An Automatic Life Belt.

Novel Invention Which May be Worn While Asleep.

Passengers on ocean liners may soon be able to sleep in life preservers, if the plans of a Harlem inventor do not go awry. This man is S. Salvator of 238 West One Hundred and Thirty-fifth street. He has been working for some time on an invention by which, he says, the danger of drowning in one's berth after a night collision or wreck of an ocean steamship will be reduced to a minimum.

Mr. Salvator's attention was first called to the necessity of a life preserver one could sleep in by the sinking of the French Line steamship La Bourgogne in the summer of 1898, when hundreds of lives were lost. The ship went down in the darkness so quickly after the collision off the Newfoundland coast that scores must have drowned in their staterooms.

Salvator was ruminating over the helplessness of a traveler thus trapped in a sinking ship when he had occasion to cross the ocean. There was a midnight panic on this ship, and descriptions of the scenes of confusion as the passengers rushed madly about in the darkness or semi-darkness impressed him with the belief that something ought to be done to put a life-preserver within instant reach of a passenger on his awakening from sleep.

To sleep with a cork jacket on was out of the question, so the inventor began to work along a totally different line. He decided to make a preserver that would be made effective only by its coming in contact with water. This idea he has now worked out and has obtained a patent on. It works on the principal of a water-generated gas which fills a belt and gives it buoyancy. Uninflated the belt is a light thing, which would hardly be felt if worn by a sleeper, but when filled with gas it is blown up to the size of an ordinary cork jacket.

The belt is made of rubber and is about eight inches wide, and can be blown up by means of a small cylinder. In this cylinder is placed a composition of acids which when acted upon by water instantly inflates the belt. The belt has been tested in the ocean and it has been found that the water acts upon the acids and inflates the rubber in less than three seconds. The ingredients in this composition Mr. Salvator keeps secret. The composition is the result of four years' work in the laboratory. It will retain all its strength for several years.

Speaking of the merits of this new theory of life preservation, Mr. Salvator said:

"One of the horrors of ocean travel is the chance of not getting hold of a life preserver at the critical moment if summoned from a sound sleep by the cry that the ship is afire or is sinking after a collision. How many persons have been drowned by not being able to get a life belt in the darkness can never be known, but no one who has traveled much by sea can have failed to note the imminence of that peril.

"When one is aroused by a sudden cry, the first impulse is to reach the deck. This impulse is natural and overmastering. Even the thought of a life preserver is forgotten in the wild desire to get out of the bowels of the ship. Once on deck it may be too late to get a life belt or impossible to get one on account of the mad struggle for the life preservers. But note how simple all this would be with my automatic belt. One would tie it loosely about one's body on going to bed. In case of a rush to the deck one would be ready on the instant to leap overboard without the necessity of wasting time in getting a life belt.

"Even while the noise of the splash one would make in striking the water would be in the air the automatic action would have taken place and before one would rise to the surface after the leap the belt would be fully inflated. Of course the inflation, as the rubber is impervious to air, would last indefinitely. It has been tested and has lasted fourteen days. That is a long enough immersion for anybody. If not picked up by that time the victim will be dead of exposure.

"One important feature of this belt is that it takes up comparatively little room when inflated. This consideration is of vital importance in the case of persons leaving a sinking ship in row-boats. Usually these boats are so filled that there is little if any room for the cumbrous jackets or life belts ordinarily in use. Everything is sacrificed for the biscuit boxes and water jugs, which, of course, is the right thing to do.

"The automatic belt, occupying but little more room when folded up than a common towel, one for each passenger, can be carried with but little diminution of the available space. More than that, each occupant could wear the belt with little inconvenience, even if he were working at the oars. In the small boats in a heavy sea persons are washed off every now and then before they can don a life belt, even if one should be within reach. If all were wearing automatic life belts they would be buoyed up as soon as they would strike the water.

"I firmly believe the idea applied in this automatic belt can be employed in other directions, as, for instance, to the raising of sunken ships. Divers could descend to the hold and place within many very large inflated bags. The action of the water on the composition would cause inflation, which would expel the water and give the ship a buoyancy that would raise her. Of course, these bags would be far larger than the life belts.

"There is one feature about the automatic belt that was brought out in the New York Times last Sunday in an article on the existing life preservers. That is the growing scarcity of cork and the tendency to stint ships in the supply of life belts. Now, with the automatic belt, the supply is practically limitless, for the composition, which causes the inflation, is cheap, and the belt may be made of less costly material than pure rubber. I have these model belts made of rubber that they may be seen at their best. These belts will each support a weight of twenty-four pounds, and as a person in the water needs to have only his head supported, the belt is adequate to the holding up of anybody unless he have an abnormal case of 'big head,' and in such cases it is usually filled with 'hot air.'"

The Wings of The Morning

By Louis Tracy.

Continued from last Tuesday's edition.

"I am sure Tennyson saw our island with poetic eye, for he goes on—

'Sail from day to day, but every day
The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts
Among the palms and ferns and precipices;
The blaze upon the waters to the east;
The blaze upon this island overhead;
The blaze upon the waters to the west;
Then the great stars that globed themselves in Heaven,
The hollower-bellowing ocean, and again
The scarlet shafts of sunrise—but no rain.'"

She declaimed the melodious verse with a subtle skill that amazed her hearer. Profoundly moved, Jenks dared not trust himself to speak.

"I read the whole poem the other day," she said after a silence of some minutes. "Sorrowful as it is, it comforted me by comparison. How different will be our fate to his when another ship stays by this isle!"

Yet neither of them knew that one line she had recited was more singularly applicable to their case than that which they paid heed to. "The great stars that globed themselves in Heaven," were shining clear and bright in the vast arch above. Resplendent amidst the throng rose the Pleiades, the mythological seven hailed by the Greeks as an augury of safe navigation. And the Dyaks—one of the few remaining savage races of the world—share the superstition of the people who fashioned all the arts and most of the sciences.

The Pleiades form the Dyak tutelary genius. Some among a bloodthirsty and vengeful horde were even then pointing to the clustering stars that promised quick voyage to the isle where their kinsmen had been struck down by a white man who rescued a maid. Nevertheless, Grecian romance and Dyak lore alike regulate the influence of the Pleiades to the sea. Other stars are needed to foster an enterprise ashore.

CHAPTER X.

Reality v. Romance—The Case for the Plaintiff.

Night after night the Pleiades swung higher in the firmament; day after day the sailor perfected his defences and anxiously scanned the ocean for sign of friendly smoke or hostile sail. This respite would not have been given to him, were it not for the lucky bullet which removed two fingers and part of a third from the right hand of the Dyak chief. Not even a wealthy savage can afford to treat such a wound lightly, and ten days elapsed before the maimed robber was able to move the injured limb without a curse.

Meanwhile, each night Jenks slept less soundly; each day his face became more careworn. He began to realize why the island had not been visited already by the vessel which would certainly be deputed to search for them—she was examining the great coast line of China and Siam.

It was his habit to mark the progress of time on the rudely made sun-dial which sufficiently served their requirements as a clock. Iris happened to watch his chipping the forty-fourth notch on the edge of the horizontal block of wood.

"Have we really been forty-four days here?" she inquired, after counting the marks with growing astonishment.

"I believe the reckoning is accurate," he said. "The Sirdar was lost on the 18th of March, and I make this the 1st of May."

"May-Day!"

"Looked at in that way it seems to be a tremendous time, though indeed, in some respects, it figures in my mind like many years. That is when I am thinking. Otherwise, when busy, the days fly like hours."

"It must be convenient to have such an elastic scale."

"Most useful. I strive to apply the quick rate when you are grumpy."

Iris placed her arms akimbo, planted her feet widely apart, and surveyed Jenks with an expression that might almost be termed impudent. They were great friends these two, now. The incipient stage of love-making had been dropped entirely, as ludicrously unsuited to their environment.

When the urgent necessity for continuous labor no longer spurred them to exertion during every moment of daylight, they tackled the box of books and found, not volumes which appealed to them in common, but quaint tomes in the use of which Jenks was tutor and Iris the scholar.

It became a fixed principle with the girl that she was very ignorant, and she insisted that the sailor should teach her, for instance, among the books he found a treatise on astronomy; it yielded a keen delight to both to identify a constellation and learn all sorts of wonderful things concerning it; but to work even the simplest problem required a knowledge of algebra, and Iris had never gone beyond decimals. So the stock of notebooks instead of recording their experiences, became covered with symbols showing how x plus y equaled x2 minus 3,000,000.

As a variant, Jenks introduced a study of Hindustani. His method was to write a short sentence and explain in detail its component parts. With a certain glee Iris surveyed the intricacies of the verb compound verb, but, about her fourth lesson, she broke out into exclamations of extravagant joy.

"What on earth is the matter now?" demanded her surprised mentor.

"Don't you see?" she explained, delightedly. "Of course you don't! People who know a lot about a thing often miss its obvious points. I have discovered how to write Kiplingese. All you have to do is to tell your story in Urdu, translate it literally into English, and there you are!"

"Quite so. Just do it as Kipling does, and the secret is laid bare. By the same rule you can hit upon the Miltonic adjective."

Iris tossed her head.

"I don't know anything about the Miltonic adjective, but I am sure about Kipling."

This ended the argument. She knitted her brows in the effort to master the ridiculous complexities of a language which, instead of simply saying "Take" or "Bring," compels one to say "Take go" and "Take come."

One problem defied solution—that of providing raiment for Iris. The united skill of the sailor and herself would not induce unraveled cordage to supply the need of thread. It was either too weak or too knotty, and meanwhile the girl's clothes were falling to pieces. Jenks tried the fibrous trees, the sinews of birds—every possible expedient he could hit upon—and perhaps, after experiments covering some weeks, he might have succeeded. But modern dress stuffs, weakened by aniline dyes and stiffened with Chinese clay, permit of no such exhaustive research. It must be remembered that the lady passengers on board the Sirdar were dressed to suit the tropics, and the hard usage given by Iris to her scanty stock was never contemplated by the Manchester or Bradford looms responsible for the durability of the material.

As the days passed the position became irksome. It even threatened complete collapse during some critical moment, and the two often silently surveyed the large number of merely male garments in their possession. Of course, in the matter of coats and waistcoats there was no difficulty whatever. Iris had long been wearing those portions of the doctor's uniform. But when it came to the rest——

At last, one memorable morning, she crossed the Rubicon. Jenks had climbed, as usual, to the Summit Rock. He came back with the exciting news that he thought—he could not be certain, but there were indications inspiring hopefulness — that towards the west of the far-off island he could discern the smoke of a steamer.

Though he had eyes for a faint cloud of vapor at least fifty miles distant he saw nothing of a remarkable change effected nearer home. Outwardly, Iris was attired in her wonted manner, but if her companion's mind were not wholly monopolized by the clush haze detected on the horizon, he must have noticed the turned-up ends of a pair of trousers beneath the hem of her tattered skirt.

It did not occur to him that Iris received his momentous announcement with an odd air of hauteur, and it was passing strange she did not offer to accompany him when, after bolting his breakfast, he returned to the observatory.

He came back in an hour, and the lines on his face were deeper than before.

"A false alarm," he said curtly in response to her questioning look.

And that was all, though she nerved herself to walk steadily past him on her way to the well. This was disconcerting, even annoying to a positive young woman like Iris. Resolving to end the ordeal, she stood dignidly before him.

"Well," she said, "I've done it!"

"Have you?" he exclaimed blankly.

"Yes. They're a little too long, and I feel very awkward, but they're better than—than my poor old dress unsupported."

She blushed furiously, to the sailor's complete bewilderment, but she bravely persevered and stretched out an unwilling foot.

"Oh, I see!" he growled, and he too reddened.

"I can't help it, can I?" she demanded piteously. "It is not unlike a riding-habit, is it?"

Then his ready wit helped him.

"An excellent compromise," he cried. "A process of evolution, in fact. Now, do you know, Miss Deane, that would never have occurred to me."

And during the remainder of the day he did not once look at her feet. Indeed, he had far more serious matters to distract his thoughts, for Iris, feverishly anxious to be busy, suddenly suggested that it would be a good thing were she able to use a rifle if a fight at close quarters became necessary.

The recoil of the Lee-Metford is so slight that any woman can manipulate the weapon with effect, provided she is not called upon to fire from a standing position, in which case the weight is liable to cause bad aiming. Though it came rather late in the day, Jenks caught at the idea. He accustomed her in the first instance to the use of blank cartridges. Then, when fairly proficient in holding and sighting—a child can learn how to refill the clip and eject each empty shell—she fired ten rounds of service ammunition. The target was a white circle on a rock at eighty yards, and those of the ten shots that missed the absolute mark would have made an enemy at the same distance extremely uncomfortable.

Iris was much pleased with her proficiency. "Now," she cried, "instead of being a hindrance to you, I may be some help. In any case the Dyaks will think there are two men to face, and they have good reason to fear one of us."

Then a new light dawned upon Jenks.

"Why did you not think of it before he demanded. "Don't you see, Miss Deane, the possibility suggested by your words? I am sorry to be compelled to speak plainly, but I feel sure that those scoundrels do attack us in force. It will be more to secure you than to avenge the loss of their fellow-men. First and foremost, the savage Dyaks are pirates and marauders. They prowl about the coast looking for much for a fight as for loot and women. Now, if they return, and unexpectedly find two well-armed men awaiting them, with no prospect of plunder, there is a chance they may abandon the enterprise."

Iris did not flinch from the topic. She well knew its grave importance.

"In other words," she said, "I must be seen by them dressed only in male clothing?"

"Yes, as a last resource, that is. I have some hope that they may not discover our whereabouts owing to the precautions we have adopted. Perched up there on the ledge we will be profoundly uncomfortable, but that will be nothing if it secures our safety."

She did not reply at once. Then she said musingly—"Forty-four days! Surely there has been ample time to scour the China Sea from end to end in search of us? My father would never abandon hope until he had the most positive knowledge that the Sirdar was lost with all on board."

The sailor, through long schooling, was prepared with an answer—"Each day makes the prospect of escape brighter. Though I was naturally disappointed this morning, I must state quite emphatically that our rescue may come any hour."

Iris looked at him steadily.

"You wear a solemn face for one who speaks so cheerfully," she said.

"You should not attach too great significance to appearances. The owl, a very stupid bird, is noted for it philosophical expression."

"Then we will strive to find wisdom in words. Do you remember, Mr. Jenks, that soon after the wreck you told me we might have to remain here many months?"

"That was a pardonable exaggeration."

"No, no. It was the truth. You are seeking now to buoy me up with false hope. It is sixteen hundred miles from Hong Kong to Singapore, and half as much from Siam to Borneo. The Sirdar might have been driven anywhere in the typhoon. Didn't you say so, Mr. Jenks?"

He wavered under this merciless cross-examination.

"I had no idea your memory was so good," he said, weakly.

"Excellent, I assure you. Moreover, during our forty-four days together, you have taught me to think. Why do you adopt subterfuge with me? We are partners in all else. Why cannot I share your despair as well as your toil?"

She blazed out in sudden wrath, and he understood that she would not be denied the full extent of his secret care. He bowed reverently before her, as a mortal paying homage to an angry goddess.

"I can only admit that you are right," he murmured. "We must pray that God will direct our friends to this island, otherwise we may not be found for a year, as unhappily the fishermen who once came here now avoid the place. They have been frightened by the contents of the hollow behind the cliff. I am glad you have solved the difficulty unaided, Miss Deane. I have striven at times to be coarse, even brutal, towards you, but my heart flinched from the task of telling you the possible period of your imprisonment."

Then Iris, for the first time in many days, wept bitterly, and Jenks, blind to the true cause of her emotion, picked up a rifle to which, in spare moments, he had affixed a curious device, and walked slowly across Prospect Park towards the half-obliterated road leading to the Valley of Death.

The girl watched him disappear among the trees. Through her tears shone a sorrowful little smile.

"He thinks only of me, never of himself," she communed. "If it pleases Providence to spare us from these savages, what does it matter to me how long we remain here? I have never been so happy before in my life. I fear I never will be again. If it were not for my father's terrible anxiety I would not have a care in the world. I only wish to get away, so that one brave soul at least may be rid of needless tortures. All his worry is on my account, none on his own."

That was what tearful Miss Iris thought, or tried to persuade herself to think. Perhaps her cogitations would not bear strict analysis. Perhaps she harbored a sweet hope that the future might yet contain bright hours for herself and the man who was so devoted to her. She refused to believe that Robert Anstruther, strong of arm and clear of brain, a Knight of the Round Table in all that was noble and chivalric, would permit his name to bear an unwarrantable stigma when—and she blushed like a June rose—he came to tell her that which he had written.

The sailor returned hastily, with the manner of one hurrying to perform a neglected task. Without any explanation to Iris he climbed several times to the ledge, carrying arm-loads of gross roots which he planted in full view. Then he entered the cave, and, although he was furnished only with the dim light that penetrated through the distant exit, she heard him hewing manfully at the rock for a couple of hours. At last he emerged, grimy with dust and perspiration, just in time to pay a last visit to Summit Rock before the sun sank to rest. He asked the girl to delay somewhat the preparations for their evening meal, as he wished to take a bath, so it was quite dark when they sat down to eat.

Iris had long recovered her usual state of high spirits.

"Why were you burrowing in the cavern again?" she inquired. "Are you in a hurry to get rich?"

"I was following an air-shaft, not a lode," he replied. "I am occasionally troubled with fiery wit, and this is an instance. Do you remember how the flame of the lamp flickered whilst we were opening up our mine?"

"Yes."

"I was so absorbed in contemplating our prospective wealth that I failed to pay heed to the true significance of that incident. It means the existence of an upward current of air. Now, where the current goes there must be a passage, and whilst I was busy this afternoon among the trees over there"—he pointed towards the Valley of Death—"it came to me like an inspiration that possibly a few hours' hewing and delving might open a shaft to the ledge. I have been well rewarded for the effort. The stuff in the fault is so eaten away by water that it is no more solid than hard mud for the most part. Already I have scooped out a chimney twelve feet high."

"What good can that be?"

"At present we have only a front door—up the face of the rock. When my work is completed, before to-morrow night I hope, we shall have a back door also. Of course, I may encounter unforeseen obstacles as I advance. A twist in the fault would be nearly fatal, but I am praying that it may continue straight to the ledge."

"I still don't see the great advantage to us."

"The advantages are many, believe me. The more points of attack presented by the enemy the more effective will be our resistance. I doubt if they would ever be able to rush the cave were we to hold it, whereas I can go up and down our back staircase whenever I choose. If you don't mind being left in the dark I will resume work now, by the light of your lamp."

But Iris protested against this arrangement. She felt lonely. The long hours of silence had been distasteful to her. She wanted to talk.

"I agree," said Jenks, "provided you do not pin me down to something I told you a month ago."

"I promise. You can tell me as much or as little as you think fit. The subject for discussion is your court-martial."

He could not see the tender light in her eyes, but the quiet sympathy of her voice restrained the protest prompt on his lips. Yet he blurted out, after a slight pause—

"That is a very unsavory subject."

"Is it? I do not think so. I am a friend, Mr. Jenks, not an old one, I admit, but during the past six weeks we have bridged an ordinary acquaintanceship of as many years. Can you not trust me?"

Trust her? He laughed softly. Then, choosing his words with great deliberation, he answered—"Yes, I can trust you. I intended to tell you the story some day. Why not to-night?"

Unseen in the darkness Iris' hand sought and clasped the gold locket suspended from her neck. She already knew some portion of the story he would tell. The remainder was of minor importance.

"It is odd," he continued, "that you should have alluded to six years a moment ago. It is exactly six years, almost to a day, since the trouble began."

"With Lord Ventnor?" The name slipped out involuntarily.

"Yes. I was then a Staff Corps subaltern, and my proficiency in native languages attracted the attention of a friend in Simla, who advised me to apply for an appointment on the political side of the Government of India. I did so. He supported the application, and I was assured of the next vacancy in a native State, provided that I got married."

He drawled out the concluding words with exasperating slowness. Iris, astounded by the stipulation, dropped her locket and leaned forward into the red light of the log fire. The sailor's quick eye caught the glitter of the ornament.

"By the way," he interrupted, "what is that thing shining on your breast?"

She instantly clasped the trinket again. "It is my sole remaining adornment," she said, "a present from my father on my tenth birthday. Pray, go on!"

"I was not a marrying man, Miss Deane, and the requisite qualification nearly staggered me. But, I looked around the station, and came to the conclusion that the Commissioner's niece would make a suitable wife. I regarded her 'points,' so to speak, and they filled the bill. She was smart, good looking, lively, understood the art of entertaining, was first-rate in sports and had excellent teeth. Indeed, if a man selected a wife, as he does a horse, he's—"

"Don't be horrid. Was she really pretty?"

"I believe so. People said she was."

"But what did you think?"

"At the time my opinion was biassed. I have seen her since, and she wears badly. She is married now, and after thirty grew very fat."

"Artful Jenks. Iris settled herself comfortably to listen.

"I have jumped that fence with a lot in hand," he thought.

"We became engaged," he said aloud. "She threw herself at him," commented Iris.

"Her name was Elizabeth—Elizabeth Morris." The young lieutenant of those days called her "Bessie," but no matter.

"Well, you didn't marry her, anyhow," commented Iris, a trifle sharply.

And now the sailor was on level ground again.

"Thank Heaven, no," he said, earnestly. "We had barely become engaged when she went with her uncle to Simla for the hot weather. There she met Lord Ventnor, who was on the Viceroy's staff, and—if you don't mind—we will skip a portion of the narrative—I discovered then why men in India usually go to England for their wives. Whilst in Simla on ten days' leave, I had a foolish row with Lord Ventnor in the United Service Club—hammered him, in fact, in defence of a worthless woman, and was only saved from a severe reprimand because I had been badly treated. Nevertheless, my hopes of a political appointment vanished, and I returned to my regiment to learn, after due reflection, what a very lucky person I was."

"Concerning Miss Morris, you mean?"

"Exactly. And now exit Elizabeth. Not being cut out for matrimonial enterprise, I tried to become a good officer. A year ago, when Government asked for volunteers to form Chinese regiments, I sent in my name and was accepted. I had the good fortune to serve under an old friend, Colonel Costobell; but some malign star sent Lord Ventnor to the Far East, this time in an important civil capacity. I met him occasionally, and we found we did not like each other any better. My hope beat his for the Pagoda Hurdle Handicap—poor old Sultan! I wonder where he is now."

"Was your horse called 'Sultan'?"

"Yes. I bought him in Meerut, trained him myself, and farried him all the way to China. I lost him next to the British army."

This was quite satisfactory. There was genuine feeling in his voice now. Iris became even more interested.

"Colonel Costobell fell ill, and the command of the regiment devolved upon me, our only major being absent in the interior. The Colonel's wife unhappily chose that moment to flirt, as people say, with Lord Ventnor. Not having learnt the advisability of minding my own business, I remonstrated with her, thus making her my deadly enemy. Lord Ventnor contrived an official mission to a neighboring town and detailed me for the military charge. I sent a junior officer. Then Mrs. Costobell and he deliberately concocted a plot to ruin me—he, for the sake of his old animosity—you remember that I had also crossed his path in Egypt—she, because she feared I would speak to her husband. On pretence of seeking my advice, she inveigled me at night into a deserted corner of the Club grounds at Hong Kong. Lord Ventnor appeared, and as the upshot of their vile statements, which created an immediate uproar, I—well, Miss Deane, I nearly killed him."

Iris vividly recalled the anguish he betrayed when this topic was inadvertently broached one day early in their acquaintance. Now he was reciting his painful history with the air of a man far more concerned to be scrupulously accurate than aroused in his deepest passions by the memory of past wrongs. What had happened in the interim to blunt these bygone sufferings? Iris clasped her locket. She thought she knew.

"The remainder may be told in a sentence," he said. "Of what avail were my frenzied statements against the definite proofs adduced by Lord Ventnor and his unfortunate ally? Even her husband believed her and became my bitter foe. Poor woman! I have it in my heart to pity her. Well, that is all. I am here!"

"Can a man be ruined so easily?" murmured the girl, her exquisite tact leading her to avoid any direct expression of sympathy.

"It seems so. But I have had my reward. If ever I meet Mrs. Costobell again I will thank her for a great service."

Iris suddenly became confused. Her brow and neck tingled with a quick access of color.

"Why do you say that?" she asked; and Jenks, who was rising, either did not hear, or pretended not to hear, the tremor in her tone.

"Because you once told me you would never marry Lord Ventnor, and after what I have told you now I am quite sure you will not."

"Ah, then you do trust me!" she almost whispered.

He forced back the words trembling for utterance. He even strove weakly to assume an air of good-humored badinage.

"See how you have tempted me from work, Miss Deane," he cried. "We have gossiped here until the fire grew tired of our company. To bed, please, at once."

Iris caught him by the arm.

"I will pray to-night and every night," she said solemnly, "that your good name may be cleared in the eyes of all men as it is in mine. And I am sure my prayer will be answered."

She passed into her chamber, but her angelic influence remained. In his very soul the man thanked God for the tribulation which brought this woman into his life. He had traversed the wilderness to find an oasis of rare beauty. What might lie beyond he neither knew nor cared. Through the remainder of his existence, be it a day or many a year, he would be glorified by the knowledge that in one incomparable heart he reigned supreme, unchallenged, if only for the hour. Fatigue, anxiety, bitter recollection and present danger, were overwhelmed and forgotten in the nearness, the intangible presence of Iris. He looked up to the starry vault, and, yielding to the spell, he, too, prayed.

It was a beautiful night. After a baking hot day the rocks were radiating their stored-up heat, but the pleasant south-westerly breeze that generally set in at sunset tempered the atmosphere and made sleep refreshing. Jenks could not settle down to rest for a little while after Iris left him. She did not bring forth her lamp, and, unwilling to disturb her, he picked up a resinous branch, lit it in the dying fire, and went into the cave.

He wanted to survey the work already done, and to determine whether it would be better to resume operations in the morning from inside the excavation or from the ledge. Owing to the difficulty of constructing a vertical upward shaft, and the danger of a sudden fall of heavy material, he decided in favor of the latter course, although it entailed lifting all the refuse out of the hole. To save time, therefore, he carried his mining tools into the open, placed in position the cheval de frise long since constructed for the defence of the entrance, and poured water over the remains of the fire.

This was his final care each night before stretching his weary limbs on his couch of branches. It caused delay in the morning, but he neglected no precaution, and there was a possible chance of the Dyaks failing to discover the Eagle's Nest if they were persuaded by other indications that the island was deserted.

He entered the hut and was in the act of pulling off his boots, when a distant shot rang sharply through the air. It was magnified tenfold by the intense silence. For a few seconds that seemed to be minutes he listened, cherising the quick thought that perhaps a turtle, wandering far beyond accustomed limits had disturbed one of the spring-gun communications on the sand. A sputtering volley, which his trained ear recognized as the firing of muzzle-loaders, sounded the death-knell of his last hope.

The Dyaks had landed! Coming silently and mysteriously in the dead of night, they were themselves the victims of a stratagem they designed to employ. Instead of taking the occupants of Rainbow Island unawares they were startled at being greeted by a shot at the moment they landed. The alarmed savages at once retaliated by firing their antiquated weapons point-blank at the trees, thus giving warning enough to wake the Seven Sleepers.

Iris, fully dressed, was out in a moment.

"They have come!" she whispered.

"Yes," was the cheery answer, for Jenks face to face with danger was a very different man to Jenks wrestling with the insidious attacks of Cupid. "Up the ladder! Be lively! They will not be here for half an hour if they kick up such a row at the first difficulty. Still, we will take no risks. Cast down those spare lines when you reach the top and haul away when I say 'Ready!' You will find everything to hand up there."

He held the bottom of the ladder to steady it for the girl's climb. Soon her voice fell, like a message from a star—

"All right! Please join me soon!"

The coiled-up ropes dropped along the face of the rock. Clothes, pick, hatchet, hammer, crowbars, and other useful odds and ends were swung away into the darkness, for the moon as yet did not illumine the crag. The sailor darted into Belle Vue Castle and kicked their leafy beds about the floor. Then he slung all the rifles, now five in number, over his shoulders, and mounted the rope-ladder, which, with the snare cords, he drew up and coiled with careful method.

"By the way," he suddenly asked, "have you your sou'wester?"

"Yes."

"And your Bible?"

"Yes. It rests beneath my head every night. I even brought our Tennyson."

"Ah," he growled, fiercely, "this is where the reality differs from the romance. Our troubles are only beginning now."

"They will end the sooner. If it be God's will, we will escape; and no man is more worthy than you to be His agent."

CHAPTER XI.

The Fight.

The sailor knew so accurately the position of his reliable sentinels that he could follow each phase of the imaginary conflict on the other side of the island. The first outbreak of desultory firing died away amidst a chorus of protests from every feathered inhabitant of the isle, so Jenks assumed that the Dyaks had gathered again on the beach after riddling the scarecrows with bullets or slashing them with their heavy razor-edged parangs, Malay swords with which experts can fell a stout sapling at a single blow.

A hasty council was probably held, and, notwithstanding their fear of the silent company in the hollow, an advance was ultimately made along the beach. Within a few yards they encountered the invisible cord of the third spring-gun. There was a report, and another fierce outbreak of musketry. This was enough. Not a man would move a step nearer that abode of the dead. The next commotion arose on the ridge near the North Cape.

"At this rate of progress," said Jenks to the girl, "they will not reach our house until daylight."

"I almost wish they were here," was the quiet reply. "I find this waiting and listening to be trying to the nerves."

They were lying on a number of ragged garments hastily spread on the ledge, and peering intently into the moonlit area of Prospect Park. The great rock itself was shrouded in sombre shadows. Even if they stood up none could see them from the ground, so dense was the darkness enveloping them.

He turned slightly and took her hand. It was cool and moist. It no more trembled than his own.

"The Dyaks are far more scared than you," he murmured with a laugh. "Cruel and courageous as they are, they dare not face a spook."

"Then what a pity it is we cannot conjure up a ghost for their benefit! All the spirits I have ever read about were ridiculous. Why cannot one be useful occasionally?"

The question set him thinking. Unknown to the girl, the materials for a dramatic apparition were hidden amidst the bushes near the well. He cudgeled his brains to remember the stage effects of juvenile days; but these needed limelight, blue flares, mirrors, phosphorus.

The absurdity of hoping to devise any such accessories whilst perched on a ledge in a remote island—a larger reef of the thousands in the China Sea—tickled him.

"What is it?" asked Iris.

He repeated his list of missing stage properties. They had nothing to do but to wait, and people in the very crux and maelstrom of existence usually discuss trivial things.

"I don't know anything about phosphorus," said the girl; "but you can obtain queer results from sulphur, and there is an old box of Norwegian matches resting at this moment on the shelf in my room. Don't you remember? They were in your pocket, and you were going to throw them away. Why, what are you doing?"

For Jenks had cast the rope-ladder loose, and was evidently about to descend.

"Have no fear," he said, "I will not be away five minutes."

"If you are going down, I must come with you. I will not be left here alone."

"Please do not stop me," he whispered earnestly. "You must not come. I will take no risk whatever. If you remain here you can warn me instantly. With both of us on the ground we will incur real danger. I want you to keep a sharp lookout towards Turtle Beach, in case the Dyaks come that way. Those who are crossing on the island will not reach us for a long time."

She yielded, though unwillingly. She was tremulous with anxiety on his account.

He vanished without another word. She next saw him in the moonlight near the well. He was rustling among the shrubs, and he returned to the rock with something white in his arms, which he seemingly deposited at the mouth of the cave. He then went back to the well and carried another similar burden. Then he ran towards the house. The doorway was not visible from the ledge, and she passed a few horrible moments until a low hiss beneath caught her ear. She could tell by the creak of the rope ladder that he was ascending. At last he reached her side, and she murmured, with a gasping sob—

"Don't go away again. I cannot stand it."

He thought it best to soothe her agitation by arousing interest. Still hauling in the ladder with one hand, he held out the other, on which luminous wisps were writhing like glow-worms' ghosts.

"You are responsible," he said. "You gave me an excellent idea, and I was obliged to carry it out."

"What have you done?"

"Arranged a fearsome bogey in the cave."

"But how?"

"It was not exactly a pleasant operation, but the only laws of necessity are those which must be broken."

She understood that he did not wish her to question him further. Perhaps curiosity, now that he was safe might have vanished her terror, and led to another demand for enlightenment, but at that instant the sound of an angry voice and the crunching of coral away to the left drove all else from her mind.

"They are coming by way of the beach, after all," whispered Jenks.

He was mistaken, in a sense. Another outburst of intermittent firing among the trees on the north, showed that some, at least, of the Dyaks were advancing by their former route. The appearance of the Dyak chief on the flat belt of shingle, with his right arm slung across his breast, accompanied by not more than half a dozen followers, showed that a few hardy spirits had dared to pass the Valley of Death with all its nameless terrors.

They advanced cautiously enough, though dreading a surprise. The chief carried a bright parang in his left hand; the others were armed with guns, their swords being thrust through belts. Creeping forward on tip-toe, though their distant companions were making a tremendous row, they looked a murderous gang as they peered across the open space, now brilliantly illuminated by the moon.

Jenks had a sudden intuition that the right thing to do now was to shoot the whole party. He dismissed the thought at once. All his preparations were governed by the hope that the pirates might stand in their quest a few hours of fruitless search. It would be most unwise, he told himself, to precipitate hostilities. Far better avoid the conflict altogether, if that were possible, than risk the immediate discovery of his inaccessible retreat.

In other words he made a grave mistake, which shows how a man may err when over-agonized by the danger of the woman he loves. The bold course was the right one. By killing the Dyak leader he would have deprived the enemy of the dominating influence in the campaign of revenge. When the main body, already much perturbed by the unseen and intangible agencies, which opened fire at them in the wood, arrived in Prospect Park to find only the dead bodies of their chief and his small force their consternation could be turned into mad panic by a vigorous bombardment from the rock.

Probably in less than an hour after their landing the whole tribe would have rushed pell-mell to the boats, cursing the folly which led them to this devil-haunted island. But it serves no good purpose to say what might have been. As it was the Dyaks, silent now and moving with the utmost caution, passed the well, and were about to approach the cave when one of them saw the house.

Instantly they changed their tactics. Retreating hastily to the shade of the opposite cliff they seemed to await the coming of reinforcements. The sailor fancied that a messenger was despatched by way of the north sands to hurry up the laggards, because the distant firing slackened, and, five minutes later, a fierce outbreak of yells announced to the trees to the right heralded a concerted rush on the Belle Vue Castle.

The noise made by the savages was so great—the screams of birds circling overhead so incessant—that Jenks was compelled to speak quite loudly when he said to Iris—

"They must think we sleep soundly not to be disturbed by the volleys they have fired already."

She would have answered, but he placed a restraining hand on her shoulder, for the Dyaks quickly discovering that the hut was empty, ran towards the cave and thus came in full view.

As well as Jenks could judge, the foremost trio of the yelping horde were impaled on the bayonets of the cheval de frise, learning too late its formidable nature. The wounded men shrieked in agony, but their cries were drowned in a torrent of amazed shouts from their companions. Forthwith there was a stampede towards the well, the cliff, the beaches, anywhere to get away from that awesome cavern where ghosts dwelt and men fell maimed at the very threshold. The sailor, leaning as far over the edge of the rock as the girl's expostulations would permit, heard a couple of men groaning beneath, whilst a third limped away with frantic and painful haste.

"What is it?" whispered Iris, eager herself to witness the tumult. "What has happened?"

"They have been routed by a box of matches and a few dried bones," he answered.

There was no time for further speech. He was absorbed in estimating the possible number of the Dyaks. He saw fully he had seen about fifty. Moreover, he did not wish to acquaint Iris with the actual details of the artifice that had been so potent. Her allusion to the box of water-sodden Tandatickors gave him the notion of utilizing as an auxiliary the bleached remains of the poor fellow who had long fallen a victim to this identical mob of cut-throats or their associates. He gathered the principal bones from their resting-place near the well, rubbed them with the ends of the matches after damping the sulphur again, and arranged them with ghastly effect on the pile of rubbish at the further end of the cave, creeping up the cheval de frise for the purpose.

Though not so vivid as he wished, the pale-glimmering headless skeleton in the intense darkness of the interior was appalling enough in all conscience.

Continued in next Tuesday's edition.