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## CAST AWAY AT THE POLE.

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The amazing adventures of two explorers who found the Pole after they had ceased to look for it.

(*Complete in This Issue.*)

### CHAPTER I.

#### HURLED INTO SPACE.

OUR situation was not only hopeless, but demoralizing as well. I realized this when I caught the professor looking at me with hard and hungry eyes.

"What ails you, Prebble?" I asked, straightening out the sleeping-bag with my numb fingers.

"My body craves nutrition," he answered huskily; "I must eat. Have you forgotten that we divided the last ounce of pemmican yesterday?"

"How could I forget it," I replied, "with this dreadful gnawing at my stomach to serve as a constant reminder?"

"Something must be done!" my companion declared with convulsive energy.

"But what?" I returned. "Here we are, lost on the ice cap, abandoned by our Eskimo guides, sled gone, dogs gone, compass broken, and nothing to eat but our sealskin clothes. Something must be done, you say, and I agree with you fully. You joined this expedition to solve problems. Solve this one."

That should have floored Prebble. But it did not.

"I have already solved this one—to my own satisfaction," said he.

And again that hard and hungry look was turned on me.

"What are you thinking of?" I demanded angrily.

He gave a cackling, ill-timed laugh, a laugh that irritated me beyond words.

"The old law of the survival of the fittest will apply here," he said. "In your dash for the pole, captain, you have attained the farthest north, and I have demonstrated the truth of the meteoric theory of the aurora borealis. If I go back I can tell what *you* have done; but you, if you returned to civilization without me, could no more tell of my discovery than discourse in Attic Greek. Ergo, *I* return."

I knew what he meant well enough. But I was not ready to serve as a diet for the professor, even at the command of science; and as for eking out my own miserable existence with a ragout à la Prebble, I would as soon have thought of bolting the rule of three.

"You're crazy," I said shiveringly.

"Consistent, my dear fellow."

"See here," I went on, "somewhere behind us is the ship and the ship's crew. When the Eskimo guides get back without us, searching parties will be sent out and we'll be found."

"But suppose the Eskimo guides don't get back?"

"I choose to think that they will," I responded firmly. "I'm not going to

yield up my life to you and your meteoric theory of the aurora. That's flat."

"Haven't you a thought beyond your own selfish aims and ambitions?" Prebble returned indignantly.

"Possibly I have," I flung back at him tartly, "but I refuse to throw myself away on a little old professor with a bee in his bonnet."

That was a shot that went home. The professor sank into a morbid silence.

"Besides," I proceeded, "the farthest north doesn't satisfy me. I shall attain the only point on this earth where the compass has but three cardinal points, east, west, and south."

"The North Pole!" he exclaimed, "Madman!"

"I shall attain it," I repeated, a warm glow of enthusiasm pulsing through my hungry body; "I shall plant my country's flag at the apex of the earth."

"What good will it do your country, or any other country?" he asked.

"You talk strangely, professor," I said frigidly.

"How will the discovery of the North Pole benefit mankind or advance civilization a single inch?"

"Consider the luster of the achievement, sir."

"Luster of the achievement! *Mirabile dictu!*"

"Not only that," I went on, waving my mittened hand in a direction I believed to be south, "but somewhere behind us is that execrable Griffyn, F. R. G. S.—an Englishman, sir, who has sworn to beat me to the Pole. Have you no pride, no patriotism?"

"I have both," said Prebble plaintively. "But I am hungry."

• "Hungry!"

The insolence of this professor filled me with wrath unutterable. I towered above him and gave him a look that sent him crouching to his knees. He lifted his hands appealingly.

"Your nose, sir," said he, "is very white."

I left off glaring at him, picked up a handful of snow, and began rubbing my nose. By the time circulation was restored, I found the professor had

crawled into the sleeping-bag; so I crawled in beside him, thankful he had warmed it up.

This particular bag was a three-man bag; that is, capable of holding three adults. It was shaped like an envelope, opening from end to end; was made of reindeer skin, and had an outer covering of oil-tanned sealskin, the latter keeping out the water and keeping in the animal heat.

I fastened the flap over the opening. Then Prebble bade me an ironical "good-night."

The professor's "good-night" may have been ironical because of one of two things: either because of his resentment toward me, or because at that time of the year in the Arctic continental day reigned and there was no night.

"Which is the greater achievement, Prebble," I asked, "finding the Pole or demonstrating the truth of a meteoric theory?"

"There is no comparison, Captain Salis. Finding the North Pole is simply a matter of brute endurance; but demonstrating the truth of that theory, sir, involves ratiocination—calls forth all the best powers of the mind."

"Bah, sir!" I cried.

"Bah to you!" he retorted.

Thereupon he rolled to one side of the bag and I rolled to the other. There was a coldness between us.

Strange how little things conspire to shape our destinies here below. But for the space which mutual intolerance placed between the professor and myself in that three man sleeping-bag, one or both of us would have been sacrificed, and our sleep would have been a sleep of death.

I remember reflecting bitterly on our hapless lot and dozing off by degrees, the professor's snores fading on my ears and at last dying away utterly. How long I slept I have no means of knowing; but suddenly I was awakened by such a tremendous shock as I never expect to experience again and live.

The ends of the frozen bag were bent towards each other with a great crackling, so that instead of lying prostrate I was in a sitting position. I thrust one hand toward Prebble's side of the bag.

only to encounter a partition of deer-skin.

What had happened? The sleeping bag had suddenly acquired motion—not over the rough surface of the ice cap, but apparently through the air.

I had a thought which chilled my blood. Had the bag slipped over a precipice at the edge of the ice cap? And were we falling, falling——?

But no, this could not be. There was no precipice at the edge of the ice cap, and the theory was untenable.

Besides, if we had been falling, we would have struck something long since.

“Have you noticed, captain, that we have a concentric and a lateral as well as a forward motion?”

“Prebble!” I exclaimed. “Are you alive?”

“Keenly, sir. This is a most astounding phenomenon.”

I now discovered that the partition of reindeer hide separating the professor from myself consisted of a fold of the sleeping bag pushed inward as by some hard substance.

“What do you think is going on?” I asked.

“Our gyratory motion suggests a hurricane,” he answered. “It may be that we have been caught off the top of the ice cap by an Arctic whirlwind. Can you open the flap, captain?”

I could and did after some little trouble. The lengthwise slit was in front of us, and we were able to look through it without a change of position.

The view was not satisfactory, for a great white cloud enveloped us and made it impossible to see very far in any direction. We were suspended in gray space and moving with frightful rapidity.

As we gazed out into the void a black object came rushing from overhead, grazed the side of the sleeping bag, and vanished below. It was over in a flash; so quickly, in fact, that neither I nor my companion could determine what manner of thing the object was.

“Merciful powers!” I gasped.

“We are bounding upward,” mused Prebble; “upward as well as onward.”

“Can you imagine what that thing was?” I queried.

“Possibly a missile of meteoric origin. You are more athletic than I am, captain, and don’t you think you could get an upward look without falling from the bag?”

I craned my neck outside. The next instant an exclamation escaped my lips.

“What do you see?” asked Prebble eagerly.

“A rope!”

“Suspended from what?”

“I can’t see. The object it hangs from is lost in the clouds. By the mizzen-truck of the Great Harry!”

“What now?”

I had made a discovery that almost caused my hair to stand on end.

“This sleeping bag is caught on the fluke of an anchor——”

“I see, I see!”

“The sleeping bag was scooped up bodily, the fluke catching it in the center. Your weight on one side and my weight on the other balances the bag.”

“Beautiful, beautiful! Some aeronaut is making for the Pole by balloon—his drag rope swept the ice cap—the anchor caught us. The object that darted downward a moment ago was a sandbag, thrown from the balloon to offset our added weight. Most remarkable!”

Prebble was chuckling, rubbing his mittened hands together and thoroughly enjoying the situation.

“Some scamp is trying to get ahead of Griffyn and me,” said I crossly.

“Do you observe that the cold is abating?” inquired my companion.

“The sleeping-bag does seem to be thawing out.”

“Exactly! And I am in a profuse perspiration.”

Prebble divested himself of his mittens and parka. Then from somewhere about his person he produced his steel-rimmed spectacles and adjusted them to his nose.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, peering at me sharply. “It is a joy to use one’s glasses and have them keep clear of the frost. Do you realize what a rising thermometer means, captain?”

“It means warmer weather,” said I, divesting myself of a few of my furs.

"Also that we are sailing southward at a great rate."

I was startled, for I had not thought of the rising temperature in that way. My hope of reaching the Pole, on that expedition, was to be only a hope and nothing more!

The field was being left clear for my rival, Griffyn, the man who had followed me like a shadow ever since leaving the coast of Labrador. My bitterness of soul may be imagined but not described.

In the gloom of the moment I forgot my hunger, forgot that the professor and I were balanced on the iron horn of a dilemma that might easily prove our undoing—forgot everything, in fact, but that I had weathered that long Arctic night and borne innumerable hardships all to no purpose.

Hours passed; then, suddenly, my companion reached over the partition and touched my shoulder.

"The cloud is vanishing," he said. "Lean out and look upward, captain."

I obeyed. High above us was the huge bulk of a balloon, and visible over the rim of the wickerwork car, suspended beneath, were the faces of two men whom I knew only too well.

I was speechless for a moment. Then a cry of rage escaped me.

"Salis, by Jupiter!" boomed a voice from overhead.

"Griffyn!" I shouted.

What an irony of fate! My enemy and his secretary were the aeronauts, and it was *their* anchor that had hooked into our sleeping-bag.

Prebble clasped his bony hands convulsively.

"I didn't know that Griffyn had a balloon," he muttered hoarsely. "For heaven's sake, captain, be amiable! Be——"

"Silence!" I commanded.

"You have taken an underhand advantage of me, Captain Salis," my enemy called down. "You have attached yourself to my anchor, sirrah, with never so much as a 'by your leave.' Your conduct is unprofessional, and I shall make it known to the members of the Arctic Club. If I had wanted to take you with me, I should have invited you."

Being a sailor, I had a supply of language for just such an emergency as this. Before I could release the torrent of words, however, Griffyn, F. R. G. S.—to his lasting infamy be it said—had reached his hand from the basket and had severed the drag-rope with a keen knife.

Down we dropped through the depths of space; down, down, the wind shrieking in our ears and our brains reeling. Then a shock, a roar as of a hundred Niagaras, and after that—oblivion.

## CHAPTER II.

### DANGERS MANIFOLD.

"WHERE are we?"

That was my first question. It fell instinctively from my lips and was addressed to no one in particular.

I was a very much bewildered man. As I reclined on the ground and made use of my startled eyes to my right, I saw a pond, circular in form and perhaps fifty yards in diameter.

This pond was edged with blocks of white stone. Knee deep in the center of it stood a graven figure of colossal proportions, a jet of water spouting from its uplifted hands.

Rose bushes in full bloom bordered the lake; and back of the rose bushes, separated by a stretch of white sand, grew palm trees tossing their fronded tops in the balmy air.

Birds sang in the depths of the grove, and a genial heat pervaded the atmosphere.

I rubbed my forehead, water flying from the sleeves of my soaked coat as I raised my hands.

"Where are we?" I asked again, this time in louder key.

"Marvelous!" crooned a familiar voice behind me. "*A* is the balloon, *b* is ourselves, *c* is the lake, and *x* the way we got out; *b* divided from *a* goes into *c*——"

I looked around, and there knelt that blessed old professor, wet as a rat, tracing algebraic symbols in the sand with his finger.

And behind him—good heavens! What I saw behind the professor, stealing upon him with deadly intent, was a

figure such as I had never before encountered outside of a hideous nightmare.

Seven feet the figure stood, if it stood an inch. It walked upright, and bore a striking resemblance to man, having two arms, two legs, a head, and features more or less human.

But it was covered from top to toe with a fine reddish hair, the hair of the scalp long and flowing about the shoulders. Save for a bearskin twisted around its middle the monster was entirely nude.

How its eyes snapped and glowed in the furry recesses of its face! And as it stole toward the professor with cat-like tread it raised a long spear with a shimmering point, poisoning the weapon deftly.

I tried to shout a warning, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I tried again, and this time I managed to gurgle incoherently.

The professor peered in my direction. I fluttered a hand toward the impending danger, and he turned around.

"Ha," he gasped; "the Missing Link!"

Speech returned to me. With it came the thought that unless I put the professor's peril into terms he could instantly comprehend, he was lost.

"*A* is the Missing Link," I cried, "*b* is the spear, and *c* is yourself. *A* divides itself from *b*, *b* goes into *c*, and *x* is what becomes of Prebble!"

He gave a yell of horror and fell flat. *Chug!* As he dropped, the spear flashed through the air above his head and buried its point in the sand.

In a twinkling I sprang for the spear, jerked it from the ground and balanced it in my hand as I faced the hairy demon.

"Don't kill him, captain, don't!" cried Prebble excitedly. "Really, he's a most remarkable specimen, and we must take him back with us."

The Thing crouched in front of us, eyes burning like twin coals and muscles working with an itch to spring.

"It's a gigantic gorilla!" I declared.

"Nonsense!" returned Prebble. "It's as much above the gorilla as it is below man. It thinks we're pagan gods,

and was simply bent on testing our invulnerability. Careful what you do, captain! It completes the Darwinian chain——"

"Darwinian fiddlesticks!" I cut in, out of patience.

"Calm yourself, sir. Fortune favored us when we were cut loose from the balloon. We fell into that lake, and this creature must have pulled us out. If it had wanted to slay us, why didn't it do so while we were unconscious and entirely at its mercy? Observe, captain."

Prebble got up and looked the hairy monster in the eye.

"Hungry," he said, making motions with his hands and jaws as though eating, "famished."

"What kind of a pagan god do you imagine it will think you if it finds you are hungry?" I demanded.

"That's so," said the professor. "Your lucubrations, captain, occasionally evolve something that is particularly apt."

Just then the monster roared aloud. The mighty sound went echoing through the grove, and was answered in kind from a dozen different points.

"We are undone!" I groaned as a whole pack of the fiends appeared and raced toward us in full cry from every quarter.

I was not blind to the incongruity of the situation. Although no judge of art, I knew full well that the colossus in the center of the lake was beyond the craft of these half naked creatures whose facial angles were small improvement on those of the orang-outang.

Granted that these man brutes were subjects of a ruling race, where were the real lords of the country, or some one in authority to whom we could make appeal?

Prebble and I were face to face with death in a most horrible form. The red demons were rushing upon us, snarling and yelping like so many bloodhounds, their spears leveled and ready to impale us.

We could not take to trees, for the attacking force was between us and the grove. Nor could we retreat, for the lake lay behind us.

Our doom was sealed. I felt it in

every fiber, yet I would not shame the glorious traditions of the American sailor by standing supinely and allowing myself to be speared.

The last ditch for me! Gripping the haft of my seven-foot lance, I held it at attention.

Considering that the world was to lose an exhaustive paper on the meteoric theory of the Aurora and a thesis on the Missing Link, Prebble carried himself admirably.

"Thirty seconds of life, captain," said he. "They are getting ready to throw."

"Only one of them is to throw," said I. "Look! That hulking imp with the rings in his ears is to have the first cast. See him rise on one foot—he throws himself back—he lets the spear fly——"

I watched, every faculty whetted to abnormal keenness. The weapon darted toward us, its bright point cleaving the air like a jet of fire.

I struck at it wildly. Fate was kind, and I countered the shaft, swerving it sideways and sending it hissing into the waters of the lake.

The fatal moment was postponed, that was all. Clenching my teeth, I waited for the next enemy to step to the front and make a trial.

"Captain," quavered the professor, clutching my arm convulsively, "I have *this!* I had forgotten about it."

A revolver! Prebble was holding it out to me in his shaking hand.

A shout escaped me. Flinging down the spear, I clutched the firearm, and before a second savage could launch a shaft I had fired.

The effect of that shot was tremendous. The bullet did not find a mark—my nerves were not steady enough for accurate shooting—but the report was all sufficient.

Every one of the uncanny creatures fell face downward and lay groveling on the earth.

"Now, Prebble," I cried sharply, "run for your life! The woods, the woods!"

We started, and had almost gained the shelter of the trees when a second detachment of the enemy appeared before us. I presented the revolver and

pulled the trigger, but only an ominous *click* followed.

Again and again I tried, but without success—the cylinder was empty!

"Die like a man, Prebble," I gasped; "that's all we can do now."

Another moment and we should have fallen, pierced by half a dozen spears; but the unexpected happened.

Out from the shadows of the palm trees glided a form in white, halted between us and the threatening spear points, and raised one hand commandingly.

Instantly every spear point dropped, and the form in white turned slowly and surveyed us.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES.

OUR protector was a woman. Her delicate features, the shell-like tint of her cheeks, her long sunny hair, her graceful form, all testified to that.

She was clad in a clinging robe of white, edged with gold galloon; buskins of white and gold covered her small feet, and around her brows was a gold ribbon. She wore no head-covering, and her wealth of yellow tresses flowed about her like a veil, even to her waist.

Never had I beheld such rare loveliness, and twenty years of sea had not blunted my appreciation of the divine in woman. An exclamation of astonishment and admiration fell from my lips.

Nor was the astonishment all on our part. Surprise and wonder were mirrored in the woman's wide blue eyes.

Although thankful for her timely intervention, I would have had my meeting with her occur under happier auspices. A young man—I was but thirty-five—should be particular how he comes under the eye of beauty, and my water-soaked clothes and disheveled appearance made my position most embarrassing.

Prebble did not seem to mind it. He was smirking and rubbing his hands and pushing himself forward in a way that irritated me.

"Thank you kindly," said he, bobbing his head and flashing his bald pate

in her eyes. "Are you the owner of these beautiful grounds, madam?"

Our language was not hers. She stared at the professor blankly, and then shifted her gaze to me.

She smiled. Small wonder she smiled, with my learned companion ogling and ducking and making a display of himself.

"Hungry," whimpered the professor, conveying imaginary things to his mouth and working his jaws, "famished."

He turned to me with an unwonted luster in his eyes.

"We can't deceive *her* into thinking we are pagan gods," he imparted. "This is paradise, captain, and she is one of the peri."

"Stop your tomfoolery," said I petulantly. "Your spectacles are hanging from one of your ears, one of your nuclucs is gone, and you look as though you had been through a cyclone. She's laughing at you!"

"At us," he tittered; "*both of your* nuclucs are gone, captain, and——"

I did not hear the rest. Looking down, I discovered to my horror that my feet were bare, and never before had they seemed so large or so out of place.

I reddened to the roots of my hair. A sailor and a gentleman may be excused, I trust.

She spoke to us, her voice like a flowing rill, rippling, musical. But her words! They were as much beyond us as ours were beyond her.

When she ceased speaking there was silence. I looked, perhaps, what I could not say, for she vouchsafed another smile, turned to the hairy ones behind her, and addressed them imperiously.

She vanished then, vanished whither she had come. I gazed after her with eyes that spoke what my lips dared not utter if they could.

The fiends stole up to us fawningly, making signs indicative of good will as well as suggesting that we go with them. We heeded the mute request and were led off through the grove in the direction taken by the lady, Our Lady of Hope and Deliverance.

Behind us trooped the other detachment of Missing Links, equally harm-

less and equally desirous of showing the amicable turn their feelings had taken.

"Where are we, professor?" I asked for the third time.

"We have fallen," said he, "upon some uncharted isle in the tropics. You are Telemachus, I am Mentor, the maid is Circe. Beware, captain!"

"Folly!" I retorted. "Do you mean to say that we were carried, on the anchor of Griffyn's balloon, from above the Arctic Circle to below the Tropic of Cancer?"

"How else do you account for the flowers, the palms, the balmy atmosphere? We are castaways, captain, and our lines, it seems, have fallen in pleasant places."

I marveled. Yet how else could we explain the surroundings in which we found ourselves?

Presently we came upon a vista which seemed cut bodily from the "Thousand and One Nights."

A palace arose before us; a palace with domes and towers of purest white outlined against the blue sky.

A great flight of marble steps led upward to the façade of the building. On either side of the first step stood two stalwart warriors on guard.

"Such a magnificent building," murmured Prebble. "There must be something to eat inside of it, captain."

"That is my hope," said I, "and the quicker we fall to, the better. I am growing weak in the knees."

At the foot of the grand stairway a man appeared as if by magic. Evidently he had been informed of our coming and was expecting us.

He was of normal height and wore a white tunic edged with silver. His head was uncovered, and his forehead and short yellow hair were spanned with a silver ribbon.

His face was high-browed and almost of Grecian contour. His eyes were blue, as were those of the young woman, and as they rested on me a peculiar sensation sped along every nerve.

Mentality was the key-note of the man's eyes. The powers of his mind were extraordinary and were reflected in his glance in a manner most strange and incomprehensible.

Not being versed in psychology, I could not explain this visual force. I merely realized that the eyes of this startling individual usurped the office of lips and tongue, speaking a language and compelling obedience.

The reader will please make a note of this weird power. We afterwards found that the ruling race in this wondrous country all possessed it in greater or less degree.

Without a spoken word the man turned on the hairy creatures who had conducted us to the palace. They quailed under his look, shivered, and slunk away.

Then he flashed an order to us. The next moment he was ascending the steps, Prebble and I at his heels.

Whether it was the hypnotism of the man's eyes, or a weakness caused by hunger, yet my brain grew dizzy, I staggered rather than walked, and had but faint recollection of events for some time.

We were in a large room, it seemed, and more of the uncouth slaves were at work over us. In due course we left this room and came out into another, where there were strange plants and blossoms and couches covered with finest skins.

We reclined. Slaves hovered about us, giving us food out of silver dishes.

What we ate I do not know; but the food, whatever it was, was piquant and delicious. With hunger finally appeased, I dropped away into refreshing slumber.

I was awakened by a touch on the shoulder. Starting up from the couch, I encountered the eyes of the man who had met us at the palace steps.

The eyes bade me get up. I obeyed, and caught a glimpse of the professor, in a tunic of white and silver with a silver ribbon snugly encircling his bald spot.

At this I laughed immoderately, but ceased when the face of our unknown friend turned on me in rebuke. The face was grave, ominous, and I read disaster in its every line.

Commanded by a look, Prebble and I trailed after our guide to an archway hung with arras in cloth of gold. The curtains were parted by invisible hands and we passed through into an immense

apartment, our eyes dazzled with a scene of gorgeoussness I shall never forget.

Yellow and white and blood-red were the prevailing colors of vaulted roof, lofty walls, and tessellated floor. The gleam of gold was above us, the sheen of silver on all sides, and our buskined feet trod tiles of jasper.

In front of us, at the farther end of the vast room, was a throne with a crimson canopy. Under the canopy sat a man, clad in the prevailing white and silver, and wearing a crown that flashed with jewels.

On the topmost step of the short flight leading to the dais sat a regal figure in white and gold. I rubbed my bewildered eyes, for, unless they deceived me, this was she who had saved us at the lake.

"The room was thronged with people in white and silver and white and gold, and a V-shaped lane had been opened for us up to the very steps of the throne. Rays of sun, entering through windows in the eastern wall, struck the tiles and threw wondrous patches of scarlet over the white-clad groups.

And amidst all this bewildering scene the analytical mind of Prebble was at work. I could hear him mutter:

"The women wear the gold and the men wear the silver. How does it come that an island so rich, with inhabitants of such intellectual power, has never been heard of by the outside world? Captain!"

"Well?" I breathed softly.

"They still think we're pagan deities. We have been robed in the costume of the country, and you, with your black hair and dark eyes, look well enough, although a trifle out of place. Don't stand there like a dazed imbecile! Throw dignity into your bearing. Watch me!"

He adjusted his spectacles, folded his arms across his narrow chest, and peered about him with lofty disdain. But he was not of a size to foster an impression of haughtiness.

As we stood there, cynosures for all eyes, two of the red warriors stole past us with velvet tread. Between them they carried our old sleeping-bag and laid it on the floor before the throne.



The man who had taken us in hand advanced, kowtowed to his ruler, and began to talk. They were queer sounding words that came from his lips, and that they had all to do with us was evident from the astounded looks that continued to be turned in our direction.

When he had made an end, he salaamed and stepped back. Thereupon the young woman spoke to the king from her seat on the step.

Her remarks finished, the king himself indulged in a few words, and the man who had brought us to the throne room gave his attention to the sleeping-bag. Our clothes were inside the bag, and were brought out and duly exhibited.

There was something else which our friend wanted, and he got it by burying himself to the heels in the bag. As I live, it was a quart flask of whisky!

"Look here, Prebble," I growled in his ear, "did you have that flask all the while we were lost on the ice cap?"

"I was saving it for emergencies, captain," he mumbled.

"And you never said anything about it!" I exclaimed fiercely.

"I tell you I was saving it for emergencies!"

I was strongly tempted to lay hands on Prebble, but just then hands were laid on both of us, and we were hurried up nearer the throne.

The king rapped his scepter against the arm of the throne chair. A little man appeared; a little man with luminous eyes and the nose and chin of a Punchinello.

In his hands he carried two metal circlets, each crossed with a pair of thin metal bands bent into concave form. He seemed to understand what was wanted of him, for, after saluting the king, he came to Prebble and me and placed the contrivances upon our heads. They fitted the skull like a cap.

I trust that so far it has not been necessary for an officer and a gentleman to dwell upon his veracity. That I advert to it here is simply because I have reached a point where the reader's credulity may receive its first shock.

Other shocks will follow, and I wish to lighten the blows by a manly and straightforward statement.

Prebble and I had dropped in on a truly wonderful people. The skill they showed, the arts they applied, the highly developed mental processes that were theirs, were the natural concomitants of a civilization marked at every turn by ways and means to us oftentimes inexplicable.

I am writing these experiences with painstaking care, and if the reader will abide with me to the end, I promise that he shall not only be instructed and thrilled, but convinced as well. Now, then, for the first shock.

The instant those metal caps were placed upon our heads, Prebble and I were put *en rapport* with these amazing beings. We could not only understand their speech, but our tongues were endowed with it!

"Strangers, whence come you?" demanded the king.

Prebble clapped his hands like a delighted schoolboy, pulled off his metal cap, looked at it gloatingly, fondled it and then replaced it upon his shining pate.

"From a far country, sir," he answered.

"What brought you hither?"

"Chance."

"And a drag-rope." I added mentally.

"Are you from beyond the ice wall?"

Prebble blinked in bewilderment.

"I do not understand, your majesty," said he.

For once I happened to be a little quicker of comprehension.

"What is the latitude of this country, sir?" I asked eagerly.

The king nodded toward the little man with the hooked nose and chin.

"Eighty-nine degrees and forty minutes north," said the little man.

"Twenty minutes," I gasped, reeling against Prebble. "Twenty minutes from the Pole!"

"How—what—why——" faltered Prebble. "The open sea—the ice—What does this all mean?"

"Only twenty-three miles from the goal of my hopes," I shouted; "only twenty-three miles from fame, from the greatest discovery the world has ever known! Glory!" I danced around like

a wild man. "Twenty-three miles," I roared, "twenty-three miles!"

I started at a run for the doorway, anxious to leave the palace and race on foot over the twenty-three miles that separated me from the spot it was my consuming desire to reach.

Prebble grabbed me, but I kept on, jerking him heels over head. The two hairy warriors then placed themselves in my way, and I fought like a fiend to escape.

Disorder reigned. The king was on his feet, the court was in tumult. Still struggling with all my might, I was hauled back to the foot of the throne.

When a measure of quiet once more obtained, the king again seated himself.

"For ages," said his majesty, "our mythology has taught us to look for two fiends who were to drop from the sky and bring woe and ruin to my devoted kingdom. Are you those arch fiends? Answer!"

By this time I had recovered my wits.

"No, sir," I replied, "we are not the fiends you are expecting. They are coming through the air on a strange ship, and seem to be a little behind schedule, but I assure you they will arrive all right."

Prebble whirled on me, caught one of my hands, and shook it heartily.

"Neatly done, captain," he whispered.

"I must beat Griffyn to the Pole," I returned excitedly. "If he comes down anywhere this side of latitude ninety, I think that will block him."

"We will be on the lookout for the fiends you mention," pursued his majesty. "Meanwhile, as there seems to be no little mystery surrounding you two gentlemen, I shall be under the painful necessity of having you put to death!"

"Sire!" cried the young woman, looking up at the king and holding out her hands appealingly.

We started to enter a vigorous protest, but the king waved his hand impatiently.

"Princess Ylma, enough!" said he to the young woman sternly.

To us he added: "I am deaf to your entreaties. You have come as tradition says the demons were to come, you act strangely, and an ounce of prevention,

in this particular case, is worth a pound of cure."

The professor and I gazed at each other in wildest horror. For a space Prebble appeared to shrivel up; then suddenly he expanded, a forlorn hope flickering across his pallid face.

Springing to the heap of garments lying on the sleeping-bag, he picked up the flask and carried it to the edge of the dais.

"We are very great prophets in our own land, O king," he averred glibly. "Behold the proof of our skill!" and he waved the bottle aloft.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"The Elixir of Life, sire. Drink, and you will renew your youth."

Eagerly the king grasped at the flask. Unwittingly Prebble had touched a button that connected with his majesty's dearest desire.

"Beware, your majesty!" cried voices. "It may be poison!"

Already the king had unscrewed the top. After hesitating a moment he smiled craftily.

"Drink!" said he, handing the flask to the professor. "If it kills you, I will let it alone."

Prebble took a swallow from the flask. Then I grabbed it away from him and took another.

This satisfied the king. Taking the flask from my hands, he raised it to his lips and drank deeply.

He was lost! As the fiery liquor went down an electric thrill sent the hot blood racing through his veins, and he felt that the beginning of his rejuvenation was at hand.

"These are not the fiends who were to bring destruction to my kingdom!" he cried. "These are my great and good friends! Lord Nylis, they are in your charge—their safety be upon your head.

"Lodge them royally, give them the best of everything. Gadzooks, but I feel a different man already! Away with them, Lord Nylis! And as for the rest of you, depart from the presence. I would fain be alone with my elixir."

Again was there confusion. During the hubbub, Prebble and I were conducted from the throne room and from the palace by Lord Nylis.

The flask of Bourbon had saved us, for the time being. But at what a cost of danger to ourselves and vicissitudes to that devoted kingdom!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### COLD FACTS ABOUT A WARM COUNTRY.

"EIGHTY-NINE forty, eighty-nine forty," I kept repeating to myself as the professor and I followed Lord Nylis down the grand stairway of the palace.

I could think of nothing but that the culmination of my earthly desires lay only twenty-four miles away.

This Lord Nylis was the astute person who had engineered our entrance into the palace. At the foot of the marble steps he paused and looked toward the red warrior on the right.

Instantly the warrior's spear rang thrice against his shield.

"That calls my oyd car," explained his lordship; "we are some distance from my palace, and must ride."

The metallic crash of spear on shield had brought me to myself. At his lordship's mention of a conveyance an idea flashed through my mind.

"Could we not ride to the Pole?" I asked eagerly. "It is not far, Lord Nylis, and I particularly desire to reach the Pole."

He shook his head.

"It would be as much as our lives are worth," he answered.

A cold chill struck to my heart.

"What do you mean?" I faltered.

"The Pole is in the land of the Churs," he went on. "They are brutes like these," he indicated the guards to right and left of the palace steps, "but they are not under our domination. Some of the Churs we have brought to submission by will power alone, and they are everywhere throughout the kingdom, serving as soldiers and menials.

"The Churs at the Pole, however, are wild and ferocious. We never encroach upon their territory unless in quest of slaves. Ah, here is the oyd car. Mount, gentlemen."

The vehicle now drawn up before us was a queer bit of mechanism. The bed of it was diamond shaped and had a

large wheel at each side and smaller ones at the points, front and rear.

Across the middle was thrown a very wide seat, and there was another narrow one, occupied by a shaggy Chur, in the front point.

"Home, Klimon," said Lord Nylis.

Klimon bent over a square box and slightly raised a sliding cover, at the same time manipulating a lever on his left. At once we glided away, smoothly and noiselessly.

The vehicle ran point foremost. But what furnished the motive power? The professor was first with a question on this head.

"What is the power that drives this vehicle, your lordship?"

"We call it *oyd*," answered the noble. "It drives all the machinery in the kingdom."

"Oyd," muttered the professor. "I know about everything worth knowing, but somehow that has escaped me. Will you explain?"

"The force is magnetic," was the answer. "There is a mineral which we delve from deep in the ground and call *zellin*. The whirling of the earth creates a friction which makes of the North Pole a tremendously powerful lodestone, so that it attracts every particle of *zellin* on the surface of the kingdom—and it attracts only *zellin* and nothing else."

"I see," said the professor sagely. "You have a piece of *zellin* in that box on the forward point of the carriage."

"Yes. That box is a non-magnetic screen, and when it covers the cube of *zellin* the oyd power is shut off. But the instant the front of the screen is raised, the attracting force sets in and we move."

"Most remarkable!" cried Prebble. "The amount of power is regulated by lifting the front of the screen?"

"Exactly. If the front is raised one third, the oyd force, or attraction, is only one third; if raised one half, the attraction is one half the power of the *zellin* cube, and so on. Hence we proceed at a slow pace, at a run, or, with the full power of the cube, we all but fly."

Prebble struck his hands together in ecstasy.

"How large is the cube, your lordship?" he asked.

"This car is fitted with a twelve-inch block, which is a twenty-four man power. A six-inch cube would be a twelve man power, a twenty-four inch cube would be a forty-eight man power, and so on."

"Is the force of the polar attraction always the same?"

"Always."

"And always attracts due north?"

"The attraction is continually toward the Pole."

"How are you able to proceed in anything but a straight line?"

"That lever on Klimon's left connects with the wheel at the rear point. The turning of that wheel acts as a rudder and steers us easterly or westerly."

"Beautiful, beautiful! But if you wish to go south, directly away from the Pole? Your rudder couldn't help you to move in that direction."

"Certainly not. When we wish to go southward we make use of the suboyd power."

"What is that, pray?"

"Do you not know that there is another magnetic pole? The other is simply a focus of magnetic power, and is the one that attracts the needle of the mariner's compass——"

"Ah, yes," murmured Prebble. "That pole is located in 71 north and 96 west."

"It is the source of our suboyd power," resumed his lordship. "There is another screened box under Klimon's seat. This second box encloses a cube of soft iron. If we wish to travel due south, or in any direction east or west by south, the cube of zellin is screened entirely and the cube of iron is switched forward on a movable arm. The ratio of power in the suboyd cube is exactly the same as in the oyd block."

"How beautifully Nature has cared for you in this delightful country!" chirruped the professor. "Beyond the ice wall we know nothing of the oyd or suboyd powers. The force that attracts your cube of soft iron is barely sufficient to sway our magnetic needle. How do you explain the difference in the power in your country and ours?"

"I don't explain it," said Lord Nylis.

"It is one of Nature's inscrutable laws."

We were traveling swiftly over a well paved road. The breath of June was in the air, green groves and flower strewn meadows stretched on both sides of us, and as we journeyed I caught glimpses of strange looking houses half hidden by the trees.

The people we passed, or who came down to the roadway to look at us, were all of a kind with the men and women we had already seen, albeit of lower station. But I saw none of them at work.

The country blossomed as the rose, yet no yellow haired laborers were in the fields. I asked Lord Nylis about this.

"We labor with the mind, not with the hands," he replied. "What the oyd and suboyd forces cannot accomplish, the Churs take care of."

My brain was overwhelmed with all this riot of new sensations and unheard of conditions. Prebble and I had been dropped into a country as different from our own as our minds could conceive.

There were a thousand and one questions I wanted to ask, but their very multitude appalled and silenced me.

I thought of the Pole, and, in spite of the savage Churs, I determined to reach it just as soon as I had familiarized myself somewhat with the ways of the country and could plan intelligently. Certainly if I could not get to the Pole, Griffyn would not be able to do so.

From the Pole my thoughts wandered to the Princess Ylma. Her lovely face was before me, the rich cadences of her voice in my ears.

Ah, if fortune would be kind to me! If I could win her and carry her back to my own country and my own people——

I came to myself with a guilty start. What crazy notion had taken possession of me that I should raise my eyes to a princess of the blood?

I tried to banish her from my thoughts, but her entrancing features and dulcet voice would not allow themselves to be ignored.

I recalled the smile she gave me: and

then I recalled my missing muclues and turned toward my two companions. Prebble was just asking for a test of speed—he wanted to see how fast the oyd car could run.

“Full power, Klimon,” said Lord Nylis.

The Chur opened the screen to its full extent, and the carriage leaped away like a bullet from a gun. I clung to the professor and the professor clung to me.

Houses, people, trees passed so swiftly that they danced on the sight in blurring lines. Finally we slowed down by degrees and came to a halt in front of his lordship’s palace.

“Thank Heaven!” I exclaimed.

“Hurrah for the oyd power!” cried the professor, beside himself; “the most wonderful power on earth!”

“It is the making of the kingdom,” remarked Lord Nylis as he descended. “Follow me, gentlemen.”

This palace, as was fitting, was much smaller and less ornate than the one we had just quitted. Still, it was a gem in its way.

On a terrace, amid flowers and shrubbery and splashing fountains, we reclined at length on couches spread with downy robes of fur. The heat was such that the shade of the terrace was most refreshing. If I had had a cigar or a pipe, I would have been in a seventh heaven.

“What is the name of this country, your lordship?” I asked.

“We call it Nyll,” he answered.

“And what is the name of the reigning house?”

“Boazar. Boazar III is now on the throne.”

“Has he many children?”

I was slowly working up to the subject that was becoming as dear to my heart as the discovery of the Pole.

“One only, the Princess Ylma.” His lordship’s voice saddened as he added with a gloomy shake of the head: “Poor Princess Ylma!”

I roused to inquire why the Princess Ylma should be the object of his commiseration, when Prebble broke in ahead of me with a question on an altogether different matter.

“Whence comes this heat, Lord

Nylis? You have the sun here for six months at a time, but it does not furnish sufficient caloric for a climate like this.”

“The friction of the earth in its rotation around the Pole generates the heat,” his lordship explained.

“But the Pole is figurative,” demurred the professor. “The earth can cause no friction in turning around a figurative axis.”

“The axis is not figurative. The Pole is a real one.”

“Of course it is,” said I. “What do you think I’m looking for, Prebble?”

He turned his head and blinked at me through his glasses.

“We’re learning things, Captain Salis,” said he, “that no two men outside of Nyll ever learned before.” He pressed one hand to his temples. “Merciful powers, my head is splitting! This is morning, isn’t it, Lord Nylis?”

“Yes,” replied his lordship, “the morning of the long day.”

“When do you dine?” inquired Prebble, moistening his lips with his tongue and thinking no doubt of the good things we had had at the palace of King Boazar.

“In two weeks and three days,” said Lord Nylis.

I was startled. Prebble nearly fell off his couch. His lordship noticed our astonishment and added:

“We eat but three times daily.”

“That’s our custom in our own country,” I commented.

“But our days are six months long.”

I groaned.

“And you eat only once in two months?” I asked.

“Three months intervene between breakfast and dinner, and dinner and supper. We sleep throughout the long night.”

“I’m not a bear—I can’t hibernate,” said Prebble, rearing up on his elbows and looking at me. “Captain, let’s go home!”

Although his frame was meager and showed no results of high living, I yet knew that Prebble was fond of his meals, and something of an epicure.

“Home!” I exclaimed. “You invent the flying machine, professor, and I’ll navigate it. Until you do, don’t

talk about home. You're wasting your time."

"There, there, my friends," put in Lord Nylis smilingly, "we shall not expect you to abide by our customs in this respect. Eat when you feel like it, sleep when you wish. You shall have the run of the larder and untrammelled use of the dormitory. The king's orders, gentlemen. My humble roof is yours."

"Many thanks, your lordship," said Prebble, himself again. "I am a man of science, but my stomach is my weak point. I believe that even now I could—er—relish a glass of—of—— By the way, what do you drink in this glorious land?"

"Water."

"Nothing but water?"

"We have nothing else. We find water sufficient."

Prebble was forgetting himself. Had there been any alcoholic beverages in the kingdom, that flask of Bourbon would have been no novelty to the king.

Suddenly there came to our ears a loud shout from the direction of the road. We sprang up in time to see a large oyd car with a dozen armed Churs and one Nyllite sweep up to the palace steps.

The instant the car stopped, the warriors and the man in charge of them leaped to the ground and rushed up to the terrace. In another instant Prebble and I were surrounded.

"Seize them!" commanded the Nyllite who was captain of the king's guard.

Six spear points pricked my breast, and six pairs of ferocious, bloodshot eyes glared into mine. The professor was also at bay in a precisely similar manner.

"Count Zylox, what means this?" demanded the indignant Lord Nylis, confronting the captain of the guard.

"The king is dying!" cried the count excitedly.

"Dying?" echoed his lordship, aghast.

"Aye, and through the machinations of these foreign devils! Woe, woe to this land, Lord Nylis! At this very instant King Boazar is stretched out on the dais, at the foot of the throne

chair, rolling his eyes, gasping and chokingly endeavoring to give his final orders."

"What does he say?" queried his horrified lordship.

"We cannot understand his pitiful attempts at speech," responded the tearful captain of the guard. "'Whash mazzar,' it sounds like; 'whash mazzar, whash mazzar,' over and over again. Ah, this is a sorry day for our beloved country. Our good king! The last of the Boazars!"

He whirled furiously upon the Churs who were threatening Prebble and me.

"Bind the foreign devils!" he shrieked. "Their lives shall pay for this, and a poor enough forfeit it is!"

## CHAPTER V.

### PREBBLE WORKS A SPELL.

OUT of the frying pan into the fire is a homely expression, but it describes a situation which seemed to fit our case. The king was in no danger, but had used his "elixir" too freely.

Yet how to convince Count Zylox of this before we were drawn and quartered? That was the question.

"If you ever thought in your life, Captain Salis, think now!" cried the professor, brushing the sweat from his forehead with a fold of his tunic.

"Cords, cords!" shouted Count Zylox; "bind them!"

"Lord Nylis," I exclaimed, "we appeal to you! The king is in no danger. I swear it!"

"Danger?" repeated the captain of the guard. "He lies like a log, I tell you, and his end is near."

"Not so," clamored the professor. "That is the way the elixir works. Did you not see me swallow it? And my friend, there! If it had been poison, we ourselves would be dead or dying. Look out, you relic of the Stone Age, you're sticking me!"

Prebble brushed aside a spear point that was making itself too keenly felt.

"What he says is true," I averred. "In a few hours the king will be himself again."

"I will not believe it," was the fierce response of Count Zylox. "Rather

than bother with binding them, it would perhaps be as well for us to run them through——”

“Not that!” spoke up Lord Nylis. “The king has placed these gentlemen in my charge, and I am responsible for them with my head.”

“But the king is passing! He is——”

“These gentlemen say not. I yield up my guests only on the king’s orders, Count Zylox.”

“The king is incapable of giving orders.”

“He will issue them when he is capable.”

“What if he dies?”

“In that event I take my commands from Princess Ylma.”

Count Zylox was an exceedingly angry man. He stamped about the terrace in his buskins.

“My hospitality has taken a rather grim turn, count,” observed his lordship. “I must request that you have your Churs lower their weapons.”

“And permit these foreign devils to escape?” cried the exasperated count.

“By no means. Guard them until we have further news of the king.”

The count gnawed his under lip for a moment. Then he said:

“We will tarry three hours. By that time a courier from the palace will let us know whether the king lives or is dead.”

“If he lives his wishes will be brought by the courier,” said Lord Nylis, “and shall be implicitly obeyed.”

“And if he dies?”

“If he dies, these foreigners shall suffer death by oyd.”

“’Tis well,” said the count, and gave orders that caused the Churs to withdraw and marshal themselves in a column behind Prebble and myself.

I sat down on my couch and Prebble sat down on his. This constant peril was most trying to the nerves, for we never seemed able to tell when the lightning was going to strike, or how.

“This death by oyd,” murmured Prebble, “what is it, your lordship?”

“If the king dies, and the Princess Ylma so commands, as she undoubtedly will in that event, your feet will be securely bound to the feet of your friend. A twenty-four man block of zellin,

properly screened, will be chained to your wrists, and a twenty-four man block of iron will be chained to the wrists of your companion. The screens will then be raised by degrees. You will be pulled north, your friend south. First, a force equivalent to six men will drag at your limbs, pulling against each other; then twelve men; then eighteen; then the full twenty-four.”

It was awful to contemplate! The very fiendishness of it fairly sickened me.

“It is the punishment for high treason,” commented the count, glowering at us.

“Wait six hours instead of three!” implored Prebble.

“Three hours only!” snapped the count.

How slowly the minutes dragged! It seemed as though I had lived an age before my eyes, eagerly scanning the road, saw a small oyd car come flying to the palace steps.

One Chur and one Nyllite were the passengers. Bounding to the ground the Nyllite dashed up the slope toward us, flashing the king’s ring in his hand.

“I come from Princess Ylma!” cried the courier.

Why the Princess Ylma, I asked myself? If the king was not dead, why was the Princess Ylma assuming the prerogatives of government?

“What of the king?” demanded the count.

“He recovers!”

“I told you so!” jubilated the professor.

“Is he well?” asked the count.

“Excepting a headache. The lords in waiting are attending him.”

“What says the Princess Ylma?”

“That under no circumstances are the strangers to be injured.”

I began to breathe once more. Prebble was again his cocksure and assertive self.

The count came forward, and I thought he looked like a disappointed man. He bowed to us humbly.

“Pardon the disagreeable interruption,” said he. “When I come again it will be by his majesty’s command.”

He gave orders to his Churs, and they defiled toward their oyd car. The

messenger had already returned to his and was racing back whence he came.

Presently the larger car got in motion, and we were left alone with our genial host as before. Prebble, settling himself comfortably on his couch, continued to delve for facts.

"Regarding these Churs," said he, "are they animals, pure and simple, your lordship?"

"Whether or not they have souls," replied his lordship, "is a moot point. They have a certain amount of reason, but are so brute-like that only our superior minds hold them in check. A commission of our wisest men, appointed by the king, is now making experiments to discover whether the Churs are imbued with the immortal spark."

"They are all slaves?"

"Every one outside the great wall. If they were not held down with a wall of iron they would rebel and seek to overthrow us. Fear alone keeps the horde of Churs back of the great wall. If they once lost this fear they would swarm over the wall and lay this kingdom in ashes."

"Wall?" queried the professor, scenting another mystery.

"Boazar I, of illustrious memory, encircled the land of the Churs with a great wall of granite. Since then our minds have developed in power to an extent that gives us no fear of our traditional enemies. The only disaster that could befall us would be a dethronement of reason, an eclipse of our faculties. This would give the Churs their opportunity.

"But"—and here his lordship straightened proudly—"our brains continue to improve, while the Churs continue to sink into barbarism and brutality. Some day we shall grow so strong that we can invade the country of the Churs, enslave them all, and after that gradually train them, and so better their condition. It is the dream of Boazar III one day to emancipate the slaves. But this will not come for many generations, not until such an act is entirely safe."

"You speak of the Churs as traditional enemies?"

"They were here when Lokai the Bold broke through the ice wall and

settled the land, an event which took place in the night of prehistoric times. Then the Churs roamed through the sun of the long day and through the blackness of the long night, fighting, rending each other like beasts.

"Lokai warred with them and drove them out with sword and spear. But sword and spear were useless against them. They multiplied amazingly and returned again and again to the attack. Only the irresistible powers of the brain were efficacious, and not until the descendants of Lokai began to develop and use these latent powers was there any peace in the land."

"This is glorious," murmured the professor. "It is an ideal state—a Kingdom of the Mind with the Powers of Darkness under heel. But here's a point. Your ancestor, Lokai the Bold, penetrated the ice wall. Have your people never tried to reach the world whence he came?"

"Expedition after expedition has tried, but, in all save one instance, without success. The cultivation of mental powers has ill prepared us to cope with the rigors of ice and cold. Brute endurance is needed there.

"Nevertheless, in our own generation the ice has been successfully conquered by one Gneisen. He did not live to return, but sent back a gorr plate tied to an eagle's leg. The gorr plate told us things of the outside world that have entirely wiped out all desire to know more about it."

"Gorr plate!" exclaimed Prebble. "The deeper we go the thicker the mysteries. What, in the name of all that's good, is a gorr plate?"

"It is a square of chalcedony, a thought record. We wish to communicate with one another, so we send thoughts and impressions, not words. On the chalcedony square we place our hands, we think, the thoughts record themselves in the plate. The plate is sent to the one we would have know our wishes or experiences, and he or she lays hands on the plate and the thoughts of the communicant come to the brain."

Prebble jumped to his feet and walked around his couch. Then he sat down again, his head in his hands.



"Have you one of these gorr plates in your pocket?" he inquired.

Lord Nylis smiled.

"No; but if I had it would be nothing but so much chalcedony to you. Your mind—pardon me—is not cultivated along the proper lines."

At this implied doubt of his mentality, Prebble bristled up. The next moment, however, the irritation passed.

"Will you read this gorr plate sent home by Gneisen?" he asked.

"It is in the archives of the king's palace. But I have the gist of it in my mind."

"What were Gneisen's thoughts?"

"Horrible! He recorded impressions of two things in particular that filled me with disgust and despair for the human race. One of these things was a thin silver disk, with a woman's head on one side and an eagle on the other. There was also a motto, 'In God We Trust.'

"The desire to accumulate these fetiches was so strong that people did not hesitate to betray a trust, bartering their honor and sometimes their lives for the insensate objects. There were those who had millions more of these than they needed, and others who had not one. It was a mad race, according to Gneisen, and many of the weaker were crushed, trampled on and slain."

The professor looked at me and indulged in a sly wink. His lordship was on ground familiar to us, but neither Prebble nor I had anything to say.

"What was the other thing that filled you with disgust and despair, Lord Nylis?" queried the professor.

"It was a brown fluid in glass receptacles," went on his lordship. "This fluid was even more insatiable in devouring honor and life than was the silver disk. It struck at the mind with sledge hammer blows, according to Gneisen, made raving beasts of sensible men, and finally brought horrible death. The wonder is that sensible men would have anything to do with it. Do you know anything about this fluid?"

I left the professor to wrestle with the question. I might have said something to confound the fluid with Prebble's elixir and the consequences would have been disagreeable.

"I believe I have heard of it," mumbled the professor. "Talking about gorr plates, is it possible to——"

Prebble thus deftly shifted the topic. The gorr plates were wonderful enough, but I was not particularly interested in them at that moment.

My fancies flew to Princess Ylma. Young, beautiful, only child of the reigning king—what could there be in such a fate to commend the princess to his lordship's commiseration?

I resolved to find out. At that moment Lord Nylis was deep in an earnest discussion with Prebble, and while waiting for a chance to put in a word on my own account I fell asleep.

How long I slept is of no importance. The period seemed brief, but it may have been hours in duration.

I wakened abruptly and started to a sitting posture. His lordship was gone, but on the couch nearest mine lay Prebble, Count Zylox standing over him.

Behind the count was the same detachment of soldiers that had accompanied him on his previous visit. The professor was just opening his eyes.

"You here again!" he exclaimed, starting up and casting a quick glance at the forbidding faces of the Churs.

"By the king's express command," answered the count.

"How is his royal highness?" inquired Prebble.

"He is feeling much better, and desires that you refill this flask forthwith." The captain drew the bottle from the breast of his tunic and extended it toward Prebble. "His majesty must have more of your elixir within the hour."

Blockheads that we were! Why had we not foreseen this contingency?

Still, if we *had* foreseen it, what could we have done to save ourselves? It is possible we could have stolen an oyd car, given the zellin cube free reign, and thus reached the Pole.

Would we have bettered our condition by so doing? Might not the savage Churs have killed us out of hand?

There was no time to waste in useless surmises. Count Zylox represented the king, and the king meant business.

"Mercy on us, man!" gurgled the professor. "Do you think I carry a

supply of the elixir around with me and have it constantly on tap?"

The count smiled sardonically.

"I think nothing at all. The king commands that I bring him the elixir within the hour. If you refuse to comply with his reasonable demand I am to convey you into the serene presence on the point of a spear. As to which I do, I am indifferent."

Zylox had educated his head at the expense of his heart. He had no kindly feeling for us, and orders were orders.

Poor old Prebble! I see him now as I saw him then, clasping his bony hands, shaking as with an ague, looking despairingly from the count to the file of Churs.

Suddenly he sank back on the couch with a muffled groan, his stony eyes upturned to the cloudless vault overhead.

"Where is Lord Nylis?" I struck in, thinking our host might devise some way out of the difficulty.

"Lord Nylis can be of no assistance to you," returned the officer frigidly. "Am I to have the elixir or am I not?"

"You are!" screeched Prebble, hurling himself to his feet. "I told the king I was a great prophet, and you shall see I am not without honor even in this country. Observe! Watch! I shall work a spell to fulfil the king's desire. Ah, ha! Room, there, give me room!"

They gave him room, plenty of it. I feared that danger had suddenly turned the professor's brain and that he had gone stark, staring mad.

He whooped, he howled; he threw himself into the most amazing attitudes and fanned the air with his arms.

I looked on horrified. Count Zylox gazed at the contortions of my learned friend in startled wonder. As for the Churs, their superstitious minds were imagining dire things, and they seemed more than half inclined to run.

Suddenly the air above us was rent with a terrific explosion. Simultaneously with the explosion the heavens were lighted by a flash of reddish fire, ghastly in the broad light of day.

Every eye turned aloft. A blazing balloon was dropping earthward like a lead plummet; and following the airy track of the balloon, at slower pace and

with hair raising gyrations, was a parachute.

Two men were clinging to the parachute. I recognized one of them as my rival, Griffyn; the other as Pollock, his secretary and companion.

The burning balloon dropped into the roadway, the wickerwork car, loaded with food, scientific instruments, and other impedimenta, striking ground with a prodigious thump.

Griffyn and his companion alighted a moment later, on the terrace, and not more than a dozen feet from Prebble.

The Englishmen were stunned by the shock and lay on the ground in a state of dazed bewilderment. Without loss of a second, Prebble bounded to Griffyn, bent over him, searched his pockets, and arose triumphantly with a nickel plated flask.

Turning upon the astounded captain of the guard Prebble presented the flask with a low bow.

"The elixir is not in the same flask, count," said he, "but I do not think his majesty will be over particular. It gives me great pleasure to comply with his majesty's command."

## CHAPTER VI.

### FLIGHT.

PREBBLE was not mad; on the contrary he was very level headed. But—query—what would he have done if there had been no flask in the pockets of either Griffyn or his secretary?

The professor afterwards told me that in falling backward on the couch the despairing gaze he turned upward had encountered the balloon.

The airship was in difficulties, plunging wildly and making ready to fall. Griffyn and Pollock were even then taking to the void with their parachute.

"Ideas came rapidly," continued Prebble, "for I was between the Churs and the deep sea, so to speak, and your life as well as mine hung in the balance. Chances were that either Griffyn or Pollock had a flask, and those were the chances I had to take. A special providence watches over children and—and others, captain, and I got the flask."

I think Count Zylox was deeply im-

pressed. At any rate, his hand trembled as he took the flask from Prebble.

The Churs were flat on the ground, face downward. It was their customary attitude when anything occurred which, to them, was supernatural.

Before the count entirely recovered or the Churs arose Griffyn was on his feet and had advanced to where I was standing.

His face was vacuous, his eyes staring. He knew me, but it is one thing to cut a man from your balloon and launch him into eternity and another thing to meet him again, front to front.

Finally he spoke, but there was no sense to his words. I answered him, and that he failed to understand me was evident from the blank look he wore.

What was wrong? Had I forgotten my mother tongue?

"Remove the talk ring, captain," suggested Prebble. "He's giving you English and you're giving him Nyll."

I removed the talk ring. While wearing it I thought in Nyll, talked in it, and my own language was a dead letter.

"Captain Salis!" breathed Griffyn. "Captain C. G. Salis, U. S. N.! Can I believe my eyes?"

"You cast a brother mariner adrift in midheaven," said I cuttingly. "No wonder you are surprised to meet me again, alive and hearty."

"You took a base advantage of me," he protested warmly. "You attached yourselves to the drag anchor in the hope of reaching the Pole neck and neck with myself."

"Rubbish!" I exploded. "You're a sane man, Griffyn, and you do not really think that Prebble and I would do such a thing and run the risk of having our lives battered out against the top of some iceberg."

He muttered in his beard. At last he observed:

"We have been hovering over this country for hours, driven back and forth by one current and then another. The intense heat, or something else, burst our balloon, and the fire——"

"I have no interest in your misadventures," said I coldly. "You cut us adrift, and we were saved by a miracle

only to find ourselves in the midst of a sea of dangers. It will be your business to share some of these dangers with us."

Pollock came up just then, bursting with questions. But Pollock was the kind of man I left out of my calculations.

He was the son of a rich distiller, I had been informed, and his father had helped him to a place in Griffyn's expedition by subscribing twenty thousand pounds to the exploration fund.

Count Zylox and Prebble were holding an animated conversation, and I donned my talk ring to take part in it.

"These are the two fiends spoken of in that tradition of yours, count," the wily professor was saying. "Take them back with you to the king, keep them in confinement and watch them well."

"It shall be done," the count answered cheerfully.

He was showing a good deal of respect for us since the professor had worked his "spell."

"Tell the king," I put in, "that we request him not to deal with the prisoners in a summary manner."

Prebble threw a surprised look at me. He could not understand, I suppose, why I wished to spare the Englishmen when they had shown no disposition to spare us.

"I will carry your message to the king," said Count Zylox.

Thereupon he ordered the Churs to make prisoners of Griffyn and Pollock, and to convey them and the parachute to the oyd car. He would likewise have carried off the wreck of the balloon had not Prebble vigorously objected.

I could not imagine what Prebble wanted with the remains of the airship. In due course, however, his ideas were made known to me, and I found them particularly bright.

Griffyn and Pollock resisted arrest like true Britons. But they were effectually overcome and borne away.

During these momentous events, Lord Nylis had not shown himself. Nor had any one issued from the palace either to make inquiries or to take part in the proceedings.

"Now, captain," said Prebble, after a swift precautionary glance around us,

"we must get to work without loss of time."

"At what sort of work?" I inquired.

"You will find out presently. We must act first, and then do our talking."

He gathered up his tunic about his thin legs and put off down the terrace toward the road. I hurried along in his wake and joined him beside the wicker-work balloon car.

Nothing remained of the basket but a jumble of broken reeds. There was a water can, knocked into a cocked hat and trickling its contents over the road; also a number of scientific instruments, a shotgun and cartridge belt, and a bag containing pemmican and ship's biscuit.

The scientific instruments were ruined, but the bag of food was in good condition, and the gun and ammunition appeared to be uninjured.

"Bring the biscuit and pemmican, captain," said Prebble, taking possession of the firearm and belt. "We'll stow these away where we can find them when wanted, and then hold a council of war."

The articles were hidden in a clump of bushes, and we returned to our couches on the terrace. Prebble was rubbing his hands delightedly.

"I counted on finding the food," said he, "but the shotgun and the ammunition were a stroke of luck. Just what we needed, too."

"You're thinking of making a run for it, are you?" I asked.

"Sh-h-h!" he returned, looking around apprehensively.

Coming over to my couch, he sat down beside me.

"There's nothing else for it, captain," he proceeded.

"I am of your opinion," I returned.

"Our position here is becoming untenable," he resumed. "The king will want more of the elixir, and if it is not forthcoming we will be impaled on the same spear and conveyed into the royal presence."

"We might have reasoned that out before," said I.

"I thought of it, but we needed time in which to recuperate after our long fast, and to adjust ourselves to certain

conditions of the country. Food and rest have prepared us physically, and now that we are acquainted with the mechanism of the oyd car, and are possessed of a shotgun and a bag of food, we are well equipped for flight."

"We must have the car."

"Cars are plentiful. We will lie in wait along the road; then, with the aid of the shotgun, you can take possession of the first car that comes along. After that, away to the south en route for home!"

"To the south!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly. We can't go astray, captain. The cube of iron will draw us along the proper road. We will make in the direction of least resistance."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Do you think the oyd car will carry us over the ice wall and the open sea?"

"How do we know there is an open sea? As for the ice wall, *que transtulit, sustinet*. Our good star is above us. South we must go; it is the only way."

"It is not the only way!" I declared. "Our hope lies in the zellin cube, and we must go whither it takes us."

"To the land of the Churs, my dear sir!" palpitated Prebble. "We would be slaughtered on sight. Have you not had sufficient experience with these man brutes?"

"Remember how superstitious the Churs are," I urged. "The report of that revolver was enough to vanquish them, and now we have a shotgun. Think of that!"

"I read you, captain," said the professor, disgruntled. "Griffyn has arrived. Your fear that he will reach the Pole first impels you to take any chance, however desperate. I go south, sir!"

"And I go north," I returned firmly. "We will divide the pemmican and the ship's biscuit."

"And the shotgun?" he asked coolly.

"We will draw straws for the shotgun. You can get your own oyd car, and I will——"

"Hist! His lordship."

I looked up hastily. Lord Nylis was approaching us across the terrace. Klimon, in the road below, was sitting in the point of his lordship's conveyance.

"Gentlemen," began Lord Nylis, his face troubled, "the fame of your elixir has spread throughout the kingdom. To the lords in waiting his majesty has described its effects upon the system so eloquently that all are wild to try the new fluid for themselves. The second flask the king claims as his own to the last drop.

"But he orders you, through me, to work another spell for one thousand keeses of the elixir. If not too much trouble to you, he desires that you have it fall at the palace steps. Menials are already waiting there with goblets."

My heart smote wildly against my ribs. Had we been too late with our plans for flight?

"How much is a keese, your lordship?" Prebble inquired with a business-like air.

"Two blicks make one keese. A blick, I should say, is about the quantity contained in the second flask."

"In other words," said Prebble briskly, "the king wants two thousand flasks of our elixir rained down in front of his palace?"

"The menials are waiting," his lordship repeated, "and the king's household is impatient."

"We shall have to repair to the palace to make the incantation," said Prebble.

While speaking, he telegraphed me a message with his eyes. If we fled it must be now or never.

Whether north or south made little difference. The thing was to get away before the household grew too impatient.

"I imagined as much," remarked his lordship gravely. "If you gentlemen will descend to the oyd car I will retire into the palace for ten minutes or less and rejoin you the moment I have finished the business that detains me. This is important or I should not delay."

Nothing could have been more opportune. His lordship went one way, and Prebble and I the other.

"The bag of food and the gun," muttered Prebble; "we must have those before we go to the oyd car."

Proceeding to the clump of bushes, we brought out the articles. As the ex-

ecutive end of the expedition, I assumed charge of the gun and belt, strapping the latter over my tunic about my waist.

Next we stole silently upon the oyd car. Approaching the unconscious Klimon from the rear, I tumbled him incontinently into the road and jumped into his seat.

Prebble was already up behind. With the shotgun firmly held between my knees, I bent over the power box and lifted the screen.

Away jumped the car with a suddenness that almost threw the professor into the road. And not an instant too soon.

The dazed Klimon had bounded to his feet and grabbed at the rear of the vehicle, missing it by no more than a hair's breadth. He pursued us, but he might as well have tried to overtake a whirlwind.

We were heading for the land of the Churs and for the North Pole! All fear was lost in the excitement of the moment.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A TERRIFYING DENOUEMENT.

My nerves were not so preyed upon that reason failed me; and while bending over the zellin box, one hand on the screen and the other on the steering lever, I had a few thoughts pertinent to the situation.

When we had left the king's palace, Klimon had used the zellin cube. That meant, of course, that we had proceeded in a northerly direction.

To use the suboyd power, as represented by the iron block, would have been to drive back through the heart of the kingdom. Flight in that direction meant undoubted capture.

Another point: I was not sufficiently familiar with oyd cars to distinguish the iron box from the zellin box.

His lordship's car, however, had just come from the king's palace. The zellin cube must have been used, and, therefore, it was reasonable to infer that this cube was still ready for duty.

I did not pull out the screen to its fullest extent, and thus give the car the full power. We could easily distance

Klimon with half the oyd force, and I wanted to accustom myself to running the machine before urging it to its utmost.

The car was easily handled. The rear wheel was the rudder, and its resistance was strong in moving any way short of due north.

The "feel" of the tiller, if I may be allowed the expression, was an indication of the direction we were going. As I figured it, we were headed north by east.

Suddenly I was startled out of my reflections. Directly ahead and bearing down on us was the official oyd car containing Count Zylox and the detachment of the guard.

A groan came from Prebble.

"They're after us, captain," was the burden of his lament.

I was of the same opinion. But there was no retreat for us, and we must go ahead and look pleasant.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Prebble," I called over my shoulder. "Wave your hand and laugh as we pass the count. He'll think we're out for a little spin, just for the fun of the thing."

"He may think we're bound for the palace," said the professor, reviving.

"He won't think that; we're going directly away from the palace."

"Then he can't be coming *from* the palace, can he?"

"No, but he may be after us, all the same. There! Now hail him; laugh, and be hearty about it."

The count had slowed down his car to a walk, and was watching us with surprise and suspicion.

"Ahoy, there, count!" I yelled as we sped by; "how am I for a navigator, anyway?"

Prebble gave a laugh, but there was not much heartiness about it.

"Where are you going?" shouted the count.

"Yes," I roared back at him, pretending not to understand. Then I drew out the screen a little farther.

I could not look behind and manage the car, so I asked Prebble what the count was doing.

"He's keeping right on," returned the professor. "Great Colossus!" he sputtered, aghast.

"What now?" I demanded.

"The count has caught sight of Klimon—he's stopping the car—he talks with Klimon—Klimon jumps in his car—the car turns—They're pursuing us, captain, they're pursuing us!"

It was useless for us to attempt to escape from the official car. It had a three-foot cube of zellin, equivalent to a drawing power of seventy-two men.

Our machine, on the contrary, was equipped with only a twenty-four man block. Even allowing for the added bulk and heavy load of the count's car, we were greatly outclassed.

I opened the screen to its widest, and at times we seemed hardly to touch the road so fast did we go.

"Are we holding our own, Prebble?" I cried.

"They're gaining, gaining!" he answered. "There comes a spear!"

"Where does it strike?"

"Ten feet behind us."

Half a minute passed.

"Another spear," chattered Prebble, "six feet behind."

I muttered an exclamation. The count had gained four feet in thirty seconds, and something would have to be done at once.

"Prebble," I shouted, "come here and run the car."

"I can't!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you can; you'll have to."

"What are you going to do?"

"Never mind. Time is too precious to waste in talk."

On hands and knees he crept to the forward point of the car, and slipped into the driver's seat as I vacated it.

"You've steered a boat?" I asked, my lips to his ear.

He nodded.

"This steers in the same way. Keep a firm grip on the helm or you'll get a broken rib."

With this warning I crept back to the middle seat, the shotgun in my hand. The official car looked like a sailless junk loaded to the gunwale with pirates.

Shields and spears bristled in the sun, and out of the center of the phalanx gleamed the white face of Count Zylox, gloomy and ominous.

"Stop!" he cried fiercely.

I paid no attention to the word, but riveted my eyes on the front of the official car. Two Churs sat in the point, one managing the steering lever and the other the screen. At their feet between them was the large box holding the zellin cube.

A quick thought plunged through my brain. I hesitated but a moment, and then, kneeling on the broad seat, I threw up the breech of the gun.

There was a cartridge in each barrel. Throwing the piece to my shoulder, I took a long and careful aim at the zellin box.

A spear clove the air, narrowly missing my head. That was my signal to pull the trigger.

Bang!

The recoil wrenched my shoulder and nearly threw me from the seat. When the smoke lifted, I saw that I had worked havoc enough.

That single charge had torn away the front and side of the zellin box, caused trouble with the steering gear, and pricked the shins of the Churs in the point.

The driver and the helmsman, scared out of their wits, had hurled themselves into the road. The rest of their red companions followed them and flattened out along the ground, leaving only Count Zylox in the car.

What contortions that wonderful machine went through! Jerked ahead by a force as of seventy-two Churs, the broken helm thrashing in all directions, it zigzagged here and there, jumped aloft with wheels whirring, and finally crashed into a tree at the roadside and lay a complete wreck.

Count Zylox, I was glad to note, had hurled himself from the car before the final catastrophe, and was suffering from nothing more than a few bruises.

A wail from the professor called my attention from the scene behind.

"It's gone, it's gone!"

"What's gone?"

"The screen cover! I drew it from the box to get the entire force of the cube, and the tiller jammed sideways and knocked it out of my hand."

I was angry, for this carelessness of the professor's was like to cost us dear.

We were not pursued, it is true, but our car was running away with us.

The only power we had over it was to guide it a little to right and left. We could not stop or diminish the speed.

Our gait was that of the Empire State Express, and the track before us had suddenly widened into all outdoors. Where we had left the road I do not know, but we were racing across a broad plain, hot, sandy, level as a floor.

There were no houses, no trees, no rocks—nothing to impede our progress. This was well, considering our limited ability in handling the oyd car.

I peered ahead. In the distance there rose from the earth a cloud-like haze, funnel shaped, and resembling the swirling vortex of a cyclone.

What was it? I had no time to debate the question even had I been so disposed.

"The wall, the wall!" shrieked Prebble.

Yes, there was the great wall built to hem in the Churs. It stretched across the plain as far as the eye could see, and appeared to encircle the column of smoke, or dust, or whatever it was.

As we charged toward it, and it came plainer and plainer into view, I concluded that it must be at least thirty feet in height, of solid masonry, pierced with one brazen gate, toward which we were heading.

The gate, twenty feet wide and twenty high, looked forbidding enough, but better a collision with that than with the granite wall.

"Port your helm, Prebble," I shouted, "port!"

As he moved the tiller I saw a score of red fiends silhouetted on top of the wall. They were looking at us, whooping, dancing, and beating their spears against their shields.

Prebble began a *pater noster*, but I cut him short with the remaining barrel of the shot gun, fired into the air. The Churs melted from the wall as if by magic.

"You see!" I shouted triumphantly. "This gun is going to do the business for us, Prebble."

"That wall is going to do the business," he flung back.

"We're heading for the gate!" I answered.

"Do you think we can smash open the gate and ride through the land of the Churs straight to the Pole?" he retorted grimly. "Make your peace with the world, Salis! There'll be a smash-up in less than a minute."

"We've got to jump," said I as calmly as possible. "Better to jump than have our lives battered out against the gate."

While speaking, I threw out the bag of pemmican and ship's biscuit. The bag struck ground, sprang twenty feet into the air, and fell again in a shower of sand.

"And we've got to go through that!" cried the professor. "There'll not be a whole bone left in our bodies."

"Jump!" I shouted. "Follow me."

Out I went, shotgun in hand. When I came down I must have turned a dozen somersaults.

The gun left my hands, and the talking my head. I ripped my toga to rags, and would have lost it utterly had not the cartridge belt held its remnants about my waist.

After a second or two I realized that I was sitting on the sand watching a figure fly upward from the point of the oyd car, squirm through the air, drop and ricochet along the ground, halting at last, a mere heap of humanity in a wrecked tunic.

Was the professor dead or alive? As I picked myself up painfully to go forward and investigate, a crashing sound reached me from the gate.

Looking toward that point, I noted with wonder that the barrier had not withstood the impact of the zellin cube. The gate was ajar, various pieces of the oyd car piled in the opening.

Prebble was on his feet before I reached him. He still wore his buskins, and was frantically engaged in tying the remains of the tunic about his waist.

"Yes," he cried angrily, "you *would* come north, captain! Reason, circumstances, everything pointed south. But no, you would go north or nowhere. And now look at us!"

He picked up his talk-ring and jammed it down on his head.

He said something else, but as he was talking Nyll and I was listening in English, the sense of it was lost upon me. It was clear to me that he was not very seriously hurt, and I went back for my own talk-ring and the gun.

By the time I had recovered both objects, the Churs were fairly boiling out of the gate.

These were not the ones who had heard the terrifying report of the shotgun and dropped from the wall a short time before, but others, undaunted and eager to fall upon us.

With fierce yells and spears clashing against shields, they literally swarmed in our direction.

"Quick!" panted Prebble, "the gun, the gun!"

I threw up the breech and the empty shells were automatically ejected. Then I plucked from the belt one of the few cartridges that had remained in it after my tumble from the car.

I pressed the shell to the breech. The next moment it is possible I swore, for I am a sailor, and the provocation was great.

"What?" faltered Prebble whisperingly. "Oh-h-h, what *now*?"

I looked at him with dilated eyes.

"These shells," I replied hoarsely, "are too large! I can't get them into the gun! Griffyn must have had two shotguns—we got the belt that goes with the other weapon!"

The professor tossed his hands and fell to the ground. I stood over him, the muzzle of the gun in my hands, sweeping a circle about me with the stock.

I forget how many of those rabid Churs I mowed down with the clubbed firearm. I can only remember that we were taken, tied together with thongs, and driven beyond the great wall, spear points pricking us at every step.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A TRYING ORDEAL.

PREBBLE and I had been on tenter-hooks ever since our arrival in this circumpolar region, but we had not faced a more desperate situation than the one that now confronted us. Person-



ally, I would not have given a copper cent for our chances.

My learned companion, as was so often the case with him, was lost in contemplation of our strange surroundings to the exclusion of the animal instinct of fear. His mind was grappling with scientific data and was therefore too busy to consider our perils.

"Here," I heard him mutter, "we see the human faculties emerging through their chrysalis of brutality; primordial, obscure, but very pronounced nevertheless. How these heads and these faces would delight a Lombroso! There are no other savages in the world like these! If I could abduct one of the creatures and take it back to our own country, what a stir would be caused in the scientific world!"

Thus he mumbled, scarcely heeding the spear that accelerated his lagging pace. I also took notice of many things, but only in a perfunctory and general way.

For instance, in passing through the gate, I judged the wall of masonry to be twenty feet in thickness; I saw that the land of the Churs was ridged with rocky hills, for the most part barren; I felt the earth to be uncomfortably warm under my feet, and when we waded a small stream, the water was hot to my flesh.

In the distance that column of cloud-like vapor trailed skyward, bending and twisting at the crest, and spreading out so that the sun resembled a fiery ball in a drifting shroud. On and on we walked, until we turned into a defile among the gaunt rocks.

Spears struck shields in a ringing clamor, and, presto, the boulders spewed out a perfect mob of unkempt creatures, who ran toward us, some erect and some on all fours.

"Women and children," droned Prebble; "very curious, very. Evidently these creatures are cave dwellers; possibly survivors of the Stone Age, and, as such, our progenitors. I should like their measurements on the Bertillon System."

The women and children surveyed us in awe. The professor, however, claimed most of their attention, their eyes being focused on his head and

spectacles—the spectacles and buskins being about all that remained to him of his former state.

We were goaded into a vile smelling hole in the rocky hillside, and were made to sit down while our feet were pinioned. Then, perfectly helpless, we were left to our own devices.

One of the Churs—so tall that he stood head and shoulders above the rest—barked out a series of orders. Immediately the creatures scattered, women and children with the rest, and began fetching armfuls of dry wood and throwing it down in a heap.

While this was going forward, other Churs arrived. Two carried the shotgun across their spears in front of them, not daring to touch it with their hands.

Four, with spears elevated, had our bag of pemmican and ship's biscuit on the spear points. That, also, I suppose, was a fetich, and to be handled warily.

Lastly came a train of grizzled warriors, each with a lost cartridge on the flat of his spear head. These were thrown in a heap beside the gun and bag of food.

"We're in for it," I muttered gloomily. "Don't you think so, Prebble?"

"Monosyllabic," he answered absently.

"What?" I queried.

He gave a start.

"Their speech, captain, is of the one syllable variety; that is, rudimentary. Now, the ancient Aryans——"

"Belay!" I interrupted, out of temper. "I want none of your homilies now. We have plenty of food for thought of a different kind."

"Yes, yes," he answered eagerly; "I should call it homonymous, or rather——"

I lurched against him and brought him out of his vagary.

"Eh!" he exclaimed. "Did you say something, captain?"

"Look out there!" I answered brutally. "Lord Nylis said these creatures were cannibals, and they appear to be collecting wood. There's a chain of reasoning to claim your immediate attention."

"You think——" The professor grew pallid.

"I don't think," I answered, "I know!"

He pressed his claw-like hands together, bound as they were.

"The world will lose my demonstration of the meteoric theory," he cried bitterly, "and you, Salis, are the cause! Upon your head, sir, will fall the consequences."

"I guess we're both in for the consequences," I returned. "By the miz-zentruck of the great Harry!" I added, looking toward the wood gatherers; "there's a Nyllite!"

"A prisoner?" asked Prebble.

"No; he acts as though he had some authority among them."

"Strange!" muttered my companion, his eyes on the man. "He wears the skin of a wild beast, like the Churs, and there is not the same intelligence shown in his face as in the faces of others of his race. Here comes the tall man; he's a chief, I suppose."

The leader of the pack made toward the cave, followed by four others.

"They're ready for us, I take it," said I, trying to speak calmly.

"I beg your pardon, captain," said Prebble.

"For what?"

"For accusing you of leading me into this predicament. It has just flashed over me that we could not have gone south if we had wanted to."

"I thought it would come to you," I answered.

"We will meet our fate shoulder to shoulder," he went on. "It's not death that terrifies me; it's—it's what follows, in this case."

I laid my bound hands against his, which was as near a handshake as we could come. We differed often, Prebble and I, for we were two of diverse natures; yet I never doubted his innate manhood nor do I think he ever doubted mine.

The Chur chieftain unbound our ankles and motioned to us to rise. We obeyed and walked out among the ragged rabble that surrounded the pyre.

There we were cut asunder, and the professor was led aside and made to seat himself on a bear-skin. After this, the Nyllite stepped in front of me.

"You are from Nyll?" he asked.

"Recently," I answered.

"Where from originally? There are no black haired men in Nyll, and no hairless men like the one yonder."

He turned and indicated Prebble.

"We come from beyond the ice wall. Who are you, if I may inquire?"

"Sertez, I am called. Banished from Nyll by King Boazar on the morning of the long day. Banished," he added acrimoniously, "because I dared to make love to the Princess Ylma."

He struck a note that made my heartstrings vibrate. I eyed him keenly.

"Princess Ylma would not receive your advances?" I queried.

"No," he answered, "but that is nothing. She does not know her own mind. Apart from that, however, she is promised to a man she hates."

"Who?"

"To Count Zylox, captain of the king's guard."

At last I knew why his lordship felt pity for Princess Ylma.

"Why will the king force her to a marriage against her will?" I proceeded, feigning carelessness.

"Because Zylox is head of the house of Almik, rivals of the Boazars. On his death the king fears Ylma will be set aside in favor of Zylox, and he wishes to unite the two houses."

Sertez turned and shook his clenched fist southward.

"I bide my time!" he hissed. "Some day I shall lead a horde of Churs into Nyll and steal the princess."

The next moment he shrugged his shoulders and tossed his hands deprecatingly.

"But enough of this. I suppose you know the fate for which you are intended?"

"I can imagine what it is to be. Have you any power among these people? Can you not persuade them to give over their horrible designs?"

He shook his head.

"Your companion will be spared," said he. "He is taboo among the Churs because of his hairless head. We can none of us understand the reason; and what we cannot understand we believe to be supernatural."

I laughed bitterly at the inconsistency of the Churs. The professor would live. He might never be able to return to our own country, but his bald pate saved him from the disaster that threatened me.

I was near the shotgun, the small heap of cartridges, and the food bag. My despondent eyes fell upon them, and I noticed something, small in itself, but of great importance just then.

The cartridges differed in size! Had there been two sizes of loaded shells in the belt? And had I, in my haste at the great wall, plucked out one of the larger shells?

"I will ask you," said I to the Nyllite, "to take this cord from my wrists."

"You cannot escape," said he.

"Therefore the less reason for you to hesitate in granting my request."

He removed the bonds. Instantly I picked up the shotgun, threw up the breech, and tried one of the smaller shells.

I tremble even now to think of that agonizing moment. Would it fit, or had I tried the smaller kind just without the wall?

The shell slid into the barrel, and I snapped the breech back into place.

"Glory!" shouted Prebble, leaping to his feet and waving frantically the bear-skin on which he had been sitting.

He performed a dance, bizarre enough considering his regalia. The Churs, thinking I was about to make some attempt at escape, began closing in on me with savage cries and ferocious gestures.

I fired the single barrel into the air, and stood quietly under the smoke wreath, noting the effect. The result was all that I had dared to hope.

Down went the Churs, even Sertez sinking to one knee. Silence followed, disturbed only by the gabbling old professor, who, not knowing his bald head had save him, believed the gun had proved the salvation of both of us.

Presently the chief got up on his hands and knees, crawled to my feet, and lifted a handful of sand and threw it over his head. Then he rose and yelped at the rest of his hairy followers.

Immediately a long line of the creatures began creeping past me, every one

of them performing the same operation.

"What is the meaning of this, Sertez?" I inquired.

"As long as you remain on earth, O Thunder Maker," returned the Nyllite fulsomely, "you and your companion are the honored guests of the pack! Koz, the chieftain, tenders his abject apologies for the manner in which you have been treated.

"Those on the wall prior to the breaking of the gate averred stoutly that you were the Thunder Maker, but Koz would not believe. Now that he has heard with his own ears, and seen with his own eyes, he declares that he and his pack will be your slaves until you depart from the land."

"'Tis well," I answered with dignity. "Tell Koz that we are put out somewhat at the manner of our reception, but that we harbor no ill-will."

"He shall be informed."

"I also wish you to tell him," I continued, "that I and my companion are merely human, like the Nyllites. But we have power to requite evil for evil and good for good."

"There is no such word as 'good' in the Chur language."

"Then repeat the substance of my remarks in your own way."

Chief Koz, leader of the pack, seemed overjoyed when my words were translated by Sertez for his benefit. From condemned strangers we rose at one leap to the rank of honored guests.

The best cave in the hills was placed at our disposal, and two of the chief's sons were told off to serve us.

One of our first acts was to send for the bag of pemmican and biscuit and to fortify ourselves with a hearty meal against other emergencies which we knew would be sure to arise.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GORR PLATE.

SOON after we had finished our meal, Sertez looked in on us for a little chat. Prebble and I had just been discussing Sertez.

He was, by his own admission, a banished man; but I regarded him in the

light of a renegade. He had said Princess Ylma did not like him—for which I commended her warmly—and that, in the face of this, it was his desire to abduct her.

No gentleman would express himself in such a manner. Prebble was of one mind with me, but advised that we tolerate the fellow because of his value to us in our dealings with the Churs.

So, when Sertez crept through the low entrance into our cave and then got up and advanced into the glare of the torch that lighted the interior, we welcomed him civilly.

He remarked upon the head room to be had in our quarters, saying it was the only cave in the district where a man could stand upright without fear of knocking out his brains.

He lolled on a bear-skin and we presented him with a bit of pemmican and a ship's biscuit, both of which he appeared to relish.

"I should think," said I, "that if the Churs can climb to the top of the great wall on one side they could drop over on the other."

"So they could," he answered, "but there is no need of any climbing. You gentlemen have demolished the gate, and it is now possible to walk through with perfect ease."

"Then why don't they do it?" struck in Prebble. "From the little I have seen of both countries, Nyll is far preferable to this."

"The Churs are cowed by the superiority of the Nyllites," said Sertez. "With one look a Nyllite can make a Chur drop his spear and run howling back to his wilderness."

"Then how can you ever hope to make a raid into the other country?" I asked.

"I have been waiting for King Boazar and the Almiks to come to daggers drawn. But now I have another plan. I propose to cooperate with you."

"In what way?"

"You seem to be possessed of wonderful powers," Sertez proceeded audaciously, "and if you could by some means blight the minds of the Nyllites, the Churs would immediately overrun their country and I could get the princess."

The shotgun was within reach, and I put out my hand toward it. Prebble halted me with a look.

"That is out of our power," said he.

Disappointment overspread the villainous face of Sertez.

"There is no way you can help me?" he queried.

"No," I replied shortly.

"What is the extent of the Chur possessions?" asked the professor, at his old trade of delving for facts.

"Twenty miles from wall to wall."

"And what causes that pillar of smoke which we see to the north?"

Sertez looked surprised.

"I supposed everybody knew that," said he. "The earth, grinding around its great spindle, causes much heat, so that smoke and minute particles of dust arise and mingle with the clouds."

The professor grabbed at his head. After a moment he continued:

"What is the diameter of the North Pole?"

"One-half a geographical mile."

"Round on top?"

"No, flat—flat as a floor. The Great Ziff lives there."

"Who under the canopy is the Great Ziff?" I demanded.

Again the surprised look filtered across Sertez' face.

"Your ignorance astonishes me!" he exclaimed. "The Great Ziff, gentlemen, is head chief of all the packs. When the time comes to raid the land of the Nyllites, he will head the packs in person."

"He is a warrior of prowess?"

"He is invincible in combat, a veritable lion. But the eyes of the Nyllites are too much for him, as for the rest of his followers. There are some peculiar things about the Great Ziff, gentlemen. For instance, he is not subject to the influence of time. He has lived many thousands of years, and will no doubt last as long as the earth endures."

I saw a grin forming about the professor's thin lips.

"How do you account for this—er—remarkable longevity?"

"Very easily. What makes time? Days, of course; the succession of light and darkness. What makes days? The

rotation of the earth on its axis. The Great Ziff lives on the end of the axis and doesn't rotate. Therefore he is not subject to the influence of time."

The professor reached for the gun this time, but I grabbed it from him.

"Sophistry!" he cried. "The rotation of the earth, as you say, makes what we call a day; but neither days, nor months, nor years make time. They are but way stations on the eternal path."

"When you have been longer in the country you will know more about it," was Sertez' unruffled rejoinder.

Prebble grew red in the face, and only succeeded in calming himself after a great effort.

"How far is the North Pole from here?" I asked.

"An hour's journey."

"I am anxious to pay my respects to the Great Ziff——"

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"At a distance of fifty feet from the Pole the terrific heat would scorch you to a cinder."

"How does the Great Ziff get on and off the Pole?"

"He rarely gets off. As for getting on, he was there when the earth began to rotate."

"Nonsense!" whooped the professor.

"The longer you stay the more you'll know," said Sertez laconically.

"If the Great Ziff leads his subjects on their raid into the land of Nyll," I put in, "he'll have to get off the Pole, won't he?"

"He will," answered Sertez. "When ready, he'll come. Fire has no effect on him, and that is another of his peculiarities. It is said he is very fond of blue fire. He is served by little boys in red caps——"

"What folly is the man talking!" exclaimed the disgusted professor.

"And by monsters all head and no tail," continued Sertez, "and by hideous, slimy things that creep on the earth and slide through the air, and by——"

"Hold!" ordered Prebble. "We have enough of that. We're after facts, not fancies."

"The longer you're with us, the more——"

"Yes, yes, you said that before."

"The Churs believe these things about the Great Ziff."

"About what I would expect of their primitive minds," sniffed the professor.

"They run to physical, rather than to mental power," said Sertez, rising. "If I can be of assistance to you at any time, gentlemen," he added, "do not fail to call on me." Thereupon he crawled out on all fours, as he had crawled in.

"There goes the biggest——" began the professor, but paused abruptly. "No," he went on, "I won't say it. What he tells is hardly more incredible than the things we have seen with our own eyes since reaching these circum-polar regions.

"If we were to put our experiences down in black and white for the benefit of our fellow countrymen, captain, they would call us monumental—I refrain again. The term grates on a sensitive ear."

"Truth is stranger than fiction ever dared to be," said I sagely.

A few minutes later, accompanied by our servitors Bigoll and Xit, we emerged from our cavern and started for the Pole. Our den opened on a rocky defile, with steep sides, which it was necessary for us to traverse.

At the end of the defile we came upon a group of warriors who, grinning behind their couched spears, disputed our advance. I motioned them aside, but they would not stir.

We looked around for Sertez, thinking to make our wishes known through him. He was not in sight, however.

As a last resort I fired the gun. The Churs quaked in their tracks, but did not fall as had heretofore been their invariable custom.

"Let's try the other end of the defile," said the professor.

We did, and were met by more of the Churs, who blockaded us as effectually as the others had done.

"We are honored guests with a vengeance," I fumed. "What does this mean, anyway?"

"It means," replied the professor, "that they prize our company so

highly they can't let us go. We must return to the cave."

This we did, and for one hundred and sixty-eight hours—which would have been seven days in a country where night and day recur in accepted order—we slept, ate, conversed, and made essays to begin our journey Polewards. But we were unable to leave the defile.

The outlook was discouraging. Sertez kept himself in the background the whole time, and whenever we questioned Bigoll and Xit, by signs, to tell us about him, they shook their heads and grinned blankly.

Finally, in the hundred and sixty-eighth hour Sertez materialized. He brought with him a silver box.

"You told us to call on you," said I with some heat, "whenever we desired your services."

"I am here, gentlemen," he answered blandly.

"Where have you been?"

"Abroad in the land of the Churs, organizing and preparing for the coming of the Great Ziff."

I noticed that he was highly pleased over something and repressed his jubilant feelings with difficulty.

"What's on foot?" I asked.

"A messenger, one of the Churs, has come from the land of Boazar. He says the blight has fallen, and that the mental powers of the Nyllites are dethroned. They have become gibbering idiots, doddering fools!

"And now, *now* the accepted time approaches. You do not believe in the Great Ziff. But you shall see him come in a cloud of blue fire, with the little boys in red caps, and monsters all head and no tail, and hideous things that creep on earth and slide through air. You shall witness the gathering of the packs under the Great Ziff, and then, if you follow, you shall observe the overthrow of the Nyllites and behold Sertez and Princess Ylma united and holding sway under protection of the high chief of the Churs!"

He drew a picture which horrified me. For the moment Prebble was dumb.

Sertez laughed diabolically, and handed me the silver box and a little golden key.

"For you," said he; "the messenger brought it. He said it was for the stranger with the black hair and eyes."

I was all agog with curiosity. And so was Prebble, for that matter. Both he and Sertez watched eagerly while I unlocked the casket and threw back the lid.

"A gorr plate with the royal arms!" exclaimed the astonished Sertez. "Carnelian!" he added. "The plate is from a woman."

In the box was a square, thin block of a flesh red color. I was excited, and my hands shook as I removed the plate.

"How do you know it is from a woman?" I asked.

"Young, unmarried women use carnelian for communicating their thoughts," answered Sertez; "grass-widows use chrysoprase, the green variety of chalcedony; bachelors use a varicolored block of agate, and all other men employ onyx."

"How do you contrive to learn the secrets of the plate?" I asked.

"I will show you."

He reached for the carnelian block, but I thrust it behind me.

"Very well," he simpered, but I detected a flash of his eyes which I did not like, "try for yourself, but you will learn nothing. You are not educated up to it. Take the plate between your palms, so."

He held his palms close together, illustrating how I was to hold the thing.

I did as directed. A delightful sensation, the very poetry of exquisite feeling, sped along my nerves and centered in my brain.

Apart from this, however, no tangible thought impressed itself on my mind. What mysteries were locked in the plate? I burned to know, yet dreaded using the only channel lying open to me.

Sertez was a villain. Still, he was a Nyllite, and had been brought up on gorr plates, so to speak.

My impatience to receive the message overcame my repugnance of the means. I handed the royal block to the renegade.

"Tell me what it says," I requested.

A gleam of satisfaction darted through his blue eyes. I knew I was

playing into his hands, but I also knew there was nothing else for it.

He sank on a bear-skin, the plate between his palms. Bending his head, he began in a low voice:

The thoughts of Ylma, Princess of Nyll, daughter of Boazar III, concerning momentous events taking place in the kingdom, and concerning the black haired, black eyed stranger from beyond the ice wall, who is often in her mind and always abides in her heart!

I was for snatching the plate from this renegade, my rival; but what he had said only made me wildly eager for more. I could learn more through him alone, so I suffered him to proceed.

Wondrous and unheard of things are happening in the land of the Nyllites, and I am filled with fearful forebodings. The other strangers, conjured from the sky by the hairless prophet, were condemned to death by oyd, but saved themselves by offering to deliver to the king and his people thousands of keeses of the elixir introduced by the little prophet with the glass eyes.

Whereto the foreigners last to arrive have reared a strange structure filled with wonderful vats and called by them a distillery. Into this structure maize is carried, and from it keese upon keese of the elixir is taken, to the end that the whole kingdom may renew its youth.

But if youth must be renewed at such a price, it is my prayer that the All-Wise will suffer me to age quickly and die, that I may no longer witness the orgies of these, my people.

The king, my father, lies constantly in a state of torpor, the gentlemen in waiting sing songs and hold wassail from hour to hour, the ministers have lack-luster eyes and mumble to themselves, and the business of state is at a standstill.

The people are even as the Churs, dull, besotted, reeling along the roads, shouting, raving; filling the air with hideous sounds. They have become beasts, and worse than beasts.

Princess Ylma cries aloud in her despair to the black eyed stranger from the land beyond the ice wall. Will he come to the rescue of the Hyperboreans, save this distressed people, and gain the eternal gratitude of his unhappy Ylma? Something tells me he will not ignore this prayer, and that I am as much in his heart as he is in mine.

The voice of Sertez ceased. While speaking his tones had become soft and gentle as though he appropriated for himself the thoughts of the carnelian block.

Then, abruptly, he leaped erect with flaming face and flung the gorr plate at my feet. In a voice husky with anger he cried:

"You, black haired interloper from the antipodes, dare to raise your eyes to the Princess Ylma! You have the unblushing audacity to rival one of her own race! Miscreant!"

"Renegade!" cried I hotly.

"Captain, captain," implored Prebble, observing my clenched fists, "be calm!"

"Calm," I cried, "calm, when this banished scoundrel speaks to me in the manner he does? By the mizzentruck of the great Harry, he's the worst enemy King Boazar has! I'll do my first stroke of work for Princess Ylma. I'll attend to this beggar so his pretty plan for raiding the country will fall through."

Prebble sought to hold me, but I shook him off. Then I hurled myself at the renegade.

He was slender and quick of movement, and managed to avoid me. Ducking under my fist, he raced for the entrance to the cave, picking up the gun and cartridge belt as he fled.

"There he goes!" screamed Prebble. "He's stealing our thunder! Don't let him steal our thunder, captain!"

I tried my best to overhaul the rascal, but he clawed through the opening a dozen feet in the lead.

Down I went on my marrow bones to follow, and then, just as I was close to the exit, there came a crash and the light of day was shut from my eyes.

A huge boulder, which had been kept in readiness, as I afterwards learned, was knocked free and fell across the entrance.

Prebble and I were imprisoned in the cave! Imprisoned and rendered helpless when we were needed elsewhere. For my sole wish now was to get back to the princess and save her and her people from the doom that threatened them.

I could have imitated the army in

Flanders. It is possible I did, although the memory escapes me.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE GREAT ZIFF.

"WHAT is that?" harped the querulous voice of the professor.

"A boulder blocks the entrance," I answered.

"Push it aside."

I had tried without avail.

"A locomotive couldn't move it," I panted.

"Can't you squeeze around the edge?"

"The opening is hermetically sealed. That scoundrel designed this for a living grave, Prebble."

I crept back to the torch beside which my companion crouched, wringing his hands.

"Think of Nyll!" I said in a hollow voice. "What noble minds are there o'erthrown."

"Captain," replied Prebble in an awesome whisper, "we were the demons referred to in the legend."

"Aye," I returned; "we saved our miserable lives with a flask of Bourbon, and Pollock, the distiller's son, has completed the work. They have built a gin mill, and the kingdom of Boazar is steeped in debauchery. The serpent has crawled into paradise! And the Princess Ylma! Merciful heaven, what will become of her?"

I staggered erect and beat my brow with my clenched fists.

"The opportunity of the Churs has arrived," said Prebble, still in his awed whisper. "Led by the Great Ziff, the allied packs will sweep through the broken gate and lay Boazar's domains in waste. Awful, captain! My soul shrinks at the thought."

"And that arch fiend, Sertez, will bear away the Princess Ylma!" I raved. "We must get out of here. We *must*, I tell you!"

I crawled to the rock again and pushed until I saw stars. Not an inch could I move it.

"Come back, captain," called Prebble calmly. "Don't waste your strength. Come back and let us think."

"Can we think ourselves out of this hole in the hillside?" I retorted. "Action is what we want."

"Thought must precede action. Come here and be quiet."

There was a command in his voice, and I crawled back to the torch once more and crouched opposite him, watching his face in the sickly glare.

It was a thin, strong face, the face of a thinker. His eyes gleamed and glowed as he cogitated. Finally he started, his gaze fixed on the torch flame.

"The opening, you say, is hermetically sealed?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"Then what causes that flame to bend toward the rear of the cavern? There is a draft, and there could be no draft without an opening."

"Right!" I cried, overjoyed. "There is an exit somewhere."

He pulled the torch from its socket. Holding it in his hand, he walked slowly toward the back part of the cavern, watching the flame as it bent forward, directing him with flickering finger.

The roof dipped toward the floor. Prebble went down on hands and knees, still holding the torch and following as it commanded.

He trailed away, and I saw him weaving to and fro in the distance, the fluttering torch like a star. It *was* a star; our Star of Hope if ever we had one.

Suddenly the little reddish dot came to a standstill, and Prebble's voice floated back to me.

"Eureka!" he called. "Bring what's left of the biscuits and pemmican, captain."

I snatched up the bag—it was now light and of small dimensions—and followed my companion. He waited for me.

"You'll have a tight squeeze of it," said he. "When the great primordial cataclysm fashioned this hill it had the forethought to leave a narrow passage through from the cavern to the top. I can see daylight ahead."

"Crawl for it," I returned. "I'll be close after you."

In some way I pushed and dragged



myself through, and at last we emerged on the hillside overlooking the defile that lay at our cavern's mouth. From our position we could look down and see the great boulder that had been balanced over the entrance.

The gully was full of Churs, and the center of interest seemed to be Sertez. The renegade had the gun, and was handling it with dangerous carelessness.

"If he's not careful," said I, "he'll kill somebody."

The words were barely out of my mouth when the piece exploded and one of the Churs fell in his tracks. Consternation seized upon every one, Sertez along with the rest.

The destructive power of the gun had not before been brought home to these creatures, for the mere report of it had been sufficient to compass my ends. Now, however, the bungling of Sertez had wrought a catastrophe which caused the "thunder maker" to be doubly feared.

The Churs prostrated themselves, and Sertez dropped the firearm as though it had been a serpent, flinging the belt down upon it and then retreating to a respectful distance.

"This is our opportunity, professor," said I, and we hurried down the slope and made our way to where the gun and belt were lying.

It would be difficult to decide whether our appearance in the defile, having apparently issued through the solid boulder blocking our cave, or the fatal use of the shotgun, frightened these savage creatures the more.

On several occasions I had seen their primitive minds overcome, but never to the extent that they were now.

"How—how were you able to get out of the cave?" faltered Sertez.

"It is not necessary for you to know," said I sternly, picking up the belt and buckling it around me and then possessing myself of the gun. "Inform Koz that we desire to go to the Pole and interview the Great Ziff."

"But you cannot——"

"Do as I tell you!" I broke in sternly, and emphasized the command by pointing the gun in his direction.

He gave a shout of horror and ran to

the chief. Koz listened attentively while Sertez told our wishes, and then approached us with our two servitors, Bigoll and Xit.

Sertez did not venture in our proximity. From a distance he called:

"Koz and his sons will accompany you."

"See to it, Sertez," I shouted, "that you head no foray into the kingdom of Nyll, otherwise the thunder maker shall speak in terms you cannot fail to understand."

He showed his teeth in a snarling smile, and from that I knew that we were not yet done with him. Koz himself took the food bag and carried it across his shoulder, but neither he nor Bigoll nor Xit could be induced to bear the "thunder maker."

With the three Churs in the lead, our course led us down the defile and out through a country where Titans had at one time been at play, hurling mountains at each other, piling them up fantastically.

Steadily but surely we advanced upon the pillar of smoke and dust.

As we went on the ground grew hotter beneath us. Often we struck a spot where our feet were compelled to fly upward in a wild dance, or bear the weight of our bodies on their toes.

Everywhere was desolation. Contiguous to the great wall were areas where plants and trees grew and streams of warm water had their courses.

But here the heat was fatal to plant life, and what moisture the ground contained was given off in steam. Still onward we kept our course, although it seemed every moment as though we must turn back.

A weird exaltation thrilled me. For the present I forgot that I was seeking the Great Ziff to threaten him in case he seized upon the misfortunes of Nyll to make an invasion of the country.

Again I was the polar explorer, searching for that baffling and elusive thing called the North Pole. With my eyes turned straight ahead of me I pressed on and on.

At last we reached a point beyond which it would have been suicide to venture. And there before us arose the goal of my ambitions.

Adequately to describe the soul-inspiring spectacle is beyond me. No pen could do justice to the scene, least of all mine, which heretofore has been confined to the simple annals of the log book.

I have seen a volcano in eruption, and the vomiting forth of fire and smoke and dust bear some resemblance to this polar phenomenon. Here the zone of activity was half a mile in diameter, completely circular.

Within the vortex, as the veil shifted, the great spindle was disclosed, a mighty bulwark of celestial law and order—without which there could be no night, no day—no certainty of recurring seasons—no life on this fruitful planet.

Entranced, we stood and watched the wondrous whirligig perform its mighty evolution.

Nearly three hundred and fifty feet per hour it moved, more than five feet per minute—the grand, majestic sweep of a vast world, set spinning in the night of ages by the Creator's all powerful hand.

Prebble and I stood dumb in the presence of the stupendous mechanism, Koz and his sons lying prostrate, pouring upon their heads the dust of humility and reverence. Thus, in our several ways, did the finite pay tribute to the Infinite.

"We must build a cairn," said I hoarsely, turning my bloodshot eyes upon Prebble.

He nodded, aroused the Churs, and they set to work. On a piece of flat shale with a sharp point of agate I traced the following:

At this point, during the summer of 1901, arrived Captain C. G. Salis, U.S.N., and Professor Phineas Prebble, having set out from America in the year 1900 on a voyage of discovery and exploration.

Over this we built the cairn. At the precise moment the final stone was added to the heap my attention was attracted by fearful cries from the Churs.

I faced about, and at once my startled gaze encountered a sight that froze my blood. The veil of smoke, dust, and

flame was parted by a form that plunged through it like a swimmer through the sea, separating the red billows with his naked hands.

The figure was that of a Chur of gigantic proportions. His face was the face of the arch fiend, monstrous in its every feature.

The eyes were like diamonds; the teeth long, yellow, and two of them overhanging the nether lip like tusks; the long red hair writhed as so many tongues of fire about head and shoulders, and the long, furry limbs moved with marvelous rapidity.

A whip seemed lashing my brain with stinging force; and at every blow the voice of Sertez rang in my ears:

"The Great Ziff! Now will you believe?"

In one hand this hideous giant carried a skull; in the other hand a thigh bone. Again and again he would strike the skull, and a dull, sepulchral sound would be the result.

As he pounded his horrid drum he would roar, in monotonous tones, syllables which sounded like *Us-kwee-baw*, *Us-kwee-baw!* Then, at intervals, he would lift the thigh bone and point southward.

It must not be supposed that we saw this frightful creature long. At one leap he cleared the Pole and touched earth, then away he flew at a Brobdingnagian pace, pointing southward, beating the skull and roaring his *Us-kwee-baw!*

I looked at Prebble. His head was in his hands. I turned to where the Churs had been lying, and saw that they had departed, following the Great Ziff at top speed.

## CHAPTER XI.

"ACCORDING TO GNEISEN."

HAD our series of remarkable adventures in this circumpolar country not hardened us to the improbable and the unexpected, Prebble and I would have thought ourselves gone daft.

"Let's get out of this," said the professor huskily, picking up the biscuit and pemmican bag.

I grabbed the shotgun from the rocks, scarcely noticing that the barrels

blistered my hands. Then away we went on the track of the Great Ziff, Koz, Bigoll, and Xit.

"What is your opinion of the Great Ziff, Prebble?" I asked when we had reached cooler ground and could walk and talk with some little comfort.

"Don't ask me," he begged. "Imagination appears to have taken the place of sober sense. Event follows event so swiftly that all seems a riot of the imagination. The scientific mind finds nothing firm enough to stand on, and hence all scientific deduction falls flat. I behold and marvel, captain; I make no attempt to explain."

"The furies are unleashed," said I sadly. "Nyll will be overrun, and all her magnificent civilization laid waste. The Great Ziff heads the allied packs, and every Chur is like a ravening wolf."

"We must hasten back to Nyll," averred the professor.

"But what can we do?"

"We can save the kingdom," he answered promptly, "or as much of it as is left when we arrive."

"How?"

"Leave that to me. Let your care be the rescue of Princess Ylma."

Our apprehensions spurred us on to greatest effort. Just before we reached the defile from which we had issued to begin our journey to the Pole, we surmounted an elevation that afforded us a view of the wall, the broken gate, and the plain beyond.

A host of Churs was flowing southward. The passage through the wall was like a strait, the animated billows crushing through and spreading out once more on reaching the sandy stretch.

As far as the eye could reach the inundation rolled, and we had no doubt that in the lead rushed the Great Ziff, sounding his infernal tocsin and roaring his mysterious slogan.

"Thus ignorance overwhelms learning," muttered Prebble, "and brute force subdues the mind."

"Let us not halt," I cried in fierce impatience; "on, Prebble, on!"

We could not overtake the procession of warriors, but we came among the women and children, straggling along in the rear.

It was hours before we reached the populous portion of Nyll, and what a melancholy spectacle greeted us on every hand! Houses were burning, and the Churs were everywhere like the red imps of Satan, carrying their spoils upon their backs, or driving unsteadily Nyllites before them, loaded with the loot of their own dwellings.

It appeared to have been the policy of the Great Ziff to spare, that the Churs might enslave. Everywhere there was brutality, but nowhere could we see bloodshed.

As we made along the road toward the king's palace an oyd car came tearing toward us. In the car were two men whom I recognized as Griffyn and Pollock.

"Halt!" I commanded, placing myself in the middle of the roadway and raising my hand.

They did not slacken speed, and would have cut me down but for the shotgun. I raised it to my shoulder and aimed carefully.

"Halt, or I fire!" I cried again.

This time I was obeyed.

"Great Heaven!" cried Griffyn as he stopped the car. "Can this be Salis and—and Prebble?"

"Don't say you failed to recognize us," I answered.

"But I did, though. What has happened to you?"

"There's no time to talk of ourselves," I cried; "we must do something to stem this tide of invasion."

"What can be done? The men of the kingdom are confounded and have fallen easy victims to their old time enemies."

"Where are you going, Griffyn?"

"To the distillery on a mission for Princess Ylma."

"Ha! Where is the princess?"

"Locked in a room in the king's palace."

"What are you going to do?"

"Burn that accursed distillery to the ground."

"You are mad!" broke in the professor passionately.

I looked at him in amaze.

"What do you mean?" asked Griffyn and Pollock in one breath.

"If that distillery had never been

built," said I, "this awful invasion would never have happened. You"—and I leveled a trembling forefinger at Pollock—"are responsible for all!"

"You and Prebble are responsible," flung back Pollock. "You taught King Boazar to use the elixir in the first place."

"We gave him the flask in order to save our lives."

"And we," spoke up Pollock, "built the distillery to save our own."

"Have done with this wrangling," interrupted the professor. "We are all of us at fault; but we are human, life is dear to us, and sometimes we buy it at too great a price. Have you any elixir on hand, Pollock?"

"Several thousand keeses."

"Any tanks and oyd cars at the distillery?"

"Half a dozen, at least."

"Then I will go with you, and we will save the kingdom!"

He turned on me with a hearty grip of the hand.

"I must leave you, captain. It is necessary, for you have your work to do as I have mine. You remember what his lordship told us about the Nyllite who penetrated the ice wall? The work now going on is strictly according to Gneisen. Shrewd fellow, that Gneisen!"

He sprang into the oyd car.

"*Simila similibus curantur!* To the distillery, Griffyn, top speed."

While we had stood in the road talking, many Churs passed us, but gave us little notice. Possibly they were too intent on the nefarious work before them.

I journeyed on, the horrors thickening about me as I proceeded. A whirr of wheels from behind claimed my attention, and I turned just as a familiar voice called my name.

A car was darting in my direction; to the broad seat in its center Lord Nylis was bound, and in the front point was Klimon—faithful Klimon!—shrieking like a fiend.

"Save me, captain!" implored Lord Nylis. "Klimon is taking me to the Great Ziff!"

I ordered the rebellious slave to halt. His answer was a defiant yelp. I fired

at him, and he tumbled over the iron box into the road, closing the screen with his falling body.

The car stopped. At once I sprang aboard and tore the ropes from his lordship's hands.

"You have saved me from a fate worse than death, captain," said his lordship, "and I thank you."

Suddenly his body stiffened and he eyed me sharply.

"It was reported that you and the professor had gone over to the Churs. Are you concerned in this raid?"

"We are concerned in it, sir, to the extent of trying to save the kingdom," I answered. "As to going over to the Churs, it was either that or death by oyd. The Churs spared us, and we have returned to be of all the assistance to King Boazar that we can."

Lord Nylis shook his head sadly.

"You can do nothing, I fear. The king and nine-tenths of the nobles and people have succumbed to your elixir, and its baneful effects are everywhere apparent. Our powers of mind have suffered eclipse. The kingdom is doomed!"

"The case is hardly as bad as that, I hope."

"The condition of affairs could not be worse. Every slave in the country has risen, and even the slaves outnumber the Nyllites two to one. Add their numbers to the horde that has swept down on us from the north, and you will understand how desperate is the situation. Klimon, whom I have owned for years, turned on me, and was conveying me to the Great Ziff!"

"What for?"

"To present me to him as a slave."

"Horrible!" I looked back at the still form in the road. "He will have no further part in the insurrection," I added.

"I tried to conquer him with my will, but his fanaticism was aroused by the coming of the Great Ziff, and he turned my glances as though clad in armor." He laid his hand on my knee as he asked: "Where is the professor, captain?"

"Gone to rescue the kingdom." I answered. "Griffyn and Pollock are with him."

"What can they do?"

"They can turn the weapon that has cost you so dear against your enemies. We have a saying in our country that 'like cures like.' If this is true, and if the Churs take to the elixir, and the Nyllites abstain from it, the country may yet be saved."

Hope darted into his face.

"I had not thought of that," he said. "But let us on to the palace. I am worried about his majesty."

Lord Nyllis took the driver's seat and drove the car at full speed along the road. Many attempts were made to interfere with us, but the shotgun stood us in good stead, and we finally reached the palace steps unmolested.

The king's guard to the last warrior had turned against Count Zylox, and he had been compelled to barricade himself in one of the state apartments.

The count was another of those who had resisted the temptations of the elixir, and from one of the palace windows he called down and acquainted us with his predicament.

"Where is the king?" asked Lord Nyllis.

"In the throne room. The Princess Ylma is with him, and has barricaded the doors. Hark!"

Count Zylox raised his hand.

"Can you not hear them?" he asked. "Sertez, with a score of Churs at his back, is endeavoring to batter down the doors and capture the king. I will descend and join you. Perhaps we may be able to exert our power over some of the slaves and the guard. Wait for me in the grand hallway."

There were no Churs on the steps or in the hallway. All in the vicinity of the palace were helping Sertez force entrance into the audience chamber.

The count carried a spear, and Lord Nyllis picked up another from the floor.

"What does the foreigner here?" asked the count, vouchsafing me a harsh look.

"Cherish no animosity, count," said his lordship. "The captain is truly our friend. His companion, the professor, has gone to save the kingdom."

"How?"

"There is no time for explanations. Let it suffice for you to know that this

man is my friend, and has recently preserved me from my enemies. The thunder machine he carries is to stand us in good stead. To the throne room, count, before it is too late."

We started forthwith, the sound of a heavy blow and a crash accelerating our steps. A wild scream echoed through the apartments.

"The princess!" cried the count, beginning to run.

"They have demolished the doors!" gasped his lordship.

Presently we flung into the vast chamber. The sun was gleaming through the windows and reflecting a fiery color from the blood-red tiles of the floor.

Backward and forward, as in a crimson tide, swerved the hairy, semi nude forms of the Churs. Their yelping tones, the clashing of their implements of war, caused a deafening din in the room.

King Boazar occupied the massive chair on the dais. His hands hung listlessly over the arms, and his head was bowed forward. It might have been an attitude of sorrow and despair, but I attributed it to another cause.

Before him, at the top of the short flight of steps, stood Princess Ylma, her eyes glowing and her arms outspread to block the advance of Sertez. The renegade stood below, his foot on the first step and his gloating gaze turned upward.

"Nothing can keep us apart now, Ylma!" he cried. "I have leveled every barrier that stood between us."

"Except one," she qualified, gazing at him scornfully.

"What is that?"

"My loathing for you, Sertez!"

A mocking laugh rang from his lips.

"I shall level that, my lady—trample it underfoot along with the foolish pride that has made you look down on me. You are to be mine, my princess, mine!"

He started to mount the steps. I was almost upon him, but Count Zylox was a little in advance of me.

Catching Sertez about the neck with one arm, the count hurled him backward. The renegade saved himself a fall by clutching at one of the Churs.

He whirled about, gripping his spear, and fixed his glaring eyes on Count Zylox. The count returned the glare with steady intensity.

Our entrance into the throne room had been silently made, and we had reached the foot of the dais almost before our presence was discovered.

These Churs happened to be from the pack of Koz. Thus I was known to them, and the terrors of the "thunder maker," which I carried, threw over them a spell of silence and inaction.

Princess Ylma was gazing at me as though she dared not credit her senses. Facing Lord Nylis, I exchanged the shotgun for his spear and crept closer to Sertez and Count Zylox.

"Traitor!" cried the count. "Your lying lips have given insult to the daughter of your sovereign——"

"I am a banished man; I have no sovereign."

"Nor will you have any country but hell when I am done with you! Cross spears with me if you dare."

The count was a man after my own heart. He showed a spirit that aroused my admiration, and I was sorry he was not a friend of mine.

Sertez sprang to the fray with a laugh and a taunt, the count met him bravely, and spear struck spear.

Then it was thrust, parry, thrust, parry—now high, now low—the spear heads shimmering as they darted toward each other like serpents' tongues—the count forcing Sertez back, step by step, and again Sertez pressing the count.

There was a monotony about it all in spite of the fascination which a battle to the death will always call forth. But the monotony was suddenly varied.

Sertez leaned forward like lightning. His spear point fell, rose, and there was a reddish stain marring the brightness of it.

With a muttered anathema, the count caught the haft of his weapon in his left hand and continued the battle, his right arm hanging limp at his side. I tried to press forward and draw the attention of Sertez.

"One at a time," cried the renegade.

"Back!" commanded the count fiercely. "No man shall rob me of the

pleasure of running this traitor through the heart."

I was eager to be at Sertez, for we had a score to settle on account of that little affair in the cave. Still, I could not insist on displacing the count.

The combat went on. Zylox fought at a terrible disadvantage, as was apparent to all of us, and from the throne Princess Ylma watched with breathless lips and pallid cheeks.

The stertorous breathing of the king came to our ears through the dead silence, and now and again he would move restlessly and mutter incoherently.

Once more there was the monotony of thrust and parry, above, below, and clash, clash as the spear heads met and sent ringing echoes through the vaulted chamber.

A diversion came, and came quickly. The count slipped on the jasper tiles and went down, his weapon flying from his hand.

A slight scream escaped Princess Ylma. With a cry of triumph Sertez plunged at his opponent's breast, but I struck the long shaft aside, thereby earning curses from both Sertez and the count.

Then Sertez and I went at it. The renegade was not fresh as I was, but on the contrary he had not the same unpractised hand which I was compelled to use.

A repetition of the previous performance was begun. I was more awkward than the count, however.

Every moment was a close shave for me, but after some fashion I bungled out of the traps set for my 'prentice skill. I fought blindly, persistently, pressing my foe at every point in spite of the perilous play of his spear head.

I remembered only the insult in the cave, and even forgot that the eyes of the princess were upon me. *Z-z-z-z-ip*, swish! I had caught a chiseling blow in the shoulder.

A scream reminded me of the presence of Princess Ylma.

"Lord Nylis, end this!" she cried. "I beg you save the stranger's life!"

"Hands off, your lordship!" I shouted. "You don't know what I owe this fellow!"

Sertez was at me again, cool, diabolical, wearing a crafty smile. By now there was blood on the floor. I retreated, coaxing him over the pool.

He followed. I sank to one knee, presenting my spear point. He slipped, as I had anticipated.

But he did not fall backward, as I believed he would. He pitched forward upon my weapon and it impaled him to the heart.

Prone on the floor he lay, the long shaft clinging to his breast. As we stood over him, an appalling sound floated to us from the distant corridor.

Poom, poom, poom!

"*Us-kwee-baw, Us-kwee-baw, Us-kwee-baw!*"

## CHAPTER XII.

### PECULIARITIES OF THE ZIFF.

THE Churs dropped in a flash. Zylox, Nylis, and I sprang to the throne steps and ranged ourselves abreast for the defense of the king and Princess Ylma.

I had no spear, but I picked up the one wielded by Sertez, gave it to his lordship, and took from him the gun.

"The Great Ziff!" whispered the count hoarsely.

"He will excite these Churs to frenzy," muttered Lord Nylis.

"Supposing he were killed?" I asked.

"That, at one blow, would settle the insurrection," declared the count.

"But he can't be killed," supplemented his lordship.

"We shall see," I responded.

The next moment the hideous giant bounded into the chamber, beating his gruesome drum and roaring his horrid war cry.

Princess Ylma sank to her knees with her face in her hands. The king roused himself and staggered to his feet, his bleared eyes resting on the monster.

"There," he cried; "see them!"

"See what?" asked the count.

"The little boys in the red caps! Ha! Take 'em away! They're on my back, on my head, holding my arms, dragging me down! Have I any loyal subjects left? The monsters, the creeping things, the—the——"

With a gurgling cry his majesty dropped back into the throne chair, thrashing his arms wildly. The princess sprang up and threw her arms about his neck protectingly.

Poom, poom, poom, echoed the grinning skull.

"*Us-kwee-baw!*" roared the Great Ziff, and pointed the thigh bone at the king.

The Churs sprang erect.

"Now, captain, if you can do anything," whispered his lordship frantically, "*now!*"

The giant was advancing upon the throne. In a trice I raised the gun and gave him both barrels.

The roar in that confined space was awful beyond words. As the smoke cleared we saw the Great Ziff sprawled on the floor.

We gazed, and—I am telling what I beheld with my own eyes—even as we looked his form faded into thin air, so that we saw nothing but the blood red tiles.

And then from without we heard the sepulchral sounds of bone and skull, and the roar of the Ziff as strong as ever.

The Churs rushed from the throne room and from the palace, while the count, his lordship, and I hastened to one of the windows.

There this colossal creature stood, gathering his cohorts, unharmed in body or limb.

I was sorry the professor was not a witness of this proceeding, for he afterwards told me I must have been frightened out of my wits, so that fear colored my account of the extraordinary event. Those who have followed me so far, I trust, will know me better than that.

"Barricade the palace doors!" cried Count Zylox. "We three will hold the place against the invaders!"

We hurried to follow out his suggestion. After every door had been secured, we looked down from a lofty window, and, to our intense surprise, found that the Great Ziff and his followers had left the vicinity of the palace.

"We are safe for the present," said Lord Nylis, heaving a sigh of relief.

"The Ziff will return," averred the count.

"Until he does," went on his lordship, turning to me, "there will be little for you to do, captain. If you would like to go to the lavatory and make a change of garments, I will be glad to conduct you."

He made the suggestion out of the kindness of his heart, and I was grateful to him for it. In truth, I was a sorry looking representative of the United States Navy as I stood before him.

I still wore what remained of my buskins, but they were the sole relics of my former state. In the land of the Churs Prebble and I had both donned the prevailing bear-skin, and while mine covered me from shoulders to knees, and was respectable enough, yet it was hardly a court costume even for those trying times.

Before another hour had passed I felt a different man. Immediately after emerging from the lavatory and dressing-chamber I repaired to the throne room.

Princess Ylma was still beside the king, who was recovering slightly and calling for more of the "elixir." The moment I entered, she descended and came toward me with outstretched hands.

The count, as I observed, had thoughtfully dragged the body of Sertez from the apartment, and only the stains of blood remained to mark the spot where the sanguinary struggle had taken place. My own wound was insignificant, and, having been bandaged, I felt no ill effects from it.

Save for the king we were alone, the princess and I. I caught her hands and held them for a moment, peering into her wonderful blue eyes.

"I knew you would come," she said softly, her lids drooping and the color coming and going in her full round cheeks.

"I came quickly, Princess Ylma," said I, "but could not arrive before the Churs."

"You are a stranger," she said, flashing a quick look at me, "and I cannot be your princess."

"Nevertheless," I returned, drop-

ping on one knee and pressing her hands to my lips, "you *are* my princess, and I must call you so."

She raised me gently.

"I was told that you would not be able to learn the secrets of the gorr plate," she proceeded, as I stood at her side.

"I learned them," I answered, not thinking it necessary to describe the means.

"Then, am I——" She hesitated, her lips trembling.

"You are ever in my heart," I whispered.

"And you think of me in the same manner that I think of you?"

"Yes," I replied. "Ever since you saved my companion and myself at the lake you have never been absent from either mind or heart."

A lover must be allowed some latitude, even at the Pole, where latitude is stretched to its farthest limit.

She withdrew her hands quickly. Turning, she made her way back to the throne and sat on the steps.

"Come," she said, making a place beside her. "I wish to ask you if you and your companion can be of any aid to this poor country in its present plight."

"We shall do our best to save the country," was my response, "and I believe that success will attend our efforts. The professor is now engaged in the work. Griffyn and Pellock are with him."

"Nothing can be done," she declared with spirit, "until this elixir is destroyed to the last drop! I have given orders for the burning of the building in which it is made."

"The professor countermanded your orders."

Her eyes flashed.

"Why?" she asked imperiously.

"Because, although it has been the means of bringing woe and unhappiness to Nyll, it may yet be employed in saving the country. The elixir is a good servant, but a bad master."

"How may the elixir be employed?"

"Let the Churs partake of it, and it will render them helpless. Then the Nyllites may rise, conquer the savages——"



"And resume their use of the elixir," she interrupted sorrowfully.

"No. After the Churs have been conquered, *then* burn the distillery, and let every keese of the elixir be poured on the ground."

She clapped her hands and a joyful look overspread her face. But the joy was short-lived.

"And then," she resumed, "the king will order the other strangers to build a new distillery, as they call it, and they will have to comply in order to save their lives."

"Princess," I returned, "our poor lives have been the cause of all this misery. Had the professor and I not valued our existence so highly, the king would never have tasted the contents of that first flask, nor would the second flask have been given him, nor would the distillery have been built. Are you sure he will demand more of the elixir when he recovers reason and sees what direful consequences have followed its use?"

"The taste is strong upon him," she answered. "He drinks the brown fluid continually. I am sure he will order more of it."

"In that event," said I grimly, "Griffyn, Pöllock, the professor, and I must leave the country."

"Where will you go?" she asked tremulously.

"Back to our own land."

"Beyond the ice wall?" Her hand crept toward mine and caught it clingingly.

"Yes."

"Will there not be danger in the attempt?"

"I suppose so," was my glum rejoinder.

"Will you not dread to face it?"

Her cheek was close to mine, her starry eyes fixed upon my own and burning with a light that thrilled me.

I placed my other hand about her waist.

"I shall dread facing the danger much less than leaving the Princess Ylma!"

She sighed.

"Tell me of your own country," she said. "Is it a wonderful land like ours?"

"In some ways more wonderful, but in others less so. We have no gorr plates, no oyd cars, no kings, no princesses; but we have our Ziffs, many of them, and all fully as terrible as the one we have lately seen."

"Do they not destroy the minds of the people?"

"The brown fluid does that; then come the Ziffs."

"Does the Ziff bring his Churs?"

"We have no Churs, princess. Every man is his own Chur. These shaggy monsters skulk in the trail of the brown fluid, and battle with the man's better self until the Ziff comes and finishes the work."

She shuddered.

"I should not like your country," she said; "only, if you were there, even such a land might be paradise for me!"

The words were still on her lips as I plucked the last one with a kiss.

"You scoundrel!"

Count Zylox! The princess pushed from me with a little cry, and we both looked up to find the captain of the guard regarding us with a scowl.

I arose haughtily.

"I cannot forget that I am in the presence of a lady," said I, "or I should answer your speech in kind. Eavesdroppers rarely hear anything to their liking."

"You introduce a curse into the land," sneered the count, "and after destroying the people, you attempt the destruction of the king's only daughter. so——"

"Liar!" I cried.

His base insinuations were too much for my hot blood. I launched myself toward him, and, had not the princess interfered, would have taught him a lesson then and there.

The king's daughter was between us. My hands fell, and I stepped back.

"Your pardon, Princess Ylma," I murmured. "At some other time and in some other place he shall yield me satisfaction for his words."

"He shall not!" she returned, a very queen in speech and bearing. "You shall prove your manhood by ignoring a man who forgets himself as Count Zylox has done."

She faced the count.

"I desire you to leave this room. There are other things to command your attention at the present moment."

"Nothing more important than this," he answered.

She bent her eyes upon his steadily. "Withdraw!" she commanded.

For the first time I saw that the count had the shotgun in his hands.

"Let him first give me that weapon, Princess Ylma," I requested.

"Take it," said the count savagely, and flung it with all the force of his left arm down on the tiles.

The piece was broken beyond repair. My heart sank, for I had counted on using the gun in defense of the palace should we be attacked.

As the count turned on his heel, a loud commotion was heard at the palace entrance. He hurried away, and I started to follow.

"Promise me before you go," said Princess Ylma, "that you will not renew this quarrel."

"I promise," said I, and hastened on.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE PALACE DUNGEON.

WE were unnecessarily alarmed by the noise on the palace steps. The Great Ziff had not returned with the Churs; but Pollock had come with an oyd car and a tank of elixir.

He reported that Prebble, Griffyn, and himself had started in different directions through the kingdom, each with a car containing a large quantity of the "brown fluid."

This was being judiciously distributed among the Churs.

"They are wild after the stuff," said Pollock, "and are casting aside their loot, their shields and spears, and even allowing their prisoners to escape, so that they may drink more and more of the fire-water. In twenty-four hours, if the Nyllites will rise, Nyll will be theirs once more."

Pollock left, after being reassured as to the safety of the king and the princess. I ran back to the throne room to acquaint the princess with the progress of the good work, but the apartment was deserted.

Since there was no danger to threaten, I threw myself down in one of the reclining rooms to rest after the exciting events of the last few hours. Worn out, I fell asleep.

When I awoke I was not in the reclining room. All around me was blackest darkness, and a dank smell as from moldy walls.

What had happened to me? I dashed my hand across my face to free my brain from the evil spell that seemed to encompass it.

Still the darkness would not lift. Was I mad? I reached out on either side. On my right, space; on my left, a blank, slippery wall.

I felt below. I was lying on a slab of stone.

Staggering erect, I groped my way aimlessly about. Presently I came to another wall.

Turning, I paced to the wall opposite. Twenty paces. Between walls, the other way, I also counted twenty paces.

Then I climbed upon the block of stone and reached upward, my fingers touching the roof. Under me, around, above, nothing but granite.

Sitting down on the slab, I bowed my head in my hands. I was a prisoner, there was no doubt of that.

But how had they been able to carry me off without waking me? I am not a heavy sleeper, and the croon of a rope through an oil sheave has more than once sent me from my bunk.

I smelled an odor strange to my nostrils. Ah, I had been drugged.

Resistance was feared, and these men, who were wide awake for six months of the year, had taken advantage of me in my sleep and drugged and imprisoned me.

It was Zylox, of course. He had seen me with the princess, had heard our conversation, and it had increased his enmity toward me.

He was a brave man, and had the good of the kingdom at heart. But brave men are weakest when struck on the side of their affections.

He loved the princess and she cared nothing for him. He would not brook interference on my part, and death was to be my portion.

I wondered how long an interval had passed since I lay down in the reclining room. I also thought of Prebble, and wondered if he had succeeded in saving the kingdom.

What would he do when he heard that I was a prisoner? What *could* he do?

Possibly he would not hear. No doubt I was in the stronghold of Count Zylox, where I could be dealt with at my enemy's pleasure.

And the princess! Would she ever know my fate?

As I sat there with bowed head, a door opened raspily and light struck across the gloom. I looked up and saw the count entering, accompanied by four armed Churs.

I sprang erect and rushed toward him, but two spears crossed in front of my breast and stayed me.

"Keep your distance," said the count.

"Is there a spark of honor or manhood about you?" I cried. "Will you not grant me the satisfaction one gentleman may yield another, face to face?"

"I would not soil my hands fighting with you."

"Coward!"

He smiled.

"A caged rat may rage at a lion," said he coolly.

"Where am I?"

"In a dungeon of the king's palace."

"Why am I here?"

"For *lèse-majesté*."

"High treason!" I exclaimed. "A trumped up charge, Zylox. No stranger in the country can commit treason."

"No; but he can do worse and plan odious things."

I trembled with anger.

"It is not the part of a brave man to taunt a prisoner unable to defend himself," said I.

"Then don't force me with your questions."

"Does the king know I am here?"

"You are here by his orders."

"Then you have poisoned his mind against me."

"I have simply told him the truth, and he has drawn his own conclusions."

"What is to be done with me?"

"What should have been done when you and your comrade first showed yourselves in the land." He added laconically: "Death by oyd."

I sank down on the stone slab.

"When?" I asked after a moment.

"In two hours."

"Where?"

"Here in this cell."

My impending doom, strange as it may seem, had a quieting effect upon my nerves.

"What of the kingdom?" I asked.

"It survives and will live to the end of time under the reign of the Olmik-Boazars. The Churs are all enslaved, and the Great Ziff has fled to the Unknown."

"Heaven be praised for that! The professor was successful in his attempt to save the land."

"The weapon that wrought the havoc was turned upon our foes. Small credit to this professor of yours! He and you introduced the evil, so it was his business to stamp it out if he could."

"He is safe?" I asked.

"Yes, he and the other two. They will be given safe conduct to the ice wall. If they return to the country your fate will be theirs."

"Leave me in peace," said I.

"Will you have more peace with a light?" he sneered. "I have brought you one."

One of the slaves carried two luminous globes. At a signal from the count he laid one of the globes on the floor.

"Two hours," said Zylox, with a grim laugh, and passed out with his attendants.

The door was secured, and again I was left alone. The light, however, made my situation more endurable.

Even when confronted by death a man's mind will deal with trivial things. I marveled at the luminous globe, for it was not fed with oil, nor had it a wick.

It resembled a sphere of glass, but if it was glass it was the first specimen of it I had seen in Nyll. I walked to the globe, bent over it, and picked it up.

Something white lay under it. Hastily I put down the globe and possessed myself of the object.

It was a bit of folded linen. I un-

folded it, and found that it bore queer marks upon its surface, made with a yellow pigment.

Long and earnestly I studied the marks, but could make nothing of them. I turned the square of linen upside down, and still the characters were not legible.

Suddenly a thought struck me, and I removed the talk ring. I had found the key to the situation, for the words were written in English and, of course, I could not read them while thinking in Nyll.

Keep a stiff upper lip, captain. Your friends have not abandoned you. I will be with you presently.

The note was unsigned, but I knew it must come from Prebble. The light bearer had been bribed to lay down the note with the luminous globe.

Hope revived in my breast, although, for the life of me, I could not understand how getting out of the dungeon would save me from my impending doom.

After escaping from the palace, I would still have to leave the kingdom, and to do that unseen, in the broad glare of that long day, would be impossible.

For some time I continued to rack my brain with doubts. Then again came the creak of the door, and Prebble stood before me.

He, also, was clad in a new tunic, and through the lenses of his spectacles his eyes beamed encouragingly. I rushed to him and caught him by both hands.

"Prebble!" I exclaimed. "How have you managed to come to me?"

"Lord Nyllis requested it of the king as a personal favor," he answered.

"The king is determined on my death?"

"He is adamant."

"If that flask of Bourbon is to be blamed for it, it is strange the rest of you are not here with me."

"It is not on account of the flask of Bourbon, captain. The rest of us have not dared to make love to Princess Ylma."

"Then, as I expected, Zylox is the moving force against me."

"Not only Zylox, but the whole kingdom—except Lord Nyllis. He regrets the occurrence, but you have made him your friend, and he stands by you."

"What of the princess?" I smiled.

"She stands by you, too, and there have been stormy times in the palace, the princess entreating her father to spare you, and her father only wishing you had nine lives, like a cat, so he could take them all. You have committed a very heinous offense, captain."

"I could not help it; nor would I have helped it if I could."

"That's like you. But I must not squander anything so valuable as time is, at the present moment. Plans have been made to rescue you."

"To get me out of the palace?"

"Yes."

"What will they avail? Suppose I *do* get out of the palace, what then? Must I hide myself somewhere until the long night when all Nyll sleeps?"

"Hardly. Griffyn has constructed a new balloon——"

"Constructed a balloon?" I gasped.

"That is it. He has made it out of a royal cloth woven from thread spun by spiders. Griffyn has really done remarkably well. The structure used as a distillery formed his work-room, and, while he was ostensibly assisting Pollock in the manufacture of spirits, he was really constructing this airship.

"He utilized what materials he could take from the wreck of the old balloon, and the result is most creditable. The bag is now being inflated in an open space near where the distillery used to be.

"The gin-mill has been burned to the ground, you know, and there is not a drop of elixir to be had anywhere in the kingdom."

"Will Griffyn, feeling as he does toward us, take us with him?" I inquired doubtfully.

"Misfortune has drawn us all together, captain, and Griffyn's feelings toward you have undergone a change. Besides, I insured our passage in the agreement."

"What agreement?"

"A balloon is not of much use without gas. Griffyn could make the bal-

loon, but he could not make the gas. I have done that in return for the privilege of our being allowed to go with him in the airship."

"And the balloon is being inflated, you say?"

"It will be ready for us by the time we are ready to use it."

"But I am to meet my fate within two hours!"

He laughed.

"So you are, but not in the way you imagine. Now listen, captain. Shortly after I leave, a slave will come to you with food. When he goes out, you will accompany him. He understands, and there will be no trouble.

"When you part from the Chur some one else will take you in charge. That is all. It is thought that I have come to say good-by to you, so I must not linger too long or suspicion will be aroused."

"I will do everything I am told to do," said I, pressing Prebble's hand.

He went away, and I paced the confines of the dungeon impatiently while waiting for the Chur with whom I was to depart. He came in due course, nervous to a degree and frightened almost out of his wits by the part he was playing.

Through damp and tortuous underground passages I was conducted, until it seemed as though we had traversed several miles of labyrinth. When we reached the end we were at a flight of stone steps leading upward.

The Chur ascended the steps and pushed at an iron door. After some effort he succeeded in throwing the door open, and daylight penetrated the gloom.

As the slave stood on the topmost step I saw hands reach over and lay a golden chain around his neck. His face quivered with joy, and he kissed the hands before they were withdrawn; then he beckoned me and stood aside while I passed up and out.

The exit let me out of doors. A grove stretched around me, and I could see no one, not even the person who had conferred the gold necklace upon the Chur.

I turned to question the slave by signs, but he had disappeared. Earth covered the spot where I had gained the

surface from below, and so nicely was the door fitted into the turf that no eye could detect its presence.

As I stood waiting, I heard a soft voice:

"Captain!"

Behind me stood Princess Ylma, having just stepped out from among the trees. I hurried to her, caught her in my arms, and pressed my lips to hers.

"I was not expecting you, Ylma," I said.

"Did you think I would abandon you?" she returned, a surprised look on her face.

"No, no, not that. I was sure you could do nothing. The professor, in fact, told me how hard you had labored with the king, and how unsuccessful you were."

"My father was very unkind to me," she said with trembling lip. "He does not appreciate what you and the professor have done for the kingdom."

"We wrought the evil, Ylma, and it was our duty to repair it as well as we could. His majesty owes us nothing on that score. But where are we? Had I not better be hastening to the airship?"

"Are you so anxious to leave me then?" she pouted.

"I wish that I might never leave you!" I answered fervently. "I am forsaking Nyll for the good of the kingdom, Ylma. You understand. We talked of it in the throne room."

"I understand," said she with mock pathos, "that I would not abandon you, but that you willingly abandon me. How ungrateful, captain!"

"Not willingly, dearest," I insisted. "You would not have me stay when all the people, except yourself and Lord Nyllis, are crying for my blood because——" I hesitated.

"Because," she finished, "you have dared to love the princess!"

"Yes," I proceeded, "and I would willingly barter one hour of happiness with the princess for this death by oyd. If you say so, dear one——"

"No, no," she whispered, placing one small hand over my lips, "I do not say so. Forgive me if I tease you, captain. These are the palace gardens, and we are not more than a stone's throw from

the lake where I saved your life so many, many hours ago. Lord Nylis is coming for us with an oyd car, and we are to remain here and listen for his signal. Until we hear the signal we may talk."

"I hope the signal will be long in coming," said I as she led me to a stone seat. "You realize, do you not, that we are parting forever?"

"No," she returned, "I cannot realize it, captain."

"You must realize it, Ylma," I persisted. "It will be beyond my power to return here. I trust the sacrifice I am making for this kingdom will long be remembered. It is costing me more than I can tell you."

"Then why make the sacrifice, captain?" she murmured, leaning against me and looking up into my eyes.

Her mood perplexed me. There was no understanding her.

"There must be a sacrifice, Ylma, whatever I do," said I. "If I leave the country, I sacrifice you; if I remain, I yield up my life. I will do as you tell me, my princess. Shall I go or stay?"

"You must neither leave me nor remain here," said she enigmatically.

Then she laughed in my bewildered face.

"Is this airship of yours, captain, unable to carry one more? Why may not Princess Ylma go with you?"

"Ylma!" I cried, and caught her to my breast. "You would leave your kingdom, your father, all for me?"

"My happiness lies with you, dear," she answered simply. "If I remained here I should be unhappy. Your people shall be my people, your country my country."

"It is you, then, who are making the sacrifice," said I fondly.

"Neither of us shall make a sacrifice," she replied. "Do you not know that I am promised to Count Zylox, a man I loathe and abhor? My father has a will of iron and is determined to unite the two royal houses of Nyll.

"You are to be slain, and immediately afterwards, while your blood is still red on the count's hands, our nuptials are to be celebrated. Can you imagine a more horrible fate? By leaving my country with you I shall be the happiest woman in the world."

Life was bright for me then. Not only had I discovered the North Pole, but I had won a bride, the fairest and most lovable of women.

While we sat there and talked a voice called from a distance.

"His lordship!" exclaimed Ylma, starting to her feet. "Come," she added, catching my hand. "Lord Nylis is taking desperate chances to aid us. The Chur who brought you through the underground passages to the grove won his freedom; but we can only requite Lord Nylis by giving him our love and gratitude."

Together we hurried toward the road. As we pushed through the bushes we saw an oyd car drawn up and waiting for us.

The car contained but one passenger, who, muffled to the eyes in a white robe, sat in the driver's seat.

"Is the coast clear, your lordship?" I asked.

He nodded.

"What you are doing for us in this hour," I went on, "I shall never forget!"

I was standing beside the oyd car assisting Ylma to mount. Suddenly the muffled figure uprose and cast aside the cloak.

It was not Lord Nylis at all, but Zylox. Ylma screamed, and the count struck at me savagely with a short sword.

"Don't forget!" he cried. "Up, Churs! This way, guard!"

The captain of the guard had every advantage, and it is a wonder he did not cleave me to the chin with his sword. Ylma dropped on the seat of the oyd car, and I jumped back, the sword grazing my arm.

Meantime the Churs began pouring into the road from among the trees, before and behind the car. Zylox, baffled in his attempt to cut me down, stood looking at me, the sword in his left hand.

"Well it was," he shouted, "that we discovered the plot of Lord Nylis to help you! But you are not out of the country yet, and you shall not leave this spot alive!"

In the breast of my tunic was the little silver box with the gorr plate sent

to me, in the land of the Churs, by Princess Ylma. I treasured it above diamonds and rubies, but I saw immediately that I must part with it.

Drawing it forth, I poised it a second in my hands, and then hurled it at the count. It struck him in the forehead, and he threw up his hands and fell backward from the car.

The sword left his grasp and dropped clattering into the roadway. I secured it in a flash, leaped aboard the car, drew up the screen, and wielded the tiller with my left hand and the sword with my right.

Like an arrow from a bowstring we darted away, mowing a swath through the ranks of the Churs. Leaning over the forward point of the vehicle, I slashed furiously with the blade.

In almost less time than it takes to tell of it we had left Zylox and his detachment of the guard far behind.

"This is awful, awful," moaned Ylma.

"If we could have helped it, Ylma," I answered, "I would have been happy. The count discovered your plans in some way and took his lordship's place in the oyd car."

"There are several cars pursuing us," said my companion.

"Have we far to go?" I asked, drawing out the screen and giving the car more speed.

"Only a little way. There! Ahead of us is the airship."

A low hill, bare of trees, lay directly before us. On the crest of the hill arose the four ruined walls of Pollock's distillery, and near the walls was the huge, swaying bulk of the balloon.

In the sunlight the great globe looked like frosted silver. About the basket I could see the forms of Prebble, Griffyn, and Pollock looking down on us with frantically waving arms.

What was the matter with them, I was asking myself? Certainly the mere excitement attending our flight and pursuit could not cause such strange actions on their part.

Presently the road angled to the right, and when we dashed around we came upon six oyd cars drawn up abreast of each other across our path.

There was no getting between the

cars, and no swerving to right or left to pass them. Thick woods flanked each side of the way.

In order to avoid a wreck, I was forced to draw to a halt.

"In the name of the king!" shouted a voice as a man arose in one of the cars that confronted us.

The whirr and rumble of the other cars could be heard advancing upon us from behind.

"Lost!" exclaimed Ylma in a heart-breaking tone. "All is lost, captain!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A BEWILDERING SENSATION.

IN that dread moment when, as Ylma said, all seemed lost, I cast a quick look upward toward the hilltop where the balloon was swaying. Prebble was executing a war dance and pointing with his hand toward the roadside.

I understood then that we were to leave the car and take to the woods.

"Not lost, Ylma!" I panted, springing to the ground, the sword gripped tightly in my right hand. "Come! We will gain the hill if Heaven so wills it, or I shall die making the attempt."

Her courage rose grandly to the occasion, and she leaped lightly to my side.

"Do you think there is hope?" she asked.

"While there is life there is always hope."

With hands clasped we hurried into the deep shadow of the wood. We were within spear-throw, but none of the ugly darts was launched at us.

Me they were willing enough to spear, but the princess was at my side, and none dared risk a throw.

"Follow them!" ordered a voice. "Rescue the princess—not a hair of her head must be injured—but slay the foreign devil—slay him!"

"Slay the foreign devil! Slay him!" shouted other voices.

"Faster, faster!" panted Ylma.

"Oh, captain, can't you go faster?" I was running my best, and dragging her after me. She was sobbing breathlessly, but urging me to swifter pace at every bound.

From behind us came a triumphant cry. I paused, turned, and saw that a Chur had overtaken us. Warding a spear thrust with one hand, I passed the sword through his body and whirled to renew our flight.

Ylma, overcome with fear and fatigue, had fallen.

"I can go no farther, captain," she cried, throwing her arms around my neck convulsively. "Leave me! Save yourself!"

"If I go, Ylma," I answered, "you go with me."

Then I picked her up in my arms and ran on blindly. We were ascending the hill, now. There was no timber, and we were in plain view of our pursuers.

But still no spears were thrown—the danger to the princess was too great. A hundred yards more and we would be at the balloon!

Could I make it? The Churs were bounding up the hillside from rock to rock, coming closer and closer at every spring.

The sweat stood out on my forehead in great drops, my heart pounded furiously, and I could hear the roar of rushing blood in my ears. Another of the Churs was right at my heels.

Then I perceived that Griffyn and Pollock were beside me. A lusty right-hander from Pollock laid the Chur in his tracks.

"Let me help you, captain," said Griffyn.

Between us we bore Ylma the remaining distance and placed her in the basket.

"In with you!" cried Prebble. "For Heaven's sake, hurry!"

The professor was standing on the rim of the basket, knife in hand, waiting to cut the rope that held the balloon to earth.

I was thrown into the basket by Griffyn, who piled in after me. Prebble cut the rope and we shot skyward with Pollock clinging to the edge of the car.

I looked over and downward. Nyll and the Nyllites were receding rapidly. As I gazed, the Churs hurled an impotent shower of spears which fell far short of us.

Zylox was below, and his was the last

face I saw. Its expression of hate and baffled rage was awful to behold. As his figure faded and blurred on my sight he was shaking his fist upward at the mounting airship.

"Saved!" cried Prebble jubilantly. "I told you that when you left the dungeon, captain, you would meet your fate."

Ylma smiled and held out her hand to me.

"I did not think of your words in this light," said I, taking the little hand in mine.

"I think the lot of us have had a time of it," said Griffyn.

"So we have, my hearty," I returned, "but all's well that ends well."

"May I look over, captain?" asked Ylma.

"Certainly you may," said I, and I held my arm about her while she took a final look at her country and her people.

When she turned to me a moment later, there was a smile of joy on her lips and tears of sorrow in her eyes.

"The wind favors our return southward," said Griffyn; "if nothing unforeseen happens, we shall reach the land beyond the ice wall before——"

\* \* \* \*

"Good gracious alive, captain! I never knew you to sleep like this before. Wake up, wake up! Here are the Eskimo guides and some of the fellows from the ship. We're found, do you hear? Found!"

I raised my head slowly and looked around in bewilderment. Prebble was talking, but I understood him with difficulty.

I reached up my hands to remove the talk-ring. They encountered the hood of my parka, and there was no talking there. Where did I lose it?

"You act as though you were in a trance," went on Prebble. "Aren't you hungry, man? Here, put your teeth into this chunk of pemmican. You'll feel better when you get something inside you."

Surrounding me was the rough surface of the ice cap, and I was reclining half in and half out of our sleeping bag. Two dog sledges were drawn up a little way off, and Lieutenant Corson, who



had been left with the ship, was looking down at me apprehensively.

Behind Corson stood a group of undersized men clad from top to toe in furs. They could not be Churs. If they were they had shrunk sadly in size.

I got up unsteadily, rubbing one hand across my forehead.

"We are ready to return to the ship," said Corson, "but you had bet-

ter eat something, captain, before we start."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Prebble curiously.

"Nothing," I answered with a short laugh. "I'll take the penmican, if you please."

And then, as I sat down on one of the sleds to eat my frugal meal, I added: "Great guns!"

THE END.