

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVENTURE OF FALSE CAPE

I

DIRCK LOVELESS was in a serious situation. He had not understood how serious until, crouching inside the tool-house door, he listened to the cold-blooded conversation between Eugene Renton and Donald Mayne. Impulse had landed him in a perilous predicament. What Renton said to Mayne had frightened him horribly.

What had happened was this: the boy, always irresponsible and impetuous, had left a note for his sister saying that he was going over to False Cape that night to dig in for a crack at the white brant at dawn. He often had done it in quieter times. Boy-like, he wished to surprise Lanier and show now, to the older man, a half-dozen pair of the wildest and most difficult of all water-fowl.

The calm between two storms was the time to get away; the wild, rough weather off False Cape promised to drive the snow-geese into his gun. The enterprise was a blazing indiscretion; but discretion is seldom instinctive in an impulsive boy who is eager to exhibit his prowess to a man he blindly admires.

The easiest way for Dirck to get to False Cape was to run up under the lee of Tiger Island. That was a risky affair, and it proved disastrous. For, in trying to gain a weather shore, he was nearly run down by Ray Wirt in his bootlegger launch. He was recognized, hailed, chased, shot at, driven towards the diving-dock, hurled against it by a squall, caught there by Bert Mewling and the diver's gang, and locked up in the tool-house.

The Adventure of False Cape

This now was the very dangerous plight of Dirck Loveless; this was why nobody at Place-of-Swans would really feel any anxiety concerning him until the afternoon of the next day.

After that they'd search for him on False Cape. If Renton killed him here and scuttled his boat, nobody ever could know what had become of him.

The men who had caught him had taken everything he possessed except his matches. And first thing the boy did in the tool-house was to light one of these, examine the windowless interior, select a long-handled shovel, and start to dig out under the sill. The floor was of dirt; the structure built of pine logs smeared with blue clay. There appeared to be no foundation under ground, excepting piers of coquina to support the log sill.

But when Renton's penetrating, unpleasant voice broke out in harsh argument with another and unknown voice, the lad listened, horrified, for his tunnel was not half dug, and the only weapon he had was his shovel.

To strike Renton with that before he could shoot seemed to be the only chance now. He stood beside the door, desperate, his shovel lifted for a blow, waiting for the lithe and agile murderer to open the door and enter with gun levelled.

When the wrangling outside terminated and Renton had gone angrily away to the Gay-Cat, bent upon his deadly purpose, the strain left Dirck weak and almost sick; and he rested on his shovel and strove to keep his head and key up his courage.

Then almost instantly came the cool, cautious voice of the unknown man outside, calling to him by name.

Dirck made the effort: "I'm listening. What do you want?"

"Did you hear what Renton has been saying?"

"Yes. I heard what you said, too."

"I had to say that. I'm Donald Mayne. I'm your friend. I'm John Lanier's friend. I'm going to open the

The Mystery Lady

door as soon as Renton is out of sight and let you make a bolt for it."

"How do I know *you* won't shoot me?"

"I tell you I'm a friend of John Lanier."

Suddenly Lanier's instructions flashed into Dick's memory.

"Are you that fisherman he told me about?" demanded the boy tremulously.

"Yes, I'm a fisherman. *Go on!*"

"W-what do you do with the f-fish ye catch?"

"When I catch them I fry them."

Mayne heard the lad sob with excitement and relief. He said:

"If you can get out any other way, Dirck, I'd rather not open the door, because others are watching me. Could you dig out the rear and take to the woods?"

"I've dug half-way out."

"Go on and dig. If Renton brings Welper here I'll start arguing. How much time do you need to dig out?"

"I don't know——"

"Can you get off this island after you're out?"

"I can swim the channel to False Cape."

"All right. Dig like the devil. I can see men on the dock looking this way. And there's a woman at a window in the bunk-house watching me. Don't worry, dig! I'll hold off Renton."

It seemed hours to Mayne before Renton came out of the Gay-Cat. Harry Senix was with him.

Renton came forward with his jaunty, nervous step. Senix shambled, and Renton paused impatiently at times to await him. When they came to where Mayne was standing Renton's ashy visage contracted till his even teeth glistened.

"Barney put it up to the club," he said. "We voted to croak the kid. Now what have you got to say, Mayne?"

The Adventure of False Cape

"Plenty," replied the other, smiling. "For one thing, I wasn't present."

"Your vote isn't necessary——"

"I'm not saying it was. I'm telling you I wasn't present."

"Are you trying to tell me I lie?"

"I'm trying to tell you that I was not present when the vote was taken. I don't *know* what was voted. I don't have to take your word, or anybody's. I wasn't there. I want official information."

"You didn't have to be there, and you know it! It requires two dissenting votes to kill anything. There was a quorum of the members of the Forty Club, who compose the expeditionary force on this island. There was Barney Welper, Sam Potter, Harry Senix, Dan Supple and myself. You were absent."

"How about Helen?" asked Mayne coolly.

"She votes the way I do," said Renton bluntly.

"Ask her."

"I don't have to."

"Yes, you do, under the rules. I'm not obliged to take your say-so for gospel. There's Helen over there now, looking at us out of the bunk-house window."

Renton said: "You're making a big argument out of a simple matter. . . . But I'll go over and ask her."

"No; I'll hear for myself what she has to say." He turned towards the bunk-house. "Helen!" he shouted; "would you mind coming over to settle an argument?"

The figure at the lighted window disappeared, reappeared carrying the glass lamp, set the wretched light on the grass, and came gracefully towards him. Her bare feet were covered by Chinese slippers, and she wore a scarlet and gold kimono over her lacey nightdress.

Mayne said smilingly: "Gene wants to shoot the Loveless kid to stop any chance of his squealing. I want to make a little money out of his sister first. I need it. Eugene doesn't. Which way do you vote?"

"The club votes to croak him," interrupted Renton—

The Mystery Lady

"all except Mayne here. You vote that way, don't you?"

The girl gazed at Mayne, then turned to Renton.

"Why not take the jack first as Donnie proposes?" she suggested. "You can bump the little rat later."

Surprise, then chagrin, turned Renton faintly red.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You're in Orizava Oil, too. Do you want to see this little rat on the witness stand?"

The girl shrugged: "I've got enough on him to keep him off of any witness stand. I don't care what you do to him later, but if there's any more jack to be picked up, let Don get it if he needs it."

Renton's visage became ghastly.

"You know the way I vote; what are you going to do? I want an answer."

"Vote as I please," retorted the girl. "Don't try to get fresh with me, Eugene."

Senix, who had not uttered a word, began to laugh and dandle his heavy head vacantly.

"That's what you get for playing a skirt, Gene," he mumbled. "I never saw a skirt I'd stake to a nigger bill——"

"Do you think any skirt would ever stake you to anything, you poor dope?" retorted Helen Wyvern. And to Renton: "Your head's swelled because you cleaned up in South America. All right, a girl can stand for that. But you're a tight-wad too, Eugene, and that combine isn't making much of a hit with me!"

She looked him over insolently, gathering her kimono in one brilliantly ringed hand.

"You seem to think I ought to vote whatever way you vote. I might, at that, if you weren't so blame stingy. But I'll do my own figuring and run my own business; and you'd better act up different if you ever plan to hook up with me."

The glare that Renton turned on her from his pale eyes she encountered with careless contempt.

The Adventure of False Cape

He said hoarsely: "You seem to have changed a lot since you took this trip with Donald Mayne. What's the big idea?"

"Aw, my hat," she retorted wearily, "haven't you any sense at all? Do you think any woman has got to stand for your rotten disposition? Get wise, loosen up, talk sense—or step on your gas and beat it."

"You don't vote to croak the kid, then?" he demanded venomously.

"When I stop to pick up a dollar, do you think you can kick it out of my fingers? Nothing like that, Eugene. I don't have to ask you how to make a living, do I?"

"No; you ask Donald Mayne, now——"

"That's a dirty slam," interrupted Mayne quietly. "You know there's nothing in it."

"Do I?"

"Well, if you don't you're crazy. Ask anybody in the Forty Club whether I'm that kind of rat!"

Renton's trim, slim frame was trembling now. He said in a stifled voice:

"This rag-chewing gets us nowhere. If Helen won't vote to croak the kid, that settles it for *to-night*. But I'm going in to take a slant at him before I go to bed."

"Wait!" retorted Mayne.

"Give me that key!"

"I'll take your gun first."

"Like hell you will!"

"Yes, just like that. Give it to Helen—or you get no key."

Renton's face was now all a-quiver as he freed his pistol. At the same instant both Mayne's hands plunged into his side pockets, and Renton knew he was covered.

Slowly, looking at Mayne all the time, he extended his pistol to the girl. She took it, twirled it over her finger, and began to laugh with excitement.

"You act like a spoiled child, Eugene," she said. "Don is right. You've a hasty temper, and you ought not to go into that tool-house with a gun."

The Mystery Lady

With a sort of baffled snarl Renton snatched the key from Mayne, unlocked the door, jerked it open and, picking up the torch, entered.

The place was full of shovels, picks, grub-hoes, spades, and machinery such as dumb-scoops, cranes, drills, and several steam-shovels not yet assembled. They watched his red and smoky torch, as he moved about, lighting up the rubbish. He called out once or twice in an unsteady voice, and for a while he poked and jabbed among tools and machinery with a shovel.

When at length Renton discovered the hole under the bed-log by which the prisoner had escaped he came back slowly to where the others were waiting.

"He's gone," he said in a thin, colourless voice. "I can't tell how long he's been gone. Maybe he beat it ten minutes after we locked him in. It wouldn't take ten minutes to dig under this shanty——"

Suddenly a spasm contorted his bloodless face, and from a distorted mouth torrents of foulest blasphemy burst out.

"You won't listen to me," he yelled in a strangled voice, "when I tell you the thing to do is to bump a squealer every time. Now we've got to reckon with two squealers—John Lanier and that rat of a kid! You mark what I tell you: they're both quitters and both squealers, and they'll start a holler unless we start out and get them. Wait till Barney hears of this! You both butted in, and you've done one fine job! And all I say is this: if somebody doesn't get that pair of rats inside forty-eight hours, I quit the island—cold!"

There was a silence; then, with his hands holding level the two pistols in the pockets of his coat, Mayne said:

"I didn't quite get you. Am I to understand that you're a *quitter*?"

"Do you think I'm a fool to stay here and face the dicks with John Lanier and that kid alive and loose? No, I'm through."

The Adventure of False Cape

"Now?"

"Yes, I quit right now, I tell you."

"Is that what you're telling me, Eugene?"

"Sure. And I'm telling the world, too. I'm off this bunch. I'm through."

"Well, now I'll tell *you* something," said Mayne calmly. "You'll never live to quit us and get away with it. When it's time to beat it, we all beat it. You leave with the bunch or you stay with it—or—I'll start you on a long, long journey, Eugene. And you'll travel all alone."

"*You'll s-start me?*" stammered Renton. He whipped out his pistol, his whole body shaking. "I'm a killer," he burst out incoherently, "and I'm going to bump you off!"

Mayne eyed him intently for a moment. Then, withdrawing his own hands from the pistols in his pockets, he walked slowly up to Renton, jerked the weapon from his unsteady grasp, took him firmly by the shoulder, and gave him a push.

"Get out of this," he said. "I've got your number. You're only a kid-killer. You're all yellow. I always knew you were a miser. Now I know the rest. Beat it!" He drew the clip from the pistol, pocketed it, and threw the useless weapon after Renton.

"That's for you to play bad-man with," he said. "Stay put. Don't try to quit—or I'll slap your pasty map for you."

2

Dirck ran. A boy's legs are made for emergencies. The trouble with this boy was that he ran the wrong way.

Before he realized where he was he found himself at the wood's edge, close to the diving dock where a splinter-wood torch burned. Horrified, he stared at the smoky torch, which a rising wind was whipping into a bright red blaze.

Almost under it lay his own boat, just as he had been

The Mystery Lady

yanked out of it, except that the sail was furled. But the mast was still stepped, his gun in its case lay in the stern beside a thermos bottle, tin cartridge case, and lunch bucket.

There was not a soul to be seen either on the dock or on shore. In the *Gay-Cat* the piano still jingled, and there were thick voices hoarse in song, but both were more subdued; the only definite noise was an occasional crash of glassware.

The pines spread impenetrable shade to the very edge of the torch's glare. And even there shadows danced grotesquely, so that fixed objects seemed to be jiggling about.

The boy hesitated a moment, turned and gazed into the blackness of the woods behind him, shuddered, took his chances, and crept out into the torchlight.

There, for the first time, he realized that the wind was blowing hard again, and he saw the white teeth of writhing waters flash at him out of darkness. But that was nothing to what might await him in the other direction. He untied the painter, shoved off his boat, poled to deep water, shook loose the sail, and seized the tiller.

Over she heeled in a fountain of spray. The boy dropped his centre-board, climbed to the gunwale, and clung there, humped up like a wild-cat on a swaying branch.

Had not his gun and impedimenta been lashed to a duck-crate all must have gone overboard. Like a crazed and frantic creature the boat tore out into the gale, and the waves were becoming murderous when he fought his way to the weather shore.

That settled it. In a series of violent shivers the boy reacted to his late peril ashore. Then that miraculous shock-absorber we call Youth took the impact and distributed it. The boy wiped the spray from his eyes and drew a long, deep breath.

Lanier had been right: there never were rotters in

The Adventure of False Cape

the race of Loveless. And, in proof of this, instead of steering for home the boy continued to caress the lee shore of Tiger Island, setting a true course for False Cape.

Outside the shelter of Tiger Island the wind was rising to half a gale's velocity; white water tumbled away to the southward; an ever deeper, heavier roar rolled in from the ocean, raging and bellowing around False Cape.

"Oh, Lord," thought the boy, still assailed by sudden quivers of skin and muscle, "death was very near this time—and I don't want any of it in mine. . . . I think I know more about it now. . . . I don't want it, O Lord!"

Against a spectral sky the high pines of Tiger Island flew past as the sail-boat scudded east, her starboard rail buried in foam. Louder, heavier, grew the thunderous bombardment on False Cape; whiter, higher, writhed the tortured flood rushing southward through obscurity.

Whether he could cross the sound between Old Inlet Woods and Tiger without being capsized or without being hurled helplessly away towards Lantern Island, Dirck didn't know. In the darkness, right ahead, he caught a glimpse of a world of foam. It boiled around him, over him; his boat was on her beam-ends a moment, then hurled itself into the air and stranded like a quivering fish. Almost overhead a full gale roared, raved, screamed through the Old Inlet Pines. The pandemonium beyond the dunes deafened him.

But he was all right now. He dragged his boat far up among the reeds, unshipped the mast, seized gun-case, shovel and impedimenta, and staggered away through the sand-storm.

Again and again the wind blew him flat. He bored his way with lowered head into the gale, crawled up and over the range of dunes, and was face to face with the frantic sea.

This was False Cape, now a vast chaos of darkness, hurricane and surf. The din, the detonations of breakers in explosive crescendo, bewildered him for a few moments,

The Mystery Lady

and he lay on the sands fighting for breath which the wind ripped from his very lips.

Presently he got up, managing to balance himself, and began to dig in.

"It's going to be wonderful," he kept thinking; "such a day for white brant as nobody ever saw." And ten minutes later the boy lay snug on his slicker in the sand-pit, already hungry with the perpetual hunger of all real boys, nibbling luxuriously at his breakfast and scalding his throat with the hot coffee in his thermos bottle—the real boy *sui generis*, resilient, irresponsible, eager, forgetful, impatient, eternally the opportunist, already tremulous in anticipation of that surpassing miracle which, for all real boys, is hiding just round the corner of Life, and is on the verge of magnificent manifestation.

All night long the convulsions of the ocean resounded around False Cape, which shook to its sand-bedded depths under the battering of wind and waves.

At one time the gale attained hurricane violence, then fell to a gale, to half a gale, grew wild and gusty, veered, dropped, picked up freshly, rippled into a breeze as dawn whitened the horizon.

Now a star or two sparkled high above the tumult of water; others broke out fainter from infinite depths. Then, one by one, all stars went out in a ghostly pallor which vaguely revealed the ruled line dividing sky and sea. Against the watery, primrose-tinted light an ocean-tossed in silhouette. Far in the dawn's uncertainty a wave washed golden, another, then another almost imperceptibly stained with rose.

Suddenly, overhead, came the swift, silky whisper of snowy wings; two crimson streaks of fire slanted skyward; down through the growing glory of rosy gold hurtled two snow-geese and struck the sand with solid impact. At the same instant the sun's dazzling rim set all the vast waste a-glitter.

And now the boy's gun spoke again abruptly; then

The Adventure of False Cape

twice. Faster came the white brant; faster, faster spoke the gun. The lower rim of the sun just touched the water. The flight was done.

Now the boy gathered up the game-heavy heaps of snowy plumage spotted here and there with spatters of brightest crimson, tied them, slung them over his shoulder.

They were all he could stagger under, and he carried them up the highest sand ridge which is called Flyover Dune—a miniature mountain of whitest sand set with wild grasses. Here was a natural hollow, and here, on the summit of Flyover Dune, Dirck deposited his snow brant.

He had to go back for his gun, shovel and impedimenta, and eventually he collected everything in the sandy hollow a-top Flyover Dune.

Now Flyover Dune was so called because, after storms, duck pass over it from ocean to sound and from sound to ocean, using the same and immemorial air-lanes. Swans were passing now, the sunrise splendour all musical with their wild, sweet, bewildered voices. But these angelic creatures, on wide and silvery pinions, were immune; all the New World was sanctuary to such as these. And, watching them, the boy opened his lunch bucket and uncorked his thermos bottle with serious intentions.

In his warm sandy wallow, amid tufts of harsh dune grasses, he lay on his back and ate and drank and caressed the plumage of the white brant beside him, and watched the flight of the wild white swan. By mere chance no duck passed above Flyover Dune; his gun and he remained motionless.

But now as he lay there, his appetite satisfied, drowsy, content, dreaming awake, yet close to the verge of deeper dreams, he noticed that the swan, passing over, were swerving in the sky, dividing above him, rising to higher levels, as though they saw him.

He noted it instinctively, almost mechanically, too drowsy at first to react mentally.

The Mystery Lady

Then a vast wedge of swan veered out, southward, losing intervals, breaking files, drifting, mixing as though beset by sudden panic.

The boy's mind woke up with a conscious jolt; he stared intently at the swan; then, with infinite caution, he rolled over on his belly and lifted his head so that his eyes were level with the dune's grassy edge.

Below, on the beach, stood three men gathered round a chest.

The men were Barney Welper, Sam Potter and Dan Supple.

Their faces were flabby and pallid from the night's debauch; they were unshaven, unkempt; they still wore the gaudy bandannas and shirts of their revelry. Potter and Supple leaned on long-handled shovels; Welper carried a repeating rifle. As for the chest, it looked like one of those massive, iron-bound, nail-studded sample cases which commercial men ship about with them as they travel.

Dirck's heart had almost stopped when he beheld them. So near were they, gathered just at the base of Flyover Dune. But they had not spoken, nor had the boy heard their coming over the soft sand. And now, shifting his horrified gaze, he caught sight of a mast among the reeds to the north-west, where their sailboat had landed. There it slanted, clean out against a dune, and the furled sail white as a gull's wing at sea.

One thing was evident: neither Welper nor Potter had been as drunk the night before as they pretended to be.

And now Welper's sly eyes began to rove over the vicinity. He looked up at the dunes, and the boy's pale visage among the grasses blanched; but the sly, veiled eyes shifted northward. Then Mr. Welper spoke hoarsely:

"You see that pine with the top broken off by the wind—or—m—m—by lightning, or some m—m—some all-righteous act of Almighty God—Sam?"

"I see it," replied Potter thickly.

The Adventure of False Cape

"All right. Dan, you take the string and pegs and walk down the beach till you bring that damaged pine in line with the pine on Lantern Island."

Supple picked up a ball of cord and a bundle of pegs split from splinter-wood, and went over to the stricken tree. Here he shifted his position, squinted west until he had this tree in line with the solitary pine on Lantern Island, consulted a compass, noted the memoranda. Now he pushed a peg into the sand, looped his cord around it, paced towards Welper and Potter, compass in hand, counting his strides aloud.

Half-way towards them he consulted his compass, drove a peg, attached the cord, jotted down the memoranda, turned at right angles, strode seaward, counting his paces in a monotonous, distinct voice. At the water's edge he drove another peg, measured an angle of forty-five degrees, attached his string, and came marching up to Welper, announcing the sum-total of his paces as he halted, and offering his note-book.

Welper wrote down everything very carefully. Then he went over to the damaged pine and carefully retraced Supple's course, taking up every peg, winding up the cord, verifying by compass, note-book and stride the memoranda written.

"All set," he nodded as he arrived, panting. "You can dig the hole right here, Dan. I've got it down safe."

Potter glumly drove his own shovel into the sand also.

While he and Supple were digging Welper dropped on his fat knees, unlocked the sample case, and lifted the heavy lid. And Dirck Loveless, peering fearfully down from the dune above, gazed into a chest crammed to the rim with crushed and twisted fragments of gold.

Sam Potter, digging doggedly, paused to look over his massive shoulder at the mass of treasure.

"Say, Barney," he grunted, "you sure you fixed that grafting diver so he won't double-cross us?"

"He's a reckless devil," added Supple; "he's half Portuguese."

The Mystery Lady

"You need not worry," replied Welper, "he's getting his m—m—yes, he's getting his real money, Sam. Also, I—ah—I have the goods on Lorenzo. He's, m—m, liable for life—if I talk out in church—m—m, yes—if I talk out loud in church."

"Well," muttered Supple, "all hell would break loose if Gene and Harry and Don Mayne got wind of what we're a-doin' to them. And Bert Mewling—and that other rat, Ray What's-his-name! And Nellie——"

"When that diving Portugee keeps on haulin' up silver," said Potter, "that Wyvern woman is going to get leery, Barney."

"Helen?"

"Sure! Suppose she insists on rigging up and going down with that blame Lorenzo——"

"M—m, yes," murmured Welper thoughtfully; "I—ah—I have considered the m—m the possibility of such an unfortunate event."

"Well?" inquired Potter.

"M—m, yes, exactly," purred Welper. "*Sometimes* the—ah—the *air* does not m—m—operate as it is expected to. Accidents, m—m—regrettable accidents, occur, Sam. M—m, the life of a diver is precarious. Ah, yes—life is always precarious and full of trouble. In the morning we grow up—ah—like grass——"

"I get you," laughed Potter, and he spat upon his huge hands and resumed his shovel and his digging.

When he and Supple had excavated sand sufficient to satisfy the critical eyes of Mr. Welper, a rope was produced, the sample case locked and lowered into the hole. Then in silence the two men fell to covering up carefully the hole and its contents.

Welper suggested they work briskly because the others *might* recover from their debauch sooner than expected. Also, he pointed out that neither Mayne nor Helen Wyvern suffered from exhaustion other than that incurred by their journey from New York.

"Aw, they're not wise to anything yet," grunted

The Adventure of False Cape

Potter. "They won't ask where we are. They'll sleep late, then they'll want breakfast, then they'll want to see the diver and find out what it's all about——"

"Helen's a slick article, all the same," gasped Supple, wiping the sweat from his eyes with his brilliant sleeve. "She don't talk a whole lot, but her bean is a busy one, and what she thinks she might spill out to Eugene. And he's a dirty one to stir up. And dirtier yet to mix it with."

Potter dumped a last shovelful of sand and began to smooth out the mound. Supple aided him by kicking the pile with both feet.

"You goin' to bury any more gold, Barney?" he demanded.

"I hope to—if Providence prove propitious."

"Here?"

"M—m, yes; certainly here, Sam. . . . If it be the Almighty's will," he added piously.

Potter said: "We've got to give another souse-party, then. I'm scarey, anyway. Some calm night some o' those fancy guys we're bunkin' will get wise to us and catch that wop diver workin' in the dark——"

"If they do they'll catch a spring-blade knife in their—ah—guts," remarked Mr. Welper.

"All the same, there's no use startin' anything——"

"We'd better go," interrupted Welper; "the sun's been shining half an hour and more. Dan, you run up on to that big dune and take a little peek around first——"

"What dune?"

"That high one!" He pointed to Flyover Dune, and Dirck's blood froze in his veins.

But Supple demurred. "Go on up yourself," he returned sulkily. "I've been digging, and I'm all in—what with that blockade hootch you staked me to, 'n' everything——"

"Aw, come on, beat it, Barney," said Potter. "There's nobody awake on Tiger, you bet; you don't have to take a peek at this hour."

The Mystery Lady

He took Welper by the arm, urging him to depart; Supple shouldered the shovels. Welper's sly eyes wandered uncertainly over Flyover Dune; he hesitated; then, furtively licking his lips, he shouldered his rifle and suffered Potter to lead him across the lower ridge, and down to the reeds where the boat lay.

And now, as Dirck followed their movements with excited eyes and a blessed relief at heart, he became more and more surprised, then utterly puzzled. For instead of filing off to the north where, above the reeds, the mast of a hidden boat stuck out, they turned west, then west by south.

Then, of a sudden, the boy saw their boat. It lay hauled up in the reeds, perfectly visible from where he crouched. He had not noticed it at all until that instant.

A crawling chill of fear invaded him. To *whose* boat did that other mast belong?

Evidently the other mast was not visible to the choice company that were leaving False Cape to its sunny solitude. They filed away, plodding along down to the water, pushed off, clambered aboard, hoisted sail, and started to tack for Tiger Island. Supple was poling, for the sail hung slack. Welper laid his rifle on the turtle-deck and stretched out beside it. Sam Potter took the tiller and attempted to jockey the sheet and flirt with the gentle cat's paws that now and then caressed the sound. It took them a long time to fade away against the blue waste of water to the westward.

But even when at last they were gone, Dirck dared not stir from his nest on Flyover Dune until some explanation offered for the tip of that strange mast just visible through the reeds and bushes to the northward.

The explanation developed gradually. First he noticed the tops of bay-bushes shaking as though some creature

The Adventure of False Cape

were stirring them—cattle, or a wild hog, perhaps. Later something moved among the pines and vanished. It was dusky in there, and the boy could not make out what it was.

For a while he saw nothing more. The rising sun magnificently swept the outer ranks of pines and flashed across acres of seedlings, setting their dewy, green aigrettes a-sparkle.

Then, among these plummy young pines, Dirck saw a man.

For a few moments the man stood motionless; then, lithely, silently he traversed the patch of seedlings, crossed the border-strip where sand, set with creeping primrose and beach-plum, met the woody, fibrous debris of the pineland. He went straight to the damaged tree which Welper had lined with the solitary sentinel on Lantern Island. Placing both hands upon the trunk, he sighted for Lantern Island, stepped back, looked at the sand around him.

It was startlingly plain to Dirck that the man discovered the peg-hole in the sand. Also, to the boy it became more evident still that this man had been concealed within close view of Welper's operations, and had followed them with keen and accurate eyes. For now he began to pace out the directions taken by both Supple and Welper; and it appeared that he discovered peg-holes to verify his attempt to duplicate the recent rough survey, for, in a few minutes, he arrived at the foot of Flyover Dune, and stood looking about him at the smeared and trampled sea-sand.

Who the man might be Dirck had no idea; and it gave him a terrific shock when the man lifted his head and called out to him by name. The boy slipped two swan-shot cartridges into his gun in silence.

"Dirck!" repeated the man below; "you needn't worry. I'm a fisherman, and what I catch I fry."

The boy rose trembling. "Mr. Mayne?" he managed to blurt out.

The Mystery Lady

"Sure thing, my son. You're all right, aren't you?"

"Yes——"

"I was sure. I saw you pick up your geese and crawl up among the dunes. Where did those fancy gentlemen bury their box?"

"There—where you're standing——"

"Good-eye!" exclaimed the young man, much pleased with himself. "Bring down your game and your other stuff. Bring that shovel of yours, too. Step lively, my son; we ought to start before they're awake on Tiger Island."

Dirck draped the heavy string of snow-geese over his back, gathered his effects and made his way down to where Mayne stood scooping up sand with one foot.

"Here?" he queried, as the boy dropped his load and came up to him.

"Yes, right there, Mr. Mayne——"

"All right. Take your stuff to your boat and hurry back, old chap."

Mayne's voice was agreeable and calm, but in it there was a slight clarity of authority, and Dirck hurried to obey.

He found his boat, stowed away his geese, cartridge-case, lunch bucket, thermos bottle and slicker. He stepped his mast, laid the pole ready, and pulled up the prow to the limit of safety. Then, shouldering his loaded gun, he ran back.

Mayne already had uncovered the box. Together they managed to haul and push it up and out of the hole.

"One moment," said Mayne, who was breathing rather heavily. He pulled out a key-ring from his pocket. Other instruments dangled on the ring. He selected one which opened like a pencil-case, fussed a moment at the locked chest, then coolly opened it.

The interior disclosed an astounding sight. Crushed and battered vessels of gold, pyxes, chalices, crucifixes, chains, hilts of swords, candle-sticks—all were crammed and jammed together in a glittering mass. And the

The Adventure of False Cape

interstices were choked with doubloons as beautiful as though freshly minted.

"Get that slicker of yours," said Mayne.

Dirck ran back to his boat and returned in a trice. Mayne dug out as much as he thought the slicker would hold and the boy could carry, and bade him fill his cockpit.

Five times Dirck made the trip before the chest was empty.

When he came back, Mayne had placed the empty box in the bottom of the hole and was filling the box with sand. Filled, he closed it, found an instrument, on his key-ring to lock it, and fell to filling the excavation. Dirck used feet and hands; the hole was soon covered, the place trampled on, smoothed with the shovel. Both men were streaming with perspiration.

"Good work, Dirck," nodded Mayne with a friendly pat on his shoulder. "Now let's beat it."

At the water's edge Mayne motioned Dirck to board his boat. With his hand on the prow he said:

"Dirck, have you any idea what that loot is or where it came from?"

"No," said the boy, "I haven't."

"Well, I'll tell you; and you tell John Lanier. The ship *Welper* has happened to locate is a Spanish ship, and not the *Red Moon* galley. Tell Lanier that his hunt for the *Red Moon* galley is nothing new—not as recent even as the day of Stede Bonnet, William Kidd, and Blackbeard. From the days of the buccaneers before John Esquemeling, adventurers have searched for the *Red Moon* and her sunken treasure. Francis L'Olonnois heard of the *Red Moon* and searched for her. Barthelemy the Portuguese was after her. Montbar of Languedoc told Oexemelin at Honduras that he took a large Spanish ship off False Cape that was searching for the wreck of the *Red Moon*. She was called the *Holy Trinity*, was of immense value, the hold crammed with riches.

"The Gascon put every Spaniard to the sword, put his uncle aboard the *Holy Trinity*, and ordered him to pass

The Mystery Lady

inside False Cape by the Old Inlet, and repair ship off Tiger Island. And that same night a wounded wretch, left for dead in the hold, revived, crawled to the magazine, fired it, and perished with such Frenchmen as remained on board.

"And *that*, Dirck, is undoubtedly the ship which Welper has discovered—the *Holy Trinity*."

"Good heavens," said the boy, "where did you learn all this, Mr. Mayne?"

"Stede Bonnet knew it, Blackbeard knew it, Governor Eden knew it.

"When John Lanier left New York he sent word to me to go to Charleston and search for more of the Bonnet-Eden papers. The old Eden house already had been demolished; but I went to Raleigh, and in the archives I discovered among Eden's papers, which apparently *never had been examined since deposited*—for the seals were still *unbroken*—a full memorandum in Blackbeard's own hand, tracing the history of the *Red Moon* galley, and every attempt to find it.

"And that, Dirck, is what you are to tell John Lanier; and that the sunken ship is, probably, Montbar's prize, the *Holy Trinity*; and that Welper, Potter, the club servant, Supple, and Lorenzo Portugee, the diver, have conspired to double-cross the others, feed them the silver pieces-of-eight, and divide the gold between themselves. Now I think you'd better start back. Tell Lanier I have the situation pretty well in hand. I want him to burn *the international signal* when the entire affair is ripe. Tell him there are twenty men in Norfolk who can land on Tiger Island within three hours. . . . I wonder how much of all this you can remember?"

"All of it," said the boy quietly.

"All right. Push off!"

"I am to give this treasure to Lanier?"

"He'll tell you what to do with it."

The boy stood up, drove his pole into the shallows, looked earnestly at Mayne.

The Adventure of False Cape

"I haven't thanked you for my life. I don't know how. It's too big a debt to talk about. All I know how to say is that I'm yours—at any moment—always——" He choked, threw his weight on the pole, followed it aft, withdrew it, dropped it again with the ease of a born bayman.

Mayne stood among the reeds watching the receding boat until the boy drew in the pole, set sail, took the tiller, and set his course for Place-of-Swans.

Long before Dirck landed he could see his sister and Lanier on the east wharf in the channel between Lantern and Red Moon Islands, watching him intently through their sea-glasses. Presently Lanier hailed him through a megaphone:

"Are you all right, old chap?"

Dirck nodded vigorously.

"Any snow-geese?"

Dirck nodded violently, turned, and partly lifted the heavy string.

"All right! Everything's fine ashore. We've found the Red Moon galley!"

Dirck, in uncontrollable excitement, sprang to his feet, waved frantically, then he lifted a great battered salver of gold and waved it in the sunlight.

"What on earth is *that*?" roared Lanier through the megaphone.

And, to the girl at his side: "Your brother's boat looks as though it were full of gold plate. He's got about a ton of something in there——"

After a moment she exclaimed in astonishment: "I see something that shines like a gold crucifix—and something that seems to be a chalice——"

She drew nearer to Lanier, rested one hand on his arm. In speechless silence they awaited the on-coming boat.