

THE END OF THE REEF

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HE old keeper of the Fowey Rocks lighthouse came out upon the gallery to take the morning air. The sun was shining and the warm wind from the Gulf Stream blew lazily through the doorway into the lantern-room. The blue sea sparkled in the sunshine, and the long, easy roll of the swell told of calm weather offshore. It was a perfect day, a day of peace and quiet, upon the end of the great Florida Reef, which stretched away for miles to the southward. Eastward nothing rose above the blue rim which compassed all. To the northward the low line of hummocks showed where Virginia Key and Key Biscayne rose above the water some ten miles distant. To the westward the little lump of Soldier Key showed where there might be a solitary human within a dozen miles. And all about the blue sea sparkled in the bright light, taking on the varicolored hues found above the coral banks. Near the lighthouse, in three feet of water, the coral showed distinctly even from the height of the tower. Old man Enau gazed down at it, watching the bright green tinge melt to deeper color until, in three fathoms, the pure limpid blue of the great stream flowed past uncolored and undefiled. Fish were swimming around the iron piles of the lighthouse; great big bonito, sinuous barracuda, and now and then a shark would drift up to the iron pillars and bask a moment in the shade of the tall structure which rose above the coral bank to the height of a hundred feet and more, standing like a huge long-legged spider upon its iron feet in the shallow water.

The quiet of the morning was oppressive to the keeper. Not a sound rose from the

reef save the low roll of the sea as it broke upon the edge of the bank, not the cry of a single sea-bird to break the great stillness and beautiful quiet of the day. The old man had been in the light for three years. He was the head keeper, and his assistant had taken the small boat and gone to the distant village of Miami for the mail, which was due with the quarterly salaries. The assistant would be gone for several days, and the old man would be alone until he came back. Perhaps the younger man would take his vacation of three weeks to spend his money, for he was not supposed to remain forever upon the tower like a prisoner. Old Enau had not set foot upon the shore for nearly two years. To him the world was that eternal sea bounded by the blue rim and spotted in one or two places by the distant Keys. Whatever he had seen of human life he left behind him when he took the position as keeper. He had tried to forget. And now, as the years passed, his memories were fading. The human struggle was over. The thought of what he had seen and done was dimmed in the glare of the tropic sunshine, and the shadow of his past had faded to nothing.

He had a fine old face. Rugged and burned from the weather on the reef, his features still bore traces of culture. His nose was straight and small, and his eyes were bright and blue, the deep blue of the surrounding sea, which had kept him apart from his fellow-men so long.

He leaned out over the rail and looked down. The heat and stillness oppressed him, and as he gazed below at the white and green formations he seemed to see again the inside of a court-room. The quiet and heat were there, and the stillness was strained and intense, as he waited for

the word which meant his ruin. The faces of the jury who were trying a murder case were before him, the man on the right looking hard at him, and the foreman bowing his head gravely in that moment of utter silence before he spoke the words which meant his end. It had been a peculiar case, a case of great brutality and cruelty, apparently, from the evidence produced. He, the master of a large square-rigged ship, had been accused of a horrible crime, and the evidence of two witnesses was there to prove it. He remembered the man whose evidence was the strongest against him, a sailor whom he had befriended, and he could see the look of pious resignation upon the fellow's face. He also remembered the furtive gleam that came now and again from the corner of his eye as he sat near the witness-box and waited his turn to tell of the horror.

Why was it? Was it the heat that brought back those scenes which were fading, or was it the ominous silence of the torrid sunshine upon the reef? The lines in the face of the old man grew rigid and drawn, and he gazed stolidly into the blue water until the coral banks took on new shapes. He saw a ship's deck with the long plank strakes stretching hundreds of feet fore and aft; the low white deck-house, with the galley smoke-pipe stretching across it and the boats upon the strong-backs or booms atop of it; the solid combings of the hatchways, with the battened hatches as strong as the sides of the vessel itself; the high topgallant-rail which shut off the view to windward, and the rows of belaying-pins stuck beneath with the neatly coiled braces upon them; the high head of the topgallant-forecastle and the long jibboom pointing out over the sea; and, above all, the long, tapering spars lifting upward into the blue above, with the white canvas bellying in the breath of the trade-wind. It was all plain before him again. Then it changed—the pampero off the River Plate, the great hurricane sea which swept the ship and smashed her up, leaving her a wreck, leaking and settling, six hundred miles from shore. The fracas was there before him—the men struggling, trying to save her, until, tired out with exertion and suffering, the man with the furtive eyes had refused to do duty and managed to get the rest to back him.

Then the days following, full of des-

perate endeavor: the fellow who refused duty shirking and endangering the lives of all; the measures he took, hanging the man by the hands and flogging him until he fell in a faint; how he staggered to his feet and looked at the master—one long look full of a purpose implacable, unrelenting, and then the quiet manner he had when he obeyed. He had picked the fellow up starving upon the streets, an outcast from some country and of a social sphere above his own, taking him aboard his ship and providing food and clothing with a fair wage—and this had been the outcome.

They had left her in the one remaining boat two days after, crowding the craft almost to the gunwales; but the sea was now smooth and the wind gone, leaving a quiet strangely like that of the beautiful day about him. The row westward over that oily, heaving ocean, day after day, day after day!

One by one they had dropped off, overboard, to float astern, and all the time the *rip, rip, rip* of a triangular fin above a great shadow below the surface.

He had done what he could, taking no more of the meager food than the rest. Then the last days—four of them left, the men who witnessed against him and another, a stout fellow who had kept up better than the rest. How he had discovered that the fellow had stolen the scant store of food steadily and divided it with the man he had flogged. How, when they had taken all, they had set upon him, and he had killed the stout thief and wounded the other. There was nothing left to eat,—absolutely nothing for five days,—and they had—ugh!—it was too horrible; and upon the seventh day they had been picked up with the evidences of the horror too plain for their rescuers to make a mistake in the matter, even without the two men, who openly accused him of the whole wrong—accused him of not only killing his men, but—ugh!

The trial had lasted a week and the evidence was most horrible. The jury had convicted him upon that of the fellow who sat there with a pious look and furtive glance; the other fellow had merely corroborated his story, and, as it was two against him, his own tale was not believed. He had received a life sentence for the crime, for he had admitted killing

the stout man who had stolen the last of the food. He explained that it was his duty as captain to protect his life from their combined assault. The jury had not believed him, for the man who was against him was ready to show the falsity of his tale; he had been sentenced for life. He had served seven years and had escaped by cutting the bars of his cell and gaining a vessel which was wrecked on the coast of Africa, letting him get ashore unmolested. After drifting about for a time he had come back to America and taken the position as keeper in the tower, where his past was not open to inspection, for no one knew him or whence he came.

The sunshine was as quiet as before, but the blue Gulf Stream showed a darkening far away on the horizon, where a breeze ruffled the surface. He turned and gazed over the sea toward Florida, and a tiny black speck showed upon the waters of the reef. It looked like a small boat coming out through the Hawk's Channel, and he looked at it steadily for a long time, trying to see if it might be Johnson, the assistant keeper, returning.

The sunshine was very hot on this side of the tower, and it dazzled him for a little while as he gazed over the sparkling sea. The speck drew nearer, and he saw that it was a boat. It came very slowly, sailing with the light air, the bit of white canvas looking no larger than a handkerchief in the distance. Soon the figure of a man could be seen lying easily in the stern-sheets of the craft, and the old keeper saw that the man's legs were bare and brown. Then the tiny shallop took more definite form and showed to be a canoe, its occupant an Indian from the Everglades, coming out to fish upon the reef.

Indians seldom came so far away from land, and as the craft drew nearer and nearer Enau watched it carefully. The Seminoles were friendly. They were an unconquered tribe of Indians who had managed to evade all efforts made by the United States to subdue them. They had retired into the fastnesses of the great swamps, where no white soldier could pursue with any hope to capture, and after years of peace had come to the coast again with the understanding that they should not be molested. The old man had heard of them from Johnson, the assistant, and he had once or twice seen canoes skirting

the edge of the great bay in the distance, but he had never seen an Indian close enough to recognize him. The canoe had now come within half a mile of the tower, and was still heading straight for it.

The breeze died away again and the sun shone straight down with an intense heat. The tower cast no shadow either to east or west, and the ship's clock in the kitchen struck off eight bells. Enau mopped his streaming forehead and was about to turn into the galley to get a drink of water. The heat made him reel with dizziness, but the man in the boat made a movement, and he held his gaze fixed upon him. The canoe was coming close to the tower, and it was evident that the Indian would land there if the keeper allowed him. There was no way of getting up to the light except by way of the long iron ladder which reached from the gallery to the sea, a hundred feet below. It was an easy path to dispute with any number of men, especially as they must come through the heavy trap-door in the gallery at the top. There was no way of getting up over the outside, unless one could climb the long, smooth iron rods for a great distance and then reach out under the sill to get a hand-grip upon the edge of the floor and swing out over the gulf below. It would be a mere finger-grip at most, and a tap upon the bare knuckles would send the fellow to his death below. A good sailor might climb the smooth iron rods with great difficulty, but no one could climb up a hundred feet and swing out on that finger-tip hold with the hope of climbing to the rail above. The trap-door worked with a five-hundred-pound weight, and if any one tried to come up the thin iron ladder the keeper could simply lower the door and the stout three-inch planks would drop easily into place at will. Enau studied it all out while he gazed below, and it amused him to think what a surprised Indian it would be when he climbed up there to find the door drop fast in his face. No; the keeper was as much his own master in regard to human visitors as though he were a resident of some other planet. A thousand men could not approach him if he did not wish it. He could be all alone for an indefinite time, for he had provisions for half a year and water enough for a lifetime.

While he gazed at the approaching boat the man in her looked up. It was but a

glance, a mere look at the head upon the rail above. Enau gasped. That one glance upward was enough for him. The fellow was not an Indian, after all. The sun-tanned face, burned to a dark mahogany color, belonged to one he had not forgotten. That glance, furtive, half shrinking, animal-like, without the movement of a single feature, belonged to—yes, there was no mistake. It was Robledo, the sailor who had witnessed against him, the survivor of the horror, the man who had compassed his ruin.

Enau drew his breath quickly and stood up straight. The place seemed to swing about in the sunshine, the tower to rock like a ship in a seaway. Then he peered over again just as the craft came alongside one of the iron pillars. He did not show his face,—just his eyes,—for fear the fellow might recognize him and not come up the ladder. He would have the trap-door ready for him, for it would never do to let that human devil know he was upon the light. Yes; perhaps he would let him come up, inside the gallery, but never go back. The sea would tell no tales. There would be no marks of a struggle, no evidence of a fight—a quick crack upon the head, and over the side, down a hundred feet to the waters of the reef, where the sharks lay waiting. That would be all. He could do it easily. But, then, the fellow might be missed, after all. Some one might know he had gone out to the light, and then there would be the investigation. That was what he did not want. There must be no inquiries, no questions asked him about his past. He was an old man now, and the memory of his terrible wrongs was fading. Let them die out. He would let the enemy go as he came. The fellow could not know he was in the tower, and there was no possibility of his recognizing him, as he had not shown his whole face over the rail. Even if he had, the hair and the beard of three years' growth would hide anything of Captain William Jacobs that still existed in him. No; he would let no one come up that ladder. He would live the rest of his life in peace and quiet. He loved the bright sunshine and the beautiful sea, and he could be satisfied where he was. His wife and daughter he had long given up. They had bade him farewell at the end of that trial, holding away from him, yet with tears streaming down

their faces in the agony and horror of it all. He must be alone. There must be no one to tell him about them.

He looked down again, and saw the man below drawing on his trousers preparatory to climbing the ladder. Enau could see into the bottom of the boat beneath, and he noticed a harpoon used for spearing crawfish. Would the fellow take it with him? If so, it would be well not to let him come too near, for it could be thrown and might be dangerous. The man gave no hail, but turned his smooth-shaved face upward and began to mount the ladder. Enau went to the trap-door and loosed the weight softly. It creaked upon its hinges and settled slowly down until only a crack remained. Here he stopped it, with the bolts in readiness to shoot if necessary. He would watch the fellow and see if he showed signs of recognition. Ten years was a long time; the end of the Florida Reef was many thousand miles from where he had last seen him.

The man climbed slowly up the iron ladder, stopping now and then to look seaward. The current had swept his canoe to the northward of the lighthouse, where it trailed at the end of a long line. There was now nothing under him but the blue water. When he reached the first platform he climbed on to it and rested. It was very hot, and the climb made his mahogany-colored face darker than before. His hair was freshly parted, and looked as though it had been oiled or moistened. His coat he had left in his boat below, and his shirt was open at the neck, showing the strong, corded muscles of his throat and chest. His hands were brown and powerful, and the keeper noticed how his fingers closed with a light but certain grip upon the irons of the ladder.

In a moment he came on again, and when within a few feet of the door he looked upward and hailed. At that instant the old man closed the door and shot the bolts. He was now cut off as completely as though he had gone to the moon. The heat and excitement made his head whirl. He staggered away from the closed door and went back to the gallery. The sunshine danced upon the sea and all was quiet. Then he peered over the rail. A string of muttered curses floated up to him and a drunken voice called him many foul names, but he only

smiled and stood gazing out to sea. He could not see the man below now, for the fellow was too high up under the platform, and he made his way to the kitchen and from there higher up into the lantern, where the man's voice could not be heard distinctly.

Hours passed, and the sunshine began to slant sharply. The tower cast a long shadow to the eastward, but the canoe was still swinging to her painter, and the voice of the fellow below was still heard calling forth curses upon him. The keeper was evidently not recognized, for he heard the name "Enau" repeated over and over again, and this was his name as light-keeper—Robert Enau, head keeper of the Fowey Rocks lighthouse. If the fellow had recognized him he would have called him Jacobs, and then he would have tried to kill him. It grew dark, but he forgot to light his lantern, his whole mind taken with the one thought of how to get rid of his visitor. If the lantern was not lighted, the fellow might think that there was no one in the tower, after all, and would go away. The idea flashed through his brain for an instant, and then he centered his thoughts again on the fellow below and forgot the darkness and quiet of the tropic night. Suddenly he thought of the fellow's boat. If he could endanger it, the man might leave. He seized a heavy piece of iron and dropped it at the dark shadow floating at the end of the line. A dull crash told of the accuracy of his aim. Then the shadow faded out, and he knew the boat had sunk. There was no sound from the man upon the ladder below. Evidently he had gone down to the first landing and gone to sleep or was waiting, not knowing the damage done his craft. He could now neither go away nor come up, and the idea worried the keeper greatly. He was very dizzy with the heat and excitement, and his thoughts went again and again over the scenes of that last voyage and the trial following. In the gray of the early morning he was still sitting in the lantern, gazing out to sea, waiting for the sun to rise and show him his enemy below. The day dawned beautiful and clear, and the quiet heat continued. In a little while a noise upon the ladder attracted the old man's attention. He listened. What was the fellow saying?

"For God's sake let me up!"

Not he. No! Had the fellow shown him any mercy when he was at the end of his liberty? Why should he show him any now? All he wanted was for him to go away and let him be. He did not want to see the man. Go away!

The pitiless sunshine streamed through the iron piling and upon the man. His boat was gone. It had sunk during the night from the weight Enau had thrown into it, and the current had torn it loose. There was no way for the man to get off the light without swimming. He must stay or die. He might cling for a long time to the iron ladder and rest upon the landing, but he could not swim ten miles in that current with sharks abounding.

The day passed slowly, and the man upon the ladder raved and swore, begged and cajoled, but Enau was silent and implacable. He went back into the lantern, taking some bread with him. He was not hungry, but the heat made his head swim, and he must eat something. The day drew to a close and silence reigned below. The man had given up talking. Enau lay prone upon his stomach and peeped over the edge of the platform. He could see the man crouching upon the landing, lashed fast, to keep from falling, by a line made of his clothes. Darkness came and the heat abated a little, but no wind ruffled the surface of the Gulf Stream.

With a heavy bar in his hand the keeper sat and waited for any signs of fingers showing upon the edge of the platform. He would not let the fellow up—no, not for anything. If he died there, it was not his fault. He did not want him to come out to the light. He would not have him know that he, Captain Jacobs, was keeper.

The lantern remained unlighted. Now Enau was afraid to leave the platform an instant, for fear the fellow, desperate from his position, would climb over and kill him. He sat there during the hours of darkness and waited.

About three in the morning Enau saw two eyes staring at him. They were far away in the Hawk's Channel, but as the moments flew by they drew nearer. Soon a great shadow loomed up through the night, coming straight for the lighthouse. Then there was a sudden crash close aboard, the rattle and banging of ship's gear, followed by hoarse cries and curses. Enau went inside to the trap-door in the

gallery, and sat there watching the bolts until daylight.

In the early morning there was a great noise below. Men shouted and called him by name, but he refused to answer. He peered over the edge of the platform, and he no sooner had done so than a perfect storm of voices greeted him. Two ship's boats were tied to the piling of the tower, and many men were crowding up the ladder. More were upon the deck of the vessel, which had rammed her nose high and dry upon the reef close to the light. They were coming to take possession of the tower by force, and he saw that he must now be interviewed, perhaps taken away bodily, for the fellow on the ladder had joined the rest, and they were calling to him to open that door.

The day passed without a disturbance. The men of the four-masted schooner upon the reef spent their time rigging gear to heave the vessel off, and the man had joined them. At dark Enau, seeing that no one was upon the ironwork, lighted the lantern and then came back to his post at the trap-door, holding his club in readiness to prevent any trespassing. He sat there hour after hour, but there was no sign of an attack from below.

About midnight there was a slight noise upon the platform of the gallery near the rail. The old man noticed it, but waited. Then some one rapped sharply upon the door at his feet, and he stood ready for the attack. Then all was quiet as before.

The heat was intense inside the gallery, and Enau mopped his forehead again and again. The whole lighthouse seemed to stagger, and the room went round and round. He was dizzy and failed to see the fingers which grasped the edge of the outside platform, or the form that swung out over the gulf below. A man drew himself up until his head was level with the floor. Then he put one foot up on the landing. He could not get back. It was a sheer hundred feet and over to the sea below, and the water was only three or four feet deep over the coral. He must gain the platform or go down to his death. Gradually he drew his weight upon the landing, clutching the rail with powerful fingers. Then he quickly stood upright and sprang over. He was in the light.

Enau saw him instantly and sprang at him. It was the same hated face, the fur-

tive eyes he had reason to hate with all his soul. They clinched, and then began a struggle for life. And while they struggled the old man's mind could no longer hold his pent-up despair. He called out upon the scoundrel who had ruined him:

"You villain! you have pursued me for revenge—I 'll give you all you want," he cried. "I know you; don't think I 'll let you go." And, snarling like a wild beast, he strove with enormous power to crush the other against the rail, and so over into the sea. But the younger man was powerful. His strong fingers clutched at the old keeper's throat and closed upon it.

"I know you—I know you—I know your look—you pious-faced scoundrel!" gasped the old man. Then they fought on in silence. Suddenly those below heard a heavy fall. There was a moment's pause.

The room seemed to reel about the old keeper. He struggled wildly in that frightful grip. His breath came in bits of gasps and finally stopped under the awful pressure of those fingers. The scenes of his earlier life flitted through his mind. He saw the life-boat again riding the oily sea in the South Atlantic; the starving men, their strained faces pinched and lined, their eager eyes staring about the eternal horizon for a sight of a sail; the last few days and the last survivors, the man with that look he would never forget—stars shot through his brain and fire flared before his vision. Then came blackness—a blank.

Those below, hearing the sounds of struggle dying away, called loudly to be let in. The man released his hold of the keeper's throat and shot back the bolts in the trap-door, letting a crowd of seamen come streaming into the light.

"Get some water, quick!" called Johnson, the assistant keeper, standing back and panting after the struggle. He was nearly exhausted, but still kept his gaze fixed upon the fallen old man.

"It 's a touch of the sun," said the captain of the wrecked vessel, bending over the old keeper. "We must get him cooled off and ice to his head. Quick, John! jump aboard and tell the doctor to get a lump of ice and bring it here—git!"

"It 's pretty bad," said Johnson; "I 've been hanging on to the irons for two days, and you lose your ship, on account of a poor devil giving way under that sun; but it can't be helped."