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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Strange Interval

By SEABURY QUINN

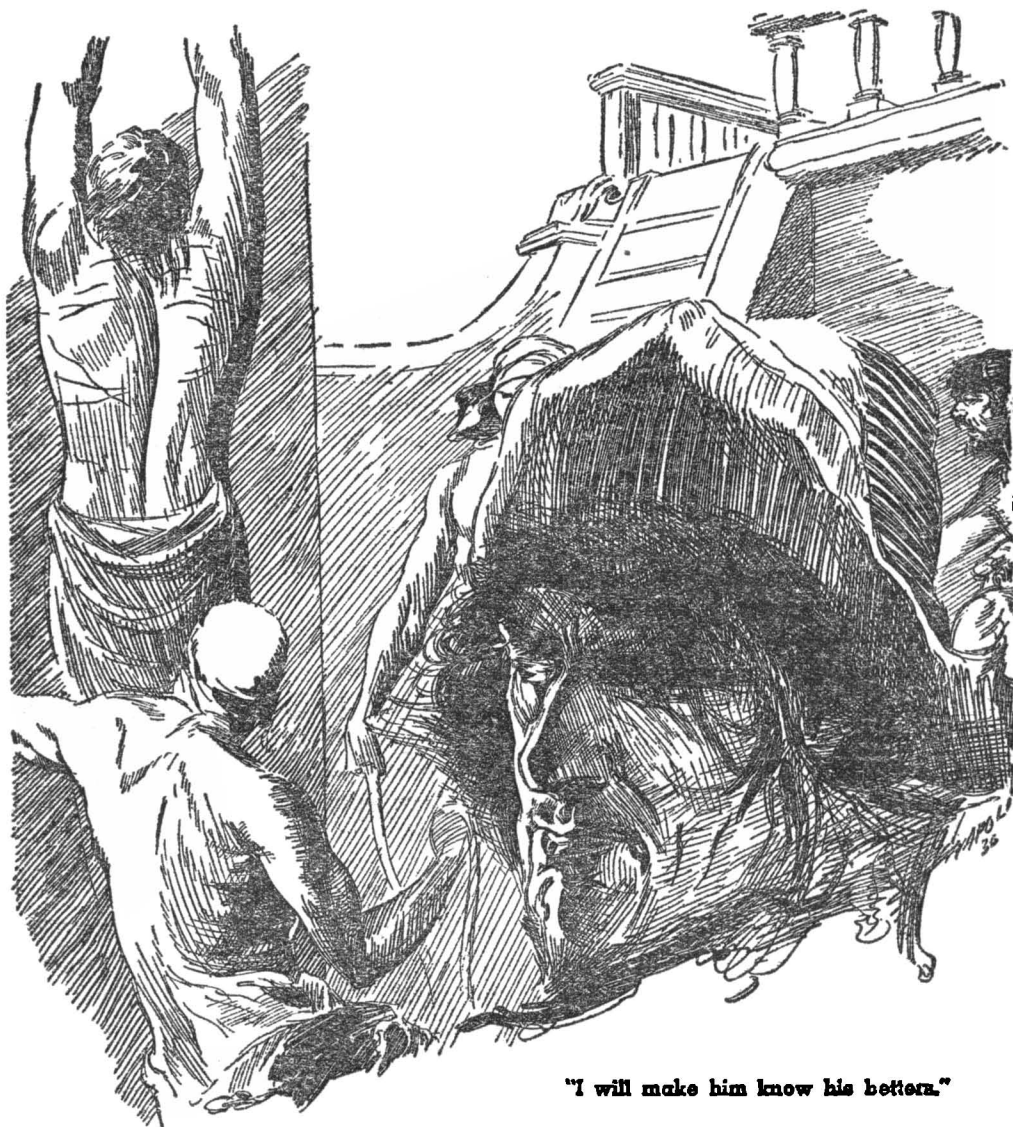
*A curious and thrilling tale of pirates, and a man who was yet not a man,
and an old obeah-woman who worked a strange witchery*

THEIR picture hangs in the great hall at Primrose Hill, that fine example of Virginia colonial architecture which has been the inspiration of so many of our more elaborate modern residences. It is no formal "conversation piece" such as the early portraitists were wont to paint, but the likeness of a man and woman who had found foretaste of heaven in each other. Colonel Willoughby Moncure Munro, brave in the white and scarlet uniform of Virginia Light Cavalry, sits beside his lady who is gowned in yellow taffeta and has her hair done high and powdered till it shines like carven silver. Their hands are clasped, and idolatry is in the look they give each other. Behind them is another face which seems to peer out from the shadows of the darkly painted background and is but half a shade removed from it. It is an aged face, a flat-nosed, thick-lipped Negro face surmounted by a turban of red-cotton stuff, and yet it is a lovely and a

loving face, for its small eyes are bright and wise and very kind, and gaze with matriarchal love upon the Colonel and his lady.

THE sun was slipping down the sky late in the afternoon of the sixteenth of September in the year of our Lord 1686, and the second year of the short and stormy reign of James II, King, Defender of the Faith, etc., as young Master Willoughby Moncure Munro laid down his fishing-pole and turned to hoist the jib and staysail of his "buckeye". The rock fish had been biting well, and half a dozen of them trailed upon the osier hung overboard from the boat's stern. Master Willoughby had passed a pleasant afternoon on the St. Mary's River, fishing, dreaming, puffing at his long clay pipe, or just gazing at the quiet sunny water with a look of leisurely content. His studies of the law with Counsellor Joseph Henderson were over, and next term of court

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"I will make him know his bettera."

he would be admitted to the bar. Just now there were no tasks demanding his attention save the sailing of his sleek-lined little boat, a daily turn about the plantings on his bay mare Josephine, and an hour or two each day devoted to re-reading Coke, lest the learned justices of the high court should catch him un-awares with some abstruse interrogation on the law of socage or free tenure. The dropping sun threw golden beams of

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light between the trees which grew as thick-set as a hedge along the river, but these grew fainter every moment. It was dark when Willoughby came out upon the confluence of the Potomac and St. Mary's, and a cool and veiling mist was coming from the waters. He threw his tiller sharply to the left and drew the lanyard of his leg o' mutton sail. Looming over him, gigantic as a mountain, ghostly as the specter of a phantom ship,

was a tall hull, the green waves slipping backward from its cutwater, no sign of light or life upon its decks.

"Ahoy, there! Hard a-larboard, or you'll run me down!" the young man cried, and as he called he saw a face look down at him and caught the glimmer of a leering, crack-toothed grin even as the schooner's prow came crashing down upon his boat, staving in its side as though it had been plank instead of hollowed log, and hurling him into the rushing back-wash. For a moment he fought desperately against the dragging weight of soaking clothes and the pressure of the water curling backward from the vessel's side, felt himself go down, thrust his head above the surface for a gasping, suffocating breath, then felt the rasping contact of a rope against his knuckles. His fingers closed upon it with the desperation of the drowning, and, half smothered by the backward-racing waves, he was dragged a little distance like a fish upon its hook, then was all but knocked unconscious as he banged against the schooner's sides when the rope was yanked abruptly from above.

A shaded lantern shed its tiny patch of light about the mainmast base as Willoughby was hauled across the rail unceremoniously, and by the feeble lumiance he saw the butts of twelve-pound carronades ranged by the rail and, wrapped in canvas like a sheeted corpse, a heavier gun lashed fast and mounted upon traverse-slides. All merchant ships went armed, as Willoughby well knew, for there were desperate craft upon the sea; but this ship carried heavier metal than a sloop of war, yet plainly she was not a member of the King's navy, as a single glance around assured him.

The skipper stood below the mast, regarding him sardonically. He was slight of build though something above middle height, with a face as brown as copper

from exposure to the sun and sea-wind. A wide-brimmed black-felt hat, trimmed with a diamond buckle, sat upon his long black hair, and a small mustache adorned his upper lip, while a neatly trimmed black beard projected from his chin. His shirt was finest cambric, ruffled at the front, with falls of lace at wrist and throat; about his waist was wrapped a scarlet sash in which was thrust a pair of silver-mounted pistols; a baldric of tan leather crossed his breast from right to left, supporting a rapier in the pommel of which blazed a monster ruby. His breeches were of wine-hued velvet, slashed and ruffled in the Spanish fashion, his bell-topped boots with cuffs turned down below his calves were yellow Spanish leather.

So much the astonished lad saw at a glance. It was not until his second look he realized the man's face was immobile as a mask, with eyes that held a coldly changeless look of utterly reptilian cruelty. About him grouped some members of his crew, savage, wolf-faced rascals, noxious off-scum of the seven seas.

Through fuddled senses one dread word smote Willoughby. Pirates! What the sea-rogues did so far upcoast he could not guess. The notched shoreline of Carolina swarmed with buccaneers, he knew, but there never had been corsairs in Potomac waters. He drew a deep breath, faced the cold-eyed man and asked:

"What mean ye by this scurvy business, sir? 'Tis lawless thus to run with no lights shown; ye wrecked my boat and well-nigh drowned me in the bargain. I'd thank ye to heave to and lower a boat——"

The pirate captain turned to a lieutenant, a venomous-looking little yellow man with strangely slanting eyes who wore, besides a pair of cotton drawers, a cutlas, a brace of pistols and diamond ear-rings as sole costume. "Would ye say

he'd bring ten pounds at market, Pipo?" he asked in an oddly clacking, toneless voice.

"*Si, Señor Capitán,*" the other answered with a leer. "Eleven, maybe, but certainly not twelve."

"Stow him below, then, till we need him in the morning; then Barnaby can show him how to wield a holystone."

A WAVE of something close akin to nausea swept through Willoughby as he heard the pirate's order. Not content with disregarding every rule of river traffic and cutting down his boat, the knaves were bent on kidnapping. He must put a bold face on. "I'd have ye know that I am Master Willoughby Moncure Munro, of Primrose Hill," he told them haughtily. "I'm a Virginia gentleman, and if ye think that ye can carry me away——"

The pirate skipper turned and nodded to an understanding group of ruffians who apparently were waiting for the signal. Before the startled youth could raise a hand to help himself he hit the deck with four stout scoundrels grappling at his arms and legs. In a moment he was stripped of shirt and singlet, hustled forward to a raised hatch-grating and lashed as firmly to the wooden bars as though he had been nailed there, his arms spread out so high that reach and strive as he would, he could not get his feet down to the deck. Thus hung, as though in crucifixion, he was beaten with ropes' ends by the seamen, blows falling alternately, rhythmically, unhurriedly, inexorably. The first blow of the knotted rope bruised his tender back, raising a red weal that turned to purple almost as it formed. A second lash cut crosswise on the first, and tiny gouts of blood stood out upon the tortured skin. Blow after blow descended, the beaters drawing their cords backward with an expert jerk each time they

came in contact with the wincing flesh. Pain from his tortured wrists was almost equal to the agony of flogging, but as blow succeeded blow the bruised skin yielded to the impact of the ropes, and soon the young man was past feeling, hanging limply on the grating, an inert and bloody thing in which the only sign of life was a convulsive jerking.

"'Twill make him know his betters," said the pirate captain as they cut the bindings from the swooning captive's wrists and dashed a bucketful of water on his raw and bloody back. "Throw him in the lazaret, but mark'ee, have him up on deck betimes tomorrow. We'll larn this fine Virginny gentleman who's master o' this ship."

Thus began young Willoughby's novitiate in hell. When morning dawned and a seaman came to kick him into consciousness, he lay upon his bed of sacks delirious with fever. The ship's physician, a former horse-doctor with a face as long and saturnine as any of his erstwhile patients, mixed a mess of wine and oil and poured it on his mangled back, while a pannikin of sharp, tart wine was forced between his lips, followed in an hour by a pap of biscuit soaked in strong Jamaica rum. The next day he was strong enough to take a little food, and the third day he was set to work swabbing decks, polishing the mountings of the guns, tarring and coiling ropes. Conversation with his shipmates there was none. None spoke to him except to curse his clumsiness at unfamiliar tasks; none answered his attempts at talk save with obscene references to his ancestry or dreadful threats of what he might expect if he failed to please Black Rudolph, as they named the skipper of the ship.

In two weeks' time he had regained some measure of his strength, but the soul-destroying toil, the scanty, swill-like food, and the ceaseless threats and blows

and bullying to which he was subjected had almost crushed the spirit out of him. Bruised face and ribs had taught the wisdom and necessity of dodging nimbly when some member of the crew passed by; experience of daily practise made him quick to sense the presence of a persecutor, even though he failed to hear the impact of bare feet upon the deck. His finely tailored clothes had long since been appropriated by such members of the pirate gang as they would fit, and his whole wardrobe consisted of a pair of cotton drawers tied about the middle with a length of sailcord. He was hound-thin, and the muscles of his arms and legs stood out like ropes against the sun-baked skin; hollows marked his cheeks from eye to jaw; his ribs were numbed by the ridges which they made against his torso; and his unkempt hair and straggling growth of beard, together with the lash-scars on his back, gave him the look of some poor Tom o' Limbo taken after weeks of hiding from the law.

Too tired to dream, the wretched young man lay upon his bed of sacks moaning softly now and then as he felt a twinge of pain in work-cramped limbs, when the pounding of quick steps above woke him from the stupor of exhausted sleep. Though the hour was past four bells and none except the members of the midwatch should have been on deck, he realized the whole crew had responded to some silent call, for there had been no shrilling of the half-caste Pipo's boatswain's pipe. He could hear the rumble of the rollers as the carronades were set, the scraping of the shot-racks and the eager, half-hushed voices of the pirates as they set the boarding-nets in place.

As he crept up the companionway and looked about the deck he saw the hurried preparations carried on. A coxswain scurried up and down behind the guns, scattering mingled sand and sawdust on the

decks to render them less slippery when the blood began to flow; there were round-shot pyramided by the carronades, open powder kegs in readiness, stands of arms—muskets, pikes and axes—ready to hand when the grapnels had been cast; and already marksmen, matches glowing in their teeth, were swarming up the rat-lines to their posts above the sails, ready to shoot down the steersmen of the ship about to be attacked. The gunner, gold rings glinting in his ears, stalked from carronade to carronade like the priest of some obscene religion visiting his foul altars ere the sacrifice began.

FOLLOWING the avid, wolf-eager glances of the crew, Willoughby descried the quarry. A bright moon rode the heavens, but the sea was swathed in fog which drifted lazily in the light breeze. A league or so away, protruding from the mist like tree-tops from a fleecy undergrowth, reared the swelling topsails of a mighty ship. On she came majestically, holding to a course which in a day or so would bring her off the coast of Hispaniola, the fog which veiled her hull and lower rigging from the pirates making their lower ship entirely invisible to the lookouts at her bow.

Her fore-and-aft rigging enabling her to sail closer to the wind than the square-rigged Spanish vessel could, the pirate craft cut a course which made a widely obtuse angle to that which the Spaniard followed, and, guns in readiness, bore down upon her victim with the stealthy swiftness of a swordfish dashing at a whale.

So swift and silent was the buccaneers' attack that a scant two hundred yards of water rippled between the craft when a startled hail rang from the Spanish ship. "*Quien viva?*" called a lookout; then, as he received no answer: "*Que buque es?*"—what ship is that?"

A pandemonium of yells, cat-calls and insults phrased in the obscenities of half a dozen languages responded to the sentry's hail, and the pirate ship swerved sharply in her course, bringing herself broadside to the galleon. Blown lint-stocks dropped on brimming touch-holes, and the pirate's black ship reeled and shuddered like a stricken thing as every carronade upon her starboard side belched orange flame and chain-shot screamed like all the demons out of hell as it winged its way to cut and mangle the tall Spaniard's rigging. The gun crews bent their backs and worked like devils toiling in the glow of their own fires as the sooted tubes were sponged and powder charge and shot were driven home; then a second salvo roared destruction and the black ship changed the angle of her course to swoop down on her quarry.

As they drew alongside, Willoughby discerned the Spaniard's figurehead, the gilded image of a female saint crowned with coronet and halo, proud-breasted under lifted arms, its body bent like a drawn bow to conform to the out-curve of the prow, its sandaled feet resting on an uncoiled serpent. About the slotted gun-ports in an ornate scroll of gilded wood her name appeared, *Santa Catarina de la Sangre Preciosa*.

This much he saw through choking whorls of swirling smoke; then with a jar which threatened every rigging-timber and hull-plank the two ships ground together and there came the clang of metal as the grappling-irons clutched and held, and like rabid dogs the pirates boiled across the rail and hurled themselves upon the Spaniard's deck.

Wild confusion prevailed there. Completely taken by surprise, for the most part only half awake, the Spaniards gathered at the mainmast, hastily adjusting breast- and head-pieces, drawing swords or snatching pikes and muskets as they

ran to form a ragged rank about their captain. As the buccaneers swarmed over-side the Spaniards rushed to meet them, and there was clash of cutlas against sword and the vicious *pung* of boarding-pikes as they were driven home, mingling with the bellowing roar of pistols and the thud of heavy axes striking iron caps or unprotected bone. The galleon's defenders were no cowards, nor were they any fewer than the pirates, and for a little while it seemed that they might sweep the boarders back, but Black Rudolph knew the strategy of such attacks. Hardly had the first wave of his ruffians, led by Boat-swain Pipo, joined the Spaniards in close fighting when a second boarding-party under command of Mate Barnaby swarmed across the railing forward, and with shouts of fury and wild exultation hurled themselves upon the Spaniards' rear.

Beset on both sides and unable to oppose effectual defense at either van or rear, the Spaniards closed their ranks and, fighting stubbornly, fell back on the shelter of the high poop cabin.

"Haul in the midship guns!" Black Rudolph ordered, and though his queer, flat voice was scarcely louder than its usual wont, it carried through the noise of conflict easily, and in quick obedience a dozen of his followers laid hold on the brass culverins, jerked them from their ports and trained them abaft. The maneuver was no novelty with Rudolph's men, apparently. As the brazen guns swung round, the pirates fighting with the Spaniards gave back quickly, leaving an open lane between their ranks down which the culverins were aimed directly at the deck's defenders. Pistols flashed, flame blazed into the brass guns' touch-holes, and a double charge of grape-shot swept the blood-stained deck with a devastating breath of hell. The close-packed group of Spaniards withered in the flaming blast

like dry grass in a fire, and before the few who still survived could form their ranks again the buccaneers were on them, plying ax and cutlas, knife and pike, in a very carnival of slaughter.

WILLOUGHBY turned sick as he saw the carnage, but a stinging blow upon his half-healed shoulders dragged his fascinated eyes away. "Up, you bandy-legged son of a sea-cook," a voice bawled in his ear. "We be packin' th' loot off th' Spanisher; lend a hand, blast ye!" Another torturing slap from the flat of a cutlas emphasized the order, and he staggered toward the rail to take his place in line.

"Women! By th' bright face o' God, here be women!" came a joyful whoop from the companionway leading to the galleon's cabin, and as Willoughby reached the corpse-strewn deck he saw Pipó and half a dozen other pirates herding a little company of females up the narrow stairs. Several were past middle life; one or two were young and pretty; one stood out from the rest like a bright star on a moonless night. She was one of those rare creatures, a *rubia*, or Spanish blond, with honey-colored eyes and hair like fine-drawn gold, brightly lustrous as the tiny wires of the filigree cross which hung about her neck. A comb of *carven* tortoise-shell, thick-set with brilliants, was in her golden hair; her gown was rustling black brocade; the little satin shoes upon her feet had four-inch heels that flashed with incrustations of white sapphires.

At sight of her, young Willoughby stopped in his tracks, heedless of the prodding blade that urged him to his task, and for a moment he felt as though the sudden sharp acceleration of his heart would stop his breath. In those days as in these, Virginia was noted for the beauty of its women, and the belles of Petersburg and Alexandria were among the fairest in

the colony, but none of them compared for one instant with this golden Spanish girl. She was like no mortal woman, but rather like a pictured saint in some superb old missal, or an angel playing truant out of heaven. But the tragic drama following her advent broke the thread of Willoughby's enraptured reverie.

"*Carmelita, costosa, niña mia*!" came a quavering hail, and an aged Spanish gentleman, his tunic soaking with the hemorrhage of the dreadful wound which pierced his chest, staggered to his feet. "*Hija mia*—little daughter—" He tottered toward Black Rudolph, trembling hands outstretched in supplication, and: "I ask no mercy for myself, *Señor*," he choked, "but she, my daughter—spare her, in God's name. By the memory of your mother—"

"Spare her? But of course," the pirate chief cut in. "She shall be spared, old rack o' bones, that I can promise you. Her pretty feet shall never tread the auction block, at least as long as she can please Black Rudolph!" With a soundless laugh he flung an arm about the girl, crushing her against him, while with his free hand he raised her chin and kissed her on the mouth.

"*Perro y hijo de perro*—dog and son of a dog!" cried the old man, stumbling forward and with his final flash of strength driving a blow full in the pirate's swarthy face.

Black Rudolph put the girl from him, not roughly, but with a kind of slow, deliberate tenderness, and the startlingly red lips beneath his black mustache were parted in a smile that showed a hard, white line of teeth as merciless as those of any wolf. "*Cabrón!*" he mouthed the deadly insult in a flat, metallic voice, and drew a dagger from his girdle. For an instant he stood statue-still, the bright steel glinting in his grasp; then with a speed almost too great for sight to mark,

he flashed the sharp blade forward twice. A man's shrill scream of pain was echoed by the girl's thin shriek of horror as the pirate wiped his knife upon his boot-leg and restored it to its scabbard. Upon the old man's cheeks hung two red, tortured globes. His eye-sockets were empty, and his hands waved feebly, gropingly, before his sightless face.

"To th' sharks wi' him!" Black Rudolph ordered, and turned his back upon his gruesome handiwork to superintend the transfer of the galleon's treasure to the storerooms of his ship.

UNWITTINGLY the pirate promised truthfully when he told the father that his daughter would be spared. When the girl recovered from her faint her eyes were dull, expressionless, lack-luster, her lips drooped flaccidly; she seemed shrunk in upon herself. She made no answer when they spoke to her; she was a shrinking, cringing fool, shuddering from all contact with her fellows. Her madness gave her liberty no other woman ever had upon that ship, for there was no joy in kissing lips as lifeless as the features of a corpse or making overtures to one who understood no word of what was said to her.

She wandered here and there at will, tolerated as a harmless animal might have been, and in her wanderings her path crossed Willoughby's at times. On one or two occasions he saved her from a fall when in her aimless walking she had stumbled over ropes or cleats; once when she crouched beside the rail, weeping softly to herself, he put a piece of sugarcane, filched from the galley, into her hand, and her vacant face responded with the semblance of a smile as she bit into the sticky, cloyingly sweet stalk. For an hour afterward she followed him about, her great eyes looking pleadingly at him,

her little hand outstretched in supplication for a repetition of the treat.

One night the ship lay motionless upon a windless sea, the great moon painting sky and fleeting cloud and lazy-swelling water with a brilliant coat of silver. Willoughby stood musing by the rail, idly noting how a line of phosphorescent fire marked the kerf of swimming fishes, wondering if quick death would come to him if he went overside, or if the pirates would recapture him and deal him death by lingering torment, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. "*Que pobre!*" breathed a soft voice in his ear as gentle fingers touched the healing rope-scars on his back. "They have beaten you, *mi pobrecito. Porque—why?*"

"You"—Willoughby turned unbelieving eyes upon the girl—"you've regained your—"

"*S-s-sh!*" she cut him short with upraised finger, glancing fearfully across her shoulder; then: "Yes, *caballero*, I have recovered reason; but in madness lies protection. Do not let them know!"

"But you spoke to me——"

"But yes, of course, my poor one; dost not think that I have eyes to see? You are beaten, cuffed and kicked, you have the lash-marks on your back, you wear no weapons. You are not of them; like me you are a prisoner; is it not?"

"Yes," whispered Willoughby, "they ran me down——" Pent-up feelings forced a spate of words from him, and in a whisper he recited his adventures since the night the pirate crushed his fishing-boat to splinters.

She listened, her eyes thoughtful, and occasionally interrupted with a soft "*que terrible!*" or an "*ay di mi!*" as his tale progressed.

When he had finished she took up her story. She was Carmelita de Guevara y Rosales, and her father, Don Pablo, had been lieutenant to the Governor of Puerto

Bello. It was under his command that the *Santa Catarina* had set sail for Spain laden with a mighty treasure for the coffers of his Catholic Majesty. She had been born and reared in the palace where her father ruled with power second only to the Governor's, but now she was a woman grown, the time had come for her to go to Spain, where in a convent at the capital her education could be finished, after which a marriage worthy of her lineage and fortune was to be arranged. "Alas," she finished, "now that I am taken by these wolves of the sea naught remains but death or a life of simulated madness; for once they realize I am sane——" she crossed herself devoutly as she begged for mercy from God's Mother.

Prisoners in the hands of ruthless captors, helpless fools of fate, misfortune drew them to each other as the iron and the lodestone are attracted. A week of stolen assignations, furtive, whispered confidences, the aromatic breezes blowing offshore, the glowing tropic moon and the youthful blood which bounded in their veins composed a formula too potent for resistance. "If things were different, Carmelita," murmured Willoughby, the pounding of his heart almost shutting off his speech, "if only I were free——"

"*Obé carísimo*," the girl's thick whisper cut across his words, "why must we toy with 'ifs'? Is it not enough that on a trackless ocean our two paths should cross, that——" she stopped and turned her face up in the moonlight, her amber eyes tear-misted, poppy-red lips fallen a little apart as her breath came in quick, labored gasps. In a moment their two mouths were one; then Willoughby was kissing her neck, her ears, the little hollow in her creamy throat where the golden cross was hung. Her soft hands traveled questingly across his breast, firm and hard as polished wood beneath its coat of tan. Her eyelids drooped until

her curling lashes veiled the amber of her eyes. "*Carillo, carillito*," she half gasped, half sobbed. "*Mi corazón, mi novio, yo te amo*—my heart, I love you——"

"Do ye, indeed, ma'am?" Flat, toneless, hardly seeming to hold interest, Black Rudolph's voice broke in upon her fervent declaration. "And would ye like to have him for yer own?"

"*Valgame Dios*," Carmelita faced the pirate with the fearless pride of love, "though I could have no more than the clasp of his hand, I would prefer it to the whole of any other man upon the earth!"

BLACK RUDOLPH looked at them in moody speculation. "Ye mean that, ma'am?" he asked at length. "Ye'd be satisfied with that in preference to a lusty lover——"

"Yes, yes; a thousand times yes!" she interrupted breathlessly. "*Señor Capitán*, can you not see we love each other? You have taken my father's life, your ship is loaded with his treasure; will you not do this one poor thing for us—give us to each other?"

"Why, if ye really meant what ye just said, I think there's no great cause for argument," the pirate answered softly. "Ye're sure ye wouldn't want to change yer mind?"

"No, no—oh, *Dios mio*, you will do this thing for me? Tell me I may have him for my own——"

"Willingly, ma'am. I'm master o' this ship, an' we're at sea. Stand up before th' mast an' I'll unite ye in th' bonds o' wedlock.

"Pipe all hands, Pipo," he commanded. "We're goin' to have a weddin'—an' another little ceremony—up on deck!"

In the dim light of a sailing-lamp the ceremony was performed, Black Rudolph drawing a gold ring from his own finger

for the bride, since Willoughby, of course, had none.

"An' now I s'pose ye'd like a tirin'-maid to sarve ye, ma'am?" the captain asked as the newly married couple faced him hand in hand.

"If you would be so kind——" the girl began, but stopped abruptly as a grimace of cold fury swept across the pirate's swarthy face.

"Kind, quotha?" answered he. "By th' shinin' face o' God, I'll show ye kindness, ye who thought to make a fool o' me! I've give ye man an' maid to once, or may I go to hell wi' open eyes. 'Twill be a few days 'fore th' present's ready fer ye, but have no fear, me beauty, it's a-comin'.

"Bid Master Shadwell make him ready fer a job o' geldin', Pipo," he turned to the boatswain, then motioned to another man to lead the bride below.

As if they had rehearsed their parts, four members of the crew hustled Willoughby into the forecastle where, a charcoal brazier glowing underneath a pot of seething pitch beside him, and a set of knives and shears laid ready on a bench, old Shadwell, the former horse-doctor who acted as the ship's surgeon, was waiting with a grim smile on his face.

"What's this?" cried Willoughby, struggling in the seamen's grasp. "What mean ye by——" A pike-stave crashed against his head, and he fell unconscious like a pole-axed ox before the butcher.

DIM consciousness came back to Willoughby, consciousness that swam up slowly through a drowning flood of pain. He heard somebody screaming in a high contralto voice, felt a paralyzing surge of pain sweep through his legs and thighs and abdomen, tried to rise, then fell back shuddering in torment. Dimly, while the torture of his suffering made him faint and sick, he realized the female

scream of anguish had been his. But why should he scream like a woman? His voice . . . Remembrance of Black Rudolph's order struck him dumb. Realization, more poignant than the agony of pain that racked him, fell upon him with the force of devastation. "Bid Master Shadwell make him ready for a job o' geldin'," Rudolph had commanded. Country-bred, he knew the process by which stallions were made neuters. He had been . . . he was no longer a man.

Had his elbows not been lashed against his sides Willoughby would have torn the dressings from his wounds and bled to death, but his captors had anticipated this, and kept him firmly bound. Moreover, they took pains to keep him sodden with great swigs of rum, which not only rendered him incapable of violent motion, but mercifully provided an anodyne for tortured mind and body. Young, strong and clean-blooded, he was quick to heal, and the rude styptic of hot pitch applied to his raw wounds had effectually forestalled infection. Within a little while his strength returned, and he could stand and walk without assistance.

Then came the very accolade of degradation. They cut the straggling growth of beard from his cheeks and lips and chin, they washed and combed his long, dark hair and piled it high upon his head and set a comb of tortoise-shell in it. They bored his ear-lobes with a white-hot iron and fastened heavy hoops of gold in them; they daubed his lips and cheeks with rouge; finally, they brought a woman's chemise of white cambric, a be-ruffled scarlet satin petticoat and a gayly striped silk shawl to tie about his waist and hips. These they put on him and with jeers and mimic courtliness conveyed him to the captain's cabin.

"Zounds," swore Black Rudolph when they thrust the crimson-faced mock-woman into his apartment, "did I not know

ye for th' thing ye are, I'd surely fall in love wi' ye, my lass!" Nor was his admiration altogether feigned. Willoughby was slightly under middle height, slender as a reed, with regular, small features and slim, patrician hands and feet. His eyes were large and gentian-blue, and shaded by long lashes. The tan of sunburn had completely left him during illness, and with his painted face and female head-dress, his ear-rings and his woman's garb, he appeared to be a more than merely pretty girl.

Black Rudolph's cabin was a faithful mirror of his personal fastidiousness. A deeply cushioned couch ran clear across one side, hanging lamps of beaten silver cast a mellow luminance upon rich Eastern rugs and gilded mirrors, finely executed pictures and exotic hangings woven in Mosul and Shamakha. A great four-poster bed of carved mahogany, with silken sheets and pillows, occupied the center of the room; a chest of ebony, which towered half again a tall man's height, stood against the wall toward which the bedstead faced.

They bound Willoughby against the chest with cotton bandages, trussing wrists and waist and ankles to a pillar so he could not move; they wrapped a band of cotton tight across his lips; last of all they passed a bandage round his brow and tied it fast behind the pillar, so he could not choose but gaze before him, since he was powerless to turn his head to right or left or drop his glance upon the floor. Then they brought Carmelita in.

She was lovely as St. Agnes led before the Roman headsman. A sleeveless robe of shimmering white gauze fell about her loosely from white throat to whiter feet, and through its veiling meshes her sweet body shone as pinkly white as a chaste marble statue with the flush of sunrise shining on it.

"*Dios mio, otra mujer*—another wo-

man?" she faltered at sight of the bound Willoughby.

"Don't be bashful, ma'am," Black Rudolph chuckled. "I promised ye a sarvin' woman, didn't I? Thar she be, an' if ye'll notice closely, ye'll see ye once was married to th' baggage, unlikely as it seems. I'm thinkin' that yer lawful wedded husband will be little use to ye, an' no proper lady has a secret from her maid, so we'll just pretend that we're alone, an'——" He drained a pannikin of rum, wiped his lips upon a lace-edged handkerchief, and tossed the silver noggin over his shoulder. "Come, little one," he ordered with a hiccup; "we've waited long enough fer——" She shrank away from him, her little hands outstretched in supplication, but a linnet in the falcon's clutch was luckier than she. He ripped her gossamer gown away and laid a layer of lecherous, drunken kisses on her shrinking body from her lips to her feet, alternating maudlin, obscene compliments with scurrilous insults and abuse; when she shrank from him in palsied horror, he beat and kicked her as a cruel master might mistreat a dog; then resumed his sottish wooing with redoubled ardor.

Willoughby was forced to watch the tragic drama to its end. The bandage held his head in place, and the only surcease which he found was when he closed his eyes to shut the dreadful vision from his sight, but then some fresh appeal for mercy from his wife would force his fascinated gaze upon the horrid tableau, and though he struggled till the strain brought torture to his partly healed wounds, he was powerless to move a muscle in defense of Carmelita.

When daylight finally crept across the sea the night of torment ended. Willoughby and Carmelita were escorted to the women's quarters and locked in with the other female captives.

THE theologians of the early church were wont to say the only pleasure which the damned in hell could have was railing at the other damned. This dreadful doctrine was made manifest to Willoughby in his new estate, for the captive Spanish women took vindictive pleasure in insulting him. No nasty name in the vocabulary of a language rich in nastiness was too vile for them to call him. Obscene allusion to his lost virility was cast into his teeth at every turn, and criticism of his every act was offered in bewildering variety of filthiness. If he strode across the deck with something of his natural gait they asked him mockingly if he expected to regain his manhood by a simulation of his betters. If, impeded by his feminine attire, he walked with something of a mincing step, the shrill, malicious mockery of their laughter cut him like a lash.

To make his mental torment more acute, he found that he was daily losing such poor vestiges of masculinity as remained in his poor, mutilated body. "I am a man!" he would tell himself vehemently. "They may have hacked and butchered me, but I am still a man." Then to his shame and consternation he would break down and cry, sobbing till it seemed his heart would break with pent-up misery and hopelessness.

A gradual transmutation was in progress physically, too. No fresh beard sprouted in the place of that the pirates had shaved off, and where once a manly stubble had adorned his unshorn face, his cheeks and chin and lips were now feathered with a film of fuzzy down. Already there was a perceptible enlargement of his breast and hips, a tightening of the waist. Unwittingly, indeed, despite a conscious effort to resist it, there came a change in walk and posture, a lighter, shorter step, a tendency to use his hands in typically feminine gestures. "I am a man," the

tortured youth would tell himself. "I will not be a woman; I won't—I *won't!*" Then tears would wash the boastful words away and the newly-budding breasts would tremble as bent shoulders shook with sobs.

Madness surely would have been his portion had it not been for Carmelita. "*Mi corazón, mi pobre corazón*—my dearest heart——" she'd murmur as she took the tear-stained cheeks between her soft, pink palms. "Have courage, *cara mia*. It is not hard to be a woman—was not the Blessed Mother one? See, I will guide you, I will help you. Lean on Carmelita, little poor one. Have we not been down to hell together? But of course. You have seen my degradation, let me help you to bear yours."

"But I love you, dear," he faltered. "We were married——"

"Foolish little sweet one," she broke in as she stopped his halting words with kisses. "*Porque no*—why not? You have kissed me as a lover, you have wed me as a husband, now you are my little sister!" And she wrapped her arms about him, laid her soft cheek close to his, and crooning soft caresses, held the sobbing, trembling girl-man close against her till the night was done.

Black Rudolph's ship, the *Vengeance*, cruised the Caribbean for another month, during which she took three prizes. Each time a fight was on Willoughby was huddled with the women in their quarters below decks, and not permitted to come out till Shadwell needed help in bandaging the wounded. By the time the *Vengeance* finally turned her bow toward Port Royal, he was so far feminized that the memory of his manhood days was like the memory of a half-forgotten dream or the hazy recollection of a story heard in early childhood.

A NEW life waited Willoughby ashore. The women captured on the *Sania Catarina*, destined for the slave mart, were left in the old barracoon until the time for auction; the bales of silk, the casks of wine, the gold and silver ornaments and utensils taken by the buccaneers were placed upon display in the market-place, with a guard of two-score ruffians to protect them and the half-caste Pipo to conduct negotiations for their sale. Carmelita and "Joaquina", as Willoughby was now known, were sent upland to Black Rudolph's *hacienda*.

This was a farm of several hundred acres kept in a state of splendid cultivation by a gang of Indian and Negro slaves, some of whom were bought, but most of them were stolen, under the direction of a huge mulatto overseer known ironically as Don Fernando. These occupied a settlement of cabins set apart on the plantation proper. The great house was attended by a half-score mixed-breed slaves, mostly octoroons, and it was here that Willoughby's enslavement started.

No task was too abject for his employment. He fetched and carried, helped as scullery maid about the kitchen, served the meats and poured the wine at meals, washed and scrubbed the marble tiling of the floors.

Once again he owed release to Carmelita. She had accepted her position with a fatalistic calm, and lived with Black Rudolph in conditions almost simulating matrimony. He was inordinately vain, and by judicious flattery she was able to secure whatever she desired enough to beg for.

"*Rodolfo mio*," she pouted, "you did promise Joaquina should be mine. How can she wait on me when she has other tasks to do? Her hands grow rough with labor and they hurt my tender skin. Give her wholly to me, *mi Rodolfo*."

"Now, Satan bake me on a spit, ye're

right!" the pirate answered with a laugh. "I promised ye th' slut, an' yours she is, body an' soul, to do with as ye please."

So Willoughby became a lady's maid and learned the arts of the boudoir as few men ever knew them. He combed and brushed his mistress' shining hair and learned to plait it in smooth coils; he learned to blend the rouge and powder on her face; he helped her to disrobe and dress.

For compensation "Joaquina" had more kisses in a day than most Abigails receive within a lifetime, and, if no one were around to see, the mistress would become the maid and lavish loving care upon her servant. "But no, my little one, my very dearest heart," she said when Willoughby protested, "are we not sisters by adoption? You are new to womanhood, *querida mia*, let me help you. Come, sit here while Carmelita does your hair!" Then she would braid and coil the heavy, dark-brown tresses, pile them high and pin them with a tall-backed comb, and standing off admire her handiwork and clasp her hands and cry, "*Que bonita! Que hermosa!*" and clasp her maid's flushed cheek against her breast while she showered kisses on the upturned lips.

The coarse chemise and gaudy petticoat which were Willoughby's first garb of womanhood were replaced by dresses of fine, stiff brocade and clinging gowns of rustling silk or cool, fresh linen. His feet were shod with silken hose and satin slippers with high red heels and silver buckles. He learned to wear a corset and to find delight in seeing how it shaped his waist and hips and bosom in gracious lines of girlhood.

When he first saw his new finery he fell to weeping with sheer happiness; then, realizing how the girlish gewgaws had delighted him, shed shamefaced tears at recollection of his vanished manhood, but Carmelita's rapturous cooings of ap-

proval as he put each garment on outweighed his self-reproachful grief, and soon the two were twittering with happy girlish laughter as item after item of the fine new wardrobe was held up for admiration.

RUDOLPH had rested at his farm for half a year when news arrived that Spanish treasure ships were setting out from Maracaibo. Improvident, like all their breed, his crew had long since squandered their loot, and were hot to take the sea-trail for fresh plunder. The *Vengeance* was refitted, and with crew augmented by a score of sturdy ruffians with worthless lives to gamble for a chance at booty, set bravely out to sea.

With Rudolph's going, life became a paradise for Willoughby and Carmelita. Together they visited the town marketplace, treading Port Royal's narrow streets in their high-heeled shoes and full skirts of cool muslin with demurely downcast eyes, yet missing nothing of the fascinating sights of this crossroads of the Indies. Or they would lie abed till late and have their breakfast of sweet limes and oranges and bitter, creamless coffee served to them while they lay in state upon the great four-poster with its sheets of fine-spun linen, and the great, high-ceilinged room would ring with happy laughter as they peeled the fruits and thrust the juicy segments in each other's mouths, pausing now and then to lick the sweetly trickling juice from each other's chins or lips or fingers. Later, dressed in airy muslin and wide hats of woven palm-leaves, they would walk about the plantings and refresh the sweating field-slaves with sweet fruit or—in which case they were blessed with frantic thanks—with gifts of silver money.

One day when they were out exploring thus they chanced upon a group of slave huts, and heard the sound of blows and a woman's feeble cries for mercy. Round-

ing the corner of the shanty they saw Don Fernando, the mulatto overseer, flogging an old woman with his rawhide whip in a perfect ecstasy of savage cruelty. "*Bruja—encantadora—ladrona—*witch, magic-worker, thief!" he snarled, making the cruel, plaited thongs whistle through the air before he brought them down upon the shivering shoulders or impotently upraised arms.

"*Bestio, canibal—stop!*" cried Carmelita.

The overseer understood the status of the women at the great house perfectly. For all their jewelry and gorgeous clothes and the luxury they lived in, they were as much slaves as any of the wretches under his command. Black Rudolph could dispose of them upon the auction block whenever he was minded so to do. Indeed, Fernando had seen more than one fine lady go down to the slave pens when Rudolph had grown tired of her. But he was free. Rudolph might take his life if he displeased him, but never could he take his freedom. "*Putá,*" he spat the deadly insult out through grinning lips, "I alone command here when the master is away. It pleases me to flog this carrion, and by all the holy saints, I will!"

Carmelita turned and lifted up her skirt, drawing from her garter the stiletto which was sheathed there. "*Cabrón,*" she cried, "you dare to name me so? *Por Dios—*"

With a skill that came from long and evil practise the mulatto flicked his whip at her, and the dagger clattered on the gravel at her feet as she shrank back with a little cry of pain. Around her wrist there lay a bracelet of red bruise where the whiplash had encircled the white flesh.

For a scarlet instant Willoughby forgot himself. No longer the poor eunuch, the woman Joaquina who had replaced the man he used to be was lost to sight

and mind behind a curtain of red fury, and with a scream of agony Fernando toppled to the ground, his face a bloody ruin of smashed flesh and broken bones where Willoughby had hurled a ten-pound rock into it.

Then Joaquina came to life again, and with a frightened whimper Willoughby shrank back, hands raised before his eyes to shut from sight the bloody havoc he had wrought.

The beaten slave-wench roused slowly to her knees; then, seeing her tormenter lying helpless, dragged herself across the gravel to the female figures who stood clasped together in each other's arms. "*Merçi, Madame; merci, Ma'm'selle!*" she croaked, and bending raised first Willoughby's, then Carmelita's dress hem to her lips. "Maman Cécilie does not forget."

They recognized her, then. She was an aged crone from Martinique who had somehow come into Black Rudolph's clutches, and had been retained because her reputation as a magic-working *obeah* woman held the other slaves in terror, and a word from her would drive them to their tasks with greater energy than all Fernando's bullying. She was of a saddle-yellow color, not like a mulatto, but rather as if the pigment had faded from her skin with age. Old, and bent, almost incredibly wrinkled she was, too, but though deformed and bent and wizened, she still retained a dignity and poise which could not help but make themselves noticed. Her eyes were small and bright and very wise, and seemed to take in everything they saw and to see everything seeable at once. Strangely, despite her uncouth ugliness, neither Willoughby nor Carmelita was frightened of her.

"I—I'm sorry if I hurt the fellow," whimpered Willoughby, "but——"

"*Tiens, Ma'm'selle,*" the aged crone

broke in, "but it was your great heart that prompted you. Have no fear, Maman Cécilie does not forget."

"But, if perchance I killed him——"

"Then everyone upon the *bacienda* thanks you from the bottom of his heart."

"But Rudolph——"

"*Aquí de Dios—Rodolfo*—I had forgotten him!" wailed Carmelita. "He will be furious, he will—*ohé*, my little sister dear, he will do unheard-of things to you!"

"Have courage, *Madame,*" the aged slave wench bobbed a trembling curtsy, "you shall be quite safe. Maman Cécilie watches over you."

BLACK RUDOLPH'S house was pleasant. Built in the Spanish style, it stood surrounded by a grove of palms, three sides enclosing a tree-shaded garden with sanded walks and a still pool where goldfish played among the roots of star-shaped water lilies. Rose-trees and trailing jessamine matched their perfumes, and the close-clipped grass grew cool and verdant underfoot. Between the trees hung hammocks of bright grass-cloth, and in one of these Willoughby and Carmelita rested on the evening following their adventure with Fernando. The night was sultry, and their daytime garb had been changed for sleeveless gowns of rippling China silk. Their bare feet, shod with sandals of soft leather, made highlights on the grass beneath the hammock as they rocked.

"Courage, *muy querida mia,*" whispered Carmelita as she pressed the other's trembling hand. "What if the yellow dog did die? You did but deal him his deserts. I will manage Rudolph; I shall tell him that the beast attacked us and we killed him to defend our honor. Never fear!"

She tossed her *cigarito* in the grass and picked up a guitar, running her fingers

listlessly across the strings a moment, then began to sing a plaintive melody:

*Pregúntale á las estrellas
Si no de noche me venllorar;
Pregúntale si no busco,
Para adorarle la soledad . . .*

O ask of the stars above you
If these my tears did not flow all night;
O ask if I do not love you,
Who of you dreamt till dawn was light . . .

"But no, we must not sing of love denied, my sweet," she broke off with a laugh. "We are here together, and alone. Is it not enough? Quick, my castanets; I will dance for you!"

She took the little wooden cymbals in her hands and leaped nimbly from the hammock. With a rattling cachinnation of swift rhythm she began, stamping through the mazes of a mad bolero, losing herself completely in the mesmerizing meter of the dance. Her body shook and trembled with the sharp staccato of the castanets, her hair, unbound, flowed down her shoulders in a golden cataract, or flickered round her like a lambent flame as she whirled and pirouetted; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes star-bright. Then, gasping from exertion, she spun across the short-cropped grass and flung herself into the hammock beside Willoughby.

"Am I not glorious?" she panted as she threw her arms about him and laid her mouth to his. "Am I not truly wonderful, *pequeña mia*? But now"—her manner changed abruptly and her voice sank to a throaty whisper—"now I would be comforted. Take my head upon your breast and smooth my hair and kiss me, Joaquina, little sister of my heart!"

For a little while she lay there like a babe against its mother's bosom, making little fearful whimpering sounds and shuddering occasionally as if with sudden cold. "I have fear, *carísima*," she murmured almost sleepily as Willoughby stroked her cheeks with tender hands. "I

have a premonition one of us will die to-night"—a shiver flickered through her and he felt her glowing flesh grow cold beneath his hand—"if it should be I, *corazonita*, promise you will not forget your little sister——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, M'sieur, Madame*," came a soft voice from the darkness, and a bent form shambled from the shadows of the rose-hedge and bobbed a curtsy to them, "*pardonnez-moi, mais——*"

"*Santisima Maria*," Carmelita crossed herself in terror, "the *obeab* woman——"

"Precisely, *belle Madame*," Cécilie bobbed another awkward curtsy; "I have come to warn you and the *beau M'sieur——*"

"*No caballero no está aquí*," said Carmelita sharply, "no gentleman is here. This is my sister, Señorita Joaquina——"

"*Pardon, Madame*, we waste the precious time," the old slave interrupted. "Black Rudolph's ship is sighted from the harbor. He will be here before the morning breaks."

"*Retro me, satanas!*" whispered Carmelita. "We are undone! *Ohé, muy hermosa mia*, he will flay you!" Locked in each other's arms, terrified and trembling, they fell into an agonized embrace.

Again the old slave spoke, gently, reassuringly, like one who would soothe frightened children. "Have courage, *mes amis*, Cécilie comes to save you from his wrath. See——" Hobbling back into the shadow, she returned with a great bundle which she dropped before them on the grass. "Clothing for *M'sieur*," she announced. "He must become a man again."

"A man?" the hot blood mounted to his face. A man was something he could never be, though he had forgotten it when he resigned himself to womanhood. Now:

"A man, *M'sieur*," she echoed. "See, here is man's attire. *Vite*, put it on. The time is short."

She helped him don the unfamiliar masculine attire, cut the once-hateful earrings and withdrew them from his ears, then with a pair of scissors clipped his flowing hair, leaving it just long enough to hide the ring-holes in his ear-lobes.

Hot tears came to his eyes and a choking sob rose in his throat as he saw the shining dark hair fall beneath the scissors blades, but a subtle change came over Willoughby as he felt the rasp of coarse wool breeches on his legs. In a moment, like the fading of a specter at the rising of the sun, Joaquina whose sweet form and substance had been his so many months was dead, a piteous, forgotten little ghost, without so much as a dead body to call hers.

"*Madame, your jewels,*" the slave called Carmelita from the trance of tragic horror which enveloped her as she watched Willoughby turn back into a man, "you will need them to escape."

HOPING to forget herself in action, Carmelita hastened to her room, gathered up her jewelry and bundled it into a shawl. It was the pick of loot from half a hundred treasure argosies; diamonds, rubies, emeralds set in exquisite gold mountings, strands of pearls for which a queen might gladly trade her diadem—she threw them carelessly into the shawl as though they had been bits of broken glass; then, tear-blinded, stumbled down the corridor to join the two who waited in the garden.

Cécilie in the lead, they hurried down a winding trail, came at last upon a strip of beach and found an open boat drawn up upon the sands. They launched it in the surflless sea and Willoughby took up the oars. Some three miles to their left the harbor lights were burning, and across the moon there loomed the black sails of the *Vengeance* as she stood toward the

roadstead, beating up against the light breeze blowing offshore.

"'Twill avail us little," Willoughby lamented, tugging at the sweeps. "They'll mark our flight and follow us, and we do not even ship a sail—this tub will be run down within a day, at most."

"It may be we can hail a ship," Carmelita answered from her station in the stern. "I can pay our passage with the jewels——"

"A ship!" he interrupted bitterly. "What ship could give us safety from Black Rudolph and his gang of cut-throats?" He tugged despairingly against the rising tide, then added somberly: "Ah, well, it is no worse to die at sea than on the land, methinks. The sharks would be more merciful than——"

"*Maria misericordiosa!*" Carmelita's scream of terror cut across his words. "*El tiburón*—the shark!" As if appearing when she called its name, a monster tiger-fish swam leisurely across their bow, its dorsal fin protruding from the cloven tide a full four feet.

"My God!" cold terror clutched his heart as he saw the dreadful thing bear down on them. "It must be full five fathoms long!" Astonishment drowned out his frightened speech, and he gazed in round-eyed fascination as the thing came slowly nearer.

Maman Cécilie stood up in the bow, her skinny arms above her head, weaving a sort of mesmeristic pattern in the air; her high, cracked voice was quavering an incantation. She was calling the great shark to them as a stableman might call a horse!

The monster fish swept close, then dived from sight, and as it disappeared Cécilie seized the clumsy anchor tethered to the boat's blunt bow by a length of rusty chain and heaved it straight into the ocean. "Back, back!" she cried, motioning to Willoughby to move aft to the

stern. "*Le raquin* takes us in his charge—he has our anchor in his mouth."

"*O santísima Maria, Madre de Dios*, guard us from the perils of black witchcraft!" Carmelita prayed, as, with a jerk which threw them from their seats, the heavy boat shot forward through the water, while ahead, like a flaming specter out of blazing hell, the mighty shark's great body glowed in phosphorescent silhouette against the blackness of the sea.

The boat's speed quickened. From their places in the stern sheets Willoughby and Carmelita saw smooth, wing-like jets of water curl upward from before her prow and curl back a full six inches higher than the gunwales. On, on they rushed due northward, while the watchers in the stern looked on in trembling awe, and the old witch-woman stood up in the prow with waving arms, urging on their dreadful steed to greater haste in a high, cracked, shrilling chant.

At last the red sun rose above the eastern sea, and the mad career of the rushing boat slowed down. Cécilie leant across the bow and pulled the anchor-chain aboard, laughing in a high, thin tone, cold and hard as the rattle of the metal links which slid between her fingers to the bottom of the boat. "*Merçi*, a thousand thanks, my friend!" she called across the heaving ocean. "Thou hast done kindly by us; keep us in sight and we shall feed thee well before another sun has set!" Fifty yards off their larboard bow a spout of water jetted up as a pair of mighty tail-flukes rose above the surface for an instant, then hit the ocean with a swishing impact, as though they waved an answer to her hail.

"Take up the oars, *M'sieur*," she ordered as she sank down in the bow. "There is rescue yonder." Following the gesture of her yellow thumb they saw a small ship, schooner-rigged, proceeding in a course which would bring her almost

square across their bows in another thirty minutes.

"*Gracias á Dios y todos santos*, we are saved!" cried Carmelita joyfully. Willoughby returned the pressure of her hand, but answered nothing. When Rudolph set out in pursuit they would need all the old witch-wife's *obeah*—and more—to save them.

MASTER JEREMIAH SMALLWOOD, captain of the *Goodly Heritage* out of Salem town, regarded his new passengers across the table in his little chart-room. He was a tall man, spare and bony, and the gravity of his expression was heightened by the sober homespun clothes he wore. Yet, had they not been so stern, his deep-set blue eyes might have been called humorous, and a hint of kindness, repressed, perhaps, but certainly innate, showed in his wide and firm-lipped mouth.

"'Twill take us but a few days from our course to set ye down at your Potomac landing," he observed, "and the price ye offer is most fair. I'll undertake to do it——"

"But the pirate," Carmelita interrupted fearfully. "Black Rudolph follows hard upon our trail, *Señor*. If he should overtake us——"

"I'll undertake to get ye home," the Yankee skipper answered with a smile more grim than humorous.

His chance to prove his boast came sooner than he thought. The sun was not more than two hours high next day when, growing higher momentarily on the horizon, there showed the topsail of a ship, and within the hour Willoughby and Carmelita recognized the *Vengeance*.

"*O santísima Madre de Dios*——" Carmelita fell upon her knees and crossed herself, then held her clasped hands up to heaven—"O mother of the motherless, protect us from this peril——"

"Silence, woman!" Skipper Smallwood bade. "What mean ye by this papistry aboard an English Christian's ship? If ye have prayers to say, say 'em in a language pleasing unto God!" Thus, having done his full religious duty, he stalked aft to squint through his perspective-glass and take the measure of the ship which followed in his wake.

Years of warring with the Spaniards had developed Rudolph's technique to routine. "Shoot down their rigging, leave them wallowing for want of steerageway, then rush in close, fling grapnels out and board." Such was his battle-manual.

True to this formula, he let drive with his pivot-gun and sent a chain-shot shrieking toward the *Goodly Heritage* at a distance of three-quarters of a mile. The shot fell short, but the *Vengeance* sailed two feet for every one the *Goodly Heritage* could make.

Skipper Smallwood stood upon his quarterdeck and hummed a snatch of psalm-tune. "*Upon the ungodly shall He rain snares—double-shot the guns with grape, Mister Henderson—fire and brimstone—three points to larboard, Mr. Alvard—storm and tempest, this shall be their portion to drink—are the pikes and muskets served out, Mister Henderson?*"

Cutlasses had been girt on, muskets and boarding-pistols primed and loaded, and a stand of pikes set ready by the rail.

Once more the pirate's heavy gun roared out, and the *Vengeance* bore straight down upon the *Goodly Heritage*. Had it been a high-pooped galleon, manned by a clumsy-sailing crew of Spaniards, Rudolph's strategy would have been successful, but the men who staffed the *Goodly Heritage* were New England sailors, men who drank the salt sea-spume with their mothers' milk and had the bellows of relentless surf on steadfast rocks for lullabies. Steered with consummate skill she offered little target for the

pirate's guns, and to Rudolph's great surprise, instead of seeking to run from him, she suddenly fell off, turned her narrow stern against him, keeping just beyond the range of grape-shot, and circled round behind him, thus evading broadside fire and chain-shot from his heavy gun, as well. Before the pirate could swing round to bring his side-guns into play or readjust his pivot-gun, the *Goodly Heritage* swerved sharply, crossed his stern a scant ten yards away, and with a flash as sudden as a summer lightning-stroke let drive a salvo of four guns. Gorged to the very lips with grape-shot, the twelve-pound carronades spat death among the close-packed pirate crew. Those who escaped annihilation were for the most part badly wounded, and the air was rent with groans and cries and shrieks of blasphemy.

"Stand by to board!" Skipper Smallwood's order roared above the pandemonium, and as deftly as a corsair ship the *Goodly Heritage* ran alongside of the *Vengeance*, which, bereft of steersman, wallowed drunkenly.

As the Puritans at Naseby swept the Royalists before them, so did Skipper Smallwood's men sweep down on the demoralized defenders of the *Vengeance*. Point and edge they stabbed and slashed their way along the deck, and more dreadful than an Indian war-whoop came the chanting of their psalm-tune as they hewed and hacked and beat down their opponents' guard, then split their skulls like kindling.

Rabid as a maddened dog, berserk with the recollection of the incurable mutilation Rudolph had inflicted on him, Willoughby charged sword in hand beside the Puritans.

BLACK RUDOLPH stood amidships with the remnant of his crew around him, and his deep-set black eyes glowed with recognition as they fell on Wil-

loughby. "Joaquina, by the shining face of God!" he cried. "Come hither, lass; I'd have a word with thee!"

Long years of training with the foil and saber had made Willoughby the equal of most men in sword-play, for the Munros were traditionally soldiers, and their men were trained to arms, even though their destined work lay in the pulpit or the courtroom. The blades engaged, and a look of almost comic disconcertion spread across the pirate's face as he realized he had met his master in the fence. He tried a feint and slash, commencing with a downward stroke as if to split his adversary's head; then, relying on the raised guard of the other's blade, suddenly swerved his steel in midstroke to cut diagonally downward to the neck. But Willoughby dropped point and shifted guard in time, so that the pirate's rapier ran up the sharply sloping angle of his sword, caught in the side-rings and, at a sharp turn of his wrist, fell clattering to the deck.

Disarmed, Rudolph gave back a step, and his cruel eyes widened and grew glazed with terror as they looked into the bare-boned face of death. He turned and ran, fleeing headlong toward the rail, and paused there with a scream as thin with hopelessness as that which Willoughby had given when he woke to find himself unmaned. Below, its pointed snout awash in the green water, as if it waited for him, lay the giant shark Maman Cécilie had called from the ocean depths two nights before.

"Strike, man! Give me th' steel, i' Christ's name!" Rudolph shrieked.

Willoughby looked overside, saw the waiting monster and withheld his thrust. The time had come to take repayment and the score to settle was a long one. The shrinking, palsied thing perched trembling on the rail had been his captor, his master. He had enslaved him, beaten

him, unsexed him, made him stand by helpless while he watched the defloration of his bride.

He lowered his point and laughed hysterically. "No steel for you, Black Rudolph," he announced. "Go ye to hell with open eyes!" Contemptuously he raised his foot and kicked the cringing rascal overboard.

WILLOUGHBY and Carmelita stood together by the rail and watched the sea slide backward from the *Goodly Heritage's* prow. Silence lay across the vaulted purple sky and the slowly heaving slate-black waters. Stars shone in the gauzy veil of cirrus clouds that masked the zenith, bright as dew-drops in a net of spider-web, and a growing pearly luminescence spread across the eastern sea. The moon rose slowly from the waters, casting a resplendent avenue of argent to their feet. "See, *caro mio*," Carmelita bade, "it is the path to Spain."

"To Spain?" he echoed dully. "Would you like to go there, Carmelita? Your father's kinsmen would receive you kindly; you could take life up as you intended before Rudolph captured you. . . ."

She looked at him, hurt wonder in her eyes. "And you?" she asked. "You would let me go?"

He kept his eyes averted. "Of course," he answered in a toneless voice. "I can arrange your passage out of Norfolk; there is no war between our peoples now, and——"

"There can never be a war between our peoples, *novio*," she interrupted softly.

He looked at her uncomprehendingly. "You mean——"

"Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God, *querido*."

"O, my dear," he breathed, and his heart beat so that he could hardly speak. "You mean you have it in your heart to

stay with me? You can respect a man who is no man——"

She laid a finger on his lips. "Do you remember what I told Rodolfo that night he caught me in your arms and asked me if I loved you?" she broke in. "Listen, heart of mine, I can repeat the words from memory: 'Though I could have no more than the clasp of his hand, I would prefer it to the whole of any other man upon the earth.'"

She faced him starry-eyed, her arms outstretched. "Guiloberto, *corazonito mio*, if you will have me I am yours *basta la muerte*—till death do us part, my dear." And she kissed him on the mouth. He caught her to him almost frenziedly, and her golden hair came down and swirled about them, veiling their joined mouths as they kissed and kissed again, then laughed and wept by turns in an ecstasy of sheer delight.

Thus did they plight their troth anew.

WILLOUGHBY and Carmelita took their place in the community, riding to the hunt, going to the balls in the great houses, entertaining in their turn, sitting in the family pew on Sundays. After service they would walk among the graves, and the neighbors smiled to see the married lovers strolling hand in hand.

But once a month, at least, Carmelita crossed the river into Maryland, visiting the Jesuit mission at St. Mary's City. Far

from crying out against the practise, Willoughby indulged her in it. Indeed, had she gone forth to worship at the shrine of Moloch—or the Devil—he would have bade her godspeed when she went, and met her with a kiss when she returned.

WHEN King William waged his war against the French and Indians Willoughby rode out with his battalion of light horse, and for six months was separated from his Carmelita, the first and only separation which they ever suffered from the night they first laid eyes upon each other.

Hastening homeward from the war, he stopped for brief refreshment at St. Mary's City, and while his horse was being fed and curried, stopped to rest in the cool shade of the small cemetery. A cross of marble, white as a pale ghost among the darker granite gravestones, seemed to beckon him, and he crossed the short-clipped turf to kneel before it and decipher its inscription. For a long time he remained kneeling, and when he rose there was a look upon his face such as one might wear if he had seen the wraith of one whom he had loved and lost long since, for the epitaph entreated:

*Ye who passe by
Pray for y^e goode estate of
JOAQUINA
Thrice-belovéd sister of Carmelita de Guenara
y Rosales
Who departed y^e life y^e 14th day of July,
A. D. 1687*

