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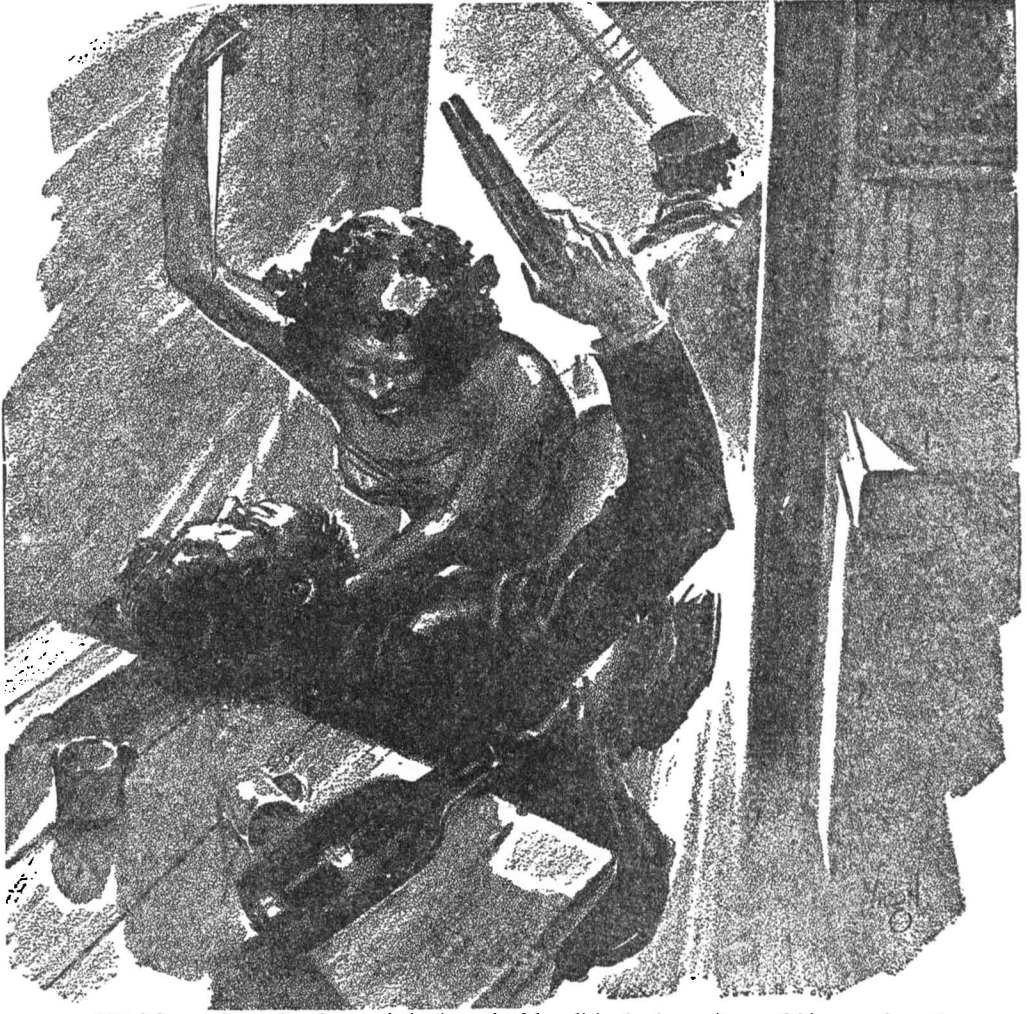
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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor. 178



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"Quick as a bouncing leopard she launched her lithe body at the would-be murderer."

The Phantom Island

By ARLTON EADIE

He bought the cabin of the old sailing-vessel to put in his garden as a summer-house—and thereby let himself in for a weird and profitable experience

"YES, sir, that's the old *Euphrates*, now. She's seen a tidy few changes in her time, she has; but she's finished her voyaging now, for they've towed her here to be broken up. She was designed for a fast

Atlantic passenger-boat—fast for her day, that is—but the Government took her over as soon as she was off the stocks, and used her for carrying troops to the Crimea. They only used her as a transport for about ten years; then she was sold out of the Service and converted into a cargo steamer, to go tramping round for another twenty. They were a bit distrustful of steam in those days and always built their vessels as full-rigged ships, so's they could sail if anything went wrong with the machinery, as it frequently did. When other, newer ships came along, and the owners found that she couldn't compete against 'em except at a loss, they had the machinery ripped out of her and used her as a sailing-ship pure and simple. She's changed hands a many times since then, and now she's come to the breaking-yard. But she were a fine ship in her day. Would you care to have a look over her, sir?"

Accompanied by my brother-in-law, George Gough, I had visited the Thames-side yard in the hope of picking up some old, well-seasoned oak with which to try our 'prentice hands in constructing a summer-house for my garden. While looking round, we had witnessed a large three-masted ship being towed to her moorings by two straining tugs, and a chance inquiry had elicited her life-history from the yard foreman.

There was something pathetic in the progress of the doomed ship as she silently glided to her last resting-place and was made fast by many hawsers. Aged, storm-battered, neglected, she seemed like some old war-charger who, its term of usefulness past, ambles wearily into the knacker's yard.

Accepting the foreman's invitation, we passed up the gang-plank, peering in turn into the fo'castle, lined with tiers of coffin-like bunks, the deserted galley with its rusty stove, the stripped chartroom and officers' cabins; finally regaining the deck and

entering the deckhouse which was situated between the main and mizzen masts. This was a fairly large structure, measuring twelve feet by eighteen, its greatest length of course running fore and aft. Round it ran a series of cushioned lockers which could be used either as seats or berths. This was obviously a relic of the *Euphrates'* luxurious, passenger-carrying days; for it was paneled in carved rosewood, with numerous ports and a large, sliding double-door on either side. Although the interior fittings showed signs of rough usage, they were much less dilapidated than the other portions of the ship, and I surmised—rightly as it turned out later—that this had been set aside for the captain.

"What becomes of all this?" I asked the foreman. "Surely it could be used again?"

The man shook his head dubiously.

"Well, I dunno, sir. Maybe, maybe not. If we has a ship in good condition to break up, they can gen'rally use the standard fittings—boats, brasswork, companion-rails and hatchways—on other vessels. But with a deckhouse like this, sir, it's a thousand chances to one against it being used on shipboard."

George suddenly pinched my arm.

"Why, here's your summer house already made for you," he whispered. "We could cart it up to your place in sections and put it together in no time. It'll be a bit of a novelty to have a real ship's cabin in the middle of your lawn. You don't see carving like this every day. Look at that figure of Neptune over the clock, and those mermaids over the doorways! And you may get the whole thing for a mere song."

Being unaware of the precise monetary value which George sets upon his vocal efforts, I am unable to say if his estimate proved to be correct, but I was quite satisfied with my bargain when we quitted the office after completing the deal.

In due course the various sections were

delivered, and the small damage they had suffered in removal proved that the note, which I had slipped into the foreman's hand at parting, had not been wasted. In a few days we had fitted them together in my garden; thereby setting the scene, as it were, for a drama as tense, grim, and intriguing as any seen upon the stage.

I SOON discovered that my novel "den" made an ideal place to write in during the summer months. I was seated there one sunny August afternoon about two months after its erection, busily correcting some proof sheets. Coming to the end of the last one, I placed it on the pile under the paperweight (for a fairly strong breeze came through the open doors), then lit my pipe and lay back on the settee, musing and day-dreaming. Gradually my thoughts turned to the cabin in which I lay. What varied scenes its portholes must have looked out upon during its checkered career; the number of miles it had traveled; the storms that must have tossed it ere it came to its present quiet haven in that shady Kentish garden, where the only sounds that broke the stillness were the drowsy hum of the bees hovering over the flower beds and the soft rustle of the wind-stirred trees.

If those wooden walls could only tell their tale! . . . The listless, half-formed thought was my last conscious sensation before I surrendered myself to the lulling magic of my surroundings and fell into a deep, untroubled sleep.

It is a well-known fact that the unconscious mind takes no heed of the passage of time; when I again opened my eyes I was uncertain whether minutes or hours had elapsed while I slept. Not that I thought long about the matter, for other and more startling problems soon forced themselves upon my mind.

When I had fallen asleep, the view from the right-hand door of the deckhouse had

been confined to a small lawn, bordered by flower beds and bounded by a tall hedge of box; but now my bewildered eyes saw an expanse of sunlit sea, upon which lay a long, low island, girt by surf-drenched coral and crowned with tropical palms. From the other door, instead of the familiar view of the back elevation of the house, an ocean of deep sapphire blue stretched out until it joined the lighter blue of the sky in one long, unbroken line.

For a minute or two I naturally assumed that I was experiencing a particularly vivid dream, but soon I began to doubt if this were so. For the delusion—if it were such—was not confined to the sense of sight. The floor beneath me rose and dipped with the steady roll of a ship at anchor; near at hand came the faint creaking of yards, with every now and then the measured thunder of the surf on the distant reef; while over all there hung that mingled odor of tar, hemp and stale cookery which seems inseparable from a sailing-ship.

I decided that this was one of the occasions when a quiet smoke would do a man a world of good. I glanced toward the table where I had laid my pipe, only to find that it, together with the pen and ink, typewriter, manuscript, and everything else belonging to me, had disappeared. In their place there lay a large chart, an old-fashioned double-barreled pistol and a decanter half filled with an amber liquid which I judged to be rum.

"Well, I've never had a dream as real as this before!" was my mental comment as I rose to my feet and bent over the chart, which was partly rolled up from each end. I put out my hand to straighten it, then drew in my breath with a sudden gasp.

Although my hand was touching the surface of the paper, and I could feel its texture with my fingers, there appeared to be nothing there! I put forth my other hand, with a like result. I glanced down

at my feet—and then only did the startling truth grip my mind.

I was disembodied—invisible—an unsubstantial phantom with the emotions and senses of a man!

I CANNOT describe the agony and confusion of my mind as I sank down on the settee I had just quitted. Was I dead?—dreaming?—mad? In vain I racked my brain for an explanation of my surroundings. I think I must have finally decided in favor of it being a dream, for I lay back once more to await events. It may or may not have been a fortunate circumstance that it did not cross my mind to make my way through the open door onto the deck outside.

"Euphrates ahoy. Heave a line there!"

The hail sounded as though it came from but a few yards off. There was a rattle of unshipped oars as a small boat came alongside, and immediately afterward two men stepped across the bulwarks and entered the deckhouse. One was a middle-aged man of harsh and forbidding aspect, the other a mere lad of nineteen or twenty. Both were dressed in seafaring clothes which went out of vogue half a century ago. The older man wore wide canvas trousers and a short blue coat with tarnished brass buttons, over which was spread the square collar of his check shirt. His upper lip and chin were shaven, but beneath it ran a strip of whisker which extended up to meet the longish hair of his head. On his left hip there dangled a cutlass, while a pistol was thrust through the belt he wore round his waist.

"Well, that business is hitched up taut and shipshape, thank the lord!" he said, tossing his broad-brimmed straw hat on a locker and mopping his streaming forehead with a gaudy handkerchief. "Whew! the sun's enough to boil a man's brains inside his skull, sink me if it ain't! Five flamin' miles through the bush they took

me before we came to the place where the old king slings his hammock, and all the while I didn't know but what the next step was going to land me in an ambush. But everything turned out all right in the end."

"The natives were quite friendly, then?"

The tone in which the younger man asked the question was that of an educated man.

"I guess they ain't got the savvy to be anything else," returned the other in a contemptuous voice. "They're as friendly and innocent as little babbies; I don't suppose a white man's ship has touched here since the day it was created. That hurricane what blew us out of our course must ha' been sent by the good angels. It's virgin soil here, Davy my lad, every foot of it!"

"And you think there may be pearls here?" burst eagerly from the boy's lips.

"I know there is! Listen here." He seated himself and bent closer to the other. "One of the chief's darters, a mighty good-looking young gal of about eighteen, or thereabouts, had 'many moons ago'—heaven alone knows how long she meant by that—been caught in a gale while out fishin', and carried to another island where there happened to be a white missionary—'God-man' she called him. There she had picked up a bit of English before she was sent back in a native craft. She acted as go-between, seein' as how I couldn't speak their lingo; and as soon as she made her papa understand what I were arter, the old boy sings out to two of his bucks, and they takes me in their canoe and paddles out into the lagoon on the fur side o' the island. Halfway across they stops and points overboard. The water was that clear and calm that you could see the shadow of their boat on the bottom, a couple o' fathoms down. Shiver me if the whole sea floor ain't smothered with real, black-edged pearl-bearing shell, laying as thick as the pebbles on Deal Beach! The natives here are as much at home in the water as on dry land. For a few glass beads they'll

clear that lagoon for us. Then, after allowing a month for the shell to rot, we can load up and make for home waters—made men for the rest of our lives.”

For a while the two sat silently reviewing the prospect before them. Then Dave rose to his feet with something like a sigh.

“It seems too good to be true, Mark, after all the ill-luck we’ve had on this cruise.”

Into the other’s heavy-lidded black eyes there came a suspicious gleam. But the next moment he burst into a hearty laugh.

“True? O’ course it’s true. Haven’t I just been a tellin’ you?” he said. “Everything’s fallen into our hands. The shell is ours for the takin’—the natives are friendly——”

“But *are* they friendly, Mark?” interrupted the boy. “They may be concealing their real feelings to put us off our guard. A sudden rush when we were unprepared, and they’d swamp us by their very numbers.”

Mark rose to his feet and clapped the younger man heartily on the shoulder.

“No fear o’ that, my lad. Why, the king is sendin’ his own darter to us as a hostage for his good behavior.”

“His daughter?”

“Ay, the one I told you about—her that can speak English. She’s goin’ to sling her hammock aboard here until we’ve got the shell under hatches. They’re bringin’ her on board tomorrow, and a prettier or daintier hostage you couldn’t wish for. Come, we’ll have a peg in honor of our guest.”

He took two glasses from the locker and filled them from the decanter on the table. His lips were twisted into a sardonic smile as he handed one to Dave and raised the other aloft.

“Here’s to Lèla, the belle of Tuvongo—our hostage!”

Even as he raised the glass to his lips his figure became shadowy and indistinct, and

the dull boom of the surf gave place to the twittering of sparrows on the lawn. The tropical isle had vanished. I was back in England, within a few yards of my own home. The only things unchanged were the walls of the deckhouse of the *Euphrates*.

FOR some time afterward I continued to sit still, my mind frantically endeavoring to recall and analyze the impressions it had received. Plain, practical sense seemed to tell me that the whole thing was nothing but a particularly intense dream; yet that commonplace explanation was far from satisfying me. The episode had been too detailed, too real, too much like an actual, personal experience for it to have been a mere fantasm conjured up by the sleeping brain. There must be some deeper, more logical explanation.

Even then I was far from suspecting that I possessed psychic powers—indeed I had always regarded such powers in others with a good deal of skepticism. Still, I felt that there must be some influence, some latent power—a legacy, maybe, of the stirred emotions of those who had lived there before—that gave the old walls the power of reproducing, to the unconscious or semi-conscious mind, some of the scenes that had been enacted within them. But, whatever the explanation might be, I was determined to make another effort to see the outcome of the strange drama whose opening had been so unexpectedly revealed.

George, of course, had his own theory.

“H’m, liver out of order,” was his verdict when I had told my story. “You keep too late hours and do too much scribbling. Come have a round at golf.”

I gravely thanked him for his good advice, but the next afternoon saw me lying on the deckhouse settee in the hope of witnessing a continuation of my vision. My mind, however, was far too excited to allow me to sleep. In vain I tried every

known device to ensure the desired oblivion; the mere fact that I was desperately anxious to sleep was sufficient to keep me wide awake. Not to be defeated, I made my bed there that night, having previously (for I had no desire to alarm the ladies of the household by any hint of supernatural happenings) made the unusually hot weather my excuse. But I must have slept too soundly on these occasions, for nothing unusual took place. I had almost resigned myself to George's view of the matter when, without warning, I experienced the sequel to the previous manifestation.

Once more it happened on an afternoon. The weather was oppressively hot, without a breath of wind stirring; the sky was overcast by low clouds and there was a hint of thunder in the air. I had been working at high pressure for the past few days in order to make up for time lost in my former experiments, and sleep came to me unbidden.

It seemed as if I had scarcely closed my eyes before I was aware of the slow, regular motion of a sea-borne ship. Eagerly I looked through the open door. Yes, there was the same low island with its ring of snow-white coral and its fretwork of bronze-green palms outlined against the sky.

Once again I experienced that strange, detached sensation of being an invisible observer of a scene of long ago.

Seated at the table, her brows puckered into a puzzled frown as she bent over an open book, was a young native girl. Her complexion of warm copper-brown, her scarlet, small-lipped mouth and straight nose, the hair which fell in wavy masses over her gently curving breasts, all seemed to indicate that at least some white blood coursed beneath the smooth, satin-like skin.

A shadow fell across the doorway and the young boy whom I knew as Davy entered.

"Hullo, Lèla," he cried gayly. "Trying your hand at white-man magic? Ah,

you'll need a bit of schooling before you'll get that book to talk to you!"

There was a flash of white teeth as her lips parted in a smile of welcome and a deeper tinge crept into her cheeks. But an instant later her lips drooped in a rebellious pout.

"Why um book no speak to Lèla same's you?" she demanded. "Lèla all same white Mary-girl. Um?"

There was something like pity in the boy's eyes as he looked down at the face upturned so eagerly to his.

"Not quite the same, Lèla. But you wouldn't understand the difference if I tried to explain. But don't puzzle your pretty head over that old book. Here's something you can understand better."

He drew a necklace of glittering glass beads from his pocket and threw it over her head.

"*Ohè!*" She uttered a squeal of childish pleasure, then dashed to the looking-glass at the end of the deckhouse and stood twisting her sinuous body so as to make the sunlight catch the stones. Suddenly, as though seized by a passing fear, she ceased her contortions and returned to the boy, searching his face with troubled eyes.

"Why you give Lèla these?" she asked, lifting the beads and running them through her slender brown fingers.

"Because it's time to up-anchor and sail for home."

"You go away—right away?" Her lips were trembling as she said the words, her young bosom rising and falling swiftly.

"Sure," answered the boy, idly turning the pages of the book on the table. Had he chanced to glance up he could not have mistaken the emotion which his words had caused. "We've got together nearly two thousand virgin pearls—some of 'em whoppers, too! And we've more nacre-shell than we can stow on board. It only remains to fill our water-tanks, escort you back to your father, and we'll be ready for

sea. But we shan't send you back empty-handed, Lèla—why, the other girls will go and drown themselves with envy when they see what you've got. See here—and here!"

He had thrown open one of the lockers, and now he poured into the girl's lap handful after handful of gaudy trifles and knick-nacks dear to the savage heart. But she made no effort to touch them as she stared down at the glittering heap with lack-luster eyes, and presently her indifference caused him to look up.

"Why, Lèla," he cried in surprise. "Don't you want them?"

"No!" She stood up, letting the rings and bracelets fall to the deck and roll in all directions. "Lèla want to stay here—with you!" And she fixed her glowing eyes upon him with a look that no man could misunderstand.

THAT the boy was genuinely taken aback by this demonstration there could not be the slightest doubt. There was an expression of embarrassed distress on his good-looking, sunburnt face as he gently laid his hand on her shoulder.

"But, my dear girl, you must go back," he said in the tone of one who humors a wayward child. "You are our hostage—the pledge given for our safety. What would your father think if——"

"Give him these!" she burst out fiercely, spurning with her bare feet the baubles on the deck. "Give him these—and let me go with you!"

He came a step nearer and looked into the flushed, quivering face. She returned his gaze with eyes that had in their dusky depths that look of dumb, adoring devotion that one sometimes sees in the eyes of a faithful dog. Thus they stood, while a dozen long-drawn breaths came from between her parted lips. Then a loud, raucous laugh from the open doorway made them both turn with a start.

"Oh-ho! little Lèla likes her quarters so

much that she doesn't like the idea of goin' back to her mat in the women's hut?" Mark came forward into the cabin as he spoke, glancing from one to the other with eyes which glowed with an animal light. "I'm sorry to have to cut short your little love scene, but sharp's the order now. The glass is droppin', and there's a bank of cloud comin' up from windward that means a blow—and a mighty stiff one, too! I don't want to be caught with a coral-reef under my lee. We'll hoist and run for it while there's time. Put the girl ashore and get back quick!"

No sooner had the boy drawn the reluctant Lèla from the deckhouse, than Mark, with a quick glance from the door, crossed to an iron-bound box in the corner, unlocked it, and drew out a bulky leather bag and emptied its contents on the table. As he did so, there burst upon my astonished gaze a cascade of shimmering opalescence which reflected back the sunshine in softly glowing, many-colored fires. Some of the pearls were quite small, but the majority were as large as peas, while one or two seemed of the size of robins' eggs, though flatter in shape. Altogether their value must have been enormous, and as I saw the light of greedy cunning which flared in the man's eyes as he ran his coarse fingers through that heap of wealth, I felt myself trembling for the safety of his young partner.

With a sudden movement he swept the pearls back into the bag, but instead of replacing it in the iron casket, he mounted on the locker at the farther end of the cabin and inserted the point of his sheathknife in the carved frieze that ran round the top of the walls.

Under his careful leverage a small portion of the woodwork hinged outward, disclosing a square cavity. Placing the treasure inside, he closed the door of his secret hiding-place and sprang lightly down, regaining the deck in time to find

himself face to face with Dave and Lèla as they re-entered the deckhouse.

"Why—not gone yet?" he cried with an oath that seemed to indicate as much fear as anger. "Are you mad? Look at the sea——"

"Aye, look at it—no boat could pass the reef!"

As Dave spoke, the ship gave a sudden lurch and rolled, staggering like a stricken thing, sharply to leeward. Looking outside, I saw that the stretch of gently heaving blue was now a seething cauldron of yeasty waves, lashed into fury by the hurricane that had burst upon us.

Almost immediately a sharp crash sounded in the cabin as the iron casket slid across the polished surface of the table and fell to the floor, the impact making the lid fly open, revealing its emptiness.

"The pearls! They're gone!"

Fiercely the boy flung the words as he stared wide-eyed at the rifled casket. When he shifted his eyes it was to fix them on his partner in a long, steady look that was in itself an unspoken accusation.

The atmosphere of the cabin grew suddenly tense as the two men eyed each other in silence across the dizzily swaying floor. Then a laugh sounded above the droning wind and crashing seas, a laugh that was more like the snarl of a wild beast than the utterance of a human being. It came from the lips of the older man as he pointed toward the native girl.

"Lèla! That she-devil has stolen them!"

A quiver ran over the girl's brown body as she realized the meaning of the accusation hurled at her, and for an instant she seemed to shrink under the venomous glare of Mark's eyes. Recovering, she threw back her head with a proud, unstudied grace, and shook it fiercely.

"Lèla no thief!" she cried with flashing eyes.

"Aye, she's right there," agreed the boy. "Natives don't value pearls, and she'd just

refused a heap of trinkets that were far more precious in her eyes. Why should she steal from us things she could pick out of the lagoon?"

A derisive smile curved the other's cruel mouth.

"You fool!" he spat out the words with eager haste. "O' course she took 'em, so's we'd have to stop here to gather more. Can't ye see her darned artfulness? She didn't want us to sail away, and to lose her blue-eyed boy. She wanted to enjoy another month of——"

The words were clipped off short as Dave stepped forward and caught him a smashing blow on the jaw, sending him sprawling over the floor. He was up again in a flash, and the next instant the two were locked together in a fierce, struggling embrace which it seemed that death alone could break. To and fro, backward and forward they reeled over the tilting, pitching floor; the one mouthing threats and curses, the other fighting in tight-lipped silence.

Outside, the hurricane was shrieking like a thousand unleashed fiends, and the thunder of the waves on the reef had merged into one long, unbroken roar. But the two fought on unheedful of the warring elements, until a sharp, jarring crash from the bows signaled a mutual truce.

"The cable's parted!" Dave cried as he rose to his feet. "Help make sail if you want to live another hour. We can finish our argument when there's clear sea ahead." And he made for the open door.

The instant his back was turned, Mark drew a pistol from his belt, cocked it, and raised it deliberately until the long, shining barrel pointed straight between the other's shoulder-blades.

"Take that, ye scum!" he snarled as he pressed the trigger.

The crash of the discharge and the smack of the leaden bullet came simultaneously. But the shot had been fired by

a man already in the throes of death. Quick as a pouncing leopard, Lèla had launched her lithe body at the would-be murderer the moment his intention had rushed to her mind. One brown hand closed over the man's wrist, jerking the pistol so that the bullet flew wide; the other rose and fell twice, sideways, with a flash of steel. Making a convulsive movement, Mark crumpled forward on his outstretched hands, then slowly slid to the deck, coughing out his life with the hilt of a native dagger protruding just below his armpit.

With a glance of silent gratitude to the girl, Dave hastened out on deck. There came a quick succession of shouted orders, the thudding of many bare feet on the deck; then the wild pitching gave place to the steady slant of a ship under sail, and the roar of the breakers grew fainter.

Turning my eyes shoreward, I saw that the foam-ringed island was slipping past as the ship gathered way. Patches of waving green appeared amid the tossing waters—the tropic brilliancy of the sky gave place to a duller hue, as the scene faded like breath upon a window-pane. I realized that I was looking out on the trees of my own garden, and that someone was gripping my shoulder and shaking me to and fro.

“WAKE up, old man! Are you having nightmares in the daytime?”

I slowly raised myself to a sitting posture. George, his hand still upon my shoulder, was looking down at me with an expression of concern on his usually cheerful countenance.

“You've been pulling such pretty faces

during the last ten minutes that I thought it a kindness to wake you up,” he told me. “You looked as though you were seeing more spooks.”

“That's just what I have been seeing,” I answered, and then went on to tell him what had occurred. At the conclusion he gave a little cough.

“It's queer, of course—very queer,” he murmured, shaking a smiling head at me. “Still, if you will persist in eating heavy lunches this hot weather——”

“Wait a moment before you laugh,” I warned him as I rose to my feet. “Lend me your pocket-knife.”

He did so, being careful, I noticed, to keep the width of the table between us. Opening the largest blade, I stepped onto the top of the locker and began to pry among the carved foliage which ornamented the junction of the wall and roof.

“I say,” began George, “what's the big idea?”

“This!”

I thrust my hand into the space which had at that moment been revealed by the opening of the cunningly contrived door, and drew out a leather bag.

“You mean that it is true—really true?” stammered George, his eyes beginning to bulge.

“Judge for yourself,” I returned in a tone of very pardonable triumph as I severed the thong which bound the mouth of the bag, and shot the contents out on the table.

There, with their satiny luster somewhat dulled by their dark hiding-place, but scarcely less precious for that, lay a heap of shimmering pearls.

