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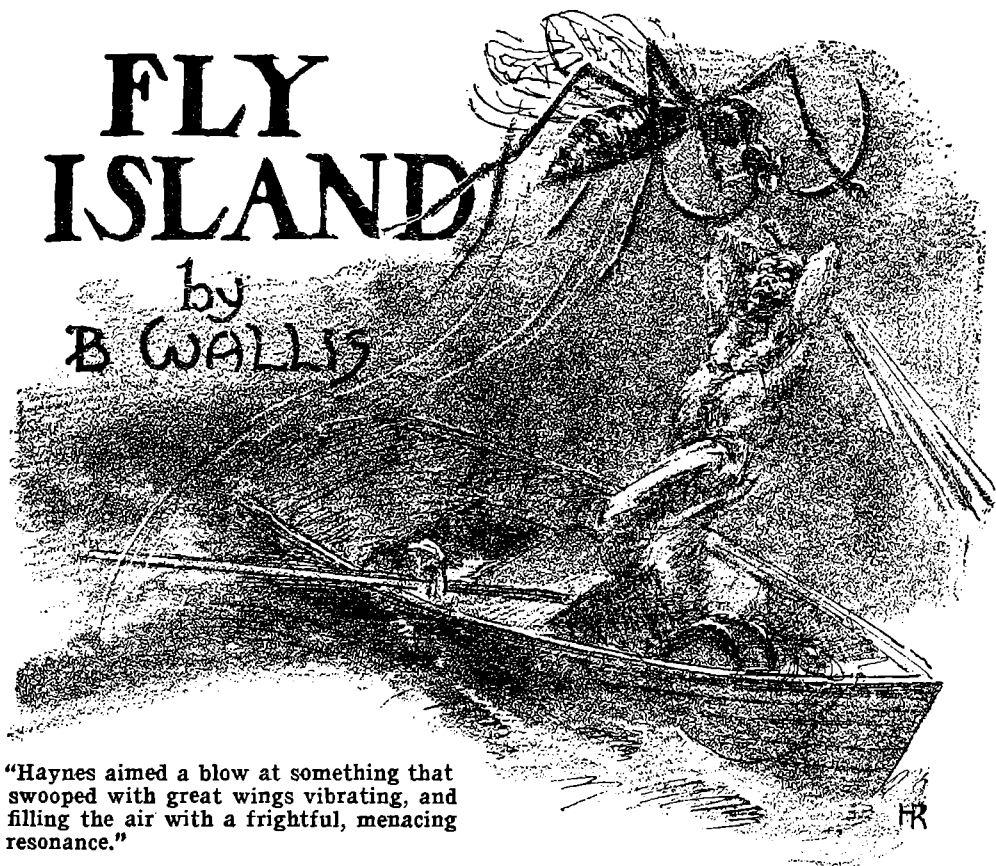
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# FLY ISLAND

by  
B WALLIS



"Haynes aimed a blow at something that swooped with great wings vibrating, and filling the air with a frightful, menacing resonance."

"LOOKS good to me!" said Haynes, the taller of the two men who had just run their little craft into the sheltered cove.

"Me for the hay this night!" agreed Manton with hearty satisfaction.

Three days had elapsed since they, sole survivors and once proud owners, had abandoned the *Tahuana* with its back broken on an uncharted reef somewhere south of the Solomons. For the hurricane that had licked into its maw their crew of three Trobiand "boys" had also left the *Tahuana* dismasted, a helpless wreck to drift in a dead calm to the one spot in that lonely waste where pink coral and surging seas would seal its fate.

By a twist of ironical fortune one small boat had come unscathed through the storm, and in this the

partners had at once deserted the ruin of their hopes and many a hard-earned dollar. A desperate chance, but their only one, and this was not the first by many a one of desperate chances calmly taken and in their passing forgotten.

For two monotonous days they had in turn steadily sculled on a compass course—somewhat indefinite of determined goal, as was their point of departure—northward to the Solomons and Bougainville; the nearest approach to civilization, though almost certainly across four hundred miles of seldom-traversed waters. For two days not a breath had stirred the stagnant molten air, but on the morning of the third, nature quickened and from a rapturously hailed cats-paw it quickly freshened to a brisk breeze; toward noon it stiffened and a

nasty chop commenced to lift, and before long ceaseless bailing alone stayed their foundering. Then into the horizon had popped this solitary island. Some hours later, and only in the nick of time, they had staggered into the sheltered cove.

As they had seen from afar, no mere surf-drenched atoll this: instead stood an odd-shaped boss of reddish rock, rounded and of easy slope save at its naked riven summit where steep jagged crags shot up abruptly to some five hundred feet above the beach they trod. Betwixt sea and summit lay a half-mile breadth of palm and sturdy undergrowth, and beyond, though now invisible, rose the rounded grassy shoulders ascending to the crown of ragged bluffs.

"Nuts, shade and water," grunted Manton, appreciatively eyeing a little rill that spilled through the greenery almost to their feet.

"It's a peach," affirmed Haynes. "After that damned two-by-four cockleshell," he added with a mariner's inborn grouch for the minor discomforts and indifference to the major perils of his calling.

By now the sun was near to setting, so they hastened about their simple preparations for the night.

"This," said Manton after supper, slowly puffing clouds of rank sweet smoke from his bearded lips, "is what I call real comfort."

"My oath!" said Haynes with laconic contentment.

**T**HEIR slumber was untroubled and sound as befitted men whose flesh for two nights had endured the bruising ribs of a craft no larger than a pleasure skiff on the Hudson.

"Say, what's the rush?" queried Haynes thoughtfully as, breakfast over, they sat whittling black trade plugs for the morning rite. "I reckon a day's rest and another such doss will set us up for the stretch to Bougainville."

"I dunno—well, we don't lose nothing, that's a fact," growled Manton with a wry twist of lip at the thought of their shattered fortunes. Truly what matter a day more or less to destitute castaways whose only prospect was a dreary beggary on the beach of Bougainville until some vessel, undermanned, contemptuously shipped them?

So the matter was settled, and for a little they lay smoking, until the sun invaded their retreat. Then they rose and with a sudden boyish curiosity wandered off into the shade of the green wall almost encircling them.

That the island might be inhabited appeared improbable, as some keen eye would certainly have noted their approach and landing, and before this have gleamed with pleasure or suspicion upon the castaways.

Though the bush proved dense, yet it was by no means impassable, the stems standing in clumps of straight and pliant texture. But underfoot the way was littered with mossy boulders and pitted with hollows that the shade of the green matted roof almost veiled, even though the tropic sun flamed above. Idly prying here and there they made their way slowly through the scrub, loth to leave the shade, though here the air was dead and stifling. Shortly the thinning of the growths and streaks of garish light ahead announced the naked rising slopes beyond.

"It's hot—shade or sun," growled Manton.

"Sure," agreed Haynes indifferently, his lean hard flesh less troubled than his great-thewed partner. "But shucks, it's— Hell! what's that?" he suddenly exclaimed in surprise.

"That" needed no close scrutiny, though the unexpectedness and nature of the object his foot had dislodged from the decay and trailing vines underfoot and sent hurtling awkwardly a pace ahead was the last thing their somewhat unimaginative

minds were that moment expecting. For human skulls are neither gracious in themselves nor indigenous to uninhabited islands.

"Well, I'm damned!—a skull!" said Manton slowly and with profound conviction, as though he voiced a prolonged and expert investigation.

"Sure it's a skull. But what is it—white or nigger?" queried his partner impatiently.

"White and no error!" announced Manton, stepping up and turning over the grimy globular thing with his foot. "Never a nigger with a head and jaw like that," he added, stating a simple fact, for the yellowed bone when clothed in flesh must have possessed markedly Caucasian features of uncommon virility.

"Yes, he's white all right—look here!" said Haynes, who on his knees was raking amid the litter and had quickly exposed a raffle of mold-encrusted bones and as he spoke held out a small, curiously hollowed object that shone with a dull glow of unmistakable nature. He rubbed it and held it up to his partner. It was gold, a replica of the human jaw done in gold, with teeth so even and perfect that art had but rendered itself nauseating.

"False teeth—a plate—well, I'm damned!" exclaimed Manton, eyeing the thing with surprize and dislike. "But what the devil was a lone white man doing here? I suppose he was alone," he added.

"Likely—guess some poor guy wrecked like ourselves—took sick maybe," said Haynes slowly and not unfeelingly; and without further discussion they set to rummaging again.

But here the soil was damp and sticky, for it was a little hollow into which moisture percolated from the near-by tiny creek. So whatever the garments of the unknown had been, now they were rotted into the encasing mire and all they garnered was the horn handle of a sheath-knife, a

belt buckle, some silver coins and two flat strips of rubber—shoe soles—and that was all, until Manton made the great discovery. Kicked the stuff from its rotting bed as he shuffled his feet some paces away and some small oval lumps appeared and rolled sluggishly to one side. Picking up one of these he examined it, but with no great interest, until suddenly his face grew startled and alert and rapidly he cleansed the thing—by the simple process of wiping it across his stained pants. Then with a hand that slightly trembled he raised it to his nose and sniffed with intent deliberation, while Haynes, catching the action, watched him curiously.

"It's O. K.! It's the real stuff!" he announced solemnly, though his suppressed emotion was very obvious.

"What's the noise about?" queried Haynes blankly.

"Take a squint at it—there's something for sore eyes!" announced Manton almost in a shout.

What Haynes saw as his partner thrust the grimy object upon him was a rough rounded lump rather larger than a hen's egg, gray-white in hue and soaplike in texture, and entirely uninteresting, though certainly curious.

"Looks like the soap we used as kids back home," remarked Haynes, quite unimpressed and plainly disappointed.

"Soap! a damned high-priced soap. Well, lots of guys never handled this stuff in all their sailing. But I lifted a chunk off the beach at Timor and got four hundred for it, so you needn't have no doubts when I tell you to take a sniff of a lump of real ambergrease," said Manton with prideful certainty.

"What! ambergris!" exclaimed Haynes. "Are you sure?" he added, as holding it close to his face he caught the peculiar sickly odor which in minute quantities renders it indispensable to the perfume trade.

"Sure! just so sure that I ain't quitting this rock until I've gone over it with a tooth-comb and found where this guy lifted it off," announced Manton with stolid decision as one after the other he seized upon the dirty lumps his foot had dislodged, and hastily cleansing them, set them not unlike a little heap of grime-en-crusting potatoes.

Half an hour later the two men relinquished their labors, having brought to light possibly some twenty pounds weight, mostly in pieces no larger than a walnut, though a few odd bits were larger than the original discovery. As was to be expected, all had lain as in a nest.

"Reckon that's all the guy was toting—likely in some sort of a sack which rotted when he cashed in," said Manton, straightening up.

"Queer, though, that a guy should go packing that weight when he took sick—must have been a stroke or something sudden," said Haynes thoughtfully.

"Well, we needn't worry—he just cashed in, that's all—but it's a stroke of luck for us, nothing less than two thousand bucks lying here," replied Manton, callously eyeing the pile with supreme appreciation.

"Two thousand! Why, that's the price of a nifty little craft," said Haynes sharply.

"Sure! and if it was twenty thousand I wouldn't kick—I got it in my head that this is only the tail-end of a big cache somewhere on this rock," growled Manton irritably.

"Maybe," replied Haynes without enthusiasm, his mind harking back again to the enigma of the unknown. "All the same there's something mighty queer about it—a guy doesn't drop in his tracks like this one without a mighty good reason, I feel it in my bones. There's something which ain't natural missing from this yarn." And despite his partner's impatience at such mere sentiment a

silence and depression quite unaccountable came upon Haynes.

IT MAY have been that an aura of bygone happenings still lingered around the spot and by some queer psychological kink found in him a medium keyed to its translation into tangible expression of the volcanic emotions that had filled to overflowing the last tense moments of the mysteriously stricken man—for who shall limit the unplumbed depths of human consciousness?

However, whatever the origin of this depression there was born in him a great unwillingness to prosecute the exploration farther, yet having no good reason to oppose the advance he silently and gloomily followed his partner toward the glare of the open and mechanically imitated his example of snapping a twig every now and again to blaze a sure return to their lucky discovery, which for lack of a container they temporarily abandoned; later the bread bag from the camp would serve well for the noble burden.

Shortly they stood on the nude, swelling breast of the hill, here almost devoid of soil where naught but patches of coarse, brittle herbage found sustenance. The wall of jungle they had pierced appeared by contrast forbidding and impenetrable.

They stood for a moment gazing across the open to where the fleckless blue sky seemed almost to lie on the edge of the slope.

"That guy must have eut across this way from the beach beyond. Ambergrease ain't never found except on the beach or floating," said the practical Manton.

"Queer though—there ain't a thing to hurt a canary here. Yet toting a pack he drops like a stone," brooded Haynes persistently.

"Well, we got no need to worry about it—he's dead meat, we ain't—

Hell! Sheer off!" Manton exclaimed in startled surprize as a shaft of speeding light flashed at a tangent to their course, with a swish of thrashing wings so close to his face that involuntarily his head jerked back as though to escape the impact of the fleeing bird.

"Looks like it's bad scared," said Haynes as both men wheeled instantly to follow the mad flight of a small island pigeon; and in the same second perceived the cause of its reckless daring. For just behind and a trifle higher followed two scintillating streaks going at the same terrific pace. Things a good foot in length, thin, and of an intense metallic blue; things that sped with wings vibrating so rapidly that merely a blur of glinting beams flickered above them, as invisible as the wing-beat of a poised humming-bird. But these things were shaped as bird never was, and though by reason of their pace impossible to desery with any clarity, yet the impression received by each astounded watcher was identical and expressed instantly.

"Flies!" cried Haynes in blank amazement.

"Or else my eyes are on the blink!" cried Manton incredulously.

And as he uttered the words, as though to deny the implication, there came a sudden hawklike acceleration of the pursuers as they swooped on the racing splash of green, and gleaming blue obliterated it. Then the tangle burst apart and a ball of green pitched with convulsive flutterings to the ground and lay there motionless.

"A foot long! Flies!" muttered Haynes with his eyes glued on the now leisurely hovering slayers.

"Flies sure enough!" said Manton in a tone of complete bewilderment. Truly there could be little doubt of the classification, for now could be plainly noted the long bisected trunks and their metallic-lustered nakedness,

a quality shared by the monstrous wings, two pairs of bluish, gleaming transparency, wings whose horny framework stood out as distinctly as that of an umbrella.

Then like stones they dropped, and though amid some taller tussocks yet their weight bore down the coarse herbage and proved no hindrance to their fastening on the little heap of green feathers.

"Eat pigeons! Flies!" said Haynes incredulously.

"I'm going to smash them anyway!" declared Manton angrily.

And filled with an unreasoning resentment at such undreamt-of freaks the two men strode rapidly to within a few paces of the intently occupied brutes. Then doubt assailed Haynes and halting he caught his partner by the arm.

"Hold on, Manton! Say, looks like these things are poisonous—the way that pigeon dropped," he exclaimed in a low, dubious voice as they came to a halt.

"Dunno; maybe they are too," admitted Manton uneasily. "And we've got not even a stick to shoo them off—might be wise to get a couple of switches from the bush, eh?" he queried with indecision.

"I reckon so—look out! they're up!" cried Haynes as the colossal insects suddenly darted upward several feet and with deep, droning, pulsating wings hovered restlessly over the spot.

That the close approach of the men had aroused resentment was instantly obvious, for after a few seconds of indecisive reconnoitering there commenced the savage circling of attack, sufficiently nerve-racking to the object of a hornet's wrath, but now a hundred times more terrorizing. Apart from their almost certain venom, the momentary glimpse afforded of their grimly efficient mandibles, an inch long and broad at the base as the jaws of a small pair of

wire-cutters, set in the flat, indigo-hued head and flanked by a pair of yellow, tigerish eyes reflecting rays from multitudinous facets; these things alone were sufficient to cast a chill of fear on the hardiest.

Abruptly there came a mad rush to the wall of bush they had just left as a wave of panic swept upon the two men, yet curiously mingled ran a thread of almost wrathful contempt: after all, these things were no more than mere insects, unique and colossal though they were—but that pigeon! instantly slain! Something incredibly deadly had been at work there.

Savagely thrashing around with their battered wide-brimmed hats, the men tore for the jungle. It was not more than fifty paces distant, and with the insects held at bay by the vigorous flailing, it is quite possible that they would have reached sanctuary unharmed. That is, had two been the only foes to reckon with, but such was not the case, and only blind chance succored the fugitives from catastrophe. For they had covered barely a dozen paces when, probably aroused by the commotion, from a point close to the edge of the jungle there arose some half a dozen of like gigantic insects. For a second they hung stationary and facing the pursuit, as though intelligently surveying the situation, then with the astounding foresight of a coursing greyhound they darted off at a tangent to the course of the racing men, obviously bent on intercepting them.

Their flight was almost like the flight of an arrow, and the fate of the fugitives was apparently sealed, a mere matter of seconds, for there could be no least prospect of combating such an array of assailants when already a couple of these malignant brutes were only just held at bay.

Of this fresh menace the panic-stricken men were unwitting; they had neither ears, eyes, nor thought

for other than the loud buzzing fiends that incessantly circled in flashing shafts of metallic iridescence as the vicious brutes swept around and over and crisscrossed their elliptoid path at lightning speed as they sought to penetrate the desperate defense of their quarry.

Fortunate it was they were ignorant of this new accession to their foes, for the knowledge must assuredly have completed their demoralization, and a single second's slackening of their defensive would have afforded the savage brutes their opportunity. What that would entail there was no saying, there was no precedent to work upon with surety; only their colossal size, the instantaneous slaying of the pigeon and the analogy of the comparatively insignificant hornet with its painful virulence, its directness of attack and its total indifference to the mere bulk of the object of its wrath, and a like intense savagery and carnivorous voracity; only by these points of marked resemblance could any conception be formulated of the possible, and very probable, magnification of such malignant potentialities in these unique and monstrous things. The one chance in a million that intervened, fate proffered in a humble guise.

There came a rustling and movement amid the coarse herbage as the great droning swept by, a sudden halt of the covey, and then like the strike of a hawk they shot downward and with unerring aim lit squarely upon a large island rat; there came the horrible rat shriek of pain, silenced abruptly as the huge insects tore their victim into shreds, gouging the hot flesh from the quivering body with their terrible jaws with incredible rapidity and savagery. In a few moments naught but gleaming pink bones remained, and of these many of the more fragile had been cut clean in two by some eager pair of man-



dibles that, shearing through the encasing flesh, had not halted there.

The feast ended, they remained a moment quietly cleansing their limbs, a simple process of drawing them gently through the slightly opened terrible jaws, as in like manner any of the wasp tribe may be often noted. Then as a unit they shot upward, and as if some memory of a previous objective had been retained, circled several times in widening circumference before taking flight to join the couple that now were flitting to and fro above the roof of jungle, under which the fugitives had gained refuge from their pursuers, the tangled network of greenery constituting an impenetrable barrier to such wide- and brittle-winged creatures.

"THAT was a close call," growled Manton. "But it beats me—sounds like a kid's fairy yarn," he added, drawing his hand across his forehead and flicking aside a spray of sweat.

"You've said it—no more for mine. Ambergris or no, I'm through," affirmed Haynes sourly as he peered here and there amid the clusters of thin pliant stems. Well within the saving shelter they had come to a halt, and now in a little depression lay panting; days of cramped misery in a small craft are ill training for a race such as theirs.

"Seems like I heard a big buzzing a little ways off," affirmed Haynes uneasily.

"Maybe—reckon those two ain't the only ones on this blasted rock," agreed Manton, scowling at the thought. "And there they are—listen to that, will you," he added in a hushed, startled tone.

There was no need to listen, it was impossible to miss the swelling, thrumming, coming nearer and nearer as the partners gazed with alarm at the thickly laced limbs and greenery overhead.

"Hell! there's a bunch of them and they've scented us!" exclaimed Haynes savagely. Then, as by the lessening and spasmodic volume of sound they knew, the great insects were alighting on the tangle above. "My oath! if they were to wiggle through! say, we better beat it to camp and get off this damned rock!" he added in an angry whisper.

"Reckon so; but I ain't going to leave two thousand bucks for no bloody flies. We can pick it up as we go, it ain't more than a step out of the way," declared Manton firmly.

"That's so—two thousand don't grow on every bush. Come on—step easy, maybe we can ditch that bunch," cautioned Haynes in a whisper. And instantly crouching low and moving softly the men made off in the direction of their find. But to their dismay they quickly discovered that no matter what the care exercised, it was impossible to make passage through the jungle without imparting a continual swaying and tremor to the springy slender limbs and dense foliage above, and from their first step the thrumming leapt again to life and thereafter accompanied their every step.

"Well, how the devil are we going to tote the stuff?" queried Haynes, irritably staring at the little heap of dirty lumps.

"Stow it in our shirts, I reckon, as we ain't got a bag like this guy." Abruptly he fell silent and a look of quickening horror crept into his eyes. "By God! that's it! They got him!" said he slowly, while Haynes stared a moment from the scattered yellowed bones to the frowning face of his partner. The thing was so obvious, it fitted in so completely with the otherwise inexplicable facts of the case, and except that their own peril had so far absorbed their entire thoughts, the discovery would have been forced upon them before.

"Likely he had not gone fifty feet when it killed him!" exclaimed Haynes in a horrified whisper, alluding to the fact that this was about the distance to the open hillside.

"They sting—and you finish?" muttered Manton.

"I reckon that's the way it goes," said Haynes very quietly.

"Maybe if we waited till dark?" he queried.

"And how are we going through this mess in the dark? And that's not the name for it after sundown," growled Manton sneeringly.

The truth of the objection could not be gainsaid; in silence the two men stared blankly at each other.

"But—you mean to say——?" said Haynes with an odd catch in his voice.

"That's so — they've got us cinched," replied Manton shortly, even coolly, his phlegmatic nature seemingly less perturbed than the finer-fibered Haynes.

"Well, we *are* in a hole!" said Haynes angrily. His nerves were on edge and a dull resentment at his partner's lack of emotion came upon him.

"Well, there ain't no use taking them to camp with us; might as well stop here—maybe they'll forget it and quit," observed Manton, though his tone held no great optimism. "We've got to sit down and think it out—though I'm damn hungry right now," he added very sourly.

Haynes stared at his partner, the idea of hunger had not yet occurred to him, but at once a desire for food came upon him; the more intensely so that an appalling vista of an indefinitely prolonged incarceration lacking even an ounce of provender instantly flashed before his horrified inner vision.

For a little neither uttered another word; each sat in moody contemplation, racking his brains to discover a

practical scheme of escape from the unique trap into which they had been driven. And as the moments sped, each realized more fully the hopelessness of their plight as now and again there swept up a fresh wave of the vicious sound, for which there could be but one explanation, the coming of new reinforcements of the malignant brutes.

They came in ones and twos as though stray foragers had been attracted by the commotion at the spot, and shortly there must have been assembled fully a dozen of the insects; a fact of which the beset were fully cognizant.

"Something has got to be done quick—the longer we stop the worse off we are," exclaimed Manton in a spasm of wrath. "If we only had a dog or something to tie up while we made our getaway!" he snarled in impotent anger.

"Eh! a dog?" said Haynes and paused while a flash of inspiration dawned in his light blue eyes, as his partner's random thought flung open the portals of an inner consciousness far more acute than his normal mental plane. "We ain't got a dog, but there's two of us——" Again he paused.

"Sure, there's two of us—but what are you driving at? Oh, I get you—one of us hikes off taking these blasted things with him while the other beats it down to the camp and shoves off—but what about the guy who stops?" queried Manton with a puzzled frown.

"The only thing I can figure out is he's got to take a chance on it. The boat can stand on and off till dark, then creep back and the guy must be handy in the bush and make a rush for it. No reason why he shouldn't pull through, likely they'll be sort of dozy after dark, and there ain't a fly that's stuck on salt water. Anyway it's the best lineup we got," asserted Haynes feverishly.

"Maybe you're right—we've got to do something or the air will be lousy with the bloody things. Let her rip—who's stopping?" he asked gruffly.

"Well—it looks like you were—you see I'm slim, you ain't, you'd shake the brush like a bull going through it, where I'd hardly make a leaf move—so I guess it's up to me to take a chance at being stung. However, I'm agreeable whichever way it is," declared Haynes quickly, with an attempt at indifference his eagerness but crudely simulated, though as a statement of simple fact his words admitted of no refutation and received the instant concurrence of Manton.

"I reckon you're right," said he simply. "Well, that's settled. Better beat it pronto! Give me ten minutes start to trail these damned things off—I'll angle around the hill. If you make it, draw in as close as you can about dusk and I'll be waiting at the edge of the brush, one whistle from each will do. Of course we can't tell a thing about what's going to happen, there ain't no sailing directions on this traverse. Just one sure thing——" He stopped hesitantly for a second, then roughly thrust out his hand. "So long, mate," he added gruffly, and Haynes, extending his long sinewy hand, nervously grasped for a second his partner's thick-muscled fingers, saying hastily, "At dusk, mate—if I get through."

Then Manton, on the point of wheeling around, suddenly halted and exclaimed, "If we ain't forgot that muck!" as he nodded toward the little pyramid of dirty lumps.

"The ambergris? let it stay! I can't pack it anyway," snapped Haynes impatiently.

"No, that's so, you've got to go light. But I'll slide back and pick it up—load it in my shirt—two thousand is two thousand," said Manton almost apologetically.

"It's up to you. But for God's sake get off—every minute counts now," exclaimed Haynes angrily.

FROM where he stood, Haynes for a moment could trace the progress of his partner by the deliberate heedlessness of his going; and with him went the hateful droning, though soon but a resonant murmur as distance intervened, until it was entirely submerged in the brooding silence that seemed to the listener to have closed in upon him. Then with feverish alertness he commenced his own retreat, and bending low, he crept from the spot, a foot at a time and often halting to listen intently for the dread evidence of malignant pursuit; but never the faintest sound of the vicious creatures came to him, and gradually his face cleared of the terrible tension that had possessed it, and his movements from a furtive crawl became a rapid though careful passage that clove the masses of pliant growths with a touch so deft that there remained barely a quiver to evidence his going.

"Clear of that hell's roost! beat them to it!" cried Haynes exultingly, as he mopped the dripping sweat from his begrimed face with one ragged sleeve, and through the other shook a trembling fist at the dull green wall that wound its solid front in sinuous course around the island contour.

"You blasted freaks! you——" he swore with intense bitterness; then, words failing him, he relapsed into a wrathful mumbling as he shipped the skulls in their rowlocks, and with long vigorous strokes pulled seaward until nearly half a mile lay between him and the terrible rock.

ALTHOUGH he had been expecting the whistle, yet its actual happening sped a stab of unreasoning terror through his high-tuned nerves. It was now almost dark—that is, as

dark as a tropic moon in its second quarter will admit—and from the approach of dusk he had timed his return so that when the crucial moment came barely a glimmer of unnecessary light should favor a possible attack by the terrible brutes. Luckily the night, though moonlit, had the edge shorn from its brilliance by a singularly fortunate haze, or rather solidity of the atmosphere, that had for some hours been imperceptibly gathering. Indeed, the weather-wise eye of the solitary man had almost unconsciously sensed its presence and the peculiar greenish hue of the blurred horizon, and with a moody shake of his head he had muttered, "Something dirty brewing, or I'm no sailorman," a premonition of impending trouble quickly submerged in the more pressing and greater peril.

Within fifty feet of the black mass of low bluff and wall of jungle he had stopped softly the way of the craft, which was now drifting very calmly shoreward. Now that a dead calm had succeeded the blow, only the ceaseless mournful swish of the miniature breakers broke the profound silence of the sultry darkness, and Manton's whistle had sounded as though its author might well have been imagined within hand's grasp of the craft's stem, and the voice that called quietly held the same queer acoustic quality.

"It's all right, Haynes!" said the invisible speaker. "I ain't heard a thing since sundown. Keep right on the way you are; if I hear a sound I'll hail you."

"Right, but you might swim out a little way, these blasted sculls creak so—might roust them out," came the reply in a querulous and irritable whisper, as after a couple of cautious strokes the speaker lay on his oars.

"Come out! I ain't no fish, and you know it, Haynes!" cried the

voice in the darkness very sharply and even angrily.

"For God's sake don't talk so loud! Do you want the whole bunch down on us?" said Haynes fiercely in a tremulous whisper. "Anyway you've got to take to the water; I ain't going to shove one of these bloody rocks through her for no one," he added more soberly and firmly.

"Rocks?—that's so, you're right. I can wade out waist-deep anyhow, and you come in that far—go slow and you'll be all right," called back Manton, his wrath appeased at this natural and seamanlike explanation.

"Say when," said Haynes nervously, and after a second's pause, "Here goes! come right in," came instantly a hoarse whisper, and immediately followed a slight rustling of the brush, succeeded by a hasty stumbling step over the boulders that strewed the beach at the spot, and in a second the sound of a heavy body splashing through the water. Even then the man in the boat sat motionless, his body strained forward, intently listening and fearfully hesitant. He sat still as a figure of stone, until another sound burst into the silent, stifling night; a sound that galvanized the seated figure with a violent tremor. A dreaded resonance so horrifying in its malignant promise that for a moment he was incapable of speech or voluntary movement. Nor did Manton's loud hail restore his shattered mentality.

"Haynes! they're on the move! Come in quick before they scent us! They're over the bush. Quick!" he cried loudly, abandoning all caution in the extreme peril of his position.

But no response came from the dark blotch which even his keen vision with difficulty identified as their craft—for now the strange murk had almost obscured the moonlight, and the nearest objects were but darker blurs of indeterminate nature. At

this immobility a sudden doubt struck home to him.

"Haynes! What's the matter? Why don't you come in? I can't go no farther," he hailed anxiously.

Then the seated man awoke to volcanic life, every muscle and sinew in his spare hard flesh tensed with the rigidity of a tightly wound steel spring, as he snatched at the sculls and drove the blades deep into the heavy black water, and at gathering speed urged the boat seaward! For terror, unreasoning frantic terror had taken possession of him; escape, at any price, was the sole instinct surging madly in his chaotic consciousness, and every other thought or emotion had been swept away by the terror of that awful thrumming. The cry of amazement and wrath that came from Manton went entirely unheeded, as it was, save unconsciously, unheard.

"You ain't leavin' me! are you?" boomed the great voice of Manton.

Then in a few seconds, it being obvious that such was indeed the case, his wrath flared to a white heat.

"You white-livered dog! if I had a gun I'd get you—a thing like you ain't fit to live. You——"

And then his voice was drowned in the shrill screaming that suddenly broke out from the seaward. High-pitched, frantic screams of insane terror, intermingled with the crashing of wood against wood, as though someone were flailing around him with a heavy object desperately, recklessly, and unheeding where his blows might land.

Which is exactly what was happening, for Haynes, upright in the boat, was aiming viciously at a something in the darkness; a something that swooped with great wings vibrating, and filling the air with a frightful, menacing resonance.

And all the while came that ceaseless, horrible animal screaming, as of

some huge rodent in the extremity of fear and anguish.

The end came as suddenly as the commencement, the frightful sound suddenly ceased, as though cut by a knife, and Manton, crouching to his chin in the still water, heard instantly the crash of a falling body, a heavy lifeless crash as of one collapsing without effort, or thought to ease the impact.

"My God! they've got him!" he exclaimed in a whisper hoarse with emotion; and as the words escaped his lips there came from the darkness an intermittent moaning and whimpering. Once, twice, thrice, it came through the stifling void, and then there was silence, not even a murmur of the hateful droning that had been fitfully audible as a diabolical accompaniment.

And as this, too, ceased, then despair gripped at the listener, and very quietly and coolly he arose and plodded deliberately shoreward muttering audibly as he went.

"Well, that's the finish, I reckon—boat gone, grub gone, stranded on this blasted rock with sure death waiting. May as well get me now as later—there's no wedding bells in this yarn for me."

And so he reached again the beach, and greatly to his surprize slid into the inky shelter of the jungle unmolested.

And as he gained the shelter, nature awoke from her drugged somnolence.

A vast stirring and sighing shuddered through the heavy air, as there passed the first warning of the coming upheaval.

**A**LL that night the hurricane endured, and dawn disclosed its terrific violence; the jungle lay in swaths of indescribable and splintered wreckage, an encircling barrier impassable to man or beast, yet from

it crawled a haggard and disheveled figure—Manton.

Stolid and deliberate as ever, calmly he surveyed the heaving expanse of tremendous seas; stared thoughtfully from the wild sea to the now calm blue sky, and growled.

"Another twenty-four hours and there won't be nothing but a swell on—it'll be soon enough to chance it." Then turning landward he gazed grimly at the work of the storm, and, as men of sociable temperament will when solitary and under the stress of emotion, again spoke aloud.

"If it wasn't for the lee of that boulder I'd be lying there too. Anyway the blow chased those bloody things to perdition out of it—guess they won't trouble me now, if I don't flag them."

The supposition was not unlikely, as these lightly framed monsters must have been driven far in the first blast that had leapt out of the darkness and screamed across the island. And with it had come ashore, bottom up, the little craft, straight to the grasp of Manton, who, foreseeing such a providential chance, was instantly again waist-deep in the swirling waters.

Lit by the continuous lightning, there was just time for a Samson such as Manton to run the craft ashore high and dry in a sheltered corner of the cove and sling the meager outfit alongside; luckily Haynes, in his insane terror, had not spared the time to ship a single article.

All that night, wet and cold to the bone, Manton had lain in the lee of a providential boulder, but, now that the boat and provender were regained, calm and stolidly hopeful.

The second dawn found him launching the frail shell, a task his great thews made light of. True, only a single scull had been regained, but with the seaman's handiness he had, the previous day, laboriously whittled and trimmed with his sheath-knife a very fair substitute from a fair-sized growth.

Sped by his powerful strokes, the craft took the water, and soon the island was receding into the speckless blue background.

Later he slackened his efforts, and holding no more than way on the craft as it rose and sank over the crests and valleys of the huge smooth swell, stared with scowling wrath at the evil spot where fate had smiled so fairly as though to hide the deadly malice in her heart.

"God!" he muttered. "To think that hell lies there—and Haynes is lying somewhere among the coral, fathoms deep! Poor guy, I guess he wasn't to blame—but his nerve broke. Poor guy! I ain't no judge and jury—and we with two thousand to rig us up anew!" he said mournfully, glancing at a small bundle tightly lashed under the stern seat.

"Well, so long, mate; you ain't to blame. So—long," he called gravely and even gently, then resumed his long, methodical stroke.

