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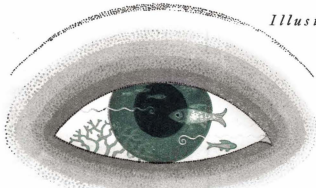
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The Mermaid's husband

A little more and it will be a habit with me to record the tales of Joseph Jorkens, so that men and women to whom the Billiards Club means nothing may come by scraps of knowledge of far corners of Earth, or tittle-tattle about odd customs of some of its queer folk, which otherwise would be lost with the anecdotes that were told only to help pass a dingy afternoon. And this tale I tell because he told it to me, and to half a dozen others, one winter's day at the Billiards Club between luncheon and nightfall.

And I tell it because it throws a little light on Jorkens' early life, which none of us shall quite clear up from one story. I tell it, too, because Aden is one of the world's inns, a halting place for innumerable travelers, and so of some slight interest to such as care for this planet. I tell it for many reasons.

Yet for one reason I nearly withhold it. There are points in it which I myself sometimes doubt. And if I doubt them, others may doubt them too.

There is no harm in that; indeed, I advise them to reserve their judgment until further investigations have been made locally, or until Science has penetrated far enough into biology to be able to accept or reject the story with certainty.

As I came into the room these words of Jorkens' caught my attention: "I was beginning to feel more and more clearly that my wife belonged to the hotel." Something about that struck me as unusual, and so I told Jorkens. I even got him to tell me the story over again from the beginning to satisfy my curiosity. If he had exaggerated anywhere he could not now alter it, with the six men sitting beside him to whom he had told it once.

"I was just showing them this ticket," he said. And he produced a ticket about three inches by five, that had once been stiff and yellow; faded now, and jagged about the edges as an old soldier's discharge sheet. He fumbled with it awhile, as though a little embarrassed; so I did not stretch out a hand for it and he kept it in his fingers, twisting it round as he talked.

"It was in Aden a long time ago. I was on my way eastwards, and we were to stop there five hours. We went ashore, in the way one does, and began looking

round. And I had not gone far when my eyes were caught by two placards outside a hotel. One said 'High Grade Teas,' and the other said 'Mermaid on View.'

"Well, I had only gone ashore to look round, so I thought I'd begin there; and I went inside to ask about the mermaid. And the man I asked merely gave me this ticket and said to me, 'One rupee.' I paid the rupee, and—well, here is the ticket."

And this time Jorkens handed it to me. On the yellow ticket were printed in capital letters the two words "Mermaid Ticket," and in small letters below it, "One Rupee." No man would have such a thing printed in order to corroborate a story that he was to tell at a club years later, and I could see that the ticket was years old. It was this ticket as much as anything that decided me to record this story; not that it is absolute proof of it, but it showed me that there was too much material there for me or anyone else to brush aside.

"Well, I was shown in with my ticket," Jorkens continued, "to a long room rather badly lighted, with a high screen at the end of it, and just space at the left-hand end to get round the screen, and a man standing there to take my ticket. In the end I got him to let me keep it, for I guessed the possibility of an unusual story and I value these bits of corroboration, though I was miles from guessing all that that idly bought ticket would mean to me.

"It is like that with the past: it is all gone now; gone forever with all its vastness, all its tremendous import; but it is made out of trifles like that one-rupee ticket bought in an hour to spare, ashore at Aden. All gone now.

"Well, I walked round the end of the screen, and there was a tank, with glass sides, and rocks in it rising up through the water, and a live mermaid on one of the rocks combing her hair. At least she ought to have been combing her hair, as she told me afterwards; it was one of the rules of the hotel; but as a matter of fact she was doing nothing at all except sitting there on a piece of seaweed and whistling, with her brass comb away on a rock at the other side of the tank.



"That's a nice tune you're whistling, Miss," I said. "Oh, do you think so really?" she answered.

"I need hardly say that I do not usually address young women as 'Miss,' but it struck me that as an exhibit in a hotel in Aden she might not have been accustomed to such refinements and courtesies as would have come the way of a barmaid in a first-class London eating-house.

"Indeed, she suggested this thought at once from the way she pronounced 'really.' And then by calling her 'Miss' I was stressing the human side of her. I thought that that would please her; and it was my immediate recognition of her humanity, a point that I always exaggerated, which as much as anything made us friends from the start.

"Others went in with their tickets looking for something odd; and of course the more that they looked for it the more they found things that were queer about her.

"Then there were those, more kind but quite as silly, who pitied her for being partly fish. They had merely annoyed her. Yes, it was a curious thing about that mermaid; she was always flattered by being mistaken for a lady, and yet in her heart she was far more fish than woman.

"Well, I said to her next, 'Yes, I think it is very nice.' And she said, 'Is it really?'

"And then we got to talking about social events at Aden, about who was coming to the hotel, and one thing and another, though all the time her heart was far out at sea."

"And do you mean," inquired Morden, who was one of those present, "that there really are such creatures?"

"Well," said Jorkens, "there was this one, at any rate. Whether there are many of them is for Science to say. And Science one day will. At present the men of that calling are doing all their biological work to prove that there is a definite unbridged gulf between us and the apes. That must always be our first interest, so far as biology goes.

"Some," he said, looking at Morden, "are naturally more interested in that than others. But when they have proved that, when we can all be sure that there is no taint of the ape in man, then it will be

By Lord Dunsany

time enough to work to the point at which we are related to fishes.

"Let me see, what was I saying? Ah, yes, we were talking, she and I, about who was coming to stay at the hotel. Nobody interrupted us. All the rest of my fellow passengers had gone to see the tanks of the Queen of Sheba, that she had made in rocky

valleys to catch the shower that falls there once a year.

"One young man came in, as we talked, with his yellow ticket. But with a flick of her tail she was behind one of the rocks at once and leaning over the top of it, with her bright brass comb in her hand, and not a scale visible, the very image of a fake in a cheap show. 'Do you call that a mermaid?' he said to the ticket collector. And the attendant only smiled foolishly. He didn't care so long as he got the ticket.

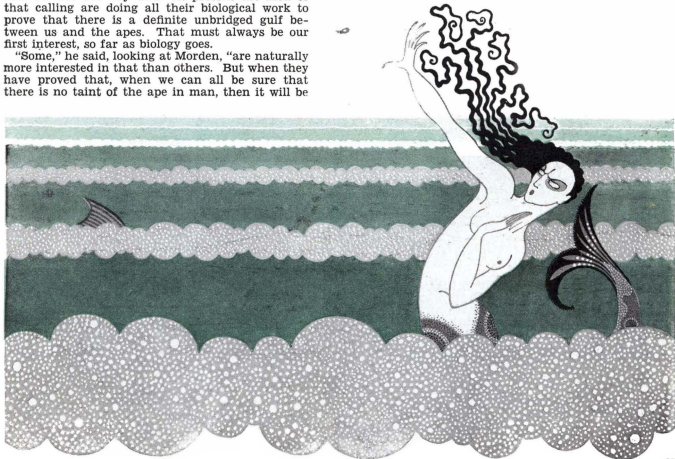
"Nobody else came near us. And after a while I gave another rupee to the man, in case he should come and say that my time was up.

"He sauntered away after that, and then we were quite alone.

"I suppose every girl has certain surroundings in which she looks her best. Certainly, half in the water and half out, among those rocks that the management had had covered with seaweeds of every color, and a shell or two on white sand on the floor of the tank, she looked perfectly splendid. And so I told her.

"'Do you really think so?' she said. And I think my remark pleased her. In her eyes there was something of the deep ocean, a long way out from shore; dark blues and greens and flashes and trembling lights, and colors you could not follow; green just where you'd swear it was blue, then blue again, and every now and then a streak of what you'd call lilac if it wasn't absurd to name such a color in trying to tell of eyes.

"Whenever I looked at them they made me think of great deeps, lonely and shoreless, shining with unseen



The Mermaid's Husband

And nothing remains but this dark dripping evening. "Well, I went back and stopped at that hotel. And the next day I had a drink with the manager, sitting outside his door, watching the folk of their small world go by, and asked him the price of his mermaid. And he said he wouldn't sell her for a thousand pounds. Of course if a man talks like that while you are having a drink with him, there isn't the ghost of a chance that he'll ever do business. I saw that, and I said no more of it.

"Well, it's a long time ago, and if I don't tell you the truth I'll spoil my story. And the truth is that there and then I made up my mind to steal her. I've never excused myself, and I don't do so now. At any rate, I never quibbled or canted about it. I never said that she would be happier somewhere else; that towns did not agree with her; that she was meant to be free; that I'd made the man a fair offer.

"She belonged to the hotel, and I knew it, and I made up my mind to steal her. That's the bare truth; and however much honesty I have lost in your eyes, I'll at any rate stick to that."

For a moment I felt, and so, I am sure, did all of us, that something was due to be said about Jorkens' perfect integrity. And yet it was difficult to think what. The mermaid obviously belonged to the hotel, and Jorkens was going to steal her. Somebody said at last, "Oh, I am sure it was quite all right." And that very feeble remark was the best we could do amongst us.


"Well, rightly or wrongly," Jorkens continued, "and we may leave out rightly, I made up my mind to steal her. I went to her then to talk it all over, and of course I paid my rupee."

That, somehow, to me was the worst of the whole story; the satisfaction, almost the smugness, with which he told us he paid that rupee. What did it amount to but an admission of, and a respect for, the hotel proprietors' ownership of that mermaid. Those tickets were their earnings. And here was he about to take away their capital, and punctiliously paying them five minutes' income upon it. It's queer how that rupee stuck in my gizzard more than the whole mermaid.

"She was quite ready to come," Jorkens went on. "I promised to marry her. 'What's that?' she said; for she knew nothing but the deeps of the sea, and the tank in the Grand Hotel, and once for half an hour a fisherman's net.

"I had made my plans, and for a while I talked them over with her; but those strange blue-green eyes, like ocean currents woven with rays of the moon, would always flash at the sight of a passing hat, if they caught it over the darkened half of the window. Then she would want to know who the wearer was, and if he was coming to the hotel, and whether to have a drink or perchance to stay, and whether he had bought the hat in Aden and at what shop. So after a while I stopped discussing my plans with her, and only told her what she would have to do.

"Well, this was the plan I made. And the first thing I needed was a Bath chair. As there had never been one in Aden I got one made by a carpenter. It excited



splendors immeasurably fairer than land. And I tried to get her to speak of the wandering tides of her home. Do you know, you might as well have gone to some glorious singer, or to some world-famous actress, right at the height of her triumphs, and tried to have a talk with her about dairying.

"The tittle-tattle of the hotel was what she wanted, and whether the man in the dry-goods shop over the way had lately bought a new bicycle. So I talked all that tittle-tattle to her, and some more that I had got out of an old illustrated paper we had on the ship, in order to go on looking at the mystery of her eyes, lighting up with

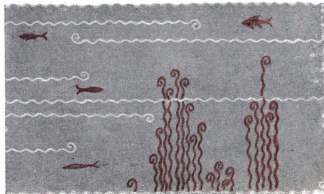
every silly trifle I told her, till they were like what imagination perceives in the deeps of strange seas.

"And so the time went by, till I told her that soon I had to go back to the ship. At this she said, 'Ow,' so plaintively that, ill-advised though it seems, and hasty and rash as it certainly was, I made up my mind in that instant to throw over my journey and get hold of my luggage and leave the ship at Aden.

"Well, I was luckily able to get all my kit off the ship, but I would have gone without any. And so I would to this day, and barefoot, and penniless, and walking all the way, if I could walk there; not to Aden but into the past, where that romance was.

"Oh, the green of those seas, and oh, those sunsets and the blaze of the afterglow! I'm sure they don't shine like that now. I never hear any one of the thousands that pass by Aden talking of it.

"I know they are all gone, all those colors and lights.



Lord Dunsany

no suspicion, because I managed to cover it by Fashion, which is the sacrested thing in England, but in Aden it seemed to have a double sanctity. Not that a Bath chair is fashionable in England now. We must give the cocktails a few more years to sink in before it comes to its own again.

"But it's queer how old fashions float round the world like driftwood; and in Aden, where Landseer was beginning to be appreciated, and Marcus Stone had not yet come, they were all ready to welcome a Bath chair as soon as I mentioned it. So I got one made with wood and old wheels and a strip of tarpaulin; and found a man who would pull it for five annas an hour. And the next thing I had to do was find a girl to go in it.

"You see, I couldn't go up to the hotel and drive straight off with the mermaid. The Bath chair was the first place they'd have looked for her. So I had to have the Bath chair definitely occupied by somebody else in the sight of all Aden. Well, I found a girl to do it: I paid her a pound. And I promised her a pound a month more for so long as she didn't talk about it.

"I made her wear a veil and gave her a green parasol and a white dress; and I got a black wig made for her, the color of my mermaid's hair. Then I had her pulled up and down the beach by the man, before the heat of the day, and again in the evening, every day for four days. We became prominent figures of Aden in those few days, going along that beach with the green sea behind us. I changed the green parasol for a blue one on the second day, for the contrast it made against that emerald sea.

"What excited more curiosity than the actual sight of us going along the beach was the speculation as to who the lady was. I had wanted to excite curiosity, in order to establish definitely that that Bath chair had an occupant long before anybody should miss the mermaid, but this curiosity was almost too much for me; had it not been for two seas and the Arabian Desert, there is no saying how far it would have spread. As it was, it was the principal topic in Aden for more than a week.

"I had a lot to do during those four days besides walking along the beach by the side of the Bath chair. All my plans had to be ready. I'm afraid it is the more innocent thieves who get caught. Those who give their whole minds to their crime, as I was doing, before beginning to steal at all, rise to high place and honor. Only, every plan must be perfect.

"And another thing is that after you've worked carefully for a while luck begins to favor you. I was extraordinarily lucky to be able to rent a small house up on the cinders of which Aden is made, above the town with a fine view out to sea. It belonged to the manager of some business they had, which was on its last legs, and he was just retiring.

"Then I had to get in touch with the clergyman there, and of course the mermaid had to have a name; and I found from the clergyman that she also had to have a parish.

"Well, I went to see her, paying my rupee as usual, and told her about her name. They had given her some silly name in the hotel, and I told her that that wouldn't do

at all. Well, I could never discuss things with her easily; a different color would suddenly flash in those eyes, and her mind would be off after some other subject quick as a startled fish. So I had to choose her name myself

"For her Christian name I thought of 'Siren'; and yet somehow she didn't remind me at all of a siren. She reminded me more of a barmaid I once knew at Brighton, a long while ago, called Gladys. As for her surname, I named her after her parish.

"You, Alton, are a lawyer," he said, turning to the man on his left. "You know that everyone born at sea is born legally in the parish of Stepney."

"Well—" Alton was beginning, but Jorkens swept on, for points like this were interesting to Alton and only funny to Jorkens, and to discuss such things between these two would have been useless.

"So she became Gladys Stepney," said Jorkens. "She had a bit of a dress. They used to dress her, she told me, in a green arrangement like seaweed; but what must have been a missionary had come along and said it ought to be black; so they gave her a small black skirt that she'd worn ever since. And now I had to get a decent dress for her; and you'll never guess what else I got for her, never. And she liked it too.

"A pair of boots. Yes, boots to stick up from the tarpaulin at the end of the Bath chair. I take no credit for it—it was just thievish cunning; but I will say, on my solemn word, she was the only thing I ever stole in my life. Of course the dress was white, stich for stich the same as the one I'd got for the lady of Aden.

"Well, the day came, and I picked my hour. Midnight's the time for such work as that in England, when honest men are asleep, afraid (Continued on page 104)



The Mermaid's Husband by Lord Dunsany (Continued from page 29)

of the darkness. Well, I went when men were asleep, but a greater terror than darkness kept them at home. I went at noon, when the sun was baking the cinders. You could commit suicide there in five minutes, by standing out in the street with your hat off. I went at noon to take the invalid lady in white to have a look at the mermaid.

"When the Arab had drawn the Bath chair up to the door I sent him away, and glad he was to get to the shade of a wall and lie down and sleep like the rest.

Then the lady of Aden and I walked inside, and I purchased two tickets. I had a red shawl that suited her very well; and her job was to put that over her white dress and vanish. There was a back door leading to another street, and she managed that very well. Five rupees got rid of the attendant.

"And then I gave Gladys Stepney her new white dress. She put it on where she was, and of course it got wet, but that doesn't matter much at noon in Aden. It was dry in half an hour. Then

I helped her out of the tank. It was amazing to see the pace at which she got over the floor; and I could see that without the dress she'd have been three times faster.

"We got to the door and I lifted her into the chair. Dresses came low in those days, so that you couldn't tell at a glance whether they hid ankles or fins. At any rate, no one was watching so far as I could see.

"Then I dragged the Bath chair away, and up to our little house; at noon, mind

you, in Aden in May, and all uphill; love is a powerful incentive. And I loved Gladys in those days. It was her eyes that made me love her. She had an amazingly beautiful figure; not the starved, flattened bust that poor silly fashion likes nowadays, but a form nourished well on her natural food, which was fish; for they fed her well at the hotel.

"And yet it was her eyes that I loved. 'Your eyes are strange today,' I used to say to her. And she would answer, 'Are they really?' or 'Do you really think so?' But the next moment, and it was for that moment I loved her, there seemed about to fall from her lips, seemed trembling upon them already, words telling in ancient Greek of the deeps of the sea.

"She might have spoken to Homer. He might have sat beside her and heard in golden hexameters, talk of the deep and mysteries of the tides, which even his tremendous imagination had never fathomed. That's how it seemed to me she might have spoken.

"Is it really nice?" she would say. And then a thought would darken the blue of her eyes, till you dreamed of the eyes of Athene, and she seemed about to say something more, something to which we could only listen in awe, though we should not understand it. And though that something more never came, I seemed to be living always on the brink of it.

"I spoke little to other men in those days, though I sometimes went to the town for a drink; I spoke little to them because I felt like a priest of the mystery that she would one day utter, something too far beyond their comprehension for it to be worth while to have any speech with them.

"But all she ever said when once I told her there was a mystery in her eyes was, 'Oh, is there really?' And it wasn't only her phrases that she seemed to have picked up at the hotel, but even her thoughts. Even her thoughts; and I never got from her any of those stories that would have been raw gold to Homer.

"Well, we got to our little house. And the first thing I did was to bring the clergyman, and introduce him to her and arrange for our wedding. The very first thing. So that he needn't have talked so much about sin as he did. I don't mean that he was actually rude; but sin was the topic he chose to talk of whenever left to himself; and sin was the end of any subject that I might choose to discuss with him. If there was any way to twist it in that direction.

"As I pointed out to him, I was ready to marry Miss Gladys Stepany there and then. If delays were made until he was ready to marry us, it looked to me as if he was making whatever sin there might be about our little house, not Gladys and I. And at that he went away aggrieved and angry.

"Of course we never let him, or anyone, see that Gladys was only a mermaid. And suspicious as he was of the invalid chair and the shawls, he was looking only for sin, so that the more suspicious he got, the further he strayed from the truth.

"Well, he went angry away from us. But he married us in the end; in the little church in Aden; the invalid lady in her Bath chair, spinster of Stepany, and the wedding veil that came in handy to hide any last trace by which she might have been recognized. Her eyes lighted up at the music as though she knew it. 'Mendelssohn,' I whispered to her. 'Who's he?' she asked. 'A musician,' I answered. 'Is he really?' she said.

"Oh, these gray days! I have that

memory to lighten them. A long way off, but still shining a little, as long as memory lasts. Seas as green as pale emeralds, and she and I with the Bath chair on the beach.

"I got rid of the Arab for good, and dragged the Bath chair myself. And when nobody was about we would go bathing, I always coming out first, and ready with a long bathing dress in case anybody was there. With a towel or two to wrap round her I was always able to carry her to the Bath chair without exciting any suspicion.

"Wild, wayward and strange as she was, I could always render her docile if she were risking suspicion, by mentioning the hotel. In a way she was fond of the hotel, because it was the hub of the only social life she knew, and she was always asking me who had gone to stay the night, who had looked in at a drink; but she was clearly made for the sea, and, however little she knew of her own destiny, when she got to the long rollers breaking lazily into surf, it was the sea that claimed her.

"In such a mood, which was strongest in her after bathing, the thought of the wretched tank in the stuffy room was repulsive to her, and in cases of necessity I had only to mention the hotel to stop any frolic of hers that might have betrayed us. What kind of frolic? Oh, anything. You never could tell what she would do. One of the things that gave me most anxiety was her habit of leaping out of the sea to bite at sea gulls.

"If she were of the long way out, and I nowhere near, she would do it again and again whenever a sea gull passed. And there would I be standing, perhaps on the beach, shouting out to her. 'The Grand! The Grand!' and hoping that no one but she would catch the allusion. How the sea gulls could be so silly as to go backwards and forwards above her again and again I could not understand; but they did.

"In the house I found things no easier. There was no one there but the cook; but I saw that we must have one or two people up there sooner or later. Otherwise suspicions would grow, and sooner or later would come the right one, and after that I should be found out in five minutes. And even if we invited nobody, someone was bound to drop in.

"As things were just then, I assure you that was impossible. We couldn't have had anyone to dinner; I couldn't even have asked them to tea. She wasn't ready for it. There were thousands of things I had to teach her. And some of them she wouldn't even learn. You've no idea how many rules there are connected with what we do naturally, like sitting down to table and eating a meal.

"It was a race with time. At any moment somebody might drop in; and there seemed more to teach her every day, as I remembered more and more trifles that I had supposed she knew, until I found she knew nothing. And it was no use conceding a point to her, because she would only go on then and ask for something more. For instance, she didn't like fish cooked, so for peace and quiet, and to please her, I said she should have them raw.

"But it didn't end there; when they came in raw she said she liked them alive. And all the time I was trying to build a hasty appearance of comfortable respectability, things seemed sliding away from under me to the sea. I had thought for days of every detail, such as getting her into her chair at the end of the table, with her fins away under the tablecloth, and I had never thought to tell her not to snarl at her food; not to—oh, thousands of things!

"It was sometimes a relief to get away from the house and down to the beach, where she seemed in less danger of being found out than amongst her own tea things. It was at her fault, but entirely mine. I'd stolen her and I was learning something of the anxieties that haunt men who steal.

"I hadn't even a hardened conscience; so that, in addition to constant fear of being found out, I was continually thinking of the hotel, and reproaching myself with the memory of what the attendant had told me; that on a good day, when a liner was in, they would make from twenty to thirty rupees. Say, two pound in a day. And one realizes then that it was no figure of speech when the manager said he wouldn't sell her for a thousand pounds. She was worth double that to them.

"Yet that was what was eating into my conscience. Love at first, a little thought for anything but her eyes; and then, as thoughts began to come back to me from beyond the remote wild tides that seemed roaming behind the flash of her glances, gradually came the thought of the Grand Hotel and the rupees they would make on a good day.

"I went down there one day and saw them trying to show some fish that looked like a cod, that they had put in the tank instead. It went to my heart to see it. And not a word of reproach to me, for they never suspected me. And somehow that hurt me as much as if they had. No, I shall never steal again.

"And this was the point I had got to when you came in," said Jorkens, turning to me. "I saw what it was impossible to be blind to, that my wife belonged to the hotel. I had stolen her; and I had thought that my anxiety would be merely to escape detection. Now I was finding that night and day I had other anxieties; night and day I was wondering how it went with the hotel I had robbed; how many rupees they got for that wretched show of the fish, what else they were doing to try to make up their losses; the Grand was on my conscience and there was no shaking it off.

"That was how it was with me when we'd been married a few weeks, and the more I thought of it the more clearly I saw the only thing there was to see. No, there's no thinking round theft; I've heard a lot of trying to talk round it, but you can't think it away.

"We were down by the sea one day. I'd brought her there chiefly to get away from the house, for every day we were lucky about callers brought the time nearer when our luck must run out and somebody would walk into the house. And we weren't nearly ready for callers. I told you I was racing against time, trying to teach her this and that; well, I was losing the race. I'd made scarce any progress at all.

"For instance, when we were first married I used to throw fish to her across the table, because she liked it, and she used to catch them in her mouth. Silly of me, of course, but I was very much in love; and it was not an untidy habit, for I never knew her to miss.

"The trouble was that she still insisted on it. And I had to do it; there was no question of that. So would you; so would any man. I'll tell you why, though it is unpleasant. Unpleasant is hardly the word for it. But once she cried. Just one howl, and I stopped her. But it was the most awful sound that ever chilled my blood.

"She was so frightfully human, too, to look at, so awfully like the girl I knew at Brighton; that I hadn't the least idea

she could cry like that, and it set my hair on end. I dared not risk anything like that happening again; so you see I was in her power.

"Well, I'd got away from the house and we were down by the sea; and I was thinking over things. She was gazing at the deep green horizon, and we were going to have a swim; and first of all I warned her against sharks, because I somehow saw by her mood and the look in her eyes that she would go a long way out that day. But she laughed at my mention of sharks; they only seemed to amuse her.

"And for a while before going in we sat on the sand. And then I thought the time had come, and the sooner it was over the better, and I told her what had been on my mind for weeks, which was that of course she belonged to the Grand Hotel. The moment I said that I felt an honest man, and better in every way for it. But a look came over her eyes like the shadow of a ship on the water. I saw then that a simple matter of honesty about which there could be no two opinions was not so simple to her.

"I might take a room at the Grand, I

said: it was a small hotel and I shouldn't be far from the tank. And then, for the first time, I found that her old interest as to who stayed at the Grand was gone. Rapidly I was losing her interest altogether; her eyes were glooming and changing, till it was as when a storm darkens the deep; and with all these changing colors darkening the iris, she was gazing out to sea.

"What had I said to annoy her? I asked her then. I had not made the standards of honesty, I had merely offended against them, and now I wanted my conscience to be at rest again. I had not made my conscience.

"But she could not see that her place was in the tank; she could understand nothing, and only gazed out to sea with her eyes glooming. Then I got the rug that she always wore when I carried her back to the chair, and asked her to come home, for I wanted to talk it all over quietly. And she never said a word and did not move; but when I touched her to wrap her round with the rug, she leaped forward, at the same time throwing away a light scarf that she wore.

"I said that she moved very fast on the

floor of the room at the Grand and that without clothing she could have gone three times the speed; her pace through the shallow water was as fast as a man running. And in an instant she was out where she could swim. A flick of her tail then and she was out of my sight, and then for a while I saw no more of her than a curious ripple which went with amazing speed straight out from the land.

"Once more I saw her, where the fin of a shark erected itself from the water. She came up out of the sea as far as her waist and flung something at the fin, then dashed away under that ripple; and a splash near the fin showed where her derisive missile had struck the sea.

"That was the last I saw of her; and I was left all alone on the beach, bitterly wondering, as I have wondered ever since, what it was she had thrown at the shark. In those depths and swimming, as she was, near the surface, as the ripple showed, she could not have found a stone. Her clothing she had cast off before she started. What, then, could she have thrown but my wedding ring? No, no, it could have been nothing else."

