life of peril through which, in my younger days, I had passed, when suddenly the blow fell which changed all my plans.

During the year 1630 an epidemic known as the "Black Death" raged through the Netherlands, and, as one of the victims to the fell disease, Anna, my wife, was taken from me. I followed her to the grave, and returned to my desolate hearth determined to die also. To this end I shut myself in the room which Anna had lately occupied, where I would permit nothing to be disturbed, nor would allow any to enter. Such food as I required was brought, by my orders, into an adjoining apartment, where I ate, when my appetite craved, in moody silence. Dust gathered. The air in the room became oppressive. I regarded this mournful chamber as my tomb.

My servants, and those who had called themselves my friends, avoided me. I heard whispers at my barred and bolted door, saying that I was mad.

A madhouse I knew to be worse than a prison. I therefore resolved to leave my home before I was prevented from doing so.

How long I had remained in the state of misery and dejection to which I had abandoned myself I cannot say. It must have been some considerable time, for when, at last, I came out into the light, the sun dazzled me. None offered to stop me when I left the house. Many of my one-time servants had been discharged by my father-in-law, who had taken upon himself the management of my estates. The gatekeeper looked at me curiously when I passed his lodge, and that was all the notice vouchsafed me by my former dependents.

I knew that Dirk Hartog had returned from the voyage upon which he had embarked soon after my marriage, and to him I determined to carry my broken heart. Only upon that mirror of mystery known as the ocean could I look for peace.

I found my old commander in the cabin of the "Santa Isabel", an ancient Spanish vessel, reported to have voyaged to the south in 1595, when Mendana, a Spaniard, was sent out with instructions to establish a colony at the island of San Christobal, in the Solomon Group, and from thence to make an attempt to discover the Great Southern Continent. Mendana's fleet consisted of three large vessels and a frigate, and, since it was intended to settle a colony, many took their wives with them, among the emigrants being Mariana, the wife of Lope de Vega, who commanded the "Santa Isabel". The total number of men in the fleet was 378, of whom 280 were soldiers. The "Santa Isabel" became detached from the rest of the fleet, and reached the Great South Land, where she spent five years in a harbour said to be of great beauty and extent---the finest harbour in the world.

All this we learnt, from the log of the "Santa Isabel", though what became of the expedition, or of those who composed it, the record did not disclose. But the reading which interested Hartog most, keen treasure-hunter that he continued to be, was a paper describing some curious drawings he had found in one of the lockers of the vessel, of hands, some with six fingers, some with four, and others with only two. Under these drawings was the following inscription, translated into Spanish from some ancient language: "These hands are not carved upon the rocks, but are painted with a pigment that withstands the elements, and yieldeth not to time. They mark the measures of gold obtained." Then followed a rude chart giving the latitude and longitude of the place which Hartog professed his ability to find.

"Join me, Peter," he said, "and let us ship together. There's treasure to be won, dangers to be passed, and forgetfulness to be had in the South. You are still a young man---in your prime. Is it fair that you should set yourself against that which

plainly hath been decreed by Fate?"

These words of Hartog moved me, as well they might, and I placed myself unreservedly in his hands. My father-in-law, when he was made acquainted with my desire to embark upon another voyage, offered no opposition. He was, I imagine, glad to be rid of me, perceiving that my moods ashore might interfere with the plans he had formed for the management of my estates. So, all being settled to our mutual satisfaction, Hartog and I went to work to equip our vessel, in which occupation I found relief from my sorrow, and became more reconciled to submit myself to the will of heaven.

In three weeks our preparations were completed. A new ship was purchased, and commissioned without regard to cost. So much money was spent upon her that Hartog called her the "Golden Seahorse". She carried six guns, and a brass bow-chaser, with which Hartog declared we might make war upon the whole South Pacific in the event of our being forced to hostilities. A great quantity of arms and ammunition was put aboard, together with a supply of beads, knives, and bright-coloured cloths to barter with the natives. Berths were also found for Bantum and Janstins in the officers' quarters, and although Hartog and I were joint owners of the "Golden Seahorse", and shared equally in the profit or loss of the expedition, Hartog was given the supreme command.

It was not until we had lost sight of land, and when I felt the call of the sea, that I ceased to mourn my lost Anna, and realized my obligation to live what remained to me of life in such manner as an all-wise Providence might determine.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOLUCCA ISLANDS

On this voyage to the place of the painted hands Dirk Hartog resolved upon a different route from that taken by former navigators to the Great South Land, and within three months of leaving Amsterdam the "Golden Seahorse" came to anchor among a group of islands to the north of New Holland known as the Molucca Islands, first visited by Sir Francis Drake in the "Pelican" during the year 1579.

The competition between England and Holland for sea supremacy was at this time very keen, and the ships of both nations sometimes carried a broom at the masthead to signify the sweeping of the ocean. We found, however, no English or other vessels to dispute with us our landing at the Moluccas, where the King received us with some ceremony.

Providing ourselves with presents, Hartog and I, attended by the ship's officers, went ashore to pay our respects to the King, who accepted our tribute graciously, and, looking up to heaven, said:

"I know that nothing happens to men which has not, long since, been decreed by Fate. So bring your ship into the harbour and let your companions land in safety, in order that, after so much tossing about on the sea, and so many dangers, you may securely enjoy the comforts of life on shore and recruit your strength."

Having thus spoken, the King laid aside his diadem, and embraced each of us in turn. He then directed such refreshments as the country produced to be set before us.

The people of the Moluccas cannot be classed as savages. They possess an intelligence and form of government which lifts them above aboriginal natives. Each island has its king, who is, nevertheless, subservient to the chief Thedori, by whom we were received. This monarch is a man of small stature, but reputed wise beyond the wisdom of most men.

Certain it is he made wise laws for the good government of his kingdom, one of which might, with advantage, be followed by law-makers in more civilized nations. This is the law which makes for peace. So long as the king upon each

island maintains peace, his people show him almost divine honours; but, if he is anxious for war, they never rest till he is slain by the enemy in battle, and to this end they set him in the front rank, where he has to stand the whole brunt of the combat. His armies, moreover, do not exert themselves vigorously until they know that the king has fallen. Then they begin to fight for liberty and their new king. Since this law was enacted no king has entered upon a war without being slain in battle. Hence peace reigns, where formerly continued hostilities prevailed.

The city of Porne, in which King Thedori reigns as paramount chief, consists of twenty thousand houses, all of which are low-built cabins. Some of the men who inhabit these dwellings have such long ears that they reach down to their shoulders, and when we expressed surprise at this, we were assured that on an island, not far off, there were men who had such large ears, that with one ear they could, when they liked, cover the whole of their heads. But Hartog disbelieved this story, nor would he visit the island when this prodigy was offered to be shown to him. We were not in search of monsters, he said, but of treasure.

We had been informed by one of the merchants at Amsterdam that when we should come to the island of Solo, one of the group of the Molucca Islands, we would find pearls as large as clove's eggs, but Thedori did not encourage us when we hinted to him our desire to possess some of these marvels. They were only to be found, he said, in very deep water, and this was not the season to obtain them. We decided not to press the matter, since we desired to leave a favourable impression, but Hartog promised himself a return visit, when, should friendly overtures prove of no avail, an appeal, might be made to the King's better judgment with the aid of our six guns and brass bowchaser. It is certain that pearls of great size do exist on these islands. The King wore one in his crown the size of a hen's egg.

On our first night in harbour at the Molucca Islands we witnessed the most remarkable display I have ever beheld. The islands are well wooded, and amongst the trees by night, through the whole island, did show themselves an infinite swarm of fiery worms flying in the air, whose bodies, being no larger than common house-flies, made such a show and light as if every twig or tree had been a burning candle. In the dark recesses of the woods, also, appeared wonderful black bats, with red eyes, of which the inhabitants of this country stand in considerable dread. The bats are thought to be the spirits of departed kings, and none are allowed to molest them.

From the security of our vessel, which lay close to the shore, we were able to view these marvels without danger, but the natives remained in their huts, afraid to venture forth, so that nocturnal dances, or meetings at camp fires, were here conspicuous by their absence.

We now met with an adventure that was destined to influence our future in a manner we did not, at the time, foresee, or it is doubtful but we would have hesitated before granting an asylum to the miserable fugitive from King Thedori's tyranny, who now came aboard. Pedro de Castro, the name of this refugee, a Spaniard, informed us that for some time past he had been held as hostage by Thedori. Three years before our visit to the Moluccas, so ran his tale, a Spanish vessel, of which de Castro was first officer, had called at the islands. The captain and crew had been well received by the King, who had pretended the same friendliness towards them as he had shown to us. But so soon as a favourable opportunity offered, Thedori had looted the ship, and taken Pedro prisoner, declaring he would hold him to ransom, until his friends returned to Spain, from where they must send cotton, and other goods, not procurable at the Moluccas, in order to ensure his release. It was by this means that Thedori obtained many useful commodities of European workmanship, the presence of which we had noticed, with surprise, among his people. De Castro had contrived to escape his gaolers, and having swum aboard our vessel, he now besought us to save him from the miserable condition to which he had been reduced since his ship had sailed, leaving him dependent upon a vague promise of release from captivity, which he knew might never be fulfilled.

"And mark you," he said, when we had assembled the officers in the cabin to hear his story, "Thedori will serve you as he served us, when the time is ripe for his treachery, for he possesses many guns, hidden away, together with a great

store of ammunition, so that he could send an army against you that you would find it impossible to resist."

We thanked Pedro for his warning, and since we determined to profit by it, we could do no less than offer him a berth among our officers. But I had no love for Spaniards or their ways, and I lived to learn that my distrust of them was not misplaced. That night we made preparations for departure, and, with the first breath of dawn, we hove our anchor aboard, and set a course for the open sea.

When it was seen that we were leaving the island the utmost excitement prevailed on shore. The natives crowded upon the beach which bordered the harbour, while some put off in their canoes, making an effort to overtake us. But the "Golden Seahorse" was a ship very finely built, which caused her to slip through the water, needing but little wind to drive her at a rapid pace, so that we soon outdistanced our pursuers, and an hour later the Molucca Islands had disappeared beyond the horizon.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE VOYAGE CONTINUED

We had been compelled, by reason of the treachery of Thedori, to leave the Moluccas without having obtained a supply of fresh water. This made it necessary to keep a sharp look-out for some island from which to replenish our tanks. On most of the islands in the Pacific water is readily obtainable. It is only upon the Southern Continent that great stretches of waterless country prevail.

At length we sighted an island, the coast of which was rocky and barren. Through stress of weather we were compelled to keep off the shore, steering northward until, on the third day, the weather having moderated, we hove to as near to the coast as we dared approach, and endeavoured to land a boat's crew. In spite of breakers and a heavy sea, six of the sailors leaped overboard opposite a sandy beach, and with great difficulty reached the shore. Whilst searching for water the sailors saw four natives, who fled at their approach. They were wild, black, and entirely naked. Not finding water, the seamen regained the boat, bruised and half-drowned. Again we set sail, and next day we were off an island of considerable size, with two dangerous reefs stretching out into the sea. At length we managed to effect a landing, and fresh water being found, the ship was brought to anchor between the reefs, where some shelter was to be had, although the position of the vessel was by no means secure.

Upon this island we fell in with a race of savages totally unlike any we had previously met with. These people have no houses or garments of any kind, and, setting aside their human shape, they differ but little from brutes. They have large heads, round foreheads, and great brows. Their eyelids are always half-closed to keep the flies out of their eyes, these insects being so troublesome that no fanning will keep them away; so from their infancy being so tormented, they do never open their eyes as other people do, nor can they see far unless they hold up their heads as if they were looking at something over them. They have great bottle noses, full lips, and wide mouths.

They appeared to be quite indifferent to our landing upon their island, nor did they exhibit any fear or surprise at seeing us. We endeavoured to make them help us carry some water barrels to the boats. But though the barrels contained only six gallons each, and we put them on their shoulders, all the signs we could make to get them to carry them were useless. They stood like statues, without motion, grinning like so many monkeys. Having watered our vessel we once more put to sea.

We were now, by our reckoning, somewhere in the vicinity of New Holland, and at six o'clock in the evening we shortened sail. We were then in twenty fathoms of water, when suddenly we again found ourselves in deep water, and believed all danger at an end. But in less than an hour, without warning, our ship struck on a rock, and remained

immovable. Not being near to any shore we were well aware of the gravity of our position. We feared we had struck a submerged coral reef, and all sails were immediately taken in, and the boats lowered. We had struck just before dark, and at daylight I observed land some eight miles distant. High tide was expected at about eleven o'clock, when it was hoped the vessel would float off, though we feared she would sink in deep water.

At twenty minutes past ten the ship floated, but the leak she had sprung gained on the pumps, and there was now three feet nine inches of water in the hold. The men were wearied to death. Each could only pump a few minutes at a time, and then sink exhausted upon the deck. At first we despaired of saving the ship, but eventually we got a sail drawn over the leak, and anchored seven leagues from the shore. Next day we found a safe place where the vessel could be moored near the beach, where, on examining the ship's bottom, we found that a large piece of rock had broken away from the reef and remained stuck in the hole it made. Had it not been for this singular fact the "Golden Seahorse" must have foundered.

During the week which followed this adventure, which had almost proved disastrous to our voyage, we lightened the ship as much as possible, and made our camp ashore. We judged we had now come to the coast of New Holland, and since I had been the first to observe it on the morning after we had struck upon the reef, Hartog named that part of the coast Peter's land.

The ship being safely careened, the carpenters set to work to repair the damage done to the hull by the sharp rocks, and, as this would occupy some time, we decided to overhaul our stores, of which we made an inventory. At this work we found the services of Pedro de Castro of great value. De Castro was a man well versed in figures, and able to enumerate with surprising facility. Indeed, I think he spent most of his spare time in mental arithmetic, calculating the riches and treasure which he hoped some day to obtain.

One evening, when Hartog and I were seated together in front of our tent, de Castro brought us a paper which he said had been given him by a relative at Lisbon, who informed him that it was an extract from an ancient Portuguese manuscript, supposed to have been written by navigator Van Nuyts in 1467. The translation of this curious paper ran as follows:

"Land of Gold. While some fishermen of Lamakera, in the island of Solo, were engaged in their fishing, there arose so great a tempest that they were unable to return to the shore. Thus they yielded to the force of the storm, which was such that, in five days, it took them to the Land of Gold, which is properly called the Southern Coast. When the fishermen reached the Land of Gold, not having eaten during those days of tempest, they set about seeking for provisions, and such happy and successful fortune had they after searching the country for yams and batatas, that they alighted on much gold in a cavern, enough to load their boats until they could carry no more, but, when they were ready to start loading, there came upon them so great a trepidation that they did not dare take any of the gold away with them."

This further account of gold upon the Southern Continent strengthened our belief that treasure would be found at the place of the painted hands, to visit which our present voyage had been undertaken. But what could have caused the fishermen of Lamakera so great a trepidation we were at a loss to understand. Well, perhaps we would soon learn, for Hartog reckoned we were not many leagues north of the place marked upon the chart, which had encouraged us to embark upon this voyage.

CHAPTER XXX

A SPANISH SETTLEMENT

The "Golden Seahorse" being now repaired and revictualled, we once more put to sea, and stood to the south at a safe distance from the coast for fear of again meeting shoal water. On the morning of the first day out we passed the shoal

upon which we had so nearly lost our ship, it being but a spot of land appearing above the surface, with several rocks about it ten feet high, to be seen at low tide. It is of triangular form, each side one league and a half long.

We now approached some formidable cliffs, which rose, like a gateway, shutting out the land beyond. It was here that Hartog reckoned we should find the place of the painted hands, if, indeed, such a locality had any real existence.

The weather was now calm and fine, the wind fair, with a cloudless sky overhead, so that barely an hour passed from the time we observed the cliffs before we rounded them, when a sight appeared so unlooked for as made us wonder if our eyes had played us false.

The coast along which we had sailed since first sighting the Great South Land had been so barren and desolate as to make the novel and attractive scene which now greeted us the more remarkable. Clustered together in a pleasant valley, surrounded by green hills, and facing a white sandy beach, were some two hundred houses, built of stone, and roofed with what appeared to be clay, of such extraordinary whiteness that it glistened, like snow, in the sun's rays. The herbs and grass around the town were green and inviting, while tall, straight trees, not torn by the wind, bore evidence of shelter from tempest which the hills provided. To add to the beauty of the scene, flocks of parakeets and bright-coloured parrots flew among the branches of the trees, while sweet scents, from many kinds of flowers, were wafted to us from the shore. On the beach we perceived a number of white people, dressed in the fashion of some thirty years before. Many of them wore ruffs and cloaks, which were now no longer the mode, and, to set our doubts at rest as to their nationality, the Spanish ensign floated from a flagstaff in front of the town. It was plain we had chanced upon a Spanish colony, probably of some of the people of Mendana's fleet, who had succeeded in forming a settlement in New Holland.

Anxious to make a favourable impression upon our first landing, Hartog and I now donned our best, and the cutter, being manned, we were pulled toward the beach, where we could see that a number of Spaniards had assembled to receive us.

On landing we stepped forward as the leaders of our expedition, when we were greeted with the most extravagant demonstrations of delight at our arrival, and were presently conducted by some of those whom we took to be in authority to one of the flat-roofed stone houses, somewhat larger than the others, where Donna Isabel Barreto, the ruler of the settlement, graciously welcomed us. From her we learnt the following strange story.

The voyage of Mendana, as previously stated, had been undertaken with a view to colonization as well as discovery. After reaching the Solomon group the fleet dispersed. The "Santa Isabel", as her log informed us, spent five years in a fine harbour on the Southern Continent, from whence she had returned without establishing a settlement. Another of the ships and the frigate remained for a time at the islands, where the crews left many evidences of their visit. But it was reserved for us to ascertain what had befallen the "Concordia", the third of the vessels of Mendana's fleet. This ship, under the command of Captain Barreto, had reached New Holland, where the present settlement had been formed, and the town built. There were turbulent elements, however, among the crew, who had been allowed a license at the islands which their captain was not disposed to continue. He ordered the execution of some, before the rest were brought to submission. But there was sullen discontent remaining. To make matters worse, sickness broke out. It carried off a large number of the Spaniards, and Barreto himself died, as did his first officer. The pilot then claimed to take command, but to this Donna Isabel objected. As the captain's wife, she declared it to be her right to rule the settlement, and, marrying a young Spanish officer, Fernando de Castro, she assumed the title of queen, with Fernando as prince consort. To complicate matters still further, the pilot and those who were attached to him sailed away in the "Concordia", taking the infant son of Fernando and Isabel with them, and leaving the adherents of the queen marooned in this pleasant and fertile valley. Fernando, soon after the sailing of the "Concordia", died, since when Donna Isabel, who had resumed the name of Barreto, had reigned alone. This was, in brief, the story the Queen had to tell; and on hearing it Pedro de Castro threw himself at her feet, and claimed to be her son.

Donna Isabel was now past middle age, being near forty years old, but she bore herself with a degree of uprightness and vigour which defied the advance of time. She was readily convinced of the truth of Pedro's statement, and when she had bidden him to rise she embraced him, and acknowledged him to be her son.

"You have been led back to me," she said, "by the will of heaven, and by the courage of these brave men who shall henceforth be to me my brothers."

Fair words, but lacking the ring of sincerity, as we were subsequently to find.

Queen Barreto then begged us to consider her dominions at our disposal to the extent of all they contained. Houses were allotted us, and servants were instructed to place before us the best the country produced. We fared sumptuously, for the natural growth in this sheltered valley is surprising. The bread given us was made from three kinds of roots, of which there is a great abundance, and they grow without labour, receiving no more help than being dug up and cooked. These roots are pleasant to the taste, very nourishing, and keep for a long while. They are a yard long, and half a yard thick. The fruits, too, were numerous and good, consisting of oranges and lemons, which the Spaniards had planted, together with many earth-nuts, almonds, and other fruit, as well as sweet canes. Of live stock the settlers possessed goats, pigs, and a few cows. Round the houses were many fruit trees, with entwined palisades, by reason of the great quantity of pigs; the town was well arranged, the houses and yards being very clean.

Queen Barreto kept Pedro with her in her own house, while Hartog and I, together with the officers and crew of the "Golden Seahorse", were suitably accommodated and made free of the settlement, where we enjoyed a run ashore after so much storm and stress at sea.

We had not yet ascertained whether the settlers had been successful in finding gold in this place. Pearls and silver they possessed as evidence of their wealth, but we saw no gold among them. Pedro, who came to consult with us regarding this, informed us that his mother, the queen, had heard nothing of the place of the painted hands, or of gold being found there, but had told him that some years previously an expedition, sent to punish a tribe of natives who had proved hostile to the settlers, had reported the discovery of caves, very deep and mysterious, into which the natives could not be induced to enter, where, it was reported, gold was to be found by washing the sand from the bed of a subterranean stream which took its course through the caves from none knew where, and emptied itself into the sea.

To these caves, therefore, now being rested and refreshed, we determined to direct our steps.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PLACE OF THE PAINTED HANDS

Upon leaving the Spanish settlement, Queen Barreto provided us with an escort to guide us to the caves in which it was reported gold was to be found. The country outside the settlement was of the same rocky, barren nature as everywhere along the coast, while the natives we encountered were hostile and warlike. Armed with spears and slings, they attacked us, and were only driven off after many had been slain.

Pedro de Castro did not accompany us. He had pleaded a disinclination to leave his mother so soon after their long separation. At the time we thought his conduct strange, but in return for the assistance that Queen Barreto had given us, we promised him a share of any gold obtained.

At length, after a day's journey, we came to the entrance to the caves, a gloomy portal to a tunnel which ran into a high rocky cliff from which issued a sluggish stream over a bed of water-worn pebbles. At the entrance to this dark recess,

upon the face of a flat rock, appeared painted hands, some with six fingers, some with four, and others with only two. They were painted with a dark brown pigment, and were easily discernible. It was the sight of these hands, and the assertion that they had reference to the measures of gold obtained, as set forth on the paper found by Hartog in the locker of the "Santa Isabel", that decided us to explore farther into the heart of the caves, and, having procured torches, Hartog and I, accompanied by Janstins and a lad named Bruno, a Mulatto, entered the tunnel, and made our way along the left bank of the stream.

As we advanced the caves increased in size, until at length we stood in a great apartment, formed of colossal fluted pillars, and roofed high above our heads with depending stalactites which glistened in the light of our torches. Everywhere in this huge cavern the same mineral formation was to be seen, so that we seemed to be standing in a palace composed of glittering gems.

The stream here was wide, moving sluggishly over a bed of black sand. Presently a cry from Janstins brought us to where he was standing beside a heap of what, at first sight, looked like yellow clay, but which, upon closer inspection, proved to be a quantity of gold dust, interspersed with small nuggets. Here, then, was the treasure collected by the fishermen from Lamakera, and abandoned by them in 1467, almost two hundred years before the date of our coming. But the cause of the great trepidation which had come upon them, so that they had been unable to carry the gold away, we had yet to learn.

We had become so intent upon our gold discovery that we had failed to notice a peculiar humming sound, which became louder as it drew nearer, and suddenly we observed descending upon us, from the vaulted roof, what appeared to be white feathery clouds, which, however, speedily resolved themselves into a prodigious number of flying hornets. Bruno was the first to be attacked by these venomous insects. In a moment he was covered with them, and ran screaming into the water of the slowly-moving stream. His cries were pitiful, but we could do nothing to relieve him. In less than a minute he was stung to death.

It now became imperative, if we would save ourselves, to make the best of our way out of the caves without attempting to carry off any of the gold we had found. The fate of the boy Bruno had caused a diversion among the hornets to which we probably owed our lives. In the hope of distracting them still further, we fired off our muskets, which awoke echoes in that silent place the like of which had never been heard before. Had we exploded a barrel of gunpowder, the sound of it would not have been louder nor the concussion greater, than was caused by the discharge of our firearms. Huge masses of stalactites fell from the roof, while the air space around us became filled with bats, and flying creatures with heads like foxes, disturbed from their slumbers by the discharge of our guns. The flapping of their wings drove off the hornets, and greatly aided us in our escape from a horrible death.

On reaching the entrance to the caves, where we arrived more dead than alive from our adventure, we were met by those of our crew whom we had brought with us, but were informed that our guides had returned to the settlement. For this conduct the guides had offered no explanation. They had said they were acting in accordance with directions given them by Queen Barreto, and that, having brought us to the mouth of the caves, their mission ended. We did not at the time attach much importance to this desertion of us, being now well acquainted with the path over the cliffs into the valley, opposite to which our ship lay at anchor, so we did not anticipate any difficulty in returning. As we advanced, however, our journey was continually impeded by attacks made upon us by hostile natives, so it was not until toward the evening of the second day after leaving the caves that we succeeded in climbing the cliffs above the settlement. Judge then of our dismay when, upon looking seaward, we perceived our ship standing out from the bay under full sail, while at her mizzen floated the flag of Spain.

CHAPTER XXXII

MAROONED

As we stood upon the cliffs overlooking the Spanish settlement, watching, with blank faces, the "Golden Seahorse" sailing seaward under a foreign flag, it was borne in upon us that we owed our loss to the treachery of Queen Barreto, who, taking advantage of our absence, had pirated our vessel. On descending to the town our suspicions were confirmed. Here we found the settlement abandoned by the Spaniards, who, before leaving, had imprisoned our crew, bound and gagged, in the Queen's house. Having released them, we heard from Bantum, our second officer, the particulars of what had occurred.

"No sooner had you left the town," said he, "than Queen Barreto, with Pedro de Castro and a swarm of Spaniards, came aboard of us. De Castro knew where the arms were kept, and, before I could guess what they intended, they had hoisted their flag at the mizzen, and held possession of the ship. We put up a fight, but what could we do, outnumbered as we were--ten to one? We were quickly overpowered and brought ashore, where they trussed us up and left us as you found us. Had you not come in time we would certainly have died of thirst and starvation."

When we had listened to Bantum's account of what had taken place we could not blame him for the loss of the ship, but Hartog swore a great oath that, if ever he should meet de Castro again he would reckon with him in such manner as his base betrayal of us gave warrant. The ingratitude of this man will be apparent when it is remembered that we had rescued him from slavery, had admitted him to an equality with our officers, and had loaded him with favours, for which he repaid us by stealing our vessel.

It now became necessary to review our situation. Of food and fresh water we had an abundant supply, and there were dwellings at our disposal more than enough, for the Spaniards had numbered over two hundred, while we mustered but thirty. We possessed, however, no arms or ammunition beyond what we had taken with us upon our expedition to the caves. The thought of this caused us grave anxiety when we reflected upon the small force at our disposal should hostile natives, having discovered our weakness, be tempted to attack us. Repining, however, would avail us nothing, so, at Hartog's request, I set about organizing our camp. Hartog himself was so cast down by the loss of our ship that he seemed incapable of diverting his thoughts from the catastrophe which had overtaken us. I thus found our former positions reversed, Hartog being on the brink of the same hopeless despair which had obsessed me when Anna was taken from me, while upon me devolved the task of heartening him.

And now a new danger threatened us. We had not been a month at the settlement after the piracy of the "Golden Seahorse" before it became evident to me that our crew had ceased to regard their officers with the same respect as they had formerly shown them on board ship. Sailors, ashore, are accustomed to a license they do not look for at sea. Hence it was but natural that, since their ship no longer claimed their duty, they should regard themselves as freed from discipline. This revolt against authority, however, I knew to be a menace to our common safety, and I determined to put an end to it. I spoke first to Hartog, who spent most of his time in the Queen's house, brooding over our misfortune, and thus setting a very bad example.

"It is not because you are no longer captain of the 'Golden Seahorse'," I said to him, "that you should regard your responsibilities at an end. If you can regain your authority over the men, we may yet win through. If not, then let us at once abandon ourselves to the mercy of the savages, whom, I may tell you, I have observed watching us from the cliffs above, and who are only waiting to assure themselves of our weakness before they attack us."

For a time Hartog remained silent. Then he rose, and stretched himself; drawing himself up to his full height, he stood before me, the finest specimen of a man I have ever met.

"You are right, Peter," he said. "I deserve the scolding you have given me. Show me the man who will not obey me, and I will talk to him."

Now there was one, Hoft Hugens, a Swede, who had made himself a leader among the mutinous and lazy crew. I had intended dealing with this man myself, but it now occurred to me that his schooling would serve to rouse Hartog from his apathy.

"If you must know, then," I answered, "it is Hoft Hugens to whom the men look as leader."

The next minute Hartog was striding through the town, a native club in his hand, which he had taken from the Queen's house. Although past noon, there were none to be seen outside the huts. All were asleep after their mid-day meal, upon which they had gorged themselves to repletion. At the sight of this defiance of discipline a deep flush overspread Hartog's face, as though he felt shame for having allowed his authority to pass from him. Then he began to beat with his club upon the doors of the houses until the men came out, some in sleepy remonstrance, and others with curses in their mouths at having been disturbed from their siesta.

"Well, what have you to say?" demanded Hartog. "Is it not enough that our condition is such that if only fifty determined savages came against us they could kill us and destroy the settlement, but you must waste your time in gluttony and sleep? Where is the watch, whose duty it is to keep a look-out as though I stood upon my quarterdeck?"

"Nay, Hartog," answered Hugen, whom the others now pushed forward to be their spokesman, "there must be an end to such talk. We shall never get away from this valley. What need then for so much rule when death is certain?"

"Certain it is for thee," cried Hartog, placing his hand on Hugen's shoulder, and tightening his grip so that the man winced with pain. "Ask pardon before I tear thine arm from its socket!"

At this, those who had begun to advance to their leader's assistance drew back. It was known that the punishment which Hartog threatened had actually been carried out by one of the buccaneer captains upon a mutinous seaman, and none doubted but Hartog had the strength to fulfil his threat. Hugen's face blanched as the grip tightened upon his arm. He tried to free himself. Tears started to his eyes. A sob broke from his heaving chest. Then he screamed with the intolerable agony he suffered, but none dare interfere, and I verily believe that Hartog would have performed his promise and torn the limb from its socket had not one of the men, who had been looking seaward, cried, "A sail! sail!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

CAPTAIN MONTBAR

The report of a sail having been sighted dispelled every other thought. Hartog released Hugen, and, hurrying to the Queen's house, shortly afterwards returned with his spyglass, with which he anxiously scanned the horizon.

"God be thanked, Peter," he said presently, "our ship is coming back to us, convoyed by a frigate."

So great was my joy at hearing these words that at first I could hardly credit the truth of them, but as the ships drew nearer we could all see that the smaller of the two was the "Golden Seahorse". The vessels sailed into the bay which formed the port of the settlement, and dropped anchor close to the shore, when a boat put off from the frigate, and was rowed toward the beach. The crew were smart, and the boat was fresh painted, while, seated at the stern, was a striking, yet curious, figure. His dress was that of a French exquisite, very rich, and trimmed with much gold braid. On his head was a curled wig of the latest mode, and a flashing diamond brooch adorned his lace cravat. On nearing the beach upon

which we were assembled one of the sailors stepped into the water and waded ashore, carrying this gallant upon his back, who, being deposited upon a dry spot, so that his buckled shoe might escape damage from the salt water, gravely saluted us. Hartog then, stepped forward, when the Frenchman, for such we took him to be, addressed him as follows:---

"I have come, sir," said he, "to restore to you your vessel, which I understand was stolen by Spanish treachery."

"You are welcome," answered Hartog. "I thank Providence that my ship has fallen into honest hands. I have yet to learn to whom I owe its recovery. May I hope that you will favour me with your name?"

"Montbar," replied the stranger, and at the mention of his name both Hartog and I started.

"You honour us by your visit, sir," said Hartog, with a bow as graceful as that with which Captain Montbar acknowledged it. "Your reputation is known to all seamen as that of a brave man and a princely gentleman."

Hartog then led the way to the Queen's house, where we proposed to confer together as to the circumstances which had occasioned Captain Montbar's arrival.

Captain Montbar was known to us, and to most navigators at this time, as a French gentleman of fortune who, having heard of the cruelties practised by the Spaniards, had conceived an aversion against them which amounted almost to frenzy. He had heard of the buccaneers, who were known to be the most inveterate enemies of Spain, and, in order to join them, he fitted out a frigate which he placed at their disposal, together with his own services. The achievements of this frigate were so pronounced, and the Spaniards suffered so much from Montbar's exploits, that he acquired the name of 'Exterminator.' His intrepidity would never let him suffer the least signs of cowardice among those who associated with him. In the heat of an engagement he went about his ship, observing his men, and immediately killing those who shrank at the report of pistol, gun, or cannon. This extraordinary discipline had made him the terror of the coward and the idol of the brave. In other respects he readily shared with such of his men as showed spirit the great booty that was acquired by his fearless disposition. When he went upon these buccaneering expeditions he sailed in his frigate, his own property, nor would he take a lion's share of the treasure obtained from captured Spanish merchantmen, but divided it equally with those who formed his ship's company.

Such was the remarkable man to whom we owed the restoration of the "Golden Seahorse".

From Captain Montbar we learned the particulars connected with the recovery of our ship from the Spaniards.

"I had been driven out of my course," he said, "by contrary winds, when we sighted a vessel flying the Spanish flag, which I am bound, by a solemn oath, whenever an opportunity offers, to destroy. I was about to sink her when I noticed an unusual number of people upon her decks, among whom were several women and children, and, since I war only with men, I sent a boat to demand the surrender of the vessel. This was at once agreed to. Her colours were struck, and my own hoisted at the mizzen. I then went on board to hold an enquiry, and decide what was to be done, when I found that the ship had been stolen from a party of Dutch navigators on a visit to this country. The object of stealing the ship was for the purpose of conveying the settlers, who had been marooned here for some years, to their homes. It was not difficult, in the crowded state of the vessel, to find many who were prepared to disclose the whole truth. Donna Isabel Barreto, who appeared to be a queen among these people, then offered to make terms with me, promising, if I would suffer her to continue the voyage, she would send, as ransom, a large sum of money, of which she professed to have command at Madrid; but, having some experience of Spanish promises, I declined this offer, preferring to retain possession of the ship I had captured, which appeared to be of good build and well found. I undertook, however, to disembark Donna Isabel and her followers upon the first land we sighted, which happened to be a desolate-looking island by no means comparable with this fertile valley. Isabel then threw herself on her knees, and implored me not to abandon

her, and her people, to death by slow starvation, which the landing of so great a company on such an uninviting shore would mean. But I was obdurate. 'Be thankful,' said I, 'that your lives are spared you. It is not for me to interfere with the decrees of Fate. This punishment for having stolen their vessel from those who trusted you, and to whom you were bound by the laws of hospitality, has clearly been ordained by Providence. Land, then, and, by your submission in face of adversity, seek to atone for your treacherous conduct.'

"The party being landed and left to shift for themselves, I resolved to continue my voyage to this place, of which I had been given the bearings, in order that I might restore to you your ship, for I take no booty except from Spain."

We again thanked our generous visitor, nor could we do less than place ourselves and our ship at his disposal.

"Come back with me, then," said Montbar, "and join our band. I have voyaged far into these southern latitudes in search of treasure, and I may tell you that the islands of the south are by no means comparable with those in the west."

But at this we asked time to consider. Although we had no cause to love the Spaniards, we had no reason to hate them with the same inveterate hatred displayed by Montbar. Besides, in spite of the glamour that surrounded them, we knew the buccaneers to be no better than pirates. Still it seemed a poor return to make Captain Montbar for the service he had rendered us to refuse his request. While we hesitated between two minds what we should do, I bethought me of the gold dust at the place of the painted hands. We had never intended to abandon this treasure by reason of a swarm of insects, however numerous and venomous they might be. The fishermen from Lamakera had excuse for doing so, since they lacked the equipment to combat the pests which infested the caves, but, with the resources of a ship at our disposal, it would be strange if we could not devise some means to carry off the gold, share it with Montbar, and thus repay the obligation we owed him.

I mentioned this project to Hartog, who at once fell in with my plan.

"You are a wizard, Peter," he said, "for finding a way out of a dilemma. If we can get this treasure, and either share it with Montbar, or give it all to him should it not prove considerable, our debt will be paid, so that we may continue our voyage whithersoever our fancy leads us, but, with the price of the ship on my conscience, I could never regard myself as a free man. Montbar knows this.

"It is the rule of the sea that captured vessels are spoils to the victor. For all his fine speeches, I feel convinced that Montbar looks upon the ship as his own, and has only come to obtain her crew also to be henceforth under his command. But, should ransom be paid, Montbar would consider us freed from all obligation."

That evening, therefore, Hartog stated plainly our conditions to Captain Montbar, which, shortly, were that if the treasure proved to be of great value, we would divide it equally among the companies of the frigate and our ship; if not of great value, then the whole of the treasure was to go to the frigate as salvage for our vessel; and if we did not succeed in bringing the treasure away, then our ship and her company were to be at Montbar's disposal, to do with as he thought fit.

These proposals were received by Montbar with a gravity and shrewdness which clearly proved his professed generosity in returning us our vessel was only preliminary to demanding a ransom.

"Let it be as you say, then," he said. "Within a week we shall have ascertained the value of this treasure, when the matter may be adjusted in the manner you propose. Meanwhile, the resources of my vessel are at your disposal."

We thanked him and withdrew, but we determined only to employ our own men on our second visit to the caves. A fair remuneration for the salvage of our ship was all that Captain Montbar looked for or expected, and we saw no reason why

we should disclose our secret to any beyond those chosen from our own company, nor did Montbar seek to pry into our business, contenting himself with our promise, at the end of the week either to pay him salvage or surrender our ship and ourselves, to be disposed of in such manner as might please him best.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WE AGAIN EXPLORE THE CAVES

During the two days which followed the making of our compact with Captain Montbar we were busy with our preparations for a second visit to the place of the painted hands, where we knew that gold was to be obtained for those who had the courage to carry it away. This time we sailed round, so that we were saved the journey over the cliffs. We had caused to be made for Hartog, Janstins, and me dresses of sail-cloth, with masks like those worn by Inquisitors, the eye-holes being filled with glass. The sleeves of the jacket were made long, so as to cover our hands. Our sea boots and breeches we knew to be impervious to hornet stings, and, thus equipped, we hoped to succeed in carrying away the treasure which the Lamakera fishermen had abandoned.

We took the smallest of our ship's boats, in which we rowed ashore, and, leaving the crew at the entrance to the caves, we three, as silently as possible, propelled the boat along the stream into the interior. As we progressed we met with evidences of our former visit. Lumps of stalactites lay where they had fallen when shaken from the vaulted roof by the discharge of our firearms. The body of the lad Bruno was also to be seen, half submerged, in the water of the stream. Close to the body was the heap of gold dust, and this we began to load into our boat, making as little noise as possible lest we should disturb the hornets from their nests.

We worked rapidly, and in less than an hour we had filled the boat with as much as she could carry of the heavy sand, nearly all of which was gold dust, when a humming warned us of the approach of the hornets. We had brought with us but a single torch, so as to avoid the light which we knew would attract the swarm of venomous insects, as also the bats and flying creatures which had made their home in these wonderful caverns; but the solitary gleam, in so much darkness, seemed to burn with the brightness of a conflagration. The smoke, also, from our torch, ascending into the vaulted roof of the cavern, was beginning to disturb the weird dwellers from their gloomy abode, and already ghostly, bat-like forms began to fill the air space above our heads. It was time to leave, and, reluctantly, we began to push the boat toward the mouth of the cave, promising ourselves to return next day for more of the precious stuff; of which there appeared to be an inexhaustible supply. As we neared the entrance to the cave, however, we were startled to observe a peril which had hitherto escaped our notice. Poised over the arch of the narrow passage was a mass of rock so finely balanced that it seemed to be held in its place by the weight of a number of bat-like creatures clustering at one of its angles. As we approached, these bats, startled by the light of our torch, began, one or two at a time, to rise from their resting place, causing the rock to topple toward us. Thus we stood in danger of being crushed by the mass should it fall as we passed the entrance, or, worse still, if it fell before we escaped into the cave beyond, we might find ourselves entombed alive in this dreadful place, to become a prey to the horrors of which we had had previous experience.

"Forward!" roared Hartog, and, putting forth his great strength, he began to propel the boat, heavily laden as she was, at a rapid pace toward the entrance of the cavern. With our hearts in our throats, Janstins and I came to his assistance, and, pushing frantically together, we drove the boat through the entrance just as the bats, in a body, rose from the balancing rock, which, relieved of their weight, fell with a crash, effectually blocking the path into the cave. Fortunately we were on the right side of the obstacle, and our way was open to the sea, but a moment's hesitation would have consigned us to a lingering death, which, I am not ashamed to say, I shuddered to contemplate.

We now took off the canvas jackets and masks we had worn as a protection against stings from the hornets, and, without further mishap, conveyed the sand we had brought away with us on board our ship, from which we washed six buckets

full of gold dust. Each bucketful we reckoned, by weight, to be worth twenty thousand English pounds, so that we had ransom to pay Montbar for salvaging our vessel, besides retaining enough to make us all rich men.

Our crew, who had now become obedient to Hartog's authority, were desirous to continue the search of the cavern, in the hope of obtaining more of the precious metal, but on being taken to the entrance to the caves, it was found that an impassable barrier of rock stood between them and their desire for boundless wealth. They were, therefore, compelled to be satisfied with a share in the gold we had already won.

And here it may be observed how wise are the ways of Providence and how watchful appeared to be the good genius who followed our destiny. Had limitless wealth been suddenly showered upon us, what evil consequences might have followed? Man is, after all, but an avaricious creature, who requires the discipline of necessity to restrain his covetous nature. The prospect of gold-getting would probably have undermined Hartog's authority, and would most likely have ended in disaster for us all. As it was, we had enough, but not more than enough, and the discipline of our ship, so necessary to our common safety, was maintained.

We paid Montbar, according to our agreement, gold to the value of sixty thousand English pounds, that being half the value of the gold obtained, with which he expressed himself well satisfied.

"Honesty is, after all, the best policy," he said. "Had I not restored to you your ship I would have missed this treasure, that will well repay me for my long voyage, which I had before thought profitless. I regret your decision not to accompany me to the West Indies, but since you have paid your ransom you are free to go whithersoever your fancy may lead you, without let or hindrance."

We thanked Montbar, although I could not help smiling at the tribute which he paid to honesty when I remembered that the lockers in his cabins were crammed with the loot which he had taken as a freebooter upon the seas.

CHAPTER XXXV

I AM KIDNAPPED

We were now of two minds, whether to continue the exploration of New Holland, or to shape a course for the islands of the South Seas; but Hartog finally decided for the islands, where there is always adventure and profit to be had. Besides, we were anxious to prove the truth, or otherwise, of the existence of the Islands of Engano, mentioned by Marco Polo in the account of his voyage round the world in the year 1272, as the Male and Female Islands.

The first group of islands we touched at after leaving the abandoned Spanish settlement at New Holland, appeared to be well wooded and fertile, and approaching one of the largest we cast anchor near the shore. On the following day we endeavoured to work to windward of this dangerous coast, but in spite of skilful seamanship it soon became certain we were being drawn, probably by some strong current, closer to the land. The ship was so near to the rocks that escape appeared impossible. At three in the afternoon, however, the ship doubled the reefs, it may be said, almost by a miracle.

This adventure set us thinking upon a record among the manuscripts we had brought with us of a remarkable phenomenon existing somewhere in these regions. In describing one of the larger islands the record says: "By the coast of this country, toward the north, is the sea called the Dead Sea, the water whereof runneth into the earth, and if anyone falleth into that water he is never found more. And if shipmen go but a little way into it they are carried rapidly downward, and never return again. And none knoweth whither they are carried, and many have thus passed away, and it hath never been known what became of them."

We had hitherto given little credence to this report, but our recent experience proved the currents running between these islands to be strong and treacherous, and warned us to be on guard against them. The great distance we were from home, and the absence of any assistance to be looked for from men of our own race made it doubly necessary to consider every aspect of our voyage in order to escape the many perils which everywhere beset us.

We now approached a coast running east and west to the horizon, so that we could not say whether we had come to an island or to another southern continent. The anxieties through which we had passed, particularly our narrow escape from shipwreck upon the reefs, made it desirable we should seek some haven in which to recruit our strength and re-victual our ship before setting out upon our homeward voyage, for Hartog was anxious to deposit the gold we had obtained from the place of the painted hands in safe keeping at Amsterdam. The carrying about of so much treasure on board the vessel was a risk he thought it imprudent to run, as the presence of gold on the ship would prove a constant temptation to the men to mutiny. Besides which, there was always the chance of capture by pirates or freebooters who, at this time, roamed the seas. General satisfaction was, therefore, expressed when Hartog announced his intention of returning to Amsterdam.

On the morning of the next day after sighting the land along which we now coasted the look-out reported a sheltered bay, which promised us the haven we desired, and an hour later we cast anchor under the lee of a bold headland, near to a beach, which bordered what appeared to be a fertile and well-wooded country.

We had barely found our moorings when five natives came in a canoe, the middle one vigorously baling the water out of the craft. As they drew nearer we observed that they were all women, one standing up at the prow, whose red hair came down to her waist. She was white as regards colour, beautifully shaped, the face aquiline and handsome, rather freckled and rosy, the eyes black and gracious, the forehead and eyebrows good, the nose, mouth, and lips well-proportioned, with the teeth well-ordered and white. Being rich in so many parts and graces she would be judged to be a very beautiful woman, and at first sight she stole away my heart. On arriving alongside she climbed aboard with amazing agility, and without the least sign of fear, from which I conjectured that Europeans were not unknown to her. As her eyes swept us her glance halted when it rested upon me, and, without embarrassment, she made signs for me to approach her.

"Whence come ye?" she said, speaking in Spanish, though with an accent that sounded unfamiliar.

"From the white man's country," I answered, "to seek adventure in this land."

"Ye come far to seek little," she replied. "This land is desolate. None may live upon it. It is waterless."

"Then we must look farther," I answered. "We are in search of water."

"I can show you where water is," she continued, "if you will come with me."

I hesitated, and Hartog, when he caught the drift of her invitation, bade me on no account trust myself alone with these savages.

"Our boats will be lowered directly," I answered. "Then you may show us where to find fresh water, and we shall be grateful."

"I cannot wait for your boats," she replied. "Come with me now if you are not afraid. Your boats can follow."

It would have shamed me to confess fear to go with these women, and, not dreaming of treachery, I descended to the canoe, while Hartog and the others made ready to follow in the ship's boats. But I had no sooner set foot in the canoe

than the four girls, who possessed the strength of young men, began to paddle vigorously toward a point which jutted out on the western side of the bay in which the "Golden Seahorse" lay at anchor. We soon rounded the point, when we lost sight of the ship. Thinking that all this was intended for a jest, I remonstrated with my beautiful captor, and called upon her to bid the girls cease rowing until my companions should come up with us; but at this she only laughed, and at a word from her the girls redoubled their exertions until the canoe seemed to fly over the surface of the water. We now approached a precipice, which rose sheer out of the sea, and, as we drew nearer, I observed a tunnel into which the water rushed with the force of a mill-race. It then came to my mind that this was the current I had read of which ran into the earth, and along which shipmen had been carried, never to be heard of again.

I glanced at the woman who had kidnapped me in this strange fashion seemingly with the object of enticing me to my doom. Her face was set and stern; with both hands she grasped a steering paddle, with which she guided the canoe into the rushing stream. The girls had ceased rowing, and were crouched together in the frail craft, which now, caught by the hand of Nature, was carried with incredible speed into the darkness of the unknown.

How long we were in the tunnel I cannot say. It seemed an eternity, but it could not actually have been very long. The speed at which we travelled was so great as to make the drawing of the breath difficult, and a strange humming sound---very loud---made it impossible to speak or even to cry out. I had abandoned hope and resigned myself to death when suddenly we emerged from the tunnel into a blinding sunshine, which dazzled the eyes after the darkness. Once more we had come to the open sea.

The girls resumed their paddles, and now began to urge the canoe toward one of two islands visible on the horizon about thirty miles apart.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE MALE AND FEMALE ISLANDS

I was now able to demand an explanation for the cause of my abduction, which I did with some warmth.

"In what way have I offended," I asked of the woman who had enticed me on board the canoe, "that you should repay the trust I placed in you with treachery? We came among you as friends, desiring nothing so much as your goodwill. But you have treated me as an enemy, carried me away from my ship, and separated me from my friends. Take heed, I am a man, and have some strength. You are but women. Why, then, should I not overpower you and return the way I came?"

"That is impossible," answered my captor. "None could make their way back through the tunnel against the stream."

"At least, tell me then," I continued, "your name, for what purpose I am brought here, and whither you are taking me."

"My name is Sylvia Cervantes," replied my captor, proudly. "As to why you are brought here, ask the wise-ones whom you shall presently see. Yonder islands are the Islands of Engano."

In the surprise which her words occasioned I almost forgot the anger which had begun to burn within me when I thought of how basely I had been betrayed. Before me were the wonderful Male and Female Islands, fabled by Marco Polo. I had come upon this voyage with Dirk Hartog in quest of adventure. Well, here was an adventure awaiting me that was likely to prove the most remarkable I had yet encountered.

As we drew near, to one of the islands, I was impressed by the extreme beauty of the scene. The cliffs rose to great heights, forming a dark, clear-cut line against the sky, while between the lofty walls, verdant valleys stretched down to

the white, sandy beaches, upon which the waves broke in glistening spume. Toward a beach, somewhere about the centre of the island, our course was laid, and upon coming to the shallows, the girls shipped their paddles and sprang into the water, when, with others helping them, they ran the canoe on to the beach, making no more of my weight than if I had been a child.

I now observed among the woods of the, very ancient stone buildings, which, at one time, must have been occupied by a people possessing a high state of civilization. They were in ruins, and overgrown by flowering shrubs and creepers, but were apparently still used as habitations for it was to one of these houses I was presently conducted. Here I was invited to rest and refresh myself with some delicious fruit that was set before me, the like of which I do not remember having tasted before.

Sylvia Cervantes now joined me, and in the witchery of her presence I forgot my perilous plight, and gave myself up to the luxury and enjoyment of the moment.

From Sylvia I learnt the history of my capture, and why she had come to entice me away with her.

Having inquired my name, which I gave her, Sylvia continued as follows:---

"You must know, then, Peter," she said, "that we are ruled here by custom which may not be changed. The wise-ones who live on the mountain tops tell us what to do, and we do it without question. The wise-ones are not as others are. They see what others cannot see, and they know many things that others cannot even guess at, so when the wise-ones told me your ship was on the other side of the Great Barren Island, and that I was to take my canoe and bring you here, I could not help but obey."

"How is it possible," I asked, "that mortal eyes can see so far?"

"The eyes of the wise-ones are not as mortal eyes," replied Sylvia, gravely. "Rest now, and to-morrow you shall hear what is required of you."

I was so affected by the calamity which had overtaken me that I lacked the disposition to question Sylvia more closely on the matter. It was plain I was a captive, and helpless to avert my fate, whatever it might be. As well then accept the inevitable, and make the most of the passing hour. I did not value life, since Anna's death, at a pin's ransom. If, therefore, the end of all things for me in this world was at hand, let it come. I would welcome it without regret.

Sylvia now told me as much as she knew about the island to which I had been brought, and of its people.

In ages gone by, she said, when the stone houses were new, and a flourishing city stood in the valley, a disagreement had arisen between the king and queen, who held equal sway over the two islands, of such a nature that the breach became impossible to be healed. Instead of going to war with each other, and thus sacrificing the lives of many of their respective followers in battle, who had no part in their quarrel, an agreement was come to whereby the king withdrew himself to the western island, leaving the queen in undisputed possession in the east. The king took to him all the men in both islands, giving up to the queen the women, to become her subjects. Since then the Male and Female Islands had been managed as separate communities. There was no king or queen now, the people of both islands being ruled by the wise-ones, who lived on the mountain tops in the Female Island. But the inhabitants of the two islands still continued to live apart, the males on one island and the females on the other. On the Male Island the males dwelt alone, without their wives, or any other women. Every year, in the month of March, the men came to the Female Island, and tarried there three months, to wit, March, April, and May, dwelling with their wives for that space. At the end of those three months they returned to their own island, and pursued their avocation there, selling ambergris to the traders from Sumatra. As

for the children whom their wives bore them, if they were girls they stayed with their mothers; but if they were boys their mothers brought them up until they were fourteen years old, and then sent them to their fathers. Those women who were married did nothing but nurse and rear their children. Their husbands provided them with all necessaries. Those who were unmarried, and until marriage, became Amazons, doing all the work on the island that would, in the ordinary course, be done by men. They were very strictly reared, and were as hardy as boys. If necessary they could fight in defence of their country with a courage equal to that displayed by the bravest warriors. Such were the strange customs of the people on these two islands as related to me by Sylvia Cervantes.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A TASK IS SET ME

On the day after I was made captive to the people on the Female Island in the Engano group, I was given an opportunity to observe the customs which prevail among these Amazons. They appeared to be a happy, healthy people, nor could I fail to notice the absence of ill-temper and discord, which may be observed in all communities in which men and women live together, and where jealousy between the sexes is too often the cause of lifelong feuds. Here the matrons seemed content to devote themselves to the rearing of their offspring, who, in return, rendered heart-whole affection to their mothers. I never witnessed such docility and loving obedience as was displayed by the children of this island to those who had the care of them, and while I remained at Engano I never heard a child cry or saw a woman in tears.

As the girls reach maturity, which they do in these latitudes at the age of about twelve years, they are instructed by their mothers how to perform the necessary work, and become very skilful at throwing the lance, harpoon, or any manner of dart, being bred to it from their infancy. These girls, from this training, possess wonderful eyesight, and will descry a sail at sea farther than any sailor could see it.

The dress adopted by the dwellers on the Female Island, though scanty to civilized eyes, is nevertheless suited to their manner of life. It consists of tapa cloth cut in a deep fringe depending from waist to knee. Their hair, which is long, hangs down their backs. Those who, like Sylvia, have red hair, are mostly freckled and rosy, which, so far from detracting from their beauty, rather adds to their charms. The dark-haired ones are burnt brown by the sun.

I was now taken by Sylvia to be presented to the wise-ones, at whose instigation I had been brought to the island. These I found to be men, if indeed they could be called such, but they were so wizened in appearance as more to resemble monkeys. Their manner of life is so austere as to make it a matter for marvel that body and soul could cling together. They will not kill an animal for food, or for any other purpose, not even a fly or a flea, or anything in fact that has life; for they say they have all souls, and it would be a sin to kill them. They eat no vegetables in a green state, only such as are dry, for they believe that even green leaves have life. And they sleep on the bare ground, naked, without anything to cover them, or to soften the mountain rocks which form their bed. They fast every day, and drink nothing but water. Yet, in spite of the rigour of their discipline, they attain to extreme old age; not one of the wise men, so Sylvia informed me, being less than one hundred years old, while some were accredited with upwards of two centuries of life. By reason of their abstinence, they are supposed to be gifted with mysterious occult powers, notably second sight, by which they are able to locate strangers at a great distance from their own country, and to foretell their advent. Not long since they had foretold the coming to the island of a Spanish fleet, when the whole Amazon population had taken refuge in subterranean caves until the Spaniards had left, which they did under the belief that the island was deserted. It was by means of this second sight that the "Golden Seahorse" had been located, and that I had been selected from among the crew to carry out a project which the wise men had in view, and the particulars of which I was about to learn.

The chief of the wise-ones, who acted as spokesman, now informed me of the reason I had been brought to the island.

"You must know, Signor," said he, addressing me as though I was a Spaniard; an appellation which I felt inclined to resent, "that we are troubled by a demon we have found it impossible to slay. Many of our girls have fallen victims to the monster, while the men from the Male Island have repeatedly attacked it during the months of their residence here, without being able to overcome it. In length the creature is thirty feet, and of great bulk. It has two forelegs near the head, armed with claws. The head is very big, and the eyes stand out from it on knob-like excrescences. The mouth is big enough to swallow a man whole, and is armed with pointed teeth. In short, the monster is so fierce that all stand in fear at the sight of it. Now it is known that the men of your race are brave, and possess weapons of which we have no knowledge, so, when it was revealed to us that your ship was close by on the other side of the Great Barren Island, we resolved to bring you here; who seemed, in our eyes, to be a brave man, so that you may rid us of the demon which threatens our peace, if not our very existence."

"Alas! oh, wise-one," I answered. "How much better to have brought the ship also! On board of her, it is true, we possess weapons against which even such a monster as you tell me of could not prevail. But these weapons I have not with me. How then can I, single-handed, hope to overcome so terrible a creature as you describe? Rather send me back to my ship, when I promise to bring her here, so that a party of us, well armed, may attack the demon, when no doubt we shall be able to destroy it." But at this the wise-one shook his head.

"To bring the ship here," said he, "would be easy. But how do we know we could be rid of her without injury to our people?"

"I would pass you my word as to that," I answered.

"So you say now," replied the wise-one. "But how shall we know that you would keep your word?"

An angry retort sprang to my lips, but I restrained myself on receiving a warning glance from Sylvia, which reminded me that I stood at the mercy of these monkey men.

"Give me three days, then," I answered, "to devise some means for destroying the monster. If I succeed, I demand to be sent back to my ship. Without this promise I will do nothing for you, let the consequences to me be what they may."

The wise-one seemed to ponder my words carefully.

"Be it so, then," he answered. "If in three days you rid us of this demon I will see that you are restored to your friends. But if you should fail, and survive, you must nevertheless be put to death. We have no room on the Islands of Engano for strangers."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE SLAYING OF THE GREAT CROCODILE

I now bethought me of how I might best set about the task of vanquishing the monster which held the Female Island in terror, and which, from the description given me by the wise-ones, I judged to be a crocodile. Nor in this was I mistaken, for, being taken by Sylvia to a place of safety from which I could see the demon, I was confirmed in the opinion I had formed by what I saw, although I had never seen a crocodile of such amazing proportions before. It lived in a cave close to a fertile plain, where goats belonging to the islanders were pastured. Not far off was a stream at which it went to drink, and a deep furrow in the sand marked the road it made to the water. During the day it remained in its cave, but toward evening it would issue forth and attack the goats, three or four of which it would kill, and carry off to its lair. Those in charge of the goats dared not interfere, lest the monster, deprived of its accustomed food, might seek its dinner

among the ruined stone houses in which the islanders lived.

Now I noticed that the road along which the crocodile travelled to the water was very deeply furrowed, thus proving how the great lizard had repeatedly dragged its heavy bulk over the same spot on its way to drink at the stream, and I bethought me of a plan to deal with the reptile. The only weapon I had upon me when kidnapped from my ship was a short sabre or manchette, which I wore as a sidearm. But this I hoped would prove a formidable weapon when put to the use for which I now intended it.

During the morning of the next day, when we knew that the crocodile would be asleep in his cave, Sylvia and I went together to the road which the reptile had made, by the weight of his body, to his usual watering-place.

Here, with such rude implements as the islanders possessed, we dug a trench the width of the road, and for some distance along it. At the bottom of the trench we laid a stout log, in which was firmly fixed my manchette, its sharp point upward. We then filled up the trench with soft sand, and retired to the place of vantage which I had occupied the previous day, and from which we could see the crocodile make his evening raid. Towards sundown he came forth with a rush among the terrified goats, four of which he slew with a stroke from his powerful tail, after which he proceeded to drag their mangled carcasses into his lair. We waited an hour, when, just before sundown, the reptile came forth again on his way to the water. We watched him with bated breath, and Sylvia, who now, for the first time, began to understand the trap I had set, could hardly contain her excitement. When the crocodile came to the sand-pit we had dug on the road he sank down, when the sharp blade of the manchette entered his breast, and as he dashed forward, rove him to the navel, so that he died on the spot in the greatest agony.

Sylvia now summoned the islanders to see my work. They came from all parts, and raised so great a shout when they saw their enemy dead that the sound of it reached the wise-ones on the mountain-tops, who peered down at the beast where he lay in a morass of blood which deluged the sand so that it ran into the stream, dyeing the water a deep red.

The death of the reptile, and the craft and cunning I had displayed in the killing of it, so impressed the Amazons that they came to me in a body, with Sylvia as their mouthpiece, asking me to stay and be their king, nor did the wise-ones raise any objection to this proposal. But although I admired Sylvia, I had no desire to spend the rest of my days at Engano, not even as King of the Amazons. I therefore answered that my comrades were no doubt looking for me, nor would they continue their voyage home until all hope of my rescue had been abandoned, and I reminded the wise-ones of the promise they had made me of safe conduct back to my vessel, in case I should succeed in ridding the island of their enemy. The justice of my claim was not to be denied, and with the dawn of the morrow the wise-ones undertook to ascertain the direction in which the ship lay and to send me aboard her.

That evening a feast was held in my honour; some of the men from the Male Island came over, by special permission of the wise-ones, in order to be present, and to see the man who had slain the monster against which they had been unable to prevail.

The men from the Male Island I found to be as free from ill-will toward one another as were the women on the Female Island. Since they had neither wife nor child, they associated in pairs, and mutually rendered each other all the services a master could reasonably expect from a servant, being together in so perfect a community that the survivor always succeeded his dead partner to any property he may have had. They behave to each other with the greatest justness and openness of heart. It is a crime to keep anything hidden. On the other hand, the least pilfering is unpardonable, and punished by death. And indeed there can be no great temptation to steal when it is reckoned a point of honour never to refuse a neighbour what he wants; and when there is so little property of value it is impossible there should be many disputes over it. If any happened, the wise-ones interposed, and soon put an end to the difference.

In all my travels I never met with happier or more gently disposed persons than the people of the Male and Female Islands of Engano.

CHAPTER XXXIX

I BECOME A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC INFELICITY

Next morning the wise-ones, according to promise, informed me, by means of their power of second sight, that my ship was in the place where I had left her, which seemed probable, as it would no doubt be on land that Hartog and my friends would be looking for me.

I passed my word to the wise-ones that Hartog's vessel would not visit the Engano Islands, since strangers were not welcome; and, having bid good-bye to the Amazons, I once more embarked with Sylvia in her canoe, and was paddled round the east end of the Great Barren Island, where, in the distance, was the "Golden Seahorse" still at anchor in the bay where I had last seen her.

When I came aboard Hartog was overjoyed at my return. "I shall have to keep thee tied up, Peter," he said to me, in jest at my frequent mishaps. "You are for ever either falling overboard or running away." But when I told him of my adventure on Amazon Island he listened with great interest, expressing regret that I should have pledged my word against the ship's calling there. His disappointment, however, was modified when I told him that nothing of any commercial value was to be found upon either of the Engano Islands; nothing, in fact, being worthy of notice but the wonderful contentment of the inhabitants, a commodity which could not be carried away.

"Let us up stick and home, then," answered Hartog merrily. So, having presented Sylvia and her accompanying Amazons with gifts, in return for which they showed us where excellent water was to be obtained with which we might replenish our tanks, we bade farewell to the Great Barren Island, and shaped a course for Holland.

On our arrival at Amsterdam Hartog arranged for the disposal and division of our treasure. He and I, as joint promoters of the expedition, each took to the value of twenty thousand English pounds, giving the remainder to be divided among our officers and crew, who had never in their lives before looked to possess so much money. The ship was put out of commission, though, for the present, we determined not to sell her. Hartog promised himself a spell ashore, and I also looked forward to a life of ease and recreation. I was now a rich man, with more wealth to my credit than would satisfy my simple needs for the remainder of my life. Why then, I asked myself, should I seek further peril and adventure in unknown lands to gain money of which I already possessed more than I knew what to do with?

I did not return to my estate, which had become distasteful to me, recalling, as it did, the brief span of nuptial happiness which I had enjoyed with Anna, and when, later, my father-in-law, the Count of Holstein, offered to buy it from me, I was glad to sell it to him. With a portion of my capital I now secured a full share in the business of De Decker, my old master, and, having purchased a fine house at Amsterdam, I resolved to settle down to the lucrative business of a merchant.

Before taking possession of my new home I paid a visit to my family at Urk, where I found that my father had retired from the active management of his fishing business, which was now carried on by my eldest brother, who was married, and blessed with three sturdy boys. My two younger brothers were also married, and both had begun to rear families.

"Only you, Peter," said my mother, "my favourite son, the flower of the flock, are alone and childless."

I had not, since Anna's death, given a thought to marrying again, but my mother's words appealed to me with some force when I reflected that I owed it to my country not to lead a life of selfish celibacy. I would never love with the strength of my first love which I had given to Anna; but there seemed to be no reason why I should not become the head of a house, and the father of a family, so that I might live again in my children.

Now, it so fell out that Pauline Rutter, a niece of De Decker, came at this time to stay with her uncle at Amsterdam, and as I was a frequent visitor at De Decker's house, I often met her. Pauline was proud, dark, and self-willed--the very opposite of what Anna Holstein had been when I married her, and for this reason, perhaps, I liked her the more, since it put an end to all comparison between her and Anna, to whom I had given my first love.

Pauline was flattered by the attention I paid her, and when at length I asked her to become my wife she made no secret of her satisfaction at the prospect of becoming Madam Van Bu.

"I have always thought, sir," she said, "that you would marry again. It is a duty which you owe to your wealth and position. That your choice should have fallen upon me is an honour of which I am very sensible."

It will thus be seen that in the alliance which Pauline and I proposed there was to be no love-making. The bargain was one that might have been made in the course of De Decker's business. I was to give Pauline my wealth and name, in return for which she promised to become my wife, and to undertake the management of my household. It was a shameful bargain, and I was well served for my part in it.

We had not been married a month before each of us began to observe in the other an incompatibility of temper which made any kind of agreement between us, even on the most trivial matters, impossible. Pauline declared that I brought the manners of the fore-castle into her drawing-room, while the social inanities to which she devoted most of her time angered me into upbraiding her with her frivolity and lack of common sense. These mutual recriminations soon led us into a condition of life which destroyed all prospect of peace and contentment in our home. Neither would give way one jot. The more Pauline stormed at me for my boorishness and want of consideration for her the more obstinate did I become in ascribing to her frivolous nature the true cause of our unhappiness. I admired Pauline, and I looked to her to become the mother of my children; but we could neither of us endure the other's presence for any length of time without a squabble, so that our domestic infelicity became a jest and a byword even among our servants. In these circumstances I felt it would be better that we should part. It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and I was convinced that I would regard Pauline with more kindly feelings if seas between us rolled than were possible if we remained together in the same house, and I have no doubt that Pauline thoroughly reciprocated my sentiments.

In this mood I sought my old comrade Dirk Hartog. I found him, as I expected, at a tavern which he frequented. He was seated at a table with Bantum and Janstins, poring over a chart in which all three appeared to be deeply interested.

CHAPTER XL

THE YELLOW PARCHMENT

"Welcome, Peter!" cried Hartog, when he saw me. "I'd have wagered you'd be with us, and here you are in the nick of time."

"What's in the wind now?" I asked, as I drew a chair to the table at which the three were seated.

"The greatest and best chance that was ever offered to seafarers," answered Hartog. "Read that, and say whether any man with the blood of a rover in him could sit tamely at home when such a country as this is waiting to be explored."

With these words he pushed toward me a parchment yellow with age, but very clearly written, so it was easy to decipher. The paper, a translation in Spanish from some ancient tongue, read as follows:

"The Ruby Mountains. Among these mountains there are certain great and deep valleys to the bottom of which there is no access. These valleys are full of rubies. Wherefore the men who go in search of them take with them a piece of flesh as lean as they can get, and this they cast into the bottom of the valley. Now there are a number of white eagles that haunt these mountains and feed upon the serpents in which the valley abounds. When the eagles see the meat thrown down, they pounce upon it, and carry it up to some rocky hill-top, where they begin to rend it. But there are men on the watch, and as soon as they see that the eagles have, settled they raise a loud shouting to drive them off. And when the eagles are thus scared away, the men recover the pieces of meat, and find them full of rubies, which have stuck to the meat down in the bottom of the valley. The abundance of rubies in these depths is astonishing, but none can get down, and if any could they would be devoured by the serpents which abound there. This country is inhabited by pygmies and giants. The giants, who are by far the largest men to be seen in this strait, are ruled by the pygmies."

"And who is the author of this fairy tale?" I asked.

"One to whom I take my hat off," answered Hartog. "Marco Polo, the first and greatest navigator in the world's history. Where he could go we can follow."

"And where does he place the Ruby Mountains?" I inquired.

"That is what troubles me," replied Hartog. "Marco Polo knew the Great South Land, but not so thoroughly as we are beginning to know it now. From this chart I place the Ruby Mountains on the north-west coast of the continent of New Holland."

"Whose chart is it?" I inquired.

"Marco Polo's own," said Hartog. "It was given to me by a man I once befriended, together with the parchment you have just read. How he came by it I need not say. The man is dead, and I trust his sins are forgiven him. But I know he would not lie to me, not willingly."

"It seems a wild goose chase," I said, although my doubts were rapidly dissolving under the witchery of Hartog's sanguine temperament.

"So did our last voyage," answered Hartog. "Yet every word that was written upon the paper that guided us was true. And why should we presume that men would give so much labour to preparing these charts and manuscripts in order to perpetuate lies?"

I could not but admit this. The ability to make these drawings, and to inscribe these manuscripts, I knew was confined to a very few, who were mostly men of truth and honour. Such accounts as were available of the wonderful voyages of Marco Polo I had read with avidity, and I saw no reason to doubt the assertions of this brave and learned man.

"What do you propose, then?" I asked Hartog, although in my own mind, I knew the old sea-dog was impatient to be off on a new treasure-hunt.

"What else can I do, Peter?" replied Hartog, "than take ship for this place? I could never rest content, nor would you either, with the thought of these Ruby Mountains still unexplored."

"You have settled the matter, then, so far as I am concerned," I said, with a laugh.

"And why not, partner?" answered Hartog. "We own a fine ship that was surely never intended only to make a maiden voyage. We could visit this place, and be back in twelve months---two years at most. What is to keep us, then, from our pleasure trip?"

Before Hartog had done speaking, I knew my mind was made up to go with him. My life at home with Pauline had become intolerable, nor did I take any active part in De Decker's business, finding the drudgery of the counting-house irksome after my more exciting experiences on sea and land, so, without further ado, I expressed to Hartog my willingness to join him in a fresh adventure to the South.

Hartog was overjoyed at my decision.

"I made no doubt you would come with me, Peter," he said. "We have been shipmates too long to sail our separate ways alone. With Bantum and Janstins, who are willing to sign on, and a picked crew; we can explore the Ruby Mountains and be back within the year."

CHAPTER XLI

THE RUBY MOUNTAINS

On our second voyage to the South in the "Golden Seahorse" we followed the route we had originally taken with the "Endraght", avoiding as far as possible the calms and currents which had then impeded our progress, as also those islands where we had met with a hostile reception. It became necessary, however, to call at some of the groups we passed, and it surprised us to find how diversified are the manners and customs of the natives who inhabit the numerous islands of the South Seas. Not only are the people of each group governed by different laws, but frequently each island is distinct from the others in the language spoken and the manner of life followed upon it. Hence it would require a bulky volume to describe in detail the many and varied tribes we met with on our journey.

We made the coast of New Holland within five months after leaving Amsterdam (a record voyage), somewhere about the same place where I had affixed the metal plate at the time of our first visit. But we did not land here, as the weather was unfavourable, a strong breeze blowing and a high sea running at the time, making it necessary to keep a good offing from the shore. As we coasted toward the south, however, the weather moderated, so that we were able to bring our ship with safety nearer land.

From an observation we took when the weather was favourable, we ascertained that we were three hundred miles to the north, with an unbroken coastline extending before us; so we concluded we had rounded a promontory, and were now upon the west coast of New Holland. This encouraged us in the belief that we were following the right course to the Ruby Mountains, for Marco Polo's parchment informed us that the giants whom he saw were by far the largest men to be seen "in this strait," from which it seemed the intrepid Venetian navigator had sailed through this strait as early as the year 1272, when he made his famous voyage round the world.

As we proceeded along the coast, the weather being now clear and fine, we observed great stretches of country, flat and uninviting, upon which there appeared to be no sign of life. Indeed, the whole of this southern continent seems to be sparsely populated when compared with the islands, upon most of which the native inhabitants are very numerous. In this may be seen the hand of an all-wise Providence. In the ages to come a white population will, no doubt, emigrate to New Holland, and if this great continent was found to be densely populated by a black people, it would be a work of great difficulty to overcome them. Whereas, the aboriginal population being scant by reason of the barren nature of the

country, the task of colonization by the whites would be easy. We often sailed for more than a week at a time along this coast without seeing any sign of human habitation, and those natives whom we did see were of so poor a description and appeared to be so frightened of us and of our vessel as hardly to deserve the name of humans.

And now we approached some cliffs, beyond which appeared a lofty range, which, from our present position, and the bearings given on Marco Polo's chart, Hartog declared to be the Ruby Mountains.

As we approached the cliffs, a bold headland, which stood between us and a view of the coast beyond, assumed the appearance of a lion's head. The resemblance was so striking that it appeared as if the mighty hand of Nature had hewn a colossus from the living rock in the shape of a lion to guard the entrance into this land.

Upon rounding this remarkable promontory, we found ourselves opposite a beach bordered by a broad line of surf, which indicated that the water here was very shallow for some distance from the shore. Both the surf and the beach seemed to be alive with black children, so diminutive were the forms who disported themselves in the breakers, or ran up and down upon the sand with the eagerness and agility generally displayed by boys at the seaside. As to the real ages of these people, however, we were not left long in doubt. Four canoes put off from the shore and came alongside. They were manned by twenty-five blacks, who, notwithstanding their small stature, we could see at a glance were full-grown men. We made signs to them to come aboard, but they were evidently in doubt whether or not to accept our invitation. We then threw out to them some small pieces of iron and strings of beads, at which they showed great satisfaction. These little men appeared to be an intelligent race. Their bodies were small, but their heads, in proportion, were large. They wore no beards, but their hair was curly like the Kafirs, some of them wearing it tied to the neck in a knot, and others letting it fall loose down to the waist. All of them had holes through their noses to carry fish bones, polished white. Some wore strings of human teeth round their necks.

At length, five, bolder than the rest, ventured aboard. They did not appear to be afraid, and what astonished us most was that they seemed ready to take charge of us. They made signs that we should go ashore, and one of them, who appeared to be a chief, attempted to drive Janstins into the sea by hitting him with a kind of hammer with a wooden handle, and at one end a black conch shell. Janstins laughingly disarmed his small antagonist, which seemed to surprise him as well as the others, and brought them together in consultation.

Ten of the pygmies now came aboard, to whom we gave nutmegs and cloves, thinking to please them. They took what we gave them, although they appeared surprised that we should offer them anything. The little chief, not more than three feet high, who had so amusingly attempted to drive Janstins into the sea, again made signs to us to go ashore. So Hartog ordered the pinnacle to be manned, and armed against treachery. But we had not come within musket shot of the beach when the water became so shallow that we could not take the boat any farther, whereupon a number of us stepped out into the shallows, up to our waists in mud and kelp, and with some difficulty made our way to the beach, where the pygmies mustered in great force.

On the beach we noticed fresh human footprints that must have been made by men of great stature. They were twice as long as the footprints we made, and none of us were noted for small feet. On going a short distance into the woods we saw a vast number of huts made of dried grass, so cramped that a man of ordinary size could not creep into them on all fours, yet many of them contained families of pygmies. We afterwards tried to penetrate somewhat farther into the wood, in order to ascertain the nature and situation of the country, when, on coming to an open place, a number of tall savages, none of them less than eight feet high; came out from the brushwood as though to attack us. On the neck of each giant sat one of the pygmies, who directed him in the same way that a man would guide a charger. The pygmies then began to let fly their arrows at us with great fury, by which Janstins was wounded, and one of the men hit in the leg. We were all hard pressed, so I ordered a volley to be fired, which killed one of the giants, so that the others dragged the dead man into the wood, from which all quickly disappeared. Being so far from the beach, and having a very difficult

path to travel, we determined to return to the ship and report to Hartog what had occurred.

Hartog, upon learning what had befallen us, resolved to make no further overtures of peace to these treacherous natives, who appeared to be more like wild beasts than men, and who, by their conduct, had placed themselves beyond all claim to consideration. It seemed that the pygmies possessed a greater intelligence than the giants, whom they used as ordinary men would use horses or beasts of burden. It was for this reason that the little chief had attempted to drive Janstins into the sea with his conch-shell hammer, regarding him as some smaller species of giant whom he could easily frighten into obeying him.

During the afternoon some canoes came off in which were a number of pygmies, but they made no attempt to come aboard of us, remaining, as they thought, at a safe distance from the ship. In order to convince them of the error of this, however, and to punish them for their treachery of the morning, Hartog ordered our brass bow-chaser to be loaded with grape, and fired amongst them, which caused great consternation, and sent them back to their woods howling in terror, taking their dead and wounded with them.

Hartog was determined to explore the range of mountains which we could see not far distant from the coast, in order to ascertain the truth, or otherwise, of the existence of rubies in the valleys as set forth in Marco Polo's account of this country. Although we had carefully looked for these gems among the ornaments worn by the pygmies, we had not seen any, from which we concluded that the men spoken of by Polo as having procured the rubies must have been of a different race, or possibly his own sailors. Toward evening we observed a large bird in the sky, which Hartog, with the aid of his spy-glass, pronounced to be a white eagle.

CHAPTER XLII

THE VALLEY OF SERPENTS

We now equipped an expedition to explore the Ruby Mountains, of which I was appointed leader. Hartog wished to come with us, but I persuaded him that his place was on board our ship, which, remembering how the Spaniards had, on a former occasion, pirated the vessel, he could not deny.

"You are right, Peter," he said, when we had argued the matter. "We cannot both go, and, since I am captain of the 'Golden Seahorse', I clearly perceive my duty is to stand by her through fair and foul."

The matter being thus concluded, I took command of the party for the shore. In the forenoon we rowed for the beach in two pinnaces, well manned and armed. In all the places where we had landed we had treated the blacks with kindness, offering them pieces of iron, strings of beads, and pieces of cloth, hoping by these means to win their friendship, and to be allowed to explore the country; but, in spite of our friendly overtures, the blacks received us everywhere as enemies, and nowhere more so than in this land of pygmies and giants. We therefore determined to waste no more time in making useless efforts for peace, but to meet force with force. Twelve men, well armed, we considered to be a match for all the savages we were likely to encounter during a day's march inland.

We had brought with us some coils of stout rope in order to assist us in descending from the mountain heights into the valleys below, for I did not place much reliance upon the fable of the eagles and the pieces of fresh meat as a means to procure the rubies which it was said were washed down by torrential rains at certain seasons. If rubies were to be obtained, I argued, it must be by a more practical method than that employed by Marco Polo's men. Besides, we had no fresh meat with which to give Polo's experiment a trial.

After our recent brush with the natives these wild men gave us a wide berth, and we saw no sign of them on our way to the mountains, to which we came after two hours of walking. The sides of these mountains are rocky, with no verdure of any kind upon them except a species of stubble which grows in patches. When we came to the top of one of these hills, we looked down a sheer cliff into the valley. I never before saw any place so inaccessible to man. Nothing without wings, it appeared, could descend into those depths. After exploring the mountains for the best part of an hour, however, we came to a position where it was possible, with caution, to descend for some distance, and by aid of our rope, one end of which we fastened to rocks or stubble as opportunity offered, we succeeded in reaching a cliff from which there was a drop of not more than two hundred feet. This I calculated to be the entire length of the rope we had brought with us, by which I resolved to be lowered. Bantum tried to dissuade me from my project, urging that the risk was too great; but I was determined that, having come so far, I would not go back without being able to make some report of the valley we had undertaken to explore, and a descent by means of the rope seemed to be the only method, nor could Bantum suggest any other.

I now knotted at one end of the rope a cradle in which I could sit. while being lowered, and so long as the rope held, of which there appeared to be no reason to doubt, for my weight was well within its compass, I did not anticipate danger.

All being made ready, and every possible precaution taken against accident, I was let down from the top of the cliff to what looked like the dried-up course of a stream composed of pebbles and wash-dirt. The whole valley presented the most dreary and desolate appearance. The high cliffs by which it was surrounded rose like perpendicular walls, casting deep shadows, so that the sun's rays never penetrated to the floor, for which reason it was destitute of verdure, barren to the eye, and depressing to the senses. As I descended it seemed to me as though I was being lowered into some forgotten tomb.

At length my feet touched ground, and, extricating myself from my cradle, I began to explore the course of the stream. The light in these depths, although it was noonday, was not greater than twilight, and I found some difficulty in ascertaining of what the bed of the stream was composed, but by crawling on all fours I was able to form some idea of its composition, and among the wash-dirt I found a number of dark stones, which, from the experience I had gained at Amsterdam, I knew to be rubies of a size and weight that promised great value.

I now became so absorbed in my hunt for rubies that the dismal nature of my surroundings was forgotten. The greed of gain obsessed me, and as I gathered the precious stones into my pocket I would not have exchanged this desolate valley for the most beautiful spot on earth.

But I was soon to learn how the wealth of the world is for ever encompassed by dangers that we wot not of. A shout drew my attention, and on looking up a sight met my gaze which drove all thoughts of ruby-hunting from my mind, and made self-preservation my only concern. The rope by which I had descended, relieved of my weight, swayed like a serpent endowed with life, and for this reason, perhaps, it was being fiercely attacked, about midway from the top, by a flock of white eagles which tore at the hemp with beak and claws. I ran to the cradle; but I had barely come to it when the rope parted, a hundred feet or more of it falling down to where I stood scarcely able, as yet, to realize the extent of the disaster which had overtaken me. A return to the ship for a fresh rope would occupy, I knew, six hours at the least, provided my companions were not molested on their way by hostile savages, and I shuddered to think what my sufferings must be during such a period of enforced solitude in this dreadful place. I shouted to my comrades on top of the cliff, who answered me, but it was impossible to understand what was said. I noticed, however, that some had already set off on a return to the ship, as I conjectured, for a fresh rope; while others continued to watch me. Thus I did not feel so deserted as I would otherwise have done, though I dreaded the weary hours before me, particularly when it should become dark, as would happen sooner here than above.

And now, to add to my terrors, I became aware of a low, hissing sound which seemed to come from all around me, first from one quarter and then from another. The air seemed to menace me with the hisses that were borne upon it. Then, in spite of the gloom, by straining my eyes I could see the cause of this hissing. A number of serpents were crawling out of the crevices of the rocks around, and making toward me. I shouted in the hope of frightening them away, but, although they paused, irresolute, at the sound of my voice, they came on again, drawing closer every minute. They were of all sizes, some of great length, black and venomous-looking. One monstrous reptile of the constrictor species continued to watch me from an adjacent rock upon which it lay, its forked tongue darting in and out of its mouth. I felt that my reason was leaving me. Endurance has its limits--I could bear no more. Death or madness awaited me.

Then a miracle happened. The white eagles, the cause of my mishap, now proved my salvation. They descended upon the serpents like bolts from above, carrying them off in their talons to the mountain tops, there to be devoured at their leisure. The dark valley became alive with flapping white wings and squirming serpents, in the midst of which pandemonium I mercifully lost consciousness.

When I came to myself Hartog was beside me. It was pitch dark, but he carried a ship's lantern in his hand.

CHAPTER XLIII

WE AGAIN LEAVE NEW HOLLAND

"Courage, comrade," said Hartog, who held a flask of spirits to my lips, and at the sound of his familiar voice life returned to me. I was so weak, however, and the shock to my nervous system had been so great, that I could not speak. I pressed his hand to let him know how thankful I was that he had come himself to my assistance. None, I firmly believe, but Hartog could have saved me at that moment from madness or death. With the tenderness of his great heart, which could be gentle as a woman's upon occasions, he lifted me in his arms, and bore me to the cradle at the end of the rope by which he had descended. I was soon drawn to the top of the cliff, where my companions awaited me, and presently Hartog himself joined us. We did not fear the pygmies and giants at night-time, for the dread of evil spirits in the dark is universal among the aborigines of New Holland, making it unlikely they would attack us, but it was a melancholy procession which made its way through the woods to the beach where our boats lay, with me carried on a stretcher by willing hands, since I was incapable of making any exertion.

Next day, after a night of delirium, during which I raved, so Hartog told me, of eagles and serpents, I awoke refreshed, though still very weak. I could not bear to be left alone, not even for a moment, and Hartog nursed me with a tenderness that my mother would have given me had she been at my bedside. At length I pulled through, and was able to come on deck; but it was a shadow of my former self who crept up the companion ladder to where a couch had been prepared for me. As I lay thus, recovering my strength in the sun, I was able to give Hartog some account of my adventure. At first, when I spoke of rubies, he evidently regarded what I said as a flight of fancy inseparable from the dreadful ordeal through which I had passed. But when I insisted that I had told him nothing but truth, he brought me the clothes I had worn on my descent into the valley, the pockets of which we found to be full of the rubies I had collected. But, after consultation, we determined to say nothing about these rubies to any member of the crew. The wealth of the Indies would not have tempted me to descend into the valley again, and Hartog considered the risk too great for him to run, upon whom the safety of us all depended. To have asked others to undertake a danger from which we shrank would have been to undermine our authority and sow the seeds of mutiny. Thus we kept our secret, and after a further week's rest, during which I fully regained my strength, we made sail for the open sea.

The land which we had up to now skirted and touched at was not only barren and inhabited by savages, but also the sea in these parts seemed to yield nothing but sharks, swordfish, and the like unnatural monsters, while the birds also were as wild and shy as the men. What pleasure the wretched inhabitants of this country can find in their lives it is hard to

understand.

We were now once more in need of water, and having sighted an island, we made for it, but could find no means to get near the land, owing to the heavy surf. We found the coast very precipitous, without any foreland or inlets. In short, it seemed to us a barren, accursed place, without leaf or grass. The coast here was steep, consisting of red rocks of the same height almost everywhere, and impossible to touch at owing to the breakers.

During the whole of the next day the current carried us northward against our will, since we were running with small sail, and had but little control over the rudder. In the afternoon we saw smoke rising up from the shore, when I took charge of a boat's crew, in order to effect a landing, with our spirits somewhat revived, for I concluded if there were men on the island there must be water also.

Coming near to the shore, we found it to be a steeply-rising coast, full of rocks and stones, with a violent surf running. Nevertheless, two of our men swam ashore, and succeeded in drawing the pinnacle close to the reef, upon which we landed.

We now began our search for water, without, however, finding any, when we observed coming toward us, from the direction in which we had seen the smoke, three men creeping on all fours. Their appearance was so wretched that we began to doubt if they were humans. They made no sound, apparently being incapable of speech, but they signed to us with beckoning fingers to approach them. Then they raised themselves upon their knees, and stretched out their hands to us in mute appeal. They were white men---some of the Spaniards marooned by Captain Montbar as a punishment for having stolen our vessel. And, with a shock, I recognized among them Pedro de Castro, the traitor to whom we owed the piracy of our ship.

When we came close to the unfortunate Spaniards whom Montbar had left to shift for themselves on this desolate shore I bent over to examine them. But that they moved I would not have thought them to be alive. The pupils of their eyes were strangely dilated, and there were black circles under their eyes. Their hollow cheeks were deeply wrinkled. Their lips glued to their yellow teeth. They exhaled an infectious odour, and might well have been taken for dead men come forth from the tombs.

We had some salt junk and biscuits on the boat, kept in one of the lockers against, as sometimes happened, the boat being unable to return to the ship in time for meals, and I sent one of the crew to fetch a portion, which he set before the famished men.

When the Spaniards saw the food their limbs were affected with a shivering, and tears came into their eyes. Then they fell upon it, and devoured it with sobs of joy. In astonishment and pity we watched them at their wolfish meal. When they had finished I asked de Castro for some account of what had befallen them.

The devil Montbar, he said, had abandoned them upon this desolate island, telling them to make shift for themselves, and to learn from the hardship of their lot repentance for the act of piracy they had committed in stealing our ship. On searching the island they found it to contain no water except a brackish liquid, to be had by digging. The only food obtainable was shell-fish, and occasionally the rank flesh of sea birds. They had neither the tools nor materials to build habitations, and were forced to shelter themselves from the scorching sun in summer and from the bitter cold in winter with a few bushes. When de Castro spoke of Montbar he became livid, and a very evil light shone in his eyes. For two years they had endured upon this island untold suffering. All the women and children were long since dead, except Donna Isabel Barreto, who clung to life with the tenacity born of a desire for revenge. Of the two hundred and forty Spaniards marooned by Captain Montbar but thirty now survived, the rest having perished miserably from starvation and exposure, when their bodies had been cast from the cliffs into the sea.

When Pedro and his companions had somewhat recovered they led us to where their wretched settlement had been made among a clump of gaunt, wind-swept trees, and, in pity for their forlorn condition, I ordered all the provisions we had in the boat to be brought for their refreshment. Donna Isabel threw herself at my feet, clasping my knees, and covering my hands with kisses. She had lost all trace of the proud beauty she had formerly possessed. Her skin had been burnt almost black by the sun, and a mane of tangled white hair surrounded what had once been a noble countenance. Only her eyes retained their brightness, and at thought of rescue, and possible revenge upon her enemy Montbar, they seemed to glow with unnatural fire.

I knew that Hartog would not have wished me to leave these wretched outcasts to their fate, however little deserving they may have been of our sympathy, so I invited them to accompany us back to the ship. They came protesting they would henceforth be our slaves, ready, in all things, to obey our slightest behest. But I had little faith in their promises when their necessities should be relieved.

Hartog, as may well be imagined, was considerably surprised when we returned on board with the remnant of the Spanish settlement in such sorry plight, but he approved of what I had done in bringing them off the island. They were sent forward, where they received every attention. Donna Isabel was the only one allowed to berth in the cabin. We had no women's dress on board, but we found her warm clothing, in which she appeared as a man. After a while she recovered her good looks, and we found her companionship agreeable.

A week later we came to an island which promised more favourable conditions than the one we had just left, and where we obtained a supply of good water for our tanks.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE ISLANDS OF ARMENIO

It was now brought home to me that Donna Isabel Barreto was henceforth to play no unimportant part in the prosecution of our voyage. She had recovered her good looks, and although she was older than any of us on board the "Golden Seahorse", and probably ten years older than Hartog, she nevertheless exerted an influence over the captain which I could see he found it impossible to resist. Donna Isabel had once more resumed her feminine attire, having stitched together for herself a wardrobe from the ship's stores of cloth and calico, and Hartog begged from me three of the rubies which I had found in the Valley of Serpents, which he presented to her, and which she wore sewn on to a black velvet cap.

Donna Isabel openly expressed her desire to amass treasure in order to follow up Montbar and take her revenge upon him for having marooned her and her people upon a desert island. This desire for revenge obsessed her. Her Spanish blood burned to repay the insults and indignities which Montbar had heaped upon her, and she looked forward with pleasure to the tortures which she promised herself she would inflict upon Montbar when once she held him in her power.

In order to obtain means to make war upon her enemy, Donna Isabel persuaded Hartog to embark upon a fresh adventure, which promised to provide the necessary funds to equip a frigate equal to that owned by Montbar, so that she might engage him upon equal terms.

The story that Donna Isabel had to tell was one confided to her by her late husband, Captain Barreto, which she had kept locked in her memory ever since, waiting for some such opportunity as the present, when the information she possessed might be turned to account. The story was, briefly, as follows:

A long time ago a Spanish vessel sailed from Manila for Mexico, and east of Japan had by a violent storm been driven toward a small but high-rising island.

When the crew went ashore, the island proved to be a country, strange and unknown to anyone; the people being of handsome stature, white skinned, and of good proportions, very affable, and amiably disposed. On their arrival in Mexico, the sailors related many marvels about the wealth of this island, giving their hearers to understand that, so to say, gold and silver were almost to be picked up at discretion on the shore, while the kettles and other cooking utensils of the natives were made of these metals. These islands were named the Islands of Armenio, after an Armenian merchant who was on board the ship. Donna Isabel professed to have received from her late husband the true bearings of these islands, which she confided to Hartog, and a course was set accordingly.

Pedro de Castro, Donna Isabel's son, had now been forgiven his treachery toward us in stealing our vessel, since Hartog considered his punishment in having been marooned upon a desert island commensurate with his offence. He was, therefore, permitted to join us in the cabin, and was given employment as ship's purser, for which he was well suited. He expressed great contrition for what he had done, and I honestly believe at the time he intended to serve us faithfully. But treachery once practised is oft-times repeated, so I made up my mind to keep a watchful eye on Pedro de Castro lest we again be caught tripping.

We now proceeded northward, coasting with great care a succession of small rocky islands that appeared to be uninhabited. As we proceeded, the weather became rough and tempestuous, the sea running so high that it sometimes threatened to engulf us. During the whole of our voyage we had not met with such a mountainous sea.

At last we perceived a land to the north, trending to the north-east, of which the coast seemed to be one continuous rock, remarkably level at the top, and of a reddish colour, against which the sea broke with such fury as to make a landing impossible, but Donna Isabel declared this rock to be one of the islands of Armenio we had come in search of. As there were no other islands to be seen, we concluded that during the ages which had passed since the white-skinned people inhabited them, the continuous beating of the waves had gradually demolished the islands until nothing remained but the plateau of red rock to which we had come, and over which the sea sometimes swept in a mass of foam. But, having come to the island of her dreams, Donna Isabel would not leave it until we had ascertained, beyond doubt, that a landing was impracticable. It was not handsome, white-skinned natives whom we had come in search of, she said, but solid gold, which neither tempests nor seas can destroy. In order to satisfy her, we remained several days in the vicinity of this mass of rocks, hoping that the weather would moderate, so as to make possible a landing upon it, and at last we were rewarded for our patience by a lull in the heavy breakers, so that the pinnacle, of which I took charge, was able to approach close to the steep and jagged shore. Thereupon six of the Spaniards leaped overboard, trusting to their skill as swimmers to make the land, which they did, remaining on shore for upward of an hour. When they returned they reported the rock to be a mass of auriferous quartz, in which was embedded more gold than they had ever thought to see in one place, but so tightly wedged was it between the crevices that they had been unable to bring any of it away except a few small specimens which they showed us. With picks and crowbars, however, they declared it would be easy to obtain an unlimited supply of gold.

When we reported the finding of the gold to Donna Isabel, she vowed she would never consent to abandon the treasure. "The sea cannot always be rough," she said. "A calm must follow. Let us, therefore, wait in patience until it comes, so that we may land and enrich ourselves."

Hartog, also, was in no mood to leave the gold until every effort had been made to obtain it, so we continued to beat about in the vicinity of the island awaiting a calm.

After three weeks tossing on the ocean, during which time of stress we suffered much hardship by reason of our decks being continually drenched by the seas which swept us fore and aft, a calm suddenly fell, as it does in the tropics, without the least warning. Fortunately we were not far from the island when the calm fell, so that we lay within easy reach of it.

Without loss of time we manned the two pinnaces, I taking command of one and Janstins of the other, and made for the shore. Donna Isabel insisted upon coming in my boat. She had discarded her feminine apparel, and now appeared in the sailor's clothes we had given her when she first came aboard. Hartog, as captain, remained in charge of the ship.

When we came to the island we found no difficulty in landing, and were soon engaged with the picks and crow-bars we had brought with us, in the work of gold-getting. We found the report given by the Spanish sailors, who had been the first to land, to be somewhat exaggerated. Still, there was an abundance of gold between the crevices of the rock, and, what was more remarkable, we came upon what had evidently been vessels of beaten gold, thus proving beyond doubt that the island had formerly been inhabited.

During the course of the morning we obtained as much gold mixed with quartz as the boats could conveniently carry, when we returned to the ship, intending, after our midday meal, to come back for a fresh supply of the precious metal, but on getting aboard we found Hartog much perturbed by the extraordinary behaviour of the compass, and the strange appearance of the sky.

"I don't like the look of it, Peter," said Hartog, when we descended together to the cabin to discuss the situation. "I never knew this to happen before but once, and I am not anxious to repeat the experience. Unless I am greatly mistaken, there's something big coming."

When we returned to the deck, a low moaning sound came to us across the sea, but, otherwise, there seemed to be nothing to cause anxiety. Donna Isabel wished to return to the island for more gold, but Hartog would not permit of any further expedition being made that day. He ordered the boats to be hoisted, and the treasure carried below. Every stitch of canvas had already been taken off the ship by the captain's orders, and we now rode upon a glassy sea under bare poles. Then the moaning increased, and presently there appeared upon the horizon a black line over which lightning played, although no clouds were visible. The atmosphere was at this time so oppressive that it was difficult to breathe.

Hartog then ordered the helm to be lashed, the hatches to be put on, and all hands below, he and I being the last to quit the deck just as the storm broke upon us with hurricane force.

For three days and nights we remained between, decks, with the hatches battened down, not knowing but that each moment might be our last. The noise was deafening, while the violent motion of the vessel made the getting about from one part of the ship to another difficult and dangerous. Food and water we obtained with difficulty, not at regular intervals, but when opportunity offered, crawling from one to another, and helping those who, from exhaustion, were least able to help themselves. The air became so foul in the cabin as to cause the ship's lanterns to burn dimly, so that we feared they would soon be extinguished. Thus we lived amid the raging elements, shut up in a storm-tossed coffin which we knew might go to pieces at any moment.

At length, on the third day, Hartog ventured to open one of the hatches, when a rush of cool air came to us as we lay gasping below, bringing with it new life and vigour. The hurricane had passed, and although the wind and sea still ran high, we were told we might come on deck. But the happiness we felt at being released from our dreadful imprisonment was checked when we saw the havoc which had been wrought by the wind and the waves upon our ship. The decks were swept clean, the masts gone by the board, the larboard bulwarks stove in, while the cook's galley had disappeared.

CHAPTER XLV

SUMATRA

All hands now set to work to cut away the wreckage of our masts and rigging, which, as the ship rolled in the trough of the sea, threatened to stave in the hull as the spars dashed against it with each recoil. Had it not been that the "Golden Seahorse" was a new ship, upon which no expense had been spared in the building, we must have foundered. But it was amid such scenes of storm and stress that the indomitable spirit of Dirk Hartog asserted itself, and seemed to animate both officers and crew with something of his own courage and determination. Forgetting the hardships and privations through which we had passed, we set to work, under the magic of his influence, with such goodwill that, in the space of some six hours, order had been evolved out of chaos, and our vessel once more rode the sea in safety. The pumps were then manned, when it was found that although much water was in the hold, it was easily gained upon, from which we concluded that no leak had sprung in our timbers, notwithstanding the battering they had received. Jury-masts were then rigged, upon which sufficient sail was set to give the ship steering way, when we hoped to make a harbour where we might refit, and effect necessary repairs.

We were now anxious to reach some port where new masts and rigging might be obtained, as our progress under jury-masts, which carried only a limited spread of canvas, was necessarily slow. Donna Isabel was in favour of abandoning the "Golden Seahorse" at the first port we came to where another ship could be purchased to convey our treasure to Spain, but neither Hartog nor I would consent to this proposal, having no desire to see the interior of a Spanish prison, or to taste of the horrors of the Inquisition. It was astonishing how quickly Donna Isabel and her son, Pedro de Castro, appeared to have forgotten the obligation they were under to us for having rescued them from the desert island upon which they had been marooned. Both now spoke as if we were indebted to them for having put us in the way of enriching ourselves with the gold obtained from the Islands of Armenio, and Donna Isabel declared that the treasure really belonged to her, since she had possessed the secret which led to its discovery. I was so disgusted by the ingratitude of these Spaniards that I could hardly bring myself to speak of the matter with patience.

Hartog now proposed that we should make for Sumatra, and as this proposal appeared to promise a way out of, our difficulties, I had nothing to say against it.

Sumatra is one of the Sunda Islands, having Malacca on the north, Borneo on the east, Java on the south-east, and the Indian Ocean on the west. It is eight hundred miles long and about one hundred and fifty broad, and it possesses a fine harbour capable of containing any number of the largest ships. Here we arrived without mishap, within three weeks after setting our course for this port, and cast anchor in a sheltered spot close to the shore. The harbour is commanded by a strong fortress, well fortified, and mounted with cannon. Three ships were at anchor, a Spanish frigate and two smaller vessels, one flying the flag of England, and the other displaying the colours of the Netherlands. We had barely found our moorings when a boat from the man-o'-war came alongside, steered by a young Spanish officer, who bore as much arrogance in his demeanour as there was to be seen gold lace and brass buttons upon his uniform. He haughtily demanded an interview with the captain, but upon Hartog stepping forward his manner became less offensive, and finally they descended together to the cabin, being shortly afterward joined by Donna Isabel.

Since I was not invited to this conference, I was forced to remain on deck, feeling very jealous of the influence which Donna Isabel exerted over Hartog, to the destruction of the mutual trust and confidence which had formerly existed between us. I felt, also, there was trouble in store for us. Hartog, although brave and resourceful upon the sea, was but a child when it came to dealing with business matters ashore, and I well knew that he would prove no match for the wily Spaniards with whom he was now in consultation.

Presently the party from the cabin came on deck, when I perceived that Pedro de Castro was one of those who had been present at the conference. The young Spanish officer was now all smiles and affability, and Donna Isabel and her son, accompanying him to his boat, were rowed aboard the frigate.

Hartog then came to me, and I could see he was worried, and ashamed at having shut me out from what had taken place in the cabin.

"Forgive me, comrade," he said, "but Donna Isabel would have none present at the interview with the Spaniard save only myself and her son Pedro."

"Since when has Donna Isabel Barreto become captain of this ship?" I asked.

"Nay, Peter, I forgive thee that sneer," answered Hartog, "though I would not take it from another. It has been decided to transfer the treasure to the Spanish frigate, the captain of the warship undertaking to protect us while we remain in this port and to pay for all necessary repairs to our ship. These were the best terms I could make, and they seem to me fair enough."

I had no desire to haggle over terms, for I was already rich enough to make me careless of what became of the gold we had taken from the Island of Armenio, but I realized how great was the influence Donna Isabel had acquired over Hartog in order to induce him to lay aside his claim to a part of the treasure.

During the day a boat came from the frigate into which the gold was loaded and transferred to the warship, together with the Spaniards we had aboard of us, whom I was glad to be rid of on any terms, and that evening was the first upon which I had felt at home in our cabin since Donna Isabel and her people had joined us.

It was a beautiful evening, with a gentle breeze off the shore---the very night, as I remarked to Hartog, to put to sea.

"I wish we could up anchor and be off," answered Hartog. "But we have work to do ashore in attending to the ship's repairs before we may hope to leave this place where, I make no doubt, we shall be imposed upon and robbed by the sweepings of Europe who inhabit this island. It is fortunate we have the word of the Spanish captain that he himself will be responsible for all we need."

I did not answer, for I did not share in Hartog's sanguine expectations regarding the Spaniards. I had experienced too many acts of treachery to trust them, and there existed, as I knew, at this time, a natural antipathy between the Netherlands and Spain, which made any binding compact between the people of these rival nations impossible. I did not, however, voice my suspicions lest my opposition might be attributed to jealousy.

As sometimes happens, I was unable to sleep that night, my thoughts taking wing among the many scenes of adventure through which I had passed, and refusing to compose themselves to rest. With the dawn I was up and on deck. As I stepped upon the poop and looked around upon the quiet harbour where the ships rode at anchor, I became aware of a certain emptiness in the bay. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The Spanish frigate was gone.

CHAPTER XLVI

MAHOMET ACHMET

When Hartog was told of the treachery of Donna Isabel Barreto, in stealing our portion of the gold obtained from the island of Armenio, and leaving us, for all she knew or cared, without the means to repair our vessel, he did not show so much anger as I expected. He seemed more to regret the loss of Donna Isabel than the treasure with which she had so heartlessly decamped.

"She was a clever woman, Peter," was all he said to me in reference to the matter, "and I shall miss her." Then he clapped me on the shoulder, and bade me not despond. "We still have the rubies," he reminded me, "which, properly invested, will more than pay for all we need."

I had forgotten the rubies, but I stipulated that the disposal of them should be left in my hands.

"Willingly, Peter," replied Hartog, "for, between ourselves, I doubt not I am more at home on the sea than in making a bargain with land-roguers ashore. Take you command of the ship until she is once more taut and trim."

To this I agreed, although I had no intention of depriving Hartog of his authority, and, after breakfast, I landed with a boat's crew, in order to interview the islanders, and, if possible, to make arrangements with some of them for the equipment of our vessel.

Achin, the metropolis of Sumatra, is situated at the north-west end of the island. It stands on a plain, surrounded by woods and marshes, about five miles distant from the sea, near to a pleasant rivulet. The city consists of some eight thousand houses which take up more ground than a city of this size would demand by reason of every person surrounding his dwelling with a palisade that stands some yards distant from it. The inhabitants are, in general, small, and of very swarthy complexion. They have black eyes, flat faces, and high cheek-bones. Their hair is long and black, and they take great pains to dye their teeth black. They also besmear their bodies with oil, as do the natives of other hot countries, to protect themselves from being stung by insects, while they let their nails grow exceedingly long, scraping them until they are transparent, and dyeing them vermilion. The poorer class go almost naked, having only a small piece of cloth round the waist, and a piece of linen about the head, or a cap made of leaves resembling the crown of a hat. The richer sort wear white breeches to above the knee, and a piece of calico, or silk, wrapped round their loins and thrown over the left shoulder. Some wear sandals, but all are bare-legged and bare-bodied from the waist upward. The common language among them is the Malayan language, and, by speaking to some whom I met on landing, I found I was able to make myself understood, and to understand, though imperfectly, what was said to me. The Sumatrans are a very indolent race of people, which accounted for the small interest they took in the arrival of our ship, none thinking it worth while to come aboard, or to make any inquiry concerning us.

When I explained that my business was to obtain new masts and rigging I was directed to the house of an Arab named Mahomet Achmet, a carpenter and ship chandler, if such he could be called, who traded with vessels visiting the island, and dealt with them in the matter of repairs or refitting. Mahomet, like all the inhabitants of Sumatra, spoke the Malayan language, but we occasionally helped each other with Spanish or Dutch words, of which he had acquired the meaning by his intercourse with crews of these nationalities. When I told him we required masts as well as rigging, he seemed to consider my request unreasonable. There were masts on the island, he said, good ones too, made of beech, but they belonged to the king, who set great store by them, since they had come to him as the result of a victory by the fort over a foreign vessel which had attempted to raid the island and take by force what could only honestly be obtained by trade. On my asking to see the king Mahomet turned up his eyes with an exclamation of astonishment at my audacity. No foreigners were permitted to see the king, he said. It was death to enter without permission the inner apartments of the palace where the king lived. But when I produced one of my rubies he became less demonstrative in his protestations against my proposed visit.

"It is for these toys that I would trade with the king," I said to him, as I held up the red crystal to the light in order that he might see it better.

"Such toys the king likes well," answered Achmet. "Give it me, and I will send it to the king, and ask if he will receive you."

"Nay, Achmet," I answered, "I will not part with my jewels save only to the king himself. Send, therefore, and tell him that a rich merchant from the East is here to trade for gems such as are only fit for kings to handle."

I could now see that Mahomet Achmet was on the horns of a dilemma. His natural cupidity urged him to rob me of my jewels, but should this come to the king's knowledge he would doubtless suffer for having taken the law into his own hands. Finally he consented to send a message to the king on my promising that not only would I pay him liberally for such ship-chandlery as he might supply us with, but that if all went well I would present him with a ruby of equal value to that which I had shown him before I left the island.

While the messenger was absent on his mission, Mahomet gave me some interesting information regarding his Malayan Majesty. The king, he said, owned a large number of horses, as well as elephants, all having magnificent trappings. He was at no expense in time of war, for all his subjects were obliged to march at their own expense, and to carry with them provisions for three months. In peace time his Majesty's living and that of his household cost him nothing, for his subjects supplied him with all kinds of provisions. He was, besides, heir to all those of his people who died without male issue, and to all foreigners who died within his territories, while he succeeded to the property of all those who were put to death for offences against the law.

From this it will be seen that the revenue of this prince is very considerable, and that he is personally interested in the death of foreigners within his kingdom, whether from natural causes or in the execution of the law, of which he is the sole arbiter.

CHAPTER XLVII

KING TRINKITAT

The space of an hour had barely elapsed since the sending of the messenger to King Trinkitat of Sumatra, announcing my arrival in his dominions, before an answer was brought me that his Majesty desired my attendance at the palace forthwith, so I made ready to accompany those he had sent for me, and who acted as my bodyguard.

The king's palace stands in the middle of the town, its grounds being oval in shape, and about a half-mile in circumference, surrounded by a moat twenty-five feet broad, and as many deep. All round the palace there are cast up great heaps of earth instead of a wall, planted with reeds and canes that grow to a prodigious height and thickness. These reeds are continually green, so that there is no danger of fire. There is no ditch or drawbridge before the gates leading to the palace, but, on each side, a wall of stone, about ten feet high, that supports a terrace on which some guns are planted. A small stream runs through the middle of the palace, which is lined with stone, and has steps down to the bottom of it for the convenience of bathers. There were four gates and as many courts to be passed before we came to the royal apartments, and in some of these outer courts are kept the king's magazines of rifles and cannon. Here also are stalls for the king's elephants. In the king's magazines are to be found numerous cannon, and a quantity of small arms, while his guards consist of a thousand men. But his greatest strength is in his elephants, which are trained to trample upon fire, and to stand unmoved at the report of artillery.

When we came to the inner courts, beyond which were the apartments of the king, our bodyguard halted, and Mahomet Achmet and I entered the king's presence unattended.

We found his Majesty seated on a divan surrounded by his numerous wives and slaves, to the number of several hundred, for the apartment in which the king received us was a very large one, more resembling a courtyard than a room, since the roof was open to the sky. The king seemed to be a man of middle age, whom I judged to be about forty years old, but his attendants were all young, some of them scarcely more than children.

All were attired in the same manner, so that it was difficult to tell their sex, with short white breeches to above the knee, silken scarves of various colours wrapped round their waists, the end being thrown over the left shoulder, and white turbans upon their heads, into which their long hair was gathered. Some were yellow-skinned, others brown, others again jet-black. All had been rubbed with oil so that their skins glistened like polished marble, and they stood about the courtyard or around the king in silent groups, like so many statues.

Mahomet Achmet prostrated himself when he came into the king's presence, as is the manner of the East; but I contented myself with bowing low as I approached the divan upon which his Majesty sat, very gorgeously dressed in red and blue silk robes embroidered with golden dragons, which I concluded he had obtained from China. Upon his head he wore a white turban with a jewelled aigrette of great value. His countenance was intellectual, and his expression shrewd.

King Trinkitat received me graciously, and ordered a stool to be placed near to the divan so that I might sit and converse with him upon the matter in hand. When I showed him some of my rubies he at once said, "These come from the South Land," and upon my asking him how he had arrived at this conclusion, he answered that some of his people visited annually the South Land to trade with the natives, and had reported a white ruler there among a tribe of savages who had in his possession a great quantity of valuable jewels, which he would not part with for money, but only in exchange for certain commodities, by the aid of which he was making the tribe he governed the most powerful upon the Southern Continent.

"What is the name of this white chief, your Majesty?" I asked, deeply interested.

"King Luck," answered Trinkitat; "but I thought you came from him."

"That is not so, O king," I replied. "These rubies are magic rubies that are found only in a valley guarded by serpents. If they are honestly acquired they bring great happiness to those who possess them, but if they are stolen, or dishonestly come by, they bring a curse upon the robbers, and upon the land in which they dwell and all the people who inhabit it."

At this I thought the king appeared disappointed. I had reckoned on his being superstitious, and indeed it is well known that certain jewels do possess mysterious qualities that influence the lives of those who own them, although I had no authority, beyond my own perspicacity, for endowing my rubies with supernatural charm.

"How many of these jewels have you?" asked the king, holding one of the rubies up to the light.

I mentioned the number as being thirty, that being half of all I possessed.

"There is not enough money upon the island to pay a fair price for these stones," declared Trinkitat, "and how should it benefit me if I acquire them for less than their fair value if, in that case, they are to bring upon me and my people a curse rather than a blessing?"

"Nay, O king," I answered, "I ask no money for these gems, but rather your good offices in helping us repair our vessel, which, after much storm and stress, has found in your harbour a haven of rest."

"That you shall have, and welcome," replied the king, and after some further explanation as to what was required, and more bargaining, it was finally agreed that I would allow the king to retain the six rubies I had brought with me, and that the balance of the thirty, which I offered, was to be paid over when our vessel had been new masted and fresh rigged at the king's expense. Mahomet Achmet was given directions to see that this work was promptly carried out, after which we bowed ourselves from the king's presence, I being well satisfied with the bargain I had made.

Next day the work of repairing the ship began. She was careened in the shallows of a safe and convenient harbour, and such an army of workers set to work upon her that in the course of a week the "Golden Seahorse" was once more ready for sea.

While the repairs to our vessel were in progress we received welcome assistance from the crews of the English and Dutch ships in the harbour, with whom we soon became acquainted. The Dutch vessel "Speedwell" belonged to the Dutch East India Company, a company which, at this time, was growing in wealth and importance. She was bound on a voyage to the North for a cargo of furs, and Captain Smuts, in command of her, was anxious that we should join him in this expedition, for, said he, two ships will more readily succeed than one, since each may help the other. But we not being equipped for northern travel decided to continue our voyage south, though we arranged with Captain Smuts to meet him later at the Molucca Islands, where we had resolved to call King Thedori to account for his treacherous conduct toward us on our former visit.

Before leaving the island of Sumatra I paid a second visit to Achin, where I was given a final audience with King Trinkitat, when I paid him over the balance of the rubies. I found the king well disposed toward me, and apparently satisfied with the payment made him in return for the refitting of our vessel, which indeed was at a princely rate, when the value of the rubies was considered. He did not attempt to extort more than was justly due to him according to promise, as is the habit with these half-savage potentates, when dealing with foreigners, but this I attributed to the superstition I had so happily aroused in him that the rubies would bring misfortune if not honestly come by. I questioned his Majesty more closely with regard to King Luck, and, from what he told me, I felt convinced that this man, now a chief among the savages of New Holland, was none other than my old antagonist Van Luck, though how he came to be rescued from the sea I had no means, at that time, of knowing. King Trinkitat possessed no chart of the place to which his ships traded, as the captains of his vessels mostly steered by the stars. But he promised me that, if ever I should again visit his island, he would send a pilot with me to conduct me to King Luck.

Mahomet Achmet, with whom I parted the best of friends, expressed the hope that we would one day meet again.

"I will not sell this jewel, Signor Peter," he said to me when I paid him for his work with some money we had aboard the ship, and presented him with a fine ruby, according to promise. "I will keep it in memory of a shrewd man whose wit did more to save him than his money, for I may tell you that neither you nor your ship's company would have been allowed to leave this place had you not spoken to the king of the ill-luck which these rubies bring to those who come not honestly by them."

I thanked Mahomet for his frankness, which I promised to remember should I ever have occasion to revisit Sumatra.

And now, all being ready, we put to sea, and by evening the island of Sumatra had disappeared beyond the horizon.

CHAPTER XLVIII

STATEN LAND

Hartog believed, from an ancient Portuguese chart which we had with us, that an island continent lay to the south-east, and after a lengthened period, during which we encountered bad weather and rough sea, we sighted a formidable coastline, which appeared to be a mainland extending on either side as far as the eye could reach. We coasted along this new-found country for several days in search of a landing place, without being able to find one, the coast being a continuous line of precipitous rocks. Toward the end of the third day we encountered a canoe, the largest we had seen, containing upward of one hundred natives. We offered food and other articles, but, although the canoe came quite close to us, none of her people could be induced to come on board.

These natives appeared to be strong and fierce, nor did they show the least fear of us, but rather an intention to begin hostilities when an opportunity should offer. In view of this we loaded our brass cannon, and made ready a supply of ammunition in case they should attack us. But after keeping company with us for some time the canoe made off, and Hartog had no mind to follow it.

Next morning we hove to off a pebbly beach, upon which I undertook to land a boat's crew and examine the country. Hartog sent two boats, one in my charge and the other in charge of Janstins. The sea was smooth, so that we had no difficulty in running the boats ashore, where, leaving a man aboard each, the rest of us followed the course of a stream inland. Here we soon came to a valley so beautiful as almost to defy description. Colossal trees rose to a great height above our heads, festooned with a flowering creeper which resembled a bridal veil, whilst emerald green ferns stretched their fronds into a stream which descended from the higher land beyond by a series of cascades. A kind of flax plant grew here, with leaves over nine feet long, and bearing a flower which looked like a bunch of feather plumes, whilst palms and cabbage trees abounded everywhere in great profusion.

My attention was diverted from the beauties which surrounded us by some strange footprints which I noticed on the soft ground near the stream, and which appeared to have been made by a bird or two-legged animal of prodigious size. The footprints measured fully three feet in length, and I fell to wondering what kind of a creature it could be who had made them, when I was startled by a cry from one of our men, which caused me to look in the direction whence it came. At a distance of some fifty yards from where I stood I then perceived a huge, wingless bird. Its head, armed with a formidable beak, reared full twenty feet from the ground; its body, big as an ox, and covered with black bristles, supported upon legs thicker than the girth of a man. As yet this prodigy had not observed us, for it was stalking quietly among the trees, followed by a brood of chickens, each larger than the biggest ostrich I had ever seen.

I now noticed that one of these chickens had strayed from the others, and I saw Janstins, who had evidently not observed the mother-bird, aiming his matchlock at it as though about to fire. I shouted to him to desist, but too late to save the mad fellow from his folly. There was a flash, and a loud report, and the giant chicken lay on its back, its legs kicking in the air.

"To the boats!" I cried, and the scared sailors, when they saw the mother-bird, needed no second warning. There was a rush for the boats by all but Janstins, who seemed as one amazed, and incapable of action at the sight of the monster. I could not leave him to the fate which threatened him, so, running to his assistance, I dragged him down behind some fern trees, where we hid out of sight of the mother-bird, who seemed bewildered by the unaccustomed sound of firearms, and perplexed at the death of her chick, for which she could not account. But we both knew that her inaction was momentary, and that when she discovered us we must expect the full force of her rage, which could only result in the loss of our lives. Whispering to Janstins, I bade him remember that in courage and caution alone lay our hope of escape, and he presently recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to follow me when we ran, bent double, under cover of the luxuriant foliage, to the beach, where we arrived only just in time to scramble into the second boat that was being shoved off by the terrified sailors, before the mother-bird, now joined by her mate of even larger proportion, came in pursuit of us, and so carried away were these monsters by rage at our escape that they advanced into the sea, stretching their necks at us while uttering a loud, drumming noise which we could hear repeated when we were on board the ship, and even after we were out at sea.

Next morning, at daybreak, we again made the coast, and toward evening we found ourselves opposite a sandy beach upon which a number of natives appeared to be engaged in some tribal ceremony. Fires were lighted along the sea shore, and, upon drawing nearer, we were able to distinguish groups of men, apparently captives, with their hands bound behind them, standing together while their captors performed an extravagant dance round them. Armed warriors then rushed upon each other in mimic warfare, and the sound of their bare feet, as they stamped in unison upon the hard sand, came to us with measured cadence across the sea. When the dance was ended, the captives were made to lie flat, one behind

the other, till they formed a black patch upon the beach. Then appeared a number of men pushing from above high-water mark a war canoe, the prow of which, elaborately carved, and upstanding to the height of thirty feet, was decorated with shells and bunches of feathers. On came the canoe, slowly at first, and then with increasing speed, until it reached the row of victims, over whom it crunched, taking the water reddened with their blood amid an uproar of shrieks and groans most dreadful to listen to.

Not wishing to engage these savages, Hartog stood out to sea, but so fearless were they that when they saw us they came in pursuit of us. Over twenty canoes crowded with natives put off from the shore, but we greeted them with shots from our brass cannon, which sent them back quicker than they came, many being observed to fall after each discharge of grapeshot and canister amongst them.

We left this country, which Hartog named Staten Land, in honour of the States of Holland, with an unfavourable impression of its inhabitants, who appeared to be bloodthirsty savages, prone to hostility without provocation.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE CANNIBAL ISLANDS

After leaving Staten Land we sailed west to between the fifteenth and twenty-first parallels of south latitude, when we fell in with a number of islands, some of considerable extent, while others were mere islets of sand and rock, uninhabited except by sea-fowl and turtle. A great barrier reef surrounds the group to the eastward, leaving the southern quarter open. This barrier is broken by numerous passages, between which navigation is possible, but dangerous, except in fine weather. In addition to the great barrier, every island has an encircling reef of its own. The general appearance of these islands is bold and striking. They are perhaps the mountain tops of some sunken continent. The island upon which we landed was one of the largest of the group, with a background of wooded hills, and a fringe of palm trees to the beach, beyond which a native village stood among green foliage.

We found the inhabitants of this island not nearly so friendly as other savages we had met with. The men were larger, and bore a ferocious aspect. The chief wore a necklace of whales' teeth, his hair frizzled into a mop, which stood out from his head, coloured to a reddish-brown. His skin was a light brown, with no tattoo marks upon it, but shiny, as if rubbed with oil. He carried a club and spear of elaborate workmanship, and wore a cloth petticoat made from the bark of a tree, and painted with some skill in its design. His followers were similarly, but not so strikingly, clad, the women wearing feathers in their hair, and a peculiar leaf from a tree, which looked like white satin. Altogether this race appeared to be possessed of a far higher state of civilization than the people in Terra Australis. They were, however, openly addicted to cannibalism, and made no secret of this abominable practice.

These natives did not display any hostility at our landing, nor did they express any surprise at the presents we made them of beads and bright cloth, although they accepted what we gave them with avidity. We stayed at this island for nearly two months, during which time we learnt something of the customs of the people, and I was able, after a while, to understand some of their language. It seemed that these savages were continually at war with one another, and the boom of the great wooden war drums was always sounding somewhere in the group. It was from prisoners taken in battle that men were provided for cannibal feasts, hence there was never lacking a cause for quarrel. The prisoners were kept in a compound, where they were fattened for the pot and killed when wanted.

These islanders were industrious in their own way. They built comfortable houses, and made excellent pottery capable of withstanding the heat of fire when used for cooking. Their boat-builders constructed sea-going canoes capable of travelling long distances. They also made a delicate cloth from the bark of the mulberry tree, upon which they printed from wooden blocks patterns of great elegance. Their spears and clubs also showed much taste in their construction and

ornamentation. The women made fishing nets of coconut fibre, with which they captured an abundance of fish. The tribes on the different islands kept up a system of barter with one another, exchanging commodities, the making of which was their hereditary occupation. A son followed the occupation of his father, and for him to have followed any other occupation would have been regarded as an offence against ancestors. A son was expected to do exactly as his father did before him, and to do it in the same way.

One day when I was fishing outside the reef, I was startled by a cry, and looking toward whence it came I perceived a young girl in evident terror, swimming for the reef with the black fin of a shark close upon her. Going to her assistance I managed, at some risk, to drive off the shark, and, pulling the girl into my boat I took her on board our ship, where I delighted her with a present of printed calico with which to reign as a queen of fashion among her tribe. When I took her ashore she showed her gratitude by taking my hand in hers, and placing it upon her forehead, which meant the making of a compact between us that she would lay down her life for me if occasion should require. It was to this that we subsequently owed our escape from death.

We had not found anything profitable to trade from these islands with the exception of sandal wood and tortoiseshell, of which we obtained a supply, but I noticed that the chief did not appear to grudge anything we took from him. It became a joke among our crew that they could have anything for the asking, and the ship was soon a museum of island curiosities. This aroused my suspicion, for I knew the cupidity of savages, and how they always try to take all and give nothing in return.

Toward the end of our visit, I also observed that numbers of savages from the adjacent islands began to arrive in canoes, and that preparations were being made for a feast. It was then that I noticed the girl I had saved from the shark was often to be seen standing on the beach opposite to the ship, gazing at the vessel long and earnestly. Thinking she wished to come on board again, I went in my boat to fetch her, but when I met her she showed great alarm lest we should be seen speaking together, and, urging me to follow her, she led me to a secluded spot of the island, in order that we might be free from observation. Here she confided to me the treachery of Vale Vulu, the chief whose guests we were.

It appeared from this girl's account of the matter that Vale Vulu's professed friendship for us was only a blind in order that he might attack us unawares. To this end he had invited certain tribes from some of the adjacent islands, with whom he happened to be on friendly terms, to a feast, the principal food of which was to consist of the dead bodies of our crew. His own tribe, unaided, he did not consider strong enough for this enterprise, but with the assistance of the friendly cannibals, whom he invited to the banquet, he made no doubt that he would easily be able to overcome us, particularly as we were to be taken unawares. The plan was to invite us to the feast, which we would be told was to consist only of fish, coconuts, and bananas, but, when we were seated, at a given signal we would be massacred and eaten, after which Vale Vulu would take possession of our ship and all that belonged to us.

The poor girl, when she had finished her story, confessed she would no doubt suffer death by torture for having betrayed the plot. I tried to induce her to come on board with me, but she refused, saying that if she did so an attack would be made upon us at once, where our ship lay, helpless, in the lagoon. I could not but see the force of her argument, and, as the matter was too urgent to admit of delay, I hurried on board and informed Hartog of what I had heard.

Our plans were soon made. All hands were told to be in readiness to man the boats in order to tow the ship out of the lagoon during the night, when we would depend upon a breeze to escape from these bloodthirsty savages. Arms and ammunition were served to the crew, and our brass cannon was loaded to the muzzle with grape and canister.

During the early part of the night we could see lights on the shore, whilst the beating of war drums and the sound of wooden horns continued to a late hour. At last all was still, when we slipped our anchor, and began the arduous task of towing the ship out of the lagoon through the opening in the reef which marked a break in the line of white surf. During

the night we laboured at the oars, and when morning broke we had succeeded in towing the ship into the open sea for some distance from the land. But our peril was by no means at an end. An absolute calm prevailed, and unless a breeze came in time we feared the savages would put off in their war canoes to attack us. Nor in this were we mistaken, for we presently heard a great beating of drums and blowing of horns, while we could see the savages crowding on to the reef, from which they watched us lying becalmed. Ten canoes then came through the opening in the reef, each containing some one hundred savages, and were paddled rapidly toward us.

When the canoes came within range our brass cannon accounted for one of them, on board of which I hoped was the traitor Vale Vulu, but the others came on, and there is little doubt that by force of numbers we must have been overpowered had not the breeze, which we could now see approaching, come in time to save us. The canoes were all round us, and the savages had already begun to swarm on to our decks, when the sails filled and the "Golden Seahorse" began to gather way. We were now incensed against the cannibals for their treacherous conduct, and many fell to the discharge of our muskets. With our cutlasses we soon drove those who had ventured upon the ship into the sea, and a second discharge from our brass cannon disabled one of the largest remaining canoes, when the others made off. As our ship bowed to the waves of the ocean we were able once more to breathe freely, and, taking a last look at the island, I fancied I saw a dark form hurl itself from one of the highest cliffs upon the rocks below. Was it the brave girl, I wondered, who had saved us, and who had thus escaped torture by destroying herself?

CHAPTER L

AGAIN AT THE MOLUCCAS

Hartog was anxious, before returning home, that we should call again at the Molucca Islands, and demand an explanation, together with a ransom of pearls, from King Thedori, for having treated us so scurvily on our former visit. We knew that this treacherous chief depended for the success of his piratical schemes on taking by surprise those for whom he pretended friendship, and for that reason we had arranged to meet the "Speedwell" so that we might, by strategy, pay Thedori back in his own coin, capture him, and hold him to ransom.

Now we knew that if Thedori, or any of the people, caught but a glimpse of the "Golden Seahorse", they would make ready to attack her with all the force at their command, but the "Speedwell" was unknown to them, and there were many harbours among the Moluccas where our ship might remain unnoticed while our plans were matured. The plan we had formed was a simple one, and was therefore the more likely to succeed. It was, shortly, as follows. On reaching the Moluccas we would choose a convenient harbour as the base of our enterprise, when the "Speedwell" would set out alone for the island ruled over by Thedori, where we had no doubt the captain and crew would be well received, as is the habit of this crafty king when dealing with strangers, in order that he may eventually pillage them. Thedori was to be invited by Captain Smuts to go aboard his vessel to inspect the cargo of furs and other goods in which he proposed to trade. Once on board the "Speedwell", the King of the Moluccas would be kidnapped, and brought away to where the "Golden Seahorse" was at anchor, when Hartog undertook to deal with him.

Captain Smuts, whom we found waiting us at the Moluccas, was very ready to fall in with this plan when we told him of the large pearls that were to be found at the island, some of which we intended to demand as the King's ransom for being allowed to return to his people.

The island we had chosen as the base for our operations happened to be the one of which we had been told on our former visit that the men possessed such large ears that with one ear they could, when they liked, cover the whole of their heads; for when we landed, and met the natives, we observed in them this remarkable peculiarity. Their heads were the smallest and their ears the largest that I have ever seen in human beings. The intelligence of these savages was as small as their heads. They showed no interest in us, and seemed to be indifferent to our appearance among them. This stupidity on

their part, however, so far from giving us any anxiety, rather commended itself to us, since it appeared unlikely they would attempt to interfere with our plans.

When we had rested and refreshed ourselves for three days at this island, the "Speedwell" set out upon her voyage to the main island, leaving the "Golden Seahorse" to await her return. In order that I might advise and consult with Captain Smuts with regard to our project, I became his passenger on the "Speedwell", it being understood that I was to keep out of sight until Thedori was safely aboard. So, every precaution being taken in order to ensure success, we arrived at the main island during the afternoon of the day we had set out, and cast anchor in the bay from which, nearly six years before, in the "Golden Seahorse", I had escaped with Hartog and our crew from the captivity which Thedori had intended for us after capturing our vessel.

I had no pity for the man whom we had come to call to account, for, to my mind, treachery is the worst of crimes. An open enemy may be fairly encountered, but a snake in the grass can only be met by the same serpent tricks as he plays upon others, and when I thought of the welcome Thedori had given us at our first interview with him, when he had exhorted us to land in safety so that we might enjoy the comforts of life and recruit our strength, in order, as it subsequently transpired, that he might betray us, I felt that no reprisals could be too severe against one guilty of such roguish deception.

The city of Porne appeared unchanged from when I had last seen it. There were a few new houses close to the beach, but otherwise the city itself, with its low-built cabins and regular streets, was the same.

I was greatly surprised, however, upon entering the harbour to see the Spanish frigate, upon which Donna Isabel Barreto had decamped with the gold taken from the island of Armenio, at anchor close to the shore. What could have brought the frigate here, and kept her here for so long a time since I had last seen her at Sumatra, I was at a loss to understand. The unexpected appearance of this vessel seemed likely to complicate our plans, and I determined to elucidate the mystery before proceeding with the matter in hand.

It was late in the afternoon when we cast anchor in Porne Harbour, and that night the same wonderful display of glow-worms showed itself among the woods on shore. It was then also that I knew that the black bats would be abroad, so as to make it unlikely our movements would be observed, since the inhabitants of Porne would be shut up in their houses.

So, when all was still, I took the smallest of the ship's boats, and was rowed in the direction of the frigate.

CHAPTER LI

GETTING BACK OUR OWN

We took no lantern with us in the boat upon our expedition to board the Spanish frigate, trusting to the light of the stars, and that given by the glow-worms on shore, to guide us, and as we approached the frigate we observed her also to be in darkness, with no sign of life on board.

When we came alongside I climbed to the deck by the anchor-chain, when I found the ship to be deserted, with hatches on, and the doors to the cabins securely locked. So, judging we had nothing to fear from the Spaniards, we returned to the "Speedwell" as silently as we had come. I did not tell Captain Smuts of the treasure which I believed to be still upon the frigate, as I desired, in the first place, to consult with Hartog as to the course to be adopted regarding it. Captain Smuts, on receiving my report that the Spanish ship was apparently out of commission, concluded that no change need be made in our original plan, the preparations for the carrying out of which were accordingly proceeded with.

Next morning, after breakfast, the captain of the "Speedwell" and his officers, in their best uniforms, and with a picked boat's crew, set out for the shore, taking with them presents for King Thedori and his chiefs, with a view to establishing friendly relations with them. In the course of an hour they returned, when, the captain repeated to me the greeting given him by the King of the Moluccas, which was almost word for word that extended to Hartog at the time of his visit in the "Golden Seahorse". Evidently King Thedori had a set speech wherewith to welcome his guests whom he afterwards intended to plunder. Captain Smuts was so impressed by the amiable bearing and fair words of the King that he found it hard to believe so much treachery could lurk behind such a frank and open exterior. Thedori, he said, had promised to come on board the "Speedwell" next day to inspect the furs, and arrange about the price to be paid for them. On my asking if any Spaniards had been met with ashore, Captain Smuts replied that he had not seen any, so we had no means of ascertaining what had become of Donna Isabel and her people, as well as the captain and crew of the frigate.

Next morning King Thedori came on board the "Speedwell" in the captain's boat, which had been sent for him. He did not bring with him any of his guards or attendants, not having the least suspicion of the trap we had laid. It was only when he came into the cabin that his suspicions were aroused, and it was then too late for him to retreat. I was sitting at the table when Smuts brought him in, and was presented to him as part owner of the furs. I saw him start when our eyes met, but otherwise he gave no sign that he knew me. There was wine and other refreshment upon the table, of which he was invited to partake, but declined, and then, after some further conversation between us, Captain Smuts, according to arrangement, made excuse to go on deck, leaving Thedori and I alone together.

Thedori was the first to speak, and I could see that his small black eyes glittered dangerously when he looked at me.

"We have met before, senior," he said, addressing me, as he had done at our first meeting, as though I was a Spaniard.

"Yes," I answered; "I was once the King's guest, welcomed with fair words, and offered the hospitality of his kingdom. Yet, had not chance intervened, I doubt I had been here to-day to welcome the King as a guest, in my turn, aboard this vessel."

Thedori rose, and went to the cabin door. It was locked, but he showed no surprise at finding himself a prisoner. He had probably heard the captain turn the key on the other side of the door when he went out.

"What is it you want of me?" he asked, coming back to the table and resuming his seat. He spoke with assumed carelessness, but I could see that his face was livid. I pushed the wine-jar toward him.

"Drink," I said. "You will need it. The wine is not poisoned."

With the ghost of a smile he filled a goblet which stood at his elbow, but his hand shook when he raised it to his lips.

And now the noise of the anchor being hove aboard, and the usual commotion on deck preparatory to setting sail, arrested his attention.

"Come," said he, "I would make terms with you. What is it you want."

But at this I shook my head.

"Promises and fair words once broken cannot be repeated," I answered. "Besides, I am not alone in this business. There are others who must be consulted. But you will soon learn the terms of your ransom."

At this I thought he appeared relieved. He probably expected that we intended to murder him.

I had given instructions for a prize crew to be put on board the frigate, so that both vessels might leave the harbour together and presently I felt, by the motion of the ship, that the "Speedwell" was at sea.

During our passage to the place where Hartog awaited us, King Thedori and I continued to sit, one on each side of the cabin table, without speaking, and when we had cast anchor, and Hartog joined us, Thedori, who had made up his mind to the inevitable, calmly awaited our terms, which, stated briefly, were that he should pay for his ransom, to each ship, one hundred pearls of the size of dove's eggs, and that the cargo of the frigate was to be transferred to the "Golden Seahorse". To the first part of our demand the King made some demur, but when we threatened to take him away with us on our voyage home, he promised to send some of the big-eared men for his ransom if we would give him speech with their chief. To the latter part of our demand Thedori readily agreed.

"You will find nothing on board the frigate," he said, "but some bags of stone ballast in the hold. Everything else of value has long since been taken on shore, and is being made use of by my people."

While the messengers were away procuring the King's ransom, we questioned Thedori as to how the Spanish frigate came to fall into his hands, when we learnt that some time since, during a calm, the frigate, caught by one of the strong currents which prevail among these islands, had drifted into the harbour of Porne, where an attack had been made upon her, and she, being short of ammunition, has been taken as a lawful prize. The Spaniards had been allowed to depart in their boats. So, for the second time, Donna Isabel and her people were probably castaways upon some unknown shore.

Thus does Providence reward treachery.

When, in the course of three days, the messengers returned with the King's ransom, we sent his Majesty ashore, to find his way back to his own kingdom as best he could. A more splendid lot of pearls than those paid to us I had never seen, and these we divided equally between the "Golden Seahorse" and the "Speedwell", to be allotted among the officers and crews of both vessels in such proportions as might be decided upon on our return to Amsterdam. The stone ballast, which, as we expected, turned out to be the gold-bearing quartz we had obtained from the island of Armenio, we transferred to our own ship.

And now, with a cargo which for richness had surely never been surpassed, we once more set sail for home.

CHAPTER LII

CONCLUSION

As we neared Amsterdam I began to think, with some trepidation, of my inevitable meeting with Pauline. It was now three years since I had set out upon my second voyage in the "Golden Seahorse", compelled to this course by reason of the incompatibility of temper which existed between my wife and me, making a happy union between us impossible. Yet when I took myself to task I could not but blame myself for much that had occurred. Pauline was vain, but so are most women, and most men too for that matter, for while a woman seeks admiration for her personal charms a man is equally proud of his achievements, and he is never so happy as when he is being praised for what he has done. So, on reviewing the matter of our matrimonial squabbles calmly and dispassionately, I came to the conclusion that there had been faults on both sides, and I made up my mind to be more conciliatory and less exacting in my conduct toward Pauline in the future, hoping by these means to effect a reconciliation so that I might live with some degree of comfort in my own house. To this end also I resolved to give Pauline my share of the pearls and as ransom by King Thedori, in order that she might possess a necklace unequalled at Amsterdam. Besides which I had my rubies.

Hartog also had become graver and more reserved than was his habit before we had set out upon this voyage. He seemed to regret the well-deserved fate which had overtaken Donna Isabel Barreto, and he would have asked nothing better than to set off on a voyage of discovery in search of her.

So it was with subdued and chastened spirits that Hartog and I arrived at Amsterdam, where it was arranged that Hartog should dispose of our rich cargo and apportion the profits of the venture. As a peace offering to Pauline I took with me twenty splendid pearls and six silver fox-skins, and, thus provided, I presented myself at my house at Amsterdam, to which I was at first denied admittance by the man-servant, who opened the door to me, and who had no knowledge of my identity.

While we were arguing the matter; however, Pauline appeared in the hall, into which I advanced to meet her. She was changed, I thought, and her face had wonderfully softened. I held out my arms to her, and she came to me, nestling into my embrace as though she indeed belonged to me. Then she rested her head upon my shoulder, and gave way to tears. I was touched by this kindly greeting, and had begun to mentally upbraid myself for my former conduct, and to promise amendment in the future, when the cause of my wife's changed disposition was suddenly, in a flash, revealed to me by a series of yells from a room upstairs, accompanied by a low voice of pleading in remonstrance, and what sounded like the, throwing about of some hard substance on the floor.

I looked into my wife's eyes, and read in them the secret of the great happiness which had come to me.

"He is quarrelling with his nurse," she said, smiling up at me through her tears. "He is such a masterful baby."

Next moment I was bounding up the stairs, and on entering the nursery I saw my boy seated on the floor, his face red with passion, while with his chubby little hands he was tearing the sails off a toy ship that had been given him to play with. The clever lad, even in his infancy, must have noticed that the wretched apology for a ship which they offered him was not rigged in seaman-like fashion. Well, I promised myself that I would make him a model of the "Golden Seahorse", perfect in every detail, and big enough for him to sail in. When I came into the nursery he stopped crying and looked at me, but the nurse kept on saying, "Oh, Master Peter, Master Peter, you must not be naughty like that," as though she were repeating a formula.

I ran to Master Peter and picked him up, when he tried to bite my hard hand with his little pearly teeth. Ah, what a lad of spirit he was! He was not a bit afraid of me or of anyone. A boy after my own heart. Then he looked at me, and the passion in his rosy face melted into a dimpled smile. He knew me, I am certain of it, and putting his little arms round my neck, he seemed to ask pardon for his wilfulness. We were comrades from that moment, he and I, and although not a word was spoken we understood each other thoroughly.

Pauline and the nurse watched us. Both women were weeping, as is the way with women when they seek to relieve their feelings. But the tears they shed were tears of joy.

When we were more composed, Pauline and I and young Peter went together to look at the presents I had brought back with me. Pauline was delighted with the pearls and the fox-skins, but she at once decided that the skins would make a warm winter coat for baby, and a splendid rug for his little carriage. I believe she would have given Master Peter the pearls to play with had he shown a fancy for them, but fortunately he did not notice them, so taken up was he in burying his face in the thick fur of the silver fox-skins.

What a home-coming this was for me after so much tossing upon the ocean, and so many wanderings into unknown lands, and how I trembled when I thought on the dangers I had passed, and how easily I might have lost my life, and thus forfeited the happiness that I knew was in store for me!

Well, my voyages were over now. Never again would I leave my wife and child for the hazards of the sea.

When I told Hartog of my great good fortune he was warm in his congratulations. I took my boy on board the "Golden Seahorse", and presented him to Hartog.

"We must make a sailor of him," said Hartog, when he had sat Master Peter upon the table between us in the cabin. "He is a sturdy lad, and has the look in his eyes that seeks for space--the look of the sailor, whose natural home is the sea."

Could it be? Who can tell? Little Peter had a steadfast, far-off look in his eyes. I had not noticed it until Hartog directed my attention to it. Was it the call of the ocean? The call to the Dutch, and the English--seeking for space?

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