

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ADVENTURE IN LOVELESS LAND

#### I

UNDER the rough horse-play and drunken revelry at the Gay-Cat a sinister and definite purpose was becoming more and more apparent.

Much scuffling, shouting, loud laughter accompanied the scramble for the boats. The boisterous and fantastic still masked the ferocity of intent; rapacity still grinned and coveted; murder merely flickered in dull, drink-inflamed eyes.

Somebody had nailed the black flag, with its skull and crossed thigh-bones, to the masthead of Ray Wirt's fishing-boat, and the lumberjacks and Bonnet Bay men were capering and yelling around it, firing their guns into the air.

Lorenzo, half crazed by blockade whisky, had found the fireworks brought from Bonnet House, and he was setting off chasers and Roman candles in every direction, imperilling everybody. Rockets whizzed along the water; bombs rose roaring into the sunset light, bursting in pale and ghostly radiance over sea and shore; the balls from the Roman candles were mere ghosts of colour exploding in showers of sickly sparks. But against the low floating sun the pines of Tiger Island stood gigantic and black, and the boats and men too were black as shadows dancing on a screen.

Lumbermen, baymen, divers, dredgers, had decked themselves in the garish finery used in former orgies at the Gay-Cat; red shirts, red sashes, red bandannas tied askew over weather-beaten brows, did duty again.

They had learned the songs of the Forty Club; they

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sang "Old Stede Bonnet" and "Davy Jones"; they crowded the rocking sail-boats and launches, laughing, scuffling, filling the air with the random roaring of intoxication. And underneath always smouldered their ultimate rage and purpose. Already the sinister, which had lurked in abeyance, began to burn and show a redder glimmer in their eyes.

In the lurid light of sunset Ray Wirt set a megaphone to his distorted mouth, and his voice checked and dominated the tumult.

"Ahoy, you Bonnet Bay men!" he shouted. "They's a mint o' gold on Place-o'-Swans! What you-all aimin' to do about it!"

At that the shrill yelling, which had partly ceased for a moment, died out utterly. In comparative stillness, amid the lap of wave and creak of rocking craft, a metallic clang sounded distinctly. Somebody was loading the magazine of a rifle. Instantly all around the dry clink-clank rattle of weapons being loaded broke out on every boat.

"They got our ship!" cried Harry Senix shrilly. "Her belly's full o' gold an' they're a-diggin' the very guts out of her! Are we goin' to get ours?"

Mr. Samuel Potter arose from the engine-pit of the launch.

"Let's go!" he bellowed. "Who's goin' to go over and clean out John Lanier's bunch on Place-of-Swans?"

"Listen!" yelled Dan Supple, standing between Welper and Potter. "Every fella here can stuff his pants full of gold if he ever gets into that cofferdam!"

In the silence an indescribable torrent of exclamations burst from Lorenzo. His two assistants seized the mast of their sail-boat, stepped it, hoisted sail amid a confusion of high-pitched cries. Everywhere aboard the rocking boats sails went up, booms swung wide; the confusion of voices swelled to a jangling shout.

The sinking sun flashed crimson on mast and sail and hull as the boats, getting under way, crept out of the

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shadow of Tiger Island. Red shirts, red bandannas gleamed; red sunset light glinted on rifle and shot-gun; the wild shouts became a sustained and yelling uproar; boats fouled, were fended off, fought clear with curses and blows from pole and oar; the staccato racket of launches echoed over the water; drink-crazed men began to shoot at the distant, sunlit islands towards which they were headed; futile volleys from rifle and shot-gun rattled at random over the water; the black flag, made by Helen Wyvern, flapped broadly and rippled out from the mast-head of Ray Wirt's fishing-boat.

On board Mr. Welper's launch Dan Supple, squatted in the engine-pit, steered wide of the grotesquely crowded and heterogeneous fleet of small craft.

"Let 'em do the dirty work," he muttered to Mr. Potter, "and we'll pick up what we can on our way to False Cape."

Mr. Welper, extended flat on his stomach on the turtle-deck forward, said over his shoulder to Potter: "I didn't see Donald after he tried to stop the stampede to Place-of-Swans."

"Me neither," added Supple, fussing over his engine. "I guess he thinks the beans is spilled and we're headed for Sing-Sing, sure."

"If he smelled a rat I dunno," remarked Mr. Potter; "but there was rats to smell a-plenty."

Supple set aside his oil-can and crouched, one grimy hand on the tiller.

"That's kinda funny, his girl startin' for Norfolk. Looks like Providence was warnin' her to beat it. Maybe Don is fixin' to folla her now that the beans is spilled."

"M—m, yes," said Mr. Welper thoughtfully; "it's just as well that Nellie left us. M—m, yes; speaking in all reverence, Dan, I consider her escape a direct intervention of m—m—of that Providence which so mercifully——"

"Barney!" interrupted Mr. Potter.

"Yes, Sam?"

"You got those rockets handy?"

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"Yes; here in two bundles under my overcoat."

"One bundle of red ones and one of green?"

"And safe and dry, right here, Sam!"

"We send up three red and two green for the *Mandrill's* boat to come ashore for us?" inquired Supple.

"Quite right, Dan. . . . The wind's going down with the sun," he added, squinting at the ragged, bellying line of sail-boats to starboard standing in for Place-of-Swans.

Beyond, like skirmishers, three launches were well out on the sunset sea, headed for Place-of-Swans.

"Slow down and circle, Dan," said Mr. Welper. "We don't want to mix in with the dirty work."

Potter said: "It's going to be some mix-up, what with those drunken lumberjacks and that bunch of Bonnet Bay crackers full of boot-leg. . . . I guess there'll be some hog-killin', Barney."

"If it be the will of the Almighty," said Mr. Welper piously, "everything is in the hands of an all-powerful Providence. We must have trust and faith, Sam. M—m, yes, we must hope for the best with faith and resignation. I—ah—venture to hope that John Lanier is, m—m, shortly to be removed, so to speak, from among those present at the m—m—the banquet of life. Yes, Sam, I have faith in John's imminent and—ah—violent demise. *Not*, Sam, that I speak in any spirit of revenge for, m—m, for injury unjustly done to me by him and that blamed gay-cat of his. No, Sam, I would wish him a full life and a happy end. I would wish him all the earthly satisfaction that the—ah—the poet includes in the stanza:

From the banquet of life rise a satisfied guest,  
Thank the lord of the feast and in peace go to rest."

Supple, steering in a wide circle, grinned.

"He'll get his diff'runt, I guess!" he remarked. "An' you can't tell what that drunken crowd from Bonnet's will do to his girl, neither."

"I deplore it," murmured Mr. Welper, "but I fear it

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is destined to be. Violence, Dan, begets violence; wrong must be atoned. A pebble cast into the ocean, Dan, starts ripples which reach to the—m—m—the uttermost ends of the earth. Yes, Dan, our every action begets, m—m, consequences which, like ripples, spread—ah—indefinitely. When John's girl frisked me in the Forty Club consequences were inevitable. She's going to experience a few this evening—God willing!" he added piously.

His sly eyes stole out towards the grotesque fleet standing in for Place-of-Swans.

"It's going to be rough on a woman when that gang lands," said Mr. Potter, following his glance.

"Sam," said Mr. Welper solemnly, "the wicked shall be utterly cut off. When those roughnecks get ashore and begin the party, I want Dan to take the launch in close. The stuff they took from us on False Cape must be piled up with their stuff. When the boys locate it we'll go ashore with three sacks apiece. That's all we could have time to drag across False Cape with safety."

Potter, watching Place-of-Swans through the marine glasses, handed them to Welper.

"Looks quiet at Place-of-Swans," he remarked; "nobody on the cofferdam, nobody on the scows, no dredging, no boats out."

After a few moments: "And no smoke coming from the chimneys," observed Mr. Welper. "Did you notice that, Sam?"

The last level rays of the sun flooded the distant house with a rosy light. The western window-panes glittered as though flames illuminated them from within. The gilded seahorse burned in the sky like a golden coal of fire.

"That's a still-looking place," said Welper.

"A little too quiet," nodded Potter.

"It looks suspicious!" said Mr. Potter with emphasis.

Welper turned and looked at the motley fleet of boats standing in under a slack and fitful wind for Place-of-Swans.

"If any people are at Place-of-Swans," he said,

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"they've seen that bunch making for them. John Lanier is no fool. . . . You know what I think, Sam? I think John, and the kid brother, and their three crackers, know what's coming. And I think they locked up, took what gold they had, took their women, and beat it for civilization."

### 2

Mr. Welper was partly right and partly wrong.

An hour before the rim of the declining sun had touched the waste of western waters, Donald Mayne's launch, rushing in between Lantern Island and Old Inlet, and passing the deserted blinds on Crescent Bar, had landed on Red Moon Island just north-east of Loveless Land.

As John Lanier came down to the little wharf, Mayne, tying his launch, shouted up to him: "Call your men in from Star Shoal and the cofferdam! The Tiger Island gang is coming over to clean you out!"

Lanier turned and ran for the north dock, picked up the megaphone, hailed Old Jake on the dredging scow.

"Bring the men ashore, Jake!" he shouted. "We're going to have trouble with the Tiger Island gang! Bring in what gold you have sifted out, and leave everything except your rifles!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" bellowed Old Jake.

Dirck appeared, running down to the dock, rather white with excitement. Maddaleen came more leisurely behind her brother.

"Donald Mayne has just arrived," said Lanier coolly. "He's mooring his launch at the south dock. It seems that the Tiger Island gang is coming over here."

There was a brief silence; all three looked across the sunset water. Far away, against the north-west, the pines of Tiger Island looked black along the horizon.

"Well?" asked the girl quietly.

"Probably," said Lanier, "the gold they discovered

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in the silt on that raft of ours that broke away has started this business."

Mayne came up, rifle in hand, and took off his hat politely. Lanier presented him to Maddaleen, who offered her hand with smiling composure. Then he shook hands with Dirck.

"I think it's going to be all right," he said. "Twenty of our men are on their way here from Norfolk. We may have to stand off the Tiger Island crowd for a while. There are seven of us, aren't there?"

"Eight," said Maddaleen.

Lanier's eyes met hers. "We are not going to need you on the firing-line, I think," he said. "How much time have we, Don?"

They all turned instinctively to look at Tiger Island. At that instant Harry Senix started shooting his fireworks at random. The multi-coloured glare was visible against the pines.

"Welper engineered this business deliberately," said Mayne to Lanier. "Something has aroused his suspicions. I think that he and Sam Potter mean to disappear under cover of the general tumult. Their tramp steamer has arrived off False Cape, as you know—the *Mandrill*. I think they mean to signal her to-night."

"Three red and two green rockets," nodded Lanier. He turned to Maddaleen. "That's quite all right," he said with a faint smile, "all the officers and half the *Mandrill's* crew are our people." And again to Mayne: "We mustn't lose Dan Supple, or Renton, or Senix, or Mrs. Wyvern."

"Dan goes with Welper and Potter," said Mayne. "Harry Senix is with the gang that is coming here. Renton was bitten by a moccasin this afternoon. He died just as I left."

Lanier said: "That's rather a horrible ending. Where is Mrs. Wyvern?"

"Gone to Norfolk, on her way to New York."

"Do you know where to get her, Don?"

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"Yes—if we want her."

"Of course we want her!"

"I'm not certain—but probably we shall want her," admitted Mayne quietly. "You can leave that safely to me, John."

Lanier cast a sharp, hard glance across the water, which was now tinted scarlet.

"There are seven of us," he said, "to stand off that crowd. *There are four servants in the house—all women.* I think, Maddaleen, that your cook had better draw the fires. Then I'd like to have you take all the servants over to Loveless Island and stay in the Old Manse until the affair is over."

"I don't want to stay there," she said, reddening, "I can use a rifle. So can my servants. They're all North Carolina girls. They know how to shoot. Let us stay here."

"I want you to go to Loveless Land," repeated Lanier. "I want you to take five rifles there from the gun-room and plenty of ammunition. Five women who can use rifles can hold the Old Manse against five hundred roughnecks from Tiger——"

Old Jake and his three men—Bob Skaw, Sid Warnock and Chester Gray—came clumping up from the wharf below. Very quietly Lanier explained the crisis.

"Jake," he added, "Miss Loveless and the other women are going over to the Old Manse. I want you and Warnock and Gray and Skaw to ferry them over. *There's a good well in the old cellar, I understand.*"

"Yas, sir."

"All right. Take a rope and bucket. Take plenty of provisions, although they won't be needed because this affair is not going to last very long. And, Jake?"

"Yas, sir?"

"You and Chester and Sid will take every sack of gold in the cellar over to the Old Manse."

"Yas, sir."

"And this is our plan," continued Lanier, quietly



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lighting a cigarette. "We seven men are going to try to hold the house against assault until twenty of my own arrive from Norfolk. That sounds rather easy, doesn't it?"

"Unh!" grunted Bob Skaw, with a shadow of a grin on his hard jaws. "I reckon the Bonnet Bay scum must be right smart full o' joyful juice to come botherin' folk on Place-o'-Swans."

"Yes," said Mayne, "they are very full of the joyful juice, Bob. Also, they have sifted the silt on the raft that drifted away last night. And between boot-leg juice and Aztec gold they're a mean crowd to argue with."

"A sober man is meaner—he shoots straighter!" remarked Captain Winch gravely.

There was a little subdued laughter.

"All right," said Lanier cheerfully, "will you start things, Maddaleen? All right, Captain Jake. Now, Dirck, we'd better go to the gun-room. Don, you'll keep watch with your marine glasses, won't you?"

"I will," said Mayne.

He followed the others into the house.

"The north hall-way window upstairs, Mr. Mayne," said Maddaleen pleasantly.

He mounted the stairway, drew a chair to the window, seated himself, and adjusted his binoculars.

After a moment: "Well, I'll be shot!" he muttered; "they're all as crazy as a flock of loons!"

Through his glasses the grotesque fleet was visible under the lee of Tiger Island. Sails were being hoisted, launches started; but what caught and held his disgusted gaze was the black flag with its skull and bones flapping from the masthead of Ray Wirt's sail-boat.

It seemed too ridiculous to be anything except a farce—the broadest of burlesque and most reckless of horse-play.

Only he knew the men, and knew that they were murderously drunk, otherwise his amusement had been more genuine.

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He watched the slow getting under way, the scuffling, the interference and collision, the launches rushing to and fro, circling the craft, the lagging sails of which now felt waning and capricious breezes from the westward.

Presently he picked up Welper's launch, veering out widely to the eastward.

"The fox!" he thought. "If there are to be pickings he'll hang around. Then he'll make for False Cape and send up his comic rockets. We've got him; we have got Sam Potter, too, and Dan Supple."

He called down to John Lanier with careless levity: "The three-ring circus is afloat and heading this way."

"There isn't much wind, is there?" inquired Lanier.

"Not much."

"All right. Which do you prefer, Don, a 45-70 or a 30-30?"

"I'm not particular," replied Mayne politely.

Lanier stepped to the window of the gun-room and gazed silently across the sunset water. Out of the northern distance, enveloped in a pinkish light, sailed Mr. Welper's armada, moving straight southward across a sea of rose and gold.

"Coming on in line of battle," he remarked to Dirck, amid the clatter of ejectors which the boy was testing on every rifle.

"Do you know what I think, Lanier?" said Dirck eagerly, yet with a certain new and becoming modesty in voice and attitude.

"What's that, Dirck?"

"I don't know, but it seems to me that if you and Mr. Mayne and I went out to meet them in our big powerboat—I mean the *Moccasin*—we could crumple up those sail-boats. The *Moccasin* is all steel, and is very powerful, and she has a reinforced steel prow. What do you think?"

Lanier slammed in the bolt of the 30-30, locked it, lifted his head and looked at the distant line of sails.

After a moment's silence: "Dirck, that was spoken

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like an admiral. I think it well worth trying. I think we can throw the fear of God into their sailing craft before they get within rifle-range of Place-of-Swans. Let me consult Donald Mayne——”

He called for the latter, who came downstairs, his telescope under one arm, the marine glasses under the other.

When Mayne heard the suggestion he nodded.

“Yes, but they have four launches. It wouldn’t do to have them drive in here while we are at sea.”

“The *Moccasin* is faster than anything they have, except their big power-boat,” insisted Dirck.

“Welper and Sam Potter are in that,” said Mayne. “If we raise the deuce with their sail-boats I think Welper will run for False Cape. I believe it’s worth trying a dash at them, John.”

“All right. Are all the rifles in good shape, Dirck?”

“Everything is shipshape; the proper ammunition is in boxes beside each rifle.”

“Where is the *Moccasin*?”

“At the south dock, padlocked.”

“Well, I wish you’d take three rifles of the same calibre, and plenty of ammunition, and wait for us in the *Moccasin*. Is the key in the back door?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Run down and see how the men are getting on in the cellar.”

Dirck hurried out. Mayne said to Lanier: “Bullets are bullets. High-powered rifles can raise hell with us— if they’ve got them.”

“Have they?”

“I didn’t see any, and I looked. But Welper is such a fox one never can be sure that what he lets you notice is all there is to see. I’m only wondering about the women, if anything happens to us——”

“Jake and his men can stand off those drunken thugs until our people arrive from Norfolk,” said Lanier. “If we go out to meet them maybe we can save this house

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from being riddled—perhaps set on fire. I think we had better have a try at them.”

“It appeals to me,” said Mayne, levelling his telescope. Presently he said: “Welper’s launch is far out to the eastward, marking time. Three other small launches are cutting circles around the fleet.”

“Is it coming on?”

“Very slowly. The wind is light and comes in puffs. Some of the boats are being rowed. It’s too deep to pole, I suppose. . . . I wonder if those drunks realize that they’re actually committing an act of piracy? Helen Wyvern made that black flag for one of their drunken parties, when they all rigged up in cheap finery and sang the Forty Club songs. But this is no joke. They’re sailing under the Skull-and-Bones. That is no bay-men’s feud. It’s not merely robbery under arms. It’s piracy.”

“Is their black flag still flying?” inquired Lanier, sorting pistol clips.

“Flapping from the masthead of Ray Wirt’s fishing smack.”

“That confirms my belief,” remarked Lanier. “Barney Welper never will come in under that flag, whether it’s hoisted in jest or earnest.”

“If that gang lands, storms this house, and kills us or drives us off, *then* Welper will slip in, pick up what he can, and beat it for False Cape. Not otherwise, Don. Here’s ammunition for your pistols. Did Dirck take our rifles and cartridges?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Go down to the dock and see that everything is shipshape. I’ll be along in a moment.”

As Mayne went out carrying his night-glasses and a sackful of clips, he encountered Miss Loveless entering the house by the rear door. She smiled and passed on, and came leisurely and silently into the gun-room. Lanier, stuffing the pockets of his Norfolk with clips, looked over his shoulder, then turned around.

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"Everything is on Loveless Land—the servants, all our gold, ammunition, and provisions."

"Is the well all right?"

"Jake's men are dipping it out."

There was a pause; the girl laughed.

"We cut down a sapling and nailed our house-flag to it. Our ensign is flying over the Old Manse."

"Fine," he said smilingly; "now we'd better go."

The girl's smile faded. "Let me remain here with you, please. I prefer to be where—where my brother is."

"He won't be here. He and Donald Mayne and I are going out in the *Moccasin* to take a look at that Tiger Island gang."

That this news was unwelcome, and that it astonished her and made her afraid was visible in the girl's paling face.

She said with an effort: "Is that what must be done, Mr. Lanier?"

"I think it should be done."

She remained silent so long that he said finally: "Dirck really need not go. Donald and I can do all that is necessary."

Her deep, swift flush silenced him. She said: "If you said such a thing to Dirck he'd never forgive you. My brother will go, of course."

They walked slowly to the rear of the house together. Lanier drew out the key, waited for her to pass out. As she did not move he looked at her with a questioning smile.

"I want to go out in the *Moccasin* with my brother," she said. "I can shoot, as you know."

"Four are too many."

"Why?"

"Four in the *Moccasin* would offer too good a target," he said patiently.

She continued to gaze at him; her mouth began to quiver a very little.

"I ask to go because I—I wish to be with—with you,"

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she said in a ghost of a voice. "And that is the reason—John Lanier—"

"That is a strange reason," he said unsteadily. "Why do you desire to be with me?"

"It would be very strange if I did not wish to be with you—in this hour—John Lanier."

She turned sharply, brushed her eyes with her fingers, rested a moment against the wall with head bowed. In a stifled voice: "I'm sorry. I'll do what you wish."

Behind her she felt him close to her, became rigid as his arms encircled her. There was a silence; then her slender body slowly relaxed until her head, reversed, lay back upon his shoulder. Her eyes were closed and her lashes wet when he kissed the upturned lips. That was all. She straightened herself, withdrew herself gently, stepped across the threshold out into the fading sunset light. He followed, locked the rear door from outside.

"We'll run you over to Loveless Land first," he said.

Her hand touched his, and one of her fingers linked itself with his as they walked together down to the dock where the *Moccasin* lay.

"All set!" cried Dirck from the engine-pit. "Sis, we're going out to give them a razzle!"

The girl leaned down over the dock. "I want you to promise me to do everything that Mr. Lanier tells you to do," she said. "He is in command, remember, Dirck."

"Yes, I will," said the boy seriously. "Don't waste a second's worry over us."

Lanier helped her over the side and jumped down to the deck. The *Moccasin* backed off, turned, darted away across the Channel towards the little rickety wharf on Loveless Land, where an armed man stood guard.

Before the launch had stopped Maddaleen, resting one hand on Lanier's shoulder, sprang ashore.

Then she turned, looked at her brother, looked at Mayne, then looked at Lanier with all the virgin soul of her in her eyes.

"Au revoir! Good luck," she said briefly.

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The *Moccasin* backed away, swung east, rushed seaward through sombre, smouldering light. When she rounded Red Moon and was out of sight, the girl turned away towards the Old Manse, moving erect, but as though slightly fatigued.

### 3

As the *Moccasin* rounded Red Moon Island her crew caught sight of the Tiger Island fleet standing well in towards Place-of-Swans—a long, straggling line of craft under lagging sail and oar and pole, around which formation three noisy launches circled in frantic effort to stimulate them to speedier activity.

Ray Wirt's patched-up smack left the fleet, the black flag flapping at her peak.

Over the water a dull ruddy light partly revealed and partly veiled objects afloat. It was evident at first that the Tiger Island fleet had not noticed the *Moccasin*. Probably nobody expected any such onslaught from Place-of-Swans. Undoubtedly the eyes of the marauders were all turned on Red Moon Island and on the cofferdam. In fact, already several boats were headed towards the cofferdam and the barges anchored there.

However, from away to the eastward, Mr. Welper presently discovered the *Moccasin*. But he was too far distant for the fleet to hear his alarming hails; and, besides, what wind stirred blew fitfully from the west. It was only when they began to fire their guns from Welper's launch that the fleet's wandering attention was brought to bear upon surrounding waters.

But already the *Moccasin* was rushing down on them through the red dusk when Ray Wirt's first yell of warning alarmed the motley mariners of Tiger Island.

Then bang! bang! bang! spoke their rifles, shot-guns and pistols; and then came a tumult of shouting from every boat as the *Moccasin* at full speed struck Wirt's old smack abaft the beam, crashed into the bow

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of the boat beyond, staggered, backed, pivoted, rushed upon the next boat, and cut her almost in two.

Wirt's smack had heeled over, spilling out her crew, rifles and all, and they were splashing and floundering and cursing in five feet of horribly cold water, and striving to climb up upon the wrecked smack. The second boat, torn open, had settled swiftly; her crew, chin-deep, rolled drunken and terrified eyes at the *Moccasin*. The third boat, on her beam ends, was being frantically clawed at by her wading or swimming crew.

One of the launches had turned tail and was already disappearing into the ruddy murk of evening; the other three, firing frenziedly, were running parallel to the *Moccasin*, which was now going like a runaway horse and creating havoc among the sail-boats.

And now from every side rifle and shot-gun blazed at the *Moccasin*; a hail of buck-shot and soft-nosed bullets saluted her.

Lanier, steering and lying prone in the engine-pit, passed tarred waste and oakum to Dirck with his free hand, and the boy stuffed the bullet-holes where water squirted through. Mayne, flat on his belly in a mess of bilge and oil, ran the engine and took Lanier's orders.

But the increasing storm of lead could no longer be endured; that was evident to everybody. There were two bullet-holes in Lanier's cap when he lowered his head and gave orders to Mayne to back out of the mess.

As the *Moccasin* won free, and was turning, she ran foul of a launch, and on to the deck forward, and into the engine-pit, jumped four dark, raging and cursing shapes with the dull glint of knife and pistol playing among them.

Lanier, on his knees, swung his rifle and knocked the Portuguese diver overboard; Mayne and Dirck fired upward into the faces of the men above them.

Two fell overboard. The remaining man, Harry Senix, stood swaying and screaming forward, gouts of



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blood squirting from his side, white face and hands striped with it, and all the while firing and wavering blindly, without aim, into the engine-pit of the *Moccasin*.

"You dirty squealer!" he shrieked at Lanier. "I'll do your business for you now——"

A lurch of the launch sent him sprawling across the turtle-deck, his pistol exploded, fell into the sea, and Senix rolled as the launch rolled and fell with a sodden thud across the gunwales.

His scarred hands still clawed at space; his deathly features were convulsed.

For a little while he hung there, balanced, his mouth open, and his eyes, too. Then he shrank, collapsed; and as the *Moccasin* rushed through gathering darkness the bow-wave washed the corpse overboard.

After a little while: "Is anybody hurt?" demanded Lanier.

"All safe here," replied Mayne.

"Nothing to mention," said Dirck, in a voice which trembled with the pride and joy within him.

"Are you hit?" inquired Lanier sharply. "Take the helm, Don!"

He crawled over to Dirck, played his torch over him: "You got it in the left arm. Wait a moment——"

But the bone was intact under the nasty, tearing track of a bullet; and when the *Moccasin* was out of range Lanier washed and bandaged the wound.

It was the moment of the boy's life. No wealth, no honours offered, ever could have bought such a moment from him. He felt weak with loss of blood, a little dazed by the bullet's shock. But never had any boy known such supreme happiness.

"It's nothing," he said. He was utterly content with that perfect enjoyment of youth that worships the picturesque, and would give life itself to figure as the central interest in any dramatic situation.

And when Lanier said simply: "You've all the nerve you need, old chap; I want no better man in a scrap,"

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Dirck tasted all that all healthy youth was born to dream of, to long for.

Lanier rose from the pit, seated himself in the stern, and took the tiller. The engine was racing. Mayne went forward and lay flat on deck, rifle in hand.

"Take a shot of those boats around the cofferdam," said Lanier.

Mayne fired; flashes came from cofferdam and barge, and bullets whanged and whined overhead until the *Moccasin* was out of range.

Astern it was difficult to make out the Tiger Island fleet—a few blots here and there.

"Don't you think we'd better make another dash at them?" said Dirck, trying to speak modestly.

"That's a blood-thirsty young gentleman," said Lanier to Mayne, with a short laugh. And to Dirck: "I think they're done for, old chap. I don't think they'll try to land on Place-of-Swans now. They'll all flock around the cofferdam and try to loot it, but it won't pay them——"

From across the water came the reports of rifles.

"By Jove," said Lanier, "they *have* landed, and our people are firing on them from the Old Manse!"

He turned the launch instantly, heading for Red Moon Island. But it was only when the *Moccasin* was close in shore that its crew made out four boats rowing hastily away.

Mayne opened fire on them; Dirck contrived to use his rifle, resting it on the port gunwale; but the hostile craft were clearly anxious to get away, and very soon became lost in the thickening darkness.

And now, as the *Moccasin* rounded Red Moon Island and passed in between it and Loveless Land, an exclamation from Donald Mayne drew Lanier's attention.

Away to the eastward, over the sea dunes by Old Inlet, a rocket soared up into the night sky and burst, blood red. Another followed, another, then a fourth

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rocket exploded in a shower of green stars; and yet another followed, also green.

"Well," drawled Mayne, "what do you know about that, John?"

"The old fox," said Lanier. "That's what I thought he'd do, Donnie. He's done for now. Barney Welper has run his race. So has Sam Potter; and Dan Supple; and Renton is dead and Harry Senix. At seven o'clock to-night the Forty Club was pulled. Every crook in it is under lock and key at this moment. And elsewhere too—in Rio, in San Francisco, in London, Paris, Brussels—what a net-haul, Don."

After a silence. "Well," he said, with a sigh, "we've been years at it, and it's over—it's finished to-night—civilization is likely to have a respite. But nothing more than that, Don. If all the crooks on earth were gathered in at a given moment, in ten years they'd be as numerous as ever—perhaps even cleverer than ever. Heaven knows! It's a never-ending fight. How are you feeling, Dirck?"

"Fine!"

"We'll fix you up. Your sister will see to you. Donnie, what's that over yonder? Over there beyond the Old Man's?"

"That's a big power-boat," said Mayne presently, "coming like the deuce."

Lanier said sharply: "They haven't any such boat, have they?"

Dirck now made her out. "It's the big Revenue power-boat from Norfolk," he said.

"Signal her, Don," said Lanier.

Mayne stood up, levelled his electric torch, and flashed the International Police Signal. Instantly from the big launch the answering signal sparkled. As she altered her course and sped in nearer Lanier hailed her.

"Your men from Norfolk, Mr. Lanier," came the reply across the water.

"All right!" shouted Lanier. "Welper and Potter are on their way to the *Mandrill*. They're canned. Senix

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and Renton are dead. Mayne knows where to find the Wyvern woman. But there's a rough gang from Tiger Island loafing around these waters. You might as well round them up and run them in to Norfolk. Sweep up between here and Tiger Island, due north."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

### 4

"Head her in towards Loveless Land," said Donald Mayne. "There's somebody down on the dock there with a lantern. . . . I think it's your sister," he added to Dirck.

It was. When she saw her brother standing on deck with his left arm in an extemporized sling, she handed the lantern to Lanier; Mayne fended off the launch as it slowed down; Maddalene sprang lightly to the deck.

"What's the matter, Dirck?"

"Scratched!" he said carelessly, trying to extirpate every trace of pride from his voice.

The girl laid one hand tenderly on her brother's shoulder, and turned to Lanier with the question in her eyes.

"We'll take him over to the house and sterilize it," said Lanier. "I think it is not a mortal injury," he added, smiling at Dirck.

The boy laughed boisterously. Laughter is the safety-valve at such moments, and it relieved Dirck enormously.

"You had a good time out yon, I reckon," said Old Jake, grim in his envy and disappointment. "We had no excitement here—just fired a shot or two at four of 'em off Red Moon. Next time," he added almost savagely, "you've got to take *me*, Mr. Lanier."

"I promise!" said Lanier, laughing.

"I hope," said Old Jake resentfully, "you weren't mean enough to shoot 'em all. There's a few left, I hope?"

"Plenty, Captain Jake. They may cool their heels in

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Norfolk Jail a while, but they'll be out again some time, and then you can square it with Bert Mewling and Ray Wirt if you like."

To Maddaleen he said: "It's really all over. Your servants can come back to the house now." And again to Jake: "Your men had better fetch back our gold at once. If you'll jump in you can take the *Moccasin* back for them."

Old Jake got in and sat down forward, still thoroughly disgusted with his luck.

To Dirck Mayne said: "I'm a pretty good surgeon. I'll fix you up if you like."

"Thanks," said the boy, "I'd be delighted!" He was having a wonderful time.

"Everything you'll need is on the top shelf of the emergency locker in your bathroom," said his sister. She added to Mayne: "We keep first-aid material ready. There are no physicians nearer than Norfolk."

When the launch stopped at the dock Mayne took the rear door key from Lanier, flashed his torch, and aided the boy to land. Then Lanier sprang ashore, and, with rather a mischievous impulse, bent over and lifted the girl to the wharf.

"You didn't have to do that!" she said indignantly.

Then seeing the expression on his face she laughed, accepted his arm, and fell into step beside him; and in silence they walked across the grass to the rear door.

Mayne and Dirck already had gone in; the door swung open.

"Dirck isn't seriously hurt—it's a very slight flesh wound," said Lanier.

"I'll run up and look at him. . . . And I'll come back," said Maddaleen naively.

It was her instinct that spoke, not her brain, which had not had time to consider the paramount instinct of new love—the absolute necessity of being alone with the beloved.

## *The Mystery Lady*

Lanier paced the grass. After interminable minutes his lady-love came downstairs to the back door.

She wore no hat—another miracle of instinct.

They seemed to know where to go—further marvellous display of blind intuition.

In the little stone summer-house they seated themselves. After a few moments she gave him her hands. Her youthful heart was very full, very tremulous.

"Do you remember our first evening here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You knew I was in love with you, then?"

"Yes."

"Were you, too?" he asked in a voice unsteady with lover's hopes and masculine stupidity.

"No!"

"Oh!"

The girl's hands trembled in his.

"But I am—now," she said.

After a long while she turned her head and gave him her lips.

Mayne came out on the front porch.

"Where are you, John?" he called.

"Here!" replied Lanier, irritated.

"Oh! Well, Dirck's all right. I put him to bed and he's asleep"—walking across the grass towards the summer-house whence Lanier's voice had proceeded.

"May I tell Don?" he whispered. "He's my closest friend."

"Yes, dearest, if you wish."

And when Mayne walked up: "Donnie, Miss Loveless has just promised to marry me. And I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my feet. Please tell her I'm respectable."

Coming out of a clear sky the affair staggered Mr. Mayne, but he got away with it very creditably. His cordiality was genuine and acceptable; he lingered

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exactly long enough; he took his departure gracefully and with dignity.

As he was going Lanier said: "By the way, Don, don't let the Wyvern woman get away. You say you know where you can find her?"

"Yes—if I want her."

"What do you mean? Of course we want her."

"I—am not sure," murmured Mayne, as he turned away in darkness.