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THE LURE OF ATLANTIS

by Joel Martin Nichols Jr.



THERE have been so many queer yarns in the newspapers about the sinking of the *Nautilus* that I, being skipper of the four-masted schooner *Brant*, which picked up Professor Charles Randolph, her only survivor, had better set down what really did happen down there in the Sargasso Sea.

The *Nautilus* was a steam yacht owned by Professor Amos Tyrrel, a wealthy English naturalist who had built a laboratory on the Cornish coast for the study of fish and seaweed. He and Randolph, who had been his assistant for twenty years, sailed in the *Nautilus* on the fifth of last February to do some research work in the Sargasso.

About this time the *Brant* was rounding the Horn out of Santiago, Chile, with a load of nitrates bound for Charleston, South Carolina. We struck a blow off the River Platte, and my old hooker lost her rudder. When things cleared up a bit we found ourselves pretty well out in the South Atlantic, but we rigged a jury rudder and headed northwest, figuring on dropping into some Cuban port to refit.

We struck the Sargasso about fifteen days later, and one fine morn-

ing we picked up this Professor Randolph, who was bobbing about in the open sea without the sign of a stick to keep him up. He was delirious when we brought him aboard, but after he came to his right senses he told me the queerest yarn I ever heard in my life—and I've heard some rather good ones in the forty years I've been following the sea. At first I put him down as crazy, but we'd no sooner got him aboard than hell began a-popping all around us right there on the *Brant*. When she finally got through, with two of her sticks missing and some of those hard-boiled birds in the fo'c'sl a-praying to the Almighty to save 'em from the devils of the deep, I made up my mind that maybe he wasn't so crazy after all. Then I had Randolph write down his story in his own words. I turned the original over to the authorities, and I suppose the British Admiralty has it now, but I copied the whole thing, word for word, in the *Brant's* log. The professor headed his story in big letters: STATEMENT OF DR. CHARLES WILLIAMS RANDOLPH CONCERNING THE SINKING OF THE NAUTILUS. And this is how it read:

CAPTAIN ANDREW WATERS of the schooner *Brant* has asked me to write down the story of the cruise of the *Nautilus* and of what befell her unfortunate crew and my colleague, Dr. Amos Tyrrel; and since it seems certain now that the *Brant* is not to suffer the fate of the *Nautilus* I have agreed to comply with his request.

It is perhaps unnecessary for me to delineate the relationship between Dr. Tyrrel and myself, since we were students of natural science together at the University of Edinburgh, twenty years ago. His accomplishments in the field of natural history, his studies and deductions from his exhaustive researches in the seven seas, his magnificent laboratory at Bournewell—all have given him an international fame which needs no emphasizing here from me. Suffice it to say that I may designate myself merely as an unworthy assistant in his great work, a humble satellite reflecting but a dim gleam from the splendor of his genius.

The world, when it has read this statement, will realize that these are strange words coming now from me, in view of the discord (mild term!) between Dr. Tyrrel and myself, which ended in the horrifying fate of the *Nautilus*. It was a discord which really had its inception five years ago, when Dr. Tyrrel exhibited the first signs of a divided interest in his life-work—an interest which led him away from his studies of undersea life and eventually found him devoting a large share of his time to archaeological research.

He began this course by taking extended trips to Egypt and Central America, where he indulged in a comparative study of prehistoric architectures found on the two continents, professing to find between them a most amazing and wholly unaccountable similarity. Being engrossed with our original labors, I paid little at-

tention to his assertions, until one day he came to me with the astounding announcement that he had evolved a tenable theory for the existence of the lost continent of Atlantis. In support of it he produced a vast number of photographs and other data, which purported to show that the pyramids found in the jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula were in reality small copies of the mighty piles found in Egypt, and that in other ways he had established an unanswerable argument for there being, in prehistoric times, a bridge of land between the African and American continents. It was his further contention that this land connection was the lost Atlantis, sunk beneath the waves of the south Atlantic ocean by some stupendous cataclysm. Egypt, in the heyday of its power, he asserted, had been naught but a poor outpost of Atlantis, reflecting only a dim glimmer of the splendors of that lost continent.

I must confess that I was bitterly disappointed in my colleague's new activities, for I had always held that the existence of Atlantis was a matter for metaphysical speculation and not one to engage the serious attention of men engrossed in the more objective sciences. I was gravely considering the necessity of voicing this conviction in the form of a gentle reproof to Dr. Tyrrel when he came to me one day in great excitement, brandishing before my eyes a piece of twisted metal.

"I have it, Randolph!" he fairly shouted at me. "This proves my theory. We've found Atlantis!"

Dr. Tyrrel was not given to practical joking, so I accepted the professed metal, although with a preconceived skepticism. It was, I should say, a bit of framework done in bronze, very like the lintel of a door. There are many similar pieces in the temples of ancient Egypt. Carved on its surface, however, were some peculiar hieroglyphics which on closer ob-

servation I recognized as a type of cuneiform writing.

"Is this one of your Egyptian finds?" I queried, somewhat testily.

He waved me down in derision.

"This," he said, excitedly, "was pulled out of the south Atlantic Ocean on the flukes of an anchor dropped overboard by the tramp steamer *Pole Star*."

"Ah, yes," said I. "A bit of submerged driftwood—"

"Nonsense!" he shouted. "Let me tell you about it. This vessel was caught in a storm somewhere down there—I've got the exact bearings—and her anchor was carried overboard by a large sea. It ran out almost the whole length of the cable before they could arrest it. When they finally had opportunity to attend to it they found that they were anchored. Think of it, Randolph—anchored out there in the Sargasso Sea where the Admiralty charts set the depth at nearly a mile! And when they got the anchor up they found this bit of bronze twisted about one of the flukes."

"A hoax!" I exclaimed. "They fooled you for a good price."

"I paid them nothing," he retorted. "They believe there was some subterranean upheaval throwing up a submerged island which by chance caught their anchor. But this bit of bronze never came from any submerged wreck as they believe. It came from one of the hilltop temples of the lost Atlantis. I have been able to translate this inscription. Do you know what it means?"

I admitted, caustically, that I did not.

"It means," he continued, "'Wynona, Fair Princess of Atlantis.' There is something more but it is unintelligible. Wynona was the daughter of the last king of Atlantis."

"Small good it will do you," I put in. "You can never prove it."

"Indeed?" he retorted. "Then you may be interested to know that I've ordered the *Nautilus* to be ready for sea in eight days. I'm going down there with our diving equipment, and if it isn't too deep I'm going to explore this watery kingdom. You may come if you wish."

TO MAKE a long story short, I must say here that I was in reality more interested than I cared to admit, and it took no great urging to get me to go along. As Dr. Tyrrel had pointed out, we were already well equipped for the contemplated cruise. The *Nautilus*, Dr. Tyrrel's yacht, was virtually a floating laboratory in which we had spent many happy months in our explorations of the seven seas. On board was every apparatus imaginable to aid in deep sea work. Many of the devices had been invented or perfected by my colleague. Chief among these were two of the latest type diving suits—glass, steel and rubber affairs capable of withstanding excessive undersea pressures. Air was furnished to the wearer from tanks at the shoulders, and thus the danger of entangling life lines and air-hose was eliminated. Now, as I write, it seems to me almost a catastrophe that these invaluable accessories have been lost forever to the world.

We steamed out of our harbor at Bournewell on the fifth of February. Our voyage was uneventful, and three weeks later we were over the spot indicated in the nautical bearings furnished us by the captain of the *Pole Star*.

How well I remember that morning of our first sounding! How well I remember my own excitement, raised to the zenith by the enthusiasm of Dr. Tyrrel! And how well I remember the look on his face and the leap in my own heart when our sounding lead showed bottom at 280 feet, even as the captain of the *Pole Star* had said! We had indeed found a

submerged island. Whether it was Atlantis, I was still skeptical.

On the following morning, after having made the necessary preparations, we donned our diving suits and dropped over the side of the *Nautilus* into the sea. The spot, as I have already indicated, was approximately in the middle of the Sargasso Sea, but fortunately the surface of the ocean about us for the space of almost a square mile was free of the encumbering marine growth so peculiar to these waters. Thus, throughout the middle part of the day we expected to have the full value of the sun, thereby rendering unnecessary our electric searchlights, which were at best rather cumbersome and unsatisfactory for deep sea work.

Once in the sea, with our arms locked together we sank down—down—down. The water proved to be even clearer than we had hoped,—indeed it was almost abnormally transparent—and the shafts of the sun bade fair to penetrate quite as far as we desired to go.

We must have been descending slowly for nearly five minutes when suddenly Dr. Tyrrel loosed his arm and pointed with his gloved finger into the distance at my back. Turning my head within my helmet I saw, with a tremendous leap of my heart, that we were floating slowly down beside a beautiful, tapering pinnacle cut in a stone which appeared to be marble. Almost immediately, other and lesser pinnacles arose gradually about us, all of them glowing with vari-colored tints under the penetrating rays of the sun. Peering at some of the nearer ones, I saw that they were not some mere basaltic upheaval. They had been built by human hands.

We had found Atlantis!

THE luminous glow from above had grown only slightly dimmer when we came gently to rest on what appeared to be the roof of some gigantic

building—a roof which on closer observation I saw was of a thick but lucid crystal. All about us, on a kind of ridgepole of this temple (if such it was) I saw bits of curiously carved statuary, some of them apparently broken off by the undulating action of the deep sea currents. I would have paused over them in wonderment had it not been for Dr. Tyrrel, who, without hesitation, walked deliberately to the edge of the roof, where we again dropped off into the open water. A moment later we filtered gently to rest on a wide landing in a magnificent set of marble stairs. Glancing up with thumping heart I realized that we were standing at the very threshold of a splendid marble temple!

I would that I had the time or the talent for describing the magnificence, the awe-inspiring beauty of that scene. The walls towering up before us were of purest marble, slightly tinted a bluish green by the intervening water. Above our heads the shafts of the sun, only slightly dimmed by the lesser depth, played on those lofty spires with all the colors of the rainbow—tints shading away in all degrees of green, yellow, red, purple and blue. All about us on the stairs, standing for the most part on pedestals of what appeared to be pure gold, was some of the most exquisite statuary I have ever seen. Save for a few pieces carved in the form of some hideous beast, the like of which I have never seen on earth, the majority of the effects were extremely pleasing to the eye, and were evidently from the hands of the sublimest masters, who had far surpassed the best of Phidias or Praxiteles or the unknown author of the *Venus of Melos*. And yet the effect in totality was marred, as I have indicated, by the weird shapes of some of the beasts.

Then, too, there was a peculiar type of fungus growing over them, a kind

of seaweed unknown to me, which writhed and moved about the statuary like a thing alive. Some of it seemed actually to be coiling and uncoiling about the throat of a beautiful maiden, exquisitely carved in a pinkish marble, standing near us on the stairs. While I was charmed with the statuary, I must admit from the outset that this strange marine growth made me shudder. It was too uncannily alive. Even as we walked up the steps it recoiled from our footsteps to make way for us, but on looking back I noted that it returned again to its original resting place and seemed, in fact, to be following us up to the top!

At the head of the flight we found a pair of magnificent bronze doors, fortunately wide open. Oddly enough, both were heavily embossed with the figure of a winged animal not unlike the Egyptian Sphinx, part woman, part beast, and part bird. Although the doors were open, there was a tangle of that disgusting marine growth across the threshold, and Dr. Tyrrel with a gesture of impatience drew his knife to hack a way into the place; but even as he reached out to seize the stuff it recoiled and parted of its own accord, thereby giving us ready access.

Behind the bronze doors was a magnificent hall or foyer—I do not know how else to describe it. Half way down on our right was an open doorway leading into another and more spacious hall. Light from the ocean surface filtered into the place through the crystal roofs, but its intensity had been so greatly dimmed by the depth that we could not see clearly for more than twenty feet ahead of us.

Keeping well to the right so that we should not lose our way, we suddenly came face to face with the wall of the temple, noting with a gasp of admiration that its surface was covered with beautiful murals, apparent-

ly done in gold leaf with backgrounds of silver and a substance which might be ivory. Following the murals to the very foot of the walls, I noted that the floor on which we were walking had been done in the most delicate and intricate of mosaics.

We feasted our eyes on these beauties for several minutes, and then began following the wall at our right. I was in the act of commenting, mentally, on the absence of any furnishings or statuary in the hall proper, when suddenly there loomed before us in the greenish gloom a sizable marble cubicle. Coming nearer we saw that this was only the first of a series, mortised to the walls and standing about as high as our waists. A farther approach showed us that they were in reality a row of marble bins (to use a prosaic term). But what bins they were! What beauty, what contents! Pounds and pounds of jewels in every hue of the rainbow!

In one cubicle I buried my arms up to the elbow in the finest of rubies. From another I saw Dr. Tyrrel hold up a double handful of glittering emeralds. And diamonds!—a king's ransom in those alone.

My natural cupidity had seized hold of me, and I was for taking some of the gems with us, but I noted that Dr. Tyrrel—always the scholar—had tossed his jewels back into place; and then I shamefacedly followed his example. As we wandered farther down the hall, he informed me in the sign language we had developed for undersea work that he had concluded this was a mortuary chapel built on one of the Atlantean hilltops. If such it proved to be, he pointed out, we should soon come upon human remains, as the Atlanteans were credited by ancient chroniclers with having developed an amazing method of preserving their dead.

He was walking to one side and a little ahead of me as he imparted this

information, and he had scarcely finished when I saw him suddenly pause, peer ahead into the gloom, and then hurry forward, signing me to follow. In the greenish half-light I saw that we were approaching the end of the hall and that up against the wall was what appeared to be a huge marble altar.

And then I saw Wynona, Princess of Atlantis.

SHE was laid out there in her crystal tomb. Her eyes, with their glorious blue, were open and smiling; the roses were still in her cheeks; the very pink was in her fingernails! I suppose I was a bit wrought up, for I could have sworn that she moved and smiled up at us. Dr. Tyrrel had dropped on one knee, his hands clasping the sides of her bier; and now he crouched there, peering through the glass of his helmet at this lovely handiwork of God. I do not know whether he cried out with the marvel of it, but I know that I did, for the sound echoed and re-echoed within the confines of my glass-and-rubber prison.

Never before had I seen so beautiful a creature. Her tomb, or casket, all of clear crystal, was tipped upward so that she appeared to be reclining there, gazing out upon the hall below her. I could see every outline of her figure, every lineament of her features. I recognized immediately the Egyptian strain in the firm, straight nose, the perfect curve of the somewhat full lips, and the exquisitely modeled chin, tender yet imperiously firm, but withal—shall I say it?—slightly cruel. Her figure, slightly swathed in a filmy lace of gold, was perfection—possibly a trifle fuller at the hips than we are wont to approve nowadays, but perfect nevertheless.

I have spoken of her contours as purely Egyptian; but here the comparison ceases, for your ancient Egyp-

tian was of a swarthy race, but this woman of Atlantis was of the fairest, with wide-opened eyes as blue as the cornflowers in our native England, and high-piled hair as yellow as the golden fillets with which it was bound.

I can see my reader shudder at the thought of thus gazing upon the dead, but I can tell him the sight of the lovely Wynona thus affected neither Dr. Tyrrel nor myself. I do not know how long we stood there, gazing at this exquisite creature, but it must have been a very long while, for my heart began to labor and my head began to throb in a way which told me that the oxygen in the tanks at our backs must be getting low.

Almost at that identical moment I felt an uncanny tightening and drawing sensation about my legs and ankles. Glancing quickly downward, I saw something that left me cold with horror. That loathsome seaweed, unnoticed by us, had crept into the chapel and was now seemingly growing in all directions over the floor. Some of it had entwined about my ankles, producing upon them a peculiar drawing and tugging sensation similar to that felt by a person walking in the undertow on a wave-washed beach. A swift glance over to my colleague produced in me a second and greater wave of horror. I saw him there lost in contemplation of the sleeping beauty and utterly unmindful that this hideous creeping thing had gone farther on him than it had on me. Indeed, it bade fair to cover his whole body.

During the course of my twenty years' exploration of the world under the sea, I have had many occasions to be terrified by the activities of plant and animal life there, but never have I been so submerged in horror as when I beheld that slimy weed squirming and twisting over our bodies. I must have cried out with the shock of it, for my head began to ring within my

helmet, and I clutched frantically for the knife at my belt, with the intention of hacking away the stuff at my ankles. My panic was short-lived, however, for no sooner had I reached for the weed than it uncoiled itself of its own free will, seeming actually to recoil at the dull gleam of my weapon.

Then, in two strides, I was at Dr. Tyrrel's side, intending to shake him back to a realization of our danger. Twice I grasped his shoulder before he paid the slightest attention to me, absorbed as he was in his contemplation of the smiling beauty in her crystal tomb. Finally, on my last somewhat rough importunity, he turned suddenly about and struck at me angrily with his hand. Almost immediately he must have regretted this act, for he signed to me that he was sorry, that he had forgotten himself for the moment.

I told him our oxygen was getting low, and pointed to the seaweed on his body, expecting him to be as horror-stricken as I had been. Oddly enough, however he did not seem to mind it, for he got to his feet and then, to my profound astonishment, the weed slowly unfolded and left him free.

With a last glance at our recumbent beauty we started from the hall, the seaweed drawing apart before our steps until a wide lane extended before us to the door. Outside on the terrace we prepared to loose our weights for our journey to the surface, but here a new and greater horror struck me.

Glancing down from our high point of vantage before the temple doors I saw in the mass of seaweed to the right and left of the staircase the ribs, the broken stumps, the twisted stern-plates, the battered superstructures, of many sunken ships. There must have been at least a hundred of them piled together helter-skelter, and heaven knows how many more lay

farther down in the valley, where the rays of the sun did not penetrate!

I do not know how long we would have paused there gazing upon this scene of desolation had it not been that the increased difficulty of breathing warned us we could tarry no longer. Accordingly we slipped our weights and arose slowly to the surface, the rose-and-nile green of the Atlantean spires dropping slowly behind us. Only once did I look down in our journey, and not until then did I realize that the seaweed from the Atlantean temple had followed us—was in fact dogging our very heels! The stuff hovered there on the surface for a minute after we had climbed aboard the *Nautilus*, and then, as if pulled by some unseen hand from below, it slowly sank from sight.

I COME now to a point in my story where I am loath to continue, for it must reveal in me an atavistic strain, the existence of which, until this last accursed cruise of the *Nautilus*, I had never suspected. As may be guessed from the preceding narrative, neither Dr. Tyrrel nor myself had ever married, our labors and researches having provided us with a diversity of experience which rendered unnecessary a venture into other fields of existence. Up until the time of the last cruise of the *Nautilus*, I can say with certainty that no woman, nor even any thought of woman, has ever disturbed the quiet tenor of my emotional life. For my colleague I think I can say the same. Hence it was somewhat a shock to me when I awoke during that night to find the lovely, sensual face of the exquisite Wynona haunting me, there in the darkness of my cabin.

For a time the sensation was a pleasant one: I felt a warm invigoration of my being, a sensuous flow of hot blood in my body which, although slightly tempestuous, was not without

a certain indefinable charm. I remember that I reached back to the head-board of my bed, seized there the enamel rail and stretched myself in the warm luxury of the tropic night. I felt remade—a new thing. I felt that in some indefinable way nature had poured into me renewed health, renewed youth. I wanted to arise, to pace about my cabin; I wanted to go to the decks of the *Nautilus*, to race up and down, cloaked only in the star-spangled robe of the equatorial night. I felt that I had the power to reach out and embrace the whole world.

For a time I lay there enjoying to the full this entirely new reaction and speculating on the psychological aspect of my new inspiration. In a little while, however, I began to grow too warm; the hot blood pounding through my veins became in a very few minutes a source of complete and profound and wholly inexplicable irritation. In vain I attempted to throw off the mood. In vain I attempted all the known tricks of wooing sleep; in vain I tossed and tumbled about with the gentle rolls of the *Nautilus*. Eventually I arose, drew on my dressing gown (for I had thrown aside my pajamas when the mood first came upon me), and thus attired strode out upon the decks.

Forward I saw a tiny ruby glow, which I took to be the lighted cigarette of the watch. Above, almost outshone by the brilliance of the Southern Cross, were the riding lights of the *Nautilus*. All was peace, excepting in my own brain.

I strode forward, my irritable mood pricking me onward, and reprimanded the watch for smoking on duty, although I knew such mild breaches of discipline had been winked at by both captain and mate on these long voyages. I remember how in surprise he flipped it overboard, the glowing end describing a perfect half-circle

as it dropped into the sea. Somehow even that bothered me.

Presently I walked back toward the stern, and, rounding the corner of the after deckhouse, I came suddenly upon Dr. Tyrrel. He was standing there, half draped over the rail, and peering intently down into the sea. For some reason unknown to me I paused there watching him. He did not move; he might have been a statue of stone gazing over the rail. Again I felt a wave of unreasonable irritation, a veritable sweep of anger. Why should he be standing there peering so intently down into the sea? Why was he not in his cabin, where he belonged at this hour, gaining rest for the labors of tomorrow? Somehow I did not realize then that I was blaming him for the very thing which I myself was doing.

As I stood there watching him, he slowly straightened up and lifted his eyes to the stars. His lips were moving, and I thought that he sighed. It was then that I noted, seemingly for the first time in all our relationship, what a handsome figure of a man he was, with his clear-cut, aquiline profile, his full molded chin, his crisp, curly hair only slightly tinged with gray at the temples, and that magnificent figure with its tremendous shoulders, flat hips and gently sloping flanks. Somehow it made me feel small and puny and hopeless. All my new-found vigor drained from me in that moment, and I felt a strange, hot resentment against the man. Suddenly I had come to be old and worn and gnarled and terribly weary. Thinking thus, and without disturbing my colleague, I went back to my cabin and a sleepless vigil into the dawn.

THAT morning, while we were taking breakfast, Dr. Tyrrel told me quietly that there would be no need for my going down that day.

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The Lure of Atlantis

(Continued from page 24)

"Why?" I asked, somewhat testily, though never before had I questioned his decisions.

"It is exhausting work," he replied, "and we do not know how long we can stay here before there may be a storm, in which case we may have to up anchor and run before it. I think we can work best by going down in turn, I today, you tomorrow."

His reasoning seemed wholly specious, but I assented sullenly.

Throughout the four hours of his trip below I lived in torture. I thought of him down there walking through those magnificent halls, enjoying the wonders of Atlantis, the attractions of the ancient chapel, the charm of that smiling beauty there in her crystal tomb. Vaguely I wondered what he would bring up with him, and you may guess that I was somewhat startled when he came up, as he had gone down, with nothing at all.

That night, for the first time in our long friendship, we had harsh words in his cabin. I upbraided him for bringing up none of the jewels, pointing out that even if he himself had no need for further wealth, some of the rest of us were poor men and could put them to good use. My remark seemed to anger him greatly, and he lost himself in a mighty gust of wrath.

"They are not ours," he thundered, towering over me. "Not one jot nor tittle of them shall we take! They are hers. They belong to Wynona. You shall not have them."

"You are mad!" I raged. "You are inhumanly selfish! You at least owe it to these poor men aboard, who could be made independent for life. It is not within your right to deny them."

All my raging was of no avail, and the next morning I was only partly

surprised, though greatly angered, when he told me curtly that only he would go beneath the waters. And for another four hours I sat there on the decks of the *Nautilus*, suffering the tortures of the damned. And again he came up empty-handed.

That night we went at it again over the teacups. I raged, I tore, I stamped about the room; but he answered me with gentle words, or, more often, not at all. For the most part he was peculiarly silent, almost uncannily pleasant. When I had finished my tirade he got up, but paused on the threshold of his cabin.

"Fear not," he said with a peculiarly quiet smile, "they shall have everything. Every foot of Atlantis shall be theirs. They shall climb its hills, wander through its halls, sun themselves on its terraces. They shall know its every beauty, all its wealth. But for you, my friend, I can promise nothing. You are not wanted down below."

His cryptic remark startled me, and I began to wonder if he were not a little mad.

That night I lay awake through all the long hours until dawn, thinking not of the jewels, of the wealth in Atlantis, but only of Wynona. At dawn I slept a little, and she came in all her gorgeous beauty and mocked me there in my cabin. That day, I vowed, it should be I who would go below.

In that I was vastly mistaken, however. We quarreled at the rail just before he went over, but he brushed me back and plunged into the sea. I saw his face, laughing up in derision through the glass of his helmet, as he slowly sank from sight.

FOR perhaps an hour I sat there by the rail, until the strain became no longer endurable. Then it was that

the bonds of my respect to Dr. Tyrel's judgment were broken and I realized, of a sudden, that there was nothing to keep me from going down even against his wishes. Thinking thus I got myself into my diving dress and slipped over the side.

I landed, by good luck, about half-way up the stairs to the temple. There again before me I saw that accursed seaweed, but I spurned it quickly aside and climbed the stairs. At the entrance the wretched stuff attempted to bar my way, but I drew my knife and slashed at it until it drew back. Then I walked into the foyer and from thence into the chapel.

Somehow I knew I should find him there, and I was not disappointed. As the details at the farther end of the hall were revealed to me through the dimness, I saw him kneeling before that altar with his head down across her crystal tomb, his face, behind the glass in his helmet, pressed close to hers. And then I knew that I hated him—hated him because he loved her, and because I loved her, and because in some way I knew he was the favored one. For the first time I realized that I, too, had cared nothing for the jewels; that I, too, would have scorned to rifle her chapel. Always it had been Wynona, and now he had taken her from me! I hated him with every spark of my soul, every fiber of my being.

"Dastard!" I shrieked. "Thus you have beguiled your time; thus you have hoodwinked us all!"

I had forgotten that the sound could not penetrate beyond the confines of my helmet, and now it echoed and re-echoed in my steel-and-rubber prison, ringing and screeching in my ears until the very blood seemed to well up into my eyes and the sea before me was as scarlet.

Without thought of what I was about to do I pushed forward, knife in hand. I would kill him there; I

would cut him down with as little compunction as I had the seaweed before the portals. But I must be crafty! I had no intention of giving him a chance in fair fight! I would walk up behind him and strike with my knife through the rubber joints at his throat, rip the blade downward to his breast, and leave him there either to drown or bleed to death. How I would laugh as he died there at the feet of his beauty! What an outcome for his secret tryst!

And then a very strange thing happened. There was no way under heaven that he could have known of my approach, for he was kneeling with his back toward me. There was nothing to warn him, no sound from me that could have penetrated that watery space to the ears within his helmet. Yet, while I was still twenty feet away, I saw him get slowly to his feet and turn about, his hand going to the knife at his belt even before he could have realized my purpose.

Thus confronted, I brandished my weapon and bade him in our sign language to be prepared, since I intended to kill him or die in the attempt. Scarcely had I finished, when to my utter astonishment he slowly replaced the knife in its sheath and quietly awaited my coming.

Taken back though I was, I had no intention of losing my purpose. His very sureness enraged me the more. I strode forward, bending all my weight against the intervening water, holding my blade in readiness.

Now I stood before him, and saw his white, sneering face behind the glass. Shrieking aloud with a strange exultation, I raised my weapon to strike. But I never made that stroke. Even as my arm descended in its murderous errand, I felt myself suddenly and helplessly snatched away.

It was that accursed seaweed! The damnable stuff had twined about my body as I strode across the hall; and

now, as I drew near enough to plunge my weapon home, it had snatched me away. In vain I foamed and fought it, slashing to the right and to the left. In vain I ripped and tore and cut, using my gloved hands where the blade seemed too slow. Where I slashed off yards of the stuff, new tendrils seemed to grow, enveloping my body.

Frothing and screaming, kicking and squirming, I was dragged across the hall and out on the steps before the temple. There, despite my weights, the weed seemed to gather under me, forcing me upward. In but a few minutes the slowly receding spires of Atlantis told me that I was on my way to the surface.

I LAY on the bosom of the sea, kicking and screaming, but that diabolical stuff was determined that I should not sink again. Finally, as all strength seemed to be leaving me, I felt myself hauled slowly out of the water. They on board the *Nautilus*, seeing me struggling there in the water, had slipped a boathook under the ring at my belt and were pulling me to her decks.

But I was crafty. Once on board I revealed nothing of what had happened, merely pretending that I had been taken with cramps on coming to the surface. Then, very carefully, I laid my plans to kill Dr. Tyrrel as soon as he should return. Secretly I got out my pistol and a knife, and watched for the ascending bubbles that would tell of his coming.

But he never came. I waited there until dusk—waited until the captain came to me in alarm and begged me to go below in search of his missing employer. I should have been glad to go—for another purpose than he thought—but I knew that devilish seaweed would stop me at the outset. Looking over the side I could see it lurking there, waiting. Once I was

in its clutches it could hold me there powerless while my quarry came aboard in safety and my last chance was lost. But I could not tell them this, so I cut a rent in my diving dress, telling them it would be impossible for me to venture below.

With the coming of darkness, all thought of my leaving the ship was abandoned, and Dr. Tyrrel's life was despaired of. For myself, I knew that he was still down there keeping his tryst with Wynona, and the thought of it made me fairly boil with rage. As the night wore on, I became exhausted with the play of conflicting emotions, and, pretending an illness, I went to my cabin.

I MUST have slept longer than I had intended, for I had many long dreams in which I saw my colleague in the arms of Wynona. The two of them stood there on one of the pillars of Atlantis, mocking me as I struggled with the weeds of the Sargasso. Each dream brought the stuff nearer my throat, while it shook and crushed me as if I were a rodent in the grip of a python. It had clutched my shoulders and was shaking me again, when I awoke and saw that I was not at the bottom of the sea but safe in my cabin, with the captain of the *Nautilus* grasping me frantically by the shoulder.

"What is the matter?" I demanded, bounding out of my bed and wondering if Dr. Tyrrel had slipped back during the watches of the night.

"The ship is sinking, sir," he said, his voice all a-tremble in the darkness. "You'd best come on deck. There's something wrong. I don't understand it."

The man's teeth were actually chattering, and the tones of his voice struck me into a panic. As I stood there, peering at his white face in the gloom, I noticed for the first time that the floor of my cabin had as-

sumed a noticeable angle. The ship appeared to be no longer responding to the roll of the seas, but wobbled and tugged in an uncannily impotent way.

Hastily donning an overgarment, I hurried out on deck. The night was starlit, the ocean smooth, save for the gentle undulating billows from which it is never free. And yet the *Nautilus* was going down by the head! Already the angle of her decks had assumed a higher pitch while I had tarried there in my cabin. At that moment she assumed a slight list to port, the wobble becoming more accentuated with each billow. In the forward part of the vessel there arose a wail of voices, from the throats of terror-stricken, helpless men.

I turned angrily to the captain and demanded why he had not set the crew to the pumps.

"I've tried that, sir," he answered, "and I found there isn't a drop of water in her hold!"

"It's her anchor, then," I said; "it's probably caught on the bottom and the rising tide is pulling her under." (I am not a nautical man, and this seemed an adequate explanation.)

"I had the anchor up an hour ago, sir," he answered. "I tried to pull out of here—actually tried to get her under way; but her propellers won't budge her. My God, sir! it seems that we're being pulled down! We actually can't move!"

At that moment there came a ripping and creaking sound from her hold, followed by another drunken wobble to port. And that, I think, gave me my first inkling of what was really happening to the *Nautilus*. Running up into the forward part of the ship, I peered over the side. What I saw there pulled a strange cry of exultation from my throat.

Under her bowsprit and, I dare say, all along the whole length of her keel, were little, suckerlike tendrils protruding from the water, worming and squirming their way upward over her smooth white sides.

The *Nautilus* was in the grip of the Sargasso seaweed! She was being pulled under—pulled under to Atlantis! Now I understood that gruesome pile of wreckage so far below.

I realize that when the world reads this it will call me mad, and I think for the next few hours perhaps I was. I sprang into the air; I jumped and leaped about the deck. I shouted for very joy. I was going to fool Dr. Tyrel after all! He had said Atlantis would not take me, but it was taking the *Nautilus*, and if it took the *Nautilus* it must take me!

The crew must have gathered from my yells and exclamations of triumph what had happened, for they left off their wails and went to work with hatchets, knives and axes. The weed, by this time, had crept up almost to the rails, and now, as if realizing it had been discovered, it actually began swarming over the side, on to the decks, and eventually into the masts and rigging. They, poor fellows, chopped and hacked and fought it through most of the night. It was a losing fight. Inch by inch her bow tilted downward. Inch by inch her rounded stern arose toward the heavens. Once they tried to lower her boats, but no sooner had these touched the water than the seaweed fastened its clutches upon them.

When the angle of her decks became impossible for further footing, I climbed to her stern rail, where I perched and howled and shrieked in glee.

Ah, fool, fool that I was! I had forgotten that Atlantis did not want me. Had I been more clever, had I had more of the cunning of the day

before, I should have hidden myself away somewhere in the bowels of her and gone down with her to the very depths.

She went down at dawn with a dull creaking of strained timbers and a hoarse, despairing gurgle and whistle from the air expelled from her holds. And I—fool!—perched there on her stern rail, shrieked and shouted for the very joy of it. One by one I saw their bobbing heads go under; one by one I saw the last bits of wreckage enveloped by that slimy creeping thing and engulfed forever.

At noon, at night, I was still floating on.

Again and again I dived, seeking to entangle myself; again and again I felt myself thrust backward to the surface. The sun, a blistering ball of copper in the sky, sank lower and lower, and with the coming of the night I believe I must have slept there on the bosom of the Sargasso Sea.

There were other days and other nights, when I screamed and writhed in raging impotence, for I had come to realize that the sea was only playing with me, waiting there idly for me to die, when I should be carried far from Atlantis and Wynona by some swift current. But on the dawn of the third day a great ship hovered over me and even against my will I was saved.

I come now to the end of my story. I know that the world will judge me mad in the writing of it, but for the world and its judgment I care nothing, for I know whereof I have spoken. I have yet another and longer story to bring to a close and as I set this down I plan to write my finis to it out there on the decks of the *Brant*. Of this Captain Waters knows nothing, for I have his promise that he will not read this until tomorrow.

Therefore on this third day of

March I hereby set my signature to this, my story.

CHARLES WILLIAMS RANDOLPH.

WELL, Randolph's story as he told it to me when we first pulled him aboard the *Brant* was about the same as his statement, except maybe it wasn't so connected. But, as I said before, we'd no sooner got him aboard than the capful of wind we'd been relying on dropped off and left us in a dead calm, and then things commenced to happen.

It was about midnight that night, I guess, when we first noticed the old hooker had stopped rolling and was beginning to wobble in a queer sort of way. I didn't pay much attention to it, but turned in, leaving the deck to the mate. He woko me up about an hour later. She was down by the head and already in a bad way. I remembered Randolph's yarn about the seaweed then, and so I ran for'ard to the chains and looked over the side.

Well, sir, I could see it there on her cutwater and all around her forefoot. Then there came a creaking and a groaning from her holds, which meant that her bottom must be covered. I had the whole crew piped and we went to it with axes and knives and everything we could lay our hands on. As heaven is my judge, you could see it a-growing over her sides—it was alive! In no time at all it was on her decks and into her rigging. While we were fighting it out of the main shrouds it would get into the jigger, and when we'd get at the jigger it would get up into the mizzen, and so on. Finally we began to list pretty badly to port, and so I ordered the mate to cut away the fore and jigger, they being the ones that seemed the worst. This helped a little but not much.

And that man, Randolph! He was a fiend! He came out on deck and danced there like a maniac, yelling

and singing. He didn't try to interfere with the crew, so we didn't pay any attention to him. After a while I saw him going below, and I didn't find him until afterward.

We were pretty well loaded up with Chilean nitrates—valuable stuff—and so I held on to her cargo as long as I could, hoping we might get her clear; but after a while I saw it was no go. With the cargo out of her, I knew she'd be harder to pull under; but on the other hand, when she was empty it would be easier for that stuff to pull her over on her beam ends. But it was nip and tuck for our lives then, and to hell with the cargo. So I gave the order for half the crew to open her hatches and get the stuff out.

It was in powdered form and packed in sacks, three hundred pounds to the sack. We began getting it up as best we could, and no easy job it was, with the list on her and the wobble and all that slimy stuff a-squirming over her both a-low and a-loft.

WE'D dropped about twenty or maybe thirty bags over the side when one of them broke and spilled into the water. That was what saved us—that bag breaking over the side. I was standing by the rail helping the men, when I saw it spill into the water; and then I noticed there was a hissing and a boiling all about her where the stuff had gone in. And that weed—it just melted away all around her waterline for the distance of ten feet—curled up and dropped off! That gave me my idea. There was some chemical reaction in that nitrate which was death to that seaweed.

I grabbed the next bag and knifed it open, and we dumped it in. Then I was sure—the nitrates would do the trick.

Well, sir, we just quit fighting that stuff with knives and axes and went

at it with those nitrates. We sprinkled it all over the ship fore and aft, and then we put the whaleboat over the side and sprinkled the stuff against her sides and as far down as we could get below her waterline. Pretty soon the weed in the rigging began to dry up and wither away, and then she began to roll a bit instead of wobbling. Another six hours of it, with most of the cargo overboard, and we were clear. We still had some canvas on her and a little breeze came along and pushed her out of there.

I thought maybe Randolph had thrown himself overboard and had not been noticed during the excitement, but the next day we found him hiding in the after hold. He said he was waiting for the ship to go down and that nobody would fool him this time. When I told him she was clear he began to cry like a child. Then I got him up to my cabin and set him about writing his statement.

But I'd forgotten he had a mania for making away with himself—I suppose I'm to blame for that. He went out on the deck afterward. I didn't see what happened, but the mate said he climbed up into the mizzen shrouds and then threw himself down—not into the water but upon the deck. When we picked him up he was conscious, but dying.

I felt sorry for him, poor devil! He called to me as he lay there dying, and made me promise that I'd bury him as soon as he'd gone.

"I can walk back by myself," said he. "I know the way. I'll find her."

Well, what could I do? I promised. He went, about half an hour later, smiling a good-bye. We sewed him in one of those sacks, put some scrap iron at his feet, and let him go. I suppose he's down there now, and I hope he found her, whoever she may be.