

the broiling sun failed to warm him. The course to Ryderbank now lay fair with the wind and the lone man in the catboat drove a slack sail. Once or twice Cerdic saw him lean far over the gunwale—evidently to get a better lay of the course and look out for shoals. Once he remained unduly long in this position, staring ahead.

"He has spotted them," Cerdic soliloquized. "Our friends the Indians are the two guides and that ungrateful person who wanted water so badly is, no doubt, the respected Colonel Ryder. He might have had a willing ally had he been in less of a hurry. . . . Oho, they're off. What a bundle of fire-crackers that noisy beggar of a gas-boat is!" Yet this noise was very heartsome to him. He hoped that they might steer in his direction.

"He's keeping them in sight, all right," Cerdic commented after he had scaled the rock to get a better view. "A race." He entered into the spirit of it. "Lee a little—now keep it there—their course is set for the Soo—you'll lose them. No . . . something wrong with the works; their skill doesn't seem to lean to mechanics. Now he'll breast them—he's got a nice breeze!"

The object of the man in the sailboat was apparently to cut the course of the popping launch from leading him out of wind. While it was gaining lap upon lap the sailboat cut closer to shore so as to head off a possible turn. It was not a race—it was a pursuit which strained every muscle of the man behind the sail. His precaution was well-devised but the turn was taken so close to shore as to make it perilous for tacking. The launch under full power again swung in sharply and barely escaped running on a shoal and scudded by while the sail still quivered for the turn.

It looked like a futile chase. The sailboat was again twenty laps astern before she caught a full sail and even then she veered out to open while the launch crept closer and closer landward.

"They're going to beat it on land," yelled Cerdic, as if to enlighten the pursuer. "Hold her close! You may land up close enough to them yet. Hurrah!"

A puff of smoke rose from the boat ahead and she stopped dead, her engine gasping wheezily, her hull crouching and scraping on something hard.

At the same time the sail of the other boat flapped loosely and dropped into folds. The man at the stern picked up an oar and began to scull in the direction of the wreck.

Cerdic watched this manoeuvre with intense interest. The two occupants of the floundered boat were quailing before the aggressive master of the other.

"The fiend!" exploded Cerdic. This was directed to the man in the catboat who, as soon as he came alongside the derelict, hoisted his sail and tacked out to open water. Cerdic watched for some other queer manoeuvre but the sail bellied happily to the north-west in the direction of Ryderbank and kept its course.

"Their plight is worse than mine," thought Cerdic. "A sea will probably run before sunset and swamp them. I, at least, am high and dry. Poor beggars. They were the ugly demons but we are three in about the same kind of bag of tricks. Our friend, the Colonel, must have very little respect for the ordinary decencies or he would at least take a chance on my being a desperado. I'd answer for the other fellows if I had any show—but here I am very much as there they are. They're as human as I am. If it gets no rougher they may hang on until morning—or a sea might come up in an hour and skihoot them into eternity. Help might come to us all to-morrow—if we sit calmly and wait."

He laughed softly and beat his heel nervously against the rock and fell to thinking.

"It's a chance, no matter how one looks at it," he conceded after a minute's cogitation. Then he sat down and removed his shoes and socks, and with much deliberation he clambered to the top of the reef and began an inspection of Jake Hilder's rough coffin.

It was a wonderful piece of rough carpentry, consisting of a cedar trunk

seven feet long and gouged out with the tools of a bushman. The ends were square and the bottom flat. What was left undone in the finishing was accomplished by the weather.

Cerdic lifted an end of it with apparent ease and sent it sliding down the rock. It struck endwise in the sand, requiring much exertion to get it out again and set flat upon the water. Before the water had filled the hole it had made Cerdic noticed the frayed ends of a sack. Had he not heard the story of Jake Hilder's fortune he would have ignored the presence of anything so common as a frayed sack. But his imagination flew loose at sight of it. He bared his arms to the shoulders and commenced scooping up sand, badger fashion, plastering the rock all about him. The sack ripped a little when he clutched at it. That was promising. More digging and he had successfully loosened the sunken treasure of Jake Hilder. He lifted it up with both hands and let it fall into the bottom of the improvised scow, where it went to pieces, and a stream of weather-stained sovereigns rolled about, lining his craft with gold.

Smiling upon his quaint fortune, Cerdic pondered the point of how he was to get away with it. He had a serviceable and seaworthy boat, though it rode low in water. But there was not a scrap of driftwood around the reef that would serve for an oar. He searched all around the reef with no

luck and he returned at last to Jake Hilder's bones. The eye-sockets in the skull were fringed with cracks on the outside curve which gave a look of ghastly humor to the face. Cerdic smiled reciprocally and bent down to pick up the largest bone he could find. Nodding with satisfaction he looked to the chalky face as if to ask approval and then started upon the strangest voyage ever recorded in the history of the North Channel.

The lake was a sheen of ripples on surface but beneath pulsed the latent energy which, on the Great Lakes, breaks out with little warning into violent waves.

He found himself drifting westward and northward, and it took all his strength with both hands paddling to steer in the direction of the next island. He might have sat in his curious craft and drifted—he would have landed before night opposite Ryderbank. But his only object for putting out at all was to help the other unfortunates to safety. But how? There was room for only one in his boat—three would be as safe in the open water. And then there was the gold! Two might drift to safety. Which two was a speculation he did not fancy.

Reaching shore he picked up a piece of pine board and fashioned a paddle with his jackknife. It had taken him nearly an hour to get under way again and he calculated that it would be sunset before he reached the stranded pair.

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