

Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the

BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIV

NUMBER 1

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 18, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

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"Its yellow fangs were buried in Yardley's shoulder."

THE devil is in Cape Horn for men that sail, and if it can't get you one way, it will get you just the same. It isn't just the wind, either.

The wind had done enough. Six times we beat into it, trying to make into the Pacific before our cargo of wheat molded. But six times we lost headway on the starboard tack and were drawn in toward the same rounded cliff. Stormy petrels screamed at us from their desolate perches. The surf burst like cannon shells. At a yell from the lookout I sang out to let go. We wore around for the sixth time and legged it for the open sea. There we hove flat aback and argued.

Ned Priest, my mate, voted for the long road eastward. Give up, he said, and market the wheat in Port Elizabeth or Durban, with the following westerlies fetching us across to Africa in half a gale. But a stubborn fever

was on me. I meant to win up onto the Chilean coast if I had to float ashore on a plank. And the crew were for it, too. The days backing and filling and banging about had only made them madder. Priest was right, but it's too late to say so now.

We waited for a lull and tried it the seventh time. Ten miles of sea-room we put between us and the rocks before we came up into the wind's eye and dug into the crests. The sun went out in murk. The petrels deserted us. It began to snow. Ice had formed on the rigging and weighed us down by the head, so that there was no steadiness in the wheel.

That is the only explanation I know for getting off our course. Certainly we made more southing than westing. Some say that a strange current sets toward the frozen lands. Priest swore it had pulled Yardley's *Rambler* into the polar regions. But that

was sailor talk. The *Rambler* had disappeared most of a year ago, being last sighted a goodish way south of the Cape. Priest was merely playing a shrewd hunch, as it turned out; for, sure enough, we got trace of Yardley very soon.

Whatever happened to queer my navigation, the first reckoning I was able to get—which was on the third day when the snow stopped falling—showed us to be in latitude 64° south, with loose ice floating about. Something devilish in that! Almost as if the compass had quit. I watched it for an hour. It was jumpy, as if something besides the magnetic pole was pulling it.

Priest growled, "The wind's dropping. We'll never get out of this."

I hauled around on a long tack, but the wind died out completely, and through that day and night we lay becalmed in a cold sea, still drifting.

That brought back the talk of Ralph Yardley. But the double lookout I set was not for Yardley's *Rambler*; it was for ice. Good-sized bergs loomed up out of eddying murk, making plenty of distance while we made none—or else our drift was more rapid than I can believe. Those bergs were thirty-foot walls of green fire. Deathly cold or not, they blazed with green light, and blue and yellow flares played through them. The sheen blinded us when we got too close. They cracked like thunder. It was for them I kept the lookout and waited for the crash that would finish us.

However, those same lookouts saw the boat that settled things. A gig it was, bobbing in the lee of a big iceberg. And when we rowed to investigate, a man lay in the bottom. He was far gone from exposure and died the next day.

He was one of Ralph Yardley's crew; he told us that much. Yardley was fast in the ice of the Great Barrier a few hundred miles southward. He had found a big vein of pure iron cropping out of the ground where a

split in the ice-barrier let him through. Then the ice pack had formed and sealed the *Rambler* tight. If he could stave off starvation, he was a rich man. This poor fellow who mumbled the story and pegged out seemed to have stolen the boat in a dash for civilization.

We thought it over. If Yardley was alive, we were murderers to run off and leave him. But we were taking the same chance of death that he took if we tried to reach him. Priest said only a fool would look for another fool such as Yardley was. I was agreeing with that because I knew the man, and I knew there was a streak of craziness in him. But maybe I was the fool that Priest meant. At least, the dream of profit tempted me hard. Under our hatches the wheat was moldy and foul. We had shipped too much water to save it. I faced a total loss, whatever port I made.

Out of sympathy for the *Rambler's* desperate plight, the crew were for making a try at the Barrier. Maybe I talked up the money side of it rather strong, too. We headed into the south on the first fair wind we had had. I thought that was a devilish circumstance—the sending of that wind to blow us into the deadly reaches of the frozen silence.

In a little while the compass ceased its jumping and lay steady. We steered squarely on the mark and came to a sheer face of ice that appeared to be hundreds of miles long. It was the great Antarctic Barrier on the rim of the polar continent. For a day and a half we sailed along it without finding a single break—like the Wall of China. And then suddenly it fell away, giving the picture of a Norwegian fiord, rock-bound. It was a bay half a mile wide, frozen over.

In the middle of it rose the masts and yards of a windjammer badly listed to port and partly thrust up onto the humpy ice. We ran across the ice and read the name on the

counter: *Rambler of Boston*. The boys cheered and swarmed aboard.

One look sufficed. Her sticks were sprung; her deck had buckled and burst open; bulkheads were ripped. She was a total wreck. Not a sign of life remained. If her company was not all drowned, they were dead of cold somewhere. We had come too late. The picturesque, harum-scarum Ralph Yardley was no more.

It gave us quite a shock to see this hulk without a vestige of man on her. It didn't seem right that nature had spirited away her victims and buried them. I think we all kept our eyes open pretty wide as we fanned out over the ice on the trail of food. We had to have food, fresh food, and the place was a storehouse of game. We went after it. Gulls everywhere. Guillemots chirping. Clumsy, shapeless seals staring at us with big round eyes and not moving, half asleep. Penguins approaching in a stately procession, bowing and scraping, all dressed up in their white shirt fronts. They grew wary later. We were walking right into their stone-nests. We climbed the cliff to look for birds' eggs. And because we were staring so hard for something else, we found it in a crevice.

It was the body of Ralph Yardley frozen into the ice.

The spring of the year this was. The ice on the bay was honeycombed, and the snow was melting off the rock ledges of the crevice. Otherwise we never would have seen the body; the snow would have concealed it. But now the body was encased in a solid block of ice as clear as crystal. There was no recognizing it as Yardley then. Still, it was a human figure, the only one we saw. We began hacking.

Priest came running and shook his head. "Leave him," he said. "It's a proud grave with a glass cover. Clear out while we can. Don't go poking about."

I disagreed. "There's bound to be some writing on him. Some facts."

"Facts that killed him," Priest barked. He was angry. "Greed's eating on you. Better not to know too much. Yardley was always a liar. Leave him be!"

That was a hard way to talk of the dead. I wanted to know about the iron mine, I admit. So did most of the others. I laughed at Priest.

"Scared of ghosts?" I asked him. "Whittle away, boys. Have him out!"

The chopping took a long time. The work raised a sweat. They say it's because the air is so dry. Devilish funny, though! It wasn't much above freezing. Coats and jackets went flying. At 60° we would have roasted.

Out came the block of ice with the body of a man in it. We warped a rope around it and hauled it out to the ship, hoisted it aboard and slid it into the cabin where a fire was burning. We left it there and continued after game.

That evening, officers and men messed together in the foc'sle in order not to eat in the presence of the dead. Priest said he would be damned if he went aft to sleep, and so did the second officer. Priest talked a good deal of Yardley's heavy drinking and his cold-bloodedness. He called him a dope-fiend, I remember.

I turned in early, tired and gloomy with what that day had brought. Witnessing disaster and death leaves a deep mark. Sleep is the only way to cure it.

WHEN I came into the cabin, the block of ice was all but melted. In a pool of water the figure was nearly free. The whole body was wrapped in sealskin. I stooped and plucked away a corner of it which covered the face, and brought the lamp down to it. A greasy face coated with seal fat running off from the unscraped hide. Ay, this was

Ralph Yardley! What a sleeping-bag he had made, I thought.

Slopping through water, I dropped into my bunk and was soon dreaming.

Toward morning I woke with a queer sound in my ears. Somebody was grunting and spitting and stumbling around the main cabin.

I sang out, "Priest—that you?" and knew while I sang out that it was not the mate. He would be the last man on earth to stumble about, striking things. Like a cat on his feet—that was Priest. And he despised any man that spat.

For that matter, no normal man needed to stumble about while the sun was shining all night. I felt uneasy as I listened to that thudding outside the door. Something was prowling there without sense or explanation, like ghosts rapping on tables; something that didn't answer. Besides, I recalled somebody I had known who was always spitting. That somebody was now a cold corpse lying stiff and stark and done for. *He* wouldn't ever spit again—unless his ghost had the power to do it.

I got up, shivering like an ignorant sailor. *Bang!* a set of knuckles struck the bulkhead. Shuffling boots too heavy to lift! A choking cough! I stood at the door, afraid to open it, just because I couldn't explain a common noise. My memory was frightening me. Too much talk the night before! Others had the same memory. Suddenly I laughed. They were playing a joke on me, knowing what I knew. I laughed, and then I grew hot with anger. It was no way to treat the dead.

I flung out into the cabin and stood with my fists drawn up.

"Whoever's doing that—I'll teach you to be decent! Bear around here!" I bawled at the tall, bulky figure shambling toward the companion steps.

It was hazy with smoke from the stove, hazy and warm and close. A smell hung in the air, a dank smell

that instinctively made me bristle. Some smells belong in certain places, and this was a faint odor that wilted flowers give off—and moss that is ripped from tree-roots. Not much of a smell, but I think if a dog had been there, it would have laid back its ears and howled uncomfortably.

The figure had not turned around, but was still lurching toward the door. I started after it—and brought up, searching for the body. The skin of a seal I saw; it had nothing in it. Like the shed hide of a musk-ox it sprawled there. My teeth chattered when I saw that. And then the figure turned on me.

It was too big for Priest, and Priest was the biggest man aboard. The face glowed and gleamed; so did the hands that flapped as the creature walked.

"Rum—gi' me rum!" came from the leering mouth.

Closer—closer the figure staggered. It was but a yard from me. It was dark, dirty grease that streaked that face. It was seal-fat.

"Yardley! Yardley!" I knew him. I pushed him off. I snarled at him.

His knees gave way, and down he went, mumbling. When he did that, I got a bit of second wind, seeing him motionless as he should have been. In a daze I fetched a flask and stepped up and stuck it between his teeth. His fingers reached to clutch it, and they were as cold as icicles. He downed all he could and let the flask fall. For three minutes neither of us stirred. Then he began to jerk in every muscle, the way one does in a convulsion. That ended, he sighed.

"Feel better," he said. "Worst spell I ever had." He spoke as if his mouth were full of porridge. "Must have got frosted bad. Fingers and toes numb."

I sat down at the table, weak as water. "Yardley," I told him in a wobbly voice, "I swear to God you were dead! Frozen in a cake of ice!"

"Whisky heart," he answered. "Lays me out cold, days on end."

"Cold! Embalmed, I tell you! Must have been weeks in that ice——"

My head went round and round. He checked me. "What day is this?"

Vaguely I babbled something about October. He glared at me.

"Not October. August. Don't I know? It's August! Where am I?"

I jumped up and circled around him and spilled onto the deck. I let out a roar for Priest, for anybody. Half a dozen men came running. The scuttle opened on the rest of them. They crowded the door. I hauled them in with all my strength. They crowded back and stood jammed. They were worse scared than I was.

Ralph Yardley rose to meet them. He swept up the gingham table-cloth and wiped his face and hands and grinned and spat. His lips were blue; his eyes were deep-sunk. He saw Priest shouldering in. Priest at least was not afraid.

They faced each other. "Hello, Ned! Don't you know me?"

"Ay," replied Priest slowly, "I'd know you in hell. And that's where you've been. We should have left you there. You're a dead man, Ralph Yardley."

"Many's the time I've been dead," croaked the other. "But never so cold. Catalepsy is the name they give it. Walking with angels—beauties they were."

"How long?" asked Priest. "You never breathed through that ice."

"Two months," I said. "August he thinks it is."

"You can't do that," persisted Priest. "It's against nature. You're dead, I reckon. But you don't scare me, Yardley, miracle or not. Hold hard, boys!"

But they couldn't hold hard. Somebody got his breath and plunged for the deck. Like bleating sheep the rest plowed after him, tripping and

sprawling. The door rocked shut. The three of us were left alone.

"Look here," said Yardley, "I'm right enough. You mustn't go saying I'm dead. Suspended animation—that's happened before. It's happened with me twice."

"Listen," Priest objected. "The ice sealed you in—four inches thick over your face. You couldn't possibly breathe. *That* never happened before."

Yardley laughed. "They put bodies in air-tight coffins in vaults, and later on they find the clothes torn off 'em. I'm alive, Ned. Feel me!"

"I don't want to. Have it your own way. What were you doing here?"

"Found a fortune underground. Iron mine. I'll tell you about it. Discovered it by accident when I was climbing over the tundra. The earth fell in with me, and I slid through an opening into a cave. Say, where's my crew gone to?"

"You ought to know," said Priest. "You know everything."

I was staring so hard at Yardley that I had no chance to miss the look he gave the mate. He seemed to be staring through a film and watching Priest from a long way off. His expression was a sort of hard, implacable eurse. I almost looked for Priest to shrink and dry up where he stood. There was hate between them, but Yardley's hate curdled my blood. I figured that there was not enough fire in him to work him to rage, or else, having been over the edge of the Great Beyond, he knew how useless and silly was human anger. His old hate was nothing but a bad memory, and in a calculating graveyard fashion he would make Priest pay for it.

"Well," he said, "this cave was not deep to start with. I walked on and on. It got deeper and warmer. I saw a light reflected from above. That was when I reached the main chamber. The sun shone down off the ice through an open shaft. Another shaft

went below—an old volcano, maybe—heating the place. Must be holes like that all over the earth—breathing-holes. Down in the chamber you wouldn't know any ice was around. You'd say you were in the tropics. Once the Antarctic was a warm country, anyway—a few million years ago. Look at the seals. They used to be bears. The bones in their flippers prove that. And penguins—they were badgers, I'm told, that gradually took to the water when no more food was left on the land. Besides, I've seen fern-fossils in rocks, and petrified tree trunks. You don't have to go so far back. How about the mosquitoes here? Where do they grow so big and sting so bad? I figure it, the floor of that cave dropped in an earthquake and never got a touch of this cold. Just went on blooming."

"Are your men in the cave?" Priest snapped.

Again Yardley looked a hole in him. "They stayed aboard the *Rambler* and tried to break her out. When I came back from exploring, they were gone, and the boats were gone. It looked like they deserted. It was after I fell into the cavity that I came back to find the ship cracked open and nobody on her. I'm cold," he said suddenly. "Give me some whisky, will you?" He seized the bottle I passed him and drank it dry—all of a pint. I gasped. He hadn't turned a hair.

"What about this iron mine?" I found my voice. "What's your proposition?"

"Half and half for you fellows and me," he replied. "You'll be rich."

"There's a good many of us," I objected. "We'd be doing the work."

"Maybe, but I discovered it. We can pry it off in chunks. Dead easy."

Priest rumbled, "You don't get me down into that hole, Yardley. Likely now, the mouth of hell is in that hole, and you've sold your soul to the devil

for the poor boys you'd push into the crater—or whatever it is. You never were human, Yardley. I knew you in Borneo where you played with voodooism. I don't get your game, but it's a deep one. I'll gamble there's no iron at all."

YARDLEY got out of his chair and made a motion to fasten his hand on Priest's shoulder. At once the mate had him by the neck, shaking him. I thought he would strangle him, forgetting how weak Yardley must be. It astonished me to see Yardley close his awkward hand on Priest's hair and force Priest's head back. His other hand gripped Priest's throat. They stood a moment pitching off balance. But Yardley did not fall. Instead, Priest squirmed and coughed and went into a nervous flurry and fought loose and cowered down.

"Don't lay your hand on me!" he howled. "I'll shoot you if you do!"

Yardley laughed at the man's insane fear and without a glance at me stalked out of the cabin, hauling along the sealskin and throwing it about him.

I stared at Priest. "His hands are cold as ice," I said. "He can't hurt you with 'em. They've got no strength. What are you afraid of?"

"No strength? He burned me, man! He *burned* me—like a hot iron!"

I confess there were blue marks on Priest's throat where those clumsy fingers had pressed. But burn? How could fingers numb with cold be able to burn? Intense cold burns, I suppose. That must be what Priest meant."

But he wouldn't have it so. He felt it to his toes, he said. And before my eyes those blue spots grew red as fire. While I looked, blisters formed.

Priest put a wet towel to his hurt and rocked back and forth. He admitted that he should not have gone

at Yardley. He knew better. Ralph Yardley was not like any other man, he declared. He had fought him before. He had seen him knifed in Shanghai and left for dead. The man had too much vitality to die. Priest swore there were four bullets in his body, one of them in his head.

"But how can his fingers burn?" I demanded. "Are you crazy, Priest?"

"Electricity burns," was the answer. "He's full of electricity."

"Oh, rot!" I snorted. "You're dreaming, and I'm dreaming! His skin is rough, and he tore you; that's all. There was a hole in that cake of ice!"

"Vance, there wasn't any hole in that cake of ice. Yardley was dead. What's more, his heart is dead now. He'll live on and on, but he's got no feeling."

I stamped out onto the deck, savage because I couldn't understand. And up forward Yardley was talking to the crew. He was selling his iron mine to them, arguing how rich he could make them, offering to show them how easy it was to pick up a thousand dollars apiece by a few days with a pickax.

They were afraid of him, but he was overcoming the fear by plain talk, and he had got out a pipe and was filling it, as if to give further evidence that he was no ghost. He struck a match as he talked. It burned down to his fingers before he put it to the pipe. It burned *between* his fingers, and yet he didn't seem to notice it. Priest had maintained that this fellow had no feelings. So it appeared.

I was so shaken up by these things that I remained rooted there while a sort of mutiny was preached on my own deck. Because that's what it was. Yardley, laughing recklessly, as much as said that the officers hadn't the guts to tackle the fortune underground, and if the men didn't take it themselves without regard to orders from aft, they were sheep with no minds of their own.

With that, he climbed over the rail and down onto the ice and made off, waving his hand for them to follow. And sure enough they followed, the lot of them, slowly, like sleep-walkers. They stumped across the ice and up the shore-hill and out of sight. It was uncanny to see them go. Superstitious fellows, every one; frightened by a dead man come to life—but dragging after him just the same.

I went below and got out my revolver and set to cleaning it. What I wanted of it I don't know. Self-protection must have been in my mind. Priest sat watching me and drawing in his breath as he touched those blisters of his. I had nothing to say to him. The gun had got rusted from long disuse. It took me a good while to rub down the rust spots. Then I loaded it, put it into my pocket, drew on my coat and mittens and cap, and pounded off across the ice.

NOBODY was in sight at first. All I followed was footsteps in the sugar-ice, footsteps leading up over the hill and through two gullies. At the end of the second one I made out three or four figures bunched in front of an overhanging rock. In that moment one of them passed out of sight. In a couple of minutes another disappeared. Yardley's cave entrance was narrow, I concluded, and he could take only one man at a time. When I arrived, the coast was clear. A warm breath blew in my face, wafting out of the space underneath the basaltic rock.

A rope had been moored around a big boulder at one side of the crevice and led into the darkness. No guts aft, eh? I set both hands on it and, crouching, started in. I went slowly, pausing half a dozen times to listen and wonder. It was dark. I was on a slippery skidway that might end in nothing. By degrees it dropped off through a succession of landings until it reached a considerable depth. Then

it straightened out into a gallery with many turnings and twistings for two hundred feet or more. The walls were as smooth and cool as a dog's nose, but not cold. Indeed, the air grew mild as milk as I groped in twilight. The rope had stopped at the beginning of the gallery. I had nothing to follow after that.

The gallery stopped, also. It was a blind alley. I went back to the foot of the descent and tried another avenue, but I had no better luck. Three times the result was the same. Yet I could hear a confused echo of talking at no great distance. I sang out. A voice answered me. A second voice blended with it. I stumbled onto two men who like me had gone wrong and failed to find the main body of the crew. There was no use in chancing the black passages any further, I argued, when we had no light. It was better to go back to the entrance and wait for the others to come out. So we struggled back to the light by great good luck and went hand over hand up the rope into the sunlight.

We waited there till the cold got into our blood, but nobody appeared. The men grouched because they were losing a share in the iron.

I said, "I didn't smell any iron. But I smelled gas. I'll be satisfied to get those lads back safe and sound." And I headed for the ship.

I wanted Priest's advice, but he was in no shape to help. He was drunk. That was odd. Of all men, Priest was the least likely to get drunk, or even to take one drink. Yet he was sprawling over the table with a bottle at his elbow. He blinked foolishly. When I stormed at him, he began to shed tears.

"I'm sick," he muttered. "Strength's gone out o' me. Can't get warm. Did for me—thass what. Dragged it out o' me. Weak as a baby—thass what I am."

No more than that could I extract from him; it was all he knew and all he would talk about. Yardley's fin-

gers had drained him, he kept repeating. It sounded impossible but for my own feeling when Yardley's cold hand had touched mine. Now I was frightened in earnest and didn't stop to ask myself how he did it. I was frightened for the crew. Yardley possessed some hypnotic power.

I bolted out and fled over the ice and up the hill to the gulley. I scrambled into the cave, yelling, "Yardley! Yardley! Yardley!"

Feet came scuffing from far off. I crouched in the dark and held my gun in my hand. Grunting and spitting, a figure loomed out of one of the galleries and started past me up the rope. I let him go part way, thinking to follow him into the sunshine, for it was hard to see clearly in this rat-hole. But he stopped before he reached the top, as if he realized that I was behind him.

Then something peculiar happened. It was twilight in that entrance till he came. Now the light rushed in, stronger and stronger, and surrounded him in bright rays of yellow and red. They flowed over him, danced on his head and shoulders, and flowed out. Not sunlight, any of it, but a sort of curtain of colored fire. Many a time I've seen that curtain dancing across the night sky on the Norway coast. It was the aurora borealis looking like lightning when it struck Yardley.

I forgot everything in watching it. It was so much like lightning that I wondered why it didn't strike the man down. As I thought about it, I knew it was made of the same stuff as lightning—a stream of electricity rushing through the atmosphere from the sun to the earth's poles.

And Yardley attracted it. He was magnetic. More than that, it had an effect on him. He stood up straight and threw back his shoulders and drank it in greedily. He thumped his chest, swung his arms. Sparks went from him to the walls. He was a storage battery receiving a new

charge. Here was the explanation of the burns on Priest's neck. Yardley had the enormous vitality and conducting power of a bar of metal. It must have kept him alive in the cake of ice when other men would have been congealed in five minutes.

From being frightened for the crew, I became filled with fear for myself. He had turned and was coming down. The rays grew dimmer as he put the outer world behind him. They flickered toward him but no longer reached him.

"Who's there?" he demanded. "Who called me? Speak up!"

I shrank back. "I took the wrong turn," I said. "Lead the way in."

"Oh, ho! It's the captain. Give me your hand. I'll lead you."

An electric flashlight played on my face. I stared into it.

"No," I said. "You won't touch me. You see this gun? Put down the light and start in where my men are. I'll pick it up and follow."

"You don't need to be afraid," he answered. "I won't hurt *you*." And he put down the light and walked away.

I RAN and picked it up and played it on him. He nodded and strode off into the gloom, which after a bit thinned as if light was coming from farther in. The gallery widened, emptying into a broad chamber almost as light as high noon. It was warmer here than in the passages. In the rock-ledges grew tufts of tall, pale grass and little stunted trees with half-grown, colorless leaves. I heard a tinkling spring and saw a pool of water at one side.

I saw more than this. On the edge of the pool my men were sitting and lying in attitudes of comfort. The sight relieved me, and I sang out to them.

Hardly a head turned. Not one raised his voice. I bawled at them again and went to one and clapped him on the back. I got no response.

Heaving him around, I looked into his face. It was the face of a sick man, pallid, lost to all interest, without much sense in it. I sprang to another and gripped him by the arm. His teeth were chattering.

Angrily I faced Yardley and accused him. He shook his head.

"You've been listening to Priest," he protested. "Ned Priest never liked me. But ask these Jacks if I hurt them. Why should I? Who'll take out the iron if they don't? What's wrong with them; tell me that."

"The same thing that's wrong with Priest," I barked. "The very touch of you curdles the blood. You put your hands on 'em. That was enough."

"Yes, I put my hands on them, easing them down the rope. What of it?"

"What of it? You've killed before. I know stories of you."

"Maybe I have. I get mad quick. And don't you bait me, if you're wise. But these boys—I never struck one, nor wanted to. I helped each one down the rope, and something came over them, and they slumped down like you see them. Look here—what I've done in the past is over. There's a fortune here, but two men can't dig it, and two men can't sail a ship through icebergs. That's pure iron!"

He pointed to a red streak inlaid in the rock, a mammoth vein, and I thought now that I could smell it. But I was not concerned with iron. The fate of a ship's company appeared to be settled. Life was playing a horrible joke: burning men in the frozen Antarctic. It could not be doubted, for I examined the skin of these apathetic faces, while weakened arms tried to push me away, and every face had tiny blue spots—or if not the face, then the arms and the hands.

I was afraid to give them first aid. Artificial respiration might overtax the heart and rupture it. In a rage I confronted Yardley, who had

dropped down on a boulder and was staring at his hands doubtfully.

"I'm going to the ship for brandy, and you'll come, too," I told him.

"Brandy—ay, let's have brandy," he growled.

"Not you. I'm taking you so you can't do any more harm here. Get up!"

"Go careful! I get mad quick," he warned me. "I'll have brandy, too."

"Will you? I'd be wasting it," I flung out harshly. "You're dead."

He gave me that blank look he had given Priest. Suddenly I thought I understood what that look meant. He seemed to be wondering if I was right. It came to me with a funny feeling that Priest might have been nearer to the truth than he knew when he said that Yardley was dead. Wasn't he as cold as ice? Wasn't his every movement automatic and expressionless? No man could live two months in an ice-cake. But dead men had been restored to life—at least for a time—by modern science. One way was to massage the heart, to stimulate it.

"It's a lie," he stated, his fishy eyes on mine. "I'm as much alive as you are. You couldn't do what I did to those fellows there. See these muscles."

"Neither could you do it by yourself," I snapped him up. "Enough electricity has flowed into you to kill you—if you weren't already dead. Maybe it killed you. Maybe you froze to death. While you were lying there, the electric current switched from the North Pole to the South Pole, and you were in the path of it. In a moment it may switch back, Yardley. This is only temporary."

It was a bold stroke to scare him into submission. But it worked in the opposite way. His pale face became green. He choked and spat and flung out his arms and came at me. He was still capable of violent anger.

"What do you know of physics?" he bellowed. And I knew I had

touched him on a raw spot. He was admitting that *he* knew physics.

I threw up the revolver and checked him. "You knew what you were doing when you touched those men!" I dared him. "You never wanted iron, you crook! It was *silver* you wanted, silver you could mine yourself! I see it behind you—that dark strip—or I'm blind! Only one pick could work at a time. Share it? Not you!"

A cunning, desperate distortion of his features answered for him.

"Put down the gun! I wasn't sure it was silver, but you know—you're sure, are you? It's all a lie about the men there, but it can't be helped now——"

I broke in: "Why, rot you, they're not dead yet!" I glanced up into the shaft that had grown dark all in a minute. "Walk, Yardley! A storm's coming, and I'll shoot you like a snake to save these lads!"

At that his filmy eyes woke up with real passion. They flamed hot. His lips worked. His nerves jerked. He coughed and spat.

"Easy there!" he said in his throat. "I'm riled bad. Stop, I tell you!"

But he was talking to himself more than to me. He was fighting down his fury before it should make his heart pump too fast. Ay, he had to go softly to save that swollen heart of his from giving way. He got control of himself.

"I'll go with you," he agreed. "Why not? You can't find this place again. Say good-bye to your men when you walk out. Just you and I left."

A lucky thought! I hunted around, and my eyes fell on the tufts of yellow grass. I jumped to pluck handfuls of it, an armload. I motioned him ahead. Once in the passageway, I began dropping bits of grass as I went, to make a trail so that I might not be lost when I returned. At last we stood below the entrance.

The light was poor above us. As Yardley climbed, no colored curtain of polar rays drove in to surround him. Something had happened to the atmosphere, to the aurora borealis. But all I could see when we arrived outside was that the wind was blowing strong and thick clouds blotted the sun.

WE CAME out of the gulley onto the bare, rocky slopes. And without warning, snow drove at us like a fog full of stinging needles. It came so quickly that in one gasp I was blinded.

Close on Yardley's heels I pressed as he stumped over the ridge into the next hollow for shelter. But the wind roared the length of the hollow and dazzled me with its white shrapnel. In two minutes I could see nothing but Yardley's great body lurching in front, his head bent forward. He made little headway and presently slued around to yell something and point back from where we had come. At once he charged the ridge. I rushed after him, determined to halt this retreat and keep on to the ship, which would be in danger now.

But the broken rock tripped me. Down I went on hands and knees and tried to pull myself up the rise. My eyes were half shut when a stone, dislodged by Yardley's boots, skipped straight for me and clipped me on the side of the head. I was dazed for an instant and grabbing right and left for support. The one thought was to catch up with him, and I managed to do it, although my brain was whirling. I reeled into him before I saw him, and he leaped about, his face close against mine.

"Warp about!" I bawled. I lifted my right hand—then realized in a cold sweat that the gun was not in it. The gun was gone; I had dropped it!

Yardley was not slow to grasp the situation. His teeth showed. His great paw swept toward me. I flung

to one side, aided by a furious gust that pitched us apart and took the breath out of my lungs. I slid off the ridge backward and fumbled among the stones while I descended, searching with my fingers for the lost revolver. My eyes were no good at all. They were filled with fine dust sifting with the snow.

Almost on top of me he came. Frantically, hopelessly I scuttled to avoid him, so anxious to find the gun that he had me before I could gather myself and run. Madly I lashed out, filled with panic at the idea of his touching me. But he was at my back, gripping my coat and trousers and partly lifting me.

"It's the cave, fool!" he gasped above the screaming blizzard. "My-game! Up! Up!" He pushed me toward the rocks again.

I left off struggling. He was not touching me; it was the slack of my clothes he held. He held on firmly, too firmly for me to reach and unbutton the coat and slip out of it. But not a finger on my flesh! He was saving me from his poison touch. If I behaved, I might escape the evil that had overtaken the others.

We mounted the ridge without falling. There the blizzard tore us this way and that as if we were empty garments on a wash-line. It blew me over, and him with me. When I could stagger up, his face was close to mine, and I saw a great gash in his face where a stone with a razor edge had cut deep into the flesh. He must have seen me staring at it, for he put his fingers to it.

"Why don't you bleed?" I blurted, wondering at the lack of gore.

He drew in his breath and let it out in a furious noise. Yet he nodded as he yanked me after him by the clothes, dragged me into the gulley again with unerring instinct, although I was completely lost, and found the cave when any other man would have missed it a mile. He ran, crawled,

stumbled, fled to it, sniffing a scent that I could not smell. I know now that it was blood he smelled. *Blood* his bloodless veins called for. He gabbled while he tore on. At the bottom of the slide we fell apart, but his wild gabbling kept me plunging after him in the black passage without the need of the grass tufts to guide me by.

We were quickly spewed out of the dark into the light central chamber where the men still hunched about the pool. He made straight for them, charging like a bull. I had no idea what he was up to, but I reasoned that he meant them harm, and that is why I yelled with all my might and hurled myself at his legs.

He went down. The faces of the men lifted and turned to us. Pale? They were more than pale; they were white as alabaster. They were faces drained of life. Lying there, grappling Yardley's legs and roaring for help, I saw more than the pallor of those faces; I saw a cheek, a neck, an arm ripped as by a jagged weapon and oozing dried, caked, blackish stains. I raised my head and stared harder. Each man wounded by the same identical means! And I *knew!* There could be no mistake about what had ripped that flesh. Those were the double marks of teeth—teeth that had fastened on, a mouth that had sucked the pulsing stuff of life.

Wild though this thought was, the evidence convinced me. Yardley's frozen blood was water except for the blood he could draw from others. And he had drawn it. He had rushed back for more when he found how little he had left.

All this raced through my mind in a few dreadful seconds. Then the feet I was clutching began to double up and Yardley's upper body to double down. In a moment he would have me and put those killing hands on me. There was probably enough electric current in them even now to sap my strength and make me like

these others. It would be my blood first. He was too strong for me.

But these forms of men that had been poor flies in his spider-web had started to move. Dopy and anemic though they were, they had heard an officer roar, and they were briny sailormen to the core. They appeared to be in a dream, not knowing rightly what it was all about, and some could not stand but crawled. The best of them tottered. Like the corpses in the *Ancient Mariner* they came at the pace of a crab, while I hauled at those legs to keep out of reach of those hands. And when that devil Yardley *did* grasp at me, it was my hair he seized and not my skin—as if he would save me if he could. He pulled. I bore the blinding pain as long as possible before I gave up trying to break his foot with a toe-hold.

His hand clamped on my back. His voice snarled at my ear:

"Don't get me mad, you bilge-rat! I'm saving you! The silver for us two that can work the ship! Avast now! Leave 'em to me! Blood—warm blood!"

I cursed him and pitched about, driving my knee for his groin, making him keep his attention on me. For those wobbling, flabby fellows were dragging nearer and nearer. Three yards—two yards—he let out a terrible noise. He had seen them. Letting go all caution, he went for me. His left hand swept over my face toward my throat. I yelled again—and then they were on him—a slow-moving wave.

NOT a hand among them could have squeezed juice out of a tomato. Not a ray of hope lived in their gaunt faces. But somewhere inside of them was the call of vengeance. They flopped across him and pinned him down, and others flopped across them, and still others clawed up onto the human heap to sag like rag dolls. Nothing but dead weight to fight with,

yet I thought for a while they would surely smother him. The touch of him they never shrank from. They were throwing themselves away—all that was left of them; squaring accounts with me for having deserted the ship.

But they played into his hands. At the bottom of the press he was surely taking toll. I knew and shuddered at the picture of that beast in his inhuman appetite. I was right. The pile began to sway. Man after man fell off, powerless to cling. Not that they weren't an enormous load to cast off. It took a giant's strength to do what Yardley did and to get out from under. He made it at last and got up, trembling from the exertion. He looked as haggard as they did.

I crouched to spring. I had my fists. If I could knock him out, the job was done. He was looking toward me, too. Was he? Past me, rather. I chanced a glance behind me. Ned Priest stood at the edge of light—Ned Priest, drunk—drunk!

No doubt of it: he swayed and barely kept his feet; his eyes were red, and the lids drooped. He had a candle. The fellow I had found lost in a blind passage was at his elbow. He and the grass tufts had guided Priest to us. But he was drunk. Priest was drunk.

Just the same, the whisky served a purpose. Past me he stumped and reeled, ignoring me. I saw a knife in his other hand, the cook's carving-knife. He had murder in his heart along with the false courage of the burning liquor.

"You Ralph Yardley!" he trumpeted. "Dog me, you scum, you'll answer for plenty! Back to the grave, you moldy ghost! You and your Borneo witchcraft!"

And Yardley stepped back. Out of the welter of limp men he retreated slowly. Priest lunged after him. I gripped his arm and demanded the

knife and cursed him for a sot that could not strike straight. But he shook me off.

Into the pale shadows surrounding the far margin of the pool Yardley backed, into the darkness of another antechamber leading God knew where. Suddenly he was out of sight. Tripping over his own feet, Priest was after him and into the rift which, when I reached it, I saw was not too dark to make out shapes.

And if the chamber behind us was decently warm, the passage ahead was all but hot. The air coming out of it felt like a dank human breath.

"Stop!" I cried out to Priest. "The place is foul! It's a trap! Stop here! He's got to come out!" But I might have been talking to a wooden post.

The fool! But I had to stay with him. He was the only hope I had of making out to sea again. We kept on, wading through twilight to what?

We were wading through more than that. The footing grew slimy and soft, and I thought things crushed when I took a step—things that wriggled. A dull light shone at some distance, with Yardley bulking against it. Priest in his fury of impatience broke into a run. Before the passage ended, he almost ran right into Yardley, who had purpose in his moment of waiting there. For when in the nick of time he stepped aside and avoided the thrust of the knife, Priest was rushing off balance down a fairly steep grade into a vast marsh and could not stop himself.

I braced myself between the passage walls and blocked the hole so that Yardley—who reasoned that Priest was alone—banged into me as he charged back from the hideous place into which he had led us. I made an instinctive thrust outward and sent him back. He slipped on the mossy edge and skittered down after Priest.

Ay, it was moss that grew here. And beyond the moss was a steaming

swamp out of which rose a veritable jungle of spotted, leprous mangrove trees and scaling palms whose bleached leaves never rustled and were yellow—yellow.

In that swamp, fuming with humidity, other trees had fallen to rot away, as other things were rotting away—the lost crew, I told myself, of the *Rambler*. Its stench was horrible. Not all vegetable matter—no; and all the flesh in it was not dead. Some of the logs moved. Black snake-eyes lifted on a long neck. The subterranean lake was alive with reptiles.

I had forgotten the blizzard of short minutes before. This was the stinking hinterland along the tropical Congo or deep in the tuggy equatorial recesses of the fever-hot Amazon country. The sweat ran down into my eyes. My clothes stuck to me. Strength seeped out of me. It was the most amazing thing in the world when from a hundred feet overhead a cold flurry that was snow drifted down onto my head. I looked up and saw a great opening whence the light came, reflected from huge blocks of ice. The earth's extremes of climate prevailed here *one hundred feet apart*. I breathed deep of the gusts of bracing air.

Then out of the mists below came the baying voice of Priest. It was the desperate voice of fear. He was bellowing hollowly and slashing with the knife. Something had got hold of him. I inched down the slippery slope, calling encouragement. It was not Yardley he slashed at. There was Yardley—behind him—unseen—wading silently knee-deep toward Priest's hunched back and lifting his deadly hands. They reached and touched Priest. They clamped upon his bare throat. I shouted—but the mischief had been done. Those fearful fingers were biting home!

Nevertheless, the mate did not stiffen and drop. Instead he came around like a figure on a pivot. He

whirled on the impulse of his nerves and let drive. The knife took Yardley on the ribs, bit deep—and broke off. A mortal wound in the lung! But Yardley was not mortal. I knew it when he paid no attention to the thrust and swarmed over Priest, wrapping him in his arms. Priest's broken blade cut at him and ripped his clothing and his hide, so that I knew he was not done for yet. All the same, there was strength enough in Yardley to put the mate under if he could not be killed. Besides, Priest had slipped and was down on one knee.

It was the saving of him. A frightful black head had risen out of the dark water on a neck as long as a giraffe's. It towered above the men, its beady little eyes ablaze. Then it whipped down with narrow jaws agape. Its yellow fangs were buried in Yardley's shoulder. A jerk—and Yardley was lifted into the air, screaming. He released Priest and flapped his arms and snatched at nothing. A while he hung there, giving Priest his moment to splash crazily shoreward and claw up the mossy bank. I pulled the mate to safety and stared at the awful picture below. While I held my breath, those venomous jaws bit through and dropped the body of Yardley into the mire. A chunk as big as my two fists was torn from him. He threshed there—in a death flurry, I felt certain.

No! He was up and beating toward the bank, his pasty face wild with fear, the strange life in him carrying him on. Slipping, clutching, up he came, unquestionably mad with terror. And he made it, made the rock wall and the rift through which he had come into this hellish place. He was gone.

At his heels went Priest. I followed, listening for a spent body to drop. Yardley was running. He led us out into the chamber where the

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The Death Touch

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crew was—and past them unmolested. Now he was in the passage beyond. We rushed after him and were at the bottom of the cave entrance when he plunged into the white, frozen Antarctic. Gaining the top, we saw him wading through the snow.

“He’ll make for the ship! Cut him off!” cried Priest.

I could not answer. The sudden cold, after the dank tropical heat, froze my throat. I plowed on, watching that lumbering mass ahead of us. I could not have moved faster, nor could Priest.

But something was coming over Yardley. The swing was going out of his body and giving way to a stiffness. Bowed against the wind, he became all of one piece, as rigid as stone. His legs moved with no roll to them but only a mechanical jerkiness, and they were lagging presently. We were able to gain on him.

Where the hills sank to the bay on our left, he did not turn. We could see the ship now, but he did not see it or turn his head to find it. He kept on past it. I crept up closer, until that great hole in his shoulder was plainly visible, white as leprosy.

At the last I yelled at him, and Priest flung his broken knife and hit him in the back. There was no response. He kept on at that mechanical gait, on—on—on. . . . I laughed and stopped Priest.

“Can’t you see? He’s frozen!” I said. “He doesn’t know what he’s doing. He’ll go on and on until——”

Priest’s bloodshot eyes met mine. “Until what?” he demanded.

I had no answer. Until he was dead? Let electrical science explain how he was alive at all. But electrical science would never know.

“There’s maybe half a crew to save,” I said, and turned around.

But we were held there in spite of

ourselves, our eyes on that single moving thing in all the vast motionlessness. It dwindled to the size of a penguin and then to a mere speck. Beyond it was nothing but polar silence.