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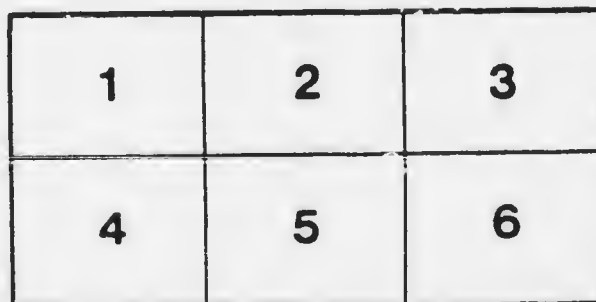
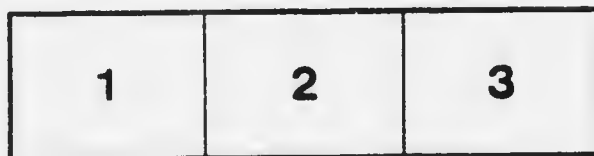
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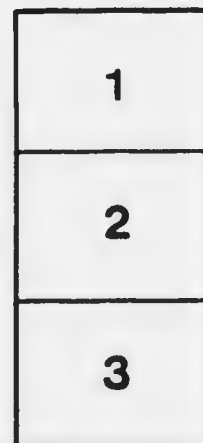
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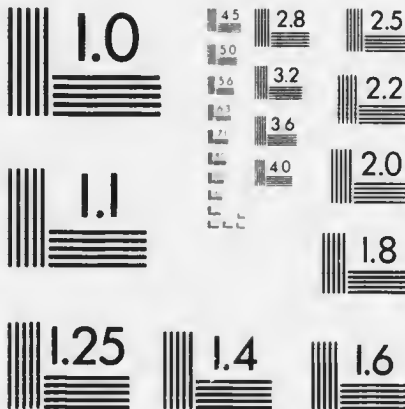
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FOREST FUGITIVES

BY

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "LOVE ON SMOKY RIVER,"
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Forest Fugitives

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE BEHIND THE SURF

JOHN ALVAREZ met his daughter in Port-of-Spain, and remained no longer in the town than the business of removing her boxes from the ship to his carriage required.

Mary found her father a changed man—more changed than she had expected. She thought him aged by more than the seven years which had passed since she had last seen him. He was sad, whom she had known so gay in the grey manor-house and beloved Irish countryside; but she understood this, knowing the cause of his grief. The changes in him which she could not understand had caught her attention after the first moment of affectionate greeting, and filled her with a vague uneasiness. And yet these changes were vague, small things in themselves—matters of the voice, the set of the lips, the glances of the fine eyes. There was a

note of bitterness in the voice now; at times the lips slanted and narrowed in a bitter sneer; at times the eyes, which she had known as gay and brave and tender, took on for an instant a furtive, questioning flicker.

Mary said nothing of these things. She sat in the great lumbering carriage with one of her father's strong hands between both of hers, and answered his questions about her dead mother. The heat of the tropical afternoon was oppressive. The four mules which drew the carriage moved slowly, though the black postilion did not spare the lash. Behind the carriage another black, well mounted, led Alvarez's saddle-horse.

"She spoke of me—even at the last?" queried Alvarez.

"Always," replied the girl. "Yes, and at the last, and even when the fever was upon her. I think you were always in her thoughts, as in her heart. And she did not suffer, even at the last, except for you and me—and for you more than for me."

"Ah!—and now she knows all!" he cried bitterly, staring straight before him.

Mary nestled a tear-wet cheek against his shoulder. "But she knew before," she whispered. "She told me of the money. The loss of the fortune meant nothing to her, dear, unless she feared that it made you unhappy."

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Alvarez said nothing to that, but he raised his disengaged hand for a moment clenched above his head in a gesture of angry despair, then let it fall again to his knee.

The carriage had not won more than a mile from the town when its occupants saw half a dozen horsemen turn a bend in the road and approach at an easy canter. The two leaders were evidently personages, and the remaining four as evidently a bodyguard, for they were uniformed and armed. One of the two was elderly, the other young.

Mary felt the muscles of her father's shoulder harden and thrill against her cheek. She sat up straight in her place at that, and swiftly dried her poor, beautiful eyes. She glanced at her father and saw his big face set straight to the front, hard as stone.

As the six horsemen passed the carriage they did not slacken their pace. The elder of the two personages touched a hand to his hat. The younger raised his hat and swept it down and up again with a flourish, his eyes on Mary's face. John Alvarez returned the salutation frigidly, stiff-necked and without a glance, but the moment the cavalcade was past his face twisted and flamed, and an astounding oath burst from his lips. He struck his clenched fists on his knees. Mary turned an astonished and frightened face to him and he laughed harshly.

"Forgive me, little one," he said, "but I do not forget when it was otherwise between that nincompoop and John Alvarez. And now you see! He threw his dust on us, by——!"

Mary calmed him with hand and voice. The dust was nothing, she said. Wheels threw dust as well as hoofs for the matter of that.

The man's muscles relaxed, and some of the hot blood faded from his face.

"That was Laval," he said. "And the young fool's name is also Laval—father and son."

"The Governor!" exclaimed Mary, with interest.

He sneered.

"Even the Governor," he said. "Did he fear that I wanted to ask alms of him? He has had money of me—money and support. He has come to me begging, hat in hand, but now he cannot lift his hat from his head, by ——! now that he thinks my money and my power are gone. He need not fear that an Alvarez would stoop so low as to ask help of him. The fool! The bladder of wind!"

"Do not let his rudeness worry you, my dear," advised the girl.

They slept that night in a small plantation house in which John Alvarez's word was law. The night breeze blew cool and Mary was very tired. She slept dreamlessly until her father

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awakened her at dawn. They set out on the last stage of their journey in the cool of the morning and reached John Alvarez's house before the heat of noon.

The house was a large one, two stories high and built of stone. The windows, upstairs and down, opened on wide galleries. In front, beyond tangled gardens and plantations of bananas and limes, flashed white surf and the breathing sea. Great forest trees crowded down to the house from the wooded slopes behind and almost enfolded it.

Mary had strange companionship in that house. Her personal attendant was an old black woman named Sarah, an English negress from the little island of Barbados, who had nursed Mary in her babyhood and had been maid to Mary's mother. Sarah's husband, Sam, was the only other servant who slept in the big house, but the little grey huts which clustered in the shade of the bread-fruit and mango trees were alive with black and brown people of all ages.

As for the companionship of her father, she had little of it. Alvarez was never at home for more than a week at a time, and his business—whatever it was—sometimes kept him away from his daughter for two, even three, months on end.

It is not difficult to picture the girl's loneliness and distress of mind and heart. From her father she could learn nothing of his affairs nor of the

business which took him away from her so frequently and for such lengths of weary days. He was affectionate; he understood her distress; sometimes in his remorse for the life he had called her to he became bitterly violent. Grief was always with him; and more than once she read something in his black eyes which told her that he was afraid—afraid for himself and for her of menaces unknown to her.

Old Sarah talked without restraint, but always of the past. She seemed to be as ignorant as Mary herself of the present state and nature of John Alvarez's affairs. She harked back always to the glories of the past—to the great day when John Alvarez and his bride, spending a few weeks in Barbados on their way from Ireland to Trinidad, had taken Sam and herself into their service. Ah, but John Alvarez had been a great man then! Had not he and his Irish bride been the honoured guests at Government House during their stay in Barbados? It was so. Nothing was too good then for the wealthy, dashing, romantic Alvarez of Trinidad. He tossed gold about him in a shower, and why not? The fattest lands in Trinidad were his then—lands that bred gold pieces and carried thousands of slaves in their green breasts. In Trinidad life had gone to the same tune for years. Great had been the name of Alvarez in the big, green, sweltering island. No

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blood out of Spain, nor yet in it, was so potent and rare as the Alvarez blood. No fortune in the islands was so great as the Alvarez fortune, and alas no hands in all the world could loose the golden store so swiftly, so joyously, as the hands of John Alvarez. She, old Sarah, had seen this very house full of great folk—of Spanish and English and French. The old Governor had loved Alvarez as a son and honoured him as his dearest friend. Laval, the present Governor, a poor officer then in the public service, had been hat in hand to John Alvarez.

Mary listened to these things with a strange mingling of pride and sorrow in her heart.

One day when her father happened to be at home young Laval, the Governor's son, called at the lonely house. Mary, from the shuttered gallery, saw him ride up through the tangled gardens and plantations. She saw her father meet him at the foot of the steps, a groom lead the horse away, and the two enter the house. She was called a little later, and the young man was presented to her. His manners were perfect, his eyes all devotion. He remained to dinner, and rode away under the stars. A great display of silver and rare wines and complicated foods had been made during the dinner, and Alvarez and the guest had done full justice to the wines.

Alvarez turned to his daughter after Laval's

departure and placed his hands on her slender shoulders.

"They begin to think that I am on my feet again," he said. "Well, let them think so! But that young man will not return. He is nothing—less than nothing—his father over again. I have told him that you are betrothed to an English gentleman, and I wish to God it were true, my dear."

Mary was confused, but thankful. She did not like anything that she had seen of young Laval.

"Are your fortunes mending, dear?" she asked.

Her father admitted it and then denied it.

"How do I know?" he exclaimed. "A month ago I thought we were out of the fire, but no, I am still held hand and foot! A turn of the wheel may deliver me, a turn ruin me. I have only you to fight for now. I should send you away—but no, do not ask that! We shall go away from this place some fine day—and not as paupers."

"I shall never leave you," she said.

He kissed her for that.

"And never question me," he begged her. "I play a dangerous game, but I shall win—for you. I owe it to your mother, girl. I shall win, never fear, and you shall have joy and peace far away from this green hell. The world has preyed upon me, and now——"

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He turned and left the room. She ran after him, clasped him about the neck, and begged him to do nothing dangerous, to risk nothing for her sake.

"Sell this place and come away," she pleaded.

"I do not want wealth."

He was very tender with her.

"I am not my own master," he said. And so she came by the impression that life was mixed in high and dangerous politics.

Two years of Mary's life were dragged out fearfully in that lonely house between the surf and the forest. She had no other friends than her father and the servants. Sometimes her father entertained guests whom she was not asked to meet. Again and again he talked of their leaving the island soon, only to tell her that the time was not yet ripe; but at last the time came.

The night was full of movement and sound and loneliness. The sea swept in upon the land without haste, without effort, and flashed as white as snow along the lilac sand. It seemed to breathe and quiver a little under the low stars, as if stirring in its sleep, but the flashes of its strikings ran like fire for miles along the curve of the coast, and its drumming voice filled the air. The wind ran in upon the land, between the sea and the stars. It struck higher than the surf, and lifted its wild voice in the crests of a thousand trees.

It sang along the wooden galleries of the big house in its tangled plantation of limes and oranges and flowering shrubs.

Mary paced the floor of one of the upper chambers of the house. Through and above the stir and tumult of wind and surf and shaken foliage she felt an appalling loneliness. It was late, but she could not sleep. Long ago the servants had retired to their quarters in the courtyard behind the house. All the doors and windows on the lower floor were locked and barred, but a spirit of fearful uneasiness had come in to her. The flame of her single candle stood straight and steady within its protecting barrel of glass, but its illumination did not touch the shadowy corners of her room.

In the shine of the candle her face was as white as the flashes of the surf beyond the gardens, her loosened tresses as black as a starless night, her eyes as black as the depths of black waters.

There was other life than that of the wind and the foliage in the garden between the house and the sea. Two men moved there, close to the front of the house, with muskets in their hands. They wore soiled white uniforms with red facings and brass buttons. They were native constables from Port-of-Spain. They seemed to be at once guarding something and awaiting something. Every now and again one or the other moved seaward for

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a distance of fifty yards or so through the trees and flowering shrubs, and noiselessly back again to his companions.

The girl suddenly caught a sound on the gallery outside her open windows that was not of the wind's making. Alvarez entered the room from the gallery. She uttered a low cry, ran to him, and clung to him.

"I was afraid," she whispered. "I have been afraid all day!"

He pressed his lips to her forehead and held her tenderly.

"But I did not know you would be home so soon," she said.

"I came for you," he answered in a quiet voice. "I cannot let my little daughter be lonely any more. You must come away with me to-night. Get a few of your dresses together, and your jewels. We must hurry."

She drew back from him and eyed him searchingly.

"What has happened?" she asked. "I have been afraid for you—I don't know what of—for a long, long time."

He smiled bitterly and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I have enemies," he said. "I am in debt. My affairs are in a tangle, my dear, but I'll have them straight again in a month or so. But hurry!"

We must get away immediately. My enemies are powerful—and I have lost my power. My foreign ventures have all gone wrong. I have been stripped to the skin. We shall go to one of the windward islands for a little while. Come!"

She obeyed without further questioning. She was glad to go with him from the lonely house.

As he led her through the shadowy garden he was careful to avoid two motionless shapes that lay on the ground, one within a few paces of the foot of the gallery steps, the other about thirty yards away.

A boat and four men awaited them on the lilac sand, where the surf flashed and spread and vanished. They were rowed far out between the white stars and the white sea-fires, and at dawn were picked up by a white schooner.

CHAPTER II

MR GEORGE HILL LANDS ON THE NORTH-EAST COAST OF NEW BRUNSWICK

MR GEORGE HILL, late of the Royal Navy, later of Wadham College, Oxford, and last of the brig *Dartmouth*, clung desperately to the keel of the overturned long-boat. He shouted lustily whenever his mouth was clear of salt water. The battered boat wallowed in the trough of the seas. Spray flew over it every minute, and every now and again it was washed from end to end by green water. Since it had been flung upside-down by a crooked sea half an hour before, three men had loosed their hold of it; but Hill still hung to it. Sometimes, in a brief lull amid the battering and wrenching of the waters, he rode the boat with knees and hands, feet and elbows, shook the water from his eyes and nostrils and filled his lungs with air. At other times he maintained his hold on life and the keel of the tortured craft with the fingers of one hand.

He was a stayer. He was not afraid of death.

The proximity of death did not daunt his heart or dull his wits. He was not afraid to fight it to a finish. He would never admit the mastery of death until the last spark of life was out.

At last the fog began to lift and thin. A little breeze fanned out of the west. The roaring of the torn waters over the ledges where the brig had struck and broken sounded faint and far. The temper of the seas became perceptibly milder every minute, and though the boat continued to wallow on her battered gunnels and pitch fore and aft, the ginger and kick had gone out of her movements. Hill straddled the keel and rode her easily, as one rides a vicious horse which he has mastered. She no longer buried him in green water or flung him from side to side and forced him to cling with bleeding fingers.

Hill believed that he was in the drift of a coast-wise current and hoped that it would swing him ashore somewhere. As the boat continued to wallow in the trough of the seas, his eyes were of little use to him. His horizon was restricted—an horizon of lifting and sinking wave-heads and trailing tatters of fog. He could see the leaden sky overhead brightening to silver. Throughout that desperate battle with the seas he had kept his heavy reefer of pilot-cloth on his back. Several times, in the bitterest stress of the fight, he had thought of discarding the coat or at least of

lightening its pockets; but he had thought better of it each time. Now that the immediate danger of drowning was passed he was glad that he had refrained from giving the coat or the contents of its pockets to the enemy. From one pocket he drew a large flask of dull metal. It was deeply dented on one side but otherwise undamaged. It was full of Jamaica rum. He swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of the potent stuff, then returned the flask to his pocket. The mouth of the other side pocket was stitched tight, so he did not open it, but he patted it with his hand and felt something hard and lumpy therein. Also, he felt the ache of a bruise on the point of his right hip. He didn't mind that. Sixty guineas in English gold were worth a bruise or two. From an inside pocket he drew a light, oblong packet securely wrapped and sewn in tarred canvas. Good! He returned it to its place and buttoned the water-soaked coat to his chin. Satisfied that his belongings were safe, he shouted for help more lustily than ever.

An hour passed. The waves dwindled to such an extent that they did no more than joggle the drifting boat. The autumn sun stood several hours high above the eastern sea-rim, in a clear, blue sky. The last of the mist shredded away from the slopes of the diminishing waves, and Hill saw a rugged coast close aboard. He heard the

thudding and bursting of surf on a rocky landwash. His feet and legs were numb with the chill of the water, and he beat them against the flanks of the boat. He shouted again and again and waved his arms above his head. At last he heard an answering hail above the clamour of the surf. A minute later a skiff appeared around a brow of rock. He could make out two persons in the skiff—one in the stern, one on a thwart pulling on the oars. Fisherfolk, he supposed. His heart went out to them and he shouted cheerily. Then he saw that the person in the skiff's stern was a woman with a bright red shawl about her shoulders. He raised himself to his knees at that discovery and again waved his arms. The woman answered by waving her red shawl. The man at the oars turned his head and glanced over his shoulder, and Hill caught a glimpse of a swarthy cheek and a ring of gold in the lobe of the right ear.

The skiff came on swiftly and was soon alongside. Hill scrambled to his feet, but even as he balanced himself for the jump his benumbed legs gave way under him and he pitched forward and sprawled helplessly across the skiff's gunnel. He felt a strong hand seize him by the slack of his breeches and throw his legs inboard. In a second, and only for a second, he was sickeningly conscious of weakness, fatigue, and hunger; but his attention was sharply diverted from these things

by sounds and other indications of something of a more desperate nature. He lay face downward, unable to raise himself or even turn his head for the moment. He heard a cry from the woman, a snarled curse from the man. A heavy foot struck him a glancing blow on the head and a lighter foot trod upon his legs. In the same instant of time his ears were stunned by the shock of an explosion close above him. With a desperate effort he raised himself to his knees. He caught the bitter stench of burnt powder. The oars lay across the thwarts, but the rower was gone. Forward, the skiff was empty. He turned his head dizzily and saw the woman standing close behind him. The violence of his reception aboard the skiff had played more havoc with his wits and spirit than the long hours of battling with the seas had done. He felt helpless, horrified, and bewildered. He gazed stupidly at the pistol in the woman's right hand. It hung limply at her side. It stamped a picture on his dazed mind that the after years never erased—the brown barrel, the silver mountings, the goose-necked hammer hard down upon the flake of black flint, the slender finger still crooked on the trigger.

He withdrew his eyes from the pistol and raised his glance slowly to the woman's face. For the first time he noticed that she was young. She was looking over his head, beyond him, at the

joggling seas. Her cheeks were white and her lips twitched.

"You shot him," he remarked. "What for?"

She turned tragic, horror-stricken eyes upon him. They were grey as a starless night or the depths of a winter sea.

"I killed him," she said dully. "He fell backward into the sea. He dropped his knife when I fired."

She crouched in the bottom of the skiff and covered her face with the red shawl. Hill turned and saw the knife under a thwart. It had a five-inch, double-edged blade and an ivory haft.

"The devil!" he exclaimed.

He seated himself where the fellow with the earrings had so lately been, and threw the oars between the polished thole-pins.

"Where's the harbour?" he asked.

The young woman uncovered her face and regarded him with dry eyes. It was evident that she felt fear but no remorse for her deed of violence. She turned her glance from the man to the rocky coast.

"We can't go there," she said. "Turn, turn quick!"

Hill pulled the boat's head around without waiting to argue or question. His nerves were shaken. A weight of fatigue suddenly descended upon him and his strokes became short and feeble.

The woman took the oars from him, pulled strongly and swung the skiff's head shoreward. She drove the narrow craft straight through the surf on to the landwash of shelving, kelp-padded rocks. At the moment of impact she threw the oars inboard and sprang over the gunnel. Hill scrambled out of the skiff and fell flat in the weed. He gripped the rubbery stuff with his sore fingers as the surf frothed over him. He would have been content to lie there for an hour and sway gently and indolently with the weed to which he clung, but the girl laid hands on the collar of his coat and dragged him up out of reach of the foam.

Hill sighed, turned over, and sat up. He felt that it was his duty to assist the young woman in whatever she was about. He felt this with his heart rather than with his head, for he was too tired to reason. He saw that she had dragged the skiff well up the slope of weedy rock. He saw her stoop and take something from the skiff. It was the knife with the ivory haft. She flung it, circling and flashing, far out into deep water. Hill got stiffly to his feet and joined her.

"Was he thinking of using that knife on me?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Didn't you know that?"

"I didn't understand. I don't understand even now. Why did he want to kill me?"

"For the sake of whatever it is that drags down the pockets of your coat."

"Sixty guineas and a flask of ship's rum. But you pistoled him and saved my life. I thought you simple fisherfolk when I first saw you."

"I saved you from that beast—but there are others not far away. Lend me a hand with the skiff. We must hide it among the rocks and then start for the settlements."

By this time the numbness was beginning to wear out of the young man's legs. The blood tingled painfully in them and they ached at knees and ankles. But they supported his weight. He helped the young woman to pull the skiff ten or twelve yards farther up the shore and there stow it away in a cleft between two boulders. He wondered at the strength which she displayed, for she was slenderly built. Her round arms, which were sunburned to a golden tan, gave him the impression of firm young flesh rather than of hard muscles. They were bare to the rounded elbows. As his eyes and mind grew clearer, recovering from the strain of the long struggle with the sea and the shock of his violent rescue, he observed his companion with growing wonder and curiosity. His blue eyes brightened, and so did his manner, but he was clever enough, and experienced enough, to suspect that the least likely way of satisfying

his curiosity concerning her would be to question her. So he pretended to accept her actions and herself as a matter of course.

They ascended the broken cliff to a region of small, wooded hills and open levels warmly floored with mosses of many tints. The young woman walked in front at a sharp pace. She seemed to be interested in her companion only in the matter of getting him away from the scene of his rescue. For half an hour she advanced without a word, only turning her head occasionally to assure herself that he followed. At last she halted and spoke, seeing that he was in distress. By that time they were deep in a great forest of spruce and fir, pine and hemlock.

"Did you hurt your leg?" she asked.

Hill sat down on the moss and nursed his right leg, just below the knee, in both hands.

"Not to-day," he answered. "It's an old wound—a nick from a cutlass. The chill of the water seems to have settled in it."

She glanced nervously around, then sighed resignedly and seated herself on a little mound in front of the young man.

"I suppose you were wrecked," she remarked casually.

"Yes," he said, and smiled grimly.

"How did you ever come by a nick from a cutlass?" she asked.

"That happened seven years ago, when I was a reefer aboard the old *Dauntless*," he replied. "We were hunting pirates among the West Indian islands and up and down the Spanish Main. In the course of time we ran one of the breed into a creek—a notorious gentleman who was flagrantly known by the name of the Planter. The old man sent us off in boats to cut him out. That is when I got my leg hurt."

"And the Planter?" she asked breathlessly.

"He gave us the slip," said Hill. "He was a rare 'un. But we got the schooner and a dozen of his dead and wounded."

"And you? Are you still hunting pirates?"

"No. I left the service three years ago. Yesterday I was a passenger aboard the brig *Dartmouth*, bound for the Miramichi River."

"You are within six miles of it now," she said. "Your course lies south and west. Have you a compass?"

He shook his head, regarding her questioningly.

"Here is mine," she said faintly, with averted face. "South and west will bring you to the river and the settlements."

"But I thought you intended to come with me," he protested. "I thought you were bound for the settlements too."

"No. I must leave you here," she said. "I must go—back."

"But you dare not go back," he retorted. "You said so."

"I said nothing of the kind. I dare to go where I please. It was only to get you out of danger that I came this far."

"I have not questioned you concerning the nature of the danger that threatens me, but I suspect that it has something to do with robbery and murder. I have gold in my pocket, as you know. Sixty guineas. And I am unarmed. And now I do not ask you why you will be safe where I would be in danger. You are evidently a young lady of superior breeding, if I may make so bold as to say it. But I do not ask you to tell me the reason of your fears for my safety. I am anxious to meet your friends. I cannot believe that the fellow with the ear-rings and the knife was a friend of yours. I will accompany you back to your friends."

They were on their feet now, facing each other.

"No!" cried the woman. "Go on—alone!"

She turned and covered her face with her hands.

Hill's cheeks whitened and his blue eyes hardened.

"So that is it!" he exclaimed harshly. "You—with your beauty—are safe with your treacherous friends! But forgive me. The fact that you saved my life gives me no claim upon your patience. I will take the compass and go—with thanks."

So he went, leaving the young woman standing

with bowed head. He was shaken with horror. He was hot with indignation against the world in general and against that young woman's circumstances and friends in particular. Why had he not suspected the truth before? He could answer that. Her face gave the lie to the truth. He felt a melting pity, as well as indignation and horror. And he felt that he had been tricked and made a fool of in some way. This was unreasonable of him. What business was it of his? He owed her nothing but gratitude. She owed him nothing. To save his life she had stained her hands with blood—perhaps with the blood of a lover! But he could not bring himself to believe that. He knew that she had hated the man whom she had shot. But what of it? He held no brief for her virtue. And yet—well? He could have believed anything of her more easily than the truth. He knew the world and the cities and ports thereof. He knew men and women of all kinds, and something of the ways of every kind. But this woman? The thing was not in her eyes. It was not on her lips. Her voice and manner were alike clear of it.

For nearly an hour he limped beneath the dusky forest on the course which she had set him. He was dizzy with hunger and fatigue and the stress of his emotions. He was about to lie down on the dry moss and rest when a sound that was not

of this strange and daunting wilderness struck upon his ear. It was the voice of a fiddle—of a fiddle industriously jiggling out a hornpipe. He halted and harkened for a second or two, then pressed forward at an improved pace. He soon came out on the edge of a small circular clearing. In the centre of the clearing stood a squat cabin of logs. Against the front wall of the cabin, beside the open door, sat the fiddler on a block of wood. He was an elderly person. He wore a cap of reddish-yellow fur pinched high on the top of his head. The hair of his head was long and grey, as was the hair of his face. He sat with hunched body and sprawled legs and gave the impression of extreme thinness and unusual length.

At Hill's approach across the clearing he stopped fiddling and glanced up. Then he drew in his legs and jumped nimbly to his feet. His bright glance ran sharply and suspiciously over the young man.

"What's yer business here?" he asked ungraciously.

"I want food," said the other. "I will pay for it," he added bitterly.

The woodsman's manner changed in a flash. He grinned apologetically, laid his fiddle and bow on the block upon which he had been seated, and extended his hand. Hill eyed him keenly, then accepted the hand.

"Ye be welcome to what I have, mate, without price or payment," said the old man. "It be now nigh eighteen years since I quit servin' me country without askin' me cap'n's pleasure in the matter, an' yet every time I clap eyes on a seafarin' man I up an' think as how I'm to be took at last for a deserter."

Hill's only reply to this explanation was a polite but wan smile. He limped into the cabin and sank heavily upon a bench against the wall. The woodsman followed him, built up the fire and fried a venison steak. After his meal Hill felt an overpowering craving for sleep. The September sun and dry airs of the forest had evaporated all the water from his clothing by this time.

"I'm dead sleepy and dog-tired," he said, and straightway kicked off his shoes and crawled into the woodsman's bunk.

He sank immediately fifteen fathoms deep in slumber.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM BOLT HEARS A ROMANTIC TALE

THE sunshine had left the open door of the cabin when George Hill opened his eyes. It struck red through the little window in the western wall. Hill continued to lie motionless for a full minute, picking out, clearing, and arranging his memories of recent events. Then he rolled out of the bunk and put on his salt-rimed shoes. The cabin was empty save for a huge iron-grey bitch and three nursing puppies beside the hearth. The mother dog lay at full length, with her long muzzle on her paws and her glowing eyes fixed upon the man beside the bunk. She looked formidable and suspicious, and Hill decided that the right thing for him to do was to leave the cabin as quickly and quietly as possible and look up the old woodsman. So he started for the door. He was within a pace of it when a throaty growl from the big beast by the hearth brought him to a sudden halt. He glanced over his shoulder at her. Her unwinking eyes glowed upon him. She had not raised

her head, but she had lifted her upper lip slightly to display a number of tusk-like fangs. While he stood still she continued to growl, but with less of menace in the sound. He ventured another slow step towards the threshold, but the noise she sent after him brought him around with a jump and set the nerves of his scalp a-crawl. And still she had not moved nor changed her position by an inch.

Hill knew enough about dogs to realise that she intended him to remain in the cabin until her master's return. He could see no reason for opposing her intention, so he retraced his steps to the bunk with an air of unconcern. The big dog stilled her growling immediately and covered her glistening fangs. She did not cease to regard him steadily, but her unwinking eyes lost something of their red glower. He sat on the edge of the bunk and fell to whistling a tune which he had learned from the master of the lost brig.

Fifteen minutes later the old woodsman entered the cabin with another big iron-grey dog at his heels. He carried a shot-gun in one hand and two brace of ruffed grouse in the other.

"Be ye feelin' any better for yer sleep, mate?" he asked.

"Much better, thank you," replied Hill. "What I want now is a bath. I'm sticky and crusty with salt. Is there a stream handy?"

"Aye, just to the south o' this clearin'. I'll be gettin' supper while ye wash."

"But the old girl with the pups won't let me leave the cabin."

"Walk right out, mate. She'll not trouble ye now."

Hill left the cabin and limped across the clearing to the brook. The sun was behind the western tree-tops now and the forest underways were dusky. He got out of his clothes quickly and stepped down the mossy bank into the amber water. It was cool and refreshing. He splashed lustily for ten minutes, then waded ashore and found one of the iron-grey beasts, the dog, seated on his coat. Gingerly he approached, and gingerly he gathered up and donned his shirt, breeches, and stockings.

"Will you let me have my coat?" he asked.
"It is my own."

The dog moved aside with dignity and again sat down and faced him. He pulled on the coat, felt the pockets and found them secure, and returned to the cabin with the dog marching at his heels.

"Those dogs of yours keep a sharp eye on me," he said as he sat down to supper.

"Aye, mate, they do," answered the woodsman, heaping slices of fried ham on his guest's plate.
"An' for why? They don't know nothin' about ye, mate—no more nor I do."

"For that matter, I know nothing about you," returned Hill.

"Aye, mate, that be the truth; but the cases differ. I set here at home, on me own land, like a squire in his hall, ye might say. But what about yerself? Ye come out o' me woods, a sea-farin' man past a doubt, tender on one leg an' rimed with salt, with rum in one pocket an' gold in t'other. Ye're welcome, mate, ye're welcome, but me an' the dogs has a natural right to keep an eye on ye till we larn more about ye."

"Of course you have," said Hill, smiling; "but I doubt your right to go through my pockets."

"I didn't go through 'em," replied the other. "I felt 'em on the outside when ye was asleep—just to make sure you hadn't pistols aboard."

"Right," returned Hill. "I don't blame you for taking that precaution. The more I see of this colony of New Brunswick, or province, or whatever you call it, the more convinced I am that it is not the safe, God-fearing, law-abiding land that I was led to expect. But I think I'll have but little difficulty in proving to you the honesty of my intentions and character."

"Aye, mate, that ye will," replied the other heartily. "Already I know ye for a gentleman by yer look an' yer lanwidge. But I calls ye mate for all that, seein' as how I be a gentleman

meself now, so to speak, me own master an' a-livin' on me own land, tho' poorly born—in the gutter, so to speak—an' roughly bred."

Hill bowed gravely.

"I see your point," he said. "A small slice, if you please. Thank you. Well, as man to man, my name is George Hill and I was cast up on the coast this morning, the sole survivor of the brig *Dartmouth*."

"Belay that!" cried the woodsman. "Garge Hill, ye say. There be a name, nate, I dips me colours too."

He laid his knife aside, removed and lowered his fur cap with both hands, and then returned it to the top of his head.

"Why do you do honour to that name?" asked Hill.

"As a seafarin' man ye should know," replied the other. "Cap'n Garge Hill was his name, an' we called 'im Gingery Garge—behind his back. Aye, behind his back, but with all due respect, so to speak. A good skipper he was, an' a master-hand in a fight. I sailed with him two years in the old *Destructive*, an' when we fit the whole world at Trafalgar the same identical broadside that knocked me flat knocked 'im dyin' acrost me legs. Would Gingery Garge be any kin to ye by any chance, mate?"

"The *Destructive*, seventy-four, was my

father's last command," said Hill quietly. "I remember him very faintly—his head, his laughter, his broken nose, his maimed left hand. I was not five years old when I last saw him."

"Aye, mate," returned the woodsman, staring intently. "A tall man, a giant, with a swing in his stride like the marching o' a Highlander."

"Not as I recall his appearance," said Hill. "Five foot eight or nine would be his height, I should say, but he was very broad in the shoulders and deep in the chest. As for his stride—no, my friend, it was a limp. He had taken a pistol-ball through his left ankle when he was a reefer aboard the sloop *Spitfire*."

The woodsman jumped to his feet, leaned across the table, and shook his open hand under his guest's nose.

"Lay it thar, mate!" he cried. "I be proud to know ye, by the guns o' Nelson! Gingery Garge's own boy! A splinter o' that rare old rib of oak, as sure as he died acrost me knees."

Hill stood up and grasped the woodsman's hand. His thin, square face flushed slightly. His blue eyes were steady and clear.

"I have papers here," he said, thrusting his left hand into the breast of his coat and drawing forth the waterproof packet.

"Put 'em away, mate," replied the other, "an

tell me what ye will. How come ye, Gingery Garge's son, to be wanderin' in these woods?"

"I'll tell you all about myself," said Hill, re-seating himself on the three-legged stool. "It won't take long. I was born twenty-five years ago, the fourth child and second son. My mother sent me to Bedford School when I was nine years of age. I left school when I was fourteen and joined the *Royal Alfred* six months later. I left the service three years and some months ago and went up to Oxford to read for Holy Orders."

"Way enough!" exclaimed the woodsman.

"Back all! Ye left the Navy, sir! Did ye say it, mate, or did me poor old ears trick me?"

"I said it, my friend. I left the Navy and went up to Oxford and studied for the Church."

"To make a parson o' yerself?"

"Aye, that was my intention; but I changed my mind a few months ago and decided to venture my life and modest capital in this country. I took passage on the brig *Dartmouth*, from London, a matter of five weeks ago, and this morning I came ashore on the bottom of the long-boat."

"Ye left the Navy, sir. With what rank, may I ask?"

"Senior lieutenant and second in command of the *Dreadnothing*."

"With yer papers all straight, cap'n, may I make so bold as to ask?"

"All straight and in order."

"Ye'd lost yer money, maybe, an' some great friend offered ye a snug little parish with one sarvice a month an' a thousand pund the year."

"I still had my money."

"An' ye left the Navy. I be all befogged, mate. Ye left the poundin' o' England's enemies for to pound the pulpit. Wot would yer honoured pa hev said? An' wot did he think on it, him a-layin' there in his canvas jacket under the green seas with the roundshot at his feet?"

"Ah—I—I was young—and romantic. There was a lady. Her father—well, her father was a bishop. I was a fool! I see now that I was a fool! The old cock—his right reverend lordship—said that no daughter of his would ever marry anyone but a parson. You may well scratch your whiskers, lad. I would to heaven I'd hung off an' scratched mine—and had some to scratch! But I went about an' stood away after the Greeks and the Hebrews and the Early Fathers. I overhauled them and laia them aboard, and when I was boxing the Book of Job in the Hebrew tongue the lady married the Dean of Sturminster."

The woodsman sighed and left his seat at the table to light a candle at the low fire on the hearth. An empty bottle served him for a candlestick. The feeble flame stood straight, for there was no breath of wind from the open door. The night was

warm, the sky above the tree-tops dimly lit by stars. The woodsman stood the candle on the shelf that ran across the rough front of the chimney, sighed again and turned.

"The devil be in 'em, as sure as me mark spells Willyum Bolt," he said. "But never a one o' 'em could make a fool o' me—not that identical sort o' fool anyhow. But I ain't sayin' what a bishop's daughter might o' done to me in the balmy days o' me youth."

Hill smiled grimly in his dark corner. His heart and pride were still sore.

"But it be in me mind, cap'n, as how ye'd make an infernal rum parson," added William Bolt.

"I don't doubt it," replied the other.

Bolt crossed to the door and looked out.

"Lucky thing ye run foul o' me, cap'n," he remarked, without turning his head. "Aye, ye might well say lucky. Where'd ye think ye was headin' for?"

"I was bound for the settlements on the Miramichi River," replied Hill. "I haven't much farther to go, have I?"

"Well, mate, on the course ye was headin' when ye first hove into my view, I'd make so bold as to say a considerable distance. Ye come into the clearin' from the north. Ye was headin' south."

"South, with a little westing. What of it?"

"Ye'd never hev made yer landfall on that course, cap'n. The settlements an' the Miramichi lay due north o' this here cabin."

"North? But I came from the north!"

"Aye, cap'n, ye was headin' straight away from the settlements, straight for the back o' nowhere—south an' south an' west into the woods where ye wouldn't run on to a clearin' nor a cabin in two hundred miles."

The young man's heart jumped painfully in his side, then chilled. After a silence of several minutes he spoke.

"Aye, lad, it was a fortunate thing that I heard your fiddling," he said.

The woodsman nodded and stared out at the night. He sniffed the still air.

"We ain't had a blessed drop o' rain for six weeks," he remarked, "an' the woods smell drier nor the hatches o' hell."

But Hill did not hear him. He was wondering why the strange woman had done him this treachery after having saved him from the sea and the knife of the fellow with the ear-rings.

CHAPTER IV

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS AT SPICER'S TAVERN

HILL refrained from speaking of the girl to William Bolt. He could not rid his thoughts of her for more than a few minutes at a time, even when he was talking of his own life in the Navy or listening to his host's adventurous yarns. He passed the night, the day, and a second night at the old man's cabin, recovering his strength. Two mornings after the morning of his amazing adventure with the young woman he and Bolt set out for the nearest point of settlement on the southern shore of Miramichi Bay. Bolt left a family of Micmac Indians who lived near his farmstead in charge of his dogs, buildings, and live stock.

The two saw no one on their journey of eighteen miles from Bolt's clearings to the little town of Chatham. The way led through great forests of pines and spruces and firs, broken by groves of maple and birches, by hollows of black mud overgrown with alders and coarse grasses and by open glades. They crossed a number of shrunken streams where the amber water trickled thin and slow, almost lost among mossy boulders. Near

the streams were brush-strewn "choppings," some of the last winter and some of winters ago, where lumbermen had been at work.

The little town lay beside the broad blue river, a few miles above its mouth. Behind the town, between it and the edge of the forest, ran a strip of farmlands and stump-jagged clearings no more than a mile in width at the best.

During the journey William Bolt had remarked feelingly and frequently on the dryness of the country. The moss of the forest aisles was like tinder underfoot. It crumbled to powder at a touch. Even the swamps were dry, all the black mud-holes filled with pale green weeds and dry grasses. But the drought had not set in until August, and so the crops had escaped damage. The hay had been an exceptionally heavy cut all along the river, and grains of all kinds—wheat, oats, barley, and buckwheat—had suffered only in the length of the straw. But the aftermath of the meadows had come to nothing, and the pastures were burned brown.

In and about the little town the barns of the farmers were full. Stacks of hay and straw stood in the farmyards. The stores and warehouses of the traders were full, stocked with tea, rum, molasses, oil, candles, clothing, wines, tobacco, sugar, and what not, to supply the town and the country around for the next eight months.

The saw-mills and grist-mills were busy. Ships, houses, and stores were being built. The air rang with the cheery sounds of axe, hammer, and saw.

Thus it was with Chatham in September of the year 1825, and so it was with Newcastle and Douglastown on the northern shore. The little towns were busy and prosperous, and so were the villages and farms that flanked the river up both shores for a distance of nearly one hundred miles. There was shipping in the river, great and small, foreign and local. Some of those vessels had come freighted with supplies for the settlers, and some had brought more settlers from England and Scotland to swell the busy army that was carving out a pillar of an empire beside the Miramichi. It was good work—good for the Colony, for England and for mankind. New acres were cleared for the plough, that ancient provider. New sons and daughters were born, with old-land names and new-land dreams. Here the brain of the peasant expanded, and the heavy feet of the peasant stepped more lightly and more freely than in the old fields across the seas. Timber was cut for England and the West Indies, as well as for local use. Ships were built to trade around the seven seas, and tall pines were felled and bulky tamarack-knees hewn out to spar and rib the warships of old England.

George Hill sensed all this quickly and felt his

blood warm to the new land. It was his intention to pass the night in Chatham, at Spicer's Tavern, and to cross and ascend the river to Newcastle in the morning. He had letters of introduction addressed to residents of Newcastle—a letter of introduction to Major Thomas Darnell, and one of introduction and one of credit to Mr Alexander McDuff, a man of wide and various commercial interests.

Hill's first glimpse of the river in front of the town disclosed to him a vessel that stood out from the rest of the anchored shipping like a falcon in a flock of pigeons. She was a stout brig, heavily sparred and taut and trim aloft and alow. Her sides were black, her ports were white as snow. There was a gleam of gold-leaf about her fiddles, and the white ensign with the red cross hung over her taffrail.

"We'll go aboard, William," said Hill. "Perhaps we'll find some old friends for'ard or aft. Come, lad, lead the way to a boat."

"Not me, mate," replied Bolt, gazing at the brig with yearning in his eyes. "Eighteen year ago I deserted me ship in the Port o' St John. Go aboard yerself, cap'n. I'll wait for ye at the tavern."

"Eighteen years! That is a long time, Bill, an' you look about as much like a sailorman now as I look like a parson."

"I never did look overly much like a sailor-man, mate, though I was one, an' a good 'un at that. An' like as not there be officers an' able seamen aboard that there brig what was reefers an' ship's boys when I give up the Navy. I'll not risk it, cap'n. Ye'll tell me all about it when ye come ashore, maybe."

Hill changed his mind about going aboard the brig immediately. In the first flush of enthusiasm at seeing the white ensign he had forgotten the sorry and scanty state of his attire. So he went shopping instead, accompanied by Bolt. In one store he found a hat and a pair of shoes more or less to his taste, in another a pair of pantaloons that would serve at a pinch, as well as stockings and shirts, collars and stocks. As he could not find a coat to fit him he stuck to his serviceable blue jacket. He changed at Spicer's Tavern, and supped there with William Bolt. They had a punch with a foundation of rum, and at eight o'clock he left the woodsman singing deep-sea ditties in a cloud of tobacco smoke before an empty bowl. Down at the shore he found a lad with a boat, and was rowed out to the brig. He was challenged as he came alongside.

"Mr George Hill, late first-luff of the *Dread-nothing*, to see the captain," he cried.

This attracted the attention of the entire watch, including its officer.

"What is Mr Hill doing there?" asked a voice that was not of the sentry who had challenged.

"He is waiting to be invited aboard," replied Hill, warm with the punch which Mr Spicer had mixed so skilfully.

"Does the gentleman in the boat know Mr Simon Snow?"

"He does—many times to Master Simon's cost. If Mr Snow is there tell him with my compliments that the gentleman in the boat will dust his jacket for him with a dirk-scabbard when I—when he—when the said gentleman gets aboard."

"Does Mr Hill know Commander Needham?"

"Piggy Needham? Aye, in good truth. Heave him overboard that I may have a good look at him."

"Commander Needham says that the gentleman in the shore-boat is intoxicated and an impostor, and that Mr Hill is a parson."

Hill did not argue these points but straightway sang a song for which he had been famous of old in the gun-room of the *Badger* and later in the ward-room of the *Dreadnothing*. After that he was invited to pull in and come aboard. He found two old friends aboard the brig *Columbine*, Needham the commander and Snow the second-lieutenant. He was received with questions and open arms and led to the ward-room. There he told his story—again without any mention of the

girl who had rescued him from the bottom of the long-boat and the knife of the rogue with the earrings. He was well treated, you may be sure. The ward-room hummed in his honour. It was years since he had last seen the boys—and now he made the most of his chance of seeing and hearing them.

Between songs and toasts Hill learned that the *Columbine* had been engaged in hunting pirates since Christmas. She had hunted them high and low, even from Brazil and the Guianas northward to the St Lawrence, and through the Strait of Belle Isle and around Newfoundland. He gathered that the sport was poor, the quarry elusive.

"I've hunted the vermin myself, and never got anything but a nick on the leg from a cutlass," he said. "They're a poor, chicken-hearted lot nowadays, it seems to me, an' not worthy the name of pirates."

"Some of my grandfather's hardest fights were with pirates," said a youth named Radnor. "A gentleman of fortune was well worth overhauling in those days."

"Since Kidd, there's been only one on this side of the world worthy of the name, and that is the Planter," said Snow. "He's a rare 'un."

"The Planter!" exclaimed Hill. "Do you tell me that he is still afloat? I've chased him myself and got my leg hacked for the trouble."

"Yes, he's still afloat, as far as I know," said Needham. "We have not sunk him anyway. He is one of the old school right enough. But for him we'd not be lying here in the Miramichi to-night."

Piece by piece Hill heard the story of the brig's long and fruitless chase of the last gentleman of fortune of the old school. In pursuit of the Planter's schooner the ten-gun brig had worried up and down the islands and the main month after month, and run her nose into many ports that stunk of fever. Once she had missed catching the schooner up a tree-walled creek by no more than half a day. Again she had driven her from an anchorage and sent her flitting in such haste and disorder that several casks and three members of the watering party were left ashore. Needham's persistency had begun to tell on the pirate's nerves in time, and the schooner had flitted northward from her old hunting-grounds; and Needham had followed with his ten-gun brig, picking up the scent in the form of coastwise rumours. He had lost the scent entirely in the Gulf of St Lawrence in July. Since that time he had heard nothing of the Planter's schooner, nothing of any deed of violence of sufficient magnitude to suggest the hand of that notorious representative of the old school of Flint and English.

After Hill's departure from the inn to visit the brig, William Bolt continued to sit behind the empty punch-bowl and smoke and sing. He touched rum infrequently nowadays, but when he did touch it, it was quick to touch him back. He was alone in the big parlour, which had been reserved for Hill and himself. It was just ten by the clock on the chimney-shelf when he was disturbed by a rap of knuckles on the door. The door opened and Spicer, the taverner, looked in.

"A lady wishin' to see Mr William Bolt," he announced.

William dropped his pipe, and the long stem hopped on the floor in half a dozen pieces. But he recovered his composure quickly—such as it was. He would show a bold front before this lubberly Spicer, who had been a sergeant in an infantry regiment. For the honour of the Navy he would show the land-lubber that no announcement, no matter of how startling a nature, could discompose William Bolt.

"Show her in, me man," he said.

The visitor entered, her face heavily veiled. William got to his feet and bowed unsteadily.

"Set ye down, madame or miss," he said. "I be proud to see ye."

In silence she took a chair beside the table. William crossed to the door, shut it tight, locked

it, then turned the key back so that it filled the key-hole.

"Why do you lock the door?" she asked, in evident agitation.

"So's to keep that mudcrusher on t'other side from pryin' an' spyin' into yer affairs," replied the old man, reseating himself.

This precaution did him credit, but it must be considered as an inspiration, for his brain was not as clear as it should have been.

"Your friend? He is not here?" queried the visitor.

"So ye come to see the cap'n, did ye? I might have knowed it. He be aboard the ten-gun brig in the stream, a-callin' on the ward-room mess."

"Calling? Why calling? Isn't he one of the brig's officers?"

"Not him, me dear. Cap'n Garge Hill be a pore shipwrecked mariner in these parts an' never sot eyes on the brig *Columbine* afore in his life. Resigned from the Navy he be these three years back, all along o' a female beauty, an' come as near makin' a parson of himself as ye ever see."

"But the vessel that was wrecked? Wasn't it a ship of war?"

"Not it. But I'll not answer any more o' yer questions, me dear lady, onless ye fly yer colours."

"My colours?"

"Yer face, miss. Colours is simply a nautical manner o' speakin'."

The visitor hesitated a moment, then removed her thick veil. Mr Bolt took one look at her in the candle-light, then sank back in his chair with a gasp, his mouth and eyes wide with astonishment.

"Bless me soul!" he exclaimed; and then, in a small voice, "Be ye the bishop's daughter?" he asked. "That there destructive female beauty?"

"No. I—I am the daughter of a—humble tradesman."

"Not ye, miss. I know a gentleman when I see one. I knowed a female o' quality once—at gun-range so to speak—squire's daughter. Ye talk like her; but she—well, miss, she hadn't yer lines nor figger-head. Ye be the bishop's daughter, past a doubt, a-chasin' of that pore young man. Look at yer shoes—silver buckles an' all—trim an' expensive. An' yer trim ankles, miss. Ye can't throw no tradesman in Bill Bolt's eyes."

"You have befuddled your brain with rum, my friend."

"Not me. It be yer beauty, miss, that—that has took me all aback. When ye first come in, an' afore ye stowed that there veil, I was sober as his spirituous lordship, yer own papa."

"I am not a bishop's daughter, and I don't know what you are talking about. It does not matter who I am. I want you to say to Captain

Hill that I meant him no harm—that I followed to recall him and saw him meet you. And tell him that I shall never forget what he said to me—just before we parted—and that I hate him.”

“Miss, me mind be all in a fog,” complained William. “Did ye come ashore with ’im on the bottom o’ the brig’s long-boat? Aye, that’s it.”

“I did not. I was ashore at the time—and I saved his life. But do you remember my message? Repeat to me what you are to say to him.”

“Ye meant ’im no harm. Ye run after him an’ tried to git him to come back to ye, but when ye seen me ye sheered off. Ye’ll never forget the thing he said to ye just afore he slipped his cable, an’ ye hate him.”

“That is near enough. Now I must go. Here is a guinea for you.”

“Keep yer money, miss. I own land, I do. Have a glass o’ port wine afore ye go.”

“No, thank you. Remember the message for your friend. Good night.”

“I be comin’ along with ye, miss, for to see ye safe home.”

“Sit where you are unless you want to be shot like a dog,” said the young woman. “I have a pistol here.”

She showed him the butt of it. She veiled her face, went to the door, unlocked it, and drew out the key. She opened the door a crack, slipped

out and locked it on the other side. For a moment William contemplated the advisability of making an outcry, but he quickly thought better of it. He had no wish to appear a fool in the eyes of Sergeant Spicer. He sat still for several minutes, trying vainly to prick his dazed and befuddled brain to a state of reasonable activity. Failing in this, he went to the sideboard where two decanters stood, laid hold of their necks, and carried them to the table. He found a glass. He took his seat, pushed the empty punch-bowl away, and arranged the decanters in front of him.

"Port for you," he said to the port. "Starboard for you," he said to the sherry. He drank a glass of port and smacked his lips.

"Now I'll cross the deck, in a manner o' speakin'," he said, and tossed off a glass of sherry.

"That female beauty threwed me all in a twitter," he said; and again he crossed the deck—in a manner of speaking.

Mr Hill, arriving at the tavern at three in the morning, found the key in the outside of the parlour door, turned it and entered. The room was in darkness, for the candles had burned out. He found a new candle on the chimney-piece, struck a light, and discovered William asleep at the table with the decanters before him. He shook the ancient ex-mariner by the shoulder.

William opened his eyes slowly and stared owlshly at Hill. Then he stared at the two decanters. He sighed.

"Mate, she's after ye," he said.

"Bill, you are drunk," returned Hill. "I am heartily ashamed of you—you an' your long grey whiskers."

"Drunk, d'ye say? Mate, I be sober as—as a water-cask. Rum could never get the better o' me—nor larboard wine nor starboard wine neither. She be after ye, mate. An' if I was in yer shoes, cap'n, I'd lay to an' let her come alongside—aye, an' I'd let her come aboard."

"What are you trying to talk about?" cried Hill.

"The lady, mate. The female beauty as driv' ye off the seas an' into the arms o' them Early Fathers. The bishop's daughter."

The young man laughed loud and long. The old man became indignant.

"An' she left a message for ye," he said, banging a fist on the table. "A message, by the bones o' Drake! Hark to this. She meant ye no harm, says she. She run after ye to fetch ye back, but went about when she see ye safe with me, she says. An' she saved yer life, says she—an' she won't never forgive ye for what ye said to her—an' she hates ye."

Hill's flushed face went white. He leaned across the table.

"Did you dream that, you drunken old swab?" he asked.

William snorted, and struggled as if he would arise and smite.

"Did she say she was the bishop's daughter?" asked Hill.

"Not her. She said as she wasn't. But she couldn't fool me—not with them eyes an' them ankles. Mate, ye be a rare young fool."

"Did she tell you her name?"

"Not her; an' when I offers to convoy her home she up an' p'int's a pistol at me heart. Shoot away, says I. Pistol-balls can't hurt William Bolt, says I, but one shot from them eyes o' yer ladyship's can blow me clean out o' the water."

"Turn in, you old reprobate, and try to dream it right," said Hill. And he turned in himself.

It was high noon when George Hill opened his heavy eyes. Slowly and painfully he recalled his visit aboard the ten-gun brig, his return to the inn, and Bolt's amazing story. Slowly and painfully he raised his head from the pillow and looked across the room at Bolt's bed. That worthy was still deep in slumber. Hill got out of bed and rang for hot water. Spicer himself brought it. He drew Spicer into the room.

"Was there a lady here to see me last night when I was aboard the *Columbine*?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—leastwise, to see Mr Bolt," answered the taverner.

"Exactly. You know her, of course—her name, and so on?"

"Why, sir, that I can't say, for she wore a long cloak an' a black veil across her face. But for her voice an' her feet, she might 'ave bin a man dressed up—maybe a young gentleman from the brig a-playin' of a joke on the old party, as was my first idee. But she wasn't."

"How do you know she wasn't?"

"Well, sir, her voice was female past a shadow of doubt, an' very genteel into the bargain. An' the same might be said of her foot."

"And what else? Out with it, my man. You followed her."

"Well, sir, as for that, I followed her a matter of fifty yards maybe, walkin' very respectful and cautious in the interests of my house and law an' order, when all of a sudden she rounds on me and claps a pistol to my head. 'Go home an' attend to yer own business,' says she, 'and leave other folk to attend to theirs.'"

"Very good, my man. I thank you, and here is a guinea for you. Keep it to yourself, as well as the other matter. If you blab, if you talk, if you let so much as one word about that lady's visit pass your teeth, you will wish to heaven the French had killed you at Waterloo."

CHAPTER V

SIGNS AND PORTENTS

By the time George Hill was shaved and dressed, William Bolt was ready to join him at a breakfast of coffee and dry toast. Hill charged the other not to mention the queer affair of the night to a soul. William agreed to keep silent on the matter. He seemed to be in a very low frame of mind and held his head between his hands.

"I be a-goin' home to me farm, mate," he said. "This sort o' thing be altogether too upsettin' for an old man's system."

"If I were you, Bill, I'd give it up entirely," answered Hill. "I'd swear off for good and all."

"I wasn't referrin' to the rum," returned the old man, "nor yet to the port wine nor the sherry wine. Liquor hasn't no effect on me, nor never did have. But it be a awful thing, mate, to be cursed with a young sailorman's heart inside a old farmer's carcass."

He set out on his homeward journey an hour later. He had permitted Hill to pay his score

at the tavern, but had refused a gift of money with an air of quiet dignity. They planned to meet again, in Chatham, before the first snow. Hill changed his mind about crossing to Newcastle and presenting his letters of credit and introduction that day. He hoped that by remaining a little longer at Spicer's Tavern he might see or hear something more of the strange young woman. He could not rid his mind of her, and the message which she had left for him with old Bolt puzzled him sorely, and bred misgivings in his heart as to the soundness of his judgment. Had his last words to her been wrong as well as unkind? And if so, how? How, in heaven's name? If she was not that, what was she then? After all, she had repented of her intention of sending him into the trackless wilderness to lose himself, and had followed to recall him. That alone showed a heart and conscience. And she had saved his life. She had visited the tavern to make herself known to him as being guiltless of treachery, and to let him know that she hated him. But why did she hate him? And why had she gone to so much trouble to let him know of it? Was she in grave fault or simply in grave misfortune? These questions and a dozen others fretted his mind.

Needham and Snow visited Hill ashore that evening. The ten-gun brig was to get up her mud-hooks in the morning and sail south, for her

commander was of the opinion that the Planter had slipped away to the islands again. The sailors remained at the inn until midnight. Hill did not retire to his bed until several hours after the departure of his friends, but he heard nothing more of the mysterious young woman. He lay a-bed until close upon noon, then went down to the water-front and found that the *Columbine* had left her anchorage hours before, and had dipped her tops beneath the eastern horizon. He wandered aimlessly about the wharves and shipyards, and was presently attracted to the water's edge between two wharves by a group of persons who were evidently keenly interested in something which lay in their midst. He soon discovered that the thing they looked at was a dead man—a very dead man.

"Ye can see as he's been under water; but he was a-wash when I found him," said a fisherman. "The minute I see the hole in his chest I knowed it was a case for yer honour."

"A case for the grave-digger, since ye've cheated the lobsters," returned an elderly gentleman in a high hat, long blue frock, and nankeen trousers. "What d'ye expect me to do, Tom Shinn? It looks like foul murder, I grant you, but the poor fellow is a stranger to me. Do you expect me to lay my finger on the rascal that fired the weapon—musket, pistol, rifle, or fowling-piece—which

caused this poor rogue's death? A magistrate I am; a magician I am not. Here's your crown piece, Tom, for bringing him in. The constable will now take charge of the corpse, which shall be exhibited for a day with a view to identification."

At that moment Hill obtained a clear view of the drowned man, and recognised him as the fellow who had been in the skiff with the girl and who had been shot by the girl. He felt a chill pass under his new hat and down his spine, but said nothing. A short old mariner in a round straw hat, pilot coat, and canvas breeks spoke up.

"Beggin' yer honour's pardon, sir, I identifies that there mug here an' now," he said. "Walter Biggs, I be, an' bosun aboard the barque *Fox* yonder. Two year ago come Christmas, off Dominica, we had a brush with a bloody pirate called the Planter, an' I seen that identical corpse on the pirate's fo'castle-head, so help me Peter, with pistols in both hands an' pistols in the tops o' his boots. But he wasn't a corpse then, yer honour, ye can lay to that."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed the magistrate. "My good people, this takes on a colour of importance. Mr Biggs, are you able and willing to endorse the statement but now made by you by kissing the good book, on your honour an' your hope of salvation, so help you God?"

"Aye, that I be, yer honour," returned Biggs,

squirting tobacco juice. "I took particular notice of him that day off Dominica, seein' as I let off a musket at him five times an' he shot a hole through my hat. I remembers his ugly face like the face o' my own mother. An' more nor that, yer honour, I'll fetch Cap'n Dent ashore to take a look at 'im. The cap'n will remember 'im, ye can lay to that, for didn't he shoot a hole in the cap'n's shoulder that day off Dominica—an' as purty a day it was as ever ye clapt eyes on, ashore or afloat, an' our bones would be coral now, yer honour, but for the blowin' o' a frigate's royals over the horizon afore the pirates could make fast their irons on our rail."

"Fetch him ashore, my brave Biggs! Fetch your captain ashore," exclaimed the magistrate, in a voice of high excitement. "But hold! Is this fellow the bloody Planter himself, d'ye think?"

"Nay, yer honour, that corpse bain't the Planter himself," replied Biggs. "I seen the Planter that day, on the poop, a-smokin' of his pipe as cool as a cucumber an' dressed up like a Navy admiral—a big man an' naughty to look at, with eyes black as sloes. This here corpse, I take it, was maybe his bosun or second mate."

Hill did not wait to hear more. He felt dazed and sick. He made his way back to Spicer's Tavern like one walking in his sleep, and there

called for brandy. What was he to believe now of the beautiful young woman who had saved his life—the worst or the impossible? She was the companion of pirates—their prisoner, perhaps, but their companion for all that! But was she their prisoner? She enjoyed a degree of freedom, it seemed. Recalling the clear glance of her dark eyes, the tones of her voice, the whole bright but tragic picture of her, he could not believe the worst; and yet what else was he to believe, in the name of sanity!

“But it is no affair of mine!” he exclaimed—and he knew that he lied when he said it.

He sat alone in his room, miserable and puzzled. A second glass of brandy failed to cheer him. Spicer entered and told him of the discovery of the dead pirate and of the organisation and dispatch of an armed party to search along the coasts of the bay and the seaboard for others of the same company. Hill made no comment. To Spicer he seemed indifferent as to whether or not the pirates were captured. But he remained in Chatham all that day and did not leave for Newcastle until the following afternoon, after the return of the armed party. The searchers had found no other pirates or doubtful characters, alive or dead. Then Hill hired a boat and two men and crossed the river to the little town of Newcastle on the northern shore. He passed the night at a little inn and found his

way to Major Darnell's first thing in the morning. The major had a large farm on the river, about a mile above the town. But the major was not at home. He was somewhere in the woods on the Bartibog River, shooting moose, and was not expected home for a day or two. So Hill returned to the town and sought out Mr McDuff. He had no difficulty in finding Alexander McDuff, an elderly Scot with a sandy beard and a cold eye. He opened his packet of precious papers and handed over to the merchant a letter of introduction and another of credit. McDuff armed his thin nose with a pair of the best Scotch pebbles and perused the documents slowly. At last he folded the papers and turned his cold, bright gaze upon the young man.

"When did you arrive?" he asked, and his voice was as cold as his eyes.

Hill told him of the wreck of the brig *Dartmouth* and of the time and manner of his arrival on the coast, but omitted to mention the young woman or the swarthy man with the earrings.

"And you are the sole survivor of that company, young sir?"

"I am, beyond a reasonable doubt. I saw the other boats swamped and broken before they were clear of the breaking brig, and of the poor lads who clung to the keel of the upturned long-boat

with me, I saw them all slip into the sea one by one."

"You have been a long time coming to me with your credentials."

Hill told him of his meeting and stay with William Bolt, and something of the few days which he had spent at Spicer's Tavern in Chatham. McDuff was not satisfied. He said that Hill must produce someone to identify him. Hill retorted that the letters themselves identified him. The Scot denied that assertion. Hill began to lose his temper. He snatched the papers from the other's hand and returned them to his pocket.

"This is outrageous!" he exclaimed. "What am I to understand from your attitude? Do you refuse to accept this business?"

"I'll tell ye, young sir," returned the Scot calmly. "My attitude denotes doubt. I never have held with these stories of sole survivors. Why should one man escape, with his papers all safe and dry in one pocket and a fist full of gold in another, and twenty other stout fellows all go to a sea grave? I maintain that it is not reasonable—that it smells of more than shipwreck."

"What does it smell of?" demanded Hill, his face red with anger.

"Why, sir, that is neither here nor there at this stage of the argument. Try to consider the case from my view-point. Why didn't ye come to

me while the ten-gun brig was still at anchor off Chatham? And maybe it would have been better for your business if ye'd come before the dead pirate was picked up on the coast."

"The devil!" cried Hill. "You take me for a pirate, do you? If you wore a sword at your side instead of a pen behind your ear I'd take a look at the colour of your blood for that!"

"Softly, softly," returned the merchant, cold and unruffled. "The colour o' my blood is neither here nor there—and such talk is not for my counting-house. Your case is already out of my hands, and I must ask ye to come along with me to our magistrate, Major Thomas Darnell."

"The major is not at home. He is somewhere in the woods, shooting."

"How do you know that? And what d'ye know of Major Darnell?"

"I have already been at his house, and his servant informed me that he was in the woods. I have a letter in my pocket for him."

"Ye have a wonderful pocket, young man. But do ye know the major?"

"I do. It is not more than three years since I last saw him, and that was in my uncle's house in London."

Mr McDuff gazed at Mr Hill for half a minute in silence.

"So," he said. "Ye might have told me that

before, my friend. If ye had, I wouldn't have been forced to question ye so sharply. But business is business."

"If it is business to call a man a liar and a pirate, I think but little of it," retorted Hill with spirit.

"Tut, tut," returned the other. "Come along to my little home, Mr Hill. The sun is over the yard-arm. A nip will do neither of us any harm. You must consider yourself my guest until the major's return."

But George Hill would have none of that. His pride was on its hind legs, clawing the air. He cocked his hat at the merchant and marched out of the counting-house and back to Johnny Walker's house of entertainment. He wrote a letter to Major Darnell, ate his midday meal in Johnny's parlour, then set out to deliver the letter with his own hand at the major's house. He found the major at home, in a high state of excitement, and but then returned from the woods. Their greeting was cordial. Darnell called for claret and asked a dozen friendly questions, but his manner was uneasy and preoccupied. He was a nimble little man of about fifty years of age, with flowing brown side-whiskers and poppy grey eyes. He was like a ramrod for straightness both in body and spirit, and very active on his feet. His nerves were just under his skin. He couldn't hide the

thing that was worrying him for long, and after the second glass of claret he let it out.

"The woods to the north an' west are full of smoke an' the whole damned country is dry as a bone!" he exclaimed. "You'll see trouble here, my lad, if we don't have rain damned soon—an' plenty of it. An' wny don't we get rain? Here it is the last of September, an' not a drop to cool a sinner's tongue have we had since the first of August. An' they call this a country for a gentleman to invest his fortune in an' found a landed estate! It's like playin' draughts on the top of a keg of powder with a drunken man and a candle. How d'ye find the claret, my boy?"

Hill replied that he found the claret to his taste, and agreed with his host as to the dry state of the woods. It had been pointed out to him before by William Bolt. Then he told about his interview with Alexander McDuff, and the major was so indignant at the merchant's suspicions and incivility that he forgot all about the smoke in the woods. He bawled from the window for two horses to be saddled and brought to the door immediately.

They found Mr McDuff still in his counting-house. The major talked to him frankly and forcibly. The Scot protested.

"I did not mean to insult Mr Hill," he said. "He will tell you, my dear major, that I was

politeness itself the moment I was assured of his identity. But this business of banking calls for the exercise of caution in every case and at all times—then how much more so in this case and at this time. Mr Hill arrived alone—one out of twenty, and just now the country is being overrun by bloody pirates and all manner of dangerous and lawless characters. Word came from Chatham but half an hour ago that five ruffians boarded a small schooner last night, where she lay at anchor in the midst of the shipping off the town, overpowered a lad and a man who were aboard, and slipped the cable. But a pistol was fired, and someone yelled, so the alarm was given, and the drifting schooner was boarded by lads from the other ships before she could get clear. Five were taken. Two of them have been identified by mariners in the bay as members of the Planter's notorious company. They'll swing for it—the five of them."

Again Hill experienced that discomfiting sensation as of a trickle of icy water a-crawl upon his scalp and down his spine.

"Five, did you say?" he asked in a somewhat stuffy voice. "All men, I suppose?"

It was a fool's question, that last, and he could have bitten his tongue through for having let it slip. The merchant turned a cold and calculating eye on him and cocked a sandy eyebrow.

"Men for a certainty. Did ye expect them to be women?" returned the Scot.

"What with dry weather an' pirates, this condemned country appears to be posting along the high road to hell!" exclaimed the major. "Leave these vermin in their own breeding places, say I, where folk are used to them. What right has the Navy to chase them up into these waters? What is the Government thinking of? George, my boy, we'll go see these rascals, an' stop the night at Spicer's. Did they lay hold of the Planter himself, Mr McDuff, by any lucky accident?"

"I believe not, sir," said the merchant.

"I doubt if he was with the party," said Hill. "He wouldn't have bungled the job of cutting out the schooner, you may lay to that. That isn't his style. I've tried to cut him out, and I know. But what is he doing in a trap like this? He must have lost his schooner. Needham must have pressed him hard to break him on a leeshore in this fashion."

"The general opinion is that he lost his schooner in Newfoundland and came to this coast in a fishing-boat of some sort," said McDuff.

Hill and Major Darnell set out for Chatham within the hour. Hill was loath to go yet loath to remain behind. He feared that he might discover more than he had been told of. They spent the night at Spicer's Tavern, and saw the five prisoners

in the morning. They were dangerous and sullen-looking rascals to a man. They had been roughly handled in the capturing, and several of them wore blood-stained bandages. One was an Englishman. The others were of various and mixed breeds. The mariners from the ships and the settlers were for hanging them all out of hand, but the magistrates promised them a fair and lawful trial. One of the justices of the peace, a gentleman by the name of Wilcox, was for sending all the way to the capital of the province for a judge learned in the law, a great man and a cousin of his own. But the others would not consider it for a moment. They were in a hurry to get to work, and they did not want to be overshadowed. They agreed with Major Darnell, who expressed himself by shouting, "Can't we string up five pirates without sending to Fredericton for a paunchy lawyer in a wig? This country is going to the devil at a canter!"

The trial was set for the morrow. The high sheriff of the county and a company of militia took charge of the prisoners. The town was all agog with excitement. The streets were crowded with men from the ships, from the farms and the woods, and from the little towns farther up the river. The people were very properly cocked up over the capture of the five. Had they not done what the Governments of the West Indies and many ships

of the Navy had been trying in vain to accomplish for years? They had. Surely it was idle to deny it, and yet the mariners from the ships denied it. The sailors asserted that the townsmen had taken no part in that great deed. They maintained with voice and fist that all the glory of the capture lay with the merchant-marine. Wise men remained in their houses or aboard their ships. Rum was consumed in unusual quantities. Blood was spilt, but mostly by way of the nose, and so without serious results.

Hill smoked his pipe beside the door of the tavern after supper, watching and listening to the foolish activity of the street. Suddenly a small boy with a tanned face and bare, tanned legs appeared at his side.

"Cap'n Hill about anywhere?" asked the boy.

"I'm your man. What do you want?" answered Hill.

The boy slipped a small piece of folded paper into the young man's hand and immediately took to his heels and vanished around a corner of the tavern. Hill did not shout after him or attempt to follow him. He spread the fragment of paper in his palm and read the six words written thereon:

"Remember that I saved your life."

That was what he read. That was all of it.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRIAL OF THE FIVE

THE sun came up as clear as glass, but shimmering like a white flame over a cloudless sea-rim. The dew was heavy as raindrops on the dusty grass in the trampled gutters and lanes of the town. These things promised another dry, hot day. A bank of brown mist lay low and level over the forests to the northward and westward. Major Darnell told Hill that the bank was of the smoke of distant forest fires.

"But they are hundreds of miles away, thank heaven!" he said. "And it is now the first of October. The autumn rains are bound to come soon. Bet you three guineas, my boy, that we have a shower before to-morrow's sunset."

"Taken," replied Hill, without a thought of the wager or the weather. His nerves were on edge and his spirit was uneasy.

Distant winds dispersed the western bank of smoke. An hour later the smoke crawled thin and blue upon the river and through the town for a little while, then vanished utterly. The air grew

hotter and closer as the unshaded sun continued to climb the cloudless sky. Seamen and landmen awoke and took up their foolish arguments and activities of the past night with aching heads and embittered hearts. Some opened their heavy eyes in the streets and others in the fields behind the town. Some returned to consciousness on the water-front; some awoke in their own beds or aboard their own ships. The smoke from the forest fires was not the only menace in the dry air that morning. Mischief was brewing, as any fool might see for the trouble of looking. The magistrates saw it, but they felt no anxiety. They enjoyed the excitement and the opportunity to display their power.

The brawling in the streets and taverns revived at an early hour. The magistrates, who had already called out one company of militia to assist the sheriff in guarding the pirates, now called out another company to assist the constables in policing the town. The second company failed to turn out in full strength for obvious reasons. It paraded just thirty-six strong, including its captain, its lieutenant, and its youthful ensign. A deputation from the men of the anchored ships visited the magistrates and demanded that the five pirates, being seafaring men, be tried for their lives aboard one of the ships by a board of masters and mates and seasoned mariners.

"They be our enemies, not yourn," said the leader of the deputation. "They be our prizes, not yourn. They carry on their divilments on the face o' the waters, an' on the face o' the waters they was took—aye, an' by lads from the ships. An' shipshape they'll be tried, an' shipshape they'll swing."

But the magistrates would have none of that, and said so in hearty language. They showed their commissions. They spoke of the majesty of the law, just as if law was unknown in the merchant-marine. Then they dismissed the deputation of sailormen with fleas in its ears.

The brawling in the streets grew apace. The militiamen on police duty became insubordinate. They ignored military discipline, drank and fought with the brawlers, mislaid their muskets, and discarded their stuffy red tunics. They started more disturbances than they quelled. No seafaring man was safe from violence and arrest at their hands, but they absolutely refused to take any friend or acquaintance into custody. The youthful ensign lost his temper and prodded an insubordinate corporal with his bright new sword, so they took his sword away from him and threw it into Pat Murphy's pigsty, thus reducing him to tears. One by one and two by two they were placed under arrest by their captain—theoretically at least—until only the three officers, two ser-

geants, and half a dozen trusty privates were left on duty.

Masters and mates of the ships in the bay caught the fever and came ashore in their best blue coats to uphold the honour of the service. They demanded representation on the bench of judges at the trial, all the credit for the capture of the pirates, and the immediate release of such of their men as had been arrested and confined by the constables and busy men of the militia. Of course the magistrates refused to consider their ridiculous demands. The excitement swelled. The prisoners were escorted to the little square courthouse by a strong guard of militiamen with fixed bayonets, the officers with their swords naked in their hands, the sheriff with a brace of pistols and a dozen trusty citizens armed with whips, sticks, swords, and fowling-pieces. They feared an attempt on the part of the sailors to cut out the prisoners and hang them from the yard-arms of the ships, and they were for resisting such an indignity to the law and the land with their very lives. But no attack was made on the escort. Within five minutes of the arrival of the prisoners the courthouse was jammed to the doors and walls by a sweltering and excited populace. Landsmen and mariners, woodsmen and townsmen crowded rib to rib, shoulder to shoulder, toe to heel. Those who could not enter crushed about the doors and

open windows, and struggled for the possession of points of vantage on sill and threshold. The fighting had ceased in street and pothouse. A quick-breathing, stuffy quiet descended upon the little town.

Major Darnell sat on the bench with four other magistrates. George Hill had a seat near the dock wherein the five prisoners stood with irons on their wrists and a bristling iron hedge of bayonets around them. Mr McDuff, the merchant from Newcastle, crowded him on one side and a stalwart farmer crushed him on the other. The farmer breathed heavily through his nose, and frequently wiped the blood from a split lip with the back of his hand. The merchant took snuff and offered the box to Hill.

The trial went along smoothly enough while the gentleman who prosecuted for the Crown called up witnesses to tell the story of the capture of the prisoners, and then more witnesses to identify two of the prisoners as members of the crew of the notorious Planter. This done, he questioned the prisoners as to the whereabouts of their captain, but not a word could he get out of them. They gazed at him sullenly, without moving a lip or flickering an eyelash.

A young lawyer who had been selected by the magistrates to defend the prisoners arose in his place and yawned. He was fully dressed for his

part. He regarded the five rogues in the dock for a moment with mild interest, then turned to the prosecutor and asked if the prisoners were being tried for their lives as suspected members of the crew of a certain notorious pirate, or for assault and battery and the attempted theft of the schooner, *Fire-fly*, two nights ago.

"Both," replied the prosecutor.

Then the senior magistrate on the bench spoke up for no better reason than that he had not heard his own voice since the commencement of the trial.

"It is immaterial which, as the rascals are bound to swing in either case," he said.

A gentleman from the woods who had absorbed much rum and lost no blood raised a cheer at that. He owed the senior magistrate five pounds. The prosecutor for the Crown coughed behind his hand. The eyes of the young lawyer who defended the prisoners shot fire.

"I take exception to your honour's remark!" cried the young lawyer indignantly. "Swing they may, and welcome, but I object to your honour's attitude, which is dead against the letter and traditions of the law and most unseemly—and an insult to the learned profession to which I have the honour to belong. An insult, sir. I take it as an insult."

"Take it as you see fit, sir," retorted the senior

magistrate, very red in the face. "I'm no lawyer, thank the Lord!"

A shout went up from the body of the court, but it was speedily silenced by the sheriff, a fierce and fearless old gentleman who had fought at Waterloo. The senior magistrate was calmed to silence by his companions on the bench. But the case for the prisoners looked hopeless. It seemed that hanging was to be their fate, whatever they were found guilty of.

"Mark the rogue with the wart on his nose," whispered McDuff to Hill. "Fear of death has him gripped by the vitals. D'ye see what he's up to? He'll try to save his dirty neck in a minute by turning traitor to his mates. He'll give evidence against them. Ye can see it in his flickering eye. It's as good as a play. Mark the jumping of the sweat on his yellow face and the twitching of his windpipe."

"You are a heartless old devil," returned Hill, in a voice of disgust. "If you had ever risked your own life, sir, you'd not be so highly amused by the shadow of the fear of death in another man's face."

The merchant chuckled and took more snuff. He prided himself on his heartlessness, mistaking it for courage and strength of character.

The air was stifling. One of the guards fell to the floor with a crash, musket and bayonet and all.

And then the thing which McDuff had foreseen happened. The prisoner with the wart on his nose leapt over the rail of the dock. As the militiamen collared him he cried a few words to the magistrates. He was dragged to the platform. The other prisoners tried to follow him, cursing furiously, but they were beaten back by the guards. The rails of the dock were splintered. A hum of excitement filled the reeking air, and the crowd swayed like a tide in a rocky cove. The pirate on the platform flourished his chained hands in the faces of the magistrates.

"If it be the Planter ye want, I'll tell ye where to find 'im!" he shouted. "Give me my parding an' I'll lay ye on his course. Knock off these here bangles, yer honours, an' ye've as good as got yer blessed fingers on 'im already. He bain't five mile from here——"

Above the noises of the crowd, which were like the noises of heavy seas beating and churning among rocks, the crack of the pistol at one of the open windows was heard by only a few. The pirate span on his heels, screaming, and fell with a thud at the feet of the magistrates. Within a second of the shot the smoking pistol hurtled through the air and fell upon the head of an unoffending trader. Shouts and curses arose within the court and without it. Chairs and benches were overturned. The four remaining prisoners

vanished from the wrecked dock into the heaving, twisting crowd. Alexander McDuff forgot his hard heart and clung to Hill for protection. A fowling-piece in the hands of a nervous citizen exploded and tore a hole through the ceiling, bringing down a shower of plaster. A pistol went off, and the ball shattered the glass of a window. Hysteria of fear seized upon the majority of the men in the court and they fought like beasts to escape by the doors and the windows.

"The pirates are upon us!" screamed someone.

This alarmist was no less a person than Mr McDuff; but only Hill was aware of that. Hill broke McDuff's hold, cursed him for a fool and a coward, and hurled him violently aside. Hill stood his ground. The magistrates stood theirs—but some of them wobbled at the knees and showed faces as bloodless as tallow. The panic-stricken crowd span and surged and fought around the room and slowly drained out by way of the doors and windows. The militia went with them, unofficially—and so did the four living prisoners. At last only a dozen people were left in the court, counting the dead pirate and three unconscious fellows who had lost their footing and been walked over. Mr McDuff got slowly to his feet, dusted his clothes with his hands, and took snuff. The magistrates sat in divers' attitudes of fury, bewilderment, and despair. The uproar of the

panic continued to fill the room, drifting in from the square.

When Major Darnell and Hill left the courthouse, quiet had descended upon the town. Shame had dispersed the foolish people. The townsmen had retired to their houses, the mariners to their ships, and the men from the woods and farms to any likely shelter that offered. McDuff overtook Hill and the major. All three crossed the river to Newcastle in the same boat.

"Come home with me, gentlemen," said McDuff, upon landing. "We'd all be better for a bottle of claret after witnessing that disgraceful scene."

"I'll not deny that," returned the major. "What with rage and disgust I'm as dry as a brick-kiln."

Hill halted and faced the merchant.

"I'm a poor dissembler, Mr McDuff," he said, "and before I accept your hospitality I must tell you what I think of you and so give you an opportunity to recall your very polite invitation."

The merchant chuckled.

"Let it go at that, my young friend," he said. "Wiser men than you have mistaken excitement for fear before now. Come, sir. My claret is as sound a wine as ye'll find in the province. Come—for I've taken a fancy to ye. I admire your courage."

"Come along, George," said the major. "Mr

McDuff is a very worthy man in his own way—which doesn't just happen to be yours or mine—and every word that he says about his claret is true."

So Hill went along with them; and he not only drank a pint of the merchant's claret but he met the merchant's daughter.

McDuff was a widower, and Flora was his only child. She kept his house for him, with the assistance of three Scotch servants. She had been in the province only two years, having been brought up and schooled in England until her sixteenth birthday. If she resembled her father in anything it was in length of limb. She was taller than most women, but as graceful as a nymph. Her plentiful hair was as warmly brown and bright as the shell of a seasoned hazel-nut. Her eyes were pale but shot deep with cross-lights of green and suggestions of smouldering fires. Her shapely brow and throat were white as milk. Her cheeks were delicately pink. Her nose was small but attractive. Her chin left nothing to be desired. Her lips were entirely satisfactory in shape as well as colour. In short, she was a dashed attractive young woman. The sight of her made George Hill think more kindly of her father; so much so, in fact, that after drinking his claret and before returning with the major to the farm, he drew one hundred pounds on the strength of his letter of credit.

Quiet still held the little towns on both sides of the river when Hill and the major left the merchant and his daughter and went to the inn for their horses. They rode down to the water-front and looked out at the anchored shipping.

"I wonder if those four unfortunate devils were recaptured," said Hill.

"I don't know and I don't care a ——!" replied Darnell. "I am sick of the whole mad business. I'm sick of the country. Savages!"

At that moment cheering broke out in the anchored fleet. It rolled heaviest and highest from a big, full-rigged ship lying in mid-stream. Up to the to'ga'ntsail-yard-arms of the ship's mainmast and foremast slid four swinging black shapes.

"There's your answer, my boy," said the major dryly.

"The devil!" exclaimed Hill. "The sailors have hanged them out of hand. Now there'll be more trouble."

"I doubt it," replied the major. "We've had our bellyful of trouble and trials—enough to last us for a year. I'm through with it, at any rate. I'm all for a quiet life on the farm."

CHAPTER VII

THE SECRET HUT IN THE WOODS

"THAT'S not the end of the pack of curs," said the major, as he and George Hill rode farmwards. "Some of them are still abroad—the fellow who shot that big, traitorous rogue through the window for one. That was a clever piece of work. I never saw anything more neatly done, rip me if I ever did!"

"Very neat," said Hill, without enthusiasm.

"The rascal had his mouth open, all ready to tell us the whereabouts of his captain and comrades, when *spat!*—the ball hit him in his traitorous heart. I take off my hat to that marksman. I rejoice in his escape, by the Lord Harry!"

"Very clever work," said Hill.

"But of course I'll hang him like a dog if ever I clap my eyes on him," said the major.

Hill took up his abode, for the time being, with his friend the major. Darnell advised him to go slowly in the matter of investing his money. He had sunk all his own capital in the country, and

with the smell of smoke in the air he was not altogether pleased with what he had done. Rain did not fall that day or the next. On the morning of the day after the hanging of the captured pirates by the men of the fleet, George Hill set out immediately after an early breakfast to investigate the forest behind the major's house for some sign of the fire other than the frail and elusive mist of smoke. He had not gone more than fifty yards into the cover of the woods before he was suddenly confronted by the girl who had rescued him from the bottom of the long-boat. He halted sharply, but for several seconds he stared stupidly, in silence, distrusting his eyes. The light beneath the high roof of the forest was green and brown and golden—and dim. It was an elfin light, ripe for the breeding of visions. So for a second or two the young sailor was of the opinion that the thing before him was a trick of the forest or of his own brain.

"Is it you?" he breathed at last, chancing the reality of the vision.

"Yes," she said. "I have been waiting for you. I have been as far as the edge of the wood, but feared to go nearer to the house than that."

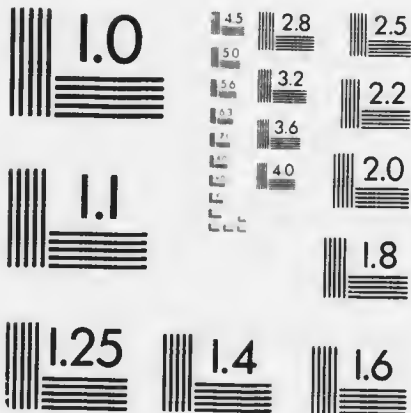
She spoke in timid, uneven tones.

"Why have you waited for me?" he asked in some confusion. "What do you want of me?"



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Undoubtedly she was a questionable character, hand and glove with the fellows who had set the whole country-side by the ears, but unquestionably she did not look it. And she had saved his life. And she had set him on a false course. These things were undoubtedly so, but of late he had dreamed of her, by day as well as by night.

"I want your help," she said unsteadily. "I am in danger."

She bowed her head and hid her eyes with her hands.

Hill's cheeks went red, then white. His heart thumped in his side and his voice caught in his throat. He was young, and still a sailor in spite of his excursions into the Early Fathers; and she was young and beautiful. He stepped forward.

"How can I help you? What can I do?" he asked.

"Give me food—and shelter—for a little while," she answered, still with her head bowed and her eyes hidden.

"Are you hungry?" he cried. "Come with me to my friend's house."

He felt a great pity for her, a hot anger against life. In the stress of these emotions he stepped close to her, took hold of her wrists, and withdrew her hands from her face. She raised her head bravely and looked at him. Her cheeks were

colourless. Her lips trembled. Tears glinted on her lashes and gleamed softly in her unfathomable, dark eyes. Her wrists trembled in his grasp.

"I dare not go there, or to any house," she said. "I trust no one—but you. And I am hungry—and without a roof—and in peril of my life."

All thought of her true character and her terrible associates fled from him. He could only realise the pity and youth and beauty of her. He released her wrists gently, with a great effort of will.

"Wait here," he said. "I shall soon be back with food and blankets."

He went swiftly back to the major's house and entered it without attracting attention. Darnell and his labourers were somewhere down by the river. The cook was in the summer-kitchen, which stood apart from the house. Hill went through several rooms, watching and listening with a casual air, before he began to collect provisions. He saw nothing of Edward Frisk, the major's body-servant, and supposed that he had been sent to town on some errand by his master. He found a store of blankets in a big press and took three of them. He took two bottles of wine and a lump of pickled pork from the cellar, bread and biscuits from the pantry, and an axe from the chopping-block beside the back door. He made a pack of these things and with them stole across the fields behind the

house and into the woods. He congratulated himself on the neatness and dispatch of the performance. He soon found the girl, and there and then he opened one of the bottles and the parcel of biscuits. She was hungry. He watched her eat and drink with a fluttering of his heart which he attributed to pity—to nothing but pity.

They went deeper into the woods, and in time selected the heart of a thick and tangled growth of spruces as a good hiding-place. Hill set to work with the axe and soon had enough poles cut and trimmed for the frame of a small lean-to camp. It was now close upon the noon hour, and he had to go. He promised to return before night to build the shelter, bringing more provisions with him, if he could possibly give his friend the slip.

Hill got back to the house in time for the mid-day meal. Edward Frisk waited on table. The major talked busily; but Hill spoke only a few words, and those wide of the mark.

"What is the matter with you, my boy?" asked the major. "What has happened to your tongue—and your appetite? You act as if you have something on your mind."

"I have a headache," said Hill.

"So have I," replied the major, brushing a hand across his forehead. "The air is so damn dry and smoky. A canter into town will do us both good. I want to see a man on business; and

then we might call and pay our respects to Miss Flora."

"I should like to," lied Hill, "but the fact is, sir, my game leg is bothering me—the old cutlass wound—and I strained it coming ashore from the wreck. The saddle galled it the other day."

The lid of Edward Frisk's left eye flickered at that moment; but neither of the gentlemen saw it.

So the major rode off alone, after charging Hill to keep his lame leg on a sofa until his return. He said that he would be home before sundown, unless McDuff invited him to supper. Hill entered the sitting-room and lay down on the sofa. He forced himself to remain in that position for fifteen minutes. Then he arose lightly, went noiselessly to the door and opened it. To his chagrin he found Frisk idling in the hall. Both young men looked confused at the encounter. The servant spoke first.

"What can I get for you, sir?" he asked.

"Arnica," said Hill. "If there isn't any in the house you must go to the village for it."

Frisk went up to the major's dressing-room and opened the medicine chest. He found a bottle of arnica, as he had expected to. He put it in his pocket and returned to Hill, who had returned to the sofa.

"There's no arnica in the major's chest, sir," he said.

Hill looked relieved. He fished ten shillings from his pocket.

"Get me some," he said. "A shilling's worth will be enough. Spend the rest of the money on yourself. If you meet your master, tell him I sent you. And as it is a very close day, take your time."

"And a horse, sir?"

"I don't feel that I have the authority to tell you to take a horse. You'd better walk."

Frisk left the house immediately. Hill got quickly to his feet and set about making up another pack for the nameless girl in the woods. He considered himself very cunning; but so did Edward Frisk consider himself very cunning. He stole more wine, more bread, and a smoked ham. He helped himself to another blanket in which to wrap the provisions. He crossed the fields behind the house and entered the woods. Then he ran, showing no signs of a game leg.

The girl confronted him before he was within fifty yards of that particular thicket in which the camp was to be built. She welcomed him with a fluttering gesture of the hands, a swift lifting and lowering of the eyes that set his blood aglow. He told her of his cleverness in getting rid of the attentions of the major's servant. They entered the thicket. He laid the fresh supply of provisions on the ground and went to work at putting up

the frame of the camp. Two growing trees served as uprights, the strongest of the trimmed poles as a cross-piece, and the other poles were used for the roof. She helped him set the poles in place. Suddenly he turned and faced her.

"Tell me who you are, and what you are doing here, before I go any farther with this," he said. "I have a right to know."

"I cannot tell you—now," she replied.

"In that case I—I must withdraw my protection," he said. His voice shook as he said it, and his glance wavered from hers. His threat did not carry conviction.

"You coward," she whispered. "I saved your life, and now you refuse me protection."

"Yes, you saved my life," he said bitterly. "You have reminded me of that fact before, once just before the five pirates were to be tried for their lives."

"And what of it?" she asked, her head high, her eyes flashing.

"What of it!" he cried. "Have you no conscience left? You were with one of that crew of murderers when I first saw you. His body was picked up by a fisherman, and identified by a sailor as that of one of the Planter's men."

"You are right. I was with him when you first saw me. You have not forgotten the other circumstances of our first meeting, I suppose."

Hill groaned in agony of spirit.

She placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Do you still think me what—what you once called me?" she asked.

"What else am I to think?" he returned wearily.

"Look up," she said. "Look me in the eyes."

He obeyed. His face was bloodless. Hers bloomed like a rose. Their glances held for several seconds. His wavered first.

"Do you still think that of me?" she asked.

"You twist me around your finger," he murmured, staring blindly down at the moss of the forest floor.

"Are you so weak—so weak that I can twist you around my finger, while you think that of me?" she whispered. "No, I cannot believe that of you. I know you are brave, I believe that you are just and merciful, and I still hope that you are not a fool. Look at me again and tell me. You are not a child. You have seen the world. Use your man's eyes."

He obeyed.

"But why do you refuse to explain?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Do you still believe that thing of me?" she asked gravely.

"No, by God!" he cried.

He lost control of himself then for a moment,

all his caution and reason scattered by the beauty and mystery of her, and would have grasped her in his arms if she had not repulsed him. She hid her face and wept. He returned to his work on the shelter, in a fever of emotional stress and mental confusion. By the time he remembered Frisk and the arnica the roof of the low shelter was thatched with spruce boughs. He mopped his face, donned his coat, and went to the girl. She had regained her composure fully. He promised to return on the morrow, raised her right hand to his lips, then shouldered the axe and hurried away. He was relieved to find that he had reached the house before Frisk. He washed all signs of toil and stress from his face and hands, and lay down on the sofa in the sitting-room.

Frisk soon appeared and produced the arnica from his pocket.

"Hope you haven't been sufferin' for it, sir," he said.

It was close upon midnight when the major got home. He had supped with the McDuffs. He was in high feather, thanks to Flora's eyes and the merchant's claret; but he had taken just enough of each to cause him to want more. Flora's eyes being out of his reach at the moment he went down to the cellar for a bottle of claret. He came up faster than he had gone down, shouting that

someone had stolen four bottles of his extra special port. Hill shivered in his chair. Why had his eager and foolish hands happened on the extra special stuff, he wondered. He said nothing.

The major dashed upstairs. He came down in fifteen minutes breathing heavily.

"The fellow denies it," he said, "but I've given him the bounce for all that. He's a liar as well as a thief, even if I can't prove it. I've never trusted him. He's got a shifty eye."

"I thought he looked honest," said Hill lamely.

He decided to do something for the dismissed servant. It would have to be done on the quiet, so as not to excite the major's suspicions, and very craftily so as not to excite Frisk's. He would think out a plan when he got to bed.

The two friends drank a bottle of claret and retired. Hill had been in his bed an hour, but had not fallen asleep or even extinguished his candle when the door of his room opened cautiously and Edward Frisk entered on tiptoes and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

Hill sat up in his bed.

"What the devil is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

The servant smiled, laid a finger on his lip, and approached the bed. He halted within a few feet of it.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," he whispered.
 "But maybe you was expectin' to see me?"

"Certainly not," returned Hill. "What do you want of me?"

"It's this way, sir," replied Frisk. "Major Darnell has fired me out of his service for stealin' wine. I'm leavin' before breakfast, you may be sure, or maybe the cook will be accusin' me of stealin' bread an' ham an' pork by that time. D'ye get me, sir?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, sir, it's this way. Maybe the major would forgive you for takin' the wine an' the victuals without askin', but he has a eye for a pretty woman as bright as your own, sir. He'd feel cut up, an' no mistake, if ever he come to hear about what you've got hid back there in the woods, sir."

"You impudent rascal! You dirty, crawling spy! How dare you speak so to me, and of that young lady?"

"Not so loud, sir, if you please, unless you want the major to join us."

"Damn your infernal impudence! Here, I'll give you five pounds, and if you ever breathe a word of this—a single word of it to a living soul, I'll—I'll be the death of you, if I swing for it!"

"Thank you, sir. There's a vessel sailing to-morrow for home an' I'm anxious to take passage

aboard her. Fifty pounds, sir, if you please. I can't manage with a shi'lin' less."

A chill went through the young man in bed. What did the fellow know that he thought was worth fifty pounds, he wondered.

"Fifty pounds!" he said, glaring at the smirking servant. "You are a fool! Why should I pay fifty pounds for your silence?"

"I'll make that clear to you, sir, with pleasure," replied Frisk. "Many's the time I've heard the master speak of you an' your affairs, of your pious mother an' your rich an' pious aunt who holds that a young gentleman hasn't any more right to carry on than a young lady. I figger it's worth fifty pound to you to have me out of the country, sir, for should the major hear what I could tell him he'd feel it his duty to write all about it to your aunt, sir."

Hill felt a great thrill of relief; but he did not show it.

"It's more than I can afford just now," he said sullenly.

"Tell that to the marines, sir," returned Frisk softly.

Hill got out of bed, unlocked a desk, produced and counted out the required sum of money, and handed it over.

"What is the name of your ship?" he asked.

"You wouldn't be rash enough to tell it to the

major, even if he was to ask you, sir, so I don't mind tellin' you," replied the servant, with a sly, self-satisfied smile. "*Star of Bristol* is the ship's name, sir, an' she sails before noon."

"Then you have been intending to sail for some time?"

"Yes, sir. I've been waitin' for a windfall."

"And when do you leave this house?"

"This very minute, sir, thank you. Good-bye, sir, an' good luck to you in all your little affairs, an' may your pious aunt never get wind of your goin' on."

Hill restrained himself with an effort. Frisk smirked and left the room. Hill remained where he was for an hour, then crept out of his room and downstairs. This was his last chance to rifle his host's larders for the girl, and place the discredit of the act upon the shoulders of the contemptible Frisk. He set about making the most of this opportunity with quite a light heart, amused by the smart Frisk's ridiculous mistake. He made a package of several pounds of cheese and a deep apple pie, and hid it in a haystack behind the barn. Then he returned to his bed and fell asleep. He dreamt that he married the bishop's daughter, heavy-heartedly, vaguely and bitterly conscious of a great mistake. Edward Frisk and the pirate who had been taken out of the sea by the fisherman were at the wedding. In the middle of the service

the dead pirate bet him fifty pounds that he would not kiss the bride then and there. He lifted the bride's veil and beheld the girl who had saved his life by shooting the pirate. The bishop's bellow of consternation woke him up.

Hill sat up in his bed, wide awake. The dream slipped out of his mind, and the happenings of the night and early morning flashed into it. It was now broad daylight. Again he heard the bellow that had awakened him, and now he recognised it as the voice of his host. The door of his room flew open and in dashed the major.

"The thief's gone!" roared the major. "And more than the wine has gone with him. A dozen spoons and five golden guineas! Have you missed anything? Did you leave that desk open, or has it been broken open?"

Hill got out of bed and examined the desk.

"It seems to be all right," he said.

"And your money? Count it over."

Hill made a show of counting.

"It is all right," he said, and closed and locked the desk.

Then the cook began, half-way up the back stairs. She wanted to know the whereabouts of a ham, an apple-pie, and half a dozen loaves of bread.

The major and Hill galloped into town without waiting for breakfast. They failed to either see or hear anything of Edward Frisk. Darnell gave

a minute and vivid description of the fellow to the town marshal, and offered a reward for his capture. As they turned their horses' heads homewards, Hill saw the royals and topsails being shaken out on a big ship in the stream. He heard the husky voices of the men walking up the anchor.

"What ship is that?" he asked of an idler in the street.

"*Star of Bristol*, sir," was the answer.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REVEREND JOHN FARLAND APPEARS ON THE SCENE

GEORGE HILL was romantic, as you may have guessed, and despite his pity and fear for the girl, thoughts of her sang in his heart as he and the major rode home to breakfast. Nothing sang in the major's heart, however. Though the sun shone bright and the sky was clear, a ghost of haze hung low around the horizon, and the warm air was tainted with the scent of invisible smoke. The major sniffed and swore. He cursed Edward Frisk; he cursed the country and predicted its swift and utter ruin.

Hill had difficulty in getting away from his host that day; but at last he gave him the slip for a few hours and took the pie and the cheese to the girl. Again he kissed her hand. He said nothing about Edward Frisk.

William Bolt appeared at the major's next morning, with the dogs at his heels and the pups in a basket on his arm. He told them that the forests

were in flames far back on both sides of the river, and that the flames were closing swiftly upon the settlements. He advised Hill and Darnell to join him in flight by water to some point on the coast beyond the zone of fire. He had a chartered schooner in the river, provisioned for man and beast. His live stock and his season's crop were all aboard, stuffed into the hold and heaped and penned on the deck, and still he had room for more, he said.

"You are right," said the major. "The entire dashed country will be burned to a cinder, as sure as the devil was its discoverer. But how can I go with you, man? See what I have here, and every blessed shilling of my fortune sunk in it! Can I sail away with my fine new house and beautiful new stables, my ditched meadows and tile-drained fields, my frost-proof cellars and vermin-proof granary? No! There is a chance that we'll have rain before the fire strikes us. I must take that chance. And we have a fighting chance of beating off the fire even if it does get to us. I must stay and fight."

Hill expressed his determination to remain and assist the major in the fight.

William Bolt seemed to be in no haste to return to his chartered schooner. He and Darnell were on very friendly terms. Claret was brought up from the cellar. Hill excused himself after the

first bottle of claret (which had been opened immediately after breakfast), saying that he had some business to attend to in town. In town he bought about fifty pounds weight of mixed provisions. He started homewards with the pack on the front of his saddle, but before coming in sight of the house he deposited the pack in a clump of bushes at the edge of a field. He stabled the horse and immediately returned on foot for the provisions.

William Bolt saw Hill ride to the stables, then hurry away again on foot. The claret had put the major to sleep, but it had acted on William as a stimulant to the imagination.

"The cap'n be up to somethin'," he muttered, leaning forward and gazing intently out of the window. "It be more'n business, I'll swear, that makes 'im step out so brisk on a stuffy day like this here."

At that moment a vivid memory of the beautiful young woman who had visited him at Spicer's Tavern popped into his heated brain.

"That will be it!" he exclaimed. "He's got that there bishop's daughter hid away somewheres. Maybe he's made a prisoner of her, so's she won't marry him. Somethin's afoot, anyhow."

He left the house without disturbing his host's slumber, and followed Hill at a discreet distance. He followed to within eye-shot of the thicket in which the provisions were hidden, and from there

across fields and pastures and into the forest. His imagination, naturally free-footed and now spurred by the claret, ran far ahead of him and even of Hill. He pictured the lady in irons in the heart of the forest, or perhaps she was bound to a tree with ropes. He would rescue her from his young, heartless friend; or he would even go so far as to force Hill to marry her, if such should still be her wish. He was thinking vividly, but not reasonably, as you may have noticed. He was not quite himself, and that's a fact. A sheet in the wind.

Hill approached the secret hut without announcing himself. He came suddenly to the edge of the tiny clearing in the heart of the dense grove. His pack fell from his shoulder, and he uttered a gasp of astonishment, for there stood the girl elbow to elbow with a large, strange man clad in parsonical attire.

The girl's face went white as paper at sight of Hill, but her companion showed not so much as a flicker of surprise or confusion. He smiled and bowed at the gaping Hill and doffed his hat. He stepped forward with his right hand extended.

"I cannot be mistaken," he said, in a pulpity voice. "You are the charitable and honourable young gentleman to whom I owe so much. Let me press your hand, sir, and thank you from the bottom of my heart."

He pressed Hill's hand. Hill was too far gone with astonishment to return the pressure.

"From the bottom of a loving father's heart," added the stranger.

Hill felt the world of realities slipping backward from beneath him. What the devil did this mean? She, the associate of pirates, the daughter of this dignified and reverend gentleman in gaiters and a shovel hat! Had he dreamt all the rest—or was he dreaming now? He looked at the girl. She smiled pathetically and approached him. Blood tinged her cheeks again.

"This is my father," she said, in a very small voice. "He arrived only a few minutes ago. I have been waiting for him ever since I came here."

"My name is Farland," said the cleric. "The Reverend John Farland, Master of Arts, at your service, sir."

"Then what were you doing with the pirates?" asked Hill, still staring dazedly at the girl.

Mr Farland replied for her. He placed a large, graceful hand on the young man's shoulder.

"That is an amazing story, sir, and a long one," he said, "and it may not be told just now. Yes, and a terrifying story! You shall know all in time, my dear sir. Now it is enough for you to know that you saved her from those bloody-minded fellows—from all harm. How can I thank you,

sir? How can I ever repay you? Let me embrace you."

Hill was far too blankly amazed, too deeply bewildered, to resist or return Mr Farland's fatherly embrace. Doubts and questions whirled through his brain, and atop this racing stream swam a new puzzle. When and where had he met this large and godly man before? Vaguely, yet how insistently, familiar was that big, dark, bland face.

"Poor dear Mary," said Mr Farland, shaking his head heavily. "I should not have left her behind me. I should not have left her alone even for a day in that wild and desolate place. I should have taken her with me to my northern mission-field. But God has been good to me. How merciful are His ways, how wonderful is His mercy."

The girl trembled slightly; but Hill did not see it, for he was gazing at her father with perplexity and something like admiration in his eyes.

"I—I am glad that I was able to be of some slight service to her," he said, breathlessly and shyly.

"Slight!" exclaimed Farland, his large face suddenly brightening, then softening swiftly as though he were on the verge of tears. "Oh, my dear lad!" He clasped Hill's hands. "I cannot lose you now. We cannot lose you, my dear boy. Come with us, George—back to my northern mission—out of this doomed, lawless land."

"You are very kind, sir," returned the young man, in uncertain tones. "I cannot go with you now. I must stick to my friend, Major Darnell, until this menace of fire is passed. After that, sir—if I may visit you—and your daughter—in your northern home. You puzzle me, sir. I have seen you before, somewhere—I'll swear to it—or someone greatly resembling you."

The expression of Mr Farland's eyes seemed to alter for a fraction of a second. The thing was too swift and slight for the puzzled young man to detect.

"But I insist," said the parson, smiling tenderly. "You have done me a great service, my dear boy, and I feel that in taking you with us out of this threatened country I shall be doing something toward repaying you. Come, lad."

"No!" cried the girl, high and shrill.

The parson stepped back a pace, still smiling blandly, and slipped his right hand beneath the tails of his clerical coat. His daughter was upon him quick as a flash and had that hidden hand gripped tight. Hill stood and stared, his wits scattered afresh by this new wonder. Even while he stared and the parson struggled to get his right hand out of the girl's grasp, William Bolt stepped out from behind a screen of foliage.

Mr Farland's eyes hardened and narrowed at sight of the ancient woodsman. Even his smile,

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which he had maintained while struggling with his daughter, slipped from his face. Her face did not change colour, for it was already deathly pale, but her eyes turned to Hill in horrified inquiry. Hill expressed his astonishment and displeasure at the sight of Bolt with a round sea oath. But William was in no way disconcerted by the manner of his reception. He doffed his fur cap and bowed, first to the girl and then to the parson.

"Nay, nay, yer lordship," he said, smiling broadly. "This be a free country, yer lordship, an' if the cap'n be such a danged young fool as not to want to marry yer beautiful daughter, then ye can't force 'im to it."

Mr Farland's eyes opened a little wider and the tightened lines about his jaws relaxed. His right hand having been released, he withdrew it from behind his back and placed it tenderly on his daughter's shoulder. A swift glance at Hill told him that this intrusion was not of the young man's planning. He turned and smiled upon William Bolt.

"Perfectly true, my good sir," he said. "This is a free country, as you very justly remark. You seem to know me, sir. May I ask how you happen to know me?"

"By the company I find ye in, yer lordship—an' yer gaiters," replied William. "Tho' this be

the first time I've had the pleasure o' clappin' eyes on yer nibship I've met yer daughter afore. She was after the cap'n that time, too. I'd heared all about her from the cap'n there—all about the beautiful daughter o' the bishop—but I wasn't expectin' to see her on this side o' the ocean—an' much less was I expectin' to see yer lordship hisself. She be a lively creature, sir, if ye'll excuse me for sayin' so. If I was in the cap'n's shoes, yer lordship, I'd jine up with her quicker'n I shoot a Frenchman. An' now, sir, I'll venture to offer ye the hospitality o' my friend, Major Darnell."

"You are drunk, my man," said Hill.

"Drunk be damned!" retorted the old woodsman. "The liquor has never yet been brewed nor distilled that could jounce *my* wits."

Mr Farland exchanged a few whispered words with his daughter. Then he turned again to Hill and William Bolt.

"Gentlemen, my daughter wishes you both to leave us now," he said. "Return to the worthy major's, if you please. We shall follow you in the course of an hour."

He shook hands heartily with both of them. Hill glanced inquiringly at the girl. She nodded her head.

"By the way, don't mention us to my dear friend Darnell," added the parson. "We were

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like brothers when we were young men. I haven't seen him for years and want to take him by surprise."

Hill and Bolt took their leave then, the former puzzled and uneasy, the latter delighted with himself and the world. On the way home Bolt chaffed his companion on his secrecy, on his sly way of hiding his great and beautiful friends in the woods, on his unreasonable disinclination to marry the girl. Hill was in a bad humour. He neither denied nor confirmed the old man's statements. He paid no attention whatever to the clarety babbling, but walked heavily and silently with his own thoughts. The fact is that, being a young man of no less than average intelligence, he experienced considerable difficulty in fitting the Reverend John Farland into the mysterious and mad scheme of things at his face value.

They found the major with a headache, which he credited to the hot and smoky condition of the atmosphere. Three hours passed, and still the parson and the girl failed to put in an appearance. This fact increased Hill's anxiety concerning the girl and his suspicions of the parson. He took William Bolt aside and charged him not to mention Mr Farland and the young lady to the major or to anyone else.

"Mr Farland? D'ye mean his lordship the bishop?" queried Bolt.

"Have it your own way. Don't mention either of them to anyone, that's all I ask of you."

"Why not, mate? If a man bain't to mention a bishop, what the devil be he to mention?"

"Do you want to cause that young lady to suffer?"

"Not for a thousand pound! Not for the king's golden crown!"

"Then I'll tell you, William, that we've got to keep our mouths shut concerning those two. They are in hiding. What else? Do you look to find a bishop and his daughter in the woods every day? The Church and the Crown are both after him."

"Ye don't say! Blister me figgerhead! What for?"

Hill thought hard. He was not used to this sort of thing.

"He murdered a man—one of his own minor canons," he said.

William Bolt accepted it and was greatly shocked.

"A murderer!" he exclaimed. "And him a bishop! Be that the reason ye didn't want to go along with the two o' them, cap'n? Be that the reason ye don't want to marry the girl?"

Hill hung his head in silence, knowing himself to be an inexpert liar.

"Then I tell ye, Cap'n Hill, ye bain't the man

"I took ye for," said Bolt, in tones of disgust. "Ye bain't the man yer father was afore ye."

Hill continued to hang his head in silence. It hurt him to have William Bolt think so poorly of him, but he could see no help for it.

Bolt left the major's house that evening and sailed away in his schooner. Hill returned to the hut in the woods, only to find it deserted. He felt grief then as he had never felt it before. He cursed himself for a fool. Why had he not gone with those two and left the pig-headed major to shift for himself? He owed the major nothing and he owed his life to that girl. And which of the two—Darnell or the young woman—stood the more in need of his help and protection? The girl, of a certainty. And yet she had cried out against his going with them. Why was that? Was she playing with him? Had she simply used him in her need and then cast him aside? Was the man really her father—and a parson? If not, who was he—and what? Then jealousy took his bewildered heart in its torturing hands and wrung it to an agony past belief. He lay down on the forest floor and cursed the day of his birth.

The smoke grew dense that night. The major was in a desperate mood at thought of the menace to his property. Hill also felt desperate, though just then he did not care a snap of his fingers for

the smoke. The major's throat was as dry as the forest. He brought up claret—bottles of it. Hill made no protest. He sat up to the desperate major, glass for glass; and, according to the ideas of those days, he manfully upheld the honour of the Navy against that of the Army.

The next morning—the morning of the sixth of October—broke hot and close. There was no wind, and yet, far away, there was a faint sound as of wind. Smoke hung in the forest and over the clearings and like a fog upon the breast of the river. Major Darnell galloped madly into town and madly out again. Hill didn't care. He didn't give a rap for his friend's jangling nerves and jumping temper. As for the smoke—let it smoke! He sat at home, with his head between his hands, asking himself terrible, fruitless questions over and over.

Before noon a little wind came in from the sea and cleared the smoke away. The major immediately felt a turn for the better.

"Now for a dash of rain, and we'll pull through," he said.

As the day advanced the faint sounds in the surrounding forests became stronger. By sunset rumblings and cracklings were heard, vague but vast. No rain fell. The wind from the sea died away.

The morning found the world covered with a pale mist lightly tinged with purple. This mist

gradually darkened and thickened, though there was no wind. Again the major galloped into town, leaving Hill idle and indifferent at home. The air was dry and hot as the breath of a furnace. It seemed to sap the vitality of wit and will. The major found the people of Newcastle to be as fretful as himself and a great deal duller. They seemed to be ridden by an irresistible lassitude. A few women became hysterical as the gloom deepened and the heat gained in intensity.

The major rode wildly home on his sweating horse for lack of anything better to do. By that time the woods seemed to be alive with sound and movement, though as yet no glare or flash of fire showed through the murky pall. The air was full of a thrilling and incessant rustling. Explosive reports rang out from the veiled forest far and near.

The major found Hill and two of his labourers letting loose all the live stock—the horses, the horned cattle, the calves and pigs and poultry. That sight, atop of the smoke and general cussedness of things, gave him a touch of hysteria. He screamed and swore. He ordered the men to catch every freed animal and return it to its place. The labourers went stolidly on with their task of liberation. Hill wiped the sweat from his face, then firmly but gently dragged the cursing old soldier out of his saddle.

"What is the matter with you?" he cried. "Can't you see that the place is doomed—this place and the whole country? Do you want the dumb beasts to be roasted in their stalls? We've given them a chance for their lives."

Reason returned to the major. He realised that nothing could now save his property; and though he saw the virtue in what Hill and the men had done he continued to cling to the head of his own horse.

"We are surrounded," said Hill coolly. "The river is our only chance. You have canoes. We must escape in one."

"What's this," whispered the major, staring at the back of his left hand. "Ashes, by the Lord!"

The horse tossed its head quickly and violently, breaking the major's hold. It went up in the air, turned like a flash on its hind legs, and dashed out of the yard and away.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLIGHT BY WATER

DARNELL and Hill ran to the doomed house, pocketed their money and filled a stout sack and two pairs of saddle-bags with valuable papers, food, and a few pieces of jewellery all stowed away in disorder. The major was for trying to take his heavy chest of silver table-ware away with them, but Hill would not hear of it, so they buried the silver in a corner of the cellar. As they left the house by a side door they saw innumerable pillars of black smoke horribly illuminated by flames ascending straight from the veiled forest on every hand. Ashes, cinders, and calcined leaves fell in showers. The major sank to the stone step and covered his face with his hands.

"Ruined," he moaned. "Why should I go?"

A few red brands fell about them. A haystack burst into red and yellow flames. Hill seized Darnell by a shoulder and pulled him violently to his feet.

"Brace up!" he cried. "You are not the only

sufferer. The whole settlement will be in flames soon. Come along."

He ran, and for fifty yards or so he dragged his friend with him. The major shook out his own legs at last. They crossed fences, ditches, and meadows, and soon reached the grove beside the river where the canoes were kept. The canoes were gone.

"The miserable rascals!" cried the major. "The ingrates! They've saved their own skins without a thought for their master."

"We're old enough to take care of ourselves," said Hill. "You must have another canoe somewhere, or a boat of some kind."

"In the red barn!" exclaimed the other. "It has been there all summer. It must leak like a basket."

Hill waited to hear no more, but let his freight of saddle-bags and sack thud to the ground and started back towards the farmstead at top speed. The major followed. One corner of the red barn was in flames when they reached it. The interior was choking with the smoke of smouldering green hay. Hill soon stumbled upon the canoe, lifted it, and carried it out.

"Resin!" he gasped.

"I'll fetch it from the kitchen," replied the major. "Make for the river. I'll overtake you."

Hill hoisted the canoe to his shoulders and

staggered off. He was strong enough, but not trained to the task. Darnell overtook him at the second fence. Darnell had a pair of paddles on his shoulder, and a little pot of mixed lard and resin in his hand. They rushed the canoe to the river in short order, threw the dunnage aboard, and launched upon the foggy stream. The darkness of smoke about them was shaken by terrific explosions and pierced by flames. Burning twigs and branches fell hissing into the water all around them.

The seams of the canoe were dry. She leaked like a basket, even as the major had predicted. They were forced to put ashore before they had gone more than three hundred yards. Darnell made a small fire of drift wood and set the resin to melt, while Hill unloaded the canoe and turned it over. They daubed the defective seams generously with the mixture of gum and fat. While thus employed they were startled by hysterical screams and cries for help from the top of the bank. They heard the scrambling and sliding of feet. Into their restricted circle of semi-illumination came two dishevelled figures.

"Fifty guineas to ye for the canoe!" cried one.

"McDuff!" exclaimed the major.

The merchant embraced the soldier. Flora wilted upon Hill's breast, slid her arms around his neck, wept on his shoulder, and upset the pot of

resin. Darnell freed himself from McDuff violently, rescued the precious resin, and then snatched Miss Flora from the sailor's arms into his own. Hill let her go without protest and returned to his work on the canoe.

"Why didn't you get away on one of your own vessels?" asked Hill of the merchant.

"Too late! Too late!" cried McDuff. "My trust in God was too great, an' when I saw that He had turned a deaf ear to my prayers and that the fire was in the town, both my ships had sailed away—one of them afire, and there was no help for me anywhere."

He stumbled around the canoe with the intention of embracing Hill, but Hill received him with a dab of hot resin on the wrist.

The canoe was launched again. All four got aboard, together with the original dunnage and the merchant's cash-box. Hill and the major paddled cautiously. The hidden surface of the wide river seemed to be alive with sound and movement. Human and bestial cries rang out on every side, pitiful and daunting. Splashing of floundering bodies of men and beasts sounded from the shallows; shouts and the splashing of paddles and oars sounded from deep water. Through and over all burst the reports of the exploding forest and ran the crackling thunder of the devouring flames. The great valley was filled with smoke to the very

dome of heaven. The choking gloom was lit fitfully by running walls and leaping pillars of fire.

Suddenly lightning rent the hidden sky and flickered through the shrouding smoke. Thunder burst and rolled over the stricken valley with sounds as of falling worlds. Then the wind struck, spreading the flames across meadows and wide clearings like a red tide. The river foamed. The little towns on both sides of the river burst into sheets of fire.

The major's canoe was overturned by the first stroke of the hurricane. It was close to the shore at the time, in only four or five feet of water. Hill grasped Flora McDuff with one arm and the wallowing canoe with the other, and clung to each like grim death. Darnell and the merchant clung to the canoe. Thus they were flung ashore, canoe and all, by the tortured waters. Hill maintained his grip on the prostrate Flora with one hand and on a gunnel of the stranded canoe with the other. Thus the four lay sprawled in the mud and water-grasses, washed and half smothered by the boiling spray, until the first fury of the wind was spent.

Again they launched the canoe and embarked. They had lost everything but the dripping clothes on their backs and the contents of their pockets. The river continued to thresh from the onslaught of the wind. The canoe wallowed and pitched.

McDuff sat limp and motionless, so stupefied with terror as not to realise the loss of his cash-box. The glare of the burning towns pierced the smoke and stained the tossing waters. The explosions of stores in the towns outcrashed the farther explosions of the forests. Drifting ships burned like giant lanterns. Animals from the farms and the forests swam near the canoe.

The canoe won safely beyond the blazing towns. Other fugitives from the fire were adrift on every hand, some in boats, some in canoes, some on scows and rafts. Only a few of them were marked by the dim blink of lanterns. Voices of anger, horror, and despair rang through the night.

A small raft of logs carrying no light struck against the canoe in the darkness and overturned it. Hill laid hold of Flora while they were under water. He brought her to the surface and fumbled against the raft. They clung to it and cried out together to be assisted aboard. The girl was dragged out of the water and Hill was dealt a glancing blow on the head with the heel of a booted foot. His finger-hold on the edge of the raft was broken and he was thrust far beneath the surface. He came up swiftly, slightly dazed but fighting mad, and struck out in search of the raft. He swam in the wrong direction, however, and soon blundered against the smooth side of a canoe. He grasped the gunnel with one hand,

only to be promptly beaten off with bleeding knuckles. He swam with an ear to the water, hearkening. Suddenly, close at hand, he heard the spat of a boat's cutwater footing the little waves. She was sailing, yet showed no light. More by good luck than good management he obtained a hold with his right hand on the gunnel of the unseen boat, amidships.

Hill let the boat drag him alongside for half a minute. Then, slowly and cautiously, he made fast with both hands and pulled himself up and inboard. He crawled under the boom and lay still just forward of the little mast. This craft was certainly not overcrowded. He could neither see nor hear anything to indicate life aboard her save the steadiness with which she sailed her course. There was a man at the helm, beyond a doubt. Hill did not announce himself. He had no wish to find himself again plunged into the water. He felt tired and disheartened, and his head ached.

The sail jibed. Hill ducked just in time to escape a blow on the head from the boom. He crouched lower and fell asleep. A sharp pitching of the boat awakened him. Dawn was breaking—a ribbon of water-grey light along a horizon of shaking seas. The pale light spread slowly upon the waves. He saw a figure in a cloak crouched in the bows of the boat, almost within reach of his hand. He looked aft and saw a bulky

figure in the stern-sheets. The light from the east continued to spread and strengthen. Hill recognised the big man at the tiller as John Farland. Farland raised his head at the same moment and saw that the huddled shape beside the mast was not his daughter.

Mr Farland sprang to his feet with a gesture at once threatening and apprehensive, stood so for several seconds without speaking, then subsided into his place. Black suspicions filled Hill's mind, but he hid them as well as the swift contraction of fear at his heart.

"I have accepted your invitation after all," he said.

He got to his feet and stood with one hand on the slender mast, in a position which enabled him to keep an eye on each end of the boat. He saw the girl turn and regard him in amazement and consternation. She did not speak. Farland seemed to be equally devoid of anything to say. Hill explained his presence briefly. Fear took the place of amazement in the girl's face; but the man smiled blandly.

"The Almighty guided you to us through the dangers of the night," he said unctuously. "He has answered my prayers."

Hill frowned, sorely perplexed.

"I am here, certainly, and I am glad you like it," he said.

He glanced at the girl and was puzzled for an interpretation of the look in her eyes. It was quite evident to him that she did not share the man's pleasure at the reunion. He saw fear in her eyes, and horror in every line of her beautiful, despairing face. He knew that her fear was not of him; he suspected that it was for him. He decided to hide that suspicion and others, to dissemble, to play a game.

"You are right, sir," he said. "The hand of God was in it, as you say."

They breakfasted on biscuits and a bottle of the major's port. Hill and the girl sat elbow to elbow just aft of the mast, and Farland remained at the tiller. The first sip of the wine brought Darnell to the young man's mind. He wondered if his friend had been rescued from the water. He felt anxiety, but no prick of conscience, for he had done his duty in rescuing Flora McDuff. He knew that the major was a strong swimmer.

"What put the idea that I was a bishop into the head of that long-whiskered friend of yours?" asked Farland.

Hill laughed and told the story of his early love-affair as he had told it to Bolt.

"And the foolish fellow got it all mixed up. He evidently thinks that I jilted the young lady, and that she and her right reverend father have followed me across the ocean," he concluded.

" You served your country in the Navy? " queried Farland.

Hill nodded.

" And you studied with a view to entering the Church? "

" Yes. I—I was a fool."

" It is a poor profession for a man with worldly ambitions," said Farland. " I ask nothing better for myself. My heart and soul are in the work. I care nothing for worldly wealth, worldly fame. When and where did you first meet Mary? "

He asked the question without the slightest change of tone. Hill stared at him. Farland returned the stare with a kindly, unwavering gaze of mild curiosity. Hill felt the girl at his elbow tremble. He did not look at her.

" At the edge of the forest, sir, a few days ago," he lied easily.

The sun slid up out of the sea. Astern, to the south and west, the sky was black with smoke. The three voyagers continued to sail northward along the coast until close upon noon, Farland and Hill chatting all the while in the most amiable tones. The girl added nothing to the conversation. At last Farland ran the boat into a little cove that was walled with tumbled boulders and edged with sand. The three disembarked and made the boat fast.

" You once mentioned the fact that I reminded

you of someone you had met before," said Farland suddenly. "Have you placed the resemblance yet?"

"I have," replied Hill, laughing, "and in the light of William Bolt's mistake it is rather amusing."

"How so, my dear boy?"

"The person you reminded me of at the first glance is no one less than the Right Reverend Peter Whopple, Bishop of Oxford, the father of the young woman who made such a mess of my career."

Farland eyed him keenly for a second, then laughed heartily.

"You must try to forget that unfortunate incident," he said.

"I remember it as a joke," replied Hill.

Farland said that they would go into camp for a few days, as he had engaged to meet a party of his northern parishioners here or hereabout. Hill asked no questions, but he felt uneasy. He wondered if he had overshot the mark when he had told the fellow that he resembled the Bishop of Oxford. That had been a lie, of course, for he had not yet placed that resemblance. He felt that he might have lied more cleverly.

They built two rough shelters in the woods above the cove. Hill was not astonished to find that the boat's stores consisted entirely of the pro-

visions which he himself had supplied to the girl, but his scepticism concerning Farland's right to gaiters and a shovel hat was considerably strengthened by the discovery.

The smoke continued to hang in the south-west all day. Farland kept a sharp lookout in every direction. His nervousness and apprehension did not escape Hill's notice, in spite of his efforts to hide them.

Shortly before sunset Hill found an opportunity to speak to the girl alone. Farland had strolled northward along the coast for a short distance. Hill took one of her hands between both of his.

"Is he your father?" he asked. "Be merciful. Tell me the truth."

She averted her face but did not withdraw her hand.

"Yes," she whispered, "he is my father."

"And what is he?"

Her hand twitched between his fingers, but she did not speak.

"Is he what he claims to be—a parson?"

She turned to him swiftly, and their eyes met for a second. She sighed and bowed her head. She stood very close to him. Still clasping her hand with one hand he drew her head to his shoulder with the other.

"The others?" he asked unsteadily. "How

came you to be with that fellow who tried to kill me that morning I came ashore?"

She clung to him and wept with her face against his shoulder.

"Those others—I hate them," she sobbed. "I was not in their power—never—never for a second! He—he is mad—my father. But do not question me more now. Be merciful as you are strong. Don't you trust me?"

"I love you!" he cried, crushing her to his breast. "I love you! And I am being tortured to madness by this mystery."

Neither of them saw or heard the ragged fellow in the underbrush behind Hill, crouching there with a cudgel in his hand and suspicion and hate in his eyes. Neither of them saw that Farland had turned and was approaching them.

"Tell me, for God's sake!" he besought her. "What claim upon you had those men of blood? Can't you realise my torture? Give me peace with a word."

The fellow in the underbrush stood up lightly and struck heavily. Hill moaned, sank to his knees, then fell prone and lay motionless. The ragged fellow stepped forward and raised his cudgel again, but the girl screamed and sprang upon him before he could strike a second time. Farland came running and found the girl and the ragged man struggling together above Hill's

motionless body. He plucked a pistol from the tail-pocket of his coat, set the muzzle of it against the ribs of the wrestling man, and pulled the trigger. The weapon missed fire. The fellow turned his face, wrenched himself violently away from the girl, and struck the pistol from Farland's hand.

"What be ye about?" he cried, drawing a knife.

Farland closed with him without an instant's hesitation, lifted him high, and hurled him to the ground with terrific force. The knife flew abroad, and the ragged man lay where he struck with both wind and sense knocked out of him. Farland glared down at him for a moment, breathing thickly.

"The dog!" he exclaimed. "Didn't I tell them all it was death to lay a finger on you!"

He swayed, then sat down heavily.

"He stuck me once," he said, "behind the shoulder—deep by the feel of it and the jump of the blood on my back."

He sank back and rolled over on his face.

A minute before the girl had been weeping against her lover's shoulder, and now three men lay unconscious at her feet. She ignored the fellow whom her father had disabled, caring nothing if he were alive or dead. She turned tragic eyes from her lover to her father and back

again. With a moaning cry she sank to her knees beside Farland, drew a knife from the breast of her gown, and cut away the blood-sodden and red linen from his back. The small, deep puncture was bleeding freely. She ran to a nearby spring for water, bathed the wound, and bound it with linen from her petticoat. She turned him over, fetched a bottle and forced a little wine between his lips. He opened his eyes, only to close them immediately.

The girl then turned to Hill. He lay on his side, with one arm over his face and one leg drawn up. He did not seem to breathe, but she felt for the beat of his heart and found it. Fearfully she put her hand to the back of his head and brought it away wet with blood. Her heart contracted, her eyes dimmed, and for a moment she swayed on her knees, but she fought off the weakness. While she was bandaging his unconscious head she heard slight sounds close behind her. She turned and saw Farland on his knees with the pistol which had missed fire in his hands. He swayed weakly, but with fumbling fingers he placed a new cap on the nipple. She saw the ragged one crawling painfully toward the underbrush.

CHAPTER X

LOVE FOUND AND LOST

FARLAND levelled the pistol and fired. The ball crushed into the back of the ragged one's skull.

"I warned him," said Farland in a weak voice. "Did the poor fool think I had lost my sting?" Then he lay down and closed his eyes.

Mary completed her task of bandaging Hill's head. He moved a hand and spoke.

"It was well begun," he said bitterly; "but why leave it unfinished?"

"You are safe," she whispered, kneeling low with her face close to his. "Have no fear. Drink a little of this."

He swallowed a little of the wine, then pushed the bottle from him. He raised his bandaged head slightly from the moss. She put an arm behind him and helped him sit up. He saw Farland lying prone and the other figure sprawled a few yards away.

"Who is it—over there?" he asked.

"The man who struck you," she answered.
"He is dead."

"But your father?" he queried. "Why does he lie there? And what of that other? Are they both dead? Did you save me from both of them?"

"My father is alive, though wounded," she said.
"He killed the other."

She laid Hill tenderly back and left him to struggle dizzily with this new puzzle. Twilight had deepened to dusk. The first white stars glinted for a little while, only to be veiled by a thin mist. The air grew cool, cooler than it had been for weeks. The girl made a fire, put coffee to boil in a blackened kettle and ham to fry on a flat stone. Then she helped Hill to his feet and supported his dragging steps to one of the shelters. There she made a bed for him of dry moss and spruce boughs. She went to her father then, and would have led him to the other shelter, but he protested in a hoarse whisper. He wanted to occupy the same hut as Hill. Mary refused to consider it.

"You are a fool!" whispered Farland.
"Would I harm that young man, do you think? my last chance for a safe and peaceful old age! I see now that I have nothing to fear from him. I have read his heart and his character like a book. He would not do me an injury if I were the devil

and all the other fallen angels rolled into one. Lay me beside him."

"No," she said.

"Would I have taken this stab in the back if I had intended treachery to Hill?" he asked with a sneer.

"You have changed your mind then?"

"With a vengeance. He is harmless. I see our salvation in him."

"Will you swear to me that he is safe from your hand?"

"I swear it—by the memories of my mother and yours."

So the two wounded men lay side by side in the one shelter. Hill slept soundly through the night, and was on his feet in the morning; but Farland passed a wakeful and feverish night. The wind continued to blow from the east, and rain began to fall before noon. The dry earth drank thirstily. The rain continued to pour down throughout the day. The drenched air smelt sweet and clean.

Mary spent most of the day in attendance upon her father. Hill pottered about in the open, wet and cool to the skin. The dizziness went from his head, and though the back of his skull was very painful, and the scalp gashed and swollen, he felt no anxiety about it. Better still, his heart was lighter. He felt no doubt of Mary now; and though still sorely perplexed by her father, he felt some-

thing of kindness towards him. Farland had taken a serious wound in his defence. Therefore Farland, whoever and whatever he was, intended no treachery. It was the reasoning of a generous nature.

Hill examined the corpse. It was of a small, thin man in ragged clothing, swarthy of skin, black bearded and ringleted, with pictures of ships, anchors, and mermaids tattooed in blue and red on his forearms. The feet were bare and calloused. The eyes were wide open, black and dully glazed. The entire top of the skull had been shattered, and the forehead blown away, by the ball from Farland's pistol.

"A sailor—and doubtless one of those bloody pirates," reflected Hill.

He did not care. He was becoming hardened to horrors and careless of appearances. What mattered one nameless sailorman more or less, or one dead pirate more or less, in this country of mysteries, death, and amazements. He took the corpse by the heels and dragged it into the underbrush, intending to bury it as soon as he felt strong enough to dig a grave. He then went to work cutting branches from the surrounding spruces and firs with the very knife which the dead man had sunk in Farland's back. It was a fine knife, keen and heavy and long in the blade. As he plied it in his peaceful task his thoughts went back to an-

other knife—to the knife from which Mary had saved his life with a pistol-shot.

He gathered up the boughs he had cut, and with them thickened the thatch on the roofs of the two huts. He collected dry wood and stored it under cover. He let the fire go out, for he was not woodsman enough to keep it burning in the rain.

Hill and the girl ate cold meals that day. Farland ate nothing but drank a little broth and a great deal of cold water. The rain ceased soon after sunset, and Hill made a roaring fire and dried his clothing. After that he sat for several hours with Mary and her father. He told the girl that he had dragged the body of the stranger into the brush and would put it under ground in the morning. She nodded her head in silence. The wavering light of the fire washed into the shelter. He asked no questions, but felt for and found one of her hands and held it tenderly. She made no effort to withdraw it.

Farland spoke in a feeble, rambling voice.

"The rogue got his deserts," he said. "We are well rid of him. He'd lay his dirty hands on you, would he—the dog! And what of the lad he bashed over the head? Hill, you call him. A very agreeable and harmless young man, that."

"He is here, father," said the girl; and her hand trembled in Hill's fingers.

"I am here, sir, alive and not seriously hurt, thanks to you," said Hill.

"Alive, are you?" returned Farland. "Thank God for that, my lad. I'd be sorry to have anything happen to you. . . . The knave who hit you didn't know you, captain, or he'd not have aimed the blow at your skull. . . . Sitting there, are you—you and Mary—the two of you like a pair of love-birds on a twig. She's a good girl, is Mary, and well brought up, like any gentleman's daughter—and through hell she has been, though never a smirch nor a taint of it touched her. May the fires of the pit crack my bones else! Blood and death! The curs feared me worse than the devil."

The girl withdrew her hand from Hill's clasp, soothed her father, and gave him water to drink.

Hill left them soon after that, built up the fire with dry wood and green, and retired to the other shelter. The night was chilly. The cold awakened him at midnight and he went out, shivering, and piled more wood on the fire. While he was warming himself beside the flames, Mary issued from the other hut and came to the fire. The hood of her cloak was turned up over her head. Her eyes were deep wells of light in the fireshine and her cheeks were tinted pink by the wavering radiance of the flames. She looked at Hill and smiled.

Hill moved around to her side of the fire. He extended his hands to her and she placed hers in them. Neither spoke. It seemed to him then that words were poor things and spoken questions and answers of no importance. Speech was not needed in this high communion. He put an arm about her slender, round waist and held her close to him, tenderly and lightly. So they stood for a full minute in silence. She lifted her face to him and he felt the flutter of her breathing upon his eyes. He bowed his head and touched his lips to her white brow, then to her lips. Neither spoke. What had either to say, with the heart of each beating against the other's heart?

They heard the voice of the wounded man calling his daughter's name. Then she withdrew herself tenderly from Hill's embrace, and he let her go tenderly. He looked up and saw that the stars were shining. He sat down beside the fire. He knew that she loved him, and, knowing this, what mattered the little things he did not know? In her eyes and on her lips he had found the truth of her and of love. Since he had seen the mystery of love unveiled in his love's eyes, what mattered any other mystery? Tragic and bewildering circumstances had brought them together, and parted them, and joined them again; and now the tragedies were condoned, the riddles solved, the doubts consumed by the white flame of love.

Hill continued to sit by the fire and think of Mary in a high ecstasy of mind and spirit until sleep overcame him. He slept in the open, beside the fire, until dawn.

Hill found a white bloom of frost on the moss when he awoke. He remembered the night and was happy. He looked into the shelter and found Mary and her father both asleep. The wounded man was covered to the chin with blankets—blankets which Hill had taken from the major's house. The girl lay wrapped in her long, blue cloak, with the hood of it over her head. One round arm was extended and upon it her cheek was pillowed. Hill retreated noiselessly, fetched his own blanket and laid it over her feet. He smiled at the recollection of old William Bolt's remarks concerning those feet and ankles. But what mattered it if she were the daughter of a bishop, a madman, or an outlaw? She was herself! And she was his!

The young man put wood on the fallen fire and went down to the little cove where the boat lay beached and the tide moved with a sound as light as breathing about the weedy rocks. He threw aside his clothes and dipped once in the frost-cold water. He dried himself on his shirt, dressed hastily, then stood and watched the sun climb out of its seabed, pushing and parting before it curtains and coverlets of pearl and pink and gold.

When Hill returned to the camp Mary was cooking at the fire and Farland was sitting up in the shelter with the blankets draped about his broad shoulders. Hill paused for a moment beside the girl and smiled into her wonderful eyes. Her cheeks were pink. He passed on quickly to the wounded man and asked him how he felt.

"Weak," replied Farland. "Confoundedly weak—but hopeful."

He regarded the young man searchingly for several seconds. Then his glance wandered and he gazed reflectively out at his daughter beside the fire. He sighed heavily.

"Winter will soon be upon us," he said.

Then he looked at Hill again.

"What is to be the end of this?" he asked.

"It would have been better for us all if the knife had reached my heart, by heaven! I'm on a lee-shore, and that's a fact. A fine one I am to guide and protect that child! She'd be better off with you, lad—alone with you. She'd be safer away from me. Take her away, captain."

"Not I," returned Hill hoarsely. "She wouldn't go with me. She wouldn't desert you."

"True; but why? She owes me nothing—but fatherhood. Fatherhood! Save the mark! Come nearer. I have a word for your ear."

Hill obeyed.

"Leave us," whispered Farland. "I am death to you. I warn you because I like you."

The young man shook his head.

"Are you blind?" exclaimed Farland.

"No; but all the dangers this side of hell and beyond could not frighten me away from Mary," replied Hill. "I love her; but even without that, I would not desert you in your time of need."

"You know me?"

"I do. But a few moments ago it came to me—the memory of where and when I had seen you before. You took the knife in my defence. Mary saved my life—and she is the dearest thing in the world to me. I stand by you—God forgive me!"

Farland trembled violently.

"You are mad," he whispered. "Or a fool."

He laid hold of the other by a wrist.

"I have money," he continued. "Pots of it, could I but lay my hands on it. But I need my strength—and a schooner. . . . But we must get away from here to-morrow, even if you have to carry me down to the boat."

Hill broke roughly away from Farland and left him. His face was grey. He did not pause to question him about the money or about the need of moving on the morrow.

Hill avoided Farland as much as possible during the remainder of the day. He asked only one

question that day, but that one again and again. It was always of Mary that he asked it, and the answer was always in the affirmative. He questioned that of which no doubt existed in his mind or heart, for no better reason than that the answer was like music and wine to him. Her love was the excuse, the absolution and the reward for all.

Hill did not make known to Mary the matter of his conversation with her father.

Farland gained strength swiftly that day. His spirits seemed to improve also. He ate a little solid food, cleaned and loaded his pistol, and smoked a pipeful of tobacco.

The night fell frosty. Hill and Mary sat by the fire for several hours, with clasped hands and with her head nestled on his shoulder. They said but little; and nothing of what they said had any practical reference to their perilous situation or the approach of winter.

Hill piled the fire high before he retired to his shelter. He slept soundly, in spite of the agitated state of his mind and heart.

The little clearing was full of the first level wash of daylight when Hill awoke. There was no sound or stir of wind, no sound of anything save of the soft fret of the tide along the rocks. The air was cold and the moss and ferns in front of the shelter were a-gleam with frost. The fire had burned down and fallen to grey ashes and a

few veiled embers from which one slender thread of azure went straight up in the still sunshine. Hill threw aside his blanket, drew on his shoes, and went to the fire. He shivered, crouched low above the ashes, and cleared the little rosy heart of the fire with a breath. He placed a handful of dry bark on the pulsing coals, and a yellow flame leapt up. He laid on a few sticks of dry wood, then straightened himself and went softly, expectantly, to the entrance of the other hut. He stood motionless as a wooden figure for several seconds, staring into the green and golden twilight of the shelter. Neither Mary nor her father was there.

Hill turned his head and scanned the little clearing and its walls of thick brush and tall, green spruces. He saw no sign of his companions. He turned again and questioned the shadowy interior with puzzled eyes. Then he noticed that two of the blankets were gone—that only one of the three blankets remained in the hut. And the sail of the boat, which had been spread on the mossy floor, was also gone. The thing that Farland had said about moving jumped into Hill's mind and struck like an adder. The muscles about his heart tightened and stiffened.

A glance told him that the provisions still lay in their place. The clutch of muscles on his terrified heart relaxed a little. Mary and her

father had not gone then. But why had they removed the blankets and the boat's sail from the hut? He dashed through the tangled underbrush to the little spring. Mary was not there. He shouted her name, then her father's, but received no answer to either. He dashed back to the camp, only to find the round clearing and the bushy shelters still empty and silent. The fire of dry wood burned clear and high, and to Hill it seemed a mockery in that desolate place. He went down to the cove. The boat was there, lying high and dry and sharply listed to starboard. Hill uttered a cry of joy. They had not gone! She was somewhere near at hand! He returned to the camp at top speed, to find the heedless fire still the only living thing in that empty place.

Hill spent hours in searching and calling in vain through the quiet forest. Echoes answered him, and the sudden flights of wild things from their coverts. He returned frequently to the camping-place, each time eager with hope until stricken afresh with despair. He explored the coast for several miles to the north and the south.

Mary and her father had deserted him under cover of night; but why?—and how? Farland did not fear him, of that he was sure; and if Farland had intended treachery to him, why had he not murdered him in his sleep instead of going

to the trouble of running away? They had gone without food. They had left the boat. Farland was in no condition to make a long journey on foot.

His faith in Mary did not waver for an instant. Perhaps something had frightened them—or perhaps they had been taken away by force. But he had heard nothing. He had slept soundly through the night. He felt that he was in the grip of a nightmare. Sea and shore, forest and sky took on an appearance of daunting unreality in the golden flood of the western sun. He left the coast and again wandered through the desolate woods, crying the girl's name. It was dusk when he got back to the camp. The place was still empty and silent. Even the heedless flames of fire had deserted it. He entered the hut that had sheltered Mary and lay down on the moss with his face in his hands.

Hill kept the fire burning high all night; but nothing came of it. In the morning he decided to return to the Miramichi. The belief that Mary and her father had been taken from the camp by force was now fixed in his mind. He could not imagine how the deed had been accomplished without disturbing him, but his belief in it was firm. The question of who had done the thing seemed to him to have only one answer. They had been taken by the law.

He set out on his journey soon after sunrise, with the provisions in a pack on his shoulders. He felt that he could make better time on foot along the coast than in the heavy boat without a sail. He travelled at a desperate pace, spurred forward by fear. At noon he rested for an hour. Early in the afternoon his weak leg began to pain him. Before dusk he came to a fisherman's hut.

The fisherman and his wife eyed Hill with suspicion; and when he told them that he was one of a party of fugitives who had escaped from the great fire by water, and that now he was returning alone to the Miramichi, they exchanged covert glances. They took him in, however, fed him and offered him a bed for the night.

"I must press on immediately," said Hill. "I want a man and a skiff to take me to Chatham or Newcastle. I'll pay—and that well."

"There bain't no wind to-night; but there'll be a breeze i' the mornin', ye kin lay to that," said the fisherman.

"You have oars, I suppose," said Hill wearily. "I go forward to-night, afoot or in your skiff. If afoot, I pay for it in pain and fatigue; if in the skiff, I pay with two golden guineas."

He took the coins from his pocket and laid them on the edge of the deal table. The man and the woman examined the coins with interest.

The woman even took them up and pinched them with her teeth. She nodded her head toward her husband.

"Make it three, cap'n, an' ye be as good as there already," said the fisherman.

Weariness and craving for sleep weighed on Hill's brain and gnawed at his bones. The lids of his eyes felt like lead. Without a word he produced a third coin and placed it beside the others.

"Easy come, easy go," whispered the woman. But Hill did not hear.

"There's your money," he said. "Now get your gear aboard."

"What be the trouble with yer head?" asked the fisherman, with a glance at the small bandage which Hill still wore.

Hill got smartly to his feet.

"Damn your impudence!" he cried. "Show me to your skiff, or you will suffer for it."

The fellow retreated a step before the hot, hard glare of the young man's eyes.

"Another guinea, cap'n," he said. "It be worth four to ye."

Hill swept the gold from the table back to his pocket.

"You worthless rogue!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't trust you to land me in Newcastle if you were paid fifty for the job. Confound you for a

robber and a cheat! Out of my way, hell blister you!"

He took up his pack and a staff that he had cut during the day's weary journey, and marched out of the fisherman's hut. He stumbled southward for half a mile, and then suddenly his wits cleared and a suspicion awoke in him. He halted and harkened, but heard nothing except the low, sobbing whisper of the tide along the coast. He turned aside to a clump of stunted spruces, gathered some dry moss and branches hastily together, struck a light and started a little fire. He laid his pack at the edge of the firelight and backed in among the spruces. He waited, crouching low with his eyes on the fire. In the excitement of just anger his weariness was forgotten.

Hill did not have to wait long. Soon the fisherman appeared, crawling noiselessly at the edge of the firelight. Hill moved forward a little and struck once with his staff of green maple-wood. Once was enough.

"That will keep the dog quiet for a few minutes," he murmured.

He took up his pack again and hurried back towards the fisherman's hut. When he sighted the hut he saw that a light still shone in the window and that the door stood open. In the oblong of the dim-lit doorway he saw the black shape of the woman. He turned to the left and

went down to the edge of the tide. He soon found the skiff. Between two boulders he discovered the little mast and sail and a pair of oars. He ran the skiff into the black water and put his pack and the gear aboard. He manned the oars and pulled out from the whispering landwash.

CHAPTER XI

RIISING FROM THE ASHES

ALL the Miramichi country had been burned to ashes, but Hill found towns of tents and huts among the black ruins of Chatham and Newcastle. The heroic people were rebuilding their homes. A few vessels still rode to their anchors in the stream.

Hill sank the borrowed skiff and entered Newcastle on foot. He found the settlers to be dull with grief, and many of them sick with despair, for all their activity. Most of them had been ruined in pocket, and many of them in heart as well. Lives had been lost, and in the way of property nothing had been saved from the fire except a few trinkets and coins. Two relief schooners from Richibucto had saved hundreds from starvation. These vessels had brought tents and clothing as well as food. The cry for help had gone abroad and answers were expected from other parts of the province, from Nova Scotia, from Maine, and even from England in time.

Food and clothing and money would come in to the burned settlements from the pitying world, but how were wives and children and husbands to be restored to empty arms and the lurid horrors of that night to be wiped out of stricken hearts and dazed minds?

Men whom Hill knew slightly seemed to be strangely incurious about him. They did not ask where he had been or how he had escaped from the fire. They asked no questions; they answered him in flat voices. He learned that Major Darnell and the McDuffs had survived flame and flood, and that the merchant and his daughter were up the river with the major. He wandered among the huts and tents and black foundations looking for Mary and her father, seeking some word or sign to lead him to them. He neither saw nor heard anything of them. The only strangers in the place were the crews of the two schooners that had brought relief. There were no prisoners of any sort in Newcastle, and when Hill mentioned the pirates who had been caught and hanged, and the wild scene in the courthouse, men looked at him as if he had dragged half-forgotten and altogether meaningless things out of the dusty past. His hopes rose, and his bewilderment deepened. He hired a boy to row him across the river to Chatham. There his failure to see or hear anything of Mary and her father

was as absolute as in Newcastle. He went aboard every vessel in the river, under cover of all manner of invented excuses, but his search was fruitless.

Hill slept aboard one of the schooners that night, at the invitation of the skipper. He slept far too soundly for dreaming. He awoke to find his head throbbing, all his muscles sore and stiff, and his weak leg inflamed. He dragged himself out of the berth and went ashore. He could not think. His aching brain refused to form any plan of action. All he knew was that he had lost Mary.

He wandered up the northern bank of the river. He halted frequently to bathe his face and hands in the stream, sometimes even to lie at full length on the ground for a few minutes. At last he came to the ruins of the major's fine place and to a hut built of blackened logs. He fell at the threshold of the door.

Darnell and McDuff were hunting through the ruined forests for the liberated cattle. Flora McDuff was alone in the hut. She did not hear any sound at the door, but presently she opened the door to look out for her father and the major. She found George Hill unconscious at her feet—George Hill, whom she had seen go down in deep water on that night of horror! She retreated with a cry of terror. She recovered herself swiftly and dragged the young man into the hut. She laid him on a low bed of blankets and spruce branches,

forced some brandy into his mouth, and bathed his face with cool water from the well.

When the major and McDuff appeared an hour later Hill told them a rambling and muddled story of his recent adventures. His face was flushed and his eyes shone. His voice was thick. They could make very little of his story, and in return for it the major mixed him a bitter dose of quinine and brandy and forced him to swallow it. After that he slept restlessly for an hour.

"He has a fever, as sure as I'm a pauper," said the major; "but I suppose that is one degree better than being dead at the bottom of the bay, as we thought. Looks as if he'd had a rough time of it, poor lad. Someone or something has given him a whack over the back of the head. The skulls of the Hills are made of uncommon hard bone, thank heaven!"

When Hill woke up he expressed astonishment at seeing Darnell and the McDuffs about him. It was evident that he did not remember having seen them an hour ago. He asked where they had found him, and when, and was puzzled to hear that Miss McDuff had discovered him lying unconscious at the door. Darnell asked him how he had managed to avoid the watery grave that had gaped for him, where he had been ever since, and what he had done to the back of his head.

"I swam around in the dark until I was picked

up by a couple of people in a boat," he said.
"We sailed northward. I'm not very clear about what happened after that."

"But where have you been ever since?" asked the major.

"On the coast somewhere, I think."

"Can't you remember what happened to your head?"

"It feels sore. Perhaps I fell down and struck it against a rock."

"Where are your friends—the two who rescued you from the water?"

"I don't know. I would to heaven I did!"

The major examined his tongue, felt his pulse, and administered another dose of quinine.

Hill realised that he was in the grasp of a fever. He could feel it creeping through his blood, aching in his bones, swelling and dwindling in his head. It went through him in waves from the soles of his feet to his scalp, now sickening him with dry heat, and now shaking him with cold. A fear that he would babble of Mary and her father possessed him. He tried to impress upon his mind the necessity for absolute silence, to fix the idea of that requirement so firmly that his brain would observe it even in delirium.

"Not a word," was his thought. "Not a word. Keep your mouth shut."

The fever grew in him as the day advanced.

His blood warmed, his cheeks flamed, his brain seemed to float in his skull.

"Not a word!" he cried, staring wildly at Flora McDuff. "Not a word, by heaven! A word might ruin all."

During the night he raved. His speech became so loud and wild that no one could sleep in the hut. Only Flora could quiet him at all, and that only for a few minutes at a time. He sat up on his couch and flourished his arms.

"They've been taken back to the Miramichi!" he cried. "Three guineas, four guineas, to the man who gets me there in time to save them."

He accused Major Darnell of having hit him treacherously over the head. He raved about death by drowning, about death by fire. Suddenly he shot out a hot, dry hand and seized Miss McDuff by the wrist.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Tell me the truth—who are you?"

She made no effort to get away from him. She met his wild glance and smiled, calm but very white in the face.

"I am Flora McDuff," she replied.

"Flora McDuff!" he exclaimed. "That's something new. I don't believe it! That is worse than anything you have told me yet, by the Lord Harry! A daughter of that cowardly, heartless old money-bag! I can't believe it! What were

you doing in the company of the fellow with the ear-rings. But what does it matter so long as you love me? Nothing!"

Flora's face took on a tinge of pink in the candle-light. Her strange eyes brightened and softened. She glanced at the major and her father with a flicker of a smile on her lips. Then she soothed the young man with whispered words and a touch of her cool fingers on his brow, and laid him back on the pillow.

The major looked embarrassed.

"He is mad," he said. "He is stark, staring mad. He has a fever of the brain, the poor lad. That wound on the head has played the devil with him."

Mr McDuff grinned mirthlessly but said nothing. He could not think of anything particular to say.

"If he has a fever of the brain, would it not be well to call in a doctor?" suggested Flora. "What would his people at home think of us if we were to let him die for want of a doctor?"

"You are right," said the major. "He is mad. He does not know what he is saying, nor does he mean a word of it, Miss Flora. His poor tormented brain has confused you with someone else, past a doubt. I'll go and hunt up Doctor Thompson. He'll be somewhere about, for I saw him yesterday. Keep the poor lad's head wet, and give him another dose of quinine."

The major left the hut. It was long past midnight. Hill rolled his head from side to side and muttered jumbled words in a thick voice. Mr McDuff lay down and fell asleep instantly. Flora crouched beside Hill's couch and harkened keenly, but she failed to catch a word of his mutterings. She gave him more quinine, and soon after that he became quiet and slept.

The major returned at dawn with Doctor Thompson. The doctor was a thick-set man of middle age with steady hands, unwavering eyes, and crusty manners. He paid no attention to Miss McDuff or the merchant, but set to work upon Hill without the loss of a second.

"Brain fever," he said. "I must have some of his blood."

He produced a lancet. The major held the basin. Flora retreated to the farthest corner of the hut and covered her eyes with her hands.

The doctor took a considerable quantity of the sick man's blood, gave brief instructions to the major, and then hurried away.

Hill slept until noon. The fever came upon him again, and again he talked wildly and violently. That night he addressed Miss McDuff by the name of Mary, with marked demonstrations of affection, and called the merchant a bloody pirate. Doctor Thompson came again and took some more of the hot blood. So things went for

eight days, and at the end of that time poor George Hill was rid of his fever, and of most of his blood as well. He was as weak as a new-born child—
weaker, to be exact. He was pumped dry. Everything except his heart felt light as a feather. His first sane thoughts were anxious ones; but he was afraid to voice any of the questions that fretted his heart. Hours of sanity passed before realisation came to him of the full extent of his weakness, of his helplessness. Then he knew that Mary was lost to him—that she had been lost to him for days—and despair closed in upon him.

Flora McDuff and the major nursed him. Flora was gentle, even tender; but the major was grumpy and seemed to be in very low spirits. The charming young woman's attentions embarrassed the convalescent. Sometimes he trembled under the light, ministering touches of her hands; and it is probable that she misinterpreted his tremors. He cursed his helplessness, his flabby muscles, and his poor head that spun like a top every time he lifted it from the pillow. In the depths of his heart he wished Flora's ministering hands and beautiful green eyes somewhere else. They tortured him. They distracted his thoughts without bringing him any comfort.

One afternoon when the two young people were alone in the hut she knelt beside his couch and laid a hand on his arm. She stooped low over

him with smiling lips. Her cheeks were like milk and roses, her eyes like sun-shot depths of green sea, her hair like a crown of copper.

"Who is Mary?" she asked.

The faint colour fell from Hill's cheeks and his weary eyes brightened with apprehension. A tremor went through him. He closed his eyes.

"I don't know," he said faintly.

"When you were delirious with fever you called me Mary," she said, bending closer. "You—you clung to me—and called me Mary. Is it a name you dreamt?"

"Yes," he replied.

He opened his eyes.

"No," he said.

He thought swiftly and lied desperately.

"The woman who did not keep faith with me—who married the Dean of Sturminster. Her name is Mary. Did I speak of her in my delirium?"

Miss McDuff drew back a little, and the expression of her eyes and mouth changed swiftly.

"You have not forgotten her?" she queried.

"She jilted you. She made a fool of you. And after all these months and these tragic happenings you have not forgotten her?"

He shook his head miserably. He hated untruth.

"But what had she, the daughter of the Bishop of Oxford to do with pirates?" asked Flora.

"God knows!" he whispered. "Why do you ask?"

"You spoke of pirates frequently, and usually in connection with this Mary," she said.

"Madness of fever," he murmured weakly. "She had nothing to do with pirates; but when I was a reefer I hunted pirates."

Then he closed his eyes and fainted dead away.

Miss McDuff's manner changed toward him after that, very slightly, 'tis true, but sufficiently for the major to notice it. The major seemed pleased by the change, and his own manner towards Hill warmed and softened.

Hill's strength returned to him slowly, but it brought him no peace. He looked back no farther than the wonderful thing which he had found and lost amid mysterious tragedies and questionable adventures. When he looked forward it was to see nothing—a daunting emptiness down the years. He was like a gambler who has been ruined in the first hour of play. But he had played with life, and life had tricked him. He had not realised the magnitude of the prize he played for until the game was lost. And the stakes! There he had been tricked! He had wagered so little and put it on the table so eagerly—no more than a man will risk for the excitement of a morning's sport—only to learn that in redeeming it he had been left naked.

This is the way George Hill stood toward himself and life and the world when Major Darnell brought a small, elderly gentleman home with him one noonday. The stranger was a missionary and a bishop. He had no seat in the House of Lords and as yet he possessed no exact or stationary See; but he was a bishop. The king and two archbishops had said he was a bishop, and they had sent him across the ocean as spiritual relief along with a ship-load of material relief. His name was Jardine. Hill not only knew him but was known to him, for he had been a fellow of Hill's college at Oxford. It was not long before he had heard as much of Hill's story as anyone was likely to hear. He was a fine little man and full of fire. His fire warmed the emptiness in the young sailor's heart.

"Here I am, a bishop without a diocese and without priests and deacons, and I find you ready to my hand," he exclaimed. "This is luck. If your heart is in it, my dear boy, I'll make a deacon of you before you can say scat."

"Done," said Hill, who had been thinking hard while the other was talking.

He mailed his water-run letters of credit back to his bankers in London, and directed them to send him gold in their place. He wrote to his mother and to his rich and pious aunt. Then Bishop Jardine ordained him and put him in

spiritual charge of a parish of vague bounds, which included Newcastle and Chatham and as much of the surrounding desolation as possible.

Hill had been on his feet several days before he was ordained, and he commenced work immediately. His first parochial duty was a trip up river with the bishop by canoe.

CHAPTER XII

THE REVEREND GEORGE HILL

BISHOP JARDINE left the Miramichi for other parts of the province. Hill made his headquarters in Newcastle, in a log cabin built at his own expense and largely by his own hands. He went at his new work grimly, but from the very beginning in a spirit of sincerity. He gave all his wounded heart to it. The fact that he had turned to the ministry at a time when his own life was empty and his own soul bruised did not cause him to belittle the concerns of the lives and souls of his people. He was no fair weather parson. No inspiration of coloured windows and golden altar-cloths was his at this time. He found comfort in the teachings of Christ, and this comfort he took to the lowly cabins and scattered lodges of his people. He went about his work as a minister even as he had gone about his sailor-work in the old days—dignified, efficient, and unwavering in purpose and in faith. He knew the ways of men and something of their hearts, and this knowledge

was useful to him in the service of God even as it had been in the service of his earthly king. His courage and temper remained that of the young sailor who had bled for his country.

Hill's cabin contained two large rooms and a loft and two chimneys. Sometimes one room, and sometimes both, were occupied by the sick and needy. It was a home, but not his home. He paid for the food and fuel that were consumed in it. He paid Doctor Thompson to attend to the bodily ailments of his guests, for he had and these others had not. It was thus that his simple and direct nature read his duty in the life and words of the Son of Man Whom he served. When his own house was full he sought shelter elsewhere. As he slept and ate so did he pray and preach where and when the need was. He dressed like other men. He gave no thought to the building of a church until all his people were housed. It seemed to him that the Word required no especial roof and that it consecrated all roofs.

Major Darnell admired Hill prodigiously. Mr McDuff thought him a fool. Whatever Miss McDuff's thoughts on the subject were she kept them strictly to herself.

Hill was not silver-tongued, but the simplicity and brevity of his words and the unfaltering sincerity of his eyes made his sermons peculiarly convincing. He read the service from a book save

on infrequent occasions when he had forgotten to bring the book with him. At such times his prayers were very short, but clear and to the point. Even in the privacy of his own chamber his prayers were never long. He never prayed for himself, never even for strength to carry on his work. He had strength, and he knew that it would not fail him so long as his work was right. He prayed for his people, and always for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the woman whom he had lost and whom he still loved.

Hill found opposition even to his unpretentious and practical methods of serving God and his fellows. There were some cases which called only for spiritual help, and among these he met with unfriendliness, distrust, and active opposition. The morals of his flock were not high. The majority of his people were primitive and possessed of primitive passions. Drinking to excess was one of their few recreations, and fighting was another. They had other vices, which were also looked upon as recreations. Thus it was with the majority. The civilised minority shut their eyes and attended strictly to their own concerns. But Hill went straight ahead. No man could escape his care by proclaiming himself a black sheep. When Steve Beezley beat his wife in drunken bravado and then announced that no priest or parson this side of hell could make him blink an

eye, Hill went out to Beezley's shack, spoke a few comforting words to the woman, and then took Steve outside in the snow and shut both his eyes. This simple line of argument made a deep impression on the recipient.

"I reckon there be somethin' in religion after all," he said.

A young man named Jones proclaimed the facts that he would not marry a young woman named Nason, and that there were not enough Nasons in the country to make him marry her. George Hill married them. Young Jones realised that there was something in marriage.

Late in February Hill made a trip to the northern coast on foot, accompanied by William Hinks. He had selected Hinks for the journey against the advice of everyone. Hinks had the name of being one of the worst characters on the river. He was a deadly fighter, but of late he had not found any man willing to fight with him. But he had the reputation of being a fair fighter. Was it knives? Right—let each man have a knife. Or clubs? Or fists and feet? Or fists alone? Hinks had always been willing to fight with anything so long as the chosen weapons were abided by. But he had killed a man once who had named fists and feet and had produced a knife in the heat of the struggle.

Hill knew nothing of this man but what he had

heard, for Hinks had never interfered with him in his work.

"Why d'ye pick on me?" Hinks had asked, scowling darkly, when Hill had sought him out and asked him to go north.

"Because I want to know you," Hill had replied frankly.

"Ye needn't try to convert me. I'm done with priests an' churches."

"You are afraid to give me a chance."

"Afraid! I'm with ye, little man."

They wore snowshoes, and each carried a pack. When they halted for the first midday meal they did not exchange a dozen words. In silence they tramped northward all afternoon. Sometimes one broke the trail and sometimes the other. Hinks was a big man and Hill's senior by ten years or more. He was lean, broad and deep of chest, long of limb. His features were large and cleanly cut; his skin was swarthy; his eyes were dark grey, and his expression was sometimes cynical and always proud and sombre. When they halted for the night they dug a long, broad trench in the snow with their rackets and built a big fire in one end of it. They ate their supper in silence, then filled and lit their pipes.

"I've been told that you are a dangerous man," said Hill.

"I'm a hellyun," replied Hinks quietly, staring

at the fire in the far end of the trench with brooding eyes.

"But you have never troubled me," said Hill.

"Why is that?"

"I got my pride," said Hinks. "Ye ain't worth troublin', little man."

"Not so much 'little man,' if you please," said Hill.

The other smiled faintly, scornfully, and continued to gaze straight ahead.

"Why do you think so poorly of me?" asked Hill. "Do you consider me a failure as a man or as a parson?"

"I don't care a whoop in hell what kinder parson ye are; but as a man ye're a coward," said Hinks.

"A coward! You are the first to tell me that. Why do you think I'm a coward?"

"If ye ain't, why don't ye take yer chances like a man? Why don't ye love a woman, an' have a child—an' take yer chances with this lovin' an' merciful God ye preach so much about?"

"I'm not sure that I understand you."

"How can yer merciful God hurt a man who don't care for anythin' half so much as he likes himself? He can kill him—but what's that? Ye ain't afeared of death, I've been told. No more am I; but when I had a woman an' a baby I was

afear'd of it, an' I took three chances of bein' killed instead o' one—an' I was killed twice—suffered two deaths an' wasn't put out of my misery!"

"I think I understand you," said Hill quietly. "You despise all men who have not suffered as you have, or at least have not taken the same chances of suffering—and you distrust God."

"Ye've named it," said Hinks.

"I'll tell you this much," returned Hill. "I love a woman. I lost her. I don't know whether she is dead or alive. If I could find her—and I'd go through hell's flames to find her—I'd take the chances you speak of with a glad heart."

Hinks glanced at him, but said nothing. Hill knocked the ash from his pipe and retired to his blankets. Hinks smoked and dreamt through another hour, then piled the fire high and lay down beside the parson.

They were early afoot next morning, and they tramped steadily northward through an empty wilderness until sundown. By the fire that night their talk did not go beneath the surface of things.

At noon of the third day out from Newcastle they reached the cabin of the fisherman from whom Hill had taken the skiff. A blue feather of smoke climbed from the little chimney into the frosty

air. Hill removed his snowshoes, lowered his pack to the snow, and then knocked on the door. His fur cap was pulled low down, and the collar of his fur coat was up about his ears.

The door was opened by the fisherman—a big, bewhiskered fellow with shifty eyes.

“Good morning to you,” said Hill. “I’ve come to pay you for the skiff I took from you last October.”

Recognition flashed in the fisherman’s eyes. He sprang across the threshold with a snarl of rage, straight at Hill’s throat. Hill dodged and let him go by. Hinks stepped aside with an expression of pensive detachment on his handsome face. The fisherman turned and came back on the jump, with his big hands extended and his long fingers crooked to throttle. Hill ducked, closed with him, and laid him flat on his back. With knees and hands he kept the fisherman down and helpless.

“Now will you listen quietly,” he said. “I’ve come to pay you for the skiff I took. I’ll pay you five guineas, though it’s too much. Will you behave yourself if I let you up?”

“I’ll git square with ye yet for the bat ye give me over the head,” gasped the fellow.

“Calm yourself,” said Hill; “be reasonable. Remember the thing as it happened, and think of it as it might have happened. When I hit you on

the head I saved you from the crime of murder, past a doubt. You came creeping up to my fire when you thought I was asleep, to rob me and very likely to murder me. You have a bad eye."

"Let me up," gasped the fisherman.

Hill did so. The fisherman got stiffly to his feet.

"Who's in bed?" asked Hill, glancing past the other into the dusky interior of the cabin.

"Is someone ill?"

A moaning voice cried feebly for water.

"I have medicines in my pack there," said Hill, taking a step towards the door.

The fisherman barred his way, and thrust him back violently.

"Don't be a fool!" cried Hill. "I may be able to help her. I know something of doctoring. Let me in."

The fisherman reached a hand behind him and shut the door.

"Go on about yer business, ye bloody pirate," he snarled. "I want no help from ye nor any o' yer kind."

"If ye're set on goin' in an' doin' a spell o' doctorin', go ahead," said Hinks indifferently.

"I'll hold this lad for ye."

"No," said Hill. "If it has to be done I must do it myself."

He stepped close to the fisherman and eyed him steadily.

"I'm not a pirate," he said. "I'm a minister, a preacher, whatever you want to call it, and I know something of doctoring. Your wife, or whoever it is you have in there, needs assistance. It is my duty to do all that is in my power to help her. I must enter your house. Step aside or I shall enter by force."

The fisherman pushed the door open and stepped aside. Hill entered the cabin. The fisherman picked up Hill's pack and followed him, closing the door behind him. Hinks lowered his own pack to the snow, sat down on it, and filled and lit his pipe.

Hill found the fisherman's wife in a high fever, very weak and gasping for every breath. Every breath caused her intense pain. He diagnosed it as pneumonia. He had seen several cases of pneumonia of late, and had noted Doctor Thompson's treatment of them. He gave the woman a dose of quinine in brandy and water, then set the sullen husband to work tearing up an old sheet and pillow-case for the hot oatmeal poultices which he made and applied. Fifteen minutes after entering the cabin he opened the door a crack and looked out. Hinks still sat on his pack smoking unconcernedly.

"You'd better make camp, Bill," he said.

"I've a very sick woman in here and won't be able to go far away from her for a few days."

Hinks nodded, drew his axe from the ropes of his pack, and entered the nearest thicket of spruces. There in the deep snow he dug a trench, floored and roofed one end of it with spruce boughs, and made a small fire at the other end. He cooked and ate his midday meal, and then chopped and split a supply of firewood.

The sun was behind the west when Hill left the cabin.

"It's a bad case," he told Hinks. "If I were a real doctor just for a few days I'd feel safer. She is sleeping now."

"A doctor's a damn sight more use than a parson," said Hinks, busying himself with the frying-pan and kettle.

Hill's eyes brightened dangerously for a second, but he said nothing. Hinks asked no questions about the woman. He seemed to feel no interest in her case or in the affairs of the fisherman. They ate in silence and smoked for half an hour in silence. Then Hill shook the ash from his pipe and climbed out of the trench. On the snowy bank he turned and looked down at Hinks.

"Don't expect me back before sun-up," he said. "I'll have to make a night of it, for the man is

useless—not much better than half-witted, I fear. Good night.”

Hinks glanced up and nodded his head slightly.

Hill got but little sleep that night. He kept up the poulticing of the patient until sunrise; but between the mixing and applying of the hot poultices he caught a few cat-naps, seated on a hard stool with his head and arms on the table. The fisherman also kept vigil—a sullen, silent, watchful vigil.

Hill breakfasted with Hinks in the trench and returned to the cabin immediately afterwards. Dibbin's oatmeal gave out in the course of the morning; but Hill had a ten-pound bag of it in his pack and so the poulticing went on.

It was not until three days later that Hill felt that his duty permitted him to continue his journey. The woman was entirely free of fever by that time and almost free of pain. Hill and his companion travelled northward along the bitter coast all day and made camp in a little clearing in the brush. The snow lay deep in the clearing and deep in and over two little lean-to shelters of brush. The two did not occupy the storm-torn shelters, but dug a trench. Hill was as taciturn as Hinks that evening. They continued their northward journey in the morning. Hinks asked no questions, made no comments. They saw no signs of human life

until shortly before sunset. A thread of smoke above the tree-tops on their left caught their attention then. They turned into the woods and soon came upon a clearing in which stood a log house and a log barn. A big, iron-grey dog stalked around the corner of the house, stiffened his ruff at sight of them, and gave tongue. The door of the house opened and William Bolt appeared, with another dog and several pups at his heels.

William Bolt had fled from the Miramichi just before the fire had swept the settlements, and had never returned. With the help of his retainers, a family of Micmacs, he had built the shacks and established himself on a likely piece of land. He had been forced to butcher a few of his horned cattle because his supply of fodder had threatened to give out before the end of the winter. He had added frozen fish and frozen venison to the store of food which he had brought in the chartered schooner. He was very comfortable, and he was overjoyed at seeing Hill again, in spite of the fact that the two had last parted at a moment of misunderstanding.

The two friends talked of the great fire, of old adventures afloat, and of the weather until Hinks retired to his host's bunk and pulled the blankets over his head. Then the old man laid a hand on Hill's knee.

"Ye don't look happy, mate," he whispered. "An' ye bain't happy, I'll lay to that. What's gnawin' of ye? Whatever's become o' the young lady?"

The young man told him. He told the truth of his adventures on the coast. He opened his heart wide to the old ex-sailor who had served with his father at Trafalgar. Bolt was deeply moved and bewildered beyond the power of words to describe.

"An' they give ye the slip—an' her a bishop's daughter?" he muttered. "An' her the purtiest thing ever I clapped a eye on! I can't make head nor tail of it, mate, an' that's the blisterin' truth."

"She is not a bishop's daughter," replied Hill miserably. "I was lying when I let you believe so. She is that man's daughter—and the woman I love. Dead or alive, she's the woman I love! And I've lost her—because I am a coward!"

"Who's her father?" asked Bolt. "If he bain't a bishop, then what the devil be he?"

"That is one question I must refuse to answer," said Hill. "I'm a parson myself now, and when I'm not free to tell the truth I must hold my tongue."

Bolt eyed him intently for several seconds.

"She be quality, anyhow," he said. "Aye,

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an' a rare, distractin' beauty. I never see such eyes afore, blister me paint else! What matter if her pa was a bishop or the divil? She wasn't neither, i'll lay to that. An' ye've went an' lost her. God pity ye!"

CHAPTER XIII

HOLE HARBOUR

THERE were four log huts in Hole Harbour. The largest of these contained two rooms, and in it lived John Farland and his daughter.

Wind and snow swirled across the black forests and white barrens and eddied into the rock-rimmed cup of the little harbour. A small fore-and-aft schooner lay at anchor there, frozen into the ice.

Farland and his daughter crouched by the clay hearth in the outer room of their hut. The small windows were shuttered heavily, and the strong door was strongly barred. Farland had loaded pistols in his pocket and a cutlass on the floor beside him. He had recovered completely from the knife-wound in his back. His eyes were clear and his swarthy cheeks were firm and tinged with brisk blood; but an air of gloom enveloped him.

The girl crouched low, with a blanket about her shoulders. Despair was in her face.

"I had to bring you with me," said Farland.
"What else could I do?"

Mary was silent.

"And it was your own wish to come away with them that last time and leave George Hill asleep," he continued.

"They would have killed him else," said the girl drearily.

"Perhaps; but I have taken greater risks and won through," said the man. "And so have you. What of that shot that saved the secret of my hiding-place from the magistrates? But love has made a coward of you. Pedro was alone. The others were waiting at the edge of the brush. If I had killed Pedro and aroused Hill we would have been three to four."

"You forget that you were wounded," she said.

"True," he replied.

The wind swooped down from the edge of the barrens. The fire leapt high in the chimney. The snow washed harshly over the roof, as dry as sand. Farland glanced around the room at the shuttered windows and barred door.

"Now that they have their money, nothing but their fear of me saves us," he said. "I used to think that they would leave us in the spring, but I know now that Pedro will not allow that. They will take us with them."

"Not alive," replied the girl in a faint whisper.

"But for that dog Pedro they'd all be under

my thumb again. I must fight him. I'll cure him of his infatuation, by——!"

"He would not fight. It would be the death of both of us."

"I'll see a way out when spring comes. We'll give them the slip somehow."

The girl was silent.

"If there is a hell hereafter it will make a second for me," said the man.

Mary sank her face in her hands then and wept violently. The man looked at her, his face a mask of torture and self-loathing.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FORTUNE AND THE NEW FIELD

HILL made William Bolt's place his headquarters for ten days, and from there made trips inland and northward along the coast. Half his mind was on his work as a missionary and half was on his hopeless quest. While he looked for people who needed the comfort of the Word and material help he also sought a clue, a hint, a rumour. At the mouth of Portage River he found a little village of fisherfolk and Micmacs. These people had food and clothing—and nothing else. They had seen no minister of any church in fifteen or twenty years. They lived beyond the reach of the laws of God and the laws of man, ignorant of and unknown to those laws. The white folk were of French and Irish and mixed bloods. The blood of some of the Micmacs also were mixed. To keep warm, to fill the belly, to avoid sudden and violent death—these were their ambitions. Most of them showed more than animal courage and endurance in their hunting and fishing, and something more



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than animal cunning. They were men. They were the super-animals. The best of them had the fire behind their foreheads, despite their ignorance. They could outwit and outfight the beasts on which they preyed. But they were savages, and in some respects they had fallen below the savage standard to that of the beasts.

Hill saw in this a field for the extension of his work; but he found no clue, heard no rumour. These degraded people were not talkative. Hill and Hinks found a few trappers and their families farther up the river and another village like the one at Portage River twelve miles farther along the coast.

"There is work here," said Hill.

"Aye, work for a doctor," said Hinks.

Hill let that pass. He was not afraid of Hinks but he felt a great pity for him—and an ever-growing respect. He would enlighten him some day, somehow or other.

They travelled fast on their return journey, pausing at Dibbin's cabin only for long enough to see that the woman was up and about. As they smoked beside their last camp-fire, on the night before their arrival at Newcastle, Hinks told something of his past. His parents had come to the Miramichi from Ireland—humble folk, but honest and industrious. They had been content to cultivate an acre of land and to take wages; but William

had gone beyond that sort of life at an early age. He had trapped and lumbered and cleared himself a big farm away up the river. At the age of twenty he had married a girl of eighteen, another child of Irish settlers. For six years the two had been happy, despite the fact that their nearest neighbour lived six miles away. Then one January morning an Indian woman had arrived at their snug house of logs with word that her children were dying for want of food. Hinks and his wife had fed the squaw; then Hinks had gone away with her, carrying a pack of provisions on his back. It was a fifteen mile journey, and they had travelled slowly because the squaw was weak. The starving children had been fed, and Hinks had returned to his own clearing to find his house in ashes and his wife and his own two children lying on the floor of the little barn, one of the children already dead and the woman and the other child dying of their burns. The young wife had known him and had been able to tell him of the awaking in the night to smoke and flames; of the rescue of one child and the return to the furnace for the other; of the flames that had enveloped her and of the torture worse than death. She had died within three hours of his return, and the baby had followed her before sunset.

"If I hadn't gone with the squaw to take food to her children my wīfe an' my children wouldn't

hev bin burned to death," said Hinks. "I acted accordin' to the teachin's of Christ—an' that's what come of it!"

Hill remained silent, staring at the fire.

"Could God have saved them?" asked Hinks.

"Yes," said Hill.

"But He didn't—nor He didn't give me a chance to save them."

"They still live."

"I'd believe that if I could see them," said Hinks.

The two reached Newcastle next day. They found one room of Hill's house unoccupied. Hill took money from his pocket and turned to his companion.

"How much do I owe you, Bill?" he asked.

"Not a penny," said the other quietly. "If ye're satisfied with me, take me along with ye on the nex' trip. I'll be proud to go with ye, for ye're not the kind of blithering preacher I mistook ye for. I like ye, an' that's a fact."

"Thank you," replied Hill gravely.

Hill went on with his work as before. He saw a great deal of the McDuffs and Major Darnell. The McDuffs were once more established in a house of their own by this time. They seemed to be fairly comfortable. Mr McDuff talked a great deal about the destruction of his property by the fire, but only one vessel of his fleet of seven had

been damaged and he was busy every day with preparations for the coming season's trade. Major Darnell, however, was in a sorry plight, for he had lost everything but his pension. He kept a stiff upper lip, however, and kept himself alive through the winter on his traps and gun and his share of the world's charity. He talked of going north and settling beside William Bolt in the unburned, unclaimed forest. He could have gone at any time, but he put it off week by week.

George Hill saw easily why the major continued to reside in want on the Miramichi. The veteran had lost his heart to young Flora McDuff. He who had faced the hosts of Napoleon without dismay or confusion now trembled and changed colour at every careless glance of that girl's green eyes. He was captivated, fascinated by her youth and beauty; and perhaps a thought of her father's evident solvency sometimes came pleasantly to his distracted mind. Hill saw all this, and more. He saw the girl's very evident interest in himself and his affairs and felt abashed by it, for she aroused no stronger feeling in his breast than a mild admiration for her beauty. He was sorry for the major who, bereft of his house and lands and horses, cut a pathetic figure as a lover.

Bishop Jardine returned to Newcastle in April. Hill told him of his desire to leave his present charge for the farther and rougher field about and

north of Portage River. The bishop made no objections to this plan, for he saw that Hill's strength lay in missionary work.

"You may go north as soon as a man arrives from home to take your place here," said the bishop. "I expect one in a week or two."

The new rector arrived ten days later, and the vessel that brought him also brought several letters and a small but weighty iron box for the Reverend George Hill. The letters were delivered into Hill's hands by the captain of the barque, and the iron box was carried to Hill's house by two sailors and escorted by the barque's second mate and three men with drawn cutlasses. This imposing procession, and the evident weight of the iron box, distracted the attention of the populace from their new pastor. Men and women and children fell in behind the box and its escort and followed to Hill's cabin. Mr McDuff, Bishop Jardine, and Mr Low, the new rector, joined the procession.

Hill sat down on the box and glanced through the letters. Several were from his mother; one, dated the twenty-first of January and written in a very feeble hand, was from his wealthy and pious aunt; and one of more recent date was from his aunt's lawyers.

Hill looked up and around with grave eyes. He saw Captain Snow and the mate, the five mariners, the bishop, McDuff, and Mr Low all regarding him

and his iron box curiously. He got to his feet and shook hands with the two officers from the barque. Then he produced money from his pocket and gave a coin to each of the five sailors. The sailors saluted and were marched off by the mate. Captain Snow produced the key of the box and a receipt form for Hill to sign. Hill signed the paper and the captain departed.

"What's all this about?" asked the bishop.

"What have ye there in the box?" asked McDuff.

"My Aunt Eliza Gaylord is dead," said Hill. "She has left me a fortune—worth five or six thousands a year, it seems."

"English?" queried McDuff.

"Yes," said Hill.

"It wouldn't all be in that box," said McDuff.

Hill shook his head and reseated himself on the box.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Bishop Jardine. "Six thousand a year! A great deal of money. Now you will alter your plans, I suppose."

"No, sir," said Hill. "I'll start north in three days, with your permission. I must write some letters and find and provision a schooner."

"You are a remarkable young man," said the bishop, with wonder and admiration in his voice.

"Aye, remarkable," said McDuff, turning and leaving the cabin.

Bishop Jardine and Mr Low left a few minutes later. Hill sat on the iron box, with the key of it in his hand, and gazed straight ahead. He pictured the six thousand pounds a year. He pictured the lands and houses that produced six thousand pounds a year. Yes, it was a great deal of money, even as the bishop had said, but what could he buy with it that he wanted? Could it bring back to him a moment of that night?

William Hinks entered and found Hill seated on the box. He listened to the news without comment, and showed no surprise when he learned that Hill still intended to stick to his work and to go north to Portage River. He offered to help in the preparations for the move and to accompany the parson to the new field. Both offers were thankfully accepted. Plans for the journey were being discussed when Major Darnell entered the room. The major was in a state of high excitement.

"Is it true you've come in for a fortune, you lucky young devil!" he cried. "Millions, I hear! Is it true, my dear boy?"

"It is a fact," said Hill calmly. "Who told you of it?"

"Who told me? Bless my soul, it's all over the village. A dozen people told me. They say you have half a million of it right here in that iron box. And they tell me that you're thinking of staying on in this miserable hole and trying

to save our souls, when you might be back in England and living like a gentleman, but I don't believe a word of it."

"I mean to stick to my work. I'm going north to Portage River in a few days."

"I admire you for it, my boy, but I'll be damned if I'd do the same if I were in your shoes! No, by the Lord Harry! I can't make you out, my boy. Something has gone wrong with you."

Hill smiled grimly.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I don't want to go home. I'm interested in my work, and now that I am rich I can do something for my friends."

"Tut, tut!" returned the major, shooting a sidelong glance at William Hinks. "Friends, d'ye say? You'll find the woods to be full of your friends now. Have a care that you don't give your whole fortune away, or that it isn't taken from you. Watch your money and your friends."

During the five days immediately following his sudden change in worldly conditions, George Hill was a busy man. He bought a little fore-and-aft schooner, and stocked it with an eye to the needs of the people of Portage River. He gave away two hundred pounds in five and ten pound lots. He gave his two-roomed house to the village to be used as a free hospital, endowed it generously,

and put Doctor Thompson in charge of it. He gave Bishop Jardine an order on his London bankers for a sum of money to be devoted to the building of a little church in Newcastle. He forced a like order upon Major Darnell. Mr McDuff soon got wind of all this. He visited Hill and expostulated violently with him for his witless liberality, and for his pains he was shown the door.

Those were busy days; and on the night of the fifth day aboard the little fore-and-aft lying at anchor in the bay, Hill laid his heart bare to William Hinks. It was a chilly night, though the day had been warm. The sky was full of white stars. Flocks of northing geese went over the river constantly, in thin-drawn, wavering lines against the stars, their wild and plaintive cries ringing faintly down to earth. A lantern hung in the fore-rigging of the little schooner. Hill and Hinks paced the narrow deck. The balance of the crew, an old man and a boy of sixteen, were in their bunks below.

"Ye told me once somethin' about lovin' a woman an' losin' her," said Hinks suddenly. "Was that long ago?"

For an instant Hill started and quivered as if he had been struck.

"Not long ago," he said.

They were silent for five minutes. Then Hinks spoke again.

"I want to be square an' above board with ye, Hill, because I like ye," he said. "So I'm tellin' ye now that I once saw ye with a girl, an' it wasn't long ago. A foreign-lookin' young woman and—and right pretty. I've bin wonderin' if that would be the one ye was speakin' about?"

Hill halted and grasped his companion by the arms with both hands. He stared eagerly yet grimly into the woodsman's face. There was a dangerous flicker in his blue eyes.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "What do you know? Out with it!"

"It was before the fire," replied Hinks quietly. "I saw ye in the woods back of Darnell's place with her. She was a stranger to these parts, but I'd seen her before once. I saw her shoot the pirate through the court-house window. There was one other man in the crowd who saw who fired the shot, but I tripped him up an' punched him behind the ear before he could grab her, or even let a holler out of him. It wasn't my affair, but I admired the slick way she shot. I reckon she had her own good reason for shootin'. I was glad to see her get clear of the crowd. This is the first time I've spoken of it to a soul, but I've bin wonderin' of late if she's the woman ye mean?"

"Yes," said Hill. "I did not know it was she who fired that shot, but by God I love her

all the more for it." And then he told William Hinks the whole tragic and amazing story.

When the fore-and-aft let go her hook in the mouth of Portage River the people thought that she had come to trade. They had been expecting a schooner from the south for several days. The river was running yellow and strong, staining the water of the straits, and sweeping along pans and cakes of sodden ice, but the villagers put out in their skiffs and canoes and crowded over the schooner's low rails. Some had pelts and some had cured fish to trade for groceries and clothing and rum; and those whose skiffs and canoes were empty were ready to pledge the fish of the coming summer and the furs of next winter.

"I'm not trading," said Hill. "I'm a preacher."

Some of those who heard looked suspicious, and all looked disappointed. Some grumbled and some swore. Hinks drew Hill aside.

"Let me trade with them," he said. "They'll get full value, an' them as need somethin' for nothin' will get it. No good in makin' beggars of the whole lot."

"Right you are," answered Hill. "Go ahead with your trading."

"My friend here is a preacher, but I'm a trader," said Hinks to the men of Portage River. "I've

got baccy an' flour, boots an' blankets, powder and shot, twine for yer nets, tea an' molasses an' salt."

Trade started briskly; but something of the nature of a riot followed the discovery that there was no rum aboard the *North Star*, and that not one of Hill's dozen bottles of brandy was for sale. The disturbance was soon quelled, though the grumbling was not silenced. The skiffs and canoes put back to shore, and not one of them went empty.

Hill went ashore next morning and set a crew of men to work at felling and squaring lumber for a house; but he had to show them the colour of his money before they would so much as whet their axes. He visited a dozen cabins before returning to the schooner, and after his midday meal aboard he returned to the hamlet with his medicine-chest. There was much sickness in the place, and, worse still, there were numerous cases of a mental condition verging on idiocy. The people had been practically shut off from the world for two or three generations. Their minds had suffered more than their bodies. The majority of those who seemed to be normal both mentally and physically were of mixed white and Micmac blood. And they were indescribably ignorant, and, being ignorant, they were suspicious. Hill returned to the schooner at dusk in low spirits.

Hinks sailed back to the *Miramichi* for another

freight of food and blankets and tobacco. Hill remained at Portage River doctoring his sullen people and urging the builders forward with their work on the house. The house was completed a few days after the *North Star's* return to Portage River. Hill paid the workmen with gold, and every mother's son of them tested his coins with his teeth before pocketing them. Hill felt a swift, mad desire to pitch into them with his fists, but he conquered it.

Hill's first religious service at Portage River was attended by seven women and five babies, four very deaf old men, and one middle-aged male idiot. It was not a success.

CHAPTER XV

PAT CORMACK AND THE MISSIONARY

GEORGE HILL toiled manfully day and night, and though he did not seem to make much progress towards the spiritual and mental enlightenment of his people, his ministrations as a doctor were highly successful. He felt discouragement every day, and but for the society of Bill Hinks he would have gone mad with loneliness and heartache. Hinks was not a cheery companion, but he was sympathetic. Towards the end of May they sailed the fore-and-aft schooner northward along the coast to Burnt Cove. The folk of Burnt Cove were not improvements on the folk of Portage River. They differed from the latter only in that they were fewer in number and seemed not to be so well fed. Hinks carried on a pretence of trading with them, but in almost every case the people of Burnt Cove got something for nothing. Hill found enough illness to keep him busy for six days. He made no attempt to preach, and on

the seventh day the *North Star* sailed back to Portage River.

They found a strange schooner at anchor in the river's mouth and trouble ashore. The trader which had been long expected by the people had arrived; the men who had taken Hill's wages had quickly exchanged the money for rum; the men who had pledged their fish and furs of the future to Hinks had quickly opened new accounts and pledged their catches of to-morrow over again—this time for rum. Men who exchanged the skins of fox and fish and lynx for Hill's flour and blankets now produced more skins and exchanged them for rum.

Hill and Hinks went ashore. They found the villagers aroused from their lethargy and fighting-drunk. They were received with harsh words and threatening gestures. Hinks was all for retorting with his fists—even with a club, if need be, but the parson restrained him.

"Our quarrel is not with these unfortunates, but with the rogues who supplied them with the liquor," said Hill. "Oh, the poor fools! They grumbled when we gave them ten shillings' worth of flour for five shillings' worth of pelts, but they hand over five fox skins for every bottle of rum to this rascal Wilks. We'll go to the heart of it. We'll go aboard Wilks's schooner."

Hinks was willing. He was more than willing.

"Wilks belongs to the Miramichi," he said.

"I know it," replied Hill.

"He works for Alexander McDuff," said Hinks.

"The fore-and-aft and the rum belong to McDuff."

"Very good," replied Hill.

They returned to their own schooner. Then they went aboard Wilks's command. Wilks met them at the rail and asked their business.

"I'm the Reverend George Hill, missionary hereabouts," said Hill. "My business with you is to order you to get up your anchor and get to the devil out of this."

"Ye sound more like a pirate nor a parson," sneered the skipper.

"Perhaps so, my good fellow, but I'll be obliged to you if you'll keep your ill-mannered comments to yourself. If you are not out of the river in half an hour I'll put you out."

"How d'ye figger to do it?"

"Steady there, Jim Wise," said Hinks. "I got ye covered. Lay that musket down an' step out of the galley or I'll send ye to dainnation so quick ye won't know if ye're awake or asleep."

Jim Wise obeyed.

"An' you there behind the hatch, I got my larboard pistol trained on ye," continued Hinks. "Chuck yer axe into the scruppers or I'll put somethin' into yer vitals ye'll wish wasn't there."

An axe went into the scruppers. The skipper's eyes rolled uneasily.

"Ye'll answer for this to Mr McDuff!" he cried.

"The sooner you tell McDuff all about it the better pleased I'll be," said Hill.

Wilks got up his anchor half an hour later and sailed away.

The people of Portage River took it for granted that Hill was in some way at the bottom of Wilks's sudden departure with much rum still aboard. They expressed their displeasure by crowding into skiffs and canoes and pulling out to the *North Star*. Hill armed himself, Hinks, old Peter Brewer, and young Andy Smith with handy pieces of stove wood.

"What do you want?" he asked of the occupants of the first skiff to come alongside.

The reply served fully to show the murderous frame of mind the men were in. It sent all the colour out of Hill's tanned face and lit a flame in his eyes like the blue fire at the core of an iceberg.

"An' the darned fools mean it," said Hinks. "They're just mad enough an' drunk enough to mean it."

"Yes. They must learn a lesson," said Hill.

The first man to top the low rail was the father of two children whom Hill had nursed back to health. He fell back into his skiff with a bleeding nose. The second, the third, and the fourth to

attempt to board the schooner were rapped smartly over the skulls with the pieces of stove wood. Two of them fell into the water. A canoe was upset. Hinks suddenly jumped back from the rail, drew a pistol, and fired. A fellow in the bow of a skiff let fall his musket into the river with a yell of pain and rage. His arm was broken.

The attack drew off. The men who had fallen into the stream were rescued by their friends. Three muskets were fired harmlessly at the schooner. Then the skiffs and canoes were headed for shore.

"After them!" cried Hill. "They haven't learnt their lesson yet."

He and Hinks jumped into the boat astern, cast her off, and pulled at top speed after the skiffs and canoes. The villagers disembarked and waited on the edge of the river, still dangerous with rage and rum but somewhat shaken with astonishment. Hinks sprang ashore with a cocked pistol in each hand and threatened them. They fell back a little and crowded closer together.

"Spread out," cried Hinks. "Spread out, so's I can see ye all. If any mother's son of ye starts loadin' a musket he'll finish the job in hell."

Hill pulled off his coat.

"Pat Cormack, step out here," he ordered. "You're the biggest man on this river. Step out and learn what I think of you."

Pat stepped out slowly. He was very big and not entirely sober. He held an axe in his big right hand.

"Drop that axe," said Hinks.

Pat obeyed, but with evident reluctance.

"Kick it into the river," ordered Hinks.

The villager seemed to reflect.

"Hurry up about it, or ye'll find that fine buckle on yer belt comin' out of the middle of yer back," said Hinks.

Cormack kicked the axe into the shallow water.

Then the fight began. Everyone enjoyed it except Pat Cormack. Hill weighed one hundred and seventy pounds and Cormack two hundred and twenty. It took Pat just five minutes to learn that he could not reach the parson's face with either ham-like fist, so he let fly a kick. He got slowly to his feet, wondering if he had kicked himself by mistake. Then the parson hit him. He got up again, only to be hit again.

"Next," said Hill. "But after I've whipped ten of you I'll claim the right to preach you a sermon."

"I'd like to know how ye do it," said a thick-set fellow with black whiskers. "Hev ye a rock in yer hand?"

Hill raised his hands, wide open.

"Come and I'll show you," he said.

"Don't ye do it, Jake," mumbled Pat Cormack

between swollen lips. "Leave 'im be. Leave 'im preach if he bes sot on it."

"He kin preach till he busts hisself for all o' me," said Jake.

The light of Hill's blue eyes warmed and softened and he smiled engagingly.

"Men, I don't want to fight, though I fight better than I preach," he said. "But the way you treated me to-day made me see red. What have I ever done to you that you should want to murder me? Bill Hinks and I have given you better value for your trade than anyone else who ever put into this river. I have done my best for you and your families as a doctor, and I'm willing to try to save your souls into the bargain. But when we send that robber Wilks out of the river with a flea in his ear—that rascal who robs you to the bone—you all set out to murder us. By nature I have a mild and pleasant temper, lads, but such dirty, treacherous, cowardly treatment as that would anger a saint in heaven. And I'm no saint, God knows. I'm a man trying to help other men. I've been a sailor and fought for my king and country. I've bled and I've spilt blood. You made me see red. Dogs wouldn't turn on a man the way you men turned on me to-day—and all because I chased the robber with the rum from his anchorage. If you didn't like it, why didn't you come out and offer to fight me fair? Don't you know that

the only kind of fighting that is any good is fair fighting? The way you men fight makes the saints and angels weep for shame. But you'll do better in the future, lads. I'll hold no bitterness in my heart against you if you fight me fair. Pat Cormack fought fair—bar that one kick he let fly at me—and he took his beating like a man. I can see it by the way he looks at me now out of one eye. Does he want to shoot me from behind a tree or knife me in the back for the little beating I gave him? Not he. The worst thing Pat Cormack will ever do to me, or ever wish me, will be a pair of black eyes. I'll not count this a sermon, lads, because I didn't set out with a text nor in the proper frame of mind for preaching. But I feel better now. To-morrow night I'll hold service ashore here in my new house."

He turned away. Hinks, who had pocketed his pistols some time before, followed him down to the skiff. The villagers were silent. Several of them glanced down dully at the weapons in their hands. Much of the madness of the rum had gone out of them. Some of them felt dim, faint stirrings of shame. Pat Cormack broke the heavy silence.

"There bes jist one man i' this river can best me in a fair, bare-handed fight—an' that bes the parson," he said, glancing around with his undamaged eye.

"Ye forget Pierre Leduc, up the river," remarked somebody.

Pat fingered his whiskers, then wiped the blood from his lips and nose with the back of his hand.

"Aye, Pierre," he said thoughtfully. "But he fights wid his feet more nor his hands. Maybe he could best me an' maybe not, but I bain't afeared o' him, an' I'll bet ye me skiff an' hand-lines an' fox-traps agin a bar'l o' flour, Jim Murdock, that the parson could best him i' any manner o' fight ever invented, fair or foul, hand or foot, knife or bat or gun."

The bet was not taken. Hill preached a simple, straightforward sermon that night to an attentive congregation. After the service he went to Pat Cormack's cabin, by invitation, and pulled an aching tooth from the jaw of Pat's eldest boy. Then he dosed Charlie Lunt's baby for colic and compounded a liniment for old mother Murdock's rheumatism.

For Hill a peaceful and busy week followed his fight with the men of Portage River. He did not preach again, but married four couples and baptised six children. He spent most of the time in doctoring and nursing. Hinks helped him in the nursing. Hinks's skill and tenderness in the care of a sick baby were wonderful to see. Pat Cormack formed a somewhat disconcerting habit of

following the parson about from door to door and even from bed to bed and begging for instruction and enlightenment in the practice and ethics of fair fighting. Hill showed him a few swings, punches, hooks, guards, and side-steps, and Hinks gave him a lesson in rough-and-tumble.

At noon of the eighth day after the trader's departure and the subsequent disturbance, a skiff came into the river from the north and two men entered the village and inquired for the doctor. They said that they had heard of him in Burnt Cove. No, they didn't belong to Burnt Cove themselves. They came from farther north. They were strangers to the people of Portage River. They answered Hill's brief questions briefly.

"Ye'll be well paid in gold," said one of them.

"I'm not working for gold," said Hill.

He asked Hinks to take charge of Portage River while he was away. At first Hinks refused to consider the idea of remaining behind for a moment, but on second thoughts—and those thoughts were of two sick babies whom he had taken charge of—he consented ungraciously to carry on the work at Portage River to the best of his ability.

"I'll doctor an' nurse for ye the best I can, an' if there's any call to fight I'll fight, but I'm damned if I'll preach for ye," he said.

Hill smiled and continued to make a selection from his big medicine chest.

"An' if ye be bound to leave the fore-an'-aft behind, ye needn't worry about her," continued Hinks. "Wilks can come back for trouble an' welcome. He'll find it jumpin' right out in his face more nor he's lookin' for. We got some husky lads on our side now who was agin us before. An' if that bone-crusher Leduc comes down river an' makes a noise I'll convert him in yer name."

"I leave everything in your hands, Bill," said the missionary.

So Hill went away in the skiff with the two strangers from the north, leaving Hinks ashore and old Peter Brewer and young Andy Smith aboard the fore-and-aft in the stream, all well armed. He left the *North Star* swinging idly to her anchor more for a sign of good faith with his new and awakening people than for any other reason. He felt no fear for her safety or for the safety of her stores. He knew McDuff the merchant too well to expect another visit from Wilks the trader. And he believed, with Hinks, that some of the men who had tried to take his life a week ago would now fight in defence of his property. That thought warmed his heart.

The skiff sailed well on a light, beam wind. Burnt Cove was passed within three hours of

leaving the river. The bleak, rocky coast was unrolled mile by mile, dreary bluff, empty cove, and frowning cliff. It was new country to Hill. He watched it idly, wondering why any people should make their homes in such a cheerless wilderness. His attention was attracted to a point on the coast ahead by a thin veil of smoke. He kept his eyes on this, and as the skiff crawled along and opened a little bay to his view he saw that the smoke went up from a heap of charred timber above the landwash. A grey fish-stage at the edge of the tide told him that the smoking mass had been a human habitation. There were no other cabins in sight.

"Who lived there?" he asked, pointing at the smoke.

Both men said that they did not know. They said it sullenly.

"You don't know!" exclaimed Hill. "How is that? Are there so many settlers on this coast that you don't know one from another? That is the first sign of life we've seen since we passed Burnt Cove, and you don't know anything about it! And you don't seem to care! Run ashore and we'll look into the matter."

The man at the steering-oar made no response to the order by word or act. He did not even look at the missionary, but cast a flitting glance at the smoking timbers ashore and then gazed straight ahead, and the skiff continued to sail

straight ahead on a course that would soon take her across the mouth of the bay. The man forward of the little mast was likewise unresponsive. Hill stared hard at the steersman, then turned on the thwart and stared at the man in the bow.

"Are you deaf?" he asked.

Their eyes avoided his. They made no answer. Hill's eyes brightened and hardened.

"Head her in," he cried. "If you don't, you'll have to look for another doctor!"

"It bes nought," replied the fellow aft. "Nought but a old, deserted hut. An' we bes in a hurry, sir. That poor woman bes desperate bad."

Hill stood up. He made no movement of the hand toward his breast, where two loaded pistols were stowed safely away, but took up a heavy, birch-wood thole-pin.

"I'm accustomed to being obeyed," he said. "I'm a dangerous man to cross."

So the skiff was run into the little bay. Hill sprang ashore and ran up to the heap of black and smoking poles. The boatmen did not follow him. A glance over the charred timbers showed him a human body. He dragged it out of the ashes and examined it. It was of a young and muscular man. The fire had burnt away the hair and heavy clothing and blackened and blistered the skin. One blistered hand still gripped the

haft of a short axe. The head of the axe had been burnt free of the handle and the wood was black in the grip of the black fingers. The dead man's breast showed a great wound, and the back of the skull was smashed to pulp. Hill hunted through the ruins of the hut again, gazed all around at the empty rocks, then returned to the landwash and the skiff.

"There's been foul murder done here," he said. "I'll look into it later. Now take me to the sick woman."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SICK WOMAN OF THE HIDDEN HARBOUR

HILL did not speak again to his companions during the remainder of the journey along the coast, and they did not speak to him. He suspected them of knowing all about the burnt hut and the murdered man. He thought of the loaded pistols in his breast with grim satisfaction. Bill Hinks had suggested the pistols, had loaded them for him and forced them upon him.

The long twilight deepened into a night of black shadows and ashen gloom. A myriad of small, white stars glinted far and high. The restless black tide whispered and sobbed along the broken coast. Under the cover of the dark Hill slipped one of the pistols from his breast to the right hand pocket of his coat. He did not think that the boatmen would commit any treachery against him before he had done what he could for the sick woman, but he felt that it was wise to be ready to deal with the unexpected. So he nursed one pistol in his breast, the other in his pocket,

and the heavy thole-pin in his right hand. He sat astride the thwart, with every sense straining forward and aft, ready to strike quick and hard at the first warning. But nothing violent happened. The skiff was run ashore and the fellow in the bow sprang out and held her steady. The steersman unshipped his oar and shouldered Hill's bag and roll of blankets. Hill stumbled out on to the landwash. He could not see any lights nor hear any sounds to indicate a settlement.

"Are we there?" he asked.

"We got about a mile to go," answer'd the man with the baggage.

Hill followed the two across the shingle and up a sharp rise encumbered with boulders. The guides moved slowly, feeling for a way. Hill could not detect any sign of a path with his feet or his eyes. They went inland, across a strip of barren and through a rough wood. Hill tripped in a root and narrowly escaped a fall. This shook his nerves and his temper. He reached forward and seized one of his guides roughly by the shoulder.

"Where the devil are you taking me to?" he cried.

"To the sick woman," growled the fellow.

"Lead on," said Hill, recovering his sense of caution and control of his temper quickly.

They went on in silence. They turned to the

north and soon began to slant back toward the coast. If the settlement was on the coast, why hadn't they sailed to it in the skiff? Hill wondered, but did not voice the question. He soon caught a grey glimmer of the sea and again the uneasy sob and whisper of the tide. He followed his guides down a rocky, twisting path. They halted close against a bulk of blackness. Hill heard the rapping of knuckles on thick timber, then the withdrawing of bolts. He saw a smeared gleam of yellow light close before his eyes and heard an exchange of whispered words which he failed to catch. The door was opened a little wider and his bag and blankets were passed across the threshold. He was pushed after them and the door was closed behind him. The room was dimly lit by a fire on a wide hearth. He turned, with the thole-pin from the skiff still in his hand, and eyed the person who had admitted him. The fellow had his back to the room and was swiftly shooting the bolts of the door into place. Hill noted his bulky shoulders.

"Here I am," he said. "Where is the sick woman?"

The man at the door straightened his back with a jerk and turned swiftly. Hill retreated a pace and swung back the hand with the thole-pin, ready to strike quick and hard. But instead of striking he let the thole-pin slip from his fingers

and hop on the floor. The man whom he faced was Farland—Mary's father!

It was evident to Hill that Farland's amazement was as great as his own. Before Hill could find his voice Farland placed a finger on his lips for silence. The big man's eyes shone like coals of fire. His face went colourless with emotion. He stepped close to the missionary and laid hold of his right wrist with a hand that shook.

"Not a word!" he whispered.

He pointed across his shoulder at an inner door.

"There's a woman in there with Mary—one of their wenches. Have a care. Not a look or a word!"

"Mary?" breathed Hill.

"Alive—but very ill. Fear—and a starved heart. But I've kept her safe from them. They still fear me—while I'm on my feet. Not a word, if you would save her. Not a look!"

He turned and went swiftly to the door of the inner room. He opened it, looked within and spoke a word. He drew back and a young woman came out, walking with bowed head. She shot a curious, sidelong glance at Hill, her eyes bright at once with a strange mixture of boldness and shame, then went to the hearth and placed a stick on the fire.

Hill stood and stared at the open door. He

felt dizzy. For a second or two fireshine and candle-light dimmed before his eyes. His breath hung in his windpipe, his heart shook in his side. He put out a hand and pressed it against the rough wall, and so steadied himself. He saw Farland beckon to him from the inner room, but he did not move immediately. He could not move.

"This way, doctor," said Farland. "Fetch your medicines."

A vague, monstrous horror weighted Hill's feet and numbed his brain and muscles. He had felt the same thing in dreams, long ago when he was a child. And was this a dream? Or was she really there in the next room, only a few feet away from him—Mary—she whom he had lost? What was this illness they had told him of? Was Mary ill? Was she dying? Did her life depend now upon his skill as a doctor? God! Had he found her only to see her die! Or was it a dream—all a dream—the strangers from the north, the skiff, the voyage along the desolate coast, the ashes of the hut and the blistered corpse, the roundabout journey through the dark, this hut and the face of her father—were all these things but mad trickeries of dream?

The woman who had mended the fire now thrust his heavy canvas bag into his hands and pushed him toward the door of the inner room. He crossed the threshold and heard Farland shut and

fasten the door behind him. The room was lit by two tallow candles.

A woman lay in a narrow bed, frail, motionless, with closed eyes. Hill approached the bed slowly, his gaze of fear and longing fixed upon the averted face. He bent above her. Was it Mary? Did she breathe? He placed a light and fearful hand upon her still face and felt the flutter of her breath. He found one of her wrists with trembling fingers and felt the faint, slow run of her blood. Then the strength went out of his knees and he sank beside the bed and hid his face in his hands. Presently he put out a fumbling hand and found one of her hands. She opened her eyes, turned her face on the pillow and looked vacantly at the bowed head so close to her. Farland approached, bent over her, and whispered a few words in her ear. A quiver went through her, and her eyes brightened for an instant, then closed again.

Mary opened her eyes again half an hour later and looked into her lover's face. He was holding a cup to her lips. She did not speak.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

She sighed faintly and smiled. The smile was of pure anguish and weariness. It filled him with a pity that was half horror, with horror that was all pity for her and for himself. The terrible fear that her mind had gone possessed him. The hand

that held the cup shook so violently that the bitter draught spilt over on her chin and throat. He turned to Farland, who stood motionless and silent a few paces away.

"She does not know me!" he whispered. "By God!—if she has lost her reason—so shall I go mad!"

The other advanced to the bed and gazed down tenderly into the girl's face. He passed his hand soothingly across her forehead, then turned to Hill.

"Be patient," he said calmly. "She has not forgotten you, lad, and she knows you now; but she mistakes you for a dream—or your ghost. She has seen you so a hundred times in her dreaming, awake and asleep. In a little while she will know that it is really you."

He went to the door and opened it cautiously. He saw the young woman crouched by the hearth.

"You may go now," he said. "My daughter has taken medicine and is sleeping. Come back early."

He closed the inner door behind him, crossed the outer room, and commenced unbolting the outer door. The woman went without a word, and Farland bolted the door behind her. He put more wood on the fire, for the night wind from the north was cold, then returned to his daughter's room. He found Hill standing motionless beside

the bed, gazing down at Mary. Her eyes met the gaze, wide and unwavering.

"I still see it," she whispered. "It is still here."

Her father knelt and took one of her frail hands between both of his. He stroked it tenderly.

"Pedro sent two of them out for a doctor," he whispered. "They've played into our hands this time, my girl—for who've they fetched into this prison but George Hill. I don't know where they found him or why they think him a doctor—but here he is. It is George, my girl—else we are both dreaming or gone stark mad."

"I have dreamed this thing a score of times before," she sighed. "He is dead. It is his ghost. Or we are both mad."

"But two of the fellows brought him to this very door," returned her father. "They think he is a doctor. Would they mistake a ghost for a doctor? Not they. Look at this hand of his. Feel it. Is it a ghost's hand, my girl—or a dream's? Kneel down, George, and let her touch your face."

George Hill knelt and bowed his head low. She gazed at him with wide, fearful eyes and touched his face lightly with her left hand. He grasped the hand in both of his and pressed it passionately to his lips, then to his eyes, palm

upward. She felt his sudden, hot tears run upon her fingers. Then she knew that it was true--that this was not a ghost or any trick of heart-ache or fever, but her lover in the flesh. She uttered a low cry and lost consciousness.

Mary recovered consciousness quickly and remembered instantly. She looked up into his bright, weather-tanned face and his blue eyes a-gleam with tears. She smiled joyously but did not speak. She drank from the cup which he held to her lips, then sighed contentedly and closed her eyes. She felt his lips brush her lips, her eyes, her forehead. Then she slept.

Hill went to the outer room, where Farland stood by the fire. He saw that the wooden shutters on the small, square windows were closed and barred. He noted the heavy bolts on the strong door. He stood beside Farland and fixed his eyes on that dark, handsome face.

"How long has she been ill?" he asked.

"She has been growing weaker for months," replied Farland. "She is not ill. She has had no fever, no sickness. Grief and terror are the things that have pulled her down. She'll regain her strength quickly now."

"Why did you leave me?" asked Hill. "If she cared so much, why did she run away from me in the night?"

The other did not answer immediately. He sat

down on a stool and gazed reflectively into the heart of the fire.

"You still care for her?" he queried.

"As for nothing else in the world," said Hill.

"Good lord, man, can't you see how I care for her!"

"And you know me. You said so once. Are you sure that you know who I am?"

"You are the Planter—that bloody pirate and murderer," said Hill. "You are too courageous to deny it. For that matter I do not care who or what you are."

"I don't deny it," said Farland. "I am John Alvarez, the Planter, the pirate—and if ever a man's soul was ripe for hell, mine is over-ripe. But my wife never knew it, and my daughter never knew it until your ships hunted us out of the islands. I was undone then. I had to take the girl aboard and run for it. But I kept her safe—until now. Here we are in a trap. But the dogs still fear me. I sleep always with pistols in my hands and every door and window barred and bolted. It is well you came; but we are still in the trap."

"We'll get out of it," said Hill with assurance.

"Do you think God has brought me to her again only to let us perish?"

"God?" queried the other. "What has God to do with it, my young friend? Do you think

that I'd be here now, alive, if God Almighty ever took a hand in the games we play down here? "

"He has protected you that you might protect her," said Hill with conviction. "And He has brought me to this place—because I have tried to serve Him of late."

John Alvarez smiled grimly at the fire, then turned to his companion with a glow of affection in his black eyes.

"You are a simple soul, but honest and brave," he said. "Chance brought you to this place, my boy, and if we win out of it we'll do so by our own strength and courage. So don't leave anything more to God than you have to. Are you armed? "

"Two pistols and a knife," said Hill.

He had forgotten that he had asked a question that had not been answered. Every thought and care of the past had slipped from his mind. He was only conscious of the girl sleeping quietly so near him, under the same roof with him, just beyond that thin wall of poles and that half-open door. His prayers had been heard and answered. A miracle had been performed. The lost was found; life was again a golden thing; duty was no longer the only spur to living, nor the achievement of merit the only reward for striving.

"We left you that night for your own good,"

said Alvarez. "To have awakened you then would have meant sure death to you. Pedro was there, within a yard of me, and the four others were in the bushes; so I told him that there were six other fugitives from the fire in our party, all men, all armed, and two of them magistrates. So he was very careful to go away quietly and quickly. If I had not been wounded I'd have shouted to you and taken the chances of two against four. We went down to their boat without a word and pulled out to the schooner."

"Who is Pedro?" asked Hill.

Alvarez uttered a string of appalling oaths in a quiet voice.

"He is the only one I fear," he said. "The others fear me; but their fear of that yellow — is greater. The others are beasts, dogs. They have no fire in their bellies save lust. Bah! They are easily fed. Dogs! At a kick they yelp. At a second kick they lick the boot. They would not have kept us here a month. All they wanted was the money. They got it. I took them to it and they were satisfied. But was that devil's brat satisfied? No, by——!"

He paused and looked at Hill. The young man's face was turned to the half-open door. Hill left his seat, crossed the floor on tiptoe, and looked into the other room. He stood motionless on the threshold for a few seconds, then entered.

The fire went out of Alvarez's face and he smiled.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered. "I don't believe he heard a word of it all. I don't believe he'd give me his attention if I told him the history of my life. He knows who I am—and doesn't seem to care a damn, by——!"

He, too, left the hearth and looked into the other room. Mary still slept, and Hill knelt beside her bed. He was about to enter when he heard a guarded knocking at the outer door. His face hardened. He stepped lightly to where the young man knelt and gripped his shoulder with fingers like iron.

"Get up from your prayer-bones," he whispered harshly. "Pull your wits together and play the doctor. Pedro is at the door!"

Hill got to his feet. Alvarez went to the outer door.

"Who's there?" he asked in Spanish.

"It is me, Pedro," came the answer, in the same language. "I come to ask what the doctor says, my captain."

"She is sleeping now," replied Alvarez through the crack at the edge of the door. "The doctor has given her a draught. He says she is very ill."

"I humbly beg you to tell him that if your daughter dies he shall die also," said the man outside.

Hill, who had joined Alvarez, heard this. Alvarez looked at the missionary and smiled darkly.

"If any man can save her life he is the man," he replied. "He seems to be a very clever doctor."

"It is well," said Pedro; and they heard him turn away from the door.

Hill gripped Alvarez by the arm.

"Who is this fellow you call Pedro?" he asked.

Alvarez repeated what he had already told of Pedro, and added the following facts. Pedro was the unacknowledged son of a gentleman with whom Alvarez had long ago been on very friendly terms. Pedro had been well educated by a learned priest in Port of Spain, but in his sixteenth year and a sudden fit of temper he had stuck a knife into his pious instructor. This act had cooled his rage and at the same time cleared his wits. He had stowed the priest's humble savings in his pockets and fled from the town. Alvarez had run across him a year later, somewhere among the islands. That had been twelve years ago. Pedro had been second in command of the Planter's big topsail-schooner at the time of the last disastrous flight into northern waters.

"But why do you fear him?" asked Hill. "Why did he bring you here, and why

does he keep you here? What does he want?"

"Mary," replied Alvarez. "That's what he wants, damn him!"

Hill realised then that his troubles were not yet over.

Mary awoke three times during the night and knew Hill every time. Twice she drank a little weak brandy and water and once half a cup of broth. Hill and Alvarez did not get much sleep. Now one lay down and now the other, but neither remained in his blankets for more than half an hour at a time. They talked spasmodically of Mary, of their present danger, of ways of escape from Pedro and his fellows. They did not tell the stories of their pasts. Hill knew that Alvarez was a pirate, but he saw him only as Mary's father and as a strong man on his side, armed and cunning and courageous. How and why he had become a pirate, and what he had been before, seemed unimportant to him then. He knew the worst of Alvarez and did not care. And he told nothing of his own life since their flight from him. That, too, seemed unimportant. He forgot that he was a priest.

The young woman who had nursed Mary returned early, and Alvarez unbolted the door and let her in. She shot an inquiring glance at Hill as she passed him in the outer room. She had

red cheeks, red lips, and bright eyes. Hill noticed these things and asked Alvarez who she was.

"One of their wenches," said Alvarez. "They found her somewhere on the coast and enticed her with their gold. They have plenty of gold. She seems to be contented with her lot."

CHAPTER XVII

MORE OF THE HIDDEN HARBOUR

ALVAREZ cautioned his daughter against letting any sign or hint escape her before the woman of her interest in the doctor. Mary understood and nodded her head.

Hill left the house after breakfast and examined the harbour. Alvarez had told him that he was safe until such time as Pedro should decide that Mary was no longer in need of medical attendance.

"And what then?" Hill had asked.

"You'll never leave this harbour alive, with or without us, if that — can help it," Alvarez had answered. "If he suspected the truth of how things are between you and the girl he'd kill you to-day, but as it is you are safe until she regains her strength—and so am I."

Hill did not approach the other cabins. He saw that the little harbour was open to the sea only by way of a very narrow channel. A fore-and-aft schooner rode sweetly to her anchor in the basin of clear water. Two skiffs lay on the land-

wash. The sun was high enough to flood its warmth and light over the eastern wall of the harbour. The sky was blue and clear. Birds piped in the thickets above and behind him. He saw faces peering out at him from the doorways of two of the other cabins. He lit his pipe and went down to the edge of the water and gazed out at the fore-and-aft and the glimpse of open sea beyond the narrow channel; but he turned his head frequently to look at the house which sheltered Mary Alvarez. How that name sang in his heart—Mary Alvarez! And yet it was the name of the daughter of a robber and a man of blood. The Reverend George Hill did not care. To the music of her name he racked his brain for some plan of escaping with her out of this sunlit, menacing place. His work and people at Portage River and Burnt Cove were forgotten. Of his life of yesterday he thought only of William Hinks. He did not think of him now as a soul to be saved but as a trusty friend and a great fighter, and he wished that Hinks was with him now. Fighters were what he needed—fighters on his and Mary's side. He longed for Hinks, that terror of the Miramichi; and he thought of John Alvarez, that bloody rogue and masterful fighter, with a glow of something verging on affection.

He turned from the edge of the tide and ascended the steep slope behind the Alvarez cabin to the

rugged plateau above the harbour. He looked around at the far-flung black and grey desolation, then down into the secret anchorage. He realised that the only chance of escape would be by way of the sea. The uninhabited, uncharted wilderness at his back offered no help and no refuge. For a little while he considered the schooner lying so calm and light on the sunlit water below him. That schooner, and the skiffs on the landwash, formed the key to his problem of escape. He turned and without design moved slowly away from the edge of the descent.

"You don't go 'way so soon, doctor," remarked a voice behind him.

He jumped around as quick as a cat, but he had wit enough not to put his hands to the hiding-places of his pistols. He beheld a tall, yellow-skinned, moustached, ringleted, black-eyed young man standing in an easy attitude within a few yards of him. The fellow was smiling at him—a light-hearted but peculiarly unpleasant smile. The fellow held a double-barrelled fowling-piece ported across his body, the weight of the weapon in the crook of his left arm and two fingers of his right hand resting lightly on the triggers. He wore spotless nankeen trousers strapped down over well-varnished Wellington boots, a red silk sash about his waist, a silk shirt open at the neck, and nothing on his head.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Hill, looking the picturesque stranger over with hard and hostile eyes.

"I ask you, doctor, you don't go 'way to-day," said the other, flashing sharp white teeth in a wide smile. "You don't finish so quick."

Hill knew that this was Pedro, the fellow with more devilish wit in his head and more of hell's fire in his belly than Alvarez himself. He knew that this was the man who would not let Mary go, who waited and watched until even the tough old heart of John Alvarez was touched by fear. This was the man who was not satisfied with money. His first impulse was to spring, grip the muscular throat with one hand, and smash that white-fanged smile with the other; but he smothered the impulse. He was learning discretion. He saw that his spring would probably be less swift than Pedro's fingers on the triggers, and even if he should be quick enough to avoid instant death he would not be able to choke the fellow to silence instantly. He would play a game, and at the same time express something of what he really felt.

"Do you think I'd go away on foot?" he exclaimed. "And without my medicines? When I'm ready to go, my man, I'll go as I came—at your trouble and expense."

"Dat right," said Pedro. "Me send you, yes."

Dat woman leetle more better soon, you t'ink, doctor? "

A white rage glowed in Hill's heart and brain.

" If you find it hard to express yourself in English, my man, try your own language," he said. " I know a little Micmac. Not much, but more than you know of English. Talk your own tongue. Talk Micmac."

Pedro's face darkened, his eyes flashed, and his unpleasant smile became a bitter and menacing grin.

" Micmac! " he cried. " Micmac! Me—Pedro Alfonso Da Silva Mariano! " Then he ripped out twenty-five astounding oaths, most of them in Spanish and a few in English. Then, in Spanish, he expressed his opinion of the doctor and the doctor's ancestry.

Hill knew enough of the language to catch the drift of the other's remarks, but he did not say so. He passed Pedro, eyes to the front and hands fisted at his sides, and began to retrace his steps down the slope. Pedro sprang after him and gripped him by the shoulder. Hill turned, and the Spaniard saw something in the blue eyes and hard-set mouth that caused him to loose his hold quickly and step back a pace. So they stood for several seconds in silence, Hill with his hands at his sides and murder in his eyes, and Pedro with the muzzle of his fowling-piece extended, and a dis-

quieting flicker of a sensation that was new to him in his heart.

"She don't get better quick, dat woman, you dead man damn quick!" cried Pedro.

Hill dared not risk a reply. He glared at Pedro until the black eyes wavered, then turned again and continued on his way down the slope.

"I don't kill you!" the Spaniard screamed after him. "For why? You know for why plenty soon!"

In the cabin Hill found Mary resting easily and awake. The other young woman was with her. He went through a play of measuring out and administering a dose of medicine—but it was really nothing but weak brandy and water that he gave her. He felt her pulse, shook his head anxiously, drew the nurse aside and whispered to her that a brain-fever was the thing he feared and was fighting against. But he assured her that he was a very able physician and had cured many worse cases than this one. He then went to the outer room, closing the door behind him, and told Alvarez of his meeting with Pedro. Alvarez was of the opinion that no harm had been done.

"He'll wait until he thinks that he has no more need of you, no matter how angry you make him; and the moment you are through with your doctoring he'll try to murder you, whether he is angry

with you or not," said Alvarez. "Your life is safe, for a few days at least."

"The fellow is a fool and a coward," said Hill. "I've stood eye to eye with him, and I know. Leave him to me."

Just then someone knocked on the outer door. Hill went to it and opened it. Pedro stood there.

"What do you want now?" asked Hill. "Do you wish to offer me more threats and insults?"

"No, 'Mister Doctor,'" replied Pedro. "I come ask how the señorita get better—how she do now?"

He smiled. Hill glared.

"She is threatened with a fever of some sort, most likely of the brain," said Hill grimly, staring the other straight in the eye.

Pedro swore.

"But I gave her a soothing draught, and she is sleeping quietly now," continued Hill. "She'll sleep for half an hour or more, and then I may be able to tell you exactly what her illness is."

"You best make her better!" snarled Pedro.

Hill regarded him curiously.

"How do you feel yourself?" he asked.

"Me?" queried the Spaniard, with a sudden start and a swift change of tone and expression.

Hill stepped across the threshold and closed the door behind him. His brow was puckered.

"Your eyes don't look right," he said. "Let me see your tongue."

Pedro shivered slightly and projected his tongue. Hill regarded that perfectly normal member for several seconds with a searching, chilly glance. Then he placed light finger-tips on the pirate's left wrist. He wagged his head.

"Too much rum," he said.

"No!" exclaimed Pedro, swiftly and nervously.

"Drink plenty little rum. What you think, Señor Doctor? You think me sick?"

"Perhaps so. We'll know more about it to-morrow," said Hill calmly.

"No, no! Feel damn good! Don't feel sick!" exclaimed Pedro.

"Don't you feel a little heaviness, perhaps a slight dizziness, in your head?" asked Hill quietly.

The outlaw's face took on a lighter tint of yellow. One hand went slowly to his head and fingered his brow and scalp with a touch of fearful inquiry. His black glance dulled and widened upon the doctor's face. The smile faded from his lips.

"What you t'ink, Señor Doctor?" he asked, in a shaking whisper.

"Can't say just now," replied Hill indifferently. "You may be perfectly well by to-morrow. Perhaps it is nothing but a touch of liver."

He turned and entered the cabin, leaving Pedro Alfonso Da Silva Mariano standing outside with a hand clasped to his brow.

"That yellow dog Pedro is a coward," he informed Alvarez. "I put the fear of death into him."

"I doubt it," said Alvarez. "He is playing with you. He doesn't fear death."

"We'll see about that," returned Hill. "You have lost your nerve."

Alvarez groaned and averted his face.

Mary did not speak a word to her attendant during the day, but she smiled covertly at Hill every time he visited her. She took a little nourishment in the form of broth and brandy and water, but when the woman left the cabin in the evening she ate a little venison steak and bread, and drank a bowlful of strong broth. She was free from fever and pain. She had not suffered from fever even before Hill's arrival. Now that the numbing agony of loss and despair had gone from her heart, and the ache of fear had lifted from her mind, nothing ailed her but weakness. She was happy. Her faith in Hill's ability to get her out of Hole Harbour was as great as his own.

The night passed uneventfully. The young woman who attended on Mary during the day arrived soon after sunrise. Her name was Sarah Hewet. Hill had seen several other women in the harbour during his outing of the day before— young women like this Sarah, and like her suggesting no trace of Latin or tropical blood. And

the two men who had brought him from Portage River had in no way suggested foreign blood or breeding in speech or appearance. He questioned Alvarez about them.

"Pedro and his sweet fellows got them together," said Alvarez. "They picked up the women here and there along the coast since we settled in this cursed harbour. Perhaps they found the two fishermen where they found the schooner, but I don't know where the devil that was. Don't worry about them. They are contented with their lot, you may be sure—and they're being rewarded with my gold, damn them!"

Then Hill remembered the body of the man in the smoking ruins of the hut.

CHAPTER XVIII

MARY GIVES THE GAME AWAY

JOHN ALVAREZ was afraid to put so much as his nose outside the door of the cabin except under cover of darkness, for he was not sure that Pedro considered him necessary to Mary's recovery. So he was taking no risks of a knife in the back or of a charge of slugs from ambush. He saved himself for the sharp and bitter struggle that was bound to terminate his sojourn in Hole Harbour, perhaps his sojourn in the world. He lurked indoors and fretted his nerves, and in his distracted mind magnified the strength and cunning of Pedro Da Silva Mariano.

George Hill walked abroad on the morning of his second day in the secret harbour as he had on the morning of the first. He had taken Pedro's measure—to his own satisfaction, at least—and felt that he was safe from attack for a day or two yet. On his way down to the landwash he was overtaken by one of the men who had fetched him

from Portage River. The fellow requested him to follow to one of the cabins and give surgical aid to a man who had met with an accident. Hill turned without a word. He was glad of an excuse to get close to the life of the settlement and spy into it, to investigate its strength and temper. He was led to a one-roomed hut, and there found his patient prone on a couch of spruce boughs and sail-cloth. A young woman squatted on the floor beside the couch and regarded its occupant with dull eyes.

The face of the sufferer was of a deathly pallor. The eyes were closed. Hill turned back a blanket and saw the right arm swathed from shoulder to wrist in blood-soaked linen. The hand was black and swollen. The right side of the neck was swollen and discoloured.

Hill replaced the blanket.

"I can do nothing," he said. "He's as good as dead already."

The woman did not stir or speak. The fellow in the doorway was silent. The man on the couch opened his eyes suddenly. They were wide with horror. A convulsive quiver went through him from head to foot. A shrill scream escaped from his motionless lips as his affrighted spirit tore itself free and passed.

"Straight to the devil!" said Hill grimly.

He turned, brushed the horror-stricken boat-

man from the threshold, and stepped out into the sunshine and clean air. He moved between the row of cabins and the shingle. Men and women issued from the cabins and eyed him curiously. One man confronted and halted him on the narrow path—an elderly, squat-figured, ugly fellow with his hair in a pigtail and a white scar at the base of his brown neck.

"Was it Jake wot hollered then?" asked the fellow.

Hill pointed a thumb over his shoulder at the hut in which he had left the corpse.

"Aye, that would be Jake," said the other. "Wot did he holler for?"

"He's dead," replied Hill coolly. "That was his death-cry."

"Hell!" exclaimed the pirate, and some of the colour slipped out of his ugly face.

"You may well say it," retorted Hill. "If there's a hell of flames and red torture your friend Jake caught a glimpse of it as his black soul tore clear of his foul carcass."

"Aye, that would be it," said the other heavily.

Hill pushed him aside and continued on his way toward the house that sheltered Mary and her father. He was within a few yards of the door when Pedro appeared from behind a boulder on his left and halted him with uplifted hand. Pedro

approached. He did not smile to-day. His manner was anxious and subdued. He said that he had passed a restless night, that he still felt a dizziness in his head, and that he wanted medicine.

Hill looked him over and thought quickly. Pedro showed the very symptoms that Hill had pretended to discover in his pulse and tongue on the previous day. Hill suspected that the fellow had eaten or drunk something that did not agree with him. He decided to make the most of it, seeing that the fellow feared sickness worse than the devil. Again he examined the tongue, the pulse, and the eyes.

"You are feverish," he said, "and your stomach is upset. Your eyes don't look right."

"You t'ink it bad?" queried Pedro.

"It may be the commencement of anything," said Hill, "or it may be nothing. I've doctored a dozen such cases on this coast. Most of them were as well as ever in a few days. Only two or three of them died."

Pedro swallowed hard, and then asked what the two or three had died of.

"Small-pox," said Hill.

The effect of that grim word on Pedro even exceeded the other's expectations. The pupils of his black eyes expanded with terror, his limbs shook, and his thick lips became as grey as ashes.

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He clawed at Hill's breast with trembling fingers and begged for medicine.

Hill drew back a pace and cried "Hands off!" with a convincing show of concern.

When Hill concocted a dose for Pedro the temptation to put an end to the vile career there and then was strong—so strong that the priest and doctor in him had to struggle hard against the sailor and lover for several minutes. One of his enemies had died only an hour ago, and now his arch-enemy—the man who intended to kill him in a few days and take Mary—was at his mercy! Would it not be a sin against innocence to let slip this opportunity of saving the woman he loved and ridding the world of one whose iniquities stank to heaven? His hand went from bottle to bottle. The sweat broke out on his face. To poison a man—even so vile a man as Pedro! It was not the way to fight, as he had been taught to fight—even for the life and honour of one dearer to him than his own life and honour. No, it could not be done! As a fighter he could not do it, then how could he do it as a doctor and a priest? When the time came he would shoot the fellow with pleasure or thrust a knife into him with relish, but he could not do the thing that all that was unscrupulous and cowardly within him urged him to do.

Hill mixed a dose and took it to Pedro. The

fellow gulped it down without a moment's hesitation. Hill returned to the cabin depressed by the strain and tear of conflicting emotions.

Alvarez looked up from where he was moping beside the hearth.

"Who are you doctoring now? One of their women?" he asked.

"Pedro," said Hill. "He is bilious, but I have made him think that he is in for small-pox. The coward is frightened half out of his wits."

Alvarez started up from his seat excitedly, then glanced at the door of the inner room and sat down again. He beckoned Hill to him.

"Will he let you doctor him?" he whispered, his voice shaking and his eyes flashing with eagerness.

"I know what is in your mind," replied Hill. "It can't be done. I gave him a dose that will neither help him nor harm him, though he'll feel like a sick dog to-morrow."

Alvarez gripped him by the arm, pulled him close, and glared into his face with enraged and threatening eyes.

"You dosed him—he swallowed the stuff—and it will do him no harm!" he exclaimed in a rasping whisper. "You fool! You knave! Haven't you the wit or spirit of a louse?"

Hill smiled coolly into the distorted face. His

doubt passed and his spirit lightened before the other's ignoble fury.

"I am not without a sense of honour," he said.

"Honour!" sneered Alvarez. "Fool! I thought you loved my girl, and wanted her for yourself! And yet the chance was yours—to kill him without danger, without setting the others at our throats—and you hold your hand!"

"Old man, I spare you for your daughter's sake," replied Hill steadily, "but I ask you to take your hand from my arm. We must stand together until this danger is past. But for that, you old reprobate, I'd drive your insolent tongue down your foul throat with my fist!"

Alvarez dropped his hand from Hill's arm, but the sneer did not leave his lips nor the red glimmer of fury fade from his eyes. He got slowly to his feet.

"Did I spare your life for this?" he asked.

"Did I save it for this? Your precious honour! He'll be back to-night for the girl, I suppose, and you will hand her out to him with your honourable blessing. Have I kept her safe to be sold by a——"

This was more than Hill could stand, despite the fact that he realised in the deep calms far below the surface of his temper that Alvarez was half mad with anxiety for his daughter. His right fist caught Alvarez on the point of the jaw. Back

and down went the Planter like a log into the fireplace.

The thud of the pirate's fall brought Sarah Hewet to the door. She saw what had happened at a glance, and her eyes shone with a lively interest, with curiosity and amusement. Hill did not notice her. For a moment he stood motionless, frozen with shame for the blow. All the rage had gone out of him with the effort of the blow. Then he stooped and yanked the unconscious Alvarez out of the ashes, brushed a little smouldering fire out of his clothing, and poured cold water over his face.

Presently Alvarez opened his eyes slowly. He stared stupidly at Hill for a second or two, then sat up and began to swear.

Sarah Hewet closed the door of the inner room softly and returned to the side of Mary's bed. She was smiling slyly to herself, for it amused her to see the doctor from up the coast take side with Pedro in his innocence. Suddenly she ceased her smiling, aware that the woman in the bed was watching her furtively from beneath drooped lids, through veiled lashes. She started slightly and stared at Mary with hard eyes. A sudden doubt of the gravity of the other's condition sprang up in her mind like a flame.

Mary was frail, but there was pink in her smooth cheeks, and her flawless lips were bright. Her

brow and hands showed neither the dryness nor the dew of fever. Since the first morning after the doctor's arrival her face had shown nothing of pain or fear, and yet she had lain silent and motionless all yesterday and all to-day with closed eyes. Or had her eyes only been veiled by their lashes all the while as now? And why, if she were too weak to speak or open her eyes, had she consumed two cups of strong broth so eagerly?

Sarah had found a few crumbs of bread on Mary's blanket upon her return to the sick-room that morning. Twice that day she had caught the girl and the doctor exchanging guarded whispers. Now she went close to the bed and gazed down at Mary with bright and suspicious eyes.

"They was fightin'," she said. "It do beat the divil how men fight. The doctor knocked yer father into the fire."

Mary sat straight up as quick as thought, with her eyes wide open. Her right hand shot out and gripped the other young woman by a wrist.

"Are they fighting?" she cried. "My father and the doctor? It cannot be! Let me go to them!"

Sarah was satisfied. Her sudden suspicion had been tested and proved to be well-founded.

"They've quit," she said. "They bain't

fightin' now. Lay still an' I'll look. Stop where ye be or ye'll do yerself a hurt."

Mary struggled for a moment to get out of bed—struggled strongly against the other's detaining hands—and then, as if suddenly realising her mistake, she sank back limply on her pillow.

Sarah could not refrain from a smile of evil triumph. She went to the door, opened it slightly, and looked cautiously out. She saw Hill and Alvarez seated amiably beside the hearth, with their heads close together, conversing earnestly in whispers.

"Aye, the fight bes over an' no harm done," she said, turning to Mary. "They bes t'icker nor t'ieves agin."

Mary looked at her steadily and saw sly derision in her face. Her heart sank. The other knew now that she was not so ill as she had pretended to be.

"I feel faint," she said, and it was the truth.

Sarah smiled unpleasantly, ironically, but held a cup of brandy and water to Mary's lips.

"Aye, yer strength come sudden an' went sudden," she said. "When ye grippit me wid yer hands yer fingers was that strong I sure t'ought for a minute the divil hisself had cotched holt o' me."

"I—I was frightened," replied Mary unsteadily, scanning the other's hard, bright face for some

hint of softness, some hint of mercy or friendliness. "I was afraid he—he had killed my father."

Sarah said nothing to that. The expression of taunting derision did not leave her bright, brown eyes and harsh red lips.

Hill entered and stooped low over Mary, making a show of feeling her pulse and of listening to her respiration. He saw that she was excited and frightened, and guessed that she had heard something of the disturbance in the other room.

"It is all right," he breathed. "We understand each other again—your father and I—and he is not hurt. I lost my temper."

"This woman knows that we have been tricking her," whispered Mary.

Hill straightened himself and glanced swiftly at Sarah Hewet. He was quick enough to catch the unpleasant, knowing smile. He went out to Alvarez immediately and told him. The Planter swore an oath or two, then felt about his person for his knives and pistols.

"Damn that woman!" he exclaimed. "Six against two, not counting the wenches. Where's my cutlass?"

"Steady," cautioned Hill. "One of them died to-day. Your cutlass is on the bench there."

The evening twilight was dulling. Sarah Hewet passed swiftly through the room and opened the outer door. Alvarez cursed her for a spy. She turned in the doorway and laughed at the two men.

CHAPTER XIX

HILL SHOWS HIS TEETH

A SHRILL cry of distress rang above the taunting laughter. Sarah turned on the threshold. A woman approached the open door, running desperately and crying out despairingly, with two men following close. Alvarez drew pistols from his pockets and stood his ground; but Hill snatched up the cutlass from the bench and sprang to the door. With his left hand he pushed Sarah Hewet roughly outward and aside. He moved aside and let the fleeing woman pass him and enter the cabin, and then he ran forward to meet her pursuers.

The fellows halted, hesitated, then turned and fled. They were unarmed, save for the knives in their belts, and they were ignorant of the fact that, since Sarah's recent discovery, the doctor was fair game. They heard Sarah screaming after them, but failed to grasp the significance of the words she screamed, so intent were they on their efforts to keep ahead of the young man with the cutlass. One of them tripped and fell, and

as he scrambled to his feet he heard the sigh of the heavy blade in the air—and that was the last sound heard by him with his earthly ears.

As Hill hurdled the body of the fellow whom he had just cut down, a jagged lump of stone whizzed past his head from the rear. He knew that Sarah Hewet had thrown it, but he had no time then to turn and look. He was among the huts of the enemy now. Men and women darted this way and that before him, confused but hostile. He struck again; but the second object of his wrath was more fortunate than the first and escaped death by plunging through an open door. He darted between two of the cabins and among the boulders which dotted the slope behind. In the shelter of a big rock he turned to draw breath and to survey and consider the situation.

A glance was enough for Hill. He saw that Sarah Hewet's word had at last been heard and understood. Pedro and another man, and the amiable Sarah, were cautiously approaching the open door of the Alvarez cabin. The others had taken cover. A musket banged and flashed at the corner of one of the huts and a ball whined high over Hill's head.

Hill tucked his cutlass under his left arm, drew his pistols from his pockets and primed them. He stooped and ran to the shelter of a rock which stood a little higher on the slope and a little nearer

to Mary's shelter than the last. He was in no hurry to return to the cabin, for he felt that he could do more toward damaging and distracting the enemy from without than from within—while the light lasted, at least.

Alvarez discharged a pistol, and though no one fell Pedro and his followers scattered. Pedro ran along the upper side of the cabin to a little window. Hill fired, and Pedro ducked and ran on. Hill had no ammunition, so only one shot remained to him. He returned the empty weapon to his pocket, and gripped the cutlass. He crouched low and slipped from cover to cover toward the open door behind the gloom of which his ally the Planter waited. When within twenty yards of the door he sprang up and ran for it, shouting his name as a precaution against being fired upon by Alvarez. Two shots crashed behind him, one from the rocks on the slope and one from the cluster of huts, but the balls went wide and high. A pistol spat in the doorway. As he reached the threshold he turned and discharged the weapon in his left hand at a moving shape. A woman screamed. He paused and looked toward the sound with horror-stricken eyes. He saw Sarah Hewet crawling aside from the path into a cover of jumbled boulders. His heart sickened at the sight and for the moment all the high spirit of combat went out of him. He had shot a woman! Then Alvarez swore at him,

laid hold of him, and yanked him across the threshold. The door was shut and the bolts were thrust home.

John Alvarez was in a devilish temper. He cursed like the pirate he was—himself and Hill and the enemy, heaven and hell, the day of his birth and the threatened day of his violent death.

"Here we are in a trap!" he cried, when he was through with his cursing. "Shut in like damned souls in hell—without food or drink."

"We have food and drink enough for a day, and now there are only four against us," replied Hill.

"They'll shoot us down like dogs through the windows," said the other.

"You talk like a fool!" retorted Hill. "The windows are high and strongly shuttered."

"Then they'll starve us for a few days," said Alvarez. "That can be done without risk to their—hides. When we are too weak to fight they'll come in and cut our throats—your throat and mine. They won't kill Mary or the wench you let in a little while ago. Do you know that? D'ye understand what it means, damn you! And you could have poisoned Pedro this morning!—and with him dead the others would be afraid to lift a hand. Bones of—! And I thought you a man—and a lover, by—!"

Hill turned away and reloaded his pistols.

"Have you a musket?" he asked.

The Planter replied in the negative, with a fresh explosion of oaths.

Hill stepped into the ashes and fallen embers on the hearth, crouched and looked up the rough, wide chimney. He saw the early stars gleaming softly in a patch of green sky. He extinguished the live embers with his feet, then stowed his pistols securely in his breast and began the short but strenuous ascent of the chimney. The soot enveloped him in clouds, and the jagged edges of the stones played havoc with clothing and skin. These were small matters, however, and he did not give them a thought. When his head was clear of the top of the chimney he made sure of his foothold, braced himself securely, and wiped the soot from his eyes and the blood and dirt from his hands with the silk kerchief from his neck. It was a night of starry dusk and pale gloom.

Hill drew forth his pistols and rested his elbows on the loose stones of the chimney's top. His smarting eyes strained against the vague shadows and half-lights below and his ears questioned the windless air. For a time he could see nothing that seemed to move or menace, and hear nothing but the shrill barking of a fox far inland and the soft stir of the tide in the narrow mouth of the harbour and along the outer coast. Thus for fif-

teen seconds or thereabouts, and then a small, brief sound rang upon his anxious ears and gripped his attention like a shout. It was a sneeze, incomplete as if swiftly muffled by a hand, but human and masculine. It sounded from before the door of the cabin and not more than fifteen yards away. Hill focused his gaze on the spot and made out a vague fragment of blackness that he had previously thought to be a bush. It seemed to be motionless, but he was not sure. He raised the hammers of the pistols noiselessly.

It was a nerve-racking game, this watching and waiting upon shadows and the ghosts of sounds. Hill was sure that the particular fragment of blackness upon which his gaze was fixed moved slightly to the left. He levelled a pistol at it, but before his finger had contracted on the trigger he heard the scrunch of a booted foot on a pebble. He turned his head a little to the right. Yes, there was another suspicious bit of blackness that seemed to move furtively, inch by inch, against the gloom. He covered it with the pistol in his right hand. He felt a pulse beating in his cheek and a tingling of nerves across the back of his neck. He did not like this sort of work. A brisk fight in the open, even against odds, was more to his taste. He glanced to the left. The shadow there had advanced perceptibly toward the door below him. A few paces more would put it out of his line of

fire. A panicky twinge went through him. He brought his right hand around to his left and discharged both pistols as one at the one shadow.

A yell of dismay rang above the thumping bang of the double shot, and this was followed instantly by the sounds of a frantic and swift retreat.

"Clean away! Confound the luck!" muttered Hill. He crouched so as to bring his head and shoulders below the coping of the chimney—and this not a moment too soon, for a musket bellowed down there on the right and a bunch of slugs hummed over him. He felt a sharp blow on one of his ankles and immediately squatted lower and reached down a hand.

"Here's a brace of live ones," whispered the voice of Alvarez. "Pass me down the empties."

Rearmed, Hill raised his head and shoulders again. He was just in time to see a red spurt of flame leap from the gloom straight in front. The ball ripped bark from the ridge-pole of the roof. He fired at the flash. The echoes of the shots ceased to clang around the rocky walls of the harbour and silence fell again. The bitter smoke drifted away. Hill waited, straining every faculty for the detection of sound or movement. A minute passed—two minutes. Then a ragged volley of three shots spurted on the right close in. One ball struck the chimney. Hill let fly at the

nearest flash, then squatted low. He heard another shot, and something hard and heavy struck him on the top of the head. His feet lost their hold of the rough stones and down he went. His fall was broken by the head and shoulders of Alvarez, who had been crouching at the back of the fireplace, about to pass up a brace of loaded pistols.

The two men rolled out together on the hearth. Alvarez came to his feet as quick as a cat. The room was black.

"A light!" cried Alvarez.

A spark flew; the red glow of the tinder followed; a little flame came to life. Hill sat up, brushed the blood from his eyes, and beheld Mary's face close to his, illuminated by the candle in her hand. He saw another young woman behind her—another pitiful and tragic figure. Then the Planter took the candle from Mary and shouldered her aside. He examined Hill's head.

"They didn't shoot you," he said. "What the devil did they hit you with? Are they on the roof?"

Hill put up a hand and felt the scalp-wound. He jumped to his feet.

"It's nothing!" he exclaimed. "A stone must have fallen on me from the top of the chimney. Give me the pistols!"

"No!" whispered Mary, clinging to him.

"Let me go, I can shoot straight—and this is all my fault."

Hill clasped her to his breast for a moment, then freed himself from her and sprang to the hearth. He started up the maw of the chimney at a great rate, heedless of the damage to his hands and knees and elbows. Alvarez detained him for a second by clutching him by an ankle and passing the pistols up to him. He paused again just below the coping of the chimney to wipe the blood from his face that crawled down from the wound in his scalp. Even as he did so he heard the report of a musket and the smack of a bullet against the stones beside him. Then he raised himself and looked out and down.

Several minutes passed without sign or sound of attack. Nothing moved near the cabin. Hill began to wonder if any of his shots had been successful. Half an hour passed. Hill had just decided that the enemy had postponed operations until dawn when a musket belched from halfway up the steep slope behind the harbour. The pistol which he held in his left hand slipped from his fingers, struck the roof twice, and from there fell to the ground with a clatter.

"Hit!" he said.

He returned the other pistol to his pocket, then put his right hand across to his left shoulder. He winced at the touch. He lowered himself slowly

until his feet were in the ashes on the hearth, then stooped and entered the room. Alvarez and the women still stood there, as he had last seen them. The candle still burned in the pirate's hand.

Hill's wound bled freely, but he believed that the bone had not been touched. The ball had passed clean through the flesh and muscles near the top of the shoulder. He and Mary bathed it and dressed it. While they were thus employed two more shots were fired at the chimney. The Planter stamped and fumed and cursed the persistent marksman.

"Like rats in a trap. . . . The yellow-faced son of a——! If I could get a shot at the cowardly swab I'd put him out of action, by——!"

Hill glanced up from the bandage which Mary was beginning to wind about his shoulder.

"It's a warm spot up there," he remarked, "but if you think you can pot the fellow why don't you try a shot or two. I warn you that the light is bad—no light at all—and that fellow has the range to a wish."

"I'm too broad for the —— chimney!" exploded the pirate. "I tried to get up, confound you, and damn near stuck!"

"I'll go," said the strange woman. "I can shoot a pistol, an' I bain't carin' if they kill me or not. They killed my man! They—they——"

She snatched a loaded pistol from the Planter's

hand, ducked into the fireplace, and started up the chimney.

"Stop her!" cried Hill.

"Not I," said Alvarez. "Let her blaze away at the yellow-bellied cowards. I'll reload for her. If there's anything in what the priests and parsons tell us, she'll hit something."

They heard the bang of a musket and the bark of a pistol in reply.

"There she goes!" exclaimed Alvarez, and fell briskly to the work of reloading.

Three more shots were fired at the chimney, and each was answered sharply by the woman. Then she came down.

"I reckon I done for one of them," she said.

"Someone let a yelp out of him, anyhow. I hope to God it was that devil they calls Pedro!"

Alvarez fetched brandy for her.

"Was it Pedro who killed your man?" he asked.

"No," she said. "One of them's dead already, as doctor knows, but it was Pedro sent them—it was Pedro they fetched me to."

CHAPTER XX

IN THE TRAP

"WHEN was that?" asked Hill.

"It was the mornin' of the very day they fetched yerself here," answered the woman.

She crouched on the floor and covered her face with her hands. The spirit of fight had left her as quickly as it had come to her. Mary tried to comfort her. Alvarez gave her more brandy.

"If you did for one of them, my girl, there are only three left," he said. "Did he yell as if he'd got it in the vitals?"

She did not answer. Perhaps she did not hear him. Hill looked at her and again remembered the singed corpse in the smoking ruins.

"If they get on the roof they'll pull up a pole here and there and fire down on us," he said.

"And we'll blow out the light and fire back at them," replied the Planter, who seemed to have taken heart suddenly. "We'd have them against the sky. We've got three pistols and some powder and ball I hid away. That cursed woman

took my musket long ago. But we'll do for them yet, lad. That poor creature struck a blow for us. That's a good omen, by——!"

"If we could get out at them," said Hill. "We can't do it by way of the door, that's certain."

He turned suddenly and extinguished the candle by striking it to the floor. He had heard a sound, furtive but terrifying—a sound as of something scraping against the wall and the eaves of the roof.

The room was in utter darkness, for the little windows were shuttered and the fire had been trampled out hours ago. Hill whispered to the women to get under the table. They obeyed in silence. It was a sturdy table with a top of axe-hewn planks thick enough to defy the pistol and musket-balls of 1825. Then Hill thrust a bench and two stools into the mouth of the chimney, thus blocking it so that no one could enter the cabin by that way without noise and delay. He and Alvarez loaded the three pistols fumblingly. It was not an easy task in a darkness that hid the hand held within a few inches of the eyes. Hill took one of the pistols and the cutlass and felt his way noiselessly to the inner room. He heard faint whispers of sound on the roof, like the furtive stirrings of naked or moccasined feet. He went to the seaward wall, knelt and pried up several of the poles of which the floor was con-

structed. The cabin had no cellar. He laid the pistol convenient to his right and set to work with the cutlass at the soft soil. He loosened the earth with the point of the heavy blade and then shovelled it away with one hand. He worked slowly and noiselessly and paused frequently to question the darkness around and the unseen roof overhead with straining eyes and ears.

The roof of the cabin was of poles laid close together from the tops of the walls to the ridge, and covered with bark and brush. Brush and bark were torn away at a spot near the chimney, and a musket was discharged into the room. Alvarez retorted with two shots through the same crack. Then the roof was deserted. Hill's arm pained him sharply, and he exchanged places with Alvarez. The short tunnel beneath the big sill-log of the wall was completed before dawn. Nothing had been heard of the enemy for an hour or more. Hill crawled through the hole into the dusky first twilight of dawn. Alvarez passed a pistol and the cutlass out to him.

Hill made the round of the cabin, crawling close to the walls and low on the ground. He made out several figures, posted here and there as if on guard, all at a discreet distance from the cabin. He was sure that two of these, at least, were women, and he could not feel certain that any one of them was a man. Perhaps all the men

had been killed or wounded. He returned to the cabin by the way he had left it. As he squirmed through the tunnel, feet foremost, he covered the outlet of it with some brush which he had collected for the purpose.

Hill reinforced the bandage on his left shoulder and went up the chimney again. It was a slow and painful ascent. For several minutes after reaching the top he felt faint and dizzy. The dawn lifted and strengthened out of the sea. Hill looked abroad over the little harbour—the grey water, the still fore-and-aft, the huts, and the rocky slopes. As the light grew he saw the sentinel figures clearly. Only one of them was that of a man—of a man with a bandaged head. Pedro was nowhere in sight. Had Pedro been killed? Had the strength of the enemy been reduced to the women and this one wounded fellow? Hill hoped so, but he was not rash enough to act immediately on that hope. He waited. He saw a little feather of smoke start from the chimney of one of the huts.

A figure appeared on the edge of the plateau above and behind the harbour. It commenced the descent. Another appeared and followed the first—and then another, another, and so on until six were in sight, moving down the slope toward the cluster of huts. Hill could see that the leader was white—one of Pedro's men—and that the

others were Indians. Reinforcements! His heart sank at the thought and the sight. Then Pedro himself appeared in the door of the hut from which the smoke went up, stood there for a moment, then faded back into the dusk. Hill turned his head and saw the fellow in the bandage standing on the boulder beside which he had been crouching, the better to view the approach of the reinforcements.

Hill raised himself until his head and shoulders were clear of the chimney. He levelled the pistol. A woman screamed a warning. A musket was fired on the hillside. Someone shouted. The fellow on the rock turned his bandaged head and looked up at the chimney. Then Hill pulled. The fellow screamed, swayed, then slumped and slid to the ground.

Hill ducked.

"Every one counts," he muttered.

A fusillade rang out and chimney and roof were peppered with bullets and slugs. The fire upon the chimney soon grew so hot that Hill was forced to descend. Mary helped him out of the fireplace. He swayed, and she supported him. He was weak from loss of blood and this last discouragement. They gave him brandy, without water. All the water was gone. He told them of the thing he had seen from the chimney-top.

The roof was again occupied. The besieged

heard the sounds of bark and brush being torn away, then the *chunk* of eager hatchets on wood. Thin fingers of sunshine reached down into the darkness of the cabin. spurts of flame and smoke and lead followed the shafts of light, and with no more execution. Hill and Alvarez replied in kind to the shots from above, and at this game they had the advantage of the devils on the roof, for they had something to fire at while the others could only shoot blindly into darkness. Close upon the heels of one of the Planter's shots an agonised grunt was heard, followed by sounds as of a heavy body rolling down the slope of the roof—and then a thud and a guttural cry.

The firing on the roof suddenly ceased and the inmates of the cabin heard someone shouting up to the attacking party in peremptory tones and the Spanish tongue.

"Hark!" said Alvarez. And presently, "It is the Cuban," he continued. "He gives them Pedro's order that they are to stop firing in on us because of the risk of hitting one of the women. They are to get in. They are not to shoot again until they can see what they are shooting at. But what ails the brave Pedro that he does not give his orders with his own mouth?"

Half an hour passed without sign or sound of attack. All was silent on the roof and about the walls of the besieged cabin. The inmates crouched

in the dark, with thumping hearts and dry lips, now glancing up at the bright rents in the roof, now turning their heads this way and that, with eyes and ears aching against the blackness and silence.

"What the devil are they up to now?" asked Alvarez, in a whisper which shook with rage and anxiety.

His question was answered by a resounding thud on the door that made the stout planks quiver and the strong bolts jump and rattle. He went close to the door, with a pistol in each hand, and waited. The mighty blow was repeated, the hinges creaked, the timbers groaned, and a piece of iron fell to the floor with a clatter. Alvarez licked his lips nervously, eagerly, and cocked the pistols. Lust of blood was hot in him. He would pistol two of them as the door burst inward and brain another—one more, at least—before they could strike back.

Again the battering log struck the door, and again the honest iron and timber withstood the shock.

Hill stood in the gloom with Mary in the embrace of his right arm, the cutlass in his right hand. Her arms were around his neck.

"Hark!" she whispered.

He heard nothing but the shuffling of moccasined feet outside the door. She drew the pistol from

his pocket and slipped from his embrace. At that moment the door received another blow; one of the planks gave way at the top, admitting the head of the stick of maple which had served as a battering-ram. The bulged planking on both sides of the breach sprang back into place, pinched the ram, and held it tight. Alvarez thrust his right arm through the opening and discharged a pistol full into the face of one of the Micmacs. At the same moment, by the sudden ray of light through the broken door, Hill saw Mary crouched on the hearth, and it flashed into his mind that the base of the chimney had not been barricaded after his last descent. Before he could move, the pistol exploded in the fire-place and a thump and clatter sounded on the hearth. Mary sprang back—and Hill saw a sprawled human figure squirm in the dead ashes for a moment and then lie still.

As Alvarez turned his face to the disturbance at the chimney, a musket bellowed outside. He seemed to flinch at the sound. He regarded the dead Indian for a second or two with distended eyes.

"That makes two," he said calmly. "And there lies his musket. Pick it up, George."

He moved out of the ray of light and sat down on a bench in the brown gloom. Hill picked up the dead Micmac's musket from the hearth and reprimed it. Mary reloaded her pistol. They

realised that it would be useless to try to dislodge the battering-ram and so close the break in the door from within. They waited for a renewal of the attack. They heard a sudden excited jabbering in the Micmac tongue, with one voice loud and dominant above the others. The sound retired from the vicinity of the cabin. They waited. Nothing happened.

"Perhaps they don't relish the job," remarked Hill.

Slow minutes crawled away.

"Brandy!" cried Alvarez, in a sharp, unfamiliar voice.

Hill and Mary went to him and found him lying on the floor beside the bench. They lifted him into the light. His big face was grey. His right side was red and wet from shoulder to hip.

"They got me," he whispered. "That last shot. A slug in my vitals! A swig of rum—an' I'll take another of 'em to hell with me—by the bones of Iscariot!"

They gave him brandy. Hill examined his side and bandaged it. The wonder was that he still lived.

Half an hour passed.

"They've got a bellyful," said the Planter, sitting up. "And so have I," he added, and lay down again.

He asked for water, but there was none in the

cabin. Hill's left shoulder was so greatly inflamed and swelled by now that he shrank from attempting another passage of the chimney, or even of the short tunnel. At last he removed the shutters from a seaward window and glanced cautiously out. He saw the quiet basin of the harbour and the fore-and-aft. The little schooner's anchor was catted, her head-sails were up, and two skiffs, each pulled by a Micmac and a white woman, had her in tow. She was crawling toward the narrow mouth of the harbour. One of Pedro's men was at the wheel and two other figures moved about the deck.

"They're off!" exclaimed Hill, and just then a thin mist of smoke drifted across his view and vanished; but the smell of it hung in his nose—a rank smell.

"They're going," he said, turning from the window. "They're towing out the fore-and-aft."

The women stared at him. Alvarez opened his eyes. A shot banged from the harbour, and a ball plunked into the wall close to the frame of the open window.

"Let 'em have it," said Alvarez. "Every one counts."

Hill rested the Micmac's musket on the ledge of the window, took a careful aim at the fellow at the schooner's wheel, and fired. When the smoke had cleared from the window he saw that

the white man was down and that an Indian had replaced him at the helm.

"I think that's the last of Pedro's gang, except Pedro himself," he said.

"What's burning?" queried the Planter.

"Those red cowards have set fire to something."

Kate Wells, the young woman who had come to them for protection, went up the chimney. She soon came down and reported all the cabins, save one and the storehouse, in flames and the schooner clear of the harbour with her mainsail hoisted.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEATH OF PEDRO

WOOD smoke and the stench of burning provisions permeated the cabin. At last Hill ventured to unfasten the broken door and swing it open. He stepped forth into the smoke and sunshine with his cutlass ready. The basin was empty. The skiffs were gone from the landwash. Three of the clustered huts were burning briskly and the fourth was in momentary danger of ignition from flying sparks. The storehouse also was strongly afire. It belched out clouds of black, rank smoke.

Hill advanced cautiously. The sight of a human leg protruding from behind a boulder brought him to a nerve-racking halt. He crouched and moved off to the left and with infinite care flanked the boulder, only to find that the out-thrust leg belonged to a corpse. He stood straight and went forward briskly. His spirits soared. The victory was his. Mary was saved to him. That thought

sweetened even the twinges of pain in his left shoulder. He was glad that he had been wounded—that he had not saved her without suffering to himself. No shadow from the tragic cases of Kate Wells and Alvarez crossed his mind. He went to the door of the hut that was not burning and looked in. He started back from the threshold with a low cry.

Pedro lay on the floor with a rag of sailcloth under him and a rag of blanket for covering. He moaned and rolled his head from side to side. In a flat, pitiful voice he begged for mercy, for water. Smoke-dimmed sunshine fell upon his terrible, dull face, and Hill saw and understood. Hill understood the moaning, the flat-toned cries for mercy, the sudden departure of the Micmacs and the women. He had seen small-pox before and pitted his faith and charity and poor skill against it—but never before had he seen so swift and terrible a case as this.

Hill withdrew a pace from the open door. The rolling smoke smarted in his eyes. He remembered that he was a priest and that he had come to this place as a doctor. He did not forget that Pedro was his enemy and that no death was bad enough to exceed his deserts, but these things did not matter now. He went swiftly back to the cabin which sheltered his love and his allies.

"They have gone—all of them except Pedro," he said. "He is ill, and they have deserted him. I must go to him and do what I can, though I fear I cannot save him."

Mary looked at him with loving wonder in her eyes. Kate Wells glanced at him for a second and swiftly away. Alvarez laughed wildly.

"Save him!" he cried. "Save him! That snake! Have you gone mad?"

"I came here as a doctor," said Hill, picking up his bag of medicines from the floor. "God in His infinite mercy brought me to this place as a doctor, and now it is my duty to do all that is in my power for my enemy. I fear that I cannot save his miserable life, but the duty confronts me. I am a priest as well as a doctor."

Mary stared at him with bewilderment and anxiety in her eyes, as if she feared that he had suddenly lost his reason. Alvarez sat bolt upright on the floor and uttered a hoot of savage and derisive laughter.

"A priest!" he cried. "You?—you fool! A priest, you say—and her lover! I'm not dead yet, by God!"

Hill's face crimsoned.

"I'm of the Anglican Church," he said.

"It is well for you," retorted Alvarez, and though he followed up the remark with a string

of oaths, his blasphemy sounded meaningless, even cheerful. He sank back to the floor as if exhausted.

Mary uttered a low cry of relief that rang tremblingly between tears and laughter. She caught Hill in her arms and pressed her face against his neck. The heroic spirit of her gave way and she laughed and clung to him, and though her right arm pressed heavily and painfully on his wounded shoulder, he did not flinch. He embraced her with his right arm and held her close. For a moment his duty to Pedro was forgotten. The woman against him filled his heart and mind. He felt the stir of her heart against his side, her tears and the breath of her sobs and laughter against his cheek and throat. She was safe, and she was his. The blood tingled in his veins. His eyes smarted with tears to match her tears. She was his, all his this thing of life and fire and tenderness, this white flower out of the mire, this white flame out of the stress of perils and bloodshed and dishonour, this slender, supple wonder of womanhood. Pedro and Alvarez were forgotten. All the world was forgotten except herself and himself. He pressed her close, bowed his head until his lips were in the soft coils of her hair, and closed his eyes. At one and the same time he was consumed by the great fire of love and wrapped about by the great calm of perfect peace.

The lovers were aroused from their blissful entrancement by the report of a pistol-shot. They started apart. Alvarez sat up, looked around him and at the open door.

"Where's that woman?" he asked. "Has she deserted us? No, by——!"

He was staring out through the open door. A terrible smile twisted his big face. Hill sprang to the door and saw Kate Wells approaching swiftly but unsteadily. She had a pistol in her hand. She halted before him and lifted wild eyes and a bloodless face to him.

"Ye needn't trouble yerself wid doctoring Pedro," she said. "I give him a pill—yes, an' he knowed who it was give it to him, praise be to the saints! He opened his eyes an' seen me—an' knowed me, too. Fear lit in his snake's eyes, bright an' red as hell-fire. Didn't ye hear the yelp he let out of him afore I pulled the trigger an' give him his medicine? He won't need no more of yer doctorin', Pedro won't."

She commenced to laugh then, wildly, violently. She staggered into the cabin and sank to the floor, and there, with both hands before her face, continued to scream her wild laughter. Mary went to her, knelt beside her and tried to quiet her.

"Give her brandy," said Alvarez. "She deserves it, poor wench."

Hill ran to the hut in which he had last seen Pedro. He looked fearfully in at the narrow door. Pedro was still there—the poor husk of him at least—but he was motionless now, and silent. The vile spirit had fled. Blood stained the weather-worn sailcloth on which he lay.

Hill shivered and stepped back from the door. He felt no pity for the dead. He looked around him. The basin of calm water and the rocky slopes were empty and lifeless. The huts still burned, though roofs and walls had fallen in. The storehouse was a black mass oozing black and stinking smoke that crawled low and heavy over the ground. He went to the nearest fire, snatched out a blazing brand, and with it set fire to the hut in which the body of Pedro Da Silva Mariano lay stiffening in its own black blood. He laid the brand to the four corners of the roof and then hurled it through the open door and turned away.

The same fear that had driven the Micmacs and the surviving whites away in the fore-and-aft, with their work of bloodshed undone, now drove Hill and his companions out of the hollow of the harbour to the high and open plateau behind it. Alvarez was moved with difficulty. From the foot of the slope to the top of it he had to be carried bodily by his daughter and George Hill. Kate fetched water to the wounded man. Mary and Hill made several trips between the cabin which they had

deserted and the plateau, with blankets, clothing, liquor, arms, and ammunition—with everything they needed, in fact, except food. There was no food in the cabin; there was none in the harbour. The Micmacs had taken what they needed and destroyed the rest. Worse still, they had not left a boat of any kind in the harbour.

Mary and Hill were not dismayed by the discovery of the lack of food and boats. Though it was many hours since they had last eaten, they did not feel hungry, and they felt no immediate need of returning to civilisation. Despite the perils and horrors through which they had just passed, the desperate condition of Alvarez and the tragedy of Kate Wells, their love and the fact that they had found each other again seemed to them the only realities in life. It was selfishness perhaps, but under the peculiar circumstances it was surely pardonable. They walked on air, but in answer to a prompting of the common day they took a loaded musket and a hook and line along with them. They wandered into the woods.

Mary and Hill returned to the camp overlooking the little harbour shortly after sunset, with a dozen trout and a hare. Kate Wells had kept the fire burning and was crouching near it. Alvarez lay on his back and babbled incoherently about money. The lovers prepared the hare and the fish, made a stew of the former and fried the latter. They



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and Kate Wells ate heartily, but Alvarez would not touch the food.

Alvarez was in a high fever. Hill gave him medicine, and after a time he slept. Kate Wells slept also. The lovers sat by the fire very close together, happy and unafraid, as trustful as children who have learned nothing of the terrors and uncertainties of life. They were together, and life was good. The present was theirs, and the future lay before them, dim but golden. Their future was secure to them. To question it then would have seemed to them as needless as to question their love. Of the past they feared nothing. They had won clear of the valley of the shadow. They had survived the madness of grief and longing and despair, and love had burned bitterness out of their hearts even as it had burned out fear. They looked back and down upon the past as from a high place of peace and security. Their enemies were dead and their hired assailants, the Micmacs, were flown. Nothing menaced them.

They talked of their first meeting. She did not ask him how he came to be afloat on the upturned long-boat, nor did he ask her how she came to put out to his rescue in company with the fellow in the ear-rings.

"What did you think of me when you first saw me?" she asked.

"I thought you the most beautiful woman I had ever seen," he said.

"And were you surprised?"

"I was amazed—dumbfounded."

"And when I shot that fellow? What did you think then?"

"That you were the most wonderful thing in the world."

"But you did not like me then."

"I did, by heaven! And when you sent me astray in the woods I felt that I had been betrayed by all the world. It was as if I had loved you for years, and trusted you—and you had suddenly turned on me."

Her head nestled closer in the hollow of his neck and shoulder, and the clasp of her fingers tightened in his.

"Did you love me then?" she asked.

"Yes. Otherwise I should not have cared, for I was not lost. I knew the bitterness of love before the sweet of it, but it was love."

"But you thought I was——"

He kissed her on the lips.

"Did you ever doubt me again?" she asked.

"Never," he cried.

She told him of her life before that first strange meeting of theirs. She was born in the island of Trinidad, but her mother was an Irish woman, and she had been taken to Ireland when she was

very young, to her mother's people. From her fourth to her seventeenth year she lived in Ireland, in an old, grey house in the country. Her grandparents were very kind to her, and she loved them dearly. Her mother visited her in Ireland three times during her long sojourn there, and for a year each time; and once, when she was ten years old, her father had come and had remained for several months in the old, grey house. That was when she had learned to care for him so that she had never since been able to bring herself to hate him. He had won her childish heart in a day with his gentleness and gaiety. He had turned the old house from grey to gold during his short visit, and had set the whole county jinking. The family, the servants, and the neighbours had all fallen under his spell. He had brought back roses to her mother's cheeks.

Yes, that was what John Alvarez had been, and nothing had killed the memory of it in her heart. And when he had gone away, taking her mother with him, she had missed him more keenly than she had missed her dear and gentle mother. After that her grandparents and the servants sang her father's praises to her continually, and she was very proud to be the daughter of so wonderful a man. The old housekeeper told her that Señor Alvarez was the finest gentleman she had ever seen, and that his

blood was of the highest that had ever gone out of Spain, and his wealth was too vast to be told in a long summer's day. It seemed that it was owing to his wealth that her grandparents still enjoyed the old manor-house and the few hundreds of acres around it. So her father became a hero to her.

Her mother returned a few years later, departed again, and again returned. When Mary was in her sixteenth year her mother came home to Ireland for the last time, pale and sad, and Mary heard from the old housekeeper a vague story of something having gone wrong with her father's affairs. Her mother died eighteen months later. Her father wrote and asked her to come to him, for the disorder of his affairs made it impossible for him to go to her. So she went. In Trinidad she lived a lonely, meaningless life in a great house overlooking the sea and far from any town. For months together she had no other companionship than that of the servants. She saw but little of her father, for his homecomings were brief and infrequent. His gaiety was gone, and though he was always affectionate and gentle with her, the expression of his face was grim and sometimes terrible. So a few years passed, and then one night he came home unexpectedly, helped her to collect some of her clothing and valuables, and led her down to the sea. A boat that was wait-

ing for them took them out to a big schooner. Soon after this Mary learned the truth about her father—the truth which even her mother had not known, though the poor woman may have guessed it at the last. Her father was a pirate!

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CHAPTER XXII

OF MARY'S PAST

ALVAREZ had hoped to be able to set his daughter ashore and establish her safely in one of the other islands before she could learn his terrible secret, but the vigilance and tenacity of the English ships in those waters had made that hope a vain one. England had sworn to rid the seas of that big schooner and her commander and her infamous company. She had staked her reputation for respectability on that achievement. Brigs and sloops-of-war and even a frigate or two were set on the Planter's heels. Alvarez crowded his schooner north and south and east over those blue seas, but for every time he sank a pursuing topsail astern he lifted a menacing topsail somewhere on the horizon. He dodged and doubled and turned, but to no avail. He lurked in green-walled havens, and more than once his refuge came within an ace of being converted into a trap. At last he sensed an opening to the north, crowded through and escaped from the narrow seas which he knew

into waters unknown to him. Even then he would have returned, but for the attentions of a heavily sparred brig that hung on his heels.

It was during this long and bitter chase that Mary learned the truth, at first from her own observations and then from her father's lips. He had been a pirate for more than a dozen years. It had commenced with a discreet voyage immediately after the last fragments of his paternal fortune had slipped through his fingers. That first venture had been bloodless but profitable. Six months later another voyage—and bloodshed. He kept up his play of wealth and respectability. He kept his good name fragrant ashore even while the name of the Planter grew flagrant on the sea. Even his own men did not know that their dashing commander was the great John Alvarez. Between voyage and voyage he dined with the governor in Port of Spain or entertained that distinguished gentleman under his own roof.

Mary had learned all this, and more, while the big schooner was being chased northward. At last the schooner had struck on a ledge as her company had won ashore in the boats with nothing but their lives and their treasures of minted gold. They had buried the gold and then gone south along the coast in search of food and a new ship. They had established themselves on the southern coast of Miramichi Bay, for the river seemed to

them a likely place in which to pick up a seaworthy vessel. The presence of the ten-gun brig in the river had caused them to lie low for a time. Alvarez had scattered his men in small parties to spy out the land. Then Hill had come ashore and Mary had saved him from the knife of the fellow with the ear-rings. Later she had thought him a spy from the ten-gun brig and had sent him out to lose himself in the wilderness. She had felt swift and deep regret for that act.

"I was a fool," whispered Hill, tightening the grip of his right arm on her slender waist. "But you soon forgave me."

"Yes; or I should not have gone into the town to tell you that I hated you," she answered.

She told him, briefly, of the capture of six of the company and of the scattering of the rest. She and her father had escaped into the woods. Pedro had followed them and found them. She told of firing the shot through the window of the courthouse and killing the prisoner who was about to buy his life by sealing her own and her father's fate.

"There is blood on my hands," she said.

Hill lifted both her hands to his lips and kissed them again and again.

"Then I fled even from my father," she said.

"You were my only hope. But he found me again, there in the hut which you had built for

me. He had escaped from Pedro and the others and stolen a boat. It was his intention to go north and take all the gold for himself—for us."

"I wonder why he wanted me to accompany you," said Hill.

"He thought you were a spy and—and he would have killed you," she answered. "Then the fire swept out of the forest. When he discovered you in the boat he began to doubt your enmity; and later, when he saw that you cared for me so greatly he felt that you might prove to be more useful to us than the buried gold. When he realised that you knew who he was and yet loved me none the less, he did not care at all for himself or the treasure but thought only of my future. Then Pedro found us again—and we had to go with him—or you would have been murdered. Did you feel any doubt of me when you awoke that morning and found that we had gone?"

"No!" he cried.

He told her of his searchings through the woods, of his fears and bewilderment and despair. He told her of his life after losing her.

"I turned to God then," he said. "There was nothing else left in the world for me."

Mary retired to the little shelter of boughs and lay down beside Kate Wells. Hill rolled himself in a blanket beside the fire.

Hill was awakened in the grey dawn by a touch on his wounded shoulder. He opened his eyes and sat up sharply and beheld William Hinks bending over him. He stared, speechless.

"Here ye be, and alive at that," said Hinks, straightening his long back. "Well, I'm glad of it. What the devil have ye bin up to since ye left Portage River? Looks like ye'd bin havin' a lively time."

Hill threw off his blanket and got to his feet. He looked at the shelter of boughs and saw the two blanketed forms lying beneath it. His gaze moved slowly around to the background of forest, black and shapeless in the faint light, to the coldly glimmering sea and the shadowy pit of the little harbour at his feet.

"It is true," he said softly. "I have not dreamed it."

"Ye've bin hit," remarked Hinks. "What was the game?"

Hill placed his right hand on his friend's shoulder.

"I've found her, Bill," he said. "They brought me to her—those fellows who came to Portage in the skiff, looking for a doctor. She was ill—but it was only with fear and with longing for me."

"The woman ye lost?" queried the woodsman.

"Here she is," said Hill.

Mary came from the shelter. Her black tresses flowed upon her shoulders and the shadows of dreams were still in her fathomless, dark eyes. She wore a long robe of some soft texture of a lighter grey than her eyes. It was corded loosely about her slender waist. Her slender white feet gleamed beneath the hem of it. She glanced at Hinks without fear, scarcely with interest, then turned her eyes to her lover's face with a look of love and trust and tenderness beyond and above the descriptive power of words. The young man was thrilled through and through by that look. All his heart seemed to melt to liquid fire and flow away. Hinks removed his hat and turned his face to the sea. The time had been when a woman's eyes had thus lightened and softened and darkled and shone for him.

Hill took her hand—and straightway he forgot all about Bill Hinks.

"Well, I'm right glad ye found her," said the woodsman.

They turned to him at that.

"This is my friend Bill Hinks," said Hill to the girl. "He is the one man in the world I dared to tell all that I knew about you—and of my love and my loss."

She looked straight into Bill's eyes and extended a hand to him. He took her hand and held it awkwardly for a moment. Then, catching sight

of the blanket-swathed figure of Alvarez on the other side of the fallen fire, he started sharply. He had seen it before and thought it a roll of bedding; but now it moved.

"What is it?" he asked.

Alvarez sat up, and a fold of the blanket fell away from his face. It was a terrible face. Horror, terror, a passion of fear possessed it. Cheeks and brow were furrowed and drawn. There was no light in the black eyes now save a wide, pale shine of terror.

"Save me!" he cried. "Brandy!"

Kate Wells came running from the shelter at the cry. Mary and Hill went to him, and Mary knelt and put her arms around him. Hill gave him brandy, and he gulped it thirstily.

"Who's that?" he asked, staring at the woodsman.

Hill assured him that it was a friend.

"I was near gone that time," said Alvarez. "I'll be gone before night. Lay me flat. I'm ripped through, by——!"

"You are strong," said Hill gently. "You'll live for years—in repentance—and die at last in peace—without fear."

The wounded man's face looked fuller and stronger now, as if his deep draughts of brandy had fed it with blood and life. His eyes had darkened and brightened, and the shine of

utter terror had faded from them. He smiled grimly.

"Repentance?" he queried. "Will that float the schooners and the brigs and the barquentines I've sent to the depths, think you? Will it fetch the dead men up from the weed, and put the flesh back on their bones and heal their slit throats? Will it do these things, or any one of them? I tell you, no!"

The women covered their faces with their hands and wept. William Hinks shivered and lost colour. Hill, kneeling and bending low over the pirate, began to pray in a whisper.

"Stow that!" said Alvarez. "You are a dozen years too late. If there is a God—a just God—then the less said the better. If not, then I'll take my chances with whatever there is. Tell me what you'll do with my girl."

Hill ceased the praying, and set his mind at rest on that point.

"Yes, I believe you, but get her out of this country," said the other. "She was seen and marked on the Miramichi. And those women who got away with the Micmacs—do you think they love us?"

"He's right," said Hinks, drawing nearer and looking down at the sufferer as if at a terrible and strange animal. "She was marked on the Miramichi—an' yerself likewise, George—an' that's why

I set out to hunt for ye's soon as I did. Aye, George, ye've got to git out of here, the two of ye, and the quicker the better."

"What do you mean?" asked Hill, getting swiftly to his feet. "We were marked, you say? Has that old fool Bolt been talking?"

"Bolt? I reckon not," replied Hinks, and he explained his meaning briefly. Alexander McDuff and his daughter had come to Portage River in a brig within twenty-four hours of Hill's departure with the strangers from the north. They were looking for Hill, and when they learned that he had gone north in a skiff, and that Hinks did not know where he had gone to or how long he would remain away, they were not entirely successful in their efforts to hide their uneasiness and suspicions. It was quite evident to Hinks that they suspected him of knowing more than he told. They took pains to make themselves very agreeable to him, however, and they informed him that they would await the return of their friend the captain in the captain's own house. Hinks had nothing to say to that arrangement, but that night he and Peter Brewer moved all that remained of Hill's gold aboard the *North Star*. He overheard McDuff questioning one of the villagers concerning Hill's habits. That excited his curiosity, and one question in particular puzzled and worried him. The merchant had asked the villager if a

young woman of foreign appearance had ever been seen in the vicinity. After that Hinks spent most of his time, day and night, spying upon the McDuffs, and he was rewarded. One night, while he knelt with his ear to a crack in the log wall of the hut, he heard an illuminating conversation between the father and daughter. The gist of it was that they intended to make George Hill toe the mark, that undoubtedly the young woman who had visited Hill at Spicer's Tavern in Chatham and had later been seen in Newcastle on the day of the trial of the pirates was the same person whom Edward Frisk had seen in Hill's company in the woods behind Major Darnell's house. Confronted by Frisk Hill would come to his senses. If the woman was still with him then he would be confronted by the men who had seen her shoot the pirate through the window of the court-house, and that, taken one way or the other, was enough to hang the hussy for. If he had lost track of her or tired of her so much the better, but in either case all they had to do, knowing what they knew, was to have a word or two with him. They would speedily lead him and his fortune back to the ways of respectability.

That was enough for Hinks. He slipped out of the mouth of the river that very night in the little fore-and-aft, accompanied by old Peter Brewer and young Andy Smith, and here he was,

thanks to the smoke of the burning huts. The *North Star* lay in a little cove a mile or so to the southward.

"Them McDuffs ain't far behind, ye can take my word for it," he said in conclusion.

CHAPTER XXIII

FUGITIVES

ALL this seemed preposterous to George Hill. He was dazed by the monstrous absurdity of it all. What had the McDuffs to do with his affairs? What claim had they on him or his fortune?

"Let them come!" he exclaimed. "I am my own master."

At that Alvarez swore feebly but feelingly. Hinks drew the missionary a few steps aside and whispered in his ear.

"Ain't ye got it into yer head, George?" he asked. "They're after ye—that green-eyed wench an' her penny-pinchin' father. If they find ye here like this they've got ye trapped. They'll hand over yer girl—this here young woman ye be so damned crazy about—to the magistrates. They'll hand her over for a pirate, leastwise for a consort of pirates—an' what then?"

"My God!" cried Hill in a voice of rage and horror.

His heart felt as if it were being pinched by a

gigantic hand of ice and iron. His brain span, and for a moment a red mist swam across his vision.

"They dare not harm her," he continued in a choking whisper. "She is innocent—as innocent of the crimes of her father as I am, as you are. And what have I done that I should fear McDuff or the magistrates? I'll face them and their charges, by heaven! I'll ram their lies down their throats."

"Damn ye, George, shut yer mouth and listen to me!" cried Hinks. "Ye be a gentleman an' a preacher an' my friend, but I'll get sense into yer thick head if I have to beat it in with my fists. Hark to me now, confound ye! I know yer girl be as clean-handed as any woman in the country, because ye've told me so, an' all about it, an' I've seen her with my own eyes, but I be yer friend, George. My friendship won't count much for ye with the magistrates—the friendship of Bill Hinks, the bad man of the Miramichi. An' they'll twist all that they know of ye agin ye—the good, the bad, an' the doubtful—an' make bad of it all. What will yer preachin' an' doctorin' an' charity count for ye when the spies tell how ye was mixed up with the foreign woman afore ye ever took to preachin', afore the big fire? How'll that look after they catch ye here with the very same woman an' the old pirate himself? Oh, ye could git yer

own neck clear of the rope easy enough, with yer fortune an' great family an' the help of them McDuffs, but they'll hang yer girl—aye, hang her by her pretty neck till the life's cloked out of her—as sure's hell's red!"

Hill saw it then. His mind cleared.

"So we are against the world, it seems," he said calmly, and then, "Are you with us, Bill?"

"Ye needn't ask that," returned the woodsman. "Git the stuff together an' I'll scout back and fetch along the fore-an'-aft."

Hill and the women breakfasted on the remains of last night's supper, and Alvarez on a swig or two of brandy. Hill made two packs of the blankets and ammunition. Then Hinks reappeared suddenly, sprang upon the smoking embers of the little fire and trod them out. This done, he snatched up a musket and one of the packs.

"Follow me," he said in a pinched voice. "I was too late. They've got the fore-an'-aft, an' they're comin' along. We got to take to the woods."

"But Alvarez? And we have no provisions!" protested Hill.

"Leave me here and save Mary," said Alvarez steadily. "They'll not harm me—dying as I am this very minute."

Mary crouched beside him.

"Go," he continued. "Go now, with George

and his friend and that poor wench. I'll cover your retreat, my dear, and make a good end to a bad race. I'd die in agony if you tried to move me now. I'll be dead before another sunrise, anyhow. With a little of that brandy in a pannikan where I can reach it easy, and this pistol for company I'll be all right. I'll tell them a fine story when they come. Trust me to fool them. Go now, girl, if you have any pity at all in your heart for me."

She kissed him on the lips and her tears fell upon his face.

William Hinks went first, with a pack on his shoulder and a musket in his right hand, breaking a way through the tangle of underbrush. Kate Wells followed, empty-handed, dull-eyed, unquestioning. Mary and Hill moved side by side, the girl stumbling with her hands pressed to her face. Sobs shook her. So they moved slowly westward for several miles. Then they halted and Hinks roped his pack and Hill's together and shouldered the double load.

"Now ye can help the girl along," he said. "She's pretty nigh played out, I reckon, but we ain't got time to rest."

It was long past noon when Hinks at last let his pack fall to the moss beside a little brook. He lay flat and lowered his lips, his whole face, to the cool water. The others halted and followed

his example. They rested there for an hour. Though they could easily have caught trout in the brook they went dinnerless, for Hinks would not allow a fire to be made. The women slept. The men talked. Hinks's plan was to travel due west through the woods until they came out on the southern shore of the St Lawrence somewhere about the River du Loup. He believed the distance to be but little more than two hundred miles. During the journey they would be able to live on the country, for the streams and forests were rich in game.

"And what then?" asked Hill drearily. "Even when we reach the settlements we'll be strangers in a strange land—and penniless. What then?"

The last menace had discouraged him.

Hinks drew a leather wallet and a small pouch from hiding-places about his person.

"Here's a bunch of yer private papers an' thirty of yer golden guineas, anyhow," he said. "I've toted them around with me ever since ye left Portage River, just on the chance of trouble."

Hill was glad of the money, small though the amount was; and though he feared that the papers would prove to be useless in the strange settlements to which they were bound, he did not say so to Hinks. He thanked the woodsman warmly for his thoughtfulness and loyalty.

"Nothin' to fuss about, George," returned Hinks. "We be friends, you an' me."

"You are certainly proving your part of it," said Hill.

"I'm doin' my damndest," admitted the other. Then he returned to their plans. He had thought everything out. When they reached the big river—and maybe it would take them three weeks to get there—they'd pay their way up to the city of Quebec. There they would be safe from Alexander McDuff, at any rate, for he would believe them all to be dead by that time. Then Hill would spend what was left of his money on a decent outfit of clothes, and call on the bankers and such folk and show his papers. If he couldn't raise money on his papers he could at least write a letter to his bankers in London, and while waiting for a reply he and Hinks would work and so support themselves and the two women.

Hill took heart. The simplicity and fearlessness of the woodsman's plans comforted and cheered him. The thought of those two hundred miles of wilderness, which he feared for Mary's sake, lightened a little on his heart, and the picture of John Alvarez lying helpless and awaiting death, with the brandy at his left hand and the loaded pistol at his right, dimmed on his inner vision.

He told Hinks something of their perils in Hole Harbour and all that Mary had told him

about herself and her father. The woodsman was deeply impressed. He accepted the story of Mary's past with a faith as absolute as Hill's own.

"I seen she was all that the minute I set eyes on her this mornin'," he said. "But her father! I reckon he must hev bin a rare fighter in his day—before he got to bein' afeared of hell-fire. Honest, too, I'd call him. No lip-repentance for him just because his light was blinkin'—but he sounded to me like he was sorry enough in his heart. 'Would repentin' raise up the dead men I've killed an' put the flesh on to their bones agin?' says he. If them McDuffs find him, trust him to fool 'em. 'I'll cover yer retreat,' says he, cool an' pleasant as ye please."

"He's not lacking in courage," said Hill. "I pity him from the bottom of my heart, God knows!—and, God forgive me, I was beginning to feel something like kindness towards him."

"I reckon God'll forgive ye that," said the woodsman dryly.

Both men were silent for a little while.

"If he be the merciful God ye say, maybe He feels the same way Himself about now," continued Hinks. "I've often heard ye preach, an' ye always give the sinners a chance, George. I took a fancy to that damned pirate, an' that's the truth. I'll bet ye there was some slick, respect-

able, smooth-tongued son of a —— at the bottom an' the beginnin' of all his troubles an' his devilments."

"I don't know," said Hill.

"We'd best be movin' along," said the other, getting to his feet.

They went very slowly, but as straight as a crow's flight. At sunset they halted by another stream. Hill caught some trout, and Hinks made a tiny fire to cook them at. The fire was of the driest of dry splinters, and the thin feather of smoke that started up from it was broken and spread within a few feet of the ground by a screen of boughs. It was extinguished as soon as the fish were cooked. The men stood guard from dark till dawn, turn and turn about, armed and alert. Mary shared Hill's last vigil. In silence they watched the high stars fail and vanish, the blackness deepen, then lighten. From opaque grey to ghostly blue the dawn grew out of the unseen and crept into the forest. With chirp and scurry and flutter of wing the world awoke in moss and tree. The ghost-light brightened to an intensity of blue, then swiftly thinned and paled until it was as colourless as spring water. A tide of gold, bright as fire and clean as dew, washed the high spires of the forest.

"The sun is risen," whispered the girl.

She sank to her knees and bowed her face in her hands. Hill stood his musket against a tree and knelt beside her; and so they prayed in silence for the soul of John Alvarez while the life of the new day grew and shone around them.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE WHITE CROSS

THE fugitives from the greed of the McDuffs and the law of the land moved steadily westward through an unmapped and pathless wild. They crossed many streams and little rivers, many open barrens and black-pitted swamps. They pierced high forests of pine and spruce and hemlock, and black and grey desolations where fires had raged and spent their fury. They passed over high ridges crowned with groves of maple, beech, and birch, and through cedar-filled valleys where the dusk of evening lay brown at noon. They saw moose and caribou and deer, villages and choppings of the beaver-folk, footprints of bear in moss and mud and the scars of their claws on the trunks of trees, but nowhere any sign of the occupation or passing of man. They took their food easily from stream and covert and open glade as they moved along.

Hinks always led the way. His old habit of grave reticence returned to him. The lovers walked in a dream-world, detached from the

common realities of life. Through the grey days and the golden they moved in a realm of bliss and security. There was only poor Kate Wells to remind them of the monstrous and bizarre past, and she was as silent as a shadow. Death itself could not have freed them more absolutely from the griefs and dangers they had suffered than these uncounted days and uncounted miles of their journeying hand in hand. Mary's strength increased steadily, and her beauty burned ever brighter and clearer.

Night after night, by one red fire after another, Mary told of her Irish child-life and George of his sheltered boyhood and his brisk days at sea; and their talk sounded to Hinks and themselves like the retelling of wonder-tales from some pleasant old book. Dreaming and living ran sweetly together there. This wonder touched even the scarred heart of Bill Hinks and brought to it a soothing numbness of peace. Time seem to fail and baffle there like the trade wind in the doldrums. The days passed like pictures painted by a sun that did not age in his work, toned and tinted by the same high clouds, the same low veils of mist again and again. Days and nights ceased to be units of time. Yesterday was not of the past; to-morrow would not be of the future. But Bill Hinks did not forget the old, world-weary significance of sunrise and sunset.

At last the morning of the lover's awakening broke. It was a grey morning, chilled by a light wind from the north-east. As Hinks trod the last red embers of the fire into extinction, preparatory to breaking camp, he said, "I reckon we must be gettin' pretty nigh to the big river. This here was our twenty-fourth fire."

"Twenty-four?" queried Hill, glancing from the woodsman to the ashes. "I did not count them," he continued. "It seemed to me but the one fire, relighted night after night. And have we come two hundred miles do you think?"

"Better nor that," said Hinks, "an' it was a right pleasant journey, I must say."

"I should be happy all my life in the wilderness," said Mary, "away from wickedness and fear and danger—away from people—far away from hate and sorrow and misadventure. I should be happy to live all my life with the trees and the rivers and to be fed as the wild creatures are fed."

"God feeds the wild creatures," said Hinks grimly—"an' the big fellers eat the little fellers—an' sometimes they starve. I ain't got any grudge agin the trees nor the rivers, but sorrow don't keep himself to the coast an' the settlements."

Mary was silent, for she had heard the woodsman's story from Hill.

The sun pierced the grey veil suddenly. Before noon they broke through a screen of underbrush

into the upper end of a long, narrow clearing. It sloped down between walls of forest to a cluster of log buildings and a red stack of last year's buckwheat straw. Beyond and below were other clearings—pastures, fields of growing grain in several tints of green, meadows ripe for the scythe, and stone-walled orchards. Far away against a dome of purple firs gleamed a white cross, and beyond the firs the breast of the great river shone as silvery as the flank of a fresh-run salmon.

The four stood motionless for several minutes, gazing out in silence over that vast and peaceful scene. Poor Kate Wells stared blankly, but the faces of the others were lively with many changing emotions. The eyes of all three brightened, the woodsman's with a gleam of his old, bitter devilry, Hill's with something fine and eager and hopeful, Mary's with a radiance that was tender and trustful and half shy. The woodsman's glance wandered over the scene, questioning and challenging, Hill's explored the far river, but the girl's rested upon the white cross a-gleam against the purple firs.

"Come," said Hinks. "Whatever's ahead has got to be faced. I've heard tell that these French folk ain't altogether lackin' in human kindness. Poor Kate will keep her mouth shut, I reckon. She seems to hev got the habit of it." He glanced at Mary and a faint flicker of a smile softened his

eyes and lips. "If ye stick to us, I reckon we'll pull through. Anyone but a fool would believe anything ye say, for yer goodness shines in yer face as bright as yer beauty."

They went down the clearing, the men with their lean packs on their shoulders and their weapons in their hands, and all four of them weather-beaten and tattered from the wilderness. The first person they encountered was an ancient, crooked man with a woollen cap on his head and a black pipe in a corner of his toothless mouth, who knew no word of English. He paid no attention to the few questions which Hill addressed to him in laboured French, but stared at Mary Alvarez with keen, unclouded eyes.

"We may's well move along," said Hinks.

They continued on their way toward the heart of the settlement, and the old man followed them, using a mattock with which he had been working as a staff to support his steps. Dogs barked at them. A young woman caught sight of them and fled. Men and women and children appeared, stared at the strangers, then cried out one to another from field to field, from door to door.

"The devil!" exclaimed Hinks. "They'll have the whole country-side up an' out in a minute."

A dozen people drew to within a few yards of them and moved forward with them. At last an

elderly priest in a cassock issued from a cabin and confronted them.

"What do you want?" he asked in English.

"We have not asked for anything, but a trifle of ordinary civility would be welcome," replied Hill.

The priest's thin face flushed faintly.

"I must ask your pardon," he said. "My people are ignorant, simple folk and see few strangers—and those always from the river. It seems that you came from the west."

He turned to the rustics and dispersed them with a few quick words and a gesture of his thin hands.

"And now if you will be so good as to follow me," he continued, looking at Hill again. "My house is not far from here—a poor house, but at your service."

In spite of the cleric's assertion they walked a long three miles before they reached the parsonage in the green twilight of the grove of fir and pine. The little church stood within fifty yards of the house, and between the two, at the edge of the grove, stood the high white cross fronting the east. An old peasant woman met them at the door. The curé spoke to her briefly, then requested Mary and Kate Wells to enter the house. He motioned to the men to follow him and led the way to a rustic seat a few yards away. They sat down.

"You have come a long distance," said the priest.

"We have," replied Hill. "We are bound for the city of Quebec."

The priest produced a snuff-box from somewhere inside his dusty cassock, offered it first to Hill, then to Hinks, then took two generous pinches himself. He stowed the snuff-box away, produced a large handkerchief of red silk and trumpeted violently. He sighed and wiped the tears from his eyes.

"I trust that you will forgive an old man's curiosity," he said.

"Certainly," replied Hill without enthusiasm.

"I have not always lived in this peaceful village," continued the curé. "I was born in the city of Quebec and was a great traveller in my youth and early manhood. I know the east and the west. I was an eager student and great things were expected of me, but ambition and study brought on a fever that shattered my health—and here I am. Though I have been here thirty years I am still something of a man of the world, and when an English gentleman issues from the woods, accompanied by a young lady—undoubtedly a young lady—of Latin and Celtic extraction, my curiosity tingles."

Hill eyed him in astonishment, and Hinks shot a glance of suspicion at him.

"The lady is your wife, I suppose, and the poor afflicted woman her attendant," added the curé.

"My promised wife," said Hill.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old gentleman expectantly, but before he could put a question the servant called to him from the house. He excused himself and hurried away, his rusty cassock flapping about his thin legs. He stood for a few moments on the threshold, exchanging words of evident interest and importance with the old woman, then bowed his head and entered the house.

Hill and Hinks continued to sit on the rustic bench in the green and golden shadows of the grove.

"What d'ye reckon the old feller's got in his mind?" asked the woodsman.

"I wonder," returned Hill.

Then Hinks drew his sheath-knife from his belt, a plug of black tobacco from his pocket, and with infinite care cut a pipeful of the tobacco, rolled it smooth between his hard hands, and filled his pipe. Then he returned the primed pipe to his pocket and burnished the blade of the knife by thrusting it into the soft loam between his feet.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed. "I feel jumpy as a cat!"

Hill said nothing.

And so half an hour passed before the curé re-

appeared. The old man approached the two on the rustic seat slowly, with his head bowed as if in a perplexity of thought, and his hands clasped behind him. He halted before them and looked up sharply, his grey glance going straight and keen to George Hill's eyes. The sailor's glance did not waver under that prolonged and searching stare. The curé's eyes were the first to turn aside. His lids fluttered, and he smiled faintly.

"Come, my friends," he said. "The chicken and the salad are awaiting you."

They got to their feet in silence, and in silence followed him into the house. In a cool, book-lined room they found a round table laid for three.

The old man caught the swift, anxious question of Hill's glance.

"The others have had refreshment, and are now resting," he said.

He waved them to seats, drew up his own chair, bowed his head, crossed himself, and then fell to with the carving knife. He served his guests, but not himself. He poured claret for them.

The curé was silent throughout the meal, and his guests ate and drank and said nothing. The old man's change of manner caused the others sharp uneasiness. They wondered why he did not question them—what had killed or satisfied his curiosity in them and their affairs. They eyed him constantly, though covertly, but for a long

time he continued to sit in a gloom of meditation, with bowed head, ignoring his food and his guests alike.

At last, when the simple meal was over and Hill was about to jump to his feet from sheer nervousness, the old man looked up at him suddenly, and spoke.

"Do you trust this man?" he asked. He did not look at Hinks, but indicated him with a lifted finger.

"Trust him!" exclaimed Hill, staring. "Aye, with my life! He is my friend."

"Very good," returned the other calmly.

He leaned back in his chair.

"A trusted friend is a gift from God—a blessing to cherish," he continued. "I hope you have a friend in Quebec also. But what do you intend to do when you get to that city?"

"I have no friends there to my knowledge, but I have business there which is urgent," replied Hill.

"Your betrothed wife is a good Catholic," remarked the priest.

"I understand you," said Hill. "I get your meaning. Yes, I suppose she is what you call a good Catholic, though I had never thought of her as such. She is more than that I assure you—a thousand times more. She is all that is good and brave and beautiful."

"And you are a heretic, I believe. It is a pity, my son."

Hill's face went red, and his blue eyes flashed.

"Do you consider this a fit time for doctrinal discussion?" he cried. "And for the calling of names? Then, sir, let me tell you that I do not. Heretic? But let that pass. I believe in God. I have preached Christ. I have served God in peril of my life even as I have served my earthly king. And I love this woman. If I were a heathen—if we were both heathens—I should love her as greatly."

The curé smiled.

"I have not always been a parish priest," he said. "I knew the great world once. Long ago I was in a fair way to become a poet—and poets, as you know—Nay, let the dear memories lie buried! But still I can read the hearts of men as clearly as their souls. Even now I read you like a book, my son."

The old man's smile was disarming.

Hill smiled, too. The heat of indignation left his face and eyes.

"I trust that you find the perusal agreeable," he said pleasantly.

"I admire what I read," returned the other. "But enough of this. Will you be so kind as to tell me the nature of your business in the city of Quebec?"

Hill told him it briefly.

"I can help you, my friend, and shall be glad to do so," said the curé. "My name goes beyond this parish, as you shall see. Vanity, vanity! I thought that I had forgotten the world, and now I brag of my ties with it. But it is a small sin—and ail your fault. And now, perhaps, you are anxious to see your betrothed again. She is in the church praying for her father's soul."

Both his guests sprang to their feet.

"For her father's soul!" cried Hill.

The curé nodded his head.

"What do you know of her father?" demanded Hill.

"She is a good Catholic," replied the other quietly. "More than that I am not at liberty to say."

Hinks swore beneath his breath.

"Then you know all!" exclaimed Hill. "You know all—and we are at your mercy!"

The old man stood up and laid a hand on the lover's shoulder.

"So be it," he said. "You need have no fear. Go to your love, and, as you believe the soul of man to be immortal, join her in her prayers."

CHAPTER XXV

EVEN HINKS FINDS PEACE

HILL found Mary Alvarez in the church, kneeling before the chancel steps. He sank to his knees beside her and bowed his head. He felt his love's silent prayers and knew them to be for the soul of him whom they had left on the threshold of eternity so long ago and far away, beyond twenty-four days of peace and hundreds of miles of unmapped wilderness. But he made no conscious prayer. His heart gave thanks to God for the dear woman beside him—to the God of the great world and the little lace-decked, tinselled altar, of the rolling seas and shadowy forests, of valour and love and beauty and death. He knelt there as a lover and fighter. His priesthood was forgotten. He thanked God for youth and life, for the glow in his blood, for deliverance from his enemies, for the red heart and clear spirit and white body of the girl beside him. He thanked God that he had been bred a fighter, and that by his courage and strength and

skill Mary Alvarez had been saved from death and worse than death. And then the question came to him: where would he turn for comfort now, if he had lost Mary yesterday, or a month ago? Would he turn to God again as he had in his first fear of having lost her? He could not answer the question, but his heart suddenly sickened with pity for all mankind less fortunate than himself—for the dead and the unbeloved, for motherless children and defeated men, for the lonely and the lost, for William Hinks and the dead Alvarez.

Had he lost, at the last, in his great adventure? Would he now turn to the curé's God for comfort? Again his soul refused the question. He prayed now, but without conscious words, for his friend Hinks, for poor Kate Wells, and for the embittered, red soul of John Alvarez.

Later, when the sun was gone and the last flush of red had slipped from the western sky, George and Hinks stood outside the little church. Now and again the voice of the old priest came to them softly and faintly through the open door. The mild shine of the candles on the altar touched the narrow windows. Within, with the curé, were Mary and Kate Wells, and the old servant, praying for the souls of the departed.

"George, ye put life into me heart an' soul with yer friend'ship," whispered the woodsman

huskily. "You be a fighter, George, even at yer prayers—an' I be a fighter. . . . Ye learnt me to believe in yerself, an' to think better of all men an' women—yes, an' to take off my hat to the God ye fought for. And I tried to find Him, to ask Him why He had burned my woman an' babies to death—like I'd look for an' question a man who had harmed me. But I didn't find Him. . . . D'ye reckon He'd answer me now if I went in there—without any fight or anger in my heart?"

Hill turned to his friend and took him tenderly by the arm.

"I honestly believe it," he said. "What does God know of anger and pride and hate? We are told that He is the spirit of good, that He is love and mercy. Then what should He know of evil? The blind fire that robbed you was not His fire. I will swear that He knew nothing of that until the white souls of your loved ones flew to Him—and then He comforted them—as He would have comforted you if you had told Him of your grief. Tell Him now. Go in there, where He already listens, for I believe that He stoops closer to that old man and those women than he ever stooped to me when I served Him with my heart and my hands and my own strength. I asked no help from Him even when I worked for Him. I served God even as I had served my king and country—

as a duty and for the joy in the fighting and in the pride of my own strength. I fear now that my way was not the best way."

"It was the way that called to me," said the woodsman. "But maybe ye're right in this other idee, too—about God not knowin' evil."

He left his friend's side. A moment later Hill saw the tall figure blot the soft light of the open door for an instant, then vanish within.

In the outer gloom, beneath the grove's roof of living green and the high glinting of the stars, George Hill knelt, and asked in a new humility of spirit that the supplications of his friends in the little church be heard.

George Hill and Mary Alvarez were married early on a blue and golden morning by the wise old priest who had once known something of the great world, and could still read the hearts of men and women.

After the ceremony the groom received some fatherly advice and a letter to a cousin of the curé's, who was a banker in Quebec. The lovers went aboard a small lugger then, accompanied by William Hinks and two of the curé's parishioners. The old man blessed them from the shore, where he stood between his old servant and Kate Wells, with a dozen of his simple flock behind him.

Poor Kate's journey was ended. She stood

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with a little cross clasped to her breast in both hands and gazed after the lovers and the big woodsman with expressionless eyes.

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William Hinks did not cross the ocean with the Hills. From Quebec he went down the great river on a lumber-barge as far as St Anne's, and from there, in one craft or another, he worked his way around the Gaspé Peninsula and south to the Miramichi. Though the old bitterness of spirit and lust for fighting had left him, he had Mr Alexander McDuff up before the magistrates for the theft of a fore-and-aft and a sum of money, the property of Mr George Hill. Major Darnell was on the bench, and his justice was not softened by mercy. It seemed that the major had suddenly outgrown his friendship for the merchant and his daughter.

George and Mary lived long and sheltered lives, in love with one another and the world. Their attitude toward the doctrinal differences of Canterbury and Rome puzzled their neighbours and acquaintances for a time, and for a time his relatives, who heard that he had been ordained a deacon by Bishop Jardine, and been in charge of a large parish for several months, wondered how he had come to marry a Papist. But they soon ceased to wonder, for to know Mary was to understand.

There were children. Two sons followed in their father's steps, and went far beyond them, one dying a bishop and the other an admiral, but neither of them was ever as brisk a fighter or as great a lover as their father.

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