

THE MYSTERY

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE
and SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS
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CHAPTER XXV.

The Catastrophe.
He approached me with a confidence that proclaimed the new leader. A brace of Colt's revolvers swung from his belt, the tatters of his blood-stained garments hung about him.
"Well, here we are," he remarked.
"I nodded, waiting for what he had to disclose."
"And lucky for you that you're here at all, say I," he continued. "And now that you're here, what are you going to do?" That's the question—at are you going to do?" He cocked his head sideways and looked at me speculatively as a cat might look at a rather large mouse. "We've been a little rough," he went on after a



"And you know a heap too much."

moment, "and some folks is straight-laced. There might be trouble. And you know a heap too much." "What do you want of me?" I demanded. "It's just this," he returned briefly. "If you'll lay us over to San Salvador, we'll let you go as one of us and no questions asked." "If not?" I inquired. He shrugged his shoulders. "I leave it to you." "There's always the sea," I suggested. "And it's deep," he returned briefly. "We looked out to the horizon in a diplomatic silence. I did not know whether to be angry, amused, or alarmed that the man estimated my cleverness so slightly. Why, the hook was barely concealed, and the bait of the coarsest. That I would go safe to a sight of San Salvador I did not doubt. But the fact never entered the harbour I was absolutely certain. The choice offered me was practically whether I preferred being thrown overboard now or several hundred miles to the southeastward."

"I thought rapidly. It might be possible to announce a daily false reckoning to the crew, to sail the ship within roving distance of some coast; and then to escape while the men believed themselves many hundred miles at sea. It would take a nice calculation to prevent suspicion, but as it was only chance I resolved upon it immediately."

"That's very well," I said firmly, "but you can't get anywhere without me, and I'm not going to put in two years and then keep my mouth shut for nothing. I want a share in the swag—an even share with the rest of the crew."

"Oh, that'll be all right," he cried; "you can have it."

"If anything was needed to convince me of the man's sinister intentions, this ready acquiescence would have been enough. I knew him too well. If he had had the slightest intention of permitting me to go free, he would have bargained. The Nigger called us to mess. We ate in the after cabin. The chest was locked and the men had as yet been unable to break into it. Pulz professed some skill in locksmithing and promised to experiment later. After mess we went on deck again. The island had dropped down to a level and showed as a brilliant glow under a dark canopy. I leaned over the rail looking at it. Below me the extra dory bumped along. The idea came to me that if I could escape that night, I could row back to Percy Darrow. The two of us could make shift to live on fish and shellfish and mutton. The plan rapidly defined itself in my brain. From the remains of the Golden Horn we could construct some kind of a craft in which to run free to the summer trades. Thus we might in time reach some shore or another of the Sandwich Islands, where a passing trader could take us back to civilization. There were many elements of uncertainty in the scheme, but it seemed to me less desperate than trusting to the caprices of these men, especially since they now had free access to the liquor stores."

While I leaned over the rail engrossed in these thoughts, one of the black thunder clouds that had been gathering and dissipating over the island during the entire afternoon suddenly glowed overhead with a strange white incandescence startlingly akin to Darrow's so-called "devil fire." Strangely enough, this illumination, unlike the volcanic glow, appeared to be cast on the clouds from without rather than shot through them from within, as were the other volcanic emanations. At the same instant I experienced a sharp internal revulsion of some sort, most briefly momentary, but of a character that shook me from head to toe.

I had no time to analyse these various impressions, however, for my attention was almost instantly distracted. From the cabin came the sound of a sharp fall, then a man cried out, and on the heels of it Pulz darted from the cabin, screaming horribly. We were all on deck, and as the little man rushed toward the stern, Handy Solomon twisted him dextrously from his feet.

"My God, mate, what is it?" he cried, as he pinned the sufferer to the deck. But Pulz could not answer. He shivered, stiffened, and lay rigid, his eyes rolled back.

"Pits," remarked Thrackles impatiently. The excitement died. Rum was forced between the victim's lips. After a little he recovered, but could tell us nothing of his seizure.

"Panchu, here, says he's been a mechanic," said he. "I right well know he's been a housebreaker. So he's got the safe for the job, and you can kiss the book on that."

Pendosa, with a grin, leaned over the cover from behind and began to pick away at the lock with long, crooked wire. The others drew close about. I slipped nearer the door, imagining that in their riveted interest, I saw my opportunity. To my surprise I caught a glimpse of legs disappearing up the companion. I took stock. Pulz had gone on deck.

This surprised me, for I should have thought every man interested enough in the supposed treasure to wish to be present at its uncovering; and it annoyed me still more the success of my plan demanded a clear deck. However, there was nothing for it now but to trust that Pulz had wished to visit the forecastle, and that I might find the afterwards empty.

I paused at the foot of the companion and looked back. A breathless silence of excitement held the pirates in a vise. From above, the hanging lamp threw strong shadows across their faces, bringing out the deep lines, accentuating the dominant passions. With their ragged and blood-stained unbuttoned shirts, their filthy, they showed in violent antithesis to the immaculate white of Old Scrub's cabin, its glittering brass, and its shining leather. I darted up the steps. The contrast of the stark night with the glare of the cabin lamp dazzled my eyes. I stood stock still for a moment, during which the only sounds audible were the singing of the winds through the rigging, the wash of the sea, and the small, sharp clink of Pendosa's instrument as he worked at the chest.

Presently I could see better. I looked forward and aft for Pulz, but could see nothing of him, and had just about concluded that he had gone forward when I happened to glance aloft. There, to my astonishment, I made him out, huddled in silhouette against the stars, close to the main track. What he was doing there I could not imagine. However, I did not have time to bother my head about him, further than to rejoice that he could not obstruct me.

I should very much have liked to get hold of a rifle and ammunition, or at least to lay in biscuit and water, but for this there was no time. It was absolutely essential. The dull glow of the island was still visible. I had my pillar of fire and smoke to guide me. Without further delay I jerked loose the painter and drew the extra dory alongside.

I had proceeded just so far in my movements, when the most extraordinary thing happened. I shall try to tell you of it as accurately as possible, and in the exact order of its occurrence. First a long, straight shaft of white light shot straight up through the cabin roof to a certain height. It shone through the wooden planks as an ordinary light shines through glass. By contrast the surrounding blackness was thrown into a deeper shade, yet the shaft itself was so brilliant as almost to scorch the sight. Curiously enough, it was defined accurately, being exactly in shape like one of the regular tin air-shafts you see so often in cities. At the instant of its appearance, the wind fell quite calm.

Almost immediately the rectangle on the roof through which the light made its passage began to splay out, like lighted oil, although the column retained still the integrity of its outline. The fire, if such it could be called, ran with incredible rapidity along the seams between the planks, forward and aft, until the entire deck was stretched like a red-hot iron display in this, vivid lines of incandescence. From each of these lines then the fire began again to spread, as though the flames were being blown apart by a breeze. All took place practically in an instant of time. I had no opportunity to move nor to cry out; indeed, my perceptions were almost entirely lost for a moment. Observation. Up to now there had been no sound. The wind had fallen; the waters passed unnoticed. A stillness of death seemed to have descended on the ship. It was shaken by a sharp double report, one as of the fall of a metallic substance, the other caused by the body of Pulz, which, shaken loose from the trunk by a heavy blow, smashed against the rail of the ship and splashed overboard. Someone cried out sharply. An instant later the entire crew struggled out from the companionway, rushed in grim silence to the side of the vessel, and threw themselves into the sea.

My own ideas were somewhat confused. The fire had practically enveloped the ship. I thought to feel it; and yet my skin was cool to the touch. The ship's outlines became hazy, a dizziness overtook me; and then all at once a great desire seized and shook my very soul. I cannot tell you the vehemence of this desire. It was a madness, nothing could stand in the way of its gratification. Whatever happened, I must have water. It was not thirst, nor yet a purpose to allay the very real physical burning of which I was now dimly conscious; but a craving for the liquid itself as something apart from and unconnected with anything else. Without hesitation, and as though it were the most natural thing in the world, I vaulted the rail to cast myself into the sea.

A last living impression of a furnace of light, then a great shock tumbled through me, and I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI.
In the Wardroom.
Over the wardroom of the Wolverine

had fallen a silence. It held after Slade had finished. Captain Parkinson, still and erect, sat in his chair, staring fixedly at a spot two feet above the reporter's head, seemed to weigh, as a judge weighs, the facts so picturesquely set forth. Dr. Trendon, his sturdy form bent forward into himself, only the regard of his keen eyes fixed upon Slade's face, unflinchingly and a bit anxiously, showed that he was steadily of the narrator as well as the narrative. The others had fallen completely under the spell of the tale. They sat, as children in a theatre, absorbed, forgetful of the world around them, wrapped in a more vivid element. At the close, they stirred and blinked, half dazed by the abrupt fall of the curtain.

Slade told his story with fire, with something of passion, even. Now he felt the sharp reflex. He muttered uncertainly beneath his breath and glanced from one to another of the circle of faces. "That's all," he said unsteadily. There passed through the group a stir and a murmur. Someone broke into a stir and a coughing. Chairs, shoved back, grated on the floor.

"Well, of all the extraordinary things I've heard of, this is the most extraordinary," began a voice, rumblingly, and broke short off as the speaker, at its own infraction of the silence.

"That's all," repeated Slade, a note of insistence in his voice. "Why don't you say something? Confound you, why don't you say something? His speech rose husky and cracked. "Don't you believe it?"

"Hold on," said the surgeon quietly. "No need to get excited." "Oh, well," muttered the reporter, with a sudden lapse. "Possibly you think I don't believe it. I don't. I suppose I'd believe it myself, in your place."

"But we're heading for the island," suggested Forsythe. "That's so," said Slade. "Well, that's all right. Believe or disbelieve as much as you like. Only get Percy Darrow off that island. Then we'll have his version. There are a few things I want to find out about myself."

"There are several that promise to be fairly interesting," said Forsythe, under his breath. Slade turned to the captain. "Have you any questions to put to me, sir?" he asked formally. "One moment," interrupted Trendon. "Boy, a pony of brandy for Mr. Slade."

The reporter drank the liquor and again turned to Captain Parkinson. "Only about our men," said the commanding officer, after a little thought. Slade shook his head. "I'm sorry I can't help you there, sir."

"Dr. Trendon said that you knew something about Edwards."

"Edwards?" repeated Slade inquiringly. His mind, still absorbed in the events which he had been relating, groped backward. "Trendon came to his aid. 'Barnett asked you about him, you remember. It was when you recovered consciousness. Our ensign. Took over the charge of the Laughing Lass.'"

"Oh, of course. I was a little dazed, I fancy."

"We put Mr. Edwards aboard when we first picked up the deserted schooner," explained the captain. "Pardon me," said the other. "My head doesn't seem to work quite right yet. Just a moment, please." He sat silent, with closed eyes. "You say you picked up the Laughing Lass. When?" he asked presently.

"Four-five-six days ago, sir, the first time."

rose, too, but his knees were unsteady. He tottered up to the berth of aid of Barnett's arm, would have fallen. "Overdone," said Dr. Trendon, with some irritation. "Coet you something in strength. Foolish performance. Turn in now."

Slade tried to protest, but the surgeon would not hear of it, and marched him unobtrusively to his berth. Returning, Trendon reported, with growls of discontent, that his patient was in a fever. "Couldn't expect anything else," he added. "Pack of human interrogation points bounding him all over the place."

"What do you think of his story?" asked Forsythe. The grizzled surgeon drew out a cigar, lit it, took three deliberate puffs, turned it about, examined the ash end with concentration, and replied: "Man's telling a straight story."

"You think it's all true?" cried Forsythe. "He thinks it's all true." "An orderly appeared and knocked at the captain's cabin." "Beg pardon, sir," they heard him say. "Mr. Carter would like to know how close in to run. Volcano's acting up pretty bad, sir."

CHAPTER XXVII.
The Jolly Roger.
Feeling the way forward, the cruiser was soon caught in a maze of cross currents. Hither and thither she was borne, a creature bereft of volition. Order followed order like the rattle of gunfire, and was obeyed with something more than the Wolverine's customary smartness. From the bridge Captain Parkinson himself directed his ship. His face was placid; his bearing steady and confident. This in itself was sufficient earnest that the cruiser was in ticklish cases. For it was an axiom of the men who sailed under Parkinson that the calmer that nervous man grew, the more serious was there for nervousness on the part of others.

The approach was from the south, but suspicious aspects of the water had fended the cruiser out and around, until now she stood prow-on to a bold headland at the northwest corner of the island. Above this headland lay a dark pall of vapour. In the shifting breeze it swayed sluggishly,

heavily, as if riding at anchor like a logy ship of the air. Only once did it show any marked improvement.

"The time looked at him inquiringly. "About as beautiful as prussic acid," said the surgeon, explaining the surgeon.

The ship edged on and inward. Presently the singing of the leadman sounded in measured distinctness through the air. A sudden activity and bustle forward, the rattle of chains, and the Wolverine was at anchor. The captain came down from the bridge.

"What do you think, Dr. Trendon?" he asked. "More explicit inquiry was not necessary. The surgeon understood what was in his superior's mind."

"Never can tell about volcanoes, sir," he said. "Of course," agreed the captain. But we do you recognise any of the symptoms?"

"Want me to diagnose a case of earth quake, sir?" grinned Trendon. "She might have a chance to make sure just now. Seemed to be coming right for us. Wind's shifted it since."

"He couldn't be anything alive up there?" "Not so much as a bag," replied the doctor positively. "Well, then, when the vapour lifted a bit that I saw something moving."

"There it is," cried Forsythe. "Look! The highest point." Dull, gray wisps of muck, the aftermath of the gaseous cloud, were twisting and spiraling in a waltz-dance across the landscape, and seen by snatches and glimpses through it, something flapped darkly in the breeze. Suddenly the veil parted and fled. A flag stood forth in the sharp gust, rigid, and appalling. It was black.

"The Jolly Roger, by God! They've come back!" exclaimed Forsythe. "And set up the sign of their ship," added Barnett. "If they stuck to their flag—good bye," observed Trendon grimly.

"Dr. Trendon," said Captain Parkinson, "you will arm yourself and go with me in the gig to make a landing."

"Yes, sir," responded the surgeon. "Should we be overtaken by the vapour while on the highland and be unable to get back to the beach, you are to send no rescue party up there until the air has cleared."

"But, sir, may we not—?" "Do you understand?" "Yes, sir." "In case of an attack you will at once send in another boat with a howitzer."

"Yes, sir." "Dr. Trendon, will you see Mr. Slade and inquire of him the best point for landing?" Trendon hesitated.

"I suppose it would hardly do to take him with us," pursued the commanding officer. "If he is roused now, even for a moment, I won't answer for the consequences, sir," said the surgeon bluntly.

"Surely you can have him point out a landing place," said the captain. "On your responsibility," returned the other, obstinately. "He's under opiate now."

"He is so," said Captain Parkinson, after a time. "Going in, they saw no sign of life along the shore. Even the birds had deserted it. For the time the volcano seemed to have pretermitted its activity. Now and again there was a spurt of smoke from the cone, followed by subterranean growlings, but, on the whole, the conditions were reassuring."

"Penny-popperwheel of a volcano, anyhow," remarked Trendon, disparagingly. "Real man-size eruption would have wiped the whole thing off the map, first whack."

CHAPTER XXVIII.
The Cache.
Outwardly the book accorded ill with its surroundings. In that place of desolation and death, it typified the petty neatness of office processes. Properly placed, it should have been found on a desk, with pens, rulers, and other paraphernalia, forming exact angles or parallels to it. It was a quarto, bound in marbled paper, with black leather over the hinges. No external label suggested its ownership or uses, but through one corner, blackened and formidable in its contrast to the peaceful purposes of the volume, a hole had been bored. The agency of perforation was obvious. A bullet had made it.

"Seen something of it, I reckon," said Trendon, as the captain turned the volume about slowly in his hands. "And of death," returned Captain Parkinson solemnly. "Do you know, Trendon, I almost dread to open this."

"Pshaw!" returned the other. "What is it to us?" He threw the cover back. Neatly lettered on the inside, in the fine and slightly angular writing characteristic of the Teutonic scholar, was the legend:

Karl Augustus Schermerhorn,
1409 1/2 Spruce Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.

The opposite page was blank. Captain Parkinson turned half a dozen leaves. "German!" he cried, in a note of disappointment. "Can you read German script?"

"After a fashion," replied the other. "Let's see. Es kommt rechts—un- dreissig unterjache." He read. "Why, blast it, was the man running a haberdashery? What have three dozen under-shirts to do with this?"

"A memorandum for outfitting, probably," suggested the captain. "Try here." "Chemical formulae," said Trendon. "Pages of 'em. The devil! Can't make a thing of it."

"Well, here's something in English." "Good," said the other. "By combining the hydrosulphate of iridium with the fumes arising from oxide of copper heated to 1000 C. and combining with picric acid in the proportions described in formula 18, a reaction, the nature of which I have not fully determined, follows. This must be performed with extreme care owing to the unstable nature of the benzene compounds."

"Picric acid? Benzene compounds? Those are high explosives," said Captain Parkinson. "We should have Barnett go over this."

"Here's a name under the formula. Dr. A. Mardenter, Ann Arbor, Mich. That explains its being in English. Probably copied from a letter."

"This must have been one of the experiments in the valley that Slade told us of," said the captain, thoughtfully. "Why, yes," he cried, with something like exultation. "That's what Dr. Schermerhorn was doing here. He has the clue to some explosive so terrific that he goes far out of the world to experiment with it. For companions he chooses a gang of cutthroats that the world would never miss in case anything went wrong. Possibly it was some trial of the finished product that started the eruption, even. Do you see?"

"Don't explain enough," granted Trendon. "Deserted ship. Billy Edwards. Mysterious lights. Slade and his story. Any explosives in those? Good enough, far as it goes. Don't go far enough."

"He certainly leaves gaps," admitted the other. "He turned over a few more pages. 'Formulae, formulae, formulae. What's this? Here are some marginal annotations.'"

"Unhappily," read Trendon. "Let's see. That means 'highly unsatisfactory' or words to that effect. Hi! Here's where the old man loses his temper. 'Listen! May the devil take Carl and Crum for carless—hm—well, pig-dogs. Now, where do Carl and Crum come in?'"

"They're a firm of analytical chemists in Washington," said the captain. "When I was on the ordinance board I used to get their circulars."

"Eis in. What? More English? Worse than the German, this is." The writing, beginning evenly enough at the top of a page, ran along for a line or two, then fell, sprawling in huge, ragged characters the full length. Trendon stumbled among them, indignantly. "June 1, 1904," he read. "It is done. Triumph. (German word.) Eureka. Es ist gefut. From the (can't make out that word) of the inspiration—godlike power—solution of the world's problems."

Why, the old fool is crazy! And his writing is crazier. Can't make head or tail of it." The captain mused. "An ill outlook for the man we're seeking," the captain mused. "Dead if he's anywhere on this highland," declared Trendon. Let's look at his flagpole. He examined the staff. "Came from the beach," he pronounced. "Waterproof. It may be he isn't so dead, either."

"I don't quite follow you, Dr. Trendon." "Why, I guess our man has figured this thing all out. Brought this pole up from the beach to plant it here. Why? Because this was the best observation point of good as a permanent residence, though. Planted his flag and went back."

"Why didn't we see him on the beach, then?" "Did you notice a cave around to the north? Good refuge in case of fumes." "It's worth trying," said the captain, putting up his glass. "Hold on, sir. What's this? Here's something. Look here."

Trendon pointed to a small bit of wood rather neatly carved to the shape of an arrow. The arrow pointed to the right, at the height of a man's face. The others clustered around. "Oh, the devil!" cried Trendon. "It must have got twisted. It's pointing straight down."

"Strange performance," said the captain. "However, since it points that way—have aside those rocks, men." The first slab lifted brought to light a corner of cardboard. This, on closer examination, proved to be the cover of a book. The rocks rolled right and left, and as the flag-staff, deprived of its support, tottered and fell, the trove was dragged forth and handed to the captain. Within the ground jarred with occasional tremors and the mountain puffed forth its vaporous threats, he and the surgeon, seated on a rock, gave themselves up with complete absorption to the reading.

CHAPTER XXIX.
The Hearing.
Friday hearing was commenced on the bill and answers. E. W. Patterson was on the stand in the afternoon. He swore that before the execution of the bills of sale he gave F. W. Roach, of Brock & Patterson, Ltd., a statement of his financial standing, estimated his assets at about \$4,600 and his liabilities at \$3,000. He afterwards, but before executing the instruments, gave Mr. Kelley a statement, placing his assets at \$4,600 and his liabilities at \$3,000. He said that a more correct statement would have been had by Mr. Roach if he (Patterson) had about doubled his liabilities and reduced his assets by one-half. He had omitted to tell Mr. Roach of \$1,300 owing by him to H. J. Smith and J. H. Baxter for Mr. M. G. Todd, K. C., and Tilley & McInerney represented the plaintiffs and Dr. A. O. Earle, K. C., and J. King Kellogg, and J. B. M. Hexter represented the defendants.

In the Gault Bros. case the plaintiff had sold goods to the defendants and had taken a bill of sale under which the plaintiffs had the power to take possession on failure of payment. This they attempted to do some two years ago, but were resisted by the defendants. The assignment subsequently made assignment, and the parties went into equity to determine whether or not the plaintiffs were entitled to the possession of the goods. The proceeds from the sale of the goods by the assignees. That which purported to be a bill of sale was not registered, and the defendants contended that the bill had been. Judge Barker decided in favor of the plaintiffs on all points.

Hanington, Todd & Hanington were for Gault Bros. J. B. M. Hexter for Morrell & Sutherland, and A. I. Trueman, K. C., and J. King Kellogg for the assignees. In the C. P. R. vs. Nason, the plaintiff company had obtained an order of injunction restraining the defendant from prosecuting a suit at law brought by him to recover wages alleged to be owing by the C. P. R. and which wages were trusted in the Maine supreme judicial court. His honor Friday dissolved the injunction with costs, and the defendant by filing an affidavit denying collusion as required under the act, and which they failed to file with their bill.

Clifford Harridge, of Thaw's counsel, stated today that the affidavits to be presented in Thaw's behalf would be made by his attorneys, and the various elements who have appeared for the defense. These affidavits merely state that Thaw is at present able to advise his counsel and fully understands the proceedings against him.

The Thaw jury was late in arriving, however. When he finally took his place on the bench, all the members of the Thaw family were seated in the courtroom. When Harry K. Thaw was called to the bar he seemed surprised and delighted to find his family once more in the courtroom. They had all been excluded ever since the taking of testimony was begun. The prisoner bowed to each member of the family group in turn, and they all smiled placidly back at him.

Of Thaw's six attorneys present Mr. Delmas nor Mr. Gleason was present. It was generally understood that the proceeding had to be but a formal adjournment of court until Justice Fitzgerald had had time to satisfy his conscience as to whether or not a commission in larceny shall be ordered.

On a farm near Petersburg (Ind.) is still standing a blockhouse which sheltered the settlers of the region when Gen. William Henry Harrison and Tecumseh's men were gunning for one another.

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EQUITY COURT

E. W. Patterson Tells of Financial Statements He Made—Judgment in Two Cases.

His Honor Justice Barker Friday delivered judgment in the suits of Gault Bros. Ltd., vs. Morrell & Sutherland and the assignees of their estate and in the suit of the C. P. R. vs. Nason, in the former deciding in favor of the plaintiffs and in the latter in favor of the defendant.

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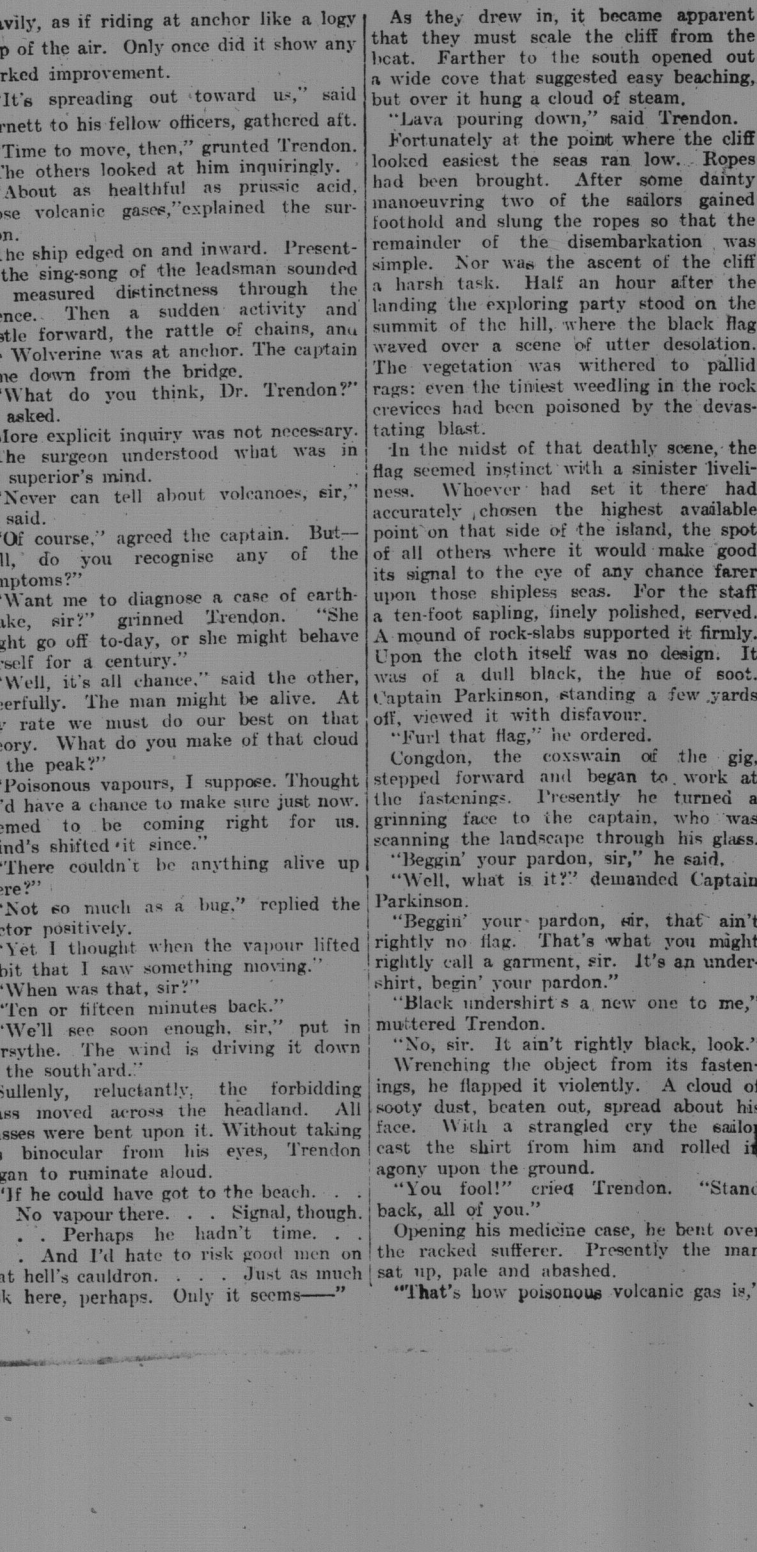
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With a strangled cry the sailor cast the shirt from him.



—occupy a unique position among cloths.